

# Liberal Arts Education and Translation Training in the Peking College

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The Peking College (or Tongwen guan) (1862–1901) was a passive and yet necessary product of the clashes between Qing China and the West in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Its curricular development from a school of interpreters to a school of combined learning later on, however, was anything but passive. This change in focus is usually explained either by the marginal victory of the reforming camp over the conservative camp in the government, or the expansion of western learning in the light of emerging modern schools in treaty ports pertaining to the introduction of science and engineering subjects.

One neglected angle in the literature on the College is its coincidental orientation since the late 1860s towards a broad-based curriculum similar to what liberal arts education usually advocates. While a wider subject range of western learning was a logical response to the needs of late Qing China, such a paradigm shift might also have been further reinforced by the increasingly prominent influence of Robert Hart (1835–1911) and William Martin (1827–1916) in the College since the 1870s, whose respective education backgrounds happened to display combined features of arts, sciences and social sciences. This paper contends that it might have been a conscious choice of Hart and Martin, given their quasi liberal arts education inclination, to continue broadening the 8-year curriculum in which translation played a significant part. This strategic change made it possible for the nurturing of a new generation of Chinese diplomats and talent to operate at a time when Qing China started to forge ties with modern nations, precisely because their focal point was not translation alone. This study is significant in two regards. First, it represents a rare attempt to examine translation education as reflected in the curricular reform of the College. Second, it proposes a new perspective in analyzing the Peking College.

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