
Why Should We Learn from the Barbarians?

: The Concept of Westerners as Barbarians
and the Translation of Western Works
in the Modernization of China in the Late Qing

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Abstract

Since ancient times, the Chinese had developed a kind of superiority complex over their neighbours. By labeling the tribal people around them *yi*, the uncivilized barbarians, the Chinese distinguished themselves from the others, justifying their claim to rule over all places, ‘under the Heaven’ (*tianxia*). When the Europeans started to come to China in the 16th century, they were taken by the Chinese as barbarians in no different way. But with the disastrous defeats at the two Opium Wars (1838-1840 & 1858-1860), the Chinese gradually realized the need to learn from the West and we saw in the second half of the 19th century the so-called Self-strengthening Movement, which was in fact an attempt to modernize itself by learning from the West. But it was a slow and painful process, as the conservative forces were steadfast in their opposition to learning from the barbarians. The present paper attempts to explain how this concept of Westerners as barbarians has affected the modernization of China in the late Qing, mainly the second half of the 19th century.

Keywords

translation studies, patronage, barbarians, Prince Gong, *Tongwenguan*

I

Since ancient times, the Chinese had developed a kind of superiority complex over their neighbours. By labeling the tribal people around them *yi*, the uncivilized barbarians, the Chinese distinguished themselves from the others, justifying their claim to rule over all places ‘under the Heaven’ (*tianxia* 天下)¹. When the Europeans started to come to China in the 16th century, they were taken by the Chinese as barbarians in no different way. Regardless of their nationalities, they were seen as inferior and uncivilized people from peripheral distant lands. But with the disastrous defeats at the two Opium Wars (1838-1840 & 1858-1860), China gradually realized the need to learn from the West to modernize and strengthen itself to cope with the changes brought about by the encroachment of the West. We saw in the second half of the 19th century the so-called Self-strengthening Movement in China, which was in fact an attempt to modernize itself by learning from the West. But it was a slow and painful process, as the conservative forces were steadfast in their opposition to learning from the barbarians.

The present paper attempts to explain how this concept of Westerners as barbarians has affected the practice of translation in the modernization of China in the late Qing, mainly the second half of the 19th century. It will first examine how the Westerners were regarded as uncivilized barbarians by the Chinese. It then proceeds to analyse how some more far-sighted Chinese started to argue for translating Western works as a means to strengthen the country. It will explain the problems faced by them and the

1) This is, of course, a very much simplified and generalized description of the picture. For detailed studies on the subject, one may consult Yuri Pines (2005), pp.59-102; (2002), pp.101-116; Nicola Di Cosmo (2002).

ways they have adopted to solve them. Lastly, it will establish how this notion of Westerners as barbarians gradually changed and translation was firmly accepted as an effective weapon in bringing in modern ideas from the West.

II

Lydia Liu, in her famous work *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*,²⁾ argues that the interpretation of the word *yi* as equivalent to “barbarian” was but a construction of a “super-sign”—*yi/barbarian*—by the British. To her, it was Charles Gutzlaff (1803-1851), a Prussian missionary who in 1832 first made a protest to the Chinese officials about the use of *yi* on the Westerners, after which the British became more and more critical and intolerant towards this term and the Chinese attitude.³⁾ She quoted Robert Morrison (1782-1834), the first Protestant missionary to China, for support. In his *The Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, the first Chinese-English bilingual dictionary published in 1815, Morrison defined *yiren* as “a foreigner,” referring to “a distant man; one from remote parts.”⁴⁾ Robert Morrison even suggested that *yi* was in fact “the more respectable term” than *fan*. This seems authoritative enough. However, what Lydia Liu probably does not know, or at least she has not mentioned is: Robert

2) Lydia H. Liu (2004), p.31. She has expressed a similar view in earlier and later works. See Liu (1999), pp.133-134; (2009), pp.1859-1863.

3) Lydia Liu is referring to the voyage made by Hugh Hamilton Lindsay of the East India Company and the Prussian missionary Charles Gutzlaff in the *Lord Amherst* to the China coast in 1832. For the voyage, see Lindsay and Gutzlaff (1834); Hsu (1954), pp.231-252.

4) Robert Morrison (1815, I), p.61.

Morrison himself had a clear understanding of the derogatory nature of the use of the word *yi* among the Chinese at that time. In 1821, eleven years before Gutzlaff made the protest, Morrison wrote the following lines in an article openly published in the *Chinese Repository*:

the Chinese word *E* 夷 which is usually translated [as] *foreigners*, but which conveys, in addition to *not belonging to China*, an idea of inferiority, resembling the word *barbarian* as anciently used by the Greeks.⁵⁾

Then in 1827, when he had to explain the use of *yi* to the Supercargoes of the East India Company, he stated categorically that *yi* “is a dubious word, never used by ourselves.”⁶⁾ Clearly, he deliberately avoided using the term, precisely because he was aware that it had an inferiority connotation. This explains why he would prefer to translate *yi* as “a foreigner” in his dictionary.

There are other evidences to prove that the British, or the Westerners in general, had all along been aware of the disparaging use of the word *yi*. Long before the British established their trading post in Guangzhou, in the Ming Dynasty, the Jesuit missionaries were clear about how they were treated by the Chinese. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) recorded in his memoir that the Chinese took all foreigners as uncivilized and illiterate barbarians, “as though there was no room for doubt that they differ but little from the beasts of the field and the forest”, “scarcely ever do they give them a title more honorable than they would assign to their demons.”⁷⁾

5) Morrison (1839, II), p.31.

6) Hosea B. Morse (1926-1929, IV), p.152.

7) Matteo Ricci (1953), pp.88-89. In various other places of this work, there are similar

As for the British, they had indeed filed a petition, if not a protest, to the local authorities in Guangzhou about the use of *yi* much earlier than Gutzlaff did. In November 1814, John F. Elphinstone, Supercargo of the East India Company in Guangzhou, in a meeting with a senior Chinese minister, registered his discontent towards the use of *yi* for the British.⁸⁾ This proves unmistakably that *yi* as barbarians was not a construct created by the British after the protest of Gutzlaff in 1833. But this kind of feeble protest would not change the attitude of the Chinese, and for some time Westerners, regardless of their nationalities, were seen as uncivilized barbarians from peripheral distant lands. All interactions with the West were placed conceptually within the framework of traditional Chinese world order, which was, as Fairbank summaries, Sinocentric, hierarchical and non-egalitarian.⁹⁾ In practice, there was the well-established tributary system that set out the rules controlling the sending of envoys in great details in every aspect including the frequency of envoys, their routes to the Capital, the way to write and present tributary letters, and the ceremony for seeing the Emperor, etc.¹⁰⁾ It should be pointed out that the missions sent by Western countries were without exception taken as tributary envoys.¹¹⁾

complaints. *Ibid.*, p.167; p.201; p.447.

8) Liang Tingnan (2002), p.555. But Liang Tingnan got the date wrong. It was not the 15th year of Jiaqing, which was 1810, but the 19th year of Jiaqing, that was, 1814. Strangely, Lydia Liu has consulted Liang's work at other places in her book. An explanation is needed as to why she makes no reference to this work when she talks about the protest made by the British against the use of *yi*. See also J. Morrison (1834), p.40.

9) John K. Fairbank (1968).

10) A detailed and in-depth treatment of the tributary system in China is found in Li Yunquan (2004).

11) For example, the Dutch sent an embassy to China in 1794-95 and was treated as a tributary envoy. See Lodewijk Duyvendak (1938 & 1940). Even the Macartney Mission from Britain in 1872-73 was treated in the same manner by Qianlong

During the Ming dynasty, there was an establishment in the Central government structure, the *Siyi Guan* (四夷館), literally, the Four Barbarians Institute, for diplomatic translation and interpreting.¹²⁾ The Qing changed the *yi* (barbarian) into *yi* (translation), thus having a *Siyi Guan* (四譯館); literally Four Translation Institute. However, the institute and their activities are irrelevant to our discussion here, for two reasons. First, the translators/interpreters in the institute, known as *tongshi* (通事) and generally translated as “linguists,”¹³⁾ could only handle the languages of the neighbouring tributary states like Siam, Mongolia and Vietnam. Second, they managed only diplomatic exchanges and would not translate works of Western learning.

The first Chinese official in the Qing to initiate translating works from the Westerners in order to know more about them was Lin Zexu (林則徐, 1785-1850), imperial commissioner sent to Guangzhou in 1838 to wipe out the illicit opium trade conducted by the Westerners. Fully aware of his own limited knowledge of his opponents, Lin hastily formed a translation team upon arrival, and with merely four barely qualified translators, he started his venture to translate Western works in order to secure information about the enemies.¹⁴⁾ In a memorial to the Emperor, he

(乾隆). See Alain Peyrefitte (1993); Earl H. Pritchard (1943), pp.163-203.

12) For *Siyi Guan*, see Wild (1945), pp.617-640; Hu Qiubi (2008).

13) For example, see William C. Hunter (1882); Paul A. Van Dyke (2005). Cranmer-Byne argues that there should be a distinction between “linguists” and “interpreters”: “The word ‘interpreter’ generally indicates a reasonable degree in verbal translation from one language into another, but the attainments of these ‘linguists’ were of a low grade, most of them not having progressed beyond the most elementary stage.” (J. L. Cranmer-Byng 2000, 7), p.122. It should be pointed out that the term *tongshi* was not limited to *Siyi Guan*, but was applied to the interpreters in the Canton Trade System. Despite the special role they played in Sino-Western relations, the *tongshi* has not been thoroughly studied. See Van Dyke (2005), pp.77-93; Lawrence Wang-chi Wong (2007).

14) The earliest report of the translation team of Li Zexu was made by Bridgman

justified his act of translating Western works: “only when we know the strengths and weaknesses of the barbarians that we can draw up plans to put them under control.”¹⁵) At his instruction, excerpts from English newspapers published in Macao, Guangzhou and even Singapore such as the *Canton Register*, the *Canton Press* and the *Singapore Free Press* were translated, which provided invaluable information about the Westerners. He also asked to translate Hugh Murray’s *The Cyclopaedia of Geography* (1834) in order to know more about the outside world generally unknown to the Chinese. Among all the works translated at Lin’s instruction, Emerich de Vattel’s (1714-1767) *Le droit des gens* [Laws of Nations] was of significance, even though only three paragraphs were actually translated, as it was the first time the concept of international law was ever brought into China.¹⁶) Clearly Lin felt the need to have a grasp of the common diplomatic and legal practices among Western countries before he took action against the foreign traders. For these translation activities, Lin has long been commended by the Chinese historians as the “First Chinese to see the world with open eyes.”¹⁷)

But nevertheless, progressive as he might have seemed, Lin Zexu was educated in traditional Confucian learning and his world view was in no way much different from his fellow countrymen at that time. In his writings, he adopted extremely disparaging wording in describing the Westerners, whom he indiscriminately called barbarians, although he was willing to make a distinction between good barbarians (*liangyi* 良夷) and

(1839), p.77. The first study of the topic is Carl T. Smith (1967), pp.29-36. See also Wang Hongzhi (2011), pp.84-94.

15) China’s First History Archive (1992, I), p.765.

16) For the introduction of international laws into China in the late Qing, cf., Lin Xuezhong (2009); Svarverud (2007); Z. Li (1996).

17) Wenlan Fan (1947, I), p.21.

evil barbarians (*jianyi* 奸夷).¹⁸⁾ He was aware that the Westerners had some strength, but he had not the least intention to learn from them at all. His translation activities were attempts to grasp more knowledge about the barbarians so as to better handle them. However, even this kind of translation activities invited criticism. His successor, Qi Shan (琦善, 1790-1854), accused him for “spying on the barbarians”, an act that harmed the dignity of an Imperial Commissioner and brought disgrace to the Empire.¹⁹⁾

Although China was badly defeated in the First Opium War, most of the people did not seem to see the need for any change at that time, probably with the exception of two persons, Wei Yuan (魏源, 1794-1857) and Guo Songtao (郭嵩燾, 1818-1891), who categorically advocated learning from the West through translation. Wei Yuan is well known for his saying ‘learning the superior skills of the barbarians in order to control the barbarians’ (*shiyichangjiyizhiyi* 師夷長技以制夷), and his seminal work *Haiguotuzhi* (海國圖志) [An Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries] (1844, 1847 and 1852) was in fact a collection of translated works by various people about the world. He even urged the establishment of translation bureaus to translate Western works systematically as the first step to learn more about the West.²⁰⁾ On the other hand, Guo Songtao, the first Chinese ambassador sent to Europe in 1876, had memorialized to the Emperor as early as 1859 to set up a foreign language school in Beijing, selecting young talents to learn the Western languages so that they could act as sources of information of the West.²¹⁾ No doubt, in this

18) China's First History Archive (1992, I), p.514.

19) Yuan Wei (1976, I), p.178.

20) Yuan Wei (1998, II), p.26. For Yuan Wei, see Wang Jiajian (1964); Chen Qitai and Liu Lanxiao (2005).

21) Zhongyangyanjiuyuan (1966), p.855.

aspect, Wei Yuan and Guo Songtao were the most open-minded people in China at that time who were eager to know more about and even learn from the rest of the world.

Interestingly, they viewed Westerners very differently from their contemporaries. Although they also used *yi* to call the Westerners, they did not use it in a negative sense. In fact, they were explicit in arguing that the foreign people they were handling were not the same as the traditional neighbouring barbarians. This paragraph from the introduction of *Dilibeikao* (地理備考) [Studies in Geography] by José Martinho Marques (1780-1867)²² collected in Wei Yuan's *Haiguotuzhi* deserves full citation:

The label of Barbarians should be applied exclusively to those cruel and savage people. It is said that our ancient emperors therefore would not easily bother them. It is not correct to say that all foreign countries, in particular those that are civilized, should be referred to as barbarous. ... Among those people from afar, there are many who understand proprieties and virtues. They are extremely knowledgeable and well versed in astronomy and geography. They know things very well, past and present. They are wonderful people in the world and dear friends from other countries. How can they be taken as barbarians?²³

In the same paragraph, there is a quotation from Confucius that “all within the Four Seas were brothers” to argue against discriminating the Westerners. On the other hand, Guo Songtao was also well disposed towards the Westerners. In his direct encounters with some Westerners in Guangzhou and Shanghai, he came to the conclusion that the Westerners

22) For José Martinho Marques, see Zhao Lifeng and Wu Zhen (2006), pp.131-136; Wu Zhen (2006).

23) Wei (1998, III), pp.1888-1889.

were polite, civilized and reasonable. He even found them beautiful looking,²⁴⁾ contrasting drastically to Lin Zexu's first impression of the Portuguese in Macao, who looked so ugly to him that he agreed it was not injurious to call them 'Devils.'²⁵⁾ In his diaries which were not published until the 1980s, Guo attributed the clashes between the Westerners and the Chinese in the newly opened treaty ports to the ignorance and antipathy of his own countrymen towards the West.²⁶⁾ Should the Chinese be more open-minded and unbigoted, they would be able to learn from the West and become strong.

Unfortunately, Wei Yuan and Guo Songtao were real rare birds in China at that time. In the mid-18th century, no one took their words seriously. Wei Yuan remained a junior local official throughout his life and died an unhappy man in a temple. His *Haiguotuzhi* did not attract much attention until at least two decades after his death. On the other hand, Guo Songtao, though a senior minister, was considered a strange person, often ridiculed for his favourable stance towards the West. He was not allowed to publish the record of what he saw and thought about the West when he was ambassador in Europe, because the picture he drew about the West was considered too affirmative. His enemies even questioned his loyalty to the country.²⁷⁾

III

A much stronger patronage in promoting Western learning in China

24) Guo Songtao (1980, I), pp.31-32.

25) Z. Lin (2002, 9), pp.403-404.

26) Guo (1980, I), p.469.

27) Cf., Wang Rongzu (2000); Zhong Shnhe (1985), pp.193-237.

came to existence in Prince Gong (恭親王, 1833-1898), younger brother of Emperor Xianfeng (咸豐, 1831-1861). During the Second Opium War, when the British and French troops were approaching Beijing, he was instructed by the Emperor, who had already fled to Chengde, to handle the peace negotiation. Apparently, as Prince Gong did a very good job, the British and the French requested that all future dealings should be managed by him. He was considered by the Westerners as an efficient, upright and fair person.²⁸⁾ After the war, Prince Gong was tasked to take charge of all foreign affairs. He immediately set up the *Tsungliyamen* (總理衙門), the Foreign Office of Imperial China in the modern sense.²⁹⁾ But generally speaking, Prince Gong has been more remembered as the initiator and *de facto* leader of the Self-Strengthening Movement in the 1860s, the first serious attempt of the Qing to modernize itself to cope with the encroachment of the West. It should be, however, pointed out that the Self-strengthening Movement is more often known in Chinese as *yangwuyundong* (洋務運動), literally, Foreign Affairs Movement. This reflects the nature of the movement more accurately: it was an attempt to strengthen China through learning from the West.

As the leader of this process of learning from the West, Prince Gong had a different attitude towards the Westerners. In a report to the Emperor on the ways to deal with the Westerners, he indicated that there had to be a change in strategy because the situation they faced was not the same as that of the past, when they only had to deal with the neighbouring tribes. One particular observation he made about the Westerners was that they were reasonable, reliable and trustworthy. They could be bound by treaty terms. "By good faith and justice we can still win them over and control

28) Mary C. Wright (1957), pp.15-16.

29) About the *Tsungliyamen*, see Masataka Banno (1964); Wu Fuhuan (1995).

their nature.”³⁰) It was reported that he was once asked by the French interpreter if he considered the Westerners “a barbarous people”. His reply was most direct and positive: “I never thought so, because, having no acquaintance with your true character, I had no fixed opinion; but now, most certainly, I do not.”³¹) In fact, we can tell that he had a genuine respect for some Westerners. One thing that marked him out from the other senior ministers in the Qing court was that he had no hesitation in employing Westerners to his service. The most well-known example is Robert Hart (1835-1911), who worked as Inspector General of China’s Maritime Customs for almost half a century since November 1863. Prince Gong was quoted to have said that if we had a hundred Harts, things would be easy. He even called him “*Wo-mun-tee Ha-ta*”: “the Hart of us.”³²) W.A.P. Martin (1827-1916), who was appointed as the Chief instructor (but he preferred to be referred to as President) of *Tongwenguan* (同文館), literally the Institute of Common Writings, also reported the “uncommonly gracious” manner that Prince Gong greeted him: “always taking both my hands in his, after the cordial manner of the Tartars, in marked contrast with the rigid salute of the Chinese, which even between intimate friends consists in each shaking his own hands at a respectful distance.”³³) This should not be surprising. After all, he was the one who concluded the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), which stipulated that the word *yi* should no longer be used in all future official exchanges with the British.³⁴)

Among his various initiatives in the modernization programme, the one

30) Qi Sihe (1978, V), p.340.

31) D. F. Rennie (1865, I), p.182.

32) *Ibid.*, p.264.

33) William A. P. Martin (1900), pp.294-295.

34) Inspector General of Customs (1973, I), p.419.

that was relevant to our discussion here was the establishment of the first institute to teach Western languages in China, the *Tongwenguan* in Beijing in 1862. Apart from the fact that there was a clause in the Treaty of Tianjin that “All official communications addressed by the Diplomatic and Consular Agents of Her Majesty the Queen to the Chinese Authorities shall, henceforth, be written in English. They will for the present be accompanied by a Chinese version, but, it is understood that, in the event of there being any difference of meaning between the English and Chinese text, the English Government will hold the sense as expressed in the English text to be the correct sense,”³⁵⁾ which implied an urgent need for the Chinese to train up capable translators/interpreters, Prince Gong also argued that mastery of foreign languages would be the first step to handle the foreigners. “How could we expect to put them under control if there was a serious barrier in communication?” he asked.³⁶⁾ By 1863, English, French and Russian were taught there, with German and Japanese added in 1871 and 1895 respectively.

We are not going into details on the developments and achievements of the *Tongwenguan* here.³⁷⁾ There are several issues that should be probed into in some depth, so as to reveal more clearly how the notion of Westerners as barbarians has actually affected the translation practice and modernization in late Qing China.

First, the appointment of foreign instructors. While it seems natural and undisputable to appoint foreign instructors to teach foreign languages, Prince Gong encountered problems in doing so for *Tongwenguan*. At the

35) *Ibid.*, p.418.

36) Qi (1978, V), p.345.

37) For discussion on *Tongwenguan*, see Knight Biggerstaff (1934), pp.307-340; Martin (1900), pp.293-327; Su Jing (1985), pp.289-330.

very initial stage, they just wanted to recruit from Guangzhou some Chinese who might be able to speak English. Such an attempt was doomed to fail, as no qualified language instructors could ever be found from the pool of *tongshi* and foreign trade merchants there.³⁸⁾ This, though obvious enough for those who knew the situation in Guangzhou, delayed the whole process, and *Tongwenguan* was not able to start classes until almost two years later, in June 1862, when the Court finally agreed and they were able to hire a British, J. S. Burdon (1826-1907), to be the first instructor at the Institute. Nevertheless, even this most reasonable move had to be justified by several memorials to the Emperor; and one very important point stressed in the memorials was that these foreign instructors were honest and subservient. Further, they were put on probation for a period of one to two years, while at the same time, Chinese instructors were appointed to keep a vigilant eye on them.³⁹⁾ Despite all these obstacles, Prince Gong valued these foreign instructors tremendously. He paid extremely high salaries to them. For example, Burdon, while on probation, received an annual salary of 300 taels, which was more than 3 times that of the Chinese instructors, who made only 96 taels. Some more qualified instructors who joined *Tongwenguan* slightly later got an annual salary as high as 3000 taels.⁴⁰⁾

It is difficult to determine if these foreign instructors deserved these high salaries, as there were controversial reports on their performance. But apart from the normal teaching duties, some voluntarily took up an important, extra task: translating Western works into Chinese. It was stated clearly in one memorial to the Emperor that translating was not part

38) Zhongguoshixuehui (1961, II), p.7.

39) *Ibid.*, p.7.

40) Biggerstaff (1961), p.120, 50n.

of the duties of the instructors (*shishufenwai* 事屬份外).⁴¹⁾ But throughout the forty years of its existence, 26 pieces of works were translated by the instructors in collaboration with the students.⁴²⁾ Although this is not an impressive figure, the translation activities of the *Tongwenguan* deserve good attention, for two reasons. Firstly, some of the most important Western works translated during the Self-strengthening Movement were actually made by the instructors of *Tongwenguan*. Among them, there was the second half of the famous *Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, the first half of which had been introduced into China by Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi (徐光啟, 1562-1633) over two and a half centuries before.⁴³⁾ Other works included the first Chinese translations of books of botany, algebra and modern mechanics. Second, it started the practice for foreign language schools in late Qing to translate Western works; and again, credits should be given to Prince Gong. Upon hearing from George Seward, the American Consul in Shanghai, that W. A. P. Martin, who had not yet joined *Tongwenguan* at that time, was translating *Elements of International Law* by Henry Wheaton (1785-1848), Prince Gong took the initiative to put up a memorial to the Court to seek support for the project. Chinese officials were assigned to help polish the language and 500 taels were provided to cover the printing cost.⁴⁴⁾ With his strong support, this first complete translation of an international law book was made in 1864. Three hundred copies were printed and distributed to all Chinese officials who were involved in foreign affairs. This was of immense significance as the Qing court could now handle international matters according to

41) Qi (1978, II), p.64.

42) Xiong Yuezhi (1994), pp.322-323.

43) Cf., Peter M. Engelfriet (1998).

44) Martin (1900), pp.222-223; pp.233-234.

Western practices. In fact, Prince Gong reported that he had adopted the knowledge he acquired from Martin's Chinese version of *Elements of International Law* to successfully resolve conflicts with Prussia.⁴⁵⁾ It was clearly an achievement of Prince Gong as a strong patron in promoting translations that helped China to cope with the West. Subsequently, other works in international laws were also translated by the instructors and students of *Tongwenguan*, including the *Woolsey's International Law*, *Penal Code of Strait Settlements* and *Code Napoleon*.

However, when Prince Gong tried to introduce Western learning to the teaching programmes in *Tongwenguan* in 1867, he encountered the most severe criticisms from the conservatives. We are not going into the details of this so-called 'Tongwenguan Controversy of 1867',⁴⁶⁾ which has also been seen as a debate over the adoption of Western learning at the highest level of the Qing court.⁴⁷⁾ Briefly, Prince Gong and his group saw science, and in particular mathematics, as the basis of the strength of the West and hence wanted to set up a new School of Astronomy and Mathematics in *Tongwenguan*. Even more significantly, he proposed to allow and even encourage the *jinshi* holders as well as members of the Hanlin Academy to apply for admission to the new programme. For this very bold proposal, he was harshly condemned. The strongest voice of opposition came from a real heavy weight figure, Wo Ren (倭仁, 1804-1871), Grand Secretary as well as Imperial tutor of the Emperor Tongzhi.⁴⁸⁾ Wo, described by one study as the "high priest" of the Cheng-zhu Neo-Confucianism at the Tongzhi court, accused Prince Gong for sending the Chinese scholars to

45) Wen Qing (1929-1931), p.25. For W. A. P. Martin, cf., Covell (1978); Duss (1955).

46) A precise account of the event can be found in Kwang-ching Liu (1976), pp.87-100.

47) Ding Weizhi and Chen Song (1995), p.78.

48) On Wo Ren, see Li Xizhu (2000); Chang Hao (1960), pp.1-29.

taking the barbarians as teachers. To him, China was a great country, and there were abundant talents. “Why the barbarians? Why do we have to honour the barbarians as our teachers?” he challenged. To invoke a kind of emotional appeal, he referred to the Second Opium War and reminded the Court that the barbarians were their foremost enemies who had invaded the country and killed their people.⁴⁹⁾ Thus, employing foreign instructors to teach the *jinshi* and Hanlin scholars would be an erroneous act that harmed the pride and dignity of the country. In the end, the court would lose the support of the people.⁵⁰⁾ Further, he argued that only those who were inferior in “intention and conduct” would honour the barbarians as teachers. To this, Prince Gong replied, avoiding the term *yi*, that it was not shameful to learn from the others, but it would be most shameful to be inferior to the others. Here, in an indirect way, he admitted that the Chinese were inferior to the Westerners.⁵¹⁾

Prince Gong and his group adopted yet another tactics. They argued that the so-called Western learning, such as mathematics and astronomy, was in actual fact not from the West, but had first originated from ancient China. It was spread to the West a long time ago. Hence, asking the *jinshi* and Hanlin scholars to learn these subjects was not problematic as they were not actually learning from the barbarians.⁵²⁾ He also insisted that employing the foreign instructors in the *Tongwenguan* did not necessarily mean that they were taking the foreigners as teachers, as they had specified that the students in the institute would not “perform the rituals of the disciples” to the instructors.⁵³⁾ By downplaying the role of the foreign

49) Zhongguoshixuehui (1961, II), p.30.

50) *Ibid.*, p.34.

51) *Ibid.*, p.25.

52) *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

53) *Ibid.*, p.36.

instructors, Prince Gong hoped to dismiss the accusation that they wanted to take the barbarians as their teachers.

Although the Court ultimately approved the establishment of the School of Mathematics and Astronomy, it was but a bitter victory for Prince Gong. The idea of recruiting high degree holders and Hanlin scholars to study at *Tongwenguan* was dropped and there were only a few applications to the institute that year. As one study correctly puts it, Wo Ren “stood not only for the political interests and alignment of certain metropolitan officials, but also for a major cultural position, albeit by no means the only one.” The Empress Dowager would not accord full support to Prince Gong because “her own position as regent, and indeed the Manchu rule itself, were dependent on Confucian morality and culture.”⁵⁴) There was no way for her to agree to “honouring the barbarians as teachers.”

IV

As we have pointed out, the Treaty of Tianjian in 1858 specified that the term *yi*s should not be applied to the British in all official documents. However, a treaty term agreed upon at gunpoint would not be able to change the mindset of the people overnight. While the Qing court and its ministers would try not to use *yi* openly in their official communication with the Westerners, they continued for some time using the term in internal documents. This even led to a protest from the British side and the Chinese ministers had to find excuses to account for that.⁵⁵) Further, as

54) K. Liu (1976), pp.95-96. For the rise and fall of Prince Gong and his relationship with the Empress Dowager, see Jason H. Parker (1979).

55) Qi (1978, III), p.531.

shown above, even such a strong patron as Prince Gong encountered serious problems and criticisms in his reform attempts of learning from the West. However, with the somewhat half-hearted support from the Empress Dowager, and finding allies in some of the more progressive Chinese governors or governor-generals like Zeng Guofan (曾國藩, 1811-1872), Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823-1901)⁵⁶ and Zuo Zongtang (左宗棠, 1812-1885),⁵⁷ who rose to power quickly in the 1860s for their contributions in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, he was able to set up the *Tongwenguan* and other institutes to introduce Western learning into China. It should be noted that Zeng and Li, together with others like Ding Richang (丁日昌, 1823-1882) and Shen Baozheng (沈葆楨, 1820-1879), also started language schools and translation bureaus, in addition to shipyards and arsenals, to train up experts in Western languages and learning. Among them there were the famous Jiangnan Arsenal set up with the advice of Rong Hong (*Yung Wing*, 容闳, 1828-1912), the first Chinese graduate at Yale University,⁵⁸ and the Fuzhou Navy Yard School, where the famous translator Yan Fu (嚴復, 1854-1921) graduated. Very often, these Chinese senior ministers worked very closely with the foreigners and had first-hand experience in knowing how strong the Western powers were. For example, both Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang had employed Western weapons in their suppression of the Taiping Rebellion, not to say that the Ever Victorious Army led by General Gordon (Charles George Gordon, 1833-1885) had actually assisted them in the campaigns.⁵⁹ To

56) On Li Hongzhang's role and contributions to the modernization movement, see Samuel C. Chu and Kwang-ching Liu (1994).

57) One should note that Prince Gong repeatedly quoted the memorials of these governor-generals as well as their activities for support. Cf., *Zhongguoshixuehui* (1961, II), pp.32-33; pp.35-36.

58) See Yung Wing (1909).

59) For the Ever Victorious Army, see Andrew Wilson (1976); Richard J. Smith (1978).

them, Westerners were for sure not barbarians. But nevertheless, although they had no hesitation in learning from these friends from afar, they were trained in traditional Chinese education, and did not have any genuine understanding of the West. Thus their scope of learning was very much limited within that defined by Wei Yuan in the 1840s: to learn the “superior skills” of the Westerners. As a consequence, works translated in the entire Self-strengthening Movement concentrated mainly on ship and weapon building, mathematics, astronomy, geography, and at most international laws.⁶⁰ Even as late as the 1890s, Zhang Zhidong (張之洞, 1837-1909) was still advocating the notion of taking Western learning as utility while keeping Chinese learning as the substance (*Zhongxue-wei-tixixue-wei-yong* 中學為體西學為用). We need to have a new generation of intellectuals who had received education in the so-called ‘new schools’ (*xinxuetang*) in China and/or had lived abroad so that a deeper understanding of the Western culture could be attained. Among them, there was one of the most important translators, if not *the* most important translator of the late Qing, Yan Fu, who first attended the Fuzhou Navy Yard School established by Shen Baozhen and then the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, London. Having a true understanding and respect for Western culture, Yan differentiated himself from the earlier translators in translating works of social sciences. Apart from the famous *Tianyanlun*, translated, or more accurately adapted from Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, he was the one who introduced to the Chinese intellectual world the Western concept of liberalism, mainly through his translation of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*.⁶¹ Only at this stage, we can comfortably

60) For a comprehensive account and lists of the works translated during the Self-Strengthening Movement, see Xiong (1994).

61) Cf., Max Ko-wu Huang (2008).

say that the concept of Westerners as barbarians was completely abandoned by the learned people. The advocacy of translating Western literature, mainly fiction, by Liang Qichao (1873-1929) in 1898 can be seen as another major landmark because the Chinese had always been proud of their very rich literary heritage.⁶²⁾ Of course, before long, there was the new cultural movement in the May Fourth, highly iconoclastic and anti-traditional in nature.⁶³⁾ Then in the 1920s, slightly over half a century after the Treaty of Tianjian that banned the use of *yi*, there was the slogan of “wholesale Westernization” (*quanpanxihua*),⁶⁴⁾ which was not only solid evidence that Westerners were no longer barbarians, but that a process of cultural self-colonization had been going on in China. By this time, many traditional Chinese practices and thinking were considered barbarous by the Chinese themselves. This is probably another classic example of the irony of history.⁶⁵⁾

62) Cf., Wong (1998), pp.105-126.

63) For a classic study of the May Fourth, see Tse-tsung Chow (1960).

64) The term ‘wholesale Westernization’ was formally coined and promulgated by Hu Shi in 1929. Cf., Shih Hu (1929), pp.112-121.

65) For details of this change, cf., Wong (2005), pp.109-134.

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