ABSTRACT

When people talk about Empress Dowager Cixi (慈禧太后) of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the impressions are mainly negative and she is accused of being the culprit for the downfall of the Qing Empire. This accusation is not convincing enough to explain such a historical fact and based on this reason, it has created a tremendous interest to analyze and study the reasons behind such an accusation. This thesis aims to analyze the images of Empress Dowager Cixi in traditional text and to identify the factual images that Empress Dowager Cixi used to portray in the real history.

The thesis comprises of five chapters: In the first chapter, analysis of the images of Empress Dowager Cixi in both Chinese and Western text will be made to find out whether there is any difference in the traditional images portrayed. Her traditional images will be talked about and the sources of such images will be discussed. In order to demist the biased ness in these traditional images, other more reliable sources that can help in the analysis of her real images will be given. In the second chapter, the traditional saying about Empress Dowager Cixi’s childhood and family background will be discussed. New findings regarding this aspect will be explored in order to develop new insights in the analysis of such a historical figure. In the third chapter, Empress Dowager Cixi’s images in two important historical events will be discussed in details. Both traditional images and the more unbiased factual images will be touched
on. These two historical events are the Coup d’état of 1898 and the Boxer Catastrophe. In the fourth chapter, four theories will be given to analyze the relationship between Empress Dowager Cixi and the downfall of the Qing Dynasty. These theories will borrow the discipline from economics, sociology, psychology and gender studies to foster the explanation of the downfall of the Qing Dynasty. The last chapter is a conclusion regarding the findings and analysis made in the above chapters.

This study reveals that many of the traditional images given to Empress Dowager Cixi are full of bias and these images are mostly portrayed by her political enemies. Although it is a fact that she made many mistakes when she was in control of politics for the Qing Dynasty, blaming her for the entire downfall of the empire, is not justified and correct. Research and analysis into this matter has shown that the downfall began during the reign of Emperor Dao Guang and he should be the one bearing the consequences of causing the downfall of the empire, due to his foolishness and indecisiveness in managing the changing world affairs.