ABSTRACT

China's defeat in the Opium War was dismissed by most contemporaneous Chinese scholars and officials as an historical accident, but her defeat and humiliation in 1857 - 1860 shocked many of the intelligentsia and officialdom into a greater awakening. Therefore, Ch'ing court began to believe Wei Yuan's opinion as correct: "learn the superior techniques of the barbarians to control the barbarians". This dictum rang out as the motivating spirit of the Self-strengthening Movement from 1861 to 1894.

The purpose of this study is to make an evaluation of China's Self-strengthening Movement which intended to make efforts to strengthen the nation's military and industrial basis against future encroachment of the Western powers on China.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One discusses the background of the Self-strengthening Movement. Chapter Two analyzes the motivating forces of this movement and discusses the trend of the Manchu regime's efforts moving from military industries to light industries. Chapter Three examines how the autocratic power of Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, who controlled the court for 48 years, had weakened the Self-strengthening Movement. At the same time, this movement was wholeheartedly supported by Prince Kung and Wenhsiang in the capital, and by several provincial leaders in the provinces -- such as Tseng Kuo-fan, Tso Tsung-t'ang and Li Hung-chang. According to the changing emphasis and the shifting philosophy, the Self-strengthening Movement can be divided into three periods. Thus, chapters Four, Five, Six represent each period respectively and introduce some
representative industries which were launched in the respective 
periods. The first period, roughly from 1861 to 1874, stressed the 
adoption of Western firearms, machines, scientific knowledge, and 
the training of technical and diplomatic personnel through the 
establishment of the T'ung-wen college and other new schools, and 
the dispatch of students abroad. In the second period from 1875 to 
1884, while defence industries remained a chief occupation, greater 
attention was directed to the development of profit-oriented enter-
prises such as shipping, railways, mining, and the telegraph. The 
third period from 1885 to 1894, saw the idea of enriching the nation 
through light and consumption industries such as textile and cotton-
weaving gaining increasingly favour. The final chapter (Chapter Seven) 
makes an assessment of the repercussions and limitations of the 
Movement.

The findings show that the scope of activity in the Self-
strengthening Movement was too limited and too emphatic to firearms, 
ships, machines, communications, mining, and light industries. No 
attempts were made to assimilate Western institutions, philosophy, arts, 
and culture. The self-strengthening efforts barely scratched the surface 
of modernization, without achieving a breakthrough in industrialization. 
For all its shortcomings, the Self-strengthening Movement marked the 
beginning of industrialization in China.