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Historically, China and the United States were on friendly terms most of the time

In 2017, between September and November, I was conducting research in the Palace Museum, Beijing, thanks to a grant awarded to me by the J.S. Lee Fellowship Programme.

On 8th November the Museum was closed to the public, because on that day the President of China, Mr Xi Jinping, hosted a reception for the President of the United States, Mr Donald Trump, at that famous cultural site.

The following day, the 9th, a photo of the two presidents and the two first ladies standing in front of the Taihe Gate appeared in all the newspapers in Beijing. Who would have thought that eight years later, the two presidents would be locked in a tariff war from which neither man could dig himself out.

This is really sad, since history tells us that in the 19th century the relationship between China and the United States was a cordial one. The US never "bullied" China (to use a Chinese expression) in the way that other "Western powers" (another Chinese expression) did. The US did not gang up with Britain during the First Opium War (1839-42), nor did she gang up with Britain and France during the Second Opium War (1857-60).

After 1860 foreign countries gained the right to set up legations in Beijing. Whilst Britain, France and Russia tried to extract as much concessions and privileges from China as possible, the US took no part in such "grabbing" frenzy. The *Zongli Yamen* (full name *Zongli geguo shiwu yamen*, literally "Office in charge of various kingdoms' affairs") came into existence in early 1862, an organisation which the British and the Americans loosely called "the Foreign Office" or "the Board of Foreign Affairs". The *Zongli Yamen* documents reveal that their staff were daily struggling to cope with "unreasonable" and "overbearing" demands from the British, the French and the Russians. But no such complaints were levied against the Americans.

Indeed, two American persons living in Beijing, namely W.A.P. Martin (1827-1916) and Anson Burlingame (1820-1870), had won a certain degree of trust from the *Zongli Yamen*. This was no small accomplishment, as in the 1860s practically every Chinese in Beijing viewed all Westerners with suspicion.

William Alexander Parsons Martin was a missionary from Livonia, Indiana. In late 1863 he had nearly completed translating *Elements of International Law*, a work by the American jurist and diplomat Henry Wheaton (1795-1848). When Prince Gong (old-styled romanisation "Prince Kung"), Head of the *Zongli Yamen*, knew of Martin's translation endeavour he assigned four Chinese scholars, all well versed in

literature, to help him. The end product, called *Wanguo Gongfa* in Chinese, was printed at the expense of the Chinese government, in 1865. To show his appreciation Prince Gong gave Martin a professorship at the newly-established *Tongwen Guan*, a state-funded language school sometimes referred to as the "Peking College" by the British.

Martin became the Head of the Tongwen College in 1869. By 1880 the College had translated into the Chinese language works on political economy, chemistry, natural philosophy, physical geography, history, French and English codes of law, anatomy, physiology, *materia medica*, and diplomatic and consular guides. Among the last category is the *Xingyao Zhizhang* (literally "pointers for the starry carriage", because the Chinese called their envoys to foreign lands "starry envoys"), which is a translation of the French book *Le Guide Diplomatique: précis des droits et des fonctions des agents diplomatiques et consulaires*, by Karl von Martens and M.F.H. Geffcken. When *The Pointers for the Starry Carriage* came out in 1876 it immediately became a "must read" to all Qing officials posted to foreign countries.

The trust shown to Anson Burlingame by the Qing government was even more remarkable. Burlingame was the American minister to China, who took up residence in Beijing in July 1862. Five years later, in November 1867, while still serving as American minister, he was asked by the *Zongli Yamen* "to be a representative of China, and to lead a delegation to the various foreign countries who have signed a treaty with China".

That was not the first time for China to employ foreigners in the post-Opium Wars era. One can cite as an example Robert Hart (Irish), entrusted with the management of all the customs houses in China. On the military front there were Frederick Townsend Ward (American) and Charles Gordon (English), who were recruited by provincial officials to fight the Taipings. But all those men were employed to do work in China. To engage an American person, and to send him abroad to seek the goodwill of foreign rulers for China, was definitely an unprecedented step that the Chinese government took.

Burlingame accepted the Chinese appointment, and resigned his American job by telegram. He then wrote to William H. Seward, US Secretary of State, explaining why he had made such a decision:

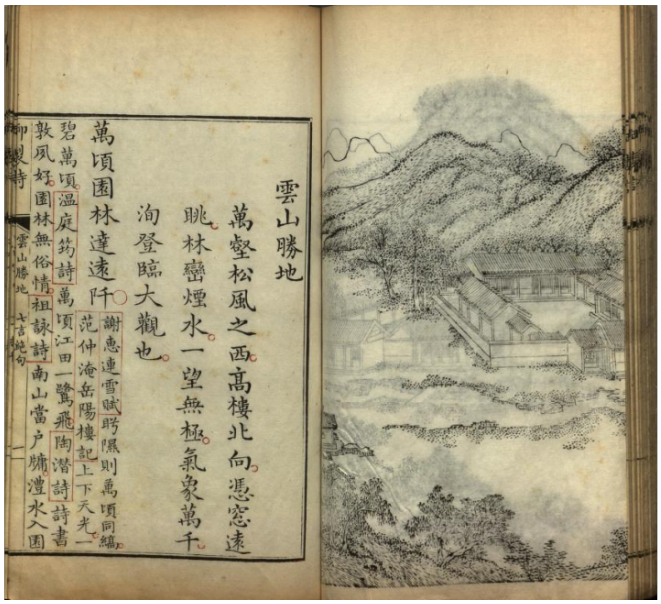
> I may be permitted to add that when the oldest nation in the world, containing one-third of the human race, seeks, for the first time, to come into relations with the West, and request the youngest nation, through its representative, to act as the medium of such change, the mission is not one to be solicited or rejected.

The Burlingame mission, as historians call it, set off on 25th February, 1868. It consisted of about thirty people, most of them Chinese, with the exception of two Westerners - John McLeavy Brown (Irish) and Emile Deschamps (French). They crossed the Pacific Ocean, reaching San Francisco on 1st April. The Mission then proceeded to Washington D.C., and met President Andrew Johnson at the White House in June.

THE HON. ANSON BURLINGAME, AMBASSADOR OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE, WITH THE MEMBERS OF HIS LEGATION.—SEE NEXT PAGE.

A page from the *Illustrated London News* Supplement, October 3, 1868.
People standing (left to right): Zhuang Chunling, Guirong (interpreter in Russian), Lianfang (interpreter in French), Fengyi (interpreter in English), Burlingame, Deming (interpreter in English), Takeshina (interpreter in Russian), Tingjun (interpreter in French), Kang Tingyong.
People seated: Deschamps, Sun Jiagu, Zhigang, Brown

China presented to President Johnson a selection of Chinese woodblock-printed books, which were subsequently deposited at the Library of Congress, and are still there today.



Imperially composed poems on the 36 views of the Summer Mountain Villa (御製避暑山莊三十六景詩), printed 1712, one of the Chinese books presented to the United States by the Burlingame delegation.

Burlingame died before the Mission was completed - in February 1870, when mission members were in Russia. The proceedings of the trip were written by Zhigang, the most senior Chinese member of the Mission. The book, under the title *Chu shi tai xi ji* (My first diplomatic trip to the Far West), came out in 1877.

W.A.P. Martin lived long enough to witness the sad event of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. He must have been devastated to see all his hard work, tirelessly built up for thirty years, destroyed in less than three months. In the aftermath of the debacle China had to pay indemnity to the “Eight Allied Powers” (another Chinese expression). The United States, unlike her European peers, showed that she was not after China’s money. She used the indemnity payments to set up a “Boxer Indemnity Scholarship”, which enabled Chinese youngsters to go to study in an American university. China became a republic in 1912. And if we look at the C.V.s of those who held important positions in the Chinese Republic government, we could see that half of them had studied in one or more American universities. In other words, a significant proportion of the educated class in 20th-century China benefitted directly from the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship.