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CHAPTER ONE

The Reform Movement, the Monarchy, and Political Modernity

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Historians have generally seen the failure of the reform movement of 1898 as a tragic lost opportunity, as a sign of the dangers of court politics, or as proof of the weakness of reformist ideas or the reform-minded bourgeoisie.¹ For

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1. Useful (and representative) works dealing with the reform movement include Hao Chang (Zhang Hao 張灝), *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); idem, "Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890-8," in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 11, *Late Qing, 1800-1911*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-chiang Liu, pp. 274-338 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1980); idem, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890-1911* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); idem, *Lieshi jingshen yu pipan yishi: Tan Sitong sixiang de fenxi* 烈士精神與批判意識—譚嗣同思想分析 (The spirit of martyrdom and critical consciousness: an analysis of the thought of Tan Sitong) (Taibei: Lianjing, 1988); Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Kang Youwei Tan Sitong sixiang yanjiu* 康有為譚嗣同思想研究 (Studies on the thought of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong) (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1958); Tang Zhijun 湯志鈞, *Wuxu bianfa shiluncong* 戊戌變法史論叢 (Collected essays on the history of the 1898 reform movement) (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1957); Wang Rongzu (Young-tsu Wong) 汪榮祖, *Wan Qing bianfa sixiang luncong* 晚清變法思想論叢 (Collected essays on reform thought in the late Qing) (Taibei: Lianjing, 1990); Wu Tingjia 吳廷嘉, *Wuxu sichao zonghenglun* 戊戌思潮縱橫論 (Views on the intellectual tide of the 1898 reform movement) (Beijing: Renmin

good or ill, the failure of reform led to the success of revolution, since the Qing's "new policies," whose implementation began in 1902, came too late. The failure of the reform movement, which climaxed in the "hundred days" of imperial edicts in the summer of 1898, has seldom been questioned; after all, it resulted in the "coup d'état" of the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908) and the execution or exile of the movement's leaders. Nonetheless, this negative view of the reform movement overlooks the fact that it was also a turning point in the shaping of China's modern political culture. Before 1898, participation in the affairs of government by non-office-holding literati was limited to informal and largely illegitimate networks under the loose protection of high officials.² Even the system of private secretaries and aides (*muyou* 幕友) of officials that flourished in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion was just that: private and non-official.³

Between, say, 1895 and 1898 an explosion of open and openly politicized literati clubs and journals and academies—sometimes with only the most nebulous of links to officialdom—challenged the court's right to limit social forces and determine policy behind closed doors. After 1898, it was the Manchu court that lacked legitimacy. After 1898, new forms of political engagement and new standards of state-society relations came to be accepted as just by China's townspeople, young literati, and even rural gentry. This chapter

daxue chubanshe, 1988); Paul A. Cohen and John E. Schrecker, eds., *Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, East Asian Research Center, 1976); Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858–1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975); Kong Xiangji 孔祥吉, *Kang Youwei bianfa zouyi yanjiu* 康有為變法奏議研究 (Studies of the Reform memorials of Kang Youwei) (Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988); idem, *Wuxu weixin yundong xintan* 戊戌維新運動新探 (New inquiries into the 1898 reform movement) (Changsha: Hunan sheng xinhua shudian, 1988); and Luke S. K. Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

2. James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies, 1992).

3. My intention here is not to deny that a public sphere (*gong*) and possibly a kind of civil society were evolving in the late Qing—as outlined in Mary Backus Rankin, "The Origins of the Chinese Public Sphere: Local Elites and Community Affairs in the Late Imperial Period," *Etudes chinoises* 9, no. 2 (1990): 13–60; idem, "Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere," *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (Apr. 1993): 158–92; and William T. Rowe, "The Problem of 'Civil Society' in Late Imperial China," *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (Apr. 1993): 139–57; however, this trend was not recognized as fully legitimate by the court or, perhaps, even by public opinion, such as it was, until the reform movement was well under way.

shows how a new conception of the monarchy encapsulated a self-consciously "modern" sense of political justice.

The reformers lost their heads, or at least the freedom to reside safely in China, but won the argument. For since 1898, it has proved exceedingly difficult for small leadership circles to lay claim to a legitimate right to rule without popular sanction, although of course the twentieth century has been marked by repeated and occasionally long-lived attempts to do so. By 1898, as the reformers looked to the West and Japan, they saw that political modernity lay in popular power (*minquan* 民權) and a strong state. Popular power did not imply enfranchising the ignorant masses, but in the years following the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 it legitimated literati calls for reconstituting the Qing state.⁴ Furthermore, the very ambiguity of "popular power" proved to be a persuasive factor in reconceptualizing the legitimate state, as sovereignty (*zhuquan* 主權) shifted from the monarchy to the populace in the eyes of radical literati. In other words, the center of the polity moved from the dynastic house to the nation; 1898 marked a pivotal moment in the creation of a distinctively Chinese national identity defined in political terms through a mass citizenship that implied—at least potentially—full-fledged political rights and participation and immediate membership in a community of ethnic, historical, and cultural ties.

The monarchy became particularly destabilized during the course of 1898 for at least three reasons. First, the rise of Cixi had already created two foci of power, the empress dowager and the young emperor, neither of which was fully legitimate by itself.⁵ Second, 1898 climaxed in a clash between the factions of the empress dowager and the emperor that left the emperor permanently wounded and destroyed the balance between the two that had provided at least a precarious political and ritual stability earlier in the decade.⁶ And third, the very reforms advocated in 1898 created a contradiction at the root of the institution of the monarchy. The first two points are widely accepted; the third inspires this chapter. For the reformers, on the one hand, the emperor was to be all-powerful and all-wise, pushing reforms

4. Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Zhongguo jindai minzhu sixiangshi* 中國近代民主思想史 (The history of democratic thought in China) (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp. 216–27.

5. Marianne Bastid, "Official Conceptions of Imperial Authority at the End of the Qing Dynasty," in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, ed. S. R. Schram, pp. 147–85 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987).

6. Kwong, *Mosaic of the Hundred Days*.

to completion against obscurantist opposition; on the other hand, he was to be literally self-effacing, creating new power structures that would replace the court with a government dominated by reformist literati, and was eventually to acknowledge that sovereignty lay in the people.

China's early transition to a post-feudal order ("early modern" in European historiography)—strong imperial rule, a rationalizing bureaucracy, the center's suppression of local power structures, and the dissemination of a kind of civil religion—was under way as early as the eighth century.⁷ But educated Chinese at the end of the nineteenth century, no matter how great their pride in their culture's general accomplishments, saw China as a loser, not a pacesetter, in the historical race. They were willing to forgo many long-accepted ideas about political order to build a modern nation-state, taking as models various examples of success: Britain, Germany, France, the United States, Russia, and Japan. No one wished to copy any of these models in its entirety, but they were seen as sources of knowledge about China's possible future—as roadmaps to its survival and prosperity in the modern world. The reform movement engaged in a creative appropriation, based on limited knowledge of the West, of several notions that were seen as compatible with Chinese culture: the nation-state, mass citizenship, a constitutional monarchy and representative government (local self-government and national parliaments), and commercial development. In other words, for the reformers, "political modernity" did include the institution of the monarchy.

At the same time, the reform movement attempted to use the monarchy for modernizing purposes. For both practical and theoretical reasons, the reformers sought no changes in the lineage basis of China's rulership. Practically, they hoped for the court's support to reshape the bureaucracy and were in no position to challenge its authority. Theoretically, they favored using all the autocratic powers of a modernizing emperor along the lines of Peter the Great and the Meiji emperor; they could imagine but not yet build any alternative sources of power and legitimacy.

The reformers were to some extent advocates of democratic thought and constitutionalism, but paradoxically these self-proclaimed modernizers at least ostensibly supported an especially autocratic monarchy. At the same time, they sometimes used a transcendental language derived from New

7. Alexander Woodside, "Territorial Order and Collective Identity: Tensions in Confucian Asia: China, Vietnam, Korea," *Daedalus* 172, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 216–17.

Text Confucianism that posited progressive forces rooted in the cosmos.⁸ This was a critical step in expanding the scope of the "public" (*gong* 公), for Confucius was no longer the private property of the emperor, whose own claims to authority were now seen as derivative. The category of the "public" was deeply embedded in reform discourse long before 1898, and by the 1890s it was providing a critical step for creating a modern politics of open, legitimate contestation.⁹ The reformers' claims to a voice were based squarely on their moral scholarship, and they implicitly acknowledged that no single person in the political realm could claim final interpretive authority. Nothing, perhaps, was new here, but the political crises of the late Qing forced what had once been but a factional tactic into the open. As Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), and other reformers began rethinking the nature of monarchical power (*junquan* 君權), claims to authority that were in effect based on mere birth—the sanctity of the impe-

Does this characterize the Chin. monarchy adequately?

8. For New Text Confucianism, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Anne Cheng, "Nationalism, Citizenship, and the Old Text / New Text Controversy in Late Nineteenth-Century China," in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890–1920*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter Zarrow, pp. 3–38 (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

9. See Mizoguchi Yūzō 溝口雄三, "Chūgoku no 'kō' 'shi'" 中國の「公・私」("Public" and "private" in China), 2 pts., *Bungaku* 56, no. 9 (1988): 88–102, no. 10 (1988): 73–84; and William T. Rowe, "The Public Sphere in Modern China," *Modern China* 16, no. 3 (July 1990): 309–29. Huang Kewu (黃克武), "Cong zhuiqiu zhengdao dao rentong guozu—Qingmo Zhongguo gong si guannian de chongzheng" 從追求正道到認同國族—清末中國公私觀念的重整 [From the pursuit of rights to national identity: renovating the Chinese conception of public and private in the late Qing], paper delivered at the conference "The Public and the Private: The Restructuring of Collective and Individual Bodies in Modern China [1600–Present]," Academia Sinica, Taipei, May 21–25, 1999), has recently stressed the link between such seventeenth-century critics of the monarchy as Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu on the one hand and the late Qing reformers on the other in terms of the equation of dynastic succession with "selfishness" (*si*)—the opposite of "public" (*gong*). Nor were such views unusual in the seventeenth century (see Xiong Bingzhen 熊秉真, "Shiqi shiji Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangzhong feichuantong chengfen de fenxi" 十七世紀中國政治思想中非傳統成份的分析 [An analysis of nontraditional elements in seventeenth-century China's political thought], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan*, no. 15A [June 1986]: 1–31). In the hands of the reformers, "public" was associated with democracy, a widespread view by the 1890s (Huang Kewu, "Cong zhuiqiu zhengdao," p. 14). The point here, however, is that even if democracy remained a utopian projection, "public" functioned as an immediate challenge to traditional imperial prerogatives.

Q rial line—could not survive. This gives rise to several questions. Did Kang Youwei and the other reformers seek (merely) to use the existing monarchical institution to press for reforms that would eventually lead to democracy? Did they wish, on the other hand, for reforms that would strengthen the state but fall short of what we now consider democracy? Did they seek to fashion a new basis of authority and power that would replace the monarchy? Did they seek to replace the entire system of authority resting on the examination system, the gentry class, the system of sacred-classical learning, the bureaucracy, and the monarchy? What future did they envision for the Qing court? How radical were they?

In fact, the reformers' views were shifting, ambiguous, and uncertain. This was not mere political weakness or the odd result of particular circumstances but a central intellectual dilemma in the reformers' political philosophy as they attempted to redefine kingship without abandoning it. One can trace something of a division among the reformers, with Liang Qichao and Wang Kangnian 汪康年 (1860–1911) more or less on the "people's" side and Kang Youwei and Mai Menghua 麥孟華 on the "ruler's" side; more to the point, however, each individual reformer was divided internally and dealt with the ambiguity of power in different ways. It can, on the other hand, be argued that the contradictions were more apparent than real.¹⁰ In this view, when Kang praised "popular power" and even envisioned a post-Qing polity, he was expressing his long-term goals. For the immediate future, however, the reformers sought only reform: fundamental institutional changes within the existing framework of the monarchy and the bureaucracy. In this view, when the reformers praised autocratic methods and glorified the emperor, they were only recognizing the political realities and challenges facing reform in the late Qing and attempting to harness the emperor to pull the cart of reform in the direction of democracy or, at any rate, constitutional monarchy. The "paradox" of the reformers' willingness to rely on imperial power is explained by lack of alternatives: young literati-intellectuals could scarcely lead bottom-up reforms capable of changing the entire system, nor could they imagine a popular revolution at this point. It is also true that in the

10. The case for the fundamental consistency of the reformers, and Kang Youwei in particular, is well expressed by Wang Rongzu (汪榮祖, *Kang Youwei 康有為* [Taipei: Dongda tushu, 1998], pp. 18–32, 63–81), who explains apparent contradictions as tactical shifts in terms of the overriding goal of institutional change (*biansfa* 變法).

Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908) they found a willing, if ultimately ineffective, supporter.

Nonetheless, to explain a paradox is not to diminish its paradoxical nature. If the reformers' views of the monarchy were consistent at a discursive level—autocratic reform now, constitutional monarchy later, perhaps full-fledged democracy someday—they nonetheless spoke of the institution, powers, and charisma of the monarchy in contradictory ways. At a rhetorical level and, I think, in terms of the ideas and imaginations of the reformers, the monarchy retained much of its potency and mystical awe. After the failure of the 1898 reforms, although Kang remained loyal to the Guangxu emperor, Liang moved in a more secularizing direction. Nonetheless, in 1896 Liang began his noted analysis "China's Weaknesses Are Due to Avoiding Problems" ("Lun Zhongguo jiruo youyu fangbi" 論中國積弱由於防弊) by emphasizing the "public mindedness" of the former kings.¹¹ In other words, he simply took for granted the origins of the monarchical institution in the ancient myth of civilizing sage-kings. Liang's goal was to contrast their impartiality with the selfishness (*si 私*) of the later emperors. In this, he did not go beyond the earlier views of Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–95), whose views, indeed, Liang was vigorously promoting.¹²

The cosmological foundations of the Chinese monarchy thus were beginning to be questioned by the 1890s, but by no means had faith in them disappeared even among the most "advanced" of China's educated classes. This is not to imply that the Chinese monarchy's legitimating techniques were stationary; the eighteenth century in particular had seen large discursive shifts,¹³ but it is to emphasize that we should hardly be surprised at finding individuals expressing differing views of the monarchy. The consistency of the reformers' views is discussed below, but it is ultimately less central to this chapter than the twists and turns in their efforts to reconceptualize the monarchy. The problem of the monarchy was but one part of a larger complex of questions about institutional reform, but it was intimately

11. Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji* 飲冰室合集: 文集 (Collected essays from the Ice-drinker's Studio) (Zhonghua shuju, Beijing, 1996), 1: 96.

12. Wm. Theodore de Bary, trans. and ed., Huang Zongxi, *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 78–80.

13. Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press., 1999); Angela Zito, *Of Body & Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

connected with the deepest layers of cultural and national identity and even existential orientation. To put it crudely, if the sage-kings' creation of civilization (that is, China) did not survive the debacle of 1898, then what became of national identity? It was one thing to criticize historical emperors for selfishness; it was quite another to overturn the foundations not just of the central political institution but of the very culture itself. And if the monarchy was fundamentally corrupt from the beginning, what did that imply about Tian 天 (Heaven) and humanity's place in the cosmos? This chapter cannot investigate these larger questions systematically, but, even as mere questions, they illustrate that more than politics was at stake in the late 1890s. I begin with a discussion of Kang Youwei's early writings on the monarchy, which established the case for autocratic reform; then show how Liang Qichao and other reformers adapted these views to the needs of the reform movement after 1895; and finally suggest how New Text Confucianism fostered a reconceptualization of rulership that was profoundly destabilizing for the existing monarchy but offered a path toward a new cultural identity.

Kang Youwei's Early Views on the Monarchy

By the mid-1880s, Kang Youwei had produced a systematic synthesis of his political and philosophical position.¹⁴ In *A Complete Book of Substantial Truths and Universal Principles* (*Shili gongfa quanshu* 實理公法全書), a kind of outline of his views, Kang sought to delineate absolute moral truths based on a scientific or mathematical approach that supported his universalism.¹⁵ Using the Confucian value of benevolence (*ren* 仁), he proclaimed the equality of humanity as well as a notion of individual autonomy (*ge you zizhu zhi quan* 各有自主之權). This in turn led him to a condemnation of despotism.

14. San-pao Li (Li Sanbao), "K'ang Yu-wei's *Shihli kung-fa ch'uan-shu* (A complete book of substantial truths and universal principles)," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* no. 7 (June 1978): 683-725.

15. Kang Youwei 康有為, *Kang Youwei quanji* 康有為全集 (The complete works of Kang Youwei), ed. Yuan Shiping 遠世平 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 1: 245-306; Wang Rongzu (Young-tsu Wong) 汪榮祖, "Wuxue sasui yicheng: Kang Youwei zaonian sixiang xulun" 「吾學卅歲已成」: 康有為早年思想析論 ("My Learning Was Complete at Thirty": an interpretation of the early thought of Kang Youwei), *Hanxue yanjiu* 12, no. 2 (Dec. 1994): 53-54.

Kang was a Guangdong native, a precocious student, and a man who assigned himself the mission of saving China. He was perhaps the most influential politico-philosophical writer of the 1890s in China and one of the key figures in the project of creating modern Chinese thought. Although Kang had not yet formulated the principles of his utopian vision by the 1880s, many of his radical notions were already developed. Marriages should be freely contracted and subject to change; children should be raised in public nurseries with no filial obligations (nor would parents have obligations toward their children); and sages and teachers would have no special authority.¹⁶ Kang's vision of the king was that of a mediator (*zhongbao* 中保), chosen by the people for their own protection as two individuals chose a mediator in a dispute.¹⁷ Kang's general approval of democracy is clear. He favored republican forms such as parliaments but criticized direct democracy as inferior. Unlimited monarchical powers (*junzhu weiquan wuxian* 君主威權無限), however, contravened scientific truth. In other words, despotism not only was an artificial institution but also lacked any basis in justice. Kang supported a system of indirect democracy in which officials would be elected to carry out administrative functions.¹⁸ Such officials would themselves be regarded as kings, a nomenclature implying that potentially anyone could be king (*junzhu* 君主). Indeed, the notion that "power belongs to all" (*quan guiyu zhong* 權歸於衆) suggests that human institutions should be built on the basis of equality (*pingdeng* 平等).

However, at the same time, in his *Esoteric and Exoteric Essays of Master Kang* (*Kangzi neiwai pian* 康子內外篇), Kang presented a vision of an absolute and highly active monarchy.¹⁹ He defined the sage as one who possesses transformative powers. Sagely rulers can manipulate and control the people. At the same time, they must understand the circumstances and trends (*shi* 勢) around them in order to lead and correct. China is uniquely suited for this task:

16. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 245–306; San-pao Li, "K'ang Yu-wei's *Shihli kung-fa chüan-shu*," pp. 696–708.

17. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 288; San-pao Li, "K'ang Yu-wei's *Shihli kung-fa chüan-shu*," p. 708. Kang's idea here may be an echo of the "social contract." Rousseau's *Social Contract* had been translated into classical Chinese in Japan in the late 1870s. The notion of mediation seems to have little to do with traditional notions of kingship but resonates with the informal authority of local gentry.

18. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 288, 298.

19. *Ibid.*, 1: 165–200.

not because of China's huge territory or its large population or its abundant natural resources, but because of its unique respect for imperial power (*junquan duzun* 君權獨尊). This respect was indeed not stolen from circumstances, nor was it teased out of profit; rather, it was achieved through the accumulation of the benevolence (*ren*) of the founding emperors, the righteousness (*yi* 義) of the Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, and the promotion of honorable rewards by millions of sages and worthies over millions of years.²⁰

Kang was not here exalting the supreme power of the emperor for its own sake, but he noted that it could be used to supplement deficiencies in the bureaucracy, the populace, and the military. Yet it is also clear that the emperor can have only the best interests of his people in mind; he cannot act for his own benefit. Following the ancient "Legalist" thinkers Guanzi 管子 and Shang Yang 商鞅, Kang wrote that the "way of the sages is to take care of the people and correct their virtue" and create prosperity.²¹ This is not merely what a king does; it is what a king is: "The distinction between the hegemon and the true king lies solely in the mind-and-heart. When the mind is sincerely devoted to the people, leading them to wealth and power, this is the kingly way. When the mind is obsessively devoted to oneself and leads the self to wealth and power, this is the method of the hegemon." At the same time, the root of kingly behavior is not mysterious; it is simply the "mind that cannot bear to see suffering." Suffering requires action to cure it. Rotten old customs are deeply rooted. Kings must therefore use power. By no means did Kang think the people would naturally follow the ruler willy-nilly; rather, kings must use "the method of rewards and punishments" (*kaisai zhi shu* 開塞之術) to threaten and coerce.²² This, too, defines the sage, and at this point in his argument Kang referred to the Confucian dictum: "Restrain the people with rites, pacify the people with music," making them good and joyful without their even knowing how this comes to pass. "Thus it is said, 'The people can be made to follow [the Way] but not to understand [it].'"²³ Governance follows from punishing evil and rewarding

20. Ibid., 1: 165-66.

21. Ibid., 1: 166.

22. This is the primary theme of "Hebi" 闢闢, the first chapter. The term *hebi* is virtually untranslatable, referring on different levels to closing and opening (the most literal level), strategies, magical powers, and these very techniques to reward virtue and punish evil. It is derived from the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經, *xici shang*), which defined "change" (*bian* 變) in its terms: *yibe yibi wei zhi bian* 一闢一闢謂之變.

23. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 166; *Lunyu* 8.9.

good; the loyalty of the masses comes from benefiting them. Kang cited numerous historical cases of kings not only gaining and retaining power in this way, but also converting entire populations—to Buddhism in the case of the Liang, to Western customs in the case of the Meiji emperor, and even to various changes of fashion. Kang was thus talking about a good deal more than what we normally mean by political power.

Rulers need to possess an understanding of history and the models of the past, techniques of administration, a sense of priorities, and the ability to assess the present situation. Kang here promoted an activist style of ruling. Although the "mind that cannot bear suffering" lies at the root of government, rulers cannot be merciful to evildoers. Citing Ming Taizu's (r. 1368–99) harsh treatment of malfeasance, Kang praised the Ming founder's love of the people in this regard. First, the system must be reformed, and only then can one "nourish the people with magnanimity."²⁴ Then will ordinary people obey the laws, the talented rush forward to prove their merit, and culture flourish. The powers of the ruler will be virtually unlimited. He can encourage and nourish talent; build schools; spread knowledge; develop infrastructure, industry, commerce, and farming; train armies; and clarify the rites and music (or government). When the nation thereupon becomes wealthy and strong, domestically customs will be uplifted and externally foreigners will be subjugated. This will be the time to "avenge the anger and shame of our ancestors, recover China's culture (*shengjiao* 聖教), preserve the sacred relations (*shenglun* 聖倫) from imminent destruction, and save the kingship (*wangjiao* 王教) from gradual disintegration."²⁵

Passages such as these can be understood in terms of the Confucian statecraft tradition, as Hao Chang suggests,²⁶ or of Legalist influences, as San-pao Li suggests.²⁷ Both are present, and Kang's faith in what we may call behaviorism is obvious. The point here, however, is that Kang exalted not so much the monarchy as power—or, more precisely, transformative power—itself. It is true that he associated this power with the traditional

24. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 169.

25. *Ibid.*, 1: 170.

26. Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals*, pp. 26–27.

27. Li Sanbao (San-pao Li) 李三寶, ed. and trans., "Kangzi Neiwaipian chubu fenxi—Kang Nanhai xiancun zuizao zuopin" 康子內外篇初步分析—康南海現存最早作品 (An analysis of the Esoteric and Exoteric Essays of Master Kang—the earliest extant writings of Kang Youwei), *Qinghua xuebao* 11, no. 12 (Dec. 1975): 217.

kingship represented by both the Yao-Shun ideal and the historical dynasts. This led Kang to assert the supremacy of the monarch, and his prose is redolent, in the final analysis, of the Confucian ideal of the "kingly way," which was associated with the glorification of imperial institutions. Nonetheless, as in mainstream Confucianism, his final concern is the welfare of the people and the morality of rule. The kingship is instrumental in that sense; it is historically determined, and there is little indication in these passages that Kang treated it as rooted in the nature of the cosmos. He has preserved the omnipotent, almost magical, kingship but separated it from its old moorings. A later essay in the volume perhaps clarifies this point. Kang borrowed the second-century B.C. thinker Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 distinction between benevolence (*ren*), associated with others, and righteousness (*yi*), associated with the self.²⁸ But unlike Dong, Kang emphasized the contradictory aspects of the two virtues—benevolence representing regard for others, unselfishness, and egalitarianism; and righteousness, self-regard and hierarchy. The traditional Chinese reverence for the ruler over the subject, the male over the female, and the good over the base all represented "righteousness"; more to the point, they should be replaced with more egalitarian attitudes. Kang thus clearly preferred benevolence and even the Mohist "universal love" (*jian'ai* 兼愛) and Buddhist egalitarianism to the traditional Confucian regard for righteousness. In regard to the monarchy, he concluded that a king should behave with universal love even though the people could be self-regarding.²⁹ The moral responsibilities of the ruler thus demanded his administrative perfection; equally, rulership was infused with moral meaning.

Kang was concerned with the history of governing insofar as it offered models of imperial decisiveness; he showed no such interest in institutions. The monarch must be devoted to the welfare of the nation and that in turn required fundamental, sweeping change. Change, in turn, was dictated by and must be in accord with circumstances and trends, even while it was the test of leadership. Kang simultaneously suggested that in some ultimate sense the monarch and the people were equal but that for the time being the king stood far above the nation. Kang's activist emperor possessed charisma in the sense of having almost-but-not-quite magical powers. Kang did not

28. Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 1: 187–88.

29. *Ibid.*, 1: 189.

discuss Yao, Shun, or later dynasts as anything but human, but because these particular men "could understand the trends and penetrate into people's minds" and because they knew the "methods of power," they could accomplish anything.³⁰ This was ultimately a moral and even spiritual vision of leadership, however, because Kang firmly planted the monarchy in the soil of benevolence and selflessness. If there seems to be a contradiction between what in the end boils down to a fairly traditional conception of the monarchy and a strong egalitarianism, this was resolved for Kang in the stringent moral demands he placed on the monarchy as a personal institution.

Yet any sense of an actual emperor's personality disappears under the weight of the responsibility Kang assigned to him. If imperial charisma for Kang, as noted above, derived from skills of an incredible order, another part came from the mind-and-heart rooted in benevolence. Kang wrote as a would-be advisor or prime minister to the king, and there is much in his approach, in terms of both style and substance, that had a long Confucian pedigree. His rhetoric is heightened so that the ruler is discussed in an exalted language. Kang's ruler was, in his capacities, greater than an ordinary individual who happened to hold a certain post, but he was also less than an ordinary human, stripped of desires and required to deny himself ordinary pleasures and self-regard. Yet the ruler nonetheless remained an individual: in no sense was the power of the collectivity immanent in him. What Kang made him was the sole, personal focus of sovereignty.

In these early essays, Kang did not separate the state from the person of the ruler nor, for all Kang's egalitarianism, did he treat the people with any great respect. If anything, it was their duty to be passively transformed; after that, they conceivably might form a nation. Kang's thought moved in two separate directions. He desired fundamental reform, including reform of the monarchy, even as he would strengthen the institution, not least by recalling its cultural resources to it. Kang maintained a "more or less conciliatory attitude toward the existing political order,"³¹ and he justified this with a synthesis of Confucian statecraft and Legalist ideas. Kang's thinking was divided not so much between conservative and radical tendencies, for Kang felt no conflicts between different goals and his radical vision was moored safely

30. *Ibid.*, 1: 165.

31. Hsiao, *A Modern China*, pp. 80-81.

to the future, as between means and ends.³² For all practical (immediate) purposes, he could not envision a Chinese state except as the creature of the emperor. Yet, as Young-tsu Wong has pointed out, Kang's main concern in these texts was not to exalt the ruler but to press for reform. In other words, Kang's stress on the powers of the emperor was a recognition of the historical reality that reforms could be legislated only from the top.³³

However, there is no direct contradiction between the view that Kang exalted the emperor and the view that he remained firmly committed to fundamental reform; in other words, Kang was neither a hypocrite cynically using an emperor he reduced to a tool nor was he a mental slave of the traditional imperial ideology. It is true that a careful, literal reading of the *Eso-teric and Exoteric Essays of Master Kang* shows Kang to be describing, not praising; yet, on the other hand, what Kang describes—in lyrical prose—is an essentially charismatic kingship. Indeed, Kang's vision of an activist emperor was at odds with the mainstream of imperial Confucianism, which, generally speaking, promoted a more passive sage-ruler. Nonetheless, Kang was within the mainstream in portraying the emperor's moral and cosmic authority even while he clearly condemned autocratic power as outside the bounds of the Confucian value of benevolence or the Mohist-Western value of universal love. Whatever Kang "really" thought of the origins and institution of the monarchy, he portrayed it in terms that ranged from "artificial" to "sacred" and from dysfunctional to both moral and powerful. We should also remember that he was to invest the efforts of a lifetime in Guangxu and the Chinese monarchy.

For Kang, there was nothing incongruous about combining the "traditional" monarchy with reform—any more than building progress on the past ever need seem strange. In retrospect, we may isolate tensions in Kang's

32. In this sense, I cannot agree with Hao Chang's (*Chinese Intellectuals*, pp. 29–34) emphasis on the dichotomy between radicalism and conservatism in Kang, but the distinction he notes between the political and moral layers of Kang's thought is extremely useful.

33. See Wang Rongzu, "Wuxue sasui yicheng," p. 58; idem, *Kang Youwei*, pp. 63–90. Wang thus criticized Hao Chang's and Richard Howard's emphasis on Kang's "conservatism" in this regard. Howard ("K'ang You-wei [1858–1927]: His Intellectual Background and Early Thought," in *Confucian Personalities*, ed. Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett, pp. 294–316 [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962]) stated that Kang saw the monarchy as valid and the emperor as magical. See also Chang (*Chinese Intellectuals*, p. 29): Kang "spoke expansively not only of the cultural glories of the Chinese tradition, but also of the irresistible, absolute moral authority of the Chinese emperor."

thought, but the direction he gave the reform movement of 1898 directly contributed to what we may call political modernity. First, his stress on activism and wholesale, transformative change was a profound challenge to the status quo. The modernist project of rebuilding society was, for Kang, to be accomplished through the cosmological kingship. Whether, for Kang, its powers stemmed from Heaven or the imagination of the people need not detain us here; rhetorically, at least, traditional kingship was alive and well. Yet, second, a possibly unintended but necessary consequence of Kang's conception of the Chinese emperor was to show that rulership itself could be consciously reformulated. The search for the roots of monarchism led not merely to its exaltation but also to its moral purpose. The implication that an immoral—or simply passive—monarchy was not legitimate did not have to be made explicit, but it could not be ignored. It remains true, however, that if Kang could reconcile such disparate views—Confucianism, statecraft thinking, Legalism, even Mohism—within an ideal kingship, he had less to say about the institutions that might support reform. Rulership for Kang lay in meeting challenges, creating (undefined) institutions, and overcoming danger.

During the 1890s, Kang did, of course, have much to say about specific institutional reform, and he cannot be accused of ignoring the issue for long.³⁴ Indeed, the association between the New Text school and statecraft interests from the early nineteenth century virtually guaranteed that Kang, who emerged from this tradition, would pay a great deal of attention to institutions. His radical claims for Confucius "as a reformer," for the "three ages" as an evolutionary scheme, and for a re-reading of the entire Confucian tradition shocked a generation but established the intellectual basis for sweeping political and social reforms. He explicitly linked the Age of Disorder with the absolute monarchy, the Age of Approaching Peace with constitutional monarchy, and the Age of Universal Peace with republicanism. At best, monarchism might be associated with the Age of Approaching Peace. As a long-civilized nation, though one still far short of perfection, China needed a constitutional monarchy that recognized the people's rights.

Kang's views of the monarchy in the mid- and late 1890s contrasted in significant ways with his earlier views. Like other reformist thinkers, he treated a parliament as a means for promoting national unity and connecting

34. Hsiao, *A Modern China*; Kong Xiangji, *Kang Youwei bianfa zouyi yanjiu*; Wang Rongzu, *Kang Youwei*.

ruler and people, but Kang also offered a picture of the emperor outside politics and administration yet no longer above the nation. At the beginning of the hundred days, Kang memorialized the emperor to establish a parliament, so that "the ruler and the citizens discuss the nation's politics and laws together."³⁵ He advocated the separation of powers: the parliament makes the laws, legal officials adjudicate them, and the government administers them. What, then, does an emperor do? "The ruler remains in general charge" (*renzhu zongzhi* 人主總之). Not only did Kang thus preach the doctrine of Western-style constitutional monarchy, but he also clearly implied that the emperor, although establishing the constitution, is also subject to it. Under such a system, the government "represents" the emperor, who is sacred but without responsibility and (thus?) forms "one body" with all the citizens.

Rulership here is attenuated and edging toward the symbolic rather than practical. Nonetheless, Kang claimed that this was a recipe for strengthening China, just as autocracy had proved to weaken the country. In his famous but undelivered "second memorial" to the throne of May 1895 opposing the proposed peace terms with Japan, Kang had complained of the growing gaps between ruler and officials and the officials and people.³⁶ This charge had long been fundamental to the reformist position, but later Kang elaborated in another memorial: a unified country was strong and orderly, whereas autocracy led to a system in which the people paid their taxes but did not participate in government, fought with one another, and thought only of their own benefit.³⁷ The lesson Kang drew was that unity and assimilation under the great umbrella of benevolence would prevent ethnic strife, at least on the political level. Kang thus implied that the institution of a parliament (or constitutionalism generally) would unite not only ruler and people but also the people themselves.

He cited the usual mythical sage-kings (Huangdi, Yao, Shun) to show that in ancient times China had been governed with a democratic spirit

35. Kang Youwei 康有為, "Qing ding lixian kaiguohui zhe" 請定立憲開國會摺 (Memorial requesting the establishment of a constitution and parliament), in Jian Bocan 翦伯贊, *Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法 (The reform movement of 1898) (Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguangshe, 1953), 2: 236–37.

36. Kang Youwei 康有為, "Shang Qing di di er shu" 上清帝第二書 (Second memorial to the Qing emperor), in Jian Bocan, *Wuxu bianfa*, 2: 152.

37. Kang Youwei 康有為, "Qing jun min hezhi Man Han bufen zhe" 請君民合治滿漢不分摺 (Memorial requesting the joint rule of ruler and people and the joining of the Manchu and Han peoples), in Jian Bocan, *Wuxu bianfa*, 2: 238.

but—tellingly—noted that the ancient kings had lacked the institution of a parliament to assure cooperation between ruler and people. Kang praised the emperor for being willing to give up power if it would benefit China,³⁸ while at the same time he repeatedly promised the Guangxu emperor that his sacred rule (*shengzhi* 聖治) would surpass that of the earlier rulers and even spread beyond China itself. Given his views of Chinese history and culture, as well as the political needs of the reform movement at its height in the summer of 1898, Kang had no choice but to emphasize monarchical power (*junquan*). In a June memorial, for example, Kang used language reminiscent of the “Hebi pian” 闕闕篇, reminding the emperor of his “inexhaustible powers,” his duty to take action, and his ability to change customs and arouse the people.³⁹ The Guangxu emperor’s powers in fact were quickly exhausted. No notion of imperial charisma could survive 1898. Reformers—and revolutionaries—thus turned increasingly to various sorts of secular, popular organization to build a more open and contestatory politics in the wake of the hundred days and, in the process, relocated the myth of sovereignty to “the people.”

Liang Qichao and Reforming the Monarchy

In the mid- and late 1890s, Liang Qichao used Kang’s evolutionary notion of the Three Ages to explain the historical role of the monarchy. Kang’s most important disciple, Liang would begin to break away from Kang after they were forced into exile in the autumn of 1898, but at this time he was still a close follower. Already a prominent spokesman for reform in his own right, Liang had also begun his wide reading in Western history and politics.⁴⁰ In an essay written on the eve of the hundred days entitled “Reasons for the Replacement of the Monarchy by Democracy” (“Lun junzheng minzheng xiangshan zhi li” 論君政民政相嬗之理), Liang equated the monarchy not with the Age of Disorder (as had Kang at times) but with the following Age of Lesser Peace; democracy in his scheme marks the Age of Universal Peace.⁴¹ Liang thus moved China further up the ladder of political evolution

38. Kang Youwei, “Qing ding lixian kaiguohui zhe,” 2: 237.

39. Kang Youwei 康有為, *Kang Youwei zhenglunji* 康有為政論集 (Collected political writings of Kang Youwei), ed. Tang Zhijun 湯志鈞 (Zhonghua shuju, Beijing, 1981), 1: 277; cf. Hsiao, *A Modern China*, pp. 208.

40. Chang, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao*, pp. 59–72.

41. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 2: 7–11.

than had Kang, and constitutional monarchy disappeared as an independent stage. In Liang's imaginary of origins, the Age of Disorder was marked by "multiple lords," by which he meant both tribal and feudal-aristocratic systems. Monarchism thus represented a higher stage of civilization than feudalism.⁴² Liang completely junked the sage-king founders of Chinese civilization here and replaced them with warring tribal chieftains, cruel lords, harsh punishments, high taxes, a caste system, and even slavery. Confucius, however, emerged to lead China to the next stage of civilization by criticizing the hereditary lords, promoting independent farmers, and even envisioning the final Universal Peace. Thus was China rescued by the "uncrowned king" (*suwang* 素王) from the worst excesses of aristocratic misgovernment and made strong by the recruitment of the talented into a national bureaucracy. Liang felt that disunity led to weakness since rulers pursue their selfish interests (*jun zhi siyu* 君之私有) by encouraging their peoples to fight one another. That is why unitary kingship represented at least a "lesser peace" that saw relatively little warfare and other disturbances.

Liang thus followed Kang's New Text-derived adulation of Confucius. This provided the basic operating framework of his reformism, although Liang already showed signs of a more pragmatic, even hard-headed approach. He also believed (like Kang) in a kind of historical determinism: there was no use in pushing history faster than it could move, but when the time was right, trying to stop progress was futile. Yet Liang was already publicly postulating a new kind of relationship between ruler and people. Democracy was essentially a higher stage of unity for Liang, related both to communal property (*gongchan* 公產) and popular unity (*hezong* 合衆); indeed, his essay "Grouping" ("Shuo qun xu" 說群序) began by emphasizing that the ruler should be "a member of the same group as the people."⁴³ Still, the point here is that once a particular stage is reached, no country can revert to a simpler, less advanced political form. What, then, of contemporary

42. With a considerable degree of historical justification, Liang classified ancient Athens as an aristocratic slave state, not a democracy, thus saving his evolutionary scheme and allowing him to claim equivalence between China and the West in terms of ancient historical development. Liang argued that both the ancient Mediterranean world and the ancient Chinese states of Xia and Shang contained some of the seeds of democracy, but neither developed them. However, in a letter to Yan Fu, Liang explicitly condemned attempts to find equivalence between China and the West ("Yu Yan Youling xiansheng shu" 與嚴幼陵先生書, in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 108).

43. Ibid., 2: 2-3; see Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, pp. 95-107.

political forms? In what stage was China and the world today? The vision of a world beyond China was important, for Liang emphasized that the laws of history were universal. Broadly speaking, it made no sense that some parts of the world would be significantly advanced over others. Thus Liang argued that even republics like the United States and France were not in fact approaching the Age of Universal Peace, since major powers like Britain, Russia, and, for that matter, China were still monarchies and significant portions of the globe remained mired in tribal forms. The world as a whole, marked by selfish struggles among nations, was thus a world of chaos. The stage of Universal Peace might be far, far in the future.⁴⁴ If Westerners had realized the virtues of public-mindedness, they still had not eliminated the selfish struggles among nations, families, and individuals. Liang concluded: China needed the West's knowledge of legal matters but only (China's) "laws of the sages" could finally civilize the whole world ("China Should Seek Legal Knowledge" ["Lun Zhongguo yi jiangqiu falü zhi xue" 論中國宜講求法律之學]).⁴⁵

In the meantime, however, what of China's monarchy? When was democracy to replace it? Liang was not to answer these questions directly in the years leading up to 1898. In fact, he vacillated between sharp criticism of the monarchy and a call for popular participation in government on the one hand and an appreciation of the special powers of the monarch and skepticism about the abilities of the Chinese people on the other. Like Kang, Liang judged rulership itself on the basis of ultimate or moral standards, but he emphasized public-mindedness (*gong*), which was conceptually related to the practical question of grouping, rather than benevolence (*ren*), which remained open to a more spiritual interpretation. Liang maintained his loyalty

44. Liang's new awareness of the international context and "global consciousness" undoubtedly led to a sense of local difference, but his sense of temporal progress remained universal; that is, if the West was "ahead" of China, this was not because it had a unique historical trajectory. China would catch up quickly since world historical trends mandated change (or else—without reform, extinction). He cited Kang Youwei's notion that the West was 80–90 percent civilized whereas China was 10–20 percent; neither had completed the evolutionary trajectory ("Yu Yan Youling xiansheng shu," in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 109; cf. Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996]; and Rebecca E. Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 [Oct. 1998]: 1096–118).

45. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 93–94.

to the monarchy as an institution, the Qing dynasty specifically, and to Confucianism (*baojiao* 保教), but his political critique grew increasingly sharp and even bitter.

Liang's case for the monarchy was made most convincingly in his first major essay, "A General Discussion of Reform" ("Bianfa tongyi" 變法通議), published serially in 1896–97.⁴⁶ Basically, this work assumed the existence of the monarchy rather than arguing for it; nonetheless, this assumption led Liang to assign an essential role to the emperor. He argued for the necessity and desirability of change, opposing the conservative prejudice against changing the "inviolable" ways of former kings. "Those who cannot create laws are not sages, and those who cannot act according to the times are not sages." Indeed, this applies not only to the founders of new dynasties but to all rulers. Without change, inertia will lead to weakness, but if leaders consider their faults and change, "this is renewal of the kingship" (*si wei xinwang yi* 斯爲新王矣).⁴⁷ In this sense, Liang was following Kang's early insistence on an activist kingship and emphasizing the historical innovations—in response to the trends of the day—of dynasts from the earliest times through the Qing itself. Liang considered this responsiveness to be the essence of sagehood, and if Kang claimed Confucius as a reformer and the founder of Ming as a sage, Liang added the Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Yongzheng (r. 1723–35) emperors to the list. Replying, in effect, to the conservative charge that the reformers were slavish imitators of the West, Liang proclaimed that a characteristic of sages was that they felt no shame in learning from others. Nonetheless, Liang's ultimate goals remained conservative in their own way. He demanded "improvements" in order to preserve the nation, the race, and Confucianism. He challenged neither the institution of the monarchy nor the Qing's right to rule.

Another Kang disciple and a fellow student with Liang Qichao, Mai Menghua, wrote even more explicitly in favor of a disciplinary state. In his essay "Should China Follow Monarchical Power or Democracy?" ("Lun Zhongguo yi zun junquan yi minquan" 論中國宜尊君權抑民權), Mai praised the monarchy as the best way to achieve reform.⁴⁸ Mai, who was one

46. Ibid., I: 1–92.

47. Ibid., I: 4, 1.

48. Mai Menghua 麥孟華, "Lun Zhongguo yi zun junquan yi minquan" 論中國宜尊君權抑民權 (Should China follow monarchical power or democracy?), in Jian Bocan, *Wuxu bianfa*, 3: 111–13.

of the most active proponents of reform, argued that the essence of sovereignty (*daquan* 大權) lay in the "ability to create a political system, to establish new precedents, and to kill people or let them live." For Mai, power was indivisible. The key point was not that the Chinese people were backward, although this was a consideration, but that (legitimate) power stemmed from the top and attended to the needs of the people. Mai's analogies were to the way individuals ran their own lives—unless they lost control—or the way family heads ran their families—unless they allowed the servants to take over. When kings command the empire, the people depend on them; if rulers lose power, however, then corrupt officials will emerge, and the nation will lack the (sovereign) power it needs to survive. "Democracy," according to Mai, describes a situation in which rebels emerge and all seize power for themselves. This disaster occurs when the king neglects his duties and loses or gives up his power.

Mai did not rule out the possibility that democracy might be workable, but he thought this course would be practical only after the entire population was properly equipped to manage its own affairs. Meanwhile, at least, China needed discipline like that found in the Western nations with their population registers, efficient tax systems, compulsory education, health and safety regulations, meritocratic civil services, and stable currencies. Mai looked to the West and saw not freedom but efficiency, order, and unity. He looked at China and saw laxity, corruption, and favoritism. The Confucian family model of government remained the core of Mai's political thinking, but this was a paternalism more severe than kindly. As in the contemporary West, "The Former Kings ruled by taking the people as their children and themselves as parents and taking the people as their students and themselves as teachers." They made all the decisions for the people. In effect, Mai urged that this model be applied to contemporary China, which was suffering from a lack of monarchical power.

It might be argued that Mai's "monarchical power" is close to a notion of state sovereignty rather than specifically tied to personalized power. Aside from the single reference to the Former Kings, Mai did not celebrate the monarchical institution in anything like the terms Kang used in some of his early essays. Mai presumably understood that the actual rulers of the Western nations were not themselves kings, however much power they had. Perhaps Mai in some sense foresaw a split between duties and power on the one hand, which he celebrated, and a potentially symbolic kingship on the other.

If so, however, this represented a step Mai himself did not take. Mai offered no defense of even bad rule, but he was like Hobbes in his desire to locate sovereignty at a clear and specific point. It is hard to imagine a more specific point than a single ruler. The activist ruler is theorized in Mai's writings not through charisma but through administrative power.

Liang's concerns were broader. The theme of unity emerged more clearly in Liang than that of discipline or administration. Liang demanded cooperation and an end to discrimination between the Manchu and Han peoples. The corollary to this was to end divisions between ruler and people. Both propositions rested on the assumption of the "great principle of making the empire public" (*gong tianxia zhi dayi* 公天下之大義).⁴⁹ In trying to prove that the Manchus had nothing to fear and much to gain from reform, Liang did not treat the Qing emperor as a Manchu king. Rather, the emperor was a kind of embodiment or symbol of the group. The meaning of "group" (*qun* 群), for Liang, was based more on history and culture than on "race." The group, in turn, was a nation defined by the state rather than ethnicity. The historical role of the monarchy in uniting state and nation was critical. Liang praised the putatively reformist tendencies of the present emperor ("sagacious, benevolent, indomitable, and open-minded") and cited the historical contrast between the English and French revolutions in regard to the monarchy. The English kings—in Liang's view—compromised with popular demands, and so the imperial system survived and England had peace, prosperity, and an empire. In France, however, monarchical and aristocratic obduracy had led to disaster. In other words, China's national unity depended on reform rather than revolution, moderation and compromise rather than extremism, and monarchism rather than republicanism.

These remarks serve to confirm the general view of Liang's politics at this time. He was cautious, reformist, antirevolutionary, and committed to gradual change within the existing system. But the worldview that underlay his political position was increasingly radical. Aside from his growing sympathies with racial analysis, there can be no doubt that for Liang the monarchy had already become somewhat attenuated. For all his rhetorical flourishes, and for that matter for all his skepticism about the capabilities of the Chinese people as such, he nonetheless looked outside the monarchy for the main motive force for reform. Specifically, Liang seemed to place most of his hopes in the gentry-activists (*zhishi* 志士), and a great deal of "A General

49. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 80.

Discussion of Reform" focused on institutional reforms in the areas of education, the civil service, and the role of the gentry. There is a sense of both top-down, court-derived reforms and bottom-up, popular changes. Nonetheless, Liang retained a real fascination with the charisma of the monarchy. Given China's great population, abundant minerals, fertile soils, and intelligent people, "when monarchical power is uniform (*junquan tongyi* 君權統一), the emperor need fear no obstacles to whatever he wishes to establish."⁵⁰

Liang also had to support the monarchy for lack of other options. Democracy or republicanism he considered premature, given the backwardness of the Chinese people, whom he called "ignorant" and "weak" although certainly educable.⁵¹ Orderly, top-down reforms were necessary to avoid the kind of disorder that revolutionary plots threatened. Thus, in his short essay "An Examination of Ancient Parliaments" ("*Gu yiyuan kao*" 古議院考), Liang presented the institution in terms long familiar to the reform movement: not as an institution that allowed policy to be made by the people but as a technique of "uniting" the ruler and the people in order to concentrate their powers.⁵² Although Liang praised parliaments for allowing the efficient separation of legislative from administrative functions, his tone remained paternalistic, and he praised kings who ruled by discovering what the people wanted.

Nonetheless, Liang indulged in some sharp attacks on the institution of kingship itself, most frankly in a letter to Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853–1921). Although he denied that China's history was fundamentally inferior to that of

50. *Ibid.*, 1: 4.

51. *Ibid.*, 1: 80, 110. It is sometimes suggested that "democracy" and "popular power" in writings from this period actually refer to what might be called "gentry democracy"; however, although it is true that the publicists of the 1898 generation advocated nothing like universal suffrage and could not imagine giving the vote to porters and maids (any more than could their Victorian counterparts in Britain), nonetheless "popular power" was certainly not restricted to gentry (*shenshi* 紳士) in the legal sense of the term but to educated men (*shi* 士) broadly defined. The operative dichotomy was not between elite and populace but between those who were officials and those who were not, although of course the late Qing's educated stratum wished to educate the masses before allowing them political participation (Li Xiaoti 李孝悌, *Qingmo minchu de xiacengshehui qimeng yundong, 1901–1911* 清末民初下層社會啓蒙運動 [The enlightenment movement for lower-class society in the late Qing, 1901–11] [Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, Jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1992]). In turn, their advocacy of popular education, although scarcely new in the Confucian tradition, also demonstrated their ultimate commitment to democracy.

52. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 95–96.

the West, Liang accepted Yan's judgment that the reasons for the decline of the "yellow race" boiled down to rulership (*junzhu*).⁵³ Furthermore: "The strength of a country stems ultimately from democracy. This is the nature of democracy. Monarchism is simply selfishness (*si*), whereas democracy is simply public-mindedness (*gong*). 'Public-mindedness' is the ultimate standard of governance, whereas 'selfishness' is rooted in humanity."⁵⁴ In equating the monarchy with selfishness, Liang was not, however, issuing a blanket condemnation. He urged that a balance be struck between *gong* and *si*. Excessive self-suppression (*keji* 克己) could lead to self-destruction, and selfishness was, after all, natural. Liang started with the proposition that the Chinese people were still ignorant and aimless. To unify them, they needed to be given a goal that was already popular. Such a goal could be gradually broadened until the people learned to trust the reformers (and finally themselves?). The question was whether under the immediate circumstances it was or was not the role of "monarchical power" to transform them.

The ancient dichotomy between *gong* and *si* was central to Liang's views of the monarchy.⁵⁵ It was also related to another reformist assumption. The reformers tended at times to dismiss China's entire post-Qin history as a kind of wrong turn, a 2,000-year detour. One point was to use the ancient past to attack the recent past, but more was involved as well. To denigrate the Han and the Tang along with the traditionally despised Qin was to attack, above all, a particular form of dynastic rule. If the relationship between Confucianism and monarchism, as between the gentry and the court, had never been entirely easy, still the reformers were attacking imperial Confucianism as it had developed over centuries. This is, of course, one reason why conservatives and even less radical reformers were so shocked by Kang and Liang. The only form of kingship that generations had known was at stake. Referring to the pre-Qin past, Liang proclaimed: "The Former Kings treated the empire with public-mindedness, and thus did they manage affairs. Later ages treated the empire with selfishness, and thus they avoided problems."⁵⁶

What Liang meant, as he explained in "China's Weaknesses Are Due to Avoiding Problems," was that the duty of rulers was to take care of the people actively, not simply to try to maintain the status quo and ignore real

53. Ibid., 1: 108.

54. Ibid., 1: 109; cf. Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, pp. 104-5.

55. Huang Kewu, "Cong zhuiqiu zhengdao."

56. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 96.

problems. The attitude of "avoiding problems" arose from selfishness.⁵⁷ As rulers became isolated and ignorant, chasms developed, and the ruler treated his officials like animals, and officials regarded the ruler as a common man. For 2,000 years, laws became stricter as politics and education declined, and "monarchical power became ever more exalted" (*junquan ze rizun* 君權則日尊) as national prestige decreased. People were left helpless; oppressors (*minzei* 民賊) intensified their exploitation.⁵⁸ The entire system, in Liang's reading, became more and more elaborate, with the emperor isolated from the people and the bureaucrats tripping over one another. This he naturally contrasted with ancient times when the rulers of the various kingdoms (*guo* 國), large and small, were all close to the people and unified under the emperor (*ge qin qi min er shang tong yu tianzi* 各親其民而上統於天子).

If much of Liang's critique derived from long-standing Confucian criticisms of the monarchy, his reading of Chinese history also led him to praise emperors who appointed commoners to advise them and went on tours to make contact with the people. That emperors should seek and heed advice was scarcely a new idea. That their failure to do so would lead not merely to mistakes but to the depletion of the popular spirit (*minqi* 民氣) and ultimately the weakening of the state rested on a sense of the utility of popular activism—the converse of imperial "selfishness." Again, the issue that lay behind Liang's immediate concerns was the problem of grouping (*qun*). In this vein, he also critically noted the tendency of the ancient emperors to call themselves "I, the one man," to separate themselves from the people.⁵⁹

In contrast to the weak nations of selfish monarchs, strong nations of citizens are formed when the people exercise their rights or powers (*quan* 權).⁶⁰ Such powers cannot be exercised by one person, since no one is strong

57. *Ibid.*, 1: 99.

58. *Ibid.*, 1: 96.

59. *Ibid.*, 2: 3–4.

60. *Ibid.*, 1: 99. There is a good deal of ambiguity in this use of *quan*, which was coming to mean "rights" but still retained strong overtones of "power." For different perspectives, see Roger Ames, "Rites as Rights: The Confucian Alternative," in *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, pp. 119–216 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Neo-Confucianism and Human Rights," in *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, pp. 183–98; and Stephen C. Angle, "Did Someone Say 'Rights'? Liu Shipei's Concept of *Quanli*," *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 4 (Oct. 1998): 623–51. Liang here seems to mean something like legitimately held powers, that is,

or wise enough for such responsibilities. The "Former Kings" thus understood that equality was essential. Yet, again, Liang does not condemn selfishness totally. He seems to derive rights from the Western doctrine of autonomy (*zizhu zhi quan* 自主之權) and acknowledges that autonomy, with its emphasis on duties and rewards, represents a kind of selfishness. Without this selfishness, citizens would have no basis on which to exercise their rights. As long as no one seizes the rights of others, these rights accumulate to form a strong nation.⁶¹ Such rights should not be subject to struggle, which harms others, nor can they be neglected, which harms oneself. If neither the emperor nor the people are willing to assume responsibility, the result is disaster. Yet if one party pushes the struggle for power to the utmost selfishness, this situation, too, results in powerlessness.

An even sharper defense of popular power, "Reform of the Various Nations Stems from the People" ("Lun dadi geguo bianfa jie you min qi" 論大地各國變法皆由民起),⁶² was penned by Ou Qujia 歐榘甲 (1858-1912), another of Kang's disciples. Like Wang Kangnian, Liang Qichao, and even Kang Youwei, Ou cited the advantages of communication and unity between high and low. However, this did not mean that Ou believed China was ready for democracy; indeed, he, too, followed the hoary family model of government and emphasized the ruler's dual roles in taking care of the people and maintaining order. Ou defined the ruler in terms of his ability to unite the people (*neng qunmin wei zhi jun* 能群民謂之王). The ruler formed "one body" with the people, representing the collectivity (*min zhi ji* 民之積), and was himself constituted by combining all the people (*he zhongmin er chengjun* 合衆民而成君), just as in physics bodies are composed by combining particles or as nations are formed by combining ethnic groups. At the same time, Ou drew a distinction between ruler and the "king." The king does not actively unite the people but seems to draw them to himself: "those

not civil or negative rights (e.g., the right not to be tortured) but the positive rights of citizens to speak out and to participate in political events. Such rights are, after all, powers of a sort.

61. We may thus conclude that even the radical reformers of 1898 were still operating consciously and unconsciously within a Confucian framework; however, Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-98) did directly attack the three bonds (*san'gang*); for the political import of this, see Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals*, pp. 93-103.

62. Ou Qujia 歐榘甲, "Lun dadi geguo bianfa jie you min qi" 論大地各國變法皆由民起 (Reform of the various nations stems from the people), in Jian Bocan, *Wuxu bianfa*, 3: 152-56.

to whom the people come are called king" (*min suo guiwang wei zhi wang* 民所歸往謂之王).⁶³

Ou's approach to the monarchy, emphasizing national integration even more than the "wealth and power" of the state, comes close to Liang Qichao's position at the time but without Liang's counterbalancing criticisms of the monarchical institution. Where Ou went beyond the other reformers, however, was in the lessons he drew from China's immediate dire circumstances. If the king had lost power, like a father who could no longer feed or educate his children, the solution lay not in some attempt to revive long-lost institutions but in creating new ones. With proper education and ethics, the people themselves could be energized to renew the nation. Reform in China was the responsibility of the people, not the leaders. Logically enough, Ou concluded that the people were therefore to blame for the failure to reform. Similarly, the political successes of the West were attributable to the people, not the rulers. But Ou was caught in a trap, unable to suggest how to get from here to there. He had no faith in China's historic institutions, although he found much of the traditional sage-king model attractive. He had no faith in the people as presently constituted, although he could imagine no other source of fundamental change. He took some hope in the historical fact that the peoples of the West were once equally backward, but he noted that Chinese culture could hardly revive while China was being enslaved by those very same Western Powers.

Sages and Kings

The reformist ideology—and its views of kingship—derived from the New Text tradition as reshaped by Kang Youwei, who turned Confucius into a leader and prophet. Liang not only used Kang's evolutionary understanding of the Three Ages to make sense of the impending transition to democracy, but in his "An Interpretation of the Spring and Autumn Annals" ("Du Chunqiu jieshuo" 讀《春秋》界說), he also exalted Confucius as the "uncrowned king" (*suwang*).⁶⁴ The point here is that Liang separated sagehood from the

63. The locus classicus for this remark is the *Guliang* commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Guliang zhuan*, Zhuang Gong, third year): *wangzhe min zhi suo guiwang ye* 王者民之所歸往也。

64. Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Du Chunqiu jieshuo" 讀《春秋》界說 (Interpreting the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), in *Jieshuo Liang Qichao zhaxue sixiang lunwenxuan* 界說梁啟超哲學

monarchy and clearly valued the former more highly; at the same time, the purpose of the sage was to help the king. Specifically, Liang explained the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as Confucius' attempt to "carry out the matters of the emperor" at a time of general decline, that is, to reform the age. Now, how could Confucius, a mere commoner, speak of such matters as rituals and regulations? Because being a sage, he understood the need to save the world from chaos and to clarify universal principles (*gongli* 公理).⁶⁵ Confucius' means was to influence and "use" the king. Charges that Confucius sought to usurp power were mistaken—although Confucius surely could have gained power if he had wanted to. Although Liang would seem to be implying that both sages and kings were necessary, his main point was that Confucius possessed the "great virtue and magnificent achievements of a founder of a teaching."

Liang also noted that Confucius was a lawgiver. His greatness resided in his use of laws to establish order in the Age of Disorder, as well as in looking ahead to the laws for the ages of Approaching Peace and Universal Peace.⁶⁶ Today, Liang urged, China needed to pursue the study of the law because it was through laws that the group was linked together to form a political community. Intelligent emperors in the past had recognized this truth, but it was a wisdom that had been forgotten after the Qin; even as the population increased, laws were simplified, and no attempt was made to keep them up to date. Turning to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Liang claimed its emphasis on rites (*li* 禮) was the equivalent of universal principles or truths (*gongli*), which in the West were used to circumscribe power.

Thus for Liang what distinguished Chinese civilization was not the institution of the monarchy but the perfection of sagehood. The sage possessed many of the attributes of the king. He was a lawgiver and retained great charismatic powers, influencing events as he recognized and responded to contemporary trends. Nonetheless, the sage worked only through indirection, and Liang never imagined that sages were so plentiful that they could replace real kings. Liang's criticisms of the monarchy as an institution and his respect for democracy stand out more clearly than Kang's at this time, although the two men agreed that the emperor had to lead the neces-

思想論文集 (Selected writings defining Liang Qichao's philosophical thought), ed. Ge Mao-chun 葛懋春 and Jiang Jun 蔣俊, pp. 19–28 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1984).

65. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

66. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: wenji*, 1: 93.

sary reforms to create a more democratic order. But much more clearly than Kang, Liang linked the Chinese emperor with the nation or "group." The dichotomies shifted as well. If Kang's emperor was to be *benevolent* rather than *righteous* and Liang's emperor was to be *public-minded* rather than *selfish*, what change has occurred? The key factor was probably Kang's universalism. Although Kang certainly stressed the need for reforms to make China strong, he still spoke largely in terms of the universal, cosmic kingship. Liang, on the other hand, although still devoted to an ultimately universal vision, pictured an emperor more clearly defined as Chinese. Liang could not, however, quite decide if the emperor still served as a necessary symbol of unity, the core around which the Chinese nation was to be formed, or if this role was largely obsolete.

The reform movement generally and the Kang-Liang radicals are often subsumed under the theme of building up the "wealth and power" of the Chinese state; almost equally prominent has been the theme of a struggle between pro-democracy forces and defenders of despotism.⁶⁷ Yet the reformers were capable of advocating strong imperial rule. My intention is not to deny that the reformers on balance contributed to the development of an opposition to despotism, but to note that their attitudes toward the monarchy were in fact complex and shifting. It seems more useful to conceptualize what was going on as a partly unconscious effort to rethink the Chinese notion of kingship. This was not, of course, the main goal of the reformers, but one consequence of their intellectual and political work was to enlarge the space of politics. The traditional form of the Chinese state—revolving around court, bureaucracy, and dynasty (the imperial family through time)—would not long survive such changes in political consciousness. Perhaps most important, the shift of China's historical center from kings to sages created a new space for a Chinese identity to emerge that was independent of the dynasty. Of course, "new knowledge" from the West played a major role in this process, but the essential framework remained Confucian. In the 1890s, the Next Text tradition in the hands of the radical reformers encouraged a massive reorientation of Chinese politics.

At the same time, for all the reformers, the Chinese notion of kingship represented a lever for change. In China's institutional and legal framework, the ancient pedigree and traditional charisma of the monarchy were seen as

67. See, *inter alia*, Chang, "Intellectual Change"; and Xiong Yuezhi, "Minzu juexing de yikuai lichengbei," esp. pp. 217–26. But the approach is general in the literature.

advantages. Reformers seized on the long-standing links between the sage-king ideal and the Mencian notion of popular legitimacy (*minben* 民本). On the other hand, the historical monarchy was also a symbol of the decadence and dissipation of an entire civilization. All the evils of the post-Qin system were captured by the notion of the ruler who failed to take care of the people, to create a system of order, or even to extend his raw, coercive powers. Instead, broad chasms had developed between the emperor and his subjects, between the officials and the people, and even between the emperor and his officials—gaps that marked the sheer impotence of the Chinese state and the gross ignorance of the people. There had been little sense in imperial Confucianism of the king as a leader of a *people*, and the reformist ploy of legitimating a certain kind of monarch served also to legitimate the people itself.

Nonetheless, this was an unstable formulation: the monarchy as a symbol of national unity turned out to be a hollow hope. The emperor was firmly delinked from the cosmos and even *Tianxia* 天下, and perhaps even from the nation. What the reformers did not want to do, of course, was to allow ethnic antagonisms to come to the fore. They therefore had to treat the actual monarchy as a “Chinese” kingship with no reference to unique Manchu-Qing elements: they had to develop a conception of the nation that explicitly denied the importance of ethnicity. If the Guangxu emperor was in fact ready to play the role of a national king, others in the court were not about to let this happen. Yet the deeper problem the radical reformers faced was to determine whether the emperor was an asset or a liability to the nation. By historicizing the kingship, the reformers separated it from one of its traditional charismatic bases, sagehood. This break from Kang’s early essays revived a Legalist-influenced notion of (imperial) sagehood. Although it had long been recognized that the emperor, being mortal and prone to mistakes and ethical lapses, should take the advice of the wise men about him, nonetheless the Chinese idea of kingship had become rooted in the concept of sagehood. The moral authority of an emperor’s critics never extended to challenging the institution itself; nor did it even match the charismatic authority of the emperor, which was rooted both in ancient cosmological notions and in the Three Bonds (*san’gang* 三綱) of the Confucian social tradition.

By the 1890s, however, ultimate authority was being removed from the emperor, slowly and unevenly but inevitably. The reformers, like their

predecessors, focused some of their harshest criticism on the isolation of the emperor. Unlike their predecessors, they turned instead to the "people" and discovered that popular power was exceedingly difficult to comprehend in terms of the traditional cosmology. Yet if the emperor were to become a committee chairman of a desacralized state, what would become of the basis of its legitimacy? It was the promise of "popular power" both to replace the emperor institutionally (eventually) and to be self-legitimizing. Yet when the reformers looked at the Chinese people, they seemed sadly wanting. The monarchy was thus simultaneously necessary and utterly decadent.