

CURRENTS: Humanities Work Now

Missionaries, Merchants, and Manual Laborers: The People Connecting the US to China in the late 19th Century

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In 1860, Chinese intellectual Feng Guifen penned an essay challenging his compatriots to learn what they could from the west, arguing that there would be Chinese able to take that knowledge and allow China to surpass Western achievements. He wrote at the end of a period of explosive change in the relations between China and the West, including the United States. Trading patterns upended by two Opium Wars transformed Western and American access to Chinese ports and created new opportunities for inland missions. The number of Americans in China engaged in trade and missionary work rapidly increased. Chinese merchants, students, and migrants arrived in the United States to seek their fortunes, while their laboring compatriots found a rougher passage to the Americas as coolie laborers. Figures like Peter Parker, Houqua, Edwin Stevens, Hong Xiuquan, Nathan Dunn, Yung Wing, and Caleb Cushing moved back and forth across the Pacific, bringing people, money, and ideas with them that would upend the status quo of the "Canton" trading era. This project follows these individuals and others as a means of understanding the U.S.-China relationship between 1830-1860 through the eyes of the people who played the largest role in shaping it.

Monday, March 31

Dresher Center Conference Room (PAHB 216) and online via WebEx

If you are interested in ordering a boxed lunch, please register at the link in the QR code.

