

Lessons from Austria-Hungary

Kang Youwei's Vision for China's Reform in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract

This article analyzes how Kang Youwei (1858–1927), a reformer and intellectual in China, used examples from Austria-Hungary to support his plan to reform China. By using textual analysis of three articles Kang wrote in 1906, 1908, and 1912 about Austria-Hungary, which are collected in *Kang Youwei Quanji*, and by comparing them with modern studies, this article shows how Kang linked religion, politics, and the economy in Austria-Hungary to his political beliefs in monarchism, a centralized government, and his role as a Confucian reformer. It also argues that Kang used selected or exaggerated facts about Austria-Hungary to advocate for his political beliefs.

Introduction

The history of Austrian-Chinese communication can be traced back to the early 14th century. Odoric of Pordenone (1285/6–1331),¹ born in Pordenone, present-day Italy, visited China and stayed in Beijing for three years.² The British East India Company acting in agreement with King George III's government, decided to send an embassy to China led by Lord George Macartney (1737–1806), a politically well-connected peer from Northern Ireland.³ However, the entire venture had cost the East India Company a small fortune, for which the company had received no return.⁴ While most European countries' impression of China worsened after Lord George Macartney led the first official British diplomatic mission to China, the people in Habsburg Austria remained a favorable opinion of China, especially on Chinese art.

While people in Habsburg Austria had great interest in China, elites and leaders of the Chinese Empire did not have much interest in foreign nations, including Austria. The Europeans had limited access to China in the late 18th century. Until 1842, Canton (Guangzhou) was the sole port of call for Western traders, a system known as the Canton System.⁵ However, the first Chinese person who lived in Habsburg Austria was recorded in 1780, and was likely a sailor.⁶ The official connection between Austria and China came roughly a century later. In 1869, China established diplomatic relations with Habsburg Austria-Hungary. However, the Chinese Ambassador in Austria was based at Berlin, in what was then the German Empire, until 1902.⁷ Austro-Hungarian representation in East Asia followed a similar pattern. In 1883, the seat of Austria-Hungary's diplomatic mission in East Asia was moved from Shanghai to Tokyo "to stress the importance that Japan had acquired in international relations in East Asia."⁸ In 1896, the Austro-Hungarian government finally decided to establish a legation in Beijing and split the representation for China and Japan.⁹ By the late 19th century, the Chinese ambassador to Austria was based in Berlin, and the Austro-Hungarian representation in East Asia was in Tokyo. Both sides chose a more influential country in the region as the base for their diplomatic presence.

Although the official connection between China and Habsburg Austria was limited, some Chinese intellectuals still visited Europe, including Austria, to seek inspiration for

¹ A. C. Moule, "A Life of Odoric of Pordenone," *T'oung Pao* 20, no. 3/4 (1920): 288, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4526615>.

² Gerd Kaminski, *Österreich und China im Bild 1624-2016 中奥关系史图解* [Austro-Chinese Relationship in Charts]. (Bacopa Verlag, 2016), 23.

³ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*. 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵ John D. Wong, "Introduction," In *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.), 2.

⁶ Kaminski, *Österreich und China im Bild 1624-2016*, 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸ Michael S. Falser, *Habsburg Going Global: The Austro-Hungarian Concession in Tientsin/Tianjin in China (1901-1917)*. (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2022), 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

modernization, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was a period of crisis for China, marked by significant military defeats and internal instability. Having been defeated by Britain twice in the Opium Wars (1842 and 1860),¹⁰ Chinese leaders and intellectuals were concerned about the country's future. As a result, the Qing government¹¹ made two major attempts to modernize China. The first attempt was the Self-Strengthening Movement, which took place from roughly 1861 to 1895. There were three phases in the Self-Strengthening Movement. The first phase took place from 1861 to 1872, characterized by the idea of "use Western methods to defeat Western powers."¹² During this time, the focus was on setting up translation offices, modern schools, and sending students abroad to learn about Western technology, as well as training people in technology and foreign affairs.¹³ The second phase was from 1872 to 1885. Although national defense industries were still the main focus, more attention was also given to profit-making businesses such as shipping, railways, mining, and telegraphs.¹⁴ The third phase was from 1885 to 1895. The focus on building the navy continued. At the same time, the idea of developing light industries to make the country richer became more accepted.¹⁵ In 1894, the First Sino-Japanese War broke out. The Chinese Beiyang Fleet, which was established during the Self-Strengthening Movement, was defeated. In 1895, the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed.¹⁶ The defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War marked the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement, as the Beiyang Fleet was defeated by the Japanese.

The Qing government's second attempt at modernization was the Hundred Days' Reform, led by Emperor Guangxu (1871–1908) in the summer of 1898. Influenced by Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and his supporters, Emperor Guangxu issued edicts calling for political and economic reforms. He ordered changes to China's examination system, the upgrading of Peking College, and the opening of several modern schools. Emperor Guangxu also made economic reforms, such as ordering local officials to coordinate reforms in commerce, industry, and agriculture, and to increase the production of tea and silk for export.¹⁷ Several reformist thinkers, including Kang Youwei, were appointed as secretaries in the Grand Council so they could take part in important discussions and memorialize the emperor through their superiors.¹⁸ This reform effort failed due to Empress Dowager Cixi's intervention.¹⁹ She was disturbed by some of the proposed changes that threatened to weaken the Qing ruling house, and was worried that the faction supporting Guangxu seemed influenced by both the British and the French. On September 21, 1898, Empress Dowager Cixi issued an edict claiming that the emperor had asked her to resume power, and she put Guangxu under palace detention.²⁰

¹⁰ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, Glossary A67.

¹¹ The Qing dynasty was the ruling Chinese dynasty before the Republican Revolution in 1911.

¹² The term "use Western methods to defeat Western powers." is called 師夷長技以制夷 in Chinese. See Immanuel Hsu, 徐中約. *Zhongguo Jindai Shi* 中國近代史 [The Rise of Modern China], vol. 1. Translated from English. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2001), 280.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁷ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 220-221.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Glossary A61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

The intervention of Empress Dowager Cixi not only led to the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform but also forced Kang Youwei into exile. Kang was born in Guangdong in 1858. He passed the imperial examination and became an Imperial Scholar (*Jinshi* 進士) in 1885.²¹ He was a key figure during the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898. He was one of the reformist thinkers who was appointed as a secretary to the Grand Council by Emperor Guangxu. Kang tried to organize several reforms, including the proposal to reframe Confucianism as China's version of a state religion.²² After the failure of the reform in 1898, he fled to Hong Kong with the help of the British Consulate in Shanghai.²³ Soon after he arrived in Hong Kong, he moved to Japan with the permission of the Japanese Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu (大隈重信).²⁴ However, Ōkuma Shigenobu soon resigned as Prime Minister and the new Japanese government led by Yamagata Aritomo (山縣有朋) decided to change its diplomatic policy towards the Qing government,²⁵ Kang was forced to leave Japan and moved to British Columbia, Canada in 1899.²⁶ During his exile, he wrote the *Book of the Great Unity* (*Datong Shu* 大同書) in 1901, Chow finds that there are resonances between Kang's thought of the Great Unity and the progressive theory of history found in British liberalism.²⁷ Kang traveled to many countries during his exile, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1904 and 1908.²⁸ In 1911, a revolution occurred in China, leading to the overthrow of the Great Qing Empire by Republican revolutionaries. A new government, the Republic of China, was established in 1912.²⁹ Kang spent 15 years overseas and eventually returned to China in 1913 after the revolution.³⁰

The *Collection of Kang Youwei* is the main primary source for this essay. This book is a compilation of articles and letters written by Kang Youwei. Among Kang Youwei's writings, this essay will analyze articles about his tour of Austria-Hungary. Many of the historical facts mentioned in Kang's articles reflect the situation in Austria-Hungary, including Austrian history, politics, and more. Kang also studied Austrian historical events, such as the Thirty Years' War, Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and political issues such as the parliamentary conflict, the succession crisis, and Pan-Germanism.

This paper will connect Kang's work with the situation in Austria-Hungary and argue that Kang used the historical facts in Austria-Hungary selectively to advocate his political beliefs towards China. Kang's articles are significant because they provide an outsider's perspective, that of an intellectual from East Asia, on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and examine how he connects the issues in Austria-Hungary to China. I analyze Kang's views on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the Empire's religious issues,

²¹ Tianren Wu 吳天任, *Kang Youwei Nianpu* 康有為年譜 [Chronological Biography of Kang Youwei], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2018), 1: 113.

²² Kathy Chow, "Making the Twain Meet: The Invention of Confucian Religion and Kang Youwei's Political Theology." *Political Theology* 23 (2022): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.2014625>.

²³ Wu, *Kang Youwei Nianpu*, 1: 251.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:252.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 269.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 268.

²⁷ Chow, "Making the Twain Meet," 31.

²⁸ Youwei Kang 康有為, *Kang Youwei Quanji* 康有為全集 [Collection of Kang Youwei]. Vols 8-9. Ed. Yihua Jiang and Ronghua Zhang, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 9: 291.

²⁹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 261.

³⁰ Wu, *Kang Youwei Nianpu*, 2: 559.

political conflicts, issues of loyalty, and economy, especially how Kang selectively or mistakenly chose historical facts about the Austro-Hungarian Empire to support his political beliefs. This paper mainly examines three articles written by Kang. The first article is “Inspection on the Evolution of the Germanic States and Austria-Hungary” (1906),³¹ primarily looks at the history of Germany and Austria-Hungary from Kang’s perspective. The second article “Complementary Record of the Austrian Trip” (1908),³² mainly discusses his trip to Austria and his thoughts on the Austrian monarchy, history, politics, and economy. The third article is “Inspection of Austrian Political Parties” (1912),³³ written just after the 1911 republican revolution. This article examines Austria-Hungary’s politics, particularly party politics in the early 20th century.³⁴

Religious conflict and Austrian Catholicism

Religion and religious conflicts play a large role in Kang Youwei’s descriptions of Austrian history. He describes conflicts between “Popes and Emperors, Popes and Princes, Old Religion (Catholicism) and New Religion (Protestant)”³⁵ in the Holy Roman Empire, stating, “[those] conflicts are all resolved by arms, with killings filling cities and blood flowing like rivers, displaying brutality.”³⁶ He also highlighted the brutality of the Popes, arguing that the Popes’ brutality led to the religious conflicts.³⁷ Kang’s description of religious conflict in the Holy Roman Empire does reflect the historical reality of significant population loss during the Thirty Years’ War. For instance, under Swedish occupation, the city of Mainz lost 40% of its population.³⁸ However, Kang highlighted the casualties in the Thirty Years’ War not just to point out the facts, but to make a comparison with the religious conflicts in China and advocate his political ideas.

After describing the religious conflicts in the Holy Roman Empire, he then turns to religious conflicts in ancient China, saying,

The disputes within Confucianism and Buddhism are confined to debates of words and ideas, conducted with tolerance and gentleness in teaching, which is why they seem weak [compared to the conflicts in the Holy Roman Empire]. And now, philosophy is growing every day, and science is becoming clearer. Even though people [in China] are still not very educated, and religion is still needed to teach them, we can no longer treat people as foolish. And a hundred years from now, as conflicts between nations gradually subside, the ideals of Confucius concerning universal harmony and great unity, and the Buddhist spirit of transcending birth and death, may resonate even more deeply into human hearts.³⁹

³¹ The original title in Chinese is “日耳曼沿革考 奧大利匈牙利沿革附。” See Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 235.

³² The original title in Chinese is “補奧遊記。” See Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 384.

³³ The original title in Chinese is “奧政黨考。” See Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 291.

³⁴ Kang’s articles were originally written and published in Chinese. I have translated the passages into English myself.

³⁵ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 253.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War*. (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 147.

³⁹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 253.

He made this specific comparison due to his preference for Confucianism. By comparing the brutal and violent religious conflicts in the Holy Roman Empire to the peaceful religious disputes in China and expressing his prediction for the future of the world, he aims to emphasize that the harmonious ideals in Confucianism and certain Buddhist ideas will dominate the future peaceful world. However, his description of religious disputes in China is not entirely correct, as the religious conflicts in ancient China were not always peaceful. For example, the Tang emperor Wuzong (r. 840–846), as one of China's most enthusiastic Taoist rulers, ordered the Huichang persecution of Buddhism.⁴⁰

Kang did not view the Empire's close relationship with Catholicism positively: "The greatest harm to Austria lies in the union of religion and politics. The Roman Catholic Church keeps its people ignorant, and the Roman authority in Austria remains as strong as ever. The government follows the [Roman] Church's command, to the extent that even if a newspaper publishes slight criticism of the Church, it will be shut down immediately."⁴¹ To Kang, the close relationship between the Empire and Catholicism was one of the reasons that made Austria's strength "difficult to restore."⁴² He also emphasized the power that religious figures in Austria wielded compared to Prussia, stating that the Catholic Church prevented the Empire from reforming.⁴³ Catholicism was not a religion that could help the country reform; instead, it weakened the nation. One reason he had a negative view of the Empire's close relationship with Catholicism is that this connection weakened the Emperor's power, and he had a preference for a more powerful monarch. He argued: "When the Austrian emperor wanted to reform, the church leaders would stop him. The people listen to the priests and hate the emperor. The emperor feels unsafe and do not dare to act."⁴⁴ To Kang, the Catholic Church in Austria was too powerful, and he preferred the emperor to hold more power. Kang's preference for Protestantism is also a reason, as Chow states, Kang's proposed reforms in 1898 illustrated his attempt to "fit Confucianism into a Protestant understanding of religion."⁴⁵ In other words, Protestantism was the model for Kang's reform of Confucianism, and he naturally favored Protestantism over Catholicism. Thus, his favourable opinion of Protestantism led him to share a more critical attitude towards Catholicism in Austria.

Although Kang did not have a positive view of Catholicism, he favorably described the Catholic practice of the veneration of Virgin Mary.⁴⁶ Kang expressed his opinion that Christians venerating Virgin Mary's statue were no different from Chinese people worshipping Guanyin,⁴⁷ concluding that Chinese traditional customs were not necessarily bad.⁴⁸ He argued that "People today want to give up the light [of the east] and learn from the darkness of the West. They do not know what is right or wrong, but only try to please

⁴⁰ Timothy H. Barrett, "THE MADNESS OF EMPEROR WUZONG," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004): 173, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44160395>.

⁴¹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9:294.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Chow, "Making the Twain Meet," 31.

⁴⁶ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 398.

⁴⁷ Guanyin is a Buddhist bodhisattva. Originally called Avalokiteśvara in India, Guanyin was introduced to China and became popular in East Asia.

⁴⁸ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 398.

foreigners.”⁴⁹ His statement is connected to the specific historical background of the early 20th century, when, starting from the Hundred Days’ Reform, Confucian moral rules based on “ritual” were seriously challenged by Western trends and reform thinkers.⁵⁰ Kang, as a supporter of Confucianism, mentioned religious practices in Austria because he wanted to use the veneration of Virgin Mary in Austria to justify that it was acceptable for Chinese society to maintain ties with its own religions, such as Confucianism and Buddhism. From his perspective, Austria, as part of European society, accepted the veneration of the Virgin Mary, and therefore, it was acceptable for Chinese people to keep their old customs. Although he criticized Catholicism in Austria, he still used Catholic practice in Austria to justify his argument. In other words, he selectively used the historical facts and situation in Austria selectively when it suited him.

Political Diversity in the Empire

Ethnicity within the Empire was especially important in Kang’s essay. The topic of his chapter pointed out that, “Austria’s lack of strength compared to Prussia (German Empire) is due to its lack of linguistic unity.”⁵¹ Kang analyzed the different ethnic groups within the Empire and compared Austria to Germany, two states with similar cultures. He explained:

The current territory of Austria consists of fourteen nations... Each region maintains its own language and script, making it impossible to unify. Thus, there are fourteen languages and ten writing systems, which interrupt governance and progress, leaving no viable solutions. If [the government] wishes to enforce unity through political and legal measures, the current trend of civil liberties prevents it. The Austrian monarch fears the people and dares not impose it forcibly... On the other hand, in Germany, the monarchy holds substantial power, allows the enforcement of linguistic unification. All of Germany only has four languages, and now everyone is gradually proficient in Prussian language (German). Austria had monarchical authority but dares not exercise it, marking a significant difference from Germany... Nevertheless, the harm caused by linguistic differences and lack of mutual understanding is also severe [in Austria].⁵²

Kang identified two reasons why Austria was weaker than Prussia (German Empire): the power of the monarch and linguistic diversity. Historian Bálint Varga argues that “the national and the imperial were not necessarily incompatible, but could mutually reinforce each other.”⁵³ Kang obviously didn’t agree with Varga’s point. Instead, he agreed with a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Duan, Lian 段煉. “*Qingmo Minchu de Daode Jiaolv ji Yingdui zhi Ce*” 清末民初的道德焦慮及應對之策 [Moral Anxiety and Coping Strategies in the Late Qing and Early Republican Period]. *Ershiyi Shiji* 二十一世紀, no. 130 (2012): 53, <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c130-200907054.pdf>.

⁵¹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanjì*, 8: 256.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bálint Varga, “Writing Imperial History in the Age of High Nationalism: Imperial Historians on the Fringes of the Habsburg Monarchy,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 24, no. 1 (2016): 91. doi:10.1080/13507486.2016.1217402.

more traditional idea that the late Habsburg Monarchy was in permanent crisis, its state unity eroded at the expense of rising nationalist movements.⁵⁴ He argued that the diversity of languages threw the Empire into disorder, caused chaos in its military, and explained how Prussia defeated Austria in the Austro-Prussian War.⁵⁵

Kang then turned to discuss the problem of ethnicity in China. He emphasized the linguistic diversity in the Chinese military, and suggested that “soldiers from Fujian and Guangdong should all be taught standard pronunciation within their camps, as well as the soldiers from Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan regions.”⁵⁶ He particularly focused on ethnic and linguistic issues within Austria-Hungary because China faced a similar situation. China was also a country with significant ethnic and linguistic diversity. Ethnicities like Han Chinese as well as Mongols lived in the Manchu Qing Empire. Even among Han Chinese, different languages or dialects were used in different areas. Another similarity he saw was a record of military failure. Austria was defeated in the Austro-Prussian War in 1866 while China was defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Kang naturally connected these similarities together. Kang wanted to ensure that China would not repeat Austria’s “mistake” and instead should work to unify its language. From Kang Youwei’s point of view, countries with unified ethnicity and language were stronger than those with significant diversity. However, it is important to note that there were more important reasons that led to Austria’s defeat in the Austro-Prussian War, as Beller argues. One reason was diplomatic: the problem was Austria’s isolation on the international great power level.⁵⁷ The second reason was military innovation: “the superior tactics and training of the Prussian forces, especially the ultra-effective use of breech-loading rifles by the infantry.”⁵⁸ Another reason was that it was “under the emperor’s jealously guarded prerogative of control of the military that the necessary reforms had failed to occur.”⁵⁹ This is a significant point, as Kang argues that it was the lack of power of the monarch that led to the weakness of Austria. However, according to Beller, the emperor was one of the reasons that led to the failure of military reforms before the Austro-Prussian War. Moreover, none of Beller’s points argue that Austria’s defeat was related to linguistic or ethnic issues in the military.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was established due to the new constitution sanctioned in 1867, in which Hungary was allowed to have great autonomy under the crown, “with very different constitutions, different administrative and judicial systems, and even different qualifications for citizenship.”⁶⁰ Kang provided his opinion on Austro-Hungarian relationships,

Although the Hungarians acknowledge the Austrian Emperor as their king,
Hungary maintains its own national structure, which is far from being a vassal

⁵⁴ Varga, “Writing Imperial History in the Age of High Nationalism: Imperial Historians on the Fringes of the Habsburg Monarchy,” 80.

⁵⁵ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanj*, 8:257.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8: 258.

⁵⁷ Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1815–1918. of New Approaches to European History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 116.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*. (Harvard University Press, 2016), 262, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf5rq>.

state. The system [of Austria-Hungary] is similar to how Australia and Canada relate to Britain, except that Australia and Canada have British-appointed governors, while Hungary is governed entirely by Hungarians. Apart from the Austrian Emperor, not a single Austrian interferes in Hungary's internal affairs. Even the Emperor, holding a nominal title as king, cannot intervene in its internal governance. The only areas in which Austria exercises authority over Hungary are foreign affairs, military matters, and finance... This arrangement is nearly no difference from that of an alliance, with the Austrian Emperor serving as the alliance's leader... If other major powers benefit from Austria's weakening... then Hungary and Austria could be separated in a single day.⁶¹

In this passage, Kang expressed his negative view of the system established after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. From his description, the great autonomy of Hungary within the Empire would eventually lead to separation if other great powers desired it. Kang highlighted the Austria-Hungary relationship within the Empire to support his broader argument. Kang's observation of Austria-Hungary is correct in some ways, as he realized that under the Compromise, "Austria and Hungary integrated in only three competencies, run by three joint ministries that were responsible for foreign affairs; for the armed forces; and for funding these joint activities."⁶² Still, he exaggerated the degree of autonomy in Hungary. Although Kang claimed that the union between Austria and Hungary had "no difference from that of an alliance."⁶³ In fact, Austria and Hungary experienced a deeper integration than a simple personal union because of the Compromise.⁶⁴ Furthermore, at the legal level, the Austrian legislation does not say a word about the possible negative conflicts of the competences in relation to the Ministry of the Common Affairs, which allows its intervention into Hungarian political life.⁶⁵ From Kang's description, he was not a supporter of the idea of regional autonomy. To him, Austria-Hungary was not a successful state. He connected these two elements together to support his claim for a more centralized government.

Kang concluded that Europeans did not understand the "method of unification,"⁶⁶ that "even after they take over another land, they still keep its name and government, and just make themselves the king"⁶⁷. He argued that the lack of understanding of the "method of unification" was the reason Europeans kept fighting for a thousand years.⁶⁸ Kang aimed to support his idea of a unified China by using the Hungarian example to illustrate to his readers that autonomy could lead to potential chaos. He wished to underline that China needed unification to avoid wars and conflicts. His claim is reasonable in the case of Austria-Hungary, but other European states had different strategies for consolidating

⁶¹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 394.

⁶² Mate Paksy, "Toward a Better Understanding of Peripheral Nation-Building Strategies: A Critical Comparison of the Austro-Hungarian Ausgleich and the Canadian British North America Act (1867)," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 33 (2020): 834, <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1007/s11196-020-09736-3>.

⁶³ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 394.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 835.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 825.

⁶⁶ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 394.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

power. For instance, the civilizing mission (*mission civilisatrice*) is an important concept for the French.⁶⁹ In other words, “assimilation” was actively practiced in French governance. Kang’s claim is an oversimplification, and he only emphasizes what he wants. His racial idea also provides an explanation for his idea of “unification.” In his *Book of the Great Unity*, he separated people into “white,” “yellow,” “brown,” and “black” races.⁷⁰ In this article, Kang used Austrians to represent the “white” race, while using Chinese people to represent the “yellow” race. As he separated people too simply, he did not realize the diversity within the “race.” Although Kang argued the greatest difference between European states and China was that Europeans do not understand the “method of unification” while China does. In fact, China also experienced relatively long periods of division, bringing this claim into question. According to Zhou, the total number of years that China was under unification is 950—only 45% of the time from 221 BCE to 1911 CE.⁷¹ In other words, the remaining 55% was spent in periods of division.

Kang also wrote about party politics in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Kang argued that Austria was not strong domestically and pointed out the reason: “Austria is skilled in maintaining harmony in foreign affairs, but its domestic governance is ineffective because there are too many political parties in parliament, debates are too scattered, and the government lacks fairness and justice.”⁷² Kang further explained that Austria had the most political parties at that time, making compromise in parliament difficult due to the Empire’s ethnic diversity. According to Kang, the Austro-Hungarian parliament was in chaos, “The leaders of the German and Bohemian parties are all aggressive and domineering, holding the highest power.⁷³ Some grab the Prime Minister by the throat, while others brandish swords to attack... This is no different from the chaos of the mobs during the French Revolution.”⁷⁴ He then compared party politics in Austria-Hungary with those in other countries, such as Britain and the USA, and concluded that strong countries usually had fewer political parties.⁷⁵ Kang also worried about China: “If China were to establish a constitution with political parties, I wonder how many parties there would be?”⁷⁶ Kang further explained the diversity in China and concluded that “Given China’s vast size... [and] those who discuss politics and law often lack experience and simply follow the crowd, repeating ‘political parties,’ I cannot predict how much future danger, chaos, weakness, and decline this will bring to China.”⁷⁷ Kang mentioned the various parties in Austria-Hungary to argue that such a system was not suitable for China. To Kang, countries with fewer political parties were stronger. He highlighted the disorder in the Austro-Hungarian parliament to illustrate that China would also become weak if it adopted a similar multi-party system. Kang’s observation that the parliament in Austria-Hungary was chaotic

⁶⁹ Krishan Kumar, “The French Empire: ‘IMPERIAL NATION-STATE,’” In *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World*. (Princeton University Press, 2017), 429.

⁷⁰ Chow, “Making the Twain Meet,” 37.

⁷¹ Haiwen Zhou, “Unification and Division: A Theory of Institutional Choices in Imperial China,” *Annals of Economics and Finance* 24, no. 1 (2023): 13, <http://aeconf.com/Articles/May2023/aef240102.pdf>.

⁷² Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 292

⁷³ The “German Party” here is referring to *Alldeutsche Vereinigung*.

⁷⁴ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 293

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9: 291

was correct in some ways. As Bader-Zaar pointed out, government agents were involved in election conflicts that resulted in fraud and sometimes violent clashes ending in bloodshed.⁷⁸ While it is true that the Austro-Hungarian parliamentary system was chaotic in some aspects, it is questionable whether the parliamentary system led to Austria's weakness. Roháč argues that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire occurred particularly as a result of the removal of the possibility of bargaining through standard political processes, when the Reichsrat (Imperial Council) and the national diets were suspended during the First World War.⁷⁹ Witt states that having a voice in the government convinced minorities that they were participating in the destiny of the state.⁸⁰ In other words, the existence of the parliament allowed ethnic minorities to solve their problems within the imperial system, which actually benefited the Empire. Furthermore, Witt also points out that "Parliament's ineffectiveness did not matter so much in this case; the importance was the equal value of all citizens to the Monarchy."⁸¹ Kang clearly didn't pay attention to this aspect; he focused more on the effectiveness of the concentration of government power.

The timing of Kang's article "Inspection of Austrian Political Parties" suggests his growing concerns about China's future following the Republican Revolution. Although his last visit to Austria was in 1908, he wrote this article in 1912 as a response to the Republican Revolution.⁸² Before 1910, the Qing government restricted and controlled political parties in China. It was only in 1910 that the Manchu court agreed that a fully elected parliament should be convened in 1913.⁸³ From Kang's perspective, political parties had not been a significant issue before the Revolution. The Revolution made the formation of various political parties much easier. The number of political parties grew rapidly after the 1911 revolution. From February to October 1912, there were 85 political parties and groups officially registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. There were many more that were not registered or were registered later.⁸⁴ Kang was worried about this growing factionalism and expressed his idea of "merging political parties like Britain and the US"⁸⁵ in China, through his observations of Austrian politics in 1908.

Kang observed the diversity within the Empire, including the Compromise between Austria and Hungary, the ethnic diversity within the Empire, as well as the diversity in parliament in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Kang was clearly not a supporter of these forms of diversity; he selectively and even mistakenly chose the facts in the Empire to justify his political idea of a more centralized and homogeneous government.

⁷⁸ Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "Democratization and the Practices of Voting in Habsburg Austria, 1896–1914: New Directions in Research," *Austrian History Yearbook* 53 (2022): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237822000042>.

⁷⁹ Dalibor Roháč, "Why did the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapse? A public choice perspective," *Const Polit Econ* 20, (2009): 174, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10602-008-9058-0>.

⁸⁰ Katrina Witt, "The Politics of Managing Pluralism: Austria-Hungary 1867-1918," *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (2009): 86, <https://doi.org/10.29173/cons6899>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 291

⁸³ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 263

⁸⁴ Yu-fa Chang 張玉法, "Minchu zhengdang de diaocha yu fenxi" 民初政黨的調查與分析 [A Study and Analysis of Political Parties in the Early Republican Period]. *Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan* 近代史研究所集刊, no. 5 (1976): 121-122

⁸⁵ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 291

Monarchical Power and Imperial Loyalty

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was built upon loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy. Kang Youwei highlighted the Habsburg monarch, particularly on the popularity of Emperor Franz Joseph: “What Austria can still preserve today is due to Emperor Franz Joseph’s long reign. By granting freedom to the people, he has earned their gratitude, making them reluctant to rebel against him.”⁸⁶ He also pointed out the succession crisis in Austria-Hungary: “However, if the Emperor leaves no successor, a major upheaval may occur.”⁸⁷ Kang then mentioned the death of the Emperor’s brother, Maximilian, who was Emperor of Mexico. He also discussed the possible heir to the throne, Otto,⁸⁸ who had married the daughter of an earl. Kang viewed him as the only person who could save the Empire.⁸⁹ Although some of the names and facts he referenced were inaccurate, Kang accurately recognized that Emperor Franz Joseph enjoyed “unprecedented popularity,”⁹⁰ as well as the reality of a succession crisis in the Empire and the potential chaos it could bring.

As discussed in the “Political Diversity in the Empire” section, Kang emphasized the weakness of the monarch’s power in the Empire. He also stated: “The Austrian Emperor’s authority, originally inherited from a unified tradition, was once immense. However, after significant conflicts between the monarch and civilians,⁹¹ the emperor has power but dares not use it.”⁹² Although Kang claimed that after the 1848 revolutions, the emperor dared not use his power, his claim is incorrect. The *Sylvesterpapent* (*New Year’s Eve Patent*) in 1851 overthrew the March Constitution and returned Austria to absolutism.⁹³ Austria entered Emperor Franz Joseph’s neo-absolutist era. According to Beller, it was in the areas where Franz Joseph had reserved to himself the most influence, in foreign policy and the military, that Austria’s performance was to prove calamitous.⁹⁴ First, after the 1848 revolutions, Emperor Franz Joseph dared to use his power in foreign policy and the military. Second, as discussed in the “Political Diversity in the Empire” section, Kang argued that the Austrian monarch’s lack of power led to its weakness. However, Beller told a different story: it was the areas where the emperor had the most influence, diplomacy and the military, that broke the neo-absolutist system.

Kang compared Austria to Germany and emphasized the supreme power held by the German Emperor. He noted that freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, as promised in the Constitution of Germany, were merely symbolic and not actually shared by the people.⁹⁵ He further explained his ideal system: “The monarch and the people govern together, benefiting one another...this system is truly appropriate. Germany, now the

⁸⁶ Ibid., 9: 294

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Kang is mistaken, the heir to the throne was Archduke Francis Ferdinand (1863-1914).

⁸⁹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 294

⁹⁰ Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, 341

⁹¹ Kang is referring to the 1848 revolutions.

⁹² Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 396

⁹³ Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1815–1918. of New Approaches to European History*, 86

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 293

world's foremost rising power, serves as proof of this."⁹⁶ In other words, Kang advocated for a system similar to Germany's, where the people held limited judicial and legislative power while the monarch retained greater authority, particularly in executive power. Kang's opinion on Germany reflects German influence in China. From 1870 to 1895, Germany and China had close cooperation, and the two countries developed strong economic and trade relations.⁹⁷ Starting from 1870, Germany became China's first choice as a partner for cooperation in reform plans during the Self-Strengthening Movement.⁹⁸ According to Yu, there are three reasons why China chose Germany. First, Germany had strong military technology. Second, at that time, Germany did not have imperial ambitions in China. Third, after the victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), China had a new image of Germany, which gave China a new model to follow for its own reforms.⁹⁹ Among these three reasons, two of them are related to the military strength of Germany. The military strength of Germany left a deep impression on the reformers in China, which extended to Kang. Kang's German preference also reflects German influence on the Japanese system. Kang saw Japan as a country that shared the same language and customs with China;¹⁰⁰ he argued that reform should be fully based on Japan's Meiji Restoration.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, the Japanese political system had great influence from Germany, the Meiji Constitution (Constitution of the Empire of Japan) promulgated in 1889 was modeled on the German-Prussian constitution.¹⁰² Kang's view of Japan, as well as the fact that Japan modeled Germany, resulted in Kang's advocacy of the German model.

Kang discussed Georg Ritter von Schönerer, the leader of the Austrian Pan-Germans.¹⁰³ They advocated the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the unification of all German people with the Prussian-dominated German Empire.¹⁰⁴ After 1901, Schönerer lost much of his influence and in 1907 failed to win re-election to the Diet.¹⁰⁵ Kang, however, exaggerated his influence, saying that Schönerer had a strong party.¹⁰⁶ Historian Andrew Whiteside argues that the reason for the ultimate failure of Pan-Germanism to achieve its goals was Schönerer's violent methods and inability to capture and hold the support of the young and workers.¹⁰⁷ Kang didn't see this, arguing that

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Yu, Hefang 虞和芳. "Zhong-De guanxi fazhan de lishi yanjiu: 1861–1917" 中德關係發展的歷史研究: 1861–1917 [A Historical Study of Sino-German Relations: 1861–1917]. *Ouzhou Guoji Pinglun* 歐洲國際評論, no. 10 (2014): 165

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 166

¹⁰⁰ Huijun Lin 林慧君, "Kang Youwei Wuxu Bianfa shiqi de Riben guan—yi Riben Bianzheng Kao wei kaocha zhongxin" 康有為戊戌變法時期的日本觀—以《日本變政考》為考察中心 [Kang Youwei's View of Japan during the Hundred Days' Reform: A Study Centered on A Study of Japan's Political Reform]. *Chang Geng Keji Xuekan* 長庚科技學刊, no. 7 (2007): 187, <https://doi.org/10.6192/CGUST.2007.12.7.13>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 190

¹⁰² Bernd Martin and Peter Wetzler, "The German Role in the Modernization of Japan — The Pitfall of Blind Acculturation." *Oriens Extremus* 33, no. 1 (1990): 77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24048466>.

¹⁰³ Wanen B. Morris, "Reviewed Work: The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan-Germanism by Andrew Whiteside," *Social Science Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1977): 936, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42859733>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanj*, 9:291

¹⁰⁷ Morris, "Reviewed Work: The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan-Germanism by

“[the unification] is what the people desire and what the situation demands.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, by the time Kang visited Austria-Hungary in 1906 and 1908, Schönerer and his party had already lost much of their influence. His exaggeration of the influence of Schönerer reflected his preference for the German system and showed that he was deeply influenced by ethnic ideas and nationalism. Thirty years after Kang’s visit, Austria was “incorporated” into Germany under the Nazis, which caused tragic results. After the Second World War, Austria became independent again, and was no longer a part of Germany.

Although Kang repeatedly emphasized crises in Austria-Hungary and supported the German model, when he described Schönerer’s act of praising Emperor Wilhelm II in the Parliament, he described it as “arrogance.”¹⁰⁹ This reaction can be attributed to Kang’s strong monarchist beliefs. In the Chinese context, Kang still supported the Qing Monarchy even after the Republic of China was proclaimed. According to Spence, General Zhang Xun led his army into Beijing in 1917 and declared the restoration of the abdicated Qing emperor Puyi, while Kang Youwei hurried to the Forbidden City in official robes to serve the new emperor.¹¹⁰ Kang’s enthusiasm for the Qing emperor extended to Austria-Hungary, where he expected Austro-Hungarian subjects to remain loyal and respectful to their emperor.

Economic Development and Moral Contradictions

Kang Youwei discussed Austria-Hungary’s economy using charts and statistics to analyze and compare it with other great powers in the early 20th century. His analysis included the amount of farmland, income across various sectors, and industrial output. Kang also compared the Empire’s economy with other great powers, focusing on banking, ports, and maritime affairs.¹¹¹ After this analysis, Kang concluded that Austria-Hungary’s industry was not powerful enough, and its mining sector was also underproductive. He believed this was why Austria-Hungary was not as wealthy as France or Germany.¹¹² Although Austria-Hungary’s economy did not leave a strong impression on Kang, he still connected Austria’s weak economy to the “simplicity and honesty” of Austrian farmers.¹¹³ To support his argument, he contrasted this with America, which he identified as having the world’s strongest economy but whose people also “steal, cheat, [and] fake” the most.¹¹⁴ Kang suggested that economic growth could lead to moral decline, arguing that as a nation’s economy improves, its people’s character may worsen. Kang’s argument is connected to the situation in China. In the early 20th century, China struggled with its economy and sought modernization. Kang’s connection between Austria’s economy and the kindness of its people intended to show that, despite its weak economy, China could still have virtuous citizens. Despite criticizing American people as those who “steal, cheat, [and] fake” the

Andrew Whiteside,” 936

¹⁰⁸ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 9: 294

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 9: 291

¹¹⁰ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 272-3

¹¹¹ Kang, *Kang Youwei Quanji*, 8: 403-6

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8: 407

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

most,¹¹⁵ he still argued that “If we follow this trend, then the world will become like the United States, moving quickly toward a peaceful and united future... Even if there are some problems along the way.”¹¹⁶ This reflects his contradictory idea towards modernization: worrying about the risk of moral decline accompanying modernization, but also viewing modernization as the only path to national strength.

Conclusion

Although Kang Youwei accurately observed certain historical facts about Austria-Hungary, he sought to validate his political ideas by using examples selectively or even inaccurately. Kang mostly emphasized the negative aspects of the Empire. He compared the Thirty Years’ War to religious disputes in ancient China, which he described inaccurately. He argued that the ideals of harmony in Confucianism, along with certain Buddhist principles, would dominate a future peaceful world. He criticized the Empire’s connection to the Catholic Church because of his preference for a powerful monarch as well as his favourable opinion towards Protestantism. Kang highlighted the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire because of the similarities between China and Austria-Hungary. He incorrectly blamed the Empire’s defeat in the Austro-Prussian War on linguistic and ethnic issues. He also exaggerated the degree of autonomy in Hungary. This all shows his preference for a more centralized government. Kang highlighted the chaos in the parliament, but in fact, the parliament allowed ethnic minorities to solve their problems within the imperial system, which was beneficial to the Empire’s stability. Kang’s comments on the parliament expressed his disapproval of the multi-party system, as well as his concern about the 1911 republican revolution. Kang also incorrectly described the neo-absolutist period, when it was through diplomacy and the military that the emperor’s influence most contributed to Austria’s weakness. By comparing the Austrian system to the German system, he expressed his preference for the German system, which reflects German influence in China as well as in Japan. He exaggerated the influence of Pan-Germanism in Austria, which shows that he was influenced by ethnic ideas and nationalism.

Kang had complex feelings towards Austria-Hungary due to his different political beliefs. Although he expressed his disapproval of Catholic influence, he also justified his Confucian belief by describing the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Although he did not have an optimistic opinion of Austria’s future, he showed his disapproval of the praise for Emperor Wilhelm II in the Austrian Parliament. He was not impressed by the Austrian economy, but he highlighted the simplicity and honesty of Austrian farmers.

Kang’s opinion of Austria-Hungary reflects his varied political beliefs. He was a monarchist figure, a Confucian reformer, and a supporter of a government with concentrated and centralized power. Although he did not have a strong influence on China after the republican revolution, looking at it today, China’s development largely followed what he had hoped. Although a monarchy did not return to China, two major political parties dominated China in the 20th century: the Nationalist Party during the Republic of China (1912–1949) and the Communist Party during the People’s Republic of China

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

(1949–), both following a pattern of Party-State system.¹¹⁷ The Chinese government in recent years has also spread its international influence through Confucianism, such as through the Confucius Institute.

¹¹⁷ I use Dr. Yu Miin-ling's definition of Party-State System (黨國體制) here. According to Dr. Yu Miin-ling, Party-State System means that in a country, "a single dominant political party seeks, or in reality manages to control the entire country's resources and institutions. And it aims to extend the party's will and authority into every government institution and even into every corner of the society." See Miin-ling Yu 余敏玲, "Tong zhong you yi de liangan dangguo tizhi" 同中有異的兩岸黨國體制 [Similar Yet Different: The Party-State Systems across the Taiwan Strait]. *Dianzi Qikan Jiyi* 電子期刊記憶 (2013): 2.

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