

Document 6.1: Excerpt from letter by Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang to Zongli Yamen (the Foreign Relations Bureau) on sending young men abroad to study, March 1871

Both Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) and his protégé Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) were deeply committed to the Self-Strengthening Movement.

[After a delegation sent by the empress dowager Cixi] had traveled in various countries,... they saw the essential aspects of conditions overseas, and they found that cartography, mathematics, astronomy, navigation, shipbuilding, and manufacturing are all closely related to military defense. It is the practice of foreign nations that those who have studied abroad and have learned some superior techniques are immediately invited upon their return by academic institutions to teach the various subjects and to develop their fields. Military administration and shipping are considered as important as the learning that deals with the mind and body, and nature and destiny of man. Now that the eyes of the people have been opened, if China wishes to adopt Western ideas and excel in Western methods, we should immediately select intelligent young men and send them to study in foreign countries....

Some may say, “Arsenals have been established in Tianjin, Shanghai, and Fuzhou for shipbuilding and the manufacture of guns and ammunition. The Tongwen College [for foreign languages] has been established in Beijing for Manchu and Chinese youths to study under Western instructors. A language school has also been opened in Shanghai for the training of young students. It seems, therefore, that a beginning has been made in China and that there is no need for studying overseas.” These critics, however, do not know that to establish arsenals for manufacturing and to open schools for instruction is just the beginning of our effort to rise again. To go to distant lands for study, to gather ideas for more advantageous use, can produce far-reaching and great results. Westerners seek knowledge for practical use. Whether they be scholars, artisans, or soldiers, they all go to school to study and understand the principles, to practice on the machines, and to participate personally in the work. They all exert themselves to the utmost of their

ingenuity, and learn from one another, in the hope that there will be monthly progress and yearly improvement. If we Chinese wish to adopt their superior techniques and suddenly try to buy all their machines, not only will our resources be insufficient to do so but we will be unable to master the fundamental principles or to understand the complicated details of the techniques, unless we have actually seen and practiced with them for a long time....

We have heard that youths of Fujian [and] Guangdong [provinces] and [the city of] Ningbo also occasionally have gone abroad to study, but they merely attempted to gain a superficial knowledge of foreign written and spoken languages in order to do business with the foreigners for the purpose of making a living. In our plan, we must be doubly careful at the beginning of selection. The students who are to be taken to foreign countries will all be under the control of the commissioners. Specializing in different fields, they will earnestly seek for mastery of their subjects. There will be interpreters, and instructors to teach them Chinese learning from time to time, so that they will learn the great principles for the establishment of character, in the hope of becoming men with abilities of use to us.

Source: de Bary, William Theodore, and Richard Lufrano. *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 2: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 241.