

Formation of the Great Unity (Datong) concept by Kang Youwei and E. Bellamy's Utopia "Looking Backward"

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Abstract

Article is dedicated to a difficult question of the Great Unity ideal forming which defined the political and ideological environment of China until the end of the first third of the XX century. In Confucian canon the ideologem of the Great Unity (Datong) was considered as society of primitive simplicity in which all its members have equal rights and minimum material prosperity. In the 1890th Kang Youwei and his students Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong completely rethought Datong and began to treat it as future open global society. There are sufficient bases to assume that new Datong interpretation appeared thanks to the Chinese translation of the E. Bellamy novel "Looking Backward", performed by Christian missionaries. Research is conducted on the basis of the comparative method, and the intellectual environment and ideological schemes, but not by literary tracks, in view of incomparability of means in the Chinese and English languages. The Bellamy's novel was published in the missionary magazine Wanguo Gongbao in 1891 – 1892, and was printed as the separate book in 1894. The novel was apprehended by Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong as an important grant for understanding of public situation in Europe and America, and became the basis for the first Chinese utopian novels and treatises. Its impact on the public environment of Japan was almost as big though the translation into Japanese was only available in 1903. Substantial features of the works by Kang Youwei and E. Bellamy demonstrate many coincidences; it is possible to take for granted the influence of the American socialist model on forming the future society views of the neoconfucian philosopher Kang Youwei. These arguments allow to draw a conclusion that the intellectual space of China was not isolated from universal tendencies; moreover, Christian missionaries played in intellectual forming role in new generation of the Chinese intellectuals taking part in the Movement for reforms of 1898.

Keywords: Kang Youwei, Edward Bellamy, Utopia, "Looking Backward", The Great Unity (Datong).

Introduction

From all intellectual schemes created in the conditions of traditional Chinese statehood crisis in the 19th century the theory of Kang Youwei (1858-1927) was the most influential. It was connected with a Confucian ideal of the Great Unity (Datong). In "Autobiography" (Wo shi) Kang Youwei declared that about 1885 he appreciated Confucius's ideal (Martynov, 2010). Meanwhile, the analysis of his works shows that in works of the 1880th years the term "Datong" was not used by him yet. His student Liang Qichao (1873 – 1929) demonstrated that Kang began to develop the doctrine about "the general principles" (gongli) no earlier than in 1891, and Datong problem was addressed still later (Liang, 2007). Martin Bernal (Bernal, 1973) first made the assumption that the concept of Datong drew attention of Kang Youwei only through the western source, especially Edward Bellamy's (1850 – 1898) novel *Looking Backward* translated to Chinese. The analysis of these problems makes contents of this article.

Data and methods

The main complexity in studying the intellectual constructions of Kang Youwei is his tendency to mythologize his own biography for the purpose of proving his own divine essence. Having proclaimed himself the perfect wise man, Kang claimed that all his philosophical and political concepts were issued before his 30 anniversary. Comparison of the early Kang Youwei creativity period views in the context of his era intellectual environment allows to disprove a number of mythemes. In the context of intellectual history it also allows to check effectiveness of the developed hypotheses and research methods on non-Western material culture. The last is investigated on the comparative method basis. In view of incomparability of ladders and literary receptions in the English and Chinese languages, research can operate with a historical context and ideologems in the course of their adaptation to the Chinese way of thinking.

Results

Since 1875 the American and British missionaries published irregularly appearing publications review of London "Times" in Chinese under the name *Wanguo Gongbao* (The Review of the Times), and church materials in this almanac alternated with various secular objects, practical contents, as well as modern fiction. Since 1889 the magazine was issued under aegis of *Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese* (S.D.K.). In the 1890th Timothy Richard (1845 – 1919) became the editor-in-chief of *Wanguo Gongbao*. T. Richard was the Welsh Baptist missionary who communicated with Kang Youwei for a long time and left extensive correspondence, as well as the memoirs published in 1916. After defeat of China in war with Japan in 1895 and up to the 1898 Hundred days' Reform movement "The Review of Times" was published by hundreds of thousands copies and Kang Youwei became a sample of the modern popular scientific and political press for reformers circle (Zhang, 2007). There is also a version that since 1895 Liang Qichao took up the position of the secretary for T. Richard.

In his own "Autobiography" Kang Youwei claimed that he was subscribed for *Wanguo Gongbao* since the first trip to Shanghai and Beijing (in 1883) became interested in West science. The novel *Looking Backward* by E. Bellamy was for the first time published in Boston in 1888, and quickly became the best-seller in the English-speaking world, and then across all Europe. 300 000 copies of the book were sold for the first two years of the publication in the USA and Great Britain, and in Russia in 1891 – 1918 it was republished at least seven times in three different translations. Not being outstanding in literary way, Bellamy's book had enormous success as containing an ideologem important for those times, and also easily perceived ideal of social fabric.

The plot of the novel is extremely simple: the young man by the name of Julian Vest sank into a lethargical sleep in 1887 and woke up in Boston of 2000. Lately the world changed to unrecognizability: the private ownership on means of production consigned to the remote past, the social inequality was liquidated, men and women were balanced in the rights, as well as use of general education. "The right to have intelligent parents" became one of the most important rights of each society member. All benefits in Bellamy's world (not to be associated with anarchists of the time, he called a new system as "nationalism") are created by Industrial army in which served all citizens age 21 to 45. In Industrial army they work off their education, and further get professions depending on tendencies and individual abilities. Despite professional distinctions, all possess equal opportunities and social credit. Pair family and private homes stayed the most suitable for convenient life of citizens, however in houses the kitchens were absent – as a symbol of women liberation, - and all citizens eat in public dining rooms. In Bellamy's novel a set of life lines for modern consumer society were predicted: credit cards (in Yekaterinburg the monument for credit card and Bellamy was put in 2011), supermarkets, escalators, obtaining information by phone, trade by mail, and many other things. The part of his ideas was realized by business community of the USA almost immediately.

Contemporaries worldwide in Bellamy's novel were attracted not only by pictures of life and daily routine, but also by the fact that sweeping social and economic changes did not happen by means of revolution. Bellamy declared that the level of production development and trade banking system is so big that they cannot serve only the interests of a narrow group of the owners, and have to therefore developed to serve the society in subordination to the state. The new corporate state combined the clearness of army system with satisfaction of each persons needs therefore the reform captured not only the USA, but also all on the world. In fact, Bellamy predicted globalization. Though the social order described in the novel is called "nationalism", in the world of 2000 there is a full freedom of trade and travels.

The translation of the Bellamy's novel into Chinese was published in "The Review of Times" from December, 1891 to April, 1892 under almost literal name (*Hui tou kan*); in 1894 it was published in the separate book under called *Bainian yijiao* (Hanan, 2004). All main ideological moments placed above in translation were completely kept. This translation was republished in the separate book in 1913. Reformers of a Kang Youwei circle – especially Liang Qichao and more radical Tan Sitong (1865 – 1898), were familiar with this novel, and highly appreciated it. Liang even declared that it is one of the most important books about the West, available in Chinese. Moreover, the translation inspired Liang Qichao to write "The Future of New China" (*Xin Zhongguo weilai ji*) – one of the first utopias in modern Chinese literature (Hanan, 2004).

Here it is necessary to consider that the fiction role in traditional Chinese society and in the west of the XIX-XX centuries did not coincide at all, and the Chinese intellectuals considered a fiction as the textbook on realities of the western life. Tan Sitong (*Ren Xue*, "An Exposition of Benevolence", 1896 – 1898) mentioned Bellamy's novel in the treatise "Ren Xue" – without providing precisely his title and author name, and even put it on the same level with Confucian utopia of Datong. This passage was incorrectly interpreted by the translator of the Tan Sitong treatise into English – Chan Sin-wai (The Hong Kong University). Chan Sin-wai mistakenly declared that it was about "Rip van Winkle" by V. Irving (T'an Ssu-t'ung, 1984).

It is almost improbable to assume that Kang Youwei was not familiar with the translation of the Bellamy's novel. Lack of mentions of the novel is quite explainable – he did not like to show sources of the representations which were not implanted in the culture of China, and this myth was developed by Liang Qichao subsequently. Most likely, Kang Youwei read *Looking Backward* in Chinese translation for process of its publication or got to read it slightly later – after publication of

the separate edition in Chinese. It brings us to the comparative analysis of a public ideal by Kang Youwei and Bellamy.

The ideal of Kang Youwei was formulated by him in "The book of Great Unity" (*Da tong shu*) journal edition of which was issued in 1913, and the full text appeared after death of the author – in 1935. Kang, however assured that the text was created much earlier, at least in the 1900th. Though Bellamy's ideal was much less radical, than the one of his Chinese colleague, parallels are extremely indicative. Moreover, it can quite turn out that an ideal of Kang Youwei contained direct borrowings of the separate utopian ideals by Bellamy.

The anonymous translator of Bellamy in the prologue of the novel already used the term "Datong" for the translation of the concept "world of the future". Further, when the translator approached a passage about disappearance of crime and even household lie, the main character exclaims – "It is really world of Datong!" In Bellamy's original the hero quotes the Bible: "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). From this it is possible to draw a conclusion that giving of considerably new sense to ancient Confucian concept of the Great Unity and its communication with the future it was made among Christian missionaries though in translations of the Bible into Chinese the term "Datong" was not used.

Bellamy's ideal was opposed by Marxist appeal to revolution the author, but, nevertheless, borrowed the major situation from Marxism – society of the future will combine the highest level of science and equipment development with public morals. For Kang Youwei it, apparently, became the main source of absolutely different idea of a social fabric desirable picture. The ancient ideal of Datong was turned to primitive simplicity whereas Datong in treatment of Kang Youwei is a wonderful new world of the air ships, ocean and transcontinental communications and total absence of hand labor.

The term "Datong" from the translation of *Wanguo Gongbao* began to be used in this magazine and further, in particular, when translating Mackenzie's "History of the Nineteenth Century". "The Great Unity" was used as a synonym for "cosmopolitanism". T. Richard's preface to this translation contained important aspects of the future world by Kang Youwei – overcoming the barriers between countries and transformation of the world into a uniform family by means of railroads, steamships and telegraph. Also Kang Youwei believed that he opened the important law of world development – the high level of scientific and technical progress in the West is tied to development of political democracy. Also when he lived in America and Europe in 1899 – 1913, he was convinced that situation in Europe, especially the gap in the income between top and bottom strata of society was not only reduced, but, on the contrary, growing.

Bellamy and Kang Youwei also made related the dislike for extremism in all forms, shapes and versions. Bellamy directly wrote that, taking a liking for poor and oppressed members of society, he does not at all accept anarchists and syndicalists who are associated with denial of morals, religion, and dissoluteness in all its versions. One of *Looking Backward* characters directly declared that propagandists and provokers of radicals were in the service of monopolists to discredit idea of reforms and to avert people from it. Kang Youwei also claimed that revolutionary radicalism and labor disputes harm the business progress. Socialist and communistic theories caused strong concern as the world antagonism of strong and weak powers would only amplify because of internal split between rich and poor classes, thought Kang Youwei. However Kang Youwei considered that aside from social problems, there was a problem of egoism and individualism which could be solved only by personality liberation and liquidation of family institute. In comparison with Puritan moderation of Bellamy, Kang Youwei may seem no less radical, than followers of Chinese "Cultural revolution" (Bernal, 1973).

Kang Youwei, unlike Bellamy, recognized that his ideal was turned to the far future and in general was impracticable immediately. Moreover, he considered socialist and communistic ideals

were only a weak shadow from the true Great Unity opened for the Confucius world. In this context Kang mentioned falanster of S. Fourier, comparing to the ideal of Mencius' well-field system (*jing tian*), but Fourier at the same time called the Englishman. However, the narrowness of the falangist life horizon, impossible to survive in the present (Fokkema, 2011) was the main reason for which Kang did not agree with Fourier. Kang Youwei formulated at once an ideal of the open global world which was completely opposite to a modern world situation – dissociation of the national states, the competition because of resources and situation in world power hierarchy.

His students considered ideals of the teacher slightly different. Liang Qichao in the biography of Kang published in 1901 described his studies in the field of the Great Unity in detail for the first time. In the biography written by Liang the doctrine of Kang Youwei is classified as "philosophy of socialism school" (*shehuizhuyipai*). Liang Qichao built the beginning of the socialist theory to Plato, and conducted to Kang through Kant and Saint-Simon further, but right there made a reservation that Kang Youwei did not know the western languages, did not read the western books, and all coincidence of his theories with European is mere chance (Liang, 2007).

The last statement, at least, is ambiguous: apparently, Kang Youwei really was not especially familiar with works of the leading western philosophers they were translated into Chinese no earlier than 1898. However sources of ideas of the western thought for Liang and Kang were absolutely identical – the missionary press in Chinese that was proved by casual and wrong references to Plato and Kant. In one place of the "Book of the Great Unity" Kang Youwei called Darwin the founder of the utopian doctrine (Dirlik, 2005). However it cannot be considered as simple ignorance, it is manifestation of feature thinking of the Chinese intellectuals of the 19th century which J. Levenson called "method analogy of cultural values". In other words, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao sincerely considered that all modern western concepts gradually remind traditional Chinese, which makes their application in China possible (Dirlik, 2005). However, Liang Qichao perfectly understood all restrictions of this method, but justified himself with the fact that it was convenient at least for educational purposes. At the same time there is a strong desire to attribute creation of this method to Christian missionaries who constantly tried to find the Chinese analogies for the ideas preached by them.

In this context comparison to similar Japanese experience is important. It becomes clear that the Japanese translation of the novel *Looking Backward* was published ten years after the Chinese printing (in 1903) both extended and had significant effect in the Christian environment. However, in view of basic openness of Japan for the intellectual environment of the outside world, the Japanese intellectuals got acquainted with the original in the 1890th, and it created no smaller furor, than in China. The Japanese social reformist and pacifist Abe Isoo (1865 – 1949) read Bellamy's novel even during training in the USA and compared impression to "The Sun in Heaven" (Tipton, 2013). The return influence of the Japanese intellectual environment on a circle of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao contacts became obvious just in the 1900th when both of them were in emigration and steel more open for influences of the outside world.

Discussion and conclusions

Kang Youwei consistently mystified his own biography and was consciously "making his own works more ancient". It is quite possible that his interest in Ancient Chinese public ideal of the Great Unity (Datong) arose no earlier than the middle of the 1890th under the influence of the American socialist utopia of the Christian thinker E. Bellamy. Such assumptions have strong base:

1. In works Kang Youwei written before 1895 the term "Datong" is absent and there is no treating Confucius ideal as the far future societies'.
2. Bellamy's novel in the Chinese translation was well-known to students of Kang Youwei – Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong which highly appreciated the public ideal of the American.

3. In general-theoretical plan Bellamy and Kang Youwei shared dislike for extremism and revolutionary changes of society.

4. Ideal of Kang Youwei was borrowed from Bellamy's novel specific details of the far future way of life, including equalization of rights for men and women, release from kitchen slavery, etc.

These arguments allow to come to a conclusion that the intellectual space of China was not isolated from universal tendencies; moreover, Christian missionaries played a great part in intellectual formation of the Chinese intellectuals new generation taking part in the Hundred days' Reform movement.

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