

The Charitable Man from Afar: A Reappraisal of S. W. Williams' (1812-1884) Involvements in the Mid-19th Century East Asia

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I The Highlights of Williams' Career

When Frederic Wells Williams¹ was compiling his father's biography *The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams* in 1889, he used the three words of "Missionary, Diplomatist, and Sinologue" in the subtitle. It is true that as a missionary printer sent to China in 1833 for the Canton press of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Williams worked enthusiastically for the opening of China and Japan to the West and Christianity for more than two decades until he accepted an invitation to become secretary and interpreter of the American legation in China in 1856.

¹ Born in Macao, F.W. Williams (1857-1928) spent his boyhood in Peking and graduated from Yale in 1879. He joined the Yale faculty as an Oriental historian in 1893 and played a leading role in Yale-in-China, the Yale foreign missionary society which developed educational and medical institutions in Changsha, Hunan Province since 1901. The name of the society has been used recently by Yale's President Richard C. Levin for his new initiatives for collaborative educational programs with China's top universities such as Beida and Fudan.

His share in gaining the Kanagawa Treaty of 1854 was so impressive that Commodore Perry wrote the following letter in Hong Kong to him on September 6, 1854.

In taking my departure from China I feel myself called upon by every sense of propriety and justice to bear the most ample testimony to the talents, zeal, and fidelity with which you conducted the important duties entrusted to your management as Chief Interpreter of the Mission to Japan. I say little when I declare that your services were almost indispensable to me in the successful progress of the delicate business which had been entrusted to my charge. With high abilities, untiring industry, and a conciliating disposition, you are the very man to be employed in such business. With my best respects to Mrs. Williams, I am, dear sir, very truly yours, M. C. Perry.²

For the next two decades from 1856, Williams served as a diplomat in China. He helped negotiate the Tientsin Treaty of 1858, especially being responsible for the successful insertion in the treaty of the clause granting

² F. W. Williams, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.D.: Missionary, Diplomatist, Sinologue* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), pp. 229-30. Perry also eagerly tried to secure Williams' help in compiling the narrative of Japan expedition after returning the US and wrote to the latter on March 13, 1855 in New York as follows: "I shall be impatient until I hear from you, and hope you will write by return of mail, and write fully. I should be greatly disappointed not to have your assistance.... The truth is, every incident connected with the Japanese expedition is looked upon with great interest, and there is one universal demonstration of applause at every event which has occurred, and I feel a nervous desire to make the report alike creditable; in doing so I depend confidently on your services in the way I have suggested. You write with so much care and so graphically that it will not give you half the trouble it would many others. Do not forget send me some translations of Japanese poetry, also Chinese done into English, if you have any; there scraps can be appropriately introduced. The specimens furnished to the *Hong Kong Register* by your Chinese clerk (Lo) are quite interesting..." Ibid, p. 231.

toleration to Christianity.³ He was several times in charge of the American legation in Peking in the intervals between ministers. When he decided to resign in 1876, the State Department sent him the following notification to recognize his outstanding accomplishments:

Your knowledge of the character and habits of the Chinese and of the wants and necessities of the people and the government, and your familiarity with their language, added to your devotion to the cause of Christianity and the advancement of civilization have made for you a record of which you have every reason to be proud. Your unrivalled Dictionary of the Chinese Language and various works on China have gained for you deservedly high position in scientific and literary circles. Above all the Christian world will not forget that to you more than to any other is due the insertion in our treaty with China of the liberal provision for the toleration of the Christian religion.⁴

Returning home, he became the first professor of Chinese language and literature at Yale in 1877, and the president of the American Bible Society and the American Oriental Society in 1881. With the help of his son F.W. Williams, he spent almost two years from 1881 to revise and enlarge his monumental work, *The Middle Kingdom*, first published 1848 based significantly on the *Chinese Repository* (1832-51). And he was fortunate to see the publication of the new version in October 1883, just a few days before

³ For the details about the drafts and revisions of the “toleration clause” based on an archival discovery at Yale, see De-min Tao, “The Chinese-American Negotiations on Relaxing Prohibition of Christianity in 1858 as Seen from *S. W. Williams Family Papers*” (in Chinese), *Wakumon* (Journal of Association for the Study of Cultural and Linguistic Exchanges between China and the West, Kansai University), No. 9, pp. 57-65.

⁴ *The Life and Letters*, p. 412.

his celebration of the half-century anniversary of his first landing at Canton in 1833, and about four months before his passing away in February 1884.

Judging from the above highlights, it is obvious that Williams' accomplishments as a missionary, a diplomat, and a Sinologist were unusually rich and outstanding.⁵ The present paper tries, however, not to further explore Williams' accomplishments, but to focus on his personal thoughts and feelings in relation with these accomplishments, especially his less-known experiences as a humanitarian activist. By doing so, the author hopes to shed some new light on his attitude toward East Asia as well as the American way of involvement in the region during the mid-19th century.⁶

II Intellectual and Medical Aids as a Means of Disseminating Christianity

From its very beginning, American protestant mission to China tended to use intellectual and medical aids as a means to disseminate Christianity, and thus had a uniquely pragmatic character.

After his arrival in 1830 in Canton with David Abeel as America's first missionaries, Elijah C. Bridgman (1801-1861) immediately started leaning

⁵ There have been some different views over Williams' character as a missionary. For example, Murray A. Rubinstein points out in *The Origins of the Anglo-American Missionary Enterprise in China, 1807-1840* (The Scarecrow Press, 1996, p. 256) that Williams "was not a typical missionary candidate nor did he become a typical missionary," as a printer, a China Watcher, and a Sinologist, he "would serve his nation and its people better than he served his God." Although Williams did not serve as a preacher, he was still a true missionary in its real sense. From my examination of Williams' hand-written journal of Japan expedition kept at Yale, I have identified that over thirty places where Williams had showed his missionary zeal were omitted by F.W. Williams when he was editing the journal for publication in the early 20th century.

⁶ Tyler Dennett compiled the pioneer work *Americans in Eastern Asia: A Critical Study of United States' Policy in the Far East in the Nineteenth Century* (MacMillan Company, 1922) based on the theory of power politics when the Washington conference had just ended. Contrary to his approach, however, there is a need to reexamine the history of the same period from humanitarian concerns of our age.

Cantonese at the guidance of Robert Morrison (1782-1834). Gradually, he became aware that “during the long intercourse which has existed between nations of Christendom and eastern Asia, there has been so little commerce in intellectual and moral commodities,” and that “this whole nation (of China) is in a profound sleep,” as exemplified by the modern Western experiences, the most important means of improvement for her would be “the increase of knowledge.”⁷ He also pointed out that “the Chinese government will not tolerant the public preaching of the gospel, the great means of introducing a knowledge of Christianity will be tracts and books.”⁸ Fortunately, the joint proposal by Bridgman and Morrison to establish a mission press at Canton was approved by the American Board, and echoed by the American merchant D.W.C. Olyphant with his generous arrangement of a donation. And the prominent monthly journal of *Chinese Repository* was thus commenced in May, 1832.

Williams was the right man came in 1833 to manage the printing office and assisting Bridgman in editing the journal. From time to time, however, the printing and distribution of the journal, tracts, and books were interrupted by the Chinese authorities. In August 1834, Williams reported to Secretary Rufus Anderson of the American Board that “we are much hampered on account of a recent search which was instituted by the provincial authorities at command of emperor, in order to find any natives who had been engaged in the manufacture of two Christian books which had been sent to Peking by the governor of Fukkeen. This edict caused some alarm and our teachers instantly left us. Search has also been made at

⁷ Michael C. Lazich, *E.C. Bridgman (1801-1860) : America's First Missionary in China*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, pp. 86, 112.

⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

Macao for traitorous natives , but we do not hear of any who have thus far been apprehended....Thus are we hindered more at present than ever before. We cannot get a book printed, and those now printed can neither be sent away nor distributed prudently in Canton; and we cannot procure a teacher with whom to study the language. (This situation) induces us to think of prosecuting our operations out of reach of the officers of this government. Whether such an establishment cannot be organized nearer China than Singapore, is a point not yet settled.”⁹

The arrival of Dr. Peter Parker in October 1834 in Canton seemed to be a turning point. At the advice of the American Board, he had studied theology and medicine at Yale in order to be prepared to minister to both the physical and spiritual needs in China.¹⁰ His appearance “introduced a new factor that has performed a service of the highest importance between foreigners and Chinese by removing their mutual misunderstandings. This was the establishment at Canton of a dispensary and hospital for the free treatment of natives. No branch of mission work in the East is now better known or more universally successful than this of medicine; its direct use in spreading the Gospel among all classes of the people has been inestimable; but at this time the experiment was considered hazardous by the foreign community in China, and was looked upon with suspicion by local authorities. At the end of its first year, however, when thousands of impatient Chinese were clamoring for admission to the crowded dispensary, the residents of the factories cordially agreed to payback the sum advanced to Dr. Parker by the mission, and formed the "Medical Missionary Society"

⁹ *The Life and Letters*, p. 76.

¹⁰ *The Origins of the Anglo-American Missionary Enterprise in China*, p. 270.

subscribing sufficient funds to carry on the benevolent work. The hong-merchant Howqua, as soon as he understood the object, gave the free use of a large house during twenty years for hospital purposes.”¹¹

Because of such successful experiences, when the American Board tried to change its policy in the early 1850s, Williams showed his dissatisfaction in a letter to his brother W. F. Williams, a missionary in Turkey, complaining that “the worthy secretaries in Boston have newly concluded to bring my printing office to a conclusion and get all our printing done by other offices at such rates as we can arrange the job. Dr. Anderson seems disposed to subordinate and surcease all printing offices, schools, and hospitals, and turn all the energies of the missions hereabouts into preaching....Amid such a valley of dry bones as China, subsidiary means, like schools and hospitals, in which to teach and practice the principles of Christianity, are worthy of not a little care. Dr. Parker’s hospital still goes on, supported by the charity of foreigners, and the Gospel is constantly made known there; so also at other hospitals. I will not deny that too much stress and time may be given to these departments, but it is difficult to tell beforehand what will pave the most promising path. Blessed is the work of doing good in any line; all finally run into the same Sea of Glass where its earthly agents will one day be so happy in casting their crowns of glory before Jesus, that they will quite forget the discussion as to whose rill was straightest, and deepest, and had the purest water. My vocation seems to be rather hereditary, and I think I should be dissatisfied if I had no printing-office to look after, though belike I

¹¹ *The Life and Letters*, pp. 76-77.

am not now well able to judge.”¹² Given that fact that the monthly journal of *Chinese Repository* had been earning an undisputed reputation for the American protestant mission for about twenty years, it is understandable that Williams was unwilling to give up the job both as an editor and a printer. But more importantly, he expressed his belief in pragmatism here that every kind of good doing would finally lead to the dissemination of Christianity.

It is interesting to see that in the same letter, Williams mentioned that “a large fleet of United States ships of war is here at present, and Commodore Perry” will soon “visit Japan and tell the Siogoun that he must treat our whalers more civilly.”¹³ Perry was really fortunate to secure the service of Williams, a missionary who had stayed in China for two decades and acquired profound knowledge about East Asian languages and cultures, and was then in a transitional period and being available to assume a new responsibility.

III A “Cooperative Policy” toward China and Japan

During the mid-19th century, America’s diplomacy toward China and Japan appeared less aggressive and more patient if compared with the European powers, although the gunboats were used at times.¹⁴

Concerning the peaceful conclusion of the Kanagawa Treaty,¹⁵ Williams

¹² *The Life and Letters*, pp. 180-181.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁴ The Sherman incident of 1866 and the 1871 expedition to Korea for conducting an on-the-spot investigation of that incident, as well as the American participation in the Shimonoseki War of 1864, were some examples of the American gunboat diplomacy. See Yong Hum Kim, *East Asia’s Turbulent Century*. New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1966, pp. 14-16.

¹⁵ Perry did not try to force a treaty by just one visit in 1853, but giving the Japanese government several months of time to think about its options to respond to the American request and then came again in 1854.

wrote proudly when he was about to leave Japan in June, 1854 that “now, not a shot has been fired, not a man wounded, not a piece of property destroyed, not a boat sunk or a single Japanese be found who is the worse off, so far as we know, for the visit of the American expedition. ...By permission of the Commodore, I drew up a paper of a general character which was sent to Lin (the Japanese chief commissioner Hayashi; here the same Character was read by Williams in its Chinese pronunciation) last evening by Moriyama. In it I endeavored to show how Japan could learn much which would be of enduring benefit to her by adopting the improvements of western lands, and allowing her people to visit them and see for themselves; adding that it was to set before them the most useful and curious specimens of Western art that the President had sent out to them, such things as a steam engine, a telegraph apparatus, a daguerreotype, all sorts of agricultural implements, books and drawings explaining these and other things....”¹⁶

This kind of attitudes could also be found in the diplomat efforts of Townsend Harris (1804-1878), the American consul in Ningpo of China who went to Japan as the first American Consul General in 1856 and succeeded in persuading the Japanese negotiators to conclude the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce by guaranteeing them a higher importation tariff rate and a ban on the opium trade.¹⁷

¹⁶ S.W. Williams, *A Journal of the Perry Expedition to Japan, 1853-1854*. Edited by F.W. Williams. Kelly & Walsh, 1910, pp. 224-225.

¹⁷ See Mario E. Cosenza, *The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris: First American Consul General and minister to Japan*. Japan Society, New York, 1930. As Dennett commented that the treaty “was not only more liberal in its provisions than the Cushing treaty with China (of 1844), but even more liberal than the treaties of Tientsin which had followed the occupation of Canton and the destruction of the Taku forts.” He even quoted the following comment by the British historian Longford: Harris’s service in Japan would not be “exceeded by any in the entire history of the international relations.” *Americans in Eastern Asia*, pp. 362-364.

Williams was known by his criticism of England's opium trade, too. While he was supportive of England's war against China in 1840 for its commercial and diplomatic causes, he thought that "the whole expedition is unjust one in my mind on account of the intimate connection is sending here had with the opium trade, but we shall find very few expeditions that have not had a good deal to find fault with in them. There is a way some have of saying that 'it will all work well, and that good will come out of evil,' which is only a sheer excuse for leaving themselves in indolence. For my part, I am far from being sure that this turn up is going to advance the cause of the Gospel half so much as we think it is. England has taken the opium trade upon herself nationally, and can that be a cause to bless? for the success of her arms here would extend that wicked traffic ten thousand times more than the Church is ready to extend her stakes here."¹⁸ In 1850, in view of the rising tension between the native Chinese and the Englishmen, he pointed out again that "the poverty induced by the opium trade is pressing harder and harder upon them (the Chinese people), and the lower classes are devoting themselves to robbing, piracy, and emigration in order to procure food and work."¹⁹ Because of his consistent stand on the issue, when the new version of his *Middle Kingdom* was released from the press in October 1883, almost all the reviews by English readers condemned his "opium intolerance—his settled conviction that England, by reason of her opium policy, was at the bottom of much of the present misery in China."²⁰

Williams was also critical of French diplomats' excessive intervention in the cases of controversies and conflicts between missionaries, converts and

¹⁸ *The Life and Letters*, p. 122.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

antichristian Chinese. In November 1870, at great efforts of China's leading statesman Tseng Kuo-fan (1811-1872), the "Tientsin Catastrophe"²¹ was almost settled. According to Williams, "the French Charge has received 460,000 Tls. (\$657,000), of which 250,000 Tls. are for the families of the victims and the rest for the buildings destroyed. The acceptance of this sum seem to me to close all warlike action on the part of France, but I hear that Rochebovart (the French Charge) says that he has left his country free either to fight or make up. The American mission chapels are paid for—4,500 taels—and the English soon will be. ...What a pest France is in this world! She never learns to treat others justly, nor is she content to mind her own affairs, while the mass of people are almost as ignorant as heathen, and quite as superstitious. She has made more wars, more trouble, more tyranny, more persecution, than any other Christian (so-called) nation."²²

During Williams' diplomatic career as secretary and interpreter in Peking, the most respectable American Minister he had worked with was Mr. Anson Burlingame (1820-1870; served as the minister from 1861 to 1867). Early in 1860, when Congress decided to return the surplus and accumulated interest of the indemnity (claimed mainly by the Americans who had the property loss during the wars in China) to China, Williams made a proposal to use it for establishing "an American-Chinese College in China, in which Chinese students should be instructed in Western learning and American students could receive such instruction as would fit them for positions in the consular, diplomatic, customs and commercial life China.

²¹ For the details of the incident, see Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and Growth of Chinese Anti-foreignism 1860-1870*. Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 229-261.

²² *The Life and Letters*, pp. 386-387

Anson Burlingame supported this proposal, and it seemed to have met with approval of President Lincoln.” However, it was not realized because “Congress took no action on it.” Dennett praised Williams’ proposal as the “most notable one” because “in it was clearly foreshadowed the system of ‘Indemnity students’ for which provision was made at the time of the return of the Boxer Indemnity surplus nearly 50 years later.”²³

Burlingame was known by for his “cooperative policy” toward China. As defined by him, “that policy is briefly this: An agreement on the part of the Treaty Powers to act together upon all material questions; to stand together in defense of their treaty rights, but determined at the same time to give those treaties a generous construction; determined to maintain the foreign system of customs, and to support it in a pure administration and upon a cosmopolitan basis; an agreement to take no cession of territory at the treaty ports, and never to menace the territorial integrity of China.”²⁴ The policy was seconded by Sir. Frederic Bruce, the British Minister in China, for he also recognized that Britain’s interests in China were depend upon a Chinese central authority whose jurisdiction throughout the empire was unquestioned.²⁵ “Despite the opposition of the foreign trading communities along the coast (the bitterness and arrogance of whose bearing towards the natives can be measured and understood only by those who are familiar with the principles and conduct of foreign adventurers in the East), the Burlingame policy succeeded before long in establishing an equitable friendship with the leading statesmen in China, and in preserving their

²³ *Americans in Eastern Asia*, p. 330.

²⁴ *The Life and Letters*, p. 359. For a discussion of the context of Burlingame’s cooperative policy and his relations with Secretary William H. Seward of the State Department, see *Americans in Eastern Asia*, pp. 367-390.

²⁵ *China and Christianity*, p. 186-199.

country from the inevitable effects of a doctrine which if persisted in would have resulted in the disruption of the empire.”²⁶

On the other hand, after the upheaval of the Taiping rebellion and the Arrow War (so-called the “Second Opium War”), the leading Chinese statesmen such as Prince Kun, Tseng Kuo-fan, and Li Hung-chang (1823-1901) launched a number of reform programs for self-strengthening. The Tsungli Yamen, the newly founded foreign affairs department, went so far as to entrust Burlingame with China’s first mission to the West for the treaty revisions when it learned that Burlingame was going to retire in late 1867.²⁷ The Chinese Emperor’s rescript on the appointment ran as follows: “The envoy, Anson Burlingame, manage affairs in a friendly and peaceful manner, and is fully acquainted with the general relations between this and other countries; let him, therefore, now be sent to all the treaty powers as high minister.” This was apparently a favorable recognition of the “cooperative policy” promoted by Burlingame, and as evaluated by F.W. Williams, the author of *Anson Burlingame and the First Chinese Mission to the Foreign Powers*, “the greatest compliment ever paid by one great nation to another.”²⁸

²⁶ *The Life and Letters*, pp. 359. Burlingame was also known for his introduction to Prince Kun and the Tsungli Yamen of W.A.P. Martin and his translation of *Laws of All Countries*. See Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, eds., *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923*. Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 98.

²⁷ While there was a preliminary comparison of Burlingame mission and the Iwakura mission by Professor Tanaka Akira, the interesting topic deserves a more careful study in the future. See Tanaka Akira, *Meiji Ishin to Seiyo bunmei: Iwakura shisetsudan wa nani o mita ka*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, pp. 166-170.

²⁸ *The Life and Letters*, p. 371. Tyler Dennett considered F.W. Williams’ book “a very sympathetic biography which is based on all the known sources of information.” See *Americans in Eastern Asia*, p. 389.

IV Williams' Fight for Exiles, Coolies, Immigrants, and Sufferers

As is well known, Williams joined the "Morrison" adventure from Macao in 1837 in an attempt to repatriate seven shipwrecked Japanese and open communication with their countrymen. But the American ship was fired in both the bay of Edo and the bay of Kagoshima due to Japan's seclusion policy. Upon leaving Japan, Williams and his fellows realized that "there was little prospect of being received at any other port: moreover our men (shipwrecked Japanese) declared that their lives would be in jeopardy if they should now be received anywhere, or if they should attempt to steal ashore under cover of night....Their disappointment was great for their expectations had been raised to the highest pitch; and three of them shaved their heads like Buddhist priests, in order that the hair might grow equally, thereby showing their determination to live among foreigners. All of them agree to go quietly back and become perpetual exiles."²⁹

The seven men were finally brought back to Macao and employed by the missionaries in one way and another. As Williams recalled some forty years later, "two remained with Mr. Gutzlaff for many years; and two worked in my printing office at Macao.... Rikimatsu, the youngest man, went to Nagasaki with (British) Admiral Stirling in 1855 as his interpreter. He and Otsan, who lived at Shanghai, both showed in their correct lives that the faith which they had professed was a living principle. They were the first fruits of the church of Christ in Japan, whose numbers are now flocking in like doves to their windows."³⁰

Williams did not only fight for the Japanese exiles deprived of their

²⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

³⁰ *The Life and Letters*, p. 99.

rights to return home, but also fought for the Chinese coolies and immigrants. In early 1860, he stayed for a few weeks in Macao before taking a leave of absence from his duty as a diplomat, and learned that some American ships there had been participating in the coolie trade and carried off kidnapped men to Peru. He got so angry at his fellow countrymen's wrongdoing as to cause "the arrest of one vessel charged with having such unwilling freight on board, and presided at the examination of more than three hundred men, all of whom were released and sent home."³¹ It was in this connection that he wrote and circulated 6,000 copies of his only Chinese tract, entitled "Words to Startle Those Who Are Selling Their Bodies [to go] Abroad."³² He exposed the means employed by the Portuguese to beguile natives into accepting contracts for coolie labor, and criticized that "the Chinese have been dreadfully misused by these cooled dealers; in Macao, the Portuguese are not able to get workmen to come either to their houses and ships, so great a dread have the natives of being stolen and packed off to the barracoons. Over ten thousand Chinamen have been sent away in 1858, and half this number are already gone this year from here. The Portuguese are ruthless and reckless, and they get hold of natives ten times more the children of hell than themselves, and make these to act for them."³³

Williams' fight for the Chinese immigrants in California was during his tenure as Professor of Chinese language and literature at Yale. Some ten years earlier when the US-China Treaty of 1868 was signed between the Chinese Envoy Burlingame and Secretary Seward of the State Department, the latter was very much "concerned about the delays in the completion of

³¹ Ibid., pp. 325-326.

³² Ibid., p. 326.

³³ *The Life and Letters*, p. 326.

the Pacific railroad due to the inability of the contractors to secure labor.” As Burlingame explained later to Bismarck in Berlin, the treaty therefore offered “substantial protection to the Chinese in California,” because “a treaty being the supreme law of the land (the U.S.) overrides obnoxious local legislation against the Chinese immigrants.”³⁴ As the result, “there were large importations of coolies to work on the Pacific railroads and in 1869, out of a total of 10,000 railroad laborers, nine tenths of them were Chinese....By 1875 the number of Chinese on the Pacific coast, notwithstanding the large numbers who had returned to China, had risen to 100,000.”³⁵

Since Williams was quite familiar with the course of the treaty revisions, when the tide of anti-immigrants movement arose in the Pacific coast states in the late 1870s, he made great efforts to stem it and succeeded to some extent. He composed an elaborate paper entitled “Chinese Immigration” to fight against the popular prejudice, reading it before the Social Science Association at Saratoga in September, 1879 and having it published afterwards in a brochure. He drew up a petition, which was signed by the entire faculty of Yale College, to urge President Hayes to veto the Chinese Immigration Bill of 1879. He stated in it that ““if this Bill becomes an Act some results may ensue which should be considered. The privilege of self-government depends at present upon the sanctity and stipulations of the treaty of 1858. The Chinese Government has never shown any intention to abrogate those treaties forced from it by Western nations, though its authorities chafe under the confessed disabilities it places them in regard to complete jurisdiction on their own soil. Therefore, if the first step be taken by

³⁴ *Americans in Eastern Asia*, p. 540.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

our government in changing treaty stipulations, we furnish the other party with all example and argument needed, according to the uses of international law, to justify it in abrogating this principle of extra-territoriality. To do so will throw out our countrymen living in China from the protection of our laws, and neutralize consular interference in upholding them, thereby turning the residents over to the provisions of Chinese law, and the usage of Chinese courts administered by ignorant or prejudiced officials.”³⁶ As he had wished, President Hayes vetoed the Bill in question resolutely, and sent a mission to Peking to modify the treaty and had the issue solved in a legitimate manner.

As a retired missionary and diplomat from China, he was always concerned about what was going on in China. “The great famine of 1878 in Northern China enlisted his keenest sympathies and aroused, as may be supposed in a case where suffering was involved, all the energies at his command for its alleviation. Whatever public notices and private appeals could effect in stimulating the pity of those about him, Mr. Williams tried eagerly and often. His knowledge of the afflicted provinces and his personal acquaintance with the missionaries of all denominations who were engaged upon the spot in organizing methods of relief, combined to make him a useful cooperator in circulating information and receiving contributions in America.”³⁷ Mr. William even tried then to induce Congress to return a portion of the indemnity surplus of 1859 in order to relieve the famine district.”³⁸ Unfortunately, the suggestion was not adopted because some Senators were not in favor of it due to their prejudice against the Chinese.

³⁶ *The Life and Letters*, pp. 430-431.

³⁷ *The Life and Letters*, pp. 431-432.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

V Appreciation of East Asian Traditions and Progressive Minds

In a sense, it could be said that Williams' appreciation of East Asian cultural traditions was fully revealed in the above-mentioned "Chinese Immigration," a paper aimed at rebutting the misunderstanding and prejudice about the Chinese. And one of its passages ran as follows.

The summary murder which the courts of California converted the Chinese into Indians, when it was desired to bring a law to bear against them, has spice of the grotesque in it. The physiologist, Charles Picketing, includes Chinese and Indians among the members of the Mongolian race; but the Supreme Court (of California) there held "that the term India, included the Chine or Mongolian race." It thus upheld a wrong, while it enunciated a misconception. It placed the subjects of the oldest government now existing upon a parity with a race that has never risen above from tribal relations. It included under one term a people whose literature dates its beginning before the Psalms or the Exodus, written in a language which the judge would not have called Indian if he had tried to learn it, and containing authors whose words have influenced more human beings than any other writings, with men whose highest attainment in writings have been a few pictures and tokens drawn on a buffalo robe. It equalized all the qualities of industry, prudence, skill, learning invention, and whatever gives security to life and property among mankind, with the instincts and habits of a hunter and a nomad. It stigmatized a people which has taught us how to make porcelain, silk, and gunpowder, given us the compass, shown us the use of tea, and offers us their system of selecting officials by

competitive examination, by classing them with a race which has despised labor, has had no arts, schools, or trade, and in the midst of the Californians themselves is content to dig roots for a living.³⁹

Here Williams enumerated with admiration almost all the major contributions to the world's civilization made by the traditional China, from the literary accomplishments, the technical innovations, to the civil service examination systems. Needless to say, China also had the shortcomings in many aspects of its society and culture and fell behind the Western nations significantly in the process of industrialization and modernization. But Williams chose not just to expose its "dark side", but also tried to understand her as a whole and introduce her merits with sympathy.

In July, 1883, after the revision and enlargement of his monumental work *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, and History of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitant*, he restated in the preface his motivations for writing such a book as follows.

In this revision the same object has been kept in view that as stated in the Preface to the first edition—to divest Chinese people and civilization of that peculiar and indefinable impression of ridicule which has been so generally given them by foreign authors. I have endeavored to show the better traits of their national character, and that they have had up to this time no opportunity of learning many things with which they are rapidly becoming acquainted....They will become fitted for taking up the work themselves and joining in the multiform operations of foreign civilizations. Soon railroads,

³⁹S.W. Williams, *Chinese Immigrants*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879, p. 31.

telegraphs, and manufactures will be introduced, and these must be followed by whatsoever may conduce to enlightening the millions of the people of China in every department of religious, political, and domestic life.⁴⁰

There were good grounds for Williams' optimism about China, for he had had more than forty years of experiences there during which he witnessed a number of great changes. He recalled that "on my arrival at Canton in 1833 I was basically reported, with two other Americans, to the hong-merchant Kingqua as *fan-kwai*, or 'foreign devils,' who had come to live under his tutelage. In 1874, as Secretary of the American Embassy at Peking, I accompanied the Hon. B. P. Avery to the presence of the Emperor Tungchi, when the Minister of the United States presented his letters of credence on a footing of perfect equality with the 'Son of Heaven.' With two such experiences in a lifetime,...it is not strange that I am assured of a great future for the sons of Han."⁴¹

Williams' experience also included his personal contacts with progressive minds of contemporary China. For example, "one of the members of the Foreign Office (the Tsungli Yamen), now dead, was the governor, in 1849, of the province of Fuhkien, and published a geographical and historical amount of other lands, the matter for which he had collected mostly from personal inquiries of Rev. David Abeel and of the son of Dr. Morrison. Being too favorable in his remarks on foreign lands, he was degraded for its publication and returned to his native village, about 1851, where he engaged in school-teaching. Fourteen years afterward, this man, Seu Ki-yu

⁴⁰ S.W. Williams, *The Middle Kingdom*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904, Preface in vol. I, pp. XIV-XV.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. XIV.

(1795-1873), recalled to the service of his sovereign for the same reason which had wrought his degradation, viz., his superior knowledge of foreigners, then more than ever needed in dealing with them at the capital. Our own government, at my suggestion, sent him a fine portrait of Washington, whom he had eulogized in his *Ying Wan Chi Lioh*, or 'Survey of What is within the Islands and Seas.' The last act of Mr. Burlingame as Minister to China was to present it to him in Peking. His infirmities ere long compelled him resign and return home, where he lingered a few years."⁴² The ups and downs of Seu Ki-yu's political life, just as Williams' two experiences in 1833 and 1874, symbolized the transition of China's attitudes toward the outside world during the mid-19th century.

It is natural to imagine, however, that Williams's appreciation of Chinese culture must have been nurtured by his close relations with his Chinese tutors and assistants. Of which, the Cantonese Lo Sun who participated in the second expedition to Japan in 1854 was the most reliable and welcome partner he had ever hired. As the Chief Interpreter then, Williams did have confidence in himself in reading and speaking Chinese. But he still needed a Chinese assistant to help him polish his translations and copy them in elegant calligraphy that would impress the Japanese negotiators headed by the Hayashi *Daigaku no kami*, because it had been the practice in Tokugawa Japan for the master of the Hayashi house (serving as the president of the shogunal college as well as a foreign affairs advisor to the Tokugawa shogun) to handle diplomatic correspondence in Chinese. In addition, Williams also planned to use his free time during the lengthy voyage to continue his study of Chinese and to work on translation projects.

⁴² *The Life and Letters*, pp. 417-418.

The two reasons justified the employment of a Chinese assistant.

In a letter to his wife from “Hakodadi, Island of Yesso” on May 21, 1854, Williams praised Lo as follows. “The non-arrival of the envoy and Dutch interpreter from the capital has thrown the whole business of interpreting upon me, and I can assure you I have business enough for twenty tongues to be kept up at trip-hammer rate the livelong day....so I bring Lo into considerable service to make one language help the other, and thereby avoid many mistakes. He takes a lively interest in all our operations and gets on admirably with the natives (Japanese); he is, indeed, the most learned Chinaman they have ever seen, and their delight in showing off to him their attainments in Chinese is increased when he turns a graceful verse or two for them upon a fan; of these he has written, I should think, more than half a thousand since coming to Japan, and nothing pleases him like being asked to do so.”⁴³

It was during this expedition which led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Kanagawa that Williams got to know the Japanese negotiators and deeply appreciated their open-mindedness and gentlemanly behavior. He wrote in his journal in June, 1854 that “in reviewing the proceedings of the last few months, it is fair to give the Japanese officers the credit of showing none of that hauteur and supercilious conduct, which the perusal of books might have reasonably led one to infer formed a part of their character. Compare the conduct of the Burmese when Crawford went to see them at Ava, or of the Chinese when Amherst went to Peking, with that of Hayashi and his colleagues, and down, too, in the subordinate ranks of officials, a class who

⁴³ *The Life and Letters*, p. 219. For the details about Lo (Luo), see De-min Tao, “Negotiating Language in the Opening of Japan: Luo Sun’s Journal of Perry’s 1854 Expedition,” *Japan Review* of the Nichibunken in Kyoto, No. 17 (2005), pp. 91-119.

are noted in China for their contemptuous treatment of foreigners, and everyone must admit their superiority in point of courtesy, their decorum, their willingness to receive suggestions, and their general good sense in discussing the matters brought forward for their acceptance. Perhaps more impracticable men could easily have been found, and these seven (commissioners) were probably chosen for their views being favorable for a change in the national policy.”⁴⁴

VI Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to explore Williams’ personal thoughts and feelings in relation with his accomplishments as a missionary, a diplomat, and a Sinologist, especially his less-known experiences as a humanitarian activist, and found that he had a kind of compassion with almost all kinds of losers and the unfortunate. While he joined the justifiable efforts by the Western nations to change the seclusion policies of China, he was critical of Britain’s opium trade, France’s excessive diplomatic interventions, and Portugal’s ruthless dealings of coolies. He was the first one to propose a plan for the establishment of an American-Chinese College for mutual understanding by returning the surplus and accumulated interest of the indemnity, which foreshadowed the “Indemnity Students” program in the early 20th-century China. He also persuasively defended the rights of the Chinese immigrants who constituted the major work force in the construction of the Pacific railroad based on the treaties of 1858 and 1868 signed between the two countries. And he was enthusiastically supportive of Anson Burlingame’s “cooperative policy” toward China which would have a

⁴⁴ *A Journal of the Perry Expedition to Japan*, p. 226.

kind of impact on the American “Open door” policy in the early 20th century.

Needless to say, Williams was basically motivated by a sense of Christian humanitarianism and “Manifest Destiny” of his time. In addition, I would assume, his lifelong love and pursuit in botany might also have an influence in shaping his profound benevolence. When Williams was recommended in 1832 by his father to go to China as a missionary printer, he was a devoted student in Chemistry and Botany at Rensselaer Institute of Troy in New York and confessed that “so deeply has the love of the works of God, and through them, Him, got imbued into me-and is almost now a second nature,-that I fear, if I went, any object of natural history would interest me more than any thing else. If this takes place, it will alter my course of life, which was to be a naturalist.”⁴⁵ When he was in Shimoda in 1854, his Chinese assistant Lo recorded in his journal that “the *azalea* is very abundant on the hills about, nor are the flowers rare, My friend made large collections of them, which he afterwards dried and preserved for future study, showing himself worth to be a disciple of Confucius, who advised his followers to read the Book of Odes, that they might become acquainted with names of birds and animals, plants and trees.”⁴⁶ His close friend Dr. Blodget, a missionary in Peking also recalled that “flowers were his especial delight. His fondness for botany became almost a passion, the beauty and wonder of growing things being ever a joy to him. Often on an evening’s ramble he would gather a bouquet to adorn the table, and was never weary in pointing out their beauty and interest....”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *The Life and Letters*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ “Journal of the Second Visit of Commodore Perry to Japan,” in Hawks, ed., *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*, vol. II, p. 404. As quoted in note 2 of this paper, Perry was very interested in Lo’s journal.

⁴⁷ *The Life and Letters*, p. 367.

There seemed to be a kind of consistent unity between his love for flowers and his love for peoples, because both flowers and peoples were the creature of God. According to Blodget, when Williams stayed in Peking he was “never unobservant of the simple country people whom he met in the streets or country lanes. He loved to give them kindly salutations, adding at times some questions as to the welfare of those whom he knew, and a bit of friendly help to those in need. His name and those of his children became in time well known to these poor peasants, and to this day its fragrance lingers in their comfortless homes.”⁴⁸ And during the great famine of 1878 in China, Blodget, then in Peking, received a letter from Williams, who expressed with deep concern that “I have already written Olyphant & Co. to send you \$100 to help you in supporting some of your people in their misery till God sends rain on the earth and revives life and work to his creature.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 367-368.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 432.