

天津高等女學堂演操



西復興老畫店

CREATORS OF MODERN CHINA

100 Lives from Empire
to Republic 1796–1912

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Li was at the centre of two critical tensions in 19th-century China. The first was debate about Western ideas, technologies and their implementation; and the second was the growth of regional power among the elite classes, as demonstrated through the rise of regional armies that weakened the centralized might of the Qing imperial forces. In over five decades of service to the Qing government, Li advocated institutional innovation, in the face of the countervailing force of Confucian revivalism, which argued instead for a return to Confucian learning and classical texts as resources for confronting Western incursion. Yet his efforts were curtailed by endemic conservatism, as well as the limits of his own vision in redesigning traditional systems of government – particularly the structures that enabled his own considerable personal power. Assessments of his life and career are ongoing, but scholars concur that his personal story is uniquely entangled with China's internal and external conflicts of the period, and its contested paths to modernization.

Susan I. Eberhard

84. GUO SONGTAO

郭嵩燾 (1818–1891)

DIPLOMAT AND FIRST CHINESE MINISTER TO BRITAIN

Guo Songtao was a scholar-official, diplomat and educator from Xiangyin county in Hunan province. Having earned his *jūnshì* – top-level civil service – degree in 1847, he assisted his fellow Hunanese and close friend Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) in organizing local militia into the force that would become the Hunan Army, to defend their home province against invading Taiping forces. At Guo's suggestion, in 1853, the Hunan Army built its first naval force and expanded its revenue beyond the *lijin*, a commercial tax on local merchandise. While supporting the campaign against the Taiping, Guo read and researched widely in history and *li* 'ritual' (a core concept of Chinese statecraft, including the political and social theories of Confucius). Guo understood the latter not as rigid rules and routines, but rather as practices animated with human emotion, which underpinned proper community relationships. In the process of his research, he became deeply influenced by another, earlier Hunanese, Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), a Ming loyalist who, after the Qing conquest of the 1640s, devoted his scholarly energies to understanding the cause of the Ming's decline. Guo came to believe that the present internal and external crisis faced by the Qing was rooted in an atrophy of ritual in local communities. He contended that ritual, as a foundation for rebuilding social order, should not remain static, but must be reformed to keep up with changing circumstances. Guo's interest in reform also extended to rebuilding local society and economy, which had been devastated by war. He believed that the court and

the hardliners in foreign policy – in calling for war against the West – missed the real root of China's problems.

During the Second Opium War (1856–60), Guo was dispatched by the Xianfeng emperor to assist Mongol Prince Sengge Rinchen (1811–1865) in defending Tianjin against British and French forces. Guo was specifically tasked with increasing the army's revenue by closing tax loopholes in Shandong province and establishing more *lijin* (internal transit) tax bureaux. But he was critical of Sengge Rinchen's hawkish foreign policy and advocated a longer-term strategy focused on developing naval capability, training students in foreign languages, and treating the West with sincerity and good faith. His disagreements with prevailing views at court led to his impeachment, and he returned home in 1860.

In the aftermath of the Qing's defeat in the Second Opium War, the court was newly dominated by moderates seeking reconciliation and cooperation with Western powers. Guo's knowledge of the West and openness to Western learning attracted the attention of leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Recommended by Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), another major player in the revival of Qing military forces against the Taiping, Guo served as governor of Guangdong between 1863 and 1866.

Lock & Whitfield (act.
1856–1894), Guo
Songtao, 1880 or earlier.
Woodburytype on paper
mount. National Portrait
Gallery, London.



Following the complete breakdown of Sino-British relations during the Second Opium War, in which tensions in the provincial capital of Guangzhou (Canton) had been the touchpaper to the conflict, Guo built good relationships with the British consuls, and mediated between the Cantonese gentry and foreigners in several local disputes. However, in 1867, Guo was removed from the position, probably due to the jealousy of his superiors and colleagues. It likely did not help that his personality had grown increasingly abrasive and that he was often openly critical of court policies.

After eight years in retirement, in 1874, Guo was recalled by the court and recruited into the Zongli yamen – the new diplomatic office established by Prince Gong (1833–1898) after 1861 – to assist with foreign affairs. The next year, the killing of British interpreter Augustus Margary (1846–1875) in Yunnan set off yet another diplomatic crisis with England, and Guo was selected to head the mission of apology to the Court of St James's and thereafter establish a permanent legation in London to represent the Qing dynasty. This was a first for the Qing, which had no prior tradition of dispatching resident diplomats to foreign countries, relying instead on imperial envoys and travelling missions when necessary. The lack of institutional precedents and clear guidelines regulating the conduct of legation staff made Guo's task difficult, confusing and vulnerable to criticism, and he resigned after less than two years of service. He was succeeded by Zeng Jize (1839–1890), the eldest son of Zeng Guofan.

Despite Guo's personal frustration while serving as the Qing's inaugural minister, the establishment of the Qing legation in London improved China's international standing and opened up an official channel of communication between Qing diplomats and the British Foreign Office, which had previously been the monopoly of British diplomats in China. With the help of his English secretary Halliday Macartney (1833–1906) and Chinese student interpreters, Guo and the legation maintained an amicable relationship with the Foreign Office, and dealt with more than a dozen major diplomatic issues, ranging from seeking redress for Qing subjects from Britons who had committed crimes in China, to offering diplomatic apologies for offences committed against Britons in China. Guo also established a Qing consulate in Singapore, and protested against a proposed poll tax on Chinese merchants and labourers in British Columbia.

The most controversial aspect of Guo's tenure came from the publication of his *A Record of a Diplomatic Mission to the West*, his personal journal recording his observations on the voyage from Shanghai to London. In this, Guo interpreted international law, British colonialism and the British parliament as moral systems, as a modern manifestation of the Confucian Way, which he believed had been in long-term decline in China since the founding of the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE; he viewed international law, for example, as a reenactment of ancient ritual, founded on 'fidelity and righteousness'. He was criticized for this view not only by his domestic opponents, but also by Dutch diplomats, who viewed his depiction of British colonialism as naively simplistic. After his resignation from London, Guo retired to Hunan and devoted his effort to educating local youth and engaging in rebuilding a moral order from the

bottom up, by setting up private academies teaching new curricula. Frustrated with Qing officialdom, he shunned government service, turned his attention to local affairs and became a pioneer in the Hunan Reform Movement. His belief that 'Western learning' was not in contradiction with the Confucian Way, but rather consistent with a Chinese humanistic, moral vision, helped find Chinese accommodations for new, foreign ideas, and paved the way for the next generation of intellectuals to argue for deeper, more thoroughgoing reforms in government.

Jenny Huangfu Day

85. CHEN JITONG

陳季同 (1852–1907)

FLAMBOYANT QING EMISSARY TO FRANCE

In 1884, as the Qing empire and France became embroiled in a conflict over Vietnam, a book titled *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (The Chinese painted by themselves) by Chen Jitong, the military attaché of the Chinese legation, appeared in Paris. Covering topics such as family structure, government, education and gender relations, it presented a panoramic sweep of Chinese society and culture in a positive manner, at a moment of high political tension. Reprinted several times and translated into other European languages, it helped to transform its author from a junior diplomat into perhaps the most widely read Chinese writer in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. It also marked the beginning of a series of remarkable literary and public engagements by Chen, which shaped aspects of Qing cultural diplomacy in the late 19th century and pioneered a mode of cross-cultural mediation in modern Sino-Western exchanges.

Born to a scholar-gentry family in mid-19th-century Fuzhou, Chen Jitong belonged to a generation of writers – including the famous translators Yan Fu (1854–1921) and Lin Shu (1852–1924) – who were shaped by the twin influences of a vibrant local intellectual culture rooted in neo-Confucian academics and poetry clubs, and the new scientific and foreign language curriculum of the Fuzhou Navy Yard, a flagship institution of the late Qing Self-Strengthening Movement. Having studied naval engineering and French, Chen travelled with the first Qing government-sponsored education mission to Europe in 1877, enrolled in courses in international law at Paris's École Libre des Sciences Politiques, and was afterwards appointed attaché to the Qing legations in Berlin and Paris. Equipped with strong language skills and technical expertise, as well as with considerable personal flair, Chen Jitong used the opportunities furnished by his official duties assisting the Qing ambassador on diplomatic visits to build his own social network, while writing books for a French audience at a prolific rate.

Between 1884 and 1891, Chen published several more books in French – including a comparative study of Chinese and French theatre (*Le Théâtre Chinois*),