The Relationship between Science and Religion in Kang Youwei's Confucianism



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To Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), once of Balliol,
whose works have profoundly inspired my understanding.

In loving memory of my father, Wan Baoshan 万宝山 (1944–2016).

Abstracts

Short Abstract

In this thesis I analyse the relationship between science and religion in a non-Western and specifically Chinese context through an examination of the writings of Kang Youwei (康有爲 1858–1927), a prominent reformer and Confucian thinker of the period of transition from Imperial to Republican China. Described by his followers as the 'Martin Luther of Confucianism', Kang envisioned a central social role for Confucianism as a state religion, championing the restoration of a 'pristine' religion of Confucius (*Kongjiao* 孔教), by both modelling it after Christian practices and revitalizing the ancient Chinese belief in *Shangdi* 上帝 (as a universal concept, equated with 'God'). He upheld the unitary nature of the concept of *jiao* (教) or 'religion', manifested in a variety of religions united by their shared moral aim and in their teachings on reverence for Divinity, the soul's immortality, and compassion.

My research reveals that, before the rise of radical materialism and scientism, fully one generation before the acceptance by Chinese intellectuals of the 'Conflict Thesis', Kang had already sought to conceptualize the relationship between what are now generally categorized as science and religion. Expounding a holistic world-view founded upon a belief in the oneness of knowledge, Kang appropriated Western scientific concepts such as the 'ether' in his re-interpretation of the Confucian Classics. He saw no conflict between modern science and Confucian Religion, whose quintessential doctrines, in his view, contained the origins of scientific thought. Acknowledging that conflict with science might occur with other religions like Christianity, he admitted that certain religious doctrines required correction when scientific evidence made it imperative; no matter how far science advanced, however, it could never disprove the existence of God, whose infinite nature he believed lay beyond the grasp of finite—even if brilliant—scientific minds. Closer analysis of Kang's conception of the complementary relationship between science and religion, I suggest, can contribute to a richer picture of Kang's thought, a better understanding of the field of science and religion in China, and a more global account of the subject.

Long Abstract

Writing in 1925 in relation to the so-called Conflict Thesis, according to which science and religion are in a fundamental conflict, Alfred N. Whitehead argued that because science and religion were of such importance to humanity, the future course of history would depend upon the decision of his generation as to the proper relations between these two great forces. Since the mid-twentieth century, the Conflict Thesis has received substantial attention from historians of science, who have demonstrated that science and religion have been so richly interrelated in different periods of history that no simple general model or master narrative is possible. While Western scholarship on the subject over the past few decades has been extraordinarily rich in terms of its depth, diversity and popular appeal, the vast majority of these studies have largely been carried out within a Western context and with a focus on the relations between science and Christianity. In light of an emerging globalizing vision and at a time when increased efforts should be made to avoid provincialism in scholarly pursuits, it is highly desirable that other religious traditions and the non-Western contexts should also be considered and analysed.

In many ways, the analysis of the 'science and religion question' in modern China has reflected the stimulation and intellectual influence of the West. Indeed, modern Chinese concepts of 'science' (*kexue* 科學) and 'religion' (*zongjiao* 宗教) have been shaped by their Western counterparts. Although in traditional China the line between religious reasoning and the study of the natural world was more blurred than in the West, in current Chinese thought not only does the Conflict Thesis prevail, but also for political and ideological reasons, the tension between science and religion is even sharper. However, the history of science and religion in modern China has not been studied in any depth. Although the past three decades have witnessed a revival of interest in the topic in Chinese academia, most of this scholarly output is either devoted to the justification of the orthodox conflict model, or is focused on the Western context. At the same time, there seems to be a tacit assumption in the literature that the question of science and religion, being chiefly a Western issue, did not become a subject of serious consideration until the late 1910s with the rise of the New Culture intellectuals, who advocated a vehement opposition to religion in favour of science, or more accurately, radical materialism and scientism.

My thesis challenges that assumption by demonstrating that the first reflections on the subject actually started at least one generation earlier with the late Qing reformers in the 1890s, and especially in the writings of Kang Youwei (康有爲 1858–1927), the chief intellectual architect of the Reform of 1898. Widely regarded as a foremost and representative thinker of the period of transition from Imperial to Republican China, Kang was also an avid student and passionate advocate of Western science, and more significantly, a religious reformer.

Regarded by his disciples as 'the Martin Luther of Confucianism', Kang endeavoured to restore Confucianism to its 'pristine' state, and he re-named his restatement of it as *Kongjiao* 孔教, the religion of Confucius. Most of the studies on Kang, however, have treated him primarily as a political reformer and utopian writer, and many have been characterized by a dichotomous view. Thus, he has been frequently depicted as progressive before the reform, but as conservative and even reactionary after that period. In doing so, many commentators have, in applying a Marxist reductionist analysis, tended to either downplay or overlook Kang's religious sentiments, considering his advocacy of a Confucian religion as being merely politically motivated. Since the turn of the new millennium, as cultural conservatism began to gain momentum in China, Kang's body of work has returned to the centre of academic studies. It has come to be increasingly recognized that Kang's actions and ideas cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration their spiritual-religious dimensions.

Indeed, a careful examination of Kang's writings, freed from the limitations imposed by the dichotomous view and analysed according to the different phases of his life, reveals that he was, contrary to conventional accounts, also a religious figure who was deeply concerned with religious issues throughout his career. From his childhood, he had, by reason of his early training in Confucianism, developed a reverence for *Shangdi* 上帝, the Supreme Ruler in Heaven spoken of in ancient Confucian texts. Meanwhile, he was exposed to widespread local beliefs based on a folkloric admixture of Buddhist and Daoist ideas. His early religious leanings were further nurtured through his reading of Buddhist literature; and his short periods of practising

Buddhist meditation in seclusion led him to experience several mystical states, such as are canvassed by William James, during which he had the vision of being born to be a sage with a bodhisattva-like mission to deliver from suffering not only his compatriots in China but also the whole of humanity. This sense of mission, buttressed by a belief in the Mandate of Heaven, persisted as a strong inner driving force throughout his life and sustained his tenacious commitment to his reform cause.

To carry out his redemptive mission, Kang concurrently embarked on two interrelated realms of reformation: political and religious. His political aim was to transform the imperial government into a constitutional monarchy so as to better prepare China for survival and dignified prosperity. His religious quest was to recast Confucianism as a religion and in particular, to institutionalize it as a state religion. A firm believer in the religious origin of morality and in the moral basis of society, he considered politics and religion as 'two wheels' of the chariot of state. Religion would serve as a foundation for good political order and national solidarity, while politics would provide institutional assistance and support to religion for the common good of all. In this light, Kang's political reform and his religious cause can be regarded as complementary aspects of one coherent project. Despite his earnest efforts, Kang's political reform failed disastrously, with dire consequences for his personal life.

Kang's religious reform, on the other hand, achieved a degree of success. It was carried out in two main areas. At the institutional level, he proposed the creation of a national Confucian Church modelled on its Christian counterpart, with branches set up in every locality across the country. His proposal was partially realized through the establishment (with the assistance of his young disciple, Columbia graduate Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章) of the Confucian Religion Association and its branches during the early Republican period; but, in later years, the Association slid into a decline and eventually lost its appeal to the public. Kang's agenda to make Confucianism a state religion in the national Constitution was rejected by the National Assembly, and was severely criticized by the New Culture intellectuals, who took the opportunity to start a concerted campaign against religion.

At the doctrinal level, Kang sought to recast Confucianism through a radical reinterpretation of the Confucian Canon. He attempted to revitalize ancient Chinese belief in *Shangdi* as recorded in classical Confucianism and, by appropriating apocryphal accounts, to ascribe divinity to Confucius by extolling the Sage as a divine teacher, born after a miraculous conception, who was bestowed the Mandate of Heaven. On the other hand, Kang emphasized that, although divinely-originated, the religion of Confucius was human-oriented. Unlike the founders of other religions, Confucius had focused his attention on the human world by setting forth detailed teachings to nurture proper human relations so as to ensure social order. Furthermore, Confucius had a vision for the future of mankind, as manifested in his espousal of the progressive theory of the Three Ages (*sanshi*) and the doctrine of the Great Unity (*datong*), two of the most profound teachings of Confucius that had, in Kang's view, been largely forgotten. Thus, Confucianism represented a highly advanced form of religion originally founded by Confucius and now being restored by Kang's exegesis, a religion which called for profound change both at the level of the individual and in the structure of society.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who had embraced Western conceptions of religion and who excluded Confucianism from the camp of religions, Kang upheld the unitary nature of the concept of *jiao* (教) or 'religion', which he believed was manifested in various types of religion, all of which shared the same goal of teaching people to avoid evil and do good. He stressed that all the major religions of the world, despite their differences, were united in their fundamental teachings. To begin with, all religions taught on reverence for God. He considered 'God' to be a universal concept, often given different designations in different cultures. He favoured the conception of a pantheist God who did not have a visible substance but who existed within this world that was in constant change. Second, all religions taught the doctrine of the existence of the soul, although the human soul had similarly been given different names in different religions. In his view, the immortality of the soul was manifested in repeated reincarnations within this world rather than through its continuance in another world. For Kang, there was only one world, with two realms (visible and invisible). It was his conviction that unity of religion was not only necessary but also inevitable, for his progressive view of religion would lead to the

logical conclusion that as peoples around the world become increasingly connected, diverse religions would also be unified, and there would appear a new, universal religion, which would help usher humankind into the ideal world of the Great Unity.

An earnest self-taught student of Western science by means of an arduous reading of Chinese translations, the young Kang established himself as one of the most learned Chinese scholars in Western learning in the late nineteenth century. Having experienced the intellectual exhilaration of encountering the most recent developments in science, he became one of the pioneer Confucian teachers who lectured on Western learning, and he further called for science education to be included in the reform of the national educational system. He recognized the potential of science and technology to transform the material conditions of existence and argued that China could be saved through the vigorous promotion of technoscience. His observations from visits to industrially advanced powers such as Great Britain, America and Germany convinced him of the urgent need for China to encourage scientific inventions by setting up a mechanism to protect patents so as to give China a 'cutting-edge' advantage in the fierce competition with other countries. Furthermore, his ideal world of the Great Unity could not come true without a high degree of scientific and technological development, for he believed that the increase of human happiness and decrease of suffering also depended on material progress. Unlike the New Culture intellectuals, however, his passionate appreciation of science did not convert him to materialistic scientism or indiscriminate Westernization.

In the intellectual realm of his holistic, associative thinking, Kang maintained an unfractured concept of scientific knowledge and Confucian verities as being complementary aspects of one knowledge. He attempted to synthesize his Confucian religion and Western science, both of which, in his view, were essential to individual intellectual development as well as to national progress and prosperity. He saw no conflict between them, for he believed that the Confucian Classics had already contained the origins of modern science, which happened to have been recently developed into finer stages of scientific discovery in the West. So, embracing Western science was entirely legitimate and consonant with his religious cause of going back to 'pristine' Confucianism. Epistemologically speaking and in accordance with Confucian thinking, the principles of nature discovered through science should only

lead to a consonance with the higher principles enshrined in the Confucian Classics. Conflict with science might occur with other 'inferior' religions like Christianity, but rarely if ever with the more advanced Confucian religion. Further, Kang did not insist on the infallibility of the founders of religions and considered religious doctrines as standing in need of adjustment when scientific evidence made correction imperative. But no matter how far science advanced, it could never disprove the existence of God, whose nature he believed lay beyond the grasp or measure of finite—even if brilliant—scientific minds.

Nowhere is Kang's view of a complementary relationship between science and religion more clearly manifest than in his appropriation of scientific notions in his Confucian exegesis, an attempt that has been recognized by later scholars as a new paradigm for the Confucian tradition. Like his reformist ally and disciple in spirit, Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, Kang argued that 'ether' and 'electricity' constituted the essence of the all-important Confucian virtue *ren* (goodness, benevolence). Kang also demonstrated one aspect of scientific spirit: abiding by verified facts and proven theories. Upon learning that the concept of 'ether' had been shattered by Einstein's theory of relativity, for example, he thenceforth stopped using the term himself. At the same time, he waxed more eloquent about 'electricity', considering it to be what was commonly known as spirit, and the very medium through which human consciousness was spread. He further applied the notion of electricity to his explanation of the nature of the soul and the mysterious mechanism of divine retribution. All of this brings to mind the efforts of some of the eminent scientists in late nineteenth century Europe to reconcile their religious convictions with contemporary scientific theories through the mediating role of 'ether' or 'electricity'.

As a self-proclaimed sage for his age, Kang could not remain content with the role of a mere reformer of Confucianism. He set out to establish his own doctrine of 'celestial peregrination', a doctrine which mixed, or, synthesized, astronomical knowledge with his metaphysical speculations. Revealing this doctrinal epiphany, he had eventually become, in the sense denoted by his own definition, a *jiaozhu*, a founder of a religion, confident that his doctrine would be practised in the future world of the Great Unity.

Seen from a broader perspective, Kang's construction of a universal concept of God, his vision of the future unification of religions and his conceptualization of a compatible relationship between science and religion exemplified the rise of transnational, trans-religious spirituality. This intellectual activity took place in the context of major events in the formation of imperial and colonial modernity. In these processes, the cultural and religious encounters between the Christian occidental and the Confucian–Indian oriental worlds led many to a search for a common essence between different traditions as well as between different domains of human thought.

This thesis contributes to a richer picture of Kang's thought by giving adequate attention to its religious and scientific dimensions over his whole life, a better understanding of the historical relationship between science and religion in a modern Chinese context, and, more importantly, a more global account of the subject from a non-Western perspective.

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Notes and Abbreviations

In this thesis, Chinese characters have sometimes been provided to assist readers. In the main text, I have employed the traditional complex characters in accordance with the academic norm followed in studies on pre-1949 China, but in notes and the bibliography, I have retained the simplified characters in those titles that have been published in simplified characters. Translations in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, are all mine, and I take sole responsibility for any inaccuracy or infelicity of language.

CHC *The Cambridge History of China*. eds. Twitchett, Denis C., and John K. Fairbank, 1978–

CHZWL *Chen Huanzhang wenlu* 陈焕章文录 [Collected Works of Chen Huanzhang], 2005.

KX *Kexue* 科學 [Science Magazine] (1915–1919)

KJHZZ *Kongjiaohui zazhi* 孔教會雜誌 [The Confucian Association Monthly] (1913–1914)

KJSNDS *Kongjiao shinian dashi* 孔教十年大事 [Events on Confucian Religion during a decade], ed. Ke Huang, 1924.

KXRSG *Kexue yu renshengguan* 科学与人生观 [Science and the Philosophy of Life], by Zhang Junmai *et al.*, 1998.

KYWQJ *Kang Youwei quanji* 康有为全集 [Complete Works of Kang Youwei], 2007.

LQCQJ *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁启超全集 [Complete Works of Liang Qichao], 1999.

LSZFGB *Linshi zhengfu gongbao* 臨時政府公報 [Provisional Government Gazette (1911-1912)], photo-offset reprint by Jiangsu guji, 1981.

TSTQJ *Tan Sitong quanji* 谭嗣同全集 [Complete Works of Tan Sitong], 1981.

XQN *Xinqingnian* 新青年 [New Youth Journal] (1916–1921)

YBSHJ-JWW *Yinbingshi heji jiwaiwen* 饮冰室合集集外文 [Essays not Included in the Collected Works from the Ice-Drinker's Studio], ed. Xia Xiaohong, 2005.

ZFGB *Zhengfu gongbao* 政府公報 [Government Gazette] (1912-1928), photo-offset reprint by Shanghai shuju, 1988.

ZMDZH-WH *Zhonghua minguoshi dang'an ziliao huibian 3: wenhua* 中华民国史档案资料汇编 3: 文化 [Compilation of Archival Materials Pertaining to the History of the Republic of China *3: Culture*], eds. ZDLDG, 1991.

Introduction

> *'How could it be that Isaac Newton possessed a religious belief?' a group of Grade 10 students asked their physics teacher.*
>
> *'Well, he did not turn to religion until his declining years when he was not doing much scientific research.'*
>
> *Not fully satisfied with the answer, they turned to their politics teacher and received another explanation:*
>
> *'Newton had a dual personality: he was a materialist during his scientific work, though an idealist in his private life.'*

This classroom episode occurred in 1953 at Nanjing No. 1 High School in the newly-founded People's Republic of China.[1] At that time, students across the country were taught that dialectical materialism was the rational scientific worldview, while idealism, of which religion was considered to be a typical form, was misguided thinking that had to be stoutly resisted. That is why those students had been so puzzled when they first learned about the religious beliefs of Isaac Newton, who was widely regarded as the 'greatest physicist' of his time. In response, the teachers had to explain away these beliefs in a way that conformed to orthodox ideology.

That dichotomous image of Newton persisted into the 1990s when I was a high school student. He was still being portrayed as an icon of science and reason during the prime of his life, eventually declining and becoming a deplorable victim of religion in his dotage. For this reason, Newton was an often-quoted example of how religion stands in the way of scientific endeavours. This Chinese view of Newton can largely be traced to Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, a work that has been extremely influential among Chinese Marxist intellectuals, and in which Newton was criticized for having 'in his old age busied himself with expounding the *Revelation of St.*

[1] An account of the anecdote was posted on 27 August 2012 by one of the students who had asked the question on the *Xici hutong* 西祠胡同, a popular Chinese Internet forum, in relation to a discussion on why some scientifically-educated people in the West still hold religious beliefs. See Xiyang Wanchang 夕阳晚唱, 'Jiu Nanlaibeiwang de wenti xiangqide 就"南来北往"的问题想起的 [Nanlaibeiwang's Question Has Reminded Me of Something]', Forum discussion, *Xici hutong*, 27 August 2012, http://www.xici.net/d175186744.htm; Xiyang Wanchang 夕阳晚唱 and Wan Zhaoyuan 万兆元, 'Qingjiao 请教 [An Inquiry]', Email, 23 October 2012.

John'.[2] Imagine my surprise when, in 2008, I was introduced to a totally different Newton presented in a recently published English biography of Newton:[3] a great scientist deeply engaged in religious studies throughout his life, who saw no contradiction between his interpreting the Bible and simultaneously decoding the Book of Nature! This surprise 'discovery' inspired me to embark on an exploration of the fascinating subject of science and religion, particularly in the Chinese context.

The Chinese dichotomous conception of Newton is a revealing example of the so-called 'Conflict Thesis', according to which science and religion are in a fundamental conflict. The thesis became part of China's intellectual orthodoxy during the iconoclastic New Culture Movement in the late 1910s and has held sway ever since.[4] My research, however, is not so much an examination of the Conflict Thesis as it is a search for its historical antecedents in the context of modern Chinese thought. Were there alternative configurations of the association between science and religion before the Conflict Thesis took root? How did the predecessors of the New Culture intellectuals understand the concepts of science and religion and their relationship? These questions focused my attention on the late Qing[5] reformers, especially Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), a prominent and representative thinker of the period of transition from Imperial to Republican China.[6] While he was chiefly known as the principal intellectual architect of the Reform of 1898 (*Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法), he was also the pre-eminent promoter of religious reform. As 'the Martin Luther of Confucianism', he led a movement to turn Confucianism into a Confucian religion he named *Kongjiao* 孔教.[7] This thesis will examine Kang's evolving concepts of what

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[2] Friedrich Engels, 'Dialectics of Nature', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, trans. Clemens Dutt, vol. 25 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 345.

[3] Rob Iliffe, *Newton: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). I was invited to translate the work into Chinese; its Chinese version was published by the Yilin Press in Nanjing in 2009 and reprinted by Oxford University Press (Hong Kong) in 2015.

[4] For an in-depth discussion on the rise of the Conflict Thesis in Chinese thought, see Danny W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

[5] In this thesis, the 'late Qing' is usually used to refer to the last years of the Qing dynasty from the 1894-5 Sino-Japanese war to the 1911 Revolution that overthrew the dynasty. In a more general sense, it is also used to cover the dynasty's last seven decades, starting from the first Opium War.

[6] See, for example, the view of his major biographer in the West, Kung-ch'uan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-Wei, Reformer and Utopian* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 594.

[7] *Kongjiao* (Kong being the surname of Confucius) was a new term employed by Kang to refer to his reformed Confucianism in contrast to orthodox Neo-Confucianism. In some English texts, the neologism 'Confucianity' has been proposed as a translation for *Kongjiao,* so as to highlight Kang's

are now generally categorized as science and religion, and argues that his writings constitute a major early attempt to conceptualize their relationship.

Science and Religion

In many ways, the analysis of the so-called 'science and religion question' in twentieth-century China has reflected the stimulation and intellectual influence of the West. Indeed, modern Chinese concepts of 'science' and 'religion' have been shaped by their Western counterparts. The English word 'science' is derived from the Latin *scientia*, which means 'demonstrated knowledge'. In the Western world, the study of nature was traditionally denoted by the term 'natural philosophy', which sought to discover the physical causes of natural phenomena. Though originally not concerned with mathematics, whose computations did not involve physical causes, natural philosophy achieved union with mathematics in the seventeenth century and thereby gave rise to the Scientific Revolution. Exact sciences such as chemistry, physics and biology had matured as independent disciplines by the early nineteenth century. Only then did natural philosophy come to be called science in general, and 'science' was used as an umbrella term for a range of different sciences.[8] This 'modern science' is understood as 'a knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws especially as obtained and tested through scientific method'.[9] According to one definition, scientific method here refers to the process of 'systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses'.[10] This is widely held to be the central characteristic of modern science, so much so that science is often identified with scientific method itself. While in a stricter sense the term 'science' is restricted to the study of the physical world and its phenomena, in a broad sense the generic term is also used to

appropriation of Christian practices. See, for example, Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 292; Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 42–43. While cleverly coined, 'Confucianity' might lull a reader into overlooking the doctrinal differences between *Kongjiao* and Christianity.

8 Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 307.

9 'Science', in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, Inc.), accessed 12 August 2012, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary.

10 'Scientific Method', in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed 28 January 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/.

cover the social sciences, which have developed out of the application of the scientific method to the study of human society and behavior. Auguste Comte's 'Law of Three Stages' and Karl Marx's 'scientific' view of history, for example, were some of the most significant early achievements in the social sciences and would prove extremely influential in twentieth-century China.

To some extent, the term 'natural philosophy' carried a meaning similar to the classical Chinese idea of *gezhi* 格致, which means 'acquiring knowledge through investigation of things'. So when a version of Western science was first introduced into China by the Jesuits in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then again by Protestant missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, *gezhi* was adopted as the term for natural science. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, a neologism *kexue* 科學 (which literally means systematized branches of learning) was invented by Japanese scholars to refer to the modern science introduced from the West, so as to distinguish it from the old term *gezhi*, which was reminiscent of Chinese traditional learning. The new term highlighted some key characteristics of modern science, notably its specialization and professionalization. It was soon introduced into China from Japan (which had then become the portal through which Chinese scholars acquired Western learning), and was used interchangeably with *gezhi* before it was eventually accepted, primarily through the promotion of the new journal entitled *Kexue* 科學 (Science), as the standard Chinese equivalent for science in the mid-1910s.[11] *Kexue* or science is now generally understood as 'exact and systematized knowledge' of the world, which primarily refers to the natural sciences, but in its broad sense it also covers disciplines such as psychology, sociology and economics. Two features are often noticed in its Chinese usage. One is that science is conventionally approached from a pragmatic perspective, and therefore it is often used together or even elided with technology. The other is that, as is the case in the West, science is often employed as a standard for value judgement in various fields.[12]

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[11] For a comprehensive discussion on the replacement of *gezhi* by *kexue*, see Fan Hongye 樊洪业, 'Cong gezhi dao kexue 从"格致"到"科学" [From "gezhi" to "Science"]', *Ziran bianzhengfa tongxun 自然辩证法通讯 [Journal of Dialectics of Nature]*, no. 3 (1998): 39–50. It is noteworthy that at the turn of the century a similar process of redefining and retranslating the English term 'science' was also going on in the Arabic world, see Marwa S. Elshakry, 'Knowledge in Motion: The Cultural Politics of Modern Science Translations in Arabic', *Isis* 99, no. 4 (2008): 701–30.

[12] For a summary of the use of *kexue* or science in the modern Chinese context, see Wu Guosheng 吴

The term ‘religion’ is even more problematic. Its origin, the Latin *religiō*, has an obscure etymology and Max Müller concluded that it ‘can only have meant respect, care, reverence’ in its first conception.[13] In pre-modern West, the word ‘religion’ was rarely used to refer to sets of beliefs or practices (the meaning that is familiar to us), but it was often employed to denote a moral virtue such as piety. In this context, the expression ‘true religion’ was used by some Church Fathers in the Middle Ages to refer to the pious worship of God rather than to doctrinal orthodoxy. This understanding of religion as an ‘interior’ virtue persisted until the sixteenth century, when the term began to be used in an ‘exterior’, generic sense, both as a body of doctrine to be affirmed and as a set of public practices to be distinguished from Islam, Judaism or even other branches of Christianity. This significant shift in the conception of religion is considered by Peter Harrison as a ‘precondition’ for a relationship between science and religion.[14] In the intellectual discourse in the West, the modern concept of religion was very much shaped by the Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition, and in relation to science it refers primarily and sometimes solely to Christianity, or in specific cases to either Protestantism or Roman Catholicism.

It is a much more complicated story in China. When the Christian religion was introduced into China by Jesuits as a structured system of beliefs and practices, organized in a church-like institution, it was difficult to find a Chinese equivalent.[15] The traditional concept that came closest in meaning was *jiao* 教, which literally means ‘teaching’, ‘instruction’ and ‘education’. By the late nineteenth-century, China’s religious landscape, which had traditionally been constituted by the institutionalized Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教), namely, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism on the national level and by communal religions on the local level, had been altered by the presence of ‘foreign’ Christianity, which spread after the Opium Wars under the assistance of military power.[16] In this context, Christianity was also

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国盛, *Shenme shi kexue 什么是科学 [What Is Science?]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2016), 1–17.

13 Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1889), 36.

14 Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 7–11.

15 Vincent Goossaert, ‘The Concept of Religion in China and the West’, *Diogenes* 52 (2005): 13–20.

16 Cf. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago:

considered a kind of *jiao*, and was referred to as *Tianzhujiao* 天主教 (Catholicism) or *Yesujiao* 耶穌教 (Protestantism), literally, the religion of the Lord of Heaven or of Jesus, respectively. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and fellow Jesuits upheld Catholicism as the 'true', 'universal' religion, and concluded that China lacked a proper religion but was instead mired in superstitions, heterodox beliefs, idolatry and atheism. Similarly, considering Christianity as authentic religion, nineteenth century Protestant missionaries criticized Chinese traditional culture, and claimed that China had no *true* religions. In response, Chinese intellectuals started to contrast Chinese *jiao* with Christianity, thus initiating the 'religious question' of modern China. Central to the discussion was whether the concept of *jiao* matched the notion of 'religion' introduced by the Jesuits and Protestant missionaries.[17]

Many saw the difference between the two terms and opted for, once again, a Japanese neologism, *zongjiao* 宗教, which eventually, in the early twentieth century, became widely accepted as the Chinese equivalent for 'religion' in the Western sense outlined above.[18] Under this rubric were grouped Buddhism and Daoism, together with Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism, while as I show in this thesis, there were heated debates concerning whether Confucianism was a religion or not.[19] In the meantime, local cults and practices were now labelled as superstitions or *mixin* 迷信, another new notion adopted from the West via Japan. Thus with the coming of such neologisms as *zongjiao*, *kexue* and *mixin* there appeared a triangle in Chinese modernist rhetoric, with science becoming the touchstone in differentiating 'religion' (compatible with science) from 'superstition' (unscientific).[20] Kang, however,

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University of Chicago Press, 2011), 22–23.

17 For a recent study of Ricci's notion of Chinese religion and its impact, see Zhang Zhigang 张志刚, *Zongjiao zhonguohua yili chensi 宗教中国话义理沉思 [Sinocization of Religions: A Theoretical Study]* (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2017), 128–40.

18 See Goossaert, 'The Concept of Religion'; Vincent Goossaert, 'The Social Organization of Religious Communities in the Twentieth Century', in *Chinese Religious Life*, ed. David A. Palmer, Glenn Landes Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 172–90.

19 Goossaert, 'The Social Organization of Religious Communities', 176. The controversy is still alive today, but as far as this thesis is concerned, the religious dimension of Confucianism has been widely accepted. Without an understanding of this, as Wei-ming Tu put it, our appreciation of the Confucian terms such as 'profound person', 'politics' and 'metaphysics' are shallow, inadequate or even misleading. See Wei-ming Tu, *Zhongyong Dongjian 中庸洞见/An Insight of Chung-Yung*, bilingual (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2008), 4.

20 Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 50–51. For a discourse on *jiao* and 'religion' in the early 20th century, see Hsi-yuan Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion: The Formation of Religious

disapproved of those neologisms, in particular the usage of *zongjiao* for religion, arguing that the Chinese *jiao* represented the true sense of 'religion', a notion that in his view had been narrowed, if not distorted, in its scope by the Christian religion.[21] His position was largely neglected. Several decades later, however, an increasing number of scholars in Chinese religious studies have begun to argue that the concept of religion accepted in China, which has been largely shaped by the model of Christianity, is inadequate to capture the quintessential nature of Chinese religious tradition. To understand Chinese religion, therefore, the category of 'religion' must be reconsidered.[22] Several attempts have been made in this direction, in particular to define the religious nature of Confucianism.[23] Rodney Taylor, for example, appropriated Frederick Streng's definition of religion as a means toward ultimate transformation in his analysis of Confucianism, positing that the Confucian concept of Heaven, which functioned as a religious absolute, has provided humanity with such a means—the pursuit of sagehood.[24]

My research traces Kang's use of the concepts of science and religion during the replacement of Chinese traditional terminology with modern terms deprived from Western/Japanese sources. I examine the way Kang defined those concepts for himself in the following chapters, but outside of the context of Kang's own work, I will use both terms, science and religion, in a more general sense. Although they remain difficult to define, and always need to be placed into their relevant contexts,[25] I treat science and religion as two evolving systems of knowledge and practice, the former enabling people to understand and manipulate their environment, and the latter conferring meaning on their lives. With this general understanding, science is roughly

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Discourse and the Confucian Movement in Modern China' (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1999), 1–70.

21 Kang, 'Kongjiaohui xu (er) 孔教会序(二) [(A Second) Introduction to the Confucian Religion Association (1912)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 345–46.

22 For a strong argument for this position, see Zhang, *Zongjiao zhonguohua*, 128–60.

23 See, for example, C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); Hans Küng and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 1989); Wei-ming Tu, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1985).

24 Rodney L. Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 2–4; cf. Frederick J. Streng, *Understanding Religious Life* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985), 1–8.

25 In terms of religion, it has been widely acknowledged that there simply cannot be a universal definition. See, for example, the discussion by Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27–55.

defined as the academic discipline that systematically engages with the natural and human worlds on the basis of empirical interactions with those realms. Scientific knowledge, therefore, covers general truths or the operation of general laws which are especially obtained and tested through scientific method. The umbrella term, 'science', also covers what are known as social sciences which have, chiefly since the early nineteenth century, claimed that they have applied scientific method to the study of human society and behaviour. Religion is regarded as a belief system grounded in reverence for a supernatural power or powers, which gives rise to private, communal, or institutional practices of worship, in order to meet spiritual needs at the level of both individual and collective life. This definition makes theist belief an indispensable part of a religion, by which all the world's theistic religions are included, but atheist systems like Marxism are not.

The relationship between science and religion, two of the most potent cultural and intellectual forces of human life,[26] is both an old and a fresh issue in the West. In pre-modern Europe, a synthesis of knowledge and belief was created when Christian doctrine and ancient Greek cosmology were harmonized in the medieval period.[27] The pioneers of modern science, such as Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler, were either Roman Catholics or belonged to a Protestant church. In their efforts to expound the knowledge of astronomy, they entered the field of theology in order to explain how the Copernican system could be made consistent with Biblical exegesis.[28] For many seventeenth-century natural philosophers, like Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton, religion served as an incentive as well as a sanction to investigate the workings of a universe created by God.[29] The 'reintegration' of religion with natural philosophy was largely achieved by way of natural theology, which used scientific knowledge to establish an axiomatic statement that the natural order was the consequence both of the existence of God and of his specific attributes.[30]

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[26] See Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The New American Library, 1925), 180; cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1.

[27] Robert H. Brown, *The Wisdom of Science: Its Relevance to Culture and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 148.

[28] Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science: 1300-1800*, New Edition (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1957), 69–70.

[29] Grant, *Natural Philosophy*, 298.

[30] John H. Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Since the Scientific Revolution, generations of Western intellectuals have appraised the relationship between science and religion and have suggested a number of ways of conceptualizing this association.[31] Of these, the 'conflict' view was voiced by a number of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers, but it did not begin to hold sway among European intellectuals until the late nineteenth century, when John Draper and Andrew White represented the history of science as a series of wars and conflicts between science and the Catholic church, or between men of science and theologians, whose celebrated examples include the cases of Galileo and Darwin.[32] Such a view became known as the Draper-White thesis and was widely interpreted as a conflict between science and religion in general. It had exerted an enormous influence in the twentieth century, with the success of science held as a standing refutation of the authority and truth of religion.

Since the mid-twentieth century, however, the Draper-White thesis has received substantial criticism. Alternative ways of relating science and religion have been proposed and critiqued. In his work on the origins of modern science, for example, Herbert Butterfield suggested that in the long run it was Protestantism that became an ally with the scientific movement in the early modern period.[33] However, a number of historians of science such as John Brooke have demonstrated that science and religion have been so richly interrelated in different periods of history that no simple general model or master narrative is possible.[34] Peter Harrison has carried this 'complexity thesis' further and argued that the discrete categories of 'religion' and 'science' were intellectual constructs of the last three centuries, for there were no clear-cut boundaries between their underlying semantic fields in the remote past.[35] In sum, Western scholarship on the subject over the past few decades has been

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University Press, 1991), 32, 77.

31 Cf. Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3–10.

32 Cf. John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875); Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vols (New York: D. Applelton and Company, 1896).

33 Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, 58.

34 Cf. Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 2–4; McGrath, *Science and Religion*.

35 Cf. Harrison, *The Territories*. For an anthropological perspective on the emergence of religion as a modern historical object, see also Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27–82.

extraordinarily rich in terms of its depth, diversity and popular appeal, and has demonstrated the immense historical complexity of science-religion relationships.[36]

The vast majority of these studies, however, have been carried out within a Western context and focused primarily on the relations between science and the Abrahamic faith traditions, in particular, Christianity, and their conclusions hold only for Western science and religion. In light of an emerging globalizing vision and at a time when increased efforts should be made to avoid provincialism in scholarly pursuits, it is highly desirable that other religious traditions and their non-Western contexts should also be considered and analysed.[37] For example, the 2011 collected volume on science and religion around the world represents a pioneering effort towards this direction by exploring the way nature has been understood and manipulated in such diverse regions as ancient China, India, and sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, it demonstrates the value of plural perspectives for the construction and perception of science-religion relations.[38]

Although in traditional China the line between religious reasoning and scientific thought (defined as the study of the natural world) was probably no less blurred than in the West, in current Chinese thought not only does the conflict model prevail, but also for political and ideological reasons, the tension between science and religion is much sharper than in the West. Having taken root during the New Culture Movement that upheld radical rationalism in the form of scientism, the Conflict Thesis held sway among intellectuals across the nation in the second half of the twentieth century, with regularly repeated endorsement from the official atheist ideology, and has remained the orthodox interpretation till this day.[39] According to this position, science, whose spirit is atheistic, cannot but contradict the theistic beliefs central to religion; the

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[36] For a concise yet updated summary of the historiography on the historical inter-relations of science and religion over the past few decades, see Geoffrey Cantor, 'Science and Religion: From the Historian's Perspective', in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Science*, ed. James W. Haag, Gregory R Peterson, and Michael L. Spezio (London: Routledge, 2012), 24–33.

[37] Phee Seng Kang, 'Bridging Science and Religion in China: Emerging Opportunities for Global Dialogue', *Theology and Science* 4, no. 2 (2006).

[38] See John H. Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Science and Religion around the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[39] See also Paul Shan, 'Science and Faith in China Today', in *Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S.J. (1592-1666)*, ed. Roman Malek, vol. II (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1998), 1204.

conflict between the two is often interpreted as the surrogate for that between atheism or theism and between the materialist and idealist worldviews.[40] Accordingly, the dominant view in Chinese academic discourse has remained the Conflict Thesis.

Unlike in the West, the history of the complex relationship between science and religion in Chinese history has not been studied in any depth. It must be acknowledged, however, that the subject has already received scholarly treatment in related studies on the history of science in traditional China, such as Joseph Needham's monumental works, and in various works on the history of religion in China by modern scholars both at home and abroad.[41] Benjamin Elman's recent monographs on the introduction of modern science into China have treated the missionaries' representation of a harmonious view of science and religion by means of natural theology, but have ignored the ways that contemporary Chinese thinkers approached the issue.[42] In discussing his famous question as to why modern science was not developed in China, Needham has argued that Confucianism was a hindrance to science, while Daoism was more 'scientific' and had a closer connection with science.[43] Nathan Sivin has, however, challenged this claim, pointing out that there was no documented evidence that Daoist scientists or technologists were predominant in either quantity or quality.[44] Derk Bodde has joined in the discussion by concluding that the development of modern science in traditional China was inhibited by several aspects of the Chinese humanistic tradition, including what he has described as the non-supportive role of religion, the anti-scientific sentiment which resulted from a preoccupation with morals, and the organicist thinking in the Chinese approach to nature.[45] In general, the view that a Chinese intellectual tradition dominated by

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40 Ren Yuanli 任延黎, *Gaokeji yu zongjiao 高科技与科学 [Advanced Science-Technology and Religion]* (Tianjin: Kexue jishu chubanshe, 2000), viii–ix.

41 Cf. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*; Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*; Mou Zhongjian 牟钟鉴 and Zhang Jian 张践, *Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi 中国宗教通史 [A Comprehensive History of Chinese Religions]*, Revised (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

42 Benjamin Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Modern Science in China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

43 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: History of Scientific Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1956), 35, 103, 129.

44 Nathan Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 310.

45 Derk Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science: The Intellectual and Social Background of Science and Technology in Pre-Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

Confucianism was not favourable to the growth of modern science has been widely shared by Chinese scholars in the twentieth century.[46]

On the other hand, the inclusive attitude regarding the relationship between natural knowledge and religion or faith in traditional Chinese thought has also been widely recognized. For in the Chinese way of holistic thinking, the two were basically one. This is evident in the afore-mentioned Confucian concept of *gezhi*, and in the related notion of *xiaxue shangda* 下學上達, or learning what is below in order to penetrate to what is above.[47] As Paul Shan has observed, the Chinese emphasis on human reason as the predominant source of knowledge and the tendency of Chinese thought towards universal unity entailed the integration of science and faith.[48] Similarly, a recent case study has also stressed the role of religion in the life and thought of Zhang Heng 张衡, a prominent Confucian scientist in second-century China.[49]

The past four decades following China's reform and opening-up have witnessed a growth of interest in science and religion within the Chinese academic community. The new development has occurred alongside the emergence of a more neutral discourse on religion and has also been stimulated by the vibrant and rigorous studies in science and religion in the West. The revival is illustrated by the increase of published monographs and translations on the subject,[50] and by the organization of a series of lectures or seminars on science and religion, such as the 2002 international forum jointly organized in Beijing by the Berkeley Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)[51] and

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46 See, for example, Yu-Lan Fung, 'Why China Has No Science - An Interpretation of the History and Consequences of Chinese Philosophy', *International Journal of Ethics* 32, no. 3 (1922): 237–63; Ren Hongjuan 任鴻雋, 'Shuo Zhongguo wu kexue zhi yuanyin 說中國無科學之原因 [On the Reasons Why China Did Not Have Science]', *KX* 1, no. 1 (1915): 6–12; Ren Jiyu 任继愈, 'Rujiao de xingcheng 儒教的形成 [On the Formation of Confucian Religion]', *Zhongguo shehui kexue 中国社会科学 [Chinese Social Sciences]*, no. 1 (1980): 10.

47 Cf. *Lunyu* (Analects) 14:35, James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics I: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893).

48 Shan, 'Science and Faith in China Today', 1202.

49 Lei Libai 雷立柏 [Leopold Leeb], *Zhang Heng, kexue yu zongjiao 张衡: 科学与宗教 [Zhang Heng: Science and Religion]* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000).

50 Dozens of titles on science and religion by Western scholars, including Bertrand Russell, Ian Barbour, Edward Grant, Richard Olson, John Brooke and Peter Harrison, have been translated into Chinese.

51 For more on this seminar forum that has been acclaimed as 'the first-ever dialogue between Chinese scientists and religious studies scholars in a public forum', see Phee Seng Kang, 'Bridging Science

the Templeton-sponsored Science and Religion Series (2005–2009) in collaboration with several top Chinese universities.[52] More importantly, the academic interest in science and religion is manifested in the large number of journal papers published on the topic over the recent decades. The Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index Database shows that as many as 799 papers have been published in its source journals on science and religion (i.e. whose titles contain 'science and religion') from 1979 to 2018, with 44 from the period of 1979–1989, 93 from the 1990s, 366 from the 2000s, and 296 from the 2010s.[53]

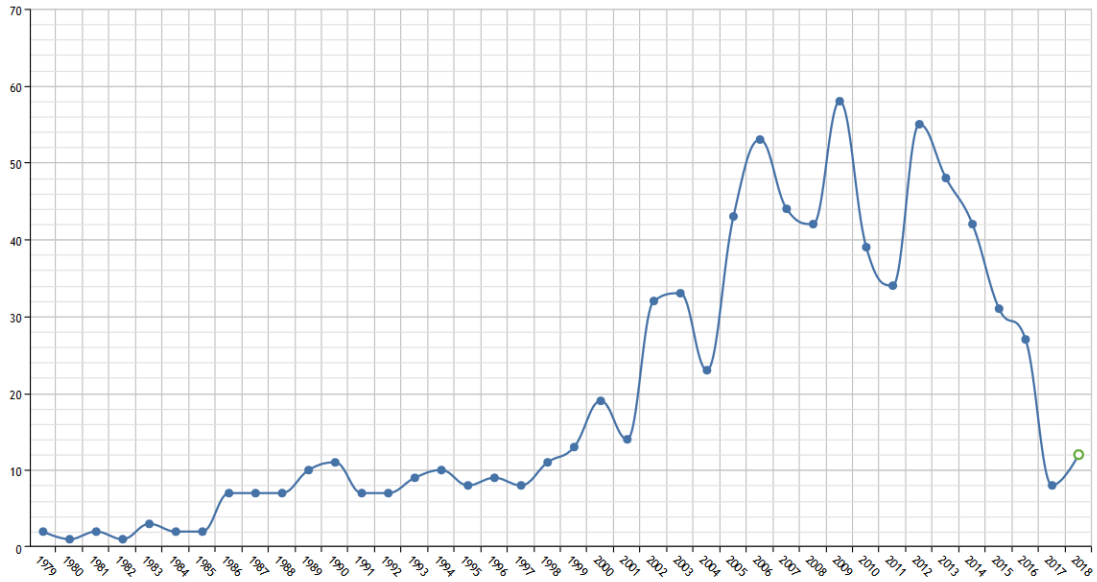


Figure 1: Nos. of Chinese Papers on Science and Religion (1979–2018) © CNKI

A general survey of this body of literature reveals that, as is to be expected, the prevailing position has been to justify the orthodox conflict model. Although attempts have been made to consider whether religion and science can be regarded as belonging to distinctive yet equally valid domains, this view has failed to receive wide recognition except among those intellectuals who professed a religious belief. Some of the papers published in the new century have also begun to consider the possibility of a harmonious relationship between science and religion, but that has proved to be a

and Religion in China'.

52 Melville Y. Stewart, *Science and Religion in Dialogue* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009). This is a collection of papers by two dozen Western philosophers and scientists who participated in a recent five–year–long Science and Religion series in China.

53 Data from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) http://www.cnki.net/, accessed on 9 December 2018.

difficult and sensitive effort in the contemporary Chinese context.[54] As the prominent Chinese scholar of religious studies Zhuo Xinping has concluded, attempts by Chinese academics at building a new paradigm of science and religion as an alternative to the deeply ingrained conflict model are encouraging, but they are not likely to make any breakthrough in the near future. Significant advance in interpreting the relationship between science and religion in the Chinese context cannot appear unless there are breakthroughs in the understanding of 'religion' in Chinese thought.[55] China's 'religious question', as Goossaert and Palmer have observed, remains 'as intractable as ever'.[56]

Scholarship on Kang

There is a tacit assumption in the literature that the question of science and religion, being chiefly a Western issue, did not become a subject of serious consideration until the late 1910s with the rise of the New Culture intellectuals, who, from the outset, pronounced the relationship between the two fields to be antagonistic. Consequently, discussions of the history of the science and religion issue in China normally start with the New Culture Movement.[57] My thesis challenges this assumption by demonstrating that the first reflections on the subject had actually started at least one generation earlier with the late Qing reformers, who went into the political and intellectual arenas in the mid-1890s and exerted great influence for over a decade. Furthermore, many of the major issues concerning Chinese religion or the relationship between science and religion that are being discussed today had already been considered a century earlier by the reformist thinkers.

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[54] For a detailed analysis of the literature on science and religion over the recent decades, see Gou Wenzeng 勾文增, 'Dangdai kexue yu zongjiao yanjiu de yanjin 当代科学与宗教研究的演进 [A Review of Contemporary Research on Science and Religion in China]', *Nanjing ligong daxue xuebao 南京理工大学学报 (社科版) [Journal of Nanjing University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences)]*, no. 2 (2012): 44–51.

[55] Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, 'Zhongguo zhishijie dui zongjiao yu kexue guanxi zhi lun 中国知识界对宗教与科学关系之论 [Discourse on the Relationship between Science and Religion among Chinese Intellectuals]', in *Qiao: kexue yu zongjiao 桥: 科学与宗教 [Bridging Science and Religion]*, ed. Kang, Phee Seng, Ted Peters, and Gaymon Bennett, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007), 230–44.

[56] Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 401.

[57] Cf. Zhuo, 'Zhongguo zhishijie'.

During the period of transition from Imperial to Republican China, faith in traditional Confucianism was shaken and the general indifference to Western learning was replaced by increasing recognition of the need for reform, by drawing on the experiences of foreign powers. In this regard, late Qing reformist thought, though politically-oriented, can also be regarded as an intellectual emancipation, or 'enlightenment', the first of its kind in modern China.[58] The reformist thinkers were at a critical juncture in history, characterized by profound perplexity over the encounter between Chinese and Western systems of knowledge and over the relationship between material and spiritual cultures.[59] For this reason, they found it imperative to consider the question of religion and science. Partly to counter the influence of the 'intruding' foreign religion—Christianity—there appeared a revival of Buddhism among Chinese scholars who considered it more suitable for the Chinese.[60] Meanwhile, there was a resurgence of the Gongyang School which emphasized the religious, mystical dimension of Confucius. Accompanying these religious trends was the introduction of Western science and secular ideas, which progressed through different phases. During the first phase from 1842 to 1860, modern science began to be introduced, but on a very-limited scale and its impact on the literati was insignificant. During the Self-Strengthening Movement (*ziqiang yundong* 自強運動) of the following three decades, although the focus was still on technology, the natural sciences were introduced on a larger scale, though necessarily with an emphasis on their utilitarian aspects. In the 1890s and especially from 1895 onward, Western political and social theories were introduced, and modern science gained gradual acceptance among the Chinese literati, and especially among the reformist thinkers.[61] As a result, late Qing reformist thought contained both scientific and religious elements, a fact that is recognized even by Marxist scholars, although

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58 See John K. Fairbank, 'Introduction: The Old Order', in *CHC*, vol. 10, 1978, 1–34; Charlotte Furth, 'Intellectual Change: From the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895-1920', in *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

59 Yunzhi Geng, *An Introductory Study on China's Cultural Transformation in Recent Times*, trans. Wang Huimin (Beijing & Heidelberg: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press & Springer-Verlag, 2015), 1–2.

60 See Ch'i-ch'ao Liang, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, trans. Immanuel C. Y. Hsü (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 116–17; Sin-wai Chan, *Buddhism in Late Ching Political Thought* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1985), 30–49.

61 See Hao Chang, 'Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890–8', in *CHC*, vol. 11, 1980, 274–83; Elman, *A Cultural History*, 100–226.

they assert that the former contradicted and overwhelmed the latter.[62] However, both Western and Chinese historiography have failed to give due appreciation to the importance of the religious element in the thought of the late Qing reformers.[63]

Among the reformist thinkers, Kang Youwei stood out as the leader of the reform campaign in the late 1890s. The campaign was triggered by China's defeat in the 1894-5 Sino-Japanese War and culminated in the short-lived Reform of 1898. Kang's ultimate vision was to transform the imperial government from a despotic to a constitutional monarchy through gradual reforms by drawing on the European precedents, so as to better prepare China for survival among the competing and often militarily aggressive nations. Although the Reform was soon cut short by a coup, Kang remained committed to the vision during his ensuing fifteen years in exile. He refused to endorse the path of revolution and continued to advocate constitutional monarchy among overseas Chinese. Even after the Revolution of 1911, which overthrew the Manchu rule of the Qing dynasty and ushered in the Republican era, Kang's position did not change. He vigorously argued that a constitutional monarchy would better suit the needs of contemporary China than a republican form of government in terms of maintaining national unity. With that belief, he participated in the ill-fated Manchu Restoration of 1917 at a high cost to his political credibility.[64]

Most Chinese studies of Kang over the past century have focused on his political thought and life, and have been characterized by a dichotomous view. Thus, he has been frequently depicted as 'progressive' before and during the Reform of 1898, but as 'conservative' and even 'reactionary' after it.[65] Accordingly, Kang's work and thought in his later life have been considered to be of less value; therefore they have received less scholarly attention, a situation that has been aptly described as 'studies of half Kang'.[66] Similarly, his early life has largely been neglected in scholarly

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62 Li Zehou 李泽厚, *Kang Youwei Tan Sitong Sixiang Yanjiu 康有为谭嗣同研究 [A Treatise on the Thought of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong]* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1958), 6–7.

63 Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 45; cf. Li, *Kang Youwei*, 6–7.

64 For a concise yet well-informed English introduction to Kang's life, see H. L. Boorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 228–33.

65 For the most representative version of this view, see Tang Zhijun 汤志钧, *Kang Youwei yu wuxu bianfa 康有为与戊戌变法 [Kang Youwei and the Reform of 1898]* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984).

66 Ma Honglin 马洪林, 'Kang Youwei yanjiu bainian huigu yu zhanwang 康有为研究百年回顾与

literature, and there has recently been a call to 'discover the young Kang' by turning to his early writings and thought.[67] The dichotomous view, moreover, has begun to be discredited by historians who have carefully examined Kang's writings and manuscripts.[68] For example, Hsiao Kung-ch'uan, Kang's main English-language biographer, corrected what he calls 'the misconceptions into which [he] had previously fallen', and concluded that Kang had remained true to his thought throughout his life and 'stood as the most important and most representative thinker of the period of transition from imperial to Communist China'.[69]

At the same time, Kang was the chief promoter of a religious reform, which aimed to 'restore', at both doctrinal and organizational levels, Confucianism to its 'pristine' state as a religion. Starting from the early 1890s, he embarked on a reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics based on the New-Text exegesis, portraying Confucius as a founder of a *jiao* or religion (*jiaozhu* 教主) as well as a reformer of political institutions. In addition, Kang presented to the Throne a proposal for the establishment of a National Confucian Church during the Reform of 1898 and organized the Confucian Religion Association and advocated the adoption of Confucianism as a state religion.[70] Most scholars, however, have treated Kang primarily as a political reformer and utopian writer,[71] and therefore have tended to either downplay or overlook his religious convictions, considering his advocacy of a Confucian religion as being merely politically motivated, a cynical device for

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展望 [A Review of Studies of Kang Youwei over the Past Century and Prospects for Future Research]', *Dongfang luntan* 东方论坛, no. 5 (2008): 83–92.

67 Tang Wenming 唐文明, *Fujiao zaikuan: Kang Youwei kongjiao sixiang shenlun* 敷教在宽: 康有为孔教思想申论 *[Teaching with Tolerance: A Study of Kang's Thought on Confucian Religion]* (Beijing: Zhongguo remin daxue chubanshe, 2012), 200.

68 See, for example, Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, v; Ma Honglin 马洪林, *Kang Youwei pingzhuan* 康有为评传 *[A Critical Biography of Kang Youwei]* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009).

69 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, v, 594.

70 Y.-P. Kuo, '"Christian Civilization" and the Confucian Church: The Origin of Secularist Politics in Modern China', *Past & Present* 218, no. 1 (2013): 235–64; Vincent Goossaert, 'Republican Church Engineering: The National Religious Associations in 1912 China', in *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 209–32.

71 Recent studies in English of Kang's utopian thought include Federico Brusadelli, 'A Tale of Two Utopias: Kang Youwei's Communism, Mao Zedong's Classicism and the "Accommodating Look" of the Marxist Li Zehou', *Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 103–22; Ban Wang, ed., *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 49–64, 87–105.

achieving a political and personal agenda.[72] His main Chinese-language biographer Ma Honglin has attempted to offer a materialist analysis of Kang's discourse on God in his later years.[73] Hsiao has given due attention to Kang's religious thought, but has concluded that his subject's 'Confucian religion' ended up in a moral philosophy.[74] This view has itself been challenged by Lauren Pfister, who has argued that Kang's version of religion was based on principles that can be recognized as legitimate religious claims.[75] The Taiwan-based scholar Zheng Zhiming has re-evaluated Kang's efforts to restore the 'ancient Chinese belief in the Supreme Ruler' (*Shangdi* 上帝) in his 'religious reinterpretation' of Confucianism.[76] Tang Wenming from the Chinese Mainland has recently produced a book-length study of Kang's early thought on the Confucian Teaching, and he has argued that Kang's religious thought is still of value for today's China.[77] Recently, there have been attempts to compare Kang's thought with the doctrines of other nineteenth century religious figures.[78] It is now increasingly recognized that Kang's actions and ideas cannot be fully understood without taking their spiritual-religious dimensions into consideration.[79] Kang has also come to be recognized as the first and most vocal Chinese proponent of a new way of thinking about the religious question in China.[80]

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72 For more on this Marxist reductivist view, according to which Kang's religious ideas were simply an expression of political interests, see Ma, *Pingzhuan*; Geng Yunzhi 耿云志, 'Kang Youwei de shengren qingjie jiqi yi kongjiao wei guojiao shuo 康有为的圣人情结及其孔教为国教说 [Kang's Sage Complex and His Views on Confucianism as a State Religion]', in *Kang Youwei yu jindai wenhua 康有为与近代文化 [Kang and Modern Culture]*, ed. Fang Zhixin 方志钦 and Wang Jie 王杰 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2006).

73 Ma, *Pingzhuan*, 206–11.

74 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 114.

75 Lauren Pfister, 'A Modern Ruist Religious Vision of a Global Unity: Kang Youwei's Utopian Vision and Its Humanistic Religious Refraction in European Sinology', in *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).

76 Zheng Zhiming 郑志明, 'Kang Youwei de zongjiaoguan shang 康有为的宗教观上 [On Kang's Religious Views I]', *Ehu 鹅湖* 23, no. 3 (1997): 17–28; Zheng Zhiming 郑志明, 'Kang Youwei de zongjiaoguan xia 康有为的宗教观下 [On Kang's Religious Views II]', *Ehu 鹅湖* 23, no. 4 (1997): 22–31.

77 Tang, *Fujiao zaikuan*.

78 See, for example, Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 896–97.

79 Wei Leong Tay, 'Kang Youwei, The Martin Luther of Confucianism and His Vision of Confucian Modernity and Nation', in *Secularization, Religion and the State*, ed. Haneda Masashi (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Centre for Philosophy, 2010), 97–109. see also Takeuchi Hiroyuki 竹内弘行, *Chūgoku no jukyō kindaika ron 中国の儒教近代化論 [The Modernization of Chinese Confucianism]* (Tokyo: Ken bunshuppan, 1995), 112–65.

80 Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 46.

Kang was an earnest, self-taught student of Western science via Chinese translations as well as one of the early voices that called for saving China through science and technology. Controversies, however, also abound over his views on science. He was, for example, labelled as a 'champion of the opposition' to science by one scholar,[81] but acclaimed by another as 'an early though unhonoured prophet of a new faith' in science.[82] All these bear witness to the need for more comprehensive and in-depth study of Kang's views on science as well as religion, and in particular, their relationship, through a careful examination of his writings, freed from the limitations imposed by the dichotomous view and analysed according to the different phases of his life. The publication in 2007 of his twelve-volume *Complete Works* (*Kang Youwei quanji* 康有為全集) has increased the convenience of such a scholarly endeavour within a Chinese academic context that has witnessed a revival of interest in Kang.

Since the turn of the new millennium, as cultural conservatism gains momentum in China, not only have different dimensions of Kang's intellectual output, including his early and later thought and his aesthetic pursuits, received increasing scholarly attention, but many of his political and religious proposals, which had been ridiculed or ignored over the last century, have also been treated with increasing sympathy and received scholarly reappraisal.[83] Kang's important position in the Confucian tradition has become more widely acknowledged. Hsiao's claim, made in the 1970s, that Kang had launched a new stage of the development of Confucianism[84] has been echoed by

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81 O. Brière, *Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy, 1898-1950* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 15.

82 Kung-ch'uan Hsiao, 'K'ang Yu-Wei's Excursion into Science', in *K'ang Yu-Wei: A Biography and a Symposium*, ed. Jung-pang Lo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967), 397.

83 See, for example, Tang, *Fujiao zaikuan*; Zeng Yi 曾亦, *Gonghe yu junzhu: Kang Youwei wanqi zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 共和与君主: 康有为晚期政治思想研究 [Republic versus Monarchy: A Study of Kang's Political Thought in His Later Years]* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010); Zhu Yitian 朱忆天, *Maixiang jindai wenming guojia de tansuo: Kang Youwei houqi sixiang yanjiu 迈向近代文明国家的探索: 康有为后期思想研究 [Towards a Modern Civilized Country: A Study of Kang's Later Thought]* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016); Aida Yuen Wong, *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Zhang Yongle 章永乐, *Wanguo jingzheng: Kang Youwei yu Weiyena tixi de shuaibian 万国竞争: 康有为与维也纳体系的衰变 [Nations as Rivals: Kang and the Decline of the Vienna System]* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2017); Gan Chunsong 干春松, *Baojiao liguo: Kang Youwei de xiandai fanglue 保教立国: 康有为的现代方略 [To Establish the State through Preserving the Faith: Kang's Strategies for Modernization]* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2015).

84 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 125.

a number of prominent contemporary scholars on Chinese intellectual history. Tu Wei-ming, for example, considers Kang a precursor to the third epoch of Confucianism (the first two being classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism), that is, New Confucianism (*xinrujia* 新儒家), which arose in the 1920s and has continued until this century.[85] However, the early New Confucianists, and their successors based in Taiwan and Hong Kong, who have prioritized 'inner self-cultivation' over the institutional and political dimensions of Confucianism, would normally not associate themselves with the name of Kang Youwei.[86] In contrast, the New Confucianists on the Chinese Mainland have advocated 'a return to Kang Youwei' and revisited many of his ideas, such as a titular monarchical republic and Confucianism as a state religion, in their discussion on the future reintegration of Confucianism with the state.[87] This 'political turn' as well as its modernist approaches has been controversial, however.[88]

To conclude, Kang's body of work has returned to the centre of academic studies nearly a century after his death. This thesis constitutes another effort to add to a more well-rounded picture of Kang's thought by focusing attention on the religious and scientific dimensions of his writings, and, in doing so, to contribute to the discourse on science and religion both in China and internationally.

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[85] Wei-Ming Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 141–61; cf. Jesús Solé-Farràs, *New Confucianism in Twenty-First Century China: The Construction of a Discourse* (Routledge, 2013), xxi, 105; Gan Chunsong 干春松, *Kang Youwei yu ruxue de xinshi 康有为与儒学的新世 [Kang Youwei and the New Epoch of Confucianism]* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2015).

[86] For a good discussion between Kang and New Confucianist schools, see Gan Chunsong 干春松, 'Kang Youwei yu xiandai ruxue sichao de guanxi bianxi 康有为与现代儒学思潮的关系辨析 [On the Relationship between Kang Youwwei and Contemporary Schools of Confucianist Thought]', *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao 中国人民大学学报 [Journal of China Renmin University]*, no. 5 (2015): 22–30.

[87] For an update of the collective proposals of New Confucianists based in the Chinese Mainland, see Jiang Qing 蒋庆 et al., *Zhongguo bixu zairuhua 中国必须再儒化 [China Must Be Confucianized Again]* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2016).

[88] For an informed, comprehensive critique of the New Confucianist 'political turn', see Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, 'Yixiangtiankai: jinnianlai dalu xinruxue de zhengzhi suqiu 异想天开: 近年来大陆新儒学的政治诉求 [A Fantasy: On Recent Political Appeals of the New Confucianists on Chinese Mainland]', www.aisixiang.com 爱思想, 1 July 2017, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/104951.html; see also Kiri Paramore, '"Civil Religion" and Confucianism: Japan's Past, China's Present, and the Current Boom in Scholarship on Confucianism', *Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 2 (2015): 269–82.

Chapter Organization

To bring out the development of Kang's thought, the chapters of this thesis are organized according to the five distinctive phases of his eventful life. This could be roughly divided into four segments: his early years (1858–1888); his career as a radical reformer (1889–1898); his exile abroad (1899–1912) and the early Republican years, when he was back in China (1913–1917); and his later years (1918–1927).

Chapter One discusses Kang's early thought within the religious and scientific contexts of the late Qing. It starts with his religious leanings. Born to a family steeped in Confucian tradition in a village in southeast Guangdong, Kang was informed of ancient Chinese religious thought (in particular the concepts of *Shangdi* and Heaven) as recorded in the Confucian Canon, and was at the same time exposed to local popular beliefs and practices with their Buddhist-Daoist admixture. His digression into the practice of Buddhist meditation during his rigid training in Neo-Confucianism led him to certain forms of mystical or religious experience. The chapter then traces Kang's avid learning and acquisition of knowledge of Western sciences in the early 1880s by reading Chinese translations. It then focuses on Kang's 'enlightenment' in the mid-1880s, through which he attempted to integrate all the components of knowledge he had acquired, Confucian, Buddhist, and Western. Recurring themes in Kang's thought during this period include his image of himself as a modern sage and his fascination with the future unification of the world. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to his discourse on *jiao* (teaching, religion) and *xue* (learning, science) in his early writings, most notably, *Interior and Exterior Chapters of Master Kang* (*Kangzi neiwai pian* 康子內外篇) and *A Compendium of True Principles and Universal Laws* (*Shili gongfa quanshu* 實理公法全書), none of which were published during his lifetime. The latter work, as its name indicates, represented Kang's first attempt to work out a set of universal truths based on his knowledge from scientific and religious sources, thereby laying the foundation for his design of an ideal future world.

Chapter Two presents Kang's endeavour in two interconnected lines of action: as a revisionist Confucian educator and a promoter of science in the 1890s. After his return from his political debut at the capital, he set up an academy in Guangzhou,

whose eclectic curriculum included such unconventional subjects as mathematics and Western learning, arguing that Confucian classics had already contained the origins of Western science. What was most unusual about his teaching, however, was that rather than toeing the line of orthodox Neo-Confucianism, it was based on a radical revision of Confucianism, which he had recently developed drawing on the New Text exegesis. His recasting of Confucianism primarily inheres in two works, *An Investigation into the Forged Classics of the Xin Dynasty* (*Xinxue weijingkao* 新學偽經考, 1891) and *A Treatise on Confucius as a Reformer* (*Kongzi gaizhikao* 孔子改制考, 1897), which presented Confucius as a founder of a religion as well as a visionary reformer who sanctioned political and social reforms. Equipped with the progressive concept of the Three Ages (*sanshi* 三世) that buttressed his political theory, Kang spearheaded the reform movement of the late 1890s, with the assistance of his able disciple Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929). His reform proposals included the introduction of Western science in the examination and education systems, and the creation of a national Confucian Church based on the Christian model in order to better counter the Christian challenge and preserve the Confucian Faith. The chapter ends with a discussion on the effort of Kang, Liang and especially Tan, to promote a unified system of knowledge, which was neither Western or Chinese, and which contained both religious and scientific elements in harmony.

The third chapter treats Kang's completion of his reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics in the early years of his exile abroad, and his new insights on religion obtained as a result of observations from his world travels. In his annotations of the Four Books and his commentary on the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), most of which were not published due to the circumstances of his exile, Kang sought to refine or elaborate many of his views, which had been expressed in his earlier lectures and works, on such topics as the divinity of Confucius, serving Heaven, cultivating human nature, the nature and immortality of the soul and the Heaven-ordained laws in all things. Like Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898), a comrade of his and a monist philosopher, Kang also employed scientific terms, in particular 'ether' and 'electricity', in his Confucian exegesis. He speculated on the future of the existing religions and the appearance of a new one as well as the need for a high degree of scientific and technological development in the future world in his *Book of the Great Unity*

(*Datongshu* 大同書, partially published in the 1910s). His travels to various countries in America and Europe sharpened his observations of their spiritual traditions and material development. As a result, he became more convinced of the superiority of Confucianism over Christianity as well as China's urgent need to develop science and technology. In his treatise on *Saving China Through Material Reconstruction* (*Wuzhi jiuguo lun* 物質救國論, published in 1908), in particular, he spoke in glowing terms of the value of science as well as its practical and utilitarian aspects. I also introduce a discussion of Liang Qichao's conversion to the Western conception of religion (and his use of the Japanese neologism *zongjiao*), which had started the first debate on whether Confucianism was a religion among Chinese intellectuals, and Kang's response.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Kang's Confucian movement in the early Republican years in the 1910s. Convinced that the success of a country depended on the two complementary aspects of politics and religion, Kang proposed both a political and a religious solution for post-Revolution China—the adoption of a constitutional monarchy, which he now termed as a titular monarchical republic, and the institutionalization of Confucianism as a religion. While the former was rejected outright by his fellow countrymen, the latter achieved some limited progress by way of the 1912 establishment of the Confucian Religion Association (*Kongjiaohui* 孔教會) with the support of his capable disciple, Columbia graduate Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1880–1933). Apart from defending the religious nature of Confucianism and exalting the position of Confucius as a founder of a religion, the Association also launched an impressive campaign to have Confucianism enshrined as the state religion in the new Constitution of the Republic. This campaign (which failed) as well as the personality of Kang was severely criticized by Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 and his fellow New Culture intellectuals, who drew on the authority of science in their opposition to religion. These iconoclastic attacks on Confucianism in particular and on religious belief *per se* sensationally established the Conflict Thesis in the mainstream of Chinese thought.

Chapter Five looks at the final decade of Kang's life. Despite his political setbacks, Kang kept abreast of both domestic and international affairs. He saw a silver lining in

the otherwise dark clouds of the Paris Peace Conference—the proposal for the creation of the League of Nations, which he immediately connected with the Confucian doctrine of the Three Ages and which in his interpretation constituted the beginning of the realization of the Age of the Great Unity. As an indirect response to the unprecedented debate on the question of science and metaphysics (including religion) in the early 1920s, Kang reaffirmed his position on the complementary relationship of Confucianism and Western science at both national and individual levels during his impressive lecture tour to the North. In doing so, he elaborated the important role of scientific knowledge in understanding key Confucian concepts and the human soul as well as in shaping one's views on life, the world and even the universe. In his last book, *Lectures on the Heavens* (*Zhutianjiang* 諸天講, published posthumously), which was a compilation of his lecture notes at his newly-established Academy of Celestial Peregrination (*Tianyou xueyuan* 天游學院), Kang blended knowledge of astronomy with his metaphysical speculations. While speaking of science in glowing terms, he also affirmed the existence of God, whose nature he claimed lay beyond the comprehension of the limited faculties of scientists. The chapter ends with a brief account of Kang's posthumous fate and fame during the following decades after his death in 1927.

In the conclusion, I give a summary review of Kang's resilient, dynamic, elastic concept of *jiao* or religion and his appreciation of its compatible, complementary relationship to science. In closing, I highlight three areas to which this thesis aims to contribute: a richer analysis of Kang's thought by focusing attention on the religious and scientific dimensions of his life-long writing; a better understanding of the historical relationship between science and religion in a modern Chinese context; and a more global account of the subject from a non-Western perspective.

1 The Awakening of a New Sage

> *I suddenly perceived heaven and earth and whatever is between them come into oneness with me, radiating bright light in great profusion. Believing myself to be a sage I laughed with joy; then thinking of the sufferings of the people in the world, I wept in sorrow.*
>
> —Kang Youwei[1]

Kang Youwei was born in 1858 in Sucun Village 蘇村, Nanhai 南海, in the southern Guangdong province. The Kang family had lived in the village for many generations since the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). A short distance to the west of Sucun, the Xijiang river, the fourth longest in China, flows southward through the Pearl River Delta before entering the South China Sea. About 50 kilometres to the east of the village lies the city of Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton), the cultural and commercial centre of south China, which had been China's only 'open port' before the First Opium War (1939–1942). Its economic and cultural connection with the outside world had created favourable conditions for the emergence and acceptance of new ideas in the region, where many influential figures in Chinese modern history, such as revolutionaries Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864) and Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925), were born. In fact, the jurisdiction of the city used to cover a part of Nanhai.[2] Kang's family possessed a piece of property in Guangzhou, initially obtained by his great grandfather Kang Jianchang 康建昌, who once held a provincial post.[3] Growing up in close proximity to Guangzhou, the centre for the dissemination of Western learning in the mid-nineteenth century, would prove highly advantageous to Kang's intellectual development, as I will show later in this thesis.

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1 Kang, 'Woshi 我史 [My History (1899)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 5, 2007, 62.

2 Nanhai had been designated a county since the 3rd century BCE. It is now a district, still bearing the same name, of the Foshan prefecture, Guangdong. Following the tradition of the *diwang* 地望, according to which a person of rank was often respectfully referred to by the name of his birthplace, Kang was also known as Kang Nanhai or Mr. Kang of Nanhai.

3 Later Kang and his family moved to the urban residence in 1890. See Kang, 'Woshi', 58, 81. The house has recently been rebuilt and converted into a museum honouring Kang.

1 The Awakening of a New Sage

Kang's birth took place in the context of two devastating wars being fought in China, on sea and on land, respectively. On the one hand, the Second Opium War (1856–1860) was halfway through and would end with the capture of the Forbidden City by the Anglo-French troops, the Chinese Emperor's flight and the burning of the Summer Palaces. After the war, the opium trade was legalized in China, and so was missionary work, with the Christian religion, which had been banned in 1767, being granted 'full security' of its 'members, property and religious practices' on the Chinese land.[4] The shocking and humiliating defeat of the war gave rise to China's modernization campaign known as the Self-Strengthening Movement. On the other hand, the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) against the Qing dynasty, which had started in the neighbouring Guangxi province, was still raging and would not be completely suppressed until 1865. The civil war brought both loss and honour to Kang's family, many of whose male elders, including his father, were involved in fighting against the rebels. Some of them had been killed in the battle, and the returning survivors were promoted to civil service positions because of their military feats. One of Kang's granduncles, General Kang Guoqi 康國器, for example, was appointed Financial Commissioner and then acting Governor of Guangxi before his retirement. Though not a scholar, he built a handsome family library that housed a collection of over 20,000 books. The library would become a storehouse of knowledge for the young Kang Youwei, for which he was ever grateful to the granduncle.[5]

Kang's family upheld a scholarly tradition rooted in Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, the imperially sanctioned school of Confucianism based on the interpretations of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) of Southern Song. Also known as the Learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學) or the Learning of the Principle (*lixue* 理學), the 'rationalist' school held a well-defined genealogy of the Confucian Way: originally conceived by ancient Chinese Sages, it was passed down to the Duke of Western Zhou (*circa*. 11th century–771 BCE), and then to Confucius, who compiled and edited its sacred Texts, the Five Classics, namely, the *Yi* 易 or *Changes*, the *Shu* 書 or *Documents*, the *Shi* 詩 or *Odes*, the *Li* 禮 or *Rites*, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 or *Autumn and Spring Annals*.

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4 'Treaty of Tientsin [Tianjin], 1858', 1860, http://www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/162.

5 Cf. Kang, 'Woshi', 59, 60. After the death of this granduncle, Kang wrote him a tribute praising his military and civil accomplishments, see Kang, 'Kanggong shizhuang 康公事状 [A Eulogy for His Excellency Mr. Kang (1884)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 5–13.

From Confucius it was transmitted through Mencius (372–289 BCE) and Xunzi 荀子 (313–238 BCE) to the Neo-Confucian masters including Zhu Xi. As a complement to the Five Classics, Zhu Xi further compiled, edited and commented on a compendium of the Four Books, including the *Lunyu* 論語 or *Analects*, the *Mengzi* 孟子 or *Mencius*, the *Zhongyong* 中庸 or *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Daxue* 大學 or *Great Learning* (the last two being two treatises taken out from the *Book of Rites*). Zhu's annotated edition of Four Books had become the standard curriculum for the imperial civil service examinations (*keju* 科舉) during the following Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, and his philosophy, which stressed moral cultivation and rationalism, exerted a great influence upon the Chinese literati and society.

Kang's great-great grandfather, Kang Hui 康輝, a teacher of local note, was the first member of the family to have obtained a provincial degree. Regarded as the founder of the scholarly tradition in the Kang family, he passed down to his descendants the Neo-Confucian philosophy, with emphasis on both personal cultivation and contribution to the state. His legacy was carried on by one of his grandsons, Zanxiu 贊修, Kang's grandfather, who became a provincial graduate (*juren* 舉人) and served as an educational officer in the region. As no member of the next generation of his family succeeded in passing the civil service examinations, Zanxiu had great expectations of Youwei, his first-born grandson. 'Long have I wished for a grandson till my eyes are weary,' he wrote on hearing the news of Youwei's birth, '[but now] I have restored the scent of books [literary pursuit] which you should perpetuate.'[6] Youwei, who lost his father at age 10, was very close to his grandfather, who took care of him and supervised his moral upbringing and literary education.

A diligent and avid learner, the young Kang proved an excellent pupil. At five, he started his formal education by learning to recite the Four Books. At eight, he was already reciting difficult passages from the *Documents*. By the age of nine, he had almost finished mastering the recitation, from memory, of such classics as the *Changes* and the *Rites*. His reading list also included titles on government as well as

[6] Kang, 'Woshi', 58; translated in Jung-pang Lo, ed., 'Chronological Autobiography', in *K'ang Yu-Wei: A Biography and a Symposium*, trans. Jung-pang Lo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967), 23.

official documents, which suggested his early interest in politics and statecraft. The list quickly became long as he immersed himself in various books among the collections in the family library.[7] However, Kang was loath to practice writing the rigid 'eight-legged' essays in preparation for the civil service examinations. Under family pressure, though, he did make efforts in that direction, but in vain, as he repeatedly failed the local examinations.[8] It was this unpleasant experience that partly gave rise to his later attempts to have the examination system abolished, an idea that would find its way into his future reform memorials to the Throne.

In 1876, Kang Youwei sought the tutelage of Zhu Ciqi 朱次琦 (1807–1881), a leading Confucian scholar in the region, who had been a friend of Kang's grandfather in addition to being his father's teacher. Rising above the popular partisan separation between the rival schools of Song Learning (which emphasized moral philosophy) and the Han Learning (which prioritized textual research), Zhu adopted an eclectic approach in instructing his students in 'five fields of learning', namely, Classics (*jing* 經), histories (*shi* 史), government (*zhanggu* 掌故), moral philosophy (*xingli* 性理) and literary writing (*cizhang* 詞章). Zhu emphasized the moral praxis of Confucian teachings in improving the wellbeing of others and the society, and opposed the advocacy of intuition and meditation by the Learning of the Heart-and-Mind (*xinxue* 心學). A rival to the Learning of the Principle, this 'idealist' school was based on Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) idealistic interpretation of Confucianism under the heavy influence of Chan (Zen) Buddhism.[9] Kang received Zhu's teaching with great enthusiasm, like 'a blind man seeing the light' as he later put it, and was able to harmonize the various sources of knowledge he had previously acquired.[10] Kang's intensive study for the next three years under Zhu consolidated his foundation in Confucian learning, and made him more aware of the practical significance of Confucian scholarship. At the same time, his ambition to become a sage grew and intensified, an ambition that he had started to cherish in his childhood.

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[7] Kang, 'Woshi', 59–60.

[8] Kang, 60–61, 64.

[9] For Zhu's scholarship, see Kang, 'Nanhai Zhu Xiansheng mubiao 南海朱先生墓表 [Epitaph for Mr. Zhu of Nanhai (1882)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 1; Jian Chaoliang 简朝亮, 'Nianpu 年谱 [A Chronological Biography]', in *Zhu Jiujiang (Ciqi) xiansheng ji 朱九江（次琦）先生集 [Collected Works of Mr. Zhu Ciqi]* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 9–91.

[10] Kang, 'Woshi', 61.

Two events, which took place during the period of Kang's studies under Zhu, are worthy of mention, for they were not only of personal importance, but also showed his strong and independent character. One was Kang's wedding in 1876, at which, to the disappointment of the guests, he refused to follow the custom of allowing them to tease his bride, because he considered it inappropriate. The other was a tragedy—the drowning of his beloved grandfather in a flood. Overcome by grief, he studied the mourning ceremonials as recorded in the *Rites*, and carried out the ancient rituals in every movement and motion. The villagers, who had scoffed at his extreme ritual obedience, came to respect him as he persisted in his ways.[11] His high regard for the ancient classics (as evinced by his strict compliance with ritual prescriptions for expressing filial piety) and his nonconformist thinking were characteristic of many of his future endeavours.

Kang resumed his studies under Zhu after his grandfather's burial. In early 1879, however, he decided to leave Zhu, his last acknowledged teacher, as he had developed a revulsion against conventional book learning. For the next ten years or so, he was left to educate himself, exploring other avenues of knowledge that were not in accordance with the Neo-Confucian tradition. He resumed his early interest in Buddhism and practised spiritual self-cultivation through meditation, which led him to the exploration of several mystical experiences. Meanwhile, his trip to Hong Kong turned him into an eager student of Western learning through his reading and intensive study of Chinese translations of Western books. By the middle of the 1880s, Kang had achieved a seminal breakthrough in his learning; he achieved this by synthesizing various sources of his knowledge, Confucian, Buddhist and Western.[12]

1.1 Religious Leanings

To say Kang Youwei was a 'religious man' often raises the eyebrows of those who are familiar with the literature on Kang. Two questions they may readily ask in

[11] Kang, 61–62.

[12] Kang, 'Yu Shen Xingbu Zipei shu 与沈子培刑部书 [A Letter to Shen Zipei (1889)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 237.

response are: Did Kang maintain a belief in God or in gods and spirits? Did he, like many religious figures in history, have personal religious experiences?[13] These are legitimate questions. For one thing, the issue of Kang's religious convictions has not received adequate treatment in the related literature, and the mystical states he had experienced in his youth have been overlooked or disregarded as trivial and sentimental.[14] For another, many religious figures in history did have personal religious experiences, which were considered of paramount importance for their faith and life. 'Personal religious experience', the American philosopher and psychologist William James wrote in his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 'has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness.'[15]

James proposed two essential criteria for marking out mystical states from others. The first is 'ineffability', meaning the mystical state must be directly experienced and cannot be imparted or transferred to others. The second criterion is 'noetic quality'. To those who experience them, mystical states seem to be 'states of insights into depths of truth', which most often carry with them 'a curious sense of authority for after-life'.[16] In this section, I will attempt to give a 'yes' to both questions by demonstrating that Kang was well informed concerning ancient Chinese religious ideas through his Confucian education, that was exposed to the folk beliefs of his time, with their characteristic Buddhist-Daoist admixture, and that his attempts at Buddhist meditation had led him to vividly and intensely experience certain autobiographically recorded mystical states, which can be considered as being clearly among the 'varieties of religious experience' analysed by William James.

1.1.1 Classical and Folk Beliefs

Through his study of and training in Confucianism, Kang became informed of ancient Chinese religious thought as recorded in the 'Pentateuch' of the Confucian Canon, in particular the *Documents* and the *Odes*. Although the time of their composition has

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13 These questions, for example, occurred frequently during my discussions with several scholars at the Institute of Modern Chinese History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, when I was a visiting academic there in early 2015.

14 See for example the treatment in Ma, *Pingzhuan*; Huang Jing 黄晶, *Kang Youwei zhuan 康有为传 [A Biography of Kang Youwei]* (Beijing: Beijing lianhe chuban gongsi, 2013).

15 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), 379.

16 James, 480–81.

been the subject of controversy, at least some chapters of those texts are generally believed to have been written in pre-Confucian times.[17] In them was recorded a belief in the existence of a Supreme Ruler, called *Shangdi*, a designation that was used interchangeably with the more abstract *Tian* 天 or Heaven. As the Supreme Ruler, *Shangdi* gave decrees to man, as described in one of the earliest passages in the *Documents* (which Kang recited at a young age), a speech by King Tang, the founder of the rising Shang dynasty (*circa.* 17th–11th century BCE).

> It is not I, the little child, who dare to undertake what may seem to be a rebellious enterprize [sic]; but for the many crimes of the sovereign of Hea [Xia, *circa.* 21st–17th century BCE] Heaven has given the charge to destroy him. ...as I fear God [*Shangdi*], I dare not but punish him.[18]

After he overthrew the Xia dynasty and established his own dynastic reign, Tang gave an announcement to the people, in which he offered a prayer to the 'spiritual Sovereign of the high heavens' (*Shangtian shenhou* 上天神後).[19] Apart from being recorded in the *Documents*, the text of the prayer found its way into the *Analects*, to be committed to memory by generations of future Confucian students:

> I, the child Lü, presume to use a dark-coloured victim, and presume to announce to Thee, O most great and sovereign God [*Di*], that the sinner I dare not pardon, and thy ministers, O God, I do not keep in obscurity. The examination of them is by thy mind, O God.[20]

Like the *Documents,* the *Odes* also contains many references to *Shangdi* (or *Tian*). Sometimes he appeared to be an anthropomorphic Deity—'God is with you / Have no doubts in your heart'; 'King Wen ascends and descends / On the left and the right of

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[17] For details see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 377–80.

[18] *Shu*, V 1:1–2; James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics III: The Shoo King, or The Book of Historical Documents* (Hong Kong: At The Author's, 1865), 173–74. Here and in other parts of this dissertation, I generally follow the time-honoured translations of Chinese Classics by James Legge, who, as a rule, rendered *Shangdi* as God.

[19] *Shu*, IV 3:3; Legge, 187.

[20] *Lunyu* 20:1; Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 350. It should be noted that the passage containing the prayer has been declared by scholars as a later addition to the *Documents*, but the fact that it was included in the *Analects* is of great significance.

God.[21] At other times, *Shangdi* or *Tian* was portrayed as an abstract Providence, who not only conferred blessings but also meted out punishments through natural phenomena, such as sending down rain for crops or causing natural disasters—'God has reversed [His usual course of procedure] / And the lower people are full of distress'; 'The doings of High Heaven / Have neither sound nor smell.'[22] As the prominent contemporary Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 has observed, the references to *Tian* in these two oldest Confucian Classics, except those referring to the physical sky, generally designate the ruling anthropomorphic type of *Tian*.[23]

The belief in an anthropomorphic *Tian* or Heaven was maintained in the *Analects.* Confucius said, for example, that he knew the 'decrees of Heaven' at fifty (2:4), that 'there is Heaven—that knows me' (14:35), that 'Heaven produced the virtue that was in me' (2:3). He said that 'he who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray' (3:13). When his disciples asked leave to pray for his recovery, he said that 'my praying has been for a long time' (7:35). He was described as 'a bell with its wooden tongue' used by Heaven (3:24); he agreed that 'Death and life have their determined appointment; riches and honours depend upon Heaven' (12:5).[24] On one occasion when he encountered a life-threatening danger, he spoke calmly to his disciples:

> After the death of King Wen, was not the cause of truth lodged here in me? If Heaven had wished to let this cause of truth perish, then I, a future mortal, should not have got such a relation to that cause. While Heaven does not let the cause of truth perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me? (9:5)[25]

Passages such as those quoted above demonstrate Confucius' strong faith in Heaven, his certitude in his Heaven-endowed mission to carry forward the cause of truth, and in the providential arrangement of his life. It has been argued that *Tian* in the classical Confucian tradition functioned 'as a religious authority or absolute often theistic in its

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[21] *Shi* III 1:2, 1:6, 1:1; James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics IV: The She King, or The Book of Poetry* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford & Co., 1871), 436, 448, 428.

[22] *Shi* III 2:10, 1:1; Legge, 499, 431.

[23] Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 31.

[24] The translations of the above quotes from the *Lunyu* (*Analects*) are taken from Legge, *Chinese Classics I*.

[25] *Lunyu* 9:6; Legge, 218.

portrayal'.[26] Although Confucius did not speak much about life after death or spiritual beings,[27] he never denied their existence; instead, he stressed proper sacrifice to them. 'He sacrificed to the dead, as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits, as if the spirits were present.'[28] Unlike the Judaeo-Christian God, who alone should be worshipped to the exclusion of all others, *Shangdi* or *Tian* was believed to have associates or junior deities and various spirits, all deserving sacrifice from man. It was recorded in the *Documents*, for example, that the legendary Emperor Shun not only sacrificed to *Shangdi*, but he also 'offered appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers; and extended his worship to the host of spirits'.[29] As will be seen later in this thesis, Kang shared the same beliefs as those expressed by Confucius, and on many occasions in his writings unabashedly likened himself to Confucius.

Compared with *Shangdi*, which modern scholars take to have originally been the tribal god of the Shang people or speculate might possibly have meant the High Ancestor of the ruling house,[30] *Tian* carries naturalistic, fatalistic and ethical connotations in addition to its anthropomorphic meaning.[31] As *Tian* gradually and eventually replaced *Shangdi* and became the customary term, the Chinese concept of the ultimate Reality also came to assume an increasingly impersonal character. In the later Neo-Confucian tradition, *Tian*, or *Tianli* (天理, Principle of Heaven), had become an overwhelmingly abstract, monistic concept.[32] Nevertheless, *Shangdi* was still retained as part of the name of the Supreme Ruler in the Confucian Classics and the imperial rites of worship. Worship of *Shangdi* or Heaven, however, had become reserved for the emperor alone. As was the case in the Qing dynasty, the Supreme Ruler was represented by a wooden tablet inscribed with the words 'August Heaven the Supreme Ruler' (*Huangtian Shangdi* 皇天上帝) placed at the Temple of Heaven (*Tiantan* 天壇) in the capital, where prayers and ritual sacrifices were offered by the

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26 Taylor, *Religious Dimensions*, 2.

27 It was famously said in the *Analects* that the subjects on which the Master did not talk were 'extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings'. *Lunyu* 7:20; Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 201.

28 *Lunyu* 3:12; Legge, 159. As we will see in this thesis, Kang would later argue that Confucius' teachings on God and spirits should primarily be sought in the Five Classics rather than the *Analects*.

29 *Shu* II 1:3; Legge, *Chinese Classics III*, 33–34.

30 Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), 2–3.

31 Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 1:31.

32 Taylor, *Religious Dimensions*, 2.

emperor at the Winter and Summer solstices.[33] The common people, on the other hand, could only offer sacrifices to local deities and spirits, including the spirits of their ancestors, at shrines and altars. As will be seen later in this thesis, Kang would strongly criticize, as Christian missionaries in China had done, this deprivation of the common Chinese of the right to worship of *Shangdi*.

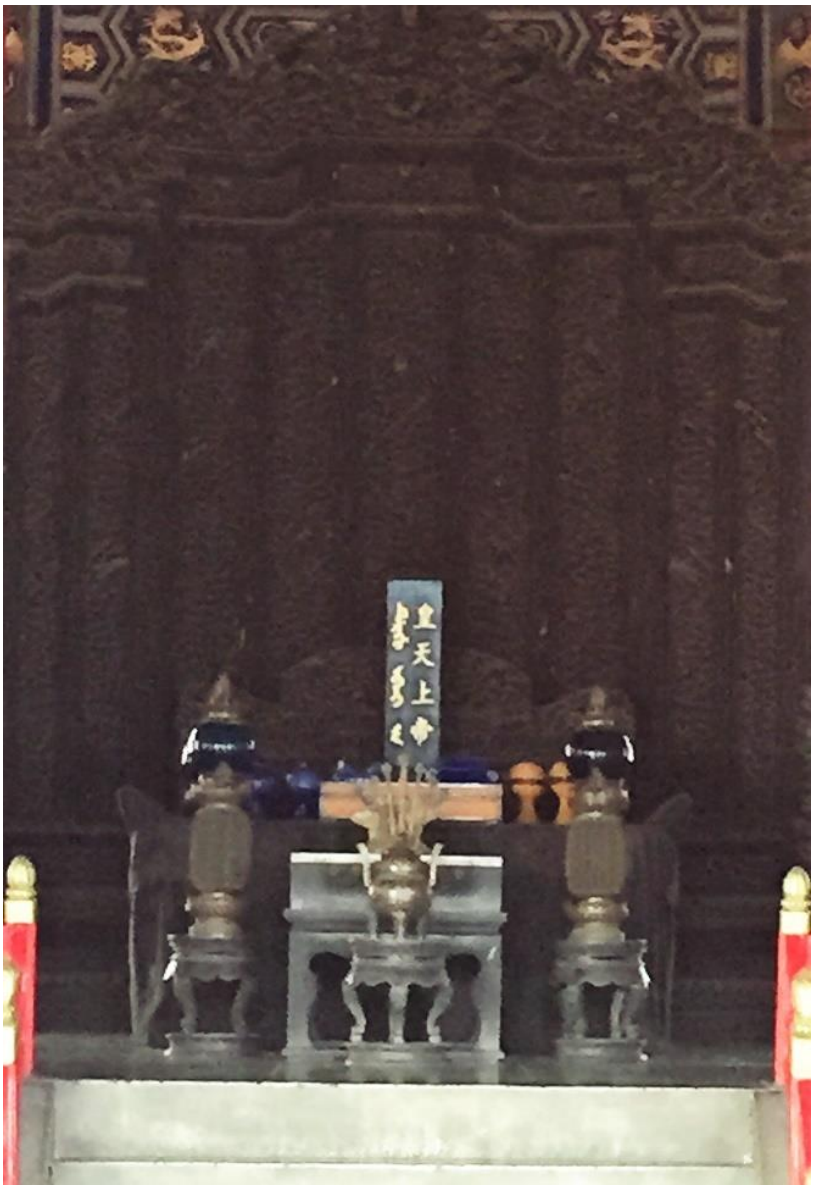


Figure 2: Tablet of *Huangtian Shangdi* (God), Tiantan, Beijing © the author

[33] The imperial worship of the Qing dynasty at the Temple of Heaven started on the first day of the tenth lunar month, 1644, when the Manchu Emperor Shunzhi offered a prayer and announced his mounting the throne of China. For a description of the solemn ceremony and a translation of his prayer, see Joseph Edkins, *Religion in China; Containing a Brief Account of the Three Religions of the Chinese*, 2nd ed. (London: Trübner & Co. Ltd, 1893), 18–20.

Kang was also exposed to the local beliefs and practices of his childhood home. The ancestral shrine of the Kang family was built by Kang's great-great grandfather, and was later expanded by his granduncle, the general.[34] As for the Confucianists, they had set up Temples of the Literati (*wenmiao* 文廟, also known as Temples of Confucius), at county levels and above, to honour Confucius and his associates, and had built Shrines of the Worthies (*xianliangci* 賢良祠) at various localities. One of Kang's granduncles (not the general), for example, was honoured at the local shrine for his literary accomplishments as well as his contribution to the local welfare.[35]

To honour spirits by offering sacrifice to them was fine, but to engage in communication with them was too much for a Neo-Confucian family like the Kangs. The practice of interacting with the spirit world by way of a trance medium was popular at the grassroots level in traditional China, but a strict Confucianist was supposed to follow the example of Confucius and avoid even talking about it, let alone practising it. That is why it was considered a serious problem if a family member started the practice. In his eulogy for his granduncle, the general, Kang praised him for divorcing his wife because 'she was talkative and fond of the art of *wu* 巫 and *xi* 覡.[36] The character of *wu* means a female spirit medium, while *xi*, a male trance medium, both commonly rendered into English as 'shaman'.[37] The practitioners were believed to have the power to interact with spirits for the purpose of healing, divination and supplicatory prayers.[38] The ancient shamanic art of *wu* and *xi* continued to be practised during Kang's times, but it was generally looked down upon by Confucianists. As will be seen later in this thesis (Section 2.1), it was a commonly-held view among late nineteenth century Confucianists that the indigenous fold religion practices of *wu* could be considered to be the Chinese equivalent for the concept of 'religion' in the West.

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[34] Kang, 'Kangshi jiamiao bei 康氏家庙碑 [An Inscription on the Stone Tablet of the Kang Shrine (1917)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 2007, 438–40. The family shrine, together with the ancestral tombs, was destroyed by imperial order after Kang's reform was cut short by the Coup of 1898. During a recent visit to Kang's restored old house, I noticed an altar built into the inner side of a wall in the yard, possibly for the purpose of honouring certain household deities.

[35] Kang, 438.

[36] Kang, 'Kanggong shizhuang', 12.

[37] L. C. Hopkins, 'The Shaman or Chinese Wu: His Inspired Dancing and Versatile Character', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1945): 3–16.

[38] For an observation on the Chinese *Wu-ism* by a contemporary Western scholar, see J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. VI (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1910), 1212.

With the rise of Daoism and the coming of Buddhism, more deities were added to the pantheon of the Chinese people, and accordingly more temples and monasteries were built. Thus at the local level, the communal belief system was often a mixture of the Three Teachings, namely, Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as some forms of the *wu*. This was particularly true with regard to Kang's hometown. About 16 kilometres to the south of his old house was the mountain of Xiqiao (西樵山), renowned for its natural scenery and spiritual heritage. An ancient, extinct volcano, the mountain has many peaks, cliffs and caves, adorned with waterfalls and small woods. Since the seventh century, Buddhist and Daoist monks had often visited; some had built monasteries there over the course of the next millennium. Neo-Confucian scholars came during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and set up Confucian academies. By the mid-nineteenth century, the mountain had become known as a resort of the Three Teachings. While many of the old monasteries and academies had been destroyed in wars, some had survived or been restored, and new ones were to be built. The reconstruction of the Celestial Cloud-Spring Abbey (*Yunquan xianguan* 雲泉仙舘), for example, was completed in the very year of Kang's birth.[39]

1.2.2 Buddhist Inspiration

Kang developed an interest in Buddhism in his early years. This religious predilection, or a 'natural liking for religion' as his disciples and early biographers observed, was first nourished by his visits to religious sites and reading Buddhist Texts.[40] In his boyhood, Kang was often brought by his grandfather to visit local scenic spots including Buddhist temples and Daoist monasteries, on which occasions the grandfather would speak of great names associated with those sites. That created in the young Kang a strong desire to emulate and associate himself with such illustrious men as Huineng 慧能 (638–713, the famous Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism), and Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227, the renowned Daoist Master).[41] Kang's first reading

[39] Guan Xiang 关祥, ed., *Xiqiaoshan zhi* 西樵山志 *[A Gazette of the Xiqiao Mountain]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1982), 86.

[40] Lu Naixiang 陆乃翔 and Lu Dunkui 陆敦骙, 'Nanhai xiansheng zhuan 南海先生传 [A Biography of Mr. Kang of Nanhai]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 12, 2007, 457.

[41] Kang, 'Woshi', 60.

of Buddhism had taken place before he went to study under Zhu Ciqi, who was known for his distaste for Buddhism. Kang later recalled that he had perused the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 or *Garland Sutra* as early as age sixteen, and found it 'comprehensive, profound and inexplicable'.[42] The sutra is one of the most influential Mahayana works and constitutes the basic text for the creation of the Chinese Huayan School. The text describes a cosmos consisting of infinite realms that mutually contain each other; in particular, it offers a detailed account of the various stages of the practice of the bodhisattva, a Buddhist practitioner who out of compassion delays entering nirvana in order to remain behind and save other beings.[43] This bodhisattva concept of compassion would have an important bearing on the development of his thought, as will be discussed later in this thesis.

Kang did not actively pursue his interest in Buddhism until towards the end of his study under Zhu, when he decided to discontinue his book-learning based training in orthodox Neo-Confucianism by reason of his realization that it would only 'smother his spiritual faculties'. Instead, he opted to seek ways to 'achieve peace of mind' and to 'fulfil my mission in life'.[44] Privately, and against his teacher's counsels, he turned his attention to the rival Learning of the Heart and Mind.[45] He converted to the belief that the Chan idea of sudden enlightenment through self-reflection might facilitate rather than obstruct his pursuit of sagehood, a belief that could be traced back to the beginning of Neo-Confucianism.[46] As a result, he abandoned his studies and started to practise Chan meditation by secluding himself in his room. Through this practice he had an extraordinary experience as described in his own words which are quoted at the beginning of this chapter. He had written of having experienced the feeling of being at one with heaven and earth while suffused in supernal light, a state that

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[42] Kang, 'Chang'an yanjianglu 长安演讲录 [Recorded Talks (by Kang) in Xi'an (1923)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 293; cf. Kang, 'Woshi', 67–68.

[43] Cf. 'Flower Ornament Sutra 華嚴經', Digital Dictionary of Buddhism 電子佛教辭典 (University of Tokyo), http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/)

[44] Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

[45] Mao Haijian 茅海建, *Cong jiawu dao wuxu: Kang Youwei woshi jianzhu 从甲午到戊戌：康有为我史鉴注 [Kang's 'My History' Verified and Annotated: 1894-1998]* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 15. Mao's examination of Kang's manuscript of *My History* shows that Kang had first written and then crossed out this sentence: "Privately I was fond of [the learning] of [Wang] Yangming."

[46] For a case study of Chan influences on Neo-Confucianism, see Ari Borrell, 'Ko-Wu or Kung-an? Practice, Realization, and Teaching in the Thought of Chang Chiu-Ch'eng', in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter Gregory and Daniel A. Getz (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 62–108.

reminds one of the Confucian concept of becoming one with the universe (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).[47] Kang's fellow students, who had heard his unnatural laughter and cries, thought he had become insane or had suffered a mental breakdown.[48] Kang, however, believed that he was in a state of limbo, eagerly and intensely seeking truth but not yet obtaining it, a state of mind described as 'a demon flying into one's mind' in the Buddhist texts.[49] This mystical experience gave Kang the conviction that he was born to be a sage with a bodhisattva-like mission to deliver mankind from suffering. His 'sage complex', something comparable with a 'Messianic complex', which he had cherished since boyhood, now received a mystical endorsement, and from then on would assume a strong presence as a relentless driving force in his life.[50]

After leaving his teacher and returning home, Kang went into semi-seclusion by residing in the White Cloud Cavern (*Baiyundong* 白雲洞) at the northern foothills of Xiqiao. Regarded as the jewel of the scenic attractions in the mountain, the cavern was a sizable natural cave leading into a cliff, a few meters from the ground and facing an attractive waterfall. Since the late sixteenth century when stone steps were built leading to its entrance, it had become a famous resort for Confucianists to engage in scholarly reflections and meditative pursuits. In its vicinity lay the recently-refurnished Three Lakes Confucian Academy (*Sanhu shuyuan* 三湖書院), the Ancient White Cloud Monastery (*Baiyun gusi* 白雲古寺), where the Buddha was worshipped, and the grand, newly-restored Celestial Cloud-Spring Abbey, where the famous Daoist Immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 was worshipped. Hence the Cavern had long been considered a blessed spot for Buddhism, Daoism as well as Confucianism. The academy, the monastery and the abbey housed a good collection of books of the Three Teachings, to which Kang was given access, as well as a group of resident monks and scholars, whose intellectual company Kang may have sought.[51]

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47 Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

48 This has been described by some scholars as one of Kang's 'traumatic life experiences'. See Tay, 'Kang Youwei', 59.

49 Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

50 Geng, 'Kang Youwei de shengren qingjie jiqi yi kongjiao wei guojiao shuo 康有为的圣人情结及其孔教为国教说 [Kang's Sage Complex and His Views on Confucianism as a State Religion]'.

51 Wenshizu 文史组, ed., *Nanhai wenshi ziliao: Xiqiaoshan zhuanji 南海文史资料: 西樵山专辑 [Historical Materials of Nanhai: On Xiqiao Mountain]* (Nanhai, 1983), 47, 48, 51–59.



Figure 3: The White Cloud Cavern (*Baiyundong*), courtesy of Jia Xiaoye, 2017

There Kang immersed himself in reading Buddhist and Daoist books so as to 'nourish his spirit and purify his mind from impure thoughts'.[52] As a result, he had another extraordinary experience, or a 'great enlightening' (*dache dawu* 大澈大悟) in the words of his disciple and biographer Liang Qichao.[53] According to his autobiography penned ten years later, Kang stayed up all night for a whole month and let his mind

[52] Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

[53] Liang, 'Nanhai Kangxiansheng zhuan 南海康先生传 [A Biography of Mr Kang of Nanhai (1901)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 2, 1999, 486.

wander freely, reflecting on Heaven and the human world, experiencing alternative states of ecstasy and of profound sorrow. At first, his mind was full of 'wild, demon-like thoughts', but as his practice progressed he felt 'spiritually transcendent and joyfully at ease'.[54] In addition, he practised the *Wushengdao* (五勝道), probably a Daoist art,[55] through which he said he was able to 'see' his spiritual self, a self that existed outside his body but which could also enter his body when he so wished. In other words, he realized that his physical body was not indispensable to his spiritual self (soul). As a result, he began to view his own body as nothing but a carcass and those of others as no better than swine.[56] It was also during this period that Kang attempted to write a commentary on the *Laozi* (老子), one of the primary Daoist texts. But eventually, he found the work 'abhorrent' and abandoned his effort.[57] Indeed, that seemed to be the beginning of the end of Kang's affection for Daoism; rarely would he revisit Daoist texts or Daoist practice in his later life.

His seclusion in the mountain ended in autumn under pressure from family elders (mother, uncles and great uncles) who wanted him to prepare for the civil service examinations: otherwise they would cut off financial support for him. As an aspiring scholar without a source of income, Kang depended on them for his living, and had to consider their demands and hopes (for him to bring honour to the family by passing the exams).[58] However, the profound insights he gained from the experience during his seclusion, namely, the archetypal Buddhist bodhisattva's compassion for mankind, would have a lasting effect on his future life and thought. For some time during his youth, as he recalled in his evening years, he had even harboured the idea of 'casting

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54 Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

55 What Kang meant by *wushengdao* is not exactly clear. Jung-pang Lo, Kang's grandson who rendered Kang's *Woshi* into English, interpreted it as 'the theory of the successive ascendency of the five elements in their cycle'. See Lo, 'Autobiography', 34, 145. Some biographers of Kang, however, have argued that it was a particular Daoist spiritual practice. See, for example, Huang, *Kang Youwei zhuan*, 16.

56 Kang, 'Woshi', 62; cf. Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 486.

57 Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

58 Kang, 62. It was an established tradition in the Kang family, a practice common among many families at that time, that one branch of the family specialized in Confucian learning in order to pass the civil service examinations and obtain official positions, and the other branch engaged in economic activities to provide financial support for the entire family. See Richard C. Howard, 'K'ang Yu-Wei (1858-1927): His Intellectual Background and Early Thought', in *Confucian Personalities*, by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 297; see also Richard C. Howard, 'The Early Life and Thought of K'ang Yu-Wei, 1858-1895' (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1972), 13–17.

aside worldly cares' (*yishi* 遺世) and 'becoming a Buddhist monk' (*chujia* 出家), but was held back by his compassion for the sufferings of his mother and his widowed sister and the sorrows of the people around him. So, he did not give up Confucianism to convert to Buddhism, for he thought Confucianism would better prepare him for his self-imposed mission to lighten the sufferings in the human world.[59]

His interest in Buddhism, however, remained throughout his life, and Buddhist ideas can be easily discerned in his later thought. Historians have rightly pointed out that Kang was formally introduced to Buddhism by way of the byway of Neo-Confucianist works, which were heavily influenced by Buddhism.[60] In this he was not without predecessors and comrades. Quite a few prominent Confucian scholars before him, like Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841) and Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), were deeply attracted to Buddhism, and some were even completely converted. It has been argued that there was a 'Buddhist revival' among Chinese intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century. The central figure among them was the Confucian-turned-Buddhist Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), whom Kang later befriended.[61] Apart from printing and circulating Buddhist texts in China, Yang was believed to be the first Chinese Buddhist to go to Europe where, probably under the influence of Max Müller (1823–1900), he began to conceive of Buddhism as a world religion in a modern age of science. In a sense, the Chinese Buddhist revival was a response to the impact from Christianity following China's defeat in the Opium Wars.[62] The increasing need for national salvation and the preservation of Chinese culture gave rise to an 'intellectual eclecticism' which was intent upon searching for alternatives or new perspectives from Buddhism in addition to Confucianism.[63] Some of the contemporary intellectuals regarded Buddhism as a better countervailing force to Christianity than Confucianism. '[H]ad it not been for

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59 Kang, 'Wuxu lunzhou zhong juebishu ji wuwu bahou 戊戌轮舟中绝壁书及戊午跋后 [My "Last Note" Penned in a Ship in 1898, with Postscripts Added in 1918]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 5, 2007, 4–5.

60 See Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 487; Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 108. But that view holds less weight now that we know Kang had already become interested in Buddhism and read Buddhist literature in his boyhood.

61 Chan, *Buddhism in Late Ching*, 30–49.

62 Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Harvard University Press, 1968); Chan, *Buddhism in Late Ching*.

63 Chan, *Buddhism in Late Ching*, 48.

the presence of Christianity,' one scholar has observed, 'Buddhism would not have been so enthusiastically studied' by late Qing Confucian scholars.[64]

1.3.3 Knowledge of Christianity

Unlike many of his educated contemporaries who resented and disregarded Christianity, the young Kang paid serious attention to it. His motivation, however, was more for the purpose of learning about it so as to mitigate its impact, than to seek truth from it. Around the time of Kang's birth, Catholicism and Protestantism had obtained legal status in China under the treaty system established after the Opium Wars, and during Kang's youth, Christian missionary work became increasingly active in the coastal areas including his home province, Guangdong. As the missionaries intensified their attacks on Chinese morality and such folkloric practices as zoolatry and ancestor worship, the resentment of the Chinese gentry-scholar class against Christianity continued to grow.[65] Interestingly, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Kang would adopt some of the concepts and rhetoric of the missionary discourse in his later advocacy of reforming Chinese morality and beliefs.

Another source of Kang's childhood impressions of Christianity might have come from the distorted lens of the ongoing, devastating Taiping Rebellion. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, many male members of Kang's family had joined the imperial forces in the fight against and the eventual suppression of the uprising, a battle that has been interpreted by some scholars as the struggle between Confucian and Christian ideologies. The millenarian rebels, who called themselves God-worshippers, were led by Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be another son of God the Father and the younger brother of Jesus Christ. Although its true nature has remained a subject of scholarly controversy, there is no doubt that the Taiping ideology carried a strong religious character, with Anglo-American Protestant inspiration combined with traditional Chinese religious elements. A recent study based on a close reading of the Taiping corpus has argued that the Taiping appeal to the common people came from Hong's representation of his Taiping Christianity as 'a

[64] Chan, 49.
[65] See Paul A. Cohen, 'Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900', in *CHC*, vol. 11, 1980, 560–65.

revival and a restoration of the ancient classical faith in *Shangdi*'.[66] As will be shown later in this thesis, Kang had also tried to restore the ancient Chinese belief in *Shangdi* in his endeavour to reform Confucianism.

Kang's first reading of Christianity, as he recalled it in 1904, had occurred twenty-five years earlier, that is, in 1879 when he had stopped his Confucian training under Zhu and started to explore other avenues of learning.[67] That year, he read Wei Yuan's *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (An Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries), which contained a good deal of general introduction to Christianity as practised in the West. The multi-volume *Illustrated Gazetteer*, first published in 1843, was regarded as the first significant Chinese work on the West, whose composition was stimulated by the Anglo-Chinese First Opium War. Kang also read some Christian texts by missionaries, although it is not easy to ascertain the exact titles. As an eager reader of the influential and informative weekly, *The Globe Magazine* (1874–1883, Wan-kuo Kung-pao 萬國公報), edited by American missionary Young J. Allen (1836–1907), Kang would probably have read the religious treatises and articles included in its collected issues, which he purchased in 1883.[68] It can also be inferred that he possessed the Chinese translation of the Bible and at least read some of it. As indicated in his later correspondence, he had lent an eleven-volume copy of the *Old Testament* to the Confucian scholar and provincial censor Zhu Yixin 朱一新, with whom he discussed the relationship between the 'ancient' doctrines of Moses and the later teachings of Jesus.[69] In his early writings in 1880s, he also made references to Biblical names, such as aligning the time of Fuxi 伏羲, the legendary ancestor of the Chinese people, with that of Adam and Eve.[70] Included in his reading list might also have been *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), a catechism

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66 Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 4.

67 Kang, 'Yidali youji 意大利游记 [An Account of My Travels in Italy (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 7, 2007, 397.

68 Kang, 'Woshi', 63.

69 Kang, 'Yu Zhu Yixin lunxue shudu 与朱一新论学书牍 [Letters to Zhu Yixin on Learning (1891)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 334. Zhu did not seem to have been convinced by Kang's arguments. Kang, however, alleged that Zhu had been convinced and 'enlightened', suggesting that Zhu had expressed contrary opinions in his letters and essays was 'only for the sake of appearance'. See Kang, 'Woshi', 81.

70 Naiwaipian, p. 111.

written in classical Chinese by Matteo Ricci. First published in 1603, the work was probably the most influential religious text produced by the Jesuit mission to China. Its title and summary were included in the 1795 imperial collection *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Bibliography of the Complete Library in Four Sections). Reprinted in 1868, the work was spoken of highly by many, such as the protestant missionary Richard Timothy, and Kang's future disciple Liang Qichao.[71]

In his study of Christianity, Kang consciously compared it with Buddhism, a comparison that led him to the surprising conclusion that the Christian Faith was originally derived from Buddhism. 'Each of the Christian doctrines,' he later wrote, 'be it on the soul, love, miracles, or on confession, salvation, hell and heaven, speaks directly to the heart and is in no way different from Buddhism.'[72] Whether Kang was justified in this claim is not as important (given the objective of this thesis) as what his claim implied: he had already begun to make efforts to synthesize the Western religion with Chinese religious traditions, a direction that he would continue to pursue in his later works. This process of his intellectual quest would eventually culminate in his third mystical experience or enlightenment, which occurred towards the end of 1884 (see Section 1.3). Although Kang's understanding of Christianity, as Hsiao has observed, might have been fragmentary,[73] Christian practices exerted a strong impact on his thinking and his later proposal to turn Confucianism into a state religion.

1.2 Scientific Pursuits

In addition to the avenue of religious exploration, Western science was another source of knowledge for Kang to pursue outside the Neo-Confucian tradition. As his early education was strictly focused on the Confucian Classics, the young Kang had had

[71] For a discussion on reactions towards the book, see the 'Translators' Introduction' in Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven [Tianzhu Shiyi]*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Kuo-chen Hu (St. Louis: Ricci Institute, 1985), 38–47.

[72] Kang, 'Yidali youji', 397. On Buddhist influences on Christianity, the most important (if fraudulent) contributor to the debate was Nicolas Notovitch, see Nicolas Notovitch, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, trans. Alexina Loranger (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & company, 1894), 13–62. Modoern scholars, who acknowledge 'many parallels concerning the births, lives, doctrines, and deaths of the Buddha and Jesus', have remained divided on the issue, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[73] Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 111.

little knowledge of the outside world. His teacher Zhu Ciqi's curriculum paid little attention to natural studies and Western learning. At that time, although decades-long educational efforts, missionary or government-sponsored, had achieved some success in disseminating Western knowledge in China, they did not produce any major impact on the mind of the generality of the Chinese literati concerning the importance of modern science. A case in point was the controversy over a scientific education programme offered by the Beijing Tongwenguan (京師同文館, Academy of Combined Learning, also known as Interpreters' College in English), established by the Zongli Yamen (Board of Ministers for Foreign Affairs) in 1862 during the initial stage of the Self-Strengthening Movement. In 1866 the college proposed to recruit students from those who had passed the civil service examinations to study mathematics and astronomy with Western tutors, but it was fiercely opposed by the conservative officialdom, who were imbued with uninformed, negative notions respecting foreigners. Their accusations were severe—that Confucian scholars in 'the right path' (*zhengtu* 正途, i.e. civil service examinations) should not engage in those technical pursuits that would corrupt their minds, and if they were to learn technical knowledge from Western tutors, they would be put in the danger of being induced to convert to Christianity in the same manner 'as half of the ignorant masses have done'.[74] So learning modern science from Westerners was considered likely to have dire moral consequences for Confucian scholars. Although the programme was commenced and continued for years by virtue of the support of the Zongli Yamen, the academic quality of the students enrolled in the programme remained low largely due to the controversy.[75] The introduction and acquisition of Western science was often met with opposition or indifference from the influential conservative officialdom and the mainstream Confucian scholars, who would ignore anything but the Five Classics and Four Books as their passports to securing state offices.

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[74] Quoted in Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixue dongjian yu wanqing shehui* *西学东渐与晚清社会 [The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty]*, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011), 257.

[75] For a good discussion on the controversy, see Xiong, 256–62; Timothy B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 15–17.

1.2.1 The Window of Geography

It was only in 1874 when Kang was sixteen that he saw world maps for the first time and laid his hands on a popular contemporary geography, Xu Jiyu's 徐繼畬 (1795–1873) *Yinghuan zhilue* 瀛寰志略 (A Compendious Description of the World). This work became the first window through which Kang began to view the world, and by which he learned the basics of world geography and the history of other countries.[76] It seems, however, he read the work with a condescending attitude towards foreigners, for he still shared the prevailing perception of them as 'barbarians'. Kang did not question this view until five years later, when his brief yet intellectually significant visit to Hong Kong in 1879 made him realize that 'the Westerners have the art of good government and should not be regarded as barbarians as depicted in the old and outdated perspective'.[77] With this fresh understanding as well as a newly-ignited passion for Western knowledge, he perused for a second time *A Compendious Description*, along with Wei's *Illustrated Gazetteer*.[78]

Kang's earliest knowledge of Western science must have come from those above-mentioned geographies which he specifically named. Therefore, an examination of their 'scientific content' would help us ascertain Kang's 'scientific intake' around 1880. Xu's *Compendious Description* demonstrated a scientific attitude: 'It is gratifying to observe,' wrote a contemporary European reviewer, 'how readily our author admits the truths of western science, even when opposed to the favourite hereditary opinions of his country.'[79] What was referred to by the reviewer was the fact that Xu decided to accept, after verifying with his European informants, the existence of the 'Frozen Ocean at the South Pole', which had not been shown in the earlier Jesuits' maps in China and whose existence was contrary to the traditional Chinese view.[80] In addition, unlike the earlier Jesuits, Xu placed China in East Asia on the map, demonstrating that China, far from being the centre of the world, was only one of the countries located in Asia. His neutral stance in his accounts of Western

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76 Kang, 'Woshi', 61.

77 Kang, 63.

78 Kang, 63.

79 'Review: A Compendious Description of the World (Lit. the Oceanic Circle) by Seu Sung Lung in 6 Vols, 1849', *The North-China Herald*, 28 September 1850.

80 'Review: A Compendious Description'.

people and political systems was another sign of his objectivity, but it was also probably one of the reasons for his eventual dismissal from his post.[81] In reference to this, the *New York Times* observed in 1868, 'Till within a quarter of a century, the study of barbarian annals has been one of the most dangerous branches of learning a Chinese could pursue; and a candid geographer has dared the fate of Galileo.'[82] In addition, the work also covered the history of various countries, and in doing so it touched upon the development of Western technology, though little was said about the exact sciences. Kang must have appreciated Xu's objectivity when he picked up the work a second time. Fifteen years later, he still spoke highly of it for its accuracy and clarity and recommended it to his students and other scholars as the best primer on world geography.[83]

Unlike Xu's *Compendious Description*, Wei's *Illustrated Gazetteer* in its final edition of 1852 devoted a few sections to Western astronomy. With the understanding that to better understand geography one was required to possess a knowledge of astronomy, the compiler included excerpts from a recent work on geography written in Chinese by Martinho José Marques 瑪吉士 (1810–1867), a Macau-born Portuguese sinologist.[84] Marques posited that the Earth was spherical rather than flat as previously thought. This was followed by an accurate presentation of the heliocentric theory, presenting the Sun at the centre with a rotating Earth and other planets revolving around. This was no longer a theory, Marques argued, but a truth proved by generations of Western astronomers.[85] That was not the first time that a heliocentric theory was introduced into China, for nearly a century earlier, the French Jesuit Michel Benoist had already presented the Copernican system to Chinese

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81 Cf. Yuezhi Xiong, *The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty*, trans. Yanxin Chan, Jiao Li, and Junchao Wang, vol. 1 (Singapore: Enrich Professional Publishing, 2013), 172.

82 'America in China.', *New York Times*, 29 March 1868.

83 Kang, 'Guixue wenda 桂学问答 [Answers to Questions on Learning in Guiling (1894)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 2, 2007, 23. As the *Illustrated Gazetteer* was basically a compilation of various excerpts from various works, it contained some inconsistence or inaccuracies, which, in Kang's view, made it inferior to Xu's *Compendious Description*. Cf. Kang, 19.

84 Ma Jishi 瑪吉士 [Martinho José Marques], *Xinshi dili beikao quanshu 新釋地理備考全書* (Guangzhou: Haishan xianguan, 1847).

85 Wei Yuan 魏源, *Haiguo tuzhi 海國圖志 [An Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries]* (Yangzhou: Guweitang, 1852), 2a, 3a-b.

astronomers.[86] However, because the theory ran contrary to the traditional geocentric conception, it was ridiculed by such leading scholars as Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), the author of the influential *Chourenzhuan* 疇人傳 (Biographies of Mathematical Astronomers). Although he included the theory in his collection, Wei Yuan did not consider it to be true: 'If the Earth did rotate and revolve continually [as the Westerners claimed],' he commented, 'then the Pole Star should also be moving rather than remain in its constant position.'[87]

At the time Kang first read the *Illustrated Gazetteer*, the heliocentric theory was still not widely accepted among Chinese intellectuals. 'Of ten Chinese who heard the theory,' commented Li Gui 李圭 (1842–1903), who is on record as one of the first Chinese nationals to have circled the globe, 'eight or nine would not believe it.'[88] Li himself was not convinced until he made the trip in 1876–7, travelling all the way eastward and finally arriving in Shanghai where he had started. We have no idea if Kang accepted the theory upon reading the *Illustrated Gazetteer*; but even if he did not, he was likely to have been convinced by Li's account. In any case, as was indicated in his later correspondence with Zhu Yixin, Kang had by 1891 already accepted and, indeed, had even begun to advocate, the heliocentric theory, commenting that the theory did not start with Copernicus, but had been originally invented by Pythagoras.[89]

1.2.2 Book Purchase at Shanghai

Not content with reading works on the West by native Chinese authors, Kang decided to collect and peruse translations of Western books. He did not seem to have a speedy start in that direction until the end of 1882, when he stopped at Shanghai on his way back home from Beijing, where he had sat for, but failed, the triennial provincial examination. Designated a treaty port after the Opium War and with an increasingly large International Settlement, Shanghai had developed into a prosperous international

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86 A. Udias, 'Jesuit Astronomers in Beijing, 1601-1805', *Quarterly Journal of The Royal Astronomical Society* 35, no. 4 (1994): 463–478.

87 Wei, *Haiguo tuzhi*, 4a.

88 Li Gui 李圭, *Huanyou diqiu xinlu 环游地球新录 [A New Account of a Trip Around the Globe]*, New edn. (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 158.

89 Kang, 'Yu Zhu Yixin', 334.

city. Kang's visit to Shanghai intensified his desire to learn from Westerners, a desire that was first ignited during his visit to Hong Kong three years earlier. 'The prosperity of the Shanghai [International Settlement]', he observed, 'further convinced me that Westerners' art of government must have had its own source of learning.'[90] For Kang, who did not read in any foreign language, the only viable way to learn from the West was through reading translations of Western books, and nowhere could he find a better place than Shanghai to purchase them, especially scientific titles. Since the 1860s, Shanghai had replaced Guangzhou and become the centre for the translation and publication of Western books as well as for the dissemination of Western learning, or to be specific, Western science.[91]

The central figure of the scientific translation enterprise in Shanghai was the British scholar John Fryer (1839–1928 傅蘭雅), the chief translator of the Translation Department at the Jiangnan Arsenal, set up in 1868 with the sponsorship of the open-minded Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), the chief Confucian general who suppressed the Taiping Rebellion. It aimed at 'the translation and publication of books relating to the Arts and Sciences of the West'. By the year 1880, Fryer and his staff of native and foreign translators had translated an impressive number of 143 titles, two thirds of which had been printed by the Arsenal, as is shown by the table below.[92]

Subjects	List 1, published	List 2, unpublished	List 3, in course of translation.
Mathematics, Surveying, &c.	22	2	3
Engineering, &c.	7	3	1
Chemistry, &c.	5	1	1
Geography, &c.	8	0	2
Geology, Mining, &c.	5	0	0
Astronomy, Navigation, &c.	9	3	0
Physical Science	6	4	1
Medicine	2	1	3
Arts and Manufactures	13	9	0
Naval & Military Science	15	9	2

90 Kang, 'Woshi', 63.

91 Xiong, *Xixue dongjian*, 338.

92 Reproduced (with adaptations) from John Fryer, 'An Account of the Department for the Translation of Foreign Books at the Kiangnan Arsenal, Shanghai', *The North-China Herald*, 29 January 1880. The number of the published translations would double by the time the Translation Department stopped functioning in the early 1900s. Cf. Xiong, *Xixue dongjian*, 396.

Chronology, News summaries, &c.	6	1	0
Naval Architecture	0	3	1
History	0	5	0
International Law	0	2	0
Miscellaneous	0	2	0
Total	98	45	13

Figure 4: Translations by the Jiangnan Arsenal Translation Department (1880)

The translations covered a wide range of subjects, but as might be expected, a large share of attention had been given to the military and naval sciences as well as engineering and surveying. Apart from their military utility, these translations were for sale, and copies of them were found in mission schools as well as personal libraries of some eminent native scholars. They were also on display in the Chinese Reading Room in Shanghai, which was set up in connection with the Shanghai Polytechnic Institution (*Gezhi shuyuan* 格致書院). According to Fryer, as many as 31,111 copies of the works had been sold up to mid-1879.[93] That was an impressive number given that there had been no regular means of communication, no postal or railway delivery, and no means of advertising or distributing them to the public.

As Fryer acknowledged, most of the translations of the department were either too specific or too profound in their content to be understood by the general popular readership. In order to remedy this defect, Fryer, who professed a firm belief in the role of translation in 'bringing about the intellectual and moral regeneration' of China, started as an individual initiative, *The Chinese Scientific Magazine* (*Gezhi huibian* 格致彙編), in 1876.[94] The monthly continued publication for four years in two periods of 1876–78 and 1880–82. The focus of the magazine was the introduction of elementary knowledge of modern science, and its Q&A column proved to be especially popular among its readers. By the time of Kang's visit, its past issues had been collected and reprinted, and were made available for sale at the Polytechnic Institution. As the 'first scientific magazine' in China, a Chinese historian of science

[93] Fryer, 'An Account of Translation of Foreign Books'.
[94] Fryer.

observed, Fryer's magazine played an important role in the 'scientific enlightenment' of late Qing intellectuals.[95]

Concurrently, Fryer and the Translation Department were behind another endeavour of a similar nature—the production of introductory textbooks for Chinese students. For that purpose, Fryer chose the science primers published by Macmillan & Company in England in 1872. Compiled by Henry Roscoe (1833–1915) in collaboration with several other top British scholars including Thomas Huxley, the series was considered to have represented the state of knowledge in the scientific fields in Great Britain.[96] The Chinese translation was completed with the collaboration of Young J. Allen before being published by the Jiangnan Arsenal in 1879–80 under the title of *Gezhi qimeng* 格致啟蒙 (Primers on Science Education). That would presage a more ambitious project, an expanding textbook series, the *Gezhi xuzhi* 格致須知 (Science Outline Series), which was to be accompanied and complemented by an illustrated series, *Gewu tushuo* 格致圖說 (Science Handbook Series). Conceived as a multivolume set of texts that would keep growing, the series was published in 40 volumes from 1882 to 1898.[97]

Another motivation for scientific translation was more missionary in nature. There were various missionary-related printing presses in Shanghai. Although their primary focus was on religious publications, they also printed various scientific texts, with the intention of using science as a medium for conveying religious truth. The tradition of employing science to assist missionary work had been started by the Jesuits in late sixteenth century China, and was inherited by mid-nineteenth century Protestant missionaries in China. As may well be expected, these scientific titles were informed by natural theology. A typical example was the Scottish Missionary Alexander Williamson's (1824–1904 韋廉臣) *Gezhi tanyuan* 格致探原 (lit. Inquiry into the Origins of Things Based on the Investigation of Them), which was known in English as *Natural Theology and the Method of Divine Government*.[98] Parts of the work had

[95] Xiong, *Xixue dongjian*, 328–29.
[96] Elman, *Science in China*, 321.
[97] Elman, 321, 323 see also appendix 3.
[98] As its English name indicates, the work was compiled by drawing on William Paley's *Natural Theology*, the Bridgewater Treatises and James McCosh's *Method of the Divine Government*.

been published as a series of articles in the *Globe Magazine* before being published by the Presbyterian Mission Press in 1876 and used as a textbook in the Tongwenguan and mission schools.[99] In his work Williamson tried to demonstrate the design of the Creator through science and stressed the harmony between science and religion: 'He [God] has consciously and purposefully embodied His thoughts in the laws and works of nature; and therefore in investigating the phenomena around us we are in reality reading an autograph of the Almighty.'[100]

In summary, Shanghai had the largest collection of copies of scientific books for purchase. Kang seized that opportunity. 'I purchased a large number of translated titles,' he wrote, 'and took them home while travelling by boat and cart.'[101] Although we have no idea what those titles were, it was possible that he might have obtained many of the titles mentioned above. He did not stop there, as evidence shows that he would continue to collect books on Western learning. The next year, for example, he purchased the collected issues of the then recently-discontinued *Globe Magazine*. There has been an unsubstantiated estimation that by the Reform of 1898, Kang may have collected over 3,000 copies of books on Western learning.[102] These books set the stage for Kang to explore another source of knowledge, Western science.

1.2.3 Gleaning from Translations

'Upon my return in the eleventh month [of 1882],' Kang wrote, 'I embarked on a thorough study of Western learning.'[103] According to his autobiography, his reading list for that year covered such subjects as acoustics, optics, chemistry, electricity and mechanics, as well as histories and travelogues. He even had the ambition to compile *Wanguo wenxian tongkao* 萬國文獻通考 (A General Study of Documentary Records of the Countries of the World), in which he said he would include discussions on such

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99 Wei Lianchen 韋廉臣 [Alexander Williamson], *Gewu tanyuan 格物探原 [Natural Theology and the Method of Divine Government]*, 2nd ed., 6 vols (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1880); cf. Elman, *Science in China*, 321.

100 Wei Lianchen 韋廉臣 [Alexander Williamson], *Jidu shilu 基督實錄 [The Light and Life of the World]* (Shanghai: Meihua shuguan [The Presbyterian Press], 1879), Preface.

101 Kang, 'Woshi', 63. His purchase of these books, in all probability, was funded by his uncles.

102 Jiang Guangxue 蒋广学, *Liang Qichao pingzhuan [A Critical Biography of Liang Qichao]* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2005), 21.

103 Kang, 'Woshi', 63.

subjects as music, prosody, and cartography as well as those mentioned above.[104] For the next five years up to 1888 when he made his debut on the political stage, he continued his reading of translations of Western scientific texts. In his diary of 1887, for example, he recorded that on the twenty-second day of the fifth lunar month, he read the ninth volume of the 1877 collection of Fryer's *Chinese Scientific Magazine*.[105] In particular, the first twelve issues ran a serialized, illustrated *Introduction to Modern Science*. The series contained 300 items carefully selected by John Fryer from English science primers, which were organized according to such major fields or topics of modern science as astronomy, gravitational laws of matter and motion, geology, geography, heat, light, electricity, chemistry, botany, and physical anthropology. These introductory texts provided Kang with a good knowledge of the basics in the sciences. Kang considered the magazine to be one of the best works on Western science, and he would later recommend it to his students.

Kang was particularly fascinated by astronomy. As was mentioned earlier, his encounter with modern astronomy had first occurred during his reading of the two geographies of the world. More importantly, the *Chinese Scientific Magazine* contained a large amount of astronomical knowledge. Its first issue, for example, covered such subjects as the vastness and infinity of the universe, the stars, the solar system, the comets and the phenomena of eclipses.[106] These were among the favoured topics often found in Kang's later talks and writings. His reading list on the subject also included the *Tantian* 談天, a translation of John F. Herschel's *Outlines of Astronomy* (1858). Kang tried to apply astronomical knowledge to practical use as well. He recalled that in 1886 he had 'studied astronomy at night', in an attempt to work out 'a natural calendar' in order to solve the confusion caused by simultaneously using the Muslim, the solar and the lunar calendars.[107] On another occasion, he recollected that he had 'used a telescope to observe the heavens day and night' along with his reading of the *Lixiang kaocheng houbian* 歷象考成後編, a Chinese

104 Kang, 63.

105 Kang, 68; cf. Elman, *A Cultural History*, 124.

106 Fu Lanya 傅蘭雅 [John Fryer], 'Gezhi luelun 格致略論 [Sketches of Science]', *Gezhi huibian 格致彙編 [The Chinese Scientific Magazine]* I, no. 1 (1876): 1–6.

107 Kang, 'Woshi', 65.

compendium of observational and computational astronomy.[108] Kang found new astronomical knowledge very inspirational and thought-provoking. It motivated him to reflect on 'the realms of the heavens' and 'the realms of the stars', speculating on 'the orbital movements of the heavens' and 'communications with the moon and the stars' in the far-off future.[109] He believed that contemplations on the heavens would help reorient one's views of life and the world. His interest in astronomy would be maintained throughout his life and it would reach a climax in his last years, during which he lectured on astronomy (as will be discussed in Section 5.3).

Reading of Western sciences not only forced Kang to shed his old views, but it also infused him with new insights. This was evidently shown in his study of mathematics. Although mathematics was not part of his Confucian curriculum, Kang made an effort to study it on his own. Although he did not specify what books he was studying, Euclid's *Elements* would have been among them, as he quoted terms from this work in his contemporary writings. His reading list also included mathematical treatises by native scholars and other Western mathematical texts, such as those titles translated by Fryer, many of which he had purchased in Shanghai. But his perceptions of a decline in the power of his memory as a result of a severe headache in 1885 caused him to decide to discontinue that mathematics study.[110] He did not, however, abandon it altogether. A diary entry in mid-1887, for example, recorded that he studied the method of *tianyuan* 天元, the Chinese version of algebra.[111] He was reading from the *Baifutang suanshu* 白芙堂算書, a recent collection of over twenty mathematical treatises by native scholars from the thirteenth century onward. With these readings, he acquired a fair knowledge of mathematics.

Around 1885 when he was contemplating the future world of the Great Unity, he proposed that carefully-selected books should be collected and compiled, for the universal edification of mankind. For the genre of specialized learning, he suggested such subjects as music, mathematics, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, geography, and

108 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang 诸天讲 [Lectures on the Heavens (1927)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 12, 2007, 12.
109 Kang, 'Woshi', 64.
110 Kang, 65.
111 Kang, 68.

physics.[112] From this it can be inferred that he had probably studied books in those fields. It also shows that he had, by that time, begun to accept the modern classification of Western sciences. He further suggested that for every five years, the essentials of each subject should be selected from various books and published as a compilation, so that 'students would not lose direction in their pursuit of those specialized sciences'.[113] That might be an indirect indication that he may have found himself lost in his extensive reading of various translations of Western books. This explains why he stressed the importance of such selected collections of Western books as the *Xixue dacheng* 西學大成 (Great Anthology of Western Learning), an 1888 collection that included many new editions of works originally produced by Fryer. Kang also appreciated scientific experiments, and would try them out whenever possible. For example, he did an experiment on the killing of bacteria with soap water, apparently in relation to the Pasteur's theory of germs. In an entry in his 1887 journal, he recorded: 'I observed things through a microscope and saw many tiny animals and plants [bacteria], which can only be killed by soap water.'[114]

To conclude, without formal training in science, Kang basically taught himself by reading translations of Western scientific books. His grasp of Western scientific knowledge, though sometimes understandably shallow and fragmentary, was rather remarkable among his cohort of educated contemporaries in the late nineteenth century. It is safe to conclude that his intensive and extensive study had turned him into one of the most learned Confucian scholars of Western sciences of his time.

1.3 Enlightenment

By the mid-1880s, Kang achieved an intellectual breakthrough, in which he attempted to integrate all the sources of knowledge he had been pursuing. In early 1884, he read Buddhist texts extensively along with the literature of Brahmanism at two Buddhist monasteries in Guangzhou. He later recalled that he had also written a treatise on

[112] Kang, 'Shili gongfa quanshu 实理公法全书 [A Compendium of True Principles and Universal Laws (c. 1885)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 160.

[113] Kang, 160.

[114] Kang, 'Woshi', 69.

Brahmanism,[115] a work which is no longer extant. He also studied mathematics and read translations of Western science. During the autumn and winter of that year, he spent time in semi-seclusion, this time in his family library named the House of Calm and Contentment (*Zhanrulou* 詹如樓). According to his own account penned at a later time, he speculated about the mystery and infinity of time and space, explored deep and abstruse statements in the classics and in other philosophic works, examined the hidden meanings of Confucianism and Buddhism, and compared the tenets of various religions.[116] As a result, Kang said later, he had arrived at an understanding of the profound truths and principles in the universe and conceived of himself as a sage with the mission to deliver the world from its sufferings:

> As I realized that the spirit is immortal, I made my principal work the explanation of the phenomenal world; as I realized that coarseness and refinement, purity and filth are all relative, I directed myself to intuitive thought; …I made benevolence the centre of my philosophy, which was to follow the will of Heaven in bringing about unity to the earth, the unity of nations, the unity of races, and the unity of religions.[117]

He was convinced that to bring about unity of religions on the earth was the will of Heaven and a manifestation of the virtue of benevolence. In that context, he saw his mission in clearer terms. ‘I was born in this world’, he wrote, ‘to save the masses of living things. For their sake I would be happy go to purgatory instead of residing in heaven.’[118] In the terminology of Buddhist thought, it could be surmised that he had, by this declaration of intent, stated his desire to serve humanity as a ‘bodhisattva’. Thus, he seems to have assigned himself the role of a messianic saviour, and privately, he even pictured himself as Confucius reborn for this age.[119]

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115 Kang, 81.

116 Kang, 64. One of his reading titles was likely to have been Williamson’s *Gujiao huican* 古教彙參 (Ancient Religions and Philosophies). Published in 1882, it had soon become the primary work in Chinese that discussed the various doctrines of ancient religions around the world, including those of Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt as well as Brahmanism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. See Wei Lianchen 韋廉臣 [Alexander Williamson], *Gujiao huican 古教彙參 [Ancient Religions and Philosophies]*, 3 vols (Shanghai: Yizhu shuju, 1882).

117 Kang, ‘Woshi’, 64; translated in Lo, ‘Autobiography’, 40–41.

118 Kang, ‘Woshi’, 64.

119 Indeed, as is indicated by Kang’s corrections on his manuscripts, he had initially considered himself to be ‘Confucius’ before replacing th word ‘Confucius’ with ‘Sage’. See Mao, *Woshi jianzhu*, 15.

Kang lost no time in elaborately organizing his insights from those experiences and attempted to develop a philosophy based on them, a common practice, according to William James, for professional mystics at the height of their development.[120] Clearly, his mystical experiences had furnished him with spiritual insights and fortified him with great confidence and fearless tenacity. Now that he believed that he had found the truth (*dao*), he felt contented and fearless even in face of death.[121] Within a couple of years, he produced a number of works in manuscript, most notably the *Kangzi neiwai pian* 康子內外篇 (Interior and Exterior Chapters of Master Kang)[122] and the *Shili gongfa quanshu* 實理公法全書 (A Compendium of True Principles and Universal Laws).[123] The former, portions of which were published in 1899, expressed his general philosophical and religious thought, while the latter, the manuscript of which was not published until the late 1970s, encapsulated his early ideas about a world utopia.[124] An examination of these works would enable us to see how Kang attempted to syncretize Chinese and Western knowledge, to harmonize Western science and the Confucian Classics, and to bring about the unity of religions.

1.3.1 Universal Laws

Nowhere was Kang's syncretism of Chinese and Western systems of knowledge more evident than in the *Compendium*. It is written in a style similar to that of a treatise on geometry, in a manner reminiscent of Euclid's *Elements*. The first six books of *Elements* were translated into Chinese in 1607 by Ricci in collaboration with his Chinese convert, Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562-1633). Since then the translation had become arguably the most famous and popular translated Western text, and remained influential in the late Qing during which the remaining nine books of *Elements* were also translated. Like Newton who had adopted the structure of *Elements* to codify his

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120 James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 382.

121 Kang, 'Woshi', 65.

122 Kang, 'Kangzi neiwai pian 康子內外篇 [The Esoteric and Exoteric Essays of Master Kang (1886)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 95–112.

123 Kang, 'Shili gongfa'. Because this work contains historical information that was not available until the early 1890s, some scholars have argued that it could not have been written, as Kang claimed, in the mid-1880s. In my view, it was more likely that the manuscript was written earlier but was revised by Kang at a later time, with pieces of new information inserted.

124 Provisional translations of these two works can be found in San-pao Li, 'K'ang Yu-Wei's Iconoclasm: Interpretation and Translation of His Earliest Writings, 1884-1887' (Ph.D., University of California, Davis, 1978).

new mechanics, or Spinoza who formulated his *Ethics* in the formal apparatus of geometry, Kang also attempted, as he himself pointed out, to use the *Elements* as a template to organize his 'axioms for mankind'. While *Elements* consists of a set of definitions, axioms, theorems, propositions, lemmas, and scholia, Kang's *Compendium* contains definitions, true principles, universal laws, lemmas and commentaries.

Apart from its formal structure, Kang's *Compendium* also contains various religious, scientific, Chinese and Western elements. Its aim was to set forth principles and institutions for the use of mankind based on an extensive examination of those principles in various religions and cultures. 'True principles' were defined as those being in agreement with verified scientific truths, time-tested traditions, or geometrical axioms. Once true principles were understood, the universal laws could then be determined. The work consists of ten sections on key aspects of human life, including the relations between husband and wife, parents and children, sovereign and subjects, friend and friend, as well as rites, religion, law, and the art of government.[125]

Now that he had written down the Truth he believed that he had obtained, Kang felt he could die without regret. When he suffered from a severe headache that defied Chinese doctors, for example, he 'calmly' awaited death while checking over his notes and essays.[126] He did not die, however, for he cured himself by taking some Western medicine (it is a pity he did not specify the medicine). That experience further strengthened his confidence in Western science and buttressed his own conviction in his Heaven-endowed mission, something he had been spared to pursue, a mission that remained yet to be accomplished.

1.3.2 Unity of *Shangdi* (God)

Unification of religion, as was mentioned above, was an essential part of Kang's vision of a future world of the Great Unity. In his discussion of religions around the world, he employed the Chinese term *jiao*. In Confucian tradition, *jiao* was understood as cultivation of the way for the development of the Heaven-endowed

[125] Kang, 'Shili gongfa'.

[126] Kang, 'Woshi', 65.

human nature. Following the traditional *yin-yang* philosophy, Kang classified all religions into two groups:

> I say there are [in reality] only two religions. All those that [teach] the establishment of states and governments; recognize the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers; authorize the occupations of the scholar, farmer, artisan, and trader; maintain the customary rituals practised by shamans and priests in connection with [the belief in deities and spirits]; and approve of the eating of vegetables, fruits, fish, and meat, [are essentially identical with] Confucianism….On the other hand, there are those that prohibit meat-eating; require celibacy, worshipping their founders by day and by night, and refraining from carrying on the four occupations; reject the four tenets; follow the rules of supernatural beings; and transcend human feelings and desires, are [essentially identical with] Buddhism from which stemmed Christianity, Islam and other [similar] religions.[127]

Yang religions, represented by Confucianism, were more oriented towards meeting human needs, while *yin* religions, as typified by Buddhism, more oriented towards suppressing human passions and sensual desires. Which of these two would win and which would lose? In Kang's view, both kinds of religions were needed, and their alternative approaches and contrary spiritual practices would complement each other and guide mankind in progression to the future world of the Great Unity. His classification of religions into two basic categories was often repeated in his later writings or speeches, sometimes from a different perspective, as we will further discuss in the following chapters. It is worth noting that at this stage, Kang did not categorically assert the superiority of Confucianism, a stance that he would later assume.

Meanwhile, Kang reflected on the concept of *Shangdi* or 'God'. As discussed in Section 1.1.1, in ancient Chinese literature, there were two main terms—*Shangdi* and *Tian*—that were used to denote the ultimate Reality—*Shangdi* and *Tian*. The former carries the strong sense of a personal God, who lives in heaven but comes into contact with human beings through rewards and punishments. The latter is a more abstract and vague concept that is usually associated with destiny, calamities and blessings.

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127 Kang, 'Neiwaipian', 103; translated in Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei,* 165 with minor adaptations.

Shangdi had been used in ancient times before it was gradually replaced with *Tian*, which then became the dominant term for the abstract, mysterious Being in an increasingly polytheistic Chinese culture. Herbert Giles, Professor of Chinese at Cambridge, whom Kang would meet later, observed that the Chinese use of the two terms could be compared with that of 'God' and 'Jehovah' in the Bible.[128] The early Jesuits had adopted both *Shangdi* and *Tian* for *Deus* before Pope Clement XI's 1704 order forbidding the use of those terms and declaring the proper Chinese equivalent for God to be *Tianzhu* (天主, literally, Lord of Heaven). That decree, together with the Papal interdiction of Chinese rites such as worship of Heaven, Confucius and ancestors among Chinese converts, was refuted by the angered Emperor Kangxi, who banned Catholic missionary work in China. This series of disputes, known as the Rites and Term Controversy, would have a far-reaching impact.[129]

The 'Term Question' also plagued later Protestants in nineteenth-century China. There was a protracted debate on whether *Shangdi* or another Chinese term such as *Shen* (神 literally, Deity), should be adopted as the proper name for 'God'. Despite heated discussions on the question among the missionaries in China, Europe and America, especially those that were involved in Chinese translation of the Bible, the exact connotations of these Chinese terms remained controversial. Eventually, a compromise was made by agreeing to disagree: English missionaries were in favour of *Shangdi*, while American missionaries in general preferred *Shen*. The impact of this difference would linger for the following century, as shown in the coexistence of two editions of the Chinese Bible, one using *Shangdi*, while the other *Shen*.[130] The unsolved Term Question was neither a merely linguistic issue nor was it solely a theological matter, for it raised a host of other questions in relation to the nature and content of Chinese religion. For this reason, it lay at the heart of the encounter and comparison between Confucianism and Christianity, and in that sense, between Chinese and Western cultures as well.[131]

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128 Herbert A. Giles, *Religions of Ancient China* (London: Archibald Constable & Co Ltd, 1905), 17.

129 See George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Loyola University Press, 1985), 25–76. See also the 'Translators' Introduction' in Ricci, *True Meaning*, 13–55.

130 For a summary account of the controversy among the Protestant missionaries over three decades, see S. Wells Williams, *Controversy among the Protestant Missionaries on the Proper Translation of the Words God and Spirit into Chinese* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1878).

131 For a recent review of the controversy over the Term Question, see Irene Eber, *The Jewish Bishop*

The debate on the Term Question went beyond the missionary circles and attracted the attention of native Christians as well. During the years 1877–8, for example, the popular and influential *Globe Magazine* had published a series of articles debating on the proper Chinese terms for God by a number of native Protestant converts as well as a couple of missionaries. The debate was initiated by the native pastor Huang Pinsan 黄品三, who, in his article on the 'sacred appellation', argued against the current options of *Shangdi* and *Shen* and proposed an innovative term, *Zaohuazhu* 造化主, literally, the Lord of Creation. The American missionary John Roberts (Lu Pei 陸佩), who disagreed with Huang's proposal and favoured the term *Shen*, followed up by inviting contributions from other native Christians. As a result, nearly 50 articles appeared in the magazine within less than two years, debating the Term Question between Roberts and Chinese Christians and sometimes among the latter themselves. Three years later, Young Allen initiated a prize essay contest, inviting non-Christian Confucian scholars to elaborate on the origins and connotations of *Shangdi*, *Tian* and *Shen*, and in due course two essays were selected as winners and were published in the *Globe Magazine*. Yet the Term Question remained unresolved.[132]

A passionate reader of the *Globe Magazine*, Kang was motivated by the debate over the Term Question to reflect on the issue. With a firm belief in the unitary nature of the concept of *Shangdi*, Kang attempted to find a more suitable designation for it. 'In the world there are many names which fail to reflect realities,' he wrote in his *True Principles and Universal Laws*, 'but because *Shangdi* is the origin of all things, his designations must be carefully chosen.'[133] He listed as many as fourteen existing names from various religions, including the Chinese terms *Shangdi* and *Tian*, Christian terms like Creator, God, Jehovah, Deus and Elohim, Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism, and Brahma and Uma in Hinduism. None of them, however, were appropriate in Kang's view. Some of them could be rendered as the Everlasting, but

and the Chinese Bible: S.I.J. Schereschewsky (1831-1906) (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 199–233.

132 For a good introduction, see Man-Kong Timothy Wong, 'The Rendering of God in Chinese by the Chinese: Chinese Responses to the Term Question in the Wanguo Gongbao.', in *Mapping Meanings: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China*, ed. Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff (Leiden; Boston: BRILL, 2004), 589–614; for a collection of those articles, see Li Chichang 李炽昌, *Shenghao lunheng 圣号论衡 [Discussions on the Chinese Translations of the Divine Name]* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).

133 Kang, 'Shili gongfa', 154.

that, Kang argued, suffered from being too vague. If they were to be translated as Heaven (*Tian*), they would suffer from being too shallow. Accordingly, he proposed three terms as proper designations for God, namely *Qihua* 氣化 (Qi-based Transformation), *Yuanzhi* 原質 (Primordial Element) and *Dazhuzai* 大主宰 (Great Sovereign).[134] The first term was a Neo-Confucian concept, through which it was believed the first members of each species of creature, including man, originated, something like spontaneous generation. The second, *Yuanzhi*, was originally a Chinese neologism created to translate the chemical elements. The third was one of the terms that was often employed by missionaries to refer to their God, such as in Williamson's *Natural Theology*.[135]

These names, of which Kang favoured the first, represented different attributes of his concept of God. On the one hand, he maintained that although called by different names in different cultures, God was one. It may be worth highlighting here that this concept of the unitary nature of God is in agreement with the teachings of the Abrahamic line of religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Baha'i Faith. On the other hand, Kang believed that God as the origin of everything existed in constant flux and resided everywhere and within everything. This, however, differs from the Judeo-Christian conception of God as a Creator existing outside his Creation and entirely independent of it. In his later years, Kang would pick up the subject again, taking great pains to demonstrate that belief in God (however named) was common to every nation and every religion (see Section 5.3.2).

To sum up, the young Kang Youwei demonstrated strong religious leanings whose sources could be traced to the traditional belief in *Shangdi* or Heaven in classical Confucianism, the local folk beliefs with their admixture of Buddhist-Daoist concepts, and his mystical experience brought about by his exposure to Buddhist ideas and meditation. His knowledge from the Confucian and Buddhist sources was further complemented by his Western learning which he had acquired through reading translations of Western scientific books. His learning culminated in an 'enlightenment' in the mid-1880s, through which he was reinforced in his earlier image of himself as a

134 Kang, 154.
135 Wei, *Gewu tanyuan*, Preface.

modern sage, with a bodhisattva-like mission to deliver from suffering not only his compatriots in China but the whole of humanity as well. Believing that he had arrived at an understanding of the great *Dao*, he worked out a set of what he regarded as universal principles based on his knowledge of scientific and religious sources, thereby laying the foundation for his design of an ideal future world community. Seen from a broader perspective, Kang's construction of a universal concept of God, and his vision of the future unification of religions exemplified the rise of transnational, trans-religious spirituality. This intellectual activity took place in the context of major events in the formation of imperial and colonial modernity. In these processes, the cultural and religious encounters between Western European Christian thought and Chinese Confucianist doctrine and Indian religious systems had led many scholars and intellectual investigators to embark on a search for a common essence between different religious traditions and different domains of human thought.[136]

[136] I have not the time or space here to enter into a comparative discussion on this important topic, but interested readers may want to refer to a comparative study of the reform programmes of Kang Youwei and Vivekananda (1863–1902), see Krishna Prakash Gupta, 'Religious Evolution in Premodern Asia: A Comparative Study of K'ang Yu-Wei and Vivekananda' (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1976).

2 The Confucian Luther

1888 was a watershed in Kang Youwei's life, the year in which he made his debut on the political stage. In June of that year, Kang, aged 30, left Guangzhou for Beijing to sit for the triennial provincial civil service examination. Six years before, he had travelled to the capital for the same purpose, but had failed the exam. This time, however, he felt much better prepared, as he had not merely consolidated his old (Chinese) learning, but had also studied the new (Western) learning. The always self-assured Kang felt more 'learned' and 'confident' than ever before, with a sense of 'being exalted above mundane things' towards the end of the 1880s.[1] His ambition was to become a top advisor to the Throne, in which position he would be able to assist the Emperor in reordering and restoring China in terms of economy, politics, diplomacy and culture.[2] To achieve that, however, he would first have to pass the civil service examinations. However, he again failed.[3]

Perhaps to help himself recover from that devastating disappointment, Kang visited the nearby Western Hills. Looking down from the mountain heights at the capital city, he could not help feeling deeply concerned for the future of China, whose position had further declined since the defeat by the French at the *Majiang* battle in 1884. He was convinced that imminent reforms must be carried out in order to save China from the encroachment of foreign powers. In this he saw a central role for himself, a calling that was motivated by his sense of a Heaven-endowed mission to save China. However, failure in the civil service examinations had hindered and handicapped him. Worse still, his political mentor in the capital, Zhang Yanqiu 張延秋, an imperial censor and academician, had recently died of illness. Kang could no longer count on Zhang's recommendation letters and his network of highly-placed connections in order to become acquainted with the metropolitan officials.[4]

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1 Kang, 'Woshi', 31.

2 Kang, 'Neiwaipian', 97.

3 He seems to have even tried to cover this up in his autobiography by confusing it with the next examination he sat. For more details, see Zhang Yong 张勇, 'Kang Youwei de "zuowei" jiqi xiandu 康有为的"作伪"及其限度 [On Kang Youwei's "Forgery" and Its limits]', *Lishi yanjiu 历史研究 [History Studies]*, no. 6 (2005).

4 Kang, 'Woshi', 72.

2.1 A Memorial to the Throne

2.1.1 'Heed Heaven's Warning!'

Kang did not give up easily, however, and he made friends with some of the intermediate level officials, such as the Ministry of Punishments secretary Shen Zengzhi 沈曾植, who sympathized with his reform ideas (I will discuss his reform proposals later in this chapter). Kang also approached and sought interviews with high officials, and, in many instances, he was customarily and cursorily ignored. His friend-turned-critic, Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬, later accused Kang of trying to seek personal wealth and position by writing flattering letters to high officials.[5] That accusation was not entirely justified, for Kang's letters also contained his reform proposals, and even stern terms reminding the high officials of their responsibility. His reproachful tone even angered some of the recipients. The Minister of Personnel Xu Tong 徐桐, for example, had Kang's letter returned the very next day with a rebuke.[6] As a result, Kang's letters created a stir among the metropolitan officialdom, a consternation that was probably due more to their tone than their contents.

Failing to enlist the support of high officials, Kang conceived an even bolder act, and he decided to petition the Throne directly. That was a phenomenally audacious move, for common scholars did not have the privilege of communicating with the Son of Heaven. By taking this unusual initiative, Kang hoped that his voice could be heard by the young Emperor Guangxu 光緒, who was positioned to take over full power from Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 the next year. At the same time, however, he was prepared for the likely consequences, including imprisonment.[7] For his memorial to reach the Throne, Kang had to find a high official to submit it on his behalf. Of those he requested, only the President of the Censorate Qi Shichang 祁世长, whom Kang praised for his courage and integrity, consented to help. On the morning of 10

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5 Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬, 'Bo panfan Kang Youwei nishu 駁叛犯康有為逆書 [Refuting the Letter from the Fugitive Kang Youwei]', *Shen Pao 申報 [Shanghai News]*, no. 9173 (27 October 1898): 3.

6 Zhu Weizheng 朱维铮, *Qiusuo zhenwenming 求索真文明 [In Search of True Civilization]* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1996), 189, 210; Kang, 'Woshi', 72.

7 Kang, 'Yu Youbo shu 与幼博书 [A Letter to Youbo (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 175.

December 1888 when Kang was about to leave his hotel room to hand in his memorial, he learned that a public execution was being carried out nearby and that traffic was so heavy that his carriage could not traverse the street. He considered the event an ominous sign that he could lose his life as a result of his imminent action. He recalled his hesitation in his autobiography: 'I had an old mother at home—how could I die and leave her?' That thought, however, was immediately pushed out of his mind by the recurring sense of a bodhisattva-like mission: 'If I was born to save the world, how can I withdraw now?'[8] Fortified by a firm belief that one's life and death were predestined by Heaven, he went to the Censorate's office by a circuitous route. The appointment with Qi, however, did not take place due to the latter's sudden illness.

Although his memorial failed to reach the Throne, its contents were made known, for he had copies of it circulated at the same time in the capital and within his home province.[9] Like his letters to those high officials, it contained a tone of reproach. He took advantage of the recent occurrence of a landslide at the Imperial Mausoleum and interpreted it as a sign of Heaven's warning to the Throne, a warning that he thought showed 'the utmost love from the heart of Heaven'.[10] To show respect to Heaven and return His kindness, the Empress Dowager and the Emperor should, he wrote, in accordance with the ancient tradition, reflect upon their own behaviour, and the ministers should apologize for negligence in the discharge of their duties. Kang deplored the fact that he could not see any evidence that these proprieties were being observed. Instead, construction work continued in the Summer Place and 'exotic techniques and improper technologies' like electric bulbs and model trains were being introduced for the entertainment of the imperial household.[11] Therefore, he urged the Throne to heed Heaven's warning and make efforts for the reformation of China.[12]

Unlike the technology-oriented proponents of the Self-Strengthening Movement, Kang emphasized the importance of political reforms, calling for a change in the

[8] Kang, 'Woshi', 72.
[9] Kang, 'Yu Youbo'.
[10] Kang, 'Shang Qingdi diyishu 上清帝第一书 [My First Memorial to the Throne (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 182.
[11] From another perspective, this is a sign of their interest in Western technology.
[12] Kang, 'Diyishu', 182.

outmoded customary ways of governance.[13] In his view, the fact that the introduction of Western-style factories and such technological achievements as electricity lines, mining machines and warships had not strengthened China as had been expected, was largely due to the lack of effective means of communication between the Throne and the populace. He harboured the idea of a parliament similar to the British model, arguing that it had had a precedent in ancient China and could be set up in China, with local officials forming the House of Lords and elected degree-holders the House of Commons.[14] Oblivious to Parliament's legislative power, however, Kang did not seem, at that time, to have grasped the nature of the British parliamentary system. He would revisit the concept of parliamentarism in his future political endeavours, as I will show in later chapters.

2.1.2 Countering Christian Threats

In his memorial to the Throne, Kang also stressed the factor of religious threats from outside. He cited the fate of Vietnam as an object lesson for China. After taking control of Vietnam, a former vassal state of Qing, the French had 'gradually won the hearts of the Vietnamese', Kang wrote, 'by setting up churches to lure them to Catholicism as well as by building railways to promote commerce'.[15] The French missionaries had also increased their activities in China's peripheral provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan. According to Kang's estimation (or exaggeration), the majority of the local people in those provinces had been coaxed to convert to Catholicism. Recounting the recent rumours that the Vietnamese, together with the people of Laos and Siam (now Thailand), had accepted a French priest as their General Chief,[16] Kang warned that in a few years the French might lead their Vietnamese followers in invading South China, with Chinese Catholic converts collaborating from inside. Bearing in mind China's recent defeat by the French, Kang predicted that if the French warships could also make their way up the Yangtze river, the Catholics in

[13] Kang, 182–84.
[14] Kang, 'Lun shiwu 论时务 [On Current Affairs (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 165–66.
[15] Kang, 'Diyishu', 181.
[16] Kang was probably referring to the formation of French Indochina in 1887, which consisted of Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina (which together form modern Vietnam) and Cambodia; Siam would be added in five years' time after the Franco-Siamese War in 1893, and the leased Chinese territory of Guangzhouwan would be added in 1898.

inner China would also rise and help them.[17] Kang's recognition that Catholicism and Protestantism were Western imperialist tools, and his corresponding distrust of the Chinese converts to a foreign religion, were not surprising, for such views were widely shared among his contemporaries. Those sentiments had been formed and spread since the Opium Wars, and were successively intensified by various religious disputes (*jiaoan* 教案), in which foreign Christians and Chinese converts were often treated more favourably in trials than non-believer locals, since the former group were invested with extraterritorial privileges.

Kang's solution for countering the Christian threat was a vigorous programme of education of the populace. He observed that the main reason for the massive conversion to Catholicism in those peripheral provinces was lack of education. The provincial folk were uneducated and most of them were illiterate. They would often turn to local *wu* (shamans) for help in making decisions and for guidance during significant occasions in their lives. Kang declared that they were illiterate, ignorant, impoverished and superstitious, and these were conditions which provided the French missionaries a good opportunity to convert them.[18] Here Kang seems to have held an unstated impression that Catholicism was similar to or could be treated like a form of *wujiao* or shamanism, which was considered by Chinese Confucianists to be something of a low status and a product of a lack of education. At that time, the Chinese equivalent of the Western type of religion was a subject of scholarly discussion. A typical view was expressed by Peng Guangyu 彭光譽, Qing's Commissioner to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, at the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in connection with the Exposition. He argued that 'religion' in the West had its proper Chinese equivalent in *wu*, the form of religion practised in ancient China long before the appearance of the Confucian school. However, he added that in later times both practitioners and books of *wu* had always been placed under a legal ban to prevent them from corrupting the people, for 'China was never found wanting in men who are versed in supernatural things'.[19] I will

[17] Kang, 'Diyishu', 181.

[18] Kang, 181; see also Kang, 'Yu Pan Wenqin shu 与潘文勤书 [A Letter to Pan Wenqin (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 168.

[19] John Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing, 1893), 376. Peng's address was translated into English under the title of 'Confucianism'; its Chinese original, *Shuojiao* 說教, was published in China in 1896 by an imperial order, demonstrating that it

revisit the controversy on the Chinese equivalent of 'religion' in later chapters. Suffice it to say here that Kang's implied assertion that education could help get rid of *wujiao* or that sort of 'religion' would become the prevailing idea among intellectuals in twentieth-century China.

Kang observed that in addition to the general populace, many of the officials and students of Confucianism across the country were not properly educated in Confucianism either.[20] He considered this fact to be one of the grievous problems faced by the dynasty. Although he did not elaborate on this particular issue in his memorial, he discussed in detail the ways and means by which to restore Confucian learning in localities across the entire country in his correspondence with his friend Pan Yiqin 潘峄琴, who had just been promoted to Educational Officer of eastern Zhejiang province. One of his proposals was to have the most morally upright and learned among the deceased local Confucian scholars worshipped in shrines and temples so that they could serve as exemplars and provide inspiration for the student population in China. For the funds needed to build the shrines and temples, Kang's solution was daring: to turn some of the Buddhist or Daoist temples, which existed in each locality, into Confucian temples, simply by replacing the old images or statues with the tablets of Confucian scholars. Kang showed no leniency to the rest of the temples, which he called 'improper shrines' (*yinci* 淫祠), and believed they should be utterly destroyed.[21] His proposal, if implemented, would have met with great opposition from the general populace, and would have come under strong criticism from the local authorities for inviting disorder. Perhaps that was why Pan did not follow it. Kang remained unsympathetic to the popular forms of worship and considered them as a distraction from, or even a threat to the Confucian faith. In this he may well have been inspired by missionary critiques of Chinese popular beliefs and by his impression that in Europe the Christian faith was practised to the exclusion of other forms of worship. He would revisit the idea in his memorials to the Emperor during the later Reform of 1898.

represented the orthodox views on Confucianism and religion.

20 Kang, 'Diyishu', 182.

21 Kang, 'Yu Yiqin xueshi shu 与峄琴学士书 [A Letter to Pan Yiqin, a Member of the Hanlin (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 190.

It should not be concluded, however, that Kang's idea to turn some of the Buddhist temples into Confucian shrines meant that he was opposed to Buddhism. As discussed in the previous chapter, not only had he read Buddhist literature and practised Buddhist meditation himself in his youth, but he had also emphasized the supplementary role of Buddhism to Confucian training. In a letter to the Imperial Academy compiler Huang Shaoji 黄绍箕, whom he had also befriended, Kang observed that the Buddhist practice of self-discipline and self-restraint was conducive to the cultivation of determination and perseverance, which were essential qualities for accomplishing any worthy cause. The Confucian training, on the other hand, was broad in scope yet less strict in self-discipline; the disciplinary fortitude of Buddhist practice would benefit Confucianism. For this reason, he compared Buddhism to medicine, which one needed to take when ill, while Confucianism was like staple food that was indispensable to one's daily life.[22] He explained that for a Confucian scholar, excessive desire for material benefits were like his internal ailments, while habitual commitments to essay writing and textual criticism could be likened to skin ulcers.[23] Drawing on his own experience, he urged Huang to read Buddhist books and try some Buddhist practice instead of confining himself to Confucianism. He recounted that even the great Confucian master Zhu Xi was fond of Buddhism up to the age of 50 and benefited a lot from it. Kang wrote that if he himself had spent more time exercising his mind through Buddhist practices in the mountains, he would have probably achieved more by then.[24] As we will see later in this thesis, this view of a complementary relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism would remain a constant element in Kang's religious thought.

Towards the end of 1888, Kang was frustrated. He had achieved a measure of fame because of his outspoken letters to high officials and his failed memorial to the Throne, but he had also received many criticisms from metropolitan scholar-officials. Meanwhile, the situation in the capital became such that it was no longer considered appropriate for him to make critical comments on state affairs, as the imperial Court was busy preparing for the wedding of the young Emperor. To celebrate the imperial

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22 Kang, 'Yu Huang Zhongtao bianxiu shu 与黄仲弢编修书 [A Letter to Huang Zhongtao, the Hanlin Compiler (1888)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 188.

23 Kang, 'Yu Shen Zipei'.

24 Kang, 'Yu Huang Zhongtao'.

event, it was announced that an extra provincial examination was to be held during the following autumn. Kang decided to remain in the capital in order to have another go at it. 'To amuse himself', Kang started to study stele inscriptions collected in the capital city. An accomplished calligrapher himself, he soon turned a pastime into a serious scholarly pursuit. Studying stylistic changes in the development of Chinese calligraphy energized his mind for political reform. In one year's time, Kang was able to produce a treatise on the history of calligraphy, *Guang yizhou shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫 (Extended Paired Oars for the Boat of Art), which immediately became a best seller following its publication in 1891,.[25] What is pertinent to this thesis is that his study on ancient inscriptions helped him revisit the Old Text versus New Text controversy, which will be discussed in the next section.

In Autumn 1889, Kang sat the extra examinations but repeated the same failure as at his previous attempts. Beyond disappointment, he was furious. He accused the chief examiner, Xu Tong (who had been offended by the reproachful tone of his letter a year before) of failing him after presumably recognizing his essay by its style.[26] This failure had deprived him of the opportunity, at least for the next three years, to become an official, which in turn meant he would not be able to help save China in the role of an imperial official. Kang then began to consider what profession he should pursue. He reckoned that he could not become a scientist, for he did not possess the funds to purchase scientific instruments which he considered indispensable to pursuing science; neither did he have a community of fellow scientists with whom to collaborate. The only viable option for him was to become a teacher and educator, for which he was well-prepared by virtue of his integration, in the mid-1880s, of various branches of knowledge, religious and scientific, Chinese and Western.[27]

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[25] See Kang, 'Woshi', 73. For a recent study of Kang's calligraphic art in the English language, see Wong, *The Other Kang Youwei*.

[26] See Kang, 'Woshi', 73.

[27] Kang, 'Yu Shen Zipei'. It appears that he did not reveal his new doctrines to his associates until the end of his sojourn in the capital, when he shared a copy of his *Interior and Exterior Chapters* with his friend Shen Zengzhi.

2.2 An Unconventional Teacher

Returning to his home province, Guangdong, he was warmly received as a celebrity scholar. Although he had failed the civil service examination, he had achieved fame for his bold attempt to send a memorial to the Throne as well as for his outspoken call for reforms. After he moved his residence to Guangzhou in 1890, some young local scholars came to seek his tutelage, among whom was Liang Qichao, who would become his most renowned disciple and eventually aid him in his reform cause.

Like Kang, Liang had received a good Confucian education during his childhood at home. In 1887 he entered the prestigious *Xuehaitang* 學海堂 (Academy of the Sea of Learning) in Guangzhou, where he, as a distinguished student, devoted himself to the philological study of the classics and refined styles of writing. At sixteen (in 1889), he sat and passed the provincial examinations with high honours and had thereby received a provincial degree (*juren*).[28] The year 1890 was a watershed in Liang's intellectual development. His eyes were opened up and his intellectual horizons broadened by his contact with Kang. Their first meeting lasted a whole day, during which Liang was as much awed by Kang's insights and learning as he was depressed by the discovery of the 'uselessness' of his own previous learning.[29] Liang thereupon decided to leave his old school and come to study under Kang's tutelage. For a provincial graduate to become a student of someone like Kang, who had not yet succeeded in earning the same degree, was extraordinary, and Liang's 'conversion' created quite a stir among local scholars. This episode illustrates Kang's charismatic influence over the minds of the young scholars of his time.

As the number of his students increased, Kang decided to set up a private academy in Changxing Lane 長興里 in Guangzhou in 1891. He later moved the academy to a larger residence and renamed it as the *Wanmu caotang* 万木草堂 (Thatched Hall among Ten Thousand Trees). The academy thrived, and by the mid-1890s the number

[28] Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 and Zhao Fengtian 赵丰田, eds., *Liang Qichao nianpu changbian 梁启超年谱长编 [A Chronological Biography of Liang Qichao]* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983), 1–22. That, however, marked the summit of his success at the civil service examinations, for he was never to pass the metropolitan examinations, despite his several later attempts.

[29] Liang, 'Sanshi zishu 三十自述 [An Account of Myself at 30 (1902)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 1, 1999, 958.

of its students had reached over a hundred.[30] Kang's curriculum was reminiscent of his teacher Zhu Ciqi's in its eclectic approach, but it differed in a very important aspect: it included unconventional subjects such as mathematics and Western learning. According to Liang's summary, Kang's teaching programme was founded on Confucianism and Buddhism and was complemented by history and Western learning.[31] As a generic or protean term, Western learning at that time included knowledge of the Western political system, science and technology.

2.2.1 Western Sciences

The negative attitude of the literati towards Western learning (see Section 1.2) remained largely unchanged up to the early 1890s. As a result, modern science was hardly among the curriculum of regular Chinese academies, nor was Western learning given due attention in their lectures. Being an avid student and beneficiary of Western science, Kang found it natural and necessary to include the pursuit of scientific knowledge as a theme in his curriculum. He followed a progressive approach by starting with an emphasis on the ancient binary concept of *liuyi* 六藝 or six arts. The term referred firstly to the Six Confucian Classics, each of which corresponded to the cultivation of one aspect of a moral life, and secondly to the six skills, including rituals (*li* 禮), music (*yue* 樂), archery (*she* 射), charioteering (*yu* 御), writing (*shu* 書) and arithmetic (*shu* 數). Kang advocated the restoration of the secondary category of six arts, which had been long forgotten. As archery and charioteering were no longer useful in today's world, Kang suggested that they be replaced with cartography (*tu* 圖) and shooting (*qiang* 槍).[32] The message Kang was trying to convey was clear: Confucian students should follow the ancients in paying due attention to practical knowledge and skills, and to do so was legitimate and justified.

Then, in another published treatise on the ways of acquiring knowledge, Kang urged young Confucianists to make efforts to acquire Western sciences by reading translations of scientific texts. The titles he recommended covered such fields as

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30 Kang, 'Kang Nanhai xiansheng jiangxueji 康南海先生讲学记 [Notes of Mr. Kang's Lectures (1896)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 2, 2007, 105.
31 Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 483.
32 Kang, 'Changxi xueji 长兴学记 [The Curriculum for Changxing Academy (1891)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 345–46.

astronomy, geography, botany, zoology, optics, acoustics, electricity, mechanics, chemistry, most of which had been included in the 1888 collection of *Great Anthology of Western Learning* (*Xixue dacheng*). He stressed that it would be ideal if one could purchase the translations by the Jiangnan Arsenal Translation Department 'in their entirety'.[33] He also listed an earlier title on anatomy, Benjamin Hobson's *Quanti xinlun* 全體新論 (Human Anatomy, 1851). It was no surprise that Kang singled out his favourite, the collected issues of John Fryer's *Chinese Scientific Magazine*, which he still considered as the best reading for its comprehensive coverage of nearly every natural science. As for mathematics, Kang recognized its study as being of fundamental significance to the pursuit of other subjects such as astronomy and geometry. He suggested that learners should start with Euclid's *Elements* before embarking on subjects such as algebra and calculus.[34] The way he discussed these titles indicates that he had read them himself and obtained a fair knowledge of each of the subjects.

Although he did not give lectures on any particular science, Kang often incorporated scientific knowledge in his lectures on general topics. He established a library at the academy with the books he had collected over the past decade, and encouraged students to browse through them and to turn to him for instruction when necessary.[35] Appointed by Kang as assistant lecturer, Liang had designed a monthly reading schedule for the younger students. Like Kang, Liang considered acquisition of Western learning as a must for modern scholars. After obtaining a fair knowledge of the history of Western countries, their current state, and the source of their power and wealth, Liang wrote, that one should proceed to read primers on natural sciences. For this purpose, he recommended the multi-volume *Gezhi xuzhi*, the *Tantian*, and the *Dixue qianshi* 地學淺釋, an 1873 translation of Lyell's *Elements of Geology*.[36]

33 Kang, 'Guixue wenda', 23.
34 Kang, 23.
35 Liang, 'Sanshi zishu', 958.
36 Liang, 'Dushu fenyue kecheng 读书分月课程 [A Monthly Reading Schedule (1892)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 1, 1999, 8.

2.2.2 Chinese Origins

While many scientific books translated or written by missionaries were informed by a natural theology, which used scientific knowledge to glorify the Christian God, Kang considered Western science as a field separate and distinct from Christianity, as knowledge with a universal character. This understanding resonated with the Confucian concept that everything has an ultimate organising principle and this principle can be ascertained through investigation of it (*gezhi*). On this basis, Kang upheld the view that Western sciences had their origins in Chinese traditions (*xixue zhongyuan* 西學中源). This was not a new idea, though. Since the Jesuit mission to China, the notion—whose weak version implied that modern science had been anticipated by Chinese classical scholarship—had been developed among the Chinese literati, including the late Emperor Kangxi, who himself had studied Western mathematics under the tutelage of missionaries.[37] The view was also shared and promoted by some of the missionaries in China. William A. P. Martin, for example, argued for the notion of 'Oriental origins of Occidental sciences' in his Chinese review of Western learning.[38] Martin further asserted that ancient Chinese arts must have been spread to Greece through the intermediaries of Egypt, Persia and India.[39]

Kang elaborated on Martin's claim: all of the branches of learning had once been highly developed in the times of the legendary ruler Huangdi 黃帝 about four thousand years before, but they had not been passed down to posterity in China. Their remnants were somehow spread to the foreign lands and were picked up and further developed by the Westerners.[40] For Kang, it was easy to find supporting evidence in mathematics, astronomy and geography, which were ancient and traditional fields of learning in China. Echoing the view of Emperor Kangxi, Kang claimed that the modern methods of algebra and calculus had originally been introduced from the East (India), and cautioned his students not to disregard them as the 'heterodox learning from the Westerners'.[41] The idea of a spherical earth, for another example, could be

[37] See Elman, *Science in China*, 155–56.
[38] Ding Weiliang 丁韙良 [William A. P. Martin], *Xixue kaolue 西學考略 [A Brief Review of Western Learning]* (Beijing: Zongli yamen, 1883), II, 55a.
[39] Ding, I, 52a.
[40] Kang, 'Mingongpian 民功篇 [On Civil Feats (1886)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 5, 2007, 75.
[41] Kang, 'Changxing xueji', 246.

found in the *Zhoubi suanjing* 周髀算经, one of the oldest Chinese mathematical texts.[42] When it came to the modern exact sciences, Kang argued that their principles could also be seen in Chinese classics. 'In the times of Mozi 墨子 (*circa* 479–81 BCE),' he wrote, 'the principles of optics and mechanics were already known.'[43]

In addition, Kang claimed that the Chinese had made ingenious inventions long before the Westerners created the same objects, inventions such as Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78–139) water-powered armillary sphere and Zu Chongzhi's 祖沖之 (429–500) south-pointing chariot. This demonstrated that the ancient Chinese, Kang wrote, were actually more intelligent than the Westerners. The fact that sciences had been developed into finer and higher stages in the modern West rather than in China, was not because of difference in intellect between Westerners and Chinese. Rather, it was due to difference in attitudes and practices. 'In the West,' Kang wrote, 'programmes have been designed to teach sciences at schools, both the sovereign and the ministers sponsored sciences, and scholars jointly participate in the pursuit of sciences.' In China, Kang observed, the contrary was true, since the sciences were not valued, sponsored or pursued in a serious manner. Consequently, China had fallen behind in her material and technological development. But if China were to make reforms to systematically pursue scientific learning in the Western manner, Kang reasoned, it would be merely a matter of time before China would catch up with the West.[44]

Kang's adoption of the notion of the Chinese origins of Western sciences would, he hoped, serve a threefold purpose. First, it would help offset the prevalent resistance to the teaching and learning of Western sciences. Second, it would ease the resistance to the proposed reforms: for if to study Western sciences was in fact to recover something that was originally and rightfully Chinese, to reform society according to the Western model was also to recover a lost heritage in China. Thirdly, it would counter the alleged Western mental superiority, as the gap in scientific development

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42 Kang, 'Neiwaipian', 106.

43 Kang, 'Yu Hong Youcheng jijian lun zhongxi yixue shu 与洪右臣给谏论中西异学书 [A Discussion with Hong Youchen on the Differences between Chinese and Western Learning (1891)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 337.

44 Kang, 337.

between the West and China did not imply any intrinsic deficiency or inferiority in Chinese intellectual capacities.

2.2.3 Cosmic Evolution

Cosmic evolution was another area for which Kang and his students claimed a Chinese historical priority. The Darwinian theory of evolution, along with its social implications, was formally introduced into China in the late 1890s through Yan Fu's 嚴復 paraphrased translation, known as *Tianyanlun* 天演論, of Thomas H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, in which the translator gave a fair account of Darwin and his theory in the form of notes. In 1896, when Kang read Yan's manuscript translation, which was already circulating before its eventual publication in 1898, Kang appeared to be more confirmed than inspired, for he said he had developed similar principles a decade earlier and had discoursed on them in his lectures. This claim, which has not been adequately treated in James Pusey's 1983 *China and Charles Darwin*,[45] was substantiated by his former students. According to Liang, who was among the earliest readers of Yan's manuscript, he and his fellow students had learned about similar ideas on evolution from Kang, though these ideas had not been explored to the same depth as Darwin had. 'Don't think,' Kang cautioned, 'that these are original principles, for there might be many Westerners who have studied them for many years.'[46]

Indeed, an examination of Kang's early writings shows that although he had not read Spencer, he had developed a 'Spencerian' conception of evolution that embraced the successive development of the physical universe, living organisms and the human world. According to his autobiographical remarks, he reflected on the 'evolution of Heaven and Earth' and the 'origin of living things' at the age of 26, that is, in 1884 when he renewed his basic worldviews.[47] It is a pity that he did not elaborate on his findings, but from his other writings it can be inferred that his idea of creation would

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45 Cf. James R. Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1983), 44–45, 89–90.

46 Liang, 'Yu Yan Youling shu 与严又陵书 [A Letter to Yan Fu (1896)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 1, 1999, 73.

47 Kang, 'Woshi', 64.

be in the Daoist tradition, according to which all things, including Man, are evolved from the primal *qi* through the interaction of the elements of *yin* and *yang*.[48]

Six years after his contemplations on creation, Kang confided to one of his most talented students, Chen Qianqiu 陳千秋, that 'humans could produce the horse and vice versa,' and that 'man had evolved from apes,' which Chen believed and for which he was said to have found supporting evidence.[49] The idea that 'man could descend from the horse' came from the *Liezi*, whose first chapter also dwells on the processes of evolution or devolution between species.

> All species develop in their own ways: …When withered and decayed, plantains turn back into dirty soil and become dark-footed grass whose roots in turn are transformed into bombyx and whose leaves into butterflies. … The insects in turn produce leopards. Leopards produce horses. Horses produce humans who in the end return to the cycle of change in the great Nature. [1.4][50]

Related to this was his belief that the human body shrank as the earth became cooler, a belief that grew out of a personal observation. In 1892, Kang made a flute according to the instructions left by the ancient Chinese, but found it too long for his fingers to cover the stops, which led him to conclude that the ancients were larger than today's human beings.[51] When visiting the British Museum of Natural History in 1904, Kang felt great joy when his eyes fell upon the statues of Darwin and Huxley, who 'were like old friends' to him.[52] He commented that the theories of the two were regarded as 'new inventions' in the land of Europe, but he had already developed similar, though less elaborate, ideas before he had ever read a word of text in any Western book, for the idea of biological evolution, he asserted, had been enshrined in ancient Chinese thought and classics.[53]

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48 See Kang's introduction to Kang Youwei 康有为, *Datongshu 大同書 [The Book of the Great Unity]* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1935).

49 Kang, 'Woshi', 81.

50 Liezi, *Liezi [in Chinese-English Version]*, trans. Liang Xiaopeng, Library of Chinese Classics: Chinese-English (Beijing: Zhonghu Shuju, 2005), 7–8.

51 Kang, 'Woshi', 81–81; translated in Lo, 'Autobiography', 54.

52 Kang, 'Yingguo youji 英国游记 [An Account of My Travels in Great Britain (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 8, 2007, 23.

53 Kang, 23.

To conclude, Kang's advocacy of the teaching and learning of Western sciences was not limited to his labours in his academy or within his region. His vision was to have them included in the state examination and education systems. He supported the establishment of the special examinations on political, economic, military, and natural sciences (*jingjiteke* 經濟特科), for which he was recommended as a candidate in 1898. In his memorials to the Throne, he suggested that the practice of the special examinations could be emulated in the reform of the civil service examinations, arguing that the rigid, book-based 'eight-legged' essays should be replaced by policy papers (*celun* 策論) on specialized subjects, including astronomy, geography, chemistry, optics, electricity, mechanics, cartography, arithmetic, mining and law as well as the Confucian Classics. He further proposed that the natural sciences should be included in the school curricula across the whole county, so that young students would spend their precious time and energy pursuing those useful subjects instead of confining themselves to empty talk and the Four Books.[54] As will be seen in the next section, Kang's proposals were taken seriously by the Emperor, who issued an edict on reforming the civil service examinations during the Reform of 1898.

2.3 Recasting Confucianism

What was most unusual about Kang's teaching, however, was that rather than toeing the line of orthodox Neo-Confucianism, it was based on a radical revision of Confucianism, which he had only recently developed, drawing on the New Text exegesis. He had cherished the desire to become an independent sage or a founder of a religion (*jiaozhu*),[55] but now he may have come to see it as being more realistic if he were to bow to the authority of Confucius and become, in the words of Liang Qichao,

[54] Kang, 'Qingfei bagushitie kaifa shishi gaiyong celun zhe 请废八股试贴楷法试士改用策论折 [A Memorial to the Throne Requesting the Replacement of Eight-Legged Essays with Policy Papers in the Civil Service Examinations (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 78–79; Kang, 'Qingzhao jingjitekeli tuixing shengtongsuikeshi pian 请照经济特科例推行生童岁科试片 [A Request for the Application of the Practices of the Special Examinations to the Civil Service Examinations at Various Levels (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 50–51.

[55] Kang, 'Canyiyuan tiyi liguo zhi jingshen yishu hou 参议院提议立国之精神议书后 [On the Senate's Proposal to Establish the Moral Spirit to Sustain China (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 2007, 206.

'the Martin Luther of Confucianism',[56] by restoring Confucianism to what he believed was its original sacred and pristine state.

2.3.1 Conversion to the New Text School

To better understand Kang's intellectual reorientation away from the Old Text school, which had underpinned orthodox Confucianism, to the New Text school, which had once been the orthodox ideology of the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE–25 CE), an account of the origin and history of New Text Confucianism is required here. According to the traditional account, the Confucian Classics had been destroyed in the Burning of Books and Burying of Scholars (*fenshu kengru* 焚書坑儒) during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). In early Former Han, surviving Confucians wrote down from memory the Five Classics, and for their instruction and dissemination, erudite scholars (*boshi* 博士) were appointed in the Imperial Academy under state sponsorship. As these texts were recorded in contemporary-style script (*jinwen* 今文), they were later dubbed as 'New Texts'. Then, New Text Confucianism was exalted as the officially sanctioned doctrine, with the promotion of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), the leading Confucian scholar of the period. Of the Classics, the *Annals* by Confucius as interpreted in the *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳) came to be regarded as the most valued text; this portrayed Confucius as a charismatic prophet or 'uncrowned king' (*suwang* 素王) who was accorded the Mandate of Heaven but did not attain kingship. The commentary provided not only the name but also key doctrines to the Gongyang school, which was regarded as the heart of New Text Confucianism.

Around the same time, however, alternative versions of the Classics, recorded in 'old' or pre-Han script (*guwen* 古文, hence 'Old Text'), were allegedly discovered at places such as Confucius' old residence. Among them was the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, another commentary on the *Annals*. In contrast to the *Gongyang*, the *Zuo Commentary* portrayed Confucius as a respected teacher and a mere transmitter of classical learning, a learning that was believed to have passed down from the ancient sagely rulers, in particular the Duke of Zhou 周公 of the eleventh century BCE. Subsequently, some

[56] Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 486.

scholars claimed superior authenticity for Old Text Classics over the New Text version on the ground that the former were written in more ancient script. Liu Xin 刘歆 (*circa* 50 BCE–23 CE), the Imperial Librarian, vigorously called for the incorporation of Old Text Classics into the officially-sanctioned texts. Despite opposition from New Text scholars, Liu's proposal received the support of his patron, Wang Mang 王莽 (*circa* 45 BCE–23 CE), the powerful regent who eventually seized the throne and established the transitory Xin dynasty (9–23 CE). Apart from the relative authenticity of their respective versions, the two schools differed ideologically: New Text Confucianism endorsed various superstitious and supernatural beliefs as advocated in the contemporary *Apocryphal Texts* (*weishu* 緯書), while the more rationalistic Old Text Confucianism tended to shun those tendencies, a difference that was most evidently manifested in their portrayals of Confucius. In the following Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE), the competition between the New Text and Old Text schools continued, but eventually the latter got the upper hand and the former fell into obscurity. As a result, the Confucian orthodoxies in later dynasties, including Neo-Confucianism in the Ming and Qing periods, were primarily based on Old Text sources. It should be noted, however, that over a period of time the two versions of texts became more or less mixed up during the ensuing discourse and the distinctions between them were no longer clear.[57]

New Text Confucianism, on the other hand, had basically been forgotten for fourteen hundred years until the mid-eighteenth century, when the Qing scholars reopened the New–Old Text controversy. The New Text advocates claimed that some of the Old Text sources might well have been fabricated during the Xin dynasty of Wang Mang. In their search for authenticity, they revisited the *Gongyang Commentary* and revived the Gongyang school. One of the leading New Text scholars was Liao Ping 廖平 (1852–1932), who pinpointed Liu Xin as the forger of Old Text Classics and upheld Confucius as a charismatic visionary and institutional reformer.

[57] For a historical treatment of the Old–New Text controversy, see Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 1:17–18, 65–66; Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 133–36; cf. Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu Gailun 清代学术概论 [Intellectual Trends in the Qing Period (1920)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 10, 1999, 3095.

On his way back home after his unsuccessful candidature in Beijing, Kang met and conversed with Liao in Guangzhou in early 1890. It was widely believed that Liao was the inspiration behind Kang's conversion to New Text Confucianism. Liang Qichao, for example, stressed the great contribution Kang had made to the New Text scholarship but at the same time admitted the 'undeniable influence' of Liao on Kang's thinking.[58] Kang, however, never acknowledged his debt to Liao; instead, he claimed that he had discovered the truth of the New Text version independently in 1888/1889 (that is, before he had met and conversed with Liao), when he was working on stele inscriptions and reviewing the Confucian Classics.[59] According to his account, he had already considered the Gongyang scholarship even before that. As early as in 1880, he had studied the *Gongyang Commentary* and the writings of earlier Gongyang scholars. Initially, he did not seem to have been convinced by the Gongyang doctrine. He even wrote a treatise, *Heshi jiumiu* 何氏糾謬 (He's Errors Exposed) to refute He Xiu (何休 129–83), the leading Gongyang scholar in Later Han, who took an interest in supernaturalism and was inclined to deify Confucius, assigning to him a messianic role. However, Kang said he soon came to realize that he was wrong and consequently had burned his critique.[60] The incident suggests that Kang began to see some validity in the Gongyang tradition. Following his 'enlightenment' in the mid-1880s, although he remained in the camp of orthodox Confucianism, he expressed such views as would lend support to the New Text school in his *Jiaoxue tongyi* 教學通義 (The General Import of Teaching and Learning).[61]

2.3.2 Restoring the Religion of Confucius

Kang's recasting of Confucianism started with his *Xinxue weijingkao* or *Forged Classics* (1891), a work that was described as a 'hurricane' that hit the Chinese

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58 Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu', 3097; cf. Liang, *Intellectual Trends*, 92.

59 Kang, 'Woshi', 73.

60 Kang, 63.

61 See Kang, 'Jiaoxue tongyi 教学通义 [The General Import of Teaching and Learning (1885)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 17–58. For a good discussion on the Gongyang influence on Kang's early thought as expressed in the work, see Liu Wei 刘巍, 'Jiaoxue tongyi yu Kang Youwei de zaoqi jingxue luxiang jiqi zhuanbian 教学通义与康有为的早期经学路向及其转变 [Jiaoxue Tongyi and Kang's Approach to Classical Studies and Its Ensuing Change]', *历史研究 [Historical Research]*, no. 4 (2005): 190–49.

intellectual world.[62] In this work, Kang upheld New Text Confucianism and attacked the Old Text Classics in the course of reinterpreting Confucianism in a radical fashion. Kang made a number of bold assertions. First, contrary to the traditional account, the Confucian Classics had not been totally destroyed in the book-burning in the Qin dynasty, for, he argued, those copies kept in the imperial library had survived. It followed that New Text Classics as transmitted in the Han period were authentic and complete texts. Second, the Old Texts had, in their entirety, been forged by Liu Xin, who had also tried to cover up the traces of his forgery by interpolating glosses into ancient works. The reason for his forgery, according to Kang, was to help Wang Mang usurp the Han throne and legitimize the Xin dynasty. Among other things, Liu had compiled two influential works: one was the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Official System of Zhou) under the name of the Duke of Zhou, making the Duke a rival to Confucius; the other was the *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), whose fact-finding statements went against the mystical, religious interpretations of the *Gongyang Commentary*. Liu's spurious works, Kang claimed, became widely diffused and accepted through the great commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (678–751), whose popular edition and annotation of the Confucian Classics was based primarily on the Old Texts. As a result, many books of the New Texts became mixed up with the Old Text version and it remained difficult to distinguish the true classics from the corrupted texts. Third, the extant Five Classics had been authored by Confucius himself, rather than merely edited by him as had been traditionally supposed.[63] The *Annals*, in particular, enshrined 'great principles hidden in esoteric language' (*weiyan dayi* 微言大義), through which Confucius had advanced the ideas of *tuogu gaizhi* 托古改制 or institutional changes proposed on the basis of false attribution to earlier sage kings.[64]

Having made these claims, Kang attempted to substantiate them by painstakingly going through various ancient works and selecting an array of evidence in his

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62 Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu', 3097.

63 In his later writings, he would take a more lenient view on Confucius' authorship of all the Classics, acknowledging that Confucius 'edited' the *Documents* and 'trimmed' the *Odes*. See, for example, Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu 中庸注 [The Doctrine of the Mean Annotated (1901)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 5, 2007, 389.

64 As Liang Qichao stressed, by institutional change Kang meant a kind of political and social reform. Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu', 3098.

favour.[65] Whether Kang's claims were entirely correct or not is beyond the scope of this thesis,[66] but his reinterpretation shook the foundation of imperial Confucianism, for its very sources, the Old Text Classics, had now been called into question. No doubt this new interpretation would pave the way for his reform proposals, but at the same time, Kang was, as might be expected, accused of distorting the orthodox teachings by the orthodox Confucianists, causing such a furore that copies of *Forged Classics* were ordered to be destroyed by an imperial order. Predictably, the critiques and the issuance of the imperial order only served to bolster its fame and popularity.

Kang sought to defend the position of Confucius upheld in the New Text school: Confucius was not a mere transmitter of ancient teachings as had been traditionally regarded, but an originator of new teachings and hence, conceivably, a founder of a religion (*jiaozhu*). In the *Apocryphal Texts* popular in the Han period, such as the *Chunqiuwei* 春秋緯 (Apocrypha on the *Annals*), Confucius was presented as a supernatural being. According to one account, his mother was once taking a walk on a hill when she fell asleep. In her dream, she was invited to the Black God (*heidi* 黑帝) and had intercourse with him. When she awoke she felt pregnant and eventually gave birth to Confucius within a hollow mulberry tree. For that reason Confucius was called the Black Sage (*xuansheng* 玄聖). In other accounts, the capture of a unicorn (*huolin* 獲麟, allegedly in 481) was interpreted as an omen that Heaven had conferred its Mandate on Confucius to found a new dynasty, and a small red bird was believed to have brought an inscription from Heaven, announcing that Confucius had created institutions and laws following the Mandate of Heaven.[67]

Kang did not hesitate to follow these *Apocryphal Texts* in deifying Confucius. In a following work, *Kongzi gaizhikao* or *Confucius as a Reformer* (1897), he wrote:

> Heaven, having pity for the many afflictions suffered by men who live on this great earth, (caused) the Black [God] to send down his semen so as to create

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65 Cf. Kang, 'Xinxue weijingkao 新学伪经考 [An Investigation into the Forged Classics of the Xin Dynasty (1891)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 1, 2007, 353–558; Kang, 'Kongzi gaizhikao 孔子改制考 [A Treatise on Confucius as a Reformer (1897)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 3, 2007, 1–260.

66 For a thorough critique of Kang's claims, see Qian Mu 钱穆, 'Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu 刘向歆父子年谱 [Chronicles of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, Father and Son]', *Yenching Journal*, no. 7 (1930).

67 See Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 2:129–30.

> a being who would rescue the people from their troubles—a being of divine intelligence, who would be a sage-king, a teacher for all ages, a bulwark for all men, and a religious leader [*jiaozhu*] for the whole world.[68]

By virtue of his miraculous conception, Divine authority was bestowed upon Confucius, and Kang portrayed him as a Heaven-ordained teacher for all ages. Liang Qichao later observed that because Kang had 'mistakenly' considered Christian worship as the basis of good government and state power in Europe, he had attempted to exalt Confucius to the rank of Christ as a founder of a religion.[69] There is no doubt that the role of Christ served as a reference for Kang in his religious endeavour, but considering his early religious experience, Kang almost certainly had a personal belief in the divinity of Confucius. Kang stressed that, although divinely-originated, the religion of Confucius was human-oriented. This is a key theme that, as we shall see, he would reiterate frequently. The central mission entrusted to Confucius was to lay down infallible laws and formulate institutions valid for all ages, a system that would eventually bind together all people.[70] Kang believed that the teachings of Confucius were directed toward the regulation and improvement of human life, with the ultimate aim of bringing unity and harmony to China and to the earth.

Kang claimed that Confucius' essential teachings were encoded in the Classics and were primarily transmitted by oral tradition. As time passed, however, misinterpretations crept into the texts and some key doctrines of Confucius were forgotten. One may ask: what were exactly those doctrines and how did they get lost? Kang's discussions on this issue were scattered among his various writings and lectures to his students. A coherent summary was offered by Liang in his 1899 speech on 'Religious Reformation in China' at the Japanese Society of Philosophy.[71] According to Liang, just as Buddhism was comprised of two major schools, Mahayana and Hinayana, Confucianism also consisted of two schools: *xiaokang* 小康 (Lesser Prosperity) and *datong* 大同 (Great Unity). The doctrine of *xiaokang* represented Confucius' mundane teachings, which were taught to all his disciples

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68 Kang, 'Gaizhikao', 3; translated in Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 2:675.

69 Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu', 3098.

70 Kang, 'Gaizhikao', 3.

71 Liang, 'Lun Zhina Zongjiao Gaige 论支那宗教改革 [On the Religious Reformation in China (1899)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 2, 1999, 263–66.

through the *Odes*, the *Documents*, the *Music* and the *Rites*, which had been edited by Confucius.[72] The doctrine of *datong* represented Confucius's supramundane teachings, which were only transmitted through the *Changes* and the *Annals* to disciples of higher intellect. Being written by Confucius himself, these two books were the chief repositories of the essence of his teachings. In the former were enshrined Confucius' teachings on the 'supramundane dharma', while the latter 'encoded' his subtle principles on statecraft (*jingshi* 經世, literally, setting the world in order), which needed decipherment in order to fathom their inner meanings.[73]

During the ensuing Warring States period (403–221 BCE), Liang continued, the *xiaokang* school was primarily inherited by Xunzi, while the *datong* school was inherited by Mencius through the *Annals* and by Zhuangzi 庄子 (369–286 BCE) through the *Changes*. During the Han period, however, the doctrine of *datong* was discontinued, while that of *xiaokang* prospered. That happened because, for one thing, the rulers of various dynasties preferred the *xiaokang* school, which tended to support despotism, to the *datong* school, which upheld democratic ideals. For another, the subtle yet profound teachings enshrined in the *Annals* were obscured, as people were increasingly side-tracked by Old Text Confucianism from the more reliable interpretation of the *Annals*, namely, the *Gongyang Commentary*. That meant, Liang stressed, that what had been practised in the name of Confucianism for the past two thousand years was only the *xiaokang* school transmitted through Xunzi, while the comprehensive, authentic *datong* school had been forgotten.[74]

Kang and Liang both considered religion to be a profoundly powerful source for the development and strengthening of a country. The fact that the modern West enjoyed its present level of civilization was precisely due to the 'religious revolution' and the

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[72] This account differed from Kang's claim in *Confucius as a Reformer* that all the Six Classics were authored by Confucius in the name of the ancient Sages. Liang offered a weak version of the authorship of the Six Classics to soften Kang's strong version, a position that Kang occasionally endorsed. Cf. Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 389. A note is needed here on the term 'Six Classics'. The Confucian tradition holds that there had been originally 'Six Classics', but one, the *Music* (*yue* 樂), became lost, hence the more commonly used term 'Five Classics'.

[73] For a detailed discussion on the protean idea of *jingshi [chingshi]*, see Hao Chang, 'The Intellectual Heritage of the Confucian Ideal of Ching-Shih', in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, ed. Wei-ming Tu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 72–91.

[74] Liang, 'Lun Zhina Zongjiao', 263–64.

'revival of classical learning'.[75] By contrast, China's present weakness and its inferiority to the West were due to the fact that the original teachings of Confucius had been lost. The pressing task for China, therefore, was to initiate a 'religious reformation' in order to bring the true teachings of Confucius out of obscurity, a mission that fell, Liang said, on the shoulders of none other than Kang himself. In summary, Liang declared that the teachings of Confucius as expounded by Kang conformed to the needs of modern society, as they had six qualities: they were progressive rather than conservative; they advocated equality instead of despotism; they were inclusive rather than exclusive; they were devoted to the greater social good rather than just the interest of individual persons, they encouraged independence instead of weakness; and they valued the soul above the body.[76]

Convinced that Confucius had originally been a founder of *jiao* or religion whose essential teachings had been lost, Kang endeavoured to restore Confucianism to its 'pristine' state by recasting it as a religion, to be called *Kongjiao* 孔教. In doing so, he was consciously following the example of Martin Luther who had initiated the Protestant Reformation, and for that reason, Kang was often referred to by his disciples as the 'Martin Luther of the Confucian Religion'.[77]

2.3.3 Reform and a Confucian Church

Kang adopted the Gongyang concept of the Three Ages, which he considered as one of the lost doctrines of Confucius, and developed it into a progressive view of history that would furnish the basis of his political theory. As a society developed from the Age of Disorder (*juluan* 據亂) through the Age of Approaching Peace (*shengping* 升平) to the Age of Universal Peace (*taiping* 太平), the system of government would accordingly evolve historically from the rule of a despot through an intermediate stage of joint-rule by a despot and (the representatives of) the people to a third stage of rule

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75 Liang was probably referring to the Reformation and the Renaissance. Liang, 263.

76 Liang, 263. Liang then elaborated on each of the six qualities except the last one, 'valuing the soul above the body'. One possible reason why Liang did not talk about the soul could be that Kang had not yet written much on the topic at that time.

77 Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 486. It is interesting to note that Martin Luther had also had a mystical experience through which he suddenly 'saw the Scripture in an entirely new light' and straightway he felt as if he were 'born anew' and he had found 'the door of paradise thrown wide open'. Quoted in James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 382.

by the people themselves. Late-nineteenth-century Qing, in his judgment, was in the Age of Approaching Peace, so its autocratic government ought to undergo institutional reforms towards the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.[78] Convinced of the truth of this Confucian doctrine, in the latter 1890s, Kang initiated a campaign for reform, which was triggered by China's debacle in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). China's defeat proved to be a watershed in the course of Chinese intellectual history in several ways. To begin with, the event signified the ultimate failure of the technology-oriented Self-Strengthening Movement: the clear policy implications were that technological improvement alone was inadequate to save and strengthen China. Secondly, shocked by the power of a Japan transformed through Westernization, many of the Chinese literati and officials mitigated their earlier opposition to reforms and acknowledged the Japanese experience as a more successful model for development from which China could learn useful lessons for achieving its goal of becoming wealthy and powerful. Thirdly, the result of the war had completely destroyed the Sino-centric view of the world, causing the reigning Confucianism to be seriously undermined, and attempts had to be undertaken by the Chinese intelligentsia to work out a new view of the world.[79]

When the news of China's defeat spread to Beijing, Kang was there for his metropolitan examinations—he had passed the provincial examinations two years before—and succeeded in becoming a *jinshi* 進士 (metropolitan graduate) before being appointed a second-class secretary in the Board of Works. He acted immediately to lead his fellow examination candidates gathered at the capital in sending a petition (known as *gongzhe shangshu* 公車上書, candidates' memorial) to the Throne urging the rejection of the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki, by which Taiwan was ceded to Japan; however, that effort was all in vain. Nevertheless, Kang and Liang (who also took the examinations but failed) decided to remain in the capital in order to make new efforts to generate public awareness of the need for political reforms. They started a reform newspaper and established a reform association, *Qiangxuehui* 強學會 (Society for National Strengthening). Initially, the society was enthusiastically supported by the elite in the capital, whose sponsors and members

78 Liang, 'Lun Zhina Zongjiao', 264–65.
79 See Furth, 'Intellectual Change', 13; Fairbank, 'Introduction'.

included high officials and missionaries, as well as Kang's associates. Because of its critical review of state affairs, however, the society, as well as the newspaper, was suppressed by a decree of the imperial Court early in 1896. Subsequently, a string of reform associations and newspapers were set up in several provinces, and particularly in Hunan, where Tan Sitong, a young scholar who had been inspired by Kang's reform calls, was playing an instrumental role (I discuss Tan in the next section).[80]

Because of the mounting hostility among the powerful conservatives to his activities, Kang left for Guangdong, where he resumed his teaching at the *Wanmu caotang* and made lecture tours to Guilin in the neighbouring Guanxi province. With a hard-earned *jinshi* degree and the newly-garnered fame as leader of the 1895 petition initiative, Kang enjoyed considerable respect from and commanded some influence over the local scholars and officials. He observed that scholars in Guangxi were very open-minded, like those from Guangdong and Hunan, and he conceived the idea of expanding the base of his political and religious cause to Guangxi. Therefore, he proposed and supervised the organization of *Shengxuehui* 圣學會 (Society of Sacred Learning) in Guilin in 1897. The society was set up, in Kang's words, to venerate Confucius alone, as the divine founder of a religion.[81] In taking this initiative, Kang held up Christianity as a reference. 'Western countries have promoted their religion across the planet and penetrated its influence inland in China,' he wrote. 'The common worship of Jesus, and Jesus alone, has united and empowered the missionaries. It is the Chinese scholars' fault, then, to have failed to revere and worship Confucius alone, and promulgate his sacred religion.'[82] Emulating Christianity, Kang introduced the practice of worshipping Confucius and having lectures every ten days. In an effort to restore ancient Chinese practices, Kang established a school affiliated to the society, teaching subjects in traditional Chinese learning and Western learning. The society also planned to sponsor translation of Western books so as to educate and enlighten the general populace. 'Learning and

[80] For a concise yet informative introduction to the reform movement in Beijing and Hunan, see Chang, 'Intellectual Change', 291–318.

[81] Kang, 'Shengxuehui houxu 圣学会后序 [An Afterword to the Society of Sacred Learning (1897)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 2, 2007, 265–66. Kang's efforts to idolize Confucius had started from the early 1890s when he had attempted to revive and practise ancient religious rituals for worship of Confucius at his academy in Guangzhou. See Kang, 'Woshi', 81.

[82] Kang, 'Shengxuehui yuanqi 圣学会缘起 [An Introduction to the Society of Sacred Learning (1897)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 2, 2007, 268.

scholarship,' Kang observed, 'are needed if the Confucian doctrine is to be promulgated.'[83] In addition, the society started a weekly (which later became a monthly), the first private newspaper in the province. The society, together with its school and newspaper, thrived for over a year until it was banned as a consequence of the failed Reform of 1898. Liang considered the society to be the southern counterpart of the *Qiangxuehui* in Beijing as an important source of new learning and new thought.[84] Though short-lived, the society would serve, as I will show later, as a model for the future endeavours of Kang and his followers in exile, and as a forerunner to the Confucian Religion Association eventually established in China in the early 1910s (see Chapter 4).

Kang returned to the capital again in late 1897, when China was faced with another crisis. It started with the forced lease of Jiaozhou (Kiautschou) Bay to Germany, which was followed by the seizure of Port Arthur and Dalian by Russia, and the demands for territorial concessions made by France, Japan and Great Britain. These events and the poor performance of the Qing government led Kang and many of his contemporaries to believe that China was in imminent danger of partition. Conscious of, and building upon the widespread sense of crisis, Kang organized in April 1898 the short-lived *Baoguohui* 保國會 (Society for Preserving China), calling for prompt reforms in order to preserve 'the country, the Chinese race and the religion/teaching' (*baoguo* 保國, *baozhong* 保種, *baojiao* 保教). By *baojiao* Kang meant the protection of the Confucian tradition, 'the sacred teaching', from imminent cessation in face of the foreign military and religious encroachment.[85]

The best way to preserve Confucianism, in Kang's view, was to reform and institutionalize it by modelling it after the then evidently successful Christian practices in the West. His proposal was motivated by at least three factors: his conviction that Confucianism was originally and essentially a religion; the perceived superiority of the church as an organizational form of Christianity in the West; and the alarming spread of Christianity in China. As early as in 1895, he had observed that the

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83 Kang, 268.

84 Wendian 钟文典 Zhong, *Guangxi Tongshi 广西通史 [A Comprehensive History of Guangxi]*, vol. 2 (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1899), 407, 382–410.

85 Kang, 'Baoguohui zhangcheng 保国会章程 [The Charter of the Society for Preserving China (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 54–55.

Chinese people were prone to be seduced by Christianity precisely because the true doctrines of Confucius had not been properly and duly promulgated. He lamented the fact that while Christian churches were seen in many places, there was only one Confucian temple in each locality. To counter the Christian influence, he proposed that the state should sponsor scholars well-versed in the doctrines of Confucius and support them in their efforts to instruct the common people in the authentic doctrines of the Confucian Classics. Building on an 1888 proposal to Pan Yiqin (see Section 2.1.2), he suggested that all improper temples across the country be transformed into Confucian temples; and that Confucian teachers should be sent abroad as missionaries to spread Confucian teachings and establish Confucian temples.[86]

All of Kang's efforts culminated in the launch on 21 June 1898 of a reform programme by the Emperor, to whom Kang served as one of the chief advisers. In a following memorial to the Emperor, which accompanied the presentation of his *Confucius as a Reformer*, Kang proposed the establishment of a national Confucian Church (*Kongjiaohui* 孔教會). The church would, Kang suggested, have as chairman Duke Yansheng (衍聖公), the eldest male in the main line of descent of Confucius.[87] Membership was to be open to everyone, high and low, educated and illiterate, in the empire. It would have two practical functions. First, it would relieve the government of the unpleasant task of having to deal with cases of religious disputes involving Christian converts (the Confucian Church would agree on and abide by codified rules with its Catholic and Protestant counterparts). As was well-known, religious disputes in Late Qing often led to diplomatic crises or even military conflicts with foreign powers. The second function of the Confucian Church was to revive the morality of the people by dispatching instructors across the country to diffuse Confucian teachings. For that purpose, Kang requested that an imperial decree be issued to have all improper temples, such as those erected to worship animal spirits, converted to local Confucian churches or temples,[88] which all people, including women and

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[86] Kang, 'Shang Qingdi disanshu 上清帝第三书 [My Third Memorial to the Throne (1895)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 2, 2007, 75.

[87] The title was conferred in accordance with a millennium-long tradition. The then Duke Yansheng was Kong Lingyi 孔令貽 (1872–1919), the 76th-generatoin descendent of Confucius.

[88] Kang used the two words interchangeably, Confucian temples (*gongmiao* 孔子廟) and Confucian churches (*gongzi jiaohui* 孔子教會).

otherwise marginalized villagers who had previously been denied access to Confucian temples, should be allowed to worship at.[89]

In a revised version of the memorial,[90] Kang set forth more details on the structure of a Confucian religion based on the Christian model. He did not conceal his admiration for what he believed to be the role of Christianity as a unifying force for many Western countries.[91] In place of the Confucian Church he had proposed earlier, he now proposed that a ministry for religion should be created at the national level with an elected head; Confucian churches or temples should be set up in each locality; Confucian pastors should be elected and professionalized, with at least one assigned to each church; both men and women should gather in their local church every seven days to receive instruction in the Confucian Classics; Confucius, along with Heaven, should be worshipped as the divine founder of a religion for China; and, last but not least, all improper temples should be converted into Confucian temples by imperial order and with the use of force if necessary.[92] As a result, what he proposed was very similar to the Christian practice, with Christ replaced by Confucius, the Bible by the Confucian Classics, and God by Heaven. His reference to Christianity, however, was limited to the institutional aspect; at the doctrinal level, he had, as demonstrated in the previous section, turned to ancient Chinese texts. As Goossaert and Palmer have observed, Kang's proposal was a 'wild hybridization' of Confucian fundamentalism and Christianity as conveyed by missionaries in China.[93]

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89 Kang, 'Qing shangding jiaoan falv ... yi zun shengshi er bao dajiao zhe 请商定教案法律.....以尊圣师而保大教折 [A Memorial to the Throne Requesting the Making of Laws on Religious Disputes ... so as to Revere the Sacred Teacher and Preserve Our Great Faith (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 93; cf. Kang, 'Woshi', 94.

90 When he published it following the failure of the reform, Kang did not reveal that it was a revised version rather than the original version. The discrepancies between the two were not proved until the 1980s when the original memorial was brought to light. For this Kang was accused of forgery himself, see Xiangji 孔祥吉 Kong, *Kang Youwei Bianfa Zouzhang Jikao 康有为变法奏章辑考 [A Critical Collection of Kang Youwei's Memorials on Reforms]* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2008). This issue is not crucial insofar as this research is concerned, because the two versions differed in detail but not in principle. Kang's revision and editing of the original memorial also allows future scholars or researchers to follow or trace the development of his thought.

91 See Kang, 'Woshi', 94.

92 Kang, 'Qingzun Kongsheng wei guojiao li jiaohui jiaobu yi Kongzi jinian er fei yinci zhe 请尊孔圣为国教立教会教部以孔子纪年而废淫祠折 [A Memorial Requesting that Confucius Be Worshiped as the Founder of the State Religion, that a Ministry of Religion and a Church Be Established, that Calendar Years be Reckoned from the Birth of Confucius, and that Improper Temples Be Suppressed (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 98.

93 Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 46.

By suggesting the forcible conversion of all improper temples into Confucian shrines, Kang put forward a precise plan to eradicate Chinese traditional or folk religion so as to establish a Confucian religion as the exclusive state religion. In both the 1898 memorial and its revised version, Kang criticized Chinese folk religion, lashing out at various polytheistic practices, which in his view were responsible for the degradation of the Chinese people. He listed the popular yet 'improper' cults of worshipping gods of fertility, wealth, carpentry and literature. 'It's a crying shame,' he lamented, 'that some Confucian scholars, heedless of the import of their learning, pray to and worship the so-called god of literature!' Even worship of the god of the town *Chenghuang* 城隍, a practice endorsed by the state, was, in Kang's view, incompatible with the Confucian doctrines. What appeared most absurd to Kang was for humans to worship such animal gods as the Dragon King, the Bull King and the Monkey King, not to mention the worship of a trunk or a rock.[94] Beyond that, it pained him to notice that Confucius was not widely worshipped among the general populace, while Guan Yu 关羽 was worshipped in every household, although the latter was no more than a distant follower of the former.[95] Kang's rhetoric was reminiscent of contemporary missionary attacks on Chinese polytheistic beliefs and superstitious practices.

Kang's proposal for creating a Confucian religion on the Christian model found little support among the wide circle of Chinese intellectuals and officials. Not only were the more conservative opposed to his proposal; even many of the more reform-minded, such as Yan Fu, found his ideas too radical.[96] Indeed, after the publication of his memorial to turn improper temples into Confucian churches, a rumour started to circulate that Kang may have converted the Emperor to Christianity, and a subsequent imperial edict protecting the missionaries only reinforced the impression that Christianity was out to eradicate Chinese religion.[97] In response to these circumstances, Kang changed his strategy. In a later memorial to the Emperor, he suggested that all temples in towns and villages across the country be turned into

[94] Kang, 'Qingzun Kongsheng', 96.

[95] Cf. Kang, 97.

[96] Yan Fu 严复, *Yan Fu ji* 严复集 *[Collected Works of Yan Fu]*, ed. Wang Shi 王栻, vol. 1 (Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 82, 85.

[97] Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 46.

primary schools and that temple revenues be appropriated for funding those schools. Kang remained unswerving in his attacks on what he called immoral cults and improper forms of worship. The Emperor was so pleased with the proposal that he immediately promulgated an edict of the same nature, an edict that was widely understood as a call for the destruction of all temples. Although the edict was later recalled, Kang's proposal foreshadowed the large-scale confiscation and destruction of temples, and the anti-superstition campaigns of early twentieth-century China.[98]

Kang's effort to institutionalize Confucianism and reform Chinese religion, however, soon came to an end when the whole reform enterprise was cut short, in less than 100 days since its start (hence the name 'Hundred Days Reform'), in a coup by the Empress Dowager, who remained the ultimate decision-maker of the Dynasty. The Emperor was put under house arrest and his reform measures were cancelled; Kang and Liang escaped death and fled to Japan, with a reward placed on their heads, but six of their fellow reformers were beheaded, among whom was Tan Sitong, son of a provincial governor. Given his fame as an advocate of reform in Hunan, Tan had been, during the Reform of 1898, summoned to Beijing for an audience with the Emperor and then appointed a low-rank post in the Grand Council, assisting in reform measures and facilitating contacts between the Emperor and Kang. On the eve of the coup, Tan disdained flight and chose to be executed, fulfilling his expressed wish to become the first to shed blood for the cause of reform in modern Chinese history.[99] Tan's death brought great sorrow to Kang, who later penned these verses in his memory, 'A rare and heroic soul, he has been invited to reside beside God (*Di*).'[100]

As Kang's admirer and 'disciple in spirit', Tan's monist philosophy had been considered to have been inspired by Kang's thought; at the same time, Tan's thinking,

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98 Kang, 'Qinggai zhisheng shuyuan wei zhongxuetang xiangyi yinci wei xiao xuetang... 请改直省书院为中学堂乡邑淫祠为小学堂 ... [A Memorial to the Throne Requesting the Transformation of Provincial Academies into Middle Schools and Improper Temples in Towns and Villages into Primary Schools ...(1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 4, 2007, 317–19; cf. Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question*, 46–47.

99 For a concise sketch of Tan's life, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644-1912* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2010), 792–95; for a detailed, comprehensive account of Tan's intellectual development, see the introduction to Sin-wai Chan, trans., *An Exposition of Benevolence: The Jen-Hsüeh of T'an Ssu-t'ung* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984).

100 Kang, 'Kang Nanhai xiansheng shiji 康南海先生诗集 [Collected Poems of Mr. Kang of Nanhai (1888-1927)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 12, 2007, 189. In Chinese, 鬼雄請帝在帝旁.

especially his appropriation of Western scientific notions in his religious reflections, would exert a traceable impact on Kang's thought. Therefore, I will devote a large portion of the next section to Tan in relation to the reformists' efforts to construct a new, unified system of knowledge.

2.4 Knowledge Is One

Encouraged by the reformist ferment in the mid-1890s, there was a renewed and expanded quest for knowledge among the more open-minded Chinese intellectuals. As has been shown in the previous sections, a key feature of Kang's reform campaign was the advocacy of Western learning, in which he saw both a power to emancipate the Chinse mind and a means of strengthening China. To meet the increasing demand for new knowledge, Kang proposed that in addition to translating directly from Western texts, translation should be carried out from Japanese sources as well. His reasoning was that translating from Japanese would be more efficient because of the affinity between the two languages, and that Japanese translations of Western books represented a selection by the Japanese scholars of the best original titles.[101] For this purpose, by reviewing his own collection of Japanese books and referring to certain Japanese catalogues, Kang had compiled a lengthy, annotated bibliography of Japanese works. It listed more than 7,000 titles grouped under fifteen subjects, namely, physiology (medicine included), sciences (including philosophy, psychology and ethics also included), geography and cartography, politics, law, agriculture, industry, commerce, education, literature, languages and scripts, fine arts, fiction, and military arts.[102] It is worth pointing out that Kang used the Japanese neologism '*kexue*' (science) in his bibliophagy. For that reason, he was sometimes given the credit for being the first Chinese scholar to use the term,[103] but that was more the result of copying Japanese titles than an intentional, informed borrowing of a new term. In fact, he had serious reservation about that term, which he rarely used in his other writings.

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101 Kang, 'Riben shumuzhi 日本书目志 [An Annotated Bibliography of Japanese Titles (1898)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 3, 2007, 264.

102 Kang, 'Riben shumuzhi'. For a discussion on the possible sources of Kang's bibliography, see Mao, *Woshi jianzhu*, 382–83.

103 See Fan, 'Cong gezhi dao kexue'.

Although Kang's recommendations, as stated in the list of books which in his view deserved translation, were not followed by the contemporary translators,[104] his bibliography contributed to his countrymen's awareness of the various branches of new knowledge and gave them an idea of the different possible ways of classifying knowledge. Traditionally, books in China were grouped into four categories: *jing* 經 (Confucian Classics), *shi* 史 (historical works), *zi* 子 (works of other schools of thought, works devoted to agriculture, medicine, mathematics and astronomy, and the miscellaneous works) and *ji* 集 (literary works). As they strove to acquire Western learning, the Chinese intellectuals, Kang's disciples, followers and associates in particular, started to reflect on the classification of knowledge as well as on the relationship between Chinese and Western learning.

2.4.1 A Three-Tiered System

A notable attempt at classification was the 'triumvirate of knowledge' proposed by Liang in his 1896 *Xixue shumubiao* 西學書目表 (A Bibliographical Table of Books on Western Learning). The table included over three hundred titles deemed 'worthy', selected from Western works translated into Chinese over the previous half century, many of which were accompanied by his concise annotations.[105] Breaking from convention, Liang classified Western learning into three categories: *xue* 學 (science), *zheng* 政 (management) and *jiao* 教 (religion). Under *xue* were listed such subcategories as mathematics, mechanics, electricity, chemistry, acoustics, optics, thermodynamics, astronomy, geology, zoology and botany, physiology, medicine and graphics. To the category of *zheng*, he assigned historiography, law, bureaucracy, and management of education, agriculture, mining, commerce, shipping, and art of war. He listed *jiao* as the third category, although he omitted books on religion in his bibliographical table. Liang acknowledged the difficulty involved in classifying Western books, pointing out that as the art of management was based on the sciences, there was no clear demarcation of boundaries between books on the sciences and

[104] Kang was right, though, in his prescription, which, as it happened, turned out to be a good prediction—by the early 1900s, more books had been translated into Chinese from Japanese than directly Western sources.

[105] Liang, 'Xixue shumubiao 西学书目表 [A Bibliographical Table of Books on Western Learning]', in *YBSHJ-JWW*, vol. 2, 2006, 1121–58.

books on management.[106] He further indicated that scientific discoveries or principles were to conform or testify to the validity of the subtle, profound principles of religion. Therefore, he reasoned, understanding of the former was conducive to a surer grasp of the latter. A basic knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and geography, for example, should make it easier for pupils to comprehend the subtle teachings of the Confucian Classics (although Liang did not elaborate on how).[107]

Liang's triumvirate of knowledge was embraced by Tan Sitong, when the two met and conversed in Beijing in early 1896. By that time, Tan had already become an earnest student of Western learning and a convert to the ideas espoused by Kang, whom he had not yet met but whose *Forged Classics* he had read. When he learned from Liang the entirety of Kang's teachings based on the New Text exegesis, he discovered that he and Kang shared a great deal in common in their thinking.[108] Thereupon he declared himself 'a disciple in spirit' (*sishu dizi* 私淑弟子) of Kang.[109] His admiration for Kang was such that he spoke effusively of Kang as being 'an equal of Confucius' (*kongzi zhiwai wuou* 孔子之外無偶) and he saw in Kang the 'rebirth of the Buddha' (*yifo chushi* 一佛出世).[110] At the same time, Tan had also developed a deep interest in Buddhism and Christianity through reading Buddhist and Christian books as well as cultivating a close association with Buddhists and Christians. Liang recalled that by the time they met, Tan had become a great admirer of Jesus' teachings on love.[111] Like Kang during his youth, Tan also made efforts to integrate various components of his learning, Chinese and Western, scientific and religious.

Tan did not unthinkingly accept Liang's classification of knowledge in its entirety, however; he developed it into a three-tiered hierarchy, with science and religion being

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106 Liang, 'Xixue shumubiao xuli 西学书目表序例 [Preface to A Bibliographical Table of Books on Western Learning (1896)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 1, 1999, 82.

107 Liang, 'Du xixueshu fa 读西学书法 [On how to read books on Western learning]', in *YBSHJ-JWW*, vol. 2, 2006, 1170.

108 Tan Sitong 谭嗣同, 'Zhishi shipian 治事十篇 [Ten Essays on Managing Affairs]', in *TSTQJ*, 1981, 445.

109 Liang, 'Tan Sitong zhuan 谭嗣同传 [A Biography of Tan Sitong (1898)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 2, 1999, 231.

110 Tan, 'Shang Ouyang Zhonghu 上歐陽中鵠 [Letters to Ouyang Zhonghu]', in *TSTQJ*, 1981, 475.

111 Liang, 'Tan Sitong zhuan', 232. For a discussion on the missionary influence on the reformers, see Zhi-yun Chen, 'Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao's Missionary Education: A Case Study of Missionary Influence on the Reformers', in *Papers on China*, vol. 16 (Cambridge, MA.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1962), 66–125.

placed at the two ends. 'There are various kinds of sciences,' he wrote, 'and the most practical should be the natural sciences; there are different arts of management, and the most practical should be knowledge systems to promote people's rights. The profound principles of both management and learning can be found in religion, which is more comprehensive.'[112] When acquiring knowledge, Tan continued, one should begin with mastery of the natural sciences, which constituted the 'foundation of basic learning', and then proceed to the art of management. When solidly grounded in these two, one could then explore the 'profound, subtle truths of religion', the highest level of knowledge.[113] Tan found this progression from the study of nature to the acquisition of spiritual virtues in complete agreement with the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism. In the Buddhist context, knowledge involved the 'transmutation of sense-consciousness' before that of 'thought-consciousness'. Similarly, the Confucian Classics stressed the point that the acquisition of knowledge relied on an examination of the nature of things, and Confucius had said that studies of what was below could help one get through to what was up above (*xiaxue shangda*).[114]

Thus, Tan attached the greatest importance to religion, on which depended the success of the other two types of knowledge. 'When religion is not practised,' he wrote, 'management will deteriorate, which in turn will lead to the extinction of science.'[115] Therefore, it was no use discussing management and science without discussing religion, for otherwise 'the skills in management and accomplishments in science would be turned into lethal weapons.'[116] He implied that religion provided man with spiritual guidance for the application of social theories and scientific discoveries. On the other hand, science was considered no less important, for it could be 'the most efficient way of achieving the immediate end of national defence.'[117] In Tan's three-tiered hierarchy of knowledge, science and religion were united, with the former leading to the subtle truths in the latter, and the latter serving as a spiritual guide for the application of the former.

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112 Tan, 'Shang Ouyang', 462.
113 Tan, 464.
114 Tan, 'Renxue 仁學 [The Science of Benevolence]', in *TSTQJ*, 1981, 331.
115 Tan, 'Shang Ouyang', 464.
116 Tan, 455.
117 Tan, 455.

Tan's prioritization of religion in the system of knowledge reflected his religious zeal, which was shared by Liang and their friend Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑 (1863–1924), a lay Buddhist scholar who sympathized with the reformers. The three of them would read Buddhist texts and the *Book of Revelation* in the Bible together, and express their reverence for Confucius, the Buddha, and Jesus, whom they referred to as the Three Sages (*sansheng* 三聖), the 'only three' who had attained divinity.[118] 'We were carried away by various religions,' Liang recalled about twenty years later, 'whose founders we regarded as being exalted above the common run of human beings. We revered and blindly worshipped them to such a degree that we decided no poems should be written without employing allusions from the Scriptures […] of Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity.'[119] As a result, their poems 'of new learning' were often full of terms, images or metaphors from the literature of different religions. Two lines by Tan, for example, may be cited as an illustration:

> Three denials were uttered before a rooster began to crow,
> Don't fight against the Dragon and the Frogs over territory.[120]

According to Liang, the dragon was interpreted as an allusion to Confucius and the frogs, his followers.[121] Although it is hard to see how they could connect the unflattering imagery of the frogs with the followers of Confucius, these lines are quoted merely to reveal Tan's passion for religion and the reverence and respect he and his youthful intellectual companions had for the founders of the three religions.

2.4.2 Harmonizing the Three Religions

The youthful idealists also cherished the ideal of unifying the three religions into one, an idea that Kang had proposed. Kang's contemporary critics accused of him of harbouring a desire to be the 'Pope' of the proposed unified religion.[122] While Liang considered Confucianism, or to be exact, Kang's version of Confucianism, deserving

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118 Tan, 'Renxue', 289.
119 Liang, 'Shihua 诗话 [Literary Criticisms]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 18, 1999, 5326.
120 Liang, 5326.
121 Liang, 5326.
122 Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬, 'Kang Youwei shishi 康有为事实 [Facts about Kang Youwei]', in *Cong wuxu dao xinhai 从戊戌到辛亥 [From 1898 to 1911]*, ed. Tang Zhijun 汤志钧 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1990), 65.

of being regarded as a superior universal religion for the world in the future,[123] Tan argued that the Buddha could unify Confucius and Jesus, all of whom were alike in their benevolence, but differed in the reasons for being benevolent.[124] The spiritual concept that Tan identified as the fundamental universal principle underlying Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity was 'interconnection'; this principle of 'interconnectedness' was, according to Tan, the fundamental meaning of 'benevolence', through which the Way or Dao unites all as one. The sense of interconnection between self and others, Tan explained, which was derived from the Buddhist idea that there was neither a form of others nor of self, was shared by Confucianism and Christianity.[125] Here Tan was perhaps alluding to the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; or as Confucius put it, Do not do unto others what you would not have done unto you. With this spirit, Tan advocated the exchange or 'connection' between different peoples in the realm of religion to complement the already existing exchange in science, government and trade.[126]

In addition, Tan considered two things as being essential to all religions, that is, the virtue of compassion and belief in the soul. Drawing on Martin's 1881 translation of Williamson's *Ancient Religions*, he emphasized that all religions, be they Western or Eastern, of the past or present, followed the two universal principles. No religion could, he asserted, be established without preaching these two doctrines, and for a religion to spread to the most barbaric and perverse regions, it had to speak of the soul in the most absurd manner if necessary.[127] In Tan's view, once the immortality of the soul and the existence of an afterlife were recognized, even the most benighted persons would know that there were infinite joys to delight in or bitterness to suffer after death; they therefore would not conceive of covetous or pessimistic thoughts only because of transient suffering or happiness in their present life. If they understood that besides the soul, the substance of the body would also continue to exist in various forms even when slain, Tan continued, they would be prepared to die

123 Ding and Zhao, *Nianpu changbian*, 34–35.
124 Tan, 'Renxue', 289, 354.
125 Tan, 289.
126 Tan, 297.
127 Tan, 309.

for righteous causes and would have no fear in their minds.[128] This ideal can be regarded as an indication of Tan's stature as a highly idealistic yet principled thinker and social reformer. As Tan penned these lines, it is as if he was describing in advance the principle he was standing up for in his mind when he chose not to flee on the eve of his self-sought arrest and consequent death two years later.[129]

In discussing the soul and the afterlife, Tan stressed his belief in transmigration of souls, then a popular concept that was also a view held by Kang. It implied that every person in this present life had a former life and would have a future life. Even if one could usually not recall one's previous life, Tan reasoned, its recollection and knowledge would eventually come to him, probably on the 'Final Judgment Day' talked about by Jesus. Tan was aware that the concept of previous life and transmigration was not accepted in Christianity. He explained that because Westerners had no idea of the soul's 'previous karma', they conceived of a contrivance that all men were born sinful.[130] Tan considered the idea of original sin absurd: what had the ancestors' sin to do with their descendants? Even in man's law, he argued, punishments were not extended to the wife and children of an offender. How could Heaven's benevolence be outstripped by man's?[131] Tan was confident that Buddhist doctrines of transmigration, together with those of causation and retribution, could stand the test of time and could not be dismissed.[132]

2.4.3 A Monistic Philosophy

Eventually, Tan reduced his three-tiered system into a monistic philosophy of *ren* 仁 as expressed in his masterpiece *Renxue* 仁學 or *The Science of Benevolence,* which was published posthumously by Liang.[133] The composition of *Renxue* was, in

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128 Tan, 309.

129 Cf. Liang, 'Tan Sitong zhuan', 233.

130 Tan, 'Renxue', 311.

131 Tan, 311.

132 Tan, 310.

133 Tan, 'Renxue'. *Ren* refers to the virtue of goodness, humaneness or benevolence. Different scholars have rendered *Renxue* into various English combinations, including 'A Study of Benevolence', 'An Exposition of Benevolence' and 'The Science of Love'. These diverse renditions demonstrate the richness of the title and the possibility of different interpretations. Given that in *Renxue*, Tan identified the essence of *xue* as science, I prefer to use my own translation, 'The Science of Benevolence'. For an complete English translation of the work, see Chan, *An Exposition*.

Liang's view, a result of the author's reflections on the essence of Confucianism and Buddhism, his gleanings from the writings of philosophers, and his elaboration on the principles and goals set forth by Kang.[134] Tan considered that the principal property of *ren* was 'interconnectedness', which was expressed as 'oneness'.[135] From this perspective, any idea of a conflict in knowledge on any aspect of the universe, be they spiritual or material, was unacceptable to Tan. The medium of interconnectedness through which *ren* was made manifest, according to Tan, was the y*itai* 以太 or 'ether'.[136] The ether, however, was so closely related to *ren* that the two concepts often seemed interchangeable in Tan's philosophy. The nature of Tan's conception of the ether, that is, whether it is material or immaterial, has been a cause of major controversy among scholars. Considering the proper understanding of the ether to be a prerequisite for the study of *ren*, Tan devoted the first chapter of his *Renxue* to its discussion.

> Throughout the realms of physical phenomena, empty space and sentient beings, there is something extremely great and supremely subtle which adheres to everything, penetrates everywhere and connects everything, so that everything is permeated by it. It has no visible forms, no sound, no smell or taste. It has no name but we call it the ether (*yitai*).[137]

Tan then went on to unite in ether the central teachings of Confucius, Mozi, the Buddha and Jesus and the discoveries of science. He argued that in respect of its virtue, Confucius variously referred to it as benevolence (*ren*), as the origin (*yuan*) or as the nature (*xing*). Mozi referred to it as undifferentiated love (*jianai* 兼愛). The Buddha referred to it as the Buddha-Nature, and as compassion. Jesus referred to it as soul and as loving others as oneself and regarding one's enemies as friends. The scientists referred to it as the power of affinity (*aili* 愛力) or attraction (*xili* 吸力).[138]

Not only was the ether the very means by which creation came into being, Tan explained, but it was also the very sustainer of the universe and everything within it.

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134 Liang, 'Tan Sitong zhuan', 232.

135 Tan, 'Renxue', 291–93.

136 Tan, 291.

137 Tan, 293; translation taken from David Wright, 'Tan Sitong and the Ether Reconsidered', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 3 (1994) with minor adaptations.

138 Tan, 'Renxue', 293–94.

He stressed that the ether was the substratum of all natural phenomena including ever-multiplying micro-organisms. Moreover, the ether was also the medium by which human thought was transmitted. He tried to illustrate the dynamics thereof through what he regarded as the mere manifestations of the interactions between ether, 'brain' and 'electricity'.[139] Clearly, Tan's ether carried material elements, but it was far from being purely material. Not only was the ether 'the origin of the elements', and the primal stuff that all things were made of,[140] it could also be identified with the spiritual teachings of sages, the power that maintained human relations, and the medium that spread thought. He went so far as to claim that the either could be considered as nonexistent in a Buddhist sense.[141] Thus his ether is more of a spiritual concept, connecting the physical and spiritual realms.

What, one may wonder, were the sources of Tan's concept of the ether? It is, as is to be expected, concept derived from a Western source. The ether is an ancient concept in the West. By the 19th century, it was widely used to refer to an assumed most elastic and subtle medium, which penetrated and permeated objects and spaces, through which electricity, light, magnetism, heat and even nervous impulses were believed to spread.[142] In confronting previous theories positing the existence of many types of ether, a general agreement emerged among physical scientists, such as Oliver Lodge and Joseph Larmor, on the existence of a single, pervasive ether uniting all natural phenomena.[143] Towards the end of the century the ether came to be generally recognized as an immaterial medium rather than consisting of minute particles with definite locations in space, and this concept of ether was able to survive in the early 20th century when all other rival concepts were shattered by the relativity theory of Einstein (Kang would discuss this in his later years, as we will see in Chapter 5).[144] There were also attempts to explore the theological or spiritual significance of the ether in order to defend the coherence of science and religion, such as the attempts by

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139 Tan, 294–95.

140 Tan, 306.

141 Tan, 331.

142 G. N Cantor and Hodge, M. J. S., eds., *Conceptions of Ether: Studies in the History of Ether Theories, 1740-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1–2.

143 Cantor and Hodge, M. J. S., 258.

144 Edmund Whittaker, *A History of the Theories of Aether and Electricity* (Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1951), 303.

a large number of eminent European scientists who joined the Society for Psychical Research founded in 1882.[145]

Tan's concept of the ether was shaped by his reading of the *Zhixin mianbingfa* 治心免病法, John Fryer's translation of Henry Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography*. Although Wood mentioned the ether only in passing, Fryer elaborated on it in his translation by inserting a passage on the 'omnipresent' ether from David Well's *Principles and Applications of Chemistry*: 'Recently in Western countries it has been discovered that in the Myriad Things there is a fluid called ether.…'[146] Fryer then emphasized the mental aspect of the ether and made it explicit that it was the ether that transmitted thought, just as sound was transmitted by the air.[147] In addition, Wood described love as a 'great universal spiritual law of attraction', which 'inheres in universal matter', and 'permeates universal Spirit'. By exercising the great force of thought focused on the attributes of God, one could not only heal oneself but also improve the situation of the world.[148] Fascinated by the translation, Tan commented that he had not been able to see a glimpse of the truths of Christianity until he read the work.[149] From Fryer's elaboration Tan drew a distinctive quality of his ether, namely, the power to convey thought between human minds, and he was convinced that mental power or thought was capable of transforming the world.[150] Tan expanded the ether into an omnipotent, omnipresent cosmic concept in his *Renxue*, and in so doing he was joining the ranks of Lodge and Larmor in the West.

Viewed from the perspective of Tan's cosmic ether, which carried both material and spiritual properties, knowledge can only be one, and science and religion cannot but

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145 Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait, *The Unseen Universe: Or, Physical Speculations on a Future State* (Macmillan and Company, 1875), vii; cf. Cantor and Hodge, M. J. S., *Conceptions of Ether*, 140, 147, 151; Richard Noakes, 'Ethers, Religion and Politics in Late-Victorian Physics: Beyond the Wynne Thesis', *History of Science* 43, no. 4 (2005): 415–55.

146 Cited from David Wright, *Translating Science: The Transmission of Western Chemistry into Late Imperial China, 1840-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 381.

147 Fu Lanya 傅蘭雅 [John Fryer], trans., *Zhixin mianbingfa 治心免病法 [A Method for Healing the Mind and Avoiding Sickness]* (Shanghai: Gezhi shushi, 1896), 1.13a-b; translated in Wright, 'Tan Sitong and the Ether Reconsidered', 30.

148 Henry Wood, *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography: A Restorative System for Home and Private Use, Preceded by a Study of the Laws of Mental Healing* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1893), 94, 112.

149 Tan, 'Shang Ouyang', 461.

150 Tan, 461.

be in harmony. If the ether is the origin of the universe and the cause of every phenomenon in the world, then the study of the natural world would inevitably lead to knowledge of the same single reality, the ether. If the ether is identified in its qualities with the virtues of benevolence, universal love, compassion and the concept of the soul, then the knowledge of the ether achieved through sciences would naturally lead to a surer grasp of the subtle truths in the great religions. Thus, both science and religion were harmonized when connected by a profound understanding of the ether. In Tan's philosophy, there was no true difference or separation in the universe, a universe which was defined by the single reality, the ether. He could always see the whole picture, for beneath the surface every object, every event or every phenomenon was interwoven and inextricably inter-connected with every other object, event or phenomenon. This somewhat mystical line of reasoning is consonant with the manner in which Kang conceived of the world, and as will be seen in the next chapter, Kang borrowed Tan's concept of the ether in his interpretation of *ren* as well.

To sum up, the 1890s witnessed Kang's endeavours in two interconnected lines of action: as a revisionist Confucian educator who also promoted Western science, and as a political as well as religious reformer. His curriculum at the *Wanmu caotang* was characterized by its teaching of Western learning and his radical revision of Confucianism based on the New Text exegesis. His recasting of Confucianism presented Confucius as both a divine founder of a religion and a visionary reformer who sanctioned political reforms according to the progressive doctrine of the Three Ages. His reform proposal included the inclusion of modern science in the examination and education systems, and the establishment of a national Confucian Church in order to better counter the foreign religious challenge and preserve the Confucian faith. He concluded that to save China from the imminent danger of dismemberment and to make her wealthy and strong, science and technology were crucial, while a parliamentary polity and a common spiritual system were no less important. He believed that knowledge was one: ancient Chinese classics had already contained the origins of Western sciences, and principles of nature discovered through science could lead to the more profound teachings enshrined in Confucianism. Inspired by Kang, disciples such as Liang and Tan articulated a holistic system of knowledge, which was neither Western or Chinese, and which contained both religious and scientific elements interacting in harmony.

3 The Great Unity

> *For the sake of saving China, I have chosen to take risks and now I am faced with imminent death. This, it appears, is my destiny. However, can spirit ever die? I would like to entrust my elderly mother to the care of Junmian, a staunch and upright man. I believe he will spare no effort to look after my families and to promote our great Cause. Whoever among my other disciples arises and protects my families and our country, my spirit will surely bless him.*[1]

This is a translation of Kang Youwei's 'last note', penned on a British launch in the waters near Shanghai on 24 September 1898. After leaving Beijing on the eve of the Dowager Empress' palace coup that abruptly cut short the reform he championed, Kang was travelling from Tianjin to Shanghai on a British steamer, utterly unaware that a reward of high price had been placed on his head, that a Chinese cruiser was speeding onward to intercept him, and that Chinese detectives and policemen were waiting on the wharf to arrest him. Before the steamer pulled in, however, the alarmed British Consul-General, Byron Brenan, who feared that Kang's arrest on a British ship might cause unwanted diplomatic complications, took timely action and intervened by dispatching a launch to transfer him to the British mail steamer Ballaarat.[2] Upon learning about the death warrant issued by the Empress Dowager, charging him with the alleged crime of 'poisoning the Emperor to death', Kang wrote the above-mentioned 'last note' to one of his most loyal followers, Xu Qin 徐勤 (courtesy name: Junmian 君勉, 1873–1945), whom he had sent to Japan to head the Academy of Great Unity (*datong xuexiao* 大同學校) established among overseas Chinese students in Yokohama in the previous spring.[3] Escorted by a British gunboat, Kang arrived safely in Hong Kong late at night on 29 September.[4]

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1 Kang, 'Wuxu lunzhou juebishu'.

2 A couple of sources in Chinese claim that the British missionary Timothy Richard played a role in Kang's rescue, but that is not substantiated by the related English sources, including Richard's own memoir. See Mao Haijian 茅海建, *Cong jiawu dao wuxu: Kang Youwei woshi jianzhu 从甲午到戊戌：康有为我史鉴注 [My History by Kang Youwei Verified and Annotated: 1894-1998]* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 786; also cf. Timothy Richard, *Forty-Five Years in China: Reminiscences* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1916), 265, translated into Chinese in 2005.

3 Jung-pang Lo, ed., 'Sequel to the Chronological Autobiography of K'ang Yu-Wei', in *K'ang Yu-Wei: A Biography and a Symposium*, trans. Jung-pang Lo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967),

During his sojourn in Hong Kong, the China Mail made Kang's cause known internationally for the first time through an interview which was widely reported in other newspapers, including The North-China Herald and the Chinese Shen Pao in Shanghai. By that time, it had become clear that the Emperor, who had previously been reported dead, was actually under house arrest. In that interview, Kang claimed that before leaving the capital he had received secret edicts from the Emperor, who, sensing that a palace coup was imminent, had instructed Kang to devise means for rescuing him.[5] Kang's strategy was to obtain international support, especially from Japan and Great Britain, to help reinstall the Emperor. At the invitation of the Japanese prime minister Okuma Shigenobu, Kang journeyed to Japan, where he had the pleasure of meeting some of his disciples, including Liang Qichao, who, like him, had had a narrow escape. During their reunion they found time to write about their recent experiences. Kang updated his autobiography, *Woshi* 我史 (My History), of events in his life since 1895.[6] Liang, for his part, wrote the far-reaching *Wuxuzhengbian ji* 戊戌政變記 (An Account of the Coup D'état of 1898), which was published in his newly-established political periodical in Yokohama, *Qingyibao* 清議報 (China Discussions).

Both accounts were, of course, focused on the political events, and the total veracity of their narratives has long been debated. These accounts revealed that the narrow escape they each experienced had only served to strengthen their faith in Heaven. Reviewing his ten-day escape journey to Hong Kong, Kang reckoned that he could

178, 253–54.

4 Kang, 'Woshi', 102–3; cf. 'Brenan to Sir C. MacDonald', in *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of China* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1899), 307–8.

5 'Kang Yu-Wei's Story', *The North-China Herald*, 17 October 1898. The two edicts provided by Kang were translated into English and published along with the interview, but their authenticity would become a topic of heated controversies for a long time, both during Kang's lifetime and after his death. Scholars have now ascertained that the first edict was an adaptation by Kang of an edict addressed to one of his fellow reformers; the full truth of the second edict, however, is still a mystery. For an updated and comprehensive discussion, see Mao, *Woshi jianzhu*, 735–42.

6 Kang's autobiography, which had been read by only a handful of his disciples, was not published during his lifetime; shortly after his death in 1927, it began to circulate in manuscript copies before it was finally printed in the 1950s. For a detailed and up-to-date discussion, see Mao Haijian 茅海建, 'Kang Youwei zixie nianpu shougaoben yuedu baogao "康有为自写年谱手稿本"阅读报告 [A Report on Reading Kang's Manuscript of His Autobiography]', *Jindaishi yanjiu 近代史研究 [Journal of Modern Chinese History]*, no. 4 (2007).

have been caught and killed ten or eleven times, had he left the capital one day later, had he stayed a few hours longer in Tianjin, had he not changed plans and boarded a British steamer, had the cruiser giving chase not turned back halfway due to insufficiency of fuel, had the English authorities not been alarmed or had they not come to his rescue, etc. The fact that he had emerged unscathed by virtue of a string of remarkable coincidences, decisions and eventualities, was, he believed, the will of Heaven. These extraordinary occurrences amounted to a clear vindication of his belief that he had been entrusted a Heaven-sent mission. The whole episode strengthened his determination to prosecute his reform cause with renewed vigour despite the setbacks he had experienced.[7] This belief in heavenly intervention was shared by his disciples who were fellow survivors in exile. Drawing on Kang's account, Liang stressed that his teacher had been protected and preserved by Heaven, with 'gods and spirits' alongside to protect him during his narrow escape.[8] 'That both Mr. Kang and I have survived the extraordinary dangers,' Liang confided in a letter to his wife, 'seems to demonstrate the protection from spirits…. I am now even more convinced that Heaven has treated me with bounty, preparing me for future success.'[9] When he penned these lines, he may have been alluding to the traditional Confucian tenet that he who possessed great qualities would surely receive heavenly blessings: 'Heaven, in the production of things, is sure to be bountiful to them, according to their qualities.'[10]

With the downfall of the friendly Okuma administration, Kang failed to enlist the Japanese aid in rescuing his Emperor. As the pressure from the Qing Court to expel him mounted, Kang decided to leave for Great Britain via Canada. Borrowing terms from the *Garland Sutra*, he wrote a farewell poem to his disciples, expressing his confidence in the imminent appearance of a 'garland China'.[11] While he was in London in June 1899, a motion was made, chiefly through the instrumental role of his friend Lord Charles Beresford, in the House of Commons for British intervention in

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7 Kang, 'Woshi', 106.

8 Liang, 'Wuxuzhengbian ji 戊戌政變記 [An Account of the Coup D'état of 1898]', in *Xuxiu Sikuquanshu 續修四庫全書 [A Sequel to the Complete Library in Four Sections]*, vol. 446 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 250–51.

9 Ding and Zhao, *Nianpu changbian*, 168.

10 *Zhongyong* 17:3; Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 399.

11 Kang, 'Kang Nanhai shiji', 194.

China, but it was defeated.[12] Disappointed, he returned to Canada where there was a large population of overseas Chinese. On the strength of the supposed edicts, he established the *Baohuanghui* (Association to Save the Emperor) in Victoria in July 1899. The next few years saw a rapid expansion of the Society, with branches established in Chinese communities across Canada and in the United States, Latin America and Southeast Asia. The expansion was assisted by the establishment of newspapers, schools and even property development and banking businesses. Travelling around and assisted by his disciples, Kang advocated the adoption of a constitutional monarchy for China. Inevitably, his party fell into dispute with the other party of their fellow outlaws, the *Tongmenghui* 同盟会 (the Revolutionary Alliance) led by Sun Yat-sen, who aimed to establish a republic and called for the overthrow of the Manchu regime. Kang's group had the upper hand in the competition for overseas Chinese allegiance, before gradually losing ground to the latter.[13]

Since its establishment, the *Baohuanghui* had functioned as Kang's power base and, with donations from overseas Chinese, provided him with the necessary means to sustain his political activities. Taking advantage of the Boxer Uprising of 1900, Kang mobilized the entire resources of the Society and sponsored an armed movement in central China to overthrow the Empress Dowager and to restore the imprisoned Emperor. The proposed plot, however, was discovered, and consequently thirty of his followers were caught and executed. This caused great sorrow to Kang, and made him resolve, at least for the immediate future, to abandon the use of violence as a means of achieving his reform program. He withdrew from political activities and entered a two-year period of semi-seclusion, taking up temporary residence in Penang, Malay and subsequently at Darjeeling in northern India. He devoted much of his time to writing commentaries on the Confucian Classics, thereby completing his reinterpretation of Confucianism, a project which he had started a decade earlier.[14]

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12 Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 180, 255–56.

13 Lo, 181; for more details on Kang's overseas activities, see Robert Leo Worden, 'A Chinese Reformer in Exile: The North American Phase of the Travels of K'ang Yu-Wei, 1899-1909' (Ph.D., Georgetown University, 1972).

14 Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 185–88.

3.1 Confucian Reinterpretation Completed

The first work Kang chose to annotate was the *Zhongyong* or *Doctrine of the Mean* (hereinafter referred to as the *Mean*), attributed to Zisi 子思 (circa 483–402 BCE), the grandson of Confucius. Originally one of the treatises collected in the *Rites*, it was singled out and annotated by Zhu Xi before being included in the Four Books. Accordingly, the rank of its author was exalted in the Confucian tradition, with his tablet being placed in the Temples of Confucius as one of the four associates to keep his grandfather company.[15] Zisi was given the title of the Transmitter of (the Teachings of) the Sage (*shusheng* 述聖), for he was believed to have transmitted the Doctrine of Confucius to Mencius, the Second Sage (*yasheng* 亞聖).[16]

After he finished the *Mean Annotated* (*Zhongyongzhu* 中庸注), Kang completed the *Chunqiu dayi weiyan kao* 春秋大義微言考 (A Study of the Profound Principles and Hidden Meanings of the Emended Annals). In this work, which he regarded as a sequel to his two earlier works, the *Forged Classics* and *Confucius as a Reformer*, Kang maintained that in emending the original *Annals*, Confucius had 'encoded' in the text profound principles and subtle meanings, some of which were explained in the two 'truthful' commentaries of the *Gongyang* and the *Guliang* before being tampered with by the 'false' *Zuo Commentary* allegedly forged by Liu Xin. Galvanized by a sacred sense of mission, Kang attempted to 'decode' as many of those hidden meanings and principles as he could by tracing, with the assistance of its two truthful commentaries, what the Sage had deleted, adapted and added during the process of his emendations. Through that process, Kang claims to have rediscovered the Doctrine of the Universal Peace and its principle of the Great Unity, which he considered were not only requisite for the advancement of China but also vital in order for the whole world to achieve a higher stage of civilization in conformity with doctrine of the Three Ages.[17]

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15 It was recorded that Zisi 'directly reached to Heavenly virtue' (*zhida tianting* 直達天德) and possessed a mysterious power of discernment. For more discussion on this topic, see Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 45.

16 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 369.

17 Kang, 'Chunqiu bixiao dayi weiyan kao 春秋大义微言考 [A Study of the Profound Principles and Hidden Meanings of the Emended Annals (1901)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 6, 2007, 4.

3 The Great Unity

While residing at the hill resort of Darjeeling, Kang continued his reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics by completing three more works, the *Analects Annotated* (*Lunyuzhu* 論語注), the *Great Learning Annotated* (*Daxuezhu* 大學注), and the *Esoteric Meanings of the Mencius* (*Mengziwei* 孟子微). In all these works, he claimed that he sought to bring out the true meanings and ideals of the Way of Confucius. He pointed out, for example, that the texts of the *Analects* contained hints of the ideal of the Great Unity, which was authentically inherited by Mencius and best revealed in his writings. In annotating the *Mencius*, he took the unusual measure of reorganizing the sections and passages under eighteen thematic topics including nature and destiny, mind and body, benevolence and righteousness. With these, he had finally completed his annotations of the Four Books. Around that time, however, the Four Books, along with other Confucian classics, were soon to lose their prestige by reason of the fact that the imperial service examinations, which had been abolished during the 1898 Reform but reinstalled afterwards, were abolished in 1905.[18]

Kang claimed that he had annotated those Confucian texts (except the *Mencius*) in early 1890s when lecturing in Guangzhou, but he noted that all the manuscripts had been lost or destroyed following the coup of 1898.[19] His re-written annotations, however, were not published until after his return to China in 1913, by which time the manuscript of the *Great Learning Annotated* had been lost again.[20] Although many of his views expressed in those annotated works had already been made known in his earlier lectures and works, he was trying to elaborate on them in his annotations as well as to provide them with a scholarly, textual foundation. As the scope of those texts was broad, Kang's comments accordingly covered a variety of topics, including the divinity of Confucius, Heaven, human nature, spirits and the soul, and involved the appropriation of Western scientific terms in his efforts at Confucian exegesis.

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[18] Kang was aware of the tendency, for he had commented in 1904 that the new school textbooks would disregard the Confucian Classics, which meant that the Chinese would renounce the founder of their religion (教主) and become a people without religion. See Kang, 'Yidali youji', 375.

[19] Some scholars have rejected Kang's claim outright, while others have observed that Kang's claim was not groundless. My understanding is that Kang was very likely to have produced manuscripts of those works in the form of lecture notes.

[20] Only portions of his commentary on the *Mencius* had been printed during his exile in the *China Discussion* in Japan by Liang Qichao in late 1902.

3.1.1 Confucius as a Divine Teacher

Earlier, as we have seen, Kang had attempted to deify Confucius by following indiscriminately the apocryphal account that Confucius, who was born of the Black God, was 'a being of divine intelligence' and 'a religious leader for the whole world' (see Section 2.3.2). In his latest commentaries, however, he only accorded a brief mention of the apocryphal claim of Confucius' miraculous birth, and further glossed it by stressing that the account was intended to mean that Confucius had been born of Heaven and had received the Mandate of Heaven.[21]

Kang's firm belief in the divinity of Confucius, however, remained unchanged. He considered Confucius a *shenren* 神人 or 'divine man', a term that was used by Mencius in his categorization of men into several ranks according to their virtue, with *shenren* and *shengren* 聖人 (sage) listed as the highest two. In Legge's translation: 'He whose completed goodness is brightly displayed is what is called a great man. When this great man exercises a transforming influence, he is what is called a sage. When the Sage is beyond our knowledge, he is what is called a spirit-man.'[22] Legge translated *shenren* as 'a spirit-man' rather than 'a divine man', because he considered the latter rendition unacceptable on the grounds that it would apply to man a term appropriate to the actions of God.[23] In a sense Legge's statement was in accordance with the orthodox interpretation of the term by Zhu Xi, who held that by *shenren* was meant a sage—an unfathomable sage rather than an entity of a higher rank.[24]

Kang, however, categorically disagreed. In his commentary on the *Mencius*, he claimed that by *shenren* Mencius had meant a divine man whose station was above that of a sage, and had intended to reserve the term for Confucius alone. Unfortunately, Kang argued, Mencius was not properly understood by his posterity, and as a result, Confucius had been inaccurately called a sage for two millennia.[25]

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21 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 386; Kang, 'Mengziwei 孟子微 [The Esoteric Meanings of the Mencius (1901)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 5, 2007, 444.

22 *Mengzi* 7(2):25; James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics II: The Works of Mencius*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1895), 490.

23 Legge, 492.

24 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu 四書章句集注 [Interlinear Analysis of and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books]* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 370.

25 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 384–484.

However, Kang failed to explain why Mencius himself called Confucius a sage in numerous places in his writings, and placed Confucius on a par with the previous sages including King Wen of the Zhou dynasty, King Tang of the Shang dynasty, and Chinese legendary sage kings Yao and Shun, with approximately 500 years between the appearances of two consecutive sages.[26]

To support his claim that Confucius had been regarded as a divine man, Kang turned to Mencius' illustrious contemporary, Zhuangzi 庄子 (*circa* 369–289 BCE), who had also classified men into several ranks, including, from higher to lower, the heavenly man (*tianren* 天人), the divine man (*shenren*), the perfect man (*wanren* 完人) and the sagely man (*shengren*).[27] According to Kang's interpretation, Zhuangzi ascribed to Confucius the status of the divine man (the spirit-man in Legge's translation) and designated him as the 'Holy King with Divine Intelligence' (*shenming shengwang* 神明聖王), while in comparison, Zhuangzi only considered Laozi, whose body of thought he had inherited, to be a perfect man.[28] Again, that was Kang's taking from Zhuangzi, for the latter was not explicit about assigning to Confucius a divine status. Kang did not stop there. In his laudatory description of Confucius, Kang even appropriated certain Buddhist expressions as well as the attributes of the first hexagram (*qian* 乾) described in the *Changes*:

> Possessing the creative power and having Nature under his command, he possesses a complete understanding of the connection between the end and the beginning. Mounting the carriage drawn by the six dragons at the proper times, he drives through the sky. With a pre-knowledge of numerous ages, he is capable of transformation by bending or extending himself, with limitless incarnations.—Can these attributes be ascribed to anyone but Confucius?[29]

Clearly, Kang portrayed Confucius as a divine figure, one who was mighty and omniscient. In his commentary on the *Analects*, he described Confucius in a way that was reminiscent of the way Jesus was presented in the Christian tradition. 'Confucius

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[26] Cf. *Mengzi* 7(2):38; Legge, *Chinese Classics II*, 501–2.

[27] *Zhuangzi* III 11:1; James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Taoism II: The Writings of Kwang-Tze, XVIII-XXXIII, The Thai-Shang Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions*, The Sacred Works of China (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1891), 214–15.

[28] Kang, 'Mengziwei', 384–484.

[29] Kang, 483.

had a heavenly body,' he claimed, 'whose celestial soul reaches everywhere and whose intelligence resides in everything. Occasionally, he would come to the earthly world by taking on a human temple and content himself with his life by following the right path.'[30] In this, Kang seemed to have been influenced by both the Buddhist concept of reincarnation and the Christian metaphor of the 'Word becoming flesh'.

Having thus sought to establish the station of Confucius as a divine teacher, Kang proceeded to elucidate Confucius' teachings in their totality by turning to the *Mean*. He believed that this canonical classic had revealed the Sage's doctrinal discourse (*jiaolun* 教論) more profoundly than any other Confucian text; however, its import had, unfortunately, not been properly and adequately comprehended.[31] Kang made a good point in highlighting the doctrinal centrality of the *Mean* in the Confucian tradition. Composed in fewer than 2,000 characters, the treatise contains a masterly discussion of what we would describe as the spiritual or religious dimension of Confucianism, or as the contemporary new Confucianist Wei-ming Tu termed it, the 'Confucian transcendence'.[32] The *Mean* begins with three definitional statements on three significant notions in Confucian philosophy, *xing* 性 (nature or human nature), *dao* 道 (path or way) and *jiao* 教 (teaching or instruction):

> What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow human nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching [*jiao*].[33]

In his commentary, Kang explained that human beings were born of Heaven in the sense that their nature, the spiritual essence of human life, originated in Heaven rather than with their parents. This human nature was shared by all human beings, and those who were enlightened ahead of others and therefore were more advanced at

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30 Kang, 'Lunyuzhu 论语注 [The Analects Annotated (1902)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 6, 2007, 450.

31 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 369.

32 Cf. Sze-kar Wan, 'The Viability of Confucian Transcendence: Grappling with Tu Weiming's Interpretation of the Zhongyong', *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 7, no. 4 (2008): 407–28.

33 *Zhongyong* 1:1; Here I have adopted Tu Wei-ming's translation. Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 5. Cf. Legge's rendition: What Heaven has conferred is called the Nature; an accordance with this nature is called the Path of duty; the regulation of this path is called Instruction. Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 383.

cultivating the Way would instruct the rest of them.[34] For Kang, a proper *jiao* or Teaching (or a religion, according to his own understanding of the term) was 'rooted in Heaven but designed for humanity' (*yuanyutian er yiyuren* 原于天而宜于人), and the Teaching of Confucius had perfectly manifested these two qualities. It was rooted in Heaven because its very foundation as well as object, human nature, was imparted by Heaven. It was designed for humanity because it instructed people by means of, to use Kang' own term, *rendao* 人道, literally, the human way or the way of being human (I will discuss this term in detail in Section 3.3.2).[35] Kang summarized the 'great, comprehensive, heavenly' Way of Confucius as follows:

> It has its root in the decree of Heaven (*tianming*) and, unfolded, finds its realization in the way of being human (*rendao*). It is based on the virtue of utmost sincerity, and, expanded, achieves the instruction and transformation of the people. It reveals the subtleties of ghosts and spirits (*guishen*) and all creatures, and makes manifest the evolution of the Three Ages .... In its basic terms, it dwells on human relations and conduct, and the practices of government; in its subtle forms, it even transcends the attributes of Heaven that have no sound or smell...[36]

Kang stressed that Confucius did not leave spiritual beings out in his subtle teachings. Confucius was quoted in the *Mean* as discussing the 'abundant display' of the powers of ghosts and spirits (*guishen*): 'We look for them, but do not see them; we listen to them, but do not hear them; yet they enter into all things, and there is nothing without them.'[37] To gloss this passage, Kang entered a detailed discussion on the two notions of *gui* 鬼 (ghosts, demons) and *shen* 神 (spirits, deities), drawing on classical quotations while also interpolating his own interpretations. As is well known, there were diverse and often confusing accounts of the two notions in Chinese traditional thought and folk religion.[38] One version held that a person had two types of soul, the *hun* 魂 (the intelligent or spiritual soul) and the *po* 魄 (the corporeal or animal soul). After the physical death, the *hun* would go up to heaven and was called *shen* (spirits),

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34 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 369.

35 Kang, 370.

36 Kang, 369.

37 *Zhongyong* 16:1–2; Legge, *Chinese Classics I*, 397–98.

38 Stevan Harrell, 'The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 1979): 519.

while the *po* would return to the earth and was called *gui* (ghosts).[39] This account was close to the Confucianist idea expressed in certain Confucian Texts such as the *Rites*, with which Kang aligned himself.

Kang then went into a discussion of how various religions approach the popular belief in ghosts and spirits. 'The Buddha talked exclusively about ghosts,' he commented, 'and Jesus focused his discussions on spirits.'[40] Some might say, in this context, that Kang had grossly over-simplified the teachings of the Christ and the Buddha. However, according to Kang, Confucius 'taught about both ghosts and spirits and recognized their virtue' and regarded the 'combination of both ghosts and spirits' to be the most effective way for moral instruction of the people.[41] Here Kang was referring to a discussion in the *Rites* on how, for the teaching of the common people, rules were constituted making use of their belief in ghosts and spirits, and how temples and shrines were built for ghosts and spirits, with sacrifice ceremonies designed, in order to strengthen the people in their observance of those rules.[42] This argument was made to support his repeatedly asserted view that the doctrine of Confucius was more comprehensive and more easily within the capabilities of ordinary human attainment than the Buddhist and Christian doctrines of, for instance, celibacy. Kang did not, however, lose sight of the fact that the later Neo-Confucianists were not fond of talking about spirits. He observed with regret that the discourses of bygone times on ghosts and spirits had sharply declined during the transition from classical Confucianism to Neo-Confucianism. He held the Neo-Confucianist masters accountable, noting that they had obtained their inspiration from the fourth-century Ruan Zhan's 阮瞻 treatise on the non-existence of the spirits (*Wuguilun* 無鬼論). 'While Confucius stressed the widely-extended virtue of the spirits,' he wrote, 'the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi attributed them to the energetic operations of heaven and earth, and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) consigned them to the two breaths of nature.'[43] Acknowledging that the more intelligent people became, the fewer spirits

[39] Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, 'Hun and Po', in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (Routledge, 2008).

[40] Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 376.

[41] Kang, 376.

[42] Kang, 376. Cf. *Liji* 21:2; James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Confucianism IV: The Li Ki, XI-XLVI* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1885), 221.

[43] Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 376. Indeed, it was not until the time of the comparatively modern Song scholars that *gui* and *shen* were given a semi-physical, semi-metaphysical signification. See a

they would believe in, Kang nevertheless asserted that the existence of the spirits was irrefutable.[44]

Not content with repeating the classical view, Kang ventured into a discourse of his own conceptualisation on the nature of the human soul, that is, *hun* or the spiritual soul. He asserted that unlike the *po* that came from one's parents, the human soul came from Heaven, to which it would also return. In this connection, he explicitly equated the human soul with the Heaven-endowed human nature. He stressed that in essence the 'brilliant, pure, indivisible' soul was none other than the 'illustrious virtue' (*mingde* 明德), the 'virtuous nature' (*dexing* 德性) and the 'intelligent spirit' (*shenming* 神明) that were mentioned in various Confucian Classics; and he related the term to the Buddhist concept of 'hidden nature to be manifested' (*jianxing* 見性).[45] Kang explained that this human (spiritual) soul and the animal soul, which both resided in a human being, were locked in a constant struggle. The former was inclined towards manifesting such virtues as benevolence and righteousness, while the latter tended to be vulgar and greedy by nature. If a man's spiritual soul could subdue his animal soul, then he was a superior man (*junzi* 君子). If the former was obscured and suppressed by the latter, then he was a mean man (*xiaoren* 小人).[46] Eventually, the spiritual soul could get ensnared in worldly desires, losing its Heaven-endowed nature, and could even remain so forever.[47] Therefore, Kang reasoned, that it was incumbent upon a man to protect his Heaven-endowed nature from the temptations and corruptions of his animal soul. He should further nourish it in such a way as to expand its powers and make it become 'brilliant, illustrious, strong and mighty' (*guang ming gang da* 光明剛大), even capable of assisting the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth.[48] That, Kang commented, was what Mencius meant by the statement, 'Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven…. To nourish one's nature, is the way to serve Heaven.' Kang added that this was precisely

discussion in James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Confucianism II: The Yi King*, 2nd ed., The Sacred Books of the East, XVI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 34.

44 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 376.

45 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 423, 438.

46 Kang, 430.

47 Kang, 438.

48 Kang, 433.

the way to serve *Shangdi* (God).[49] Kang's view in this regard is comparable to that of the later 'New Confucianists' (*xinrujia* 新儒家), who claimed that the religious character of Confucianism was expressed through 'ultimate self-transformation' or the infinite potential of each human being for self-transcendence.[50]

The spiritual soul of a man was immortal, Kang stressed. It would not change or perish with the death and decomposition of the body. In particular, the well-nourished soul, meaning, that of a superior man, was refined and strengthened by benevolence and intelligence accumulated in this life and would therefore undergo a myriad of changes without being even slightly affected. For such a soul, this life was no more than a transient phase, just like a reflection of the sun in a mirror.[51] To Kang, the immortal soul, after being disembodied, would wander everywhere before becoming incarnate again in this world—that was why it was described as 'wandering and returning soul'. This accounted for the doctrine of retribution, a deep-rooted notion in Chinese tradition, which Kang upheld. The goodness done or the evil perpetrated by one in his previous life,' Kang wrote, 'will be proportionately repaid in reward or punishment in this life.' Therefore, a person should be extremely careful about his deeds and actions in this life, for they would determine his well-being in his next incarnate life, even though ages of time may separate his two lives.[52] Again Kang identified this as yet another subtle teaching of Confucius, largely forgotten but now being made explicit by him.

In this entire endeavour by Kang to exalt the station of Confucius to that of a metaphysical divinity, and in his striving to restore the Teachings of Confucius to their pristine purity as he divined it, Kang seems to have been driven by what is known as a 'Messianic complex'. We might well characterise Kang's indefatigable endeavours as the expressed mania of a self-appointed Bodhisattva, a modern-day Sage driven by his desire to carry out his own Heaven-ordained mission, essentially of the same nature as that given to Confucius, mandating him, the late Qing reformist, to edify and rescue the people of China and the rest of humanity.

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49 Kang, 433.

50 Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 94.

51 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 423.

52 Kang, 434.

3.1.2 Scientific Notions Appropriated

What is physics, or what is a physicist? Kang reflected on the question by tapping into both ancient Chinese concepts and modern scientific notions. Physics, he declared, simply involved the investigation of 'Heaven-ordained laws' (*tianze* 天則). In his view, the concept of Heaven-ordained laws had been proposed in the *Odes*, which was quoted by Mencius. The verse in question was *tiansheng zhengmin youwu youze* 天生蒸民有物有則, literally, 'Heaven produced human beings; there are things, and there are (their) laws'. Traditionally, however, the 'things' were interpreted narrowly as being what belonged to the human body and human relations. According to Zhu Xi, for example, the word 'things' referred to all societal relationships, such as that between father and son, as well as all man's bodily faculties like the hearing of the ears. The laws, therefore, referred to the function of every faculty and the duty of every relationship that every human being must seek to observe.[53] It was based on this understanding that Legge translated the verse as 'Heaven in producing mankind, gave them their various faculties and relations with their specific laws.'[54] Kang, however, deviated from his predecessors and interpreted the verse in such a way as to include everything in the world:

> In producing each and every thing, Heaven has endowed it with shape, colour, awareness, and nature. Thus each has its own measure, degree and boundary, with prescribed rules, which are called heavenly laws. This applies to everything in the world, be it water and clay filled with *qi*, trees and plants with growth, or birds and beasts with senses. A physicist, therefore, is simply someone that investigates the heavenly laws in things.[55]

In this passage Kang put the 'things' in the world into three categories, the mineral, the plant and the animal (including humans). All of them, he affirmed, constituted the objects for study by physicists. The purpose of physicists, therefore, was to discover the Heaven-ordained laws so as to put them to purposeful human use. He gave two

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53 Zhu, *Sishu jizhu*, 387.

54 *Mengzi* 6(1):8; Legge, *Chinese Classics II*, 403. The verse was rendered as 'Heaven gave birth to the multitudes of people, so that they had faculties and laws.' in Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 1:34.

55 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 426.

examples to illustrate his point, one from traditional Chinese medicine and one from Western science. The plant aconite (wolfsbane) possessed the attribute of being 'heaty', while rhubarb possessed the property of being 'cooling'; once their natural properties were discovered, they were capable of being used for medicinal purposes by Chinese physicians. Similarly, metal could conduct heat and electricity could travel long distances; following the laws of their nature, Westerners had made wires out of the metal and harnessed electricity to transfer sound via wires (i.e. the invention of the telephone).[56] It was not surprising that Kang's interpretation is reminiscent of the concept of 'natural laws' in the West. In the late nineteenth country, missionaries customarily employed it to support their argument for the existence of an infinitely intelligent God as the Creator. But as we will see later in Chapter 5, Kang's concept of *Shangdi* (God) differed from that of an external 'Law-Giver' of the natural world.

After discussing plants and metals, Kang's discourse turned to the human realm. He equated the 'Heaven-ordained law' in human reality, which he also called 'Heaven-endowed nature', with the 'virtuous nature' spoken of in the *Mean* and the 'illustrious virtue' in the *Great Learning*. Citing the verse following the one quoted above, in the *Odes*, Kang argued that Man, the most noble of all creatures, had the unique natural capacity to 'love the admirable virtue' (*haoshi yide* 好是懿德). By 'virtue' was primarily meant benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*), the former embodying the will of Heaven, and the latter the moral principle of Heaven. For man to love these virtues, he wrote, was like a magnet attracting the iron filings. In a way reminiscent of the approach adopted by Tan Sitong in his *Renxue* and, in all likelihood under Tan's influence, Kang then turned to the concept of the ether and his knowledge of electricity in an attempt to illustrate the underlying mechanism. It was the ether within man that attracted virtue, for virtue contained ether as well. 'That is just like the attraction between two things that carry positive and negative electricity [electrical charges] respectively,' he commented, 'for if they don't contain electricity themselves, they cannot attract each other.'[57]

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56 Kang, 426.

57 Kang, 426.

Kang seemed to have regarded the traditional concept of *qi* as a pervasive ether that lent spiritual form to both electricity and lightning.[58] Western knowledge of electricity was introduced into China in the mid-nineteenth century. Electricity and electrotherapy were the subjects of MacGowan's *Bowu tongshu* 博物通書 (Philosophical Almanac, 1851) and Hobson's more influential *Bowu xinbian* 博物新編 (Treatise of Natural Philosophy, 1851), both of which regarded electricity as a key to understanding the human nervous system. For Kang, however, electricity was not merely a subtle material force, but also a mysterious spiritual force capable of generating power. In his appropriation of the scientific notion, he tried to connect the ancient concept of 'spiritual energy' (*shenqi* 神氣) with the modern concept of electricity. He quoted Confucius as saying, in the *Rites*, that Earth contained a spiritual or mysterious energy that produced the wind and thunder-clap (*fengting* 風霆), by which the seeds of forms were carried abroad, and the various things showed the appearance of life. Kang interpreted this 'spiritual energy' as 'electric spirit', arguing that etymologically both the characters for 'spirit' and 'electricity' shared the radical '*shen* 申', which meant 'to extend'. This electric power permeated man and every other creature and connected each and all. 'The invisible human consciousness,' he wrote, 'is like electricity that connects all, and that's why an idea born of one's sincerity may reach others, irrespective of the interval of hundreds of ages or the distance of millions of miles.'[59] 'The concept of benevolence,' he further observed, 'whose pictographic representation literally means two human beings in each other's company, conveys the meaning of mutual attraction; that is love, which is in reality electricity.'[60] Kang used 'ether' in a similar manner. 'The commiserating mind,' he commented, 'is benevolence, is electricity, and is ether.'[61] The commiserating mind was one of the key ideas of Mencius, who held that 'all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others.' This 'commiserating mind' (*buren* 不忍) or 'compassion', according to Mencius, was essential to Man and was the principle of

58 Elman, *Science in China*, 399.

59 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 376, see also 371.

60 Kang, 379.

61 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 414. The discussion of the 'ether' and 'electricity' was not among the contents of the *Mengziwei* when the manuscript was first published in 1902; Kang may have added these topics during his later revision of the work.

benevolence. When a commiserating mind was widely practised, the emergence of a commiserating government to rule the kingdom would be a matter of course.[62]

To interpret *ren* or 'benevolence' with 'electricity' and 'ether' was a radical departure from the conventional frame of reference in the Confucian tradition. This has been considered by some scholars to be an 'invention' of Kang, on the grounds that although Tan Sitong had used the concept of the ether in his written works before Kang, the former had actually borrowed the idea from the latter, who had been spreading that concept orally in his lectures during the 1890s.[63] This claim is speculative, at best, for no written records can be found to lend support to it. The lecture notes kept by Kang's disciples in the 1890s, for example, did not mention Kang's use of the 'ether'. Unless new evidence emerges to the contrary, it is more plausible that Kang had borrowed the idea from Tan, whose *Renxue* had been widely circulated by the time of Kang's composition of those commentaries. It does not matter, however, whether Kang or Tan had used the term 'ether' first. What is significant is that they were each open to integrating Western scientific notions with Chinese concepts in their reinterpretation of the Confucian tradition, an effort that demonstrated their holistic views on the material and spiritual aspects of the world.

Another term that Kang used in his reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics was 'heat' (*re* 热). Deviating from his earlier view that the world originated from the primal warm *qi* through the interactions of *yin* and *yang*, Kang now claimed that 'heat' was the beginning of everything. 'All things were born of and through heat,' he wrote in his commentary on the *Annals*, 'and in fact the earth was born of the sun.'[64] As heat was from the sun, he reasoned that that was why the *Changes* extolled 'the brilliant sun' (*daming* 大明) as the source of the beginning (of the earthly existence).[65] That was also why Confucius established the ritual in the *Rites* that the

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62 *Mengzi* 2(1):6; Legge, *Chinese Classics II*, 201–2.

63 Fansen 王汎森 Wang, *Zhiniu de Diyin: Yixie Lishi Sikao Fangshi de Fansi 执拗的低音——一些历史思考方式的反思 [An Insistent Low Voice: Some Reflections on Historical Thinking]* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 85.

64 Kang, 'Chunqiu kao', 77.

65 Apart from 'the sun', the word '*daming* 大明' is capable of another interpretation, that is, 'to clearly understand', which Legge followed in his translation. See *Zhouyi zhengyi 周易正義 [The Verified Meaning of the Book of Changes]* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), 9; Legge, *Texts*

Son of Heaven was supposed to regard the sun as the chief object of veneration (*zhuyuri* 主于日) when offering annual thanksgiving and sacrifice to Heaven on the occurrence of the vernal equinox.[66] Beyond that, worshipping the sun was, in Kang's view, an ancient institution that many countries observed in antiquity. A case in point was Zoroastrianism, whose followers in Persia still continued the practice of worshipping the sun.[67] To Kang, there was a fundamental agreement between the natural phenomenon of the sun being the source of earthly life and the religious practices of worshipping the sun in China and other countries.

Kang also made use of his scientific knowledge in his account of the principle of 'retribution' in relation to the recurring nature of the immortal human soul. 'The rays that reached the earth today,' Kang wrote, 'had actually been issued forth from the sun twelve years before.[68] In like manner, the cause of a certain retribution one has received today might have occurred hundreds of years before.' He added that it was not unusual for the cause to have an effect after so many years, and he offered an analogy in the physical world: 'Just like the travel time of the lighting, which takes quite a while to reach the earth despite its marvellous swiftness.'[69]

Kang's attribution of all the Five Classics to Confucius would sometimes bring into question the authoritativeness or infallibility of the Sage when statements in the classics were found to be in stark contradiction to the established findings of modern science. In such cases, Kang would appeal to what we may describe as the technique of explanatory accommodation. In the *Annals*, for example, there is a recorded instance of an eclipse of the sun, which occasioned the ritual of 'saving the sun' by 'drumming and sacrificing to the God of the earth'. The reasoning offered in the *Gongyang Commentary* was that the sun was eclipsed and offended by the moon, the spirit of the earth, so by performing the ritual, it was intended that the moon would be

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of Confucianism II, 213 (appendix 1:1).

66 *Liji* 11:1. Legge's reconsidered translation of the verse under question is: '… the sun was considered (on the occasion) as the residence of (the spirit) of Heaven.' See Legge, *Texts of Confucianism IV*, 1; cf. James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Confucianism III: The Li Ki, I-X* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1885), 427; *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 *[The Verified Meaning of the Rites]* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), 926.

67 Kang, 'Chunqiu kao', 77.

68 This is an incorrect statement. It actually takes only 8 minutes for the sun's rays to reach the earth.

69 Kang, 'Mengziwei', 434.

frightened and persuaded to withdraw.[70] This was in direct contradiction to scientific facts. As Kang acknowledged, 'the eclipse of the sun can be predicted while seated and its mechanism is very easy to understand.' It was not, however, that the Sage did not understand it; it was just that he was offering an explanation that would accommodate the low intelligence of the people of ancient times by attributing the eclipse of the sun to the workings of spirits. After all, Kang concluded, to regulate the conduct of the people by referring to the power of the spirits and the need to please or appease them was the ancient Sage's way of moral instruction during the Age of Disorder, a time of widespread ignorance and simple-mindedness.[71]

3.1.3 In the Future World of *Datong*

Not long after he completed the reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics, Kang Youwei also finished the writing of the *Datongshu* 大同書 or *Book of the Great Unity,* whose original manuscript he claimed had been written nearly two decades earlier and whose ideas he had shared with some of his students in the 1890s.[72] *Datong* 大同 or Great Unity, a term which has received multiple renditions in English, refers to the ideal state of society depicted in the *Rites*, a concept that was traditionally understood to have denoted the conditions of a 'lost paradise' which had prevailed under the legendary sage-kings who had reigned long before the birth of Confucius.[73] Kang, however, attempted to align the concept with the theory of the Three Ages, and recast it as Confucius's prophetic anticipation of a future ideal world that was to be realized in the Age of Universal Peace.

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[70] Li Xueqin 李學勤, ed., *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan zhushu 春秋公羊傳注疏 [The Gongyang Commentary on the Annals with Annotations and Commentaries]* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), 199–200.

[71] Kang, 'Chunqiu kao', 85.

[72] Kang, 'Kang Nanhai shiji', 136. Except the first two parts which were printed in 1913, Kang did not have the work printed during his lifetime, for he considered the time was not right. The entire book was published in 1935, eight years after his death.

[73] For a discussion on the concept and its English translations, see Laurence G. Thompson, *Ta T'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-Wei* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958), 27–30; see also Bart Dessein, 'Yearning for the Lost Paradise: The "Great Unity" (Datong) and Its Philosophical Interpretations', *Azijske Studije* 5, no. 1 (2017): 83–102.



Figure 5: *Datong* 大同 in Kang's Calligraphy, ©Kang, *Datongshu* (Shanghai, 1935, [2])

The central theme that ran through Kang's *Datongshu* was his foundational conviction that the goal of human life was to attain happiness through the removal of suffering. To seek pleasure and avoid suffering, Kang asserted, was the only correct, natural Way for all who were endowed with life, and even those who underwent sufferings out of their own volitional choice were likewise only seeking pleasure in the long run. The standard by which to judge the merits or demerits of various teachings and institutions, therefore, was the degree to which they were able to assist people in achieving that goal.[74] Many religions had fallen short of the standard, in his view, for some of their practices and doctrine ran contrary to the principle of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, such as the extreme austerities advocated in the discontinued religion of Mozi or practised by adherents of various sects of Hinduism and Protestantism, celibacy in Catholicism and Buddhism, and the domination of women

[74] Kang, *Datongshu*, 9.

by men in Judaism and Islam.[75] It was Confucius, the Sagely King with divine intelligence, who, in the Age of Disorder, set up the progressive doctrine of the Three Ages in order to guide humanity to develop and advance towards the Age of Approaching Peace and finally enter into the Age of Universal Peace. Now, it was his duty, Kang was internally convinced, to carry forward the mission of Confucius by elaborating on the Way of the Great Unity for the Age of Universal Peace.[76]

In this ideal world, as conceptualized by Kang, happiness was maximized, and suffering was minimized. Kang accepted the Buddhist idea that life was basically characterized by various kinds of suffering, but he rejected the Buddhist solution, that is, the extinction of desires. As discussed in previous sections, Kang always held that what he conceived of as perfectly natural human desires should be acknowledged and allowed to be gratified in a seemly manner according to the teachings of *rendao*. In his analysis, the cause of suffering was from various boundaries and inequalities, such as those between nations, classes, races, sexes, families, occupations, and governments. So, the way to avoid suffering and obtain happiness was to abolish these boundaries and establish equality. While his proposals to dissolve families and to deinstitutionalize marriage were considered too radical and even ridiculous by many of his readers, his scheme to abolish the barriers of nation states and form a united world government supported by a universal parliament seemed to be practically pertinent to the needs and exigencies of his times; his ideas anticipated and predated the call for the creation of the League of Nations (more on this in Chapter 5). The world of the Great Unity, therefore, would be one of peace, equality and high moral attainments. No place would be allowed, Kang stressed, for the cruel Darwinian principle of ‘survival of the fittest’, which only held true in the biological realm of the jungle, definitely not in the society of the Great Unity, where cooperation and collaboration were exalted above brutal competition.[77]

Kang’s future world of the Great Unity could not be realized without a high degree of scientific and technological development either, for he believed that the increase of human happiness and decrease of suffering would largely depend on material

[75] Kang, 10.
[76] Kang, 11.
[77] Kang, 357; for a concise discussion of the one-world philosophy of the book, see Thompson, *Ta T’ung Shu*, 37–55.

inventions. The true purpose of material inventions, he argued, was to add to the sum of human happiness. Life in the world of the Great Unity should be very pleasant: much of unpleasant toil and tedious labour would be carried out by machines; travelling would be made easy by technologically advanced vehicles, including 'flying rooms and ships' propelled by electricity or a new fuel; public housing (there would be no private homes any more) would be equipped with mechanical devices or robots; 'smart beds' would be made so that romantic music would play automatically when people were making love on them.[78] Kang also predicted that sophisticated, advanced devices would be made to monitor the deeds of people, so that they would not dare to cheat or commit wrongdoings in private, just as if they were being observed by the invisible spirits.[79] In the world of the Great Unity, honours and rewards would be offered to encourage people to pursue knowledge and strive to make new inventions, new theories and new techniques. 'In this way human life on earth will advance daily and there is no need to fear retrogression.'[80]

Applying the protean theory of the Three Ages to the analysis of religion, Kang predicted that the development of religion would undergo three stages as well, polytheism, monotheism and atheism.[81] He further divided the process of the unification of the nations into one world of the Great Unity into three successive stages, with a table showing the differences in the degrees of progression between and among them. In the first stage, when the first foundations of the Great Unity were laid, the adoption of a religion would be left to the decision of each state; people would revere Heaven, but they would revere the spirits still more. During the second stage, when the Great Unity was gradually coming into being, states would deliberate on the refinement of religious doctrines, and a new religion would be created through the process of combining the merits of the teachings of all sages; Heaven was to be worshipped, while reverence for various spirits would decline and disappear. During the third stage, when the Great Unity was achieved, no particular religion was to be upheld, but the most meritorious precepts of all religions would be selected and upheld. Even Heaven would not then be worshipped, and instead, the spirit of every

78 Kang, *Datongshu*, 441–47.
79 Kang, 448.
80 Kang, 409, 414.
81 See the discussion of Huan-Chang Chen, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 16–17.

man (i.e. the human soul) would be revered, as all the people are recognized as being 'Heaven's people, all endowed with absolute equality.[82]

Kang further predicted that most of the existing religions would become extinct in the world of the Great Unity. One reason was that everyone would, as mentioned above, be equal, and no founder of religion was to be revered. It would be forbidden for a religious leader to gather a multitude to follow him, for the idolizing of an individual would destroy the principle of equality and cause people to regress to the Age of Disorder. Moreover, the increase of human knowledge would make it difficult to idolize a religious leader or indeed any leader.[83] The other reason was, Kang argued, that by the time of the arrival of the Age of Universal Peace, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam would have served their purposes and would no longer be needed in the new intellectual and social conditions then prevailing. Confucius' doctrine of the Three Ages would have been completely fulfilled and Confucianism would itself become unnecessary. In the case of Christianity, its four essential doctrines—reverence for Heaven (God), love for our fellow men, repentance of sin, and judgment after death—would become redundant. For people would naturally love one another and would naturally be without sin; their understanding of the natural workings of evolution would take away their reverence for Heaven (God), and their realization of the logical impossibility of limitless numbers of souls waiting in the empty space for the Last Judgment would make them refuse to believe in or behave according to a fear of a Doomsday. Likewise, in Kang's view, the excessive emphasis placed within Islam on the worship of Heaven (Allah) as well as such practices as the subjugation of women would have lost their appeal. 'The shore having been reached,' Kang explained by means of a Chinese idiom, 'the raft may be discarded.'[84]

There would remain certain Taoist and Buddhist practices, for in the perfect and joyful society of the Great Unity, men would have desire for none other than longevity and the life beyond. The study of the art of physical immortality (*xianxue* 仙學) could still be regarded as an extension of the law of the Great Unity, while the study of Buddhahood (*foxue* 佛學), was more profound and went beyond the world

82 Kang, *Datongshu*, 164; Thompson, *Ta T'ung Shu*, 126–27.
83 Kang, *Datongshu*, 427–28.
84 Kang, 452; Thompson, *Ta T'ung Shu*, 275.

of the Great Unity. That would not be the end of it, for after the studies of immortality and Buddhahood would come 'the study of celestial peregrination' *(Tianyou zihxue* 天游之學), on which Kang said he had written another book. The doctrine of celestial peregrination would become a major subject of Kang's talks and writings in his later years, which I will discuss in the final chapter.[85]

Some may take issue with several aspects of Kang's discourse, as very briefly outlined above. He may sometimes be charged with the error of having made some very sweeping statements based on pitiful ignorance of certain fundamental theological concepts in religions other than Confucianism. His vision of the ultimate future human society in the era of the Great Unity throws up some totally unexpected outcomes based on his idealistic intellectual constructs, including the eventual 'irrelevance' of all religions leading an advanced humanity to choose ultimately to do away with all the current forms of organized religion, including Confucianism itself. However, the crucial point that needs to be made here is that, for all the complexity of his thought and the occasionally remarkable inconsistency of his theory, Kang must be acknowledged, in the history of ideas in modern China, as a towering intellectual who sincerely explored both Western science and ancient Chinese religious doctrine. Kang may be said to have regarded both systems of knowledge as compatible and complementary forces to be harnessed for the economic advancement, spiritual progress and collective general prosperity of China and the peoples of the world, for the present age and for the future world of the Great Unity.

3.2 Liang's 'Change of Heart'

During his retreat at Darjeeling, Kang received disturbing news about the rise of different opinions among the ranks of his party, and, in particular, about the views of Liang Qichao in Japan. For one thing, Liang had lost faith in reforming the Qing court by urging it towards a constitutional monarchy, and had begun to approve of the call for a revolution to overthrow Manchu rule and to establish a republic, very much in line with the thought of rival revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen. Greatly alarmed, Kang wrote long letters to Liang and his other followers, explaining why a reformed

85 Kang, *Datongshu*, 451–53; Thompson, *Ta T'ung Shu*, 275–76.

constitutional government would serve the best interests of China by maintaining its unity and peace. Drawing on the Confucian visionary theory of the Three Ages, he argued that China, which he considered was passing through the Age of Approaching Peace, could not directly leap in one bound onto the stage of a republican government, which was the appropriate institution for the Age of Universal Peace. As a result of Kang's efforts, Liang was convinced and returned to his previous position of promoting constitutional monarchy as an intermediate measure.

Liang's mind, however, remained unchanged in another area of emerging difference between him and Kang: the characterization of Confucianism as a religion. Liang's concept of religion had undergone a dramatic change around 1902 (when he turned 30), as a result of the influence of Western liberalism and the Japanese intellectual deliberations on religion. During the first few years of his exile in Japan, Liang, who had quickly learned to read in Japanese, immersed himself in Japanese translations of Western books. The authors he read included such major names in Western philosophy as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Spinoza, Leibniz, Wolf, Comte and so on. Attracted to the idea of liberalism, he considered freedom of spirit or thought a most desirable value, the exercise of which required freedom from enslavement to the old learning of China.[86] At the same time, he kept abreast of the discourse on the nature and function of religions among the Japanese academics. He came to see the difference between the Chinese concept of *jiao* and the European concept of religion, expressed in Japanese by a neologism, *zongjiao*.[87]

3.2.1 Confucianism Not a Religion

The manifesto of this change in Liang's conception of religion was stated in his 1902 essay entitled 'To Preserve the Faith is Not the Way to Exalt Confucius'. Its import was that Confucianism was not a religion in the European sense, and that there was no

[86] Liang, 'Jinshi wenming chuzu erdajia zhi xueshuo 近世文明初祖二大家之学说 [On the Thought of Bacon and Descartes, the Two Pioneers of Modern Civilization (1902)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 4, 1999, 1030.

[87] For the discussions about whether Buddhism and Confucianism were religions or philosophies in late nineteenth century Japan, see G. Clinton Godart, '"Philosophy" or "Religion"? The Confrontation with Foreign Categories in Late Nineteenth Century Japan', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 1 (2008): 71–91. For a well-informed study on the Japanese intellectual impact on Liang, see, Kuangmin 郑匡民 Zheng, *Liang Qichao Qimengsixiang de Dongxuebeijing 梁启超启蒙思想的东学背景 [The Japanese Intellectual Background of the Enlightenment Ideas of Liang Qichao]* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2003).

purpose, either, in making it into one. Liang remarked in the beginning that he was fighting against his old self, for what he was about to set forth ran counter to what he had proclaimed a few years before.[88] He defined religion in the European sense, adopting the Japanese neologism *zongjiao* instead of the traditional Chinese term *jiao*:

> By religion (*zongijao*) the Europeans mean superstitious belief (*mixin*). Its domain lies beyond the body, with the soul as its basis, with practices of worship as its rituals, with leaving this world as its aim, with the Kingdom or nirvāna as its desire, with reward or punishment in the next world as its way. These features are shared by all religions, be they big or small, refined or rudimentary.[89]

Having thus defined religion, Liang stated that religion was no longer desirable in this day, as it hindered freedom of thought and consequently, the progress of human society. Instead of the theory of the Three Ages, Liang now employed Comte's theory of Three Stages in his analysis of the nature and future of religion. 'To profess a religion,' he wrote, 'the most crucial requirements are to have absolute faith in its doctrine and to fight against heresies. The former tolerates no doubt and therefore suffocates the freedom of thought. The latter makes believers attach themselves to their own doctrine to the exclusion of other thoughts.' Therefore, despite its great contribution in the first stage of social progression, religion was no longer instrumental to human progress and its disadvantages might outweigh its advantages in the present, second stage. Liang was convinced that being a product of the first stage, religion would decline in the second stage, a phenomenon that had already been proved by the vicissitudes of Christianity in the West.[90]

According to Liang's new definition of religion, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and even Daoism were considered religions, but not Confucianism. Liang argued that the teachings of Confucius were primarily concerned with statesmanship, ethics and morality, without superstitious beliefs, practices of worship, and intolerance of doubts and differences of opinion. 'In short,' Liang wrote, 'Confucius was a philosopher, stateman, educator, but not a founder of a religion.' In addition, Liang continued,

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88 Liang, 'Baojiao feisuoyi zunkong lun 保教非所以尊孔论 [Preserving the Faith Is Not the Way to Exalt Confucius (1902)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 3, 1999, 765.
89 Liang, 766.
90 Liang, 766.

Confucius did not talk about the spirits and the life after death, and therefore was very different from the founders of religions in the West.[91] Here Liang obviously deviated from the views that Kang had espoused as well as his own earlier statements in the 1890s that Confucius had teachings on the supernatural world and that Confucianism had historically been regarded as a religion in history (see Section 2.3.2).

To take Confucianism out of the category of religion was now a must for Liang, because his concept of the usefulness of religion as an instrument for social advancement had changed from positive to negative; yet his basic allegiance to Confucianism remained firm. Excluding Confucianism from the category of 'religion' was, in Liang's view, indeed, better for Confucianism, for in his opinion Confucianism was more comprehensive and more open-minded than all other religions properly regarded as such, and because of its tolerance and openness, it could (as a body of principles for social governance and moral development) be further perfected by learning from the merits of the great religious and philosophical systems. There was no need, therefore, to attempt to preserve Confucianism by recasting it into a religion like Buddhism and Christianity.[92] Again, this was in stark contradiction to the view espoused and championed by Kang, a position which Liang himself had once wholeheartedly embraced and supported (see Section 2.3.3).

The notion that religion as a system of superstitious belief which was no longer conducive to meeting the urgent requirements and exigencies of the present age, however, represents only one aspect of Liang's revised conception of religion. He could not simply turn a blind eye to the important role religion played in society, be it in history or during his own lifetime. Perhaps to remedy the one-sided critique of religion in his previous essay, he discussed its various functions in a more comprehensive way in a subsequent essay on the advantages and disadvantages of religion and philosophy. 'Everything has two sides,' he started, 'if we only see its disadvantages and losses and therefore dismiss it in its entirety, we will fail to benefit from its advantages and gains.'[93] While he maintained the view that religion, being

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91 Liang, 766.

92 Liang, 769.

93 Liang, 'Lun zongjiaojia yu zhexuejia zhi duanchang 论宗教家与哲学家之短长得失 [On the Advantages and Disadvantages, and the Gains and Losses of Religious Leaders and Philosophers

inclined towards superstition, was an obstacle to truth, he emphasized that people with religious zeal were more skilled at managing the world than philosophers, although the latter excelled the former in terms of their skill in exploring the principles in depth. In the annals of history, most of the extraordinary people, the heroes and heroines who had made great contribution to their nations, were chiefly motivated by their religious belief. Here Liang gave a long list of such people, including Oliver Cromwell, Joan of Arc, Amerigo Vespucci, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Cavour and William Gladstone in the West who were committed to their Christian faith, Yokoi Shōnan and Oshio Heihachiro in Japan, who both drew heavily on Zen Buddhism. In particular, he singled out his teacher Kang and his deceased friend Tan Sitong, whose Buddhist belief, in his view, had been instrumental in fuelling their endeavours to bring about the awakening of their fellow countrymen.[94]

Liang attempted to discuss religion in its relation to philosophy (*zhexue* 哲學, another Japanese neologism). He argued that there were two types of philosophy: materialist and idealist. The former could only produce learning, but the latter was capable of making great men, as shown by the influence of the doctrines of Spinoza and Hegel on Napoleon, Bismarck and the Russian nihilists. Liang claimed that idealist philosophy was close to religion in its effect and indeed could be placed under the category of religion.[95] He observed that religious thought was more conducive to the management of the world than materialistic philosophy for five reasons. First, religious thought was crucial to the unification of diverse minds. He was at pains to point out that although in the future when human civilization achieved the highest level and everyone was able to conduct himself well, there would be no need for religion, yet at present people did need religion to help maintain unity. Second, religious thought could instil a hope for the future amidst difficulties and suffering, as it taught happiness in the next world for the soul. Third, religious thought was capable of detaching people from their worldly cares and pursuits. Fourth, religious thought could prevent people from transgressions by its teachings which induced fear of punishment for wrongdoing. Lastly, religious thought encouraged people to be

(1902)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 3, 1999, 762.

94 Liang, 762.

95 Liang, 762–63.

fearless in the face of great challenges, a fearlessness born of the belief that there was no death, since after the body died, the soul would exist for ever.[96]

At the same time, Liang argued that despite its benefits to a society, religion was not conducive to the advancement of scholarship and learning. In order for a society to develop healthily, it needed 'both people professing a religion and those who try to destroy it'. Interestingly, Liang called this a form of 'division of labour' and cited the laws of economics for his support, saying that the more labour was divided, the more advanced a society would become. By 'destroying religion' Liang meant to do away with the superstitious beliefs (*mixin*) in religion rather than its moral teachings—morality belonged to the whole society rather than a particular religion; if morality was destroyed in the course of fighting against religion, that would cause great harm to the society. Here, Liang was calling for a twofold approach to religion: retain its moral teachings and get rid of its blind beliefs. 'Religion and superstition often keep each other's accompany,' he commented. 'The moment superstition arises, truth becomes obscured, and as superstition continues, human intellect will not develop.' Therefore, he concluded that those in pursuit of scholarship had to fight against the enemy, superstition.[97] Liang's view as expressed in this essay has sometimes been considered by some scholars as the beginning of the discussion on the Conflict Thesis in the discourse on science and religion in the Chinese context.[98]

3.2.3 Buddhism a Better Choice

Liang considered it to be within one's right whether to believe in a religion or to fight against it. Which religion was the best if one wanted to choose one? Liang's answer was that it all depended on one's particular situation. Although religions varied in terms of their efficacy and degrees of perfection, what really mattered was the degree to which one was moved by the doctrine rather than its profundity and perfection. Whoever was confirmed in a religion would have the utmost devotion, and this devotion was the very source of great courage and perseverance, and therefore of great achievements. 'Therefore,' Liang concluded, 'the great achievements of each

96 Liang, 763–64.
97 Liang, 764.
98 Zhuo, 'Zhongguo zhishijie'.

and every extraordinary personage in the world are but a result of that utmost devotion. Only one who understands this truth can proceed to talk about religion.'[99]

Deep in his heart, however, Liang had his own definitive answer: Buddhism was the best choice, at least for the Chinese people. He elaborated on this idea in a follow-up essay entitled 'On the Relationship between Buddhism and Social Governance'. This essay stands out among all of his writings as his most comprehensive, in-depth treatise on religion; it reveals Liang's basic views on Buddhism and Christianity, which he considered to be the archetypes of two categories of religion, and in many instances, it also reflects the views of Kang Youwei on the two religions. These views established the railroad tracks for Liang's future attitudes towards religions, from which he might occasionally deviate but would never be derailed.

Liang began the essay by trying to address 'a big question': Could China develop without a religion or belief in a faith? He argued that although religion would not be needed in a fully developed civilization, 'religion is a must' for today's world which was still far away from that perfect far-off future stage.[100] This statement differed from his earlier view in the previous two essays, which indicated that the world had already entered the second stage of civilization and therefore did not need religion that much. Liang disagreed with the opinion that education could be a substitute for religion, an idea which was spreading among some of his associates in Japan. It might be an option in countries where universal education had been achieved and where good conduct had become second nature to the generality of the people. As China had not yet reached that stage of development, there was an 'absolute need' for the discussion of the question of faith and religion for China.[101]

If China must have a faith to sustain and support her development, which religion should the Chinese people put their faith in? In Liang's mind, Confucianism was no longer an option, for he now considered the Confucian tradition more of an ethical teaching than a religion, with its emphasis on practice instead of faith. This did not, however, in any way mean that Confucianism was not good. The teachings of

99 Liang, 'Lun zongjiaojia yu zhexuejia', 764.
100 Liang, 'Lun Fojiao yu qunzhi zhi guanxi 论佛教与群治之关系 [On the Relationship between Buddhism and Social Governance (1902)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 4, 1999, 906.
101 Liang, 906.

Confucius might be much more effective in the more civilized future than in the present age which, in Liang's mind, still bordered on the barbarian. He also disregarded the option of Christianity, as suggested by those who were 'intoxicated with the Western wine' and thereby became misguided by 'the assumption that the Christian faith is the source of the power of the West'. He listed three reasons. First, historically Christianity had no emotional connections with the Chinese people and was not conducive to guiding the people; second, it was backed by and made use of by European powers and therefore might bring disaster to the nation; third, its doctrine was not so profound and refined as to be able to train the entire humanity. 'If we are to choose a new faith for our nation which had not possessed one,' he asked, 'why not turn to the loftiest and profoundest one?' By that he meant Buddhism.[102]

Liang then elaborated on six 'superior characteristics' of Buddhism. Firstly, Buddhism was an 'intellectual' faith rather than a superstitious one. While other religions stressed faith even without understanding, Buddhism aimed at true understanding through enlightenment and upheld the belief in the believers' attainment to Buddhahood.[103] Second, Buddhism was committed to the wellbeing of all rather than the personal salvation of oneself. This, according to Liang, was most evidently testified by the way of the bodhisattva: 'I will not attain to the Buddhahood until everyone has attained it'.[104] Third, Buddhism was oriented towards this world rather than the other world. Liang refuted the Neo-Confucian criticism that Buddhism was inclined to quietness and nothingness, arguing that the doctrine of the bodhisattva was to endeavour to turn this world into Heaven on earth by guiding and enlightening the wayward and lost souls.[105] Fourth, the Buddhist teachings on the soul were superior to those in other religions, in particular, Christianity. Buddhism taught that the soul would forever suffer or benefit from what it had done in this life. Knowing that there would be greater happiness or bitterness after death, people would so conduct themselves as to perform good deeds and avoid committing bad actions. Knowing that the soul would never perish, people may find it easier to die for righteousness without fear. This was, Liang declared, the 'applied Buddhism'

[102] Liang, 906.
[103] Liang, 907.
[104] Liang, 907.
[105] Liang, 907–8.

advocated by Tan Sitong and exemplified by his unflinching courage.[106] Fifth, Buddhism upheld equality rather than differentiation. Other religions commanded the obedience of all to one, while Buddhism aimed at the equality of all. Good as they were, other religions were at most suitable to the Age of Disorder and the Age of Approaching Peace, but Buddhism suited all the three Ages.[107] The last advantage of Buddhism was that it emphasized self-reliance rather than dependence. According to other religions, happiness and woe came from an outside agent, and that was why prayers and worship mattered. As for Buddhism: all-encompassing was the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect, according to which each and every one was the bearer of the effects of previous causes as well as the creator of new ones. Therefore, we should always be cautious in considering what causes our own actions or deeds might bring about.[108] Liang concluded that these six features were the very reasons why he believed in Buddhism himself. If Buddhism was that good and helpful, one may ask, how come India, its birthplace, failed to remain an independent nation? Liang's answer was that India's plight was not because of practising Buddhism, but because of failure to practise it.[109]

These are the major themes of Liang's three 1902 treatises on religion. The differences and even contradictions between the first and third are easily noticeable. In his first treatise, Liang was very critical of religions, including Buddhism, arguing that they would all be bound to decline in the future as they were superstitious in nature and not conducive to the progress of the human mind and the development of science, while stressing that Confucianism, which was not a religion but could have the advantages of a religion, would surely prosper on its own right by reason of its own merits as a moral system regulating interpersonal relationships. In his third treatise, however, Liang affirmed that China did need a religion, and that religion should be Buddhism. In accounting for these apparent contradictions, Xia Xiaohong, a leading scholar on Liang, has commented that 'they do not mean Liang's views on religions have dramatically changed over the short span of a few months'. It is just that Liang, in his eagerness to convince people of an idea, would 'amass all proofs and arguments in his favour', without due considerations of possible contradictions to

106 Liang, 108.
107 Liang, 908–9.
108 Liang, 909.
109 Liang, 910.

what he had written or would write.[110] There is certainly some truth in the comment. However, I would offer this observation: Liang's conception of religion had evolved over those months and had crystallised into a final comprehensive statement of his own credo in his third and final thesis. As Liang himself acknowledged, 'I do not mind criticizing myself of yesterday with myself of today'.[111] In other words, he had, over the years, formed a complex view of religion: he conceived of religious beliefs as being superstitious by their very nature but that religion as such was still needed in today's world which has not yet attained the perfect stage of human civilization; at the same time, he differentiated between religions, arguing that Confucianism was not a religion in the Western sense and that Buddhism was, in his considered opinion, a superior religion that was better suited to the particular requirements of the Chinese people. This seemed to constitute his basic understanding of religion, and, on this point, his view remained more or less the same for the rest of his life.

While Kang was very swift and forceful in 'correcting' Liang's political inclination towards revolution, he remained, for the time being, relatively quiet on his disciple's 'change of heart' about promoting Confucianism as a religion. As far as extant records indicate, Kang did not have direct discussion with Liang on whether Confucianism was a religion or not. The reasons for his reticence are not entirely clear. Perhaps he thought that the proof he had set forth was complete and his arguments well-founded. Perhaps wisdom dictated silence so long as Liang remained 'politically correct'. Perhaps he did not want to enter into a debate with his own rank and file on an issue which he considered of great importance but lesser urgency at that time. Unlike Liang, Kang's belief in Confucianism as an archetype of religion only increased during his next round of world travels. Only after the passing of two years, among the records of his travels, did Kang refute Liang's view that Confucianism was not a religion, and explicate on the undesirability of the Japanese neologism *zongijao* as a fitting rendition of 'religion'.

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110 Xia Xiaohong 夏晓红, *Jueshi yu chuanshi: Liang Qichao de wenxue daolu [Awakening the People and Passing Down to Posterity: A Study of the Literary Development of Liang Qichao]* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 134.

111 Liang, 'Qingdai Xueshu', 3100; cf. Liang, *Intellectual Trends*, 103.

3.3 Observations during World Travels

In April 1903, Kang learned about the news of the death of Grand Secretary Ronglu 榮祿, the favoured advisor to the Empress Dowager, whom Kang regarded as his arch opponent and nemesis. Feeling safer, Kang decided to end his retreat in northern India, and he left for a tour of Southeast Asia. He was happy to witness the further development of the branches of his *Baohuanghui*. He convened a conference in Hong Kong for leaders of the Association, at which it was decided that renewed efforts would be invested in the diffusion of reformist knowledge among the Chinese people, both at home and abroad. Among other things, two newspapers, the *Shangbao* 商報 (Commercial News) and the *Shibao* 時報 (Eastern News), were to be started in Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively, and the *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (New People's Miscellany), which was started and run by Liang Qichao in Yokohama, and the book company in Shanghai under their control, were to be reorganized.[112]

Having settled the affairs of the Association and recovered his health, Kang embarked, from May 1904 onward, on an extended tour of Europe, visiting as many as eleven countries, namely, Italy, France, Hungary, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Holland and Great Britain. During his journey, he was accompanied by his interpreter Zhou Guoxian 周國賢 and joined by his daughter Tongbi, then studying in the United States, and Lo Chong 羅昌, who was then an undergraduate student at Oxford and who would later marry Tongbi. Kang's sojourn in Europe ended in November, when he set sail from Liverpool for Canada. Shortly afterwards, he completed a book consisting of his accounts of and observations from his travels to the eleven European countries (*Ouzhou shiyiguo youji* 歐洲十一國游記), which was published in Shanghai in 1905.[113]

During the next five years, while making his main residence in Canada, he made another four tours to Europe (August 1906–March 1907, November 1907–July 1908, March–April 1909 and July–August 1909) in addition to his frequent visits to the

[112] Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 193–94. Known in English as Quong Jee Sue Kouk Ltd, the press was established in Shanghai and owned by a Hong Kong businessman, but it was under the distant supervision of Liang Qichao in Japan.
[113] Lo, 195–98.

United States, Mexico and Brazil. He even purchased, probably with funding obtained from his lucrative property business in Mexico, a small island near Saltsjobaden in Sweden as his resort home on the European continent.[114] He visited new cities and revisited old ones, covering nearly all the countries in Europe. During these travels he was often accompanied by his second concubine, Ho Chan-li 何旃理, a young American-born Chinese woman, who served as his English secretary after they got married in 1907. He wrote another series of accounts of his travels, most of which were not published until the 1910s.

Unlike his first visit to Europe in 1899, when his sole purpose was to secure political support to reinstall the Emperor, the aim of these later tours was, according to Kang, to examine the politics, culture and customs of Western countries so as to find the best remedies for the ills of China.[115] Among other things, his extensive travels had further convinced him that a constitutional monarchy was the most suitable form of government for China at its current stage of political development, that the Confucian religion enjoyed doctrinal superiority over other religions, and that China must follow the example of European countries and seek material development through science and technology.

3.3.1 Reflections on Religions

As his own travel accounts show, Kang often sought to visit religious sites during his travels; he was keen to observe the local religious practices and customs, which in turn stimulated his reflections on religions in general and on Chinese religious practices in particular. This is most evidently manifested in the account of his sojourn in Italy. On 19 June 1904, he arrived in Rome and visited the impressive St. Peter's Basilica, which he called 'Peter's Temple', regarded by Europeans as the largest one in the world.[116] Apart from its size and grandeur, St. Peter's appeared unique in Kang's eyes for another reason: the decline of Catholicism and the rise of Protestantism were closely related to its construction, whose financing by means of the corruptive 'indulgences' had incurred the wrathful protestation of and precipitated

[114] Lo, 204.
[115] Kang, 'Ouzhou shiyiguo youji xu 欧洲十一国游记序 [Preface to Accounts of My Travels to Eleven European Countries (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 7, 2007, 344.
[116] Kang, 'Yidali youji', 360.

the calls for reform issued by Martin Luther. On seeing the Chapel of the Confession, Kang remarked that the practice originated in Buddhism, and that confession was in reality the same as what Confucius described as inwardly accusing oneself for one's own perceived faults (*neizisong* 內自訟).[117]

Unlike the 'inward confession' advocated by Confucius, Kang wrote, the Catholic practice of having priests hear the sins of penitents was disadvantageous, because it could lead to sexual abuse of women by the priests. The numerous cases of such sex abuses, Kang argued, contributed to the notoriety and consequent decline of Catholicism, very much in the same way that sexual misdeeds by Buddhist monks had debased and harmed Buddhism in Chinese history. Kang believed that the requirement of celibacy among the priesthood was the cause of the scandals in both Catholic and Buddhist settings, for he considered the human sexual urge a natural and legitimate need that should be properly expressed. In a way that brings to mind his earlier distinction between the *yin* and *yang* religions according to their attitudes towards physical desires (see Section 1.3.2), Kang opined that religions which suppressed human sexual desire would decline while those that acknowledged them would prosper. In this connection, he quoted three examples in the history of religion. Martin Luther had succeeded in establishing Protestant Christianity because 'he married a nun' himself and denounced celibacy in his teaching; Padmasambhava (蓮花生, lit. Lotus-Born) was able to spread Buddhism to Tibet because he allowed his followers to 'gratify their sexual desires by getting married'; the Japanese monk Shinran founded the flourishing Jōdo Shinshū sect because he 'took a wife and ate meat'.[118] Here Kang gave, in the words of Hsiao, 'a hedonistic interpretation' of the history of religion,[119] an interpretation that was rooted in Kang's understanding of the goal of human life as being to seek pleasure and shun suffering, as he stressed in his *Book of the Great Unity* (see Section 3.1.3).[120]

Kang's visit to the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls was equally impactful and thought-provoking to him. Witnessing how Paul, an indirect disciple of Jesus, was so

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[117] Kang, 362.

[118] Kang, 362.

[119] Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 30.

[120] Kang, *Datongshu*, 9.

much revered and loved in the Christian tradition, he lamented the fact that, back to China, the temple of Mencius, a distant yet most illustrious disciple of Confucius, was not even properly maintained. Moreover, he stressed that Confucius himself had come under recent attacks from a small number of 'ignorant and presumptuous people' (*wangren* 妄人).[121] They would pick up certain new theories from Europe and use them to denounce Chinese morality and religion, mistakenly believing the former to be superior to the latter. In particular, Kang singled out and refuted one of their main criticisms—the claim that Confucianism was not a religion. Without specifying names, Kang was almost certainly alluding to the view voiced by Liang Qichao two years earlier. 'It is said that a religion (*zongjiao*) must speak of the spirits', he wrote, 'and therefore the teachings of the Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad are considered religions, whereas Confucianism is not, for Confucius did not speak of spirits.' That was a very ignorant and weird view, Kang argued, for it implied that China had been a country 'without religion' before the arrival of three foreign religions. That, however, Kang said, was far from the truth, as 'the Chinese concept and character of *jiao* was an ancient one, which had been discoursed on in numerous places in ancient Chinese classics and their commentaries'.[122]

Here Kang was struggling between the Chinese concept of *jiao* and the Western term 'religion'. Unlike Liang who had shifted to the Western conception of religion, Kang sought to align the two concepts together. He argued that under these two generic terms could be grouped the various systems of moral teachings in the world, all of which shared the same goal of teaching people to live a moral life. 'The essence of any *jiao* (religion)', he stressed, 'lies in making men shun evil and do good.'[123] At another place, in his account of his visit to Cambridge University on the invitation of Herbert A. Giles (1845–1935),[124] its Professor of Chinese, Kang attempted to define

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121 Kang, 'Yidali youji', 374.

122 Kang, 374.

123 Kang, 374.

124 A British diplomat in China and reputable sinologist, Giles became only the second person to hold the chair of Chinese at Cambridge. Among other things, he was known for the widely used Wade–Giles Chinese romanization system which he had improved based on the work of his predecessor, Thomas Wade. Kang had a nice conversation on such topics as Chinese religion with Giles, who was about to publish his small volume, *Religions of Ancient China*. According to Kang, Giles was very critical of James Legge's translations of Chinese classics, commenting that they had 'distorted' their original meaning, due to the translator's covert bias in favour of Christianity, and consequently, they had misguided European readers into looking down upon Chinese religion. See

the two terms in a broad sense. 'The Chinese word *jiao* means emulation (*jiao* 效),' he wrote. 'In other words, one who is enlightened ahead of others (*xianjuzhe* 先覺者) sets forth a doctrine (way), so that others can emulate the enlightened one by following the doctrine (way).' This was, Kang argued, exactly what was 'originally' meant by 'religion' (which he transliterated as *lilijin* and spelled out the English letters).[125] It followed that there could be a variety of *jiao* or religions, and they did not have to be limited to those that were focused on doctrines pertaining to spirits. The fact that the concept of religion as being restricted to belief systems that subscribed to a belief in the existence of spirits was, in his view, a result of the limitation imposed by Christianity. Nevertheless, Kang argued in line with the definition in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, a proper *jiao* was one that was based on an intimate grasp, by the sage, of the Heaven-endowed human nature, and in that sense it could said to have originated in Heaven.[126] In summary, Kang understood a proper religion (*jiao*) to be a set of teachings on cultivating the divinely-bestowed human nature expounded by one who had become enlightened ahead of others and which was passed down to posterity through a community of followers. With this analysis, he had made another attempt to harmonize *jiao* and 'religion', considering them to be different linguistic references to the same universal concept.

In this connection, Kang offered an uncompromising criticism of the Japanese neologism, *zongjiao*. which, as discussed in the previous section, had contemporaneously begun to be used to refer to 'religion' in China. Kang adopted an etymological approach in his argument. The Japanese, being fond of using two-character words, had coined the term *zongjiao* by combining *jiao*, meaning Buddhism, and *zong*, sects of Buddhism, but it was, he said, an awkward linguistic hybrid that did not make much sense. It could only be used to refer to doctrines that were focused on or made use of beliefs in the spirits, but it was not a suitable term for what he believed to be the true concept of 'religion' or *jiao*. Therefore, Kang urged

Herbert A. Giles and Charles Aylmer, 'The Memoirs of H.A. Giles', *East Asian History*, no. 13/14 (1997): 1–90; Kang, 'Yingguo Jianbuliezhu daxue huawen zongjiaoxi Zhailushi huijianji 英国监布列住大学华文总教习斋路士会见记 [An Interview with Herbert Allen Giles, Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University of England (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 8, 2007, 27–57.

125 Kang, 'Yingguo Jianbuliezhu', 34.

126 Kang, 34.

Chinese scholars to disregard the use of *zongjiao* and to continue to employ *jiao*.[127] As I will show in later chapters, Kang would revisit and eventually modify his own position on this point.

3.3.2 *Shendao* and *Rendao*

The differences between religions, then, primarily consisted in the means by which they instructed the people. '*Jiao* (religions) vary in their ways of instruction. Some instruct people by means of *shendao* 神道 (the way of the spirits), others by means of *rendao* (the human way), still others by means of both of those ways.'[128] Here Kang resorted to the binary terms, *shendao* and *rendao*, to substantiate his analysis. *Shendao* is an ancient concept that can be traced back to the concept of *shendao shejiao* 神道設教 in the *Changes*: The sages laid down their instruction for the people by means of the way of the spirits.[129] In its normal usage, *shendao* might mean either or both of these two things: 1) the teaching that spirits exist and they have power to reward virtue and punish evil; and 2) the ways in which spirits are supposed to act, especially in terms of their interaction with human beings.[130] It follows that a *shendao jiao* or religion was one that made extensive use the notions of hell and paradise, doctrines on the retributive powers of ghosts and spirits and various practices, so as to make people avoid evil and do good out of fear of punishment and desire for reward.

In contrast, by *rendao* or the human way, Kang meant a set of teachings that was capable of being practised by the whole community of human beings (ordinary human beings) instead of a mere portion of them (like priests, monks or hermits). These teachings nurtured proper human relations through the practice of moral principles and permitted adherents to satisfy human desires in a seemly and moderate manner.[131] These teachings for promoting moral conduct, interpersonal relationship and social

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127 Kang, 33–34.

128 Kang, 'Yidali youji', 374.

129 *Shendao* defies simple translation. Legge rendered it as 'the spirit-way', while Richard Wilhelm adopted 'the divine way'. Legge, *Texts of Confucianism II*, 230; Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes, 3rd ed. (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 486.

130 For a concise discussion on the term, see Robert F. Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 149.

131 Kang, 'Zhongyongzhu', 373.

harmony, Kang claimed, found their best expression in the Way of Confucius, which was designed for the very purpose of guiding and moderating people in meeting their natural needs on a daily basis, and that was why it was said in the *Mean*, Kang argued, that the Way could not be departed from even for a moment.[132] The Confucian teachings on the Five Relations (husband-wife, father–son, ruler–minister, older–younger and friend–friend) and the Five Constant Virtues (benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness), for example, conformed to the Heaven-endowed human nature and were indispensable to human life. These made the Confucian Way superior to other doctrines that advocated practices, such as celibacy and eating no meat, which, in Kang's view, sought to suppress human nature, and therefore could only be practised by a few.[133]

Kang compared the Sages, the founders of religions, to be superb spiritual Physicians (*yiwang* 醫王), who would exercise their discretion to choose the most appropriate ways for their mode of instruction of the people according to their mental state and development. In ancient times, Kang explained, the people were ignorant, and they believed that everything beyond their clear perception was in the charge of spiritual beings. So the ancient Sages took advantage of what the people believed and thereby instilled in them a sense of fear. As a result, people would refrain from doing evil because they had something that they feared; similarly, they would turn toward goodness because they had something that they longed for. Hence most of the archaic religions set forth clear-cut doctrines on ghosts and spirits. Kang claimed that the Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad had inherited and retained those ancient doctrines to form such conceptions as the promise of paradise and the threat of hell in order to influence people in their moral choices, and as a result, their teachings had given rise to the growth and development of religious communities of followers and had been successfully promulgated far and wide.[134]

Similarly, many of the extravagant superstitious beliefs and practices in pre-Confucian China had been passed down to the Chinese people living during Confucius' time. Loathing the superstitious nature of the popular worship of various

[132] Kang, 370.
[133] Kang, 369, 373.
[134] Kang, 'Yidali youji', 374.

spirits and decrying its excessive influence on the people, Kang wrote, Confucius had undertaken to sweep it away by denouncing those various spirits which demanded worship, and had only preserved the sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, the gods of mountains and rivers, the god of the land and the god of grain. The reason why Confucius had spared and condoned these five sacrifices, Kang explained, was not so much because they were enduring truths, but because of their temporary utility as pragmatic concessions given after taking into account the needs of the princes, the ministries and the general populace of ancient times. As human intelligence progressed to a fuller degree, Kang predicted, those sacrifices (which were still being practised in Kang's lifetime) could and should, eventually, be gotten rid of as well.[135] With this thesis, Kang presented his own progressive outlook on religion, arguing that Confucianism constitute an advanced and superior form of religion:

> Previously, the way of the spirits (*shendao*) was employed to govern the primitive people, but when progress had been made [in human intelligence], the human way (*rendao*) was increasingly employed. This signified cultural advancement. It can be concluded, therefore, that as a founder of a religion Confucius represented an advanced stage in cultural progress.[136]

That was the reason, Kang explained, why Confucius rarely talked about spirits and advised paying due respect to them but kept them at a distance. This, however, should not mislead one into doubting the Sage's faith in Heaven or *Shangdi* (God). Kang asserted that Confucius stressed reverence for the Supreme Deity in such a direct and emphatic manner that it even eclipsed the reverence evinced in the monotheist teachings of Christianity and Islam.[137] With this statement, Kang was trying to make the point that the Teaching of Confucius contained not only the truths that were enshrined in other religions, such as reverence for God and the immortality of the soul (part of *shendao*), but also the merits in its doctrine that were absent in Christianity and Islam, such as the use of the human way (*rendao*) in its moral instruction and the progressive doctrine of the Three Ages. It followed that Confucianism was a superior system of religious thought which was best suited to the needs of both the Chinese people and the people of other lands. Confucianism was, in Kang's view, not only

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135 Kang, 374.

136 Kang, 374; my translation, based on the translation in Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 114.

137 Kang, 'Yidali youji', 375.

good for the present time but also for the future of the world. This is a theme that Kang would repeat in a number of places among the various accounts of his thoughts during his travels, and as we shall see, in his later writings as well.

3.3.3 On Material Reconstruction

Around the time he completed the records of his travels, Kang wrote a book of a different kind, *Wuzhi jiuguo lun* 物質救國論 (On Saving China Through Material Reconstruction, hereafter cited as *Saving China*), in which he extolled the function and utility of science and technology. The work consisted of twenty essays, in which he promoted the need for development of commerce, industry and technology to enrich and modernize China. Unlike the other works written by him during the period of his exile, most of which did not get printed until the era of the Republic, this work, *Saving China*, was published in Shanghai in 1908. Its publication and circulation within China was possible because the book was focused on material development and contained little about political reforms and debates. Even before its publication, its main ideas had been made public through Kang's talks to the Chinese community in North America. On the evening of 16 March 1905, for example, he had given a talk to the members of the Los Angeles branch of the *Baohuanghui*, during which he spoke about the importance of science and technology to China.[138]

He made it clear in the preface to *Saving China* that during his travels he was awed by the level of material civilization in the countries of Europe, and he was increasingly convinced that China would be destroyed by the foreign powers unless she attained the same level of industrialization as had been achieved in the West. China's spiritual inheritance, in the form of its morality and philosophy, was in no way inferior to that of Western countries. The expedient and urgently needed key to national salvation, in his opinion, lay in 'material learning' (*wuzhi zhixue* 物质之学). By 'material learning' he meant a wide range of things, among which were, primarily, scientific technology and such practical, specialized branches of learning as chemistry, optics, electricity, mechanics, astronomy, geology, arithmetic, botany and biology.[139] Therefore, *wuzhi*

[138] Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 198.

[139] Kang, 'Wuzhi Jiuguo Lun 物质救国论 [On Saving China Through Material Reconstruction (1904)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 8, 2007, 67 .

zhixue is often rendered as ‘science and technology’ in this thesis, consonantly with the renditions by a number of other scholars.[140] Not only did Kang believe, as was clearly shown in his avid acquisition and advocacy of Western learning, that science could generate new knowledge and new understanding, thus contributing to personal development, but he was also convinced that science was essential for the survival and prosperity of a nation, as demonstrated by the examples of Japan and the United States and the European countries.

In Kang’s opinion, the true basis of the wealth and strength of Western countries lay in material learning, something that the Chinese had, in his view, failed to grasp despite various earnest attempts in their quest for China’s wealth, prosperity and power. From the 1860s onward, Kang wrote, the leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement had mistakenly assumed that the strength of Western countries resulted from armaments and warships, and had then endeavoured to improve China’s arms. After the military defeat of 1894 by Japan, the Chinese came to understand that Europe’s and America’s strength lay in an educated citizenry which in turn depended on a good school system. As a result, the whole country concentrated on establishing new schools. Since 1898, more and more Chinese had imagined that the foundation of wealth and strength of Europe and America lay in the Westerners’ profound philosophy and in their ideas of freedom and revolution. Thus, they discarded China’s traditional teaching and learning and embraced those Western concepts, such as freedom and revolution. All these efforts, according to Kang, missed the point, for Western countries had actually become strong because of the development of science and technology while the root of China’s current malady and weakness lay solely in its failure to promote science and technology.[141] In today’s world, he further added, countries prospered, declined or even collapsed depending upon the level of the development of science and technology they attained.[142] ‘Indeed science is the first and foremost means for saving China,’ he wrote at the end of the book. ‘Even if other things are to be left unattended to, science should never be neglected.’[143] This emphatic statement on science, in retrospect, brings to mind the similar views of the

[140] Cf. Hsiao, *K’ang Yu-Wei*, 520.
[141] Kang, ‘Wuzhi Jiuguo Lun’, 63.
[142] Kang, 63, preface.
[143] Kang, 95.

later New Culture intellectuals, who nevertheless would not give credit to Kang for his pioneering advocacy of science. For this reason, Kang has been acclaimed, and rightly so, by Hsiao as 'an early though unhonoured prophet of a new faith' in science.[144]

While advocating the rescue of China through material reconstruction and simultaneously engaging in business activities himself, Kang never neglected the political domain of his endeavours. He welcomed the Qing Court's 1906 announcement of preparations for constitutional rule.[145] Like other constitutionalists, however, Kang was not satisfied with the government's proposed gradual and time-consuming process of preparation; instead he petitioned for the immediate convening of a parliament.[146] Eventually, the constitutionalists, both at home and abroad, joined hands and formed a party, Friends of the Constitution (*Xianyouhui* 憲友會), which was legally registered in China in early 1911. Kang acclaimed this as a milestone in China's political history as well as the culmination of his efforts in this direction starting with the *Qiangxuehui* in 1895.[147] Earlier, in his renewed efforts to promote constitutional monarchy, Kang was greatly saddened by the news of the death, in 1908, of Emperor Guangxu, whom he believed to have been murdered by the Empress Dowager, who, as history records, herself strangely died one day after the Emperor. As the Emperor had died without an heir, one of his nephews, the three-year-old Puyi 溥儀, was chosen to succeed to the throne, with his father as the regent. Kang promptly pledged his allegiance to Puyi, and proceeded forthwith to request the imperial Court to abrogate the arrest warrant naming him and his

144 Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 397.

145 The imperial decision was stimulated by the fact of Russia's defeat by Japan in their 1905 war, which was regarded as a 'victory of constitutionalism over monarchism' (as expressed by the famous scholar-turned-industrialist, Zhang Qian 張謇, also a constitutionalist), and was a response to increasing domestic demands to adopt constitutionalism. See John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 140, 388–89.

146 Kang, 'Zhonghua Xianzhenghui qiaomin gongshang qingyuanshu 中华宪政会侨民公上请愿书 [A petition of the Chinese Constitutional Association and overseas Chinese (1908)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 8, 2007, 411.

147 Kang, 'Minzhengbu zhun diguotongyidang zhuce lun 民政部准帝国统一党注册论 [On the Registration of the Imperial Unification Party by the Ministry of the Interior (1911)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 192.

followers.[148] The reign of the child Emperor, however, was short-lived. Increasing anger and despair were provoked by the appointment of a cabinet dominated by members of the Royal Family. To the constitutionalists, the cabinet appointment revealed the Court's half-hearted commitment to real constitutionalism. The revolutionists took it as a justification for intensifying their call to overthrow the Manchu rulers. These sentiments served as a catalyst for the revolutionary movement and the rapid fall of the Qing dynasty.[149]

To sum up, during his long years of exile, Kang found the time and the peace of mind to bring to completion his religious reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics. In doing so, he had actually established a Confucian theology by elaborating on such topics as the divinity of Confucius, the idea of serving Heaven, the concept of *jiao*/religion, the nature and immortality of the human soul, and the principle of Heaven-ordained laws applicable to all things. His study of other religions during his extensive travels around the world strengthened his belief in the doctrinal superiority of Confucianism, because it was rooted in Heaven but designed for humanity, encompassing and employing both the way of the spirits (*shendao*) and the human way (*rendao*). During his travels, Kang became totally convinced of the practical and utilitarian aspects of science and technology as being the foremost prerequisites for the development and advancement of China. While Liang Qichao embraced Western conceptions of religion under the Japanese contemporaneous intellectual influence, analytically excluded Confucianism from the realm of religion and thereby indicated a relationship of conflict between religion and science, Kang remained firm in his view of science and religion as being compatible and complementary branches of one unified system of knowledge. This line of reasoning was most clearly demonstrated in his appropriation of scientific notions, in particular 'ether' and 'electricity', for his interpretation of such Confucian concepts as *ren* and human nature, in a way that was reminiscent of the monistic philology of Tan Sitong. Kang also speculated on the eventual and ultimately inevitable disappearance of Confucianism, Christianity and Islam, and prophesized the rise of the study of the art of immortality and Buddhahood

148 Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 212–20.

149 For the fall of the Qing dynasty and the Republican revolutionary movement, see Michael Gasster, 'The Republican Revolutionary Movement', in *CHC*, vol. 11, 1980, 463–534.

in the ideal world of the Great Unity to come, a world that would be constructed on a high degree of scientific and technological development. He was implying that when Confucianism itself was spent, the superior beings of that far-off future time would turn to his writings and mystic experiences and then embark on a study of the spiritual reality of ‘celestial peregrination’, a topic which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

4 A State Religion

4.1 A Titular Monarchical Republic

Kang Youwei was taken by surprise when news of a revolt at Wuchang (which triggered what came to be known as the Revolution of 1911) reached him in Suma, Japan, where he had recently gone to be with Liang Qichao. Within less than two months after the Wuchang revolt, a majority of Chinese provinces had declared their independence of Manchu rule. To appease the revolutionary movement, the frightened Qing court quickly reshuffled the 'royal cabinet' by appointing the Chinese general Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 (1859–1916) as its prime minister and hurriedly announced the 'Nineteen Major Articles'. According to the articles, a Constitution was to be drafted by the National Assembly, the power of the Emperor would be radically curtailed, a parliament would be elected, and all political exiles were pardoned.[1] Kang and Liang welcomed these changes, which in their view had already turned the polity into a constitutional monarchy, and they therefore urged the revolutionaries to strike a peace deal with the government, so as to avoid the dangers of political chaos and national disunity.[2] The government's policy changes, however, were 'too little, too late' for the revolutionaries, who proceeded to declare the establishment of the Republic of China in Nanjing on 1 January 1912, with Sun Yat-sen as Provisional President. In an effort to avert a civil war, a compromise was struck between Yuan and the revolutionaries, whereby the presidency was handed to Yuan after he had pledged to support the republic and undertaken to secure the abdication of the Qing monarch.[3]

Kang, however, was deeply disappointed at the adoption of a presidential system by the new Republic. It was not that he was against the idea of a republic. On the contrary, he stressed that a popular government was what Confucius had envisioned for a future China and what he himself had expounded in his *Book of the Great*

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1 Chuzo Ichiko, 'Political and Institutional Reform, 1901-11', in *CHC*, vol. 11, 1980, 398.

2 Kang, 'Yu Li Yuanhong, Huang Xing, Tang Hualong shu 与黎元洪、黄兴、汤化龙书 [A Letter to Li Yuanhong, Huang Xing and Tang Hualong (1911)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 210–17.

3 For more on the birth of the republic, see Ichiko, 'Political and Institutional Reform', 515–34.

Unity.[4] The problem was, Kang argued, China was not yet ready for a presidential form of republican government, for he reasoned that in line with the doctrine of the Three Ages, the system of government should advance in stages as the society evolved, and constitutional monarchy should come in as an intermediate stage between despotism and democracy. Even if China was to become a republic, there were several other forms of republican rule to choose from. To copy the American version would lead to power struggles for the presidency and result in crippling disunity. In his view, the United States was successful with a presidential democracy because of its unique qualities, especially the fact that its founding members were all Puritans, who 'desired only to save the people' without 'thirsting for positions of power'.[5] He urged his countrymen to learn from the lessons of those countries in which the American model had been tried and had failed. The French adoption, for example, had resulted in a devastating revolution followed by decades of chaos and turmoil, primarily due to, in his view, the absence in France of a Puritan 'moral basis' to check contentious bids for the lucrative presidency. Kang predicted that an immediate Chinese presidential Republic would lead to similar dire consequences.[6]

The best choice for post-revolution China was to become, in Kang's words, a 'titular monarchical republic' (*xujun gonghe* 虚君共和). This was the term he had invented to describe the system of government practised in such countries as Canada and Australia (Kang would elsewhere sometimes use the same term to refer to the British parliamentary system, which he had earlier on called a 'constitutional monarchy'). A titular monarch, Kang argued, would function as a point of loyalty and allegiance for all the peoples of China, thereby warding off potential contentious bids by individuals for the position of President, thus preserving order during the period of transition. Disputes would then be fought out 'verbally and in ink' in Parliament rather than with 'guns and blood on the battle fields'.[7] Kang explained that republican rule represented the third stage of monarchy, succeeding the stages of a despotic monarchy and a constitutional monarchy, and he explained that what he was proposing was in

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4 Kang, 'Gonghe zhengtilun 共和政体论 [On the Polity of a Republic (1911)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 241.

5 Kang, 'Jiuwanglun 救亡论 [A Treatise on Saving China (1911)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 233; Kang, 'Gonghe zhengti', 242.

6 Kang, 'Gonghe zhengti', 243.

7 Kang, 241, 245, 247.

essence a democratic polity with a titular monarch.[8] 'It is a blessing from Heaven', Kang wrote, 'for post-revolution China to adopt this wondrous system, one that possesses all the benefits of a republic but not the chaos and conflict it often entails.'[9] To occupy the position of titular monarch, Kang personally considered the last Manchu emperor, Puyi, as a natural choice.[10] Aware of the widespread anti-Manchu sentiments, however, Kang had proposed an alternative candidate, Duke Yansheng, who, as a descendent of Confucius, was indisputably qualified for the position. Kang compared this proposed arrangement with the Papacy in Italy, although he noted that the latter was not a hereditary office and the Pope wielded much more power.[11] Kang did not spell out one nicety: having a descendant of Confucius serve as titular monarch would also support his other campaign to make Confucianism a state religion (to be discussed in the next section).

Kang's proposal was enthusiastically supported by Liang, who elaborated on the proposed system—for which he even offered a name in English, 'Public Kingdom'—in his famous treatise on the reconstruction of post-revolution China.[12] Shortly after the revolution started, Kang and Liang circulated their proposal in China through telegrams, letters and emissaries. It was, unsurprisingly, turned down as unpractical and inopportune by Yuan Shikai, who was seeking to make himself president, as well as by revolutionary leaders including Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 and Huang Xing 黃興.[13] Liang soon accepted the political realities and let go of the titular monarchy concept. At the invitation of Yuan, Liang returned to China and accepted a position in the government. He played a key role in the merging of several constitutionalist parties into the Democratic Party (*Minzhudang* 民主黨) to contest the first national elections for the formation of the National Assembly. His party,

8 Kang, 247.

9 Kang, 248.

10 Kang, 'Yu Li Yuanhong', 211–12; Kang, 'Gonghe zhengti', 249.

11 Kang, 'Yu Li Yuanhong', 211; Kang, 'Jiuwanglun', 237; Kang, 'Gonghe zhengti', 248.

12 Liang, 'Xinzhongguo jianshe wenti 新中国建设问题 [On the Reconstruction of New China (1911)]', in *LQCQJ*, vol. 8, 1999, 2437. If he had thought to consult the Oxford English Dictionary, perhaps Liang might have been inspired to offer another term in his effort to coin a new English name as an appellation for Kang's 'titular monarchical republic'.

13 Ding and Zhao, *Nianpu changbian*, 565–78.

however, was defeated by the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* 國民黨) which had evolved from the revolutionary *Tongmenghui*, the bitter rival of the *Baohuanghui*.[14]

Unlike Liang, Kang remained adamantly sceptical about the infant presidential Republic, whose poor performance only served to convince him of the potential advantages of his proposed titular monarchical republic. He had not merely invented the term to appease and appeal to the revolutionaries; he genuinely believed in it. Not only was the system well-tested in a number of countries, but the installation of a titular monarch also carried, in his mind, an elegant spiritual connotation consonant with his championing of Confucianism as a religious system of social governance. To institute a 'sacred and inviolable' yet politically powerless 'monarch' was in a sense like setting up a clay or wood idol in a temple for people to bow to with all due reverence. The former (the monarch) would avert a contest over the position of Sovereign, in the same way as the latter (the idol) would serve to resolve disputes among the worshippers. Kang emphasized that such a system conformed to the ancient principle of 'teaching people by means of the way of the spirits' (*shendao shejiao*, see Section 3.3.1). 'Spirits are between existence and non-existence,' he wrote, 'but they cannot be disposed of.' That was why, he explained, ancient sages had used the retributive power of the spirits and deities to edify the common folk and cultivate their morality.[15]

Kang's opponents, however, did not take the trouble to notice the subtle distinctions he tried hard to clarify between a titular monarchical republic and a despotic monarchy. Abhorring the Manchu regime, they branded Kang as an obstinate monarchist, hence an enemy of the new Republic. In his letter to his Minster of

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[14] Alarmed by the electoral victory of the Nationalist Party, Yuan's associates assassinated the party's charismatic leader Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 in early 1913, which triggered a short-lived armed resistance against Yuan led by Sun Yat-sen. After putting down the revolt, Yuan dissolved the National Assembly by expelling its Nationalist members in early 1914.

[15] Kang, 'Yu Li Yuanhong', 211; Kang, 'Jiuwanglun', 237; Kang, 'Ni zhonghua minguo xianfa cao'an 拟中华民国宪法草案 [A Proposed Draft Constitution for the Republic of China (1913)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 2007, 47. I am aware that Kang's views in this regard bear a degree of similarity to the notion of political theology in the West, but as my thesis is focused on the Chinese context, and given the constraints of space and time, I have to leave the topic for future research. For further reading, please refer to Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); David Wong, 'Confucian Political Philosophy', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 771–88.

Education Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), for example, the then Provisional President Sun Yat-sen did not consider Kang a suitable candidate to be invited to join the new government, because of 'his persistent opposition to the Republican ideals'.[16] Among the revolutionaries, there remained a strong hostility towards Kang, and there had even been occasional assassinations of his 'monarchist followers' in China, which eventually required an edict by Sun to forbid those acts of violence.[17] Given those conditions, Kang did not go back to China until late 1913, when he returned to Guangdong to attend his mother's funeral, thereby ending his fifteen-year exile.[18]

4.2 The Confucian Movement

The successful governance of a country, in Kang's view, depended on two complementary factors: the agency of the spirits in the invisible realm as well as the art of government in the visible world of human affairs, with the former providing a moral foundation for the latter. To nourish and maintain the morality of the populace, Chinese Sages had set up temples for the worship of deities and spirits, and, in like manner, the founders of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam had instructed people in the name of God or a supreme being.[19] In addition, the importance of morality would increase in a society as its system of government evolved. As Montesquieu had pointed out, Kang wrote, an autocratic government lived and ruled by might, a constitutional state by honour, and a republic by virtue.[20] Kang further quoted James Bryce (1838–1922), whom he called 'my friend', as saying that the American system 'would not have succeeded but for the presence of a mass of moral and material influences stronger than any political devices'.[21] Like Bryce, Kang was a firm believer in the religious origin of morality and in the moral basis of society.

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16 Sun Zhongshan 孙中山, *Sun Zhongshan quanji 孙中山全集 [Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 19.

17 *LSZFGB*, no. 1 (Jan. 29, 1912), 8-9; also in *ZMDZH-WH*, 1991, 13.

18 He also had the remains of his brother, executed in Beijing in 1898, brought back and buried beside their mother. In addition, he took the occasion to rebuild his ancestral cemetery which had been destroyed by imperial order as a direct consequence of the failure of the Reform of 1898.

19 Kang, 'Yu Li Yuanhong', 211; Kang, 'Jiuwanglun', 237; Kang, 'Ni xianfa cao'an', 47.

20 Kang, 'Zhonghua jiuguolun 中华救国论 [On Saving China (1912)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 325.

21 Kang, 325; cf. James B. Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 357. The civic virtues required included a sense of reverence and love of and a commitment to the rule of

Kang considered politics and religion as the 'two wheels' of the chariot of a democratic republic.[22] Post-revolutionary China was in great danger, Kang said, because her wheel of politics was undergoing upheavals while the wheel of religion was disintegrating. As stated earlier, Kang had already appointed Liang as his right-hand man to commit himself to the arena of politics. For repairing the other wheel, Kang the self-appointed sage reformer had formulated a clear vision and a remedy for the ills besetting China: to recast Confucianism, set up Confucian churches on a national scale, and reinstate Confucianism as a state religion. He had trumpeted the call during the reform movement of the late 1890s, completed the reinterpretation of the Confucian Canon in the early years of his exile, and designed a blueprint for the proposed religious revival of China. Now he needed a handpicked lieutenant to execute his religious agenda. Kang assigned this role to his young disciple Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1880–1933). Chen would go on and become the chief evangelist for Kang's views both in the English-speaking world and in China. It is therefore appropriate, at this juncture, to outline Chen's presentation of Kang's Confucianism.

4.2.1 Chen's Presentation

Chen was born in Guangdong, the province which also produced Kang and Liang. After securing a good foundation in classical Chinese, he briefly attended Kang's academy in the late 1890s, where he consolidated his knowledge of Confucianism. It is noteworthy that the impulse to worship Confucius had come to Chen's mind in his childhood, long before he heard of Kang's advocacy of Confucius as a founder of a religion.[23] In 1904 Chen obtained the highest Metropolitan decree (*jinshi*) before he journeyed to the United States to study economics at Columbia University. In 1911, he obtained a Ph.D. in economics, thereby becoming the first Chinese scholar to have secured 'doctoral' degrees in both China and the West.

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law. Kang's acquaintance with James Bryce may have occurred when the latter served as British ambassador to the United States from 1907 to 1913.

22 Kang, 'Jiuguolun', 316. Similarly, Bryce commented that 'Morality with religion for its sanction has hitherto been the basis of social polity.' Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 725–26.

23 Chen, 'Jiamu litaifuren...shilue 家母李太夫人...事略 [A Biographical Sketch of My Mother, Mrs. Chen, née Li (1929)]', in *CHZWL*, 2015, 419.

4 A State Religion

Chen's dissertation, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School*, offered a detailed account of classical Chinese economic thought in light of Western economic principles. Since its publication in 1911, Chen's work has remained an important reference and has been reprinted repeatedly.[24] Its underlying goal was decidedly of a religious nature: to promote, in his own words, the 'religion founded by Confucius'.[25] That message got through to readers and reviewers. 'No one can read these pages', wrote Henry S. Seager, Professor of Political Economy at Columbia University, 'without becoming convinced that Confucianism is a great economic, as well as a great moral and religious, system.'[26] Chen devoted his opening chapters to a lengthy introduction to Confucius and his school of thought, an introduction which was very much in line with the interpretation propounded by Kang, to whom Chen acknowledged his 'great indebtedness'.[27] Chen's account was the first full summary in the English language of Kang's Confucianism, presented with scholarly moderation and great clarity, occasionally offering his own adaptations to some of Kang's views.

Quite unconventionally, Chen categorized Confucian concepts into two general classes, one based on the 'law of variety', concepts changeable with the needs of the times, the other on the 'law of unity', precepts unchangeable and rooted in human nature.[28] The most significant of the first type was the doctrine of the Three Ages (which he rendered as the 'Principle of the Three Stages'). As for the unchanging law of unity, Chen argued that it had several designations. 'From the religious point of view,' he wrote, 'the unity is called God; from the philosophical point of view, it is called *Yuan*; from the ethical point of view, it is called love.'[29] *Yuan* 元, rendered as 'the great and originating power' by Legge, was represented by *Qian* 乾, the symbol of Heaven in the *Changes*.[30] Chen considered Legge's translation 'obscure', for it failed to make clear that both concepts, *Qian* and *Yuan*, meant 'God'. In addition, he

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24 Chen, *Economic Principles*. It received positive reviews upon its publication, from such prominent scholars as John M. Keynes, 'Review', *The Economic Journal* 22, no. 88 (1912): 584–88. It was also listed as key reference in Max Weber's classic *Confucianism and Taoism*. Since 1970, it has been reprinted or reissued more than 10 times by British and American publishers.

25 Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章, *Kongjiaolun 孔教論 [On the Confucian Religion]* (Shanghai: Shangwu Press, 1912), 65; Chen, *Economic Principles*, 4.

26 Chen, *Economic Principles*, ix.

27 Chen, xii.

28 Chen, 15.

29 Chen, 20–21.

30 *Yi*, Appendix 1:1; Legge, *Texts of Confucianism II*, 213.

asserted that the all-important Confucian virtue, *ren* (benevolence), referred nothing else other than 'love'.[31] 'These three names [*Yuan*, *Qian*, and *ren*] are based on the same principle, because it is a unity,' he went on to explain. 'The unity of the universe is nothing but love. The cement of the universe is called God or *Yuan*, and that of society is called love.'[32] Here Chen had developed upon Kang's views. While Kang sought to establish the unitary nature of the concept of *Shangdi* or 'God', and sometimes struggled over the relationship between 'God/Heaven' and '*Yuan*', Chen went further by unequivocally equating God with the concepts of *Qian* and *Yuan* in classical Chinese thought. He considered *Yuan* to be the philosophical name for God, explaining that Confucius preferred the term *Yuan* to the more personal 'God' because the Sage was writing from the philosophical rather than the religious point of view.[33]

Chen continued to expand on the concept of *Yuan* in a theological way, relating it to such themes as creation, the origin of man and the fatherhood of God. Quoting from the *Changes* and the classical Gongyang scholar He Xiu, he stressed that *Yuan* was the 'infinite breath' that brought everything into being, and was the ruling power governing the whole universe. 'This is', Chen declared, 'the theory of creation in Confucianism.'[34] If *Yuan* was the origin of everything, it followed that humanity, like heavens and earth, also originated in *Yuan.* Building on the comments by another Gongyang scholar Dong Zhongshu, Chen speculated that man might originally have come from *Yuan* either at the same time with or even before the creation of the heavens.[35] It seems that by 'origin of man' Chen meant a spiritual genesis: the spirit of man was already with *Yuan* before the creation of heaven and earth. Chen considered this Confucian doctrine of the origin of man as a principle of 'the highest theological stage', for it 'made every man free from supernatural power' and dependent only upon his own conscience. In this light, he argued that one may call *Yuan* Father instead of God, and regard all other men and even all the heavens as his brothers.[36] To illustrate this concept, Chen quoted a famous passage from the *Guliang Commentary*, for which he offered an English translation: 'The female alone

31 Chen, *Economic Principles*, 21 note 1.
32 Chen, 20–21.
33 Chen, 58.
34 Chen, 59. Cf. *Yi*, Appendix 1:1.
35 Chen, 59.
36 Chen, 59. This is reminiscent of the statement in the *Means* that human nature originated in Heaven.

cannot give birth; the male alone cannot give birth; and God alone cannot give birth. The three must unite together, then there is a birth. Therefore, we may call anyone either the son of his mother, or the son of God.'[37] In Chen's view, this might well be regarded as the Confucian doctrine of Trinity, because it required the union of father, mother, and God to give birth to a human being (compare Kang's discussion in Section 5.2.1). This concept of the Confucian Trinity, it may be observed, is certainly not the same as the Nicene creed of the Holy Trinity. However, the key point in Chen's reasoning is: the fatherhood of God naturally included the brotherhood of men, and the two constituted the most important principles among Confucius' sociological and moral teachings.[38]

'It is the habit of the Chinese', Chen wrote, 'to seek from [Confucius'] writings sanction or guidance in the determination of important questions.'[39] The Canonical principles of Confucianism were of value not only for scholarly study, Chen argued, but also for their application to practical affairs, and his work on the economic principles of the Confucian school was presented as a testimony to the above claim. The work was a 'scientific' testimony as well: not only was it presented as a study that employed the methods of Western science, but its subject was also the 'science of economics', for which he found a 'scientific term' from the *Changes—licai* 理財, a concept likened to the scientific administration of wealth.[40] Hence, his definition of economics as the science of 'administering wealth according to the principle of justice, for the sake of men who live collectively'. Closely related to economics, Chen stressed, were the moral and political sciences, for the ability to formulate rules of economics as to what was right and wrong could only come through a body of moral teachings.[41] From this we can see that Chen used the word 'science' in a broad sense which covered both social and natural sciences. 'All the social sciences relate man,' he wrote. The principles of such sciences as of sociology, politics, ethics, religion and justice could all, in his opinion, be found in the 'Confucian Bible'.[42]

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37 *Guliangzhuan*, 3rd year of the reign of Duke Zhuang; Chen, 60.
38 Chen, 58.
39 Chen, 37.
40 Chen, 47.
41 Chen, 49.
42 Chen, 49.

With the introduction to his *Economic Principles*, Chen had summarised the cardinal principles espoused by Kang and presented in a systematic way his own depiction of Confucius as a founder of an advanced religion. In order to do justice to Confucius and promulgate his teachings, however, words and theories must be realized in the material world. Kang's strategic agenda for saving China called for formal organizations and institutions akin to Christian churches.

4.2.2 A Confucian Church Established

Like Kang, Chen had embarked on early efforts to institutionalize his own religious agenda. Emulating Kang's *Shengxuehui*, established in 1897 in Guilin (see Section 2.3.3), Chen had established in his hometown a society of a similar nature, though on a smaller scale, the *Changjiaohui* 昌教會 (Society for Promoting the Religion [of Confucius]) in 1899.[43] Its membership was open to all the villagers, men and women, young and old. He also built a village school; he explained that the *Changjiaohui* served as the root of the school, and the school was the fruit of the society. 'There is no greater joy', he wrote in a song for the school, 'than to emulate the Sage. Our school aims to promote the Sage's religion and to renew the people.'[44] Later, Chen repeated his practice in New York, where he also set up a *Changjiaohui* in order to promote Confucianism among overseas Chinamen and individual foreigners who may want to investigate Confucianism.[45] He once commented that if translated into English, *Changjiaohui* would be something like 'Confucian Church'. In his introduction to the society, he refuted 'misconceptions' about Confucianism, arguing that China had fallen behind in modern times not because of Confucianism but because of failure to practice true Confucianism, and that Confucius did talk about spirits as well as human beings and his religion was indeed the most perfect on the earth, superior to Buddhism and Christianity.[46] Together with the society in his hometown, the *Changjiaohui* in New York was designated a branch of the National Confucian Association when the latter was established in 1912.

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[43] Although a student of Kang, Chen did not seem to have been affected by the consequence of Kang's failed reform, probably because he was too young and too new a student of his to have gotten involved in Kang's political activities in Beijing in 1898.

[44] Chen, 'Gaoyao Yanzhou Yingchuan xuetang xiaoge 高要砚洲穎川学堂校歌 [Songs for the School of Yingchuan Village, Xianzhou, Gaoyao (1929)]', in *CHZWL*, 2015, 453.

[45] Chen, 'Zhi yinbing xuezhang shu 致饮冰学长书 [Letter to Liang Qichao]', in *CHZWL*, 2015, 2.

[46] Chen, 'Meizhou huaqiao chuangli changjiaohui xuyan 美洲华侨创立昌教会叙言 [Introduction to the Changjiaohui Established Among the Chinese in America]', in *CHZWL*, 2015, 363–66.

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In early 1912, Chen returned to post-revolution China, determined to devote himself to his religious cause. The dramatic changes in the new republic made Chen and Kang feel the urgent need to revive Confucianism as a religion. Two issues were uppermost in their minds. One was the disturbing news that the Ministry of Education had removed the traditional mandatory requirement that in all state schools the Confucian Classics be studied and rituals of reverence to Confucius (including the ritual practice of *kowtow*) be performed.[47] The other equally disturbing trend was the idea that Confucianism was not a religion, a denial first voiced by Liang Qichao ten years earlier. This idea was gaining currency in China as the Western conception of 'religion', together with the borrowed Japanese neologism *zongjiao*, became more widely accepted among scholars and the media. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, for example, did not consider Confucianism as a religion in the directives it issued. Those moves, which were welcomed by the more Western-minded or pro-revolutionist scholars, disturbed many Confucianists, who feared that the Confucian tradition, the Faith of China, might be discontinued. Thereupon, a variety of societies emerged throughout the country in order to 'venerate Confucius' and 'defend Confucianism', often backed by provincial officials and regional generals.[48]

Although he remained in Japan, Kang kept abreast of the latest developments in China. To counter those deleterious trends, in a letter to Chen dated 30 July 1912, Kang proposed the 're-establishment' of a *Kongjiaohui* 孔教會, which literally means 'Confucian Religion Association' or 'Confucian Church'.[49] His vision was for this national society to establish its branches first in big cities and then in each locality, with Confucian instructors or pastors giving regular sermons to a congregation of men and women, old and young. Kang promised Chen all his support, moral and financial, as well as the requisite human resources. He suggested that Chen simply commence

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[47] 'Putong jiaoyu zanxing banfa 普通教育暫行辦法 [Provisional Regulations for General Education]', in *LSZFGB*, No. 4, 1 February 1912.

[48] These societies included, for example, the *Zongshenghui* 宗圣会 or Worshipping the Sage Association established in north-western Shanxi and the *Kongdaohui* 孔道会 or Confucian Way Association set up in eastern Shandong.

[49] Kang, 'Yu Chen Huanzhang shu 与陈焕章书 [Letter to Chen Huanzhang (1912)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 337. By 're-establishment' Kang probably meant a continuation to the *Shnegxuehui* he had set up in Guilin, Guangxi in 1897.

operations after enlisting the support of a couple of venerable Confucian scholars, such as Kang's old friend Shen Zengzhi.[50]

Kang's proposal must have been music to Chen's ears. Chen had actually long cherished the same idea as the one Kang now proposed, and before the arrival of Kang's letter, he had already obtained the support of Shen and of Kang's old foe Liang Dingfen.[51] Chen also publicized the idea of a Confucian Association through his talks. Eventually, the Confucian Religion Association (hereafter referred to as the CRA) was officially established in Shanghai on 7 October 1912 (corresponding to the birthday of Confucius by lunar calendar reckoning). Chen was elected one of its five secretaries, while its presidency was intentionally left vacant (pending the return of Kang). Its mission statement proclaimed a twofold aim: to 'promulgate the Confucian religion' and to 'contribute to the betterment of the society'.[52] It soon secured official recognition from the government, which paved the way for its rapid expansion. Its membership was growing fast; it even attracted some foreign members, such as Reginald Johnston (1874–1938), then Commissioner of the British-leased territory of Weihaiwei in northern China. Johnston wrote that he was 'thoroughly in favour of' the objects of the CRA and that he believed it would be a 'terrible misfortune' for the Chinese people to cease holding Confucius in reverence. Meanwhile, he rightly predicted that the Association might expect harsh criticism and opposition from Christian missionaries and their converts.[53]

As a national organization, the CRA declared in its constitution that branches and sub-branches would be set up across China and at overseas Chinatowns. This vision was soon turned into reality in an impressive way. According to the statistics published in its monthly, the *Kongjiaohui zazhi* 孔教會雜誌 edited by Chen, the CRA had had over 140 branches by early 1914. Its Beijing branch was particularly impressive. Set up in early 1913, it was supported by over two hundred Confucian

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50 Kang, 337.

51 Chen, 'Shen Yi'an xiansheng zhuan 沈乙盦先生传 [A Short Biography of Mr. Shen Yi'an]', in *CHZWL*, 2015, 393. Thus Shen, a Metropolitan degree holder who had held the highest official position in late Qing, became the most prestigious figure among the initiators of the Association.

52 Chen, *Kongjiaolun*, 98.

53 Zhuang Shidun 莊世頓 [R. Johnston], 'Zhuang Shidun jun yuanshu 莊世頓君原書 [Letters from Mr. R. Johnston]', *KJHZZ*, no. 3 (1913). Johnston would later serve as tutor and advisor to Puyi, who was allowed to continue living in the Forbidden City after his abdication.

scholars and politicians, including Yan Fu, Liang Qichao and Liao Ping. Given this new development, it had been decided at the first Confucian Congress held in September 1913 that the CRA's headquarters were to move to Beijing. The next year, however, Kang, who had assumed the position of its president, decided to move the headquarters to Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius. He explained that the religion of Confucius was not merely for a particular country, but for the whole world—beyond China, Confucius was also widely revered in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Therefore, it made more sense for the headquarters of the CRA to be permanently instituted at the Holy Land of Qufu. The more important reason, which remained unspoken, was the worsening political situation in the capital, where President Yuan was preparing to make himself Emperor, a move that Kang and the CRA opposed.[54]

A pressing concern of the CRA was to defend the religious nature of Confucianism, as the opposite view had been gaining ground. In his second introduction to the Association, Kang revisited some of those arguments expressed in the earlier account of his travels (see Sections 3.3.1): refuting the 'erroneous view' that Confucius should not be regarded as a founder of a religion, continuing to loathe the term *zongjiao*, the Japanese 'mistranslation' of 'religion',[55] and maintaining the view that *jiao* and 'religion', if properly understood, were equivalents. He stressed that religions differed not so much in *what* they taught than *how* they taught it. As the people developed to a more civilized stage, the founder of their religion, such as Confucius, would come away from superstitious concepts (*shendao*) and employ primarily *rendao* (the human way) by focusing his teachings on nurturing proper human relations and establishing higher forms of social order through the practice of moral principles (see Section 3.3.2). At the same time, Kang claimed that even according to the narrow sense as expressed by the term *zongjiao*, Confucianism was a religion, for Confucius 'revered Heaven and worshipped God' and discoursed on spirits.[56]

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[54] For a detailed dicussion, see Zhang Songzhi 张颂之, 'Kongjiaohui shimo huikao 孔教会始末汇考 [A Review of the History of the Confucian Religion Association]', *Wenshizhe 文史哲 [Journal of Chinese Humanities]*, no. 1 (2008): 55–72.

[55] However, Kang was not always successful in resisting the occasional need to use the term. He would use *zongjiao* interchangeably with jiao in some of his later writings, such as his 1917 treatise on republicanism. See Kang, 'Gonghe pingyi 共和平议 [A Dispassionate Treatise on Republicanism (1917)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 33.

[56] Kang, 'Kongjiaohui xu (er)', 345–46.

Similar arguments were promulgated by Chen in his *Kongjiaolun* 孔教論 (A Treatise on the Confucian Religion), a collection of his two talks and his introduction to the CRA. The talks were given at the American missionary Gilbert Reid's International Institute on the topics 'Confucianism, a Religion' and 'China under the Republic Still in Need of Confucianism'. Highly influential and widely circulated, the book was regarded by some scholars as the 'Manifesto of the Confucian Religion'.[57] Unlike Kang, Chen accepted the neologism of *zongjiao* as an adequate translation of the English word 'religion'. He admitted that most English definitions of 'religion' in general denoted beliefs in the spirits (*shendao*). With this understanding, he set out to defend the view that Confucianism was a *zongjiao* or religion in its very essence. Emphasizing that Confucianists should ask themselves what was meant by religion/*jiao* instead of turning to Westerners or followers of other religions, he went straight to the Confucian definition of *jiao* in the *Mean*: 'What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow human nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching [*jiao*].' (see Section 3.1.1)[58]

Chen asserted that the word 'Heaven (*Tian*)' referred to in the *Mean* meant God (*Shangdi*), and 'cultivating the Way', therefore, was to set right 'words and thoughts' according to what God had imparted, human nature. This represented Man's striving for the divine union 'between man and Heaven' by following the will of Heaven. 'Is this not religion?' Chen asked emphatically.[59] Like Kang, Chen was in fact trying to redefine the contemporary concept of religion or *jiao* by drawing on the ancient Confucian Classics or what he would prefer to call the Confucian Bible. He explained that the Chinese word *jiao* contained three senses, namely, religion (*zongjiao*), education (*jiaoyu* 教育) and edification (*jiaohua* 教化). 'Confucianism has all three connotations,' he wrote, 'but it is essentially a religion.' That's why he insisted on using the term 'Confucian Religion' rather than the 'Confucian Way', for the former demanded, and was capable of producing, 'faith' on the part of followers, a condition that in his view was a prerequisite for a true believer's practice of any religion.[60]

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57 Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion', 124.

58 *Zhongyong* 1:1; Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 5.

59 Chen, *Kongjiaolun*, 2.

60 Chen, 93.

Chen then argued that Confucius was a founder of a religion, a station that had been accepted by Confucius himself and acknowledged by his disciples and followers, by his contemporaries and the people of later generations, and even by foreigners. In portraying Confucius as a divine figure, Chen had to explain away the contradictory remarks by Confucius acknowledging the limits of his own knowledge. Chen said that this was simply a sign of the superlative humility evinced by Confucius. The reason that Confucius had not exalted himself to the same station as Jesus and Muhammad was because the society he lived in was much more civilized than the societies living during the times of Jesus and Muhammad, which rendered the excessive use of *shendao* or the way of the spirits less necessary.[61] Having established that Confucius was a founder of what must rightfully be regarded as a religion, Chen offered arguments intended to show that Confucianism had been properly regarded as a religion in terms of its designated name, lineage, rituals, codes of conduct, temples, Holy Land as well as the Confucian doctrines on the immortality of the soul, the existence of spirits and deities subordinate to God and the principle of divine retribution.[62] Throughout the discussion, Chen did not attempt to distinguish between the Chinese *Shangdi* and the Christian 'God'; instead, he followed Kang in equating the two terms and by articulating a universal concept of Divinity.

4.2.3 The State Religion Campaign

Apart from defending (and, indeed, propagating) the religious nature of Confucianism, the CRA endeavoured to have Confucianism adopted as the state religion of the Republic. In the Provisional Constitution of 1912, 'freedom of religion' was granted to the people, but no 'state religion' was specified.[63] To many Confucianists, however, that article was positively and definitely detrimental to the interests of Confucianism, because it was often used as an excuse for diminishing the influence of Confucius in the educational system and in contemporary society. A requisite way to remedy the situation, they believed, was to make Confucianism a *guojiao* 國教 or

[61] Chen, 6–7. Some may very well think that this explanation is somewhat contrived and perhaps even a bit chauvinistic.
[62] Chen, 16–26.
[63] For an English translation of the 1912 Provisional Constitution, see B. L. Putnam Weale, *The Fight for the Republic in China* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917), 401–7.

state religion; this they proposed to achieve by having this status recognized and protected in the 'Permanent Constitution' that was about to be drafted.

When the CRA was established, it did not explicitly state in its constitution its intention to advocate for Confucianism to be constitutionally installed as a state religion. However, that intention was implied in Kang's introduction to the Association, in which he noted with regret that the new republican government had failed to make Confucianism the state religion, a status that Confucianism had enjoyed *de facto* for thousands of years.[64] In a talk given at the CRA, Chen likewise restated his earlier view that religious freedom had been practised in traditional China when Confucianism was the *de facto* state religion. He stressed that specifying a state religion and protecting religious freedom were compatible objectives, like the 'two wings of a bird' or 'two wheels of a chariot',[65] the latter of the which was probably a phrase Chen borrowed from Kang. Chen's call was echoed by many other Confucianists. One Confucian scholar, for example, argued that of the four major religions professed by people in China, Confucianism was much better qualified to be nominated as the state religion than Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.[66]

Kang deliberated further on this issue in his *Proposed Draft Constitution,* which was published by instalments in his newly-launched personal magazine, *Buren* 不忍 (meaning 'compassion'). He stated that freedom of religion should be constitutionally protected, but added that 'Confucianism should be made the state religion' except in Tibet and Mongolia where 'Buddhism can concurrently be regarded as a state religion'.[67] Kang shared Chen's view on the compatibility of adopting a state religion and guaranteeing the principle of religious freedom. He explained that religious freedom was a hard-won principle in Europe, acquired through much bloodshed and many wars—the Crusades against the 'foreign' religion (Islam) followed by the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) between the Catholics and the Protestants. By contrast,

64 Kang, 'Kongjiaohui xu 孔教会序 [Introduction to the Confucian Religion Association (1912)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 9, 2007, 341.

65 Chen, 'Mingding yuanyou zhi guojiao bingbu aiyu xinjiao ziyou zhi xinmingci 明定原有之國教並不礙於信教自由之新名詞 [Specifying the Previous State Religion in Clear Terms not Contradicting the Neologism for Religious Freedom]', *KJHZZ*, no. 1 (1913): 1–12.

66 Chen Baozhen 陳寶徵, 'Kongjiao yi dingwei guojiao lun 孔教宜定為國教論 [On Confucianism Being Qualified for Being the State Religion]', *KJHZZ*, no. 1 (1913): 27–30.

67 Kang, 'Ni xianfa cao'an', 81.

religious freedom had been practised for over two millennia in China, where Daoism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were all allowed to spread alongside Confucianism, the *de facto* state religion in times past. There had never been religious wars fought on Chinese soil, a situation that was due to Confucius, who taught the principle of 'transmitting his religion with tolerance'.[68] Unfortunately, Kang lamented, Confucianism was now faced with the danger of being neglected and even disregarded by the Chinese people, so, he argued, it was high time that Confucianism should be enshrined as the state religion. Not only would a state religion not impinge on religious freedom, but it would also have the effect of strengthening a country by serving as a unifying force. Chinese history had proven Confucianism's tolerant and therefore unifying nature. Furthermore, many European countries had specified a state religion in their constitutions while upholding the principle of religious freedom. The same constitutional arrangement could be adopted in China, Kang stressed.[69]

Kang contended that Confucianism was a better candidate for serving as a state religion than any of the other major religions that were practised in China. Beautiful as they were, the Buddhist and Christian religions were not very helpful to the government of a state as they aimed at individual cultivation and redemption through 'revering God and nourishing the soul', while the religion of Confucius was not only more all-embracing in scope but it also paid more attention to the concerns of this world.[70] Some scholars have argued that here Kang had emphasized the lack of 'a concern with the transcendental' as 'a fundamental advantage of Confucianism'.[71] However, Kang would not have agreed that Confucianism was lacking a transcendental aspect. He maintained that Confucianism embraced both 'the human way' (*rendao*) and 'the way of the spirits' (*shendao*), but with a distinctive focus on the former, and that it was that focus, not the presence or absence of a transcendental concern, that distinguished Confucianism from other religions. Kang concluded his discussion by specifying what was implied by making Confucianism a state religion: to continue the traditional rituals of worshipping Confucius by officials; to restore the

68 Kang, 82.

69 Kang cited the practices of many Europeans countries where either Catholicism or Protestantism was exalted above other religions. For example, he emphasized that at Oxford and Cambridge students were required to attend morning service in honour of Jesus Christ, as required by the Church of England.

70 Kang, 'Ni xianfa cao'an', 82.

71 Cf. Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion', 147–48.

requirement that the Confucian Classics be studied at all state schools; and for the state to sponsor and protect a Confucian Church.[72] When he made the last proposal, Kang may have had the newly-established CRA in mind.

The calls made by Chen and Kang were duly followed up by the CRA. On 15 August 1913, the Association sent a petition to the newly-instituted bicameral National Assembly,[73] requesting that Confucianism be adopted as the state religion in the proposed Constitution. The petition, which was drafted by Chen Huanzhang and later published in the Association's *Monthly*, set forth several arguments for their position. First, Confucianism had, historically, always served as the basis of morality for the Chinese people. 'The establishment of a state', Chen wrote, 'is based on morality, and morality is regulated by none other than religion.'[74] Chinese morality was rooted in Confucianism, a moral tradition that was inherited from the ancient sage kings. Confucius' teachings on morality were enshrined in the Confucian Bible. Therefore, to sustain Chinese morality required that Confucianism be upheld as a state religion. Second, Confucianism had been the state religion of China for the past two millennia. This was the view that Chen had expressed in his earlier writings, such as in his 1911 *Economic Principles* and his *Kongjiaolun.*[75] To make Confucianism a state religion of the republic, then, was to continue a time-honoured tradition, a tradition that met the expectations of the general populace. The third argument, the principal focus of Chen's petition, was that a state religion would not impinge on religious freedom:

> A state religion and the freedom of religion can go hand in hand and complement each other. If religious freedom is granted but no state religion is instituted, that would give too much freedom to the people and the consequent centrifugal forces of societal change would cause the nation to go off balance. On the other hand, if a state religion is instituted but religious freedom is not allowed, that would mean too much interference in the spiritual life of the people and the pressure so exerted would destabilize the conditions of peace and tranquillity in a country.[76]

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72 Kang, 'Ni xianfa cao'an', 82.

73 The Assembly was called together on 8 April 1913 by Provisional President Yuan with a twofold aim: to elect him President of the Republic of China and to make a Constitution to replace the provisional one.

74 Chen, 'Kongjiaohui qingyuanshu 孔教會請願書 [A Petition of the Confucian Religion Association]', *KJHZZ*, no. 6 (1913): 13.

75 cf. Chen, *Economic Principles*, 42–47.

76 Chen, 'Qingyuanshu', 1913, 14.

Chen pointed to the common practice in many modern countries simultaneously to specify a state religion and constitutionally protect freedom of religion. To support this, he quoted relevant constitutional provisions from as many as eleven countries. He added that although countries such as the United States, Great Britain, France and Russia did not specify a state religion in their constitutions, they practised either Protestantism, Catholicism or Eastern Orthodox Christianity as their *de facto* state religion. Now that the new Republic had made a provisional Constitution, in which freedom of religion was granted but a state religion was not specified, that situation had caused confusion among the people, who were thereby led into thinking that the principle of religious freedom was meant to get rid of Confucianism. To arrest that negative inference and dispel popular misapprehension, Chen argued, the new Constitution should, 'in explicit terms', adopt Confucianism as the state religion in addition to constitutionally upholding freedom of religion as a modern principle of democracy, so that Chinese morality would be consolidated, and the new Republic could be established upon a solid, lasting foundation.[77]

The petition was drafted by Chen Huanzhang and co-signed by Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑, Wang Shitong 王式通 as well as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao. Xia, who had been a long-time friend and ally of Kang and Liang, was serving as head of the social education department at the Ministry of Education. Wang was a legal scholar who, like Xia, had also served in President Yuan's administration. It was interesting, however, to see the name of Yan Fu among them. For one thing, he had earlier distanced himself from Kang's call to 'preserve Confucianism' in the late 1890s. For another, he did not consider Confucianism as a 'religion' *per se*, as he explicitly stated in 1899.[78] That was also the view that Liang had voiced a decade earlier in Japan, questioning the asserted religious character of Confucianism. Indeed, Liang had argued that to specify a state religion would interfere with the desirable principle of religious liberty.[79] Does the fact that both Yan and Liang had now agreed to join Chen in proposing that Confucianism be made a state religion mean that they had

[77] Chen, 21.
[78] Yan Fu 严复, *Yan Fu ji 严复集 [Collected Works of Yan Fu]*, ed. Wang Shi 王栻, vol. 4 (Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 850.
[79] Cf. Liang, 'Baojiao feisuoyi zunkong'.

changed their position and now considered Confucianism as a religion? The answer is, arguably, no. Rather, their support for the petition may be viewed as an effort to resist the contemporary tendency to remove Confucius from schools and reduce the influence of Confucianism in society. Although they did not consider Confucianism a religion, both men held Confucius in high esteem and regarded his teachings as being vital for sustaining Chinese morality and maintaining social order in China.

The CRA's petition immediately received popular support across the nation. Its branches and sub-branches promptly dispatched circular telegrams to support the petition and they sent delegates to the capital to present their petitions to the government and the National Assembly. Its overseas branches joined in the campaign by sending telegrams to President Yuan.[80] The petition was also seconded by a large number of prominent individuals, such as Vice President Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 (1864–1928), who was in turn seconded or supported by nearly twenty military and civil governors from a dozen provinces.[81] In addition, several members of the National Assembly also publicly voiced their support for the proposal.[82] For many of the supporters, it should be observed, their emphasis was not to seek to assert the religious nature of Confucianism, but to acknowledge the need to buttress the role of Confucianism in sustaining Chinese morality and social unity.

At the same time, voices of opposition were mounting, especially from those with a Christian background. Realizing that the movement to install Confucianism as a state religion, if successful, would give an advantage to Confucianism and possibly hold in check the growth of Christianity in China, many Christians immediately initiated a 'counter-campaign'. They made 'every possible effort' by means of public meetings and newspaper articles to protest against the proposition. To coordinate their efforts, a committee of seven leaders was set up. Among other things, they also sent a petition to the National Assembly asking for the rejection of the state religion proposal.[83]

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80 For a collection of these telegrams, see *ZMDZH-WH*, 1991, 51-52.
81 Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion', 161.
82 *KJHZZ*, vol 1, no. 7 (Aug 1913); vol. 1, no. 9, (Oct 1013)
83 'A State Religion for China?', *The North-China Herald*, 30 August 1913.

4 A State Religion

On 27 September, corresponding to the birthday of Confucius in the Chinese lunar calendar, a proposal based on the petition of the CRA was brought up on the agenda for deliberation by a Constitution-drafting Committee, consisting of 60 members elected from both the Senate and House of Representatives. The committee chose as the venue for their conferences the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests (*Qiniandian* 祈年殿) at the former imperial Temple of Heaven (*Tiantan*). In the magnificent, solemn circular hall, which had been considered as the most sacred spot in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and in whose centre was placed the tablet of *Huangtian Shangdi* (August Heaven the Supreme Ruler), the Chairman of the committee, Tang Yi 汤漪, was inspired to urge his fellow members to draft an enduring Constitution, 'as solid as' the circular triple-gabled building, for the new Republic.[84]

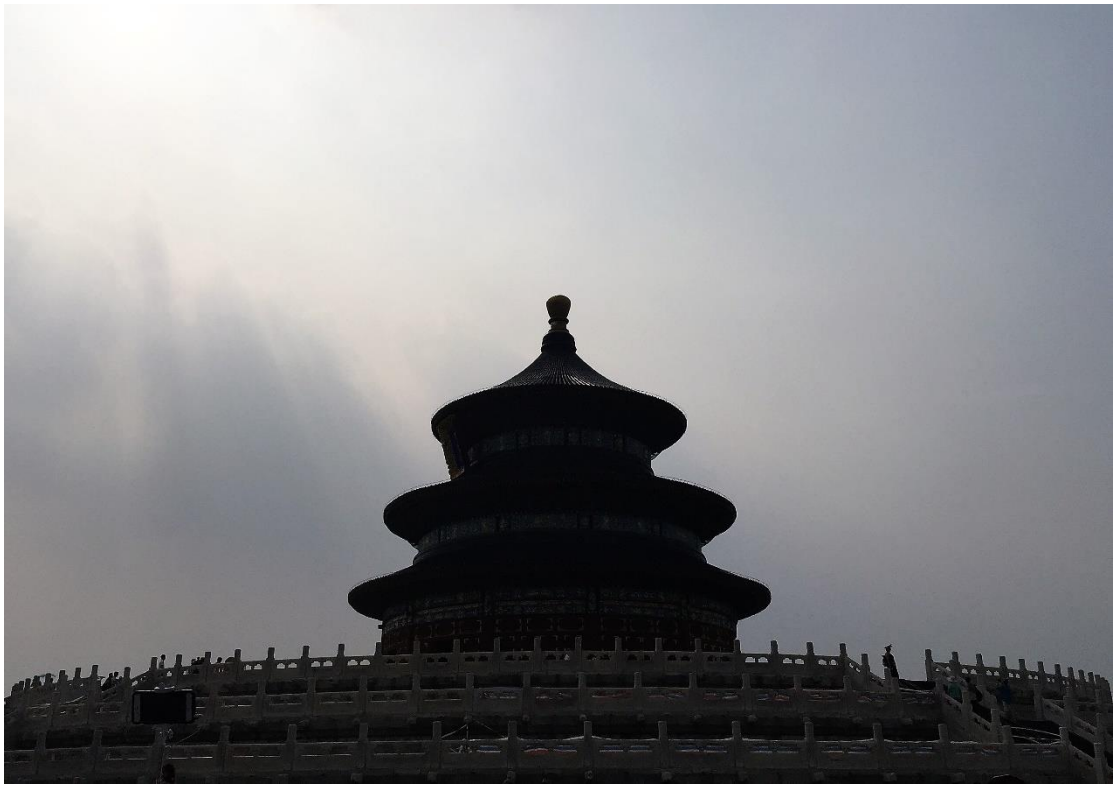


Figure 6: Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, Temple of Heaven, Beijing © the author

The state religion proposal was heatedly discussed, but no agreement was reached. The debate continued in a meeting held on 13 October, when a vote was eventually taken. According to the minutes, six members spoke for the proposal, while seven

[84] Wu Zongci 吳宗慈, *Zhonghua minguo xianfashi* 中華民國憲法史 *[A History of the Constitution of the Republic of China]* (Shanghai & Beijing, 1924), 24.

stated their opposition to it. As a result, the proposal failed to pass, having received as few as eight votes. As an alternative, the majority of the committee voted for an amendment to be added to Article 19, stating that 'in the education of citizens, the Way [*dao*] of Confucius shall be adopted as the great principle for the regulation of persons'.[85] The Chinese wording, the *dao* of Confucius, deliberately differed from the *jiao* (Religion) of Confucius (*Kongjiao*), as proposed by Kang and Chen. Furthermore, the article avoided the mention of a 'state religion'; it actually limited the role of Confucianism to the realm of education. As expected, the news that the state religion proposal had been rejected by the Constitution-drafting Committee disappointed the numerous supporters of the proposal, who called for a reconsideration of the proposal through telegrams and letters, but all in vain. Before the Constitution drafted by the committee (known as the Temple of Heaven Draft) was submitted to the National Assembly for examination and approval, however, the assembly itself was abruptly dismissed in the beginning of 1914 by President Yuan in his attempt to secure more presidential power.

Some hold the view that President Yuan supported the state religion movement and exploited it to advance his scheme to become Emperor. This view was not only circulated among his contemporaries (including some members of the Drafting Committee), but it has also been upheld by a number of later scholars.[86] Admittedly, from the early days of his presidency, Yuan had taken measures to 'venerate Confucius'. In his edict of 22 June 1913, for example, he declared that he would solicit opinions about resuming the abolished ceremonies to offer ritual sacrifice to Heaven and to worship Confucius. He extolled the Sage for his 'republicanism-oriented' doctrines of the Three Ages and the Great Unity in a manner reminiscent of statements made by Kang.[87] Several months later, the 'Political Council', which Yuan had set up in place of the National Assembly, resolved that the

[85] In Chinese, 國民教育以孔子之道為修身大本. The English translation is taken from Wei-tung Pan, *The Chinese Constitution: A Study of Forty Years of Constitution-Making in China* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute of Chinese Culture, 1945), 159.

[86] See, Wu, *Zhonghua Xianfashi*, 38, 108. See also Chow's misleading statement that Yuan became an 'enthusiastic patron of the Confucian movement' in Tse-tsung Chow, 'The Anti-Confucian Movement in Early Republican China', in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 291.

[87] *ZFGB*, no. 404 (June 23, 1913). Yuan's edict was challenged by over thirty members of the National Assembly, who blamed Yuan for 'copying' Kang's ideas and for interfering with the principle of freedom of religion, insisting that the issue of 'worshipping Confucius' should be resolved by the Assembly instead. See *ZMDZH-WH*, 1991, 3-5.

traditional rites and activities in Confucian temples be revived across the country. Then, in the Autumn of 1914, Yuan personally presided over a grandiose ceremony to worship Confucius at the Confucian Temple in Beijing, an act that officially resumed the traditional biannual sacrifices offered to the Sage, known as *dingji* 丁祭.[88] Because these measures were similar to those suggested by Kang and Chen, it was easy to assume that Yuan supported their state religion campaign. However, as Hsi-yuan Chen has convincingly argued, Yuan was careful to distinguish his 'veneration of Confucius' from promoting Confucianism as a religion, let alone a state religion.[89] That was understandable, for the former was able to help him obtain legitimacy and advance his monarchist scheme, while the latter could induce unwanted protests from those who opposed the state religion proposal and could conceivably lead to a potential power struggle between religion (the Confucian Church) and the machinery of the state (unless he, as President, were to be designated head of the proposed Confucian Religion).

It was also true that the CRA welcomed Yuan's reinstatement of the traditional ceremonies to worship Confucius, but they kept at a distance from him politically, and many of the prominent members of the CRA were against Yuan's monarchical movement to declare himself Emperor. For Kang, the attempt to restore a despotic monarch differed dramatically from his idea of a titular monarchy. He and Liang were among the first to oppose the movement. Their follower and associate, General Cai E 蔡锷, initiated a revolt in South China, followed by a number of other provinces which declared their independence. Sun Yat-sen, who had fled to Japan, also made efforts to overthrow Yuan. Besieged by protests and rebellions, Yuan was forced to change his newly-installed monarchy back to a republic in early 1916.

After Yuan's death from uraemia in June 1916, the National Assembly was reconvened in September, at which meeting the resumption of the examination of the Temple of Heaven Draft was placed at the top of its agenda. Chen Huanzhang again sent a petition to the Assembly, urging that Confucianism be made the state religion and that '*Kongdao* [the Way of Confucius]' in the amendment be changed to

88 See *ZFGB*, no. 499 (Sep. 24, 1913), 10; no. 563 (Nov. 27, 1913), 1; no. 636 (Feb. 14, 1914), 21-22; no. 860 (Sep. 26, 1914), 1-2.
89 Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion', 165–72.

'*Kongjiao* [the Religion of Confucius]'.[90] Meanwhile, contrary proposals to abandon ceremonies for the worship of Heaven and Confucius were also put forward to the Assembly for deliberation. In response, Kang sent letters to the Assemblymen as well as to the President and the Premier, urging them to show respect to the tradition and disregard those 'absurd' proposals.[91] As was the case during the Drafting Committee period, supporters and opponents of the state religion proposal at the plenary sessions of the reconvened Assembly debated three inter-related issues: Was Confucianism a religion? Was it qualified to be the state religion? Would adopting Confucianism as the state religion interfere with the principle of religious freedom? The underlying issue to be resolved as a pre-requisite to any meaningful discussion on the three major issues was: How was 'religion' or *zongjiao* to be clearly defined in the context of Chinese thought and practice? No consensus, however, was reached on any of these issues. During the first reading of the draft Constitution, the controversial proposal was again brought up for deliberation by the Assembly of more than eight hundred members. When it was put to a vote, the proposal failed to win the support of the majority. Nor was it passed during the second reading. Instead, a compromise amendment was passed, stating that Chinese citizens had the freedom to 'honour Confucius or profess any religion'.[92] This was tantamount to an announcement of the ultimate failure of the state religion campaign. Deeply disappointed, Chen immediately criticized the Assembly in an open letter for having 'slain the life of' Confucian Religion in a twofold way: not only did it fail to make it the state religion, but it also disqualified Confucianism as a religion.[93]

The Temple of Heaven Draft was not confirmed by heavenly blessings: before the second reading was completed, the National Assembly was again dismissed due to the power struggles among regional warlords. On 1 July 1917 General Zhang Xun 張勛 (1854–1923) launched a coup in Beijing to restore the abdicated Puyi to the throne. Kang collaborated in this effort, and he must have considered it a good opportunity to

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90 Chen, 'Kongjiaohui guojiao yijianshu 孔教會國教意見書 [The Views of the Confucian Religion Association on State Religion]', *Ching Shih Pao 經世報 [World Managing Monthly]* 2, no. 3 (1913): 9.

91 Kang, *Zhi guohui yiyuan shu* 致国会议员书, *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 318-320.

92 Cf. Wu, *Zhonghua Xianfashi*, 170; Pan, *The Chinese Constitution*, 192.

93 Chen, 'Guohui xianfa huiyi duiyu kongjiao dageming jinggao guoren shu 國會憲法會議對於孔教大革命敬告國人書 [A Letter to Compatriots on How the Constitutional Session of the National Assembly Has Slain the Life of the Confucian Religion (1917)]', in *KJSNDS*, 1924, 34a–36b.

promote his proposal of a democratic polity with a titular monarch. In support of his actions he cited the Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660 following the Cromwellian Protectorate. Kang reasoned that in order to regain her stability and avoid further upheavals, China should follow the English model and restore Puyi as titular monarch.[94] To his great disappointment, he soon found that his collaborator, General Zhang, was only paying lip service to constitutionalism, and the vast majority of the whole nation, including many of his early followers such as Liang, were against the Manchu restoration. In less than two weeks, Puyi the emperor was forced to abdicate again, and Kang had to seek refuge in the United States legation in Beijing. A warrant for his arrest was issued by the restored Republican government, and was not lifted until March the next year. At the national level, the attempted restoration ushered in a decade of warlordism, with regional leaders fighting to dominate the government and the presidency changing hands frequently.[95] Kang's participation in the ill-fated restoration struck a heavy blow both to his political credibility and to his moral standing, after which he seemed to have exerted little influence upon Chinese political and intellectual trends. As a result, he resigned his post as president of the CRA, after which Chen Huanzhang became its *de facto* leader.[96]

4.3 In the Name of Science

As can be seen from the above discussions, the campaign for Confucianism to be adopted as a state religion had also given rise to an anti-Confucian movement. Among other things, many of its critics drew on the authority of science in their opposition to 'religion', a term that had by then become associated or even equated with 'superstition'. The revival of the state religion campaign and Kang's participation in the Manchu restoration of 1917 had attracted intense opposition from Chen Duxiu and his fellow New Culture intellectuals. In the rest of this section I discuss how, with the

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94 Kang, 'Zhongguo shanhouyi 中国善后议 [On the Reconstruction of Post-Revolution China][1916]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 2007, 274–75.

95 John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History, Second Enlarged Edition* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 257–87. It was not until 1927 that warlord-divided China was brought to a nominal unification by a united front of the reorganized Nationalist Party and the newly-established Communist Party, both inspired by Leninist Russia.

96 The Association underwent a revival in the early 1920s under Chen's leadership. For his contribution, Chen was elected vice-president of the newly initiated World Conference for International Peace Through Religion in the late 1920s.

increasing commitment of these thinkers to a radical form of scientism, their iconoclastic attacks on religion in general, and on Confucianism in particular, firmly established the Conflict Thesis in the mainstream of Chinese thought.

4.3.1 Religion and Superstition

By the early 1910s, the neologism *zongjiao*, which had been widely accepted as a legitimate translation of 'religion', was considered to refer predominantly to the belief in spirits and deities. As Wang Jingfang 王敬芳, a member of National Assembly, pointed out, the mention of religion would immediately remind a contemporary Chinese of the concept of *shen* 神 (spirits, deities).[97] That was why in the state religion campaign the attitude of Confucius toward the existence of spirits was heatedly debated. As Hsi-yuan Chen has observed, even the same saying of Confucius on 'respecting spiritual beings but keeping aloof from them' (*Analects* 6:20) was interpreted differently to support opposing arguments. Defenders of the religious nature of Confucianism stressed Confucius' reverence for spirits or his acknowledgment of deities, while opponents of this view highlighted his exhortation to keep a distance from them.[98] In this connection, the opponents argued that in the context of Confucianism *jiao* was meant to refer to *jiaohua* (education and transformation) rather than *zongjiao*, while the supporters contended that *jiao* encompassed both, stressing that moral instruction of the people was the very purpose of religion. For Kang and Chen, to define religion merely in the sense of belief in the spirits was inadequate, but even if that definition was accepted, they maintained, Confucianism could properly be regarded as a religion because there were numerous places in the Confucian Canon where spirits and deities were discussed.[99]

Closely related to the association of 'religion' with the need, as a matter of definition, to subscribe to a belief in spirits, was the increasingly politicized notion of *mixin* or superstition as a negative force. As stated in the previous chapter (see Section 3.2.1), *mixin* was another borrowing from Japanese terminology. Like *zongjiao*, it became

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97 Wu, *Zhonghua Xianfashi*, appx. 39.

98 Cf. Chen, 'Confucianism Encounters Religion', 76.

99 Chen, 'Kongjiaohui wei xianfa qicao weiyuanhui foujue guojiao jinggao quanguo tongbao shu 孔教會為憲法起草委員會否決國教警告全國同胞書 [Letter to Compatriots on the Rejection of the State Religion by the Constitution-Drafting Committee (1917)]', in *KJSNDS*, 1924, 83a–87b.

popular in China in the beginning of the twentieth century largely due to its frequent use by Liang Qichao in his influential journalistic articles. Initially, the term was employed in the literal sense of 'irrational faith' in contrast to 'rational faith', and whether a person's faith convictions were rational or irrational could be settled by pointing to 'reason' as the standard for distinguishing between the two. Liang held that without the sanction of reason religion would give rise to *mixin*, and yet he pointed out that religion was not the same as *mixin*. He stressed that superstitious beliefs in religion would obstruct the progress of the human intellect and scholarly pursuits, but he did not regard *mixin* as an absolutely negative force, for he acknowledged the achievements of certain historical figures as a result of the transformative power of their persistent, irrational faith.[100]

As time passed by, however, the term *mixin* acquired increasingly negative connotations in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. A foreign religion was regarded, in the minds of patriotic Chinese, as promoting certain elements of 'blind faith' or unquestioning obedience to sometimes inexplicable dogma and occasionally outright superstition. To many of the educated elite, superstitious religious ideas were abhorrent, for they considered these religious ideas to be part of an imperial tool that had been employed to convert, rule and oppress the Chinese populace, and they now regarded superstition as a great hindrance to the progress of scholarship and science in China. Moreover, the term *mixin* came to also be used to designate various practices of popular beliefs, such as animism, reincarnation, divine retribution, and geomantic omens, all of which were often considered signs of ignorance. Accordingly, in early twentieth China, when a concerted campaign was mounted against whatever might qualify as a form of 'superstition', it had become a revolutionary tool to transform or refine the political, intellectual and popular traditions of China. In this connection, superstition was often regarded as an intrinsic part of 'religion' and sometimes even as a surrogate name for religion, in the sense that both entailed 'irrational faith' in supernatural forces.[101]

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100 Liang, 'Lun zongjiaojia yu zhexuejia', 764–66.

101 For more details, see Shen Jie 沈洁, 'Fanmixin huayu jiqi xiandai qiyuan 反迷信话语及其现代起源 [The Discourse against Superstition and Its Modern Origins in China]', *Shilin 史林 [Historical Review]*, no. 2 (2006): 54-79. For a summary discussion on the concept of superstition in history across the world including traditional China, see S. A. Smith, 'Introduction [to The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present]', *Past & Present* 199, no. suppl_3 (1 January 2008): 7–55.

Given this context of the movement to expunge superstition from the cultural life of the Chinese people during the period of revolutionary struggle, the advocacy of Confucianism as a religion, not to mention a state religion, raised the eyebrows and incurred the opposition of many intellectuals. As expected, a recurring view expressed in the Drafting Committee and during the debates at the Assembly was that to qualify as a 'religion', a religious body of teachings had to contain elements of superstition and such doctrines as 'divine retribution'. On this basis, some Assemblymen dismissed the claim that Confucianism was a religion, because it contained nothing superstitious. Even some of the those who wanted to exalt Confucianism hesitated to endorse the state religion proposal for fear of narrowing the scope of Confucianism and even of degrading Confucius (which was exactly what Liang had argued a decade earlier, see Section 3.2.1).[102]

In response, the supporters of the state religion campaign adopted two seemingly contradictory approaches. Some accepted that superstition was a part of religion, and argued that Confucius also condoned the use of divine retribution for 'stealthily ruling the people'.[103] Some rejected the view that superstition was a prerequisite attribute of a religion, stressing the fact that Confucius' focus on morality and human relations made it a more advanced form of religion. In his letter addressed to the President, the National Assembly, the state council, governors, local assemblies and gentlemen in the military, educational, journalist, agricultural, commercial and industrial circles, Liao Daochuan 廖道传, a Confucian poet and local magistrate from Guangdong, argued that 'religion' referred to Sages' teachings that cultivated the Way for the people, to which superstitious belief was not at all indispensable. He stressed that Confucian transcendence (seeking to understand Heaven and Earth) was to be achieved through living this life rather than in a next world.[104] In a similar vein, Chen Huanzhang added that 'superstition' was 'a term used to discredit religion', for what

[102] See Wu, *Zhonghua Xianfashi*, 106–7.

[103] Wu, appx. 20.

[104] Liao Daochuan 廖道传, 'Qing zun Kongjiao wei guojiao shang dazongtong dengshu 请尊孔教为国教上大总统等书 [A Petition to President (et al.) to Enshrine Confucianism as State Religion]', in *ZMDZH-WH*, 1991, 47. Although it was not known how widely the letter was circulated, it is recorded as having been received by the office of the President.

was taken as 'faith' by believers was often unjustly dismissed out of hand as 'superstition' by non-believers.[105]

In fact, Chen and Kang had both long held the view that Confucius, the founder of a new religion, was *against* the superstitions that were prevalent in China's old religion of polytheism.[106] Prior to Confucius's time, Chen argued, people had believed in a myriad of spirits, which fell into four classes, those of heaven, of earth, of the dead and of all material things, but above them all there was a Supreme God (*shangdi*). Under this ancient form of Chinese folk religion, superstition prevailed in the whole empire.[107] The communication between the spirits and men were achieved through the intermediary priesthood of shamans, which was in fact a body of scholars. Their profession was further divided into six categories, astrology (*tianwen* 天文), the almanac (*lipu* 历谱), the five elements (*wuxing* 五行), milfoil and tortoise (*shigui* 蓍龟), miscellaneous fortune-telling (*zazha* 杂占), and physical laws (*xingfa* 形法) which studied the features of geography, of human beings, and of things. Although the six professions were traditionally classified as magic (*shushu* 数术), Chen argued that 'they were really a mixture of magic and science', a feature that had been obscured and indeed forgotten in modern times.[108]

Chen claimed, as Kang had, that as a religious reformer, Confucius had swept away the old superstitions; that was why Confucius disliked talking about spiritual beings. Instead, Confucius stressed the individual cultivation of one's Heaven-endowed nature, aiming by this purposeful discipline to achieve the highest standard of harmony with Heaven and Earth. The religion of Confucius, Chen argued, was a Way of self-cultivation worthy of being held up as being a more advanced stage in religious practice and human history.[109] In other words, Chen claimed that Confucius

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105 Chen, 'Kongjiaohui wei xianfa', 84a.

106 Although Kang did not use the neologism *mixin*, he meant the same things that were later covered by the term. Chen, on the other hand, used both 'superstition' and *mixin* in his English and Chinese writings.

107 Referring to the same period, Feng Youlan has commented that the Chinese at that time were 'superstitious and ignorant', and they 'had religious thought but no philosophy', and the religion and spirits they believed in were similar to those of the Greeks. He has also argued that belief in a myriad of spirits had precedence over the concept of a supreme God. Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 1:24.

108 Chen, *Economic Principles*, 40. For another discussion on the five professions, see Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 1:26–30.

109 Chen, *Economic Principles*, 40–41. Chen considered this form of religion not only new to ancient

replaced the old religion (polytheism) with his own set of teachings. This, he added, should not lead one into thinking that Confucius was irreligious, for the Sage had recognized the usefulness of the old religion and retained some of the old elements in his writings. Chen then cited quotations from the Confucian Texts that stressed 'the way of the spirits' (*shendao*), many of which Kang had cited and discussed (see Section 3.1.1).[110] By doing so, however, Chen left the reader with a somewhat schizoid image of Confucius, characterized by both his unwillingness to talk about spirits and yet his recognition of their usefulness as agents of retribution as part of a process contributing to the moral instruction of the people.

In this regard, Kang's arguments in his treatise on the *Annals* were clearer and more convincing. Applying his progressive theory of the Three Ages to his studies of religion, Kang asserted that Confucius had turned extravagant polytheism (the first stage) to measured polytheism (the second stage) by dramatically reducing the number of spirits that were deemed worthy of receiving worship and sacrifices, in an effort to gradually prepare the populace for the third stage, the eventual practice of monotheism. To be specific, Confucius preserved only five sacrifices: those offered to Heaven, Earth, mountains, rivers and ancestors, and he denounced any other type of worship, such as animal worship.[111] The problem was, Kang argued, that Confucius' teachings on the issue had been forgotten, and extravagant polytheism had been revived as manifested in various 'improper worships and sacrifices' (*yinsi* 淫祀), practices that he had denounced in memorials to the Throne in the late 1890s (see Section 2.3.3). Thus Kang was, in his own way, a strong advocate of the need to eradicate superstition from Chinese cultural life and religious practice. Although he condemned many of the folk practices of the Chinese countryside, he did not consider as superstitions certain other beliefs, such as reincarnation and divine retribution, which were often denounced as superstition by his contemporary opponents.

When pressed for a distinction between religion and superstition, science was sometimes called on to play a role by Chinese intellectuals in the 1910s. That which

China, but also new in today's Western world, which was 'only now' witnessing the appearance of such forms as the Ethical Culture Society. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the Society contained essentials found in the teachings of Aristotle and the stoics.

110 Chen, 41; Kang, 'Kongjiaohui xu (er)', 346.

111 Kang, 'Chunqiu kao', 135.

was against science was superstition rather than religion. As will be seen in our later discussions, however, the problem was that there was no consensus, let alone agreement, on what 'science' was, or what its boundaries were. For Kang, science was an important source for intellectual and material development, but it had its limits. Many of his contemporaries of the younger generation, on the other hand, sharply disagreed; and they opted for scientism.

4.3.2 Scientism versus Religion

While most of the early advocates of science, like Kang and Liang, had not been trained in science, the 1910s witnessed the appearance of young Chinese scientists trained in the United States with financial support from the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Programme.[112] Many of them, while still studying abroad, joined in the effort to promulgate science in China not only as a source of material development, but also as a powerful tool to reform traditional cultural practices and do away with the traditional mental attitudes, which they thought were frequently superstitious, sometimes extremely so. In the practice and pronouncements of many of these proponents of science, the power of science was often exaggerated, and science was almost invariably placed in opposition to religion as well as superstition.

The most vocal promoter of modern science was a new monthly, the *Kexue* (Science). It was initiated in the beginning of 1915 by a group of Chinese students at Cornell University, who had organized the Science Society of China (*Zhongguo kexueshe* 中國科學社) in the previous year, in their effort to emulate the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Its founding members included Ren Hongjuan 任鸿隽 (H. C. Zen), Yang Quan 杨铨, Zhao Yuanren 赵元任 (Y. R. Chao) and Hu Shi, who would achieve prominent positions in politics, education and scientific research after they returned to their motherland. The society itself was moved to China in 1918 and became the largest association of scientists in China prior to the official *Academia Sinica* (1928). Ren, who had once served as secretary to Sun Yat-sen prior to his studies in the United States, would go on to head the department of specialized

[112] The programme, known in Chinese as 庚子賠款獎學金, was established by the US government with the excess payment of the Boxer Indemnity. During the two decades following its inception in 1909, the scheme had sponsored around 1,300 Chinese students to study in the United States.

education at the Ministry of Education before taking charge of an organization that supervised a principal source of financial support for scientific activities in the Republic; Yang would serve as General Secretary of the Academia Sinica; Zhao, though trained in mathematics and physics, turned himself into an internationally known linguist, and Hu Shi, who switched to philosophy and became a disciple of John Dewey, became one of the leaders of the New Culture Movement.[113]

Although edited remotely in the United States, the monthly was printed in Shanghai and was distributed from there. It was stated clearly in its preamble that the journal aimed to spread the latest scientific knowledge as well as popular science so as to appeal to the general public. The journal would cover physical and natural sciences and their applications, and publish brief biographies of scientists, but it would exclude political and metaphysical discussions. It stressed the importance of 'rectifying names', saying that concerning Western scientific terms, they would make deliberate choices on the most appropriate translations from existing Chinese ones, or produce new terms if they had not been previously translated or if the old ones were found inadequate.[114] Naturally, one of the key terms to be first decided on was the Chinese translation of 'science'. As the journal's title indicates, the editors had decided on *kexue* rather than *gezhi*. In this way, it helped to put an end to the coexistence of the two as interchangeable terms for 'science'. It has been acknowledged by Chinese historians of science that since 1915 when the journal of *Kexue* was started, the term *kexue* had completely replaced *gezhi* as the standard translation for 'science'.[115]

Beyond a proper Chinese translation for 'science', the contributors to the *Kexue* also attempted to offer a proper definition of the term. A typical view was from Ren, the chief editor of the journal. 'Science is a generic term for systematic knowledge,' he wrote. 'In its broad sense, any system of rational knowledge that offers an account for a thing or phenomenon can be called science.' However, he emphasized that in its

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113 See Peter Buck, *American Science and Modern China, 1876-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 91–98; Zuoyue Wang, 'Saving China through Science: The Science Society of China, Scientific Nationalism, and Civil Society in Republican China', *Science and Civil Society*, Osiris, 17 (2002): 291–322.

114 'Liyan 例言 [The Preamble]', *KX*, no. 1 (1915): 1–2.

115 See Wu, *Shenme shi kexue*, 11. The monthly continued for 45 years until 1960, one year after the Science Society of China was dissolved under Communist rule. In 1985, the *Kexue* monthly was revived and has remained in publication until the present time.

modern usage, the term was conventionally employed in a narrower sense, that is, it referred to 'systematic, interrelated knowledge of a certain phenomenon, whose general principles are induced from experiment-based observations and induction.' According to this definition, astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology and psychology, for example, were considered as sciences, while history, fine arts, literature, philosophy and theology, for instance, were not. Ren stressed that the defining feature of modern science was its method, in particular the inductive method. This method was powerful and effective, because for one thing it was 'experimental', consisting of such steps as experiment, observation, hypothesis and verification, and for another, it was 'progressive', giving rise to general principles from which new knowledge and principles could be deduced. 'The essence of science', Ren summed up, 'lies in its method rather than its objects.' In his opinion, it was precisely the lack of the scientific method that had hindered the birth and rise of science in China.[116] In a similar vein, Hu Mingfu 胡明複, then a Ph.D. candidate in mathematics at Harvard, argued that the scientific method represented the very spirit of science and could make an even greater contribution to mankind if it was applied to such other domains of human life, such as thought, morality and culture.[117]

The *Kexue* monthly grew quickly in its influence among Chinese intellectuals and played a very significant role in the popularization of science. Like Kang Youwei, the contributors of the *Kexue* extolled the practical benefits that science brought to mankind through technological achievements, and they therefore vigorously advocated saving China though science. They highlighted the fact that it was modern science that had given rise to the industrial revolution, which in turn contributed to Europe's rapid development in wealth and power. Therefore, it was of utmost importance for Chinese schools to pay great attention to science education, if China was to catch up with her Western counterparts.[118] Unlike Kang, however, they clearly distinguished science from its industrial applications. Echoing Huxley's rejection of application as the goal of science, they stressed that the natural purpose of science was not to put scientific discoveries to practical uses, but to 'explicate the

[116] Ren, 'Shuo Zhongguo wu kexue'.
[117] Hu Mingfu 胡明復, 'Kexue fangfa lun yi 科學方法論一 [On the Method of Science: I]', *KX* 2, no. 1 (1916): 719–28.
[118] Ren Hongjuan 任鴻雋, 'Kexue yu gongye 科學與工業 [Science and Industry]', *KX* 1, no. 10 (1915): 1089–99.

truth of the world' through the exercise of man's innate abilities and to become the master of Nature, rather than its slave. They argued that this purpose of science resonated with the goal of education, which was, in the words of Matthew Arnold, 'to know ourselves and the world'. They stressed that the effect of science was not limited to the natural and physical domains, for science could also play a role in conjunction with the liberal arts in guiding human behaviour and social organization. Malthusianism and Darwinism were often-quoted examples in this regard. In education, therefore, more attention should be given to the method of science rather than the actual knowledge of science, and above all to the training of a scientific mind.[119] When Kang studied and advocated science three decades earlier, he had also emphasized the importance of science to one's intellectual development, but his focus was more on the principles discovered by science than on the method of science itself. In hindsight, the discussions on the definition, method, aim and spirit of science in the *Kexue* could be seen as a belated making up for what had been largely neglected and consequently found to be lacking in the earlier phases of Chinese introduction of Western sciences in the late nineteenth century.[120]

Not only was science touted as the key to material development through technology and as the primary means of improving human health and longevity through medicine and food production, it was also regarded as a way to achieve intellectual emancipation and freedom through the scientific explanation of natural phenomena, and even of advancing moral development, via the explication of economic and sociological principles. Science, therefore, was not only the solution to China's material underdevelopment, but it was also the remedy for her spiritual backwardness. Without mentioning its name, Confucianism was criticized as outdated and no longer useful: 'Even China's morality and classical learning,' it was stated in the 'Foreword', 'long cherished as national essence for thousands of years, have become corrupted

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[119] Ren Hongjuan 任鴻雋, 'Kexue yu jiaoyu 科學與教育 [Science and Education]', *KX* 1, no. 12 (1915): 1343–52.

[120] For a good account of the contribution of the *Science* and the Science Society of China to the development of science in China, see Zhang Jian 张剑, 'Cong "Kexue jiuguo" dao "kexue jianguo" 从"科学救国"到"科学建国"[From "Saving the Nation" to "Building Up the Nation" through Science]', *Ziran bianzhengfa tongxun 自然辩证法通讯 [Journal of Dialectics of Nature]*, no. 3 (2016). Those papers of general discussions on science had been collected and published in one volume in 1919, then expanded and reprinted a decade later. cf. Zhongguo kexueshe 中國科學社, ed., *Kexue tonglun 科學通論 [General Discussions on Kexue]* (Shanghai: Zhongguo kexueshe, 1934).

and lost efficacy in their entirety.' Confucianism was again held accountable by Ren for China's failure to give rise to modern science. China, so to speak, had lost both the material and spiritual means of maintaining her independence and existence. 'The solution, therefore, is science, and science alone!'[121] Here was an embryonic form of a statement that can be characterized as a strident commitment to scientism, according to which every aspect of the universe is knowable only by the methods of science and every problem can ultimately be solved by science.[122]

Although the *Kexue* attempted to limit its scope to the physical and natural sciences and it excluded metaphysical (including religious) discussions, it was difficult for the contributors to ignore religion in relation to the development of science. Not infrequently, religion was juxtaposed with superstition and placed as the conceptual opposite of science. 'In medieval Europe, religion and superstition obstructed the progress of human knowledge,' the author of the foreword to the first issue noted. 'We would have remained ignorant today, if it had not been for such scientists as Galileo, who loved truth and persevered in its pursuit, and who, with bloodshed, wrestled and fought with religion for freedom of thought.'[123] The case of Galileo was again highlighted in a following article in the same issue on the life and work of 'the pioneer of modern astronomy and experimental science'. It delineated how Galileo, at an advanced age, was tortured by the Catholic Church,[124] and was forced to promise on oath not to discuss the 'anti-Bible' view that the earth moved around the sun.[125] The Chinese readers were quick to discern the Conflict Thesis that was clearly conveyed therein. Upon reading its first issue, for example, Cai Yuanpei, the former Minister of Education, expressed his appreciation of its promotion of 'pure science' to the exclusion of religion. He applauded Galileo as a model for scientists, who in his

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121 Ren Hongjuan 任鴻雋, 'Fakanci 發刊詞 [Foreword]', *KX* 1, no. 1 (1915): 3–7. While acknowledging the fact that advances in science had assisted the ongoing European war, its special issue on war and science argued that science had played a bigger role in preserving and achieving peace. Yang Quan 楊銓, 'Zhanzheng yu kexue 戰爭與科學 [War and Science]', *KX* 1, no. 4 (1915): 353–58.

122 For more on the definition of scientism in the Chinese context, see Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*, 20–21.

123 Ren, 'Fakanci'.

124 It should be noted, however, that Galileo was threatened with torture but not actually tortured, though the latter was widely believed.

125 Yang Quan 楊銓, 'Jialileiwo zhuan 加里雷倭傳 [A Biographical Sketch of Galileo]', *KX* 1, no. 1 (1915): 99–105. Unlike many of the later accounts of Galileo, however, the essay acknowledged that Galileo had professed Catholicism and 'was most sincere in his belief'. It further quoted Galileo as 'often' saying that 'science and Scriptures, if correctly understood, agree with each other.'

opinion 'spearheaded the war between science and religion'. 'Science is founded on experiments,' he continued, 'and is fundamentally incompatible with religion, a product of fabrication.'[126]

It is understandable that the Conflict Thesis was propounded in a magazine edited by a group of Chinese students at Cornell. One should remember that the university's former president, Andrew Dickson White, was credited with being one of the chief promoters of that thesis through his influential book, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, which since its first publication in 1896, was reprinted many times and remained a popular work for decades. 'As Andrew White pointed out,' it was stated in a 1916 *Kexue* article on the method and spirit of science, 'history shows that struggles and conflicts between science and religion have invariably resulted in the good of both.'[127] The article noted that the very spirit of science was to seek truth and dispose of what is shown to be false, and that the history of science in the West consisted of its 'constant fights' against old superstitions, customs, religions and morality. This warfare was welcome, because it contributed both to the progress of science and to the 'purification' of religions and morality.

The Conflict Thesis was further promoted by another new and even more influential magazine, the *Xinqingnian* 新青年 or the *New Youth* (*La Jeunesse*), established in late 1915 by Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879–1942). As a masterly publicist and propagator of ideas, Chen has been compared to Voltaire in his role as the 'grand impresario of modern thought' in China.[128] The magazine soon became the vehicle for intellectual change in China and spearheaded the New Culture Movement, an intellectual campaign for the rejection of Confucian values, which were held responsible for the weakness of the nation.[129] It was also a campaign for the embrace

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126 Cai Yuanmei 蔡元培, 'Fu Ren Hongjuan han 复任鸿隽函 [A Letter in Reply to Ren Hongjuan (1915)]', in *Cai Yuanpei quanji 蔡元培全集 [Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei]*, vol. 10 (Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 249–50.

127 Hu, 'Kexue fangfa lun', 723; cf. White, *Warfare of Science with Theology*, viii. White's original wording reads, 'In all modern history, … all untrammelled scientific investigation, no matter how dangerous to religion some of its stages may have seemed for the time to be, has invariably resulted in the highest good both of religion and of science.'

128 Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*, 68.

129 Many of those anti-traditional, anti-Confucian themes had been advanced by the Anarchist groups of Chinese overseas students in Paris and Tokyo about a decade earlier. Cf. Robert Scalapino and George T. Yu, *The Chinese Anarchist Movement* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of

of egalitarianism and other Western values, which Chen articulated through the personae of 'Mr. Democracy' and 'Mr. Science'. He trumpeted the call to criticize and reject traditional culture and to build a new one based on the scientific outlook in his leading article 'My Solemn Plea to Youth' which initiated the first issue of the *New Youth*. He urged China's young minds to be scientific and not speculative, for science conformed to both objective phenomena and to human reason, while speculation, whose products included religion, 'not only overreached objective phenomena but also banished subjective reason'. The former characterized modern progress and was the force behind European ascendency; the latter, on the other hand, belonged to the past—the days of ignorance—but was still prevalent among the less enlightened people of the modern day. If the Chinese people were to progress from their unenlightened state, they had to have recourse to opportunities to practise science, which alone could correct all the fanciful notions and irrational beliefs in their traditional culture.[130] Chen was emphatic about the power of science:

> In today's ever-changing world, every new occurrence and every minute thing is subject to the scrutiny of scientific laws; the efficacy of science will subject all human thoughts and actions to reason and thereby get rid of superstitions and still the capricious winds of ignorance.[131]

By subjecting all human thoughts and actions to science and reason, Chen was explicitly advocating a strong scientism. Yet he had never been trained in science; for him, science was more of a weapon against superstition and a way to expose a lethargic mode of thought than a dynamic force in conquering nature.

Equally forceful was Chen's attack on religion, which was taken as a symbol for various forms of unfounded belief: 'If the existence of the gods and spirits of heaven and earth cannot be proved accurately, all religions are nothing but deceitful idols: the god Amida is false; Jehovah is false; and the Supreme Lord of Heaven [head of the Taoist Pantheon] is false.' 'All kinds of God, Buddhas, Immortals, Spirits revered by various religions are useless,' he concluded.[132]

International Studies, University of California, 1961), 9.

130 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Jinggao qingnian 敬告青年 [My Solemn Plea to Youth]', *XQN* 1, no. 1 (1915): 5 of 1st art.

131 Chen, 5 of 1st art; Cf. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*, 64–65.

132 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Ouxiang pohuai lun 偶像破壞論 [On the Destruction of Idols]', *XQN* 5,

In disposing of the very basis of religious belief by reducing ultimate reality to the material atom and through drawing on an 'all-powerful science', Chen presented a clear conflict model of science and religion. 'In order to support Mr. Science [in China],' he categorically declared, 'we cannot but oppose […] old religion [beliefs in gods and spirits].'[133] Many of his fellow leaders of the New Culture Movement joined him in promulgating science and denouncing religion in their eager efforts to get China onto the tracks of modern progress. And they did so with supreme confidence, or, one might say, even with a certain hubris. As they applied Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages to their analysis of the Chinese society, they concluded that China still remained in the stage of religion and superstition, far away from the positive or scientific age. To get rid of religion and to promote science, they felt, were objectives that were fully justified and imperatively necessary.[134] As expected, the New Culture iconoclasts would inevitably come into conflict with Kang's insistence on reforming the Confucian religion, and, in particular, his campaign to establish Confucianism as a state religion.

4.3.3 Substitutes for Religion

Initially, in his hostile scrutiny of Confucian values, Chen Duxiu did not attack Kang Youwei. In fact, he had once been an admirer of both Kang and Liang and was an avid reader of their works during his formative years. He turned from being a reformer to becoming a revolutionary during the years he spent in Japan in the 1900s, but he did not join the anti-Manchu *Tongmenghui* led by Sun Yat-sen. He later became an advocate of modern (European) civilization, which he considered owed three significant debts to the French, namely, democracy as seen in Lafayette, evolutionary theory in Lamarck (the predecessor of Darwin), and socialism in Saint-Simon and Fourier.[135] Despite changing his mind on a number of issues, he remained appreciative of the early contribution of Kang and Liang to the 'enlightenment' of the Chinese people.

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no. 2 (1918): 89; translated in Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*, 71.

133 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Benzhi zuian zhi dabianshu 本誌罪案之答辯書 [A Reply to the Charges Against Our Magazine]', *XQN* 6, no. 1 (1919): 10–11.

134 Cf. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, 'Xuyi 序一 [Preface One]', in *KXRSG*, 1998, 3.

135 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Falanxi renmin yu jinshi wenming 法蘭西人民與近世文明 [The French People and Modern Civilization]', *XQN* 1, no. 1 (1915): 2nd article.

All of that changed in late 1916, when Chen read Kang's letter to the President and the Premier, which was published in a newspaper on 20 September. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kang requested that the government restore the practice of worshipping Confucius on one's knees (which had recently been nullified by the Ministry of Interior Affairs); that it continue the ritual of offering sacrifices to Heaven; and that Confucianism be made the state religion by the Constitution.[136] Deeply incensed by Kang's statement that 'the Chinese would degrade themselves to the status of barbarians if they discontinued worshipping Confucius as founder of their religion', Chen immediately published a refutation of Kang's letter in the following month's issue of his *New Youth.* Apart from criticizing what he considered to be Kang's logical contradictions, Chen made several counter-claims. First, the Chinese were not a religious people and Confucianism was not a religion. 'Religion aims at salvation of the soul and is oriented to the other world,' he wrote, 'while Confucius did not talk about ghosts or death, so his doctrine concerning human nature and the way of Heaven is philosophy rather than religion.' Secondly, for the state to exalt Confucianism above other religions would interfere with the modern principles of religious freedom and of the separation between state and church. Third, given its 'inseparable association' with despotism, Confucianism was not only incompatible with republicanism but with modern life. Last but not least, religion was no longer valuable in the age of science. 'The majority of scientists have disregarded religions as fictions,' he claimed, 'and the knowledgeable Ernst Haeckel is their contemporary representative.'[137] In a sense, Chen Duxiu and Kang agreed on one point, that is, that orthodox Confucianism as it had been practised in imperial China was no longer suitable for modern China in a world of rival nations. They differed in their solutions, however. While Kang attempted to reform Confucianism to conform to the needs of the times, Chen wanted to get rid of it.

The points outlined above were further elaborated in Chen's subsequent articles. In his further discussion on the question of Confucianism as a religion, Chen proposed

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136 Kang, 'Zhi Li Yuanhong Duan Qirui shu 致黎元洪段祺瑞书 [A Letter to the President and the Premier (1916)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 10, 2007, 316–17.

137 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Bo Kang Youwei zhi zongtong zongli shu 駁康有為致信總統總理書 [A Refutation of Kang Youwei's Letter to the President and the Premier]', *XQN* 2, no. 2 (1916): 3rd article.

substituting science for religion.[138] 'It is my faith', he declared, 'that man will rely on science as the proper way to obtain true understanding and to regulate their actions in the future, and all religions are to be disposed of.' This conviction came from his understanding of the evolution of 'laws'. According to his view, there were two types of laws in the world, natural and man-made. Natural laws were universal, everlasting and inevitable; man-made laws were partial, transient, and fortuitous. The former could be revealed by science, while the latter were contained in religions, morality and civil laws. Man's greatest task and utmost goal, therefore, was to 'correct' all man-made laws and make them come into agreement with natural laws, laws that had been and would continue to be discovered by science. In this sense, he argued that the mysteries of the universe and of human life, which had so far been 'inaccurately' accounted for by religions, would one day be correctly explained by science. 'Therefore,' he concluded, 'I propose substituting science for religion as our true faith. It may take a long time to solve all the mysteries for us, but it will eventually.'[139]

Chen's view was echoed by Cai Yuanpei, who was then President of Peking University and who had invited Chen to head the university's division of arts and humanities. During a 1917 talk by Cai, whose notes were published in the *New Youth*, he proposed 'substituting aestheticism for religion'. He claimed that religion was a question of the 'bygone age', for 'the components of religion have now been accounted for by modern science' (that is why he considered Kang's Confucian movement an outdated, futile effort). In his view, religion was important in the past because it was able to provide people with knowledge (*zhishi* 知识), altruistic will (*yizhi* 意志) and emotional support (*qinggan* 情感). With social development and scientific advances, however, all the mysteries of the world, including the origins of different species, could be accounted for by science in a convincing way. These in turn could help people understand that moral principles were not God-given, but could be deduced from human experience and the findings of biology, psychology and sociology. Thus, religion had already been deprived by science of the functions of conferring knowledge and providing guidance through ethical principles. As for the

138 In the nineteenth century there were several Western proposals in favour of *substituting science for religion* as the basis of society, the most notable being that of Auguste Comte. I am aware that there was a certain similarity between Comte's views and those of Kang's as well of Chen's, but given the constraints of time and space available, I will leave this issue to future research.

139 Xin qinniang , 1917, Vol. 2, no.5

remaining function of providing emotional support, Cai argued that it could be substituted for as well with an aesthetic education including fine arts and music. That way, modern people would be able to enjoy all the benefits originally offered by religion without having to suffer from its disadvantages.[140] 'In an age of science,' he claimed categorically, 'all knowledge and every moral issue can be secured or solved through science, and they have nothing to do with religion whatsoever.'[141]

As can be seen, there was a big difference between Kang and Chen in their conceptions of science as well as of religion. For Kang, science was of great importance for education and material development. That was a position he had always maintained, and he stressed how advances in sciences and their technical application could contribute to a country's material and cultural development.[142] But he never placed science above religion or exalted it to position where it could work to answer all questions and meet all the needs of human society to the total exclusion of religion. Kang considered science, religion and politics as important domains of human endeavour and emphasized their complementary roles in the development of a country. For Chen and his fellow New Culture intellectuals, however, science was something greater than the natural sciences and their materialization in the form of technology. Nor was it merely a weapon to fight against superstitions and religions. Chen developed a form of positivist philosophy, that is, he advocated the use of science to solve all issues in human life and society. As for those problems that could not yet be solved, they would be resolved by science in due course. In that sense, he advocated the substitution of religion by science and called science the true faith.

Rarely did Kang respond to his young critics directly. For one thing, he would not deign to argue with them. He did not regard them as being qualified for judging someone like himself, who had, in his own words, 'gained great insights and rich knowledge from being immersed in reading Chinese books for decades and travelling to as many as thirty-one countries'. 'How overconfident are those', he wrote

140 Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, 'Yi meiyu dai zongjiao shuo 以美育代宗教說 [On Substituting Aestheticism for Religion]', *XQN* 3, no. 6 (1917): 2nd article. For a English discussion on Cai's aestheticism, see Laurence G. Thompson and O. Briere, trans., *Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy 1898-1950* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 31–32.

141 Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, 'Tongxin 通信 [Correspondence]', *XQN* 3, no. 1 (1917).

142 Kang, 'Gonghe pingyi', 33.

dismissively in a 1918 letter to a friend, 'who have neither read much [in the Chinese classics] nor travelled abroad and yet have presumed to take on the role of being my judge and examiner!'[143] Furthermore, he had already refuted, in his earlier defence of the religious nature of Confucianism, criticisms such as those put forward by Chen Duxiu. In a written exchange with a Japanese friend, he commented that it was not worthwhile to further refute the claim that Confucianism was not a *zongjiao* or religion. He observed that it was ironic that European and American authors considered Confucianism a religion while the Chinese intellectuals insisted on its not being one.[144] There was, however, one criticism that Kang had not fully elaborated on yet, that is, the Conflict Thesis. This he would tackle in detail in his later years, during his lecture tours and his enunciation of 'celestial peregrination', which constitute the subjects of the next chapter.

[143] Kang, 'Zhi Zhang Yishan shu 致章一山书 [A letter to Mr. Zhang Yishan] [1918]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 82.

[144] Kang, 'Yu riren moujun bitan 与日人某君笔谈 [A Written Exchange with a Japanese Friend (1920)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 118. This is a rare case where Kang employed the neologism, *zongjiao*, without a criticism.

5 A Celestial Wanderer

Having taken refuge for seven months in the American legation in Beijing following the debacle of the 1917 Restoration, Kang left it escorted by legation guards, and returned to his residence in Shanghai in early 1918. There he would live for most of his last nine years. He had a magnificent Western-style mansion built in downtown Shanghai near the International Settlement (which he had visited in 1882, a visit that intensified his desire to learn from the West, see Section 1.2.2).[1] In the centre of the backyard, he set up a small chapel, which he named *Sanbentang* 三本堂, the Hall of Three Roots. Here he placed the spirit tablets for God of Heaven, Confucius the Sage, and his ancestors. On the occasion of the dedication of the chapel, Kang elaborated on Xunzi's idea that ritual had three roots, namely, in Heaven and Earth, in forefathers and ancestors, and in lords and teachers,[2] a theme that Kang often visited in his later writings:

> Man has his roots. Without Heaven he would not have come into life; without ancestors, he cannot have come forth; without Sages, he would not have been educated. Therefore, Heaven is the root of his life, ancestors are the root of his kinship, and Sages are the root of his education. It follows that one should worship Heaven in association with the Sages and also his ancestors.[3]

Despite the harsh criticisms made against him by the New Culture intellectuals, Kang remained unshaken in his political convictions, and kept abreast of both domestic and international affairs. As the World War drew to a close, Kang called on the embattled factions in North and South China to reach a truce, so as to enable China, a member of the Allied Powers, to unitedly defend her interests at the forthcoming peace negotiations in Paris. His plea was informed by a religious element. 'In the same way

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1 A mansion was required in order to house his large family, including his five wives, six minor children, and their maids. Kang had had six wives in all—the third one had passed away in 1914. His first two children had grown up and were married. See Ma Honglin 马洪林, *Kang Youwei dazhuan 康有为大传 [A Comprehensive Biography of Kang Youwei]* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1988), 568–69.

2 John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 49.

3 Kang, 'Sanbentang luocheng jiwen 三本堂落成祭文 [An Oration for the Dedication of the Hall of Three Roots (1922)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 182.

that recitation of the names of the Buddha helps,' he wrote in a circular telegram to the regional generals and government leaders, 'the thought of peace, when repeated in your mind for thousands of times, would quench the idea of war, at least temporarily.'[4] His call went unheeded.

China was accorded a very unfair treatment at the Peace Conference, where it was decided that Germany's colonial rights in the Shandong Peninsular, which had recently been seized by the Japanese, be transferred to Japan rather than returned to China. As the news reached Beijing, it touched off a strong student protest on 4 May 1919 against the Japanese demands and the terms of the Versailles Treaty, a protest that soon spread to other cities and developed into what later became known as the May Fourth Movement (which itself has often been considered to be an extension of the New Culture Movement). Although he disagreed with the New Culture intellectuals on many issues, Kang immediately joined with them in supporting the students' movement and demanding that the authorities release the arrested students and punish the 'traitors' within the government who opted for collaboration with Japan.[5] Under pressure, the Beijing government released the students, dismissed the officials, and refused to sign the treaty. Strongly influenced by a rising tide of Chinese nationalism, the Movement shaped the outlooks of a generation of political and cultural leaders. Chen Duxiu, for example, converted to Communism and helped found the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1921.

However, Kang saw a silver lining in the otherwise dark clouds of the Paris Peace Conference, and he became extremely excited at the proposal of US President Woodrow Wilson (whom he described as 'an old acquaintance') for the creation of a League of Nations to maintain world peace. 'An association of great and small states, all being treated equally and accorded freedom,' he wrote the Chinese delegates to the Peace Conference in early 1919, 'will constitute the solid road to the Universal

[4] Kang, 'Cu nanbei suyihe yiying Ouzhou heju dian 促南北速议和以应欧州和局电 [A Telegram Urging a Quick Truce between the South and the North to Better Defend China's Interests at the European Peace Conference (1918)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 93.

[5] Kang, 'Qing zhu guozei jiu xuesheng dian 请诛国贼救学生电 [A Telegram Demanding the Punishment of the Traitors and the Release of the Arrested Students (1919)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 105–6.

Peace.'[6] He immediately connected the Wilsonian proposal with the doctrine of the Three Ages, which, for many years, he had hailed and highlighted as the essence of Confucius' teachings. In his view, the proposed League of Nations would usher in the Age of Universal Peace and constitute the beginning of the World of the Great Unity he had earlier envisioned, although it was a century earlier than the timeline he had projected. Accordingly, he arranged first two chapters of his *Book of the Great Unity*, the chapters previously published serially in his *Buren* magazine, to be printed in book form and circulated. He commented that when he completed the book in the early 1900s, he had never expected that he would be able to witness during his lifetime the Great Unity coming into being as it soon would, with the establishment of the League of Nations.[7] Although he was subsequently disappointed at how the League, after its establishment in June 1919, was dominated by a few powers, with China being degraded to 'a fourth-class state', and concluded that it had failed to realize the Great Unity to a satisfactory degree, Kang was appreciative of what had already been achieved, and predicted that the world of the Great Unity would be fully accomplished in the fullness of time, but perhaps not until after another world war![8] In this he showed both a prophetic foresight, and an unshakeable certitude in the ultimate attainability of the Great Unity envisioned by the doctrine of the Three Ages.

Kang's primary concern, though, was for contemporary China. Indeed, he was dismayed to observe China's further disunity on military, political and ideological fronts. Successive wars were fought in northern and central China between regional warlords, who had by then formed three major cliques. As things stood in the early 1920s, the Zhili clique managed to take over the Beijing government following military victories over the other two, but its control over the country remained weak and nominal. North-eastern Manchuria enjoyed *de facto* independence under the still formidable Fengtian clique, who had the backing of the Japanese, while South China was divided among several military factions including the Anhui clique and Sun

[6] Kang, 'Zhi yiheweiyuan shu 致议和委员书 [A Letter to the Chinese Delegates to the Peace Conference (1919)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 99; cf. Kang, 'Ji'nan yanjiangci 济南演讲辞 [A Talk Given at Ji'nan (1923)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 249.

[7] The poems and comments in his handwriting were reprinted in Kang, *Datongshu*, [1-11].

[8] Kang, 'Qing Quanyangyi zhuanda Riben neige chebing jiaohuan dian 请犬养毅转达日本内阁撤兵交还电 [A Telegram Sent via Inukai Tsuyoshi to the Japanese Cabinet on Withdrawing Army and Returning the Shangdong Peninsula (1919)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 108–9; Kang, 'Zhi Jin Yunpeng Yan Huiqing shu 致靳云鹏颜惠庆书 [A Letter to Premier Jin and Foreign Minister Yan (1920)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 138.

Yat-sen's self-proclaimed military government in Guangzhou. By that time, Sun had reorganized his Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*, the KMT), with assistance from the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists, and was preparing for a northern expedition. Contrary to the popular narrative that Kang withdrew from political activities and was largely forgotten by his countrymen in his later years, the records shows that he often expressed his views on state affairs through private and circular telegrams,[9] and he was sometimes consulted by the Beijing government, including President Cao Kun 曹錕 (in office 1923–1924), and by provisional governors and regional generals. While shunning contact with the revolutionary nationalists (and now the Communists as well), Kang actively sought association with certain warlords, in what would prove to be a vain attempt to enlist support for his old proposal of a titular monarchical republic. In particular, he placed his hope in the 'Confucian General' Wu Peifu 吳佩孚 (1874–1939), commander-in-chief of the Zhili armies, with whom he was on friendly terms and had frequent correspondence until the very last year of his life.

5.1 Science versus Metaphysics

A bitter war was being fought at the same time in the intellectual world, and an unprecedented debate broke out between metaphysicians and defenders of science.[10] The prelude to the debate was Liang Qichao's reflections on the European War and its dire consequences. At the end of 1918, Liang went to Europe on a one-year tour, whose primary purpose was to observe post-war European societies and study their efforts at reconstruction. He was accompanied by six friends, including the Neo-Confucian thinker Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1886–1969, later known by his English name, Carsun Chang) and Ding Wenjing 丁文江 (V. K. Ting, 1887–1936), a pioneer native geologist trained in Great Britain—these two individuals would later initiate the debate and become its outspoken protagonists and rival participants. While

[9] It is estimated that he spent as much as 1000 Chinese dollars, an impressively large sum according to the standard at that time, on telegrams alone each month. Ma, *Kang dazhuan*, 569.

[10] The Chinese word for metaphysics, *xuanxue* 玄學, is a protean term that designates the philosophy of life, morality and religion and so on. Here 'metaphysicians' primarily referred to Confucianists.

in Europe, they visited battle sites in various countries, and interacted widely with European intellectuals.[11]

Shocked by how scientific and technological advances had contributed to the rise of modern wars and their destructiveness, Liang started to reflect on the 'European dream of omnipotent science'. 'Not only had the advances of modern science [and technology] transformed the external life of Europeans,' he observed, 'but they had also shaken their internal life.' According to him, Christianity and idealist philosophy, which had been the foundations of European internal life, had been dealt a deadly blow by modern science. Everything, including the human mind, was reduced to a mere movement of matter; principles and laws could only be obtained through the method of scientific experiment rather than through philosophical contemplation. As a result, a purely materialist, mechanistic view of life had emerged 'under the shelter' of science, which encouraged pleasure-seeking, self-indulgence and the law of the jungle. The World War, Liang declared, was a 'retribution'.[12] To avoid repeating the same fate of the Westerners, Liang argued that the Chinese people needed to draw on the wisdom of their ancient Sages with respect to the need for harmony between the spiritual and material aspects of life: what distinguished man from the animal kingdom was his capacity for living a life of the spirit; material life, important as it was, should not impair the development of spiritual life, nor should it become the central issue of human life.[13]

Liang's observations exerted a great impact on Chinese intellectual opinion, and his views were shared and promoted by the defenders of Chinese traditional learning, who challenged scientism. In February 1923, Zhang Junmai gave a speech on 'the philosophy of life' at Tsinghua University in which he maintained that traditional Confucianism had contributed to the spiritual civilization of China by offering solutions for the problems of life, and argued that however developed science and

[11] For example, Liang wrote that he had met prominent European politicians, philosophers and writers, including Henry Bergson. He also had an audience with the king of Belgium. He visited the University of Oxford on 24 June 1919. Ding and Zhao, *Nianpu changbian*, 881, 885.

[12] Liang, 'Ouyou xinyinglu jielu 欧游心影录节录 [Recorded Reflections During my Travels in Europe: A Selection (1920)]', in *LQCQJ*, 1999, 2973.

[13] Liang, 'Xianqin zhengzhi sixiangshi 先秦政治思想史 [A History of the Political Thought in pre-Qin China (1922)]', in *LQCQJ*, 1999, 3694.

technology were, they had no bearing on the issue of the philosophy of life.[14] The proponents of a scientific outlook immediately responded. A rationalist and scientific positivist, Ding Wenjiang [15] rebutted Zhang's views in an article entitled 'Metaphysics and Science'. Labelling Zhang as 'a spectre of metaphysics', he asserted that science was all-sufficient, for everything, including the philosophy of life, lay within the province of science and could be examined by the scientific method.[16] Zhang retorted with a lengthy article, arguing that science was limited in its scope and methods, for there was a body of knowledge, such as are to be found in philosophy and religion, that could not be verified by science.[17] As the debate moved into the second round, Liang intervened as an arbitrator who recognized neither the bankruptcy of science nor its omnipotence. He acknowledged that many problems of life could and should be solved with the application of scientific knowledge, but he also stressed that there was a certain portion, indeed the most important part, of human life, such as love, religious experience, moral sentiment, aesthetic feeling, that had to search for solutions in realms that lay beyond the domain of science.[18]

Over the following year, a large number of the leading scholars and thinkers actively participated in the debate. A few, such as Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) and Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886–1962), sided with Zhang, while many others, including Hu Shi and Wu Zhihui (1865–1953), joined Ding's camp. All the 'saints' in religion, philosophy and science, be they Eastern or Western, were enlisted to support one side or the other. At a later stage, Marxist thinkers, such as Chen Duxiu and Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935), also joined in and presented a materialist perspective. Considering the polemics to be a belated repercussion of the debate between science and religion in Europe, Chen Duxiu upheld the monistic belief that only objective, material causes could account for social history and determine the philosophy of

14 Zhang Junmai 张君劢, 'Renshengguan 人生观 [The Philosophy of Life]', in *KXRSG*, 1998, 30–37.

15 For a critical English biography of Ding, see Charlotte Furth, *Ting Wen-Chiang: Science and China's New Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

16 Ding Wenjiang 丁文江, 'Xuanxue yu kexue 玄学与科学 [Metaphysics and Science]', in *KXRSG*, 1998, 38–56.

17 Zhang Junmai 张君劢, 'Zailun renshengguan bingda Ding Zaijun 再论人生观并答丁在君 [Another Discussion on the Philosophy of Life and My Replies to Ding]', in *KXRSG*, 1998, 30–37.

18 Liang, 'Renshengguan yu kexue 人生观与科学 [The Philosophy of Life and Science]', in *KXRSG*, 1998, 125–32.

life.[19] In the end, the 'scientific' faction, or, more exactly, the proponents of scientism, was generally considered to have obtained the upper hand. As D. W. Y Kwok has observed, science had emerged stronger than before, and its scope was widened, covering aspects of natural and social life, while the scientists claimed to 'have the key to the imponderables of life and the universe'.[20] Coupled with the anti-religious sentiments in the early 1920s, the debate consolidated and even perpetuated the conflict model of science and religion that would prevail in the Chinese intellectual world for decades until the present day.

Kang Youwei did not participate directly in that debate, and it seemed that he was largely ignored by the mainstream intellectuals. However, he was not silent, and he expressed his views on some of the issues under debate through his letters, talks and lectures. He welcomed Liang's observations on post-war Europe and the latter's restored appreciation of Confucius. Kang commented that the disastrous European War had changed the popular views on Western learning. During a public talk he gave in April 1923, he asserted that the War was a 'result of the extravagant spread of Bentham's utilitarianism and Huxley's (representation of the) doctrine of survival of the fittest'. Post-war Europeans had now been alerted to the fact that their doctrines were not perfect. As a result, Kang continued, erudite scholars in many countries had turned to the humanistic teachings of Confucius, and their respect for Confucius had increased. To support this claim, he quoted a passage from Yan Fu, which expressed disappointment in the 'material-oriented European civilization' and a renewed appreciation of the 'revivifying Way of Confucius'.[21] Kang regarded Yan's testimony as being of special significance, not only because Yan had received his education in Europe and had translated seminal Western works, but also because Yan, according to Kang's understanding, had earlier been attracted to Christianity. Furthermore, alluding to his erstwhile student Liang, Kang added that some Chinese scholars, who had once attacked Confucius, had recently changed their position after a trip to Europe.[22]

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19 Chen, 'Xuyi'.
20 Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*, 159.
21 Kang, 'Kaifeng yanjiangci 开封演讲辞 [A Talk Given at Kaifeng (1923)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 238–39.
22 Kang, 239.

In condemning indiscriminate Westernization, however, Kang did not blame science for the war. Indeed, he retained a firm belief in science as a powerful positive force for economic and social development. In the same talk, he extolled the scientific advances recently made in Europe, and emphasized their contribution to Western material development. He lamented that China was weak because science and technology were not sufficiently advanced, but at the same time he maintained that China was a leader in metaphysical studies. He concluded his talk with a discussion on the complementary relationship between Chinese and Western cultures, or, more specifically, between Confucianism and science:

> Therefore, we should learn from Europe and America as far as material development is concerned. Science should be promoted in order to make up for what we are lacking. But in terms of moral education, we have our own teachings, which should be preserved and should never be disregarded…. We could offer better service to our country and the world by externally pursuing European and American sciences while internally preserving and practicing our national essence, the Confucian religion.[23]

Here Kang seems to have advocated a similar version of *zhongti xiyong* 中體西用, the guiding principle of the Self-Strengthening Movement, which regarded Chinese learning (Confucianism) as the internal, spiritual foundation and Western learning (science and technology) as the external, material force for China's development. This view of complementarity can be taken as Kang's basic stance towards the debate between the scientists and the metaphysicians, and it fairly characterizes his outlook on the relationship between Chinese and Western civilisations in general. Nevertheless, while he was reaffirming the importance of Confucianism to contemporary China, a position that resembled the traditionalists' views, Kang had also, in a similar but not exactly the same way as the stance adopted by the proponents of scientism, accorded to science an important role to play in shaping people's views on life, the world and even the universe, as will be seen in the discussions in the following two sections.

[23] Kang, 239.

5.2 A Lecture Tour to the North

Throughout 1923, as the debate on science and metaphysics gained momentum, Kang set out on an extensive tour to the north. It started with his visit to the city of Luoyang, where he attended a birthday celebration of General Wu Peifu.[24] Then he visited a few other cities such as Kaifeng, Baoding, Ji'nan and Qingdao, where he also delivered public talks. The most important visit was to the northwestern city Xi'an, which had been capital city to many bygone dynasties. Presumably because of Wu's introduction and partly because of his own prestige, Kang was granted an extraordinary welcome when he arrived at the ancient city on 6 November 1923. Seated in an automobile car, he was escorted into the city gate by a brigade of guards consisting of both cavalrymen and infantrymen. As he proceeded, he was greeted by a huge number of spectators standing on both sides of the street, with drums beating and flags waving, and crowds hailing him as 'Sage Kang'.[25] When he reached the Palace of Eight Immortals (*Baxian'an* 八仙庵, a Daoist monastery, where the late Empress Dowager and Emperor Guangxu had temporarily taken refuge during their flight to the city after the capture of Beijing in 1900), he was warmly received by a group of the local elite led by Liu Zhenhua 劉鎮華, the governor-general of Shaanxi.

During his sojourn in Xi'an, Kang was invited to give a dozen talks to audiences from various political, intellectual, religious and journalistic circles. Of particular importance were the talks delivered at the branch of the Confucian Religion Association, the branch of the Universal Morality Society (*Wanguo daodehui* 萬國道德會),[26] the Buddhist Society and the Young Men's Christian Association. His presentations were well-attended, sometimes by thousands of people. Of the various themes that ran through these talks, two recurred and stood out. One was the renewed

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24 Kang, however, rarely ever mentioned his attendance at the celebration, possibly because he considered it inconsistent with the preservation of his dignity as the modern Sage which he regarded himself as. See Kang, 'Kang Nanhai shiji', 416; cf. Tao Juyin 陶菊隱, *Wu Peifu jiangjun zhuan 吳佩孚將軍傳 [A Biography of General Wu Peifu]* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1941), 89.

25 Kang, 'Kang Nanhai shiji', 358.

26 Formally established in Shandong in 1921 by a member of the CRA, the Universal Morality Society became one of the most prominent redemptionist movements in China, and Kang would serve as acting president in 1923 before being elected president in the last year of his life. See Kang, 'Zhi Yanshenggong han 致衍圣公函 [A letter to Duke Yansheng]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 252; *Wanguo daode zonghui gaikuang 1921-1980 萬國道德總會概況 1921-1980 [An overview of the Head Office of the Universal Morality Society 1921-1980]* (Taibei: Daodehui Press, 1980), 16.

call to restore Chinese moral character and instil cultural confidence by venerating Confucius and preserving Confucianism, an echo of his previous call for a Confucian religion. The other theme was his repeated emphasis on the importance of material development, and in particular the significance and role of science and technology, on which he had been spoken publicly over the previous decades.

5.2.1 The Confucian Way

More than ever before, during his discourses, Kang placed primacy on religion and Confucianism within a context of comparative religious studies. He started with a reconsideration of the terms, religion, *zongjiao*, and *jiao*. While he had previously denounced *zongjiao* as a mistranslation of the English word religion, which he had thought was a broader, generic term, he now acknowledged that *zongjiao* was actually a more accurate and acceptable rendition of the term. He argued that the English word 'religion' and the Japanese term *zongjiao* referred to *shendaojiao* or 'teachings of the way of the spirits', which were primarily concerned with the soul, spirits and deities, and as such, they were inadequate to account for Confucianism, which, although rooted in a Heavenly origin, was oriented to the needs of humanity, and therefore was primarily concerned with *rendao*, or the ways of being human.[27]

There might be two main reasons for this dramatic change in Kang's account of the terms. One is that Kang now had a better grasp of what was meant by 'religion' in English, a term he now said had derived its meaning from a Greek context.[28] Whether in its contemporary use or in its etymological and historical definitions, 'religion' was concerned with reverence for or worship of divine beings. This claim had already been expounded by some of the Chinese participants in the debate over science and metaphysics, who were aware of Max Müller's discussions on the historical meanings of 'religion' three decades earlier (see Introduction).[29]

The second reason is that *zongjiao* or religion as such had largely been discredited by that time, and to continue to promote Confucianism as a religion would only do more harm than good. In this sense, he had come to accept what Liang had advocated some

[27] Kang, 'Kaifeng yanjiangci', 236; Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 275.
[28] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 279.
[29] Cf. Müller, *Natural Religion*, 33–43.

twenty years before, claiming that Confucianism was different from and exalted above a *zongjiao* or religion in the Western sense. Given the climate of widespread intellectual revulsion towards organized religion, it had become strategically advantageous for Kang to dissociate Confucianism from the term *zongjiao*, and to content himself with classifying it as a *jiao* in general and a *rendaojiao* or 'teachings of the human way' in particular. In other words, Kang had abandoned his attempt to make a universal concept out of the English term 'religion'. However, he maintained that the Chinese concept of *jiao* continued to be a universal phenomenon, but with different manifestations in different cultures.

During his talk at the Xi'an branch of the Universal Morality Society on 19 November, Kang gave a comprehensive, critical review of the way religions had first appeared and later developed in different regions. He started with a quote from Hong Liangji 洪亮吉, an eighteenth century Chinese scholar and statesman: 'Each of the Nine Continents on the earth had its First Sage.'[30] For Kang, this verse touched upon the question of the origin of religions. 'After the appearance of human beings,' he continued, 'there must have been someone from among them to arise first and proclaim laws or doctrines (*shuofa* 說法), so as to teach his fellow beings to avoid evil, do good and live a moral life. As the world was not interconnected, each region had its own Sage, and these Sages were the founders of various religions (*jiaozhu*).'[31] So those founders were self-driven rather than being instructed to do so by a personal higher power; their religions were founded to regulate the deeds of the people, and the goal of religion was the realization of morality among its practitioners. Therefore, Kang claimed, once born into this world, one stood in 'absolute need' of religion (*jiao*), without which one was 'hardly any better than the beast'.[32]

Having thus put forward his concept of religion (*jiao*) and its origin, Kang discussed each of the major extant religions in the world, often drawing on his own observations of their religious sites, customs and practices during his extensive travels. In doing so, he frequently compared and contrasted them, highlighting both differences and

[30] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 286. According to Chinese traditional thought, the world consisted of nine continents.
[31] Kang, 286.
[32] Kang, 282.

possible connections between them. In the land of India, there had first appeared Brahmanism. When the rival Buddhism arose, Brahmanism came to be considered as 'heterodoxy'. The truth was, Kang argued, that being born within the matrix of Brahmanism, Buddhism had absorbed many of the latter's doctrines. In Europe, the religion of Moses, now known as Judaism, was promulgated before it was eclipsed by the religion of Jesus. Judaism was disadvantaged, Kang commented, by limiting its God to the Israelites, and by refusing to teach the gentiles. He extolled Jesus for his dramatic reform of the old tradition and his efforts to evangelize all regardless of tribe or race. Echoing his early position (cf. Section 1.1.3), Kang argued that Jesus, being an eclectic, had absorbed Buddhist doctrines. His evidence included the spread of Buddhism to the West following Alexander's conquest of India and the ritualistic resemblance between Catholicism and Buddhism. At the doctrinal level, Kang argued that the Christian notion of Heaven was originally taken from the Buddhist concept of *rentianjiao* 人天教 (literally, the Human-Heaven teaching), a doctrine that emphasized rebirth in Heaven instead of attaining Buddhahood.[33] In addition, he claimed that a professor at Oxford had proved that over seventy doctrines of Christianity could be traced back to Buddhism. In Arabia, Muhammad founded Islam, which spread to many parts of world, including Persia, a land that had witnessed the birth of the ancient 'Sun religion' (*rijiao* 日教) founded by Zoroaster, whose dualistic cosmology, he said, resembled that of Confucius in his view. When it came to Chinese native religions, Kang saved Confucianism for another discussion, but he gave a severe critique of Daoism. As in his earlier writings, he disapproved of the Daoist pursuits of physical immortality and he criticized various occult techniques, saying they were actually not in accordance with what Laozi had taught.[34]

Throughout this historical account, Kang emphasized what he characterised as three common features of all religions: a founder, a book and a community of believers. In other words, a self-motivated teacher brought forth a set of teachings, which were then enshrined in a book (the Vedas, the Bible, Buddhist Sutras and the Quran), and were practised by generations of his followers (see also discussions in Section 1.3). In

[33] For more details on the doctrine, see 'Rentianjiao 人天教 [Human-Heaven Doctrine]', Digital Dictionary of Buddhism;'Huayan Wujiao 華嚴五教', in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[34] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 286; cf. Kang, 'Woshi', 62.

addition, he stressed that all religions taught reverence for God (Heaven) and love of humanity (*zuntian airen* 尊天愛人). Moses' teaching, for example, was centred on worship of God, and this was preserved by Jesus in his religion. Muslims were most diligent in worshipping God, which reminded him of the Confucian teaching on being always mindful of God in the *Odes*. He explicitly claimed that the concept of Heaven was the same as that of God in Christianity during his talk at the YMCA.[35] As for love of humanity, all the founders of religions loved others and exhorted their followers to do the same, although, Kang commented, there was nevertheless a difference of degree in their teachings. While 'an eye for an eye' should be avoided and injuries should not be returned with revenge, to turn your other cheek when you were slapped on one, as Jesus had taught, was extreme and difficult for common folk to practise. Similarly, to demonstrate Buddhist compassion and love was praiseworthy, but it would be very hard for the followers to emulate the Buddha who is said to have fed an eagle or a tiger with his own flesh in order to rescue their intended prey, according to certain Buddhist legends. In contrast, Kang emphasized that Confucius showed a Middle Way in his teaching on reciprocal love and respect, and Confucianism was therefore more suitable for the majority of humanity.[36]

Given that all religions shared these common teachings, Kang reminded his audience of the necessity for the unification of all religions in the future, a theme that he had conceived in his youth and later elaborated in his *Book of the Great Unity* (see discussions in Sections 1.3.2 & 3.1.3).[37] As an initial step, he proposed the union of Confucianism and Buddhism in the context of Chinese culture. People should practice the former in their prime, honouring parents and giving birth to children; after they reached fifty, when women arrived at their menopause and men were approaching the end of their life, people should practise Buddhism, thereby nourishing their souls.[38]

It might be observed in this context that Kang did not mention any miracles related to those founders, nor did he talk about their claim to divine revelation. This does not mean, however, that Kang was ignorant of the phenomena of miracles and divine

35 Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 280, 285–88.
36 Kang, 287.
37 Kang, 285–88.
38 Kang, 296.

revelation claimed in the Abrahamic religions. He chose to overlook them, for in his view, these claims were the mere methods employed by some of the 'self-driven' founders of religions, rather than the universal features of all religions. It seems doubly ironical or paradoxical that Kang was himself occasionally engaged in an effort to point to a Divine or Heavenly source of inspiration in the teachings of Confucius, as instanced by his not very resolute attempt to deify Confucius as having been the offspring of the Black God. Taking Kang's earlier discussions on the concept of *jiao,* the sages and human nature, it may be argued that Kang also believed in divine inspiration, but that inspiration, instead of being imparted directly by a higher divine source such as the Holy Spirit, came, indirectly, from the Sages' reflections on the Heaven-endowed human nature.

The underlying aim of Kang's discourse on comparative religion was to defend and exalt Confucianism. It was his consistently-held view that religions differed not so much in *what* they taught as in *how* they taught it. He had earlier classified religions according to whether their primary means for instruction was 'the way of the spirits' (*shendao*) or 'the human way' (*rendao*) (see Section 3.1.1). Kang reiterated that Confucianism was superior because it encompassed both of those ways. He defended his view by revisiting the beginning verses in the *Mean* on the definition of human nature, the Way and *jiao* (see Section 3.1.1). Since *jiao* was about cultivating man's Heaven-endowed nature, Kang started by expanding the meaning of human nature. He made a categorical claim that the Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi had been one-sided in his interpretation of human nature as mere moral principles, for human faculties and desires should also be considered part of human nature. If this was so, it followed that a *jiao* would have to tend to both aspects of human nature, moral principles, and human desires and faculties. That, in his view, was precisely what Confucius had done: Apart from teaching on the Five Constant Virtues (again see Section 3.1.1), Confucius recognized such human desires as the sexual impulse and established the institution of marriage to accommodate it. This husband-wife relation provided the foundation for the other four primary relations (father–son, ruler–minister, older–younger and friend–friend), for each of which Confucius had set up the appropriate rites and norms of ritual propriety. Likewise, dance and music were also designed to please human eyes and ears, and pleasant food and delightful smells were allowed to please tongues and noses. In summary, Confucius' teachings were so

comprehensive that they encompassed both the spiritual and physical aspects of human life. That was why it was said that no one could live outside the Way of Confucius, if he chose to live like a human being. On the contrary, the *shendao* religions were focused on the soul and took little care of the body; they even suppressed or denied human desires, such as in the case of the practice of celibacy. In other words, they were outside of the human way and therefore only suitable for certain people rather than for all.[39]

According to Kang, another big difference between Confucianism, a primarily *rendao* religion, and those primarily *shendao* religions consisted in whether gratitude and veneration were duly accorded to parents and ancestors. Kang argued that as human nature was imparted to each one by Heaven through one's parents, it followed that for one to come into being, it required the union of three factors: Heaven, a father and a mother. That was why it was said in the Classics, Kang argued, that 'man cannot be born until the union is achieved between the three entities.'[40] For Kang, this notion was one of the most profound doctrines of Confucius and constituted the definitive feature of Confucian teachings in contrast to the tenets of other religions. His reasoning was as follows. Once people realized that they, like everyone else and indeed everything else, were born of Heaven, then they would understand that they were one with their fellow human beings and even with a myriad of things, and it would only be natural for them to show forth benevolence to them. Similarly, once people realized that they were also born of their parents, then it would only be natural for them to honour their parents and ancestors and to show affection towards their family or clan members. This was nothing less than the cardinal virtue of filial duty. The two virtues, benevolence and filial piety, Kang argued, constituted the two mighty pillars of the Way of Confucius. They were ritually manifested in worship of Heaven and worship of ancestors respectively, both of which were necessary for the maintenance and governance of a country. Judging from this perspective, the disadvantages of other religions soon became obvious—they only revered Heaven (God) without giving due honour and gratitude to ancestors. Thus, Kang concluded,

[39] Kang, 276.
[40] Kang, 276.

Confucianism was a more balanced, more comprehensive religion and it was better suited to the needs of the people of China and, indeed, the entire world.[41]

One conspicuous feature of Kang's talks and writings in his later years was his downplaying of the dividing line between what he had called the 'false' imperial Confucianism and his 'authentic' Confucianism. Whereas he had earlier advocated the New Text school and disregarded many of the Old Text classics as fraudulent, he now rarely stressed the distinction between the two schools. That was quite understandable, for Confucianism itself had been called into question since the 1911 Revolution and in particular during the New Culture Movement. That left Kang in a dilemma. To argue for the continued relevance of Confucianism to modern China, he had to resort to his critique of Neo-Confucianism by means of New Text exegesis, but in doing so he would inevitably weaken the authority of Confucianism and therefore play into the hands its opponents. In the end, he concluded that sectarian disputes must be overcome for the sake of the survival of Confucianism as a whole. Nevertheless, while tactfully restraining himself from public discourse on the Old Text versus New Text controversy, Kang did not entirely ignore the distinction.[42] Both in his private writings and in his letters to foreign (mostly Korean) Confucianists, his attack on the Old Texts remained as strong as his advocacy of his version of Confucianism.[43]

Clearly, Kang's defence of Confucianism was positioned as a response to the contemporary criticisms against religion in general and Confucianism in particular. His strategy of dissociating Confucianism from *zongjiao* as well as from the Western conception of 'religion' resembled the approach adopted by Liang Qichao in the early 1900s. Nevertheless, Kang maintained a belief in a universal concept of *jiao* with culture-specific forms of manifestation, and he attempted to demonstrate that Confucianism, if properly understood and followed, represented the more advanced stage of such a *jiao*. His views, however, were ignored in mainstream Chinese intellectual thought, which had become deeply anti-traditional and anti-religious in the 1920s.

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41 Kang, 276; Kang, 'Kaifeng yanjiangci', 236.

42 Cf. Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 126.

43 See Kang, 'Da Pujun datixue shu 答朴君大提学书 [A Reply to Pakki-yang, the Korean Commissioner of Education (1924)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 344–46; see also Richard Wilhelm, *The Soul of China*, trans. Arthur Waley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), 76–80.

5.2.2 The Power of Science

The other theme of his talks was the importance of material development, backed by science and technology, for China. Kang asked his audience to extend their love or *ren* to their motherland by making up for what was lacking in China. One of the priorities, in his view, would be to build highways and railways and set up telephone lines following the example of the European nations, as better connections between different cities and regions would lay the foundation for further development. Another priority was to pay greater attention to science and technology, whose power had underpinned European economic and industrial development. This was an echo of the call he made in his *Saving China* about two decades earlier. It is worth noting that his proposal was not limited to the mere introduction of Western science and technology. He showed both his insight and foresight in emphasizing the need for China to encourage scientific inventions and their application by setting up a mechanism to protect the rights of inventors. As the recent history of nations across the world showed, he asserted, it was the accumulation of inventions that had distinguished between the powerful and the weak nations, the rich and the poor, and even the civilized and the 'barbarian' countries.[44] In an effort to combine the spiritual and the material aspects of life together, Kang stressed that devoting oneself to the material development of one's motherland was nothing short of a manifestation of God's love and compassion towards his fellow countrymen.[45]

Apart from extolling the material application of science, Kang often waxed eloquent in praising the inspirational power of scientific knowledge, which, he argued, would help reorient one's views of man, the earth and even the universe. To begin with, Kang remained fascinated by 'electricity'. Earlier on in his annotation on the *Mencius*, he employed 'electricity', together with 'ether', in his interpretation of the all-important virtue of *ren*, arguing that the former constituted the essence of the latter. He had also considered electricity as the medium through which human consciousness or thought was spread, not only within the body but between human beings (cf. Section 3.1.2). In his later years, he dropped the concept of ether, but he went further with his bold

[44] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 275.
[45] Kang, 282.

claims on electricity.[46] He told his audience that he had written a book entitled *Diantong* 電通, literally, 'Interconnection by the Means of Electricity', in which he had elaborated its universal principles.[47] He distinguished between two types of electricity. The visible was what was commonly known as electricity while the invisible was in fact what was commonly known as spirit. For Kang, the wireless telegraph system then recently developed by Marconi was an extraordinary invention, for it not only made possible the instant transfer of messages between America and Europe, but it also showed a glimpse of the omnipresence as well as the power of the invisible form of electricity.[48] Kang borrowed the idea of a 'transmitter of wireless electricity' (*wuxiantai* 無線台) and attempted to account for the claims and recorded instances of transmission of thought without the means of human sensory channels or physical interaction in Confucian and Buddhist literature.[49] Commenting on Confucius' saying that 'he who is of utmost sincerity is capable of foreseeing', Kang explained that that was possible because 'utmost sincerity' (*zhicheng* 至誠) was in essence a transmitter and whoever possessed the quality was able to send out wireless electricity, through which foreknowledge of things was obtained.[50]

In a similar manner, Kang employed the concept of 'universal connection through electricity' in explaining the doctrine of karma. As briefly noted earlier (see Section 4.2), Kang was a firm believer in reincarnation, the doctrine that at physical death the soul would transmigrate to or be reborn in another body, human or animal. For Kang, the truth of reincarnation was incontestable, for it was attested to in the ancient texts of India, Egypt and Babylon as well as in Buddhist sutras and Confucian apocrypha, many instances of which were also reported in Chinese histories and folklore. Although the New Culture intellectuals denounced the concept of reincarnation as sheer superstition, Kang never concealed his belief in it. During his first talk at Xi'an attended by the local elite in military, civic and literary circles, he recounted an

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[46] This indicates that Kang was aware that the concept of ether had been discredited by Einstein's theory of relativity, a fact that he highlighted in a letter penned three years later. See Kang, 'Yu Tongfu Tongjian Tongning shu 与同复同箴同凝书 [A Letter to Tongfu, Tongjian and Tongning (1927)]', in *KYWQJ*, vol. 11, 2007, 453.

[47] The book was never published, and its manuscript has not been seen.

[48] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 274. As is shown in the following sentences, Kang used the phrase 'a transmitter of wireless electricity' instead of the standard term 'a radio transmitter'.

[49] The popular English term for such phenomena is 'telepathy' coined by Frederic Myers, a founder of the Society for Psychical Research.

[50] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 274.

anecdote concerning two brothers in his village. When travelling to another village, they had been greeted by a nine-year boy, who asked knowledgeable questions about their mother and family debts; the boy was believed to be a reincarnation of their deceased father. Kang asserted that it was through the means of electricity that divine reward or retribution were carried out, according to which one's welfare and fortune were determined not only by his efforts in this life, but also, and even more importantly, by his deeds in the previous life. Therefore, one should not complain about the adversities in this life, and should always strive to do good so as to have a better next life.[51] Kang's use of electricity to account for divine retribution brings to mind the efforts by scientists such as Oliver Lodge (1851–1940) and others, as mentioned in Section 2.4.3, to use radio waves and electromagnetic waves to try to communicate with the dead.[52]

For Kang, electricity was not only a universal medium that penetrated and connected everything, but it also constituted the essence of human virtues and even the human soul. 'Everyone possesses electricity,' he wrote, 'but its growth requires cultivation on the part of an individual. With diligent nourishment, the scattered dots of electricity in his body can aggregate and form an electrical crystallization, an entity that, if well-preserved, will become bright and lasting.' He argued that it was through the power of his well-gathered and preserved electricity that the Buddha had been able to fathom so many mysteries. He further affirmed that the method for gathering electricity was nothing less than the cultivation of one's virtues, a practice that was advocated in the Confucian tradition. The 'illustrious virtue' mentioned in the *Mean* was meant to refer to electricity, and 'to make the illustrious virtue illustrious' in the *Greater Learning* was in fact an exhortation 'to gather together your electricity'.[53] The best way to gather electricity was to practice the virtue of *ren*, which in Kang's view bore an 'intrinsic resemblance' to electricity. 'The natural attraction between the *yin-negative* and the *yang-positive* electrical charges', he said, 'is in fact the love between two people as conveyed by the written form of the concept of *ren* (仁), which consists of the radicals for "two" and "person".' He commented that Kropotkin's

51 Kang, 274, 289.
52 See Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 371–90.
53 Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 274.

concept of mutual aid, which was popularly promoted in Europe and America, corresponded with the benevolent love deeply implied by *ren.* When this love was extended to a family, a nation and the world, *ren* was manifested therein, and electricity was accordingly more prevalent, bringing about interconnected harmony.[54]

'Microscopy' was another modern scientific art that engaged Kang's lasting interest and imagination. Earlier on in his autobiography he had discussed his experience of looking through a microscope in his youth and its inspirational impact on his thought (see Section 1.2.3). Now, about twenty-five years later, he resumed the topic and elaborated on microscopy and its religious implications during his talk at the YMCA in Xi'an on 17 November 1923. As in the case of his discussion on electricity, he claimed that he had composed a manuscript on microscopy (*Xianwei* 顯微),[55] from which he quoted: 'I have once observed an ant through a microscope with 300 times magnification,' he said, 'and the ant appeared about five Chinese feet long, with heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys about the same size as a human's.' Based on this observation, Kang began a lengthy process of deduction and speculation. If observed through a microscope with 3,000 times magnification, the ant would appear ten times larger. With increasing magnification, Kang reasoned, the ant would appear larger and larger, conceivably even as large as the earth. Indeed, it could appear infinitely large as the magnification of the observing device infinitely increased. It followed that the ant could, like the earth or even the universe, contain a myriad of entities that were simply too small to be noticed by the naked eye.[56]

For Kang, that process of mental reasoning had powerful spiritual connotations. To start with, it could easily lead one to the realization of the relativity of such common concepts as big and small, manifest and hidden, visible and invisible. Those differences and distinctions could only hold true from the viewpoint of the naked eye, for there were numerous things existing beyond human vision. If one could rise above the limitations of one's physical eye and observe in the mind the vast space that appeared empty, one should be able to know that God (*Shangdi*) and spirits were all around in the invisible realm. They were watching at every moment, and therefore one

54 Kang, 275.
55 The alleged manuscript was never published and perhaps is not extant any more.
56 Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 280–81.

should always be vigilant even when alone.[57] Here Kang was attempting to offer a 'scientific' rationale for the Confucian doctrine of *shendu* (慎獨 being watchful over oneself when one is alone), drawing his audience's attention to the exhortation in the *Mean* that the superior man did not wait to be cautious and apprehensive until he saw physical indicators with his physical eyes. For Kang, this spiritual awareness and practice was essential to the cultivation of one's illustrious virtue, which he had now unequivocally identified with the human soul. 'The illustrious virtue is the soul in the finer sense,' he claimed. The knowledge that God and spirits were watching all the time would help prevent one from having evil thoughts or committing acts of evil, which would obscure and defile the soul. As an illustrious soul was needed to match 'the benevolent and loving heart of God', Kang exhorted his audience in these words: 'Remember Heaven's will all day long and remain ever cautious and reverent, and you will be able to bring out your illustrious virtue.'[58]

In addition to knowledge of microscopy, astronomy continued to be a source of inspiration for Kang. Twice during his talks in Xi'an, he dwelled on the theme of how knowledge of astronomy could help relieve one's anxieties and sorrows by reshaping one's views of self, the earth and the heavens. He started with a claim that he had elaborated in his *Book of the Great Unity*—that everyone, every family, every nation in this world was afflicted with various kinds of worries and sorrows. In a sense, the purpose of this life on the earth was to relieve oneself of worries and become more contented and happy. This was, Kang claimed, the very goal of all religions, whose founders had, like great physicians, offered a number of recommendations for mankind. Each of their prescriptions, however, had its pros and cons. Kang told his audience that he had a better prescription, namely a 'celestial journey or peregrination (*Tianyou* 天游), a new doctrine that he had been able to adduce based both on his experience of living through sorrows and on his increased knowledge of the heavens. To experience the joy celestial journey, one did not have to go to heaven; instead, one simply needed to shift one's perspectives with the help of modern astronomy. First, understanding the Copernican perspective that the earth, rather than being the centre of the universe, was just a small planet in the vast solar system would make it easier

[57] Kang, 280.
[58] Kang, 280.

for its inhabitants to view their planet as one village, diverse countries as neighbours, and one's own nation as a family. Second, the knowledge that the earth, if viewed from other planets, was high in the heavens would help its inhabitants consider themselves as celestial inhabitants, no longer having to yearn to go to heaven. Third, the realization of how vast and limitless the universe was would help people see how puny and trivial their problems and worries were.[59] In this vein, he commented that new astronomical discoveries made with the telescope had invalidated the teachings on heavens in all religions and had also brought great joy to human hearts. Revising the Confucian concept of *gewu qiongli*, he exclaimed, 'Indeed, the investigation of things and the fathoming of principles can bestow upon man limitless power and inestimable joy!'[60] As we shall see, he would dwell on these topics in his last book on the heavens.

In summary, Kang had in his various talks proposed a twofold programme for saving China—to preserve China's national essence, that is, Confucianism, and to make up for what she was lacking, that is, material development backed by scientific inventions. This position represented his eclectic view on the complementary relationship between Chinese and Western civilizations, and can be seen as his response to the iconoclastic New Culture–May Fourth intellectuals who had advocated an indiscriminate Westernization. As for individual salvation, Kang also put forward a two-fold recommendation—to revere God and practice *ren*, and to heed the spiritual implications of science, in particular electrical studies, the art of microscopy and astronomy. Ironically, Kang's stress on and appreciation of the enormous impact of scientific knowledge upon one's views of life and of the world resembles the views of the advocates of scientism in the ongoing debate over science and metaphysics. But there was a noticeable difference—he always bore in mind the spiritual dimension of life and maintained a belief in a spiritual Heaven. 'It is my hope,' Kang exhorted his audience at the end of his first talk in Xi'an, 'that all of you will always heed Heaven's will and bear in mind the universal connection of electricity, so that you will be able, under the guiding principle of *ren*, to fulfil your responsibilities, determine your destiny and secure boundless and eternal blessings.'[61]

59 Kang, 271–73, 288–89.
60 Kang, 273.
61 Kang, 275.

5.3 Celestial Peregrination

All under Heaven are one family, and the Middle Empire one person.
To fathom out a myriad of things, and to nourish all with benevolence.[62]

Kang Youwei composed this couplet in early 1926 for his newly-established Academy of Celestial Peregrination (*Tianyou xueyuan* 天游學院). Located within his own residence in Shanghai, the academy was the third that Kang had organized in China in his lifetime, the first two being the *Wanmu caotang* in Guangzhou and the *Shengxuehui* in Guilin. He made himself president of the academy, and employed several tutors. Its mission statement echoed the universal ideals of the couplet—'to investigate the principles of heaven, earth, humans and things for the benefit of the mind, the body, the family, the state and the world (*tianxia jiaguo shenxin* 天下家國身心)'. Its curriculum covered five disciplines—classical studies, philosophy, literature, politics and foreign languages. Under philosophy were listed such subjects as astronomy, geography, electricity, biology, science of man (*renxue* 人學), the human way (*rendao*), Chinese philosophy, Japanese philosophy, Western philosophy, psychology, ethics, sociology, the way of the spirits (*shendao*), and the doctrine of the Great Unity.[63] The curriculum demonstrated Kang's usual eclectic approach to teaching and his emphasis on the vision of the Great Unity. Compared with his earlier curricula, it also revealed the increased importance Kang had now come to attach to the study of supernatural and metaphysical subjects such as souls, ghosts and spirits.

To many of his contemporaries and some of his future Chinese biographers, however, the mixture of 'idealist and materialist' subjects did not make much sense and was a sign of 'a confused mind'.[64] This may partially explain why the academy was able to recruit only around twenty students for the first term. The small number also indicated the dramatic decline of Kang's prestige among young students. Kang was disappointed, but he did not lose hope. 'Jesus had only a dozen disciples,' he commented, 'but his religion has now been promulgated across the world. So,

62. Kang, 'Kang Nanhai shiji', 416.
63 Cited in Wu Tianren 吳天任, ed., *Kang Youwei xiansheng nianpu 康有為先生年譜 [A Chronological Biography of Mr. Kang Youwei]* (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1994), 768.
64 Ma, *Kang dazhuan*, 610.

numbers do not matter much.'[65] The academy lasted only a year till the end of 1926. Kang closed it because he decided to leave Shanghai, which was likely to be overrun by the southern Nationalist forces, backed by the communists, which had recently defeated General Wu Peifu in their northern expedition. As always, Kang was determined to shun the revolutionaries, nationalists or communists.

5.3.1 Lectures on the Heavens

Kang took on the task of lecturing on astronomy, which, as the academy's name suggested, occupied a central place in its curriculum. He claimed that his lecture notes had been drafted some forty-two years earlier, though he added that they had been improved through additions and revisions.[66] Although there has been suspicion that Kang may have back-dated the origins of these notes, it is beyond doubt that, as discussed in Section 1.2, he had already become enormously interested in astronomy in the 1880s. He had turned himself into a well-informed amateur in astronomy through diligent reading of translations of Western books, a learning process that was enriched by his observations through telescopes. His interest in astronomy was sustained throughout his life. During his tours around the world following the stormy reform years, he took every opportunity available to him to look through the telescopes at a number of observatories. 'When observed through the telescope,' he wrote concerning fixed stars being all suns, 'their rays and brilliance differ from those of planets and resemble those of the sun.'[67] In his last years, when the political and military situations had frustrated each of his efforts to 'save China', he resumed his studies of astronomy, finding solace in 'celestial peregrination'.

As he was giving lectures on astronomy, he further revised his lecture notes in preparation for their publication as a book. Although he wrote that he had completed the manuscript in the summer of 1926, its revision did not seem to end there. In a letter to his children dated 10 February 1927, less than two months before his death, he instructed that two lines should be added to the chapter on Einstein. 'Einstein has

[65] Ren Qisheng 任启圣, 'Kang Youwei wannian jiangxue jiqi shishi zhi jingguo 康有为晚年讲学及其逝世之经过 [My Recollection of Kang's Lectures in His Later Years and His Passing Away]', in *Wenshi ziliao xuanji 文史资料选辑 [A selection of literary and historical materials]*, vol. 31, 1962, 241.
[66] Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 13.
[67] Kang, 55.

surpassed Newton,' he wrote, 'in his abandonment of the concept of ether and in this discovery of the conic curvature of light concerning universal gravity.'[68] Clearly Kang was referring to Einstein's theory of relativity. This indicates that despite his advanced age, he tried to keep abreast of new scientific knowledge. By the early 1920s, both Einstein and his theory of relativity had become well-known among Chinese intellectuals in China through an increase of publications on the topic in Chinese prompted by such events as Bertrand Russell's lectures in China in 1921 and Einstein's planned visit in 1922.[69] As a result, the theory of relativity was quickly and widely accepted by the New Culture intellectuals, many of whom found its revolutionary nature and implications particularly attractive.[70]

Although Kang wanted that book to be finalized with all due haste, it was not published until 1930, three years after his death, under the title of *Lectures on the Heavens*. For the next three decades, however, the book was almost completely ignored, and even his admirers and students attached little importance to it. It was Hsiao who first seriously examined the book in the 1960s; he offered original insights on Kang's scientific attitude, which permeated those lectures.[71] The book consisted of fifteen chapters of various lengths, twelve of which dealt primarily with astronomical knowledge in the West, while the remaining three, Chapters 10, 11 and 15, were largely concerned with content of a religious, philosophical or cosmological nature. With those chapters on the moon and the Milky Way being the longest ones, the lengths of the sections were decided less by the intrinsic importance of the matter under discussion than by the author's personal interest or the amount of information available to him in translated works.[72]

Kang began the first chapter with an account of the study of astronomy in the history of China but considered it 'like the prattle of children' from the perspective of the knowledge available during his time.[73] In the next nine chapters, he dwelt

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68 Kang, 'Yu Tongfu shu'.

69 Einstein only stopped in Shanghai on his way to Japan; it had been arranged for him to pay a formal visit to China afterwards, but that did not materialize due to disagreement on the amount payable to him.

70 See Danian Hu, 'The Reception of Relativity in China', *Isis* 98, no. 3 (2007): 539–57.

71 Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 375.

72 Hsiao, 282.

73 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 17.

respectively on the earth, the moon, the sun, planets, comets, meteors, the Galaxy, and the extragalactic regions which he called ‘Heavens of Rosy Clouds’, covering such subjects as their origin, composition, form and movements. A survey of these parts shows that his knowledge of astronomy, although not free from inaccuracies, was exceptionally broad and, as Hsiao points out, was quite up-to-date at that time, a remarkable achievement for a man without special training who was dependent on translations for his astronomical knowledge.[74] When discussing the origin of the earth, for instance, Kang introduced the ‘New Nebular Hypothesis’ (Planetesimal Hypothesis) of T. C. Chamberlin (1843–1928) and F. R. Moulton (1872–1952) as well as the ‘Nebular Hypothesis’ of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1829), and pointed out that the new theory was extremely popular.[75]

In the tenth chapter, ‘on the extragalactic heavens’, Kang flew from astronomical facts into sheer cosmic imagination. Although Europeans ‘have stopped with the extragalactic regions’ in fathoming the heavens, he asserted that there must be numerous heavens beyond the extragalactic sphere.[76] Since those limitless heavens transcended understanding, he claimed he was ‘only’ able to speculate and name 240 of them. Having thus established the infinity of the universe based on what he believed were astronomical facts, Kang marched into the transcendental realm of religion in the next chapter, asserting the existence of God above all the heavens. In the following chapter on Buddhist literature on heavens, he concluded that the Buddhist views were fanciful and baseless. This, however, was understandable because the Buddha, like the other founders of a religion, was born in ancient times without the use of a telescope.[77] Armed with an invincible belief in the infinity of the universe, Kang categorically dismissed as erroneous Einstein’s theory of a finite universe in the ending chapter.[78]

One distinguishing feature of the *Lectures* is that Kang’s belief that scientific facts obtained through the telescope were the only valid criterion of astronomical knowledge. He disowned any time-honoured tradition or belief concerning the earth

74 Hsiao, ‘Excursion into Science’, 380.
75 Kang, ‘Zhutianjiang’, 20.
76 Kang, 83–84.
77 Kang, 101.
78 Kang, 116.

and the heavens if it failed to conform to the scientifically proven facts. This was reminiscent of his earlier position in the *Shili gongfa* that all principles, if and when possible, should be subjected to scientific verification (see Section 1.3.1). He repudiated China's native astronomy as 'only half intelligible' and being 'of little worth' due to the absence of fine telescopes.[79] He deeply appreciated the introduction of Western astronomy by the Jesuits in the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which had advanced China's astronomy, especially in calendrical reform, but he regarded it as a pity that the Copernican heliocentric theory and the Newtonian notion of universal gravitation had not been made known earlier to the Chinese.[80] Kang further repudiated the practice of Chinese astrology: 'It can be readily seen that', he explained, 'as our earth is but one of the sun's planets, and a small one at that, it is impossible to expect any correspondence between the stars and the divination of the officials of a single state.'[81] Convinced that the earth was but a tiny planet in the vast universe, he did not hesitate to point out the fallacy of honouring the earth as the mate of heaven, a seminal concept of Confucianism.[82] In a similar manner, he condemned as erroneous the views on the heavens held in Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, which in his opinion had risen due to lack of telescopes.[83] While astronomy had been advanced in the West through the use of telescope and mathematics, Kang promoted a method for pursuing astronomy that centred on the use of the telescope, without taking into consideration the crucial role of mathematics.[84] This inadequacy, however, should not lead one to undervalue his appreciation and promotion of scientific attitudes in general.

As was mentioned earlier, Kang's motivation for engaging in prolonged astronomical studies was not merely the acquisition of scientific knowledge. As in his Xi'an talks (see Section 5.2.2), he emphasized the metaphysical implications of astronomical knowledge for this mundane life. In the traditional Chinese worldview, Kang wrote, the earth and the heavens constituted the universe. The Chinese often envied the life of the denizens of heaven, and Kang himself was a firm believer in the existence of

79 Kang, 17.
80 Kang, 18.
81 Kang, 18; translated in Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 378.
82 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 19.
83 Kang, 101.
84 Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 394.

life on other planets. As astronomy advanced, however, it had become demonstrated that the earth turned out to be merely one of the planets circling the sun, which itself was only one of the countless stars in the universe. Kang wholeheartedly welcomed this overthrowing of the traditional geocentric and anthropocentric view of the universe, which had proved so disheartening to the ecclesiastical elites in Europe.

Kang earnestly, and fancifully too, believed that his theory of 'celestial peregrination' could help his fellow human beings to get rid of worries and to achieve happiness through intellectual thought and celestial reflection. By reflecting on the infinity and vastness of the heavens, and the tininess and insignificance of the earth, they could see how microscopically infinitesimal and trifling their sufferings and vexations were. Once aware of the fact that they were the inhabitants of a tiny planet in the vast immensity of space, and thus coming to the realization that they were actually denizens of the heaven too, people would rationally transcend the pain-inducing limits of families, tribes and nation states in the realms of their knowledge, thought and actions, thus achieving utmost happiness. It was due to ignorance of those facts, Kang argued, that the founders of religions invented such concepts as paradise and hell in their compassionate efforts to bring joy to the anguished human hearts.[85] Here one observes the progression of Kang from the path-finder Confucian theologian to proponent of mystic studies in astronomy.

5.3.2 A Treatise on God

It was no surprise that Kang devoted a whole chapter of his book on the heavens to a discourse on God (*Shangdi*). For one thing, Heaven (*Tian*) and God (*Shangdi*) were interchangeable terms in ancient Chinese texts. 'When the term Heaven (*Tian*) is employed in China,' he pointed out, 'it denotes Lord of dominion (*zhuzai* 主宰), which means God (*Shangdi*)'.[86] He also cited for his support the examples where the two terms were used together as one concept in Chinese classics, such as *ditian* 帝天 or God the Heaven.[87] It was based on this understanding that he often used Heaven to refer to 'God' in other religions, such as his repeated comment that 'reverence for

[85] Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 11–12.
[86] Kang, (Chapter 11), 93.
[87] Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 273.

Tian (Heaven)' was taught in Christianity. For another thing, it was commonly taught in various religions that heaven was the abode of God. It was also Kang's declared belief that 'high above the inscrutable Primal Primary heavens (*yuanyuantian* 元元天) exists God.'[88] So it was only natural for Kang to talk of these two terms together. This recalls his earlier attempt in the 1880s to establish the universality of the concept of God by striving to find the most appropriate term for the concept of the ultimate Reality (Section 1.3.2). Now in his last book, not only did he assert the existence of God, but he also attempted to prove it, against the broader context of the spread of strong anti-religion sentiments and the rise of scientific materialism in the 1920s.

Kang's chapter on God consisted of a presentation of utterances concerning God by European philosophers followed by a forceful argument for the existence of God. He started by stating that ancient European discourse regarding the heavens and deities was highly erroneous. He cited two illustrations. One was the Aristotelian model of the universe, described as being comprised of 'concentric crystalline spheres', which was held in place and put into motion by an external God. The other was the Ptolemaic model, a revision of the Aristotelian model, which divided the heavens into two parts, the sublunary and the superlunary. They were like 'the layers of an onion' with circular and cycloid movements, high above which 'there was the abode of God'. Kang's representation of these models was hardly intelligible to a Chinese reader, but he made his point clear: 'In the millennium of the Middle Ages, Ptolemy's theories were universally upheld; today, they are seen as quite laughable.'[89]

Kang then entered a discussion on theism and atheism in European philosophy. He stated that European and American philosophers generally subscribed to either one or the other of the two doctrines. 'Atheism is untenable,' he claimed, 'since perfection denotes the existence of God.' With atheism being thus summarily dismissed, he presented five 'current arguments' for the doctrine of theism: 1) the ontological argument, which took God's perfection as proof of his existence; 2) the psychological argument, as advanced by Descartes, which claimed that in men's hearts there existed an awareness of God, and that this must be because God's existence had made it so; 3)

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88 Kang, 273.

89 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 92. For a concise introduction to the Ptolemaic system, see E. Edson and E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004).

the cosmological argument, which held that the existence of the universe must have had an origin, and that this origin lay in God; 4) the argument from design, which maintained that the universe was such a work of fine art that its good order presupposed a maker who must have been its architect, if not its Creator; and 5) the moral argument, which stated that man's willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of the group must have come from a source in the unseen world, God.[90]

Although Kang's presentation of these well-known proofs was occasionally obscure,[91] his message was clear: the five proofs fell short of proving the existence of God, which according to Kant was an existential judgment or an *a posteriori* statement. Kang reasoned that 'from experience we cannot know for sure that there is no God, nor can we say with confidence that there is.'[92] Nevertheless, he stressed that the ontological argument should be sufficient to demonstrate the existence of God from at least one aspect. That people always hesitated to acknowledge the argument was due to dualistic thinking, for which there were three explanations: The first held that both perfection and imperfection were derived from God. The second maintained that God represented perfection, and imperfection, which was embodied in matter, coexisted with but did not come from God, the encounter of the two producing various forms of suffering. The third doctrine claimed that God and the Devil both existed in the world, the former being light and the latter darkness.[93]

Having discussed the existence of God, Kang moved to the subject of how God existed. He stated that there were two theories in this regard. One was monotheism, which envisaged that 'God has an innate noumenal substance', and that 'he is the highest entelechy', from which all the worldly phenomena were derived or emanated. The other was pantheism, which held that 'God does not have a substance of his own', for 'he exists in constant change, and thus the universe is in an ever-changing process of daily renewal'. The two theories held different views on the possibility of attaining ultimate knowledge of the universe. Monotheists would argue that once the nature of

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90 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 92. The translation of quotes from Kang's treatise on God are done by me with Patrick Swire; reference has been made to the corresponding renditions in Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 183–84.

91 See the discussion in Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 182.

92 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 92.

93 Kang, 92–93.

God was known, the phenomena of the universe could be deduced therefrom. The pantheist thesis, however, held that despite our knowledge of God, the phenomena of the universe could not be fathomed as they were changing all the time.[94]

Although Kang tried to appear impartial, his implicit preference for pantheism could be detected from his remarks: 'The concept of pantheism held by us [the Chinese] is slightly different from the view proposed by those like Spinoza and Goethe. They believe that God is everywhere, hence the term pantheism. We stress that God does not have a substance but exists in a constant flux, which is in agreement with Bergson's thesis.'[95] By 'constant flux' Kang seems to be alluding to the Confucian concept of change as best illustrated in the title and content of the *Changes*. He made an insightful observation here about the difference between European and Chinese pantheism—the former stressed God's omnipresence while the latter emphasized the character of being in constant change (a key concept of Confucian thought).

Kang went on to discuss monotheism, which could be divided into two doctrines: emanation and creation. Emanationists, according to Kang, considered God as the same substance as the universe through which he manifested himself. Creationists, however, held that this world had a Creator who existed outside and beyond it, and who, having created the world, existed along with it. In Kang's view, Neo-Platonism, Indian philosophy and the theories of Spinoza, Schelling, and Hegel, all belonged to the former, while Judaism, Christianity and Islam subscribed to the latter. Kang highlighted Schelling's attempt to mediate between the two by arguing that 'the world as it is has resulted from the limits of the substance of God, but it lies solely in God's freedom of choice whether to create or not in the first place'. That was, in Kang's view, a compromise between the fixed limits of God having a substance and the freedom consequent upon his being without substance.[96]

Having given a relatively comprehensive account of European utterances on God, Kang started to put forth his views on why God necessarily existed. 'That there is God

[94] Kang, 93.
[95] Kang, 93.
[96] Kang, 93.

high in heaven', he asserted, 'is a belief common to all nations and all religions'.[97] Then he took great pains to illustrate this 'universal truth'. In ancient Chinese literature, to start with, references to God and Heaven were present in many places. The *Odes*, for example, spoke of 'serving God with entire intelligence', and also said that 'God is with you, have no doubts in your heart.'[98] It was on this account, Kang argued, that grand ritual sacrifices were made to God outside the city. Similarly, Mencius said, 'Though a man may be wicked, yet if he adjust his thoughts, fast, and bathe, he may sacrifice to God.'[99] Kang went on to show how the same God was worshipped but was called by different names in different religions: God was called Brahma in Hinduism, and Yahweh in Christianity. In Islam God was worshipped five times and bowed to seventy times a day, which Kang felt was particularly austere. Only the Buddha did not revere God and was said to have fought with God, and God, being defeated, became a disciple of the Buddha.[100]

Kang upheld the unity of God, that is, he claimed that there was but one God; but it would be wrong to assume that his notion of God was completely congruent with Western monotheism. As was mentioned above, although he maintained a firm belief in the existence of God, he held a more pantheist view. Moreover, he thought there were a number of questions left unanswered by monotheism, and in particular, by the doctrine of creation.

> First, if the universe, as it is said, came into being by means of God's creation, then when did the creation begin? Second, if man is regarded as free, then that would affect God's omniscience and omnipotence, for the two [man's freedom and those attributes of God] are incompatible. Third, if we follow the doctrine of emanation, then the day when man is emancipated should also be the day when God is emancipated; according to the doctrine of creation, however, God exists outside this world, that means even if man is completely

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97 Kang, 93.

98 *Shi* III 1:2; Legge, *Chinese Classics IV*, 433, 436, with minor adaptations.

99 In Chinese: 雖有惡人，齋戒沐浴，可以事上帝. *Mengzi* 4(2):25; translation taken from Legge, *Chinese Classics II*, 330.

100 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 93. I have not been able to find the source for Kang's statement on this peculiar 'Buddhist' concept of God. A similar account in Chinese folk mythology relates that the God of the Northern Heaven (*Xuantian Shangdi* 玄天上帝), also a major Deity in Daoism, was said to have become a disciple of Dīpankara Buddha, a Buddha of the Past.

> redeemed, that should be nothing more than the redemption of the things he has created. What, then, would be the position of God?[101]

Whether these questions constitute an adequate criticism of monotheism is irrelevant for our purposes. What is significant is that they have clearly revealed Kang's resistance to the idea of God as an outside Creator. Rather, his God was the source and sustainer of everything; without having a substance, he existed in constant change, a change which permeated a myriad of things; he preordained human affairs and exercised his decrees through rewards and punishment. In fact, Kang had professed unwavering belief in this concept of God since he was a young man. Therefore, it is hard to agree with Hsiao's statement that Kang 'remained an agnostic (or an atheist)' before he entered his old age.[102]

Kang agreed that both God and the universe were unknowable in their essence, and he argued that their ultimate comprehension was beyond the limited capabilities of men. In this regard, he offered a critique of certain limited concepts of God. 'In the older religion of Christ [Judaism] God is called Yahweh,' he commented, 'but to say Yahweh is of the Israeli people would immediately make it an unbefitting name of God.'[103] Furthermore, he was aware of the attacks on the belief in God from mechanistic scientists and materialists of modern times. Newton had, in Kang's view, held that the heavens were formed by the power of attraction and repulsion while Laplace's theory of mechanistic materialism developed on Newton's theories, going so far as to claim that there was no God. In recent times, Kang continued, most of the adherents of materialism professed atheism, while there were those such as Bergson who still stuck to pantheism. Kant revered God as the mysterious, but his view was attacked by the school of Newton and Laplace by means of their theories of attraction and repulsion, so much so that belief in God was almost shaken among Europeans.[104]

Kang's basic position on the issue can be summarized as follows: science can modify religious beliefs, but scientists cannot disprove God. Kang did not insist on the infallibility of the founders of religions, who in his view were just a bit wiser than the

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101 Kang, 93.

102 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 141.

103 Kang, 'Chang'an Yanjianglu', 273.

104 Kang, 'Zhutianjiang', 93.

ordinary.[105] Nor did he believe in the absolute truth of religion. He considered religious beliefs to stand in need of adjustment wherever established scientific evidence made it imperative to correct previous misconceptions of reality. Kang was ready to disown any traditional views, religious or otherwise, when they were found contradictory to established scientific facts. A typical example was his critique of the various discussions on the physical heavens in religious teachings.

> The founders of religions lived in the past when there were no refined telescopes available; they were therefore not free from inaccuracy in their discussions on heavens…. The Buddha's descriptions of the various worlds, which increased in number by thousand folds, were mere random speculations rather than factual presentation of the universe.… The discussions on the heavens and God in Christianity and Islam were far less profound than the Buddhist texts, so I would just skip them.[106]

Referring to Confucius' remarks on the limits of his own knowledge, Kang implied that the Sage's humility should also be maintained by scientists in their attitude towards the existence of God, for he was too exalted to measure, too subtle to fathom.[107] Therefore, it was inappropriate for a scientist to assert the non-existence of God. Kang did not believe that by relying purely on physical senses, all facts and reasons could be revealed. In this sense, he set out to rebut Newton, Laplace, Darwin and the like, whom he otherwise praised in glowing terms, for their imprudent and arrogant denial of God:

> Could Newton, Laplace, Darwin and the like have had any clue that there would be telephones, power lines and wireless telephones? No, they could not have known of these very rudimentary items, that all now consider commonplace.… They were not able to foresee the existence of electricity [in every entity], so how much less could they pass judgment on the existence of God or know about all the mysterious things in the world?[108]

Quoting Zhuangzi's saying that 'a man's life is limited while knowledge is limitless', Kang concluded his discussion on the subject by a series of forceful question: 'Since their knowledge was extremely limited, how could men like Newton, Laplace and

105 Kang, 101.
106 Kang, 101.
107 Kang, 40.
108 Kang, 93–94.

Darwin dare to claim to comprehend all about Heaven? How could they assert there is no God? In so doing they only showed their ignorance of their own limitations.'[109]

In summary, as a work on astronomy, Kang's *Lectures on the Heavens*, being a mixture of a recitation of Western philosophers and his own speculations, neither presented new findings nor advanced scientific theories.[110] Its significance, however, lies more in the intellectual sphere than in the scientific field. Kang demonstrated an appreciation of scientific method and a reliance on science, notably astronomy, in advancing his cosmological understanding. For this reason, Kang has been regarded by some historians as the first thinker of modern (or pre-modern) China to enrich Chinese philosophy by injecting Western elements into it.[111] Indeed, Kang had unknowingly helped to usher in another new phase of China's response to the West by the appropriation of natural science as a means of enriching Chinese intellectual life.[112] However, one of Kang's contributions, often neglected, was his effort to construct a universal concept of God that was in harmony with science. He spoke of science in glowing terms while affirming the existence of God, emphasizing his view that no matter how far sciences may advance, scientists could never disprove God, whose nature lay beyond the comprehension of the limited faculties of men. Driven by a messianic self-image as sage for his age, Kang Youwei had set forth his own *jiao* or doctrine of 'celestial peregrination' in his final book, and had become, at least within his own private mental universe, a *jiaozhu* or founder of a Teaching/religion.

5.4 The Fate of Kang's Skull

To come into being and to abide, to assemble and to disperse—
These are the natural course[s] of man and nature.[113]

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109 Kang, 94 (Chapter 11). It should be pointed out, however, that in purporting to refute Newton's denial of God's existence, Kang was mistaken, for not only did Newton believe in God and regard his scientific work a way of knowing the mind of God, he also shared Kang's fundamental position: 'concerning things unknown nothing is rashly to be affirmed or denied'. See J. E. McGuire, 'Newton on Place, Time and God: An Unpublished Source', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 11, no. 2 (July 1978): 121. cf. Rob Iliffe, *Priest of Nature: The Religious Worlds of Isaac Newton* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

110 See also Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 394.

111 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 140.

112 Hsiao, 'Excursion into Science', 395.

113 Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 249. In Chinese, 成住聚散，人天之常.

5 A Celestial Wanderer

Early on the morning of 31 March 1927, Kang Youwei passed away in his residence in Qingdao, Shandong, which he had named the House of Celestial Peregrination.[114] It has been suggested that he might have died of food poisoning from something ingested on the eve of his death, but that has never been verified. Kang may have had a premonition of his imminent death a couple of weeks earlier when he was celebrating his seventieth birthday in Shanghai. On that occasion, he received a congratulatory tablet and a jade sceptre from the abdicated emperor Puyi, to whom he had maintained his allegiance; in response, he wrote a 'memorial of thanks'. In an elegant style of prose, which he had rarely adopted in the vast body of his writing, Kang penned a summary review of his eventful life since the Reform of 1898. Completing the letter, he threw down his brush and declared, 'Here are the affairs of my mind during my life!' Just before leaving Shanghai for Qingdao after the birthday party, he walked around his garden, and said, 'This is the end of my fated stay in Shanghai!'[115] According to his attendant, Kang observed the stars on the eve of his death, and made his usual remarks—'Alas, all is lost!' Then he added, 'There is no foothold left for me in China, but I simply cannot die on foreign soil.'[116]

By the declaration of 'All is lost' and saying there was 'no foothold left' for him in China, Kang was alluding to the triumphant advances, which he by no means wished to see, and must have dreaded, of the northern expedition of the southern Revolutionary Army (*gemingjun* 革命軍), led by Sun Yat-sen's successor, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887–1975). The nationalist forces had wrested control over large territories, including Shanghai and Nanjing, in South and East China, from the control of the Zhili clique headed by Wu Peifu and the Anhui clique. They would forge ahead and in a year's time would reunify China under the control of their government (whose seat had been moved to Nanjing), thereby ushering in what is called the Nanjing era.[117] Kang had correctly foreseen the victory

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114 In addition to Shanghai, Kang also had a residence in Qingdao, a city that had become the preferred domicile for members of the former royal family, including Puyi, after they were expelled from the Forbidden City in 1923 on the grounds that they had participated in the failed Restoration attempts.

115 Lo, 'Sequel to K'ang's Autobiography', 249–50.

116 Li Keliang 李可良, 'Wo yinxiangzhong zhi Kang Youwei 我印象中之康有为 [My recollections of Kang Youwei]', in *ZYKYW*, 1996, 482–83.

117 For more on the northern expedition, see C. Martin Wilbur, 'The Nationalist Revolution: From

of the nationalists, but he had never backed off from his disapproval of the revolutionary approach and discourse adopted by the nationalists and later the communists; Kang loathed their political views so much that, if at all possible, he would avoid living or dying at a place controlled by the revolutionaries and their ilk.

Kang died a disappointed man. He had not accomplished his mission to save China. Politically, his proposal of a titular monarchy for China was rejected outright, and his efforts at restoration failed disastrously. So did his religious cause. The Confucian (Religion) Association, which he and Chen had established to institutionalize his *Kongjiao,* had lost its vigour and appeal.[118] His pleas on behalf a Confucian religion were, in the words of Hsiao, 'not so much opposed as ridiculed or ignored' by the younger generations of Chinese intellectuals.[119] He had also been criticized for his character deficiencies. 'Kang had attempted to promote Confucianism as the state religion,' wrote a magazine review on Kang's work and life published a year after his death, 'but regrettably his deeds and conduct had failed to conform to the teachings of Confucius. Under a moral scrutiny, he could well be said to be a transgressor of the Confucian ethical code (*mingjiao zuiren* 名教罪人).'[120]

Kang was buried at the foot of Xiang'er Hill in the suburbs of Qingdao, at a site that he had chosen himself according to the art of Chinese geomancy (*feng shui*). His death received little attention within the political and cultural circles, partly because the gaze of the whole nation was fixed on the ongoing northern expedition, and partly because Kang had lost the high esteem he had once enjoyed among the mainstream Chinese intellectuals. That stood in stark contrast to the treatment accorded to Liang Qichao, who died two years later and was mourned nationwide, with hundreds of elegiac couplets written by the political and cultural elite as eulogies to honour him.

Canton to Nanking, 1923–28', in *CHC*, vol. 12, 1983, 527–720.

118 The Confucian (Religion) Association officially ceased to exist in 1937 when the nationalist government ordered it to change its name to Confucian (Studies) Association (*Kongxuehui* 孔學會). Chen Huanzhang, however, continued his pursuit of Confucian Religion in Hong Kong under British rule, where he established the Confucian (Religion) Academy (*Kongjiao xueyuan* 孔教學院) in 1930, an institute that has continued to thrive till this day. It has been officially recognized as one of the major religious communities of Hong Kong. For the history of the institute, see http://www.confucianacademy.com/load.php?link_id=27660.

119 Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 126.

120 Huang Yanyu 黄延毓, 'Kang Youwei de shengping jiqi xueshu gailue 康有為的生平及其學術概畧 [A Short Account of Kang's Life and His Scholarship]', *Nanfeng* *南風* 3, no. 1 (1928): 45.

While Liang shared Kang's disapproval of revolution, he managed to remain on good terms with the revolutionaries. In contrast, Kang's long-standing anti-revolutionary position and his insistent advocacy of constitutional monarchy had caused him to be regarded as an enemy of republicans, nationalists and communists, the last two groups having dominated China's political and intellectual stage during Kang's last years. Naturally, he was viewed negatively during the Nanjing era, a two-decade period that witnessed the rise of the Communist movement, the Sino-Japanese War, and the KMT-CPC conflicts which finally culminated in the communist takeover in 1949.

A keynote communist perspective on Kang was articulated by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) on the eve of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. An admirer of Kang during his own adolescence, Mao regarded Kang as one of the Chinese progressives who had gone through hardships in their quest for truth from the West; unfortunately yet inevitably, Mao said, their proposed remedies for China had failed one after another. In particular, he commented that Kang, despite that fact he had written the *Book of the Great Unity*, could not find the road to attain that vision.[121] Mao believed that the CPC had found that road in Marxism-Leninism, and about ten years later he would attempt to realize that vision in the communes of the Great Leap Forward. Inspired by Mao's argument and in a state of socialist ferment, PRC scholars started a debate about the legacy of Kang, in particular on his utopian thought, around 1958, the sixtieth anniversary of the Reform of 1898. Most of the participants in the debate adopted the Marxist approach of analysing his work through the prism of class struggle, claiming that Kang's scholarship had purely served his bourgeois political agenda, although among them there was also the more balanced voice of a young Li Zehou 李澤厚 (who would later become a prominent Chinese philosopher) who defended Kang's utopianism from the harshest critiques.[122]

Posthumously, Kang's reputation deteriorated. Being the chief proponent of constitutional monarchy, he was denounced as a reactionary defender of the old

[121] Tse-Tung Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. IV (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 412, 414.

[122] For a good discussion, see Brusadelli, 'A Tale of Two Utopias'; see also Xu Guangren 徐光仁, 'Ping Luo Mengwei xiansheng du renmin minzhu zhuanzheng duiyu Kang Youwei de pingjia 评罗孟韦先生"读人民民主专政"对于康有为的评价 [A Review of Mr Luo's Essay Entitled "Reading Mao's comment on Kang"]', *Huanan shiyuan xuebao 华南师院学报*, no. 2 (1959): 78–84.

tradition, a view that had dramatic consequences when it led to the destruction of Kang's tomb in August 1966 at the height of the campaign to 'do away with the Four Olds' (*po sijiu* 破四舊) during the initial stage of Mao's Cultural Revolution.[123] Kang's remains were dug up by a group of Red Guards consisting of students and teachers from Qingdao No. 5 Middle School. His bones were burned, while his skull was placed in a wheelbarrow and paraded through the streets, amidst shouts of the slogan, 'Down with the founder of China's Royalist Faction!' By that time, the term 'royalist faction' had taken on a new political connotation, denoting those who defended the more liberal political incumbents who were then coming under attack. When the parade ended, Kang's skull was left on the ground, and it was picked up and hidden away by a curator of the municipal museum.[124] In hindsight, Kang would probably not have been too upset about the fate of his skull, for its treatment had put him among the rank of those religious (in particular Buddhist and Catholic) and scientific saints in history, whose remains or brains were preserved, worshipped or studied.[125] That episode was a prelude to even fiercer attacks on Kang's historic role at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Among other things, he was condemned as an anti-revolutionary reformist, whose legacy had been allegedly inherited by Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇, the recently disgraced *de jure* head of the PRC, who had been labelled a traitor to the revolution due to his 'capitalist leanings'.[126] Kang was not alone in receiving this treatment, for the historic Confucian Cemetery in Qufu was also destroyed, and Confucius himself also became a subject of criticism during the politically motivated anti-Confucian campaign in the 1970s, with the Confucian legacy being considered to be a hindrance to the progress of socialist China.

By contrast, Kang received a much more lenient and positive treatment across the Pacific in US academia. The year 1958, which also marked his hundredth birthday

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123 The 'Four Olds' was a pejorative reference to 'old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits'. For more on the campaign to destroy the Four Olds, see Guo Jian, Yongyi Song, and Yuan Zhou, *The A to Z of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 70–72.

124 Lin Zhiye 林治业, 'Yuan Kang Youwei mu shi zheyang beihuide 原康有为墓是这样被挖毁的 [An Account of the Destruction of Kang Youwei's Original Tomb]', *Laonian shenghuo bao 老年生活报 [Daily for the elderly]*, 12 December 2012, sec. 6, http://epaper.qingdaonews.com/html/lnshb/20121212/lnshb514317.html.

125 For a recent volume on 'savant relics', see Marco Beretta, Maria Conforti, and Paolo Mazzarello, eds., *Savant Relics: Brains and Remains of Scientists* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2016).

126 Ma, 'Kang Youwei yanjiu', 88.

anniversary, witnessed an appropriate celebration by way of the publication of Laurence G. Thompson's translation of his *Datongshu*, the first book-length translation of his works in English.[127] That was followed by a well-attended symposium on Kang Youwei, whose contributions were edited and published as a book by Kang's grandson Jung-pang Lo, then associate professor of history at the University of California, who also added to the volume his translations of Kang's *Chronological Autobiography* and of its *Sequel* edited by Kang's daughter Tongbi (Lo's mother).[128] One of the key participants at the symposium was Kung-Chuan Hsiao (often quoted in this thesis), whose careful examination of Kang's works and manuscripts resulted in the publication of a monograph on Kang's thought, which has remained the definitive work of scholarship on the subject in the English language. As was mentioned in the introduction, Hsiao spoke highly of Kang as a 'patriotic' revisionist who occupied a seminal position in the Confucian tradition.[129]

When Hsiao's work was introduced to post-Mao China, it was welcomed—but not without reservation—by Chinese intellectuals. Among other things, they criticized the author for being too sympathetic to Kang.[130] In the 1980s, Kang was rehabilitated, but only partially. His thought was subject to an analysis based on dialectic materialism—he was recognized for his 'progressive' role in the 1898 Reform, a movement whose own nature was being heatedly debated, but his thought and political activities after the Reform continued to be denounced as anti-revolutionary. Subsequently, as a material manifestation of Kang's political rehabilitation, his skull was finally interred in a dignified new grave built by order of the local government of Qingdao in 1985, seventeen years after it had been dug out and vilified by the Red Guards. Meanwhile, his old house in Sucun, Nanhai had been restored to its former state, and was made a site for patriotic education.

Kang's posthumous rehabilitation has presaged the full-scale revival of Chinese academic interest in Kang at the beginning of this century, as demonstrated by the

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127 See Thompson, *Ta T'ung Shu*.

128 Jung-pang Lo, ed., *K'ang Yu-Wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967).

129 See Hsiao, *K'ang Yu-Wei*, 122, 125.

130 Wong Young-Tsu 汪荣祖, 'Yizhe xuyan 译者序言 [Preface by the Translator]', in *Jindai zhongguo yu xinshijie 近代中国与新世界 [A Modern China and a New World]* (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1997), 1.

literature review in the introduction of this thesis. Going beyond the limitations on analysis previously circumscribed by ideological constraints, this thesis has attempted to bring out the development of Kang's thought in terms of his conceptions of *jiao/*religion and its relationship to science, based on a scrutiny of Kang's body of writings and analysed in the context of his contributions to the national discourse on science, religion and public policy during the different phases of his eventful life.



Figure 7: Kang's Restored Tomb, courtesy of Hu Weijun (Kang's great granddaughter)

Conclusion

Summary

Unlike the image of Kang Youwei as he is depicted in conventional accounts, Kang is presented in this thesis as a religious figure. From his childhood, by reason of his having been immersed in Confucian education at home, he had developed a reverence for *Shangdi*, the Supreme Ruler in Heaven spoken of in ancient Confucian texts, to whom a grand annual ceremony of sacrifices was still being performed by the Qing emperor. At the same time, he was familiar with the practices of ancestor worship within his family and was exposed to popular local beliefs based on a folkloric admixture of Buddhist and Daoist ideas. His early religious leanings were further nurtured through his visits to nearby temples and holy places and by his reading of Buddhist literature. His short periods of intense immersion in the practice of Buddhist meditation in seclusion led him to experience several mystical states, such as are canvassed by William James, during which he sensed that he was becoming one with the universe in profuse light, including a vision of his being born to be a sage with a bodhisattva-like mission to deliver from suffering not only his compatriots in China but the whole of humanity. This sense of a bestowed mission, accompanied and buttressed by a belief in the Mandate of Heaven, persisted as a strong inner driving force throughout his life and sustained his tenacious commitment to his reform cause.

To carry out his redemptive mission, Kang concurrently embarked on two interrelated realms of reformation: political and religious. His political aim was to transform the imperial government into a constitutional monarchy through gradual reforms so as to better prepare China for survival and dignified prosperity among the competing nations. His religious goal was to recast Confucianism as a religion and in particular, to enshrine it as a state religion. A firm believer in the religious origin of morality and in the moral basis of society, he considered politics and religion as ‘two wheels’ of the chariot of state. Religion would serve as a foundation for good political order and national solidarity, while politics would provide assistance and support to religious institutions for the common good of all. In this light, Kang’s political reform and his religious cause can be regarded as different aspects of a larger project. Despite his

repeated efforts, Kang's political reform failed disastrously, with dire consequences for his personal life. His own analysis and interpretation of the 'eleven' instances of his narrow escape from capture and death, however, only served to strengthen his faith in his mission and his belief in the will and protection of Heaven.

His religious reform, on the other hand, achieved a degree of success. His determination to reform the Confucian tradition came from several sources, including a personal intellectual dissatisfaction with orthodox Neo-Confucianism, its perceived inadequacy to help China counter external colonial aggression, and the stimulus and challenge from an advancing and intruding Christianity. His Confucian reformation was carried out in two main areas. At the institutional level, he proposed to the Throne the creation of a national Confucian Church modelled after its Christian counterpart, with branches set up in every locality across the country, each being assigned a Confucian pastor to offer weekly sermons to its congregation. By means of this Christianity-like design, Kang had hoped to bring Confucianism out of the exclusive province of the educated elite and to connect it with the general populace. His vision of a proper Confucian church, however, differed from the Christian model in an important way: it should always be attached to or accompanied by a school or an academy (or a university at the national level), an idea that could be traced back to the practice in ancient China, where a state school had often served as a Confucian temple or shrine. His proposal was only partially realized through the establishment (with the assistance of his young disciple, Columbia graduate Chen Huanzhang) of the Confucian Religion Association and its various branches during the early Republican period; but, in later years, the Association slid into a decline and eventually lost its appeal to the public. Kang's agenda to make Confucianism entrenched as a state religion in the national Constitution was rejected by the National Assembly, and was severely criticized by the New Culture intellectuals who took the opportunity to mount a concerted campaign against religion. The failure of his initiative to institutionalize Confucianism as a religion, it can be seen, was perhaps due not so much to the imperfection of his programme as to the adversities he faced and the exigencies of the times. The forces of political turmoil and revolutionary zeal, along with the forces of anti-traditionalism and scientism and the urgent demands for national survival and enlightenment, all combined to frustrate Kang's vision of a

Conclusion

Confucian religion revitalized to harness the power of science and technology to propel China onward and upwards towards spiritual as well as material prosperity.

At the doctrinal level, Kang sought to recast the Confucian tradition through a radical reinterpretation of the Confucian Canon drawing on the New Text exegesis of the Gongyang school. Breaking from convention, he presented Confucius as a founder of a religion whose teachings also sanctioned political and social reforms. On the one hand, he attempted to revitalize ancient Chinese belief in *Shangdi* found in classical Confucianism and defended the religious nature of Confucianism by demonstrating that Confucian Texts contained numerous discussions on such subjects as Heaven (God), spirits and the human soul. Appropriating apocryphal accounts and Zhuangzi's statements, he also attempted to ascribe divinity to Confucius—by extolling the Sage as a divine teacher, born after a miraculous conception, who was charged with the Mandate of Heaven to carry forward an ever-advancing Way. Kang thereby placed Confucius in the same rank as the founders of the great religions. On the other hand, he emphasized that, although rooted in Heaven, the religion of Confucius was human-oriented. Unlike other founders of religions, Confucius had focused his attention on the human world by setting forth teachings to nurture proper human relations so as to ensure social order and the well-being of the people. Beyond that, Confucius had a vision for the future of mankind, as manifested in the progressive doctrines of the Three Ages (*sanshi*) and the Great Unity (*datong*), concepts cherished by Kang as being among the most profound teachings of Confucius which had been largely forgotten due to the prevailing influence but corrupt content the Old Texts. Thus, Confucianism represented a highly advanced form of religion originally founded by Confucius and now being restored by his exegesis, a religion which called for profound change both at the level of the individual and in the structure of society.

The concept of *jiao* or 'religion' occupies a pivotal position in Kang's religious discourse. Kang had developed a progressive view of religion as an instrument for the education and development of humanity. To begin with, religion was born when a self-driven man, who had become enlightened ahead of others, arose and expounded on a set of instructions to teach his fellow beings to avoid evil and do good. Naturally there appeared multiple religions in the earlier periods of time, when groups of people who lived in isolated regions would each have developed its own religion in

accordance with the teachings of its founder. Despite their multiplicity, all religions shared the same goal—the realization of a moral life for their followers, but they might, necessarily, differ in their means of instruction. Even within one geographical region, later religions might have adopted ways of teaching that were different from the older ones. But there were regularities to follow in analysing them, according to Kang. At an earlier stage or in a certain region, if people had been ignorant, and their intellect had not been fully developed, the founder of their religion may have resorted to *shendao* (the way of the spirits), making use of, for example, notions of paradise and hell, clear-cut doctrines on the retributive powers of ghosts and spirits and various practices, so as to make people avoid evil and do good. But, he argued, to a more civilized audience, whose intellect had been developed to a higher degree, the founder of their religion may have employed primarily *rendao* (the human way), by coming away from superstitious concepts and focusing his teachings on nurturing proper human relations and establishing higher forms of social order through the practice of moral/heavenly principles as well as satisfying human desires in a seemly and moderate manner. According to Kang's reinterpretation, which dramatically differed from the Neo-Confucian account, human desires, like moral principles, were also part of human nature as endowed by Heaven. Therefore, a proper 'religion' or *jiao*, Kang argued, was one that, as defined in the *Means*, cultivated the way for nourishing human nature without suppressing the natural human desires. The Sages, or the founders of religions, each constituted in his own self the highest exemplar that his followers could model themselves on in their quest for a fuller development of their Heaven-endowed nature.

One can hardly miss the end-point of Kang's theory of the history of religion. It followed that when peoples in different regions became more connected by virtue of improved transportation and communication, their religions also came into contact, as evidenced by what had happened in history. Thereupon Kang entered a comparative analysis of the major religions of his times, an analysis often adorned with anecdotal observations from his extensive world travels. Earlier in his youth, he had, following the traditional *yin-yang* dualistic philosophy, attempted to classify all religions into two groups according to their attitudes towards human desires. The *yang* religions, represented by Confucianism, were more oriented to meeting human needs, while the *yin* religions, as typified by Buddhism and others, were more oriented to suppressing

them, especially the human sexual urge. Kang later gave up his intellectual construct of the *yin-yang* classification, and instead opted for the *shendao-rendao* demarcation, but that was more of a change of terminology than of substantive content. He argued that authentic Confucianism encompasses both ways, based on *rendao* yet retaining *shendao,* while Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were primarily confined to *shendao.* Thus, Kang asserted, Confucianism was not only a religion, but, as a religion of superior wisdom, represented a more advanced stage in cultural progress and therefore, he believed, was better suited to the modern world, and more specifically, to the immediate needs of the Chinese people. That was his clear and stern response to the emerging view that Confucianism was not a religion or *zongjiao* (the Japanese neologism for 'religion') on the grounds that Confucius had not discoursed much on such key elements of religion as spirits, the soul and the afterlife. That view was first raised by his erstwhile disciple Liang Qichao and soon gained momentum, thereby triggering the first debate over the religious nature of Confucianism among Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In this connection, Kang began to tackle the question of the term *zongjiao/*religion. He argued that the Japanese neologism denoted only the *shendao* doctrines, and therefore was a mistranslation of the English term 'religion'. For in his understanding, the original concept of *religion* [*lilijin*] was a broader, generic term that encompassed both *shendao* and *rendao*, although it had long been narrowed down by institutionalized Christianity. He maintained that *jiao* and 'religion', if properly understood, were equivalent terms. He continued to employ this etymological approach in his later defence of Confucianism during the Confucian Religion movement, arguing that the Confucian tradition, properly understood, was a religion, even in the narrow sense of *zongjiao*. In the post New Culture era, however, when the concept and practice of religion had become intellectually and politically discredited, Kang switched his strategy. He now acknowledged that *zongjiao* was an accurate translation of 'religion', both of which referred to *shendao* teachings, and as such, they were inadequate to encompass Confucianism, which enjoyed the distinction and advantage of being primarily a *rendao* teaching while retaining the *shendao* teaching as well. He stressed one unique teaching of Confucianism, the veneration of one's ancestors, something that had been rejected by some religionists, especially the Christian missionaries, as being incompatible with worship of God. But for Kang, the

two practices were in perfect harmony and honoured a fundamental verity that humans came into being through the agency of God and one's parents, and therefore, one should show gratitude to both one's parents and Heaven (God). Kang's revised position seems very close to the now widely-accepted view that Confucianism is primarily an ethical and humanistic body of teachings that contained shades of religious belief. But considering his understanding of *jiao* as the cultivation of the Way by which the Heaven-endowed human nature can progress towards sagehood, Kang's Confucianism can be more accurately described as a religious system of knowledge that primarily manifests its society-transforming effects by extolling a moral code based on attainable human standards.

With an eye vigilantly looking for signs of ingathering unity despite diversity and complexity in the world of phenomena, Kang had pondered the theme of unity of religion throughout his life. He stressed that all the major religions of the world, despite their differences, were united in a number of fundamental teachings. To begin with, all religions taught reverence for *Shangdi* or 'God', a concept that he believed was universal, though given different designations in different cultures. In his youth he had attempted to find a more suitable common term for naming the ultimate Reality, and in his later years explicitly sought to prove the existence of God against the spread of strong anti-religion sentiments and the rise of scientific materialism in the 1920s. Kang himself favoured the conception of a pantheist God who did not have a visible substance but who existed with and within this world that was in constant change. Second, it was his conviction that all religions without exception taught love of one's fellow beings, which was best captured by Jesus's counsel to 'love your neighbour', the teaching of compassion exemplified by the Buddha and the Confucian virtue of *ren*. Thirdly, all religions taught the doctrine of the existence of the soul, although the human soul, like the concept of God, had been given different names in the different religions. He believed in the immortality of the soul, but that immortality, he held, was manifested in repeated reincarnations within this world rather than in its continued life in another world. For Kang, there was only one world, with two realms (visible and invisible). It was his conviction that unity of religion was both necessary and inevitable. Indeed, his progressive view of religion would lead to the logical conclusion that as peoples around the world become increasingly connected, diverse

religions would also be unified, and there would appear a new, universal religion, which would help usher humankind into the ideal world of the Great Unity.

An earnest self-taught student of Western science by means of an arduous reading of Chinese translations, the young Kang turned himself into one of the most learned Chinese scholars in Western learning in the late nineteenth century. Having experienced the intellectual exhilaration of encountering the most recent developments in science, he became one of the pioneer Confucian teachers who lectured on Western learning, and he further called for science education to be included in the reform of the national educational system. He recognized the potential of science and technology to transform the material conditions of existence and argued that China could be saved through the vigorous promotion of technoscience. His observations from visits to industrially advanced powers such as Great Britain, the United States and Germany convinced him of the urgent need for China to encourage scientific inventions by setting up a mechanism to protect patents so as to give China a cutting-edge advantage in the fierce competition with other countries. Furthermore, it was clear to Kang that his ideal world of the Great Unity could not come into practical realization without a high degree of scientific and technological development, for the universally desired increase of human happiness and decrease of suffering also depended on material progress. He spoke of the value of science as well as its utility in such glowing terms that he can indeed be regarded as a pioneer who helped usher in a new phase of China's response to the West. Unintentionally, he contributed to the rise of scientism as a new faith in China, for which he naturally declined to take credit. Unlike the New Culture intellectuals, however, his passionate appreciation of science did not convert him to fervid materialistic scientism or cause him to advocate indiscriminate Westernization.

In the intellectual realm of his holistic, associative thinking, Kang maintained an unfractured concept of scientific knowledge and Confucian verities as being complementary aspects of one body of knowledge. He attempted to synthesize his Confucian religion and Western science, both of which, in his view, were essential to individual intellectual development as well as to national prosperity. He saw no conflict between them, for he believed that the Confucian Classics had already contained the origins of modern science, which happened to have been recently

developed into finer stages of scientific discovery in the West. So, embracing Western science was entirely legitimate and consonant with his religious cause of going back to 'pristine' Confucianism. Epistemologically speaking and in terms of the Confucian concept of *gezhi* that was infused with a moral orientation, the principles of nature discovered through natural science are expected to conform or lead to the higher principles enunciated in the Confucian Classics. Conflict with science might occur with other 'inferior' religions like Christianity, but rarely if ever with the more advanced Confucian religion. The Darwinian principle of Evolution by Natural Selection, for example, contradicted the Christian doctrine of creation, but it fitted in well with the Confucian notion of evolution through constant change and transformation. Further, he did not insist on the infallibility of the founders of religions and he considered religious doctrines as standing in need of adjustment when scientific evidence made it imperative to correct previous misconceptions of reality. But there was a limit to the sovereignty of scientific reasoning. No matter how far science advanced, it could never disprove the existence of God, whose infinite nature Kang believed lay beyond the grasp and measure of finite scientific minds, even those as brilliant as Newton's or Einstein's.

Nowhere is Kang's view of a complementary relationship between science and religion more clearly manifest than in his appropriation of scientific notions in the process of his Confucian exegesis. Like his reformist ally and disciple in spirit, Tan Sitong, Kang related the all-important Confucian virtue *ren* to 'ether' and 'electricity', arguing that the latter constituted the essence of the former. This attempt has been recognized by later scholars as a new paradigm for the Confucian tradition. Upon learning that the concept of 'ether' had been shattered by Einstein's theory of relativity, however, he willingly stopped using the term himself. In doing so, he demonstrated one aspect of scientific spirit: abiding by verified facts and proven theories. At the same time, he waxed more eloquent about 'electricity'. He distinguished between two types of electricity, a subtle yet visible material power and a more refined invisible power. He claimed that the latter was in fact what was commonly known as 'spirit', and was the very medium through which human consciousness was spread within the body and between human beings, and through which Heaven and man were connected. He applied the notion of electricity to his explanation of the nature of the soul and the mysterious mechanism of divine

retribution. All of this brings to mind the efforts of some of the eminent scientists in late nineteenth century Europe to reconcile their religious convictions with contemporary scientific theories through the mediating role of 'ether' or 'electricity'.

As a self-proclaimed sage for his age, Kang did not content himself with the role a mere reformer of Confucianism. He desired to establish his own *jiao* or religion, and he indeed embarked upon this enterprise in his later years. He began in earnest by expounding his doctrine of 'celestial peregrination', a doctrine that mixed, or, synthesized, his astronomical knowledge with his metaphysical speculations. He taught that knowledge of the heavens, coupled with observation by the naked eye or through a powerful telescope, could provide a paradigm shift in thinking. As an offer of solace to humanity, Kang stated a theoretical proposition that the realization of this truth would assist his fellow human beings in getting rid of worries and achieving happiness—the ultimate goal of all religions in his understanding. For the realization of the vastness of the universe would make them look beyond and thereby transcend their trifling sufferings and vexations. The awareness of the fact that if observed from other planets they were actually 'denizens of Heaven' would help them transcend the limits of families, tribes and states and eventually achieve utmost happiness. His intellectual convictions as to the metaphysical implications of astronomical knowledge for this mundane life, however, had not shaken his belief in *Shangdi*, the Supreme Ruler in Heaven. In the final analysis, Kang had eventually become, at least within his own private mental universe, a *jiaozhu* or founder of a *jiao*/teaching/religion, believing that his doctrine would be practised in the future world of Great Unity, a world that Confucius had prepared humanity for.

When the whole body of his intellectual output is studied, Kang must be acknowledged as a courageous thinker who strove to bridge the gap between what he sincerely believed to be a superior religious system, Confucianism, and its complementary role as a moral force by which to harness the power of Western science and technology to serve the needs of economic development and material prosperity of the people of China and the world. This view of an inclusive relationship of science and religion has not lost its original freshness to a twenty-first century mind

who attempts to reconsider the role of spiritual traditions in a predominantly materialistic society.

Seen from a broader perspective, Kang's construction of a universal concept of 'God', his vision of the future unification of religions, and his conceptualization of a compatible and complementary relationship between science and religion, all exemplified the rise of transnational, trans-religious spirituality. This intellectual activity took place in the context of major events in the formation of imperial and colonial modernity. In these processes, the cultural and religious encounters between the Christian occidental and the Confucian-Hindu oriental worlds led many to a search for a common essence between different traditions as well as between different domains of human thought. The sometimes seemingly Quixotic yet farsighted concepts enunciated by Kang Youwei beckon an increasing number of scholars to a reconsideration of his hopes, dreams, ideals, principles, systems, institutions and his agenda for the alliance of science and religion working hand in hand to address the crying issues of humanity at crossroads.

Implications

This thesis has contributed to three areas of scholarship. To begin with, it has sought to enrich our understanding of Kang's thought through a rigorous examination of its religious and scientific dimensions by analysing the evolution of his thinking as gleaned from writings written over the course of his whole life. While Kang has traditionally been studied as a political figure, a utopian thinker and a philosopher, my thesis has established that he should also be regarded as a religious figure and a proactive policy-maker both in terms of his private belief and public involvement in religious activities. Kang's ascendancy to the heights of his status as a foremost religious thinker of his time is described by reference to his early religious experience and through a consideration of the written evidence regarding his personal belief in supernatural forces, his construction of a Confucian theology involving the existence of God, the will of Heaven, divine retribution and the attributes of the human soul, and his endeavour to institutionalize Confucianism as a state religion. Similarly, as a pioneering advocate of science, Kang's conception of science, though rudimentary in certain aspects, has proven to have been more nuanced and balanced than the ideas

maintained by the indiscriminate promoters of scientism among the younger generation of the New Culture–May Fourth intellectuals who were critical of him.

Second, my thesis has demonstrated the complex nature of the historical relationship between science and religion in modern China. It has defended the argument put forward in the introduction: one whole generation before the Conflict Thesis took root in Chinese thought in the 1910s, the late Qing reformist thinkers, represented by Kang, had already reflected on the relationship between what are now generally categorized as science and religion. Their conceptualization extended beyond a simple conflict or harmony thesis. While maintaining a fundamentally complementary relationship between religion and science, they also treated that relationship in consideration of individual religions and the overall classification of knowledge. Their acknowledgement of conflict between science and certain religious doctrines did not make them reject religion in its entirety, nor did their recognition of the power and value of science convert them to scientism.

Third, being carried out in the context of China's unique intellectual tradition, this thesis seeks to contribute to the global discourse on the relationship between science and religion by presenting an alternative perspective, a non-Western, Confucian-inspired configuration of their relationship. The ancient Chinese concepts that underpinned Kang's personal embrace of science and religion, such as a holistic view of the universe, creation without a creator, law without a law-giver, and the idea of the natural law of constant change, are capable of offering new insights into the current debates on the topic, such as the debate between evolution and Intelligent Design. In terms of methodological significance, Kang's openness of mind and his readiness and willingness to give up any doctrine when contradicted by verified scientific facts are admirable. His more balanced approach in his differentiating treatment of individual religions in relation to science, though rejected by the later New Culture iconoclasts, seems to have become increasingly consonant with today's academic predispositions and with emerging global conceptualizations of the issue of science and religion. Kang's message is clear—that there exists a deep complementary concord between true religious teachings and true scientific principles, because both conform to the nature of a cosmos that unites humanity, heaven and earth. Dichotomy and division find no place in his mind, a mind that was trained in

the holistic thinking of Chinese tradition and which was devoted to a search, engaged in throughout his adult life, for unity (*datong*) at various levels.

This thesis is focused on Kang Youwei. To fully illustrate the intellectual richness and complexity of the period of transition from Imperial to Republican China, other prominent contemporary thinkers have been included, in particular, Kang's allies Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong and Yan Fu, and Kang's political detractor, the revolutionary thinker Zhang Binglin. They have all been discussed or touched upon in this thesis in terms of their relation to Kang, but each of them, being a gigantic intellect, deserves more substantial treatment on his own terms by way of concentrated focus on the views they articulated in their discourse on science and religion. This may be one direction for the continuation of my future research.

Another direction for further research would be a more comprehensive study devoted to Kang's religious thought. His voluminous writings contain elaborate discussions on various religious themes, many of which have begun to be revisited with vigour and increasing frequency by today's scholars in relevant fields. In particular, his reconstruction of the concept of 'religion' in light of the Chinese traditional notion of *jiao* has of late begun to resonate with present-day thinking, as illustrated by the recent proposal from a number of leading Chinese scholars to reconsider the generic concept of 'religion' in a consciously Chinese context rather than from a Eurocentric perspective as has been the practice for the past century and a half, so as to provide a new paradigm for the re-evaluation of Chinese religion, and in that sense, of Chinese culture as well (see the discussion in the Introduction).

Having completed the research to produce this thesis, I have come to perceive the foresight of Liang Qichao's pronouncement in his summation of the significance of his teacher's life and work—a statement that was made a century ago but which has hitherto been largely ignored—that Kang's mind was dominated by religious thought, and it was his religious cause that would in due course be recognized as paramount among all his contributions to the progress and development of the Chinese nation.[1]

[1] Liang, 'Nanhai Kang', 488.

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