

Need of Change in Early 19th Century China

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Citation: Dr Swati Mishra, et.al (2021). Need of Change in Early 19th Century China, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 27(2) 1188 -1190

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v27i2.10705

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The research paper is primarily based on three essays: "Geopolitical Analysis of Western Expansion in Maritime Asia" (Jame Kate Leonard), "Wei Yuan and the Hai-Kuo Tu-Chih" (Wei Yuan), and "Wang Tao's Perspective on a Changing World" (Paul A. Cohen), as well as "Changing Chinese View of Western Relations" (Yen Ping Hao).

Scientific Novelty. This paper primarily examines the works and ideas of Wang Tao and Wei Yuan, which explore the threats faced by China in the 19th century and the evolving global landscape of that period, and how these intellectuals came up with ideas about the needs of China and what changes it needed.

Conclusions. Both Wang Tao and Weiyuan are esteemed scholars and intellectuals of 19th-century China, having authored influential works. Wang Tao is renowned in modern Chinese journalism. He was a distinguished scholar, journalist, educator, and historian, while Wei Yuan was a prominent scholar serving the Qing government. The ideas and opinions of intellectuals play a significant role in shaping a society.

Keywords: Western expansion, Qing China, Asia, colonialism,

INTRODUCTION

"Learn from special tribes, their special skill to subdue them"-Wei Yuan (1794-1857)

"Once the sweeping reforms in China had taken effect, China would possess something which is lacking in the West, which is moral qualities."- (Wang Tao-1828-1897)

During China's modernization, both Wei Yuan and Wang Tao made significant contributions to the reformist movement. Directly or indirectly, their essays address the Sino-foreign relationship and the Western threat to the Asian and African subcontinents, as well as how China effectively responded to foreign threats without compromising its integrity. Foreign threats were humiliating and unpleasant, but China learnt a great deal. Before these threats emerged, China held the misconception that it was the Middle Kingdom (中国), embodying civilisation itself from a Chinese perspective. East Asia was regarded as the entire world. These threats could not significantly impact China, and it managed to preserve its rich civilisation and culture. Mainly, the period covered by these essays relates to Sino-foreign relations during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

What I find similar in these essays is the emphasis they place on the tribute system and the need for change in China at that time. A tribute is a form of wealth one party offers to another as a sign of respect; generally, tribute is paid to a more powerful suzerain state by an adjacent state. China's foreign relations were hierarchical, as the country was internally vast and elevated, while it believed non-Chinese barbarians were externally minor and inferior. The Manchu, who ruled China for approximately 300 years, gradually adopted Sinicisation and traditional Sino-Confucian institutions in the 17th century. As foreigners, they were not in a comfortable position to promote nationalism when China faced Western invasion in the mid-19th century. It was the reality that anyone coming into contact with China was expected to participate in the Chinese world order by observing the appropriate formalities and ceremonies in their interactions with the Son of Heaven, and these practices were referred to by foreigners as the tribute system. Whenever non-Chinese peoples refused to follow the Chinese system, force might be applied. Nonetheless, according to Sun Zhu's

and Mencius' doctrines, supreme excellence lies in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. Since ancient times, pacifism has been a vital element in China's relations with non-Chinese ethnic groups. China, from Han times onwards, has admired the triumph of literati culture (wen) over brute force. Wei Yuan described the tributary system as a framework for foreign relations based on treaties, according to European customs.

Wang Chao's *Changing World* explores how, by the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese scholars were blindly following Confucian doctrine, and they were quite surprised when they discovered that China was not, in fact, the Middle Kingdom. The Chinese misinterpretation of Westerners was evident in their physical images, such as believing they had white skin, red hair, and fitting clothes, and that it was a common belief the British could not bend their waists or legs. Later scholars clarified that it was a myth, and Westerners could also climb mountains and cross oceans. Wei Yuan states that the relationship between the West and China began with trade. It was believed that foreigners needed large quantities of Chinese products, such as tea and silk. It was also believed that the relationship between the West and China was primarily economic and not political, so officials did not want to be involved in diplomatic ties with the West. Chinese scholars at that time recognized the significance of other nations and felt the need to learn their techniques and languages.

Wang Tao has stated that a military defeat by Britain was humiliating. He advocated for ongoing reforms in China, asserting that once these reforms are implemented, China would possess something that the West lacks: moral qualities. Foreigners were addressed as *yangwu*. "Foreign affairs." Wei Yuan stated that his main aim was to thoroughly understand the *yangwu* affairs, or the affairs of foreigners. According to him, all countrymen should study the geography of foreign countries.

Defeat in the opium war was a turning point in the history of China. After the war, Wei Yuan stated that the West had won because of its advanced military technologies. He wanted to encourage the Chinese people to learn the techniques of building ships, making weapons, and acquiring another knowledge from the West. Wang Tao also agreed with the concept of learning from the West. Many other scholars and intellectuals have supported their ideas. Strengthening the military force was the most important change that the Chinese people wanted after the opium war.

The interest in world geography also emerged as a pressing need, driven by the desire to gain knowledge about previously unknown parts of the world. But the most urgent need of the time was to strengthen China's understanding. Translation schools were founded, and students were encouraged to learn foreign languages. Encyclopedias were translated into Chinese. The superior military force of the British was a matter of concern, and scholars provided impetus for learning techniques from the West. Several methods for controlling barbarians were proposed. Few scholars considered using trade to meet the necessities of foreign relations. The early 19th century witnessed the emergence of interest in statecraft, or its practical application to society. Wei Yuan, in his *collection of Qing dynasty writings and statecraft*, highlights the importance of the present and describes the practical application of this, as well as the pressing problems in China at that time. It was a series of essays on statecraft under the reigning dynasty, highlighting its political and economic issues. It inspired a series of similar anthologies aimed at making the ideas of officials on governmental problems readily accessible.

Skillful diplomacy had a paramount role in China's understanding of the West. Scholars realized that peaceful negotiations with foreign countries are good for China; otherwise, China would not be able to compete with the West, as the West has proved its superiority. Wei is famous as a scholar, but his attention to "*Han Kuo Tu Chi*" is his understanding of China's relationship with maritime Asia. During the Qing period, maritime Asia had been accepted as part of China's tributary sphere. The Manchus had neglected certain parts of the Inner Asian border. Wei Yuan stated that maritime Asia emerged as a series of geopolitical regions that bounded Asia on the east and South. The most powerful Kingdom claimed leadership throughout these regions, and weaker countries would pay tribute to it. He considered China as supreme power in Asian tributary hierarchy and had significant responsibilities in maintaining peace in maritime Asia it was very events personal observation the Qing has not fulfilled its tributary responsibility in maritime Asia China's tributary and tribute system was good for safety of its border areas as most of the neighbouring countries where weaker than it and we are dependent on it but in 19 century British systematic naval power proved Its superiority British sports were spread all over the world and this is how they started dominating Asia and Africa as they were linked to east by a fortified port system which connected Africa India and South East Asia.

The first link between Europe and Asia was Africa, an extensive and populous continent that lacked political unity and was made up of various autonomous Kingdoms. In his essay, Wei Yuan has described China's maritime affairs with other countries and the Western threat to Asia and Africa. Although he described various States and regions that suffered from threats, he was mainly concerned about China. In his essay, Wei Yuan has appreciated the efficiency of the British trading system and well-equipped trading ships. He has also mentioned a good relationship between China and India, noting that it was culture that has bound the two

nations since ancient times. The superior armed forces of Westerners made him consider developing alliances with the French, Americans, and other powerful European countries, through which warships could be purchased. He advocated the immediate purchase of warships and the training of an efficient Chinese Navy. The purpose was to enable China to assert its power and influence in maritime Asia, paving the way for more active Chinese involvement in naval affairs. Wei proposed that coastal cities must be well fortified and armed so that Westerners could not seize China. He believed that peace could be maintained until China's power and defence were built on the coast and China's influence was reestablished in maritime Asia.

Conclusions

The thoughts of Wei Yuan and Wang Tao complimented each other in modernization process in 19 century China it is evident that Wang Tao deeply influenced by Wei Yuan and by and large both of them maintained issues of problem with traditional Confucianism and give importance to western knowledge and demanded fourteens to modernise China and enable it to compete with western nations, which was the need of time. The paper concludes that these intellectuals and their writings paved the way for a modern China, highlighting the areas where China is weak and where it needs to strengthen itself. The writing of these intellectuals contributed to making strong modern China.

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