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Book Review

Giray Fidan. *Chinese Witness of the Young Turk Revolution: Kang Youwei's Turk Travelogue*. Translated by Giray Fidan. New York: Kopernik Inc., 2019.

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Giray Fidan's translation of Kang Youwei's travel book through Turkey, *Chinese Witness of the Young Turk Revolution*, is the first full-length, English language translation of Kang's Travelogue, offering readers a unique glimpse at Chinese perceptions of the social and political circumstances in Turkey following the Young Turk Revolution. Fidan is a professor of Chinese Translation and Interpretation at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University in Ankara, where he specializes in Chinese perceptions of the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey. He is well-positioned to bring a rarely seen work to the attention of English readers.

Fidan's one hundred twenty-page long text includes a three-page bibliography, a five-page glossary, and seventeen pages displaying thirty-three of Kang's postcards documenting his stay in Turkey. The book begins with a brief introduction by Fidan, in which he addresses Kang Youwei as an outstanding scholars, statesmen, and political reformer, who advocated for a utopian society. Kang believed that social development depends on the gradual and decisive shedding beliefs and traditions that divide peoples of the world. Fidan suggests that Kang's utopian views grew from China's declension from a once powerful civilization to a semi-colonial country struggling under the weight of Western economic and imperial ambitions. Fidan goes on to address Kang's interest in the Ottoman Empire and his admiration of the early reforms of Midhat Pasha and the 1876 Constitution, and his hopes for the success of the new constitution adopted following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The author provides readers with ample notes and citations throughout

the text; however, he makes no attempt— apart from the introduction—to commentate or interpose his interpretation of Kang’s writing.

Kang opens his travelogue with two prefaces: the first of which centers on the deterioration of the Turkish Empire and the circumstances under which the empire began to wane. He argues that the Turkish Empire was one-dimensional in that it relied too heavily on military power and too little on social, political, and intellectual innovation. As their military power began to fade, Turkey was unable to prevent the militarily powerful, imperialistic-minded European nations from undermining the Turkish Empire politically and economically. The second preface to the Turkish Travelogue spotlights Kang’s reason for writing his travel book. He argued that China and Turkey suffered from the same sickness; the best cure for which was not the violence of “self-surgery,” but rather creating equality under the law. While Kang doubted that the Young Turks movement could “manage” their habits long enough to create lasting reforms in their country, he believed that the Chinese possessed the necessary discipline to enact lasting social reforms and suggested they use Turkey as their example.

Kang’s travelogue conveys his admiration for the Turkish people, who following their defeat of the Mongols, rose to dominate vast portions of Europe from Russia to the Mediterranean Sea. He suggested that the Turks might have taken all of Europe had the threat of their incursion not caused the European monarchs to unite their armies in response. Ironically, Kang suggests that it was the threat of a Turkish invasion that brought an end to feudalism in Europe. As a result, Europe began to evolve socially, intellectually, and politically. During the century that followed, Europe grew increasingly powerful and nations, such as England, Germany, and France become the dominant economic and military powers in the world. Inversely, the Turks, whose society struggled to keep pace with the changes taking place in the West, slipped into a state of social stagnation as they watched their land and culture progressively consumed by the nations of Europe. However, Kang notes that the ratification of the Turkish constitution following the Young Turk Revolution was the key to initiating a cultural revival for the Turkish people. As such, he felt China, struggling under similar circumstances as the Turks, had much to benefit from following the Turkish example.

The reoccurring theme of this is that of European influence on a once great culture—the effect of which seems to divide and disenfranchise Turkish culture. Subsequently, the more European influence seeps into Turkish society, via schools, architecture, politics, or economics, the more rigidly the Turkish people reached into their past and cling to the traditions of old. Indeed, Kang’s travelogue reads like a case study on social identity, or historical memory, that laments the disconnect between a people’s past and present, while documenting their attempt to revive the lost consciousness of their culture’s exceptionalism.

The book has a few flaws that may deter potential readers. The brevity of Fidan’s preface and the lack of analytical annotations make fully comprehending the events described by Kang challenging for those who lack background knowledge in Ottoman Studies, Chinese History, or The Young Turk Revolution. Moreover, Kang delves into the minutia of every location he documents during his travels in Turkey, and in doing so, Kang becomes unfailingly repetitive. It seems difficult to believe that every location he visited was the most beautiful place in the world, (every temple, palace, fortress, and mosque is unequaled in beauty), especially when he follows

this high praise with descriptions bemoaning the poverty that afflicts the local population and the filth in which they live. However, in the context of the author's stated goals, (to provide the first full English-Language translations of Kang's Travelogue), most of the above-mentioned criticism is unavoidable. Fidan's work will find an eager audience with scholars of Middle Eastern and European history. Additionally, students of Nationalism and Imperialism will find it equally valuable.