Wang Tao (王韬, 1828–1897) was one of the first few individuals in the nineteenth-century China who consciously confronted the challenge of the West to the civilization of China. He identified himself with the self-strengthening movement, and even urged the way for institutional reform. His thought, which favoured extensive imitations of Western traits, was considerably influential among the intellectuals in later phases of modernisation. This academic exercise purports to study Wang Tao’s thought on "foreign and matters".

This paper consists of seven chapters, the first of which gives an overview of this study, while the second surveys the life and career of Wang Tao. Wang Tao’s thought underwent clear and positive changes in the course of time. The development of his thought is analysed in Chapter Three. As one who stood in the early stage of the reform movement, the burden fell on Wang Tao to make elaborate justifications for changes and the adoption of Western methods. Chapter Four focuses on the ideological basis of Wang Tao’s thought. In Chapter Five, Wang’s ideas on the "foreign matters" are treated in more detail under five categories, namely, economics, military, diplomacy, politics and education. Chapter Six evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Wang Tao’s thought. The concluding chapter of this study highlights some outstanding features of Wang Tao as an early reformer.