

# The Bridge of Chinese and Western Information Exchange in the 19th Century—The Translation of *Peking Gazette* from *North-China Herald* Office\*

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The publication of the translation of *Peking Gazette* by *North-China Herald* Office began in 1850 when “The North-China Herald” was first published and finally ended at the end of the 19th century. *Peking Gazette* is also known and used by more Western readers through the great influence of English newspapers under the jurisdiction of *North-China Herald* Office. These translations provided western readers with rich knowledge about China in the late Qing Dynasty, enhanced their understanding and understanding of the events from the court to the social customs in the late Qing Dynasty, and on this basis, exerted an important influence on the historical process of Sino-Western relations in the middle and late 19th century.

*Keywords:* *Peking Gazette*, *The North-China Herald*, Sino-Western relations

In the 19th century, *Peking Gazette* in China was not only the main information transmission carrier between the court and the populace, but also an important information source for Westerners to learn about the latest developments in the Qing government and Chinese vast inland areas. In the 19th century, Westerners, represented by the British, took great interest in *Peking Gazette* and carried out a series of important translation activities on it. However, the academic research on *Peking Gazette* has mostly focused on its Chinese originals at present, which has not yet discussed the translation of *Peking Gazette* in middle and later period of 19th century.

*North-China Herald* Office, the oldest newspaper and periodical distributor in modern Shanghai, is the main and the most important publishing organization for the translation of *Peking Gazette* in the 19th century. Among the translations of *Peking Gazette* produced by various organizations or individuals in the 19th century, the translations produced by *North-China Herald* Office are the most systematic and numerous. These translations not only received widespread attention from Westerners who cared about Chinese affairs in the 19th century, but also had an important impact on the process of many major events involving the relationships of China and the Western countries.

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### Establishment of the Column “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*”

*The North-China Herald* is the first publication in Shanghai to publish the translation of *Peking Gazette*, and its history of publishing the translation of *Peking Gazette* is also the longest. As early as the beginning of its establishment in 1850, From 1853 when the newspaper began to regularly publish the translation of *Peking Gazette* to July 1871 when *The North China Daily News* and *The North-China Herald* formally established the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column, the source and publication form of the translation of *Peking Gazette* had changed several times. According to the characteristics of these translations, the publication of the *Peking Gazette* translation of *The North-China Herald* before the establishment of the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column can be discussed in 4 time periods:

The first stage was from 1850 to 1852. At this stage, *The North-China Herald*, like other English newspapers in China at the same period, occasionally published translations of *Peking Gazette*, but it did not regard *Peking Gazette* as an important source of news for newspapers and will not publish these translations under the title of *Peking Gazette*.

The second stage was from 1853 to the autumn of 1856. At this stage, *Peking Gazette* became an important source of news when *The North-China Herald* reported on China affairs. Most of the *Peking Gazette* news published by *The North-China Herald* at this stage was related to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and most of the translations were written by Walter Henry Medhurst. The newspaper also published these translations of Walter Henry Medhurst as a book under the title of “Excerpts from *Peking Gazette*, 1853-1856”. At this time, *The North-China Herald* usually used *Peking Gazette* as the general title of the translations, but no column has been set up for these translations for publication. Both the way in which the translation is published and the translation method of the published translation are relatively changeable. The following will be explained from the perspective of publication time and translation method respectively:

First of all, in terms of publication time, the publication frequency of the translation of *Peking Gazette* in *The North-China Herald* at this stage was extremely unstable, and it could be published every week, every half month or even a month or two. In most cases, the translation was from *Peking Gazette* published one to one and a half months ago. The main factor that affects the publication time of the translation was that translators often could not obtain *Peking Gazette* in time. The editor of the newspaper explained the delay of *Peking Gazette* before the translation of *Peking Gazette* published on April 9, 1853: “After waiting for 3 or 4 weeks, some *Peking Gazette* were finally sent to Shanghai last week. The following is a brief summary of its contents...”<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, as far as the translation method is concerned, the translations during this stage is usually preceded by the date of publication of the original *Peking Gazette* with the A.D. Chronicle, For the brief and short daily official bulletin affixed to the palace gate and imperial edict, the translation was more uniform, and the specific content will be translated literally, while for the memorial, two translation methods are mostly adopted: one is to translate the name and official position of the reporter first according to the original structure of *Peking Gazette*, and then translate the summary of the report or the memorial<sup>2</sup> instead of the full text; The second is to break the structure of the original text, first stating the basic information of the memorial from the perspective of the

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<sup>1</sup> “*Peking Gazette*”, *The North-China Herald*, April 9th, 1853, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> “Abstract of *Peking Gazettes*”, *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, November 4th, 1875, p. 450.

translator, and then abstracting the important parts of the memorial. Taking a translation of this newspaper under the title of *Peking Gazette* published on August 13, 1853 as an example, the main body of the translation was as follows:

The *Gazette* of the 16th July, contains a report from Wang-e-tih, the acting viceroy of Fo-kien, detailing the breaking out of a rebellion in the prefectures of Tseuen-chow and Chang-chow in that province. According to his statement, on the 13th of May, a band of men belonging to the 'small sword society' entered the district city of Hae-teng, liberating the criminals, and murdering the office.....Respect this.<sup>3</sup>

The first sentence of the translation was not translated according to the original format of *Peking Gazette*, but a statement of the basic information and general content of the memorial from the perspective of the translator. The part after "According to his statement" is literally translated according to the original text of *Peking Gazette*. In addition, "Respect this" in comments written in red with a brush was also translated at the end of the text.<sup>4</sup>

The third stage was from the autumn of 1856 to 1866. In September 1856, as Walter Henry Medhurst left Shanghai for London, The translator of *Peking Gazette* in *The North-China Herald* had also changed. The existing materials show that an interpreter from the British Embassy in Beijing, Hank Porter, translated *Peking Gazette* in 1864 and some of the translations were published in *The North-China Herald*.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to confirm other translator information that published the translation of *Peking Gazette* here. However, the editor's notes in the front of the translation of *Peking Gazette* published by the newspaper in October 1856 and September 10, 1859 all showed that the translation of *Peking Gazette* was still completed in Shanghai at that time. At this stage, *The North-China Herald* published the translation of *Peking Gazette* at a faster speed, thus becoming a source for major English newspapers in Hong Kong to obtain the news of *Peking Gazette*.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth stage was from April 1867 to July 1871. At this stage, the publication form of the translation of *Peking Gazette* was relatively chaotic, which mainly results from two facts: First of all, the publication of the translation was fragmented. This stage was a stage in which the name and layout of *The North-China Herald* changed frequently. The translation of *Peking Gazette* was rarely published separately, but scattered in 4 columns: "Summary of News", "Clippings", "Tientsin" and "Peking Gazette".

Secondly, the diversity of translation sources. At this stage, the *Peking Gazette* contained in *The North-China Herald* come from correspondents in Tianjin and Beijing, *The Cycle*, *The China Mail*,<sup>7</sup> *Foochow Advertiser*<sup>8</sup> and other sources.

As a newspaper published in the same newspaper office, *The North China Daily News* came out later than *The North-China Herald*, but it set up a fixed column for the translation of *Peking Gazette* earlier than *The North-China Herald* and named the column "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*". The North China Daily News is not the first English newspaper to translate *Peking Gazette*, but it is the most successful newspaper to publish the translation of *Peking Gazette*. Many local newspapers, whether in Hong Kong or Shanghai, published the translation of *Peking Gazette* earlier than The North China Daily News. Until 1871, most of the translations of

<sup>3</sup> "Peking Gazette", *The North-China Herald*, August 13th, 1853, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> "Peking Gazette", *The North-China Herald*, September 16th, 1854, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> F.O. 233/32, "Transcriptions Peking Gazette, Translated by Hank Porter", 缩写为 J.H.P.

<sup>6</sup> "Peking Gazette", *The China Mail*, January 1st, 1866, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> "Clippings", *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, July 14th, 1871, p.216.

<sup>8</sup> *The North-China Herald and Market Report*, August 21st, 1867, p.216.

*Peking Gazette* published by The North China Daily News were transferred from other newspapers. In 1870, the Tianjin Incident took place. In August of the same year, *North-China Herald* Office published news reports on religious cases and letters from missionaries and sold them out quickly. Considering the needs of the readers, the newspaper published a collection of translations of relevant Chinese government official documents related to the incident, including Zeng Guofan's memorial and the emperor's decree 2 months later. Some of the translations were even attached by then British diplomat in China Wade to his correspondence with the British Foreign Secretary for his reference. *North-China Herald* Office should realize the business opportunities contained in the translation of *Peking Gazette*.<sup>9</sup> Considering that *The North-China Herald*, which originally published the translation of *Peking Gazette* in the newspaper, is published weekly and the information will be delayed, starting from July 21, 1871, the newspaper added a column to the daily newspaper *The North China Daily News* to translate *Peking Gazette* regularly and systematically.

Influenced by the setting of "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" column, *The North-China Herald* followed suit and began to set up "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" column at the end of July 1871 to summarize the contents of *The North China Daily News* and "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" columns every week. This practice continued until the end of the 19th century when *The North China Daily News* and "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" columns were cancelled.

### **Version and Content of the Translation of North-China Herald Office *Peking Gazette***

From 1871 to 1899, the translations of *Peking Gazette* published by *North-China Herald* Office went through the columns of *The North China Daily News*, "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" and *The North-China Herald* and "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*". Then, after all the translations of *Peking Gazette* were published this year, the newspaper will sort out and publish the contents of the columns in the following year. In terms of effectiveness, the translation of *Peking Gazette* published by *The North China Daily News* is the most effective, followed by *The North-China Herald* and *Peking Gazette* published every year, while in terms of reading convenience, it is the opposite. In order to facilitate the discussion, this article calls each edition for "Daily", "Weekly" and "Annual" respectively according to the characteristics of each edition.

#### **"Daily", and "Weekly"**

*The North China Daily News* published on July 21, 1871 began to set up a column entitled "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*". When the journal published the English abstract of the content of *Peking Gazette* from June 11 to 16 of the same year, *The North China Daily News* basically stopped publishing the translation of *Peking Gazette* from other newspapers and became the most timely English newspaper at that time. The translation published by the newspaper was also the original version of the translation of *Peking Gazette* published by *North-China Herald* Office, which is the so-called "Daily" in this article. There are two main differences from the way other English newspapers published the translation of *Peking Gazette* before: First of all, the translations contained in the "Abstract of *Peking Gazette*" are more systematic and the total amount is far from comparable to other publications: previous English newspapers and periodicals only selected the translations of important news in the monthly *Peking Gazette* for publication, and the dates of the published translations are not consistent. The

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<sup>9</sup> "New Advertisements", *The North-China Daily News*, August 3rd, 1870, p. 1; "New Advertisements", *The North-China Daily News*, October 14th, 1870, p. 1.

dates of the translations published in the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” are consistent. Even if the *Peking Gazette* translations on certain days are not published, the dates will be listed “No news” or “document of importance” or “interest”; secondly, the translation of *Peking Gazette* published in various English newspapers and periodicals before often contained editor’s notes or comments, while *The North China Daily News* has separated “translation” from “theory” since it set up the column of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*”. The column of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” is only used to publish the translation of *Peking Gazette* and translator’s comments, while the editor’s comments on these translations are placed in the column of “Local News”.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the first two pages of *The North China Daily News* were used for advertising, and news reviews were published from the third page, in which *Peking Gazette* was published. More than half of the six issues of *The North China Daily News* published every week will have a column entitled “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*”. Each column will contain a summary of *Peking Gazette* published in 1-5 days. When the speed was fast, the newspaper could publish the translation within half a month of the original publication of *Peking Gazette*. After the 1890s, Due to the gradual popularization of telegrams and the vigorous development of new newspapers, The “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column began to appear less frequently. However, the frequency of the “Notes from Native Papers” column has increased significantly. The information provided by the new channel has a substitute effect on the translation of *Peking Gazette* to some extent. In 1896, *The North China Daily News* published an imperial edict transferred from Shanghai Chinese “Shanghai News” to appoint Liu Kunyi. The imperial edict was published in Shanghai News the day after it was issued, apparently by telegram. The translation of the news appeared in *The North China Daily News* the next day, at least two weeks faster than the publication of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*”.<sup>10</sup> Since 1898, *The North China Daily News* has postponed the publication of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” to the fourth edition. At this time, the volume of the column has been greatly reduced, and the effectiveness of the content has also decreased. It is often three months after the original Chinese text is published that the translation of the column can be found.

When *The North China Daily News* published “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” at the end of July 1871, *The North-China Herald* followed suit, changing the previous way of distributing the translation of *Peking Gazette* in various columns and setting up “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column to include the content of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column published by “North China Daily News” every week, which is the so-called “Weekly” of this article. Since *The North-China Herald* is usually published on Saturday, on the same day as the last issue of *The North China Daily News* every week, sometimes the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” column published in the *The North China Daily News* released on Saturday will be included in the *The North-China Herald* released the following week. In terms of format, *The North-China Herald* directly uses the format of *The North China Daily News* and “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” columns. In several adjustments of the column of *The North China Daily News*, *The North-China Herald* has also made adjustments at the same time.

### “Annual”

In the spring of 1873, the newspaper published the translation of *Peking Gazette* published in 1872 in the column of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” under the title of “Peking Translation in 1872”. This became the practice of newspapers. By 1900, 27 copies of “Peking Translation” were published. These pamphlets are the so-called

<sup>10</sup> *The North-China Daily News*, January 4th, 1896, p. 3.

“Annual” of this article. They are the most widely circulated translations of *Peking Gazette* and are also the most frequently used by Chinese researchers in the 20th century.

These “Annual” are slightly smaller in shape than the 16 book sizes. The front and back covers are made of yellow cardboard paper. The front covers are printed with the title of the book in red English “*TRANSLATION OF Peking Gazette*”, and the cover covers are printed with a red border. The back cover is printed with an auspicious pattern in Chinese tradition, which implies “Zhirigaosheng”. The pamphlets published from 1875 to 1900 were all bound in a unified way. The design of this binding method obviously imitated the yellow skin *Peking Gazette*. Only the pamphlets published in 1873 and 1874 had red covers and back covers, and the text patterns were printed in black.

The main body of the “Annual” summarizes and reprints the contents of the “Weekly” directly, but the contents attached to the “Annual” before and after the translation are not found in the “Weekly” and the “Daily”. These contents include four categories:

#### **First of all, preface**

Most of the “Annual” published from 1876 to 1882 had the editor’s preface and preface on the front page of the inner page.

The speech is written by the chief editor of newspaper office. Generally, it gives a brief explanation of the editing process and text structure of “Annual” this year, and then gives a general introduction to the key contents in the translation of *Peking Gazette*, which mainly plays the role of “reading guidance”.

#### **Secondly, the catalogue**

In the “Annual” published by the newspaper from 1875 to 1894, except 1885 and 1889, the text of the translation was accompanied by a catalogue. The catalogue divides the translations into six parts—Court Affair, Judicial and Revenue Administration, Civil and Military Administration, Instruction, Worship and Usages, External Relations, and the translations in each part are arranged by date. These catalogues are preceded by a paragraph stating that the catalogue was written “for the purpose of classifying translations for reference”.

#### **Thirdly, Appendix**

Most of the “Annual” published before 1894 have appendices, and their content types are uncertain, including translations, papers related to *Peking Gazette*, charts, indexes, etc. For example, the imperial edict of March 17 and May 21, 1872 and the memorial of Prince Gong were attached to the first volume of the “Annual” in 1873. The contents were related to Zeng Guofan’s death and Sino-British negotiations respectively. The translations of these two important news were not included in the text of the translation, so they were added to the appendix. The “Annual” published in 1880 was followed by the “Organization Table of the Central Government of China”. The 1884 edition was followed by a “List of Senior Officials” in Chinese and English.

### **Format and Translation Method of the Translation of North-China Herald Office *Peking Gazette***

From 1871 to 1899, the translation format of *Peking Gazette* in the “Weekly” and “Annual” of *North-China Herald Office* completely reproduced the column format of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” in *The North China Daily News*.

Although there are differences in translation details, the translations published in the column “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” strictly follow some common principles in translation:

First of all, in terms of content selection and translation strategy: As the main object of translation, As far as the imperial edict is concerned, special attention is paid to the three types of contents: the emperor’s movement, the appointment and dismissal of officials, and the judicial trial. As far as the playing films are concerned, special attention is paid to the eight types of contents involving China and foreign countries, suzerain-vassal relations, military operations, finance and economy, religious activities, local unrest, judicial trials, major disasters, and social customs. Special attention is also paid to the playing films of Li Hongzhang and other important relative officials. For valuable palace copies and imperial edicts, the full text will be translated literally, while for playing films, compilation and abridgement will be generally adopted, and only a few important memorials will be translated in full.

Secondly, the way to deal with the content of “with Chinese characteristics” in official documents is: (1). The official documents recorded in *Peking Gazette* strictly abide by the system of “raising the head” in Qing Dynasty, Most of the words referring to the royal family should be “raised” (i.e. Raised a few squares), For example, words such as “Chao” and “Palace” need to be lifted in one frame, and words such as “Emperor” need to be lifted in three frames. The processing method of “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” is that all words that need to be raised in official documents, no matter how many heads are raised, will be written in large letters of the corresponding English words, such as “Court” for “Chao” and “Palace” for “Palace”. (2). The memorial in *Peking Gazette* only translates the name, official position and official document type of the memorial, except for the compilation, abridgement or full-text translation of the main body as appropriate. The formulas used in the original text, such as “kneeling”, “courteous folding and praying for holy lessons” and “writing for this purpose”, are not translated. (3). For the Chinese idioms appearing in the text, if there are English idioms that can correspond to them, they will be translated by English idioms, If there is no correspondence, literal translation will be carried out, and the more difficult contents will be annotated.

### **Utilization Value of the North-China Herald Office’s Translation of *Peking Gazette***

The value of the translations of *North-China Herald Office’s Peking Gazette* can be reflected through the readers’ reading and utilization of these translations. The readers of the *North-China Herald Office’s Peking Gazette* translation are mainly westerners who are interested in China. These westerners mainly use the *Peking Gazette* translation in three ways:

First of all, Western readers can learn about the Chinese empire and its rulers through the translation of *Peking Gazette*. Throughout the 19th century, Westerners were very interested in the attention paid to the emperor’s news in *Peking Gazette*. *North-China Herald Office’s* translation of *Peking Gazette* satisfies Western readers’ curiosity and desire to explore the rulers of the Chinese empire. The “imperial edict” part of *Peking Gazette* focuses on the emperor’s words, deeds and thoughts, so it is also the most interesting content for ordinary Westerners who care about Chinese affairs. Since the newspaper began to publish the translation of *Peking Gazette*, The “imperial edict” has always been the focus of translation. At the end of the 19th century, in order to meet the needs of readers to know the dynamics of Chinese emperors more quickly, *The North China Daily News* and *The North-China Herald* even set up a “imperial edict” column outside the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*”

column to publish the latest *Peking Gazette* imperial edict translation transmitted by telegram. Since then, readers can see the corresponding translation within one week after the *Peking Gazette* published the imperial edict.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, for 19th century Chinese researchers, the *Peking Gazette* news and its translation are the main channels to understand Chinese politics and society. Since many British sinologists in China in the 19th century were themselves providers of the translation of *Peking Gazette*, these translations of *Peking Gazette* not only served as a channel to spread information, but also represented the progress and research level of British sinology at that time to a certain extent.

Thirdly, Europeans have a tradition of paying attention to war and court news. In the 19th century, British business newspapers had the habit of publishing court records and government gazettes for readers to keep as materials for future reference. The English newspapers published by the *North-China Herald* Office are no exception. Both *The North-China Herald* and *The North China Daily News* have been setting up columns to publish the court records of the British Supreme Court and Mixed Court in China. In contrast, the establishment of the “Abstract of *Peking Gazette*” obviously undertakes the function of publishing the relevant information of Chinese “court records” and “Official Gazette”.

### Summary

The translation of *Peking Gazette* produced by the newspaper is the most important part of the translation of *Peking Gazette* in the 19th century. It is better than the translation published by other newspapers in terms of quantity, system and standardization. At the same time, *Peking Gazette* is also known and used by more Western readers through the great influence of English newspapers under the jurisdiction of *North-China Herald* Office. These translations provided western readers with rich knowledge about China in the late Qing Dynasty, enhanced their understanding and understanding of the events from the court to the social customs in the late Qing Dynasty, and on this basis, exerted an important influence on the historical process of Sino-Western relations in the middle and late 19th century.

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<sup>11</sup> “Imperial Decree”, *The North-China Daily News*, January 4th, 1899, p. 4; “Imperial Decree”, *The North-China Herald*, January 9th, 1899, p. 23.