Li Hung-chang in Chihli: The Emergence of a Policy, 1870-1875

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The year 1870, which saw the unification of Germany and the consolidation of a revolution from above in Japan, saw a major event in China—the appointment of Li Hung-chang (1823–1901) as governor-general of Chihli and as imperial commissioner for the Northern Ports. Even while he was absorbed in the task of suppressing internal rebellion in the 1860s, Li had been the foremost advocate of “self-strengthening” (tzu-ch'iang)—the policy of building up China's military potential, chiefly by adopting Western technology, so as to meet the challenge of external aggression. In his new position of influence, close to Peking, Li worked to continue and expand this policy.

A reassessment of the self-strengthening movement must include an inquiry into its ideological implications. Did men like Li (there were very few of them) aim merely at the adoption of Western technology, or did they also propose reform? Did they modify the Confucian emphasis on moral government, which relied chiefly on virtue and culture as the sources of power? Inquiry must also be made into the complex factors that frustrated the success of the movement—the institutional and intellectual milieu, and the weakness of the new military and economic forces that had arisen after a generation of contact with the West. But, first of all, it is necessary to consider the political context. Was the self-strengthening movement initiated by the central government or by the provinces? Was it a matter of
sporadic efforts by a governor-general here, by a governor there, or was it a part of Ch’ing national policy?

The self-strengthening movement began in the early Tung-chih period, originating chiefly in the provinces but enjoying the strong support of the court. It was Li Hung-chang who first proposed the teaching of mathematics and the sciences at a government “interpreter’s college,” and who founded China’s earliest modern arsenals; it was Tso Tsung-t’ang who planned a large shipbuilding program. Li and Tso were stoutly backed, however, by the Tsungli Yamen at a time when Prince Kung was at the height of his power and when Wen-hsiang was still in good health. The development of “regionalism”—the administrative leeway that the governors-general and governors enjoyed regarding the temporary imperial armies (yung) and the likin—did not handicap the cooperation between Peking and the provinces in the new projects.

In 1870, a new page was turned in the history of the self-strengthening movement. Li Hung-chang, in moving so close to Peking, became in effect a metropolitan official. Li performed many central government functions in the fields of diplomacy and military planning, and he made an attempt to coordinate self-strengthening efforts not only in Chihli but in other parts of the empire. It remained to be seen, however, whether, on the one hand, Li—and, for that matter, Prince Kung and Wen-hsiang (before his death in 1876)—would continue to have an effective voice in the councils around the throne, and whether, on the other hand, the measures they proposed could be carried out in the provinces, particularly in the militarily and financially vital area of the lower Yangtze.

This chapter presents aspects of Li’s first five years in Tientsin—his functions in the imperial government, his ideas regarding self-strengthening, and the manner in which his proposals were received in Peking and in the provinces. As a senior official who had occupied key positions during the campaigns for the suppression of the Taipings and the Niens, Li had formed many friendships among governors-general, governors, and les-
 ser officials. As the acknowledged but untitled leader of the Anhwei Army, Li also developed a degree of influence in provinces where units of that army were stationed. But in the last analysis, it was the specific imperial sanction for each of Li's proposals, as well as his position as imperial commissioner, that accounted for his role as coordinator of policy. In the early 1870s, we find him taking remarkable initiative in shaping policy, and for a time it appeared that his programs might, at least in part, be carried out on a national scale.

Li's central government functions

It was a crisis in China's foreign relations that brought Li to Chihli. Under pressure of the harsh French demands that followed the Tientsin Massacre of June 21, the court on July 26 ordered Li, who had been engaged in operations against the Moslem rebels in Shensi, to move his forces to Chihli and join the twenty-eight battalions of the Anhwei Army (Huai-chün) previously brought there by Tseng Kuo-fan. A month later, on August 29, when Li and an army of about twenty-five thousand men arrived at the border of Chihli, he was appointed its governor-general, replacing the ailing Tseng. It was the court's wish that the Anhwei Army, which had proved so effective in fighting the Taipings and the Niens, should now be used for the defense of the metropolitan province against possible invaders.

For one who thinks in terms of twentieth-century Chinese politics it is possible to imagine Li as a proto-warlord, henceforth dominating the area where the capital was situated. This is completely misleading, for although Li's role as leader of the Anhwei Army certainly accounted for his being brought to Chihli, the Anhwei Army itself was by this time an integral part of the dynasty's armed forces. While its status continued to be that of yung, a temporary imperial army, Peking had control over the appointment of its higher officers and over its finances. The commanders (t'ung-ling) of the Anhwei Army, although normally recommended by Li, were appointed by imperial edict.
and all had the title of general-in-chief (t‘i-tu) or brigade general (tsung-ping) under the Green Standard system. The subordinate officers, although chosen by the commanders, were also given the titles of Green Standard officers by the Board of War—colonel (fu-chiang), lieutenant-colonel (ts’an-chiang), and the rest, usually in an “expectant” (hou-pu) capacity. There is no question that the troops and officers of the Anhwei Army regarded themselves as serving the dynasty. It was, moreover, from imperially authorized sources that the Anhwei Army was financed—the maritime customs of Shanghai and Hankow, the likin from Kiangsu and Kiangsi, and, in smaller amounts, the treasuries of Liangkiang, Hupei, Chekiang, Shantung, Szechuan, and Shansi. While Li enjoyed close personal relationships with the governors-general of Liangkiang (Tseng) and of Hukuang (Li Han-chang) and was friendly with several governors, the court had the authority and influence to see that the funds were continued or withheld and, indeed, to replace the governors-general or the governors. Ever since 1864, units of the Anhwei Army had been frequently moved by imperial edict from one province to another. In summoning Anhwei troops to Chihli, the throne was merely calling upon the services of one of its best forces.

On the other hand, thanks to his role as the leader of the Anhwei Army, Li gained a trusted position near the capital itself and was relied on to perform duties that belonged to a central government official. On November 12, 1870, less than three months after his designation as governor-general, he was given the further appointment of imperial commissioner (ch‘in-ch’ai ta-ch‘en), vested with duties even broader than those of the former commissioner of trade for the three Northern Ports (sank‘ou t‘ung-shang ta-ch‘en). Li was instructed to reside at the strategic port of Tientsin and not at the provincial capital of Paoting. The edict stipulated that Li was to go to Paoting only in the winter months when the port of Tientsin was closed; it was not until December 1871 that he first visited Paoting. Beginning in 1872, he also went to Peking about once a year for
audiences with the throne and consultation with the ministers. Li’s letters of 1872–75 mention his discussions with Prince Kung, Wen-hsiang, Shen Kuei-fen, Pao-yun, and Li Hung-tsaо—all five being grand councillors and, except for the last, ministers of the Tsungli Yamen.7

Li was responsible, of course, for Chihli provincial affairs. The provincial treasurer at Paoting was authorized to act for him on routine petitions, but important matters were brought to his yamen at Tientsin.8 Among provincial matters to which Li gave his personal attention was internal policing, for which he used the so-called Trained Troops (lien-chün), an army of about six thousand men selected from the Green Standard forces by previous governors-general.9 Among questions of civil administration brought up by Li in memorials to the throne were local government finance (particularly the question of how to reduce the burden on chou and hsien magistrates), the province’s financial obligations to Peking, the salt monopoly, and the transmission of tribute rice to T’ung-chou. Li’s most pressing and difficult provincial problems, however, were those created by the breaches in the dikes of the Yun-ting River. Northern Chihli saw one of its worst floods of the century in the summer of 1871, followed by a more moderate one in 1873. It was Li’s responsibility to raise funds for relief and to revive agriculture in the areas affected. He also had to supervise repairs on the dikes—work that was to continue for several years.10

Meanwhile, Li was increasingly involved in his duties as imperial commissioner. These entailed, first of all, the supervision of foreign trade at the ports of Tientsin, Chefoo, and Newchwang through the superintendents of customs at the three ports—the one at Tientsin being a new post created at Li’s recommendation.11 But Li was also relied on by the Tsungli Yamen in questions concerning foreign trade in the empire as a whole. The Yamen often asked Li to study the proposals made to it by Robert Hart—for example, the latter’s draft regulations, submitted in the spring of 1872, concerning the customs declaration form, the re-export certificate, and the transit pass. On
his authority as imperial commissioner, Li sent “instructions by letter” (cha-ch’ih) to the superintendents of customs at Tientsin, Shanghai, and Hankow for their comments. Li added his own ideas and recommended to the Yamen that revisions be made in Hart’s draft to make it more difficult for Chinese merchants to evade duties and likin. The final draft was worked out at Tientsin between Li and Hart.12

As imperial commissioner, Li had the responsibility of dealing with foreign representatives on local issues—for example, ironing out the final details of the Sino-French settlement regarding the Tientsin Massacre and determining the Russian and British claims.13 Moreover, Li’s diplomatic activities soon included national issues that the Tsungli Yamen considered would be more convenient for Li to handle at Tientsin. Further, the Yamen frequently sought Li’s advice on policy and sometimes would entrust policy making to him.

The first important national issue Li handled was the treaty with Japan. As early as October 1870, after his first meeting with the Japanese representative who came to China to request a treaty, Li advised the Yamen that it was in the Ch’ing interest to form such ties. Li was impressed by Japan’s comparative success in dealing with the West (for example, the ability to manage maritime customs without employing foreigners and to regulate missionary activity) and by the large funds that Japan was reported to have raised for arsenals and steamships. Li felt that China should befriend Japan, perhaps even send officials to reside in that country, with a view to preventing her from siding with the Western nations. On the Yamen’s recommendation, the throne entrusted Li and Tseng Kuo-fan, who was the commissioner of trade for the Southern Ports, with the responsibility of formulating a policy for the treaty. Subsequently, Li was given full powers for the negotiations. The talks took place in the summer of 1871, China being represented by two officials of lower rank under Li’s supervision. Eight months later, when the Japanese representative came to China to demand changes in the draft of the treaty, negotiations were
again held at Tientsin. In May 1873, Li was the plenipotentiary who exchanged the ratified texts with the Japanese foreign minister, who had come to Tientsin for the purpose. Li discussed various matters with him, including China’s concern about Korea.14

Similarly, Li was given the authority to meet with the representative of Peru who requested a treaty in October 1873. Through the intermittent negotiations that lasted until June 1874, Li’s objective was to have the Peruvian representative accept a Chinese mission to investigate the conditions of Chinese labor in that country. The upshot was the Yung Wing mission to Peru in August 1874.15

Beginning in 1872, the Yamen often enlisted Li’s assistance in vital matters with which the Yamen itself was dealing. In September of that year, when the Russian and German ministers were passing through Tientsin, Li took the opportunity to discuss with them, on the Yamen’s behalf, aspects of the “audience question.” In April 1873, when Li himself was in Peking, he supported the compromise solution that was proposed by Wen-hsiang against those who insisted on kowtow. Li’s intervention is said to have been important among the factors that “smoothed away all difficulties,” resulting in the modified ceremony adopted at the audience held on June 14.16

In May and June of 1874, during the crisis that had been created when the Japanese landed troops on Taiwan seeking redress for shipwrecked Ryūkyū sailors murdered by the aborigines, Li participated in efforts to resolve the problem. Li advised the Yamen on the military measures that would strengthen China’s hand in the negotiations—“to prepare for war secretly so that peace may be achieved quickly and endure.”17 When the Japanese minister to China arrived in June 1874, the Yamen hoped that he could remain at Tientsin to negotiate with Li. However, he proceeded immediately to Peking, as did Ōkubo, the special commissioner who came in August. A settlement calling on China to pay 500,000 taels to Japan was reached on October 31, with Sir Thomas Wade acting as inter-
mediary. Meanwhile, however, Li had been actively seeking the mediation of Benjamin P. Avery, the new American minister who had just come from Japan and was then in Tientsin.\textsuperscript{18}

If Li was serving as a central government official in his diplomatic activities, the same may be said of his role in the Ch‘ing government’s military planning—despite the fact that he played but little part in the great Ch‘ing military achievement of the period, namely the suppression of the Moslem rebels in Kansu in 1873 and the reconquest of Sinkiang that followed three years later. It was Li, however, upon whom the court relied for the defense of the capital area and for coordination of military preparations in the coastal and Yangtze provinces. It has been stated above that as the Chihli governor-general, Li had control over the six thousand Trained Troops used primarily for local policing. As imperial commissioner, he had the further duty of supervising the coastal defense of the metropolitan area, including the safeguarding of the Taku estuary and points halfway between Tientsin and Peking.\textsuperscript{19} Similar responsibility was formerly borne by the Mongol prince Seng-k‘o-lin-ch‘in, who was imperial commissioner during the crisis of 1857–60, and by the Manchu grandee Ch‘ung-hou between 1861 and 1870, when he served as commissioner of trade for the three Northern Ports. Ch‘ung-hou had built fortifications in the Taku area and had organized the Western Arms and Cannon Corps (yang ch‘iang-p‘ao tui), which grew to 3,200 men, under the command of the Tientsin brigade general.\textsuperscript{20} Li was authorized to take charge of the forts and the corps, although his predecessors as governor-general, including Tseng Kuo-fan, were never given this authority. In November 1870, Li appointed Lo Jung-kuang, the famous Anhwei Army artillery officer, as the Taku regiment colonel in charge of the forts. The Anhwei Army’s best artillery, as well as new cannon built at the Nanking Arsenal, were brought to Taku, and new Krupp guns were ordered. Li put the Foreign Arms and Cannon Corps through retraining, particularly in the Anhwei Army’s favorite technique of constructing fortified encampments.\textsuperscript{21}
In November 1870, the court directed that the twenty-eight battalions (about fourteen thousand men) of the Anhwei Army originally under Liu Ming-ch’uan be moved from Chihli to join the nine battalions of the Anhwei Army that Li had left in Shensi. At Li’s recommendation, ten battalions of the Anhwei Army under Kuo Sung-lin also went to Shensi and Kuo himself was to bring ten battalions to Hupei, to help guard against the secret societies of the Hunan-Hupei area. However, two battalions of Liu’s best troops were retained at Paoting, together with two battalions of the Anhwei Army cavalry. Two battalions of Li’s personal guards were stationed at Tientsin. In addition, twenty-three battalions (about 11,500 men) under Chou Shen-ch’uan were stationed in the area south of Tientsin, particularly at Ma-ch’ang, a base that Chou was to build up. In 1873, Chou’s troops were used to construct a fortified town between Taku and Tientsin, and later they were put to work repairing dikes and reclaiming salt marshes for farmland. But they were also drilled and given training in the latest types of rifles and artillery. Li described them as a “mobile force for the defense of the metropolitan territory.”

Due chiefly to Li’s relationship with the Anhwei Army, he also participated at times in the court’s military planning for other parts of the empire. His role was passive with regard to the northwest. In 1870-72, he sent two contingents of a thousand men each from the Trained Troops of Chihli to Urga, to help guard against possible Russian encroachment on Outer Mongolia. On September 1, 1871, apprised of the Russian occupation of Ili, the court ordered Liu Ming-ch’uan, who had requested a leave of absence due to illness, to take his forces from Shensi to Kansu and thence to Sinkiang. Liu again pleaded illness, and on September 21, the court revised its orders, requiring him only to advance to Su-chou in Kansu. Although Li was not convinced of the value of Sinkiang in China’s total strategic picture, he wrote Liu urging him to comply. Without consulting Li, however, Liu once more begged the throne for a leave and recommended that Ts’ao K’e-chung, a general not of Anhwei
Army background, replace him and lead his forces to attack Su-
chou. The request was granted. Ts’ao was summoned to Peking
for an audience in November 1871 and was appointed to the
command. Li pledged himself to support Ts’ao with Anhwei
Army funds but recommended that only twenty-two of Liu’s
thirty-seven battalions be transferred to him. In August 1872,
mutiny occurred in certain units of Ts’ao’s forces; the throne
referred the matter to Li, who recommended that Liu Sheng-
tsao, Liu Ming-ch’uan’s nephew and a former Anhwei Army of-
ficer, should take over. Liu Sheng-tsao came to Tientsin for
consultations with Li and was given the appointment by the
throne. Li had hoped to suggest that Liu move all the Anhwei
forces in Shensi back to the coastal area, but the twenty-two
battalions were retained in Shensi at the request of its gover-
nor.

Li’s own conviction was that the coast, particularly with a
restless Japan quickly arming, was far more in need of protec-
tion. Ever since the end of the Nien Rebellion, eight battalions
of the Anhwei Army, under Wu Ch’ang-ch’ing, had been sta-
tioned at several points in Kiangsu; at Li’s recommendation, the
throne, in November 1870, approved their remaining there.
These forces were under the direction of Tseng Kuo-fan, the
governor-general of Liangkiang, but Li often wrote to him to
make suggestions on such subjects as the training needed by the
artillery corps or the strategic places where troops should be
quartered. Tseng, on his part, would inform Li when he ordered
the transfer of units from one location to another. In November
1871, when the Anhwei Army in Shensi was transferred to
Ts’ao K’e-chung’s command, Li took the opportunity to recom-
mend to the throne that fifteen of the thirty-seven battalions be
moved to Hsü-chou in northern Kiangsu. In approving the idea,
the throne directed that these battalions (led by an Anhwei
Army officer named T’ang Ting-k’uei) be put at the disposal of
Tseng. After Tseng died in March 1872, Li continued to ad-
vise his successors in the Liangkiang post on military af-
fairs—including the organization of a small navy with gunboats
built by the Kiangnan Arsenal. Though Tseng's successors were free to direct the Anhwei Army in Kiangsu, they developed the practice of informing Li of their decisions whenever units were reassigned to new locations.27

In the summer of 1874, during the crisis created by the Japanese invasion of Taiwan, Li extended his concern to the Fukien-Taiwan area. It was upon Li's advice that the Tsungli Yamen recommended to the throne that Shen Pao-chen, the director-general of the Foochow Navy Yard, be appointed imperial commissioner for the defense of Taiwan. In June, Li suggested to Shen and to the Yamen that thirteen battalions (6,500 men) of the Anhwei Army at Hsü-chou, under T'ang Ting-k'uei, be dispatched to Taiwan to be put under Shen's control. This was approved by the throne in late July, as was Li's further recommendation that the twenty-two battalions of the Anhwei Army in Shensi be transferred to Kiangsu and Shantung, to meet the contingency of a Sino-Japanese conflict.28

Meanwhile, Li kept in touch by correspondence with Shen, with Li Tsung-hsi, the governor-general of Liangkiang, and with Chang Shu-sheng, the governor of Kiangsu, arranging to ship munitions from Kiangsu and Chihli to Taiwan. On July 13, Li was instructed by the throne to "make a general plan for the entire situation" and to "deliberate jointly" (hui-shang) with officials in the provinces concerned regarding defense preparations.29 Li advised Shen that clashes with the Japanese were to be avoided, while preparations for war must be hastened. Li arranged to have three ships of the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company and three Foochow-built steamships transport the troops in Kiangsu to Taiwan. Because the six vessels had to make three voyages to complete the shipping of 6,500 men, the last contingents did not reach their destination until October, although the first arrived in mid-August. Li corresponded with officials in Fukien and in Liangkiang on defense measures. Alarmed by rumors of Japanese intentions, Li Tsung-hsi and Chang Shu-sheng requested that the twenty-two battalions of the Anhwei Army from Shensi come to
southern Kiangsu. Li decided, however, that only five should go there, and that the remaining seventeen (including five cavalry battalions) should be stationed at Chi-ning, Shantung, where they could easily be moved either north or south. Li assured his colleagues that even should there be war, given the resources of the Japanese, action was not likely to spread to the coast for a few months. There was time, therefore, to plan coastal fortifications carefully and to order foreign-made guns and rifles. It is difficult to say whether these defense efforts had any actual bearing on Japan's accepting a peaceful settlement in late October. But Li had clearly emerged during the episode as the coordinator of Ch'ing military preparations on Taiwan and on the coast.

The crisis also revealed that Li depended on the throne's support for the continued financing of the Anhwei Army. Beginning in 1872, such provinces as Shantung, Chekiang, Szechuan, and Shansi had been reducing their annual contributions (hsieh-hsiang) to the Anhwei Army, if not defaulting entirely, due to Peking's pressure on them to supply funds for other purposes. In 1872, the Anhwei Army still received large sums from the Shanghai and Hankow maritime customs and from Liangkiang sources (especially from Kiangsu likin and Kiangsi salt likin), but in the eighteen months following January 29, 1873, the annual average received from Kiangsu likin (which was the largest single source of Anhwei Army funds) dropped from 1,000,019 taels to 873,332. There was danger that the trend might continue, for we find Li frequently writing to the governor of Kiangsu and governor-general of Liang-kiang, urging them to see that payments were made promptly. Li had to remind these officials that the appropriations were backed by the throne itself. He warned Li Tsung-hsi not to withhold the Anhwei Army funds "so that I do not have to appeal to the throne." To Chang Shu-sheng, who had formerly been an Anhwei Army commander but whose interests were now not necessarily identical with its interests, Li wrote bluntly: "I will certainly fight for the funds. Let me swear it by smearing
my mouth with blood." On at least one occasion, Li actually did appeal to the throne regarding the Anhwei Army appropriations. He requested in a memorial dated September 1, 1874, that Szechuan province be instructed to pay its arrears of more than 200,000 taels. In his letters to the governor-general of Szechuan and others, Li stressed that the Anhwei Army was in the service of the state and should be supported by it.

**Self-strengthening—the emergence of a policy**

Li’s service to the state was not limited to diplomatic work or to advising the throne on the use of the Anhwei Army. As he himself conceived it, his role in the dynasty’s military planning should include the enhancement of China’s military capability—which alone could insure peaceful relations with the powers. Li assumed that the aim of the Western maritime powers in China was commerce and not aggrandizement. Nevertheless, he feared that an occasion might arise when one or more powers would use force. Moreover, a real threat existed in an increasingly powerful Japan. “It is only when we can strengthen ourselves every moment,” Li exhorted his colleagues, “that peace can be maintained and trouble prevented.”

Li found that he had both to redefine and expand his program for self-strengthening. Although his primary objective continued to be the building up of an armament industry, experience had shown that arsenals and shipyards were by no means easy to operate. Moreover, there were constant innovations in these fields in Western countries, and it was impossible to catch up quickly. To meet China’s needs for some time to come, it was necessary to purchase the latest types of foreign-made weapons and to create a navy of foreign-built ships. Li further realized that the capacity of Chinese arsenals and shipyards had been severely restricted by lack of competent personnel and of revenue—the two Chinese words both pronounced *ts’ai*. While seeking a gradual expansion of the armament industry, it
was necessary to support new programs of personnel training and to devise means for enlarging the income of the state.

How then could the state best encourage technical personnel or increase its revenue? Although perhaps he was aware that they were not all feasible, Li nevertheless advocated certain institutional reforms that he had been considering since the mid-1860s. The Taiwan crisis and the discussion on coastal defense that followed gave him the opportunity to present his views to the throne, along with his proposal for a fundamental change in the dynasty's strategic concept: to abandon the plans for reconquering Sinkiang and, instead, to concentrate the available resources on defense and self-strengthening programs on the coast.

Although Li could usually count on the court's approval of his conduct of diplomacy or his advice regarding the disposition of the Anhwei Army, it was not as easy to persuade the throne to accept self-strengthening measures involving innovation. The Tsungli Yamen enthusiastically supported some of Li's recommendations, but it was either indifferent or unable to give support to others. There was, moreover, the need for coordinated efforts at the provincial level. After Tseng Kuo-fan's death in 1872, Li increasingly felt the need for allies in Liangkiang and other parts of south China, and we find him using his influence on the court to see that such men as Shen Pao-chen and Ting Jih-ch'ang were appointed to key posts.

**Li's efforts up to November 1874**

Since the mid-1860s, four modern arsenals had been founded, two of them shipyards as well: the Nanking Arsenal (moved from Soochow to that city in 1865), the Kiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai (founded in 1865), the Foochow Navy Yard (1866), and the Tientsin Arsenal (1867). Except for the Nanking Arsenal, which was financed by Anhwei Army funds, all had been authorized by imperial edict. The Nanking and the Kiangnan arsenals had been founded by Li himself, but he was
disappointed by the results. The Nanking plant, which was operated by the Scotsman Halliday Macartney, could produce bronze cannon as well as percussion caps and shells. The Kiangnan Arsenal, a much larger establishment, had spent about 2,500,000 taels in five years, principally from the Shanghai maritime customs revenue. Although it did contribute to the Anhwei Army's campaign against the Niens with muskets and carbines, bronze cannon, percussion caps, and shells, it was not until about 1868 that it succeeded for the first time in producing a rifle—the outdated muzzle-loading type. Li regarded the Kiangnan and Nanking arsenals as no more than "the first step." Between 1867 and 1870, the shipyard attached to the Kiangnan Arsenal constructed four small steamships, described by Li as "neither merchant steamers, nor warships," and as "useful for warfare on the river but not at sea."

One of Li's earliest acts in Chihli was to expand the Tientsin Arsenal, founded by Ch'ung-hou three years before. Li recommended to the throne that a former manager of the Kiangnan Arsenal be appointed its head and that its equipment be increased. Because Li was, at that juncture, planning to equip his army in Chihli with foreign-made breechloading rifles and Krupp guns, he decided that the best contribution the Tientsin Arsenal could make was to supply the ammunition required by these weapons. Between 1871 and 1874, the arsenal received nearly a million taels allocated by the throne from the maritime customs revenue of Tientsin and Chefoo. Three new plants were added to the one originally in existence, so that by 1874 more than a ton of powder was produced daily, as well as a large quantity of cartridges and shells. Li also planned, however, to manufacture the breechloading rifle itself. Machinery for the production of rifles of the Remington type was ordered and installed in 1874–75.

Li hoped that the Kiangnan Arsenal, with its larger plant, could devote greater resources to the manufacture of rifles and ordnance. Although the Kiangnan Arsenal was controlled by the governor-general of Liangkiang, Li often discussed its af-
fairs in his letters to Tseng Kuo-fan. Twice in 1871, Li urged Tseng to check the accuracy of the boastful reports made by Feng Chün-kuang, its chief manager, and to give greater authority to Hsü Shou, the famous mathematician and engineer in the arsenal's service. Li sometimes communicated directly with these managers. It was presumably on his advice that the arsenal acquired additional machinery in 1871 for rifles of the Remington type, some 4,200 of which were produced before the end of 1873. After Tseng died in March 1872, Li continued to advise his successors regarding the arsenal. He urged that, in addition to breechloading rifles and bronze cannon, it should manufacture cast-iron cannon and torpedoes. The first cast-iron cannon was produced in February 1874. During 1871 to 1874, 2,000 rifles and 1,100 carbines produced by Kiangnan were sent to Chihli, but the bulk of its products were assigned to the various armies of the Liangkiang area.

Because the Nanking Arsenal was financed with Anhwei Army funds, Li retained control over its personnel and policies. There was at least one occasion, in 1873, when an order for the change of the arsenal's Chinese director was issued by Li (presumably in his capacity as imperial commissioner for the Northern Ports), although he acted with the written concurrence of Li Tsung-hsi, the governor-general of Liangkiang. Until 1874, the bronze mortars built by Macartney were for the exclusive use of the coastal fortifications at Chihli. Beginning in early 1874, however, Li Tsung-hsi ordered the arsenal to make guns and various kinds of ammunition needed by the forces in Kiangsu.

Li's concern for the Chinese armament industry also extended to Fukien. Late in 1871, the Foochow Navy Yard was attacked by a subchancellor of the Grand Secretariat as wasteful and ineffective. This official, Sung Chin, recommended to the throne that the shipbuilding programs at both Foochow and Shanghai be discontinued. Following instructions from the throne to give his views, Li joined Tso Tsung-t'ang and Shen Pao-chen, the founder and director of the Foochow Navy Yard,
in defending it. Li’s memorial of June 20, 1872, made the famous statement that China was encountering “the greatest change of situation (pien-chü) in three thousand years.” Because Western military power was based on rifles, cannon, and steamships, China must master the secrets of such equipment so as to insure her long-term survival. Li warned that Japan was ahead of China in these matters and was “viewing China in a threatening manner.” Supporting a suggestion made earlier by the Tsungli Yamen, Li proposed that the Foochow and Shanghai shipyards might build freighters as well as gunboats and make the former available for purchase or hire by Chinese merchants. Li added a proposal of his own involving reform of institutions. Because the government-built gunboats could be used for coastal and river patrol by the coast and Yangze provinces, should they not be financed by the appropriations from the provinces devoted to the old-style navy? Li suggested that the court should issue an edict to the effect that the construction of war junks be discontinued altogether. He was greatly disappointed when this last proposal was not supported by the Tsungli Yamen, although at its recommendation the throne decided to continue shipbuilding at Foochow and Shanghai.

Li attached great importance to the Foochow Navy Yard and its training programs and took it upon himself to assist Shen Pao-chen’s work. Li had formed the opinion by 1872 that Shen (who happened to be a chin-shih classmate of Li) was one of the very few high officials of the time who had a clear understanding of what self-strengthening required. Several times Li used his influence with Li Ho-nien, governor-general of Fukien and Chekiang, to persuade the latter not to obstruct Shen’s work. In May 1874, during a visit to Peking, Li spoke on Shen Pao-chen’s behalf with Shen Kuei-fen, grand councilor and president of the Board of War (who also happened to be a chin-shih classmate) and obtained his promise and that of Prince Kung that they would make favorable recommendations on Shen’s future requests about the financing of the Foochow yard.
Li realized, more acutely than he had in the early T'ung-chih period, that successful operation of arsenals and shipyards depended on trained technical personnel. The school Li founded in 1863, the Shanghai T'ung-wen Kuan (which was combined with a new translator's school of the Kiangnan Arsenal in 1867 and renamed Kuang Fang-yen Kuan), had been giving instruction in English, mathematics, and sciences to classes of about forty students still in their teens. But few outstanding graduates had been produced; the results, as in the case of the Peking T'ung-wen Kuan, were disappointing. In 1864, Li had suggested to the Tsungli Yamen that a new category (k'o) be created under the examination system to accommodate men who specialized in technology. The little interest that the Shanghai and Peking schools had aroused among the literati convinced Li that only such a change could provide the incentive for the pursuit of "Western learning."47

Li supported a proposal to send Chinese youths to the United States for their education. He was persuaded that a prolonged period of study abroad was the best way to train Chinese who, upon their return to China, could become instructors in the Shanghai and Peking schools or serve in the arsenals and shipyards. The proposal originated with Yung Wing and Ch'en Lan-pin and was brought to the court's attention in a memorial from Tseng Kuo-fan in October 1870. However, Tseng merely mentioned the idea casually in connection with another matter, and Li, in a letter dated December 13, 1870, urged him to draft concrete plans to be submitted to the court. "It can never be expected," Li wrote, "that the matter be initiated by the court."48 Li also suggested that the draft regulations include a provision that the students be awarded chien-sheng status before going abroad and that upon their return they be assigned official ranks, after being given an examination by the Tsungli Yamen. Li was later satisfied that the regulations merely promised official positions for the returning students. In August 1871, he joined Tseng in submitting a memorial to the throne on the subject, after having corresponded with the
Tsungli Yamen and obtained its concurrence, particularly on the proposal that 1,200,000 taels be allocated over a twenty-year period from the Shanghai maritime customs revenue. As authorized by an imperial edict, a bureau was established in Shanghai in 1872 to select students, and the first group of thirty left Shanghai that summer, to be followed by a similar number annually for three years. The boys selected were between eleven and sixteen sui. A tutor went along to teach them Chinese subjects, but each student was to spend fifteen years abroad, traveling during the last two years. Because the authorized plan was based on a joint memorial from Tseng and Li, it was considered to be under the supervision of the two commissioners at Nanking and Tientsin. The officials in charge in the United States reported to Li and to the governor-general of Liangkiang.

In June 1871, Li had briefly considered sending students to Britain also. His more urgent problem, however, was to find mature personnel in China who could serve at once in managerial or technical capacities in the arsenals, the shipyards, or the customs administration. Li often wrote to colleagues in other provinces inviting nominations of such personnel. In January 1874, when Shen Pao-chen consulted him about a plan to send the graduates of the Foochow Navy Yard School to Britain and France, Li responded with enthusiasm. He wrote to the Yamen about the plan and brought it to Prince Kung's attention when he was in Peking in May 1874. Li also considered sending the sons of the Tientsin Arsenal's Chinese technicians to Germany for study. The Taiwan crisis intervened, and it was not until 1876 that further action was taken.

Li was increasingly convinced that Western technology could be used to augment the wealth of the Ch'ing state as well as its military strength. In Kiangsu, in the early T'ung-chih period, he had been impressed by the successful invasion of the carrying trade in Chinese waters by Western steamships, although at that time he was anxious to protect the seagoing junks that carried the tribute rice to Chihli. As early as 1864, Li had pro-
posed to the Tsungli Yamen that Chinese merchants be permitted to own and operate steamships and foreign-style sailing vessels, in competition with Western ships. In the two years after he came to Tientsin, a series of events prompted him to make immediate plans for a Chinese steamship company. During the flood and famine in Chihli in 1871, he deeply resented the exorbitant rates foreign ships demanded for the transport of relief grain. New breaches of the Yellow River dikes that winter convinced him that the Grand Canal was to become useless. He was against investing enormous sums to restore the former course of the Yellow River so as to improve the Grand Canal's navigability. He saw in a fleet of Chinese-owned coastal steamships the solution to the ancient problem of how to carry tribute rice from the south to the north. It was at this juncture that the Tsungli Yamen suggested that ships built by the Foochow Navy Yard might be hired out to Chinese merchants. Li was asked by the Yamen to make arrangements to this end, and through the summer of 1872 we find him corresponding on the subject with such officials as the superintendent of customs at Shanghai and the head of the Liangkiang administration's new naval fleet (which consisted chiefly of Kiangnan-built ships).

Li found that the Foochow- and Shanghai-built ships were not suitable for the freighting trade, as they were costly to operate and drew too much water for some harbors. Following the advice of Chu Ch'ı-ang, a Chekiang official in charge of the junk transport of that province's tribute rice, Li decided that the best plan was for a group of Chinese merchants to buy foreign-built steamships and to operate them for the general carrying trade as well as for the transport of tribute rice; presumably Chinese-built ships could be added to the fleet later. Li approved Chu's plan to establish a bureau (chü) in Shanghai and to "invite merchants" (chao-shang) to operate steamships. It was understood that the enterprise was to be "supervised by the government and undertaken by the merchants" (kuan-tu shang-pan). Li arranged a loan of 136,000
taels to the enterprise from Chihli military funds, making it clear, however, that "profits and losses are entirely the responsibility of the merchants and do not involve the government." While the availability of government appropriations for tribute rice transport made the project particularly feasible, Li undoubtedly regarded it as part of a general policy for China's self-strengthening. "The use of the steamship for the transport of tribute rice is but a minor consideration," Li wrote the governor of Kiangsu in December 1872. "The project will open up new prospects for the dignity of the state (kuo-t'i), for commerce, for revenue, for military strength—for the China of centuries to come." Li was also interested in reports of Japan's effort to develop commercial shipping. He wrote in early January to an official whom he had recommended to be a secretary of the Tsungli Yamen: "We let other people move about at will in Chinese waters. Why do we deny the Chinese merchants alone a foothold? Even Japan has sixty or seventy [merchant] steamships of her own; we alone do not have any. How does this look?"  

To obtain the tribute rice cargo for the steamships, Li had to enlist the cooperation of officials in the lower Yangtze area. Siding with the vested interests of the junk owners, the Kiangsu officials initially opposed Li's plan. In October 1871, Shen Ping-ch'eng, the superintendent of customs at Shanghai, and Feng Chün-kuang, the head of the Kiangnan Arsenal, joined in a petition of protest to Ho Ching, the governor-general of Liang-kiang, and their views were supported by Chang Shu-sheng, the Kiangsu governor. Invoking Peking's authority, Li reminded Ho that the proposed steamship company eventually would purchase and hire Chinese-built ships and was in line with the Tsungli Yamen's original proposal that had been approved by the throne in June 1872; it was therefore a matter with which Ho, as acting commissioner of trade for the Southern Ports, should be properly concerned. To governor Chang, Li exploded: "I have worked together with you for nearly twenty years. Did you ever see anything that I was determined to do
discontinued because of unjustified criticism?" Ho and Chang eventually allowed 20 percent of the Kiangsu tribute rice to be shipped annually by steamer. Together with a similar quota from Chekiang, this assured the new enterprise an annual tribute rice freight of 200,000 piculs, or a payment of 112,000 tael. In December, Li memorialized to request imperial sanction of the entire plan. The memorial was approved on December 26, and on January 14, the Bureau for Inviting Merchants to Operate Steamships (Lun-ch’uan chao-shang chü; known in English as the China Merchants’ Steam Navigation Company) was inaugurated in Shanghai. Because it was on the basis of Li’s memorial that the project was approved, the Bureau was regarded as under the jurisdiction of the imperial commissioner for the Northern Ports. Li retained firm control of its personnel and policies. In July 1873, when two Cantonese compradors, Tong King-sing and Hsü Jun, became the directors (tsung-pan) of the new company, it was Li who issued the appointment. Li found it necessary, however, to appeal to the Kiangsu governor and the Liangkiang governor-general to help by giving the enterprise larger tribute-rice consignments and by providing it with loans from provincial funds. Thanks to such assistance, as well as to the efforts of its ex-comprador managers, the company’s fleet grew to thirteen ships (8,546 net tons) by 1875 and services were developed on the Yangtze River and on several coastal routes.

The purpose of the Chinese merchant steamers, as Li told the Tsungli Yamen, was to compete with foreign enterprise and restore China’s “control of profit” (li-ch’üan). But Li was particularly intrigued by the possibility of opening up a new source of revenue to the state by working mines with Western methods. Early in 1868, when he was still involved in the war against the Niens, Li had proposed in connection with the question of treaty revision that foreign engineers be allowed to work Chinese coal and iron mines. After coming to Chihli, Li became increasingly convinced that the use of pumps and other machines in mining pits not only would provide the Chinese ar-
senals and shipyards with vital materials and fuel but would profit the state financially. Li was also aware of the fact that the Japanese had been working their mines with Western techniques. In his memorial of June 20, 1872, concerning the Foochow shipyard, he proposed projects “supervised by the government and undertaken by merchants” to work mines with machinery. He also recommended using Western foundry techniques to produce cast iron and steel. Li emphasized that coal and iron could be marketed for profit and were “of great importance to the policy of enriching the state and strengthening military power.”

Li was disappointed when the Tsungli Yamen, while favoring the continuation of the Foochow shipyard, failed to make a recommendation to the throne regarding mining projects. He wrote Wang K'ai-t'ai, the governor of Fukien, that the failure indicated that the Yamen thought only of the present and not the future: “What will become of us a few decades hence?”

On his own initiative, Li encouraged Feng Chun-kuang, the director of the Kiangnan Arsenal, and others to make plans for working coal and iron mines at Tz'u-chou, in southern Chihli. In 1874, an English merchant, James Henderson, was sent to Britain to buy machinery and hire workmen. Li was not, however, merely concerned with the opportunities for such projects in Chihli. He wrote the governor of Shansi, Pao Yuan-shen, in November 1873, urging him to open up the rich mineral deposits of that province with new methods. “The earth is not stingy with its treasure,” Li wrote, “but few in China are aware of this truth; please give this matter your attention and do not worry all the time about poverty.” Early in 1874, Li asked Li Tsung-hsi, the governor-general of Liangkiang, to try to persuade Liu K'un-i, the governor of Kiangsi, to introduce machinery in the coal fields at Lo-p'ing, Kiangsi. Liu refused. In August 1874, at the very height of the Taiwan crisis, Li advised Shen Pao-chen to try to work the mines of that island. Assisted by H. E. Hobson, the commissioner of customs at Tamsui, Shen made arrangements for a coal mine near Keelung in 1875.
Li's proposals of December 1874

Since the Tientsin Massacre, the initiative for self-strengthening had come chiefly from Li, with some cooperation from the Tsungli Yamen and from Tseng Kuo-fan and Shen Pao-chen in the provinces. The Taiwan affair further stimulated attention to the problem of military preparedness. On November 5, 1874, the Tsungli Yamen, in which the ailing Wen-hsiang was still the dominant spirit, memorialized on the lessons of the incident. The Yamen lamented that although there had been much talk of self-strengthening since 1860, little had actually been done. The Yamen recommended that governors-general, governors, and the Manchu commanders-in-chief of the coastal and Yangtze provinces be invited to submit their views on the needs of coastal defense (hai-fang) under five headings: military training, weapons, shipbuilding, revenue, and personnel. In a personal memorial submitted a month later, Wen-hsiang (who had risen from his sickbed to take charge of negotiations with the Japanese on the Taiwan incident) reminded the throne that there was a real possibility that Japan, "accustomed to break her word," would allow her rebels at home to seek adventure in China. Wen-hsiang recommended that military preparations on Taiwan be continued and that plans be made immediately to buy ironclads and gunboats from abroad.66

Although it was the Yamen that initiated the policy debate in 1874, Li put forth the boldest proposals. "What is urgently needed today is to abandon established notions and seek practical results," he urged in his memorial of December 10.57 The two essentials for a successful coastal defense program were, in his view, "the change of institutions (pien-fu) and the proper use of personnel (yung-jen)." Li wrote Wen-hsiang that he was aware that not all his proposals could be adopted, but that he had to make them, because "the responsibility is on my shoulders."68

Li proposed general military reform for the coastal and Yangtze provinces. In the early T'ung-chih period, when he
worked with the British and French forces in Shanghai and with
the Ever-Victorious Army, he became convinced that the num-
ber of troops in the Chinese armies could be greatly reduced,
thereby saving funds that could provide better equipment and
pay for selected and efficient units. Soon after he became im-
perial commissioner in 1870, Li had drawn the throne’s atten-
tion to the uselessness of the Green Standard Army, including
the so-called Trained Troops. He now went further and
pleaded that “Rather than having a large number that are use-
less, it is better to have fewer of high quality.” Li proposed that
all “weak and exhausted” army units, whether Green Standard,
Trained Troops, or yung forces, should be disbanded altogether,
while the best troops, fewer than a hundred thousand for all the
coastal and Yangtze provinces, should be converted into
“foreign-arms and cannon corps.” Equipped with recent models
of rifles and cannon and reinforced by coastal fortifications, the
comparatively small number of troops could be relied on at
least to defend the two vital areas, Chihli and the lower
Yangtze Valley. Li suggested that orders be placed immediately
for firearms such as the Martini-Henry and the Snider and for
cannon produced by Krupp, Woolwich, Armstrong, and Gat-
ling. China’s own arsenals, however, must also be expanded.
They must aim at making breechloading rifles and cannon, as
well as torpedoes, while further plans could await the develop-
ment of a steel industry as well as coal and iron mines. The
manufacture of powder, cartridges, and shells needed to be ex-
panded and new plants for this purpose should be established at
such inland places as Soochow and in the interior provinces.

Li supported Wen-hsiang’s proposal for a Chinese naval
fleet of foreign-built vessels. Li felt that the navy was not quite
as important as the army, but agreed that effective defense re-
quired ironclads for the open seas and floating gun-carriages as
well torpedoes for the harbors. He recommended that six iron-
clads be ordered immediately, two to be stationed in north
China (probably at Chefoo and Port Arthur), two close to the
Yangtze estuary, and two at Amoy or Canton. In addition,
twenty floating gun-carriages should be ordered for use at the various ports. Li suggested that Chinese students should be sent abroad to the shipyards where the vessels were to be built, to learn shipbuilding and navigation techniques. Meanwhile, the building programs at Foochow and Kiangnan yards should be strengthened. Li visualized a Chinese naval fleet consisting eventually of sixty vessels.

To finance the new army and navy, Li suggested, first of all, that revenue be saved by disbanding worthless troops and by discontinuing the construction of war junks. The new army and navy were expected, however, to cost more than ten million taels and additional appropriations had to be arranged. The most reliable source, Li emphasized, was the “four-tenths quota of the maritime customs revenue” (ssu-ch’eng yang-shui). This fund had been allocated at some ports for the use of arsenals and for the Anhwei Army, but a considerable portion remained, particularly if the part reserved for the Board of Revenue at Peking was included. Li proposed that some three million taels that had been saved by the Board from this source should also be used for coastal defense. He also suggested that loans could be obtained from foreign firms, to be paid in installments out of the four-tenths quota. Li recommended that likin on imported opium could be raised somewhat, while taxes could be levied on native opium, which he thought might as well be legalized until such time as the drug’s importation could be stopped altogether. To insure larger revenue for coastal defense, Li proposed, for the first time explicitly, that preparations in coastal provinces be accorded priority over the recovery of Sinkiang. He pointed out that Sinkiang had come under Ch’ing rule only in the Ch’ien-lung reign, and that it was very difficult to defend, particularly now that the Moslem chieftains at Kashgar had Russian and British support and the Russians had occupied Ili.

Given the limited revenue available, the court would have to make a choice between adequate preparations in the coastal area and the recovery of the “wasteland” in the far northwest. Li would draw the defense line at the Kansu border and guard
it with military colonies into which some of the present armies there could be converted, while the Moslem leaders at Ili, Urumchi, and Kashgar might be accorded the status of native chieftains (t'u-ssu) or tributaries. Presumably a balance between Russian and British influence would help to insure stability in Sinkiang. Funds saved by canceling the expedition could be diverted immediately to the coastal provinces.

Undoubtedly with Li in mind, the Tsungli Yamen had proposed in its memorial of November 5, 1874, that there should be a single commander-in-chief (t'ung-shuai) in charge of the coastal and Yangtze provinces, and that under him there should be a system of newly chosen generals-in-chief and brigade generals, to be stationed in different provinces. Li regarded the idea as impractical. Given the existing authority of the governors-general and governors in financial and military affairs, a single command for all the provinces concerned was hardly feasible, particularly since the lack of telegraph and railway prevented rapid communication. Moreover, mere "consultation" (hui-t'ung shang-ch'ou) between the commander-in-chief and the provinces was not likely to lead to effective action. Li, therefore, favored more than one command for the coastal and Yangtze areas—perhaps three "high officials" (ta yüan) exercising supervision over such new projects as the naval fleet. For the supervisory positions in south China, Li recommended Shen Pao-chen and Ting Jih-ch'ang. From Li's correspondence, we know that he had been using his influence with Wen-hsiang and other ministers at court to get Shen appointed as the governor-general of Liangkiang and Ting to a responsible post in south China. Li obviously hoped that with himself at Tientsin and Shen at Nanking, a high degree of coordination could be achieved in carrying out new programs.

While Li was concerned with the immediate financial and political arrangements, he also put forth proposals of long-range significance. He brought up, for the first time directly to the throne, the need for a change in the examination and civil-service systems. Li lamented the continuing apathy among the
literati toward Western methods (yang-fa) and pointed out that neither the T'ung-wen Kuan type of school nor sending students abroad would arouse sufficient interest if the criteria for the selection and the advancement of officials remained unchanged. Li attacked the literary examinations, which emphasized calligraphy and the eight-legged essay, as "hollow and ornamental." He pleaded that while this kind of examination could not be "abolished immediately," it was necessary to create "another basis (k'ō) of advancement through government activity concerning Western affairs (yang-wu)." Li proposed that a Bureau of Western Learning (Yang-hsueh chū) be created in each province involved in coastal defense, where science and technology (including such subjects as chemistry, electricity, and gunnery) would be taught by carefully chosen Western instructors, as well as by qualified Chinese, such as those being trained in the United States. Advanced students were to be "tested through performance" and were to be assigned posts in arsenals, shipyards, and the armed forces. Moreover, such personnel were to be allowed opportunities for rapid promotion, comparable to those for persons possessing military merit, and were to be awarded "substantive posts, in the same way as officials who advanced through regular channels." Li predicted such a new personnel policy would result in an appreciable advance in armament making in China in about twenty years.

Li urged the use of Western technology in transport, mining, and manufacturing. He drew the throne's attention to the military and commercial advantages of the railway, and to the military value of the telegraph. Pointing out that British textile imports into China amounted to more than thirty million taels per year and were harmful to Chinese handicrafts, Li suggested that the Chinese themselves should establish machine-operated textile mills. He particularly stressed the opportunity that lay in opening up mines—not only coal and iron, but also copper, lead, mercury, and the precious metals. Li compared the failure to exploit such resources to keeping family treasures perma-
nently sealed up while worrying about starvation and cold. He recommended that foreign geologists be invited to prospect the mines in the provinces and that Chinese merchants be encouraged to form companies (kung-ssu) to work mines with machines; the government could help the companies with initial loans and thereafter receive 10 or 20 percent of their profits. Li expected the benefits from the mines to be apparent in ten years. He realized that new mining projects were opposed by the gentry and the people on grounds of geomancy and by "incompetent officials" who feared that the concentration of miners might lead to disorderly conduct. Li described such objections as "ridiculous," for the Western nations and Japan were all developing mines: "Why is it that they do not suffer from them but, on the contrary, have achieved wealth and strength (fu-chiang) through them?"

Li had thus proposed programs for self-strengthening that were broader and more far-reaching than those presented by him or by others in the 1860s. The question was, of course, whether any or all of the proposals might be accepted. Li received scant help from the governors-general, governors, and Manchu commanders-in-chief who also gave their views on the Tsungli Yamen's original memorial. Stimulated by the recent Taiwan crisis, all the memorialists agreed that the coastal defense needed to be strengthened. But, in the view of the Tsungli Yamen, except for Li and Shen Pao-chen (who also made a strong plea for a navy that included foreign-built ironclads and for the development of mines), none put forward proposals that were "concrete and practical." By early January 1875, replies had been received from twelve officials, in addition to Li and Shen. Although all twelve favored new training for the army, only one suggested that the particularly weak units of the Green Standard forces should be disbanded. Six favored forming a new navy with foreign-built ironclads, but only one or two had useful suggestions on how they were to be financed. All twelve assumed that war was to be carried into Sinkiang; two in particular argued eloquently that the Russian
threat to the land frontier posed an even more urgent problem than coastal defense. Four favored making some exception in the rules of civil or military service to place competent men where they were needed, but only two vaguely suggested that Western studies should be encouraged. Four realized the importance of mineral resources, but only one (Li's brother Hanchang) supported without reservation the use of machines in mines. Only one (the governor of Kiangsi, Liu K'un-i) agreed with the Tsungli Yamen that there should be a single commander-in-chief for coastal defense, but he qualified the proposal by suggesting that the generals-in-chief and brigade generals chosen by the commander-in-chief should be under the direction of the governors-general and the governors of the provinces concerned. Three recommended that the command of coastal defense be divided between the two commissioners at Tientsin and Nanking—two mentioned Li by name for the supervisory responsibility in north China.

Decision rested, of course, with the court. A meeting of the ministers was to consider the matter on January 2, but it was postponed due to the T'ung-chih emperor's illness and his death on the twelfth. In late January, Li went to Peking and was summoned three times to audiences with the dowager empresses. He also talked with Wen-hsiang and Li Wen-tsao and urged that Shen Pao-chen be appointed governor-general of Liangkiang, a post that had been vacated by Li Tsung-hsi (who was taken ill) and temporarily filled by Liu K'un-i as acting governor-general. Wen-hsiang arranged to have Robert Hart, who had obtained price quotations on British-built gunboats through his agent in London, go to Tientsin and discuss the details with Li.73

While in Peking, Li personally urged the court to reconsider the expedition into Sinkiang, and, according to Li, there were people at court who agreed with him.74 But due chiefly to reluctance to "abandon territories acquired by an imperial ancestor," the throne abided by its decision (made as early as February 1874) to encourage Tso Tsung-t'ang to proceed. On March 10,
Tso was instructed to formulate plans for the expedition, including arrangements for the supply line. On May 3, Tso was appointed imperial commissioner for military operations in Sinkiang. This effort to reconquer the far northwest was bound to cut into the revenue for the proposed coastal defense plans, although as of 1875 it was still uncertain whether Tso or the dynasty would really persevere in the long and arduous task of recovering Kashgar and Ili.

The court did not entirely neglect coastal defense, however. The Taiwan affair was fresh in its memory and in April 1875, the murder of A. R. Margary, an interpreter entering Yunnan from Burma, raised the possibility of a threat from the British. The court was willing to see Li in a position to coordinate military preparations on the coast. On May 30, 1875, Shen Paochen was appointed governor-general of Liangkiang and commissioner of trade for the Southern Ports. At the same time, Li was appointed commissioner of coastal defense of north China and Shen, commissioner of coastal defense of south China, both charged with the responsibility of training troops, establishing "bureaus" (meaning, probably, chiefly arsenals), reorganizing taxes, and other tasks necessary to defense. An edict of the same day declared: "Coastal defense is vitally important, and it is urgently necessary to make preparation before trouble comes, so as to strengthen ourselves." The throne noted that ironclads were extremely costly, but authorized Li and Shen to order "one or two to begin with." The Board of Revenue and the Tsungli Yamen subsequently recommended that beginning in August 1875, an annual appropriation of four million taels be made for coastal defense, to be expended by the two commissioners. It was specified that the yearly sum was to come from the "four-tenths quota of the maritime customs revenue" at the coastal ports and from the likin revenue of coastal and Yangtze provinces. Because the Board of Revenue did not want to give up that portion of the four-tenths quota reserved for itself (or the sums it had received in the past from this source), and because the board plainly was not giving coastal
defense priority over other imperially sanctioned claims on the four-tenths quota, Li feared that only a fraction of this annual fund would be left for him and Shen. Moreover, Li was certain that with the pressure from Peking to raise large sums (at least two or three million taels annually) for the construction of imperial mausoleums and palaces and with the Sinkiang campaign being given priority, probably only one or two coastal and Yangtze provinces would have any surplus in their likin revenue, which was also relied on by the provinces themselves for their own financial needs. Li foresaw that the four million taels appropriated was to become largely nominal, although he hoped that at least some small portion might be available.  

Predictably, the court did not heed Li’s counsel concerning the reform of institutions. Admitting the weaknesses of the Green Standard Army, the court, also on May 30, instructed all governors-general and governors concerned with coastal defense to complete, within a year, the reorganization and consolidation of the Green Standard “outposts” (hsün) and to provide the troops with uniform training. No mention was made, however, of disbanding the inferior units. The throne also passed over the proposed “bureaus of Western learning” and the new civil-service category for persons versed in this learning. One of the May 30 edicts states that both proposals had been referred to Prince Li (Shih-to) and to Prince Ch’un (the new child-emperor’s father), along with the Tsungli Yamen’s recommendation that diplomatic envoys be sent to Japan and the West. While the two princes favored the latter idea, they did not comment on the proposals regarding Western learning. So as to avoid “disagreement,” the throne would therefore defer decision on these proposals until the diplomatic missions abroad proved successful! In another edict of the same day, the throne encouraged Li and Shen to recommend to it men who were versed in yang-wu, including those qualified to serve as envoys abroad. None of the edicts mentioned Li’s proposals regarding railways, telegraphs, and textile mills, but one gave Li and Shen authorization to proceed with the specific mining
Thus, only a few of the proposals Li put forward were adopted by the throne, and, in view of the priority the throne gave to Sinkiang and to the increasing financial needs of the court itself, a major new start in coastal defense and in self-strengthening was hardly to be expected. Yet, it may be said that new ground had been broken in Ch’ing policy. Not being able to compete with the arsenals and shipyards of the West, China, it was decided, would have to acquire Western-made armaments through purchase. In the next few years, a spate of orders came from Tientsin and elsewhere for Remingtons, Sniders, Krupp and Gatling guns. As early as April 1875, with the Tsungli Yamen’s support, Li ordered four gunboats from Armstrong & Co., through Robert Hart’s London agent—two 330-ton ships, each carrying a 26.5-ton rifle gun, and two 440-ton ones, each equipped with a 38-ton gun. The ordering of more gunboats and an ironclad was contemplated, pending the availability of funds. It was planned during 1875–76 to send graduates of the Foochow Navy Yard School to Britain and France. Both Li and Shen interpreted the imperial sanction for the mines in Chihli and on Taiwan as general approval for such projects elsewhere. Within the year following May 1875, Li wrote to the governors of Hupei, Kiangsi, Fukien, and Shantung, urging them to work the mines with machines. Coal and iron fields were planned in Kuang-chi and Hsing-kuo, Hupei, in late 1875 under the sponsorship of the commissioners at Tientsin and Nanking as well as the Hupei governor; a similar project was initiated in Kiangsi in 1876, the same year that prospecting was done at K’ai-p’ing, Chihli. During that year, Li and Shen Pao-chen also considered the establishment of a cotton textile mill at Shanghai.

What was particularly gratifying to Li was the fact that at least two like-minded colleagues had been brought, partly on his recommendation, to positions of influence. Shen Pao-chen arrived at his new post in Nanking in November 1875. In Sep-
tember, Ting Jih-ch'ang, on Li's recommendation, had been appointed director-general of the Foochow Navy Yard, and in January 1876, he became governor of Fukien with authority over Taiwan. In Chihli, Li pressed forward with plans of long-range significance—the sending of five young officers of the Anhwei Army to German military academies, further expansion of the Tientsin Arsenal, the establishment of a school of Western sciences in connection with the Arsenal's new plant for manufacturing torpedoes. Similar work was being carried on by Shen and Ting in south China. In early 1877, thirty students of the Foochow Navy Yard School were sent to Europe. Meanwhile, Shen did much to strengthen the Nanking and Kiangnan arsenals, adding to the former a torpedo plant and acquiring for the latter machinery for making cast-iron rifle guns of the Armstrong type, the first of which was produced in 1878. A school was set up at the Nanking Arsenal, and an effort was made to improve the school and the translation department at the Kiangnan Arsenal. Although the plan for a textile mill was found not to be immediately feasible, in late 1876 Shen Pao-chen arranged large loans from the Liangkiang provinces to the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, enabling it to buy sixteen ships from the American firm of Russell and Co. and thereby increase its fleet to thirty-one vessels (22,168 net tons). For the first time since Tseng Kuo-fan's death in 1872, Li had an ally at the head of the Liangkiang administration.

We see, therefore, that only a small part of Li's comprehensive program was put into practice. Nevertheless, as compared with its beginnings in the early T'ung-chih period, the self-strengthening movement had certainly expanded. In the new shipping and mining enterprises, the movement had gained another dimension: to the desire for effective armament was added the desire to augment the state's wealth, again by using Western technology. The plan for a navy of foreign-built vessels represented a realistic appraisal of the capacity of China's new shipyards, as well as an awareness of the urgent need for
preparedness. The sending of students to Europe, in the wake of the educational mission to the United States, was a further acknowledgment of the need for technical personnel. Among the high officials there were very few men who, like Li, wanted to see drastic reform in civil-service regulations and in the military system. But under the continued pressure from foreign powers, at least the objective of gaining "wealth and strength" for the state, which Li so eloquently advocated, had won widespread acceptance, if not active support.

With Li as the imperial commissioner at Tientsin, the self-strengthening movement had, moreover, acquired a strategically placed coordinator. It is plain that Li's power was limited. He could get the court to accept only a few of his proposals, and the financial and other resources he needed often lay in provinces beyond his jurisdiction. But it may be said that in the 1870s, Li was at least given a good opportunity to expand his efforts. The Anhwei Army in Chihli and elsewhere enjoyed the throne's support, and imperial approval had been given to his program for the arsenals, for studies abroad, for merchant steamships and mines, and for a new navy. Beginning in 1875, men who had been recommended by Li, Shen Pao-chen, and Ting Jih-ch'ang were in the vital posts in Liangkiang and Fukien, and, with sympathetic officials in other provinces, there was at least a chance that self-strengthening might become an empirewide effort. If by "regionalism" is meant the administrative leeway enjoyed by the governors-general and governors over the armies and the likin of the provinces, this trend had continued since the early T'ung-chih period. But the imperial authority over armies and revenue anywhere in the empire was never questioned, and Peking's control over provincial appointments, at least at the higher levels, had not diminished. The court's support was plainly still the key to the success of any new policy. To the extent that Li's recommendations on policy and personnel met with imperial approval, he represented, in effect, a centralizing force on behalf of what he considered an urgent national task.
Notes

1. I have dealt with Li's early advocacy of *tzu-ch’iang* in "The Confucian as Patriot and Pragmatist: Li Hung-chang's Formative Years, 1823–1866" (see chapter 1).


4. In 1870, Liu Ming-ch’uan and Kuo Sung-lin had the title of *t’i-tu*, while Wu Ch’ang-ch’ing was a *chi-ming* (designated) *t’i-tu* and Chou Sheng-ch’uan a *tsung-ping*. See, for example, *LWCK Memorials*, 17.6b–7, 12: Chou Sheng-ch’uan, *Chou Wu-chuang kung i-shu* (Works of Chou Sheng-ch’uan), 10 *ts’e* (Nanking, 1905), 2 hsia, 1–9.


6. *LWCK Memorials*, 17.10. When Ch’ung-hou was appointed *san-k’ou* *t’ung-shang ta-ch’en* in 1861, the edict specifically stated that he was not given the title *ch’in-ch’ai*. However, the commissioner of trade for the southern ports (*nan-yang t’ung-shang ta-ch’en*) had been given the title *ch’in-ch’ai* in the early 1860s. Li’s office of imperial commissioner at Tientsin was often referred to later as commissioner of trade for the Northern Ports. See *Ch’ou-pan i-wu shih-mo* (The complete amount of our management of barbarian affairs), 260 *ch’ian* (Peiping, 1930; hereafter cited as *IWSM*), Hsien-feng, 72.1b–2; T’ung-chih, 18.25b.


8. *LWCK Memorials*, 17.29b and 18.76.


16. *LWCK Tsungli Yamen Letters*, 1.35b–38; *Letters*, 13.4, 10b; Hosea Bal-
lou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, 3 vols. (London,
1910–18), II, 267.
17. *LWCK Tsungli Yamen Letters*, 2.34; see also 2.20, 24, 26b–29, 30–31.
61.22.
21. *LWCK Letters*, 10.30b, 34b, 35b; 11.5b; 13. 14b. *Memorials*, 17.50b;
22. *LWCK Memorials*, 16.42; 17.1, 6b, 12b, 51; 20. 37; 23. 27b. *Letters*,
23. *LWCK Memorials*, 17.27b; 18.32, 63.
24. *Tung-hua hsü-lu* (Continuation of the Tung-hua records) (Taipei
22–25.
hua hsü-lu*, T‘ung-chih, 95. 37, 45.
26. *LWCK Memorials*, 17.7. *Letters*, 10.27b, 30b; 11.7b, 12b–13, 23b. *Tung-
hua hsü-lu*, T‘ung-chih, 92.7.
Tseng’s successors as governor-general of Liangkiang up to early 1875 were
Ho Ching (acting, March-November 1872), Chang Shu-sheng (acting, Novem-
ber 1872–February 1873), and Li Tsung-hsi (February 1873–January 1875).
28. *LWCK Tsungli Yamen Letters*, 2.24b, 34b; *Letters*, 14.6b–7, 9b; *Tung-
29. *LWCK Memorials*, 23.28b; *Letters*, 14, 7b, 8, 11, 14b–15, 18b, 19b, 24,
31.
35. *LWCK Letters*, 12.3b; 14.28b, 32.
1840–95 nien (Materials on the history of modern industry in China, first
*Yang-wu yün-tung* (The Western Affairs Movement), comp. Institute of Mod-
ern History, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Bureau of Ming and Ch‘ing
Archives, Central Archives, 8 vols. (Shanghai, 1961), IV, 127.
37. Demetrios C. Boulger, *The Life of Sir Halliday Macartney, K.C.M.G.*
(London, 1908), 148–150, 177; *North-China Herald*, August 16, 1867; *Chiang-
nan chih-tao-chü chi* (Records of the Kiangnan Arsenal), 11 chüan, comp.
Wei Yün-kung (Shanghai, 1905), 3. 2, 58; *Chi-ch‘i chü* (Arsenals), 2 vols., in
Hai-fang tang (Files on maritime defense), ed. Kuo T'ing-i et al. (Taiwan, 1957), I, 27–28, 41.

38. *LWCK Letters*, 11.7b, 23b; 13.14b. See also 11.6b, 27b.


43. *IWSM*, T'ung-chih, 84.35; *LWCK Memorials*, 19.44–49.
44. *LWCK Letters*, 12.21, 26b.
47. *IWSM*, T'ung-chih, 25.9–10b; *LWCK Memorials*, 24.23b; *Letters*, 15.4.
52. *LWCK Letters*, 13.28b, 32b–33.
57. *LWCK Letters*, 12.31, 34b. See also 12.36b.
59. *Kou-mai ch'uan-p'ao*, III, 925; *Han-cheng pien* (Section on shipping), 6 vols., in Chiao-t'ung shih (History of communications in China), comp. Ministries of Communications and Railroads (Nanking, 1930 ff.), I, 142.
62. *IWSM*, T'ung-chih, 55.15b–16; Knight Biggerstaff, “The Secret Cor-

63. *LWCK Letters*, 12.21, 26b.
71. *LWCK Memorials*, 12.26; 13.2; 14.32; 15.2b, 6b–7. See also 14.38; 15.17.
72. *IWSM*, T'ung-chih, 98.31–100. 44.
74. *LWCK Letters*, 15.2b. Strangely enough, Prince Ch'un, who had urged a belligerent stand during the crisis created by the Tientsin Massacre, agreed with Li on Sinkiang; see 16.17.
78. *Tung-hua hsū-lu*, Kuang-hsū, 1.56–57. According to Li's information, when the officials at court held a meeting to discuss the proposals on coastal defense, Wen-hsiang was sympathetically inclined toward Li's recommendations on "bureaus of Western learning," railways, telegraph, and mines, but two Chinese officials strongly condemned them, and others at the meeting were indifferent. *LWCK Letters*, 17.13.
79. In a letter to C. Hannen dated October 25, 1875, Robert Hart commented on the Chinese purchase of foreign arms and on the arrangements being made for a modern coal mine on Taiwan: "Forts are bristling all round Tientsin and in many other places, and official talk loves to dwell on the sweet syllables the Chinese mouth makes of the word 'Krupp.' Torpedoes are toys in all the houses, and, as for an eighty-ton gun creating astonishment, the wonder
It is that thousand-tonners have not yet been devised for the Chinese and sent out in cases, and as numerously, as needles and matches! The big giant is really waking up, but what a time it takes to yawn and rub his eyes!" Quoted in Morse, *International Relations*, II, 163. See also *LWCK Tsungli Yamen Letters*, 3.17–19; Chou Sheng-ch’uan, *Chou Wu-chuang kung i-shu, chüan-shou*. 40b.


82. *LWCK Letters*, 15.29, 30b, 33, 35; *Memorials*, 29.1–2; Tung-hua hsü-lu, Kuang-hsü, 1.115, 140.
