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Kang Yuwei on the origins of western civilization

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the research in the shaping of concept of civilizational development made by the prominent Chinese philosopher Kang Youwei (1858-1927). The vision of Western civilization from the point of view of a Confucian thinker is considered on the basis of the material "Travels to Italy" (1904). Kang Youwei argued that Unity is the basic law of history. From Kang's point of view, the Roman Empire was an example of a state, which was founded according to the laws of the evolutionary development of nature and society. 19th century Italy was seen as a young state that which had not yet overcome the consequences of the "birth trauma". Shaping his views within the Sino centric paradigm, Kang Youwei considered the world civilization as a single evolutionary process of ascending from barbarism to the heights of culture, respectively, the positive experience of the West can be used to correct China's shortcomings and return a high political and geostrategic status to the country.

Keywords: Kang Youwei, Civilization, Globalism, Sinocentrism, Confucianism, Great Unity (Da tong).

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Introduction

Our research has been dedicated to the problem of apprehension of the essence of the Western civilization by the prominent Chinese thinker and reformer Kang Youwei (康有为, 1858–1927). An important peculiarity of his socio cultural and intellectual experience is his long stay outside the borders of China (in 1898-1914), the opportunity to be directly acquainted with the life of more than thirty states of the then world. Interpretation of his impressions from the Western way of life has only been started and is evoking considerable discrepancies in the national sinologist in Europe, USA, Russia and Eastern states, the Chinese Peoples Republic included. The article deals with our outlook on intellectual ideas of Kang Youwei, who perceived himself to be a prophet, a founder of the new global religion. Correspondingly, the experience of the Western civilization occupied not a small place in his globalized historical doctrine.

The basic task of the research is the solution of the issue, connected with transformation of the Confucian consciousness, the carrier of which is a prominent thinker, who has been brought up in a traditional Chinese way. The obtained external experience is expressed in

theoretical self reflection of the philosopher relative to this experience. Kang Youwei was one of the first Confucian in China, who had the opportunity to associate for a long time with the carrier of the Western culture, without being constrained with official limitations or the need to express a point of view, engaged by the state.

Materials and methods

Methodology of the research of intellectual changes in China at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries was reflected by the prominent Chinese philosopher Liang Qichao (1873–1929). He suggested the so-called method of analogy of cultural values, which became the main basis for comparing Western and Chinese intellectual history from their functional point of view. From the position of analogy method Liang Qichao named his teacher Kang Youwei as “Martin Luther of Confucianism. (Martynov 2010, p. 35) The method of analogy was inseparable from axiological comparative one, which had been widely used by multiple Chinese thinkers, including Liu Renhang (184-1938), and by later researchers. With many restrictions inherent in this method, it remains the basic one in modern sinology, though when used without criticism it turns intellectual history into the “worsened version of philosophy history”. The basic list of personalities dates from thesaurus of the same Liang Qichao (Elman 2010, p.376)

The basic sources are the selected traveller’s impressions by Kang Youwei “Travelling to Italy” (1904 r.)¹, and also the basic philosophical treatise of the thinker “The Book of the Great Unity” (first published in 1935 r.)².

Results

Intellectual foundation of Kang Youwei teaching

The whole of the philosophical teaching of Kang Youwei is based on evolutionary teaching. One of the most complicated issues for his biographers to study is the time of mastering evolutionary views by the thinker. Even the senior contemporaries of the thinker drew attention to the fact that Kang Youwei used later figures to date his latest works to justify a myth that he had created his works before he reached the age of thirty years thanks to the inspiration coming from the Heaven (Martynov 2010, p.27-28) (Alitto, Liang Shuming

1 Kang Youwei (康有为). Идали юцзи (Travelling to Italy 意大利游记) // Цюаньцзи (Complete collected works соч., 康有为全集); Гл. ред. Цзян Ихуа, Чжан Жунхуа (姜义华, 张荣华编校). Т. 7. Пекин: Чжунго жэньминь дасюэ чубаньшэ, 2007. С. 347–406. [Kang Youwei. Yidali youji. Quanji, Jiang Yihua, Zhang Ronghua bianjiao. Di 7 ji. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe]. Далее цитируется как: «Кан Ювэй, 2007».

2 Kang Youwei (康有为). Датун шу (Book about the Great thre Great Unity, 大同书) / Ред. и предисловие Тан Чжицзюня (汤志钧导读). Шанхай: Шанхай гуцзи чубаньшэ, 2005. 18, 292 с. [Kang Youwei. Datong shu / Tang Zhijun daodu. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005]. Then «Kang Youwei, 2005».

2010, p. 156). This became the basic theory of Tan Zhijun about the late formation of Kang Youwei history of philosophy. In the foreword to the Datong Shu publication Tang asserted that this happened not earlier than Kang departed to emigration, it means not earlier than 1899, where he got acknowledged with the treatise by Thomas Huxley "Evolution and Ethics, translated by an outstanding philosopher Yang Fu (1854–1921) under the title "Theory of the Development of Nature»³.

The principled innovation of Kang Yuowei, a philosopher, was the syntheses of the Confucius doctrine with the notion of changes (both in nature and in human establishments), and that was expressed in the teachings of Three Eras (san shi). The concept of Tree Eras existed in the Chinese thought in different modifications from the time of Confucius and was considerably developed in in the Han era (III BC through to III AD), but its consistent outline was offered by Kang Youwei only. The traditional Chinese outlook considers the world as space and time wise continuum; the teaching about Three Eras presupposed the correlation of stage changes both in time and in space. In other words, the concept of three epochs/eras had the general methodological sense for Kang Youwei. If before Kang the concept was innovational, - from ideal state of the celestial Empire in antiquity, which is replaced by the "eclipse of Dao way" then the novelty of Kang Youwei was the transformation if the time sequence into the evolutionary one. The first epoch, when Kang Youwei lived himself, was the era of Chaos (Uzui lyan shi). Then there comes the epoch of the Rising World (or the Rise to Balance, shen pin shi); according to Kang some countries of the contemporary to him Europe and America are close to the latter. Then in an indefinitely far future, the epoch of Great Balance or Great World (tai pin shi)) would come into being and the Great Unity would be realized in the whole world. Each epoch correlates with evolution of public and social life: autocracy and patriarchal family in the Epoch of Chaos; constitutional monarchy and nuclear family with equality in gender in the Era of the Rising world; democratic republic and communism (with complete removal of all borders, including the borders between states, social, sex differences and even between the species) The three-base structure was singled out in each of these epochs , that was designed to show unlimited development in the philosophical methodological sense even after the advent of the Great Unity. (Kuang Bolin 1980, p. 91) (Kobzev 2002, p. 467–468).

Kang Youwei concept was a Confucian one considering its deep philosophical foundation. It is connected both with the notion of ren-humanity which Kang Youwei proclaimed as universal constant and due to the fact that the thinker understood moral progress meaning development.

By development the thinker understood moral progress, and only after that the material one. Each successive era is more progressive and civilized as compared with its predecessor. The Great Unity is a true paradise on Earth, where every living being will be freed from suffering and achieve Buddhahood⁴. Human society, no matter Western or Eastern, would necessarily pass through Three eras, as they have the meaning of a universal law of historical development. The development is gradual, and the exact time limits of this process cannot be fixed, however but the sequence of eras turns cannot be broken (Kuan Bolin 1980, p. 91).

³ Kang Youwei 2005, p. 9, 17.

⁴ Kand Youwei 2005, c. 290–292.

Contemporary Italian sinologist Federico Brusadelli, considering the intellectual evolution of Kang Yuwei, tried for the first time to put the Chinese thinker within the context of intellectual history, by quoting R. Kozellek and M. Foucault (Brusadelli 2020, p. 2, 4). In reality, A. I. Kobzev considered the doctrine of the Great Unity (which is unanimously proclaimed to be the main theoretical achievement of Kang Yuwei) in the terminology of “unifying globalism” and “ecumenism” (Kobzev 2002, p. 469). F. Brusadelli also considered the thinker’s activity in a religious context, designating the teaching outlined in Datong Shu as its theology rather than philosophy of the history, not as a philosophy of history. In fact, it is within this context that he recalls M. Foucault, since Kang Yuwei did not recognize the “time break”, and his theory is not an allegory about unrealizable worlds, but a completely positivist description of the action and fulfillment of objective laws of society and history (Brusadelli 2020, p. 5). F. Brusadelli interprets Datong Shu as a “global history” written from the position of its completion in the indefinite but not in too distant future.

The treatise “Travels to Italy”

“Journey to Italy” was published in Shanghai in 1905 as part of the collective works “Travels in Eleven European countries”⁵. In its form, it is an eclectic work in the traditional genre, which combines diary entries (the presentation begins with a half-word: from the beginning of a trip to Europe, dated on the 6th day of the second moon of the 30th year of the Guangxu era)⁶, a variety of judgments, poetic inserts, and mini-essays that in sum form a philosophical commentary. Let’s list the structural parts keynoted by the author (headings are not numbered in the original):

1. “The South China Sea and Indian Ocean Route”.
2. “From Aden to the Red Sea”.
3. “From the Suez Canal to Port Said”.
4. «The Mediterranean Sea».
5. “Song of the Mediterranean Sea “(poem)
6. «Travels to Italy».
7. “My feelings when I landed in Europe after a sea trip” (begins with a poem, then the text is prosaic)⁷.
8. “I contemplate the sea and the whole of Naples from a tavern at the foot of Mount Vesuvius” (begins with a poem, then the text is prosaic).
9. “Eight fragmentary stanzas about Raphael” (a prose text with numerous poetic inserts).

Within sections 8-9, extensive plug-in considerations are presented, which are independent essays. Chinese sociologist Wang Mingming identified 11 in-text comments (Wang Mingming 2019, p. 3) saying that:

1. “Roman palaces are not as great and refined as the Chinese Qin and Han dynasties.”

5 Kang Youwei 2007, c. 406. Specially indicated that is typesetter, not woodcut edition.

6 22, March 1904

7 This section gives the description of ruins in Pompous.

2. "The Chinese should preserve their cultural relics not to lag behind the Europeans."
3. "Four hundred cathedrals in Rome are inferior to the Cathedral of St. Peter".
4. "Why parliamentary system arose in the West, and not in the East."
5. "Success and bad luck in the historical development of Rome".
6. "History of Italy"⁸.
7. "Civil Policy of Italy".
8. "Roman Catholic doctrine (with the attached argument that the teaching of Jesus Christ came from Buddhism)."
9. "On ancient Roman dialectics".
10. "A comparison of Ancient Rome and the Han Chinese Empire; five reasons why Rome did not yield to China."
11. "On the origins of the civilization of five seas and three continents".

Wang Minmin deliberates on the duality of approaches to Kang Yuwei's reasoning. On the one hand, Kang Youwei acted as an ethnographer who found himself in a situation of the first contact with the Other (Wan Minmin 2019, p. 4). Actually, he had not got a slightest idea about Ethnography, however, cherishing a dream to "become a sage, I had read all the books before I turned thirty years"⁹ (Martin 2010, p. 103), he knew about the collections bicsiin which contained many records about the various overseas wonders¹⁰. In other words, traditional Chinese learning possessed adequate thesaurus and forms of sharing the impressions from a variety of non-Chinese Other; therefore, the Kang Youwei was not in this respect a unique guy and he did not become an example for being modelled. (Wan Minmin 2019, p. 4)¹¹; "Journey to Italy" was not the first description of the Western civilization on the part of the educated Chinese (Findeisen 2000, p. 91).

If we consider "Journey to Italy" as a document that shows the personality of Kang Yuwei himself rather than the reality description, then its significance rises greatly. For illustration, let us cite the translation of the last two paragraphs of Kang Youwei's treatise (actually, from the discussion "On the origins of the civilization of the Five Seas and three Continents"):

I believe that the bearers of European civilization are the sons of Rome and the grandsons of Greece. The primogenitors of the five seas and three continents came from there; their female primogenitors came from Arabia. The new civilization of America is the essence of the offspring that recently swept India and Japan, and is shaking our country. Europe is relatively young, its

8 In headlines 5 and 6 the term *yange* is used that means "evolution, process of consecutive changes", rather than *lishi* (proper, "course of events").

9 As how Kang Youwei named himself in his "Autobiography" (second year of Guangxi, 1876).

10 Specific genre of Chinese authors prose, mainly created by state officials. The only constructive law of the genre was the authors' will, however, the works in the *bijie* genre included "stories about amazing", plotless notes and sketches, poetic inserts and reasoning on different subjects. There were plenty of authors who were involved in research in different fields of the sciences, from linguistics to antiques, to music and astronomy. (Алимов, Кравцова, 2014, с. 1244–1256).

11 On the contrary, Zhu Ziquig (1898–1948) testified that in his youth he was fascinated with literature about traveling and in particular by "Travels to Italy", written by Kang Youwei. During his visit to Italy in 1932 he used the work written by Kang Youwei as a guide and a "tuning for of observer" (Findeisen 2000, p. 90).

culture has grown out from ancient Egypt and Babylon, which are its seeds; isn't it amazing?! The Emperor Dante¹² founded a capital so splendid and magnificent that it kept existing for a thousand years, surpassing anything known on earth in splendor and strength, although Turks and Muslims threw down a challenge to it.¹³ Mahomet founded a new state in Mecca, uniting possessions of many rulers from Spain in the West to India in the East, North Africa in the South, and the Caspian Sea in the North. The Arab civilization spread out over 20,000 miles¹⁴, crossing seas and continents; and so a great power emerged that traded with Rome and China, and was organized in a completely new way. The caliphate grasped all the lands of India, Persia, Rome, and China, having created a new government and a new religion. However, the Turks and Persians split into two kingdoms, each with its own religion¹⁵, and in turn there came a wave of conquests. Europe has been lost for the Arabs since the Crusades, and since then European civilization has spread across the land. Truly, the countries of the five seas and three continents are extremely strong and culturally educated, and are developing astonishingly fast¹⁶.

Now the whole world is going through a cycle of great changes. Among the countries of the five seas and three continents, the possessions of Islam are the poorest and most stagnant, the states of Tu and Bo¹⁷ are the most closed and retrograde. But cannot it happen that the spirit of the earth has been depleted without a trace?! It also happens that the trailblazer lags behind, and the cycle of Tao begins anew. In fact, when time passes, all countries without exception will change, while the Turks and Persians, remaining unchanged, will hardly be able to survive. Europe is the geographical center of the countries of the five seas and three continents, and it must necessarily become the model and center of attraction for the world civilization. Will it disappear otherwise? < ... > The Caucasian race is known for its tenacity all over the world, and the subjects of the Emperor Dante are very white and have huge noses. I have not reached the borders of all five seas and three continents, and only in my dreams I visited the Black and the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf¹⁸. These are the lands that my compatriots should pay attention to (Kang Youwei 2007, pp. 405-406).

The exile period in the life of Kang Uvea between 1899 and 1913 can be seen as “the exile”, although Xiao Guncang asserted that the philosopher perceived his life after the failure of the Reformation movement, “as a joyful vacation after a hard work, time when you can no limits to wander across the world and satisfy your long existing conscious thrust for changing places” (Hsiao 1975, p. 28). This approach is valid, This approach is true, but it should be considered presently as superficial. We once devoted a separate work to the self-assimilation of Kang Youwei to Confucius. Within the framework of Kang Youwei's sincere

12 In original text.

13 Probably Kang Youwei meant Constantinople, Istanbul and Baghdad. He stayed in Istanbul during the days of The Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

14 The Chinese measure (li) was approximately equal to 571.5 meters during the time of Kang Youwei and in modern China it is 500 m.

15 In this way Kang Youwei interpreted the split of Islam followers into Sunni and Shiite.

16 Kang Youwei uses ambiguous combination *guayi* (怪异), which means “strange, remarkable, wonderful, fantastic, monstrous, incredible” as well as “utterly changeable”.

17 Tu Bo is the name of Tibet in the Tang era. (VII – IX cen.).

18 Then mistakenly the Red sea is given in the same treatise.

belief that he is compatriot of Confucius, his travelogues acquire quite a different sounding.. The parallels of exile were as follows: both Confucius and Kang Youwei were forced to flee their homeland as a result of the failure of an overwhelming political plan; both shaped the main provisions of their teachings in exile; they became conscious of unreliability of their own mission in this situation; the duration of emigration in both cases was 14 years¹⁹ (Martynov 2014, p. 297, tab. on p. 305-306).

Kang Youwei's European experience had its own peculiarities, which was analyzed by Taiwanese researcher Wang Yongzu. According to his opinion, it was the trip to Europe in 1904 that finally persuaded Kang Youwei that material civilization is basically cosmopolitan, can be neither Chinese nor Western, which became the reason for realizing the universality of social and civilizational evolution, whereas the stages of which are the same for everyone (Martynov 2014, p.296). However, it opportune to bear in mind that the process of maturation of the Kang Youwei doctrine was extremely long, because back in his youth, after his first visit to Hong Kong in 1879, he made sure that the Englishmen could not be considered "barbarians" (Martynov 2010, p.109). Due to his Confucian worldview, Kang Youwei was more focused on antiquity rather than modernity. What is more, without a command of European languages, he did not realize the depth of interethnic contradictions, while considering the diversity of Europe by using the analogy with the different provinces of China, which were characterized by ethno national differences and different dialects. Since the West was a "Pandora's box" for Kang Youwei, containing both the probable collapse of the Qing Empire and the secret of its salvation, the thinker first paid attention to the details of the environment that were available on a surface. Hence the "hutuns" of Naples that he noticed". In this aspect, Wang Yongzu was right in asserting that Kang Youwei's trip to Italy only strengthened the speculative structure already created in his mind, and what he saw meant only something to justify a priori built structures (Martynov 2014, p.299) But Wan Yongzu as we believe, exaggerated the simplicity of Kang Youwei structures; on the contrary, Wang Minming emphasized that "Journey to Italy" is one of the most theoretical and systematized texts created by carriers of traditional Chinese consciousness who find themselves in a foreign cultural environment (Wang Minming 2019, p. 5).

Context: Kang Yuwei-the Traveler²⁰

After fleeing China in September 1898, Kang Youwei's family did not have a permanent home for a long time. On October 25, 1898, on the invitation of the Japanese government, the thinker started for Tokyo; all expenses were paid from the state budget. After the change of government, Kang Youwei decided to go overseas, in search of a support for the Guangxu Emperor (1875-1908), who happened to be under home arrest. On April 7, 1899 Kang Youwei arrived in Canada and was received in Ottawa on May 10 by the Governor-General of the

¹⁹ "The fourteen years exile" is to be understood as a metaphor, consciously adjusted life circumstances of Kang Youwei to fit to the biography of the First Teacher. In reality the emigration of Kang Youwei lasted 16 years. (Ван Минмин 2019, с. 12), as it will be shown in the next section.

²⁰ In this section all facts are given according to the information of Kang Youwei grand son, professor of Luo Rongban (son of Youwei daughter Kang Tunbi) in our translation. (Мартынов 2010, с. 231-287).

British Dominion, Sir W. Laurier. Having enlisted support from the officials, on May 31, 1899, the thinker arrived in Great Britain. In London, he was staying with a former Lord of the Admiralty, Admiral Beresford, whom he had known since before the coup d'état. However, the consideration of the case of pressure being exerted on Empress Cixi with the aim of establishing a constitutional order in the House of Commons (June 9, 1899) completely failed. In the second half of the year, Kang Youwei stayed in Canada, founding the Society for the Protection of the Emperor, which became the first Chinese political party on a global scale. At the very end of the year, the thinker returned to Hong Kong, while the Qing court put Kang Youwei on the international wanted list and organized a "hunt" for him by the special services.

After the assassination attempt, Kang Youwei left for Singapore, where he landed on February 1, 1900. It was on the very day of his landing, the thinker was attacked; several more attempts on his life were made later, and from February 23, Kang Youwei lived under the protection of Indian soldiers appointed by the colony's governor. After the outbreak of the Yihetuan uprising, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao began preparations for an armed performance demonstration scheduled for August, and Kang led a propaganda campaign from Singapore. Since assassins were sent to the island, from July 26 to August 9, 1900 Kang Yuwei lived under guard at the governor's residence, and then he was offered to move to Penang, in the colony of Malaya. After spending almost a year and a half in Penang, in December 1901, Kang Youwei fled for Northern India, with a mild, mountainous climate. In January 1902, the thinker settled in Darjeeling, where he lived until the spring of 1903, busy with writing.

The period from the fourth to the ninth lunar month of 1903 Kang Youwei traveled to Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia before moving to Hong Kong. In 1904, a World congress of the Imperial Salvation Society departments was held in the British colony. After initializing a global political and economic organization, Kang Youwei embarked on a European tour. He sailed from Hong Kong on March 22, 1904. After visiting Bangkok, Malacca, and Penang, the Chinese thinker continued on across Ceylon, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal. On June 16, he arrived in Brindisi. After a three-day tour of Naples, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, Kang Youwei arrived in Rome on June 19; he stayed in the Eternal City for a week. On June 26, Kang Youwei left via Florence and Milan for Paris, where he also stayed for three days. Then his route included Switzerland, Austria and Hungary. Half a month in July and August were spent in the UK, followed by a trip to Denmark. In Copenhagen, Kang Youwei was received by the Foreign Minister, who was acting Prime Minister. The stay in Oslo (Norway) took one day, and Kang Youwei stayed in Sweden for a long time, where he was received by the Foreign Minister on August 24. On September 23, the Chinese thinker went to Belgium and Holland, surveyed the Waterloo field and the house of Tsar Peter I. From September 29 to November 3, Kang Youwei studied industrial enterprises in the UK, after which he left for Montreal. In Canada, he designed the text "Travels in eleven European countries".

On February 12, 1906 after a hard disease Kang Youwei left for the United States. Because of his poor health, he stayed in Seattle for a month and then for two months in Los Angeles. When he arrived in Washington, D.C., on June 16, 1905, he attended a sitting in the House of Representatives, and undertook the excursion to the memorial to J. Washington at Mount Vernon. On June 24, 1905, the thinker was invited to the White House for an informal

dinner with President T. Roosevelt, with whom he discussed the repeal of laws discriminating against the Chinese in the United States. Then he spent a lot of time traveling through the states of New England and the Midwest. On December 2, Kang Youwei crossed the border with Mexico. Having visited Mexico, the states of Hidalgo, Oaxaca and Yucatan, in August 1906, the Chinese philosopher left for Milan. Through Florence, he went to Germany, and in the eighth lunar month settled in Sweden, where he purchased real estate. On January 4, 1907 Kang Yuwei returned to Berlin, then he surveyed the Rhineland, and arrived in Monte Carlo via Brussels and Paris. On January 29, 1907 Kang was already in Madrid, reaching Cordoba and Granada in February. Then he crossed Gibraltar, having visited Tangier and Fez, where he was even favored with an audience with the King of Morocco. In February-March 1907 Kang Youwei traveled to Portugal, France, and the United Kingdom from there he started for the United States. In the fifth lunar month, he visited Mexico again. He was also planning to go to Russia, but the tsarist government issued a decree ordering his immediate arrest and deportation to Beijing, and he had to abandon his plans.

After the bankruptcy of American and Mexican enterprises of the Society for Emperor Defense, Kang Youwei went to Germany in April 1908, and on May 5, he attended the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the reign of Emperor Franz Josef in Vienna. In May – June 1908, Kang Youwei lived in Sweden and Norway, and then decided to return to Hong Kong. That was a circular road: on July 21, the thinker arrived in Belgrade, then visited Sofia, and on July 27, in Istanbul, he happened to be a witness of the victory of the Young Turk Revolution, establishing the constitution. After visiting Athens, Kang Youwei went to Switzerland, and from Italy sailed to Ceylon. After arriving in Penang, the thinker received news about the death of the Guangxu Emperor (November 14, 1908). After recovering, in the spring of 1909, he went to Egypt, went sightseeing about Cairo, Luxor and Aswan. Then he traveled to Palestine, visited Jerusalem, and stayed at the Dead Sea. He traveled through Switzerland and France to Britain, visiting Bath and Hampton Court. He visited Canada, in the summer of 1909 Kang Youwei spent a month in Potsdam, and returned to Penang on August 16. Then the indefatigable traveler went to explore the shrines in the South India, visited Madras and Bombay, and then again stayed in the Buddhist temples of Ceylon.

In the spring of 1910. Kang Youwei settled in Singapore having spent four months in Hong Kong with his mother. After the next trip to Hong Kong in May 1911, the thinker went to Japan in June, where he bought a house next door to his student Liang Qichao, who lived in the country permanently. There he got the news that the Qing government had relieved the thinker of all charges against him and revoked the decrees on his arrest and execution. The beginning of the Xinhai Revolution and the establishment of the republican system did not allow Kang to return to China. He stayed in Japan, associated with former Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, he lived for a long time in Osaka and Nikko, and visited Hakone, Kyoto, and Hiroshima. In early 1913, he underwent surgery for a stomach ulcer in Tokyo, and on August 9 of the same year, his mother died. Due to his poor health, Kang Youwei could not attend her funeral in Hong Kong and plunged into the Confucian ritual for a year of mourning. Only in 1914, after receiving three invitations from President Yuan Shikai, did Kang Yuwei return to China after a sixteen-year break. His entire numerous family reunited on Chinese New Year's Day, on February 14, 1915.

Kang Youwei's Italian Experiences

According to Wang Minmin, the book "Travels to Italy" was designed in the traditional style of "stories about the amazing things" (Wang Minmin 2019, p. 13). Diary entries enumerate numerous military installations of the British Empire²¹. This immediately set the overall tone of the story, but in Wang Mingming's opinion, it came from the expectations of Kang Youwei's potential readership. Great Britain for China in the early twentieth century was a leading imperialist power and at the same time a role model; accordingly, Italy and France were considered as equal on the same line with it, which gave a landmark for readers.

Those who have not traveled to Europe think that these places resemble the abode of the celestials, inhabited entirely by sages and immortals; how can they know about impenetrable dirt and insurmountable disorder, and about that thieves and swindlers are everywhere! Therefore, as they say, "a hundred times heard does not exceed once seen." When I used to travel around Europe and America, and England itself, what I saw was very far from what I used to imagine when I was studying, and that gave birth to disappointment. That is why when you go ashore and reach your destination, you feel very confused (Kang Youwei 2007, p. 351).

As Wang Mingming believed, this maxim is addressed to the younger generation of Chinese people, who are used to comprehend Western countries something like future for China. Therefore, in travel notes we can see constant comparison. (Wang Minmin 2019, p. 14). On his way from Brindisi to Naples, Kang Youwei gives contradictions to each other data. So, he describes how he was cheated when the cost of his baggage was calculated and he says that "Italians are the poorest and most mendacious, many of them were thieves". When describing the surroundings of Mount Vesuvius, he mentioned the crowds of beggars and concluded that the picture "is no different from what in India". Here, he tries to explain this situation, so as not to scare off his readers. The explanation is as follows: the existing Kingdom of Italy was founded "in the eleventh year of the reign under the motto Xianfeng²², the fourth year of my life." That is, Italy is a young state, the order in which has not yet had time to settle down. Kang Youwei went on to draw parallels with China in describing the rural landscape, saying that the huts here resemble Egyptian or Indian huts ("their walls are rough and not dressed, very ugly"), and "the mountain slopes are cultivated in the same way on the island of Java." The landscape and soil are similar to those in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, and the village lanes are similar to the quarters of slums of Guangzhou. From this it is concluded that the way of life of all ancient civilizations is uniform, so by contemplating the houses and fields of Italy and China, "you can learn the consequences of evolution." Their level of development is significantly inferior to the Nordic countries. But poor districts all over the world are the same: the lanes of Naples, littered with horse manure and rotting garbage, where carts have broken ruts in the street surface, are "like Beijing's hutongs." This is due to

21 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 346–348.

22 Xianfeng is the motto word for ruling of Qing Emperor Yizhu (1850–1861). The eleventh year of Xianfeng corresponds to 1860 according to the Western calendar.

the fact that “bettering the order in an ancient state is like the demolition of an old house, that is, it is extremely difficult.” Nevertheless, the Chinese are able to learn from the Western way of life²³.

The Civilization of Ancient Rome and lessons for China

If we take the general concept expressed in Kang Youwei’s philosophical essays, it turns out that the root cause of Italy’s backwardness (“the most underdeveloped of the large European countries”) was the fall of the Roman Empire and feudalization of Medieval Europe. Having re-set a single state in 1860, Italy had to spend heavily on maintaining the army and fleet, which created a gap with the more prosperous countries north of the Alps. All this is described in the final section “Travels in Italy”, where Kang Youwei examines the system of local self government in Italy, its transport, economy, tax system and so on, up to the structure of the up to the structure of the national bank and the system of commercial banks²⁴.

The description of Naples opens with a poem about Camillo Cavour, inspired by his bronze monument, where the hero of Italy is compared to Zhuge Liang²⁵. This is the key to his method of universal analogies, since the thinker declared that the one who studies the evolution of world civilization should first consider the evolution of Europe, “and anyone who wants to know the evolution of Western Europe should start with the ruins of Ancient Rome²⁶.” In fact, the main goal of Kang Youwei’s Italian tour was the ancient Roman history. It was on the ruins of Pompeii that he uttered the maxim that was quoted by Xiao Gongquan (Hsiao 1975, p. 28):

Once there was a catastrophic eruption of a volcano, now all of us who are living, are able to explore the past directly. If it were not for the volcano, how would we come to know the life of the people of the ancient Rome? And how would we comprehend the Qin Empire if there was no Great Wall? Under the heavens, losses and gains follow each other; in nature, everything complements each other. Therefore, anyone who talks about the Tao cannot fail to understand the alternation of Yin and Yang. Therefore, the volcano, which caused great harm [to the people of antiquity], to some extent benefitted subsequent generations; how cannot one admire this order of things?! Small-minded thinkers who see only one side of things, how can they talk about the Tao? (Kang Youwei 2007, p. 354).

Visiting the historical monuments of Pompeii and the Roman Forum, as well as the Vatican Museums, forced Kang Youwei to talk about the preservation of historical relics in China. In his work “The Chinese should preserve their cultural relics to keep up with the Europeans,” Kang Youwei lists the imperial palaces of various dynasties that were destroyed

23 Kang Yiuwei 2007, p 351–353.

24 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 393–396.

25 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 353. Zhuge Liang (181–234) military statesman of the Eastern Yan year and the Three Kingdoms epoch. He was protagonist of folk art and classical Chinese literature, as personification of strategic talents, great wisdom and creativity, personal disinterestedness and service

26 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 354.

in civil conflicts, starting with the great Afan Palace that was burned down by Xiang Yu²⁷. These examples serve as proof that the Chinese are far inferior to the Italians in terms of preserving cultural relics. Kang Youwei identified two reasons: the ancient emperors “disliked the old and built the new”, and subsequent dynasties destroyed the legacy of their predecessors. In his usual style, Kang Youwei cites the example of his fellow Guangdong residents, who usually have beautiful gardens which perished after the founding family went bankrupt, so that no trace remained. He sternly concludes: “if people do not know how to honor heroes and preserve antiquities, then they are barbarians.” The Chinese have preserved the memory of the past achievements in literature, but do not have material monuments of antiquity. However, one of the reasons for the fragility of the material side of Chinese culture is that since ancient times the buildings were wooden, with the exception of a few pagodas. Therefore, the Chinese must master the art of stone construction and learn how to preserve material cultural values²⁸.

In the text “Travels to Italy”, Kang Youwei often used the term “civilization” (wenming). The thinker revealed it through binary oppositions: examples of high or low civilizational development. His use of the term “dialectic” (which does not exist in traditional Chinese philosophy) is not accidental: Kang Youwei, is fully aware of the existence of material and non-material civilization, subordinated these aspects to politics. Despite the fact that Kang Youwei considered Europe as an integral civilizational field, he clearly saw the differences between the countries. At the same time, he believed that from the point of view of material civilization, Italy was not inferior to either England, or Germany, or even China. From the point of view of spiritual culture, there is much common ground in culture for China and the West than in the material sphere, since civilization is a process, not a state (Wang Mingming 2019, pp. 17-18). Civilization is the universal expression of progress from “barbarism” to “culture.” At the same time, Kang is a Confucian. Datong shu claimed that a man has a body like all other living beings, including animals without brains and the lowest of insects, and he should do everything possible to help them free themselves from suffering and death²⁹, but this did not apply to the civilized and uncivilized state of humanity. In other words, lack of culture typologically can express both a lower position on the evolutionary ladder (and such societies are to be saved, that is, “they are to be subjected to evolution”), and regression, a stop in the development, degeneration. Kang Youwei’s evolutionary view of the struggle against chaos allowed him to promote the unity of human civilization and encourage his countrymen to consider Westerners as the crown of evolution, who are superior to the Chinese in everything. The Chinese people, being the offspring and heir of Chinese civilization, are responsible for the achievements of the past for the sake of the future (Wang Mingming 2019, pp. 18-19).

In the Book on the Great Unity, the thinker interpreted “civilizational empathy “

27 Afan is the main residence of Qin Shihuang (238–209 B.C.), Chinese integrator Xiang Yu (232–202 B.C.) – rebellious military leader of the Kingdom of Chu, who destroyed the Qin Dynasty and its capital. He suffered losses in his battle with the founder of the Dynasty Han Liu Bang and committed a suicide.

28 Kang Youwei (2007, c. 370–371. wrote about it before the epoch-making archeological discoveries in the first third part of the XX century, when material traces were found belonging to the Chinese civilization through to the Neolithic period. Historical and archeological expeditions of Liang Sicheng and (son of Kang Liang Quichao pupil) and his wife Lin Huiyin in 1932–1937 allowed to open completely the wooden structure of the IX-X centuries.

29 Kang Youwei 2005, p. 4.

on a maximally broad scale, even calling up to study civilizations that were given birth on other celestial bodies, “sharing their joys and sorrows³⁰.” At the same time, civilization is an integral part and diagnostic feature of the evolutionary era. The basic law of evolution is the desire of intelligent beings to unite and eliminate competitiveness. Many small chiefdoms formed states that competed with each other, like the destinies of ancient China, Egypt, Hellas, Babylon, and Persia. Over the centuries, states have grown in size, and clearly show a tendency to unite on a global scale³¹. However, Kang Youwei was far from accepting the homogeneity of historical time, and argued that savagery and civilization could well coexist. Moreover, he came to the conclusion that the brutality of the manifestations of war is directly proportional to the degree of development of material civilization³², but this does not lead to the condemnation of civilization, because value orientations are relative. Kang Youwei did not use the concept of civilization to describe historical facts that exist for him by themselves and do not carry moral lessons in themselves. Nor did he associate civilization with any form of organized religion. This kind of theoretical calculations can be perfectly traced in the text “Travels to Italy”, for example, in the description of the Coliseum and the acts of Julius Caesar and Octavian Augustus³³. At the same time, the Roman Empire was described by Kang Youwei as a state that arose naturally in accordance with the law of evolution³⁴.

Conclusions

It is absolutely important to study the intellectual heritage of Kang Youwei for our modernity as it goes through a process of civilizational change. The thinker was brought in the milieu of the traditional Sino centric paradigm, where China occupied a central place in the Celestial Empire, while all other states and cultures occupied a peripheral, subordinate position. This “architecture of the universe” was the integral part of Kang Youwei’s entire thinking, even defining sacred geography Datong Shu, according to which all the mountain ranges connecting the continents of the Earth – the Himalayas, Cordillera, and Andes – are only branches of the middle Kun-Lun³⁵ (Martynov 2017, p.273). This showed that Kang Youwei, who had to go through many life and political disasters, retained a sense of the indissoluble unity of the world: what is required for the development of China fits well for the rest of humanity (ibid.). Wang Mingming described the change in his worldview in terms of changing the “tributary model” to the “pilgrimage model”, which to a certain extent determined the rhetorical style. Kang Youwei was an inquisitive exile, not a bearer of an imperialist “burden” (Wang Mingming 2019, p. 29). However bearing in mind his religious worldview, it is possible to interpret Kang Youwei’s activities as a mission to save the Guangxu Emperor. The scale of

30 Same.

31 Kang Youwei 2005, p. 56.

32 Kang Youwei 2005, p. 68.

33 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 365–366.

34 Kang Youwei 2007, p. 367.

35 Kang Youwei meant Kunlun in Dao Buddhist Chinese Mythology: a sacred mountain, hiding Western paradise, a place where Heaven and Earth unite.

the world is expanding enormously, but at the same time Kang quite consciously correlated all the entities he saw and knew with the traditional chronology and eventful outline of Chinese history (Rome was founded in the seventeenth year of the reign of Zhou Ping-wang), using Gregorian dates only when he could not find a Chinese counterpart for them. In a sense, this is a transformed tributary model. .

The model of civilization constructed by Kang Youwei in the text “Travels to Italy” has not yet had time to take shape completely, but it also corresponds well with the logic of the presentation in the final philosophical text “Books of the Great Unity”. Kang’s mission in The Travels was to debunk the notion of the West as a Buddhist paradise of “Pure Land.” To do this, he used not only direct comparisons from the experience of the present and past of the West and China, but also he linked the differences with the stages of civilizational development. In the Travels to Italy, there is still no statement from Datong Shu that Switzerland, the United States, and the Scandinavian countries are almost at the threshold of moving into the next era of civilizational development. In turn, long descriptions of the Roman past are called upon to illustrate different variants of the basic law of history – the law of unity: unification in a historically short time followed by disintegration (Rome), long unification with a slowdown in development (China). Historically, for Kang Youwei, these states were equivalent and of equal worth, since the formation of the Roman Empire took place simultaneously with the establishment of the Qin and Western Han empires.

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