Kang Youwei’s Political Investigation of Overseas Travels After the Failure of the Hundred Days Reform Movement

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Abstract. Without a choice, Kang Youwei had to into exile overseas after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform. During his exile, he traveled across the world for sixteen years. The main purpose of his round-the-world journey was to study the Western political systems, and to develop a strategy for China to become a prosperous nation. This paper intends to study the oversea tourism activities of Kang Youwei, in order to provide an insight into his ideological believes after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform movement.

Introduction

Kang Youwei (1858-1927), a principle leader of the Hundred Day’s Reform movement, was also a well-known political scholar who was willing to adopt traditional Confucianism as an implement to promote an institutional reform during the late Qing Dynasty. Since the failure of the Hundred Days Reform movement, Kang Youwei was exiled and lived overseas. During his years in exile, Kang Youwei visited thirty-one countries over a span of sixteen years. He has traveled more than two hundred thousand miles, which is approximately five times the circumference of the earth. During his journey, he visited numerous famous places around the world, such as the Eiffel tower, the Acropolis of Athens, the Ganges River in India, the skyscrapers in New York, the Himalaya Mountains and the Egyptian pyramids. [1] It was also noteworthy to mention that Kang Youwei was the first Chinese citizen who had been to the Arctic. In this paper, Section I analyses the overview of Kang youwei’s travel activities. Section II analyses the political system in the Britain. Section III analyses Hints obtained from studying of the French Revolution. Section IV analyses the thoughts generated in India. Section V analyses the extended scope of Germany political system. The last part is conclusion of the article.

The Overview of Kang Youwei’s Travel Activities

As a result of many years in exile, tourism became Kang Youwei’s favorite hobby. He had been to France seven times, eight times to Great Britain and eleven times to Germany. Due to his extensive travels, he defined himself as a scholar of political science. Indeed, Kang Youwei had showed great enthusiasm towards the study, analysis and evaluation of political systems and constitutions.

With this in mind, it should be pointed out that Kang Youwei was not only a political scholar, a leader of a major institutional reform movement, but also an expert tourist a super who had traveled to many foreign countries. During his sixteen-years of traveling, Kang Youwei widened his horizons and gained a deep understanding of the political systems as well as the cultures and customs of various countries across the world.

The Analysis of the Political System in the Britain

As a figure of the Bourgeois Reform movement in modern China, Kang Youwei focused on the constitutional monarchy with the greatest passion. Great Britain was the first country that established a constitutional monarchy in Europe, which led to an open political system and made a great impact and deep influence on the political systems in other countries. As a strong nation, Great
Britain had vast colonies overseas and its political system was very advanced. All of the achievements were also due to the Teutonic people’s who had immigrated into the Great Britain. They had active, open minded, and positive personalities, which allowed them to think differently and fostered their creativity.

Moreover, Kang Youwei has analyzed the geopolitical factors that contributed to the establishment of Great Britain: first, as an island, Britain was easily influenced by the continental civilization, but it was isolated from continental wars. Second, the unique geographical location allowed Britain to accept the eminent, skillful and wealthy peoples who were trying to avoid the draft during the continental wars. Britain therefore had ample financial and human resources to serve as strong pillars to support the Industrial Revolution, and the subsequent foreign expansion and overseas colonization [2].

**Hints Obtained From Studying of the French Revolution**

As a leader of the Hundred Days Reform movement, Kang Youwei was an advocate for legal reforms of the monarchy and was opposed to the use of revolutionary force to seize political power. Prior to the failure of the Hundred Days Reform, his understanding about the Western political system was limited to the knowledge available in books, those books attempted to highlight the advantages and significance of the Western political systems. After visiting France, Kang Youwei developed his own point of view. He thought that the French Revolution was extremely crude, even though the French Revolution played critical roles in promoting the replacement of the absolute monarchy by the constitutional republic.

Although the revolution abolished the absolute monarchy political system and led the formation of the nation as the republic, the reestablished Democratic Republic of France was not as democratic as the other nations in Europe, as there were many inequalities that developed after the revolution. He saw many drawbacks associated with political campaigns. These campaigns were not only highly corrupt, but there was also vicious competition among the candidates, and some candidates had even resorted to assassinations against their political opponents to gain power.

In “Travel in France” [3] Kang Youwei pointed out that since the French nobility controlled the political power after the revolution, the political system was full of corruption, partisan disputes and severe persecution of its citizens, such as rapes and land grabs. All of these observations led him to a new position with a more mature understanding of the concept of Western political systems. From that point forward, Kang Youwei began to study the other political systems with dialectical approaches [4].

**The Thoughts Generated in India**

Kang Youwei’s political philosophy was based on the “Chunqiu III” principles, which indicates the historical development of human society. This philosophy was described in “Confusion Examination System” in greater detail. Although it was an outmoded political philosophy at that time, during his time in India, Kang Youwei still adhered to the “Chunqiu III” political philosophy and believed it was the correct political theory. Kang Youwei could not tolerate the burning heat of the summer, the poor sanitary conditions, dietary customs and the living conditions he encountered in India, which he considered as deplorable. For this reason, Kang Youwei said that India was the most depressed country in the Western world. During his time in India, he observed that dead bodies were burned on the banks of the Ganges River, while the people bathed in the river behaved normally, talking and laughing as usual without showing feelings of consternation. Kang Youwei was shocked by this phenomenon. Furthermore, Kang Youwei discovered that people in India showed excessive love towards animals; they did not hunt wild animals and did not even trample on ants. As a consequence, wild animals could appear anywhere, endangering people’s lives, and people’s safety became a serious concern. With regard to the excessive love given to animals, Kang Youwei thought that it should be more important to protect the lives of the citizens. All of these consequences were due to a deviation from the law of the development of human society, and
because they didn’t follow the flow of the “trouble times—world of peace—prosperous world” theory. Therefore, people in India felt hopeless, distracted, and they needed to pray for the salvation of their souls through the faith of Buddhism.

The Extended Scope of Germany Political System

Kang Youwei visited numerous countries during his exile. Germany was the one that impressed him the most among all of the other countries. He enjoyed each visit to Germany. He believed that Germany had established the best democratic political system and house of Parliament. In addition, he felt that the landscape and the politicians in Germany were the best in the world. Thus, he was truly impressed by Germany. In Berlin, Kang Youwei paid sincere tribute to the statues of Bismarck and Luther and he felt deeply inspired by their accomplishments. In his travel notes “Travel in Germany” he said that Bismarck’s feat was highly meritorious. Many people in other countries said that Kang Youwei could be the “Bismarck” of modern China, and he felt very proud to be held on a par with Bismarck. This indicated that Bismarck was a very meaningful person in Kang Youwei’s heart and he even tried to follow Bismarck’s steps in promoting the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in China. Kang Youwei played a similar role as Bismarck while serving in the government of the Qing dynasty; he and Emperor Guangxu planned to establish a movement to end Feudalism [5].

Conclusion

Indeed, Kang Youwei traveled the world opened his ideological vision, he has no longer superstitious democratic political system of the west, and through the comparison of Chinese and Western culture, he gained new insight into the political systems in the western world. As China has a unique Feudalistic social system, the political system in the western countries can not be simply reproduced in China. Therefore, Kang youwei thought in order to develop a prosperous country, many factors should be considered. The leading of a movement to against Feudalism is only the initial step, more and more work has to be planed to achieve political reform in China.

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Reference


