

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE 1898 REFORM OF CHINA AND THE MEIJI RESTORATION*

XIAO Lang(肖 朗), TIAN Zheng-ping(田正平)

(Dept. of Education, Xixi Campus of Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, 310028, China)

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Abstract: The authors studied and compared the 1898 Reform of China and the Meiji Restoration in an attempt to determine and show the different characteristics and influence, mainly from three aspects: (1) goal and historical background of the reforms, (2) introduction and features of the Western democratic thought into China and Japan, (3) establishment and guiding ideology of the modern educational system.

Key words: 1898 Reform of China, Meiji Restoration, Western democratic thought, modern educational system, comparative study

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INTRODUCTION

In 1998, many magazines including *Historical Research* (Beijing), *Open Times* (Guangzhou) and *Twenty-First Century* (Hongkong) published articles in special columns to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the reform of 1898. However, people seem to have forgotten that 1998 is also the 130th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, which greatly influenced the reform of 1898 in China. So, as to our knowledge, there is no report of comparative study on the two important reforms in the modern history of China and Japan, we wish to remedy the regrettable defect.

As is well known, the Meiji Restoration and later reforms changed Japan rapidly from a feudal country to a modern state. Kang Youwei, who led China's reform movement in 1898, observed in his *First Petition to the Throne* in October 1888, that since Japan had become powerful within a few years of the Meiji Restoration, China, with her much greater resources, should also be able to become a strong country quickly if she would but undertake reforms (Kang, 1981). In the wake of China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, Kang Youwei intensified his efforts to persuade the government to institute reforms and never failed to extol the achievements of the Meiji Restoration. His plans for reform, which he proposed to model after the Meiji example, in-

cluded (1) the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, (2) the creation of a parliament, and (3) the formation of a modern system of education. It is true that the Meiji leaders did achieve great success in these three areas. Kang Youwei, emphasizing on these three points mainly, attempted to construct a modern state like Meiji Japan.

In this way, the early Meiji experience greatly influenced the reform of 1898 in China. We believe, however, that the differences between the two reforms are far more numerous than the similarities. Our purpose, therefore, is to focus on the basic differences in the ideas and democratic thoughts of the two reforms and examine their historical backgrounds.

GOALS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE REFORMS

The spirit of the Meiji Restoration is expressed best by the words "revering the Emperor" (*sonnō*). Revering the Emperor was originally joined with the idea of expelling the Western barbarians (*jōi*). According to the ideas of some experts, the later Mito school first used the words *sonno*, *jōi* (Moroyama, 1969). But revering the Emperor soon came to mean the same thing as "overthrowing the Bakufu" (*tobaku*). When the *tobaku* idea first reared its head in the

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1860's, it frustrated plans for closer cooperation between the Court and the Bakufu which the Emperor and the shōgun had worked out, and presented an opportunity for the two most Anti-Bakufu Han, Chōshu and Satsuma, to seize the leadership of all the han. On the other hand, both Chōshu and Satsuma realized, after the British bombarded Kagoshima in 1863 and the combined naval expedition of Britain, France, America and Holland destroyed the shore batteries at Shimonoseki in 1864, that they could no longer oppose the Western powers by military means. These domestic and international developments transformed the Meiji Restoration's sonnō, jōi into sonnō, tobaku.

In fact, Japan and China had rather different political structures. China's feudal order never had the kind of complex political structure that the Tokugawa system had with the Emperor, the Bakufu and the Daimyō domains; rather, China's centralized political system placed the Emperor at the center as the highest feudal authority. All high officials were appointed directly by the Emperor and had to obey his orders absolutely. In China, therefore, there was no Bakufu which had to be overthrown; thus the Emperor could not gain new recognition and respect by destroying an unpopular government.

In Japan, the sonnō, tobaku idea was to destroy the Tokugawa bakufu's feudal system and establish a modern central government with the Emperor at the center. After the Meiji Government was formed, a group of Chōshu and Satsuma Samurai took the reins of government into their own hands. Possessing a more progressive spirit than the old bakufu officials and impressed by the modern Western civilization, they devoted all their efforts to introduce Western political, economic and educational systems into Japan.

Japan's jōi ideas, however, gave birth to no more than the movement to introduce Western industry into China. After the Opium War of 1840, Wei Yuan, a leading Chinese thinker who wrote *An Illustrated Handbook of Maritime Countries* advocated his own jōi strategy of "using barbarians to control the barbarians" (Wei, 1999) (by studying and using Western science and technology against the Western nations). After suffering defeats at the hands of the Franco-British forces in the Second Opium War (1857-1860), China set up the Zongli Yamen (Board of

Foreign Affairs) in Beijing in 1861 to improve relations with the Western nations and to introduce modern science and technology. This was the high point of the industrialization movement. But China's Westernization was concerned almost exclusively with Western science and technology and brought about virtually no change in China's traditional feudalistic political structure.

Japan won an overwhelming victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. But one might say that, rather than beating China with military power, Japan defeated her with modern systems. Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, shocked by that defeat, criticized the industrialization movement; they believed that unless the government undertook thorough reforms, as Japan had done after the Meiji Restoration, it would be virtually impossible to rescue China from its deepening crisis (Kang, 1981; Liang, 1936). The reforms of 1898 followed swiftly. But although following the Meiji model, the reformers could not reproduce the social conditions and historical background that existed in Japan at the time of the Meiji Restoration. As we said, the Meiji Restoration was a set of changes that occurred under the slogan of "revering the Emperor and overthrowing the Bakufu". These changes overturned the feudal Bakufu and created the new Meiji Government. The reforms of 1898 in China, on the other hand, were carried out by a group of progressive intellectuals without real power who persuaded the Guang Xu Emperor to proclaim these superficial reforms while leaving the traditional system undisturbed. The reforms were not only out of touch with reality but the entire plan, contained in 67 government ordinances issued during the "hundred days" (June 11 ~ September 21), was blocked by conservative bureaucrats and amounted to little more than scraps of paper. In addition, the real power in the government, Dowager Empress Ci Xi, would never permit radical reforms which posed a threat to the political position and special privileges of the Manzhou nobles. It was thus no easy task to advance the reform movement in the face of the powerful reactionary forces. In short, any reform was absolutely impossible to introduce without first overthrowing the traditional feudal system. If the Restoration had preserved the complex feudal system of Tokugawa in Japan, it is doubtful whether the Meiji leaders could have had any re-

al chance of success.

INTRODUCTION AND FEATURES OF THE WESTERN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT

Constitutional monarchy is one expression of democratic ideas. The ultimate goal of Kang Youwei's constitutional reforms of 1898 was to establish a political monarchy like Japan's. In 1898 he presented to the Guang Xu Emperor a copy of his book *On the Meiji Political Reforms* (Kang, 1976). Kang's account was based mainly on information he acquired from an English missionary, Timothy Richard, an American missionary, J. Young Allen, and from Huang Zunxian's *A Japanese History* (Huang, 1968). These were China's notions of constitutional monarchy to be modelled after Japan's.

In 1868 the Meiji Government issued the Five-Article Charter Oath in which the concepts of constitutional and parliamentary government were first hinted at by an article which says that "all matters shall be decided by open discussion". In the years that followed, many Japanese scholars were actively concerned with modern Western thought and were striving to introduce it as rapidly as possible. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* was translated by Nakamura Masanao in 1871. The ideas of Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Herbert Spencer, Adam Smith and others were also introduced into Japan. These modern English and French doctrines, entering Japan in a disorderly fashion, formed the intellectual background of the movement for liberty as well as people's rights in the early Meiji period. The ideas of Mill and Spencer found favor with the gradualist advocates of democratic thought, while Rousseau appealed more to the intellectuals of a radical persuasion. The ideological debate between these two groups discussed whether an English-style constitutional monarchy should be introduced into Japan, or whether the French republican system of democracy was more appropriate. However, this question was never raised during China's reforms of 1898.

Although Japan's early Meiji intellectuals had received a Confucian education, they realized the impracticality of Confucianism, and made every effort to adopt the modern civilization of the West as the best way to modernize Japa-

nese society. Kato Hiroyuki, who introduced Western constitutional thought to Japan, pointed out that Meng Zi's Jun Qing Min Gui Lun (the theory that the ruler serves the people) was by no means democratic because Meng Zi considered the country and the people as the private possessions of the ruler (Kato, 1967). Fukuzawa Yukichi, who was influenced by Mill and Spencer, denounced Confucianism as an abstract theory of morality which had no connection with man's daily life and which not only contributed nothing to the advancement of humanity but actually was a hinderance to it (Fukuzawa, 1962). Despite Nakae Chōmin's deep respect for Confucianism, his democratic ideas were founded on Rousseau's liberty and equality (Kuwabara, 1966). Fukuzawa and Nakae played major roles in advancing the movement for liberty and people's rights in the early Meiji period. The democratic thought of modern Japan was thus developed by many who offered positive ideas.

Kang Youwei and others in China tried to copy Japan's constitutional monarchy, but they could not match the Japanese understanding of modern Western democratic ideas. Although the ideas of Darwin, Huxley and Spencer, as interpreted by Yan Fu, had a major impact on China's reformers after 1898, these Western ideas were not the principal intellectual force of the 1898 reform movement. Kang Youwei merely used Huxley's and Spencer's concept of historical evolution to reinterpret Confucius in his *On Confucius as Reformer* (Kang, 1958). In this book he advocated the thesis of a political system in historical progression from absolutism to constitutional monarchy, and from constitutional monarchy to democratic republicanism. His principal objective was to root out the retrogressive Confucian view of history, which Chinese intellectuals had accepted, that political systems had degenerated from the Xia to the Shang, and from the Shang to the Zhou dynasty. This reveals the progressiveness of Kang Youwei's ideas. But ideas that were rooted in Confucianism, as his were, could not escape the fact that, conceptually, they were pre-modern.

By the time of the 1898 reform, Kang's "thought of the great harmony" had already been established, and was composed of a confusing mixture of ideas from Confucianism, Lao Zi's philosophy, Buddhism, and Christianity. It can

hardly be called scientific and democratic thought, but was in fact, a kind of utopianism (Kang, 1956). To make clear Kang's ideas on constitutional monarchy, Liang Qichao, Kang's disciple, published an article in 1896 called Textual Research on Ancient Parliament based on Meng Zi (Liang, 1936). Liang pointed out that Meng Zi's Zhu Dai Fu (great officials of state in ancient times) was equivalent to the upper house of parliament in Western countries, and his *Guo Ren* (people) was like the lower house. In other words, the ideas of modern parliamentary government were contained in Confucianism.

Tan Sitong, who was more progressive than Kang and Liang, advocated radical democratic ideas in his *The Theory On Goodness* (in Chinese). His ideas closely resembled those of Rousseau, but he was actually in no way influenced by Rousseau. Tan's ideas were constructed from the theories of Huang Zongxi and Wei Yuan, to which he added a knowledge of Western natural science (Yang, 1957). But Confucianism remained the real basis of his thought.

Confucianism, which supported China's feudal order, was encouraged and protected in Japan during the Tokugawa period. After the Bakufu collapsed, however, most Japanese intellectuals rejected Confucianism and positively sought out the modern thought of the West. In contrast, Chinese intellectuals, while attempting to carry out the reforms that Japan had implemented earlier, did not reject traditional Confucianism, or criticize it. Their not doing anything other than use Western democratic thoughts to suggest new, and often strained, interpretations of Confucianism was one cause for the failure of the 1898 reform.

ESTABLISHMENT AND GUIDING IDEOLOGY OF THE MODERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Japan established the modern educational system after a series of reforms starting from the Meiji Restoration. In China, although the reform of 1898 failed, the proposals of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao to reform the educational system were eventually adopted by the Qing government at the beginning of the 20th century, which resulted in the establishment of the modern edu-

cational system. Nevertheless, after comparing and examining the establishing process and guiding ideologies of the two systems, it is easy to find great differences between them.

Firstly, the two countries were acquainted with the Western modern education at very different levels. As is well known, the Japanese government sent a large number of students like Ito Hirobumi, Nisi Amane, Tsuda Shinichiro, Mori Arinori as early as the Tokugawa period to study in Western countries, where they acquired professional knowledge and got well acquainted with their education systems. After returning to Japan, most of them held important posts in the Meiji government and directly participated in a lot of work to establish the Japanese modern education system. Fukuzawa Yukichi paid three visits to Western countries as a member of the Bakufu delegation. When he returned, he wrote some books like *On the Situation in Western Countries* and *On the World Geography* which extensively introduced Western modern education into Japan (Fukuzawa, 1962). In 1871 after the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government sent another delegation, led by Iwagura Tomomi, to study the education system in Western countries. The study lasted a year and eight months. On arriving in Washington, the delegation was warmly received by Mori Arinori, the envoy to America who during his stay there, sought advice from American political and educational circles on how to establish modern education in Japan. Later, he compiled thirteen letters he received into the book *Education in Japan*, which played an important role when the Meiji government initially formulated the school educational system (Mori, 1973). Tanaka Fujimaro, a delegation member, headed the Monbusyo (State Culture and Education Ministry of Japan) after his return to Japan, and wrote *A Report on Findings on Western Modern Education* recounting comprehensively modern education in America, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Holland and some other countries. It also had a deep impact on the Japanese educational reform in the 1870's (Tanaka, 1974).

On the other hand, before the reform of 1898, the Chinese people had very limited knowledge of modern education in Western countries. Rong Hong, the first student returned in 1857 from America in modern Chinese history,

later introduced to the leaders of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and high-ranking officials of the Qing government the modern education in America (Rong, 1968). Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang adopted Rong Hong's proposal and obtained the permission of the Qing government that, from 1872 on 120 young children would be sent to study in America, which became the beginning, in modern Chinese history, of sending students to study abroad. But these students were repatriated before they could finish their studies and were not put in important positions. After that, some local bureaucrats also sent some students to European countries to study military mechanical technology. But the number was so small that the information about the Western modern education could not be introduced by them into China. In fact, before 1898, the Chinese people were already well acquainted with the modern education in Japan, because the Qing government sent a group of diplomatic officials to work in Japan in 1873 after the two countries established diplomatic relations. Some famous intellectuals were also invited by Japanese cultural and academic circles to visit Japan. Thus, they recorded and compiled what they had seen and heard in Japan into books as important sources of information for the Chinese to know about Japan. One of these books, Huang Zunxian's *A Japanese History*, gave a detailed account of the establishment of modern education in Japan after the Meiji Restoration. It indicated how well the Chinese people were acquainted with Japan (Huang, 1968).

Secondly, it was just because China and Japan had different acquaintance with Western modern education that led to the different means of introducing. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan undertook an omnibus reform on its traditional feudal education and introduced Western education in various ways. For instance, in the 1870's, Japan followed the French model of educational system, but as for the educational ideologies, the content of courses and the courses offered, they followed the British and American models. The Japanese also translated and introduced a great number of textbooks from Britain and America. In contrast, the Qing government's educational reforms, with the 1898 reform as the beginning, followed Japan's model as much as Japan followed the Western model.

Thus, the educational reform indirectly introduced the Western modern education by following Japan's model. Just as an old Chinese saying goes "learning after the superior gets the mediocre, learning after the mediocre only inferior". The indirect means of learning from the West made the Chinese modern educational system lag far behind that of Western countries, even Japan.

Finally, great differences existed between the guiding ideologies of the modern education in China and Japan. In the 1870's, with G. Guizot's *Histoire de la Civilisation on Europe depuis la chute de Empire Romain Jusqualla Revolution Francaise* (Europe's Civilization History) and T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* translated into Japanese, the trend of thought of "civilization" appeared in Japan. Influenced by this trend of thought, Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote *On Japan's Education and On the Basic Theories of Civilization*, both of which became best sellers in contemporary Japan. In these two books, he accepted G. Guizot's and T. Buckle's concept of historical civilization which described human history's transition from "uncivilized age" to "civilized age". In his opinion, the developed countries in the West had entered the "civilized age"; Japan, China and other less developed Asian countries should absorb Western culture and education to enable these countries to enter the "civilized age". According to this viewpoint, Fukazawa Yukichi sharply denounced Confucianism, pointing out that it was an obstacle to hinder humanity from advancing to the "civilized age" (Fukuzawa, 1962; 1958; 1959). In sharp contrast to this, some Chinese bureaucrats and intellectuals advocated absorption of the Western advanced science and technology, but rejected the Western concept of valuable "liberty", "equality" and "democracy" at the core of their culture and traditions. The attitude could be concluded as an idea Zhong Ti Xi Yong Lun (the theory of maintaining the Chinese morality and making use of the Western science and technology). In 1898, Zhang Zhidong who wrote *On China's Education*, theorized and systematized the idea (Zhang, 1990). With the influence of this idea, the confused mixture of the moral education based on Confucianism, and the mental education focusing on imparting Western science and technology, was considered as an ideal mod-

el for the Chinese modern education system.

CONCLUSION

With the previous detailed analysis, the following conclusions can be made. Firstly, the idea of "revering the Emperor and expelling the barbarians" that was put forward during the Bakufu period developed into "revering the Emperor and overthrowing the Bakufu" during the Meiji Restoration, when the reform goal was fundamentally to overthrow the feudal system of Bakufu. In order to achieve this aim, the radical Samurai (the feudal warriors) resorted to force. However, in China, neither Yang Wu Yun Dong (the industrialization movement) nor the reform of 1898 put forward the idea of overthrowing the feudal society of the Qing Dynasty. The real power of the government was still in the hands of those feudal conservative bureaucrats. Secondly, as to the guiding ideology, during the Meiji Restoration, the democratic thoughts of Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill were widely disseminated in Japan, and influenced Fukuzawa Yukichi, Kato Hiroyuki and Nakae Chōmin who strongly criticized Confucianism. In contrast, by 1898, no Western democratic thoughts were propagated in China, except for evolutionism. Moreover, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong advocated "thought of the great harmony" and Jun Qing Min Gui Lun, mainly through the Confucian concepts and thoughts instead of Western democratic ones. Thirdly, around the Meiji Restoration, Japan sent quite a number of students to study in Western nations, and later also sent many high-ranking officials to examine the education in the West. Influenced by the thought of "civilization", they established Japan's modern educational system, following French, American, British and German models. In China, however, only a few students, with Rong Hong, Ma Jianzhong and Yan Fu included, had returned by 1898. Little did the Chinese know about Western modern education. Therefore, China's modern education, established at the beginning of the 20th century, was modelled after

Japan's and took Zhong Ti Xi Yong Lun as the guiding ideology. Mainly for these reasons, Japan's modernization reform starting from the Meiji Restoration resulted in quick development. As a result, Japan soon became a main power in the world. The reform in the Qing Dynasty, on the other hand, brought about little development in China and eventually led her to deteriorate into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

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