

# The Significance of Early English Version Sinological Periodicals in the Overseas Transmission of Chinese Language

Huanhai Fang

*Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005 China; Overseas Educational College, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361102, China*

Fangfang Qin

*Overseas Educational College, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361102, China*

Ling Shen

*School of Humanities and Journalism, Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College, Zhangzhou 363105 China*

**ABSTRACT:** The transmission of early Chinese language and the interpretation of characteristics of the Chinese language from westerners is an academic field which requires the involvement of multidiscipline. It is based on the whole background of Chinese cultural transmission meanwhile the transmission of Chinese language is the precursor of cultural transmission. The research not only offers historical reference of early Chinese language transmission experience but also illuminates the historical gains and losses of Chinese language transmission. Thus, the English periodicals of sinology is not only the main route for transmitting knowledge concerning China and building the image of China, but also the core carrier for western public to understand the knowledge of Chinese society in an all round way. Among all these, not only the cognition of Chinese language and knowledge framework conform to intrinsic characteristics and laws of linguistic, the overseas transmission and research of Chinese language also has country-specific and contextualization differences, which has distinctive value to the research of the history of international Chinese education.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The professional sinology was officially established in the West in 19<sup>th</sup>, one important mark for sinology to be a formal discipline is the emergence of extensively influenced professional periodicals. These periodicals were established in European or appeared in ceded land and newly opened port city. From the development process of periodicals, although Chinese language and culture are developed, prior to late Qing Dynasty there are no periodicals but Dichao similar to communicate issued by government, while before this, western world had already appeared periodicals published at regular intervals spreading knowledge to the public, such as Eastern Western Monthly Magazine (1833), this is the first Chinese periodical established in China by foreign missionaries. Just as Chinese Repository (1833, 5: 234) said:

“They did not at first clearly understand what was meant by a monthly periodical. We have heard many express their qualified approbation of the work. Those few who have done otherwise are for the most part such as are either self-sufficient in their own knowledge, or proud of their own ignorance. We may venture to say that no natives of good sense and

unprejudiced minds are against it. How far it will be supported by the Chinese themselves remains to be seen. The nature of the work is, so far as we know, entirely new to the Chinese around us; a periodical for the diffusion of useful knowledge was, probably, never before published in ‘the celestial empire’. Excepting the Peking Gazette and the provincial court circulars, which are mere governmental papers, there are no periodical publications of any description whatever in the land”.

This paper also said, “The first number of this work was brought from the press on the 5th of August, 1815. Dr. Milne’s observations on the Magazine are worthy of notice. He was a man who formed his plans with enlarged and liberal views, and executed them with great zeal and carefulness. He was a very nice observer of men, and enjoyed excellent opportunities for learning the character and habits of the Chinese; he understood their prejudices, and knew how to assail them; he saw their miseries, and toiled even unto death to relieve them.—In 1819, he gave the following account of the Magazine, which had then been four years in circulation.”

From the development process of sinology discipline, the emergence of English periodicals

concerning sinology indicates that the discipline of sinology has its own academic form. Sinology is not only a science of study in a corner followed by a few people but the knowledge which opens to the general public. Sinology periodical is not only the main route spreading knowledge concerning China, building the image of China to western world but the core carrier for western public to understand the knowledge of Chinese society in an all round way.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF EARLY SINOLOGICAL PERIODICALS

The early Chinese periodicals of sinology originated from William Milne, in order to solve problem regarding Qing government's prohibition decree in terms of preaching and printed Chinese Gospel publication, Milne opened printing house in Malacca printing a large number of Bible in Chinese, Book of sermons and Gospel tracts even editing and publishing the first monthly circulated magazine in modern China 1815 named Chinese Monthly Magazine lasting 4 years and publishing English publications at the same time. However, objectively speaking, early Chinese sinology periodicals established by missionaries indeed mainly concentrated in the Southeast Asia with its purpose mainly based on the background of spreading Christianity. With China forced to be opened to the outside world, this kind of Sinology journals gradually developed into mainland China and gradually increased the number of scientific content, to the nineteenth century, this journal had dozens of kinds, such as :

Essay and Eastern Western Monthly Magazine and Zawen pian, 1833;  
Chinese Serial, 1853;  
Chinese and Foreign Gazette, 1854;  
Shanghae Serial, 1857;  
Chinese readers, 1868;  
Tandao Retold and The Peking Magazine, 1872;  
Amoy Newspaper, 1886, etc.

At the same time, some westerners began to establish western language sinology periodicals opened to western public mostly in English, French, German, Portuguese and even Japanese and Russian and other languages are also involved. At the very beginning, it was based on the commercial factors. Scattered Commercial periodicals issued at regular intervals came into being in some important port cities and commercial cities of China. Foreign businessmen who lived in various places in China are the target readers of these periodicals, such as follows:

The India-Chinese Gleaner (1817-1822);

The Missionary Herald (1819-1850, Boston)  
A Abelha de Chine (Portuguese, 1822, Macao);  
The Canton Register (1827-1843, Canton);  
The Canton Press (1835-1843, Canton);  
Hongkong Gazette (1841, Hongkong); North China Herald (1850, Shanghai);  
Foochow-foo Courier (1858, Foochow);  
Hankow Times (1866, Hankow);  
Amoy Shipping Report (1872, Amoy);  
Northern Post (1880, Tianjin);  
Chefoo Express (1894, Yantai) etc.

We have to admit that the Chinese and foreign periodicals established by missionaries have various purposes, some of missionaries in the name of preaching actually did the spying job catching a glimpse of our real situation, collecting information for their own country, making full use of any convenient opportunities to monitor China and even China's occasional move can be heard by the target countries over months. What's more, the government gazettes published in China were sent to foreign countries which was happening in China, regardless of the degree known to westerners.

In this period of time, according to the record and narration of national library a, the common English periodicals with relative sheerness and high specialization are as follows:

Chinese Repository (1832-1851);  
Periodical of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (1858-1948);  
Chinese Recorder (1868-1941);  
Chinese Review or Notes & Queries on the Far East (1872-1901) etc.

In addition, except for these common periodicals, there are also some English sinology periodicals with highly academic values. However, because of tiny surviving parts, they are rare in China. The main periodicals of this kind are as follows:

Canton Miscellany (monthly, 1831, East Indian Company, Canton);  
Chinese Miscellany (1845-1850, Walter H. Medhurst, chief-editor, The Mission Press, Shanghai);

The Chinese and Japanese of facts and events in science, history, and art, relating to eastern Asia (monthly, 1863-1865, James Summers, chief editor, London);

Notes and Queries on China and Japan (monthly, 1867-1870, N.B. Dennys, Hongkong) etc.

The most of them are edited by western specialists. These sinological periodicals in English try to reflect every aspect of China in the 19th century to the public in the West, for they spread objectively Chinese knowledge and are an important

part of the West about Chinese language culture system in the 19th century. These periodicals in English also witnessed Chinese cultural might speaking right in the international community. Their transmission gradually shapes the “image” of China created by the West and even influences the western value evaluation about every aspect of Chinese society. Although these missionaries had their special aids, just as the paper in *Chinese Repository* (1833, 5: 235) had said:

“The first specimens were very imperfect, both as to composition and printing: but they were understood by persons who were in the habit of reading; and the editor hoped, that a fuller acquaintance with the language would enable him to improve the style. It was originally intended, that this little publication should combine the diffusion of general knowledge, with that of religion and morals, and include such notices of the public events of the day, as should appear suited to awaken reflection and excite inquiry. To promote Christianity was to be its primary object; other things though they were to be treated in subordination to this, were not to be overlooked. Knowledge and science are the handmaids of religion, and may become the auxiliaries of virtue”.

Based on the background of strengthening Chinese abroad, transmitting and promoting Chinese abroad spread to research establishing process, publishing content, changes and social function of the western sinological periodicals in English in the perspective of the strategic research “*Chinese culture goes abroad*”.

### 3 AN OUTSIDE VIEW ON CHINESE INTERNATIONAL TRANSMISSION

The spreading of Chinese abroad is a phenomenon which has not emerged for recent years, but a proposition with a historical significance of Chinese culture spreading and Chinese image research, which has been attended and studied without a stop. For recent years, to popularize Chinese worldwide and construct Confucius Institutes is just a corollary of historical transmission of Chinese abroad. In the process of the entering of Chinese to the world’s multiculture, “reciprocal subjectivity” should be attempted between different language cultures to eliminate prejudice, introspect and improve itself and dialogue and communicate with other language cultures.

In terms of Chinese’s transmission research, through systematic collating of these rare sinology periodicals’ research in English, it is where the deep academic value of the western periodicals’ research in English lies to arrange Chinese existing form and evolution clues in the transmission and explore similarities and differences between bilateral

language cultures. As it is, Chinese knowledge construction in the western sinological periodicals in English benefits from dual cultural horizon of Sino-western cultural exchange and is closely connected with the transmission of Chinese in the West. Much attention should be paid to several important problems.

The first is how to arrange effectively Chinese existing form and evolution clues in spreading abroad, analyze the complex dynamic process of the mutual identification between Chinese and Western languages and explain cognitive deviation of Chinese and Chinese characters in sinology periodicals in English. In this process, we could find much misunderstanding just as follows (Robert Kennaway Douglas, 1875):

“The words of a sentence are as a piece of clay in the hands of a porter. If they be soft and pliable, that is to say, if they be capable of inflexions and of syntactical motion, they may be moulded to express with varying vigour and force the highest fancies and noblest thoughts of an able writer in all the changing beauty of poetic diction or of rhetorical eloquence. But if on the other hand they be destitute of inflexion, and be cramped by inexorable laws of position, which cannot for a moment be departed from, without a sacrifice of sense, the result must be that the literature of which they are the component partake to some extent of their hard unyielding nature”.

“They are, as has been said of the writings of the Scribes at the time of Our Lord, cold in manner, second-hand and iterative in their very essence; with no freshness in them, no force, no fire, servile to all authority, opposed to all independence; never passing a hair’s breadth beyond the carefully-watched boundary line of precedent; full of balanced inference and orthodox hesitancy, and impossible literalism; elevating mere memory above genius, and repetition above originality”.

However, in the eyes of Westerners, Chinese, as any other languages, has its general principles or composition rules. All elements in Chinese sentences can be articulated through auxiliary words or every word’s position in the sentence, and what’s more, there are certain grammar structures in Chinese sentence and if it is violated, the rules of the language will be broken. However, whether in spoken Chinese or in written language, there are always rich expressions or descriptive means in Chinese, which is paradoxical to simple features of Chinese grammar. At the same time, because of Chinese peculiarity as a non-pinyin language, the Chinese is mainly regarded as “ideographic” based on human language habits of “the age of barbarism” in the West. At present, we need to analyze and explain cognitive deviation of Chinese and Chinese characters in the West, arrange systematically Chinese existing form and evolution clues in English

periodicals and explore similarities and differences in Sino-western language culture system in our research.

The second is how to make use of foreign materials in Sinology such as English periodicals to highlight Chinese culture traces in other cultures. Foreign literature on Chinese culture such as rare English periodicals spread psychological accepting inertia which other cultural forms do not have, and its speaking authority should not be ignored in prevailing sinology district of the West, we could say that no country could ignore its cultural transmission and accumulation in the exotic area, and English periodicals, as an important part of Chinese culture abroad, are admittedly a historical imprint. It is worthy of close attention to the present international Chinese educational circles to research how to make use of foreign materials such as English periodicals to highlight Chinese culture trace in other culture, activate historical memory, enhance cultural confidence, increase dialogue speaking right, shape dialogue advantage and explore an effective output way of Chinese culture.

As it is, we should investigate comprehensively the historical background of rare English periodicals in the 19th century and their recorded Chinese historical facts, focus on their contributions in the process of transmission of the Chinese language abroad and reveal historical information of Chinese cognition and knowledge construction of the western English periodicals based on the background of Sino-Western cultural exchange. On the basis of arranging systematically Chinese data from the western rare English periodicals, it is the prerequisite of researching Chinese features in the western sinology to absorb information of Chinese features and combine other common English periodicals to compare with sinological works.

Of course, it can be seen that we need to collect Chinese materials of rare English periodicals in the 19th century to undertake basic work such as cataloging and reading the first-hand data of those materials and then discriminate, summarize and describe them. Thus, it is the most basic research to grasp entirely the first-hand Chinese research materials of rare English periodicals. In addition, these research Chinese materials of rare English periodicals in the 19th century belong to heterogeneous materials. We need to compare them with other English periodicals and apply language typology's method to investigate the historical evolution of Chinese research based on the background of the transmission of Chinese abroad and lead the research of Chinese feature to communication.

#### 4 THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF ENGLISH PERIODICALS AND OTHER SINOLOGY WORKS

Chen Yinke, who was a famous scholar, pointed out that Chinese culture was conserved in the language. This is to say, in terms of the "Chinese" research, the spread of Chinese in the West has been an important cultural phenomenon and a field missionary pay utmost attention to academic research. The description of Chinese in English sinology periodicals accords with the looks of sinologists, which directly leads to a climax of Chinese research in the 19th century and endows the cognition of Chinese with a tint of "exotic". It provides a new research perspective for the arrangement and research of English periodicals in the western sinology to make use of Chinese materials of rare English periodicals in the 19th century and combine other disciplines to explain the complex dynamic process of each other's selection and influence in the language cognition of Sino-West to analyze their features and rules of evolution. This perspective avoids limits of "local" perspective in Chinese research and adopts a dual academic horizon of "local" and "exotic".

That is to say in details, based on enough investigation and analysis of Chinese materials of rare English periodicals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the academic value of Chinese features' research is judged to extract systematic information of Chinese and relative materials of other common English periodicals are compared to get a breakthrough in research thinking and theoretical methods for Chinese materials in Sinology. The cognition of Chinese features is more systematic with the research of "exotic" scholars of English periodicals so that a more complete Chinese features' system of the spreading of the Chinese language is constructed. At the same time, because the authors of Chinese research materials in English sinology periodical come from many countries and they centralize research achievements of the western sinologists in Chinese for many years, we can acquire cognition of Chinese features we can't get easily by means of domestic Chinese materials, and apply national and typological perspectives to get new academic concept in terms of Chinese. It inherits and innovates exotic sinology research and extends effectively space of relative disciplines such as abroad Chinese research to provide new theoretical guidance and feasible operation advice for the practice of Chinese abroad spread.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Chinese knowledge construction of English periodicals in the western sinology originates from missionary needs, but their theoretical analysis of Chinese conserves intensively linguistic data of the early transmission of Chinese and Chinese features' research and covers the shortage of Chinese research in domestic Chinese academic circles.

The Chinese research form in the western sinology is an objective reality no matter how it is, and there is neither need for the full affirming nor for complete disavowal. Whether subjective or objective, wrong or correct, one-sided or overall cognition of Chinese in the West always provide us with "exotic" thinking. As for the transmission of Chinese abroad and Chinese features' research, our research of Chinese spread should adopt a dual perspective of "local" and "exotic" instead of a mere "local" perspective. So, English periodicals of early western sinology should take a place in the research of Chinese spread and Chinese features.

We have to observe that Chinese cognition and knowledge construction in the western sinology are a dynamic evolution system and their construction and evolution bear linguistic intrinsic features and rules. Because of national and contextual differences of the transmission of Chinese abroad and research, there are different types of models in the research of Chinese features and there are dynamic diachronism and synchronism. In addition, it boasts unique value for the research of the international Chinese language educational history.

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Corresponding author: Shen Ling, professor, School of Humanities and Journalism, Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College.Email:gwshenling@163.com.

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