The question 'Why is China backward?' was the central examination of China's thought on wealth and power in his preoccupation of Yen Fu (1853-1921), and this led to his passionate search for wealth and power from the West. Although Yen Fu was not the only Chinese commentator on modern Western texts, he was nonetheless a figure of enormous distinctive influence on China. In his day, he was the most thoroughly learned Chinese scholar in Western Philosophy and Social Science. He was the first one to introduce some of the main currents of nineteenth-century thought into China through his works of translation. That of Thomas Henry Huxley's (1825-1895) On Evolution was the work that most greatly influenced Chinese society.

This academic exercise consists of seven chapters. The first chapter begins with an introductory account of the many critics who tried to change and reform China with different ideas. Chapter two gives a brief biographical background of Yen Fu, together with the contemporary socio-political situation in China. The next chapter analyses the theoretical origins of Yen Fu's thought namely that of social Darwinism and the Spencian Theory, while chapter four focuses on his concept of wealth based on Adam Smith's (1723-1790) book The Wealth of Nations. Chapter five
touches on Yen's ideas about power and the strategies to enrich China. Chapter six is an objective approach to an examination of Yen's thought on wealth and power in his later life.

The concluding chapter provides a general criticism of his work and points out some of the implications of his thought.

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