

Foreign Language Education During War-time: Interpreter Training in Shanghai During the Late Qing Dynasty

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Interpreters as intermediate agents play a significant role in negotiations. During the Late Qing Dynasty, with the increasingly frequent China-foreign exchanges, a variety of foreign language schools began to emerge in Shanghai, which cultivated a number of diplomatic interpreters. This study attempts to shed light on the foreign language education in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty, with emphasis on interpreter training. Through the sorting and analysis of historical materials, it is found that interpreter training in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty mainly happened in two kinds of schools, namely missionary schools and government-run foreign language schools. To further understand the training of interpreters and the interpreters cultivated in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty, the goal and education model in the two kinds of institutions are analyzed in this paper. Besides, the important interpreters from those institutions are listed. The importance of interpreter training during war-time is also discussed in this paper.

Keywords: foreign language education, interpreter training, Late Qing Dynasty, Shanghai

Introduction

In the aftermath of the First Opium War, Shanghai, one of the five treaty ports opened for Chinese-western trade, rapidly became the largest commercial center in China. Since the opening of Shanghai in 1843, a large number of foreigners came to Shanghai to do business, preach, and live. Along with this great social change came language and cultural challenge. The demand for interpreters to facilitate communications between Chinese and foreigners quickly rose to a level beyond supply. For a time, interpreter as a profession that was not valued in the past became a popular occupation with high income. Accordingly, a surge of English learning emerged in Shanghai society, which birthed different kinds of foreign language schools. These schools offered foreign language courses to help students master foreign language skills and consequently produced many interpreters, who had left profound impact on the history of this period. However, amid the present studies on foreign language education in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty (Zhang, 2014; Zhang, 2015; Yan & Zhu, 2015; Ji & Chen, 2007; Wang, 2007; Li, 2016), very few paid attention to the cultivation of interpreters, leaving this topic almost untouched. Based on this lack of research, this paper investigates the foreign language education and interpreter training in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty.

Drawing on archival records, personal accounts, and other relevant historical materials, this paper first examines the two main types of foreign language schools. The background, purposes, and methods of foreign language teaching of these schools are fully analyzed. In particular, this paper looks into how interpreters were

trained in these schools, and how interpreters from these schools made their contributions to China-foreign communications during that special historical period. From the analysis, we can see the differences among the two types of foreign language schools and interpreters produced by them.

Foreign Language Education in Shanghai During the Late Qing Dynasty

Political factors play a very significant role in education development (Zhao, 2005, p. 15). The rise or fall of foreign language education does not depend entirely on the language itself, but more importantly on the political and social environment. On one hand, government's recognition and support can provide direct impetus for the development and prosperity of foreign language education. On the other hand, the development of foreign language education in a particular area is closely related to many social factors, including local economic development, social demand for language professionals, and also social perception of foreign language.

The opening of Shanghai in 1843 transformed it from a pure Chinese society to a society of both Chinese and foreigners. This great change in social structure prompted the demand for foreign language professionals. With the increasing frequency of China-foreign exchanges, the economic and cultural value of language capital experienced a rapid rise. As a result, learning foreign language became a social trend, and interpreter as a profession quickly gained popularity among people. Under this social trend, more and more missionary schools began to offer foreign language courses to attract students. Around the 1860s, the Shanghai authorities started to realize the importance of language in communications and established the first government-run foreign language school—Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan—to cultivate qualified translators and interpreters. The establishment of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan showed the authority's recognition of foreign language education, which undoubtedly speeded up the elimination of social prejudice against foreign language. This coincides with the rapid development of foreign language education in Shanghai after the 1860s. All in all, the political and social factors jointly spawned the emergence of foreign language education in Shanghai, while the government's recognition finally led to the booming and prospering of it.

To sum up, during the Late Qing Dynasty, foreign language education in Shanghai was mainly carried out in two types of institutions: missionary schools and government-run language schools. They differ in many ways, such as the original intentions, school-running methods, and the students' career paths after graduation. Next, special attention is paid to interpreter training in these different institutions.

Interpreter Training in Two Types of Institutions

Against the special backdrop of enemy invasion, interpreting activities in the Late Qing Dynasty were largely politicalized. As the "conduit" of message, interpreters served as the bridge between Chinese and foreigners, without whom communications would be impossible. In addition, in official negotiations between Chinese government and the western countries, the performance and behaviors of diplomatic interpreters directly represented the interests and positions of the country. Interpreters, to a large extent, participated in the shaping of history in this period and proceeded the historical process. The possession of qualified interpreters meant a more active position in negotiation, while the lack of qualified interpreters usually led to a rather passive position. Therefore, during that historic period, interpreter training was an important part in the foreign language education in Shanghai. For many of the foreign language schools, the purpose of establishment was to nurture qualified translators and interpreters, and for many students of these schools, they decided to learn

foreign language to be a translator/interpreter. In this section, we are going to take a deep dive into the training of interpreters in two types of foreign language schools.

Interpreter Training in Missionary Schools

Looking back on the development of education in Shanghai during the modern times, missionary schools founded by the western missionaries can be viewed as the beginning of foreign language education. Providing education service was a very common way to help preach, and many missionaries wished to gain more followers and enlighten people through this method. Therefore, the western missionaries in Shanghai were motivated to run schools from the very beginning. Throughout the Late Qing Dynasty, missionary schools were the first educational institutions in Shanghai that offered foreign language courses.

The development of missionary schools in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty underwent three stages. In 1846, the American missionary William Jones Boone founded a boys' school and offered English courses. In the first two decades after Shanghai was opened as a port, more than 10 missionary schools were set up in Shanghai, and most of them offered foreign language courses. At this stage, the scale of the schools was generally small, and students could study in these schools for free; hence most of the students enrolled were poor children or homeless people, just as Feng (2002) described in his article, "the schools were set up for poor and young children to learn both Chinese and foreign language" (p. 56). In this circumstance, students of these early missionary schools were eager to find a job of interpreting or translation to make money as soon as they learned some superficial knowledge of English. Predictably, they were not qualified enough to undertake important interpreting tasks. In fact, they were later criticized by the Shanghai authorities for their terrible interpreting performance. Li Hongzhang once scolded this group of interpreters as "people who colluded with the foreigners only to fulfill their own interests" and "not worth being trusted at all" (Anonymous, 1989, p. 107). By the 1860s, after the adaptation and development in the first stage, social demand for interpreters grew rapidly, and people's attitude toward foreign language learning shifted from a passive one to a rather positive one. Noticing this change, missionaries in Shanghai paid more attention to foreign language education, and more and more foreign language courses were launched to attract students. After the 1870s, most of the missionary schools in Shanghai offered English courses. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, English courses had become very common in missionary schools, and many of these schools even used English as the language of instruction. By this time, English teaching had already become a prominent feature of missionary schools.

Despite the fact that missionary schools were set up for the purpose of evangelism, these schools did start English teaching in Shanghai and cultivated a considerable number of interpreters who were proficient both in English and Chinese. Among all the missionary schools in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty, Saint John's University was the most prominent one in terms of interpreter training. Founded in 1879 by American missionaries, it was one of the oldest missionary schools and also the first school where all courses were taught in English. Saint John's University adopted many measures to promote English learning. First, all courses except Chinese were taught in English and all textbooks except Chinese were written English, and students were required to use English to fill the answer sheet in exams. Second, students were required to learn western manners and customs. Third, English debates and drama performances were organized to enhance the students' language skills. Forth, all communication between teachers and students should be carried out in English, and all the school documents were written in English. These measures undoubtedly created an excellent language

learning environment for the students. Under this model of “input + output”, students of Saint John’s University acquired the qualities necessary to be an interpreter. What is more, translation and interpreting ability was highlighted in Saint John’s University’s language teaching philosophy. The first translation/interpreting textbook in modern China—*A Manual of Translation: One Hundred and Twenty Lessons*—was compiled by Yan Huiqing, a teacher at Saint John’s University.

Of all the students who graduated from Saint John’s University, many became interpreters. Some of them served for the authorities and thus were recorded in the archives, while some of them served mostly in business occasions as interpreters and were rarely recorded. From the current historical materials, we summarized the most outstanding interpreters from Saint John’s University (see Table 1).

Table 1

Diplomatic Interpreters From Saint John’s University

Name	Work experience as an interpreter
Shi Zhaoji (1877-1978)	In 1893, Shi visited the US with Yanru, the Chinese Minister to the US and served as an interpreter. Later, Shi went to the US, Mexico, Peru, and other countries, and he served as the plenipotentiary minister to the UK and the US.
Yan Heling (1879-1937)	Yan successively served as a diplomat in Zhejiang government, a foreign secretary of the Beiyang government, a member of Chinese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, the first secretary of the Chinese Embassy in the US. As Yan was fluent in both Chinese and English, he undertook interpreting activities in many diplomatic settings. In 1916, Yan served as the interpreter for Yuan Shikai when he met with several American officials including Paul Samuel Reinsch.
Yuan Lvdeng (1879-1954)	Yuan was employed as a diplomatic consultant in Ningbo prefectural government to help handle the religious cases. In 1913, Yuan was employed as the interpreter for the Han-Yue-Chuan Railway Office.
Shi Youming (1881-1940)	In 1903, Shi served as an interpreter in Shanghai Municipal Council. Later, Shi served as the Chinese Consul General in New York and Panama.
Gu Weijun (1888-1985)	Gu was introduced by Tang Shaoyi to serve as the interpreter and secretary for Yuan Shikai. Gu undertook interpreting work in many important diplomatic settings. His interpreting performance was praised by both parties. Gu later served as the prime minister of the Beiyang government of the Republic of China, the Chinese ambassador to the UK, the Chinese ambassador to the US, and the chief representative of the UN.
Liu Hongsheng (1888-1956)	Liu worked as a teacher, interpreter, and lawyer. In 1908, he served as an interpreter in the mixed court of the Shanghai International Settlement for half a year.
Tang Yueliang (1890-1956)	In 1925, Tang served as the director of the Foreign Affairs Office. In 1926, Tang served as Feng Yuxiang’s secretary and interpreter.
Song Ziwen (1894-1971)	Song served as the English secretary for Sun Yat-sen. Proficient in both English and Chinese, Song served as the interpreter for many leaders, including Chiang Kai-shek.

All the mentioned above were excellent interpreters trained by Saint John’s University. In fact, until Saint John’s University was closed in 1952, numerous outstanding interpreters had been nurtured, and many of them was involved in interpreting work, such as Yu Dawei, Zhang Dawei, and Yu Hongjun, etc. In addition to these prominent figures, Saint John’s University also cultivated a large number of compradors. According to a research, more than half of students from Saint John’s University became compradors after graduation, and it was once called “an institution of southern Christianity that focused on the cultivation of business compradors” (Gu, 1981, p. 368). Being proficient in both Chinese and English, these compradors undertook a lot interpreting work in their career paths. However, for the fact that most of these interpreting work occurred in daily business exchanges, little had been recorded in historical archives.

All in all, represented by Saint John's University, the missionary schools in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty cultivated a considerable number of interpreters, which greatly eased the shortage of interpreters at that time.

Interpreter Training in Government-Run Language School

As one of the five ports that opened in 1843, communication between Chinese and foreign people in Shanghai soon became a new normal. Among the foreigners, some missionaries could speak quite good Chinese and interpret for them, while Chinese people could only rely on the ill-educated “linguists” whose Chinese was poor, let alone their English skills. As Yang (2020) stated, for a long time since the opening of Shanghai, those linguists were active in almost every corner of Shanghai. Feng Guifen, an educator during the Late Qing Dynasty, once depicted the “linguists” in his book. “Before becoming a linguist, they were jobless and hanging around all day long, and they’d do anything for their own profits regardless of the cost” (Feng, 2002, pp. 55-56). Ge (2006) also mentioned these linguists in his travel notes, “the linguists always wait along the river to wait for the foreigners to come and help them make deal with Chinese people, from which they would gain profit” (p. 88). It could be concluded from these descriptions that both professional skills and qualities of the linguists were poor. Therefore, the Chinese government could only depend on the foreign interpreters in important negotiations. Li Hongzhang described China's position in negotiations with foreign countries as below:

During the 20 years since the opening of Shanghai, quite a number of foreigners have been learning the Chinese language and Chinese history, and they are now familiar with Chinese society, manners and customs. In contrast, very few of our Chinese officials could speak foreign language. What's more, every foreign country has appointed one or two interpreters in Shanghai, and in negotiations we can only rely on these foreign interpreters who stand for their own country. As for the Chinese “linguists”, they are untrustworthy and totally inadequate to be interpreters. (Association of Chinese Historians, 1961, p. 139)

Recognizing the lack of qualified interpreters and the importance of foreign language, the Qing government decided to start foreign language schools. It was in this context that the first government-run foreign language school—Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan was established.

Foreign language education and interpreter training in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan.The foreign language education of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan focused on the training of translating and interpreting abilities. Through the analysis of its teaching staff, curriculum and language skills testing methods, a comprehensive outlook of foreign language education of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan can be formed.

Along the running path of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan, great emphasis was put on the building of a brilliant foreign language teaching team, which can be seen from the difference in salary. According to the budget paper for salaries of teaching staff in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan, the salary for foreign teachers who were in charge of foreign language teaching was 1,500 taels per year, while that for teachers who taught Confucian classics, history, and mathematics was just 120 taels per year, and the salary for class interpreters was 240 taels per year, also higher than the 120-tael salary. This indicates that the organizers of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan planned to spend heavily in employing foreign language teachers. Based on the existing materials, the profiles of foreign language teaching staff in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan are showed in the following table:

Table 2

Foreign Language Teaching Staff in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan

	Foreigners	People with overseas experience	Graduates from Guangfangyan Guan	Not clear	Total
English	1 (Young John Allen)	5 (Huang Sheng, Shu Gaodi, Feng Yi, Wang Fengzao, & Qu Anglai)	5 (Yan Liangxun, Wang Fengzao, Zhu Geren, Qu Anglai, & Zhu Jingyi)	1 (Shen Youfu)	10
French	5 (John Fryer, Clemen (to be verified), Boyer, Adolf Bottu, Bebelmann)	3 (Huang Zhiyao, Wu Zonglian, & Zhou Chuanjing)	4 (Huang Zhiyao, Wu Zonglian, Zhou Chuanjing, & Xu Shaojia)	1 (You Xuekai)	11
German	1 (Carl Traugott Kreyer) -	-	-	1 (Feng Guojun)	2

Source: Shanghai Difangshi Ziliao (Shanghai Local History Materials), Xixue Dongjian yu Wanqing Shehui (The Dissemination of Western Learning and the Late-Qing Society), etc.

Table 2 above shows that in the total of 23 foreign language teachers, seven were foreigners, and eight were Chinese with overseas experience, accounting for more than half of the teaching staff. The 15 teachers had long been steeped in western cultures, so they were qualified to be foreign language teachers. Among the foreign teachers, Young John Allen graduated with honor from Emory College in the fall term of 1858, Carl Traugott Kreyer graduated from University of Rochester in 1863, and John Fryer was the first professor of oriental language and literature at University of California, Berkeley. Besides, Adolf Bottu was a clerk in the Municipal Council of the French Concession and Bebelmann was a railway engineer, both of them were supposed to have received good education. In this perspective, the foreigner teachers were not as disqualified as Liang (1992) described “half of the foreigner teachers were ignorant and incompetent missionaries” (p. 33). Apart from the teachers mentioned above, many of the teachers were graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan and they should be qualified teachers as well. Overall, Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan had a relatively strong faculty team.

Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan was established in an era that was suffering from the shortage of translators and interpreters, so its foreign language curriculum centred on the training of translation and interpreting ability. The 12 experimental regulations made it clear that translation and interpreting ability was used as the standard to assess the students’ performance. It was stipulated that upon the finishing of the three-year study, students who could translate a book independently may be recommended for an entrance into the government, while those who could not translate would be dropped from the school. In addition, translation was an important part of the course structure. Students were required to translate an article every seven days, and those who got high score would get award (Anonymous, 1989). It’s no surprise that students would study translation harder with this incentive mechanism.

Another feature of foreign language teaching in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan is the integration of learning and practicing. Many of the students participated in the translation activity in translation department of Jiangnan Arsenal while they were still studying at school. Moreover, students also had the opportunity to act as the class interpreter at Jiangnan Arsenal’s night school. Those practices in both translation and interpreting could on one hand improve the students’ language skills, and also on the other hand stimulate their enthusiasm for language learning.

The foreign language tests in Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan also focused on the assessment of students’ translation and interpreting ability. According to the 12 regulations, translation tests were conducted to test

students' foreign language skills. What is more, as stated in Young John Allen's diary (Adrian, 1983), during the time he worked in the school, the customs intendant would examine the students each Sunday afternoon through having them translate the notes he received from the American and English consulates. Since the notes were submitted in English with a Chinese translation version, the intendant was able to check the correctness of the students' translation even though he had not learned English before. According to Biggerstaff (1961), there were also two oral tests every month, which means speaking ability was also highlighted. This is something worth mentioning because speaking ability was not taken seriously in Beijing Tongwen Guan, and that may explain why graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan were more competent than graduates from Beijing Tongwen Guan in terms of language skills.

Interpreters from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan. The graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan were mainly engaged in the following four kinds of work: translator/interpreter, foreign affairs personnel, teacher, and industrialist. Although the historical materials relating to the graduates of Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan are scattered in the unwieldy mass of files, we can still sort out the translators, interpreters, and the marks they left on history.

Many translators and interpreters during the Late Qing Dynasty and early years of Republic of China were graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan. In terms of their employers, some of them worked for Chinese government such as Zongli Yamen and some others worked in Chinese embassies in foreign countries. Their duties included translating the diplomatic documents, accompanying Chinese officials for foreign visits, and also helping with the negotiations between China and foreign countries. The table below shows the list of translators and interpreters from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan.

Table 3

Translators and Interpreters From Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan

Name	Job	Name	Job
Chen Yifan	Translator in Zongli Yamen, interpreter in Chinese Embassy in the UK	Hu Weide	Translator student in Chinese Embassy in the UK
Zhu Geren	Translator in Beiyang government	Yang Zhaoyun	Translator in Susong government
Liu Jingren	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in France, the UK and Russia, translator in Zongli Yamen	Wu Zonglian	French translator in Jinghan Railway Bureau, interpreter in Chinese Embassy in Russia, France, and the UK
Cai Zuolai	Translator in Jardine Matheson	Lu Zhengxiang	Interpreter of Chinese commissioner in Russia
Tan Rukang	Translator in Xuzhou Railway Bureau	Zhai Qingsong	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in Italy
Qu Anglai	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in the UK	Dai Chenlin	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in France
Zhang Yongjian	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in Germany	Wu Kezhuo	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in France
Tang Zaifu	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in France	Zheng Rukui	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in Japan
Liu Shixun	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in France	Huang Zhiyao	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in the US, translate for Shiwubao (The Chinese Progress) and Changyan Daily
Zhang Kunde	Interpreter in Chinese Embassy in Busan	Zhang Junmai	Interpret for Hans Driesch's speech in China

Source: Shanghai Difangshi Ziliao (Shanghai Local History Materials), Qingdai Guanyuan Lüli Dangan Quanbian (Archives of Officials in Qing Dynasty), website of Shanghai Local Chronicles, website of Pudong History, etc.

The translators and interpreters listed above have facilitated the negotiations between China and foreign countries in many significant occasions. Taking Liu Jingren for example, he was an interpreter in Chinese

embassy in Russia, and he mediated in negotiations between the two countries. Another example is Liu Shixun, who was an interpreter in Chinese embassy in France. In 1901, he assisted Li Hongzhang in the negotiation of Boxer Protocol. The Archives of Officials in Qing Dynasty recorded him as “Liu Shixun, born in Nanhui, Jiangsu province, accompanied officials to France and Russia as an interpreter. In 1905, Liu Shixun was sent on a diplomatic mission to France, and he was also envoy to Japan and Portugal” (Qing, 1997, p. 329). Although China was in an unfavorable position in its negotiations with other countries due to political reasons, these interpreters still tried everything they could do to fight for China’s profit interest. They helped to remove the language barriers and were indispensable in communication with foreign countries.

Apart from the interpreters who assisted the negotiations, graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan also translated books in different branches of knowledge, including politics and law, military affairs, and geography, etc. At that time, a wave of learning from the western science and culture was rising in Chinese society and those translated books were the most needed materials in the wave. For example, the book about French navy translated by Qu Anglai, books about English navy and American navy translated by Zhong Tianwei, and the book about German army translated by Wu Zonglian offered great resource for Chinese people to know more about military force of other countries. Based on the available materials, altogether, graduates from Shanghai Guangfangyan Guan translated 32 books. Liang Qichao (1923) made a comment on the translated books,

In the latest five decades (roughly 1870s-1920s), the most memorable thing is the translation of books, though the books may seem a little superficial, they did open a new window for people who couldn’t speak foreign language to see a new world. (p. 125)

Conclusion

Interpreting as a communicative activity is more than just the transformation of languages, and interpreters’ role in history should never be neglected, especially during war-time. As a result, interpreter training during war-time is not only necessary but also important. Being one of the first ports opened for trade, Shanghai was the area with the most abundant interpreting activities in China during the Late Qing Dynasty. In this circumstance, the unavailability of competent interpreters in the first two decades became a major and urgent problem to be solved. Focusing on the training of interpreters in Shanghai during the Late Qing Dynasty, this study digs the historical materials and analyzes the efforts and contributions that missionary schools and government-run foreign language schools made to nurture qualified interpreters. These two type of schools occupied an important role in foreign language education and produced a great number of interpreters. By delving into two specific schools, we found that the interpreters they nurtured were all round the world. They helped Chinese officials in many significant negotiations with foreign countries and took part in the making of history.

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