ABSTRACT

The notion of learning from the west plays an important part in the history of modern China. In the beginning phrase, the Chinese's idea of learning from the west was merely restricted to adopting western technical skills, particularly in relation to western warships and cannons. After China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, China was faced with the threat of being carved up by the imperialist powers. This led to a growing consensus among some Chinese scholars that merely learning the technical skills of the westerners was insufficient. They started to advocate that China should also adopt the western style of government. They felt that this was the necessary requirement for China to be prosperous and powerful and not be suppressed by the imperialist powers. This consensus reached its peak after the Sino-Japanese war in which China's defeat proved that merely adopting western technical skills was insufficient to face the challenge posed by the imperialist powers. Subsequently, the Hundred Days' Reform broke out. The Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 was a political movement led by a group of scholars, headed by Kang You Wei. They were supported by Emperor Guangxu. Within these hundred days, from 11 June 1898 to 21 September 1898, Kang You Wei submitted many suggestions to Emperor Guangxu and many decrees were issued by the Emperor pertaining to the measures brought up by Kang You Wei. The reforms pertained to political, economic, military and educational aspects. The aim of the Hundred Days' Reform was to adopt the western political system and establish a constitutional monarchy in the Manchu government. However, the Hundred Days' Reform was not supported by Empress Dowager. On 21 September 1898, the Empress launched a coup d'etat and had the Emperor imprisoned and killed six of the reformists. The coup d'etat also spelled the dismissal of all the measures introduced during the Hundred Days' Reform.

This thesis aims to appraise the individual level of influential effect that Empress Dowager, Emperor Guangxu and the reformists exerted on the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform.

This study reveals that although Empress Dowager was the one who brought the Hundred Days' Reform to an end, Emperor Guangxu and the reformists also had significant responsibilities towards the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform.