

Research on Tong King Sing's Views of English Teaching—Taking the Chinese and English Instructor as an Exemplar

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Abstract: Tong King Sing, a renowned comprador and industrialist in late Qing Dynasty China, received Western-style education from a young age and developed an indissoluble bond with the English language. He further engaged in translation and Western trade, forming unique views on English teaching throughout his educational and professional career. This paper provides an overview of Tong King Sing's English language acquisition and practice, and analyses his views on English teaching based on his book *The Chinese and English Instructor*. These views can be summarized as follows: advocating equal dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, emphasizing practicality, and prioritizing communication. These perspectives offer valuable insights for current English teaching practices.

1. Introduction

Tong King Sing (1832-1892) (also known as Tang Tingshu), born in Xiangshan County, Guangdong Province (now Tangjia Town, Zhuhai City, Guangdong), was a renowned Chinese industrialist, philanthropist, and a key figure in the Westernization Movement, who made significant contributions to the advancement of English teaching in China. Tong received a solid bilingual education during his early years, and later worked as a translator in government agencies and as a comprador in foreign trading firms, regularly engaging with foreigners and foreign businesses using the English language. Tong King Sing held a strong emphasis on English teaching, gradually developing his unique perspective on the subject through personal English language acquisition and practical experiences. He compiled and published *The Chinese and English Instructor* (*yingyujiquan*), a book that served as both a textbook and a Chinese-English dictionary, actively supporting the cause of English teaching in China. While there has been extensive research on Tong King Sing's entrepreneurial activities and exploration of *The Chinese and English Instructor*, studies focusing on the underlying English teaching philosophy within the book are

relatively scarce. Therefore, it is essential to analyze and summarize Tong King Sing's views of English teaching from the perspective of cultural exchanges between China and the west, and explore its potential relevance to the current landscape of English teaching.

2. Tong King Sing's English Acquisition and Practice

Tong King Sing, born in Xiangshan near Macau in Guangdong Province, China, grew up during a time when there was a high demand for individuals proficient in foreign languages, particularly English, due to the development of foreign trade. His father, seeking better opportunities for his children, sent Tong and his brothers to Morrison School in Macau^[1], where they received English teaching under the guidance of Samuel Robins Brown, the headmaster of the school.

Morrison School was a bilingual institution that emphasized English teaching and used English as a medium for delivering modern education. The curriculum included various subjects such as astronomy, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, physiology, geography, history, composition, and music, all taught in English. This content-based teaching approach enabled students to learn both English language skills and Western scientific knowledge. Tong King Sing made significant progress during his time at the school, going from having no knowledge of English to being able to converse, read, and write in the language. He also acquired advanced Western scientific and technological knowledge, broadening his intellectual horizons.

After completing his education, Tong King Sing worked as an English translator for the Hong Kong government and the Shanghai Customs, gaining practical experience in English. He observed that Chinese business personnel were vulnerable to deception and manipulation by foreigners due to their insufficient English proficiency and related knowledge. Recognizing the importance of English in commercial activities, he decided to compile a book to facilitate interactions between Guangdong merchants and foreigners. In 1862, he published *The Chinese and English Instructor*, a comprehensive work serving as both a dictionary and a textbook. It played a vital role in promoting English learning and modernization efforts among Cantonese merchants at the time.

Tong acknowledged that *The Chinese and English Instructor* was an emergency learning method and that formal school education would yield better outcomes. He actively supported the establishment of the Anglo-Chinese College (ying hua shu guan) and the Shanghai Polytechnic Institution (ge zhi shu yuan), contributing to the cultivation of commercial talents and social elites in China. He also participated in the late Qing government's program to send young children to study in the United States, fostering cultural exchange and educational development between China and the West.

In summary, Tong King Sing's personal experiences in English learning and practical application shaped his unique perspective on English teaching. His early exposure to English, coupled with his involvement in translation and foreign trade, provided him with a profound understanding of the language's practical implications. His actions, including compiling *The Chinese and English Instructor*, supporting the establishment of Western-style schools, and advocating for international education, reflect his high regard for English teaching and his visionary outlook on the nation's future development. These endeavors exemplify his English teaching philosophy, with *The Chinese and English Instructor* being his most notable work, encapsulating his distinctive approach to English teaching.

3. The Main Tenets of Tong King Sing's Views of English Teaching

In my opinion, Tong King Sing's English teaching perspective can be succinctly summarized into three points. Firstly, he upheld the concept of equal cultural exchange and dialogue between China and the West. Secondly, he prioritized practicality, focusing on the real demands of

commerce and trade. Thirdly, he placed communication as the foremost priority, emphasizing the cultivation of business English communication skills. The equal exchange and dialogue form the cornerstone of Tong's English teaching perspective, while the emphasis on practicality and communication mutually complement each other and are organically integrated.

3.1. Equal Exchange and Dialogue between Chinese and Western Cultures

During the late Qing dynasty, the Qing government maintained isolationism and conservative attitudes towards foreign cultures. However, Tong King Sing, through his work and perspective, demonstrated a concept of equal exchange and dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, which was commendable given the historical context. Tong King Sing's early education at Morrison School exposed him to Western culture and its importance. He recognized the value of Western culture but did not consider it superior or inferior to Chinese culture. Instead, he advocated for equal exchange and dialogue, believing that both cultures could learn from and inspire each other. This perspective is evident in his compilation of *The Chinese and English Instructor*.

The title itself, *The Chinese and English Instructor*, reflects Tong King Sing's mindset of equality between Chinese and Western cultures. Unlike other books circulating at the time with derogatory titles for foreign languages (such as "devil's language", "barbarian language", and "savage language", etc.), he used a neutral term "ying yu" (English), conveying an attitude of equality and respect towards foreign languages. This choice indicated his recognition of English as a language of commerce and the importance of China learning and mastering it for effective business communication. It also showcased his positive attitude towards foreign language learning and his expectation of establishing a cultural exchange environment based on equal dialogue.

The phonetic system used in *The Chinese and English Instructor* further demonstrates Tong King Sing's open and inclusive attitude towards cultural exchange between China and the West. He annotated English pronunciation using Chinese characters, facilitating English learning for Chinese speakers. For example, the Chinese characters for "zuo ri" (yesterday) were annotated as "ye shi da di". Additionally, he used Romanization to indicate the pronunciation of Cantonese, catering to the needs of foreigners learning the language. For instance, the annotation for "guang zhou cheng" (Guangzhou City) was "Kwong Chow foo". This approach bridged phonetic barriers and facilitated communication and understanding between different linguistic backgrounds.

The entries included in *The Chinese and English Instructor* reflected both Chinese and Western cultural systems, conveying a notion of equal treatment and mutual respect. Chinese elements in the entries mainly include Chinese history and culture, such as "fu ma" (son-in-law of the emperor), "zhuang yuan" (top scholar in the imperial examination), "tai jian" (eunuch), etc., Chinese classic works (such as "yi jing" (*Book of Changes*), "shi jing" (*Book of Songs*), "li ji" (*Book of Rites*), etc.), and Chinese economic measurements (*zhang*, *liang*, *hu*, etc.). Western-themed entries mainly include the names of Western countries (England, America, Holland, etc.), foreign trade goods (clocks that self-chime, watches, telescopes, etc.), Western economic measurements (yard, gallon, ounce, etc.), and modern Western transportation vehicles (steamships, trains, railways, etc.). This vocabulary compilation exemplified compatibility between Chinese and Western cultures, showcasing the similarities and differences between traditional Chinese society and modern Western society.

Tong King Sing's English teaching perspective of equal exchange and dialogue showcased his recognition and respect for cultural diversity. He was ahead of his time in promoting mutual learning and exchange between Chinese and Western cultures. Overall, Tong's perspective and efforts made positive contributions to the mutual learning and exchange between Chinese and Western cultures, breaking biases and discriminatory notions prevalent during the late Qing dynasty.

3.2. Practicality First

Tong King Sing's view on English teaching in *The Chinese and English Instructor* emphasized practicality ^[2]. The book was compiled with the intention of facilitating trade, solving language barriers, and providing convenience to those involved in foreign affairs. Tong recognized the losses and difficulties faced by individuals who couldn't understand English and aimed to address this issue through his publication. In the preface of *The Chinese and English Instructor* Tong states: "Because I have seen friends who are unable to communicate in English suffer losses, be deceived, or be humiliated due to not understanding English, I have revised this book. It is not enough to help the world, but it can at least provide some convenience for those involved in foreign affairs" ^[3].

The Chinese and English Instructor went beyond being a simple English textbook or Chinese-English dictionary. It included a specific section called "mai ban wen da" (Merchants' Questions and Answers), catering to the needs of individuals engaged in the merchant industry. This section provided practical knowledge related to business transactions and aimed to equip learners with the necessary skills for effective communication in the foreign affairs industry.

The book's phonetic annotation method was particularly commendable. Tong King Sing utilized the traditional Chinese *fanqie* method, which involved comparing English words and phrases with Chinese (including Cantonese) pronunciation and translation. This approach allowed foreign affairs personnel to quickly overcome language barriers and find solutions to practical problems in their work by consulting *The Chinese and English Instructor*.

Tong King Sing employed various techniques within the *fanqie* method. He used Chinese characters that sounded similar to English words to annotate pronunciation, enabling students to establish a connection between Chinese and English pronunciation. Additionally, Tong created new characters by adding a *kou* (a square-shaped Chinese character) to the left of existing characters, developing a phonetic method specifically for these new characters. This innovative approach helped learners accurately understand and pronounce English words.

Furthermore, Tong introduced special symbols in the phonetic method to assist with English pronunciation. He used straight lines, dots, triangles, and other symbols to indicate specific pronunciation methods and phonetic features. Through these methods, Tong fully utilized the characteristics of the Chinese phonetic system, enabling students to grasp English pronunciation more quickly and improve the authenticity of their pronunciation.

Although the use of Chinese characters to annotate English may seem peculiar from a modern English teaching perspective, it was "a practical method shared by Chinese and foreigners at that time" ^[4]. It met the social needs of the era and provided learners with a convenient pronunciation aid. Moreover, this annotation method leveraged the positive transfer of Chinese phonetics to English phonetics teaching, displaying its rationality and practicality.

In summary, Tong King Sing's view on English teaching emphasized practicality and effective communication. *The Chinese and English Instructor* served as a valuable resource for merchants, businessmen, and individuals involved in foreign affairs. The book's phonetic annotation method, along with its focus on practical application, provided a feasible approach to English learning for the Chinese people of that time.

3.3. Communication as the Foremost Priority

Tong King Sing, with his extensive practical experience in business and trade, recognized the vital role of effective communication skills in facilitating successful business activities. He placed a great emphasis on the significance of business communication, which is evident in his work, *The Chinese and English Instructor*. This book, specifically focused on practical business dialogues, integrating English language learning with the practical aspects of business communication.

The Chinese and English Instructor consisted of six volumes, covering a wide range of topics. While it included vocabulary and phrases, a significant portion of the content was dedicated to sentences and dialogues. Each volume started with a section on “qie yin cuo yao” (Pronunciation Essentials), followed by major categories containing various subcategories, including vocabulary and dialogues. Volume four concentrated on dialogues, encompassing everyday conversations and basic question-and-answer exchanges. Volume six primarily comprised specialized question-and-answer sections related to business affairs, such as trading tea, poultry, groceries, and renting ships. These dialogues covered various aspects of business activities, equipping learners with the necessary communication skills to navigate different business contexts.

Moreover, Tong King Sing paid attention to the standardization and authenticity of the business dialogues in *The Chinese and English Instructor*. The sentence patterns and question-and-answer exchanges included in the book were noted for their correctness in English expression and adherence to grammatical norms ^[2]. Tong incorporated authentic ways of expressing business English, distinguishing his work from previous Cantonese-influenced English textbooks in China. Furthermore, the book not only provided language resources but also explanations of relevant commercial knowledge, enriching learners’ understanding and application of business English.

Tong King Sing also emphasized the development of intercultural communication skills. In the preface of *The Chinese and English Instructor*, Tong stated, “Not only can Chinese learn English, but English and American people can also learn Chinese”, indicating his early recognition of the importance of intercultural communication ^[2]. He recognized that learners often encounter individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in business activities. Therefore, *The Chinese and English Instructor* incorporated dialogues and situations that touched upon intercultural communication. This aspect of the book helped learners understand and adapt to the norms of business communication in different cultural contexts, fostering intercultural awareness and the establishment of sound business relationships.

During the late Qing dynasty, English teaching methods and resources were relatively simplistic. However, *The Chinese and English Instructor* took a practical and applied approach by providing authentic dialogue demonstrations in real-life contexts. This allowed learners to acquire authentic expressions of business English through imitation, enhancing their accuracy in expression and language application. Tong King Sing’s efforts and advanced educational principles served as a valuable example for business English teaching at that time, influencing its subsequent development.

In summary, Tong King Sing’s focus on practical business communication, standardization of dialogues, integration of commercial knowledge, and emphasis on intercultural communication skills made *The Chinese and English Instructor* a significant contribution to English teaching in the late Qing dynasty. This work provided learners with authentic and standardized linguistic materials, enabling them to acquire effective communication skills in business contexts. Tong King Sing’s principles and teaching methods remain relevant and inspiring even in contemporary times.

4. The Value and Significance of Tong King Sing’s Views of English Teaching

Tong King Sing’s English teaching perspective was not only ahead of its time but also had a profound and lasting impact on the subsequent development of English teaching. There are several key aspects that highlight the significance and value of his educational ideas.

Firstly, Tong recognized the importance of intercultural communication and emphasized equal dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. This concept was progressive during his time and remains crucial in today’s globalized world. By promoting cultural exchange through English teaching, Tong fostered cross-cultural awareness and facilitated international cooperation.

Secondly, Tong King Sing’s perspective on English teaching prioritized practicality. He

integrated English language learning with the practical needs of business communication. *The Chinese and English Instructor*, with its extensive collection of business English dialogues and practical language materials, provided learners with the necessary skills to navigate real-world business environments. This practical-oriented approach was unique at the time and continues to hold significance in modern educational perspectives that emphasize the application of knowledge.

Thirdly, Tong emphasized the importance of communication skills, particularly in the context of business. He understood that effective communication plays a critical role in successful business activities. *The Chinese and English Instructor* focused on developing learners' business English communication skills through practical dialogues and expressions. This communication-centered teaching approach was advanced for its time and remains relevant in today's globalized business world, where effective communication is essential for building relationships and achieving success.

In summary, Tong King Sing's English teaching perspective, characterized by its emphasis on intercultural communication, practicality, and communication skills, was far-sighted and influential. His ideas continue to provide valuable insights and guidance in cultivating cross-cultural awareness, practical application abilities, and effective business communication skills. The legacy of Tong King Sing's contributions to English teaching is still evident in contemporary educational practices, reflecting the enduring relevance of his educational philosophy.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, Tong King Sing developed an inclusive English teaching perspective through his formal education in English and extensive practical experience. He advocated for equal communication and dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, emphasized the practicality of English teaching to meet the demands of business interactions, and prioritized the cultivation of communication skills, particularly in the context of business communication. His publication, *The Chinese and English Instructor*, partially addressed the practical needs of English teaching in business activities, making significant contributions to the advancement of English teaching in China at that time. His English teaching perspective continues to provide valuable insights and guidance for contemporary English teaching, international business communication, and intercultural communication.

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