

The American Context of China's Christian Colleges and Schools Project
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The American Context of China's Christian Colleges and Schools project is investigating the interaction between the Christian educational institutions in China and American liberal arts colleges between 1900 and 1950.

Funded by the Luce Foundation, the project is based at Wesleyan University and directed by Professor Ellen Widmer of the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures. Through meetings held in 2002 and 2003 and the development of a web site (<http://www.library.yale.edu/div/colleges/>), the project will explore the relations between the Christian schools of China and the small, liberal arts colleges in America that supplied many of their faculty and certain of their core ideas. The values, structures, and activities of liberal arts colleges in the two countries during the first half of the 20th century will be examined.

An important goal of the project is to facilitate the identification and accessibility of the primary source materials held at the designated institutions to enhance their use in undergraduate student research. The first meeting of the project was a workshop at Wesleyan September 20-21, 2002. Organizers of the workshop were Ellen Widmer; Suzy Taraba, Head of Special Collections and University Archivist at Wesleyan; and Martha Lund Smalley, Research Services Librarian and Curator of the Day Missions Collection at the Yale University Divinity School Library.

The September 2002 workshop focused on gathering information and perspective on archival and print resources that document the interaction between American colleges and the Christian colleges in China. Participants in the workshop included representatives from eleven U.S. schools: Carleton, Claremont, DePauw, Dickinson, Grinnell, Haverford, Mt. Holyoke, Oberlin, Smith, Wellesley, and Wesleyan. Archivists reported on their holdings and on the history of involvement with China at their institutions. Additional papers were provided by Professors Ryan Dunch, Patricia Hill, and Peter Ng.

In preparation for the September 2002 workshop, the eleven participating U.S. institutions contributed information, documents, and photographs to a web site that is designed to raise the consciousness of undergraduate students regarding the availability of primary sources on this theme. Contributions from the participant colleges are supplemented by records from the China colleges held in archival collections at the Yale University Divinity School Library, including an online image database related to the China Christian colleges and universities: <http://research.yale.edu:8084/ydlchina/index.jsp>. It is hoped that

this web site will be an ongoing source of information and guidance for undergraduate research.

A second meeting of the project will be held in September 2003, organized by Ellen Widmer and Daniel Bays of Calvin College. This conference will focus on historical interpretation of the interaction between the U.S. and China colleges. Scholars will be invited to give papers that examine various facets of the U.S.-China interaction, exploring questions such as the following:

- What ideal of the educated person in China and the U.S was reflected in the values and structures of the liberal arts colleges?
- What historical processes were at work in both sets of schools?
- What were the assumptions and expectations that produced these schools and how did they change over time?
- How was the liberal arts ideal manifested in the curriculum, pageantry, dress, music, architecture, physical education, education for women, school traditions, school governance, fund-raising, etc.?
- What was the role of religion, science, race, and culture in creating "well-educated women and men?"
- What were the weaknesses or flaws in realizing the ideal? How did the various denominations differ in their approach to education?
- How was this reflected in the colleges in China? And especially, what can we learn from the contrasts and similarities between the Chinese and American experiences?

The fact that many graduates of the Christian colleges have achieved prominence in various walks of life in China over several decades, and that when permitted in the 1980s, graduates of all the former Christian colleges formed active alumni/ae associations, indicates the importance that these organizations had in Chinese life during the twentieth century.

Another focus of the 2003 conference will be how missionary experience abroad carried influenced college curricula and campus life at American institutions that had a special relationship with one of the Chinese Christian colleges. Is it coincidence, for example, that not long after the Christian Colleges were founded, Wesleyan University initiated a course on comparative government in 1914, one that included units on India, China, and Japan? Between the

1910s and the late 1930s, campus publications at Wesleyan and elsewhere help to detail a growing interest in China at American institutions, particularly when they chronicled home visits of graduate missionaries who came in pursuit of financial contributions and manpower for Chinese and other foreign schools. Throughout the Republican era there was a constant stream of American graduates of liberal arts colleges who made their way to and then back home from China. At the very least, this dynamic helped to internationalize the campuses from which these graduates emerged. Oberlin's strong consciousness of its ties to Shanxi Province is one particularly tangible example of how reverse influences from China had an effect on American soil. And there is evidence to suggest that Americans with China experience, in concert with those whose missionary experience took them to other countries and cultures, created a wave that gave rise to, or significantly altered, such disciplines as anthropology and linguistics. The inception of area studies programs in the postwar era, along with the study of comparative religion and comparative botany are other direct legacies of missionary experience abroad. Thus even decades after the Christian college era ended in China in the early 1950s, important traces of its impact continue to be visible both in the U.S. and in China.



University of Nanking Students, no date
photo courtesy of Martha Smalley from the China Colleges and Universities Image Database, Yale Divinity Library
Source: <http://research.yale.edu:8084/ydlchina/index.jsp>



Ginling College Faculty in Nanjing, 1927

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