

China's Alternative: Kang
Youwei's Confucian Reforms in
the Late Qing Dynasty

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ABSTRACT

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by

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Students of Chinese history have grappled with the role of Confucianism in China's encounter with imperialism, colonialism and modernization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was commonly believed that Confucianism was an obstacle in China's struggle to become a modern nation; this thesis seeks to show how Kang Youwei, a Chinese Confucian scholar, a philosophical thinker and a reformer, attempted to change the Qing Dynasty from a traditional monarchy to a constitutional state. By analyzing primary sources of both English and Chinese texts by Kang Youwei, this thesis demonstrates how Kang redefined and reshaped Confucianism. Confronting China's internal and external challenges in 19th century, Kang Youwei promoted political reforms for the Qing government by challenging existing neo-Confucianist thought as well as traditional Confucian social norms such as male-centeredness, political hierarchies and economic self-isolation. Even though Kang's reforms

eventually failed, his ideology and practices showed an alternative path for China which underwent tumultuous socio-political changes in the early 20th century. Based on these observations, this thesis also analyzes Kang Youwei's reform ideas and their theoretical and practical limits. The significance of this thesis lies in revealing China's encounter with imperialism and modernization through the lens of Kang Youwei's reforms and shedding new light on the role of Confucianism in modern and contemporary China.

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This honor thesis tries to explore China's modernization process during the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, along with a crucial figure, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927). The late Qing dynasty of China faced numerous problems for both the Manchu governors and Han Chinese subjects, particularly for those intellectuals who tried to speed up the modernization process. Besides political and military crises, the predominant ideology, Neo-Confucianism, was challenged and questioned when the nation simultaneously faced western imperialism and semi-colonialism.

The recorded history of China can be extended for more than 4000 years, and different schools of historians disagreed with when the classification of Modern China begins. Some historians argue that the first Opium War (1839-42) represents the transition since it opens China for foreign imperialism from the sea. On the other hand, some historians argue that the transition happened between the Ming dynasty (1368-1643) and the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), since the Qing dynasty was essentially founded by foreigners, the Manchus.¹ The foreigners here essentially mean non-Han Chinese, as they differed from the mainstream ethnic identity. Historically, the Manchus originated from the nomadic Jurchen tribes in present day Manchuria, living mainly by hunting and fishing.² The Manchus conquered the Ming dynasty and founded the Qing dynasty in 1644, partially because of internal problems within the Ming dynasty. The Qing imperial court and political power was mainly controlled by the Manchus, giving Manchus certain privileges and prohibiting Manchu-Chinese intermarriage.³ Ironically, the Manchus utilized Neo-Confucianism, developed by Chinese philosophers such as Zhu Xi (1130-1200) 朱熹 during the Song dynasty (960-1276), as an orthodox state religion, and they also kept Ming political institutions and governments. Hence, the Qing dynasty ruled and won over the Chinese by establishing political thoughts and governmental institution in the most orthodox way. As a foreign invader, the Manchus did not govern China in a foreign way, but rather they used the most Chinese way of governing.

Before explaining the transformation of Confucianism at China's struggling times, the late nineteenth century, I will take a close look at the background of Neo-Confucianism and its derivations from Confucianism. While Confucianism initially put an emphasis on rituals, hierarchy, and self-cultivation, neo-Confucianism emphasizes morality and artistic ability in an extreme way. The Civil Examination specifically embodies the Neo-Confucian thoughts since students had to follow the interpretations of Neo-Confucian thinkers such as Zhu Xi. The orthodoxy Neo-Confucian teaching became widespread after the death of Zhu Xi, who was regarded as the master of Neo-Confucian orthodoxies. Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian ideologies further put emphasis on filial piety and social hierarchy, but without a negative connotation in the modern sense. It was the natural law philosophy, based on the

¹ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.

² Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 20.

³ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

concept of orderly principle and reasons, and the naturally developed order had closely defined social morality such as the idea that young had to closely follow and respect the seniors. Zhu Xi intends to teach more about self-cultivation, which states that both the citizens and the emperors should be particularly moral. Nevertheless, those teachings of Neo-Confucianism slowly evolved after the Song dynasty to the rulings of the Mongols under the Yuan dynasty. The foreign rulers such as the Mongols and the Manchus were using the Civil Examination, which was a close affiliate of Neo-Confucianism, to stabilize the Han Chinese subjects.⁴ Zhu Xi himself, however, “had insisted on the transcendence of principle precisely to deny its use to the established order”.⁵ It was not the origins of the Zhu Xi orthodoxy that enforced the rigidity, but later followers of Neo-Confucianism slowly transformed it to be an “intellectual strait-jacket reinforcing the growing rigidity of Chinese society.”⁶

The Civil Examination was designed to recruit talent for the government, designed for district, provincial, and metropolitan level, and it was held twice every three years. In the Civil Examination, students were tested on their interpretation on the Confucian Four Books by writing the “eight-legged essay”, which emphasize the use of words, rules of rhyme, and calligraphy.⁷ It requires fundamental literary skills but not comprehensive knowledge, since it only covers the Confucian classics. It was a completely merit-based examination and the passers would become governmental officials. It allowed students from the lower end of the social class to enter the classes of gentry and nobility. The Civil Examination was commonly practiced during the Tang dynasty, and the Qing dynasty fully implemented the system, allowing some Han Chinese to enter the bureaucracy. However, there were debates over the Civil Examination and the literary ideals that it represented. The Song dynasty is commonly known for its military weakness but an extreme prosperity in entertainments, especially poetry. It was clearly explained by Shu Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), a famous poet as well as a political official in the Song dynasty, when he opposed 王安石 (1021-1086) Wang Anshi’s reform on making examinations more practical and building a stronger royal cavalry:

The preservation or loss of a nation depends upon the depth or shallowness of its virtue, not upon its strength or weakness. The length or shortness of a dynasty depends upon the stoutness or flimsiness of its social customs, not upon its richness or poverty. If its moral virtue is truly deep, and its social customs truly stout, even though the country is poor and weak, its poverty and weakness will not affect its duration and existence. If its virtue is shallow and its social customs flimsy, even though the nation is rich and strong, this will not save it from coming to an early end.⁸

⁴ Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 75.

⁸ Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press: A Division of Macmillan, Inc, 1981), 27.

This observation toward the emphasis on extreme morality and virtue rather than practical subjects was criticized by western scholars to be the ultimate reasons behind the failure of China's modernization process during the early nineteenth century. Western scholars in the 1960s and 70s predominantly believe that the problems lay not on multiple individuals, but on the dominant mentality and ideology of Chinese people, with the most famous of them being Confucianism, and Neo-Confucianism specifically. Those scholars include Max Weber, Joseph Levenson, and John King Fairbank, all of whom pointed out the necessity of having a bourgeois class within society for a nation to modernize, which Neo-Confucianism intends to prevent. Mary Clabaugh Wright described in her book, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism*, the opposite relation between Confucianism and modern economy: "A Confucian society is of necessity an agrarian society: trade, industry, economic development in any form, are its enemies."⁹ As a result, this thesis intends to show the possibility of modernization under the overall framework of Confucianism and the complexity within different types of Confucian ideologies, looking closely at a scholar who was educated by the Confucian system, Kang Youwei. In sum, the Confucian ideal was not the definite obstacle for China's complete modernization, and there were efforts to modernize the country by reinterpreting Confucianism and revolutionizing it. Before reaching the conclusion, there are several major primary sources analyzed in this thesis, including *The Book of the Great Community*, *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, *Confucius as a Reformer*, *Reform in Japan*. This thesis is divided into three sections, Kang's early works such as *The Book of the Great Community*, Kang's works before his peak of political influences, and Kang's actual reform proposal, with an ending that summarizes his later influences and what path China eventually took.

This thesis will cover the time period between 1880 and 1920s, which extends from Kang's youth to his exile time in Japan, which was also the most dramatic one in Chinese history, as well as the most depressing history for Han Chinese, who struggled to seek their own identity for both themselves and their country.

The Qing dynasty was founded by the Manchus in 1644, while it faced both internal and external crisis in the mid nineteenth century. Internally, there were multiple rebellions during the late nineteenth century, including the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), Nian rebellion (1851-1864), and other two rebellions led by the Muslims in the Northeast. Those rebellions put extra pressure on the fiscal situation of Qing dynasty.¹⁰ Externally, the defeat of the two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) further incentivized foreign imperialism, giving Hong Kong to the British and multiple foreign trading ports, including modern day Shanghai. Nevertheless, foreign aggression did not stop after the 1860s. Japan's taking over on Taiwan (1895), Russia's occupation of Ili (1871), and France's war on Annam (1887) were all examples of imperialism that Qing government had to deal with during the second

⁹ Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 3.

¹⁰ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1990), 139.

half of the nineteenth century.¹¹

In response, the Qing government initiated the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895). The Self-Strengthening Movement was a series of modernization movements initiated by both the Qing imperial court and local governors. The initial efforts of the Self-Strengthening movements included the establishment of the Zongli Yamen, which was an office for international relation and conduct, along with a college of foreign language.¹² The core of the Self-Strengthening Movement, however, was strengthening Qing China's military and industries. During the Self-Strengthening Movement, the Jiangnan arsenal and Nanjing arsenal were built, along with a modern naval fleet in northern China. Other industrial modernizations included the establishment of factories, telegraph buildings, and sending students overseas to learn western knowledge. In sum, the Self-Strengthening Movement was a modernization process in response to initial imperialism from Britain since 1860s, but the result was an unexpected failure. In 1895, the annexation of Korea and the domestic defeat in the first Sino-Japanese war indicated the failures of Self-Strengthening movement and put further pressure on Qing government. After this stage, the Qing dynasty entered a semi-colonial situation where industries were controlled by foreign capital including foreign trading port and railroad systems. The overall country was carrying a comprehensive amount of debt, both from railways and the enforced "Compensation" for the war China lost.¹³ As Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901) said, the situation in China and the challenge was never been seen for two thousand years.

Several explanations have been presented by historians in different generations as to why Qing China underwent a series of internal and external challenges. First, there was no national consciousness among the Chinese people yet during the late Qing dynasty. Trying to defend Annam and Korea, it was the local military governors or generals who were contributing to the fight rather than the overall Qing nation, since their own interests would be closely linked to the victory or defeat. However, regular peasants nearby in Beijing paid less attention to the war, except being charged with more taxation. Furthermore, the literati elite in traditional Qing were completely indifferent to western culture and books, as shown by the bureau of translation publication only sold 13,000 copies of western essays and books, while Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Conditions in the West" sold more than 250,000 copies in Japan during the Meiji restoration.¹⁴ On the defensive level, the Taiping rebellion was eventually controlled by local Xiang army 湘軍 rather than Qing official army, and Li Hongzhang's own fleet was the dominant force that was fighting against the Japanese navy. Li Hongzhang was a powerful official in the imperial Qing court,

¹¹ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 239.

¹² Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 270.

¹³ Mary Clabaugh Wright, *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 11.

¹⁴ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.2 Late Qing, 1800-1911, part 2, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu and John K. Fairbank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 275.

commanding the Beiyang 北洋 Navy of the Qing. Li Hongzhang tried to improve Qing China's military strength by importing western technologies and weaponry. The Self-Strengthening movement was even regarded as a reform led by Li Hongzhang himself as an individual, and the Sino-Japanese War was even regarded as a war between Japan and Li Hongzhang as an individual. Instead of national consciousness, there was a cultural consciousness within Han Chinese, along with the loyalty with local identities and kinship, but there was no nation-state that Chinese people were aware of. The weakness of the Qing official army was another primary reason.¹⁵ As the result, even though the local mercenaries could control local military rebellions to some extent, the Qing defense forces were not strong enough to deal with western powers that brought advanced military technologies to Qing China.

Secondly, corruptions internally within Chinese officials remained a significant problem. In government, most upright officials were not able to get promoted, while the trust of the court was paid to the eunuchs. The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) (慈禧) tried to use the naval expenses to build the summer palace in Beijing to celebrate her birthday, during the crucial time before the Sino-Japanese war.¹⁶ Men of wealth and nobility tended to encourage governmental officials to create positions in order to accommodate a friend or pay back favor, which forbade the upright officials from getting promoted in a legitimate way.¹⁷ A unique aspect of the Manchu ruling Qing dynasty was that the majority Manchus were essentially sinified, and they were adapting to Chinese social norms such as the traditional bureaucratic system, Confucian classics, and the orthodox moral terms. The Manchus governed China by becoming more Confucian instead of forbidding Confucian teaching.¹⁸ There were important positions in the Qing bureaucrat that were reserved for Manchus only. Therefore, the Manchus were blamed by scholars for corrupt conducts. However, many western scholars have believe that the Manchus were a scapegoat,¹⁹ essentially due to anti-Manchu sentiments throughout the Qing and afterwards. Still, the corruption within the Qing government was a core factor resulting in an ineffective administrative and response to western imperialism.

Thirdly, there were other social forces that made the Qing government difficult to govern, including population growth, poverty, huge gaps between the wealthy and the poor, as well as inefficiency of agriculture.²⁰ Most importantly, the agricultural economy of China could not support its government, which were confronting modern western countries, resulting in enormous expenses. The overall structure of the government was another problem within Qing China, since there were not enough governmental positions for a growing number of literate men who wanted

¹⁵ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895-1980* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 6.

¹⁶ Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 4.

¹⁷ Susan Mann Jones and Philip A. Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion", in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, vol.10 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 114.

¹⁸ Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 55.

¹⁹ Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 67.

²⁰ Spence, 165.

to enter the bureaucracy, and there was no sufficient reward for them.²¹ Both taxation and monetary policies in Qing dynasty were inorganized; inflation lasted for more than a century, from the 18th century to the end of 19th century, and the nonexistence of standard taxation rate put more pressure on the peasants, partially impacted by the inflow of silver and foreign capitals. It was also an illustration of bureaucracy's failure in Qing China, along with improper control over the financial policies.

Another significant reason behind China's weaknesses is that Qing government lacked experience in diplomacy toward western countries. For the past two thousand years, different dynasties in China have faced foreign intrusion, but most came from the north, specifically the nomadic invasion. However, the Han Chinese firmly believed in the concept of Tian Xia, believing that the universe was ruled by the imperial court and a virtuous emperor, and the influence of the emperor will be extended to major and minor officials, common citizens, tributary states, and then the "barbarians", or the enemies perceived by the court outside. The tributary states were surrounding nations that submitted tributes to the Chinese imperial court, agreeing to be ruled by the emperor, and the emperor would protect its tributary states when it is possible. Therefore, the refusal of having an equal relationship with western countries had a fundamental impact on miscommunication and western country's aggression in sharing China's opportunities. The Tongzhi restoration 同治中兴 transformed Qing's tributary system in some way from the 1830s to the 1870s, and Qing began to learn the treaty systems of western diplomacy. Tongzhi Restoration was a set of reform movements by the Qing imperial court after the first Opium War, allowing it to sustain itself for the later 60 years.²² The restoration improved its international relation office and established the Zongli Yamen,²³ successfully suppressing the rebellions, attacking corruptions within the bureaucracy, and further enhancing its military, which was also referred to the Self-strengthening Movements. The According to Mary Wright, the difficult transition contributed to Confucian ideals: "It (The Qing) was helpless where the immediate requirements of foreign policy ran counter to the fundamental requirement of the Confucian order."²⁴ Even though it is debatable that Confucian order prevented Qing China develop its diplomatic systems, the Qing China was inexperienced in modern day foreign relation during the 19th century, even though the Tongzhi restoration partially improved it.

Natural disasters are one fundamental factor that historians tend to neglect, or at least ignored its significance. Nineteenth century China had an agricultural based economy, and its most fertile land in central east was extremely vulnerable for natural disasters. The most common natural disasters were flooding of the Yellow River and Yangzi river, along with drought. The river systems were largely unstable, which directly caused social problems. Jonathan Spence points out flooding was one key

²¹ Jones and Kuhn, 110.

²² Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 9.

²³ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 268.

²⁴ Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 250.

factors in the Nian rebellion when frequent flooding forced peasants to move away from their land.²⁵ The Boxer rebellion of 1900 also was caused largely by drought, argued by Paul A. Cohen.²⁶ Even though the Boxer rebellion was not during the middle nineteenth century, it shows how important a role natural disasters played. In traditional Confucian thinking, natural disasters represent the punishment from the heaven, along with the conception that the rulers were not virtuous enough. The natural disasters, therefore, not only brought economic hardship for peasants, but also gave them ideological support for uprising and rebellion.

China had a glorified history of technological innovation during its ancient time, such as the Great Four Invention, but it failed to go through the same industrial revolution as western countries did during the 18th and 19th century. During China's ancient times, it was well-known for its technological advances such as navigation, mathematics, and printing. On the other hand, China did not go through the Industrial Revolution as western countries did, which did not impact China neither. China, therefore, fell behind in regards to technological developments, and it was predominantly shown by the gap in military technologies and shipbuilding, and it largely contribute to the weakness of Qing military. The falling behind in China's technology also impacted its industrialization progress, which would not be able to support a modern military.

Confucian intellectuals in late Qing China presented numerous reform ideas to overcome Qing China's challenges. Nevertheless, Kang Youwei was one of those scholars who succeeded in persuading the emperor to begin a reform in a short time period, even though those reforms were eventually unsuccessful. There were significant social forces that worked against Kang, and Kang himself ignored some crucial aspects of the Chinese emperor system. The Empress Dowager, Cixi, was the largest obstacle in front of Kang. The late Qing imperial court was dominated by Cixi, the only woman to attain a high level of political power in China during Qing, and Guangxu (1871-1908) 光绪, who was the emperor from 1874 to 1908, was the nephew of Cixi. Nevertheless, the military and fundamental decisions were controlled by Cixi, since Guangxu was not a legitimate heir to Tongzhi 同治 emperor but owned his position by Cixi's will.²⁷ Holding the highest power in imperial China, Cixi tried her best to protect the Manchu imperial lineage in China.²⁸ Behind Cixi, there are numbers of Manchu governors who feared that the reform and the companion of Emperor Guangxu and Kang would threaten their power in the imperial court. Besides those Manchus and governors in power, millions of Confucian scholars were against the reforms that Kang provoked, since the progress of cancelling the Civil Examination would put their careers and lives at risk. This thesis illustrates some details of Kang's reform and ideals that challenged traditional Confucian ideologies, including some controversial parts of Kang's ideas. By dividing Kang's works into

²⁵ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1990), 185.

²⁶ Paul A Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 95.

²⁷ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 319.

²⁸ Spence, 217.

three stages, we will see the transition of Kang's thinking, based on the experience that Kang Youwei encountered.

Under these circumstances, numerous voices to cope with China's internal and external challenges were created among bureaucrats and intellectuals both inside and outside the Qing government. Kang Youwei was one of these intellectuals who were preoccupied with bringing changes to Qing China. What makes Kang's position unique was, however, the fact that he intended to interpret Confucian ideology from radically different perspectives. Criticizing Neo-Confucian scholarly tradition that was the main academic trend in late Qing China, Kang presented substantially different views on Confucian China that are often labelled "utopianism" or "conservative radicalism." In the following chapters, this study will focus on his writing during three periods, his early ideals, his emerging impacts, and his actual reforms with aftermath. Hence, I will present both his thinking as well as how his thinking changed.

Chapter 1 Kang You-wei's Early Idealistic Thoughts

Kang Youwei was born in a scholarly family within southern province of Guangdong. The birth of Kang brought happiness for his family since the first two children were both girls, and the birth of Kang implied the continuation of Confucian lineage within the family, and this shows the conservative background that Kang was born in. Multiple family members within Kang's family took a position within the government, including his grandfather.²⁹ When Kang was young, his family tried to educate him in the Confucian way, encouraging him to read "eight-legged essay" and memorize Confucian classics. Nevertheless, Kang did not like traditional Confucian classics, and Kang never received high achievements in civil examination. At 19, Kang became a student of Zhu Ciqi, a famous official and Confucian scholar with high reputation in southern China. Zhu's thinking belongs to traditional Neo-Confucianism, putting emphasis on moral code and how an upright person should behave.³⁰ Nevertheless, compared to contemporary scholars, Zhu's thinking was eclectic, trying to utilize Confucian classics to improve the society. Surprisingly, Kang challenged what Zhu said and counter-argued with his teacher. Shocked by Kang and his non-traditional thinking, Zhu criticized Kang, and Kang began to question the nature of Chinese traditional education. After three years of following Zhu, Kang went back to his home, absorbing ideal Daoism and Buddhism. The encounter of Daoism and Buddhism was significantly important since it symbolizes the complexity of Kang's thinking in his early life. It shows the influence of his thinking was not limited to Confucianism but also Daoism and Buddhism, which were other two dominant school in Chinese philosophy. Hiding in the mountains next to his home, Kang escaped from the society, searching for his own idealized world.³¹ During his journey within the mountains, Kang met with one Confucian official, Zhang Dinghua, who shared *The Travel Journal of the World* by Li Kui with Kang,

²⁹ Huang Jing, *The Biography of Kang You-wei*, (Beijing: Jinghua Press, 2002), 8.

³⁰ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 82.

³¹ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 83.

and the western impact of this book opened the new world for Kang, which Kang was especially obsessed with.³²

In 1879, Kang travelled to Hong Kong, and this trip completely changed his mentality. Kang was shocked by the prosperity of Hong Kong, governed by Britain after the Opium War.³³ In the same year, Kang travelled all the way to Beijing to take the civil examination and visited Shanghai on the way back. At a trading spot governing by foreigners, Kang began to realize the backwardness of China, specifically its economy, way of living, and technology after comparing inner China and Hong Kong. At this time, western works exercised even more influence toward Kang, even though Kang was not exposed to a comprehensive number of western works.³⁴ Most of the early western works in China were religious works such as Christian gospels, along with some scientific writings. However, there were not many books about politics and social science.

What is worth noting is that Kang built a society against the foot-binding practice in the southern province of China during his travel to Shanghai. Foot-binding was a common practice since Song dynasty until the late Qing dynasty, and it was not only limited to upper class women. The practice requires women to bind their feet during their childhood and restraint it to about 4 inches in length. Women, after binding feet, were seen as a sign of beauty and sexually desirable by men, and it shows that women were regarded as “sexual and maternal but otherwise worthless” in a Neo-Confucian society.³⁵ The foot-binding practice was an illustration of oppressing women and the rigid hierarchy within Neo-Confucian order, and wives were required to completely submit to men. It was the first society that Kang organized, as well as the first anti foot-binding society that China had. Family background fundamentally impacted Kang Youwei, since his mother sustained the whole family after his father died, when Kang was only 6 years old. Kang held a highly progressive understanding toward women, and the anti-foot binding society was the first step that Kang took to challenge the existing Neo-Confucian order within traditional China.³⁶

During his early twenties, Kang was heavily impacted by western ideologies, and he bought the *World News*, learning specifically about foreign history, geography, and science. Under those foreign influences, Kang produced his first work, *The Book of the Great Community*, during years 1884 to 1885. The first draft was titled the *Universal Principles of Mankind*, and Kang continued working on the book until 1885, and he spent later years revising the book until he opened his own school in Canton in 1890s. Kang Youwei did not publish *The Book of the Great Community* until 40 years later, potentially recognizing the extremity of the utopian ideologies within *The Book of the Great Community*, and Kang only showed it to his fellow students such as Liang Qi-chao. Upon the request of his students, Kang published the first two chapters of *The Book of the Great Community* in 1912, but the entirety of the book

³² Huang Jing, *The Biography of Kang You-wei*, 30.

³³ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 86.

³⁴ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement”, 284.

³⁵ C. Fred Blake, “Foot-Binding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor” *The University of Chicago Press*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring 1994), 678.

³⁶ Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 41.

was not published until 1935.³⁷ However, Kang was constantly making revisions, and the official *The Book of the Great Community* was not finished until 1901, according to Liang Qi-chao.

It is worth mentioning the historical contexts of Qing dynasty during the 1880s. As the nation was humiliated by the Opium War, there were political measures that the Qing government and intellectuals implemented to solve China's problems. The most famous one was the Self-Strengthening Movements from 1861 until 1895. Several governors took charge of building factories for steamships and arsenals, including Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 (1823-1901), Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885), Zeng Guofan 曾国藩 (1811-1872), and Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), with Li Hongzhang being the most famous among all. Li firmly believed that it was necessary for China to update and catch up on western shipbuilding and weaponry, while he also firmly believed that China was superior to that of the west in every other aspect such as morality and philosophy.³⁸ Therefore, the Self-strengthening Movement primarily included the adoption of western firearms, machines, and knowledge of science. The main objective was to preserve the Manchu ruling house.³⁹ Immanuel Hsu, in his book *The Rise of Modern China*, believed that there are three main stages in the self-strengthening movement, and Li Hongzhang realized the poverty of China, which prevented China from consistently generating the numerous expenses of adopting western weaponry.⁴⁰ Without manufacturing those weaponry itself, the Qing government had to pay an infinite amount to purchasing western ships and gunpower. During the third stage, Li faced competition from other governmental officials in the south, and the separation of politics dissects the overall progress of modernization within Qing dynasty. However, *The Book of the Great Community* was produced during this period of the self-strengthening, yet its ideals were completely opposite to the political trend in China, believing in the superiority of ideologies of China. *The Book of the Great Community* shows the weaknesses of Confucian ideologies and its complications.

As for the historical background of the time periods that *The Book of the Great Community* was written, Kang's ideals above contrasted with the national sentiment, especially toward foreign invasion. While the wars in Okinawa, Ili, Vietnam, and Korea further invoked anti-foreign sentiments within Qing China, Kang claimed that the national borders should be eliminated, and that all the countries should be united. The idealism and utopian views within *The Book of the Great Community*, however, was impractical for the period Kang was writing. On the other hand, Kang's *The Book of the Great Community* shows the author's superiority compared to his contemporaries. While the Self-Strengthening Movement was only limited to solving China's problems in the technological sense, Kang recognized China's problems within Confucianism, especially with his criticisms of the traditional treatment of women and the abuse of power within the traditional family. On the other hand, Li

³⁷ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 123.

³⁸ Hsu, 281.

³⁹ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 284.

Hongzhang and other Self-strengthening Movement leaders still believed that the social system, especially Confucian ideologies, were much more superior than western ideologies. Here is one quote from Zhang Zhidong, expressing his opinion on rejecting western political structure and government:

Then it is said that under a republic the Chinese can establish mercantile companies and build factories. And what is to hinder them from doing this under the present government? There is no law to hinder the launching of such enterprises...The same may be said about the establishment of schools. Our laws have ever encouraged the opening of colleges, schools, and benevolent institutions by wealthy literati, and why ask for a republic to bring about this end? ...The English word liberty, which means 'just in everything and beneficial to all,' is mistranslated. The 'Liberty Club' that now exists in foreign countries should be called the 'Debating Society.' If we wish to make China powerful and capable of resisting foreign nations, we must cherish loyalty and righteousness and unite ourselves under the imperial dignity and power.⁴¹

This quote from Zhang Zhidong is a typical example of Self-Strengthening leader's thoughts toward reform. Essentially, those political leaders rejected western political thoughts and stayed conservative on Confucian government. Joseph Levenson mentions this limitation of Self-strengthening movement in his book, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, that those intellectuals tried to utilize western technologies and science while relying on Confucian mentality and ideologies. Nevertheless, Levenson affirmed that the Self-Strengthening movement was primarily an ideological compromise, and it was impossible for China to modernize just relying on Confucian thoughts. The Self-Strengthening Movement represents an ideological compromise that was attacked by western scholars. Hsu, moreover, also believes that the problem behind the Self-Strengthening Movement was more than the weakness in science but rather deeper problems in ideologies and social structures. However, there were dramatic differences between Kang Youwei's thoughts and his contemporaries. Even though *The Book of the Great Community* intends to show an ideal side of the world, it also recognizes the problems within Neo-Confucian thoughts.

The Book of the Great Community presents a utopian society without human sufferings, and it is potentially the society that Kang ultimately created during his later life. The significance of *The Book of the Great Community* lies in Kang's goal of changing China from traditional monarchy to a Constitutional Monarchy, and then the third stage, ultimate utopian society.⁴² As Kang introduced, the current society is a society of disorder 乱世, and the second stage being the age of increasing peace and equality 升平世, and then a society with ultimate peace and equality 太平世.⁴³ In Kang's discussion of *The Book of the Great Community*, we can see some radical ideals in extreme, even in modern day's standard, without mentioning the strict social

⁴¹ Zhang Zhi-dong, "Zhang ZhiDong on the Central Government" in *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary History*, ed. Pei-Kai Cheng, Michael Lestz, and Jonathan D. Spence (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 181.

⁴² Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 32.

⁴³ Kang You-wei, *Ta Tung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-wei*, trans. and ed. Laurence G. Thompson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958), 72.

shackles during late Qing dynasty with the rigid system of Neo-Confucianism. From *The Book of the Great Community*, we can see the transformation of a traditional Confucian scholar from focusing on the “eight-legged essay” to a western way of looking at the world. The main thesis of *The Book of the Great Community* is abolishing boundaries, including racial, class, gender, and national boundaries, and Kang believes that abolishing boundaries would ultimately bring people happiness and avoid suffering. Kang intends to reject the similarities between his arguments and Buddhism. Buddhism mainly promotes the cessation of suffering through the cessation of attachment, such as physical pleasure, while Kang does not advocate cessation of attachment. In contrast, Kang believes the ultimate peaceful society should have plentiful resources and pleasure for people to enjoy. Kang’s utopia society was appealing more to materialistic pleasure, and it helps him challenge the moral detachments of Neo-Confucianism from economic developments, and he tries to legitimate materialistic desire and mundane lifestyle.⁴⁴ *The Book of the Great Community*, therefore, represents the ideals and potential actions that Kang believed will eliminate human suffering and promote peace and pleasure.

The first fundamental abolishment incited by Kang is the abolishment of states and national boundaries. Kang believes that patriotism resulted from the existence of nation state will lead to violence, war, and suffering of human: “The fewer the states the fewer the wars, the more the states the more the wars. Therefore, comparing the two, the oppressions received from a universal autocratic ruler are preferable to the wretchedness received from the calamity of wars among many contesting states”.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Kang understood that the abolishment of national boundaries cannot be achieved in the short term, but Kang affirms that it should be the ultimate results of mankind.⁴⁶ Kang lists issues such as the self-interest of different entities, and the unevenness under the common parliaments for all nations as the potential obstacles for his proclamation. Under the common parliament, citizens need to speak both their own language and a universal language and be allowed to travel whenever they are willing to, under the common law of the universe.⁴⁷ Each individual state will be forced to conduct disarmament, and the rebellion of individual states will be handled by the universal army, which also assists in keeping order and to execute policies throughout the world.

Second major ideal that Kang provokes is the abolishment of social class and the promotion of equality. Kang utilizes Confucius to give an example of social equality, not only referring to economic statues, but also social hierarchy: “Confucius originated the idea of equality...He transmitted the ancient assigned-field system, so to do away with slavery, and wrote the constitution of the Chun Chiu as to put a limit to the monarch’s power. He did not exalt himself to his followers, and he rejected the authority of great priest”.⁴⁸ Therefore, rejecting the Neo-Confucian’s emphasis on

⁴⁴ Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning (1890-1911)* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1987), 58.

⁴⁵ Kang You-wei, *Ta Tung Shu*, 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

filial piety and hierarchy between subjects and governors, Kang gives his new interpretations toward the Confucius and his teachings. At the same time, Kang does not mention the emphasis on social hierarchy in Confucian doctrine at all.

Afterwards, Kang explains the reasons for liberating women and promotes free marriages, even though he does not argue against women's status in traditional Confucius filial structure. Women remained at the lowest level within Chinese society following the Confucian ideologies, while Kang does not explain this contradiction. On other hand, Kang specifically blames Neo-Confucianism for incorrectly applying Confucian thoughts and doctrines: "The Sung Confucians were very high-principled. They sought to surpass the sage. (Confucius). They succeeded in causing countless numbers of widows to grieve in wretched alleys, harassed by cold and hunger....but they thought it is a beautiful custom".⁴⁹ In the next section of *The Book of the Great Community*, Kang pushes to abolish class boundaries within traditional families, and Kang believes that raising children in public schools will reduce their reliance on their parents so that those children will be partially free from filial obligations during their later life.⁵⁰

On the commercial, agricultural, and industrial reform, Kang claims that all those sectors will belong to the public in his utopian society. There will be public land for people to cultivate, and both commercial sectors and industrials sectors will belong to the government, and people will share similar wages, assuming there will be abundant products for people to consume.⁵¹ Even though there was no evidence that Kang was influenced by Marxism, Kang's ideals were extremely similar to that of communism. In regard to distribution and economic equality, Kang tries to promote evenly division of wealth, relying on assumptions that there were enough resources and wealth. Nevertheless, Kang's goal is promoting top-down reform movement from Chinese government, rather than a revolutionary movement from the bottom. Therefore, Kang is calling for a socialist reform in economic aspects rather than a revolutionary movement for the nation.

However, Kang's thinking was problematic, especially in both ideological and factual aspects. Kang's writing shows that his understanding toward the world still stays at the surface level. For instance, Kang believes that the assimilation of South America could be achieved in the short term, under the common leadership of Brazil, for the simple reason that Brazil was the largest country in Latin America. Kang prioritizes certain country over another, believing that Germany would assimilate western Europe, Russia would assimilate eastern Europe, and the Ottoman empire would assimilate other Islamic states, showing his stereotypical thoughts. Kang ignores so many aspects including religion and language, and we can obviously see the limitations of Kang's knowledge and thinking, even extended after the 20th century, since the last edition was after 1901. At the same time, even though Kang claims there should be universal equality among different racial group, he said that Africans and darker skins groups need to receive different treatments under universal

⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁵¹ Ibid., 223.

governance. Therefore, Kang's thinking was bound by traditional altitude including bias and stereotypical discrimination.

The Book of the Great Community's role in Kang's intellectual life is significant in that it represents his ideal world and the goal Kang tries to construct. Even though Kang fully understand that it will be impossible to change the society in this ideal stage, it symbolizes the directions of Kang's actions before he became politically influential in the future. Secondly, Kang's ideals were considered both conservative and progressive. While Kang was claiming some radical ideals on equality, he tries to utilize a peaceful way of transformation. Since the ultimate goals of Kang are happiness and elimination of suffering, it is only possible for Kang to achieve it in a nonviolent way, which shows a conservative side of Kang's thoughts.

During his contemporary times, the most important response toward *The Book of the Great Community* was his most important student, Liang Qichao. In his work, *Intellectual Trends in Qing Dynasty*, Liang describes his attitude and the reactions toward the publication of the first few chapters of *The Book of the Great Community* as "a volcanic eruption and an earthquake within scholarly world". Liang describes Kang as one of the most significant thinkers in Chinese history as predicting the emergence of Chinese communism in the 1920s in China, showing his ultimate admiration toward Kang for his ideals in *The Book of the Great Community*. On the other hand, Liang criticized Kang for not showing entire *The Book of the Great Community* to the public. According to Liang, Kang thought it was only possible to reach "Xiao Kang 小康" in the short term, which is sustaining national boundaries and family boundaries. In Confucian definition, Xiao Kang was the opposite of Da Tong 大同, or the Great Community, and it symbolizes a decline of moral standard that everyone only pays attention to their own family and own livings. Da Tong, or the Great community Kang claims, invokes generous humanness toward each other in the society among people without kinship. Therefore, Releasing *The Book of the Great Community* during this chaotic time of China would only exerts negative impacts toward the society rather than enlightening people. Liang, therefore, criticized Kang as an idealist who were unwilling to accomplish his own goals and preferred to standstill rather than having radical actions toward his goal. Liang believed that Kang was self-contradictory since he was willing to create his ideals but tried his best to prevent his ideals from spreading.

Because *The Book of the Great Community* was published in China by 1934, after the death of Kang himself, while the translation of the book was not published until the 1950s. There were not many contemporary reviews of *The Book of the Great Community* before the 1950s, and years between 1930s and 1950s China went through its second Sino-Japanese war, and contemporary reviews toward *The Book of the Great Community* were extremely limited. Nevertheless, there were a few reviews about Kang and his book during late 20th century. For instance, S.Y. Teng believes that Kang's thinking was not the first example of utopia within Chinese philosophical thoughts, and similar thoughts can be traced back to original interpretation of Confucius and "Ren 仁", so Kang was primarily extending his interpretation of

Confucianism and applying to his ideal thoughts.⁵² “Ren” was a central ideal in Confucianism, meaning the humanness and benevolence between people and one another, especially adult’s protection over the children. In Hao Chang’s writing, he believes that Kang wrote *The Book of the Great Community* in order to show the opposite of the current situation of Chinese people and Qing China under imperialism.⁵³ Furthermore, contrasting to the understanding of suffering and Buddhism influences, Chang believes that Kang shows his materialistic way of looking at the world in his *The Book of the Great Community*. In Kang’s utopia world, materialistic living and abundance life were necessary, along with an emphasis on Confucian morality. Therefore, Kang also tries to utilize it as a challenge toward the rigid structure of Neo-Confucianism as the contradiction between commercial living and development of the society.

As a matter of fact, Kang never initiated a political reform similar to what he expressed in *The Book of the Great Community*. However, this does not mean *The Book of the Great Community* was an insignificant part of Kang Youwei’s thinking. The radical thinking in *The Book of the Great Community* illustrates the wide spectrum of Kang’s intellectual thoughts and his absorptions of western learnings, Buddhism and Daoism. The further impact of *The Book of the Great Community* was even more significant, as some of his ideas potentially influenced Mao Zedong and ideologies of Chinese communism. In one of Mao’s article, *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*, Mao comments on Kang and *The Book of the Great Community* as: “Kang wrote the book of world communism, but he did not and could not find the way toward Da Tong”. Wen Shunchi, in his article, *The Ideological Source of People’s Communes in Communist China*, believes that Kang’s *Ta Tung Shu* certainly exerted an impact on Mao himself, even though Mao may not read the book during the 1930s but rather later.⁵⁴ Thus, the comments of Mao show an unpractical side of *Ta Tung Shu* and Kang’s ideal world, especially during the time of warfare in early 20th century China.

As discussed in this chapter, Kang attempted to establish himself as a new Confucian intellectual through his critiques of contemporary Neo-Confucian scholarship. *The Book of the Great Community* was an epitome of his early discussion of Confucianism as liberating, being reform oriented and even utopian. Nevertheless, Kang’s zeal for an equilibrium-oriented new Chinese society was highly idealistic and many of his reform ideals were not based upon his conviction for liberating values. Instead, Kang seemed to be preoccupied with presenting conditions for government-led Confucian reforms by constructing contemporary Chinese society. In fact, this study will explore the question of how Kang’s early idealism encountered political circles and how he began to emerge as a scholar that exert impact within China. By writing two important works, Kang became well-known, which was an essential step

⁵² S.Y. Teng, review of *Ta Tung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-wei*, by Laurence G. Thompson, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.32, no.4 (Dec 1959), 426.

⁵³ Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning (1890-1911)* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1987), 63.

⁵⁴ Wen-shun Chi, “The Ideological Source of the People’s Communes in Communist China,” *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 2 (April 1967), 64.

that allowed him to participate in actual political reforms.

Chapter 2: Kang's Groundbreaking Works in the Early 1890s

During the 1880s, Kang tried to submit advices and warnings toward the Guangxu emperor as a regular citizen, without having any official title. However, none of them succeeded since the bureaucrats under the emperor certainly disliked Kang's aggressive ideas and negative tones. Without achieving anything in Beijing, Kang returned to Canton and built up his own school in 1888. Liang Qichao then became his student at this time. Utilizing his school as a basis, Kang spread his ideologies to his follow students. Politically, Kang was trying to utilize his occupation as a teacher as a place to gain support for his opinions, and Kang was primarily teaching Mahayana Buddhism, non-Confucian Chinese trends of thoughts, and western learnings.⁵⁵ After his initial failures in sending letters to the emperor, Kang recognized the strength of conservatives within the country, so Kang determined to write several groundbreaking works to persuade the conservatives to adapt making progressive changes to the country.

During the time of his teaching, Kang began to write two of his initial works that was published, including *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty* (1891) 新学伪经考 and *Confucius as a Reformer* (1896) 孔子改制考. Those two texts exerted significant influences toward Kang's actual reform in 1898. When Kang was young, he studied ancient works and calligraphy, and both of those texts were considered studies of ancient texts. Within itself, those two texts are not inherently linked to political reforms, but rather an argument attacking multiple Confucian texts. Kang claims that specific Confucian classics were rather not written by Confucius himself and were falsified by someone else.⁵⁶

During the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), the first Qing emperor destroyed public Confucian texts and massacred Confucian scholars, trying to unify the ideological thinking within the Kingdom. Therefore, the elimination of Confucian texts became controversial for scholars in later dynasties and there were constant debates on the extent of Confucian texts' elimination. Confucianism had been revived during the Han dynasty and became the national religion in the later western Han dynasty. After Qin and early Han, a new script of Confucian teachings and manuscripts were written based on people's recounts and memory of Confucianism. This is called the "New Texts". On the other hand, "Old texts" were found during later Han dynasty, and those texts had been hidden away to save them from the burning of Qin and unearthed from the walls of Confucius' old home.⁵⁷ Scholars during the Hans were unable to distinguish specific version as more authentic than another.

⁵⁵ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 291.

⁵⁶ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 110.

⁵⁷ Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press: A Division of Macmillan, Inc, 1981), 113.

Between 9-23 CE, Wang Mang 王莽 took the throne and built the Xin dynasty, with his favorite official, Liu Xin 刘歆 (46 BCE-23 CE). Liu Xin was the third son of Liu Xiang 刘向 (79-8 BCE), who was a powerful governmental official under the western Han, and Liu Xiang was assigned to collect and organize the old Confucian scripts, the “old texts”, that were found during the later western Han, and Liu Xin was asked by the emperor to finish his father’s work after Liu Xiang’s death. The work was primarily comparing two or more surviving text and creating an approved version. Nevertheless, both Liu Xiang and Liu Xin cannot successfully complete all of the old Confucian scripts: “Chapter 30 of the Hanshu lists a total of 677 works, of which no more than 153 survive in some form today”.⁵⁸ One text that was organized by Liu Xin was extremely controversial, the Zuo Zhuan 左传, which Liu Xin claims was found during the demolition of Confucius’s residence along with Zuo Qiuming’s interpretation of the *Annals*. Then, Liu added those parts within his new editions. Nevertheless, those interpretations became extremely controversial. This controversy cast doubt on Confucianism for 2000 years, since it questions the validity of Neo-Confucian texts itself. Kang uses this controversy to attack Liu Xin, and Kang claims those “old texts” were forged by Liu Xin himself.

Using a book of compounded essays, Kang argues that the foundations of neo-Confucianism was fake and had been replicated by Liu Xin. Kang describes those texts that was written in Xin dynasty as the studies of Xin, rather than authentic Confucianism: “Those are the studies of Xin rather than the Studies of the Han. Scholars during the Song dynasty were reading those falsified classics, rather than the true words from Confucius himself”.⁵⁹ In the first chapter of the book, Kang not only declared his standpoint, but also emphasized the impact of false classics that all Confucian scholars in later ages from fifth century to nineteenth century were reading falsified classics. At its core, this book serves more than the purposes of academics, but rather a social proclamation that there were problems within neo-Confucianism in the current Qing dynasty. Kang further argues that Qin emperor did not burn all Confucian classics in the country, but rather left several versions among official academy for reference purposes. As Kang said: “The emperor asked to burn all books among common people, but he asked a core circle of officials to keep their Confucian books. The purpose of book burning was trying to fool the common people while keeping themselves wise”.⁶⁰ Kang tries to argue the preservation of authentic Confucian book so that there should not be two different versions of Confucian classics being read afterwards. Therefore, one of those two versions has to be falsified by Liu Xin. At the same time, Kang recounts the descendants of Confucius himself in a calendar aspect,⁶¹ which further shows high probability of books being preserved. Therefore, those new scripts that were remade are essentially correct. By numbering those examples of potential preservations of old scripts, Kang tries to cast doubt on

⁵⁸William T. Rowe, *China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 377.

⁵⁹ Kang You-wei, *On the Falsified Classics of Qing* (Beijing: Renming University of China Press, 2010), 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

Liu Xin's collections and reorganization of those old scripts.

According to Kang, based on Han Confucian scholar Fu Sheng 伏生, there were multiple Confucian works that exist today that were not supposed to exist:

According to Fu Sheng, there were twenty eight new scripts that were existing, while there should not have Gu Wen Shang Shu 古文尚书, which was found in a wall of a Confucian scholar, and there should not be thirty seven chapters of Yi Li 逸礼, five chapters of Zhou Guan 周官, Ming Tang Yin Yang 明堂阴阳, and Wang Shi Li Ji 王史氏记...and there was nowhere mentioning those texts in other Confucian classics, so there is no doubt that those texts were falsified and remade by Liu Xin.⁶²

This is an example of Kang utilizing new scripts and its preservation to counter argue the authenticity of the old scripts. By quoting and reading through an early Han Confucian scholar, Kang showed that those books were never heard of during the early Han dynasty, so that there is a high possibility that those unheard texts were falsified.

Another fundamental argument that Kang made in his book was the doubt on calligraphy within old scripts themselves. Kang describes that the later found old scripts were different in how it was written, and the form was changing even though they were supposedly from the same source, Confucius: "Confucius's own teachings were taught and adsorbed by his descendants for tenths of generations, along with the preservations of scholars, and they were passed by mentors to students, father to sons. How there can be differences in the ways of writings?"⁶³ Then, Kang further provides evidences that Liu utilized his power to organize a group of people to falsified book together for him,⁶⁴ which explains the extent that so many books were falsified by Liu, as Kang claims.

As mentioned above, one main target of Kang's argument is *左传*, *Zuo Zhuan*. *Zuo Zhuan* was supposed to be written by Zuo Qiuming, a famous historian in the Spring and Autumn period. Nevertheless, Kang believes that the current versions of *Zuo Zhuan* left was falsified by Liu Xin, who added his personal beliefs into the text. Most importantly, Kang uses *Zuo Zhuan* as an evidence to claim that Liu Xin also falsified some parts of *Analects*, and *孝经*, *the Classics of Filial Piety*.⁶⁵ Therefore, Kang's target was not only one single falsified book, but rather a majority of Confucian classics with significant spectrums. According to Kang, all " 'Erya' 'Gushu' 'Maoshi' 'Yili' 《尔雅》 《古书》 《毛诗》 《逸礼》 " ⁶⁶ were falsified by Liu Xin, and Kang affirms that there is no doubt "Song people interpreted and studied those falsified classics and got an understanding opposite from original Confucian thoughts".⁶⁷ By arguing that the classics Song Scholars were reading were forged, Kang argues that their ideologies developed by those classics already derived

⁶² Ibid., 38.

⁶³ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 109.

from original Confucian thoughts.

Nevertheless, Kang's argument in his book were essentially flawed. Kang never admit or list any possibilities that those early Han scholars may not even read through the entire Confucius classics. Therefore, Kang made this assumption that those Confucius scholars he mentioned were reading through all Confucian classics, despite the limited resources during 100 BCE. Kang's logic was essentially flawed: if any of those texts did not appear in any of those scholar's works, their authenticity was in doubt. Even Liang Qichao himself describes Kang's book as tending toward "manipulating evidences rather than relying on them".⁶⁸ Most importantly, in 1929, a scholar in Beijing University wrote a book, *刘向歆父子年谱*, *The Annual Accounts of Liu Family*, completely rejected the arguments of Kang Youwei, describing the innocence of Liu family and their contribution on reorganizing Confucian classics. There was also commonly believed that it would be too much speculations that Liu Xin recreated all of those Confucian classics by themselves. There was much doubt with Liu's ability on accomplishing that.

However, Kang's main purpose was to emphasize the impacts of his arguments, rather than his attacks on Liu Xin himself. Those arguments were not new in traditional scholarly circle, and several Confucian scholars also suspected the authenticity of the Confucian classics. Nevertheless, Kang was the first one specially mentioning the fundamental consequences of falsified books. Therefore, Kang rejects the entire neo-Confucian ideologies. Kang's tone in the book fills with confidence and certainty: "Here are all evidences, and there is completely no doubt that those texts were falsified".⁶⁹ From the tone of the book, Kang not only wrote an argument specifically about an old controversy in ancient texts, but rather making a political proclamation toward the foundation of neo-Confucianism.

This book, *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, exerts numerous impact on the scholar field after it was published in 1891. The Qing government tried to censor and destroy all versions of it two years after it was published, since its ideals were too radical in criticizing Neo-Confucian classics. The contemporaries commented the book *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty* "went beyond the usual academic interpretation of Confucian teaching, with dangerous and undesirable political implications."⁷⁰ There was consistent debate on the authenticity of Confucian texts, even after Kang died in the 1920s, but *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty* was the scholarly benchmark during the late nineteenth century.

Next book Kang wrote is *Confucius as a Reformer*. Compared to *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, which paid significant emphasis on academic aspects, *Confucius as a Reformer* pays more attentions to the evolution of Confucianism and the historical part of it. Essentially, Kang argues that Confucius was a historian, who learned from the past and conducted reform based on the past. The history for Confucius, however, can be traced backed to 1600 BCE, when the legends of early

⁶⁸ Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 117.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁰ Hsu, 383.

civilization began. Kang argues that Confucius referred to early Chinese establisher for his philosophical ideas and conducted reform when he wrote his classics. Confucius referred to the early philosophical scholars, but Confucius was not a conservative; he was using ancient custom as a logical back up for his reforms.

First part of *Confucius as a Reformer* is spent to narrate how different school of thoughts were developed based on the past, which illustrate how those schools of thoughts borrowed ideals from early Shang and Zhou dynasty. One of the prominent philosophical schools of thought is Mohism, leaded by Mozi, and Kang claims that the thoughts of Mozi were derived from early leaders in Chinese civilization: “In the past, the emperor Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu all care about the common people and hold respects toward heaven and spirituals in nature, which is why the heaven allowed them to be the emperor”.⁷¹ Kang uses this quote to show the early impact of civilization toward the developments of early philosophical thoughts. Hence, Kang argues that those schools of thoughts all tend to borrow ideas and inspirations from previous dynasties and civilization. Besides the respects toward the spirituals and nature, Kang argues that Mozi’s frugal life was learned from historical figures, since early emperors tend to be economical as living, as well as the promotion of no sacrifices in burial ceremony: “No sacrifices and expensive spending that promoted by Mozi was borrowed from the emperors, Rao 尧, Shun 舜, Yu 禹”.⁷² After specifically mentioning Mozi, Kang moves on to argue that all fourteen famous philosophers were learning through the past to some extent, by providing textual evidences of how early emperors were referred by those philosophers.

Kang uses one section to show how progressive Confucius’s ideals comparing to contemporaries, which shows the reform nature of Confucius’ thoughts. Kang explains that there were different generations of philosophical thoughts before Confucius himself: “If we look at the Spring and Autumn period, we can know that Confucius certainly made some reform. Therefore, thoughts during the Spring and Autumn are one generation of thoughts, while most people don’t understand that Confucius is the pioneer of reformation”.⁷³ By utilizing this sentence, Kang argues that there is significant difference between ideologies of Confucianism and thoughts during the Spring and Autumn period. Furthermore, Kang lists the details of Confucius’ reform: “according to Li Ji, common scales, writing style, clothes, names, tools, were all changed and improved in Kingdoms that Confucius went through”.⁷⁴ Therefore, using those examples, Kang argues that Confucius made fundamental changes toward the society, not limited to political thoughts, but also on ways of living. Comparing different social changes before and after Confucius’s time, Kang argues the reform nature of Confucius himself.

Then, Kang uses examples within ancient texts to show that Confucius conducted reforms by borrowing ideals from early dynasties. According to Kang himself, “Confucius conducted his reform from Yao, Shun, the King Wen of Zhou,

⁷¹ Kang You-wei, *On Confucius as a Reformer* (Beijing: Renming University of China Press, 2010), 52.

⁷² Kang, *On Confucius as a Reformer*, 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

the King Wu of Zhou...Among those previous leaders, Confucius especially appreciates the King Wen of Zhou, and Confucius primarily lean toward Zhou dynasty traditions rather than Xia dynasty”.⁷⁵ Within the overall frameworks, Kang argues that the promotion of peace within Confucianism was derived from Yao and Shun: “The book Chun Qiu begins at Zhou, and end at mentioning Yao and Shun. Governing an empire of warfare and bringing peace were initiated by the King of Wen, as well as Yao and Shun”.⁷⁶ Therefore, the core of Confucianism, peace and anti-war, was derived from previous governing, which Kang argues that Confucius borrowed those mentality and further promotion. Furthermore, Kang uses evidences to show the emphasis on rituals was borrowed from the King of Wen in Zhou dynasty:

During the King Wen of Zhou, there was chaos in the court, but King Wen built up the rituals...therefore, Confucius wrote Li Jing and also put emphasis on rituals... Then, memorizing Confucian books, following Confucian traditions, wearing Confucian clothes are all followed after King Wen’s issues and his laws.⁷⁷

Besides rituals, Kang mentions that the two most essential characters, Ren and Xiao, filial piety, were also borrowed from the King Wen of Zhou: “The Wen emperor promotes benevolence toward its people, promoting respects among officials, promoting filial piety among descendants, and promoting trusts among commoners”,⁷⁸ Kang uses this further to show how Confucius borrowed ideas from King Wen of Zhou. Besides Confucius himself, the descendants and students of Confucius further combined and learned from previous emperors, which help recreates its schools of thoughts.⁷⁹ Hence, Kang utilizes these pieces of evidences to demonstrate how Confucius’ nature is more of that of a reformer instead of a conservative.

Borrowing ideas from the past does not necessarily imply that Confucius was a conservative, but it shows that Confucius was using progressive ideals from the past to support his own reforms. In those instances, Confucius suggests that the progressive thoughts of the King Wen of Zhou were largely forgotten and being replaced. Therefore, Confucius not only utilized the progressive thoughts in the past, but also cited them as ideological support for his political reforms during his own time periods.

Most interestingly, Kang uses more than one section to explain how hard challenge Confucius had to overcome to conduct reform, showing a derivation of Kang’s argument that Confucian as a reformer, and showing the political practicality of Kang’s *Confucius as a Reformer*. Kang specifically lists examples of criticisms that other scholars directed toward Confucianism, for various reasons including inappropriateness in existing cultures and being too aggressive in reforms.⁸⁰ Kang tries to show how dedicated Confucius was when he advocated his reforms under

⁷⁵ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 264.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 266.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 272.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 288.

criticisms. Kang adds this section to show that Confucius is a reformer, but also to show the necessity of continuing reform under pressure and conservative opposition. It is a derivation from the central argument that Kang tries to argue for Confucius being a reformer, and listing opposition from other schools of thoughts does not add significant value to Kang's argument. Nevertheless, the mentioning of criticism to Confucius implies a propaganda nature of *Confucius as a Reformer*, that Kang advocate determination in future reform, setting a tone for Kang's actual political participation in the reform.

The *Confucius as a Reformer* generated as highly radical in mind of Neo-Confucian scholars. As Hsu explains contemporary's reaction to the book as: "Kang's interpretation of Confucius as a reformer and his casting doubt on the authenticity of the classics were nothing less than blasphemy and heresy in the eyes of these guardians of Confucian virtues".⁸¹ Scholars also began to question the identity of Kang himself that they said Kang seemed like a Confucian scholar, but he was anti-Confucian in nature.⁸² *Confucius as a Reformer*, in a sense, was indeed an earthquake for scholars during the late Qing, as they describes Kang as a barbarian instead of a Confucian scholar.

Essentially, these two ground breaking works are considered foreshadowing of Kang's actual political impact in the late 1890s. As an unqualified candidate within Confucian literati without passing the civil examination, Kang used both *Confucius as a Reformer* and *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty* to appeal to audiences and to enhance his own reputation. Nevertheless, Kang achieved his goal and used these works to foreshadow his political ambition and future reforms. The next chapter within this study will illustrate Kang's participation in politics within the Qing court and his subsequent reform.

Chapter 3: Ideals in Actions: The One Hundred Day Reform

After publishing *Confucius as a Reformer* and *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, Kang became well-known among scholars in China, even though he didn't have any official titles without passing the Civil Examination. In 1895, Kang and Liang went to Beijing for another Civil Examination together, just after the Qing government had lost to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese war, and a treaty had been signed in Shimonoseki. The treaty of Shimonoseki was just one single unequal treaty that Qing government signed with imperial powers, but the treaty of Shimonoseki was a national humiliation in particular because it symbolizes China can no longer represent the highest level of civilization in East Asia, especially in term of modernization progress such as manufacturing and military. In the treaty of Shimonoseki, Korea gained independence, along with the cession of Taiwan, Liaodong peninsula, Penghu island. The Qing China was forced to submit 200 million taels to Japan, while opening a series of trading ports and allow Japanese nationals to

⁸¹ Hsu, 382.

⁸² Ibid.

engage in industry and manufacturing.⁸³ The treaty symbolizes Japan surpassed China as the leading state in East Asia, and the failure of the Self-Strengthening movement. During this time of national humiliation, Kang and Liang organized memorials and gathered signatures of 603 provincial graduates to protest the peace treaty.⁸⁴ The radical memorials were predominantly opposed by conservatives in the court, and Kang's attempts to submit his memorial failed multiple times. The first one succeeded in June 1895. Even though the emperor initially saw the first memorial by Kang, Kang's next memorial was again blocked by conservative officials surrounding the emperor. At this point, Kang and Liang refocused on evoking more consciences among intellectuals and young people. Kang organized several study societies, schools, and newspapers such as *The Hunan Daily*, and *The Hunan Journal*, as well as established the *China Reform Association* to enhance support for reform. Kang tried to educate and influence the literati-gentry class of late Qing China, believing that a lack of education would prevent people from supporting their reforms. Additionally, Kang and Liang intend to impact a more diverse population, especially the scholars and local gentry, since the local gentry were a powerful group with social impacts.⁸⁵

In 1897, another tide of foreign imperialism entered Qing China, including German's lease of Qingdao 青島. Kang was recommended by some progressive officials to further submit his memorial and his ideas about the reform, while Kang was asked to attend an interview with several highest officials, including Li Hongzhang. In this meeting, Kang expressed the urgency of reform and fully rejected traditional laws of China.⁸⁶ After this, even though Kang don't have the status to attend the emperor in person, Kang was allowed to submit his memorial without any obstructions. By January 1898, Kang was seen by the emperor himself, allowing Kang to describe his plan of reforms.

Kang wrote three books together, *Reform in Japan*, *The Reforms of Peter the Great*, and *The Partition and Destruction in Poland*. These three books remain a form of memorials, while the only audience of those book was the Guangxu emperor. By looking at these books and examples of reforms by Japan, Russia, and failure to reform in Poland, Kang successfully persuaded the emperor to conduct reform as he wanted, and the Guangxu emperor was more determined than ever to begin an institutional reform.⁸⁷ The Guangxu emperor placed Kang's assistants in several key positions including within "The Bureau of Translation and as the Secretary of Grand Council". As a result, the One Hundred Day reform was conducted by Kang and his followers, leaded by the Guangxu emperor. The following paragraphs will closely analyze Kang's reform in education, political administrations, commerce and industrial developments, as well as the logic behind those reforms, according to Kang.

Kang made following suggestions to the Qing emperor, and the majority of

⁸³ Hsu, 344.

⁸⁴ Hsu, 367.

⁸⁵ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 292.

⁸⁶ Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 17.

⁸⁷ Hsu, 371.

them were implemented. The first one was a comprehensive selection of talent among the governmental officials rather than selection by the Civil Examinations. Kang pointed out that Japan utilized all kinds of the people at the beginning of the Meiji restoration, rather than only relying on officials who were selected by the Civil Examination, since civil examination only emphasizes moral superiority rather than practical skills. Kang tried to promote specializations within the court, along with a broad selection of regular people with talents: “If one official specializes in one job, he should not be distracted, and he will thus be good at the job. There are so many difficult jobs in the world, and those cannot be finished by one responsible official.”⁸⁸ Beyond making this suggestion, Kang pointed out the problems in the Qing bureaucracy, stating that it was lacking both specializations and appropriate personnel. Nevertheless, the Qing government and bureaucracy did not need more bureaucrats, as this thesis mentioned at the beginning. The numbers of applications outnumbered the numbers of governmental posts, thus creating numerous governmental positions that were useless in nature and generating expenses.

As Kang mentions, there is a disconnect between the governmental positions and the practical functions of the Qing government. Therefore, Kang advocates a wider and a more practical selection toward the government officials. At the same time, Kang called for the decentralization of power, rather than relying on one official: “In terms of national policies and principles, Japan recruits and appoints all kinds of talents, regardless of one’s background, without the intervention by any specific high-ranked official. This practice greatly differs from ours. Western countries adopt similar procedures, so they all became stronger as a nation”.⁸⁹ The influence of western thoughts including Japan’s reform was fundamental, and Japan was a persuasive example that Kang utilized. Kang concluded that the Japanese government functioned much better than Qing government, even though Japan was too small for traditional China to be compared to. Kang called to eliminate the Civil Examinations, claiming that officials were learning unimportant and impractical information. Kang claimed that there is no correlation between the Civil Examination and what Confucian scholars were studying, especially considering the differences between science and moral teaching.

Hence, Kang used harsh criticism toward the Qing government itself, trying to persuade Gunagxu emperor to correct the problem of Qing dynasty, and his criticism specifically targets the inexperience of Qing government in international relations and diplomacy:

Our nation used to be secluded and isolated with a limited scope of politics. While falsely identifying itself as the middle kingdom unmatched by the others, our nation suffered from stagnation and gradual decline.⁹⁰

Kang was very brave in this aspect, considering the only audience of *Reform in Japan* was the Qing emperor and being able to criticize the ancestors of the emperor himself. The inexperience and ethnocentric attitude of Chinese had been a

⁸⁸ Kang You-wei, *On Reform of Japan* (Beijing: Renming University of China Press, 2010), 45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

problem, and Kang was able to point out the arrogance of Chinese civilization. Kang recognized the central issues Li Hongzhang failed to recognize, that Chinese philosophical thoughts and diplomatic relations were inferior, instead of superior, than other western countries.

Changing political structure was also another major theme Kang closely considered, and his ideals were largely borrowed from the western political systems. Kang describes the old political structure within China as lacking legislation and only having executive branch: “All the Chinese governmental officials are executive officials that carry out the law, but none of them serve as legislative branch”.⁹¹ There is no evidence suggesting Kang referenced political structures in United States, yet it seems that Kang closely analyzed the political structures in both Japan, United States, and France in regard to the separation of powers. Even though Kang never served as an official in Qing government, Kang clearly has a deep understanding of Confucian structure, by acknowledging that the emperor primarily has the power of designing the law, and citizens were only supposed to follow law instead of designing them. In this regard, Kang challenged traditional Confucian thought and encouraged the establishment of a parliament to discuss potential laws, thereby serving as legislative branch.

Books remain a medium for transmitting knowledge and political thoughts, especially in Kang’s mind. One of the most important changes Kang tried to implement was translating books and encouraging Confucian scholars to absorb western knowledge. Liang Qichao, the most trusted fellow of Kang, was appointed as the director of western book translation in Shanghai, along with other fellows that Kang trusted.⁹² Kang Youwei tried to encourage a similar policy to Japan’s policy of books: “At the beginning of the restoration, we have to open an official publishing house to collect and edit foreign books. Then we recruit talented scholars to translate the materials and approve their free affiliations with the publishing house”.⁹³ Furthermore, Kang suggested that it is useless to develop a military when the country has not developed its educational system: “If the school system is not reformed, it is useless to improve the military”.⁹⁴ Fully recognizing the backwardness of education and circulation of books, Kang did not intend to initiate a military reform. As Kang claims, the military won’t be strong when the educational systems cannot keep up, and Kang was aware of the skyrocketing expenses of purchasing equipment from foreign countries.

Scholars blame anti-monetary sentiments on doctrines of Neo-Confucianism. Kang did not explicitly against promoting trading and monetary policies, and Kang encouraged the emperor to utilize monetary incentives to encourage innovative thinking in technologies and scholarly works. Kang uses both examples of the western countries and Japan to describe this stage of social development:

Western countries used to be fooled by the church and the pope, just like our

⁹¹ Ibid., 25.

⁹² Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, 80.

⁹³ Ibid., 37.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

nation. In the 1400s, the British Beacon offered prizes to incentivize people who wrote new books, explored new land, and invented new technologies, which led to an enlarged body of intellectual citizens and a stronger nation. Following Beacon's method, Japan prized Takeshiro Maturawho for his new books and maps.⁹⁵

As Kang defended it himself, all nations went through a similar stage, as the Catholic church controlled all the power and prevented people from gaining knowledge during the Medieval Periods in Europe. Kang tries to compare China and the western countries, citing that China was not alone in failing to develop a superior political structure, and the fault was not lie in Chinese people themselves. In Kang's opinion, there were some weaknesses in traditional Chinese thinking, but it was not late to changing it. Kang said the Chinese people had been fooled by the rigid Neo-Confucianism, just like Europeans under the Catholic Church. Kang was not against utilizing monetary incentives for scholarly works and scientific inventions, while he thought it is an appropriate solution for incentivizing innovations and technological advancements. Anti-monetary sentiment was not a rigid social doctrine that was fixed in people's mind, but rather it was flexible with progressive thoughts.

Similarly, Kang did not avoid talking about monetary policy such as banking, and Kang persuaded the Guangxu emperor to help establish more banks in China: "If there are extra capitals hold by the government and individuals, the central bank can control the interest and market, without losing it to the westerners. If capital can easily flow, agriculture, manufacturing and business can collect capital so that the foundation of the industry will be built. The first step should widely establish banks".⁹⁶ Kang did not mention the contradiction of Confucianism and monetary development at all, and Kang tried to promote Confucianism to the dominant ideology, and it was rather not against promoting monetary exchanges.

At the same time, Kang points out the irresponsibility and corruption of the Qing officials, partially because the knowledge needed for the civil examination is not applicable for governing a country:

[In China,] the officials study useless subjects, and are thus unable to put into practice what they have learned. Further, officials were not being responsible and competent due to meagre income, little chance for promotion, and corrupt bureaucracy. At the same time, without high salary and incentive for promotion because of corruption, officials are not being responsible and they are not able to accomplish things.⁹⁷

While Kang rationalizes the incompetence of governmental officials, he also describes the corruption and unfairness present in government systems. Officials with competence cannot rise to appropriate positions suiting for them because of unfair rewards, higher positions were full of officials who were incompetent, but had relationships with more powerful people.

While Kang Youwei tried to conduct reform on social issues, he claimed that

⁹⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 180.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 59.

the Qing government should be more transparent in regards to taxation. Kang described taxation in the Western country is much higher than the taxation in the Qing dynasty, but the Qing people cannot appreciate a lower tax rate, because they were not aware of the tax rate at all, as Kang wrote:

Western countries offer a detailed list of taxation and expenditure for the public. Their people will not be angry because they know that their contribution is used in the right place, even though their taxation is much higher. However, China has never implemented a similar policy since the ancient time ...while the people cannot see clearly what the nation had done with their taxation, so they would not appreciate it even though their taxation is much lower comparing to western countries.⁹⁸

Kang persuaded the Guangxu emperor to implement a transparent taxation policy and a tax comparison to western countries, so that common people could appreciate the lower tax rates. Another major reason Kang promoting this policy was to reduce corruption among the officials. What Kang failed to recognize was that Chinese commoners were much poorer compared to western peasants, considering inflation and local differences. This showed Kang's lack of understanding regarding the global economy during that time.

Kang strived to change Confucianism into a general ideology rather than a prominent religion with heavy emphasis on rituals and ceremonies. Kang suggested changing the traditional ritual department into an educational department to help educate and spread Confucian ideals. This would allow Confucianism to be separated from politics: "We should change the department of ritual to department of Confucian education, trying to find the way of Confucius, talking about the hierarchy between emperor and subjects, fathers and sons, loyalty, love, and organize meeting for certain times".⁹⁹ Besides switching the overall role of Confucianism, Kang's true intention was reducing the power of ritual departments. Similar to Martin Luther, Kang hoped to reduce expenses on rituals and transform overall religion in people's life, dissolving Confucianism as a daily ritual.

By redefining Confucianism and conducting radical reforms, Kang successfully attracted his most important follower, the Guangxu emperor. The new reform was on the way, from June 11th to September 21st, lasting for approximately 100 days:

A bureau of agriculture, industry and commerce to be established at the capital with branch offices in every province; a mining and railway office at the central government; regulations to reward technological developments; post office at the capital and other commercial centers; and monthly budgetary reports to rationalize government finance...a radical revamping of the civil-service examination system, including the replacement of the traditional requirement for good calligraphy and stereotyped eight-legged essays with new requirements for essays on current affairs and for a knowledge of 'substantial studies'; and the establishment of a Metropolitan University at the capital and of various high and primary schools in every province plus military and technical schools...A number of offices in the central government and several provincial offices under the governors

⁹⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 88.

and governors-general were abolished.¹⁰⁰

Most of the reforms were implemented by Kang Youwei and his advisors, but some were ordered by the Guangxu emperor. However, the Guangxu emperor did not implement several extremely radical reforms, including the promulgation of a constitution, the establishment of a national assembly, and the announcement of joint rule by the emperor and people,¹⁰¹ suggested by Hao Chang. This shows that the Guangxu emperor was not completely controlled by Kang, and rather that he was able to make independent decisions, contrasting to images that the Guangxu emperor was only a puppet of Kang Youwei and reformers.

While Kang's reforms were against bureaucrats' interests, he didn't recognize the power structure within the Qing court. The biggest mistake Kang made was that he overestimated Guangxu emperor's power. He believed that there were no obstacles as long as the emperor himself was determined to conduct the reform: "Our nation, China, is dominated by monarchy. As long as your majesty are determined to conduct reform, no one dares to oppose your policies. The reform would be successful in this case".¹⁰² Kang certainly overestimated the power of Guangxu emperor, since the Empress Dowager overshadowed the whole Qing imperial court. Lead by a coup of the Empress Dowager Cixi, the reform was terminated at the end of year 1898, with the Guangxu emperor being placed under house arrest and Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao being forced into exile. Some parts of the reform were preserved and persisted, such as the establishment of Peking University and some of the superfluous offices were abolished. According to Hsu, the Empress Dowager made it clear that the problem was not the reform but rather the way Kang Youwei implemented it. This study in the next chapter will give a closer look at causes and further impact of Kang's reform and its aftermath.

Conclusion: Aftermath and China's Eventual Path

It was no coincidence that the reform failed, even though its ending resulted from a political coup. The failure of the reform can be traced in different social aspects, rather than a political incident itself. As a matter of fact, the Hunan gentry rejected Kang and Liang along with their ideologies when they were in control of the central politics.¹⁰³ As Hao Chang records: "A public petition in the name of the Hunanese gentry as a whole was presented to the governor. It denounced the radical reformers as dangerous heretics and requested the expulsion of Liang Chi-chao",¹⁰⁴ and it was during the summer of 1889, before the political coup organized by Cixi. In a word, Kang posted a deep cultural challenge to the overall gentry class rather than only Cixi's or the bureaucrats' power. At the center of the political chaos, Kang proclaimed concentration of power by the emperor himself and his advisors and therefore deprived power from the existing bureaucrats and the court. Considering the political support Cixi had from her Manchu elites, there was no way Kang could have

¹⁰⁰ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 326.

¹⁰¹ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 327.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰³ William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 242.

¹⁰⁴ Hao Chang, "Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement", 315.

succeeded. Cixi also tried to show it was not the fault of the reform but the fault of Kang and his advisors themselves.¹⁰⁵ The Confucian scholars who were preparing for the Civil Examination vowed to “eat” Kang, because the abolition of the eight-legged essay hurts their future and symbolizes their previous efforts as worthless.¹⁰⁶

One of the most important reasons behind the failure of Kang’s reform was his own identity as well as his inconsistency of philosophical thoughts. Essentially, Kang was never educated in a western way, and his understanding of the western world was limited to his travel experiences in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Kang’s thinking, therefore, was a compromise between Confucianism and western political thoughts. Trying to imitate western political structure, the gap of ideological difference was too large for Kang Youwei to fill in himself. Scholars criticized Kang and his reforms as not radical or complete enough that the reform failed to assemble complete western political thoughts.¹⁰⁷ Scholars commonly argue that Kang’s reform on Confucianism did not evoke an echo among the intellectual masses. Indeed, Kang’s persuasion was successful for a small group of Confucian progressive scholars, along with the emperor, but he did not gain a grassroots support from millions of Confucian students, who were learning about the “eight-legged essay”. Kang’s understanding about the emperor was largely a traditional and highly Confucian one. Kang relied on the right rulership, Guangxu Emperor, attempting to bring the country from tradition to modernity. As Jerome B. Grieder comments on Kang Youwei’s reform: “It was rather a desperate and disastrous attempt to vindicate reformist premises-dazzling as a rocketburst against a darkening sky that leaves the night blacker than before.”¹⁰⁸

As this thesis illustrates, Kang is more a philosopher than a politician. There was a huge variation in Kang’s thinking during his early days and the 1890s, which shows that Kang’s thinking was not entirely consistent, especially when he tried to apply his ideals to the realistic world. Abolishing the traditional Civil Examination within a year was unrealistic and impossible. Additionally, Kang did not understand the deeper side of the problems and the trend of social changes within the society.

Besides the compromising nature of Kang’s philosophical thinking, Kang failed to recognize the anti-Manchu sentiments, which was a key advantage for the revolutionaries after ten years. Anti-Manchu sentiments became a fundamental advantage and a propaganda method for revolutionaries, especially for gaining support from common people. Even Kang’s most distinguished student, Liang Qichao was largely anti-Manchu, writing about the brutal nature of Manchu army when it conquered China during the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Liang increasingly disagreed with Kang and the Qing government for cooperating with foreign powers, which determined to partite China with growing aggression. On the other hand, Sun Yatsen utilized the anti-Manchu sentiments among Han Chinese,

¹⁰⁵ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement”, 323.

¹⁰⁶ Hsu, 381.

¹⁰⁷ Wang, Xiaoliu, ed, *One Hundred’s Day Reform and Reform During Late Qing Dynasty* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998), 53.

¹⁰⁸ Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press: A Division of Macmillan, Inc, 1981), 132.

¹⁰⁹ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement”, 306.

especially among the southeastern areas, and organized the revolution of 1911 with the slogan: “Overthrow the Manchus and restore the Chinese”.¹¹⁰

Personality and character plays a central role. According to multiple sources, Kang was widely recognized as an arrogant person. As Liang suggested, Kang was largely subjective in his arguments and writings, manipulating evidences to support his view.¹¹¹ In 1893, Kang had already established his own school in Canton, teaching western thoughts. Sun Yatsen began to hear of Kang as a scholar, since Kang was among the few scholars who were willing to read translated western books. Hearing Kang was knowledgeable in western learning, Sun requested to meet Kang in person. Kang, however, suggested that Sun should “fill out application and request to be a disciple” first.¹¹² Sun, therefore, refused to meet Kang because of his arrogance. After Kang was forced to exile in Japan, Kang expelled a representative out of a meeting with the revolutionaries for his excited state of expression.¹¹³ Even though the source suggests these descriptions are mainly of Sun Yatsen, it is commonly agreed that Kang was somewhat an arrogant person with aggressive ambition. Sources also pointed out that Kang and the Guangxu Emperor intended to use a military coup to overthrow the Empress Dowager, while some eunuchs let out the secret and Empress Dowager Cixi took the action first.¹¹⁴ The incident itself was not significant in nature, since the reform was likely to fail. This narration, however, shows the ambition of Kang Youwei as an individual that wanted to lead the overall country and was willing to use forces when necessary.

There was an immediate legacy of Kang’s reform and its failure. Kang’s reform generated a tide of ideological changes within the Chinese people, and they began thinking about the practicality of current government structure and educational systems. There were generations of study groups, comparing western ideologies and traditional thoughts, which shows the enlightening progress of Chinese people. Those studies societies were largely sponsored by the literati gentry class,¹¹⁵ and those studies societies were utilized for sending new thoughts to the newly opened academics, such as Peking University. There was also a spreading of newspapers and articles, impacted by the greater circulation of publications. Those circulations of ideas were not only limited to the ports, but also with inland cities and towns, and a raising sense of nationalism began to emerge with a sense of nation state, rather than pure loyalty with the emperor and subject system.¹¹⁶

The failure of reform sequentially enhanced anti-foreign sentiments in the imperial court and indirectly fostered the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The Boxer

¹¹⁰ Mary Clabaugh Wright, *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 11.

¹¹¹ Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 62.

¹¹² Shen Weibin, *Sunzhongshan Yu Xinhaigeming (Sun Zhongshan and Revolution of 1911)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 91.

¹¹³ Shen Weibin, *Sunzhongshan Yu Xinhaigeming (Sun Zhongshan and Revolution of 1911)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 98.

¹¹⁴ J.O.P. Bland and E.Backhouse, *China under the Empress Dowager: Being the History of the Life and Times of Tzu Hsi* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 198.

¹¹⁵ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement”, 332.

¹¹⁶ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Changes and the Reform Movement”, 335.

Rebellion was a complicated issue, and Paul A. Cohen gives a detailed narration on the Boxer rebellion and rationale behind the historical event. The Boxers developed an ignorant anti-foreignism resulted from superstition and misunderstanding of missionary activities, and they began to attack foreigners within the modern day Hebei, Shandong, and Shanxi area. The retaliation that resulted from the Boxer rebellion brought another tide of turmoil and instability to the imperial cities and surrounding areas,¹¹⁷ and other provincial powers began to isolate the Qing court. The Boxer rebellion further sped up the progress of Qing's failure, while the One Hundred Days Reform was an indirect cause for the Boxer rebellion. Ordinary people probably didn't have much sentiment toward Kang and his reform, but the official Qing court developed an anti-western feeling even more after Kang tried to grasp powers from the Empress Dowager. The Qing decided to support the Boxers rather than suppressing them partially due to growing anti-foreign sentiments in the imperial court because of Kang Youwei and his reform.

After the failure of the One Hundred Days reform, even the conservatives in the Qing court saw changes were necessary. As shown by Cixi's reforms to the government after 1900s, the Qing government finally abolished the Civil Examinations, even though it was already too late. A constitution was drafted and implemented, but the revolutionaries already took actions.¹¹⁸ The failure of radical reform sent a signal that an Constitutional Monarchy will never be possible and the Manchus were unwilling to give up their powers. China eventually took another path toward revolution, when Sun Yatsen organized the Revolution of 1911 and completely overthrew the Qing government. Nevertheless, China went through an even more difficult time during the revolution, leading to an unstable republic and a period of warlords and division, and China further suffered during the Second Sino-Japanese war, partially resulting from lack of industrial and technological developments during the first twenty years of twentieth century.

Confucianism was not rejected during the early ages of republic under Sun Yatsen, while Mao advocated a dramatic anti-Confucianism campaign trying to eliminate Confucianism in the newly born republic. During the years of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, a massive anti-Confucianism campaign was conducted and numerous remaining Confucian historical sites were destroyed. In the mind of Mao, Confucianism remained as a conservative ideology that blocked universal class struggle and proletarian revolutions, as James Gregor and Maria Hsia Chang analyzed in their co-authored essay "Anti-Confucianism: Mao's Last Campaign".

Confucianists may or may not have advocated centralization, institutionalization, ideological unity, and economic production, but it is manifestly clear that neither Confucius nor the Confucianists ever advocated class struggle. The indisputable core of the Confucian tradition was its advocacy of *jen*, the doctrine of benevolence and collective harmony. Confucius represented, therefore, all exponents of any form of class harmony, collaboration, compromise, and

¹¹⁷ Paul A Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 256.

¹¹⁸ William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 258.

accommodation...By 1949, he (Mao) had specifically isolated the Confucian doctrine of *jen* (benevolence) as the object of his scorn. It was not benevolence, but violence, that would be applied as a policy toward 'reactionaries and towards the reactionary activities of the reactionary classes.' The policy of benevolence would be 'applied only within the ranks of the people, not beyond.'¹¹⁹

As the above text indicates, Confucianism was regarded as an obstacle for the proletarian revolution of modern China, at least for Mao, advocating a much more violent alternative to transform China from a backward monarchy toward a communist republic. Hence, Mao and other western scholars such as Joseph Levenson and John Fairbank have a similar attitude toward Confucianism that it is necessary for China to reduce the importance of Confucianism for China to modernize.¹²⁰ As the path of China has shown, the influence of Confucianism faded throughout the twentieth century China and has continued until present day.

It is more than a coincidence that the majority of scholars agreed on the contradiction between Confucianism and China's modernization. Confucianism does have some characteristics that should be criticized, especially its link with hierarchy and overemphasis on morality rather than innovation and social progression. Nevertheless, this thesis challenges the mainstream thinking by showing Kang Youwei's works, a Confucian scholar who tried to transform and set traditional Qing dynasty in reform. Utilizing arguments from *The Book of the Great Community*, *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, *Confucius as a Reformer*, *Reform in Japan*, Kang Youwei presents us an alternative that Qing China could take before it was completely revolutionized and entered chaos for another 40 years. A reform similar to Meiji restoration could potentially give China an option to transit in a much more peaceful way, and this question was the initial reason this thesis born. The Manchus were trying to learn from Japan and their rapid modernization, preserving their own Confucian lineage and power, and scholars had argued that the institutional reforms such as the Self-Strengthening movement had pushed the modernization progress more than people thought.¹²¹ However, the progress was not as fast as Chinese intellectuals like Kang Youwei and Sun Yatsen hoped it to be, but it shows some capability of Manchu lineage conducting reform. In contrast, there were major reasons that Kang's reform failed including some fundamental mistakes and contradictions, especially anti-Manchu sentiments. Most importantly, China could potentially suffer a much longer time than 40 years if Kang's reform continued but without building a modernized nation. It is impossible to project another path of China, while it is only possible to recreate a reform that based on Confucianism China could take.

It is also worth noting the role of Confucianism in present day China and

¹¹⁹ A. James Gregor and Maria Hsia Chang, "Anti-Confucianism: Mao's Last Campaign," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 11 (Nov 1979), 1087.

¹²⁰ Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 61.

¹²¹ Michael Gasster, "Reform and Revolution in China's Political Modernization" in *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900-1913*, ed. Mary Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 93.

overseas Chinese community. Confucian institutes were built all around the world, influencing overseas Chinese community, funded by the government of People's Republic of China. The Confucius Institute were opened and promoted by the PRC during 2004, and it serves the function of teaching Chinese language and culture. It represents the PRC's efforts to spread Chinese traditional culture and ideologies. IN 2014, faculty in University of Chicago signed a petition against the funding of Confucian Institute in University of Chicago, claiming that the existing of the Confucian Institute "put political constraints on free speech".¹²² The controversies around Confucianism in twenty first century allow us to ask following questions; What is the role of Confucianism in Modern Day China? Was the Confucian Institute represent a different attitude that current People Republic of China government previously have toward Confucianism and its rigidity? Will there be another transformation of Confucianism in the future? As scholars criticized Kang Youwei himself was not Confucian at all, how will the definition toward Confucianism change throughout time? This thesis, however, tries to challenge some existing misperceptions toward Confucianism, and it intends to present Kang and fellow Confucian scholars' efforts to modernize China under the ideological norms of Confucianism. The significance of this thesis relies on its discussion on how Confucianism can be transformed, and it tries to give a alternative that China could take at its darkest time.

¹²² Harini Jaganathan, "Confucius Institute Protested by Faculty", *The Chicago Maroon*, May 2, 2014. URL: <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/2014/05/02/confucius-insitute-protested-by-faculty/>.

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