

CHINA'S SELF-STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT:  
A NOBLE PLAN DETACHED FROM REALITY

Jason Qu

Historical Context

The tumultuous forces of exploration, trade, and imperialism by the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century spelt the creation of a new world order, one that would counter the many that had preceded it. The last Chinese Imperial Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, would face the rise of this new order. How it did so would directly influence the fate of China in the modern age.

Throughout the reign of the Qing, internal problems, including overpopulation, famine, bureaucratic corruption, and inefficiency negatively impacted the administrative and bureaucratic functions of the Dynasty. Ethnic discord between the Han majority and the Manchu ruling minority also translated into tensions and conflict. This is evident from the large number of rebellions of the Qing Era, with Taiping Rebellion being the most notable one amongst others such as the White Lotus Rebellion. They characterized an antagonistic sentiment of the Han Chinese against the Manchu court. Furthermore, popular sentiment against foreign

---

Jason Qu is a Senior at St. George's School in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he wrote this Independent Study paper in the 2015/2016 academic year.

aggression was also expressed in the Boxer Rebellion, signifying anti-imperialist and anti-western feelings. Court officials such as the notorious Ho-Shen and the Empress Dowager Cixi definitely did not relieve these tensions with their ostentatious displays of wealth and influence. The staunchly conservative Qing court also did not help China: as foreign imperialist powers began to encroach on Chinese territory with their own interests in mind, China found its aging technologies and society unable to cope with this pressure. Thus, Qing found itself facing many qualms and conundrums by the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet, in the past, throughout many periods of world history, Chinese culture and society were proud displays of a noble and dignified civilization tracing its roots back to the dawn of civilization. China was a regional and global economic, cultural and political leader during the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. Its cultural institutions and traditions found themselves manifested in other societies—the appearance of Chinese architecture, clothing, and characters throughout East Asia serves as testament to China’s cultural impact. It produced goods, including porcelain, silks, and spices that were traded around the world. The Qing demanded tribute and subordination from neighboring kingdoms and polities, and extended a sphere of influence throughout East Asia. Through the spread of Chinese goods to the Near East and Europe and the dominance of Chinese culture and ideologies in the region, China had established itself as a power to be reckoned with, and a proud culture.

However, as the Western world caught up technologically, economically, and politically, this ancient world order that China had created and became accustomed to for millennia was slowly collapsing and being replaced by a new, Western-led order. The industrial revolution in Europe yielded great technological advances for the West, and resulted in more effective systems of communications, transportation, and production. It also meant a greater thirst for resources.

As the West rapidly expanded its trade networks around the globe, China found itself surrounded by Western influences.

Moreover, European merchant ships and corporations began to undermine the traditional tribute system of trade that had dominated China’s economic interactions with the outside world. However, the Qing imperial court remained stubbornly in the old world order that was falling apart and failed to recognize the technological superiority of the West, and, consequently, began to fall behind militarily, politically, and technologically. As Western nations and westernizing nations such as Japan began to more zealously pursue the resources and material riches of East Asia, China found itself at the center of a conflict for influence. More specifically, China found its sovereignty and autonomy being encroached on by foreign interests. The West, eager to enter the lucrative Chinese market, petitioned China for an opportunity to engage in mutual trade. However, as China denied the West this opportunity, tensions built up, culminating in the Opium Wars where the technological disparity between China and the West was unmistakably exposed. Gradually, as the façade of Chinese superiority began to crumble away, China found herself out of touch with the modern world. She no longer knew how to interact with the outside world, nor did she comprehend its position within it.

This new position of China in the world elicited a concerned response from the Qing court. Many officials and courtiers saw the infringements into Chinese society by foreign parties as acts that violated the cultural and traditional integrity of the Chinese nation and state. They were strongly opposed to the idea of adopting Western technologies and ideas, believing that it only contributed to an erosion of Chinese tradition. Yet, other factions in court saw reform as essential in maintaining China’s control over its own affairs. Liberal-minded court factions unanimously agreed that reform was crucial in preventing encroachments on Chinese sovereignty by Western powers, and the possible collapse of the Qing polity. The nature of this reform, however, was widely disputed. Some saw reform as a mere introduction of Western technologies in order to strengthen China’s military force and fend off foreign imperialist interests. Others envisioned a grander plan of introducing Western industrial practices and instituting Western infrastructure such as railways and postage systems. A few

radicals even pushed for modern westernization of the education system, moving from traditional Confucian studies and also abandoning the 2,000-year-old absolute monarchical system in favor of a constitutional monarchy. However, dissent, reactionary forces and a lack of an organized initiative prevented the grand plans of reform from ever becoming reality.

The failure of this initiative, termed the Self-Strengthening Movement, ultimately dictated the future of the Qing as a state and the fate of China in the modern age. The Qing would only outlive the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a little more than a decade, leaving China on a mission to seek a new understanding of the world and of government. Yet the Self-Strengthening Movement would represent the first of many undertakings taken by China to reorient itself to a radically evolving and changing world.

### Historiography

A variety of historical narratives exist, critically analyzing the Self-Strengthening Movement and its impacts. Certain perspectives regard disunity amongst the reformers and fierce conservative opposition as being the main factors hampering the success of the movement. Others take into account traditional Chinese statecraft and philosophies when analyzing the demise of the reforms. In a lesser-known epistemological analysis of the movement, doubt is cast on the very nature of the movement and the influence of this view on later appraisals of the movement and its success. Still other theories see the Qing as doomed to fail and the Self-Strengthening Movement as merely another manifestation of its corruption and institutional inefficiencies.

Scholars such as Li Chien-Nung,<sup>1</sup> Samuel Chu,<sup>2</sup> and Benjamin Elman<sup>3</sup> are representative of those advocating historiographical theories that blame conservative opposition, incoherent reform policies, and institutional corruption in causing both the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the demise of the Qing. They believe that the Movement itself was weak and dispersed, and was countered by a barrage of scholar-officials and millennia of Chinese tradition. According to Chu, “China suffered from a

lack of unified leadership working toward reform and modernization... [whereas] the vast majority of the ruling official-gentry class was conservative in outlook and regarded innovations as possible threats to the basis upon which its privileged position in Chinese society was founded.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, they also championed the view that the disorderly, regionalist, and factional structure of the Qing court and administration, as well as corrupt officials, made it hard to channel resources for both reform and military efforts against foreign aggressors. Further, Elman states, “lack of leadership, vested interests, (and) lack of funding”<sup>5</sup> contributed to the inadequacies of the late Qing state. Finally, they hold that the indecisive and indeterminate plans and policy of the court rendered the Qing state and China vulnerable to foreign military advances. Li notes, citing both the Sino-French war and Sino-Japanese war of 1894 as representative examples of this claim, that “the Chinese failure in the Sino-French War may be attributed to this indecision and lack of determination”<sup>6</sup> and that “throughout the Sino-Japanese conflict, not a single person could understand one day what course was to be taken the next; from the beginning to the end there was no firm policy.”<sup>7</sup> Li, Chu, and Elman believe that a lack of firm leadership in both reform activities and the normal functions of the state were the most characteristic features of this period of Chinese history.

Other academics such as Michael Gasster<sup>8</sup> and Kwang-Ching Liu,<sup>9</sup> however, have claimed that the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement was due to the intrinsic flaws in the philosophy of the movement. They do not downplay the flaws of the Qing polity, nor do they reject the lack of consistency in the reform movement as a factor. However, they see the reforms as a defense mechanism, as a method for preserving the Chinese world order that had existed for over two millennia against the new encroaching imperialism of the West. Gasster notes, “All that they did [Western education, technology, diplomacy, etc.], however, they considered means of defense. Each step had to be justified on the grounds that it would help to keep the foreigners out; at the same time, each experiment had to be guaranteed not to impinge on the essentials of Chinese life.”<sup>10</sup> To Chinese statesmen,

Western superiority lay only in technological and materialistic affairs. Sociately, philosophically, and culturally, Chinese methods were superior to all others in every way. For these historians, this attitude made it almost impossible for the reforms to be effective. They believe that if the reforms did not extend as far as influencing Qing statecraft, there could be no force nor backing behind the reforms, as the system could not adapt to the society nor the world to which it was to govern. Yet, the reforms, if too radical, would never have gained any momentum from the Qing establishment. As Liu states:

But it should also be apparent from this study that the reforms Li advocated were limited in nature—that Li could not be an It or a Bismarck because the very pragmatism that enabled the young Chinese statesman to recognize the need for new policies also prompted him to compromise with existing military and administrative practices that were, in the long run, inconsistent with his aims<sup>11</sup>...Li did visualize certain general reforms, but it must be emphasized that, in both cases, his vision was severely circumscribed by what he considered feasible...While Li's proposals were audacious in certain respects, they were inadequate in others. Despite the fact that he showed a degree of cultural mindedness, he never questioned the Confucian socio-political order...

To these scholars, the reforms were limited by philosophy and tradition and failed because of a dogmatic and inflexible mindset.

A second narrative which adds to both schools of thought views the societal tensions of the Qing period as contributing to many ills in statecraft and administration. Kwang-Ching Liu<sup>12</sup> asserts that the problems caused by limited opportunities for a surging population, bolstered by an increase in education and literacy, led to structural instability in Qing society. These tensions caused nationalistic (anti-Manchu) and democratic sentiments that furthered this instability. The reforms to counteract this instability were too shallow, the officials were too dogmatic, and the court was too stagnant in adapting to these rapidly changing domestic problems, thus suffocating the Self-Strengthening Movement.

Luke S. K. Kwong,<sup>13</sup> in another interpretation, argues that the Self-Strengthening Movement itself never actually failed. The

illusion of failure, Kwong contends, is due to a faulty interpretation of the Movement itself. Kwong believes that since the Movement was appraised as a military movement, later generations have seen the reforms as a failure due to the military losses near the end of the dynasty. However, if the reforms were seen merely as an adaptive strategy to reform the nation, it can be argued that ideas and technologies from the West were imported and spread throughout China through trade, the various academies set up by the reformists, and by the students sent abroad to study western academic subjects. As Kwong summarizes:

The self-strengthening movement is generally believed to have spanned the period from the early 1860s to China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894-1895. Such a span, however, involves a distortion. The problem arises in part from the assumption that the innovations introduced in the early T'ung-chih period were all, by design, war-oriented; hence, the test of their efficacy by China's performance in war. This of course, is an overgeneralization. The problems stems also from the depiction of these innovations as the outcome of a "movement." As such, they certainly failed to produce the results that might have been expected had there been a bona-fide organized movement.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, for Kwong, a flawed interpretation of the Movement by academics created the illusion of the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

A fourth historical theory on the demise of the Self-Strengthening Movement, championed by Stanley Spector, contends that the main proponents of the Self-Strengthening Movement, such as Li Hung-chang, used the label of "Self-Strengthening" to enrich their own fortunes and expand their own powers. Spector states, "the self-strengthening movement failed to strengthen China, but gave wide powers to Li Hung-chang and a few leaders like him at the expense of the central government and its forces."<sup>15</sup> This view asserts that the many activities of reform throughout the 1860's to 1895 reform periods were plots set up by power-hungry officials in an attempt to raise their own positions.

From the historiographical analysis, two main groups emerge, those focusing on the political struggles of the Qing

imperial administration and those focusing on the philosophy behind the reforms. Both narratives are based on an underlying question—was the Qing destined to be vanquished by a new world order set up by imperialist Western states, or did the Qing’s internal issues prove to be conducive to its demise?

### Thesis

The focus of this paper will be on the Westernization reform period in the Qing Dynasty, occurring from the 1860s to 1895, and the reasons for its ultimate failure. Considering and analyzing the historiography on the topic of the Self-Strengthening Movement (The Movement), this paper will contend that the entrenched conservatism of the Qing Imperial Court was the decisive factor in the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement. More specifically, it will examine two main elements for this conservatism—traditional Chinese statecraft and ethnic dynamics within the Qing Dynasty. Additionally, this paper will delineate two factors that further contributed to the failure of the Movement: a lack of unified leadership in heading the reform, and institutional and administrative issues within the Qing Imperial system.

The Qing dynasty was not unique among non-Western powers in pursuing Western-oriented reforms; the Ottoman Empire with its Tanzimat Reforms and the Japanese Empire with its Meiji Restoration are two such contemporaries of the Qing. This paper will make comparisons between the Qing and these two empires in implementing their respective reforms. It will examine the goals of the movement as Western-oriented reform intended to increase the strength of the Qing state in relation to its foreign counterparts.

This paper will consider the goal of the Self-Strengthening Reforms to be the preservation of the Qing dynasty through technological progress and institutional reforms. This consideration has been reached through analyzing primary sources from the period, which will be cited and explained in the essay itself. Thus, when the paper refers to the “failure” of the Movement,

it refers to the failure of the Movement in achieving its goals of dynastic preservation.

A quick note on spelling conventions—this paper has used both the *Pinyin* romanization system and the Wade–Giles romanization system. This choice has been made to preserve a consistency between the names used in sources and the names quoted in this paper, so that readers may more easily refer to individuals, events, and institutions when conducting further research by using the sources cited in this paper.

The analysis will begin by providing an overview of the nature of the reforms. It will then explain the administrative and internal functions of the Qing Empire. Thereafter, it will more specifically examine the reform policy of the Qing and the organization of the reform movement. Finally, it will evaluate the impacts of conservatism in the Qing court and in Chinese statecraft that accounted for the various features of the reform policy and organization. Through this paper, I will provide a picture of what caused the debacle of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

### The Nature of the Reform Movement

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, China began to see its millennia-old illusions of superiority slowly erode away. Its world order, consisting of the tribute system, the Mandate of Heaven, and the isolationist trade policies, began to seem irrelevant and obsolete. As the West began to exert its force and influence over the Qing Empire, scholars and officials within the Empire would see a need to emulate the technologies, organizational hierarchies, and cultural traditions of the Occident in an attempt to prevent China from becoming subjugated by the West. This process of endeavored reform and emulation became known as the “Self-Strengthening Movement”. As the movement gained momentum within the hearts and minds of certain prominent individuals of the Empire,<sup>16</sup> in particular the viceroy of Chih-li, Li Hung-chang, and other individuals, such as Qing grand secretary Wo-jen, who had a more conservative and traditional mindset, would form a most vehement opposition.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of scope, the reforms envisioned Western-style modernization in a variety of fields: military<sup>18</sup> and industrial technology,<sup>19</sup> intellectual<sup>20</sup> and academic thought,<sup>21</sup> military organization,<sup>22</sup> the diplomatic bureaucracy,<sup>23</sup> economic restructuring,<sup>24</sup> and more. Reforms as radical as adjusting the political order were proposed.<sup>25</sup> In an article by Wang T'ao, a journalist and writer, the very essence of the Qing Imperial system was compared to that of Britain and criticized as detached from the people and in need of desperate reform:

The real strength of England, however, lies in the fact that there is a sympathetic understanding between the governing and the governed, a close relationship between the ruler and the people...

And moreover the principle of majority rule is adhered to in order to show impartiality...In their treatment of the people the officials never dare to use severe punishments, heavy fines, or tyrannical and excessive taxation. Nor dare they accept any bribery...or squeeze the blood and flesh of myriads of people in order to fill up their own pockets...The English people are likewise public-spirited and law-abiding...

An important question is jointly discussed in the upper and lower houses of Parliament, and all must agree before an action can be taken. If there is a proposal for a military expedition it is necessary to make a universal inquiry of the whole nation. When the multitude of the people desire to fight, then there is war; and when the multitude desire to cease, then a truce...

The expenditure of the British ruler is a constantly fixed amount... he does not dare to eat any myriads of delicacies. His palaces are all very simple; he does not care for extravagance...The king has only one queen, and besides here there is no concubine, and there has never been a multitude of three thousand beautiful women in the harem...<sup>26</sup>

Wang T'ao's writings show that radical reformists believed that the very essence of Qing society and governance was flawed and that in order for China to experience a true rebirth, its social conditions and Imperial order would both have to be amended.

However, in reality, the reforms were mainly limited to material matters, such as the improvement of weaponry and transportation infrastructure, with few instances of actual intellectual

and institutional reform.<sup>27</sup> It was thought that modern materials such as steamships, guns, and cannons would help provide the Qing with the physical force necessary to repel foreign troops.<sup>28</sup> Wang T'ao warned of this lack of substantial reform in another article.

Unfortunately, however, we are still copying the superficialities of their methods, getting the terminology (of Western civilization) but little actual substance...They (Chinese manufacturers) usually believe that their thinking and wisdom are sufficient to match those of the Westerners, or that they have even surpassed them...

But the so-called able minds of our people are not necessarily able, and the so-called competent ones are not necessarily competent. They are merely mediocrities who accomplish something through the aid of others.

Therefore, the urgent problem of our nation today lies primarily in the governance of the people; next in the training of soldiers; and in these two matters the crucial thing to aim at is the accumulation of men of ability. Indeed, superficial imitation in practical matters is certainly not as effective as arousing genuine intellectual curiosity...

The themes on classics in the second examination [of the Imperial Examination System] ought to be replaced by some practical knowledge...so that the candidates can understand the body politic and can transfer their knowledge into actual practices...<sup>29</sup>

This warning, however, would go unheeded. The Qing establishment believed there was no need for any alterations in social and academic institutions; in fact, once any reform activity began to threaten a traditional Chinese practice or philosophy, that activity was promptly terminated, treated as an attempt gone wrong.<sup>30</sup> Such instances reveal the inherent ethnocentrism of the Qing in the period of the Self-Strengthening Movement,<sup>31</sup> a belief that would undermine the effectiveness of the reforms and ultimately work against the long-term interests of the Qing. It was a belief and attitude that was rooted in and found its support from millennia of Chinese imperial history and tradition. This attitude is also what the paper will define and thus term as conservatism.

Yet perhaps the scope of the reform movement may not have been as limited as thought by Wang T'ao. According to one perspective by Kwang-Ching Liu, a Taiwanese historian of late imperial China, it may have been good judgment and prudence

that restricted reform activities to simply technological affairs, considering the massive amounts of conservative opposition to the reforms.<sup>32</sup> When taking into account the strong repudiation of Western-style schools and education by the Court in the 1860s and 1870s,<sup>33</sup> pursuing more wide-ranging reforms in education, politics, the military, and the economy with a comparable zeal may have simply been foolish. Despite the Qing government's choice to limit the scope of its reforms, the fact that such reforms were even realized in the first place implies that China had begun to take its first steps towards modernizing and adapting to the new world order. Thus, activities of reformers such as Li-Hung Chang, Tseng-Kuo-fan, and Tso Tsung-t'ang in initiating reform activities such as the Fuchow artillery, Fukien Shipyard, and P'ei-yang Navy,<sup>34</sup> rather than being in vain, may have helped sow the seeds for Western-style modernization in the Republican period after the demise of the Qing in 1911.

Yet we must also consider the impulse for reform from the perspective of the Court. The whole reasoning behind reform was to be able to equip China with the proper mechanisms to combat not only internal issues, but, most importantly, external threats that posed a peril to Court sovereignty over the Qing realm. The reform movement recognized China's technological disparity with the West as a disability that debilitated the Qing state in dealing with foreign parties. Reformers thus saw the fundamental goal of the reform movement to enable China to deal with the West on equal terms, to preserve the territorial integrity of the Qing, and most importantly, to keep China the master of her own fate. As evidenced in a memorial to the throne from Li Hung-chang in 1872, reformists believed that technological disparities between China and the West were a major vulnerability in China's dealings with the West, and posed even an existential threat.

Your minister has been thinking that the various European countries in the last several decades have advanced from India to the southern oceans, from the southern oceans to the northeast, and have invaded China's frontiers and interior land. Peoples never recorded in previous histories (Western Imperial Powers), who have had no contact with us since ancient times, have come to our ports of entry to ask for trade relations...

The Westerners particularly rely upon the excellence and efficacy of their guns, cannon, and steamships, and so they can overrun China. The bow and spear, small guns, and native-made cannon which have hitherto been used by China, cannot resist their rifles...

To live today and still say "Reject the barbarians" and "Drive them out of our territory" is certainly superficial and absurd talk...we cannot preserve and protect them (peace and Chinese territory) unless we have the right weapons...

The method of self-strengthening lies in learning what they can do, and in taking over what they rely upon...If we can really and thoroughly understand their methods...can we not expect that after a century or so we can reject the barbarians and stand on our own feet?

Your minister humbly thinks that all other expenditures of our nation can be economized, but the expense for supporting the army, establishing defense measures, drilling in guns and cannon, and building warships should by all means never be economised...[if] we shall be obliged to neglect all these defense measure, the nation will never have anything to stand upon, and we shall never be strong... Not only will we be a laughing stock to foreigners, but we will also strengthen their aggressive ambitions...<sup>35</sup>

Li's usage of language such as "overrun" and "stand on our own feet" reflects a certain attitude of the reformers in regard to the purpose of the reform movement. To them, the reform movement and modernization were requisite for the continued existence of the Qing polity. Deficiencies in China's military equipment and a relative lack of technological knowledge were major causes for China's disadvantaged position in the world of nation-states. We thus must define the goal of the movement as one designed in order to protect the Qing state from the erosive forces of foreign states, and to furnish the Qing with the tools it needed in order to deal accordingly with these foreign parties.

Historical hindsight tells us that the reform movement was ultimately a failure. The apportionment of the Qing realm into foreign "spheres of influence" by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the defeat of Qing in several strategically important regional wars,<sup>36</sup> and the invasion of mainland China and subsequent subjugation of Qing authority by the West during the

Boxer Rebellion all speak to the unrealized potential of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

The Qing reforms were not unique in either nature or scope; contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century polities such as the Ottoman Empire and Meiji Japan, in face of fragmentation triggered by nationalistic movements and coerced trade with the West, respectively, also carried out Western-style modernization as a means to strengthen their own states and better confront the encroachment of Western imperialism.<sup>37</sup> A quick analysis of events and a brief comparison with contemporary reform and modernization movements in Turkey and Japan lends some comparative insight into the efforts and achievements of the Chinese Self-Strengthening Movement. In Ottoman Turkey and Meiji Japan, the reforms were not limited merely to technological and material improvements. Japan's adoption of a mercantilist economy with a constitutional democracy, a bicameral legislature, and a dismantlement of the Tokugawa social order indicated a near total emulation of Western methods and philosophies, economically, politically, socially, and militarily.<sup>38</sup> The Tanzimat reforms, though producing less fruitful results, also pushed reforms beyond the mere material and technological realms, extending to legal, religious, and educational spheres.<sup>39</sup> Reform activities of such a depth and breadth were never more than conceptualized and debated by reformists, let alone implemented, during the period of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

The Movement itself was as a haphazard attempt to preserve the Qing Empire and forestall its continued decline. Through this, China could preserve its traditions and institutions by fending off Western encroachment into its territories, politics, and economics. Its sole purpose, for most scholars and officials, was to protect and shield the old systems of tribute, isolationism, and Sino-centrism in a rapidly evolving and changing world dictated not by China's terms but by the Occidental powers.<sup>40</sup> In comparison, both the Ottoman Empire and Meiji Japan were willing not only to consider, but also to radically modify their political and societal institutions in strengthening their own systems. They sought to

evolve alongside a rapidly changing world. Yet, the proponents of the Self-Strengthening Movement neglected to consider the possibility that China had to change *with* the world, rather than the world with China. This dogmatic worldview of the Qing court thus was a major factor in causing the failure and collapse of the 1860s to 1895 reform period—The Self-Strengthening Movement.

#### Flaws Within the Qing Imperial Administration

One of the main reasons for the downfall of the Qing not only in Self-Strengthening, but also undoubtedly in its existence as an entity, was its inept efforts in administration and foreign affairs. Such incompetence was due to its own institutional flaws and to the mercurial nature of the individuals within its system.

#### Institutional Disorder

The Qing court was hampered in its efforts at governing internal affairs and dealing with external issues by its kaleidoscopic bureaucratic system and administrative institutions. Characterized by an imperial system permeated by a nimety of officials, bureaus, and organizational hierarchies with no standardized system of ascribing administrative functions, the Qing often faced bureaucratic gridlock. In addition, regionalism and the decentralization of authority to local officials often made it difficult for the Imperial Court in Beijing to achieve its objectives.<sup>41</sup>

The Qing military suffered from even worse institutional disorder. Army units were individually commanded by regional governors, with little collaboration between individual army commands,<sup>42</sup> and the Qing military force as a whole<sup>43</sup> suffered from internal differences in organization and disparities in both equipment and training. The Ministry of War in Beijing served merely as a formality, having neither real authority nor function.<sup>44</sup>

What resulted was an inefficient system of scattered authority and lack of a unification and centralization of power within the Empire. Such a system meant chaos for the Qing state and caused frequent disputes between individuals of the scholar-official class, as well as between different levels and divisions of govern-



ment, as to who really wielded power within the Qing system. This institutional disarray hindered the Qing polity not only in times of crisis,<sup>45</sup> but also in the administration of day-to-day affairs.<sup>46</sup> A malfunctioning state system made it nearly impossible for the Qing dynasty to operate, let alone embark on ambitious and transformative reforms. Thus, institutional failure would plague not only the Self-Strengthening Movement, but also the Qing's functioning as a healthy and stable state.

### Corruption

Institutional turmoil was an issue that plagued the Qing's attempts at governance, but it was not the only problem with its political system. Corruption was perhaps one of the most pervasive traits of the Qing system in its waning days. Many members of the ruling scholar-gentry class often failed to carry out their duties properly, frequently avoided reporting truthfully to the Court about regional issues,<sup>47</sup> and evaded contributing financially to national war efforts and policy initiatives.<sup>48</sup> Officials and eunuchs bought and sold positions and promotions, accepted bribes, and frequently pocketed sums of money intended for public projects.<sup>49</sup> In many cases, they prevented the allocation of public funds for genuine utilitarian purposes, believing such expenses to be profligate. In one instance, Li Hung-chang requested funds for the purchase of artillery equipment and shells from Germany, yet Chang Pei-l'un, an official in charge of military equipment, denied this request, believing such an expense to be a waste of capital.<sup>50</sup> Money in the empire was often mismanaged, and frequently devoted to personal causes rather than for the public good.

The extent of corruption was not limited to officials and eunuchs. Corruption and economic misconduct reached as far as members of the Imperial family. In an ostensible act of greed, the Empress Dowager Cixi obtained a loan from a foreign power originally intended for use in China's naval modernization, and employed it for the construction of a summer palace.<sup>51</sup> Such lavish consumption drained the treasuries of the Qing, and left the

Self-Strengthening Movement with little money to spare for its own reform activities.

Corruption on the part of officials, eunuchs, and the imperial family would leave the Qing financially debilitated and unable to appropriate funds for public affairs. As capital became increasingly concentrated in private hands, the Qing state would suffer from a lack of adequate finances in administering its daily duties and interacting with the West. A lack of funds also debilitated the reform movement in its efforts and attempts to modernize. This debilitation is exemplified in the Movement not being able to facilitate the purchase of arms and the building of factories. Corruption in the late Qing dynasty would result in the economic misconduct of the Empire's administrators and the incompetence of its officials.

### Cixi and the Eunuchs

After the death of the Eastern Empress Dowager Cian, the imperial Court, supposedly under the tutelage of the Kuang-Hsü Emperor, gradually shifted into the hands of the Western Empress Dowager Cixi.<sup>52</sup> From thereon, Court policy and authority would be subject to the whims and fancies of Cixi and her entourage of eunuchs. The Court was transformed from an institution of scholar-officials, and the Emperor who competently administered the empire, to a den of corruption that fuelled the personal and often conflicting objectives of both Cixi and the eunuchs.

In an extreme reversal of fortunes, eunuchs, previously servants of the imperial family, gained so much prestige and power that even princes and grand councilors, the most powerful administrators in the empire, eventually became subordinate to their authority.<sup>53</sup> Control of positional arrangements within the Qing bureaucracy eventually fell into the hands of eunuchs, resulting in nepotism on a systemic scale. As the scholar-officials order became more and more dependent on the power and influence of the eunuchs, the Qing state found itself subject to the whims and fancies of the Empress Dowager Cixi and this body of *de iure*

servants whose personal interests would cause great detriment to the Qing state.<sup>54</sup>

A culture of corruption and misconduct rocked the Qing state to the core in its twilight years. Officials were no longer devoted to proper management of the Empire, bribery and corruption were widespread, and the monopolization of power by Cixi and the eunuchs spelt out a further deterioration of the political climate at the hands of self-interest. In this environment of corruption, administrators found it nearly impossible to facilitate the proper administration of the Qing Empire, let alone appropriate the necessary capital towards funding reform initiatives.

Thus, as Cixi and her entourage of eunuchs became more embroiled in material pleasures, and mercurial in policy stances and administration,<sup>55</sup> reformers and officials found it difficult to maintain a consistent and coherent strategy in regard to the reform movement, and internal as well as foreign affairs. This monopolization of power by this small group of individuals would hinder the effort of benevolent and determined reformers and administrators.

#### Summation

Both the institutional flaws and corruption of Qing officials hampered the efforts of the Qing not only in pursuing reform activities but also in carrying out the normal functions of government. Qing was hampered by institutional complexity through an extremely decentralized and diffused system of authority that contained a myriad of officials and bureaucrats. This chaos hindered it in properly administering its own affairs as well as in implementing reform activities. The dysfunctionalities and pecuniary misappropriations by its officials would also hinder the reform activities being proposed and carried out by reformists. Finally, the Imperial Court transitioned from a functional body of scholar-officials and the Emperor to an agglomeration of interests and corruption consisting of eunuchs and the Empress Dowager Cixi. Such a transformation would result in little regard for the

importance of the reform movement, yet another factor exacerbating the effects of conservative opposition.

#### Lack of Unity Within the Reform Movement

The 1860s to 1895 Self-Strengthening Movement was plagued by its lack of a unifying vision and a strong, authoritative leader who had reliable backing from the imperial Court. The culture of corruption, the institutional flaws, and the monopolization of power by Cixi and the eunuchs simply made it impossible for either to arise.

#### A Collection of Dispersed Regional Activities Without A Unifying Vision

Names such as Li-Hung-chang, Tseng Kuo-fan, and Tso Tsung-t'ang are often associated with the 1860s to 1895 reform movement. Indeed, such individuals were prominent proponents of reform activities and did produce results in their respective efforts. However, while they may have conversed with each other about the Movement and even collaborated on reform activities on certain occasions,<sup>56</sup> they and other reformists never created an official reform policy complete with a list of guidelines and goals that could be applied to the whole state, nor were they ever unified in their attempts at reforms. Rather, their endeavors were individual and were never part of any grand vision for a re-imagined China.

This lack of coordination between reform activities hindered the efforts of the reform movement as a whole. It caused the reform movement to fail to produce any substantial and long-lasting effects on Qing China. While these activities did result in certain benefits for the Empire, such as the creation of arsenals and shipyards, the importation of Western learning and knowledge, and the formation of the Peiyang fleet,<sup>57</sup> these activities did not represent any considerable and significant advancements for the Qing polity and were, in many respects, purely cosmetic, a mere illusion aimed at preserving existing Qing structures.<sup>58</sup> Yet such efforts would see their illusions disassembled in 1895 as the Qing

acknowledged defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the First Sino-Japanese War.

The absence of a unified and coordinated reform policy became apparent to the Qing Court and all its officials when China's reforms were put to the test in the First Sino-Japanese War. The Peiyang fleet, a product of China's Self-Strengthening era through the mid to late 1800's and the flagship fleet of the Chinese Navy, was sent to confront the newly Westernized Japanese Imperial Navy in battle. Yet a lack of cohesion within the Qing administration in dealing with the war effort led to China's defeat and the loss of the entirety of the Peiyang fleet through either destruction or surrender to the Japanese forces. During the course of the war, Li Hung-chang and the Peiyang fleet provided the main source of funding and troops for the Qing war effort.<sup>59</sup> While other officials may have voiced support for the war effort and reform activities, their commitment to their words was not always as firm and was frequently withdrawn due to a "lack of funds in their respective treasuries" or concerns that "the unexpected expenditure would impede the financial activity of their provinces."<sup>60</sup> As China began to see the fruits of its reform movement destroyed in war, and to witness Japan, a former tributary state, defeat it in war, Li remarked, "The one province, Chihli, is dealing with the whole nation of Japan."<sup>61</sup> Such a quote reflects the extent to which regionalism dominated the Qing system and hindered both the reform and policy objectives of the Qing dynasty.

This regionalism and disjointed nature of the reforms could have very well been countered by two potent correctives—a unified vision spearheaded by a visionary leader with great authority in and magnanimous support from the Court. Yet the prevailing culture of conservatism in the Court made it nearly impossible for this to happen. For a unified reform movement to happen, the court needed to lend its consistent support to reformers, rather than simply oscillate mercurially between two different policy stances on reform due to situational circumstances. And yet the opinion of the Court shifted often due to the many memorials and impassioned attacks made against Western-style moderniza-

tion and reform.<sup>62</sup> The Movement could not receive the blessing of a Court with a uniform stance in its favor. And thus it could not organize itself into a coherent policy that was long-term in nature and nation-wide in breadth. Dispersed reform-minded undertakings could not produce the wide-sweeping and broad changes of the Qing system that reformists had intended; they could only create results that were transient in nature with superficial effects. Thus, the Qing gradually saw its efforts come to nothing and its vision of a strong and powerful China slowly disintegrate into national humiliation, as wars were lost and humiliating treaties were signed.<sup>63</sup> The haphazard and disorderly nature of the reform movement contributed to its demise into a fruitless experience.

The disunity of the reform movement might have been rectified by a leader who could galvanize the whole of the Qing into a frenzy of reform activities designed to orient it towards adjusting to a new world order. And yet Court inconsistency and constant opposition dictated that such a leader could never emerge.

#### A Lack of One Powerful Leader

Perhaps the most potent cause of the Self-Strengthening Movement's lack of a cohesive and unified policy was its absence of a single, powerful leader who had the authority, jurisdiction, and influence necessary to create a unified reform policy and thereby ensure the achievement of its goals. The absence of such a leader was one of the major causes for the failure of a coherent reform policy to be planned, and thus a main reason for the ultimate demise of the Movement.

In studying the reform period between 1860s to 1895, many historians frequently cite Li-Hung-chang, Tseng Kuo-fan, and Tso Tsung-t'ang as leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement.<sup>64</sup> Yet Li was merely the Viceroy of Chihli and Minister of Peiyang,<sup>65</sup> Tseng, merely a former Viceroy of Chihli and a military general,<sup>66</sup> and Tso, merely the Viceroy of Liangkiang and a military general as well.<sup>67</sup> None of these prominent reformists ever held any position within the Grand Council, the most powerful policy-making body of the Qing Imperial administration. None of

these reformists ever held any position in the *Tsungli Yamen*, the main body for Foreign Affairs and the bureau most involved with Westernization activities.<sup>68</sup> Their voice and influence were limited by their exclusion from higher offices of power and impact within the Qing state. Though they could request audiences with the Emperor and Empress Dowager Cixi, their efforts in devising and carrying out reforms could always be overcome by a higher voice of authority who could ordain the cessation of such reforms or by the constant stream of conservative opposition to reform activities. No prominent reformist would ever emerge from either the *Tsungli Yamen* or the Grand Council, perhaps the most relevant bodies to create a unified and coherent reform policy geared at reorienting China to the outside world.<sup>69</sup> And thus, without solid and reliable Court support, or support from the relative bodies, the reform movement was unable to ascend to a more prominent level of significance in Qing policy. The only reforms Li, Tseng, and Tso could hope implement directly would be the establishment of Western military and academic institutions with the blessing of the court, a benediction that was often wavering. To add to their difficulties, whenever powerful voices from Beijing and the Court cried foul, their endeavors would be subject to great scrutiny and suspicion.

As powerful as Li, Tseng, and Tso were, their limited powers and responsibilities meant that their only hopes at creating a nation-wide reform movement were to appeal to the Court and the sovereign through Court audiences and memorials. And yet there existed perpetually a stream of conservative opposition to their efforts and goals.<sup>70</sup> They thus could only attempt to conduct reform activities from their own respective domains, away from the abrasive conservative opposition in Beijing. However, the Self-Strengthening Movement, a movement aimed at strengthening the Qing dynasty as a whole, could not be directed solely from Chihli or Liangkiang. Li, Tseng, and Tso only had the authority to appropriate funds from their respective provinces; while they could gain access to the treasuries of other provinces through an Imperial edict, provincial officials frequently found excuses to dodge the usage of their funds.<sup>71</sup> This paucity of economic capital

made it extremely difficult for the reformists to command the resources required in conducting reform activities.

The Movement's lack of a leader who could appropriate the necessary funds and direct a coordinated approach to the reform movement limited the reforms to being merely regional initiatives by Li, Tseng, and Tso. Neither man had the power nor financial ability required to coordinate a national reform effort. Their attempts at reform without cooperation from the whole country limited the Self-Strengthening Movement to a collection of regional reform activities at best.

Consistent Court attitudes in favor of Western-style modernization and reform could have been crucial in producing a leader for the reform movement with considerable political and economic muscle, adequately equipped with the authority and finances necessary to coordinate a nation-wide reform movement. Such a leader might have invigorated the Qing towards a serious attempt to modernize, such as during the Japanese Meiji Restoration or the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms (both of which will be further explored in the next section). Yet, the vacillation and fluctuation of the Court and its position towards Self-Strengthening, due to constant opposition and the whims and fancies of Cixi and corrupt officials, prevented the emergence of such a leader. It also prevented the emergence of a unified and coherent reform policy. It thus limited the Self-Strengthening Movement to being solely regional initiatives spearheaded by Li, Tseng, and Tso with limited national effects.

The Self-Strengthening movement was without a leader whose position could enable him to create a unified reform movement with considerable results. The reform movement was aimed towards strengthening the Qing dynasty as a whole, and such a movement could not have been realized through only provincial resources and regional efforts alone. Without a strong leader who could counter conservative opposition, control the progress of Westernization and modernization, and ensure that the whole nation was contributing to the reform movement, the Self-Strengthening Movement lacked the momentum required for

it to truly strengthen China's position in the international arena and the state of affairs within the domestic realm.

#### A Comparison to the Japanese Meiji Restoration and Ottoman Tanzimat Reforms

Contemporary reform movements in Meiji Japan and the Ottoman Empire reflected a major difference in implementation—they were initiatives prioritized by central governments and unified policies manifested in projects mandated by the Court and key officials. China's modernization reforms, as stated, were individual reform attempts without any unified direction. Japan and the Ottoman Empire demonstrated reform on a national scale, and both the Meiji and Tanzimat reforms produced wide sweeping results affecting both Japanese and Ottoman political institutions and society. The ability of both polities to implement reforms of such a magnitude and scope reflects the influence and potency of centralized policies and support.

Japan's Meiji restoration was a return to the centralized rule of the Japanese Imperial Court and Emperor after nearly a millennium of marginalization by the feudal *shoguns* and *bakufu* governments.<sup>72</sup> It was also a highly unified series of Westernization and modernization reforms that would place Japan among the rank of the Western powers. Japan's political institutions, social hierarchy, and economic structures were all adjusted along the lines of Western ones within several decades.<sup>73</sup> The force of the Imperial Court and Diet in forcing these reforms would prove instrumental in their success. Individuals such as It Hirobumi Saigo Takamori, Yamagata Aritomo, Okubo Toshimichi, and Kido Takayoshi<sup>74</sup> were all instrumental in ensuring that political power would rest in Imperial hands and in implementing the emulation of Western ways. Japan's modernization would position it as East Asia's hegemon, and would soon enable it to challenge China's position as the region's dominant power, a status that successive Chinese dynasties had held for millennia.

The Ottoman Empire's reforms, whether pre-1839 under Sultan Mahmud II<sup>75</sup> or post-1839 under Sultan Abdülmecid's

Edict of Gülhane or Tanzimat edict,<sup>76</sup> also produced results that would affect the very essence of Ottoman governance and society. These reforms aimed at centralizing many of the institutions and practices of the Ottoman regime.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, the reforms professed under the Tanzimat Edict enacted new laws that reflected the French civil code and were to be enforced by a Western-style court system, regulated many of the Empire's administrative functions, abandoned the millet system, increased the freedom of the press, sent students abroad to study Western ways, and introduced Western teachings.<sup>78</sup> Such progress reflected the profound nature of the reforms and the extent to which they had altered the Ottoman Empire.

#### Summation

In both Japan and the Ottoman Empire, the ability of strong reform leaders such as Emperor Meiji, Sultans Mahmud II and Abdülmecid, as well as administrators such as It Hirobumi and Mustafa Reshid Pasha, helped fuel the great achievements of both the Japanese and Ottoman reform Movements. Additionally, a unified reform vision and policy gave the reforms in the respective polities a clear goal and objective that would actually provide both empires with substantive change. This unity was absent in the Qing's Self-Strengthening Reform, and such a lack would result in the Self-Strengthening Movement consisting of only a chaotic scatter of reform activities.

The Self-Strengthening Movement was unable to find a strong leader or formulate a cohesive set of goals and policy objectives. A lack of consistent Court support due to conservative opposition and the mercurial whims of Court officials and the Sovereign were instrumental in hindering the success of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Thus, the Self-Strengthening Movement was limited in its potential to being a simple collection of regional reform activities and initiatives.

### Causes and Effects of Manchu Conservatism in the Reform Movement

A major reason of the lack of consistency in Court support of the Reform Movement was because of conservative opposition to reform activities. Yet why did the Court seek to adopt such a rigid standard of conservative Confucianist thought in formulating policy? The Qing was a regime ruled by an ethnic minority that sought to inherit a long and proud legacy of Chinese statecraft, culture, and philosophy. The success of their adherence to Chinese principles and values would greatly impact the legitimacy their government had in the eyes of the Han Chinese majority. Yet, this nearly dogmatic adherence to Chinese mores, a tactic that seemingly would stabilize and preserve the Qing, would also lead to the demise of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

### Ethnic Dynamics and Effects on Governing Ideologies

The Qing dynasty was one of two dynasties in Chinese imperial history ruled by a non-Han Chinese people.<sup>79</sup> The Aisin-Gioro clan, the imperial family of the Qing, and its Manchu nobility, constituted a minority<sup>80</sup> within the Chinese population. Consequently, in order to justify its rule over a large Han majority population, the Qing adhered to strict Confucian policies and methods of governance as a measure of legitimacy,<sup>81</sup> a method aimed at gaining support from the indigenous Han.<sup>82</sup> This tactic, while successful in co-opting the Han gentry and contributing to a continuation of Chinese-style institutions and ways of thought, would also prove decisive in undermining the Self-Strengthening Movement.

Traditional Chinese thought, embodied in Confucian principles, values Chinese ways of life over foreign ones. It regards the customs of foreign people as inherently inferior and commonly ascribes to them the status of “barbaric.”<sup>83</sup> This ethnocentric view of the world and of China’s relation to it manifested itself in many Chinese imperial traditions and institutions, such as the tribute system<sup>84,85</sup> and the imperial examination system,<sup>86</sup> traditions in which the Han took great pride. The Manchu dynasty used such

pride to its advantage, and, in propagating a sense of Chinese greatness and superiority in tradition, established its legitimacy as a protector of China’s heritage and supremacy. However, as the West rose to prominence and began to make its mark on the world, this mindset would make it problematic and inherently illogical for China to adapt to a world dominated by Western imperialism.

Chinese pride in traditional cultural institutions and ideologies, as well as a prevailing belief in ethnocentrism, made it difficult for the Han Chinese to accept a barbarian foreign race as rulers of their nation. The outnumbering of the Manchu ruling elite by the Han majority also jeopardized the stability of the Manchu Qing dynasty. The Manchus sought to solidify their rule through both cultural integration and enforced submission.

In a most aesthetic and symbolic act of force, the Empire mandated that all its Han Chinese subjects abandon their traditional practice of abstention from cutting hair and relinquish their ancestral garb, instead adopting the Manchu queue and style of dress. All those who opposed would be sentenced to death. This was a most blatant overturning of a Confucian principle in Chinese culture—Confucius had taught that every part of a person’s body was sacred as it was the gift of life from one’s parents, and must be kept intact.<sup>87</sup> It also implicitly made the statement that all subjects of the Qing were now subjects of a Manchu regime.

The Manchu elite also sought to integrate itself into Chinese culture. It underwent a process of Sinification, with its rulers taking up Chinese practices and embracing Chinese culture. The Qing’s dogmatic adherence to Confucianism and traditional Chinese thought was also a method of integration. As the Qing and Manchus were seen as increasingly “Chinese,” they would gain increasing legitimacy and support in the eyes of the native Han majority. This adherence to tradition was a feature of the Qing that lent it strength, for it was able to capitalize on the ethnic and cultural pride of the Chinese. Yet it also led it to an inability to react pragmatically in times of crises and trouble. Examples in the following section will show the ineptitude of Qing officials in understanding the importance of shifting away from

Chinese tradition towards Western-style modernization and reform in order to adapt to a changing and shifting world. The ruling Manchu had failed to realize that it was able to shift away from a dogmatic adherence to Chinese principles, and embrace Western ideas, as it gained a certain degree of stability and legitimacy. This made it impossible for the Qing Court to offer its consistent and reliable support to reform-minded individuals and to commit to a reform policy.

#### Reasons for Opposition

The conservative opposition in China was founded on two major forces—one steeped in Chinese statecraft and a worldview that had been present for the duration of the Chinese civilization, and the other founded on the Qing dynasty's governing strategy of appealing to Chinese traditionalism and conservatism as a source of legitimacy. This opposition was founded on the belief that Chinese culture and institutions were superior by nature, and it was inherently ethnocentric. To them, the natural action of the Court and the Dynasty in the face of Western imperialism was countering in order to preserve the cultural integrity and Chinese nature of the Qing realm. If "Self-Strengthening" were to occur, it must not infringe on traditional Chinese culture or institutions—its purpose was to protect these Chinese cultural mores. Any talk of adopting Western cultural institutions or ideologies pursuing Western studies was contrary to this objective.

The Self-Strengthening movement, however, recognized the weaknesses of China's technological and intellectual capital. It sought to establish China and her strength through the study and adoption of Western technological advancements in order to confront the West on equal footing. Reformists saw value in not only bringing Western-style military hardware to China, but also in pursuing educational reform and Western Studies. As evidenced from a letter from the Chinese Minister to England and France Kuo Sung-tao to Li Hung-chang, an adoption of foreign studies was seen as crucial to China's attempt at Westernizing:

In my humble opinion, I should like to have the government students abroad change their major subjects to metallurgy, railroad construction, and electricity. At the same time the governors-general of all provinces should be ordered to select and support more intelligent youths to go to the various factories in Tientsin, Shanghai, and Fukien to study machinery and to learn foreign languages and then to be sent to foreign countries.<sup>88</sup>

In another memorial from Li Hung-chang and Tseng Kuo-fan to the *Tsungli Yamen* (Foreign Affairs Office), it was argued that only through sending Chinese students abroad to study and imitate Western methods could China ever hope to properly combat the Western Powers.

They (Pin Ch'un, Chih-kang, and Sun Chia-ku) found that maps, mathematics, astronomy, and navigation, shipbuilding, manufacturing, and other matters all give assistance to military affairs...

To establish arsenals for manufacturing and to open schools for instruction in China is just the beginning of the struggle to rise again. To go abroad for study, to gather ideas and the benefits of greater knowledge can produce far-reaching and great results. Westerners seek knowledge for actual use. Regardless of whether they are scholars, workers, or soldiers, they all go to school to study and to understand the principles, to practice on the machines, and to get personally familiar with the work...If we Chinese wish to adopt their superior techniques and suddenly try to buy all their machines, not only is our power insufficient to do this, but there is no way for us to master either the fundamental principles or the details of the profound ideas contained in these superior techniques, unless we have actually seen them and practiced with them for a long time.<sup>89</sup>

The deeply entrenched conservative atmosphere of the Manchu court made such thought sacrilege, a betrayal of traditional Chinese philosophies and technologies.<sup>90</sup> It would completely contradict the objective of Self-Strengthening, the protection of the cultural integrity and preservation of traditional Chinese mores in the Qing realm. It was also an affirmation of Western superiority. Such thought was logically impossible for the conservative factions of the Qing, who dogmatically pursued the ethnocentric interpretation of China's relation to the world. Conservative Court officials believed that Western learning would produce within Chinese scholars an affinity for the West, and would result in disastrous

effects for the Qing. In a memorial to the throne submitted by Wohen, Grand Secretary and head of the Hanlin Academy (Imperial Institute), Western studies and pedagogues were seen as useless and ultimately debilitating to Qing power:

Your slave has learned that the way to establish a nation is to lay emphasis on propriety and righteousness, not on power and plotting... Now, if we seek trifling arts and respect barbarians as teachers regardless of the possibility that the cunning barbarians may not teach us their essential techniques... all that can be accomplished is the training of mathematicians. From ancient down to modern times, your slave has never heard of anyone who could use mathematics to raise the nation from a state of decline or to strengthen it in time of weakness...

Moreover, the barbarians are our enemies... Our capital and its suburbs were invaded, our ancestral altar was shaken, our Imperial palace was burned, and our officials and people were killed or wounded. There had never been such insults during the last 200 years of our dynasty...

The only thing we can rely on is that our scholars should clearly explain to the people the Confucian tenets... Now if these brilliant and talented scholars... have to change from their regular course of study (Confucianism) to follow the barbarians, then the correct spirit (Confucianism) will not be developed, and accordingly the evil spirit (Christianity) will become stronger. After several years it will end in nothing less than driving the multitudes of the Chinese people into allegiance to the barbarians.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, as seen in the memorials and documents of conservative officials,<sup>92</sup> the very idea of implanting Western style education and industry within Qing China made it seem as if one were advocating exactly the opposite of what the Qing intended—an avoidance of altering Chinese ways of life.

The conservative factions ultimately saw no need for foreign ideas or technology. It was thought that if China were the most superior civilization in the world, then Western academics and knowledge must be consequently inferior. Furthermore, if Western ways were inferior, there was no use at all in incorporating them into the fabric of Qing society, for their inclusion would have no use in improving China's situation.<sup>93</sup> Most importantly, however, if the whole purpose of Self-Strengthening was to strengthen Chinese culture and tradition against the wave of Western influence

both politically and culturally, then the incorporation of Western technologies and studies into China, as proposed by the reformists, was contradictory to the ultimate goal of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Consequently, the ethnocentric and Confucian values of the Manchu court and many of its officials predisposed them to a way of thinking that demanded strict obedience and loyalty to the *status quo*, and proscribed the importation of Western ways.

It must also not be forgotten that the Qing was recovering from the wounds of the Taiping Rebellion in the period between the 1860s to 1895. Perhaps in an attempt to assuage ethnic qualms and reinforce a sense of legitimacy, the Qing found itself hesitant to deviate from a dogmatic adherence to Chinese tradition. As the Taiping Rebellion was partly founded on Han nationalism and pride, the Qing found it necessary to assure the Han population that the Manchu dynasty was perfectly capable of preserving Chinese cultural principles and mores.

The effects of the Taiping Rebellion thus may have also put a limit on the Qing's ability to adopt more pragmatic policies and turn their mindsets towards reform and self-strengthening. The Qing, embroiled in a battle for legitimacy, may have found itself needing to prove its devotion to Chinese principles and tradition in order to ensure the continued support from the Han majority. Thus, the Qing Court's vacillation on Self-Strengthening may have been a result of an attitude of trepidation in the recovering from a rebellion that threatened the existence of the Dynasty. It may have simply been a result of fear, as the Dynasty knew not whether to respond to the voices of conservative opposition or reform-minded liberals.

#### Effects of Conservatism on the Self-Strengthening Movement

The Self-Strengthening Movement was never an official policy or directive of the Qing Court; rather, it was a loose collection of activities and objectives pursued by reform-minded officials.<sup>94</sup> Without a unified movement under which reformists could rally, or a central Court backing to fortify the image of the Movement, the reformists and the Self-Strengthening Movement were vulner-



able to critique and a barrage of opposition from conservative court officials. The Movement's supporters were outnumbered and overcome by its opponents, and such a situation would hinder the Movement's momentum.<sup>95</sup>

Perhaps the most significant obstruction faced by the Movement was the support for conservative policies espoused by the Qing matriarch, the Empress Dowager Cixi, in the later stages of the movement.<sup>96</sup> Court support favored a Confucian mindset in regard to foreign policy. This support played a major role in obstructing the progress of the Movement.<sup>97</sup> Memorials to the throne from traditionalist officials also did not help in promoting the ideals and aims of the Movement; rather, they encouraged the Court to revoke many of the activities of the Movement.<sup>98</sup>

Xenophobia coupled with restrictions on Western learning also contributed to a misunderstanding of, and subsequently, an ignorance of the West by Court officials.<sup>99</sup> Court suspicion of reforms and reformists was a key result of such a mindset, one that would persuade the Court to close down artilleries, schools, and factories<sup>100</sup> and dissuade the populace from participating in activities associated with the West. Kuo Sung-tao notes the effects of disapproval of Westernization by officials and the scholar-gentry class on the common people, as well as the misleading of the imperial Court by officials in a letter to Li Hung-chang:

Personally I think there is something in the minds of the Chinese that is absolutely unintelligible. Among the injuries that Westerners do us there is nothing more serious than opium...For several decades it has been the national humiliation, it has exhausted our financial power and poisoned and injured the lives of our people, but there is not a single person whose conscience is weighed down by it...Nevertheless as soon as these people heard of the building of railroads and telegraph lines they became sorely disturbed and enraged and arose in multitudes to create hindrances and difficulties. There are even people who regard foreign machines as an object of public hatred...I do not know what is in their minds...They (the provincial authorities) impose their ignorant ideas on the Court under the guise of public opinion. The latter encourages them to do this and itself uses "public opinion" as a gloss for its own purposes...

The critics merely say that wherever the machines of foreigners reach, the local geomantic harmony (*feng-shui*) is injured. This is a great error...What harm is there?<sup>101</sup>

In the letter, Kuo shows disdain for the flawed and stubborn view shown by the public for Western material objects. Li Hung-chang, in a response, claims the authority of the gentry class as the main obstacle to the acceptance of Western methods by the people:

But the gentry class forbids the local people to use Western methods and machines, so that eventually the people will not be able to do anything...Scholars and men of letters always criticize me for honoring strange knowledge and for being queer and unusual. It is really difficult to understand the minds of some Chinese.<sup>102</sup>

A conservative body of scholar-officials and their support from the Imperial Court would prove to be the main hindrance to the success of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Their writings, arguments, and actions would ultimately undermine the activities of reformists during the period from the 1860s to 1895. The battle between conservative and liberal factions in the Court caused the Court to shift between stances favorable and unfavorable to Self-Strengthening. It made it impossible for a unified policy to be developed in regards to the goals of Self-Strengthening.

### Summation

The effects of Qing Confucianism can be stated as the single most important factor in undermining the Self-Strengthening Movement. Though lack of unity within the Movement and institutional flaws within the Qing cannot be overlooked when accounting for the failure of the Movement, such factors did not necessitate its collapse; rather, they only exacerbated the effects of the conservative Court on the implementation of the reforms. As the Self-Strengthening Movement valued the West as worthy of study and emulation, its main opponents were conservatism, Chinese tradition, and Confucianism.

The attitude of conservatism based on a dogmatic adherence to traditional Chinese statecraft and Confucianism arose from the nature of the Qing dynasty as being ruled by a Manchu

minority. The Qing dynasty had been predisposed to a dogmatic adherence to Confucianism as a method of political control. Ironically, this policy that was thought to produce political stability would ultimately hamper the fortunes of the Self-Strengthening Movement, thus leaving China vulnerable to the machinations of the West.

Yet during this period, the memories of the Taiping Rebellion were still rather fresh in the conscience of the people and the Court. Weary from a revolt that nearly threatened the existence of the Dynasty, the Court must have deemed it necessary to prove its legitimacy by demonstrating its commitment and loyalty to Chinese tradition and principles. This fear may have caused a hesitation towards embracing Western principles and ideals, hindering a consistent policy in regard to reform and interacting with the outside world.

This conservatism made the Court fluctuate constantly between differing positions, sometimes support for, and other times opposition to, the Self-Strengthening Movement. It caused the inevitable failure of the emergence of any unified reform policy or reform-minded leader with significant authority and resources to facilitate a nation-wide reform movement. It hindered the development of a unified reform policy and the emergence of a strong leader who enjoyed the potency of authority and adequate resources in paving way for a nation-wide reform effort that could actually provide for substantial results for the whole nation. It also hindered the development of consistent and reliable Court policy with regard to reform, Western-style modernization, and internal and foreign affairs. For many conflicts, such as the Dungan revolt, Sino-French War, and Sino-Japanese War, the formulation of Court policy and responses became bitter battles between Court factions that greatly hindered the effectiveness and competency of the Qing Court.<sup>103</sup> It would also leave China with no solid course of action in times of crises, furthering the development of socioeconomic and political issues within the empire. This would further add to the lack of administrative efficiency and finances for the Qing dynasty, further complicating the individual efforts of the many

prominent reformists during the period. Thus, conservatism also exacerbated many of the issues facing the Qing, and made it more difficult for the individual reformists such as Tseng, Tzo, and Li to carry out their own reform activities.

Li Hung-chang best articulated the feeling of overwhelming conservative opposition to the reform movement in a conversation with Japanese Prime Minister It Hirobumi during China's signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki after the First Sino-Japanese War. It, a main implementer of Westernization in Japan,<sup>104</sup> inquired of Li why China's situation had not changed after decades of reform. Li replied:

Affairs in my country have been so confined by tradition that I could not accomplish what I desired...Now in the twinkling of an eye ten years have gone by, and everything is still the same...I am ashamed of having excessive wishes and lacking the power to fulfill them.<sup>105</sup>

Li's reply demonstrated a frustration at the depth to which China was imbedded in tradition, at how China's attitudes would not shift, regardless of situation or circumstance. This reply articulates the monumental hurdles of many millennia of tradition that the Movement had to overcome in order to succeed. It demonstrated that, in order for the Self-Strengthening Movement to bear any fruit, in order for China to have any hope in fending off Western influence and encroachments on her sovereignty, China would have to reconsider and possibly abandon its philosophies and traditions.

### Conclusion

In the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Qing dynasty faced a logical dilemma in reconciling its Confucian political philosophy with its internal and external relations. It did not wish to let go of its traditional views of the world and of government, yet it also could not properly interact with foreign nations, in a rapidly evolving new imperialistic world order, with that mindset. The Qing Empire, the last in a succession of many Chinese dynasties each viewing itself as ruler of "All Under Heaven," carried with it an ethnocentric attitude in its dealings with the outside world.

Yet the world no longer operated under a system in which China was the dominant power. The rise of the West and Japan exposed glaring holes in the Qing's belief system, beliefs that had been held by the Chinese civilization for nearly the entirety of its existence. Thus, prominent individuals of the Qing Empire saw reform and emulation of the West as a necessary undertaking in order to restore the Qing dynasty to its rightful place in the world order. Only through reforms of this nature could the Qing, and thus China, be able to stand on its own feet again and interact with the outside world as it did before.

The Self-Strengthening Movement, born of Chinese ethnocentrism, would ultimately be marred by such thought itself. Its goals of expanding Western technology, industry, and education to China would be seen as unnecessary and harmful to traditional Chinese society and culture. Its activities would be terminated at once if traditional Chinese practice were to be threatened. Its proponents would be denounced as deluded and misled. Conservatism and traditionalism in the Qing was caused in large part by the instability and numerical disadvantage of the Manchu Court vis à vis the Han majority, and would hinder the efforts and the plans of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

Additionally, no powerful individual would come to champion the Movement in its undertakings. No grand councilors, grand secretary, eunuch, imperial prince, member of the royal family and not even the Emperor himself would show a strong commitment to the ideals and goals envisioned by the Self-Strengthening Movement. If such an individual had taken up a prominent role in planning and implementing reform activities, much of the opposition on the part of conservative factions may have been countered by the influence of such an individual. Yet the absence of such an individual resulted in reform being suffocated by traditionalist officials and the lack of a national and coordinated reform policy and reform movement. The Self-Strengthening Movement was thus limited to purely regional activities, none able to bring about substantial benefits for the Qing. Even these regional activities were frequently criticized and undermined by corrupt and conservative

officials. In the end, the conservatives never allowed the reform movement to grow into an official national effort. If a strong and influential official had come to direct the Movement, perhaps there may have been a certain amount of momentum and progress as a result. The Movement never received such a blessing.

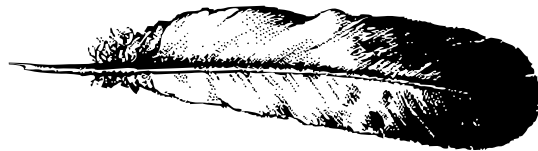
Corruption and dysfunction by scholar-officials, institutional disorder, and the monopolization of power in the hands of the Empress Dowager Cixi and eunuchs would also spell out troubles for the Empire. The Empire was prevented from functioning in an efficient manner. Instead, it was bogged down by self-interest and greed, its administrative tasks neglected, resulting in the haphazard and disjointed implementation of reform activities. Such blatant opportunism not only exacerbated the issues posed by conservatism and lack of unification to the success of the Self-Strengthening Movement; it also made it exceedingly difficult for the Qing to function as a state.

The Self-Strengthening Movement and its supporters envisioned a reborn China, a China that could interact with the West on its own terms. Yet rather than envisioning a China that would adapt to a new world order as one among many sovereign states, the reformists envisioned a China that would return to its former position in the world as a hegemon, with all other foreign entities mere vassals and "barbarians." Through the emulation of the West and the adoption of Western ways, the Qing hoped to take up again this role one day. Such a hope was not realized. The Qing Empire would succumb to foreign conflicts, internal rebellions, famines, Han nationalism, and foreign spheres of interest infringing on its sovereignty. A myriad of factors caused the Qing's ultimate collapse. Whether or not the Self-Strengthening Movement could ever have saved the Qing as an entity, the Qing's inability to adapt and assimilate itself into a new world order was both a cause of the Dynasty's demise and a result of its conservative mindset. The Self-Strengthening Movement was certainly a victim of such a mindset.

The main difference between the Qing and Meiji Japan, the other contemporary East Asian superpower of its time, was

that the latter was more receptive and more open to a complete transformation, while the former intended to preserve its existing institutions and practices. The latter had a reform and modernization policy that was actively applied and pursued by the entire nation. If the Qing had been just as receptive, perhaps it could have avoided its fate and joined Japan in becoming a power to be reckoned with.

After the collapse of the Qing in 1911, China would transition through many shifts in political and economic philosophies in an attempt to become a stronger state, from Confucianism to Republicanism and from Capitalism to Communism. Nearly a hundred years after the end of the Self-Strengthening Movement, China would begin to rise again as a major economic and political power. Such would be the result of a radical change in mindset, although this time it would be from China's willingness to set aside its Communist dogma and adopt market-style economic policies. While China's past and culture are still deeply imbedded within its national conscience, its society and technological knowledge have transformed and facilitated its smooth integration into the global age.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Li, *The Political History of China, 1840-1928*. (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1956).
- <sup>2</sup> Chu, *Reformer in Modern China: Chang Chien, 1853-1926*, 4. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965)
- <sup>3</sup> Elman, *Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865-1895*, (Cambridge, Cambridge Uni Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 38, No. 2, May 2004: 283-326).
- <sup>4</sup> Chu, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Elman, 283.
- <sup>6</sup> Li, 121.
- <sup>7</sup> Li, 141.
- <sup>8</sup> Gasster, *China's Struggle to Modernize*. 2nd ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1972).
- <sup>9</sup> Liu, "The Beginnings of China's Modernization," from Chu et. al., *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*. (Armonk, NY and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).
- <sup>10</sup> Gasster, 18.
- <sup>11</sup> Liu, 18, 34, 40.
- <sup>12</sup> Liu, "Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West," from Liu, *China's Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-century China and American-Chinese Relations*. 33-37. (Taipei, ROC: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2009).
- <sup>13</sup> Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898*. (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).
- <sup>14</sup> Kwong, 152.
- <sup>15</sup> Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army; A Study in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Regionalism*, 153. (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1964).
- <sup>16</sup> Li, 100, 107. Individuals included Li-Hung-chang, Hu Lin-I, Tseng Kuo-fan, Tso Tsung-t'ang, and Kuo Sung-tao.
- <sup>17</sup> Hu, *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement*. First ed., 439-445. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991). Individuals included Wo-jen, Chang Sheng-tsao, Yü Ling-chen, Liu Hsi-yü, Liu Hsi-hung, Wang Chia-pi, and Fang Chün-i.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 408-414, 415-428. Military and industrial Westernization activities included the Fuzhou Mawei shipyard, the machine factory at Tianjin, the Jiangnan Manufacturing

Company, the China merchant Marine Company, Daye Iron Mine Company, Hanyang Iron Works, Gansu Machine Woollen Mill, and the Shanghai Machine Textile Factory.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism. The T'ung-Chi Restoration, 1862-1874*. Second ed., 156. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962) Li Hung-chang's Kiangnan Arsenal is a prime example of indigenous Chinese attempts at weapons manufacturing.

<sup>20</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response to the West; a Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*, 73-75. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), The creation of T'ung-Wen Kuan, the establishment of language and Western schools in Beijing, Shanghai, and Canton as proposed by Li Hung-chang and Tseng Kuo-fan, and Li Hung-chang's proposal of sending students abroad to study are all examples of reforms in academics and scholasticism.

<sup>21</sup> Li, 103. Educational reform activities included students sent to study in the United States in 1876, army officers sent to study military techniques and technology in Germany in 1878, a naval academy established in Tianjin, and a military academy established in Tianjin.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 103. Such reforms included the formation of the Peiyang fleet; Wright, 198, 204-205, 206-207, 211, 200. The transformation of the Eight Banners into regionalized armies, such as the Hsiang Army, as well as the creation of modern navies such as the Yangtze Navy heralded a transformation in Qing military organization. Regionalized armies, however, would cause increased confusion and chaos, as well as inefficiency and military disadvantages if a lack of cooperation between armies were to occur. A Western-style military with an officer corps, one that would have created a much more cohesive military, would have been too socially disruptive to have been allowed.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolph, *Negotiated Power in Late Imperial China: The Zongli Yamen and The Politics of Reform*, 83-93. (Ithaca, New York: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2008). The formation of the Tsung-li Yamen in 1861 provided the Court with a bureau specifically created for managing issues of Foreign Affairs and dealing with foreign entities.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, 174-178. The reopening of the Grand Canal, the use of coastal transport routes, creation of Chinese merchant shipping, relaxation of policies forbidding Chinese companies from using Western technologies, and proposed telegraph

lines and railways all marked policies aimed at revitalizing the Qing economy.

<sup>25</sup> Liu, "Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West," from Liu, *China's Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-Century China and American-Chinese Relations*, 66-69.

<sup>26</sup> Wang T'ao, T'ao-yuan wen-lu wai-pien, *A Note On the British Government*, from Teng and Fairbank, 139-140.

<sup>27</sup> Liu, "Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West," from Liu, *China's Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-Century China and American-Chinese Relations*, 52-53.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 48-51.

<sup>29</sup> Wang T'ao, T'ao-yuan wen-lu wai-pien, *On Reform*, from Teng and Fairbank, 138-139.

<sup>30</sup> Hu, 443-445. Memorials to the throne from Liu Hsi-hung, Yü Ling-chen, Wang Chia-pi, and Fang Chün-i all convey a sense of Chinese supremacy in affairs.

<sup>31</sup> Teng and Fairbank, 76-77.

<sup>32</sup> Liu, "The Beginnings of China's Modernization," from Chu et. al., *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*, 18, 34. Liu presents the idea that Li and other reformers had to concede to concessions and compromises in reform activities in order to ensure that the reforms actually manifested into reality. If the reforms had been too radical and called for actual institutional and social change, the court and conservative officials may not have permitted such reforms. Thus, Liu asserts that the limited approach in which reform activities were proposed and implemented was the only way to ensure that reform would have actually happened; otherwise, the result may have been no reform at all.

<sup>33</sup> Li, 105-106.

<sup>34</sup> Li, 100-103.

<sup>35</sup> A memorial to the throne from 1872, from Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Li, 110-139, 141. *Dungan Revolt, the Sino-French War in Indochina, and the First Sino-Japanese War*.

<sup>37</sup> Buruma, *Inventing Japan, 1853-1964*, 15-16. (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2003); Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 7-18. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Lebra, Joyce C., "Okuma Shigenobu: Modernization and the West," from Skrzypczak, *Japan's Modern Century*, 33-38.

(Tokyo: Sophia University, and Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc, 1968).

<sup>39</sup> Hanio lu 72-76, 86-102.

<sup>40</sup> Gasster, 11-21.

<sup>41</sup> Li, 141-142; Spector, xxix-xxx, xxxv-xxxviii, 87-91. The Qing court could not discipline its officials in achieving policy goals. In the instance of the First Sino-Japanese War, regional officials frequently avoided having their funds and troops being put towards the war effort. In addition, in several cases, there were many officials and advisors who were able to voice their opinions on matters concerning foreign affairs, war, etc. and consequently it became difficult to know who had authority over such issues.

<sup>42</sup> Li, 93; Spector, 181-183. Such was a result of the Taiping Rebellion, in which local militias and forces were employed in fighting the rebels. After the rebellion had been suppressed, the Qing's unified Banner armies were disbanded, and regionalised army commands came to form the bulk of the Qing's military force.

<sup>43</sup> Li, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 110-139, 141. Frequent court deliberation in the Dungan Revolt, the Sino-French War in Indochina, and the First Sino-Japanese War and a lack of decisive action would render the Qing vulnerable.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolph, 133-150. The *Tsungli Yamen* frequently clashed with the Grand Council as to who had the authority to deliberate and issue directives concerning Foreign Affairs and control the flow of information concerning Foreign Affairs to the Court and Emperor.

<sup>47</sup> Li, 49-50. During the period leading up to the Taiping Rebellion, chief ministers Ts'ao Chen-yung and Mu-chang-a, as well as many governors preferred to omit details about floods, famines, and secret rebel societies as they feared that such instances would be blamed on their administrative skills and would cause their official status to be rebuked. Ts'ao and Mu frequently put aside reforms and neglected to notice issues with the Qing Imperial administration.

<sup>48</sup> Li, 142; Spector, xxxix-xliii.

<sup>49</sup> Li, 140-141; Spector, xxix-xxxv. A prime example of corruption was the case of Ho Shen, an official whose close relations with the Qianlong Emperor earned him many favours and much immunity. Yet, in many other examples,

court officials frequently sought promotion through bribery and actively practiced nepotism. Eunuchs and officials who controlled positional appointments also resorted to selling such appointments to those who could pay to be a member of the scholar-official class.

<sup>50</sup> Li, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 140. The Cixi Emperor embarked on the construction of the Yi-heYuan summer garden palace, an extra addition to the already expansive Yuan-ming-yuan summer garden complex. She used a loan (meant for a naval purchase) from a foreign entity to conduct the construction.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 95-100.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 91, 98-99.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 88-91, 97-99.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>56</sup> Spector, 158-166.

<sup>57</sup> Li, 103.

<sup>58</sup> Rudolph, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Li, 137-143. Li Hung-chang was the main architect behind constructing the war effort. Memorials to the throne requesting the deployment of soldiers and Li hung-chang's commitment of the Peiyang fleet and army to the war effort highlight this.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 142. This quote is from the context of the First Sino-Japanese war, a conflict in which the Peiyang fleet, in which all of China's modernized naval fleet could be found, was either destroyed or seized by Japan.

<sup>62</sup> Hu, 439-445.

<sup>63</sup> Li, 83-33, 139; Rudolph, 55-56. Examples include the Treaty of Nanking (1842), imposed on China by Great Britain after the First Opium War; Treaty of Tianjin (1858), imposed on China by France, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States after part of the Second Opium War; Treaty of Ili (1881), imposed on China by Russia after the Dungan Revolt; Treaty of Tianjin (1885), imposed on China by France; the Treaty of Beijing (1887), imposed on China by Portugal; the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), imposed on China by Japan. In all such treaties either land concessions or political changes were made according to the interests of foreign powers.

<sup>64</sup> Li, 100-101; Hu, 406-408; Spector, 152-153. Tseng, Li, and Tso's suggestions of emulating the West (Hu, 406-407), the creation of shipyards and arsenals (Li, 101), as well as

experiences with Western military technology (Spector, 152.) are all cited by historians as further evidence of the prominence of these key figures.

<sup>65</sup> Li, 141-142; Spector, 133.

<sup>66</sup> Spector, 119, 135-136, 152.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 149, 152.

<sup>68</sup> Rudolph, 2, 157-158.

<sup>69</sup> Li, 141, Rudolph, 167-172. Both offices were ultimately more involved with either Foreign Affairs (Tsunqli Yamen), Imperial Court policy (Grand Council), or directing information to the Emperor (both). No official within either bureau had the time or the interest in pursuing Westernization. Only those who had first hand contact and experience with Western technology understood its benefits, as noted by Spector, "The experience of the provincial military leaders...who learned through bitter trial the value of equipping their own troops with Western weapons...provided a fresh and material background for the movement in China which came to be known by...the adequate name of "self-strengthening." (Spector, 152).

<sup>70</sup> Hu, 439-445.

<sup>71</sup> Li, 142. An official seeking funds had to firstly memorialize the Emperor for permission to appropriate funds from another province. The memorial was passed to the Ministry of Revenue, who, after approving the request, would ask the province in question to deliver the funds. Provincial officials frequently avoided this by claiming a lack of funds so as to making it impossible for their provincial treasury to supply the court with the funds that it requested.

<sup>72</sup> Japan, from the late 1100s to the mid-late 1800s would be ruled by successive shogunates, removing power from the Imperial Court and dispersing it among local clans, fiefdoms, and lords. Not until the Meiji Restoration in 1868 would power once again be centralized in the hands of the Imperial Court, but also a National Diet (Legislature), a product of Western emulation.

<sup>73</sup> Lebra, Joyce C., "Okuma Shigenobu: Modernization and the West," from Skrzypczak, 33-50. (Tokyo: Sophia University, and Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc, 1968).

<sup>74</sup> Buruma, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Hanio lu, 55-60.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 60-62, 72.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 60-62, 70. Centralization efforts included efforts to subordinate the authority of nobles and officials to that of the Ottoman Sultan and court, census and financial records, a standardized system of taxation, issuing of passports and travel permits, new bureaucratic offices and executive councils, and a centralized monetary system with centrally minted coinage.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 63, 74-76, 94-95, 95-103.

<sup>79</sup> Tignor et al., *World Together, Worlds Apart: A History of The World from The Beginnings of Humankind to The Present*. 3rd ed, 405-406. (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011). The other non-Han dynasty able to monopolize power over China was the Yuan Mongol dynasty, established by Khublai Khan.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 507. The demographics of the Chinese population at the time of the Manchu conquest placed the Manchus at a great numerical disadvantage. There were around 1 million Manchus, whereas the Han population totalled at around 250 million.

<sup>81</sup> Li, *Political History of China: 1840-1928*, 99-100.

<sup>82</sup> Gasster, 5-11.

<sup>83</sup> Wang, Fuzhi, Du Tongjian lun, Huang shu, and houxu, from Quanshan yishu, from de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2, 32-35. (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). This view is characterized by the writings of Wang Fuzhi from Quanshan yishu, emphasizing the worldview of the Chinese civilization as being superior to all others, and with others being flagged as "barbaric."

<sup>84</sup> Tignor et al., 257-258, 340-343. The system was a key tenet of Imperial China's dealings with the outside world, throughout the Qin to the Qing Empires.

<sup>85</sup> Gasster, 5-7.

<sup>86</sup> Tignor et al., 168-171, 250-253, 343-344. The Imperial Examination system was the method through which aspiring men competed for positions within the bureaucracy, and its main curriculum was Confucian, Daoist, and traditional Chinese texts and philosophies. Its philosophy was based on the Confucian belief that scholars were best suited to administer and empire Gasster, 9; Wang, Fuzhi, Du Tongjian lun, found in Quanshu yishu, from de Bary et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2, 31-32. The Confucian influence on the imperial examination system is noted in Du Tongjian lun.

<sup>87</sup> From the *Xiaojing* or *Classic of Filial Piety*, “身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也。” (One’s body, hair, and skin, are received from his mother and father, and so he would not dare [allow] his body to be harmed: this is the beginning of filial piety.) Translation taken from Clark, Anthony E. “Early Modern Chinese Reactions to Western Missionary Iconography.” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 30 (2008): 5-22. doi:http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2008/SERAS\_2008.pdf.

<sup>88</sup> A letter from Kuo Sung-tao in London to Li Hung-chang from 1877, from Teng and Fairbank, 99-102.

<sup>89</sup> A memorial to the Tsungli Yamen from 1871, from Teng and Fairbank, 91-93.

<sup>90</sup> Liu, “Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West,” from Liu, *China’s Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-Century China and American-Chinese Relations*, 57.

<sup>91</sup> A memorial to the throne from 1867, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 76-77.

<sup>92</sup> Li, 105-106.

<sup>93</sup> Gasster, 17-19; Wright, 196.

<sup>94</sup> Chu, 4; Liu, “Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West,” from Liu, *China’s Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-Century China and American-Chinese Relations*, 47-48.

<sup>95</sup> Liu, 56-57.

<sup>96</sup> Li, *1840-1928*, 99.

<sup>97</sup> Hu, 443-444.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 439-445. Major conservatives who petitioned the throne in hindering the reforms include the aforementioned Wo-jen, Chang Sheng-tsao, Yü Ling-chen, Liu Hsi-yü, Liu Hsi-hung, Wang Chia-pi, and Fang Chün-i.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 439-441, 443-445. This mindset can be seen in the memorials of Wo-jen, Yü Ling-chen, Wang Chia-pi, and Fang Chün-i.

<sup>100</sup> Li, 106-107.

<sup>101</sup> A letter from Kuo Sung-tao in London to Li Hung-chang from 1877, from Teng and Fairbank, 99-102.

<sup>102</sup> A response from Li to the letter from Kuo, from Li, 108-109.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Frequent court deliberation in the Dungan Revolt, the Sino-French War in Indochina, and the First Sino-

Japanese War and a lack of decisive action would render the Qing vulnerable.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>105</sup> Conversation between Li and It Hirobumi at the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki on March 20, 1895, from Teng and Fairbank, 126-127.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Confucius and Zengzi (Supposed Authors), *Classic of Filial Piety (Xiaojing)*.

Kuo, Sung-tao, Letter to Li Hung-chang from London in 1877, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 99-102.

Li, Hung-chang, Memorial to the Throne in 1872, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 109.

Li, Hung-chang, Letter to Kuo Sung-tao in 1877, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 108-109.

Li, Hung-chang, Extract of a Conversation between Li Hung-chang and It Hirobumi in 1895 at the Signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 126-127.

Li, Hung-chang and Tseng, Kuo-fan, Memorial to the Tsungli Yamen in 1871, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 91-93.

Wang T’ao, *T’ao-yuan wen-lu wai-pien, A Note On the British Government*, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 139-140.

Wang T’ao, *T’ao-yuan wen-lu wai-pien, On Reform*, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 138-139.

Wo, Jen, Memorial to the Throne in 1867, from Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West*, 76-77.

### Secondary Sources

Bennett, Adrian Arthur. *John Fryer: The Introduction of Western Science and Technology into Nineteenth-century China*. Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1967.

Buruma, Ian. *Inventing Japan, 1853-1964*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 2003.



Chu, Samuel C., Kwang-Ching Liu, David P. T. Pong, Yuen-sang Leung, Richard J. Smith, Key-Hiuk Kim, Edwin Pak-wah Leung, Ming-te Lin, Thomas L. Kennedy, Chi-Kong Lai, and Chia-chien Wang. *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*. Armonk, NY and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

Chu, Samuel C. *Reformer in Modern China: Chang Chien, 1853-1926*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Clark, Anthony E. "Early Modern Chinese Reactions to Western Missionary Iconography." *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 30 (2008): 5-22. doi:[http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2008/SERAS\\_2008.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2008/SERAS_2008.pdf).

De Bary, Theodore William, Richard John Lufrano, Wing-tsit Chan, Julia Ching, David Johnson, Kwang-ching Liu, David Mugnello, and Chester Tan. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Eastman, Lloyd E. "Political Reformism in China Before the Sino-Japanese War." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1968): 695-710. Accessed December 29, 2014. JSTOR.

Elman, Benjamin A. "Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865-1895." *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2004): 283-326. Accessed December 22, 2014.

Esherick, Joseph, and C. X. George Wei. *China: How the Empire Fell*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.

Fairbank, John K. *Cambridge History of China: Volume 10: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 1*. Vol. 10. London, NY, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Gasster, Michael. *China's Struggle to Modernize*. Second ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1972.

Hahn, Emily. *China Only Yesterday 1850-1950: A Century of Change*. Edited by John Gunther. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Incorporated, 1963.

Haniolu, M. ükrü. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Hu, Sheng. *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement*. First ed. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991.

Kennedy, Thomas. *The Arms of Kiangnan: Modernization in the Chinese Ordnance Industry, 1860-1895*. Replica ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978.

Kwong, L. S. K. "The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China C. 1860-1911." *Past & Present* 173, no. 1 (2001): 157-190.

Kwong, Luke S. K. *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898*. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984.

Li, Jiannong, Ssu-yü Teng, and Jeremy Ingalls. *The Political History of China, 1840-1928*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1956.

Liu, Kwang-Ching, Yung-fa Chen, and Guangzhe Pan. *China's Early Modernization and Reform Movement: Studies in Late Nineteenth-century China and American-Chinese Relations*. Taipei, ROC: Institute of Modern History, Academ Sinica, 2009.

Lovell, Julia. *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*. London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2012.

MacNair, Harley Farnsworth. *Modern Chinese History, Selected Readings; a Collection of Extracts from Various Sources Chosen to Illustrate Some of the Chief Phases of China's International Relations During the Past Hundred Years*. New York, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1967.

Min, Tu-gi, Philip A. Kuhn, and Timothy Brook. *National Polity and Local Power: The Transformation of Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA and London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard University, 1989.

Rawlinson, John Lang. *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*. Series 25. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Rudolph, Jennifer M. *Negotiated Power in Late Imperial China: The Zongli Yamen and The Politics of Reform*. Ithaca, New York: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2008.

Skrzypczak, Edmund R. *Japan's Modern Century; a Special Issue of Monumenta Nipponica Prepared in Celebration of The Centennial of The Meiji Restoration*. Tokyo: Sophia University, and Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc, 1968.

Spector, Stanley. *Li Hung-Chang and the Huai Army; A Study in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Regionalism*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1964.

Teng, Ssu-yü, and John King Fairbank. *China's Response to the West; a Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Tignor, Robert L., Jeremy Adelman, Stephen Aron, Peter Brown, Benjamin Elman, Stephen Kotkin, Xinru Liu, Suzanne Marchand, Holly Pittman, Gyan Prakash, Brent Shaw, and Michael Tsin. *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of The World*

from *The Beginnings of Humankind to The Present*. 3rd ed. New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Van De Ven, Hans. *Breaking With the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Wakeman, Frederic E., and Wang Xi. *China's Quest for Modernization: A Historical Perspective*. Berkeley, Calif., California: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1997.

Wright, Mary Clabaugh. *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism. The T'ung-Chi Restoration, 1862-1874*. Second ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962.

Zarrow, Peter, Seungjoo Yoon, Tze-Ki Hon, Timothy B. Weston, Richard Belsky, Joan Judge, Hu Ying, Rebecca E. Karl, and Xiaobing Tang. *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*. Edited by Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Gue. Zarrow. Cambridge, MA: Published by the Harvard University Asia Center, 2002.