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THE FIRST MODERN CHINESE TRAVELOGUE ON ROMANIA: KANG YOUWEI'S QUEST FOR MOTIVATING ANALOGIES

Mihai Ionuț FĂT¹

ABSTRACT:

KANG YOUWEI 康有為 WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURE OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT OF 1898 IN CHINA. THE REFORM ATTEMPTED TO CONSTITUTIONALISE THE CHINESE MONARCHY DURING THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR GUANGXU 光緒 (B.1871, R.1875-1908), IN THE LATE YEARS OF A MORIBUND DYNASTY, THE QING (1644-1911). THE UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT FORCED HIM INTO EXILE TO JAPAN FIRST. FROM THERE HE STARTED TO TRAVEL EXTENSIVELY, BECOMING A SEASONED TRAVELLER AND A KEEN OBSERVER OF PEOPLE AND PLACES. THIS IS HOW THE MOST INTERESTING, CHALLENGING, CONTROVERSIAL AND BEAUTIFUL PIECES OF MODERN CHINESE TRAVEL LITERATURE WERE BORN.

THE PRESENT STUDY AIMS TO UNVEIL THE REASONS WHY SUCH A CHINESE INTELLECTUAL AND REFORMER TOOK INTEREST IN A THEN RATHER OBSCURE COUNTRY LIKE ROMANIA AND WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF HIS VISIT.

THE RESEARCH IS USING DIFFERENT SOURCES, INCLUDING HIS TRAVEL MEMOIRS TO OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL WRITINGS. HIS TRAVEL NOTES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ROMANIA, UNLIKE SOME OTHER SOURCES REMAINED JUST IN A MANUSCRIPT FORM, PRESERVED AT THE THE SHANGHAI MUSEUM, BEING MADE AVAILABLE TO THE WIDER READERSHIP ONLY IN THE COLLECTED FORM OF THE AUTHOR'S WORKS, POSTHUMOUSLY PUBLISHED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

KEY WORDS: KANG YOUWEI, TRAVEL LITERATURE, CHINA, ROMANIA, CHINESE LITERATURE.

Travel writing was a very appreciated literary genre during the period which corresponds to the European La Belle Époque (1871-1914). It became popular not only on the European continent but also as a world wide phenomenon that followed the rush for novelty inspired by the age of exploration and the effect of a confluence or clash of civilisations and cultures generated by it.

The adventure novels like those of Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925) or Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), much appreciated at the turn of the century, that were contemporaneous

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or subsequent to the travel writing of some pioneering historical figures such as Alexander Burnes (1805-1841), Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) or Charles Montagu Doughty (1843-1926), found immense appeal among a readership fascinated by the unknown.

Travelogues, with their function as mirrors of reality, were not just simple accounts of journeys and places, but many a time they constituted expressions of intimate experiences and personal statements by which the authors endeavoured to secure their place in the eternal memory of the generations to follow. They carried messages through time, messages that had everlasting reverberations and historical implications.

This trend was not only a monopoly of the Western explorer who had been turning to the East or other directions, since the times of Marco Polo, in order to refresh his own static world with flavours from a far away mystery land. Even for the easterner, no matter how far his plot of land in the East might have been, being discovered by somebody so motivated like the Western explorer, had mutual implications that stimulated his innate curiosity and convinced him to leave fear and lethargy aside and move towards what he thought were realms worthy of being emulated in their progress. The Western daring and incisiveness was seen as a progressive force. Crossing distances required a motivation that was very much envied and often perceived as a leap forward. This was also the case with the Chinese explorers of the Western world at the beginning of the 20th century. In response, they too started to venture in the thereto little known western world and learn from it, get inspiration and try to refresh their own society by making the society aware of the importance of their own experience through writing about it.

China, a mighty giant of the East, stiffened by millennia of old traditions of unchanging practices and habits had her own wandering misfits. The inspiring depths of the far horizon attracted many intellectuals who started to march westward. Among them the most noticeable and controversial figure of all remains undoubtedly Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). He was a revolutionary thinker that left an indelible mark on the memory of his age by being associated, in his guiding role, to the “Hundred Days Reform” wùxū biànfǎ 戊戌變法 (1898) of the emperor Guangxu 光緒 (b.1871, r.1875-1908). The reform movement, which aimed to remove the stubborn Empress Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835-1908) from power and replace her rule with a constitutional monarchy with the help of the powerless emperor Guangxu failed and resulted in its leader being purged and others forced into exile. The aftermath found Kang Youwei travelling in Europe to one of the most unseemly of places, a country that once fell under the influence of quite a few empires and survived by mimicking obedience : the kingdom of Romania.

One should ask then why would such an esteemed figure as Kang Youwei venture to such an apparently insignificant place, so much battered by history and tributary to others, since much of what an Asian intellectual would expect to find useful for him was maybe elsewhere, in the much more developed and independent West ? At least for Kang Youwei, it seems that the use of the word “insignificant” in a reference to Romania was unconceivable and there were reasons why he chose to travel to the Eastern European countries and draw certain conclusions that only few readers of his works would expect for him to draw. In his account he exclaims: “ I really wouldn’t dare to belittle Romania!” [1]

ROMANIA: A PLACE OF CONFLUENCE

Among the written manuscripts which Kang Youwei left behind and managed to survive untouched by the depredations of time can also be found the one kept now in the

Shanghai Museum of History describing the kingdom of Romania which he had visited after crossing the border from Bulgaria.

His travelling notes were supposed to be addressing a Chinese readership. The style glows with beautiful literary expressions and shines with poetical interludes.

Before describing his impressions about the natural landscape, the author starts with a startling conclusion regarding the early history of the place. He doesn't mention however the source of his informations, one that could have been otherwise local or the very result of his vast readings, prior to the visit:

“The origins of the Romanian people are to be found in the Eastern Roman Empire. ‘*ni*’ [from the word ‘Romanian’] refers to the kind of people. After the fall of Constantinople under the Ottoman rule, the Byzantines took refuge to the north and settled there. Therefore, the Romanians are the bearers of an old language and ancient customs that make their level of civilisation rise above that of the Serbians, Bulgarians, Turks or Greeks. Moreover, by traveling across the country one may notice that the land is so well tended, the stations are so beautiful and clean, the infrastructure so complete, comparable with that of the Northern European countries, while leaving behind former Roman populated countries like Italy and Spain. Her future days of glory are therefore unquestionable, the country being the foremost among the five great Eastern European countries, as can be known from the very history of her formation.” [2]

In his view, the Romanian claim of “Roman identity” was not a “forgery” of history and the name was not a boast, but was substantiated by what his eyewitness account revealed: how well the country had been managed, as a product of what the Romans also were supposed to be known for, builders of roads and infrastructure. The Byzantines, as Eastern Romans and inheritors of a significant legacy, were equally famous for the impregnable wall system of their renowned metropolis. The fall of Constantinople could only reveal some natural flaws that the Ottomans took advantage of, something that didn't detract from the long lasting Byzantine reputation as masters in fortifications and wonderful engineers. It seems that a reflection of those qualities was somehow seen as present in Romanians as well, according to Kang Youwei, who repeatedly mentioned in his account the managerial ability of the Romanians regarding their own capital: “The Romanians are good at tending to their capital city. The peasants are disciplined and clean. The stations are of an advanced capacity. Outside the stations the weeping willows abound and bring shade to the buildings. They are accustomed to erect fences and sweep the places clean in such a way that only the Northern European countries are able to compare to them. Southern European countries like France, Austria, Italy, Spain and Portugal are lagging behind.”[3] The comparison with the Western Europe denotes also an affinity to the Scandinavian countries that Kang Youwei developed as he became enamoured with Sweden where he even intended to stay [4], a potential home that he left in 1904, four years prior to his visit to Eastern Europe. Like nowadays intellectuals or royalty, he also felt the need to diversify his life by settling in exotic locations that could also legitimise his status and satisfy his need for freedom from the restrictions experienced in his own country, where he was forced into exile, an exile that started in Japan [5].

As himself took a steamer to cross the border, he recalls the struggle for Bulgarian independence, how the Russian armies also crossed by steam launches the Danube river and waged war in order to protect their fellow Christian brothers from the ravages of the despotic Ottoman rule. The event mentioned took place during the 1877-1878 campaign that marked the collapse of the Ottoman influence in Eastern Europe and the beginning of the end for the Ottoman Empire. Impressed by the place, he dedicates a poem to that historical event while being inspired by “the breezy wind that pushes tides, the gulping sound of waterbirds and the

hoisted presence of both the Romanian and Bulgarian national flags in the middle of the river that enables one to have the complete view of past and present at the same time”[6]. The poem is among the only few known in literature to be dedicated by a Chinese traveler to the countries belonging to this part of the world and certainly the only one mentioning a Romanian flag:

“ The Danube back it flows with clarity,
Bulgarian and Romanian flags in the mid river flutter,
I can only imagine the events of thirty years back,
When steaming Russian launches attacked like flying metal.” [7]

Having previously traveled to other European countries, Kang Youwei was able to compare the kingdom of Romania with other parts of the world, including those south of the Danube and pass judgement on how his experience north of the Danube was different than the experience gained in the countries he mentions as once inhabited by Romans. According to him , emblematic for Romania and extremely important was the Danube River whose size he admired as one of the broadest in the World, surpassing even that of the Ganges, but being only a second to that of the Yangtze River of China. The Danube receives the water streams of his affluents and flows into the Black Sea creating a delta , with three distributaries, that he believes to be one of the greatest in the world, a delta uninhabited and forsaken because a lack of agricultural vision of the people used only with wheat as staple, who didn’t consider cultivating rice in a place too humid and unsuitable for the wheat to grow. The lack of knowledge regarding rice and the prevalence of wheat as the staple food were according to him the obstacles that prevented Romanians from properly using the advantages of a damp climate [1].

While impressed by the size of the Danube, he sincerely confesses to be ignorant of that of the Amazon, a place that remains still untraveled for him [8]. His patriotic and nationalistic soul didn’t hold him back from being praiseful towards what he thought was superior about his own country the greatness of rivers in China.

For him, the Danube river was not only a natural boundary situated between countries like Romania and Bulgaria, but also a cultural one, separating the Balkans from the rest of the Eastern Europe. He mentions how different the cultural landscape appears to be while looking from the Bulgarian side to the Romanian one, how “the weather is different and the architecture is particular, due to the fact that the place while being located in Eastern Europe its architecture has been the result of a synthesis forged between the Asian and European civilisations.”[9] He continues with his apprehension of the style by affirming that “the buildings are under the influence of the Greek style of Orthodox churches combined as well with Islamic and Western European styles, three styles integrated into one. Looking at them afresh they reveal themselves in all their ingenious elegance. The Islamic style of sculpted ornaments is refined and beautiful but too intricate, the Greek Orthodox style of the church towers bears resemblance to the long type of Indian tiles, while the West European style is massive but lacking in any sculpted ornamentation. The present Romanian style gathers the best elements of the three styles while discarding their shortcomings, thus becoming truly exquisite. ”[10] As a conclusion, he also draws a hierarchical scale of the styles present in small buildings around the world .He has the highest regard for the Gothic Revival style, to which the Romanian style, which unites both Asian and European styles, is only the second, followed by the Indian [8].

As it can be seen, Kang Youwei makes a strong case for Romania as a place of cultural confluence. This confluence makes the country cosmopolitan in a way comparable to the great empires of the West. Therefore, it can be said that he somehow may have found country’s variety and syncretism in art and culture to be an expression of what actually the Byzantine Empire once was: a nodal point in which civilisations met. As he links Romanians to the

Eastern Roman Empire he becomes the first one to acknowledge this affiliation in an argued way, decades earlier before Nicolae Iorga, the well-known Romanian historian, was to produce his most famous account on the Byzantine political ancestry of the Romanian statehood, "Byzantium after Byzantium", a work that was meant to be eye-opening on the Romanian culture and its origins as linked to that of Byzantium [12].

THE BUCHAREST DURING LA BELLE ÉPOQUE (1871-1914) IN KANG YOUWEI'S VIEW

Kang Youwei praises Bucharest (卜加利士) for his imposing, ingenious and elegant architecture [8].

Out of all the official buildings that he could inspect, his attention was arrested by the one that had been just erected, a neoclassic building that was ordered to host the Postal Service Palace and inaugurated in 1903. The same building is used in the present as the Museum of National History of Romania and remains an important historical landmark of the city. Kang Youwei was enticed by the sculptures adorning the building, which he found particularly rich. He also referred to its form, perhaps with regard to the rooftop, as most sinuous and to the structure as ingenious and beautiful [8]. Perhaps his interest in the building wasn't only an aesthetic one. As he was wandering during his exile, he was very much tuned to the realities of China and seems to have received telegrams from China that were regularly informing him about emperor's state of health. Guangxu was an ailing emperor and his relationship with the reforming monarch was a very close one. Kang Youwei wasn't just an adviser but also a political mentor and the one whose force was behind the throne that initiated The Hundred Days' Reform (June-September 1898), a movement supposed to modernise the Chinese monarchy and assure its survival during an age when the republic as a form of governance became more and more acceptable. The reform had the function of turning China into a modern type of monarchy that would allow the country to thrive and prosper without facing internal challenges that could lead to a bloody revolution like the one that took place in France and that he criticised [12]. The Emperor was a frail human being, but his mind was open and he promoted thrift and frugality regarding the bureaucratic expenditures of his office and also as his personal way of life. While acting as an example of austerity of rule, Guangxu realised the dire situation China was in under the tight grip of his adopting aunt, Empress Cixi 慈禧 (1835-1908), famous for her conservatism and lack of amenability to change. Since Guangxu was still under house arrest in the Hall of Jade Ripples 玉澜堂 in the Summer Palace, where he expired during the same year of Kang Youwei's visit to Romania (1908), the emperor had no real power. As an oddity of destiny, both him and the empress Cixi would pass away just one day apart. Kang Youwei was aware of this possibility and seems to have always been faithful to his Lord. As he read some worrying news in a message that he received, he hurriedly sends a telegram from Bucharest back to the court, wishing health and longevity to his Lord and disciple in political affairs. He also produces on the spot a moving poem, with hopeful thoughts dedicated to him:

"The sun around the dragon scales turned for ten years more,
The ranks are mindful, before his chamber thus aligned
Whether the emperor is healthy or not, the question scares the realm
It is not for gold to pray, but ask the Heavens wide." [13]

The ten years that Kang Youwei refers to are the years that had passed since the emperor started to be under house arrest. The poem reflects the desperation of saving such a person's life, whose value couldn't be quantified in gold and that couldn't be saved otherwise than submitting to the will of Heaven. The officials are waiting aligned in front of the imperial chambers worried about the result of emperor's convalescence. Uncertainty is floating into the air of the Chinese court. The state of emperor's health was important not only for those close to him but for the entire realm that depended on his fortitude and revolutionary attitude, with all his possible flaws and mistakes. The emperor managed to offer China a new perspective. Not only the emperor was ailing but China in the East was ailing too. The well-known expression "the sick man of Asia" came to be more popular with the writings of Yan Fu (1854-1921), which originally inspired Kang Youwei's interest in Western culture and made him become a voracious reader of Yan Fu's first translations of Western seminal works of philosophy and politics. Yan Fu in his *Yuanqiang* affirmed that "China is actually a sickman"[18]. According to any sound logic, an ailing person would require a proper medical attention and even surgical operations. Kang Youwei advised against completely discarding those affected tissues of the Chinese society and militated for improving them, turning them into better. In spite a conclusion that some scholars like Ma Honglin may have arrived to by pointing out the Darwinist influence on Kang Youwei's philosophy [15], his upbringing couldn't be altered just by a simple ideological switch. Beneath the stormy appearance of his ocean tides, the depths were stable and unyielding. While roaming around the city, he describes what is to be identified with the Cişmigiu Park that he visited as "a park two miles vast with meandering rivulets, shady willows along the winding alleys, flowers rich and the green luxuriant, with the water also green reflecting, over a bridge that leads to a waterside pavilion and scenery like that from China. The weather was torrid. In the evening I took dinner on the stairs of the pavilion looking at the wild ducks and the rowing boats and listening to music. This is also the unavoidable free wandering of a traveler. In waiting for the boarding date to come and take a boat on the Black Sea I remained still for two more days here. I spent the afternoons inside the pavilion. There was no human presence, but only the sound of birds, joyfully satisfying." [16] Kang Youwei compares the aesthetics of the landscape with a Chinese classical scenery, as a proof of longing for his own country. He also uses two expressions meant to be allusions to his forced exile. The "wandering off" xiāoyáo 逍遙, famously used by Zhuangzi in his works to describe a state of natural detachment and overcoming of distances is motivated by a lack of choice and the "unavoidable circumstances" 不得已 that he had to face. He feels hopeless and lost, like most of the exiled, but at the same time he confronts reality with a sense of detachment and acceptance. According to a Chinese typical style, his prose alternates with poetry. He retells the poem titled "An Afternoon Rest in the Waterside Pavilion from the Park of Romania's Capital City Bucharest" that he composed under the influence of the experience he had there:

"Down hang the willows tall along the alleys between streams,
A terraced tower green it grows, to water ripples and bird sound a host.
Without a human presence, to a forgetful world I came it seems
Like in a dream was taken back to the pavilion of a kingdom lost." [17]

However, the waterside pavilion that he describes is to be identified with that of the later so-called "Monte Carlo buffet" or the "Monte Carlo Island" [18], a setting that reminded him of the lost days in the Empire. At the same time the idea of the "kingdom lost" is also referring to Rome and the Roman civilisation that he subtly alludes to also when he mentions the common origin of the French and Romanian people. He will notice how the Romanian

people embrace elements of the French culture, including the language which he describes as popular due to a common origin [1]. He later on is to notice also the erected roman monuments of old that belonged to the Institute of Antiquities (Bówùyuàn 博物院) and were guarding a courtyard filled only with a large number of them, the museum being hosted inside the building of the University of Bucharest [19] that had six hundred students and fifty members of the teaching staff with classes being held in French and German [1].

A respect for the monarchy and the Imperial past related to the origins of the Romanian people is present throughout Kang's entire memoir about Romania. The Băneasa hippodrome for example is mentioned in relationship with the preparations for organising the great race held in the honour of King Carol I of Romania's forty years jubilee, an event that already took place in 1908. He found the hippodrome to be a striking piece of architecture, unequalled in any of the places that he visited . He praises it as surpassing in all aspects those vestiges of hippodromes that he had the opportunity to visit previously. He subtly associates the hippodromes with the Roman ones, since he refers to them as "vestiges". This imperial nostalgia would continue to follow him as he tries to attach meaning to whatever reminds him of a vibrating past, a state of mind reflected by the poem that he wrote while at the border between Bulgaria and Romania. The nostalgia for a bygone age is explicable through his own political tragedy. For such forced wanderer, the wandering is always devoid of meaning and an empty journey. The wanderer is always haunted by the same emptiness inside and although the places that he would visit are supposed to fill his life with novelty and a richness of information, he would still remain the perpetual victim of the defining instability of his lifestyle. There was nothing substantial to cling on, not even the islet that charmed him in Sweden and finally left behind for a more interesting horizon, no matter how welcoming some far away lands were to him wherever he went.

The hippodrome most probably was located on the present area corresponding to the Romexpo Exhibition Center of Bucharest. It is here that Kang Youwei made the remark about Romania not being at all an insignificant country, but one to be praised and appreciated, as he previously learned from some Europeans [8]. This becomes evident for him when he arrives in Bucharest at 11h in the night and discovers the city with its vibrant night life, the electrification of the roads , the restaurants, the majestic churches, banks, entertainment places, which according to him, although cannot compare to those of Hungary, are still a variant of those from Budapest , but at a smaller scale. All these are for him, anyway, something different than the less grand or impressive city life that he encountered in Serbia or Bulgaria [8].

The first diary entry of a date in his memoir about Romania, that he mentions as the day following his date of arrival, is *wushen* 27/6 (July 25, 1908), when he visited the Royal Palace which he describes as yellow in colour, like most of the Eastern European type of building colours, a colour which he understands to be a trace left by the Austrian influence in architecture [8]. He mentions the relative small size of the Palace and that the summer retreat of the king was what is to be identified with the Peleş Castle, situated on a mountain side. The name of the king was Carol and he named an heir to his throne in the person of Prince Ferdinand. Since the monarchy didn't have the real power, the king was free to wander around and he didn't have so many obligations to attend to [8]. He continues then to describe the form of governance as unicameral with a Parliament that consisted of 200 parliamentarians, the former Parliament being of a smaller number, according to the building that was also of a smaller size and which was expanding when he visited it on the Metropolitan Hill of Bucharest (where the patriarchal seat of the Romanian Orthodox Church was also established). He then proceeds at depicting the Bell Tower opposite to the Parliament, to be identified as the one

erected during the reign of the Prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu (1654-1714) [8]. He mentions next to it some monk dwellings to be located nearby and on the roadside statues of historically important figures like the one which probably can be identified with that of the assassinated minister Barbu Catargiu (1807-1862, rendered in Chinese as kélālizhāo 咳拉厲招)(Ionescu, 1938, p.237) and possibly Alexandru Golescu (1819-1881, yālishāndà lāgūhuā 亞力山大·拉孤晔像), both prominent officials that he recognises as meritorious in their actions on behalf of the Romanian people for the consolidation of the kingdom as a viable political entity, comparing them with such famous advisers and strategists of the Qin court in China as Wang Meng 王孟 (325AD-375 AD) who helped to unify the country for the first time and Guo Wei 郭威 (904AD-954AD) the founder of the Later Zhou dynasty 後周 [8]. He also uses this instance to make a new remark: “Which place doesn’t have its own flavoured grass scent that can spread around? The only question is how far.”[20] That is why he appreciates the bridge over the Danube, identified with “Carol I” and more recently called “Anghel Saligny”, after the engineer that designed it, and considers it as not less impressive than that of New York, with his bronze statues of soldiers (jīnrén 金人) guarding it, perhaps reminding of those that fought during the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878). This infrastructure was the product of good governance and a careful planning, considered as a trait of the national character. Romanians, like their ancestors, the Romans, were builders and planners. Their government emancipated itself from the Ottoman rule and the local factories were not yet opened for production, so the majority of goods were imported mostly from Germany [1]. These dire conditions were generated by centuries in which Romania couldn’t make herself known to the world due to the shadow cast by an enslaving and subjugating Ottoman Empire and due to the less favourable international conditions that set her at the suffocating crossroads of so many Empires that vied for power, engaged in a seemingly never-ending Eastern European “Great Game”, as Kipling coined once that referring to Central Asia.

According to Kang Youwei, the Romanian politics was the most corrupt and he associates the roots of this corruption to the long centuries of subservience to the Ottoman Empire and with the Turkish customs which could be discarded only after forty years of modernising progress under the new crown [8]. He understands the geopolitical dynamics of the region and the importance of a favourable location for a country to develop. He mentions that this step of modernising progress in such a short time “not only can make Bulgaria and Serbia feel surpassed but also can put to shame countries like Italy and Spain, while the Turks could feel even more ashamed at the sight of it.” [21]

Romanians were the proud heirs of an already old fashioned cosmopolitan past, a legacy hard to discard or adapt, to which they were instinctually clinging on with stubborn determination, while confronted with the overwhelming proximity and presence of the Slavic and Ottoman worlds. Both these northern and eastern “barbarians”, as the Romans would consider them, were threats that plagued their Byzantine inheritance and eroded the Roman spirit of their ancestors. Therefore they steeped themselves into the classics and made Latin and Greek central to their education, followed later on by French. It is in this way that such journeys initiated by the Romanian gentry and described by Claude Anet, that pioneered long automobile races starting from the rather obscure Giurgiu, a city on the Danube and heading straight to the glamorous Isfahan, in Persia, were made possible [22].

However, it is in this context that Kang Youwei, later on would express his worry about the countries in East Europe, so eager to embrace a French culture above which the shadow of

the French revolutionary atrocities looms still large and fresh as ever. He draws a general conclusion only after finishing his Eastern European journey with his visit to the Ottoman world, a world that he would describe as tormented by the same falling order of things. Criticising the general trend of embracing French culture, he relates:

“East Europe, East Asia, Russia, Russia and Persia are all adopting the French literary style, the school instruction being conducted in French, a language popularised as the right standard to be followed. Being often purged by oppressive regimes, the intellectuals in these countries were all full of resentment and there was no one left not to follow the French example and lead the people in the spirit of the French Revolution. They soon all became followers of the French, doing this in order to inspire courage into the [oppressed] hearts of their fellow countrymen. `By visiting countries like Turkey, Russia, Persia, Romania, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Serbia a prevalence of French can be discovered, their francophile leanings being the most obvious. However, any liking for things taken to the extreme can be harmful , over-enthusiasm can generate [regrettable] changes. As all people, due to the institutionalised education in French succumb to the misleading ideals of the French Revolution, adopting them in administration, this will certainly turn contrary to their expectations and how can the unrest be avoided then? There are already such examples in the case of Russia and Persia . How can then Turkey be a different case? I fear that transformations like those generated by the French Revolution are close to happen here as well”[23].

To understand the concerns that troubled Kang Youwei in his trip to the eastern extreme of the European continent one has to look for the analogies that he obsessed about. One of them is another eastern empire, Persia, a closer relative on the Silk Route, that went through the same political transformation process as China. Persia was yet another “sick-man”, often menaced by external aggression and disabled by a seemingly corrupt dynasty, the Qajar (1789-1925) which was confronted with another constitutional revolution inspired by the French fashion. It seemed inevitable that in order to effect some real changes a violent transition of power should be enacted. In Europe Romania was one of the few countries who largely benefitted from the French spirit of law making. Since the 1848 movement, started mostly by French educated elites, Romanians had been following a model that aimed to radically change their way of doing politics. The Napoleonic spirit was that of total emancipation, an emancipation that required a tribute in blood.

Therefore Bucharest, as a veritable mirror of a Romanian style of modernising progress, had to make large sacrifices in order to discard long rooted customs and replace them with what Romanians always had an affinity to, as close relatives, the high culture of the fellow Latinate French. In this context the French and European La Belle Époque corresponded with that particular period of national and cultural emancipation of the Romanian people, having in Romanian consciousness this double significance, an international one as a current of high culture they adhered to and one particular to Romania proper, that referred to the gaining of national and cultural emancipation.

It can be rightfully said that La Belle Époque brought about Romanian emancipation in all senses. Bucharest was the perfect mirror of that, precisely because it was the closest major city to the Ottoman Capital and because, unlike the cities from Transylvania that were never contaminated by the Balkan politics or by the Ottoman corruption, had to make a herculean effort and struggle with an enemy within that was very hard to uproot. The antidote was a new renaissance, no matter how daft or forced might it have looked like. This entailed a painful growth process and sometimes traumatic experiences that had to shake from the foundations those society habits which otherwise had the role to provide an illusory stability, one who had the pernicious function of leaving the country frozen in time.

The dreadful lock had to be broken by means of a social cataclysm if not otherwise and the French revolutionary spirit had always been an animating force that provided the means for such changes to take place. As seen from the later developments in Romanian history, this spirit had always been there.

Kang Youwei correctly noticed the usefulness of the French revolutionary thought in the case of the newly emancipated Eastern European countries. Without revolution, nothing could have been achieved.

His opinion about the presence of the French culture in such countries was not a positive one. He feared that instability. The Chinese, like the Romanians had to survive while struggling between a tradition of an imperial past and a present that required changes and transformations.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT ROMANIAN PEOPLE: CLIMATIC RACISM

During his sojourn in Romania, Kang Youwei makes some striking remarks regarding the physical appearance of the Romanian people, considerations that were nothing short of racist.

His attitude must be understood from two perspectives: an ideological one, related to the progressive currents that tried to demolish some old established views and challenge the traditional order of things, as a tendency to revolutionise the society and a psychological one, guided by his identity as a Chinese who had the inferiority complex of a person coming from a feudal and undeveloped country with a superiority complex underlying it, that of an individual product of a very old culture whose pride suffers at the sight of any familiar backwardness. Kang Youwei literarily hates to discover in others a part of his own flaws as a Chinese. How could such a great civilisation as the Chinese one, with such a cultural longevity become the “sick man of Asia”, so frail and helpless against foreign aggression? The Chinese paradox haunts him and forces him to find even the most unseemly explanations and produce the most controversial theories related to race, culture and material progress. He doesn't seem to have had some other sources influencing his world view except the translations of Yan Fu or the traditional Chinese works of literature and philosophy. There are parallels however that can be drawn with some of the much later envisioned models for Europe to follow as a unified political structure of the future. Racial intercourse and the white supremacy is a recurring obsession for a complexed Chinese intellectual. Chinese self-sufficiency and self image as a prosperous and powerful nation was challenged by the material progress of the West that put a thousand years old civilisation to shame and denied its authority in a world dominated by people of white complexion.

There was a contradiction between his equalitarian stance and the support towards monarchy. He was sending telegrams scared by an eventual demise of a king that was only a junior in politics. Kang Youwei saw in him the only hope for China to be saved from a seemingly unavoidable internal turmoil.

Countries in crisis, out of desperation come to rely even on the weakest examples of human lives and attach to them the value and meaning of a messianic mystique, in order to motivate their struggle for survival. Much like Jean D'Arc in France during the Middle Ages, there was a need for China also to find a similar example of purity and innocence in the frail and unexperienced emperor that would eventually save the country from losing a much treasured identity. It is this self-contradictory nature that made Kang Youwei denounce tradition and fully support it at the same time. This inner contradiction made him close to a Dostoevsky character, belonging to a world in which humanity can also be found in crime and murder, a paradox that generates much anxiety and deviation. His deviations become more

evident in the way he writes about the inhabitants of Romania and the conclusions that he draws:

“Romanians have brown skin colour, but not too dark. Only those that live close to the Black Sea are really dark-skinned with a colour contrast between the palmar side and the dorsal side of the hand, much like the Indians and the Orang Malay. The white-skinned people here present different rosy shades. From Budapest eastwards, people are becoming more like brown, due to the exposure to sunlight. Therefore the whiteness in Europeans can be found only in countries like those of Northern Europe while a little bit to the north-east they tend to lose that shade and together with it the wealth and power also becomes late for them to acquire. Could it be otherwise? Once I composed a poem that says: ‘In the Mediterranean Sea white people live,/ Both heavens-proud much then I can conceive. ‘In the Southern seas I met once on a boat two people and I noticed their bodies to bear resemblance to that of the Chinese .I thought there was an explanation to that and that they were Chinese students, so I inquired them about it , only to find out that they were long-term Spanish residents in the Philippines. The seed can migrate across the earth while the earth transforms itself according to the sun. The colour of the body is according to the position on the earth and when the degrees would change, the colour also changes. Therefore it should not be forced into it”[24].

Kang Youwei, in his pursuit for understanding the differences between people, comes to the conclusion that the racial factor is an essential one in determining the material and economic development of one nation. Another factor that he considers important is the climate. Therefore he places the racial evolution in a geographical context. At the same time , from the above paragraph one may notice that he classifies the Romanian people as belonging to the same racial category with the other Europeans who according to him are all part of the white race, an arrogant race especially because of the whiteness of its skin and the economic development that it brings. In his most important and representative work, the “Book of the Great Unity”(Datóng shū大同書) he provides with what he considers to be an effective method of changing the physical constitution of a human being. He mentions that the white colour is mostly associated with the inhabitants born in North-European countries and has to do with the lack of sunlight and the prevalence of cold. The cold climate would force people to become more dynamic and productive, therefore the children should all be born in countries with a cold climate and little exposure to the sun and not be raised in a hot climate, so that they wouldn’t be exposed to the energy of the land (dìqì 地氣) [25]. This method that he promoted was literally called a “racial improvement” (réngzhǒng gǎiliáng 人種改良) method, a racial policy that he insistently recommended [26]. His arguments are as it follows:

“The foetus receives the influence of the energy of the land where the birth takes place. Therefore in the rugged mountain valleys, deep and tight, most often people with malformations, tumours and skull protrusions, sharp chin and twisted nasal bridge, yellow pale complexion are born. They do not have fleshy cheeks. Their character is petty and narrow, they are sharp and heavy, deep and obstructed and dangerously isolated, few of them being endowed with intelligence in a wider, enlightened sense. In a marshy place, people being born there are weak and feeble, moist and loose, rarely having strength in their bones and a brave soul. Their character is roundabout, slippery and lewd, twisted and weak. Only few can be tough and direct, chaste and loyal. (...) Therefore, people from the urban settlements, inhabiting vast plains and fertile land have broad forehead and full chin, bright complexion and fair skin, like the Chinese. Africans with black flesh and silver-white teeth, with pointy cheeks and tilted face, with a protruding backside of the skull and a forward chin, are an established race born

and raised mostly in tropical countries and living inside ravines. The South Sea islands are close to the equator. The Chinese and British who come to dwell here on long term, turn wasted and brown in colour. They sweat much and become dull.”[27]

Kang Youwei then continues to build his case about how unhealthy is to live in countries with a hot climate, close to the equator. Speaking from his own experience consisting of interactions with the British who were born in India, he considers that the land had a pernicious influence on their skin colour, a fact that he also noticed regarding some of his own countrymen that established themselves in India and mated with local women [25]. He also mentions India as having a numerous population of women that should be relocated for birth to those northern countries with a cold climate. He recommends the children to be raised in these new locations, at least until they turn twenty of age in order to avoid receiving the energy of the place where their parents came from [26]. He also attributes the role of planning to an institution located in those temperate and cold places, responsible with supervising the process by which “white and rosy colour should be obtained and the blueish dark should be discarded, as a method of improvement”. [28] At the same time he calls the black type of people using an expression that can be “mildly” translated as “unwanted kind” (èzhǒng 惡種) [26]. Interesting is that while he notices the same tendency towards developing a darker complexion in the case of the Romanian inhabitants of Bucharest, he mentions in another context the Hungarian type of complexion as identical to the Austrian one, although the Hungarians, according to him are people of a different race that had to survive among Aryans [29]. Therefore his skin colour theory about skin complexion being somehow related to the economic progress shows an obvious degree of coherence throughout all of his writings. This can only demonstrate how deeply rooted his racial convictions were. He would mention Bucharest as inferior to Budapest in many respects. At the same time, such detailed observations of the skin colour show that he may have been surprised by the contrast between the economic development and people’s “backward” appearance. However, like in the case of other countries visited, he provides with a statistics about the number of wealthy people in each country and referring to Romania he estimates the number of one thousand per million, mentioning that the Romanian soil is rich and the natural conditions are providing the peasants with the means to prosper [29]. In all his travelogues it is easily to notice the attention that he pays to the economic dimension of the places he visits, an attitude motivated by the realistic belief that only the economy and material prosperity can save one nation from extinction. These ideas and guiding principles are clearly articulated and expressed in his work “Material Prosperity Saves the Country” 物質救國論 (1906). Kang Youwei’s particularity as a thinker consists in looking at society as a whole. That is why he also tries to explain one nation’s progress not only from a chosen angle that excludes all the others, but by adopting a holistic attitude, that provides ample means of analysis. However, his racial considerations detract considerably from the merits of a supposed-to-be unbiased observation. This can only be further understood by employing the theoretical and practical tools of the deeper psychology. At the same time his conclusions could be the result of the traditional influence of Chinese culture, demonstrating the existence of a culturally and traditionally inherited colour sensibility.

The belief in such a discriminating theory could be related to older sources of Chinese thought, especially maybe those of the early School of Five Elements (五行家), who was concerned with colours, direction and the elemental matter corresponding to it, a concern that he tackled with in his notes where he allocates a special section to this school [30], or even the earlier Taoist philosophy of Laozi who mentioned in one of his chapters that “humans conform

to the earth” 人法地 [31], only later during the Han dynasty to be adopted by Confucianists and incorporated under one form or another into theories like that concerning the “causal correspondence between heaven and man” (天人感應) . However, his opinion about certain types of behaviour as being related to the race or the climate is not an exclusively Chinese theory. Not long before his “Book of the Great Unity” (大同書) was published, Kalergi’s “Praktischer Idealismus: Adel, Technik, Pazifismus” (1925) gained acclaim in Europe. Kalergi has made similar remarks about how the cold European climate was favourable to technological progress [32] and how other races should mix with the Europeans [33]. This dissolution of racial and national boundaries was considered as beneficial by both Richard Kalergi and Kang Youwei, who sought in such a way to alleviate poverty and bring about a state of material welfare for a larger population. Whether Kalergi’s theory had some influence on Kang Youwei or not it is hard to assess. What can be said is that Kang took every opportunity to observe the environment he was introduced to. Even while leaving Bucharest for Constanța, the biggest port at the Black Sea, on the way to the seaside, in *wushen* 6/28 (July 26, 1908), after only one day stay in Bucharest, he noticed how flat the road were and how treeless was the wilderness [34] . Arriving there he noticed how the sea waves were not tall and how small seized the boats were [34].

However, one overlooked detailed by Kang, related to informations not sufficiently available at that time, was the fact that most of the high culture that Europe is known for originated in areas like the Mediterranean basin, alphabetical writing being first documented in such hot places like the Sinai desert, being actually semitic. It is known that the first vocalic alphabet was the Greek, developed from the earlier semitic writing systems [35]. Thus one can conclude that the such theories were only desperate products of that sort of practical idealism that aimed to smooth the path that humanity was naturally inclined to take towards a major shift of paradigm at the beginning of the 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

Kang Youwei , apart from the circumstances of his exile that forced him to travel, out of necessity, far away from his country, looked at travelling as a responsibility towards the old empire that he left behind, taking on the task of getting to know the world better, in order to have a more complete picture of where China stands and how a constitutional reform should be more effectively conducted . He confesses these thoughts to his readership in a very plastic manner, by way of metaphor, in a publication that appeared just five years before he set foot on Romanian soil, in 1904. He wrote a very short introductory explaining the purpose of his travel to eleven European countries that he considered important. Romania was not included on that list, showing that his taste for Eastern Europe must have developed only after getting enough of what the more developed western parts of the continent had to offer in that sense. His statement of purpose reads in the most compelling way:

“In case there may be an illness affecting China, shouldn’t someone think of how to keep the country longer alive? Therefore why shouldn’t one chose to mix all the fruits and flowers that can be found in all the countries of the world and examine their nature and properties, their colour and taste, to separate the good ones from the already dried, to check if they are beneficial or not, why shouldn’t he combine them into a formula and turn them into a medicine which he would eventually administer to China so she can have the intake without becoming a victim of malpractice? Doesn’t that require the work and abnegation of a Shennong [34], who can taste the bitter medicine without losing his life, taste hundreds of plant

ingredients in order to discover that miraculous cure so that his effort would yield results ? That person is the long distance farer , entrusted by Heaven with a heavenly responsibility (...).”[37]

Kang Youwei was not an idle type of traveler. In his traveling incursions he was motivated by a special quest. That quest was actually one for useful analogies. The successful story was meant to provide some part of that cure that he mentions, an ingredient to the “formula” that he planned to make available for that “sick man” of Asia whom he sought to save, for China. Perhaps he was, as it was normal, impressed by the advancement of the West but what he admired the most were examples of nations that managed to grow and thrive in dire conditions and succeeded to escape those traps of history that could have eventually lead to a total loss of identity, freedom and autonomy. China was facing such a crisis, so was the entire world. And this world full of problems had different solutions to them, many worthy of consideration. Since he dedicated such a substantial account to Romania, full of praise and high regard, this meant that he appreciated the fast recovery and determination of the country to emerge glorious from the obscurity that she was committed to by the unfair treatment of a tumultuous destiny.

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同之，万西班牙人久留非利家者。盖种随地迁而地从日变，欧人之臂相色采亦皆其地生是，使独稍易其度，即不能尔，故无可强也。

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