

The Historical Contributions and Reality Reflections of the Boxer Indemnity Between China and Britain to Cultural and Educational Affairs in the Republic of China

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Abstract

According to the rules in “*The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*” between China and Britain, the sum money of interests should be used in permanent memorial cultural and educational affairs. Although it lasted for a short period, the cultural and educational affairs it sponsored were various, such as aiding cultural constructions financially, supporting higher education and research facilities, selecting government-supported students to study in Britain, encouraging the publishment of textbooks, and supporting education in rural and border areas etc.. These strategies pushed forward the “*balanced*” development in education and improved the overall education level. Some strategies still have enlightening influence on the cultural and educational development condition nowadays.

Key words: The Boxer Indemnity between China and Britain; Cultural and educational affairs; Historical contributions

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INTRODUCTION

The refund problems of British Boxer Indemnity have lasted for 18 years, and finally resolved in September,

1930, by signing the new indemnity contract as the settlement. The new contract has decided to make use of the indemnity “by arranging and building Chinese railways and other production enterprises, with its annual interests used for culture and education development” (Editorial Board of Education Yearbook, para.2, 1971, p.1797). On April 8, 1930, the “Indemnity Management Board” was formally established. In July of the same year, the fourth meeting of the board has agreed on *The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*. Its first rule stipulates that “the indemnity interests should be used for permanent memorial errands of contributing to education and culture construction, and shall not be used as any organ or temporary subsidy fee.” (The Second Historical Archives of China, 1992, p.581). Since then, using British Boxer Indemnity for Chinese education has had a strong basis. “From the perspective of indemnity utility effectiveness”, British Boxer Indemnity is “the best of all claims” (Wang, 1985, p.426). Because of this, the deep exploration of the culture and education development sponsored by British Boxer Indemnity interests, has great historical value and practical significance.

1. THE BRITISH BOXER INDEMNITY BACKGROUND

In 1912, Britain began to put forward the refund of Boxer Indemnity, but has not been taken seriously. In April 1917, for encouraging China to join the Allies in the war against Germany, the British Foreign Ministry finally decided to delay indemnity payment for 5 years. In the spring of 1922, the British Parliament and British newspapers frequently discussed the British Boxer indemnity problem, “*The Times*” addressed that “we should select Chinese youth to study in the UK, the more the better”, and said that “Students in today’s world, namely business travelers or businessmen in the future, which is in close connection with Britain and its business interests” (Fu, 1987). In November 1922,

Japan decided to refund Boxer Indemnity to China, which brought a great stimulus to Britain. On December 22nd of the same year, the deputy minister of British government gave China a verbal notice that intends to return the Boxer Indemnity Chinese. But because of the British cabinet members change, the matter was shelved.

In the 1920s, China had undergone profound changes in domestic situation, with Chinese people's anti-imperialist and patriotic sentiment rising. Especially, the abolition of unequal treaties which were imposed on China had been proposed by more and more people. The result is, as the first one to sign unequal treaties with China, Britain is facing much pressure. In 1925, after May 30th Massacre, anti-British movements were occurring continuously in China. British interests in China are facing an unprecedented threat, members of British Parliament, scholars and the media are concerned about this, hoping to get Chinese favor through refunding British Boxer Indemnity, but the focus falls on the use of indemnity. The British government, members of media mostly advocated supporting education, but small part of businessmen believes that British has financial difficulties and setbacks, the refund should be used to build railways, which is of mutual benefit (The British Returned Indemnity for Hesitation, 1925). Most scholars support refunds used for education in China. Russell has published an essay, which says that "Chinese youth is very enthusiastic about higher education. Universities constructed by Chinese people,

are all erected with excellent spirit. The only setback is in funds, which can merely not support their running" (Fu, 1987). Besides supporting refund for higher education use, they also proposed to introduce some students to study in the UK. In China, the indemnity refund use is controversial: constructing Han Railway, dredging Tianjin River, revitalizing education etc.. Most scholars, educators and media claim to use indemnity for the revitalization of education, but the big warlords advocated refund use for the railway transportation in China.

In September 1930, China and the UK governments noted, to refund the indemnity as the culture and education fund. Soon, the two governments changed their plans, and decided to use the indemnity for building Chinese railways and other infrastructure, with its interests for cultural and educational undertakings. The final decision is, per annum interest is five percent of business income, and is used to support the cultural and educational undertakings. These provisions have defined the purpose of the funds and forbid other organs and individuals arbitrarily using this fund. In time of war, with shortage of money, these funds have provided a good guarantee for the smooth development of culture and education, and plays the role of "timely assistance".

On July 4, 1931, the board of directors for the indemnity has issued *The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*, and divided education and culture into five categories.

Table 1
The Indemnity Amount of Interests in Five Types of Education Dominant Proportion

Culture and education	Dominance ratio	Remarks
A. Large scale construction The Central Library	25%	Including science, industry, history, archeology and other museums and the Central Museum; subsidies the for the preservation of inherent cultural heritages
B. Grants for domestic higher education	35%	Cost of construction or equipment fees or lectures and research institutions with high performance (lectures should pay special attention to subjects of agriculture, engineering, medicine and science)
C. Send a number of students to study abroad,	15%	Enhance English culture and promote the relationship between Chinese and British education
D. Special work Awards for the provision of textbooks	1%	For primary, secondary schools and vocational Schools
E. Set special awards for valuable works establishment	24%	The construction should start from remote or urgent provinces of rural education; National Center for the construction of large industrial vocational school

Source: Chapter: The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards. (1934). *The Management of Indemnity Board Journal*, (60), 7.

2. PATHS OF BRITISH "BOXER INDEMNITY" USAGE IN CHINA

2.1 Grant Cultural Construction

"*The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*" issued by the board of British Boxer Indemnity directors has divided the dominant use into two parts. The first

part is the construction of large-scale central libraries and Central Museums (including history, archaeology, art, science and industry museums). When the museums are completed, the regular fee and incidental expenses should be provided by the central government. The second part is domestic subsidies for inherent cultural preservation of historic antiquities (The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards, 1934). The Board believes that, from

the perspective of visual impact, the construction of Central Museum and Central Library should be built in the capital, so as to collect and protect precious cultural relics, books, and to highlight the function of national cultural center. In 1935, the board funded one hundred and fifty thousand for the museum and library construction costs; while in 1936, the board respectively granted three hundred thousand for the museum and library construction costs; at the same time, for the protection of traditional culture, historical relics, and ancient relics, they allocated one hundred thousand every year, and set up a special committee for specific operation.

2.2 Subsidized Higher Education and Research Institutions

At the beginning of the Nanjing national government governance, China was in a relatively stable political and economic environment, with major universities and

institutes expanding the school buildings, add experimental and research equipments. But because of limited financial resources in the central government, interest indemnity returned can act as an important economic source of school infrastructure. According to *The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*, higher education and research institutions with impeccable performance can be funded for domestic buildings, construction costs and equipments, with particular emphasis on agriculture, industry and medicine department. The resolution of the board had suited the focus of higher education development at that time, which laid a good foundation for the construction of colleges and universities and their later development. Set 1934 as an example, through the number of indemnity grants allocation, the board had a huge investment in higher education and research institutions.

Table 2
Higher Education and Research Institutions Subsidies Passed by the Indemnity Board in 1934

Scientific research institutions	Subsidy amount (yuan)	Grant project
National Centre College	10 thousand	Set up one lecture
National Zhongshan University	130 thousand	A lecture and equipment costs (for three years)
National Wuhan University	130 thousand	A lecture and equipment costs (for three years)
National Chekiang University	130 thousand	A lecture and equipment costs (for three years)
National Institute of Technology	10 thousand	Set up one lecture
National Shanghai College of Medicine	60 thousand	Construction fee (for three years)
Private Nankai University	60 thousand	The equipment costs (for three years)
Private Yenching University	45 thousand	The equipment costs (for three years)
Private Xiamen University	30 thousand	The purchase of science books (for three years)
Provincial Xiangya Medical College	60 thousand	The equipment costs (for three years)
Central Health Laboratory	70 thousand	A lecture and equipment costs (for three years)
National Central Research Institute	100 thousand	Manufacture of scientific instruments and equipment costs (for three years)
National Academy of Beijing	100 thousand	The equipment costs (for three years)
National Institute for Compilation	50 thousand	Construction fee (for two years) and Translation
Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture	20 thousand	Prepare registration fee (for two years)

Sources of data:

a) The Second Historical Archives of China. (1992). *The historical archives of the external debt of the Republic of China* (Vol.12, p.779). Archives Press.

b) The Boxer Indemnity by Assigning the Number. (1934). *Chinese Education Circles*, 22(2), 83-84.

Explanation: due to the more subsidized institutions, not fully listed.

In addition to the various universities and research institutions above, other universities such as Guangxi University, Henan University, Yunnan University, Gansu Academy, Shandong University, Sichuan University, University of Transportation, Private Jinling University, Lingnan University, Xiehe University of West China in different years had obtained indemnity interest subsidies to different degrees, so as to continue the construction

and development in the case of funds shortage. From Table Two, we can see that funds for higher education and research institutions are not only in large numbers but also has good continuity; the funds are not only used to support the building of institutions, colleges and universities and hardware equipments, but also for hiring teachers, strengthening soft power such as help to buy books; the funded institutions not only includes national

and provincial universities, but also private institutions. It can be said that these subsidies had “*timely assistance*” effect on the universities and institutions.

After the outbreak of war, the board provided a timely adjustment of higher education grants focuses, and set professors and scientific assistance systems, not only to solve the problem of teachers in exile career, but also to be conducive to carry out teaching and scientific researches. In addition, the board had established scientific research assistant positions, and organized *Northwest Education Investigation Mission* to provide employment opportunities for a large number of graduates. All these measures of the board had not only solved the social problems at that time, but also prepared for the development of Chinese education and culture after the Anti-Japanese War.

2.3 Select British Overseas Students

Inspired by the American indemnity students, Britain had

also intended to use the restitution indemnity interests to send free students to study in England, and they set up “*Chinese University Committee*” to be responsible for the work of students studying in London, and allocated 200 thousand pounds of the indemnity as foundation (Wang, 1985, p.460).

Set a certain number of students to study abroad through the examination by the board. Those teaching assistants who have excellent performances in domestic higher education institutions, and university graduates who have done special achievements or specialized works in the community, can take part in this examination. (Tai, 1935, p.120)

The Indemnity Board decided to use 15% of the interest for examination fees of selecting Chinese students to study in England. During the period from 1933 to 1945, 193 students were sent to England in 9 respective sessions. Because of the inconvenience of the war, no students were sent to study abroad from 1940 to 1943.

Table 3
Nine Session British Boxer Indemnity Fees and Subsidy Amount (unit: yuan)

Session	Numbers	Subsidy amount	Representatives
The first session 1933	9	About 59 thousand	Wang Baoren, Wu Daren, etc.
The second session 1934	26	180 thousand	Chen Yongling, Xia Jian Bai, etc.
The third session 1935	24	230 thousand	Qian Zhongshu, Xu Baolu, etc.
The fourth session 1936	20	420 thousand	Weng Wenbo, Wu Zhengkai, etc.
The fifth session 1937	25	475 thousand	Lu Jiayi, Huang Yushan, etc.
The sixth session 1938	20	480 thousand	Wang Chengxu, Peng Hengwu, etc.
The seventh session 1939	24	426 thousand	Qian Weichang, Guo Yonghuai, etc.
The eighth session 1944	28	Cao Richang, Wang Xianzhong, etc.	
The ninth session 1945	17	Huang Kun, Wang Zuoliang, etc.	

Sources of data:

- Jiang, Z. Y. (Ed.). (1991). *The Republic of China Education Yearbook* (3). Zongqing Book Company.
 - The Boxer Indemnity by Assigning the Number. (1934). *Chinese Education Circles*, 22(2), 83-84.
 - Twenty-Four Annual Subsidy for Education and Culture. (1935). *Chinese Education Circles*, 23(1), 221-222.
 - Twenty-Five Annual Education and Culture Subsidies Control Case. (1936). *The Management of Indemnity Board Journal*, (10), 10.
 - This Year (Twenty-Six Annual) the Indemnity Control Plan. *The Education Magazine*, 28(10), 78-79.
 - The Boxer Indemnity Allowance Control Section. (1939). *The Education Magazine*, 29(12), 51-58.
- Explanation: 1944, 1945, the specific use of the subsidy is unknown, so no notes.

The purpose of British Boxer Indemnity is to “cultivate many specialized scholars to enrich higher education” (The Second Historical Archives of China, 1997, p.277). There are strict restrictions on their eligibility requirements: Teachers (*assistants*) who have excellent results in higher education institutions; graduates who serve the community and have special grades or specialized works. The selection of the students is quite high-standard, and the academic starting point is very high. As the Chinese students tend to be older, they pay more attention to academic progress, and most of them enter higher education institutions such as the University of London, University of Cambridge, University of Oxford etc.. The funded

students professional distribution is also consistent with the characteristics of oversea studying Chinese students at that time, with most of them choosing science and Engineering (p.147), a small part choosing Liberal Arts (p.46). Funded students in England were mostly immersed in study. They were in a good scientific research environment, developed a rigorous, diligent studying habit, and achieved outstanding academic achievements. This had laid a good foundation for display of their talents, and contributed to the community (Liu, 2000). Whether in agriculture, industry, medicine and physics or in literature, history, philosophy and law, a group of talents had emerged in our country, mostly acted as pioneers and founders in related fields.

2.4 Textbooks and Publication Bonus

In *The British Boxer Indemnity Interest Expense Standards*, 1% of the interests were used for setting up schools and occupation school textbooks award and set value of special work incentives. As an important cultural construction, the board considers publication as a direction of subsidy. This shows that the state had paid attention to education publishing, and shows that a lot of defects existing in published and special works of Chinese textbooks whether in quality or in quantity. In 1934, “award for senior primary school history textbooks was four thousand yuan; award for primary school music was four thousand yuan; award for public education reading is four thousand yuan” (Twenty-Four Annual Subsidy, para.2, 1935). In 1935, the junior high school history textbook award was six thousand yuan; junior high school geography textbook bonus is six thousand yuan (Twenty-Five Annual Education, para.4, 1936). “In 1936, the disposable interests of this kind for 25 years was twenty-eight thousand yuan, and was set up for special award for monograph publication”. From the visible three years, we can see that the board focused on primary and secondary school textbooks publication of comprehensive subjects, and focused on the overall quality education of primary and secondary school students, so as to cultivate the spirit of patriotism for primary and secondary school students. At the same time, the board also saw the low degree of national cultural level, and set public popular reading as an important aid project. Although the board has only used 1% of the interest for textbooks and special work incentives, this little reward inspired the education and publishing circles to edit and publish outstanding books to a certain extent, provided excellent textbooks and specialized books for students and the public, and is conducive to the improvement of the poor quality of social reading.

2.5 Grants for Education in Rural and Border Areas

Rural education should imitate the rural normal education implemented in Jinling university, which admits rural children who are eager to learn, teaches necessary academic knowledge half-day, and guides them practice agriculture skills for the other half of a day. When the Studies are completed, students can be rural teachers ... so as to suggest indemnity committees to provide a part of the fund for the development of agricultural subsidies in China. (Anonymous, 1934)

For the development of the rural economy and improvement of the rural education level, the board of directors gave the resolution of “constructing a provincial model primary school, a school of agriculture or occupation, or midwifery school to develop rural education, and remote, urgent provinces to start first should also be emphasized.”

After “September 18th Incident”, to meet the needs of building national defense, the government decided to develop the northwest region. In September 1934,

the Gansu Provincial Department of Education Director Zhu Mingxin proposed in the “*Education Plan of Six Northwest Provinces*”: “The Ministry of Education should grant each northwest provinces teaching fees; the indemnity fees should be allocated five hundred and forty thousand (Shaanxi, Gansu, Xinjiang is one hundred thousand each; Qinghai, Ningxia, Suiyuan eighty thousand each).” At the same time, for developing education of the northwest provinces, the National Defense Design Commission suggested a thorough investigation on the indemnity, and using indemnity subsidies for frontier education (The Second Historical Archives of China, 1994, p.10). Britain emphasizes the education of Chinese middle school students. “In the fourteenth year of the Republic of China, through collective research of British educators, secondary schools should be funded to shape students’ personality, so as to achieve British interests.” (Wang, 1985, p.440) Thus, from 1934 to 1944, the Indemnity Board provided education grants for ten consecutive years in the northwest frontier. First, grant compulsory education in Frontier Minority Areas. In 1935, the amount of indemnity funds for compulsory education in Frontier Minority Areas accounted for the compulsory education expenditure of Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai provinces of about 1/3; second, send experts to examine northwest provinces education. In September 1936, the board of directors sent Mei Yibao, Guo Shou, the British representative Dai Leren to Ningxia, Gansu, Suiyuan and Qinghai provinces for education examination; In the spring of 1937, the board hired Tao Menghe, Gu Jiegang, Wang Wenjun and Dai Leren to compose of the “*Northwest Investigation Group*”, to give deep examination. The researchers put forward many proposals under investigation, and were adopted by the board; third, the creation and development of border middle schools. The Indemnity Board has founded middle schools such as Huangchuan Middle School, Qianjiang Middle School and He Xi Middle School in Qinghai Xining, Guizhou Anshun and Gansu Jiuquan Huangchuan. These schools played positive roles in the development of border areas and cultivating ethnic minority students.

The education subsidies in rural and frontier areas were short in time, inadequate amount of subsidy and also influenced by British value orientation, but the funding had played a catalytic role to improve rural and remote border areas of education conditions.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF BRITISH “BOXER INDEMNITY” AND ITS ENLIGHTENMENTS

3.1 Influence

The Indemnity Board had basically achieved the principle of “giving priority to efficiency as well as equity”.

Under the circumstance of tense situation of education funds, the British Indemnity played a role of “*timely assistance*” in the development of relevant culture and education. First of all, invest 35% of the interests of higher education and scientific research, so as to provide money and income security for a large number of studies processed by returned students after finishing their study abroad. It promoted Chinese scientific research institutions in the initial development period. This period is also a period to accelerate the development of China’s higher education, and the indemnity also played an important role in promoting our country’s higher education development; second, a large number of students who studies in England and returned to Chinese academic community, had conveyed fresh blood broke the monopoly status of the returned students from America, which is beneficial to the ecological balance of academy. A large number of students to become leaders in the academic circles in later China, for example: agricultural educationist and plant physiology expert Shi Hansheng; famous writer and litterateur Qian Zhongshu; famous physicist Qian Weichang and Guo Yonghuai; the economist Qian Rongkun; third, take other cultural business into account, construct large museums and libraries, which is conducive to the protection of Chinese precious cultural relics and valuable historical heritages; public textbooks and monographs, which help students improve the quality of learning materials, and also provides high-quality and rich resources of national publications; Fourth, pay attention to the development of education in rural and border areas, provide funds for education in rural and border areas, which is not only conducive to the improvement of people’s cultural qualities in rural and border areas, but also conducive to reduce the gap between eastern and western regions, and to promote national unity. Although with the cultural colonialism color, the indemnity interests funding Chinese culture and education still has great historical value in promoting higher education, scientific research, education, and other aspects.

3.2 Enlightenments

First, set the Indemnity Board as the storage and distribution mechanism of indemnity interests, which guaranteed objective and impartial in the use of indemnity. As a special institution for managing indemnity interests, the Indemnity Board members include educators, politicians, foreign experts and scholars from all walks of life. Their mutual interests are restricted and balanced. They supervised each other, guaranteed the money not to be removed and not to be biased in allocation. In the distribution of interests, through in-depth discussion and thoughts, the board strived to protect and develop culture and education as much as possible, so as to maximize the effectiveness of the money. Today, setting corresponding directors in universities or educational administrative

agencies as supervision, management, execution mechanism, is not only conducive to the efficient use of educational resources, but also can greatly improve work efficiency, ensures the development of education to play the role of “*Accelerator*”. Second, as the premise of educational decision-making, educational investigation is the first step in education. Before the Indemnity Board provided subsidies for the northwest frontier education, they had sent “*Delegation Team*” for two times to make an on-the-spot investigation, and had given detailed investigation report. Relying on this field investigation report, the board of directors made a scientific decision finally, which played a huge role in the development of northwest border education. On-the-spot investigation of education is an effective way to obtain real information, a necessary preparation for making scientific decisions and a principle of adhering to seek truth from facts. It is necessary to conduct the necessary fieldwork and investigation before making scientific decisions. Third, according to the needs of national construction and long-term interests, allocate limited funds for education step by step. (a) Divide priorities. After the outbreak of war, east and north China had fallen into enemy’s hands. The strategic position of Northwest China had become increasingly prominent, so does the development of frontier education. Subsequently, the Indemnity Board sent a delegation for a detailed review of the northwest education, and provided the corresponding subsidy. (b) Divide severity. The development of higher education has become the focus of the national government. Higher education is not only attached with the quality of national cultural quality, but also related to entire country construction and China’s status in the international community in the future. Thus higher education grants became an important part in grants of the education division.

The purpose of western countries transformed from taking “*Boxer Indemnity*” to inland use to using “*Boxer Indemnity*” in China is not innocent. They intended to steer from economic plunder of the wealth to control Chinese culture, and should enlighten us to give a clear look at the “*Boxer Indemnity*”. From another perspective, the invasion of foreign powers and the split plot on China, objectively stimulated the Chinese ethnic solidarity, national consciousness, and the awaken to “*the Chinese Nation*” concept. Chinese nation had gradually become the consensus of the people of all ethnic groups in Chinese culture, and its development phase entered to conscious development period (Wu, 2014). Education, as a fundamental task crucial for generations to come, is related to the hope and the future of the nation. Investment in education we should pay attention not only to press matters of the moment, but also to the long-term strategies.

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