

Furtherance and Shaping: On the Media-Making of Hankow in the “Foreign Newspaper Era” (1866-1900)*

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“The Era of Foreign Newspapers” refers to the period from the emergence of the first modern newspaper in Hankow in 1866 to 1900 when Wuhan’s newspaper industry was dominated by foreign newspapers. The well-known foreign newspapers in Wuhan during this period mainly included *Hankow Times*, *The New Edition of Tan Dao*, and *Han Bao*. The subjective purpose of foreigners’ early endeavors of running newspapers in Wuhan was mainly to use newspapers to convey business information, spread religion, or influence public opinion in order to safeguard their own interests in China. However, foreign newspapers in this period played a constructive role in the development of Wuhan’s local society: It gave birth to the emergence and development of the first private and official newspapers in Wuhan and shaped the local social, cultural, and political changes in Wuhan in the late Qing Dynasty. Sorting out and explaining the constructive influence of Hankow’s foreign newspaper in this period has certain significance for restoring the social and political landscape of Wuhan at that time and better understanding the context of historical development.

Keywords: “The Era of Foreign Newspapers”, semi-colonial Hankow, colonial history, news history, media-making

Research Origin

Nietzsche once attempted to prove a point in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, that is, there is no fact, only interpretation. It shows the efforts made by human beings in various objective facts to understand the surrounding environment, to restate the phenomenon, which will finally to be incorporated into their own cognitive category. History cannot be deduced afterwards, but the interpretation of history helps us better understand the past. So far, with the continuous deepening of the excavation of the historical materials of newspapers and the increasing number of interpretations, new thoughts have been brought forth to the study of the history of newspapers. However, the study of the history of modern Chinese newspapers should not only center around Chinese society itself alone, but should also take the contemptuous historical and international environment into accounts so as to reasonably “summon the west back”. Although the early form of Chinese newspaper “Di Bao” (court bulletin) appeared no later than the Han Dynasty, the first Chinese newspaper in modern sense is *Mifeng Huabao* (*A Abelha da China*), which was founded and published in Portuguese by a foreigner named Barbosa in Macao in 1822. And the first commercial newspaper run by Chinese people, *Zhaowen Xinbao* (*Zhaowen News*), did not appear until 1873 in Hankow.

When concerning the general historical setup of China’s modern newspaper industry, there has always been the saying that “Shanghai in the east, Tianjin in the north, Guangzhou in the south, and Wuhan in the middle”

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(Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 13). It is not a mere coincidence that Wuhan has become the national political center three times respectively during the Revolution in 1911, the Northern Expedition, and the Anti-Japanese War; rather the historical development of Wuhan's newspaper industry in modern times has certainly casted its influences. Ever since its port-opening in early 20th century, Hankow has enjoyed the reputation as "the Oriental Chicago". As the western influences spread to the east, the inception of Wuhan's newspaper industry was among the first in inland China. Various newspapers, especially progressive newspapers have played important roles in major historical shifts, such as the Revolution in 1911 and the May 4th Movement. In terms of issuance number and political influence, Wuhan's newspaper industry was already developed in a relative sense by the end of the Qing Dynasty, second only to Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, thus ranking Wuhan as the most important inland center for newspapers. As the business and missionary center in central China, Hankow had gathered a large number of foreign missionaries, businessmen, and diplomats; various foreign newspapers were established successively in Hankow. According to incomplete statistics, there were at least 55 kinds of foreign newspapers in Hankow's history, among which *The Central China Post* issued in English has the longest time of publication and the greatest influence in modern and contemporary central China.

It is not difficult to find that, unlike the development pattern of newspaper industry in major western capitalist countries, modern newspaper industry in Wuhan and even in China almost all came into being and developed under the influence of foreign newspapers. According to statistics, from the emergence of newspapers in Hankow in 1866 to 1900, there were 20 kinds of newspapers in Wuhan, among which, 16 were established and run by foreigners with private and official newspapers taking up to only four. It is quite obvious that during this period, the large-scale inception of official newspapers has not yet begun, and the self-run newspapers by Chinese were still lackluster. Therefore, some academics named the period from the 1860s to 1990s "the foreign newspaper era" of Hankow in modern times (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 99). During the period, foreign newspapers in Hankow, served as "stones from other mountains"¹, have objectively accelerated the transformation of Chinese people from translating newspapers to running newspapers, and therefore are of great significance to the changes of Wuhan's social culture.

Foreign Newspapers as Stones From Other Mountains: Literary Instrument Smuggled Amongst the Guns of Great Powers

Since Hankow's port-opening in 1861, in the following 30 years, "Almost all newspapers, without exception, were founded by westerners for various purposes. They are the 'literary instrument' for the invasion of foreign powers" (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 130). As an important means of winning the popular support and cultural infiltration, all kinds of foreign newspapers founded in modern Hankow were instrumental almost from the beginning of their establishment.

Outpost of Early Trade

If the Opium War woke up the Chinese from the fantasy of the invincible "Celestial Empire" and forced China to take the first step towards modernization, then it was the Second Opium War and *The Treaty of Tianjin* (1858) which ended the war that really shocked the inland city, Wuhan and its traditional social system.

¹ The expression of "stones from other mountains can be used to polish jade" metaphorically refers to fact that the talented individuals or things from foreign countries can serve the interest of the home country.

The very significance of Hankow's port-opening lies not only in its being the largest trading port in inland China at that time but more importantly in its having exposed the huge inland market of China to foreign trade forces in a way that has not existed before. For a time, "the passage to all countries on the earth is unimpeded, a change that has not occurred for thousands of years" (Association of Chinese Historians, 1961, p. 351). Back then, shipping was the most important transportation in China and as Hankow has long enjoyed the reputation as the "thoroughfare of nine provinces", its strategic position in shipping of the middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River was almost self-evident: Since the first voyage of American company Russell & Co's cargo ship "Surprise" to Hankow in 1863, merchant ships of British firms such as Tai-koo, McBian, and Hoong'on have all flooded in to Hankow port. "The occurrence of the newspaper (in Hankow) is closely related to foreign business, whose primary need is to make the shipping information and market condition known" (Guo, 2003, p. 138). Therefore, in terms of function, the foreign newspaper in this period was mainly to provide commercial information such as shipping date, house rental, price rise and fall to foreign businessmen who wish to invest in Hankow.

Hankow Times, a typical commercial newspaper, as both the first foreign newspaper and the first newspaper ever founded in Hankow, holds a special position in the early development of Wuhan's newspaper industry and should have casted more profound and lasting influences, existed only shortly, which is slight bizarre. This is because, restricted by historical conditions, there were frictions with the locals and bandits were in frequent activities in surrounding villages; therefore, very few foreigners came to live in Hankow after its port-opening. "The attempt to live among the Chinese soon ended" (Rowe, 2016, pp. 59-60) as foreigners retreated back to the safer and better conditioned concession area, further narrowing the potential readers of *Hankow Times* to foreign businessmen: "Obviously, (*Hankow Times*) taking foreigners as the target audience and very likely had little effect on the local officials and gentry in Hubei" (Su, 1987, p. 548) leave alone on the ordinary people. Although *Hankow Times* and the subsequent *Wuhan Recent Events* (founded in 1883 by British) were the pioneers in the history of Wuhan's newspaper industry, their influence on the society back then was not very obvious because of their short existence.

Admittedly, as the "literary instrument" that serves the invasion of imperialist powers, the primary concern of Hankow's foreign newspapers in this period was the interests of foreign merchants. Since the port-opening, the development of early trade in Hankow was unconventional, creating a demand for the exchange with foreign merchants, which also made the foreign newspaper in this period the outpost of early trade.

Tool for Missionary Work

Catholic missionary activities in Wuhan can be traced back as early as the reign of Chongzhen in the Ming Dynasty. However, during the reign of emperor Yongzheng of Qing Dynasty, Christianity was regarded as heresy and has thus been banned; missionary work was under strict restriction until the reign of emperor Daoguang. And it was after the opening of Hankow that Wuhan had become a missionary center in central China with foreign missionaries increasing their privileges via various unequal treaties. By the end of the 19th century, 80% of the religious propaganda materials distributed by the Protestant Church were compiled and distributed by the "Religious Tract Society" in Hankow, and Wuhan became the headquarter of the society in China.

Timothy Lee, the chief writer of *The Times* and British missionary, clearly pointed out the important role of newspapers in religious propaganda, calling newspapers "a faster way for missionaries", "to influence millions of people", and "to make millions of people change their minds". Compared with other neighboring countries in

Asia, China has a history of thousands of years of using text for dissemination. In addition, printing in the Ming and Qing Dynasties was convenient and practical. Therefore, China was almost naturally equipped to use newspapers for religious propaganda. Young J. Allen (also known by his Chinese name Lin Lezhi), a missionary of American Southern Methodist Church, stated outright that “It is difficult to explain the teachings of the lord and properly introduce western learning from the pulpit. Only by words and printing can it be widely and deeply spread and for a long time” (Gu, 1996, p. 221).

Moreover, the role that newspapers played in religious preaching can be seen from the change of the attitude of Griffith John (also known by his Chinese name Yang Gefei), a British missionary who has preached in Wuhan for more than 50 years and is known as the pioneer of Christian missionary in Central China. As early as 1861, Griffith arrived in Wuhan as the first missionary in central China. He initially insisted on “distributing Gospels and preaching on the street so as to attract Chinese to join the church one by one and from bottom to top” and was known as “the street preacher” (Gu, 1992, p. 195). However, because Griffith’s Chinese was rather stiff and often contemptuous of the Chinese, the effect of his oral preaching was not ideal. It was until later, as his understanding of Chinese society gradually grew that he noticed Chinese people at that time were profoundly influenced by Confucianism: “Their heroes are not warriors, not even politicians, but scholars”. Therefore, to influence China and its people, one must start from “these people... so as to completely penetrate the empire and effectively change China’s public opinion and actions” (Gu, 1981, p. 156). Afterwards, Griffith changed his bottom-to-top preaching strategy in his early years and tried to use publications to have an impact from top to bottom. In 1872, Griffith John founded the *Tandaoxinbian (Religious News)* in Hankow to spread Christian doctrines and preached to the local heathens. The importance of newspapers in the early missionary activities in Wuhan is thus quite obvious.

The Mouthpiece of Political Propaganda

As the spokesman for the imperialist powers, foreign newspapers in this period were generally a set of discourse legitimizing the interests of the imperialist powers in Hankow or even in China. The shift of *Han Bao*’s ownership from the English into the Japanese signaled the end of British and American monopoly of Wuhan’s newspaper industry. Compared with newspapers founded by British and American in China, *Han Bao* run by the Japanese spared no effort in political propaganda and advocacy, and thus had a more direct impact on local social culture and political activities in Wuhan. As Japan’s first newspaper and its first public opinion agency in China, the operator of the *Han Bao*, Tsung Fong Kotaro, repeatedly submitted requests to the Japanese authorities to influence Chinese public opinion by running newspaper, making the purpose of running *Han Bao* extremely clear since its establishment:

the principles of running *Han Bao* should be as follows: First, to introduce the facts about Japan to the officials and people in China to earn their favor and trust. Second, to demonstrate the interdependency between China and Japan as that between lips and teeth and to list the facts of China and Japan deriving from the same origin. (Li, 2014, p. 31)

On the surface, *Han Bao* was dedicated in advocating “the same culture, the same continent” and in exposing Russia’s crave for the land of China. But essentially, “resisting Russia and rejecting Europe to rejuvenate Asia” was only a cover for Japan’s attempts to squeeze out the influence of other powers in Wuhan and even in China so as to further consolidate Japan’s privileges. And the nature of *Han Bao* as Japan’s propaganda machine in China is completely bare.

Ripened Fruit: Local Newspaper Industry in Hankow

The emergence and development of Wuhan's newspaper industry is largely a local response to foreign newspapers. In fact, some academics believe that the modern newspaper industry in Wuhan originated from the practice of running newspapers in the Hankow concession by British, American, Japanese merchants and missionaries, due to the significant impact of foreign newspapers on the local industry in Wuhan (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 38). Although the subjective aims of businessmen and religious figures from Europe, America, and Japan to run newspapers in Wuhan vary from one another, foreign newspapers did have a constructive impact on the growth of local newspapers in Wuhan by stimulating the emergence and development of private and official newspapers.

Zhaowen Newspaper: The Pioneer of Chinese Self-Run Newspapers

Since the opening of its port to the end of "The Era of Foreign Newspapers" (1900), Hankow witnessed the establishment and demise of more than a dozen newspapers. However, most foreign newspapers did not last for long and mostly had foreigners as their target readers, with *Han Bao*, which was published in Chinese and thus had relatively more readers, as the only exception. Consequently, foreign newspapers during this period "very likely had little effect on the local officials and gentry in Hubei" (Rowe, 2016, p. 548), leave alone the populace. Overall, the social groups affected by foreign newspapers during this period were relatively small. However, as an important part of western learning, it shed a light on the Chinese people in Hankow to develop the idea of running their own newspapers. On August 8, 1873, Xiaomei Ai founded and published the *Zhaowen Newspaper* in Hankow.

Huihu Tang, a leading researcher in the history of journalism in Wuhan, once thoroughly analyzed the population and geographical location of Hankow during the late Qing Dynasty, and believed that the cultural inclusiveness and openness of its wharf culture had an important impact on Hankow's becoming a major town of news industry in China at the end of the 19th century (Tang & Zhu, 2012, pp. 127-130). However, although Hankow has a tradition of using written media as "written text is not only used for store signs and advertisements (like today), but also can be seen almost everywhere on everything" (Rowe, 2016, p. 28), illiteracy was on the high side of the population in Hankow at that time, and the public literacy did not provide a unique advantage for the development of the modern newspaper in Hankow. Plus, as early opening trading ports, Shanghai and Guangzhou are surely no less culturally inclusive than Hankow. For these early trading ports, what they have in common is they were all important strongholds for foreigners to run newspapers in China. According to the local chronicles of Shanghai and Guangzhou, there were no less than 20 types of foreign newspapers in Shanghai before 1900. Therefore, perhaps it was because of the early impact of western tradition of running newspapers that cities like Hankow, Shanghai, and Guangzhou had easier access to "the guidance from western merchants who are familiar with stylistic rules and layout (of newspaper)". Then it was not entirely a historical accident that *Zhaowen Newspaper* was founded in Hankow and became the pioneer of Chinese self-run newspaper.

In fact, in 1893, Guanying Zheng once commented in his reflective work *The Warning in the Times of Peace and Prosperity* that

Newspapers have been opened in various commercial outlets in China, such as Shanghai, Tianjin, Hankow, Hong Kong and other places. Yet the owners are all westerners. Every time there is a negotiation between China and foreign countries, there are those who slander the Chinese authority and confuse the people. (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 126)

Perhaps it was precisely due to westerners who intended to manipulate the minds of the Chinese people by running newspaper in Hankow, forerunners like Xiaomei Ai who lived in the era and experienced the dilemma of suffocating silence, yearned to establish Chinese self-run newspaper so that “conditions at lower levels are accessible and current events can be well known by the public” (Shenbao, 1873, p. 13). The development of history was not stagnant, and the people of Hankow were not indifferent to the great changes in history. It may be that foreign newspapers in Hankow were essentially the tools of the invasion by foreign powers, but they have imperceptibly become the catalyst for Chinese people to run their own newspapers, encouraging the pioneers to “learn from the west and make changes, whose early endeavors truly opened the ‘chapter’ of Wuhan’s modern journalism history” (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 130).

Hubei Business Daily: The Earliest Commercial Official Newspaper Published by the Late Qing Government

In 1896, in order to publicly express his support for the reformist *The Chinese Progress* (Shiwu bao), Zhang Zhidong issued a “Letter on Regulating Official Sales in Hubei Province” to recommend to his subordinates:

For over a hundred years, the western countries have spared no effort to promote their newspapers, such as the British *Times*, the French *Le Dent* and the German Clones. Over the past two decades, these foreign newspapers have gradually become popular in China, but since they are run by foreign merchants chasing after profit, the truth is inevitably distorted. What they record are mostly farfetched analogies and have nothing to do with grandiosity, and rightly deserve to be despised by scholars and officials... (*The Chinese Progress*) translated news from the original articles on foreign newspapers and is presided over by Chinese gentries and officials, and therefore is a good newspaper founded by the Chinese. (Zhang, 1998, pp. 3317-3319)

It can be seen that Zhang Zhidong not only despised foreign newspapers, but also distrusted local private newspapers. He believed that both foreign newspapers and private newspapers lack “the participation of gentry and officials”, so “distortion” is almost inevitable. And the policy that only government-run newspapers should dominate public opinion and enlighten social attitude was confirmed again by Zhang Baixi, then the imperial censor, who presided over the implementation of the “New Deal”:

There are dozens of newspapers run by private sectors in the open ports in China. However, the cost (of running private newspaper) is small and the purpose is disordered. Except for few better ones, many of them are confusing the right and wrong and misleading the public. They often reside in concessions, hang foreign flags and self-claim to be just comments to criticize the current situation. The influences they cast on the public is profound and deeply-rooted. They can hardly be ignored nor stopped. Official newspapers run by the government are thus the only solution to this as they can truly guarantee clear understanding and accurate recording of facts and therefore will be able to well serve the opening-up and the widespread of knowledge. (Wang, 1902, p. 18)

Perhaps Zhidong Zhang was aware that all western countries have newspapers to lead the public, and the task of “honoring the imperial court and defending the state” obviously cannot be assumed by outsiders who hung the flag of the foreign countries and self-claimed to be just and fair to criticize the current situation. In addition, the development of private Chinese newspapers was quite uneven, making it difficult for them to take on the major role in Zhang Zhidong’s eyes. So, in April 1899, he supported the Hankow Bureau of Commerce in establishing the *Hubei Business Daily* in Wuchang. As the earliest official newspaper published by the late Qing government, the birth of *Hubei Business Daily* can be described as an effort made by the government to gain a place in the discourse matrix at that time. Therefore, it is also a local product jointly produced by foreign newspapers and Chinese private newspapers.

Furthermore, during this period, due to the exploratory development of local newspapers, official newspapers were unable to establish their own news channels, and there were not yet a large number of specialized personnel engaged in the news industry. As a source of information, foreign newspapers have objectively promoted the transformation of official newspapers from “translating news” to “running news”. In fact, until 1910, only 33 news practitioners were registered by the Wuhan government (Li, 2014, p. 22). In contrast, the newspaper industry in western countries has already made significant progress at this time, entering “the golden age of newspapers” one after another. Yet, Hankow’s then official newspapers were still in a transitional stage from “translating newspapers” to “running newspapers”, and various foreign newspapers were their important sources of information. Therefore, at the beginning of its establishment, *Hubei Business Daily* not only published news on the “market prices of goods in local and neighboring provinces”, but also large parts of “contents on business translating from western books or newspapers” (Tang & Zhu, 2012, p. 168).

As a medium, newspapers surely are not independent from other social factors in the different stages of content production and consumption, but rather subsystems located in a relatively complex network of a larger social system, thus forming a special interactional relationship between different newspapers. Both *Zhaowen Newspaper*, the first private newspaper run by Chinese and *Hubei Business Daily*, the first official newspaper of the late Qing government, reflected the introspection of the pioneers of this period on the dominance of foreign newspapers in Hankow. And it was in this introspection that the practice of running Chinese local newspapers was ripened and began.

A Shaped Society: Hankow Under the Influence of Foreign Newspaper

The famous Chinese journalism scholar Gongzhen Guo once said,

The opportunity for the integration of Chinese and western cultures has opened up a new era that has never been seen in history. Yet, tracing back to the source, who channeled the communication between both sides? It is the books and newspapers published by foreigners (in China). (2003, p. 148)

Ever since the Opium War, the number of commercial ports that China was forced to open continued to increase. These ports were like cracks of varying sizes in China’s traditional social system, providing an opportunity for newspapers, as pioneers of western learning, to enter and spread in late Qing Chinese society. The impact of foreign newspapers on Wuhan in terms of culture, society, and politics was almost foreseeable.

Setting the New Trend: Promoting the Spread of Western Learning in Hankow

Since foreign powers opened the door of China with guns and cannons, Chinese people have gradually realized the importance of western learning and new knowledge from the west.

At that time, while Chinese society was stirred by the Opium War and the Rebellion of Hongyang, the Chinese people witnessed the fierceness of western ships and cannons, and came down to the theory that western learning can be used for the purpose of upholding the Chinese feudal society. (Guo, 2003, p. 136)

And foreign newspapers have played a certain historical role in promoting the dissemination of western learning in Hankow. On the one hand, early religious figures who came to Wuhan to preach realized the market of western knowledge in Chinese society, believing that “spreading western knowledge to the Chinese people at such a time will inevitably establish friendly feelings towards outsiders in their minds” (The Conference of Christian Missionaries, 1877, p. 136). Therefore, some religious newspapers were not entirely about religious content, “besides religion, there is the knowledge of sound, light, chemistry, and electricity (on the newspaper)”, or “in

the name of enlightenment, they also introduce some new western knowledge in addition to preaching” (Liu, 1991, p. 3).

On the other hand, the continuous setbacks of the Qing government in the war shattered Chinese people’s illusion of the invincible “Heavenly Dynasty” back then and caused some officials of the Qing court to re-examine their relationship with the “foreign barbarians” with a “weigh gains and losses to change for the better” attitude so as to “learn from the barbarians and master their skills to fight them”. As a pioneer of western learning, foreign newspaper has naturally become an important channel for the Chinese people to practice “learning foreign experiences”. Therefore, since the Westernization Movement, the translation of foreign newspaper has become an important measure to introduce western civilization. *The Chinese Progress* (Shiwu Bao), founded by Liang Qichao and others in 1896, “aims to introduce the principles of political science by translating newspapers from various countries, with new releases attached at the end of the volume” (Shenbao, 1894, p. 20). Although it was in Shanghai, far from Hankow, it was highly praised by Zhidong Zhang, the then Governor of Hubei and Hunan provinces, who demanded “all the civil and military offices in Hubei Province, from civil service to various schools in various states and counties, and from military positions to commanders in all departments, each office shall have one copy (of *The Chinese Progress*) on schedule” (Zhang, 1998, pp. 3317-3319), making the newspaper quite influential among the officials in Hubei.

Overall, although early foreign newspapers had more advantages in terms of format and printing technology, they may not have a decisive impact on the emergence of local scientific ideas in Wuhan due to the lack of potential audience and consequently weaker impact. And as for official newspapers, though they often adopted western learning knowledge from foreign newspapers, their influence was not optimistic as they still had a narrow translation scope and limited audience to a few enlightened officials and modern school students.

However, objectively speaking, it is not to be denied that the emergence and translation of foreign newspapers back then have indeed provided an opportunity for the dissemination of modern ideas in Hankow. Even though they had not been widely and directly spread among the public, they did “shaken their minds... and it was through the sought of flexibility that motivation of change for the better was generated” and through the dissemination of western learning, foreign newspaper have promoted “readers to understand the overall situation of the whole world, not to be arrogant, to strive for new learning, to break out of the rigid stereotypes by knowing all new learning paths” (*The Chinese Progress*, 1897, p. 1).

***Han Bao*: Fueling the Momentum of Reform Movement**

The dissemination of western learning provided new ideas and perspectives for the advanced Chinese people who were deeply trapped in various crises at that time. The voices of criticizing monarchy, advocating civil rights, and calling for the establishment of democratic systems by imitating the west gradually became stronger. By the end of 1890s, the early “technological innovation” advocated by a few Chinese officials who were keen on the westernization of China was but an arrow at the end of its flight due to its difficulty in reaching the foundation of feudal autocracy. Under the influence of western learning, the “Reform Movement” aimed at completely changing the political order in China began to flourish.

In contrast, due to the presence of Zhidong Zhang, who respected and guarded the Qing court and took it as a responsibility to “correct people’s hearts and eliminate evil beliefs”, Hankow did not become the center of reform ideas, as the neighboring city Changsha did. However, as *Han Bao* “suppressed the old party, aided the new party, and promoted the momentum of the reform”, empress dowager Cixi urged local authorities in Hubei

to “urgently find ways to prohibit it” citing reasons such as “fabricate rumors, mislead the world and the people, and ignore any concerns” (Song, 2011, p. 173). If other foreign newspapers are more of a long-term and indirect driving force for the changes in local society, then the influence of the *Han Bao* on the Reform Movement and even the entire Wuhan can be said to be rather direct and significant that according to Xuezhai Guan’s recollection,

From the imperial edict, Hankow is also a place where newspapers are abundant, and there are certainly more than one type of newspaper. However, when consulting with old colleagues, no one can name out other newspapers other than *Han Bao*. (Guan, 1985, p. 123)

In terms of content, *Han Bao* has published articles promoting the idea of reform, such as “On the Priority of Rich Education in State Governance”, “On the Origin and Development of People’s Wisdom”, and “On the Suggestion of Establishing Schools in China to Reserve Talents”. The newspaper supported the reform and was less obstructed by the Qing government due to the protection of the Japanese government. Therefore, in its comments, *Han Bao* openly expressed its support for the “Kang Party’s words”, stating that “Youwei Kang, Qichao Liang and folks alike are upright, and the new policies they speak of are beneficial to the country” (Liu, 1991, p. 160). *Han Bao* further criticized the conservative atmosphere and even publicly supported emperor Guangxu’s personal governance, saying, “For the twenty sixth year since the emperor reigned, he loved the subjects as if they were his own children, without any flaws or immorality” and “If the empress dowager does not withdraw from the court, and emperor Guangxu does not resume to power, tens of thousands of people will feel uneasy, and the hidden villains will take advantage of the situation” (Liu, 1991, p. 37). But it was precisely because of the many connections between the *Han Bao* and the Reform Movement, as well as the frequent publication of “rebellious words” criticizing the empress dowager that it ultimately touched empress dowager Cixi on her sore point and led to the ban and suspension. Although the Japanese government was working hard for it and “considered taking note of local officials and requesting the lifting of the ban on the publication” (Liu, 1991, p. 42), *Han Bao* still had poor sales due to the Qing government’s ban on purchasing and reading “rebellious newspapers”, making it difficult to continue. It ceased publication on September 28, 1900.

As Japan’s top public opinion agency in China, *Han Bao* was originally intended to influence Chinese public opinion and political situation through its publication, and to safeguard Japan’s interests in China. But in terms of influence, it had a direct driving effect on the Reform Movement and forged a stronger connection between Wuhan and Japan: It facilitated Japan to make Wuhan, a city located inland, its largest base in China, and increased the total import and export trade volume of Wuhan’s Jiangnan Pass at that time; after 1900, the number of students from Hubei and Hunan provinces studying in Japan reached the highest in the country at that time, which also contributed to the craze for the Japanese to run newspapers in China. At the time of the Xinghai Uprising, there were over 70 Japanese journalists reporting in Han, even surpassing local journalists (Li, 2014, p. 33).

Conclusion

The famous media research scholars Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, and D. Charles Whitney once proposed the viewpoint of media construction, believing that media itself is not only passively reflecting social reality, but rather media and politics, media and society, media and audience, and culture is embedded in each other (2014). While being shaped by politics, society, and culture, media also participates in the construction of these fields.

During the era of foreign newspapers in Wuhan's history, foreign newspapers served different commercial, religious, or political purposes and was truly "a stone from another mountain" for the society of Wuhan in the late Qing Dynasty. But if we break free from the binary opposition between colonization and invasion in modern Chinese history, and center on the development of Wuhan's modern newspaper industry, and objectively examine the constructive historical role that Hankow's foreign newspaper has played in the dynamic and diachronic changes, it is difficult to deny its formative influence on the local newspaper industry as well as its shaping influence on the social and cultural changes in Wuhan.

Of course, the fundamental driving force behind historical progress is the development of social productive forces, and the media environment and the constructive role of media are not the decisive factors in historical changes. This article does not deny the role and influence of many other factors and other newspapers in historical changes. It only chooses the special historical perspective of the era of foreign newspapers, and explores the positive promoting effect on Wuhan society of foreign newspapers, which originally were tools for foreign aggression. The aim is to add some perhaps slightly different annotations to the existing critical discourse system, and to promote understanding of cultural and historical interactions.

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