

Confucian Religion and Education System in the Kang Youwei's Reform Plans (At the Turn of the 19th-20th Centuries)

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Abstract: This study deals with the views of famous Chinese reformer and founder of modern neo-Confucianism-Kang Youwei (1858-1927). During the period of the 1890s and during Hundred Days Reform Movement of 1898 he offered to the emperor the project of establishment the Confucian Chapel and giving to Confucianism the status of official religion. He put forward similar projects immediately after the revolution in 1911. At the same time, he did not separate the plans of establishing Confucianism from the reforming of education system in China. Historical-genetic and comparative-historical methods were used in the research. The analysis of Kang Youwei's and his contemporaries' works shows that the reformer believed the backwardness of China and inability of the country to compete with the leading Western powers-especially the United States, Britain and Germany comes from the low moral qualities of the Chinese and the imperfection of education system. Reformation of Confucianism on the model of the Christian church and the inclusion of its values in the education system will help to awake the spirit of the nation and to bring the reforms into action quickly. The contemporaries called him "Martin Luther of Confucianism." However, the power elites of the Qing dynasty turned down his projects as radical ones. In 1898-1913 Kang Youwei lived outside China. When he came back, politicians of Chinese Republic rejected the project of Confucian Chapel as being contrary to the ideals of republicanism and democracy; Kang was perceived as a reactionary and conservative. The study is of interest to researchers of Chinese ideology, religious and education idea.

Key words: Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Confucianism, education in China, Confucian Chapel, hundred days reform movement of 1898, Qing dynasty, Chinese Republic

INTRODUCTION

Confucianism played a special role in Kang Youwei's (1858-1927) system of views. He wanted to organize it on the model of the Christian church and integrate it in the system of government as well as in the education system. Being brought up in the tradition of the Song Neo-Confucianism, Kang Youwei believed that Confucianism has the great advantage over other religions it integrated Tao path of the Heaven and human being.

In other words, Confucianism integrates faith as well as rational knowledge. These ideas were notified in his speech at the opening of the Confucian Society in New York in 1908.

By that time, he had already spent 10 years in the West. He visited the major centers of the USA, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany and India. While traveling Kang Youwei got the idea of the European spiritual culture. Politics and science, knowledge and belief were separated from each other

there. Responses to the causes and effects of these events were supposed to help with solving the most important problem Kang Youwei had. How could China achieve the level of development of the Western powers, while saving national identity? Under the circumstances, Confucianism seemed to him the most important opportunity that could be used in three main areas:

- Kang Youwei emphasized the rationality of Confucianism, that didn't pay too much attention to the other world, the spirits or the acts of changing of human nature. This corresponds to Confucian Analects (Legge, 2013)
- Kang Youwei tried to reform the education system that had to integrate the Western scientific method and Confucianism, organized on the model of the Christian church
- Kang Youwei wanted to rethink the role of Confucianism in the Chinese identity as a nation and in the moral education of people

Kang Youwei was misunderstood by Confucian conservatives, remained in power until the revolution in 1911 as well as by the reformers and revolutionary of the new generation, closely related to emigration. It was his tragedy as a reformer.

In this study we will pay special attention to the use of Confucianism in the process of reforming the traditional education system and the transformation of Confucianism into church religion by Kang Youwei.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main source of information for this study was the complete collection of Kang Youwei's works. It was published in Beijing in 2007 in 12 volumes, organized in a strictly chronological sequence. Program and personal materials were contained in books 1-9. In addition, Kang Youwei's biographies written by Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and his other disciples in the period of 1901-1929 were published in the 12th book. These biographies are considered the primary source of information. Historical-genetic and comparative-historical methods were used in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the words of Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei is the "Martin Luther of Confucianism" (Tay, 2010). The main reason why Kang Youwei insisted on the establishment of the Confucian Chapel was its educational role and function of the social order. This explains the role of the education system in this process. In the 1890s Kang Youwei worked on the manuscript *Shili gongfa quanshu* ("The complete book on the veritable order and public law of a state). He expounded his views on the concept of "learning" in this work. From viewpoint of Kang Youwei education includes two main principles:

- Increasing the level of intelligence and competence of students that is inseparable from their social communication skills and self-respect
- Instruction of students in the "subtle principles and basis of institutions, established by people from five continents" which will lead to the fact that educated people would benefit society in the future and at the same time would eradicate personal weaknesses

Kang Youwei tried to implement these principles in his own private school which he founded in 1891. His principles were stated in the expression: "You should base on Western science to understand China". It is logical that Kang Youwei primarily attracted experience of

world religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. In 1891 in his letter to Zhu Yixin Kang Youwei wrote that the widespread of Confucius Tao way depended on the perspicuity of his teaching as well as its popularity among people. He also compared the experience of China and India, noting that the reason for the wide spread of Buddhism in China and the lack of interest in Confucianism in India was the difference in treatment strategy. He considered the main reason for the success of the Christian propagation in the Asian and African countries to be gunboat diplomacy and the technical superiority of the western countries, he supposed the religion to be one of this superiority reasons.

After China's defeat in the war with Japan in 1895, Kang Youwei introduced religious reform in general plan of reformation. He tried to bring it to the emperor. In the second and third memorandum to the emperor Guangxu, he wrote outspoken that the transformation of Confucianism into the church will allow confronting the decay of moral qualities of Chinese people. He also suggested starting expansion of Confucianism abroad. In an address to the emperor in 1898 he wrote outspoken about the need for official proclamation of the *Kongjiaohui* as well as transformation of the direct descendants of Confucius in the analogue of European bishops. Kang Youwei's plans were aligned with the education.

Kang Yuwei considered the backwardness of education system focused on cramming Confucian canons and writing eight-legged essays on government examinations (*keju*) to be the reason for the decadence of the state. In other words, the age-old commentarial tradition should be abandoned and the origins of Confucian teachings returned. The expansion of modern knowledge should be connected to the training of beliefs. Moreover, Confucianism will encourage education and strengthening of the national identity of the Chinese. And the modern education system leading by Peking University will result in the disclosure of talents and increase in the development level of the population.

Such extreme projects caused the wave of criticism in 1898. Many people saw a veiled attempt of Christianization of China in the project of Confucianism. Kang Youwei was accused of trying to make himself status of Pope to share the power with the emperor in one of his pamphlets. Unorthodox views on Confucianism led to the disruption between Kang Youwei and an influential politician of the time Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909). He remained misunderstood among his pupils. The strongest disagreements took place with Liang Qichao, after 1902 he ceased to support the plans of his master in the field of education and Confucianism, although in the political area

they communicated and cooperated until the end of life. Chen Huanzhang (1880-1933), Kang's disciple became his active supporter. Chen Huanzhang was one of the founders of the Society of Confucius. In 1911 he defended his thesis at Columbia University on "The Economic Principles of Confucius and his school" which held the same idea of the indissolubility of education, religion and the economy. For the translation of the concept "Confucian canon" he suggested using the term "The Bible".

Several imperial decrees based on Kang Youwei's ideas were issued during the Hundred Days reform movement in 1898. Decrees published on June 23 and June 30 canceled eight-legged essays at state, district and school exams. Before that on June 12 a decree on the protection of foreign missionaries was issued. On August 9, 1898, a decree on the development of Peking University's organization charter was issued. An American missionary William Alexander Parsons Martin was responsible for it.

The imperial decree of July 10 on the reorganization of schools in the provinces stated that the temples of cults and heretical teachings were to be closed and the premises and property should be handed over to authorities of public education. Moreover all subjects in schools should worship Confucius and offer sacrifices. Goossaert (2006) called such requirements as "Confucian fundamentalism", providing for the unconditional prohibition of all ideas and practices that were not referred to the classical confucian doctrine.

It is known that reforms of 1898 have failed and until 1913 Kang Youwei was forced to live outside of China. In exile, he was actively engaged in the establishment of the Confucian Chapel and campaigned for a constitutional monarchy. In China itself in one and a half decades, Confucianism quickly declined. It became apparent during the reform of education in 1905 and after the cancellation of public examinations in 1909. As a result, Confucianism lost its main institutional principles. In 1911 in consequence of the revolution, China became the republic and Confucianism finally ceased to be a state ideology, it was gradually excluded from the education system.

In the context of the revolutionary chaos, the beginning of the Civil War and the attempts of General Yuan Shikai to seize power, Kang Youwei completely saved his old beliefs. He wrote to Chen Huanzhang on the 30th of July, 1912 that setting up a political party amid the political turmoil, opposition of the President and Parliament would be rash. However, the use of Confucian Chapel would effectively influence the society and politicians. He realized that the public system was conservative and a huge number of students, landowners

and officials lived in the country. All of them would willingly join the Confucian Chapel. He even gave specific predictions, if an immediate campaign would start just in six months Confucian Chapel would be opened in each prefecture and district.

At the end of 1912 Kang Youwei published the declaration of Confucian Chapel in which he set forth the following arguments which were suitable for use in revolutionary propaganda.

- National identity and religion are directly linked. Kang Youwei cited as an example the Jews, whose state was destroyed at the beginning of Christian Era but Judaism and its education system preserved and the Jewish state could be restored. (Kang Youwei visited Jerusalem in 1917 and apparently he knew something about the Zionist movement)
- The development of all the great religions of the world is due to proselytism that is why confucian chapel should organize an active missionary activity
- Republican officials declare confucianism to be a relic of the past and it is contrary to the republican system and democracy. Kang Youwei acknowledged that confucianism encouraged vertical hierarchy and relationship of subordination but stated that it insisted on the public welfare and care of the upper about the lower. In other words, confucianism is not contrary to the republican system, advocating a strong state power
- Kang Youwei stated that religion did not have to be theism. The term *zongjiao* meaning religion in Chinese came from the Japanese language which used Chinese characters primarily referring to Christianity. However, the main thing in any religion is not the God but the organization of order and spirituality in society. Thus any religion including Confucianism contradicts neither modern science nor democracy and the republican system. After Qing dynasty fall the Chinese have lost all faith and morality, they like savages even lost the concept of the system governed by the law. It is impossible to construct the normal society, based only on the law, that's why the state religion is needed

These Kang Youwei's ideas made a strong impression on the part of the national elite. In 1913 during the parliamentary debate on the draft, Constitution "Petition about the establishment of the national Confucian Chapel" was presented. Its co-authors were Chen Huanzhang, Liang Qichao and outstanding translator Yan Fu (1854-1921), who first introduced the Chinese with the works of Adam Smith, Rousseau,

Montesquieu and Mill (Lee, 2010). The demands in the spirit of the time contained in the "Petition", in particular because of the revolution people became masters of the country. In olden days Confucianism has always supported the opinion of the people and wasn't contrary to the modern democratic politics.

As far as the republic is not conceivable without morality and the basis of morality of the Chinese people is Confucianism, China had to make it a state religion. The petition was supported by the vice-president Li Yuanhong, the governors of ten provinces and even the Minister of Education, Tang Hualong (1874-1918). The last one said that the Confucian classics should definitely be studied in primary and secondary schools to form the spirit of the young generation. And compulsive worship Confucius after the adoption of a state religion would make all citizens faithful.

Cai Yuanpei the philosopher and political leader was the main opponent of these measures. Afterwards he became a principal of Peking University and clearly stated that China was not a religious country in general and Confucianism was not a religion. Moreover, the adoption of the law on Confucian Chapel would worsen the situation of Buddhism and Islam and would probably lead to the separation of Xinjiang, Mongolia and Tibet from China. As a result in 1913 all the propositions of Kang Youwei and Chen Huanzhang were rejected.

Once in 1915, Yuan Shikai restored the monarchy for a short term, during the development of the monarchic constitution Chen Huanzhang petitioned to establish a Confucian state church again, using the old arguments. However, Kang and Chen failed over and over. More than that the Constitution of the Republic of China adopted in 1912 proposed an amendment and the 11th Article guaranteed full religious freedom (Billioud and Thoraval, 2015). Until the beginning of World War II the Ministry of Education was controlled by anarchists, who insisted on strict secular and scientific nature of the school and university public education.

CONCLUSION

Modern Confucian philosophers, in particular Feng Youlan (1895-1989), insist that Confucianism is an organic synthesis of philosophy, organization of knowledge and moral system. Throughout the 21st century traditional Confucian China had to live through the simultaneous invasion of Western science and Christianity while Europe was gradually beginning to retreat from it (Lomanov, 2002). In this situation, Kang Youwei and his

disciples had to operate in the new conditions. In philosophical terms, it was the splitting of a single syncretic world of religious and scientific picture of the world and it was necessary to find a place to Confucius in both of them. Hence Kang's attempt to become "Martin Luther of Confucianism" and to be the founder of his own Confucian Chapel.

This project was inspired not so much by spiritual reasons as by foreign policy factors. Imperial China ceased to be a competitive power in the international stage in the beginning of the 20th century. It was important for Kang Youwei to adopt all the best achievements of Western civilization. Besides, he considered the ecclesiastical system and the education system to be a single entity as far as Confucian system was set up in such a way. Kang Youwei apparently did not realize the evident contradiction.

As it turned out his system was too radical for imperial China and unacceptable for Confucian-Orthodox. For the new generation of Republican intellectuals and politicians Kang Youwei's Confucian Chapel was deeply archaic and reactionary. His idea contradicted republicanism and democracy. The main purpose of Kang Youwei was preservation the cultural identity of China in the modern world and was not understood by his contemporaries.

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