This study of K'ang Yu-wei and the Reformation Movement of 1898 is mainly concerned with K'ang's proposals and activities before and during the reformation period from June 11 to September 21, 1898. Ever since China suffered defeat in her war with Japan in 1894-1895, the Ch'ing dynasty was in a critical situation. The western powers, with the Tsarist Russia in the lead, competed fiercely in the so-called "Battle of Concessions" craving for their respective political and economic "spheres of interest and influence" in China. Through the signing of various conventions and agreements, they had broken China into pieces in an informal way. China was in a great danger to be formally dismembered.

On the other hand, the political power of the Ch'ing dynasty was in the hands of the Empress Dowager Tsu-hsi and her conservative henchmen. They were unable to check the advances of the invaders and were also unwilling to adopt the necessary political and economical measures to strengthen the country.

K'ang Yu-wei was one of the reformists who considered that China had to make an over-all change in the aspects of her political, institutional and economical structures for struggling for survival. He gave his ideas of reformation either through submission of petitions and memorials to the Emperor Kuang-hsü or through publishing his suggestions in the various societies and newspapers, hoping that they would help the country change to a new direction.
This academic exercise consists of six chapters. Chapter one gives a brief introduction to the background of K'ang as a reformer and the contents of his reform proposals. Chapter two deals with some of K'ang's contemporary reformists and their proposals. Discussions are also directing to why K'ang Yu-wei emerged as the leader of the Reformation Movement. Chapters three and four discuss K'ang's reform proposals and activities before the promulgation of Emperor Kuang-hsu's Imperial decree which announced the formal beginning of a national reformation movement on June 11, 1898. Chapter five centres on K'ang's proposals and activities after the launching of the Reformation Movement till it was eventually crushed by the Empress Dowager in her coup de'tat on September 21, 1898. This study:

The last chapter concludes with a discussion of the reasons for the failure of the movement. It also provides a brief review of the impact of the movement on China before 1911.