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大同書
*BOOK ON THE
GREAT UNITY***Confucian Eugenics? Revisiting Kang Youwei's 康有為 (1858-1927)**
Book on the Great Unity (Datong shu 大同書)

16:15-17:45, Thursday, 22 May 2025

Venue: SOF-E-17, Schönberggasse 1, 8001 Zürich

Guest Lecture by Prof. Dr. Ady Van den Stock, Ghent University

The late Qing reformer and thinker Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) was arguably one of the first – and almost certainly the most influential – proponents of Confucian iconoclasm" (Philippe Major 2023). His radical reordering of the canon of "Classic Studies" (經學) and his controversial recasting of Confucius as a religious prophet and social reformer put him at the forefront of *fin-de-siècle* attempts to reimagine and reinvigorate the Confucian tradition in the final years of the declining Qing empire. His deep involvement in the 1898 Hundred Days' Reforms and his leading position within the transnational Chinese Empire Reform Association (保皇會) cemented his status as a major political and activist figure in the history of modern China.

In this talk, I will revisit an underexplored dimension of Kang Youwei's posthumously published *Book on the Great Unity* (大同書, 1935). I focus on the eugenicist aspects of the book, where Kang develops a utopian vision of a future in which all boundaries of nation, class, race, family, and gender have been overcome. *Kang proposes* the establishment of a "Human Roots Institution" (人本院) – called "Institute for Fetal Education" (胎教院) in the draft version, where he lays out an institutional framework intended as a substitute for the traditional family after the equalization of gender roles and the transfer of child-rearing and educational responsibilities to society as a whole. Taking the infamous section on "Removing Racial Boundaries and Uniting the Human Species" (去種界同人類) as a foil, I analyze the logic behind Kang's design for the "Human Roots Institution." I argue that his ideas on the hereditary and environmental determination of human nature, his advocacy of racial improvement, and his concerns over the prevention of abortion and the maintenance of reproductive potential point toward an overarching problem throughout the *Datong shu*: the "Great Peace" envisaged by Kang can only be arrived at and preserved by means of a deeply intrusive state-apparatus that is designed for constantly monitoring the bodily as well as psychological or spiritual health of its global citizens, even if the latter are supposed to have transcended all narrow bonds of race, class, nation, and even kinship. While scholars such as Wang Hui 汪暉 have already pointed out how Kang's vision remains caught in a tension between universalism and nation-state-centered modernization, I further propose that both elements of this constitutive tension play a role in this book's vision of society and its proud declaration that "the world of the Great Unity may be called the medical world" (可號大同之世為醫世界).

Prof. Dr. Ady Van den Stock currently is a Visiting Professor at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Ghent University. His research focuses on modern Chinese philosophy, religion, and intellectual history, specifically the thought of Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Lim Boon Keng (1869-1957), "ethnic minority philosophy," Sino-Islamic traditions of thought, and 20th century and contemporary developments in Confucianism. His publications include an outstanding monograph on 20th c. Confucianism entitled "The Horizon of Modernity: Subjectivity and Social Structure in New Confucian Philosophy", published in John Makeham's prestigious Modern Chinese Philosophy Series at Brill (2016). He has published dozens of articles in international academic journals and contributed book chapters to several reference works and edited volumes. He has translated the work of famous modern and contemporary Chinese thinkers such as Li Zehou, Yang Guorong, Feng Qi, Ge Zhaoguang, Tang Wenming, and Zhao Tingyang.

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