

Superficial Reciprocity: The Chinese Educational Mission and the Burlingame Treaty

Guochao Zhao

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) was China's first governmental sponsored study abroad program in the United States. Started in 1872 and terminated in 1881, this nine-year project was an integral part of the Qing government's Self Strengthening Movement, which sought to modernize China through, as the contemporary slogan put it, "Chinese studies for the essence, Western studies for the practical application." In addition, through their experiences in the United States, the CEM graduates became the core nucleus of China's modern state bureaucracy.¹ As a result, the CEM forms an extremely important part of the story of China's late nineteenth-century modernization, and of early US-China relations.

As many scholars have pointed out, the CEM was made possible by the 1868 Burlingame Treaty, negotiated in Washington between the US Secretary of State William Seward and the Chinese delegation's chief diplomat, the American Anson Burlingame. Overall, Burlingame hoped the treaty would "placate the Western nations,"² and serve as a model for diplomatic reciprocity on a "strictly reciprocal basis"³ between western nations and China. Scholars have largely agreed, calling it "the first equal treaty between the two countries, and perhaps the only equal treaty the Qing signed in the nineteenth century."⁴

And yet a closer look at the origins of the CEM, and the treaty's seventh article, which granted Chinese most favored nation treatment in access to American government controlled schools, reveals that the treaty was far from the reciprocal agreement many assume. This paper uses the seventh article and subsequent negotiations over the CEM to demonstrate that the treaty ultimately served American interests.

Scholars exploring the CEM's origins generally assume that the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty is the key for establishing the mechanism by which Chinese students could study in the United States. So for instance, Liang Biyin in her book writes that this treaty clause, is the "contractual basis" for the CEM to be conducted in the United States.⁵ Few, however, have actually analyzed or even questioned why this particular treaty provision was made in 1868.

The seventh article was certainly not written to satisfy demands from the Chinese side. In fact, the Chinese government at that time was not ready to send students to study in any foreign country. Nor did the Chinese educational system reward or admire overseas education. After all, the first Chinese graduate from an American school and the CEM's most vigorous advocate, Yung Wing, spent more than a decade failing to convince Qing government officials to adopt just this sort of educational project. Despite his belief that studying overseas was a vital part of China's modernization, Chinese officials repeatedly ignored him.

While the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty granted Chinese students most favored nation treatment, this paper shows how the original purpose was far more limited and gave only an appearance of reciprocity. This paper reexamines the US State Department archives to reveal vital clues that explain that the seventh article was actually intended to build an interpreter-training school to provide American consulates with qualified interpreters and consuls in China. The stipulation of the most favored treatment to Chinese students was, therefore, created to maintain the appearance of treaty reciprocity. The CEM was therefore not the planned outcome of the treaty, but an unforeseen development in which neither the Chinese nor the American governments were deeply involved. Instead, the CEM was established through the private efforts of individuals like Yung Wing, who turned the treaty stipulation's original purpose on its head. In short, rather than as a symbol of diplomatic reciprocity, the educational provision in the treaty's seventh article was actually inserted to benefit US diplomatic and commercial interests in China, not to lay the groundwork for student exchange. This not only challenges our understanding of the CEM and the Burlingame Treaty, but also suggests that early Sino-US relations were far more unequal than they at first appeared.

The Perseverance of Yung Wing

The CEM was China's first governmental attempt at sending its people abroad for education. Between 1872 and 1875, the Qing government dispatched to New England 120 students in annual installments of 30 students. They were expected to live and study there for fifteen years to acquire the "foreign techniques" relevant to the army and navy, such as astronomy, mathematics and engineering, so that "China could gradually be strengthened."⁶ Although this project was terminated prematurely in 1881, the students who had participated still "made groundbreaking contributions" to the technological development of China and "served as vital mediators" between China and the West during the last decades of the Qing dynasty.⁷

The CEM also helped nurture China's modern diplomacy. Six years before the Chinese legation was built in Washington, CEM officials undertook the sorts of tasks usually reserved for diplomats. They reported to the Qing government, for instance, on the activities of Chinese communities in the Americas,⁸ and participated in President Ulysses Grant's inauguration.⁹ The CEM was therefore "practical spadework" that prepared the way for sending permanent diplomatic legations, and was a "valuable training ground" for future Chinese diplomatic and consular personnel.¹⁰

The most favored nation provision in the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty launched this educationally and diplomatically influential project. This particular stipulation is therefore believed to indicate China's willingness to conduct an educational exchange with the United States.¹¹ But the experiences of Yung Wing, to a large extent, tells quite a different story.

Starting in the 1830s, Yung Wing spent nearly two decades abroad studying in Macao, Hong Kong and the United States. He eventually obtained a degree from Yale in 1854, which unquestionably distinguished him from his traditionally educated Chinese counterparts. This particular background also influenced his belief that Western education was "the most feasible method" for the "reformation and regeneration" of China.¹² To realize this ambition, he was, as he wrote in his autobiography, "determined that the rising generation of China should enjoy the same educational advantages that I had enjoyed."¹³ This ideal, plus his experience in the United States, and his persistent urging upon Qing officials of the necessity of foreign education, were critical for the imperial court

to approve the CEM.¹⁴ Accordingly, he was hailed as the “head and front of this program.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, Yung Wing went through “thick and thin” over seventeen years of “laboring and waiting.”¹⁶ One year after graduating from Yale, Yung Wing returned to China in 1855, aiming to materialize his dream of overseas education by presenting his proposal to some influential officials.¹⁷ But the civil servant examination system largely hampered his efforts, because it was based on mastering traditional Chinese literature, and required no expertise in Western learning. This examination was not abolished until 1905, and was almost the only way for a young man to enter officialdom and subsequently attain fame and fortune. Given that, most Chinese in the 1850s did not find it appealing to go abroad for an education. As Yung Wing’s own experience demonstrated, even with a Yale diploma, he had no access to influential officials, because he had not been educated in the traditional exam system. Thus, from 1855 to 1860 he “was going from one thing to another and keeping himself poor” while accomplishing nothing.¹⁸

The Self-Strengthening Movement the Qing government launched in early 1860s provided an opportunity for people with overseas backgrounds like Yung Wing to have influence among progressive Chinese officials. Subsequently, he was introduced to Zeng Guofan (曾國藩), who was one the most powerful officials as the viceroy of the Liangjiang area (兩江總督)¹⁹, and was a major advocate of this self-strengthening campaign. But this movement was not intended to comprehensively reform China. Instead, it only aimed at protecting the Confucian order through adopting Western technology.²⁰ This meant that the scope of Zeng’s modernization was primarily confined to the military, and he had little knowledge or concern about Western education more broadly.²¹ This narrow perception compelled Yung Wing to put his plan of study abroad “in the background” during his first interview with Zeng, although the influence of this influential man strongly tempted him to bring it up.²² Although following the meeting Yung Wing received an official position, the first mission Zeng assigned him was purchasing machinery in America. This had little to do with his passion for foreign education.

Despite the Self-Strengthening Movement’s attempts to modernize aspects of China’s bureaucracy, the conservatism of Chinese officialdom was a major obstacle that held back the momentum of implementing any study abroad plan.

Compared with schools that taught Western subjects in China, sending students abroad was a far more rapid way of training Chinese students who could then oversee the factories, and replace hired foreign experts whose loyalty to China was suspect.²³ But conservative officials, still the majority, insisted that learning from other countries damaged the nation's dignity and betrayed its traditional values.²⁴ Fearing these dominant influences, even if Li Hongzhang (李 章)²⁵ in 1865 envisioned sending students abroad for an education that would help China step into the future, he still had to keep this opinion private.²⁶

He served as a translator from 1865 to 1870,²⁷ and during those years most Qing officials heard his lobbying with indifference.²⁸ Facing opposition from "all forces of conservatism," even influential and progressive officials with prominent positions like Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang who favored his plan, "were not ready to venture the attempt to carry it through with the Imperial Government."²⁹ Additionally, when Yung Wing first tried to propose his plan of foreign education in 1868, the year the Burlingame Treaty was concluded, he first brought out other proposals, and placed the educational plan second in the sequence to avoid its "over prominence."³⁰ However, even these meticulous preparations failed to convince any official to bring his plan before the imperial court.³¹

Yung Wing's waiting, was eventually yet unexpectedly terminated by the Tianjin Massacre (天津教案) in 1870. This incident was due to the locals' misunderstanding on the work conducted by the Roman Catholic Church in the city, and resulted in the burning down of foreigner-owned properties such as a church and hospital, and the murder of several priests and nuns. To settle matters, a commission including Zeng Guofan was assigned to negotiate with the representatives of foreign powers, and Yung Wing was called on to act as the interpreter. He used the opportunity to restate his plan, and used the riot to drive home his points about the dangers caused by popular ignorance, as well as the disadvantages the commissioners encountered when negotiating directly with foreigners.³² This time, Zeng Guofan agreed to incorporate his project in a memorial to the throne and subsequently composed another two with Li Hongzhang to elaborate the planning. Eventually, the CEM obtained approval from the imperial court in 1872. To Yung Wing, the role played by the Tianjin Massacre in materializing his enterprise was entirely unexpected.³³ Ironically, without the Tianjin Massacre, it is possible the CEM plans would have been

further delayed.

Based on Yung Wing's frequent and often frustrated attempts to push forward educational opportunities abroad, we can see that the CEM was not a top-down project pushed by the Chinese government. Before it approved carrying out the CEM, in fact, it was barely involved in materializing this overseas education scheme. Instead, the realization of the CEM was predominantly attributed to Yung Wing's perseverance as well as the patronage of a handful of open-minded officials, and was fortuitously accelerated by the Tianjin Massacre.

In this sense, the CEM was actually a premature project for China. Its establishment rested on the work of just a few individuals, it was launched when the momentum for sending students abroad was still weak, and only came about because of an accidental opportunity provided by the Tianjin Massacre. Thus, even in 1872, when the first batch of the CEM students were dispatched to America four years after the Burlingame Treaty was signed, the Qing government was still not willing to fully embrace the idea of study abroad.

The Qing government's plans quickly confirmed this assumption. For instance, although Yung Wing's American education and the decisive role he played in turning the CEM into a reality would have made him the obvious choice to lead the mission, he was instead appointed as its associate commissioner. The commissioner's position was instead given to Chen Lanbin (陈兰彬), a traditionally-educated Chinese scholar official who knew no English and who measured things and students only by Chinese educational standards.³⁴ He was in fact selected "as a counterbalance to Yung Wing"³⁵ because in principle and significance, the CEM "was against the Chinese theory of national education."³⁶ This peculiar arrangement indicates the Qing government's concern over the influence an overseas education would have on student behavior and thought. This reveals that the Qing government was not thoroughly prepared for cultivating overseas students when the CEM launched.³⁷

All told, the Qing government's lack of preparation, its ambivalence, and its limited involvement in the CEM's construction reveal that the Burlingame Treaty's most favored nation stipulation was not made at the Chinese government's request. Instead, the clause was inserted to cater to United States interests.

The Burlingame Treaty and its Seventh Article

Anson Burlingame was critical to the signing of the Burlingame Treaty. After serving in Beijing as the United States minister to China for six years from 1862 to 1867, he was appointed as China's envoy to lead its first diplomatic mission to the West asking their "forbearance and patience."³⁸ To be more precise, the mission asked foreign powers "to give to those treaties which were made under pressure of war, a generous and Christian construction."³⁹ Burlingame's amicable attitude towards China and the country's lack of qualified diplomats jointly contributed to his nomination.

The conclusion of the 1868 Burlingame Treaty is the culmination of the delegation Burlingame led to the United States. The pact recognized the jurisdiction of Chinese authorities within land granted to America for trade and commerce. It confirmed the empire's control over its own dominions, and it denied the right of the United States to intervene in the domestic administration of China. The treaty also contains stipulations such as granting Chinese and Americans the right of free migration to their mutual countries, and affirming the most favored nation treatment to Chinese who visited or resided in America and vice versa. It thus reflected the spirit of diplomatic reciprocity. Burlingame considered it "the out growth of that co-operative policy,"⁴⁰ which attached importance to the territorial and administrative integrity of China, and which he conceived and implemented when he served in Beijing. Wu Tingfang (伍庭芳), the Qing government's sixth minister to the United States, regarded the treaty as "the first attempt on the part of a Western power to apply the principle of reciprocity in dealing with the Government and people of China."⁴¹

While recognizing the Burlingame Treaty's attempts at reciprocity and amity, it is worth noting that the treaty was reached when there was a wide power gap between China and the United States. This imbalance of power could make articles appear reciprocal that in fact could only be implemented by the Americans.⁴² For example, the clause that conferred Chinese and Americans the right to free migration to each other's country benefited the United States more because it needed workers for constructing the transcontinental railroad. With this particular provision, as Burlingame himself contended, "we have been enabled to push the Pacific Railroad over the summit of Sierra Nevada."⁴³ China, on the other hand, had no urgent need for American immigrants. The demand

for Chinese labors may also have led the treaty to forbid the coolie trade, since Burlingame thought such a ban would encourage free emigration.⁴⁴ The coolie trade was also prohibited from the US, though the possibility of this trade originating in America was “neither very common or even likely.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the most favored nation treatment concerning travel and residence failed to protect the people of the two countries equally, as the anti-Chinese movements in the US during the 1870s overtly demonstrated.

To put it simply, in the light of the power gap between the two countries, it is not surprising that the treaty ultimately served the interests of the United States, and that some of the reciprocal stipulations were to China just paper promises that were actually made merely for an appearance of reciprocity. This argument provides the lens to analyze the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty.

The treaty's seventh article gave the reciprocal right to Americans and Chinese to attend government-controlled schools, and further stipulated that Americans and Chinese may establish and maintain schools on each other's territory. Given the lack of interest among Qing officials in Yung Wing's plan for a study abroad program, and that the CEM was not finally launched until four years after the Burlingame Treaty, the most favored nation clause for Chinese students was actually another form of reciprocity on paper only. When the treaty was signed there Qing officials demonstrated little interest in sending students abroad. It was also extremely unlikely that, given circumstances, the Qing government would found schools in the United States, and equally unlikely that Americans would study in Chinese government-controlled schools. Therefore, in reality, the goal of the seventh article was to allow American citizens to build and operate schools in China. The Americans hoped that this would solve a significant problem they faced operating in China.

The Interpreter and Consul Problem of the United States in China during the 1860s

No direct documents survive from the Burlingame Treaty negotiations because they were not recorded. It was instead “conducted by means of personal interviews and confidential conversations” between Anson Burlingame and the Secretary of State William Seward.⁴⁶ But despite that, the treaty's

motivation can still be effectively explored by investigating the correspondence between the U.S. legation and consulates in China and the Department of State during Burlingame's term. As the preamble of this treaty claims, it was concluded based on circumstance that had arisen after a previous pact signed in 1858. Meanwhile, it was an embodiment of Anson Burlingame's six years of ministerial experiences in China.⁴⁷ Additionally, the timeframe of these documents almost paralleled Yung Wing's pleading with Chinese officials to adopt the CEM.

Throughout the official correspondence, no official encouraged Chinese to study in America, nor did they mention the possibility of establishing Chinese schools in America or Americans attending schools controlled by the Chinese government. This absence of discussion further proves that the provision granting most favored nation treatment to Chinese students was merely a superficial reciprocity.

On the other hand, American diplomats in China constantly urged the State Department to establish a school in China for interpreter-training. According to Burlingame, a lack of trained interpreters hampered American interests. Creating a school in China to teach American youth the Chinese language would effectively place the consulates of the United States, he wrote, "in a more respectable position."⁴⁸ Because of their language fluency, in the future those trained interpreters could assist in American consulates and become Chinese-speaking consuls.⁴⁹ The insufficiency of qualified interpreters and consuls helped drive an interest in education on the American side, and is a manifestation of the peculiar Sino-American relationship in the 1860s.

China and the United States in the 1860s "were not important to, or even interested in, each other," and the American Civil War further aggravated America's indifference.⁵⁰ The involvement of the United States in China at that time was hence chiefly confined to carrying on a "relatively small but profitable trade" and protecting its citizens there.⁵¹ Its arrangements concerning the diplomatic, consular establishments and personnel in China, is an illustration of this moderate involvement as well.

In 1863, the Secretary William Seward rejected a request for reorganizing and reforming the legation and consulates in China. Arriving amidst the American Civil War, the request was pushed aside because it was "absolutely necessary" to avoid attention on interests that were not important or urgent.⁵²

As a result, the American legation in Beijing was dwarfed by the “extensive precinct” of other powers.⁵³

In addition to deficient working conditions, the legation and consulates also constantly faced a lack of personnel. As Burlingame noted, the American and British legation “have the same law to execute, and the same diplomatic questions to consider.”⁵⁴ However, Burlingame could not find anyone to write for him, while the British minister, “has three interpreters, two attachés, and ten consular pupils, and he keeps them all busy.”⁵⁵

In terms of the consulates, Britain in 1863 had consuls and interpreters at all of the fourteen treaty ports in China, and almost every consul spoke Chinese, while the United States only had eight consuls and three interpreters.⁵⁶ For “practicing the utmost possible economy” during the Civil War, the position of consul in some ports was often assumed by merchants because the U.S. government had no need to pay them a salary.⁵⁷ Besides, regardless of whether those consular positions were undertaken by merchants or professional diplomats, they were frequently changed and nearly all of them were illiterate in Chinese.⁵⁸ Consequently, they could neither directly converse with native officials, nor be credible judges and representatives of their countrymen in China.⁵⁹ Samuel Wells Williams, who acted as the secretary and chargé d'affaire in the American legation during the 1860s, noted that those consuls inevitably “weaken our national character with the Chinese rulers” and “injure the standing of the consular office in the estimation of Americans themselves.”⁶⁰

Because the United States claimed extraterritoriality in China, interpreters were crucial for ensuring all cases in the consular courts between Americans and natives could be intelligently decided.⁶¹ In addition, interpreters were required to present in the Chinese courts, and act as assessors when Americans faced criminal and civil action against Chinese.⁶² Corresponding with native officials was also another important responsibility, and all these duties were, as the consul general George Seward in Shanghai wrote, “extensive and difficult.”⁶³ The manner in which such works were performed, “will always go far to determine the nature of our relations with the authorities.”⁶⁴

Yet, the United States was unlike other powers such as Britain, France and Russia, whose consulates in China “are all supplied with trained interpreters.”⁶⁵ The American consuls were, by contrast, “compelled to request the aid of missionaries in their interviews or correspondence with Chinese officials,” or

even turn to Chinese interpreters whose English was often imperfect.⁶⁶ This chronic embarrassment resulted in continuous requests to the Department of State for competent interpreters, and rendered Samuel Williams afraid of “wearying by repetition.”⁶⁷ Having interpreters was “vital to the efficiency of our consular service and measurably to the honor of our nation,” he emphasized, so “the country must educate them.”⁶⁸ Consul general George Seward shared this view. He saw the absurdity of a “consulate in China without the means of communication with the Chinese” and believed this awkwardness could be avoided by establishing interpreter-training schools.⁶⁹ By doing so, he reckoned, the consulates may subsequently be made “comparatively effective.”⁷⁰ Moreover, because those interpreters would be “eligible to the higher posts” after having some training in the consulates, the school was thought to help prepare Americans for consuls who were conversant with the language and customs of China.⁷¹

Evidently, Burlingame, Samuel Williams and George Seward all agreed on the need to establish an interpreter-training school. They understood the critical role played by American diplomatic officers in China. Before Secretary of State John Hay inaugurated the Open Door Policy in 1899, America’s China policy was often what its chief diplomatic representative in that empire said it was, rather than formulated at the Department of State.⁷² Given this, Burlingame promoted the education plan to reflect “lasting honor upon our beloved country,”⁷³ and pointed out that even some relatively small countries such as Holland and Portugal had students in China training for consular duties.⁷⁴ So, even a few months before Burlingame headed for America to negotiate the treaty, he still expected the adoption of this plan.⁷⁵ William Seward, however, did not respond to Burlingame’s repeated request for consideration. On top of longstanding indifference at the State Department, the American Civil War only aggravated the problem, making China diplomacy less important than America’s national survival.

All of this is the key context for understanding the inclusion of the educational provision in the Burlingame Treaty. It was not to promote Chinese students studying in America. Instead, the need to train interpreters for American diplomatic and commercial negotiations, was the actual intention for including the educational reciprocity provision.

Conclusion

After the signing of the Burlingame Treaty, Anson Burlingame claimed that it was an agreement in which “the United States have asked nothing for themselves.”⁷⁶ As evidence, he specifically pointed to the seventh article, which “opens the gleaming gate of our public institutions to the students of China.”⁷⁷ For this reason, many scholars praise this treaty for its reciprocity and amity. Moreover, when exploring the origins of the CEM, scholars usually agree with Burlingame that the treaty laid the legal foundation for the CEM. However, they rarely analyze or even question why this particular article was placed in the treaty.

As this essay has shown, the treaty stipulation on education was in fact not made to satisfy the demands of the Chinese government. It had no such demand when it negotiated the Burlingame Treaty, and had displayed little interest in educating students overseas. Nor was the Qing government eager to send students abroad. Instead, it repeatedly ignored and rejected Yung Wing’s plans. Considering that Yung Wing was the CEM’s most vigorous advocate, this indifference demonstrates that the seventh article was included to satisfy American interests, rather than those of China.

The US State Department archives are vital to recovering the motivation of the Burlingame Treaty. Extensive correspondence demonstrates that the seventh article was actually intended to materialize the plan for building an interpreter-training school to fill American consulates with qualified interpreters and consuls in China. What’s more, a closer attention to this specific clause shows the stipulation of the most favored treatment to Chinese students was actually created to maintain the appearance of treaty reciprocity. Simply put, the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty was created to serve the American interests in respect to diplomacy and commerce in China, not as a path for student exchange.

As a result, we need to understand how the CEM was the unintended result of the Burlingame Treaty. The treaty’s original purpose was far more limited and gave only an appearance of reciprocity. In the end, neither the Chinese nor the American governments did much to develop the CEM. Instead, this educational project was predominantly launched by the efforts of private individuals like Yung Wing, who turned the treaty seventh article on its head.

Consequently, the paper challenges the current understanding of the CEM's origins. It also suggests that closer examination of the Burlingame Treaty is likely to reveal a much more nuanced understanding of this treaty's management of Sino-US relations in the 1860s. While the treaty was praised for its reciprocity and respectful treatment of the Chinese government, the seventh article suggests a broader pattern of surface reciprocity that disguised embedded American interests. The CEM, therefore, provides the possibility to re-examine the origins of early student exchange, as well as to deepen the history of early US-China relations.

Endnotes

- 1 Stacey Bieler, *"Patriots" or "Traitors"? A History of American-Educated Chinese Students* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), xii.
- 2 David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement: American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 108. Thomas La Fargue, *China's First Hundred: Educational Mission Students in the United States, 1872-1881* (Pullman: The State College of Washington Press, 1942), 32.
- 3 Thomas La Fargue, *China's First Hundred: Educational Mission Students in the United States, 1872-1881* (Pullman: The State College of Washington Press, 1942), 32.
- 4 Guoqi Xu, *Chinese and Americans: A Shared History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 58.
- 5 Biying Liang, *Chen Lanbin and the Diplomacy of Late Qing Dynasty* (Guangdong: Guangdong People's Press, 2011), 97.
- 6 Guofan Zeng, "The Memorial of Selecting and Sending Intellectual and Bright Lads to Study Abroad," in *Materials on Modern Chinese History: Self-Strengthening Movement* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1961), 153.
- 7 Stacey Bieler, *"Patriots" or "Traitors"? A History of American-Educated Chinese Students* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), xii.
- 8 Charles Desnoyer, "'The Thin Edge of the Wedge': The Chinese Educational Mission and Diplomatic Representation in the Americas, 1872-1875," *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (1992): 243-4.
- 9 Edward J. M. Rhoads, "In the shadow of Yung Wing: Zeng Laishun and Chinese Educational Mission to the United States," *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 1 (2005): 42.
- 10 Charles Desnoyer, "'The Thin Edge of the Wedge': The Chinese Educational Mission and Diplomatic Representation in the Americas, 1872-1875," *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (1992): 242-3.
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- 12 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), preface.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 14 "Mr. Low to Mr. Fish," Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, July 12, 1872, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1872p1/d84>.
- 15 Joseph H. Twitchell, "An Address Delivered before Kent Club of the Yale Law School, April 10, 1878," in *My Life in China and America*, ed. Yung Wing (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 87.
- 16 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 15.
- 17 Joseph H. Twitchell, "An Address Delivered before Kent Club of the Yale Law School, April 10, 1878," in *My Life in China and America*, ed. Yung Wing (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 89.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 19 The Liangjiang area (两 江 地 区) included Jiangsu Province, Anhui Province, Jiangxi Province and Shanghai (江 省、安徽省、江西省、上海市). As the viceroy, Zeng Guofan was in charge of the political, civil and military affairs in these places.
- 20 Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Stepping Forth into the World. The Chinese Educational Mission to the United States, 1872-1881* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 216.

- 21 Chris Robyn, *The Chinese Educational Mission to the United States. A Sino-American Historico-Cultural Synthesis, 1872-1881* (Master Dissertation, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996), 22.
- 22 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 52.
- 23 Thomas La Fargue, *China's First Hundred: Educational Mission Students in the United States, 1872-1881* (Pullman: The State College of Washington Press, 1942), 29.
- 24 Stacey Bieler, *"Patriots" or "Traitors"? A History of American-Educated Chinese Students* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 4.
- 25 Li Hongzhang was the protege of Zeng Guofan and was another main advocate of the Self-Strengthening Movement. He was in charge of the CEM after Zeng Guofan died in March, 1872.
- 26 Ni Shi, *Ideology and Tragedy: the Analysis of the Fate of the CEM Students*, (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press. 1996), 76.
- 27 Joseph H. Twitchell, "An Address Delivered before Kent Club of the Yale Law School, April 10, 1878," in *My Life in China and America*, ed. Yung Wing (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 91.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 60.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Joseph H. Twitchell, "An Address Delivered before Kent Club of the Yale Law School, April 10, 1878," in *My Life in China and America*, ed. Yung Wing (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 92.
- 33 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 61.
- 34 Ibid., 70.
- 35 Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Stepping Forth into the World. The Chinese Educational Mission to the United States, 1872-1881* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 78.
- 36 Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909), 63.
- 37 Ni Shi, *Ideology and Tragedy: the Analysis of the Fate of the CEM Students* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press. 1996), 146.
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- 43 Anson Burlingame, "Speech of Hon. Anson Burlingame," in *Reception and Entertainment of the Chinese Mission by the City of Boston* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1868), 27.
- 44 "Mr. Burlingame to Mr. Seward," Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United

- States, November 14, 1867, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1867p1/d444>.
- 45 John Schrecker, “‘For the Equality of Men-For the For the Equality of Nations’: Anson Burlingame and China’s First Embassy to the United States, 1868,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 17, no.1 (2010): 29.
- 46 Frederick W. Williams, *Anson Burlingame and the First Chinese Mission to the Foreign Powers* (New York: Scriber’s, 1912), 144-5.
- 47 Zhongbo Hu, *Sino-U.S. Educational Exchanges from the Perspective of Sino-U.S. Relations* (PhD Dissertation, Central China Normal University 2016), 31.
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Abstract

Superficial Reciprocity: The Chinese Educational Mission and the Burlingame Treaty

Guochao Zhao

Started in 1872 and terminated in 1881, the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) was China's first governmental sponsored study abroad program in the United States. It was an integral part of the Qing government's Self Strengthening Movement, and forms an extremely important part of the story of China's late nineteenth-century modernization.

The seventh article of the 1868 Burlingame Treaty granted Chinese most favored nation treatment in access to American government controlled schools. Therefore, scholars exploring the CEM's origins generally assume that this article is the key for establishing the mechanism by which this pioneering project was carried out in the United States. Additionally, they largely assume that this provision demonstrates that the Burlingame Treaty overall was the first equal treaty between China and the West.

However, few have actually analyzed or even questioned why this particular treaty provision was made. Closer study reveals that when the treaty was signed, China was not ready to send students to study in any foreign country. Nor did the Chinese educational system reward or admire overseas education. After all, the first Chinese graduate from an American school and the CEM's most vigorous advocate, Yung Wing, spent more than a decade failing to convince Qing government officials to adopt just this sort of educational project. Despite his belief that studying overseas was a vital part of China's modernization, Chinese officials repeatedly ignored him.

As a result, this paper reexamines US State Department archives to reveal vital clues that explain why that the seventh article was actually intended to build an interpreter-training school to provide American consulates with qualified interpreters and consuls in China. The stipulation of the most favored

treatment to Chinese students was, therefore, created to maintain the appearance of treaty reciprocity. In short, the treaty's seventh article was actually inserted to benefit US diplomatic and commercial interests in China, not to lay the groundwork for student exchange.

Although the seventh article of the Burlingame Treaty granted Chinese students most favored nation treatment, this paper shows how the original purpose was far more limited and gave only an appearance of reciprocity. The CEM was not a planned outcome of the treaty, but an unforeseen development in which neither the Chinese nor the American governments were deeply involved. Instead, the CEM was established through the private efforts of individuals like Yung Wing, who turned the treaty stipulation's original purpose on its head. Closer attention to the seventh article of the treaty, therefore, demonstrates that aspects of the treaty that look reciprocal were in fact ways of strengthening the US position in China. As a result, this paper challenges the current understandings of the Burlingame Treaty, and re-examines both the origins of the CEM and the early years of US-China diplomacy.

Keywords: Chinese Educational Mission, Burlingame Treaty, Sino-US Relations

