From Proposal to Policy: China’s Translation Policymaking in the 1860s
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ABSTRACT

Although much scholarly attention has been focused on the nature and purpose of translation policy, where and how such policy came into being has rarely been specified. Based on an investigation of the network of memorials from the 1860s in China, this paper traces how translation jumped onto the national policy agenda and was gradually popularised, with a detailed contextual analysis of the vehicles, makers, processes, and effects of translation policy. It is found that, in the 1860s, two particular memorials played a decisive and formative role as an umbrella policy in translation policy, which was supported, adjusted, echoed, or even refuted by a series of other memorials, and that these memorials together shaped the general translation policies of the time and indicate a complex process of conflict, compromise, and consensus. It is also argued that such archival material as memorials helps to expose the process of making translation policy and that the close sifting of fragmentary archival sources and the reconstructing of a network may facilitate the understanding of translation history.

KEYWORDS

Translation policy, memorials, dynamic making process, the Qing dynasty, translation history.

1. Introduction

Translation policy, owing to its ubiquity and influence, has drawn increasingly wide attention from scholars in recent years. One major concern is that of translation policy between majority and minority languages within a linguistically diverse society (Branchadell 2004; Díaz Fouces 2004; García González 2004; González Núñez 2013; 2014; Li et al. 2017; Meylaerts 2011). Another aspect of translation policy that has attracted attention, albeit to a lesser degree, is that of foreign contact. In this respect, specific regulations (Huang and Chu 2012), social context (Jacquemond 2009), and the role of translation institutions (Teng and Wu 2015; Yang and Luo 2014) have been touched upon. It is noteworthy that most of the studies cited here illustrate what translation policy is or what it is for, rarely specifying where and how it came into being. Moreover, the government and the institution or organisation involved has been generally assumed to be a single entity, and the process through which policymakers move from conflict to consensus has yet to be addressed.

Historically, a translation policy may not exist in a single document but rather in a series of fragments. Also, its makers may have held diametrically opposed views rather than essentially similar ideas. Translation policymaking in the 1860s in China is a case in point. Intriguingly, during that period translation began to be discussed with increasing frequency in official national documents. Why and how did this happen? Based on a
network of memorials (zouzhe 奏折), which were the basic means of communication between the bureaucracy and the emperor (Wu 1967: 7), this paper traces how, in the 1860s, translation jumped onto the national policy agenda and was gradually popularised, including a detailed contextual analysis of the vehicles, makers, processes, and effects of translation policy. The questions concerned are: Where did translation policies exist and how did translation become part of the agenda? Who were the initiators or makers of policy? What was the role of memorials in the policymaking of the 1860s and the subsequent translation boom?

2. Historical background and memorial system

An in-depth exploration of where “translation policies emerge and take shape” (D’hulst et al. 2016: 10) requires thorough historical contextualisation, and it is therefore crucial to have a deep understanding of the period investigated in this paper, i.e. the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). As the last era of imperial rule in China, that of the Qing dynasty was one of transition, in the sense that it witnessed the gradual decline of feudalism and, in 1911, the arduous establishment of a modern nation. In its early and middle governance, the Qing court made little effort to know the West, even as foreign contact, for example through trade, shipwreck rescue, envoys, and conflicts, became inevitable and increasingly frequent (Zhu 2019). In those unavoidable instances of linguistic contact, certain locals, foreign missionaries, and traders along the coast, who had become familiar with each other’s languages, served as interpreters (Ji and Chen 2007; Si 2002; Zhou 2005). However, they were not sufficiently reliable due to their poor language skills and occasional misconduct (Feng 1994: 83; Wang 2017: 139). Although the Qing court established a Russian school (Hao 2005: 57-60) in the early 1800s, to train Chinese–Russian translators, this later ceased operations. The court was unable to meet the need produced by the growing number of contacts with foreign countries, such as Britain, France, and Spain. For a long time, there were no competent official translators, and the translation of foreign languages was not on the agenda of the Qing court.

It is widely recognised that the Qing dynasty’s military defeat by Western powers in the First Opium War in 1842 was a historic watershed event, forcing the court to address the rise of and threat from the West, which had experienced industrial and scientific revolutions. Some far-sighted Chinese officials and intellectuals, including Lin Zexu (林则徐, 1785–1850) and Wei Yuan (魏源, 1794–1857), were aware that it was no use merely keeping watch over foreign countries; rather, it was imperative to realise China’s military inferiority and backwardness and make changes (Jiang 2006: 11). However, the warnings of such individuals received little official response and failed to stimulate the court to reflect on its predicament and decadence, let alone to take action.
It was not until the 1860s, after defeat in the Second Opium War and when the Qing dynasty was on the verge of bankruptcy, that dramatic changes took place. The shock of defeat in 1860 served as a wake-up call to the intelligentsia and officialdom (Hsu 2000: 276; Jiang 2006: 10); in the face of domestic revolution and foreign invasion, there was a widespread sense that the dynasty was toppling and that an age of anarchy was approaching. Eventually, although rather unwillingly, the Qing court changed its centuries-long policy of diplomatic isolation and took practical steps to open up to the outside world. A series of ground-breaking national measures were proposed and put into practice, including the establishment of Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen (总理各国事务衙门 ‘The Office of Qing Foreign Affairs’) and, notably, the training of translators. This sudden but significant change is one of the main reasons why the 1860s are the academic focus of this study. The inclusion of translation on the national agenda at that critical moment in history may help us to speculate on “what history can tell us about translation” and “what translation can tell us about history” (Rundle 2012: 239).

To understand the process from proposal to policy it is essential to know the general policymaking process in the Qing dynasty, which was nationally and historically specific. On the national level, the policies of the Qing dynasty were based largely on a memorial system, embodied in the edicts of the emperors and the memorials of their officials (Chao 2015; Zhuang 2016). The emperor was the absolute ruler, and it was an almost daily routine for the reigning emperor and his high-ranking officials to go to court and discuss various issues. The officials wrote their proposals, requests, and reports in memorials and submitted them to the emperor before the court. These memorials, addressed to the emperor and presented in written form, were the primary way in which officials reported events, expressed opinions, and made requests. In response, the emperor usually issued edicts specifying his approval or disapproval and sometimes further commands or instructions. Therefore, for a proposal to become policy in the Qing dynasty, it had to be embodied in a memorial and then granted an edict or decree demonstrating imperial approval. As these memorials covered a variety of issues — general and specific, national and local — they had diverse momentary and/or historic impact and made varied contributions to policymaking. Some memorials drew enough attention to put their subjects on the policy agenda and even shape policy, while some were targeted solely at specific cases and had no further significance; others were refuted by officials or denied by the emperor.

Given the wide range of social, economic, and cultural records and discussions concerned, these memorials and edicts, as indicators of governance in the Qing dynasty, are of great historical significance (Chen 1982; Feng 2004; Rong 1987; Yan 2011) and have already attracted considerable attention (Chao 2015; Liang 2015; Wu 1967; Wu 1970; Zhuang 2016). Many have been collected and compiled in historical archives.
according to a certain emperor’s reign, a particular official, or a topic (including foreign affairs, religion, economy, agriculture, and education). It is noteworthy that the memorial system has been the focus mainly of historians rather than translation scholars, and that the role of such archives in translation history has been undervalued. As Munday (2014: 72) puts it, “material on translation and translators is often housed in the collections of others,” “hence some detective work is required to locate it.” In this case, discussions on translation policy in the Qing dynasty are scattered among archival collections of memorials and edicts, including Chouban Yiwu Shimo (筹办夷务始末 ‘Management of Foreign Affairs’)\(^1\), which is a huge officially produced archival collection and provides authoritative accessible primary sources. The original archives have been preserved and photocopied by the National Palace Museum of China. For scholarly convenience, punctuated, calibrated, and numbered versions covering the three successive reigns were published by Zhonghua Book Company in 1960, 1979, and 2008, respectively; these editions include the title and solar calendar date for each piece and indexes for the whole work. This archival collection is extensively drawn on by many other collections and is the source mostly referred to herein.

Given the large number of memorials and the wide range of subjects in the collection, an initial focused screening was performed using the titles of memorials\(^2\) to identify pieces potentially relating to foreign contact or translation. The subsequent close reading of each document in turn further narrowed down the scope. In the course of this process, a rough idea was gained about the situation of translation at the time.

Because, as discussed above, translation was rarely highlighted during the long period from the early to the middle Qing dynasty, only some passing comments on translation were found in the memorials and edicts of that time (Zhu 2019). However, things began to change in the 1860s. Translation, which had remained largely unappreciated in earlier years — despite unavoidable foreign contact — was seen as relevant and having a significant role to play. Translation, and especially translator training, began to be repeatedly mentioned and heatedly discussed in memorials and thus became part of the national agenda.

The emerging discussions on translation in memorials are thought-provoking. With two memorials by Yixin (奕䜣, 1833–1898), among the many by him and other officials\(^3\), as major clues, how the translation policy of the 1860s came into being and what its nature was will be illustrated in detail. The two memorials concerned are that of 20 August 1862 regarding the establishment of Tongwen Guan (同文馆 ‘School of Common Languages’) in Beijing and that of 11 December 1866 regarding adding Tianwen Suanxue Guan (天文算学馆 ‘Department of Astronomy and Mathematics’) to Tongwen Guan. Both memorials focused on training translators, but they underwent
highly contrasting processes from proposal to policy. Each contributed significantly to translator training in the late Qing dynasty.

In fact, these memorials and, more precisely, their content, are not unfamiliar to scholars, particularly historians of Chinese history. The common focus has been Tongwen Guan, which has received considerable attention from a variety of perspectives. A major area of interest is the controversy between reformists and conservatives about the set-up of Tongwen Guan (Liu 1982; Qian 1983; Xiang 2006); other scholarly interests range from its specific initiatives and significance in language learning (Gu 2004; Zhang 2009) and modern education (Liu 2007) to institutional translation policies (Huang and Chu 2012; Luo and Yang 2015; Yang and Luo 2014). It should be noted that the focus of this study is not Tongwen Guan but the memorials themselves, as a network of official documents on policymaking. In other words, the core of this study (despite some unavoidable overlaps) is not what the policy was exactly about, but where and how it came into being at the time and was gradually popularised.

3. Two memorials by Yixin

The Second Opium War placed the Qing court in a new predicament. Unlike previous emperors, who had absolute authority, neither of the emperors of the 1860s took power; Emperor Xianfeng (reigned: 1851–1861) fled the imperial court to Jehol and died the following year, while his heir, Emperor Tongzhi (reigned: 1861–1875), ascended to the throne at the age of six, and thus power was held by his mother. For these reasons, the emperor was more of an institution than a person, and the unusual accomplishments and considerable changes of the time were actually the work of officials (Hsu 2000: 262; Wright 1962: 50). One of the leading officials was Yixin, who, after the Qing dynasty’s military defeat in 1860, was fully authorised to take charge of peace negotiations and foreign affairs as an imperial envoy. Being the younger half-brother of Emperor Xianfeng, and an empowered, high-ranking official, he spoke with weight and thus was entitled to greater access to policymaking than others and influence in this area.

The military defeat also had a direct impact on translation. The imminent threat implicit in the lack of qualified official translators was made unprecedentedly explicit by a provision in the Treaty of Tianjin (made between the Qing court and the British government in 1858), which stated that, in three years’ time, Chinese versions of official communications would no longer be offered; and that, in the event of any differences of meaning between English and Chinese texts, the English text would prevail (as quoted in Wang 1957: 102). In order to find solutions to the difficulties associated with foreign contact, in 1861, Yixin and other officials drafted and submitted the Memorial on six comprehensive regulations for a way out (奕䜣桂良文祥奏统计全局酌拟章程六条呈览请议遵行折, abbreviated hereinafter...
as Memorial for a way out); this immediately secured approval due to Yixin’s strong political position (Wright 1962: 15). In this memorial, Yixin proposed six necessary regulations for a way out of domestic and foreign trouble, among which the establishment of Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen and the training of translators were included. This was not only a turning point in the nature of relations with foreign countries, transforming their basis from tributary or trading to diplomatic, but was also significant to translation policy, in that, from then on, translation became an official concern and public topic. Therefore, although translator training, as a specific initiative, was a particular focus of the memorials concerned, the general term “translation policy” is used throughout this paper in a larger historical and national context.

Memorial for a way out was a kind of meta-policy that established the direction for foreign contact. One reason for this was that Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen, as “the prototype of a foreign office until the creation of the Wai-wu-pu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1901” (Teng and Fairbank 1975: 49) began to take full responsibility for foreign affairs. The other reason, concerning translation, is that translator training was subsequently initiated and remained a priority. First, it was clearly pointed out in this memorial (Jia et al. 1979: 2674-2680) that language barriers had prevented the Qing from knowing and communicating with the West, so it was advised that four reliable traders (two from Guangdong and two from Shanghai) with a certain command of foreign languages be selected to instruct several brilliant boys from baqi (八旗 ’Eight Banners’)5. Meanwhile, it was proposed that the model of the old Russian school be emulated (仿照俄罗斯文馆) in terms of salary, rewards, sanctions, etc. Despite some adjustments in practice (for example, when no competent Chinese traders were found, foreign instructors were eventually employed instead), the regulations in this memorial were mostly referred and adhered to.

The steps for a way out were followed in 1862 by the Memorial on the set-up of Tongwen Guan (奕䜣等又奏设同文馆学习洋文拟章呈览折) (Bao et al. 2008: 342-346). As a branch of Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen, the school aimed to prepare qualified official translators who would understand Westerners and their languages and not be misled or deceived in contact with foreigners. The specific policies of this memorial related principally to appointing teachers and screening students. First, regarding teachers, no Chinese nationals were found to be qualified to teach foreign languages (广东则称无人可派; 上海虽有其人, 而艺不甚精). Therefore, John Shaw Burdon (1826–1907), a British missionary and sinologist, was recommended and then appointed to teach English. Meanwhile, Xu Shulin (徐澍林), a Chinese intellectual, was employed to teach Chinese Confucian classics, as well as to ensure that the foreign instructor did not practice his religion privately; the salaries and subsidies of these men were also clearly specified. Once qualified instructors were available, Russian and French would also be taught. Second, the student candidates were to be intelligent boys from
Eight Banners of around 14 years of age, who were expected to be competent in translation after training. Third, the scheduling, content, delivery, and screening of periodical exams (monthly, quarterly, and yearly) were to be conducted according to the practice of the old Russian school. The translation of diplomatic notes would form the main part of the examination (俟一年后学有成效，再试以各国照会，令其翻译汉文). Moreover, detailed provisions regarding attendance requirements, promotions, conditions, and procedures, etc., were included in the list of regulations. Those students performing well would be accordingly rewarded and promoted.

Both the original intentions of the school (to train Qing’s own translators) and the translation section of the exams prove that this was, in essence, a translators’ school. Since the advanced planning of Memorial for a way out had already paved the way, Memorial on the set-up of Tongwen Guan was smoothly seconded by the court and put into practice, and thus the governing officials reached an agreement regarding the urgency of the need to understand the West. It is worth noting that as the students learned foreign languages, they were also to learn Chinese classics from the Chinese instructor. The implication is that the students needed to learn from the foreign instructors nothing but their languages, and the combination (or balance) of foreign language and Chinese classics might be an additional reason that the memorial was apparently exempt from objections.

Conversely, another memorial by Yixin and other reformists sparked wide controversy — even turmoil — at Tongwen Guan. On 11 December 1866, Yixin and other reformists submitted the Memorial on adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to Tongwen Guan (奕䜣等奏拟设馆学习天文算学折, abbreviated hereinafter as Memorial on adding a department) (Bao et al. 2008: 1945-1946). The effect of the language instruction during previous years was roughly evaluated in this memorial. Apparently, although the teenage students attained a command of foreign languages, they had trouble understanding Chinese classics (各馆学生于洋文洋语尚能领略，惟年幼学浅，于汉文文义尚难贯串); they should work more on learning and practising the translation of foreign languages into Chinese (现仍督令该学生等，将洋文翻译汉文，以翼精进). Simultaneously, as astronomy and mathematics were believed to be the basic requirements for the manufacturing of machines and weapons and, thus, the core competence of Western strength (因思洋人制造机器火器等件，以及行船行军，无一不自天文算学中来), it was proposed that Western instructors of astronomy and mathematics should be sought. Students should be selected from among the scholars who had succeeded in imperial exams and were considered potential officials (招取满、汉举人及恩拔岁副优贡). Provisions on exams, subsidies, and promotions were similarly specified. Despite the apparent similarities between this and the former memorial, in fact, great disparities existed. The aim had shifted from the understanding of Western languages to the learning that would follow this, in which the Chinese classics were to
be replaced by Western studies and the student candidates were not to be teenagers but those who were already partially educated in the Chinese classics.

This memorial, strongly opposed by die-hard conservatives, triggered a heated debate among officials. The reformists, headed by Yixin, insisted in their memorials that Western science was essential to China’s self-strengthening. However, the conservatives, headed by Woren (倭仁, 1804–1871), submitted one memorial after another in opposition (see Table 1). The objections in the memorials of Woren (Bao et al. 2008: 2009-2010, 2035-2036) can be summarised as follows. First, that Chinese Confucian classics should not give way to Western science, since a nation’s self-strengthening lay, fundamentally, in the minds of people rather than in techniques (立国之道，尚礼义不尚权谋；根本之图，在人心不在技艺). Second, that even if science was to be included in the curriculum, Chinese instructors should be employed instead of Westerners (不必奉夷人为师). Additionally, those who passed the imperial exam were to be trained as imperial officials and reserved for the court and should not learn Western “tricks” for fear they would be fooled and misled by foreign instructors (今令正途从学，恐所学未必能精，而读书人已为所惑). Unsurprisingly, these presumptions (by Woren, Zhang Shengzao, Yu Lingchen, Chongshi, and Yang Tingxi; see Table 1) were rebutted one after another in subsequent memorials by Yixin and his followers and, particularly, by the emperor in his edicts that names of recommended Chinese instructors be put forward. In the end, no matter how strongly the conservatives rejected the proposal, the intensive debate and to-and-fro battle via memorials was put to an end by an imperial edict (Bao et al. 2008: 2071-2072) forbidding further discussion (所请著毋庸议), on the basis that the conservatives had failed to recommend any qualified Chinese instructors. After a far harder-fought process than that concerning Memorial on the set-up of Tongwen Guan, with the consent of the throne the proposal in Memorial on adding a department became policy and was put into effect.

Although the views of conservatives were totally opposed to the proposal in this memorial, they were rebutted by the reformists and particularly refuted by the emperor. As the conservatives were not able to provide an alternative solution, they finally had to stop arguing. In this way, a compromise and reluctant consensus were reached, though the conservatives remained unconvinced. This case is indicative of how the policymaking process can be complicated by conflicts, requiring unwilling compromise to attain a final consensus.
Table 1. Memorials and Edicts on the Department of Astronomy and Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official</th>
<th>Memorial/Edict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yixin</td>
<td>Memorial on adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to Tongwen Guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Shengzao</td>
<td>Memorial of objections to recruiting talented scholars as students for a department of Astronomy and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperor Tongzhi</td>
<td>Edict of no further discussion on Zhang Shengzao’s memorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woren</td>
<td>Memorial of objections to recruiting talented scholars as students for a department of Astronomy and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yixin</td>
<td>Memorial of reasons for adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woren</td>
<td>Memorial of objections to a department of Astronomy and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yixin</td>
<td>Memorial of rebuttal against Woren’s objections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperor Tongzhi</td>
<td>Edict designating Woren to recommend Chinese instructors to set up another department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woren</td>
<td>Memorial of failure to recommend Chinese instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperor Tongzhi</td>
<td>Edict designating Woren to continue to look for and recommend Chinese instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Lingchen</td>
<td>Memorial on not adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to avoid insurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongshi</td>
<td>Memorial of no need to limit students for a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to talented scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Tingxi</td>
<td>Memorial on closing Tongwen Guan to avoid chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperor Tongzhi</td>
<td>Edict of no further discussion of Yang Tingxi’s memorials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The network of memorials

The school, despite its name, proved to be much concerned with the nature of translator training. The course of translator training can be traced from the purposes, practices, exams, and effects specified in the memorials. Take the Department of Astronomy and Mathematics as an example. Its eight-year curriculum (Association of Chinese Historians 1961: 84-85) began with language acquisition in the first year and continued with the translation of diplomatic notes (翻译条子) in the second, the translation of selected works (翻译选编) in the third, the translation of documents (翻译公文) in the fourth, and the translation of books (练习译书) in the final four years. Although the teaching of Western studies, such as geography, history, mathematics, and chemistry, began in the third year, translation was a major means of teaching, practice, and examination throughout the curriculum. The
translators it cultivated also testified to the role of the school. Some of them stayed in Beijing and translated for Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen, some served as translators (or interpreters) in border affairs or diplomatic missions, and some even became diplomats themselves (Association of Chinese Historians 1961: 64, 69-70, among others). Therefore, it is undeniable that translator training at the time was indebted to Tongwen Guan.

With their detailed measures, the two memorials described above — the first of their kind — were fundamental to and functioned as the regulating documents for translator training in the 1860s. They stood not as two separate documents but as joint pivots of a network of memorials. As Pym (1998: 91) puts it, "the more you trace the links of a network, the better you can approximate its actual historical form." The high correlation between the two memorials, and the strong adherence of other memorials to these, offer a view of the specific vehicle and the dynamic making, developing, and popularising process of translation policy in that decade.

With regard to translator training, the two memorials were complementary and progressive. In terms of content, they were complementary: The establishment of a language school was the first step towards making translation official and accessible, and the introduction of astronomy and mathematics clarified what needed to be translated. The two memorials enhanced translator training as a whole; thus, a training programme that included foreign languages and practical knowledge began to take shape. In terms of objectives, the two memorials were progressive. An openness to foreign languages was crucial for the transition from absolute resistance to diminished reluctance towards understanding the West. Initially, Chinese Confucian classics enjoyed a role of equal importance to foreign languages within the school. The subsequent significant step of introducing Western studies caused disruption and even posed a challenge to deep-rooted Chinese tradition. That is why the later memorial aroused fierce debate between reformists and conservatives. Eventually, the two memorials together resulted in a gradually growing openness to the outside world.

Moreover, the policies in these two memorials did not remain unchanged. Instead, they were subject to occasional adjustments, with ensuing memorials proposing supplemental provisions in which problems in practice were pointed out and rectifications were proposed (see Table 2). In December 1865, after Tongwen Guan had been in operation for three years, Yixin and other reformists presented a memorial with six additional articles regarding adjustments (奕䜣等又奏重拟同文馆章程呈览片) (Bao et al. 2008: 1561-1564) that were mainly related to performance management, involving the guarantee of subsidies, attendance, and incentives that the former regulations did not fully detail. The primary change was a phase-out plan, regarding whether a student was able to continue his study; in this, a preliminary screening could take place based on the student’s performance.
during the first three months, with another screening after one year of study based on language competence and translation ability. It was clearly specified that students with a poor command of foreign languages and who rendered unreadable translations would be removed and replaced (如于西洋语言文字无所通晓, 或略知大概而翻译模糊者, 即行撤退, 另传更换). In addition, the Memorial on adding a French and Russian department to Tongwen Guan (奕䜣等奏同文馆添开法俄文馆折) (Bao et al. 2008: 656-658) was submitted in 1863, while another on the rewards for Chinese instructors (奕䜣等又奏同文馆汉教习两年期满请照章奖叙折) (Bao et al. 2008: 1354) was submitted in 1865; many others pertaining to students, exams, etc., were also submitted. The initial memorial, together with subsequent ones addressing adjustments, improvements, and even termination, constituted the policy of Tongwen Guan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Memorial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Memorial on the set-up of Tongwen Guan (with regulations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Memorial on the engagement of instructors in Tongwen Guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Memorial on the rewards for foreign instructors in the Russian and French Department as committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Memorial on the adjustments of regulations of Tongwen Guan (with specifications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Memorial on the postponement of exams in the English Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Memorial on the exams of Tongwen Guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Memorial on adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to Tongwen Guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Memorial on adding a department of Astronomy and Mathematics to Tongwen Guan (with articles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Memorial on the selection of students for a department of Astronomy and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Memorial on the selection of excellent students from Shanghai and Guangdong for exams in Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Memorial on adjustments in employing instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Memorial on the screening of students in Tongwen Guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Memorial on the grading of students by exams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Some Memorials on Tongwen Guan in the 1860s

Most importantly, the two memorials served as a kind of umbrella policy; they were influential and fateful in that they brought about a series of other similar policies in the 1860s. After the language school in Beijing became operational, translator training soon spread to other parts of the nation. In 1863, as an indication of support, Li Hongzhang (李鸿章, 1823–1901) submitted an eloquent memorial to establish the School of Foreign Languages in Shanghai after the model of Tongwen Guan (李鸿章又奏请仿同文馆例于上海设立学馆学习外国语文折) (Bao et al. 2008: 610-612). He
explained its necessity and said that it was difficult to guarantee the absence of prejudice or misinterpretation in contacts with other countries since only foreign interpreters were available (遇见中外大臣会商之事，皆凭外国翻译官传述，亦难保无偏袒捏架情弊). The motivation of the language school, i.e. translator training, was once again verified. At the end of his memorial, Li suggested that the same model be followed in Guangzhou and that officials there should examine its feasibility. In response, an edict (Bao et al. 2008: 612) was issued that a language school should be opened in Guangzhou (已谕令广州将军查照办理). In compliance with the edict, the officials in charge submitted memorials about their preparatory work (Bao et al. 2008: 704-705, 722); then, in 1864, a similar language school was also established in Guangdong.

Similarly, memorials regarding the establishment of the Department of Astronomy and Mathematics became catalysts for the introduction of Western studies. This was also echoed in memorials regarding the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, which was established in 1865 and to which a translation department was added in 1868 to translate and introduce Western scientific works; another sequel was Fujian Shipyard, in 1866. These institutions invested considerable effort in training translators, and the translation of Western scientific works was a major task for them. The standard translation procedure at the time involved foreign experts being employed to translate the text and dictate the translation to Chinese collaborators, who transcribed their words to create a draft (Hung and Pollard 2009: 373). By creating a similar model, these memorials and edicts helped popularise translator training and enhanced the legitimacy of the introduction of Western studies.

As illustrated above, the two memorials — as policies in different phases — developed individually with constant adjustments and mutually led to the popularising of translator training. Through these two memorials, the acquisition of foreign languages and access to Western studies were initially proposed and officially licensed in the late Qing dynasty. The difficulty and historical importance of this breakthrough, owing to the fact that the Qing court had adhered to an isolationist policy for so long, must be recognised. These memorials therefore act as milestones of translator training and indicators of the changing attitudes towards Western studies. Together with many other memorials, they outline translation policy in the 1860s and its development, with sweeping effects.

5. Translation policymaking in China in the 1860s

The two memorials by Yixin and other reformists concerning Tongwen Guan have a central role in the network of documents. Prior to these, Memorial for a way out acted as a gateway, shining a light in the general direction. The policies of the two memorials then developed in a progressive way and were complemented or echoed by other similar memorials; both of the
initial memorials were evolving and reproductive. In this way, dozens of memorials became involved, and the network created by them resulted in gradual changes to general policy. In answer to the questions posed in the introduction, based on these two notable memorials — and especially the network they formed with other memorials — it is now feasible to form an overview of the process of translation policymaking in the 1860s.

Where did translation policies exist? Current studies of translation policy put more emphasis on what policy is than on where it is formed. The policymaking vehicle has, in most cases, been taken for granted. The memorials cited above give clear and helpful clues to policymaking processes, being proposals that survived the procedure of submission, presentation, discussion, and then decision. A study of memorials facilitates access not only to the policies established but also to proposals that were denied or refuted. It was unlikely that every memorial would draw enough attention for its proposals to be implemented nationwide, but the dynamic process involving the flow and pattern of memorials resulted in policy. Take, for example, the case where the addition of an astronomy and mathematics department was proposed in one memorial, which then prompted a series of other memorials with manifold arguments from all sides in either support or opposition (see Table 1). After the proposal was finally adopted, it was further developed, supplemented, and adjusted by subsequent related memorials. Additionally, it led to other memorials with similar purposes and proposals for similar measures in other cities. Thus, by means of memorials, policy was shaped, improved, and promoted.

In this case, the policy as a whole gradually came into being. That is, the policy neither materialised suddenly nor progressed linearly from a proposal. Instead, it started from a single proposal in a particular social and historical context, then became popularised one step at a time: from being partially opposed it became generally accepted, from being innovative it became systematic, and it increased in scope from the regional to the national. As discussed above, memorials to the throne were the vehicles of translation policy in the 1860s. The resulting policy included not only the proposal and the related decision but also subsequent decisions intended to enforce or implement the policy (Anderson 2003: 3). As such, while the two cited memorials were central, translation policy in this decade existed not only in these but in a series of such official documents. It was the network comprised of the meta-policy in *Memorial for a way out*, the umbrella policy of Yixin’s two memorials, and other supporting memorials that helped gradually popularise and improve translation policy in the 1860s as a whole.

More specifically, memorials on national affairs were the vehicles of translation policy. This meant that policy regarding translator training in the 1860s was closely interrelated with national policy. The titles of the different memorials, which concern the establishment of language and science schools, demonstrate that their focus was not exclusively translation (even if translation was deeply emphasised). Translation was initially a measure
of last resort in the face of a national predicament and pressing need, specifically the lack of qualified official translators to facilitate foreign contact. Despite a reluctance to be open, the Qing court turned to translator training initially for the sake of self-protection and then introduced Western studies for the sake of self-strengthening. The formation of translation policy reflected the changing attitudes of the Qing court from passive to active openness in the following decades. Therefore, translation policy was rarely isolated from national policy.

Who were the initiators or makers of translation policy? Under the memorial system in the Qing dynasty, the emperor alone made final decisions on all major national affairs, and hence he alone can be referred to as the decision maker. From a broader perspective, since major imperial policy decisions were generally made on the basis of proposed “deliberations” (Wu 1970: 9), the emperor and high-ranking officials should all be regarded as policymakers. Because of their different degrees of power, they had varied access to and played different roles in policymaking. In the case of the two emperors of the 1860s, although the reigning emperor should have played a major role in forming policies, neither had the final say. In order to avoid confusion, the power struggle and the inherent authority of the dowager empress at the time is not addressed in this paper. A crucial concern is the participation of officials with diverse views, presented via memorials. Their memorials regarding language and science schools, whether about necessity, feasibility, or the possible risks, together formed the driving force in policymaking.

It can be clearly seen that the reformists, represented by Yixin, initiated proposals, submitted memorials, and put these into practice; their role was, therefore, pioneering and decisive. Evidently, they were the active agents in policymaking. What makes the situation complicated and intriguing is that conservative officials, offering considerable resistance, also participated in the process. Owing to the interactive and dialogic nature of policymaking, the process was advanced also by these strong objections. Thus, this case illustrates that policymakers as a group did not necessarily share the same attitude or play identical roles in the policymaking process and that the institution cannot always be considered as a whole. The memorial regarding the language school encountered little disagreement among officials, so it was approved and put into effect soon after its submission. That was not the case with the memorial concerning Western studies. Instead of a simple proposal–approval model, the memorial concerning the introduction of Western studies was subject to great disputes and repeated discussions. A close look at the diversity of views among policymakers helps reveal both the content of and the motivations behind the policy formed. Table 1 above suggests that both reformists and conservatives were involved in the policymaking process and that their memorials and edicts were intertwined. Thus, the focus can be extended from the simplified final decision to several rounds of in-depth and to-and-fro discussions.
What was the role of memorials in the policymaking of the 1860s and the subsequent translation boom? The founding of the schools of the 1860s has been considered the beginning of modern foreign language instruction, with translation constituting a means of teaching foreign languages (Tao 2016) or “the beginning of western education in China” (Hsu 2000: 271). In fact, the initial objective, performance, and practical effect were all closely related to translator training. Thus, the memorials concerned can be labelled the vehicles of policy regarding translator training.

In actuality, rather than mere translator training, these memorials concerned the incompatibility between the old and the new and the confrontation between Chinese and Western thought; the resulting innovative measures inevitably led to a departure from tradition. As stated above, Tongwen Guan itself was largely modelled after the old Russian school and even directly borrowed from previous articles on subsidies, exams, and promotions. Six articles attached to Memorial on the set-up of Tongwen Guan began with the same phrase: “With reference to the Russian School” (查旧例, 俄罗斯文馆...). For example, the monthly, quarterly, and yearly exams were entirely in line with the old pattern, even in terms of when and how they were organised. Moreover, the students were required to be selected from Eight Banners and, specifically, from among those who had passed the imperial exams. Such regulations disclose the flaws of a stereotyping educational tradition as well as the career goals of the literati. They illustrate the general intellectual climate of the time and the inertia of firmly rooted inherited institutions (Fairbank 2008: 503-504). Hence, at the time, the imitation of Western armament, technology, and diplomacy was a superficial gesture towards modernisation (Hsu 2000: 262).

How did translation become part of the national policy agenda? Overall, translation policy in the 1860s reflected the gradually changing attitudes of the Qing court towards the outside world, from resistance to reluctance to openness. While the court was compelled to train translators to facilitate foreign contact, the introduction of Western studies indicates that motives were gradually shifting: from a passive acceptance of the need to know the West to an active desire to learn about it. With the two memorials by Yixin as guiding policies, translator training was widely discussed as part of the political agenda from then on.

Although the focus of this paper is confined to the 1860s, this does not mean that policymaking via memorials came to an end with that decade. This process continued to develop in the following decades and had great formative influence in the larger historical context. Subsequently, in the late Qing dynasty, learning about the West expanded from the initial languages to include sciences and then Western systems and ideas. The range of languages concerned — initially, just English — grew to include Russian and French in the 1860s and German and Japanese in the following decades.
Regionally, the cities that were home to translator training and translation activities included Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Fuzhou. In addition to such initiators as Yixin, a growing number of other officials were deeply involved and submitted memorials with proposals and suggestions. From the 1870s, the promotion of Western learning was no longer restricted to the recruitment of foreign instructors; rather, one memorial after another was presented to propose sending young students abroad (Bao et al. 2008: 3322-3326, 3699-3700, among others). In this way, the great change in Qing court from conservative instinct to readiness for Western learning, and the subsequent achievements in translation, were brought about. It can be said that the two cited memorials written at the historic turning point of the 1860s, together with other contemporary memorials, paved the way for and triggered the translation boom that ultimately arrived in the 1890s.

6. Concluding remarks

A study of where translation policy was formed, who the policymakers were, what the policy concerned, how the related proposal first appeared on the agenda, and whether it was put into practice may help lay bare the dynamic, spiralling process of policymaking. Memorials and edicts containing proposals by officials and decisions by the throne are of great significance serving as authentic archives of a particular mode of intra-governmental communication (Wu 1970: 2) and grounding the study of policymaking processes in evidence, since memorials are proposals by officials that were not necessarily enacted in policies.

Memorials and edicts, as “existing material that has not necessarily been considered from the point of view of translation” (Rundle and Sturge 2010: 3), offer a potential way to “embed translation in a larger dialogue” (O’Sullivan 2012: 137). An individual document may be regarded as a fragment, but within a network and taken as a whole such documents foreshadowed, triggered, and catalysed translation policy; as such, they are definitely constructive in the writing of translation history. Arguably, archived documents, among which discussions on translation are sparsely scattered, are no less useful to such work than the grand narratives of high-profile translators and their achievements — provided that the documents are threaded together and mapped to trace the trajectory of translation activities. Therefore, a close sifting of materials and the construction of a network that are not specifically about translation may facilitate the reconstruction of translation history.

The undeniable weakness of this study is that, because an archival collection itself is a kind of historical narrative, the documents collected and kept are “in a highly conditioned mode of not just presence but highly enhanced presence” (Pym 1998: 51). In this study, memorials by conservatives, which reflect a particular perspective, exist in relatively small numbers and are likely to be overlooked or ignored. In this sense, to aim at the best
possible reconstruction of how the past really was (D’hulst 2001: 31) implies both the ambition and limitation of translation history.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (grant number 19BZS053). We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions and to the editors for their devotion and patience.

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**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the repository “Unihan” at https://www.unihan.com.cn/books/mingqing/qdwj.
Biography

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Notes

1. *Chouban Yiwu Shimo* consists of three parts, containing documents from the reigns of Daoguang (2719 documents), Xianfeng (2988 documents), and Tongzhi (3258 documents). The original documents are chronologically compiled.

2. The titles of memorials in this paper have been drawn from the Zhonghua Book Company edition and translated by the authors of this paper.

3. Yixin, as the head of *Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen*, submitted the memorials on behalf of himself and certain other reformists. For the sake of brevity, only Yixin is mentioned hereinafter.

4. For the sake of concision and readability, the key points in the memorials referred to herein are paraphrased in English by the authors of this paper (with some direct Chinese quotes in brackets). The page number of each quote is specified when the memorial is mentioned.

5. The Eight Banners was the system of military and social organisation in the Qing dynasty; in a broad sense, Eight Banners refers selectively to the most privileged population.