

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Internalizing the West: Qing Envoys and Ministers in Europe, 1866-1893

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Internalizing the West: Qing Envoys and Ministers in Europe, 1866-1893

by

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This dissertation examines five missions sent by the Qing court to investigate Europe and engage in diplomacy between the Opium Wars and the Sino-Japanese War. How did the attitudes of Chinese officials towards the West change, and how did they conceptualize and internalize what they saw there? To address these questions, this study looks at the meeting of cultures from the Chinese point of view and revises the defunct

“Western impact, Chinese response” school of history by understanding the subaltern perspective.

Diplomats were instructed to remit journals regularly to the court. Each chapter takes one diplomat’s submissions as its subject. Chapter one focuses on Binchun’s travels in 1866. He deployed a wide range of literary techniques to tame, feminize, and domesticate the West, treating it as an object of fantasy. Chapter two focuses on Zhigang’s mission from 1868 to 1871. He concluded that the scientific and political achievements of the West were due to a superior application of Neo-Confucian principles. Chapter three focuses on Zhang Deyi’s travels from 1866 to 1872. He was open to Western categories and ways of thinking, exhibiting a proto-nationalist consciousness. Chapter four focuses on Guo Songtao’s mission from 1877 to 1879. He concluded that the West was in possession of the Mandate of Heaven. Chapter five focuses on Xue Fucheng’s mission from 1890 to 1893 and the professionalization of Chinese diplomacy.

This dissertation identifies three modes of narrative. Binchun and Zhang Deyi, in the 1860s, were enchanted and unsettled, and wrote to entertain. Zhigang and Guo Songtao, in the late 1860s and 1870s, explained the success of the West based on the moral and natural principles of Confucianism. Xue Fucheng, in the 1890s, employs a strategic and confrontational depiction of the West to win domestic support for modernization. The diplomats applied existing categories and ways of thinking to describe the West, creating versions of the West which were not in conflict with Chinese thought and practice. This process shifted and enlarged the meaning of tradition and enabled the Qing literati to embrace texts and practices outside of the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy.

Introduction

Few Chinese scholars today would use the phrase “China’s response to the West” to describe the history of the Qing after the Opium War. The problem, as pronounced by historian Paul Cohen nearly thirty years ago, is that the phrase “tended to distort Chinese history either by exaggerating the role of the West or more subtly, by misconstruing that role.”¹ Since then, the field of Chinese history has blossomed in many directions, but it has not offered a decisive alternative view of the intellectual and cultural shifts in the decades after the Opium Wars. How did the late Qing literati conceive of the West — and of China’s own place in the world — if the West did not simply “impact” and China did not simply “respond”?

This study attempts to address that question. The most direct way to understand the meeting of cultures is to look at where that meeting happened. The Qing investigatory and diplomatic missions to Europe recommend themselves for this purpose. Led by Qing officials, each of these missions stayed abroad for more than a year and collected information about the West — intelligence which the Qing court urgently needed for conducting its foreign affairs. They submitted their journals and reports back to the court and shared their experiences with friends and colleagues in letters and poems. This body of writing was an important source of knowledge about the West for literati of the late Qing. Written by Confucian elites rather than missionaries or the Chinese in the foreign service, their impact was immediate and significant. The controversy and debate they generated changed the domestic discourse on foreign affairs and reform.

What follows is a study of the process of coming to terms with the West. I focus on the five most influential of these missions, about which the records are most complete:

those headed by Binchun (1866), Zhigang (1868-1871), Chonghou (1871-1872), Guo Songtao (1877-1879), and Xue Fucheng (1890-1893). All five spent most of their time in England and France and went on at least a tour to the rest of European powers. The “West” they spoke of corresponded to this collective entity, with an emphasis on England and France. The primary mode of this interaction is, strictly speaking, impact and response. A flurry of images, sounds, facts, and experiences had an impact on them, and they recorded their responses in their journals. But rather than adopt categories from the point-of-view of the impact and measuring the recipients for the degree of their understanding, I am interested in the process of conceptualization and internalization from the observers’ point of view. The “West” was not a definite entity to be revealed, but had to be reconstructed, internalized, even partially imagined, to be meaningful. The questions I ask are: What did the travelers notice and how did they describe what was different about the West? How did they come to terms with Westerners’ lifestyles, religious views, social customs, family structures and gender roles? In light of what they saw abroad, did they come to reconceptualize China and the problems it faced? If so, what sorts of programs did they prescribe for the Qing? How were their views received at home, both by political elites and the local gentry?

Most of the missions I examine here have been documented since as early as the missions themselves. Contemporary admirers and detractors of leading members of the missions offered their own interpretations.² These early analyses, although dated and partisan, offer important insight and clarification for the future historian. In the first half of the twentieth century, area studies scholars explored the historical contexts and diplomatic significance of the missions led by Binchun, Zhigang and Chonghou.³

Recently, John Schrecker revisited the rhetoric and philosophy of Anson Burlingame, representative of the Qing in the treaty revisions of 1868-1869 (what I refer to here as the “Zhigang mission” in chapter two) and its significance to the domestic politics of Prussia.⁴ The significance of Guo Songtao’s embassy, the first of its kind, has been the center of several diplomatic and political studies.⁵ J. D. Frodsham’s masterful translation of Guo’s journal is a goldmine of historical insight, and his excavation of contemporary Western sources on the mission provides an important additional perspective on just what Guo experienced.⁶ There has been relatively little scholarly attention on Xue Fucheng and his embassy, probably because ambassadorial work had largely been subsumed under routine bureaucracy and ceased to be a significant historical event in its own right. On the whole, the major English works on these missions have been diplomatic and political history, and no major studies have been written since the 1990s.

From the 1990s on, just when the paradigm shifted away from modernization and interest in diplomatic missions waned in Western academia, Chinese scholars picked up the momentum. The modernization policies of the Deng Xiaoping era had a liberalizing influence on Chinese academics. As historians reoriented themselves from a Marxist narrative to the historiography of modernization, they became interested in discovering how the late Qing literati encountered modernity. Diplomatic journals and travelogues to the West were republished and examined to excavate the shape of Chinese minds as they first, to use a stock phrase, “opened up their eyes to see the world” (*zhengyan kan shijie*).⁷ The last decade saw a conscious breakaway from the modernization theory and a wave of studies built on theories in comparative culture. This new scholarship forcefully dismantled earlier interpretations: no longer were the diplomats evaluated based upon

their openness to modernity; their interpretations of the West were either seen as a product of “the clash of cultures,” or the work of deeper patterns of subjective experience universal to the human mind.⁸

My own work engages with two types of literature in the English language: First, I address a historiographical gap and bias that dates to the dismantling of the impact-response model in the 1980s. Second, I explore these diplomatic missions as a distinct form of travel where competing forces converged to produce new visions about the world. These Qing officials traveled to the West during the thirty-year calm between two defining catastrophes: The Opium Wars (1840-42 and 1856-60) and the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). These events bookend the period of my examination. They are also watersheds in modern Chinese history. They were especially instrumental in framing what has been called the “modernization narrative.” After the Opium Wars, the Qing sought limited renovation in military, foreign policy, language and technique training, and industrialization. Each step forward was painfully extracted from the court by military setback, and then met by another. Each step forward expanded the mental scope of the traditional literati ever so slightly, allowing them to see the real relation of China to the West and the need for full-scale reform. After the Sino-Japanese War, the elites awakened to the message of political reform, but a series of poorly executed reform policies precipitated ever-deepening frustration with the Qing, finally leading to the end of China’s monarchical rule in the 1911 revolution.

Scholarship from the 1980s on has enlarged our understanding of the picture. The Qing’s apparent inertia and misguided policies in the Opium War is not seen as the result of a slow-learning “traditional mind,” but of an internal schism among the elite and

within the political culture.⁹ More recently, historians called into question the inevitability of the Qing's defeat in 1895 and the narrative of failure itself.¹⁰ Scholars interested in cross-cultural translation have recently pointed out the flaw in seeing the Sino-Japanese war as the critical turning point in Chinese acknowledgement of Western challenge, and have sketched a more dynamic, long-term process.¹¹ These changes are reflective of the larger shifts in historiography: instead of a foot-dragging failure at responding to the West, scholars are delving into the internal structure and secular change over the late imperial period.

Yet our general impression of the second half of the 19th century is still of an ominous interlude between the two great wars. A recently published textbook summarizes this period: "Progress, though real, was never rapid enough, and late in the century China suffered further blows to its pride, first its defeat by Japan in 1894-95 and then the allied occupation of Beijing in 1900."¹² This period remains as a series of doomed attempts at chasing an elusive goal. Now, it is not my goal to purge this modernization narrative from future textbooks. The most notable events from the 1860s to the 1890s were indeed the series of modernization projects undertaken by the self-strengthening officials, and these projects did prove largely inadequate to make the Qing into an imperial power like Japan. Though its content changed radically over the years, modernization was and has remained the central concern of the Chinese authority since the last decade of the Qing. It is an undeniable fact that many historical actors understood their quests as bringing a traditional China up to date with a modern world. Tradition and modernity are a pair of concepts rooted in the historical reality of modern

China, and whatever political annoyance they might bring to our current sensibilities, they should not be abandoned as categories of analysis.

But there are flaws in this narrative. The main problem is that it coerces the dynamic and multifaceted process by which the Qing came to understand the West, wrought with creativity and imagination, into a series of half-hearted strides towards a pre-ordained end. By setting the targets for the Qing elite, it privileges those figures and events which seem to fit the straight line between tradition and modernity and selectively emphasizes the “modern” aspects of their thinking.¹³ We have a rather clear picture of the intellectual ferment after 1895, but few studies have taken a systematic interest in Chinese understanding of Western culture, society, and institutions in the decades prior.¹⁴ Up to 1895, did the West figure in the imagination of the Qing literati merely as a seat of military power? Was there no genuine interest or curiosity — only ignorance and resentment?

A corollary to this historiographical privilege is the idea that knowledge about Western culture and institutions came to the Qing elite via the mediation of Japan. The eminent historian Yu Ying-shih says in a recent talk: “Prior to the May Fourth Movement, most of the ‘Western learning’ absorbed by Chinese learned men — be it in philosophy, political thinking, culture, sociology, psychology, or other fields — came in second-hand via Japan.”¹⁵ Professor Yu’s statement is not an exaggeration. Measured by sheer volume and scope, Japan was the dominant figure in the transmission of Western knowledge, and its influence upon Chinese reform and revolution deserves more scholarly attention than it has received to date. As historian Douglas Howland notes, the reorientation of Japan from the Confucian civilization towards the West proved

destabilizing, even devastating, to the Chinese world view.¹⁶ But Japanese influence was not the sole channel by which late Qing literati received their knowledge about the world, nor did they, for the most part before 1895, digest the West from what was chewed over by Japan. Outside of the impetus from foreign communities and treaty-port intellectuals, a small but influential group of Confucian literati carried on their own investigations and analyses. Against the voluminous studies on the Japan-influenced constitutional reforms and revolutionaries, scholarly interest in the intellectual developments in the decades prior to 1898 – which greatly influenced the generation of reformers – remains surprisingly thin.¹⁷

Some of the diplomat-travelers I write about can be seen as the intellectual heirs of “barbarian managers” of the Opium War generation: they were curious, almost relentless in their seeking of facts, and attuned to the changing dynamics within the West itself. What differed was their better understanding of the West through first-hand observation. These Confucian elite were the overlooked agents who mediated the Western impact within domestic discourse prior to the 1900s. Here, I examine their firsthand observation of the West, their refining of observations into the Chinese language and concepts intelligible to Chinese, and when my sources allow, domestic reception to the accounts written by the diplomats. Their writings do not exhibit a rigid dichotomy between things as inherently “Chinese” and “Western,” and they show a remarkable openness to common humanity. Some were even inclined to see the West as an alternative seat of civilization, one that was in certain ways truer to the prescriptions of the sage kings. Drawing upon a heterogeneous body of Chinese texts, they made sense of

a host of Western beliefs and practices, ranging from Christianity, to parliaments, sunbaths, and flush toilets, in ways surprising to contemporary and modern sensibilities.

This is a study also of travel. The earliest envoys did not see themselves as diplomats, but travelers on personal journeys. The transatlantic ocean voyage was experienced as a daunting trial of courage and moral resolve. Foreign dignitaries were approached as friends and acquaintances. Some of their reports were given in the form of poetry and prose, in the cultured language of travel literature. As time went on, the persona of traveler disintegrated and was replaced by the voice of diplomats and bureaucrats. But even as they consciously restrained themselves from speaking of their feelings and experiences, diplomats were still travelers, explorers, and border crossers. Not just in their movement from China to Europe, but also in their psychological journeys to a different culture, and of intellectual passages beyond the borders of Confucian civilization. None of these borders were well defined, and it was up to them where to draw the line.

From the 1980s on, travel writing has attracted the interest in Western academia of literary scholars, anthropologists, and historians. Inspired by symbolic anthropology and postcolonial writings, scholars developed a theoretical framework to analyze the meaning of travel and to reflect critically on the relationship between travel and colonialism. Taking as his subject British travelers between the two world wars, literary critic Paul Fussell defines the travel genre as a bridge between the physical world and the imaginary world, “where the specific becomes the general, fact becomes figure and observation is transformed into vision.”¹⁸ Fussell’s work provided a point of departure to ask how travelers’ imagination and self-projection transformed unfamiliar landscapes

into an extension of their own world. What happens when the traveler was a European explorer and colonizer, upon whom domestic policy makers and larger audience depended for their depiction of other parts of the world? Scholars have shown that European travelers to Egypt participated in colonialism by imposing their own political ambition and world order on their travel depictions.¹⁹ In her study of the colonial travel writing in the late 19th century, Marie Louise Platt shows that “European visual imagination fixes and subordinates non-European peoples,” and such imaginations were transported back and circulated for domestic purposes.²⁰

Does this perspective have any relevance to the Chinese travelers who surveyed the world in the age of European imperialism? The Qing envoys and ministers had as their assistants and travel companions some of the most active agents of colonization: the young and ambitious men employed as custom officers by Robert Hart, the inspector general of the Maritime Customs; the equally ambitious men sent by the foreign offices of England, France, and Germany, for their cultural and diplomatic orientation; or an ex-military officer such as Halliday Macartney, grandson of the famous Lord Macartney who refused to kowtow to the Qianlong emperor. The diplomats’ journals are filled with the names of these Western assistants, and they often quoted their words verbatim. Not all trusted their Western companions, and a few of the diplomats complained about the fuddling habits of their Western secretaries (often interpreted, interestingly, as clumsiness, stupidity, and incompetence rather than foreign interference). But collectively this foreign corps exerted an undeniable influence in Chinese embassies. The colonial consciousness of these Western advisors found an exclusive outlet as soon as their ships embarked. Their language, attitudes, body gestures, and habits – not to mention their

views on international politics, history, science, art – were assiduously observed, recorded, pondered at, *investigated*, by the Chinese diplomats, and such investigations meant an instillation of the logic of imperialism.

In recent years Chinese and Japanese scholars have become more interested in cross-cultural travels, both between East and West, and between East Asian countries. The works of Joshua Fogel and Douglas Howland, among others, have deeply enriched our understanding of the lively tradition of cross-cultural dialogue and mutual discovery initiated by travelers, sojourners, diplomats and students.²¹ Cross-cultural travels during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often produced a great jostling of sensations – shock, excitement, confusion, anxiety – when existing world views were called into question. But as Fogel points out, travel writing in East Asia “remains largely virgin terrain with vast tracts ... awaiting scholarly examination.”²² There has not been a study which treats the Qing diplomatic missions to Europe as travels and cross-cultural voyages. As literary scholar Richard Strassberg points out, travel in imperial China meant something different than in Europe. It was primarily internal, never for the pursuit of profit, and travelers usually had little interest in foreign cultures. Travel in traditional China was not about discovering the unknown, but repeating the ritual and moral experiences which were inscribed in the landscape: “Within a cosmology without a purposeful Creator or strong philosophical interest in the concepts of truth and progress, the dominant Confucian ideology advocated the recovery of a ritualized moral order based on archetypes that were primarily cyclical and spatial. The literary forms of Chinese travel writing evolved out of a matrix where narrative was dominated by the

impersonal style of official, historical biography, and subjective, autobiographical impulses were largely subsumed within lyric poetry.”²³

In the experiences of the late Qing diplomat-traveler we see the convergence of two modes of traveling: the internal and spiritual journeys described by Strassberg, and the relentless explorations studied by postcolonial critics. The Confucian mode was almost a learned instinct; the colonial mode was acquired by observation and under the tutelage of foreign advisors. Into this duality we might add a third component: a distinct Qing imperial imagination of the world. In her study of the Qing conquest of Taiwan, historian Emma Teng demonstrates the existence of colonial gaze in the Qing officials and literati who saw themselves as participating in a “civilizing project.”²⁴ Late Qing diplomat-travelers employed this rhetoric and attitude widely as they journeyed across the oceans and meshed foreign experiences with their pre-existing sensibilities. The chemistry of multiple meanings for travel did not produce peaceful minds, and it certainly made many colorful and intriguing accounts of foreign lands. What do we make of the diplomats’ journals as narratives about the world? How did the multiple forces described above interact with one another to produce their accounts? What did they see as the landscape of the world, and what kind of “inscriptions” did they make for their fellow literati to follow?

My main sources are journals and letters diplomat-travelers produced while they were abroad. Imperial regulations obligated ministers to keep personal journals and submit them monthly to the Zongli yamen. These would be exhaustive accounts including both “what is real in foreign countries, and what is bluffed,” and the court insisted that they must be from the first-hand experience of the ministers.²⁵ According to

historian Yi Dexiang's statistics, more than thirty journals were delivered from the 1860s to the 1900s, penned by twenty-two diplomats.²⁶ Most of them were published before 1900, and many in multiple editions. It is not uncommon for them to have prefaces or titles written by influential political figures. Guo Songtao's *Shixi jicheng* had its titles printed in the calligraphy of Prince Chun, one of the most powerful figures in the Grand Counsel. Xue Fucheng's journal became standard study material for the civil service examination in 1901.²⁷ From the 1860s to the 1900s, these journals occupied a central place in disseminating narratives of and knowledge from the West.

Nearly all major journals have been published in multiple editions, and sometimes under different titles. As differences between editions can be numerous and significant — how their contents and wording changed over time reflects the political sensitivity of their writing — I will briefly explain the different types of sources I have used and how I have used them. As a rule they were first published in independent volumes: sometimes by the authors themselves, sometimes by the *Tongwenguan* or the *Shenbao*. In a few cases, I have found these early journal editions, complete with prefaces and colophons.²⁸ These earliest, individual publications are the first stratum of my sources. Their publications were not always immediately following the missions, and their forms differed from the original manuscripts in various degrees, but they let us see how these writings made their first appearances to the Qing reading public.

Systematic Chinese interest in world geography began during the Opium War and reached its height in the 1880s and 1890s, when concerned scholars began systematically seeking diplomat journals and publishing them in collections of world geography source books. The most famous collection of this kind, the *Xiaofanghu zhai yudi congchao* [The

Xiaofanghu collection of geographical works] was published in three parts in 1891, 1894, and 1897. Their compilation and publication was undertaken and funded by Wang Xiqi, a wealthy amateur geographer. Collectively, the *Xiaofanghu* contains more than 1200 individual works, exhausting all available Chinese-language sources on world geography that Wang could get his hands on.²⁹ A large number of diplomatic journals were preserved in the particular form and edition that Wang found them in the 1890s, often in a truncated form, probably because Wang edited out flourishes he considered unnecessary. Nearly a hundred years later, the Yuelu Press republished the most influential of these travelogues under the collective title *Zouxiang shijie congshu* [Marching towards the world]. Edited, punctuated and introduced by the erudite historian Zhong Shuhe, this series has remained the most authoritative version of these journals. These collections of reprints are the second stratum of my sources, and whenever possible, I have used the *Zouxiang shijie* series as my reference throughout this dissertation.

A third type of sources, sometimes with overlapping content, surfaced in the twentieth century. These were long-term journals by the diplomat-travelers from which their official travel journals were originally extracted. The Confucian literati enjoyed keeping journals as memos and for self-reflection, and it appears that many of these travelers kept such a continuous journal from early adulthood to the end of their lives. At least three diplomats I have discussed here, Guo Songtao, Zeng Jize, and Xue Fucheng, had just such a lifelong habit. As manuscripts of their journals resurfaced in the 20th century, we see a larger picture than disembodied travelogues.³⁰ It is possible to look at their lives before and after, how their experiences with Western influence before their

travels informed their approach of the West, and how they steered themselves after their diplomatic careers. It allows me to compare between sections of these manuscripts and their published editions, to see what was deleted or revised for political reason, and any disjuncture between perception and presentation.

Other than diplomatic journals, I make use of a variety of writings that get at the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of their authors abroad: poetry books, letters to friends and colleagues, official reports, memorials, and essays. In so far as they saw themselves as transmitters of Western knowledge these interactions are an important aspect of this study. Conversations with people back home provided the diplomats with important feedback, guidance, even correctives, on the way they observed and recorded. Whenever possible, I have referenced the writings of their friends and colleagues to get a sense of how the domestic audience responded to these travel writings. Due to the scattered nature of these sources, I can only make general impressions in most cases. The question of audience, dissemination and circulation awaits further study.

Each chapter is a study of an individual diplomat's travel and travel writing. Biographies are sometimes thought of as a fickle ally of the historian, grounded as they are in the individual rather than collective, long-term patterns. But in my case they are the most natural way of presenting my findings. The personal characteristics of the journals lend themselves to a biographical style. As the project has evolved, I have come to see this organization as inevitable: each traveler had his own way of organizing knowledge about the world and constructing his narrative; each synthesis of the West is grounded in the traveler's own intellectual background and political concerns. While these factors were often shaped by the same historical currents, there was enough

diversity and change in the identity of the diplomats that it would be futile to study them as a collective.

The biographical style also settles methodological dilemmas. Historian David Nasaw says that the biographical form offers “a way of transcending the theoretical divide between the empiricist social history and the linguistic-turn cultural history without sacrificing the methodological or epistemological gains of either.”³¹ I find in it a way to integrate the larger social and political processes of the late Qing and the mental structures and systems of meanings of the traveling literati. It helps break down the unified façade of the “Chinese response” and reveal the different ways each individual mind met the world with historical awareness and personal identity.

Chapter one focuses on the European travels of Binchun, an ex-magistrate who had worked as a secretary for Robert Hart, in 1866. The power configurations surrounding the mission, combined with the literary aestheticism of Binchun, resulted in a narrative strategy that depicted the West as a realm of wonderment. Binchun deployed a wide range of literary techniques to tame, feminize, and domesticate the West, transforming it into an object of fantasy. A close reading of Binchun’s prose and poetry reveals internal fault lines in Binchun’s rhetorical strategy as he framed his narrative for domestic and foreign audience, and as he groped with the meaning of the West himself. Binchun’s poetic persona was also a way of avoiding Western diplomacy and the reality of the Western challenge. Instead of representing the Qing in formal diplomatic functions, he exchanged of poems and held casual conversations with European monarchs and nobility, which enabled him to frame his experiences for as an imperial envoy surveying tributary states.

Chapter two focuses on the travels of Zhigang, a former Mongolian secretary at the Zongli yamen, when he accompanied Anson Burlingame on the Qing's first diplomatic mission. Though a non-Han bureaucrat, Zhigang prided himself with being a Neo-Confucian thinker and took an interest in statecraft. In stark contrast to Binchun, Zhigang's writing exhibited sober realism. Zhigang saw the West according to the natural and moral principles of Neo-Confucianism and suggested that Westerners' scientific achievements and political order was a result of their better application of these principles. The West slipped comfortably into his existing models of a functioning society, and he was not in the least suspicious of the interpretative limits of his analytical framework. Zhigang's rational understanding of the West typifies a strain common to these journals: a tendency to build their models of the West upon existing assumptions of human nature and political theories, which limits their understanding of the internal structures of the Western society, systems of learning, and political institutions.

Chapter three examines the journals of Zhang Deyi, who accompanied the aforementioned Binchun and Zhigang, and in 1870 accompanied Envoy Extraordinary Chonghou on his apology mission to France in the aftermath of the Tianjin Massacre. One of the youngest members in the missions, Zhang's approach to the West was more intuitive and sentimental, though he, like Binchun, carefully sidestepped matters with political and social implications. Zhang assumed the persona of a collector of curios and gathered everything new that met his eye, digested and undigested. Zhang's early journals show that the West was not necessarily threatening and unsettling for a Chinese traveler who had little attachment to the ideological structure of the literati. Zhang's lack of framework undermined the coherence of the meaning of the West, but it also made

him open to Western categories and ways of thinking. In his development from a student translator to a diplomat, we can also see how he developed a proto-nationalist consciousness from his conversations with Japanese students studying in the West, and how this consciousness resulted in a reductionist understanding of Confucian thought.

The first three chapters show how the West was written by middle-level bureaucrats before the Qing dispatched more important and influential figures to serve as diplomats. Due to the relatively low status of their authors, these journals, despite their value to the historian, did little to change existing paradigms in viewing the West. The next two chapters turn to established literati whose rigorous analyses set off major changes in literati's perception of the West. Chapter four focuses on the writing of Guo Songtao, posted to England and France between 1877 and 1879 as the Qing's first resident minister to a Western power. Guo's experience prior to his travels had convinced him that the Qing dynasty had deviated from the Confucian Way. His examination of key aspects of Western institution and culture interplayed with his reservations about the long-term trajectory of imperial Chinese institutions. Applying the theory of the Mandate of Heaven to the West, he interprets achievements of Western imperialism as evidence of its possession of the heavenly mandate. This realization led Guo to think that the deterioration of Confucian learning in China had deprived the literati of their moral integrity, resulting in a grand eclipse of China's prosperity and that of its adjacent Asian neighbors under the influence of Confucianism.

Guo's overzealous embrace of the West was lambasted by the literati, and the court nervously withdrew its endorsement and banned his journal. The last chapter looks at how Guo's successors took a more rigid delineation of the West, framing it as an

inheritor of Chinese tradition in order to legitimize the adoption of Western learning, technology and institution. Xue Fucheng, the focus of this chapter, had been an experienced strategist for leading statesmen such as Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang prior to his appointment as minister to England, France, Belgium and Italy in 1889. He pieced together, from a hodge-podge of native traditions, a Chinese origin for the entire body of Western practices that he deemed worthy of emulation. Unlike Guo, Xue's central interest was not in domestic reform, but in extending the Qing's overseas interest to form a British-style colonial empire. Xue's awareness of the impending clash of Western powers led him to reinterpret Chinese statecraft tradition and justify an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. His interpretation of the West and Chinese tradition, along with his practical proposals, directly influenced the reformers and their conservative opponents in the years after the Sino-Japanese War.

These journals are good signposts for constructing an analytical framework of an initial hypothesis for how the Qing literati's perception of the West evolved. I argue that during the 1860s to the 1890s, the Confucian literati's imagination of the West was dominated by three largely sequential narrative modes: the disengaged, semi-fictional mode adopted by Binchun and Zhang Deyi; the holistic and integratist mode seen in the writings of Zhigang and Guo Songtao; and the strategic and confrontational mode represented in the notes of Xue Fucheng. This sequence grew out of the inclination of a universal ideology to deal with the West in Chinese terms – an intellectual and political demand to internalize the West. The process of domestication, rationalization, and redefinition of the West from Binchun to Xue Fucheng were the steps the Qing literati took to locate the West in their intellectual map.

I. Envoy on a Raft Binchun's Mission to Europe, 1866

The first Qing mission to Europe was headed by sixty-two-year-old Han bannerman Binchun in the fifth year of Tongzhi, 1866. Over the course of seven months, he and three students from the newly instituted foreign language school, Tongwen Guan, visited the capitals and major cities of nearly all the European powers: Marseilles, Lyon, Paris, London, Birmingham, Manchester, the Hague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, St. Petersburg, and Berlin. The mission was, in the words of a British newspaper, “among the lions of the season” – they were the most prized guests of high society, received by monarchs, ministers, and noblemen throughout Europe.¹ By Binchun's own account, well before he arrived in Sweden, the fame of his poetry and affability had reached the Swedish royal house. His proudest memory was of the occasion on which the Queen of Sweden, impressed by his poems published in the local newspaper, entreated him to compose poems for the royal family. Binchun's party returned at the end of 1866, to a warm reception from his friends in officialdom in both the provinces and the capital. His journal on the journey was soon submitted to the emperor for an imperial perusal and later published under the name *Cheng cha biji* [Notes on a Raft] with prefaces written by high officials.² According to the report of a British newspaper, “the Chinese at Peking have been enthusiastic at the account which Pin Ta-jen has given them of his visit to Europe.”³

Binchun's story calls into question the well-rehearsed tropes of the “disdainful gaze of the Chinese gentleman.”⁴ In many ways, the mission reflects the cautiously optimistic spirit of the Tongzhi Restoration, a reform effort that had been under way

since 1862.⁵ The decade-long war against the Taiping rebels had been won in 1864. Self-strengthening programs were being experimented with by practical-minded local governors and supported by two powerful statesmen in the Grand Council, Prince Gong and Wenxiang. Western hostility had been tempered by the so-called “cooperative policy,” which sought to bolster the Qing court and encourage its diplomatic representation by peaceful means. Despite the milder atmosphere, the reform effort was spurred on by painful memories. Neither the court nor its officials would forget the Qing’s humiliating defeat in the Sino-Western confrontations of the early 1840s and, more recently, 1858-60, when the allied expeditionary force drove the court to Jehol and plundered and destroyed the Imperial Summer Palace. Self-Strengthening officials understood that the management of rampant foreigners required an intimate knowledge of how they thought and worked. Yet they had only a couple of general texts based on secondary sources. No reliable, first-person account of the West was available.⁶

In 1865, Prince Gong requested that a mission be sent to Europe to collect information on those countries. In his memorial, he explained that since the signing of the first treaty in 1842, foreigners had become increasingly savvy about Chinese internal affairs, but that Chinese knowledge of the West was in a deplorable state. Officials in the Zongli Yamen, the new Chinese office of foreign affairs, had long considered such a mission useful for its dealing with foreigners, he said, but it balked at the expenditure, bemoaned the lack of suitable personnel, and could not sidestep the intractable issue of diplomatic protocol. Now, Prince Gong wrote, Robert Hart, the Inspectorate General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, was offering to bring along a couple of students of the Tongwenguan on his home leave to England. This was an opportunity to send a

delegation of investigation informally to avoid the issue of diplomatic representation and cheaply: paid for by the Customs. But the relative youth and inexperience of the students necessitated supervision by an older and more reliable official, and Prince Gong recommended Binchun. As well as keeping the youngsters out of trouble, he would be asked to “record everything pertaining to mountains, rivers, and customs” in order to confirm what was known from secondary sources. After brief deliberation, the throne approved the petition – Binchun was given brevet rank as a third-degree civil official and the students were given lesser official status, in order to “make them more impressive.” Two Customs officers under the supervision of Hart, the Englishman Edward Bowra and the Frenchman Emile de Champs, were to serve as the mission’s interpreters and tour managers.⁷

A retired magistrate, Binchun came to the attention of the ministers of the Zongli Yamen, who recommended him to work with Robert Hart as a reader and a mediator between the Yamen and Hart. In the year and a half they worked together, Hart himself repeatedly expressed his satisfaction with Binchun’s quick grasp of foreign matters.⁸ According to him, Binchun was a vocal advocate for the Qing’s establishment of regular diplomatic intercourse with West, and had nominated his son to head such a mission.⁹ In 1865, when Hart suggested bringing along a small group of Chinese to England, Binchun was considered unanimously to be the ideal candidate to lead such a mission: reliable, experienced, politically savvy, and likable.¹⁰ Heading the mission was difficult and controversial, but according to his friends, Binchun “gallantly took the matter upon himself.”¹¹ In Binchun the Zongli Yamen found a perfect bridge between the culture of

Chinese literati and the Qing's Western advisors, and his accounts would become the most popular travelogue to the West for the next decade.

Existing literature offers a variety of views on Binchun's accounts.

Contemporary English observers, most notably W. A. P. Martin, read Binchun's writing as characteristic of a narcissistic, mediocre official who was unable to look beyond his immediate surroundings to see anything of real interest.¹² Likewise Charles Drage and Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, basing their works on the diaries of British members of the mission, see Binchun as a conservative old fogey and the mission as a failure.¹³ Taking a more positive view, Knight Biggerstaff enumerates the observations that Binchun did make in his journal, and notes only that "insufficient time was spent in Europe for the members of the mission to obtain information which would be of very great value to the Foreign Office."¹⁴ While Binchun's detractors focused on what he did not notice, his supporters, looking at what he *did* record, argue for a proto-modernist consciousness. In spite of their difference, both parties share the tendency to use modern standards of their own time and place to judge Binchun's writings and fail to situate them in his own domestic environment.

I take the integrative approach of treating his journal and the poems as a whole, a product of his personal effort and his contemporary political and cultural milieu. Instead of merely listing what Binchun wrote down, I am interested in how and why he wrote about his observations. How did his personal interest and political concerns shape his image of the West? How did he reconcile his existing world view with his new findings? Why was his rosy picture of the European countries not resisted by disgruntled literati, like the journal of Guo Songtao ten years later, but instead welcomed by his domestic

audience?¹⁵ These questions will allow us to go beyond the simple dichotomy of “reactionary” and “progressive” Qing officials and see how the literati understood the West on their own terms.

The Ex-Magistrate and His Mission

From a prestigious lineage surnamed Yao in Liaoning, Binchun had served as a district magistrate in the provinces of Jiangxi and Shanxi before his retirement in 1864. He served longest in Gan County, Jiangxi, on the Gan River. It was a hilly region intercepted by numerous waterways, making it a haven for bandit and opium traders, and an ideal site for Christian preaching. Of his earlier life we know relatively little, but from scattered mentions of him in memorials and other documents, he seems to have been a competent and fair-minded official. His name was brought to the attention of the Daoguang emperor in 1839 because of his excellent work in suppressing the local opium trade.¹⁶ When a bandit panic seized Jiangxi in 1849, he interrogated suspects accused of being Black Lotus (*qinglian jiao*) sectarians, and found that they were peaceful Christians and had never engaged in illegal activities.¹⁷ Given the merit-rating “excellent,” he was reappointed as the magistrate of Xiangling County in Shanxi. According to his cousin Yang Nengge, the provincial financial commissioner of Jiangsu, Binchun “was known throughout Jiangxi for his extraordinary administration for twenty years.”¹⁸

To his friends, Binchun was known as a free-spirited and soft-spoken man. In a preface to his published poems, Zongli Yamen minister Dong Xun describes him as “introverted and too frail to bear the weight of his clothes,” and always “speaking in quiet

stammers.”¹⁹ In tracing his formative years in a long poem he describes himself as stubbornly following the scholarly practice of “painstaking study” (*kudu*) when many others had given up the standard academic route in favor of purchasing a degree.²⁰ Holding himself to a high literary standard, he refused to repeat established conventions and sought new inspirations. According to Yang Nengge, Binchun had tried to sell some literary pieces, but when they turned out not to be popular, he resolutely abandoned the project. He was a sociable man and especially close to his maternal cousins, the Yangs, who were exceedingly successful in the civil examinations and highly acclaimed for their literary achievements.²¹

With his retirement from local administration, Binchun’s position changed. It now rested on a delicate and precarious position between two superiors, his employer Robert Hart, and the Zongli Yamen. While he most likely considered himself an equal to Hart, or even a cultural superior, his continuing employment and promotion within the Qing bureaucracy depended on Hart’s satisfaction with his performance. Binchun was also intent on bringing his third son, Guangying, into the circle of the Maritime Customs and the Zongli Yamen, and had successfully recommended him to Hart as a Chinese reader. At the same time, Robert Hart saw his social network and popularity among the officials as an asset, and confessed in his diary that Binchun was a “ship” for his “voyage” to opening the Qing to Europe.²² Hart’s confidence in Binchun showed in his handling of a disagreement between Binchun and the Maritime Customs officers, Bowra and de Champs. When the two officers reported to him that Binchun was “selfish, arrogant, [and] overbearing,” Hart recalled that Binchun had “always been pleasant in the extreme” with him and had “shewn himself a man of great good sense,” and deduced from there

that it must have been Bowra and de Champs who were being reckless and foolish. He reasoned that “if I go against [Binchun], and unsuccessfully, he will never be my friend, & I shall not gain the other objects in as satisfactory a way as [could] be wished for.” His plan, in short, was to “keep Pin in a good temper, to make him as powerful as possible,” and “to keep him as a friend in power.”²³ In Binchun’s relationship with Robert Hart and the Zongli Yamen, we observe a triangular relationship at work: the Yamen used Binchun to help “manage” Hart, its most valuable foreign advisor;²⁴ Binchun depended on Hart’s approval for the positions of himself and his son; and Hart needed Binchun to persuade the Qing government, via the Yamen, of merits of Westernization and establishing diplomatic representation abroad.

Not only was Binchun’s position an ambiguous one at home, it was the center of controversy while his mission was abroad. Binchun’s official rank was the subject of the most minute examination in the British newspapers, as they debated what kind of reception it warranted the mission. One newspaper reports: “The Study of buttons is essential to an accurate appreciation of Chinese life... We have scanned their costumes from their skull cap to their thick-soled shoes; and round the outside of their flowing robes, back and front, without being able to discover the all-important sign of rank about them.”²⁵ Some speculated that Binchun was a nobleman – it was even rumored that Binchun was a brother of the late emperor Xianfeng. Others, citing an official “Red Book” published in Beijing, made a precise mapping between the ranks in the Chinese and English bureaucracy and identified Binchun as one of the “Under Secretaries for State.”²⁶

How did the mission come to be received by European royalty, given its semi-official status and Binchun's relatively lowly rank? Hart's diary reveals only the vicissitudes of his arrangements for the mission with the Zongli Yamen, leaving out, as historians Smith, Fairbank and Bruner put it, the "number of reminders, memoranda, and the like that must have been necessary to set up the elaborate schedule of appointments, diplomatic calls, and contacts with statesmen in more than half a dozen foreign countries."²⁷ In the end, it must have come down to British desire to open China and to encourage diplomatic intercourse, and, as Smith, Fairbank, and Bruner note, to Hart's high standing in British government circles. A closer look at Hart's journal shows that he did not secure any promises of official reception for the mission; he seemed to have merely notified the foreign office of each country of the impending visit of Binchun. As he explained the matter to Bowra in a letter: "It was civil of the F.O. to offer to appoint someone to go with the Mission: I did not suggest it." The news that Binchun would be received by the Prince and the Queen came rather abruptly towards the end of the mission's stay in London. When he learned that Binchun might be invited to the Prince's levee, Hart gave his sanction to Bowra in writing: "let him go (accompanied by yourself of course): but don't let him take his flute!" (underlining in the original)²⁸ This kind of last-minute coordination suggests a lack of precise plans beforehand, and perhaps more importantly, a desirable flexibility that Hart left with the mission. He brought the mission to Europe and let things run their course: should the foreign office find Binchun presentable and worthy of official accommodation, they could take the initiative to raise Binchun's status from a mere visitor to a "commissioner." Otherwise the mission would remain strictly informal and be left on their own. As it turned out, Binchun's public

performance did not disappoint his sponsor, and society soon discovered that “the members of the suite were extremely affable, and entered very readily into conversation, to the extent of their ability, with their guests.”²⁹

As the head of the mission, Binchun understood well the diplomatic dilemma that he was caught in. What he chose to write down and how he composed it was not, as some of his contemporary Western observers believed, an impulsive expression of his innermost feelings, but a prudent move catering to both the Chinese authority and foreign communities. Knowing that Hart was striving to secure a favorable impression of the West, he could not openly ridicule or criticize the unseemly customs that irritated him.³⁰ For the foreign practices that he found superior to the Chinese ones and worthy of emulation, overt praise would not be countenanced by the Chinese side, especially since his promotion to third rank had already provoked a barrage of criticism from jealous officials, who thought his distinction too easily earned.³¹ Drafting Hart’s letters was relatively straightforward, but to weigh in with his own opinion of the diplomatic affairs and modernization projects would expose Binchun to scrutiny and interrogation from both sides.

Besides his immediate superiors, Binchun was also aware that a wide range of readers, both Chinese and foreign, awaited his accounts with different expectations. To his literati friends and relatives, such as his *jinsi* brother and his Yang cousins, he had promised an account of the “scenery overseas” upon his return.³² In the words of historian Tobie Meyer-Fong, poetry was “a means to establish social prestige.”³³ Traveling to exotic and unknown lands was a prime source of new poetic inspiration.

These readers of refined taste, whose support was indispensable to his social prestige, devoured the Binchun's writing for its artistry.

While his domestic readers expected accounts along the traditional lines of travel literature, his foreign audience had something quite different in mind. While he was still abroad, the contents of Binchun's journal were the subject of public speculation by his British hosts – whether he would write about the steam sawing engine, or the customs of the West, or merely the “outward appearance” of the most superficial kind.³⁴ He was undoubtedly aware of the pressure, and on at least one occasion, revealed to the British public that he was going to write a “good report” of things he had seen and to “promote harmony between the two countries.”³⁵ Still, questions remain: How did Binchun situate himself between his public role as a representative of the Qing, and his private role as a Confucian scholar embarking on a historic journey? What kind of account would meet the expectations of, or at least be tolerated by, his broad expected readership?

In his study of traditional Chinese travel writings, Richard Strassberg notes a double role of the traveling literatus: he employs the narrative persona of the historian in conveying the actual scenes and public values, and a lyrical one to capture his “momentary experiences of self-realization in descriptions of landscape.”³⁶ The realism of Binchun's journal, *Cheng cha biji* (the *biji*) and the romanticism of his poetry exhibit this dichotomy.³⁷ The terseness and economy of the *biji* is reminiscent of the style of Confucius, who had allegedly incorporated the most time-enduring principles into the most succinct and subtle of texts, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Binchun's personality as an ex-magistrate and a representative of the Zongli Yamen comes through strongly in

his journal, his attention drawn to people's livelihood – civil order, telegraphs, railways, and land reclamation projects, among others.

Many of Binchun's poems, on the other hand, fall into the conventional categories of "palace style poetry" (*gongting shi*), "poetry on mountains and rivers" (*shanshui shi*), "poetry embracing the past" (*huaigu shi*), and "poetry on heroes" (*haoxia shi*). The palace style poetry privileges women and frivolous things which, according to literary scholar Fusheng Wu, allows the poets more artistic control and affords them "a ready alternative to the old preoccupation with such masculine qualities as social responsibility and moral seriousness."³⁸ By applying the palace style conventions (slender waist, long skirts, perfume, and cosmetic powder) to Western women, Binchun erases their identity as foreigners and transforms them into conventional objects of desire. "Poetry on mountains and rivers" enabled him to notice the familiar and non-threatening aspects of the West and helped relieve his anxiety, homesickness and uncertainty. "Poetry embracing antiquity" was a convenient genre to link the present to the past, transforming moments of uncertainty, as Meyer-Fong explains in a different context, "into a more generalized reflection on the evanescence of all things."³⁹ Finally, by styling himself as a knight-errant using "poetry on heroes," Binchun highlights his ambition and the hardship he endured on the journey – a reflection of his own moral superiority.

Binchun employed prose and poetry to fulfill his conflicting and ambiguous roles in the mission. He was both the head of a Qing mission and a private traveling literatus, and each persona demanded its own appropriate expression. The succinct and objective style of the journal was meant to make it presentable to the Chinese authority and the foreign communities. He would keep his emotion and opinion out of his official report

and encode them in his poems, safely outside the immediate comprehension of most foreigners. But, as we will see later, once Binchun recognized the affective power of poetry across cultures, he employed it as a diplomatic tool to enhance his own influence and China's image.

One prominent characteristic sets Binchun's accounts, both his journal and poetry, apart from those of Zhang Deyi, the Tongwenguan student accompanying the mission, and those that resulted from later missions. Binchun resisted linguistic innovations and avoided the semantic untidiness that we would imagine was inevitable if one had to describe a foreign culture with any depth or complexity at a time when no ready translation was available. This does not mean that he adopted no neologism to describe novel objects of foreign origin. Among others, he made limited use of *zhaoxiang* (photography), *shuifa* (fountain), *jiqiju* (factory), and *huolun* (steam-engine). Yet none of these was new to the Chinese who had some contact with Westerners; they were neologisms that had already been established in the Chinese language. Outside of these he was extremely reluctant to describe novel things of foreign origin and uncertain utility. Zhang Deyi's journal, an account three times as long, is filled with awkward and ad-hoc terms and descriptions of how things worked and what they were for – the “copper-eyed device” that let out water once plugged in with a leather pipe, the “legless and round chair named ‘untopplable’,” the “ground-wetting water carriage” for cleaning the streets, and the “virility suit” for safety when sleeping with whores.⁴⁰ Binchun wrote about none of these objects, for they did not appear to have an immediate and proper use to his magistrate's eye. When he did describe novel objects, his effort was spent in explaining away the uncertain or the unknown by ascribing to them a single, simple principle that

was already known to the Chinese. For example, a wide range of modern machines were named in a common fashion, by coupling “huolun” with the names of their Chinese counterparts. In describing Western culture and society, he also followed a similar pattern of avoiding describing phenomena that did not fit into the established Chinese concepts and vocabulary. Whereas Zhang Deyi’s account often betrays a sense of confusion and disbelief, Binchun’s account shows a clear and confident grasp of what he saw. He leaves his reader with the impression that the foreigners abided by the same general principle as the Chinese. While the specifics of their customs might be different, they could be understood by a simple transformation (inversion, alteration, or simplification) of the Chinese equivalent.

Was this simply because Binchun was linguistically unimaginative and culturally conservative? The Chinese scholar Yin Dexiang thinks that due to his obsessive and blinding cultural pride, Binchun unwittingly fell into a “linguistic trap” that filters Western reality through a Chinese aestheticism.⁴¹ While it is certainly true that Binchun exhibits an unswervingly China-centered aestheticism, it does not follow that he ignored the more disturbing aspects of Western culture (such as Christian religious zeal, the lack of filial piety, and gender relations) and paint a harmless, rosy cultural norm congruent with the Chinese tradition. As we have seen, Binchun was far from the conservative type that categorically rejected foreign ingenuity. Our goal, then, is to find out how his cultural filter worked. To capture Binchun’s mind as the foreign space unfolded before him, we can follow two clues. One is in the differences between his *biji* and poems, and between poems written for different purposes. The other is in his generous dispensation of Chinese cultural and ritual terms to recast foreign people and their practices, especially

in places where the fit was rather poor. Three key aspects of the West in Binchun's writing along these lines – the material world of the modern industrial cities; high society and its cultural spectacle; and the political centers of the European powers – show how his cultural filter worked.

The Industrial Cities

Binchun describes in his journal the grandeur of Western cities and convenience of their streets. Of Marseilles he wrote: "Streets and markets are bustling and prosperous."⁴² All buildings are six or seven stories, with carved and painted gables, reaching to the tip of the clouds." Of particular importance were the gas lamps, which lit the night like the sun, so that citizens walking at night did not need to bring candles. The vibrant street activities in the evening also received some notice: "Streets and alleys are all connected, and market lamps are as numerous as stars. [On a normal day] they outnumber the lights on New Year's Eve elsewhere." Emphasizing the height of the buildings and the density of street lights is a convention to convey the splendor of the city, which he often employed when he arrived at a new city. Besides the facility and convenience of the streets, the discipline of the police and citizens in both Paris and London are marked with special emphasis. The police monitoring the streets "shuttled back and forth without a moment's rest, and their clothes and hats are bright-colored and all brand new." Even during the daytime the only sound audible was from the wheels of the carts. "Passengers are as quiet as ants, and no one made any noise." Binchun clearly expressed this satisfaction openly and affably, for before long even a British newspaper

could write that “the cleanliness and maintenance of order in the streets of Paris have placed Baron Houssmann very high in [the embassy’s] estimation.”⁴³

Binchun noted the convenience of new transportation and communication facilities, such as trains, call bells, and telegraphs. His *biji* description of the train is terse on the mechanism of the engine, noting only that it was driven by steam, but he includes a long enumeration of the practical considerations of the train: the thick and soft cotton-padded cushions, the availability of spacious storage cabinets, and the large glass windows protecting the passengers from wind and sunlight. One could choose to sit or lie down, eat or drink, to stand up or look round – all at will. The train starts after a bell rings three times to notify the passengers; at first it moves slowly, but after a few paces runs “like an unbridled horse.” As to his personal experience, he only relates that once the train went its full speed, objects outside the window flew by so quickly that it was impossible to see them clearly.

While the *biji* depicts the train in an objective manner, Binchun’s poems capture a sense of ecstasy and a clear preference for adopting the train. In a long preface to the poems, he reiterates the main points in the *biji*, but concludes it with a note on the essential role of railways: “the train covers three thousand li a day, but this cannot be achieved without the railway.”⁴⁴ In his poems he describes the train as “movable houses” and compares himself to the Warring States Daoist Liezi, who could glide thousands of miles in the wind. With only six wheels, the power of the train exceeded that of a thousand oxen. “If King Mu of Zhou had known this method,” Binchun conjectures in his verse, “he would surely have covered the whole world with his wheels!” A second poem under the same title focuses on the otherworldly experience of the train ride, replete

with metaphorical expressions to highlight the speed of the train. He describes the mountains outside the windows as “retreating birds” and the cottages as “passing like rolling waves.” In the end, the mundane objects he observed from the train assumed a human voice and seemed to celebrate in unison his mission as “descending from Heaven.”

A close reading of these seemingly rambling lyrics shows that a great deal of forethought was put into their composition. First, a warm and unreserved praise for the efficiency of the train is expressed in a playful language that suggests an almost childlike excitement and fancy. Liezi’s wind ride lends a ready reference to describe the speed and ease of the train ride, but at the same time it evokes a counterpart to the train in the Chinese tradition to imply that traveling at such speed was not unknown to the Chinese. Next, by citing King Mu’s mythical travel around the world, he secures a tentative approval of the railways within the established classical tradition. But Binchun does it with rubber gloves on: he is conjecturing that had King Mu known of the train’s existence, he would have liked to have it and made good use of it. The poet’s imagination mediates between the classical-mythical world and the modern West. The kind of criticism that conservative officials leveled against the self-strengtheners would not have applied here, for he was rhyming in a state of ecstasy, not opining realistically. Finally, he invokes a Chinese cosmology and hierarchy of the world by anthropomorphizing the scenery and declaring its celebration of his mission. In a time when domestic opinion predominately objected to the railway, and the only sanctioned discussion on its adoption was for the need of self-defense and commerce, Binchun’s personal notes on the pleasure and comfort of the train ride was truly new.⁴⁵

Binchun was keen, too, on other steam-powered industry – coin production, cotton manufacture, and land reclamation activities. He also noted, with approval, the prevalence of telegraphs. But nowhere do we see him more earnest than in advocating the drainage works in the Netherlands. Low-lying and vulnerable to flooding, the Netherlands easily evoked the sympathy of the ex-magistrate, who had spent many years in Jiangxi, where hydraulic maintenance had always been indispensable for agriculture.⁴⁶ As soon as the train entered the Netherlands from Belgium, he noted that “the waterways are numerous, all straight and long; bridges are as dense as a forest, and the natives are all simple and rustic.” He spent the next few days examining the systems of polders, drainage ditches, and pumping stations. “Their residents maintain the rivers, and erect stones in the water on which they built wooden platforms and build houses of six or seven stories. They gather soil on the banks and plant trees, leaving roads two or three zhang wide so that carriages can drive by.” The swamps were made suitable for agriculture by using the steam-powered polder mills to remove excessive water, an application of “reversing the nature of water” rarely seen in Chinese agriculture. “Peasants dwelling on the hills of the Lower-Yangzi used bamboo ditches to channel water from ravines” he said, “but they were merely yielding to the nature of water.”⁴⁷ The oxen-driven bailing buckets seen in Jiangxi were an instance of “reversing the nature of water,” but relying on human labor it was useless for large-scale irrigation. So impressed was he by the Dutch system that he dedicated to it a poem and made it available to the press.⁴⁸

Binchun selectively emphasized those Western inventions that he considered useful, but he had little interest in the principles behind them, and was barely aware that

they constituted fields of study (*xue*). An important clue is his use of *fa* (method) to capture the “ways” of the devices. *Huolunfa* (the method of fire wheels) is the application of steam engines; *dianji jixinfā* (the method of using electric machines to send letters) is the principle behind telegraphs; *shuifā* (the method of water) is what enabled the dancing fountains; *zhaoxiangfā* (the method of illuminating physiognomy) is the way to take photos. That each of these devices had its own *fa* meant that he was aware that they each followed a different mechanism, but by coupling *fa* with the names of the devices, he also tried to fix their principles within the devices themselves, not in distinct bodies of knowledge (*xue*) that enabled their invention. That *fa* is an unstable and ambiguous space in Binchun’s linguistic repertoire is seen in his writing on the steam engine. Originally a Buddhist term signifying a fire whirled in a circle (and an emblem of illusion), *huolun* was borrowed by European translators to denote steamships and trains.⁴⁹ By the late Qing, *huolun* had become a rough equivalent of “steam engines.” Binchun consistently used it in a vague fashion to account for the power source of nearly all Western machines. The elevator was a vertically mobile room “driven by the *huolun* method.” Cotton textiles were woven “by a *huolun*.” Carpenters used a *huolun* to carve wood. A water pump was powered “by the method of *huolun*.” The object of *huolun* is interchangeable with the principle behind it: “China is using *huolun* to fill her ships; if we use this *fa* in peasants’ field, the country will never worry about flood or drought.”⁵⁰

Binchun was, after all, a member of the Confucian literati, not a mechanic or an engineer. To spend time in learning the intricate contrivance of the machines was beneath him. Having discerned that the universal principle behind these self-driven machines was the application of the various *fas*, he saw no need to dwell on the details of

their working. On a couple of occasions where he did investigate the scenes of the workshops and wrote on their operation, he was most interested in the spatial arrangement of the workshops, the movement of the workers and the products of each stage. “A wooden slab of more than a *zhang* was pushed to the iron wheels...and in no time it was separated into more than ten pieces.” Comparison with the Chinese practice is typically included in a strong but terse exclamation on the efficiency of the Western method, as in his descriptions of the train, mint, and others: “Compared with two workers dragging the saw back and forth, it is a difference of heaven and earth!” In most cases, however, his approval of the machines did not go beyond a few words, such as “very dexterous” or “quite convenient.”

Never do his visits to factories or shipyards make it into a poem. Poems are reserved for expressing emotional nuances and important discoveries in the ontological realms. The train ride and steam polder mills were exceptions because they stretched his imagination of the human capacity to overcome natural constraints. On the other extreme of the natural scale, the human discovery of the microscopic world was a fundamental revelation and deserving of a full verse. Binchun’s *biji* records that a French minister in Sweden showed him microscopic images projected onto a wall. A drop of water was placed on a slide and its image appeared on a wall. Inside the water drop Binchun saw worms looking like scorpions shuttling about. After another drop of vinegar was added into the solution, the “scorpions” suddenly turned into “shrimp.” He was told that water contained various uncountable tiny creatures whose shapes could not even be illuminated by such mirrors (the microscope). In the end, his conclusion was that the Warring States Daoist Zhuangzi’s insistence on the existence microscopic worlds was not just a fantastic

fable and contained a large portion of truth. In rhyming a commemorative verse for this occasion Binchun underlined his homesickness and a joint conviction in the wisdom of

Buddhism and Daoism:

A beam on the wall reveals walking scorpions,
It tugs the string of my home-longing heart.
Look, my friend, a single grain of millet
Contains a world of the Xumi Mountains,
“There was a world called ‘the antennas of barbarians’,”
Was Zhuangzi not telling the truth?⁵¹

The superficial similarity between Zhuangzi’s cosmology and the revelation of a Western scientific demonstration produced the effect of confirming to Binchun the literal correctness of a Daoist fable. It was a “curious and fantastic sight,” as he admits, but not an utterly unthinkable one. His invocation of the Daoist tradition constituted the transformation of a new discovery into part of his existing realm of knowledge. What is more interesting is that what had previously been taken as a Daoist metaphor was shown to be real. In his grafting the microscopic world onto Zhuangzi’s sayings, the new observation changed what he had understood as Daoism: this was a new Daoism that could be tested empirically and no longer resided in the abstract and theoretical realms.

Some members of the embassy were attentive to the underside of industrialization or its threat to the Chinese economy. Kuijiu, the youngest member of the mission, had a question about the commercial motivation of the French. When told that the French were among the most wealthy nations in the world, he asked: “Then why do they come to China to gain money?” Zhang Deyi’s journal contains not a few accounts on beggars in England and France. The plight of children and youth eking out a life in factories and on streets struck a sympathetic chord in these younger members of the mission. The

following excerpt is taken from a *Birmingham Daily Post* report on the embassy's visit to an edge-tool works at Aston.

While standing in one place, watching some men busy at the forges, Fung-Yi questioned some of the youngsters near as to their age, and whether they could read and write. One ragged little urchin, who was begrimed with dirt, said he was eight years of age, and could neither read nor write. Next to him was another, who said he was eleven and he could write his name, but could not read. "Ah!" said Fung-yi, "Your fathers ought not to make you work before you can read."⁵²

No such discordant voices ever appeared in Binchun's writings; he made no mention of the lower classes in Europe or the threat to China from the Western powers: a curious aspect that we will address later. Throughout the mission, Binchun lavished his attention on high society, and especially on the prominent role women played in it. It is this social and cultural aspect of his account we now turn to.

Women and High Society

Mirroring the Western obsession with the oppression of women in China, a nearly universal perception among the Qing observers of European society after the Opium War was that women's status was higher than men's. Xu Jiyu puts it flatly in his description of Britain: "Men constantly obey women – it is the same in the entire country."⁵³

Binchun's initial impression on his ship coincided with Xu's observation: Western husbands served their wives "like a maid or a concubine" on a daily basis. On the mission in 1868, Zhang Deyi relates that he was told by a Westerner on the ship that foreign countries "had the practice of debasing men while exalting women. Husbands were most subservient to their wives and did not dare to leave their wives an inch for fear

of upsetting them. In childrearing too, men tended to every detail like a wet nurse.”⁵⁴ Binchun was aware that men were more active and assertive in politics, commerce and industry; they were the indispensable cogs in keeping the social and political machines running. Yet he seemed to have understood the role of most men as that of functionaries, like yamen staff who did not command real prestige. The salon culture and the rise of poetesses in Victorian England gave ladies of high society considerable cultural prestige, and it is not surprising that Binchun saw them as the more leisurely sex that dominated the more important aspects of cultural life. His poems impart a picture of a high society populated with, if not dominated by, ladies. In the forty-nine titles he composed between his arrival in Marseille and his return from Belgium, seventeen evoke images of beautiful women – their magnificent jewelry, dresses, and arts. Some are dedicated to the queens, princesses, nobility, and wives of local notables in various countries; others to dancers, singers, and actresses that he saw in theaters. He wrote poems about men far less often, and only then about a few individuals that he felt a strong cultural connection to, such as the French sinologist Marquis d’Yervey Saint-Denys.

Noblewomen are often described as fairies and immortals, untouched by the human world. Hostesses sometimes exhibit thoughtfulness and wisdom that evoke the Confucian feminine virtues described by historian Susan Mann.⁵⁵ A princess, for example, was praised for “belaboring herself with exchanging greetings” with him.⁵⁶ The queen of Prussia had a “gentle and honorable manner,” a radiating modesty and spoke with genial tone.⁵⁷ Upper-class women were admired for their fragrance, grandeur and above all, their elegance and purity. In a group of three poems devoted to social customs of interaction with women, he writes: “They are untouched by worldly smog, and do not

let your tobacco near them,” and adds a line of commentary to explain that Westerners respect women above all else and men should avoid their presence when they smoke.⁵⁸

Mann observes that there was a distinction in Qing literary construction between the secluded, pure-minded *guixiu* and the cultivated and sensuous courtesan.⁵⁹ Bin creatively combined the two images in writing about upper-class European women. The womenfolk of local notables were praised for their learning, cultivation, playful vivacity, and stunning beauty. He befriended a number of women by talking or playing games with them, and in one instance received a gift from two young ladies of a photograph of themselves.⁶⁰ He consciously adopted a more personal and jocular style to describe these women and sometimes even incorporated their full names (in Chinese transliteration) into his poems. Bowra’s sister Anna was “so bright and clever that she could understand the language of flowers” and “loves Chinese the best among all dialects.” Another female guest, “a rare beauty,” was facetiously criticized for following him like a fluttering butterfly and for making a blossom into a hairpin. Still a third female guest had “a smile echoing springtime,” and volunteered to take off her wedding ring to show him. Binchun was impressed by her professed objection to Western “superstition” which, as he understood, generally considered it “inauspicious” to take off one’s wedding ring.⁶¹

Historian Joseph Levenson’s notion of the Ming amateur official helps explain Binchun’s affinity to Western women. Distinguished by their refined aestheticism and achievement in the arts, these women of high society mirrored his own role in the Chinese society, where there was an “alignment of the highest cultural values with the highest social power.”⁶² Accepting that women were socially more prestigious than men, he consciously cultivated good relationships with them. Focusing on women also gave

him a freer hand in asserting his own agency in the mission. In the world of women – in their glittering dresses, perfume and cultivated mannerisms and arts – he avoided the more visible display of power and manipulation in the world of diplomats and bureaucrats. Lavishing his attention on women and their arts was a way of evading the control of his Western assistants, who wrestled to impose their agenda on him. So when an official reception was scheduled with ministry personnel in Paris, he quietly slipped away to visit the Theatre de l’Ambigu.⁶³ He later reported not a word on the reception, but on the dazzling scenes in the play and the beautiful actresses.⁶⁴ During a meeting with some French ministers the next day, he “sat with their mistresses, who inquired about Chinese customs.”⁶⁵ Those women all understood enough to praise and admire Chinese customs, he reported with evident satisfaction. While the mission was in England, a newspaper reported that after having gone through a number of rooms in a button manufactory, Binchun “betook himself to a small room where only a few young women were at work” and remained there to rest. His intrusion evidently took by surprise the women workers enjoying their tea-time. One of them, “a blushing damsel,” “offered him a cup of tea, which he drank with evident relish.”⁶⁶

No one on the mission failed to notice the strange Western practices between the sexes. Zhang Deyi, a far more zealous journalist than Binchun, updates his account with shocking and outrageous discoveries: young men and women pecked the back of their own hands to pass kisses in the air; one must hold and smell the Queen’s extended hand to show respect; pretty young girls attended shops to attract customers and rich liaisons.⁶⁷ Binchun was silent on all these, and preferred to paint to his reader a healthier picture of gender relations, explaining the differences as according to ritual. Perhaps because of his

ritual interpretation of Western etiquette, Binchun was willing to make bodily contact with women in the ways that Zhang was not.⁶⁸ As he wrote in a verse, “only after a handshake could one be said to have fulfilled the ritual.” Asking his readers not to blame him for breaching the Confucian ritual code, he wrote: “I am afraid that you might blame me for my careless conduct, but it wasn’t that I loved their soft hands.” In the commentary, he adds that handshaking was a sign of respect and was performed regardless of sex.⁶⁹

As a rule, Binchun relegated the cultural difference between China and the West to one of the specifics of daily customs, not one of fundamental values, and still less did he condemn Western customs. That he was willing to accord Western customs equal weight and legitimacy is clear from his usage *liang qi* (two branches): one branch was China, and the other the West. “Not until I asked for their customs did I realize how they do things differently from China. Taking off one’s hat is an observance of ritual protocol – sure, with a sincere and honest heart, why set up fences?” There was a measure of good sense in these customs, which he was willing to acknowledge. We also see an occasional hint of bewilderment and regret. “They do not hesitate to stain their texts. Men and women do not avoid each other and they will not be suspected of impropriety. It is most regrettable how they let their beautiful skirts trail along the ground to sweep the floor.”⁷⁰ In resorting to the form of poetry, however, he trivializes these differences and expresses them in a lighthearted style. For a reader who had never been to the West, these would have appeared as queer, even silly, but not utterly senseless.

Binchun’s favorable assessment of the Europeans was seldom extended to other ethnicities. If the European women were the epitome of beauty, purity, elegance, and

rationality, the native men and women in south Asia, India and the Mediterranean were ugly, uncivilized, and next to slaves. The embassy met many different cultures during their sea-borne trip. In Vietnam, the first foreign country they passed, Binchun noticed the crude garments and the wobbly shelters of the natives. “Half of their residents only used a single sheet of cloth to cover their bodies. Men had long hair and mostly do not have beards. Women walked barefoot and do not wear pins or ear rings. I cannot tell their gender (*mo bian ci xiong*).” A wild gust could easily send pieces of their houses up in the air, and even their so-called “royal palace” looked extremely shabby.⁷¹

Nowhere is his ethnic view more clearly shown than in a journal entry in which he directly compares South Asian natives and Europeans. His view of the Africans in service of the colonists was especially grim, describing them as “savage and horrifically shaped, with tattoos and wild hair.”⁷² It was recorded on the day when the embassy’s ship picked up new passengers in Ceylon, bringing the count of nationalities on board to twenty-seven, and the languages spoken to seventeen. Binchun was new to this ethnic diversity, and was evidently amused by some. “Some [people] were tall and long, and some were large without match, boasting more than a hundred kilos. Some had disheveled beards and hair. Their patterned dresses looked like those in the Wu opera, or what the *kadhampas* wore to drive away demons.”⁷³ He then directs his attention to the Europeans on board: “only the people from large European countries looked beautiful and civilized. Women especially had pretty faces and elegant posture, and they wear clothes of the highest quality and artistry.”

Binchun’s image of the Europeans and their societies is distinct from the dominant official discourse and popular perception in his time. In his study of racial

discourse, Frank Dikotter notes that the late Qing response to race was largely constructed by a process of “defensive stereotyping,” the most common aspect of which was to demonize foreigners as “barbarians.”⁷⁴ Bin’s juxtaposition of the Europeans and other ethnic groups was not primarily a racial view, but one based on cultural distinction. Civilization is reflected in the sophistication of cultural artifacts, literary tradition, and the elaboration of ritual code. In all these regards the European societies were vastly more similar to China than the other regions he passed by. The simplistic dress code of the native Vietnamese, in comparison, was interpreted as sign of primitivity, for “the male and the female are not differentiated.”⁷⁵ Despite Bin’s initial shock at the features of black people, however, he gave them due praise for their hard work. On his return journey, he dedicated a “Song of the Blacks” to the dozen African slaves working in the engine room. “Black men were hired to work in our boat, and they were willing to brave the fiery fire in the great stove.” Comparing them to intrepid soldiers standing firm in the battle field, Bin expresses a strong sense of admiration: “Alas! They never complain a word! Even though they have appalling looks, their hearts are truly praiseworthy. I am writing this down to spur our officials.”⁷⁶

Poetry and Cultural Diplomacy

Even though Binchun styled himself an envoy of the Celestial Kingdom in his own writing and self-perception, he could not avoid the questions of politics and diplomacy facing the real world. Hart and his assistants tried their best to present him as a veritable hallmark of China’s progress, even a proto-ambassador.⁷⁷ Yet as important as

he was to Hart's project, Binchun was still a mere employee under Hart, and worse still, was subject to the surveillance of Hart's underlings for most of the mission. He might be the symbolic head of the mission, but he had little control over the flow of events. We have seen how he sought the company of women and theater to dodge the control of Bowra and de Champs. As time went on, he found a more constructive way to expand his own influence – by writing, exchanging, and disseminating his poems. In many places he visited he left a trail of poems to his hosts as a token of gratitude and affirmation of mutual friendship. These poems were often inscribed in his own calligraphy on objects with cultural connotations, such as fans, printed copies of famous poems, or scrolls. He also kept a record of these poems for himself, with comments on the occasion and sometimes the reception of his poems by foreigners. Some European nobility recognized the cultural symbolism of poetry for their Chinese guests and initiated the exchange of poems, much to the delight of Binchun. Let us first look at his meeting with the French sinologist Marquis d'Yervey Saint-Denys (De Liwen), the first significant intellectual and cultural exchange that took place between Binchun and the European nobility.

According to Binchun's account, The Marquis of 'De' called on their hotel on a rainy day and presented him as a gift a translation of Tang poems.⁷⁸ He was “an extremely artistic person who dissipates himself daily with poetry and wine and does not seek to advance his career.” When he called again two days later, Binchun had already prepared a return gift, a poem in the form of an octet, which reads in part:

I met someone who truly knows me in the outer ocean,
 Pure talk makes us into intimate friends.
 We started by tracing the paths of past sages.

Tired of mundane affairs, you refused to serve as a court official.

By taking note of the Marquis' gift of Tang poems and his return poem, Binchun describes the French nobleman as partaking of a distinctly Chinese cultural form. He described his relation with the Marquis in personal terms, referring to him as "someone who truly knows me," and later in the poem, "an old friend." "Pure talk" was a favorable pastime in the Six Dynasties among literati who distained public service and preferred the private society of intimate friends. "Past sages" is probably a reference to Confucius and Mencius, a topic that Saint-Denys, specialized as he was in Chinese classics, would have some interest in. Binchun's description of the Marquis's rejection of a bureaucratic life for the pursuit of Chinese literature only added to the latter's prestige in the eyes of Chinese literati. He conformed to the standard of Confucian "amateurs" in every sense of the word in Levenson's definition: "genteel initiates in a human culture, without interest in progress, leanings to science, sympathy for commerce, or prejudice in favour of utility."⁷⁹ By recording his poetry exchange with the Marquis, Binchun at once demonstrated to his readers the civilizing influence of the Confucian culture and legitimized the intellectual pursuits of European nobility.

This initial success with poetry exchange was significant. In poetry Binchun discovered a sublime cultural form to communicate directly to Westerners, a language that transcends all cultural barriers. To be sure, he still needed translators to render his poems into the foreign languages, but the more important message was transmitted through the cultural repertoire associated with writing and exchanging the poems. After meeting with the Marquis, Binchun consistently relied on poems to accrue to himself cultural prestige and made it clear for all to see that he was not a mere figurehead

manipulated by his European assistants. The composition of poems was often accompanied by a fair amount of drinking and toasting to warm up the conversations. Such exchanges gave Binchun a way to “know” the other and find materials to compose poems for them. For example, a few days after meeting the Marquis, Binchun met Charles “China” Gordon, the famed commander of the Anglo-Chinese “Ever Victorious Army.” The two met up for a drinking party and reminisced about the years Gordon spent in China. Always attuned to the sensibilities of the Chinese literati, Gordon brought the silver pot that Li Hongzhang had given him, filled it with wine and presented prominently at the table. After a few drinks, Binchun improvised a couple of poems for Gordon on the dinner table, and Gordon gave him a painting that he had received from the Tongzhi emperor.⁸⁰

By repeatedly resorting to cultural exchange, Binchun rendered the concerns of diplomatic protocol largely irrelevant. Knowing his literary penchant, some newspapers translated and published his poems, and others prepared Chinese ink and brush to await his arrival. Binchun was delighted when he learned that a poem he had written about the Netherlands polders was transcribed unto “hundreds of thousands of sheets of newspapers” and “spread all over the ocean countries.”⁸¹ The next day the curator of a Dutch zoo laid out Chinese writing gear and begged for a quatrain. Once he got the poem, he noted, the curator held it tight and left with satisfaction. Among the fans of his poems were the Swedish royal family. The Queen, who was a Dutch princess, intimated to Binchun that she felt honored that her home country should deserve such beautiful verses.⁸² The King personally arranged his visit to all places of interest in the palace, with the Queen pointing out to him objects of significance. Binchun duly recorded his

impression of the palace in set of Palace Style poems richly embellished with traditional tropes.

The Palace Style poems were an important part of Binchun's description of the political centers of European politics. All foreign elements were painted over with familiar Chinese tropes in a language that evoked a timeless and transcendental realm. Given the luxuriance of the European palaces, it is not surprising that Binchun resorted to the Palace Style to describe their material abundance. What is more interesting is his emphasis on ritual ceremonies and the virtue of European monarchs. This is demonstrated in his accounts of his visits to Windsor Castle. The *biji* contains three long entries on his visits with the British royalty, the detail of which exceeded all his other accounts. The visit lasted three full days. On the first day, the group took a train to Windsor Castle and toured its gardens and major collections of antique and art. On the morning of the second day, a court official delivered an invitation from the Prince of Wales to his State Ball in the afternoon, and immediately members of the mission started a busy day of preparatory work. The British assistants and translators "rushed to make their uniform and ceremonial swords ready," whereas the Chinese members wore their official gowns, and it was not until the evening did they finish the preparation. The royal carts took the members of the mission to the palace in the afternoon. The quarter was most closely guarded with heavily armed "generals" and cannot not "be reached by common people." After being led through a bewildering number of hallways and stairs, the party arrived at a "dance palace" of the utmost grandeur. Binchun estimated the number of lights to be "eight thousand and five or six hundred." Four hundred royalty and ministers were present, together with more than eight hundred "palace ladies." He

took the Prince of Wales, the twenty-five year old heir apparent, to be the de facto ruler of England: “the monarch has not been receiving guests in the last few years, and asks the Prince and his consort to deal with diplomatic affairs and ceremonies.”

The dance itself was described as a ritual in which all participants adhered to an elaborate dress code and rules of conduct. He started with the audience: the prince and his consort sat facing south. On the two sides were three levels of platforms, on which the officials could choose to either sit or stand. Binchun and his entourage were seated facing the prince. Men and women danced about ten times, each step according with the rhythm of the “sonorous” music played by musicians sitting on the very top level of the hall. Military ministers wore red uniforms, whereas civil ministers wore black ones, and both had their clothes embellished with guilt. After the dance, all stood up and waited on the two sides as the prince and his consort walked to another room.

The formality of the dance stood in contrast to their casual meeting with the prince afterwards. Soon after the dance, Binchun was led to a separate room in which the prince and his consort “both stood to receive them.” The prince asked about his impression of London and pointedly wondered how it would compare with China. Binchun dealt with the delicate question with a diplomatic courtesy that avoided any direct comparison: “China has never before sent any envoy to foreign countries,” he said, “and it was only with this imperial commission that [we] first learned that there are such beautiful places overseas.” It was a well-rehearsed reply, one that Binchun would continue to deliver in other countries.⁸³ According to him, the prince was gladdened by this reply and modestly declined his praise. In a poem dedicated to the occasion, Bin describes the prince as a brilliant young leader steeped in a Confucian-style elegance and

courtesy. Praising his fame as “known throughout the countries of the ocean,” the poem goes on to say, “in this faraway place he found ways to show respect to the Chinese envoy. His humble words and modest air only accentuated his excellence.”⁸⁴

The thorny question of comparisons between the two countries came up again the next day, when the mission was received by Queen Victoria. After being led through numerous doors and hallways and some waiting, Binchun entered the “inner court.” The Queen was intent on extracting a clearer answer from him. Having learned that the mission had been present for a few weeks, she inquired flatly about the differences between Britain and China. Binchun replied that the British “buildings and equipments exceeded the Chinese in the intricacy of their manufacture.” Perhaps because the Queen was still not satisfied, he also added that “your political system also has many merits.” Thanks to the Queen’s generosity, he continued, the mission had been able to visit all the wonderful places. Delighted in the compliment, the Queen expressed the hope that Binchun would bring these observations back to China so that “the two countries would become even closer.”⁸⁵

Without documents from the British side, we cannot confirm that things went exactly as Binchun recorded. But expecting that his journal would be published and eventually made available to foreigners, Binchun was not likely to fudge these things. It seems that the audience with the Queen was stressful, if not unpleasant, and he did not think fit to devote any more description to her than referring to her by the formalistic and gender-neutral title – “the monarch” (*junzhu*). The Queen’s splendor moved the more stoic Zhang Deyi to write that she “was over forty but had lost none of her beauty,” but it did not evoke the fancy of our poet.⁸⁶ He wrote no poems that day; in fact, nothing he

wrote about the Queen reveals her as a woman or the real power holder. While his meeting with the Prince the day before was depicted in the most favorable light, the Queen appeared to be a dry-witted figurehead. In any case, Binchun's account makes it clear that he did not make any concessions on matters of principle. In complimenting the British ingenuity in making "buildings and equipments," he was only dressing up the familiar Chinese diatribe against the "Western contrivance" with a positive twist. In writing about his audiences with both the Prince and the Queen, Binchun made sure to note the gloating satisfaction of his hosts in hearing his compliments. By doing this, he accentuated his skills in managing and pacifying the foreigners with just the right words. His underlings, however, were less easy with this episode. Zhang Deyi prudently left the episode out of his journal and only noted that "his Excellency answered each of the Queen's questions appropriately."⁸⁷

For Binchun's domestic audience, he provided a new picture of how things were conducted ritually in the British royal palace. Leading officials during the Opium War, after some rudimentary "investigation" by talking to Western informants, reported that Britain was "a country of barbarians... They do not yet know about ritual, righteousness, benevolence, and humility, and how could they know anything about the differences between the monarch and the ministers, and between the high and the low?"⁸⁸ Even the more accurate accounts given by Lin Zexu and Xu Jiyu depict the British court as one without a clear hierarchy or proper rules. Lin Zexu's British informants had told him that the royal families "lived in houses not at all different from those of the commoners," with only a couple of guards.⁸⁹ Xu Jiyu also notes, regarding court etiquette in England, that "the base and the noble are mixed in their seating. There is no difference between those

below and those above, and those on the left and on the right.”⁹⁰ Binchun describes a royal court that shared many common elements in etiquette with the Chinese court. Ritual and proper distinction of hierarchy permeated every visible aspect of the court’s activities. The State Ball is described as a coordinated dance with an elaborate dress code and sophisticated musical accompaniment, which punctuates every movement of the dancers. The ruling house commanded enormous wealth, power and prestige, and lived in a guarded palace forbidden to commoners. On the top of the hierarchy is the virtuous prince who welcomed the foreign envoys to his court. This characterization would undergo a dramatic change in his poems during his return trip, a subject that we turn to now.

Back to the Celestial Kingdom

The mission was a transformative experience for Binchun. For a man who had worked all his life climbing the ladder of success and serving in administrative posts, it was a fulfillment of the wilder side of his youthful dreams – being a knight-errant (*youxia*) like those in vernacular fiction. Towards the end of his trip, Binchun wrote a long poem to his brother and cousins as a conclusion to the mission. “I have always longed to drift on the ocean...Every time visitors came from overseas, I envied endlessly their rambling talks.” His artistic zeal found ample employment in the curious and splendid sights. He took enormous pride in the attention and care that he received in Europe. Being a spectacle in public was a sign of prestige and honor that he rarely received back home. While the more self-conscious Zhang Deyi was often disturbed by the throngs of

Europeans following them, Binchun gaily accepted any publicity as evidence of his popularity and charisma. He was also attentive to the reportage in European presses. “They started spreading the word of our arrival two months ago, and when we arrived, many came to see us and to take photographs of us.” He duly noted that the high demand for his portrait had led the shrewd businessmen to raise the price of his photos. In a commemorative poem for this occasion, he compared himself to the Song dynasty celebrity-poet Lu You, whose sensuous figure was a favorite image decorating literati’s fans.⁹¹

But Binchun’s self-aggrandizement took a subtle turn at the time of his return. This change of emotion is indicated in the title of his two poetry collections, *Haiguo sheng you cao* [Sketches of a triumphant mission overseas] and *Tianwai gui fan cao* [Sketches of a return trip to the celestial kingdom]. While the dominant tone in *Haiguo* is one of a glorious triumph, *Tianwai* records the poet’s emotional fluctuations and metaphysical speculations during a long journey back to home. The first entry of *Tianwai* was composed with a subdued tone of melancholy: “I have already seen much, and so we made plans for our return. Foreigners came to see me off, and they, too, were sorrowful at our parting.”⁹² On their way back, the mission briefly re-visited Marseille and Italy, where the poet reminisced about the start of the mission. When they reached Denmark, however, it was announced that an epidemic had spread from continental Europe, and the country was closed to any visitors from those countries. This rejection added to Binchun’s sorrowful mood a sense of dejection. He chastises Denmark in a poem: “An epidemic is a disaster sent from Heaven; how could it be brought in by visitors? I do not believe closing customs can solve the problem; they wantonly suspect

passing visitors.”⁹³ It is the first and only censure of a European country in his writing. From here on, he repeatedly complained about the physical hardship, loneliness, and uncertainty he endured in the trip, mostly in the form of poetry. He made it clear in these poems that to be the first Chinese official to carry out such a mission one needed not only luck and an adventurous heart, but an unselfish desire and unswerving loyalty to sacrifice oneself for a great cause.

The return trip was long, lonely and uneventful. But it was just the kind of quiet life that he needed to settle his thoughts and reorient himself for his friends and superiors back home. It also gave him time to edit his journal for presentation to the Zongli Yamen. Whereas poems had been used for expressing a wide range of personal sentiments in the first half of the journey, they now became an arena for his self-moralizing meditations. He was searching for the true meaning of this journey, a simple and powerful message that could bind all his experience, past and present, into a coherent order. Was the luxurious life that he lived in Europe a betrayal of the Confucian way of life? Was the new knowledge he had gained about the cosmos and nature a challenge to his old beliefs? Were the prosperity of the West and their clever ways to be desired and emulated by China? What should constitute the correct way of governance – technology or virtue? These puzzles were not brought up explicitly in his writing, but the strong moralizing themes of his poems make it clear these were the questions he was groping with.

The answer was revealed to him in the middle of a night on the Indian Ocean, when a beam of bright light suddenly shone through the darkness and illuminated the night. The passengers on the boat were all puzzled by the sight, but Binchun alone stood out on the deck and let out a long sigh. It was at that moment that he intuited the abstruse

message in the Surangama Sutra (*huayan jing*), that all attachments were derived from delusions and moral corruption.⁹⁴ The next few days he composed a weighty set of eight twelve-line poems in which he meditated on many historical figures of the Warring States, from those who lost their thrones to immorality, to those who fell victim to their own clever schemes. “The sages always taught about virtue,” he concluded, and “true gentlemen always abide by a life of poverty.”⁹⁵ Wealth and fame are not worth pursuing, and only through reading ancient texts could one establish moral rectitude and find the true way. Zhang Deyi also briefly notes this sudden illumination of night ocean and the bewildered passengers, but did not connect it with any divine messages.⁹⁶ That Binchun immediately interpreted it as a profound revelation and used it to purge his worldly attachments indicates the extent of his emotional turmoil and moral conflict. If he had left Europe with any lingering attachment, he was brought back to the fundamentalist camp after that revelation, and he would repeatedly bring up this insight to his friends back home.

His recapitulation of the mission in an eighty-line poem to his brother, cousin and nephew when the ship finally reached Hong Kong gives us some indication of his final phase of reconceptualizing this “grand journey” (*zhuangyou*). After explaining his childhood ambition, he tells the sweeping scale of the travel, its lightning speed, and the sweat and hazard that he suffered. The bulk of the poem is spent dramaticizing the truly exotic elements and “special beauty” (*zhuamei*) of the fifteen countries, but it was a purely material beauty that barely leaves any room for culture and humanity: the huge and horrendous lions, the snowy white pheasants, the mountainous whales, the fountains

that shoot water up ten zhang, and the fireworks that spread the whole sky with glittering beads. He also recapitulated his audiences with European monarchs in a different light:

The vassal lords (*fanwang*) all understood how to respect their guests, and invited us everywhere for sightseeing. They asked about our Great Central State – “is it as extravagant as the foreign states?” I answered: “Our sacred doctrine values study and propriety. Heaven and earth are bonded by five relations, among which filial piety comes first. The righteous principle is most strictly differentiated from profit, and greed and brutality are despised by all. His Majesty is sage and virtuous, and does not hold clever contrivances in high esteem. His virtue propagates like that of Yao and Shun, and he admonishes us against extravagance and arrogance.”⁹⁷

The British prince that Binchun had once painted as a Confucian-style monarch – charismatic, virtuous and humble – was now reduced to a materialistic “vassal lord.” He was quick to point out that the attention he received in foreign countries had nothing to do with himself, but the reputation of his country: “They valued me not for other things, but because I am from the Central Kingdom.”⁹⁸ Thus even these extravagant vassal lords shared enough of Confucian sensibilities that they stood in awe of the Central Kingdom. With this new spin on his audience with the European monarchs, Binchun finally brought his mission into the traditional imagination of a China-centered civilization. This would be a version acceptable to officials of all stripes – the self-strengtheners would appreciate his fundamental embrace of the Chinese essence, and the more conservative-minded officials would welcome its portrayal of a materialistic West devoid of culture.

As the ship sailed along the Chinese coast from Hong Kong to Tianjin, Binchun was once again busily socializing with officials and recounting his experience. Sailing along the coast, the sight of the Humen and Dagou forts evoked memories of the repeated defeats that Qing troops had suffered in recent years, but he discreetly avoided making

connections between these recent battles and the Western imperial forces. Only on one occasion, when his ship stopped at the Dagu fort, did he slip out of his self-protective aestheticism to indicate a grave political concern. He comments on the thick ice covering the road and writes: “The greatest cold does not come suddenly – its omens will always come first. The astrological signs are not dangling in vain, and the sages are alert to heavenly changes. History is not recorded in a single book, and past events are every bit as portentous as cracked turtle shells.”⁹⁹ Wrapped in talk about heavy snow, the real meaning of these words – a warning that the challenge from the West was no less than a heavenly change – was clear to anyone who remembered the battles at Dagu in 1858 and in 1860.

Reception

The immediate readers of Binchun’s accounts in 1867, the Zongli Yamen ministers and leading provincial officials, valued its information about foreign customs and social conditions, but they were also disappointed by its lack of political or technological contents. Prince Gong was candid when he reported to the throne that Binchun offered “only a general shape” of Western countries and could not “get to the bottom of things.”¹⁰⁰ Only a few weeks after his return, Binchun delivered the *biji* and a collection of maps to the Zhili governor Li Hongzhang. Li perused them immediately, and in a letter to their mutual friend Fang Ziyuan the following day, he told how it failed to meet his expectations: “It is written with clarity and cannot be faulted, but it has absolutely nothing detailed to say of the political affairs and key manufacture methods

about each country. It is only a record of his travel.”¹⁰¹ Given what we know about Li’s priorities, it is not surprising that he should find Binchun’s travel far too short and his insight shallow. In the following years, the Yamen would select relatively opinionated personnel as diplomatic delegates.

Besides delivering his accounts to the Zongli Yamen, Binchun disseminated them within his circle of friends and officials both in the capital and the provinces. This was partly for self-promotion, but there was an extraordinary demand for travel accounts about the West. As Xu Jiyu explains: “So many came to request the biji that it was decided to publish it so that all admirers could read it.”¹⁰² It was the same enthusiasm and curiosity that prompted Zhang Deyi to publish his journal in 1868. In his own preface, Zhang writes: “Recently there have been a great many visitors coming to request my journal, and I do not even have time to embellish my words and sentences.”¹⁰³

To prepare publication, Binchun had his friends and relatives write prefaces for them. Many of them were Zongli Yamen ministers and Tongwenguan professors who had befriended Binchun during his service at the Imperial Customs. If Prince Gong and Li Hongzhang showed disappointment in the practical value of Binchun’s accounts, authors of these prefaces were unanimous in glorifying his undertaking as a civilizing mission of the Qing empire. Xu Jiyu, author of the most informative guide on foreign countries, starts his preface with a conventional flourish: “Since the virtue of our Celestial Dynasty is spread afar, Western countries have all been waiting anxiously to communicate with the Heavenly Home.”¹⁰⁴ Li Shanlan, the Qing’s foremost scholar in Western mathematics and astronomy, used this occasion to celebrate the Buddha for its astrological insight. In a wordy introduction densely packed with Buddhist symbolism,

he emphatically notes that the theory of the earth's movement around the sun did not, as European missionaries insisted, originate in the West, but was first expounded in Shakyamuni's teaching.¹⁰⁵ None of the prefaces mention the political implication of the mission. Binchun's travel was a continuation of the Chinese empire's long tradition of cherishing distant lands, and Binchun's accounts proved that the virtue of the Chinese civilization was widespread and universally admired. That the mission's objective was to investigate the Western powers was entirely lost, bespeaking the nervousness in revealing the court's real intention in dispatching the mission. Just as Binchun disguises his own political concerns in heavy poetic tropes and sentimental verses, the authors of his prefaces safely stayed away from the sensitive issues that were likely to disturb their audience. Perhaps they were equally wary of the political and military weakness of the Qing when stripped of its celestial aura.

Outside the circles of Yamen officials and high ministers, Binchun's account was well received by the foreign communities in China for its positive depictions of the West. Accustomed to contempt from the Chinese literati, they hardly expected that a low-level bureaucrat would paint such a rosy and assuring picture of the West. Reversing their initial scruples at Binchun's appointment, they welcomed his accounts and blamed the Chinese book industry for not making it more popular. Wandering in rural Zhili in the 1870s, the missionary Joseph Edkins struck up a conversation with a few local notables and asked whether they had read Binchun's travel accounts. When told that they had not, he wrote in regret: "A work like this, elegantly written in prose and poetry, fails to reach far in Chinese society. The Chinese conductors of the book trade do nothing to push the circulation of new works."¹⁰⁶ Binchun's favorable accounts surprised W. A. P. Martin,

president of the Tongwenguan, so greatly that he rationalized: “For every word of praise he no doubt had ten of censure...but the censure was confidential and did not appear in print.”¹⁰⁷ A few years later, an annotated copy of the *biji* was reprinted in Japan with woodblock illustrations (see figure 1). The editor notes in his preface that the account “praises Western countries and their substantive learning – a reason why they were increasingly civilized. It is as if [Binchun] is afraid that China could not catch up with them. It also reflects [China’s] reflection of its real strength.” Even as large a country as China could realize the value of Westernization, he says, how could Japan not hurry up? This preface reflects the thinking of the Meiji reformers more than Binchun’s intent. As we have seen, there is little in Binchun’s writing that suggests his fear of China’s backwardness, nor does he ever use the term “substantive learning” to describe the root of Western power.¹⁰⁸

Outside the court and his close acquaintances, scattered evidence suggests that there was a fairly wide interest in Binchun’s travel among the literat not involved in foreign affairs. Some copied excerpts of Binchun’s journal and poems into the own *biji* and made their own comments. The famous literary critic Lin Changyi gives high regard to Binchun’s poems for both their literary achievement and information about foreign countries.¹⁰⁹ Mao Xiangli, an expectant salt commissioner in Zhejiang, wrote a long entry on Cheng cha *biji* in his own journal, *Mo yu lu*, published in 1870. “It was full of strange and curious things,” he notes, “a present-day Classic of Mountains and Seas.” He complained that Binchun’s account was “too long and uncontrolled,” and that he “did not have time to write about the vital and vulnerable parts of foreign countries and the ways of their institutions,” but it was still “sufficient as a subject for tea-time chatting.”

Mao's response coincided with the assessment of Prince Gong and Li Hongzhang: the West must be understood in strategic and defensive terms; the rest was merely triviality fit for gossip. He expunged most of Binchun's social account, preserving only his meetings with monarchs and a few nobility. He also cut Binchun's descriptions of city scenes and passages relating to customs and everyday life, but reproduces in almost exact detail descriptions of the zoo (including the full description of plants inside), the Prime Minister's house, the Crystal Palace, Windsor Castle and a factory. Notwithstanding his complaint that Binchun tended to focus on new and flashy objects to attract his reader, Mao's condensed version focuses on them further and reduces them to a list of exotic objects. The meaning of *huolunfa*, which Binchun uses to denote the method of using steam engines, is reinterpreted variously as "falun," "zhuanlun" or simply "lun," a magic, self-propelled wheel of obscure origin.¹¹⁰

When Mao died a few years later, his work was compiled and edited by a friend Zhu Zuolin, who furnished each essay in *Mo yu lu* with a commentary. The following comment was made both on Mao's reproduction.

Sipping a cup of finely steeped tea, one might unscroll this book and read a few passages. It gives one thoughts of riding wind and braving ocean waves. Both the Emperor Qinshi huangdi and the Emperor Wu of Han had longed to reach the outer world. According to this account – although it is merely a textual recording, it is not a mere fabrication – the teaching and music of our country has truly spread afar. Otherwise how could his travel have encountered such things tens of thousands of miles away? [Mao] thought Binchun's writing was uncontrolled and wordy, so he has now deleted some parts and enriched its literary flavor. It is a work of his own, and the best parts far exceed Binchun's original work.¹¹¹

There is no way to verify whether Zhu's commentary was sincere or mere flourish, but it hints at how the work was understood by his contemporary readers. If Binchun

(and his official friends who wrote him prefaces) sought to downplay the foreign and threatening aspects of the West, his effort was so successful that it was taken as hard evidence that “the teaching and music” of China had spread to foreign countries, and it entrenched their confidence in Chinese tradition. It is also an important clue to the question we posed at the beginning of this paper – why were the literati not offended by Binchun’s praise of the West so to accuse him of being “a foreign stooge”? The key is that he gave no indication that there was an alternative vision of civilization apart from the Chinese one. He embraced those inventions of modern industry that he deemed necessary to enhance the livelihood of the Chinese peasants and workers, and made no mention of the rest. The sources of these machines was the universal application of *huolun*, a method that could be mastered quickly. He purified his Western society, making mention of only the aesthetically pleasing parts. The Western monarchs were, at their best, Confucian-style rulers, and at their worse extravagant and materialistic princes who admired the Chinese emperors but could not bring themselves up to their standard. All the virtues of the West were virtues of the Chinese, and all the merits of Western society and politics were fundamentally the same as those the Chinese sages had striven for. It is no surprise Mao Xianglin would complain about its wordiness and lack of focus – if the West was, as Binchun describes, entirely encapsulated within Chinese principles, what else is there to know about it other than a few palaces and clever devices, some new plants and animals, and a great deal of beautiful scenery?

Binchun’s resistance to semantic complication and linguistic innovation is significant, as it helped him couch all foreign scenes comfortably within the Chinese literary imagination. By contrast, Zhang Deyi’s frequent use of transliteration indicates

an awareness that his Chinese translations could not capture the full sense of the words. Readers of Zhang's journal were likely to pause and think about the linguistic and semantic limitation of its language, or the subtle differences between what was described and what was really going on. For example, in his description of the Western "civil examinations" (including the degrees of *xiuca*, *juren*, and *jinshi*), he reports that the candidates were only specialized in one art among many subjects: literature, mathematics, astronomy, geography, mechanics, medicine, chemistry or natural studies. He surmises that the reason for this was "probably that the Western customs esteem military and debase humanities (*zhongwu qingwen*), and that is where they fall short."¹¹² A sensitive contemporary reader would not have failed to notice the poor fit between Zhang's long list of Western subjects and the binary concept of *wen* (humanities) and *wu* (military) he imposed upon them. Zhang's frequent use of "it must be" (*xiangbi*), "probably" (*gai*), and "presumably" (*dagai*) indicates that intent or causality was not immediately clear to him from what he could observe. To use the familiar *ti-yong* formula, his language captures a great deal of form and utility (*yong*) whose essence (*ti*) was not obvious to the Chinese readers, whereas Binchun's text stayed safely within the bounds of the Chinese *ti*.

In de-emphasizing the cultural differences between China and the West, Binchun added to a critical understanding about the fundamental commonality of humanity. It would hardly occur to his readers that the thoughts and wants of the people he described in these European countries could be very different from those of the Chinese. Even though his poetic depiction of the Western monarchs changed towards the end of his trip, most of his writing treats the West as China's peer. Their societies were orderly, their citizens disciplined, their police diligent, and the difference between the high and the low

was observed. He equates Western customs with Chinese ritual and shows that the ability to appreciate Chinese poetry and calligraphy was common to the Europeans. By highlighting the exotic products of foreign countries as his most surprising observation, he leaves his readers with the impression that their difference from China was one of form, not principle. By extension, the application of certain Western inventions, such as trains, telegraphs and steam-powered polders, would be justified and gainful in China.

As indicated by his poem on the Dagu fort, Binchun was well aware that conflict was brewing, and that further confrontation between the two cultures could be calamitous. Contrary to the view that Binchun's accounts were reflections of anachronistic values, they were a peculiar product precisely of the circumstances of his time and of his priorities. Straddling Chinese officialdom and Western society, he understood that each order required a different mode of participation and representation, and he struggled, to the best of his ability, to act in and write about them accordingly. His strenuous effort towards softening and domesticating the West might have preserved his integrity and social prestige, but it was not appreciated by either of his superiors. Hart seemed to have forgotten him in early 1868, for he made no mention of him while promoting the Burlingame mission. The Zongli Yamen transferred him to "oversee" the Tongwenguan in 1870, a position of higher prestige but with little substance.¹¹³ His *biji* and poems remained a popular source of information on the West for years to come and aided high officials such as Zeng Guofan and Guo Songtao in their diplomatic work.¹¹⁴ But his literary sensibilities would increasingly attract criticism from a younger generation of pragmatic officials, who exhibited a more militaristic and confrontational stance.

II. Burlingame's Co-Envoy Zhigang's Rationalization of the West, 1868-1871

The Burlingame mission is unique in Chinese history. That the Qing empire should appoint an American ex-minister as its diplomatic representative astonished many contemporary observers and fascinated many more in the next century and half.¹ Since its commission in 1867, much scholarship has been devoted to debating the nature and significance of the mission: whether it was a step forward or backward for the Qing, whether Burlingame accepted the position out of personal gain, American interest, or pure goodwill, and whether the mission made any substantial impact on the opening up of China.² The origin of the mission is well known. As the American minister to China from 1862, Burlingame proved himself a sympathetic friend to the Qing. His helpful mediation in the Osborne-Lay Flotilla incident especially won him their praise and trust.³ When he informed the Zongli yamen officials of his resignation in 1867, Prince Gong and Wenxiang, leading officials in the yamen, suggested that he represent China in its first diplomatic mission to the West. They lamented the difficulty of finding suitable Chinese representatives, and wanted him to convince the Western powers of the Qing's difficulty in making any significant changes in the upcoming treaty revisions.⁴ With the encouragement of his friend, Robert Hart, head of the Imperial Customs and principle advisor to the Zongli yamen, he accepted the position.⁵ The appointment of Burlingame reflects an important belief among a few key officials in the Restoration period, that an honest appeal to foreigners' common sense and better nature was more effective than deception and manipulation.⁶

Nearly all English scholarship on the mission mentions the names of two Chinese co-envoys accompanying Burlingame on his mission: Zhigang and Sun Jiagu. With the exception of one article by Knight Biggerstaff, which use Zhigang's journal to gauge the mission's reception in Europe, little has been said on their experiences.⁷ These two names merely exist as an indispensable footnote to the glory of Burlingame – it was *his* mission, as it appeared in all newspaper accounts and studies of the event. But to the Chinese co-envoys it was also their mission – a prolonged show for which they were both performers and audience. Burlingame stepped in at courts, banquets and on parades to boost the mission's prestige, but he did not stay with the embassy most of the time. Zhigang and Sun Jiagu were the *bona fide* representatives of the Qing: They greeted Western monarchs, feasted with their ministers, visited all major industrial and cultural establishments, socialized with the upper classes, and debated Qing's foreign policy with ministers, missionaries and businessmen. It was their stories that became the Chinese memory of the mission. If the “Burlingame mission” produced any long-lasting impact, it was impressed in the perspectives of the West that it created, even if they were limited to a small circle of officials.

As co-envoys, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu were chosen, respectively, for their “honesty, sincerity, and breadth of knowledge,” and “steadiness and composure.”⁸ Following the dynasty's tradition, the pair were complementary in their ethnicity and personality – Zhigang was a Manchu provincial graduate in literature and Sun was a Han metropolitan degree holder.⁹ The “honesty and sincerity” of Zhigang suggests a degree of bluntness and a studious instinct for facts, to be balanced by Sun's savvy serenity. In the court's memorial on their appointment, their responsibility lay in “assisting

[Burlingame] in diplomatic affairs, and should anything happen, [in] fully notifying the Zongli yamen by steamship mail.”¹⁰ The primary objective for Zhigang and his colleagues was to make speedy and respectable diplomatic representations of the Qing. The Zongli yamen also hoped that they would acquire some authentic knowledge about the diplomatic formality among Western nations. To that end, it appointed two Western secretaries (*xieli*), Englishman J. McLeavy Brown and Frenchman E. de Champs, chosen both for their experience and their nationalities.¹¹ In addition, several Tongwenguan students and clerks, including two who had just returned from the Binchun mission, accompanied the embassy as secretaries and interpreters.¹² The mission was scheduled to visit the major cities of the United States, England, France, Russia, and Prussia, with brief stops in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Italy – all during the course of one year. In the end, it took the mission nearly three years to return.

Born in 1819 into a Manchu family in Heilongjiang, Zhigang was appointed Second Class Secretary in the Bureau of Rites (*libu yuanwai lang*) after he earned his juren degree. After a brief stint serving as the prefect in Guizhou in 1864, he was recommended as a Secretary (*zhangjing*) to the Zongli yamen, a post he kept until the beginning of the mission.¹³ We know little about his experience in dealing with foreigners prior to the mission. In a treaty negotiation with Belgium, minister August T’Kint seemed satisfied enough with Zhigang’s assistance that he left him a rifle as a parting gift.¹⁴ It was a rare distinction among Zongli yamen secretaries. In the wake of the border delineation with Russia, he was sent to Aigun in 1866 to investigate trade and to manage military revenue. Concerned with the weak Qing defense along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers against the powerful neighbor, he added to his routine report to the Zongli

yamen an additional five-point plan for how to set up guard posts and encourage migration to the region. He notes in particular that bannermen should be allowed to bring in Han peasants as tenants, but a strict prohibition of land transactions was necessary to keep the land in Manchu hands.¹⁵ “There is no good way to defend such a vast and empty territory from a strong and insatiable neighbor,” he says, “and yet if we do not plan ahead, there will be absolutely nothing we can do when things get urgent. It takes three years to collect medicine to cure a patient with seven years of illness.” These were unusually impassioned words for a mere secretary. Between the doves and hawks in the Zongli yamen, Zhigang seemed to occupy a middle ground: he was friendly and helpful with foreigners, and yet he was far from the soft-boned, fawning type that wished to dream imperialism away.

It was perhaps these qualities that made Zhigang stand out in the eyes of those in charge of Zongli yamen when they searched for co-envoys to travel with Burlingame. A contemporary’s impression adds a personal and scholarly dimension: he was said to be an open-minded Neo-Confucianist who accepted doctrines of both the schools of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming as he saw fit, but always “with the goal of improving people’s livelihood in mind.”¹⁶ Contrary to Binchun, he was nearly free of the poetic inclinations of the literati – he never wrote a poem in his journal and never indulged himself with describing the scenery or the beauty of Western women. He was interested in the issues of “self-strengthening”: new types of steamboats, cannons and guns, and strategies to tame Western powers. But in many ways his curiosity and horizon surpassed them: he was an enthusiastic student of natural sciences, always keen on learning the principles behind Western inventions; he observed the religious and cultural inclinations of

Westerners, seeking to understand their human nature and the ways they differed from Chinese; he gathered information on Western governments and noted the affinity between their monarchs and peoples. As the empire's envoy, he also tried to conduct diplomacy in the ways he saw fit – often in a hybrid style that incorporated the Qing's universal claims with Western international law. That all these reactions came from a rather typical middle-level Manchu official with little training in science or diplomacy makes it an interesting case.

According to a contemporary observer, Zhigang exhibited the same heroic spirit as Binchun when he heard of the mission: he “firmly took the envoyship upon himself” when no one else wanted to go.¹⁷ His courage was not ignored by the court and his fellow literati.¹⁸ The day before their departure, he and Sun Jiagu knelt in front of the emperor and the empress dowagers for their instructions. Speaking from behind a yellow satin screen, the empress dowager Cixi alerted them to the “idle rumors that had risen everywhere” about their dealing with foreigners, and as if contemplating the possibility of a shipwreck, asked whether their parents were still alive. In his reply Zhigang acknowledged the fierce detraction from the conservatives: “even Prince Gong dared not defend [us], and we can only make the best of our effort.” The audience lasted a few minutes, during which empress dowager inquired about their itinerary and previous positions, and admonished them not to become the laughingstock of foreigners.

Zhigang respectfully recorded the conversation, along with every movement of the eunuchs and palace officials, on the first page of his diary, *Chushi taixi ji* [Record of the first mission to the West] (hereafter, *ji*), an account that he kept until the end of the mission. He wrote with purpose, never wasting words on trivial and repetitive

observations. For clarity of themes, he often combined events of several days into one entry. The journal went through three publications in the Qing period: the first edition, compiled by a certain Bire zhuren, was released in 1877; a pithier edition, under the name *Chushi taixi jiyao* [A summary of the first mission to the West] (hereafter, *jiyao*) was published sometime around 1890, sponsored by a certain Qieyuan zhuren; finally, a slightly modified edition also appeared in the famous *Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao* collection a few years later. Stylistic differences aside, discrepancies between the first and second prints abound and reflect the differences in the priorities of the two periods.¹⁹ In addition to Zhigang's account, Zhang Deyi, one of the young Tongwenguan interpreters on the mission, also kept a journal.²⁰ His writing is shorter and more formulaic than Zhigang's, but he updated it daily with the embassy's activities. This makes his writing a useful reference for the advance of the mission, and it also offers a different perspective on Zhigang. A letter of less than a thousand characters, written by Sun Jiagu to a friend after his return, has survived to tell his impression of the trip.²¹ Its value is compromised, however, by Sun's caution in describing his experience in any other wording than the orthodox one.

A Confucian Explorer of Natural Laws

The most immediate and enduring source of fascination for Zhigang was Western machines. Within two weeks of arrival in California, he had already seen the local shipyard, carpet mill, mint, farms, and a mercury mine, all fully mechanized and updated with the latest equipment. The same drill was repeated everywhere the mission went in

the American East and Europe. The level of detail and accuracy in his descriptions suggests that he observed with intense interest and often took the trouble of looking up design graphics. He attempted to grasp what appeared to pertain to natural laws – principles of mechanics, chemistry, biology, optics, cosmology and medicine. His contemporaries, such as Binchun and Zhang Deyi, stopped at a general impression of the flurry of movements, the sounds of the machines, and the efficacy of “fire-wheel methods.” But Zhigang was interested in the corresponding natural laws behind each device as he understood it: thermodynamics for steam-powered machines, chemical components of the air for hot-air balloons, galvanism for making batteries, fluid dynamics in gas lighting networks and tap water systems, electromagnetism in telegraphs and telephones and even some rudimentary optics for photography.²² His observation was never systematic, nor did he consider the principles of these novel machines as constituting their own field of learning. Even as he relied on a traditional vocabulary, however, he gave reasonably sound approximations of scientific principles. Knowing that “the principle of steam engines is the same, whereas their applications are different,” he also lavished his ink on the shapes, teething, and rotations of the various gears and how they work in tandem.²³

Zhigang’s indefatigable drive soon distinguished him in the eyes of American journalists. The New York Times observes: “Chi Tajen (His Majesty Zhi) inquired very intelligently and minutely into all he saw at the mills, and almost intuitively comprehended the explanations given him.”²⁴ This was no exaggeration. The level of sophistication and accuracy of his diary was an outstanding example of how well a Confucian could grasp the nuances of modern science with no special training in it. He

was ready to claim such a gift for himself in his journal. The reader is told, for example, that a foreign manager at a textile mill showed off the fact that he only needed one supervisor to watch over hundreds of machines. Zhigang immediately observed to him that the system must have relied on an electric device to transmit signals from the machines. The manager was shocked by his technological acumen, and “a Westerner who stood by his side repeatedly nodded in agreement, and to show that he appreciates how the envoy understood things.”²⁵

Throughout his writing on modern industry, Zhigang imparted an important message: the principles of Western sciences can be found in Chinese wisdom. No matter how intricate the machines were, they were all dictated by nature.²⁶ After giving one of the best descriptions of a steamship found in Chinese literature, he declares that the principle of all steam-powered machines mimics the dynamics in the human body: “when heated, the energy machine (*qiji*) moves and produces energy (*qi*); the energy rises from behind and subsides in the front, circulates in the *ren* and *du* arteries, and spreads throughout the four limbs and hundreds of bones... Those who recognize this principle find numerous utilities based on it; this is the origin of affairs of machines.”²⁷ In another occasion, after giving the details of a mercury furnace, he explains that the Western method of separating mercury from the ore was an application of an old Daoist method: “The extraction of mercury from mercury sulfide ... was originally an ancient Chinese method. Westerners obtained it and developed chemistry out of it. Confucius said that we should ‘extend the principle to similar things in order to enrich our knowledge in it.’ Looking through all Western methods, none went beyond those words.”²⁸ These two examples have been given as evidence that “Zhigang was never interested in the

knowledge itself” because of the “interference from traditional Chinese thought and moralism.”²⁹ This view essentially sets, from our modern vantage point, a single model of valid knowledge and faults him for not having a scientific mind-set. It suggests that the pernicious influence of Chinese tradition led him astray. While it is undeniable that Zhigang did not fully appreciate the rigor of scientific inquiry, he absorbed most scientific facts readily and enthusiastically. He was able to do so precisely because he drew freely from a rich body of traditional knowledge in nature.

This phenomenon of tracing origins of Western learning in China has been described as the *xixue zhongyuan* theory.³⁰ According to Republican historian Quan Hansheng, this theory had three major uses: when wielded by conservative officials, it was a reason for ignoring Western learning, for it is already found in Chinese literature; progressive officials used it to justify learning from the West; it also helped maintain the prestige of Chinese tradition. Quan criticizes the prevalent notion that the *xixue zhongyuan* theory was a backward and ignorant notion, and sees it as a necessary step that helped China advance. But his argument assumes that the theory was always a conscious attempt for Chinese literati to fudge history in order to justify ideologies. While this might be true in later times – especially for the generation of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong, and even Xue Fucheng – Zhigang did not seem to be aware that the West was the seat of its own learning, distinct from the Chinese tradition. He still held a world view in which civilization was, by definition, Chinese. The “central kingdom” was perhaps no longer a geo-political reality, but it was still a cultural one.³¹ Any phenomenon judged civilized must be Chinese. In this sense, Zhigang’s identification of steam engines and chemistry as rooted in Chinese practices was not driven by an anxiety

to encourage Chinese hubris – he never argued against or belittled Western practices on such grounds. It was his attempt at describing them as sound, rational and corresponding with other sound and rational knowledge – Confucianism. His assertion that “even machines were modeled after nature” was a refutation to widespread domestic opposition to modern industry, commonly thought of as “freakish skills and artful devices” violating the state of nature.

Zhigang was open about the benefits of industrialization. He was first and foremost impressed by the steamship that carried the embassy to the United States. He elaborated on the danger of the seafaring trip in an elegant essay – a striking contrast with his otherwise austere style – only to conclude it with a celebration of the ship’s efficacy. There was a tradition among travelers overseas to attribute their safe arrival and return to supernatural powers, but Zhigang gives no such rhetoric in his journal. The tempests he saw in the ocean only made him appreciate the power of human ingenuity and increased his confidence in the steamship. Yet he did not give uniform approval to all machines. He took different attitudes towards the machines that appear beneficial to people’s livelihood and the strength of the country, and those appearing to produce goods for display and amusement. Setting aside his Confucian scorn for Daoism, he found Daoist concepts useful in explaining the nature of Western machines: the profiting mind (*lixin*) gives rise to the mechanical mind (*jixin*), which in turn gives rise to machines (*jiqu*). So these products of “freakish skills and artful devices” (*qiji yinqiao*) would naturally be attractive to people of “curiosity and artful mind” (*haoqi zhiyin*). When touring a weaving factory in Lyon, Zhigang came under the impression that Joseph Jacquard, the inventor of the Jacquard loom, exhausted himself in conceiving the elaborate device, and

died soon after his machine was made to work. He laments: “the mechanical mind is most abhorred by Daoists, but how could the Western machine makers fail to know this? [Or if they knew,] they still refused stop, but hoped to finish the machine and enjoy its benefits. But without life where does one begin to speak of profit? Alas!”³²

As Chinese historian Zhang Baichun points out, there has been a long tradition in Chinese literature to use *ji* in allusion to “complex and skillfully manufactured devices, in particular transmission mechanisms assembled from many individual parts.”³³ From its association with machinery, *ji* has long connoted ‘trickery’ and ‘cunning’, as shown in the common compound *jixin* (machine heart). A well-known Daoist text *Huainanzi* from the second century BC has the following to say about *jixin*: “If one hides a ‘machine heart’ in your bosom, then one’s purity is not unadulterated and one’s divine virtue will be incomplete.” The compound word *jiqu* did not find its way into popular usage until the 1860s, when a memorial by Li Hongzhang in 1864 on the importance of building steam engines (*qilu*) and machines (*jiqu*) paved the way for its widespread propagation. From the very inception of its translation, the semantic encoding of the word ‘machine’ carried with it a negative connotation suggesting crafty arts and abject motivations. This unfortunate word choice must have played, along with political, social and economic considerations, into the initial Chinese rejection and suspicion of modern industrial benefits. Zhigang’s association of *jiqu* with *jixin* and his frowning upon the “freakish skills and artful devices” do not seem like a willful derision of foreign things, but a natural application of his knowledge in the Chinese classics to explain a Western phenomenon (namely, the human cost of engineering) which it appeared to him eluded the Westerners themselves.

The simultaneous fascination with and worry about machines was shared by many contemporary observers. It was perhaps most strongly expressed in the journal of Liu Xihong, vice minister to England in 1876 and minister to Germany in 1877.³⁴ Starting in the early 1870s, the Qing sent scores of technicians and students abroad with the express purpose of learning sciences and machine-making for a nascent Chinese industry. Scientists like Xu Jianyin (son of the renowned mathematician Xu Shou) wrote extensively about modern industry in their journals; students such as Yan Fu and Ma Jianzhong also sent their notes back to key officials such as Li Hongzhang to keep him updated on recent technological developments in the West.³⁵ Backed by powerful statesmen and already familiar with scientific principles, they wielded newly coined terminology with ease and described modern industry with a general detachment.

Things were different when Zhigang traveled in the late 1860s. No Chinese observer had written an informed account of Western industrial establishments or scientific methods. The picture of the industrial world and its people was still murky and mysterious. Only months before the mission, a heated debate on the utility of astronomy and mathematics had absorbed the attention of the court and the official society in Beijing. Prince Gong, head of the Zongli yamen, petitioned for the recruitment of provincial and metropolitan graduates into the Tongwenguan to study mathematics and astronomy taught by foreign teachers. The Grand Scholar Woren argued that barbarians taught only trickery and that nothing but a faithful adherence to Confucian rites and morality could strengthen the Qing.³⁶ Even though the empress dowager sided with Prince Gong, the debate unleashed a torrent of angry condemnations targeting the self-strengthening officials.³⁷ In this flurry of debates, Zhigang's superiors in the Zongli yamen took

different sides, and he was left to struggle with mapping the meaning of science and technology at his own discretion.

In other fields of natural inquiries, Zhigang exhibited the same desire to rationalize the West according to Confucian word view. After an extensive tour of the London zoo and viewing with interest hundreds of animals that he had never seen before, he notes that for all their efforts the Westerners had not managed to collect a single dragon or phoenix, divine animals whose appearance signaled the coming of a sage. He also reasoned that since dragons were amorphous and enigmatic creatures, they could neither be recognized nor captured.³⁸ He did not reject facts that contradicted received wisdom, but tried to incorporate them into his existing knowledge. An interesting example is his experience at the Cambridge observatory. Astrological divination was a sacred right of rulers and formed the basis of all Confucian classics. From the Han period onwards, the state adopted as orthodoxy the theory of interactions between heaven and men called correlative cosmology: dynastic fate is reflected in movement of heaven and earth, and the vicissitudes of human affairs find expression in a variety of natural portents and anomalies. In showing auspicious or anomalous signs, Heaven passes judgment on the moral conduct of the emperor. By the Ming dynasty, celestial observations were conducted by the Astronomical Bureau, which submitted reports to the emperor collectively. Atmospheric observations and significant celestial phenomena were all carefully noted, but they largely played a symbolic role and were seldom used to criticize the emperor. Although the bureau did conduct systematic and objective observations, its mission was still “fundamentally to legitimate the Emperor’s position as Son of Heaven.”³⁹

Western theories about stars and planets as constant, independent bodies following regular patterns of movement found a ready ear in Zhigang. He observes that Western astronomers stop at the observing stage, and do not foretell human affairs from their signs. This is because they do not believe that the sun and the moon, far away as they are from the earth, have any bearing on human affairs. The stars and planets, he reasoned, are “convergence of the essence and spirit” (*jujing huishen*) of heaven and earth, and “stay fresh after tens of thousands of eons” (*wangu changxin*). Given their permanent nature, it made sense to him that they should not suddenly change their appearances. He also acknowledges that foreigners’ method of observation was more precise and far-reaching than the Chinese way of “staring at the sky,” and regrets not having enough time to study their instruments in detail.⁴⁰ But the conflict between Western and Chinese theories was real and fraught with important implications: The idea that stars and planets are fixed entities independent of human affairs was antithetical to the foundational ideology of the imperial dynasty; if celestial objects do not change, how do they carry warnings from Heaven? Some later ministers chose to ignore this – Guo Songtao and Xue Fucheng, for example, both wrote extensive notes on theories of Western astronomy but limited their discussions to a technical level and never compared it to the Chinese belief.⁴¹ Both showed the recognition that Western and Chinese learning governed distinct realms of knowledge and should not be mixed. Zhigang’s discussion does not explicitly refer to Confucian cosmology, but it is clearly what he had in mind when he wrote the following paragraph:

The Chinese saw it as calamities and anomalies when the sun emitted no light or showed the color of blood. I privately thought that the sun was very high – according to Western methods the sun was ten million li from

the earth, and the moon is eight-hundred thousand li away – they gather spirits of heaven and earth, forever stays new and should not frequently change. But there are times when clouds shade the sky and the sun appear like blood; and sometimes when clouds show slight darkness and the sun emits no light. It suddenly emerged to me that the changing of colors in the sun and the moon is due to the obscuring of the qi on earth, which keeps the eyes from getting a straight view of them. It is often said that the sun has arches protruding like ears, the moon has halos, the rain brings rainbows, and that one finds misty air in sunny days and miasma in moist days. This is nothing but the intermingling of air of different temperature and moisture, and the grievance, bitterness, poison, and resentment of the people. The mixing and brewing of these qi produces different shapes, colors and smells (of the sun and the moon), which are then interpreted as calamities. Even though there was the theory that “heaven presents celestial phenomena in order to signal auspice or ill omen,” celestial objects are permanent and do not change.⁴²

According to his theory, anomalies of the sun were real signs of calamities, produced by the mingling of air with bad air and bad breath, rather than Heavenly warnings in a figurative sense. By observing these phenomena and interpreting them as criticisms from Heaven, the ruler would be obliged to tend to the suffering of the people. Perhaps due to the sensitivity of the subject and the novelty of his explanation, his musing on the subject did not appear in *Chushi taixi ji*, but was included in the later *Chushi taixi jiyao*.

Zhigang was open to new facts and willing to reconcile them with Chinese wisdom, but his investigation of nature was rooted in the Confucian view of the natural world. Like Binchun, he never referred to the knowledge he acquired as “Western learning” (*xixue*) collectively, but used “Western methods” (*xifa*) instead. The one exception was when he admitted that he did not have time to investigate in detail the “various schools of studies and inquiries of Westerners (*xiren gejia xuewen*) and their manufacturing methods (*zhizao zhifa*).”⁴³ Even there, his primary emphasis was on

Western learning as methods for production. In his discussion of steam-engines, the mercury furnace, Jacquard looms, and Western observatories, he consistently showed the inclination to make sense of new facts by interpreting the Classics. His reconciliatory attitude reflected the inner world of many conscientious literati in his time. When China was still deemed the only civilized center of the world, any acceptance of Western ingenuity had to be in agreement with Confucianism – for the language of the classics was the language of truth. Yu Ying-shih observes to this effect: “It is an undeniably unique feature of the Chinese critical tradition that political and social criticism consists primarily in the interpretation of the Way, not in the discovery or invention of another way.”⁴⁴ Starting in the 1870s, writings of ministers and students abroad would gradually evince the belief that Western methods grew out of a distinct “Western learning,” and that Chinese and Western learning governed different realms — the former was the authority in morality; the latter in (the rather cold) matters pertaining to natural laws, international laws, technology, industry and commerce. But this distinction did not exist in Zhigang’s consciousness, as he wrote on a different occasion: “the Chinese follow reason (*li*) more than feelings and emotions (*qing*), and the Westerners follow their feelings and emotions more than reason.”⁴⁵

Religion and Human Nature

Like most of his contemporaries, Zhigang had a low estimation of Christian theology at the beginning of the mission. He was curious enough to have read parts of the Bible, but did not seem to be aware of the different schools of Christianity.

Recognizing the diplomatic sensitivity to religion, he resolved not to engage in any arguments on Christian theology.⁴⁶ This did not keep him from writing about Christianity and his interaction with Christians in his journal. During the mission's stay in New York – home of Burlingame and the city friendliest to the Chinese – six months into their travel, he observed that his expectation of running into conflict in a Christian country was entirely faulty. As time went on, in fact, he felt that his interaction with the natives was dominated by “harmonious and happy” sentiments. He collected sufficient evidence in his journal to show that the human nature of Chinese and Westerners was basically the same. In California, for example, he met a wealthy merchant who started his business with loans from a friend who remained faithful despite his repeated failures; when he eventually succeeded, he shared his huge profits with his friend. “I did not expect to see in this foreign land the same kind of friendship as between Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya,” he writes. He was also impressed by the generous accommodations in the Cooper Union, and the orphanages and sanatorium he visited. The great hero George Washington, in his rejection of wealth and fame after a life of accomplishment, was basically enacting some salient virtues of a Confucian gentleman. Even the invention of the flush toilet was a footnote to the Daoist master Zhuangzi's adage: “The Way can be found even in matters of human waste.”

But why, he asks rhetorically, despite their common human nature, were the Chinese in California still oppressed for being “heretics”? In a reflective essay, Zhigang meditates over the question, struggling to understand what appeared to him central to the Christian doctrine – the forgoing of one's own father (*wufu*) in favor of a Heavenly Father. Coming from a culture where paternal authority was the basis of all social order,

Zhigang was particularly perturbed by the notion of *wufu*, and seemed to cling to it as a Western reality without observing how most contemporary families worked. He realizes, however, that the basic Christian impulse of “sacrificing oneself to save the world” is the same as in Mohism; they differ only in paths. It was probably why the Ming official Xu Guangqi allowed his missionary friends to assume the title “Western Confucians” (*xiru*). This Christian humane objective is laudable to him, but that they subject themselves only to their Heavenly Father is nonsensical. Zhigang surmises that because Westerners “did not remember the family name of their first ancestors,” they had to make up the story of a “Heavenly Father” and call themselves Sons of God. He thinks that the Christians miss the point when they call the Creator “their father”: that there is a cause to everything on earth is a given, but “if one calls that cause ‘father’, then where does one place one’s real father, and the emperor, who is the son of Heaven?”

This rambling essay hardly answers the question that prompted it, but it affirms his first impression: that human nature is indeed the same between China and the West, and fundamentally good. The Heavenly Father was a creation of bookkeeping negligence and flawed reasoning, neither of which is incorrigible. In a glow of confidence, he observes that many Europeans were buying Confucian texts and sees promises in their newly found interest in Confucianism. “Once their path to virtue and wisdom is opened up, the two cultures will naturally become harmonious even where there is no anticipation. In that case, even though we are far apart, there will truly be no distance between us.”⁴⁷ Here Zhigang is showing the same optimism as exhibited in Binchun, the belief in the existence of a shared culture between China and the West. Whether he

wrote it partly to appease his readers, Zhigang takes the notion that Confucianism was in the process of transforming Western countries as reality.

As the mission left the hospitable United States and made its way into the more ambivalent England and France, Zhigang gradually departed from this slightly sympathetic view to Christianity and became convinced that the religion was doing more harm than good, eventually settling on the conclusion that it was a scourge and threat, both to China and the Western countries themselves. His effort not to engage in conversations on religion was to no avail, as he inevitably found himself provoked into a defensive stance by misunderstandings and rumors about Chinese customs brought back by missionaries. In one case, a Parisian asked him why Chinese parents murder their children, “feeding them to dogs and pigs,” as he was told by the missionaries who opened orphanages in China. Zhigang flatly rejected the authenticity of the source, pointing out that China was the most populous nation precisely because parents nourished their children. He admitted that the Qing government could not stop all instances of female infanticide, but no family would abandon their sons (undoubtedly affirming the Parisian’s view). After correcting factual errors, Zhigang gave a long and impassioned censure against missionary activities, listing the unethical tactics they deployed to attract Chinese converts, and the troubles they caused to the government. Not only did they lie to the Chinese, they also spread wicked rumors in their own countries to elicit sympathetic donations. “Western countries seek precision in everything, yet in this alone they could not discern the real motives and practices of the missionaries; they willingly subject themselves to their manipulation.”⁴⁸

After recording the conversation with the Parisian, Zhigang launches into another meditative discourse on Christianity and Confucianism. He continues his thinking on Christianity as an externality imposed by manipulative and cunning people. It is not in the Westerners' nature to substitute friendship for the Five Relations, but a longstanding habit imposed by Christian thought. Since they saw Heaven as their father, and their natural fathers and rulers also saw Heaven as their father, the relationship between father and son, and between ruler and subjects, had to be one between peers. The Song dynasty Neo-Confucianist Zhang Zai taught that "Heaven is our father and Earth our mother," a teaching that Zhigang thought close to Christianity in principle, but the latter lacked means of expression, namely, proper social hierarchy, for their affection towards one another. Still, he hopes the recent Western interest in Chinese books would help them mend their ways soon.⁴⁹

Two months later, still in Paris, a coterie of missionaries came to his door. Apparently knowing his belligerence against Christianity, they came for another debate on religion, led by a vigorous old man who looked like an experienced polemicist. According to his account, the conversation revolved around the concept of prayer: The old man shifted the ground to Confucianism, bringing up as evidence Confucius' admission that he, too, prayed when he fell ill. Ignoring the old man's take on Confucius, Zhigang retorts that prayer was only proper for uncivilized people, such as the "red men" in America or the "black men" in Africa, who need to be asked to pray in order to turn from their barbarous and murderous ways. He affirms his belief that China and the West shared the fundamental characteristics of civilized culture, which distinguish the two from other peoples: "You and I belong to people who have long known ritual and

righteousness. We only pray when we have committed evil wrongdoing; if we did not, what use is there for praying on the seventh day of the week? In any case, don't we ourselves already know whether we have committed any crimes?"⁵⁰ The old man, he says, was at once embarrassed by Zhigang's retort and waved his disciples off, and from then on no one came to challenge him again.

The war between France and Prussia further convinced him that the European countries themselves were as much victims of Christianity as China was. He laments that with all the protection they received, neither the Christian God nor the Christian Church offered any aid to the French government, a grave violation of the Confucian reciprocity. The Church lost its power with the French defeat and all its prayers proved ineffective. His final lament does not correspond to the political situation of any European country, but seems to be a veiled criticism of Empress Dowager Cixi: "The Western religion (Christianity) truly suits the secret mind of women in this world! It knows that if mothers come to a religion, their sons will follow it, too. In this way women take control of the fate of the country."⁵¹

It is hard to tell how much the Taiping Movement, which the Qing had only squelched after fifteen years of bloody war, had shaped Zhigang's view of Christianity, but surely the dark shadows of Hong Xiuquan and his frantic God Worshippers lingered over his perception of Jesus and Christians. His Christian theology appears partly based on Hong's dreams of the Heavenly Father. Yet Zhigang refrained from denunciation of the religion, and was willing to give credit for what Jesus did right according to his Confucian view. Jesus to him was an intelligent man who had no intention of harming the world; after all, he went about preaching, healing, and telling fortunes. He was given

the most severe death sentence known in the West only because he crossed a most important ritual boundary and claimed to be a king in his own right. As bright and upright (*congming leiluo*) as Jesus was, he did not understand the principle that “one should hide one’s talent when the Way does not prevail;” he vainly showed off his skills and offended the rulers of his time, thus hastening his demise. After he was killed his disciples came up with the theory of resurrection, both to hide the truth of his death and to use it to spread the religion.⁵² But the missionaries departed from the original teaching of Jesus and used the religion as pretense to extract profit and commit murder and plunder in foreign lands.

Their Ways of Governing

Prussia made the most favorable impression upon Zhigang. The Prussian King, William I, was an “energetic seventy-three year old who had a majestic air and straightforward personality,” and who “treated others like his own family.” He often looked out to the the main street from his palace window and was greeted by passers-by with a doffing of their caps. Zhigang admires the candid and amicable relationship between the monarch and the people, but he also points out that the king’s dignity and authority was unsurpassable, and no one dared to treat him with irreverence on the battlefield or in court. The strong affective bond between the ruler and the people was further affirmed to Zhigang when he talked to a Prussian woman during a walk in the suburb. She asked Zhigang whether the Chinese also loved their ruler, a question that “tugged the strings of his heart,” and he replied: “if the Chinese did not love their ruler,

how could we have brought the rebellions and upheavals in the last thirty years to an end?” To this the woman gave a simple but shocking reply: “There is none in our country who does not love the monarch.” He writes that this small comment was more thought-provoking than the cannons and ships of Western countries. Remembering the Warring States story that claims that the ruler favored by the people could dispel strong enemies, Zhigang predicts that the King of Prussia had already won the crucial battle and would eventually dominate Europe.⁵³

Just like the Binchun mission, members of the Zhigang mission felt that they developed personal relationship with Western monarchs and royal families. Zhang Deyi had reported that when he politely declined the Swedish king’s cigars, saying that he was afraid of intoxication, the king forcibly gave him several to put into his pockets. Zhang told him that Chinese clothes do not have pockets, and was laughed at by the king for his “stubbornness.” Reluctant to let him go, William gave Zhigang a ceramic plate with a print of his image and took his hands to ask him never to forget him.⁵⁴ All the handshakes, warm greetings, and exchanges of personal gifts ensured that members of the mission were charmed by the personality of the monarchs. With the exception of England and France, Zhigang describes nearly all Western rulers in favorable light: the Russian king “had a grand build, his spirit was exposed and his temperament was deep and calm”, and he also treated his officials and people like family.⁵⁵ The Swedish king was “most sincere and frugal, likes hunting, and maintains a peaceful and unassuming air – he could even drop by their houses during a hunt and present them with cheeses.”⁵⁶ The King of Belgium “had a tall figure, an elegant and cultured face, and spoke with deep sincerity.”⁵⁷ The Queen of the Netherlands was said to be “extremely virtuous and

capable, and none in her country fail to obey her.”⁵⁸ He also approved of the self-restraint of the Spanish general Francisco Serrano, who served as president of the Provisional Government after toppling the monarch Isabella II in the Glorious Revolution two years prior: “The way he received our letter in the outer hall was an execution of a national rite; the way he invited us to chat in his own inner chamber was abiding by his own station (as a provisional ruler): Everything he did was according to propriety.”⁵⁹

Indeed, not only were the Western countries headed by civil rulers, their accommodation of the mission also abided by ritual behavior. Zhigang was always keen in making note of the order in which the kings and ministers received them, the number of carts royal houses sent to receive the embassy, the assignment of seats at each banquet, and royal objects of symbolic value. It is evident that he did not understand the significance of everything he saw, and that he often made wrong assumptions about what constituted Western rites, such as noting that President Johnson of the United States “stood facing south” while receiving the letter of credence from Burlingame,⁶⁰ and exclaiming that “lost ancient rites were recovered” in the West during a banquet with the Swedish royal family.⁶¹ But more importantly, he was generally of the attitude that each country abided by its own ritual that the rulers used to display their power and to distinguish themselves, and they were to be respected and accommodated to the best of his ability. This attitude is also imparted to his reader by a sprinkling of the character ‘*li*’ in his accounts of royal visits, such as *liche* (ceremonial carts), *siliguan* (official in charge of rites), *jugong wei li* (bowing as a ritual performance), and *liguan* (ceremonial cap). By relativizing *li* as a type of behavior common to all Western royal houses, rather than a

privilege of the Chinese emperor alone, Zhigang created images of states legitimate to his Confucian readers.

The Second French Empire was beset by domestic riots and war with Germany during the time of the mission. For about five months in 1869, Zhigang and the rest of the mission stayed in their hotel rooms and seldom ventured out. His journal writing was reduced to a couple of entries per month. Zhang Deyi's journal tells that he, too, mostly stayed in the hotel, visited homes of acquaintances and whiled away the time playing children's games and watching dances. To Zhigang the troubles of France were a result of two illnesses: the debauchery of Napoleon III and corruption due to appointment by popular votes. He made a brief account of the street riots in protest of fraud at the 1869 elections, apparently unaware of the socialist claims advanced by the rebels. He heard that the corruption of the election was caused by candidates who gave away gifts in exchange for votes and thus caused popular discontent. The riots were, among other things, Parisians' response to the suppression of popular will by an autocratic government, but Zhigang readily took it as evidence that representational government was doomed to fail. "The West set up offices based on recommendation, but unfortunately they follow the votes of the people and do not understand the evils this gives way to. [In this system] the gifted men who cultivate themselves in dark rooms stay forever in quietude."⁶² Zhigang most likely confused the electoral system with the Chinese practice of recommendation by high officials and village elders, the most prevalent method for appointing local officials up to the Tang dynasty: "The system of recommendation only works when there are virtuous monarchs presiding the country," but Napoleon III hardly made the cut. He "used his own political party to tax the people and keep an army, and to

use the army to further suppress the people.”⁶³ He was the very type of inhumane king that Mencius warned against, and when the news came that Napoleon III was toppled by Prussia, Zhigang felt that his Confucian sense of righteousness was vindicated.

If France was the prime example of why Western states fail, all the other countries he visited showed why they were successful. Their governance gained support of the people. The American government had “a hall for publically discussing matters.” The meetings were presided over by “elderly and experienced men” and attended by representatives from each state, and votes were taken to ensure that “the people’s will was expressed and fairness is maintained.”⁶⁴ The English government had a “change of the constitution” that gave people the right to “elect officials” (probably a misunderstanding of the Reform Act of 1867). Even the French royal family made the large paved streets in front of their palace a public park with beautiful trees and benches for the recreation of women and children – an “act of great significance” to Zhigang’s eyes. At the end of his European visit, his overall assessment of Western governments was favorable and yet alarming: “Western rulers are not restricted to male or female, but if the ruler does not fulfill his way, his countrymen will not obey him, and his policies will not prevail. Western countries do not always agree in their ways of governing, but they do not dare to go against the people’s will – this is common to all.” The suggestion that the West as a whole wielded the support of their people might have been considered too incendiary to the Qing literati. It was edited out of the 1877 edition of his journal, but appeared in the later ones.⁶⁵

These insights were given primarily from a Confucian perspective. Throughout his travel in Europe Zhigang remained quite ignorant of the institutions of constitutional

monarchy and democracy, and based his judgment entirely on familiar criteria: personal virtues, or the lack thereof, of the rulers, and whether they lived up to their Mandate of Heaven. The teaching of Mencius was shown perfectly proficient in explaining the success and failure of these institutions. While his observations constituted no fundamental challenge to the Chinese order, their messages must still have been shocking. The images of majestic, benevolent rulers who treated their subjects like their own family and were in return loved and respected by all, sounded like something from an idealized past. The fifteen years of Taiping scourge, while universally condemned as heterodox, must have raised some serious doubts about the Qing's mandate among the elite. The Tongzhi emperor being but a child, the Qing lacked a ruler matching the composure and wisdom of its Western counterparts. This was perhaps why Zhigang considered his conversation with the Prussian woman more revealing than demonstrations of Western force.

Envoy between Two Worlds

While Burlingame announced to the world that the mission initiated China's "entrance into the family of nations," the Qing court had an entirely different understanding of the mission. It did not consider itself an equal member in an international community of nation states. Previous treaties had been imposed on China "at cannon's mouth," and the Qing court justified each step of the way with the principle of "*jimi*" – the bridle of the barbarians (after 1861, Westerners).⁶⁶ Few Qing officials knew about international law (*wanguo gongfa*) before the mid-1870s, and certainly none

had a systematic view of the Burlingame mission – neither Zhigang nor Zhang Deyi ever mentioned the term “international law” in their journals.⁶⁷ This did not mean, however, that Zhigang and Sun Jiagu were mere puppets in Burlingame’s show. They exerted their influence and interpreted the mission along the Chinese line. At a banquet with leading officials and businessmen in California, for example, while Burlingame celebrated the mission as marking China’s first step in “stretching forth its arms towards the shining banners of Christianity and Western civilization,” Zhigang gave a proper Confucian speech to the Chinese community present, extolling the emperor’s paternalistic virtue and exhorting them “not to forget the teachings of the sages.”⁶⁸ While Burlingame negotiated with foreign governments, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu wrote reports back home and filled Burlingame with instructions they received from the Zongli yamen. They also translated the Sino-American treaty and other letters that resulted from Burlingame’s negotiations into language appropriate for the Qing’s dignity, appending explanatory notes to clarify each clause of the treaty. From time to time, when Burlingame was not present or willing to interfere, they conveyed the Zongli yamen’s concerns to foreign ministers and businesses.

The first order of business was conducting diplomatic representation appropriate to both Western and Chinese systems. Western ministers in Beijing had long demanded imperial audience. The Zongli yamen was afraid that if the Chinese envoys delivered their credentials to Western rulers, it would give their ministers another excuse to demand audience. When Binchun met Western monarchs, he simply walked up to them and bowed. Since Binchun’s was merely an unofficial visit, his lack of credentials was tolerated by all countries. When the Empress Dowager asked Zhigang whether there

would be audiences, he replied: “Whether we see foreign monarchs or not is up to them, but your slaves will definitely not seek audiences.”⁶⁹ To avoid complication, Burlingame was instructed specifically not to perform “rituals contrary to the Chinese ones,” and to deliver credentials through foreign ministers. If he absolutely had to, a provision must be made to the effect that no imperial audiences could be expected of foreign ministers in China until the emperor enters adulthood.⁷⁰ But in the flattering welcome of Washington, Burlingame readily ignored his instruction and initiated meetings between President Johnson and the embassy. This precedent was followed in all other countries.

In persuading the throne to grant credentials to the Burlingame mission, the Zongli yamen overcame significant opposition. In their memorial to the throne, Prince Gong explained that the issuance of credentials was in accordance with “ancient customs of appointing envoys” in China’s interaction with foreign lands. In these letters, Emperor Tongzhi calls himself “the Great Emperor of the Great Qing Empire” who “inherits heavenly order,” expresses his desire to “make peace forever,” and introduces his envoys as “virtuous and intelligent” officials whom he has selected to manage diplomatic affairs between the two countries. It was plain to any contemporary Western observer who understood a modicum of Chinese that this original Chinese version did not make the same claims as its translation into English. The Chinese ministers removed from the credence the overtly condescending phrases, but its overall tone was still that of a universal ruler addressing his vassal lords. As can be expected, Western detractions and attempts to translate the credence were rife. The best exemplification of this response is the mammoth volume produced by German sinologist Johannes von Gumpach in which he dissected the Chinese credence, character by character, and found every word of it

outrageous. Despite his blinding anti-Chinese sentiment, von Gumpach correctly pointed out that the Burlingame mission could not have been successful without being allowed a certain degree of flexibility in the translation of its letter of credence. But the real issue was not the characters used in these letters, but the non-existence of semantic correspondence between Chinese and Western claims in the 1860s. When Xue Fucheng delivered his letters in the early 1890s – in the same format and with similar words – none doubted that the Qing had accepted its lot as a member in the “family of nations.”⁷¹

Zhigang’s interpretation of Burlingame was an exercise in flexible translation. In his rendering of Burlingame’s address to Napoleon III, the Qing was “wishing to console and pacify France,” and China was “yielding to the popular feelings of the world in sharing profits with them.” Sometimes Zhigang’s translation adulterated the Christian claims of Western monarchs with the Confucian idea of Heavenly Mandate. The King of Prussia reputedly said that he “was extraordinary jubilant in accepting the mission’s credential ... and delighted to be friends with China with his full heart,” and “desired to work with the Chinese emperor in ordering his court according to Heaven’s Mandate.” The last clause made little sense even in Chinese – was the King of Prussia partaking of the Qing’s Heavenly Mandate, or was he submitting himself to the Qing emperor? This ambiguity was apparently not considered an issue. It was perhaps a virtue. A degree of awkwardness is accepted, even taken for granted, in documents translated from Western languages. This ambiguity smoothed over the differences between the Christian God and the Chinese notion of Heaven. With the help of the interpreters and Western secretaries in the embassy, Zhigang also translated state letters from smaller European countries. Acknowledgement of the Qing credentials from Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands

were translated so that their monarchs addressed the emperor Tongzhi, respectively, as “the Master with Supreme Authority,” “Highest, Kindest, Most Powerful and Supreme Emperor of the Great Qing” and “Highest Emperor with Power.” These titles mimic the subservient tone of vassal lords to their superior. Since these less powerful countries constituted little threat to the Qing, Zhigang saw fit to relegate them to a lesser status in his presentation of their replies. After their return, the Zongli yamen delivered only these three letters in full text to the emperor, noting their “obedient expressions of goodwill to the Supreme Emperor.”⁷² The mission assumed a Western diplomatic appearance, but it held onto the spirit of the Central Kingdom.

While Binchun made a minimal adaptation to Western etiquette – it was said that his procession was “preceded by a little man with a gilt baton, which he waves very majestically” – Zhigang and Sun Jiagu conducted themselves more like professional diplomats in social functions.⁷³ When the son of Secretary Seward saw them back on a Shanghai street, carried in sedan chairs, he exclaimed: “How different it made the ambassadors appear here, from the show they made abroad!”⁷⁴ Zhigang quickly learned how to behave in dinners and parties with foreign government officials and diplomatic communities. He was strongly affected by the jovial atmosphere in these parties and did not shy away from performing novel customs such as shaking hands with women and sitting by them in banquets. On the embassy’s banquet in Auburn, the *New York Times* reports that “the two Tajens are generally taken in hand by ladies and other gay persons, and stripped, so to speak, of their old habits.” It notes, in particular, that “Chih bears all this better than Sun” and was “almost persuaded” to dance. He was also said to have “pinned a lady’s nosegay on his hat and looked very debonair and festive.”⁷⁵ Zhigang

justifies social interactions in his journal: “Even though it is a Western custom, it fulfills important purposes. It is for officials in foreign affairs to gather with trusted ministers in each country and make merry together, so they stay in touch – not to mention dispelling potential conflict. Even in times of disagreement, there are no words that cannot be exhausted, and no emotion that cannot be conveyed. So this interlocking of ministers fulfills no other purpose than reconciling the mediators between countries. It is easy to stay abreast of the circumstances of each country. This is different from the ancient rule that prohibits officials from meddling in diplomacy.”⁷⁶

After a triumphant tour in the United States, the mission was coldly received in London. The day after their arrival, they were told that the Queen was away in Sweden and since parliament was not in session, most officials were out of office.⁷⁷ Zhigang and his colleagues stayed in the hotel for two weeks before they managed to arrange a meeting with the Foreign Minister Lord Stanley. The prolonged wait was a trial to Zhigang’s martial Manchu spirits. In his hotel room, watching dark clouds hanging outside the window, he imagined himself as a fictional martial artist inflicted with the boredom of living in a refined gentry’s household.⁷⁸ A single episode punctuated the monotony of these two weeks. The Chinese servants and a barber were found drinking and gambling with the English waiters in the hotel and their loud noise wakened other guests. When Zhigang got wind of this, he gave the Chinese servants a severe reprimand. A few days later, he prohibited members of the mission from arranging private visits to government offices or tourist attractions, except when invited by the embassy’s Western assistants.⁷⁹ To make the best use of their time, he sent two Tongwenguan students to the families of two foreign teachers to study with them.⁸⁰

In England, France, and Prussia, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu were preoccupied with visits to modern industries after delivering their credentials, and Burlingame alone engaged their foreign ministers in diplomatic talks. Excepting France, his mediation was effective. Lord Clarendon, the foreign minister of England, wrote a letter declaring that his country would renounce the use of force for its commercial interest, and Prussia would deal with China likewise.⁸¹ At the same time, the Zongli yamen, then engaging with Western ministers in Beijing on treaty revision, wrote from time to time to ask for coordinated movements from Zhigang and Sun Jiagu. The Zongli yamen hoped that the mission could bypass the resident ministers in Beijing and directly persuade their governments to hold back their requests. Arguing from a Western perspective, Burlingame's persuasive power was best exhibited in his exaltation of the Cooperative Policy – he was, after all, best known for being an orator. It was often left for the Chinese envoys to clarify, from the Qing's perspective, the finer points of concern for each treaty revision demand: the granting of imperial audiences to foreign envoys, the navigation of the inland rivers by foreign steamships, the sale of salt and mining by foreigners, and the construction of telegraph lines and railways.⁸² It is hard to tell whether Zhigang's and Sun Jiagu's involvement had any substantial impact on the treaty revision, but their participation imbued the mission with the real meaning of diplomatic representation: that the Qing “should be able to present its views directly, and not solely through the foreign envoys in Peking, however well-disposed these might be.”⁸³

A week after the mission arrived in St. Petersburg, Burlingame contracted pneumonia and died. Zhigang grieved for his colleague. Following Chinese medical theory, he believed Burlingame's death was due to his anxiety over negotiation with

Russia and his fear of being embarrassed in front of the Russians.⁸⁴ His attributing Burlingame's death to business in Russia reflected his own worry over the Russian menace along its long and porous border with China. The loss of Burlingame did not keep the mission from running its full course; neither did it keep down the Russian demands. Zhigang, now the head of the mission, had his mind set on securing a statement from the Czar similar to the Clarendon Letter, and he initiated talks with the Russian foreign office two weeks after Burlingame's death. It was his first and only taste of the negotiation table. The Russians sought the rights to construct underwater telegraphs from the Amur River to the east coast of China through Japan and complained about Qing intervention in border trade. It also requested the Qing to restrict coastal trade in favor of land routes and hasten the settlement with Muslim insurgents in the northwest. By Zhigang's own account, he declined all requests with a polite firmness and gave explanations that accorded with Zongli yamen's policies.

After several days of intense talks interspersed with visits to the fortifications, arsenals and museums in St. Petersburg, Zhigang wrote to the Russian foreign office with his proposed method for future mediation: "Matters beneficial to one party but injurious to the other need not be discussed; matters beneficial to one party and not injurious to the other should be carefully discussed, and only be set out upon if difficulties are cleared out; naturally, matters beneficial to both parties shall be easily discussed and practiced." The letter was a naïve appeal to the moral conscience of the Russians. Zhigang's Confucian universalism kept him from seeing the fact that the other side also operated with a universalism based on the logic of imperialism, trade, and human progress. In this sense, he was conducting diplomacy the same way that Lin Zexu did during the Opium War,

when he wrote to Queen Victoria deploring the moral conduct of the English opium merchants. It is hard to imagine how Zhigang's vague language could have any diplomatic effect. Indeed, the Russians replied asserting that this was exactly how they had been treating China for the past two hundred years! Zhigang seemed to have assumed that this letter was as effective as the ones the mission obtained from England and Prussia.⁸⁵ After all, he had been told by Burlingame that "if a country does not dispute statements put forth in another country's official letters, it has effectively acquiesced in the view that those statements were made according to international law."⁸⁶

After brief stops in Belgium and Italy, the mission returned to France, hoping to enter into official talks with its foreign office. At the juncture, the shocking news of the Tianjin Massacre arrived in Paris. The massacre originated with rumors that French nuns in the Tianjin Sisterhood of Mercy kidnapped children and gouged out their eyes and hearts. When the imperial commissioner Chonghou stepped in for investigation, the truculent French consul, M. Fontanier, broke into a rage and fired his pistol at a crowd of Chinese, killing a servant. The crowd became a mob. In one fit of rage, they killed Fontanier and his assistant, a dozen French nuns and priests, three Russians, and thirty or forty Chinese Christians. The incident was the most severe anti-foreign demonstration in its time, unsurpassed until the Boxer Uprising in 1900. To make matters worse for Zhigang and Sun Jiagu, the French newspapers at first carried the news that "Chinese in Peking killed the French minister, consuls and missionaries." The embassy waited in trepidation and dread – although Zhigang thought that it must be a misreport – and it was not until two weeks later that they learned the full story of the Tianjin massacre. Meanwhile, the mission was engulfed in waves of anti-Chinese anger. Zhigang said that

most Frenchmen eyed the embassy with suspicion and some even openly cursed them, but a few friends also comforted them by saying that international law stipulates that diplomats overseas would not be held responsible for anything their countrymen did in their absence. Still entertaining the hope that they could resume talks with the French government, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu refused to leave “until the matter became clear.” Living in Paris in the wake of the Tianjin incident was a painful experience, but it also demonstrated the envoys’ determination and solidarity. Zhigang was able to write in his diary that he “stood firm and unperturbed in the face of imminent danger,” and Sun Jiagu compared himself to two famous envoys of the Han dynasty who were imprisoned as hostages in their guest countries.⁸⁷

Zhigang’s overall thinking about foreign situations is summarized in his letter to Ding Richang, governor of Jiangsu and a key proponent of self-strengthening at the end of the mission.⁸⁸ He applied the logic of the Warring States and the Mandate of Heaven to explain the waning and waxing of European countries’ strength and their behavior towards China. England and Russia constituted the two major threats. England was extremely wealthy and powerful, and was preoccupied with maintaining its existing establishments. For this reason, it tended to be louder with words than action in its China policy. But once its roots deepened in India, it would inevitably extend its power into China. Russia was a powerful and insidious country that capitalized on disputes and conflicts between other countries. Ever since Prussia and Austria divided up Poland, European states were all afraid that it might expand southward and so worked together to resist it. It now had its eyes on India and northwest China, and although it had not

provoked conflict, Zhigang was alarmed by its enormous investment in military technology.

France was in deep trouble with corruption, domestic discontent, political uprisings, and war with Prussia. The fall of Napoleon III was due to his own maneuvering and violent policies. Zhigang predicted that France would not be an immediate threat to China in the next few years, but was still a concern in the long run. The Catholic Church, having lost its champion, was “a fallen tree with its monkeys dispersing.” If Napoleon III had lost his Mandate, Prussia seemed uniquely positioned to take it. It had “stolen the administrative and military methods of Guanzi (a Warring States strategist), summoning its vassals to fight the French in places near and far.” Impressed by his experience in Prussia, Zhigang had written in his journal that King William had essentially “won” Europe because of the undivided affection of his people, but he avoided any mention of the king’s virtue in his letter to Ding. America was large and wealthy and had plenty of room for development, but it befriended China only because it did not want to see other countries benefit. He saw Prussia and America as similar in their policy towards China: They had no ill intentions, but would adjust their actions depending on China’s strength. As to the other smaller states of Europe, they all wanted to benefit from opening the Chinese market. Even though they did not want to openly defy China, the larger countries would use them as an excuse.

After his return to Beijing, colleagues in the Zongli yamen inquired of him “whether it is possible to know exactly what the foreign countries were up to.” Zhigang replied: “You do not need to ask what foreign countries were up to. Ask ourselves what our intention is, and their intention will be clear.”⁸⁹ Mencius has said that “fortune and

misfortune are both brought upon oneself by one's own actions." Prussia's defeat of France during its civil war affirmed the truth of Confucian wisdom across time and space. The only way to defend China, then, was in the proper ordering of the administration and the prosperity of the people's livelihood.

Return

The mission returned to Shanghai on November 10, 1871, the day before the first batch of culprits were executed for their involvement in the Tianjin Massacre.⁹⁰ This final sentence was a result of vehement protest and threats of war by Western ministers. In addition to the executions, the Qing also exiled the responsible prefect and magistrate, promised a large indemnity, and sent Chonghou on an apology mission to France. Many literati felt insulted by this settlement and the apologetic gesture of the officials assigned to work on the case. When Zeng Guofan, the aging statesman, issued a court statement denying the anti-Christian rumors and ordered death sentences for the twenty-one culprits and dismissal of the officials in charge, he subjected his lifelong reputation to virulent attacks and wild rumors.⁹¹ He was transferred out of his post of Zhili governor-general, and replaced by his protégé Li Hongzhang. Li managed to reduce the number of executions to fifteen and appeased the enraged French minister, Julien de Rochechouart, who had demanded the executions of the two officials in charge. Having just returned from France, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu, too, found themselves the target of suspicion. They avoided contact with foreigners lest they be called traitors like Zeng, although they did report to Li that "Zeng's grand name was widely acclaimed in the West."⁹² When

Secretary Seward made a stop in Beijing during his world travel and expressed his wish to see his “old friend,” he only received a polite letter declining his visit. The excuse was that they could not see him before their impending imperial audience.⁹³

After resting for nearly a month at the Zongli yamen, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu reported back to the emperor. The emperor said a few “warm words” for consolation, but gave them no special commendation.⁹⁴ Sun Jiagu was especially hurt by the lack of official recognition of the toil he endured for three years. He told Fang Junshi that he “knew only to be cautious” abroad, “did not humiliate his emperor or father” by stepping beyond the bounds of Confucian ritual, and returned with full moral integrity. Referring to the hostile atmosphere he endured in France, he compared himself to ancient envoys taken as prisoners: “Zhang Qian was the most fortunate person in history (in the position he was granted); I do not dare to expect what he gained. Su Wu lived in pain and kept his integrity for nineteen years, but in the end he was only appointed as ‘overseer of the tributary states.’” His defensive tone exhibits a strong feeling of insecurity, perhaps due to the suspicion he received back home. In the end, he consoled himself by saying that “fairness should naturally exist in people’s heart. All I can do is to follow my fate, and perhaps all I can expect is no blame and no praise.”⁹⁵ Like many low and middle level officials in the Zongli yamen, Sun Jiagu had ventured into foreign affairs with the hope of gaining a speedy promotion.⁹⁶ It is understandable, the frustration he felt at the uncertainty of his career prospects. In the long run, however, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu were distinguished from their peers by holding relatively important posts. In less than a year, Zhigang was transferred to the Inner Mongolian frontier, serving as counselor of Uliasutai (*Wuliyasutai canzan dachen*) and in 1875, to the even more critical position of

the Urga Amban (*kulun banshi dachen*). Sun Jiagu was also elevated to a circuit intendant in the Hubei province.⁹⁷

Zhigang and Sun Jiagu both kept journals during their travel. Unlike Binchun, who submitted his writings immediately upon his return, they prudently kept their journals to themselves. Sun Jiagu intimated to Fang Junshi (almost certainly at the latter's prompting) that he had kept an account outside his official writings, but did not think the trendy diary form ideal for publication. He did consider existing accounts on the West insufficient: "Only *Yinghuan zhilue* is trustworthy, but still not detailed enough." He told Fang that it would require a few months' leave the next spring to edit his writing before submitting it for official review. But if he ever finished this account, there was significant delay. A court edict came as late as 1875 asking whether he had finished it. He gave the same reply as five years prior – that he would make some time for the writing, and promised to submit it once it was finished.⁹⁸ We do not know whether it ever made it to the Zongli yamen; even if it did, it was certainly never published.

Zhigang also kept his journal to himself at first. When he was serving in Uliasutai in 1872, a fellow official surnamed Yi asked him whether he kept a travelogue during the mission. "I have read in the past Binchun's *Chengcha biji*," he said to Zhigang, "I liked how it entertains the reader, but it also made me confused [about Western affairs]."⁹⁹ When Zhigang admitted that he had kept a journal, Yi begged him for a look and was eventually shown his drafts. These were not in a neat condition when Yi received them. He found them to be "chaotic scribbles" on travel mileage and social customs, intermixed with Zhigang's commentaries. It seems that Zhigang virtually abandoned his journal after his return, and did not mean to submit it to the Zongli yamen or for publication. Even

though it dispelled his confusion, Yi still did not consider it fit for publication. He merely transcribed the parts of the journal “most concerned with morals of the time, hearts of the people, national policies, and the livelihood of the people” and mailed them in several batches to his son, Yi Hou, to help enrich the boy’s knowledge. When Yi came back from Uliasutai in 1874, his son had already compiled the transcripts into a publishable form. To convince his father to publish it, he compared the importance of Zhigang’s journal to *Zhigulu*, a book on ancient military techniques that the family had published a decade before: “It is not right to love only the ancients and ignore contemporaries.” The son died soon after, and his father finally published Zhigang’s journal in 1877 under the title *Chushi taixi ji*. He states in its preface that he did this out of pity for his son – he did not want the boy’s hard work to go to waste – but also considered some of Zhigang’s words worthy of publication. 1877 was a bad time to release a journal like this. Guo Songtao’s *Shixi jicheng* was impeached in the sixth month of the same year, and an edict ordered the immediate destruction of its templates. We do not know whether the publication of *Chushi taixi ji* came before or after that, but presumably the scale of public outrage at Guo’s journal would have kept Yi from publishing.

Zhigang was the Urga (*Kulun*) Ambam from 1872 to 1876, taking charge of affairs of the Jebtsundamba khutukhtu (the highest Mongolian lama), the Tushiyetu and Setsen aimak, and the miscellaneous affairs regarding border trade with Russian caravans.¹⁰⁰ According to a contemporary observer, this transfer out of the capital was due to his “unwillingness to serve the officials in power.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, his matter-of-fact bluntness, lack of literary suaveness and Manchu upbringing fitted him ill for a career

among the cultured elites in the capital. He did try to catch the attention of Li Hongzhang upon his return, having submitted to him a list of newest weaponry and advising him on which particular guns to acquire. But from Li's heavily embellished replies, it seems that he treated Zhigang with politeness and distance rather than genuine cordiality. Despite his quick grasp of scientific facts, Zhigang still belonged to the class of "Confucian amateurs;" he was not the type of professional that Li and his mentor Zeng Guofan most eagerly sought for their industrial enterprises. Zhigang's duty in Mongolia had little to do with his experiences abroad. Except for a bold attempt to remove the kowtow ritual that past Urga ambans customarily performed to the Jebtsundamba khutukhtu, his work was limited to bureaucratic routine.¹⁰²

Years of traveling and living in the cold and stormy Inner Mongolia weather damaged Zhigang's health. He frequently memorialized for sick leaves, complaining about the heart pains and dizziness.¹⁰³ In 1876, he was discharged and allowed to return to Beijing. He lived in semi-reclusion after retirement, shunning his family and living alone in three mud houses he built by the Kunming lake. It was a pastoral life reminiscent of the free-spirited poet Tao Yuanming in the fourth century, who gave up official life in contempt. Just like Tao, Zhigang was often visited by peasants and other visitors and loved to keep them overnight. He moved yet again in his last years into a monastery in a valley north of Beijing and lived there until his death. The trajectory of his life after the mission points to years of frustration and emotional torment. It was a characteristic of his time that people who had seen more of the world had few channels to voice their opinions. Binchun hid his concerns behind his jovial poems, revealing his worries of "heavenly change" only in the occasional stanza. A middling bureaucrat like

Zhigang, who had neither stunning erudition nor powerful political connections, was best advised to keep his ideas to himself.

In 1890, near the end of his life, Zhigang had his journal published again with the help of friends, based on *Chushi taixi ji* and his original drafts, under the name *Chushi taixi jiyao*. They trimmed and reordered the contents to make the text more compact. Nearly every sentence was shortened; in many places only a minimal amount of description was preserved. Given the editors' predilection for succinctness, it is surprising that *jiyao* contains many phrases, paragraphs, and even pages not seen in the *ji*. These additions generally fall into one of several categories. Some are short and retrospective notes by Zhigang himself. An example is a note added to the end of the empress dowager's inquiry about the audience, explaining that "at that time, the ritual for imperial audience (for foreign ministers) had not been established."¹⁰⁴ Second, discrepancies often occur in descriptions of ceremonial occasions. Significantly, details not found in the first printing appear in the second. Given how well they fit into their original context, they were more likely crossed out from the original manuscript for the first printing – by the cautious Yi – rather than additions made by Zhigang and his pithy editors for the second printing. The restored content makes the ceremonies seem more formal and elaborate. The following extract, from his notes on the day of his meeting President Johnson, demonstrates these differences. In this case, the later, shorter *jiyao* actually preserves more content: it is more precise in describing the procedure of the ceremony, the positioning of the envoys, and notes that a panegyric is an integral part of Western ceremony. Whereas the earlier *ji* refers to Burlingame's speech as "what he drafted in Western language," it was now "words intended as a panegyric" (*songdao zhi*

ci). The new version also states specifically that the President shook hands with every member of the mission, even the students. The new *jiyao* nonetheless leaves out details such as the south-facing orientation of President Johnson, which Zhigang had thought was important following the Chinese tradition, and the speech Johnson gave to the mission.

Chushi taixi ji (1877)

Burlingame et. al went to meet President (trans. Chief Leader). At noon, we went to his foreign office first, and went to Mr. Seward to where he lives, customarily called the “White House,” because it is built with white stones on all sides. Went first to the circular room in the middle to wait, a few officials were also there.

Still led by Mr. Seward, President Johnson came to the middle of the circular room, facing south, and Envoy Burlingame read from a draft in person. After the speech in Western language, Mr. Seward took President’s draft in Western language and read it to Burlingame.

When this was over, it handed the credential to President, to be displayed for all to see. Then he handed it back to Mr. Seward, rolled up. Shortly afterward, Mr. Seward introduced us in order, and the President shook hands to greet us one by one.

Chushi taixi jiyao (1890)

Envoy Burlingame, Envoy Zhi, Envoy Sun, Secretary Brown, Secretary de Champs, and the students went to the white-house official office to deliver the credentials in person. First we went to the foreign ministry. We into the big government office customarily called “the white house,” because it was built with white stones.

Mr. Seward went in first, and came back and went into the same room (the oval office) with us all. Envoy Burlingame stood on the front, and Envoys Zhi and Sun by his sides, and the assistants stood behind. Assistant Brown had already obtained our credentials back from the American foreign office, and Burlingame handed it to President Johnson. When this was over, he displayed the credential for all to see. The only difference is that in Western ritual, the minister must deliver words of praises and prayer, to be given in person, and personally hand over the credentials.

After the ritual, Seward received the credential. From Burlingame down to the assistants and students, not one was missing in the President’s handshake and greeting ritual.

十六日，蒲使等公同往謁伯里希頓（譯

蒲使偕同志使、孫氏、柏協理、德協理

言統領也)。午刻，先至其外部公署，隨同華大臣至其所居之處，俗謂白房，因周砌白石也。先至其中間圓屋以俟，同有大臣數人。仍由華大人導引，伯里喜頓朱文遜至圓屋中間，南向立，蒲使執所擬面陳之，洋語述畢，華大臣即執伯里喜頓所擬之洋文，向蒲使代述。畢，即將國書遞與伯里喜頓親接展示。仍交華大臣捲起，旋由華大臣挨次指引謁見，伯里喜頓逐一執手問好。(55-56)

及學生往其白房公所，親遞國書。先至外部，同華大臣至大公所，俗謂白房，乃白石所建也。進至圓屋，有數洋官在。由華大人先入，復出，同至原堂。蒲使在前，志使孫使雁行立，協理等在後。柏協理於至其外部時，賚回國書，即由蒲使親遞於伯里喜頓專遞親接。訖，仍將國書展示。惟西洋禮節，使臣必有頌禱之辭，當面陳述，然後行親遞之。禮畢，華爾特接收，旋由華爾特一指引謁見，自蒲使以次，至於協理學生等，無不由伯里喜頓逐一執手問好為儀。(24b)

Thirdly, the 1890 *jiyao* includes the occasional comment, usually after a long and clinical description, in which Zhigang expresses his own feelings about what he saw (See Table I). Some of them would have been controversial. Repeatedly he suggests that some Western practices were closer to ancient Chinese traditions than was contemporary Chinese ritual. His entire exposition comparing Western astronomy to Chinese divination, missing from the 1877 edition, found its way back in. There is also biting criticism of officials in charge of foreign affairs and of corrupt local officials who drove people into the arms of missionaries. It is not surprising, given Yi's selective attitude towards the journal, that he had removed these subjective and potentially disruptive comments. A final difference is that whole pages with no incendiary or extraneous content were missing from the earlier Yi edition. These were likely pages accidentally withheld from Yi, or which Yi had not considered worth transcribing for his son.

Table I. Selected passages cut from *Chushi taixi ji*; page numbers are from *Chushi taixi jiyao*.

| | | |
|----|-----------------|---|
| 1 | juan 1, 6a-6b | On shipyards: “From what I have seen, it is easy to obtain wealth and power! I am only afraid that the lofty-minded would despise it and think of it as unworthy, and the shallow- and near-minded would gasp at it, thinking it is too much to try. How shall they cope with the circumstances?” ... “This is what Chao Cuo (a Western Han strategist) said about having trained soldiers and sharp weapons. It has been practiced since ancient times. But if you tell this to the dull-witted and the insensitive, it is rather a waste of words.” |
| 2 | juan 1, 19b-20a | On friendship. “I did not expect to see in this foreign land friendship of the kind between Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya, and to such a degree! Their honoring of sincerity is a good custom, but when it concerned business transactions, they insist on making contracts, even between father and son. Isn’t this loving sincerity, but not true learning?” |
| | juan 1, 23 | On the open socialization of diplomats: “If fellows like Guo Kai and Hou Sheng (two corrupt turncoats of the Warring States) mingle themselves, would it not be dangerous? It is difficult to choose a good envoy.” |
| 3 | juan 1, 25 | Notes on the deliverance of credential to Johnson: “Westerners do not avoid names, so everyone in the country may call the American President by his name, Johnson. As I think about it, the custom of avoiding names started only in the middle ancient times. The Book of Rites says that the Odes and History do not avoid using names... Westerners’ custom of not avoiding names is abiding by ancient norms.” |
| 4 | juan 1, 33b-34a | Notes on translating the Burlingame treaty: “People of the remote regions had different ways to construct their writings. Westerns, Indians, the Tungstic and the Muslims all had sprawling and wiry writing forms and they write horizontally... Then it suddenly occurred to me that the high ancients governed people by tying knots on ropes, and the shapes of those knots are similar to foreign writing... So I know the ways of high antiquity still exist.” |
| 7 | juan 2, 7b-8a | Meditation on Chinese practice of divination after a visit to the Cambridge Observatory. See page 13. |
| 8 | juan 2, 9a | Upon visiting a mechanized textile mill: “How could the trend of opening commerce with the West be stopped? If China could apply Western methods, Westerners themselves would be in trouble!” |
| 9 | juan 2, 26a | After discussion with Burlingame on treaty revision with England: “Those dealing with affairs with the West did not understand that extra-treaty demands are not authorized by their countries ... Think about it: There are numerous things not written in the treaties, and if we permit them all, on what basis are we dealing with diplomacy? The Chinese do not understand this, and are all fooled by them. This is wrong.” |
| 10 | juan 2, 35a-b | He wonders why, given Napoleon III’s decree to Frenchmen in China asking them to obey Chinese laws, French missionaries were still behaving lawlessly. “If Chinese officials could really purify their motives, love their people, and make clear their teachings and policies, Westerners would not necessarily disobey their countries’ decrees, and disrupt China...” |

The examples above show that the editors of *jiyao* intended to preserve Zhigang's troubled state of mind, his speculations about the roots of Western civilization, and his doubts about certain Chinese practices. In the twenty years after the mission, a great deal more information had become available on the West. Compared with the increasing body of travelogues, translations of Western books, and newspapers, the narrative content of his journal was less valuable – many of his descriptions of Western technology were undoubtedly out of date. This shifted priority is reflected in the editors' trimming of the main text. His personal insights, however, remained valuable. The Qing's disastrous defeat in the Sino-French War (1884-85) sent a shocking message to the literati. The urgency of self-strengthening, once restricted to a small circle of officials, was now widely felt. Talking about the merits of the Western learning was no longer taboo, but had become the fashion of the day. Publishers of *Chushi taixi jiyao* clearly belonged to the camp of progressive Confucianists. In its preface, a man named Songling summed up the purpose of this republication, in language wrapped in proper eulogy: "Since the Xianfeng period, the policy of transforming the barbarians with civilized culture has brought blessing to both China and foreign countries. But when I slowly unraveled the message of this book, the author seems worried about hidden troubles day and night. Why? Ancient gentlemen often worried about governing and saw having wise rulers as a source of concern ... because rulers with superior intelligence will think little of their officials, and if they have no fear in the defense of their country, they will think little of their people."¹⁰⁵ Songling compares Zhigang to the Han Dynasty scholar Jia Yi, whose work was not appreciated by in his lifetime, but later helped restore the Han dynasty. He hopes that Zhigang's words, too, could be put into practice by later generations.

There is little evidence that Zhigang's work ever became widely influential. Among later ministers and diplomats, only Zhang Yinhuan appeared to have read it.¹⁰⁶ But the fact that it made it into the geographic collection, *Xiaofang huzhai yudi congshu*, suggests that contemporaries valued it as a source of knowledge about the West. Among the scores of Europe travelers' journals in the collection, it captures a unique view of the West – the use of Confucianism to make sense of the new and the strange, absorbing them into a universalistic world view. Inevitably, many diarists of later years exhibited a similar tendency, but none to Zhigang's degree. His belief in the explanatory power of Confucianism was genuine and unswerving, and he did not make a show of it to curry political favor with the conservatives. Yet his was only a short-lived and personal attempt. The gap between Chinese and Western learning was widening, its border soon delineated, and a new space of consciousness was created for the latter category. Guo Songtao filled his journals with notes on scientific experiments, but he consistently declared, with an uncharacteristic humility, that he knew nothing about Western learning. A belief started to emerge, sometime during the 1870s, that Western learning did not belong to the realm of the Confucian gentlemen, but to the students and professionals that the Qing started sending abroad in that decade.

III. Curiosities from Ocean Voyages Zhang Deyi's Early Journeys, 1866-1872

One winter afternoon in 1918, Zhang Deyi, clad in his best ceremonial gown, summoned his sons to his sickbed. Knowing that death was imminent, he dictated his last memorial to the Xuantong Emperor, the twelve-year old ex-monarch who was seven years deposed. "In the last seven years," Zhang said, "I have been unable to sleep and eat. Haunted by illnesses that no medicine could cure, I know my end is in sight. Your Highness, being so young and already so bright and diligent, know that sincerity and respect is the foundation of the country, and that grave distress makes a sage. I am only grieving that my leaves withered before they repaid the benevolence of the nourishing spring."¹ At seventy-two, Zhang was a veritable relic of a bygone age. He had seen, in his long career, reform proposals emerge and fail, wars fought and lost, constitutional movements surge and ebb, and in the end, he watched helplessly as revolution swept through the nation and one province after another declared independence. For several years, in his Beijing courtyard, he kept the names of the officials who came and paid their last tribute the deceased Emperor Guangxu, and there was only one, he lamented, only one in the whole vast empire, who stayed in the imperial graveyard for the full three years of the mourning period.²

In the revolutionary fervor of the 1910s, few would recognize that this old shriveled man, tottering behind his country's advance, had been among the empire's first explorers of the West. Only nineteen when he embarked on the Binchun mission, Zhang brought back news from the West that few of his countrymen could bring themselves to believe. For more than a decade, his journal was one of the richest documents on the

outside world available to the Chinese literati. He had gone on a total of eight missions to Europe, America, and Japan, rising steadily from a mere student-interpreter to become minister to England in 1903.³ Born in 1847 into an impoverished Han banner family in Manchuria, Zhang was home-schooled by his mother in his early childhood and sent to a charity school at seven, his tuition paid by a great uncle.⁴ When he was fifteen, each of the Manchu, Mongol, and Han banners were enlisting youth to enroll in the newly established Tongwenguan.⁵ Zhang was among the ten selected and began his training as an interpreter of English. With a natural gift for language, Zhang passed the school's first grand exam with the highest distinction and received an eighth civil rank.⁶ Fengyi, a Mongolian youth and friend of Zhang's, scored just below him and received a ninth civil rank. When shortly after the exam, Robert Hart was planning a home visit to England, the Zongli yamen thought it good to send Zhang, Fengyi and their fellow student Yanhui, to go along so they could observe the "merits and weaknesses of Western countries."⁷ Hart then succeeded in having his secretary, Binchun, appointed head of the mission, nominally to supervise the students, as discussed in the first chapter.

Growing up in the cooperative atmosphere of the early Tongzhi years, Zhang was too young to have witnessed the two Opium Wars, which fundamentally reshaped the Qing diplomatic landscape. Compared to Binchun and Zhigang's generation, Zhang had a certain detachment from China's external crisis not uncharacteristic of the contemporary lads of his age. For most of his early career, he was merely a cog in the Qing diplomatic machine. As the only child of a humble family with prospects in officialdom, he brought with him a typical deference that ensured he could never become a dashing diplomat. He learned from his early years of service that he must keep his head

down in order to make his way up. Undistinguished as a diplomat, he made an indelible mark in history in his own way – through his journals. Zhang was the most prolific diarist among Chinese travelers to foreign countries in the nineteenth century. Like his superiors Binchun and Zhigang, Zhang's journaling started at the Zongli yamen's prompting – the undertaking of 1866, after all, presupposed that the Tongwenguan students were the primary observers.⁸ Not knowing quite what to record, Zhang settled into a form that starts with the date, the weather, and leads into a summary of the main activity of the day and its attendant observations, ending with the time of his return. When important points emerged or patterns of life were discerned, he would follow up with a “*ji*” – an empirical and descriptive note on the subject resembling an anthropologist's field notes. Sprinkled throughout his journals, and sometimes cross-referenced, they served as an aid and reminder to him and as “fun facts” to his readers. He continued journaling for the rest of his life. From his first mission in 1866 to his last one in 1903, he wrote eight lengthy journals of the daily accounts of his service. The first of these was titled *Hanghai shuqi* (Account of curiosities of an ocean voyage) and the subsequent ones *Er shuqi* (Second account of curiosities), *San shuqi* (Third account of curiosities) and so forth.⁹

These journals are a treasure trove of the daily life of the Chinese embassy and the European societies they saw. With youthful and untrained eyes, Zhang simply wrote everything he beheld, from the mundane details of everyday life to the most outlandish displays of mechanical gadgetry and scientific experimentation. A more utilitarian observer might choose to prioritize his description of events based on political relevance. With Zhang, a visit to the American congress might receive a mere two sentences,

whereas he lavished many pages on rules for marbles and gambling. He did not delve into such matters as arms manufacturing, but never missed an insight on courtship and dance-hall etiquette. Zhang's penchant for frivolity might have roused the consternation of contemporary statesmen – if they had ever bothered to read his journals – but it also makes his journals valuable to historians. It is precisely in these nitty-gritty accounts of the everyday life that we see the mental shape of a young man who faced the new formidable world. As a low-level associate, his point of view and sympathies were bound to be different from those of the ranking bureaucrats. His interpretation and portrayal of the West differed correspondingly, and in surprisingly ways. This chapter will concentrate on Zhang's first three missions, undertaken in his early life, as he travelled with the Binchun, Zhigang and Chonghou missions.

The Collector of Curios

Binchun concealed his shock and anxiety in his belles-lettre; Zhang relied on certain stylistic elements for a similar purpose. His use of “*shuqi*” (to transmit the curios) in the titles of all his journals provides a good entry point. “*Qi*” (the rare, precious, and unexpected) is evocative of “*chuanqi*,” a genre of vernacular fiction that matured in the Tang dynasty featuring tales of love, knight-errantry and supernatural intervention. One also sees a parallel between “*shuqi*” and the fictional “*zhiguai*” (and sometimes “*jiyi*”), which comprised of stories on supernatural phenomena and ghostly subjects that emerged in the Six Dynasties and were popularized in the Tang. While there is no well-defined line between *chuanqi* and *zhiguai* – many works incorporate characteristics of both

genres – the former is marked by its finer narrative quality and romantic themes, and the latter is often more crudely conceived and driven by the desire to “prove the truthfulness of the supernatural.”¹⁰ As literary scholar Sing-chen Chiang points out, the traditions of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* “connote a common thread of departure from what is culturally accepted as orthodox, normal, normative, and valuable.” With the term “shuqi,” Zhang signals to his readers that they need to put their common sense aside and be prepared to enter into a world of imagination.

The content of his journal bears out the curious choice of name. Upon first glance, his journal seems to be a record of all things queer and exciting. He recorded just about anything he pleased. This tendency set him apart from all other official travelogues. His superiors, writing with nobler goals in mind, had to sidestep the morally dubious and politically unacceptable, restricting their accounts to a small set of what they saw and experienced. Partly because Zhang’s mind was not yet loaded with political concerns, his writing exhibited the spontaneous and private quality of a genuine personal diary. When he considered publishing his first journal in 1868, he undoubtedly faced pressure from those who disdained knowledge about the West. While Binchun made the obvious choice of subsuming the West under traditional aestheticism, Zhang chose to accentuate its exotic flavor in his title: “Account of Curios of an Ocean Voyage.” By assuming the persona of the “collector of curios,” like the renowned fantasy writers Pu Songling and Ji Yun, Zhang was able to preserve in his journal contents that might seem unconventional and even outrageous to the Confucian eye. In his own words, his journals were “merely for dispelling sleepiness before teatime and after drinking.”¹¹

Hidden just beneath these modest claims was a creative and ambitious mind. By the start of his second trip abroad, Zhang saw journaling as a serious business. He resolved not to waste time in wandering and frivolous chit-chat, but to extract something useful from seemingly mundane interactions with foreigners, and to dedicate himself to knowing and writing about the unknown parts of the world. The purpose of his journaling did not coincide exactly with the purpose of the missions as envisioned by the Zongli yamen. He was driven by a naturalist and ethnographic impulse to document the unknown parts of the world. When his fellow students complained about his befriending the Japanese on a steamer, he took the opportunity to make a point on the purpose of life. “Being born onto this world, there is something to learn wherever one finds oneself, and there is no one that we cannot dedicate our sincerity to. The ancients have a wonderful saying: ‘One should not abandon learning even while traveling.’”¹² In one instance, he even tried to inspire an American traveler along similar lines. When the mission was in New York, he was brought to a young Africa-explorer who had, after surviving a long travel in the desert, come home to indulge in wine and gaming. “Living in this world,” Zhang told him, “if one does not write a book and establish one’s own words, to be passed on to future generations, then one’s life is wasted. You have already traveled and seen much, and have written a book, why not dispel your fear and continue your work? The entire world would be covered by your good writing.”¹³

Most of his writing is spontaneous free-jotting and unanalytical. One looks in vain for any sign of systematic attempt to fit the West into his existing world. Until the Chonghou mission in 1870, his writing showed little awareness of Western threat. Even when this consciousness did emerge, it chiefly consisted of his occasional attempts to

preach Confucianism to foreigners, and his assertion that “China and the West each had things to learn from each other.” He much preferred to inundate his journals with ethnographical sketches, cultural norms, and the multitudinous of odds and ends of the industrial world. Since the Chinese understanding of the West existed primarily on political and military terms during this period, Zhang’s somewhat anti-political point of view must have given his journals an unworldly quality in the eyes of contemporary readers.

Material West

Unlike Zhigang, who struggled to see reason in the Western sciences, Zhang took it for granted. He asserted in his journal that the efficacy of steamships and steam-powered polders were the work not of heaven’s will, but the ingenuity of the human mind. Facts of nature that might have seemed like common knowledge to an educated Westerner were to him supreme revelations, and he took great pains in proselytizing them, even to Westerners themselves. Armed with a modicum of newly acquired knowledge in geography, he was confident enough to challenge an English friend’s casual comment that “summer days are dreadful and winter days are lovely.” Probably because the English word “day” can also be translated into ‘*ri*’ (sun) in Chinese, Zhang took his friend’s comment as an assertion that the sun in the summer is hotter than the sun in winter. He explained to him that “if one moved to the equator, both winter and summer will be dreadful. This is not because of the power of the sun, but the earth.”¹⁴

Yet just like Binchun, he was not really interested in science qua science, but in its novel applications. His lack of order gives his descriptions of the industrial world a spontaneous and breathless quality, as if the author traveled through a magic carnival. His description of machines captures their physical appearance, their wheezing sounds, dazzling strength and efficiency. But other than recognizing the universal use of steam engine, he rarely looked into the actual workings of these machines. “Buzzwords” like *‘huoji’*, *‘lunji’* and *‘huolunji’*, all referring to the steam engine, were thrown about willy-nilly. He had little idea what those words connoted, as shown in his observation of the engine of a steamship: “hot water rolls, and the iron wheels spin by themselves; the wheels spin and the ship advances by itself.”¹⁵

Despite his general approval of industrialization, Zhang could not help but share a degree of uneasiness with the conservative officials about the material excesses of the West. He brought with him a literati’s love of the natural and unadorned, and tried, whenever he could, to create little pockets of familiarity out of his environment. Within the limit of his meager allowances, Zhang often bought potted flowers, and sometimes even small pieces of imported Chinese products, to decorate his bedroom. When Zhigang sent him to stay at Mr. Edlin’s house as a pupil, the first thing he did was to decorate his corner of the study in a Chinese style – with scrolls, plants, incense and tea – and even gave it a Neo-Confucian name: “Hut for the Cultivation of the Heart.”¹⁶ Small though these gestures were, they helped relieve his homesickness and let him regain a modicum of control.

A mild-tempered man of moderate income, Mr. Edlin made his new Chinese pupil welcome in his home. Before this experience, Zhang had lived a pampered life in

luxurious hotels and rarely seen a house of the average middleclass family. He could not but notice that the Edlins lived “a poor life” and earned their income by tutoring. For the two months that Zhang stayed in his house, the two were on amicable terms and often had long talks on China the West. In addition to exposing him to the ordinary life of an educated English family, Edlin also took him to his church (for he was also a priest or minister) for services, performances and hymnal rehearsals, taught him world history and geography, and made his library available to him. Zhang’s journal during this period includes many notes with an insider’s view of British culture obtained from Edlin and his friends.

The family’s unassuming ways stood in glaring contrast to the opulent taste of the upper class families that the embassy had been socializing with, and it was an alternative much preferred by Zhang. This experience precipitated a major realization on the nature of Westerners: Not all of them shared an insatiable desire for the new. “There were two types of Westerners: the trend seekers who loved the new and the antique lovers who admired the old,” he reports, “The trend seekers, once they saw something novel change their desires accordingly. Thus they shift their attention constantly, from trains to steamboats, to clocks, to hot air balloons, and generally despise frugality. The antique lovers, on the other hand, want everything to follow the ways of their ancestors and are not willing to accommodate any change. But because this group was by far overpowered by the trend seekers, little vestige remained from the old times.”¹⁷ Simplistic though this comment might be, it was a large step towards a more complicated understanding of the industrial ethos of the West. Instead of dismissing it as moral degeneration, Zhang saw active pursuit of new inventions as an independent value in its own right and the primary

drive towards creating a more convenient world. He did not follow the traditionalists' impulse to praise the antique lovers, but depicted them as the trend seekers' equals.

Later, in a separate note, he explained the idea of the Ages of Man. The Golden Age in the West was like the Three Dynasties in China, and moral deterioration produced the Silver and Bronze Ages. "After thousands of years, social customs worsened by day and darkness prevailed, and the 'Age of Iron' arrived." But he also gave it a twist with what sounded like theories of social evolution: "Westerners say that the present age is better than the ancient, and so stopped having an antique-admiring heart. Therefore they kept using 'Age of Iron' to denote the prevalence of iron: trains have iron tracks, boats have iron wheels, machines use iron devices, and doctors use iron (tonic) water – not one of these things does not belong to the world of iron!"¹⁸ Incredulous though he might have been, he did not seem repelled by the idea that an "age of iron" might be a step forward from the old times. Zhang merely made the observation, never developed it any further and never brought it up in the context of China. Twenty years later, in his translations of Herbert Spencer, Yan Fu would visit the same dichotomy, but identified the two opposing views with East and West: "The greatest difference in the principles of West and East, that which is most irreconcilable, is the fact that, while the Chinese love the ancients and ignore the modern, Westerners stress the new in order to overcome the old."¹⁹ Had Zhang attempted to think about Chinese tradition in a global context, it would not be a difficult conclusion to reach. But the compartmentalized and non-judgmental approach he followed kept him from making explicit comparisons between China and the West.

Then there were the odds and ends with no apparent practical value for a Chinese gentleman: funhouse mirrors, wigs, canes and umbrellas used by British gentlemen, breast lifts, infant pacifiers, music boxes, cooking utensils, musical instruments, and pets.²⁰ Toys and games occupied a significant portion of his journal. The Binchun mission was so short and busy that he did not take note of the gaming culture, but the Zhigang mission afforded him ample time to watch and participate in the entertainment of the upper and middle classes. Rules for popular parlor games are recorded with exactitude. Outdoor games such as rolling hoops, spinning tops and seesaws always caught his fancy. He painstakingly translated rules for thirteen marble games, styles for thirty-one physical exercises, and a fourteen-point lesson on how to swim.²¹ In one instance, a set of children's building blocks so took his fancy that he filled half a dozen pages with the shapes and measurements of all the wood blocks.²² One day he wandered alone into a gambling house in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a commune on the outskirts of Paris, where he memorized the set-up and rules for half of the games played there.²³

Gaming culture was an unexpected discovery that much endeared the West to him. He was fascinated by all forms of toys and games: at the age of nineteen, he was just as interested in the rocking horse as in badminton and chess. Childhood in traditional China, especially for boys, meant long hours of study under adult supervision. Motivated by the state-sponsored civil service examinations, parents emphasized early intellectual development of the child and discouraged them from "mixing and playing with other children."²⁴ Upper-class girls, living secluded lives in their inner chambers, were indulged in a wider selection of games and toys as pastimes, but it was generally thought that young men of good prospect should not dally with playthings. These divergent

expectations of girls and boys can be seen in the Qing dynasty novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, where Jia Baoyu, the teenage hero, was chastised by the patriarch for wasting time in women's games and neglecting his study.²⁵ One surmises, from the level of detail and precision in Zhang account of the games, that he meant to bring the games back to his family and friends. His meticulous measurement of the wood blocks suggests that he planned to reproduce them upon returning to China.

Zhang was characteristically silent on what attracted him to these games. There does, however, seem to be a preference for games involving physical exertion. According to historian Ping-chen Hsiung, a proper Neo-Confucian education discouraged physical activities and outdoor play. Parents and teachers praised children who showed no interest in socializing with peers and avoided going out to play.²⁶ Yet Zhang flouted these prejudices in his attention to games involving physical exercise. His single longest journal entry lists notes on swimming that he acquired from a British swimming coach. He starts by observing that "even though swimming is merely a game, it strengthens the will and courage, and helps save lives...Some people might think that swimming is not good for the weak, but doctors say that it works the arms and keeps illness away."²⁷ Underlying this casual comment was a newfound ideal of masculinity and a healthy body, different from the image of the genteel Confucian scholar. As always, he did not seem to take this conviction far, and was interested in games primarily for their fun and novelty.

Zhang was not the only journalist to have noticed the importance of games in Western cultures. Some of the older officials saw in physical games an important source of military strength and the cultivation of national character. Zhigang, for example, saw children in an orphanage carrying each other and "looking like they are playing," and

immediately understood it as being practice for carrying wounded soldiers.²⁸ Guo Songtao, observing German officers cracking walnuts with their foreheads and elbows and playing leap-frog, was completely taken in by their show of physical prowess. “They are all completely carefree and obviously enjoying themselves immensely... They are fair-skinned and refined, spending the whole day reading, without break. That country certainly produces admirably talented men. Admirable!”²⁹ The idea that strength of body reflects fitness of mind, even for the gentlemanly, would take decades to take root in China. But even in these earliest accounts we see glimmers of the awareness that education of the physical body is not only acceptable, but a necessary precondition for a strong nation. The fact that none of the Confucian literati travelers spoke ill of physical exercises – even though they might not choose to write about it – suggests a much more flexible ideal of human talent than previously understood. The aversion to labor might be culturally engrained, but it was only meaningful within a specific social context – that of the diametric functions of the literati and the peasantry. The West showed that physical and mental labor need not be oppositional, and that games could be appropriated for serious purposes, both for the individual and the nation.

Cities, Governments and Rulers

Governance was not Zhang’s specialty. Compared to the immediate interest he took in collecting facts on social customs and triviality, his attention to the more somber business of Western governments was tenuous during his first mission, and developed only gradually in his later travels. What he did write on the ways of Western

governments is permeated by an aura of romantic utopianism. He saw hints of the Three Dynasties in European institutions and rulers and did not hesitate to heap them with praises. The clarity and order in Western city life stood in shocking contrast with Chinese cities, and Zhang almost immediately adopted a comparative standpoint. Everything he wrote about city life in London and Paris had an unwritten subtext – he did not describe the unfavorable aspects of China – but it was obvious that his attention was almost exclusively tuned to the superiority of the West. Every half a mile in Paris streets, he reports, there was a copper toggle to dispense water for street cleaning, and the dirty water would flow down from the gutters out to the sea. Every ten trees, there was a spherical house for passers-by to relieve themselves. “One can barely imagine how clean and orderly these streets are! And there are not even peddlers walking around with shoulder poles!”³⁰ The police directing traffic in the streets of Paris “spoke with extreme fairness,” and the drivers obeyed them with full compliance.

He was struck by the generosity of Western governments in building public amenities available to all citizens. The King of France, he reports, was personally supervising the construction of the next World Exposition to be held in Paris in 1867, in which “replicas of capitals around the world would be made open for people to visit.”³¹ The Hampton Court Palace, after falling into disuse, “remained open and clean for visitors; men and women came in droves on weekends. Their entrance fees go to the government’s coffer.”³² The horse-drawn omnibuses in London were “used by men and women, rich and poor” and made transportation much easier.³³ It was generally the case, he writes after a talk with the director of the Crystal Palace, that when foreign countries built gardens and galleries they permit people to visit for a charge, and when the expense

for building them has been adequately compensated, they would be open to people for free. “Sharing pleasure with people and gathering their praises widely. A truly benevolent policy this is!”

This public concern was a subject conspicuously missing in the reports of the senior commissioners. Binchun and Zhigang never give a hint that the spectacular sites that they visited – the historic palaces, museums, zoos, and opera houses – were not exclusive to a prestigious few, but open to all members of the society. Was it because their attention was too absorbed in the spectacles to notice other admissions? Was it because in their lofty positions they hardly thought it worthwhile to spend any ink on mere commoners? Or did they choose not to present the fact to avoid its awkward contrast with the Chinese practice of barring foreigners and commoners alike from sites of comparable significance? These factors might all be at play. Yet there is evidence that Zhigang, at least, noticed the open admission of public amenities. When he tightened the leash on the mission’s meanderings, he nevertheless gave the students permission to visit “parks that are, on rare occasions, open to all in the country and foreigners,” provided that they pay admission fees. But he stops short of discussing the nature and purpose of these parks, and suggests that their admission of the public was entirely for profit.³⁴ Zhang’s modest status enabled him to pay far more attention to the plight of the common people, and thus his keen interest at the funding methods that made these amenities self-sustainable: he always stresses the profit they bring in to the government and private sponsors. This bottom-up perspective favoring the interest of the common people – in fiscally sound ways – is not to be seen in the works of contemporary West observers sent by the Qing. Preoccupied with their statist pursuit, these ranking

officials were only too willing to ignore practices with no apparent governing utility, and by doing so they missed a fundamental principle of the nineteenth-century Western governments.

Zhang's account of Western governance exhibits the tendency, so common among Chinese observers, to interpret order and lawfulness as a result of a rigorous application of Confucian principles. He took, for example, the justice system in England as a prime example of government benevolence. After being shown a model prison, he reports that prisoners were not only kept safe, warm and well-fed, but also engaged in paid handicraft work, the earnings from which they were entitled to collect half at the time of their release. There was no death penalty, he said, and prisoners had one day off each week and had gardens where they could stroll in in the evening. He took this as evidence for the superiority of Confucianism to legalism and argues against the necessity of laws: "From this I know that law code is not a necessity and the cruelty of officials needs to be forbidden. This was quite like the custom of the Three Dynasties."³⁵ He went to the British court and saw that sentence was given by a collective body of "twelve elderlies," and no physical punishment was taken during the interrogation. Compared to the Chinese courts, which were presided over by a magistrate versed in the classics, this method was "somewhat arbitrary and crude, but does not lack in fairness."³⁶

Among Western countries, the United States stood out as the most enlightened of all. Affected by the apparent cordiality of the American people, Zhang was disposed to reciprocate with a favorable review. The history and political system of the country interested him more than any Western monarchical polities. He depicts America as a young and vigorous nation with a utopian dimension. Ever since its independence from

England, Zhang reports, America “has treated its people with purely benevolent policies.”³⁷ Each state publicly elects its governors, chiefs of police, judges, and army leaders; “whenever they strayed from impartiality, they would be deposed by the public.” In national defense, the United States was the most efficient. Only ten thousand soldiers were needed to guard all passes and ports, and with the exception of the literati, the other three of the “four classes” – the peasants, the artisans, and the merchants – were required to serve in the army. In times of war they were soldiers; in times of peace they return to their own posts. Because of the vigilance of its states and their mutual help, “the neighboring countries of the United States would never invade them, and the various powers do not dare to challenge it.” In Zhang’s mind, the United States truly fits the ancient model of “conducting diplomacy not by armies, but with jade vessels and silk fabrics.”

Underlying this apparent national power was understood to be the moral strength of its leaders. His short biographical sketches of national leaders – George Washington, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses Grant – are all written in a style reminiscent of the heroes in popular fiction such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. President Andrew Johnson, for example, “had great ambitions when he was a youth but concealed them by being a tailor. All books concerning astronomy, geography, governing and ordering the people – there was none that he did not study, and everyone in the country respected him.”³⁸ Another example can be taken from his understanding of the cause of the American Civil War. “The Southerners, indulging themselves in ease and comfort, needed servants to tend to them morning and night, and prepare them food and drink, and that is why they refused to release the blacks.”³⁹ The leaders of the Northern states “became afraid that the slave-

owners might offend Heaven and reason and thus endanger the nation, so they convened to discuss the release the blacks to have them become commoners.” Thus, the order and peace of the country was seen as a consequence of the moral rectitude of its leaders. He only gives a brief sketch of the election of the federal government and did not seem particularly impressed with its functions. It was the people in leadership, not political institutions, that gave the United States its wealth and power.

Looking at the Other

The students’ ability to speak foreign languages greatly facilitated their communication with Europeans. A week into the voyage, Zhang and his fellow students overcame their shyness and played flute to the singing of the Frenchmen on board.⁴⁰ The lack of a strict code of conduct allowed them a degree of freedom not enjoyed by members of contemporary official missions sent by Japan. They sang, gamed, and drank with Western company on a regular basis; they accepted invitations to brothels, gambling houses, and dance halls. What they lacked in systematic insight was more than compensated by the emotional satisfaction derived from dealing with foreigners. After attending a multi-national party held by a friend of Burlingame’s, Zhang was moved to write in his diary that people in all parts of the world belonged to one family. “Our clothes might be different, but our joy and sadness are no different; our social customs might be different, but the differences between good and evil are no different.” Affected by all the merrymaking, he seems to have forgotten entirely that the purpose of the mission was to gather foreign intelligence. He was only grateful for an opportunity to

“find good friends and teachers,” for whom his “eyes and ears were made anew.” In the company of foreign friends he found the ultimate pleasure in life: “Arm in arm we chatted under one roof; isn’t this the predestined fate bestowed by heaven? What can equal this happiness? What can equal this happiness?”⁴¹

Zhang was aware early on that the large crowds following the missions did not all harbor goodwill towards the Chinese. His journals provide ample evidence of the condescending arrogance of Europeans in the 19th century. But he rarely took offence and sometimes even gives it a positive spin. Once he met two English brothers in Paris. The younger one, upon seeing him, laughed and said to his brother, “See how long his pigtail is!” To this the older one loudly rebuked: “William, what a silly child you are! Don’t you know that Europeans, too, had pigtails hundreds of years ago? They were just shorter, but all the same. If you call the Chinese braids pigtails, then shouldn’t our faces be monkey faces?”⁴² He merely recorded the instance as a funny anecdote.

Zhang generally acts from the assumption that miscommunication and misunderstanding, rather than malice, lie at the root of Sino-Western tension, and that there was no conflict that could not be defused with patience and goodwill. Even when confronted with willful and mean-spirited ignorance, he learned to remain composed and reasonable. A deputy from the French foreign office asked him to verify the newspaper’s account that the Chinese ministers brought three trucks of mice to Washington and ordered their Chinese servants to buy another two baskets. “If this be the case,” he asked, “can you teach me how to cook them?” Zhang replied: “People all around the world, when suffering from war and flood, might occasionally resort to eating mice, but as soon as our commissioner got here, there was the rumor about eating mice. I do not know

where to get them; you should probably ask someone else.” According to his account, the deputy immediately admitted that it must have been idle rumors made up by the newspaper, and thanked Zhang for his correction.⁴³ He took the same approach when confronted with rumors about infanticide of female children, and gracefully brought a British woman to apologize for her rashness in believing the rumor.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that when the offending party was the Chinese, he used the same technique to downplay tension. On his third journey, a Frenchman asked why Chinese people used “guizi” (ghosts, or devils) to address foreigners. The name, as Zhang well knew, was a derogatory word long associated with foreigners. Professor Ye Wenxian has suggested that “guizi” might have been first applied to English merchants by the Cantonese in the late eighteenth century, who disliked their habit of working until late evenings and likened them to ghosts.⁴⁵ While he might not know this piece of history, Zhang could not have been unfamiliar with the designation. How did he handle the thorny question? He made up his own etymology on the spot. Zhang told the Frenchman that “guizi” was in fact a corrupted form of the name of a foreign state which had traded with China in the Han dynasty. The name was, in fact, pronounced “qiuci,” but later generations misremembered its original pronunciation based on its written form, which looked like “guizi.” He assured the Frenchman that it was nothing more than misidentifying the English with the Russians, or Japanese as Chinese. When the Frenchman pressed him why the name is still in use, now that the distinction between Western countries has been made clear, Zhang turned the question on its head and asked why Westerners called his country “China.” He says: “Since the establishment of treaties, it has been clear to Westerners that the Middle Kingdom is called *daqing* or *zhonghua*.

Why, then, did they insist on using “China,” “la Chine,” “la Cina,” “Shina,” etc. There has never been this name for the four thousand years of Chinese history, so on what basis do Westerners use this name?”

Certainly, Zhang’s misconstruing of the etymology was a clever ploy to mask the prejudice against Westerners of his countrymen. He did this not just out of national pride, but also because the designation of foreigners as “devils” was genuinely repulsive to him. Throughout his entry he avoided using the character for “devil” in *guizi*, and substituted for it a homophone for cinnamon. Zhang’s ersatz etymology has been described by Lydia Liu as “tongue-in-cheek” and primarily intended to criticize the identification between *zhongguo* and China.⁴⁶ While the criticism is certain, it is less clear that Zhang did not mean his etymology to be taken seriously. The use of punning to create new meanings was a venerated Confucian tradition. After all, many ritual masters, including Confucius himself, were known to have deciphered subtle messages in archaic etymologies.⁴⁷ It is entirely likely, given his inclination to see misunderstandings as the only obstacle to Sino-Western rapport, that this was another attempt to downplay tension by turning it into misunderstanding. This incident might even have been premeditated or partly fictional, recorded as an exemplary case to show his readers how elegantly conceived puns can instantly resolve tricky knots. Perhaps in his years of service, Zhang has learned that the lack of cross-cultural understanding was in fact central to how conflict rose, and that one cannot take comments about another culture at face value. It was better to take them lightly than made angry by them.

In working with missionaries and customs officers, Zhang had become familiar with the myths and facts about an “enlightened” West even before he set out on his first

journey, and was sensitive to Western decries against traditional Chinese practices such as food-binding and geomancy. He was surprised to see, therefore, that many Chinese habits of thought and customs derided by Westerners were also common practices in the West. On one rainy afternoon he went out shopping with a black servant of the hotel and took shelter in the house of an American family. When lightning struck, Zhang saw a terrified young woman drawing a cross on her chest and “praying for God’s protection.” He thought: “I have often heard Westerners claim that lightning was caused by electricity and had nothing to do with the supernatural. Now I saw what the young woman did and knew that Westerners were not unafraid of being struck by lightning and that there was still something supernatural about it.”⁴⁸ He observes that beliefs in the realm of “superstition,” such as geomancy and physiognomy, were growing more popular in the West.⁴⁹ In France, he learned that the breaking of a mirror was considered inauspicious, and that an owl coming into one’s house indicates the coming of disaster whereas a bat signifies the coming of joy and good fortune.⁵⁰ The observations all seemed to run contrary to the claims made by Western missionaries and travelers who championed science and reason in China.

In personal hygiene, too, he found parallels between the two cultures. He was somewhat disturbed by the trouble that men and women took in the pursuit of bizarre aestheticism. His discovery of the nail fad in London immediately brought to his mind Western derision of the mandarins’ long fingernails. He reports that women had finger nails as long as four or five inches, and some men not only had kept their nails long, but cut them into triangles. Even more inexplicable to him were the hand and shoulder tattoos popular among artisans, for those were only applied to prisoners in China. In

Paris, he heard that Western women pursued fashion to the extent of removing a piece of bone next to their small toenail to make their feet look thin. In his typical muffled style, he utters mute protest: "...Whereas Westerners often scoffed at the long fingernails of Chinese literati, saying that they inhibit hand movements." He refrained from completing the sentence, leaving the reader to ponder the unjust double standard applied to China.

Zhang's shock at the morbid and harmful beauty practices was echoed by a more outspoken critic a few years later. In his account Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, Li Gui briefly took up the issue of women's undergarments. He saw at England's exhibition several items "made of fine blue-and-white cotton, soft and thick...with a large upper opening and a small one below, like a garment for the upper part of a person's body."⁵¹ Upon inquiry, he learned that these were for "lifting and emphasizing the breasts while narrowing the waist" in order to enhance the beauty of the figure. "What about a small bosom that cannot be enhanced?" he asked. "In that case, there is another set of articles, like two cups, which can be fastened directly to the breasts." "Yi!" He gasped: "This is almost like footbinding in China, only more harmful!" Just like Zhang, Li had reason to hold his tongue when he felt the urge to criticize the West. A protégé of the Chefoo Maritime Commissioner Gustav Detring, who in turn worked for Robert Hart, Li was offered the "correct" interpretation of everything he saw. His account, effusive with adoring praises of the West, was to figure prominently in Li Hongzhang's propaganda campaign for introducing Western mechanical technology. Yet even Li could not completely refrain from letting out an occasional grumble. Sparing and cautious as they were, these comments of Zhang and Li effectively debunked certain myths that pitted a freakishly sick China against a robust and healthy West.

China and Confucianism

From the beginning of his service abroad, Zhang adopted the official Western diplomatic view that China was a political and cultural entity parallel to the other nation-states of the world. In fact, the main message he intended to give in his first journal was that China, with all its vast “nine prefectures” (jiuzhou) and “four oceans” (sihai) as conceived in classical myths, takes up only a fraction of the earth’s surface. While a more politically savvy journalist might hide that fact behind exaltation of the Emperor’s far-reaching virtue, the unsophisticated Zhang simply listed out the sizes and names of all the continents in his preface, for his readers to judge for themselves, adding plates of hemispheres for visual effect.⁵² One of his favorite pastimes was collecting miscellany about the symbols and customs of various countries – facts such as the style of their flags, medals, insignias, and mourning attire. These exercises helped to create in him the view of a flat world partitioned into numerous political entities, and he was always happy to list China as one among equals.

This multi-state model was significant in his view of Chinese society and culture. His general assumption was that different countries had different customs and culture (*fengsu*), and that the Chinese people, by virtue of their birth, should abide by the teaching of Confucius and obey Chinese customs. As a member of the diplomatic missions, Zhang often found himself acting as a semi-official spokesperson for his country and people, and discussions of this nature inevitably involved some explanation of Chinese tradition. These conversations were sometimes prompted by a foreign

inquisitor's curiosity about China, with questions such as "What is Confucianism?" or "What is the way of the Chinese sages?" as their point of departure. These exercises must have forced the young Zhang to consider his own culture and thought in a new light – as an outsider looking in. He was concerned not with the organic integrity and subtleties of traditional thought, but more with how to package it to be conveyed to foreigners. During the course of his first three travels, he gradually adopted the word "Confucianism" (*kongjiao*), borrowed from contemporary Japanese students, to refer to the primary school of political philosophy identified with China.

Unsurprisingly, Zhang never specified what "Confucianism" meant to him. Most of the time, he gave no more than an overview of key concepts such as the "Three Bonds" and "Five Relationships." With only a rudimentary education in the classics, the profundity and subtlety of the Confucian teachings largely evaded Zhang, and in a few instances he even managed to get the fundamental principles wrong. In a conversation with Mr. Edlin's friends about the decline of Catholicism in Europe, Zhang told them that the teaching of Confucius was "the Ways of 'xiu, qi, ping, zhi'" (perfection of the self, ordering of the family, pacification of the world, and governing of the country). In his eagerness to proselytize Confucianism, Zhang misremembered the order of the last two stages. It would be simply illogical, to a proper Confucian mind, to suggest that the pacification of the world should come before the proper governing of one's country.

To Zhang, Confucianism hardly constituted the only true teaching in the world. His confidence of the universality of the Chinese models of thought was compromised by the nation-state system. The appropriate self-conduct, as he understood it, was always relative to the customs and mores (*fengsu*) of the given country. He refrained from

chastising the licentious ways of French brothels, for example, because “their practices were in accordance with their customs and mores.”⁵³ Confucianism was not the yardstick for judging the world, but had to show its ability to withstand the scrutiny of Westerners. He was satisfied, for example, when Edlin’s friends assured him that the way of Confucius was fundamentally in agreement with Western thought. “Everyone said that ‘the way of Confucius was widely spread overseas and few refuted it’,” he wrote excitedly, “They told me that even though English translation could not get at its subtle meanings, it still sounded respectable and convincing. They also said that even though Westerners do not dare to speak of Confucianism, many of their actions comply with its teaching because Confucius’ words accorded with the words of the LORD.”

If Zhang’s grasp of Confucianism was flimsy at best, he was its most proud and vociferous vocal champion in the West. In this sense, we see in him a decisive shift of Confucianism from a universal validity to “a traditionalist compulsion.”⁵⁴ With a foot in each world at a time when Chinese tradition was rapidly losing its currency, he needed to hold onto some vestiges of Confucianism to retain a sense of cultural confidence. Clearly, it was not the Confucian values that he was most passionate about, but in the identity and cultural orientation it afforded him in a world of vying nation-states. It was an incipient sense of nationalist pride that drove Zhang to proclaim the superiority of Confucianism over other systems of thought. Yet this superiority lies not in Confucianism’s contemporary relevance, but in the fact that it was professedly older than Western religions, and must therefore have been the source of their inspiration. We see this range of reasoning played out in full in a conversation he had with a young Chinese-born missionary in America. When the young man kindly reminded him to report back the

nice aspects of Western customs and governance so that the Chinese could learn from the West, Zhang replied sternly:

“Each country has its own merit in governing and good customs, and it won’t do to transplant one set of rules to another country. More important, the Chinese sages left wise words and deeds thousands of years ago. Why would we change them for things that have only existed for hundreds of years? Do you know about the sage Confucius, and of the Tongzhi emperor in the Qing?”

“Yes, I do.”

“If you know about them, then let me tell you this so you don’t forget it. The Qing law forbids shaving of a man’s hair and changing of his garment; now you have done both, so I don’t see you as Chinese but a European or American. But what are you learning missionary work for?”

“I wanted to help the Chinese find the True and Good way.”

“I pity your stupidity; how stupid you are! Don’t you know that Confucius lived farther back than Jesus and his influence spread throughout Asia? Confucianism is the way for the Chinese. Was either your father or grandfather a Christian?”

“No.”

“Then you must be following Catholicism for profit, and not for practicing kindness. You have forgotten the cardinal principle of righteousness for petty profit! You have forgotten your ancestors and father! How do you expect to face your ancestors after you die! I daresay they will certainly disown you! Alas! (Even if you were to correct yourself) it is like mending the gate after the sheep have escaped. It is too late!” At this point, his shouting roused the attention of others in the party. To help him calm down,

the hostess came by and led Zhang to the garden downstairs. When he came back he overheard foreign ministers talk about the man – “they all despise him and no one thought I was in the wrong.”⁵⁵

It is worth pointing out that to Zhang, the ultimate “crime” that the young man committed was his failure to act in accordance with his family tradition. If he was yet willing to pardon the young man’s new faith on the basis that he would no longer be considered Chinese, he could not forgive him for contradicting the practice of his father and grandfather. In this sense, filial piety was severed from its original context in Confucianism and became a superior criterion. It surpassed cultural boundaries and was the ultimate determinant for who must devote themselves to Confucianism. Whereas he generally held his tongue when he saw practices contradictory to Chinese practices, he gave the most severe censures to violations of filial piety. In one extreme case, when he was introduced to condoms, he reversed his usual openness to Western innovations and denounced it as the most heinous crime: “whoever advocates this method is cutting off the offspring of other people! Even death is too lenient for him!”

The interference of nascent nationalism in Zhang’s take on Confucianism was even stronger when he met a group of Japanese patriots on his way to France in 1870. After a few casual chats, their conversations turned into a debate on national strength and cultural superiority. One evening he found himself surrounded by five Japanese passengers, all “with strong memory and skilled at conversation” and curious about China.

“What is the number of warships China has?” The Japanese students asked.

“Numerous, on the southeast coast” was Zhang’s reply.

“Do all in your country espouse the religion of Confucius (*rujiao*)?”

“*Rujiao* is like the sun and the moon that rule the sky, and does not wear out even after tens of thousands of years. Even if there are those who worship other religions (*tajiao*), they number but one in a billion. Which religion do the Japanese belong to?”

“Our country has our own national religion. *Rujiao* is but an affiliated school; in the old times the simple-minded people worshipped the Buddha but that has now been abolished.”

“Very well, what is the central doctrine of your national religion?”

“Loyalty to the Emperor and Filial Piety to the Parents. This is the universal law (*gongfa*) of the world.”

“The two characters – loyalty and piety – from which religion did they come?”

“These were directly transferred to the mind of each emperor, applied to his governing, and recorded in writing.”

“Which religion did all your emperors espouse?”

“Our ancestral emperor was the reigning god and creator of their nation and ancestor to all subsequent emperors.”

“Nonsense! It was the Four Books and Five Classics of my country that the Japanese emperors learned from. If what you say is true, can you produce the documents that your ancestral emperor wrote?”

At this point, according to Zhang, the Japanese all became quiet and soon retreated to their own chambers. The exchange ended with his landslide victory. This entry documents, from a Chinese perspective, the political reality of Japan in the early 1870s. The Meiji Restoration in 1868 had cleared away its major daimyo opposition, and

an initial wave of state-sponsored Westernization efforts was rigorously pursued. From the emperor down, an exaltation of Western learning pervaded Japanese society. As the imperial house contemplated whole-sale adoption of Western institutions, popular attitudes in social and cultural lives shifted accordingly. Western suits and dresses were tailored for the emperor and empress, and the upper class emulated European social etiquette to the point of adopting ballroom dance. Young and ambitious Japanese students went in droves to study in Europe and America in the hope of strengthening their country. Beginning in 1868, the state had started to use religion to inculcate a sense of nationalism and cultural identity into its citizens. It unified and institutionalized Shinto – adapted from a loose body of old folk beliefs – and placed the Meiji emperor as its highest priest. To promote national identity, it separated Buddhism from Shinto, and sought to marginalize competing religions. By combining political and spiritual authority in the person of the emperor, the Meiji government channeled the old allegiances into identification with the state. It is not surprising that the young aspirant samurai, bolstered by their newfound identity, should be wont to scorn Confucianism.

This episode also reveals how Zhang's position on Confucianism was hijacked by the nationalist discourse of the Japanese. When the Japanese referred to Confucianism as "kongjiao" (the religion of Confucius) and juxtaposed it with Japan's national religion, Shinto, they implied that Confucianism was the "national religion" of China. While he had primarily identified Confucianism with Chinese culture, this was the first time he referred to it explicitly as a "religion." What was at stake was no longer what the Way entails, or even what it should be called, but which national label should be applied to its principles. Where the Japanese students were eager to flaunt their national identity,

Zhang responded in kind, reminding them that those principles belonged to the Chinese. This was a position, incidentally, that no “true” Confucianist would care to defend, for Confucianism was never primarily identified with the geographical boundaries of China. A more confident Confucianist, Guo Songtao, would even suggest that the Way no longer resided in the Central Kingdom, but was instead being realized in the West.

Imperialism and the non-West

Zhang shows almost no awareness of China’s external threat in his first two journals and merely referred to the purpose of the missions as for “the collecting of foreign customs.” In his collective preface for his first three journals, probably written in the mid-1870s, he claims that his writing “only concerns the customs and human feelings in the West” and that “one has plenty of translated accounts to consult if one wants the merits and weaknesses of the political systems of the West.”⁵⁶ While he occasionally gives in to commenting on European inter-state rivalry, he never talks about China in the context of international politics. It was as if the external and the internal worlds never touched. Despite his efforts at keeping the two realms apart, glimpses of Sino-Western tension still crop up in his journals. On a steamship to France, a conservative Japanese passenger, dissatisfied with the recent pursuit of Western ways in Japan, admitted to Zhang that he felt ashamed of his countrymen’s abandonment of their traditional costumes. Zhang heartily agreed: “Big collars and wide sleeves are the ancient clothing style of the Divine Land. What shame is there in wearing them? But exchanging what we have for what we have not – this is not unbeneficial.” “Which things do you mean?”

asked the Japanese man. “Oh, nothing outside of steamers and armaments.” “These things are beneficial, but also bring problems.” “Now that we have exchanged treaties and opened up trade with foreign countries, we cannot avoid learning these things. If we give them up in distain, our future troubles will be numerous.”⁵⁷ To Zhang, the efforts at self-strengthening were the most obvious and natural course of action for a country which had become involved with European states. But a country on such a course must assert its national identity by keeping its traditional dress code and ways of life. A few days later, when a Frenchman praised to Zhang Japan’s wholesale Westernization, Zhang became indignant: “Each country has its own principle for governing and teaching, and should not lose its original form. As to armaments and steamships, because war is at the center of Western states, other countries were forced to learn these techniques from them. But other things must not change, because there is no reason to change them.”⁵⁸

At a time when the Qing still maintained its universal pretension – at least domestically – Zhang only showed a weak and passive strain of proto-nationalist consciousness. We see occasions where he clearly resented imperialist aggressions in China, but did not know how to respond in a meaningful way. He knew that it was unwise to confront the Westerners about the two Opium Wars, lest it create unnecessary problems for the mission. This predicament creates an interesting compromise in one instance. When they were in France, Zhang and a few students were invited to an auction house featuring imperial treasures from the Yuanmingyuan palace. These spoils of the Second Opium War included an imperial dragon gown, court beads of the emperor and empress dowager, various jade and pearl ornaments, antiques, and scrolls of paintings belonging to the imperial house. Scandalized, the students walked out of the display

room, refusing to take another look. A Frenchman, probably director of the auction house, gleefully handed them each a brochure in which the prices of the items were listed. His intention was clear: he was asking the students to buy the treasures back for China. What did the students do? They cursed him in Chinese but kept their respectful expressions unchanged. Zhang notes triumphantly that, not knowing Chinese, the Frenchman and his assistants did not know what they said and remained “laughing and talking just the same.”

One would expect this to be the perfect moment for a nationalist outburst: a greasy foreign merchant peddling pilfered treasure – the very symbol of imperial power – to a group of young nationals. If this were to have happened thirty years later, we would expect a much more aggressive response from the students. It would not be hard to imagine them turning this into a cause for an anti-imperialist demonstration, or using this incident to “awaken” the slumbering masses. But the Frenchman and his shady dealership, not imperialism, were the main target of their resentment. They saw it as an ignominious act of an individual, rather than a product of the imperialistic logic of the Western states. Curiously, this episode was removed from the first publication of his journal. Zhang probably thought this passage added an unpleasant realism to an otherwise outlandish and jovial account. Perhaps he removed it in order to avoid personal tension with foreigners, which could cause difficulty in his diplomatic career. It is likely that he removed this passage for the same reason that he did not confront the curator in French: to avoid a dangerous conflict. In any case, it shows that the apparent lack of political consciousness in Zhang’s writing was not entirely his youthful

obliviousness, but a result of censorship and self-censorship. It appeared only in the *Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao* series published in the late 1880s.⁵⁹

Zhang's conflation of imperialism and individual moral bankruptcy also played into his accounts of the European colonies. The steamboats carrying the mission passed through large parts of South Asia, Northeast Africa and the Middle East, and stopped in a number of colonial outposts for maintenance and refueling. The 1865 mission made brief stops in the French-controlled Saigon and the English-controlled Singapore, Ceylon, and Aden before it reached Egypt. The Suez Canal being still under construction, the mission took a train from Suez to Cairo, and then to Alexandria, where they boarded a French steamship for Italy. The Zhigang mission, being destined first to the United States, sailed eastward and made stops in Nagasaki and Yokohama before reaching San Francisco, Panama and Cuba on its way to New York.

Touring the non-West created a positive opinion in Zhang on how Westerners changed the natives' ways of life. He was at his best as an ethnographer, always attentive to the lifestyle of the locals: their appearance, diet, style of dressing, the local plants, architecture, and landscape. He keenly observed the contrast between Western and native establishments. In Saigon, the French holding in South Vietnam, he noticed that "the residential houses along the bank were soaked in water and nearly collapsing," whereas the French built foreign-style houses further south. The rich natives lived in mere wooden houses, and the poor could only build thatches with bamboo. The local people were all "short and small, their faces exhibiting a languished expression, and their eyes dim-sighted." The men and women, old and young, "frequently open their mouths," and their voices were "husky frog croaks." They lived in poverty because "the people were

lazy and left their farms unplowed, being content to earn only enough to keep themselves warm and fed.”⁶⁰

Even though he noticed a strong Chinese influence in the Vietnamese culture – they read Chinese characters and adopted many Chinese customs, such as the hanging of couplets and a liking of Chinese poems – Zhang’s depiction of the Vietnamese was unambiguously unfavorable. His attention was mostly absorbed by the features of the customs which seemed semi-barbarous, and he attributed the hardship of the local population to the deficiency and moral failing of the natives. The contrast between native poverty and Western superiority was more pronounced in Singapore, where the mission dined in a spacious French hotel, and the natives were reduced to make their living by washing Westerners’ clothes.⁶¹ On his way back en route Saigon in the Zhigang mission, he again observed the new Western enterprises with admiration, and deplored Vietnamese indolence. “They had fertile soil but left it untouched like stone; they are enslaved by other people but do not have the slightest of shame. Isn’t this topsy-turvy!”⁶² He lamented how the natives “did not understand that even though plowing takes three years of painstaking labor to start, if practiced with constancy, it could save enough food for nine years.” If the natives came back to think about it, there wouldn’t be any vacant land or roaming vagrants in the country. These casual and extemporaneous comments do not yet constitute a coherent message, but reflected in his unsystematic eyes were glimpses of different world order. When the West entered China’s former tributary states, the old criteria for civilization started to lose its preponderance. Zhang did not make much of the Vietnamese adoption of Chinese language and cultural forms; instead, he

chastised the natives for what they lacked by comparison to Westerners: an ethic for hard work and aggressive utilization of land.

The stark contrast Zhang drew between the West and non-West, as showcased in Vietnam, was exactly what Westerners most wanted the missions to report back – “the indomitable energy which has enabled the great powers of the west to extend their commerce to the utmost ends of the earth.”⁶³ A consciousness pitting the civilized “us” against the non-civilized “them” grew. Zhigang chastised the “ruthlessness” of the Spanish colonizers who smuggled Cantonese “piggy” to Cuba, but considered it “more appropriate to hire the Africans” for the job, since “they were born in a land of hot climate” anyway.⁶⁴ He used a similar line of reasoning while arguing with a Catholic priest over the validity of prayer: “The use of prayer to accrue blessing can only be applied to the stupid peoples in deserts and forests, such as the “red people” in America, the “wild men” in Australia and those in Malacca.”⁶⁵ The old cultural demarcation – China versus the barbarians – was being transposed onto the one created by Western colonization, and China clearly belonged to the same side as the West.

Early Return, New Departure

During their interminable wait in Paris to arrange a meeting with the French foreign office from December 1868 to September 1869, a laissez faire attitude pervaded Zhigang’s crew. During this period, France saw its earliest riots by those disgruntled with the Legislative Election, which later fed into Paris Commune. Clashes with police often resulted in deaths and arrests. Caught between widespread discontent and

impending war with Germany, Louis-Napoléon hardly paid any attention to the Chinese. After delivering their credentials and a brief meeting with the foreign minister, the Chinese were left on their own. Attending balls and masquerades held by wealthy families constituted their main social activity. Going along with the common practice, Burlingame also threw three extravagant balls at the mission's residence, to the severe dissatisfaction of his co-envoy Sun Jiagu. Sometimes a visitor or two might find their way to the mission in their hotel on Champs-Elysees. Wang Chengrong, a Ningbo merchant who ran Chinese export store, occasionally took the Chinese out for a tour of the local business establishments. But no systematic tourism or investigation of the city ever took place. Things slowed down so much that Zhigang and Sun Jiagu sent some students home to cut costs.

This lack of structure gave the students unprecedented freedom to explore the city on their own and to develop a new perspective of a foreign place from what had been fed to them by Western tour guides. The mention of beggars increased in his journal, and once he even stumbled upon the home of a laundry maid.⁶⁶ In the evening the students frequently went as a group to the cafés on Champs-Elysees to watch free performances, where a cup of coffee could buy a long evening's entertainment. They enjoyed watching not only by the performers – often scantily clad singers and dancers – but also the responses of the audiences. Most of their activities were not in groups. Zhang spent much time wandering alone or making friends of his own, and the rest seemed to do the same. He began teaching himself French and soon became good enough that he was able to read simple jokes.

Zhang's carefree days in Paris came to an abrupt end with an accident that almost took his life. On a bustling Sunday, members of the embassy split into four groups shopping and visiting friends. Zhang and a fellow student in French rented a couple of horses to ride in the Bois de Boulogne. He pulled the wrong rein and the startled horse stood up and he fell off, injuring his head. After he was taken back, the embassy disagreed on which course of treatment he should follow: his Chinese colleagues assured him that the medicine they brought from home would work, while Burlingame and de Champs rushed to find him a French doctor. In the end, the Western group prevailed, with Zhigang's tacit consent. Zhang was dismayed when two French doctors came to treat him, and frightened to tears when they forbade him from taking Chinese medicine and insisted on soaking him in warm water and icing his head. He begged them to stop the bizarre treatment, but to no avail. Two days later, they came with twenty-four leeches and placed them behind his ears to suck out blood. This treatment only worsened his condition. Zhang soon stopped eating and drinking, and began to hallucinate. He stopped his journal at this point, but his servant, Zhu Shou, kept a log of his condition which he later used to fill the gap.

According to this reconstructed record, Zhang's illness attracted widespread attention, even covered in the papers. In addition to his friends and acquaintance, a trickling of Westerners came to their door and claimed to possess magic potions that could cure him. As his condition worsened, the initial split between the Chinese and Western groups widened; among Westerners themselves bickering and dissension often escalated into verbal war. The Chinese, seeing that Zhang's illness was getting worse, begged Zhigang to start Chinese treatment, only to be rebuffed on the ground that

inconsistent treatments would make things worse. They petitioned again a week later when Zhang was on the brink of death, and Zhigang finally relented and asked for a formal group letter stating their cause. Fengyi and ninety other Chinese people – the majority of the business community in Paris – all signed the letter, and Zhang was given Chinese medicine right away. His pain was immediately reduced, and he had completely recovered in two weeks. When the two French doctors took their leave after Zhang's recovery, he still thanked them for their efforts, but noted that “their face were flush with embarrassment.”

It is impossible to know how this narrative, assembled by Zhu Shou and copied by Zhang into his journal, resembled the course of events from the Westerners' perspective. What is interesting is the way Zhu paints Western medicine as utterly absurd and their doctors as incapable and obdurate at best and quacks at worst. Zhang's healing was seen as the triumph of Chinese medicine over Western methods. This view seems widespread among members of the early missions. Binchun, being a doctor himself, laughed at the naiveté of Western epidemic theory. Zhigang later attributed Burlingame's death to his disbelief in Chinese medicine. Zhang exhibited the same preference by adopting Zhu Shu's narrative. All three were admirers of Western science and technology, but in the realm of the human body their confidence in Chinese wisdom stood unshaken. While Zhang admitted that Western medical practices are superior in curing external diseases (*waike*), Chinese medicine was thought to be better at treating internal disorders (*neike*), and more versatile and efficacious.⁶⁷ He was quick to note that Chonghou's doctor, Mr. Yu, succeeded in removing a tumor from a Frenchman's face with several doses of herbs. The patient testified to the superiority of Chinese practice:

“If I had gone to a local physician, he certainly would have swollen it, cut into it until the pus is showed, and goodness knows how many months it would take the wound to heal. I now understand that Chinese and Western medicine both have merit. They are not contrary to each other.”⁶⁸

Zhang emerged from his illness in a somber mood and ready to break from his boyish ways. He reproached himself for his reckless adventurism and unfiliality. How could he let his body be damaged so when he had aging parents waiting for him back home? He petitioned to cut his trip short and go home with the first batch of returning students. He spent long hours on the ship reading and contemplating his life, directing his observations more to somber subjects and less to triviality, games and women. He was reunited with his family in Beijing in fall 1869, and father and son both cried and laughed. But this home visit, too, was short. In June 1870, a week after the Tianjin Massacre, the court appointed Wanyan Chonghou, Commissioner for the Three Ports and Senior Vice-President of the Board of War, envoy extraordinary to France for an apology mission. Since Zhigang had not returned, Zhang was the only available Chinese interpreter with overseas experience, and he was selected for the new mission. In recognition to his past service, he received a fourth civil rank and was appointed Assistant Department Director in the Board of War. At merely twenty-four – an age at which most of his contemporaries were still making attempts at the first level of the civil service examinations – he had already gained an enviable position by his service in an unconventional field.

Chonghou’s arrival on his new post was an impressive display of imperial grandeur. There was nothing glorifying in the mission itself – its sole purpose was to

pacify France and avert war. Its significance lies in the exalted status of its leader: Chonghou was the highest-ranking official yet to head a mission abroad, and the first with the title “imperial commissioner” (*qinchai*). His sedan chair was preceded by a procession of civil and military officials carrying yellow-satin flags and various parasols, awnings, and banners. The blasting of ceremonial cannons competed with a band of drum and trumpets. On the day of the mission’s departure in Tianjin, infantry soldiers knelt along the streets and hundreds of officials came to see them off.⁶⁹ Chonghou was assisted by two third ranks, the alternative circuit intendant Gao Congwang and the alternate prefect Huang Huilian. Zhang came next in line, no longer a student interpreter, but occupying a position of considerable prestige. Next to him was an array of low-ranking bureaucrats filling in variously as secretaries and scribes, then Qingchang, a Tongwenguan student in French. Chonghou also brought a couple of Frenchmen from the Imperial Maritime Customs under Robert Hart’s recommendation.

With this new group Zhang was in a different kind of company. Whereas his old companions were mostly his Tongwenguan classmates, his new traveling mates were bureaucrats who were much older and seasoned in the literati culture of the officialdom. Because of his knowledge of French and experience in prior missions, he was expected to assume the responsibility of arranging the mission’s lodging, planning out daily activities, and calling foreign officials and ministers on Chonghou’s behalf. He seemed uneasy about this abrupt change of status, and was on the lookout for a moral anchor for his new position. When Yu Kuiwen, a fifty year old doctor for the embassy showed him the letter from his octogenarian father, Zhang took it as his own motto. “Do exactly what Commissioner Chong and your mates do,” the old man says, “and when in doubt, do not

be ashamed of asking those below you.”⁷⁰ His most important warning to his son was wrapped up in the first line of *The Book of Rites*: a strict adherence to proper rites the maintenance of a respectful heart, and firm rejection of temptations. This declaration of rightful conduct signals his growing awareness of the potential readership of his journal, and the necessity of performing his role according to his official status.

Indeed, from this journey on, Zhang’s journal increasingly took on the realistic tone that he had gradually adopted after his infirmity in Paris. For the sake of continuity, he named it *San Shuqi* (Third account of curiosities), but much less of his attention was directed to the exoticism of the foreign things. When circumstances allowed, he declined invitations to theatres, shopping trips and sight-seeing, preferring to stay in the embassy for work. He also adopted rhetoric common among officials, declaring, for example, that the smooth sailing on the East China Sea was because of the “emperor’s abundant blessing.”⁷¹ On the whole, he was more aware of the political context of the world, although he was still discreet about diplomatic issues between China and the West.

The Chonghou mission could not have arrived at a more inconvenient time for the French government. Popular discontent had been brewing over Louis-Napoléon’s foreign policy and the free-trade reform. A fatal miscalculation of the emperor led him to enter war with Prussia with the hope that diplomatic glory would relieve domestic discontent. The Franco-Prussian war, which started in July 1870, quickly proved disastrous for France. A month prior to the mission’s arrival, the best troops of the French army were destroyed at the Battle of Sedan, and the emperor was captured the next day. A few days later, the Parisian National Guards stormed in Palais Bourbon and

proclaimed the fall of the Empire. It set up Provisional Government of National Defense at Hotel de Ville of Paris.

Amidst the chaos, the only French recipient of the embassy was Comte Michel Alexandre Kleczkowski, erstwhile minister to China. Despite Kleczkowski's efforts to show the embassy the best parts of the town, Zhang noticed signs of trouble and misery among the French citizens. The houses lining the streets were ugly and shabby, with broken windows and dilapidated walls, and "more than half of their residents were paupers."⁷² He heard that an officer who was dispatched here to purchase shoes and socks for the army spent all his time going to the theater and did not care about his official business. A subsequent visit to opera house failed to elicit his interest, although he noted that "most of the audiences were soldiers." Deeply distressed, Zhang laments: "Even though their capital was seized and their king captured, people in the markets and streets are reveling like it is a festival every day. Noise from drums, music, and carriages broke through the roof. This is precisely what they mean by 'sparrows cannot see it when great buildings are tumbling down!'"⁷³

Chonghou was received by Adolphe Thiers, Chief Executive of the Third Republic, only after waiting for nearly a year. Much of the year was consumed by triviality or simply wasted. Chonghou was interested in the same things that attracted Binchun: sightseeing, boating, operas, and strolling in the countryside, but there was even less systematic investigation.⁷⁴ His favorite place was the Bois de Boulogne Park, where he often enjoyed a quiet boat ride in the lake. In the evenings he liked to sit in a café on Champs-Elysees and watch dance performances. To what extent Chonghou's observation of war-torn France added to a false sense of security is difficult to assess, but

certainly he was much relieved by the internal and external crises that embroiled France, and did not take it as a first order business to study its arsenals, fortifications and factories. In his memorial to the throne upon the mission's return, he offered a detailed account of his diplomatic maneuvering on the Tianjin case. No word was mentioned of his observations abroad.⁷⁵

Zhang was shocked by the change in France after merely a year. Whereas his previous journals are full of wonderment at Western ingenuity and prosperity, his present account documents the most abject human conditions in a war-torn France. The once proud Frenchmen were humbled and brought to their knees. Beggars, wandering vagabonds and wounded soldiers are his most frequent subjects. In Versailles he saw entire villages living in caves, blood stains still visible in nearby houses. He saw people peddling horse meat and dog meat everywhere. The commoners did not wash their face, did not tend to their appearances, their clothes tattered and filled with fleas. Some smoked tobacco mixed with their saliva. Women stopped tending to their hair and looked like they wore birds' nests, and children sat in mud and charcoal all day long. A dinner party with his Western friends turned into the subject of the eating of rats and cats alike by French troops.

What he saw in France prompted him to defy Westerners' caricature of the Chinese condition as intrinsic and culture-bound. After witnessing the slums, he heaves a sigh: "Those Westerners who laughed at the poor hygiene of the Chinese, is it possible they didn't think carefully?"⁷⁶ When a poor French lady came to ask for money, Zhang remembered that just a few months ago in Beijing he had seen foreigners telling Chinese beggars off: "Now, how is wealth and poverty bound by land?"⁷⁷ When the embassy's

landlord in Paris violated the terms of the contract and overcharged them, he was made to rethink the presumption that Westerners were all fair traders who cherished good faith. Previously Zhang had concluded that Westerners shared the same emotions and kindness as the Chinese, and were perhaps even inclined to have a better assortment of natural dispositions. This time around, he realized that they shared vices and weaknesses, too. Neither was culturally or geographically bound.

Throughout the Paris Commune, Zhang kept a keen interest in the rebels. He sympathetically referred to them as “country braves” (*xiangyong*), “rebel braves” (*panyong*), or “red heads” (*hongtou*), never once using a condemnatory designation. By contrast, contemporary missionary publications tended to use much harsher words such as “*zeidang*” (party of thieves) and “*luanfei*” (unruly bandits).⁷⁸ Upon seeing a parade of rebel prisoners, he noted that they all looked “fearless” and “had a lofty bearing” (*qiyu xuanyang*). Given the anti-heterodoxy spirit of the Tongzhi Restoration in reaction against the Taiping, Zhang’s tolerance of the rebels was nothing but remarkable, especially for a newly promoted “Vice Director in the Ministry of War.” Indeed, much of Zhang’s description of the Commune was in resonant with the characteristics of dynastic rebel forces. As he explains the cause of the rebels: “The rebellion of the country braves was caused by the peace treaty between France and Prussia. When peace is attained, the braves were sure to be dispersed. Poor and homeless, on what would they rely for food and clothes once they were discharged? Thus they were driven to crime.” The lifestyle of the rebels also echoes the familiar themes: “They lived in grand buildings and feasted on the rarest cuisine. Indulging in such intense pleasure they did not even know that death was coming. When their defeat was imminent, they emptied all

buildings in a huge blaze, reducing half of their treasures to dust.”⁷⁹ Even though he praised the fearless heroism of the female Communards, Zhang followed the contemporary French press in blaming women for the fires that burned down several palaces and public structures.⁸⁰

Given his familiarity with English and French, it is somewhat surprising that Zhang’s understanding of the Paris Commune was so superficial. Even though he followed the major clashes and turns of events with reasonable accuracy, consulting newspapers and local informants, he was ignorant of the nature of the dissolution of the Second Empire and the Paris Commune. The abdication of the royal power was so simple and deterministic that it verged on the theatrical: “The empress asked the masses: ‘Can we still live in Paris?’ The masses said: ‘No!’ She then brought the heir-apparent to Belgium and then to England.”⁸¹ He makes no reference to the political programs and ideological convictions of the rebel forces. Even if he had not heard of Communism or Karl Marx, surely he must have come across anarchist or socialist tracts or pamphlets outlining the workers’ political programs, or have heard speeches or songs of a revolutionary nature, but none made an impression on him. None made him doubt that perhaps these “red heads,” unlike traditional peasant rioters, were going after something fundamentally different from material comfort. He might be sympathetic to their plight, even moved to tears by their heroic air, yet he was so uninterested in their actual voices that he failed to detect the message of the Commune. To him it was an uprising, plain and simple, like any other uprising that interspersed and reset the dynastic cycles.

Zhang clearly hoped to make these events in France known to his countrymen. After he came back with Chonghou, he set out immediately to prepare for the publication

of his journal. Given the success of *Hanghai shuqi*, there was good reason to believe that *San shuqi* would also be welcomed. He invited Sun Jiagu, then a daotai in Hubei, to write him a preface, and even drafted a list of points to explain his choice of subjects and naming schemes. But for reasons we do not know, it was never published in his lifetime. Perhaps his more prudent friends in the Zongli yamen convinced him not to, for the fear that his revelation of the chaotic side of the West would fuel anti-Western arrogance. Perhaps his family and friends, concerned that his open sympathy with the French rebels might jeopardize his reputation, talked him into putting a hold on its publication. It was not seen in public until long after his death, in 1980, after a copy of the manuscript was rediscovered by historian Zhong Shuhe at the library of a Buddhist temple in Beijing.

These three earliest journals of Zhang's set him apart from the conventional West observer. Being a low-level functionary, he did not share the priority of those in power. Naïve though it might be, in many aspects the picture he painted was surprisingly close to reality, and certainly filled in the gaps left by the senior envoys. It gives us some sense of which kinds of things, a Chinese traveler who, without being distorted by the preponderant concerns that gave meaning to most similar accounts, was most prone to notice and pay attention to. Not surprisingly, quite a different set of things triggered his fancy. His interest in the popular culture, games, physical exercises, and the lower classes were all qualities not readily seen in his contemporary journalists. To him the nation-state model was simply a matter of fact. His sympathy to the poor and the mean enabled him to investigate beneath the wealthy and enlightened façade of the West. The complexity and multitude of objects he described defy order and meaning. But perhaps this was the most powerful message inscribed in his journals: that the "West" was a

complex entity consisting of multitudinous parts that defy reductionism. If we remember the neatly packaged tenets of “Confucianism” that Zhang prepared for Westerners, we might even suggest that he was perhaps not entirely an insider to China, and not truly an outsider to the West.

Yet he was also the most wishful and idealistic of his crew, and almost seemed as though he refused to accept the harsh reality of war and imperialism. To a large extent he subscribed to a moral understanding of Western state policies based on Confucian principles, and thus his entirely mistaken view on the nature of Sino-Western conflict: If those countries are so benevolent and orderly, they must be under the guidance of the Way of the sages. Their apparent conflict with China must have been a result of misunderstanding and the obstruction of petty slanderers and businessmen. Later in his life, he would augment the mundane nature of his *shuqi* in the following terms: “Politics does not go beyond ritual, and ritual originated with matters such as eating, drinking, rhyming poems, and the most ordinary foodstuffs. In the same way river sinks are essential to the ocean, habits in rising and sleeping and the trifling business between neighbors are the key to smooth governance.” His subject matter was mundane, but to him they were curiosities; not in the grand posturing of statesmen but in the games of children did he find the essence of the West, and in this respect he scratched a more profound itch. Time and position drove it out of him, but for a brief moment he showed that the Chinese could see and understand the West as the West understood itself.

IV. “The Three Dynasties Have Reemerged!” Guo Songtao and the Way of the West, 1877-1879

Being the first resident minister to England, Guo Songtao is a prime example of how men with real insight into foreign affairs were ignored by short-sighted leadership in the decades prior to the Sino-Japanese war. He relentlessly denounced the anti-foreign sentiments prevalent in his time; he passionately advocated the opening of foreign trade and the establishment of friendly diplomatic relations with Western countries; he lashed out at popular animosity towards Western learning and proposed the establishment of foreign language schools. Many of these qualities were rarities among men of his contemporaries, and not surprisingly, their derision and slander made Guo an unpopular and lonely man for much of his life. For this reason, Guo has been described as “marching ahead of his contemporaries.”¹ His penetrating perception and breadth of knowledge enabled him to leap over the mental constraints of the others. As J. D. Frodsham puts it, “it was his misfortune to live in an age” when such qualities were applied to foreign affairs.²

In this portrayal of Guo as a reform-leaning self-strengthener is a lack of interest on the other side of Guo, the dark fatalistic strain in his thought, his scholarly devotion to ancient ritual and his sustained interest in divination.³ It is also rarely noticed that, for the grasp of Western ideas he did exhibit, he shows little understanding of such concepts as nation-states, capitalism, science, or imperialism but relied on techniques common to most West observers of his time: he drew analogy with traditional concepts and made inference by pattern-matching. If Kang Youwei’s interest in the New Text School was an attempt to seek justification for reform, Guo’s expertise in traditional learning has seldom

been exhibited alongside his modern side. This selective emphasis in Guo's intellectual interest distorts our understanding of his mental shape by presuming that existing ways of thinking is irrelevant to the acceptance of the new.

Once we depart from the narrative of China's modernization as an inevitable acceptance of universal truth, it suddenly seems that Guo's appreciation of the West becomes less exciting in its degree and depth, but more in its particular path and character. It even seems plausible that Guo was not marching ahead of his contemporaries, but would seem as veering towards his own alley where others saw as a dead end. The old and the modern strains in his thoughts are not just compatible, but must be seen as two sides of the same coin: Guo's internalization of the West was informed by his ritual reform in the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion and his own distillation of classical learning. At the same time, the image of the West emerging from his investigation strengthened his confidence in rites as the first step towards a fundamental solution to China's crises. Having been convinced that China had lost the Way, Guo engaged in a radical reinterpretation of the historical trajectory of past dynasties, coming to the conclusion that the West possessed the new Way of the modern age. Seen in this light, Guo's readiness to accept the West was not merely informed by perceptive observation, but also a product of a mind accustomed to seeing order through the metaphor of the Way. Just as Confucius saw the Way as a single, definite order elucidated by the sage kings, Guo saw the West as treading firmly on its own Way carved out by their own sages, rulers, and great thinkers.⁴ Guo's vision of the Western Way, coupled with his belief that China had fallen off of its track, forms the backdrop of his holistic acceptance of the West as the new seat of the Mandate of Heaven.

Intellectual Profile and Career Before the Mission

Guo Songtao was the eldest son in a gentry family from the Xiangyin county of Hunan. Once wealthy and prosperous, the family had declined by Guo's childhood, but it still saw to it that its three sons received proper education for the civil service examinations. Guo was only twenty when he earned his *juren* degree, in 1840, after briefly attending the prestigious Yuelu Academy the provincial capital Changsha. For the next ten years, he served in a variety of temporary jobs while continuing his bid for his *jinshi* degree: first in the retinue of Luo Wenjun, an education commissioner in charge of the fortification of Zhejiang in the Opium War, then as a teacher in a government school in Hunan, and finally as a secretary for Chen Yuanyan, a Hunanese prefect in Jiangxi. Not satisfied with pedantic learning, he directed energy to maritime defense, education, and local administration. Most notably, his experience during the Opium War made him witness to the utter ineptitude and poor discipline of the Qing troops facing England's modern navy. Immediately after the war, Guo wrote to a friend that the deeper trouble was in the Qing's own mishandling of its foreign policy and local administration, rather than mere foreign threat.⁵

When he finally won his *jinshi* in 1850 with the honor of Hanlin bachelor, a series of personal and regional calamities kept him from climbing the bureaucratic ladder the conventional way: His parents died that year, for which he obliged to remain home for the three-year mourning period. Then, in the summer of 1852, at the end of his mourning, the Taiping rebels pushed into southern Hunan and drove the locals away from their

homes. Instead of going into the capital for the Release From Academy examination to receive his official appointment, Guo stayed behind in his home county Xiangyin.

Accompanied by Zuo Zongtang, a neighbor and close friend, he moved his family to the mountains and lived there as a hermit for several months.

During these months, Guo stumbled upon the works of Wang Fuzhi, a Hunanese loyalist from the end of the Ming dynasty, whose works – often with anti-Manchu overtones – had been hidden by Wang’s family for over two hundred years but had resurfaced a decade earlier.⁶ Refusing to serve the Manchu “barbarians,” Wang dedicated himself to a close examination of the classics and history in order to apprehend principles of human affairs and diagnose the wrongdoing of his age. Reading Wang’s works in his reclusive dwelling in 1852, Guo saw himself as reliving the legacy of Wang, and pondered the same questions that interested Wang two hundred years ago: What went wrong in the present age, and how must social order be restored? Guo paid special attention to Wang’s *Liji zhangju* [The Book of Rites by chapter and sentence].

Wang belonged to the generation of late Ming thinkers who sought to break away from the speculative metaphysics of the Wang Yangming School, a mainstream in Ming intellectual life. One of their means was a re-examination of ancient rites, which they saw as having been reduced to pedagogical methods in the forms of popular lectures, and contaminated with Buddhism and Daoism. In their eyes, this decay of orthodox ritualism weakened the Ming and made it vulnerable to the Manchu invasion. Confucian ritual, according to Wang, will not only reassert Chinese civilization against the Manchu barbarism, but also restore local stability and mend the social fabric that had frayed during the peasant rebellions at the end of Ming.⁷ Reverent of Zhu Xi, Wang

nevertheless had a somewhat different emphasis on ritual from the Song dynasty ritual master. He stressed that ritual was designed by and for human beings, not to restrain their desires, but become proper conduits for emotions and desires.⁸ In Wang's own words, "ritual is for the expression of human sentiments (*qing*). When ritual is in place, feelings are appropriate to the situations; the myriad things will all be furthered without conflict." Whereas Zhu Xi simplified and recreated family rites based on the *Yili*, Wang valued *Liji*, another book in the three rites canon, for its concrete program of self-cultivation and political institutions. He mimicked Zhu Xi's method in commenting on the Four Books and wrote his own *Liji by Chapter and Sentence*, refreshing its historical relevance. It was this book that Guo read in the summer of 1852.

Guo believed, as Guo did, that the key to restoring order lies in giving proper expression to human feelings. In his mind, ritual practices in his own time had hardened into mere forms and frozen into laws. Instead of being conduits of proper emotions, they were rigid routines devoid of meaning. Rather than affirming social relations, they were oppressive measures forced upon the people without transforming them. Whereas Zhu Xi had little interest in discussing the moral principles embedded in the rites, Guo believes that it is useless to discuss ancient practices without a complete understanding of the sages' purpose in creating them and of their historical and canonical origins, and reconciling scholarly disputes on them. Times change, and ritual needs to be changed accordingly. But one cannot change ritual blindly; one must understand the original purpose of the sages in designing the ritual. Only then can one restore and adapt ritual to its rightful place in the present age.

With this in mind, Guo started writing his own commentary on the *Liji* in an effort to revive the Song scholars' "ritual-as-principle" against the narrow philological focus of Han learning scholars in his own time. He extended Zhu Xi's metaphysics on the *Liji* in order to find out how the sages had designed their institutions according to the underlying principle of the cosmos. At the same time, he investigated into the changing interpretation of rites from Han to Song, and how past scholars made changes according to the needs of their own times.⁹ Seeing ritual as flexible expressions of human sentiments, Guo sometimes took unusual steps at flaunting rigid stifling rules. His friends were scandalized to find that when he married his second wife, Guo reversed the proper order by making his new wife pay obeisance to his favorite concubine. When his new wife proved jealous and disrespectful towards the concubine, Guo promptly divorced her.¹⁰

In a broader sense, Guo's interest in ritual was an attempt to formulate social reform. When existing family and community rites proved inadequate to cope with the Taiping crisis, they needed to be changed to renew their relevance. If properly reformed and applied, ritual was the antidote to disorder. But the original purpose of ritual was to harmonize human beings with natural principle, not to restrain human feelings; if it appeared so, it was because people applied rites anachronistically, without understanding their original purposes.¹¹ With this set of (somewhat contradictory) priorities, Guo appears at once orthodox and pragmatic, difficult to fit into a conventional schema. His liberal definition of ritual anticipated his discovery of ritual in Western behavior, and his advocacy of extending ritual to the West.

Unlike Wang, who lived in the memory of the fallen dynasty, Guo and his Hunanese friends faced a regional threat that had yet to develop into a national one. The Taipings, with their Christianity-inspired heterodoxy and ruthless reputation, descended onto the hometowns of the Hunan gentry like a pack of ravenous wolves. The first order of business was not to ruminate over ritual principles in seclusion, but to seek practical means to defeat the enemies. Many years later, Guo described this transition in the following words: “I no longer desired to seek office, but did not forget, even for a moment, the livelihood and policies of the nation, and the protection of my hometown.”¹² His fellow Hunanese gentry, Jiang Zhongyuan and Wang Xin, leading their locally recruited militia, had frustrated the Taiping’s initial plan to take Hunan. These forces, organized around kinship and motivated by an earnest urge for local protection, proved far more effective than the languid imperial troops.

In the fall and winter, at Guo’s persistent urging, his friends Zuo Zongtang and Zeng Guofan began their service as extra-bureaucratic army generals: Zuo under the governor-general of Hunan and Hubei, and Zeng recruiting his own militia. Soon after, Guo was himself invited by Jiang Zhongyuan to join his army in defense of Hubei. After Jiang’s death in 1853, instead of leaving for his new post as Hanlin Compiler in Beijing, he came to Zeng Guofan’s aid, to be a secretary and strategist in his “tent government” until 1856. It was highly unusual for a Hanlin to stay behind as a member of the gentry, but the need for home defense and his friendship with Zeng outweighed his personal ambitions.¹³ Two major innovations of the Xiang Armies were partly attributed to him: the building of a water force to counter the spread of the Taipings along the Xiang and Yangzi, and a system of fundraising based on salt sales and commerce. Using the

classics as their justification, Guo and his younger brother Kuntao designed and instituted the *lijin* – a tax on goods in trade or storage – which soon became the financial backbone of the Xiang Army.¹⁴

By his late thirties, there was little in Guo's view of the West that distinguished him from the mainstream. Although he was impressed with the discipline and military might the British navy exhibited in the Opium War, he conventionally referred to Westerners as *yi* and was suspicious of their mathematical and astronomical theories.¹⁵ If there was a divergence between his perception of the Westerners and the mainstream view, it was in the same conviction he gained from the Opium War, that the root of China's scourge lies in its internal disorder, not external threat. The troubles caused by the West were merely a corollary to this fundamental illness.

His impression of the West was transformed by a visit to Shanghai in 1856. He had been traveling along the Yangzi for two months, prior to his Shanghai stop, setting up checkpoints for collecting salt taxes, and collecting information on local customs, commercial activities, and historical relics in each county and prefecture. He noticed that the opulence of Jiangsu and Zhejiang stood in stark contrast with his hometown in Hunan, and was disturbed by the customs of the Lower Yangzi – it was one of “rottenness, decadence, dishonesty and indolence, where the pursuit of selfish interest took priority and no customary rites held the communities together.”¹⁶ When he finally set his eyes on the foreign concessions, he was surprised not only by the technical ingenuity of Westerners, but by their respectful manners in contrast to the Lower Yangzi scene. “I saw a few barbarian managers of foreign firms on the street, and they shook hands with me warmly. Even though we do not speak each other's language and have only met once,

they extended their ritual [to me] to such a degree. People in the inland are far inferior to them.”¹⁷ Even the servant class had admirable manners: “The young barbarian waiters standing by the two sides of the staircase looked extremely elegant and beautiful,” he reports, “they pulled a string to show tourists the way. How respectful and understanding of ritual!”¹⁸ On the contrary, the mainland Chinese in the service of Westerners “looked hideous and behaved aggressively.”¹⁹ Order and cleanliness inside Western houses were duly noted. In addition, the delicacy of Western porcelain appeared to him “beyond what China can produce.”²⁰ After a quick tour of a steamship in the company of the British consul, Guo stopped by the London Missionary Society’s Press (Mohai shuguan) and saw Walter Medhurst and his crew: the Mathematician Li Shanlan, the missionary journalist Joseph Edkins, and Wang Tao, Medhurst’s assistant and scribe. Guo was presented with several issues of *The Chinese Serial*, a magazine featuring short articles on Western news and sciences clippings. He was impressed with the literary and scientific talents of these men, although disapproved of their work: “Many Christian tracts target Confucianism and, borrowing the Buddhists’ ideas of hell, they propagate slander and lies. It was all thanks to the diligent work of these gentlemen. I am afraid they are not without fault.”²¹

Such was Guo’s first impression of the “barbarians” upon visiting Shanghai: affable, courteous, living in orderly, clean houses, and capable of manufacturing intricate machines as well as works of art. It was only to be regretted that these learned men of the West channeled their useful energy into promulgating Christianity. From this point on, Guo’s interest in the West was not merely on a technical level, but always came with a warm appreciation of the internal order and discipline of the Western mind. This predilection was to play powerfully in the next stage in his career, and to set him off on a

divergent path from the mainstream literati. Even the liberal-minded Zeng Guofan was puzzled by the dramatic shift in his friend's attitude: "In the past I only knew that Xu Jiyu wrote a book exaggerating the merits of the English barbarians, but Yunxian (Guo's style-name) seemed astounded, too, upon returning from Shanghai."²² Convinced that China needs to treat Westerners with ritual, he started looking into history for precedents and to find out when the country had stopped doing so. The sage kings had no defense measures, he argues, they merely treated their smaller neighbors with befitting ritual, never forcing them to comply. Qin and Han abandoned ritual and relied on their military might. Worse still, from Song on, the ascendance of the civil bureaucracy meant that the belligerent stance of the pampered literati was often favored over the cautious opinions of the military staff.²³ To regain its righteous stance and accrue virtue, China needs ritual in diplomacy.

Between Guo's Xiang Army years and his mission to England in 1876, Guo served in a series of important posts, both in the capital and in the provinces. A few of his practical proposals, such as the opening of language schools, were later put into effect, but on the whole he remained ineffective and unpopular with the mainstream. His disillusion with the court and officialdom deepened by the year. His appeals against war with England resulted in a major fall-out with Senggelinqin, a Mongolian prince in charge of the Tianjin defense in 1858. In retaliation, the latter engineered a lawsuit against him, aborting his effort to institute Xiang Army-style likin to fund the imperial army. Unexpected backstabbing by Zuo Zongtang, whom he had taken for a friend for life, ended his career as governor in Guangdong in 1866.

In the eight years between 1867 to 1874, Guo remained in Hunan. In the company of a circle of like-minded gentry, he delved into ritual study to rectify the woefully broken social and political order. A real gentleman refuses to serve in office when the government has lost its foothold in virtue, he wrote in his diary. But even as he focused on local affairs, he followed every scrap of political rumor coming his way and continued to advise his former colleagues through writing. From Guo's own perspective, his aloofness afforded him a perspicuity unmatched by his contemporaries in his analyses of current events, and he could not withhold these opinions from his friends, near and far. In the summer of 1867, Guo heard from a group of friends who had recently been to the capital that the Zongli yamen had suggested that Western experts be invited to teach astronomy and mathematics at the Tongwenguan, and provided that admission to the school be restricted to candidates of the civil service examinations only. Upon reading the yamen's proposal, he became sympathetic to the flurry of protests over the plan: "This is entirely absurd. There is no word in this document that does not make one laugh to the point of spewing!"²⁴

Guo had his own reasons for rejecting the plan. First, the stipulation that only civil service examination candidates (*zhengtu ren yuan*, literally, "personnel on the correct path") be allowed to study in the Tongwenguan simply makes no sense to him. He asked rhetorically: "Do they think that only those on the 'correct path' have talent?" In his view, those recruited this way would inevitably be superfluous and insincere, because the real talents who dedicated themselves to learning are usually "the shriveled and exhausted gentleman," the kind who hid themselves in the county schools, and woods and mountains.²⁵ Secondly, the rigid work schedule and movement restriction would

simply humiliate those who were conscientious and create more conflict with their foreign teachers. He also disapproves the use of exams to promote the good students into office, and to retain the worse students to further their study. Its repeated promises of good salary and other rewards would lure the mercenaries and discourage the sincere-minded gentlemen who wished to study with Westerners for the sake of learning and sympathy with the court. In his extreme frustration, he denounced examinations as the worst enemy to learning and agreed with Woren's criticism of the proposal:

There is nothing that ruins talented men more than examinations! I have yet to see one among the Hanlin who genuinely understands literature and history. Now Zongli yamen wants to bring the Western methods into parallel with examinations for Hanlin academicians. No wonder Woren thinks that the court is merely making way for official advancement!

Guo repudiated the entire memorial point by point, and in the end concluded it, again, with his favorite example of the Southern Song demise at the hands of superfluous literati. Unlike art and literature, mathematics and astronomy are "substantive learning." How can one respond to it with superfluous words?

Guo had proposed the establishment of a Tongwenguan years ago, but when it was finally implemented, he joined its legions of critics to discredit the effort. The most urgent problem confronting the Qing, as he saw it, was not its slow speed in adopting Western teaching, but in the poor educational foundation it was built upon. While Guo certainly recognized the need for Western learning, he agreed even more with Woren that "the way of proper ruling was in the extolling of ritual and righteousness, not in clever designs and stratagem, and the basic plan should start with people's minds rather than technology."²⁶ In addition to the Tongwenguan charter, he also criticizes the handling, by the court and the Zongli yamen, of opposing views, especially in their response to

Woren. He was disturbed upon hearing that the court had ordered Woren to recommend his own “native talents” in mathematics and astronomy, knowing that he could not possibly find such candidates on such short notice. “Mr. Wo is a distinguished official known for his learning in *lixue*, and of course he does not know everything in the past and present. Yet the court has its mind set on humiliating him.” The court’s repudiation of Woren, in Guo’s mind, not only alienated the literati from Western studies, but further diminished those with cautious and mature voices.²⁷

He himself was one of those “shriveled and exhausted gentlemen” of native talent, waiting for a sage ruler to appear. When an old friend returned from the capital in 1873, the year when Tongzhi emperor started ruling in his own right, Guo hurried over to hear about the current state of things, only to be told that “the situation in the capital was like the final years of emperor Daoguang’s reign. None of the ministers and military generals was of any use.” The remaining Xiang Army veterans who remained in office, such as Zeng Guoquan and Liu Rong, were isolated and unpopular because of their sour temperament.²⁸ At a dinner party with other gentry, the group reached the consensus that “the entire court was filled with muddle-headed men, who could do nothing but obstruct men of talent.”²⁹ The real problem, as Guo puts it (after a bit of drinking), started with the constitutional decay during Daoguang’s reign. The previous emperors governed their officials with strict laws while treating the people with leniency, but Daoguang reversed this policy and became a slave to the bureaucracy.³⁰ Now, at the beginning of Tongzhi’s personal ruling, the strident bureaucracy reverted to their unruliness in Daoguang’s time, leading the emperor by the nose and eager to protect their own interest. Things went downhill from there. This was surely not a court worth serving.

Little did Guo know, when he made this remark at the end of 1873, that the court was soon to recall him for his expertise on foreign-affairs. In early 1874, Japan sent an expedition to Formosa, on the pretense of seeking retribution against aborigines there who had murdered Ryukyu fishermen two years prior.³¹ When the Japanese navy suddenly appeared in the port of Amoy, the court came to realize the vulnerability of its defensive line along the southeast coast and the importance of keeping Taiwan under Chinese sovereignty. In June, Guo received a court summons. By the time he arrived in Beijing, the Formosa crisis had been resolved, thanks to the mediation of Thomas Wade, British minister to China. But the incident gave the self-strengthening officials a much-needed opportunity to rally support for building a modern navy.

The Ryukyu Crisis and Margary Affair

In the capital, Guo found himself stepping into a precarious network of princes and high ministers with overlapping ties and conflicting interests. Much had changed from when Binchun and Zhigang took their voyages. Among the founders of Zongli yamen, Prince Gong was out of favor and Wenxiang gravely ill. Prince Chun, the father of the Guangxu Emperor, emerged victorious in the new arrangement. While Guo held Wenxiang and Prince Gong in respect, he found the men currently in power a most timid and incompetent bunch whose sole interest was in evading their responsibilities. It was much worse to have Prince Chun in power than Prince Gong, as Guo noted back in 1871, given his “vulgar nature” and unruly subordinates.³² Shen Guifen and Mao Changxi, two high-ranking officials of shallow minds and initially invited into the Zongli yamen in

order to stifle their opposition, were now its key decision makers.³³ Shen, in his concurrent post as Grand Councilor, came to side with self-strengtheners such as Li Hongzhang and Shen Baozhen. On the conservative end were Mao Changxi and Li Hongzao, Grand Councilor and teacher to the late emperor Tongzhi.

Now that the panic over the Formosa incident was over, the court widely solicited advice on maritime defense. Edicts were issued calling for proposals on what the court considered six most urgent businesses: military training, arms purchases, ship building, personnel employment, and long-term development. Sixteen governors and governor-generals were asked to submit their plans within a month; a number of concerned officials in lesser posts also answered the call. All agreed that drastic measures towards self-strengthening were necessary, but opinions differed widely on which items should take priority. On one end of the spectrum were Li Hongzhang and Shen Baozhen advocating for the immediate acquisition of the most advanced ships and guns, the building of a modern navy, and sending naval students abroad. On the other end were men who, seeing internal order and maritime fortification as key, doubted the practical need for a Western-style navy and heavy investment in industry.

Guo came late into the debate, about half a year later, when Li's naval plan had already been approved. He agrees with Li and Shen that self-strengthening was necessary, but sides with the more cautious voices in arguing that laxation of internal discipline and domestic grievances against corruption and bandits were the real problem. He assures the court that China was not at the risk of Western invasion: "The West nibbles at other countries like a silkworm in their maneuver to profit, but there has never been a case where they conquered cities and invaded territories. When Prussia and

France fought a war, it was for venting their accumulated mutual grievances, and obtained no benefits to their territories.”³⁴

Contrary to Li and Shen, Guo thinks that investment in navy, military training, shipyards, and arsenals was of little use.

The way Western governments established their policies have their root and tip. Their root lies in the court’s governance and teaching, and their tip is found in commerce. As to ship-building and industrial manufacture, which intertwine and reinforce each other, they are but one section of the tip. This is why we must first open the channel to merchants and build the foundation of adopting Western methods, tending to the root but not ignoring the tip.

In his view, most of the six prompts from the Zongli yamen were irrelevant. The root to self-strengthening lies in enriching the people and mobilizing their strengths. The West has shown an effective way to do this: to rely on merchants for funding industrial and military ventures. Wealthy Chinese merchants were funding American railways and registering their ships under Western governments, he observes, so why couldn’t China lure them into her own service? The enrichment of Chinese merchants was itself a source of national strength, even when the capital stays in private hands. Once given a stake in national interest, he believes, the merchants will dedicate themselves to national defense, investigate into foreign affairs, and the sheer proliferation of merchant steamships will be a natural asset to maritime defense. The recently inaugurated China Merchants’ Steamship and Navigation Company was a step towards this, he says, but the mutual distrust between merchants and officials dampened its momentum. He proposes scrapping the “official-supervision” part of the model altogether. “If merchants managed the company themselves without official interference, business would flow naturally.”³⁵

The way to handle these enterprises is not through outright control, but careful planning

to integrate the interest of the merchant communities with the government's long-term strategy. Officials and merchants operate according to different rules, and there needs to be an institutional mechanism linking the two establishments: a merchant-elected superintendent to take charge of all foreign trade. Once approved by the governor-general, this superintendent will be appointed by the Zongli yamen for a three-year term. This measure will drastically increase private initiative, "joining the efforts between those above and those below."³⁶

Guo's proposal shows the divergence between his priorities and those of the leading modernizers. From his experience in collecting likin taxes, he had come to see the value of economic prosperity as a source of social stability, and to promote sales taxes as a viable alternative to land taxes. He developed the Mencian idea of enrichment of the nation through enrichment of the people, linking it with the capitalist policies of the Western nations. But a nagging question still remains: How does the court ensure the loyalty and integrity of the merchants without appropriate official supervision at every step? A lack of convincing reassurance probably underlined the court's overall indifference to Guo's proposal. Guo emphasized the improvement of popular customs by rites and self-cultivation, seeing it as a catch-all solution to all social illness. And he presumably thought that a similar extension of moral principle to the merchants would solve the problem. But these ideas were never explicitly stated.

Soon after Guo's submitted this plan, a diplomatic crisis set his career on a new path. Augustus Margary, an interpreter from the British consular service, was attacked and killed on an expedition at the China-Burmese border. The murder was most likely committed by the aborigines of the region, over whom the Chinese authorities in Yunan

had little control even in the most peaceful times.³⁷ Yet the death of Margary was seized upon by Thomas Wade to settle all outstanding questions between the two governments once and for all. In the six-point settlement Wade drafted were three collateral demands on trade and diplomacy. For immediate action was the dispatch of an imperial commissioner on an apology mission to England, who would stay on as a minister in residence.

By a joint maneuver of Shen Guifen and Li Hongzhang, Guo was recommended for the post of minister to England, but he resisted it vociferously. He was sure that a lone mission could not make much difference on a large scale. The key in resolving the Margary Affair, and in setting Chinese foreign policy on the right course, lay in restoring the spirit of ritual – the principle of reciprocity, mutual understanding, and self-regulation – with regard to foreign relations. As he explains in a memorial on the matter, if the Margary Affair had occurred during the Three Dynasties, local officials in Yunnan would be held responsible for allowing anti-foreign sentiments to grow among their subordinates and the general population. Thus, he petitioned that Cen Yuying, the governor-general of Yunnan, be summarily dismissed and put under investigation for involvement in the affair.³⁸ By moving one step ahead of the British in holding the Qing's own officials responsible, Guo explains, the court will give Westerners no excuse for their collateral demands. Westerners follow reason, and as long as China conducts itself according to rites, there would never be an occasion of war – why did no one but himself in the whole wide empire see this?³⁹

This memorial set off a storm of angry responses from foes, friends, and even his own students, who condemned him for being naïve and treacherous, and for his

inappropriate citation of the Rites Classics.⁴⁰ Nothing came up in a joint British-Qing investigation of Cen, confirming public suspicion that Guo's proposal was aimed at pleasing foreigners. As he felt estranged in the capital, his critical opinion of his own countrymen drew him close to the foreign community, especially Robert Hart and Thomas Wade. During much of 1876, while he prepared for the mission at the Zongli yamen, Guo met Wade and Hart frequently and held high opinions of both men. Despite Wade's fierce temperament and unreasonable demands, he preferred to deal with a foreigner than with those pathetic men at the Zongli yamen.⁴¹

Up until the last minute, Guo was determined to decline the post. Three times he submitted resignations, and three times imperial edicts refused to grant him leave. In the end, he only changed his mind when the Empress Dowager herself entreated him to take the job. "There are ten thousand reasons why you must not resign," she cuts Guo off when he was about to give his resignation speech, "I always knew that you are loyal and devoted to the country. This is truly something that no one else can manage." Looking over to an imperial prince in attendance, she tells him about Guo: "Here is a man who is genuinely brilliant and hardworking. Try as you might, you just can't find a second one of him!" She addresses Guo again: "What do those outsiders know? Look around you, who in the Zongli yamen was not scolded by frivolous words? In any case, the emperor always knows your heart." He swallowed up the speech he had memorized at home and kowtowed.⁴²

Voyage to London

For the next three months, Guo struggled to put his embassy together. He was eager to bring along men who shared his view of foreign-affairs and the illness of China, but in this he was disappointed. As attaché he chose Zhang Zimu, an old friend and member of the Hunan gentry, and Zhang Sigui, an old acquaintance from Zeng Guofan's *mufu*. Zhang Zimu, another native talent in foreign-affairs, never managed to leave Hunan. He was removed from Guo's list after the governor-general in Hunan, apparently out of a grudge, memorialized to the court that Zhang was "not capable in foreign service."⁴³ Li Hongzhang used his influence to appoint Halliday Macartney, a British veteran formerly in charge of his arsenal, as Guo's foreign secretary. At the last minute, Liu Xihong, a Cantonese who had previously worked under Guo, was inserted as a vice-minister upon the recommendation of Mao Changxi, a high-ranking official in the Zongli yamen.⁴⁴ To seek employment in the embassy, Liu had manifested sympathy to Guo's view on foreign affairs, but once the journey began he fell into bitter quarreling with Guo.

Thus assembled, the embassy was an ad-hoc mixture of Li Hongzhang's confidants, ex-Tongwenguan bureaucrats, and a careerist (possibly schizophrenic) vice-minister and *his* own men.⁴⁵ None of them could be trusted, and none shared or even understood Guo's concern for China. He worried about schism and backbiting from the beginning of the mission.⁴⁶

Thomas Wade and Robert Hart, representing the interests of the British Foreign Office and the Imperial Customs, respectively, competed to insert their own men in Guo's entourage. Wade arranged so that his affable secretary Walter Hiller would accompany Guo on this voyage to London. Hart, who saw Guo's diplomatic stance as

the key to the future of the Imperial Customs, deployed his best men in London to give Guo assistance where he might need it. Any undesirable outside influence on the embassy in London was to be weeded out, for it might confuse Guo and throw him off of coordination with Hart's advice to the Zongli yamen. He told Campbell: "We must be beforehand and prevent 1. His getting into bad hands, and 2. The growth of a class of foreign employes [*sic*] connected with Legations drawn from other than Customs' sources." As to the manner in which this influence was to be exerted, Hart exhorts him to discreetness and gentleness, so Guo might not think them too intrusive.⁴⁷ To Campbell he also admitted his distrust of Macartney, whom he saw as leaning on Wade's side, and was eager to fill the post with his own number.⁴⁸

Rivalry and differences aside, the English collectively exerted the predominant influence over Guo. Unlike Binchun and Zhigang, who acquired a panoramic view of Europe and spoke to the statesmen of all major Western countries, Guo's impression of the West was created through a British lens. While Hart had believed that Guo should at least "have a peep at" America on his way to London, Guo never was to visit the United States.⁴⁹ With the exception of a few months in 1878, he spent most of his time in London and only briefly toured the rest of Europe at the end of his tenure. His translators spoke only English and a smattering of French. The news sources he consulted, via these translators, were entirely from the British point of view. The voyage itself was designed to showcase British dominance. With Wade's support, Macartney changed Guo's vessel from a French steamer to a British one with the view that Guo "would be impressed by stopping en route at only British points of call – the six great stages of our Imperial track across the Oceans, viz. Hong-Kong, Singapore, Ceylon, Aden, Malta and Gibraltar."⁵⁰

Given the predominant influence of the Britons, it is not surprising that Guo used the British model as the yardstick to measure those of other countries, and often contrasted the positive aspects of England with problems of China.⁵¹

With the help of his patriotic British translators, and being himself favorably predisposed towards the West, Guo saw the internal and external policies of British Empire as a perfect embodiment of the spirit of the Three Dynasties. The curriculum of the Government Central School in Hong Kong emphasized the Classics and the Four Books while downplaying literary flourishes. The system was “severe and orderly, with a far-seeing viewpoint.”⁵² The thoughtful layout of the classroom and students’ schedule suggest to him that Westerners “have inherited something of the ancients’ ideal of forming and nourishing the talents of their pupils.” In contrast, it would seem that students of Confucianism in China “have shamefully lost their education entirely.”⁵³ The Hong Kong Prison surprised him with its extraordinary thoughtfulness regarding the wellbeing of the prisoners and its exact system of meting out punishment appropriate to the degree of offence. The humaneness of the British government was palpable even in prisons.⁵⁴ On the island of Penang, he saw ten boats of natives waiting upon their retired British lieutenant and playing music while he boarded his ship. He read into this scene that the lieutenant “must have left behind him traces of humane love (*yi’ ai*).”⁵⁵

Externally, the European system of international law also struck him as a reenactment of ritual. A code of conduct “giving precedence to fidelity and righteousness,” international law allows states to compete in “knowledge and strength.” He was most impressed by the agreement of repatriation and humane treatment of prisoners of war, well-developed maritime commercial regulations, and a standard system

of signal flags. Even when acts of blunder occurred, Guo could count on his British translators to explain the problem away. When a British ironclad mismanaged its flagging and nearly crashed into the embassy's Travancore, Guo asked why it behaved thus. He was merely told that they raised their flags to show respect to the Ambassador. "But why did it cut in front of us?" "It came towards to welcome us, and then it stops to let us pass first."⁵⁶ A ludicrous episode of mismanagement was presented to Guo as a perfect display of Western etiquette. He was not the least suspicious of what he was told and commented in his journal: "Such courtesy with which etiquette is seen conducted here. China cannot reach this; far has it fallen behind!"

Not only had China fallen behind – the entire non-West was under the sway of European powers. Imperialism was interpreted in a benevolent light – a transformation of the poor and uncivilized by a powerful West. Conquests were justifiable because the conquerors were a superior civilization. In Ceylon Guo was shown the former palace of the king, who had been reduced to a commoner after the British conquest. That the British did not eliminate the ruling house, as in the tradition of Chinese dynastic founders, was particularly striking to him. He inferred from this that Britain made its profit without "relying especially on military means," by maneuvering with wisdom and strength. Compared with conventional practice of Chinese dynastic founders, England treated its subjects with magnanimity and did not resort to ruthless acts such as cutting off the rulers' offspring: "This was truly a policy unknown to previous ages."⁵⁷ Conversations with Hillier filled Guo with particularly a rosy image of British imperial policies. When Guo asked him about the wars in Sumatra, Hillier took the opportunity to further impress upon Guo the humane rule and civilizing mission of the English. The Sumatrans rebelled

against the Dutch because of their harsh taxation, most of which was siphoned to benefit the Dutch economy, but the British never did anything like that. “They built irrigation, paved roads, and added schools. Applying the wealth of the country for the benefit of the country, they share the profit with people and no resentment was bred.” This is why, according to Hiller, “all the little kingdoms in Sumatra were eager to offer their land to the British and did not want to be affiliated with Holland.”⁵⁸

Guo’s idealized image of British colonialism was sustained even when the voyage reached the Islamic states along the Red Sea, where British infantry and naval buildup showed unmistakable signs of unrest and violence. Again, his Western interpreters stepped in with ready explanation. The increase in military buildup, Guo was told, was because “the Arabic Muslims are burly and fierce, and their pillaging and murderous ways are quite beyond the imagination.”⁵⁹ Likewise, because the isolationist Ethiopia captured and imprisoned Englishmen, a righteous expedition (*zheng*) had been led against it, resulting in the death of the king.⁶⁰ The Ottoman Turks were just coming to the realization that Western institutions must be established and religious conflicts put to an end, although Guo was suspicious whether the sultan “was truly repentant and capable of ending the chaos.”⁶¹ Everywhere along the voyage, he saw the division between chaos, barbarity, and poverty, on the one hand, and order, civility and wealth on the other. The West, with Britain at its helm, possessed what seemed to him an unstoppable and natural tendency to conquer and change the non-Western states at their will.

To Guo, the West was in possession of a Way distinct from that which prevailed in ancient China. He had argued, in his maritime defense memorial, that the West strove to benefit from commercial relations with China; neither peace nor war would satisfy

them. Now he reasoned, along the logic of the imperialists, that the relationship could bring wealth and strength to both worlds: it could satisfy the commercial needs of the British while bringing improvements to the colonies. “The Western countries have their own root and branches,” he wrote, “If China can learn from the Way of the West, we can rely on each other to gain wealth and power; this is the way to preserve our country for a thousand years. Otherwise, misfortunes would surely befall China.”⁶² Upon reaching England, he submitted this portion of his journal, titled *Shixi jicheng* [Record of an envoy to the West], to the Zongli yamen.

State and Society

Arriving in England with this heightened idealism, Guo was initially disappointed to see signs of the same tendencies that hindered an efficient administrative function in China. “The division of parties in the political affairs of this country is even worse than in China,” he wrote, “The ruling party appoints all ministers from among its own men, and changes things completely [when they come to power].” The kind of mutual spite and competition this causes is much worse than in China.”⁶³ Bureaucratic inefficiency in England rivaled that of China. As soon as Guo arrived, he wrote to ask for a meeting with the Foreign Minister Lord Derby, but had to wait for a week before he received a reply. Not used to making scheduled calls, he was much piqued by the rigidity of the system: “In everything they cautiously follow every step of the established rules. The circuitousness and tardiness of this system only exceeded the Chinese bureaucracy!”⁶⁴ Ceremonies at the Court of St. James perplexed him with their laborious procedures and

long waits. In a reception by the Prince of Wales, Guo stood with other foreign dignitaries for over two hours before the ceremony even started. He complains: “All ritual forms of this country follow simplicity, but this is cruel practice. Not a single court ceremony in China would require officials to stand for this long.”⁶⁵

These complaints, though sporadic, suggest that Guo had imagined the British government rather differently, as one resembling the ancient model in *Zhou Rites*: efficient, well-coordinated, and free of red tape and infighting. He was not prepared to see another sprawling bureaucracy of monstrous preponderance. But he was quick to notice that this government was organized with a different rationale. His unfavorable impression lessened within the first month of his stay, upon visiting the House of Commons during a debate on the government’s Turkey policy. He notes the order and discipline of the parliament: the speakers followed one another like a perfectly coordinated stage play. Whenever someone had things to say, they stood up while the rest remained seated, and no one had the authority to intercede or disrupt a speaker. He also notes the flexibility of expression the system allowed: Members could express their agreement or disagreement on certain points by collectively giving loud exclamations during a speech, and they were given the chance to query the government on its policies or even criticize them.⁶⁶ Like a choreographed dance, the meeting gave proper expression to all issues of concern in an efficient and respectful manner.

To some extent, Guo’s observation of parliamentary politics reflects what most dissatisfied him about the Chinese system: the lack of channels to deliver different voices to the throne and the monopoly of power by high ministers. Power was firmly grasped by a handful of princes and high officials. Men of real talent and virtue, such as Zeng

Guofan and himself, were never given a chance in the central government. Conscientious gentry, who could have served as the channel between the people and the government, were ignored by jealous magistrates. As a Neo-Confucianist, Guo linked the clotting of political channels with blockage of the passage of *qi* through this world, often consulting the *Book of Change* in his diagnosis of the political disorder. All of the Qing's problems can all be traced to the thick wall between the ruler and the people: as the *qi* of popular grievances accumulates, banditry, anomalous weathers, floods, droughts, and uprisings follow suit, upright officials are hushed and ignored, and government ceases to perform its duties.

In the British parliament Guo saw an alternative to the Chinese system, and one in which popular feelings were always given a fair hearing by the ruling class. He notes the checks and balances between members of the parliament – the “huishen” or “yishen” (parliamentary gentry) – and the executive branch.⁶⁷ When irreconcilable differences arose, he notes, the prime minister could call for a reelection of the parliament; but if the new parliament still disapproves of his policies, the prime minister must resign. On the local level, the “Mayor System” allows the people to elect their own officials and “obeys the feelings of the people.” This system of local governance interlocked with the parliament to create a “mutually sustaining” unity.⁶⁸ It was this strong and flexible tie between the high and the low that enabled the talented people to pursue their scholarship and to devote themselves to the nation. Because the government uses tax money to improve civil affairs, they were able to tax more heavily without inciting popular discontent.⁶⁹ Seen in this light, the double system of the parliament and the mayor was “the basis upon which the country was established.”

Guo also revises his original assessment of the party system. He realized that the nature of the political parties in England was different from those in the Chinese context. In a casual chat with fellow members of the embassy, Li Fengbao brought up his confusion about Western parties: “In their daily life members of the two parties socialize with one another kindly, but whenever issues of national politics are concerned, they each stand by their own flags and drums and do not give an inch. Once the party with the majority of supporters wins, however, the opposing party steps back and listens without being resentful or difficult. How is this possible?”⁷⁰ Guo replies that there were two types of parties: those who agreed with the ruling body, and those who opposed them. The purpose of having opposing parties was to exhaust their ideas, and to find out the right and the wrong by investigation and debate. In repeated questioning and answering, the reason of each party was expressed in full and nothing can remain hidden. After the system is in place for some time, it becomes the custom, and even the people deal with one another with honesty and respect to truth.

Herein lay the key difference between Guo’s assessment of Western governments and the assessments of previous observers. Binchun, Zhigang and Zhang Deyi all followed the Chinese imperial tradition in praising the virtue of the Western monarchs. Guo never paid much attention to the moral character or (with the exception of Bismarck) the abilities of the heads of Western countries. “The virtue of Western monarchs,” he points out, “cannot compare to the rulers of the Three Dynasties.”⁷¹ The key in Western governments was that the rulers do not treat their officials and subjects and as their private property. This system gave no regard to the court’s favoritism and resentment, and any dissatisfaction of the people immediately shook those in power. By allowing

popular interrogation of the policy makers, the parliament enabled full expression of human feeling and forged a customary respect for truth and honesty. The court publicized its policies and invited criticism and comment from citizens; more admiring still, even a commoner's inquiry would be properly addressed. Guo saw this system as the embodiment of the Confucian ideal, the mutual enabling of good governance from above and refined customs below. "It is not without reason that the most talented men under heaven would converge in the West alone!"

There is a temptation to assume that Guo's praise of constitutional democracy reflects an endorsement of the principle behind it. Guo conceived of constitutional democracy based on existing notions of reciprocity and structure of the natural order. Individual rights and popular sovereignty were not concepts he was ever familiar with. Drawing analogies between processes of human affairs and cosmic forces, his concern was solely for finding an institution which effectively channels popular grievance and energy, and which binds the ruler, the officials, and the people into a harmonious and orderly unity. Thirty years later, intellectuals in the late Qing solves Guo's problem by creating a national consciousness and by making citizens out of dynastic subjects. But the concepts and vocabulary of nationalism were not available to Guo. Guo's national unity was a harmonious hierarchy patterned after natural principles.

Guo cherished the British model for giving a conduit to popular feelings, but on occasion, he worries that parliaments and congresses might pamper the people and nurture their arrogance. In this case, popular sentiment was conceived as intractable *qi* threatening to subvert order. Guo was particularly troubled by workers' riots and political assassinations. In May, 1878, news reached him that textile workers in

Manchester, in their protest against a wage cut, destroyed their machines and burned down the houses of the factory owners. He notes that the same thing happened in the railway industry in the United States the previous year. “Workers took control of their wages; at every turn they threatened to cause trouble. This is a bad custom of the West.”⁷² This was because the political system and religious teaching of the West followed the will of the people in everything they do. By allowing “parliamentary gentry” to make central decisions, the power of the people outweighed the authority of the ruler.

A democratic republic (*minzhu*) was a result of excessive political decentralization and lack of strong political leaders. He saw the disturbances caused by the anarchist and socialist movements as a result of such political decentralization. While Guo lauded the contest between two dominant parties in England as conducive to debates, he saw the proliferation of political parties in other European countries as a source of political instability. These parties, in his view, championed ideological differences and damaged public morale by giving free rein to the “drifting of human heart.” He was particularly struck by one French party which promised “the elimination of the rich and the poor” and “collective ownership of silver and silk.” He considered these promises far more dangerous than the traditional temptations – wealth and prestige, for example – to which the Chinese elite succumbed to in their pursuit of offices.⁷³

In a conversation with a Frenchman on his voyage home, he expressed this concern in full. He acknowledged the good intentions of the Western political models, but the “clamoring *qi* of the people (*minqi taixiao*) was a great threat” to its political stability. The Frenchman’s responded by saying that democracy was good in its intention

but could only be applied to an idea world free of war, punishment, and selfishness. His words made such a deep impression that Guo paraphrased them in his journal:

If people's hearts are not unified, one cannot force them to be the same. To make an analogy, the body has various parts in the front, the back, the left and the right, but for most purposes force is exerted by the right hand alone. Even in using the right hand there are different ways, but it is important that the five fingers are of different length. To establish a country based on democracy, to abolish the difference between the high and the low, would be to forcibly eliminate the differences of the world. If one cuts off one's middle finger to make up for the length of the pinky, then the entire body becomes useless, and the unity is merely a false appearance. This way of doing things cannot last long.⁷⁴

“He is indeed a Royalist,” Guo says, after quoting him in length in his journal, “but his words do not fall out of reason.” This underlines his endorsement of the British model, and resistance to republicanism. As people are naturally different in their capacities, a proper political structure should respect such differences, not forcibly eliminate them. To Guo, *minzhu* might be viable for a small and homogenous society as Switzerland, but for not a country with a larger population differentiated by wealth, status and education.

For most countries, a good government should maintain a balance between giving proper channels to popular feelings while maintaining a centralized, hierarchical political structure. Where he worried about popular clamors in France and America, the German model of centralization was likewise unpalatable to him. He saw Bismarck's state-building as an attempt to cure the weakness of parliamentary politics, which Germany adopted following the British model thirty years prior. Guo concurred with Bismarck's intentions, but he disliked the approach Bismarck adopted: “Seeing that the parliament resulted in

excessive popular arrogance, Bismarck sought to regain sovereignty, but being rushed and tactless, he pitted himself against an entire people.” In the end, Bismarck was saved only by a timely issuance of a “self-condemnation” of the monarch, in which he inquired into the people’s grievances and renewed the tie between the ruler and the people.⁷⁵ The old King understood people and got it right, Guo thought. The proper way to win people’s hearts is through openness and gentle persuasion.

Knowing the implausibility of political reform in the Qing, Guo never made mention of Western political systems in his letters with friends and the Zongli yamen. Change through political reform would certainly be faster, but it required a powerful and enlightened monarch and a group of likeminded officials. In the end, what China lacked were talented men who set their mind on the right path. Much more realistic, then, to change people through education.

Education

Guo departed from prevailing Chinese notion of Western education as mere technical training. He noted the religious overtones in the secular education in England, and its concern for the moral wellbeing of the students. His first visit to an English school was to the London-based Christ’s Hospital, a charitable institute for talented children from poor families. Guo sat alongside the benefactors and benefactresses and watched the seven hundred children take their dinner at sixteen long tables. The students sat in absolute silence while the clergy delivered a pre-dinner sermon, then three songs were sung to music while the students knelt and held their hymnals. After dinner there

was another sermon and some more songs, then the students exited the dining hall in an orderly procession, bowing respectfully to their master on their way out. Upon inquiry, Guo was told that the songs sung before and after dinner were prayers for God's blessing upon the king, the royal family, government officials, and the benefactors of the school, for they provided the means for the students' education. In Guo's view, the service was designed according to the same principle as Confucian ritual. The lyrics achieved the same purpose as the court hymns in the Book of Odes: "The Chinese sages, before they teach their students, first teach them music and songs to attune their emotion and harmonize their hearts with nature. When one hears such lyrics (as sung by the students), a desire for loyalty and love spontaneously arises. The ritual and music of the Three Dynasty do not surpass this!"⁷⁶

Guo found that Western education shared the Confucian concern for humanity and cultivation of the goodness of human nature. At the Home and Colonial Society School, an institute combining the education of juvenile and teacher's training, Guo was apprised of the pedagogical techniques developed by the Swiss educator Johann Pestalozzi. To help students learn the alphabet, teachers tossed on the floor squares of printed letters and asked students to pick out the ones being asked. Children aged four or five were being taught basic hand signs and hand exercises. Children aged seven or eight were being taught natural science, how to identify foxes and the various uses of cow leather. Those aged eleven and twelve, old enough for math and physics lessons, were being shown how to use a thermometer. In a music lesson, students coordinated their tapping, clapping, and hand gestures in perfect order, all according to the movement of the conductor's baton. At the heart of these methods was a rejection of rote learning and

respect for children's innate curiosity and playfulness. "The way Westerners develop their talent is by making their children play according to ritual code, and by grouping them by age and stimulating their minds so that they do not grow bored. Is this not perfectly good and perfectly beautiful?"⁷⁷

If the intent underlying Confucian and Christian education was similar, their institutional contrast was striking. In the Qing, state schools existed on all administrative levels, but they did little other than dispensing stipends and maintaining networks of patronage, and only those who had already obtained degrees were eligible to attend. Education was the business of private-funded schools, which aimed solely to prepare students for the civil service examinations.⁷⁸ In contrast, Guo notes that Western schools existed for every specialization – mining, medicine, engineering, agriculture, law. There were even national galleries for the edification of painters. Universal schooling was enforced. Even mechanics at arsenals were given classes in literature, mathematics, music, and the sciences.⁷⁹ Full-time schooling was required for children between four and twelve. Parents who did not send their children to school were punishable by law.⁸⁰

In England, the state did not impose rigid control on all areas of education. Even as the government oversaw and funded education at lower-levels, it did not involve itself in the management of higher learning such as at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. The universities had their own discretion in the granting of the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees. The three-tier degree system was similar to that of China, each with a senior, second, and third honor for the top achievers, but these certificates were "in name only" and did not need to be reported to the government. Upon finishing their degrees, students who made up their mind to "advance in their career" could obtain tenure at

universities and dedicate their own life to learning and teaching. Because degrees do not guarantee employment and are not linked to administrative posts, the pursuit of learning was separate from the pursuit of government jobs. Guo sees the tenure system at universities and the separation between degree and office as a direct application of “the education system handed down from the Chinese Three Dynasties, seldom understood by literati after the Han.”⁸¹ This system guaranteed scholars dignity and a degree of independence from the government, a goal which had been articulated by Guo’s reform-minded friend Feng Guifen.⁸²

Education was about cultivating the people and promoting learning. It was not a passport to bureaucratic posts. Most jobs did not require their candidates to pass the highest degree. Freed from degree earning and government service, Western education was able to fulfill practical needs of the society, and a much wider variety of careers were available to educated men.

Education was the key to Western wealth and power, and yet such success was not easily replicable. Contrary to the self-strengthening formula, “Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for utility” promulgated by Zhang Zhidong two decades later, Guo sees that Western education has its own essence and utility. Its essence was the universal instillation of the love of rites, morality, and discipline to the young. Educators worked with children’s inborn tendencies to bring out the innate goodness in human nature. Thus prepared, depending on their individual needs and interests, students moved onto more specialized or higher institutions. The state ensured universal education and funded and supervised primary schools to ensure their quality, but did not interfere with scholarly research at higher institutions. It was only upon this solid foundation of moral

and institutional soundness that the various branches in Western learning grew. If China hopes to acquire Western learning, it must water its root with humanity. As Guo explains to Li Hongzhang, “the ten thousand affairs in China have lost their root, and even if the whole country is devoted to investigating Western learning, it will not bring any benefit.”⁸³ The blossoming of science should be an organic product and cannot be grafted onto an unsuitable rootstock. As we will see, he estimated that it would take at least three hundred years for China to restore its learning to the same level as in the West.

Substantive Learning and How to Pursue it

As a scholar dedicated to *lixue*, Guo’s was interested in all forms of knowledge as long as he saw “xuewen” (learning) in them. His attitude towards science was similar to that of Zhigang, as was his general indifference to literature. Scientists and engineers, rather than poets and writers, were his favorite company in London. There was something close to his heart in the sober reasoning and the factual concerns of these men, and Guo blended naturally into their society. He seldom declined an invitation to watch scientific demonstrations and tried his best to understand the esoteric principles behind the physical phenomena. Seldom does he note a demonstration or a gadget without making an effort to describe what principles it is meant to show.

Unlike Zhigang, whose main scientific knowledge came chiefly from factory floors, Guo socialized with leading experts in various fields. William Spottiswoode, a mathematician and member of the Royal Society, visited him with members of his cohort. From a list that Spottiswoode gave him, Guo learned the names of leading scholars and

their specialization. These scholars did not accidentally stumble upon universal principles like those recorded by the sages. Each field was constantly being pushed forward by a small band of scientists, who conducted experiments and exchanged their discoveries with each other in their own societies. This was a fundamentally different method of generating knowledge.⁸⁴

As a number of Confucian natural philosophers had done in the Ming and Qing, Guo uses two sets of vocabulary to translate what he understands as the two crucial aspects of science. To denote its practical concerns, he uses terms from the statecraft tradition: “shixue” or “shizai xuewen” (substantive learning).⁸⁵ For its concern with the patterns of nature and universal principles, he uses the Neo-Confucian terms “gewu zhizhi zhixue” (the investigation of things and attainment of knowledge), or its shorter form “gezhi xue.” In addition, he uses a host of other terms to capture distinct characteristics of this study: for its precision and emphasis on reasoning, he uses “mingxue” (the study of names), a term derived the Warring States logicians. To stress its broad coverage, he uses the “bowu zhixue” (the study of myriad things), a term that originated in late Warring States to denote court academicians specializing in esoteric arts and philosophies.⁸⁶ For its metaphysical aspects – what he took as “the root of Western learning,” he used “xingli zhiyan” (words on nature and principle), a Neo-Confucian term with heavy Buddhist and Daoist overtones.⁸⁷

In addition, Guo borrows vocabulary from Neo-Confucianism and Han Learning to describe scientific methods and the spirit of science. “Kaozheng” had been a methodology in textual research associated with the Han Learning movement in the eighteenth century. Guo used it to mean empirical research and repeated testing. “Tuiqiu”

had been a term often used by Neo-Confucianists for pursuit of principles through the investigation of things. Guo used it to denote scientific reasoning.⁸⁸ “Jingwei” had been used to describe the subtlety and refinement of the Confucian canon or commentaries on the canon. Guo used it to suggest the profundity of scientific research.⁸⁹ Collectively, these terms impart the sense that scientific inquiry was part and parcel of Neo-Confucian investigation; they shared the same methodology and aimed to reveal truth about the universe. Guo was especially pleased when Yan Fu told him that science pursues the ultimate principle “in normal, day-to-day objects” with a view of understanding both principle and practical utility.⁹⁰ This definition of science unites his Neo-Confucian concern of the *li* and his statecraft concern for the *shi*.

Guo’s use of such a wide range of terms to describe Western learning suggests that he saw it as a union of disparate traditions of Chinese learning: Song Neo-Confucianism, Han learning, statecraft, and a host of schools in the Warring States. This all-encompassing quality of Western learning coincided with his own lifelong goal: to unify Song learning and Han learning, to apply the superb methodology of the latter to serve the natural principles elucidated by former.

True learning, in Guo’s view, was not the prerogative of any particular people. Unlike his contemporaries, he conscientiously avoids terms binding science with the West but prefers the general term “xuwen.” Just as real learning existed in both China and the West; false learning plagued both worlds. The development of “substantive learning,” Guo tells us, was in fact quite recent in the West, starting only with Francis Bacon around the late Ming. Bacon realized that the Greeks had been pursuing “false learning” which was “utterly useless in practicality,” and started to talk about “the

investigation of things in order to achieve knowledge.” Naming his school “the new study” (xinxue), Bacon was the originator of the substantive branch of learning. The history of Western natural philosophy before Bacon was portrayed as the equivalent of the superfluous literature that most of his contemporary literati devoted themselves to. Whereas the West strengthened its resolve in the pursuit of real learning and purged empty talk, the Chinese civil service system suppressed learning and encouraged talk.

Meanwhile, Guo’s basic conviction that Western science was in essence a unity with Neo-Confucianism and substantive learning kept Guo from delving into the spirit of scientific inquiry. He routinely uses “wu” – a word rooted in Zen Buddhism, meaning “sudden realization” or “enlightenment” – to describe how a discovery comes about. In fact, the very idea of science was understood to have descended onto Francis Bacon in a moment of “wu,” after he had immersed himself in years of study in Latin and Greek philosophies.⁹¹ Alexander Bell suddenly came to the realization that the experience at sound derives from the vibration of eardrums.⁹² The natural philosophy of Descartes was thought to result in the sudden realization of mechanical theories by Newton and of heliocentricism by Galileo.⁹³ Guo largely ignores the preconditions that enable “wu,” such as long years of mathematical, theoretical, and laboratory work. It might even emerge “out of thin air” (pingkong) – meaning without a trace of observable evidence – as when John Adams and Urbain Le Verrier correctly predicted the existence of Neptune.⁹⁴ What enabled scientific discoveries was that Westerners “used their minds sharply” and “pursued refined learning,” the very qualities advocated in the Neo-Confucian tradition.

Inventions were also explained by this process – “pingkong wuchu” (conceived out of thin air). Even though he praised the accumulation of knowledge in the West, Guo did not see in the point of aimless pursuit of flashy things. At an exhibition held by the Kensington Museum, Guo noticed an electric audio-triggered device, which sent out beams of whirling lights in different patterns and intensity depending on its sound input. He took a special interest in the patterns it created: “When the light moves fast, it becomes a disc; when it slows down it consists of small pedals like those of a chrysanthemum. They sometimes come in eight pedals, sometimes six, and sometimes five and four.” After inquiring into its inventor and the principle behind it, he asked the curator: “But this is surely just a toy. Does it serve any practical purpose?” “It was conceived out of thin air by Mr. Edelman. Like a newborn baby, we do not yet know what purpose it fulfills, but I suspect it will eventually be of great use.”⁹⁵ Guo was satisfied with the reply. To him, creativity itself was not commendable; it must be channeled into practical use to be praiseworthy.

Chinese students provided Guo with another source of knowledge. Yan Fu and Ma Jianzhong often visited him and told him what they learned in school. They were also eager to convey to him what they understood as the spirit of science. Ma Jianzhong explained to him that the philosophy of Descartes lies at the root of modern scientific methodology. Descartes, according to Ma, thought that “the words of the ancients were not trustworthy.” He trusted only his own sensory input: what he saw with his own eyes, and what he felt by his own hands and feet. For what he could not see or feel, Ma said, Descartes would “apply reasoning to predict their properties” so that they “could be made the same” as what he saw and felt. This summary, we might note, sounds like something

Descartes would argue against, suspicious as he was of all forms of sensory input. The error was more likely to have entered on Ma's end than Guo's. It is also possible that Ma contorted Descartes' philosophy in order to target what he saw as a blind faith in ancient texts among the Chinese. In either case, Guo was accepted Ma's interpretation of Descartes and the scientific spirit. It makes perfect sense to him because it accords with his own take on the study of rites and history.

As with Binchun and Zhigang, much of Guo's misunderstandings are understandable and inevitable. When Chinese still lacked a dedicated system of words to describe science, the observers relied on whatever terms and concepts were available to them. Up to Guo's time, the common terms used to describe science had immediate philosophical or religious overtones, or else (as in the case of transliterated terms) were incomprehensible. But unlike his contemporaries, the various terms which he deployed were not labels but attempts to capture the various facets of science, and he seemed to have been aware of the poor fit between existing Chinese terms and Western concepts.

The Grand Patterns of History

An investigation of the West is not complete without a foray into its history. Guo gleaned every piece of information he could gather on Western history: archaeological artifacts, museum exhibitions, historical accounts and anecdotes. He then compared it to Chinese history in order to discern the pattern of the rise and fall of civilizations in China and the West. It was clear that, by his own time, China and the non-West had lagged far behind. He dated China's eclipse to the founding of the Qin dynasty, seeing the two

thousand years between as one grand arc of waning. Prior to the Three Dynasties, he thought, China was the only civilized country, and it alone towered above the “barbarians.” But aside from the occasional sagely teacher, such as the Cheng Brothers and Zhu Xi, Chinese history after the end of the Zhou had been a gradual erosion of tradition, until China had become barbaric, and the West, civilized. Guo’s dating of China’s decline echoes the Neo-Confucian claim that the Transmission of the Way had elapsed after Mencius, a standard historical narrative to scholars of his time. But contrary to the common claim that the line of transmission was recovered in the Song, Guo thought that it was lost for good. As much as he revered the Song teachers, he considered their effort too feeble to steer the state back to the Way.

In this reconfiguration, Guo was also aided by the colonial consciousness of the West. China belonged in the camp of the non-West “barbarians” – in Asia, Middle East, and Africa and the Americas. In his reading of *The Times*, Guo caught a critique against the British monarch’s “policy of flinging Garters to any inconsiderable Princelings [*sic*] or to semi-barbarous potentates,” an oblique reference to a recent conference of the order of the garter to the Shah of Persia.⁹⁶ Guo was particularly struck by the English gradation of humanity between the “civilized,” “half-civilized” and “barbarians.” Although the article makes no reference to China, to Guo it was plainly obvious that China had lost its claim as a “civilized country,” and was relegated to the “half-civilized” alongside Turkey and Persia. He lamented: “The European countries excel in governance, education, and social customs, and they see us just the way that people in the Three Dynasties saw the *yi* and *di* barbarians. There is yet none in the Chinese literati who recognizes this!”⁹⁷ He visited an exhibit at the Kensington Museum which depicted people from around the

world. He was dismayed to see Chinese, Japanese and Indian figures scattered amongst unmistakably “barbarous” Africans and Native Americans. Utterly disheartened, he “only heaved a sigh at the display.”⁹⁸ There was nothing to say.

Guo’s conclusion that the Mandate could be conferred to a non-Chinese state should not surprise us. With China no longer the center of the civilized world, the Mandate of Heaven was released from the geographic boundary of China and gained a global dimension. To Guo the unstoppable forces of Western expansion represented the very act of an ultimate arbitrator bestowing its favor on human affairs.

In a private conversation with Li Fengbao and Luo Fenglu, Guo elaborated on why he thought China fell behind.

In the Three Dynasties and prior, China with its Possession of the Way conquered the Dispossession of the Way of the barbarians. After Qin and Han, sheer force ruled: when China was strong it annexed the barbarians, and when the barbarians were strong they annexed China. In this, China and the barbarians both acted contrary to the Way. In the thirty years since the establishment of commercial relations, it seems that the West has challenged China’s Dispossession of the Way with its Possession of the Way, and that is why China is in danger.

The sages in possession of the Way during the Three Dynasties are not within the reach of the West. Even the benevolence of the sage-kings of our dynasty is quite without match in all the 1878 years of Western history. The sages devote their lives toiling for the world, and the West made it the public affair of officials and commoners. [Yet] the sagely virtue of one man cannot be permanent, and the four sages – King Wen, King Wu, King Cheng, and King Kang – succeeded one another but altogether their reigns did not last a hundred years. But [in the West] officials and commoners proliferate generation after generation, and the prosperity of their culture increases with time. I quite suspect that even a sage’s devotion to the public during the Three Dynasties fell short of [what the Western system achieves]. The sages governed people with virtue, and yet there was waning and waxing in virtue, resulting in the chaos of the world. Virtue focuses on self-control, and treats the world with magnanimity. The West governs its people with laws. Laws can be applied to both the West itself and others. When it spreads its laws to bind other countries, it constantly

pressed them with its responsibilities and expectations. The more refined Western laws become, the more China's trouble multiplies, until it loses its own footing entirely.⁹⁹

Guo expands the meaning of the Way beyond its original Confucian implication and gives it a historical dimension. The Mencian “kingly virtue” was exhibited alongside the Western Way. This shift can be seen in his occasional addition of “qi” before the “Dao,” as in the following example: “The China after Qin-Han has lost its Way for so long! Heaven searched the world furiously, to find a Way that could anchor China. If we can obtain that Way, it will be where Heaven’s mind sets.”¹⁰⁰

Guo compares rule by law with rule by virtue. Western laws, he explains, are applied universally; monarchs and commoners are equal before the laws. They differ from the legalist tradition which created laws “to impose upon the people, to plunder and to control them, and to subject them and make them obey the rulers’ whims.”¹⁰¹ Regulated by such laws, Western institutions fulfill similar social functions as ritual: They transform people’s morals and behavior. Abiding by the principles of virtue and righteousness, these social institutions instilled love, respect, and congeniality to citizens. Ruling by virtue began in China with the sage kings, who possessed both perfect knowledge and political authority. While this classical lore was a source of pride to Confucian scholars, Guo saw it as a double-edged sword. The sage kings did not anticipate bad rulers to dominate the rest of history. The West had sages and kings in separate persons, but it had no single sage-king to both teach and rule. Its civilization had a late takeoff compared with China, but it gradually improved upon its institutions to approximate its Christian sages’ vision. In this respect, one sees resemblance between his interest in Western institutions and his devotion to the study and transformation of the

Zhou rites. In a world without a sagely ruler, a gentry-led social and institution reform was precisely what he had hoped to achieve with his ritual program in Hunan.

Guo did not simply compare the West to the state of affairs in China *after* Mencius – he compared it favorably to the rule of virtue by the sage kings themselves. If Western institutions proved more effective in the long run, whence came the system of belief upon which they were developed? He found the answer in Christianity, the “founding teaching” of Western society and considered the Bible the equivalent to the Confucian canons.

Prior to his journey, Guo’s concern for Christianity was mostly in how to rid China of the missionary meddling in local affairs. After staying abroad for more than a year, he began to see the role of Christianity in a historical light. In particular, he saw Christians in the Roman Empire as performing the same function as the Confucian sages – they brought culture and moral principles to an otherwise diverse and ignorant people. From his missionary-translated history books, he learned that the clergy in England built churches, established laws and principles of administration, propagated and perfected knowledge in agriculture, irrigation, medicine, and craftsmanship. By unifying spiritual and secular authority, the Christian church of late antiquity and the Middle Ages was able to command the minds of the people for over a thousand years.

The breakthrough in Guo’s understanding of Christianity happened on his voyage back to China. Under the influence of a few Christian travel companions, Guo started reading the New Testament – although he admitted that he could never finish a chapter in one sitting. Christian theology barely interested him (he thought that it was derived from Buddhism), and yet he admired the institutional precedence it created: by claiming to be

the son of God and dying for the cause, Jesus recruited a group of faithful disciples and established a tradition in which no earthly ruler could make the same claim.¹⁰² This was an effective means for checking the arbitrary power of the monarch. With rulers abiding by their station, the populace was given room to breathe and prosper. Guo's overall assessment was in favor of Christianity: "The breadth and refinement [of Christian teaching] do not lose to the teaching of the Chinese sages, and it allowed far fewer abuses, too. As people followed each other to worship Jesus as the Son of God, the rulers all stepped back in obedience. The religion thus greatly thrived. Truly, nothing can replace it!"¹⁰³

Christianity not only created a stable political structure, it enabled colonial expansion into the lands of barbarians. Just as it once brought culture to the European barbarians under Rome, it was the main thrust of civilizing force in the vast lands of Africa and Asia. John Fryer told Guo how this was achieved: first the missionaries searched for wild and faraway lands, studied the language of the natives, scoped out the geographic landscape and familiarized themselves with local customs. Then merchants took it over and established commercial relations, opened treaty ports, rented lands for settlements. When skirmishes ensued, the state came to the merchants' aid with military force, thus starting a chain of events leading up to the creation a colony: the acquisition of land, the removal of the king, and the establishment of new laws. Guo listened with great interest and admiration. Again, he internalized the process with an analogy with Confucianism. The missionaries fulfilled the role that had been traditionally the lot of the Sage Kings and the torchbearers of the Confucian tradition. They transformed the wild

and crude ways of the barbarians, taught them ritual and propriety, and made them orderly and wealthy.

Furthermore, Guo was troubled by the stark contrast offered by the Confucian literati of his own time. These gentlemen “learned from each other the self-righteous words with no substance, which they cried out in their intoxicated dreams.”¹⁰⁴ Where the Christian missionaries transformed and assimilated different peoples, the Confucian literati “refused to find common ground even with their own kind, and instead stirred dissent and differences.” Consulting *History of the Latter Han*, he found that this was borne out by historical precedents. After the Han incorporation of Korea, the local customs in the peninsula became frivolous, while legal prohibitions multiplied. Historical accounts of the Jin and the Liao, two nomadic neighbors of the Song, also claim that their people abandoned their rigorous and simple government for the luxurious ease of Chinese life. By the same token, he also worried that this corrupted form of Confucians would spread to the West and cause the same degeneration it did Korea, Jin and Liao:

Those who had undergone the so-called “yi xia bianyi” (the transformation of the barbarians by civilization) during the Three Dynasties, once they bordered China after the Qin, became effete and unable to strengthen themselves. Why is this? [In China] rites and righteousness daily waned, human mind and social customs decayed and dishonesty prevailed. Once [China’s neighbors] caught this wind they had no means to establish themselves! The West is opening up the various lands and using their orderly laws to change the stubborn and malicious ways [of the natives]. But I worry precisely that this Chinese wind will spread to the West, and its influence gradually sink in and accumulate – it would not be the fortune of the West. What benefit and harm the traffic between China and the West will bring to each is still unknown – who knows which extremity the Order of Heaven and affairs of men will tend towards?¹⁰⁵

So Guo believed that the influence of post-Han Confucianism was pernicious not only to China, but its neighboring states, causing a general decay of East Asian civilizations. The Western Way was seen as resembling a new Mandate, righteous, civilized, and utterly irresistible. Guo redefined and narrowed the Confucian Way: he trimmed it back to a core teaching from the Three Dynasties and argued that it applied only to an ancient, idealistic world. Seen in this light, Guo resembled later reformists in their reinterpretation of the classical tradition. But Guo's purpose was not to justify Western-style reform, but a denial of the remnants of any true Chinese civilization worthy of defense. Having lost the Way, the Confucian scholars of his time had no legitimate ground for their attacks on the West. The interests of the state do not figure prominently in his concerns because he associated them with the changing fate of the ruling house. Perhaps Guo saw this as the spirit of a true Confucian: he identifies with the new Way that Heaven had ordained.

Guo's observations abroad proved to him that he was right all along: The superiority of the West did not lie in its technical ingenuity. It was built upon a solid foundation, a moral system and tradition of learning comparable to the teaching of Sage Kings and a system of political and legal institutions perfected by later generations. In his study of China's own history and present illness, Guo found that China's decline was not an accidental or recent one, but a systemic illness deeply imbedded in its history. There is no simple, quick fix. In his opinion, none among his countrymen, not even the most zealous students of Western learning, was aware of this. There was little he could do as a diplomat, especially as a permanent resident minister of "goodwill." He job was

merely to keep an appearance of harmony between the two countries and handle routine diplomatic transactions.¹⁰⁶

Guo has often been characterized as an enlightened “foreign-affairs” expert in the self-strengthening camp. But while he agreed with Li Hongzhang that China needs to learn from the West, he rejected the leading self-strengtheners’ view that wealth and strength of the state should take priority. To invest the government’s meager budget in a few gunboats and machines is an example, in his words, of “mistaking the tips for the root, and chasing trail’s end and forgetting the origin.”¹⁰⁷ Likewise, he saw Zuo Zongtang’s purchase of German textile machines to build Western-style cotton factories as entirely misleading, of lesser importance even among “matters of the tip.”¹⁰⁸ He thought little of elite who had acquired a smattering of Western techniques and thought they had mastered the essence of Western civilization. As he told Yan Fu, “China has lost its entire root. Where should it begin with instituting Western methods?”¹⁰⁹

By virtue of this peculiarity, Guo was a poor fit for the self-strengthening camp. His concern for the loss of the “root,” his unwillingness to prefer the technical over the moral, and his aversion to building sheer state power meant he had more in common with classics like Woren than has been recognized. The oft-used dichotomy between the forces of the old and the advocates of modernization does not capture the difference of opinion. Along another axis was the division between moralists and statist. This division would gradually disappear over the next decade, especially after the moralists joined forces with the warhawks in the lead up to the Sino-French War. Having lost their ground, these literati lent their willing ears to the reasoning of such men as Zhang

Zhidong, who attempted to reduce the Confucian Way into a “Chinese essence” onto which Western technology could be grafted.

Guo advocated a diplomatic policy based on reciprocity and ritual. To him, Western powers had no intention of inflicting harm on China, and China had nothing to fear if it established itself in the position of reason.¹¹⁰ The British charity donations for famine relief made a convincing argument that there was no fundamental conflict of interests between the two nations. That the British gentry could, through their impassioned pleas in newspapers and public events, solicit widespread sympathy for the plight of a distant people was unthinkable for China. This principle of using gentle persuasion and ceremonial courtesy (an example of which is the international law) to resolve diplomatic difficulty infused Guo’s thinking during his tenure as minister to England. So confident was he in the power of this principle that he confided in his diplomatic opponent more than his official position warranted, going so far as “to tell everything and show everything to Wade” – perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate his sincerity. This habit of his caused no small trouble for Robert Hart.¹¹¹

A key aspect of Guo’s diplomatic effort was his attempt to bring about social change in China by stopping the opium trade. To him, opium had sped China’s gradual decay into precipitous decline. The corruptive effect of the drug spurred on degeneration of its officials and the straying of people’s minds. The conflict over the opium trade was also the origin of Sino-Western conflict and weakens his advocacy of openness to the West. While in London, a visit from the Society for the Suppression of Opium Trade gave him the hope that coordinated efforts by China and England could stop the trade once and for all. Guo hoped he could set the country on the right path both socially and

diplomatically by resolving the dispute over opium.¹¹² In a long memorial, he cites the anti-opium petitions he received from both the British and the Cantonese gentry as a Heavenly call from “the spirit of the past sagely emperors,” one that he dared not withhold from reporting. He asks the emperor to ban opium smoking in a sweeping, top-down measure. When the court issued an edict agreeing to act on it as soon as England promised to stop the trade, Guo wrote to the British foreign office with a plea that it “gradually replace [India’s] opium crop with grains in an effort to reduce opium trade and maintain the harmony between our two countries.”¹¹³ In this exchange, each side evaded responsibility by blaming the other as the real source of the opium scourge. The British foreign office rebuffed Guo’s proposal by citing the widespread domestic crop in Yunnan and Sichuan. Li Hongzhang complained to Guo that the cession of the trade would strip the government of a key source of funding for industrialization.

This was but one setback in the sea of frustration that was his diplomatic career. The British government’s delay in the ratification of the Chefoo Convention, drafted by Wade and Li as a resolution to the Margary Affair, was inexplicable and unfair in light of the fact that several clauses benefiting England (such as the opening of new treaty ports) had already been put into effect. He appealed to international law when a British steamship occupying a Chinese waterway refused to make way for renovation of the embankment, but was flatly told by the British foreign office that businesses in China were not subject to those regulations. It must have been clear, even to Guo, that his original assessment of the British rationale was overly idealistic. It did not give an inch where its interests were concerned, even on issues where Guo believed China had a legitimate claim. As his biographer Guo Tingyi says, “He put too much trust to the word

‘reason’ and overestimated the Britons. [When thus rebuffed] he was greatly disappointed and extremely anxious.”¹¹⁴

These failed negotiations did not change Guo’s view that China was its own worst enemy: England was unwilling to stop its opium trade mainly because it was clear that China was growing domestic opium anyway, and that a cessation of that trade could not eliminate opium from China. He was utterly ashamed upon discovering the extent of China’s domestic opium growth from foreign investigations – it was far worse than anyone in the Chinese government had realized.¹¹⁵ This tendency to see the real trouble in the Chinese policies was characteristic of his thinking from the Opium War years. If China had treated the West kindly instead of being unprincipled and aggressive, it would have not been found at war. If China happened to be militarily strong and well-defended, there might not have been a problem in its eager anticipation of war, but instead it was weak, impoverished, and internally unstable. With no moral high ground, no courtesy and no objective condition for winning, China was responsible for its own plight. It was as if the West, by virtue of its possession of its Way, had a right to inflict pain or take advantage of China’s weakness.

Guo’s effusive praise of the West in his *Shixi jicheng* [Records of an envoy to the West], often in stark contrast to a somewhat biased selection of Chinese vices, irritated and puzzled learned men of his time. In the eyes of his critics, he was inexplicably gullible in his confidence in the West and frustratingly impractical in his advocacies. Even though Zongli yamen had clearly deemed *Shixi jicheng* acceptable and hoped that its publication would ameliorate the image of the West, the court was forced by the outpouring of domestic rage to order it banned and its plates destroyed. The

discreditation of Guo's journal proved a setback for the yangwu affairs and a disaster for Guo's reputation. Worse yet, Liu Xihong, Guo's colleague and vice-minister to England, had deemed Guo's behavior outright treasonous and decided to join forces with the critics at home. Seeing it as beneath him to serve in an empty post (for "vice-ministership" was not a recognizable practice among Western nations) and goaded by the upsurge of anti-foreign sentiment at court, Liu easily slipped into an antagonistic role in the embassy.¹¹⁶ The concerted efforts of enemies near and far stopped Guo from sending his journals home. The Zongli yamen, knowing that it would rather not handle the touchy issue, did not enforce its mandatory regulation on journal submission. The bulk of his journal after he arrived in London was thus tucked away in his trunk until their recovery a few decades ago, in the 1980s.

Guo refused to report back to Beijing on the pretext of illness. Having discovered that the state could not muster the means to mend China's ills, he returned to his roots. Just as he had done to help suppress the Taipings, he worked with the Hunan gentry; this time, he was putting down the scourge of opium and sowing the seeds of a new education. For the rest of his life – he lived for another thirteen years – he never left Hunan province.¹¹⁷ He worked tirelessly to straighten "people's hearts and mind and popular customs" (*renxin fengsu*). But he knew it would be a long, arduous process:

It is certain that the rise of schools must take hundreds of years to accomplish. The first hundred years will wipe away all existing bad customs and influences, the second hundred years will see our most talented people being tempered and refined, and the third hundred years will see the gradual establishment of these habits in the general populace. Given the present state of things, unless sages rise one after another and work continuously for three hundred years, there is no hope for revival. Without this, the four thousand years of accumulated deterioration cannot not be done away with."¹¹⁸

Guo kept in contact with colleagues in foreign-affairs, but his main focus was on the moral wellbeing of local students. In his disillusionment with state effort, Guo was not alone. Eremitism in local gentry was common and steadily on the rise towards the last decades of the Qing. While few of them shared Guo's insight into the West, many were similarly wary of the social and moral disintegration of traditional society. Until the end of the Qing, these groups of local gentry seldom made it onto the national scene, but instead busied themselves with reconstruction on a small and local scale. The road which Guo abandoned for good – diplomacy and state-sponsored modernization – was now trekked by men more confident in their grasp of the West and China's prospects for adopting its ways.

V. The Empire's Far-Reaching Strategist
Xue Fucheng's Native Synthesis of the West, 1890-1893

The end of Guo Songtao's tenure in London and Paris coincided with fundamental shifts in the Western paradigm of empire-building. Chinese observers of the West had to come to terms not only with an unfamiliar world, but with one that was changing so quickly that it could barely come to terms with itself. The West took its change for progress – economic, social, and moral – and presumed that progress was inherently good and desirable. The inability of the rest of the world to progress in like fashion must, therefore, be explained away by pseudo-scientific notions of race.¹ And the engine of progress seemed to be faltering. Western opinion in the 1870s held that capitalism had entered a terrible depression; extreme measures were justified to resuscitate it, and if these measures impinged upon the well-being of peoples whom science now regarded as inherently inferior, that was no terrible price to pay; and if those people were to gain good governance, Christianity, and technology in the bargain, it was proper that the more advanced nations decide from their lofty vantage that the bargain was fair. For what capitalism needed above all was an expansion of markets to reverse its decline: What it had were young men, new weapons, and too little work at home. What emerged was imperialism, and the new reality of empire dominated Western thought.

From the perspective of a Chinese statesman in the late 1880s, the grasp of imperialism tightened from all sides. Russia had occupied the strategic town of Ili in northern Xinjiang in 1871 during the Muslim rebellions, but refused to give it up when the Qing restored control. Zeng Jize, Guo's successor as minister to England and France, secured its return in 1881, but the Russian threat was now the Qing's greatest worry.

After France seized Vietnam in 1885, England responded by annexing Burma in 1886, leaving a small stretch of the Yunnan border contested. On the western front, England made Nepal — once a tributary state to the Qing — independent in 1887 by capturing Sikkim, thus delineating the border of southern Tibet.² The most alarming developments were those in Japan. Japan had entered the race in 1875 with its annexation of Ryukyu island, and followed by forcing Korea to open treaty ports. After a messy coup by a Korean prince against the reigning Queen Min, both Japan and China sent in military reinforcements in 1884. A last-minute non-interference agreement postponed the conflict, but it was clearly a temporary measure.

The dire situation of China's foreign affairs spurred an important shift in officials' attitude towards the West. The debacle of the Sino-French war converted a number of the *qingliu* partisans, ultra-conservatives such as Zhang Peilun and Zhang Zhidong, to abandon their high moralism and become staunch supporters of the self-strengthening movement. The success of the Meiji Restoration was now well-known among concerned officials, and the earlier atmosphere of scorn towards Japan gave way to approval. Provincial officials started building local railways in 1888. Coal and iron mines were opened during the Sino-French war, using imported machinery. Textile mills with German machines and technicians were opened in the 1880s and 1890s to compete with foreign woolen imports. The pace of industrialization was slow, but its progress was sure. Even the young Guangxu emperor began to study English in 1889, tutored by the now senior diplomat Zhang Deyi. Christian organizations such as the SDK (Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese) and newspapers from treaty ports delivered information about the West to an increasingly interested

inland audience.³ Even the implacable Guo Songtao wrote in 1889 that “the literati had finally gradually awakened” to reform, and that he was starting to hear some “fair-minded discussions.”⁴ It was certain that officials were more confident in their knowledge about the West and their ability to manage foreign affairs.

This air of self-confidence is reflected in Xue Fucheng’s summary of the change of foreign attitudes towards China in 1890.⁵ Appointed minister to England and France in 1889, Xue arrived in London in early 1890 and quickly positioned himself to gather intelligence from all available sources. He reported that many British and French officials, who had previously looked down on China, now hoped for an alliance with her. There were several reasons for the shift. When the French failed to extract an indemnity from China following the Sino-French war, it appeared that China could no longer be bullied. The reorganization of Chinese coastal defenses and the Chinese navy projected an air of strength. Chinese students studying abroad often ranked highest in their classes, contrary to racist expectations. Perhaps most importantly, the proliferation of Chinese ministers and consuls around the world and their initiative in understanding foreign customs and investigating the state of affairs began to integrate China into the international order.

Much of the ground work for this improved perception of China was laid by Zeng Jize, the aforementioned successor of Guo Songtao as minister to England and France. Eldest son of Restoration leader Zeng Guofan, Zeng Jize was the man who wrestled Ili from Russia’s clutches at the negotiating table, but he contributed more to China’s modernization than this. He was a rationalizer and economizer for the Qing embassies in London and Paris. To save money and time, he streamlined routine business, compiled a code for Chinese phrases for diplomatic telegraphy, and purchased houses for the

embassy. His friend and tutor W. A. P. Martin notes that Zeng was “not a little vain of his proficiency” of English, although one can readily see, from a poem he translated, that his command of the written language was rather poor.⁶ In the West, he charmed the diplomatic corps with his spoken English and knowledge of the West. He showed up at operas and theaters with his wife and daughter, and volunteered to serve as the translator for his wife when she met with the womenfolk of other ministers. He even wrote a national anthem to be played by the brass band. Regrettably, Zeng’s journal is mostly a laundry list of his daily activities and is of marginal interest for the purpose of our study.⁷

A more interesting case is Xue Fucheng, the minister from 1890 to 1893. Xue hailed from an official family in Wuxi in the province of Jiangsu. Like Guo Songtao and Zeng Jize, Xue’s early years were deeply affected by the Taiping rebellion. His father served as a prefect in Hunan and organized local defenses against the Taipings. When his father died from illness in 1859, the young Xue returned to his hometown in Wuxi with family, only to find that the rebels had already captured the nearby Changzhou and were pushing into Wuxi. Fucheng and his brother stayed behind to bury his father while his mother and the rest of the family fled to the north. Mother and sons finally reunited after much harrowed searching the next year, but they lost all property and the lives of many extended family members to the rebels.⁸

Growing up in the shadow of the Taiping, Xue lost interest in the examination route when he failed to pass the provincial exam in 1862. Around this time he wrote a series of essays on the bankruptcy of the examination system and advocated practical learning and the revitalization of the recommendation system.⁹ He modeled himself after the late Ming thinker Gu Yanwu in his pursuit of statecraft learning. In 1865, he applied to serve under

Zeng Guofan, then charged with quelling the Nian rebels. Xue describes his scholarly interests in unusual terms: “The two thousand years of successes and failures, flourishes and degenerations, the study of military formations and the changes and opportunities they afforded, and on the sidelines, astrology, yinyang, the energy gates of the Daoists, and divination, and knowledge of key posts of mountains and rivers.”¹⁰ His was an all-encompassing and pragmatic approach to knowledge. After briefly serving as Zeng's secretary, he went on to assist Li Hongzhang in the 1870s and 1880s in bolstering coastal defenses and practicing diplomacy.

This chapter focuses on Xue's understanding of the West of the 1890s. Standing at the forefront of the Qing's self-strengthening movement, Xue's conceptualization of the West gives us unique glimpses into the mental shape of that generation of officials: What it was they were trying to achieve when the self-strengthening movement appeared to be heading to its doom in 1895; what concepts and concerns they worked with; and how they defined the Qing's problems. What new visions and priorities did Xue develop for self-strengthening as a resident minister in the West? A comparison of Xue's image of the West with that of Guo's in the 1870s will allow us to see continuity and change in official attitude in the twenty years after Guo's mission. As successive diplomats worked to legitimize his journal, they tamed its message by carving out separate spheres for Chinese learning and Western learning. The promotion of the latter was now accompanied by the glorification of the former. As we will see in Xue's writing, such sugar-coating and over-stretching often reached the point where it destroyed the integrity and coherence of classical learning, making it into a patchwork that served only to legitimize Western models.

The Guo and Xue Diaries

The professionalization of the diplomatic corps can be seen from the changing content of their journals. In the fifteen years after Guo, the journals that diplomats sent home became less of a reflection of their personal thoughts, and fell ever more in line with with a well-defined diplomatic role. Guo's journal was an extension of his mind and soul, a repository of his emotions and a ventilation of his deepest frustrations in life. He lampoons the powerful, expresses discouragement at their policies, and mocks the ignorance of the literati. The length of his daily entries varies with the intensity of his emotion and his energy; they are longest when he is most upset. During the years of his self-imposed retirement after the fallout with Zuo Zongtang, he was in the habit of recording metaphysical excerpts to keep his mind at peace. The lengths of his journal entries reached their height during his years abroad, reflecting a peak of his intellectual output. During his two-year sojourn, he produced roughly a quarter of his forty year total. This was a mixture of philosophical reflections, personal frustrations, business memos, technical and scientific observations, newspaper clips, and interesting conversations. But even the latter records were often seldom made without a personal touch — an exclamation on the achievement of the West, a lamentation on China's falling behind, an occasional jibe at stubborn officials back home. If we compare Guo's own manuscript and the portion of his journal published by the Zongli yamen, we see he mostly preserved his original writing. He did find it necessary to eliminate a few snide or overcritical comments and to change pessimistic remarks into more constructive comments. Where

he first wrote: “How polite is the conduct of ritual in this! China has fallen far behind!” He published: “Now we know full well that this country did not stumble upon its wealth and power.”¹¹ But these edits were occasional and hardly soften the flavor of his journal. Most of his private reflections were left intact. Even a slightly derisive remark about how the Vice Minister Liu Xihong “came to realize that what he had known before was shallow” once he saw the West for himself, made the cut.¹²

The journal was banned just after it was printed and distributed. Official Li Ciming noted that it had already been widespread when the court banned it.¹³ Nor does the proscription seem to have stopped many from reading it; the imperial ban contributed to the journal's notoriety. It was polarizing: Many literati, still laboring under old preconceptions, heaped scorn upon it. They objected not only to Guo's conclusions, but to his presentation of facts. His conclusions suggested a sympathy for the West, and that sympathy must have given Guo ample motive to fabricate observations.¹⁴ Other officials, such as Li Hongzhang, welcomed his refreshing message and defended Guo.

And as time went by, this latter camp gained traction. The journal had officials asking whether China had fallen behind the West in ways more fundamental than had hitherto been supposed: in its social order, intellectual and cultural achievements, and political institutions. Was there a cosmic connection between the rise of the West and the decline of China? Never mind that the answer was first a chorus of “No”s; the question was being asked in polite society.

Later diplomats boldly affirmed Guo's integrity and used his journal as a reference in their own writing. When Zeng Jize met Empress Dowager Cixi to confirm his appointment in 1878, he entreated the court to honor Guo's loyalty and honesty.¹⁵ He

wrote in his journal concerning Guo's description of Hong Kong that "not a single word of it was not right."¹⁶ With the publication of Zeng's journal in the early 1880s, Guo's journal came to be rehabilitated and accepted by the mainstream. Xue Fucheng even presented a copy of it to the Guangxu emperor himself in 1889 when he received his appointment as minister.¹⁷ In his own journal, Xue recalled Guo's defamation by the Pure Talk partisans, and admitted that he had sided with them and considered Guo's words inappropriate. Later he asked other diplomats for their opinions, and was told that Guo was on the level.¹⁸ The debate over Guo's journal was not entirely censorious; it also piqued the curiosity of some of the doubters and prompted them to gather more accurate intelligence. When he traveled to the West himself, Xue came to the same conclusion of Zeng as to the accuracy of Guo's writing. Instead of giving his own accounts of colonial establishments along the way, for instance, he asks his readers to refer to Guo's.

The acceptance of Guo's journal from the 1880s only extended to the truthfulness of its factual claims. Frank criticism of policy, by contrast, was virtually absent from later journals. Zeng regularly asked his secretary to make additional copies of his journal and to make deletions, corrections, and additions, to make it politically palatable. From the late 1870s on, approval of the West in diplomatic journals was more subtle and generally directed at more clearly-defined categories of Western learning. Even the excitable Zhang Deyi, who had written three riveting accounts of "ocean curiosities," preferred to fill his journal pages with droning bureaucratic notes. No one quite had the nerve to take up comparative studies of morality, ritual, political systems, or analyze the rise of the West alongside the constitutional decline of China. Stylistic convergences appeared in diplomatic writings to put the West and China in their separate boxes, and these will be

analyzed later in this chapter.

Taking stock of the existing diplomatic journals, Xue professed that he was unhappy with their length (Guo and Zeng both submitted only the portion of their journal written during the ocean voyage), and decided to hold out his submission until he had visited and written about all four countries to which he was a minister: England, France, Italy and Belgium.¹⁹ He also copied a large number of existing archival documents he found in the London and Paris embassy, to help him understand the progress of those posts in the previous fifteen years.

He saw three main problems in earlier journals. First, the conventional event-based format was repetitive and made it unnecessarily difficult to present large bodies of new information. Second, it was hard for a single diplomat to discern the shifting nature of international affairs; some could not see the forest for the trees, and others were intimidated by the West or lost in admiration. Their journals were accounts of trivialities. Third, it was difficult to give a balanced analysis of the West, one which explicates the necessity for change without provoking reactionary comments at home.²⁰

To avoid these pitfalls, Xue borrowed the style of early Qing scholar Gu Yanwu's *Rizhilu* (Knowledge gained day by day) in "casually picking up knowledge whenever he sees it." He states in the preface of his journal that he used the *Rizhilu* style to complement the conventional event-based journal style, but the event-based journal style is nearly absent. Contents of his entries were divided up into six categories: major diplomatic events, international affairs, the origins and developments of Western learning, the changing situations of Western politics, updates in military technology, and finally, "wherever his thoughts drifted."²¹ As historian Wu Wei observes, although Xue's

volumes of journal appeared to be casual note-taking, each volume had its own emphasis. The date format was merely an index for organizing a multitude of mini-monographs on a variety of topics. It is common to see a series of analyses of particular regions or classes of data strung together by dates. Xue weaved into topics quick summaries of events and Ancient Style prose, to relieve the monotony of its style. It was published in two parts, in 1891 and 1894 — shortly after his return and untimely death — and they quickly became popular literature about the West. Upon the inauguration of the Qing's New Policy in 1901, Xue's journal was made one of the imperial-decreed texts for civil service examination candidates.²²

Xue's journal gives the reader little clue of the true feeling of the man behind his words. The reader does not know how he lived his daily life, how he felt about his surroundings, what kinds of company he kept other than diplomats, or anything about his wife and daughter, who accompanied him. To Xue, none of this belonged in his journal. He saw himself as performing a bureaucratic function. The journal of a diplomat should be matters of public interest: country profiles, import and export figures, news clips, his own official dispatches, meetings. He makes a point of recording state ceremonies with exactitude. Like Gu Yanwu's *Rizhilu*, Xue's journal was an accumulation of intelligence. He extracts information and presents it in a disembodied fashion, and updated it when new data became available. Xue's impersonal style can be explained partly by the fact that the West was a known factor to him and his assumed readers. He had spent a lifetime pursuing knowledge about the West and formulating strategies for his patrons, following every scrap of information coming his way. Widely acclaimed as the best strategist of the self-strengthening movement, Xue had reason to think that he had the West mostly

figured out. There were no moments of wonderment, shock, or revelation, only cool-headed, piecemeal accumulation of data and occasional interpretation of the data.

He assumed most of his readers to be admirers of aspects of Western culture — in fact he appeared to be a little disturbed by the popularity of Western fads. It was thus unnecessary to write a tourist account, like those in previous journals. There is no mention of broad and clean streets and public parks, no trace of towering buildings and majestic palaces, and no appearance of pretty women and their stylish bonnets. Instead, he occasionally suggests that he was not really impressed with the quality of life he experienced. London air was heavily polluted from heavy use of coal, he pointed out, and wealthy families spent their summer and winter months in the countryside. “They called those ‘summer retreats’ and ‘winter retreats’,” he says, “but in reality they went there to breath new air and keep themselves healthy.”²³ Where Chinese cuisine encompasses delicacies from the mountains and oceans, and employ all manners of seasoning and methods of cooking; Westerners knew only to fry or stew their food, and they did not even know how good seaweed could be! The Chinese make their summer clothes from delicate, brilliant silk and in the winter from a variety of skins. Westerners all use black felt for their clothes, making them short and tight, “quite unpleasant to look at.” In architecture, too, Western houses bore their viewers with their monotony — they all look like boxes, and the so-called “palaces” are merely bigger boxes than the others! Chinese buildings are not only exquisitely designed, they are also accompanied by pavilions, towers, decks, ponds, and artificial mountains, all uniquely arranged according to their owners’ tastes. Xue tells his reader that in all matters of utmost importance to daily life, Western products are inferior to those of the Chinese.²⁴

Diplomats in the 1880s and 1890s also made headways towards figuring out just how diplomacy could effect policy changes at home. This was not the case when resident ministers were first established in 1876. Guo had often spoke dismally about the function of a minister: “It is a post that anyone can fill,” implying that the court was wasting his talent by sending him abroad.²⁵ He nevertheless sought to create channels for using diplomacy to bring about social and political reforms. We have seen in the last chapter that his energy spilled over from regular diplomatic businesses to areas of deeper significance to domestic governance, among others, to establish a Sino-Western coalition for banning the opium trade, the normalization of trade regulations, the reforming of penal laws according to international standards. But his passionate advocacy in these areas were rebuffed by court and officials back home on the grounds that they were not primarily of diplomatic concerns.

Zeng’s success in recovering Ili by negotiation gave a boost to the prestige of diplomats. High officials realized that resident ministers abroad could be used as an effective means for border defense. Knowledge of diplomatic techniques, international law and Western politics, if wielded effectively, could make China’s voice heard internationally and diffuse military threats. This change of attitude is perhaps best reflected in the change of Zeng himself from pacifist to a staunch hardliner in the Sino-French war. Standing in front of the wax figure of Lin Zexu at the Madam Tussauds Museum in 1879, Zeng reflected bitterly on how Lin had led China into that fateful war for his vainglory.²⁶ It comes as something of a surprise that, four years later, he would write to the Zongli yamen recommending the adoption of war rhetoric with France over Vietnam. It was not war that he wanted. Knowing the fragility of French politics, he

expected that news of impending military conflict to bring down the reigning cabinet and result in an election. The old tactic of playing the barbarians against one another reemerged as manipulating internal policies of foreign countries themselves. It was a costly miscalculation. As Lloyd Eastman shows, following Zeng's intelligence, Li Honagzhang abruptly hardened his attitude in negotiation with the French representative.²⁷ The Sino-French war resulted.

The strategy had been the wrong one, but it did not taint Zeng's record or diminish the role of diplomats in China's foreign affairs. Xue ranked Zeng's achievements first among the dozens of resident ministers up to his time, with Guo coming in second.²⁸ Zeng not only saved Ili, but also settled the Chefoo convention in China's favor. As to the Sino-French war, Xue refused to blame Zeng for the break with France, but attributed it to "others who secretly dragged their feet." Because of Zeng, Xue considered diplomats as important as prime ministers and generals.²⁹ The Qing urgently needed to train a body of professional diplomats and make them head up the Zongli yamen.³⁰

Though he admired Zeng, Xue's own diplomatic thinking departed from Zeng's in significant ways. For him, most diplomatic negotiations were a game of rhetoric, and rhetoric ultimately was worth very little. International law was a front for imperialism, and treaties were merely paper without the backing of military power. His rapport with the Turkish ambassador in Europe affirmed that "the present world was ruled by gunboats and canons...and the so-called international law but was a lie."³¹ The strength of the West itself was rooted in the interstate warfare that came down uninterrupted from ancient times. China fell behind not because of its own failures, but that it had been too

successful at keeping order and it had known peace for too long.³² Resident ministers hoped to make peace, but he insisted that gunboats and canons were the utmost priority, and he himself became a specialist in military technology.³³ It was clear to Xue that the world of the 1890s was drifting towards global conflict on an unprecedented scale. He did not know where it would end, and he was not sure that the West knew its future either. He cried out at the newly devised chemical weapons and self-propelled torpedoes: “Alas! The machines of death are perfected. The suffering of the people will know no end!”³⁴ There was a small consolation, however, in that since European powers were engaging in an arms race, states were more wary of war. It was a country’s weapon buildup rather than outcomes of war which determined results of inter-state conflict.³⁵

More important than expertise on weaponry, Xue saw as his main mission developing Chinese interests overseas by promoting trade and emigration. As we will see later in this chapter, Xue’s thinking went beyond the idea of “commercial war,” or the development of an export-oriented economy, which was brewing among treaty port intellectuals from the 1870s. The Qing should develop a full set of “far-reaching policies,” an idea that he revived from earlier imperial discourse, to designate colonial policies of the modern age: sending Chinese population overseas for semi-permanent settlement, incorporating Southeast Asian emigrants as Chinese subjects, and conquering nearby territories to avoid their falling into Western hands. Consuls were the most important agents for extending Chinese sovereignty overseas, and Xue devoted much of time negotiation for the expansion of consular service. Even Zeng Jize, the best diplomat up to his own time, did not understand the importance of consuls.³⁶

Chinese Origins for Western Learning

The possibility that Western learning originated in China was considered as early as the Jesuit contact in the 1600s. Evidential scholars in the Qing, intellectually predisposed to tracing textual origins of ancient classics and weeding out forgeries, applied the same methods to Western learning and concluded that mathematics and astronomy had their roots in ancient practices. Prominent figures such as Ruan Yuan documented their descent in detail. But not until after 1860, when the court felt the urgency of acquiring Western techniques, did such arguments emerge onto the national scene. As historian and literary scholar Theodore Hutters says, these types of arguments played an indispensable rhetorical role to bolster the reformers' position. It is most telling that this rhetoric virtually disappeared after the Sino-Japanese war, when Western learning became a mainstream intellectual interest.³⁷

Not all West observers bought into the nativist theory. Early diplomats such as Binchun and Zhigang were clearly familiar with it, but did not seem eager to draw conclusions. They were fascinated by the remarkable coincidences between Chinese and Western learning. When Zhigang saw the workings of a steam engine, his instinct was to praise the ingenuity of Way-as-Nature. Guo Songtao seldom paid attention to such theories and disparaged their proponents as ignorant self-aggrandizers.

From the 1880s on, the excitement of early travelers at discovering universal principles was replaced by a dogmatic insistence that all merits of the West originated in China. This anxiety to claim Chinese origins directly related to the perceived need for westernization. It was a convenient way to avoid Guo's fate; learning from the West was natural if the West learned from China. Upon exhorting the literati to take up Western

languages, Zeng makes a point of disparaging those who neglected Chinese learning: “They look like Chinese products in their appearance, but once we investigate into their scholarship, their feelings and emotions, they are no different from Westerners. So they are of no use to our country.”³⁸ Zeng even extended his disapproval to the Chinese students studying abroad. He was disappointed by Yan Fu, a Fuzhou Shipyard student who was then enrolled in the Greenwich Naval Academy. Yan’s comparison between Chinese and Western cultures had won lavish praise from Guo Songtao, and the two remained lifelong friends. But when Yan presented his writings to Zeng, hoping to renew his patronage with the next minister, he received only a lukewarm response. Zeng thought that Guo had pampered Yan with too much praise; the boy could barely compose fluent essays in his own language! It was no good to be too haughty too quickly.³⁹

Xue brought Zeng’s nativization of Western learning to new heights. He looked assiduously for ways to establish connections between ancient wisdom and Western learning. What had existed in Zeng Jize as a general confidence, Xue developed into a full-blown theory with carefully documented citations. Xue did not stop at the nativization of science and technology, but invented origins for the political, social and economic systems of the West. Xue also differed from Zeng in his espousal of non-Confucian, non-orthodox beliefs within the Chinese tradition. He did not identify the “Chinese” with the body of works under the Confucian rubric. The interests he had claimed when applying to serve under Zeng Guofan – Daoist arts, yinyang theories, divination and the rest – played into his interest in Western learning. As literary scholar Yin Dexiang has established, Xue was most fascinated with the newest developments in natural sciences — the formation of the earth, the unlimited scope of the universe, the

origin of species, and observations of sunspots. He was particularly interested in electricity and perceived it as the sixth and missing element from the Five Phases.⁴⁰ His understanding of these theories were shaped in various degrees by knowledge of ancient crafts.

A strong believer in the supernatural, Xue had delved into an eclectic body of beliefs in his early years: beyond yinyang and the five phases, he took on popular Buddhist and Daoist notions such as reincarnation, predestined fate, and ghostly retributions. Of the entries he wrote in his *Yong'an biji*, a dedicated fact-collecting notebook published in 1892, a quarter are supernatural occurrences which he had “taken pains to ascertain for himself,” and another third are stories of spirits and ghosts “according to what he had seen and heard.” The latter category, even though he could not fully verify their full existence, are still “the product and utility of heaven and earth,” and what “according to Doctrines of the Mean, manifestations of the subtle forces.”⁴¹ The rational world and the supernatural realms were tightly interwoven in Xue’s reality. Competing thinkers in the Warring States, and works of the *fangshi* — masters of esoteric arts — dealt in mysteries he thought orthodox Confucianists overlooked.

Take Xue's treatment of the Earth’s continents. The Warring States cosmologist Zou Yan had used a numerological system based on the number nine to establish the structure of the world. The earth consists of nine continents separated by a vast ocean, and within each continent were nine lesser continents split by lesser seas. Each lesser continent is a separate environ, with strange animals inhabiting its boundaries so the animals only live at the edges of the continents? In Zou’s formula, the “the central kingdoms (of the Warring States)” were one eighty-first of the earth. Sima Qian had

dismissed the theory as “over-broad and absurd.” Xue recalls that he himself had also doubted it when he was young, but when he perused the world map during his transatlantic voyage, he was surprised to find that Zou had estimated the portion of China with amazing accuracy. And where the map showed five inhabited continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia) he saw nine. The Americas, he counted for two. Asia, he took for three: the first comprised China, Manchuria, Korea, Japan, Inner Mongolia, the kingdoms of Siam, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia; the second was Russian Asia, bounded by the Amur and the Gobi desert in the south, the Black Sea and the Urals in the West, and the Arctic in the north; the third comprised India, Burma, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Africa he split in two along an unbroken range of mountains he understood, incorrectly, to run through Senegambia, Guinea, Niger, and Darfur, to the origin of the Nile. Xue asserts that his system was entirely based on natural and observable features of the earth. Because the continents were meant to be of equal size, he reassigned the Dutch East Indies to Oceania.

As to Zou’s claim that the continents were segregated by the ocean, well, that too, was grounded in fact: For is not the Gobi desert sometimes called an “ocean of sand?” Are the Red Sea and the Mediterranean not connected to the ocean, and thus part of the ocean, too? It was clear to Xue, in any case, that Zou did not cut his model from whole cloth. He more likely developed it from a school of measurement-based calculation that was earlier yet, but which it was now impossible to trace back.⁴²

Historian Mark Lewis has shown that Zou Yan’s theory played an important part in the construction of the Han empire. It provided a theoretical foundation for the imperial expansionists in their debate against the agrarian classicists. By demonstrating

that the nine provinces mentioned in the “Tribute of Yu” were collectively just one-ninth of the world, the expansionists of the Han asserted the “intellectual, textual and political superiority of the Warring States and the early empires to the world of antiquity and its classics.”⁴³ Although Xue’s primary purpose was to prove the relevance of traditional wisdom, there was an undertone of criticism of Confucian learning. By painstakingly matching Zou’s description with geographical features, Xue demonstrates that ancient China had produced minds comparable to modern geographers, not from the league of classicists, but masters of the lesser arts who were often derided by the Confucian bigwigs. Just as Han court officials invoked Zou Yan to criticize the antiquarian knowledge of the classicists, Xue, too, berated the culture of the civil service examinations and orthodox learning as outdated and stifling. The re-emphasis of pre-Han schools was Xue’s solution to the inability of Confucianism to provide the basis for scientific learning and imperialistic policies. By reminding his countrymen of alternative traditions, Xue set the stage for the search for an alternative Chinese identity.

But there was also the issue of national pride. Where Western theories contradicted established wisdom as recorded in the classics, Xue was unwilling to admit that the sages made a mistake but instead strove to reconcile the differences. In an essay about the shape of the earth, Xue has an imaginary interlocutor ask him: The earth’s spherical shape contradicts the traditional view of “round heaven and square earth.” Does that mean that they made a big mistake? Xue explains that the Chinese theory describes the principle and way of heaven and earth, not their shapes. The “round heaven” is a statement about the ceaseless and cyclical circulation of yin and yang forces and the alternation between cold and hot weathers. The “square earth” captures the principle fact

that each mountain and river has its own place on earth and cannot be moved: each natural object is squarely fixed in its own lot. The troubled interlocutor presses him further: “Does this mean that the simple facts known to housewives today eluded the sages in the past?” Xue replies that ancient sages were not able to travel around the globe, but that does not mean they did not know that the earth was round. When the appropriate time had not arrived, the sages refused to manifest their words, neither did they feel it necessary to waste their words on places they had not been.⁴⁴

Xue systematically sifts through ancient texts which were relegated to lesser status, the Mohist, legalist, and Daoist schools and the syncretic works of late Warring States and early Han. Nor was Xue alone in this endeavor. Around the same time, similar catalogs were drawn by scholar-intellectuals, both in coastal cities and in Hunan, and these efforts would reach their height in the late 1890s.⁴⁵ Xue responded to the trends of the time, resonating with his own findings abroad. The Warring States text Mozi, with its long and mysteriously mangled tracts on mechanics, spoke particularly well to the current state of technology in the West. Xue asked his secretary to compile a list of passages dealing with principles of optics, mechanics, and engineering, and recorded his central findings in his journal. After studying them, he points out, quite correctly, that certain chapters contain the master’s observations such as reflection at plane, concave, and convex surfaces, and the principles on which telescopes and microscopes were much later invented.⁴⁶

Various chapters of *The Annals of Master Lü* and *Huainanzi* were cited for demonstrating a knowledge of chemistry and electricity. For example, from the *Annals of Master Lü*, Xue found a passage that heralds modern chemistry: “Lacquer and water are

both liquids; but if you mix the two liquids together, they solidify, and if you steam the lacquer, it will dry out. Copper and tin are both soft, but combine the two soft substances, and they become hard; and if you heat the combination, it liquefies. In one instance, you dry out the material by making it damp; in the other, you liquefy the material by heating it.”⁴⁷

Guanzi with its focus on statecraft and military strategies could be tied to nearly all facets of Western learning and systems of governance. Written near the end of Warring States, *Guanzi* was attributed to a seventh century official of Qi who built the state from an obscure Zhou fiefdom into the foremost power during Spring and Autumn. Xue felt a touch defensive about promoting a text with such strong legalist overtones as *Guanzi*: “Although the book was all about enriching the country and strengthening the army, because it was written not far from the Three Dynasties, its words contained traces of the sage kings’ intentions.” Xue found the principle of Western parliaments in *Guanzi*’s call for the government “not to coerce people into what they do not like” and “not to lie to the people.” *Guanzi* stresses the importance of contemplation and engagement in all affairs, which to Xue suggests the principle behind specialization in Western learning and commerce. Moreover, *Guanzi* told the government not to “let merchants abandon profit, let the people have wandering days, or let wealth to stop circulating.” A perfect description of the principle of Western exaltation of commerce and industry.⁴⁸

Finally, from the freewheeling and seemingly absurd ramblings of Zhuangzi and Liezi, Xue extracts important insights into the real world in different scales. The chapter “Free and Easy Wandering” of Zhuangzi describes the big bird Peng’s s journey to the

“southern darkness” in the following terms: “Wavering heat, bits of dust, living things blowing each other about — the sky looks very blue. Is that its real color, or is it because it is so far away and has no end? When the bird looks down, all he sees is blue too.”⁴⁹ To Xue this passage describes a sight that only European hot-air balloon riders could see. Similarly, Zhuangzi’s parables of tiny countries living on snail tentacles “seems to resemble images shown in microscopes.”⁵⁰ Zhuangzi also provides a handy precedent for astronomy, when he daringly asks: “Does Heaven Turn? Does the earth sit still? Do the sun and moon compete for a place to shine? Who masterminds all this? Who pulls the strings?...I wonder, is there some mechanism that runs it and won’t let it stop?”⁵¹ Apparently taking this statement as concerning the orbiting of planets, Xue considers Zhuangzi to have “enlightened Western literati who speak of way of heaven.”

Xue does not think that Zhuangzi came to his conclusions after careful research or accumulation of knowledge. “He was merely indulging in his spontaneous self-expressions,” Xue says. But the fact that his words were proved right by ages later (and in a foreign land) suggests to Xue an existence of archaic yet powerful Chinese wisdom. There was no simple, rational explanation for so clear a case of foresight, and Xue did not probe the matter further. He simply alerted his readers that such words as in Zhuangzi should not be brushed aside.

It was not just that ancient knowledge helped people accept Western learning; the reverse was also something to be excited about: the possibility that ancient knowledge could be substantiated by new observations. Knowledge from the West did not purge dragons and hells from his mind, but often confirmed their existence.⁵² Visits to museums allowed him to see the strange objects mentioned in archaic texts such as in the *Book of*

Odes and the *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, but which had long disappeared in China. It was only regretful that foreign names when translated sounded strange and twisted and cannot be matched with ancient books, he said, because otherwise more than half of the creatures in those texts could be ascertained.⁵³ When he failed to find the matches where he had expected, Xue showed genuine disappointment and found it necessary to inform his readers. A case in point is his failure to find species of big bird Peng or the big fish Kun described in Zhuangzi. In both cases, Xue had found historical records after Zhuangzi to substantiate their existence: A Hanlin Academician in the Ming, for example, recorded that he found a giant feather from such a bird. He was intent upon finding these animals in Western zoos, but in this Xue was disappointed. “The fantastic animals kept in these zoos are beyond bounds, but I have seen absolutely no trace of a bird of such a gigantic proportion.” He had to conclude that some records of these animals were mere parables, not to be taken literally.⁵⁴

While Xue shows a genuine intellectual curiosity towards the past, his main concern was nevertheless to establish precise connections between Chinese and Western learnings. In his eagerness to establish Chinese precedent, he took vague suggestions for hard evidence. He did not concern himself with context. An example is how he establishes the origin of astronomical calculations on the following passage from *Zhuangzi*: “The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original one makes three. If we go on this way, then even the cleverest mathematician can’t tell where we’ll end.”⁵⁵ The only link between the two seems to be Zhuangzi’s willingness to manipulate numbers. Another example is the passage on mixing lacquer and water quoted above. The *Annals of Master Lu* invokes those observations to illustrate that illusive

nature of real knowledge and to warn the sovereign against false appearance of intelligence, or, as the leading statement of the chapter says: “To know that one does not know is the loftiest form of intelligence.” In fact, the next sentence immediately following the passage on lacquer clearly gives in to such an agnostic turn: “When the class to which a thing belongs is decidedly uncertain, what can be induced about it?”⁵⁶ Xue was not interested — or intentionally overlooked — this underlying message of transcendentalism. There is a certain irony in taking a passage that treats nature as unknowable, and identifying it as the source of modern chemistry. But the irony eluded him entirely.

It goes without saying that Xue’s main purpose in compiling his list of connections was to nativize Western learning, thereby providing justification and impetus for modernization. The creation of the fundamentals of a civilized life, he firmly assured his readers, were all attributed to the Chinese: boats, carts, arrows, fishnets, clothing, books, and seals. “Imagine the amazement of those who lived in marshes and grasslands,” he asks his readers, “when they suddenly see this civilization. Wasn’t it far more miraculous than the manufacture of Westerners today? It is only because we are used to it that we do not think so.”⁵⁷ Since the Westerners borrowed and extended Chinese knowledge, why could not the Chinese learn from them? There was plenty of precedent for the use of foreign techniques to subjugate foreigners: The King of Wu employed Chu shamans to weaken Chu, and King Wuling of Zhao borrowed the cavalry outfits of the barbarians. The lack of Chinese inventions was not because the Chinese could not pursue the new, but that they did not study the old carefully. They had forgotten the sage kings who used their ingenuity to bring civilization to humanity. “It is precisely because we

forget the old so easily that we are kept from pursuing the new.”⁵⁸ He exhorts his readers to launch parallel investigations into the old and the new learnings. They should not disdain the old, and neither should they be astonished by the new. They should be confident that the Chinese will again amaze the Westerners with new creations in another thousand years.

Chinese culture was being borrowed into Europe. Western scholars were gradually turning their backs on Christianity — even though they might hesitate to admit it outright — but whenever they speak of the teachings of Confucius, “they unanimously praised it, without a word of criticism.” Xue assured his readers that Westerners did not do this out of mere polite rhetoric; his careful examination of their words and expressions told him their words came “honestly from the depths their hearts.”⁵⁹ Now that routes between Europe and Asia were wide open, Confucianism would inevitably travel West and supplant the declining Christianity. It is hard to tell to what extent Xue genuinely believed in this Westward movement of Confucianism, but the theory must have been appealing for its emotional compensation for his open advocacy of modernization. By holding onto key facets of Chinese culture, Xue could demonstrate that China did not lose its ground in net exchange, for it still excelled in the realm of lofty, spiritual concerns. A rudimentary student of the classics at best, Xue consciously wielded “Confucian tradition” as a shield against domestic criticism of westernization. Xue’s proud assertion of traditionalism provided the stepping stone for Zhang Zhidong’s reformation of “Chinese essence” — a flawless, timeless core which Western learning was meant to preserve and protect.

Locating the West in China's Past

Perhaps Xue's most revelatory discoveries in this foreign yet familiar land were of the wonderfully pure customs of its peoples. Having spent nearly a lifetime dealing with Westerners as diplomatic adversaries in his secretarial posts, Xue never considered them as friendly human beings. He could hardly conceal his shock at discovering their courtesy and humanity. "The Westerners who abide by Christianity do not differ much from Confucianists in their nature and character, or in their self-discipline and love of others."⁶⁰ Having immersed himself in social dinners and the etiquette of Whitehall, he realized that few Englishmen at home resembled the sultry bearing of their compatriots in China. Even the notorious Thomas Wade, the former minister to China known for his bad tempers, turned out to be a helpful friend. The reason that the Chinese had a bad impression of Western diplomats — and here Xue essentially reiterated Guo's view without quoting him directly — was due to their own indecision, suspicion and lack of principle. Gradually foreigners figured that nothing short of threats could get them what they wanted, and so their diplomats changed their attitudes from civility to ruthless cunning.⁶¹

Why had the customs of China, once known for ritual and propriety, declined to the point that even the Westerners sent the worst of their kind to deal with the Chinese? Would this have happened in ancient times? Xue had a theory to explain the variation of national customs and their historical trajectories. Taking his cue from the lore of the Three Dynasties, he considered that customs in any given society as purest when the country was first established. The longer a national history was, the more its peoples were prone to social illnesses and depravity. When nations were first founded, their

populations had not multiplied and their primordial *qi* had not been dispersed, so hearts and customs were pure and honest at first. It is not always clear which events Xue refers to as the “founding of the nations,” but he seems to prefer momentous occasions that clearly and irrevocably alter the constitution of the state. It is almost certain that he took the American Revolution and the reign of Peter the Great. He might have attributed the founding of England to the Glorious Revolution. America was younger than the European states, and all were younger than China. America was like China in the times of Yu and Xia (the first of the Three Dynasties); Russia was like the Shang and Zhou (the second and third of the Three Dynasties); England and Germany were rather like China during the Han; France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, were in the same historical phase as China in the Tang and Song; and France, for all its arrogance and partisanship, was rather like the Ming.⁶²

The idea that China lagged behind the West because its history weighed it down was not new to literati of the late Qing. Zhigang and Guo Songtao had held similar opinions. It was especially popular, during the warmest periods in Sino-American relationship in the late 1860s and early 1870s, to praise the dispositions of the Americans in those terms. The sentiment gradually waned after the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act. When someone asked him why he considered the Americans to be following ancient ways, given their oppression of the Chinese, Xue pointed out that even in the Three Dynasties there were cruel kings and ministers. How could they expect all Americans to follow the Way? This theory of historical degeneration appealed to Xue in its elegance and its combination of social history with natural history. It also helped Xue establish that Western learning was indeed derived from China. After enumerating similarities between

Western ways and Guanzi, he sighs: “Is this because the Western countries opened up relatively late that the *qiyun* (circulation of *qi*) of Heaven and Earth coincided so [with ancient teachings]?”⁶³

The upside of this theory was its implication that the fortune of the West would not be permanent, but would wax and wane according to the same wheel of fortune that nature plays on China. Each of them would eventually follow the same trajectory that China did. It also provides Xue with an optimistic rationalization of China’s plight, and allows him a freer hand at interpreting what was wrong with China. Mapping Western history unto Chinese chronology provides Xue with the most irrefutable grounds for reform. If the West was recapitulating earlier periods of Chinese history, ancient Chinese institutions and customs could be recovered from the West. It might even be possible that Westerners had a better intuition for what the sages had in mind, where the meaning of the ancient texts eluded the Chinese themselves. This was most obvious in the technical and scientific ingenuity of the Westerners, but it also manifests in their political and social organizations.

Xue was not an institutional specialist. Compared with Guo’s concern with ritual reform, Xue devoted his attention to resource management, both natural and human. Just as he was eager to locate, extract and transport minerals for industrialization, he saw the effective utilization of human talent the key to China’s welfare. The secret of Western institutions was in their ability to pool ideas, money, and popular support for goals of the government. The West was able to undertake enormous projects where China failed because it had such institutional means at its disposal. This idea was not unfamiliar to the ancients, Xue says, for the *Huainanzi* says, “Gather the force of all intelligent men, then

nothing is beyond reach.”⁶⁴ This was the idea behind the success of Western learning, and more importantly, it was the principle upon which Westerners organized their political and commercial institutions. The parliament was established so that the administration could gather ideas from a wider population. “Company laws” (regulations and regulatory bodies) were set up so that the finances and facilities of the public could be fully utilized and channeled into useful purposes.

Xue’s belief that the amassing of ideas and talent was the key to all fields of Western success differed remarkably from the explanations fielded by his contemporary observers. As a critic of despotism, Guo Songtao had commented that the reason the British citizens tolerated a high rate of taxation was that they had a say in where that money was spent. By inviting the people to participate in government affairs, constitutional monarchy created an enduring bond between the high and the low. Xue, on the other hand, noticed a different aspect of the system — the ability of the state to reach far and wide to the entire population, and to regulate all branches of human endeavor. Guo had frowned upon state intervention in commerce; Xue approved of it mightily. As we saw in chapter four, Guo, in his maritime defense proposal, argued for greater freedom for merchants. An advocate of *laissez-faire* capitalism, he saw the “official supervision” of the joint-stock companies as fundamentally flawed because it introduced corruption and distorted merchant initiative. To Xue, the failure of China’s first companies was precisely due to its lack of state regulations. He recounted the “sudden liberation of ethos” in 1881, when the first joint-stock companies were established in Shanghai. “Everyone who could muster any kind of financial support invested in it, and often as much as a hundred thousand taels could be gathered instantly.” But because of

the managerial inexperience and lack of financial regulations, the head of the company squandered the money within a couple of years, driving future investors away. The problem, in other words, was that China opened up too quickly to the West, before the proper rules and institutions were in place. Xue heaves a sigh at this bitter taste of irony: “The reason that China today is closed up is because the foreign ethos came in too soon. How regretful is this! How regretful is this!”⁶⁵

The two aspects of Western political and commercial systems that Guo and Xue each noticed reflect a conceptual disjunction facing Chinese observers of the West. There seems to be a reluctance to treat statism and despotism as two separate notions, to believe that a state could simultaneously delegate authority to its citizens and hold firmly to the execution of power. So Guo emphasized the former but remained entirely oblivious to the coercive aspect of the state. Xue noticed the ingenuity of the Western systems to engineer mass projects, but barely mentions popular votes. Even well into the 1910s, a traveler as well educated in Western learning as Jiang Menglin considered the two aspects paradoxical. When Jiang first landed in San Francisco and saw the army of immigration police, he was baffled by the ubiquitous presence of the state in a *republic*. “I began to wonder why the people of a republic enjoyed less individual freedom than did the people of China, which was an absolute monarchy. In China was scarcely felt the influence of the state. ‘Heaven is high above and the Emperor is far away.’”⁶⁶

In nearly all social, educational, and political institutions, Xue found Western ways to be “patterned after the fashion of the Three Dynasties.” In fact, Xue found things so agreeable that instead of laboriously listing the differences between ancient China and the modern West, he found it easier just to talk about where the two did not match exactly,

and what the West still needed to improve upon. He summarized his caveats according to the Three Bonds: the relationship between the ruler and the subject, between parents and children, and between the husband and the wife. Western practices that violated these, in his view, contradicted the Way of the sages.

The upper and lower houses are also organized according to the old intention of “making affairs of punishment and reward public.” The only problem with it was that occasionally one or two powerful officials and generals collude and force their monarchs to abdicate. Recently this happened in Brazil and Chili. More than ten years ago it was especially common, as it had been in the time before Confucius wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The relationship between ruler and subjects in foreign countries deviates slightly from the way of the Sages.

When sons and daughters reach twenty-one, they have the so-called “right of independence.” They no longer ask for their parents’ permission for marriage, and after they marry, they separate from their parents, separate their own accounts, and in more extreme cases do not contact them. This avoids the troubles we see in Chinese families in which fathers and sons [by reproving one another] injured kindness, and where the wife and her mother-in-law bickered. But flesh and blood make the closest relations; how can we treat family as strangers? Their national laws stipulate that commoners cannot engage in fights. When a son hits his father, he is sentenced to three months; when a father hits his son, he is also sentenced to three months. It was originally Mozi’s idea of undifferentiated love that led to such mistakes. The relationship between parents and children deviates slightly from the way of the Sages.

Western customs exalt women and debase men. When a man walks on the street, he lets women pass him. Women proceed in front of men in ceremonial functions such as banquets. When a wife acquires a lover, when she is a duchess, she can abandon her husband and remarry. When the husband has a mistress, however, his wife can bring lawsuit against him. This is the opposite of the ancient idea of promoting the yang and suppressing the yin. Unmarried girls often have many boyfriends; they are not embarrassed to give birth outside of wedlock. This is why many women do not like to be married — they hate being restricted by their husbands. The relationship between the husband and the wife deviates slightly from the way of the sages.⁶⁷

Why did Xue use such mild phrasing for what, to any orthodox Confucian, would

look like the blatant perversion of human relationships? Xue only claims that Western systems “deviate slightly” from Chinese ideals. This, again, is the mapping of Western nations onto phases of Chinese history. There were impurities in Chinese culture, too, before Confucius and the sage kings expunged them; if the West was still at an early stage of Chinese history, those impurities will remain. The Three Bonds in the West were not so bad as to discredit their systems (in fact, their systems were mostly good); they were merely flawed in some respects. Elsewhere, Xue made the observation that Western women’s high status was a result of the states’ pursuit of wealth and power. In ancient times, “women’s abiding by ritual was just as strictly enforced as it is in China.” But a certain French King three or hundred years ago came up the idea of turning women into productive force, and thereby made them abandon old customs. At first he had to resort to the use of punishment, but with time women became just as useful as men, doubling the productive population of the country. This was then copied throughout Europe and so much taken for granted that the Europeans would sneer at Chinese women’s ritual. Only in Russia, Xue says, can traces of the old European customs be observed, as they still separated their sexes in their royal dinners.⁶⁸ It was not that the West was in fundamental disagreement with the Chinese practice; the divergence happened for particular reasons, not in the least because of the different stages of the historical cycles these countries were on. His de-emphasis on difference plays a significant part in transforming the conceptual locality of the West. The West was mapped onto the Chinese past and its differences tamed.

On a pragmatic level, Xue essentially lays down an ideological foundation for the advocacy of what might be called “Western systems plus the Three Bonds.”⁶⁹ By this

Xue means that as long as China could hold onto the proper bonds, it could be free to adopt Western institutions. Anything from gunboats, to arts and education, to political systems — even constitutional monarchy — was fair play, even though he was always cautious about making those points explicit. Xue tells his readers that even Westerners themselves would agree with this selective approach, for they often praised China for being the oldest civilization. They clearly admired the Chinese Three Bonds, but just could not change their ways too quickly.

The Chinese tradition to Xue was much more than what the Three Bonds entails. As he repeatedly demonstrated, the entire establishment of Western learning and systems had precedents in Chinese tradition. His purpose was not to identify the three bonds with Chinese customs, but to liberate the Chinese to embrace reform. At the same time, the Three Bonds to Xue receded into the lesser role of patching up the flaws in Western systems.

Xue would not expect that only a few years down the road, Three Bonds would become the focal point of a heated debate between the reformers and conservatives. Xue's fixation on the Three Bonds as the only remaining barrier between China and the Western worlds probably helped foster a more rigid formulation of Chinese identity. In his 1898 *Exhortation to Learn*, written in the aftermath of the Hundred Days Reform, Zhang Zhidong identified the Three Bonds as “the essence of both the sage and China.”⁷⁰ Zhang's quixotic effort to salvage Confucianism only hastened its demise, and he probably took his cues from Xue's journals, which had become a popular read. Behind his famous formulation of “Chinese essence, Western utility” was Zhang's manipulation of the Western image according to Chinese customs. Xue rhetorically downplayed the

fundamental differences between China and the West regarding human relations, and Zhang likewise decided that the West would side with China in core values. But he inverted Xue's logic. Whereas Xue considered the Western Three Bonds deviations from the Chinese norm, Zhang emphasized the common aspects and argued that the West had the same bonds as the Chinese: their monarchs and presidents had the authority to dismiss the parliament; their Ten Commandments stipulated that children must respect their parents; they universally despised women of loose morals, though their gender etiquette might be different. "Even though Westerners' ritual is simple, they did not entirely abandon the purpose of ritual." In Zhang's view, the fellows "exalting the West and debasing China" who talked about "abolishing the Three Bonds" had not only abandoned Chinese ways; they were utterly ignorant of Western affairs.

While Xue clearly preferred fundamental reform in political and social institutions, he saw no need to cling exactly to their Western forms. The Chinese needed to stay true to their own cultural practices because customs could not be expected changed suddenly. The Chinese formed their unique cultural practices because of the particular cosmic forces converging on China had already formed a unity with its human activity. One could not suddenly change patterns of activity without disturbing the spirits and forces. For example, in matters concerning burial, Westerners did not practice geomancy; they merely dug up channels and pushed the coffins underground. Graves of the poor and the wealthy were intermingled. No one ever spoke of the "veins of the dragon" in selecting locations. How does one explain the fact that even though Westerners insist that they brook no superstition, no ghostly or spiritual retributions ever befell them? Xue resorted to a bit of folk belief circulating in the Xiang Army from the Taiping suppression years,

probably as a morale booster. Captured under the rubric “yinyang pa mengdong” (ghosts are afraid of the ignorant), the tale speaks of a ghost telling a superstitious brother that demonic spirits choose to haunt those who believe in them, but they become utterly harmless to those who do not. Xue thought that because Westerners were entirely ignorant of the numerous taboos of Chinese geomancy, they were immune from their influence. The Chinese were age-long believers in these practices, making them particularly vulnerable to spirits.⁷¹ He applied the same reasoning to explain why the disrespectful attitude of the Westerners to their written texts went unpunished. The Chinese custom exalt the written word to such an extent that “even heaven, earth, ghosts and spirits followed men to cherish them,” and they sent down punishments to Chinese offenders. But because the West did not have such customs, the spirits could do nothing about their people.⁷²

Xue held serious reservation about Westerners’ rejection of the subtle spiritual powers. He lamented the fact that in matters of family relations, the West did not value producing heirs. There were millionaires who refused to marry all their lives, and instead donated their money to churches before they died. He also knew of many governors and high officials who took in young wives in their last years for fun and not reproduction. Their reason, as Xue understood, was that “after death a man returns to an unconscious state and there is no hungry ghosts to speak of.” This was fact-seeking scientism, Xue says, but do the Westerners really think that the Chinese sages were less capable than Westerners in ascertaining the substance of myriad things? The sages designed ancestral rites according to their thorough experience of the natural things (*tiwu*) and penetration into the power of spirits of ghosts. Ancestors and heirs were mutually dependent and

ancestral rites instilled the desire for goodness and the fear of bad deeds. In this regard, Christianity was based on a narrow-minded, exclusive focus on the immediate and the observable, thus missing the basis of righteousness.⁷³

Guo Songtao had greatly admired the substantive and fact-based methodology (*shixue*) of the West, and contrasted it with the superficial or “hollow” (*xu*) studies of the Chinese. While Xue Fucheng clearly accepted the importance of substantive learning, he considered the Westerners’ obsession with facts a weakness and oversight. It was not the methods and spirits of scientific inquiry which attracted Xue, but the wonderful facts and theories they produced to explain nature. Where Western learning failed to produce wonderment, Xue thought it needed to heed Chinese practices. An example is his take on medicine. He grieved that past diplomats suffered from their overconfidence in Western medicine. Zeng Jize’s son died at the hands of a Western physician, and Li Shuchang lost an eye to them. Neither would have happened if they would listen to the good Chinese doctors! Western medicine had nearly killed Zhang Deyi, when Chinese doctors stepped in. Reality is made up of both *shi* — the solid and observable — and *xu* — the ephemeral and the immaterial. There are phenomena which cannot be verified by observations and experiments, and Chinese practices, grounded in actual experience rather than isolated tests, are better at divining these hidden forces at play. This is particularly true with medical practices. Western surgical practices are obviously excellent, but their incapable of treating the subtle “inner illness” because of its inattention to *xu*. Ancient Chinese medicinal texts had discussed these aspects, but the actual methods had been lost. Xue proposes the adoption of patent law to preserve and protect native learning, not only in medicine, but in other learned traditions, too.⁷⁴

Racial Consciousness and Geographical Determinism

Race emerged in Xue's vocabulary as a familiar categorization. Classification of foreigners by skin color, as historian Frank Dikötter documents, had been common among the Chinese.⁷⁵ Diplomatic journals from the 1860s are littered with references to peoples by color, but the specific reference to *zhong*, "seed," did not appear until Xue's journal. Race was a floating concept to Xue. Probably quoting a museum placard on race, he recounts a division of world population was divided into four *zhong*: the white race, the yellow race, the black race, and the red race, and these four were further divided into fifteen "lineages."⁷⁶ Other than skin color and physiognomy, he also coupled *zhong* with a range of other denotations: nationality, tribal affiliation, and geographic location. "Chinese" (*huaren*) were sometimes referred to as "the seed of the Chinese" (*huaren zhi zhong*). Elsewhere he notes that "Prussia" was not originally a nation, but a coalition of three "races" (*renzhong*): the Romans, the Greeks, and the Germans.⁷⁷ Xue was not particularly interested in racial theories, but in their underlying colonial implications: the expansion of a particular group of people beyond their original geographic boundaries and the replacement of existing populations. Xue equated barbarianism with racial inferiority. Like the diplomats before him, Xue was greatly shocked by the contrast between the living conditions of the natives in Southeast Asians, and their European colonizers. He describes the natives of Vietnam, Siam, Burma, India, and Arabia as having pitch-dark skin, funny little limbs, and stout torsos. "Compared with the civilized and refined look of the Chinese, and that of the Europeans, the differences were

absolutely huge.”

Xue’s new knowledge in world geography and climate distribution, when combined with native theories on the circulation of *qi*, lent his racial theory a certain elegance and appeal. Upon investigating into the abundance natural resources in Southeast Asia, Xue found that the *yang* forces dominated this region, producing summer-like weather all year round, and nurturing the growth of plants, minerals, precious rocks and rare animals. Unfortunately, this region being “below the Equator” (he likely meant the Tropic of Cancer, which is nearer the middle than the Equator when Antarctica is excluded from Mercator maps), there was no force of the restraining nature to counterbalance the luxuriant *yang*. With this grand leakage of the *yang* forces, the native population melted into nature itself, returning to a vegetative state of primordial bliss. “Their tendons and strengths could not be exercised; their intellect could not grow. Dispirited, unfettered, disoriented, and timid, they could not get themselves together.” Surveying where great men emerged around the globe, Xue declares that the peoples of the temperate zones were the most favored creatures of the Creator because the climate there enabled the necessary aggregation of *qi*.⁷⁸

Xue sees conquest as a natural process in the mold of Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” History was seen as a long process of the tossing and turning of races like rocks in a tumbler, wearing down the rough corners. When the inferior races, such as the Miao people in Yunnan, remained in their own niche of the earth, living with apes and monkeys on the fringes of civilization, they could make it. But as soon as racial intermixing occurs, superior displaces inferior — natives disappear when the Europeans and the Chinese move in. Xue cites historical accounts to support his theory. The

histories of China and the West mention multitudinous barbarian races that had long since vanished silently; in China there had been the tribes of *di*, *rong*, *qiang*, *man*, and many others, but they were nowhere to be seen. He also believes that the “Red barbarians” of America had disappeared. He emphasizes that their extinctions were acts of nature, not of man. It would be a mistake to think these primitive peoples were brutally annihilated in military conquests, Xue says, because Heaven would not have allowed such acts of disharmony, and other nations in the world would not have tolerated it either. He explains that the Chinese were the most noble race, descendants of spirits and gods, and that the Europeans, having first come from Asia, shared the noble characteristics of the Chinese. When they come into contact with the inferior races, they unwittingly set off a racial elimination which Xue terms “shuaihao” (decay and consumption): “When they settle amongst one another, the noble races, even with no plan or anticipation, thrive and propagate; the humble races, even with no plan or anticipation, decay and wither... This is caused directly by laws of nature.”⁷⁹ For a recent example, Xue cites the depopulation of the Hawaiians after European settlement. Only a tenth of the native population remained, with merely a hundred years of European and Chinese settlement.⁸⁰ And the natives, he says, were too dense to understand why they were dying off! If Xue knew about any of the real methods of depopulation and genocide, he either ignored them or accepted them as facets of a natural process of racial elimination.

In Xue’s hierarchy of races, the Chinese were supreme. Theirs were the most desirable qualities. Xue had learned from a museum exhibit that Europeans originated in Asia and later migrated Westward (Eugène Dubois discovered the “Java man” specimen of *Homo erectus* in 1891, lending credence to the notion that humanity arose in Asia), so

they must have similar qualities.⁸¹ These two superior races lorded it over the myriad peoples which still crawled along at various stages of development. Although Xue never mentions any of its proponents by name, his racial theory bears the unmistakable imprint of Social Darwinism, which was ubiquitous and popular in newspapers and scientific journals of the 1890s. But Xue's idea was also a product of his own synthesis. First of all, his idea of race was fluid and vaguely-defined. Take the "huaren," a loose category of people roughly identical to subjects of the dynasty who shared many customs with their brethren in China. The term even encompassed Southeast Asians who barely spoke Chinese. What bound all these people together to make them one race? Xue establishes, from a vague hunch while glancing at the Chinese surnames, that the Chinese population were all descendants of the sage kings Fuxi, Shennong and the Yellow Emperor. This construction of race as lineage, as illustrated by historian Frank Dikötter, would become popular after the Sino-Japanese War, and especially in the rhetoric of the constitutional reformers.⁸² Xue's invocation of the notion dated a few years earlier (around 1890) and was likely to be an inspiration of the later reformers. The acquisition of racial traits, in Xue's view, did not come from natural selection, but was determined by the heavenly endowments allocated to each people. Thus, being the children of the sage kings, which Xue calls "divine spirits" (*shenming*), the Chinese were naturally protected and equipped to propagate even in hostile environments.

How does one explain the abject condition of overseas Chinese who suffered perpetual scorn and oppression by the Europeans? Xue reminded his countrymen that proper management (*jingli*) of the Chinese was essential for the realization of their natural endowment. The reputation of overseas Chinese was often injured by their lack of

control and discipline. Often their stubborn (and presumably laudable) refusal to change their customary way of life also kept them from blending into foreign societies. Even a good crop needs proper tending, and so do the overseas Chinese need effective regulation and the support of their own government. The establishment of consuls and extending of Chinese laws onto overseas population, especially the illiterate, ill-treated coolies, would steer them back onto proper conduct.

Historian William Rowe has pointed out, with respect to Qing colonial consciousness, that there was an established tradition among Qing elites of imagining natives of the southwest as “cultural counterexample” against which to celebrate their own civilization.⁸³ They attributed to them a long list of negative characteristics and collapsed them into one undifferentiated “other.” Rowe also notes that eighteenth century depictions of southwestern peoples were not always unsympathetic. Governors such as Chen Hongmou even wrote admiringly of their “rustic virtue.” Chen, as most statesmen of his time, advocated the use of Confucian education to assimilate those barbarians living on the fringe of humanity. The assumption of these eighteenth century statecraft scholars was the eventual transformation of the marginal peoples by a universal civilization. Diplomatic travelers from the 1860s on generally took a less charitable view. Zhigang, Zhang Deyi and Guo Songtao all believed, to various degrees, that the poverty of the peoples in South Asia and the Strait Settlements was due to the same characteristic traits which made them uncivilized to the eyes of the Chinese. Laziness and stupidity were the two traits most often cited. But none of them excluded their potential of being transformed. To Guo, in particular, the presence of the West signified a magnanimous gesture of humanity, a generous sharing of their wealth and knowledge with foreign

peoples.

In the atmosphere of the early 1890s, Xue's view of the traditional barbarians took a Social Darwinist character. Parallels between human societies and organisms found their ways into his writing. He compares the noble Chinese with evergreens and the inferior races with vines. As the former strengthen and thrive, the latter would naturally wither and die. He used this rhetoric to justify the occupation of northeastern Burma, an area called Yeren Shan (mountains of the savage), which the British were intent upon annexing following their conquest of Burma. The extinction of the southwestern tribes was a historical given because those races were in a vegetative, semi-conscious state and incapable of defending themselves. The only means for the survival of the individuals in those tribes would be changing their racial components through intermarriage with the nobler races — and this, Xue reminds his readers — would lead to the extinction of the inferior race. Colonialism was a conquest for land and resources, even genocide. It was not about transforming culture and social customs by superior civilization; it was nature's mechanism for the strong to overtake the weak. It could not be stopped, so it might as well be embraced.

Once Xue ruled out the viability of the other races to survive independently, his racial theory implied an impending clash between the Europeans and the Chinese over world domination. And from what Xue learned about the progress of Western imperialism, the Europeans clearly had an upper hand in the grand contest. The British "race" dominated America, assimilating the native Americans through marriage. All of Australia was dominated by the British. Africa was being divided up by England, France, and Germany. Turkey held but a small fraction of its former territory, the rest being taken

by Russia and England. Nearly all of Central Asia, previously populated by nomadic kingdoms, was now affiliated with Russia. The vast tracts of land east to Siberia and Mongolia, all belonged to Russia. The larger islands in Southeast Asia was divided by the British, the Dutch and the Spaniards. Even former tribute nations of China, such as Vietnam, Burma, and Cambodia, were taken by England and France. “Europeans have taken over 70% of Asia, and only five countries — China, Japan, Siam, Persia and Arabia — are still left independence.”⁸⁴ This view of the world in terms of racial dominance was to some extent influenced by Japanese writings. While he was in England, Xue came across a book authored by what he called “a Japanese scholar of human societies” (possibly Aruga Nagao’s *shakai shinkaron*) and summarized the book in his journal.⁸⁵ The main message of the book was the precarious existence of the remaining few non-European states in the age of racial annexation. From its Japanese perspective, China was already in dire danger; it was in the very process of being ensnared by Caucasians from all fronts. Japan, too, was gradually nibbled away one island at a time.⁸⁶ The book ended with a desperate, pessimistic call: “Oh my thirty-million breathers! What can we do about this country? What can we do about this world?” Probably thinking the message carried its own weight, Xue made no further comments. For the survival of the nation-race, the self-strengthening of China took on a new meaning. It could be the last stronghold against the spread of European peoples. The native tribes of the buffer zones around China had no means of self-defense. If China wished to preserve itself, it needed to adopt a hardliner stance: diplomatically where possible, and militarily where necessary. “Suppose there is a wealthy man who made his fortune from his farmlands. Now, there is a rainstorm and the rising water is about to destroy the embankment of the pond in the

village. Is it wise for the farmer to say that ‘because the bank is far from my field, I do not need to reinforce it’? No, that would be shortsighted, for as soon as the bank is destroyed, his fields will be flooded. The protection of the farmland should start with fixing its distant embankments.”⁸⁷

Towards a Far-reaching Strategy

The crux of the Qing’s problem, as Xue saw it, was that the administration concerned itself with a narrow set of moral and domestic concerns. Following established statecraft traditions, the state did not look far and wide enough in designing policies. The West excelled precisely because in all their major undertakings — the invention of steamboats, railways, telegraphs, for example — they seek to profit from “everywhere in the universe,” rather than merely looking inward. Xue traces this aversion to expansion and profit-seeking to a misreading of a phrase from the *Zuo Tradition*, a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and classic in its own right, on the megalomaniac figure of the Duke of Qi. The phrase, “*buwu de er qin yuanlue*,” was conventionally interpreted as a criticism of the Duke’s “not attending to virtue, but only busying himself with far-reaching strategies.” This was in line with the Confucian ideal of effortless action: a good ruler tends to his own virtue and does not engage in war and expansion. This standard interpretation did not sit well with Xue. The phrase merely denounces “far-reaching strategies” done in a virtueless manner; it was not meant as a criticism of the far-reaching strategies themselves. Xue thought that the phrase should be read as: “the Duke of Qi, without attending to his virtue, busied himself with far-reaching strategies.”⁸⁸ This fatal

misreading was magnified by the civil service examinations, which often picked this phrase as a rubric for compositions, and thus the entire educated class took the misreading for granted. What a woeful mishap! What was initially a lack of grammatical acumen resulted in misdirected, inward-looking priorities. Similarly, Xue traced the Confucianists' aversion to speaking of profit (*li*) to a misreading of Confucius and Mencius. Where the sages had opposed pursuing profit for "the private family and private individuals," they did not oppose pursuing profit for public benefit and national strength. While the sages pitted the private against the public, commercial systems in the present day unified the two spheres of interest. The joint-stock companies were designed to maximize selfish interests; once private gains were met, the public interests of the entire country would unavoidably be furthered.

With these hermeneutic devices, Xue imposes a superficial peace between mechanism of imperialism and the Confucian classics. There were two aspects to his "far-reaching stratagem": the development of export-oriented trade, and the expansion of overseas territories. During much of his time abroad he gathered information on how to fight the "commercial war" and memorialized on some of these ideas. China needed to generate wealth by decreasing imports and increasing exports. It needed to excavate gold and other minerals. It would be useful to set up commercial bureaus and to establish laws to regulate joint stock companies, and it was absolutely urgent to build transport networks and to establish patent laws in order to foster creativity and legitimate competition. None these ideas were original — treaty port intellectuals such as Zheng Guanying and Wang Tao had written similar lists a few years prior and Xue was in frequent contact with that circle.

But trade in itself was only one of the ways to get at something more important. Trade in itself was not the final goal. Xue's attention to resources made him one of the rare environmentalists of his time. He was well aware, early in his journey, of the limiting reagents of modern living: coal, iron, gold, jade, silver, wood, lead, and the various rare metals. The European scramble for African colonies further impressed the notion upon him that China must expand territorially. Being one of the oldest states on earth, China had already exhausted much of its forest — the classics tell that ancient kings used nearby woods to construct their palaces, but even in the Ming rulers had to purchase wood from the far south and southwest. Xue feared that at the rate of current development, the woods at the Chinese borders would be gone in a few hundred years. The "Tribute of Yu" speaks of gold mines along the Yangzi, but where are they now? Even copper was imported from Yunnan and Korea. The scarcity of resources was evident in the shrinking population of animals, too. Ancient China teemed with precious beasts. Gentlemen in the past often kept cranes as pets, and Xue himself had asked a friend to order him a pair. He was charged a hundred taels of silver, for a pair from *Korea*! Even though Western miners told him that China had rich ores deep underground, more so than Western country, thanks to its backward mining technology, Xue was still worried. He asked rhetorically in his journal: "Say in four or five thousand years ores in both China and the West were used up, what would happen then?"⁸⁹ He came up with no answer for the future of his fellow earthlings.

A related problem to resource depletion is China's growing population. Like the statecraft thinker Hong Liangji a century prior, Xue attributed the declining standards of living to population growth. We have seen above that he gave "the multiplication of the

population” as the primary reason for the dispersal of the *qi* allotted for the nation, which in turn would result in the decline of the country. Even though he does not mention Hong explicitly in his writing, Xue must have been under the influence of the larger intellectual trends which had influenced Hong. Xue grew up in Wuxi, not far from Hong's home in Changzhou. He recalls the elderly in his hometown talking about the material abundance earlier in the dynasty: “Compared to today those living in the Qianlong era lived in heaven; compared with those who lived under Qianlong, their grandparents in the early years of Kangxi lived in heaven.” Why? The only reason, Xue says, was that the same resources which provided one man’s food now had to support twenty.⁹⁰ While rebellions in the 1850s and 1860s had violently cut the population by millions, the curve picked up again with the last twenty years of respite. When economic imperialism is factored in, the abundance of Chinese population cheapens the value of individual labor, making it not even a tenth of foreign labor’s value. When a person cannot afford to make his own living with hard work, he would inevitably degenerate into a vagabond, a petty thief, a beggar or worse yet, a member of a secret society.

Xue’s concern about China’s population pressure and resource depletion prompted him to search for solutions on a broader, global scale.⁹¹ If the European nations could dispatch their nationals to colonize other parts of the world, why couldn’t China do the same? True, the Europeans had already conquered and divided up much of the world for their spheres of influence. But did it mean that it was too late for China to act? Not necessarily. From his study of recent European history, Xue learned that it was a commonplace for European nations to seize each other’s territories. The entire history of Europe was one messy continuum of conquering and reconquering, the making and

breaking of alliances, and the shrewd deployment of gunboats and immigrants to overseas territories. In a new and inconsistent comparison of modern affairs to Chinese history, he likened China to the weakened Zhou in the early Warring States, around the fifth century BCE (Russia was the rising Qin, England was the wealthy Chu, and France was the aggressive Qi), and told his readers that he dared not predict what was to come in the near future: Perhaps the Buddhist wheel-turning king would return in a thousand years?⁹² Gloomy predictions about the future and the Qing's ability to brave the new world had sent Guo back to his hometown, but Xue, like Gu Yanwu had done after the fall of Ming, persevered in his hope against hope.

From his diplomatic office in London, Xue gathered data on every part of the known world – population, natural resources, climate, customs, agriculture, commerce – and updated them when new information became available. In 1884, during the Sino-French war, Zhang Zhidong, governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, advocated the establishment of consuls to enlist the help of overseas Chinese. The donations and support from Malayan Chinese during that war had convinced him that the loyalty of overseas Chinese could be usefully employed for national defense and to finance modernization. He estimated that overseas emigrants remitted \$20,000,000 to Guangdong and Fujian annually, an indispensable source of economic relief. To bolster his proposal for consular expansion, Zhang sent out in 1886 an investigative mission to Southeast Asia and Oceania to collect data on the condition of the overseas population. Mixed findings returned: While the mission found prominent, well-off Chinese merchants in British settlements, they also revealed the maltreatment of Chinese coolies in the Dutch East Indies. Based on the mission's findings, Zhang even argued that donations from

Southeast Asian emigrants alone could sustain a modern navy. Zhang's daring proposals generated no small sensation at court, but eventually they were shelved when neither the Zongli yamen nor Li Hongzhang supported him; the former thought it too grandiose and costly, whereas the latter was reluctant to empower a rival like Zhang.⁹³ But Zhang had shared a large portion of his reports with Zeng Jize, the minister to England. In the spring of 1890, when Xue arrived in his office, he started working through these files to prepare for the long-standing issues concerning overseas Chinese. But unlike previous ministers who saw the establishment of consuls and the protection of immigrations as a humanitarian duty, Xue conceived of the matters differently.

Xue saw consular expansion as a strategy for building a full-fledged British-style colonial empire. In his view, expansion through trade and settlement was the natural course for the survival of states, and they did it by establishing consuls. Consuls were equivalent miniature home governments in foreign land, bestowed with the eminent right to extend sovereignty overseas. Xue's impression of the power of consuls was perhaps due to the assertive role of Western consuls in Chinese treaty ports under extraterritoriality, but while he was aware that such practices were a distortion of international law, he also knew that such violations were the norms in practice. He wrote that this key aspect was too often ignored by even the most capable rulers of China, but the ancients did write about it. The *History of Latter Han* recounts how Emperor Guangwu enfeoffed a general with the following instruction: "The ancient kings separated their lands but not their people." Xue takes this to mean the creation of other "Chinas" in separate geographic locations in order to settle and nurture Chinese nationals.⁹⁴ Perusing China's long history, Xue found no shortage of capable emperors

whose power reached realms outside of China proper.⁹⁵ The First Emperor of Qin subdued the Yue peoples in the south and chased away the Xiongnu in the north. Emperor Wu's troops reached the Gobi Desert and defeated Central Asian states. Emperor Taizong of Tang swept through the Uighur regions and down to India. The most impressive was Emperor Taizu of Yuan (Genghis Khan), who not only incorporated the whole of Asia, but also brought in Russia, reaching Turkey, Italy and Germany. There were times when Qing rulers came just short of colonization but stopped because of their lack of foresight. Emperor Kangxi permitted trade with people from the Southern seas, to use their abundance to supplement domestic deficiency. But he did not see far ahead enough. "He opened markets to the ocean and taxed imports from Southern seas, but he could have sent troops there and taxed *their* exports! He built ships and navy to keep evil usurpers from sneaking in, but he could have deployed troops to settle *their* territories, the best way to keep external threats from emerging."⁹⁶ This was well before Europe held a firm grasp of Southeast Asia and when the Qing was in ascendance. Kangxi's missed opportunity cost China dearly.

In modern times, when every inch of the earth was measured up and grabbed by Western powers, the only realistic course left for China was the establishment of consuls. These outposts of the empire, backed by state power and skillfully wielding international law, could provide the necessary means to convert hapless and semi-legal private ventures into loyal citizens, binding their commercial interests with those of the Qing. This vision of Xue's distinguished him from even the most progressive self-strengtheners, whose highest hope was to avoid internal confrontation in order to devote resources to build national defense. Li Hongzhang ruminated over reclaiming Korea and Burma, but

no one had imagined extending the empire beyond former tributary states.

The idea of colonial expansion did not figure prominently in Xue's thinking prior to the mission, and as suggested by historian Ching-Hwang Yen, was likely a product of his experiences overseas.⁹⁷ Whereas Guo and previous diplomats were impressed by the natural scenery and orderliness of colonial establishments, Xue dispatched his underlings to visit sites such as prisons, schools, and gardens, and did not go himself. He was more interested the history and techniques of colonialism: capturing key posts, deploying navies and troops, the use of commercial policies to attract settlers, setting up governors to control local population.⁹⁸ He also developed personal contact with overseas China whenever he could. Chen Jinzhong, a wealthy Singaporean merchant and third-generation emigrant who barely spoke Chinese, called on his ship respectfully when the mission arrived in Singapore.⁹⁹ Xue lavished him with praise, and noted in his journal that this man could be useful in the future. Conversations with his consul, Huang Zunxian, also filled Xue with rich insight into overseas management. Huang had served as Counselor to the Chinese embassy in Tokyo from 1877 to 1882 and Consul-General in San Francisco from 1882 to 1884, at the height of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Xue saw three plausible avenues of colonial expansion: incorporating neighboring (especially tributary) states through military occupation; protecting Chinese commercial interests in Southeast Asia; and encouraging emigration to Australia and Latin America. The first of these had originated in the debates over the Sino-French war and Japan's aggression on the Ryukyu Kingdom and Korea. As Louis Sigel points out, the "treaty port communities" of the 1880s — compradors, merchants and entrepreneurs, returned students, and gentry-merchants — had trod between anti-foreignism and conciliation,

adopting an assertive, imperialist foreign policy.¹⁰⁰ They looked for ways to convert tributary states into colonial occupations. Xue was certainly under the influence of such thinking, and carried their program into his diplomatic mission. The Western powers and Japan would nibble at China's border until they reached its inland, and the only way to check their encroachment was to stake out China's own buffer zones. Rather than wait for instructions from the Zongli yamen, Xue dispatched his own investigator to Yunnan and set up an office between the border town Tengyue and his embassy for faster correspondence. In seven long letters to the Zongli yamen, he urged for the acquisition of the wild forests of Yerenshan in the northeastern tip of Burma. The ethnographic profiles of large parts of Indochina suggested to him that if China could wrestle it from England and France, converting them into Chinese colonies would be easy.

Xue's depiction of the Indochinese echoes the colonial travel writing by his Western counterparts in equatorial African, which portrayed the Africans "as needing to be saved from slave traders and awaiting the aid of European ingenuity."¹⁰¹ In Xue's eyes, it was the oppression of the British and French colonists that the Indochinese needed to be saved from. He recalled that when he had passed by Tengyue earlier, "the roads were loaded with food and drink [which the natives had provided to welcome the Qing], and women and children competed to greet his retinue. The barbarian officers, carrying their bows and horsewhips, also had the intention of seeking [the Qing's] protection." Head of the rubber factory who worked under the British colonists sent him a letter saying that he was an ethnic Han and was still willing to be subject to Chinese rule.¹⁰² Likewise, the natives in Yangon "still kept their old calendars, after the Chinese fashion, and their clothes were no different from Chinese clothing."¹⁰³ Siam had been "coerced by the West

into not sending tribute missions to China,” and they lately regretted the westernization of their social customs, hoping to return to their old ways.

Xue’s second priority was to extend the rights and privileges of Chinese emigrants in Southeast Asia. From both his voyage and the reports in the London embassy, Xue discovered that Chinese emigrants to Southeast Asia had already controlled the commercial arteries of those regions. In French controlled southern Vietnam, where rice exports to China and South East Asia provided key revenue, “eight or nine out of ten transactions were handled by Chinese merchants.” Xue even heard the saying: “No rice, no export. No Chinese, no business.”¹⁰⁴ In the north, too, the Chinese not only dominated trade, but also controlled the lucrative mining industry.¹⁰⁵ Most of the real estate and commercial holdings in Singapore and Penang were in the hands of the Chinese.¹⁰⁶ Chinese emigrants also had extensive business networks in Yangon; they had their own guilds, companies, and collected fees to help members win lawsuits in English courts. Why couldn’t China claim the loyalty of these men living in Chinese style?

Xue wasted no time to act on consular expansion. The most urgent and reasonable request was for extending consular service to the British-controlled Strait Settlements: Penang, Malacca, Johor, Selangor, and Perak. The course of action he followed was suggested to him by Halliday Macartney, and amounted to no less than a diplomatic *tour de force*. Xue first secured an agreement from the British Foreign Office that China had, in principle, the right to establish consulates where she needed to regulate her overseas citizens. Arguing for the general case, without getting entangled with specificities, gave the Foreign Office no immediate ground for refutation.¹⁰⁷ The ground thus paved, Xue moved cautiously to make two most urgent cases only: the upgrading of the Singapore

consulate to a Consulate-General covering the Straight Settlements, and the establishment of a consulate in Hong Kong. The Foreign Office granted the Xue's Singapore request quickly, but remained equivocal on Hong Kong. In the meantime, Xue appointed Huang Zunxian Consul-General in Singapore, and planned to transfer the existing Singapore consul Zuo Binglong to take up the post in Hong Kong.

It was obvious to Xue that even if China successfully established consular jurisdiction in Southeast Asia, it would be nearly impossible to extend Chinese sovereignty over these places. On the one hand, he wrote that none other than the Chinese stood a chance of managing them, for the Europeans were too far from their homelands to emigrate *en mass*, and the native races had not yet evolved to be intelligent and civilized enough to gain their own independence. The Chinese had the best qualities of any people — refinement, perspicacity, intelligence, endurance — and if the government could “rein them in using Western methods,” these populations could become significant assets to the empire. On the other hand, he was painfully aware that the best opportunities for protecting the Chinese in Southeast Asia had been lost.¹⁰⁸ The British and the Dutch had ramped up their control over the region since the 1880s, and the future establishment of consular service would be more difficult as the British and the Dutch took every opportunity to injure Chinese profits.

But other options were still available to the Chinese. In a separate essay written the same year, Xue sounds a more daring and optimistic note. Applying his theory of geographic determinism, he pronounces that because the Southeast Asia were “below the equator” (meaning, again, in the tropics) where men were not endowed with intelligence, “none of them could ever become independent” from the West. None except for Australia.

With its expansive land mass and location in the temperate zone, Australia's climate does not differ too much from China, Europe, and America, and it has fertile soil for agriculture. (Xue does not seem to be aware how much less rain Australia gets.) More importantly, Western settlers in Australia "had not reached a large number," and the natives were all "stupid, ignorant, simple, and ugly." Chinese emigrants naturally thrived in this environment, Xue reports. More than half of the agriculture, mining, and commerce enterprises were firmly in control of the Chinese. Although the Westerners envied Chinese profit they could not expel the Chinese. "If one day Australia becomes an independent and strong realm, it must be in the hands of the Chinese race! It must be in the hands of the Chinese race!"¹⁰⁹

South America was another option. After the abolition of the slave trade in Brazil in 1888, coffee planters were eager to hire replacement laborers from China. When the Brazil government asked its minister to Paris to negotiate the hiring of Chinese laborers in 1892, Xue saw a more immediate solution to population pressure. The country not only had agreeable climates, it had large tracts of undeveloped land and no stringent anti-immigration laws. Brazil took pains to distinguish their policies from the old coolie trade, promising generous compensation, freedom, and dignity, and they encouraged men to bring their wives.¹¹⁰ These offers made Xue hopeful that the country could be made into a second home for China's surplus population. Although Brazil mostly wanted laborers, Xue envisioned exportation of all manners of people to take control of the precious *liquan*, or economic rights: workers, agriculturists, miners, businessmen. The Qing also needed to set up consuls to protect and regulate Chinese workers. "We must make it clear to them," Xue says, "that if they borrow our people to reclaim wasteland, they should

treat them well and must not expel the Chinese after they have done the work.” In time, the Chinese will purchase their own land and bring up their own children and grandchildren, and Xue hopes those future generations would not forget China and would continue sending remittances back home.¹¹¹ In countries which had grown wary of Chinese population, such as Peru, Spain, and the United States, there was no need to encourage further migration. The priority there would be setting up consuls to consolidate the existing overseas population and to turn them into loyal subjects.¹¹²

How was the Qing to mend ties to its overseas population? The Ming and Qing dynasties had viewed overseas Chinese with suspicion and barred many from returning. Now the dynasty should change its attitude. It should extend its welcoming arms and become something of a patron to all overseas Chinese. In a memorial to remove stigma from overseas Chinese submitted in 1893, Xue lays out for the emperor such an inclusive vision for running an empire. He points out that the old policies of banning emigration was a response to the exigencies of the time, to keep out rebels, bandits, and pirates, and they should not be kept when the times had changed.¹¹³

Nowadays trains and ships can go everywhere, countries on the other side of the globe seem on our doorstep, and it is impossible to govern a country with the door closed. Moreover, our Dynasty has been flourishing for more than two hundred years, and there is a danger of overpopulation in China. Therefore, we have to get more people employed to make a living, to open more commercial enterprises to provide the people’s daily necessities, to accord with our people’s desires in order to enhance their feeling of unity with us...The nature of people is to be loyal to whoever can give them a peaceful life.

When the English and the Dutch invited Chinese people to Southeast Asia, they were borrowing Chinese resources to open up wastelands. How was it that China in its turn spurred its own talented people? It should incorporate them instead, “making them

its fingers and arms, so that what was lost in the morning could be regained in the evening.¹¹⁴ Xue asks the court to publicly announce that old regulations were abandoned once and for all. Governor-generals and governors were to disseminate the imperial intention of welcoming returned Chinese through all available channels. Consuls overseas, after checking on the personal behavior of Chinese emigrants, could issue passports to those who wished to return. Consulars should also actively impose Chinese laws and regulations to keep emigrants from becoming unlawful or Westernized. These measures, Xue says, would bridge the gap between China and the outside and remove the barrier between officials and people. Those who miss their old country keep coming home, and the tenants and farmers would not think lightly of leaving their hometowns. This was the secret of “storing wealth in the people.” If disaster should befall the Qing, the dynasty could count on their help.

The court noted Xue’s memorial with enthusiasm, and after it was favorably commented upon by the Zongli yamen officials, the proposal was approved. Some scholars have considered this edict as “the beginning of a new era” of overseas Chinese protection, but it did not lead to any significant progress in attracting wealthy emigrants back home.¹¹⁵ Ideologically, however, it went a long way in opening up the minds of the literati and spurring on a wave of excitement about colonization. The court’s open endorsement of a policy of “bridging the gap between China and the outside” signaled an age of pan-Chinese unity. The passage of Xue’s memorial coincided with China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese war, and the two produced interesting chemistry among the harrowed literati. In the fall of 1895, shocked by the news of defeat, the would-be reformer Kang Youwei left his home in Canton for the capital with an ambitious plan to

colonize Brazil. His long-term reasoning sounded strikingly similar to Xue's: population pressure and scarcity of domestic resources. But there was also a distinctly political factor in his vision: to create a new China elsewhere in the event that the home front should fall to foreign powers. As he told his friend Chen Zhi: "You stay and uphold the old country while I go and establish a new country!"¹¹⁶ He wrote his ideas into memorials and solicited officials he knew to deliver them to the emperor, but many refused because of his gloomy prediction of the Qing's fate. Only Li Hongzhang nudged him to proceed with the plan when the Brazil envoy arrives to negotiate a treaty. The envoy never came, however, being stalled by the freezing weather, and Kang soon directed his attention elsewhere.¹¹⁷

The implication of Xue's memorial went far beyond the revocation of outdated practices. It was a quiet subversion of Chinese identity from dynastic subjects to nationals who were bound to an imaginary "homeland" by nostalgia, local ties, patriotism, and shared cultural practices. It slipped in the notion of a pan-Chinese solidarity which trumped class differences, regional divisions, and even loyalty to the dynasty. This is also reflected in Xue's preference of "huaren" or "huaqiao" for coolies, instead of the old term *zhuzai*, "piggies" — a derogatory designation for Chinese coolies in the New World, which had not been questioned by previous diplomats. The construct "huaqiao," as Philip Kuhn reminds us, was perhaps only a wishful hope of the reformers, and did not reflect how overseas Chinese "felt about their land of origin or their venue societies."¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the ideas set off by Xue's memorials signaled a change in the dynasty's relationship with overseas Chinese and revealed a fracture between two competing notions of Chinese identity.

In April 1894, Xue wrote to a friend back home announcing his plan to return: “My return dates have been fixed. I will see the highest of pleasure of my life when we can once again row our painted boats, climb up the towers, lean on the balustrade and laugh together facing the mountains.”¹¹⁹ He would not live to see home. Within twenty days of his arrival in Shanghai, Xue took suddenly ill and died.

Conclusion

Xue was a synthesizer and reconciler of Chinese and Western practices. Facing new challenges from the West, he extended an eclectic mixture of native learnings — pre-Han theories, statecraft traditions, and ideas about historical cycles — to meet with new notions of science, race, Social Darwinism, imperialism, and nationalism. From our perspective, Xue was limited in his knowledge of new concepts and terms, but he was not aware of such limits because the ground of traditionalism was not yet taken from under him. He interpreted Chinese tradition flexibly, and his confidence was bolstered by the apparent success that China was achieving diplomatically. Xue did not analyze the West as an alternative and independent system, nor in tracing the internal connections between its political, moral and scientific facets.

But we clearly see in Xue’s awkward patchwork that the received tradition was fracturing. Following the logic of the transmission of the Way, Guo’s analysis of the West had told him that Heaven selected the Western way over the now defunct sagely way. This verdict spelled a gloomy future for the Qing and the Chinese civilization, but nonetheless assumed that Chinese tradition was sufficient basis on which to make the

judgment. While Xue agreed with many of Guo's factual observations about the West, Xue was willing to break up the internal logic of tradition, to mesh unrelated ideas and meet each new ideological challenge as it came. Perhaps to Xue this pointed the only way out for the country; and perhaps it was this unique talent which won him listening ears from those in power. But the solutions he came up with drove a staff into the heart of the dynastic empire and its ideologies. We see desperation in his flurry of classical quotes. His peculiar glossing of ancient texts disrupted the coherency of native systems. We have seen this in how he forced new and alien knowledge into ancient philosophies in an effort to provide them with native origins. He did not appeal to the universal workings of the Way, as Binchun and Zhigang did, or to a careful analysis into the spirit of scientific inquiry, as Guo did. Those approaches would not have produced the kind of dynamite message he needed to stimulate popular interest in Western learning. Instead he turned to a kind of intellectual adrenaline shots — superficial, even farcical, pattern-matching between classical and Western learning. His analogies were not employed to help understand the West, but to justify a West that was already understood.

Since Xue argued that the West was on an earlier stage of the Chinese historical trajectory, the Chinese experience was still universal. His model justified institutional reform without the implication that China was following a foreign way, and left room for those quintessential aspects of Confucian tradition — the Three Bonds — which the West had not yet developed for itself. Domestically he needed this formulation in order to save modernization from the attacks of moralists, but it also amounted to a last redoubt against wholesale westernization. Yet it tore Confucianism into separate spheres of ethics and political ideology, for he wished to retain the former while doffing the latter. Confucian

ethics lost its political relevance, and receded into something of a software patch for Western political systems.

A similar problematic can be seen in Xue's push for colonialism. The idea of welcoming overseas Chinese back was a nail through the existing Chinese identity, as the Qing's dynastic subjects. This was no simple matter of registration; it signaled a fundamental change in what it meant to be Chinese. A new type of people was to gain admission into the empire: Chinese "nationals" who did not identify themselves with the dynasty, but saw themselves co-inheritors of symbolic cultural practices.

Xue's eagerness to fit the West into a Chinese mold required a reinvention of China. The desire itself was new; Guo and the earlier envoys had understood the West in Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist terms, but only because those were the terms of their education. Having accepted China's place as one of many modern states, under the Western conception of international law, Xue strives to make a case that China can join the ranks of the colonial powers. And to substantiate that assertion, Xue (like so many of his contemporaries) coerced the contradictory beliefs of disparate schools of learning into a unitary synthesis the only definite characteristic of which was its unambiguous *Chineseness*. But the question becomes important, which never had mattered before, just what *Chineseness* comprised: If it is not exclusive to Qing subjects, and if it is not exclusive to Confucians, where are its bounds? The pseudo-scientific racism that underpinned Europe's imperialism was waiting in the wings. It would not be long before *Chineseness* meant Han, and excluded the Qing.

Conclusion

We are not dealing with a known and an unknown variable but with two vast, ever-changing, highly problematic areas of human experience.

— Benjamin Schwartz¹

From the Envoy-Traveler to the Diplomat

Diplomacy moved from a personal travel to a central place in policy making from the 1860s to the 1890s. As an imperial envoy, Binchun flatly refused to participate in diplomatic functions and projected his mission as a civilizing affair. We see in him little expectation that the information he brought back would influence the domestic course of action; on the contrary, he made it his priority not to rock the boat. Zhigang's initiative in bridging Burlingame's negotiations with domestic authorities signaled the integration of diplomatic roles into bureaucratic channel. He was forced to practice a kind of double-faced, hybrid diplomacy after the untimely death of Burlingame. Zhang Deyi's example seems to show the Qing's training of young interpreters as diplomats did not produce the kind of effective and creative personnel it desperately needed in international affairs. The court's decision in 1862 to enroll impoverished banner boys in the Tongwenguan led to the filling of its low diplomatic ranks with career-minded bureaucrats who were too interested in the stability provided by their offices to make effective informants. The diplomatic history of the next decades does give us a few colorful and dashing personalities, such as Chen Jitong and Wu Tingfang, who, equipped as they were with fluent English and mastery of international law, made the headlines of international affairs. But it was the Tongwenguan production of traditional bureaucrats

which propped up the Qing's foreign embassies. Many of these boys — Zhang was one of them — eventually moved up the ladder and became ministers in their own right in the 1900s. The lives and experiences of this “traditionalistic” crew lie beyond the scope of this dissertation, but ought to be taken seriously as part of Qing diplomatic history.

With the establishment of resident ministers in London in 1876, the Qing began appointing diplomats from its highest official ranks. They made their voices heard more widely, at first by their personal connections with provincial and metropolitan officials, and gradually by regular bureaucratic channels. It is noteworthy that even though few of Guo's practical proposals were heeded by the court, they found sympathetic listeners in his friends such as Li Hongzhang, Ding Richang, Zeng Jize, and Xue Fucheng. Even so, part of the initial problem was a general confusion regarding the sphere of responsibility and activity in these appointments. Guo had difficulty seeing himself as a diplomat, which he understood as a conveyor of credentials and letters of apology, or a messenger between the British Foreign Office and the Zongli yamen. Layers of identity were at work in how he saw himself: he was simultaneously a member of the Confucian gentry (as in his Xiang Army years), and a servant of the Qing (as during his stint as personal secretary of the Xiangfeng emperor and his private audiences with the Empress Dowager Cixi). While he had already felt a conflict between these two roles prior to the mission, his diplomatic responsibility only added to the ambiguity: when the imperial logic of the West demanded a thorough transformation of China's internal order, where does he draw the line? Should he defend an indefensible system, or should he initiate domestic reform, as a conscientious Confucian official? What should he do when he discovered that his

moral imperative to adhere to the Way was no longer consistent with his official responsibilities?

These conflicts would gradually disappear in the next decade, due to the routinization of embassies and clearer notions of diplomatic responsibility and international law. But routinization did not diminish the role of diplomats in political debates; rather, diplomats found ways to push their concerns into the center of imperial policies. The successes of Zeng Jize's maneuvers in St. Petersburg elevated the prestige of diplomats, and diplomats began to employ international law, foreign media, and eventually the logic of imperialism itself, to compete with the West and hinder its encroachment. To Xue, as to some of his superiors, the foreign office in London was an extension of government function, and he formulated foreign policies for the Zongli yamen and ministers back home. There were many reasons for this shift, but a large part it owed to the new rhetorical devices and frameworks created by these diplomats to balance political checks on their writing against the urgency of their messages.

Three Modes of Narrating the West, 1860s-1890s

The West discovered by envoys and ministers during this period was not a simple extension of their existing knowledge. The West had to be constructed and reconstructed in multiple realms of fiction and reality, and each of its narrations was fraught with the psychic tensions of the observer. Based on the mode of conception, we can roughly divide the diplomats into three types of narrators. The earliest travelers, among whom were Binchun and Zhang Deyi, visiting the West in the mid-1860s, were at once

enchanted and unsettled by the new world they saw, and wrote journals as literature for entertainment. The second type of narrators, among whom were Zhigang and Guo Songtao, took on a more realistic and holistic approach, and explained the success of the West based on the moral and natural principles of Confucianism. Xue Fucheng characterizes the third type. His depiction of the West was strategic and confrontational and was calculated to win domestic support for modernization.

Lacking a viable, stable framework to make sense of what they saw, Binchun and Zhang Deyi resorted to what literary scholar Tian Xiaofei calls a “metaphorically colonialist” discourse which “commits acts of violence to the encountered world by imposing on it their own conceptual categories and system of classification.”² Binchun wrapped the West in poetic tropes and suppressed its otherness. Zhang Deyi dissolved the West into a collection of curios which defies coherence and meaning. Both can be seen as strategies of retreat from active engagement with the West as their authors were unwilling or unable to confront the political and cultural reality of the Western threat.

From its inception, the Binchun mission was created as something of a bureaucratic anomaly when the Qing experimented with new ways of handling the West. Binchun travelled in the immediate shadows of the Second Opium War, at a time when the mainstream understanding of his travel was to “spy the enemies.” His tasks were otherwise ill-defined: Should he describe everything he saw just as he saw it; should he extol, defame, or make things up? Each strategy would lead to its consequences. He was also subject to the conflicting interests of the court; his employer, Robert Hart; and the manipulative hands of his young customs assistants.

Binchun made it his priority to fill his notebooks with poems and verses on the flora and fauna, the exotic animals, and the beautiful women of the West. This disappointed many Western observers of Binchun, and the general impression we get from his contemporary English literature was the image of an old fool living in delusion. But if we look carefully, we find that Binchun obeyed hidden rules and limits governing what he wrote, rules imposed by the imperial logic of the Chinese empire, and Western observers were not likely to notice them. Binchun crafted his every word to solve a diplomatic dilemma: the need to satisfy imperial discourse of the Qing empire, on the one hand; and the need not to antagonize a powerful West.

He presents the West in rhymes and prose embellished with classical references, elegant metaphors, and studied exaggerations. He did not portray industrial feats such as railway trains as a threatening invention or human intervention into nature. Instead, they were a natural product of the cosmic force itself and fulfilled a Daoist promise of riding the wind and covering thousands of miles in a second. Trains do not interrupt natural order; they are in harmony with nature. The high culture of Western society he represented as a world of beautiful, sensual, and enlightened women. He praised upper-class ladies for their learning and cultivation: they were the Western equivalent to the Confucian literati, and they enjoyed real prestige and dominated every aspect of Western cultural life. In his own social interactions, Binchun preferred the company of women; he liked to chat with them, to exchange gifts with them, and as he admits himself, he sometimes even held hands with them. All of this, as he explained to his reader, was respectful and appropriate conduct according to Western ritual.

Binchun painted a political system in which ritual and proper distinctions of hierarchy permeated every moment of the court's activities. Of Western rulers he makes Confucian-style monarchs who owned the love and respect of their subjects. These kings, queens, and princes knew their place as vassal lords to the Chinese emperor, and listened attentively as Binchun lectured them on the sacred teachings propagated by the Confucian sages.

In all, Binchun feminized and civilized the image of the West. In some ways, we can see him as partaking in the writing of what some historians have called "Qing colonial discourse" that was often employed in recording the lives of people on the frontiers. This was a genre developed early in the dynasty to aid its imperial expansion into non-Han areas, and it is not surprising that Binchun found it useful in taming the image of the West. Yet unlike previous colonial writing which depicted the indigenous people as savage barbarians, Binchun portrays the West as exotic and yet civilized and obedient. He leaves his reader with the impression that the states of this West were proper tributary states, not unlike Korea or the Ryukyu kingdoms.

Zhang Deyi embarked on his European journeys as a teenager. He assumed the persona of a collector of curios, a cataloger of novel and fun facts about an unknown world. Why did he write this way? Several factors played into it: his youthfulness, his playful nature, his low status, and his intellectual uncertainty. The information he brought back was of little immediate use for the self-strengthening officials. There was precious little about naval defense, military technology, or manufacturing. But we see in his dizzying array of neologisms and his fanciful connections the different ways that the West could be understood by a Qing traveler. He did not always see West along the

dichotomies that many of his contemporaries set up to contrast it with China: the moral and the material, the martial and the cultural, the extravagant and the pristine, and reason and impulse. His lack of system and purpose allowed him to describe the West on a broader scale. His observations penetrated all social classes. He discovered middle class families and their industrious and pious lifestyle. He sympathized with beggars, child workers, laundry women, and itinerant performers whose plight made him ponder at the stereotypical image of the opulent West. He witnessed the siege of Paris and the rise of the Commune: misery, greed, all trappings of civility deserted under the instinct for survival. Zhang perceived that despite Western derisions of Chinese superstition, personal hygiene, and footbinding, similar practices abounded in their own societies. The West did not take the form of a coherent system, but full of self-contradictions and irony.

But here is Zhang's most significant departure from Binchun. While he often shared Binchun's rhetoric, perhaps due to his openness and flexibility, Zhang also proved remarkably receptive to new notions, words, and ways of categorizing the world. Equality of nations took root in his mind and became his primary way of categorizing peoples. He understood the world of nations as a catalog — each with its own customs, mores, language, insignias, mourning ritual, and its own chunk of the world. Perhaps not quite understanding the inherent conflict between the system of nation states and the Qing's imperial ideology, he was a zealous propagator of world geography, emphatically noting that China took up but a fraction of the earth. For him it was an exhilarating rather than threatening fact. In these journeys he took in his early years, he saw no inherent reason for international conflict. As his musings after socializing with foreigners show,

Zhang's ideal world was one in which different nationals join hands as brothers. That there was disharmony was due to language barriers and cultural misunderstandings.

But Zhang also felt the need to reconcile his nascent nationalism with the superiority of the Chinese civilization. He did so by couching Chinese identity in Confucianism — a sort of counterpart to Christianity and Shinto, and which he reduced to neatly packaged slogans such as “Three Bonds” and “Five Relationships.” Conversations with patriotic Japanese who were scornful of Chinese culture incensed his own patriotism. It was a moral imperative to assert the Chinese ownership of these values. Zhang's relationship with Confucianism changed when he responded and joined the Japanese nationalist discourse. What mattered was not the content of the Way, but the national affiliation of those timeless values.

Although the West took on distinct forms in their journals, an important common element underlined the mindsets of Binchun and Zhang Deyi: they both took on the attitude of political disengagement and presented the West as a land of exoticism and fancy. Neither attempted to confront the clash of interests between China and Western nations. Instead, they let the forms of their representation dominate the contents of their writing; in Tian Xiaofei's words, they both adopted a “rhetorical schemata of seeing.” As the genres they chose powerfully framed the West within stereotypical bounds, the West was largely subsumed under traditional imagination. Binchun was by far more adroit than Zhang in his manipulation of form, due to his training in literature and traditional aestheticism, but Zhang's use of vernacular techniques also integrated the West with the literati imagination. This perhaps explains why, given their enthusiasm for the West,

both accounts were readily accepted by mainstream culture, and neither author suffered the tragic fate of the diplomats who took on a realistic tone in the 1870s.

It appeared to the Qing court that writings such as those Binchun and Zhang Deyi brought back merely scratched the surface of the West and provided little intelligence of practical value. At the same time it engaged discussion of limited adoption of Western methods, more energetic and experienced diplomats were sent abroad again to gather intelligence. The realism and rationality in the observer's voice corresponded with his political and intellectual stature. In some ways, we can think of diplomats such as Zhigang and Guo Songtao as a new generation of narrator of the West, who pierced the bubbles of literary imagination and let reality dictate their pen. Stylistically, they loathed high-flown language and deemphasized genre and literary technique. They wrote those aspects of the West which would rouse the concern of domestic elite, and which Binchun and Zhang Deyi had avoided: military power, scientific learning, modern transportation, industrial enterprises. They discovered that Western success was in its effective and timely application of what they considered fundamental principles of the Way. They also spoke bluntly of their emotions, worries, and warning to the dynasty.

Zhigang envisioned Western ways with respect to the all-pervasive presence of Dao as the ultimate mover of all natural and human phenomena. He was excited by the discovery that Western mechanical contrivances — what appeared to be “freakish skills” to the literati — were made according to the same principles of the human body. Modernists might be tempted to assess such analogies as unproductive failures, but his intuitive (and often quite accurate) grasp of scientific principles shows that his analogy with traditional notions did not interfere with his understanding of new facts; it must be

remembered that his understanding of the human body was different from modern medicine's. Unlike Zeng Jize and Xue Fucheng, Zhigang exhibits no anxiety of origin and does not try to prove that Western originated in China. And unlike that later generation of diplomats, Zhigang did not feel the burning urgency of westernization or the need to mobilize all manners of existing bodies of learning to justify immediate reforms. Rather, his primary interests existed on the level of making conceptual connections and containments — to encompass the West according to the universal principles of the Way.

With respect to human nature and social order, Zhigang also perceived the perennial existence of the Way. In Catholic France, Zhigang was a lonely defender of his faith, and he was faced with a new challenge: to delineate the boundaries of sameness and differences between two systems of beliefs. On the one hand, he considered Christianity as distorting the fundamental goodness of human nature, and he conceived this distortion as a Mohist disregard of Confucian hierarchy. But after learning about some Christian teachings, he also believed in the universality of human nature and Jesus as an upright, benevolent human being. Ironically, for all his misgivings about Christian missionaries in China, Zhigang unwittingly performed as a Confucian proselytizer in the West. He debated with Christians and missionaries in England and France on the proper order of family, hoping to appeal to their sense of civilization and proper ritual. He considered his Christian opponents to be well within the civilized realm and generally assumed that cross-cultural unity would be achieved if they could correct their distorted views of family hierarchy.

Politically, Zhigang saw Western monarchs as exemplary Confucian rulers. This was to him the fundamental reason why Western states were powerful and intimidating to

China: that there were strong ties between the ruler and people. Zhigang did not see these ties as primarily constructed by institutional means such as the parliament, but saw them as outgrowths of the personal virtue of the monarchs themselves. The victory of Prussia over France in 1871 was conceived of as a classic defeat over the vainglorious tyrant Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, painted as the classic despot.

Guo Songtao's rationalization occurred on a different level. His regional background and personal involvement in the Taiping crisis prompted him to reach back to late Ming thinkers in his quest for ritual reform. In his assessment of domestic conditions, corruption was rampant, the civil service examination had long stopped selecting real talent, and the customary rituals were in disarray. After briefly serving in the court, he gave up the idea that there was any hope in effecting changes from above. He resigned his official posts, returned home, and devoted himself to local service. To him, the only hope for China was in the resurrection of family and community ritual services, in replacing the legalist, fear-inducing policies in local administration with bonding based on kinship and human sentiment.

At the outset of Guo's voyage, he had harbored two doubts about China's crisis: whether the mandate of the Qing could (or even should) survive the Western challenge, and whether the systems of government it inherited from previous dynasties were indeed according to the authentic Way. These uncertainties and his mental alienation from entrenched power at home created a peculiar prism through which the West was to be viewed: it was an idealized reality, replete with elements of effective rule which China lacked. As soon as he visited colonial establishments in Southeast Asia, he pronounced that the British Empire embodied the spirit of the Three Dynasties: its rule was

benevolent, practical, and honored by the people. England's colonial conquest was an inevitable result of its extension of benevolent rule to the disorderly parts of the world.

In England's governance, education, and law, Guo saw a system of ruling more faithfully adherent to the original intention of the sages than the imperial system of his own time. The Parliamentary system created ties between the ruler and the people. The two-party system and constitutional monarchy invited the participation and criticism of citizens, and held the arbitrary power of the ruler in check. These institutions gave vent to popular grievances and enabled reciprocity between the ruler and the ruled. In education, Western pedagogues patterned their methods after human nature, instilling knowledge and respect by careful cultivation of ritual in the everyday movement of children. In the production of knowledge, Western scholars looked for ways of improving the livelihood of the people; they perfected their knowledge for the public cause, rather than being concerned with personal advancement. To Guo, Western science integrated the two aspects of traditional learning most lacking in scholars of his own society: the pragmatic concern for substantive learning and the desire to uncover the ultimate principle in Neo-Confucianism.

It was clear to Guo that Western systems followed a different rationale. In his comparative analysis, Guo contrasted the Confucian rule of virtue with Western rule of institution and law. Heaven endowed China with sage kings in high antiquity who performed the double role of teachers and rulers. The charisma of these sages alone brought the Chinese feats of civilization. The West, because of the tragic fate of Jesus, could never effectively combine political and religious-cum-moral authorities into one body. Since their political authority did not simultaneously act as moral authority, rule

by virtue was never achieved in the West. States instead relied on the perfecting of institutions and laws as means of governance. This system of ruling had the unique advantage in that it was stable across time and space; moreover, it could be perfected by trial and error over time. The success of Western governments was in that they were not at the mercy of their rulers' virtue, and the system as a whole could be exported conveniently to civilize other parts of the world.

But Guo's was not an analysis of national or cultural differences. The universalizing impulse of his Neo-Confucian thinking drove him to work out the grand pattern behind the historical trajectories of China and the West. He incorporated world history into this new synthesis with two major innovations: first, the Mandate of Heaven was released from the geographic bounds of China — the Way was shown to have been lost after the Zhou dynasty and never recovered by the Middle Kingdom. Second, the substance of the Way was also broadened to include Western systems of law and institutions.

The political implication of Guo's analysis was unwelcome and unsettling. It not only questioned the legitimacy of the Qing, but relativized the imperial foundation of the Chinese dynastic system as the absolute standard for civilization. In the end, Guo did not formulate any clear blueprint for the future of the Qing. Despite his fervor in adopting Western learning, he maintained an ambiguous attitude towards the self-strengthening movement, which he saw as a dubious and immoral expansion of state power at the expense of the livelihood of the common people.

Guo revealed a crisis of interpretation in rationalizing the West which had been perceived but largely sidestepped by Binchun. Interpreting the West according to the

internal logic of the Way predicted a gloomy future for the Qing's imperial order. When Guo spoke of the fear that his contemporary form of Confucianism would contaminate the West, he was resigned to the possibility that the Western Way would eventually prevail upon China.

The third generation of diplomats shared Guo's admiration of the West but needed to find a way out of the crisis and built a stable framework to discuss the West without jeopardizing imperial legitimacy. In the 1880s, the state preferred a new generation of pragmatists (rather than belle-lettrists or scholars) as their diplomats and West investigators. Professional diplomats such as Zeng Jize and Xue Fucheng had spent many years socializing with foreigners and treaty port intellectuals. Their frequent interaction with foreigners in treaty-ports and military camps produced a sense of proto-nationalism, which they projected as an absolute and unquestionable confidence in a "Chinese" culture. As a product of the Chinese history, Confucianism was delineated as a set of cultural practices and moral precepts whose superiority primarily lay in its unique relevance to the Chinese. We see this in the frequent claims by Xue about Confucian norms being applicable to the Chinese due to their age-old mentality, culture, and mystical forces. This localization of Confucianism helped lift China out of the fate of being united under the Western mandate. A Confucian-style culture, characterized by the Three Bonds, would be the rootstock upon which Western merits could be grafted.

From the mid-1880s on, a shift in the mode of representation occurred in discourse about the West, in response to the increased availability in literature about the West and China's assertive role in international affairs. Diplomats no longer felt compelled to write comprehensive accounts to initiate an ignorant domestic audience into

a foreign world. They were interested less in painting pictures or moralizing about the West, but in following the techniques of capitalism and colonialism. They collected information with a sharpened sense of domestic priority. Xue's notes on the history of imperialism showed him the twin secret of Western success was capitalism and overseas strategy. In a world where military power and commercial interests dominated state interactions, China needed to borrow Western techniques to develop its commerce and its military.

Native Syntheses of the West

How did these diplomats' perception of the West differ from the reformers of the 1890s and 1900s? Their syntheses relied on their raw observations and first-hand impressions. Equivalences between Western and Chinese thought were drawn readily and hazily, and these equations compromised the integrity of both systems. In this process, we first see an elision of differences between China and the West, reflected in Binchun's hidden appropriation of native notions. In later works, equivalences were established more precisely between native concepts and observed facts about the West: Christianity and Mozi's universal love, Western rulers and Confucian-style monarchs, and imperialism with Mandate of Heaven. Binchun's rhetorical suppression of differences reappeared as Xue Fucheng's "Western systems plus the Three Bonds" formula, which he used to control and reduce the differences between China and the West to particular sections of human relationship.

Running through the diplomats is a lack of interest in Western theories of science and society as independent systems from Chinese thinking, or as interdependent systems within their own intellectual tradition – in Western terms. Names such as Montesquieu, Rousseau, Adam Smith, and Darwin make only a passing appearance in their writings. These names are often mentioned admiringly for how their ideas appeared in terms of the diplomats' existing understanding of human relationship. Differences among the political systems in Europe were recognized, but often through a manipulation of “equivalent” Chinese terms: democracy was the rule of the people by themselves and constitutional monarchy was understood simply as the joined rule of the monarch and the people – which is equated to the political form of the Three Dynasties. The socialists were seen as Taiping-style rebels whose goal was to rob the rich and equalize wealth. Descartes' metaphysics was a confirmation of fact-seeking substantive learning.

The internalization of the West developed by the diplomat corps underlined the theoretical confidence in Zhang Zhidong's formula using Western methods to complement and protect Chinese learning. Zhang's lack of theoretical interest in Western institutions was not new; it was a natural product of the diplomatic literature he relied on for information about the West. These journals honed in him the confidence that native thought was quite capable of explaining the success of the West. None of the diplomats – not even the meticulous Xue Fucheng – represented Western systems as alternative models not already encompassed from traditional learning. Guo was probably the furthest down this line, but he never shared his comparative analysis of Western law and Chinese rule with his contemporaries, which he himself only realized later in his mission. The problem of why China did not come up with Western achievements was always

framed as a partial grasp of traditional wisdom. We can speculate that the three decades of internalizing the West in terms of tradition might also have provided the inspiration for Kang Youwei's radical New Text synthesis and reinterpretation of Confucius.

Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss these native syntheses as failures of understanding. The diplomat-travelers of the late Qing did not fail to perceive a "genuine" West. This is not only because, whatever use we make of the term, the West was a changing entity of enormous complexity and contradiction. The spirit of humanitarianism and reform embodied in the British policy of cooperation in the early 1860s had, by the 1880s, been overwhelmed by a new imperial realism. Applying traditional assumptions to the West sometimes enabled Qing diplomats to notice problems within Western society that were ignored or downplayed by Westerners themselves. The Tongwenguan student Kuijiu's concern at the use of child labor in factories was derided by the British press, but the Marxists might see in him a laudable class consciousness. Zhang Deyi's criticism of the double standard of Westerners and his comparison of breastbinding with footbinding echo in our contemporary colonial and feminist studies. Xue Fucheng's concerns with resource depletion, weapon lethality, and the danger of the arms race were not groundless worries, as he was assured by his Western acquaintances. These problems would go on to define the politics of the twentieth century.

If we make a list of all the facts collected by the diplomats, we see that they include all the essential elements of the societies they visited: education, science, commerce, political systems, industry, entertainment, religion, literature, art; and their descriptions generally captured the shape of things. But I suspect that if a Chinese

dramatist were to compose a play on England based only on their descriptions, it would be as unrecognizable to the British as Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* would be to the Japanese as a portrayal of the Meiji emperor – but it might have made for tolerable satire. The key here is not what the diplomats chose to accept about the West, but the interpretive schemes they used to make sense of their data. The Qing diplomats worked within a separate sphere of meaning and a model of human civilization which had worked quite well up to their time, and they intended their accounts for people who were even more entrenched in that model. In a court where power was balanced between conservative and progressive factions, it was a rhetorical necessity to frame Western merits in terms of Chinese learning. The diplomats were undoubtedly conscious of this, and they did little to fight their filters and lenses which cast the West in the ways they needed. Thus, as the Qing's last minister to England before the Sino-Japanese war, Xue Fucheng was confident in his model of the West and the Qing's ability to transfer it to China. The only question was political will.

After the 1890s, as more information became available about the West, the importance of diplomatic journals declined, replaced by newspapers, missionary publications, law books, and travel journals by students or private travelers. Students and intellectuals to and from Japan brought in translations of Western works – not impressionistic accounts like the early diplomatic journals – but entire corpuses of translations in political theories, economics, Social Darwinism, sciences, law, and philosophy. The domestic readership was no longer dependent on the slow trickle of diplomatic journals for its depictions of the West.

What changed was not only in the amount of information available, or what information was available, but how that information was presented. As the influx of Sinified vocabularies brought with them new complexes of meaning, new spaces for interpretation, and a new attitude of seeing tradition as limited and stultifying. It was now more common to frame China in Western terms. An awareness of the limit of the explanatory power of traditional concepts was already apparent in Zhang Deyi, Guo Songtao and Xue Fucheng. This inkling took the form, for Guo, of a deep suspicion of Western-educated Chinese who, because of their familiarity with Western learning, thought that the West was easy to emulate. We also see an awareness of this new space in Xue's effort to search for a wider range of schools to contain the West. But intuition still played a large role in Guo's and Xue's methodology: both started with observable facts and groped for the internal connections on their own. Guo concluded that the West's cultural development lay not in Christianity but in moral cultivation and anti-despotism, both firmly within the Confucian sphere. Xue's equation of consular expansion with the extension of sovereignty abroad was mistaking form for cause; so was his hope that Chinese emigrants to Cuba could act as colonizers for the Qing. He looked for manifestations of power – capitalism, military technology, techniques of colonization – but had little interest in how these systems were rationalized by Westerners themselves.

The urge shared by Guo and Xue in finding Three Dynasties in the West disappeared with the introduction of Social Darwinism and linear time. The Sino-Japanese War hammered the lesson home. Yan Fu's translation of Herbert Spencer in 1895 and his introduction of the term “qun” (group, or society) signaled a decisive change in *how* the West was understood. As historian Chen Xulu tells us, the adoption of

“qun” as the organization principle of society went instantly viral among the constitutional reformers and picked up a life of its own.³ A *qun* was a unit in evolutionary struggle, a society “held together by the spontaneous habits of social discipline,” an aggregate of the individual to maximize their energy and potential.⁴ The term was also heavily nativized and traced back to Xunzi, but the native origin no longer decided the meaning of the term. No longer was history seen in terms of repeating patterns of events. The clock was ticking. Differences between the West and China were understood as the “new” against the “old,” and revolution started to look like a viable shortcut to “leap over the historical process the Western nations had gone through.”⁵ Whereas Zhang Deyi in 1869 observed that “there were two types of Westerners: the trend seekers who loved the new and the antique lovers who admired the old,” Yan Fu in the 1890s wrote that “the Chinese love the ancients and ignore the modern, Westerners stress the new in order to overcome the old.” Whereas the diplomats realigned European history onto Chinese chronology, Kang Youwei’s history was one of unilinear progress through a series of Western political systems.⁶ In the years after the failure of the 1898 reform, intellectuals such as Liang Qichao manipulated dexterously notions from Japanese political thought and started constructing what they understood as the fundamental pieces of a nation-state.

The diplomats’ portrayals of the West trace the progress of a conceptual inversion that preconditioned the epistemological shift after 1895. Working within terms of universality, the Qing travelers’ understanding of the West started by fitting the West into the Chinese civilization. They extended native notions onto Western culture, political systems, society, human beings, and learning. This conceptual containment established

and circulated a new discourse about the West in terms of civilization. Universal China consumed the West, accepting it as a part of a greater Confucian civilization; the moment it closed around the West, the very moment of the West's complete inclusion in the Chinese conceptual system, China became a part – and a small part at that – of a new universal order. Historian Joseph Levenson, quoting R. G. Collingwood, reminds us that “a body of knowledge consists not of ‘propositions’, ‘statements’, or ‘judgments’...but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer.”⁷ The changing assertions of China the diplomats’ asked were meant to address questions posed by the West. The universality that was implicit in the old ideas was lost, and with it the old ideas changed their meaning. It became possible to see Confucianism as the West saw it, as a Chinese cultural heritage and wellspring of national identity.

Notes

Introduction

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³ Carl Yeager, Anson Burlingame: His Mission to China and the First Chinese Mission to Western Nations (Georgetown: Georgetown University, 1950), Knight Biggerstaff, "The Official Chinese Attitude toward the Burlingame Mission," The American Historical Review 41.4 (1936): 682-702,

⁴ John Schrecker, "“For the Equality of Men – For the Equality of Nations’: Anson Burlingame and China’s First Embassy to the United States, 1868,” Journal of American-East Asian Relations, vol. 17 (2010): 9-34; “The First Chinese Embassy to Germany: The Burlingame Mission in Berlin, 1869-70,” Berliner China-Studien, vol. 31: 407-432.

⁵ Owen Hong-Hin Wang, A New Profile in Sino-Western Diplomacy: The First Chinese Minister to Great Britain (Kowloon, Chung Hwa Book, 1987); Immanuel Hsu, China’s Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase, 1858-1880 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁶ J. D. Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy to the West: The Journals of Kuo Song-t’ao, Liu His-Hung and Chang Te-yi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

⁷ The most important works in this school are those by Zhong Shuhe and Zhu Weizheng in a series of introductions they wrote for their compilations of diplomatic journals. Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, Wanqing de liuzhong shixi ji 晚清的六種使西記 [Six journals by late Qing diplomats] Fudan xuebao (1996), no. 1: 74-84; Zhong Shuhe 鍾叔河, Zouxiang shijie: jindai Zhongguo zhishifenzi kaocha xifang de lishi 走向世界：近代中國知識分子考察西方的歷史 [Marching towards to the world: the history of Chinese intellectuals’ investigation into the West] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985).

⁸ Fang Weigui 方維規, Wenhua bijiao yu wenhua chuanshu de guilü he xianxiang chutan: yi zhongguo zaoqi shizhe riji jicheng wei shuo 文化比較與文化傳輸的規律和現象初探：以中國早期使者日記、紀程為說 [A tentative exploration of the patterns and phenomena in comparative culture and cross-cultural transmission: a discussion centering on early Chinese diplomat journals and travelogues], talk delivered at Renmin daxue,

March 10, 2011. The latest and most representative of this new scholarship is Yin Dexiang, Donghai xihai zhijian.

⁹ James Polacheck, The Inner Opium War (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Benjamin Elman, “Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China’s Self-Strengthening Reform into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865-1895,” Modern Asian Studies, vol. 38, no. 2 (2004), 283-326; Tsu Jing, Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff, eds., Mapping Meanings: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 5.

¹² Patricia Ebrey, Anne Walthall, and James Palais, East Asia: A Cultural, Social and Political History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 304.

¹³ An example of this type of privilege can be found in historian Lai Chi Kong’s treatment of Guo Songtao as a staunch advocate of westernization and industrialization and a rational challenger of the anti-mercantile “doctrinairism of Confucianism.” Lai Chi Kong, “In Search of Wealth: Kuo Sung-tao and His Economic Thought,” Chinese Culture, vol. XXV, no. 3 (1984), 53-79.

¹⁴ Scholarship on Chinese perception of the West prior to 1895 tends to focus on the Chinese mindset, attitude, or prejudices about the West, rather than their understanding of aspects of the West. Chang Hao, “Changing Chinese View of Western Relations, 1840-1895” in Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, eds., The Cambridge History of China, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 142-201. In more recent years, scholars in comparative literature and linguistics have made important contributions to the process of cross-cultural translation. The major works in these fields include the following: Lydia Liu, Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity: China, 1900-1937 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz, eds., New Terms for New Idea: Western Knowledge and Lexical Change in Late Imperial China (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff, eds., Mapping Meaningful: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁵ Yu Ying-shih 余英時, “Guanyu zhongri wenhua jiaosheshi de chubu kaocha” 關於中日文化交涉史的初步考察 (A rudimentary investigation into the cross-cultural exchange between China and Japan), in Zhongguo wenhuashi tongshi 中國文化史通釋 [A general analysis of Chinese cultural history] (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhishi sanlian shudian, 2012), 335.

- ¹⁶ Douglas Howland, Borders of Chinese Civilization: Geography and History at Empire's End (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.
- ¹⁷ The most important historiographical gap here, as Paul Cohen noted nearly fifteen years ago, is a major, reliable biography of Zeng Guofan. Cohen, "Preface to the second paperback edition," Discovering History in China, xv.
- ¹⁸ Paul Fussell, Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 203, quoted in Susan Miller, trans. and ed., Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845-1846: The Voyage of Muhammad as-Saffār (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 49.
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- ²² Fogel, "Preface: Traditions of East Asian Travel," in Fogel, ed., Traditions of East Asian Travel, viii.
- ²³ Richard Strassberg, Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 4.
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- ²⁵ Xi Yufu 席裕福 and Shen Shixu 沈師徐, Huangchao zhengdian leizuan 皇朝政典類纂 (A categorized compilation of imperial institutions) in Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍, eds., Jindai zhongguo shiliao congkan xubian 近代中國史料叢刊續編, vol. 91-92, no. 917 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe), 11214.
- ²⁶ Yin Dexiang 尹德翔. Donghai xihai zhijian: Wanqing shixi riji zhong de wenhua guancha, renzheng yu xuanze 東海西海之間：晚清使西日記中的文化觀察、認證與選擇 [Between east and west seas: cultural observations, identifications, and selections in the journals of late Qing ministers to the West] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 38-39.
- ²⁷ Wu Wei 吳維, Waijiao shilu yu guwen xinbian: yi Xue Fucheng chushi riji wei zhongxin 外交實錄與古文新變：以薛福成出使日記為中心 (Diplomatic record and

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²⁸ These include Binchun 斌椿 Chengcha biji 乘槎筆記 [Notes on a raft] Wenbaotang cangban 文寶堂藏版 (1868); Zhigang 志剛, Chushi taixi ji 初使泰西記 [Record of the first mission to the West] Birwo 避熱窩 (1877); Zhang Deyi 張德彝 Hanghai shuqi 航海述奇 [Curiosities from an ocean voyage] Shanghai Shenbao guan 上海申報館 (1880); Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 Shixi jicheng [Record of an envoy to the West] Tongwenguan 同文館 (1875).

²⁹ Wu Fengpei 吳豐培, "Wang Xiqi yu 'Xiaofanghu zhai yudi congchao' ji qita" 王錫祺與《小方壺齋與地從鈔》及其他 [Wang Xiqi and his Xiaofanghu collection of geographical works and beyond], Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu (1995), no. 1, 92.

³⁰ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, Guo Songtao riji 郭嵩燾日記 [Diary of Guo Songtao] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 4 volumes. Zeng Jize 曾紀澤, Zeng Jize riji 曾紀澤日記 [Diary of Zeng Jize] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998), 3 volumes. Xue Fucheng 薛福成, Xue Fucheng riji 薛福成日記 [Diary of Xue Fucheng] (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2004), 2 volumes.

³¹ David Nasaw, "AHR Roundtable: Historian and Biography: Introduction," The American Historical Review, vol., 113, no. 3 (June 2009), 574.

Chapter I

¹ Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, June 13, 1866.

² Binchun's journal was submitted to Emperor Tongzhi by Prince Gong a month after the mission's return. For Prince Gong's memorial on the mission, see Chouban yiwu shimo [The complete account of the management of barbarians] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1988) vol. 46, 4443-4445. The Wenbaotang edition was published in 1868. The Japanese edition was released in 1872 by the publisher Fukuroya Kamejirō. The edition used in this paper is a 1981 reprint of the 1868 edition by Hunan renmin chubanshe.

³ The Overland Mail, March 15, 1867.

⁴ J. D. Frodsham, Sung-t ao Kuo, Hsi-hung Liu and Te-i Chang, The First Chinese Embassy to the West: The Journals of Kuo Sung-T'ao, Liu Hsi-Hung and Chang Te-yi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), xxi.

⁵ For a classic study of the Tongzhi Restoration, see Mary Wright, The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

⁶ The two popular sources on foreign countries at this time are Wei Yuan's Haiguo tuzhi [Illustrated treatise on the maritime kingdoms] (1844) and Xu Jiyu's Yinghuan zhilue [A brief survey of the maritime circuit] (1848). In addition, Xie Qinggao, a blind Hakka who spent fourteen years in southeast Asia, visited Europe and America on a Portuguese ship. Xie's description of his trip – much of it from vague impressions – was recorded by a friend who was fascinated by his experience in a short book titled Haizhi [treatise on the ocean] (1820). The text was mostly obscure during Binchun's time.

⁷ Chouban yiwu shimo, vol. 39, 3669-3672.

⁸ For example, Hart notes in his journal soon after Bin's arrival in his office: "My secretary, Ping, takes to the work very readily, and I can draft with his aid with the greatest ease" and a few days later, "he gets on very well, and begins to understand matters." Richard Smith, John Fairbank and Katherine Bruner, eds., Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 151, 153.

⁹ Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, eds., Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization, 373.

¹⁰ Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, eds., Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization, 373.

¹¹ See Xu Jiyu's preface to Cheng cha biji, 1.

¹² W. A. P. Martin, A Cycle of Cathay (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1896), 372-375.

¹³ Charles Drage, Servants of the Dragon Throne: Being the Lives of Edward and Cecil Bowra (London: P. Dawnay, 1966), 133-156; Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization, 348-361.

¹⁴ Knight Biggerstaff, "Chinese Mission of Investigation Sent to Europe," The Pacific Historical Review, vol. 6, no. 4 (Dec., 1937), 318.

¹⁵ See Chapter IV.

¹⁶ Yapian zhanzheng dang'an shiliao [Archival sources on the opium war] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), vol. 1, 540.

¹⁷ According to Historian David Ownby, the leader of the Black Lotus sect was a native of Nanchang, Jiangxi. By combining teachings of the Dashengjiao (Great Vehicle Teaching) and Luojiang, he created a distinct sect with its own scriptures for “warding off disasters and hardships.” See David Ownby, Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 136. Zhu Jinfu, ed., Qingmo jiao'an [Historical materials on missionary cases from the late Qing] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), no. 1, 42, 43.

¹⁸ Yang Nengge, “Preface,” Haiguo sheng you cao, 1.

¹⁹ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao 149.

²⁰ Binchun, Tianwai gui fan cao, 203

²¹ For a complete record of members in the Yao and Yang families who served as officials since Qianlong’s reign, see Qingdai zhupi jicheng [The complete collection of vermilion papers in the Qing], vol. 27, 407-415. This entry was compiled for Yang Ji, an affinal cousin of Binchun who was a successful candidate in the Metropolitan Examination in 1865. The families and Yao and Yang had intermarried for generations by Binchun’s time.

²² Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, Robert Hart and China’s Early Modernization, 393.

²³ Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, Robert Hart and China’s Early Modernization, 393.

²⁴ For Binchun’s role as a mediator between Hart and Zongli Yamen, see Hart’s diary entry on August 14, 1864; October 18, 1864; August 24, 1865.

²⁵ Birmingham Daily Post, June 9, 1866.

²⁶ “Celestial Buttons,” The Pall Mall Gazette, July 10, 1866. See also Birmingham Daily Post, June 12, 1866.

²⁷ Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, Robert Hart and China’s Early Modernization, 349, 350.

²⁸ Smith, Fairbank and Bruner, Robert Hart and China’s Early Modernization, 415.

²⁹ Birmingham Daily Post, June 9, 1866.

³⁰ The only exception where Bin showed a clear objection to Western cultural practice was regarding the disposal of paper with printed texts. Westerners likes being clean, he

observes, they keep their bathrooms and toilets extremely well washed. But for newspapers, letters and books, they all dumped them to the trash and sometimes used them to wipe dirty things. It was a sign of ignorance and disrespect. See Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 23.

³¹ A. B. Freeman-Mitford, The Attaché at Peking (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 227.

³² Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, no. 10, 158.

³³ Toby Meyer-Fong, Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 158.

³⁴ “Celestial Buttons,” The Pall Mall Gazette, July 10, 1866.

³⁵ “The Chinese Commissioner in Birmingham,” Birmingham Daily Post, June 8, 1866; Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post, June 13, 1866.

³⁶ Richard Strassberg, Inscribed Landscape: Travel Writing from Imperial China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 10, 12.

³⁷ There is a considerable overlap between the content in the *biji* and the poems – his fanciful exuberance is occasionally spilled over into his journal, whereas some poems are prefaced by excerpts of his journal – but in general the two genres each fills a well-defined role.

³⁸ Fusheng Wu, The Poetics of Decadence: Chinese Poetry of the Southern Dynasties and Late Tang Periods (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 46.

³⁹ Meyer-Fong, Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou, 63.

⁴⁰ Zhang, Haihai shuqi, 3, 53.

⁴¹ Yin Xiangde, “Binchun xifang jishu de huayu fangshi” [Binchun’s discourse in his writing about the West], Xueshu jiaoliu, vol. 184, no. 7 (2009), 197.

⁴² Most of the cities that the embassy visited have their own entry in the Yinghuan zhilue, an encyclopedia of foreign countries compiled by Xu Jiyu in the 1840s. It was an indispensable companion and tour guide to Bin. Upon arrival at each city and country, he checked their profile in the book and copied passages from its to his journal to provide an overview of its historical and political background. Seldom though does he reflect on the accuracy of the information or make attempt to update it.

⁴³ Newcastle Courant, May 23, 1866.

⁴⁴ Bin, Haiguo sheng you cao, no. 19, 163.

⁴⁵ Soon after the mission returned, the yamen initiated a secret correspondence with seventeen of Qing's top officials on a number of topics regarding modernization and further opening to the West. One of the six questionnaires it sent out applies to the construction of telegraphs and railway lines in China by foreigners. The replies expressed "unanimous opposition to allowing foreigners to build railway and telegraph lines in China," although a couple of officials did express interest in raising capital to build the railways with foreign aid. For a study of these exchanges, see Biggerstaff, "The Secret Correspondence of 1867-1868." When the subject was raised again by English merchants during the Zhigang mission in 1868-1871, Zhigang courteously replied that the Chinese were greatly impressed by the railway system and wished to make use of it, but it would not be feasible for some time because its construction would require the removal of the ancestral tombs scattered across the country. See Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji [Journal of the first mission to the West], 311-312. For the dominant domestic view on railroads from the 1860s to the 1880s, see Teng and Fairbank, China's Response to the West, 116-118.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Chen Hongmou's advocacy of hydraulic projects, especially polder construction, in Jiangxi. See William Rowe, Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 229.

⁴⁷ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 33, 34.

⁴⁸ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, no. 37, 170.

⁴⁹ William Soothil and Lewis Hodous, A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 162. I have not found any scholarship on the origin and evolution of the use of *huolun* in the Western context.

⁵⁰ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 34.

⁵¹ Bin, Haiguo sheng you cao, no. 53, 174. Xumi is a transliteration from Sanskrit for a mountain in Indian mythology. The Xumi Mountain is what the Buddhists believe to be the center of the universe.

⁵² "The Chinese Commissioner at Suite in Birmingham," Birmingham Daily Post, June 9, 1866.

⁵³ Xu Jiyu, Ying huan zhi lue, 240.

- ⁵⁴ Zhang Deyi, Zai shuqi [The second account of curiosities overseas] (1871) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 59.
- ⁵⁵ Susan Mann, Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 19-44.
- ⁵⁶ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 167, no. 29.
- ⁵⁷ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 178, no. 63.
- ⁵⁸ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 165, no. 26.
- ⁵⁹ Mann, Precious Records, 53.
- ⁶⁰ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 172, no. 45.
- ⁶¹ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 168, no. 32,
- ⁶² Joseph Levenson, Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 18.
- ⁶³ Drage, Servants of the Dragon Throne, 143.
- ⁶⁴ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 19.
- ⁶⁵ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 20.
- ⁶⁶ "The Chinese Commissioner and Suite in Birmingham," Birmingham Daily Post, June 9, 1866.
- ⁶⁷ Zhang, Hanghai shu qi, 46, 71, 80,
- ⁶⁸ Zhang Deyi's repulsion to European gender customs can be shown in the following instance. When the mission visited Russia, two Russian ladies on another carriage tried to "hold hands" with him, he refused and hurriedly urged his driver to speed up. See Zhang, Hanghai shu qi, 107. In a poem about a spring outing with Western men and women, Binchun uses the expression "xieshou tongdeng" (holding hands and entering the carriage together), which might refer to his assisting Western women up the step, or the two actions might not be contemporaneous. See Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 156, no. 5.
- ⁶⁹ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 165, no. 26.

- ⁷⁰ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 8.
- ⁷² Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 159, no. 12.
- ⁷³ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 158, no. 11.
- ⁷⁴ Frank Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 35.
- ⁷⁵ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 8.
- ⁷⁶ Binchun, Tianwai gui fan cao, 192, 193, no. 16.
- ⁷⁷ The subject of establishing Chinese diplomatic representation was often brought up by members of the mission and their hosts. Although Binchun and Zhang Deyi both avoided writing about it, the British press sometimes reported what they said. The Birmingham Daily Post reports a speech given by a Tongwenguan student as follows: “Fung-Yi responded to the toast in Chinese, which was interpreted as follows by Mr. Bowra: -- Having been deputed to visit foreign countries, in order to learn the various things which made those countries so great, the Commissioner has been astonished by the kindness and courtesy with which he has been everywhere received. I (Fung-yi) hope at no distant date to be a member of the permanent embassy to be established in England; and I hope then that the kindness so auspiciously begun to-night may ripen into friendship.” See Birmingham Daily Post, June 8, 1866. Whether or not this was an accurate translation of Fengyi’s speech, it shows that Hart and his assistants tried to give the impression that the Binchun mission was a preparation for formal diplomatic representation.
- ⁷⁸ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 21. See also Haiguo sheng you cao, 164, 165, no. 24.
- ⁷⁹ Levenson, Confucian China and Its Modern Fate, 19.
- ⁸⁰ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 24. See also Haiguo sheng you cao, 166, no. 28.
- ⁸¹ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 34.
- ⁸² Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 38. See also Haiguo sheng you cao, 173, 174, 175, no. 49-54.
- ⁸³ Binchun also praised Sweden in similar terms. See Cheng cha biji, 39.
- ⁸⁴ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 28.

- ⁸⁵ Binchun, Cheng cha biji, 28.
- ⁸⁶ Zhang, Hang hai shu qi, 79.
- ⁸⁷ Zhang, Hang hai shu qi, 79-80.
- ⁸⁸ Quote from Qishan's memorial to the Daoguang emperor in 1840 regarding his investigation into British military power and civil affairs. Yapian zhanzheng dang'an shiliao [Archival sources on the opium war], vol. 2, 392.
- ⁸⁹ Lin Zexu, Yang shi za lu [A miscellaneous account of Western things] (1846), Zhongshan daxue xuebao, no. 3 (1986), 19. According to Lin's descendents, this account was collected by his private secretary Chen Depei.
- ⁹⁰ Xu Jiyu, Ying huan zhi lue [A brief survey of the maritime circuit] (1848) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), 240.
- ⁹¹ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 166, no. 27.
- ⁹² Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 187, no. 1.
- ⁹³ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 191, no. 10.
- ⁹⁴ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 194, no. 20.
- ⁹⁵ Binchun, Haiguo sheng you cao, 194, 195, no. 21.
- ⁹⁶ Zhang, Hanghai shu qi, 140.
- ⁹⁷ Binchun, Tianwai gui fan cao, 202, no. 43.
- ⁹⁸ Binchun, Tianwai gui fan cao, 204, no. 46.
- ⁹⁹ Binchun, Tianwai gui fan cao, 208, no. 59.
- ¹⁰⁰ See Prince Gong's memorial reporting the return of the Binchun mission. Chouban yiwu shimo, vol. 46, 4445.
- ¹⁰¹ Li Hongzhang, "Li Hongzhang xin'gao" in Nianjun shiliao congkan [Anthology of historical materials on the Nian rebels] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1957), no.2, 27.
- ¹⁰² Xu, "Preface," Cheng cha biji, 1.
- ¹⁰³ Zhang, "Author's preface," Hanghai shu qi, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Xu, “Preface,” Cheng cha biji, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Li, “Preface,” *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Edkins, Religion in China (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1893), 209.

¹⁰⁷ Martin, A Cycle of Cathay, 374. It is hard to imagine that Binchun would go through the trouble of purging most of his writings in order to present his countrymen the false impression of a highly civilized and admirable Western culture. If such an expanded and negative report did exist, there would have been some mention of it in contemporary documents, but so far I have not seen any. The lack of supporting evidence and a clear motivation on Binchun’s part for manufacturing two reports has led me to conclude that the published journal and poems were the only accounts revealed by Binchun.

¹⁰⁸ Binchun, Yasutsugu Shigeno, Seishi Otsuki, eds., Jōsa hikki (Tokyo: Fukuroya Kamejiro, 1872), 2b.

¹⁰⁹ Lin Changyi, Hai tian qin si xu lu (1869) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 444-450.

¹¹⁰ Mao Xianglin, Mo yu lu (1870) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 40, 42.

¹¹¹ Mao, Mo yu lu, 46.

¹¹² Zhang, Hanghai shu qi, 75.

¹¹³ The Cornhill Magazine, vol., xxi, 1870, 29.

¹¹⁴ Zeng Guofan, Zeng Guofan quanji: riji [Complete writing of Zeng Guofan: his diaries] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1982), 1792.

Chapter II

¹ H. B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire: The Period of Submission, 1861-1893, vol. 2 (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910): 188.

² Johannes von Gumpach, The Burlingame Mission (Shanghai, New York etc.: 1872). Frederick Wells Williams, Anson Burlingame and the First Chinese Mission to Foreign

Powers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), Carl Francis Yeager, Anson Burlingame: His Mission to China and the First Chinese Mission to Western Nations (Georgetown: Georgetown University, 1950), Knight Biggerstaff, "The Official Chinese Attitude toward the Burlingame Mission," The American Historical Review 41.4: 682-702, John Schrecker, "'For the Equality of Men -- for the Equality of Nations': Anson Burlingame and China's First Embassy to the United States, 1868," Journal of American-East Asian Relations 17 (2010): 9-34.

³ Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 52, 2159.

⁴ On the treaty revision, see Knight Biggerstaff, "The Secret Correspondence of 1867-1868: Views of Leading Chinese Statesmen Regarding the Further Opening of China to Western Influence," Pacific Historical Review 6.4: 307-20.

⁵ In the Zongli yamen's memorial on Burlingame's appointment, he is said to have volunteered to head the mission, both out of sympathy for the Qing and his desire to make a name for himself. See Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 52, 2159-2160.

⁶ This was even explained to the emperor in Prince Gong's memorial: "foreign countries send permanent missions to each other, and not all use their own countrymen; as long as they treat each other with honesty and good faith, nationality does not need to be distinguished (原無分乎區域)." Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), 51 juan, 2160. Outside the Zongli yamen, the most ardent advocates of this approach were Zeng Guofan and his confidant and fellow Hunan scholar-official Guo Songtao.

⁷ Biggerstaff, "The Official Chinese Attitude," 682-702.

⁸ Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 52, 2165.

⁹ Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan cang Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian 中國第一歷史檔案館藏清代官員履歷檔案全編, juan 26, 576a.

¹⁰ Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 52, 2165.

¹¹ Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 51, 2160-2161.

¹² Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 52, 2168-2169.

¹³ Zhiangng's record at the First Historic Archive indicates that he was appointed the prefect in 1864, but he might not have had time to serve on this position at all before he was summoned by the Zongli yamen.

¹⁴ Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiuso dang'anguan: Zongli geguo shiwu yamen dang'an 中央研究院近代史研究所：總理各國事務衙門檔案, 1-21-035-02-057.

- ¹⁵ Zongli geguo shiwu yamen dang'an, 01-17-035-02-001.
- ¹⁶ Zhen Jun 震鈞, Tian zhi ou wen 天咫偶聞, juan 5, 38b.
- ¹⁷ Zhen, Tian zhi ou wen, 38b.
- ¹⁸ While waiting for a court audience after his appointment in the mission with Zhigang, a senior official told his son: "Mr. Zhi is outstanding among men. You must remember him with all respect!" This was almost surely a recognition of his encourage.
- ¹⁹ The two primary prints of the journal are Zhigang 志剛, Chushi taixi ji 初使泰西記 (Birewo, 1877) and Chushi taixi jiyao 初使泰西紀要 (1890). It is also included in Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao 小方壺齋輿地從鈔, ed. Wang Xiqi 王錫祺, 11 zhi, 102-144, although Zhigang's name was mistaken as Yi Hou 宜扈 there. A recent print is found in Zhigang, Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, Zouxiang shijie congshu 走向世界叢書, ed. Zhong Shuhe 鐘叔河 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985). The 1984 reprint combines the strength of two earliest prints: it is based on the more verbose *ji*, but contains the extra paragraphs in *jiyao*. It does not reflect the numerous minor differences of the two editions in the main body of the texts. Since this new volume appears to be closer to the original diary than either of the earlier editions, it will be the basis of my following discussion. Except when noted, all pages number of *Chushi taixi* are given as in the 1984 reprint.
- ²⁰ Zhang Deyi 張德彝, Oumei huanyou ji 歐美環遊記, Zouxiang shijie congshu 走向世界叢書, ed. Zhong Shuhe 鐘叔河 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985).
- ²¹ Fang Junshi 方濬師, Jiao xuan sui lu 蕉軒隨錄續錄, Qingdai shiliao biji congkan 清代史料筆記叢刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 339-342.
- ²² Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 256, 300, 306, 324, 321-322.
- ²³ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 262: "huoji zhi ti tong, er yunlun zhi yong shu" 火機之體同, 而運輸之用殊.
- ²⁴ New York Times, August 30, 1868.
- ²⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 289.
- ²⁶ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 256: "sui yun jishi, yi buneng bu fa ziran ye" 雖云機事, 亦不能不法自然也.

²⁷ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 257.

²⁸ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 263.

²⁹ Yin Dexiang 尹德翔. Donghai xihai zhijian: Wanqing shixi riji zhong de wenhua guancha, renzheng yu xuanze 東海西海之間：晚清使西日記中的文化觀察、認證與選擇 [Between east and west seas: cultural observations, identifications, and selections in the journals of late Qing ministers to the West] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 73.

³⁰ Hansheng Quan, "Qingmo De 'Xixue Yuanchu Zhongguo' Shuo," Lingnan xuebao 4.2.

³¹ This statement was given on the mission's way back, when Zhigang remembers being asked by a foreigner why China claimed to be the "Central Kingdom." His reasoning was that the name was not based on geographical location (fei xingshi juchu zhi wei ye 非形勢居處之謂也), but "the kingdom of the middle way as passed down from the sages." See Zhigang, Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 376.

³² Zhigang, Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 368.

³³ Zhang, "An Inquiry into the History of the Chinese Terms jiqi (machine) and jixie (Machinery)" in Michael Lackner, Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kirtz, eds., New Terms for New Ideas: Western Knowledge and Lexical Change in Late Imperial China (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2001) 180.

³⁴ Liu Xihong 劉錫鴻, Ying yao si ji 英軺私記, Zouxiang shijie congshu (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986), 63.

³⁵ Xu Jianyin , Ou You Za Lu.

³⁶ For memorials on this debate, see Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 47.

³⁷ Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, Xixue dongjian yu wan Qing shehui 西學東漸與晚清社會 (Beijing, Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011), 260.

³⁸ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 296.

³⁹ Thatcher E. Deane, "Instruments and Observations at the Imperial Astronomical Bureau During the Ming Dynasty," Osiris 9.Instruments (1994): 140.

⁴⁰ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 315-316.

- ⁴¹ Guo Songtao, Lundun Yu Bali Riji, Zouxiang Shijie Congshu, ed. Shuhe Zhong (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984) 479. Xue Fucheng, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi Siguo Riji, Zouxiang Shijie Congshu, ed. Shuhe Zhong (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985) 292-94, 376.
- ⁴² Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 288.
- ⁴³ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 316.
- ⁴⁴ Yu Ying-Shih, "The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century," China in Transformation, ed. Tu Wei-Ming (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994) 125.
- ⁴⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 314.
- ⁴⁶ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 316.
- ⁴⁷ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 281.
- ⁴⁸ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 310.
- ⁴⁹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 311.
- ⁵⁰ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 318.
- ⁵¹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 370.
- ⁵² Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 317.
- ⁵³ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 332-333.
- ⁵⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 335.
- ⁵⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 338.
- ⁵⁶ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 327
- ⁵⁷ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 353
- ⁵⁸ Zhiangng, Chushi taixi ji, 329
- ⁵⁹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 365
- ⁶⁰ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 269.

- ⁶¹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 327
- ⁶² Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 319
- ⁶³ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 370
- ⁶⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 270
- ⁶⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 365
- ⁶⁶ Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Vol. 2, 191.
- ⁶⁷ Lin Xuezhong 林學忠, Cong wanguo gongfa dao gongfa waijiao: wan Qing guojifa de chuanru, quanshi yu yingyong 從外國公法到公法外交：晚清國際法的傳入、詮釋與應用 (From international law to international diplomacy: the introduction, interpretation and application of international law in late Qing) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), 55.
- ⁶⁸ New York Times, May 18, 1868. Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji. 265.
- ⁶⁹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 250.
- ⁷⁰ Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 54, 2248-2250.
- ⁷¹ Xue Fucheng 薛福成, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi siguo riji 出使英法義比四國日記 (Journal from mission to England, France, Italy and Belgium), (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 126.
- ⁷² Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 81, 3266.
- ⁷³ Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, June 13, 1866.
- ⁷⁴ William Henry Seward and Olive Risley Seward, William H. Seward's Travels around the World (New York,: D. Appleton and company, 1873) 109.
- ⁷⁵ New York Times, August 18, 1868.
- ⁷⁶ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 269.
- ⁷⁷ Zhang, Ou mei huan you ji, 698.
- ⁷⁸ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 293.

- ⁷⁹ Zhang, Ou mei huan you ji, 700; Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 293.
- ⁸⁰ Zhang, Ou mei huanyou ji, 706, 708.
- ⁸¹ Biggerstaff, “The Official Chinese Attitude Toward the Burlingame Mission,” 696.
- ⁸² Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 296.
- ⁸³ Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Vol. 2, 189.
- ⁸⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 339.
- ⁸⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 367.
- ⁸⁶ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 304.
- ⁸⁷ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 363, “Sun Jiasheng shu,” in Fang Junshi, Jiao yuan sui lu, 340.
- ⁸⁸ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 378.
- ⁸⁹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 375.
- ⁹⁰ Guo Tingyi 郭廷以, Jindai Zhongguo shishi rizhi 近代中國史事日誌 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 546.
- ⁹¹ Zeng Guofan’s son, Zeng Jize, told the Empress Dowager in 1878 that his father had resolved to give up his life working on the case and had written up a last wish before going to Tianjin. But when he was in Tianjin, he found that the importance and difficulty of this case exceeded his estimation. He could have sacrificed his life and saved his reputation, but it would not have helped the situation. So he decided to sacrifice his prestige to negotiate for peace with the France. See Zeng Jize 曾紀澤, Zeng Jize riji 曾紀澤日記, vol. 2 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe), 777.
- ⁹² “Zhi Zeng gongtang” 致曾公堂, in Gu Tinglong 顧廷龍, Dai Yi 戴逸, eds, Li Hongzhang quanji 李鴻章全集, vol. 30 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 124.
- ⁹³ Seward and Seward, William H. Seward's Travels around the World, 214-15.
- ⁹⁴ In his memorial upon the mission’s return, Prince Gong had especially petitioned “imperial grace” on them, and the emperor gave only the standard comment “jiaobu congyou yiyi” (deliverance to the board for a generous reward). Chouban yiwu shimo (Tongzhi), juan 79, 3178-3179.

- ⁹⁵ “Sun Jiasheng shu,” in Fang Junshi, Jiao xuan sui lu, 340.
- ⁹⁶ Wu Fuhuan, Qingji zongli yamen yanjiu, 83.
- ⁹⁷ Wu, Qingji zongli yamen yanjiu, 83.
- ⁹⁸ Zongli geguo shiwu yanmen archive, No. 01-12-108-02-003.
- ⁹⁹ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 245.
- ¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 2001) 69.
- ¹⁰¹ Zhen Jun, Tian zhi ou wen, juan 5, 38b
- ¹⁰² Zhang Shuanzhi 张双智, Qingdai chaojin zhidu yanjiu 清代朝覲制度研究 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2010), 83.
- ¹⁰³ Zongli geguo shiwu yanmen archive.
- ¹⁰⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi jiyao, 2a.
- ¹⁰⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi jiyao, 1b-2a.
- ¹⁰⁶ Zhang Yinhan 張蔭桓, Zhang Yinhan riji 張蔭桓日記 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2004): 141-142.

Chapter III

- ¹ Zhang Deyi 張德彝, Jingmu qingxin lu 醒目清心錄 [Record for alerting the eyes and refreshing the mind], vol. 13. (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei zhongxin, 2004), 175-176.
- ² Zhang, Jingmu qingxin lu, vol. 13, 91.
- ³ Documented in this paper are Zhang’s first three missions: Binchun mission (1866), the Zhigang mission (1868-1870), the Chonghou mission (1871-1872). Between 1876 and

1878, he was translator for the London embassy during the tenure of Guo Songtao and Liu Xihong. He was transferred to Russia by Chonghou, to help with the latter's negotiation of the Treaty of Livadia, and later worked there under Zeng Jize until 1880. He documented this period of service in *Si shuqi* [Fourth Account of Curiosities]. See 張德彝 Zhang Deyi, *Suishi ying'e ji* 隨使英俄記 [Record of mission to England and Russia] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986). After working in the Tongwenguan for several years, he was appointed as an attaché for the Hong Jun embassy in Russia, Germany and Austria, during which time he wrote *Wu shuqi* [Fifth Account of Curiosities]. He came back in 1890 and was soon recommended as an alternate Daotai. In the winter of 1891, he became the Guangxu emperor's English tutor. In 1897, he went on his sixth mission, as consular to Luo Fenglu's embassies in England, Italy and Belgium (*Liu shuqi* [Sixth Account of Curiosity]). After a brief service as consular to Japan in 1902 (*Qi shuqi* [Seventh Account of Curiosity]), he was promoted as minister to England, Italy and Belgium in 1903, with a joint service in Spain (*Ba shuqi* [Eighth Account of Curiosity]).

⁴ Zhang, *Jingmu qingxin lu*, vol. 13, 18.

⁵ *Chouban yiwu shimo* 籌辦夷務始末 [A complete account of the management of barbarian affairs], *Tongzhi chao*, juan 8, 342.

⁶ According to the Zongli yamen's original plan, the students who passed the exam with distinction would be given the seventh and eighth ranks, whereas those who failed would either be demoted, retake the classes, or dismissed from the school. The first exam took place after three and half years of instruction – half a year later than scheduled – because of the frequent change of foreign instructors. It was presided over by Prince Gong himself and included tests in translation and spoken language. In the end the Zongli yamen decided to downgrade the rewards a notch for fear that “if ranks are seen as easily obtained student would no longer work hard” and gave eighth and ninth ranks to those who passed with distinction.

⁷ *Chongban yiwu shimo*, *Tongzhi chao*, juan 39, 1622-3.

⁸ In all likelihood, Zhang's fellow students Fengyi and Yanhui also kept their own records, but these were never published.

⁹ Among these eight, only the first and fourth accounts were published in his lifetime.

¹⁰ Qu Jinyan 曲金燕. *Qingdai chuanqi xiaoshuo yanjiu* 清代傳奇小說研究 (A study of chuanqi novels in Qing). Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2009, 1-2.

¹¹ Zhang Deyi 張德彝. *Oumei huanyou ji* 歐美環遊記 [Record of a circular travel in Europe and America] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 615. This is a reprint of *Zai Shuqi*.

- ¹² Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 628-629.
- ¹³ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 674
- ¹⁴ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 673.
- ¹⁵ Zhang Deyi 張德彝, Hanghai shuqi 航海述奇 [An account of curiosities on an ocean voyage] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 449.
- ¹⁶ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 711.
- ¹⁷ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 713.
- ¹⁸ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 769.
- ¹⁹ Benjamin Schwartz, In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 44
- ²⁰ For a tabulation of all the material objects introduced by Zhang up to his forth journal, see Yin Dexiang 尹德翔. Donghai xihai zhijian: Wanqing shixi riji zhong de wenhua guancha, renzheng yu xuanze 東海西海之間：晚清使西日記中的文化觀察、認證與選擇 (Between east and west seas: cultural observations, identifications, and selections in the journals of late Qing ministers to the West). (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 165.
- ²¹ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 699, 745, 752.
- ²² Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 734.
- ²³ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 790-791.
- ²⁴ Ping-chen Hsiung, A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 116-117.
- ²⁵ Lucien Miller, “Children of the Dream: The Adolescent World in Cao Xueqin’s *Honglou meng*.” In Chinese Views of Childhood. ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai’I Press, 1995): 219-47.
- ²⁶ Hsiung, A Tender Voyage, 119-120.
- ²⁷ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 779-780.

²⁸ Zhigang 志剛, Chushi taixi ji 初使泰西記 [Record of the first mission to the West] Zouxiang shijie congshu 走向世界叢書, ed. Zhong Shuhe 鐘叔河 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 277.

²⁹ Guo Songtao, Liu Xihong, Zhang Deyi, J. D. Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy to the West: The Journals (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 68.

³⁰ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 491.

³¹ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 492.

³² Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 717,

³³ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 719.

³⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 293.

³⁵ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 519.

³⁶ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 529.

³⁷ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 694.

³⁸ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 656

³⁹ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 661.

⁴⁰ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 460.

⁴¹ Zhang, Oumei huanyouji, 759.

⁴² Zhang, Oumei huanyouji, 773.

⁴³ Zhang, Oumei huanyouji, 772.

⁴⁴ Zhang, Oumei huanyouji, 669.

⁴⁵ Ye Wenxian, “Zhongguoren weishenme cheng waiguoren wei ‘guizi’?” [Why did Chinese call foreigners “guizi”?], Zhongzhou xuekan, January 2002, no.1: 124.

⁴⁶ Lydia Liu, The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 80.

⁴⁷ Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson, Lives of Confucius: Civilization’s Greatest Sage Through the Ages (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 89.

- ⁴⁸ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 657.
- ⁴⁹ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 715.
- ⁵⁰ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 764.
- ⁵¹ Charles Desnoyers, A Journey to the East: Li Gui's New Account of a Trip Around the Globe (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 110.
- ⁵² Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 439-443.
- ⁵³ Zhang Deyi 張德彝, Suishi faguo ji 隨使法國記 [Record of mission to France] (Changsha: Hunan remin chubanshe, 1982), 151. This is a reprint of San shuqi.
- ⁵⁴ Joseph Levenson, Confucian China and its Modern Fate: a Trilogy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xvi.
- ⁵⁵ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 657-658.
- ⁵⁶ Zhang Deyi, Suishi faguo ji, 24.
- ⁵⁷ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 64-65.
- ⁵⁸ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 72.
- ⁵⁹ Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao 小方壺齋輿地從鈔 [The Xiaofanghu collection of geographical works], compiled by Wang Xiqi 王錫祺, 11 zhi, 8667-8754.
- ⁶⁰ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 461.
- ⁶¹ Zhang, Hanghai shuqi, 464.
- ⁶² Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 814.
- ⁶³ Robert Hart, Richard Smith, John Fairbank, and Katherine Bruner, Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization: His Journals, 1863-1866 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 351.
- ⁶⁴ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 267.
- ⁶⁵ Zhigang, Chushi taixi ji, 317-318.
- ⁶⁶ Zhang, Oumei huanyou ji, 748.

⁶⁷ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 190.

⁶⁸ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 128.

⁶⁹ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 30.

⁷⁰ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 29.

⁷¹ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 31.

⁷² Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 100.

⁷³ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 103.

⁷⁴ The only extant copy of Chonghou's journal was discovered in 1985 and is currently held in the Hubei Provincial Library. For a brief overview of its content, see Guo Suzhi 郭素芝, "Mudu Bali gongshe qiyi de zhongguoren: Chonghou shifa riji faxian shimo" 目睹巴黎公社起義的中國人：崇厚使法日記發現始末. [The first Chinese to witness the Paris Commune: the discovery of Chonghou's journal on his mission to France]. Liaowang, no. 45 (1987), 10.

⁷⁵ Chouban yiwu shimo, Tongzhi chao, juan 85, 3429-3431.

⁷⁶ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 137.

⁷⁷ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 125.

⁷⁸ Zhong Shuhe 鍾叔河, "Bali gongshe de mujizhe: Zhang Deyi de Suishi faguo ji" 巴黎公社的目擊者：張德彝的隨使法國記 [The witness of the Paris Commune: Zhang Deyi's Record of his mission to France] in Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 14.

⁷⁹ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 171.

⁸⁰ These fires were not instigated by the Commune, but primarily resulted from the shelling by the government forces. See David, Shafer. The Paris Commune: French Politics, Culture and Society at the Crossroads of the Revolutionary Tradition and Revolutionary Socialism (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 179.

⁸¹ Zhang, Suishi faguo ji, 95.

Chapter IV

¹ This is the dominant view taken by existing scholarship on Guo, best exemplified by Wang Rongzu's well-researched biography of Guo: Wang Rongzu 王榮祖, Zouxiang shijie de cuozhe: Guo Songtao yu Dao Xian Tong Guang shidai 走向世界的挫折: 郭嵩燾與道咸同光時代 [The frustration of marching into the world: Guo Songtao and the reigns of Daoguang, Xianfeng, Tongzhi, and Guangxu] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2000) and J. D. Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy to the West: The Journals of Kuo Song-t'ao, Liu His-Hung and Chang Te-yi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

² Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy to the West, lxi.

³ An exception is Stephen Platt's recent work, Provincial Patriots, in which he juxtaposes Guo's interest in Western learning with his emphasis in ritual, but the relationship between the two is peripheral to his study. See Stephen Platt, Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 34-63.

⁴ This idea of the Confucian way is well illustrated in Herbert Fingarette, Confucius – The Secular as Sacred (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁵ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, “Zuiyan cunlue' xiaoyin” 《罪言存略》小引 [A small preface to “a brief archive of guilty words”], Guo Songtao shiwen ji 郭嵩燾詩文集 [A collection of Guo Songtao's poems and prose] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984), 34.

⁶ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, “Liji zhiyi zixu” 《禮記質疑》序 [Preface to Liji zhiyi], Guo Songtao shiwen ji, 21-23. For a detailed discussion on the discovery of Wang Fuzhi and Wang's influence on Guo, see Platt, Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China. 8-63.

⁷ Chow Kai-wing, The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 45.

⁸ Chen Lixiang 陳力祥, Wang Chuanshan lixue sixiang yanjiu 王船山禮學思想研究 [A study of Wang Chuanshan's ritual thought] (Chengdu: Sichuan bashu shushe, 2008), 76.

⁹ This approach is mostly seen in his editorial work on Zhu Xi's Family Ritual. See Guo Songtao, "Jiaoding Zhuzi jiali xu" 校訂朱子家禮序 [Preface to a revised edition of Master Zhu's Family Ritual], *Guo Songtao shiwen ji*, 65-66.

¹⁰ For a contemporary criticism of Guo's handling of his second marriage, see Wang Kaiyun 王闓運, *Xiangqilou riji* 湘綺樓日記 (Taipei: Shangwu yingshuguan, 1927), vol. 1, 171.

¹¹ Guo Songtao, *Guo Songtao riji* 郭嵩燾日記 [Diary of Guo Songtao] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), vol. 1, 543.

¹² Guo Songtao, *Yuchi laoren zishu* 玉池老人自述 [Autobiography of the old man of Yuchi], *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 552, 4a.

¹³ Lu Baoqian 陸寶千, *Guo Songtao xiansheng nianpu buzheng ji buyi* 郭嵩燾先生年譜補正及補遺 [Correction and supplementary to the chronicle of Guo Songtao] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuanjinshisuo, 2005), 30.

¹⁴ For more on Guo's justification of lijin later in his life, see Susan Mann, *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), Chapter 6.

¹⁵ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 26.

¹⁶ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 29.

¹⁷ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol.1, 34.

¹⁸ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 32.

¹⁹ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 31.

²⁰ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 34.

²¹ Guo, *Guo Songtao riji*, vol. 1, 33.

²² Zeng Guofan 曾國藩, *Zeng wenzheng gong shouzha* 曾文正公手札 [Zeng wenzheng gong's hand-written notes], juan 6.

²³ Guo, "Suibian zhengshi xu" 《綏邊徵實》序 [Preface to collected facts on pacification of borderlands], *Guo Songtao shiwen ji*, 32.

- ²⁴ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 431.
- ²⁵ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 443-446.
- ²⁶ Chouban yiwu shimo 籌辦義務始末 [A complete account of the management of barbarian affairs], Guangxu chao 光緒朝, vol 5, 2009.
- ²⁷ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 446.
- ²⁸ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 771.
- ²⁹ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 772.
- ³⁰ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 802.
- ³¹ Li Hongzhang, in his capacity as Governor-general of Zhili and Superintendent of Trade of the Northern Ports, had promised the Japanese minister that China would take matter of Taiwan into its own hands earlier in 1873. The Zongli yamen, eager to evade responsibility, foolishly informed Japan that China was not responsible for the behavior of the Formosan savages. Thus encouraged, Japan sent a naval expedition to seek redress by force.
- ³² Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 2, 657.
- ³³ W. A. P. Martin, A Cycle of Cathay, or China, South and North (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1896), 341.
- ³⁴ Guo Songtao, Guo Songtao zougao 郭嵩燾奏稿 [Guo Songtao's memorial drafts] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1983), 346.
- ³⁵ Guo, Guo Songtao zougao, 342.
- ³⁶ Guo, Guo Songtao zougao, 343.
- ³⁷ H. B. Morse, The Intenational Relations of the Chinese Empire (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1960), vol. 2, 290.
- ³⁸ Guo, Guo Songtao zougao, 349-350.
- ³⁹ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 3, 14.
- ⁴⁰ Guo Tingyi 郭廷以, Guo Songtao xiansheng nianpu 郭嵩燾先生年譜 [A chronicle of Guo Songtao] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1971), 510.

- ⁴¹ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, Lundun yu bali riji 倫敦與巴黎日記[Diary from London and Paris] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984), 7.
- ⁴² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 16.
- ⁴³ Zhang Yuquan 張宇權, Sixiang yu shidai de luocha: Wanqing waijiaoguan Liu Xihong yanjiu 思想與時代的落差：晚清外交官劉錫鴻研究 [Out of pace with the time: a study of late Qing diplomat Liu Xihong] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004), 148. The original citation comes from Qing dezong shilu 清德宗實錄 [Veritable records of the Qing emperor Dezong's reign], juan 43, 9.
- ⁴⁴ Zhang Yuquan, Sixiang yu shidai de luocha, 137.
- ⁴⁵ The possibility that Liu was so afflicted was suggested to me by Professor Luo Zhitian.
- ⁴⁶ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 2.
- ⁴⁷ Robert Hart, John Fairbank, Katherine Bruner, MacLeod Matheson, James Campbell, The I. G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 227.
- ⁴⁸ Hart, Fairbank, Bruner, Matheson, Campbell, The I.G. in Peking, 242. Thomas Wade was said to have favored the appointment of Macartney over Hart's protégé, a decisive factor which "turned the scale" and which explains, Hart's instinctive distrust of Macartney. Also see Demetrius Boulger, The Life of Sir Halliday Macartney: Commander of Li Hung Chang's Trained Force in the Taeping Rebellion (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1908), 260, 280. Macartney had served as head of the Nanking Arsenal until an accidental explosion caused him his job. According to himself, he had no diplomatic experience prior to the Guo mission and little knowledge of diplomatic protocol. Guo was from the beginning unimpressed with his service and grew increasingly annoyed by his manipulating habits. The intriguing nature of the relationship between the two awaits a further study.
- ⁴⁹ Hart, Fairbank, Bruner, Matheson, Campbell, The I.G. in Peking, 212.
- ⁵⁰ Boulger, The Life of Sir Halliday Macartney, 265.
- ⁵¹ Guo's thoughts along the voyage portion of his journey is described in his Shixi jicheng 使西紀程 [Record of an envoy to the West]. An English translation of Shixi jicheng and parts of the journals by two other members of the embassy can be found in J. D. Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy in the West: The Journals of Kuo Sung-T'ao, Liu Hsi-Hung, and Chang Te-yi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

- ⁵² Frodsham, The First Chinese Embassy in the West, xliii.
- ⁵³ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 31.
- ⁵⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 35.
- ⁵⁵ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 44.
- ⁵⁶ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 28. Macartney's record of the steamer Audacity's mismanagement can be found in Boulger, The Life of Sir Halliday Macartney, 268.
- ⁵⁷ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 51.
- ⁵⁸ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 51.
- ⁵⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 60.
- ⁶⁰ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 62.
- ⁶¹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 77-78.
- ⁶² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 91.
- ⁶³ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 102.
- ⁶⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 119.
- ⁶⁵ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 121.
- ⁶⁶ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 160.
- ⁶⁷ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 301.
- ⁶⁸ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 407.
- ⁶⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 195.
- ⁷⁰ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 434.
- ⁷¹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 434.
- ⁷² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 576.

⁷³ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 697-698.

⁷⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 910.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that Guo misunderstood the nature of William I's letter, which is nothing more than a public endorsement of Bismarck's policies. For a translation of this letter, see The Times, Jan. 10, 1875, 5. For reasons I do not know, Guo interpreted it along the lines of the "self-condemnations" issued by Chinese emperors in times of natural and human calamities, in their capacities as the Son of Heaven and the overseer of people's welfare.

⁷⁶ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 132-133.

⁷⁷ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 436-437.

⁷⁸ Evelyn Rawski, Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 24.

⁷⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 642.

⁸⁰ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 442.

⁸¹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 379-380.

⁸² Feng Guifen 馮桂芬, "Bian keju yi" 變科舉議 [A proposal to change the civil service examinations], Jiaobinlu kangyi 校邠廬抗議 [Protests from the Jiaobin study] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998), 177-180.

⁸³ Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, Li Hongzhang quanji 李鴻章全集 [The complete works of Li Hongzhang] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), vol. 32, 233.

⁸⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 159.

⁸⁵ Catherine Jamie suggests that the term "substantive learning" was more often used in the Ming to denote research of nature, whereas Qing scholars preferred the term "evidential scholarship" due to the popularity of philological scholarship. Catherine Jami, "Imperial Control and Western Learning: The Kangxi Emperor's Performance," Late Imperial China, vol. 23, No. 1, 30.

⁸⁶ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 507.

⁸⁷ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 697.

- ⁸⁸ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 478, 507, 618.
- ⁸⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 190, 509.
- ⁹⁰ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 589.
- ⁹¹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 384.
- ⁹² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 577.
- ⁹³ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 697.
- ⁹⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 479.
- ⁹⁵ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 608.
- ⁹⁶ The Times, March 5, 1878.
- ⁹⁷ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 491.
- ⁹⁸ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 568.
- ⁹⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 627.
- ¹⁰⁰ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 961.
- ¹⁰¹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 627.
- ¹⁰² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 912.
- ¹⁰³ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 913.
- ¹⁰⁴ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 930.
- ¹⁰⁵ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 955.
- ¹⁰⁶ Guo, Yuchi laoren zishu, 21.
- ¹⁰⁷ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 3, 855.
- ¹⁰⁸ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 3, 857.

¹⁰⁹ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 497.

¹¹⁰ Guo, Guosongtao riji, vol. 4, 21.

¹¹¹ Hart, Fairbank, Bruner, Matheson, Campbell, The I. G. in Peking, 250.

¹¹² For a detailed discussion of Guo's diplomatic initiatives, see Owen Hong-Hin Wang, A New Profile in Sino-Western Diplomacy: The First Chinese Minister to Great Britain (Kowloon, Chung Hwa Book, 1987).

¹¹³ Guo Tingyi, Guo Songtao xiansheng nianpu, 672.

¹¹⁴ Guo Tingyi, Guo Songtao xiansheng nianpu, 696.

¹¹⁵ Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 802.

¹¹⁶ Recent studies have shown that although selfish and needless cruel, Liu was not the rabidly anti-foreign manic as generally supposed, and a few of his offences proved to be Guo's own imagination. Be that as it might, it remains true that Liu's secret reports, prying agents, and rumors and slanders caused many a sleepless nights for Guo.

¹¹⁷ Wang Rongzu, Zouxiang shijie de cuozhe, 312.

¹¹⁸ Guo, Guo Songtao riji, vol. 4, 19.

Chapter V

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire: 1875-1914 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 32.

² H. B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 2 (Taipei, Book World Co., 1960), 412.

³ Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, eds., The Cambridge History of China, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 278.

⁴ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, Guo Songtao shiwen ji 郭嵩燾詩文集 [A collection of Guo Songtao's poems and prose] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984), 248.

- ⁵ Xue Fucheng 薛福成, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi siguo riji 出使英法義比四國日記 [Journal on mission to England, France, Belgium and Italy] (Changsha, Yuelu chubanshe, 1985), 167.
- ⁶ W. A. P. Martin, A Cycle of Cathay, or China, South and North (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1896), 364.
- ⁷ Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 This journal habit of Xue's was probably inherited from his father, who had learned from Woren the use of journaling as self-cultivation practice, to keep the mind at ease.
- ⁸ Wang Ke 王珂, Xue Fucheng nianpu 薛福成年譜 (A chronicle of Xue Fucheng), 4.
- ⁹ Xue Fucheng 薛福成, "Xuanju lun" (1864) 選舉論 (On methods of promotion), Yong'an wen waibian 庸齋文外編, 665.
- ¹⁰ Xue, "Shang Zeng houxiang shuo" (1865) 上曾侯相書 (Letter to marquis-and-minister Zeng), Yong'an wen waibian, 855.
- ¹¹ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, Lundun yu bali riji 倫敦與巴黎日記 [Diary from London and Paris] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984), 28. This edition adopts Guo's manuscript version as its main version, but it also thoughtfully includes the text of Guo's published Shixi jicheng for comparison.
- ¹² Guo, Lundun yu bali riji, 91.
- ¹³ Li Ciming 李慈銘, Yua man tang riji 越縵堂日記 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2004), 7453.
- ¹⁴ Guo's friend and fellow Hunanese Wang Kaiyun voices this suspicion: "He has already been poisoned by the West! There is nothing [in his words] worth noting!" Wang Kaiyun 王闈運, Xiang qilou riji 湘綺樓日記, vol. 6, 18.
- ¹⁵ Zeng Jize 曾紀澤, Zeng Jize riji 曾紀澤日記, vol. 2 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998), 777.
- ¹⁶ Zeng, Zeng Jize riji, vol. 2, 813.
- ¹⁷ Guo, Guo Songtao shiwen ji, 243.
- ¹⁸ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 124.

- ¹⁹ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 63.
- ²⁰ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 60.
- ²¹ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 63.
- ²² Wu Wei 吳維, Waijiao shilu yu guwen xinbian: yi Xue Fucheng chushi riji wei zhongxin 外交實錄與古文新變：以薛福成出使日記為中心 (Diplomatic record and innovation in prose: a discussion focused on Xue Fucheng's diplomatic journal), Beijing daxue xuebao, vol. 49, no. 2 (2012), 99-101.
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- ²⁴ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 598.
- ²⁵ Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, Guo Songtao zougao 郭嵩燾奏稿 [Guo Songtao's memorial drafts] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1983), 357.
- ²⁶ Zeng, Zeng Jize riji, vol. 2, 916-917.
- ²⁷ Lloyd Eastman, Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy, 1880-1885 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 83.
- ²⁸ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 825
- ²⁹ Xue Fucheng 薛福成, "Shicai yu jiangxiang bingzhong shuo" (1892) 使才與將相並重說 (On the need to give equal weight to diplomats, ministers and generals), Yong'an haiwai wenbian 庸齋海外文編 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1973), 1289.
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- ³¹ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 102, 139.
- ³² Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji 137.
- ³³ Xue, "Gongzhan shouju buyong zhiyong shuo" 攻戰守具不用之用說 (1890) "On 'not to use is the use' of offense and defense utilities," Yong'an haiwai wenbian, 1268.
- ³⁴ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 619.
- ³⁵ Xue, "Gongzhan shouju buyong zhiyong shuo," Yong'an haiwai wenbian, 1265.

- ³⁶ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 826.
- ³⁷ Theodore Hutters, Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 24-25.
- ³⁸ Zeng Jize 曾紀澤, Zeng Jize yiji 曾紀澤遺集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1983), 136.
- ³⁹ Zeng, Zeng Jize riji, vol.2, 858.
- ⁴⁰ Yin Dexiang 尹德翔. Donghai xihai zhijian: Wanqing shixi riji zhong de wenhua guancha, renzheng yu xuanze 東海西海之間：晚清使西日記中的文化觀察、認證與選擇 [Between east and west seas: cultural observations, identifications, and selections in the journals of late Qing ministers to the West] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 194-195.
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- ⁴⁴ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 499.
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- ⁵⁷ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 133.
- ⁵⁸ Xue, “Kaojiu zhixin shuo” (1892) 考舊知新說 (On investigating the old and knowing the new), Yong’an haiwai wenbian, 1302.
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- ⁶⁰ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 124.
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⁸⁵ I want to thank Matthew Davidson for bringing up the connection with Aruga Nagao.

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- ⁹⁶ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 685.
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- ⁹⁸ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 70, 74, 79.
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- ¹⁰³ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 176.
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- ¹⁰⁵ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 114.
- ¹⁰⁶ Xue, Chushi ying fa yi bi siguo riji, 175.

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- ¹⁰⁹ Xue, “Aodaliya ke zijiang shuo” 澳大利亞可自疆說 (On Australia's potential to become independent and strong), Yong'an haiwai wenbian, 1307-1309.
- ¹¹⁰ Mao Haijian 茅海建, “Baxi zhaomu huagong yu Kang Youwei yimin baxi jihua zhi chubu kaozheng” 巴西招募化工與康有為移民巴西計劃之初步考證 (A preliminary examination into Brazil's recruitment of Chinese laborers and Kang Youwei's plan to emigrant to Brazil), Shilin (2007), no. 5, 7.
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Conclusion

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⁶ Hao Chang, “Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890-9” in Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, The Cambridge History of China, vol. 11, 288. During his European travel in 1905 and 1906, Kang did a series of historical analysis comparing Chinese and Western institutions, using the West as the standard framework to measure the evolution of Chinese institutions. Kang Youwei 康有為, Ouzhou shiyi guo youji sanzong 歐洲十一國遊記三種 [Three journals during a travel to eleven European countries] (Changsha: Yuelu chubanshe, 1985).

⁷ Levenson, Confucian China and its Modern Fate, vol. 1, xxviii.

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