

Missionary-Activists and the Transformation of US-China Cultural Relations through Liberal Arts Education (Proposal for Wesleyan University, Spring 2024)

Workshop Description

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, missionary-activists, who hailed from liberal arts institutions across New England, traveled to China and made substantial impact through their educational and religious work in areas such as promoting equality of women, education of girls, ending of child-marriage and public health. In a time of rising bilateral tensions between the United States and China, the historical experiences of these missionary-activists offer important insights on how to rebuild trust between the people of both countries and bring about constructive dialogue.

The proposed faculty workshop will bring together scholars and archivists from liberal arts institutions in New England and beyond to develop a resource website showcasing the rich archival materials of these missionary-activists, devise strategies to better utilize these resources for research and teaching, and plan public engagement activities such as exhibitions and outreach programs. The liberal arts colleges of the four co-organizers shared a deep historic connection with educational institutions in China. Annetta Thompson Mills, whose personal papers are at Smith College, founded the first formal school for the deaf in China in 1887. The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions papers at Wellesley has also been extensively used and cited in studies about missionary-activists. The personal papers of Joseph Beech (Wesleyan's Class of 1899), who served as the founding president of West China Union University, offer detailed insight on how liberal arts education inspired a generation of student activists in China. The proposed workshop builds on the achievements of the "American Context for Chinese Christian Colleges"—a project funded by the Henry Luce Foundation in 2003. The edited volume of essays *China's Christian Colleges* (Stanford University Press, 2009) demonstrated how the historical experiences of these missionaries addressed key issues such as multiculturalism, diversity, and globalization. The two-day workshop will attract researchers in social sciences and humanities, archivists from libraries with substantive collections of missionary papers, student activists interested in social justice issues, and undergraduates developing research projects.

We plan to have a two-day workshop at Wesleyan in late February 2024. We envision this workshop to be a hands-on workshop that fully embraces the "teacher-scholar model of the liberal arts curriculum and to be composed of two parts. The first part of the workshop will bring together scholars, recent graduates who have submitted honors theses, and curators who have utilized archival collections in the liberal arts colleges. In the second part of the workshop, participants will visit Special Collections and Archives, the Archaeological Collections at Exley Science Center, and College of East Asian Studies, to work on the materials and develop lesson plans to incorporate these materials in their curriculum. The workshop will conclude with a planning session to develop a resource website that will provide a much more expansive list of historical materials for further research. We will draw on the expertise of Wesleyan's Traveler's Lab and Quantitative Analysis Center to develop visualization tools to search and locate research material of interest to both undergraduate and faculty researchers.

Workshop Leaders and Organizing Committee:

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Jessica Moyer, Smith College

Ying Jia Tan, Wesleyan University

Hong Zhang, Colby College (non-AALAC)

Event Support

Wendi Field Murray, Wesleyan University, Archaeological and Anthropological Collections

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