

PhD (or Postdoc) scholarship in a Kang Youwei project at KU Leuven, Chinese Studies (Belgium) funded by Research Foundation (FWO) – Flanders
4 years PhD (October 2021–September 2025) or 3 years Postdoc (October 2021– September 2024)

This scholarship is offered in the context of a research project on the portrayal of Kang Youwei as an “in-between” figure in contemporary Chinese academia (for more details, see “Project” below). We are looking for a PhD (or Postdoc) student in Sinology, Chinese studies, Chinese philosophy, or Chinese intellectual history willing to research current views on Kang Youwei in relation to past, present and future issues in religion, politics, education, philosophy, or history.

We look for a young scholar with an MA (or a PhD) degree:

- who is interested in the history of Chinese thought, willing to call dominant views into question, and open to studying the historical contingency of currently dominant views in the field of philosophy
- with good mastery of the following languages: modern Chinese, English, classical Chinese, and perhaps also Japanese
- willing and able to collaborate with other scholars
- motivated to do research, share thoughts, give advice, publish, attend conferences, check Chinese translations, etc.

We offer

- a scholarship of around 2.100€ net per month (for a PhD student) or 2.250€ net per month (for a Postdoc student). The exact take-home pay, depending on nationality and family situation, will be decided and communicated to the final candidates in July 2021.
- a stimulating environment of motivated scholars fascinated by Chinese thought and philosophy.
- support in research and publication.
- seminars with staff and PhD students on various topics related to Chinese thought.
- active participation in an international workshop on Kang Youwei.
- classes in English at the departments of Philosophy, Religion, Education, or European Studies at the KU Leuven.
- life in a small, safe, and cozy university-city with an age-long tradition, located in the center of Europe.

Interested?

- E-mail to Carine Defoort (carine.defoort@kuleuven.be) the following three items: (1) a motivation letter; (2) your updated CV; (3) a detailed research project (of max 3 pages) on the specific topics that you would focus upon and your methodological approach.
- Deadline: March 15, 2021.

Project: Kang Youwei as a “in-between” figure in contemporary Chinese academia

Background: Consistent with its growing economic, political, and military power, China wants due recognition from the global community of nations. In education this shift is signaled by a renewed interest in China’s pre-revolutionary past, the publication of nation-wide textbooks for various disciplines, and the revival of multi- or non-disciplinary “national studies” departments. A towering figure in this new intellectual climate is the political thinker Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), who was China’s most audacious, influential, controversial, and all-round

intellectual prior to the whole-sale introduction of the Western paradigm of knowledge classification in China. While he was the last major figure who tried to transform China within the dynastic framework, after a century of Western influence and revolutions, his reform plans have been rediscovered as a valuable alternative to both Westernization and the revolutionary path. His figure has thus enjoyed renewed attention, enabling scholars to find continuity in times of rupture. Nowadays Kang is used to renegotiate between past and present, China and the West, universalist claims versus cultural identity, invented versus inherited traditions, “Euromodernity” versus alternative modernities, and academic disciplines versus “national studies” departments. For some contemporary scholars and intellectuals, he has become what Confucius was for him: a source of authority on which one can project one’s own agenda.

Objective: Philosophically, we try to identify current views and debates on Kang’s supposedly traditional Chinese alternative, especially in relation to religion, politics, education, and philosophy. Sociologically, we investigate how Kang allows contemporary scholars to rethink, challenge, or legitimize current academic disciplinary boundaries. We identify the various networks involved in current Kang studies, conferences, research grants, political factions, contemporary scholarly disciple-lineages, regional allegiances (Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong), and publications.

Methodology: Literature review of the current intellectual scene will be supplemented by interviews with prominent Kang-scholars, critics, and protagonists at various university departments, including “national studies.” We will try to identify the various connections of Kang scholars, their institutional imbedding, networks, and views on the issue of Western versus indigenous models of order.