ABSTRACT

Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842 – 1922) was once a distinguished compradore in leading foreign firms for many years and later devoted himself to the establishment of several government-sponsored modern enterprises.

Being a compradore, Zheng saw more clearly than anyone before him the dynamic function of industry and commerce in Western Society. As such, while political leaders and intellectual elite of his time were preoccupied with military self-strengthening, Zheng asserted that it was more important to learn and wage commercial rivalry than military confrontation (習兵戰不如習商戰).

This academic exercise aims to examine the economic reform programmes proposed by Zheng whose main concern was to promote China’s own commerce and industry. He advocated that China should look into certain key areas: adjustment of institutional structure, recruitment of talents, utilization of natural resources, sales of commodities, establishment of financial sector and the development of transport facilities, if she wished to strengthen herself.

In addition, he felt it necessary for the Chinese people to abandon their orthodoxy of treating merchant as the lowest class of the existing social hierarchy, if the above reform programmes were to be carried out successfully. With these complete and systematic reform programmes, Zheng distinguished himself from other contemporary reformers.