

Confucian Parentalism and the late Qing's Modernization Dilemma:

An Analysis through the Cases of Li Hongzhang and Yung Wing

While Parentalism or Confucian filial piety may be familiar concepts to some, few realize that they are a continuation and extension of the ideal of the absolute monarchy system that originated in the Zhou Dynasty. More than three millennia ago, the Western Zhou dynasty instituted an absolute monarchy in China, based on the principle of the Mandate of Heaven.⁴ “The king of Zhou was the son of Heaven,”⁵ and delegated authority to his relatives and loyal vassals, who governed different regions as feudal lords. This system fostered a hierarchical and paternalistic society, where loyalty and moral virtue were expected from the subjects. The societal structure also emphasized respect, or as they called it “respect for elder”; in reality, it was a sociopolitical system where people of a “lower rank” such as sons or citizens had to “respect” their father or the emperor, taking their words as the sole reference and executing whatever they desired.⁶

Inspired partly by the Zhou system, Confucianism emerged around 500 BCE⁷ as the teachings of Confucius and his disciples on the modes of life and human interactions. Confucius highlighted the concepts of *Ren* (Humaneness), *Yi* (Righteousness), *Zhong* (Loyalty), *Xiao* (Filial piety), and *Li* (Rites) as the core values of human relationships and stressed the importance of education, moral cultivation, and social order. Initially, Confucianism had few followers and encountered competition from other schools of thought, such as Legalism, Daoism, and Mohism.⁸ However, as early as the Western Han period, Legalist doctrines were incorporated into the Confucian philosophy. They contained two aspects: emphasizing criminal law and reward-punishment measures. They were added, “to

make the common people comply with methods that the rulers govern by.”⁹ This gave rulers perfect legitimacy for their rule, complementing the idea of the mandate of heaven.

Moreover, it also served to stabilize the country by suppressing individual thoughts that differed from the emperor’s desires. This is why during the latter part of the Han dynasty this modified Confucianism was made into the dominant ideology of China. Confucian classics, such as the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Book of Rites*, were canonized and studied by scholars and officials.¹⁰ Moreover, the civil service exam, which tested scholars on *The Four Books and The Five Classics* of Confucianism, was introduced to select qualified candidates for government positions.¹¹ At the heart of this modified Confucianism was the ideal of Parentalism.

Parentalism is a set of expected social and ethical behaviors that emphasize the importance of order, filial piety, loyalty, and obedience. The ideal is based on the Confucian conception of the integration of the family, country, and the world under heaven.¹² For the Han Dynasty, Parentalism was a way to legitimize and stabilize their rule by integrating the philosophy into sociopolitical norms emphasizing obedience and loyalty. The emperor was expected to act as a father to his people who are like children or family members, who in turn owed him gratitude and obedience. In this modified Confucianism, Parentalism culture was seen as the root of all other virtues and the foundation of social order,¹³ slowly molding it into a stable combination of sociopolitical “deep structure”: like “the [stable] bottom rock layer of the riverbed, even though the river itself is ‘ever-flowing day and night’.”¹⁴

After the Han Dynasty, Confucianism did face challenges and transformations. Buddhism and Daoism emerged as rival schools of thought that offered alternative views on salvation,

nature, and metaphysics. Some Confucians tried to reconcile or synthesize these traditions and a new wave of Confucianism, known as Neo-Confucianism, arose during the Song dynasty.¹⁵ Neo-Confucianism attempted to restore the purity and vitality of Confucianism by incorporating elements of Buddhism and Daoism, as well as developing a more systematic and rational framework of metaphysics, ethics, and cosmology.¹⁶ However, the sociopolitical “deep structure” of Parentalism continued with Neo-Confucianism.

Confucianism Parentalism continued to exert a profound influence in the Qing dynasty. Confucianism in the Qing dynasty “combined morality and politics, and integrated social order and cosmic order.”¹⁷ It was a key factor in maintaining the legitimacy and stability of the Qing dynasty, which was ruled by the Manchus, a non-Han ethnic group that conquered China in 1644.¹⁸ The Manchus adopted Parentalism as a way of presenting themselves as exemplars of Confucian kingship and winning the allegiance of the Han Chinese majority. They also used Parentalism to justify their expansion and domination of other regions and peoples, such as Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Korea.

With regard to diplomatic interactions, Confucian Parentalism also shaped the major Qing policies of inclusivism and exclusivism.¹⁹ Inclusivism entailed the policy of accepting and integrating foreign states and peoples into the Qing Empire, contingent upon their recognition of the Qing emperor’s supremacy and their payment of tribute to him. This policy derived from the Confucian notion of *Tianxia* (All under heaven), which was a unique feature of Chinese and Qing Confucianism as compared to Korean or Japanese Confucianism. Originating in the Zhou dynasty, *Tianxia* implied a universal moral order that transcended national boundaries, it gave China and its ruling dynasty the status as the center of

civilizations and the source of legitimacy for other states.²⁰ The Qing Empire was the epitome of this order and the source of civilization for the rest of the world.²¹ Conversely, exclusivism entailed the policy of rejecting and isolating foreign states and peoples that did not adhere to the Qing empire's norms and values,²² implying a hierarchical distinction between civilized and barbaric peoples. Those who did not submit to the Qing authority, such as Russia, Britain, and France, were deemed barbaric adversaries or intruders.²³

The Qing's conservative policies preserved China's tradition and maintained its sociopolitical "deep structure" intact. Furthermore, following the precedent of the Ming's isolationistic policy, the Qing Dynasty focused primarily on preserving the political hierarchy while disregarding foreign relations, believing that, as told by Zheng He's voyages, foreign nations are still far behind China technologically and culturally.²⁴ However, these traditional policies also precipitated China's dramatic downfall as the second half of the nineteenth century approached. During those decades, China confronted various internal and external challenges that endangered its sovereignty and integrity. The Opium Wars revealed Qing's weakness and backwardness in contrast to the Western powers, who imposed humiliating and unequal treaties on Qing that undermined its economic and political rights.²⁵ The Taiping Rebellion nearly overthrew the feeble Qing, causing millions of deaths and widespread devastation.²⁶ The Nian Rebellion and the Muslim Rebellions further ravaged Qing and depleted its resources.²⁷ And the Sino-French War and the Sino-Japanese War not only caused Qing to lose its territory but also its influence in Vietnam and Korea.²⁸ This was a time when China had to face the stark reality of its frailty and backwardness in comparison to the

Western powers and Japan and seek ways to modernize itself and reclaim its dignity and autonomy.

In reaction to these crises, some Chinese officials and intellectuals recognized that China needed to emulate the West and adopt Western technology and institutions to fortify itself and restore its dignity and autonomy. This wave of movements to transplant Western ideals into Chinese institutions was spearheaded by scholar-generals like Zuo Zongtang and Li Hongzhang who had fought with the government forces in the Taiping Rebellion.²⁹ From 1861 to 1894, leaders such as these, now turned provincial governors or ministers, initiated and supported various reforms or policies that aimed to modernize China technologically, institutionally, and structurally.³⁰

However, Modernization for the late Qing is a complex and multifaceted process that entails not only adopting Western technology, but more importantly, according to the Max Webber's Modernization Theory,³¹ transforming its conservative Confucian Parentalism based sociopolitical structure into a modern one that encompasses individualism, democracy, and education. The late Qing faced a unique dilemma: how to harmonize its collective centered Confucian traditions with Western individual-centered mindsets in only a few decades?

This eventually proved to be an insuperable challenge, and the Qing Dynasty crumbled. Even today, the cornerstone of the modernization process is still not fulfilled: China is still a collective-centered society entrenched with conservative Confucian Parentalism values. However, it is not to say that modernization efforts were a total failure, as they stimulated the emergence of *Xin Wenxue* (New Literature) and *Xin Yinyue* (New Music)³² movements.

Moreover, reform efforts also inspired many eminent scholars and thinkers such as Li Hongzhang, Yung Wing, and Sun Yat-sen who devoted their lives to reforming China.

Li Hongzhang and Qing Court.

One of the most influential figures in China's early modernization efforts was Li Hongzhang, who rose as a conservative Confucian scholar to become one of the most influential and pro-modernization officials in the Qing court. Through a recount and analysis of three frequently overlooked yet significant events of Li's life, this section aims to illustrate and comprehend Li's changing perspectives about Western ideals of modernity and modernization. Through these events, this section aims to reveal the underlying prevalence and deep integration of the Parentalism structure in the Qing imperial court—the major force pushing for reforms during the Late Qing. Parentalism in the Qing court created a conservative, Confucianism-centered worldview that hindered the self-realization of the need for modernization and acceptance of Western sociopolitical ideals of democracy, freedom, and individualism.

Born in 1823 to a distinguished scholar-official family in a remote village in Anhui Province, China, Li Hongzhang had a brilliant mind and a prodigious memory.³³ He immersed himself in the classics of literature, history, and philosophy, and aspired to follow his father's footsteps in serving the Qing Empire.³⁴ In 1843, he excelled in the entry-level examination and secured a position in the officialdom.³⁵ He rose quickly through the ranks with his thorough understanding of the Confucian Parentalism political system of the late Qing and his brilliant abilities.

In 1860, Li was summoned by Zeng Guofan to suppress the Taiping rebellion, an uprising that sought to establish a new heavenly kingdom in China.³⁶ Zeng recognized Li's

talent and appointed him as his assistant, praising him as “a talent with great potential.”³⁷ Li soon proved himself as a competent administrator and commander. In 1862, Li was made acting governor of Jiangsu province and led his own mighty Huai Army, a modernized force equipped with Western weapons and trained by foreign advisers.³⁸

In the beginning of 1863, a coalition of Li Hongzhang’s Huai Army, Zeng Guofan’s Xiang Army, and General Gordon’s Ever Victorious Army launched a siege on Suzhou, the secondary capital of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and a pivotal city along the Grand Canal. General Gordon, a British officer employed by the Qing government to assist Li Hongzhang in quelling the Taiping rebellion,³⁹ was also a devout Christian who empathized with some of the Taiping’s religious aspirations but abhorred their violence and fanaticism.⁴⁰ Li and Gordon had a multifaceted and occasionally tense relationship. They esteemed each other’s military prowess and shared a common objective of restoring peace and order in China, but they also diverged in their views on how to deal with the Taiping insurgents. Li advocated a severe and uncompromising approach, while Gordon favored a more clement and humane one.⁴¹

The siege of Suzhou marked a critical juncture in their relationship. Li and Gordon concurred to spare the lives of the Taiping leaders who capitulated, but Li reneged on his pledge and commanded their execution.⁴² In December 1863, after an intense siege, Li’s troops penetrated the walls of Suzhou and infiltrated the city. The Taiping defenders were outmatched and dispirited, and many of them surrendered to Li. Li alleged that he had apprehended 200,000 prisoners of war,⁴³ but he had no intention of preserving them alive. He instructed his men to execute 10,000 of them in the Temple of Two Towers (Luohan Twin

Towers), a Buddhist pagoda in Suzhou.⁴⁴ The remainder were either slain or enslaved. Li's carnage enraged Gordon, who felt deceived and indignant by Li's perfidy.⁴⁵ Gordon reproached Li for being barbaric and dishonorable and threatened to resign from his service.⁴⁶ He also penned a letter to Major General Brown, the British commander-in-chief in China, articulating his outrage and disillusionment with Li's conduct.⁴⁷

Li's massacre of the rebels epitomizes the despotic and hierarchical nature of the Qing Parentalism political system, in which higher-ranking officials had absolute authority over their subordinates, could retract their commitments and obligations, and treat their lives as dispensable for the sake of executing the emperor's edicts.⁴⁸ Higher-level officials acted as the political father of their subordinates, and their sole responsibility was to comply with their own political father, the emperor, irrespective of the consequences or the opinions of others. Everyone had a fixed role and duty in this system, which ensured harmony and order in society, and rebellion against one's superiors was considered unfilial and treasonous, punishable by death. Li regarded the Taiping rebels as rebels against both their natural and political fathers, thus deserving no mercy or forgiveness. Li's massacre of the Taiping rebels was not only a military action but also a moral and political statement, asserting that "I have always been faithful to my sovereign and loyal to my country. I have always followed the teachings of Confucius."⁴⁹

Li's mindset exemplified the prevalent Confucian Parentalism worldview of most scholars and officials in the Qing court. Throughout the Qing Dynasty, Confucianism permeated every aspect of life, from familial bonds, bureaucratic norms, civil service exams, to daily rituals. And Confucius himself was venerated as the greatest of the Saints.⁵⁰

Consequently, most scholars and officials received a rigid education that emphasized rote memorization, comprehension, and adherence to Confucian principles, losing much creativity, individuality, and critical thinking abilities. After these scholars entered government, they continued to abide by Confucian and Parentalism principles and, as demonstrated by Li's actions, became servants of the only emperor and their higher officials instead of the masses. Owing to this "long tradition of historiography that glorified Confucianism as the orthodox ideology and suppressed any dissenting voices or alternative perspectives,"⁵¹ many officials pursued pleasing their superiors as their ultimate goal to retain and advance in their positions.

This hierarchical Parentalism system is a central part of the dominant Confucian Parentalism worldview which created loyal yet selfish officers who preyed on the weak and feared the strong. They were less considerate of the masses they were supposed to represent as government officials; instead, most officials were driven by the orders of the emperor and higher officials and their personal gains.⁵² This is what caused the widespread inefficiency, corruption, and rebellions in the country, especially from 1850-1880 which was ruled by weak and indecisive emperors DaoGuang and Xianfeng followed by the conservative de facto ruler Empress Cixi splitting power behind the throne.

The Confucian Parentalism structure proved effective for two millennia prior; however, with an ever-more connected global trade network and a new historical context, this structure became a barrier to progress and modernization. The hierarchical political system is also an inherent cause of the Taiping rebellion as people rose up after suffering under the corruption and indifference of local and regional officials. The rebellion also inspired some scholars to start to reflect and question the existing cultures and institutions.⁵³ However, most Qing

officials willingly blinded themselves with the delusion that China was still the powerful Asian Dragon it used to be and needed no reforms.

Moreover, the Qing dynasty suffered from a lack of reformist authority and power. Although the Qing had a strong imperial system based on Confucian Parentalism, this model also enabled the rise of Remonstrant officials and conservative speakers,⁵⁴ such as Yuan Shikai,⁵⁵ who wielded considerable influence in the late Qing period.⁵⁶ Remonstrant officials, who originated in the Qin dynasty as counselors to the emperor,⁵⁷ were regarded by the populace as the embodiment of Confucianism in governance.⁵⁸ Their power derived from the legitimacy and continuity of the Confucian Parentalism structures, which they sought to preserve at all costs. Therefore, to preserve their power, these conservative forces vehemently resisted any attempt to modernize and change Confucianism in China, even if it came from the emperor himself. They accused the reformers of violating the principle of Xiao (Filial Piety) by challenging the ancestral principles.⁵⁹ Combined with a weakened control of the country, an ever-decreasing authority amongst the people, and foreign colonization, even if the Qing wanted to execute any reforms, it would be much more harder and complex. The Parentalism structure ultimately, rather than helping Qing stabilize and prolong its rule, did the opposite, not only blinding the dynasty with arrogance and obliviousness of the need for modernization,⁶⁰ but also restraining itself from modernization due to an internal conflict of interests.

Amongst the few scholars who recognized the necessity of reform was Li, who later spearheaded this reformation movement. The Suzhou Massacre prompted Li to reconsider his dispute with General Gordon and to examine Western culture and ideals from a broader

perspective. This experience also impressed Li and made him realize that China needed to learn from the West in order to defend itself against foreign threats. He later wrote in his memoirs: "I saw that their weapons were superior to ours ... Their discipline was strict ... Their officers were brave and skillful ... Their soldiers were well trained ... I thought to myself: 'If we do not learn from them, how can we resist them?'"⁶¹ However, Li observed that Westerners were also arrogant, greedy, and disrespectful of Chinese customs and laws. He resented their interference in China's internal affairs and their attempts to impose unequal treaties on China and maintained his loyalty to the Qing dynasty and his faith in Confucianism as the source of moral guidance and social order, asserting that "I have always encouraged the study of Western science and technology and the establishment of modern industries and railways. But I have never agreed to abandon our own traditions and culture, which are the essence and identity of China."⁶² He did not see any contradiction between learning from the West and preserving China's traditions. He believed that China could adopt Western methods without losing its essence or identity.

After suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, Li stayed as the governor of Jiangsu province, initiating many reconstructions and developments of Jiangsu such as the rebuilding of the taxation and justice system.⁶³ In 1870, trusted and favored by the de facto ruler, Empress Dowager Cixi, Li was appointed as the minister of foreign affairs. He was the first Chinese official to hold this title,⁶⁴ which was created by the Qing government to cope with the growing foreign presence and pressure in China. His main goals were to maintain China's relations with its neighbors, such as Korea, Japan, and Russia, and a balance of power in East Asia.⁶⁵

A contentious issue that Li had to confront during the start of his role as the minister of foreign affairs was the dispute over the kneeling ceremony, which was a Chinese etiquette that required foreign diplomats to kneel before the Chinese emperor. This was a controversial and sensitive issue, as it involved the dignity and authority of the emperor, as well as the relationship between China and the West. The kneeling ceremony was a long-standing tradition that dated back to ancient times and was seen as a symbol of loyalty and filial piety.⁶⁶ The kneeling ceremony was also a way of expressing the hierarchical order of the world, in which China was regarded as the superior and civilized center, and other countries were regarded as inferior and barbaric peripheries.⁶⁷ Therefore, any challenge or change to this tradition would have profound implications for China's sovereignty and emperorship legitimacy.

In 1873, Li was asked by the emperor to give his opinion on whether to allow Western diplomats to meet the emperor without kneeling. This request came after several incidents in which Western diplomats refused or failed to perform the kneeling ceremony properly, causing diplomatic tensions and conflicts.⁶⁸ For example, in 1860, Lord Elgin, the British envoy who led an expeditionary force to Beijing during the Second Opium War, refused to kowtow before meeting with Prince Gong, a high-ranking official who represented the emperor.⁶⁹ In 1873, Frederick Bruce, another British envoy who came to Beijing to negotiate a new treaty with China, also refused to kowtow before meeting with Prince Gong.⁷⁰ To the imperial court, these incidents showed that Western diplomats did not respect or recognize China's traditional etiquette or authority.

In response, Li made a case for changing China's attitude and policy towards Western countries and allowing them to meet the emperor without kneeling. Li saw that the court had concerns about how abolishing the ceremony of foreigners kneeling and bowing to the emperor might lead to doubts among Chinese subjects about "kneeling and bowing" and then to doubts about the imperial authority. Therefore, he pointed out in his memorial that "[It is] the sages' opinions, [that] dealing with neighboring countries and governing subjects, are originally two different meanings. The court's rites are solemn, and Chinese subjects are not allowed to be confused. However, it is not necessary to blame the foreigners who are tens of thousands of miles away and have not submitted to us."⁷¹ That is to say, China's "rites" can only be used "inside" but not enforced "outside." He reiterated the difference between inside and outside, and that these foreigners from the west are not "barbarians" within our dominion. At the same time, Li emphasized that "the rites change with time,"⁷² and that "our dynasty has always had a certain ritual for receiving vassal states, but no certain ritual for receiving foreign countries."⁷³ The ideals of acceptance and equality proposed in Li's reformation, though seemingly in the right direction, were still retained within the frameworks of the traditional Confucian Parentalism mindset. Moreover, his proposal only stemmed from his will to stabilize and not modernize the Qing as he knew the urgency and the consequences if there were no meetings between the emperor and western diplomats: not only would western countries be offended but it would also lead to worsening relations.

Li saw this issue from a traditional Confucian Parentalism worldview and unconsciously "Confucianized" this issue of adopting more equal and modern approaches into a Confucian issue. Li then exploited this lack of definition for "barbarians" and used a smart trick to

change the status of foreigners from “barbarians” to “envoys from countries far away.” Li continued to argue that “this is a great change in thousands of years. Not only did our ancestors have no such rules.” Combined with the fact that one should adhere to the principle of *Ren* (Kindness), Li proposed that “It should be considered how to adapt to the situation, make temporary changes, and it is up to the emperor who decides on the ritual system.”⁷⁴ With this Li pointed out that not only was this change acceptable and legitimate as the ancient Sages made no rules about this situation but this change also adhered to the core principle of *Ren*. And by implementing this change, the emperor would be seen as a *Xiao* (Filial Piety) person who respects his ancestors by following their rules and not be taken as a sign of weakness and giving up the traditional culture, noting that “no one in the world and future generations dares to criticize it.”⁷⁵

However, Li’s arguments are far-fetched and weak, and many of his fellow officials, including his teacher Zeng Guofan, vehemently criticized and resisted Li’s proposal. They contended that “the kneeling ceremony is not only a custom of our ancestors but also a law of the Qing dynasty. If we violate it, we will be guilty of treason and disloyalty.”⁷⁶ They claimed that Li was contravening Confucian principles rather than adhering to them, fearing that Li’s proposal would pave the way for further concessions and humiliations by the West. Li’s proposal was eventually rejected by the de facto ruler Empress Cixi who ordered him to negotiate with the western diplomats on other matters.⁷⁷

The conservative nature and resistance to change of the imperial court can be attributed to the role of Parentalism in the Qing government. Even the slightest reforms, still within frameworks of Confucian Parentalism, would be censored and held up for question as

Parentalism placed China at the center of the world, giving all Chinese a self-sense of infinite pride, especially when dealing with “barbaric” foreigners. This pride and arrogance derived from “[China’s] long history as a civilized nation governed by ethical principles derived from Confucianism.”⁷⁸ Consequently, the Qing viewed “the peoples on their borders as barbarians who could be admitted into the Chinese world only if they accepted Chinese culture and acknowledged the emperor’s supremacy.”⁷⁹ However, even when Li provided the smart trick using the ideals of Confucianism to justify reform the conservative court still would not enforce the reform as blinded by the proud Confucian Parentalism tradition, they did not see the need to reform, especially when there was still a risk of losing their authority in the peoples’ minds. This suggests that the “deep structure” of this Confucian Parentalism worldview created by the Parentalism culture was so deeply integrated that even the most progressive reformers in the late Qing imperial court were not able to “escape” from it, let alone anti-reformists. This is the inherent cause of the inability to reform by the Qing imperial court: the deep integration and ability to resist foreign influence and changes in the Parentalism culture.

The deeply embedded Confucian Parentalism worldview also explains why most reforms undertaken by Li and the imperial court such as the Late Qing Reforms,⁸⁰ did not uptake any comprehensive sociopolitical changes and only, reluctantly under the pressure of foreign and internal wars and rebellions, attempted to enact small reforms towards stability. Li’s reforms did not challenge the authority of the emperor or the privileges of the gentry. He did not promote democracy or human rights for the common people. He did not question the validity or relevance of the Confucian classics or the civil service examinations. He did not encourage

innovation or creativity among his subordinates or students. He was content with copying or importing Western models and techniques without understanding or adapting them to China's specific needs and conditions. He was concerned with maintaining stability and order. Li, blinded by the Confucian Parentalism worldview, missed out on the most significant aspect of reform that could transform China into a modern powerhouse: a gradual sociopolitical shift away from the traditional Confucian Parentalism culture that hindered innovation, individuality, and progress. It can even be argued that all governmental reforms were doomed from the start as the goal of reformation of the Qing imperial court was simply impossible: to stabilize China with western institutions and technology while preserving Confucianism and Parentalism as the basis of the country. In other words, to reconcile the opposing individual-based, human rights institutions of the west with the conservative, collective-based, low-human rights mindsets of Qing China.

Entering the 1890s, things changed for Li. In 1896, Li embarked on a grand visit to Europe and America, which lasted for more than a year. He was invited by several countries, including Russia, Germany, Britain, France, and the United States. His main objectives were to seek allies against Japan, to learn from Western civilization, and to improve China's image and status in the world.⁸¹ Li was seventy-three—towards the end of his life—and encapsulates his change in attitude towards western technology and the lingering effect of his Confucian Parentalism worldview.

During his visits, Li openly praised many aspects of the West and when asked whether he favored the introduction of the newspaper into China as developed in the U.S. or Europe, Li's answer was stunningly honest: "There are newspapers in China, but the Chinese editors,

unfortunately, do not tell the truth. They do not, as your papers, tell 'the truth, whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'"⁸² Moreover, Li demonstrated a curious and excited attitude towards Western institutions such as the factory system, the police Force, and banking System.

Furthermore, during his visit to the United States, Li fought for the equal treatment of Chinese immigrants and workers using the western ideals of the spirit of contract, democracy, equality, human rights, cooperation, and diversity. He argued that the Chinese Exclusion Act⁸³ breached the Burlingame Treaty of 1868,⁸⁴ which established diplomatic relations and mutual immigration rights between China and the U.S., utilizing the ideal of the spirit of contract.⁸⁵ He also argued that the act discriminated against Chinese immigrants based on their race and nationality and that it was not in adherence to the principles of democracy, equality, and human right that the US upholds.⁸⁶ Moreover, he praised China as a rich and ancient country that was undergoing reforms and modernization, and he praised Chinese immigrants for their hard work and contributions to America's progress.⁸⁷

Li's visits showcase his drastic change from a conservative reformer arguing within the frameworks of Confucianism only for the stability and continuation of the Qing regime to a thoughtful, open, and reflective wise man who argues with the ideals of modernity and reflects on China with a critical lens. However, Li still exhibits lingering effects of Confucian Parentalism ideals as demonstrated by his complaints of "whenever a tragedy happens in the lower ranks, it should be concealed from the emperor"⁸⁸ to the Russian Prime minister during Li's visit to Russia, a representation of the officialdom's deception of the superiors and oppression of the inferiors. Li's claim suggests that sometimes he still views the world from a

traditional Confucian perspective in which pleasing and serving the emperor should be his goal as an official.

Li Hongzhang was a complex figure who embodied the dilemmas and challenges of China's modernization in the late Qing period. He was a conservative Confucian scholar who became a progressive reformer and diplomat. He was a loyal servant of the Qing Empire who sought to strengthen and preserve it, but also a pragmatic leader who recognized the need to learn from and cooperate with the West. He was a ruthless commander who massacred thousands of Taiping rebels, but also a benevolent governor who rebuilt and developed Jiangsu province. He was a visionary thinker who proposed the Self-Strengthening movement, but also a timid politician who failed to overcome the conservative opposition. He was a pioneer of China's industrialization and westernization, but also a prisoner of China's Confucian Parentalism culture and structure. Li Hongzhang's life and actions reveal the deep-rooted and pervasive influence of Confucian Parentalism in China's sociopolitical system. It is this "deep structure" which hindered the country's ability to reform and modernize. Li could not reconcile the conflicting demands of tradition and modernity, sovereignty and dignity, and peace and war. He could not achieve his goal of strengthening China through modernization without compromising its traditions.

Yung Wing and The Radical Reformers

While Li Hongzhang represented the traditional Confucian official who tried to modernize China within the frameworks of the Confucian Parentalism structure, Yung Wing represented the progressive Western-educated reformer who tried to westernize China by challenging the Qing government and replacing the Confucian mindset with radical Western

principles of individualism and freedom. This section will recount and analyze three events of Yung's life that illustrate his attempts to reform China through three pathways: inside the government, outside the government, and full-scale revolution.

Yung Wing was born in 1828 in a village near Macau, where he was exposed to Western missionaries and traders. He attended a missionary school in Macau, where he learned English and was exposed to Christianity.⁸⁹ In 1847, he was sponsored by an American missionary, Samuel Robbins Brown, to study in the United States.⁹⁰ He enrolled at Yale College in 1850, graduating in 1854, becoming the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university.⁹¹ Influenced by Western ideas of democracy, human rights, science, and religion, he developed a critical view of China's traditional culture and institutions.⁹²

After graduating from Yale, Yung Wing returned to China in 1855, hoping to serve his country and introduce Western civilization to his people. Yung's initial goal was to join the civil service, hoping to use his abilities and western ideals to reform China from within the Qing government.⁹³ However, he faced many challenges and setbacks in his bureaucratic career. He served as a secretary, translator, and comprador for various foreign employers in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, but encountered discrimination and resentment for his western ideals.⁹⁴ During his service, Yung proposed many reforms such as the establishment of a centralized banking system and the building of a national railroad system.⁹⁵ However, his ideas were dismissed and rejected by his conservative superiors.

Yung later wrote that "I thought I should try my best to use my limited knowledge, not for personal gain, but for the common good of my nation. I constantly changed and changed my profession just to test my endurance and how I can make myself a person who benefits

China.”⁹⁶ Yung’s quote reflects the plight of many young Chinese scholars who returned from their study abroad during the late Qing period such as Yan Fu⁹⁷ and Chen Duxiu.⁹⁸ Motivated by patriotism and a desire to contribute to China’s modernization, they faced marginalization and exclusion from the political sphere due to their western ideals that opposed the traditional Confucian Parentalism worldview. The Qing government was wary of the western values and concepts that these scholars brought back, fearing that they would undermine their authority and the Confucian tradition of Parentalism by promoting democracy and equality.⁹⁹ As a result, many were assigned to insignificant roles as translators and secretaries and denied the opportunity to present their westernized ideas in the government.

Undeterred by his previous failures, Yung Wing revised his strategy and launched the Chinese Educational Mission in 1872,¹⁰⁰ hoping to use education as a catalyst for modernization and progress within Chinese society. The mission’s goal was to send young Chinese boys to study in the United States for 15 years, where they would acquire a comprehensive education in science, engineering, law, medicine, and other fields.¹⁰¹ They would then return to China as leaders and experts who would help modernize their country. Yung Wing argued that education was the essential factor for China’s transformation and progress and that exposure to Western culture and values would expand their perspectives and motivate them to reform their own society.¹⁰² Yung’s strategy of seeking reform outside of the government was also adopted by many reformers in China, such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who initiated the Hundred Days’ Reform, a reform movement that aimed, among other things, to provide the young generation with a new education that would expose them to new ideas of modernity.¹⁰³

The Chinese Educational Mission was a remarkable reformation not only in the right direction but also radical enough if implemented on a larger scale. It has the potential to bring the comprehensive sociopolitical change China needed to modernize by opening many youngsters' minds to the western perspective. However, the Chinese Educational Mission faced many challenges and difficulties. It also encountered resistance and opposition from some conservative elements in the Qing government who feared that the students would become too westernized or rebellious or lose their loyalty to China.¹⁰⁴ Most people in both rural and urban China held indifferent or skeptical attitudes towards the program due to their Confucian Parentalism beliefs in consistency and hostile attitudes towards the western countries who pillaged and colonized China. They also treated his proposal as a threat to China's sovereignty, dignity, culture, and identity,¹⁰⁵ and accused Yung of being influenced by Western ideas and culture, and too obsequious to foreigners.¹⁰⁶

Empress Cixi swiftly terminated The Chinese Educational Mission with an imperial edict that ordered all students to return to China immediately.¹⁰⁷ She assigned the students to serve the Qing government in various roles, such as translators, teachers, and engineers.¹⁰⁸

Yung's Chinese Educational Mission reflects his and many of his fellow scholar reformer's Western liberal worldview. They can accurately identify the problem of China and proposed daring reforms that had the potential to modernize China. However, they did not see from a Confucian Parentalism perspective and comprehend what the traditional Confucian culture meant to the people of China. They did not understand that it was not feasible to persuade or even demonstrate to the conservative Chinese masses and the Qing court the values and necessity of his reform.

Despite the fact that Yung's Chinese Educational Mission only lasted 11 years,¹⁰⁹ it made a promising contribution to the sociopolitical modernization of the country many of the students who participated in the program later returned to China and played important roles in China's modern history, especially in the fields of diplomacy, politics, engineering, and education. For example, Liang Cheng served as China's minister to the United States from 1903 to 1907 and negotiated several treaties and agreements with the American government.¹¹⁰ Tang Shaoyi became China's first prime minister in 1912 and tried to establish a stable and democratic government.¹¹¹ The mission was a remarkable achievement that aimed to modernize China through Western education and to foster a new generation of leaders who could bridge the gap between China and the West.¹¹²

Yung was deeply grieved by the termination of his Chinese Educational Mission. However, Yung continued his efforts for the modernization of China. This time, Yung was convinced that only a full-scale revolution could save China and pave the way for true socio-political modernization. Yung was an ardent supporter of Sun Yat-Sen¹¹³ and helped him raise support and funds in Western countries.¹¹⁴

Most notable, was Yung's Red Dragon plan. Yung proposed the "Red Dragon-China" plan to Homer Lee and Bourne, two American military experts and adventurers.¹¹⁵ The plan aimed to support the revolutionary party led by Sun Yat-sen in the armed struggle against the Qing government, with a loan of 10 million US dollars, to buy weapons and train military officers.¹¹⁶ Yung also suggested establishing a provisional government and recruiting virtuous and talented people into the cabinet.¹¹⁷ He believed that China needed a radical reform based on Western principles of individualism and freedom.¹¹⁸

This time, everything seemed to go according to plan, and under the leadership of Sun Yatsen, the Xinhai Revolution erupted in 1911.¹¹⁹ Yung continued to support the revolution by providing advice to Sun and gathering support for the revolution in the US. Unfortunately, in 1912, Yung passed away and even on his death bed, his final wish was that his two sons could return to China to further serve the revolutionary cause.¹²⁰ The Xinhai Revolution was a significant step forward; however, it was still unable to accomplish the daunting task of sociopolitical mindset modernization of China. The revolution created the short-lived,¹²¹ democratic Republic of China and did shake up the Confucian Parentalism tradition a bit; however, as the revolution mostly happened in the urban regions, 90 percent of the population living in rural areas¹²² was barely affected and influenced by the revolutionary ideals of democracy and equality. Therefore, in 1915, with Yuan Shikai's self-proclamation as the emperor of China, China returned to a conservative, war-torn period of warlords.¹²³

Yung's third path of full-scale revolution was the ultimate solution that many scholar reformers resorted to after failing to reform within the Qing dynasty such as Yan Fu, Tan Sitong,¹²⁴ and Sun Yet-Sen. They hoped that with a full-scale revolution, they could establish a new country where the ideals of democracy, individualism, and equality would emerge. However, they neglected the fact that a socio-political transformation could not simply happen with a revolution; it needed to be the culmination of generations of transition, such as the Enlightenment in Europe. Most of those who supported the revolution did not do so for their hope of democracy and freedom but in despair of the Qing dynasty.¹²⁵ Driven by their Confucian Parentalism belief in the dynastic cycle,¹²⁶ they believed that the Qing has lost its mandate of heaven and by overthrowing the empire and replacing it with a new leadership,

they expected that it would bring economic and social stability to their lives.¹²⁷ The radical ideals of modernity, such as democracy and freedom, were things they were not accustomed to as they still viewed the world from a Confucian Parentalism perspective and saw the dynastic cycle as the normal and natural course of history.¹²⁸

Yung's life and deeds demonstrate how the paternalistic structure of the Qing society pervaded and constrained its capacity for reform and modernization. His radical reforms were met with resistance and incomprehension from the majority of the population who were accustomed to the traditional order. Yung's three paths also illustrate the predicament of the scholar reformers: regardless of their strategies, whether working within or outside the government or as a new country, they faced insurmountable challenges to transform China technologically and socio-politically in a short span of time. The underlying cause of this predicament was that the sociopolitical transformation of China had only been initiated by the influx of foreign ideas and, as in the case of the European Enlightenment, it required time to cultivate among the Chinese people a critical awareness and acceptance of modernization efforts.

Comparative Analysis

Yung Wing and Li Hongzhang were both prominent figures in China's modernization efforts, but they had different visions and strategies for China's modernization. Yung Wing wanted to westernize China by replacing its traditional mindset with Western principles of individualism and freedom. Li Hongzhang wanted to modernize China by adapting Western technology and institutions to fit its traditional Confucian ideals. Their disagreement illustrates the dilemma that China faced in reconciling its collective-centered Confucian traditions with western individual-centered mindsets in only a few decades. Their similar fate

of failure to push for comprehensive sociopolitical reform to overturn the Confucian Parentalism structure was somewhat destined. However, they did make promising progress and their reforms helped to push China along its path of sociopolitical modernization: their failures are not what they can and should be responsible for, nor other progressives in their era, but rather the task and responsibility of generations to transform the sociopolitical structure gradually at a natural pace, just as Li says towards the end of his life, “One generation can only do what one generation can do. This is not a problem that our generation can solve.”¹²⁹

To understand the challenges and possibilities of China’s technological and sociopolitical modernization, it is vital to compare its trajectory with that of other countries that underwent similar transitions and adaptations in the same historical period. This section will examine Japan, an Asian neighbor of China and a former acolyte of Chinese civilization, which achieved successful modernization by gradually transforming its political, social, and cultural structures and values over a long period. Japan’s modernization was facilitated by its ability to balance tradition and innovation with a leadership that welcomed modernization and western institutions. In contrast, China’s Confucian Parentalism structure was fundamentally opposed to western institutions and ideals, which hindered the empire’s acceptance and implementation of modernization. Moreover, the late Qing had only a few decades to attempt modernization, which was far less than the time needed for a successful and gradual technological and sociopolitical modernization.

Unlike China, Japan did not adopt a *Tianxia* worldview; instead, due to its status as an island country, Japan’s embraced an admiration for the strong culture, which helped it learn

from other civilizations and innovate.¹³⁰ Fueled by this culture to learn from the best, Japan, after being defeated by the Tang army in 663 AD,¹³¹ tried to adopt many aspects of Chinese civilization, such as the political system, culture, religion, and technology. However, Japan failed in creating a centralized Confucian Parentalism empire like China, because of its geography and regional clan powers.¹³² Consequently, Japan's political system changed to a shogunate,¹³³ where the military leaders ruled instead of the emperors, and its control was decentralized as the local leaders wielded the most power.

Like China, Japan adopted a policy of isolation and tried to bar out foreign influence until the nineteenth century, when it was forced to open by the American Commodore Matthew Perry.¹³⁴ Japan realized that it had fallen behind the West in industrialization and modernization and due to its admiration for the strong culture, Japan was determined to reform and launched the Meiji Restoration in 1868,¹³⁵ restoring the emperor's rule and modernizing its economy, society, military, education, and legal system. Like Yung's Chinese Educational Mission, Japan also implemented multiple programs to send Japanese overseas to study western institutions and technology. However, unlike the late Qing, the Meiji government valued these overseas scholars and granted with important positions within the government such as the revolutionary Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi. Combined with the fact that Japan had no centralized opposing conservative power, the restoration was a swift success as Japan embraced various Western models, such as Britain's constitutional monarchy and Germany's civil code.¹³⁶

Japan's technological modernization was rapid and successful.¹³⁷ It became a modern industrialized nation-state and an imperialist power that competed with other Western powers

in Asia. However, even though Japan successfully adopted Western technologies and institutions, it was still not fully modernized since it had not fully completed a sociopolitical mindset transformation like England did during the Enlightenment. It was only after World War II, with the forcible implementation of a democratic system by The United States and the economic growth of Japan that it started its sociopolitical transformation.¹³⁸

The aftermath of World War II saw Japan under the military occupation of the United States, which forcibly imposed a democratic system on Japan. The US also coerced Japan into embracing capitalism and renouncing its militaristic policies by adopting a pacifist constitution. Despite the rapid policy-level transition to a Western-style democracy within seven years, the sociopolitical mindset transformation of the Japanese people was a gradual process that paralleled its economic development and globalization.¹³⁹ Japan achieved remarkable economic recovery and growth after WW II, becoming one of the world's largest and most advanced economies.¹⁴⁰ According to the Modernization Theory, this economic progress also fostered a shift of values, which contributed to the evolution of the sociopolitical mindset of Japan.¹⁴¹ With the constant exposure to foreign people and ideals that globalization and capitalism brought, more Japanese learned and understood these ideals of modernity and, gradually, this sociopolitical modernization proceeded.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, the Meiji Era witnessed a remarkable transformation of Japan's technological and institutional capacities under a committed and centralized leadership that pursued modernization with vigor and vision.¹⁴³ In contrast, the late Qing dynasty suffered from a lack of reformist authority and power. Moreover, Japan's sociopolitical modernization

was carefully planned to preserve the traditional culture while innovating and embracing the ideals of modernity. Japan preserved its Shintoism, Bushido, and aesthetics as expressions of its culture and spirituality.¹⁴⁴ They also modified some aspects of Western models to suit their own conditions and preferences.

Qing also tried to combine Western institutions with traditional ideals; however, as stated previously, the two ideals were irreconcilable. The Qing were not willing to give up an inch of their own culture and power. For example, China tried to adopt a constitutional form of government that mimicked Japan's Meiji Constitution, but it did not grant any real power or rights to the people or the parliament.¹⁴⁵ It also tried to adopt Western science and technology, but it did not foster a spirit of innovation or inquiry among its scholars or students.

Just like Japan during the Meiji Restoration, China was able to modernize technologically after WW II with a dedicated and strong leadership that adapted the model of capitalism to China and embraced the ideals of new technology. However, China, who's Confucian Parentalism sociopolitical "deep structure" still lingers, lacks a sociopolitical modernization in a gradual "enlightenment" process.

Similar to Japan, China underwent a period of huge economic growth after embracing capitalism in the 1980s.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, China had some limited progress in adopting the ideals of modernity. During the 1980s, China's political system became more democratic and legalistic with the introduction of term limitations for top leaders,¹⁴⁷ direct elections in village committees,¹⁴⁸ and enhancement of the separation of power.¹⁴⁹ More importantly, sociopolitical mindset transformation was taking place in many Chinese during the 1980s, especially in the younger generation. Due to globalization and capitalism, many Chinese were

constantly exposed to foreign ideals and institutions and began to advocate for the implementation of these ideals such as freedom and democracy, as exemplified by the Tiananmen Square Incident. China's situation during the 1980s can be compared to Li's transformation from his conservative youth to his more open seventies. And, like Li in his seventies, China still needs more time and more exposure to the ideals of modernity to continue this process of enlightenment and sociopolitical modernization. Now, the Chinese people, especially the younger generation, have a crucial task to carry on this process of enlightenment and sociopolitical modernization.

Conclusion

Starting in the Zhou dynasty, the idea Legalist idea of centralized Parentalism was enhanced and systemized with Confucianism, creating the "deep structure" of Confucian Parentalism. Confucianism Parentalism became a tool for legitimizing and stabilizing the rule of successive dynasties, especially the Qing dynasty, which adopted Confucianism as the orthodox ideology and imposed it on every aspect of life. This modified Confucianism fostered a paternalistic culture that emphasized hierarchy, obedience, harmony, stability, and continuity in both society and politics. This culture was a set of values and norms "deep structure" that resisted any change or challenge to its authority.

This paper examined the influence of Confucian Parentalism culture on China's modernization efforts in the late Qing dynasty, using the life and actions of Li Hongzhang and Yung Wing as contrasting examples. It argued that Confucian Parentalism culture was a deeply ingrained and resistant "deep structure" that hindered China's ability to reform and

modernize itself, as it blinded the Chinese from the need for sociopolitical mindset modernization and prevented the acceptance of the ideals of modernity.

Chinese people need to critically examine the old traditions and ideals of Confucianism. Some Confucian doctrines, such as Parentalism, which are incompatible with the contemporary worldview, need to be replaced by ideals of individualism and freedom, which foster critical thinking and innovation, two characteristics essential for the people of China to not only improve their country but also contribute to the global community. It is imperative to acknowledge that these notions of modernity such as individualism are critical preconditions of innovation and modernization; however, it is vital not to idealize these ideas such as individualism and democracy. These ideals should not be espoused radically to the extent where they can also impede modernization endeavors such as extreme individualism which may lead to rationalized selfishness and self-serving progressivism or Eurocentrism which many European countries employed to justify colonialism.¹⁵⁰

On the other hand, some doctrines of Confucianism can be modified and reconciled with the ideals of modernity. For this, one can draw on the resources and insights of NeoConfucianism, which emerged during the Song dynasty as a response to the challenges posed by Buddhism and Daoism.¹⁵¹ For instance, the concept of *Li* (Rites), which currently connotes a rigid hierarchical order between individuals,¹⁵² can be reconciled with the modern notion of individualism to signify the respect between individuals and their uniqueness. And the concept of *Ren* (Humaneness), which currently denotes serving others, especially those above one,¹⁵³ can be combined with the modern notion of humanity to imply collaboration and mutual assistance.

This paper's arguments and implications are not only relevant for China's history but also for its present and future. China today is still a collective-centered country entrenched with conservative Confucian Parentalism values, which hinders its sociopolitical mindset modernization and development. China today is also facing various internal and external pressures that demand its transformation and adaptation. China has a gradual and complex process of enlightenment ahead of it, which requires not only time and patience, but also more young people learn about and reflect on China's recent past. China today is also aspiring to be a global leader and a responsible power, which entails responsibilities and obligations, calling for cooperation and communication. Therefore, this paper hopes to contribute to the understanding and dialogue between China and the world, as well as between China's past and future.

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