Creative Diplomacy in Constantinople: Virginia Woolf and Kang Youwei

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Abstract

This article discusses two figures who visited Constantinople/Istanbul in roughly the same period, English writer Virginia Woolf (1906) and Qing China reformer Kang Youwei (1908). While Woolf and Kang arrived in Istanbul from different contexts, they were each deeply interested in Istanbul as the capital of an empire that called their own into provocative comparison. Both produced texts that were the result of critical reflections upon their encounters there, and each would also go on to advocate for profound societal reforms, with shared emphases on social equality, pacifism, and cosmopolitan critiques of the state. By reading Kang’s and Woolf’s Istanbul-inspired and other related texts alongside one another, this article presents these literary texts as forms of creative diplomacy that engage with historical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of difference, and that highlight the possibilities of imaginative interventions into official diplomatic practices and narratives.

Keywords


In July 1908, the eminent Chinese reformer Kang Youwei (1858–1927) arrived in Istanbul for the first time. After spearheading a failed attempt to transform the Qing dynasty into a constitutional monarchy in 1898, Kang had been forced into a long period of exile, during which he visited some twenty countries, from
India to Sweden. Among these extensive travels, Kang’s stay in Istanbul left a particularly deep impression. (For one, he enjoyed the food: “Neither French, Spanish, nor Portuguese cuisine can compare,” he remarks in his travel notes.) Most importantly for Kang, his visit confirmed what he had earlier only been able to surmise from afar: that there were significant parallels between the ailing Ottoman and Chinese empires. Perpetually on the lookout for pertinent models of modernization for the Qing, Kang noted that both the “sick man of Europe” and “sick man of Asia” were once-glorious empires in crisis, reeling from the shock of an aggressive, technologically superior West, and suffering from comparable systemic issues. Both empires, he observed, were now in the painful process of re-evaluating their most fundamental cultural values and societal institutions, particularly vis-à-vis the European imperialist powers of Britain and France.

Two years before Kang’s arrival, in October 1906, the English writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) had also found herself in Istanbul, having chosen to include it as part of her Grand Tour. Yet to publish her first novel (The Voyage Out, 1915), the twenty-four-year-old’s encounter with the city occurred during an intellectually formative period, in which her proclivities for writing fiction were apparent but still inchoate. “At six I was on deck,” the first entry for Turkey in Woolf’s diary runs,

& suddenly we found ourselves confronted with the whole of Constantinople; there was St Sophia, like a treble globe of bubbles frozen solid, floating out to meet us. For it is fashioned in the shape of some fine substance, thin as glass, blown in plump curves; save that it is also as substantial as a pyramid. Perhaps that may be its beauty. But then beautiful & evanescent and enduring, to pluck adjectives like black berries – as it is, it is but the fruit of a great garden of flowers.

Delicate yet monumental, evanescent yet enduring – from her very first view, Woolf processes Istanbul as a commingling of contradictions, intuiting that this was a place where supposedly incompatible qualities and entities could co-exist.

“To some degree,” writes novelist Orhan Pamuk, “we all worry about what foreigners and strangers think of us.” In Istanbul: Memories and the City, Pamuk

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1 Kang, Y. “Lieguo Youji” (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995), 560. All translations from this text are mine.
explores his preoccupation with a specific category of writer-travelers to his beloved city in the late 1800s and early 1900s: Gérard Nerval, Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert. Pamuk is well aware that his chosen focus is fraught with the Ottoman Empire’s desire to modernize in the image of its European, and in particular French, rivals. “My interest in how my city looks to western eyes,” Pamuk continues, is – as for most Istanbullus – very troubled; like all other Istanbul writers with one eye always on the West, I sometimes suffer in confusion.” Even as he is drawn to the precious glimpses of Istanbul’s past that these foreign visitors offer, however, Pamuk bristles at the style and caliber of their observations:

Ignorance embroidered their pretensions and creative presumption prompted them to say exactly what they thought; even “cultivated” writers like André Gide saw no need to bother with cultural differences, the meaning of local rituals and traditions, or the social structures that underpinned them: A traveller, in his view, had the right to demand that Istanbul be amusing, distracting, upbeat …. For them, the west set the standard for all humankind.3

Lying beyond Pamuk’s immediate purview, Kang and Woolf offer an alternative kind of foreign perspective on early twentieth-century Istanbul. Acutely attuned to dimensions of Istanbul beyond its touristic attractions, they each display a commitment to exploring the city’s potential to unsettle one’s assumed “standard for all humankind.” Both were interested in the city, not as an exotic gallery of amusements, but as the capital of an empire that called their own into provocative comparison.

Woolf and Kang each went on to produce texts that grew out of their experiences in Istanbul. In Woolf’s case, the city of Constantinople features prominently in her 1928 novel Orlando, in which we find the diary passage quoted earlier, glimmering in transmuted form: “At this hour the mist would lie so thick that the domes of Santa Sofia and the rest would seem to be afloat; gradually the mist would uncover them; the bubbles would be seen to be firmly fixed.”4 Kang’s Istanbul travelogue would later feature prominently in the 1913 inaugural issue of his self-founded periodical Compassion (Buren). Woolf and Kang would also each go on to publish a text advocating for radical societal reforms, with common emphases on equality, pacifism, and critique of the state: in Woolf’s case this was Three Guineas (1938); in Kang’s, his One World

(Da Tong Shu), begun in 1884, written and edited continuously in the ensuing decades, and finally published posthumously in 1935. While their travels to Turkey were far from the only sources which fed into these later works, we can trace the ways in which Woolf and Kang’s reflections on Constantinople played a part in shaping these profound re-assessments of society.

For international relations scholar Costas M. Constantinou, the term *theoria* reveals the intertwined relationship between contemplative seeing, purposeful travel, and constructive self-critique. Constantinou points to the first known occurrence of the word, in the work of Herodotus, who uses it to refer to legendary lawmaker Solon’s journey from Athens to Egypt; and to the richness of the term’s forgotten etymologies, as elucidated by the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

\[\text{theor} \quad \text{Gr. Antiq} \quad \text{also in L. form the’orus} \quad \text{[mod. ad. Gr. theor-os spectator, one who travels in order to see things, also an envoy, ambassador: see THEORY.\textsuperscript{2}]} \quad \text{An ambassador or envoy sent on behalf of a state, esp. to consult an oracle or perform a religious rite (Cf. THEORY\textsuperscript{2})}.\]

\[\text{theoria} \quad \text{rare. [a. Gr. theoria a looking at, contemplation, f. theorein to look at.]}\]

1. Contemplation, survey. \textit{Obs. rare.}
2. The perception of beauty regarded as a moral faculty.\textsuperscript{6}

Through these etymological excavations, the word *theoria* regains diplomatic, aesthetic, and critical dimensions. Journeying afar and attentive seeing are linked as two integral components of *theoria*, a significant function of which lies in the survey of new and unknown things, the inspection of the doings of other peoples …. The information and knowledge acquired by such theorias is then to be communicated to the citizens of the model polis to confirm the rightness of its laws or to amend the deficient ones …. Theoria is therefore charged with the discovery of the good and held responsible for the perfect condition of the polis.\textsuperscript{7}

We can understand the essence of *theoria* to be the practice of re-shaping one’s knowledge of self and world against the grain of one’s travels, followed

\textsuperscript{5} Constantinou, C.M. *On the Way to Diplomacy*, Borderlines, v. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 54.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 51–52.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 59.
by sharing the resulting reflections on “the doings of other peoples” with one’s fellow citizens, in pursuit of the greater good.

Kang and Woolf can be seen as literary practitioners of theoria – aesthetically informed and critically reflective diplomatic figures of a kind. Both writers strove to communicate reflections on the relationship between a foreign context and their own intended “home audiences.” Both sought to formulate a radical re-envisioning of society, nation, and world that could address the issues their travels had helped them better identify and articulate. Meanwhile, for Timothy Hampton, literary writing carries a special mediating force, as “the vehicle of a formal or rhetorical power that can hold in tension different points of view, different positions, even different languages.”

If theoria is a “freelance or ecumenical embassy of prominent citizens of the polis ... a mission of problematisation to bring back new knowledge (a prophesy, alternative views, revaluations, strange ideas) that can then be used to think and reinvigorate the Self, to reconsider dominant norms and provide new frameworks for deliberating political actions,” then Woolf’s Orlando and Three Guineas, and Kang’s Istanbul travelogue and One World, are literary texts that are very much aligned with such diplomatic aims.

By restoring theoria’s etymological fullness, Constantinou hopes to broaden conventional conceptions of diplomacy, suggesting that the nature of diplomacy is “fundamentally the knowledge of the Self – and crucially this knowledge of the Self as a more reflective means of dealing with and transforming relations with Others.” For Constantinou, diplomacy should not be concerned only with state-level initiatives and policies, “but also – and more crucially – with innovation and creativity, experimentation in finding ways and terms under which rival entities and ways of living can co-exist and flourish.”

In kindred fashion, James Der Derian has influentially defined diplomacy as “the mediation of estrangement”; just as Isabelle Stengers has framed diplomacy as a negotiation between “various knowledge practices and modes of existence,” responsible for the creation of “the possibility...
of the coexistence of multiple practices without the necessity of mutual annihilation”,14 and Noé Cornago has encouraged us to “restore the long-time interrupted continuity between the undisputable relevance of diplomacy as raison de système – in a world which is much more than a world of States – and its unique value as a way to mediating the many alienations experienced by individuals and social groups.”15

Through this lens, Woolf and Kang’s writing engage in forms of creative diplomatic work, and constitute links that can help restore this continuity. The aim here is not to present Woolf and Kang as “model” diplomats – their writing shows them to be far from immune to their own variants of prejudice – but rather to show that in their approach and their aims, their work should be taken seriously as attempts to engage productively and impactfully with forms of difference across national boundaries. As diplomatic projects, in other words.

Both Kang and Woolf were on the fringes of diplomatic circles proper: Kang, by dint of his prominence in the elite echelons of Chinese politics; and Woolf via her husband, civil servant Leonard Woolf, as well as through her close friend and sometime lover Vita Sackville-West, married to diplomat Harold Nicolson, who was posted in Constantinople from 1912–14.16 Yet it is precisely Kang and Woolf’s unofficial status that enables them to engage in creative diplomacy through their writing. Unrestricted by state prerogatives, Woolf and Kang are emissaries of a different kind: more oriented towards cultural critique and reflection, more open to contradiction and ambiguity, and more able to – in Woolf’s phrasing – “achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords ...”17 In this phrasing, Woolf might be seen as prefiguring the theoretical framings of diplomacy mentioned above.18

14 Ibid., 26.
16 Nicolson was later to write in Diplomacy (1939) an observation that seems to pay homage to Virginia Woolf’s famous utterance that “[O]n or about December 1910 human nature changed,” and perhaps even to the radical transformations of her titular protagonist in Orlando (1928): “The implication is that, somewhere about the year 1918, Diplomacy saw a great white light, was converted, found salvation and thereafter and thence forward became an entirely different woman.” This quotation of Nicolson’s – via Claire Davison’s “Making a Song and Dance of It: Staging Diplomacy in William Gerhardi’s Early Novels.” In Diplomacy and the Modern Novel, eds. I. Daunais and A. Hepburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020) – was pointed out to the author by an anonymous reviewer.
17 Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, xiii.
18 The author is grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting evocative similarities between this quotation of Woolf’s with Isabelle Stengers’ and Bruno Latour’s approaches to diplomacy.
Comparatists in Constantinople

During her stay in Istanbul, Woolf describes the sensation of sitting in her hotel room and looking out over the bustling urban panorama:

From this position you see over the town ... & that is enough to give you some idea that Constantinople is to begin with a very large town .... you felt yourself in a metropolis; a place where life was being lived successfully. And that did seem strange, & – if I have time to say so – a little uncomfortable. For you also realised that life was not lived after the European pattern, that it was not even a debased copy of Paris or Berlin or London, & that, you thought was the ambition of towns which could not actually be Paris or any of those inner capitals. As the lights came out in clusters all over the land, & the water was busy with lamps, you knew yourself to be a spectator of a vigorous drama, acting itself out with no thought or need of certain great countries yonder to the west. And in all this opulence there was something ominous, & something ignominious – for an English lady at her bedroom window.19

Travel writing in English has been critiqued as a genre that “usually delivers a consoling, self-congratulatory message to the privileged, middle-class Westerners who are its principal readership”,20 one that often “proceeds by a logic of differentiation, whereby the Other is constructed in some subtle or unsubtle way principally as foil or counterpoint to the supposedly heroic, civilised and/or cultured protagonist.”21 Although Woolf’s account starts from a quasi-imperial perspective, surveying detachedly from on high, it soon swerves into markedly different territory. Rather than engaging in self-aggrandizement, we find Woolf reckoning with the fact the world she is familiar with is not, after all, at the center of things; that it is only one of various “patterns” of living, one “drama” among many, and perhaps even a less spectacular one at that. (Is this diary entry the very moment where Woolf first becomes aware of her Eurocentrism?) Adjectives such as “uncomfortable,” “ominous,” and “ignominious” further dramatize the impact of this realization. Woolf places emphasis on not only her discomfiture, but that it is well deserved. Her previous conception of the world – with life and civilization outside of Europe as a paler, poorer imitation – is revealed as naïve and presumptuous. The

19 Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, 348.
21 Ibid., 219.
insistent repetition of the second person address accentuates the passage’s self-accusatory tone: you felt yourself in a metropolis ... For you also realized ... and that, you thought ... Many years later, in the novel Orlando, when Woolf’s protagonist finds herself in a particularly ambivalent situation, she describes it as “a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind” in which the “comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her.”22 When Woolf was re-visiting her Constantinople travel diaries, this passage would surely have recalled vividly that moment when the “comforts of ignorance” were suddenly ruptured for her.

Like Woolf, who through Istanbul begins to unspool the threads of her Anglocentrism, Kang’s writing on Istanbul also involves a mobilization against civilizational solipsism. “There are two museums,” Kang observes,

both of which are in Stamboul. European and American museums are all more or less the same; one grows tired of them after a certain point. As for the museums of Australia, Java, and Myanmar, these are but paltry collections with nothing much to see. The only other museums worth seeing are the ones at Calcutta, for Indian artefacts; Cairo, for Egyptian ones; and these ones at Constantinople, for their rich and refreshing collections of Turkish and Islamic artefacts. Whilst the museums of this capital are small in scale, with a modest number of objects, particularly in comparison to the Egyptian and Indian ones, they suffice to offer one a glimpse of the splendour of Turkish and Arab civilisations. Though I have yet to travel to Persia, their customs are comparable to those of the Turks; just as, if one sees Paris, though one has yet to go to London, one nevertheless is afforded a sense of European customs. Therefore, for those who have travelled throughout Europe and America, it is a must to visit the museums of these three regions [India, Egypt, and Turkey] in order to fully experience the greatness of the world, and to have no regrets in this regard.23

While we might fault Kang for indulging in a series of broad-brushed statements, the overarching message of this passage is an insistence that museums be placed into a global context, and that anyone serious about experiencing the fullness of the world’s cultural heritage must see the collections of not just Europe and America, but also those of India, Egypt, and Turkey. This is the antithesis of the Sinocentric intellectual, convinced that the Middle Kingdom – whatever its

22 Woolf, V. Orlando, 122.
23 Kang, Y. “Lieguo youji,” 548.
current scientific and material disadvantages may be – basks supremely aloof in the inimitable resplendence of its cultural and historical brilliance.

Meanwhile, Constantinople’s iconic landmark, the Hagia Sophia, attracts unstinting praise from Kang, who describes it as spectacular and peerless. But it is not its soaring minarets or majestic domes to which Kang devotes the most ink. Rather, it is the traces of its Byzantine mosaics, still faintly visible centuries after the conversion of the building from a church into a mosque, which most pique his interest. Highlighting these traces, Kang contrasts them critically with the treatment of historic religious buildings in China: “In my country there exist those who wreak harm upon Buddhism by destroying its temples, such as the Longevity Temple in Yangcheng, which was the grandest and most beautiful of temples in all of the Guangdong region. Would it not have been ideal to have it converted into a museum instead?”

The palimpsest of religions and empires embodied by the Hagia Sophia offered Kang – and his readers – a model of cultural heritage based on coexistence, one in which the new did not have to come in at the expense of complete destruction of the old. This conveniently mirrored Kang’s stance as a reformer, and his goal of preserving China’s monarchy while modernizing it for the twentieth century.

Kang admired, too, the Hagia Sophia’s sumptuous marble, its multi-dimensional hues, veins, and swirls: “[The Papal Basilica] Saint Paul too excels at the same effect of [richly patterned marble in] five shades and six patterns, of [the illusion of] rolling waves and wispy clouds; but Saint Paul is only apprentice to this master. In fact, Venice’s Parliament, Louis XIV’s Versailles, Paris’s Louvre, along with all the palaces of Europe which employ this effect, are indebted to this example as their model.” (Kang’s description of the marblework echoes the enjoyment of Sultan Mehmed II in the fifteenth century, who loved to “[wander] through the ‘paradise-like’ Hagia Sophia … contemplating the vastness of its celestial dome, its patterned marble floors resembling the wavy sea, and its artistic gold mosaics.”) Situating the Hagia Sophia amongst these other iconic structures, dotted across Europe, Kang frames them as participants in a shared and dynamic architectural and cultural dialogue, unfolding across centuries. It is a conversation that he wishes China would also participate in: “... my countrymen do not know to preserve the things of the past, leaving our civilisation in tatters; thus we have

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24 Ibid., 544.
25 Ibid.
nothing with which outsiders who visit can authenticate [their impressions], and nothing which may pique the interest of posterity. Such a strange situation is not to be found even amongst the most primitive of nations, yet the elites and intellectuals of China are not only unaware of this issue but exacerbate it – how abhorrent!27 Kang’s critique of his home society is built upon a close engagement with Istanbul’s landmarks, in an act of comparison that brings to bear both aesthetic and historical dimensions.

Diplomatic figures – figures of theoria – are quintessential comparatists. Woolf, too, draws upon comparison as an antidote to cultural chauvinism. In *Three Guineas*, for example, Woolf writes of a hypothetical Englishwoman, who will have imbibed, even from the governess, some romantic notion that Englishmen, those fathers and grandfathers whom she sees marching in the picture of history, are “superior” to the men of other countries. Thus she will consider it her duty to check by comparing French historians with English; German with French; the testimony of the ruled – the Indians or Irish, say – with the claims made by their rulers .... Then she will compare English painting with French painting; English music with German music; English literature with Greek literature ... When all these comparisons have been faithfully made by the use of reason, the outsider will find herself in possession of very good reasons for her indifference.28

For Woolf, it is through the labor of attentive and thoughtful comparison that one can attain an informed indifference. By “indifference,” she does not mean to issue a rallying cry to dullen our senses to beauty; rather, Woolf wishes for her readers to possess a critical foundation to reject claims of absolute superiority, worth, or validity, particularly if they are claims made by those in positions of power.

This is where Woolf and Kang’s paths in Istanbul begin to diverge. If Woolf hopes, via comparison, to reach a well-rounded, clear-eyed indifference, for Kang such detachment is not an option. As mentioned earlier, Kang viewed the Ottoman and Qing empires as in comparably dire straits, both struggling to maintain political stability and integrity in the face of intense pressures from within and without. He readily subscribed to the metaphor of both empires as stricken – perhaps fatally – with illness. The troubles that the Ottoman Empire faced included “symptoms” similar to China’s own; therefore, their careful diagnosis could be used to help “cure” China of her own ills. Like many late

27 Kang, Y. “Lieguo youji,” 544.
Qing intellectuals, Kang viewed the act of comparing China to other nations as a necessary means to China’s salvation. Fixated on gleaning applicable insights from what was taking place in the Ottoman Empire, Kang’s travelogue contains an extensive list of woes that he perceives to be common to Beijing and Istanbul, from deficiencies in urban infrastructure and cumbersome taxation systems, to political and economic subjugation embodied by the presence of multiple foreign powers. He is acutely sensitive to the dominance of the city’s foreign embassies, for example, which crop up several times in his travelogue, and do not bear mentioning in Woolf’s:

Turkey must daily pay debt to six nations – a thousand pounds to Russia, six hundred to Britain, four hundred to France, three hundred to Italy, five hundred to Austria-Hungary, one hundred to Germany. Upon learning this, I realised that we and the Turks are similarly afflicted. Gazing upon these embassies, I think back to Beijing – we are truly patients with mutual sympathies, burdened as we are with the same illness [tongbingxianglian]?

Kang uses the Chinese phrase tongbingxianglian to striking effect here, using the term to denote the Ottomans and Chinese as not just stricken with the same illness, but moreover mutually sympathetic bedfellows by dint of their shared plight. To this end, besides shared woes, Kang was also eager to point out admirable aspects of Constantinople worthy of study by the Chinese, such as its impressive military academies and grand ministry buildings. And while Woolf’s focus remains squarely on Constantinople’s classic attractions and scenic spots, Kang includes tours of schools and factories in his itinerary, of which he keeps meticulous notes – recording, for example, the tuition fees of a primary school (four piastres a month), the number of pupils in attendance there (one hundred and sixty), and the length of their summer holiday (two months) – evincing a keen interest in the nitty-gritty socio-political workings of the Ottoman Empire.

In contrast, Woolf feels “out of pocket” when it comes to “those observations upon manners or politics with which all travellers should ballast their impressions … The truth is that travellers deal far too much in such commodities & my efforts to rid myself of certain preconceptions have taken my attention from the actual facts.” Whereas Kang takes pains to document

\[30\] Ibid., 540.
\[31\] Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, 348.
the social and political characteristics of the Ottoman capital for himself and his readers, Woolf is wary of both consuming and dispensing observations of an authoritative nature. Given the far longer and denser diplomatic relationship between the British and the Ottomans, with official links established since the 1500s – indeed, by the late 1800s, “the [British] Foreign Office appears to have had a greater volume of correspondence with the embassy at Constantinople than with any other diplomatic mission”32 – there was a much greater corpus of Constantinople-related texts accessible to Woolf, including those penned by several Englishwomen, the most famous among them Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and Julia Pardoe (1806–62); not to mention the many travel-related reference texts circulated among British travelers. Shortly before her visit to Turkey, Woolf references in the most popular guidebook of her day in her journal: “Baedecker [sic] will count the statues; a dozen archaeologists will arrange them in a dozen different ways; but the final work must be done by each fresh mind that sees them.” She jots later in the same entry: “The pediments of the temple line the two sides of the museum; ... but we wont write guide book –.”33 Woolf consciously stops herself from presenting the scene à la Baedeker; she wishes to write against the generic expectations and stylistics of the travel texts she has read. There is something irreducibly individual, she implies, in the act of viewing, and in each encounter. Amid the clamor of one’s guidebooks and predecessors, one should deploy one’s own senses and sensibilities.

Kang, on the other hand, must have felt as if he were writing in a vacuum, particularly in light of the rich traditions of East Asian travel composition dating back to the Song dynasty, in which “writing a poem about a famous place meant not just facing a present landscape but also the historic accretions that surrounded it like a discursive shell.”34 As a highly accomplished classical scholar, this was a tradition that Kang would have been intimately familiar with. Writing in and about Constantinople, a place for which Kang had no direct literary precedents, would have presented both an exhilarating opportunity to break new literary ground, as well as an accentuation of his isolation in exile. En route to the city from Romania, Kang writes: “Arriving at the Turkish capital at noon on the 29th. Who knows how many Chinese have crossed the Black Sea to this day?”35 The poignancy intensifies when Kang alludes to famous

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33 Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, 319.
35 Kang, Y. “Lieguo youji,” 535.
scenes from Chinese travel writing in his efforts to describe the first views of Constantinople's waterways from aboard the ship: “Houses and dwellings dot the mountain slopes; steamships, sailboats and brilliant green waves bask in each other's beauty; the picturesque landscape calls to mind that of Wuchang on the Yangtze, or Yellow Crane Tower at Hankou ...”

Kang’s reference to Yellow Crane Tower is a deliberate one. An iconic literary location, the tower provides the setting for Tang dynasty poet Li Bai’s (701–62) famous poem *Seeing off Meng Haoran for Guangling at Yellow Crane Tower*. This strategy, “by which the traveller must seek to attach unknown entities to known reference points, and to familiar frameworks of meaning and understanding,” has been termed the “principle of attachment” by historian Anthony Pagden. Originally applied to Europeans in the New World, the strategy has been critiqued for its tendency to smooth over unfamiliar phenomena in an effort to classify and subsume encounters with the “alien” into a normative framework, resulting in an “illusion” which “did not acknowledge the ways in which these new sights and sounds blew apart the comfortable conceptions of an insular European civilisation.” In Kang’s case, while some degree of nuance is certainly lost in the bold parallels he draws between the Bosphorus and the Yangtze, his strategy of smoothing over, and of subsuming the “alien” into a familiar framework, is deployed here precisely in order to “blow apart” conceptions of an insular Chinese civilization. China, Kang constantly reminds his readers, is simply one nation among many.

Throughout his travelogue, Kang strives to establish commensurability between the Turks and the Chinese, going so far as to suggest that the Turks and Chinese are historically of the same race, or *tongzhong* (lit. “same kind,” or “same race”). As Dai Dongyang points out, Kang’s use of the term *tujue* to refer to the Turks and to Ottoman Turkey, rather than the more standard phonetic translation *tu'erqi*, is significant, given that the former is an ancient Chinese name for the Turkic peoples active in medieval Central and Inner Asia (sometimes referred to as the Göktürks). By insistently employing this term throughout his travelogue, Kang emphasizes the historical and even racial links between the Turkish and Chinese peoples, bolstering his argument that the Chinese could stand to learn much of value about themselves by studying the Turks.
Kang had begun pursuing this line of inquiry as early as the late 1890s, and was almost singlehandedly responsible for identifying the Ottoman Empire as a potential “sick ally” of China’s – an argument later reiterated by his prominent disciple Liang Qichao. With regards to Kang’s political thought during this earlier period, historian Rebecca E. Karl has noted that the “geographical and tropological tongzhong relationship between the two [Turkey and China]” formed a “hopeful site for mutually dependent healing and regeneration through state reform.”40 During this period, there were only isolated instances of official contact between the Qing and the Ottomans. At the turn of the twentieth century, Sultan Abdul Hamid had sent a committee to China at the request of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who feared the anti-foreign orientation of the Qing Dynasty’s Muslim troops, the “Gansu Braves,” and hoped that the Ottoman Muslims would be able to dissuade them from further foreigner-directed violence in China. (The committee arrived, however, in 1901, too late to be of any use.) In addition, a prominent Chinese Muslim travelled to Istanbul by invitation in 1906, resulting in the opening two years later of a school for Muslims in Beijing, named the “Abdul Hamid School of Science/House of Learning.”41 In the absence of any continuous formal relationship, Kang’s high-profile efforts to formulate historical, political, and cultural linkages between the Qing and the Ottomans become all the more significant during this period of highly erratic, piecemeal diplomatic interactions between the two empires.

Kang’s arrival in Constantinople was thus in many ways a culmination of a long-term affinity he had held for this distant empire. Meanwhile, 1908 was the year that a beleaguered Sultan Abdul Hamid II was successfully pressured by Young Turk rebels into reviving the parliament and restoring the short-lived constitution of 1876–78. Kang Youwei happened to arrive in Constantinople on the very day of the official restoration of the constitution, when the city was replete with public festivities – a remarkable coincidence, and arrival scene, for the would-be constitutional monarchist in exile. Even from the ship, he writes,

it was already possible to hear the cries of celebration from the shore; once at the capital, crescent flags created shade for every street; from dawn to dusk there was drinking, the playing of drums, singing and dancing in large groups, and cries of “Long live the Sultan!”; everywhere from

the streets to parks to embassies to public areas – the elation was readily apparent.42

Curiously, Kang provides us with several different versions of the events surrounding the restoration. These accounts are placed unceremoniously at different points in the Istanbul travelogue, with no commentary concerning their overlap in subject. Each version offers certain details that the others do not.

The least stylized one focuses on describing each component of Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s ceremonial appearance, from the carriages (black lacquered), to the female consorts (adorned with white veils and purple-and-gold embroidery), to the musicians (outfitted in red), to the sultan himself (sixty-two years of age, seated in a four-horse carriage appointed with golden harnesses and sporting white whiskers, red fez, black western-style wool coat with gold shoulder-pads, a sword, and of stately bearing). We are also told, in this account, that “palace aides handed out tea-cakes, coffee, and lemon water to soothe the audience; all and sundry eagerly procured their share of these before dispersing, as did I.”43

Another version is written in the style of classical Chinese poetry. Due to its rhythmic cadence and poetic economy of form, this passage sketches events in impressionistic strokes rather than minute details, drawing on highly emotive language, with an emphasis on dramatic storytelling rather than documentary verisimilitude. Instead of the ceremony, in this version Kang chooses to focus on the build-up leading to the restoration, namely the military revolt instigated by Ahmed Niyazi Bey (1873–1912), which ultimately led to Abdul Hamid II capitulating to demands to restore the constitution. Kang presents these events to us in a tragic tenor, with lines such as “The speechless sultan weeps and snivels in fear/ drafting documents through a dreamless night.”44 Here, Kang uses poetic license to re-fashion for a Chinese audience this tumultuous series of events in Turkey’s history.

The different versions also make use of various dating systems: the Guangxu calendrical system (in which events are dated in relation to the Guangxu Emperor’s reign), the Gregorian/western calendar, and the sexagenary cycle, a traditional Chinese system dating back to the Shang dynasty. The Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), for example, is dated in one version as having taken place “in the fourth year of the reign of Guangxu.” In so doing, Kang contextualizes the developments of the Ottoman Empire as

42 Kang, Y. “Lieguo Youji,” 562.
43 Ibid., 552.
44 Ibid., 565.
commensurable with a Chinese political framework. Having once proposed a calendrical system based around the birth of Confucius (just as, he pointed out, the West had done with the birth of Jesus), Kang's choice of dating system in his writing would have been a highly self-conscious one. By including different versions of the “same” series of events, Kang points to an awareness of the impact of style and form on our conception of history. Together, the versions can be read as a kind of literary historiography.

This brings us to the fictional universe of Orlando, through which Woolf is similarly inspired by Istanbul to consider the impact of form and style upon what we think of as history. Like Kang, Woolf explores multiple versions of a grand, ceremonial event in Constantinople, presided over by her protagonist Orlando, who is serving, at this juncture in the novel, as the British ambassador to Turkey. Our sense of the event unfolds through several staggered accounts from contrasting perspectives, ranging from the diary of an English naval officer, who comments matter-of-factly about such things as “the superiority of the British,” and whose main concern during this entire event is the threat that the “native population” poses to the nerves of the “English ladies in the company”; to the letter of a General’s daughter pre-occupied with Orlando’s physical charms: “Such a leg! Such a countenance!! Such princely manners!!!”; to an unnamed newspaper: “From the gazette of the time, we gathered that ‘as the clock struck twelve, the Ambassador appeared on the centre Balcony which was hung with priceless rugs ...’” If Kang offers his reader starkly contrasting representations of the sultan – from polished and stately in a lavishly appointed carriage before a cheering crowd of multitudes, to an isolated elderly man, tearful and defeated in his private quarters – here too we are afforded drastically different vantage points. “History” in this instance is shaped by one witness’s racist machismo, and by another’s over-exuberant punctuation. The extravagant disparities in tone and focus of these three sources, all describing the “same” ceremonial event, relates to Constantinou’s claim that “employing the heterorealisms of art and literature ... is a means to reading diplomacy and world politics differently.” Likewise, Allan Hepburn draws attention to how novels engage in “manipulations of temporality” that are in effect diplomatic – “effects of acceleration, deceleration, deferral, and digression.”

45 Luo, Z. Inheritance Within Rupture, eds. C. Mei and L. Harris (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49.
46 Woolf, V. Orlando, 99.
47 Constantinou, C.M. “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography.” Postcolonial Studies 3 (2) (2000), 221.
If diplomacy and politics center on the negotiation and representation of events and of history, Woolf demonstrates an enduring fascination with the ornamental trappings of language, and how they are the very medium through which we are apprised of what “happens.” Orlando’s tenure as ambassador in Constantinople, for example, while impressive – for he “had a finger in some of the most delicate negotiations between King Charles and the Turks” – nevertheless suffers from “lamentably incomplete” documentation, due to the ravages of fire and the chaos of revolution. “Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence,” explains the narrator. We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination. Similarly, Kang’s multiple versions of the events in Istanbul, in their sheer plenitude, serve as a vivid reminder of the absence of countless other potential perspectives. Woolf and Kang’s multi-narrative approach to historical events probes the necessary role of the literary imagination in constructing history, in which representation always involves a form of narrativization, and is always incomplete and contingent.

The climax of Orlando’s time in Constantinople, and indeed the entire novel, is his sex change, in which our middle-aged male protagonist falls into a deep slumber and awakes as a woman. Orlando then flees the city amid the chaos of a revolt, and joins the company of a community of gypsies before eventually returning to England. The discussion surrounding this climactic event in the novel has understandably dwelled upon gender, particularly the fluidity of male/female as mapped onto the hybridity of Constantinople as East/West. In addition to her gender, however, we also see Orlando’s entire value system and comparative framework undergo a sea change. For Constantinou, Orlando is the ultimate transgressive figure of diplomacy, for s/he “transgresses essentialist interpretations of male and female, occidental and oriental, public and private, political and literary, historical and fictive.” Moreover, Istanbul, “the place where s/he comes to practise diplomacy,” is “a topos of ambiguity – a civilisational hybrid as much as an imaginary meeting point of East and West.” Every aspect of Orlando’s identity becomes fluid and open to question, including Englishness: “But even the bones of her ancestors, Sir Miles, Sir Gervase, and the rest, had lost something of their sanctity since

49 Woolf, V. *Orlando*, 90.
50 Constantinou, C.M. “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography,” 224.
Rustum el Sadi had waved his hand that night in the Asian mountains.\textsuperscript{51} She felt herself “only in process of fabrication ... High battlements of thought, habits that had seemed durable as stone, went down like shadows at the touch of another mind and left a naked sky and fresh stars twinkling in it.”\textsuperscript{52}

Noé Cornago points to diplomacy as a distinct form of “knowledge production,” one which is “framed in ‘highly specific and ephemeral social constellations’” and deeply “dependent on the perceptions and sociability of diplomats themselves.”\textsuperscript{53} If it is via her encounter and conversations with the gypsies of Istanbul that Orlando attains a more radical level of transformation and reflexivity, then the “specific and ephemeral social constellations” and the “perceptions and sociability” of Kang Youwei likewise indelibly shape his mission of \textit{theoria} to Istanbul.

Kang fulfils his diplomatic duties very conscientiously, “reporting back” to his compatriots his varied social encounters and exchanges in Istanbul. He shares the commentary, for instance, from a member of parliament he serendipitously encounters, including his concerns over the hastiness with which the electoral laws have been compiled, and the power struggles and corruption which currently plague the parliament, composed of individuals that the Ottoman politician sees as interested in prestige and power rather than governance.\textsuperscript{54} Later, we are also given the chance, via Kang, to visit the home of a high-ranking member of the Young Turks, identified by historian Giray Fidan as Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha (1855–1922), who would go on to serve as Minister of the Interior, Grand Vizier, and Ambassador to Austria-Hungary, among other positions.

Describing Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha as “a wealthy individual from the new ruling party,” Kang observes that his residence is “very spacious, full of greenery and pavilions, opulent and beautiful throughout, and European in style.”\textsuperscript{55} It appears that Kang’s visit to the pasha’s home was an extended one, during which the two had the opportunity to converse at length. Kang’s request to be introduced to Niyazi Bey, a key figure in the Young Turk revolution, leads his host to launch into an impassioned discussion of the success of the Young Turks as a collective effort:

\begin{itemize}
\item Woolf, V. \textit{Orlando}, 135.
\item Ibid., 137.
\item Cornago, N. \textit{Plural Diplomacies}, 28.
\item Kang, Y. “\textit{Lieguo youji},” 565.
\item Ibid., 563.
\end{itemize}
After Midhat Pasha was sent into exile, many of us were forced to flee as well, and for this reason we became dispersed across Europe, and ended up writing and publishing in the various countries we found ourselves in. We tried to awaken the people of our nation; as we did so, our people began to comprehend what was going on in the world, and the ranks of our followers gradually increased.

A failed coup attempt led the Young Turks to realize that their biggest weakness was a lack of funds, leading in turn to insufficient military clout:

So we sold everything of any value in our homes, and managed to collect four hundred thousand pounds. Secretly the soldiers, heads of harems, high-ranking officials and concubines conspired together .... the sultan, out of fear, gave in and proclaimed the constitution. This took us thirty years to achieve, step by step; we even abandoned our families to attain such results. Niyazi Bey was simply one of our pioneers. The prominent members of our organisation wished to keep a low profile; [our success] wasn't single-handedly achieved by him.56

This exchange with Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha leads Kang to impress upon his own readers that ample funds are a necessary condition for the success of any political intervention, regardless of the numbers of its supporters. Listening to this interpretation of events would have called to mind Kang’s own failed coup attempts, which had also suffered from a lack of finances, and had been readily suppressed by Qing troops.57 Kang’s extended reflections upon this exchange include dismay at the corruptible power of money, as well as admiration for the Young Turks’ courage and determination in achieving their desired aims. For the reformist in exile, this would have been a bittersweet success story to hear.

Midhat Pasha (1822–83), the figure mentioned by Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, is featured prominently in the travelogue, and in various ways constitutes a poignant analogue to Kang himself. Ahmed Şefik Midhat Pasha was a prominent statesman, instrumental in the Tanzimat reform movement, and had masterminded the creation of the short-lived 1876 constitution. He had also gone into exile when Abdul Hamid II’s commitment to constitutionalism crumbled; and had, too, set off on wide-ranging travels during which he had continued to produce texts that reflected upon Ottoman modernization, just

56 Ibid., 563–64.
57 Spence, J.D. The Search for Modern China (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 234.
as Kang continued to seek viable political alternatives for China even as he was estranged from his country. This section of Kang’s Istanbul travelogue articulates the identification of a Chinese thinker with his perceived Ottoman kindred spirit; with a man who, it must have appeared to Kang, despite being of a different language, race, and religion, was yet in several aspects closer to himself in aspirations, ideals, and experience than many of his own countrymen. Kang also notes admiration for Midhat Pasha’s groundbreaking work three decades earlier, when the Ottoman reformer had carefully compiled what in his view were the best and most suitable laws from various countries, and which laid the foundation for the current constitution. After such a promising beginning, Kang sounds pained – almost on Midhat Pasha’s behalf – at the hastiness of the execution of the constitution’s restoration in 1908: “A constitution put in place in three days, and now the Parliament will hold elections in three months – among all the nations of the world, there has never been another phenomenon under the sun as strange as the speed of this undertaking.”

In his discussion of Kang Youwei and his broader philosophy, literary scholar Ban Wang observes that for Kang, world history “is not something given and fixed, but an open-ended, ongoing conversation aimed at mutual reading and interpretation among individual nations and interlocutors. Rather than a grand narrative of Western modernity … world history is a discursive process of reading in sympathy, imagination, and understanding.” Both Kang and Woolf’s writing frame the history of one’s own nation as incomplete, limiting in perspective, and woefully inadequate on its own. They are mindful of the multiple, contingent versions of the past, of the need for dialogue between a multiplicity of historical and cultural perspectives, and of the inescapable impact of aesthetic choices on our conceptions of events.

Woolf’s concept of the “unmanageable sight” provides another portal into the possibilities that creative diplomacy offers for engaging with world history. During her time at Mycenae, which Woolf visited just prior to Turkey, she attempts to work through her reaction to the view of the classical ruins before her: “There was never a sight, I think, less manageable; it travels through all the chambers of the brain, wakes odd memories & imaginations; forecasts a remote

59 Kang, Y. “Lieguo youji,” 565.
60 Ibid., 562.
future; retells a remote past.”62 In this mode of seeing, the sight in question is so richly suggestive to the viewer that it becomes a touchstone for unsettling one's conception of past, present, and future. It is the very “unmanageability” of the sight that leads to its creative and critical potential.

One such “unmanageable sight” for Kang Youwei is the tomb of Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566). Faced with this marker of mortality for a sultan who had attained such glory and prominence during his reign, Kang finds himself overcome with emotion: “This was the peerless hero of his age, yet where is he now? Buried in this coffin of seven chi long. I am utterly distressed at the sight/ Let me improvise a poem: ...”63 Kang then breaks into a verse composition, presented as a spontaneously flowing expression of the uncontrollably strong sentiments provoked by Suleiman's tomb. The resulting poem highlights Suleiman's military exploits in Hungary, juxtaposing his former glory and glittering entourage with his current, unpeopled surroundings of quiet columns in the fading light of dusk. The act of viewing is interrupted, derailed by emotional and mental associations, by the telescoping between historical facts and emotional resonances. Kang's ode to Suleiman is couched in the rhythms and conventions of Chinese classical poetry and historical references, including an allusion to one of China's most famous Tang dynasty tombs, rendering it another poignant instance of theoria as cross-civilizational dialogue.

These “unmanageable sights” present a particularly fertile dimension of creative diplomacy, untethered to state-driven directives and demarcations. Such moments unsettle and disrupt the smooth flow of our authors’ mental and sensorial processes, rendering them temporarily more malleable, more open to leaps of thought and imagination, to the unexpected resonances of those formerly distant and different. Towards the end of Orlando, after centuries of time-travelling, gender-bending international adventures, Woolf’s protagonist muses:

"Time has passed over me," she thought, trying to collect herself; “this is the oncome of middle age. How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights a pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers. When I step out of doors, as I do now," here she stepped on to the

62 Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, 331.
63 Kang, Y. "Lieguo youji," 547.

Orlando, after many years of globetrotting and self-transformation, thus attains a kind of multiplied vision, a synesthetic state in which her memories of different places and cultures are dynamically interconnected. The flow of life becomes less smooth, but far richer. Perhaps such a state is the gift of a lifetime of theoria.

**Cosmopolitan Diplomacy**

“It is almost strange,” Woolf writes during her 1906 travels,

how the longing grows & what it desires; it will feed on names, so that the simple word Devon is better than a poem ... But yet we are not patriotic; indeed it is amusing to read the newspapers & find how little interest it is possible to take in all the frizzling & bubbling that goes on still in our island. The Times loses its stately proportions: it is the private sheet of a small colony of islanders, whose noise is effectually shut up in their prison.65

A strange sensation indeed: increased affection and longing for one’s native land, such that a mere place name grows sumptuously evocative, yet also a sense of detachment from its “frizzling & bubbling,” together with a realization of its insularity, even when it comes to its most vaunted institutions. Such a sensation marks a desire for a more complex notion of attachment, one that allows for both a sharpened sense of belonging to and critique of one’s home country, coupled with the capacity to situate it in a broader context. In the above notes, we see Woolf beginning to turn her critical attentions towards the nature of patriotism – an issue that she would tackle more fully, decades later, in *Three Guineas*, in a desire to outline the fundamentals of a fairer society.

A fairer, less insular, society is an ideal that Kang becomes similarly preoccupied with. Now that “the globe is completely known,” the proud “Middle Kingdom,” whose very name posited its position as the center of the world, turns out to be “just one corner of Asia, and only one-eightieth part of

64 Woolf, V. *Orlando*, 137.
65 Woolf, V. *Passionate Apprentice*, 345.
the world."66 One World, initially written in the 1880s but continually revised and added to until the late 1910s – there are mentions, for example, of the Panama Canal, opened in 1915 – lambasts existing socio-political values and institutions. The first half of One World was later featured alongside his Turkey travelogue in the inaugural volume of Kang’s periodical Compassion. Clearly, while the two texts were written somewhat far apart in time, Kang saw them as complementary instances of his oeuvre.

Woolf’s Three Guineas and Kang’s One World share a remarkable amount of common ground: the importance of empathy and compassion; the detrimental nature of competition, particularly of that between states; and the complicity of education and other societal institutions in furthering the latter while stunting the former. Ultimately, both works call for radical societal reforms, and for a kind of ethical cosmopolitanism as an antidote to harmful forms of competition and insularity.

For Kang, the universally shared experience of suffering is what makes us human: “the whole world is but a world of grief and misery, all the people of the whole world are but grieving and miserable people ... I myself am a body. Another body suffers; it has no connection with me, and yet I sympathise very acutely.”67 One of the remarkable dimensions of Kang’s cosmopolitanism is his desire to extend it to an interplanetary, even intergalactic, scale: “How about the living creatures on Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune?” he muses. “I have absolutely no connection [with them]; they are too distant and obscure to expect it. I wish to love them, [but] they are so far off I have no way to do it.”68 Elsewhere he adds: “In the international wars now going on among the people of Mars, how many millions of li of blood have flowed, how many billions of lives have been lost, I do not know.”69 These truly cosmopolitan ideals show Kang’s desire to exercise the empathic imagination to its extremes, prefiguring the ways in which diplomacy scholars now seek to frame the scope of diplomatic practices more broadly, such that it can “better cover heterodox scripts, unconventional sites, subversive performances, unrecognized challengers, alien narratives, muted voices, and a variety of non-human artifacts. Therein also lies the politics of diplomacy which practice theory seeks to recover.”70

In a similar vein, Woolf insists that the human figure, “even in a photograph,”

67 Ibid., 80.
68 Ibid., 66.
69 Ibid., 80.
70 Constantinou et al. “Thinking with Diplomacy: Within and Beyond Practice Theory.”
suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life.\textsuperscript{71}

Like Kant’s famous formulation that “a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere,”\textsuperscript{72} Woolf argues that injustices, even to complete strangers in places distant from us, are injustices to ourselves; a point predicated upon the understanding that all humans share a common humanity, a common potential to be done injustice to, and a common responsibility to resist injustice.

Neither Kang nor Woolf is content to stop at the observation that the world is replete with suffering and injustice. As they lament the ubiquity of conflict and violence, they are also keen to expose their systemic causes. The root, Kang writes, “of this variety of human suffering is to be found in the existence of the ‘boundary’ of sovereign states,”\textsuperscript{73} for with “states having been established, patriotisms are born. Everyone looks to the advantage of his own state, and aggresses against other states.”\textsuperscript{74} Moreover, “[S]ince there is no limit to the [possible] size of a state, then there is also no limit to the [feasibility] of uniting coexistent states,” leading to a never-ending cycle of war. For Woolf, too, the manmade disaster of war is a supreme evil which society has failed to mobilize against: “The question we put to you [is] ...” she writes: “how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war?”\textsuperscript{75} Both see education in its current form as part of the problem, rather than the solution. Woolf continues:

For do they [Cambridge undergraduates who vandalised the gates of women’s-only Newnham College] not prove that education, the finest education in the world ... does not teach people to hate force, but to use it? Do they not prove that education, far from teaching the educated generosity and magnanimity, makes them on the contrary so anxious to keep their possessions ... that they will use not force but much subtler methods than force when they are asked to share them? And are not force and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Woolf1929} Woolf, Y. \emph{Three Guineas}, 168.
\bibitem{Wallace2010} Wallace, Garrett Brown, and David Held. “Editors’ Introduction.” In \emph{The Cosmopolitanism Reader}, 2010, 8.
\bibitem{Kang2014} Kang, Y. \emph{Ta t'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-Wei}, 82.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 80.
\bibitem{Woolf1929b} Woolf, V. \emph{Three Guineas}, 91.
\end{thebibliography}
possessiveness very closely connected with war? Of what use then is a university education in influencing people to prevent war?76

Kang similarly observes that the nation-state system leads to education that is centred around national interests rather than “the greater good”: “… so long as individual states coexist and the boundaries between states have not been abolished, then in the education [of its youth] every state will continue to use its own national language so as to inculcate patriotism as the foundation of the national existence.”77 The interests of the state are glorified above all else, leading to a kind of “hypnotism,” Woolf terms it, carried out by the state on its citizens, a hypnotism of “medals, symbols, orders and even, it would seem, of decorated ink-pots …”78

Kang and Woolf both urge a reconfiguration of our notions of loyalty. To whom or what do we think we owe “loyalty, and to whom or what should we owe our loyalty? If Kang wishes us to be free of nation-states, Woolf wants us to be at least ethically independent of them, to attain a state of “freedom from unreal loyalties.” “By freedom of unreal loyalties,” she urges, “is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring up from them.”79 These kinds of false prides and loyalties cause us to turn inwards rather than look outwards; they encourage self-satisfaction rather than self-reflection; and they impose their own prerogatives upon the freedom and identity of the individual – in this case, in particular, upon the hypothetical female reader that Woolf envisions. As she adds to her female reader with some glee,

And so long as the Church of England refuses our services – long may she exclude us! – and the ancient schools and colleges refuse to admit us to a share of their endowments and privileges we shall be immune without any trouble on our part from the particular loyalties and fealties which such endowments and privileges engender.80

Kang’s “World of Great Unity” would, too, be a place free of “unreal” loyalties, with the noteworthy abolition of last names: “If we have family names then we

76 Ibid., 38.
77 Kang, Y. Ta’ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K’ang Yu-Wei, 93.
78 Woolf, V. Three Guineas, 135.
79 Ibid., 97.
80 Ibid., Three Guineas, 99.
have relatives; and if we have relatives then we have selfishness,” he explains, “which is the greatest obstruction to our principle of making the world public.”

While Woolf sharply critiques the imposition of a particularly onerous share of “unreal loyalties” upon women, Kang’s commentary on the status of women in society in *One World* is equally damning, and his proposed championing of their rights equally radical. He details at length the physical, social, and intellectual injustices against women:

[men] have callously and unscrupulously repressed them, restrained them, deceived them, shut them up, imprisoned them, bound them, caused them to be unable to be independent, to be unable to hold public office, to be unable to be officials, to be unable to be citizens, to be unable to enjoy [participation in] public meetings; still worse, [men have caused them] to be unable to study, to be unable to hold discussions, to be unable to advance their names, to be unable to have free social intercourse, to be unable to enjoy entertainments, to be unable to go out sightseeing, to be unable to leave the house; still worse, [men have] carved *(sic)* and bound their waists, veiled their faces, compressed their feet, tattooed their bodies, universally oppressing the guiltless, universally punishing the innocent. These are worse than the worst immoralities. And yet throughout the world, past and present, for thousands of years, those whom we call Good men, Righteous men, have been accustomed to the sight of [such things], have sat and looked and considered them to be matters of course, have not demanded justice for them, have not helped them. This is the most appalling, unjust, and unequal thing, the most inexplicable theory under heaven.

Kang goes on to state that “women are equal with men in their ability to handle the occupations of agriculture, industry, business, and commerce ... in their ability to study for official positions,” rendering these injustices all the more grievous. In Kang’s utopia, the institution of marriage is also abolished, with relationships instead being ratified via short-term renewable contracts; moreover, no moral ban is placed on the practice of homosexuality, “since, judged by its criterion of happiness or suffering, no harm is done to others by the practice, and there will always be those who are happier in it than in the

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81 Kang, Y. *Ta t’ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K’ang Yu-Wei*, 194.
82 Ibid., 149–50.
83 Ibid., 150.
normal relationship.”84 These are striking viewpoints espoused in a text born of the 1880s.

Kang is unequivocal about the need to draw upon as wide a range of cultural sources as possible, as a necessary condition for conceiving a better version of the world: “The values and beauties of the dwellings, clothing, food, boats, vehicles, utensils, government, education, arts, and music of the ten thousand countries of the world I have daily received and utilised.”85 (He is also, of course, rather dramatically establishing his credentials as a credible designer of utopias.) Kang’s exposure to a wide range of norms and values allows him to re-examine the most fundamental values of Chinese society, such as his assessment of ancestral worship, to this day an integral part of Chinese culture:

The Chinese system, with its maintaining of memory and respect for the ancestors, is very beautiful. Nations which do not do this forget their roots. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the other nations do not carry on this beautiful system, Europe and America are not only civilised and strong, but actually surpass China. They spend huge sums of money on public institutions for the benefit of the whole nation, and not just the individual clan. If we weigh the respective advantages of either system we must choose in favour of the one which gives the greatest advantages; although the Chinese system is good, the Western system is better, all things considered.86

“Because he looks at the several tens of nations of the earth,” Kang writes, “he thus is intimate with the people of the whole earth. Being able to think profoundly and look to the future, he thus is intimate with the people of the countless generations to come.”87 In Kang’s utopic visions, says Ban Wang, “[r]ather than being a prisoner in a particular culture, the cultural agent connects the universal and the particular.”88 By actively seeking understanding of other cultures and nations, Kang wishes to create a sense of ethical, aesthetic, and historical connectedness with the world at large. Kang’s gesture to the “countless generations to come” reveals a long-term, holistic vision of the world, one that both reaches back into the distant past and extends far into the future, that conventional forms of nation-state-focused diplomacy

84 Ibid., 39.
85 Ibid., 66.
86 Ibid., 172.
87 Ibid., 67–68.
are often incompatible with, due to its more immediate pressures and more narrowly defined aims and interests. It is this longer-term, cross-cultural outlook that Kang and Woolf, with their literary and narratological explorations, contribute through their creative diplomatic practice. It is no coincidence that Woolf’s ambassador Orlando, who offers us such an evocative diplomatic figure in their fluidity of identity, shuttling between value systems, cultures, and genders, is given a lifespan of several centuries, corresponding to an arc of transformation and of world history that far outlasts any single government.

In their writings on Istanbul and their blueprints for a better society, Woolf and Kang each have moments where their imagination falters. Conclusions are drawn due to ill-informed preconceptions or distorting prejudices. Kang, for example, observes authoritatively that recent decades of political turmoil have led Turkish men to develop gloomier countenances and more deeply furrowed brows; and that generations of Turks praying in mosques without shoes on has led them to possess oversized feet. Far more jarring are the instances of Kang’s racism. When he sees African eunuchs working at the palace in Constantinople, even as he launches into a heartfelt criticism of the eunuch system, he praises the Turks for not castrating their “own” kind, unlike the Chinese approach. In this case, Kang falls short of his own espoused ideals of equality and cosmopolitanism, revealing the limitations of his ethical and aesthetic sensibilities. Woolf, meanwhile, writes during her time in Constantinople that “You must begin at the beginning & confess that the Turk himself is the riddle; a tough, labyrinthine riddle”; and “when we come to consider the question of the West & the East – then indeed – we lay down the pen, and write no more.” There is a weariness here of East-West clichés, as well as a caution towards venturing into territory she feels unequipped to; but there is also a passivity evinced towards the supposedly impenetrable otherness of the Turks. The statements above contrast with Orlando, written two decades after, in which, instead of Turkishness as a riddle, we see a sustained, creative, and empathetic effort to engage via the medium of fiction, leading to more fluid conceptions of East and West, and cultural identity more broadly.

In this process lies the core worth of creative diplomacy. When “not only the Other but also the Self become strange, sites to be known or known anew,” Constantinou emphasizes, this allows one to “creatively deal with alterity, overcoming the diplomatic fixation of clear and unambiguous identity …” Hence the attempt, in this essay, to bring together two markedly different

89 Woolf, V. A Passionate Apprentice, 357.
90 Ibid., 353.
91 Constantinou, C.M., and J. Der Derian, eds. Sustainable Diplomacies, 68.
voices with unexpectedly kindred dimensions. In the alternating cacophony and harmony of Kang and Woolf’s writing, we are offered glimpses of the potential for an alternative form of diplomatic work, concerned more with cross-cultural transformation and long-term coexistence, one less delimited by the relatively narrower perspectives and timelines of the nation-state, and that engages ethical, aesthetic, social, and historical dimensions. If Hussein Banai identifies the troubling phenomenon of “estranged publics who continue to insist on the absolute or universal validity of their own grand narratives,”92 then it is creative diplomats like Woolf and Kang – literary practitioners of *theoria* – who engage, critique, and cross-fertilize such narratives with one another, who can help begin to rectify the issue of traditionally defined diplomats as enablers of “exclusivist narrations of public imagination in world society.”93 Through them, we can begin to answer what Banai asks: “how best [can] the practice of diplomacy ... be infused with a sense of public imagination given the myriad problems associated with sovereign misrepresentations of reality?”94 Virginia Woolf and Kang Youwei’s projects of *theoria* are incomplete and imperfect. Their work excels, not at providing us with answers, but at showing us the kinds of questions that might be asked, and the kinds of endeavors our imaginations might strive to undertake. Their writing offers us creative material and alternative vantage points from which to continue grappling with that essential diplomatic undertaking: how to engage in sustained dialogue with those different from ourselves.

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93 Ibid., 459.
94 Ibid., 471.