

THE RISE AND FALL OF KANG YOUWEI:  
THE ILLUMINATING IMPACT OF A PROMINENT  
REFORMER ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA  
IN THE LATE QING DYNASTY

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In the late 19th century China faced a crisis unprecedented in its 3,000-year history—a crisis precipitated by a sequence of humiliating defeats by the Western powers. Realizing that change was inevitable, a group of ruling elite and intellectuals in the Qing Empire advocated the “self-strengthening movement”<sup>1</sup> (1860–1895) posited on the seemingly attractive but actually misleading doctrine of “Chinese learning as the fundamental structure and Western learning for practical use,” the idea being to somehow make use of Western arms, steamships, science, and technology, while preserving Confucian values.<sup>2</sup>

Kang Youwei was arguably the first who attempted to re-examine Confucian values and implement institutional reforms far beyond simple adaption of modern technology. Kang’s great contribution was to present Confucius in a new light as an institutional innovator and proponent of change by finding in China’s classical tradition the precedents that would justify the adaptation to the present.<sup>3</sup> Kang’s chance came in 1898 when it seemed that not only the Western powers but also Japan demanded their

individual spheres of influence and intended to carve China into pieces<sup>4</sup>. As the crisis deepened, Emperor Guangxu gave Kang his full confidence and allowed him to spearhead a series of radical reforms aimed at modernizing the Chinese state, its administration, education, laws, economy, technology, military, and police systems, carrying Kang closer to power, and his reform movement almost to success. Between June 11 and September 21, 1898, during about 100 days, Emperor Guangxu issued some 40 reform decrees.<sup>5</sup> With such bold moves to assert authority and capture power, the stage was set for a final showdown. Afraid that the reforms would undermine the position of the Manchus, Empress Dowager Cixi staged a successful *coup d'état*, which stripped Emperor Guangxu of power and captured and executed those of the reformers she could find. Once Kang managed to flee to Japan, all the reform policies were reversed.

In spite of the temporary setback with the return of the conservatives to power, Kang's reform movement pushed China to a new stage in which the people widely concluded that the Manchus were out to protect their limited personal interest at the expense of the country as a whole. As a result, a sense of modern nationalism began to emerge. Ironically, in just three years, Empress Cixi herself was forced to accept the reality of the situation and started to advocate institutional reforms.<sup>6</sup> Yet those reforms were perceived as too superficial and too slow to be sincere. While Kang pursued his radical reforms for constitutional monarchy among overseas supporters, the republican revolutionaries gained momentum and eventually overthrew the Qing Empire in 1911.

## National Crisis of China and Self-Strengthening Movement

China was largely separated from the Western world by a number of natural buffers, including the Gobi desert in the north and northwest, the Tibetan Plateau in the southwest, mountains and forests in the south, and the Pacific Ocean in the east. Its geographical isolation, combined with vast territory and abun-

dant natural resources, allowed China to develop a self-sufficient agrarian economy, independent from cross-border trade. The Chinese considered their country the center of the universe and called their emperors “the Son of Heaven.” Throughout history, Confucian teaching from China greatly influenced the culture of its neighbors. With a perceived cultural superiority, China never treated the neighboring tribes or countries as equals.

Despite contact with the Europeans since the 1600s, the Qing Empire had long considered them barbarians and not been interested in goods or ideas from Europe. Yet European countries, in particular Great Britain, intended to expand their trade with China. Britain first attempted to open China diplomatically around 1787, to negotiate an acceptable framework for trade and establish some form of treaty relations.<sup>7</sup> After total failure in achieving any of its goals, Britain decided that the only way to negotiate with the Qing Empire was the threat of military force. The Sino-British conflict led to the First Opium War (1839–1842), which marked the beginning of Western influence in China.<sup>8</sup> After that, the Qing Empire had wars with almost every major power in the West and later with Japan, with frequent and devastating defeats. Every defeat resulted in a humiliating treaty, granting certain privileges of trade and conceding territory to the victorious nations. For example, in the Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the First Opium War, the Qing Empire gave Britain Hong Kong, paid a large indemnity, opened five ports, was forced to implement a fixed lower tariff on British goods, granted British citizens extraterritoriality rights, and promised Britain that any privilege given to other countries would also be granted to Britain.<sup>9</sup> A short list of the major treaties that the Qing Empire signed in the late 19th century<sup>10</sup> includes: 1842, The Treaty of Nanking signed with Britain; 1858, The Treaty of Tientsin and 1860 the Treaty of Peking signed with Britain-France allied forces; 1881, the Treaty of Hi signed with Russia, and the 1895 Sino-Japanese Treaty.

The crises, and the humiliations caused by these defeats and treaties, led to the inescapable conclusion that China must make great changes. Li Hongzhang, China’s leading statesman

from 1870s to 1901, declared in a memorial to the throne that China was faced with unprecedented changes in its history of over 3,000 years.<sup>11</sup> The dynasty might collapse if it did not take urgent action. A group of ruling elite and intellectuals felt that the only way to save China from foreign domination was to introduce government-sponsored Westernization programs, a movement generally referred to as “self-strengthening.” The primary target was military reforms, because a widely-held belief was “barbarians are superior in three ways: firstly, warships; secondly, firearms; and thirdly, methods of military training and discipline of soldiers.”<sup>12</sup> In the self-strengthening movement, the empire brought iron-clad naval ships from Europe, several arsenals were established, a New Army was formed, young officers were sent abroad to study, and foreign science and technology works were translated. Several secretaries and advisors of Li Hongzhang drew up a wide blueprint for change, involving government backing for the modernization of transport and communication, the adoption of Western science, and the expansion of commerce and industry.<sup>13</sup>

Although the list of enterprises looked impressive, the achievements were disappointing. Social and political institutions remained largely untouched, as the goal was to achieve military equality with the West while at the same time keeping Confucian traditions and ideals as intact as possible. In essence, the self-strengtheners operated on the basis of loyalty to a system, which was not designed to accommodate, let alone encourage, change. The necessary legal and administrative underpinnings were missing. As Jonathan Spence put it, “The ‘self-strengthening’ movement never really took off. Indeed, it was more a succession of experiments than a movement. The various projects undertaken... remained isolated phenomena.”<sup>14</sup> The self-strengthening movement only led to halfway reforms, mainly because the majority of Confucian literati still believed in their cultural superiority. For them, Western learning was only for practical use while Confucian learning remained the essence.<sup>15</sup>

Most importantly, before the reform movement could gain broad support, a philosophical sanction had to be found for

China's borrowing from abroad and changing the old ways. And this sanction had to be found within Confucianism, which was still the vital faith of China's ruling class. Only an insider could perform the intellectual task of updating this Confucian tradition. This was Kang Youwei's great contribution.<sup>16</sup> Of all the Confucian scholars then struggling to find justification for modernization from within China's tradition, Kang was perhaps the most brilliant, presenting Confucius in a new light as an institutional innovator and proponent of change.<sup>17</sup>

### Kang's Ideology of Institutional Reforms and Radical Interpretation of Confucianism

Kang (1858–1927) came from an intellectual background very unusual for his time. He was born into a scholar-official family. Very early in his childhood, he developed an image of himself as a Confucian sage and hence a man with a strong sense of moral mission, which was reinforced by his teacher, a prominent Confucian scholar, who emphasized the centrality of moral-political purpose in Confucian learning.<sup>18</sup> By the early 1880s, Kang was exposed to a variety of intellectual influences outside Neo-Confucianism, including non-Confucian classical Chinese philosophies, Mahayana Buddhism, and Western thought, both Christian and secular.<sup>19</sup> Before turning 30, Kang had already decided on the two goals he wished to work toward for the rest of his life. The first goal was to solve the growing national crisis in China by borrowing ideas from secular Western learning, especially in Western forms of government. The second goal was to achieve universal peace where chaos, suffering and injustice would be replaced by moral harmony and spiritual bliss, an idea likely influenced by his study of religious literature. Kang realized that the threat of Western expansion would not be simply socio-political but also cultural and religious. Christianity and its Western culture were beginning to spread across China and not only was China's political identity at risk; the Confucian faith was also at stake. His two main goals were to protect the state and the faith from imperialism. Even-

tually these two goals formed the core of Kang's agenda, which consisted of a series of institutional reforms:

- Political and military reforms: He aimed to establish a Bureau of Government Reorganization directly under the emperor and staffed by reform-minded officials. The bureau would be responsible for creating institutional reforms, most importantly, the establishment of a modern navy and army. The traditional military examination that tested prospective combatants on their skills in fighting with swords, bows, and arrows was obsolete and should be replaced by military training schools similar to the ones in Prussia and Japan. Exceptional graduates would go on to become the leaders of modernized Chinese militaries.
- Economic reforms: Six of the twelve offices that would be created under the Bureau of Government Reorganization dealt with economic development and the rationalization of public finance. Kang believed that it was the state's responsibility to promote industry, commerce, agriculture, mining and transportation.
- Cultural-educational reforms: Confucianism should be made the official religion of China to prevent all foreign religions, especially Christianity, from seeping into and tarnishing the Chinese culture. To this end, Kang proposed to form a government ministry of religion and to create a nationwide system of Confucian churches.<sup>20</sup>

He urged Japanese books containing Western knowledge to be translated and bright students from China to study abroad in the West. Radical educational reforms would start from replacing the traditional civil service examination system with tests based on specialized Western knowledge. To prepare students for the new examination, a nationwide school system would be set up.

Constitutional monarchy and national wealth and power were two guiding ideas of Kang's institutional reforms. Kang believed that constitutional monarchy would allow the common people to participate in the running of their government and have their voices heard in important decision-making, thereby building and strengthening the bonds between the ruled and the rulers. Democracy would be used as a way to achieve national and political unity. To establish democracy, Kang believed, the citizens must be educated, and thus, the aforementioned educational reforms were necessary. Increasing national wealth and power would be

made possible through the economic and military reforms. Kang recommended the Petrine Reforms of Russia and the Meiji Reforms of Japan as the models for China.<sup>21</sup>

Kang's reformism was strongly supported by his own radical interpretation for Confucianism. He wrote about and spread his interpretation in writings, which "rocked the intellectual world of the Confucian literati to its foundation,"<sup>22</sup> because he sought to purify Confucianism and rescue it from the falsehood of "imperial Confucianism." He boldly declared that the teachings of Confucius had been corrupted or falsified throughout history because of their association with the imperial government. The state orthodoxy was a deliberate distortion of Confucianism by the authoritarian state to serve as its ideological tool of control. His starting point was the New Text movement, in which Qing scholars had attacked the authenticity of the Ancient Text versions of the classics upon which the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy had been based.<sup>23</sup> The New Text versions came from the Earlier Han Dynasty (BC), while the Ancient Text versions became the standard in the Later Han Dynasty (AD). To repudiate the Ancient Text versions in favor of the New Text versions, which actually were older, gave one a chance to escape the Neo-Confucianism and reinterpret the tradition, because the New Text school of thought believed in adapting institutions to the times and so generally favored reform.

Kang's first major piece of radical interpretation of Confucianism, *An inquiry into the classics forged during the Hsin period* (1891), revived a long-forgotten intellectual controversy dating from the Han Dynasty and set forth the provocative thesis that the Ancient Text versions could all be proven by textual criticism to be a forgery. His second major work, *Confucius as institutional reformer*<sup>24</sup> (1898), presented Confucius as, above all, a great innovator, not only as the prophet-like founder of the Confucian religion, but also as an institution-building "king." He claimed that Confucius was a "sage-king" or an "uncrowned king," intent on institutional reform.

Like other New Text advocates, Kang believed that Confucius was the messianic Prophet who revealed the true teachings of Heaven to mankind. Confucius saw human history as a linear development from the age of disorder, through the age of approaching peace, to the final age of universal peace. Of course, in the original literature of the New Text versions, the term “institutional reform” was broad and vague, and dealt more with religious mystical ritual changes than with actual institutional progress. Kang’s ideal, however, had all the modern connotations: absolute monarchy for the age of disorder; constitutional monarchy for the age of approaching peace; and republican government for the age of universal peace.

Through his radical interpretation of Confucianism, he sought cultural sanction for his institutional reforms. Others had published texts stating their pro-reform ideas, but what enabled Kang’s works to have such a significant impact was the incorporation of his views of evolution and progress into a Confucian context at the very moment when these ideas were sweeping the international world. He was able to convince many ignorant and prejudiced gentry of the positive aspects of Western political values, and while they might still believe in the overall superiority of Confucianism, at least now they saw the relevance and importance of Western learning.

Kang’s radical interpretation of Confucianism, however justifiable from his own perspective, produced so much controversy that it inevitably set up serious resistance to his later effort at reform. Anyone who read Kang’s provocative interpretation would wonder what the true identity and character of Confucianism was. Confucianism, which had been the unquestioned center of faith, now became an ideology, the basis of which was problematic and debatable. For many, Kang’s ideas came as a shock which provided a powerful stimulus for change in the intellectual world of the Chinese gentry-literati, “like a volcanic eruption and earthquake.”<sup>25</sup>

## Kang's Radical Reform Movement Prior to 1898

Kang used the success of his published works on the reformist ideology to inspire and organize a radical reform movement. The foundation of this movement was laid when Kang set up a private school where he taught a small group of devoted young scholars and imbued them with his radical interpretation of Confucianism and reformist ideals. Many of these students later became dedicated supporters of Kang's reform movement; one—Liang Qichao—became his chief assistant.

In spite of his radical reformist ideology, Kang's main strategy was a traditional one: to gain the ear of the ruler and seek changes from the top down, counting upon the determination of the central government acting with the blessing of the Imperial court to bring about such change. He felt that the experiences of Meiji Japan and Russia were pertinent as models for China. He thus repeatedly sought an audience with the Qing Emperor in the hope of convincing the ruler of the need for reform.

In 1888, following China's defeat in the Sino-French War, Kang wrote a memorial to the Emperor urging remodeling of the Qing state. A memorial was a statement of facts addressed to the Emperor often accompanied by a petition. In the memorial, Kang argued that superficial borrowing from the West without a fundamental change of the political structure would be insufficient to make China wealthy and powerful. He pointed out that the self-strengthening programs, despite their praiseworthy aims, suffered from problems of abuses and corruption, which arose precisely because of the lack of an effective state apparatus.<sup>26</sup> The memorial from such a humble source naturally never reached the Emperor.<sup>27</sup> Kang also wrote to the dynasty's most powerful officials to present his bold reformist plan and remind them of their responsibilities. His straightforward message aroused curiosity and attention in officialdom.

The opportunity for a sustained and large-scale reform movement came in 1895 when China was defeated in the Sino-Japanese War. Unlike the Western powers, Japan had traditionally

been despised as a backward state far inferior to China in both power and culture. The defeat seemed particularly shocking and ominous after more than 20 years of loudly proclaimed self-strengthening reforms. As Liang Qichao remarked, the war awakened the Chinese people “from the dream of 4,000 years.”<sup>28</sup> In the spring of 1895, Kang and Liang were in Beijing for the metropolitan civil service examination when the news arrived that China was forced to accept the humiliating peace treaty with Japan. Understanding that crisis would make reform imperative, Kang immediately seized the opportunity and got some 1,300 fellow examination candidates to sign *Memorial of the Candidates*, a famous stirring memorial drafted by Kang, urging the court to reject the peace treaty and initiate reforms. Although the petition did not produce an immediate response from the court, this incident created an atmosphere of public concern and increased Kang’s popularity.

To expand his campaign, Kang created new organizational and propaganda instruments.<sup>29</sup> The first one was a study society, an organization whose function was to educate and mobilize the literati-gentry, the “upper-middle-class” of Chinese society. The second one was a newspaper, a powerful instrument for spreading new knowledge and ideals and promoting an intellectual consensus among the people. In August 1895, Kang established the Society for the Study of Self-Strengthening and published a daily newspaper, *The Sino-foreign Gazette*, under the society’s sponsorship.<sup>30</sup> At first, the society was quite successful in attracting many reform-minded scholar-officials, including mostly junior officials and a number of high-ranking gentry such as governors-general in a few provinces and prominent figures in the court. The members convened regularly every 10 days and listened to public speeches on current affairs. Between 1895 and 1898, 103 study societies, 183 modern schools, and 62 publishing houses were set up to combine modernization and liberalization in a way that the self-strengtheners had not done.<sup>31</sup> By 1897, Kang and Liang had emerged as the national leaders of the reformist campaign.

The radical thinking of Kang’s reformist campaign struck at the ideological foundation of the traditional political order.

Ideological conflict emerged not only between the radical reformers and the conservatives but also between the radical and the moderate reformers. Some original supporters, though willing to endorse some elements of Kang's reforms, had a hearty distaste for Kang's reinterpretation of Confucianism. For example, Zhang Zhidong, an influential governor-general, urged the Chinese to be "open-minded" towards Western knowledge, but in the meantime, urged them to combine this open-mindedness with "a sense of the fundamental importance" of Confucian teaching so as to make the two complement each other.<sup>32</sup> Essentially, Zhang did not move beyond the ideology of the self-strengthening movement. Zhang had originally provided funds for the Society for the Study of Self-Strengthening, but later withdrew them and banned its newspaper for advocating dating China's yearly reckoning from Confucius's birth rather than the inception of the reign of the Qing Dynasty. In the proposed re-dating scheme, Zhang sensed an ominous implication of disloyalty to the court. In February 1896, the government shut down the Self-Strengthening Society among other societies after they were impeached when court censors thought they were encouraging the literati to participate in unruly political behavior.<sup>33</sup>

The overarching issue was whether the court could absorb change. The most important figure at the court (and the whole state) was Empress Dowager Cixi. Cixi began her career as a low-ranking Manchu concubine in the imperial palace. Although she became the Empress Dowager when her four-year-old son was made the Emperor, she gained her real political power through a brilliantly organized coup, which eliminated eight regents previously appointed by her late husband Emperor Xianfeng. In 1875, the young Emperor died at the age of 19 and left no heir. Cixi appointed her sister's three-year-old son the heir, and made him Emperor Guangxu. As adoptive mother of her nephew, Cixi became regent.<sup>34</sup> As he grew up, the young Emperor Guangxu became interested in learning about world affairs. When he reached the age of majority in 1889, theoretically the Empress Dowager had to hand over the reins of power to him. In fact she still wielded

enormous influence because the Emperor was her son through adoption and could not go against her wishes.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Cixi commanded the loyalty of the majority of high-ranking officials who owed their positions to her patronage and were personally loyal to her. As a result, the imperial court came to be split between the Emperor's faction who wanted to strengthen the hands of the Emperor and the Empress Dowager's faction who still relied on Cixi. The Emperor's faction came to be associated with reform and the Empress Dowager's with conservatism. The ideological conflict between conservatives and reformers was often intermixed with the factional rivalry between the two rulers. Most government officials, including those who advocated moderate reforms such as Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong, trimmed their sails according to the changing winds in the court. They might support the reforms at times, but if the Empress Dowager's faction was in the ascendancy, they quickly withdrew their support from the reformers and their activities.<sup>36</sup>

### Close to Power: Hundred Days' Reform and the Debacle of 1898

In 1897, as the Germans forcibly occupied Jiaozhou Bay and the Western powers began to scramble for concessions, it seemed that China would be carved into pieces, intensifying the consciousness of crisis in Beijing and throughout the country. Kang capitalized on this opportunity by sending memorials to the Emperor, warning that if reforms were not made, China would disappear as a nation and the Emperor might not even be able to live the life of commoners. Kang also sought out new political allies. This time, he got the very strong support of Weng Tonghe, Guangxu's old imperial tutor. As the leader of the Emperor's faction, Weng already had many reform-minded young officials in his court and was eager to launch reform under his own leadership. Weng introduced Kang to Emperor Guangxu.<sup>37</sup> The 27-year-old Guangxu was very interested in Kang's writings, which recommended the Emperor to follow the example of Peter the Great of Russia and the Meiji Emperor of Japan to initiate reforms.

Guangxu decided to become another Meiji Emperor. On June 11 the Emperor issued a decree announcing reform as the national policy of the country.<sup>38</sup>

Kang's opportunity finally came when he was summoned to the court on June 16, 1898.<sup>39</sup> The meeting was exceptionally long, and Kang urged the Emperor to break through the barrier of conservatism surrounding him by appointing vigorous lower officials to carry out the reform programs. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Emperor requested that Kang submit ideas and information directly to him, bypassing the time consuming bureaucratic process for more efficient communication.<sup>40</sup> The famous Hundred Days' Reform began as a result of this faster communication with Kang acting as the Emperor's principal adviser for reforms.

Between June 11 and September 21, the Emperor issued some 40 reform decrees trying to force through reforms at an unprecedented pace across a broad spectrum: administration, education, laws, economy, technology, military, and police system:<sup>41</sup>

- The economic and military reforms represented an intensification of the self-strengthening movement, including promotion of agriculture, industry, and commerce through specialized bureaus, government sponsorship of mining and railroads, regulations to reward science and technology developments, a nationwide network of postal offices, and new military systems to incorporate modern military weaponry and tactics, train modern armed forces, strengthen naval forces and standardize the defense industry.

- The cultural and educational reforms went significantly beyond the self-strengthening movement, including the creation of modern-style schools teaching the Western disciplines such as universities and military and technical schools, the expansion of translation projects, and the encouragement of study abroad. The most important and radical reform was to replace the traditional requirements for good calligraphy and highly formulaic "eight-legged" essays with new requirements for essays on current events and for practical knowledge. This reform of the civil service ex-

amination system challenged the gentry-literati's right to power and thus became very contentious among the conservatives and even modest reformers.

- Finally, in the last month of the Hundred Days, the Emperor began to remodel the government structure by abolishing certain offices, redirecting the rules of the important boards and offices, and appointing new councilors. Exactly one week before the end of the Hundred Days, the Emperor stated that he was willing to open his palace for discussing changes of government structure.<sup>42</sup> This statement opened the door to endless possibilities of political institution reforms, something that the majority of the court officials definitely did not want to see as they feared that their power would be soon taken away by the commoners.

The real driver of the Hundred Days' Reform was of course the Emperor himself.<sup>43</sup> Yet Kang's influence on the throne was profound as many planned innovations bore his imprint including such ordinary programs as those involving mining, railroads, and steamships. Most of the reform ideas originated directly or indirectly from Kang. Kang's memorials, memoranda, books, and pamphlets reached the throne in large numbers throughout the summer. Explaining how he shaped the reformist policies, Kang humbly memorialized that:<sup>44</sup>

Some of the decrees promulgating the new policies were conceived by the Emperor himself and issued as special edicts, that is, they were not issues in the routine manner as answers to official memorials. The government officials were amazed and, not knowing the source of information of these edicts, suspected that all of the Emperor's special edicts were prompted by me. But how could this be possible provided the rules of our dynasty? All I did was to send in my books; and the Emperor, deriving ideas from my reference notes, would then issue the edicts.

The Hundred Days' Reform began as a series of reforms similar to the self-strengthening movement, but as the summer wore on, it grew increasingly radical and threatened to culminate in a drastic recasting of the whole political structure of the Qing Empire.

Unfortunately, the Emperor's reform decrees remained largely on paper. As before, officials waited to see what Empress Dowager Cixi would do. Cixi did not oppose reform at the outset, and even supported some of the programs, as she had done in the self-strengthening movement. As the Emperor and radical reformers were busy issuing decrees, Cixi quietly consolidated her power. The trend towards radicalization created an atmosphere of apprehension and insecurity in almost the whole of officialdom and polarized the whole court into a seemingly irreconcilable rivalry between the Emperor's faction of a small group of young radical reformers and the Empress Dowager's faction now consisting of the vast majority of officialdom including both the conservatives and the moderate reformers.<sup>45</sup>

The power struggle decidedly affected the events leading to the final showdown in which a *coup d'état* abruptly ended the Hundred Days' Reform. Fearing that Cixi might detain and depose the Emperor, the Emperor's faction desperately sought the active support of the New Army to counter this threat. Their plan was to kill the Manchu commander of all the armed forces in Beijing and Northern China, who was a trusted protégé of Cixi, surround the Summer Palace and abolish Cixi.<sup>46</sup> The young inexperienced Emperor and his equally young idealistic advisors did not realize until it was too late that the supposedly all-powerful Emperor in fact was severely limited in his exercise of power. A much more experienced political figure, Cixi acted swiftly. At dawn on September 21, Cixi left the Summer Palace for the Forbidden City to strip the Emperor of power and force him into solitary seclusion.<sup>47</sup>

As the Hundred Days' Reform ended in disaster, Kang and Liang managed to escape to Japan. Six other reformers were arrested and beheaded. Many other supporters of the reform movement were imprisoned or dismissed from office.

## Final Act: a Constitutional Monarchist in the Storm of Republic Revolution

The reform decrees were mostly reversed with the return of Cixi to power. However, the work of modernization was not halted. It continued in an old, moderate manner much like the self-strengthening movement with the support of provincial leaders such as Zhang Zhidong. Initially supportive to the reformers, Zhang soon revealed his different viewpoint in the middle of the Hundred Days' Reform, arguing that a revival of Confucianism, not an introduction of anti-Confucian, foreign reforms, would save the dynasty and China.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile the conservatives in the central government developed a strong anti-foreign sentiment,<sup>49</sup> because the reformers were helped by foreigners including missionaries. This sentiment in the court, combined with growing anti-foreignism among the peasant masses, eventually led to the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901), in which the Boxers burned missionary facilities and killed Chinese Christians,<sup>50</sup> and the War of 1900, in which the Qing Empire fought with all major Western powers and was defeated dramatically.<sup>51</sup> In 1902, Cixi and her Manchu supporters felt obligated to embrace institutional change as unavoidable, which would equal what had been promulgated in the Hundred Days' Reform. However, their only aim of using it to strengthen the Manchu position tarnished the enterprise from the start.<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime, anti-Manchu sentiment was growing as all Chinese could see the Manchus' inadequacies and all were unfortunately affected by them. The intellectuals used the protection offered by the treaty ports to establish revolutionary societies and journals.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the reformers who preferred to urge the Qing government to reform, the revolutionaries were even more radical, aiming to overthrow the dynasty altogether and establish a new republic. Sun Yatsen, the main leader of the republican revolution<sup>54</sup> wanted to drive out the Manchus, restore Chinese rule, establish a republic, and equalize land rights.<sup>55</sup>

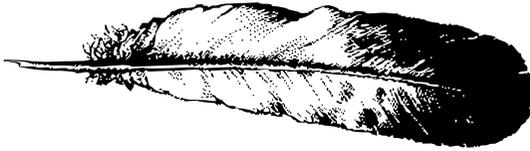
Living the life of a fugitive and exile, Kang Youwei continued his political activities overseas. He traveled extensively in India, Europe, and the United States. Ironically, his stay in Europe and his study of Western history lessened his admiration for the West and increased his appreciation for the traditional culture of China.<sup>56</sup> He now believed that the restoration of power to Emperor Guangxu would be China's only hope of national salvation and arguing for constitutional monarchy instead of republican revolutionary. His argument was that an anti-Manchu revolution was dangerous and unnecessary. It was dangerous because it would create national chaos and disorder, and it was unnecessary because the reforms of the Qing government would eventually lead to constitutional monarchy and eliminate Manchus' autocracy. What concerned Kang most was the government's ability and faith in carrying out institutional reforms effectively and rapidly so as to avoid drastic revolution.<sup>57</sup>

Fearing that Guangxu's life was in great danger, Kang founded the Society to Protect the Emperor in July 1899.<sup>58</sup> This organization had branches in Japan, Southeast Asia, Latin America, Canada, and the United States, cutting heavily into the support for revolutionaries among the overseas Chinese.

As a constitutional monarchist, Kang argued that imperialism was the most immediate threat to China<sup>59</sup> and all should rally against it by supporting Qing's reforms.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, in Sun Yatsen's position, anti-imperialism was muted, Western-style reforms emphasized, and anti-Manchuism intensified. Manchu weakness was obvious to everyone; however, anti-imperialism could not command such unanimous support, especially among the radical intellectuals and merchants, both of whose hostility to imperialism was mixed with admiration and envy. Most importantly, the Manchu ruling clan, loathe to part with power, demonstrated its incapacity to satisfy the demand for radical change. Republican revolution gradually gained much more momentum.

The revolution consisted of many revolts and uprisings, with the turning point being the Wuchang Uprising on October 10, 1911, and ended with the abdication of the "Last Emperor"

on February 12, 1912, that marked the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of China's republican era.<sup>61</sup> Throughout, Kang remained an advocate of constitutional monarchy. With this aim, he launched a failed *coup d'état* in 1917, and as late as 1923, was still seeking support among warlords in order to revive the Qing dynasty. By the time Kang died on March 31, 1927, he was dismissed by most Chinese intellectuals as a hopeless relic of the past. Sadly, in less than 20 years, he went from being regarded as an iconoclastic radical to an anachronistic pariah, reflecting the drastic change of the political environment during the modernization of China when late-Qing China stood at the historical crossroads.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ranbir Vohra, China's Path to Modernization: A Historical Review from 1800 to the Present (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992) pp. 73–78
- <sup>2</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, The Cambridge Illustrated History of China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 244–246
- <sup>3</sup> Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, The Cambridge History of China Vol. 11 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 287
- <sup>4</sup> Jonathan Fenby, Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850 to the Present (New York: HarperCollins, 2008) pp. 56–57
- <sup>5</sup> John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, China: a New History (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006) p. 229
- <sup>6</sup> Vohra, p. 94
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 26–29
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 31–37
- <sup>9</sup> Ebrey, pp. 239–240
- <sup>10</sup> Dong Wang, China's Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005) p. 5
- <sup>11</sup> Y. Chu Wang, "The Intelligentsia in Changing China," Foreign Affairs 36, no. 2 (1958) pp. 315–329
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- <sup>13</sup> Fenby, p. 36
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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88

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In historiography the Han official Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145-87 B.C.?) was China's first identifiable major figure, and he has won recognition as one of the greatest, most innovative, and most influential historians the world has produced. Inheriting his father's court post as Lord Grand Astrologer, which gave him access to court archives, he carried to completion a project initiated by his father—a history of the world up to his time (the world known to him and to China, of course). The resulting work, called *The Historical Records* (*Shih-chi*) is a masterpiece of both organization and style. Its 130 chapters include, in addition to a chronology of important events from the legendary Yellow Emperor down into Emperor Wu's reign, chronological tables for easy reference, historical treatises on topics such as music, the calendar, and waterways, and most important, hundreds of biographies of prominent or interesting people, the notorious as well as the famous. Ssu-ma Ch'ien established a pattern for organizing historical data that was used subsequently in a series of so-called dynastic histories, which preserve the history of imperial China in unsurpassed detail and uniquely systematic order. Moreover, Ssu-ma's lively style made his work a literary monument that has been read with delight by educated classes throughout East Asia.