

A Study of Foreign Language Education in Hubei Westernization Schools in Late Qing Dynasty

From the Perspective of Applied Linguistics*

Huili Hou

Department of Foreign Languages
Wuhan Technology and Business University
Wuhan, China

Abstract—Studying the foreign language education in schools set up by westernizationists may help to find some guidelines for today's foreign language education. This article tries to discuss the foreign language education from the applied linguistics perspective in two aspects, namely, foreign language education as a specialty and foreign language education for special purposes. Findings show that foreign language education in schools founded by westernizationists attaching great importance to training language skills and improving humanistic competence, could meet the need of foreign language talents in business and diplomacy in Hubei, and could provide talents to meet the nationwide need as well. Therefore, today's foreign language education planning should also help to improve students' humanistic competence while attaching much importance to language skills training under the context of holistic education.

Keywords—Schools founded by Westernizationists; foreign language education; humanistic competence; applied linguistics perspective

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of foreign language education in China, but foreign language education in the modern sense only started in the foreign language schools founded by westernizationists in the late Qing Dynasty. In the late 19th century, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Wuhan had formed a more influential foreign language education setup in China, training up many specialists of the new type who expertise in foreign languages and Chinese Classics as well. These specialists also played an important role in China's modernization process. The 1980s have witnessed the increasing studies of foreign language education in China, which has also become a hot issue in the recent years. It can be mainly found in education historian's studies, such as Fu Ke in 1986, Li Liangyou, Zhang Risheng, Liuli in 1988. In the 21st century, Gao Xiaofang in 2007, Zhang Meiping in 2011 and many other professors have specially studied the foreign language education in the late Qing Dynasty from the perspective of a language learner and teacher.

Wuhan is reputed as Oriental Chicago. Since the late Qing Dynasty, it has become a very important industrial and commercial center only after Shanghai. Zhang Zhidong, a prestigious westernizationist, carried out significant educational reforms in Hubei Province. The previous studies are helpful in sketching the foreign language education in this period, but cannot match the important status of Wuhan in China. Therefore, this study is going to research into the foreign language education in schools founded by westernizationists, and find the nature and features of foreign language education in these schools from the perspective of applied linguistics, aiming at enriching the content of foreign language education in this period on the one hand, and trying to finding some hints from them on the other, in order to find some guidelines for the current foreign language education planning in Hubei.

II. THE STARTING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN HUBEI PROVINCE

The late Qing Dynasty refers to the period from the onset of the Opium War (1840) to the fall of Qing Dynasty (1911). Missionaries and westernizationists founded many schools with different purposes. Zhang Zhidong, the influential representative of westernizationists founded the first foreign language school, Hubei Ziqiang School in 1890, which is now Wuhan University, one of the most prestigious universities in China. Many other schools were gradually founded after that. Hence, the founding of foreign language schools was the earliest one, which marked the starting of modern foreign language education in Hubei Province, and the scientific and authoritative model to learn from for the other types of schools, for example, schools set up by missionaries.

Applied Linguistics, in the narrow sense, refers to the study of language teaching. The following parts will discuss about the features and functions of foreign language education in schools founded by westernizationists in Hubei Province in this period, from the aspects of English as a specialty education and English education for special purposes.

*Fund: This research was financially supported by the Humanistic and Social Science Foundation of Hubei (Grant No. 17G089).

III. THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A SPECIALTY — A CASE STUDY OF HUBEI ZIQIANG SCHOOL

Up to 1899, in Hubei Ziqiang School five foreign languages, namely, English, French, German, Russian and Japanese were taught to students, especially after the Sino-Japanese War, Japanese was added [1]. Compared with other three schools training diplomatic translating talents in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Hubei Ziqiang School provided more foreign languages to students under the context of great need of translating talents.

Teachers came from different countries, making up the major teaching faculty. That is, Chinese teachers taught some courses in the early stage, and foreign teachers mainly taught in the advanced stage. Here is a summary of the number of foreign teachers and Chinese teachers in the school in 1899, 1 from Britain, 1 from Germany, 3 from Russia, 3 from Japan and 10 from China [2].

Students aged 15-18 came from nationwide. They came mainly from Hubei, Hunan and other provinces. Statistics show that in 1899 the total number of enrolled students reached 75, including 64 government-supported students and 11 self-supported students. Among these students, the number of students studying English, French, German, Russian and Japanese was 12, 12, 13, 15, and 23 respectively [2]. Therefore, the number of students studying Japanese was the biggest, especially after the Sino-Japanese War. For one thing, many people realized the importance of knowing Japanese, for another, the government also began to attach importance to Japanese education because Japan began to learn from the west earlier than China, knowing Japanese meant saving time to learn western science and technology.

Increased enrollment attracted more students. Before 1899, the total number of enrolled students was less than 75, while after 1899, the number reached 120 in 1903, 240 in 1904 and 354 in 1905 [2]. As Hubei Ziqiang School was renamed Hubei Foreign Languages School in 1902, the enrollment soon increases, even tripled. One reason might be Governor Zhang Zhidong's New Deal, the other reason should be the convenient transportation in Wuhan that made students come and go easily.

Course design was relatively flexible but completion study period was fixed tightly. Originally, the school only attached importance to the teaching of foreign languages and foreign technology, but after 1898, especially after the Sino-Japanese War, they included Chinese to course design. And students should complete all the courses with passed grades within five years. From the teaching hours devoted to all the courses, it is evident that the time allocated to learning foreign languages won the first place, Chinese went after, and then math.

Examination papers tested students' vocabulary and grammar on the one hand, and translating competence on the other. Vocabulary and grammar were in fact the basic language skills, and translation texts included many types of writing, concerning politics, business, engineering, travelling, biography, fables, biology, mining, and irrigation, etc., which could test students' language competence.

IV. THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

While Zhang Zhidong was Governor of Hubei and Hunan, he felt a great need for people from a wide range of disciplines, not only for foreign language talents, but also for talents in military, politics, industry, agriculture, business, teacher training, etc. Therefore, he founded a large number of modern schools in Hubei after the Hubei New Deal. According to Xiong Xianjun [3], at that time altogether 46 industrial schools were founded, among which, 37 were initiated by Governor Zhang Zhidong. Hence, the modern school education system had been formed in Hubei since then, and foreign language education had also been made universal.

These schools coexisted with Ziqiang School, also attached great importance to the study of foreign languages, social science and natural science, and had become an important place to promote the study of traditional culture, spread new knowledge and new thoughts. According to Zhao Chunhong [4] [5], Hubei Foreign Languages School, founded by Governor Zhang Zhidong, aimed at training foreign language talents for Hubei to develop its industry and business. Hubei Foreign Languages School, as the first Business English School after being renamed, especially aimed at fostering business talents who could master the knowledge of English and do business with foreigners as well. As students just regarded foreign language learning as a tool obtaining knowledge, after reforms in Ziqiang School, the knowledge of science and business were included in foreign languages learning materials, and Grammar translation was the main teaching methodology. Therefore, the foreign language education achieved its special purposes.

V. CONCLUSION

No matter what foreign languages were treated, whether as a specialty, or for special purposes, great attention had been paid to them. Therefore, the education of foreign languages had helped build the views of talents in late Qing Dynasty, that is, from fostering specialists to fostering versatile talents to all-round generalists. The foreign language education not only provided business and diplomatic talents for Hubei when in great need, but also objectively provided talents for the whole country as Hubei locates in central China and its capital city, Wuhan, was on a very important point in the comparatively more advanced transportation system in late Qing Dynasty.

Then foreign language education brought about not only talents in business and diplomacy, but also teachers that could teach foreign languages, which helped save a lot of money for the government. Therefore, foreign language education in westernization schools achieved its practical values in late Qing Dynasty.

The practice of employing foreign teachers to teach students at their advanced level might also become an important lesson for us. In the early stage, Chinese teachers could help students learn Chinese language and culture well, but in the advanced level, foreign teachers might teach them native expressions, especially in science and technology,

which could help overcome communicative obstacles on the one hand and help students lay a solid foundation in language learning and in learning western science and technology.

Furthermore, the importance was not only attached to language skills training, but also to humanistic education as the government added Chinese to the course design after the Sino-Japanese War, students could also be educated to improve their humanistic competence. Today, especially under the context of holistic education, helping students not only master the foreign languages, but also improving their humanistic competence is still of great significance. Language education should never be only regarded as a tool to learn science and technology, but also a chance to improve individual's humanistic competence.

REFERENCES

- [1] X. Gao, *A Study of Foreign Language Education in Schools Set up by Westernizationists*, Beijing: Commerical Press, pp. 177-184, 2007.
- [2] X. Gao, *A Study of Foreign Language Education in Schools Set up by Westernizationists*, Beijing: Commerical Press, pp. 188-200, 2007.
- [3] X. Xiong, *Educational History of Hubei*, Wuhan: Hubei Education Press, pp. 188-191, 1988.
- [4] C. Zhao, *A Study of the Origins of Business English Teaching in Late Qing Dynasty*, *Lantai Wolrd*, vol. 36, pp. 144-145, 2015.
- [5] H. Shen, *Business English Teaching in Government-funded Schools in Late Qing Dynasty*, *Lantai Wolrd*, vol.10 , pp. 97-98, 2015.