

Reasons for Failure to Modernise (1861-1894)

Topic

- Aims of Tongzhi Restoration and Self-Strengthening Movement: Revive the weakened Qing government and strengthen the empire against internal and external threats
- Modernise: The effective adoption of political, economic, social and military structures and systems of other modern states, particularly those in the West
- Final litmus test of China's failure to modernise: Sound defeat during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

Political (Leaders & Reformers)

Lack of Vision and Will to Modernise

The central government and advocates of Self-Strengthening failed to see the need for modernisation beyond superficial Western methods to strengthen the Qing government.

- Argued by **Immanuel Hsu** and **JAG Roberts**
- Unlike in Meiji Japan, the ultimate goal of the reformers was never truly to transform China into a modern state
- It was instead born out of a response to the internal and external problems plaguing China due to Western incursion
- They believed that the adoption of Western science and technology would enable the country to resist foreign aggression and suppress domestic unrest, rather than create a modern state
- Embraced Western values at a very superficial level, as most evident by Zhang Zhidong's slogan "Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for utility"
- Failed to grasp the need for the modern transformation of the bureaucracy, economy and cultural mindset
- Restricted the scope of China's modernisation
- Moreover, the lack of understanding of what modernisation entailed was compounded by the lack of willingness to modernise of the central government
- The modernisation movement was met with opposition from the conservative faction in the court and gentry
- Were preoccupied with their own power and self-interest rather than the strengthening of China as a

Social (People)

Social Inertia

Confucianism and traditional values still dominated much of China, and the negative association with the merchant class meant that there were few incentives for the accumulation of private wealth.

- Confucian values had put merchants at the bottom of the social hierarchy, who were seen as exploiting the people for individual gain
- Hence, mercantilism was deeply abhorred, and this hindered the modernisation of China's economy
- Private enterprise and competition was restricted and government intervention promoted under the *guan-du shang-ban* "official supervision and merchant management" system
- Businesses such as the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company and the Kaiping Coal Mines were forced to operate under government control
- **Hsu**: Characterised by bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption and nepotism; lacked entrepreneurial drive
- Stifled industrial growth and economic development
- Society returned to the idea of social stability by hierarchical societal order; modern equality was never achieved
- In addition, Sinocentrism and the belief in Western barbarianism was deeply entrenched in China, resulting in the reluctance to open up Chinese factories to foreigners
- Lack of valuable foreign capital and technology from the West restricted the possibilities of industrial growth in China

Economic/Foreign (Circumstances)

Shortage of Capital

The Qing government faced a shortage of capital exacerbated by internal instability and foreign encroachment, which hindered its modernisation efforts.

- The government faced difficulties in collecting taxes to fund its expenditure
- Taxes collected from provincial governments were limited due to the growth of regionalism and inter-provincial rivalry
- Many provincial officials would use tax revenue to fund their own individual projects to out-compete their rivals
- In addition, customs duty on foreign trade was fixed by the unequal treaties and did not suffice
- Corruption and economic mismanagement also siphoned government revenue to fill the pockets of officials
- **Frances Moulder** identified the shortage of capital as the major reason for the failure of the self-strengthening projects
- Identified the cost of the Opium Wars and the indemnities as a cause of that shortage
- China had faced several wars with the foreign imperialists, which resulted in massive human costs and damage to infrastructure and domestic industries
- Indemnities from the unequal treaties, such as the Treaty of Nanjing and the Treaty of Shimonoseki, placed a huge financial burden on the Qing government
- Restricted its ability to modernise effectively
- Moreover, the effects of foreign imperialism stirred anti-

<p>whole</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak and ineffectual political system permitted excessive and capricious taxation, rampant corruption, and a general hostility to industrial and commercial undertakings • Stifled industrial growth and the creation of a strong economy necessary for modernisation • Arguably the strongest influence in the court was Cixi, who gave the reformers no firm or consistent backing • Played the conservatives and reformers against each other so that she could hold the balance of power, exacerbating regional rivalry • Was also accused of misappropriating funds for the purchase of naval ships to refurbish the Summer Palace; hindered military development • Dismissed Prince Gong in 1884, for fear that his links with Westerners and the reforms would undermine her • Severely diminished the possibility of reform, as he was a key reformer who headed the <i>Zongli Yamen</i> and the court's progressive wing • Fairbank: Fault evidently lay in the imperial monarchy itself, the superficiality of the administration and its constitutional inability to be a modern central government <p>Lack of Coordination</p> <p>The absence of a strong central government meant that modernisation efforts were divided and <i>uncoordinated</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Qing government exercised weak centralised control, planning and direction of the entire self-strengthening process • Due to the decline in power of the government following the Taiping rebellion, as well as the reluctance to reform by Cixi and the conservative faction • Instead, modernisation was left to the efforts of a few high provincial officials such as Li Hongzhang, Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang • Albert Feuerwerker regarded Li Hongzhang as more concerned with building up his own power base than 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flawed concept of <i>ti-yong</i>, “Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for utility” • Aversion to Western culture and barbaric and vulgar in society prevented social, cultural and political change 	<p>foreign sentiments and resistance to foreign influence, ideas and technology as part of modernisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moulder argued that the reason why China's attempt at national industrialisation appeared feeble in comparison with that of Japan was because the burden of Western intervention was much heavier in China
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<p>committed to self-strengthening in the national interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensified inter-provincial rivalry; reformers competed rather than collaborated with one another and regarded their achievements as a foundation of personal power • Eg. During the 3rd period of the SSM from 1885-95, Li Hongzhang faced competition from Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi in textile and cotton-weaving industries • Reforms were only conducted within the confines of their own respective provinces • Failed to strengthen China as a whole 		
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Conclusion

- Jack Grey had argued, “China’s defeat in 1895 had showed that modern arms were useless in pre-modern hands”