Revisionism Reconsidered: Kang Youwei and the Reform Movement of 1898

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THE REFORM MOVEMENT OF 1898 sought to move the Qing empire toward comprehensive and unprecedented institutional change and thus was a critical event in modern Chinese history. Had it succeeded, China could have, like Meiji Japan, entered the modern era without revolutions. Yet, however determined and daring its leaders, the historic effort was suddenly and tragically cut short by a coup.

The standard view of the Reform Movement has been that, in reaction to China's repeated defeats and humiliation as well as the inadequacy of the Self-strengthening Movement, the reform-minded Kang Youwei (illustration 1) and Liang Qichao finally won support for change from a sympathetic Guangxu Emperor. The reformers then managed to put into effect a nationwide reform program through imperial decrees. But the movement, which lasted barely over one hundred days, came to an abrupt end when the Empress Dowager Cixi and her conservative supporters recaptured political power, executed or imprisoned many of the reformers, and placed the emperor under permanent house arrest.

In 1970, Huang Zhangjian challenged this conventional view, instead portraying Kang as a political conspirator rather than a reformer (Huang 1970). Before the reform summer, Huang argued, Kang actually pursued a contradictory "parallel policy" (*shuanggui zhengce*): While pursuing reforms openly, Kang and his followers actually sought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. According to Huang, Kang's reform proposals essentially were cover for his revolutionary intention. Accordingly, Huang argued, Kang's reinterpretation of Confucianism was aimed at making himself China's uncrowned king. But Kang, in Huang's view, changed his mind after he was granted the honor of an audience with the Emperor. From then on, Huang argued, Kang stressed the emperor's power rather than the people's power. But, according to Huang, when the "revolutionary activities" of Kang's followers in Hunan were exposed by the conservatives, the Kang circle switched back to the "revolutionary" option by resorting to the anti-dowager conspiracy that led to the coup. Later in his book, Huang tried to prove that Kang forged most of his 1898 memorials in the 1911 edition of his *Wuxu zougao* [The draft memorials of 1898]. Some thirty memorials and memoranda which Huang considers authentic were later published in a separate volume (Huang 1974). Huang's charge of forgery, supported by textual discrepancies, rests on convoluted arguments (1970:539–660). The discrepancies may arise, after all, because Kang's published memorials are based on different original drafts, revised

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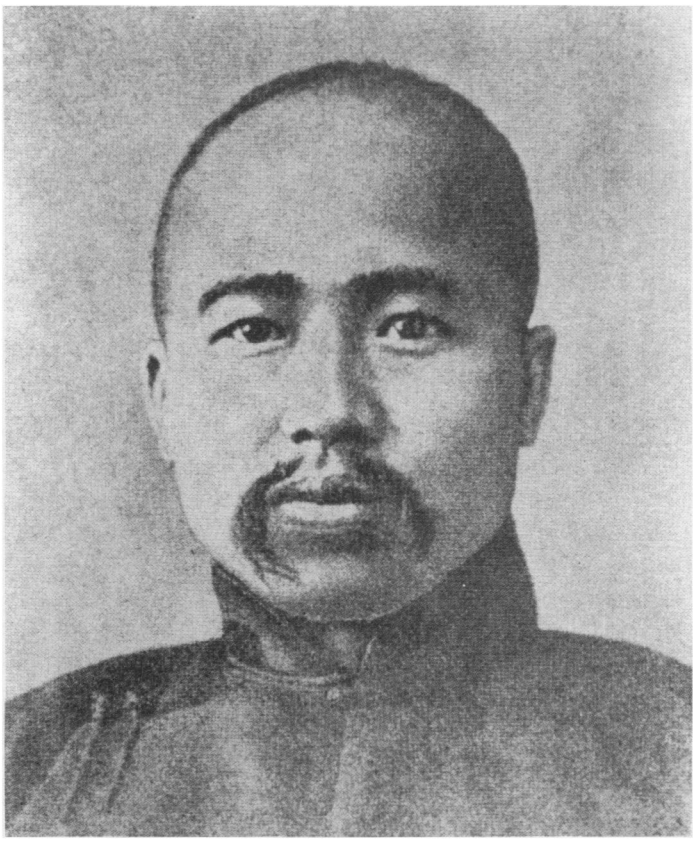

Illustration 1. Kang Youwei, probably in his early forties, in a photograph taken close to the time of the 1898 reform.

versions, or accounts written some time after the event. Kang himself called these memorials "drafts" (*gao*) rather than "presented memorials" (*zouzhe* or *zouyi*). But Huang was eager to use the discrepancies as evidence that Kang was a "conspirator," "swindler," "cheater," and "hypocrite." [1]

Huang's revisionist study inspired a younger scholar, Luke Kwong. In his *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days* (1984), Kwong contends that Kang was not nearly as important in the famous Hundred Days' Reforms as Kang and his friends later claimed and indeed was more onlooker than prime mover. For Kwong, the 1898 Reform Movement was not the climax of an unprecedented campaign for reform but a continuation of the Self-strengthening Movement. Kwong believes that

[1]Unwary readers may not notice the wide gap between Huang's sources and his venturesome arguments. For example, he cites a personal letter from Zhao Yuesheng to Kang Youwei which contains a few emotional phrases, such as "the dirty state" and "saving the 400 million Chinese," and on this basis suggests that Kang had no "intention of saving the Manchu dynasty" (Huang 1970:1–3). In fact, Kang's reformist convictions suggest that he wanted to save the dynasty in order to save the Chinese nation. Of course, the "dirty state" could certainly be made "clean" by reformist rather than revolutionary means. Huang also has problems with such concepts as "parliament" (*yiyuan*) and "people's rights" (*minquan*), which he equates, respectively, with democracy and revolution. Hence, he calls Kang a revolutionary when Kang advocated a parliament and people's rights. Kang's persistent efforts to bring about a constitutional monarchy in China required a parliament, people's rights, and preservation of the Qing.

conventional historians have uncritically adopted Kang's analysis of his own role in 1898. Kwong also easily marshals examples of the pro-reform or pro-revolution bias of modern historians and suggests that it tends to favor a large role for Kang.

Like Huang, Kwong tries to minimize Kang's role as a reformer in 1898 and indeed goes further than Huang in this respect. While Huang emphasized Kang's deception, he gave an exceedingly large role to Kang as a conspirator seeking power in the name of reform. Kwong considers Kang an insignificant figure in the 1898 Reform Movement.

Kwong's book, written in English, has aroused considerable interest among Western sinologists. His revisionist interpretation, together with his aggressive arguments and methods, generally have been praised by specialists. One specialist, for example, has declared that "Kwong has attended to 'the real forces shaping the contours of the political history of 1898' with respect for historical detail, rigour of arguments, and sophistication of approach that are unsurpassed in this field" (Price 1986:383).

The attraction of the revisionist views is not surprising, given that the conventional historiography of the 1898 Reform Movement has been overwhelmingly sympathetic to Kang Youwei and his followers. This inevitably must have given rise to a suspicion of bias. It is also true that many of the sources drawn on by conventional interpretations come from Kang and his friends. In short, there were grounds for a revisionist approach. But the works of both Huang and Kwong are conspicuously polemic. In stating their cases, they not only discount the validity of Kang's own words but also slight other archival materials which support a positive interpretation of Kang's role. Recent works by Chinese historians have pointed out and corrected many of Huang's factual errors. Their studies make clear the need for a thorough re-examination of Huang's and Kwong's revisionism. My own research at the Palace Museum Library and the Chinese First Historical Archives in Beijing in 1988 further convinced me of the need to reassert Kang's significance to the Reform Movement of 1898. In a recent paper, Huang maintained his general stance on Kang and the 1898 Reform, although admitting that his book contained numerous factual errors (1989: 729–68).

My purpose is not to judge Kang's morality or to transform Kang from the "hypocrite and liar" of Huang's description into the "sage" that Kang himself claimed to be. Kang surely was overly confident, single-minded, and even arrogant. But I believe he was a sincere, outspoken, and bold reformer. We must also note that, after the 1898 coup, Kang and Liang engaged in an active and extensive political movement and propaganda war. Like other political activists, Kang was not always consistent, honest, and modest. But these shortcomings should not blind us to the possibility that he was the key reformer in 1898. Rather, the evidence—especially the newer material—shows that his ideas were the basis of the Emperor's reform program. Kang's life and thought, which have been ably studied by many scholars, need not be reviewed in detail here. In order to clarify the 1898 Reform and Coup as well as Kang's role in them, however, I will describe the events of the summer of 1898 in a synthesis incorporating much new research data, my own and others. Thus, while seeking to buttress the old interpretation, I shall try to fix its defects as far as the evidence permits.

Kang's Reformist Campaigns Prior to 1898

The role played by Kang Youwei in the tumultuous events of the summer of 1898 in Beijing represented the logical culmination of his career to that point. For

about a decade, he had been campaigning persistently for "changing the way of doing things" (*bianfa*), or institutional change, which he considered essential to rescue China from the perils presented by a fundamentally changed world. Kang had been aware of this new world of multinational states ever since his first encounters with the West in Hong Kong and Shanghai. His strategy was to seek changes from above, counting upon the determination of the central government acting with the blessing of the imperial court to bring about such change. In this regard, he felt the experiences of Meiji Japan and Russia were pertinent as models for China. He thus repeatedly sought an audience with the Qing Emperor in the hope of convincing the ruler of the need for reform. This was not an easy task. As a commoner, he was not allowed to present memorials directly to the throne; he actually risked his life by trying to transmit unconventional ideas to the ruler. By good luck, he was not arrested or killed, but his memorials, nonetheless, were kept from the higher levels of government. But, with a strong sense of mission and a commitment to change, he persisted. He meant what he said. When he advocated abolishing footbinding, a bold challenge to custom and tradition, he not only prohibited his own daughters from binding their feet but organized the Anti-footbinding Society. Finally, his persistence and courage were rewarded. The Guangxu Emperor was impressed by his ideas, and the evidence shows that the 1898 Reform began when Kang won the emperor's attention.

While in Beijing in 1888, not long after China's defeat by France and Britain's seizure of Burma, Kang wrote to each of the dynasty's three most powerful officials—Pan Zuyin, Weng Tonghe, and Xu Tong—to present his bold plan for saving the country and to remind them of their responsibilities. The letters, as Kang claimed, "created a considerable stir in Beijing." His straightforward message aroused curiosity and attention in officialdom. Next, Kang tried to deliver his "ten-thousand word" First Memorial to the Qing Emperor via a high-ranking official. Unceasing external threats, compounded by domestic natural disasters, prompted Kang to criticize the traditional order, which he considered "worn out." Kang proposed a thorough remodeling of the Qing state, arguing that superficial borrowing from the West without a fundamental change of the political structure would be insufficient to make China wealthy and powerful. He said the self-strengthening programs, with their Western-style schools, factories, companies, and weapons, caused endless abuses and corruption, despite their praiseworthy aims. These problems arose precisely because of the lack of an effective state apparatus such as had facilitated modernization in the nations of the West (Kang 1981, 1:57–59). This memorial certainly should not be dismissed as "a routine exercise in moral rhetoric" (Kwong 1984:86). In fact, because it was neither routine nor rhetoric, no high-ranking officials—including President Weng Tonghe of the Hanlin Academy and President Qi Shichang of the Censorate—dared to deliver it (Kang 1967:45–46).

Kang was not the first reformer to criticize the insufficiency of the self-strengthening programs, but no Qing reformer before him had ever tried to present the case to the imperial court. He was not the first Chinese intellectual to point out the changed world that the Qing empire faced, but no one before him had urged the emperor to replace the traditional Chinese state inherited from the Han-Tang empire with a modern state modeled on the West.

Its failure to reach the Emperor did not render the memorial irrelevant. Copies of it were widely circulated among interested officials. Weng Tonghe, though reluctant to deliver Kang's memorial, was clearly impressed by Kang's ideas and courage. In fact, Weng would soon develop an interest in moderate reform himself (Wong 1990:121–24). Moreover, some of Kang's ideas did reach the throne in that a number

of officials either incorporated them into their own memorials or delivered them in their names. Kang particularly mentioned the Censor Tu Shouren, who allowed Kang to use his name and title to present several memorials to the imperial court in 1888 (Kang 1967:47–48). Huang Zhangjian, on the basis of Tu's published memorials and the *Qing Shilu* (1970:603–26), questioned Kang's claim to have been Tu's ghostwriter; however, Kong Xiangji has proven Kang's claim on the basis of archival evidence (1988a:20–56; cf. Lin Keguang 1990:68–72). Moreover, in an 1889 poem to Tu, Kang compared himself and Tu to a swan and phoenix, respectively, flying wing to wing and making a "long cry" that "startled the tens of thousands." Though they were different breeds, Kang continued, they sang in the same tune (Kang 1981, 1:82).

By this time, Kang had developed a clear vision for a new China. Should reform be impossible in China, he would establish a "new China" with Chinese immigrants overseas, possibly in thinly populated Brazil (Kang 1967:51). But he soon realized that founding a new China abroad would be as difficult as creating a new China at home. In any event, in late 1889, he returned to Guangdong, where he opened a school at Changxingli to train future reformers, of whom Liang Qichao would be the most prominent. According to Liang Dingfen, Kang intended to use the school as a base for political recruiting (Song 1983; Lin 1990:103, Ma 1988:124–25). Meanwhile, in addition to a lecture tour in Guilin, he completed his first major reformist treatise, the *Xinxue weijing kao* [The forged classics of the Xin Dynasty] in 1890 (Chen Zhanbiao 1989:290–91). The treatise shows his determination to use New Text Confucianism as an intellectual tool for political change.

When Kang returned to Beijing in 1895 to take the *jinshi* examination, he was better prepared for reformist activities. Moreover, circumstances now favored such efforts more than before. China had just been humiliatingly defeated by Japan, and a large number of examination candidates, young intellectuals from all eighteen provinces, were gathered in the imperial capital. These candidates provided Kang with the important "crowd," on whose behalf he drafted the famous Memorial of the Candidates (*Gongju shangshu*), also known as Kang's Second Memorial to the Qing Emperor. Although it was not delivered to the Emperor, presumably because many signatories changed their minds after the government agreed to peace terms with Japan, the memorial in both copied and printed forms were widely circulated in Beijing and elsewhere (Kang 1981, 1:114–31). At this time, Kang earned his *jinshi* degree and became an official at the Board of Works (*Gongbu*), which provided him with a base from which to submit memorials. He revised this memorial, which in its new form became known as the Third Memorial to the Qing Emperor, and submitted it in his own name to the court through the Censorate. The Palace Archive shows that it reached the Guangxu Emperor on June 3, 1895. In it, most significantly, Kang raised the issue of "parliament" (*yiyuan*). Such an idea was nothing new in 1895, as reformers such as Wang Tao and Zheng Guanying had already discussed it at great length in their writings, but no one had ever raised it with the Emperor. Huang Zhangjian did not believe it possible for Kang to have raised such a sensitive issue directly with the Emperor and concluded that Kang added the word "parliament" to the original memorial later (1970:8). The discovery of the original memorial in the Palace Archive, however, has proved that Kang not only raised the issue but argued on behalf of its importance. This original Third Memorial, now in the special collection of the Chinese First Historical Archives in Beijing, has since been published in the *Historical Archives* [*Lishi dangan*] (Kang 1986:40–50). The texts of the original and Kang's printed version are basically the same, except for minor variations in wording. Both raised the issue of parliament (cf. Kang 1981, 1:139–47). Evidence

in the archive also shows that the Guangxu Emperor attached enough importance to Kang's memorial to request that additional copies be made, with one to be forwarded to the Empress Dowager Cixi. About a month later, the Emperor took an additional step that showed his interest in Kang's ideas by circulating the Third Memorial together with memorials by eight other distinguished officials to governors-general and governors for consultation and discussion. Kang recorded this episode in his "Chronological Autobiography" (1967:67–68), and he was not boastful (cf. CFHA 1894: suishou dengji dang/Junji chu).

Kang followed up with his Fourth Memorial to the Qing Emperor in the same month, but it was blocked by Li Wentian, the assistant president of the Board of Works and a conservative who did not like Kang and his associates. At this time, the so-called "Emperor's party" (*didang*) was on the rise. As Guangxu took over the reign, he gathered around him a group of advisers and confidants. Policy differences in the war with Japan (1894–95) further distinguished the "Emperor's party" as hawks from the "dowager's party" (*houdang*) as doves. Bitterness and recriminations following the Qing defeat created more antagonism between the two factions. The Emperor's faction under the leadership of Weng Tonghe tried to rally around reform. In order to strengthen his political power, the Emperor worked hard, presumably at the advice of Weng, to get Prince Gong out of retirement despite the dowager's reluctance. The prince, however, soon proved to be more interested in stability than in reform. Weng also tried hard to get rid of his major political opponents, including Sun Yuwen and Xu Yongyi, who bitterly opposed his policy during the war. When Sun asked permission to resign in July 1896, Weng noted in his diary, the Emperor promptly approved without consulting the dowager (Weng 1925, 17:7262–63). But Xu wanted to remain. In assisting the Censor Wang Pengyun to draft a memorial against Xu and force him out of the Grand Council and *Zongli yamen,* Kang clearly rendered a service to Weng, who bitterly complained of Xu in his diary (Weng 1925, 17:7266–67; cf. Kong 1988a:117–35). Hence, no later than July 1896, Kang was already Weng's man and therefore a member of the Emperor's party. Clearly with Weng's support, Kang launched the Society for the Study of National Strengthening (*Qiangxue hui*) in Beijing, most of whose members belonged to the Emperor's party. In fact, anyone who identified with the dowager's party, including Li Hongzhang, was barred from membership. Because of this clear-cut "partisan" bias, the society was soon dissolved under mounting criticism from conservatives (Wang Shi 1986:267–74).

Through the Society for the Study of National Strengthening, Kang became acquainted with Governor-General Zhang Zhidong. Thanks to Zhang's financial support, Kang inaugurated the Paper of the Society for the Study of National Strengthening (*Qiangxue bao*) in Shanghai. But Zhang Zhidong, though willing to endorse some elements of Kang's reforms, had a hearty distaste for Kang's reinterpretation of Confucianism. When Zhang pressed him on this matter, Kang refused to trade his principles for the much-needed financial support, and consequently the paper had to cease publication (Kang 1967:74). Kang returned home to Guangdong from Shanghai, and during this interval he completed two more works on Confucianism, *Kongzi gaizhi kao* [Confucius as reformer] and *Chunqiu Dongshi xue* [On Dong Zhongshu's teachings of the Annals]. Unlike the previous work on the "Forged Classics," both works were aimed not only at destroying the orthodox tradition but creating a new reformist tradition derived from Confucianism. In them, Kang introduced new ideas under a Confucian cover or enlisted Confucius as a companion in reformist campaigns. While these studies surely contained elements of a "moral quest" (Chang 1987:65), Kang's prime concern at this time was clearly his political

interests. Kang found it advantageous to borrow the sage's authority to change China, but to what extent Confucius would facilitate change was beyond Kang's calculation. Kang seemed unconcerned that his controversial views might produce a stiffening of conservative resolve. As it turned out, the new Confucius he created shocked and alienated many people, including Zhang Zhidong. In short, Kang's somewhat arbitrary reinterpretation of Confucianism, however justifiable from his own perspective, produced so much controversy that it inevitably set up serious resistance to his later efforts at reform in Beijing (Wang Rongzu 1982:146–51).

Kang was aware of the controversy but was confident enough to disregard the criticism from his peers. He strongly believed that once he had convinced the Emperor to choose reform, the entire country would go with him. Thus, he concentrated his efforts on converting the court. The German invasion of Jiaozhou (Kiaochow) Bay in 1897 provided the opportunity for Kang's Fifth Memorial to the Qing Emperor. In this memorial, he went beyond his earlier arguments about the rigidity of the traditional system to a sweeping indictment of the weakness, turmoil, and philistinism of the Qing system. To rescue the Qing, he believed, a modern nation-state form of government, including a "national assembly" (*guohui*), had to be emulated. Kang recommended that the Emperor forcefully tell the whole country, as had been done by Peter the Great and in the Meiji Restoration, that reform was necessary (1981, 1:207, 208). But the memorial was too provocative in speaking out about China's danger and ignorance for the Board of Works, to which Kang belonged, to deliver it to the court. Nevertheless, many editions of the memorial became available to officials and concerned scholars. The printed version made clear that "national affairs should be discussed by a parliament" in order to facilitate political communications (Kang 1981, 1:207). Huang Zhangjian again has taken the position that Kang inserted the idea years later when he compiled his 1898 memorials in 1911 (1970:597). Since this memorial was never delivered, there is no palace record to trace. But the rare 1897 block-printed edition of the publicly circulated version now kept in Beijing Library and the Library of Beijing daxue or Peking University refers clearly to "parliament" (Kang 1897).

Although he disturbed the conservatives, Kang became the rising star for Weng Tonghe and the Emperor's party. Weng and his associates regarded reform not only as the necessary means to rescue the crisis-ridden dynasty but also as a rallying point to regroup themselves as a political force. This explains Weng's enthusiasm about recruiting the "wild fox" (*yehu*), a reference to Kang's flamboyant and aggressive character (Weng 1925, 17:6943), even though he ultimately found the fox too wild. Weng was not so ardent a reformer as Kang, but he earnestly wanted to help the Emperor. He also knew that he would become the *de facto* prime minister should the Emperor's power be fully consolidated. On the other hand, for Kang, it was essential to reach Weng in order to influence the throne. In fact, it was Weng who eventually recommended Kang to the Emperor. Hence, when 1898 arrived, the convergence of Kang and Weng made the rise of the reform movement almost irreversible and, conversely, relations between Kang and Weng would prove critical to the success of the reform agenda.

Kang and the Inauguration of the 1898 Reform

Kang understood that crisis would make reform imperative. The German menace at Jiaozhou Bay and the subsequent imperialist battles for concessions between 1897

and 1898 intensified the consciousness of crisis in Beijing and throughout China. Kang capitalized on this by sending memorials calling for urgent reforms to the court and by seeking out and winning new political allies to support reform, from Grand Councilors to Hanlin Compilers. More important, he already had the support of Weng Tonghe. In early 1898, in order to keep Kang in Beijing, Weng paid him a surprise visit just before his scheduled departure. Naturally, Kang cherished Weng's recognition. He compared it to the Han Dynasty minister Xiao He's support for Han Xin (1976, 20:271). Weng's interest in Kang was surely political. Wang Daxie, then in Beijing, observed in a personal letter that Kang, who had a superior ability of persuasion, might stir up something (Wang Kangnian 1986, 1:772). As Kung-chuan Hsiao's research indicates, Weng was eager to launch reform under his own leadership (1957:145–48). He already had many reform-minded young officials in his court, including Chen Zhi, Tang Zhen, and Zhang Jian. Only later did Weng discover that Kang's ardor was matched by a radicalism far beyond what Weng could support. Still, there is little doubt that it was Weng who first recommended Kang to the Guangxu Emperor.

Consequently, on January 24, 1898, Kang was interviewed by five prominent, top-ranking officials, Li Hongzhang, Weng Tonghe, Ronglu, Liao Shouheng, and Zhang Yinhuan, who asked Kang questions one after another. The text of the unusual interview shows that Kang was straightforward, as usual. When conferring with senior officials, he was confident and forceful and did not compromise in his arguments for reform (Kang 1967:84–85). He later summarized his presentation during the interview in his Sixth Memorial to the Qing Emperor, dated January 29, 1898. In it, he reiterated the necessity of a "clear-cut decree" to set the tone for nationwide reform and called for a "Planning Board" (*zhidu ju*) to administer the reform, following the example of the Meiji Emperor. Kang elaborated this idea fully in his *Riben bianzheng kao* [The Reform of Meiji Japan] presented to the Guangxu Emperor on April 13 and on June 21, 1898 (Kang 1976, 10:1, 235). The text of this book has been available for some time (Kang 1976, 10); however, the original copy which Kang presented to the Emperor was only recently discovered inside the Zhaoren Hall of the former Qing palace, the Guangxu Emperor's study, now part of the Palace Museum Library. The discovery adds further proof that the book was received and read by the Emperor (Chen Huaxin 1985:277, 269–96; Wang Xiaoqiu 1984a:3–9). As Kung-chuan Hsiao put it, Kang in these materials advised the Emperor to put the reforms into action by bypassing the existing Qing governmental structure, and his proposal for twelve departments under a Planning Board may be considered a prototype cabinet (1975:267). Kong Xiangji reached the same general conclusion, holding that in this memorial Kang presented a comprehensive plan for a new governmental structure that could replace the existing Qing bureaucracy from the central authority down to the local level (1988a:176).

We now know definitely that this Sixth Memorial reached the Emperor, for it was received and copied by the Imperial Household (*Neiwu fu*). In fact, the copy shows that the Emperor wrote a comment on it that required the officials in the *Zongli yamen* to discuss the memorial (PML 1898:1). Kang believed that his Sixth Memorial reached the Emperor through the intercession of the Censor Gao Qian, whose good offices were secured by Weng Tonghe. And Kang was right, as proved by the discovery of Gao's memorial in the Qing Archives (CFHA 1898: lufudang/waijiao lei). The memorial praised Kang as a man of erudition and talent, familiar with the West, and devoted to the dynasty. It seems likely that Weng, Gao, and Kang collaborated in the composition of the Sixth Memorial. In addition, Kang wrote at least two other memorials on the same subject in the names of Chen Qizhang

and Song Bolu on March 8 and 9, respectively (Kang 1967:86). Since the word "parliament" cannot be found in the Sixth Memorial, although the term appeared repeatedly in the previous memorials, historians on mainland China generally contend that Kang "retreated" from his position on the need for a parliament under conservative pressure (Liu Danian 1982: 157–58; Zhong Zhuoan 1986:293). But even if Kang did not use the word "parliament," the tone of his reform remained a radical one, threatening the established patterns of Qing rule. For Kang's proposals would have overturned the existing Qing governmental hierarchy and created a new, cabinet-like central office.

Huang Zhangjian's view that Kang abruptly changed his political thought from "the people's power" (*minquan*) to "the emperor's power" (*junquan*) (1970:208–22; 1989:731, 747) is also a gross misunderstanding of Kang's intent. *Riben bianzheng kao,* which Kang presented twice to the Emperor during 1898, shows no retreat from his admiration for a parliament as part of a Meiji-style constitutional monarchy. He only intended to postpone the convening of a parliament, insisting that it could not be created until the people had been enlightened (Kang 1976, 10:131). His attention now was focused on a cabinet-style organization to implement reform. When reform from above seemed possible, he certainly realized that its success depended upon the throne. Although Kang based his idea of parliament on a highly authoritarian model, he well knew that the senior Qing officials were not so progressive and reform-minded as the Meiji *genro* had been. Nor did the Guangxu Emperor possess the prestige of the Meiji Emperor. In fact, Guangxu's problem, as Weng told Kang, was that His Majesty was too weak politically rather than too strong, presumably because of the dowager. To strengthen the emperor's power (*junquan*)—more specifically Guangxu's power—was therefore essential for reform. A weak Emperor's reforms would only be obstructed by a parliament dominated by conservatives. By postponing the creation of a parliament, Kang may have changed his tactics but certainly not his long-term strategy. As Kang later told the Guangxu Emperor:

> The Ruler of Men possesses overwhelming authority; nothing can withstand your awesome force. [I beg Your Majesty] to use the authority you have to carry out tasks that should now be undertaken and to perform those that are essential. It will then be possible to change immediately the habits of the empire and to arouse the minds of the people.
>
> (1981, 1:277; Hsiao 1975:208)

It is clear that Kang's intention was to use Guangxu's power and authority to push reform. Only by fully employing the latent power of the throne, especially this particular throne, could reform succeed. Kang's plea for imperial authority, or the "Emperor's power," was not opportunistic, for insofar as his ultimate goal was concerned, his interest in a parliamentary system and constitutional monarchy never changed.

The Sixth Memorial is remarkable because in it Kang Youwei for the first time laid out a comprehensive plan for reform, while his previous memorials had primarily appealed for reform with relatively sketchy suggestions on how it might be accomplished. In late January 1898, Kang believed that he had influential friends near the throne, even if the Emperor himself was not fully converted. Since merely pleading for reform no longer seemed necessary, he began offering advice on policy issues, both foreign and domestic. He presented these memorials either in his own or his Censor friends' names, in particular those of Chen Qizhang and Song Bolu.

Kang often mentioned which memorial he drafted for whom in his *Ziding nianpu* [Chronological autobiography], and some archival evidence exists to support Kang's claims. For example, he claimed that in the wake of Germany's occupation of Jiaozhou (Kiaochow) in December 1897, he and Weng pursued a pro-Japan policy. Kang stated: "I drafted a memorial for the provincial censor Yang Shen-hsiu (Yang Shenxiu), urging an alliance with Britain and Japan; and I drafted a memorial for the provincial censor Ch'en Ch'i-chang (Chen Qizhang), also urging an alliance with Britain and Japan" (Kang 1967:80–81). Both memorials can be found in the Archives (CFHA 1898: lufudang/waijiaolei). What Kang outlined in his autobiography closely matches the contents of the two memorials.

Although Kang considered foreign policy issues important, he felt it even more imperative to discuss the comprehensive reform plan of the Sixth Memorial. In a memorial dated February 28, 1898, in Censor Song Bolu's name, Kang suggested the immediate opening of a "Bureau of Political Consultation" (*Yizheng chu*), a synonym for his Planning Board, to implement the comprehensive reform he had advocated. Clearly, he now gave priority to a cabinet-like organization over the convening of a parliament. This memorial has been included in Kang's works (1981, 1:227–29). Then, in his Seventh Memorial to the Qing Emperor, also delivered on February 28, Kang reiterated his view of the indispensability of imperial power in bringing reform into being. The original and complete title of this memorial is "Yican E Bide bianzheng ji chengshu chengqing diazou zhe" [Memorial to Report the Completion of the Book on the Reforms of Peter the Great, delivered to the Palace via the *Zongli yamen*] (PML 1898:1). Comparing this version with the published one (Kang 1981, 1:216–17), I found some stylistic changes that did not affect the essential meaning. We can understand that Kang would use more formal language in the original version which was to be presented to the court. Hoping to make a stronger case, he presented the memorial together with the prefaces of his two recently written books, *Eluosi Dabide bianzheng ji* [The Reform of Peter the Great of Russia] and *Riben bianzheng kao* [The Reform of Meiji Japan], in which he proposed that the Guangxu Emperor should emulate Peter the Great and the Meiji Emperor, both of whom successfully reformed their states (Kang 1976, 10:1–336). In this Seventh Memorial, Kang also promised the throne additional accounts about reforms in European countries as well as details of the destruction of states, such as Poland, which were lost because of their own weaknesses.

On April 12, 1898, Kang launched the National Preservation Society (*Baoguo hui*) in Beijing. Its declared purpose was to defend the territorial integrity of China against efforts by foreign powers to cut China into pieces. In order to protect the state, the people, and the culture, however, Kang found it necessary to seek reforms, to study diplomacy, and to strengthen the economy. Huang Zhangjian argued that the "state" that Kang intended to protect was "China" rather than the "Qing," which was exactly the accusation made by Kang's conservative foes (Huang 1989:759). But I suggest that Kang wanted to preserve China (the nation) through the Qing (the state). Clearly, he intended to make the National Preservation Society a protopolitical party as a means to achieve reformist rather than revolutionary purposes. In a sense, Kang wanted to develop the Emperor's party, merely a group of people around Weng, into a real political group. Later, in a poem composed after the coup, Kang addressed himself and Weng as "our party" (*wudang*) (Kang 1976, 20:271–72). He drafted a thirty-article constitution for the society, stipulating its organization, jurisdiction, leadership, discipline, and membership. He planned to open another major office in Shanghai and to set up branch offices in provinces. After an inaugural conference to launch the organization, two more meetings were

held in Beijing on April 21 and 25. At each meeting, no less than one hundred officials and scholars attended to hear Kang's speeches. In them, Kang proved himself a passionate nationalist as well as a metaphysical thinker. Kwong cited later testimony that some people in the audience felt "deceived" by Kang and that they "sat through K'ang [Kang]'s harangue impassively" (1984:143). However, Kwong omits the recollections of those who were moved to tears by Kang's oratory. We may also note that those who spoke against Kang feared reprisals when they saw their names in the newspaper. In fact, reprisals were aimed at the Kang-led political organization. Given traditional Chinese political culture's sensitivity about organized political gatherings, it was easy for conservatives to question Kang's motives. On May 2, for example, the Censor Pan Qinglan accused the society of having a hidden, conspiratorial agenda. To avoid suspicion and potential consequences, Kang voluntarily dropped the idea of the society (Tang Zhijun 1984:197–248; Kang 1967:89–90). But this blow, although it deprived the reformers of an institutional base, did not stop Kang and his followers from campaigning for reforms. They soon capitalized on an incident in which German soldiers wrecked and defiled a Confucian temple in Shandong to rally 832 examination candidates in Beijing to make a patriotic petition to the government. The petition not only protested against the outrageous German behavior but also expressed concern for Chinese culture under foreign threat. The crisis was used as evidence of the need for determined reform. Some of Kang's disciples led hundreds of the candidates to march to the Censorate to deliver their demands (cf. Kong 1988a:315–42).

On June 1, in Censor Yang Shenxiu's name, Kang submitted a memorial originally titled "Qing ding guoshi ming shangfa zhe," which called specifically for "setting the course of the state affairs in a determined direction" (*ding guoshi*) as resolutely as Duke Wuling of the Zhao, Duke Xiao of the Qin, Peter the Great of Russia, and the Meiji Emperor of Japan. Determination was essential for clearing up confusion before starting new policies (Kang 1981, 1:243–46 or Guojia dang'an ju:1–3). Kang said he handed this memorial to Yang on June 5 (1967:90–91), and it can be found in the Archives (CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang). Then, on June 8, in Xu Zhijing's name, Kang presented a memorial emphasizing the importance of decisive action to transform the Han-Tang-style empire into a modern nation-state. This is the well-known "Qing mingding guoshi shu" [Plea for clearly determining our national course], replete with Kang's favorite phraseology (Kang 1981, 1:258–60). Kang said he handed this memorial to Xu for delivery to the court (Kang 1967:91–92), and this is confirmed by Liang Qichao in a letter to Xia Zengyou (Ding Wenjiang 1972, 1:57–58). The version of this memorial originally delivered can be found in the Archives (CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang).

Kang made this appeal soon after the death of Prince Gong on May 30, 1898. The influential prince, the Emperor's uncle, had repeatedly warned the throne against drastic reform, and Guangxu had hesitated about moving reforms quickly forward for fear of the prince's objection (Su Jizu 1953, 1:332; Wei Yuankuang 1953, 4:310). On his deathbed, the prince advised the throne, in his last memorial, dated April 12, "to abide by the established rules scrupulously" (CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang), thus continuing to counsel against major reforms. But after Prince Gong's death, the Emperor appears to have felt a new freedom to pursue reforms as he wished. Kang's memorials of June 1 and June 8 were delivered in time to encourage the Emperor to act in the absence of the prince (cf. Kang 1967: 91–93). Indeed, on June 11, 1898, the throne did what Kang had persistently requested: reform by decree. His Majesty proclaimed a new course for the country, beginning the Hundred Days' Reforms. The Emperor's decision and proclamation

must have had at least the acquiescence of the Empress Dowager Cixi, to whom he had referred Kang's memorials. Liang Qichao's theory that the dowager deliberately acquiesced in the reforms in order later to have an excuse for dethroning the Emperor (Liang 1936:63) is pure speculation. There was simply no reason for her, at this time, to dethrone an emperor she had chosen. At the outset of the reform she, too, found reform imperative. According to Kang Youwei:

> The Emperor was pleased after having read my *Riben bianzheng kao,* so that he asked the *Zongli yamen* to review it. The Emperor, who was determined to launch reform, told the dowager empress through Prince Qing that "I don't want to be an emperor who would lose our dynasty, and I would rather abdicate myself if I have no power to act." The dowager empress thus agreed. Meanwhile, Prince Gong was dead, and I immediately wrote Weng Tonghe to urge [on] him the importance of seizing the opportunity for reform.
>
> (Kang 1967:91)

On June 15 a surprising event occurred. The Emperor suddenly dismissed his imperial tutor, Weng Tonghe, by decree. After the death of Prince Gong, Weng had become the most prestigious adviser to the throne and is believed by most historians to have been instrumental in inaugurating the reforms. Weng's dismissal could easily be construed as the result of a conspiracy engineered by conservatives. Kang himself believed it was the dowager's idea to dismiss Weng in order to weaken the reform party. Obviously, Kang did not take very seriously Weng's recent efforts to get him to leave on the grounds that his presence had caused too much public wrangling (Kang 1967:91, 93). In fact, Weng who initially had been Kang's advocate to the Emperor was dismissed because of the Emperor's growing radicalism under Kang's influence. Several contemporary observers, including Ye Changzhi and Zhang Xiaoruo (Zhang Jian's son), had noticed the serious disagreement between Weng and the Emperor, and Weng's dismissal did not really surprise them. The modern scholars Chen Qiu, Ho Ping-ti, Hsiao Kung-chuan, Huang Zhangjian, and Kong Xiangji also agreed that Weng was truly dismissed by the Emperor. "On more than one occasion, between January 16 and June 15," as Hsiao put it, "he [Weng] incurred the Emperor's displeasure; a climax was reached on May 27 when he [Weng] repeated his derogatory remarks concerning K'ang Yu-wei [Kang Youwei]" (1957:180). Kong Xiangji further confirmed the Emperor's dismissal of Weng by locating the vermilion edict in the Archives, in which His Majesty blamed his imperial tutor for being "inconsistent and arrogant" (1986:84–87; CFHA 1898: Suishou dengji dang/shangyu). Only the recently published *Cambridge History of China* still maintains that Weng "was dismissed from the court into retirement under pressure from the empress dowager's faction" (Chang 1980:328).

Significantly, Weng's dismissal had much to do with Kang Youwei. Hsiao was correct to point out that the Emperor was troubled by Weng's "derogatory remarks" about Kang. While Weng had first recommended Kang to the Emperor, he later tried to stop Kang. Whether Weng came to distrust Kang or feared Kang as a rival is unimportant. In any event, Weng's eventual rejection of Kang, after his earlier praise, disturbed the Emperor so much that he was dismissed. As the Emperor complained in the vermilion edict, Weng was guilty of being "whimsical in his opinion and unrestrained in his speech." Weng thus impaired a long and affectionate relationship between himself and the Emperor. Hsiao Kung-chuan's remark is most revealing:

> Weng's association with K'ang [Kang] proved to be the most costly mistake which he ever made in his long career. He counted on K'ang's help to develop a reform movement on his own but only to find out later that K'ang rapidly replaced him as the prophet of reform. Evidently, K'ang, who did not respect his theory of limited reform or defer to his leadership for reform, turned out to be an even greater threat to his position than Li Hung-chang [Li Hongzhang] or Chang Chih-tung [Zhang Zhidong]. Moreover, in trying to undo K'ang he quickly brought about his own undoing.
>
> (1957:186).

Not accidentally, Kang was summoned to an imperial audience only a day after Weng was dismissed. With Weng's dismissal, Kang became the Emperor's principal adviser for reforms. Chinese monarchs' reliance on a principal adviser for reforms—e.g., Lord Shang's influence on Duke Qin and Wang Anshi's influence on Emperor Shenzong of the Song—was well established. By using Kang, Guangxu obviously signaled his intention to pursue a more "radical" reform, but he unwittingly weakened the reform movement by dropping Weng, whose prestige and influence could not be easily and quickly replaced, and Kang himself lost an important political ally. Had an alliance between Kang and Weng been maintained, the reform movement might have fared better.

Kang during the Hundred Days

The first reform edict of June 11, 1898, was a major breakthrough. Kang kept the pressure on by sending in many more of his memorials, often in the names of Xu Zhijing, Song Bolu, or Yang Shenxiu, stressing the need to appoint appropriate people to carry out the reform programs and to use rewards and punishments as incentives to inspire government officials. Kang was not shy about recommending his disciples as well as himself. For example, he requested that Xu Zhijing submit a memorial recommending him after the issuance of the historic reform edict of June 11. Xu's memorial may well have been drafted by Kang or Liang or by both of them. Xu's memorial provided grounds for the Guangxu Emperor to grant a formal audience to Kang at the Throne Hall inside the Summer Palace on June 16. After the audience, Kang was appointed secretary to the *Zongli yamen.* This was not a high position, and the Emperor did not see him officially again. Kwong's doubts about Kang's role during the Hundred Days is based in part on these facts. In addition, Kwong estimates that Kang delivered to the Emperor no more than thirteen memorials, of which three were acted on, six were acted on in part, and the remaining four received no response at all (1984:195–96). This "not very impressive record" convinced Kwong that the editor of Kang's *Wuxu zougao* [The Draft Memorials of 1898], published in 1911, grossly "exaggerated" the number of memorials that Kang presented in 1898, whether in his own or other people's names. The collection thus, he said, "contains material that is mostly apocryphal," a charge reminiscent of Huang Zhangjian's accusation. Kwong's conclusion is inevitable: "It is clear that much of what has been said about K'ang's being responsible for the court policies in June–September 1898 and about his intimate relationship with Kuang-hsu [Guangxu] has been exaggerated" (1984:197, 200).

But Kang's role during the summer of 1898 cannot be so easily dismissed. To be sure, Kang's junior position and his controversial reputation made it impossible

for him to fill Weng's vacancy and to be present at court daily. But the single meeting between the Emperor and Kang was extraordinary. The Emperor initiated the audience regardless of Kang's low rank because he had been deeply impressed by Kang's writings—memorials as well as books. And their conversation was unusually long, about two and a half hours, despite Ronglu's having made negative remarks about Kang just before the audience (Kang 1967:93). Moreover, while conferring with the Emperor, Kang obtained agreement that a comprehensive and prudently planned reform by a "Bureau of Institutions" (*zhidu ju*), or the Planning Board, as Kang elsewhere had called it, was indispensable. Both the Emperor and Kang recognized that senior conservative officials were reluctant, if not altogether against the reforms. The Emperor agreed with Kang's suggestion that junior officials should take over actual duties while leaving senior officials in place for the time. This was a strategy to bypass high-ranking conservative officials. Kang later followed up with a memorial, titled "Wei liding guanzhi fenbie guanchai yi gaozhi youqijiu yi chaishi ren xianneng zhe" [To Give Senior Officials High Positions and to Entrust Able Officials with Real Responsibilities] (PML 1898:3), in which he reiterated his ideas on dealing with senior conservatives while entrusting able young officials with their actual duties. Indeed, during the Hundred Days, the Emperor generally followed this suggestion, relying on the Grand Council's "secretaries" (*junji zhangjing*), such as Tan Sitong and Yang Rui, while avoiding the Grand Councilors (*junji dachen*) themselves, reminding us of the Meiji Emperor's dependence on youthful and able men, such as Ito, Okubo, and Okuma, following the Restoration.

At the conclusion of the audience, the Emperor specifically requested that Kang submit ideas and information through the memorial system from his newly assigned office at the *Zongli yamen* (Kang 1967:94–99). Kang promised and indeed provided the throne with ample information, including information on reforms in other countries. In fact, supplying information was Kang's major activity during the reform summer (Kang 1967:94–99; Wang Xiaoqiu 1984a:3–9). Communications between Kang and the Emperor continued throughout the summer. Kang's memorials, memoranda, books, and pamphlets reached the throne in large numbers. Inevitably, Kang was busy writing at this time. He later admitted he spent so much time writing and compiling materials that he actually neglected his work at the *Zongli yamen* (1967:101–2). He used his office only to communicate with the throne. He had other channels for communication as well. He either sent materials directly to the Emperor or requested some high-ranking officials—specifically the Grand Councilor, Liao Shouheng (Zhongshan)—to deliver them for him (Kang 1967:109). He or the Emperor may even have used the palace eunuchs as messengers, as a hitherto unknown secret note to Governor-General Zhang Zhidong indicates (Kong 1988a:315–16). Looking closely, we may also find direct links between imperial decrees and Kang's memorials. For instance, the Emperor requested Kang in a decree to study foreign "press law" (*baolü*) for him (*Shilu* 422:7), and Kang responded with a memorial explaining how press law could be created in China (Kang 1981, 1:334).

We now are certain that many of Kang's writings were brought to the attention of the Emperor, as a large number of Kang's 1898 memorials and memoranda have been found in the Palace Archives. Kang's 1898 memorials total at least seventy. Seven of the eighteen "Memorials of a Distinguished Scholar," referring to Kang, were hitherto unknown to historians. The books he wrote and presented to the throne in 1898 are mostly accounts of reforms in foreign countries, including *E Bide bianzheng ji* [The Reform of Peter of Russia], *Riben bianzheng kao* [The Reform of Meiji Japan], *Lieguo zhengyao bijiao biao* [A table of comparative politics in various countries], *Riben shumu zhi* [A bibliography of Japanese books], *Bolan fenmie ji* [The

partition and destruction of Poland], and *Kongzi gaizhi kao* [Confucius as a reformer]. Perhaps we may find even more, as the authors of some memorials signed with other officials' names are yet to be identified. But the known number has already far surpassed the number which Kwong regarded as "exaggerated." The large quantity of Kang's writings firmly supports Kang's claim that in 1898 he "was occupied day and night in compiling books" (Kang 1967:101). Kang continued:

> Some of the decrees promulgating the new policies were conceived by the Emperor himself and issued as special edicts, that is, they were not issued in the routine manner as answers to official memorials. The government officials were amazed and, not knowing the source of information of these edicts, suspected that all of the Emperor's special edicts were prompted by me. But how could this be possible provided the rules of our dynasty? All I did was to send in my books; and the Emperor, deriving ideas from my reference notes, would then issue the edicts.
>
> (1967:105)

This was the "secret" of how Kang shaped the "new policies." One may argue that the Hundred Days' Reform programs seem too modest to match Kang's political thought. For example, neither a parliament nor the idea of the people's rights, to both of which ideas Kang was devoted, were given any importance (Hu Sheng 1981, 2:544). But avoiding or postponing the idea of a parliament was precisely Kang's plan for the reform summer, during which he perceived "imperial power" as essential for success. For the reform to succeed, he wanted Guangxu of China to be as strong as Peter of Russia and Emperor Meiji of Japan. As has been said earlier, this was not opportunism but Kang's view of what was necessary. Given his ultimate plan for a constitutional monarchy, he must have expected that a Chinese parliament would be convened once the reforms took root. This also explains why Kang no longer emphasized the "Emperor's power" after the coup, or even tried to exorcise it from his "draft memorials" published in 1911. Simply, the tactics of using the Emperor's power to push reform forward was outdated following the failure of the reform.

On the day after the audience, Kang submitted a memorial in Song Bolu's name. It was replete with Kang's arguments about the need for a clear-cut move to sever the past and transform the Han-Tang-style universal empire into a Western-style nation state, complete with references to Montesquieu. To coordinate and supervise such a fundamental change, the memorial suggested the creation of an "Advisory Board" (*Canyi ju*), identical to the "Planning Board" that he had mentioned elsewhere, to assist the Emperor in pursuing the reform agenda.[2] He also considered it important to win the commitment of all officials to reform, an idea which he had elaborated in his *Riben bianzheng kao* (1976, 10:1). In this regard, he recommended sending Manchu princes and high-ranking officials abroad for travel or study to make them familiar with the modern world. On the other hand, anyone who refused to follow the reform path should be duly punished. Kang believed that, once the reform center was consolidated, the rest of the country would deferentially follow. Success, however, still depended upon courage from the throne no less powerful than a "thunderbolt" (Guojia dang'an ju 1958:3–5; Kang 1981, 1:261–63; CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang).

[2] *Canyi ju, zhidu ju,* and *yizheng ju* seem to be alternative terms in Kang and his colleagues' proposals for the idea of a cabinet-style organization.

On June 19, taking the opportunity of expressing his gratitude to the throne for the audience, Kang reiterated his persistent view that a Planning Board had to be created as soon as possible to act as a central coordinating organ:

> Japan had the ability of acquiring wealth and power quickly because she had a well thought-out plan at the onset. Hence we must open a special Planning Board inside the Palace to appoint able officials to see the Emperor daily and to set up an overall plan, to reconsider and re-establish codes and laws, and to draft the procedure for inaugurating the reform. This is the so-called drawing of the blueprint before construction.[3]

Kang also called for pursuing the reform wholeheartedly, obviously worried by the indifference, ignorance, and opposition of many officials. He thus recommended that all officials be assembled at the palace gate to take a solemn oath for reform and proclaim it to the rest of the country. This recommendation can also be found in a Kang-drafted memorial signed by the Censor Yang Shenxiu in which a severe punishment was added for those who disobeyed the new policies (Kang 1981, 1:291–92; CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang; summary in Kang 1967:102).

Following the issuance of the reform edict, Kang was very eager to eliminate from the government examination the "eight-legged essay" (*bagu wen*), which he considered a major obstacle to reform. He found the essay useless for practical matters and injurious to the best Chinese minds by requiring the examination candidates—potential government officials—to use outdated modes of thinking. He had campaigned against the essay since 1895, and in June 1898 he urgently stepped up his appeal to abolish the essay, at least for the basic examination, and replace it with the more useful "*celun*" (questions and themes). He had raised this issue with the Emperor at the June 16 audience and had suggested that the essay be abolished by decree in order to deny senior conservative officials opportunity to obstruct the change. He made it quite clear to the Emperor that the essay, which required neither knowledge of recent history nor wisdom concerning contemporary affairs, was truly responsible for China's backwardness, and that those who obtained office by it would not be qualified to carry out the new policies (Kang 1967:97). In other words, Kang did not believe a new government could be administered by old-fashioned officials. The Emperor agreed, and yet Kang tried to keep the pressure on by asking Song Bolu to submit a memorial to the throne on June 17 (Kang 1967:99) that would repeat what he had said during the audience a day earlier (Kang 1981, 1:264–66; CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang). The piece, titled

[3]This quotation is translated from the unpublished version of the memorial in *Jieshi shangshu huilu, juan* 2, which is titled "Wei gongxie tian'en qing yumen shizong kai zhiduju yi tongchou daju" [Please gather officials at the gate to take oath and open a planning board to make comprehensive plans], while the commonly known printed version is titled "Jinxie tian'en bing tongchou quanju zhe" [The memorial on comprehensive plans] (Kang 1981, 1:275–77). The two versions read differently, but their basic message is much the same. Both stress the importance of creating the Planning Board as the logical step after the decision to launch a comprehensive reform and urged that all officials take an oath at the palace gate to show their determination on behalf of the reform. For this particular quotation, the printed version reads: "I request to follow the example of Japan by opening a Planning Board inside the inner court to accommodate talented men. With the Emperor presiding, the Board would discuss reform matters daily. Board decisions would be implemented by imperial decree. In this way, China could be reformed and self-strengthened" (Kang 1981, 1:277). It seems that the printed version, which appeared in 1899, was rewritten on the basis of Kang's memory. For Kang's idea of the Planning Board, see also *Riben bianzheng kao* (Kang 1967, 10:235).

"Qing fei bagu shitie kaifa shishi gaiyong celun zhe" [Please replace the eight-legged essay with questions and themes] in Kang's *Wuxu zougao,* is the same memorial (Kang 1981, 1:68–71). In addition, a few days later Kang requested Xu Zhijing to deliver to the Emperor the memorial entitled "Qing fei bagu yi yu rencai zhe" [Plea for abolishing the eight-legged essay so as to train truly talented men], which can be found in the Palace Archives (CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang). Before long, the Guangxu Emperor acted as decisively as Kang had persistently requested. The eight-legged essay was abolished by decree, and "questions and themes" were to be introduced on all provincial and local examinations (*Shilu* 419:5–6).

After his victory in abolishing the essay, Kang directed his attention to the creation of modern-style schools teaching Western "substantial learning" (*shixue*), to the expansion of translation projects, and to the encouragement of study abroad. He knew that modern education required a whole new set of textbooks, new equipment, and a new curriculum. At this time, plans for the Imperial University already existed, and Kang advised the Emperor to transform traditional provincial academies into high schools, prefectorial academies into middle schools, and local academies into primary schools. He did so in a memorial titled "Qing kai zhisheng shuyuan wei zhong xuetang xiangyi yinsi wei xiao xuetang ling xiaomin liushui jie ruxue zhe" [Transform provincial academies into middle schools, make unnecessary local temples primary schools, and require all six-year-old children to go to school], which was received by the court. The draft memorial published in 1911, entitled "Qing kai xuexiao zhe" [Please open modern-style schools], was a different version of the same work, apparently rewritten from Kang's memory (Kang 1976, 12:15–17). In the memorial, he also thought fit to suggest converting some unnecessary temples into modern schools. Moreover, he insisted that modern education be compulsory—all children over six should attend school—so as to elevate the quality of both officials and ordinary citizens. Given the limitation of governmental resources, Kang believed, private individuals should be encouraged to open or to finance schools (PML 1898:2; Kang 1967:104; Kang 1976, 10:196). For him, a parliament was essential for a modern nation, and modern education was essential for a successful parliament (Kang 1976, 10:306). Hence, Kang did not really abandon the idea of parliament during the reform summer, even though he wanted to postpone its creation for various reasons.

Guangxu heeded Kang's advice. In his July 3 edict, the Emperor authorized the founding of the "Imperial University" (*Jingshi da xuetang*), the first Western-style university in China, together with a "Government Printing House" (*guan shuju*) and a "Translation Bureau" (*yishu ju*) as affiliated institutions (*Shilu* 419:13–14). On July 5 the throne implemented Kang's suggestion that a special award be given to those who contributed to the funding of modern schools (*Shilu* 420:2–3). Five days later, exactly as Kang had suggested, an edict authorized the transformation of numerous traditional academies and some temples into modern schools. More specifically, the Emperor directed that the academies in provincial capitals were to be converted to high schools, those in prefectorial capitals into middle schools, and those in county capitals into elementary schools, and that textbooks would be issued and distributed by the Government Printing House. In late July, the Emperor instructed the governors-general of the provinces to seek the gentry's assistance in administering the new schools, and on August 10 he authorized the establishment of modern professional schools, such as mining and railroad schools and modern naval academies (*Shilu* 422:28–33). Finally, on September 11, following an earlier edict (August 21) requiring every province to build agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial schools, the Emperor requested that in various treaty ports new

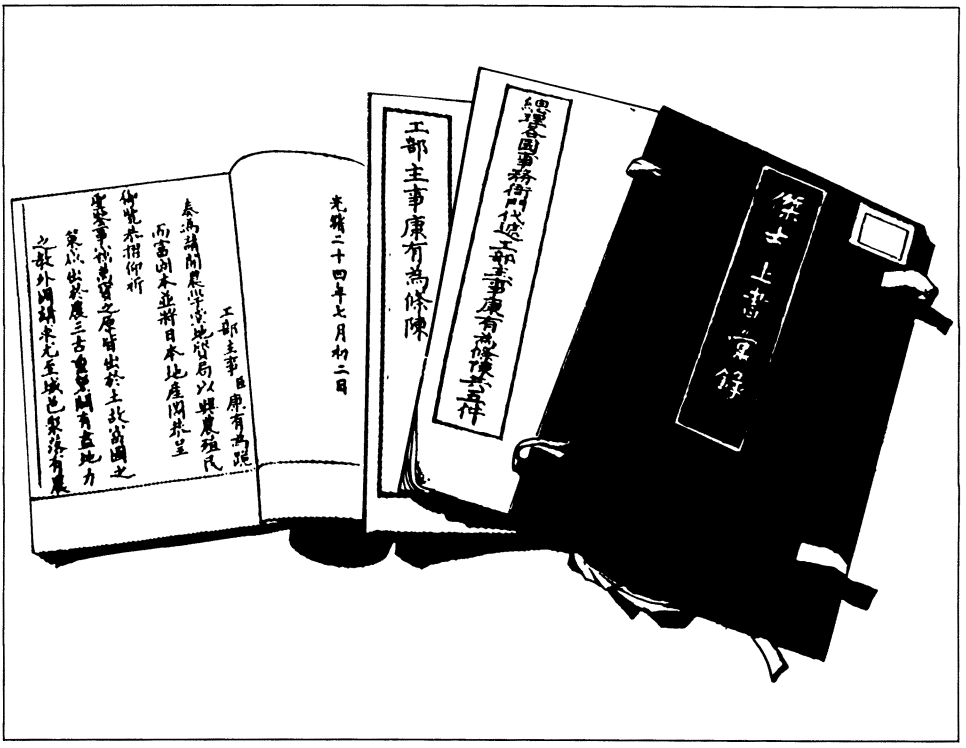

Illustration 2. Memorials of a Distinguished Scholar (*Jieshi shangshu huilu*), which Kang Youwei delivered to the Guangxu Emperor during the Hundred Days' Reform. The unpublished set of eighteen memorials is in the collection of the Palace Museum Library in Beijing.

schools specializing in business and commerce be created (*Shilu* 423:3–4; 424:11–12). Other recommendations made by Kang, such as to facilitate the translation of Western and Japanese books, to create foreign-study programs, and to publish government papers, were also decreed by the Emperor. On July 4, the Emperor authorized schools in the provinces to translate foreign books on agriculture. On August 18, he ordered the provinces to select students to go to Japan for advanced studies, and then, on September 12, he launched a newspaper in Beijing.

It was impossible for the Guangxu Emperor during the short hundred days to put into practice everything that Kang suggested. But the many programs already mentioned clearly bore Kang's imprint. The fact that the Emperor placed Kang's memorials in his study and referred to them as the works of a "distinguished scholar" (*jieshi*) is also significant (illustration 2). Kang left a mark even on such ordinary programs of the reform summer as those involving mining, commerce, railroads, steamships, and weaponry. Attention to these matters had been urged by many others, of course, but Kang had discussed them in great depth. On the subject of weaponry, for instance, he emphasized its scientific basis. As he informed the Emperor, Krupp cannons and Mauser rifles were the best in the world because the German government continuously encouraged scientific and technological improvements (cf. Hsiao 1975:331–35). He introduced the throne to the idea of instituting patent rights. On June 26, he recommended that generous awards be granted to those who produced new skills, new methods, new creative books, new technology, or new

sciences. He likewise emphasized the intellectual foundation of commerce. The material civilization of the modern West, he understood, had been created by new inventions, new knowledge, and new explorations. With this in mind, Kang on June 26 submitted a memorial entitled "Qing yi jue shang jiangli xinyi xinfa xinshu xinqi xinxue sheli texu zhuanmai yi li rencai er kai minzhi zhe" [Please reward new skills, new methods, new technology, and new knowledge, and grant special patent rights in order to encourage talented men and to enlighten our people], which was identical in basic content to the "Qing li gongyi jiang chuangxin zhe" [Please emphasize manufacturing and creativity] in the *Wuxu zougao,* which was obviously rewritten from Kang's memory (Kang 1976, 12:21–25; PML 1898:2). In response, the Emperor sent Kang's memorial to the *Zongli yamen* for further discussion (Kang 1967:102). On July 19, Kang further memorialized that

> [t]he great success of foreign commerce, I believe, is due to the excellence of its business schools which teach how to do commerce, of its business journals which provide information, of its ministries of commerce which offer a uniform administration, and of its chambers of commerce which assembled cooperative colleagues and gave encouragements by offering the patent rights.[4]

Also Kang more than anyone else in 1898 unambiguously advocated private ventures and initiatives. "The modernizing process," he wrote, "must be left basically to the genius of private enterprise" (Hsiao 1975:303). Unlike most of his contemporaries, he found nothing wrong with having such vital industries as arsenals owned and operated by entrepreneurs. In a sense, he provided the throne with a vision of modern capitalism, in particular the model of Meiji Japan that he had eloquently described in *Riben bianzheng kao.* Guangxu's response to Kang in this regard was not only favorable but quite enthusiastic. Besides authorizing the creation of special bureaus for managing commercial, industrial, and agricultural affairs as well as the post offices and professional schools that Kang had recommended, His Majesty decreed on July 5, as Kang had suggested, that special awards and patent rights be given to creative minds and that generous rewards be offered to those who financed schools or arsenals and who improved farm production. The rules for awards were detailed in the July 13 edict (*Shilu* 321:6, 16).

Kang's influence on the throne in 1898 can also be seen in Guangxu's search for a new political structure—his advisory board or a kind of cabinet—to administer the reform. It was Kang who proposed the idea of a Planning Board to determine the course of reform. The Board would be a new infrastructure "to bypass the existing administrative structure and to carry out the reform program" (Hsiao 1975:267). Kang laid out its importance as early as February 28 in a memorial in Song Bolu's name. On April 10, in presenting his pamphlets describing reforms in various foreign countries, he considered the creation of the Planning Board the most urgent of all tasks at that moment. He discussed this idea with the Emperor during the June 16 audience and wrote in a subsequent memorandum that "a Planning Board is

[4]The fullest text of this memorial is "Tiaochen shangwu zhe" [On commerce], in *Jieshi shangshu huilu, juan* 2. For this quotation, see also Kang 1981, 1:326. The two texts are identical except for a few words. Kang recalled that "on the first day of the sixth month [July 19] I submitted a memorial on commerce" (1967:107). The "Qing zhongshang zhe" [Please emphasize commerce] appears in the table of contents of the *Wuxu zougao* without the text (Kang 1976, 12:4). For recent comparative studies of the *Jieshi shangshu huilu* and the *Wuxu zougao*, see Huang Mingtong and Wu Xizhao, eds., *Kang Youwei zaoqi yigao shuping,* pp. 172–325, and Ma Honglin, *Kang Youwei dazhuan,* pp. 340–54.

indispensable." As Kang almost certainly expected his close associates as well as himself to play key roles on the future Board, its creation meant a great deal to the reform movement. As a contingency plan, Kang and his disciple Liang Qichao drafted a memorial for Li Duanfen to propose reopening the *Maoqin dian* [The Diligent Court], located west of the Emperor's *Qianqing gong* Audience Hall, where the previous Qing Emperors had dealt with special or urgent affairs (Kong 1988:320–21). Were this proposal accepted, the "new wine" of the Planning Board could be poured into the "old bottle" of the *Maoqin dian.*

Guangxu earnestly sought a new political infrastructure. His Majesty handed Kang's idea of a Planning Board to the *Zongli yamen* for discussion and comments. The Emperor was furious when senior conservatives tried to obstruct it (Su Jizu 1953, 1:337). With the tacit consent of the dowager, Prince Qing (Yikuang), younger cousin of Prince Gong and a longtime confidant of the dowager, postponed the proposal on the ground that "creating a new Planning Board at this time when the established rules are still sound can cause confusion and may not yield good results" (Guojia dang'an ju, 1958:8). However,the Emperor refused to postpone it. He requested the *Zongli yamen* reactivate the proposal on July 4 with an emphatic instruction in vermilion ink: "[I hereby] instruct the Grand Councilmen to discuss this matter most earnestly with the princes at the *Zongli yamen* and to submit a substantial report to me in a week" (Guojia dang'an ju, 1958:9). The Emperor's persistence on this caused serious embarrassment and even disarray in officialdom. At the Emperor's insistence, the report was turned in on August 2. But it contained nothing of substance. Its author or authors avoided even mentioning the Planning Board, while maintaining that His Majesty should appoint talented persons within the established system for daily consultation. The conservatives feared that the creation of a new organ such as the Planning Board would let the Grand Council sink into oblivion. The existence of such fears has been substantiated by recently discovered secret correspondence, dated July 1898, in which the writer, a conservative official, expressed his anxiety over the Emperor's determination to create the Planning Board (Kong 1988a:315–16; cf. Su Jizu 1953, 1:336).

The conservatives became more fearful in early September when the Emperor in one stroke dismissed all seven top-ranking senior officials from the Board of Rites (Wang Zhao 1953, 2:351–55; *Shilu* 421:16). To begin with, Kang had advised the throne to make changes in the established rule of communication between the throne and the officials that denied minor officials, let alone commoners, the privilege of submitting memorials directly to the throne. Kang himself had been barred from doing so. Kang believed that this restriction permitted a few senior officials to hide the truth from the throne. He made a strong case to the Guangxu Emperor, using the story of how Poland was destroyed by the deceptions of conservative officials. The deeply impressed Emperor ruled that everyone, regardless of rank, should be allowed to send memorials to the court through his superior. Even commoners could transmit their views to the throne via the Censorate. The Emperor meant what he decreed. When senior officials in the Board of Rites blocked the junior official, Wang Zhao, from delivering a memorial, His Majesty angrily dismissed all its top-ranking officials on September 4 (*Shilu* 424:11–12) and quickly announced new appointments, four of whom were fervent reformers: Li Duanfen, Liang Qichao's brother-in-law and a strong supporter of Kang; Xu Zhijing and Wang Xifan, frequent reformist memorialists on behalf of Kang; and Kuoputongwu, a close associate of Kang and the most enthusiastic supporter of reform among the Manchus. The other three—Yulu, Shoushi, and Shalian—though no friends of Kang, were not opposed to reform. They were appointed in order to present a more balanced list for the

dowager to approve (*Shilu* 424:20; Liang 1936:46). The dowager, though retired to her Summer Palace, retained veto power over appointing officials of Rank Two and above. Clearly, the Emperor could not fill all positions with people he liked. This was why Kang advised the Emperor not to try to remove all the senior conservatives at once. Kang deemed such action unrealistic and even harmful. Kang preferred leaving senior officials alone, while letting reform-minded junior officials assume real responsibilities. The Emperor had accepted his advice when he put the junior secretaries in the Grand Council, notably, Yang Rui (1857–98), Liu Guangdi (1859–98), Lin Xu (1875–98), and Tan Sitong (1865–98), in charge of "new policies" (*Shilu* 424:20). They, in effect, formed the Emperor's inner circle. On September 7, when he replaced Li Hongzhang with Yulu to head the *Zongli yamen,* the Emperor made Jiang Biao, the reformer from Hunan, the junior secretary presumably in charge of the real work (cf. Sun Xiao'en 1985:253–59). Shortly afterward, His Majesty granted an audience to the reformer Yan Fu (1858–1921), who most likely would have played an important role had the reform movement survived longer.

The 1898 Coup and Kang Youwei

In late September 1898, a palace coup took place, abruptly ending the 103-day-old reform movement. Sudden though it seemed, the coup was not really surprising. Tension and mistrust between reformers and conservatives had been building up prior to the outbreak of the coup. The old bureaucracy, overwhelmingly dominated by conservatives, was always reluctant and often sought to obstruct reform. The reformers around Kang were eager to create a new political infrastructure to facilitate the reform. The Emperor was a man of resolution. As late as September 12, he reiterated in an edict his interest in emulating Western systems and his determination to move the reform forward. He asked his countrymen for a united effort to make reform successful (*Shilu* 425:13–14). He seemed to be appealing for popular support, even though he was supposedly an autocrat. Obviously, he lacked the total autocratic power that Kang wished him to exercise, remaining under the shadow of the domineering dowager. The dowager had put him on the throne, but he had tried to establish his independence, particularly following the disastrous war of 1894–95, while the dowager was determined to hold on to her power even after she declared her retirement. The "power struggle" between the dowager and the Emperor decidedly affected the events leading to the coup.

As the conservatives became increasingly afraid of the reforms, they tried hard to influence the dowager. The dowager did not oppose reform at the outset. In fact, without her consent, the reform edicts could not have been issued. But she felt duty-bound to intervene when senior conservatives reminded her that the young monarch, misled by the radical Kang, might endanger the dynasty. When the Emperor saw the dowager in her Summer Palace shortly after having dismissed the senior officials of the Board of Rites, according to the court scholar-attendant Hu Sijing, she accused him of giving too much attention to one man to the point of disregarding established rules (Hu 1953:376). The man to whom she referred could be no one but Kang. Encouraged by the dowager's stance, the arch-conservative Zeng Lian asked the court on September 12 to execute Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong, and Liu Guangdi (Kang 1967:118). Even though the Emperor reproached Zeng, the harsh demand showed how extreme the conservative offensive had become. Huang Zhangjian insists that Zeng's attack, which "exposed Kang's hidden

conspiracy," inspired Kang to resort to the anti-dowager plot, but his evidence was purely circumstantial. As for Huang's remark that the anti-dowager plot was Kang's first step to overthrow Guangxu and the Qing, though consistent with his theory of conspiracy, it is mere speculation (Huang 1988:194, 198).

The Emperor's last resort was to reopen the *Maoqin dian,* which would have given him a *de facto* cabinet inside his palace to push the reform movement forward. Kang had worked hard for it from late August, mobilizing his sympathetic colleagues—Song Bolu, Xu Zhijing, Wang Zhao, and Tan Sitong—to support the idea. His supporters also recommended him, as well as Liang Qichao, to be key members of the reopened *Maoqin dian* (Wang Zhao 1953, 4:331–32). Clearly, this was a desperate effort to get the Emperor and his reformers together in an institutional form to coordinate and implement their programs. Since the reopening of the *Maoqin dian* was not unprecedented, the Emperor presumed that the dowager would approve it. Tan Sitong was asked to dig into the palace files in order to substantiate the proposal's precedents (Kang 1967:121–22). Then, on September 13, the Emperor made a pilgrimage to the Summer Palace, where he appealed to the dowager for support. Her tenacious rejection was surely a fatal blow to him. A final showdown now was inevitable. The conservatives lost no time in launching attacks on the reformers. Rumor had it that the Emperor would be forced to abdicate during a scheduled military review in Tianjin sometime in November (cf. Sun Xiao'en 1985:266–70).

Kang had been aware of the need of military protection for the throne, evidenced in his proposal for the creation of a loyal imperial army, comparable to that possessed by the Meiji Emperor. On September 11, he formally recommended Yuan Shikai in a memorial signed and submitted by Xu Zhijing. An able and reform-minded commander of a new Western-style army formed in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War, Yuan was then stationed at Baoding near the imperial capital. Xu commended Yuan as a general in his prime with considerable "wisdom and courage." Yuan's 7,000-strong elite troops, Kang suggested, should be expanded into a sizable imperial army:

> I believe Your Majesty needs a general like Yuan Shikai. It would be a great pity if his men could not be used as a strategic key. I humbly plead that at this time of both internal and external crises Your Majesty grant [Yuan] a special audience, show him your kindness, and promote him without following routine precedent so as to increase the strength of his newly trained army in defense of the throne.

This Memorial of Xu Zhijing (*Xu Zhijing zhe*), which is in print (Guojia dang'an ju, 1958:164–65; Kang 1981, 1:371), was originally entitled "Bianhuan riji yilian zhongbing mibao tongbing dayuan shilang Xu Zhijing zhe" [Vice President Xu Zhijing's memorial on training of a large army and the appointment of major commander at this time of national crisis], and delivered to the court (CFHA 1898: Wuxu bianfa zhuanti dang). The archival evidence shows that the Emperor acted on the same day that the memorial was received, instructing that Yuan Shikai be summoned to Beijing at once (CFHA 1898: suishou dengji dang/junji chu; *Shilu* 425:13). The Emperor saw Yuan on September 16 and promoted the general immediately afterward (*Shilu* 426:1). Remarkably, Yuan had been recommended for an imperial audience by Ronglu, the dowager's protege and governor-general of Zhili, early in July, but the Emperor ignored the recommendation by ordering it to be "filed" (*liuzhong*). And yet the Emperor gave Yuan immediate attention when Kang and Xu so recommended.

Yuan's sudden presence in Beijing, plus the unusual honor that the Emperor had granted him, only intensified the conservative's fears. Even the reformer Wang Zhao considered Yuan's role too provocative. Summoning Yuan to Beijing for a mission to pacify some bandits in Henan, as officially proclaimed, sounded too much like a convenient excuse (Wang Zhao 1953b, 4:332). The dark cloud was darkened further by the international rivalry that became implicated in the power struggle between the reformers and the conservatives. The factional struggle over foreign policy differences had been obvious since the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Whereas the dowager's men under the leadership of Li Hongzhang pursued a pro-Russian policy, the Emperor's circle favored an Anglo-American policy. With the encouragement of Timothy Richard, the English missionary, Kang actively sought Anglo-American and Japanese assistance for the reform movement, possibly an "alliance with these [three] powers" (Guojia dang'an ju, 1958:170). The sudden arrival of seven British warships at the Bay of Zhili in early September, together with the imminent visit of the former Japanese prime minister, Ito Hirobumi, in mid-September, could be easily interpreted by the conservatives as the reformers' "foreign conspiracy." What added to their fear was that the Emperor's men not only arranged for Ito to have an audience with the Emperor but also explicitly recommended that both Ito and Richard should be appointed as His Majesty's advisers (Soothill 1926:238).

The conservative Censor Yang Chongyi, who was related to Li Hongzhang by marriage and closely tied to Ronglu, reacted quickly and decisively. He sent an urgent, secret memorial directly to the dowager at the Summer Palace on September 18, warning her of the reformers' improper relations with the foreigners and their hidden ambitions, which, left unchecked, could destroy the dynasty. In this imperative message to the dowager, he cursed Kang and the Kang circle repeatedly. He even tried to implicate Kang by associating him with the rebel, Sun Yatsen. Yang thus passionately appealed to the dowager to return to power immediately so as to nip the "disorder" in the bud (Guojia dang'an ju, 1958:461). While Yang may have decided to make Kang the "scapegoat," a recently available private letter by Yang reveals that he was truly convinced that Kang was the key villain behind the throne (Wang and Chen comp. 1988:3943–45).

About this time, an acute sense of crisis developed among the reformers. On September 15, after the proposal for reopening of the *Maoqin dian* had been rejected by the dowager, the Emperor personally gave Yang Rui a secret message to convey to the reformers his profound frustration and even desperation. His Majesty said he felt powerless under the shadow of the dowager, who showed "no willingness to abandon the conservatives." He wondered, in deep anxiety, if there was a "good strategy" (*liangce*) to get out of this deadlock. He still wished he could replace all the fatuous old men with energetic young men so as to turn China from peril to security and from weakness to strength. This secret message was genuine beyond doubt, as Yang Rui's son later, in 1909, returned his vermilion decree to the Qing Censorate (Jian et al. 1953:91–92). The Emperor sent another secret note to Kang through Lin Xu to express, besides wishes for his good health, regret that Kang had to go to Shanghai to run a government paper. His Majesty still hoped that Kang would help him with reform in the near future. Almost simultaneously, the Emperor issued a decree on September 17 ordering Kang to leave Beijing without delay (Jian 1953, 2:97).

Kang and his close associates did not see the Emperor's message, sent through Yang Rui, until September 18. After reading it, they were all shocked and saddened. They believed His Majesty was seeking help or even a rescue. His statement, "I

might not be able to hold my throne," was particularly ominous. This situation most likely prompted Tan Sitong to pay the famous visit to General Yuan Shikai on the evening of the same day (cf. Kang 1967:125–26). Tan told Yuan of the Emperor's imminent danger and sought Yuan's help (Liang 1936:108). The kind of help Tan sought, according to both the Qing government's and Yuan's accounts, was nothing less than an anti-dowager plot. In short, Tan requested Yuan to kill Ronglu and to besiege the Summer Palace, where the dowager lived. Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao later specifically denied that there had been an anti-dowager plot, even though Kang admitted asking Yuan to kill Ronglu (Kang 1967:126). Modern historians have generally accepted Kang's account of this story. Luke Kwong, likewise, doubts the alleged anti-dowager plot. He concludes that, "whether T'an [Tan] and Yuan actually talked about a forceful takeover of the Summer Palace remains a moot point" (1984:217). But we cannot consider the plot a "moot point," since Liang confirmed the plot in secret correspondence to Kang in 1908 when Kang was about to write to the Manchu regent, Zaifeng, to tell what had happened in 1898. Liang advised Kang not to reveal the plot:

> My humble opinion is that our 1898 plot must be concealed, because we have to "spare the rat to save the dishes"—holding back from revealing the truth for fear of hurting the Emperor. Both the Emperor and the dowager have just passed away, and their successor can no longer bear to talk about what had unfortunately happened in the past; otherwise, they would hurt either the Emperor or the dowager. There is really no way for the Regent to judge the rights and wrongs of this matter.
>
> (Jiang comp. 1978, 2:861)

Kang accepted Liang's advice, but Liang's secret letter has since unequivocally confirmed the plot. More recently, Bi Yongnian's diary, "Guimou zhiji" [A plain account of the plot], which had lain undiscovered in the Japanese Foreign Ministry Archives until 1986, shed more light on the intricate events of 1898 (Bi 1986: 1–4; Yang 1985:3). A secret society chief and friend of Tan Sitong, Bi arrived in Beijing on September 12 at Kang's invitation. Kang told Bi about the imminent danger facing the Emperor, referring specifically to the scheduled November military review in Tianjin, and about his plan to solicit Yuan Shikai's help. Kang wanted Bi to join Yuan's force and wait for the opportunity to seize the dowager. Bi noted in his diary the confusion of September 18, when the Kang brothers, Liang Qichao, and others were busily rushing in and out and the atmosphere was very tense. About noon, a certain Mr. Qian told Bi that Kang wanted him to kill the dowager when Yuan seized the Summer Palace. Bi saw Tan on the morning of September 19, and Tan confirmed to Bi that he had failed to get a firm commitment from Yuan. Since Tan had revealed the plot to Yuan, Bi feared that their plans were doomed. As a result, Bi left Beijing in haste on September 21, only a day after Kang had departed. Bi's account has fully validated that Kang was deeply involved in the anti-dowager plot, and it generally matches Yuan's testimony.

Yuan testified that he exposed the plot to Ronglu when he arrived in Tianjin on September 20 (1953, 1:553). The dowager assumed power on September 21—the official date for the coup—barely a day after Yuan claimed to have exposed the plot. It seems extremely unlikely that Ronglu could accompany Yuan from Tianjin to the Summer Palace to see the dowager and that the dowager then rushed back to the Forbidden City to proclaim the coup, all within twenty-four hours. Yuan may not have told the truth about when and where he first revealed the plot in order to leave room to argue that the coup was not the result of his revelation.

Indeed, both Huang Zhangjian and Fang Delin have successively contended that the coup was not caused by Yuan's telling Ronglu of the secret plot on September 20. They argue that, if this were the case, Tan Sitong, who tried to persuade Yuan to join the plot, would have been arrested right after the coup. Yet Tan was not arrested until September 24. Hence, they conclude that the dowager did not hear Yuan's story before the coup took place (Huang 1970:498, 493–530; Fang 1983: 247–51). The trouble with this contention, however, is that Yuan was greatly honored and trusted by both the dowager and Ronglu after the coup. It seems inconceivable that the dowager and her conservative supporters would have rewarded Yuan so generously had not Yuan contributed decisively to the coup.

Interestingly, the Palace Archives have recently revealed that the dowager actually returned to the Forbidden City from her Summer Palace early in the evening of September 19, two days earlier than the officially announced date (Li and Kong 1986:61–62). What made her rush back? Most likely, she learned of the plot in the Summer Palace on September 19, and it confirmed Yang Chongyi's warning of September 18. She thus left the Summer Palace as soon as she could. Who informed her of the plot? Most likely, Yuan revealed the secret in Beijing on September 19 after his meeting with Tan on the evening of September 18 rather than in Tianjin on September 20. Governor-General Ronglu, according to a Japanese intelligence report, was "reportedly to have come up to Beijing in disguise" on September 19 (quoted in Kong 1988b:349). Yuan could have met and told Ronglu about the plot in Beijing on September 19. Little is known, however, concerning Yuan's whereabouts on that crucial day. Whether Yuan deliberately concealed that day's activities is anyone's conjecture. An interesting clue can be found in a set of Yuan's family letters published in 1935. In one letter to his brother Shixun, he mentioned an unexpected encounter with Ronglu inside the Forbidden City, where he had revealed the plot under pressure before they both rushed to the Summer Palace to report to the dowager (Yuan 1935:35–36). While we should not take the authenticity of this letter for granted, it incidentally substantiates the possibility that Yuan disclosed the plot on September 19. It can also explain why the dowager rushed back to the Forbidden City on the evening of the same day. Other letters in the set, which show Yuan's deep anxiety about the Guangxu Emperor's probable retaliation against him once his patron, the dowager, had left the scene, also appear to confirm that Yuan was directly responsible for the outbreak of the coup (1935:44, 52, 53).

Once the dowager returned to Beijing on September 19, though the scheduled agenda proceeded without any abrupt changes, Guangxu could no longer be his own man. When he met with Ito Hirobumi, the dowager sat behind the curtain. He said nothing, while listening to Yuan Shikai's advice to pursue a cautious path of reform during an audience. Then, on September 21, the dowager officially assumed power by issuing a decree in Guangxu's name, in which the reforms were rescinded and Kang Youwei was condemned as the culprit trying viciously to disrupt the established rules (*Shilu* 426:9–10).

Kang Youwei was an obvious scapegoat for the dowager. What was surprising was the level of her hatred. She authorized the Governor of Guangdong, Li Hongzhang, to destroy the graves of the Kang family and to burn down Kang's school, called *wanmu caotang* (The Thousand Thatched Hall), at Nanhai, for example. Her revenge must have derived from her knowledge that Kang was deeply involved in the anti-dowager plot. She also seemed aware of the Emperor Guangxu's involvement in the plot with Kang, even though the official Qing account completely denied it. It seems inconceivable that the Emperor knew nothing of the plot beforehand. Liang's secret letter of 1908 to Kang suggested the Emperor's role in the plot. The Emperor

certainly had ample reasons to regard a plot as the last resort to save his throne and reforms. However undesirable from his personal point of view, an anti-dowager plot, should it succeed, would surely restore his full imperial power.

Yuan Shikai insisted that Tan Sitong did not have the Emperor's authorization when he tried to talk Yuan into joining the plot. But Yuan incidentally made an appeal to Ronglu to protect the Emperor because "His Majesty did not mean what he had done" (Yuan 1953, 1:552–53). If the Emperor was uninvolved, why should he need protection? In fact, how to protect the Emperor became almost everyone's concern. Even the dowager wanted to cover up the Emperor's involvement to minimize embarrassment. The hasty executions of six reformers without a trial, an extremely unusual event in Qing history, had a political purpose. Liu Guangdi, an expert on law and punishment and one of the six, was taken aback by the court order of execution without a trial (Tang 1981:144). Liu perhaps failed to realize that a trial could implicate the Emperor in one way or another. In fact, one of the officials who handled this "treason case" remarked: "It all ended very quickly because they [the reformers] would tie themselves up with the Emperor were they put to trial, thus making it impossible to keep the Emperor out of the mess" (Chen Kuilong 1953, 1:481). The Censor Huang Guijun said even more bluntly that a trial would inevitably "implicate His Majesty" (*qianji shenggong*) (Yun 1953, 1:476). To be sure, all six were Kang's friends, but at least two of them, Liu Guangdi and Lin Xu, were closer to the Emperor than to Kang. It was very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to condemn the six without implicating the Emperor. Not surprisingly, many court officials, when they later published their reminiscences, generally confirmed the Emperor's role in the plot. Su Jizu, for instance, wrote:

> After the Dowager Empress returned to the Forbidden City, she angrily inquired into the Emperor's involvement in the plot. "Do you know of the plot? Are you a co-conspirator?" she asked the Emperor. The Guangxu Emperor, scared and trembling, unexpectedly replied: "I knew it." Henceforth, the dowager interrogated the Emperor [at least] twice.
>
> (1953 1:347)

Su's account explains why the dowager privately treated the Emperor very severely, even though acquitting him in official statements. She actually put him under house arrest and made repeated attempts to force him to abdicate. We must assume that she knew how deeply the Emperor was involved in Kang's plot. If so, Kang's relationship with the Emperor may have been even closer than we have described. The Emperor may have actually endorsed Kang's plot.

Conclusion

With considerable luck, Kang escaped death. Had he left Beijing a day later, he would have been caught and executed. In this regard, the Guangxu Emperor helped save Kang's life by urging him to leave. Kang was unaware that he was being pursued until after he arrived in Shanghai, where he obtained protection from the British Consulate. He then initiated a reform movement overseas in the name of Guangxu. He refused to abandon reform even after revolution broke out and a republic was born. As late as 1917, he still intended to revive a constitutional

monarchy. No one appeared as loyal to Guangxu and, ironically, to the Qing house, and as persistent in pursuing a constitutional monarchy as Kang.

While engaging in highly political campaigns during the 1900s, Kang was capable of playing up things for his own advantage, even concealing the truth and distorting facts. For example, he categorically denied the anti-dowager plot in order to protect the Emperor, on one hand, and to discredit Yuan Shikai, on the other. He certainly did not have the Emperor's secret authorization to solicit British help in restoring his power; rather, Kang acted alone in this regard. But the revisionist assertions, either denying Kang's reformist intentions (Huang) or depriving Kang of any significant role in the 1898 reform (Kwong), are too extreme to be true. To exaggerate is one thing; entirely to rewrite history, as the revisionists do, is quite another. Kang's reformist ideas can be established beyond doubt. Moreover, Kang's followers honored him as the architect of the reform, and his conservative foes considered him their most hated enemy during the Hundred Days. More important, a large quantity of Kang's writings recovered from the archives has confirmed Kang's large role in 1898. To belittle Kang by emphasizing that he saw the Emperor once also leads to a dead end. We must recognize that Kang's junior status made it impossible for the Emperor to see him regularly, lest the traditional system be changed. Leaving aside the intensive communication between Kang and the throne through memorials during the period, we cannot rule out the possibility of clandestine contacts. In his private correspondence with a friend, which was not intended to be made public, the arch-conservative Yang Chongyi reported that Kang sent his brother Guangren into the palace in disguise through secret routes (Wang and Chen 1988:3944).

Our reconsideration of the revisionist views and debates over Kang's role further clarifies the Reform Movement of 1898. The reform was certainly not the creation of Kang alone. He neither claimed this, nor did he appear suddenly in Beijing when the reform began. He had been campaigning for about a decade for the sort of reform—reform from above and by decree—which at last came of age in 1898. His persistent efforts alone, however, could not make the reform. Though a brilliant scholar, he was an ordinary intellectual without political influence. But the increasingly perilous national crisis that began in 1888—and intensified from 1894—gradually made his appeal for reform not only sensible but urgent. He thus won sympathy, respect, and friendship. The most crucial friend he made was the imperial tutor Weng Tonghe, the leader of the so-called "Emperor's party." Weng had developed an interest in moderate reform since 1890, and the Emperor's party distinguished itself by its hawkish policy during the 1894–1895 war with Japan. Upon China's disastrous defeat, Weng hoped to regroup the "party" around reform to enhance both the Emperor and his own political power.

Kang's fresh ideas and his active role in the pro-war demonstration in Beijing in 1895 naturally impressed Weng, and it was Weng who recommended Kang to the Emperor. But Weng soon found Kang too independent, too provocative, and too radical, and hence tried to stop Kang. No sooner had the reform been launched by decree than Weng was dismissed. Superficially, Weng seemed to be a victim of the conservatives, who persuaded the dowager to fire him. But the reform accelerated rather than slackened after Weng's dismissal. The dismissal and the events that followed showed that the Guangxu Emperor was firmly behind reform through the summer and a full participant in its implementation. In this sense, Weng was actually a casualty inside the reformist circle. Weng's inconsistent attitudes toward Kang disturbed and even angered the Emperor. His dismissal of Weng, and the subsequent dismissals of senior officials from the Board of Rites, amply demonstrated

His Majesty's determination. But he had to pay a heavy price. Kang could not replace Weng, as Kang possessed insufficient prestige and influence. According to the established way of doing things, Kang could not even see the Emperor regularly, as Weng had. To change the routine would require a fundamental institutional change, and Kang's idea of the Planning Board moved in that direction. But restructuring the Confucian state apparatus threatened most senior officials, thus intensifying the power struggle between the reformers and the conservatives. When the plan for reopening of the *Maoqin dian,* a moderate version of Kang's Planning Board, stalled, the Emperor and his reformist men became desperate. Kang's anti-dowager plot, which probably had the Emperor's consent, was a last resort to rescue the reform. The plot, however, mainly depended upon General Yuan Shikai. Yuan's reluctance, for whatever reasons, doomed the Emperor and reform. Moreover, there is little doubt that Yuan decided to join the conservatives by exposing the anti-Cixi plot. In short, the 1898 Coup brought the dowager back to power, but it could have gone the other way had General Yuan thrown in his lot with the Emperor and the reformers.

Glossary

bagu wen	八股文	minquan	民權
baolü	報律	Maoqin dian	懋勤殿
bianfa	變法	qianji shenggong	牽及聖躬
canyi ju	參議局	Qianqing gong	乾清宮
celun	策論	shixue	實學
didang	帝黨	wanmu caotang	萬木草堂
ding guoshi	定國事	wudang	吾黨
Gongbu	工部	yehu	野狐
guohui	國會	yiyuan	議院
houdang	后黨	yizheng chu	議政處
jieshi	傑士	zhidu ju	制度局
jinshi	進士	zougao	奏稿
junquan	君權	zouyi	奏議
liangce	良策	zouzhe	奏摺
liuzhong	留中		

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