



# China and the West

## PART 2: THE HUNDRED DAYS

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*(previous page)*  
Left: Empress-dowager Tz'ü Hsi (see page 4)  
Right: Emperor Kuang-shü who tried to reform, but was eliminated by Tz'ü Hsi

# Introduction

About the history of China a countless number of historical surveys is written by western scholars, all secondary sources. Books with primary sources are rare. On the internet there are many primary sources about the history of China. Everyone who has enough time and knowledge can find them.

Our series is intended for those who do have not enough time for extensive research, but are interested to read about the stories and documents behind the historical surveys.

The primary sources in our series about China and the West are mostly of Chinese origin. We limit ourselves to the most important, most mentioned, subjects. To the primary sources we add short historical introductions, to help the reader to place the sources in their time.

The volumes in this series can be used together with a historical survey. You can use the primary sources also as a start for your own research.

This series is a tribute to Professor Dr. Erik Zürcher (1928-2008). He focused his work at Leiden University not solely at his students. He and his staff also gave high priority to informing the public about the history of China. And they were always a great help for developers of teaching materials.

Already published in this series *China and the West*:

- Part 1: Opium War –Taiping rebellion – Self-strengthening Movement
- Part 2: The Hundred Days
- Part 3: The Boxer Rebellion

To be published in the course of 2015:

- Part 4: Women in imperial China
- Part 5: The Revolution of 1911
- Part 6: From Sun Yat-sen tot Mau Zedong



## Empress dowager Tz'u-Hsi

Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi (also Cixi) was born November 29, 1835 and she died November 15, 1908.

She was selected as an imperial concubine for emperor Xianfeng in her adolescence, she gave birth to a son in 1856. Xianfeng died young, 30 years old, and their son became the new emperor at the age of five (1861).

Taking advantage of the naivety and good nature of the late emperor's principal wife, the empress dowager Ci'an, Tz'u Hsi suggested that they became co-reigning empresses dowagers, with powers exceeding the Eight Regent Ministers. An empress dowager held regency during the reign of an underage emperor.

Tz'u Hsi managed to get enough support from the majority of ministers and ordered two opponents to commit suicide and another to be executed. This was called the Xinyou Coup. Nearly half a century she controlled Chinese politics 'behind the curtains'.

# 1 Yün Yü-ting about how empress dowager Tz'u Hsi controlled Chinese politics

## 1 YÜN YÜ-TING REMEMBERS THE CHARACTER OF TZ'U HSI

*Yün Yü-ting (1863-1918) served as emperor Kuang-hsü's secretary-adviser for more than nineteen years. He belonged to a group of pro-Emperor radical reformers. In 1910 he wrote in 'The Chingling Records' about the relationship between emperor Kuang-hsü and the empress-dowager Tz'u Hsi after China's defeat by Japan in 1894.*

Tz'u Hsi's father died while serving as a lieutenant commander in Hunan. He left behind him two daughters, Tz'u Hsi and her younger sister. The family was so poor that the two sisters did not even had enough money to ship their father's body to the north for burial. But somehow they managed to proceed with their journey. When the boat reached Ch'ingchiangp'u, another funeral boat was anchored nearby, and the dead man in this boat also had been a former lieutenant commander. Wu Ch'in-hui, the magistrate of Ch'ingchiangp'u, had been a friend of the dead man in the second boat, and learning about the latter's arrival, dispatched a servant bearing 300 taels of silver to be given to the bereaved family as a gift. Some people have maintained, incorrectly, that the amount was 2000 taels. The servant, however, delivered the silver to the wrong boat. Wu was very angry; he was about to dispatch the servant to demand the return of his silver when he was stopped by one of his secretary-advisers. 'I have heard that the people in the boat were Manchu maidens who are journeying to the capital to be selected as the emperor's spouses', said the secretary-adviser. 'They may be powerful and influential someday. Maybe it is to your advantage to be friendly with them.' Accepting this

advice, Wu, instead of demanding the return of his silver, personally went to the boat to pay his respect to the dead man. Tz'u Hsi was greatly moved. Carefully storing Wu's personal card away in one of her dressers, she said to her younger sister: 'If someday you and I achieve what we wish to achieve, we shall not forget this man.'

Once entering the palace, Tz'u Hsi soon became the emperor's favorite and in due course gave birth to a son, later known as Emperor T'ung-chih. Meanwhile her younger sister married Prince Ch'un and also gave birth to a son, later known as Emperor Kuang-hsü. By the time Tz'u Hsi became a regent, Wu Ch'in-hui had already been promoted to the position of a district governor. In a period of a few years, he was promoted to the governor-general of Szechuan. Wu had no special ability to speak of; although he had been repeatedly impeached by the censors, the empress dowager chose not to pay any attention. After he died in his post, he was given the posthumous title 'Hui' [*literally, means favour*], an indication that even then the empress dowager had not forgotten the favour that she had once received from him.

According to another story, when Wu was jailed on a criminal charge, Tz'u Hsi impersonated one of his close relatives so as to visit him in the prison. She summoned the late Shen Chia-pen, then a vice-president in charge of criminal affairs, and questioned him in great detail about the condition of prisons throughout the nation. Long after she had passed seventy, Tz'u Hsi still looked like a woman of about forty. For one thing, not a single strand of her hair had



## Emperor Tongzhi and his favorite wife Che-yi

Emperor Tongzhi (also T'ung-chih) was born April 27, 1856 and he died January 12, 1875. He was the only surviving son of emperor Xianfeng and one of his concubines, known as empress dowager Tz'u-Hsi. His father died at the age of 30. Tongzhi reigned from 1861 to 1875. He had good intentions and attempted political reform. But his reign and his marriage were overshadowed by his mother Tz'u Hsi. He died at the age of 19. The cause of his death was smallpox; the widespread rumour that he died of venereal disease was without factual basis.

Empress Che-yi (also Xiaozhey, Jiashun and 'Lady Alute') was born on July 25, 1854, and died on March 27, 1875. She was a woman of high intelligence, famous for her talent, moral character and looks. She was related to empress-dowager Ci'an who favoured her. Che-yi did not have the approval of empress-dowager Tz'u-Hsi. The grandfather of Che-yi had been Tz'u-Hsi's enemy during the Xinyou Coup, and was ordered to commit suicide after Tz'u Hsi's victory. After their marriage, the Tongzhi Emperor favoured her over his four other wives. According to Yün Yü-t'ing (page 5) Tongzhi spent almost every night with her. Empress-dowager Tz'u-Hsi warned Che-yi not to seize the emperor for herself. When Tz'u Hsi saw no signs of change she ordered the emperor and empress to be separated. More about Tz'u Hsi's interventions, see next pages.



turned white. The rumor had it that early during the T'ung-chih period the eunuch Li Lien-ying obtained for her a large ho-shou-wu [*Polygonum multiflorum*] which, being prepared in an improper manner, melted into a bowl of gruel. Nevertheless, Tz'u Hsi continued to take it. According to tradition, a thousand-year-old ho-shou-wu, when prepared by the proper method (boiling and drying alternatively for nine times), is the best rejuvenation drug. A person who takes it can live a long time.

## 2 EMPRESS DOWAGER TZ'U HSI MANIPULATES EMPEROR TONGZHI AND HIS WIFE EMPRESS CHE-YI

She [*Che-yi*] was never able to please her mother-in-law, empress dowager Tz'u Hsi. Tz'u Hsi did not treat her as well as a mother-in-law should. On January 11, 1875 the empress dowager scolded her again for some alleged offense, and the empress, when she visited her husband to inquire about his illness, tearfully complained to him about the harsh treatment she suffered at the hands of her mother-in-law. Because of the extreme cold weather, the room was divided into two sections by a banging curtain. Seeing that the empress was proceeding towards the emperor's room, Tz'u Hsi tailed her without her knowledge.

She waved the palace attendants aside when they were about to enter the room to announce her presence. She took off her shoes and walked gingerly towards the curtain. She leaned her ear against it and heard the empress's complaints which were followed by the emperor's words of comfort. 'Please be patient', she heard him say, 'someday we will become masters in our own house.' Infuriated by this remark, Tz'u Hsi pushed aside the curtain and quickly entered. She grabbed the empress' hair, hit her with all her might, and dragged her out of the emperor's presence. She then ordered the

palace guards to get striking rods ready to punish the empress for her impudence.

The Tongzhi Emperor died in January 1875. Some sources claim that Che-yi was pregnant at that time. Tongzhi had not chosen a successor before his death, so it was up to empress dowager Tz'u Hsi to choose the new emperor. Tz'u Hsi chose her three-year-old nephew Zaitian, who succeeded Tongzhi as the Guangxu emperor.

Che-yi, grieved by the death of her husband, had long lost the desire to live. On March 27, 1875 she committed suicide by swallowing gold. Ch'ung-ch'i, her father, also lost favour with empress dowager Tz'u Hsi on account of his daughter. For more than twenty years he was not given a governmental post to hold.

*In 1900 when western armies pressed on Peking, Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi asked Che-yi's father Coci to remain behind and handle state affairs. Coci and his family committed suicide after the capital fell to the foreigners.*

## 3 EMPRESS DOWAGER TZ'U HSI AND THE DEATH OF EMPRESS-DOWAGER TZ'U AN

Empress Dowager Tz'u An died on April 9, 1881. Previously it had been reported that Tz'u Hsi was seriously ill while Tz'u An was enjoying her best health. When the sad news arrived, all officials in the court thought that the Western Dowager had died; they were astonished beyond belief when they learned that it was the Eastern Dowager who had ascended to Heaven. (As Tz'u An and Tz'u Hsi lived in two separate palaces, East and West, they were referred to as Eastern Dowager and Western Dowager respectively. The people inside the palaces, however, addressed Tz'u An as Eastern Buddha and Tz'u Hsi as Western Buddha).

According to a story circulated in the palace, one day during a recess