Fin-de-Siècle Diplomat: Chen Jitong (1852-1907) and Cosmopolitan Possibilities in the Late Qing World

by
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Abstract

This dissertation explores Sino-Western interactions in the late Qing period through a biographical study of the diplomat-writer Chen Jitong (1852-1907). A flamboyant writer and self-appointed cultural mediator between China and France, Chen published, while serving as secretary in the Chinese legation in Paris in the 1880s, several books in French on Chinese culture and society. He also became a skilled public speaker at various learned societies and international congresses. In the last years of his life, Chen returned to China as a reformer, expectant official, and newspaper editor. With a colorful transnational life and career that was nevertheless heavily rooted in the late Qing self-strengthening and reform movements, Chen Jitong offers an exemplary case study for viability of late imperial Chinese literati culture in the modern world.

Chapter 1 discusses the confluence of local literati culture and the opportunities opened for a generation of late-Qing cultural figures in the cosmopolitan environment surrounding the Fuzhou Navy Yard. Chapter 2 shows that in his writings, Chen employed an innovative mélange of classical Chinese texts and references to European literature to capture the uniqueness of Confucian values while also emphasizing the universality of human feelings and shared literary values. Chapter 3 analyzes the ways in which Chen’s public activities constituted a significant discursive and personal presence for China in fin-de-siècle Paris and at the 1889 Universal Expositions. Chapter 4 reconnects Chen to the late Qing milieu by retracing his involvement in a number of political and social projects upon his return to China.

In mapping out Chen Jitong’s experiences as a cultural mediator and as a literatus-reformer, this study seeks to connect the dots between various studies of late Qing
industrialization, social activism, cultural innovation, and political reform. It demonstrates that on the international stage, late Qing diplomats were highly conscious of their position not only as representatives of the Qing polity, but as bearers of Chinese civilization. Chen Jitong’s cross-cultural performance, in particular, is a reminder that the late nineteenth century was not only an age of imperialistic encroachment, but also a time of cosmopolitan encounters.

Advisors: William T. Rowe; Tobie Meyer-Fong
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Even before coming to Hopkins, I already had a sneaking suspicion, following a couple of thoroughly enjoyable telephone conversations, that Bill Rowe and Tobie Meyer-Fong would be wonderful advisors. Seven years later, I feel extremely fortunately to have learned so much from their guidance and example about Qing society and culture, rigorous scholarship and historical empathy, reflective thinking and precise writing, as well as intellectual autonomy and academic community. Along the way, I have frequently tried their patience, only to be repeatedly rewarded with generosity and encouragement. I will always think of Bill and Tobie not only as concerned mentors but also as dear friends.

I have also learned much from many other teachers at Hopkins. Todd Shepard and David Bell graciously allowed me to sit in on their French history seminars to acquire familiarity with a historiography outside of China studies but quite relevant to my dissertation. A field with Erin Chung gave me much useful grounding in scholarship on modern Japan. Peter Jelavich opened my mind with his insightful explications of social and cultural theory and was very kind when I found myself in a difficult situation. Joel Andreas’ seminar on contemporary China helped me understand better a subject I remain deeply concerned about. He, Kellee Tsai, Rebecca Brown, and Marta Hanson have provided great support to us graduate students in East Asian Studies. I hope Yuki Johnson can be reassured that I will continue to study Japanese in the near future.

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Beyond history or China studies, many friends, some of whom I have known for well over two decades, have sustained me over the past seven years. Without Naishan Chen’s delightful companionship and always sparkling originality during my first years of graduate school, there would not be nearly as many things in life that I continue to enjoy. Chen Zufang did much to spark my intellectual curiosity and bibliomania. No words of gratitude or affection could ever repay the generosity and forbearance with which they and Chen Yan gave me a sense of family and home in the Bay Area in those early years.

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飄洋過海, 凱旋歸來). Twenty-one years later, although I have often revisited Xi’an, I am still residing on the other side of the ocean. I am not sure if obtaining a doctoral degree is in any way a “triumph,” but I do wish that yeye understood that in some way, in my work and in my heart, I have already made many returns.

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Introduction

On a Sunday afternoon in April 1928, a young Chinese writer ambled along the quiet tree-lined boulevards in Shanghai’s French Concession, searching among the Western-style villas for the residence of one of his literary heroes. Narrating his walk by invoking the works of the major French cultural figures – Corneille, Molière, Massenet – after whom the streets in this area were named, Zhang Ruogu 張若谷 (1905-1960), a Catholic aesthete and one of the foremost advocates of Shanghai modernism, eventually arrived at the house of Zeng Pu 曾樸 (1872-1935), the doyen of the Francophile literary circle in Shanghai. A renowned novelist, pioneering translator of French literature, and the founder of the influential magazine Zhen Mei Shan 真美善, Zeng Pu and his son Zeng Xubai 曾虛白 (1895-1994) – whom Zhang called the “Dumas father and son of China” – had turned their home on 115 Rue de Massenet into a bookstore, a publishing house, and a cultural salon. Here, in an elegantly furnished living room in which French books were stacked along all four walls, Zeng hosted fellow writers and aspiring disciples like Zhang Ruogu, who came to pay homage to the master, to discuss French literature, and to receive their symbolic initiation into the world of Chinese Francophile letters.1

On the occasion of Zhang’s visit, Zeng Pu regaled his guest with tales of his foray into French literature. In 1895, Zeng had been sent to study French at the Translator’s College (Tongwenguan 同文館) in Beijing, a school that trained Qing translators and

diplomats, with the aim of becoming an official interpreter. However, Zeng found the environment at the school to be disappointing, for he soon realized that most of his classmates were bureaucrats from the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, the Qing office of foreign affairs, who came to class not to study, but to chitchat and drink tea. Zeng had tried to persevere in his studies through his independent reading and memorizing dictionaries, but it was not until he encountered and received guidance from a “General Chen Jitong” 陳季同將軍, that Zeng really began took serious interest in French literature.

As Zeng recalled in a publicly published letter, he had met Chen Jitong in Shanghai in 1898, at a farewell banquet for the Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898), who was about to leave for Beijing to participate in the court-centered reform movement. Zeng immediately got along with Chen, an old student of the Fujian Navy Yard School who had lived in France for many years and was extremely familiar with French literature. After their initial meeting, Chen Jitong began tutoring Zeng Pu in French literature, tirelessly introducing Zeng to the various writers and masterpieces of the classical, romantic, naturalist, and symbolist schools, in addition to historians, philosophers and other European works in French translation.

He also encouraged Zeng Pu to participate in “world literature” (shijie wenxue 世界文學) by eliminating barriers and avoiding misunderstandings not only through the

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3 Zeng Pu, “Zeng Xiansheng dashu 曾先生答書, in Hu Shi wenxun, 胡適文存, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1930), 709-719. Zeng Pu’s letter, a frequently cited source on Zeng’s relationship to Chen Jitong, was written as a response in an exchange on translation with Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), the educator and leader of the New Culture movement.
4 Zeng, “Zeng Xiansheng dashu,” 711-712. The list of French writers, poets, and philosophers that Chen supposedly discussed with Zeng included Rabelais, Ronsard, Racine, Molière, Pascal, Montaigne, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hugo, Vigny, Dumas père and fils, Michelet, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, Taine, Brunetiè re, France, Loti. Zeng also identified each writer with the specific genre of literature for which they were best known. While this incredibly systematic inventory of French literature between the 16th and 19th centuries leads one to wonders whether or not Zeng Pu has embellished his recollection of what he read with Chen, the thoroughness of the list is at least a testimony to the self-described disciple’s cultivated cosmopolitanism.
translation of Western literature to China, but also the export of Chinese literature to the outside world.⁵

Having read Zeng’s published letter prior to his visit, Zhang Ruogu was already familiar with the story of his host’s apprenticeship with Chen Jitong.⁶ In the course of their conversation, however, Zhang would learn a few more things about the legendary General Chen. After having been sent to France to study in his twenties, Zeng told Zhang, Chen Jitong had returned to China with a French wife and settled in the French Concessions in Shanghai. However, Chen soon fell in love with an English songstress who lived in the Hongkou district (in the International Settlement). After Chen’s wife found out about the affair, she confronted the mistress with a gun and challenged her to a duel. The matter was only settled through the mediation of family and friends. In another sensational anecdote Zeng shared with Zhang, Chen Jitong had been sent to Europe by the governor-general Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901) to purchase battleships for the Qing government. However, he squandered all of the funds in Paris and incited the wrath of the powerful official, who almost executed Chen. Yet through the intervention of many officials and personal guarantees, not only did Li let Chen off, but also gave him a monthly stipend to settle in Shanghai. Toward the end of his life, the talented Chen, who had written six books about China in France, was still living off royalties from his publications.⁷ After discussing other works of Zeng Pu, which included a translation of Victor Hugo’s Ruy Blas that was

⁶ Zhang, “Chuci jian Dongya bingfu,” 2.
dedicated to Chen Jitong, Zhang was sent off with a promise that he would be welcome to borrow, at any time, from Zeng’s enormous collection of two thousand French books.  

As a record of three generations of modern Chinese writers’ engagement with the Western culture, this encounter between two Shanghai Francophiles in the late 1920s – in which the almost mythical figure of “General Chen Jitong” plays a central role as a conduit to the world of French literature – both fascinates and confounds us. On the one hand, the accounts by Zeng Pu and Zhang Ruogu must be read with an awareness that both authors, master practitioners of the “urban exoticism” popular among Shanghai writers, were prone to romantic flourishes in connecting their city, the “Paris of the East,” to the French capital through imaginative Occidentalism. Their blend of historical reality and literary embellishment may be observed in Zeng’s thinly disguised version of Chen Jitong as a Shanghai dandy in the revised version of his famous roman à clef, the late Qing political novel Niehai hua 蛟海花 (Flower in a Sea of Retribution) and in Zhang’s inclusion of a translation of Chen’s French essay on Parisian cafés in his own volume, Yiguo qingdiao 異國情調 (Exotic Atmospheres). One might wonder what the “legendary bohemian and bon vivant” was really like, not in the literary portrayals by 1920s Shanghai writers but in his own time. What kind of French books did he write? If Chen wrote books about his own country, in which ways were his representations different from or similar to existing

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8 For Zeng’s dedication to Chen Jitong, see Xiao E 囧俄 [Victor Hugo], Lü bolan 呂伯蘭 [Ruy blas], trans. Dongya bingfu 東亞病夫 [Zeng Pu] (Shanghai: Zhenmeishan shudian, 1927).
10 Zhang Ruogu, “Bali de kafeiguan” 巴黎的咖啡館, in Yiguo qingdiao. I analyze Zeng’s fictional representation of Chen Jitong in chapter 4 of this dissertation.
Western images of China? How were Chen’s writings received by readers in Europe? What kind of public life did Chen Jitong lead as a writer in Paris?

On the other hand, these Republican writers’ stories about Chen Jitong also contain intriguing references to late Qing history and thus raise a different set of questions. One might ask, for example, how the Fuzhou Navy Yard, a key institution in the Qing Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895) could have played a role in fostering such a personality as Chen Jitong. Additionally, Zeng’s account suggests Chen had connections with both the most powerful official in late nineteenth-century China (Li Hongzhang) and one of the key figures in the 1898 reform movement (Tan Sitong). What kind of political positions did Chen Jitong hold in the late Qing? Could he have really gotten away with misspending government funds? Why would he have been entrusted with purchasing naval supplies from Europe in the place? Was Chen much more than just a flamboyant “returned student”? What might we learn about modern Chinese history if we learned more about Chen Jitong’s life?

This dissertation examines cross-cultural interactions between China and Europe and the reconfiguration of elite identities in the late Qing period through a cultural biography of the diplomat-writer Chen Jitong (1852-1907). A long-term secretary and sometime chargé d’affaires of the Chinese legation in Paris, Chen became a cultural celebrity as the author of several French-language books, such as *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*. With seven books published in French and translated into multiple Western languages, Chen was the most widely-read Chinese writer in late nineteenth-century Europe. Known as “General Tcheng Ki-Tong,” he also represented China as a public

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11 These books were: *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1884); *Le Théâtre des Chinois : Étude de mœurs comparées* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886); *Contes Chinois* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy,
speaker at various learned societies and international congresses in Paris, most notably during the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889. Yet he was also a Confucian man of letters whose intellectual orientation and public career were heavily rooted in late imperial Chinese literati culture and the self-strengthening and reform movements in the late Qing. Engaging with scholarship in both Chinese and French history as well as literary studies, this study offers a fresh look at late Qing history through the life and career of a critically situated individual whose immersion in and crossing between two cultures demonstrates a set of cosmopolitan possibilities not usually associated with a period that has been mostly identified with intensifying imperialism and rising nationalism. This dissertation shows that Chinese literati in this period were not only reformers and revolutionaries overwhelmed by a sense of crisis vis-à-vis the encroaching West, per conventional historiography, but also *performers* and cultural innovators who sought to present to the world, with a significant amount of confidence and idealism, their own image of China as a living empire and enduring civilization. In doing so, I hope to contribute to an ongoing reevaluation of late Qing China’s encounter with the West, particularly during the Self-Strengthening period prior to the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, as well as to studies of modern Chinese cosmopolitanism.

**New Trajectories in Late Qing History**

The period between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century has long been a classic field of study for China scholars. Working under the paradigm

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established by John King Fairbank, historians writing in the 1950s and 1960s sought to make sense of the “two great dramas” of China’s modern history: “first…the cultural confrontation between the expanding Western civilization of international trade and warfare, and the persistent Chinese civilization of agriculture and bureaucracy; second, arising out of the first, the fundamental transformation of China in the greatest of all revolutions.” Their findings resulted in a plethora of works along two general lines – institutional history and intellectual history – both of which have since been criticized as embodying problematic applications of modernization theory and the stagnant model of “Western-impact, Chinese response.” “Westernization” (or “response-impact”) and “modernization.” Between the late 1970s and 1990s, then, institutional and intellectual histories of the late Qing fell out of favor, while a “China-centered” social history approach and, later, a revisionist cultural history approach came to the fore as scholars in the China field debated new questions of how to conceptualize late imperial China. While the historiographical emphasis was placed on explaining indigenous patterns of local societal change, the period of focus has for the most part been the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, the late Qing period, and the great question of China’s modern encounter with the West became somewhat neglected.

In recent decades, the late Qing has made a comeback in English-language scholarship, with cultural and gender historians and literary scholars leading the way in reassessing the legacy of Chinese reformers and intellectuals’ engagement with the West.

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14 Paul Cohen, Discovering History in China, esp. chapter 1 and 2.
15 One might note that the Late Ch’ing volumes in The Cambridge History of China were published in 1978 and 1980.
in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an important essay, Mary Rankin calls attention to the coexistence of two prominent strands of sociopolitical and cultural change in the late Qing: “anxiety about foreign affairs and fascination with exotic material culture and life-ways.”\(^\text{16}\) Although much of Rankin’s essay focuses on the role of reform-minded journalists and editorialists in raising public awareness in the face of foreign crises, her recognition of the “ongoing reinterpretation of Chinese culture as people came in touch with global ideas and practices” and her emphasis on the important roles played by consumer culture, the publishing industry, and literary journals in this period represent a general acknowledgement of the work other scholars have published on these cultural aspects of the late Qing.

Many of these recent studies advance a revisionist argument against the static portrayals of the late Qing period fostered by the iconoclastic and nationalist rhetoric of the May Fourth and New Culture Movements. Studies of women’s history and writings and representations of gender by scholars such as Dorothy Ko, Hu Ying, Joan Judge, Nanxiu Qian, and Catherine Yeh have convincingly depicted the dynamism of shifting gender relations and female expressions and empowerment, especially through literary activities.\(^\text{17}\) By investigating the “intense interplay of ‘emergent’ and ‘residual’ forces” in

\(^{16}\) Mary Backus Rankin, “Alarming Crises/Enticing Possibilities: Political and Cultural Changes in Late Nineteenth-Century China,” *Late Imperial China* 29.1 (June 2008): 40.

these negotiations of women’s identities, these works have revealed the late Qing period to be “a moment remarkable for both its cultural productivity and its political and ideational instability.”

If the scholarship on women and gender in the late Qing has been fueled by a revisionist approach to fill the “interpretative space” left open by earlier binary models – partly as a legacy of late Qing reformist and May Fourth rhetoric and partly as a carryover from earlier historiographical paradigms – and to focus on the “diverse voices” of this period, a similar agenda has also been carried out by a number of literary scholars working on the same historiographical issues. In his fascinating analysis of late Qing fiction, David Der-wei Wang has revealed the “…nascent creativity that appeared within the Chinese literary tradition as it ran out of energy in the mid-nineteenth century…,” or what he terms “repressed modernities,” If Wang’s work is mostly concerned with “indigenous modernities,” Theodore Huters wrestles more explicitly with late Qing writers’ borrowing of “Western mirages,” in their attempts to “come to grips with a global understanding of China, its situation in the world, and its multiplicity of internal problems.”

The dynamic between dynastic decline and cultural creativity is evident in Jon Kowallis’ meticulous examination of late Qing poetry. Kowallis writes against conventional narratives of an “intrinsically moribund” genre to uncover classical poetry as a capable “vehicle to

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19 Qian et al., eds., Different Worlds of Discourse, 1-7.
21 Theodore Huters, Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 151.
22 Jon Eugene von Kowallis, The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the “Old Schools” during Late Qing and Early Republican China (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2006). On cultural creativity in times of imperial disintegration, see David Der-wei Wang and Shang Wei, eds, Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: From the Late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).
articulate a complex and sophisticated understanding of as well as reaction to the entry of modernity.”23 Demonstrating that many key late Qing poets were not writing in seclusion, but in fact under the patronage of leading political figures, such as Zhang Zhidong and Zeng Guofan, Kowallis has shown that by reaching into earlier aesthetic traditions, late Qing poets created vivid articulations about the present and successfully combined concerns for both the individual situation of the poet and the fate of the Qing state.24

These cultural, gender, and literary histories have greatly contributed to lifting the “burdens of the May Fourth Movement” and creating for the late Qing “the kind of historical space that has long been associated with the later New Culture / May Fourth period.”25 Yet for the most part their emphasis have remained on the period of deepened national crisis and intellectual transition (1895-1915), bookended, to a certain extent, by the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 and the onset of the New Culture Movement, and on personalities within China or East Asia. Even works on the late Qing intellectuals producing nationalist discourses against the onset of global modernity have mainly rested within these confines.26 On the other hand, when direct encounters between China and the West in the nineteenth century are studied, it has often been done through a postcolonial framework that places emphasis on the subtle workings of imperialism (mainly British)

24 Kowallis, The Subtle Revolution, 41.
and even on the role of semiotics in international relations. Only most recently have some historians returned to the period of Self-Strengthening (1861-1895) to restore to the Qing empire and its institutions and diplomats a greater level of agency in its late nineteenth-century dealings with the West.

Some of these reevaluations of the late Qing have forcefully argued for its own practices as a nineteenth-century empire. For example, Kirk Larsen’s reassessment of Qing policies in 1880s Korea argues that the Qing took on an imperialistic approach in handling Sino-Korean relations in the context of global competition. Motivated by commercial interests and making use of treaties, international law, and modern technology just like any other empire, the Qing pursued an “aggressive and interventionist course” on par with Japan and the Western powers and thus “played a fundamental role in Korea’s integration into regional and global political and economic systems.”

In a similar vein, Pär Cassel has reexamined the system of extraterritoriality using the framework of “legal pluralism” to argue that far from a hegemonic institution directly imposed on the Chinese by encroaching Western powers, extraterritoriality, characterized by the mixed court system and consular jurisdiction, not only had antecedents in earlier Manchu legal practices in administering different ethnic populations, but was also employed by Qing China in Japan as late as the 1890s. By arguing for the complexity and indeterminacy of extraterritoriality as a shifting practice in the nineteenth century, Cassel’s work, along with Larsen’s study, compels us to reconsider the perceived political strength of the late Qing empire.

In addition to sending officials to Korea and consuls to Japan, the Qing also sent diplomats and students to America and Europe. With recent reevaluations of these classic topics, we have finally moved to more nuanced considerations of human agency in Sino-Western interactions during the Self-Strengthening movement. In his recent history of the Chinese Education Mission in America, Edward Rhoads argues that the mission, which has conventionally been viewed as a failure, was actually rather successful in providing for the students “a vehicle of upward social mobility,” as returned students were assigned to self-strengthening enterprises, where many played key roles in China’s modernization. Late Qing missions abroad were also about cultural encounters with the West. In a recent dissertation on late Qing diplomats in Europe, Jenny Huangfu has convincingly illustrated the creative nature of the cultural negotiations that occurred when Qing envoys went abroad. As she argues, the diplomatic diaries kept by the Qing ambassadors were records of a multifaceted and prolonged “process of domestication, rationalization, and redefinition of the West” that involved continual observation and reconceptualization of the other.

It is my goal, with this study, to contribute to this lively ongoing reexamination of the processes and implications of Sino-Western encounters during the self-strengthening period (1861-1895). In studying the figure of Chen Jitong, I argue that we gain a fuller picture of these encounters and interactions only when we reconsider in a more detailed manner not only the reconceptualization of the Western other, but the Qing diplomat-writer’s reconfiguration of China and of the self. Building on previous studies of cultural

creativity and innovation in this period and taking into account that the strengthening of the late Qing empire would have given a Chinese diplomat in the 1870s and 1880s a sense of confidence on the world stage, I demonstrate, through an analysis of Chen Jitong’s construction of China and of his own persona as a cultural intermediary, that on the international stage, late Qing diplomats were highly conscious of their position not only as representatives of the Qing polity, but as bearers of Chinese civilization. Chen Jitong’s cross-cultural performance, in particular, is a reminder that the late nineteenth century was not only an age of imperialistic encroachment, but also a time of cosmopolitan encounters.

**Chinese Cosmopolitanisms**

Cosmopolitanism is a highly topical subject in recent scholarly debates, with studies using the concept in such wide applications as an ethical imperative in the new global age, as a necessary corrective against nationalism, and as a detached, aesthetic style of writing. 32 As Judith Walkowitz has insightfully pointed out, these academic explications usually treat cosmopolitanism as “an intellectual program” or as “a social and cultural experience.” 33 In studies of Chinese history and culture, discussions of cosmopolitanism have been applied in both instances, but generally concerning the idea of cultural mediation or accommodation between China and the West.

In his *Shanghai Modern*, for example, Leo Ou-fan Lee has argued for a modern Chinese cosmopolitanism based on the embrace of Western cultures by Chinese writers.


Lee describes the modernists in 1930s Shanghai as practitioners of a self-conscious cosmopolitanism, “an abiding curiosity in ‘looking out’ – locating oneself as a cultural mediator at the intersection between China and other parts of the world.”34 Taking a more critical stance, Shu-mei Shih has argued that the Western style practiced by the Chinese modernists, especially in urban Shanghai, was a type of “asymmetrical cosmopolitanism” reflective of the effects of cultural imperialism in the semi-colonial treaty port. Shih observes that Chinese cosmopolitans in the 1920s and 1930s, while often disregarding the racial and economic hierarchies imposed by the West or Japan in the colonies, were engaged in an imaginary dialogue with the “metropolitan West.” Their cosmopolitanism, therefore, was “very much a one-sided affair, with the Chinese gesticulating energetically without really getting seen or heard.” For Shih, Chinese Occidentalists embodied limited autonomy, because their cultural stance was “almost a copy of Orientalism in that it particularized Chinese culture as the locus of the past and endorsed the universal validity of Western culture.”35 Examining the English-language literary magazines edited and the social networks formed by Chinese intellectuals who have returned from the West, Shuang Shen has argued that even under semi-colonial conditions in 1930s Shanghai, it was possible for Chinese intellectuals to form “cosmopolitan publics” that were both empowering and self-limiting as a space of translation, encounter, and comparison.36

More recent scholarship in Qing history have also begun to make various uses of cosmopolitanism. Some have focused on the increased geographical and social mobility

in the era of High Qing prosperity. Johan Elverskog, for instance, has argued that the inter-ethnic encounters that took place through the exchange of commercial goods and religious pilgrimages during the eighteenth century was a form of “Qing cosmopolitanism” characterized by “the ability of the various peoples within the Manchu state to see, think and act beyond the local, be they Mongol, Tibetan, Manchu, or Chinese.”37 In a very different study, Minghui Hu applies the concept in a revisionist appraisal of Qing intellectual history, refuting May Fourth claims of Qing incompetence in technical subjects and arguing that “cosmopolitan Confucians” between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries played a significant role in reformulating classic learning to make room for an accommodated understanding of Jesuit astronomy and mathematics, thus paving the way for the future domestication of industrial science. Cosmopolitanism, in this context, stands for the adaptability of the Qing state and the technical adeptness of its literati-elite when confronted with a foreign body of knowledge.38 Almost picking up where Minghui Hu left off, Meng Yue reconceptualizes Chinese cosmopolitanism by bringing together displaced literati, translators, compradors and merchants as they sought refuge in the newly emerging city of Shanghai in the aftermath of the Taiping civil war that ravaged the Jiangnan region. In this new space, earlier forms of late imperial intellectual and urban culture such as eighteenth-century scholarship and Yangzhou entertainment “reemerged” as a set of “unruly practices” in Shanghai.39

39 Meng Yue, Shanghai and the Edges of Empires (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
In writing about Chinese cosmopolitanism, all of these scholars are either explicitly or implicitly engaging in a dialogue with the work of Joseph Levenson. As an intellectual historian primarily concerned with issues of Chinese culture and identity, Levenson increasingly saw the evolving nature of Chinese cosmopolitanism as a key to understanding in the transition from the late Qing empire to the modern nation-state, which he famously defined in his magisterial trilogy *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* as the shift from “culturalism” to “nationalism,” as Chinese intellectuals from *tianxia* 天下 to *guojia* 國家。Influenced by his earlier study of the reformer Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and his later research on Chinese translators of Western plays (Levenson called them the “bourgeois cosmopolitans” of Shanghai), Levenson conceived of modern Chinese intellectuals who were both nationalists and familiar with foreign culture as a group of new cosmopolitans, compared to whom the “lingering Confucianists, recalcitrant and traditionalistic, seemed provincial themselves.” When late imperial China seized to be a world in itself, characterized above all by the persistent reign of high Confucian culture, and as the late Qing empire struggled to become a nation-state on par with the encroaching West, the old cosmopolitanism faded, along with the “ruined pagodas” of the nineteenth century.

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40 Elverskog (2011) and Meng (2006) are the only works which do not cite Levenson.  
For Levenson, a prominent late Qing translator like Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921), expounding the theories of Western thinkers such as Montesquieu, Mill, Huxley, and Spencer, could only be a “reactor” and not an actor in the late nineteenth-century world because as his what “China lacked…was more than wealth and power, conventionally understood. It was power to launch a Yan Fu into universal significance.”

What we know about Chen Jitong suggests a different picture of Chinese cosmopolitanism in the late Qing era. In contrast to Levenson’s description of “Confucian sophisticates” of declining relevance, Chen was an actor, a performer on the world stage, whose popularity in the late nineteenth century suggests that he carried some universal significance. Unlike twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals who lived in the semi-colonial conditions of the treaty ports, Chen Jitong, a representative of a sovereign Qing empire in Europe, was both “seen and heard” by a global audience. Furthermore, Chen Jitong did not achieve his cosmopolitan state by renouncing his Confucian values. As we will see, Chen’s sense of self as a Qing Confucian literatus played a significant role in his literary production and in his public activities. And as a shrewd reader of European writings, he was also not so much of a self-Orientalist, as some scholars have suspected him of being.

In this study, I argue that Chen Jitong embodied a type of cosmopolitanism that was first and foremost about the willingness to recognize and appreciate another culture.
without letting go of the moral or aesthetic values in one’s own, and is furthermore characterized by the cultivated ability to internalize and deploy resources from multiple cultures in constructing one’s own identity. For late Qing Chinese elites dealing with the West, this meant being able to conceive of Chinese and Western culture as sharing some universal and humanistic traits. In Chen’s case, this shared civilizational bases was often to be found in literature and poetry, but also in his confidence in China’s self-strengthening, which utilized Western science and technology. In speaking of “cosmopolitan possibilities,” however, I am thinking of the cultural, social, and political conditions that enabled such a transcultural life such as Chen’s. In order to arrive at a such a life and to investigate facets of Chen’s world beyond existing studies, I have resorted to biography.

Writing a Life in the Late Qing World

While Chen Jitong has increasing gained scholarly attention in recent years, to date there are only a few article or chapter-length studies in English, and one monograph in Chinese on this figure. While Catherine Yeh uses Chen Jitong as an example in her study of the lifestyle of treaty-port intellectuals in late Qing Shanghai, her analysis is limited to the “transitional wenren” personality she imposes on Chen and the limited number of sources available to her.46 Nanxiu Qian has referenced the Chen brothers’ involvement in translation work and especially in the establishment of the Chinese girls’ school in Shanghai, but the focus of her work is primarily on the woman poet Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽 (1866-1911).47 In her recent book, Jing Tsu does devote a chapter to Chen Jitong, yet her

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46 Catherine Vance Yeh, “The Life-style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 57.2 (December 1997): 419-470.
47 Nanxiu Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms.” Modern China 29.4 (October 2003): 399-454; “Borrowing Foreign Mirrors and Candles to Illuminate
portrayal of Chen is also based on a limited number of primary sources (in either Chinese and French) and her attribution to Chen of the idea of “world literature” for China is largely informed by a theoretical framework and perhaps relies too much on a source not written by Chen, but by his student, the writer Zeng Pu. Since all of these works address Chen Jitong as only one aspect of their respective larger projects, they do not provide any thorough analysis of the entire body of Chen Jitong’s writings nor the broader contexts of Chen’s itinerant life and career, especially of his years in France. Li Huachuan’s study of Chen in Chinese is the only work that has used a large number of both Chinese and French sources in addressing both the late Qing context and especially Chen Jitong’s literary output in French. However, Li’s work lacks a discussion of the reception of Chen’s writings and person in Europe, an in-depth treatment of Chen’s public activities in France, and a nuanced consideration of the ways in which Chen Jitong’s political career and cultural production were influence by local historical contexts, whether in Fujian, Paris, or back in China.

By constructing my study of Chen Jitong as a biography, I make use of a wider variety of sources in Chinese and French, including archival material and newspapers, many of which have not been previously examined. The biographical genre, as David Nasaw recently suggested, allows for the study of an individual life and its historical setting by putting that singular subject’s multiple worlds and multiple identities in an interactive,

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48 Jing Tsu, Sound and Script in the Chinese Diaspora (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 112-143.

49 Li Huachuan 李華川. Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng 晚清一個外交官的文化歷程 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004).
dialectical relationship. In this way, biography-as-history has the methodological advantage of “transcending the theoretical divide between empiricist social history and linguistic-turn cultural history” by “reinserting individuals into their histories as signifiers and agents.” Following a biographical subject via multi-layered inquiry allows not only for insight into an individual’s multiple identities and cultural performance in time, but also sheds light on the context, the “larger cultural and social and even political processes” in an individual’s life. In tracing the multiple socio-cultural milieus and political processes in which Chen Jitong participated, I envision my project not only as a cultural or intellectual portrait of a fascinating transnational figure, but also as a study of the various historically specific conditions in late nineteenth-century China and France, which we might call “cosmopolitan possibilities,” that enabled Chen’s career and cultural production. These would include not only the opportunities opened up for a new generation of late Qing self-strengthening elites trained in Western languages and science but still grounded in Chinese culture, but also spaces such as the mass press in fin-de-siècle Paris, the 1889 Exposition Universelle and the international congresses held in conjunction with the world’s fair, all of which provided a place for the Qing diplomat-writer to represent China on the global stage. By especially detailing the Parisian context of Chen Jitong’s writing and public activities, my study also engages with recent scholarship on individual performativity, celebrities, and charismatic figures in fin-de-siècle French history.

Sources

One of the most challenging aspects in a biographical study of Chen Jitong is the lack of conventional materials such as a family genealogy or a nianpu (chronological biography), which have been lost prior to or during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In the absence of these standard sources, I rely on a wide range of primary materials, not only to reconstruct a narrative of Chen’s career, but also to elucidate both his own writings and the cultural and historical contexts in which he lived.

At the heart of this dissertation are Chen Jitong’s own writings, especially the eight books he published in France. In discussing Chen’s portrayal of China and Europe, his self-fashioning as a writer and the reception of Chen’s writings in France, I rely not only on the texts themselves but also compare different reviews of Chen’s publications that appeared in contemporary journals. In addition to these reviews, I have collected, from various periodicals and books, over 40 different essays, prefaces, and speeches that Chen published in late nineteenth-century Paris and China. Beyond these writings, which were publicly available at the time, I also make use of over 360 classical Chinese poems composed by Chen, which provide valuable biographical detail, shed light on Chen’s political and social networks, and, most importantly, add to the emotional depth necessary in understanding Chen Jitong as a Chinese reformer and man of letters in the late nineteenth century.


53 I have ascertained this from my own research and from conversations with Chen Shuping 陳書萍, Jitong’s great-granddaughter, as well as several local scholars in Fuzhou.
To locate Chen and his family within an indigenous literati cultural tradition and local elite networks, I employ a number of provincial and county-level gazetteers and specialized local histories, as well as imperial examination papers from Qing and Republican-era Fuzhou. Other useful sources that shed light on Chen’s personal networks and social and political activities include diaries, telegrams and correspondence, as well as the poetry collections of many prominent late Qing officials, diplomats, and intellectual figures such as Li Hongzhang, Zhang Zhidong, Guo Songtao, Xue Fucheng, Zheng Xiaoxu, and Yan Fu.

Since Chen Jitong was active, both as a diplomat-reformer and as a writer during the era of the mass press in France and the emergence of Chinese newspapers, I also consult a large number (more than 60 different titles) of late nineteenth and early twentieth century journals and periodicals. In French, these include mass dailies such as *Le Temps*, *La Presse*, and *Le Figaro*, literary magazines such as the *Revue des deux mondes*, as well as *L’Écho de Chine* (Zhong-Fa xinhui bao 中法新匯報), the French newspaper printed in late Qing Shanghai. Chinese periodicals I have consulted include the commercially printed newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, late Qing reform journals such as *Shiwu bao* 時務報 and *Qiushi bao* 求是報, the government paper *Nanyang guanbao* 南洋官報, as well as Republican-era magazines such as *Zhen Mei Shan* 真美善.

In analyzing Chen Jitong as a public speaker in France, I also use a large number of different publications by the various learned societies and international congresses that gathered in Paris, including, for instance, the bulletins of the Society of Commercial Geography, the International Congress of Popular Traditions, and the International
Congress of Ethnographic Sciences. These sources allow access not only to Chen’s own speeches on China, but also enable me to place these in the French and international context.

For some key yet elusive details concerning Chen Jitong’s early education as well as public career as a diplomat and reformer, I have also consulted a range of archival sources. These include: documents related to the late Qing Chinese education mission in Europe, political and commercial correspondence of the French consuls in China, as well as documents related to mining and missionary cases in late Qing China held in the Foreign Ministry Archives in Paris, France; memorials submitted by Chen Jitong in the Grand Council Chinese-language Palace Memorial copies (Junjichu Hanwen lufu zouzhe 軍機處漢文錄副奏摺) collection at the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing, China; as well as handwritten correspondence collected in the Sheng Xuanhuai Archives 盛宣懷檔案 at the Shanghai Library.

Together, these materials allow me not only to build a detailed biographical narrative of Chen Jitong’s life and career, but also to probe the broader significance of Chen’s cultural production, social networks, and political activities in three different historical contexts: as an adolescent and student in self-strengthening era Fuzhou (1852-1875), as a diplomat, writer, and cultural celebrity in fin-de-siècle Paris (1884-1891), and as a reform-minded newspaper editor and expectant official in and beyond late Qing Shanghai (1891-1907). This dissertation thus follow this spatial-chronological structure, with two chapters devoted to Paris and one each to Fuzhou and Shanghai.

In Chapter 1, “Roots,” I provide a narrative of Chen Jitong’s early years as a student in the Fuzhou Navy Yard and as a young diplomat in Europe in the late 1870s. By demonstrating the unique confluence of local literati culture, “Western learning,” and
opportunities to go abroad, I argue that although set upon an unorthodox career path, by attending a “foreign affairs” school, Chen (and a larger cohort of late Qing literati-reformers from Fuzhou) were nevertheless nurtured by a rich indigenous cultural environment, including poetry circles, Neo-Confucian scholarship, and local festivals, all of which formed a solid basis for his self-identification as a Chinese literatus, even as he engaged with the West in creative ways.

In Chapter 2, “Painting China with a French Brush,” I discuss Chen Jitong’s literary career in France following the Sino-French war of 1883-1885. I argue that in writing about Chinese society and customs in French, Chen Jitong was neither providing a straightforward, nationalistic defense of an essentialized “China” nor offering an “Orientalized” account that catered to his Western audience. In fact, by employing an innovative mélange of examples from Confucian norms, Chinese popular culture, classical Chinese poetry, as well as appropriations and references to classical European literature, the contemporary French mass press, and the works of Western writers and sinologists, Chen was able capture the Confucian values and popular rituals that characterized late imperial Chinese culture while also emphasizing the universality of such human feelings as love and the shared value of literature and poetry across cultures.

In Chapter 3, “The Boulevardier in the Purple Robe,” I turn to the public side of Chen Jitong’s activities in fin-de-siècle Paris. Placing the public fascination with Chen Jitong into context by engaging with the historiography on the mass press and the political scandals of Third Republic France, I show that much of the contemporary observations, reviews, and commentary on Chen Jitong were intertwined with two conflicting modes in which the French perceived the social changes and cultural innovations at the turn of the
century: the decadence of the fin-de-siècle and the “pleasures of the belle époque.” Meanwhile, Chen also extended his own self-fashioning as an orator and a cosmopolitan personality, especially during the period of the 1889 universal expositions held in Paris, delivering a series of speeches and lectures before a number of learned societies and international congresses. In analyzing Chen Jitong’s oration, I argue that as Chen actively participated in the shaping of the composite image of a sociable diplomat, a cultivated man of letters, and an eloquent public speaker, he also constituted a significant discursive and personal presence for China on the international stage.

For someone who had been away from China until the 1890s, the sheer breadth – if not always depth – of Chen’s involvement in various local and trans-regional instances of elite activism in the late Qing is quite remarkable. Chapter 4, “Homecoming,” focuses on the numerous activities in which Chen Jitong became involved following his return to China in 1891. I demonstrate that rather than retiring to the life of a “treaty-port man of letters,” Chen Jitong pursued a number of different social and political projects. While demonstrating Chen’s ubiquity on the late Qing scene, I also focus on an attempt to resuscitate a mine in Guizhou in collaboration with a French syndicate, a set of memorials Chen Jitong submitted to the throne, and the prominent role Chen played in a Jiangnan-gentry led Relief Association to rescue refugees from North China during the Boxer debacle of 1900. While bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of business experience hindered Chen Jitong’s ventures in the private sphere, and shifting political winds of the turn-of-the-century limited Chen’s achievements in official postings, Chen did contribute some ideas and energy to the expanding public realm in the late Qing.
In mapping out Chen Jitong’s experiences as a cultural mediator and as a literati-reformer, I seek to connect the dots between various studies of late Qing industrialization, social activism, cultural innovation, and political reform. Arguing against postcolonial interpretations, I show that Chen Jitong’s ability to navigate and mediate between cultures was a product not of “cultural imperialism” or some form of predetermined nationalism, but rather the manifestation of a genuine Chinese literati sensibility cultivated in local settings, a humanistic understanding of Western civilization, a very real sense of confidence on the part of self-strengthening elites in the late Qing period, and a set of favorable and open cultural conditions in fin-de-siècle Paris. To some degree, this sense of opportunity and atmosphere of international cooperation was only available for his cohort, an influential group of Fuzhou men of letters who came of age in the Tongzhi-Guangxu era. By the early twentieth century, their modern reform approaches and cosmopolitan experiences would come to be replaced by a new generation’s nationalism and radicalism.
In 1902, the French sinologist and historian Henri Cordier (1849-1925), writing in his three-volume history of China’s late nineteenth-century relations with the West, told the story of the downfall of “Tch’en Ki-t’ong,” a graduate of the Fuzhou Navy Yard who, after coming to France in 1876, came to occupy “such a great place in Parisian society.” Chased after by creditors and recalled by the Qing government in 1891, Chen, who was “remarkable intelligent, of agreeable manners, very kind, and spoke and wrote French with infinite spirit” had nevertheless been an impressive presence during his time in Paris. Noting that Chen “did not know his country except for what he had seen in Fuzhou and its surroundings, since he had never visited Beijing and the North of China, or the ports of Yangzhou,” Cordier declared confidently that it was true that Chen knew European manners better than Chinese customs.54

But was that really the case? Could the most prolific and well-known Chinese writer in late nineteenth-century Europe, who made his name through writing books and giving public speeches on Chinese society, really have had a weak understanding of his country? How well would Chen Jitong, who went to France for the first time at the age of twenty-four, have understood his “China,” that is to say, the society and polity of the Qing empire? What kind of cultural and intellectual immersion might Chen, who began studying French and engineering at the Fuzhou Navy Yard in his teenage years, have been exposed to? How might have family and friends formed a “local community of knowledge” for

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Chen as he negotiated the cultural and political worlds of fin-de-siècle France and, later, 1898 reform-era China?

In attempting to answer these questions, which speak not only to Chen Jitong’s personal experience but also to that of a generation of late Qing cultural elites who were exposed to the twin influences of “Western learning” through self-strengthening enterprises and local intellectual and social traditions, this chapter provides a narrative of the first thirty years of Chen’s life. While presenting a detailed biographical account of his childhood and adolescent years in the city of Fuzhou and at the Navy Yard, as well as his early experiences abroad, I seek to demonstrate that even as a youth set on an unorthodox career path by attending a “foreign affairs” school in the 1860s, Chen Jitong was never completely divorced from a rich local culture composed of a variety of influences, including poetry circles, Neo-Confucian scholarship, and traditional festivals. By providing biographical information on a number of Chen’s Fuzhou contemporaries, I also suggest that Chen belonged to a larger cohort of late Qing literati-reformers from Fuzhou who came of age during the Tongzhi-Guangxu era and who would form a loose social network during the last years of the Qing as they carried out their various political and cultural activities.

In building this narrative, I have made use of sources in Fuzhou history as well as some of Chen Jitong’s later writings in French, whenever applicable, not only for biographical information but also to show his familiarity with local cultural traditions. As I will argue throughout this study, contrary to Cordier’s supposition, there was more than a hint of the late Qing literati sensibility in Chen Jitong’s cultural performance in fin-de-
siècle Europe. To seek the roots of this personality, we must retrace Chen’s journey from the beginning, Fuzhou in the middle of the nineteenth century.

**Fuzhou, 1852 – 1867**

*An Atypical Treaty Port*

Of the five treaty-port cities in China established by the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, Fuzhou was the slowest to develop a significant foreign presence. One reason was the relative geographical inaccessibility of the Chinese city from the sea. With a population of around 700,000 to 1 million inhabitants in the late Qing, Fuzhou prefecture, which was divided into two counties, Minxian 閩縣 to the southeast and Houguan 侯官 to the northwest, was not a coastal port but a walled city positioned thirty-four miles from the mouth of the Min river and several miles from its north bank. Shallow waters made it next to impossible for foreign ships to enter the Min River beyond the Pagoda Anchorage *(Luoxingta 羅星塔)* at the Mawei 馬尾 harbor ten miles east of the city, from which the rest of the distance was covered only by local boats, each trip taking between two to four hours.\(^5^5\) Additionally, due to a combination of factors, including strong anti-foreign attitudes among the local population, which had never experienced occupation by Western forces, as well as initial lack of interest on the part of European merchants and diplomats, it was not until 1853, when the American firm Russell & Co. settled into the region, that foreign trade – mainly of the *wulong* tea produced in the Wuyi 武夷 mountains northwest

of Fuzhou – really began to develop. Even when the Americans took interest, other countries were slow to follow. It took the French until the spring of 1869 to relocate their consulate in Ningbo to Fuzhou, as part of an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to exert political influence and extraterritoriality over the Fuzhou Navy Yard.

As a result of these circumstances, the small community of foreigners in Fuzhou did not build a settlement or concession inside or adjacent the Chinese city but mostly settled on the south bank of the Min River, across from the Middle Islet (Zhongzhou 中洲) and connected to the city by the Bridge of Longevity (Wanshou qiao 萬壽橋). Even by the mid-1860s, the foreign population, including merchants, missionaries, and Chinese Maritime Customs employees, numbered not much more than one hundred. For local youth like Chen Jitong in 1860s Fuzhou, then, this limited Western presence was hardly an important element in their daily lives or in their learning.

An Intellectual Center

The relatively slow emergence of Western diplomatic, missionary, and merchant influence in Fuzhou did not mean that it was a peripheral or underdeveloped region in the mid-nineteenth-century. In comparison to other coastal trading ports such as Shanghai, Ningbo, and Amoy, Fuzhou actually stood out for its bureaucratic centrality, its vibrant intellectual and literary culture, and its reputation for producing scholar-officials.

As the major administrative center of the province of Fujian, the walled city of Fuzhou, surrounded by mountains of the Min valley, built around three scenic hills, and

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56 Doolittle, 19-20;
57 Leibo, Transferring Technology, 93-94.
58 Mayers et al., The Treaty Ports of China and Japan, 281-283.
lined by banyan trees, was not only the seat of the county (Houguan and Minxian) and prefectural (Fuzhou) governments but in fact hosted the governor of Fujian, the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, and a Manchu garrison general, who oversaw the garrison as well as the provincial Maritime customs service.\(^59\) Through these overlapping court-appointed officials, Fuzhou retained significant political and bureaucratic ties to the imperial center throughout the Qing period.

Since its status as provincial capital also meant that it was the location of the triennial provincial-level civil service examinations, Fuzhou was also a major hub of intellectual activity, a fact that impressed late Qing foreign residents such as the American missionary Justus Doolittle, who described the city as a “great literary center,” where six to eight thousand examination candidates would gather to compete for the juren degree.\(^60\) Indeed, throughout the Qing, Fuzhou was one of the locales that consistently performed extremely well in the civil service examinations and thus supplied generations of scholar-officials for the empire. According to the classic estimates by Ping-ti Ho, Fuzhou in the Qing period produced a total of 723 jinshi degree-holders, the third most of all prefectures in the empire; notably, 557 (approximately 77%) of these successful candidates were from the twin counties of Houguan and Minxian.\(^61\) In the provincial-level examinations, the performance of Fuzhou (again, Houguan and Minxian) candidates also far outstripped that of those from other Fujian counties, accounting for over 44.5% for all provincial juren degree-holders over the entire Qing period.\(^62\)

\(^60\) Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, vol. 1, 19.
Much of Fuzhou’s intellectual aura can be traced to the existence of several well-established traditional academies in the prefecture, among which the best-known and most influential was indisputably the Aofeng Academy (Aofeng shuyuan 鳳峰書院). Established in 1707 by Fujian governor and lixue 理學 scholar Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1651-1725), Aofeng was founded in an effort to celebrate and promote the study of Neo-Confucianism, especially the regional branch of Song Learning known as minxue 閩學. As a tribute to his intellectual idols, Zhang Boxing reprinted the collected writings of the leading Song lixue thinkers Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077) and dedicated a commemorative shrine to these figures, the Correcting and Upholding Hall (Zhengyi tang 正誼堂), on the site of the Aofeng Academy on Fuzhou’s “East Street” (dongjie 東街). Around the same time, the Kangxi emperor also viewed the establishment of classical academies in the recently pacified coastal regions of Fujian and Guangdong as a way to accommodate the local scholar-gentry and to align their interests, through the indoctrination of orthodox lixue, with that of the Qing imperium. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Aofeng Academy consistently received political and financial support from the Qing emperors as well as several of their most trusted and most powerful scholar-officials. A 1733 decree by the Yongzheng emperor made Aofeng one of the twenty-one imperially designated provincial academies throughout the empire,

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while the Qianlong emperor bestowed lavish funding and a tablet to the academy. 64 Meanwhile, prominent governors such as Zhang Boxing and Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696-1771), who shared an affinity for Cheng-Zhu lixue, patronized Aofeng and donated many books to the academy. 65

As for scholarship and instruction, successive directors and lecturers at the Aofeng Academy, mostly local Fuzhou scholars who had cordial relations with the provincial officials, emphasized not only moral cultivation but also practical studies, holding steadfastly to the tradition of Song Learning and its local manifestation as Minxue, despite an empire-wide turn toward Han Learning in the eighteenth century. During the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Aofeng experienced, under the directorship of Minxian scholar Zheng Guangce 鄭光策 (1759-1804), a reinvigorated emphasis on “statecraft” (jingshi 經世) studies and “practical learning” (shixue 實學). 66 This intellectual reorientation toward a practical curriculum that focused on questions of governance mirrored contemporaneous developments at prominent educational institutions such as the Yuelu Academy (Yuelu shuyuan 岳麓書院) in Hunan and, in turn, exerted a significant influence on notable Aofeng alumni such as the future imperial commissioner Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785-1850), a native of Houguan county who entered the academy in

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1798 and studied there for seven years. Though Chen Jitong was never to directly mention Aofeng in his writings, his praise of orthodox classical learning and the civil examinations reflect a belief in the general validity of this system and none of the skepticism or radicalism shown by later acquaintances like Kang Youwei. As we will see, in the Tongzhi restoration period, the years of Chen Jitong’s youth, provincial officials like Zuo Zongtang consciously emulated Aofeng’s exemplary combination of Neo-Confucian principles and statecraft studies in setting up new academies in the locality, thereby reinvigorating this local scholarly tradition and extending its ties to the late Qing polity.

Poets of West Lake

Apart from the local academies, another locus of literati activity in late Qing Fuzhou were the numerous poetry clubs that mushroomed as increasing numbers of examination candidates and degree-holders accumulated in the city over the years. One favorite meeting place for these local poets was the Seemingly There Hall (Wanzai tang 宛在堂), a three-chamber pavilion built near the Kaihua Monastery (Kaihua si 開化寺) at the center of the scenic West Lake (not to be mistaken for lake by the same name in Hangzhou), three li outside the west gate of Fuzhou city. First constructed in the Ming, Seemingly There Hall was restored in the Qianlong reign and again in the fourth year of the Daoguang

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67 Accounts of the famed imperial commissioner who ran the Daoguang era anti-Opium campaign usually note Lin’s intellectual association with scholars influenced by the New Text school, yet the combined emphasis on moral cultivation and jingshi at the Aofeng academy must also have played a role in Lin Zexu’s formation as a reform-minded official, much as a similar learning environment at the Yuelu Academy in Changsha had influenced his good friend, the statecraft thinker Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857). See Daniel McMahon, “The Yuelu Academy and Hunan’s Nineteenth-Century Turn toward Statecraft,” *Late Imperial China* 26.1 (June 2005): 72-109.
emperor by prominent scholar-officials to house a commemorative shrine for famous local writers and poets, as well as officials who contributed to the maintenance of West Lake.\textsuperscript{68}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig1.png}
\caption{Seeming There Hall on Fuzhou’s West Lake; from He Zhendai comp., \textit{Xihu zhi} (Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2001), 66-67.}
\end{figure}

During the Daoguang period, one local poetry circle that held its gatherings at the Seeming There Hall was the Flying Society (\textit{feishe} 飛社), which counted among its members such notable Fuzhou literati as the essayist and scholar Xie Zhangting 謝章鋌 (1820-1903), the Aofeng alumnus Zhang Jiliang 張際亮 (1799-1843), as well as Chen Jitong’s father and maternal uncles Liu Xiang 劉勷 (1836-1904) and Liu Shaogang 劉紹

\textsuperscript{68} He Zhendai 何振代, \textit{comp., Xihu zhi} 西湖志 [Gazetteer of West Lake]. 1916. (Reprint, Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2001), 185-188.
Little else is known of Chen’s father, Chen Xi 陈 锡 (?-?), except that he had been an expectant magistrate of an autonomous department (xuanyong zhilizhou zhizhou 選用直隸州知州). Among Chen Xi’s children, Chen Jitong (zi Jingru 敬如), born in 1852, appears to have been the fourth of five sons. His eldest brother, Botao 陈 伯 銓 (zi 友如, 1837?-1899), was an expectant sub-prefectural magistrate (houxuan tongzhi 候選同 知) and his second eldest brother, Zhonghu 仲 筱 (?-?), held the rank of expectant prefectural registrar (houxuan fujingli 候選府經歷). A younger brother, Shoupeng 壽 彭 (1857-1928?), who appears much more prominently in Jitong’s life and on the late Qing scene, would eventually pass the juren exams and come to hold a position in the Ministry of Posts and Communications (youchuan bu 郵傳部).71

While we do not know much about Chen Jitong’s father, we do have access to much more documentation on Jitong’s maternal uncles, Liu Xiang and Liu Shaogang, both of whom have their own biographical notices in the local gazetteers. Liu Xiang was a wealthy juren who had a public career quelling local bandits and running a local school in his home, while Liu Shaogang, who was from the same lineage, was at one time appointed as an auxiliary country magistrate (xianzuo 縣佐) in Guangdong, but was most well-known in

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69 Chen Qiang 陳鏘, Chen Ying 陳瑩, and Chen Hong 陳鴻, “Xianbi Xue gongren nianpu” 先妣薛恭人年譜, in Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽, Daiyunlou yiji 黛韻樓遺集, ed. Chen Shoupeng 陳壽彭 (Fuzhou: 1914), 5a. The name of Chen Jitong’s father is not mentioned in this source, a chronological biography of Jitong sister-in-law.
70 Thus far I have not turned up any more information on Chen Jitong’s father, having consulted such sources as local gazetteers and the Aofeng Academy gazetteers and essay collections.
71 Gu Tinglong 顧廷龍, ed., 清代硃卷集成, vol. 340 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1992), 83-89; See also Zhang Jie 張杰, Qingdai keju jiazu 清代科舉家族 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 134-138. From the middle character of the Chen brothers’ names, we can surmise that the family followed the traditional convention of assigning the terms bo, zhong, shu, ji 伯 仲 叔 季 (eldest, second eldest, third eldest, youngest) to successive siblings of the same gender. Thus Chen Jitong would have been the youngest of the first four sons in the Chen family. His younger brother, Shoupeng, was born several years later.
Fuzhou for his tenure as an administrator at the Fuzhou Navy Yard. As prominent members of the local gentry, both were part of a circle of central Min poets who rallied around the influential Xie Zhangting, a widely respected scholar from the neighboring county of Changle 長樂 known for his scholarship, who, while lecturing at Liu Xiang’s home school in the late 1850s and 1860s, headed another long-running poetry circle, the Gathering Red Pavilion Society (Juhongxie she 聚紅榭社), which specialized in *ci* 詞 poetry and seemed to carry over quite a few members from the Flying Society. As we will see, both uncles Liu would play supportive roles in Chen Jitong’s life and serve as important links between Chen and the local scholar-gentry community.

*Early Schooling*

What kind of childhood and primary education would a son from a local elite background have had? Without any extant family genealogy or chronological biography, we have access to very little information about Chen Jitong’s early years, aside from a rather sensationalized profile penned in 1891 by Henri Bryois, a French writer with whom Chen was closely acquainted. According to this account, Jitong was born a sickly child, afflicted with a hunched back and an incessant cough which so weakened the boy that, at the age of four, he could barely walk. The remedy, administered by a local woman healer, first required Chen to chew on large pieces of sugar cane, followed by a daily intake of tortoise blood; but soon a violent outbreak from the treatment kept the young Chen in bed
for two years. In the end, it was the application of charred and powdered cowhide, smeared all over the body, which cured Chen for good. While the illness had kept Chen at home, it could not keep him from learning. The house in which the boy lived was coincidentally situated across from a local school, so that even while confined in bed, the young patient was able to absorb elementary lessons he overhead through the window, such that he knew these by heart by the time he entered the school.\footnote{Henri Bryois, “Le général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” \textit{Revue illustrée}, April 1, 1891. If indeed this story is accurate, the only possible source would have been Chen Jitong himself. For a discussion of the connection between Bryois and Chen, see chapter 3.} While this narrative adheres to classic tropes of childhood precocity, that Chen Jitong had supplied the story in such a manner suggests his familiarity with the literary classics.

No more is recorded, in either French or Chinese sources, of Chen’s early education. Yet those years of primary learning were of great importance, for, as Chen Jitong noted in one of his last published pieces of writing, “in life one is most unlikely to forget the books one studied in one’s childhood.”\footnote{Chen Jitong, “Preface,” \textit{Xiaodi zhongyi tushuo 孝弟忠義圖說} (Nanjing: Jiangchu guanshu bianyiju, 1906); cited in Li Huachuan, \textit{Wanqing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng}, 235.} Fortunately, Chen himself did write an essay on early education in China and we might take his word as an indicator of the type of curriculum he could have followed as a child. According to Chen, schooling for Chinese boys usually began at the age of five or six (just when, according to the French story, he would have healed from the illness), when parents selected an auspicious day at the beginning of the year to send the child to a celebrated man of letters, from whom the child learned the \textit{Three Character Classic} (San zi jing 三字經), “which summarized Chinese history and the duties of men.” After studying this this primer, the student entered formal schooling and moved on to the \textit{Thousand Character Essay} (Qian zi wen 千字文) as well as the\footnote{Chen Jitong, “Preface,” \textit{Xiaodi zhongyi tushuo 孝弟忠義圖說} (Nanjing: Jiangchu guanshu bianyiju, 1906); cited in Li Huachuan, \textit{Wanqing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng}, 235.}
learning of writing. After these preliminary studies, students began more serious works—the “four classics of Confucius and Mencius and the five jing, or sacred books”—to be followed by works of history and literature while beginning to practice essay writing for the examinations.\textsuperscript{76}

Much of Chen’s description fits the normative pattern of primary schooling as practiced in late imperial Chinese scholar-gentry families, in which children’s education began at an early age and was oriented towards the mastery of the Confucian classics that led to success in the civil service examinations, the central objective of parental aspirations.\textsuperscript{77} Family instruction could at times begin at a very early age and be especially rigorous, as in the case of Chen Yan 陳衍 (1856-1937), a fellow Houguan native, who would later become Chen Jitong’s collaborator on the 1898 reform-era newspaper \textit{Qiushi bao} 求是報 and was one of the most well-known classical poets in the late Qing and early Republic. Chen Yan was given directed readings in the classics by his father beginning at the age of three and became such an adept student that by the age of thirteen he was able to hold his own in conversations with local scholars. As confirmation of his talents, young Chen Yan was recognized and praised as a “little friend” by none other than Jitong’s uncle, the poet Liu Xiang.\textsuperscript{78}

Beyond family schooling, some local youths in the Minhou region found private tutors with whom to continue their studies in adolescence. After attending a lineage school

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 208; Chen Shengji 陳聲暨 and Wang Zhen 王真, eds., \textit{Shiyi xiansheng nianpu 石遺先生年譜} (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 13-14, 24.
run by his uncle, Yan Fu, Chen’s future Fuzhou Navy Yard schoolmate, who was from the Cangxiazhou 蒼霞洲 district of same county, was introduced to a number of texts from both Song and Han Learning and led through more advanced works of the late Ming and early Qing thinkers by one Huang Zongyi 黃宗彝 (?-1865), a local poet and scholar who belonged in the same poetry circles as Xie Zhangting, Liu Xiang, and Liu Shaogang.79

Poetry, in Chen Jitong’s own experience, was also an important component of the elementary curriculum. As he recalled in the same essay on Chinese education, to encourage the development of students’ intelligence, teachers at the local school would assign daily verses of seven characters for the students to match with a parallel line of their own. One day at school, a classmate was given the following line: “The flexible body of the bee bends around a drop of dew on a flower.” The answer escaped the boy until he was at last inspired by a scene in the garden and responded with: “The oblique eye of the sparrow stealthily watches the caterpillar, curled up in a leaf.” The student was applauded by his classmates and rewarded by his teacher.80 In this vivid anecdote, Chen Jitong both highlighted the spontaneity of literary exercises and depicted the human warmth of the classroom atmosphere. Whether or not his childhood education in Fuzhou exactly followed the general pattern he later described or reached the same intellectual depths as those of his contemporaries Yan Fu and Chen Yan, Chen Jitong’s family background and subsequent writings suggest that before his teens he had developed a familiarity with the classic Confucian texts and historical works, along with a great affinity for classical poetry.

79 Benjamin Schwartz, In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West, 23-24; Max Ko-wu Huang, The Meaning of Freedom: Yan Fu and the Origins of Chinese Liberalism, 67-68. Huang Zongyi was particularly close to Xie Zhangting, the central figure of the central Min poetry circles; see Huang’s biographical notice in Minhou xianzhi, 72:14b-15a.
“A Buddhist Solemnity”

As much time as Fuzhou youths spent on their studies, the rigorous curriculum of the classics, history, poetry, and writing did not entirely monopolize their adolescent lives. Among the many other local activities that captured the time and attention of these students were the numerous religious spectacles and folk festivities held throughout the region, especially on traditional holidays. Chen Jitong would later write much about the local manifestations of these festivals—such as the Dragon Boat Festival, the lunar New Year, and the procession of local gods—in his book about Chinese everyday life and popular culture in *Les Plaisirs en Chine* (1890). One instance, however, stands out, as it is specifically dated to Chen’s childhood years.

When he was nine years old, Chen Jitong’s father brought him along to a Buddhist ceremony. As Jitong recalled:

“It was a very pleasant afternoon. After having crossed fields bordered with tall trees and where the sound of crickets could be heard on all sides, we entered into a wood, in the middle of which stood a monastery. The priests gave us a warm welcome and told me that never had someone my age been present at the festival…We were first invited to take in a vegetarian meal, consisting of bamboo shoots, salted vegetables, and a purée of beans, all which seemed delicious to me.”

Father and son were then invited to observe the dinner of the priests, which took place in complete silence, except for a few prayers. Jitong then attempted, without success and against his father’s reprimand, to engage some meditating monks in conversation. Afterward, he and his father observed an ordination ceremony, which began with the

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81 See chapter 2, “Painting China with a French Brush.”
82 Tcheng Ki-Tong, “Une solennité bouddhiste” [A Buddhist solemnity], *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, 77-78. Since the Buddha Bathing festival takes place on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month of each year, Chen would have been recalling this episode from either May 28, 1860 or May 17, 1861, depending on whether or not he used the Chinese convention of *sui* in dating his own age.
recitation of prayers and the singing of hymns, followed by the chief priest pouring water over the a small statue of Buddha, an act accompanied by musical instruments. Finally, around midnight, a group of novice monks kneeled in the great hall of the monastery to receive tonsure. As a child, Chen Jitong remembered being disturbed by the sight of burning scalps and the apparent fanaticism of the meditating monks. However, his mind was changed when sometime later one of the Buddhist priests came to his home to have a leisurely visit with his father and enjoyed the meat dishes that were served, telling the young Chen that “Buddha is so kind that he does not pay attention to such minor details.”

Combining a general description of the religious ceremony with vivid details culled from personal memory and presented through the innocent eyes of a child, Chen Jitong has illustrated here the Buddha Bathing Festival (yufo jie 浴佛节), which was celebrated and patronized by many Chinese elites at the monasteries in late Qing Fuzhou. We also learn through this account that his father was a friendly patron of the Buddhist monasteries, which once again situates among the local gentry.

Although Chen Jitong’s father was evidently still living in the early 1860s, he (and perhaps his wife, if she had not already died) would soon pass away, as both Chen’s biography in the local gazetteers and Chen’s own writings indicate that he became an orphan at a young age. After the death of their parents, Chen Jitong and his younger brother Shoupeng were brought up by their elder brother and his wife, Madame Ye 葉氏,

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85 *Fujian tongzhi*, 69a. In dedicating his translation of *Liaozhai zhiyi* to his brother, Chen noted that they had lost their parents at a young age. See Tcheng Ki-Tong, *Contes chinois* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1889), i.
whose care Chen would recall lovingly many years later. However, as in the case of his Houguan peer Yan Fu, the death of Chen’s father probably meant the family could no longer support Chen’s studies and that his preparation for the civil service examinations would be cut short. It was at this point that Chen Jitong found the entrance to an alternative career path in the newly established Fuzhou Navy Yard.

**Mawei, 1868 – 1875**

*The Fuzhou Navy Yard*

One of the landmark institutions of the late Qing Self-Strengthening movement, the Fuzhou Navy Yard was established in 1866 at the initiative of Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885), then governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang. As one of the scholar-generals who rose to prominence in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion and as a great admirer of his fellow Hunanese, the statecraft thinker Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857), Zuo had long been invested in the idea of building a modern Chinese navy as a means of restoring the Qing empire. Having collaborated with a Franco-Chinese corps during his anti-Taiping campaigns in Zhejiang, Zuo felt confident enough in French personnel and technology to sign a detailed contract with two French naval officers, Prosper François Marie Giquel (1835-1886) and Paul-Alexandre Neveu d’Aiguebelle (1831-1875). In exchange for lucrative compensation for themselves as well as a generous base of funds used to hire

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French and English engineers and instructors and to purchase raw materials, Giquel and d’Aiguebelle, who were appointed the foreign director and assistant director of the Navy Yard, promised to build in five years a fully functioning shipyard at the Mawei harbor near Fuzhou and to establish a school for training Chinese naval construction foremen, engineers and ship captains.  

The industrial and technological aspects of the Fuzhou Navy Yard and contemporaneous Self-Strengthening institutions such as the Jiangnan Arsenal (established in Shanghai by Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 and Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 in 1865) have been thoroughly studied by many scholars of the late Qing. While an earlier wave of historiography sought an explanation for China’s loss in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 in the inadequacies of the self-strengthening projects, studies since the 1980s, focusing on modernization and technology transfer, have tended to recognize the numerous achievements made in these late Qing military-industrial complexes.  

David Pong, for instance, has noted that the unprecedented scale of the operations at the Fuzhou Navy Yard compared favorably to that of the Yokosuka Naval Yard in Japan and that the quality of

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the first vessels produced at Mawei also impressed a number of European observers.\textsuperscript{90} Beyond assessing the industrial and technological achievements, more recent reflections by Benjamin Elman also demonstrate that, more than anything else, it was the “failure narrative,” pushed to the fore by the Qing defeat in the Sino-Japanese war, which has colored views of the significant scientific and technological innovations in the Qing government arsenals in the 1860s-1880s.\textsuperscript{91}

The significance of the Fuzhou Navy Yard for late Qing history also extends beyond its industrial production to its training of a generation of new-style elites. Most studies of the Navy Yard recognize the achievement of its schools, which not only trained students in naval engineering and navigation, but also sent several groups to Europe in several educational missions in the 1870s-1880s. The Fuzhou Navy Yard is thus credited with producing a number of engineers, naval talent, and “technocrats” in the waning years of the Qing.\textsuperscript{92} But beyond its technical education, the Navy Yard school also stood out among its peers, such as the College of Translators (\textit{Tongwen’guan} 同文館) in Beijing and the School for the Diffusion of Languages (\textit{Guang fangyan guan} 廣方言館) at the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, for being grounded in the rich local cultural and intellectual environment of nineteenth-century Fuzhou. This last factor offered for its local students a continued attachment to Chinese learning and literati networks and contributed to the emergence of a loose cohort of Fuzhou literati-reformers, intellectuals, and writers, who were extremely active and influential cultural producers in the late Qing period.

\textsuperscript{90} Pong, \textit{Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization}, 221-223, 240-241.
\textsuperscript{91} Elman, “Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China’s Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865-1895.” See also the same author’s \textit{On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 355-195.
\textsuperscript{92} Lin Qingyuan, \textit{Fujian chuanzhengju shigao}, 447-462.
In terms of mediators between Chinese and Western cultures, the most notable and well-known among this group were the translators Yan Fu and Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), a native of Minxian who was assisted by many Navy Yard graduates in his popular renderings of nineteenth-century Western fiction. Yet if Yan and Lin came to prominence only after the 1895 shock of the Sino-Japanese war, it was Chen Jitong, whose major literary output, in French, was published in the mid-to-late 1880s, who first exemplified the unique blend of hybrid cultural influences set in motion by the educational program at the Fuzhou Navy Yard. A brief overview of the establishment of the Navy Yard and its recruitment and curriculum, supplemented by Chen’s own writings, allows for a sense of both Jitong’s personal experience as a student and the different ways in which the technical school co-existed with the local cultural and intellectual community.

Local Connections

While taking the initiative in establishing a “modern school” that taught Western languages and technical competence in the new naval industry, Zuo Zongtang was hardly turning his back on Confucian traditions. In fact, in as much as Zuo’s overall aim, shared with other leading provincial officials in the post-Taiping era, was to reconstruct a stable empire operating on restored Confucian values, his education projects in Fuzhou were consistent with these goals. As Suzanne Wilson Barnett has argued, late Qing Fuzhou saw not only the rise of the Navy Yard but also the restoration and establishment of a number of local classical academies, which offered a practical curriculum with a statecraft

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93 For the classic treatment of these post-Taiping reconstruction efforts, see Mary Clabaugh Wright, The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).
emphasis. Among these was the Zhengyi Academy (Zhengyi shuyuan 正誼書院), which was established in 1866 by Zuo Zongtang, who took the name of the school from the shrine for Neo-Confucian thinkers at the Aofeng Academy, which Zuo also helped restore around this time. While advocating Neo-Confucian principles and reprinting Zhang Boxing’s anthologies, Zuo also intended for this new academy to complement the Navy Yard school by offering concomitant entrance examinations, so that talented (and virtuous and upright) youth could be identified for recommendation to the new self-strengthening school. This combined revival of classical learning and practical studies, a process which Barnett calls “public ordering,” continued with the 1871 establishment of the Zhiyong Academy (Zhiyong shuyuan 致用書院), whose name, meaning “practical application,” was borrowed from a library at the Aofeng Academy. The curriculum at Zhiyong placed an emphasis on “interpreting the classics to govern affairs” (jingyi zhishi 經義治事), again reflecting a statecraft outlook. Notably, this emphasis on practical learning was also applied to the Navy Yard, as Zuo Zongtang initially named the new school there the Qiushitang yiju 求是堂藝局 (The Technical Institute of the Hall for Seeking Truth). Years later, Chen Jitong would again use the term Qiushi (Seeking the Truth) for his

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95 Suzanne Wilson Barnett, “Foochow’s Academies: Public Ordering and Expanding Education in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 526-527. Notably, Zuo was also a key proponent of classical academies in the Jiangnan region in the late Qing. See Barry C. Keenan, Imperial China’s Last Classical Academies: Social Change in the Lower Yangzi, 1864-1911 (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1994).
96 Barnett, “Foochow’s Academies,” 530-531.
Shanghai newspaper, perhaps as a symbolic nod to this statecraft tradition and to his alma mater.

Zuo Zongtang’s commitment to moral leadership for the self-strengthening projects was also reflected in his choice of successor in administering the Navy Yard. Ordered away by the throne in September 1866 to suppress the Muslim rebellion in the Northwest, Zuo nominated the former governor of Jiangxi, Shen Baozhen 沈葆楨 (1820-1879) to become the first imperially appointed director-general of the Fuzhou Navy Yard. This was an astute and significant decision, for Shen Baozhen was not only an accomplished scholar-official, a holder of the jinshi degree who had gained a solid reputation as a capable civil administrator and provincial official during the Taiping rebellion, but also a native of Houguan and easily the most prominent member of the local gentry in 1860s-70s Fuzhou. At the national level, Shen was also known for being unafraid to take a firm stance against foreigners, as he had shown in negotiations with French missionaries in Nanchang in 1860. At the local level, Shen was widely known and admired as a filial son and was indeed in retirement and attending to his father at the time the Navy Yard was founded. In addition to all of these credentials, Shen was also the son-in-law of the illustrious Lin Zexu, whose moral rectitude and resolute confrontation with foreigners had made him one of Zuo Zongtang’s role models.98 The appointment of Shen Baozhen as the chief administrator of the Navy Yard not only lifted the national profile of the enterprise, but also ensured the

support of and continuing ties, socially and culturally, to the local scholar-gentry community.\textsuperscript{99}

\textit{Recruitment and Regulations}

From the outset of his administrative tenure, Shen Baozhen was deeply committed to the school at the Navy Yard, attending to its affairs even prior to the end of his mourning period. Calling the schools the foundation of the entire enterprise, Shen fostered the ideal of cultivating a “new, modernizing elite out of the scholar-gentry class,” who were adept at the new technologies imported from the West but nevertheless held fast, as he did, onto core Confucian values.\textsuperscript{100} Such a fervent commitment to ethics was demonstrated in the recruitment process of the incoming classes of students, most of whom were selected from poor scholar-gentry families in the Fuzhou region or from merchant families in Guangdong.

As is often mentioned in studies of Yan Fu, the essay topic for the entrance exam for the first class of students was “Life-long filial devotion to One’s Parents.”\textsuperscript{101} It was important for the Qing’s future navy captains and steamship engineers to be good Confucians. Beyond the entrance examination, local candidates were also required to find a guarantor from a member of the gentry. Despite being orphaned, Chen Jitong was able to fulfill this requirement because his maternal uncle Liu Shaogang, the local poet, happened to be working for Shen Baozhen at the Navy Yard.\textsuperscript{102} In fact, as Chen’s French

\textsuperscript{99} As David Pong points out, despite his Fuzhou provenance, Shen’s tenure as director-general did not violate the customary “rule of avoidance” because the Navy Yard, as one of the new “bureaus” (ju) established in the Tongzhi restoration period, did not belong to the regular Qing administrative structure.
\textsuperscript{100} Pong, \textit{Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization}, 226-227, 318.
\textsuperscript{101} Schwartz, \textit{In Search of Wealth and Power}, 26-27.
\textsuperscript{102} This was a problematic requirement for some students from struggling families. Yan Fu, for instance, had some difficulties in convincing an uncle from his lineage to serve as his guarantor. See Pi Houfeng 皮后锋, \textit{Yan Fu dazhuan 严复大传} (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2003), 19-20.
biographer suggests, it may be Liu Shaogang who informed Jitong of the entrance exams in the first place. In any case, sometime between April 1868 and early 1869, Jitong entered the School of Naval Construction, the main French school established to train engineers.

As students at the Navy Yard school, Chen Jitong and his peers were subjected to a strict set of regulations, originally drawn up by Zuo Zongtang and to which Shen Baozhen closely adhered. Students were forbidden from outdoor activities, followed a regimented daily schedule, examined every three months, and supervised by Chinese gentry-administrators appointed by Shen. In addition to enforcing these regulations, Shen was adamant in instilling orthodox Confucian values, both for disciplining the students and for securing the support of the local gentry. He refused to compromise when Prosper Giquel proposed giving the students a month-long summer holiday, but insisted on granting mourning periods of one hundred days. Furthermore, Shen determined that students were to study daily the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Sacred Edicts* of the Kangxi emperor, in addition to practicing essay writing (*cilun 策論*) in Chinese.

While scholars generally cite these last requirements as evidence of the continuity of “Chinese learning” at the Navy Yard, it should be noted that these routines were not the only elements of the Navy Yard students’ lives that helped them remain integrated with Chinese society and values. To begin with, although students were granted leave on only

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a few holidays, they would have not only gone to see their families in Fuzhou but also have participated in the many local festivities and lineage activities on these occasions. The Dragon Boat Festival, for instance, was a time when Fuzhou residents traditionally gathered for ancestral sacrifice and a family feast in which everyone drank orpiment wine (cihuang jiu 雌黃酒) to help fend off epidemics, and went either to the Min River or to West Lake to watch the boat races. The Chinese holidays, then, were not only time away from the European language and technical instruction at the Navy Yard, but routinized periods of re-immersion in Fuzhou’s sociocultural milieu and of participation in the festivities and rituals of the local community.

In addition to these regular holidays and the official mourning periods, there is evidence that some local Fuzhou students took time off from the Navy Yard for a variety of reasons related to family matters and local conventions. As one English visitor to the Navy Yard noted in 1871, students were frequently absent from the schools for periods of up to two months, in order “to attend some ceremony connected with family affairs.” Such occasions might have included funerals of family members, lineage rituals, as well as marriages, for many of the young men who had entered the school in its first years were approaching their late teens and early twenties.

This last scenario would have been the case for Chen Jitong around 1871, when he married a local woman from the Liu family (劉氏). Little is known of the bride’s family.

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108 For a detailed discussion of Chen Jitong’s writing on Chinese holidays and festivals, see chapter 3.
110 In a nostalgic poem he composed in 1896 after observing a local wedding in Guizhou, Chen wrote: “On my wedding day twenty-five years ago / the bamboo palanquin moved alongside the colored palanquin / The beauty has long since passed away / How could I not be moved by this scene?” (My translation) For the original poem, see Chen Jitong, “Xiao fa Huangping” 暗發黃平 [Leaving Huangping at dawn], in *Xue Jia Yin*, 55. See also Qian Nanxiu’s discussion of Chen’s family and marriage in her preface to this volume.
background, but it would not have been entirely impossible for Madame Liu to have come from the same lineage as Chen’s maternal uncles or even for Chen to have entered into an uxorilocal marriage, which was not an uncommon practice in late imperial Fuzhou.\footnote{Michael Szonyi, \textit{Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 38-39.}

Kinship and marriage provided yet another link between Navy Yard students and the local community.

\textit{The School of Naval Construction}

For all of the ways in which Navy Yard students remained integrated with local culture, they did spend the majority of the year learning Western subjects. The schools at Mawei were divided into English and French sections, with the former emphasizing naval navigation and the latter engineering. Chen Jitong was enrolled in the School of Naval Construction, which had as its declared objective “to put it in the power of the pupils to explain to themselves, by the help of reasoning and calculation, the function, the dimensions, and the part played by different parts of an engine, in such a way as to be able to design and reproduce one of its detached members, and…to calculate, to design, and to trace…the hull of a wooden ship…”\footnote{Prosper Giquel, \textit{The Foochow Arsenal, and Its Results}, 18.}

In order to reach this goal of training competent engineers, its curriculum was divided into three parts: language, theoretical/scientific courses, and practical training. Students were first required to become proficient in French in order to understand the textbooks and terms being employed in their coursework. This seems to have been a challenging task, for, unlike some of the Guangdong students who already had some degree
of familiarity with English, most local youths entering the school had never studied a foreign language. As an example of these preliminary difficulties, a later French profile of Chen Jitong describes the young man’s struggles with the pronunciation of successive consonants, such as *bl* in the word “blanc.”\(^{113}\) Although this may be a dramatized account, it does evoke a sympathetic understanding of the Navy Yard students’ first encounters with the Western languages, the mastery of which would be central to their status as a new generation of foreign-trained technical experts, and in the case of Chen Jitong and Yan Fu, their careers as cultural mediators. To aid the students in their efforts, the dedicated French superintendent Prosper Giquel eventually devised a comprehensive French-Chinese dictionary of technical and related terms used in the school’s curriculum.\(^{114}\)

Following the period of language instruction, students were given courses in a variety of subjects, ranging from the basics of arithmetic and descriptive geometry to more advanced studies of physics and mechanics, trigonometry, analytical geometry, and infinitesimal calculus, all deemed necessary and crucial skills for the calculations to be implemented in the course of shipbuilding. These theoretical studies were complemented by a set of practical training courses in the construction of engines and the construction of hulls, supervised by French engineers and carpenters at the Navy Yard. Finally, students were placed in the various workshops to engage in “some manual work for some hours of each day,” as part of their training to become future supervisor of dockyard workers.\(^{115}\)

\(^{113}\) Bryois, “Le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong.” *Revue illustrée*, April 1, 1891.

\(^{114}\) Leibo, *Transferring Technology to China*, 113. This dictionary was eventually reprinted as Gabriel Lemaire and Prosper Giquel, *Dictionnaire de poche français-chinois, suivi d’un dictionnaire technique des mot usités à l’arsenal de Fou-Tcheou* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1874).

\(^{115}\) Giquel, *The Foochow Arsenal and Its Results*, 18.
While initially there had only been twelve students enrolled in the School of Naval Construction when it was first established in February 1867, by the end of 1873 there were 38 students, placed into four divisions based on their date of entry and their performance in coursework. How did Chen Jitong fare as a student at the Navy Yard? Scholars have usually followed Chen’s biographies in the Minhou and Fujian gazetteers, which describe him as always having surpassed his peers in various examinations (lijing zhenbie, jieguan qicao 歷經甄別，皆冠其曹).116 However, according to a detailed original report from Prosper Giquel to Shen Baozhen, Chen was one of the four students placed in the third division, with respective grades of 16, 14, and 14 (each out of 20) in his classroom work, calculations and design, and practical/manual work.117 While the report noted that Chen could eventually become a workshop director or supervisor after furthering training, it is evident that as of 1873, Chen’s performance at the School of Naval Construction was only average.118

Despite his rather mediocre classroom performance and perhaps because he had demonstrated a strong facility with languages, Chen Jitong was employed, after graduation, as a secretary and translator at the Navy Yard for some time between 1873 and 1875.119

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116 Fujian tongzhi, 39:71b; Minhou xianzhi 69:38a.

117 The students in this division were disadvantaged because they had not spent the same amount of time in the school as their peers in the first and second divisions. In Giquel’s words, they “have attended the same theoretical studies as their comrades but without understanding them so thoroughly. There has not been sufficient time to give them the same course of practical instructions; they have however, gone through a very detailed course of study, descriptive of engines and of boilers, which enables them to understand thoroughly the working of all the parts of an engine; and as they have remained some months’ in the designing office, they are capable of understanding plans and of explaining them to the workmen placed under their direction. Three of them have been attached to the pattern-shop for about nine months, the fourth has been for about twenty-nine months in the Fitting-shop.” Chen Jitong was the fourth student. See Giquel, The Foochow Arsenal and Its Results, 20.

118 This report is found in the French Foreign Ministry archives. See “Jiandu wen’an 監督文案 [Reports of the director],” no. 25, Affaires Diverses Politiques, Chine, 3A, MAE.

119 Fujian tongzhi, 39:69a.
this capacity, he was able to work more closely alongside the Chinese gentry-managers, who formed a significant cultural presence at the Navy Yard.

_Elegant Gatherings_

As Chen Jitong himself noted in an essay on the Navy Yard, although the French engineers oversaw the technical operations, it was Chinese officials and local gentry who were in charge of the school’s administration.\(^{120}\) Indeed, the presence of a large number of Chinese administrative personnel, many of whom were members of the local gentry and held official rank of some sort, also contributed to the continuity of literati cultural activities in Mawei. Since Shen Baozhen was an imperially appointed director-general of an irregular institution – the Navy Yard was most often referred in Chinese as the _Fujian chuanzheng ju_ (Fujian Bureau of Naval Affairs), which suggests its “ad hoc” status in the late Qing administrative structure – he had considerable personal freedom in hiring and appointing Chinese assistants and secretaries.\(^{121}\) Between 1867 and 1874, there were 130 to 197 Chinese staff members at the Navy yard, with functions and titles ranging from the two _tidiao_ 提調 (assistant directors), to various secretaries, accountants, and purchasing agents.\(^{122}\) Not surprisingly, given Shen’s own connections to the Fuzhou scholar-gentry community, this Chinese administration increasingly gained a local color.\(^{123}\) In addition, Shen was able to recruit a “significant minority of upper gentrymen, former officials, and

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\(^{120}\) Tcheng Ki-Tong, “L’arsenal de Fou-Tchéou,” in _Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes_ (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), 289.

\(^{121}\) Pong, _Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization_, 162.

\(^{122}\) In comparison, there were around 300 students in the French and English schools at this time. See Giquel, _The Foochow Arsenal_, 14 and Lin Qingyuan, _Fujian chuanzheng ju shigao_, 103. For a table of the Chinese administrative personnel at the Fuzhou Navy Yard, see Lin Qingyuan, _Fujian chuanzhengju shigao_, 106-108.

\(^{123}\) Zuo Zongtang had initially left a number of staff who had worked under him since the Taiping days, but over time these men were gradually replaced by administrators of Fuzhou origin. See Pong, _Shen Pao-chen_, 163-166.
future civil servants.” With at least fifteen juren degree-holders and a number of officials already experienced in civil service and diplomatic affairs, the Chinese gentry-administrators at the Navy Yard reinforced Shen Baozhen’s insistence on high moral and intellectual standards as well as an increasingly practical approach to modernization.

Although the Chinese gentry were hired to assist Shen Baozhen with administrative tasks and to help discipline the students, they also shared with the Fuzhou students a common provenance and an appreciation for traditional learning, which allowed some of them to form close relationships with the Navy Yard graduates. Chen Jitong, as well have seen, already had one such pre-existing connection in his uncle Liu Shaogang. In addition, he also developed a friendship with another key administrator, Wang Baochen 王葆辰 (1835-?), a juren from Minxian who served as one of the two chief secretaries of the Navy Yard and had been appointed by Shen to assist Giquel with the operations of the schools. Indeed, Wang, a notable local scholar, would end up make an appearance in Chen’s local gazetteer biography to validate Chen’s familiarity with classical learning and Chinese history. As is recorded in the Minhou and Fujian gazetteers, one day during Chen’s brief post-graduation stint as a translator at the Navy Yard, Wang could not recall the original text while discussing a story from the Han shu 漢書; Jitong, on the other hand, was not only able to immediately indicate the provenance of the passage but also to recite it from memory.

124 Pong, Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization, 199.
125 Pong, Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization, 169.
126 Giquel, The Foochow Arsenal and Its Results, 34. For Wang Baochen’s biographical notice, see Minhou xianzhi, 68:29a.
127 Fujian tongzhi, 39:69a. Interestingly, Wang was also an open-minded scholar, having supported the sending of Chinese envoys abroad as early as 1867. See Pong, Shen Pao-chen and China’s Modernization, 167.
In addition to individual connections, Shen Baozhen and his coterie of local gentry-managers also brought some elements of Fuzhou literati culture to the Navy Yard. While he was a disciplined official and incorruptible administrator engaged in serious self-strengthening and foreign affairs projects, Shen Baozhen, like his father-in-law Lin Zexu, was also a leading member of the Houguan-Minxian gentry with a reputation for loving poetry. As fondly remembered by contemporaries and related by Chen Jitong to his French readers, Shen, whenever he could take a break from the official duties at the Navy Yard, would gather his subordinates for a round of “poetry contests.” According to Chen Jitong, this was an elaborate tradition and a favorite pastime of Chinese and especially of Fuzhou men of letters. The process involved the determination of roles, which were drawn from a vase containing slips of paper. This separated participants into “examiners,” “copyists” and “candidates.” The examiners read a randomly selected line from a book to determine the subject, on which each candidate was to compose a poem within a certain allocated time. One form of competition required two subjects and that the poems treat these in parallel verses of seven syllables. Another version required that two predetermined characters be used in certain places in parallel lines. A special device is used to keep time:

“As soon as the subject is announced, another urn [for inserting poetry entries] is placed on the table. To this is attached a bell, which carries a thread, on the end of which is a lighted stick of incense. After a half-hour, the incense having burned, the thread catches fire, snaps, and lets fall the rod that served as the counterweight of the bell. As the bell rings, the cover of the urn is closed and it is no longer possible to place in it any late compositions.”

At this point, the poems collected in the urn were copied out by the “clerks” onto a sheet of paper and submitted to the “examiners,” who, after judging the entries, chants the best verses from a balcony. Meanwhile, contestants who wished to submit more than one poem

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on the subject had to pay a small fee, the sum of which was used to purchase ink, paper, brushes and prizes for the competition. The two contestants who wrote the best poems were selected to be the two “examiners” for the next round, while a dinner brought each gathering to an end.129

What Chen Jitong was describing was the local tradition of “poetry bell” (shizhong 詩鐘), a practice that was immensely popular among central Fujian (Minzhong 閩中) literati in the mid-nineteenth century and gradually spread out to poetry circles in other provinces during the late Qing.130 Jitong’s own family had inherited just such a shizhong urn from his father’s days with the Flying Society and his younger brother Chen Shoupeng, who also attended the School of Navigation at the Navy Yard, seemed to have been an especially enthusiastic participant in local poetry competitions throughout the 1880s.131

At the Navy Yard, Shen Baozhen was so attached to this literati activity that even as he shuttled back and forth between Fuzhou and Taiwan in the spring of 1875, while in charge of maritime defense after the Japanese invasion of Taiwan, he found time to round up a number of his gentry-administrators for an evening of shizhong. These poems were eventually collected and privately printed by two of the poets present as the Anthology of an Elegant Gathering at the Navy Yard (Chuansikong yaji lu 船司空雅集錄).132 Among the “Navy Yard poets” collected in this anthology were Liu Shaogang, Wang Baochen, and

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129 Ibid, 174-177.
130 Yi Shunding 易順鼎, “Shizhong menghua 詩鐘夢話,” in Gong Lianshou 政聯壽, ed., Lianhua congbian 聯話叢編, vol. 4 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2000), 2418. For a most recent scholarly account of these poetry activities in the late Qing and early Republic, which cites both Chen Jitong’s essay and his brother’s participation in these games, see Shengqing Wu, Modern Archaics: Continuity and Innovation in the Chinese Lyric Tradition, 1900-1937 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 203-217.
131 Chen Qiang et al., “Xianbi Xue gongren nianpu,” 5a-b.
even the renowned poet Xie Zhangting, all of whom were connected to Chen Jitong or to his family. That classical Chinese poetry composition was such a notable activity at the Fuzhou Navy Yard suggests that students may have also been inspired to carry on such a tradition. For the members of the first graduating classes of Navy Yard students, some of whom, like Chen Jitong, had taken up translation or assistant administrative positions by 1873-1875, observing these senior gentry would certainly have been a memorable and enticing experience. Meanwhile, a younger cohort of students emulated their elders by forming their own poetry clubs on the site of the Navy Yard, again proving that literary traditions would not be pushed aside by technical training.133

More than simply reciting the Sacred Edicts or writing political essays, it was the personal connections with local literati, fostered through the presence of a critical mass of Fuzhou gentry-administrators appointed by Shen, as well as the inherited familiarity with elite cultural activities such as shizhong that enabled Chen Jitong and his Navy Yard classmates to retain their self-identity as Fuzhou men of letters and to form close relationships with their local contemporaries who were not enrolled in Western-style schools. Naval training and foreign language studies may have made up alternative career paths for these young men from Fuzhou and led to further studies of Western culture for some, but in their formative years, Navy Yard students from Fuzhou still learned to carry themselves as Chinese elites. This sense of being grounded in the local community and in a set of Qing literati values and practices would prove to be important as some of these graduates, like Chen Jitong and Yan Fu, went on to become intermediaries between cultural worlds. Their first step in that process, of course, was to leave Fuzhou for Europe.

Paris and Berlin, 1877 – 1881

From Mawei to Marseilles

In his 1873 report to Shen Baozhen, Prosper Giquel deliberately emphasized the advantages of further training in Europe for the recent graduates of the engineering and navigation schools at the Navy Yard. Shen Baozhen, too, thought that advanced study in Europe would benefit the students and submitted a memorial petitioning for approval of an education mission. While the approval of a full-scale mission was delayed due to funding issues and the impending conflict with Japan in Taiwan, the opportunity for a small trial mission came up in 1875, when Prosper Giquel received the assignment of purchasing materials and hiring additional personnel from France for the purpose of building a new iron framed steamship at the Navy Yard.

To accompany him on this journey, Giquel and Shen selected five graduates, including Chen Jitong, from the French and English schools. While his peers were enrolled in ship factories and naval academies in France and Britain upon their arrival, Chen Jitong alone seemed to have accompanied Giquel for the entire duration of the mission, acting as his assistant between March 1875 and June 1876. Indeed, in the reports he submitted to Shen Baozhen upon their return, Giquel mentions that four students had gone abroad with him, and singled out Chen Jitong several times as having accompanied him throughout the

134 Giquel, The Foochow Arsenal and Its Results, 19; Biggerstaff, The Earliest Government Schools, 228-229.
trip.\textsuperscript{136} It seems that, already at this point, Chen Jitong’s linguistic and literary skills (and, perhaps, mediocre performance in technical subjects) had already set him apart from the other students.

Upon their return to Fuzhou in June 1876, Giquel was called up to Nanjing and Tianjin to report to Shen Baozhen and Li Hongzhang.\textsuperscript{137} He brought along with him Chen Jitong, who supposedly took the opportunity to submit to Shen a four-volume \textit{Diary of a Journey to the West} (Xixing riji 西行日記), which was read with approval by the former Navy Yard director-general, now Liangjiang governor-general and Superintendent of Trade for the Southern Ports.\textsuperscript{138} The trip to Tianjin was especially important for the development of Chen’s career over the next two decades, during which he would work closely with Li Hongzhang, who also recruited many Fuzhou Navy Yard graduates into his \textit{mufu} and Beiyang fleet. In September of the same year, Giquel and Chen also visited Beijing, where they met and dined with Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818-1891), who was soon to depart on his apology mission to London and to serve as the first Chinese ambassador in Europe.\textsuperscript{139}

Meanwhile, Shen Baozhen and Li Hongzhang once again petitioned the court with a detailed proposal for a three-year training program in Europe. Their memorial was

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\textsuperscript{136} “Jiandu wen’an” 監督文案 [Reports of the director], no. 1B, Affaires Diverses Politiques, Chine, 3C, MAE.
\textsuperscript{137} Leibo, \textit{Transferring Technology to China}, 127; Bastid, “Qingmo fuou de liuxuesheng men,” 193.
\textsuperscript{138} Fujian tongzhi, 39:69a. This diary, among the several other volumes of writing mentioned in Chen’s biography in the Fujian gazetteer, has yet to be unearthed, if it is still extant.
approved in January 1877. By the end of March, a cohort consisting of twelve students, including Yan Fu, from the School of Navigation (who would study in England), fourteen students from the School of Naval Construction (who would study in France), as well as three apprentices, was ready to depart from Fuzhou. As the French and Chinese supervisors of the mission, Prosper Giquel and Li Fengbao 李鳳苞 (1834-1887), an expectant intendant selected for the task, were to be accompanied by an interpreter, a Chinese secretary, and a diplomatic attaché. The interpreter selected was Luo Fenglu 羅豐祿 (1850-1903), a Minxian native who had graduated at the top of the first class from the School of Navigation and was working as an assistant instructor at the Navy Yard, and the attaché, appointed by Li Hongzhang, was Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠 (1845-1900), a French-speaking assistant in Li’s charge who had graduated from the Catholic school in Zikkawei (Xujiahui 徐家匯) in Shanghai. Both Luo and Ma would go on to have stellar diplomatic careers, working primarily under Li and sometimes alongside Chen Jitong, who rounded out the trio of young assistants as the Chinese secretary for the mission. According to the original proposal, Chen Jitong would receive an annual salary of 1,200 taels for his secretarial work, but would be further compensated for his studies in international law, another task that differentiated him from the other Navy Yard students, who would be enrolled in schools of mining, shipbuilding, and naval academies in England and France.


141 See the original memorial and attachments by Li Hongzhang et al.: “Minchang xuesheng chuyang xuexi zhe” 閩廠學生出洋學習折, Li Hongzhang quanji 李鴻章全集, vol. 7 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 62
Departing from Fuzhou on March 31, 1877, Giquel and Li Fengbao’s group arrived in Marseilles at the beginning of April. From there they moved onto London to visit the Chinese ambassador, Guo Songtao, on May 13. After a staying briefly near the coast in Portsmouth and helping the twelve English-speaking students settle into their new schools, Chen Jitong and Ma Jianzhong moved on to Paris with the rest of the students.\(^{142}\) While the remaining students entered engineering, mining and metallurgy, and shipbuilding schools, Chen and Ma, as previously determined, enrolled in classes at the recently established École libre des sciences politiques, where they studied French and international law. In a famous 1878 letter written to Li Hongzhang reporting on his studies, Ma Jianzhong explained that his coursework included the “Law of Nations,” international law, commercial legislation, European diplomatic history from 1830 to 1870, constitutional law, and tax regulations.\(^{143}\) Also, as with the other Navy Yard students, Chen and Ma found a tutor to assist them with their French and studies. This was a mysterious journalist named Foucault de Mondion, who in time would figure prominently in an authorship controversy involving Chen Jitong.\(^{144}\) Although diplomatic duties would soon keep Chen busy outside the classroom, his time at the École libre helped him gain some familiarity with French and international law, which would figure in his later diplomatic and translation work. Perhaps more useful in his career as a writer and orator in France, however, was the symbolic

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\(^{143}\) Bastid, “Qingmo fuou de liuxuesheng men,” 194; Bailey, *Strengthen the Country and Enrich the People*, 38-40.

\(^{144}\) See my narrative and analysis of this episode in chapter 3.
prestige that Chen would be able to flaunt by calling himself a one-time student of the elite institution.

The diaries of the Qing envoys and consuls in Europe at this time show that the officers in charge of the Chinese education mission mingled frequently and freely with the diplomatic corps. In Paris, Chen, Ma, Giquel, and Henri Cordier, who had been working for the American firm Russell and Co. in Shanghai before being recruited by Giquel in 1877 to serve as French secretary of the mission, did their best to welcome and host Guo Songtao when the latter was appointed joint ambassador to England and France in February 1878.\(^{145}\) When Guo Songtao arrived in Paris in April 1878, it was this group, along with several Chinese merchants participating in the 1878 Universal Exposition that welcomed him at the Gare du Nord station.\(^{146}\) On May 6, 1878, when Guo presented his credentials to French President McMahon at the Élysées Palace, he brought Ma Jianzhong with him to translate his speech into French and Chen Jitong to render McMahon’s response back into Chinese.\(^{147}\) Four days later, in an official communication to the Zongli Yamen, Guo Songtao appointed Chen, Ma, and Luo Fenglu, who was studying chemistry at King’s College in England, as interpreters at the Paris and London legations.\(^{148}\) In October of the same year, when Li Fengbao was appointed the Chinese minister to Germany, Chen Jitong was transferred to the Berlin legation, while retaining his position as secretary for the education mission.\(^{149}\) Thus in 1878, at the age of twenty-six, Chen Jitong’s diplomatic career officially began. For the next several years, Chen would perform double duties as

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\(^{148}\) Guo Songtao, *Lundun yu Bali riji*, 566.

\(^{149}\) Li Fengbao 李鳳苞, *Shide riji* 使德日記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1.
interpreter at the Berlin legation and secretary of the Qing education mission. Surveying Chen’s experiences in these early years in Europe, a few episodes stand out, for they prefigure the variety of social activities and the different modes of cross-cultural interactions that would characterize Chen’s later, much more publicized career in Paris.

First Encounters

As members of the newly established Chinese legations in Paris and Berlin, Chen Jitong and his colleagues were a fresh and exotic presence in the European capitals. Thus, it was almost inevitable that some encounters with curious or anxious Westerners should take place. In Chen’s experience, there were initial run-ins with gawking crowds simply marveling at the sight of Chinese officials in the European capitals. On his first trip to Berlin in 1877, Chen attracted such a large crowd while walking through the passages of the Kaiser Gallerie that he was left with no other choice than to ask a boutique merchant to call for the police to help disperse the onlookers. Indeed, the passersby who followed and surrounded Chen’s colleagues at the Berlin legation became so numerous and problematic that at the local university, a special article was added to the regulations forbidding students to follow or to harass the Chinese diplomats.¹⁵⁰

At other times, the presence of Chinese officials led to unexpected, if insulting, requests. At the Chinese legation in Paris in 1878, Chen Jitong received a visit from a messenger for a Polish countess, who apparently kept a dozen small Pekingese dogs, for whose lives she now feared. Should the “Chinese colony” (the new diplomatic corps in Paris) eat one of her pets, she threatened, she would set fire to the hotel in which the

¹⁵⁰ Tcheng Ki-Tong, “La Chine vue par un artiste,” Revue bleue, November 29, 1890.
legation was housed. Not particularly amused by this rude message – “[she] was treating us like ferocious beasts or savages,” he remarked – Chen gave a sardonic response:

“I reassured the good old countess by telling her that none of my compatriots were dog-eaters and that, if by chance one day one of her animals disappears, she would do better, before committing herself to the crime of premeditated arson, to consult the police and the attendants at the dog-pound.”

Chen’s reply in this case, part of a story that he included in a later essay on Chinese cuisine, is very much exemplary of the combination of self-confidence and wit that he would repeatedly employ in his writings to counter biased or ignorant European views of Chinese people and customs.

*Interpreter and Host*

As an interpreter for the Chinese ministers, many of Chen Jitong’s encounters with Europeans during this period took place not among crowded onlookers or ignorant locals but at official functions and in the various educational institutions, industrial sites, and entertainment venues visited by the Qing envoys. In 1878, for instance, Chen, along with Ma Jianzhong and Giquel, hosted several visits from Guo Songtao as the Qing ambassador shuttled back and forth between London and Paris. They accompanied Guo to various museums and schools, such as the École des Mines, where some Navy Yard students were studying, and helped Guo select a new site for the Chinese legation. Since Guo’s visit to Paris that year also coincided with the opening of the 1878 Exposition Universelle, most of the Chinese diplomats also attended the event, marveling at the spectacular displays and numerous visitors, while visiting with Imperial Maritime Customs commissioner Robert

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152 Guo Songtao, *Lundun yu Bali riji*, 654-659, 740,
Hart, who led a Chinese contingent to the exhibition. Mostly an observer at this time, Chen Jitong would take on a much more prominent role, eleven years later at the 1889 Exposition, representing China at a number of international congresses.

After he was appointed to the Berlin legation, Chen Jitong also frequently served as Li Fengbao’s interpreter during visits with other foreign diplomats, German ministers, and the Kaiser. On some of these occasions, it was evident that Chen’s linguistic ability and charisma allowed him to outshine his superior. For instance, in his diary for December 8, 1878, Li Fengbao recorded a visit to Kaiser Wilhelm I, who was receiving foreign dignitaries for the first time since being injured in an earlier assassination attempt. After passing on regards from the Qing emperor, Li Fengbao almost stood aside as the Kaiser and Empress took an interest in conversing with Chen Jitong and complimenting him on his fluent French. When Xu Jianyin 徐建寅 (1845-1901), a scientist at the Jiangnan Arsenal who was appointed Second Counsellor at the Berlin legation in 1879, came to Germany to investigate and purchase warships for Li Hongzhang’s Beiyang fleet, Chen Jitong travelled to France to welcome him. He then took Xu to see skating shows, the aquarium, and the wax museum, and accompanied him to survey mine and bronze factories in Berlin. While Chen was no doubt performing his duties as attaché-interpreter, he also demonstrated an ability to put Chinese visitors at ease and a gregarious nature that appealed to both Chinese envoys and European acquaintances.

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154 For example, see Li Fengbao, *Shide riji*, 5, 10.
155 Li Fengbao, *Shide riji*, 31-32.
Chen Jitong also had several opportunities to accompany his superiors on visits beyond Paris and Berlin. In early July, 1878, Guo Songtao brought Chen along on a trip to Essen, Germany to visit the Krupp factory, one of the arms-makers that fascinated Qing officials at this time as it represented the potency of European industrial and military power (Guo Songtao was especially impressed by not only the scale of the factory but also the schools established for workers and artisans). On the way back from Essen, Guo and Chen passed through Holland and Belgium, taking in the sights in The Hague and Brussels.\textsuperscript{157} Several days after their return to Paris, Chen Jitong submitted to Guo a colored sketch of the iron and gun factories; the detailed nature of this map left Guo impressed.\textsuperscript{158} In August and September of 1881, Chen accompanied Li Fengbao on diplomatic visits to Austria, Holland, and Belgium, with Li again commenting in his diary on Chen’s ability to converse with the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph I, at a palace banquet in Vienna.\textsuperscript{159}

\textit{Military Attaché}

While Chen Jitong’s main duties were to serve as interpreter and secretary for the Chinese ministers, there were several occasions on which he, in the guise as a Navy Yard graduate who held the rank of commander (\textit{dusi 都司}), represented the Chinese diplomatic corps and the Qing government in a quite different role. One such instance occurred on September 15, 1878, when French president McMahon reviewed his troops at Vincennes. In a grand event that showcased nearly 50,000 men and 10,000 horses, Chen Jitong was among the two hundred foreign officers who entered the grounds following the arrival of

\textsuperscript{157} Guo Songtao, \textit{Lundun yu Bali riji}, 639-647.  
\textsuperscript{158} Guo Songtao, \textit{Lundun yu Bali riji}, 661.  
\textsuperscript{159} Li Fengbao 李鳳苞, “Li Fengbao rennei juan lue 李鳳苞任內卷略,” in Liu Xihong 劉錫鴻 et al., \textit{Zhude shiguan dang’an chao 駐德使館檔案鈔}, vol. 1 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1966), 389-409.
the president. Wearing a sword and riding a horse that was selected especially for the occasion, on special orders from President McMahon, Chen made a memorable appearance.160

After his transfer to Germany, Chen also participated in the Kaiser Wilhelm I’s military ceremonies in a similar fashion. When Li Shuchang 黎庶昌, one of Guo Songtao’s assistants, travelled to Strasbourg on vacation in September 1879, he had plans to meet with Chen Jitong, who was also there attending the German army maneuvers, but the latter cancelled the appointment due to a banquet invitation from the Kaiser.161 The following year, when the German Grand Army Maneuvers were held in Berlin, Chen Jitong once again represented China in the role of military attaché.162

These early public appearances were brief, they are still significant episodes in Chen Jitong’s biography as evidence of Chen’s performing the role of a Qing military officer on an international stage. It should be noted that on none of these occasions did Chen appear to be in a subordinate position relative to the delegates from the other European countries. On the contrary, Chen carried himself, at this time and throughout his later writings and speeches, as a confident representative of a sovereign empire on equal footing with the European powers. According to the French writer Bryois, Chen may have also rebuffed the famous Russian general Mikhail Skobelev (1843-1882) over the Ili question when they were both present at the German maneuvers in Koenigsberg in 1879.163 Above all, participation in these military exercises elevated Chen’s position and was

160 Guo Songtao, Lundun yu Bali riji, 727-729; Le Temps, September 15, 1878.
161 Li Shuchang, Xiyang zazhi, 527.
162 The Times, August 27, 1880.
deemed important enough to also be written into his Fujian gazetteer biography. Such biographical details helped build the aura around the figure “Général Tcheng Ki-Tong” or Chen Jitong jiangjun陈季同將軍, as he would be known to his twentieth-century admirers.

*Contemporary Impressions*

With such an active early career, how did Chen Jitong’s superiors and fellow Chinese abroad see him? Guo Songtao, known for his own enthusiasm toward Western learning and cultural activities during his time abroad and for his friendly relationship with intelligent Chinese students such as Yan Fu, seemed to have also thought highly of Chen. On October 29, 1878, when he and Li Fengbao settled on personnel appointments for Li’s team at the Berlin legation, Guo commented that while the English secretary Luo Fenglu had a quiet personality and was capable of discussing scholarship, his counterpart, Chen Jitong, had a lively character, was capable was handling diverse affairs, and with further experience as an official, could develop “a thorough understanding of things Chinese and foreign and take on major responsibilities” (zhongwai guantong, kesheng daren 中外貫通, 可勝大任). At the end of that year, as he was beginning to prepare for leaving his post, Guo questioned several of the Chinese students in England on the abilities of Navy Yard standouts Wei Han, Yan Fu, Luo Fenglu, and Chen Jitong. As a sign of his recognition of Chen’s skill in navigating diplomatic and social circles, Guo was specifically

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164 The inclusion of these facts, of course, further attests to Chen Jitong’s role in supplying biographical information to Chen Yan and Shen Yuqing, his friends from Houguan and the compilers of the Republican-era Fujian gazetteer. Fujian tongzhi, 39:70b-71a.
165 Guo’s high regard for Yan Fu’s acumen and abilities to absorb new social and political theories, though factually veritable, has also become part of the lore of Yan Fu, often cited to foreshadow the latter’s later emergence as a thinker of immense influence. Their relationship in England is well discussed in Wang Rongzu, Zouxiang shijie de cuozhe, 230-241.
166 Li Fengbao, Shide riji, 1.
interested in whether or not Chen would be fit for envoy or ambassadorial duties in the future.\textsuperscript{167}

Not all of the Qing diplomats, however, had such positive memories of their interactions with Chen Jitong. Xu Jianyin recorded in his diary an incident on January 27, 1881, when members of the Chinese legation were invited to an opera performance at the Kaiser’s Altes Palais. The German ministry had sent along two wagon passes for the Chinese diplomats. As they were preparing to leave, Xu was told that Chen had announced he would be able to enter the palace without a pass and thus would find a wagon on his own. At the last minute, however, Chen changed his mind and took Xu Jianyin’s pass from a foreign servant. This caused Xu and his companions much headache in trying to gain entry to the event. Angry at Chen’s rudeness, Xu devoted almost his entire diary entry to describing this incident.\textsuperscript{168} Whatever reasoning stood behind Chen’s actions in this episode, it does seem as if he sometimes had an exaggerated sense of his ability to make his way around high society in Europe.

Promotions

Despite private complaints such as those lodged by Xu Jianyin, Chen Jitong’s work in the legations and as an administrator for the education mission brought him a series of promotions. As the three-year term for the first class of students from the Fuzhou Navy Yard drew to a close, Li Hongzhang memorialized in early 1881 for the students and administrators to be rewarded with official and military ranks. For Chen Jitong, who, along

\textsuperscript{167} The response he received was not altogether positive, with the students replying, perhaps correctly, that Chen’s knowledge was not nearly as advanced as that of Yan Fu. See Guo Songtao, \textit{Lundun yu Bali riji}, 838-839.

\textsuperscript{168} Xu Jianyin, \textit{Ouyou zalu}, 756.
with the other assistants to Li Fengbao and Giquel, had performed his administrative and supervisory with diligence while studying law and politics, Li recommended that he be awarded the rank of colonel (fujiang 副將), while given an actual promotion from captain (dusi) to expectant major (youji 游擊) in the province of Fujian.\textsuperscript{169}

In November of the same year, Li Fengbao petitioned the Zongli Yamen to reward Chen Jitong for his work at the Berlin legation since 1878. For his diligent efforts in translation work, in surveying armaments, and in participating in the reviewing of troops, Li wrote, Chen should be promoted to expectant lieutenant colonel (canjiang 參將) and awarded with a peacock feather.\textsuperscript{170} Henceforth, and until a later promotion, Chen Jitong would be known to his European friends and readers as “Colonel Tcheng-Ki-Tong.”

Having rapidly ascended the ranks in his first few years in Europe, Chen applied for and received a six month long vacation to return to Fuzhou to repair family tombs. It is back in Fuzhou, during the winter of 1882 and 1883, that we gain a few more glimpses of the kinship relations that continued to play a role in Chen Jitong’s life and the local connections that would become an important social network at a later point in his career.

**Fuzhou, 1882-1883**

*The Class of 1882*

The year in which Chen Jitong returned to Fuzhou was, in retrospect, an exciting and significant time for the local literati community and for late Qing cultural history. For

\textsuperscript{169} Li Hongzhang quanji, vol. 9, 271-272, 278-288.

\textsuperscript{170} Li Fengbao, “Zou Chen Jitong shangdai hualing baoshu ziwen 奏陳季同賞戴花翎報署咨文,” in *Li Fengbao rennei juan lue*, 177-178.
in the provincial examinations of autumn 1882, several local candidates, who would go on to rich political and literary careers in the ensuing decades, successfully emerged as new holders of the *juren* degree. Not only would they begin to form a social and literary network in Fuzhou, but intellectual and native-place ties would also connect these men to their contemporaries at the Fuzhou Navy Yard. During the 1895-1898 reform period, the relationships formed among this generation of Fuzhou literati would facilitate, at both the local and national levels, many cultural and political activities, some which, as we will see, included Chen Jitong.

Heading this list of success examination candidates that year was Zheng Xiaoxu 鄭孝胥 (1860-1938), most famous (or infamous) in modern Chinese history for having served as premier in Puyi’s puppet government in Manchukuo.¹⁷¹ In 1882, however, with the chaotic politics of the twentieth century still long in the future, Zheng was widely acclaimed as the *bamin jieyuan* 八閩解元, the first-place *juren* candidate of Fujian. With a great-uncle who had been director of the Aofeng Academy and a father who had received the *jinshi* degree in 1852, Zheng Xiaoxu, who grew up in Minxian, had a solid intellectual background deeply rooted in the local scholarly traditions. Additionally, he was married to the daughter of Wu Zancheng 吳贊成, then director-general of the Fuzhou Navy Yard, and thus already connected to the self-strengthening circles. Later, Zheng would be appointed secretary and consul at the Qing legation in Tokyo and be invited to serve in Zhang Zhidong’s private secretariat (*mufu* 幕府) in 1895. As a Fuzhou native who shuttled between the worlds of the bureaucratic and gentry elite in the urban centers, including

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Shanghai and Beijing in the last years of the nineteenth-century, Zheng would be an important associate for Chen Jitong around the time of the 1898 reforms.

Beyond his political career, Zheng Xiaoxu is also known, as he was in the late Qing and early Republic, as one of the leading poets of the so-called “Tong-Guang style” (Tong-Guang ti 同光體), a term he supposedly coined along with fellow 1882 juren Chen Yan, for the inclusive and innovative forms practiced by themselves and their contemporaries.172 Also sometimes known as the “Song school of poetry,” this group, whose early activities centered around a core of participants in Zhang Zhidong’s mufu, also included Shen Baozhen’s son Shen Yuqing 沈瑜慶 (1858-1918), as well as Yuqing’s son-in-law, the talented poet (and Houguan native) Lin Xu 林旭 (1875-1898).173 While Shen Yuqing served a number of important administrative positions in the 1890s, Lin Xu is mostly known for being one of the six reformers executed during the coup of the 1898 reforms. As close associates of Chen Jitong during the reform period, Shen Yuqing and Chen Yan, who was to become the chief editorialist for Chen’s short-lived journal, Qiushi bao, were also co-compilers of the Republican-era Fujian gazetteer in which Jitong’s biography, the chief Chinese primary source on his life, is prominently featured.

While the “Tong-Guang style” moniker was not coined until the mid-1880s and the “Song school” poetry did not fully emerge until the poets met in the 1890s, by 1882 Chen Yan and some other local poets had already formed a club of their own, the Fuzhou Branch

172 On Chen Yan, Zheng Xiaoxu, and the “Tong-Guang” style, see Jon Eugene von Kowallis, The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the “Old Schools” during Late Qing and Early Republican China (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2006), 153-231 and Shengqing Wu, Modern Archaics, 114-121, 222-245.
173 For an overview of this group’s activities, see Yang Mengya 楊萌芽. Gudian shige de zuihou shouwang: Qingmo Minchu Songshi pai wenren qunti yanjiu 古典詩歌的最後守望: 清末民初詩派文人群體研究 (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 2010).
Society (*Fuzhou zhishe 福州支社*). After the examinations that year, another new *juren*, Lin Shu, who was from a poor merchant family in Minxian, also joined this circle. Lin’s famous career as the most prolific and eccentric late Qing translator of Western fiction (who did not know any Western languages) perhaps offers the most illustrative case for the interconnections between Fuzhou scholar-gentry and their Navy Yard counterparts. As is well known, Lin’s first work, the 1897 translation of Dumas fils’ *La Dame aux camélias*, was in fact a collaboration between himself and Wang Shouchang 王壽昌 (1865-1926), a graduate of the School of Naval Construction who had studied in France and who introduced Lin to the story while orally translating it for him to render into classical Chinese. Additionally, the first edition of the book was privately printed with funding from Wei Han 魏翰 (1851-1929), one of Chen Jitong’s classmates from the School of Naval Construction who was among the five naval graduates Giquel brought to Europe in 1875 and, by 1897, was serving as the director of the Navy Yard. Furthermore, as literary scholar Han Yiyu has shown, seven of the ten collaborators who worked with Lin Shu throughout his career on French translations were from either Houguan or Minxian and were in one way or another connected to the Navy Yard. Indeed, these overlapping social and literary connections, based on native-place ties, were so prominent that at one point, the early twentieth-century writer Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884-1918) mistakenly

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credited Chen Jitong with introducing Lin to the Dumas novel and thereby initiating one major late Qing stream of translations of nineteenth-century Western literature.\footnote{This false attribution was made by Su in the March 23, 1919 issue of the May Fourth era journal \textit{Meizhou pinglun} 每周评论. I will discuss Chen Jitong’s portrayal by of twentieth-century writers in the epilogue of this dissertation.}

In fact, while they certainly knew each other and although Lin Shu would eventually pen a brief essay on Chen Jitong in his column for the early Republican paper \textit{Ping bao} 平報, there is not enough evidence to demonstrate that the two writers ever had a close relationship.\footnote{I have not yet been able to locate the original essay, “Chen Jitong 陳季同,” which was published in Lin Shu’s “Miscellaneous notes of the Iron Flute Pavilion” (\textit{Tiediting suoji} 鐵笛亭瑣記) column in \textit{Ping bao} 平報 on January 9, 1913. See the citation in Han Hongju 韓洪舉, \textit{Lin yixiaoshuo yanjiu: jianlun Lin Shu zizhuan xiaoshuo ji chuangi} 林譯小說研究: 兼論林紓自撰小說及傳奇 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2005), 348.} As for Zheng Xiaoxu and Chen Yan, who would certainly become important members of Chen Jitong’s social network in 1898, it is also difficult to say whether they met Chen in 1882.\footnote{Chen Jitong does not appear in Zheng Xiaoxu’s diaries nor Chen Yan’s \textit{nianpu} for that year.} Despite the eventual emergence of a “Tong-Guang generation” (to borrow from Zheng and Chen) of Fuzhou literati, then, these young men were not yet a major part of Chen Jitong’s immediate circle. Instead, in 1882, Chen Jitong was to mingle with a couple of emerging Fuzhou writer-reformers much closer to home.

\textit{A Sister-in-law with “bamboo grove aura”}

Two years prior to Chen Jitong’s return visit, his younger brother Shoupeng, who had just graduated from the Navy Yard School of Navigation in 1879, married a talented fifteen-year-old woman from Houguan. The bride, Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽 (1866-1911), had received an especially well-rounded home education, being taught not only such standard Confucian texts for girls as the \textit{Nüjie 女誡} (Admonitions for Women) and \textit{Nüxiaojing 女
孝經 (Book of Filial Piety for Women), but had also read other classics such as the *Four Books* and the *Zuo Commentary* by her ninth year. Additionally, she was skilled in painting, embroidery, and writing poetry and parallel prose.\(^{179}\) One of the most well-regarded women poets of the late Qing, she would eventually co-translate, with Shoupeng, a number of Western works, and participate, along with Jitong, in the 1897 public campaign for women’s education in Shanghai.\(^{180}\)

Meeting his sister-in-law for the first time in 1882, Chen Jitong was immediately impressed by her dignified demeanor and remarked to his brother: “this must be what they call the ‘bamboo grove aura’?”\(^{181}\) This comment, a reference to the intellectual spirit of literate women, traditionally attributed to a type of talented and virtuous women known as the *xianyuan* 贤媛, is an early indication of Chen Jitong’s appreciation for women writers, a favorite theme in his French-language writings.\(^{182}\)

Xue’s husband Shoupeng, who would soon embark for studies in Japan and later join Chen Jitong in Europe, was also a poetry enthusiast. He is recorded, in his wife’s chronological biography, as having participated in many literary gatherings and *shizhong* competitions, even after having graduated from the Navy Yard. When Jitong returned from

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\(^{179}\) Chen Qiang et al., “Xianbi Xue gongren nianpu,” 2b-4a.

\(^{180}\) Xue Shaohui is the subject of a forthcoming literary biography by Nanxiu Qian. For a discussion of one of Xue’s translation projects see Nanxiu Qian, “Borrowing Foreign Mirrors and Candles to Illuminate Chinese Civilization”: Xue Shaohui’s Moral Vision in the *Biographies of Foreign Women,* *Nan Nü* 6.1 (2004): 60-101. Xue’s poetry is discussed in the same author’s “Xue Shaohui and Her Poetic Chronicle of Late Qing Reforms,” in Grace S. Fong and Ellen Widmer, eds., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 339-372. On Xue’s role in women’s education in Shanghai, see Nanxiu Qian, “Revitalizing the *Xianyuan* (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms,” *Modern China* 29.4 (October 2003): 399-454. I will discuss Chen Jitong’s involvement in this campaign in chapter 4.

\(^{181}\) Chen Qiang et al., “Xianbi Xue gongren nianpu,” 6a.

Europe, the two brothers also found time to discuss literature, over wine, with the local scholar and former Navy Yard administrator Wang Baochen.\textsuperscript{183}  Chen Shoupeng, who would eventually work on some of the same public works and translation projects as Jitong in the 1890s, also managed to pass the provincial civil service examinations in 1902, thus further demonstrating the way in which Chen Jitong’s generation moved freely between local cultural traditions and the new alternatives in Western learning that were opened for them through their affiliation with the Navy Yard.

It is worth noting, in order to fully account for the continuing ties between Chen Jitong and the local community in Fuzhou, that among Chen Shoupeng’s 1902 \textit{juren} class was a young man by the name of Lin Daren 林大任 (1880-?), who would eventually marry Chen Jitong’s younger daughter Chen Chao 陳超.  Lin Daren, another Houguan native, was also a great-grandson of Lin Zexu.\textsuperscript{184}  Though Lin Daren’s own family branch experienced a declining success rate in the examinations and produced no reformer or scholar of note in the late Qing, the fact that Chen Jitong’s daughter would marry into the illustrious Lin family still serves to underscore, once more, Chen’s self-identification with the Houguan elite.

\textit{A European Guest}

Being back at home in 1882 also allowed Chen Jitong the opportunity to play host to foreign visitors.  One particularly interesting traveler who came to Fuzhou was the Russian writer Lydie Paschkoff (1845-19??), who had become quite famous for her many

\textsuperscript{183}  Chen Qiang et al., “Xianbi Xue gongren nianpu,” 6a.
articles, written in French and published in various Parisian journals, on her adventures in the Middle East and Asia. In Shanghai during the winter of 1882-1883, Paschkoff decided to visit Fuzhou, where she stayed at the Russian consulate in the foreign settlement. One day in January, Chen Jitong called and invited her to visit his family. Paschkoff described her excursion in a long article published in the *Revue scientifique*:

“Arriving near the end of the city, the porters turned onto a quiet street, lined by the houses of mandarins. They stopped in front of a set of double and trip doors, which were opened to allow my sedan-chair to enter into the first courtyard. There I stepped onto the ground and was received by Tcheng-Ki-Tong and his uncle Liu, a rich notable. They brought me to greet the women, who waited in an inner courtyard, sitting on a surrounding platform. They were all dressed in satin and wearing gems and pearls. They gave me a warm welcome and invited me to go to the room of Madame Liu. They walked with difficulty on their little feet. We sat ourselves at a round table, on which was placed a white enamel tray; they offered me Chinese liquors, preserved prunes, sweetened poppyseeds, preserved ginger roots, etc. There were thirty or so women, all of whom looked at me with curiosity and asked the question that concerned all of the women in Asia...‘How many children do you have?’ and they deplored my misfortune upon learning that I had none...The men stayed at the door of the women’s room; it was Chinese etiquette to leave the women alone when they received guests.”

After visiting the family at home, Paschkoff was brought to their “country houses” in the surrounding mountains, which, linked together by “bridges, open galleries, and bamboo paths,” absolutely resembled “the houses shown on the lacquer and ivory boxes and fans.” In this idyllic setting, Uncle Liu showed the Russian visitor the temple “in which he and his friends carried out the Buddhist ceremonies.” Liu and others even immediately performed for Pasckoff an example of their chants.

In spite of her tendency to slide into generalizations about “Chinese” manners and to match her first-hand observations to various *chinoiserie* images that she had apparently already internalized, Paschkoff’s account nevertheless provides a valuable glimpse into Chen Jitong’s family life. Though she never explicitly mentions Chen’s spouse – the

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186 Ibid., 335.
“Madame Liu” in this narrative could have been the wife of Chen’s uncle or, possibly, Jitong’s own wife – it is at least revealed that Chen, in 1882, was still close enough to a rich “Uncle Liu” (most likely Liu Xiang) that he considered bringing a European visitor to the uncle’s house on a “family visit.” Was this also Chen Jitong’s own home? It is difficult to say, but Paschkoff’s narrative does hint at the possibility of Chen having married a cousin of his in an uxorilocal marriage and was therefore living with his uncle’s family. Finally, Paschkoff’s experience in the “country houses” suggests that within Chen Jitong’s own family, there were local gentry like Liu who performed Buddhist rituals on lineage land in the surrounding areas outside Fuzhou city. When Chen Jitong later expounds the importance of ancestral worship and family (by which he often meant lineage) rituals in his French books, we know he has derived his descriptions not only from orthodox Confucian discourse but also from personal experience.

Faithful to his view that Western visitors should leave the treaty ports and go inland to see the real China, an argument that he often laid out in his later writings, Chen Jitong first invited Paschkoff to see his family in Fuzhou city and their land in the surrounding villages before finally bringing her, on another occasion, to the Fuzhou Navy Yard. There they saw some of Chen’s old teachers, including the professor Médard; one of Chen Jitong’s nephews, who was studying at the school of apprentices; and visited the School of Naval Construction where the teachers confirmed for Pasckoff the students’ ability in understanding different mechanical processes. Their aptitude, remarked Paschkoff, “must set the Western people, so inclined to impose their civilization, to reflection, for the Chinese take the best of [the West] to use perfectly against the Europeans.”

187 Ibid., 337.
After taking in more sights in and around Fuzhou, Paschkoff left China from Amoy. Evidently impressed by what she had seen in China and ready to impart advice to her French readers, she ended her essay lamenting that the Europeans, “accustomed as they were to speak of the oriental people as beings without an active spirit and incapable of serious study,” knew so little about China. One day the Europeans would have to come to
terms with the Chinese, who were a “strong, energetic, and intelligent race” with a great future.\textsuperscript{188} Coincidentally, these admonitions echoed some of the basic sentiments that underlay Chen Jitong’s own writings, which would soon inundate the French public after Chen’s own return to Europe in 1883.

Paschkoff’s positive impressions of China was much informed by her trip to Fuzhou and her guide, Chen Jitong, whose pride and attachment to his native city and its local culture is evident even in this foreign visitor’s essay. As we have seen, Chen Jitong’s intimate connection to the Fuzhou literati culture were facilitated by the existence of poetry clubs and games, an early immersion in Confucian education, participation local festivals, and the strong ties between the Fuzhou Navy Yard personnel, the local gentry-elite, and some of the student-diplomats who went to Europe in the 1870s. Furthermore, Chen shared this cultural orientation, at once grounded in literati practices and open to Western knowledge, with many of his generation, which included some of the key intellectual and literary figures of the late Qing period. In making sense of Chen Jitong’s later cultural activities in Paris and Shanghai, it is useful to keep in mind his sense of identity as a Fuzhou man of letters and as a member of a new generation of Self-Strengthening elites.

As a member of this group of young foreign affairs experts, Chen Jitong was often called upon to perform diplomatic duties for the Qing’s senior officials. Before he returned to Europe, Chen went to Tianjin to receive a special assignment from Li Hongzhang. Tensions between China and France over French ambitions in Vietnam had risen in the years between 1880 and 1883. While he was busy drawing up a tentative compromise agreement that became known as the Li-Fournier conventions, Li Hongzhang wanted to

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 340.
send Chen to Paris to survey French official and public opinion on the situation. Thus began the final and most creative phase of Chen’s career in Europe, one that began with regular diplomatic negotiations during the Sino-French conflict but soon turned into a cultural and literary project of writing and performing China for a Parisian public.

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Chapter 2
Painting China with a French Brush

On August 25, 1884, an article titled “L’Arsenal de Fou-Tchéou” (The Fuzhou Arsenal) appeared in the French newspaper Le Gaulois. Signed by “Colonel Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Chinese military attaché in Paris,” this passionate essay described both the successful efforts of the French naval officer Prosper Giquel in establishing the Fuzhou Navy Yard and the merits of the institution as an exemplary educational enterprise in which Europeans and Chinese worked side-by-side without conflict. Giquel, who is “among the foreigners who have opened the furrow for a good seed” in China, had held a distinguished position due to his role in leading a Franco-Chinese corps in suppressing the Taiping rebellion in 1862-1864. Having received honors that belonged to high ranks of Chinese officials and become the “Emperor’s choice” to oversee the creation of the Fuzhou Navy Yard, Giquel, who had “learned the Mandarin language and familiarized himself with our customs and institutions,” had led the founding of what has become a model for the kind of foreigner-led enterprise commissioned by “our government and our people.”

The name of the institution was rather misleading, for while an “arsenal” usually suggests the manufacture of firearms and gunpowder, the Fuzhou Navy Yard was essentially composed of workshops and factories devoted not only to building warships, but to extracting the metallic wealth of China. It was also a practical school, with courses led by European professors, which trained skillful engineers, some of whom had finished their education in Europe and taken up leading positions in industrial enterprises in China. Besides the tireless efforts of Giquel in furnishing the Navy Yard with material and personnel from France, the feature that made the institution, the construction of which has
received unanimous praise from all travelers to Fuzhou, so successful, but has not received enough consideration, was its unique form of administration. With the Europeans in charge of works and instruction and with Chinese officials overseeing the administrative and disciplinary duties, “order and harmony never ceased to reign between the Europeans and Chinese.” This system should be credited for the fact that “the little French colony at the Arsenal” found few obstacles in their work. Citing from an 1867 report submitted to the Paris Society of Civil Engineers, Giquel is quoted in an appeal for his country to draw lessons from the Fuzhou Navy Yard, which, with its “continual intercourse” with French industry and its training given in French, “turns the Chinese students’ eyes toward France as the progress in China gives them desire to leave the limited circles in which they were restrained.” These words, which represented “an elevated patriotism without barren ambition” can be repeated without regret by a Chinese because they are at once animated by a genuine love for one’s country and point to “the future as a hope and a source of good.” Indeed, concludes Chen Jitong, “Institutions like those of the Fuzhou Arsenal are great because they create civilizing rivalries and only they can prepare for the triumph of generous ideas, which make nations more united. It is from them and by them only that progress is born.”

The Fuzhou Navy Yard may have been a very impressive establishment, yet by August 25, 1884 it was almost no more. Just two days prior, a battle between the French navy headed by Admiral Amédée Courbet (1827-1885) and the Fuzhou fleet, with some

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ships commanded by Chen Jitong’s former classmates, had taken place at Mawei, near the site of Chen’s old school. In less than an hour, the Fuzhou fleet, taken by surprise, had been completely overwhelmed; the Fuzhou Navy Yard suffered severe damage as result of French bombardment.\textsuperscript{191} Written at the outbreak of open hostilities at the height of the Sino-French War (1884-1885), Chen Jitong’s article was a polemic decrying the undoing of an amicable relationship.

The tensions between the Qing empire and the Third Republic dated to earlier in the nineteenth century, when France made numerous incursions into Vietnam, which the Qing had long considered to be a tributary state, and eventually signed a treaty in 1874 turning the southern region of Cochin China into a French protectorate. By the early 1880s, with a new round of colonial policies being pushed by various interests groups such as the Geographical Society in Paris, the French had increased their military activities in Annam, eventually running into the Black Flag Army, an irregular Qing force commanded by the legendary Liu Yongfu 劉永福 (1837-1917).\textsuperscript{192} While tensions increased in the years from 1880 to 1883, the Qing vacillated between policies of appeasement and confrontation, the former position advocated by Li Hongzhang and the latter called for by a group of hawkish officials known as the qingliu 清流 faction. After several rounds of botched negotiations, and partly as a result of the Qing throne’s refusal to settle for paying indemnities, war eventually broke out in 1884. It was not until June the next year that an eventual peace agreement, in which the Qing recognized French claims to Annam but was exempted from


\textsuperscript{192} On French colonial debates in the 1870s and 1880s, see Ch’en San-ch’ing 陳三井, “Shijiu shiji Faguo de zhimin zhuzhang” 十九世紀法國的殖民主張, in \textit{Sifenxi pan lunshi} 四分溪畔論史 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2013), 225-234. See also John Frank Cady, \textit{The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).
paying any indemnities, was reached. Though it was a small conflict, with both sides wavering at times and the settlement preserving mostly the status quo at the beginning of the war, the Sino-French war gave rise to a wave of strong nationalism among Chinese elites and very much affected the generation of Fuzhou naval graduates like Chen Jitong, who found themselves caught between the strong antagonisms brewing in public opinion and the frustrations of searching for a peaceful resolution.

Chen Jitong’s role was particularly affected by his relationship to Li Hongzhang. In his negotiations with various French representatives, Li seems to have relied mostly on a small group of young foreign affairs experts serving as expectant officials in his mufu (tent government). In Tianjin, this included Luo Fenglu and Ma Jianzhong, who had both recently returned from Europe; in Paris, Chen Jitong seemed to have acted as important go-between in talks with French government officials. In 1883, on his way back from Fuzhou, he had arranged for private meetings with several prominent officials, including Prime Minister Jules Ferry and Foreign Minister Challemel-Lacour, in order to test French attitudes for Li Hongzhang. In August 1884, he would accompany ambassador Li Fengbao to meet eight times with Jules Ferry, always corresponding with Luo Fenglu in

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194 In his study of Li Hongzhang’s mufu, Kenneth E. Folsom identifies Luo Fenglu and Ma Jianzhong as two of Li’s most trusted “returned students.” Although Chen Jitong was not in China during the 1880s, he must be included in this group, since all three were sent to Europe by Li and given special status among the first group of Naval Yard students. See Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ch’ing Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 139-141.

Tianjin via telegram.\textsuperscript{196} While his efforts attracted much attention in the French press and angered his superior, the hawkish Zeng Jize 曾紀澤, they did not help prevent the eventual outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{197} Yet by April 1884, when Chen Jitong was officially re-assigned to the Paris legation, he had had enough media exposure to become a known name in Paris. Perhaps motivated by a need to promote a more positive image of China in this period of mounting tensions, Chen turned to writing.

\textbf{The Chinese Painted By Themselves}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{Engraved image of Chen Jitong on the front page of \textit{L’Univers illustré}, 5 July 1884. The same image appears as the frontispiece in \textit{Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes}.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Journal des débats}, 5 July 5 1884; Zhang Zhenkun, ed., \textit{Zhong-Fa zhangzheng} vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 345-347.

Chen Jitong launched his literary career in France in May and June of 1884 with the publication of eighteen articles in the prestigious *Revue des deux mondes*, under the series title “La Chine et les chinois, par M. le colonel Tcheng-Ki-Tong, attaché militaire à l'ambassade de Chine à Paris.”\(^{198}\) Having been promoted, three years earlier, by Li Hongzhang from first captain (*dusi* 都司) to expectant colonel (*fujiang* 副將), Chen evidently felt it appropriate to include this official title in his first publication.\(^{199}\) Later in 1884, the articles of “La Chine et les chinois” were collected in book form under the title *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* and published by Calmann Lévy.\(^{200}\) This book proved to be such a hit that at least eight editions were printed in the same year and that, as one reviewer quipped, “Everyone has more or less read his book.”\(^{201}\) Immediately, translations began to appear in various other Western languages. Beginning in 1885 with an English edition, *The Chinese Painted by Themselves*, these alternate versions ranged from German and Italian, to Danish and Swedish.\(^{202}\) Readers across Europe, and even in the United States, found themselves delighted by the appearance of a book on Chinese society and culture whose “author is sufficiently cosmopolitan to make his estimate of the Chinese on a comparative basis,” and whose “keen thrusts at the defects of Western civilization are none the less effective because dealt with imperturbable good humor.”\(^{203}\)

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\(^{198}\) Tcheng Ki-Tong, “La Chine et les chinois,” *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 May 1884, 278. Chen’s own role in diplomatic negotiations during this period remains to be clarified through further research.

\(^{199}\) Li Hongzhang, “Li Hongzhang zou chuyang siyi zaishi geyuan qingjiang zhe” 李鴻章奏出洋肄業在事各員請獎摺, (17 February 1881), in Zhang Xia 張俠 et al., ed., *Qingmo haijun ziliao* 清末海軍史料 (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 1982), 389-341.


\(^{202}\) For a list of these translations, see “Works by Chen Jitong” in my bibliography.

The popularity of *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* signaled an auspicious beginning to a short yet prolific writing career for Chen Jitong. In 1886, he released a comparative study of Chinese and European theatre, *Le Théâtre des chinois*, a work that for one French reviewer demonstrated not only the author’s ability to “write with elegance and with vivacity” in “the language of the day,” but also his familiarity with both French theatre and that of the Chinese.\(^{204}\) In 1889, *Contes Chinois*, his translation and compilation of twenty-six stories from Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715)’s *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異, received a detailed review from the sinologist Gustave Schlegel, who hoped that Chen “would continue to create better understanding in his European compatriots with his elegant and light pen,”\(^{205}\) and from the eminent French writer Anatole France.\(^{206}\) *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, a collection of essays on the leisurely side of Chinese life published in 1890, led to one reviewer exclaiming:

“If it must be that the China which its artists had made us realize, a land of ivory and porcelain, in monotone, still, having no perspective and light without shadows, shall be undone, let it be undone by Gen. Tcheng-Ki-Tong...a Parisian of the Parisians...he is as familiar with the society that he is in as with the one that he has quitted. Comparable to a translation made by a master of two languages may be his work, learned in the niceties and apt to naturalize them.”\(^{207}\)

Chen went on to publish three more books in Paris: an adapted novel, *Le Roman de l’homme jaune*; a commentary on Parisian encounters during the 1889 Exhibition, *Les


\(^{205}\) Tcheng Ki-Tong, *Contes chinois* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1889). For the review, see *T’oung Pao* 1 (1890), 76-79.


Parisiens peints par eux-mêmes; and after his departure from Europe, Mon pays, a collection of essays.\(^{208}\)

Some previous studies have noted a defensive tone in Chen Jitong’s French writings about China. That is, in attempting to promote the virtues of Chinese civilization by making them compatible with Western social standards, Chen Jitong may have exaggerated the rationality, harmony, and equality that existed in Chinese society.\(^{209}\) In “writing against the current” of Western misconceptions, Chen Jitong deliberately portrayed much of China in a positive, idealized light, while maintaining a critical attitude toward aspects of Western culture.\(^{210}\) To a certain degree, this analysis holds true. Yet because previous studies have not taken into account some of the extratextual resources and activities that may have influenced Chen’s writings, they do not adequately explain what kind of “Westernized” voice Chen adopted or how he managed to win over a large and diverse French (and European) readership. Furthermore, too much emphasis on the “self-orientalizing” nature of Chen’s work risks reducing their creative features to an oversimplified explanation based on the “exoticism” of a Chinese man writing in French.\(^{211}\) Was there not a more complicated process of cross-cultural negotiation at work? In what ways might Chen have maintained and affected a literati sensibility even while writing for a French audience?

\(^{208}\) Tcheng Ki-Tong, Le Roman de l’homme jaune (Paris: G. Charpentier et E. Fasquelle, 1890); Tcheng Ki-Tong, Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois (Paris: Charpentier, 1891); and Tcheng Ki-Tong, Mon pays, la Chine d’aujourd’hui (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1892).

\(^{209}\) Yeh, “The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,” 441-442.

\(^{210}\) Li Huachuan, Wan Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng, 70-80.

\(^{211}\) Catherine Yeh has called Chen Jitong “something of an Oriental Orientalist”; see “The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,” 443. For a critical reflection on Said’s “Orientalism” and Xiaomei Chen’s “Occidentalism,” as well as a conceptualization of the foreign-educated Chinese intellectual’s “self-orientalization,” see Arif Dirlik, “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism,” History and Theory 35.4 (December 1996): 96-118.
By providing close readings of a large selection of Chen Jitong’s writings on Chinese society, on Chinese women, and on Chinese literature, as well as a number of his more creative, fictional works, I argue in this chapter that Chen Jitong was neither simply providing a straightforward, nationalistic defense of an essentialized “China” nor offering a completely “Orientalized” account that catered to his Western readers. In fact, by employing an innovative mélange of examples from Confucian norms, Chinese popular culture, classical Chinese poetry, as well as appropriations and references to classical European literature, the contemporary French mass press, and the works of Western writers and sinologists, Chen was able capture the Confucian values and popular rituals that characterized late imperial Chinese culture while also emphasizing the universality of such human feelings as love and the shared value of literature and poetry across cultures. In order to convincingly make use of all of these cultural resources, Chen Jitong invented for himself an authoritative authorial persona as an insider and thus qualified mediator between cultures.

In the first place, he took the position of what some literary scholars have called the “autoethnographer,” one whose authority to write about his native society and culture is derived from a spatial and discursive displacement from that “home culture.” As Chen Jitong announces in the preface to *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, his goal is to “…present China as she is, to describe Chinese customs with the knowledge I have, but with a spirit and taste that is European. I wish to put my native experience in service of my acquired experience; in a word, I think as a European who would have learned all that I know of China, and who is pleased to establish between the civilizations of the West and

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In identifying “civilizations” in both China and the West, Chen Jitong was making a case for the existence of a foundation for intercultural communication and understanding. This also allowed Chen to establish an equivalence between “native experience” and “acquired experience” and thereby claim his unique position as an authority on both cultures.

The second literary voice Chen Jitong intentionally appropriated is that of the flâneur, that is, one who specialized in a sort of “panoramic literature” or “literature of physiologies,” a literary style particular widespread in nineteenth-century France. As famously described by Walter Benjamin, nothing – from humans to cities, animals to nations – escaped the pen of the “physiologue”, or the “flâneur who goes botanizing on the asphalt.” The sociological topics commonly discussed by the “physiologies” included “days of celebration and days of mourning, work and play, conjugal customs and bachelors’ practices, the family, the home, children, school, society, the theater, character types, professions.” Indeed, as Benjamin points out, the most celebrated example of the “physiologies” was the massive 1841 compilation Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, the title of which Chen borrowed for two of his books. Chen not only appropriated the title but also the structural elements of the “physiologies” for his own works. Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes is structured more like a collection of essays, and indeed, as noted above,

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213 Tcheng Ki-Tong, Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes, vii-viii.
214 That Chen followed such a literary style was suggested by Catherine Yeh, following Rudolf G. Wagner, but neither scholar has fully developed this point. See Yeh, “The Lifestyle of Four Wenren,” 440 and Wagner, Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 365-366.
was first published in serial form in the *Revue des deux mondes*, while many of the essays collected in his other books were also first published in a variety of French newspapers and journals. In *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, the twenty-one chapters each have simple, clear titles that are suggestive of the social categories enumerated by Benjamin: “Considérations sur la famille,” “La marriage,” “La divorce,” “La femme,” “Le journal et l’opinion,” “L’éducation,” “Le culte des ancêtres,” “Les classes laborieuses,” “Les plaisirs.”

A quick glance through the *table des matières*, then, leaves the reader with the impression of being able to “walk” through Chinese society as one reads through the various chapters. Indeed, to take his reader on such a journey is not far from what Chen Jitong proposes:

“My reader will accompany me, he will enter with me; I will present him to my friends and he will take part in our pleasures. I will open for him our books, I will teach him our language, he will cover our customs. Then, we will assemble in the provinces; along the way we will converse in French, in English, in German; we will speak of his country, of those who await his return...So he will form another idea about our civilization: of her he will like that which is noble and just; and, if he has criticisms to make, he will recall that nothing is perfect in the world and one must always hope for a better future.”

This is an invitation offered by cosmopolitan and a challenge for readers to engage in a cross-cultural conversation. From the very beginning, Chen insists on his dual authority as one who can lead a foreigner through Chinese society and as one who can readily explain that culture in a recognizable and familiar language – and style – to the French. As we will see, he does this in part by making ample use of literary allusions and journalistic references, often setting up cultural comparisons so as to makes sense of the foreign through a familiar example. Significantly, Chen Jitong also tapped into was a reservoir of scholarship, translations, and imaginative works on China by several generations of nineteenth century French writers and sinologists.

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China Painted by Westerners

The image of China in the travel writings, fiction, and literature of the West is a long-studied subject. These depictions, of course, vary significantly in form and in their respective degrees of “Sinophilia” or “Sinophobia,” and contradictory attitudes may be often found in writings by the same author. Nevertheless, there does exist a conventional narrative of the shifting Western perceptions of China in the early modern period. In this framework, China turned, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from an object of fascination and wonder for early explorers to a society intensely and enthusiastically studied by visiting Jesuits like Matteo Ricci and Joachim Bouvet. While making religious accommodations in order to facilitate cultural exchange, the Jesuits also interacted with the Qing court and began to produce writings with mostly positive descriptions of Chinese society and customs. These texts, despite the decline of the Jesuits after the “rites controversy” and Qing ban on Christianity, became important sources for eighteenth-century European knowledge on China. During the Enlightenment, China became something of a positive mirror for the *philosophes*, led by Voltaire, who saw in China a secular, non-absolutist empire ruled by the literati with an admirable ethical code as spelled out by Confucius. Around the same period, European fascination with Chinese aesthetics and material culture, epitomized by things such as gardens, furnishings, porcelain, and silk, reached the height of its popularity. Yet with the onset of imperialism and racism in the nineteenth century, both the idealized portrayals of China and the obsession with *chinoiserie* were increasingly supplanted by missionaries’ and traveler’s accounts of
despotic rule, barbaric customs, the suppression of women, and an immobile empire in poverty and decline.

At first glance, Chen Jitong’s French writings may seem to be a defensive project, designed to counter the many negative descriptions and misperceptions of China he has encountered in the West. However, his was far from a lone voice, especially in nineteenth century France, for in publishing essays on Chinese society and culture, Chen was joining a discursive realm already populated by other travelers and diplomats, French sinologists, as well as creative writers fascinated with the image of a “poetic China.”

While the Enlightenment admiration of China as an abstract model of prosperity and harmony to be emulated by the West had mostly faded by the nineteenth century, there were still Western writers who offered up some positive descriptions of Chinese society. As Pierre-Étienne Will has recently shown, between 1830 and 1900, a good number of European missionaries and diplomats and missionaries, such as Father Évariste Régis Huc (1813-1860) and Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935), made claims for a potentially “democratic” China, with built-in checks against despotism. Told as first-hand accounts,

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these writers focused on the practical autonomy and pseudo-democratic organization of local elites at the village level, while lauding the high level of literacy and education achieved across the country. One French observer, Eugène Simon (1829-1896), who had served as French consul in Ningbo and Fuzhou, in the early years of the Fuzhou Navy Yard, even went as far as to depict China as an “agrarian democracy,” replete with citizens’ assemblies and elected councils, in his influential *La Cité chinoise* (1885), a book sometimes brought up when French reviewers discussed Chen’s writings. Whether these descriptions were original and accurate or fanciful constructions appropriated from previous texts, it is evident that there existed a “positive discourse” on China, one that was perhaps not always so marginal, among nineteenth-century European writers.

Additionally, the nineteenth century was also the period during which academic sinology emerged and matured in France. Beginning with the inauguration of the chair of “Chinese and Tartar-Manchu Languages and Literatures,” held by Jean-Pierre Abel Rémusat (1788-1832), at the Collège de France in 1814, and the establishment of similar positions at other schools as well as the expansion of courses on Chinese throughout the period, “sinology” was gradually institutionalized as an academic discipline. While much of the sinological work of this period remained focused on textual and linguistic

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research on early periods, one notable area of innovation lay in the study and translation of Chinese popular literature and poetry. In particular, Yuan drama such as *Hui Lan Ji* 灰蘭記 and *Pi Pa Ji* 琵琶記, and early Qing scholar-beauty romances such as *Yu Jiao Li* 玉嬌梨 and *Ping Shan Leng Yan* 平山冷燕, captured French sinologists such as Stanislas Julien (1797-1873) and Antoine Bazin (1799-1863), who translated a large number of these texts.\(^{222}\) Meanwhile, the Marquis Léon d’Hervey de Saint-Denys (1822-1922), who succeeded Julien at the Collège de France, brought out in 1862 a substantial translation of Tang poetry, *Poésies de l’époque des Thang*, comprised of ninety-seven poems selected from thirty-five Tang poets, among which works by Li Bo 李白 and Du Fu 杜甫 comprised the majority.\(^{223}\) While this became an authoritative and frequently referenced collection, it was another volume, *Le Livre de jade* (Book of Jade) by the writer Judith Gautier (1845-1917), that signaled the height of the nineteenth-century French craze for Chinese poetry.

Gautier’s father, the writer and Parnassian poet Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), had brought home a Chinese tutor, Ting-Tun-Lin (Ding Dunling 丁敦齡, 1830?-1886), when she was eighteen.\(^{224}\) After studying and copying texts with Ding for four years, Gautier

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\(^{222}\) Xu Guanghua, *Faguo hanxue shi*, 136-137.


\(^{224}\) Ting-Tun-Lin, himself a fascinating character in Sino-French cultural interactions, was originally from Shanxi. After escaping to Macau to escape Qing persecution for associating with the Taiping Army, he was brought to France by an Italian, Josephe-Marie Calley (1810-1862), who wanted Ting’s help translating a French-Chinese dictionary. After his patron died, Ting found himself in the streets of Paris, where he was picked up by Théophile Gautier. Aside from helping Judith Gautier read Tang poetry, Ding had authored his own short novel, *Le Petite pantoufle* (The Little Slipper, 1875) and had furnished the plot for *Les Fleuves des Perles*, a novel by the writer Rene Pont-Jest, for which Chen Jitong wrote the preface! See Meng Hua 孟華, *Zhongfa wenxue guanxi yanjiu* 中法文學關係研究 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 247n3 and William Leonard Schwartz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature, 1800-1925* (Paris: H. Champion, 1927), 23.
released a volume of seventy-one poems from the Tang and Song. Arranged topically under headings such as “Wine,” “Lovers,” and “The Moon,” Gautier’s versions of these classic poems were more free-flowing adaptations than literal translations. However, they proved to be very popular and helped to expand knowledge and appreciation of Chinese poetry beyond the circle of sinologists. 225

Together with the work of the nineteenth-century sinologists, these poetry translations, if at times tinged with exoticism, helped perpetuate an image of “cultural China” well into the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in spite of the mounting negative portrayals accumulating around the same time through missionary accounts. 226 Importantly, works such as those by Gautier and Saint-Denys became textual references upon which Chen evidently modelled some of his writings, especially in translating poetry, and from which Chen readily appropriated examples. While Chen Jitong’s was a unique voice among nineteenth century French representations of China, he was not writing in an vacuum nor mounting a one-person struggle against some monolithic European disdain for Chinese culture. Yet, as we will see, this did not stop Chen from often setting himself up as engaged in a valiant battle against willful distortions perpetuated by missionaries and travel writers.

Misunderstandings

226 Meng Hua, Zhong-Fa wenxue guanxi yanjiu.
In the preface to *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, Chen Jitong accuses existing books on China written by foreign travelers to be full of falsehoods. Often written prior to the actual journey, these travelers’ accounts are made for the ostensible purpose of publishing a book and not for an objective survey of the country. This practice was not exclusive to Western accounts of China but pertained to all kinds of travel writing. They perpetuated misperceptions and misunderstandings by taking as law and stereotype the first unusual sights and people encountered. In jest, Chen announces that “all civilized nations should institute an academy whose mission is to regulate the books of travel impressions” so as to limit distortions.227 For Chen, calling out and exposing the biases in Western travelers’ writings often became a strategic practice of enhancing his own cultural authority, as one with inside knowledge of what China is really like, but also, and perhaps more significantly, as an interlocutor in the French journalistic sphere. We can observe this process at work in his criticism of the Holy Child Association.

*Holy Childhood Association*

Founded in 1843 by a Catholic bishop for the purpose of rescuing Chinese children from infanticide, the L’Oeuvre de Saint-Enfance (Holy Child Association) operated by taking in from young French children monthly donations, which went towards the operation of missionary-managed foundling homes and the buying and raising (as well as missionary training) of abandoned children in China. A highly successful institution whose annual income exceeded two million francs by 1870 and attracted members and donors throughout Europe and North America, the L’Oeuvre de Saint-Enfance gathered popular

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support in the donor countries and especially in France through emotional stories and visual materials that depicted the dire situation of unwanted Chinese babies, especially girls, who were sometimes shown to be left by their parents to be eaten by fierce animals.\(^{228}\)

It was just such stories that drew Chen Jitong’s ire. Condemning the “perfidious imagination” that led to the invention of the lore about Chinese parents leaving their poor children to be consumed by animals, Chen exposes the excessive nature of the Saint-Enfance cult through a personal anecdote. He recalls that once in Paris he had observed an old lady point to him from behind and exclaim, “Here is a Chinese; who knows if it was not my sous that purchased him?” Chen comments wryly that fortunately the woman did not have her deeds quite in order on that day, in which case perhaps he would have had to pay her interest. For “ought not every good action be profitable?”\(^{229}\) In addition to ridiculing, in this anecdote, the French obsession with the business of saving Chinese children, Chen’s clever use of the pun action, which also connotes a share of stock, links the popularity of the l’Oeuvre de Saint-Enfance to the consumer culture in late nineteenth century France. As Henrietta Harrison points out, the success of the l’Oeuvre de Saint-Enfance in France was not only attributed to universal concerns of infant mortality or Catholic missionary zeal, but also due to its appeal to the bourgeois women and young girls

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who came into possession of the “little Chinese” for whom they were designated as godparents through a church lottery.\textsuperscript{230}

Chen proceeds to argue that not only were rumors such as those of children being thrown to beasts unfounded, but that, since parental love was universal, acts of infanticide were condemned and indeed against the law in China. In addition, the Chinese government subsidized public foundling homes, while private charities were also operated in society to provide relief to needy children. In addition, there also existed social practices for destitute families, some of whom send their daughters to other families to be raised as child-brides, while others sell their children to richer families to be servants, but who, upon maturity, receive dowries from their foster families and are married off to enjoy all the privileges of being a mother.\textsuperscript{231}

Chen’s descriptions of public and private relief institutions for children are for the most part resonant with the realities in nineteenth-century China, especially in the Jiangnan region, which had been devastated during the mid-century Taiping War (1850-1864). Both Qing bureaucrats concerned with social reconstruction and public minded local elites, such as the prominent gentry-philanthropist Yu Zhi 余治 (1809-1874), put forth extensive efforts at operating relief centers such as the “Bureau of Relief and Education” (\textit{fujiao ju} 扶教局), which provided shelter, food, and basic education to refugee children, as well as foundling homes (\textit{yuying tang} 育婴堂) and “Societies for Preserving Babies” (\textit{baoying hui} 保婴會), which provided monetary subsidies to parents to discourage the drowning of babies. As Angela Ki Che Leung has argued, not only were the nineteenth-century child

\textsuperscript{230} Harrison, “‘A Penny for the Little Chinese,’” 80-81.
\textsuperscript{231} Tcheng, “L’oeuvre de la Saint-Enfance,” 177-178.
relief institutions founded upon a new view of the child “as a social being,” but increased interest and investment in local institutions in the post-Taiping era were also very much related to public anxiety about foundling homes run by Western missionaries, a large number of which would have been funded by the l’Oeuvre de Sainte-Enfance. Among the social practices encouraged around this time was indeed, as Chen described, the adoption of girls to become wives (*tongyangxi* 童養媳) for the sons of poor families. Aside from satirizing the cult of the Holy Child, Chen was also trying to show his French readers that there existed indigenous practices and institutions in China to counter the problem of child abandonment. In carrying out charitable acts, European missionaries meant well, but organizations such as the L’Oeuvre de Sainte-Enfance should be aware of the falsehood of some of their claims and thus tone down their rhetoric.

With his critique of the L’Oeuvre de Sainte-Enfance, Chen Jitong had actually stepped into an intense debate over infanticide in China. In 1875, the Parisian writer and critic Francisque Sarcey (1827-1899) had published a series of articles in the newspaper *Le XIXe siècle* attacking the claims of infanticide by the Jesuit missionaries in Jiangnan. Basing his argument on his own childhood experience with the L’Oeuvre de Sainte-Enfance and his realization of Catholic exaggerations, Sarcey’s articles were marked by an anti-clerical polemic.


234 King, *Between Life and Death*, 138-140; Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China*, 78-80;
1878), a Jesuit priest in the Jiangnan mission in China compiled an illustrated study, *L’Infanticide et l’Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en China* (1878) to make the case for the prevalence of the practice. Michelle King has shown that Palatre’s book was a complex construction, involving the selection and amalgamation of various Chinese sources such as morality books. It was then displayed at a pictorial exhibit in Rouen in 1884, alongside images produced by Chinese children at the Jesuit-run Tushanwan orphanage in Shanghai. The catalog put together for the exhibition was titled *Un orphelinat chinois de la Sainte-Enfance à l'exposition internationale d'imagerie de Rouen et l'infanticide en Chine prouvé à M. Tchen-Ki-Tong par ses compatriots* (A Chinese orphanage of the Holy Child at the international exhibition of images at Rouen and infanticide in China as proven to M. Tcheng-Ki-Tong by his compatriots), suggesting how seriously some of the Jesuits took the influence of Chen’s criticism. Yet Chen Jitong never responded to the pamphlet. He had evidently moved onto other writings, but he would reuse the example of the lady who thought she had purchased him through donation as an example of how ignorant the French masses could be.

*Around the World in Seventy-two Days*

In an 1891 essay, Chen Jitong uses a contemporary event to once again critique the modern culture of world travel. Recalling that when he first read Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* some years ago, he had wondered whether such a journey would actually be possible, Chen mused at the fact that “the fantastic voyage…is today realized

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235 King, *Between Life and Death*, 98-105.
and the reality, as ever so often, has demonstrated itself to be superior to fiction.” Not only were the eighty days of the original journey being reduced to seventy-two, but according to the American press, there would be not one, but two groups of travelers, dressed in “the colors of a great and rich newspaper,” each heading in opposite directions. They would eventually meet up again in the United States, considerably exhausted from the trip, with only meagre travel notes to show, but, with the latest press updates from New York, this was proving to be “quite the attraction for the public of sportsmen!” 237

Chen was referring to the sensational reports of the adventurous American reporter Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Jane Cochran, 1864-1922), who had two years earlier set out to match the imaginary trip made by Verne’s Phileas Fogg. Sponsored by Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World, which generated excitement and readership for the trip by running a “Nellie Bly Guessing Match,” and unknowingly pitted against a rival reporter, Elizabeth Bisland (1861-1929) from the magazine Cosmopolitan (the one who travelled – as Chen noted – in the opposite direction), Bly captivated readers and followers across the Atlantic and completed the trip in seventy-two days. 238

If the European and American public were fascinated by Bly’s trip, Chen could not understand what the fuss was all about. In today’s world, he continues in his sarcastic commentary, a postcard also takes about seventy-two days to encircle the world. In their furious race against time, what was the difference between these voyagers and the postcards that went from one means of transportation to another, or indeed, their own

luggage? Spurred on solely by the goal of beating out others to the destination, these travelers ignored both the natural beauty of the scenery as they traversed the oceans and missed the cultural magnificence of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and India. They stopped only briefly in China, and only for sake of changing boats, never minding that in this place of immense rivers and the highest peaks of the world, there lived millions of people in cities with such original architecture, Buddhist pagodas and Confucian temples. They even neglected the islands of Japan, whose exotic charms have been described by Pierre Loti. Finally, after passing through “prairies where the Indians no longer hunt, where the last buffalo was dead,” they returned to New York. In seventy-two days, they have “travelled through the great book of humanity…without having read it.”

Chen lamented this kind of travel, which was “without an idea, without a goal.” He remarks that when Robinson Crusoe ran madly around his island, at least he had a purpose. Yet these feverish globetrotters seemed to be completely “deaf to the great voice of nature and blind to the masterworks of humanity.” Their motto would always be “To be or not to be the first” and never “To see or not to see.”

According to Confucius, upon entering a new place, one should ask after the local customs to find out what is permitted and what is forbidden. However, this kind of effort was unnecessary for those who did not care to make any stops in their travels. What were these “journeys around the world” like? Chen describes an imaginary Chinese visitor who “wishing to see Paris, arrives at the Gare du Nord, takes from there an enclosed carriage and drives in a galloping fashion to the Lyon station” and asks his readers, “what would he had seen of the great capital?” On the other hand, those foreigner travelers who come to China follow a different kind of negligent

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attitude. Instead of penetrating the Chinese interior, they remain content in learning about China only through the “least Chinese of places” – the treaty-ports of Hong Kong and Shanghai, which were just as cosmopolitan as any other port city in the world. In the end, if this “new form of travel” became the fashion of the day, one would have to say “so long” to the picturesque voyages of Cook, Lapeyrouse, Magellan, and Dumont d’Urville, for if humankind were to be reduced to “accessories of high pressure steam engines,” the last word would belong to the unhappy wife of the Swedish scholar in Prince Soleil, who cried out of indignation, “I am no longer a woman, I am a parcel!”241

This biting critique, filled with irony and allusions, is one of the best written and most colorful of Chen Jitong’s French-language essays. It also exemplifies his highly performative style. Published in a popular journal (L’Illustration) with the title “Le tour du monde en soixante-douze jours” (Around the world in seventy-two days), its explicit reference to Nellie Bly’s trip serves as a hook for the casual reader. Yet the essay is not so much a commentary on the contemporary cultural phenomena itself as a polemic through which Chen advocates for a more attentive way for Westerners travelers to observe and engage with the different Asian – and especially Chinese – cultures they encounter in their journeys abroad. For retaining a curiosity about the other was not only advised by Confucius, but also that which helped produce the writings of the great European circumnavigators. It is Chen’s apparent familiarity with these Western figures, as well as his demonstrated knowledge of Verne, Defoe, and Shakespeare, that empowers this cross-cultural critique. Yet Chen is not at all putting forth a reactionary cry against the onset of the global age. Sarcasm aside, the entire piece evokes a fascination and familiarity with

the media spectacle surrounding Nellie Bly’s trip and with Jules Verne’s original story.\textsuperscript{242} The essay’s final punch line refers to the play \textit{Le prince Soleil} (The Sun Prince), a visually extravagant \textit{féerie} (fairy-tale-like theatrical spectacle) that was staged during the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, in which the protagonist – in the manner of Fogg and Bly – journeys through Sweden, Portugal, the Indian Ocean, and Japan.\textsuperscript{243} By wittily borrowing from this noted performance to underscore his argument, Chen takes advantage of his position as a “cultural insider” in fin-de-siècle Paris. His apparent delight in the contemporary events of his time makes him a cosmopolitan, rather than a conservative, voice even as he called for a more attentive observation of other cultures.

\textit{China Viewed by an Artist}

If in criticizing the Holy Child Association and media-propelled globetrotters Chen was taking on notable public subjects, he was also unafraid to engage in disputes with French artists and writers much closer to him personally, as demonstrated in his exchange with the Parisian painter and caricaturist Félix Régamey (1844-1907), a frequent collaborator who had in fact supplied sketches and engravings to supplement Chen’s various publications. In 1877, Régamey had travelled to Japan with Émile Guimet (1836-1918), the prominent industrialist, art collector, and amateur orientalist who was

\textsuperscript{242} Coincidentally, when Nellie Bly finally met with Verne in France, their interpreter was the English writer and longtime Paris resident Robert Harborough Sherard, who would translate one of Chen Jitong’s books; see Goodman, \textit{Eighty Days}, 126-127. The possibilities of circumnavigation and the cultural encounters described in stories such as \textit{Around the World in Eighty Days} would definitely have resonated with the personal experiences and global imaginations of late Qing travelers like Chen Jitong. It is therefore not so surprising to note that it was none other than Jitong’s brother Chen Shoupeng and sister-in-law Xue Shaohui who first translated Verne’s novel into Chinese, published as \textit{Bashiri huanyou ji} 八十日環遊記 (Shanghai: Jingshi wenshe, 1900). See Guo Yanli 郭延禮, \textit{Zhongguo jindai fanyi wenxue gailun} 中國近代翻譯文學概論 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 168-170.

commissioned to present a survey of Far Eastern art and religion to the French Ministry of Public Instruction and to the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris. The journey, along which the French travelers stopped in Shanghai and Canton, apparently left Régamey with a very positive – if exoticized – image of Japan and a not so sanguine impression of China. In an 1890 essay published in the literary magazine Revue politique et littéraire, Régamey put forth a comparison of the two countries based on his own travel experiences. Whereas Japan seemed to him a “flowery garden where everything was beautiful, light, and full of life,” the travelling artist can paint, without encountering suspicion from the locals, to his heart’s content. In contrast, the foreign artist in China met nothing but hostile and fearful crowds. The people in the streets of Canton would yell at the artist to throw away his drawings and run away when offered to be painted. Chinese children, at the sight of a European, “cried as if he had come into the presence of a demon who had come to snatch him away.” In short, in contrast to the beautiful and hospitable Japanese, the Chinese, as described by Régamey, were a “most abject and repulsive collection of famished, infirm, and deformed people to be found in the world.”

Régamey’s idealized image of Japan, which evidently reinforced his negative impression of the Chinese, was most likely conceived as a result of the carefully mapped out itinerary, created to keep at a minimum anxiety-inducing cross-cultural encounters, which he and Guimet followed in their officially commissioned trip. Meanwhile, his view of the Chinese population as xenophobic, superstitious, and revolting had been

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244 Félix Régamey, “Le Japon vu par un artiste,” Revue politique et littéraire, 22 November 1890.
presented to the public in a sketch, noted to be a “painting from life” (*d’après nature*), printed on the cover of the journal *L’Illustration* in March 1884, around the time of the Sino-French conflict.

**Figure 2.2.** “En Chine – Les étrangers et la populace chinoise. Dessin d’après nature de M. Régamey” [In China: The foreigners and the Chinese, illustration painted from life by Mr. Régamey]. *L’Illustration*, 22 March 1884.

This brusque and derogatory image of the Chinese people was something that Chen Jitong could not accept. In response to Régamey’s essay, Chen published “La Chine vue par un artiste” a week later in the same journal. Declaring at the outset his familiarity and friendship with the French artist, Chen proceeds to refute Régamey’s account by presenting
examples from his own experience. Recalling the curious and overwhelming crowds who gathered around him and his colleagues in Berlin in 1877, Chen suggests that the disorienting sensation of foreigner travelers was not exclusive to Westerners in China. In Paris, he has also had encounters with locals that were “as ridiculous as they were amusing,” such as the time at the Louvre museum when, while admiring a painting from the Flemish school, he heard two ladies, “who had apparently just arrived from their province,” announce loudly from behind – undoubtedly because they had been looking at his queue – that he was a woman. Chen also recounts here the time that an old Parisian lady wondered if she had paid for him with her donation to the “Society of the Holy Child.” Whereas Monsieur Régamey would be discouraged by these experiences, Chen only found them to be amusing, for he knew that “alongside this particular badauderie of people ignorant of all the races and countries, one finds everywhere the politeness and the hospitality of those who knew what considerations were due to the foreigner.”

Setting himself apart from the unsophisticated Parisian and provincial crowds, Chen is here both flaunting his own cosmopolitanism and condemning unforgiving European travelers like Régamey for failing to elevate themselves to such a tolerant perspective. Régamey, for example, was much too harsh in his judgment of Chinese children. Of course they would be afraid of encroaching strangers – such were the manner of children everywhere: “In China, as everywhere else, children are without any anti-international instincts.” Although apparently taking on a facetious tone, Chen nevertheless manages to put forth an argument for a more open-minded attitude in cross-cultural

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246 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Chine vue par un artiste,” Revue politique et littéraire, 29 November 1890.
247 As I show in chapter 3, both Chen Jitong and the French press regularly contrasted his image as a worldly man of letters with the crude and uncultured crowd that gathered around him.
encounters. In subverting Régamey’s account, Chen calls for a reexamination of the factors that caused xenophobia: “It is not the foreigner who frightens, it is ignorance” (Ce n’est pas l’étranger qui fait peur, c’est l’inconnu). How would one overcome such fear-inducing ignorance? For Chen, the solution would be through the promotion of understanding between people of different cultures. This was the project of Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes and his other writings. Through ethnographic depictions as well as the creative adaptations of folk tales, classical poetry, and fiction, Chen would attempt to create a China that was both particularistic in its social organization and universally accessible in the way its culture and human sentiments can be represented through literature.

**State and Society**

A central idea that Chen Jitong repeatedly emphasized throughout his writings was that China was a well-functioning patriarchal society in which the people willingly lived under the benevolent governance of the emperor, rather than being subjected to oppression under despotic rule. Rather than an autocratic system, Chinese society was in fact paternalistic in its organization. Against Western notions of “Oriental despotism,” Chen tried to show that in fact, as long as the Confucian pattern of hierarchical social relations was taken as a given, one can observe much autonomy in Chinese society, for in China, “political questions are closely linked to social questions.” This was an argument for cultural relativism, for however it may be different from Europe, Chinese civilization was

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248 Tcheng, “La Chine vue par un artiste.”
one that was “real and mature.” Moreover, from the emperor to the people, the Chinese followed the mandates for self-cultivation and ordering the family and state as laid out by Confucius and in classic texts like the “Ta-Kio” (Daxue 大學). As a result, everyone lived with clear moral ideals and together worked to maintain harmony within and between local communities. This was, of course, an idealized image of society as envisioned through orthodox Neo-Confucian expectations. By shifting the emphasis from the political to the social, Chen is able to gloss over the organization of Qing government in broad strokes and to focus on such topics as the examination system and the Chinese family. As for venerable institutions, Chen did offer one example – the censorate, as evidence that China was not run under an autocracy. Curiously, however, he arrived at this example through a discussion of newspapers and public opinion.

Public Opinion

As an avid follower of and frequent contributor to the European newspapers, Chen Jitong was very much aware of the value of the press as a tool for generating opinion and disseminating information to the public. Living in Paris during the late nineteenth-century expansion of the mass press, he could not help but become immersed in this new media culture. In Les Parisiens peints par eux-mêmes, he enthusiastically wrote about his visits to a newspaper’s office to observe the editorial and printing press and called the public preoccupation with the journals a “fever” that he had himself contracted. He also wrote

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about newspapers in China on several occasions. While frankly commenting on the limited development of the press, however, Chen also used these opportunities to discuss an alternative mode of public opinion in China – the censorate.

In China, Chen explains, there indeed existed numerous newspapers. The oldest of these was the “King-Pao” or Gazette de Pékin (Jingbao 京報), which was not so much a journal of opinion than a collection of information, of imperial decisions published at the order of the Grand Council for instructing the people. Received by all the officials throughout the provinces, this “Journal officiel” kept one up to date on a number of matters pertaining to public and fiscal affairs. Yet it never revealed anything about the intimate life in the court, nor did it ever carry editorials or feature articles. In addition to the Jingbao, there were several Chinese-language newspapers including the “Chem-Pao” (Shen bao 申報) in Shanghai and the “Tcheng-Kouan-Pao” (Xunhuan ribao 循環日報) in Hong Kong.254 But while these papers did carry editorials which commented on current affairs and recommended change, they published “a sort of rational and philosophical criticism, without passion or personalities” and never any personal attacks. Meanwhile, there were some journals published in English, but they were mostly only read by the European residents.255

In short, in China there did not exist the diverse collection of opinionated newspapers as one found in Europe, where the journals represented different parties and

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255 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Presse chinoise,” Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891.
were “often in battle with one another and exposed public opinion in the most opposite forms.”

One would also not find the absolute freedom of the press that was enjoyed by the European newspapers. An important reason for this was the enduring prohibition against writing histories of the reigning dynasty, for the newspaper would be just such a public account of current history. However, this did not mean that there were no checks to imperial tyranny or ways to regulate abuse of power by officials. Chen Jitong singles out in particular one institution, which functioned to channel public opinion between the rulers and the people. This was the “Tou-tcha-yang” or censorate (duchayuan 都察院), an “all-seeing court” with the right to remonstrate to the emperor and reprimand all officials, and which had a long history in China, dating back to the reign of the Emperor Wu of the Zhou. By the Ming dynasty, the government had set up an “assembly of censors” and assigned to each remonstrating official a province to monitor. The current dynasty, while inheriting this system, had fixed the number of censors to fifty-six, assigned equally between Manchu and Han officials. Selected from the most morally upright officials from the Hanlin Academy, these censors were paid minimally, but their positions came with honor as well as freedom of action.

In Chen Jitong’s depiction, Chinese censors were a powerful and effective conduit between the emperor and his people. With the power to reprimand and impeach officials and as the most intimate counselors to the emperor, they were at once “the eyes and ears

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256 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Presse chinoise,” Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891.
258 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Presse chinoise,” Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891.
of the emperor and the mouth and brush of the people.” While they did not have any specific governing powers, the censors intervened in all aspects of government. In this manner, they were similar to the journals of public opinion in Europe.260 They existence demonstrates that China was far from the autocratic society, as sometimes believed in the West. The censoring tradition was also one found not only in public desire but also in Chinese rulers. Citing from the French orientalist Guillaume Pauthier (1801–1873)’s documentary survey Chine; ou, Description historique: géographique et littéraire de ce vaste empire, d’après des documents chinois (1837), Chen offers the example of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty abolishing the law against criticizing the ruler as well as the Emperor Kangxi’s praise of this act. In his summary, Pauthier had written that “…it is not without a certain shameful feeling for us that we are forced to admit that after two thousand years of supposed progress in civilization, we are less favored in our freedom of thought than the Chinese during the time of Wen-ti, and that an absolute emperor of Asia understood better the dignity of man than the current kings of Europe.”261 Quoting the French writer in full and noting that even these words were written fifty years ago, Chen Jitong declares once again that the right to criticize, represented by the press in Europe, can be found in the censorate in China.

On a descriptive level, Chen’s portrayal of the function and organization of the censorate is not really off the mark. However, he does not acknowledge any criticisms of the institution. Yet, by the late Qing, there was mounting disapproval among urban elites.

261 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Presse chinoise,” Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891. The quote is from Guillaume Pauthier, Chine; ou, Description historique: géographique et littéraire de ce vaste empire, d’après des documents chinois. Première partie, comprenant un résumé de l'histoire et de la civilisation chinoises depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu’à nos jours (Paris: Firmin-Didot frères, 1837), 238.
that the traditional Speaking and Remonstrating Official (yan guan 言官; jian guan 谏官) were ineffective in meeting the dictates of their positions.\textsuperscript{262} Nor does Chen acknowledge the existence of the tradition of “pure discussion” (qingyi 清議), or the expression of dissenting opinion by officials, often with middle or lower ranking, but which had also come to include officials in the capital, to criticize the state of affairs in order to restore Confucian moral integrity. He would have been at least familiar with the hawkish attitude of the so-called qingliu 清流 faction during the Sino-French war.\textsuperscript{263} While he was eager to demonstrate that the Chinese government had a self-regulating mechanism empowered by an indigenous critical tradition and legitimized by historical precedents, Chen still privileged a superficial, idealized description and reached into an Enlightenment-era French rhetoric to support his case. We see him doing the same thing in his discussion of education and the examination system in China.

\textit{Education}

For Chen Jitong, the existence in China of a conscientious group of officials who served as the censors and of a literary class who acted as intermediaries between the people and the court was due to a unique education system whose central features were moral instruction and meritocratic selection. Contrasting Chinese education ideals to the European system he has been observing, Chen notes that while in Europe “the state is preoccupied with setting programs rather than teaching methods,” in China the emphasis


is placed on personal cultivation. To that end, there exists rules such as the sixteen sacred edicts issued by the Yongzheng Emperor, which encourages children “to view the serious side of things” and shows them “principles rather than circumstances, laws rather than facts.” Furthermore, students are taught that the first thing on their mind in learning should be “to form a resolution,” another principle that forms character and leads to success. In line with orthodox Neo-Confucian discourse on self-cultivation and with his own personal experience, Chen sees the formation of habits of mind as one set of defining and laudable features of Chinese education.

If moral exhortation built character and perseverance in learning, the civil examination system offered a channel through which all Chinese students, regardless of social background, can be rewarded for their hard work and intelligence. Chen presents the Chinese examination system as a “democratic” institution found in no other part of the world. Whereas it was very difficult in Europe for one from a poor background to rise, by study alone, to a position of honor and to achieve an appointment among the state’s official class, such opportunities were readily accessible and had indeed been institutionalized in China. If privilege and seniority determined promotions and hierarchy in Europe, in China, one’s rank was founded upon merit, as measured by examination success. Echoing other nineteenth-century European observers of China, Chen points to the widespread availability of village-level schools as well as family tutors, which helped maintain the

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265 Among the mandatory practices at the Fuzhou Navy Yard school was the recitation of the Sacred Edicts; see chapter 1.
affordability of education cost and thus allowed for a large number of students to spend years studying for the civil examinations.

In addition to the morality and the meritocratic spirit that it embodied, education in China was also a family matter. Not only would a successful examination candidate earn a place in the imperial bureaucracy, but his achievement would be reflected on his ancestors, as well as his parents, honored by the same rank. The social capital accrued through examination success is evident in the local celebrations of triumphant candidates, which resembled pompous festivals whose grandeur did not have equals in Europe. Chinese education created an elite class of lettrés, who helped govern the country and saw themselves as parental guardians of the local populations. Their journey from a young – and possibly poor – student to an upright and admired scholar-official embodied the familial and social cohesion that so distinguished Chinese society. This process is illustrated in a short story Chen published in 1890.

In this story, a widow, whose husband died just two months after she had given birth to a son, receives assistance from a benevolent magistrate, who encourages her to send the child to school. The boy, raised with the money given by the magistrate and named “Chan-tsang” (Shanchang 善常) in memory of the charitable support from the local official, is sent to study with an erudite local scholar at the age of six. By age thirteen, Chan-tsang has learned by heart the ancient histories and classics and is soon encouraged by his teacher to try his hand at the examinations. He eventually places successfully in the local and provincial-level examinations, returns triumphantly to his village, and marries the daughter of a well-to-do local elite. After earning the jinshi degree and becoming a

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provincial governor at the incredibly young age of twenty-eight, Chan-tsang learns that the magistrate who had helped his family was serving as a prefect in the same province but had gotten into trouble after angering a corrupt censor. Empowered with an imperial decree, Chan-tsang performs an investigation and saves the honest official, his benefactor.  

Figure 2.3. Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “L’Écolier chinois,” Le Petit Français illustré, 28 June 1890. A teacher holds the hand of a student as he teaches him to trace difficult characters. This illustration was made for Chen’s story by Félix Régaméy.
At first glance, “L’Écolier chinois” is a very plain story about the redemptive power of benevolent acts and education. It is filled with narrative tropes such as the chance encounter between the magistrate and the widow – and later on, the young man and his benefactor – as well as stock characters such as the greedy county clerk who tries to pocket some of the money the magistrate gives to the poor family and the power-abusing censor who is put in his place by the virtuous official. This piece becomes significant, however, when one considers that it was first published in *Le Petit Français illustré* in 1890, just a year after this newspaper for schoolchildren was founded. In a journal that frequently featured illustrated stories and comic strips with melodramatic plotlines, Chen Jitong’s story, with several engraved images provided by Félix Régamey, was evidently tailored for a younger audience. The vivid descriptions of Chan-tsang’s interactions with his teacher – performing kowtow to his teacher, being seated on his lap in learning characters – are presented to both show the hierarchical nature of master-disciple relations and the warm devotion to teaching and learning that is experienced by Chinese schoolchildren.

However it was received among young readers, Chen’s story at least made an impact on its editors. A comment that precedes the story remarks that while it has for a long time been isolated from the rest of the world, the immense Chinese empire, “characterized by the preponderant importance given to the family, by the cult of ancestors and by a social hierarchy based on education,” was indeed a “very old and very refined” civilization that “in no way deserves the old legends about the barbarity of the Chinese that were current in Europe.”

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Family and Marriage

In the story of the young scholar, the child’s mother is devoted to her son’s upbringing and education, telling him that through success in the examinations he will bring honor to his family, a promise that is eventually fulfilled. Indeed, the family, for Chen Jitong, is perhaps the best embodiment of social and conceptual differences between China and Europe. On the one hand, the Chinese family is homologous with the state. As the institution upon which “the entire social and political edifice of China was based,” it operated as “a miniature government,” a school in which “governing officials are formed” and of which even the sovereign was a disciple. An essentially patriarchal system in which all members were obligated to adhere to the five principles of “fidelity to the sovereign, respect toward parents, concord between spouses, accord between brothers, and constancy between friends,” the Chinese family was a model of social harmony. The filial devotion one holds for one’s parents was extended to the emperor, who was the ultimate patriarch of the “universal family” in China.270

On the other hand, as a “state within a state” (état dans l’état), the Chinese family – and here, Chen Jitong seems to be referring to the larger lineage – operated with a great deal of autonomy and independence. It adjudicated disputes between members and handed out punishments when necessary. It also arranged marriages, divided property between male descendants, and registered, in place of the state-run “état civil” in France, births, deaths, and weddings.271 In performing these functions, the Chinese family thus acted like

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a small government and a self-regulating unit of social organization that operated with minimal interference.

One of the defining features of the Chinese conceptions of family that set it apart from those in Europe was the respect given to the dead and especially to ancestors. In the West, people were generally inclined to be less mindful of the elderly and more forgetful about the dead. One knew very little of their ancestors, who are referred to in a disrespectful manner as “old ones” (les vieux), beyond three generations. Cemeteries in European were full of old tombs with blackened ever-lasting flowers (les immortelles), which suggested the lack of respect and remembrance for the dead. In contrast, in China the dead were give elaborate funeral rituals and processions and buried in the fields outside of the cities. Resting forever in peaceful harmony with nature, the dead are also celebrated twice a year, in the spring and autumn, in ceremonies that also serve to reunite the family. Meanwhile, ancestral temples constructed in the countryside served as lodges for family members who have travelled from afar and as schools. They also served as gathering places in times of weddings and examinations.272 These family celebrations ensured that one did not forget about one’s ancestors. Social harmony resulted from living in communion with one another as dictated by one’s relationship to family ancestors. Another factor was the important role played by marriage, which was also very different as practiced in Europe.

In Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes, Chen devotes two of his earliest chapters to a discussion of marriage and divorce in China. He engages the reader’s attention with the proposition that the European notion of bachelorhood and extended courtship before marriage are both unheard of and unrealistic in China, where “old bachelors and old maids

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are considered to be anomalies.”

This is mostly because marriages in China were mostly a manifestation of relations between families of similar social standing, and thus is a foremost preoccupation of one’s parents and indeed involves the entire family circle.

The reader is then led through Chen’s meticulous descriptions of the nuptial process, from the young groom’s gift of gold or silver bracelets to his future bride to the rituals and fanfare on the day of the wedding. Having made his reader a witness to the elaborate nature of Chinese marriage ceremonies, Chen launches, with a touch of sarcasm, into an assessment of weddings in Europe:

“The ceremony is a tradition that is passé in Western customs; one abolishes it as much as one could, and it hardly takes place anymore except for in the countryside, where marriages are still weddings. There one dances, one sings, and one celebrates a great joy. The weddings that I have seen, in high society, are the least gay affairs in the world. One does not attend the celebration of the civil marriage; those who allow for religious consecrations hasten to leave the church. Having hardly returned to one’s home, one changes outfits and one takes off for the train. Really, one could do better to have the mayor and the priest in a sleeping car and to proceed rapidly through the celebration before the departure of the train. The guests could gather themselves on the station platform and one could even ask the locomotives to sound a chorus, to impress the bride.”

The less important the ceremony, the less important the marriage itself becomes. “This is why,” Chen concludes, “marriage had lost its charm in Europe.”

In another essay, Chen reveals that he has been following the recent debate on marriage, initiated by the Scottish writer and feminist Mona Caird (1854-1932), as well as the public invitations extended to Alexander Dumas fils and Emile Zola to join Caird’s proposed “Anti-Marriage League,” and has been reading the responses of these writers in

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“Although very surprised by this unprecedented creation [the league],” Chen writes, “I do not wish to pronounce my thoughts before learning the opinion of these two writers.” However, both the reactions of Dumas and Zola disappoint Chen, who finds himself in disagreement with Zola’s “skeptical pessimism” and Dumas’ “indifference.” For Chen Jitong, marriage is almost a law of nature; not only is it impossible to have it dissolved like any other old and foul political or administrative institution, as Zola seemed to suggest, it also should not be treated as a matter of indifference, as insinuated by Dumas, whose careless attitude echoes that of the poor Panurge of Rabelais’s classic novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: “Marie-toi, ne te marie pas!” The only reason marriage causes such endless discord and scandal as it does in Europe is because it has become intertwined with religious and civil formalities. In China, where marriage is a pure familial act, governed solely by nature, such nuisances are indeed impossible.

Here Chen is echoing a point he made earlier in *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, where he concludes that a crucial dichotomy between Chinese and Western society is that of views on honor and wealth. In China, marriage for money does not exist. When arranging for a marriage, parents are not primarily concerned with the amount of the dowry, but with the reputation the young woman’s family. In the West, however, one calculates the worth of the dowry and the value of the inheritance. “Is this not so?” questions Chen rhetorically, “Why then would Moliere’s ‘sans dot’ [without Dowry!] be so exalted, if it were not the case?”

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In fact, as Susan Mann has shown, dowries played a rather important role in Qing families. Since they were considered to be the wife’s private property, they could come in handy in times of a decline in the wealth of the husband’s family, both to sustain the life of the woman after marriage and to support the patriline. While Chen Jitong could have used such a fact to support his case for the financial independence of Chinese women, his interest here seemed only to be rhetorical and in challenging his readers to reflect on their own society. Indeed, throughout Chen’s essays on family and marriage, the emphasis is placed on exploiting the dichotomy between what he saw as the group oriented social practices in China and the impersonal nature of the West. In condemning the individualism and the commercial calculations that affected personal relationships in Europe, Chen was making a case for the rationality of the patriarchal Chinese family.

Women

Closely intertwined with the topic of family and marriage was an issue that Chen Jitong felt to be central in dispelling Western perceptions of China – the highly misunderstood situation of women in Chinese society. Westerners usually imagined Chinese women to be “a pitiful being, hardly able to walk and imprisoned in her household, surrounded by her servants and the concubines of her husband” and depicted them as “ridiculous, grotesque, without influence, and created solely to give birth to children.” But this was a fantasy that needed to be dismissed, “however much it would hurt the self-esteem

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280 Susan Mann, “Dowry Wealth and Wifely Virtue in Mid-Qing Gentry Households,” *Late Imperial China* 29.1 (June 2008): 64-76.
of travelers.”

A large number of Chen’s most stimulating essays were written about Chinese women. Varying in style from the ethnographic to the fictional and showcasing a wide range of female subjects including the concubine, the woman warrior, and the female poet, these essays all attempt to establish autonomy and agency on the part of the Chinese woman, without yielding to European expectations.

Wives and Concubines

In contrast to the images conjured up by “storytellers of marvels,” Chen writes, Chinese women, even on their little feet, were able to walk about, to run, and to go out in her palanquin without the need to cover herself in a veil. Chinese women were “daughters of Eve,” just like their European sisters. Men and women did have their natural differences, and in China this meant that they received different educations. While men prepared to become employed by the State, women devoted their intelligence to the “invaluable science of the household.” While Chinese women may not be familiar with “the antechambers of ministers nor the fashionable receptions” where European women seduced and charmed their male counterparts, within their own home they held a considerable influence that was not available to European women. Whereas French women, upon marriage, became minors under the guardianship of her husband, who was legally

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282 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Femme,” 57. The line about Chinese women’s physical mobility was Chen’s sole defense against negative portrayals of footbinding. This neglect of the subject may be consistent with the position of his sister-in-law Xue Shaohui, the late Qing writer who held a somewhat dismissive attitude toward the anti-footbinding discourse in the 1890s. As Dorothy Ko argues, Xue held that since woman’s virtue and talent were hinged upon her overseeing the household as well as her education and command of “poetry and books,” the issue of footbinding was irrelevant to the goal of women’s self-strengthening; see Ko, Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38-40.
empowered to have a final say on the wife’s use of her own property, Chinese women were free to buy and sell property, to enter into contracts, and to determine their children’s dowries. She also shared the honors attained by her husband and sometimes by her children and it was thus in her interest to marry and to perform her maternal duties.\textsuperscript{284}

Another Western misperception that Chen felt needed to be dismissed was the negative and misleading ideas about concubinage. He argued that this was not such an atrocious custom as has been imagined. In fact, in Europe men had mistresses instead of concubines, who in fact were a kind of “legitimate mistress” in China. In contrast to the double households (double ménage) that was not uncommon in the Christian world, the important place given to the well-being of children and the prosperity and honor within the family in Chinese society required the institution of concubinage. This system may seem “indelicate” to Westerners, yet “under the pretext of delicacy, one commits much greater crimes” in Europe, “when children issued from amorous relationships are thrown into life with such an ineffaceable stain in their civil status and find themselves without resources and without a family.” Such evils, Chen argued, were much more serious than the “brutality of concubinage.”\textsuperscript{285}

Indeed, the system only functioned in China because it is tolerated by the legitimate wife. On the one hand, the Chinese wife, while being fully aware of the value of her sacrifice – “because in China as everywhere else love binds the heart together” – is willing to let the concubine into her household for the interest of the entire family, in order “for the husband to have children who honor the ancestors.” On the other hand, monogamy in marriage in China is strictly observed and even upheld by the law. The concubine, who is

\textsuperscript{284} Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Femme,” 61-62.
\textsuperscript{285} Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Femme,” 63-64.
often taken from a lower-class background, remains subservient to the wife and her children are considered to be the legitimate children of the legitimate wife. Finally, Chen remarks, concubinage was not so unprecedented in the West. After all, one finds an instance of this in the Bible, when Sarah, the wife of Abraham, finding herself to be infertile, presents her husband with her servant-girl Hagar in order for the latter to bear the couple a child: “This is, then, the horrible example that our customs emulate!”

While the biblical reference seems to have been inserted primarily for rhetorical effect, Chen is mostly on the mark in condemning the prevalent practice in France of abandoning illegitimate children (who accounted for the large majority of unwanted infants throughout the nineteenth century), a phenomena that was a major social concern at the time. Chen cleverly uses these examples to point out the rationality of the Chinese system. At the heart of Chen’s explication of how concubinage worked in China was the concern for the offspring, the sanctity of the family, the legal prohibition against polygamy, and the hierarchical status distinctions between the legitimate wife (diqi 嫡妻) and the concubine (qie 妾), all of which were fairly accurate descriptions of the custom as conventionally understood in imperial China. While he elides some of the privileges that concubines may have come to enjoy in practice over the late imperial era, his account does restore some agency and status to the Chinese wife. The point of emphasis, for Chen, was that concubine system was not symptomatic of the supposed suppression and

289 By the Qing period, concubines sometimes came to become the matriarch of the household when the wife died and, as chaste widows, to hold rights over her dead husband’s property; see Kathryn Bernhardt, Women and Property in China, 960-1949 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 160-178.
mistreatment of women by Chinese men, but a functional social practice developed for the sake of prolonging the family (by producing heirs). As for Chinese women, they could indeed at times enjoy great dominance over their husbands, as Chen would attempt to illustrate in a set of short stories.

_Fierce Women and Fearful Husbands_

Published in the folklore journal _Revue des traditions populaires_, the periodical of the Society of Popular Traditions, a recently founded learned society in which Chen Jitong, as we will see, had become actively involved by the late 1880s, these stories began with a declaration from the author:

“Chinese women, whom foreigners usually consider to be useless beings or even to be slaves, exert their authority over men just as much as other members of the weaker sex. This authority is sometimes greater than one would believe; for despite their little feet, they know how to wear their trousers, equally as much as the most autocratic of their European sisters.”

This statement, which at once asserts Chinese women’s agency and establishes equality between Chinese and European women as “sisters,” is followed by three vignettes, each of which is a humorous tale involving the failed attempt of a man (or group of men) to overturn the power relations between him and a dominant female partner. In the first story, a group of men, who had for a long time lived under the reign of a “Kingdom of Women” in the province of Shaanxi, finally got together to form a secret society for the purpose of overthrowing “the tyranny of women.” While assembling at a temple to prostrate before the gods, the women caught wind of their plan and made their way over to confront the men. Upon sight of the women, the members of the secret society made an

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escape, only to discover one of their group was missing. Resolving to rescue him, they returned to the temple to find him still prostrating before the gods. Moved by his resolution and steadfastness, they propose to make him ‘president’ of their society. Yet when they approached him, they discovered that he had become immobile only because he had been frozen to death by fright!

Another anecdote tells of a brave general, whose martial valor on the battlefield was only matched by his great fear of his wife, before him he cowered like a ‘lamb before a tiger.’ Fellow officers who were sympathetic to his plight came up with an idea for the general. They would assemble a grand review of thirty thousand troops one morning in front of the general’s house. Upon seeing her husband commanding over this formidable army, perhaps the wife would finally be impressed by his stature and cease to mistreat him. When the morning came, the troops gathered and marched before the home of the general, who arrived splendidly in his uniform and on his horse at the head of the army. Yet when his wife came out to see what the clamor was about, the general immediately fell to his feet and cried humbly: “we came in hopes that ‘Madame le Générale’ would review the troops!”

These seemingly idiosyncratic and comedic tales may have been a refreshing contribution to appear in a French journal of folklore studies, but they in fact evoke the popular Chinese literary tradition of the shrewish and fierce wife (hanfu 悍婦, pofu 潑婦) and cowering husbands who “feared the inner” (junei 懼內). Examples like the two stories above are littered throughout the collections of folk tales and anecdotes compiled by late imperial men of letters such as the Ming literatus Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) and

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the Qing writer Pu Songlong 蒲松齡 (1640-1715). In fact, the story of the “secret society of men” is borrowed from Xiaofu 笑府, a volume of comical vignettes by Feng Menglong, while the poor military officer is most probably based on the figure of the henpecked Ming general Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528-1588), whose notorious spousal troubles were documented in the biji 筆記 collection Wu zazu 五雜俎 by the scholar-official Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624). Having written about marriage, divorce, and gender relations in China from an ethnographic perspective, Chen Jitong evidently decided to resort to more literary genres in his continued writings on Chinese women. At the center of these stories are the domineering women who would definitely be counterexamples to Western expectations of gender hierarchies in China, but as episodes culled from classic vernacular tales, these comical stories have perhaps a more significant effect of humanizing the entirety of Chinese society. As we will see later, Chen Jitong became increasingly interested in telling “stories” (contes) to his European audience as a way of depicting the literary China with which he was familiar.

A Chinese Joan of Arc

Not only could Chinese women dominate the household, they were also capable of taking up arms against foreign invaders, as in the example of the female warrior Mulan, whom Chen cast, in another amusing essay, as a “Chinese Joan of Arc.” Since the first half of the nineteenth-century, through the efforts of republican historians such as Jules

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Michelet and Henri Martin, the figure of Joan of Arc (1412-1431) had been enjoying a revival as a political and cultural symbol in France. Following their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, many saw Joan as an icon of defensive nationalism. At the same time, the Catholic church also used Joan of Arc to appeal to the masses. As Venita Datta’s recent study demonstrates, the cult of Joan of Arc climaxed in the two decades in the fin-de-siècle, spurred on in part by the staging of Jules Barbier’s theatrical version of the story, Jeanne d’Arc, in January 1890. Performed and reviewed throughout the French press in that year, Joan of Arc was indeed, “the topic of the day.”

This was the context in which Chen Jitong entered the public conversation. His essay was first printed on the front page of the newspaper Le Gaulois on January 24, just as Barbier’s play was enjoying the height of public and critical attention. After summarizing the ongoing fascination with Joan and the continuing debate between “the faithful” (the Catholic right) and “the rationalists” (the liberal republicans), Chen declares that while he is very interested in reading about Joan of Arc, he is not qualified to get into the religious question behind the debates. Instead, Chen wishes to use the opportunity to discuss “our own Joan of Arc,” the woman warrior “Mou-Len” [Mulan], whose story is told in a poem studied by all children in China – one, in fact, that Chen still knew by heart. Chen then offers a translation of the “Ballad of Mulan” (Mulan ci 木蘭辭), the fifth-century poem that tells of the exploits of the girl who dressed up as a man and enrolled in the army.

to serve in his father’s place, and ended up helping to defend China against the invading barbarians.\footnote{For different versions of the ballad, see Kwa Shiamin and Wilt L. Idema, eds. and trans., \textit{Mulan: Five Versions of a Classic Chinese Legend with Related Texts} (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010).}

The rest of the essay is taken up by a comparison between the two heroines. Both Joan and Mulan were girls from rural backgrounds who loved their respective countries and were successful in deterring invaders. However, beyond this surface resemblance lay very different conceptions of society between imperial China and middle-age Europe. In the latter context, there was a need for a virgin and martyr to be clothed in a procession of “legends, marvels, of angels and saints, of dreams and apparitions.” On the other hand, the rationalism that characterized Chinese family life – “which was a spitting image of our national existence” – determined that Mulan could not but be a simple daughter who was devoted to the wellbeing of her kind and who would return, after her task was accomplished, to rejoin her family and to marry and have children. In short, concludes Chen, while the figure of Joan of Arc “embodied the enthusiastic mysticism of medieval France,” the story of Mulan “personified the Chinese family and our patriarchal institutions.”\footnote{Tcheng Ki-Tong, “Une Jeanne d’Arc chinoise,” in \textit{Mon Pays}, 76-78.} In returning home to become a good wife and mother, remarks Chen, Mulan accomplished “all that M. Lesigne would have wanted for Joan of Arc.”\footnote{Tcheng Ki-Tong, “Une Jeanne d’Arc chinoise,” in \textit{Mon Pays}, 77.} This reference to Ernest Lesigne, a French writer who had recently stirred up public controversy by publishing a book in which he claimed that not only did Joan survive her trial, but had indeed married and had many children, is illustrative of Chen’s media acumen and clever appropriation of a current
French cultural phenomenon to establish cross-cultural comparisons and make his point about Chinese society.\textsuperscript{300}

Chen Jitong was, of course, far from the only Chinese writer in the late Qing period to establish a link between Mulan and Joan of Arc. As Joan Judge has shown, both female figures were prominently featured in Chinese biographies and newspaper articles produced in the first decade of the twentieth century. Searching for a heroine in the Chinese tradition, some late Qing writers celebrated Mulan’s upholding of feminine virtue, while others recast her into a model for the new militant and nationalistic citizen. This was often done by comparing her to the French heroine Joan of Arc, whose religious beliefs were downplayed while her patriotism was emphasized.\textsuperscript{301}

Does Chen’s portrayal of Mulan slip into a nationalist rhetoric? To be sure, he Sinicizes Mulan, placing her in the Han dynasty and having her learn of her father’s conscription not through the “military rolls” (\textit{juntie} 軍貼), as in the original ballad, but by reading the \textit{Gazette officielle}, the \textit{Dibao} 郵報.\textsuperscript{302} Yet in Chen’s portrayal, Mulan is herself not so much motivated by patriotism as by concern for her family: “She does not believe herself to have been called forth to free her country. Never had she dreamed of playing the outstanding role that circumstances had thrown upon her.”\textsuperscript{303} For Chen, Mulan’s decision to join the army affirms the virtues of filial piety, while her seamless reintegration into

\textsuperscript{300} Lesigne’s book was titled \textit{La Fin d’une légende: Vie de Jeanne d’Arc (de 1409 à 1440)} (Paris: C. Bayle, 1889). See Datta, \textit{Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-Siècle France}, 148-149.


\textsuperscript{302} Tcheng Ki-Tong, “Une Jeanne d’Arc chinoise,” in \textit{Mon Pays}, 72. In portraying Mulan as a Han Chinese, Chen Jitong elides the possibility that Mulan came from Altaic origins and thus was not even ethnically Chinese. For this view, see Sanping Chen, \textit{Multicultural China in the Middle Ages} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 39-59.

\textsuperscript{303} Tcheng Ki-Tong, “Une Jeanne d’Arc chinoise,” in \textit{Mon Pays}, 75.
agricultural life following her military adventure was a testament to the centrality of the family in Chinese society. This emphasis is consistent with Louise Edward’s argument that it was not until the early twentieth-century that the family as the central object of devotion recedes in Mulan narratives, through the “transformation of filial piety into a statist discourse of patriotism.”

In taking advantage of the fin-de-siècle debate over Joan of Arc to comment on the consistency and rationality of Chinese conceptions of the family and by refusing to refit the traditional Mulan story to the demands of modern nationalism and citizenship, Chen exhibited a more nuanced understanding than a younger generation of late Qing writers of the contested stature of Western female icons and demonstrated little anxiety about joining the global order.

“Bluestockings” in China

Shrewish women and warrior Mulan, colorful figures but also literary types, were not the only examples of Chinese women celebrated by Chen Jitong. In “Les Bas-bleus, en Chine” (Bluestockings in China), an 1889 essay originally published in the literary supplement of the newspaper Le Figaro, Chen reached into classical histories as well as Qing-era women’s poetry to demonstrate the talents of writing women throughout imperial China.

Recapping his previous statements about the separation of male and female spheres of influence in China, Chen notes that there have been, throughout Chinese history, celebrated women who have taken individual action beyond the domestic realm. These

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were China’s celebrated heroines, historians, and female poets. Some of these historical examplars included “Mme Tsao-Tchao” (Ban Zhao 班昭, 48-120), who completed the history of the Han dynasty, which had been left unfinished due to the death of her brother “Pang-Kou” (Ban Gu 班固), and who had then been designated the literary instructor of the empress and other palace ladies. The other examples of famous Chinese women writers (“femmes-auteurs”) included “Ouei-Fou-jen” (Wei Furen 衛夫人, 272-349), who had been the tutor to the famous calligrapher “Ouang-You-Kung” (Wang Xizhi 王羲之); “Mlle Tcheng-Tchao-Yung” (Shangguan Wan’er 上官婉兒, 664-710), who occupied the chief ministerial post under the Tang Empress “Tien-Hiao” [Wu Zetian 武則天] and encouraged the development of literary education in the empire; and the lady “Li-Tsing-Tchao” (Li Qingzhao 李清照, 1084-ca. 1151), whose celebrated verses are considered, to this day, to be “superior than those of the most distinguished scholars of the same period.”

This brief pantheon of famous women are figures celebrated in the official histories and classical texts. Taking up posts regularly held by men, these female historians and scholars represented a tradition of learned women who, in times of need, made use of their

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306 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Les Bas-bleus en Chine.” Following the death of her grandfather Shangguan Yi, Shangguan Wan’er 上官婉兒 was taken into the palace and brought up by her mother, née Zheng. After becoming the imperial consort of Emperor Zhongzong, Shangguan Wan’er was given the title “Lady of Luminous Deportment” (zhaorong 昭容). In naming her “Tcheng-Tchao-Yung,” Chen appears to have collapsed the mother’s maiden name with the official title. For a brief biography of Shangguan Wan’er, see Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds. Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 49-50.
education to serve as capable substitutes or as instructors for men (or in the case of Shangguan Wan’er, the imperial court). This ideal of female scholars reemerged in the mid-Qing “classical revival” in the eighteenth century, during which historical exemplars like Ban Zhao were celebrated, in Susan Mann’s words, as “heroines of civilization who possessed and expressed wen, the cultural refinement displayed in writing.” Chen’s familiarity with the classical histories allowed him to reach into this tradition for ready examples to present to his French readers. Yet Chen was not satisfied only with these classical exemplars, for he also insists on showcasing excerpts from the works of Chinese women poets, for “indeed, among Chinese women of the upper classes, there are hardly any who does not know how to make verse.”

In the rest of the essay, Chen proceeds to translate six poems, with titles such as “Le Printemps” (Spring), “Fin de printemps” (End of spring), “Au commencement de l’été” (At the beginning of summer), and “À mon mari, partant pour le grand concours littéraire” (To my husband as he departs for the civil examinations). While these titles may seem familiar to readers of women’s poetry in the late imperial period, Chen does not attribute his lively renderings to any particular poetess or source, making it difficult to discern whether these were strategic selections. A closer, line-by-line examination of the poems’ verses, however, reveals that all six pieces were written by female disciples of the mid-Qing poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798) and first collected in the famous Poetry Anthology of the Female Disciples of Harmony Garden (Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan 隨園女弟子詩選).  

308 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Les Bas-bleus, en Chine.”
In translating these poems, Chen demonstrated his familiarity with and appreciation of the poetic works of the late imperial *guixiu* (cultivated gentlewoman) and *cainü* (talented women), appropriate for someone who was intimately connected to women poets in late Qing Fuzhou.\(^{310}\) He writes of these women poets:

> “The favorite subjects of their poetry are always flowers, the moon, birds, wind, and music; all those graceful themes which strike one’s imagination and the gentleness of which match so well with the feminine character. Women always have the tendency to fly toward those most delicately poetic places, where they feel most at ease, where they are really at home.”\(^{311}\)

This ideal of women poets stands in stark contrast to the famous dismissal of late imperial *cainü* by the late Qing reformer Liang Qichao, who wrote in his 1897 essay “On Women’s Education” (*lun nü xue* 論女學) that “In ancient times there were so-called talented women whose best achievements were nothing more than several stanzas of ditties upon the beauty of the wind and moon, verses describing the flowers and the grasses, or poems lamenting the passage of spring or the loss of a friend…”\(^{312}\) For reformers like Liang, an emerging modern China needed not the gentle *cainü* who were only adept in the manners of the traditional high culture, but capable “new women” with practical skills as

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\(^{310}\) See Nanxiu Qian’s work on Xue Shaohui.


well as self-sacrificing mothers of new citizens.\(^{313}\) Writing in Paris in 1889, Chen Jitong evidently did not share this imperative. He wrote about Chinese women poets from the vantage point of the appreciative male reader (or patron), not of the anxious reformer hoping to bring China on par with the West by reprioritizing social roles. This lack of anxiety is also evident in his subtle subversion of the French term *bas-bleus*.

For in calling Qing female poets China’s *bas-bleus*, Chen was also making a clever appeal to late nineteenth century French male literary sensibilities and gender values. In its original eighteenth-century English context, the term “Bluestockings” had referred to the eponymous Bluestocking Society of women intellectuals who had philosophical and moralistic leanings. Translated into French, however, the term became increasingly associated over the course of the nineteenth century with writing women who sought public attention and threatened gender hierarchies by overstepping established boundaries. Often represented by male French writers such as Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly in juxtaposition with the so-called *filles publiques*, or sexually promiscuous women, the usage of the term *bas-bleus* took on a pejorative connotation in the public discourse.\(^{314}\) In Chen’s account, however, educated and literate Chinese women were either moral exemplars from history who entered public roles only to help restore, not overturn, social order, or Qing-era poetesses whose literary talents did not lead to aspirations for a life beyond the inner quarters. They were thus neither the “illiterate slaves” in the eyes of some Westerners, nor

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\(^{313}\) For two detailed studies on the ways in which Liang dismissed the late imperial *cainü* in favor of a new idea of nation-minded women, see Hu Ying, “Naming the First ‘New Woman’,” in Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow, eds., *Rethinking the Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 180-211 and Harriet T. Zumdorfer, “Wang Zhaoyuan (1763-1851) and the Erasure of ‘Talented Women’ by Liang Qichao,” in Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, eds., *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 29-56.

the Saint-Simonian feminists who frightened French men eager to preserve their gender dominance.\textsuperscript{315} Reappropriated with Chinese examples, the literary figure \textit{bas-bleus} shed its negative associations and becomes a device, like the figure of “Jeanne d’Arc,” for Chen to restore agency – albeit from a male perspective – to Chinese women.

\textbf{Poetry and Popular Tales}

\textit{The universal appeal of poetry}

Chen Jitong’s citation and translation of Qing women’s verses was only one instance among many in which the discussion of poetry was featured in his portrayals of China. In fact, poetry was a constantly appearing element throughout Chen’s French writings; Chinese poems – either translated by Chen himself or borrowed from existing French translations or adaptations – are widely interspersed throughout his books. In his seeming conviction that poetry was a perfect mode of showcasing a civilized and charming China, Chen was at once displaying his self-identification as a literatus and reaching into the repertoire of the literary images of a “cultural China” that had already been circulating in nineteenth-century France.

Two essays on Chinese poetry are featured in \textit{Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes}. The first, “Les Chanson historiques” (historical songs) discusses the \textit{Classic of Poetry} (\textit{Shijing} 詩經). While it is mostly an expository introduction to the ancient collection, it also allows Chen to comment on the similarities and differences between Chinese and Occidental civilizations. While the flourishing of poetry in the ancient age saw parallels

\footnote{\textsuperscript{315} Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Les Bas-bleus, en Chine,” 275-276.}
to Homer’s Greece, the subjects and values contained in these verses were very much distinct from one another. As an example, Chen translates the poem “Zhi hu”陟岵, which tells of a young soldier climbing atop a mountain to think about his parents and elder brother. With its simple testament to filial duty and family bonds, this classic piece, argues Chen, was so different from the warlike poems of Greece, in which “fatherland, home, and family were abandoned for endless sieges, voyages without horizons, and the most perilous adventures.”316 In fact, in extolling the desire for peace, for work, and for the family, the poems collected in the *Classic of Poetry* were exemplary of the Chinese “national spirit.”317

However, the zenith of classical Chinese poetry, for Chen, was the Tang dynasty. A period comparable to the splendor of the age of Augustus or Louis XIV, it left immortal works that treated subjects as varied as the joys of friendship, the sorrows of parting, the melancholies in life, and the sadness of poets exiled by palace revolutions. In his essay on Tang poetry, which carries little analysis but exudes the author’s enthusiasm for the subject, Chen provides ample examples of works by Li Bo 李白 (701-762), Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), among a number of other poets. Significantly, he acknowledges difficulties in conveying the subtle meanings in Chinese verse in translation and declares that his task had been made easier by the work of Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys.318 One of the key figures in nineteenth-century French sinology, d’Hervey de Saint-Denys, who had studied Chinese and Manchu at the École des Langues Orientales and the Collège de France since age nineteen, had published works on Chinese agriculture and ethnography, and had by 1874 succeeded his teacher Stanislas Julien as the chair of

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Chinese at the Collège de France. Sympathetic to China throughout his life, d’Hervey de Saint-Denys had published a tract in 1859 deploiring French and British imperialism and acted as the official commissioner of the Chinese pavilion at the 1867 Universal Expositions in Paris.\textsuperscript{319} He had also always maintained a good relationship with Chinese diplomats in Europe, having received visits from the ambassador Guo Songtao and exchanged poetry with the elderly Qing representative Binchun 斌椿 when he visited Europe in 1866.\textsuperscript{320} The book that he presented to the Chinese envoy on that occasion was his translation of Tang poems, Poésies de l’époque des Thang (1867), the same work from which Chen borrowed examples. In combining the French sinologist’s translations in a seamless manner with his own, Chen was both appropriated d’Hervey de Saint-Denys’ cultural authority and implicitly made the case for the universalizing message of Chinese classical poetry.

This belief in the ability of Chinese poetry, in spite of being presented in another language, to speak to and touch all readers is evident in Chen Jitong’s full-length translations of the two famous Tang ballads by Bai Juyi, the “Song of Everlasting Sorrow” (Changhen ge 長恨歌) and “Song of the Lute” (Pipa xing 琵琶行), neither of which appeared in d’Hervey de Saint-Denys’ work. Chen calls the first piece, which tells of the tragic love affair between Emperor Xuanzong and his imperial consort Yang during the time of the An Lushan rebellion, “one of the our most beautiful” poems. Translating the title as “L’Amour” (Love), Chen’s short commentary focuses not on the poet’s lament on

the downfall of the imperial house but on the romantic passion evoked in the poem: “The emperor and his favorite loved, in the same manner as Romeo and Juliet, or Faust and Marguerite, and deserve to enter Dante’s Paradise, into the dazzling light of immortality.”

If the “Song of Everlasting Sorrow” finds its equivalent in the classic romances of the European literary canon, the “Song of the Lute,” which is told in the form of a conversation between the exiled poet and a beautiful but aging pipa player who had found herself drifting along the rivers, evoked a sort of “profound melancholy” in which one found the “universal principle of the equality of men before sorrow.” To emphasize this point, Chen repeats for effect one of the lines in the poem:

We are all vagrants of the universe.
Do we need to know each
Before we meet!

(Nous sommes tous les déclassés de l’univers.
Avons-nous besoin de nous connaître,
Avant de nous rencontrer?)

With the benefit of access to some of Chen’s later writings, we know that the Tang poets, especially Bai Juyi, were among his favorites. In 1895, as he gradually lost hope for foreign intervention in helping the Taiwan Republic defend itself from Japanese takeover, one of the poems Chen composed was titled “Reading the ‘Song of Everlasting Sorrow’ in the Taibei Yamen” In some of his other poems, such as one given as a gift to a courtesan in 1890s Shanghai, Chen makes allusions to Bai Juyi’s self-styled moniker “Commander of Jiangzhou” (Jiangzhou sima 江州司馬), thereby identifying with both the frustrations

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323 “Taibei yazhai du Changhen ge” 臺北衙齋讀長恨歌, in Xue Jia Yin 学賈吟. Comp. Qian Nanxiu (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 150.
of the exiled Tang poet and the commiseration between the literatus and the female performer.\footnote{Zeng Hong Shaolan jiaoshu, in \textit{Xue Jia Yin}, 145. I discuss both of these poems and their relation to turns in Chen’s life and career in the 1890s in chapter 4 of the dissertation.} In a French poem, published in the Shanghai newspaper \textit{L’Écho de Chine} in 1903, Chen also rewrote the “Song of the Lute,” borrowing from his own previous translation.\footnote{Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Guitare sur le fleuve bleu,” \textit{L’Écho de Chine}, 22 July 1903.} More than an effort to appeal to his French readership, then, these two poems in particular show how Chen Jitong’s own self-identification as a Chinese literatus entered into his literary production and affected his presentation of Chinese culture.

\section*{Contes}

In December 1885, a new learned society called the Society of Popular Traditions (\textit{Société des Traditions Populaires}) was established in Paris. This society had as its goal the collection, study, and publication of subjects such as oral literature, games and entertainment, ethnography, linguistics, popular arts, and “literary productions considered in their relations to people’s narratives and beliefs.”\footnote{“Programme et but de la Société des Traditions Populaires,” \textit{Revue des traditions populaires}, 1 (1886), i-ii.} Its founding was part of a nineteenth century nationalistic cultural movement that had its precedents in the folklore studies conducted by romantic historians such as Jules Michelet and Henri Martin, but that also had parallels in German Romanticism (which would later inspire Japanese folklore studies and the folklore movement in May Fourth era China).\footnote{For a brief discussion of the Société des Traditions Populaires, see Marie-Thérèse Duflos-Priot, \textit{Un siècle de groupes folkloriques en France: L’identité par la beauté du geste} (Paris: L’Hartmann, 1995), 15-25. On French historians as folklorists, see Charles Rearick, \textit{Beyond the Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth Century France} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974). One of the Society’s notable foreign members was Andrew Lang (1844-1912), the British folklorist whose writings were a particularly important influence on May Fourth writers such as Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967); see Chang-tai Hung, \textit{Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1986), 42-43, 117.}
Although the society had begun as a French movement with the goal of collecting and studying texts, popular songs, and superstitions from the various provinces, it seemed to have from the outset a focus beyond the national borders, with the first issue of its official journal, the *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, declaring that it would also publish foreign works and translations from regions as disparate as Turkey, Fiji, China, Japan, and the Scandinavian countries. This international outlook perhaps reflected in part the interests of some of the society’s members. Indeed, one finds in the listing of the society’s first central committee the name of Henri Cordier, the French sinologist who had worked alongside Chen Jitong in supervising the Chinese Education Mission to Europe. By the late 1880s, Cordier had established himself as an influential expert on China, having taken up a professorship on Far Eastern history, geography and legislation at the École des Langues Orientales. It may have been at Cordier’s invitation that Chen Jitong also joined the society. Chen, whose name first appears in the members’ directory in May 1888, was listed as a contributor of “popular Chinese tales” (*Contes populaires chinois*). Indeed, the translation, retelling, and adaptation of *contes* (or popular tales) – perhaps encouraged by his experiences at the Society of Popular Traditions, would comprise of the majority of Chen Jitong’s later literary production in France. The most exemplary of these works is *Contes chinois* (1889), a collection of translated tales from Pu Songling’s *Liaozhai zhiyi*.

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328 “Programme et but de la Société des Traditions Populaires,” *Revue des traditions populaires*, 1 (1886), i-iv.
330 *Annuaire des traditions populaires*, 1888, xvi, xxvi. Cordier appears in the same listing as a contributor of “Chinese popular traditions” (*Traditions populaires de la Chine*).
An intriguing link between the activities of the folklore society and Chen Jitong’s writings can be found in the front matter of this book. Dedicated to “mon frère Ihu” (Yiru 逸如 was the style name of Jitong’s younger brother, Chen Shoupeng), the author recalls that when the two siblings lost their parents in their childhood, they had “neither “Mother Goose” (Ma Mère l’Oye), to tell us popular tales, nor the good Perrault, who would have taken us to the land of the fairies.” Instead, for “graceful illusions,” they passed hours under an oil lamp, engrossed in the tales of Liaozhai. More than an emotional appeal to his readers – at one point Chen refers to “our sad youth as orphans” – this dedication is revealing in its reference to the French writer Charles Perrault (1628-1703), whose classic collection of fairy tales, which included such stories as “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Cinderella”, was first published in 1697 under the title Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l’Oye (Stories or tales from times past: tales of Mother Goose). “Ma Mère l’Oye” was also the name of the monthly dinner of the Society of Popular Traditions, a custom that actually began prior to the founding of the society. Originally called a “meeting of folklorists,” these dinners always ended with the singing of folk songs in various French dialects as well as from other countries, some of which were later published in the society’s Revue. Chen Jitong participated in one of these gatherings on at least one occasion, on May 31, 1888, along with Cordier and several other notable members, such as the folklorist and society founder Paul Sébillot (1843-1918). At one point during the dinner, as reported in the society’s journal, one of the guests began speaking of paper hens (cocottes en papier). Soon those who “possessed the talent…of making different things of folded paper set about the task, and one could see how they were

331 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Contes chinois (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1889), i-ii.
332 Annuaire des traditions populaires, 1887, xxv-xxx.
made in France, Russia, and China, among other countries.” Concluding the evening, after
others had sang the customary folk songs, Chen Jitong recounted, “with plenty of good
grace and in excellent French, Chinese stories from his native province.”

This vivid anecdote of the Chinese diplomat as story-teller and folklorist (by
membership) among French scholars is revealing of the public and personal context in
which Chen Jitong’s cultural mediation operated beyond the written text. It is also
illustrative of the informal manner in which Chen approached the translation of Pu
Songling’s tales. Most recently, Li Jinjia has argued that even though Chen’s Contes
chinois, which comprised of twenty-six selections from the Liaozhai zhiyi collection, was
the first substantial translation of Pu Songling’s tales produced in French, it was not as
faithful to the original stories as the single story translated in 1880 by the diplomat-
sinologist Camille Imbault-Huart (1857-1897). Despite its popular reception (it was
eventually translated into Italian), Contes chinois was characterized by a “confused” and
“unsteady” narrative and a “flat style.” In his review, the Dutch sinologist Gustaaf
Schlegel (1840-1903) was more generous, noting that Chen’s tales, “more adaptations than
translations,” were written with an “elegant and light pen.” Most revealing, however,
are the remarks by the French writer Anatole France (1844-1924), who reviewed Contes
chinois for Le Temps. Recalling his acquaintance with the translated stories of French

334 Li Jinjia, Le Liaozhai zhiyi en français (1880-2004): étude historique et critique des traductions (Paris:
Librairie You-Feng, 2009), 25-28. There were only two stories translated into French prior to Chen’s volume.
In the English case, the sinologist Herbert Giles had produced a full translation of the Liaozhai stories in
1880; see Herbert A. Giles, trans., Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio. 2 vols. (London: Thos. De la Rue
& Co., 1880). For a very interesting study of Giles’ translation, see John Minford and Tong Man, “Whose
Strange Stories? Pu Sung-ling (1640-1715), Herbert Giles (1845-1935), and the Liao-chai chih-yi,” East
335 Gustave Schlegel, review of Contes chinois, T’oung Pao 1 (April 1890): 76-79. Schlegel also provides a
full bilingual listing, with reference to the original text, of the twenty-six stories.
sinologists Guillaume Pauthier, Abel Rémusat, and Stanilas Julien, France notes that Chen’s translations were the “most naive” of the genre. They appeared to be “little stories analogous to our Mother Goose tales, full of dragons, vampires, little foxes, women who were flowers, and porcelain gods.” They were along the “popular vein” and perhaps represented what Chinese children were told under the lamplight. Nevertheless, France found the tales to be diverse, they were “sometimes graceful, like our pious legends, sometimes satiric, like our fables, sometimes marvelous like our fairy tales, and sometimes altogether horrible.”

Once again, we have a reference to the Mother Goose tales. It would seem that Chen Jitong had been rather successful in making his versions of the Liaozhai tales accessible for his French audience, a goal he had declared in the preface to the collection. On the other hand, the diverse effects of the stories also suggest that Chen’s selections and adaptation had performed the functions he envisioned for the short tale, the conte, as a cross-cultural literary work. These ruminations offer us a clue to the considerations that underlay Chen’s “fictional turn” in the later writings he produced in France.

The conte, Chen declares, had a double function. On the one hand, it satisfied one’s desire for the marvelous; on the other hand, it offered an indirect way to propagate morals. As the “highest expression of human deceptions and aspirations,” the popular tale provided a way to imagine all the “riches, glory, beauty, intelligence, and power” that eluded all but the most privileged in real life. Yet its fictional nature also allowed for the author to insert moral principles, and, since it were less technical and shorter, but encompassed all sorts of subjects, the tale offered a way, in Chen’s case, after his previous expository works, to

showcase the “customs, manners of thinking and behaving, and the thousand little nothings, that constituted the life of a people.”

In Chen’s retelling of the Ming era tales of fierce and dominant women and in the story about the young scholar Chan-tsang who, with help from a benevolent local official, rises from poverty to examination success, we see his putting the conte to use in narrating China.

In addition to the fantastical and the moral, there was one more element to the Liaozhai stories collected in Contes chinois. This was “l’amour”, love, which “held such an important place in life.” He declared as much in an essay on China’s social organization, claiming that “love” was the foundational sentiment of the Chinese conception of family. In addition to citing examples from classical poetry, showcasing the Chinese appreciation of romance and love through literature formed one of the major and most creative components of Chen Jitong’s literary production in French. This theme is exemplified in Chen’s adaptation of two classic Tang romantic tale as well as his writing of an original play.

L’Amour

The Abandoned Courtesan and the Redeemed Duchess

On July 23, 1890, the leading French newspaper Le Temps began serializing a novel entitled Le Roman de l’homme jaune (The Story of the Man in Yellow). Appearing almost

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daily for the next three and half weeks and released in book form late in the year, this publication was exemplary of the most creative phase of Chen Jitong’s career as a writer in Paris.\textsuperscript{340} The novel tells the tragic love story of the scholar Li-Y and courtesan Siao-Yu. In the capital to take the imperial examinations, the talented young man Li-Y falls in love with Siao-Yu, an attractive and intelligent young woman who was the daughter of a prince Huou, but had been forced out of the noble’s household. After spending three blissful years with Siao-Yu in her house, Li-Y successfully attains first place in the examinations. Yet the happiness of the young “scholar and beauty” (\textit{caizi jiaren} 才子佳人) couple is cut short when Li-Y’s widowed mother forces her son to marry a woman from a more upstanding family. Li-Y is unable to face Siao-Yu and when the latter eventually finds out about his betrayal, succumbs to illness and dies. Li-Y is compelled by others, including the haunting image of “The Man in Yellow” (\textit{Huangshan ke} 黃衫客), a chivalrous and mysterious “ancestor” of Siao-Yu, to visit his lover again at the last minute, but he could do nothing to prevent her death. Unable to atone for his unfaithfulness, Li-Y too meets his end in madness and self-imposed isolation. 

\textit{Le Roman de l’homme jaune} is a retelling of the classic Tang romance “Huo Xiaoyu’s Story” (\textit{Huo Xiaoyu zhuan} 霍小玉傳).\textsuperscript{341} Adhering to the basic plotline and using the same names of the original characters Li Yi 李益 and Huo Xiaoyu 霍小玉, Chen Jitong nonetheless made several notable alterations and significant additions. In his version


of the story, the capital is moved from Chang’an 長安 to Nanjing 南京, which seems to suggest that he has transplanted the tale to the Ming period. However, he also writes that the examinations candidates have come from all eight provinces, the number which had been established only by the Qing. Elsewhere, he indicates that the story takes place in the reign of Dali (Tang Daizong, r. 762-779), which would have been the original temporal context of “Huo Xiaoyu’s story.” Whereas the confused dating may be due to Chen’s producing the story in a rush, for serial publication, the decision to move the central setting to Nanjing, as others scholars have remarked, allows for Chen to devote many passages to showcasing the splendor of Jiangnan scenery as well as the pleasure quarters of Nanjing.342

Indeed, at times the plot of the story seems to take a backseat to detailed descriptions of popular customs and of famous sites. Thus when Li-Y goes to take the examinations, the entire system and its rites are explained in painstaking manner.343 The wedding ceremony between Li-Y and the bride imposed by his mother, a ritual which the protagonist experiences unwillingly and deliriously and which is insignificant to the turn in the plot, is also carefully depicted and includes details such as the musicians, sedan-carriers, and the characters written on the lanterns for the occasion.344 A comparison to the chapters on exams and marriage in Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes suggests that these passages were drawn from Chen’s already published essays on these subjects. Indeed, in some of these instances, the voice of the author as autoethnographer can be distinctly heard. In a dinner scene at a courtesan’s house, the narrator interrupts the storytelling by emphasizing that the tea served is taken “in the Chinese fashion” (à la chinoise) or without

343 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Le Roman de l’homme jaune, 4-7.
344 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Le Roman de l’homme jaune, 185-188.
sugar, and a drinking game that follows is explained to be similar to the Italian hand game, the “*morra*.” In another scene-setting passage, the serenity of the Jinshan Temple (金山水寺) is compared explicitly to the morose atmosphere in European convents. In an incredible side plot that has no parallel in the original story, Li-Y and Siao-Yu take a sort of “honeymoon” and travel to Suzhou and Hangzhou, “China’s Eden,” where they admire the breathtaking scenery in the mountains and around the West and Tai Lakes, while pointing out and reading to each other the lines of poetry that generations of literati have inscribed at these sites. Here the rationale for transplanting the story to Nanjing become self-explanatory.

What motivations lay behind Chen Jitong’s choice of “Huo Xiaoyu’s story” to adapt for what would be his only full-length novel? And what point – about Chinese society and culture – might he have been trying to make with this work? In a recently published survey history of twentieth-century Chinese literature, the veteran Chinese literary scholar Yan Jiayan makes the claim that Chen’s *Le Roman de l’homme jaune* deserves a place alongside the late Qing novel *Flowers of Shanghai* (海上花列傳, 1892), by Han Banging 韓邦慶, as one of the pioneering precursors to modern Chinese literature, calling it the first novel with “modern significance” (現代意義). Yan’s bases his bold assertion on a reading that sees the tragedy of the story as a condemnation of the “old concepts” and “old customs” such as arranged marriages. In other words, Chen had used the Tang tragedy in service of a May Fourth

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348 Yan Jiayan 嚴家炎, ed., *Ershi shiji zhongguo wenxueshi* 二十世紀中國文學史, Volume 1 (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), 12.
project, the critique of Confucian patriarchy, which obstructed the possibility of realizing relationships formed through free, self-selected love. If, by setting up Li-Y’s intervening mother as the villain and the young couple as victims, Chen was indeed signaling his doubts about the morality of blindly adhering to filial piety, then he would have indeed been making, through *Le Roman de l’homme jaune*, a significant epistemological shift, to borrow Haiyan Lee’s terms, from the “Confucian structure of feeling,” which privileged familial bonds and virtue, to the “Enlightenment structure of feeling,” which championed individuality and romantic love.  Yet, as we have seen, in his previous writings, Chen had always upheld the rational and moral features of what he himself called a patriarchal society. Nor would he have ever identified arranged marriages and filial piety as “old customs,” since those were for him *contemporary* practices and values. Indeed, he had even elsewhere praised the parental arrangement of marriages. In two other fictional works on the subject of love and marriage produced around the same time, there is little hint of a modern antagonism toward Confucian values.

In his essay collection *Mon Pays*, Chen included a piece entitled “L’Histoire de la Duchesse Nien” (The Story of the Duchess of Nien). In this story, a talented young man, Kung-Sheng, goes to Chang’an to take the examinations, catches sight of the beautiful courtesan Li-Oa. Falling in love, he moves in with her and living a lavish lifestyle, squanders all of his money. Li-Oa’s mother then persuades her daughter to trick Kung-Sheng out of the house and abandons him. Sinking into poverty and disrespectful occupations in order to survive, Kung-Sheng is reprimanded and ignored by his father, a

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Tang official. In the end, he is saved by a Li-Oa determined to make up for her early abandonment of her lover. She takes care of him and encourages him to once again take the examinations. This time, Kung-Sheng is successful and receives an official posting. When Li-Oa tries to persuade him to leave her and marry a young woman from a respectable background, Kung-Sheng’s father intervenes and marries the young couple. Li-Oa becomes a virtuous wife of an upright official and is eventually honored as the “Duchness of Nien.”

Like Le Roman de l’homme jaune, this story is an adaptation of a Tang romance, “The Tale of Li Wa” (Li Wa zhuan 李娃傳), written by Bai Xingjian 白行簡 (776-826), younger brother of the poet Bai Juyi. The two works share very similar plotlines, but there are two key differences: in “The Tale of Li Wa,” it is the young man who is abandoned and the mother of the female protagonist who appears as the perpetrator of the initial betrayal; furthermore, the story carries a joyful ending in which old mistakes – the waste of money and talents by Sheng, and the (unwilling) abandonment by Li Wa – are overcome by the characters’ reunion and reapplying themselves to proper and virtuous actions, thus being redeemed. As Daniel Hsieh has noted, the romantic transgressions in this story are eventually neutralized by a lingering “Confucian conscience,” resulting in Li Wa’s reintegration into a social order in which recognition from both family and state (by becoming the Duchess of Qian汧國夫人) are necessary for the fantastic conclusion.

In contrast to his free adaptation and embellishment of “Huo Xiaoyu’s story,” Chen Jitong’s

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translation of “The Tale of Li Wa” is mostly straightforward and adheres to the chronology and structure of the original. The confirmation of the Confucian and imperial order in this story remains unchallenged. Indeed, Chen would actually celebrate female virtue in a stage drama he wrote in the same year.

A Heroic Love

In one of Chen Jitong’s longest essays, he wrote of a kind of “heroic love” (*l’amour héroïque*) that sometimes occurred in China, both in reality and as a genre of drama, in which a young lady insisted on marrying into the family of her betrothed, even when the young man dies of some misfortune before the wedding ceremony. For Chen, this was a very laudable and touching phenomena. The voluntary widow who remained steadfast on fulfilling her filial duties to her fiancé’s parents exemplifies a determination and sincerity that is emblematic of the intertwining of conjugal love and Confucian morality that were hallmarks of the Chinese family. Yet he could also have been making a subtle public advertisement for a play on this very subject, which he would soon publish in the pages of the literary magazine *Le Figaro illustré.*

Titled *L’Amour héroïque: vaudeville chinois,* this one-act, nine-scene comedy of manners is set in China’s southeastern coast and tells of the family dynamics that unfold with the resolution of a young woman to marry into his fiancé’s household upon learning

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356 On this topic, see Weijing Lu’s excellent study, *True to Her Word: The Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).
of his death at sea. The play opens with a dialogue between the young protagonist In-Tao and her maidservant Lien-Hoa. Standing in a hall in the home of her deceased fiancé, Ling-Chang-Keng, the two women, dressed in mourning clothes, discuss In-Tao’s decision to follow through with her arranged marriage. In the course of their dialogue, In-Tao reveals that her fiancé was a talented young scholar who had left home to take part in the final round of civil examinations. Anticipating his triumphant return after receiving news of his success, the two families were shocked to learn that Chang-Keng’s ship had capsized upon encountering a rough storm along the coast of Taiwan and none of the passengers had survived. Out of her concern for her fiancé’s parents, who have no other children, and because she had always regarded Chang-Keng as her future husband ever since the two had been betrothed to each other as children, In-Tao was determined to continue to fulfill her duties as daughter-in-law. When her companion protests that In-Tao was still young and beautiful and did not have to become a widow, In-Tao insists that she has no regrets. On the one hand, she was firmly resolute in remaining faithful to her husband and filial to her in-laws: “my heart is like our old wells, where no waves could rise!” On the other hand, once married into her fiancé’s household, it would be possible for her adopt a boy, who would continue her husband’s line of descent and become the future head of the family.\footnote{357 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “L’Amour héroïque: vaudeville chinois,” Le Figaro illustré (July 1891), 1-2. As in Li Huachuan’s translation, the names “In-Tao” and “Lien-Hoa” probably connote Cherry (yingtao 櫻桃) and Lotus (lianhu 蓮花). Li translates the fiancé’s names as Lin Changgeng 林長庚. See Li’s translation of the play, Yingyong de ai 英勇的爱, in Chen Jitong 陳季同, Huangshanke chuanqi 黃衫客傳奇, trans. Li Huachuan (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2010), 269-286.}

In-Tao’s determination saddens her father and moves her fiancé’s parents, who, while mourning the loss of their son, describe In-Tao as “courageous” and “devoted.” They are fully aware that the young woman, who had just turned eighteen, was about to trade
her life full of “rays of sun, of lotus flowers and moonlight” for one filled with “loneliness and tears.”  Just as In-Tao helps serve a meal to her father and in-laws, they are interrupted by the sudden arrival of none other than Chang-Keng, who had apparently been washed ashore and been rescued by local fishermen after he had prayed to the “goddess of sailors,” whose visage he was able to see through a “luminous circle between the waves.”

A happy wedding ensues, with the groom’s cousin, a young man fond of quoting Confucius and a potential suitor of In-Tao, who had served as a comical foil throughout the play, serving as the master of ceremonies.

*L’Amour héroïque* is first and foremost a positive idealization of the late imperial “faithful maiden” cult. As Weijing Lu has shown, while the Chinese literati fascination with the *zhennü* in the late Ming and early Qing evoked metaphors of political loyalty, by the latter half of Qing, the widespread practice of the cult and the biographies of faithful widows had helped place these stories in more personalized narratives. The story in Chen’s play is certainly very much depoliticized. No mention is made of the “imperial testimonials” (*jingbiao* 旌表) that would be typically awarded for such virtuous acts.

Nor do economic motivations come into play, since we are informed at the outset that both the young woman and her fiancé are from well-to-do elite families, although In-Tao does explain (to the intended audience) that she would have the opportunity to adopt an heir after marrying into her fiancé’s family, a legal act that would be to her benefit.

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361 On court and local government awards for faithful maidens, see Lu, *True to Her Word*, 74-86. See also Mark Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State in China,” *Past and Present* 104.1 (August 1984): 111-152.
362 On the adoption of heirs by faithful maiden, see Lu, *True to Her Word*, 123-126.
is absolved by a patient and understanding father, who is also noted to have other children to take care of him, while the in-laws are depicted as accepting and benevolent. The central focus is placed on the decision of the young maiden, In-Tao, who declares her resolve by referring to her heart as “a dried-out well that makes no wave” (kujing wulan 枯井無瀾), a metaphor frequently found in late imperial writings on chaste widows.

Yet the solemn and tragic tone of what might otherwise have been a conventional story is first interrupted by the appearance of a male cousin, Tai-Ho, whose attempts to win In-Tao over are ineffective yet humorous, as he justifies everything with a saying supposedly from the Analects, “par Confucius” (Confucius says). His healthy appetite also allows Chen Jitong to add detailed descriptions of a pre-wedding dinner between the two families. These scenes, which include some light banter between the maidservant and the male cousin, have the effect of resettling In-Tao into the fabric of everyday life and ultimately humanizing – even in a self-mocking manner – the Confucian morals upon which the faithful maiden cult is founded. Finally, Chen’s story concludes with an unexpected turn that touches on both the local and the mythological. By setting the site of Chang-Keng’s accident near Taiwan, he has placed the story somewhere near the southeast coast of Fujian, which was not only his own native place, but a region where the goddess Tian Hou 天后 or Mazu 媽祖, a protector of fishermen and sailors was held in high reverence. It is not impossible, then, for this “Chinese vaudeville” to have originally been a local popular tale with which Chen was familiar.

363 On this dilemma, see Lu, True to Her Word, 190-195.
Was *L’Amour héroïque* ever staged? At the very least, the play was once rehearsed in 1891, with the well-known French comedians Suzanne Reichemberg, Rachel Boyer, and Coquelin cadet cast in the main roles. The dating of the play to 1891 is significant because up until now, *L’Amour héroïque* has been identified by all other studies of Chen Jitong as a work published in 1904, by the Imprimerie Orientale, a Catholic press in Shanghai. This version was in fact a reprint. That the play had been both published and staged over a decade earlier, in the same year as *Le Roman de l’homme jaune*, is an indication of Chen’s commitment, on the one hand, to more orthodox social values, and on the other hand, to celebrating the “Confucian structure of feelings” in increasingly innovative forms.

![Figure 2.4. The two versions of “L’Amour héroïque.” The illustrations in the 1891 version were once again provided by Félix Régaméy.](image)

Promotion of T’ien Hou (‘Empress of Heaven’) Along the South China Coast, 960-1960,” in David Johnson, ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 292-324. Fujian also ranked among the top-five in provinces with the most reported faithful maiden cases in the Qing; see Lu, *True to Her Word*, 97.

366 *Le Matin*, 6 January 1891.

367 This was a period in which Chen, living in Shanghai and Nanjing, had contributed articles (many of which had been previously published in France) to the Shanghai-based French newspaper, *L’Écho de Chine*; see chapter 5 of this dissertation.
Conclusion

“China is a charming country…Pagodas everywhere, bells everywhere” (La Chine est un pays charmante…Partout des pagodes, partout des clochettes). These lines, taken from, Le Voyage en Chine, an 1865 opera composed by Eugène Labiche (1815-1888) and François Bazin (1816-1878, no relation to the sinologist), are cited several times by Chen Jitong throughout his writings. Avowing that he cannot help but portray his own country in a positive light, Chen declares his approval of Bazin’s approach:

“This manner of representing China is not banal. It is in any case very French, and I would like to tell you that I knew of this refrain before coming to France fifteen years ago… I have adopted, with a real pleasure, the definition which professor Bazin has given to China.”

The “China” that emerged from Chen Jitong’s representation was indeed entirely harmonious and full of charm. Reviewing Chen Jitong’s corpus of French writings, the literary scholar Yinde Zhang has noted that Chen’s works were marked by a mixture of “a patriotic zeal, a culturalist tropism, and a universalist utopian project.” Chen’s positive portrayal of Chinese government, education, and society was indeed overwhelmingly one-sided in its insistence on the rationality and efficacy of the Confucian system, and often relied on superficial glosses of orthodox idealizations rather than specific examples. Yet they were sometimes also underpinned by a literati sensibility that crept in through translations of poetry and the valorization of literature and love as elements that could be universally shared and understood. Furthermore, Chen’s construction of a “cultural China”

369 Yinde Zhang, “Pour une archéologie de la francophonie chinoise: le cas de Tcheng Ki-tong,” 294.
followed an *interactive* approach that allowed for him to access multiple European audiences.

Having constructing a literary persona as a cultural insider on both sides, he contended with European misperceptions of China through polemics published in the Paris newspapers and literary journals. While he liberally appropriated the works of a number of French sinologists and writers, Chen also took as inspiration the interest in popular tales and folksongs generated by the Society of Popular Traditions. Through the telling of stories and songs, he sought to construct a China that was less exotic, more vivid, more human, and more accessible through empathetic understanding. And he attempted to do this in a variety of forms other than the essay collection. This resulted in works such as the adapted novel about the scholar and courtesan as well as the entertaining play celebrating the faithful maiden. In another notable instance, he convinced Alfonso Dami (1842-1927), an Italian-born composer at the Paris Conservatory, to write a score for a folksong. Titled *Saison d’amour: air chinois* (Season of Love: a Chinese melody) and published in 1890, the collaborative piece was based on a tune by Chen and adapted by Dami for piano and song.\(^{370}\) Chen also contributed the lyrics:

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Here are the swallows Returning, most beautiful,
To their nests in the spring: The woods are full of songs.
So think of those / Who, with their the languishing eyes
Remember only the absent. Ah! always faithful!

The summer turns the plains yellow / Under its blazing breath
The lotus rises in blossom, Hope swells my heart
Hot day, serene night / Short moments of happiness
Love is my conqueror. Ah! this is my punishment
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\(^{370}\) As related by Dami’s son Aldo in his family history; see Aldo dami, *Une famille liée à l’histoire: la famille Dami-Landauer* (Geneva: Perret-Gentil, 1979), 29. Alphonso Dami’s father-in-law, Moritz Landauer, was an Austrian merchant who knew Chen well and with whom Chen entered into negotiations for loans on behalf of the Qing government. See chapters 3 and 4.
Cooler autumn nights / The moon shines in the heavens
Brilliantly blooming again The gold chrysanthemum.
A roaring storm / Comes in to waken
Our slumbering love. Ah! too dull

Winter seizes the space / Of meadows and woods, chasing away
Lovers, songs, and flowers / My eyes are pouring tears
Alas! The passing bird / Bringing the happiness
Of our poor heart. Ah! Taken by the ice

In evoking images of “swallows,” “lotus,” and “chrysanthemums,” and “the moon,” the song recalls recurrent tropes in Chinese poetry that have been perpetuated among French readers through works like Judith Gautier’s Livre de Jade. Meanwhile, the passing bird and the returning swallow, along with the changing seasons, bring to mind the kind of “profound melancholy” over the passing of time and the longing for departed loved ones, themes that Chen had time and again introduced in his expositions of Chinese poetry. Yet this “Chinese melody” set to a simple tune and repeated four times in the five-page score, also seems to have been Chen’s adaptation of the genre of folksong usually called “The Four Seasons” (Siji ge 四季歌 or Siji diao 四季調). This was exactly the kind of popular melody shared and sung at the conclusion of the Society of Popular Traditions’ Mother Goose dinners.

The adaptation of folk melodies into poetic songs set to a piano score, the rewriting of scholar-beauty romances into novels and short stories serialized in French newspapers, and the transformation of a faithful maiden morality tale into a comical vaudeville are all highly performative acts by the cultural mediator. None of these works spoke of a specific China, but they were considerably different from Western images of despotic rulers, oppressed women, abandoned babies, and barbaric peoples. The literary works produced

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by Chen Jitong exuded an overwhelming “Chineseness” and “charm” that was at once fresh and immediately recognizable, all the while being packaged in artistic forms familiar to the European audience. They nevertheless drew upon a unique combination of indigenous popular repertories (including local goddesses) and literary sources available only to a Chinese literatus.
In representing China to his French audience, Chen Jitong adhered to his identity as a late Qing man of letters, holding up Neo-Confucian visions of state and society while taking advantage of his extensive familiarity with classical Chinese literature. At the same time, he also borrowed readily from an established repertoire of positive descriptions of China by nineteenth-century French observers of China as well as literary translations by French writers and sinologists. Furthermore, he established his authority as a cultural mediator by making constant reference, throughout his writings, to both classical European literature and contemporary events covered by the Paris newspapers. As we will see in the next chapter, this carefully cultivated persona and cross-cultural aesthetics extended beyond Chen’s written works to his public performances as an orator in fin-de-siècle Paris.
Chapter 3
The Boulevardier in the Purple Robe

In 1892, the Hungarian physician and social critic Max Nordau (1849-1923) published *Degeneration (Entartung)*, a lengthy diatribe against some of the current literary and artistic trends that he perceived as both influential and reflective of the moral and social decay spreading throughout late nineteenth-century Europe. His work, which attacked some of the leading intellectual and cultural figures of the time – Wagner, Ibsen, Turgenieff, Zola – appeared, as one scholar notes, as a “polemical hailstorm unleashed on modernist culture.”  

Nordau’s caustic volume began with a survey of the fin-de-siècle, which he found to be the “underlying mood” of the atmosphere of decadence and decline, characterized by, above all, “contempt for traditional views of custom and morality.”  

Writing from Paris and citing the city as the origin of both the term and the phenomena, Nordau begins his first chapter with series of vignettes extracted from the books and periodicals from the past two years. Among the several examples Nordau provided, one finds the following intriguing description:

“An attaché of the Chinese Embassy publishes high-class works in French under his own name. He negotiates with banks respecting a large loan for his Government, and draws large advances for himself on the unfinished contract. Later it comes out that the books were composed by his French secretary, and that he has swindled the banks. *Fin-de-siècle diplomatist.*”

A little more than a decade later, the British writer Robert Harborough Sherard (1861-1943), who had spent much of the previous two decades pursuing his own literary

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373 Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895), 5. For the German original, see Max Nordau, *Entartung* (Berlin: C. Duncker, 1892-1893).
374 Nordau, *Degeneration*, 4.
dreams (and his one-time friend Oscar Wilde) in Paris, penned a vivid memoir of his adventures in the French capital. After recounting in detail his meetings and conversations with such towering figures as Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas fils, Sherard recalls, in a somewhat nostalgic tone, another literary friendship:

“I must not conclude my list of princes and potentates without mentioning the name of Marquis and General Tcheng-Ki-Tong, for some time chargé d'affaires at the Imperial Chinese Embassy in Paris. Tcheng-Ki-Tong was a Parisianized Oriental of a very peculiar type. He was a man of literary tastes, and contributed largely on Chinese subjects to the leading French papers. He was the author of a number of books on Chinese questions. At the same time he was ardently attached to the pleasure of the capital. It was said of him...that tucking up his pig-tail under his hat, and in European costume, he used to attend the public halls and dance as wildly the cancan as any Valentin-le-Désossé of them all.”

Read against one another, the accounts by these two erstwhile Paris sojourners seem emblematic of the two contrasting modes in which turn-of-the-century France (roughly 1880-1914) has been historically perceived. Was this a time of decadence and degeneracy – the beginning of the “Dusk of Nations” as Nordau called it – or an era of cultural vibrancy that would only be cut short by the First World War? Contemporary observers and later historians have carried on an endless debate over the most appropriate term to describe the period: fin-de-siècle or belle époque?

Yet of interest here is the striking shared image chosen by both Nordau and Sherard to make their points. For both writers, one memorably characteristic icon of late nineteenth-century Paris was a Chinese diplomat – Chen Jitong – famous for both writing French books and appearing in the dance halls. Yet while one presented Chen as a negative, indeed scandalous, example of the times, the other cited Chen’s sociability in a celebratory


tone. How did Chen Jitong gain such popularity and notoriety in Parisian society to have landed in the grab-bag of fin-de-siècle symbols for contemporary European commentators? How faithful were these representations of Chen? While the previous chapter presented an analysis of Chen’s French writings, this chapter will investigate the various ways through which Chen Jitong emerged as a public figure in fin-de-siècle Paris. Whether he was indeed a “swindler” or “Valentin-le-Désossé,” or perhaps both, an exploration of the social aspects of Chen Jitong’s tenure in Paris requires an immersion, as Nordau had, in the mass press in 1880s and 1890s France.

Until now, studies of Chen Jitong have not adequately addressed the single most important social and cultural context in which he flourished as a cultural mediator in late nineteenth-century France. It is difficult, however, to ignore the fact that Chen’s tenure in Paris, 1884-1891, coincided with what some scholars have called the “formative period of the French mass press (1860-1910).” Enabling conditions such as the “freedom of the press law” passed in 1881 and rising literacy rates contributed to a dramatic explosion in the numbers and circulation of French newspapers and periodicals during this period, with dozens of mass-circulated dailies offered at one sou and some of the most popular titles, like Le Petit Journal, having as many as one million subscribers, the newspapers in fin-de-siècle Paris had become a significant force. As the historian Vanessa Schwartz argues, the popular press, “which offered a sensationalized reality and an emphasis on novelty” for the public, was instrumental in both representing and constituting everyday life as a “boulevard

culture.” The new press also offered a number of different ways of organizing the readers’ viewing experience, through genres such as the *roman-feuilleton*, the serialized novel set apart by a bar at the bottom of the first page); the *fait divers*, the detailed and sensation snapshots of quotidian news; and the interview, which “could attest to the range of newsworthy individuals roaming the city streets” and thus formed an essential part of the new *presse d’information*. As will be seen, at one point or another, Chen Jitong’s writings and news about Chen appeared in all of these categories across the many newspapers circulating in late nineteenth-century France.

In fact, Chen Jitong had shown a keen awareness of the centrality of the mass press in Parisian life. In one of the more animated essays in his *Les Parisiens peints par un chinois*, Chen noted the power of the newspapers to command the feverish attention of their readership:

> “Everyone reads, searches, examines, abandoning one’s own affairs to be occupied with those of others…interviews with diplomats, the slightest utterance of a monarch, the most insignificant speech pronounced at a banquet, all become sources of infinite commentaries and interminable discusses…And as if the fever was not strong enough, the propagators of this malady use all the possible means to fire it up even more: posters, advertisements, hawkers, exciting the public imagination and offering them the most fresh scandals, and when there wasn’t any, inventing them.”

And this frenzy was so contagious that Chen had been caught up in it himself. Not only did he recommend the newspapers to his compatriots from China, but Chen had also contributed “whatever I wanted, to spread this disease.”

As this last telling admission suggests, Chen Jitong was never simply a passive consumer of or an exotic subject for the fin-de-siècle French newspaper. While a

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significant portion of the press coverage on Chen Jitong did capitalize on his connection to sensational and scandalous events, the journalist portrayals also did much to help Chen extend his own self-fashioning as an orator and a cosmopolitan personality, especially during the period of the 1889 universal expositions held in Paris. In this chapter, I trace some of Chen Jitong’s public performances as well as their reception through the mass press in late nineteenth-century France and the published proceedings of various learned societies and international congresses, especially those held during the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. I show that while Chen consistently depicted imperial China as a harmonious society built upon moral and pragmatic Confucian principles, he also reminded his audience of the late Qing receptiveness to Western science and technology. In addition to using his speeches to defend Chinese culture and the interests of Chinese migrants abroad, Chen also repeated appealed for recognition of China as a humanistic, poetic realm and for the mutual understanding between China and Europe based on the cultural and literary aspects of their respective civilizations. By repeatedly inserting himself into the public and into print in late nineteenth-century France, Chen Jitong actively participated in the shaping of the composite persona of a sociable diplomat, a cultivated man of letters, and an eloquent public speaker. In vocalizing China on a world stage, Chen Jitong constituted a significant personal and discursive presence for the Qing empire in an international setting.

From “Salonnier” to “Conférencier”

The construction of Chen Jitong’s public image proceeded simultaneously as the publication of his writings. As the tensions over the Sino-French conflict subsided after
1885, the appearance of Chen Jitong’s name in the French press increasingly grew to encompass a wider variety of public activities. While the newspapers still occasionally noted his presence at certain diplomatic functions, they also seemed to take much delight in reporting on Chen’s participation in different social settings around the French capital. These “Tcheng-Ki-Tong sightings” ranged from miscellaneous notes on cultural events and fait divers reports to longer synopsis of salons appearances and lectures at learned societies. Over the course of these reports, another persona gradually emerged for Chen Jitong. No longer merely known as a successful writer or a friendly diplomat, Chen became, through the representation in the mass press of the 1880s, a quick-witted celebrity whom one might run into in the boulevards of Paris and an eloquent public speaker who could hold forth a large audience in a lecture hall.

Tracing the various occasions for which Chen was singled out in fin-de-siècle Parisian newspaper columns and commentaries, it becomes evident that the social function of the Chinese military attaché was never confined merely to visits with government officials or meetings with other diplomatic personnel. Rather, Chen was shown to have taken a diverse interest in different scientific and cultural affairs. For instance, he was in attendance, on October 24, 1887, at a demonstration of Foucault’s pendulum at the St. Jacques Tower.\footnote{Amir D. Aczel, \textit{Pendulum: Leon Foucault and the Triumph of Science} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 255n56.} A year later, in the afternoon of October 14, 1888, he stood among the notables at the widely publicized unveiling of the first statue of Shakespeare at the junction of the Boulevard Haussmann and the Avenue de Messine, with \textit{The Times} taking his presence to be a “most striking proof of the universality of Shakespeare’s fame.”\footnote{\textit{Journal des débats}, 15 October 1888; \textit{The Times}, 15 October 1888.} He
was also spotted, often while mingling with members of Parisian high society, at some of the entertainment sites and festivities that the city had to offer, and the press took quick notice of his participation in the Festival of Flowers at the Bois de Boulogne or his sitting at the racetrack with the Prefect of Police Henri-Auguste Lozé and the daughter of the Minister of War Charles de Freycinet.383

In addition to appearing in a variety of different public venues, Chen also frequented some of the cultural and literary salons hosted by the wives of elite Third Republicans. These evening gatherings, along with their high-profile guest lists and programs, were often announced and summarized in the Parisian dailies. One could then, survey a major paper like Le Matin in June 1886 and find Chen Jitong among a number of a “brilliant dilettante” audience members at a “soirée musicale” chez Madame Fuchs, where the organist Charles-Marie Widor performed some of his own compositions.384 At other times, Chen himself was the main feature of the salon, as in a March 21, 1886 assembly hosted by a Madame de la Vernéde, at which his talk on the comparative aspects of Chinese and European languages – the permanence of the former, argued Chen, allowed for the endurance of the Chinese civilization as a whole – was so well received that the papers called him a “diplomat-conversationalist” (diplomat-causeur), who had shown that he could “handle speech as elegantly as he did the pen.”385 He also attended the salon of Juliette Adam (1836-1936), the staunch nationalist, feminist, and editor of La Nouvelle Revue, rubbing shoulders with prominent politicians, writers, and others of the Third Republic’s elite.386

383 Journal des débats, 5 June 1887; 10 April 1888; La Presse, 8 June 8 1890.
384 Le Matin, 18 June 1886.
385 Le Gaulois, 22 March 1886; Journal des débats, 24 March 1886.
It is obvious that many of the newspapers repeated evoked Chen’s participation as
a way of adding a cosmopolitan flavor to significant social events. Such would have been
the case when a right-wing paper such as *La Presse* remarked in passing Chen’s presence
among the 1,500 guests at the lavish all-night wedding reception of the daughter of the
Duchess d’Uzès in a “magnificent hotel in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées.”[^387] On the
other hand, the detailed description of Chen’s very own personal affairs in the press
suggests not only public acceptance but also Chen’s own growing awareness and
cultivation of his own celebrity status. Such was the case with the press coverage of his
marriage.

In August 1888, the obituaries in several well-circulated dailies simultaneously
carried a death announcement of Chen Jitong’s first wife, Madame Liu:

> “The general Tcheng-Ki-Tong, *chargé d’affaires* of China, in his name and that of his
family, has the honor of announcing to you the grievous loss that he has come to suffer in
the person of

Mme Tcheng-Ki-Tong
Née LIOU

Honored by the Imperial title of the first class, his wife, deceased on July 6, 1888, in her
home in Fuzhou, Fujian province (China), in her thirty-six year.”[^388]

Why would Chen have bothered with such a public declaration? His family life
had, until then, meant very little to his readers, the Parisian public. Though Chen had
repeatedly valorized traditional marriage and family relationships in *Les Chinois peints par
eux-mêmes*, he wrote very little, if at all, about his own relatives in Fuzhou. Nor had
Madame Liu ever had the opportunity, unlike the wife and daughters of Chen’s erstwhile
superior Zeng Jize, to visit Europe herself.[^389] What is noticeable about the *nécrologie

[^387]: *La Presse*, 12 December 1889.
[^389]: For a fascinating account of the Zeng women in Europe, see Lin Weihong 林維紅, “Miandui xifang wenhua de Zhongguo ‘xin’ nüxing: cong Zeng Jize riji kan Zengshi funü zai Ouzhou 面對西方文化的中國‘新’女性：從《曾紀澤日記》看曾氏婦女在歐洲,” in *Wusheng zhisheng (III): Jindai Zhongguo de funü*
announcement, in addition to its specificity in dating and placing Madame Liu, was the mentioning of her imperially sanctioned title – “Lady of the first class” (gaofeng yipin furen 諥封一品夫人) – as well as the wording that places Chen himself in a direct personal relationship to the Qing state (diplomatic representative), to his family and native home (Fuzhou), and to Parisian society. As a notable public figure by this time, he had not only the “honor,” but seemingly also a social obligation to announce personal affairs of significance to his followers in the press.

In addition to claiming social status for himself and his family, Chen’s announcement of Madame Liu’s death also paved the way for the publicizing, a year and a half later, of his marriage to a French lady. On Saturday, April 12, 1890, as the front page of *Le Petit Journal* reported a few days later, a festive wedding took place in the small commune of Desnes, in the department of Jura. The groom was none other than Chen Jitong, the “distinguished French writer and the most European of the Celestials,” and the bride was one Maria-Adèle Lardanchet, a woman of local origins who, it is revealed, had been already been married to Chen in an earlier ceremony in Beijing. Dressed in “short black trousers, white silk socks with white shoes decorated in blue, a blue celestial robe with a fur cap, and two gold bracelets on his left wrist,” Chen showed himself to be “spirited and good-humored.” After a civil ceremony in the town hall, he invited everyone to a lively grand banquet, at the end of which he presented “300 francs to the mayor for the poor of the commune, 50 francs to the firemen, and 30 francs to the young men of the

village for drinking to his health.” The couple were then escorted by a “numerous and sympathetic crowd” to the Domblans station, from which they departed for Paris.\footnote{“Marriage du Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” \textit{Le Petit Journal}, 17 April 1890. The story was also printed in a number of other papers, see \textit{Le Figaro}, 17 April 1890; \textit{Le Matin}, 17 April 1890; \textit{Le Temps}, 18 April 1890; \textit{La Presse}, 21 April 1890; and \textit{T’oung Pao 2} (August 1890), 60.}

Who was Maria-Adèle Lardanchet, the young \textit{Jurasiennne} who would now be known as “Madame Tcheng-Ki-Tong”? Though some scholars have pointed out her later participation in organizing the first Chinese girls’ school, established in Shanghai in 1898, little is known of her background.\footnote{On Chen Jitong and Maria Lardanchet (Lai Mayi 賴媽懿)’s roles in the Chinese girl’s education movement in 1897-1898 Shanghai, see chapter 4 of this dissertation and Nanxiu Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms,” \textit{Modern China} 29.4 (October 2003): 399-454.} According to one story in \textit{Le Gaulois}, however, it was Prosper Giquel, the French director of the Fuzhou Navy Yard who had first brought Lardanchet, as a companion for his children, to China, where she and Chen Jitong had first met. After reconnecting again in Europe years later, with Lardanchet taking care of Chen during a period of sickness, the two were able to become legitimately married after the death of Chen’s first wife.\footnote{Adolph Aderer, “Le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” \textit{Le Gaulois}, 9 July 1891.} Indeed, Lardanchet seemed to have fully appropriated Madame Liu’s role. When she later appeared in the newspapers in Shanghai, she would be identified as “Lai, Imperial-titled Lady of the First Class, from Paris” (\textit{Gaofeng yipin furen Bali Laishi} 諡封一品夫人巴黎賴氏).\footnote{Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan,” 411.} Chen Jitong, then, had adroitly used Madame Liu’s obituary to bestow public legitimacy on his new wife.

Yet the story of Chen and Lardanchet’s wedding was also more than a confirmation of the latter’s status. One must remember that, just a few years earlier, Chen had criticized, in his first book on marriage, the drab nature of European weddings:

“The ceremony is a tradition that is passé in Western customs; one abolishes it as much as one could, and it hardly takes place anymore except for in the countryside, where marriages

\begin{verbatim}

\end{verbatim}
are still weddings. There one dances, one sings, and one celebrates a great joy. The weddings that I have seen, in high society, are the least gay affairs in the world. One does not attend the celebration of the civil marriage; those who allow for religious consecrations hasten to leave the church. Having hardly returned to one’s home, one changes outfits and one takes off for the train. Really, one could do better to have the mayor and the priest in a sleeping car and to proceed rapidly through the celebration before the departure of the train.\textsuperscript{394}

In sharp contrast to the kind of hasty modern affair depicted in this passage, the lavish style in which Chen the groom had conducted his own wedding, in the setting of his bride’s native village, matched the festive nature of the rural ceremonies – which he had found to be similar to the elaborate wedding proceedings in the Chinese village – celebrated by Chen the writer. Moreover, he had made a good name for himself by giving donations to the locals. The public persona that Chen Jitong had built for himself was not only consistent with his literary persona, but one who was identified with gregariousness and generosity.

If Chen Jitong appeared to be at home among members of the Parisian elite and to be at ease socializing with the rural residents in his wife’s native commune, there were also instances when he did not seem to carry much patience for the urban working class, whose behavior in encounters with the Chinese diplomat demonstrated a mix of gawky curiosity and mischievous disdain, and were quickly related as sensationalized \textit{fait divers} stories in the mass press.

One report told of Chen being accosted by a tinsmith in the Champs-Elysées as he was returning one evening to the Chinese legation. The tinsmith, whom the \textit{Journal des débats} described as a “coarse person,” held out his blackened hand insistently for a handshake. Since Chen did not know his interlocutor, he passed him by calmly, even as the rebuffed and angry man called a \textit{salaud} (bastard). It was only later, when from his window Chen saw the tinsmith gleefully boasting a crowd of onlookers (a \textit{badaud}) of “the

\textsuperscript{394} Tcheng-Ki-Tong, \textit{Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes}, 39.
trick” he had played on Chen and upon learning that the same thing had happened to several other Chinese – the newspaper notes that the “rascals in the suburbs” had made a sport out of this – that Chen descended into the street and promptly had the man arrested.395

Another often repeated story, first recounted in Le Grelot in 1886, relates an encounter between Chen Jitong and two coachmen under the arcades in the Rue de Rivoli. While chatting and waiting for their master, the two Frenchmen saw Chen walk by in his “Chinese uniform” – which, the newspaper had specified, Chen usually wore to official visits and international ceremonies – with “a beautiful queue hanging in the back.” One of them burst out into laughter and cried to the other: “Look at that Chinese! What a dress he is wearing, and a braid like Virginie! Don’t you think it’s funny?” At this Chen, whom the story had earlier described as a “well-known refined figure…who has the same publisher as Octave Feuillet and the Duke de Broglie,” suddenly turned around and thundered at the speaker, “Shut your mouth, Collignon!” Amazed at this unexpected and terse retort, the coach driver’s pipe fell from his mouth and broke on the pavement.396

For the French newspaper reader, what would have made these small episodes interesting and captivating was the apparent contrast between the cultivated diplomat and the curious, excited, and “coarse” types he met in the streets of Paris. As historian Gregory Shaya points out in an important essay, the chronicles and reports in the late nineteenth-century French press frequently used exactly such juxtapositions, pitting the badaud, a term “associated with workers, artisans, shopkeepers, and sales clerks” and which represented “a gaze of often morbid curiosity and a lowest-common-denominator culture of the street,” against the aristocratic flâneur, as a way to constitute the mass public who were at once the

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395 Le Petit Parisien, 18 February 1887; Journal des débats, 18 February 1887.
396 Le Grelot, 27 June 1886.
subject and the consumers of these stories.397 The mischievous tinsmith, his peers, and the
gawking coachmen were all badaud characters placed as a foil against Chen, who
represented the elegant flâneur/boulevardier. As will be seen, these were not the only cases
in which such a contrast – and, therefore, mutually constructive relationship – between
Chen and his badaud was used.

In addition, the newspaper report also presented evidence of Chen’s becoming a
“real Parisian” in his use of the word “Collignon,” a popular and aggressive insult hurled
at cabbies in the nineteenth century.398 This story may perhaps have been somewhat
embellished, but it nevertheless succeeded quite well in building up Chen’s image as a
resourceful homme de boulevard who, while among the ranks of a couple of well-known
aristocratic writers of the time, was also equally adept at making a quick comeback when
necessary. In fact, it remained a favorite of his Parisian observers. Some years later, when
the journalist Henry Fouquier recalled Chen in an essay, he cited this episode as an example
of Chen having possessed the “secret of boulevardier slang.”399

But Fouquier and others also reminisced about Chen Jitong being a conférencier,
an adroit and captivating speaker or lecturer, whose public appearances were not limited
to the streets or the salons. Indeed, by the late 1880s, the Parisian fascination with Chen –
and Chen Jitong’s self-perception – was no longer limited to his being a literary
phenomenon. During this period, Chen Jitong was frequently invited to give speeches at a

397 Gregory Shaya, “The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910,”
398 As one contemporary dictionary explains, Collignon was “an allusion to a coachman of that name who
murdered his fare. The cry “Ohé, Collignon!” is about the worst insult one can offer a Paris coachman, and
he is not slow to resent it.” See A. Barrère, Argot and Slang: A New French and English Dictionary of the
Cant Words, Quaint Expressions, Slang Terms and Flash Phrases used in the High and Low Life of Old and
399 Henry Fouquier, Philosophie parisienne (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1901 ), 360.
variety of different learned societies, with the enthusiasm of the audience feeding into his own eagerness to perform the role of a public lecturer. Chen Jitong the writer now shared the spotlight with Chen Jitong the orator. As he admitted himself publicly in December 1885, after speaking on Chinese society, economics, and social customs before the National Union of Syndical Chambers, “despite my inexperience, I find myself having acquired a taste for the noble trade of conférencier.”

Reactions to Chen’s public speaking often emphasized the spectacular nature of his appearance and his speech and sometimes took note of his self-fashioning. Consider, for instance, the comments of the geographer Ludovic Drapeyron (1839-1901), who heard Chen Jitong’s lecture on “Literature in China,” given on June 12, 1886, at the historical society at the Cercle Saint-Simon. This reviewer perceptively remarked that while Chen’s interesting exposition on China was peppered with the stylistic traits of Beaumarchais’s Figaro, the Chinese diplomat had come to the Saint-Simon circle in “a mandarin’s costume” in order to flatter his audience’s predilection for the “red pants.” “Tchen-ki-tong,” mused Drapeyron, “is not a general in the French sense of the word; [he] is less a scholar than a man of letters who floats between French literature and Chinese literature.” While Drapeyron astutely picked up on the performative aspect of Chen’s public appearance, he was nonetheless willing to designate Chen as a bicultural writer, if not exactly a serious scholar.

If the French geographer received Chen with a mixture of amusement and admiration, the same cannot be said for the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev (1853-

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400 “Une conférence du général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” Le Temps, 22 December 1885.
1900), who attended a colloquium at the Paris Geographical Society on May 18, 1888, where Chen Jitong was invited to comment on suggestions for China to adopt the Gregorian calendar. Responding with his usual rhetoric about China’s openness to modernization, Chen declared that his country follows all scientific progress with an admiring eye and was eager to adopt systems of international relations that seemed fitting. He was also careful to note the presence in the room of one of Thomas Edison’s new phonographs, which would help transmit the intellectual discussions in Paris to audiences in China. As for the modifications to the Chinese calendar, Chen was less receptive. He noted that the treaty ports and international offices, a mixed calendar that allowed for the conversion between Chinese and European dates, enabled by the simple matter of translation, was already in use. As for the Gregorian calendar, Chen remarked wryly – referring to the adoption of the Republican calendar, used between 1793 and 1805, following the French Revolution – not only has it been subject to much criticism, but it was in fact abolished by the French themselves for a number of years just a century ago!  

Solov’ev, an advocate for a spiritual unity between Western Europe and Russian through an “ecumenical Christianity,” perceived, along with a number of Russian intellectuals in the late nineteenth-century, a modernizing East Asia to be a threat, since in adapting to Western technology and materialism, China and Japan were replicating the flaws of the modern West, while cutting into the reconciliation between Russia and Western Europe. In an 1890 essay, Solov’ev freely extrapolated from Chen’s speech “an entire creed, shared by him and mass of people 400 million strong”:

403 For an elaboration of this point, see Susanna Soojung Lim, “Between Spiritual Self and Other: Vladimir Solov’ev and the Question of East Asia,” Slavic Review 67.2 (Summer 2008): 321-341 and idem, China and
‘We are prepared and capable of taking from you everything we need, all the technology of your intellectual and material culture, but we will acquire not a single one of your beliefs, not a single one of your ideas and not even a single one of your tastes.’

Yet even as Solov’ev used this recollection of Chen Jitong’s speech – putting words into Chen’s mouth in the process – to project his own fears of the “yellow peril,” he could not help but begin his essay (and contradict his own position that the Chinese was resistant to European culture) by describing Chen Jitong as the “real hero of the evening,” among a large congregation of “French geographers and Egyptologists, Dutch and Portuguese travelers…and a learned Italian monk,” for

“admit this entire throng of multicolored faces in monotone European dress, he [Chen] alone preserved his national commission. His speech was most impressive, pronounced without the tiniest trace of foreign accent in the purest Parisian patois. It appeared to contain only witty verbiage, accompanied by the laughter of general approval and calling forth a loud ovation. I, like everyone else, laughed at the witticisms of the yellow general and marveled at the purity and liveliness of his French words.”

As unforgiving as his later conclusions were, this initial observation by Solov’ev echoes that made by the writer Romain Rolland (1866-1944), who attended a lecture given by Chen Jitong on February 18, 1889 at a public session of the Alliance Française. Rolland came away from the Sorbonne especially impressed by one guest lecturer, who appeared on the stage adorned in a “belle robe violet.”

“An excellent speech, spiritual, very French, but even more Chinese,” Rolland wrote in his journal, noting that even as the speaker ridiculed the efficacy of French missions in China, he also emphasized his own

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406 Was it possible that Chen Jitong modified his official robe for a more casual and elegant look? As Nanxiu Qian has pointed out, the color for the Qing official robe is *shiqing* 石青, a dark blue, not purple, and that the photos taken of Chen by the French photographer Nadar show him wearing three different robes. One of these seemed to be of a more leisurely design, with much wider sleeves. How fitting for a flâneur! See Nanxiu Qian, *Chronicling China’s Reform: The Late Qing Woman Writer Xue Shaohui (1866-1911) and Her Intellectual Networks*, chapter 2 (forthcoming).
efforts to reduce the distance “between the two most civilized countries of the world.” In the end, the audience was mesmerized; they “swallowed all the pills and applauded furiously.” Of the four speakers that evening – including Octave Gréard, rector of the Académie de Paris, and Gaston Deschamps, literary critic and vice-president of the Alliance Française – Rolland concluded, it was the Chinese general, Tcheng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong], “whom Voltaire would have found to be the most French.”

These lines by Rolland have been cited at length by nearly every scholar who has written about Chen Jitong, while an excerpt from the diary also graces the inside cover of the recent series of Chen’s book translated into Chinese. However, as colorfully detailed and suggestive of a general fascination with Chen Jitong as they are, these impressions were written down in a private journal by the then only twenty-three-year-old Rolland, who was still years away from publishing anything substantial. They were reflective of, but could not have contributed, in any manner, to constructing Chen Jitong’s public image in fin-de-siècle Paris. Furthermore, Rolland’s journal does not nearly present a full account of the actual speech and overreliance on his description of Chen may in fact be misleading.

What exactly did Chen Jitong say on this occasion? The original transcript


\[409\] That a quote by Romain Rolland has become such a well-known example of Chen Jitong’s fin-de-siècle celebrity is most probably a result of Romain Rolland’s own fame as a prominent translated author whose works were well-circulated in twentieth-century China. On Rolland as a figure worshipped by early twentieth-century Chinese writers, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 283-289. Rolland’s prominence as an iconic French/Western author among scholars and the general public in China was further renewed in mid- and late-twentieth century China with the publication and post-Cultural Revolution reprinting of Fu Lei 傅雷 (1908-1966)’s masterful translation of *Jean-Christophe*.

\[410\] For instance, Jing Tsu assumes, from reading Rolland’s journal, that Chen’s speech indeed conveyed a “casual dismissal of the possibility that the French language could ever take root on Chinese soil.” This interpretation does not fully acknowledge Chen’s argument that a literary French, stripped of imperialistic
of the speech, so far unacknowledged by scholars, was actually reprinted two weeks later in the French magazine *Revue politique et littéraire*. A closer reading of Chen’s address in context reveals more significance to his public performance.

After emphasizing the stability of the Chinese language over centuries, a stability mirroring that of the Chinese empire and society, Chen Jitong turned to the topic at hand, the prospects for the dissemination in China of French, a language – Chen took care to remark – that he himself had been studying for many years and was still seeking to master. The Chinese people, Chen told his audience, were in no way opposed to learning the languages of the West. In fact, Chen acknowledged that the comprehension of at least one European language was necessary, “in order to familiarize ourselves with the great modern discoveries.” Commenting on the teaching of French in China, Chen explained that the imperial government had in fact already established three schools, the Tongwenguan in Beijing, which trained diplomats and officials; the French school at the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai; and his own alma mater, the French school at the Fuzhou Navy Yard, which not only turned out naval engineers but also instructors of mathematics and science, many of whom had come to Europe for further study and returned to China to lead its industrial and scientific enterprises. Thus the Chinese were very much eager to “know all the new things that Europe had to offer.”

However, the French should be advised about some existing obstacles to the reception of their language in China. Apologizing for “speaking like Brid’oison,” the bumbling judge in Pierre Beaumarchais’s *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Chen advised his listeners

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that commercial and political considerations were getting in the way of good French being spoken in China. In fact, the French who were arriving there were either finding it convenient to use English or some form of Far Eastern pidgin (sabir). And if by chance French was spoken, “it was not at all the language of Molière that they are bringing us.”

Nor were the missionaries of any help, since the immense majority of Chinese regarded with suspicion the French schools established by the Catholics. Indeed, if the French language were ever to be studied with enthusiasm in China, “it must present itself like a beautiful woman, always graceful and loveable, never seeking to dominate, who knows she is entitled to conquest, because she is so sweet, so agreeable, and so charming, but who never declares such to be her pretentions.” Once questions of politics or religion were stripped away and French appeared in her actual beauty and character, Chen reassured his listeners, “you will see that your language and its literary riches will be received in our country with the enthusiastic zealousness that they deserve.”

Given the witty references to Beaumarchais and Molière and the charming depiction – as well as feminization – of French, it was no wonder that the Parisian newspapers reported Chen’s address to be one “full of good sense and fine irony,” which had “proven, once again, that he loves and handles, with grace, our language.” There was greater significance to Chen Jitong’s speech, however, than mere clever rhetoric. In Rolland’s journal, the paragraph immediately preceding the quip about Voltaire’s would-be preference contains a description of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (1852-1905), the speaker who followed Chen: “Brazza is very tall, with a bony, dark, and overgrown face,

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412 “L’Alliance Française à la Sorbonne: Discours du général Tcheng-Ki-Tong.”
413 “L’Alliance Française à la Sorbonne: Discours du général Tcheng-Ki-Tong.”
black hair, bulky nose, vast eyes filled with a bovine torpor, a head sloping on his chest, and enormous and ape-like hands…He spoke ten times less well than Tcheng-Ti-Kong [sic]. He Italian accent was, true enough, less heavy, but more irritating.” 415 Rolland has his fun with Brazza, the Italian-born French governor of Congo, by assigning him bestial features. Yet considering that the Alliance Française was a French institution which claimed for its agenda “the propagation of the French language in the colonies and abroad” and that Brazza was in fact enjoying the height of his popularity in fin-de-siècle Paris as the “pacific conqueror” of the Congo, the refined elegance of Chen Jitong’s oratory takes on a deeper meaning. 416 Chen’s speech at the Sorbonne was a good showing not only for the flamboyant diplomat as an individual, but also for the Qing empire and Chinese civilization of which he was – and so claimed to be – a representative. Whereas the people of the African colony could only be represented by their European colonizer, Qing China, in the person of Chen Jitong, stood up on its own before the French public and spoke for itself.

While Rolland’s impressions were recorded in private, there were, however, a number of public reactions to Chen’s performance at the Alliance Française, found in the mass press. Le Matin, for example, commented that Chen had won the most success that evening, with a speech delivered in “impeccable French, which we are far from hearing all the time.” 417 Meanwhile, the Journal des débats reported that Chen, with a speech “full of good sense and fine irony” had “proven, once again, that he loves and handles, with grace,

415 Rolland, Le cloître de la rue d’Ulm, 277.
417 “À la Sorbonne,” Le Matin, 19 February 1889.
our language.”

La Liberté also cited an interview in which Chen, who “today could even speak fluently the ‘fin-de-siècle’ Parisian slang,” revealed that he nevertheless first studied the French language by reading the works of the ancien régime bishop and courtier, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, whom French missionaries in Fuzhou had insisted to be a model stylist.419

Whether they came in the form of personal reflections or public reactions, these European observers invoke many of the same tropes in discussing Chen Jitong’s public speaking. A contrast between Chen Jitong’s flamboyant dress (Chinese) and flawless speech (French/Parisian) is noted. An enthusiastic audience generous with applause is remembered. And Chen Jitong’s effective cross-cultural act is emphasized through comparisons to poorer performances by European and other international speakers. Regardless of the actual content – or perceptions thereof – of these speeches, it seemed, Chen’s visual mannerisms and linguistic facility had made him a star in fin-de-siècle Paris.

Still, it did matter on which kind of stage Chen Jitong the conférencier was to be found. For in presenting lectures to a variety of learned societies in the French capital, Chen was interacting with a different social group from the politicians he met as a diplomat or the badaud he encountered in the boulevards. Invited to give talks on China for specialized audiences at the meetings and conferences held by the so-called sociétés savantes, or learned societies, in late nineteenth-century France, Chen was given an opportunity to project the image not simply of a skilled orator but also, as one journalist noted, to present himself “in the manner of a scholar or philosopher rather than a soldier.

418 “La Réunion de l’Alliance Française,” Journal des débats, February 19, 1889.
419 “Un Chinois, élève de Bossuet,” La Liberté, February 24, 1889.
[as denoted by his official title, *military attaché*]. When these occasions coincided with the Exposition Universelle of 1889, in the form of the international congresses held during the world’s fair, they also allowed Chen Jitong to represent both China and himself—a blended version of his literary and public personas as both a “Chinese diplomat-cum-autoethnographer” and a “Parisian *conférencier-cum-flâneur*” in a global setting unprecedented in scale and media exposure.

**Chen Jitong at the Exposition Universelle**

On November 30, 1889, a few weeks after the Exposition Universelle had concluded, an article titled “L’Exposition vue par un chinois” appeared on the front page of *Le Gaulois*. Taking issue with another journal’s remark that “the mandarins had pooled their money to come see the Eiffel tower,” the author, a “Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” insisted that Chinese officials had each come on his own expense to visit the exposition. As if to illustrate the independence of these observers from afar, he proceeds to translate a long letter containing a compatriot’s descriptions of the exhibitions. As revealed through these personal musings, the writer had been stupefied by the numerous technological products, material goods, and human exhibitions on display in this great city within a city. He approved of the correct Chinese words on the poster by the Decauville railway and marveled at the speed of the elevator in the Eiffel tower: it brought you to the summit before you can recite three lines from Confucius’ *Analects*. In the Salon des Beaux Arts, he pondered the ironic fact that the many rich buyers who had in previous years’ exhibits refused to accept the works of such artists as Corot and Delacroix were now rushing to pay

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*Journal des débats*, 20 December 1885.
an exorbitant amount for these very paintings. Encountering a recording device made by
an American man named Edison in the Palace of Machines, he wondered about the
reactions of the Europeans who already complained about their wives being too talkative.
He enjoyed the splendid costumes in the Annamite theatre, was not very impressed by the
danse vu ventre at the Champ-de-Mars, and felt saddened by the juxtaposition of the
Ministry of War exhibit alongside another that showed the many ways of mending the
injured. Returning to the site of the exposition a few days after its closing, he was so
dismayed at the dispersal of all the works of art that he immediately hopped on a train to
Marseille and caught the first liner heading toward the Suez, on which he dreamt of the
wind crying like an Annamite actor and the ship doing a belly dance. 421

Rather than something out of the blue, this animated essay had in fact been
announced one day earlier in Le Matin and would be excerpted in the following day’s Le
Temps, which took note of “the same qualities of humor and of piquant descriptions and
observations” that had led to the success of the author’s Les Chinois peints par eux-
mêmes. 422 This reference to another title evidently assumed an existing degree of
familiarity among readers with the publications “le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong.” As for
those previously unacquainted with Chen, they would have had ample opportunities to
encounter him, in person or via print, over the course of the exposition.

An event designed by Third Republic leaders such as Jules Ferry (1832-1893) to at
once curb political disagreements at home and to showcase the achievements of the French
republicanism, the Exposition Universelle of 1889 was marked by such colossal projects
as the “colonial city,” the Palace of Machines, and above all, the Eiffel Tower. These

421 “L’Exposition vue par un chinois,” Le Gaulois, 30 November 1889.
422 Le Matin, 29 November 1889; Le Temps, 1 December 1889.
manifestations of modern European technology, capitalism, and imperialism itself attracted more than 32,000,000 visitors.\textsuperscript{423} A major phenomenon that accompanied the exhibition was the proliferation of international academic societies and scientific congresses. It was in these conferences, alongside fellow transnational intellectuals, writers, and diplomats, that Chen Jitong found a public niche, for, in the absence of official Qing participation in this exposition, he emerged as China’s representative.

Since the 1870s, at the urging of self-strengthening reformers who advocated for engaging with foreign science and technology and to a host of Western functionaries who worked in the Imperial Maritime Customs Service under Robert Hart, the Qing government repeatedly sent representatives to participate in a series of international exhibitions and world’s fairs. Despite increasing domestic debates surrounding the expense of sending missions to expositions abroad and criticism about the management of these missions by foreigners (employed by the Qing), reform-minded self-strengthening officials still thought of these events as an opportunity to build the wealth and power of the state through global competitions that placed so much emphasis on material progress.\textsuperscript{424}

Still, after having taken part in the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris and the London Exposition of 1884, the Qing government declined the official invitation from the


1889 Exposition organizing committee. Though this may have seemed surprising, explained one major French guidebook to the expositions, it was not due to indifference on the part of the Chinese but only because the Qing government was short of funds since it had spent so much in containing the flooding of the yellow river the previous year. However, the Chinese government did allow individual merchants from Canton to exhibit, free of duties, their goods at the Exposition.425 At the last minute, a Chinese Pavilion was put together by a French architect and occupied only 300 meters along the Avenue de Suffren (opposite the exhibit from Greece); yet, as the Guide Bleu insists, the hasty construction was sufficiently Chinese. After all, the pavilion seemed to resemble the Buddhist monasteries that had been described so well in Le Figaro by that “erudite and remarkable writer,” le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong!426

In addition to being cited as an authority on the authenticity of the Chinese exhibit, Chen Jitong, in the absence of official Qing participation in this exposition, emerged as China’s representative through his participation in several concurrent international learned societies and scientific congresses, which had been proliferating in number and marked the growing cultural internationalism in the late nineteenth-century.426 In these conferences, alongside fellow transnational intellectuals, writers, and diplomats, Chen Jitong found a niche for himself as a charismatic public speaker.

As the Exposition Universelle got under way in May, Chen Jitong became increasingly visible at various official functions and especially at the numerous

425 Alfred Picard (1844-1913), general reporter for the 1889 exposition, noted that it was Chen Jitong who had intervened on behalf of the merchants. See Exposition universelle internationale de 1889 à Paris. Rapport général par M. Alfred Picard. Tome I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1891), 426.
international congresses that were being held in conjunction with the exposition.⁴²⁷ He was nominated a vice-president of the International Congress of Folklorists, which opened at the Palais du Trocadéro on July 29.⁴²⁸ On August 26, he participated in the activities of the International Congress of Firefighters.⁴²⁹ In early September, *Le Figaro* noted his presence at the International Congress of Mines and Metallurgy.⁴³⁰ On some of these occasions, Chen’s presence undoubtedly only functioned to help the various sociétés savantes showcase a number of prominent membres étrangers lending support to their work, but at several other congresses Chen also had the opportunity to make memorable speeches.

As an honorary president of the International Congress for the Protection of Monuments and Works of Art, Chen Jitong addressed the opening session on June 24 with brief sketch of the conservation of monuments in China, in which he emphasized the respect that Chinese had for ancient buildings, family tombs, and religious edifices.⁴³¹ A few days later, he co-hosted the closing banquet of the congress at the café Riche.⁴³² On July 26, Chen presented the International Congress for the Utilization of Waters with an overview of the history of hydraulic engineering efforts in China.⁴³³ This was followed by

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⁴²⁷ There were 69 international congresses held during the Exposition Universelle. On the concurrence of international congresses and universal exhibitions, see Anne Rasmussen, “Les Congrès internationaux liés aux Expositions universelles de Paris (1867-1900),” *Cahiers Georges Sorel* 7 (1889): 23-44.


⁴²⁹ *Le Matin*, 26 August 1889

⁴³⁰ *Le Figaro*, 10 September 1889.


⁴³² *Le Temps*, 1 July 1889.

a lecture, on August 12, on “China’s social economy” at the congress of the French Association for the Advancement of the Sciences.\textsuperscript{434}

All of these speeches contain at least two dimensions. On the one hand, they offer a description of China as a more or less harmonious society with a benevolent government, a strong moral yet also pragmatic social order, and a ruling class of educated gentry-elite who, paying attention to historical precedents, had the interests of the people at heart. So optimistic a picture was presented that one observer for \textit{Le Temps} titled his reflections on Chen’s speech “Le Bonheur d’être chinois” (The joy of being Chinese).\textsuperscript{435} On the other hand, Chen’s speeches also contain invariably some form of universalistic appeal for the rapprochement between Chinese and Europeans, a cosmopolitan rhetoric through which his role as cultural mediator is immediately enhanced.\textsuperscript{436} These elements were all present in the address Chen Jitong gave before the International Congress of Ethnographic Sciences, a speech that is of interest for closer analysis not only as a vivid example of Chen’s oratory, but also as an instance in which the discourse of the Chinese diplomat and the ideals of the scientific congress were mutually supportive of each other.

\textit{Ethnicity and Morality}

The second International Congress of Ethnographic Sciences, held between September 30 and October 7, was organized by the Société d’Ethnographie de Paris, a learned society initially formed by a group of linguists and classicists and presided by the

\textsuperscript{435} \textit{Le Temps}, 17 August 1889.
noted orientalist Léon de Rosny (1837-1914). Since its founding in 1859, the ethnographers had been engaged in a long debate with another group, the Société d’Anthropologie, who insisted on the study of the physical characteristics of different races. For the ethnographers, who preferred the study of the civilized societies, the focus would always be on the moral and intellectual capacities of human beings.\(^\text{437}\)

The Société d’Ethnographie also had a long association with French sinology. Its founding president, de Rosny, not only held several prominent chairs in Asian studies at such institutions as the École des Hautes Études, but also organized the first International Congress of Orientalists in Paris in 1873.\(^\text{438}\) Another prominent member of the society to take part in the 1889 congress was the Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys (1822-1892), a prominent sinologist and former society president, who had led the committee that planned the Chinese pavilion at the 1867 Expositions Universelle.\(^\text{439}\) In 1889, the society’s official bulletin also carried several articles devoted to subjects such as political and social institutions in China, opium use and social conditions in Beijing, as well as reviews of recent works by European sinologists and missionaries in China.\(^\text{440}\) Given such sustained interest in China, it is not surprising that the society would have chosen to elect Chen Jitong,


\(^{438}\) Henri Cordier, “Nécrologie: Léon de Rosny,” *T'oung Pao* 15.4 (1914), 553.


\(^{440}\) *Bulletin de la Société d'Ethnographie*, 1889.
known by then as a prominent writer on matters Chinese, to be one of the honorary vice-presidents of the congress.\footnote{Congrès international des sciences ethnographiques, tenu à Paris du 30 septembre au 7 octobre 1889. Procès-verbaux sommaires (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889), 7.}

When the ethnographic congress held its opening session “amongst a great combination of French and foreign savants” at the Trocadéro Palace in the afternoon of September 30, Chen Jitong, a notable visible presence in his “ceremonial robe,” was seated on the dais beside the president and other prominent participants of the congress.\footnote{Le Temps, 2 October 1889.} After the opening remarks by congress president Jules Oppert, a professor of Assyriology at the Collège de France, in which he reasserted that ethnography was “the science of the intellectual movement of human groups constituted in societies,” Chen took to the stage to deliver a speech on Chinese nationality.\footnote{Bulletin de la Société d’Ethnographie, November 1889.}

China, declared Chen, offered an example of an ancient civilization that had been able to hold onto its customs and institutions for thousands of years. With the possible exception of the transmission of Buddhism from India, Chinese society has always been structured upon the cult of Confucius, a body of moral and practical principles that teaches respective social and political obligations to both the people and the government. For Chen, that which must be considered “the most remarkable of our ethnographic features” was the persistent position of influence held by the Confucian lettered class – or the gentry – whose dominant role in society is propagated through ancestral worship. Through these rituals, whose content and process was determined by the writings of the scholar-gentry, the Chinese “lived in a constant communion” with their ancestors and strove to imitate or to meet their achievements in life. In consequence, the individual in Chinese society never
feels isolated; he is “an active member of a community in which the past indicates the course to be followed.” Furthermore, this strong family tradition – for so long a privilege of the nobles in Europe – belonged to both “the most humble and the most illustrious” of Chinese. Thus it made for a solid basis for national solidarity, since the government too was formed on the model of the family.444

Chen’s sketch of Confucian ritualism is quite simplistic and glosses over many things – including the actual process of these activities, the shifting intellectual sources for these practices, and possible tensions between local society and the state.445 Yet by placing emphasis on the centrality of the Confucian gentry and the moral value of family rituals, he does reveal at least his own identification with the orthodox values and social agenda of the Chinese elite in the late imperial period.446 Interestingly, Chen’s depiction of ancestral rites as the historical link providing the foundations of the Chinese nation may have also unwittingly echoed the sentiments of the French philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892), whose famous speech on nationalism, made just a few years prior, contained the following words: “The nation, like the individual, is the result of a long past of efforts, of sacrifices, and of devotion. The cult of ancestors is the most legitimate of cults; ancestors have made us what we are…This is the social capital upon which the idea of the nation is founded.”447

Most important, for the ethnographic congress, with his emphasis on the enduring influence of the Confucian literati and the persistence of moral institutions through the ages

445 Patrilineal organizations and ancestral rituals in the Fuzhou, Chen’s home region, were both widely prevalent and constantly subject to local negotiations. See Michael Szonyi, Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
— “La Chine modern et la Chine ancienne” – Chen’s description of China fit remarkably well with Léon de Rosny’s definition of ethnography as a “Science of Civilization.” In his own address to the congress on the principles of ethnography, de Rosny had emphasized, again in contrast to anthropology, that men could not be studied as animals. The key difference lay in the human being’s possession of coherent ideas and transmission of these to succeeding generations, “in order to assure them incomparable advantages in continuous work.”448 The sustained dominance of the Chinese gentry and the persistence over time of an elaborate set of moral practices offered an exemplary case of the kind of investigations of human societies in which ethnography was able to engage.

Playing into the success of Chen’s speech at the congress, however, was not only the fact that his remarks meshed with the premise of the ethnographers, but that his performance, as noted by one reporter, was delivered “in remarkably idiomatic and correct French.”449 Chen had also taken care to include at the beginning of his remarks both extravagant words of praise for the internationalism of the exposition and a subtle defense of his own qualifications as a participant at the congress. The “beautiful work of the exposition and the scientific congresses” had convinced Chen, he admitted, that the word “foreigner” (étranger) was losing its meaning each day and would be soon dropped from the Dictionary of the Académie Française. “Our descendants,” by then, “will no longer need to hear of China and her inhabitants. There will be but one single humanity on earth, the West and the East holding hands.” Yet since the “era of universal reconciliation” had yet to arrive, the task at hand was to “learn to understand ourselves, to appreciate one

449 “Ethnographic Congress,” The Times, 1 October 1889.
another, in our true worth, without bias, without prejudice.” The study of the languages of other peoples was a most important component; after all, Chen quipped rather proudly, “It is thanks to this passionate study of your language that I have today the distinguished honor of speaking to you about my country.”

By referring to his own command of French, Chen Jitong was also acknowledging the unique circumstances underlying his involvement with the international congresses. As the secretary and chargé d’affaires of the Qing legation in Paris who was at the same a widely-recognized writer on cross-cultural matters, Chen’s presence as the one “Chinese delegate” at the various learned societies and conferences allowed him to channel both his social capital and his diplomatic position into an opportunity to construct positive images of Chinese society and to defend Chinese interests abroad, while repeatedly advocating for East-West mutual understanding. Such elements of Chen’s oratory were evident in an impassioned speech he gave on Chinese merchant culture.

**Merchants and Laborers**

On May 17, 1890, Chen Jitong appeared before the Paris Society of Commercial Geography to deliver an address titled “Commercial Education in China” (*L’Éducation commerciale en Chine*). In this speech, he cleverly and skillfully turned an exposition on the moral education of Chinese merchants into an explanation for the success of Chinese traders and workers overseas as well as a protest against ant-Chinese movements in the United States.

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Chen began by demonstrating his familiarity with French business education. He declares that he has followed the development of the various commercial schools in Paris – the École commerciale, École superieure du commerce, and the École des Hautes Études commerciales, which was just recently inaugurated. Demonstrating that he had read the syllabus and was impressed by the curriculum of these institutions, Chen then explained that there were no government-run schools of commerce in China, a patriarchal society where, he emphasized, the state intervened little in commercial matters and allowed for merchant education to be instituted at the family level.451

While it was true that historically the Chinese population had belonged to the four classes – scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants – Chen explained, there had never been strict legal distinctions that discriminated against the merchant classes, unlike the decrees that had been enacted under the reign of Louis XIV. Furthermore, upward social mobility was always possible through institutions like the civil examinations, the success in which allowed anyone in the artisan or merchant classes to move into the ranks of scholars. Finally, and most importantly, the moral cultivation so emphasized in Confucian culture still formed an important component of the education of middling merchants who would not become scholar-officials. Describing the apprenticeship of a young aspiring Chinese merchant, Chen noted that up to the age of fourteen, while learning how to read, write, and perform calculations, Chinese youths were also “familiarized with the history of their country and immersed in the books of our poets and above all our philosophers.” These classic texts formed a high-level “moral education” for the would-be merchants, because they taught a “high idea of human dignity and made the student understand that happiness

lay not in exaggerated ambition, but in the cultivation of one’s self.” In establishing as an ideal a comfortable, but simple, life, they were preaching what “one Latin poet” (here Chen’s is referring to Horace and demonstrating his own immersion in the Western classics) had called the “golden mean” (médiocrité dorée).

Furnished with the advice of the ancient sages and the examples set by one’s industrious merchant father, the Chinese youth understood from an early age that in commerce, it was above all “probity that lead to success” and that “happiness would be found in moderation while honesty was the soul of business.” Following these models, the Chinese merchant developed a temperate manner and the “simplicity of his life was one of the most important factors that contributed to the prosperity of his business.”*452* Chen Jitong’s assessment of the merchant class modeling themselves upon the Confucian gentleman was indeed an observable element in late imperial China. As Richard Lufrano has demonstrated in his study of Qing period merchant manuals, a strong emphasis was placed on self-cultivation by mid-level merchants, whose aspirations for respectability, social mobility, and economic success drew them to develop an “inner mental attentiveness” to proper Confucian behavior.*453* The causal relationship between Confucian ethics and business success is also richly evidenced in Yü Yingshi’s study of merchant culture in early modern China.*454* For Chen Jitong, however, the moral uprightness of Chinese merchants were not only cultural characteristics but also carried significant implications for contemporary Sino-Western relations.

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*454* Yü Ying-shi, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* 中國近世宗教倫理與商人精神 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye youxian gongsi, 1987).
Following his description of Chinese merchant ethics, Chen Jitong turned to contemporary examples to demonstrate the “results of this commercial education.” Since China had entered into communications and commercial relations with the rest of the world, Chinese trader and migrants have also settled in all regions, where they have had tremendous business success. Acknowledging that he may be perceived by the French public to carry “an evident patriotic bias to show you all things Chinese under a favorable light,” Chen declared that he would cite accounts by Westerners to demonstrate impartiality in assessing the achievements and behavior of Chinese merchants abroad.

Chen first cited an article published in the *Revue Blanche* by one M. E. Cordonnier, a French colonial official in Cochinchina. Recounting his observations and interactions with the Chinese traders in Saigon, Cordonnier had depicted the Chinese to be successful entrepreneurs who “brought into their commercial transactions a spirit of scrupulous honesty, which made preferred to the Europeans and Annamites” but who were also “generous and conciliatory in their operations.” One Chinese contractor, who had received an advance from Cordonnier to build a house for the French official in Hanoi, had demonstrated this honest spirit by repaying Cordonnier in full upon learning that he had been transferred to Cochinchina.455

If the positive impressions of Chinese merchants formed by impartial European colonists were not convincing enough, Chen added, the testimony of more hostile Americans would serve to solidify his case. He then reminded his audience of the recent anti-Chinese movement in the United States, during which “the protests against my compatriots had taken on, from their first days, an aggressive and extremely violent form.”

In the exclusion campaign, Chen noted, the Chinese workers and merchants who had migrated to America were accused of “every possible crime and monstrosity” and were constantly described as being “lazy, ignorant, dirty, sick, and dishonest.” However, when a government investigation was finally carried out – in California, British Columbia, and Hawai’i – many observations to the contrary were made. Indeed, the said report, from which Chen began citing extensively, had credited the Chinese laborers for having played an important role in the development of California by helping to build railways, connecting the West to the Eastern States, by cultivating the local fruit and vine culture, by draining mosquito-infested swamps for land reclamation, and by facilitating increased trade with Asia. Chinese workers had been described as “very trustworthy, very intelligent, faithful to their engagements, temperate, active, honest, able to read and write, sober, keeping up good health through their cleanliness and by taking a daily bath.” These carefully selected quotations showed the Chinese migrants to be characterized by the very opposite qualities than those propagated by their antagonists.456

If the Chinese migrant workers were shown to be healthy and hardworking, the Chinese merchants in North American were also described as clever and honorable. Chen cited the words of Matthew Baillie Begbie, the first Chief Justice of British Columbia, who commented that the four most remarkable qualities that characterized the Chinese traders were their “industrious habits, economy, sobriety, and respect for the law.” Chen also quoted one Mr. Gibbs, an official in charge of maritime ports in San Francisco, who declared that he had never seen a Chinese merchant attempt to pass undervalued goods through the customs or present false claims in business settlements and that “Taken

altogether, Chinese traders are more honorable, I think, than those of any other race – even more so than our own.” After citing similar observations by several other Americans – a bankers, a businessman, and a judge – Chen noted, with a touch of irony, that the only faults that this government-commissioned report found with the Chinese were that they were reluctant to adopt Christian beliefs and that, according to one witness, the Chinese race was so sober and industrious that “it is necessary to protect the intemperance of the whites against Oriental temperance.”

Chen Jitong presented these arguments only to show the folly of their logic. While the one witness who advocates for guarding against “Oriental temperance” is only ceding the morally superiority of the Chinese, the people who criticized the Chinese to be unreceptive to Christianity, Chen argued, were themselves hypocrites. The report had presented examples of Chinese in America who constantly denounced Christianity to be a pack of lies. While Chen himself would never be supportive of “a method of discussion that consisted of insulting those who do not think like we do,” he also asked rhetorically, was it not the Christian missionaries who brought this rejection upon themselves? “My compatriots,” Chen commented, “who never sought to convert anyone, have to hear every day that they would be going to hell; that no matter how they practiced their virtues, they who were so upright, laborious, and patient would be subjected to eternal torment only because they would not adopt the religion pushed upon them.”

Not only were they criticized for refusing Western religious beliefs, but the Chinese, who were credited with adding 289,700,000 dollars – the equivalent of a billion and a half francs – to California’s public fortunes, had become the targets of a mass movement to

As Chen reached the end of this speech, the connection between his ostensible topic and the fervent protest becomes clear. By linking the commercial success and honest behavior of the Chinese merchants and workers in America to a long tradition of Confucian self-cultivation and virtuous practice, Chen was pointing his finger not only at the rejection of Chinese workers on economic grounds, but also criticizing the proponents of anti-Chinese exclusion of cultural ignorance and intolerance.

On the other hand, Chen expected his French audience to know better. One should not be discouraged by such injustice, Chen concluded, for the fair assessments contained in the investigate report was one step toward the eventual triumph of truth. Ending his speech on a bright and utopian note almost incongruent to the darker and exasperated tone of his defense of Chinese migrants, Chen envisioned that “little by little, these misunderstandings, created by malevolence between races and nations, will dissipate. The world, illuminated by the powerful civilization of the nineteenth century, will move more and more toward peace and friendship between the different nations.” It was his belief, Chen declared, that future generations would see the eventual dissolution of prejudices and exaggerated differences and reach a “definitive reconciliation.” Time has only served to augment this “humanitarian hope in my spirit,” Chen appealed to his audience, “and I am certain that you would join me in praying for the advent of the joyful era in which ancient Asia, young Europe, and the even younger America, hand in hand, rush forward toward a future of universal fraternity.”

What lay beneath Chen Jitong’s optimistic vision of a peaceful and cosmopolitan future? What would be the basis of the mutual rapprochement between East and West?

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The answer, for Chen, would be found in an increased understanding of one another’s society and culture. As a self-appointed cultural mediator, he used his writings and public speechmaking not only to showcase Chinese civilization as one not only marked by the positive influences of Confucian morality, but also characterized by a universally relatable appreciation for poetry and the literary celebration of nature and human sentiment.

Poetry and Love

In an essay on the world’s fair’s Chinese pavilion in the widely read *Revue de l’Exposition Universelle de 1889*, Chen Jitong expressed some reservations about the exhibit. While he was happy to see that China’s arts and industry had at least been represented at the exposition, he also regretted the disorganized nature of the exhibit and the inferior quality of the goods on display. The porcelain, though beautiful, were made by only contemporary manufacturers and were not as valuable as more aged samples; the tea, meanwhile, was brought in by middlemen and not directly purchased from Chinese traders, so their taste was questionable. Yet most revealing were Chen’s introductory comments to this article. The Chinese section at the exposition was called a “pavilion,” but it was so different from the poetic pavilions back home, which were constructed by lakes under the shade of willows, where orioles sung in the spring! Yet here at the Champs de Mars, the Chinese had succumbed to reality and were only supplying European amateurs with products from the Far East. But, alas, this was the predicament of present-day humanity, which, pressed by the demands of life, was forced to “sacrifice fiction to comfort and poetry to material matters.”

Was this simply a rhetorical flourish, a strategically placed image appealing to his French readers’ expectations of an exotic Orient? Or did Chen Jitong have in mind a site like the Seemingly There Hall that idyllic three-chamber pavilion built near the Kaihua Monastery (Kaihua si 開化寺) at the center of the scenic West Lake in his native Fuzhou, which not only housed a commemorative shrine for famous local writers and poets, but was also the gathering place of poetry clubs like the Daoguang-era Flying Society, of which his own father and maternal uncles had been members? While this is impossible to ascertain, it is evident that China as a poetic civilization was very much on Chen Jitong’s agenda as he faced his French audience. For in Chen Jitong’s conception, it was poetry and literature that has, from the beginning of history, expressed the most central tenets of Chinese society and that would serve as the basis for mutual understanding between China and the West. These ideas were expressed most eloquently in the longest speech he made at the 1889 exposition, titled “The Social Organization of China.”

Beginning with a survey of the political and administrative structure of the Qing empire, Chen moved onto the homology between the imperial state and the patriarchal family. As in most of his speeches and writings, he described a polity whose ruler operated on the Confucian principles of benevolent governance and providing for the people, a social order based less on a robust administrative apparatus than on the public administration and education roles assumed by the gentry-elite and lineage organizations. Meanwhile, public opinion was communicated through institutions such as the censorate, which monitored the actions of officials and provided a harmonious link between the

emperor and his subjects. In other words, Chen was illustrating for his audience an idealistic picture of what late imperial government and society should look like, shared by many of the Confucian elite, without acknowledging any of the social disruptions that had emerged in the course of the nineteenth century.

Midway through the speech, however, Chen suddenly shifted course and declares that he will now discuss the foundational sentiment of the Chinese conception of family, which was none other than “love” (l’amour). Love manifested itself in the harmonious partnership between husband and wife, including a gendered division of spheres – the man belonged to the State, while the Chinese woman ruled over the family. But it was also central to the intimate relationships and companionate marriages formed between men and women in China, as attested by the ancient poems in the Book of Odes (Shijing 詩經) and many of the great verses of the Tang period, in which are documented tender and delicate thoughts as well as such emotions as those belonging to a woman longing for her husband from afar. While Chen recited as evidence translated passages from Chinese poetry, such as “Song of a Chaste Wife” (Jiefu yin 節婦吟) by the Tang poet Zhang Ji 張籍 (ca. 767-830), he also liberally cited the French poet Émile Blémont (1839-1927), who in 1887 published a volume titled Poèmes de Chine, a collection of Tang poetry borrowing from such notable French translations as the Livre de Jade of Judith Gautier (1845-1917). These

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466 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “L’Organisation sociale de la Chine,” 42-47.
examples included such poems as Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770)’s “Parting of the Newlyweds” 
(新婚別 Xinhun bie), in which a young bride bids farewell to her conscripted husband.467

These poetic images of parting and sorrow, especially between young beloveds, 
were related to another type of love that Chen described. This was the kind of “heroic love” 
(l’amour héroïque) that sometimes occurred in China, in which a young lady insisted on 
marrying into the family of her deceased fiancé in order to fulfill filial duties to her in-laws.
Here Chen was at once giving a positive portrayal of the late imperial cult of “faithful 
maidens” and making a subtle public advertisement for the one-act play, L’Amour héroïque, 
that he would soon publish in the literary magazine Le Figaro illustré. Again, as in many 
of his public appearances, Chen Jitong was engaged in a simultaneous project of both 
representing China and performing himself.

Having completed the task of illustrating the different manifestations of love in 
Chinese society, Chen Jitong concluded his speech, once again, with a utopian rhetoric of 
rapprochement between the East and the West:

“There is no difference in the sentiments, common to all peoples, which give birth to poetry. 
We adore poetry, music, flowers, the moon and all the wonderful creations of nature. 
Those, if I am not mistaken, are the attributes of universal civilization [les attributs de la 
civilization universelle]…All human beings are different, and consequently, all societies 
are diverse. They may all be sentimental, but each according to the sense that she attributes 
to the word…Yet despite diametrically opposite distances, the heart is the same among all 
of humanity [Or le cœur est le même dans l’humanité tout entière]. With this initial natural 
basis so well made so we could understand each other, and the ease with which we have 
employed science to help our understanding, we will avoid, one must hope, war and its 
disastrous consequences…Equality will create fraternity, while love will triumph over war. 
After all, it is perhaps the only hope of peace and at the same time her most serious 
guarantee.”468

With such eloquent speeches and grandiose predications for mutual understanding 
and reconciliation between China and Europe, Chen Jitong continued to build up his public

467 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Mon Pays, 62-65. See also Émile Blémont, Poèmes de Chine (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 
1887).
468 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, Mon Pays, 66-67.
image. Reports in society bulletins and newspapers during the Exposition not only related the content of Chen’s speeches and sometimes commented on his Qing robe, but often also emphasized that he was a writer who had long developed “fully Parisian features.” Meanwhile, Chen’s publishing career also continued to flourish in 1889. In June, his translation of the famous Liaozhai zhiyi tales by Pu Songling was released by Calmann Lévy under the title Contes Chinois. The July and September issues of Magasin pittoresque printed a lecture he gave on Chinese literature. At the same time, he began serializing, in the literary supplement of Le Figaro, a series of short essays on social customs and local festivals that would make up his next book, Les Plaisirs en Chine. It was not unusual, therefore, to pick up a newspaper during the months of the exposition and read about a reported Chen sighting at one event or another, and to flip the page to find an advertisement for Contes Chinois in the same issue.

Chen Jitong even made an appearance in the painter Charles Castellani (1838-1913)’s famous “Le Tout-Paris” panorama, which depicted groups of famous people around the sites of Paris in a “pantheon of the moment.” Exhibited at the 1889 exposition and seen by over 300,000 visitors, “Le Tout-Paris” catered to a public interest intimately tied to fin-de-siècle boulevard culture with portraits of the politicians, writers, and actors that one encountered every day in the mass press. In the panorama, Chen Jitong, can be seen strolling along the Champs-Élysées with a Chinese companion at this side and the Arc de Triomphe in the background. Sporting a dark robe and a melon cap, he is a conspicuous

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469 Le Temps, August 12, 1889.
471 “Les Plaisirs en Chine,” Le Figaro: supplément littéraire, June 8, 1889. These works are discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation.
foreign figure in a crowd of European men in top hats and bourgeois ladies carrying parasols. Yet Chen is also identified by name on the bottom of the pane alongside such notable contemporaries as the collector Émile Guimet and the statesman Charles de Freycinet, which suggests that he was understood, by both the artist and the intended viewer, as a Parisian celebrity. Chen would make much creative use of this double identity as a Chinese flâneur in his next book, Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois.

Figure 3.1. Chen Jitong in Charles Castellani’s Le “Tout-Paris”.

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The Parisians Painted by a Chinese

Like his previous *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, Chen Jitong’s book about Paris borrows its name from the 1842 collection *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. However, as Castellani’s panorama suggests, Chen Jitong was quite unlike the archetypical *flâneur* of mid-nineteenth century Paris. In contrast to the bourgeois stroller whose idle walks and urban observations were enabled by his ability to be at once a man among the crowds and an anonymous, disengaged spectator, Chen Jitong could hardly go anywhere without being noticed. Given his heightened visibility and conspicuous *otherness*, how might we approach Chen’s book on Paris and read it as a creative example of transcultural *flânerie*? I suggest two points are helpful in reading *Les Parisiens peint par eux-mêmes*, which was published in 1891, but consisted of mostly essays written around the time of the 1889 exposition. First, as Vanessa Schwartz has remarked, by the 1880s, urban spectatorship was opened up to the masses through the popular press, which was instrumental in both representing and constituting everyday life in fin-de-siècle Paris as a “boulevard culture”: “The *flâneur* is not so much a person as *flânerie* is a positionality of power – one through which the spectator assumes the position of being able to be part of the spectacle and yet command it at the same time.” As we have seen, Chen Jitong was also able to assume this superior position of spectatorship also because through newspapers sightings and his own accounts, he has often been presented alongside but apart from the *badaud*, crowds of curious and sometimes obnoxious onlookers.

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If Chen Jitong brought his cachet as a Parisianized boulevardier to his depictions of the city, he also understood that as a Chinese man of letters, a great part of the allure of his writings – he was after all writing for a French audience – lay in the culturally displaced point of view of the narrator. The constant employment of a comparative framework and a cross-cultural critique is the second key to reading Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois. Indeed Chen declares as much in his preface, when he writes that the “following pages have as their goal to help the European reader penetrate into the depths of a Chinese mind, to show which ideas may be suggested to a citizen of the middle Kingdom by the dazzling spectacles presented by the city of Paris.”476 Yet how culturally sensitive would Chen’s observations be, if he were already such a Parisianized insider? As if in anticipation of this critique, Chen adopts a distancing device in Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois. He remarks that the various observations made throughout the book do not belong to him, but to a compatriot of his who had come to visit Paris during the Exposition Universelle:

One will see that my compatriot speaks quite frankly of what he thinks; that he touches upon, turn by turn., very different subjects; that he makes excursions, somewhat at random, into European society, and report each day a certain number of curious facts, of observations that have struck him, to place them in parallel to that which occurs in his own country…He appreciates without prejudice. He is not parsimonious with praise…In addition, he will criticize often, any time he deems necessary, but always with that respect of what other people think…Sincerity, united with sympathy, would not offend the French reader. It is with confidence in the benevolent judgment of the public, that I submit to it the impressions of a Chinese in Paris.477

Thus although the book was written in the first person, the reader is asked to believe that they included not Chen’s own observations, but those of an unfamiliar – and thus truly culturally displaced – Chinese visitor. Inasmuch as some of these essays had already been published under his own name in various newspapers and journals, this was an entirely

477 Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Préface,” Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois, 2. (author’s original italics)
convincing conceit, yet it did allow Chen’s narrator to approach the French capital with a sense of awe and naiveté. Furthermore, Chen presented large parts of his chapters in dialogue form. His Chinese flâneur walked about Paris with a cicérone, a local guide with whom the ever-curious narrator engaged in a conversation to find out more about a certain institution, technology, or any underlying social changes while also presenting reflections in relation to China. The reader is then given a sense of following the narrator’s footsteps on his excursions and listening in on these conversations.

So exactly which spectacles did Chen Jitong’s Chinese flâneur encounter in Paris? Although the twenty-six chapters of Les Parisiens were arranged randomly, they can be grouped into several categories: urban spaces, public institutions, social practices, and technology and industrial modernity. To begin with, Les Parisiens covers many of the urban sites associated with modern Paris. For instance, the reader follows Chen’s narrator into the Parisian café, in which he observes all of agreeable and gregarious manners of the French people on display. In contrast to the Chinese teahouse, where customers consumed their drink in relative silence, the sociability in the Paris café at once engulfs the visitor: “You do not listen; however, you hear everything.” Chen finds the café to the meeting place of the young and politically minded as well as the “second home” of those so-called “boulevardier,” who preferred the café, where they wrote their journal articles and the chapter of a novel that would appear in the next day’s paper (here Chen could have been speaking of himself!), a thousand times to their own residences. Walking into a lavishly furnished café after spending a day at the museum de Cluny, Chen even found the
boisterous energy in the café helped to bring the displayed artwork and furnishings to life.\textsuperscript{478}

In “Les grand magasin,” Chen visits the department store (most likely the \textit{Bon Marché} which famously served as the backdrop for Zola’s \textit{Au Bonheur des Dames}), which he called a “miniature Exposition Universelle,” where one could find everything from “French fabrics to Turkish rugs to Chinese mats; from glass made in Clichy to crystal manufactured in Venice.” Yet the appearance of a cornucopia does not stop Chen from developing a critique of capitalist monopoly. He recounts an encounter involving the son of his local guide, who was given a balloon by a store employee. When Chen asked why they did not have to pay for the balloon, he was told that it had been given as both a gift and as a form of advertisement for the store. He learns that while previously there had been many balloon makers on the streets of Paris, they, like other small firms, have now all been put out of business or been taken over by the big enterprises. In his explanation, Chen has his guide illustrate this with biological metaphors and evoking Darwin. Chen ends this chapter by exclaiming, “how happy it is that at the moment the country of Confucius does not yet know about the struggle for life, the weak eaten by the strong, neither large industry nor \textit{grand magasins}!” In this statement we detect not only a lament about capitalism but also a relief that China was free from the dangers of imperialistic encroachment.\textsuperscript{479}


\textsuperscript{479} Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Les grands magasins,” \textit{Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois}, 153-158. Remarkably, in just four years, following China’s defeat it the Sino-Japanese War, Yan Fu, Chen’s English-speaking
If Chen approached a commercial enterprise like the department store with some ambivalence, he fully embraced the many public institutions of learning in Paris. A tour of the Louvre causes reflection not only on the glories of ancient civilizations but also on the lack of such equivalent institutions in China, where private collections of art do not include objects from other countries and are not accessible to the public.\footnote{Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “Une visite au musée du louvre,” \textit{Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois}, 115-122.} After visits to the Bibliothèque Nationale and the \textit{cabinet de lecture}, the public reading room where he found hundreds of periodicals and even the \textit{Shenbao}, the Chinese newspaper published in Shanghai, on display, Chen commends the French for making all sorts of public institutions – botanical gardens, zoos, museums – available for public access.\footnote{Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La bibliothèque nationale” and “Un cabinet de lecture,” \textit{Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois}, 191-199,}

Part of Chen’s fascination with the newspapers lay in the different social phenomena that he encountered as a reader of the Parisian Press. We have already seen how he used newspaper articles as launching points for his essays on marriage, on the “Chinese Joan of Arc,” and to comment on Nellie Bly’s tour of the world. On another occasion, Chen opens the morning paper to read about yet another duel between two journalists – one has already died, while the other has been seriously injured – and takes the opportunity to question, in his words, “how did the civilized Europeans come to inherit this savage custom?” For Chen, the duel belies European accusations of barbarity on the part of non-Western peoples. He points out that in China, adjudication between conflicting parties is often achieved through mediation by mutual friends. Usually a settlement is reached by having the aggressor invite the insulted party, along with the mediator, to a classmate from Fuzhou, would translate Thomas Huxley’s \textit{Evolution and Ethics} and introduce social Darwinism to China. For a study of the Parisian department store, see Michael B. Miller, \textit{The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
banquet and having the party in the wrong set off firecrackers in front of the other’s house. The non-threatening nature of the firecrackers seemed to Chen much more preferable than fighting one another to death with firearms or swords.482

If Chen found some social customs in nineteenth-century France ad Europe to be distasteful, he demonstrated much more enthusiasm for industrial and technological achievements, especially for the marvels of modern transportation, the railway. Describing a train ride from Paris to Marseilles, Chen noted how remarkable it was that a journey that fifty years ago would have taken two months by coach could now be covered in less than a day. Turning his thoughts to the passengers around him, he takes account with fascination the different kinds of people he encountered in his second-class compartment – a portly old man half reading his newspaper and half asleep, a British mother-and-daughter, and a recently married couple heading to Italy. When his fellow passengers went to bed at night, Chen, unable to sleep, used his time on the train to read George Sand’s *Compagnon Du Tour de France* (1840), comparing its idealism to the stark realism of Émile Zola’s *Germinal* (1885) and again remarking on the immense social change France has experience over the past few decades. Ultimately Chen hoped that, in spite of the hazardous effect on local industries that would result from mass industrialization, in the near future, the “machine that reduced distances” would appear in China and not only connect different points of its vast landscape but also thousands upon thousands of Chinese to their “European brothers.”483

Here Chen espoused a hope for universal reconciliation between Europe and China based on scientific progress and mutual understanding, a utopian rhetoric that frequently appeared in his writings, such as at the end of a hot air balloon ride, in which he announces that in the future, the world, united by such marvelous instruments, “will consist of but one single family,” the East and West coming together to celebrate the great day of human reconciliation. Such an optimistic statement is noteworthy in how it differed from other Chinese impressions of hot air balloons rides, a favorite topic among late Qing travelers to Europe. Some earlier travelers, such as the journalist Wang Tao and the diplomats Zhang Deyi and Li Shuchang commented at length on the scientific features of the balloons, while the philosopher Kang Youwei waxed lyrical about the cosmos in a 1904 poem about a balloon ride in Paris during his exile from the Qing. The ambassador Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838-1894), who was to play a major role in Chen Jitong’s eventual dismissal from Paris, recognized immediately the military applications of balloon technology in aerial warfare, on which he repeated commented in his diplomat diary in the 1890s. Compared to these accounts, Chen Jitong’s sanguine vision of intercultural understanding and shared scientific modernity, probably a result of both his personal sense of empowerment and his writing for a French audience, appears all the more remarkable.

Viewing the spectacles of the French capital through Chinese eyes, Chen Jitong also continued to paint China with a French brush and to appeal for reconciliation between

485 On these late Qing accounts of hot air balloons, see Chen Pingyuan, Zuotu youshi yu xixue dongjian: wan-Qing huabao yanjiu 左圖右史與西學東漸: 晚清畫報研究 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Xianggang) youxian gongsi, 2008), 134-140.
486 In nineteenth-century France and Europe, eyewitness accounts and newspaper reports often commented on the ability of balloons to reduce geographic distance and bring about fraternity between peoples; see Richard Holmes, Falling Upwards: How We Took to the Air (New York: Pantheon Books, 2013).
the two civilizations. *Les Parisiens peints par eux-mêmes*, with its alternating cross-cultural celebrations and critiques of Parisian modernity, was perhaps the ultimate expression of Chen Jitong’s supreme confidence in his own literary authority. However, even as Chen was beginning to reach the height of his popularity around the time of the Exposition Universelle, this authority was being challenged.

“The Children of My Pen”

On October 13, 1889, *Le Temps* printed a letter, dated three days earlier, from Chen Jitong, who had learned from reading another paper that a certain Foucault de Mondion had publicly declared that he was the real author of *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* and *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, in addition to drafting some of Chen’s lectures. In refutation to these claims, Chen explained that though de Mondion had been his French teacher some ten years ago, the two of them had long broken off their relationship. “In general,” wrote Chen, “teachers find themselves proud to see student profit from their lessons.” However, de Mondion was sinking to the lowest depths in attempting, in vain – since the public had continued to receive Chen well, to revoke the paternity of these “children of my pen, declared mine by printers, publishers and critics, inscribed and registered in the republic of letters.”

Evoking the affirmation of other literary authorities and the support of public opinion, Chen seemed to skillfully fend off de Mondion’s allegations.

Yet de Mondion was a relentless accuser, going as far as publishing, two months later, a book titled *Quand j’étais mandarin*, in which he repeated his claims and, as evidence of their collaboration, produced a number of letters exchanged between him and

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Chen, in which the latter is shown to have furnished titles and topics to de Mondion for composition. Foucault de Mondion also attempted to claim 130,000 francs from Chen Jitong as compensation. However, the civil tribunal of the Seine ruled de Mondion’s charges invalid, as Chen Jitong was protected by diplomatic immunity.

Did de Mondion’s claims strip Chen Jitong of his credibility as a writer in French? This case has been thoroughly discussed by Chinese scholar Li Huachuan, who points out that while it was possible for Chen and de Mondion to have collaborated on these titles, there is no reason to discount Chen Jitong’s command of written French, for even the letters from Chen that de Mondion quoted were written in a smooth, flowing style, and that there were, of course, many other publications outside of those claimed by de Mondion. It appears, furthermore, that prominent French intellectuals, such as the leading sinologist Henri Cordier, also took Chen’s side, commenting that he knew Chen to be perfectly capable of writing the books. On the basis of the one-sided evidence provided by de Mondion, it seems impossible to determine precisely the identity of the real author; rather, a reasonable hypothesis, as suggested Li Huachuan, is that the two had indeed collaborated, with Chen supplying subject material and drafts and de Mondion editing and embellishing the writing.

Returning to the question of Chen Jitong’s public profile, however, the association of his name with that of de Mondion did carry much weight in the French press in 1889, for by then de Mondion not an unfamiliar figure to the French public, his name having

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488 Adalbert-Henri Foucault de Mondion, Quand j’étais mandarin (Paris: A. Savine, 1890), 1-62.
489 Journal du droit international privé et de la jurisprudence comparée 19 (1892), 429-430.
490 Li, Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng, 27-35; see also Yeh, “The Lifestyle of Four Wenren in Shanghai,” 439-440.
492 Li Huachuan, Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng, 35.
circulated in the mass press for some time throughout the summer, as “such a singular figure in the Boulanger trial.” This background story has never been discussed in studies of Chen Jitong, but does explain both the public interest in the conflict between de Mondion and Chen and the fact that public opinion swung more toward the latter. An enigmatic but notorious figure in the annals of diplomatic history, de Mondion’s connection with Chen Jitong brought Chen to the margins of perhaps the biggest political scandal – until that point – in the Third Republic France, the Boulanger Affair.

If the universal expositions of 1889 had been designed partly in honor of the centenary of the French revolution, it was also mini-celebration of the survival of a fragile Third Republic that had confronted a possible coup-état earlier in the year. The face of the movement was General Georges Boulanger (1837-1891), the charismatic ex-Minister of War who had gathered massive popular appeal since 1885 through his fervent anti-German rhetoric and received a great deal of political support from right-wing, monarchist groups like the Ligue des Patriotes. Riding on populist calls for revenge against Germany and on funding from royalist donors like the Duchess d’Uzès, Boulanger won a serious of by-elections around France in 1888, and, after winning another in Paris in January 1889, had been surrounded by a crowd that screamed for him to march on the French Parliament and restore the monarchy. Passing up the opportunity, Boulanger was soon accused of treason by the Republic and forced to flee the country. Two years later, he would commit suicide in Brussels at the grave of his mistress, Marguerite de Bonnemains. Stationed in Paris and having recorded the melodrama of the Boulanger crisis in his diary, Chen Jitong retained

493 Le Temps, 13 October 1889.
such an interest in the political confrontation between republican and monarchist ideals and the seemingly tragic but romantic ending to Boulanger’s life that he would later translate the novel *Georges et Marguerite*, written by Boulanger’s secretary, into Chinese.\(^{495}\) In 1889, however, Chen Jitong had to deal with one of the immediate spillover consequences of the Boulanger trial, held in August—the press coverage of Foucault de Mondion, a member of Boulanger’s espionage network.

Boulanger’s animosity and desire to lead a *revanchist* movement against Germany was not just all talk. During his tenure as Minister of War (1885-1887), Boulanger had made “counter-espionage” (against German infiltration) a significant policy, not only tripling the budget of the French army intelligence service, the so-called “Statistical section,” and raising the profile of spies by labeling them “patriotic,” but also hiring putting agents into roles such as language teachers and employees of foreign embassies.\(^{496}\) One of these employees was Adalbert- Henri Foucault de Mondion (1849-1894), a former private tutor the children of the Belgian Prince de Chimay who became a French tutor, for a period of time, to Ma Jianzhong and Chen Jitong in 1877.\(^{497}\) By 1886, while he was still affiliated with the Chinese legation in Berlin, de Mondion was also running an espionage station disguised as a wineshop. In 1887, de Mondion was given 30,000 francs taken by Boulanger from Ministry funds for “clandestine political purposes,” acts among which was the forging of a highly controversial set of letters passed to the Russian Tsar suggesting that the

German chancellor Otto von Bismarck (a hated figure in France since the Franco-Prussia War) was willing to provide support for actions against Russia by Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria. These documents, known as the “Ferdinand letters,” were fabrications used as part of an elaborate strategy to drive a wedge into the imperial alliance between Russia and Germany, and to bring the former onto France’s side in the case of another conflict.  

The exposure of these affairs and of other secret dealings over the course of the Boulanger trial in August 1889, sometimes even penned by de Mondion himself in conflictual versions, helped him gain the reputation of, in the words of one diplomatic historian, a “congenital liar, a spy, a swindler, and a blackmailer.” 

One must note that de Mondion’s claims against Chen Jitong also emerged over the course of the Boulanger trial. In fact, it was in response to attorney general Quesnay de Beaurepaire’s accusations that he had engaged in producing works of “a certain literature,” which the high court understood to be “pornography,” that de Mondion sought desperately to clear his name by claiming to have been occupied writing the books by “Tcheng-Ki-Tong.” The press coverage of the Boulanger affair, then, ensured a great deal of attention on de Mondion and his accusations, thus adding yet another layer to Chen Jitong’s high profile in 1889. In the end, however, de Mondion could not harm Chen’s already firmly established public image. In an editorial response to de Mondion’s letters, Le Temps declared that Chen had proven himself to be “as spiritual a speaker as a writer.” Even outside observers felt the same way, as James Duncan Campbell wrote amusingly to his

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500 Foucault de Mondion, Quand j’étais mandarin, 2-3.
501 Le Temps, 15 October 1889.
friend and chief Robert Hart, “De Mondion was an unscrupulous and despicable personage,” concluding that the affair should not do Chen much harm.\textsuperscript{502} And indeed it did not, for Chen Jitong continued to publish prolifically, in an increasingly wider variety of genres, over the next two years.

\textbf{Prefaces for Others, Performance for Oneself}

Even as he became engaged in the authorship struggle with Foucault de Mondion, Chen Jitong’s publishing activities in the years between 1889 and 1891 also proliferated and expanded beyond the form of essays and articles on Chinese social customs. In addition to the works he released during the period of the universal exposition, Chen Jitong also serialized, between July 23 and August 17, 1890, \textit{Le Roman de l’homme jaune}, his adaptation of the Tang romance \textit{Huo Xiaoyu zhuan} 霍小玉傳, in the \textit{feuilleton} section of \textit{Le Temps}.\textsuperscript{503} In February 1891, Chen published his first and only play, \textit{L’Amour heroïque}. As Chen Jitong evolved into an acknowledged celebrity author, other writers began to see value in associating themselves with his name. Thus, in addition to his own books and articles, Chen’s writing also appeared at this time as prefaces for other European writers who produced texts on topics related to China. A closer look at two of these texts reveals some of the strategies and social connections Chen used in his self-fashioning.

In 1889, René de Pont-Jest (or Léon Delmas, 1830-1904), re-released a popular novel entitled \textit{Le Fleuve des Perles (L’Araignée-Rouge)} [The River of Pearls, or the Red

\textsuperscript{502} James Duncan Campbell to Robert Hart, November 18, 1889, in Chen Xiafei and Han Rongfang, eds., \textit{Archives of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs: Confidential Correspondence between Robert Hart and James Duncan Campbell, 1874-1907} (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990), 657-659.

\textsuperscript{503} \textit{Le Temps} 23 July – 17 August 1890. The novel was published in October as Tcheng-Ki-Tong, \textit{Le Roman de l’homme jaune} (Paris: Charpentier, 1890).
Spider]. Pont-Jest, a former marine officer who had visited China with the French Navy in the 1850s, had developed a prolific career in journalism and fiction by the late nineteenth-century. He was known to be a “noted dandy, wit, duelist, and boulevardier…a prolific journalist who wrote many gossip columns,” whose literary output consisted of a large number of “daring” novels and detective stories.\textsuperscript{504} He also specialized in the \textit{roman de mœurs}, a genre that “turned on itself, wallowing in sentiment and happy endings.”\textsuperscript{505} \textit{Le Fleuve des Perles}, a story which had first been published in \textit{Le Figaro} in 1875, seemed to belong to this genre. Set in Canton in the mid-nineteenth-century, it was a melodrama in which a promising young man of letters, holder of a \textit{xiucai} degree, and the cousin with whom he has fallen in love are wrongly accused of a murder, actually committed by a jealous butcher. After a series of interventions from a English captain and – quite reflective of typical European perceptions of the Qing court – the enlightened Prince Gong, the real criminal was found and the young couple freed and finally allowed to be married.\textsuperscript{506}

Affected by the tribulations of the protagonists or by the description of the mixture of Chinese and Europeans in a late Qing treaty-port setting - one that would have resembled Fuzhou – Chen wrote a preface, in the form of a letter to the author, “was full of praise. Having brought the novel with him on a recent journey, Chen found Pont-Jest’s work, with its skillful and truthful portrayal of Chinese customs, a pleasurable read. The novel deserved praise since it was particularly difficult “to blend together, with great art,

\textsuperscript{504} James Harding, \textit{Sacha Guitry: The Last Boulevardier} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 17-18. Pont-Jest was the maternal grandfather of Sacha Guitry (1885-1957), the French actor, director, and playwright.


Europeans and Chinese, foreigners and natives, local color and the outside world.” Even the subtitle, “Red Spider,” was, for a Chinese man of letters (lettré chinois), a promise of the book’s quality and of a tale that had the influence “of a strange dream born of the most varied sentiments and most diverse feelings possible to the human heart.”

It is impossible to know whether Chen Jitong had enjoyed Pont-Jest’s novel as much as he proclaimed. What stands out, in this instance, is the fact that Chen took the opportunity of writing the preface to project himself as a lettré chinois. He does this not only in French, but also in a second letter, written in his own calligraphic hand, that is inserted before the French version. While most of the Chinese letter is comprised of the same statements as in the French, there are two revealing differences. In the first instance, after declaring that the author had depicted China with accuracy and sympathy in a seamless blend of Chinese and Western letters, Chen poses a rhetorical question: “Who says the world is not one family (shewei tianxia fei yijia zai 誰謂天下非一家哉)?” In his study of Chen, Li Huachuan reads statements like these, which appear also in some of Chen’s essays, to be evidence of Chen’s cosmopolitan, if utopian, outlook. One is compelled to agree, but there is something much more personal to Chen’s Chinese preface than a statement of grand cross-cultural ideals.

For the letter is signed, “Chen Jingru, The Traveler Who Thrice Sailed the Raft (Sandu chengchake 三乘槎客), on the 9th day of the 9th lunar month (chongyang 重陽), in the year of Guangxu ji chou, atop the Paris tower for ascending the heights and thinking.

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507 René de Pont-Jest, Le Fleuve des Perles (L’araignée-rouge) (Paris: E. Dentu, 1889), x-xi.
508 Pont-Jest, Le Fleuve des Perles, vi.
509 Li Huachuan, Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua lichen, 147-148.
of loved ones from afar (登高懷遠塔樓).” While it is quite plausible that Pont-Jest had included Chen’s handwritten letter as a mark of authenticity, it is also evident that Chen took the Chinese composition quite seriously. Dated October 3, 1889, this Chinese letter was evidently written before the French version, suggesting that Chen’s first response, upon reading Pont-Jest’s work, was to record his impressions in Chinese. The climbing of a tower (and which tower, other than the Eiffel, would one have climbed in Paris in the fall of 1889?) on the day of the Chongyang festival, a traditional holiday associated with ancestral sacrifices and – as in the famous verse by the Tang poet Wang Wei – with homesickness, was an evocative act for the traveler far from home and a classic literati practice in late imperial China. Meanwhile, the calendric identification with the current Qing reign was statement of the writer’s political allegiance. Finally, this preface may be the first instance in which Chen Jitong employed the penname Sancheng chake – (referring to the three different trips to Europe he had taken), with which he would sign his later Chinese writings. None of his Parisian readers, of course, would understand any of this; this Chinese preface, then, was a solitary case of self-fashioning. In other words, it was important for China and Europe to blend in literature and for the universe to be comprised of one common humanity, but these things mattered especially to the sojourning Qing diplomat who saw himself as a wenren (a lettré chinois) caught between these worlds.

510 Pont-Jest, Le Fleuve des Perles, vi.
Another notable work to which Chen Jitong contributed a preface was a translation of Chinese poetry, by the Portuguese diplomat and poet António Joaquim de Castro Feijó (1859-1917). António Feijó’s *O Cancioneiro chinês*, published in Lisbon in 1890 to great critical acclaim, was itself a translation of the French writer Judith Gautier (1845-1917)’s 1867 collection of ancient Chinese poems, *Le Livre de Jade*. The literary scholar Meng Hua has argued that Gautier’s imaginative translations played an important role in extending, against the sort of materialistic *chinoiserie* – of porcelain and pavilions – that Chen had himself protested during the 1889 exposition, a nineteenth-century French
fascination with “cultural” or “literary China.” This was a literary fascination that Chen Jitong had evidently tapped into, but it also attracted other literary enthusiasts across Europe. According to Jordan Herbert Stabler, an American diplomat who befriended Feijó while both were serving in Stockholm in 1913 and who later re-translated Feijó’s version into English, Feijó, after taking a great interest in Gautier’s French rendition of Tang poetry, had spent six years during which he “read greatly in French and Portuguese in connection with Chinese literature and made a careful study of the works of the Jesuit missionary fathers.” As he neared publication of the translated work in 1885, Feijó came up with an idea for author of the preface. Writing to his friend and editor, he discussed his preferred choice:

“A colonel Tcheng-Ki-Tong, attaché to the Chinese embassy in Paris, distinguished writer, author of a book Les chinois peints par eux-mêmes, is a friend of the Count de S. Mamede. I wrote today asking him to write to the colonel that he composes an article on “The Book of Jade” by Judith Walter [Judith Gautier], in order to serve as a preface to a Portuguese translation of the book. What do you think of this idea?”

Thanks to this transnational web of relationships between these diplomats and poets, Feijó’s book cover eventually contained a “prefaciado pelo General Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” which concludes this extraordinary story of translingual poetic practice and literary consecration with these impassioned words:

“The exportation and importation of the poetry of two great civilizations is an effective means of cementing understanding and friendship between people. To mutually translate their major works is the first, the most noble of exchanges…The ancient poets making the

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512 Jordan Herbert Stabler, Songs of Li-Tai-Pê from the “Cancionero Chines” of Antonio Castro Feijo (New York: Edgar H. Wells & Co., 1922), 2-4.
513 Cartas de António Feijó a Luís de Magalhães (inéditas), espólio epistolar, transcreto e anotado por Rui Feijó, cited in Manuela Delgado Leão Ramos, António Feijó e Camilo Pessanha no Panorama do Orientalismo Português (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2001), 152. I have yet to identify the “Count de S. Mamede.”
tour of the modern world and reconciling the fiercest and most susceptible of minds, is that not an unexpected novelty, full of unforeseen charm and delightful promise?"514

Chen could have been writing as much about himself as about classical Chinese poetry. Did he not appear an “unexpected novelty” who had emerged from the Chinese legation in the Place de Victor Hugo to make the rounds in the literary and cultural spheres of fin-de-siècle Paris – charming readers, delighting observers, and promising fellow international poets their own cosmopolitan stardom? It was all too appropriate, then, that it was around this time that the photographer Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, 1820-1910), known for his portraits of writers, artists, and actors, decided to include Chen Jitong among his pantheon of cultural celebrities, taking photos of a young and handsome-looking Chen both in his official robe and in civilian dress, wearing the melon cap of a Qing scholar or gentry


514 António Feijó, O Cancioneiro Chinez (Lisbon: Magalhães & Moniz, Editores, 1890), xiii-xiv.
“L’Affaire Tcheng-Ki-Tong”

At the end of an essay about his experiences on the railway in France, Chen Jitong declared, with a touch of his typical utopian rhetoric, that in the near future the train would put Chinese people in daily contact with their European brothers.\(^{515}\) Ironically, it was partly Chen’s involvement in an ultimately aborted effort to secure foreign loans for constructing a railroad in northeast China that led to his own exile from France. Having seemingly just reached a new zenith in his public and publishing career by 1891, Chen suddenly left the legation and returned to China that spring. As the European press sought to explain his departure, they stumbled into an intriguing controversy surrounding personal debts and government loans, as well as a fierce media tussle between Qing diplomats. Lasting throughout 1891 and 1892, the “Chen Jitong affair,” as many contemporary observers came to call it, led to such widespread press coverage and an avalanche of commentary that it had the effect of reinforcing and embellishing Chen’s celebrity image, especially that of the pleasure-seeking boulevardier. It also demonstrates the extent to which Chen Jitong was willing to

The construction of railroads and the borrowing of foreign capital to finance such projects were heavily contentious issues in the late Qing. While conservative opponents of railways feared such things as unemployment for traditional transportation workers, foreign monopoly of engineering enterprises, and, worse still, foreign invasion, self-strengthening reformers and their advisers, such as Chen Jitong’s erstwhile colleague Ma

Jianzhong argued that railroads would offer opportunities to link different regions economically and thus bring wealth for the people.  

While these debates had gone on since the 1870s, it was not until the “coup of April 1884” (jiashen yishu 甲申易樞), when Qing defeat in the Sino-French war led to the dismissal of Prince Gong Yixin and the rise to power of Prince Chun Yihuan 奕譞 (1840-1891), that a decisive policy shift in favor of building railroads began to take place. Yihuan had taken an interest in railroads as early as 1881 and, as head of the newly established Board of Admiralty (haijun yamen 海軍衙門), was able to lend strong support to Li Hongzhang and others’ plans for railroad construction.  

In 1889, Zhang Zhidong, then Governor General of Hubei and Hunan, memorialized with the first proposal for a major line, one that would connect the treaty-port Hankou to Beijing (Luhan tielu 蘆漢鐵路). Zhang had estimated the cost to be around 16 million taels, but by Yihuan’s calculations, 30 million taels were needed. A debate over whether or not to procure a foreign loan for this line ended with the Qing court agreeing with Zhang Zhidong, who feared loss of revenue through interest payments. Soon, with Russian and Japanese activities in Korea raised alarm in early 1890, Prince Chun and others memorialized for the Luhan railroad project to be postponed in favor of a Guandong


517 On the coup, see Lloyd Eastman, Throne and Mandarins, 101-107 and Pan Xiangming 潘向明, “Lun Chun qinwang Yihuan” 讀醇親王奕譞 Qingshi yanjü 2 (2006): 97-106. For a convincing argument for the importance of recognizing the shift, in Qing policy, in favor of railroad construction during Prince Chun’s tenure, see Zhu Hu 朱諄 “Jiawu zhanzheng yiqian Qing zhengfu de tielu zhengce” 甲午戰爭以前清政府的鐵路政策 Qingshi yanjü 2 (1999): 71-78.
railroad (關東鐵路), a military line that would help the Qing better protect its interests in the region. When government funding for this project was delayed, the issue of foreign loans came up again.518 It is at this point that Li Hongzhang involved Chen Jitong in the matter.

The biography of Chen Jitong in the Fujian gazetteer gives him credit for first suggesting to Li Hongzhang – and through Li to Prince Chun – an interest-saving loan for constructing the Luhan railroad.519 This has led later scholars to mistakenly attribute Chen’s 1890 negotiations to this postponed project, instead of the Guandong line.520 Meanwhile, it is not at all certain that Chen Jitong was the primary initiator of the loan process. What can be confirmed is that in September 1889, Li Jingfang 李經方, Li Hongzhang’s adopted son and a friend of Chen’s, telegraphed his father to report the offer, from an Austrian merchant, of a substantial loan at 4.5%.521 After court policy shifted to the Guandong Railroad, Li Hongzhang discussed this idea with Chun in an April 21, 1890 telegram.522 By May 7, 1890, Li Hongzhang had enough support to be able to cable Chen in Paris to begin secret negotiations for a loan of 30 million taels, at an interest of 4.5%, with the Austrian banker “lundaohe 倫道呵” [Moritz Landauer (dates unknown)].523 A complicated and often protracted negotiation process followed, with as many as fifty-six telegrams passing between Li and Chen between April 1890 and March 1891.524 While Li

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518 Huenemann, 46; Ma Linghe, 30-33.
519 Fujian tongzhi 福建通志 (Fuzhou: Fujian tongzhi ju, 1922), 34:70a.
520 See Sang Bing, “Chen Jitong shulu,” and Li Huachuan, Wan-Qing yige wujiaoguan de wenhua licheng.
521 Ma Linghe, 32-33.
522 Mi Rucheng 宓汝城, Jindai Zhongguo tielu shiliao 近代中國鐵路史料, 189-190.
523 Li Hongzhang quanji, vol. 23, 48.
524 This is Li Huachuan’s count, using an earlier edition of Li Hongzhang’s collected papers, Gu Tinglong 顧廷龍 and Ye Yalian 葉亞廉 ed., Li Hongzhang quanji 李鴻章全集, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 1985). See Li Huachuan, 36-37. Chen Jitong and Li Hongzhang’s correspondence can be found in volume 23 of the 2008 edition of Li Hongzhang quanji.

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Hongzhang waited with increasing impatience for a draft contract to be drawn up and forwarded to him, Landauer delayed talks time and again for reasons that varied from unstable silver prices due to the American Sherman Silver Purchase Act in July to unfounded rumors from other French and British banks regarding another gold loan being authorized by the Qing government.\textsuperscript{525} Landauer also attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain a mandate to open up a bank in China.\textsuperscript{526} It was not until December 26 that Chen Jitong was finally able send to Li a copy of a draft contract, but with the death of Prince Chun in January 1891, the court decided to postpone negotiations for the Guandong railroad.\textsuperscript{527} By then, Chen Jitong was already in hot water.

Chen’s fall from grace began with the arrival the new Qing ambassador in 1890. Xue Fucheng, the recently appointed Qing minister to England, France, Italy and Belgium, was a talented scholar from Wuxi who had risen through the ranks of the self-strengthening movement, first under the tutelage of Zeng Guofan and, since 1875, as a member of Li Hongzhang’s \textit{mufu}. In addition to participating in some of the Qing government’s diplomatic negotiations in the 1870s and 1880s, Xue had been a strong advocate of westernizing reforms and had helped Li draft his important 1880 memorial proposing the construction of railroads. His meticulously recorded diplomatic diary (1891-1894) demonstrated a persistent, if pragmatic, interest in Western technology, political systems, and commercial infrastructure.\textsuperscript{528}

\textsuperscript{525} \textit{Li Hongzhang quanji}, vol. 23, 65, 77, 103, 112.
\textsuperscript{526} \textit{Li Hongzhang quanji}, vol. 23, 81
\textsuperscript{527} \textit{Li Hongzhang quanji}, 133, 154.
\textsuperscript{528} On Xue Fucheng, see \textit{Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (1644-1912)}, ed. Arthur W. Hummel (1943), 331-333; Zhong Shuhe 鍾叔河, \textit{Zouxiang shijie: Zhonggu ren kaocha xifang de lishi} 走向世界: 中國人考察西方的歷史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 306-34; and Ding Fenglin, 丁鳳麟, \textit{Xue Fucheng pingzhuan} 薛福成評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1998). On Xue’s diplomatic diary, see Yin Dexiang 尹德
Chen and Xue seemed to have begun their relationship on a cordial footing. When Xue first arrived in France on March 6, 1890, it was Chen who traveled to Marseilles to greet him and—as Xue took care to note in his diary, perhaps already somewhat surprised by Chen’s apparent intimacy with foreigners—along with two friends of his from the French Ministry of Works, gave Xue a detailed tour of the harbor. Upon settling in at the legation in Paris, one of Xue’s earliest acts was to retain Chen Jitong as an interpreter of the second rank. Later that month, Chen accompanied Xue on official visits to meet the president of the French Senate and the ministers of the various foreign legations in Paris. In mid-June, Chen again served as Xue’s interpreter on a one-week visit to Brussels.

Chen also kept Xue Fucheng readily informed of Li Hongzhang’s instructions for negotiating the loan for the railroad. Upon receiving Li Hongzhang’s initial instructions in May, he immediately forwarded copies of Li’s telegrams to Xue, who at the time was at the Chinese legation in London. Later, whenever negotiations with Landauer met with delay, Chen again wrote to Xue to update him on the new terms of the deal. Contrary to one scholar’s suggestion, then, Xue could not have been suspicious or angry at Chen for being left out of the loan process.

Yet there were also debts of a personal sort that Chen did hide from Xue—but he was only able to do so for a time being. In a telegraph to Li Hongzhang on December 7,

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529 Xue Fucheng, Xue Fucheng riji, ed. Cai Shaoqing (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2004), 526-527.
530 Xue Fucheng riji, 530, 546-547.
531 Xue Fucheng riji, 540, 552, 584.
532 This is the hypothesis Sang Bing offers in “Chen Jitong shulun,” Jindaishi yanjiu 4 (1999).
1890, Xue revealed that a certain French bank, to which Chen owed money, had been pressing him for a settlement. Still wishing, at this point, to preserve Chen’s reputation, since he did not want to impede the railroad loan negotiations, Xue asked Li for 4,500 pounds to help pay part of Chen’s debts. Reluctant to get involved and sounding protective of Chen, Li, in his reply, made a distinction between public affairs and Chen’s private debts, which he thought Chen should resolve on his own. Then, in separate telegrams over the next couple of months, Li repeatedly pushed Chen to settle his personal debts, at one point even directly warning Chen that, if the issue were not resolved, Xue was most definitely going to impeach Chen. Meanwhile, the pressure on Xue had been mounting, since the bank had apparently notified the French ministry of foreign affairs, which was now taking an interest in Chen’s debts, which were borrowed in the name of the Chinese legation. Wishing to keep Chen and his troubles at a distance, Xue first told Chen to stay away from the Chinese legation in January and finally ordered him to take a leave of absence and to return to China, replacing Chen with Qing Chang, previously an attaché at the Chinese legation in Russia. After Chen left France for China in late April, Xue negotiated with the Zongli Yamen and Li Hongzhang a plan to have Chen Jitong arrested upon his arrival in Fuzhou and taken to Tianjin under Li Hongzhang’s while the case was being investigated. In November 1891, Xue Fucheng memorialized the throne with a formal complaint about Chen Jitong’s personal debts. Writing that while Chen was never authorized to borrow from foreign banks on the legation’s account, it was also

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533 Li Hongzhang quanjì, 128.
534 Li Hongzhang quanjì, 128-129.
535 Li Hongzhang quanjì, 155.
536 Xue Fucheng riji, 613; Li Hongzhang quanjì, 164. Qing Chang was rumored to have had a history of rivalry with Chen, but the nature of their conflict is uncertain. See Fujian Tongzhì, 34:70a; Li Huachuan, 39 and Xue Fucheng 薛福成, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi siguo riji 出使英法義比四國日記 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 305. See also Correspondence, Hart to Campbell, June 27 1891.
inexcusable, despite a general cutback in all embassy salaries in 1887, for diplomatic personnel not to budget expenses and conduct themselves appropriately. In the end, Xue declared, it was because Chen had been so “accustomed to Western habits, always attending to social functions” (niuyu xisu, zhuani jiang yingchou 狨與西俗, 專講應酬) that he had been so profligate over the years and thus accumulated large debts. Furthermore, his actions, which were carried out in the name of the legation, hurt China’s reputation and thus cannot be tolerated. With this impeachment, Chen was formally cashiered, and the Zongli Yamen ordered to investigate and deal with Chen accordingly.\textsuperscript{537} In reality, this meant that Chen would continue to be held under Li Hongzhang’s watch until his debts were cleared. When they were indeed repaid, with help from the merchant Landauer, in July 1892, Li Hongzhang was able to memorialize the throne to have Chen Jitong rehabilitated.\textsuperscript{538}

While all of this played out in a serene manner in the telegraphs and memorials between Qing officials, a completely different scene erupted in the European press. As it turns out, while the mass press once again demonstrated their predilection for scandal, Chen Jitong and some of his journalist friends in France also helped to keep his name and story circulating. The result was confusion and intrigue with regard to his financial affairs, but yet another layer of extravagant details – and especially the image of the dandy – added onto Chen’s public persona.

Even when he was preparing to leave France, Chen Jitong kept a calm demeanor when dealing with the curious Parisian press. Nevertheless, word quickly got out that he

\textsuperscript{537} “Xue Fucheng memorial, November 19, 1891” in Zhu Shoupeng 朱壽鵬 ed., Guangxuchao donghua lu 光緒朝東華錄, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 165. See also Shenbao 申報, 4 December 1891.
\textsuperscript{538} Li Hongzhang quanjì, vol. 14, 513.
would soon be leaving the legation and returning to China. On March 2, La Presse printed an interview with Chen in which he denied all rumors of his being relieved of his functions. In a self-assured dialogue with the reporter, Chen emphasized that he was only taking a temporary leave of absence so he could go home to assist with the wedding of his elder daughter, whom he had not seen since his last trip in 1883. Not only did he not have the slightest intention of saying adieu to the city in which he had lived for sixteen years and which he had come to love, but he was at the moment preparing to publish a new volume, a “philosophical study in the form of letters” of European constitutions compared to those in China, to be released in the next month by Charpentier. The reporter had gone to Chen to verify “murmurs of a disgrace,” but Chen adroitly sidestepped the issue and led the conversation back to his status as a celebrated writer and as a “true Parisian.”

Indeed, Chen Jitong was not about to leave Paris without leaving an impression. On April 1, 1891, the popular biweekly magazine Revue illustrée, capitalizing on talk of Chen’s pending departure, featured a colored sketch of Chen Jitong by the well-known engraver Léon Ruffé (1864-1935) on its cover. Included inside the issue were two lengthy essays, one by Chen on the Chinese press and another, entitled “Le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” by Henri Bryois (1854-1917), a journalist who, just a year earlier, had published a widely-read interview with Emile Zola in Le Figaro. Chen’s own contribution presents an overview of the Jingbao (Peking Gazette), a brief discussion of other Chinese newspapers in Shanghai, and then proceeds, as he has previously, to describe the Censorate (duchayuan 都察院) as an important and well-functioning mechanism for voicing public

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539 Le Matin, 10 February 1891; Le Figaro, 28 February 1891.
540 “Chez le général Tcheng-Ki-tong,” La Presse, 2 March 1891. The book to which Chen referred may have turned out to be Les Parisiens peints par un chinois, which was published in May 1891.
opinion and checking imperial tyranny in China. It does not comment on any of his personal affairs and expect for the interesting fact that the last article Chen publishes in France before leaving for good was a piece on the press, is perhaps not of much significance for the events that were unfolding in 1891.\footnote{Tcheng-Ki-Tong, “La Presse chinoise,” 
Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891.}

On the other hand, the essay by Bryois was exactly the type of embellished account that columnists used to construct the image of a celebrity. Beginning with a description of Chen’s struggles to overcome a childhood disability and his incredible learning ability as a youth, it documented his ascent through the Fuzhou Navy Yard and into the diplomatic world. Once settled in Paris, Chen had supposedly socialized with the most famous politicians, scientists, and scholars of the day, including the social thinker Frederic Le Play, the dramatist Eugène Marin Labiche, and the grand Republican, Léon Gambetta. He was also a patriotic and witty diplomat, having won over the Russian general Mikhail Skobelev (with whom Chen subsequently became excellent friends) in a debate over the Ili crisis in 1879-1881 and tried, in vain, with the commander Fournier, to the reach a peaceful agreement during the Sino-French crisis. Not yet forty years old, wrote Bryois, Chen “has already take his place among our contemporary littérateurs” and approached his diverse works - “novels, stories, columns, economic studies and lectures,” all with “his personal touch.” It was with the goal of “opening China to our compatriots” that Chen has become involved in two important negotiations, which, Bryois promised, “one will soon speak of.” But for now, the general was returning to China to take a well-deserved vacation, during which he intends of finishing there what he has begun in France.\footnote{Henri Bryois, “Le Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” 
Revue illustrée, 1 April 1891. This obviously hagiographical essay, with its name-dropping and fantastical account of Chen being “magically healed” in}
a thinly veiled reference to the issue of the foreign loan, which by then had been leaked into the press.

![Revue Illustrée cover](image_url)

**Figure 3.5.** Chen Jitong on the cover of *Revue illustrée*, April 1, 1891.

In between these two articles, the *Revue illustrée* also included a full-size insert, with an enlarged version of Ruffe’s portrait of Chen. Standing upright and tall, in his Qing official dress, with his right hand clasping the belt in a resolute, but not stiff, manner, the “Général Tcheng-Ki-Tong” in this engraving does not look directly at the reader, but gazes his youth has nevertheless been used by some scholars to construct Chen’s biography. See Li Huachuan, *Wan-Qing yige waijioaoguan de wenhua licheng*, 50-51.
into the distance and, with his feet apart, seems ready to take on his next task – as diplomat or conférencier – with a contemplative seriousness. While the sinologist Henri Cordier, who knew Chen Jitong personally, attested that this portrait was not a faithful likeness of the real person, it is obvious that the artist had modeled the portrait on the series of photographs taken by Nadar. The vivid portrayal of Chen Jitong, in a combination of image and words, seemed to ensure that public discussions of his departure and his life in Paris would continue over the next months.

After Chen’s departure, many journalists wrote or visited the Chinese legation for a more detailed explanation. Despite an initial attempt by Xue Fucheng, who thought of the loan negotiations to be a highly important and secretive affair and wrote to Le Main to confirm Chen’s dismissal but to deny rumors of a large government-issued loan, Chen Jitong and the “mysterious nature” of his dismissal became a favorite subject in the European press. Lengthy stories, in trying to explain how the “spoiled child of Paris” had “suddenly disappeared from all his old haunts,” summarized at length both Chen’s career and the details that had emerged about the loan – did he make an “amateurish effort” to procure a loan for China while also taking 100,000 francs out of the Banque de Paris et des Pay Bas in the name of his government? Sympathizers wrote to reveal that Chen Jitong had indeed imperial authorization to negotiate loans and that, having risen to a stature in Parisian society high above his superior officials, he was indeed victim of forces of jealousy. Readers also debated back and forth Chen’s credentials – was he truly a

545 “Entre Chinois,” Le Matin, 1 May 1891.
547 The Times, 28 May 1891.
general? What kind of a school was the Fuzhou Arsenal? Other reports with sensationalist headings spread outward from Paris to English-language newspapers across North American and treaty-port Shanghai. They reported that he had abused his diplomatic privileges by “swindling the credulous Frenchmen right and left,” and that having been caught, he faced the death penalty in China. Journalists in Paris, without knowing exactly kind of punishment he could receive, interviewed the orientalist scholar Léon de Rosny and received an elaborate and completely irrelevant lecture on piety to the emperor. One newspaper even managed to have a local correspondent solicit, from a friend of Marie Lardanchet in her native department of Jura, a letter from “Madame Tcheng-Ki-Tong” describing her husband’s arrest and her wish that his life be spared. An indication of how much attention Chen Jitong was receiving may be found in a description of a countryside retreat by the journalist and playwright Alfred Capus. Spending a tranquil afternoon in a canoe under the shade of poplar trees in the village, Capus wrote, you would open up a newspaper, while waiting for the fish to fight over your bait, and read about the poor General Tcheng-Ki-Tong, the author of Les Parisiens peints par un chinois, “that delicious Chinese, who had been an instant celebrity in Paris and who was a bon garcon, very clubman and very fast-living,” who was now in quite a deal of trouble.

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549 “Will Lose His Head,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 2 June 1891; “Chinese Justice,” Los Angeles Times, 2 June 1891; “A Diplomat Condemned to Death,” The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette, 3 July 1891.
550 “Le Cas du général Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” Le Matin, 3 July 1891; Chicago Daily Tribune, 5 June 1891.
551 Journal des débats, 5 July 1891.
552 “Chronique parisienne: en province,” Revue bleue, 4 July 1891.
While the press and its readers pondered the fate of the departed diplomat, more sensational stories about Chen Jitong’s tenure in Paris also emerged. An article, appearing in *Le Figaro* on April 22 and titled “Flight of a diplomat,” offered the account that Chen’s financial troubles had nothing to do with government loans. After all, the Chinese chargé d’affaires “had been sincere when he claimed his passion for Paris, and like many others, he did not know how to resist all the temptations of the modern Babylon.” When his relationships with the stars of the theatre became costly, he had to resort to borrowing from usurers and businessmen. Chen’s recall to China came just as his profligate and amorous life led him to falling prey to traffickers and speculators. In sum, commented the columnist while supplying a most memorable line: “Tcheng-Ki-Tong is a victim of the *Moulin Rouge*.”553 This sardonic attack, launched just two days after Chen’s departure from France, seemed so vicious that *Le Matin* ran an editorial a few days later with the eye-catching title “Perfidious Figaro!”554 But although it mocked the paper for turning on its one time contributor, the report only served to perpetuate the image of the cancan-dancing, actress-wooing Chinese general.

Even sympathetic contributors, when they seemed to pen essays in the interest of defending Chen, could not avoid presenting more salacious details. Writing in the front page of *Le Gaulois*, the journalist and theatre critic Adolphe Aderer (1855-1923) noted that even though Chen had been “everywhere in Paris” and was spotted at all the premier performances, art exhibitions, and festivals, it was the society of women that he most

554 *Le Matin*, 25 April 1891. The Moulin Rouge, famous for its dancing and nightlife, had just opened in 1889.
ardently sought out. According to the papers, Chen had such a marked predilection for *les Parisiennes* that he was willing to incur heavy expenses in courting them:

“Wasn’t it one of our most beautiful actresses whom he one day invited to eat a *bouillabaisse* at *La Réserve* in Marseilles? Wasn’t it for being closer to her that he had rented in Vésinet, being the good and true Parisian that he was, a little country house? Each morning, just as a stockbroker goes about his business or a columnist goes to his journal, he took the train, a cigarette always between his lips, to report to the Legation.”

Citing the opinions of many of Chen’s friends and acquaintances, Aderer understood Chen’s indulgent ways with women to be a manifestation of his overall generous nature and saw that Chen’s inability to refuse others as one of the “attenuating circumstances” of his disgrace. After all, “everyone agreed that there was no one as helpful, obliging, and less selfish than Tcheng-Ki-Tong.” He had as open a hand as he did a heart, such that “the money of others was his own, like his own was that of others.”

While tales of an extravagant lifestyle poured forth in the Parisian press, friends and collaborators tried to tell a straight story about Chen falling victim both to angry financiers, as a result of aborted loan negotiations and as a result of jealousy from some legation colleagues. The novelist René de Pont-Jest wrote to *Le Figaro* in November to confirm that Chen had indeed been attempting to raise a large loan – 30 million taels being the equivalent of 230 million francs – for Prince Chun, but after the Prince’s death and the negotiations fell through, it was the disappointed creditors who turned and accused Chen of being a swindler (*chevalier d’industrie*), while the Chinese could not defend him without bringing Prince Chun into the scene. Despite fearing for Chen’s life, however, his Parisian friends should now be assured that he was under the protection of the “intelligent and just” viceroy Li Hongzhang in Tianjin.

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Meanwhile, Henri Bryois, who had authored the celebratory portrayal of Chen in the *Revue illustrée*, seemed to have agreed to serve as Chen Jitong’s public defender. When Chen left France for China in April 1891, those travelling with him included not only Marie Lardanchet and her niece but indeed Bryois, who, as *Le Figaro* noted, had taken on the position of a correspondent in China for *The Times*. However, other records also show Bryois to have been employed as a functionary assigned to China by the French Ministry of Public Instruction during 1891-1892. What is certain is that this French journalist and, later, diplomat (he was consul in Brazil) was residing in Shanghai that year and did pen a number of columns on China, which were published in Parisian magazines like *Le Figaro supplément littéraire* and also treaty-port newspapers like *The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*. It was in the latter publication, that Chen, with Bryois’s help, launched a campaign of self-defense.

On December 31, 1891, the *North China Herald and S.C. & C. Gazette* published a long article by Byrois that once again painted a rosy description of Chen. While admitting that Chen had indeed incurred some personal debts, Bryois insisted that Chen’s situation had “more to do with his enemies and less to do with his own weaknesses.” Citing the explanation given by a “prominent mandarin…director of the Imperial Military Academy in Tianjin,” who spoke to him in excellent French, Bryois argued that Chen had indeed, with the amount of public exposure he received in France, completely effaced the authority of Xue, his hierarchical superior, and as a result incurred much contempt, which factored

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556 *Le Figaro*, 8 April 1891.
into his recall. Yet the interest in Bryois’s essay lies not only in his placing blame on official jealousy or in his dismissal of Chen’s financial troubles—“There is a debt, a debt that was not paid, but that is all,” but in his description of Chen’s “private personality” which functioned aside his diplomatic duties. Chen had built himself up very rapidly in Europe, “thanks to his sharp intelligence, his swift and complete assimilation to Western customs, his personal charms, his cultivation of French letters, his perfect knowledge of many languages, and also a little to the curiosity badaude that he aroused in us (white barbarians).” With this last assessment, Bryois has captured with great clarity between Chen, the Parisian crowd, and the mass press, during and after his years in Paris.

Bryois would go on to write several more times to the *North China Herald*, each time citing at length a letter from Chen Jitong, who complained also of jealousy on the part of Xue, reemphasized that he had incurred personal debts in the process of negotiating the very large government-authorized loan, and dismissed all rumors of having fallen into financial trouble do to a salacious and profligate lifestyle. He was not so much a victim of the Moulin-Rouge, quipped Chen, as that of a “diplomatic comedy.” Chen’s letters, written from Tianjin, were meanwhile also forwarded to and printed in French papers. Before this, a flustered Xue Fucheng had angrily telegraphed Li Hongzhang to complain, but Xue could do no more than to write the Paris papers himself with a formal declaration of Chen’s faults. Perhaps unwilling to face the pressure of the French public opinion,

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558 “Tcheng-Ki-Tong,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 31 December 1891. Bryois does cite a credible source, for the director of Li Hongzhang’s military academy at this time was indeed Lian Fang 聯芳 (1835-?), a graduate of the Tongwen Guan and a onetime interpreter and colleague of Chen’s at the Qing legation in Paris.
559 *The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 25 March 1892.
560 *Le Gaulois*, 11 February 1892; *Le Matin*, 24 April 1892.
561 *Le Matin*, 1 May 1891 and 6 January 1892.
he stayed away from the press after that, and thus allowed Chen and his journalist sympathizers to have the last word.\textsuperscript{562}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Personal rivalries and financial scandals were not unprecedented among late Qing representatives to Europe. In the 1870s, Guo Songtao, the first Chinese ambassador to Europe, had engaged in a high-profile dispute with his colleague Liu Xihong 劉錫鴻. Liu, known for his conservative stance, had memorialized and attacked Guo for a myriad of missteps including putting on a Western coat over his Qing official robes, reading a foreign music score, and having his wife dine at the same table as foreigners. In return, Guo complained about Liu’s intractable and disruptive behavior and mismanagement of embassy funds.\textsuperscript{563} This overblown personal rivalry, which resulted in both envoys being recalled, also extended into a public conflict between Guo Songtao and the Shen Bao, when Guo perceived a mocking article in the Shanghai newspaper to be a veiled attack on him directed by Liu.\textsuperscript{564} Just a few years later, Li Fengbao, Liu Xihong’s replacement as Qing ambassador to Germany and therefore Chen Jitong’s direct superior during his time in Berlin, was accused of embezzling as much as 600,000 taels during his assignment purchasing warships for Li Hongzhang’s Beiyang fleet. While, as some Chinese scholars have recently shown, these accusations were not founded as much on solid figures as on

\textsuperscript{562} Li Huachuan, \textit{Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng}, 41.
\textsuperscript{563} For a narrative of this conflict, see Wong Young-tsu, \textit{Zouxiang shijie de cuozhe: Guo Songtao yu Dao-Xian-Tong-Guang shidai}, 242-264.
political opposition against Li Hongzhang, the dismissal of Li Fengbao could have only raised sensitivity to possible corruption among Qing diplomats.\footnote{Li Xisuo 李喜所 and Jia Jingjing 贾菁菁, “Li Fengbao tanwuan kaoxi 李凤苞贪污案考析,” Lishi yanjiu 历史研究 5 (2010): 178-188.}

It might be easy, based on such cases as that of Li Fengbao, to read into Chen Jitong’s recall the same conventional conflict between conservative Qing officials and diplomats and those with Westernizing tendencies and to attribute his “disgrace” to his being associated with Li Hongzhang’s railroad building project.\footnote{Li Huachuan, Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng, 43-44.} However, Xue Fucheng was not Liu Xihong. As discussed above, he had been a strong and influential proponent of industrial and technological borrowings from the West and had been kept in the loop about the load negotiations for the Guandong railroad. Could it be true, then, as both Chen’s French friends and contemporary Fuzhou biographers insinuate, that Xue and others were jealous of Chen’s exposure in Europe? This is also difficult to tell. Xue’s diplomatic diary certainly does not reveal any personal resentment toward Chen. What is certain is that by 1891, Chen Jitong had become a public relations nightmare for the Chinese legation in Paris and London. If he did not show any signs of envy, Xue did not hide from Li Hongzhang his frustration with having to deal with both creditors and the mass press when it came to Chen Jitong. It was probably much easier, to send him back to the Zongli Yamen and Li Hongzhang.

Ultimately, however, sorting out the details and explaining Chen’s departure from France might not be as interesting as examining the significance of his public life in Paris. Sure enough, there was much intense commentary, in the wake of his dismissal, on financial affairs or womanizing, fuelled by late nineteenth-century French preoccupations
with public scandals and decadent behavior and a mass press that catered to those tastes.\textsuperscript{567} Yet while the intrigue of the personal debts and the railroad loan – still more the difficult-to-verify gossip of a dandy lifestyle – is suggestive of the mutually constructive relationship between Chen Jitong’s public persona and the fin-de-siècle mass press, this last episode also overshadows the less sensational aspects of self-fashioning that Chen did pursue throughout the 1880s. For during this time, Chen used the opportunities to publish in the press and to give speeches at learned societies and conferences both to escape the routinized functions of the diplomat and to construct, as his friend Bryois called it, his “personal culture.” This seemed to have comprised of two elements above all – a self-image as a bicultural man of letters and a reputation as a charismatic public speaker.

While it is easy to discern Chen’s pride and confidence as a French writer, it was actually the status of a Chinese literatus – “lettré chinois” was the term Chen used again and again in his speeches and writings – that Chen seemed to covet. Having graduated from the unconventional program of the Navy Yard rather than attaining a civil examination degree, Chen, like some of his Fuzhou peers with literary or intellectual aspirations, had limited possibilities in attaining the traditional status of the scholar-official.\textsuperscript{568} Being employed as a military attaché would not have helped to alleviate that sense of alienation. Even some of his contemporaries recognized Chen’s frustration. Zhang Yinhuan 張蔭桓 (1837-1900), the Qing envoy to the United States, Spain and Peru in the late 1880s and later Zongli Yamen minister who famously patronized Kang Youwei

\textsuperscript{567} On the various scandals in fin-de-siècle France, see Frederick Brown, \textit{For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); see also Eugen Weber, \textit{France, Fin de Siècle}, 9-26.

\textsuperscript{568} For an account of Yan Fu’s frustrations around the same period, see Huang Kewu, \textit{Weishi zhi an: Yan Fu yu jindai Zhongguo de wenhua zhuaxing 惟適之安: 嚴復與近代中國的文化轉型} (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012.), 56-92.
during the One Hundred Days Reforms, passed through Paris twice during his years abroad and seemed to have developed a close relationship to Chen Jitong. Not only did Chen serve as a gracious host and take Zhang to see the Louvre, the zoo, and even a skating show, but the two also exchanged poetry, a gesture that is revealing of Chen’s attachment to the traditional forms of sociability among would-be literati. On two separate occasions in 1887 and 1889, Zhang Yinhuan commented on his friend’s position his Diary of Three Continents (Sanzhou riji 三洲日記, 1896). “Chen Jingru,” he wrote wistfully, “was a man of letters occupying an officer’s post, employed against his talents” (wenren er jiu wuzhi, yong wei qicai 文人而就武職，用違其才).

The opportunity to publish and to be accepted as a writer, then, was something that in a way fulfilled the literati aspirations for Chen Jitong, even if it meant writing in a foreign language (though, by 1890, he had studied and used French for over twenty years). Yet with linguistic prowess and a growing reputation, Chen also found himself being invited to pronounce on China in different public venues, the majority of which comprised of learned societies and international congresses. Using these occasions to perform his identity as a cosmopolitan orator, Chen developed a confident yet reconciliatory rhetoric consistent with his literary representations of China. In Chen’s descriptions and speeches, Chinese culture was steeped in tradition, moral yet pragmatic, but also humanistic and poetic, and therefore open to understanding by Westerners, as long as the dialogue was

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570 Zhang Yinhuan 張蔭桓, Zhang Yinhuan riji 張蔭桓日記, ed. Ren Qing and Ma Zhongwen (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2004), 193, 398.
carried out in a civilized manner, such as the translations and exchange of literature and poetry by Antonio Feijo and Judith Gautier.

Chen Jitong’s experiences as a conférencier at the international congresses in Paris also reveal a longer and more complex history of modern Chinese public speechmaking and of China’s participation in world’s fairs. In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century China, public oratory was perceived to be an emblem of modern civic culture. Many Chinese elites during that period understood speechmaking to be a key practice to promoting new knowledge and molding public consciousness, a practice that was equal in important to the creation of newspapers, the translation of foreign books, and the building of new-style schools.571 Liang Qichao, the most prominent reformer of the late Qing period, who had once declared public speaking (along with schools and newspapers) as one of “the three sharp tools of transmitting civilization” (chuanbo wenming san liqi 傳播文明三利器), famously opened his 1902 utopian novel, The Future of New China (Xin Zhongguo weilai ji 新中國未來記) with a public lecture. In the year 2062, a world expo is held in Shanghai. Amid a throng of merchants, famous scholars, and students from all over the world, a former overseas student and founder of the new Chinese Republic named Kong Juemin 孔覺民 (Kong/Confucius the enlightener of the people), gives a widely heard speech accounting for China’s modern history. Kong’s oratory is emblematic of the

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cosmopolitan aspirations of a generation of turn-of-the-century Chinese elites who sought to make a place for China in the international order of modern nation-states.\textsuperscript{572}

The fictional Kong had a real life counterpart in Chen Jitong, who took to the world stage more than a decade before Liang wrote his story. Studies of China’s participation in worlds’ fairs have conventionally passed over the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle because the Qing did not officially participate in the event, while most scholarship on the exposition itself usually comment on its exhibition of late nineteenth-century French colonialism through ethnographic displays of the exotic orient.\textsuperscript{573} The story of Chen Jitong, a non-official representative of the non-European yet sovereign Qing empire who used the Exposition to bolster not only the image of his country but his own position as a transnational cultural celebrity, suggests a more complicated picture. In Chen’s case, his self-identification and confidence as both a Chinese literatus and an expert on Western affairs allowed him to construct for himself a public persona first as a \textit{lettré} (a word that he repeatedly used in his writings to refer to the scholar-gentry class), a man of letters in the French literary sphere, and then as a \textit{conférencier}, a captivating public speaker on the international stage. In the absence any official representation for China at the 1889 exposition, Chen Jitong’s cosmopolitan performance as a speaker constituted a remarkable discursive and \textit{vocal} presence of not only the Qing empire in an international setting, but also of a genuine literati sensibility at work in making a case for the continued viability of


Chinese culture and civilization in the modern world. Not yet burdened by an overwhelming sense of Qing China’s inevitable collapse as a result of Western and Japanese encroachment, and buoyed by the enthusiastic reception he himself attained in Paris, Chen developed a great amount of optimism in international cooperation, a self-confidence and idealistic outlook that would be repeatedly tested during the crisis-ridden final decades of the Qing.
Chapter 4
Homecoming

In March 1907, shortly after Chen Jitong’s death and amid a flurry of writings in the Parisian newspapers recalling Chen’s vivacious personality and fame during his years in Europe, one French journal of Asian affairs published an article titled “The Formosa Republic, A Little Known Episode in the Life of General Tcheng-Ki-Tong.” Explaining that none of the numerous posthumous recollections being published in the press concerned Chen’s career after his departure from Paris, the essay goes on to briefly tell the story of an independent Republic that had been established in Taiwan in May 1895 after the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and how Chen Jitong had been involved, as its foreign minister.574 As a “corrective” to the recirculation of stories about the flamboyant diplomat, this anecdote hints that Chen’s life had taken interesting turns his return to China. How did Chen Jitong end up in Taiwan? What was his role in the diplomatic negotiations following the Sino-Japanese War? In which ways did he participate in the reform movements in the last decades of the Qing? How did Shanghai and the social networks there facilitate Chen’s reintegration into the late Qing political and cultural scene?

This chapter examines the third and final phase of Chen Jitong’s life (1892-1907). Focusing on the various activities in which Chen Jitong became involved following his return to China, I demonstrate that rather than retiring to the life of a “treaty-port man of letters,” Chen Jitong pursued a number of different social and political projects, including managing public works, mediating conflicts between Chinese and foreigners, participating

in a number of reform proposals, and establishing the first girls’ school in Shanghai. I focus on three cases in particular – an attempt to resuscitate a mine in Guizhou in collaboration with a French syndicate; two memorials Chen Jitong submitted to the throne during the Hundred Days Reform in 1898; and the prominent role Chen played in a relief association established by Jiangnan gentry to rescue refugees from North China during the Boxer debacle of 1900. While bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of business experience hindered Chen Jitong’s ventures in the private sphere, and shifting political winds of the turn-of-the-century limited Chen’s achievements in official postings, Chen did contribute some ideas and energy to the expanding public realm in the late Qing. In Chen Jitong’s experiences on the late Qing scene, we observe some of the senses of opportunity and disappointment, achievement and frustration shared by some of his generation of late Qing literati-reformers with cosmopolitan backgrounds, a theme I will return to in the conclusion. Whenever possible in this chapter, I use Chen Jitong’s classic poetry to demonstrate these experiences and emotions. We begin, first, with Chen’s rehabilitation after being recalled from France.

A Reprieve in Tianjin

Although he had been impeached by the ambassador Xue Fucheng, Chen Jitong benefitted from the protection of his longtime patron, Li Hongzhang. As we have seen, soon upon Chen’s return to China in 1891, Li arranged with the Zongli Yamen to have him transferred to custody in Tianjin, the site of Li’s naval yamen. Over the next year, Chen’s family and friends scrambled to gather funds to repay Chen’s personal debts. In the end, it was Moritz Landauer, the Austrian merchant with whom Chen had attempted to procure
the railroad loan, who stepped in to help clear Chen’s debts with his Parisian creditors. Soon after, Li petitioned to have Chen’s original title of expectant colonel (buyong fujiang 補用副將) with the brigadier-general rank and peacock feather (hualing zongbing xian 花翎總兵銜) reinstated. In his memorial, Li made the case that Chen, with his many years of diplomatic experience and deep familiarity with the French language, was really a rare talent (buke duode zhicai 不可多得之才) among the foreign affairs personnel.⁵⁷⁵ Thus Chen was restored and incorporated into Li Hongzhang’s mufu in Tianjin. By August 1893, Chen was handling consular inquiries for Li and carrying a visiting card that read, in French, “General Tcheng Ki-Tong, Foreign Affairs attaché of the Viceroy.”⁵⁷⁶

Emerging from his recent disgrace and seeking a new niche back in China, Chen Jitong would have found Tianjin, where many of his former Fuzhou Navy Yard classmates were now employed in Li Hongzhang’s staff, to be a comfortably familiar environment. As a member of the circle of junior officials who surrounded Li, Chen had the chance to build connections with both old friends and new acquaintances. This social networking, no doubt important for someone who had been away from China for a decade and half, would have been further enabled by the numerous Fuzhou natives Chen encountered in Tianjin.

Since 1870, as the governor-general of Zhili province and the superintendent of trade for the Northern Ports, Li Hongzhang had built for himself a solid power base, a strong component of which was the new Beiyang Navy (beiyang shuishi 北洋水師). Officially established in 1888, this northern fleet comprised over thirty-six ships and four

⁵⁷⁶ North China Herald, 4 August 1893.
thousand crew members and officers, equaling in numbers the Japanese navy, which in Li’s eyes posed a great threat to the Qing. The prize battleships of the Beiyang Navy were the Zhenyuan 鎮遠 and Dingyuan 定遠, two 7,000-ton iron-clads purchased from the Vulcan shipyard in Germany. In 1884, Chen Jitong had gone to Stettin to help inspect these warships, then still under construction. In Tianjin in 1891, he would have found these ships to be commanded by the captains Liu Buchan 劉步蟾 (1852-1895) and Lin Taizeng 林泰曾 (1851-1894), both of whom were Houguan natives (Lin was a grandnephew of Lin Zexu) and had graduated in the same class as Chen from the Fuzhou Navy Yard. In fact, Liu and Lin had, along with Chen, been among the five students who accompanied Prosper Giquel to Europe on his investigative trip in 1875. That they now occupied key posts as superior officers in Li Hongzhang’s navy is further evidence of the degree to which Li Hongzhang favored the first class of Fuzhou students he had himself sent to Europe. Overall, Fuzhou Navy Yard graduates accounted for over 42 per cent of the Beiyang fleet’s core.

Another Fuzhou alumnus Chen Jitong would have reunited with at this time was Yan Fu, who had been time serving as the superintendent of the Beiyang Naval Academy (beiyang shuishi xuetang 北洋水師學堂), leading classes in English. Partly because he

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578 It is possible, however, that Li’s blind confidence in his protégés might have prevented him from selecting more capable officers for his fleet; see Ma Youyuan 馬幼垣, “Liu Buchan he Dongxiang pingbalang: Zhong-Ri haijun liang zhujiang bijiao yanju situ 劉步蟾和東鄉平八郎: 中日海軍兩主將比較研究四體 in idem, Jinghai chengjiang: Zhongguo jindai haijun shishi xinquan 靖海澄江: 中國近代海軍史事新詮, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 47-87.

579 Wang, Li Hongzhang yu Beiyang jiandui, 317.
had been engaged in an educational role and not handling naval or diplomatic affairs and partly because he had been struggling to pass the civil examinations, Yan had grown increasingly frustrated with his position in Tianjin. Yet it was also during this period (1880s-early 1890s) that Yan undertook intense study to brush up his classical Chinese learning and to read deeply in Western books, including Thomas Huxley’s 1893 *Evolution and Ethics*. In just a few years, Yan’s translation of this text would initiate an intellectual revolution in the late Qing.

Chen Jitong knew Yan Fu, of course, from their days in Fuzhou and in Europe, but there is no record of the two having close relations during this period in Tianjin. Valued by the pragmatic Li Hongzhang for his foreign affairs experience, Chen seems to have been closer to fellow Fuzhou native and classmate Luo Fenglu, who had previously distinguished himself as an interpreter for the educational mission to Europe and was now Li Hongzhang’s right-hand man as managing circuit-intendant of the Beiyang fleet. Luo, along with Ma Jianzhong and Chen Jitong, were the three of the most trusted “returned students” in Li Hongzhang’s mufu during the 1880s and 1890s. All three had been assigned to special positions in the initial European education mission of 1877. While Luo and Ma returned to China early and played important roles in helping Li negotiate treaties in Korean crisis of 1882 and the Sino-French war, Chen Jitong had always been their counterpart on the other end of the telegraph line. In Luo, who was now one of the most

\[580\] In an 1894 letter to his brother, Yan compared serving in the Beiyang Naval Academy to “chewing wax” and revealed that he had attempted to transfer to work for Li’s sometime rival Zhang Zhidong; see Max Ko-wu Huang, *Weishi zhi an: Yan Fu yu jindai Zhongguo de wenhua zhuanye* 惟適之安: 嚴復與近代中國的文化轉型 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 56-92.

\[581\] Another figure who advised Li in foreign affairs was the legal expert Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842-1922), who had received his early education in Hong Kong and London, before being recruited by Li Hongzhang in 1882. While Wu certainly served important roles as a diplomat in the late Qing and early Republic, he had not been groomed by Li Hongzhang, unlike Chen, Luo, and Ma. On the “returned students” in Li’s mufu, see Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ch’ing Period*
influential figures in the Beiyang administration, Chen would have found a supportive friend as he emerged out of his initial confinement and financial troubles.

It was at Luo Fenglu’s residence that Chen met the French-American journalist Amédée Baillot de Guerville (1869-1913), whose memoirs present a colorful snapshot of Chen Jitong in this period. Visiting Tianjin in 1892 as the honorary commissioner for the following year’s World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, de Guerville had brought with him a McIntosh Magic Lantern to show slides of world’s fairs in an effort to persuade Li Hongzhang to endorse Qing participation in the 1893 exposition. Invited to exhibit his pictures at Luo Fenglu’s home, de Guerville encountered “a Chinese man dressed in the European style,” who “veritably threw himself upon me with the greatest enthusiasm,” eager to chat, “in most excellent French,” about all things Parisian. While showing slides of the 1889 exposition in Paris, something remarkable happened:

“Hardly had these last images appeared than violent and shaking sobs broke out across the darkened salon. Intrigued, I pointed my desk lamp (which was arranged so as to illuminate only my notes) towards the source of the outbreak and I noticed, seated next to the Chinese man who had recently spoken to me in French, a young and charming European woman bawling her eyes out. A few moments later this Chinese Parisian escorted the lady from the salon. I never saw either of them again.”

After some inquiries, de Guerville was able to gather that he had indeed met the famous “general Tchen-Ki-Tung,” who, despite having gotten into trouble with the Qing government, was now staying in the “comfortable and luxurious home of his friend the naval minister” and, despite having brought back a legitimate French wife, was accompanied by another “little lady who had followed him all the way from Paris.”

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Aside from attesting to the fact that Chen Jitong had indeed settled into life among the Beiyang officials in Tianjin, de Guerville’s story foreshadows what would become a famous part of Chen’s reputation: that he had carried on romantic relationships with two Western women. This is in accord with Chen’s biography in the Fujian and Fuzhou gazetteers, which records that in addition to the French lady Lai (Laishi 赖氏, Marie Adèle Lardanchet), there had been a woman scholar “Dishuang” 菊爽, who, entranced by Chen’s talents, had followed him back to China.\textsuperscript{583} Although writers and contemporaries differed on the details, Chen’s relationship with two foreign ladies would be widely circulated, and, as we shall see, dramatized in both late Qing fiction and the Shanghai press.\textsuperscript{584} Yet this focus on Chen’s reputed amorous affairs, like the French newspapers’ interest in Chen’s supposed dandyish ways, diverts attention from Chen’s activities as a recently restored expectant official.

In addition to assisting Li Hongzhang with foreign affairs, Chen also took on, during his few years in Tianjin, a variety of tasks such as the overseeing the repairs of a dike on the Yongding River (Yongding he 永定河), a historically troublesome waterway near Beijing, helping to apprehend a Japanese spy in Tianjin, inspecting the construction of docks in Port Arthur and Weihaiwei, and negotiating a new loan with the Austrian banker Landauer, an effort that again fell through due to some last minute complications.\textsuperscript{585}

\textit{in Japan, Korea, and China, 1892-1894}, translated by Daniel C. Kane (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2009), 88-89. De Guerville was so fascinated by Chen Jitong that he published a translation of one of Chen’s essays on Chinese women. See “Woman’s Love in China” [by General Tcheng-Ki-Tong, reviewed and translated by A. B. de Guerville], \textit{The Illustrated American}, 26 February 1898.

\textsuperscript{583} Fujian tongzhi, 39:72a-b; Minhou xianzhi, 69:39b.

\textsuperscript{584} While de Guerville thought, incorrectly, that Chen’s original French wife [Lardanchet] had been repatriated when she could not see Chen in Tianjin, Chen’s gazetteer biography claims that it was the second woman, “Dishuang,” who left China, taking with her a sun born to the couple.

\textsuperscript{585} On Chen’s work on the dike repair project, see “Yongding he shiba jungong zhe” 永定河石坝竣工折, in \textit{Li Hongzhang quanji}, vol. 15, 374. On Chen’s role in counter-espionage activities in Tianjin, see Qi
All of these were short-term assignments or personal initiatives through which Chen gradually reinserted himself into the self-strengthening circle around Li Hongzhang. Just as he was becoming more comfortable in the Beiyang administration, however, the Sino-Japanese war broke out, leading to a dramatic shift in Chen’s career.

“Heart and Soul” of the Taiwan Republic

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 was a watershed event in modern Chinese history. Precipitated by Qing and Japan struggles to influence domestic politics in Korea, the military and naval confrontation lasted between August 1894 and April 1895. While Li Hongzhang had built up the Beiyang Navy in preparation for just such a conflict with Japan, the fleet’s performance was hindered by poor strategic coordination, strained funding (diverted into support for both frontier defense in the Northwest and, reportedly, for the Empress Dowager’s imperial gardens), and, just as in the Sino-French conflict a decade earlier, lack of support from other Qing regional forces. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed on April 17, 1895, not only subjected the Qing to an enormous indemnity but also to full-fledged Japanese and Western imperialism in the form of industrial operations within China and the severing of the Liaodong peninsula, which was only returned to China after the so-called “Triple Intervention” on the part of Russia, France, and Germany and the cessation to Japan of Taiwan and the Pescadores islands.586

Chen Jitong and his peers, many of whom participated in the diplomatic negotiations and the actual battles, would have felt keenly the severity of the war, one result of which was the routing of the Beiyang Navy. Since Fuzhou Navy Yard graduates accounted for a disproportionately large contingent of the Beiyang fleet, their losses were also the heaviest. In November, following the loss of Port Arthur, Lin Taizeng, commander of the iron-clad Zhenyuan, committed suicide after his ship was damaged in an accident upon retreating to the Weihaiwei harbor.  

Three months later, Liu Buchan also took his own life after another round of naval losses. Of the four fellow Fuzhou graduates who had first gone abroad with Chen twenty years earlier, two had perished in this war, along with thousands of other Beiyang crew and Qing soldiers.

On March 14, 1895, Li Hongzhang embarked for Japan to conduct peace negotiations, taking with him Luo Fenglu, Ma Jianzhong, and Wu Tingfang as his advisers. Chen Jitong was conspicuously missing from this list of foreign affairs experts, for he would soon leave Tianjin for Shanghai, en route to Taiwan. He had apparently been called to Taiwan by the governor Tang Jingsong 唐景崧 (1841-1903), who had been trying to recruit mainland advisors to the island to help him deal with foreign relations as the threat of Japanese invasion of Taiwan increased. A jinshi scholar and native of Guangxi, Tang Jingsong was known for having volunteered, during the Sino-French conflict, to go to Annam to persuade the Black Flag commander Liu Yongfu to attack the
French on behalf of the Qing. With his military experience and a literary reputation – he liked to host poetry gatherings in the governor’s office – Tang was initially admired by younger scholars like Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864-1912), a Hakka poet and gentry leader from Zhanghua 彰化 in mid-Taiwan.592 Taking over as governor in 1894, Tang inherited a Taiwan that had been considerably modernized, especially under the watch of Liu Mingchuan 劉銘傳 (1836-1896), the first Qing governor of the island since it officially became a province in 1887. In a series of administrative and economic reforms, Liu had overseen the establishment of industrial bureaus, a postal system and telegraph line between north and south Taiwan, as well as the construction of a railroad. In the decade between the Sino-French and the Sino-Japanese wars, Taiwan had become both more integrated into the Qing state and more appealing to foreign empires, including Japan.593

When the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed on April 17, it included the cession of Taiwan and the Pescadores (Penghu 澎湖) islands to Japan. While Russia, Germany, and France jointly prevented Japan from taking over the Liaodong Peninsula in the northeast, in the so-called “Triple Intervention,” the European countries, especially the British, declined to become involved in preventing the cession of Taiwan.594 In Nanjing, Zhang Zhidong, the acting governor-general and Superintendent of the Southern Ports, who had strongly opposed Li Hongzhang’s appeasement policy, continued to try to find ways to

persuade the European powers to intervene. Through private telegram contact with Qing envoys in Britain and Russia, Zhang proposed a number of seemingly desperate measures, including offering mining concessions and even the mortgaging of Taiwan’s territory to the British for a number of years in exchange for military protection. A longtime patron of Tang Jingsong, Zhang also maintained close contact with the Taiwan governor, secretly sending troops and arms from Shanghai and Guangdong for the island’s defense and even discussing with Tang the appropriate terms to use when the Taiwan Republic was finally declared on May 23.

In addition to Zhang’s efforts, appeals on the part of Taiwan gentry also encouraged Tang Jingsong to remain on the island, in spite of a court edict on May 20 recalling all officials to the mainland. Among the Taiwan gentry, there had apparently already been discussion of forming an independent state. On May 16, a group of prominent Taiwan gentry sent a petition via telegram to the Qing court, declaring that since Taiwan had been abandoned by the Qing court, they had no choice but to “defend ourselves to the death as an island-state.” Led by the prominent local leader Qiu Fengjia, they held repeated meetings over the next two weeks with Tang and his small group of advisers, which now included Chen Jitong, who had just arrived in Taiwan. Finally, on May 25, the Taiwan Republic (Taiwan minzhuguo 臺灣民主國) was formally inaugurated, in a procession which showed off all of its symbolic paraphernalia, including a golden tiger flag and a seal.

596 Zhang advised Tang not to use the title “president” in any declarations, as it would displease the Qing court. Tang replied that it was the only way to gain recognition from the Western powers. Zhang Zhidong, Zhang Zhidong quanji, vol. 8, 6382; Woodside, “T’ang Ching-sung and the Rise of the 1895 Taiwan Republic,” 172.
597 “Taiwan shenmin gongbing laidian” 臺灣紳民公禀來電, in Zhang Zhidong quanji, vol. 8, 6372.
for Tang Jingsong, now the President of the Republic.598 A proclamation, translated into
English, was issued:

The Japanese have affronted China by annexing our territory of Formosa, and the
supplications of us, the People of Formosa, at the portals of the Throne have been made in
vain. We now learn that the Japanese slaves are about to arrive.
If we suffer this, the land of our hearths and homes will become the land of
savages and barbarians, but if we do not suffer it, our condition of comparative weakness
will certainly not endure long. Frequent conferences have been held with the Foreign
Powers, who all aver that the People of Formosa must establish their independence before
the Powers will assist them.

Now therefore we, the People of Formosa, are irrevocably resolved to die before
we will serve the enemy. And we have in Council determined to convert the whole island
of Formosa into a Republican State, and that the administration of all our State affairs shall
be organized and carried on by the deliberations and decisions of Officers publicly elected
by us the People. But as in this enterprise there is needed, as well for the resistance of
Japanese aggression as for the organization of the new administration a man to have chief
control, in whom authority shall centre, and by whom the peace of our homesteads shall be
assured—therefore, in view of the respect and admiration in which we have long held the
Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Tang Ching Sung, we have in Council determined to
raise him to the position of President of the Republic…

…A Declaration by the gentry and people of Formosa.599

Contemporary observers and more recent works have noted Chen Jitong’s role in
the founding of the Taiwan Republic. Since he had become Foreign Minister of the new
republic and was known for having spent a good number of years in France, many
immediately assumed that Chen was behind the idea of erecting a Republic. The American
reporter and later consul James Wheeler Davidson (1872-1933), thinking that the
declaration needed “some official well versed in international law and republican forms of
government,” surmised that Chen had actually attended meetings with higher officials in
Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai and had come to Taiwan “with definite orders.”600 The
Japanese politician Takekoshi Yosaburō 竹越與三郎 (1865-1950), in his history of the

598 Harry J. Lamley, “The 1895 Taiwan Republic: A Significant Episode in Modern Chinese History.”
Journal of Asian Studies 27.4 (August 1968): 747-749; Andrew Morris, “The Taiwan Republic of 1895 and
the Failure of the Qing Modernizing Project,” in Stéphane Corcuff, ed., Memories of the Future: National
599 Cited in full in James Wheeler Davidson, The Island of Formosa, Past and Present (London and New
York: Macmillan & Co., 1903), 279-280 and in Hosea Ballou Morse, Letterbooks (1866-1907), letter 1298,
Houghton Library, Harvard University.
600 Davidson, The Island of Formosa, 278-279.
Japanese takeover, went so far as to call Chen Jitong “the heart and soul of the new Republic.” Other accounts have credited Chen as well as the Taiwan gentry, or have argued that it was Qiu Fengjia and Taiwanese leaders who took the initiative. Given the misinformation that flowed among observers and the fact that many correspondence and documents were destroyed when the Taiwan Republic collapsed, it may be impossible to ascertain whether Chen Jitong was the person to suggest the republic as the appropriate political form for the island. As Yuzin Chiautong Ng has pointed out, such an inquiry may be misdirected in any case, as it may very well not have been the same individuals who suggested “self-rule” (zizhu 自主) and the republic (minzhu guo 民主國). Rather than bring a Western political concept to Taiwan, what Chen seems to have been more directly responsible for was extending the hope that the French would intervene on behalf of the island.

As early as May 5, the Qing ambassador in Paris, Gong Zhaoyuan 龔照瑗, had informed Zhang Zhidong that a French warship might be on its way to Taiwan. Interpreting this news as French intent to extent naval protection against Japan, Zhang and Tang Jingsong tried, over the next two weeks, to secure an agreement with France, only to be disappointed in learning that the French had told the Zongli Yamen that they would not intervene. After Chen arrived in Taiwan, however, a French cruiser, the Beaupré, did pass by the island and Chen Jitong visited the ship in Danshui on May 21,

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602 Lian Heng 連横, “Duli ji” 獨立記, *Taiwan tongshi 台灣通史*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), 76.
603 Yuzin Chiautong Ng 黃昭堂, “Taiwan minzhu guo” yanjiu: Taiwan duli yundongshi de yi duanzhang “台灣民主國”研究：台灣獨立運動史的一斷章, translated by Liao Weizhi 廖為智 (Taibei: Qianwei chubanshe, 2005), 118.
604 Zhang Zhidong quanji 章緯東全集, vol. 8, 6365.
bringing with him a letter from Tang Jingsong. The French officers supposedly paid a return visit and, according to Tang’s report to the Zongli Yamen, suggested that outside intervention would only be possible the if officials on the island declared their independence from the Qing.605 This seems to have been in accord with the rationale stated in the official proclamation. Chen Jitong was so convinced of the possibility of French intervention that he soon wired a secret telegram for his family to pass onto Li Jingfang 李经方, Li Hongzhang’s adopted son, who was about to embark on a trip to ratify the Shimonoseki Treaty and officially hand over Taiwan to the Japanese. In the message, he warned Li Jingfang not to come ashore, as he would not be welcomed in a newly independent Taiwan, which would soon receive French protection.606 In the end, however, French assistance never came. Meanwhile, Japanese troops did arrive, landing on the island on May 29, launching an offensive against local resistance forces.607 Disappointed, Chen Jitong described his sense of frustration and helplessness in a poem:

Broken rivers and mountains, like a plundered chessboard;
The children of Chiqian are overwhelmed by sorrow.
With ardent feelings for the court, the palace gatekeeper cries out,
It is too late to turn back the heaven and prevent the change from Xia to yi?
Perhaps it will not be possible for the swords to meet at Yanjin,
Who is to pity the leftover pearl in the vast ocean?
Repeatedly looking out from the Guanyin Peak,
When will the Tricolore arrive?

破碎河山劫後棋，
赤嵌赤子不勝悲。
情殷戀闕閘徒叫，

605 Lamley, “The 1895 Taiwan Republic,” 751; Takekoshi, Japanese Rule in Formosa, 84.
606 “Li Jingfang Shanghai laidian” 李經方上海来电, in Li Hongzhang quanji, vol. 26, 164. Li ended up signing the ratification aboard the Japanese ship Yokohama maru, on June 2; see Gordon, Confrontation over Taiwan, 200.
Unlike the Jin period story of the magical reunion of the precious swords Longquan and Tai’è at Yanjin, Chen would not again see the French in Taiwan. He had no choice but to witness the island being turned over to rule by the barbarian (yi) Japanese.

The Taiwan Republic, as it was set up in Taibei, lasted only for eleven days. With a resistance effort hindered by a lack of central authority, the localized war against Japan did not last long. While Liu Yongfu would head another provisional government in Tainan and hold out for several more months, the officials who were originally from the mainland decided to leave the island on June 5. Even on that day, things turned ugly, as a group of local soldiers stationed at the Tamsui harbor all but declared a mutiny and refused to let go of the German steamer Arthur, which carried Tang Jingsong and other Qing personnel. Angry because they thought that Tang was abandoning them and taking away all the silver, they went so far as to wire mines to the ship and threatened to blow everything up. In order to negotiate a safe passage, Chen Jitong sought the help of Hosea Ballou Morse (1855-1934), the Chinese Maritimes Customs officer and later historian who was at this time Customs Commissioner at Tamsui. Morse paid off the rebellious soldiers and saw the Arthur on its way back to the mainland, but not before a memorable exchange with Chen

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608 “Taibei dai Faguo bingchuan buzhi” 臺北待法國兵船不至, in Chen Jitong, Xue Jia Yin 學賈吟, 150.
609 This story comes from the biography of Zhang Hua; see “Zhang Hua zhuan” 張華傳, in Jin shu 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1075.
610 For a detailed narrative of the resistance effort in Taiwan, see Lamley, “The 1895 Taiwan War of Resistance: Local Chinese Efforts against a Foreign Power” and idem, “A Short-lived Republic and War, 1895: Taiwan’s Resistance Against Japan,” in Paul K. T. Sih, ed., Taiwan in Modern Times (New York: St. John’s University Press, 1973), 241-316.
Jitong took place. As Morse recalled, “On our way down to the Customs House General Tcheng amused me by ejaculating ‘Peut-on croire que telles choses sont possibles dans un pays civilisé?’ [Would you believe that such things were possible in a civilized country?]” The civilization had not been so apparent to me as to him.”\(^{611}\) Morse’s comments reflect his view that the republic never really stood a chance. For Chen Jitong, however, the loss of Taiwan to invading foreigners was indeed a civilizational catastrophe. In the poem “Reading the Song of Everlasting Sorrow in the Yamen at Taipei,” he compared the situation in Taiwan to the fall of Chang’an in the Tang:

Through the remote and ethereal immortal mountains on the sea,  
The priest of the great city wanders in his search.  
Reaching up to the green void one is blocked by gathering clouds;  
Looking down at Chang’an, the fog has already thickened.  
The pledge to meet on the seventh day of the seventh month is still in one’s ear;  
Heartbroken because the six armies would not set forth.  
The Emperor covers his face in helplessness,  
Knowing that blood and tears will wet the emerald quilt.

海上仙山望飄渺,  
鴻都羽士漫相尋。  
上窮碧落雲都障,  
下視長安霧已深。  
七夕有盟猶在耳,  
六軍不發最傷心。  
君王掩面知無奈,  
血淚應沾翡翠衾。\(^{612}\)

Packed with allusions to the imagery in Bai Juyi’s original lament of the tragic parting of the Emperor Xuanzong and his favorite Consort Yang in the aftermath of the An


\(^{612}\) “Taipei yazhai du Changhen’ge” 臺北衙齋讀長恨歌, in *Xue Jia Yin*, 150.
Lushan rebellion, this poem reveals the manner in which Chen Jitong perceived the historical events of his time.\textsuperscript{613} For all the outside observations of his affinity to the West and his familiarity with European political systems, Chen retained for himself a strong attachment to literati ideals, fostered by his immersion in classical history and poetry. Time and again over the next decade, he would use poetry to rationalize and to make sense of the sometimes unrealistic self-strengthening and reform projects he pursued in China. One of these ventures was an attempt to resuscitate an abandoned ironworks site in Guizhou.

\textbf{A Big-bellied Merchant in Guizhou}

Since the beginning of the self-strengthening movement in the 1860s, both coal mining and iron and steel production had been key components on the agenda of leading officials like Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and Zuo Zongtang. On the one hand, they understood that, with incursion of the West, foreigners had set their sights on China’s vast natural resources and were poised to exploit these by gaining rights to Chinese mines. On the other hand, the various self-strengthening enterprises, such as the Fuzhou Navy Yard and the arsenals in Shanghai and Tianjin, also relied on the steady and affordable production of coal, iron, and steel.\textsuperscript{614} Additionally, in the field of iron and steel production, foreign imports had also began threatening the domestic industries. Western observers like the German geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) and British scholar William

\textsuperscript{613} For a comparison, see Stephen Owen’s translation of the poem in \textit{An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911} (W. W. Norton, 1996), 442-447.

H. Shockley both observed that in regions like Shanxi foreign competition had a noticeably adverse effect on domestic iron production. As the need for Chinese experts in mining and ironworks, as well as a renewed domestic industry based on imported Western technology became apparent, self-strengthening officials sent students abroad to study (at least nine Fuzhou Navy Yard students had enrolled at mining schools and iron factories in France and Germany). In the meantime, local officials, like the Guizhou governor Pan Wei 潘霨 (1815-1894), made attempts to establish ironworks within in their jurisdiction.

Pan Wei, a career provincial official from Jiangsu who had also served under Shen Baozhen in defending Taiwan against the Japanese in 1874, was appointed acting governor of Guizhou in 1885. A committed self-strengthenener who saw opportunity in the rich mineral resources in this province, Pan immediately memorialized the government to establish a Guizhou Ironworks and Mining Bureau (Guizhou jiqi kuangwu zongju 貴州機器礦務總局), explaining that this enterprise ironworks would both support the domestic manufacture of navy ships and bring prosperity to the relatively impoverished southwest province. Locating the ironworks close to the iron ores in the town of Qingxi 青溪 in Zhenyuan 鎮遠 county, near the border between Guizhou and Hunan, Pan Wei appointed as its director his brother Pan Lu 潘露 (1827-1890), an expectant circuit intendant who had worked at the arsenals in Shanghai and Nanjing. The brothers then hired three assistants, including Pan Wei’s son Zhijun 潘志俊, who would serve as a secretary under ambassador Liu Ruifen in London in the late 1880s and who may have met Chen Jitong during that

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615 Fang Yibing 方一兵, *Hanyeping gongsi yu Zhongguo jindai gangtie jishu yizhi* 漢冶萍公司與中國近代鋼鐵技術移植 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2010), 16-17.
time, to go to England and purchase equipment from the Teeside Engine Company in Middlesborough. Although it was originally established as an enterprise under the “official supervision, merchant management” (guandu shangban 官督商辦) enterprise, the Qingxi Ironworks had difficulty attracting merchant capital and ended up borrowing from provincial funds and relying on a loan from a French bank. When it finally opened in 1890, the production was beset by problems such as the explosion of its high furnaces and the death of its director, Pan Lu. While a new director, Zeng Yanquan 曾彥銓 took over, the mechanical troubles were never resolved and official loans had also run out. In 1893, the Qingxi Ironworks was shut down.⁶¹⁷

Historians of late Qing industry and technology have come up with various explanations for the failure of the Qingxi Ironworks. Wellington Chan regards this case as an example of the difficulty in sustaining private merchant capital due to bureaucratic control and a reliance on officials loans, while more recently Fang Yibing has emphasized that, in comparison to the contemporary Kamaishi Ironworks in Japan, the Qingxi enterprise suffered from a lack of information or industrial expertise and thus was a failure in technology transfer.⁶¹⁸ A few of studies also mention an intriguing postscript to the

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⁶¹⁸ Chan, Merchants, Mandarins, and Modern Enterprise in Late Ch’ing China, 88; Fang, “Shixi jindai xishi gangtie jishu xiang dongya zhuanyi de kaiduan,” 467-468.
story, in which the Qingxi Ironworks was leased out to an expectant daotai from Shanghai named Chen Mingyuan 陳明遠, who in the name of taking over the mines, actually collaborated with a French firm and used the money to set up a company to mine cinnabar in a neighboring region, never reopening the facilities at Qingxi. What has gone unnoted is a key aspect in this venture: the role played by Chen Jitong.

In a privately published account, Chen Mingyuan (?-1920), a Zhejiang poet who had been a secretary in the Qing legation in Japan, discusses how he met Pan Wei in 1893 in Shanghai, at a dinner with the retired Guizhou governor and the journalist-reformer Wang Tao. After Pan Wei expressed regret about how things turned out in Qingxi, Chen Mingyuan volunteered to attempt to resuscitate the mine. In the winter of 1895, encouraged by Pan’s son and Zeng Yanquan, the second director of the ironworks, Chen Mingyuan committed to take on the task. He soon discussed his plans with Chen Jitong – now living in Shanghai, months after the Taiwan episode – apparently valuing Chen Jitong’s familiarity with Western merchants in China. Chen recommended an Austrian merchant named de Marteau (Daimade 戴瑪德), who was “knowledgeable about mining and capable of raising funds” (mingyu kuangwu, nengji juzi 明於礦務, 能集鉅資). The foreigner requested that a trip be taken to Guizhou to survey the mines before a loan could be procured. After the arrival of mining engineers from Europe the following summer, Chen Jitong and de Marteau departed for Guizhou.

How did Chen Jitong become involved in this project? What role did he envision for himself? Although Chen Jitong’s extant Chinese writings are rare, his poetry collection,

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619 Wu Huiyuan, “Pan Wei yu Guizhou Qingxi tiechang,” 90; Chan, Merchants, Mandarins, and Modern Enterprise in Late Ch’ing China, 88.
620 Chen Mingyuan 陳明遠, Tan Qian 譚黔 (n.p., 1900), 1a-2a.
Xue Jia Yin 學賈吟 (Chantings after Jia), comprised of 354 poems in his calligraphy, does survive. Discovered in 2001 by the literary scholar Qian Nanxiu, these poems, the majority of which were composed during Chen’s trip to southwestern China in 1896, provides a glimpse into his lofty expectations for himself and some information about the unsuccessful venture. They do not, however, tell us much about Émile de Marteau, whose name, transliterated as Daimade 戴瑪德 or Daimatuo 戴瑪陀, actually comes up frequently in late Qing sources as part of official correspondence and contracts. De Marteau was the director of a French Society for the Exploration of Mines in China (Société française d’explorations minières en Chine), known in Chinese as the Huali Company (Huali gongsi 華利公司), with offices in Paris and on the Yangjingbang in Shanghai.

Sometime in 1895 he had gotten to know Chen Jitong, who apparently still owed some money to creditors at this time, and persuaded Chen to help him negotiate mining contracts in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Hanyang, probably in exchange for a stake in the Sino-French companies that would be set up and a commission. Chen does not, however, mention this private motivation in any of his poems, giving an impression that he had set out for Guizhou to fulfill a promise to a friend (Zeng Yanquan), to contribute to China’s self-

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622 “Daimatuo zhi Sheng Xuanhuai wen” 戴瑪陀致盛宣懷文, document 039141, Sheng Xuanhuai Archives, Shanghai Library.
623 De Marteau to director of the Paris Syndicate of Industrial and Public Works in China, letter no. 49, 26 March 1896, Correspondance politique et commercial, 1896-1918, Chine 420. Mines (Chine central Kouei Tcheou, Hou Nan, Hou Pe, Ngan Hoei, Tchekiang, Fou Kien. 1895-1898), Archives de la Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Chen Jitong appears to have continued to accumulate much personal debt in Shanghai. One bank account record in 1901 notes that he owed more than 190 silver foreign dollars. See “光緒二十一年至二十七年周浦怡盛花行結締,” document 053239, Sheng Xuanhuai Archives, Shanghai Library.
strengthening, and to make a new career for himself. These are not false notes, but they do not tell the whole story.

In June 1895, Chen and de Marteau left Shanghai and headed upstream on the Yangzi River for Guizhou. While passing through Hankou, Chen spent a rainy evening in the residence of Wang Yigu 汪一姑, a courtesan from Changsha, but could not fall asleep due to the heat. Perhaps staying awake prompted him to contemplate what he could accomplish by reviving the ironworks at Qingxi. At the end of the poem he wrote that day, Chen expressed a cautious optimism:

Carrying my lute and books I journey afar,
I blindly consign my life to this light raft.

... Continuing on to Hunan and Guizhou,
Perhaps I will reap something in the evening of my life.

攜我琴書汗漫遊,
茫茫身世此輕舟。

... 行行且向湘黔去，
倘許桑榆晚景收。624

Yet heading into the relatively undeveloped southwestern regions was also perceived to be dangerous. Before Chen left Shanghai, family and friends had tried to persuade him not to go on the trip. It was commonly understood that the Hunanese did not like Westerners and thus disaster might befall on them if he travelled there with the foreign engineers.625 Indeed, by Chen Mingyuan’s account, shortly after they entered Guizhou, a local military commander who “did not understand current affairs” (bu’an shishi 不諳時事) sought intervention from the prefect at Guiyang, who brought troops to Qingxi, ready

624 Chen Jitong, “Hankou jishi 漢口即事,” in Xue Jia Yin, 3-4.
625 Chen Jitong, “Huangzhou daoshang” 晃州道上, in Xue Jia Yin, 15.
to make trouble for the Westerners. In response, Chen Jitong explained that the foreign engineers were hired by the previous mine director, Zeng Yanquan, and compared them to doctors that one invited from afar if someone in the family was sick, asking the Guizhou officers whether it would be right to refuse the doctors entry and to insult them. Fortunately, Guiyang prefect Yan Shaoguang 严绍光 was open minded about the matter and the danger of a conflict subsided.626

Upon arrival at Qingxi, Chen Jitong became more determined to resolve the problems at the ironworks:

After wasting funds on tempering and molding, The nine ren [mound] collapsed due to the lapse of one basket [of earth]. The funds no long flow and the fountain is frequently dried up, The mountain spirits laugh and present empty treasures. Just as if one searched for iron everywhere in order to cast a metal file, [Director Zeng] has spent all of his energy in trying to repay a previous kindness. At last heaven will not fail one’s bitter persistence, Please witness the final maturation of this great enterprise.

鑪錘陶冶費經營，
一簣功虧九仞傾。
泉府莫流源屢涸，
山靈應笑寶空呈。
渾如鑄錯頻搜鐵，
為欲酬恩已竭精。
畢竟苦心天不負，
請看大器晚終成。627

Yet while Chen Jitong and de Marteau were soon able to pinpoint the chief problem at the Qingxi ironworks, they had trouble alleviating the situation. Apparently the location of the Qingxi, while close to the local supply of iron ores, was too far away from the nearest

626 Chen Mingyuan, Tan Qian, 2a-b.
627 Chen Jitong, “Dao Qingxi kuangju” 到青溪礦局, in Xue Jia Yin, 15.
source of coal, which was necessary for iron production. The path to the closest source, Wanshui 灣水, was more than 300 li and over mountains roads. The transportation problems raised expenses and again deterred merchant investment. Chen and de Marteau then discovered that a river that had previously been used to ship iron from Qingxi to the port at Hankou passed through Qianyang 黔陽 country in Hunan. However, their proposed alternative plan to produce pig iron using charcoal in Qingxi and then ship it downstream to Qianyang for processing into wrought iron in order to lower costs was never realized due to lack of support from the provincial officials.628 De Marteau continued to attempt to enter into contracts with local mining bureau officials, but ran into opposition in the person of governor-general Zhang Zhidong, who disliked Chen Jitong for his “absurd reputation” stemming from the Paris scandal and feared that de Marteau and his company had eyes on taking Chinese industrial rights and therefore posed a threat to his own ironworks enterprise at Hanyang.629 In the face of challenges posed by the natural environment and official opposition from powerful officials, Chen Jitong was never able to accomplish much as a would-be industrialist, despite declared himself in a poem to be a “Big-bellied Merchant in Guizhou.”630 In spite of the unsuccessful business venture, the rest of the poetry Chen wrote during this trip yields fascinating reflections on Sino-Western relations, foreign affairs in the late Qing, and the nature of humanity. The most representative and rich of these poems was a two-part piece titled “Song of Humans and Demons” (Ren gui yin 人鬼吟), inspired by his observations travelling alongside two French engineers:

The roadside demons compete to catch a glimpse of the devil’s cart,

628 Chen Mingyuan, Tan Qian, 2b-3a; see also Xia Dongyuan, Yangwu yundong shi, 286.
630 Chen Jitong, “Yuzhong yin” 與中吟, in Xue Jia Yin, 47.
The heads and faces of the demons and devils roar with laughter. 
Since ancient times markets have gathered at midday. 
Today, all under heaven are already one family. 
Why should it be strange that demons appear to be just like humans? 
When humans seem like demons they are most capable of enduring laments. 
Along the shore of the Zangke river in the Luodian kingdom, 
I travel between two devils and amidst a crowd of clamoring demons.

路鬼爭看載鬼車，
鬼頭鬼臉笑哈哈。
日中自古為市，
天下而今已一家。
鬼亦猶人何足怪，
人如似鬼最堪嗟。
牂牁江畔羅甸國，
二鬼間行眾鬼嘩。631

As Xiaofei Tian has pointed out, Chinese travel writers and diplomats in the nineteenth century persistently used poetry as a form of rhetorical device to come to terms with the foreign. They employed the Buddhist vocabulary of “heaven and hell” and such images of *gui* 鬼, or “demons, ghouls, or devils,” to portray foreign lands and peoples as somehow subhuman or non-human.632 In the nineteenth century, many Han Chinese writers and officials still considered the southwestern frontiers, with its many ethnic groups, to be relatively undeveloped and primitive.633 Thus Chen could, in a half-serious, half-joking manner, describe both the Westerners and the local onlookers as *gui*. Yet the poem was ultimately about the transcendence of these categories. As Chen writes:

Having lived half of my life next to demons, 
It is difficult to distinguish between humans and demons at critical moments. 
If demons have souls they can be employed,

631 Chen Jitong, “Ren gui yin” 人鬼吟, in *Xue Jia Yin*, 100-101. 
633 On the incorporation of Guizhou into the Qing empire, see John E. Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China’s Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).
But how can one be close to humans who are unfaithful?
Having travelled throughout the demonic kingdoms in China and the West,
I have frequently experienced the fickleness of human relationships.
Don’t blame the demon when one brings ridicule upon oneself,
When one looks down from above there are no humans.

生平半與鬼為鄰，
人鬼關頭辨不真。
鬼若有靈都可使，
人而無信豈能親。
中西鬼國遊常遍，
冷暖人情閱已頻。
自取揶揄休怪鬼，
室教來瞰是無人。634

Having spent a decade and a half in Europe and married a Western woman, Chen has realized that cultural differences can be exaggerated and that personal accountability was the most important factor in relationships. Perhaps frustrated by the difficulties he had with some Chinese officials and perhaps also condemning blind anti-foreignism on the part of the Chinese, Chen suggests that self-examination is more important than blaming outsiders for the Qing’s problems. Although this poem is marked by an ironic and complaining voice, it also evokes author’s cosmopolitan outlook. After all, if no one was human and everyone – the French, the Han Chinese, and the ethnic peoples of Guizhou – were “demons,” then everyone was the same.

On other occasions, however, Chen’s optimism that “all under heaven are now one family” disappears as he worries about the Westerners’ actions in China. He expressed his concerns in a poem composed after encountering three other French travelers from the Lyon Mission for Commercial Exploration in China:

Encountering each other unexpectedly in the land of demons,
Recognizing fellow natives through strange tongues and strange clothes;

634 Chen Jitong, “Ren gui yin,” 100-101.
Talking excitedly of home they cannot run out of things to say,  
As they finish together a bottle of wine.  
In the straw hut hats and formal rituals are neglected,  
They have long roads ahead after going their separate ways.  
With so many foreigners coming and going in competition with one another,  
Who is to teach China self-strengthening?

無意相逢在鬼方,  
異言異服認同鄉。  
欣談桑梓言難罄  
對飲葡萄酒一觴。  
茅屋免冠儀禮肅,  
萍踪分手路途長。  
往來如織爭遊歷,  
孰為中華講自強?  

Although Chen Jitong was able to empathize with the excitement of the French visitors and no doubt had his share of the celebrator libations, he could not help but express some apprehension about the increasing number of foreigners running around China looking for potential commercial opportunities. The years after the Sino-Japanese war saw the outbreak of a true “scramble for concessions,” with European powers angling for spheres of influence in various regions. In the southwestern provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan, the French and British competed to gain control over Chinese mines and railroads. De Marteau, for instance, would go on to sign oil and mining contracts in Sichuan. As Chen Jitong’s experience in Taiwan and Guizhou, and the final line in the

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above poem, suggests, the atmosphere of Sino-foreign cooperation that pervaded the self-strengthening era was over. As imperial competition intensified and an urgent sense of crisis spread throughout the country, Chinese elites would develop a new reform agenda. Over the next several years, Chen Jitong would experience these various movements in the treaty-port city of Shanghai.

**Fragrant Sedans and Flowered Beauties**

In the late Qing novel *Niehai hua* (Flower in a Sea of Retribution) the protagonist Fu Caiyun 傅彩雲, a courtesan who had become concubine to a well-known Chinese diplomat and travelled the world with him, has relocated to Shanghai following her husband’s death, around the time of the Shimonoseki negotiations. Living in a house near the Yu Garden on Bubbling Well Road, Caiyun’s curiosity is piqued one day by a boisterous banquet next door. Taking an interest in her neighbors, Caiyun finds the head of the household to be a handsome Chinese man whose generous features made him seem like a “wealthy gentry” and the wife to be an attractive Western lady, who was fond of wearing a Chinese costume whenever she ventured outside. Guests who arrived at their large garden that evening included several of the most famous courtesans and cosmopolitan officials in Shanghai. Caiyun eventually learns that her neighbor is a talented former graduate of the Fujian Navy named Chen Jidong 陳驥東, who had led an untrammeled and romantic lifestyle (titang buqun 倜儻不羣) while studying in France. A French student named Florence (Folunxi 佛倫西) had fallen in love with Chen and became his wife. As a rising star in the Beiyang Navy, Chen Jidong was entrusted by Li Hongzhang with the task of purchasing a warship from London. However, although he held a martial post,
Chen had the arrogant and free-spirited personality of a man of letters. A celebrated author of novels and plays in Paris, he used all of the 300,000 taels Li gave him in Parisian and London society and wrote a book to promote Chinese culture. As a result, another woman – an English lady named Marta (Made 瑪德) – followed him to Shanghai. Chen Jidong carried on separate relationships with both Western women, keeping houses in two disparate locations. Yet when his French wife finally found out about his secret affair with the English mistress, a loud confrontation ensued, in which Florence pulled out two Browning pistols and challenged Marta to a duel. Caught between his two lovers, Chen had no choice but to ask the other Western-educated Chinese officials in Shanghai to help him adjudicate the affair.638

_Niehai hua_, a thinly disguised roman-à-clef which satirized many of the political events in the last decades of the Qing, was first published in 1905.639 As we have seen, its author, Zeng Pu, was a _juren_ degree-holder from Changshu 常熟 who had initially aspired to a diplomatic career but was disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm for studying foreign languages he found in Beijing. Moving to Shanghai, his life took a defining turn when he met Chen Jitong in 1898 at a farewell dinner for two young reformers – Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898) and Fuzhou native Lin Xu 林旭 (1875-1898) – who were about to embark

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638 Zeng Pu 曾樸, _Niehai hua_ 蠟海棠 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980): 304-315. Emma Teng has recently pointed out that an 1892 account in the illustrated _Dianshizhai Pictorial_ also poked fun at a merchant from Nanjing who lived with two Western wives and suspects that it may be a satire of Chen’s relationships; see Emma Jinhua Teng, _Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842-1943_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 53-54.

for the capital. With Chen as his guide to the French literary world, Zeng Pu would eventually become the most famous Francophile author and translator in late Qing and the Republican period. By 1930, when Zeng Pu finished the revised edition of Niehai hua, which contained the chapters (31 and 32) that told the story of “Chen Jidong,” he and his son Zeng Xubai (1895-1994) were at the center of a cosmopolitan literary world in Shanghai. Aspiring writers and literature enthusiasts, like the urban modernist Zhang Ruogu, flocked to the Zeng residence where Zeng liked to regale his young admirers with tales of his flamboyant teacher. While Zeng Pu’s gratitude to and affection for Chen Jitong seems to have been genuine, his portrayal and recollections of Chen were likely skewed by the pervasive romanticization of Western literary culture by Chinese writers in the post-May Fourth period. Introducing a translation of Chen Jitong’s essay on the Parisian cabinet de lecture in a 1928 issue of Zhen Mei Shan, Zeng Pu writes that following his recall, Chen had retreated to Shanghai to live the romantic lifestyle of a man of letters: “In his last years he took on a decadent [tuikatang 顱卡唐] style; he indulged in wine and women, and often wrote wild calligraphy and sang sad songs (poems).”

Was this true of Chen Jitong’s final decade, as he settled in the cosmopolitan environment of Shanghai’s International Settlement? Did Chen take part in any of the

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641 In addition to Zhang Ruogu, Yu Dafu Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945) was another notable Republican-era writers who heard from Zeng Pu stories about Chen Jitong; see Yu Dafu, “Ji Zeng Mengpu xiansheng” 記曾孟樸先生, in Yu Dafu quanji 郁達夫全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2007), 230.


643 “Duwu zhanlanguan” 讀物展覽館, *Zhen Mei Shan* 真美善, 16 June 1928, 2.
political activities during the Hundred Day Reform period? How did social networks and public spaces in Shanghai facilitate these activities? What role did Maria-Adèle Lardanchet play as a noted wife of a returned Chinese diplomat? A closer examination of Chen’s life in Shanghai at the turn of the century reveals that although he did enjoy the public life of treaty-port literati and spent time in the company of courtesans, he also became a very busy and engaged member of the urban elite, rather than turning into an apathetic dandy and retiring to a “decadent” life. As Chen sought to carve out a niche for himself in the rapidly transforming cultural and political landscape of 1890s Shanghai, he became a witness to and a participant in many of the significant events of this period, including the establishing of an all girls’ school, the publication of a reform newspaper, and the founding of a Sino-Japanese friendship association.

Shanghai in the 1890s offered a welcoming and exciting environment for Chen Jitong and his family. An international treaty-port of one million residents and three separate municipal governments in the old Chinese city, the French Concessions, and the British and American-dominated International Settlement, late Qing Shanghai was an emerging cultural, intellectual, and commercial hub that attracted all kinds of migrants – literati, journalists, merchants, compradors, would-be revolutionaries, courtesans, and foreigners of all stripes. It attracted young men with political ideals and seasoned cosmopolitans like Chen Jitong. Here Chen would reunite with old friends and forge new alliances as he undertook a number of public and official roles.644

644 The literature on late Qing Shanghai is immense. Studies that capture the lively environment around the time Chen lived in the city include Marie-Claire Bergère, Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 84-108; Meng Yue, Shanghai and the Edges of Empires (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Catherine Vance Yeh, Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); and (2006); and Xiong Yuezhi, Yizhi wenhua xia de Shanghai dushi shenghuo 異質文化下的上海都市生活 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2008).
Zeng Pu’s fictional account was close to the mark on the location of Chen’s residence. Chen did settle down near the Jing’an Temple (Jing’an si 靈安寺) in Bubbling Well Road (present-day Nanjing xilu 南京西路) area. A letter he sent to Sheng Xuanhuai in September 1895 was addressed from the Shanghai Racing Club, while a 1903 advertisement in the Shanghai French newspaper L’Écho de Chine reveals that the property for sale, a Western-style stone-and-brick house on 49 Sinza Road (Xinzha lu 新閘路), had been home to Chen Jitong and his family.645

Living in the International Settlements brought Chen Jitong close to many old acquaintances who shared his international experience or reform interests. These included the brothers Ma Jianzhong and Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840-1939), versatile cosmopolitans in their own right. Ma Jianzhong, as we have seen, had studied alongside Chen at the École libres des sciences politiques, and returned to China in 1880 to work as a trusted adviser to Li Hongzhang. On Li’s behalf, he had been instrumental in the 1882 negotiations in Korea, in which the Qing intervened militarily after a domestic uprising and then brokered, in a case “multilateral imperialism,” on behalf of the vassal peninsula a treaty standardizing tariffs with Britain, Germany, and the United States.646 Born to a Catholic family in Dantu, Jiangsu, both Ma brothers had received their education in the 1850s and 1860s from the Jesuits at the Collège St. Ignace (Xuhui gongxue 徐匯公學) in the Zikkawei (Xujiahui 徐

645 Letter from Chen Jitong to Sheng Xuanhuai, 11 September 1895, Sheng Xuanhuai Archives, Shanghai Library, 003141; L’Écho de Chine, 22 July 1903.
家匯) area in Shanghai. While Ma Jianzhong had been handpicked by Li Hongzhang to join the Fuzhou graduates in Europe in 1877, Ma Xiangbo (also known as Ma Jianchang 馬建常 or Ma Liang 馬良) joined the self-strengthening movement several years later, as a diplomatic secretary in Japan, a fundraiser for Li Hongzhang’s navy in the United States, and a Qing adviser in King Kojong’s court in Korea. Yet Ma Xiangbo also remained more attached to his Catholic background and was more invested in educational affairs. After the Sino-Japanese war and Li Hongzhang’s fall from power, both brothers retreated from further service to the Qing government. In 1897, while Jianzhong was finishing his book on Chinese grammar, Mashi wentong 馬氏文通, Ma Xiangbo, perhaps disillusioned by the outcome of the self-strengthening movement, returned to Xujiahui and once again became a Jesuit priest and to devote his energy to educational innovations.647 Chen Jitong was confounded by the elder Ma’s decision to quit public and official life. In “A Poem Sent to Ma Er Xiangbo upon Hearing of His Reentering the Saint Ignatius Cathedral in Xujiahui,” he expresses disappointment in learning of this news:

I have heard that master [Ma] has chosen a life beyond this world;  
From now on your six senses will be pure and without any dust.  
Who pities the loyal son grieving over his loss of country?  
I regret on behalf of this world this gentleman.  
Although your effort at bringing productivity to the land fell just short of success,  
The path to the court has already reached Tianjin.  
When does one break free from the reins of reputation and wealth?  
I hope to verify with master [Ma] why he has returned to a previous incarnation.

聞道公成世外身，
六根從此淨無塵。

More than a reaction to Ma Xiangbo’s choice, this poem is very revealing of Chen Jitong’s own state of mind at this time. His own comments, inserted in between lines of the poem, explain that a month earlier, in November 1897, when news had spread about Germany’s seizure of Jiaozhou Bay (Jiaozhou wan 胶州湾), he had received a letter from Ma Xiangbo, who not only bemoaned the loss of the Shandong territory but sensed that this was a sign of a “scramble for concessions” that was to come. With a heavy heart, Ma had written: “now that China is being carved up by the various powers, we have become people without a country!” While Chen certainly shared this sense of dread, he would have empathized even more with Ma’s career disappointments. In a comment that follows the fifth line, Chen exclaims: “Master [Ma] had hoped to open up natural resources for the country and to establish mining businesses, but was deterred; what a pity!” With his failure to turn things around in Guizhou and frustration that his career advancement in Li Hongzhang’s mufu had been cut short by the debacle of the Sino-Japanese war, Chen’s lament for Ma could just as well be a description of his own experience. Yet unlike Ma Xiangbo, Chen Jitong still harbored aspirations for a public or official career, and thus wonders how Ma was able to finally “break free from the reins of reputation and wealth.”
Another old acquaintance Chen met in late 1890s Shanghai was the extravagant writer Yuan Zuzhi (袁祖志 1827-1902). The grandson of the eighteenth-century poet Yuan Mei (whose female disciples’ poetry Chen had admired), Yuan Zuzhi was a Hangzhou native who had come to Shanghai in the 1850s. After serving as a magistrate for number of years, he went to Europe in 1883 with the comprador Tang Tingshu (唐廷樞, 1832-1892), then manager of the China Merchants’ Steam Navigation Company, recording in his journal of the trip many observations of Western women and thoughts on the brothels in Paris. After returning to Shanghai, Yuan built a house near Fuzhou Road and named it Willow Tower (楊柳樓台), which became regular gathering place for the treaty-port’s men of letters as well accompanying courtesans, in praise of whom Yuan wrote many bamboo twig ballads (竹枝詞). Yuan had once exchanged poetry with Chen Jitong in Berlin and the two men, with their literary penchant and admiration of courtesans, would have found each other to be kindred spirits.

In the company of Shanghai men of letters like Yuan Zuzhi and in establishments like the famous Chinese-owned Western-style restaurant Yipinxiang on Fuzhou Road, a favorite choice among Chinese patrons, Chen spent a good amount of time during his Shanghai days, socializing with fellow literati living in the treaty port and in the company of talented courtesans.

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651 On Yuan Zuzhi, see Yeh, Shanghai Love, 197-200 and Zhong Shuhe 鍾叔河, Shuqian shuhou 書前書後 (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 1992), 158-162.
652 In the poem “Yuan Xiangfu daling yishigao jianzeng shuaicheng yilü yi xiezhi” 袁翔甫大令以詩稿見贈率成一律以謝之, Chen Jitong writes: “It has been seven years since I have returned from overseas / How the times have changed! / Our matching poems in Berlin are old memories today / In the Willow Towers resides the Banished Immortal”; see Xue Jia Yin, 157-158.
653 During one evening banquet Chen attended, at least seven courtesans helped serve the wine; see “You buyun” 又步韻, in Xue Jia Yin, 154. On November 8, 1897, Chen dined at Yipinxiang with the reformer
One courtesan Chen Jitong especially admired was Hong Shaolan 洪少蘭, who entertained guests at the Nest of Heavenly Pleasures (Tianlewo 天樂窩), on Si Malu 四馬路 (another name for Fuzhou Road). A beautiful woman who always carried herself in a graceful and dignified manner, Hong was known not only for her sonorous singing voice, but was also skilled at calligraphy and reciting poetry. Chen dedicated several poems in his Xue Jia Yin collection to this courtesan, displaying obvious affection for her beauty and talents:

A graceful pearl-like voice and half-covered face,
As if she is entrusting her sorrows to the pipa.
Serving wine at the dinner table and catering to trivial matters,
She carries several of the great masters of the Tang in her breast.

婉轉珠喉面半遮,
如將幽恨託琵琶。
當筵侑酒渾閒事,
胸有唐人幾大家。  

Comparing himself in the next stanza of the poem to the “commander of Jiangzhou” (Jiangzhou sima 江州司馬) who is overcome by strong feelings, Chen wonders if the beautiful courtesan was “aware of someone listening to the same tunes at the corners of the world.” In his appreciation of Hong Shaolan’s knowledge of the great poets of the Tang and the evocation of the pipa and the possibility of meeting a familiar stranger in a faraway corner of the earth, Chen is here once again identifying himself with the frustrated and sentimental Tang poet Bai Juyi in the classic “Song of the Lute,” one of Chen’s favorite

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654 Chen Wuwo 陳無我, Lao Shanghai sanshi nian jianwen lu 老上海三十年見聞錄 (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1928; Reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1997), 46.

655 Chen Jitong, “Zeng Hong Shaolan jiaoshu” 贈洪少蘭校書, in Xue Jia Yin, 145.
poems. If this poetic appreciation of the Shanghai courtesan was representative of Chen Jitong’s “decadent” ways, he was also playing by the rules in following the elaborate courtship rituals carried on in the courtesan houses. As he imagined himself in the place of the great Tang poet, Chen was once again reconfirming for himself a self-image as a Chinese man of letters and bearer of a civilization, a persona consistent with the way he had presented himself in Paris.

Several blocks northwest of the courtesan houses on Fuzhou Road and just south of Bubbling Well Road was the Zhang Garden (Zhangyuan 張園), another popular gathering place for courtesans in late Qing Shanghai. After he purchased this property from a British company in 1882, the merchant Zhang Shuhe 張叔和 (1850-1919), who had strong ties to self-strengthening enterprises like the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company, gradually expanded the garden to a capacious seventy mu and added European-style buildings, including the two-story Ankaidi 安壌第 (Arcadia Hall), which fit as many as 1,000 people, then the tallest edifice in Shanghai. Matching its spatial immensity and reflecting the cosmopolitan inspirations of the late Qing gentry-merchant class, the Zhang Garden offered for visitors a plethora of entertainments and pleasures, including flower shows, Western cuisine, teahouses, storytelling, bicycle contests, and even fireworks.

Living near this most popular of destinations, Chen sometimes found the boisterous

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656 Yeh, Shanghai Love, 96-135; Christian Henriot, “Chinese Courtesans in Late Qing and Early Republican China (1849-1925),” East Asian History 8 (December 1994): 33-52.
atmosphere overwhelming. As his comments to a poem written during his trip to Guizhou describes, “on all the fine days in the spring and autumn, myriads of gentry and ladies come.” Tired of being neighbor to the “fragrant sedans and precious horses” (*xiangche baoma* 香車寶馬), Chen had “thrown himself to the mountains and streams.”

Yet, as Meng Yue has argued, a private space like Zhang Garden would undergo a transformation in the late 1890s. No longer exclusively an “occidentalized” dream space for the urban bourgeois, it became, especially after the Sino-Japanese War, a public site where the Chinese reformers and their Western supporters gathered to discuss current affair and geopolitical issues. The garden of entertainment became an open forum where the gentry class and dissenting Qing officials assembled to voice their criticisms of the Qing administration and foreign imperialism, while deliberating social reform projects. Eventually, some of the public lectures and conferences began to take on an anti-dynastic tone and contribute to the burgeoning revolutionary discourse in the 1900s.

As we will see, while Chen Jitong did not share the radical politics of anti-Qing agitants, he would eventually also participate in several assemblies of the reformist late Qing gentry, demonstrating a more publicly engaged side of his persona. In one of the most elaborate public gatherings at Zhang Garden in 1897, however, it was not Chen Jitong, but his French wife Maria-Adèle Lardanchet and their two daughters, who made the most impressive appearances.

**The Chinese Girls’s Progress**

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659 Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empire*, 162-169.
One of the younger personalities whom Chen Jitong met in Shanghai was the energetic publicist Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), a talented young scholar from Guangdong who became editor of the key reform journal, *Shiwu bao* (The Chinese Progress) in 1896. Living near the Ma brothers in the International Settlement that autumn, Liang frequently went over to their residence to study Latin with Ma Xiangbo. Through their introduction, Liang became acquainted with other experienced foreign affairs experts like Yan Fu and Chen Jitong. During this time, Liang Qichao’s thinking was also influenced by the Christian missionary Timothy Richard (1845-1919), for whom he had served as a secretary in 1895, and distilled some of Richard's ideas in his reform essays, “General Discussion on Reform” (*Bianfa tongyi* 變法通義), published in the *Shiwu bao*.

In one of these essays, “On Education for Women” (*Lun nü xue* 論女學), Liang Qichao, drawing on an earlier article by Richard on “Productive and Nonproductive Methods” (*Shengli fenli zhi shuo* 生力分力之說), argued that modern education for Chinese women was central to China’s nation-building. In the fall of 1897, Liang Qichao, Chen Jitong, and Jing Yuanshan 經元善 (1841-1903), a prominent Zhejiang philanthropist and director of the Shanghai Telegraph Bureau, spearheaded a movement to

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establish the first Chinese-run school for girls in Shanghai. Making wide use of the Shanghai newspapers, they generated much publicity for the school in announcements about the preparation meetings, petitioned for support from the governors-general, and gathered the sponsorship of many of the leading gentry elites in Shanghai.\footnote{Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition,” 403-404. For another study of the girls’ school, see Xia Xiaohong 夏曉虹, \textit{Wan-Qing nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo} 晚清女性與近代中國 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), 3-37.}

While Chen Jitong is listed prominently among the male organizers of some of these events, the women in his family also played a major part in the women’s education movement.\footnote{Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition,” 407-411.}

On December 6, 1897, an unprecedented public gathering was held in the Arcadia Hall in Zhang Garden. The first meeting of the newly established Women’s Study Society (\textit{Nüxuehui} 女學會), it was attended by 122 women, the majority of whom were the mothers, wives, and daughters of leading reformers and Western missionaries in Shanghai. A remarkable instance of Sino-Western collaboration, this widely publicized event was organized for the women, who were to run the girls’ school, to discuss such matters as fundraising, curriculum, and a school charter. However, as evident in the newspaper reports and firsthand observations, it also became a “family gathering” and “poetry club meeting.” Significantly, the woman elected as the foreign superintendent of the girls’ school was none other than Chen Jitong’s wife, Maria-Adèle Lardanchet, named in the press as “Lai Mayi, Imperial-titled Lady of the First Class, from Paris” (\textit{Gaofeng yipin furen Bali Laishi} 誥封一品夫人巴黎賴氏).\footnote{The announcements and documents on the girls’ school are collected in Jing Yuanshan, ed., \textit{Nüxue jiyi chubian} 女學集議初編 (n.p.: 1898).}

As the women discussed logistics and composed poetry to celebrate the occasion, three younger members were noted to be the
most “widely learned and remarkably talented” (boxue miaocai 博學妙才). These were Kang Tongwei 康同薇 (1879-1974), daughter of the reformer Kang Youwei, and Chen Jitong’s two transracial and bilingual daughters, Chen Qian 陳蕡 (b. 1884?) and Chen Chao 陳超 (b. 1885).666 Dazzling the others with their cosmopolitan air and poetic talents, Chen’s wife and daughters, whose names, Qian and Chao – derived from the legendary Han envoys Zhang Qian 張騫 and Ban Chao 班超 – reflected their father’s experience (and social capital) as a diplomat, seemed to hint at the best of possibilities for the mixing of cultures and to exemplify the benefits of racial amalgamation, as promoted by some late Qing reformers who believed in the idea of “hybrid vigor.”667

Another prominent contributor to the women’s education movement in 1897-98 was Chen Jitong’s sister-in-law, the poetess Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽. As Nanxiu Qian has convincingly shown, Xue, with her erudite background in classical learning and poetry, did much to help to modify the agenda for the girls’ school, the women’s study society, and their journal Nü xuebao 女學報, whose English title, echoing Liang Qichao’s own journal, was Chinese Girl’s Progress. While Liang and other male reformers saw political and economic modernization as priorities in promoting women’s education, Xue Shaohui and other women leaders reached into treasured indigenous traditions, such as the ideal of the worthy ladies (xianyuan 賢媛) from the Wei-Jin period, to insert their own agency into the

666 “Neidongshi Zhangyuan Ankaidi gongyan Zhong-Xi guanshen nuke huiyi disiji” 内董事張園安霈第公宴官紳女客會議第四季, in Jing Yuanshan, ed., Nüxue ji yichubian 女學集一編, 15b.
667 On late Qing proponents of racial amalgamation, see Emma Teng, Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842-1943 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 112-134. One of the theorists, the young Hunan reformer Tang Caichang 唐才常 (1867-1900), even evoked Chen Jitong’s marriage as one of his ten positive examples in his essay, “On Racial Intermixing” (Tongzhong shuo 通種說); see Hunan sheng zhexue shehui yanjiusuo 湖南省哲學社會科學研究所, ed., Tang Caichang ji 唐才常集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 102.
movement. Through her essays and draft of the Chinese courses at the girls’ school, Xue emphasized that it was necessary not to abandon the traditional aspects of women’s virtue and work, including the nurturing of the “women’s Way” (fudao 婦道) and female talents through poetry and literature. Espousing what Joan Judge has called a “meliorist” view of historical change, Xue Shaohui, much like Chen Jitong had written in his French essays, upheld the virtuous womanly ideals in Confucian culture, while adopting a pragmatic attitude to late Qing changes, especially embracing the more public and active role for women during the reform period.

The International Review

While Liang Qichao ran the Chinese Progress and Xue Shaohui edited the Chinese Girls’ Progress, another journal, titled The International Review also appeared in Shanghai in 1897. This was the Qiushi bao 求是報, founded by none other than Chen Jitong and his brother Chen Shoupeng 陳壽彭. For this newspaper, whose title resonated with the name of the original school, Qiushi tang yiju 求是堂藝局, at the Fuzhou Navy Yard, Chen Jitong tapped into native-place networks. He recruited as his chief essayist the Houguan poet Chen Yan and received contributions from the Minxian native Zheng Xiaoxu. Chen Yan and Zheng, juren degree holders from the 1882 provincial examinations, were known as the chief representatives of the so-called “Tong-Guang style” (Tongguang ti 同光體) of classical poetry, also sometimes called the Song School (Songshi pai 宋詩派), a grouping

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668 Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition,” 425-426.
loosely based on their reluctance to model their works on Tang poets as well as their collective experience as having come of age during the period between the Tongzhi (1862-1874) and Guangxu (1875-1908) reigns. At the same time, both were also advisers in Zhang Zhidong’s mufu and thus self-strengthening reformers like their Fuzhou contemporaries Chen Jitong and Yan Fu.

At first glance, the Qiushi bao resonated with the “current affairs” outlook of other reform journals. However, it distinguished itself by declaring its focus to be shishi qiushi 實事求是 (seeking truth from facts). Instead of aiming to directly influence political change through the introduction of radical ideas, its main contributors pursued substantial translations of European scientific and civil engineering treatises. Meanwhile, Chen Jitong also contributed carefully selected translations from French constitutional, civil, and press laws, in addition to a romantic novel based on the notorious Boulanger affair of 1889. Rather than being caught up in advocating an urgent political agenda in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the editors and contributors of this newspaper brought forth an innovative synthesis of continuing substantial studies concerns with a cosmopolitan yet moderate approach to Western knowledge. Though it was short-lived, the Qiushi bao

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670 Another prominent figure associated with this school was the Jiangxi native Chen Sanli 陳三立 (1852-1937), son of the Hunan governor Chen Baozhen 陳寶箴 (1831-1900) and father of the modern historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪. On the “Tong-Guang” school, see Jon Eugene von Kowallis, The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the “Old Schools” during Late Qing and Early Republican China (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2006), 153-231. Also see Yang Mengya 楊萌芽, Gudian shige de zuihou shouwang: Qingmo Minchu Songshi pai wenren qunti yanjiu 古典詩歌的最後守望: 清末民初宋詩派文人群體研究 (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 2010).
671 Li Huachuan 李華川, “Qingmo Qiushi bao zhong de faguo 清末《求是報》中的法國,” In Meng Hua 孟華 et al., Zhongguo wenxue zhong de xifangren xingxiang 中國文學中的西方人形象 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 288-298; and idem, “La France interprétée par Chen Jitong dans la Qiushi bao.” In Jin Lu, ed., Images de la France sous la dynastie des Qing, (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2009), 111-120.
nevertheless presented an alternative model of engaging with the world during the 1898
reform movement.

**Lips and Teeth**

Through his association with men like Zheng Xiaoxu and Wang Kangnian, Chen
Jitong also became involved in the formation of the Asiatic Society (*Yaxiya xuehui* 亞細
亞學會), an alliance between Chinese reformers and Japanese officials and sinologists.
While Chen had never set foot in Japan, by the late 1890s many of his fellow reformers
and diplomats had had some form of interaction with the Japanese. Zheng Xiaoxu had
served as the Qing consul in Osaka in 1892, while Wang Kangnian had made tour of
Japanese institutions in the winter of 1897. In 1891, Chen had also worked alongside
Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905), the Guangdong diplomat and poet who had authored
a history of Japan (*Riben guozhi* 日本國志) and was perhaps the foremost proponent of
adapting reforms along Meiji lines. Encouraged by firsthand observations of the success
of Meiji reforms, these men sought to strengthen China through an alliance with Japan.
They were also motivated by friendly cultural interactions with their Japanese peers.

In spite of the Sino-Japanese war that had occurred three years earlier and the
discourse of “leaving Asia” (*datsu-a* 脫亞), espoused by prominent Meiji writers like
Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835-1901), a persistent theme in Sino-Japanese cultural
relations in the late nineteenth century was the reemergence of an optimism for an anti-

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673 On Huang Zunxian, see Noriko Kamachi, *Reform in China: Huang Tsun-hsien and the Japanese Model*
Western and anti-imperialist alliance between the two East Asian neighbors. In some ways a precursor of the pan-Asianist rhetoric of the twentieth-century (i.e. Japan’s “co-prosperity sphere”), the proponents of Sino-Japanese cooperation believed in the idea of the two countries sharing a “common culture and common race” (tongwen tongzhong / dō bun dōshu 同文同種). While this conviction was partly influenced by the introduction of social Darwinism, it also rested upon a sense of shared civilization that resulted from the solid training in Chinese classics received by a generation of Meiji journalists, diplomats, and educators, who were able and eager to converse with their Chinese peers through the exchange of poetry and calligraphy.

Chen Jitong experienced this kind of exchange in January 1898, when the Japanese scholar and journalist Nishimura Tenshū 西村天囚 (1865-1924), who had travelled to Hankou to meet Chinese officials and in hopes of persuading governor-general Zhang Zhidong to push for adopting reforms with Japanese advisers, came through Shanghai to meet with the gentry-reformers in that city. Sitting at a banquet featuring in the company of wine and courtesans, Chen and Nishimura composed poems with matching rhymes, expressing regret over the Sino-Japanese war and enthusiasm for their common goal of “rejuvenating Asia” (xingya 興亞).

Indeed, “rejuvenating Asia” (as opposed to “leaving Asia”) was a key term in understanding the continuity of Sino-Japanese alliances in the late Qing. In 1880, Meiji proponents of Sino-Japanese cultural relations had created an organization called the

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676 Chen Jitong, “Jixi he Riben Xicun shiyan” 即席和日本西村時彥, in Xue Jia Yin, 153.
Society for Rejuvenating Asia (kōa kai 興亞會) in Tokyo, and some prominent China enthusiasts, such as the naval officer Sone Toshitora 曾根俊虎 (1847-1910) had befriended Chinese reformers like Wang Tao, persuading him to join the alliance.\textsuperscript{677} Two decades later, a slightly younger generation was attempting to continue this work, motivated by a sense of encroaching European imperialism, as clearly reflected in a poem Chen composed and shared with his fellow Asiatic Society members:

Having travelled around the world several times,
Quietly I make observations of the global situation.
The European countries hardly fight over petty affairs in their lands,
They have already made Africans into horses and cattle;
India and Siam have been seized and are under control,
Vietnam and Burma are being completely exploited.
Only China and Japan are leaning on each other for survival,
Together lips and teeth carefully seek to protect Asia.

The image of “lips and teeth” (chunchi 唇齒), borrowed from the classic text \textit{Zuozhuan 左傳}, had also been used in a famous 1897 essay by the scholar Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, 1869-1936), “On the benefit of mutual reliance between Asian countries” (\textit{Lun Yazhou yi ziwei chunchi 論亞洲宜自為唇齒}), in which the author advocated for common interests and interdependence based on racial affinity between the

Chinese and Japanese.\textsuperscript{679} This was the kind of shared conviction that brought Chen Jitong and other Shanghai reformers together on April 26, 1898, for a preparation meeting held at the residence of Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842-1922), the comprador and merchant from Guangdong who had become an influential voice among the Shanghai elite with the publication of his \textit{Words of Warning in a Flourishing Age} (Shengshi weiyan 盛世危言).\textsuperscript{680}

With support from Odagiri Masunosuke 小田切萬壽之助 (1868-1934), the Japanese consul in Shanghai, and the contribution of Zheng Xiaoxu in composing the society’s charter, the Asiatic Society was formally inaugurated in June 1898, proclaiming its mission to be the establishment of a variety of journals, educational institutions, and even a Red Cross society to facilitate Sino-Japanese relations in their mutual pursuit of wealth and power independent of European influence.\textsuperscript{681} This was an ambitious program that never materialized. While, as the historian Sang Bing has argued, a continuity in Sino-Japanese relations can be traced to later ventures such as the influential East Asia Common Culture Association (\textit{Tōa Dōbunkai} 東亞同文會), the activities of the 1898 Asiatic Society were cut short, as its members became entangled in the so-called Hundred Days Reforms.

The years 1897-1898 were busy ones for Chen Jitong and his family. Recently settled in the International Settlement in Shanghai, Chen found a diverse yet overlapping social network consisting of old acquaintances from his days in Ma Jianzhong, fellow

\textsuperscript{679} Zhang Binglin, “Lun Yazhou yi ziwei chunchi” 論亞洲宜自為唇齒, \textit{Shiwu bao} 時務報 18 (22 February 1897).


Fuzhou natives Chen Yan and Zheng Xiaoxu, active reformers like Liang Qichao and Wang Kangnian, and more established gentry-merchants like Zheng Guanying. These social connections and a shared concern for China’s fate in the era of intensified Western imperialism motivated these men to take action. In setting up new schools and associations, they found allies in women and Japanese counterparts. Chen Jitong, seeking a niche for himself and his family, was able to become involved in many of these public projects. In pursuing these activities, he fell in line with the main preoccupations of male literati-reformers of his time. Yet such actions as translating a romantic novel in his reform newspaper or encouraging his sister-in-law and his French wife to play significant leading roles in the girls’ education reforms, Chen always stuck a somewhat distinct sounding note, one that suggests that he was still trying to make something out of his international experience. This increasingly desperate desire manifested itself well in the two reform memorials Chen submitted to the throne in the autumn of 1898.

Two Memorials

On June 16, 1898, the same day that the Asiatic Society was established in Shanghai, the Guangxu Emperor held an audience with the Guangdong scholar Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), who had been agitating for political reforms by sending memorials to the throne and by organizing the Society for Studying Strengthening (Qiang xuehui 強学会). An unconventional thinker who harbored utopian ideals about the world order and who had become an influential leader among a younger generation of Chinese scholars for

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his radical reinterpretation of the Confucian classics, Kang’s reception by Guangxu symbolized the determination of the emperor, who had issued a reform edict five days earlier, to push forward an urgent reform agenda based on a willingness to consider a wider range of opinions.683 Over the next three months, as the “pathway of words” (yanlu 言路) was opened for lower-level officials, scholar-gentry, and common people to submit ideas to the throne, a series of new policies were promulgated, introducing changes to the political, military, and economic workings of the Qing state. Building on legacies of the self-strengthening movement and the local modernization efforts enacted in provinces such as Hunan, the so-called Hundred Days Reform (bairi weixin 百日維新) or Wuxu reform movement (Wuxu bianfa 戊戌變法) ushered in such measures as the streamlining of Qing government, innovations in agriculture and commerce, modifications to the civil service examinations, and the inauguration of a new imperial college.684 At the same time, the court signaled its readiness to work with the reformers by naming four of them, including the young Fuzhou scholar Lin Xu, as secretaries (zhangjing 章京) in the Grand Council, where they would facilitate the circulation of reform petitions. Meanwhile, more influential officials, such as governor-generals and provincial examiners were continuing to make recommendations to the court, a process that had been in place since the Sino-

683 Luke S. K. Kwong has argued that Kang did not play as central a role in the 1898 reforms and that the extent of his influence was exaggerated by accounts published after the events; see Kwong, A Mosaic of the Hundred Days and idem, “Chinese Politics at the Crossroads: Reflections on the Hundred Days Reform of 1898,” Modern Asian Studies 34.3 (July 2000): 663-695. For studies of Kang Youwei, see Kung-ch’uan Hsiao, A Modern China and a New World: K’ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975) and Jung-pang Lo, ed. K’ang Yu-wei: A Biography and a Symposium (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967).

684 Kwong, A Mosaic of the Hundred Days, 169-171.
Japanese War. It was likely this atmosphere of openness and the possibility of gaining the ear of the emperor that led Chen Jitong to Beijing in the autumn of 1898.

It is uncertain when exactly Chen made his way from Shanghai, but he was definitely in Beijing by August 27, when he and Lin Xu paid a visit to Zheng Xiaoxu, who had just arrived in the capital the previous evening and was staying at the new Fuzhou native-place hall inside the Yongding Gate. Native-place lodges (huiguan 會館) were an important and prominent social institution in late imperial China, providing support for fellow provincials and sojourners away from home. During the 1898 reform movement, as Richard Belsky has demonstrated, they also took on an increasingly politicized role. Not only could visiting scholars aspiring for an appointment secure the guarantee from a Beijing official from the same native place through the “chopped bonds” (yinjie 印結) system, but they also founded, one after another, province-based study societies, located at the various native-place lodges in the area south of the Xuanwu Gate, where scholar-officials and sojourning examination candidates gathered to discuss reforms. At the Fujian lodge, for instance, Lin Xu had founded the Fujian Study Society (Minxuehui 閩學會).

In Beijing, Chen Jitong would have found his fellow Fuzhou natives to be making the most of the impetus for reform. Zheng Xiaoxu had been summoned for an imperial audience after being recommended by his patron, Zhang Zhidong. Meanwhile, Yan Fu, now known for his translations and editor of a newspaper in Tianjin, also received an

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687 Richard D. Belsky, “Placing the One Hundred Days: Native-Place Ties and Urban Space.” In Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow, eds., Rethinking the Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 124-157 and idem, Localities at the Center: Native Place, Space, and Power in Late Imperial Beijing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 217-235.
audience with Guangxu on September 14 as the result of a recommendation from former Fujian provincial examiner Wang Xifan 王錫蕃.\(^{688}\) While Chen did not receive an imperial audience, he did manage to send three memorials up to the throne, perhaps facilitated by his Fuzhou contacts, including Lin Xu, one of the newly appointed Grand Council secretaries.

Two of Chen’s three memorial are extant in the Grand Council Chinese-language Palace Memorial copies (Junjichu Hanwen lufu zouzhe 軍機處漢文錄副奏摺), held at the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing. They are among the more than five hundred memorials submitted to the throne that year by middle and lower-level (and expectant) officials, gentry and commoners, in a movement that the historian Mao Haijian has called a “non-conducted multi-vocal political chorus,” and among the two hundred or so reviewed by the court and passed on to the Empress Dowager Cixi.\(^{689}\) Touching on international relations as well as domestic affairs like public works, they are revealing of the different roles Chen Jitong envisioned for himself in the reforms as well as his conception of the late Qing state’s place in the world.

In the first memorial, Chen expressed gratitude for the emperor’s opening of the pathway, for it gave officials and subjects an opportunity to contribute to the reform effort. Identifying the encroaching imperialism of the European countries since the Sino-Japanese War – they were “gathering in our ports, fighting over building our railroads, and opening our mines” – as the top challenge faced by China, Chen sought for a way to preserve Qing sovereignty while maintaining peace. For while reform in “educational and bureaucratic


affairs will take time take effect, and the manufacturing of firearms and battleships require thousands in funds that cannot be collected overnight,” direct confrontation with Western nations would be impossible. However, Chen observes that “at this time, the various nations seem to be, on the surface, on friendly terms with us and claiming to defend our interests,” thus “if we take advantage of this opportunity and invited them to a congress for the mutual assurance of peace, they would be obliged to participate.” It would perhaps also be an opportunity to overturn the foreign privilege of extraterritoriality and their protection of missionaries. As for those might object to consulting with foreigners on China’s domestic affairs, they should be reminded that in both the maritime customs and postal administrations, and in various self-strengthening endeavors such as the military training, railroad construction and mining, the Qing had long employed foreigners without losing its dignity (bushi titong 不失體統). Chen did not see how reaching out temporarily for foreign advisory in the politics was any different.

Citing the precedent of the 1878 Congress of Berlin, when the European powers intervened following the Ottoman Empire’s loss in the Russo-Turkish War, Chen notes that while the administrative, financial, and military affairs of the Turks had been for a while delegated to various foreign personnel, the Ottomans never ceased to be a sovereign state, nor did their emperor cease to be an autonomous ruler (Tuguo bushiwei zizhu zhibang, Tuhuang bushiwei zizhu zhigu 土國不失為自主之邦, 土皇不失為自主之君). 690 Chen

seems to envision that the Qing would regain its strength while playing the Western powers off one another.

Chen also had in mind an ideal candidate to organize and host his proposed international congress. He saw the King of Belgium, a “learned and virtuous” ruler, as the most fitting for the task, since he had travelled to China in his youth and had recently earned the respect of others through his securing of the Congo. He argued that the plan would be successful if Leopold II (1835-1909) could be persuaded to invite other European nations to a joint congress on China. Who, then, should Guangxu send to Belgium? Chen Jitong volunteers himself: “If the proposal is approved, [your majesty] should delegate the Zongli Yamen to draft a letter and select an envoy who is familiar with foreign matters, knowledgeable of languages, and adept at diplomatic rhetoric, and assign him full powers of negotiation…if there is no candidate for the moment, your servant is willing to do the utmost to follow orders and go forth.” Explaining that he had been well received by King Leopold on earlier diplomatic assignment in Belgium and that he was also familiar with the Belgian ambassador in Beijing, Chen Jitong effectively turns the memorial into an application for a new diplomatic post. Whether or not he was fully aware of Leopold II’s imperialistic ambitions in Africa, Chen saw the balancing of foreign powers as a way to buy time for the Qing reforms and to hold off a scramble for China, while also creating an opportunity to renew his career in Europe.

While his diplomatic career provided Chen Jitong with a context for making suggestions on how to handle international relations, he applied more immediate

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experience, gained from Shanghai, in his second memorial, one that proposed the establishment of a Public Works Bureau (gongcheng ju 工程局) in Beijing. As Richard Belsky has shown, one of the recurring reform agendas throughout 1895 to 1898 was the renovation of the capital’s decrepit roadways, a subject that concerned reformers like Kang Youwei but also the Guangxu emperor, who issued an edict on September 5, ordering for investigation into the problem.\(^{693}\) Chen Jitong’s memorial, submitted one week later, was a direct response to this edict. Just as in his first memorial, Chen cited a foreign example. Comparing Beijing, a “great metropolis in the five continents,” to London, Chen noted that the British capital had established a Public Works office, with its own director, for the specific purpose of raising funds, collecting tolls, and repairing roads and streetlights. As there were similar institutions in Shanghai, Hong Kong, as well as other countries, Beijing should follow suit.\(^{694}\)

The reference to Shanghai is significant because just a year earlier, Chen Jitong had held there an appointment as the Superintendent of the South City Roadworks and Reconstruction Bureau (Nanshi malu gongcheng shanhou ju 南市马路工程善後局). This temporary administration was established to follow the work of the South City Roadworks Board (Nanshi malu gongcheng ju 南市馬路工程局), founded in 1895 to build a main thoroughfare along the Huangpu River in the Chinese city and south of the French concessions.\(^{695}\) In July 1897, Liangjiang Governor-General Liu Kunyi delegated Chen Jitong to oversee the maintenance of the new road, known to Shanghai’s foreign residents

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\(^{693}\) Belskey, “Placing the One Hundred Days,” 146-148.

\(^{694}\) “Hanwen lufu zouzhe, buyi, Wuxu bianfa xiang” 3-168-9459-12.

as the “Chinese bund.” Setting up his offices by December, Chen also quickly ordered from abroad a steam roller and hired a foreign inspector to head the police force. As the superintendent of the bureau, Chen helped introduce electric lighting to the Chinese city (including a spectacular lighting of the “Chinese bund” on Chinese New Year’s day in 1898) and establish the foundations for waterworks. To raise funding for lighting the roads and establishing a police force, Chen enforced strict tolls on carriages and rickshaws passing through the new road, in the same manner as done in the international settlements. This was a direct, if relatively small step, in the assertion of “sovereignty” in the part of Shanghai administered by Chinese officials and in some ways a precursor to the more independent gentry-led municipal councils formed in 1905.

In his 1898 memorial, Chen Jitong seemed to directly apply his Shanghai formula to the administration of roads in the capital. Disagreeing with the provision in the September 5 edict that the road repairs in Beijing be funded by the Board of Revenue (hubu 戶部), Chen argued that the maintenance of the many roads lanes in the capital, which lined up to over a thousand li, and the dredging of drainage ditches, required repeated attention and could not be sufficiently provided for by a temporary subsidy from the state. Rather, the reconstruction of roads in Beijing should be paid for through foreign loans or taxes collected from carriages and rickshaws, which should be allowed to pass through city,

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696 “Malu shanhou” 馬路善後, Shen bao 申報, 17 July 1897. Chen’s appointment had been rumored for a while; see North China Herald, 23 April 1897.
697 “Zeji jianju” 擇吉建局, Shen bao, 21 November 1897; North China Herald, 24 September 1897, 3 December 1897;
698 North China Herald, 28 January 1898.
699 North China Herald, 21 January 1898; “Shiyu chejuan” 示諭車捐, Shen bao, 26 February 1898.
as was already done in Tianjin, Nanjing, and Hubei (not to mention Shanghai).\textsuperscript{701} In Chen’s vision, the renovation of the metropolitan region should be completed through a municipal institution and funded through self-generated tolls, rather than depend on a state ministry.

Was Chen angling here for a different job? Would he have been recommended (or volunteered himself) to head a new Public Works bureau in Beijing? This and the Belgian plan are intriguing possibilities that never came close to fruition because the Hundred Days Reform was suddenly cut short. Yet they were at least considered. Chen Jitong’s memorials had been passed up, through the Zongli Yamen, to the throne on September 13; an edict issued on September 19 required the Zongli Yamen to further discuss and memorialize on Chen’s suggestions. The next day, they were also submitted to the Empress Dowager Cixi for her review.\textsuperscript{702}

By this time, however, Cixi had other things on her mind. While she was never ideologically opposed to the reforms, Guangxu’s overzealousness during this period had put pressure on the delicate power balance between the Emperor and the Emperor Dowager that had been in place since the Tongzhi Restoration. Meanwhile, factional politics between Beijing officials, rumors of the reformers’ wooing of foreign intervention, coinciding with the visit of the Japanese statesman Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文, and a reported news of a possible coup against Cixi resulted in the Empress Dowager taking action. Returning to Beijing on September 21, she declared that her nephew Guangxu had sought her tutelage and began a crackdown on the leading reformers. Arrest orders were issued for Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and their peers. While Kang and Liang were able to

\textsuperscript{701} “Hanwen lufu zouzhe, buyi, Wuxu bianfa xiang” 3-168-9459-12.
\textsuperscript{702} Mao Haijian, \textit{Wuxu bianfa shishikao}, 379-380.
escape from Beijing, others were not so fortunate. On September 28, two days before the mid-autumn festival, Kang’s brother Guangren, along with five others, were executed.\textsuperscript{703} Among the so-called “six martyrs” was the young Grand Council secretaries Tan Sitong and Lin Xu. In the ensuing days, Chen Jitong and Zheng XiaoXu could not do much else than gather quietly, with a number of fellow Fuzhou natives, in restaurants around Beijing, drinking in the company of courtesans and mourning both the loss of their friend and the end of the reform movement.\textsuperscript{704}

**A Compassionate Ship from the Sea**

In the popular late Qing novel *The Sea of Regret* (Henhai 恨海, 1906), two Beijing families whose children have been betrothed to each other find themselves trapped in the tumultuous events of the Boxer crisis of 1900. One of the fathers, a Guangdong merchant named Zhang Heting, who was then in the south, receives news of the Boxer attacks on the capital. Anxious for their safety, he sets out for Tianjin, but is prevented from going to Beijing due to the intensifying conflict between the Boxers and the foreigners and the military checkpoints set up by Western troops. While people first found refuge in the international settlements, they were soon forced to hide in cellars and survive on meager gruel after the allied expedition invaded the city. With the destruction of newspaper offices by the Boxers and the stoppage of steamers between Shanghai and Tianjin, Heting is stuck in the treaty-port for several months until a chartered steamship, operated by a Relief Association organized by one Lu Shufan 陸樹藩, comes to Tianjin to take refugees back

\textsuperscript{703} Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days*,
The author of *The Sea of Regret*, Wu Jianren 吳趼人 (Wu Woyao 吳沃堯, 1866-1910), a native of Foshan then based in Shanghai, was a keen observer of contemporary events and himself a newspaper editor. He must have read the reports of a charitable organization put together by Jiangnan gentry to rescue refugees from the north in newspapers like the *Shen bao* and found the act poignant enough to include it in his novel. What he does not mention, but can be gathered from first-hand sources, is that one of the leading members of this relief associations was none other than Chen Jitong.

After the debacle that ended the 1898 reforms, Chen had soon returned to Shanghai and for a while led a quiet, private life. He participated in poetry circles with such friends as Fuzhou native Shen Yuqing 沈瑜慶 (1858-1918), son of Shen Baozhen, and Fan Dangshi 范當世 (1854-1904), a renowned poet from Jiangsu who had also worked for Li Hongzhang, while occasionally writing a preface for a newly published book by a French traveler. Soon, however, the Boxer war would once again stir him into action.

Spurred by strong anti-foreign sentiments following the outbreak of several missionary cases in Shandong and local traditions such practice of martial arts and spirit possession rituals (including a belief in invulnerability), the nativist movement that became known as the Righteous and Harmonious Fists (*Yihe quan* 義和拳) gradually gained momentum in 1899-1900 and spread northward throughout Shandong and Zhili. Aided by

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first tacit toleration and then open support from an anti-foreign Manchu group at court, including the Prince Duan and the Empress Dowager Cixi, the Boxers launched violent attacks on Westerners and Chinese Christian converts, laying siege on the Beitang Catholic church and foreign legations in Beijing. In response to these actions and the declaration of war by the Qing court on June 21, an expeditionary coalition of eight foreign nations invaded Tianjin and then swiftly took Beijing. The Empress Dowager and Guangxu fled to the northwest city of Xi’an, while a temporary truce, commonly known as the Southeast Mutual Dependence Pact (Dongnan hubao 東南互保) was signed between the Chinese governors-general Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi and the Western allies. The war and foreign occupation – which did not end until a peace treaty, at heavy costs to the Qing, was signed in September 1901 – was contained in north China.707

Did Chen Jitong play a role in realizing the mutual peace agreement in the south? Intriguingly, his biography in the Fuzhou gazetteer credits him with coming up with the idea of “having the several southern provinces declare their neutrality to avoid war and secretly help out the north,” noting that he had drawn up a petition and asked Shen Yuqing, who was a circuit intendant, to submit it to Liangjiang governor Liu Kunyi.708 Of course, the agreement between the Chinese provincial officials and the Western powers involved negotiations among a large number of actors, including the governors-general, influential

708 Minhou xianzhi, 39a.
officials like Sheng Xuanhuai, and the foreign consuls in Shanghai. Yet, as Li Huachuan has pointed out, the compiler of the Fuzhou gazetteer was none other than the daotai Shen Yuqing, himself a notable local elite who did participate in the planning of the pact. It is therefore possible that Chen Jitong may have had some input in the brainstorming during those months of crisis, but his role may have been minimal. Nevertheless, just as in his involvement with the Taiwan Republic, Chen’s popular reputation credits him with more than his actual contribution.

Historical evidence does support the next section in Chen’s gazetteer biography, which relates that Chen had volunteered to act as a mediator between the Shanghai gentry who organized a relief association, based on the international Red Cross, and the foreign armies that guarded Tianjin. This was the Benevolent Society for Relief (Jiuj ji shanhu 救濟善會) established by the Zhejiang scholar and philanthropist Lu Shufan (1868-1926). Son of the eminent book collector Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 (1838-1894), who had himself been a public activist as a leader in a number of relief and reconstruction projects in Huzhou 湖州 prefecture during the Tongzhi restoration, Lu Shufan had earned a juren degree in 1888 and worked as an editor in Beijing. After returning home to mourn his father’s death in 1894, Lu ended up in Shanghai, where he managed some family businesses. As news

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710 Li Huachuan, Wan-Qing yige waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng, 102.
711 Minhou xianzhi, 39a-b.
of the Boxer uprisings reached Shanghai in late 1899 and early 1900, Lu received visits from friends and colleagues who were distressed because they had no news of the fate of their relatives in the north. Motivated to do something to alleviate the situation, Lu Shufan discussed with some friends – probably including Chen Jitong, whom he had met in Shanghai – the idea of setting up a charitable organization that operated in a similar fashion to the Red Cross Society in the Western countries, so that it could bypass the international forces in Tianjin and bring back Jiangnan refugees. Lu, with help from Chen, ended up organizing a successful undertaking that was at once an extension of late Qing public activism as well as an unprecedented attempt in fitting a national operation into an international nongovernmental framework.

The practice of charitable and philanthropic activities – such as providing for the poor, maintaining ferry and lifeboat services, construction of community schools, and operation of orphanages – performed by local gentry-elites has a long tradition in late imperial China, especially in the Jiangnan region. In name his organization a benevolent society (shanhui 善會), Lu Shufan was deliberately acknowledging the continuity of this tradition. Lu was also heir to a particularly late Qing recent wave of Jiangnan activism, most pronounced in the extrabureaucratic relief organizations that appeared during the North China famine of 1876-79, during which philanthropists set up relief offices in key

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713 Sun Leyuan 孫樂園, comp., Jingjin jiuj shanhui tushuo 京津救濟善會圖說 (n.p., 1900), 1a-3a.
Lower Yangzi cities and made use of pamphlets, pictorials, and newspapers to raise donations for redistribution in the north. Shanghai, with the presence of a number of gentry-merchants and Westerners, along with the newly established Shen bao, was the center of this activity. In short, Lu Shufan’s efforts in 1900 was an extension of what Mary Rankin has called the “macroregional managerial establishment,” a network of scholars and gentry-merchants whose activism took on an increasingly national scope. In fact, the Benevolent Society for Relief was not the only organization established during this time. At least two other organizations headed by Jiangnan gentry were also established in Shanghai. What distinguished Lu Shufan’s relief association was its avowed intent of acting as a Red Cross-like entity and its deliberate action of retrieving refugees from the north, a mission in which Chen Jitong played a significant part.

The Benevolent Society for Relief was established on September 9, 1900. In its official announcement in Shen bao, the organizers declared that since they could not stand by to see the civilians and merchants caught in the war become “ghosts in a strange land” (taxiang zhigui 他鄉之鬼), they had raised funds from philanthropists in the southeastern provinces and modelled their organization the example of the foreign Red Cross societies, whose mission was to rescue refugees and wounded soldiers. They had also communicated

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716 Rankin, *Elite Activism*, 137-142.

with the foreign consuls in Shanghai as they prepared to set out for the warfront.\textsuperscript{718} The goal, as Lu Shufan noted in his journal of the relief mission, was to “consolidate financial power in the south to relieve the wounded in the north” \textit{(he nanfang zhi caili, jiu beidi zhi chuangyi 合南方之財力，救北地之瘡痍)}.\textsuperscript{719} After establishing donation centers in the major Jiangnan cities and receiving approval from Zhili governor-general Li Hongzhang, then in Shanghai, a party headed by Lu Shufan departed for Tianjin on October 16, armed with a passport provided by the German consul.\textsuperscript{720} Leading the 82-person mission alongside Lu was Chen Jitong and, interesting, Yan Fu, as well as a German doctor and translator.

Along the way, the group visited a German ship where they discussed the merits of the Red Cross society, with Chen Jitong serving as the translator. Arriving at the Dagu 大沽 fort, they observed that all of the Chinese harbors were displaying the American, Russian, and German flags.\textsuperscript{721} They also heard about the brutality of the Russian soldiers, who patrolled the trains along the Tianjin-Beijing line, chasing off Chinese (and Japanese passengers, probably thinking that they were Chinese). In spite of their German-issued passport and friendly meetings with the commanding officers of the foreign troops, Lu and Chen could not avoid a run-in with a group of unfriendly German soldiers, who attempted to take over the rickshaw in which Lu and Chen had been riding. While Lu Shufan was willing to concede to the demand, Chen refused the Germans, resulting in a standoff in which both sides drew swords. Electing not to engage in a violent confrontation, the two

\textsuperscript{718} “Jiuji shanhui qi” 救濟善會啟, \textit{Shen bao}, 9 September 1900.
\textsuperscript{719} Lu Shufan 陸樹藩, \textit{Jiuji riji 救濟日記} (Shanghai, n.p., 1900), 1a.
\textsuperscript{720} “Jiujihui zhangcheng” 救濟會章程, \textit{Shen bao}, 10 September 1900; “Kuhai cihang” 苦海慈航, \textit{Shen bao}, 16 October 1900.
\textsuperscript{721} Lu, \textit{Jiuji riji}, 2a.
Chinese then commissioned another cart for their transportation. Still, Chen appeared to take much offense, angrily complaining to Lu that he had “travelled throughout the five continents in his life, and never before been so insulted.” This episode is revealing of a more aggressive and prideful side of Chen Jitong’s personality. He was, after all, an expectant colonel, and one who had, for most of his life, enjoyed a privileged position among Westerners. These unruly German soldiers in Tianjin, used to having their way as the occupational force, probably had no idea that the Chinese they had tried to bully was a former diplomat who carried himself with the dignity of one who had once walked about the Parisian boulevards and told sneering coach drivers to shut their mouth!

In addition to the brutality of the Western forces, Lu and Chen also witnessed in Tianjin and Beijing scenes of devastation that the Jiangnan gentry had so feared. As Chen wrote in a poem, ““Feelings evoked by events in Tianjin” (Tianjin ganshi 天津感事):

Prosperity and decline are determined by fate;
Tears stream as I pass by Beijing.
There are but three tiles remaining on the beautiful houses,
The good people have dispersed into the nine provinces.
Monstrous flames rage on like a vast holocaust,
Sorrowful winds sweep up a rush of dust from the earth.
Don’t say that the country is still well,
War horses are passing by frequently right this moment.

盈虛消長亦前因，
涕泗交並過析津。
華屋不留三片瓦，
良民盡作九州人。
彌天烈火茫茫劫，
捲地愁風浩浩塵。
莫謂河山尚無恙，
往來戎馬正頻頻。723

722 Lu, Jiùjì rìjì, 4a-b.
723 Lu Shufan, Jiùjì rìjì, 8a.
While the stated mission of the Benevolent Society for Relief was to pick up civilians and merchants from the Jiangnan region and return them to Shanghai via steamers whose passage had been approved by the occupying Western forces, things were not simple on the ground. The organizers sometimes faced the dilemma of whether or not to rescue refugees for whom they had not planned. One of these instances occurred on October 25, when a group of over twenty tattered Chinese refugees came to the relief association for help. As they told their story, Lu Shufan realized these were laborers who had been conscripted by an Austrian officer to come to Tianjin. When their commander died in battle, this group of Chinese workers who had ended up on the other side found themselves unemployed, starving and freezing as they wandered around seeking jobs. At first, Lu did not believe he should help these refugees since they had worked for the foreigners, but after some deliberation he decided that since these men had suffered enough in the previous months and since one principle of the Red Cross was to treat equally all refugees (pingdeng jiuren 平等救人), he would provide them with a passage home. What stand outs in this decision is the remarkable process in which Lu rationalized an act of benevolence through the standards of an international organization which did not yet have a branch in China, but to whose ideals these Jiangnan elites now aspired.

Beyond transporting refugees, Chen and Lu also cooperated with local Tianjin gentry-elites to set up charitable operations such as medical relief, collection and redistribution of reduced-price grain (pingtiao 平糶), and burying uncollected corpses. In a poem written on November 7, Chen proudly summarized the organization’s activities:

A compassionate ship has come from the sea,

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Cheers reverberate like thunder across the north;
The hungry are fed and the cold are given warmth,
The stranded are revived and the stuck are returned.
Patching up wounds and handing out medicine,
Collecting bones and providing burial gowns;
The spirit of kindness is not only felt by the living,
Gratitude should be extended to the tombs of the dead.

一片慈航海上來，
歡聲北地若聞雷；
餓人得飽寒人暖，
困者全蘇滯者回。
彌補瘡痍施藥餌，
收埋骸骨贈衾材；
仁風不獨生存戴，
感激應教到夜台。\textsuperscript{725}

\textbf{Figure 4.1.} Lu Shufan and Chen Jitong encounter refugees seeking help in Tianjin. From Sun Leyuan, comp., \textit{Jingjin jiuji shanhui tushuo}, 8a.

\textsuperscript{725} Lu Shufan, \textit{Jiuji riji}, 8b.
After assisting Lu Shufan in negotiating with the various foreign military commanders and the Tianjin Provisional Government, the international administration that effectively ruled over Tianjin between 1900 and 1902 and enacted their own sanitation policies in the city, Chen Jitong returned to Shanghai in mid-November. He would later in activities for a French interviewer in a somewhat self-aggrandizing manner, calling himself the “president of a Society for Rescuing the Destitute.” But he did have something to be proud of. The society was ultimately quiet successful; by early 1901, they had already returned to the south more than 5,500 refugees. Moreover, the Benevolent Society for Relief was a remarkable instance of translocal social activism in which late Qing elites, acting independently of the state (which in any case was not really functional at this point), successfully made use of both indigenous philanthropic practices and the international nongovernment organization standards of the Red Cross. Both local elites and the Qing state had taken some interest in setting up a Chinese Red Cross a few years before the Boxer crisis. Although an actual Red Cross Society would not be established in China until the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, the Benevolent Society for Relief of 1900 represented the first actualized effort by Chinese to appropriate Red Cross rhetoric and practices in wartime relief. As such, it remains as a reminder that post-Boxer

727 Li Wenhai and Zhu Hu, “Yihetuan yundong shiqi Jiangnan shenshang dui zhanzheng nanmin de shehui jiuzhu,” 21. News and communications of the society were regularly published in the Shanghai press, especially in the *Shen bao*, and later published such as the eight-volume *Jiuji wendu* 救濟文牘 (Susheng yinshuaju, 1907).
728 The Qing had sent representatives to the Hague Peace Conference in 1899 to discuss the formation of a Red Cross Society; see Caroline Beth Reeves, “From Red Crosses to Golden Arches: China, the Red Cross, and the Hague Peace Conference, 1899-1900,” in Jerry H. Bentley et al., eds., *Interactions: Transregional Perspectives on World History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 64-93.
reconstruction and relief in Tianjin did not only involve the imposition of “hygienic modernity” by the foreign occupiers, but also the independent mobilization of Chinese elites.\(^\text{730}\)

**Final years**

After his work with the Relief Association, the 1900s were quiet years for Chen Jitong. Back in Shanghai, he found some publishing outlets in the French press of the city and managed to reissue his play *L’Amour héroïque* through the Presse Orientale, in 1904.\(^\text{731}\) He also became a columnist for *L’Écho de Chine* (*Zhong-Fa xinhui bao* 中法新匯報), which had been established in 1897 as the French newspaper of record in the treaty-port. As a “journal of French interest in the Far East,” *L’Écho de Chine* printed translations of imperial decrees and announcements from Chinese officials, political and social news about Shanghai, extracts of other newspapers around China, news from France, as well as miscellaneous columns in a section called “Variété.” Using the pseudonym “Un fils de ciel” (A son of heaven), Chen Jitong regularly contributed to this last category between autumn of 1902 to the summer of 1903. The majority of these pieces were actually adapted or excerpted from the books that he had already published in Paris, but sometimes they were also written in response to current events. In September 1902, for instance, Chen

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\(^\text{731}\) *L’Amour héroïque*. Shanghai: Imprimerie de la presse Orientale, 1904; see also an advertisement in *L’Écho de Chine*, 17 September 1904.
used *L’Écho de Chine* to praise the course of reforms the Qing had begun implementing in the New Policies period.

During the Boxer crisis, the Guangxu Emperor and the Empress Dowager Cixi had fled to the northwest city of Xi’an. Yet the Qing court would attempt to restore itself through a series of reform efforts known as the New Policies (*xinzheng* 新政) over the next decade. Beginning with an edict issued on January 25, 1901, which Chen had translated for *L’Écho de Chine*, these changes included the reorganization of government ministries, the modernization of the military, and the establishment of new-style schools.  

Applauding the reforms, Chen Jitong cites three examples – the creation of a new Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the change from the eight-legged style (*bagu* 八股) essays to policy discussion (*celun* 策論) questions in the civil examinations, and the establishment of schools and a concentrated effort to send students to study abroad, especially in Japan. He then makes an appeal to the foreign readers of the newspaper. Since the peace treaty had been signed and China was once again on the course of reform, Westerners should “leave us alone,” for in time they will see that “slow and steady wins the race” (Chen uses here the Italian saying *qui va piano, va sano*).  

Perhaps it was partly due to this moderate optimism in the post-Boxer Qing government that Chen Jitong soon took up an opportunity, in 1903, to once more serve on the staff of the Nanjing-based Liangjiang governor-general, Liu Kunyi, as a “secretary of foreign affairs.” For the next four years, under Liu and his successor Zhou Fu 周馥

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734 *L’Écho de Chine*, 31 December 1903.
(1837-1921), with whom Chen had collaborate in repairing the Yongding River dike, he would be charged with a variety of tasks involving negotiations with foreigners, including helping with the mediations in the aftermath of a missionary case in Nanchang, Jiangxi, where several Catholics were killed by rioting locals after a Chinese magistrate had committed suicide during a confrontation with a missionary. In cases like these, Chen was valued for his ability to deal with foreigners, especially the French consuls. He may have also contributed to the formation of China’s first modern fishing enterprise, the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Fishing Company (Jiang-Zhe yuye gongsì 江浙漁業公司), headed by the prominent reformer and industrialist Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853-1926), by compiling a history of fishing industries in other countries.

In Nanjing, which since 1901 had been the center of education reforms proposed by the governors-general Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi, Chen Jitong also served, for a brief period, as the managing director of the Jiangsu and Hubei Compilation and Translation Bureau (Jiang-Chu bianyiju 江楚編譯局), an official publishing house that edited and translated textbooks for the new-style provincial schools set up after 1904.

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At the same time, he and his brother Chen Shoupeng, then a translator at the Nanjing Bureau of Commerce, also helped edit one of the government news gazettes, the *Nanyang riri guanbao* 南洋日日官報 (Journal officiel de Nanyang, 1905-06).

Around this time, Chen also continued to participate in elite networks in Shanghai. In 1905, when a disagreement with the Jesuits on how to operate the Zhendan (*L’Aurore*) College led to Ma pulling out of that establishment with a large number of his students to found Fudan College (*Fudan gongxue* 復旦公學), Chen Jitong was one of the twenty-eight trustees that sponsored the new university. In a later memoir, one former student even recalled that, in the first days of Fudan College, due to an initial difficulty in recruiting a French teacher, an “old French woman” who was rumored to be the “widow of Mr. Chen Jitong” had taken over the classes. While the table of successive instructors held in the Fudan University Archives do not show any records that would corroborate the suggestion that Maria-Adèle Lardanchet had taught at the college, this anecdote does highlight the almost mythic hold Chen and his wife had on the imagination of a younger generation in Shanghai.

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739 Wu Nianqu 吳念劬, “Muxiao chuangban shiqi zhi huiyi yu zatan” 母校創辦時期之回憶與雜談, in Xue Mingyang 薛明揚 and Yang Jiarun 楊家潤, eds., *Fudan zayi* 復旦雜憶 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 24-25.

740 In the record book of faculty and employees at Fudan, “Liren zhijiaoyuan yilanbiao” 歷任職教員一覽表, Fudan University Archives, Shanghai, ZH0102-1, the first French instructor listed is for the year 1911. Many thanks to Zhang Zhongmin and Jin Juyuan for helping me access this pamphlet.
Chen Jitong’s editorial work in Nanjing was cut short by his sudden death on January 24, 1907.\footnote{“Nécrologie,” \textit{L’Écho de Chine}, 25 January 1907; “Deaths,” North China Herald, 1 February 1907.} At fifty-four years of age, he seemed to have finally settled into a more stable position, after a turbulent decade and half since he returned to China. Chen had gradually fallen from the cultural and political vanguard in the last years of the Qing, when constitutional reformers and revolutionary forces vied to seek control over the direction of the country. Later that year, as she passed by her brother-in-law’s old residence in Shanghai, the poetess Xue Shaohui recalled the achievements and frustrations of her brother-in-law’s career:

Who could compare with his merits and virtues?
The brave and courageous general was never given a title.
The crows still seem to be on the roof but guests and friends have dispersed;
Who still recognizes the thousand feet tower from yesteryears?

功德元方孰與儔,
將軍猿臂不封侯。
屋烏猶在賓朋散,
誰識當年百尺樓？\footnote{Xue Shaohui, “Shanghai guo Jingru xiongong guzhai,” \textit{Xue Shaohui ji}, 43.}
Conclusion

Like all Chinese men of letters, Chen Jitong had made for himself many red seals to stamp on books and documents. Some of the messages, written in couplets, yield insights into how Chen thought of his own career in the waning years of his life. Exhibiting pride in his service as a diplomat, one seal read, “Watched over sheep for one less year than Su Wu; Travelled abroad two more times than Zhang Qian” (Kanyang shao Su Wu liangnian, tansu duo Zhang Qian liangdu 看羊少蘇武兩年，探宿多張騫兩度). Reflecting once again how Chen idealized his own experiences through identification with historical figures, this couplet compares Chen’s European sojourn to the nineteen years in which the Han statesman Su Wu (140-60) was held in Xiongnu captivity and his trips to Europe and Taiwan to the two journeys made by the legendary imperial envoy Zhang Qian.

As a celebrated diplomat in Europe, Chen had been able to “Shake the hands of foreign kings and rulers, hold the waists of the queens of the various powers” (Wo bizu junzhu zhishou, bao lieqiang wanghou zhiyao 握彼族君主之手，抱列強王后之腰), no doubt at the many balls and state functions he had attended as the secretary or chargé d’affaires of the Qing legation.

Yet to the end of his life, Chen Jitong remained a “Fifty-five year old returned student, an old colonel of twenty-six years” (Wushiwu sui liuxuesheng, ershiliu nian lao fujiang 五十五歳留學生，二十六年老副將). More than any other phrase, these words signify the frustrations of a career that never beyond the rank of expectant colonel and that

743 The images from a booklet of seals, titled Houguan Chen Jingru xiansheng yiyin 侯官陳敬如先生遺印, was posted on the art forum, Yachang yishu wang 雅昌藝術網, in April 2009. The booklet has since change hands between collectors. I am in touch with the current owner, who resides in Fuzhou. For the original post, see http://bbs.artron.net/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=1419952.

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depended on the patronage of various governors-general. After his return to China, Chen Jitong engaged in a variety of activities that spanned what might be thought of as the “official,” “public,” and “private” spheres in late Qing society. While no success came from ventures such as the Taiwan Republic or the Qingxi Ironworks, Chen did participate, and sometimes took on leading roles, in a significant number of public-oriented reform activities in the world of the Shanghai gentry-elite, most memorably in the 1900 relief association. However, as seen in his poem written for Ma Jianzhong and in his 1898 memorials, Chen still harbored aspirations for career advancement as an official. His near ubiquity on the reform scene, during this decade, then, is partly the result of a continuous and relentless effort at niche-seeking.

![Figure C.1. Two of Chen Jitong’s seals. On the left, “Shake the hands of foreign kings and rulers, hold the waists of the queens of the various powers” (Wo bizu junzhu zhishou, bao lieqiang wanghou zhiyao 握彼族君主之手, 按列強王后之腰); on the right, “Fifty-five year old returned student, an old colonel of twenty-six years” (Wushiwu sui liuxuesheng, ershi liu nian lao fujiang 五十五歲留學生, 二十六年老副將). From Houguan Chen Jingru xiansheng yiyin 侯官陳敬如先生遺印.]

In this effort, however, Chen was not alone. Many of Chen’s peers felt undervalued in their careers. During the Shimonoseki negotiations, Luo Fenglu, despite having held an influential role as Li Hongzhang’s naval adviser, reportedly said to Japanese premier Itō Hirobumi, “You see, in our younger days we knew each other as fellow-students [in Europe], and now you are Prime Minister in your country and I am an interpreter in mine.”

Despite their inclination for classical literati culture, the Fuzhou Navy Yard students may also have suffered from something of an “inferiority complex” upon their return to China. As Max Huang Ko-wu has shown, Yan Fu always felt his Chinese learning to be inadequate, especially compared to fellow native Zheng Xiaoxu, who was an accomplished poet and calligrapher. Yan also felt his lack of a civil service degree obstructed his career path. As a result, he purchased a jiansheng degree and made four attempts to take the provincial-level exams.

Without a civil examinations degree, Chen Jitong and many of his peers could only hold onto a title as expectant (houbu) officials. As Philip Yuen-sang Leung has demonstrated, due to the increasing number of purchased ranks and recommendations in the late Qing, the expectant system had greatly expanded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. When individuals like Chen Jitong were incorporated into the private staff of a high-level official, they became part of a group of mid-level “irregular bureaucrats” who took on a number of different roles, mostly temporary assignments, in managing foreign affairs and modernization projects. Often they took on directorships of an ad hoc bureau (ju 局), established for a specific task. They also did not receive regular government

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746 Huang, Weishi zhi an, 69-70.
salaries and thus faced problems of economic survival when not given an assignment. As we have seen, in Tianjin, Shanghai, and Nanjing, Chen Jitong had taken on a variety of different assigned tasks.

The instability of life as an expectant official was something Chen shared with the large majority of literati-reformers of his generation. Whether they had studied abroad or not, men like Ma Jianzhong, Ma Xiangbo, Luo Fenglu, Yan Fu, and Zheng Xiaoju, and Chen Yan all found themselves in advisory roles as expectant circuit intendants (houbu daoyuan 候補道員) or expectant subprefects (houbu tongzhi 候補同知). On the other hand, in spite of this instability, these men all came from a background of solid Chinese learning. Born in the 1840s and 1850s, nurtured by Confucian principles but also exposed to Western affairs early on, this was a generation that had come of age during the relatively peaceful years following the Tongzhi restoration. Products of modernization programs led by self-strengthening officials like Li Hongzhang, Zuo Zongtang, and Shen Baozhen, they found not only frustration, but also opportunity in the shifting political atmosphere in the last years of the Qing. Compared to younger and more radical associates like Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, who were mostly active in what Hao Chang has called the period of intellectual transition, Chen Jitong’s generation, which we might call – borrowing from Chen Yan and Zheng Xiaoju – the “Tong-Guang generation,” developed a pragmatic and open attitude in dealing with the West and a moderate stance in political and social reforms.748

748 See Chang, Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907, 1-6.
This had much to do with some of their exposure to the outside world before the 1890s. In the case of Chen Jitong, his sense of rootedness in Chinese literati culture helped him become a cultural celebrity in late nineteenth-century Paris. Furthermore, his cross-cultural performance and self-fashioning extended beyond the textual realm, as he also became a public speaker at various international congresses (especially during the 1889 Exposition Universelle) as well as a popular figure in the French mass press. Yet Chen was not simply a literary personality, but also a reformer and man of letters whose intellectual orientation and public career were heavily rooted in the self-strengthening and reform movements of the late Qing dynasty. Coming from a literati background and trained in one of the leading late Qing foreign affairs schools, Chen would return to China at the end of the nineteenth century to take part in many of the social and political activities that spanned the last decades of the Qing.

From Chen Jitong’s case, we can somewhat alter our picture of late Qing intellectual and cultural history. I would suggest that Chen’s career and activities serve as a reminder that, for Chinese elites in the late Qing, the Sino-Western encounter was not only about “searching for wealth and power” (Schwartz) or “Bringing the World Home” (Ted Huters), but also about introducing and performing late imperial literati culture on the world stage. Chen Jitong’s appearance and performance in the late Qing world suggests that the generation of Chinese elites who matured during the self-strengthening era (1861-1895) and interacted with the West retained a certain degree of cultural self-confidence that compels us to reconsider conventional narratives of late Qing decline and intellectual crisis.
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Publications


Selected Presentations


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