





### Acknowledgement

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ABSTRACT

the Late Qing Dynasty

by

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eventually failed, his ideology and practices showed an alternative path for China which underwent tumultuous socio-political changes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on these observations, this thesis also analyzes

reforms and shedding new light on the role of Confucianism in modern and contemporary China.

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This honor thesis late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, along with a crucial figure, Kang Youwei (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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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.<sup>4</sup> Zhu Xi himself,

<sup>5</sup> 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



This observation toward the emphasis on extreme morality and virtue rather than practical subjects was criticized by western scholars to be the ultimate reasons

half of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> The core of the Self-Strengthening Movement, however, wa -  
Strengthening Movement, the Jiangnan arsenal and Nanjing arsenal were built, along



to enter the bureaucracy, and there was no sufficient reward for them.<sup>21</sup> Both taxation and monetary policies in Qing dynasty were inorganized; inflation lasted for more than a century, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> 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 a failure in Qing China, along with improper control over the financial policies.

Another significant reason behind 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 enemies perceived by the court outside. The tributary states were surrounding nations that submitted tributes to the

factors in the Nian rebellion when frequent flooding forced peasants to move away from their land.<sup>25</sup> The Boxer rebellion of 1900 also was caused largely by drought, argued by Paul A. Cohen.<sup>26</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup>

three stages, we will  
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 Youwei's Early Years

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 importance of Kang's birth.

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

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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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

a Neo-Confucian society.<sup>35</sup> 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





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

have ever encouraged the opening of colleges, schools, and benevolent institutions

now exists in foreign countries should be

resisting foreign nations, we must cherish loyalty and righteousness and unite ourselves under the imperial dignity and power.<sup>41</sup>

This quote from Zhang Zhidong is a typical example of Self-Strengthening s 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 wea4391 0 0 1h Tm0 g0 ETQq

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 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. 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.<sup>44</sup> *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



was bound by traditional altitude including bias and stereotypical discrimination.

*The Book of the Great Community* 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 symbolize





Between 9-23 CE, Wang Mang took the throne and built the Xin dynasty, with his favorite official, Liu Xin (46 BCE-23 CE). Liu Xin was the third son of Liu Xiang (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 that were found during the later western Han, and Liu Xin was

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

.<sup>58</sup> One text that was organized by Liu Xin was extremely controversial, the Zuo Zhuan, which Liu Xin claims was found interpretation of the





from original Confucian thoughts.

Never  
 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.

was in doubt.

.<sup>68</sup> Most importantly, in 1929, a  
 scholar in Beijing University wrote a book, *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 ability on accomplishing that.

to emphasize the impacts of his arguments, rather than his attacks on Liu Xin himself. Those arguments were not new

civilization began. Kang argues that Confucius referred to early Chinese establisher for his philosophical ideas and conducted reform when he wrote his classics.



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

Confucius implies a propaganda nature of *Confucius as a Reformer*, that Kang advocate determination in future participation in the reform.

The



them were implemented. The first one was a comprehensive selection of talent among the governmental officials

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 officials that carry out the law, but none of them serve as legislative branch.<sup>91</sup> 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, 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.<sup>92</sup> Kang Youwei tried to encourage a similar policy to Japan 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.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Kang suggested that it is useless to develop a military when the country has not developed

<sup>94</sup>to en

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

method, Japan prized Takeshiro Maturawho for his new books and maps.<sup>95</sup>

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 his 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 and was flexible with progressive thoughts.

Similarly, Kang did not avoid talking about monetary policy such as banking, and Kang persuaded the government that 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

<sup>96</sup> 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



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

and governors-general were abolished.<sup>100</sup>

Most of the reforms were implemented by Kang Youwei and his advisors,

succeeded. Cixi also tried to show it was not the fault of the reform but the fault of Kang and his advisors themselves.<sup>105</sup> The Confucian scholars who were preparing for essay hurts their future and symbolizes their previous efforts as worthless.<sup>106</sup>

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.

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.<sup>107</sup>

did not

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

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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

a desperate and disastrous attempt to vindicate reformist premises-dazzling as a rocketburst against a darkening sky that leaves the ni<sup>108</sup>

As this thesis illustrates, Kang is more a philosopher than a politician. There

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 , 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

was largely anti-Manchu, writing about the brutal nature of Manchu army when it conquered China during the seventeenth century.<sup>109</sup> 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 TJE1 12 TfeW\*nBT 595.32la(it)-3(5.32).

especially among the southeastern areas, and organized the revolution of 1911 with

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Personality and character plays a central role. According to multiple sources, Kang was widely recognized as an arrogant person. As Liang suggested, Kang w3 71iz





overseas Chinese community. Confucian institutes were built all around the world, influencing overseas Chinese c  
 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 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  
<sup>122</sup> 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  
 s 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.

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<sup>122</sup> Harini Jaganathan,

*The Chicago Maroon*, May 2, 2014.

URL: <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/2014/05/02/confucius-insitute-proteted-by-faculty/>.

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