

The Transformation of Extant Commentarial Tradition into a Viable Confucian
Narrative in the 19th C China and Korea – Focusing Kang Yuwei and Ch'oeHan-ki

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In this article, I inquire into how Confucians in the 19th century China and Korea, such as Ch'oe Han-ki 崔漢綺 (1803-1879) and Kang Yuwei 康有為 (1858-1927), attempted to transform the extant Confucian commentarial tradition into a new form of viable Confucianism. For this inquiry, I focus on their respective writings, Kich'ükch'eüi 氣測體義, Kihak 氣學 and Kongzigaizhikao 孔子改制考, Datungshu 大同書. What these two intellectuals have in common is their attempt to reform Confucianism without completely abandoning it. They argued in their era that a reformed form of viable Confucianism was needed by re-interpreting an evolving history and Confucian philosophy. In this, they were both critical of the past Confucian tradition and eager to formulate a reformed Confucianism adapted to the new environment.

They also share an endeavor that ultimately failed to bear fruit. In the real course of history, Confucian discourse implying Euro-Japanese Universalism dominated. Nevertheless, I will recognize their philosophies of history, understandings of their own era, and arguments for a viable form of Confucianism in comparison to the current dominant forms of Confucian discourse and in so doing to find in their attempts some contemporary relevance.