

# Fin-de-Siècle Diplomat: Chen Jitong (1852-1907) and Cosmopolitan Possibilities in the Late Qing World



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Abstract

This dissertation explores Sino-Western interactions in the late Qing period through a biographical study of the diplomat-writer Chen Jitong (1852-1907). A flamboyant writer and self-appointed cultural mediator between China and France, Chen published, while serving as secretary in the Chinese legation in Paris in the 1880s, several books in French on Chinese culture and society. He also became a skilled public speaker at various learned societies and international congresses. In the last years of his life, Chen returned to China as a reformer, expectant official, and newspaper editor. With a colorful transnational life and career that was nevertheless heavily rooted in the late Qing self-strengthening and reform movements, Chen Jitong offers an exemplary case study for viability of late imperial Chinese literati culture in the modern world. Chapter 1 discusses the confluence of local literati culture and the opportunities opened for a generation of late-Qing cultural figures in the cosmopolitan environment surrounding the Fuzhou Navy Yard. Chapter 2 shows that in his writings, Chen employed an innovative mélange of classical Chinese texts and references to European literature to capture the uniqueness of Confucian values while also emphasizing the universality of human feelings and shared literary values. Chapter 3 analyzes the ways in which Chen's public activities constituted a significant discursive and personal presence for China in fin-de-siècle Paris and at the 1889 Universal Expositions. Chapter 4 reconnects Chen to the late Qing milieu by retracing his involvement in a number of political and social projects upon his return to China. In mapping out Chen Jitong's experiences as a cultural mediator and as a literatus-reformer, this study seeks to connect the dots between various studies of late Qing industrialization, social activism, cultural innovation, and political reform. It demonstrates that on the international stage, late Qing diplomats were highly conscious of their position not only as representatives of the Qing polity, but as bearers of Chinese civilization. Chen Jitong's cross-cultural performance, in particular, is a reminder that the late nineteenth century was not only an age of imperialistic encroachment, but also a time of cosmopolitan encounters.


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Fin-de-Siècle Splendor book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. The reigning view of literary historians has been that the May Four... It demonstrates that late Qing fiction nurtured a creative, innovative poetics, one that was spurned by the reformers of the May Fourth generation in favor of Western-style realism. The author recognizes that a full account of modern Chinese fiction needs to ask why so many genres, styles, themes, and figures found in late imperial fiction were repressed by "modern" Chinese literary discourse. He focuses on four genres of late Qing fiction that have been either rudely dismissed in pejorative terms or simply ignored: depravity romances, court-case and chivalric cycles, grotesque expos Chen Jitong (simplified Chinese: 陈季同; traditional Chinese: 陳季同; pinyin: Chén Jìtóng; 1851–1907), courtesy name Jingru (敬如), also known as Tcheng Ki-tong, was a Chinese diplomat, general, scholar, and shipbuilder during the late Qing Dynasty. Chen was born in Houguan, now in present-day Minhou, Fuzhou. In 1869 he started to study

the French language at the school attached to the Fuzhou shipyard. In 1875 Shen Baozhen sent thirty Chinese students, from the training school attached to the Foochow Arsenal