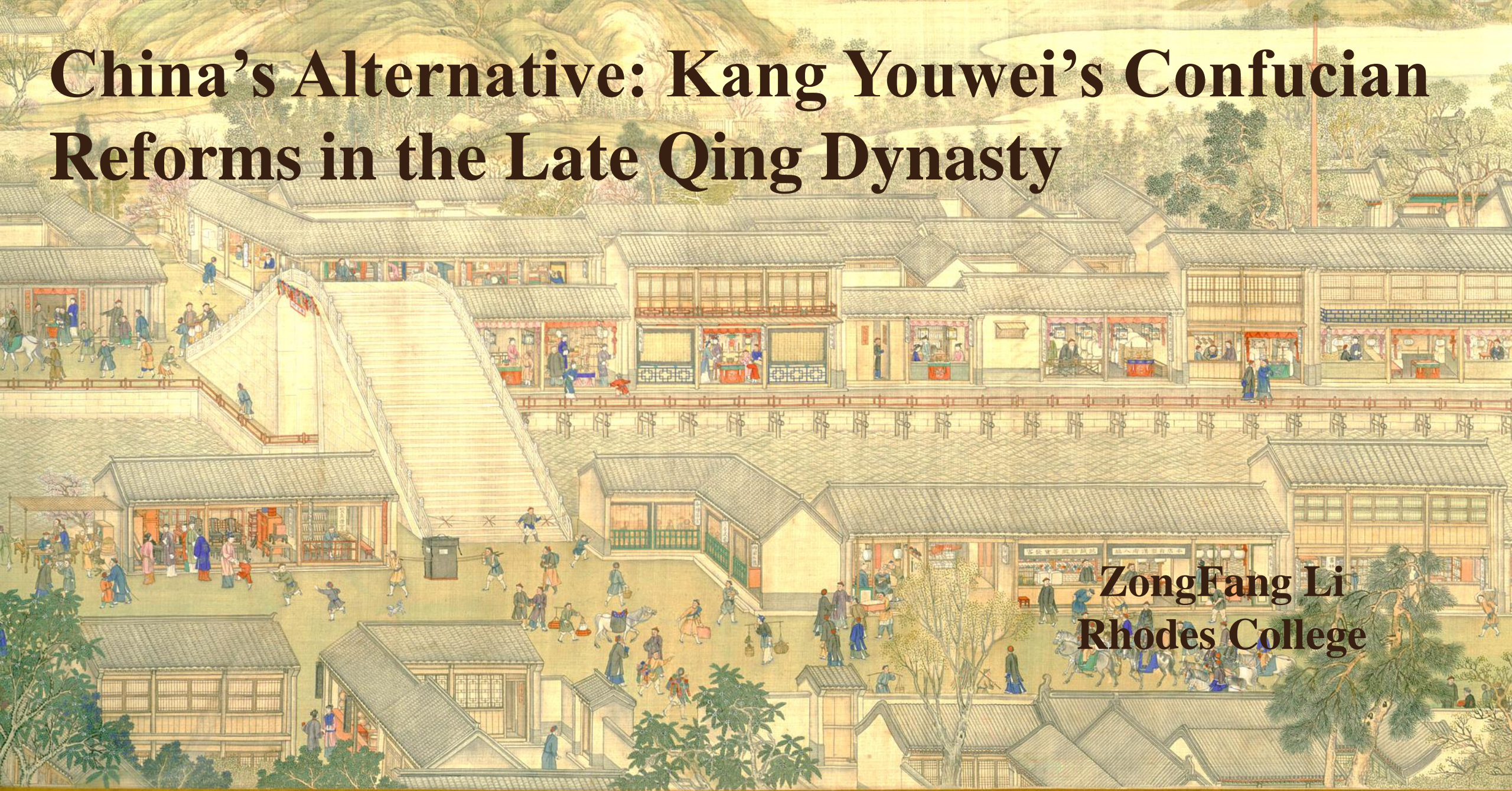


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Kang Youwei and the Modernization of China

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



ZongFang Li
Rhodes College

Source: The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou along the Grand Canal

Research Questions & the Origin of Research



Source: The red guards were destroying Confucian temples during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s

- ❖ What happen to the Five books and Four Classics 四书五经? Why Modern China have an anti-Confucian sentiments?
- ❖ Why did China went through an age of revolution?
- ❖ Were there efforts of reforming China through a more peaceful transition instead of a revolution? Was it possible for China to form a Constitutional Monarchy similar to Japan?
- ❖ **Was Confucianism an inevitable obstacle for China's modernization?**

Historical Contexts of Modern China and the Qing Dynasty



1636

Establishment of Qing



1644 to 1912

**Governed China in
the most Chinese way**



**The Civil Examination
by Neo-Confucian
Standard**



1800

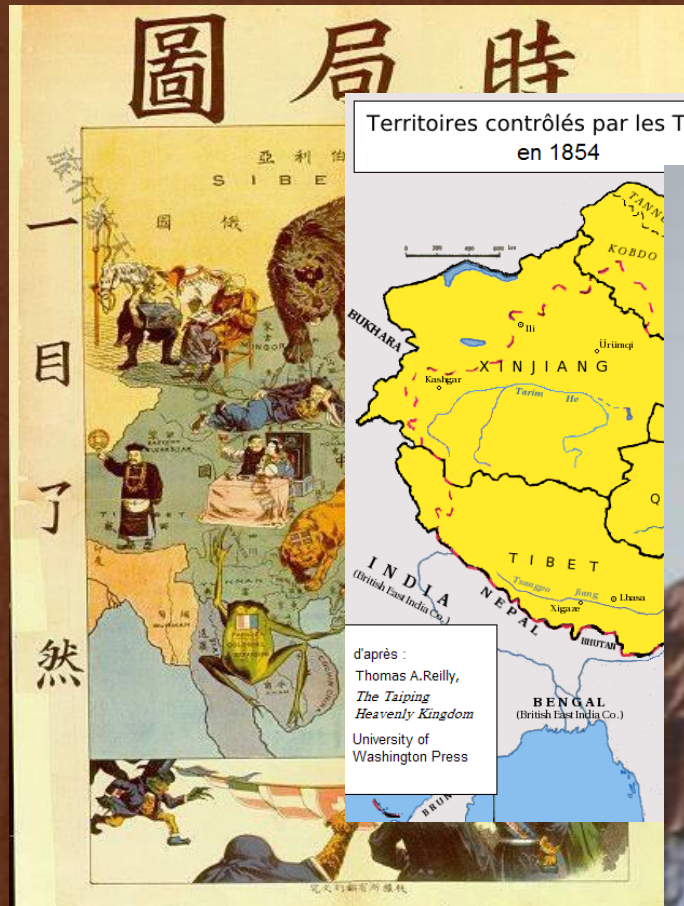
**Reached its
peak in terms of
empire size**



1939

The Opium War

“One Hundreds Years of Humiliation”



1840-1895

Losing Hong Kong, Ili, Taiwan, Annam (Vietnam) and the unequal treaties

1850-1864

Taiping Rebellion & The Nian Rebellion

1850s-1895

The Tongzhi Restoration & The Self-Strengthening movement

1895

The First Sino-Japanese War

1911 to 1949

Revolution and Division

Reasons behind the “100 Years of Humiliation”

Corruptions

Population Growth

Poverty

High inflation rate and inflow of foreign capital

Lack diplomatic experiences because of the tributary systems

Scientific and military gap without the Industrial Revolution

Natural disasters

551-479 BCE
Confucius

1130-1200
Zhu Xi and Neo-Confucianism

What
were the
problems
behind
the Qing
dynasty?



“Confucianism was the problem”

❖ **Wang Anshi** in Song dynasty (960-1276) tried to conduct reforms, making examination more practical and building a stronger royal army.

“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.”

Su Shi commented on Wang Anshi and his reforms

“Confucianism was the problem”

**Mary Clabaugh
Wright**

— “A Confucian society is of necessity an agrarian society: trade, industry, economic development in any form, are its enemies.”

Max Weber

— “The typical Confucian used his own and his family’s savings in order to acquire a literary education and to have himself trained for the examinations...The typical Puritans earned plenty, spent little, and reinvested his income as capital in rational capitalist enterprises.”

Joseph Levenson

— “The amateur’s scorn of professionals has an aspect, too, of patrician contempt for the grasping climbers who were not the gentry’s sort. There were overtones of anti-commercial feeling in the scholar’s insistence that the proper artist is financial disinterested.”

Thesis Statement

- ❖ 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** necessarily the obstacle for China's modernization, and there were efforts to modernize the country by reinterpreting Confucianism and revolutionizing it.

Kang Youwei (康有为) as an individual



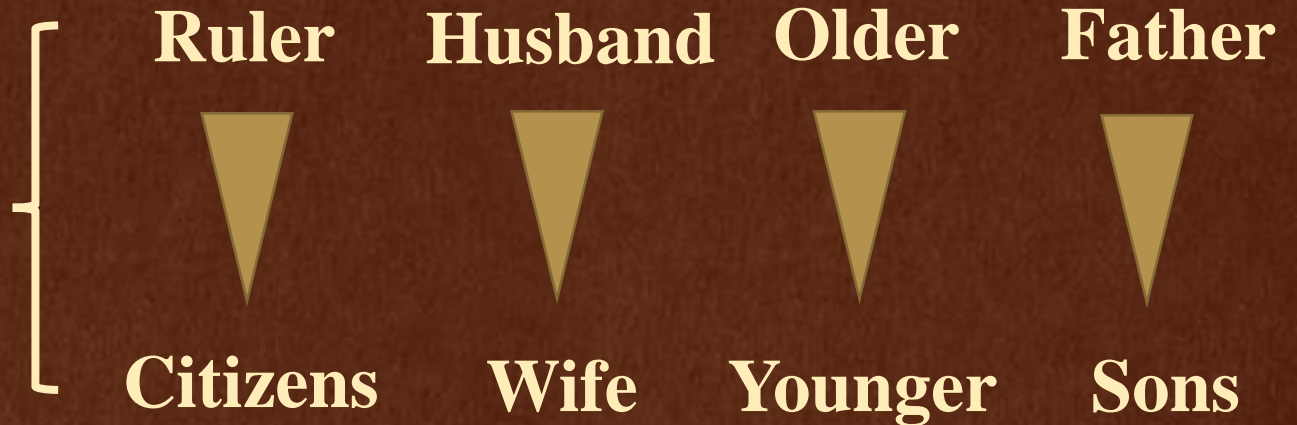
- 1858 — Born in a Chinese scholarly family nearby Canton.
- 1875 — Absorbing Daoism and Buddhism and escaping from the society.
- 1879 — Visited Hong Kong, a domain by Britain, and Shanghai, a trading port with heavy foreign influences, and was shocked by the prosperity of them.
- 1879 — Built the first society against foot-binding practices.
- 1885 — *The Book of the Great Community*.
- 1891 — *The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty*.
- 1896 — *Confucius as a Reformer*.
- 1898 — *Reform in Japan* and the One Hundreds Day Reform

Challenging Foot-binding and Neo-Confucian Social Order

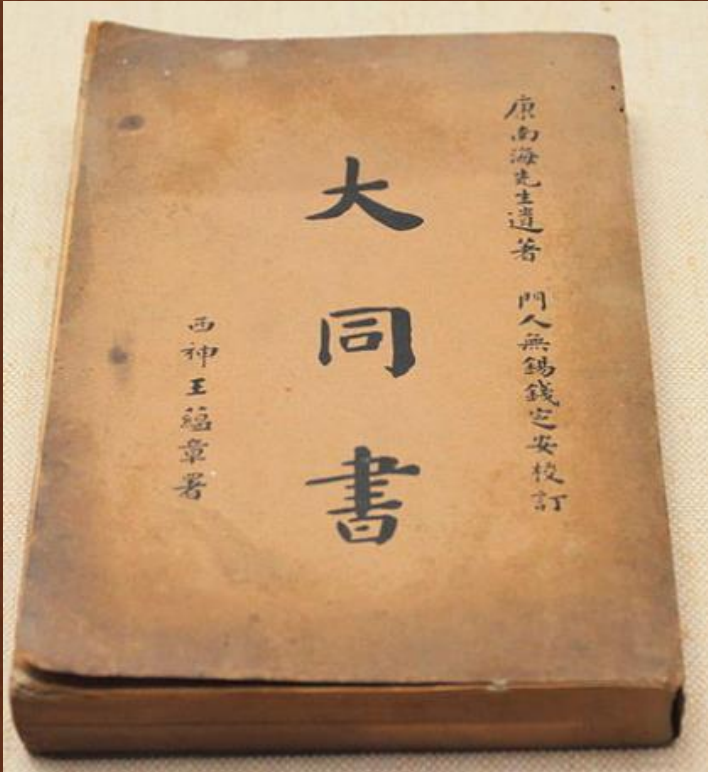


- ❖ Binding feet to 4 inches or around 10 cm.
- ❖ The “Golden Lotus” was regarded as a sign of “beauty”, and thus become sexually desirable for men.
- ❖ Mainly a requirement for upper class women initially.
- ❖ Represent that women were regarded as “**sexual and maternal but otherwise worthless**” in a Neo-Confucian society.

Neo-Confucian
Order

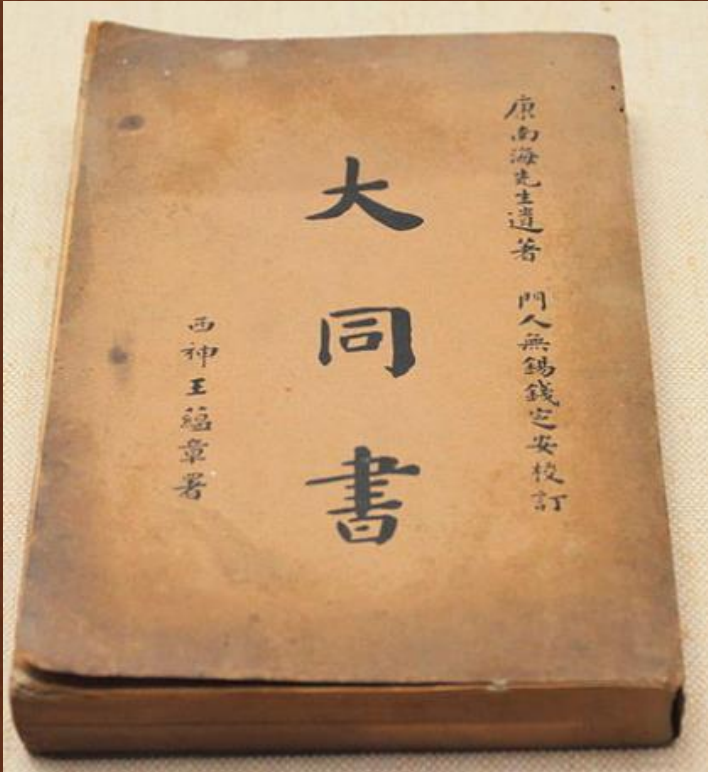


The Book of the Great Community



- ❖ Creating a society without the boundaries of nation states, families, gender and economic status.
- ❖ Intend to not publish during the 19th century.
- ❖ Criticizing Neo-Confucian social orders.
- ❖ “The Song 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”.

The Book of the Great Community



- ❖ Appealing to the Ren 仁, which means humanness and benevolence.
- ❖ “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”.
- ❖ “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”.

The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty.



- ❖ Published in 1891
- ❖ Challenged the authenticity of Neo-Confucian Classics.
- ❖ “Those (A majority of Neo-Confucian classics) 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”
— Kang Youwei.

The False Classics of the Xin Dynasty.

“The Old Texts”
that were found in
the wall of
Confucius home

“The New Texts”



Qin (221-206 BCE)

Early Han Dynasty 206BCE-
220AD

Later Han

- ❖ The Old Texts dominant the Neo-Confucian classics and volumes of books.
- ❖ “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.”
- ❖ “Went beyond the usual academic interpretation of Confucian teaching, with dangerous and undesirable political implications.”

Confucius as a Reformer



- ❖ Published in 1896
- ❖ Claims that Confucius was a reformer instead of a conservatives during his life time. (551 BCE-479 BCE)
- ❖ “According to Li Ji, common scales, writing style, clothes, names, tools, were all changed and improved in Kingdoms that Confucius went through”.
- ❖ Kang also tries to show how difficult Confucius conducted reforms, confronting philosophical and political oppositions.
- ❖ “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”.

Kang's engagement in political reforms

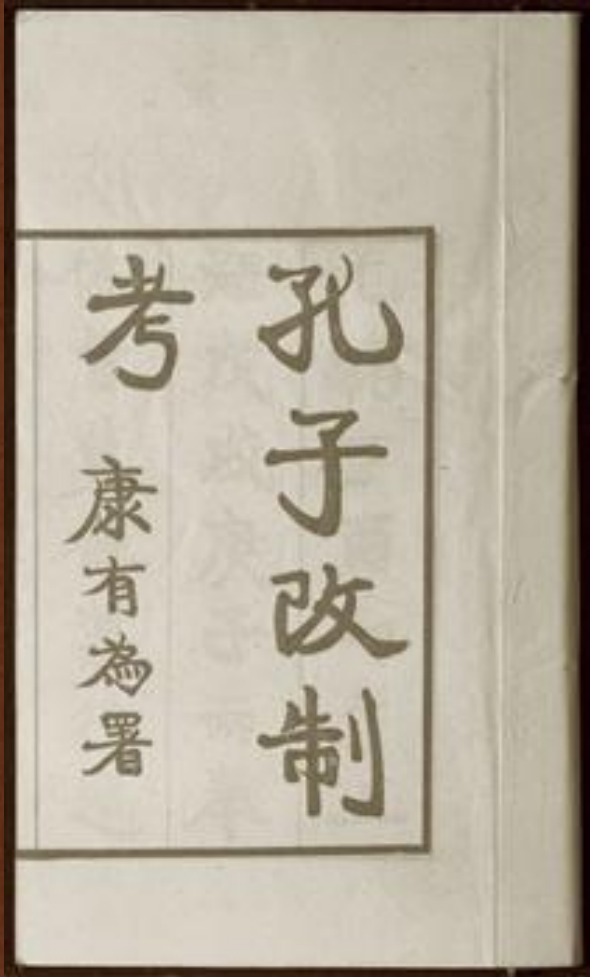


The Guangxu Emperor

- ❖ Political advocacy of reforms finally reached the emperor.
- ❖ With Guangxu Emperor's highly approval.
- ❖ Wrote *Reforms in Japan* to the Emperor, the only audience of his book in 1898.
- ❖ Radical reforms took place from June 11 to September 21, 1898.
 - Bureau of translation, industry and commerce.
 - A mining and railroad offices were built.
 - Abolish traditional eight-legged essays.
 - The imperial university of Peking was established.
 - Abolished impractical offices of rituals and temples.

Reforms in Japan

Civil Examination & Neo-Confucian eight-legged essay



- ❖ “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”.
- ❖ “[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 insufficient income, little chance for promotion, and corrupt bureaucracy.”.

Reforms in Japan

**Confucian
tributary
systems**



❖ “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.”

Mary Clabaugh
Wright



“It (The Qing) was **helpless** where the immediate requirements of foreign policy ran counter to the fundamental requirement of the Confucian order.”

**Ruler-Subject
hierarchy**



❖ “All the Chinese governmental officials are executive officials that carry out the law, but none of them serve as legislative branch.”

Reforms in Japan

❖ “Western countries used to be fooled by the church and the Pope, just like our 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.”



❖ “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”

**Anti-
commercial
sentiments**

Conclusion

- ❖ 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 the flexibility of Confucianism, as well as an alternative that Qing China could took before it was completely revolutionized and entered chaos for another 40 years.

Limitation of Kang Youwei's Reform



The Empress Dowager Cixi

- Kang ignored the anti-Manchu sentiments as the revolutionaries claims “Expel the barbarians” in the revolution of 1911
- Kang was a philosopher rather than a politician, failing to recognize the power struggle in the Qing court.

Personality: Kang being an arrogant person impact his failure at
- some degree, as well as his tendency to “manipulate evidences instead of relying on them”.

Harming the direct interest of bureaucrats and millions of
- Confucian scholars, who were preparing for the Civil Examination
- Kang's reform was a compromise that he was not westernized at a deeper level, while he tried to build a western government.

The Future of Confucianism and its Myth

- ❖ “It is manifestly clear that neither Confucius nor the Confucianists ever advocated class struggle... Confucius represented, therefore, all exponents of any form of class harmony, collaboration, compromise, and 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.’”
- ❖ “Kang wrote the book of world communism, but he did not and could not find the way toward Da Tong”
---Mao Zedong
- ❖ Controversies of Confucian Institute.

Signers of faculty petition raise concerns on Confucius Institute, faculty freedoms

Q&A

The Self-Strengthening Movements and its limitations

“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.**”

-Zhang Zhidong

Source: 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.