

[Email this citation](#)

6. God's China: *The Middle Kingdom of Samuel Wells Williams*

[Introduction](#)

[1. Xanadu](#)

[2. Romantic](#)

[Domesticity](#)

[3. The China](#)

[Effect](#)

[4. China in](#)

[Miniature](#)

[5. Floating](#)

[Ethnology](#)

6. God's China

[Early Years](#)

[China Mission](#)

[Pride](#)

[Battering Ram](#)

[of God](#)

[Heading Home](#)

[New Mission](#)

[Converting](#)

[Americans](#)

[The Middle](#)

[Kingdom](#)

[Religious Goals](#)

[Magic Bullet](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[7. Fruits of](#)

[Diplomacy](#)

[8. Bayard](#)

[Taylor's Asia](#)

[9. Exposition of](#)

[1876](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Bibliography](#)

As Samuel Wells Williams watched the story of the *Keying* unfold, he reflected on its meaning in a letter to his fiancée. To the American missionary, the treachery of Captain Kellett, the travails of the Chinese crew, and the derisive laughter of visitors to the junk did not, when taken together, comprise an isolated incident that he could easily dismiss. Instead, the Chinese junk, he wrote, was "a specimen of the treatment the people of heathen lands receive at the hands of Christians." By the late 1840s, Williams had grown frustrated with the mocking, callous, and unsympathetic attitudes adopted by many of his fellow Christians in their treatment of the Chinese. By using the word *specimen*, he meant that the *Keying* was a floating microcosm: The abuses on board this single craft reflected in miniature the disturbing new trends in the relations of Christians with "heathen lands."¹

The American missionary could make such a connection between the local and the global because he had witnessed many of these abuses firsthand, both on the junk and in China. Far from being an anomaly, the behavior of Captain Kellett, which oscillated between deception and violence, only mirrored the actions of the merchants and government officials who represented Christian nations in China. These men were all too willing to sacrifice the well-being of the Chinese by surreptitiously smuggling opium into the country and then resorting to outright force when the Chinese mounted resistance. Similarly, the mockery to which ticketholders subjected the *Keying's* Chinese crew was perfectly consistent with a more widespread feeling among Americans that the Chinese, as a race, were hopelessly pathetic. To Williams's great vexation, ordinary Americans now saw fit both to "ridicule the idea of evangelizing" the Chinese and to "laugh at all the efforts to teach them." In sum, the Christian people whom Williams had always assumed would treat the Chinese with caring and compassion had become, if not outright adversaries, hindrances to God's divine plan to spread Christianity throughout China.²

And since Williams viewed his own life as existing in perfect alignment with the will of God, he took these disturbing developments quite personally and decided to act. While the specific grievances of the *Keying's* Chinese crew would find resolution in the courthouse, for the larger problem of Christian ignorance and insensitivity no solution that simple existed. To cure this more pervasive ill infecting American society, Williams would need to attack the source. With this realization, he redirected his substantial intellectual energy into a new project. Instead of convincing the Chinese to accept Christ, he would turn 180 degrees and preach to a new audience: Americans. Williams took it upon himself to teach his Christian countrymen about the richness, the complexity, the flaws, and yet—what was most important—the overall worthiness of Chinese civilization. He would explain the ways of China to Americans.

The Early Years

Samuel Wells Williams was born in 1812 in Utica, New York, to what would become a very large family of fourteen children. He enjoyed few close friendships outside of his own family but did forge a lifelong bond with his neighbor and schoolmate, James Dwight Dana.³ After Samuel completed high school, where he had shown considerable academic promise, he dreamed about continuing his education at the college level and about following Dana to Yale. The two young men hoped to study natural history under Benjamin Silliman, the top geologist in the country. Unfortunately, Samuel's father had other plans. William Williams owned and operated one of the largest printing houses in western New York, and he fully expected to pass on the family business to his first son. He refused to pay for a Yale education, choosing instead to make Samuel his apprentice. To Samuel, the disappointment was profound. He would later regret that he had not insisted more vigorously on attending Yale even if it had meant paying his own way by finding a job in New Haven.⁴

Although he would not join Dana at Yale, Samuel Wells Williams did continue his formal education. After he had spent several months working with his father, it became abundantly clear to both father and son that Samuel, although he might one day become an able printer, possessed absolutely no business sense. Williams simply would not be able to succeed in a career in printing.

And after Samuel's mother died in 1831, William Williams relented and agreed to fund several additional years of education for his son. By way of the recently completed Erie Canal, Williams traveled to Troy, New York, and enrolled at the Rensselaer Institute.

The Rensselaer Institute had been founded in 1824 to encourage the application of science to practical affairs. ⁵ When Williams arrived there, what he found was a school that was still in an inchoate state: Only six students were then enrolled, and the school could not even provide him with a bed to sleep in. After assessing his prospects in Troy, Williams wrote to Dana in New Haven: "To tell you the truth, James, I never, never experienced such a disappointment, such an utter failure of expectations, in my life." ⁶ And so, while James Dana had successfully moved to the center of America's intellectual world at Yale, the equally talented Williams remained on the periphery.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, Williams grew to enjoy the curriculum at the Rensselaer Institute, which placed heavy emphasis on natural history. Through his study of botany, entomology, zoology, and mineralogy, Williams learned how to collect, classify, and sketch natural specimens. ⁷ These experiences in studying the natural world apparently instilled in him a reverence for the Creator. In a letter to his father, Williams wrote enthusiastically about the revelations he had received from his astronomy class, describing the sun, stars, nebulae, the Milky Way, and the vastness of the universe. "Yet the goodness and infinite wisdom of the Creator," he continued, "is as much shown in the formation and habits of the water-spider as in these suns, the size of which we cannot conceive." To Williams, the goal of science was to discern God's blueprints for the universe, and, with this noble purpose in mind, the young student decided on his career. He would become a naturalist. ⁸

While Samuel was pursuing his coursework, his father learned that the fledgling Protestant mission in Canton was in dire need of a qualified individual to operate its printing office. William Williams immediately suggested his oldest son, apparently without consulting him. The father's act may seem rash, but this notion that one or more of the Williams boys would spend their lives engaged in missionary work had come up before. Sophia Williams, Samuel's mother, had been an active church member after experiencing a religious awakening following the difficult birth of Samuel. One Sunday in 1831, she had found herself in church and without any money as the collection plate began to circulate through the congregation. In a move that proved fateful, she placed a slip of paper into the plate that read, "I give two of my sons." Though she died later that year, her words were not forgotten. ⁹

When Samuel learned that he had been volunteered for the position in China, he immersed himself in a single night of intense meditation and prayer. After emerging the following morning, he somewhat reluctantly agreed to go. Quite possibly, the recent passing of his mother played a role in his decision. If so, the fact of her death probably influenced him less than the manner in which she had died. Describing her final moments to Dana, he wrote, "Had you, dear James, been near her dying couch . . . you would have thought that death, judgment, and eternity were realities, that religion was not a thing of convenience." ¹⁰ While Williams accepted the post in China, he did, however, harbor one serious reservation. "So deeply has the love of the works of God . . . got imbued into me," he wrote his father, "that I fear, if I went [to China], any object of natural history would interest me more than anything else." ¹¹ Williams feared that his passion for natural history would distract him and divert his attention away from his responsibilities as a missionary printer. However, as will be shown, Williams eventually found a way to synthesize his love for science with his religious obligations.

10

The China Mission

Williams was not naturally predisposed to a deeply religious life. In fact, he wrote of deriving no pleasure from religion as a youth and of accepting Christ into his heart only after being subjected to heavy "maternal suasion." ¹² Yet once Williams had committed himself to God and Christ, Protestant Christianity proceeded to reconfigure his worldview, just as natural history had before. The mind of Samuel Wells Williams became papered with a vast cosmography, with Earth hanging precariously midway between Heaven and Hell. Believing that both God and Satan vied for influence over the human world, Williams in China developed an overarching objective that could not have been more grand in scale: to evict the devil from the Chinese empire and open the

hearts of a full quarter of humanity to Christ. To him, China became a vast battleground on which warring supernatural forces were poised to collide.

On October 25, 1833, Samuel Wells Williams stepped off the *Morrison* and into the foreign factories outside Canton. He moved into the American factory, where he lived without paying rent in the quarters of D. W. Olyphant, an American merchant who possessed a strong passion for missions. ¹³ At that time, the Protestant mission, though charged with the ambitious task of transforming China into a Christian stronghold, consisted of only two men, Elijah Bridgman and Robert Morrison. And to date they had secured but two Chinese converts. ¹⁴ Clearly, much work remained to be done.

While intent on accomplishing this work, Williams quickly discovered that the environment was not ideal for missionary work. First, the missionaries constituted a small minority in what was otherwise a colony of merchants, most of whom had a very different objective. "Collected from all parts of the world," Williams wrote, the merchants were animated by "the single desire to make money." To his dismay, Williams discovered that the avarice of these "wicked men" increased the difficulty of his job, in that the merchants were so visible. The Chinese regarded their behavior as reflective of the values to be found in Christian nations. And in Williams's view, the merchants were tragically unfit to represent Christ. Through their greed and immoral dealings, they were "constantly giving the lie to all the teachings of the gospel." As a result, many Chinese who might otherwise have been swayed by the missionaries' efforts were confused by these "unscrupulous" ambassadors whose actions diverged from the core tenets of Christianity. In fact, Williams went as far as to accuse the merchants of being "active guerilla parties of the evil one"; they abetted Satan in his nefarious scheme to subvert "the holy commands of God's law." ¹⁵

Along with the merchants, the Qing government also threatened to thwart the ambitions of the missionaries as it erected obstacles of both a physical and a psychological nature. With respect to the former, Williams discovered, as Nathan Dunn had before him, that he was barred from venturing beyond the narrow perimeter of the foreign factories. Obviously, this limitation on his mobility severely curtailed his missionary activities. As for psychological obstacles, the Qing government had also built barriers designed to block meaningful communication between foreigners and Chinese. The most important of such barriers concerned language: the subjects of China were forbidden to teach foreigners Chinese.

But this restriction would not prevent Williams from continuing to consider language the key to the success of the Protestant mission. If he and his fellow missionaries could not speak to the people of China and could not print religious tracts in Chinese, the Christian cause there was obviously hopeless. To learn Chinese, Williams undertook a clandestine Chinese-language project, hiring teachers who took him on as a student only at tremendous personal risk. One teacher brought shoes to every lesson so that, should Chinese officials abruptly intrude on a lesson, "he could pretend he was a Chinese manufacturer of foreign shoes." Dr. Morrison's instructor resorted to more- drastic measures. He carried poison to each session, believing a quick death preferable to the torture that would result from the discovery of his illegal activity. ¹⁶

15

In addition to tutorials, Williams launched an ambitious program of private study. For an average of five to six hours a day, he adhered to a strict regimen that required him to write Chinese characters over and over again, in meticulous and methodical fashion. ¹⁷ To add an element of practical experience, he sought out conversations with ordinary Chinese during walks which he took on an average of twice each day. Arising each morning half an hour before sunrise, Williams typically would stroll out into the public square to enjoy the cool morning air and chat with the Chinese vendors preparing to sell vegetables. After dark, he would venture out again in search of similar conversations. He found that the Chinese would react to him with varying degrees of cooperation; while some called him a "teacher" or a "gentleman," others spurned him as a "foreign devil." ¹⁸

As Williams placed language study at the top of his list of priorities, other ambitions necessarily suffered. Regrettably, one pursuit that received a demotion was natural history. "I have latterly paid but little attention to natural science," he wrote his brother in 1835, "having concluded to wait until I have acquired sufficient knowledge of the Chinese language. It is now the chief end of my desires & of my life to promote the cause of Christ among this people." Williams regarded natural history as a worthy intellectual pursuit, but he also understood it as a decidedly personal

ambition. And he knew that, to be a missionary, one needed to adhere to God's divine plan even if that meant subordinating one's own interests. While deemphasizing natural history, Williams did not abandon it completely, however. In fact, in a letter to his brother, he wrote excitedly about the three hundred species of fish he had examined. Amidst this exuberance, though, one senses the concomitant pang of guilt of one who might have felt he was shirking his religious responsibilities. In the same letter, he admitted almost apologetically, "I cannot keep my fingers off these pretty flowers & curious bugs." The implication was that he should. ¹⁹

Along with language study, Williams devoted much of his time to the publication of the *Chinese Repository*. The *Repository*, established in 1832, was a monthly periodical devoted to the dissemination of knowledge in the foreign community. Although the *Repository* was published by the Protestant mission, much of its readership consisted of traders, and so it carried articles on both religious and secular matters. Along with his responsibilities as the *Repository's* printer, Williams also contributed content to its pages. Throughout the periodical's twenty-year run, only Elijah Bridgman authored a comparable number of articles.

But unlike Bridgman, who had honed his expository skills at two prestigious institutions, Amherst College and Andover Theological Seminary, Williams possessed training only as a naturalist. ²⁰ Deeming himself inadequately prepared for a job that entailed so much writing, Williams, in letters he penned home, wrote of feeling acutely "my own incompetence." ²¹ In an attempt to compensate for the gap in his education, he obtained copies of the works of Charles Lamb, the great English essayist, and tried to imitate Lamb's prose. When Bridgman read the awkward result—articles about Canton written in a ludicrous high style—he could not contain his laughter. ²² The good-natured eruptions of a friend must have embarrassed the self-conscious Williams, who nonetheless worked hard to improve his writing. He gradually learned to write within his abilities and eventually developed a prose style that was clear and straightforward if lacking in literary flourish.

In writing for the *Repository*, Williams faced the same temptation that confronted all Westerners writing about China. He could have easily portrayed the Chinese as peculiar and their customs as different from those in the United States and, in this way, pass simplistic East-West comparisons off as legitimate ethnography. He resisted that temptation, however, choosing instead to hew to the periodical's mission: to disseminate the most-accurate information on China available. ²³ Toward this end, he wrote more than one hundred major articles between 1833 and 1851. ²⁴ Of course, the prominent storylines he covered during his tenure as writer, editor, and printer revolved around the twin issues of Christianity's advances in China and the trading privileges of Western nations (or lack thereof). But possessing a mind steeped in natural history, Williams was also able to depart from matters related solely to religion and commerce and to explore a diverse array of fields.

20

In the areas of geography and topography, he described China's provinces, the largest cities and towns of the empire, and the most prominent rivers and mountain ranges. In the area of natural history, he combined his own fieldwork around Canton with the best available published sources; he wrote articles on rocks and minerals, the tea plant, bamboo, lions, horses, bats, flying squirrels, cormorants, and bees and wasps. He reviewed books on China written by European and American authors. Most importantly, he used his articles to paint in piecemeal fashion a colorful portrait of Chinese life: diet, rice cultivation, festivals, the filial behavior of children, female education, dialects, pagoda-building, literature, theater, religion, mythology, and ancestor worship. Finally, Williams also served his readers in the foreign community by writing pieces that were directly related to their interests; he discussed Chinese imports and exports, the status of the Protestant mission, developments in the various internal rebellions threatening the empire, and the ascension of a new emperor to the throne. Of course, many of his topical pieces centered on opium: the smuggling by merchants, the problem of addiction in Chinese society, the response of Chinese officials, and the British military action. ²⁵

Williams's work with the *Repository* forced him to become an expert on China. For in order to write these articles, he had to observe the Chinese way of life, consult with Chinese people, employ his language skills to read Chinese literature, apply his training in natural history to the study of China's flora and fauna, and read all available Western sources on China. When taken together, the more than one hundred major articles that he wrote for this periodical, when combined with the thousands of others he edited, formed an unofficial first draft of his future

masterwork—*The Middle Kingdom*.

Besides this experience with the *Repository*, one other ingredient was crucial to Williams's evolution as a writer. He needed to adopt a writer's eye for seeing the world. This transformation started to take place in 1836, his third year in China. "I have lately been accustomed to walk thro' the streets of Canton and Macao," he wrote to his brother, "with my mind half agog to see every new thing I could, just as if I was intending to write a letter or journal when I returned home." Of course, Williams had walked these streets hundreds of times in the past. However, while the sights had hardly changed at all, Williams was clearly evolving. He was acquiring a heightened awareness to his surroundings, and it allowed his vision to penetrate more deeply into sights he previously considered familiar, common, or mundane: "I never fail to see something unseen before." To his surprise, Williams also discovered that his level of curiosity was not typical. In fact, he expressed his disappointment with the sea captains with whom he frequently conversed. Although they had visited intriguing ports all over the world, most of them were "mentally stone blind" and could not relay any information to the inquisitive missionary. When presented with his queries, they would offer him the same excuse for their ignorance: "I had my ship to look after." [26](#)

Williams truly was far more curious and observant than most foreigners in China. Still, the descriptive writer inside of him occupied a subordinate position to the missionary; he could understand the sights he saw only by placing them in a Christian context. When he traveled by boat from Canton to Macao in 1835, he watched Chinese farmers harvest rice and later described the scene in a letter.

We can see on both sides of the river . . . men, women, & children, engaged in the various occupations of thrashing, winnowing and gleaning. The weather is delightful, and all the population are now enjoying themselves as happily as they do at any season of the year. Even the beggars partake of the general rejoicing always attendant on gathering in the fruits of the earth. . . . The crop has been pretty good this fall. . . . There are near us two tall pagodas standing on two hills, which are picturesque and striking objects.

25

Williams's depiction of a happy harvest seems idyllic, but in the letter he goes on to tell a different story. Of course, the landscape was beautiful, the rice harvest was full, and the people were happy. However, while Williams appreciated all these attributes, he did not do so because they contributed to the well-being of the Chinese people. Rather, he valued them only as the "desirable qualities" that one looked for when selecting a site for a future missionary operation. "The day will come," he prophesied in the same letter, "when instead of pagodas, spires of churches will rise above the dull uniform town." In fact, without the Christian influence, the exuberant life he observed among the Chinese people only served the devil. For instance, during this trip, when a lusty boatman shouted "indecent" things to the young female rice harvesters on the shore, Williams became greatly perturbed. "O the abominations of heathenism," he exclaimed. "May we live unspotted from the world, the flesh, & the devil." [27](#)

Pride: Internal and External

Unfortunately for Williams, if Christianity was progressing at all in China, it was doing so only at a glacial pace. And so, after three years, Williams was frustrated. In a letter to his brother, he likened mission work in China to farming on rocky terrain. "We are apparently making but slow headway," he wrote. "Every step some stone must be rolled away, some weed plucked up. The fallow ground not being broken up, how can the seed be sown?" [28](#) When he tried to engage the Chinese in serious discussions about the miracles of the Savior, the ravages of opium smoking, or the sin of idolatry, they would show little interest, choosing instead to change the topic so as to "ask the price of your jacket" or "discuss the size of your nose." [29](#)

Such queries, besides being annoying, indicated to Williams that the Chinese were more concerned with superficial matters in this world than they were with weighty spiritual matters of the next. In his view, even their organized religion, which might have elevated their morality and shifted their attention to the afterlife, only served to reinforce their earthly concerns and

materialistic values. Most of their "heathen worship," he observed, consisted of burning colored paper or lighting sticks of incense so as to succor the favor of spirits and deities and thereby ensure material prosperity. Thus, worship in China, far from helping people transcend human greed or lust, was merely an expression of the same. "The great god they worship is Mammon," Williams asserted, "and to him they burn daily incense both of soul & body." ³⁰

At the same time, one of Williams's most fascinating traits was his insistence on subjecting his own soul to the same scrutiny that the Chinese received. He earnestly believed that when one endeavored "to study human character," one "must begin at home" and "know something of what elements your own heart is made of, before you attempt much in scanning other people's." ³¹ While he faulted the Chinese for constructing an entire religious apparatus around false idols, he acknowledged that at least they were not hypocritical. After all, their outward forms of worship truly reflected the desires within their hearts. Williams was less sure about himself. Although he had devoted his life to the service of God, he admitted that, in the secret "niches" of his own heart, he would "daily & hourly offer incense to idols" like "pride" and "envy." "O Fred," he exclaimed to his brother in a moment of soulful anxiety, "how much more guilty too are you & I for this idolatry than the poor Chinese who only exhibit to all the same idolatry that I fear we keep to ourselves?" ³²

With Williams, the outward gaze toward China prompted an inward-looking examination of his own soul; the ethnographic and the introspective were inextricably linked. And as the years in China passed, the pride that he regarded as sinful continued to grow. He became increasingly aware that he possessed several attributes seldom concentrated in a single individual: amazing stamina and health, rare linguistic talent, a gift for writing, printing skills, and training as a naturalist. The man who had initially worried about his own "incompetence" increasingly grew concerned about the swelling of his own ego.

30

His pride concerned him so deeply because he understood it in a Christian framework. His own heart became a battlefield where Satan was attempting to turn him away from God by attacking him in his greatest area of vulnerability—self love. Indeed, of all possible sins, pride stood as the most dangerous, because it had the potential to corrupt everything he accomplished as a missionary. After all, missionary work entailed the humble subordination of one's own ambitions to those of God. If Williams's deeds in China were secretly aimed at winning glory for himself rather than for God, he might be carrying out God's will to all outward appearances and yet be losing his soul to Satan in the process. For this reason, Williams regarded pride as an oppressive force, and he longed to be delivered from it. One day in 1841 he left his quarters to take a stroll by himself. While walking, he posed a question to himself: "From what do you anticipate relief that will make heaven so desirable and happy a place?" In answer, he singled out "freedom from pride" as the one thing for which he yearned above all others. Pride was so "ingrained into me that I look upon entire deliverance from it as almost heaven itself." ³³ Over the course of Williams's lengthy career as a missionary, pride would remain his greatest foe.

Interestingly, in the same letter, he imputed it to the Chinese as well. ³⁴ And so Williams believed that he had something significant in common with the people he was trying to save. In both the microcosm of Williams's own heart and the macrocosm of China, Satan appeared to be employing the same strategy. Williams would necessarily have to combat pride on two separate battlefields.

He was not alone in ascribing cultural arrogance to the Chinese. Nearly all foreigners in China—merchants, government officials, and missionaries—regarded China's excessive pride as the root of most problems. In the opinion of merchants, it was what loomed behind the system of unequal treatment under which they chafed. Foreigners could trade in only one port, Canton; they were required to transact all their business through the Hong merchants; they were compelled to abide by a long list of vexing rules or risk expulsion from the country; and when they registered complaints, these were often rudely dismissed by haughty mandarin officials. Foreign officials hoped to secure relief for the merchants, but they too experienced great difficulty in obtaining any concessions. Perhaps symbolic of the Chinese attitude toward the outside world, foreigners almost never received an audience with the emperor and, on the few occasions when these meetings did occur, the Chinese expected ambassadors to kowtow in his august presence. ³⁵

Williams readily added his voice to the growing chorus of complaints; he firmly believed that Chinese pride interfered with his missionary work. The Chinese were so smugly satisfied with the attainments of their own civilization as to render them impervious to new systems of thought, such as the one he was offering. "It was by no means pleasant," he wrote, "to live among people cherishing such self-conceited and supercilious notions regarding us." ³⁶ In Williams's opinion, the arrogant Chinese needed to be humbled before they would become receptive to his message. But how could that ever come to pass? In the 1830s, Sino-foreign relations seemed to have settled into a state of stasis that worked to the disadvantage of foreigners. While merchants could grudgingly accept the present conditions because most were still able to turn a profit, missionaries could not make any headway in their godly work as long as the status quo persisted. This stagnation, were it to last for several decades, would force them to live their entire lives in vain. For an ambitious individual like Williams, the prospect of leading a life devoid of achievement was terrifying.

Clearly, a lot was at stake. But there was really very little Williams could do to shake up affairs in China. He and other missionaries longed for the intervention of an outside force—something powerful that could smash the prideful Chinese into humble submission and compel them to prostrate themselves before the Lord, just as they had forced others to kowtow in the presence of the emperor. In sum, on the grand theatrical stage that was China, Williams longed for a *deus ex machina*. And that is exactly what he got.

35

The Battering Ram of God

"I am glad things in this region are coming to a crisis," Williams wrote to his brother in the summer of 1839, "for almost anything is better than the old dull way we were going on at a while ago, hampered and restrained beyond description." He went on to say that he was "quite confident" that God was in the process "answering the prayers of his people" and advancing "the great cause, whose progress must be onward." ³⁷ Williams was referring to China's escalating conflict with England over the lucrative yet illegal opium trade. Williams despised the opium trade, largely because it ruined Chinese lives and taught the Chinese people to distrust all representatives from Christian nations—including men and women who sought to spread the Gospel. Even so, as the above letter indicates, Williams paradoxically favored a war waged to preserve it. And so when armed hostilities finally broke out in 1839, Williams's emotional reaction could best be described as disgusted exhilaration. ³⁸

To fully understand his peculiar reaction to the Sino-English conflict, we can return to his love of natural history. Williams believed that, if one studied the natural world, one could discern God's miraculous handiwork both in the largest of phenomena, such as a distant nebula, and in the smallest creatures, such as a water-spider. In other words, since God was omnipresent, one could detect his divine fingerprints everywhere. In this sense, the Lord did *not* move in mysterious ways, since human beings could comprehend His divine plan. To Williams, the world of human affairs was no different from the natural environment. Everything that happened—even wars—worked in some way to advance God's divine plan. But since the purposes of God in the realm of human events, like the processes of the natural world, were not immediately apparent, one could demystify them only by employing one's rational faculties. Williams attempted to do just that with the Opium War. Though ostensibly an abomination in the sight of God, the war on closer inspection revealed that His divine wisdom was dictating events.

Williams explained his understanding of events in a letter he wrote to his brother in November 1840, several months after the arrival of the English fleet in Chinese waters:

I am happy . . . as God has made us so many assurances of his interest in the affairs of men, the expedition was no doubt sent here to advance his kingdom among the Chinese. . . . One of those lessons may be that they are weak by making them feel the tremendous power of foreign nations, & thus inspire them with a wholesome dread and fear of lightly trampling under foot those who come here. As a nation, this people are inconceivably conceited & proud & cannon balls are a means of disabusing them of some of the supports of their traits of character. Punishment may in the hand of God be made of great good service to this wicked

people. [39](#)

In Williams's view, the proud Chinese needed to be humbled before they would become receptive to the word of God. Although the English appeared to be accomplishing exactly that, they were not heroes in Williams's estimation because, after all, their war was a morally unjust one waged to protect the illicit opium trade. Rather, in ways that were beyond the comprehension of the English themselves (yet perfectly clear to Williams), the mighty British fleet was little more than an "entering wedge," a tool in the hands of God that He used to pry open China. In essence, the war was an act of Providence, during which the English military functioned unwittingly as the battering ram of God. [40](#)

40

Once the English had pummeled the Chinese into submission, the second phase of what Williams's perceived as God's divine plan would go into effect. With English cannons having leveled the "walls of separation," Williams wrote, "we can go in &out" and "tell them [the Chinese] of Christ &his kingdom." [41](#) This was how Williams sought to understand the large-scale events taking place in his midst. On top of the greed, drug addiction, blood, misery, death, and ruin, he placed the shimmering overlay of God's divine plan to open China, and—almost magically—the seemingly foul war made perfect sense.

Heading Home

Yet when the smoke from British cannon fire had cleared in 1842, Williams's prospects in China had hardly improved. He learned that the vast changes that were supposed to follow God's victory would not take place overnight. Feeling frustrated, Williams parceled out some of the blame to his countrymen back home who, inexplicably, were failing to seize this historic opportunity. Christians now knew that China had been forced open. To the missionary's great vexation, however, they "are apparently no more ready . . . to take possession [of China] than ever." Where were the legions of fresh missionaries and the new sources of funding, both of which were supposed to arrive in the war's aftermath? Upon turning an ear to the United States, Williams heard only the deafening silence of apathy. He was "depressed." [42](#)

Adding to his melancholy was that Williams also felt oddly underused by God. At precisely the juncture when he had expected God to give clarity to his mission in China, he instead felt desultory, uncertain of purpose, and left adrift. In God's cosmic chess match against Satan, Williams had happily volunteered to serve as a white pawn—a loyal, devoted, and selfless foot soldier committed to the cause. Understandably, God had relegated the eager white pawn to the side of the chessboard during the Opium War. But now that the great conflict had concluded, Williams fully expected to feel the hand of God putting him back into play. That nothing had happened left him feeling perplexed and perhaps abandoned. As Williams marked his ten-year anniversary in China, he had to wonder whether he was heaven's forgotten man. [43](#)

Contributing to his emotional discomfort were the deaths of a couple of fellow missionaries in China. "Two of our number have gone down to the tomb," he wrote to his brother in 1843, referring to Robert Morrison and Samuel Dyer, an English missionary in Singapore. Far more disconcerting than their deaths was the unclear or "vapory" meaning of their lives. Morrison had made a positive contribution in China, but Williams dolefully recognized that "it is not likely to be a lasting one, for succeeding events will efface the past, and the remembrances of his usefulness will in the public eye soon become mossy." [44](#) Though Williams maintained his trust in God, he nevertheless found it demoralizing to watch as, one by one, missionaries fell in the field without effecting noticeable change and without receiving appreciation, or even notice, from the Christian countries that had sent them.

Of course, behind his concern for Morrison and Dyer lurked a disturbing question: Would he share their fate? For the first time, Williams faced the possibility of passing his entire life in a faraway land without attaching his name to any lasting accomplishments and without receiving any recognition for his labors. Of course, since the work was supposed to be spiritually fulfilling by itself, a missionary was not expected to covet fame or recognition. But for Williams, who struggled mightily to control his pride, the bleak prospect of an anonymous life of futility was exceedingly difficult to accept.

Feeling jaded, he began to think seriously about returning home. More than ten years had passed since he had seen his family, his friends, and his hometown of Utica. "I feel sometimes a great desire to see you again," he wrote to his brother, "and replenish my heart with the social joys that are not here to be found." Yet since Williams had volunteered his entire life to the service of God, the mere contemplation of a furlough provoked deep questions. Was his "desire" for time away from the missionary field a fundamentally selfish impulse felt by one who had pledged a life of selfless "duty"? Williams believed that it was. Therefore, to keep the proposed furlough from being a selfish act, the directive to return home had to originate from God—not from personal reasons such as fatigue, frustration, or the need to see loved ones. This course of action was also problematic, however, since, as of late, God had been remarkably (and disturbingly) silent. And without God's guidance, Williams had become paralyzed. He felt utterly purposeless in China, and yet he also lacked a clear reason to depart for America: "I am sure that I have something here to do yet, for if otherwise it seems as if I should have found the opportunity for going." ⁴⁵ In the end, all Williams could do is to stay put in China and simultaneously hold out his passport in the hope that God would ink it with His holy stamp and send the tired and frustrated missionary back home.

Fortunately, valid reasons swiftly presented themselves whereby Williams could justify a trip home as a part of God's plan to open China. The printing types he had been using to publish Christian tracts in Chinese had grown worn and antiquated. For the mission to succeed, new ones made of steel had to be manufactured in Europe. Furthermore, Williams would have to make the order himself because only he knew the exact specifications for this new type. Since it promised to be expensive, Williams would also need to raise money back in the United States. ⁴⁶

To this reason, Williams could add another, one of a tragic nature. While he had been away in Asia, his father's once prospering business had collapsed. To support his family, William Williams had become a farmer. Unfortunately, in a stagecoach accident, he sustained a severe injury to his head and it left his mental faculties permanently impaired. ⁴⁷ And so, when the trader Gideon Nye offered to pay for Samuel Wells Williams's passage to New York in 1844, the missionary now possessed familial as well as godly reasons to depart China. ⁴⁸ Heading home at last, he wrote to Peter Parker, the medical missionary stationed in Canton, to express his gratitude to the Lord: "I sail in the morning, 11 years & 1 month from the day I landed in Canton, having received unnumbered mercies during that time." ⁴⁹ He had not achieved as much as he had hoped, but now Williams had reason to depart China with a brightened outlook.

A New Mission in America

Instead of returning by the most direct route, Williams made stops in Hong Kong, Singapore, Bombay, Egypt, Syria, Jerusalem, Malta, Rome, Paris, and London. After arriving in New York in October 1845, he wrote to his childhood friend James Dana, "Few of the Utica lads have wandered more than you & I." ⁵⁰ Here Williams was not exaggerating, since Dana had served as a mineralogist on the United States Exploring Expedition (1838–42) commanded by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes. ⁵¹

When Williams arrived home, he received a rude awakening. While living in China, he had sensed that something was not quite right with the attitudes of Christians back home. Why, he wondered, had word of China's opening failed to inspire greater interest in and support for Protestant missions? His impressions at that time were vague, though, largely because his distance from the United States had muffled much of the anti-Chinese sentiment that was the cause of Americans' apathy. On returning to the United States, he confronted the ugly truth. As was explained in the previous chapter, Americans were now wont to mock, ridicule, and act superior to the Chinese in a manner that horrified the missionary.

Williams's disappointment was profound. We can best comprehend its depths when we recognize that Williams was comparing the unfortunate reality with the utopian dreams he had previously held. From his vantage point, the early 1840s must have seemed ripe for the consummation of his grandiose dream: the mass conversion of the Chinese people to Christianity. For at that time, he had been tantalized by the prospect of two major developments, one in China and the other in the United States, working in tandem to transform China into a Protestant nation. First, the Opium

War had at last forced China to open her gates to foreign intercourse and influence. Second, the hundreds of revivals in the United States that comprised Second Great Awakening promised to rejuvenate Americans' interest in proselytizing nonbelievers in "heathen" lands. ⁵² In sum, for this rare moment in history, the forces of change appeared to be in perfect alignment: China was open to the West, and the United States had become a massive generator of zealous volunteers and generous donors.

When Williams finally returned home, however, he met only with disillusionment. These two major developments had in fact worked in synergy with one another, but they had done so toward an unanticipated and horrible result. The Opium War had convinced many Americans that China's seemingly impressive exterior was little more than an elaborate façade masking the nation's true ineptitude. What was worse, the Second Great Awakening had failed to instill in Americans a desire to convert the Chinese. It had instead produced a proud people who relished opportunities to feel self-superior by spurning the lowly Chinese "heathen" who had failed to embrace the Savior. In other words, Williams learned sadly that, after the Opium War, pride did not die, as he had hoped it would; rather, the war had merely transferred much of it from China to the United States.

The disturbing new attitude of Americans toward the Chinese appeared in the publications of Christian organizations. For example, in 1846, the Sunday-School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church published *The Chinese or, Conversations on the Country and People of China*, a book designed to teach children about China. Ostensibly at least, its didactic purpose was meant to advance the cause of missions in China: "As a mission field it [China] is beginning to assume a high degree of importance. For this reason especially we desire to make the young in our Sabbath Schools well acquainted with its extent and its claims." Despite these superficially noble words, however, the book offers nothing that one would consider edifying. Instead, it portrays Chinese culture as stereotypically odd, grotesque, and backward. The book is centered around a dialogue between William and his Uncle Adam. Although William, a curious young boy, professes to know little about on China, his natural inclination is to like the Chinese after hearing great things about Nathan Dunn's Chinese Museum and enjoying the amusing pictures on tea chests. It is the job of the manipulative Uncle Adam to disabuse his nephew of these positive thoughts and replace them with cruel and inaccurate stereotypes.

In fact, Uncle Adam seems to favor the complete eradication of Chinese culture, to be followed by the introduction of superior Christian customs, principles, and beliefs. In a section devoted to the Chinese diet, Uncle Adam lists the foods consumed by the Chinese: dogs, rats, snakes, grasshoppers, snails, cats, grubs, worms, and birds' nests. The one food they lack but desperately need is "the bread of life," otherwise known as "the gospel of Jesus Christ." When William expresses a strong desire to see a display of Chinese fireworks, Uncle Adam delivers a devastatingly brutal reply: "And so should I, William; especially if, at the end of it, the Chinese had piled up in one high heap all the images they worship, and set fire to them." After William inquires about the city of "Pekin," Uncle Adam offers a mnemonic device to help his nephew understand the Chinese capital. He instructs him to simply remember "pigtales, pagodas, and porcelain." "What a number of P's!" William exclaims. "I shall be sure to remember the pigtales, pagodas, and porcelain of Pekin." In predictable fashion, Uncle Adam proceeds to highlight the chief difference between Pekin and New York. In the former, "the people bow down to idols," while in the latter, "the true and living God, the God of Abraham . . . is worshipped."

At one point in the book, readers encounter a chapter entitled "Odd Things in China," which delivers on its promise. Its sole purpose is to depict the Chinese as bizarre, well-deserving of laughter and disgust. Over the course of ten pages, the word *odd* and its derivatives (*oddest*, *oddity*) and synonyms (such as *strange*) are used thirty times. "They must be an odd people indeed," William declares at one point. "I wonder what odd thing you will tell me about next." Toward the end of the chapter, Uncle Adam quizzes his nephew to see if he can recite from memory all the "odd" things the Chinese do: "Let me now hear, William, how many you can remember of the odd things of which I have told you."

55

Even the Chinese Museum of Nathan Dunn was not immune to Uncle Adam's assault. Given its excellent reputation, young William has heard of its marvels and expresses his enthusiasm at the prospect of paying it a visit: "What a treat I should have at such an exhibition!" Uncle Adam agrees but offers one caveat—and it is a devastatingly damning one:

I have no doubt at all, that you would be very much entertained; but, in the midst of all the curious things in these collections, there is one thought which ought to be dwelled upon; it is this, that the figures, the carvings, the furniture, the lanterns, the porcelain, and the paintings . . . are the works of heathen men; of those who either bow down to images, or believe in falsehood. . . . Everyone, then, who visits a Chinese collection, should pray for the spread of the gospel in China. . . . There are hundreds who go to see Chinese collections who never think of these things; let us not be among the number. You would open your eyes wide at the sight of their golden or gilt idols, and very likely would think of the golden image that was set up by Nebuchadnezzar . . . in the province of Babylon.

By placing everything Chinese in a Christian framework, Uncle Adam succeeds in dispersing the aura of enchantment and enlightenment that had previously made China so enticing. And later in the book, a comment made by the boy indicates that Uncle Adam's strategy has worked: "I do not like the Chinese half so well, Uncle, as I did before." [53](#)

Samuel Wells Williams probably did not read this particular book, but he was nonetheless familiar with this kind of arrogant approach to missionary work and fervently objected to its underlying premise—that one could aid the Chinese by encouraging readers to regard them as silly, pathetic, and inferior. He knew that such a book would only undermine the very movement it purported to uplift because it portrayed the Chinese as a laughable race, utterly beyond hope, and obviously unworthy of a Christian's serious attention. Indeed, Williams far preferred Nathan Dunn's *Chinese Museum*, even though its agenda was not notably Christian. In fact, in the pages of the *Repository*, Williams and Elijah Bridgman had mostly lauded the museum and its proprietor, pronouncing Dunn "a true Friend of the Chinese." [54](#)

Williams's return home, then, prompted a sea change in his thinking. In the 1830s, he had identified the close-mindedness of the Chinese as the greatest obstacle preventing the advancement of God's will in China; in the 1840s, he came increasingly to think that greatest obstacle was the close-mindedness of Americans. And since God had no British battleships at His disposal in the United States, Williams must have wondered what means He would use to blast away at the walls of American ignorance. It was at this juncture that Williams's furlough suddenly acquired vast significance: He realized that he must teach Americans the truth about the Chinese. With this epiphany, the former cloudiness that had hung over his missionary career dispersed and he saw his purpose with clarity. God had tapped the white pawn and shifted him back to the center of the cosmic chess match.

60

Converting Americans through Lectures

At first, Williams's chosen vehicle for accomplishing his objective was the lecture. He quickly worked up a series of lectures designed to provide his audiences with accurate and detailed knowledge of China. "I . . . hope that the information the people have received regarding China" he wrote of his efforts, "will not end in mere curiosity but produce more sympathy in behalf of the moral life of the nation." [55](#) Williams had already written numerous pieces for the *Chinese Repository*, and so his preparation of the lectures did not prove to be extraordinarily taxing. In fact, we can view the lectures as the second draft for the great work that was still to come.

Initially, Williams targeted the towns and cities not far from his family's home in Utica, but it was not long before word of his presentations spread. "Having heard that you are now delivering a course of Lectures in the City of Buffalo on China & the Chinese," a group of citizens from Rochester wrote to Williams, "& feeling a deep interest in that country & people & believing that the Lectures would be both interesting & profitable to our fellow citizens, we would respectfully request you to deliver the same courses in Rochester." [56](#) As Williams began to accept these invitations, his radius of influence lengthened. Soon what had started as a handful of regional engagements became an extensive tour of much of the Northeast.

In his travels, Williams expressed a strong preference for the western towns in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio over the large eastern commercial cities. In New York or Philadelphia,

which were filled with popular amusements, Williams had trouble making an impression because "one new wave of interest washes with a single sweep upon and over the preceding one." Emblematic of this fact was that, when Williams delivered a series of lectures in Philadelphia, one newspaper did not even bother to get his name right, repeatedly referring to him as "Mr. Willard."⁵⁷ In contrast, in cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, or Buffalo, the citizens demonstrated an eagerness to hear a series of lengthy lectures that did not sensationalize their subject matter. In such places, Williams regularly drew over two hundred people. And to his pleasant surprise, he found that his audiences were able to maintain a high level of interest, even after he had spoken for two and a half hours! By the end of 1846, Williams had delivered more than one hundred lectures.⁵⁸

During his stint as an itinerant lecturer, Williams also made a flattering discovery about himself: He knew more about China than anyone in the United States and perhaps as much as anyone in the entire Western world. He may have lacked strong institutional credentials, but his experiential credentials were unmatched. After all, who else had lived for over a decade in China; had learned much of the Chinese language; had observed and conversed regularly with Chinese people; had read the Chinese classics in literature, religion, statecraft, and philosophy; had studied China's natural-history and collected specimens; and had read nearly all European and American texts on the subject of China, old and new? In Canton and Macao, Williams's growing expertise had been camouflaged even to his own eyes. Since everyone in those cities knew something about China from firsthand experience, Williams's knowledge had not stood out in bas-relief. However, after removing himself to the American context, Williams realized that he was without parallel.

It was also during his furlough that Williams began to receive recognition for his knowledge. In addition to earning accolades for his lectures, he became an elected member of the American Ethnological Society. After reading a paper on China at a meeting held in the home of the president, Albert Gallatin, Gallatin acknowledged Williams's mastery of the subject. In addition, John Russell Bartlett, the secretary of the society, noted that Williams's reputation had reached Europe. The "eminent Sinologists of Europe," Bartlett wrote, now ranked Williams as "among the profoundest adepts" in Chinese "literature and philology."⁵⁹ The man who had never attended Yale, who could not be classified as a "man of letters," and who had made a clumsy attempt to imitate Charles Lamb was starting to receive recognition as a giant in his field. It was time to write a book.

65

The Middle Kingdom

Williams began writing *The Middle Kingdom* in New York in 1846, with the apartment of his brother, Henry Dwight Williams, serving as his temporary home and office. In writing this book, Williams was motivated by the same aspirations he had for his lectures.

I am not mistaken as to some of the motives which induced me to undertake a book upon the Chinese, and one of them was to increase an interest among Christians in the welfare of that people, & show how well worth they were of all the evangelizing efforts that could be put forth to save them from disorganization as a government, depredation as a people thro' the effects of opium, and eternal ruin to their souls. Ignorance is a cause, an explanation, & a motive for indifference to a subject, and to remove this ignorance removes some of those reasons for inaction.⁶⁰

This letter encapsulates Williams's overall view of the Chinese. Although he did not approve of Chinese civilization in its present state, he believed that its glaring flaws in the areas of government, religion, and morality were manifestations not of biological inferiority but rather of the pernicious influences of opium, inept government, and the devil. And yet, even with Satan locking the entire nation in a stranglehold, the Chinese still managed to develop a stable society that could boast of a rich intellectual tradition. If a book could teach American readers about this civilization and eradicate crude stereotypes in the process, the previously mocked Chinese would become a worthy but oppressed people in desperate need of Christ's liberating power. A truly wonderful transformation could then take place: American people and dollars would flow into the Protestant missions, which would then possess the means to save a quarter of humanity. It was grandiose dream.

Fortunately for Williams, when he commenced writing his book, he was not starting with a blank page. His articles for the *Repository* and his recent lectures acted as drafts for the planned literary work. ⁶¹ Still, the task was an ambitious one. After all, he intended to consolidate everything he knew about China into a single work, without resorting to summaries and without omitting details. And although such a prodigious undertaking merited single-minded attention, Williams could devote only a portion of his time and energy to his writing because he needed to tend to other things. Not only did he continue to deliver lectures in order to raise funds, but he also had begun to court a young woman.

In 1847, Henry Dwight Williams hosted a small gathering of friends, at which his older brother was introduced to Sarah Walworth. The niece of a New York chancellor, Sarah lived in Plattsburgh but spent her winters in Manhattan. After just one meeting, Williams identified something in her character that he liked. So when his lecture tour took him to Plattsburgh, he arranged to meet with her again. ⁶² This second meeting apparently confirmed his initial impression; otherwise, he would not have dropped the following bombshell in his very first letter to her:

70

Brought together in the most casual manner, we have none but the slightest acquaintance, though that has been quite enough to give me a very favorable estimate of your character, & to wish to make further acquaintance. . . . In a word, my chief object in proposing a correspondence is to learn whether you are disposed to engage in the good work of missions, and are willing to consider my proposal to accompany me [to China]. . . . I trust you will not be so much surprised at this, no doubt, unexpected note, as not to consider it; and have hopes, too, you will not say me nay. . . . I lay my suit entirely in your hands. ⁶³

Wasting no time, Williams unveiled the big question regarding missions work and the implied marriage. Apparently, the typical courtship, one that might unfold gradually over the course of several months or years, was not acceptable.

Why was Williams in such haste? The answer, quite simply, is that he knew his true calling was in missionary work, and he desired to return to the country he was already starting to miss. "I seldom hear from China now," he wrote to Peter Parker in 1846. "I long to return, and shall make arrangements to leave as soon as my book is published." ⁶⁴ Indeed, just as he hoped to accelerate his romance, so too did he try to expedite the writing and publication of his book. While he did not place limits on its scope—he chose the all-inclusive model established by Nathan Dunn—he did place strict limits on his time. Not one to wait for the Muse, the indefatigable Williams worked at a feverish pace every day. "My book takes up much of my time," he wrote to Sarah in 1847, "but I hope 'twill advance the good of that great people of whom it treats, & induce some to take more interest in their welfare." ⁶⁵

Although the wooing of Sarah Walworth proceeded at a rapid pace, it was not without its tender moments. Somewhat comically, though, even these had to adhere to Williams's rushed schedule. For example, during one meeting, Williams surprised Sarah by kissing her without warning and then making a hasty exit. He subsequently explained his unexpected behavior in a letter: "Perhaps you thought I left you rather abruptly, stealing a kiss without your permission, & then running off, but I had used up about all the time. Forgive me the apparent rudeness." ⁶⁶ Although Williams apologized for his aggressive (but probably appreciated) act, he indicates that it was motivated by the ever-ticking clock, calling him back to his lectures, his book, and China.

Indeed, since Williams spent most of this time either traveling to lecture venues or furiously writing his book in New York, it was mainly through letters that he had to convince Sarah to marry him and accept the missionary life. In the process, he had to reveal a large part of his private self—his deepest hopes, dreams, and anxieties. "You see," he explained to her, "I am the chief subject of my letters, the main argument of my writing. . . . Prevented from enjoying each other's society, we have need to become acquainted . . . to the degree that we can; and I lay open all my heart to you." ⁶⁷ Thus, for the historian trying to understand the man who authored *The Middle Kingdom*, this correspondence provides us with a window into his innermost thoughts. ⁶⁸

In these private moments in which Williams exposed his soul, we see that his growing pride continued to torment him.

I have pride enough to supply a nation, and conceit mixed in with it; and pride, to my sorrow, mixes itself with even my religious duties, literary labors, social enjoyments, and daily conduct. I . . . am sure I have enough to destroy my soul for ever if the blood of Christ do not wash it all away. If one feature more than another appears desirable in the happiness of heaven, it is that I shall be totally free from pride. [69](#)

Williams divulged to Sarah the large extent that pride permeated and tainted most aspects of his life. While his outward behavior seemed to reflect only his devout service to God, Sarah learned the truth about his pride through confessional letters such as this one. He admitted that not even "religious duties" and "literary labors" (referring here to *The Middle Kingdom*) were free of contamination.

Given this revelation, one can only imagine the sorts of questions that may have flitted through Williams's mind as he labored over his masterpiece. Was *The Middle Kingdom* truly part of God's divine plan, as Williams told himself, or was it actually the self-aggrandizing work of young man who, barred by fate from proving himself at Yale, hungered for a chance to display his intellectual talents before the world? Although Williams was outwardly self-effacing, had he secretly luxuriated in the thrilling, self-affirming reality that a common boy from Utica had ascended to the rank of America's top Sinologist? And if so, was his role as God's humble and obedient servant just that—a theatrical role played by a man trying to mask the supreme act of hubris that was *The Middle Kingdom*? In producing a work intended to be the complete and final authority on China, was he, a mere mortal, audaciously questing for literary immortality? In sum, was his magnum opus written in the service of God or in the service of prideful ambition, which would necessarily make it the devil's work?

Williams clearly dreaded any confrontation with the terrible truth that the latter might be the case. In an attempt to convince himself otherwise—that the massive work was truly an expression of God's will—he reiterated this point again and again in his letters to Sarah. On August 10, 1847, he wrote that the "chief satisfaction" he derived from his literary effort was the knowledge that he was "advancing the great & good work of China: emancipation from sin & idolatry." He added that his work on the book was really no different from engaging in missionary work in China: "I feel that I am aiding in that work as honestly here as if I were in Canton, and hope the Master will honor it." [70](#) On August 23, he restated this basic point but then nonchalantly added that he might have reasons for writing the book that were unrelated to God: "Perhaps other motives have mixed with this in a large proportion." But to downplay the influence of these ungodly "other motives," he promptly reaffirmed his bedrock assertion that the book would be used by God "to the advancement of his design." [71](#)

On August 30, Williams professed his indifference to the public's reception of his work: "I have no very high expectations of making much noise with my book." He claimed to care only that God would find a way to steer it toward "advancing the work" in China. [72](#) On September 21, however, he admitted to caring about the verdict issued by readers, hoping that they would not be "disgusted with the subject through its bad treatment." Realizing he had here exposed his sensitive ego, he quickly moved to recover: "Whatever be the result of the effort, I think I can honestly say I have endeavored to do it for the good of China and the advancement of the great work of her regeneration." [73](#) Finally, on September 27, Williams asserted that he did not care at all "about the success" of the book; in fact, "all the good it does" ought to go directly "to the praise of the Author who gave me health and ability." Here, Williams elevated God as the true author of *The Middle Kingdom*, while diminishing his own role to that of the loyal scribe. [74](#) By professing the selfless nature of his act with such frequency and vigor, Williams revealed to Sarah how truly conflicted his soul really was.

Religious Goals, Scientific Means

Whether driven by personal ambition, love of God, or a combination of both, Samuel Wells Williams was prolific. As he continued to write, the manuscript continued to expand until it overflowed the confines of one volume and spilled into a second. "I find my manuscript stretches on like a long-standing account of lawyer's fees," he joked, "and I wish 'twere clipped."⁷⁵ Apparently, nothing was clipped. Williams possessed the grand ambition not just to write about China but, like Nathan Dunn and Houckgeest before him, to reproduce China. Consumed by a collecting mania, his predecessors had sought to accomplish this objective by amassing objects and pictures; Williams chose to accumulate words. The final work, completed in 1848, was comprehensive to the point of being encyclopedic. It filled two large volumes and stretched to a length just over twelve hundred pages.

The work was so long that Williams felt he owed it to his readers to justify the length in his preface. "If . . . the volumes seem too bulky for a general inquirer to undertake to peruse," he wrote, "let him remember the vastness of the Chinese Empire . . . and he will not, perhaps, deem them too large for the subject."⁷⁶ With these words, Williams equated his book with the country itself; since China was large, the book should be long as well. And if the book stood as a textual reproduction of the country, then the act of reading the book necessarily became tantamount to taking a tour of China. With this theme of virtual travel in mind, Williams arranged for an illustrator to draw a large Chinese gateway that, when situated both on the book's cover and its frontispiece, acted as a portal to a distant world (fig. 6.1). This gateway was complete with ornate dragons and Chinese characters that, when translated into English, tellingly stated: "Among Westerners there are wise people. Kind people love all people, strangers as well as relatives." With this inscription, Williams issued a challenge to his readers to open their minds and modify their view of China. In this sense, *The Middle Kingdom* was as much about American souls as it was about Chinese souls.

The similarity with Houckgeest and Dunn was not coincidental. Like theirs, Williams's mode of comprehending China was shaped by Enlightenment science. Of course, the overarching purpose of his book was religious—to advance the cause of Protestant missions in China through the dissemination of accurate information in America. Williams makes this point abundantly clear in his preface. "Respecting the origin, plan, and design of the present work, I may be allowed to express the humble hope that it will aid a little in advancing the cause of Christian civilization among the Chinese."⁷⁷ However, although religion provided the official impetus for the book, science offered a *modus operandi*. Williams gathered, arranged, and presented this information by following a scientific model. In this way, the religiously inspired *The Middle Kingdom* bears the distinct imprint of Rensselaer Institute.



To understand the role of science on Williams's mind, one need only scan the chapter titles and subheadings. Williams categorized all aspects of Chinese life just as a naturalist trained in the Linnaean system would classify species. He devoted the first four chapters to China's geography, covering the provinces, the colonies (Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet), and a general overview of the topographical features of the empire. He next moved on to China's natural history, covering mineralogy, botany, zoology, herpetology, ichthyology, and entomology. Shifting to the human sphere, he devoted two chapters to an explanation of the government, the legal system, the administration of the laws throughout the provinces, and the treatment of criminals. He also discussed at length both the education system and the examination system, which produced the scholar-officials who ran the government. Not surprisingly, one chapter describes the Chinese written language, a subject Williams knew as well as any living Westerner. The two chapters on Chinese literature explore the Five Classics and the Four Books, the significance of Confucius and Mencius, and novels (fiction), ballads, poetry, and works of history. Williams also studied the state of the arts and sciences: math, astronomy, military science, anatomy, astrology, music, and painting.

85

Indeed, almost no category was safe from Williams's exhaustive inquiry. He examined Chinese architecture, the manner of dress, and the diet. His study of Chinese social life offers depictions of ceremonies, festivals, marriage (including the custom of polygamy), naming practices, and various pastimes, such as gambling. In addition, Williams devoted space to Chinese commerce (complete with statistics of China's imports and exports), agriculture (including tea production), and the mechanical and industrial arts (metallurgy, glass, porcelain, lacquer, silk, and carvings in ivory). Not surprisingly, Chinese religion consumes an entire chapter, as does the role of Christian missions in China, past and present. The book also contains a thorough history of the Chinese

empire, one that stretches from antiquity to the present, with the more recent history centering on China's intercourse with the outside world. Finally, *The Middle Kingdom* concludes with two full chapters that focus exclusively on the conflict with England and the opening of China.

By breaking down his vast subject into distinct categories, Williams followed a tradition begun by Houckgeest and continued by Dunn. He endeavored to make sense of China by imposing a rigid system of classification over its vastness and complexity. When all categories were filled, then and only then could he finally stop writing.

The Magic Bullet

In all areas of *The Middle Kingdom* that describe China's people, as opposed to its topography or wildlife, Williams walked a tightrope. He admitted as much in the text itself, with a statement that rendered his motives transparent: "We do not wish to depict the Chinese worse than they are, nor to dwell so much on their good qualities as to lead one to suppose they stand in no need of the Gospel." ⁷⁸ In other words, the Chinese needed to come across as immoral and corrupt on the one hand and yet, on the other, as human and therefore redeemable. Toward the former aim, Williams formulated a critique of Chinese morals that was far harsher than anything that emerged out of Nathan Dunn's museum or even Captain Kellett's junk. He reported that the Chinese "are vile and polluted in a shocking degree" and that "their conversation is full of filthy expressions and their lives of impure acts." He went on to enumerate the myriad vices of which this people were guilty: "falsity," "mendacity," "thieving," "licentiousness," insufficient "hospitality," "female infanticide," and "cruelty towards prisoners." ⁷⁹

As unambiguously negative as these words appear, we do not, however, have an accurate understanding of Williams's construction of China if we examine them in isolation. In the following passage, he places his critique in the proper context:

In summing up the moral traits of the Chinese character . . . we must necessarily compare it with that perfect standard given us from above; while also we should not forget that the teachings of that book are unknown. While their contrarities indicate a different external civilization, a slight acquaintance with their morals proves their similarity to their fellowmen in the lineaments of a fallen nature. As among other people, the lights and shadows of virtue and vice are blended in their character, and the degree of advancement they made while destitute of the great encouragements offered to perseverance in well-doing in the Bible, afford grounds for hoping that when they are taught out of that book, they will receive it as the rule of their conduct. ⁸⁰

90

When Williams refers to "the Chinese character" as immoral, he is not pronouncing the Chinese racially inferior to the people of Western nations. Rather, he is measuring the Chinese against "that perfect standard," by which he means the shining ideal of heavenly virtue contained in the Bible. In fact, far from highlighting racial difference, Williams emphasizes the innate sameness of the peoples of the earth. The "different external civilization" that the Chinese possess (and that had provoked so much mockery in the United States) is mainly superficial and masks a much deeper "similarity to their fellowmen."

Of course, the underlying "similarity" shared by different peoples was not something Williams chose to celebrate. It was instead the crux of the great problem to which he had devoted his entire life: humanity's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden and its subsequent need for holy redemption. He believed that Chinese vices flowed not out of innate biological inferiority but rather out of the "fallen nature" of their souls. Likewise, he attributed the Christian virtue that he found in Western nations to the people's exposure to the Word of God. But whereas citizens of Christian nations enjoyed opportunities to read the Bible, and many (but not all) had availed themselves of its wonderful truths, the Chinese had historically not been as fortunate. And so, Williams earnestly believed, if the Bible could penetrate China the people would turn to Christ en masse. When they did, the slough of sin, vice, and iniquity in which they currently wallowed would dry up and vanish. In sum, immorality in China was a pervasive ill for which there existed a magic bullet: the missionary movement.

Conclusion

As Samuel Wells Williams sailed out of New York harbor in June 1848, he could look back on the achievements of his furlough with satisfaction. Most obviously, he was no longer alone. When he turned to his side, he was pleased to behold his young wife, Sarah Walworth Williams, standing beside him; they had been married in Plattsburgh on Thanksgiving Day the previous fall. In agreeing to wed Williams and adopt the life of a missionary, Sarah had clearly demonstrated great courage, as southern China was becoming less safe. After she had asked Williams about the threat of antforeign violence, he tried to reassure her with the following assessment of their safety. "So far as the safety of the foreigners is concerned," he wrote, "there is little to fear; they [foreigners] are on the alert against any sudden rising, dwell close to the riverbanks, have steamers and boats lying off their factories to which they can repair at a moment's notice, and are so well armed that the Chinese . . . would be afraid to attack them."⁸¹ Although one might question whether descriptions of evacuation plans and armament stockpiles would have the intended calming effect, Sarah still consented to accompany Williams to China.

Williams could also savor his massive achievement in completing the mammoth *The Middle Kingdom* in a period of about two years. While the task of writing it had been formidable enough, he had also encountered difficulty in locating a publisher; none wanted to gamble on an encyclopedic work that neither exoticized or sensationalized its subject. In fact, he succeeded in convincing Wiley and Putnam to accept his manuscript only after Gideon Nye, the wealthy China trader, promised to reimburse the publisher for any losses incurred from poor sales.⁸² When *The Middle Kingdom* entered bookstores early in 1848, reviews were generally positive. Reverend Samuel Brown, a fellow missionary in China, read all the reviews in the New York newspapers and was able to make a favorable report to his friend: "I see it has been very highly lauded by the press in N. York."⁸³

Yet Brown also understood the most obvious pitfall of a twelve-hundred-page book. "It is not everybody that will read such a work," he wrote. "Still fewer will pay \$3 to procure it."⁸⁴ Indeed, many reviewers, while generally praising the content of *The Middle Kingdom*, predictably complained about the book's length and the author's lack of style. Williams "is far from being a finished or polished writer," wrote one, "nor has he sufficiently studied brevity, either by the compact adjustment of his materials or the omission of needless details."⁸⁵ Whereas Nathan Dunn's all-inclusive collecting had conferred a magical aura of virtual travel onto the Chinese museum, that same encyclopedic approach, when applied to writing, had produced two dauntingly weighty tomes that intimidated readers. Williams himself wondered if those who had purchased the book would "rather have their money returned than wade through so many pages."⁸⁶

95

The somewhat deterrent effect of the book's size notwithstanding, on the whole the intellectual community embraced *The Middle Kingdom*, and almost immediately it became universally regarded as the definitive authority on China. For this singular achievement, Union College conferred on Williams an honorary degree (LL.D.) in 1848; it must have been a meaningful moment for a man who felt acutely his lack of institutional credentials.⁸⁷ While the cumbersome book was seldom read by the average reader, it did succeed in becoming the single most important reference work on China. For this reason, one can measure its influence less by its sales and more by the frequency with which it was cited in other works.

For example, on January 26, 1854, a Reverend Scott delivered a lecture on China at the Mechanic's Institute in New Orleans. He began his presentation by admitting his ignorance on the subject of China. To illustrate, he jokingly made reference to the only two Chinese words he knew: *tea* and *junk*. Despite his lack of knowledge, Scott demonstrated his full awareness of the condescending mockery that suffused Western attitudes toward the Chinese at the time. "No people on the globe have been more subjected to ridicule than the Chinese," he said. "They have been regarded as 'the apes of Europeans,' and their civilization such as it is, their arts, laws, and government considered as the burlesque of ours." Scott proceeded to review the standard list of cruel stereotypes and to repeat the derogatory poem that had earlier riled Williams: "Mandarins with yellow buttons, handing you conserves of snails; / Smart young men about Canton in nankeen tights and peacock's tails." However, after reviewing the usual insults, Scott did something interesting. He informed his audience that if they were expecting more of this sort of

ridicule, they would leave disappointed. After invoking Samuel Wells Williams's *The Middle Kingdom*, he went on to deliver a lecture that owed almost all of its content to that masterful work. [88](#)

Notes:

Note 1: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 10 August 1847, box 1, series 1, Samuel Wells Williams Family Papers. Manuscript Collections, Yale University Library. Hereafter, this collection will be cited as SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 10 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Frederick Wells Williams, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.D.*, *Missionary, Diplomatist, Sinologue* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 20. [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Ibid.*, 30–32. [Back.](#)

Note 5: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 6: *Ibid.*, 34. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Samuel Wells Williams to James D. Dana, letter, 23 April 1832, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Frederick Wells Williams, 37–38. See also Jiang Qian, "Samuel Wells Williams and the Attitudes of U.S. Protestant Missionaries toward the Opium Trade and the Opening of China, 1830–1860" (master's thesis, University of Toledo, 1992), 4–5. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Samuel Wells Williams, "Autobiographical Sketch" (April 1878), box 13, series 2, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Frederick Wells Williams, 35. [Back.](#)

Note 11: *Ibid.*, 39–40 [Back.](#)

Note 12: *Ibid.*, 27. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Andrew T. Kaiser, "S. Wells Williams: Early Protestant Missions in China" (master's thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1995), 33. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Samuel Wells Williams, "Autobiographical Sketch" (April 1878), box 13, series 2, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 30 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Frederick Wells Williams, 58–59. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Samuel Wells Williams to Peter Parker, letter, August 1839 (the letter does not contain a precise date), box 1, series 1, SWWFP. Approximately two of the hours were devoted to the study of Japanese. In 1836, Williams met three Japanese sailors in Macao whose vessel had been blown away from the Japanese coast by a storm. In 1837, in what was called the "Morrison Expedition," Williams and others failed in their attempt to repatriate the men (and establish contact with the Japanese). After their efforts were repulsed, however Williams employed them in his printing office and studied Japanese with them regularly. Frederick Wells Williams, 83, 93–100. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Frederick Wells Williams, 107–8. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter 15 May 1841, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 20: *Michael C. Lazich, E. C. Bridgman (1801–1861), America's First Missionary to China*

(Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 13, 37. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Frederick Wells Williams, 66. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Ibid., 63. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Ibid., 62. [Back.](#)

Note 24: After the various treaties that followed in the wake of the Opium War, foreigners were free to live and work in several ports. Thus, by 1851, there was no longer a concentration of foreigners who were living in Canton and needed the *Chinese Repository*. [Back.](#)

Note 25: "List of Articles by S. Wells. Williams in the *Chinese Repository*," box 13, series 2, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 31 August 1836, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 17 December 1835, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 15 January 1836, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 29 July 1840, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 5 April 1840, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, February 19, 1835, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 5 April 1840, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 29 September 1841, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 5 April 1840, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), 118, 122. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Frederick Wells Williams, 103–4. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 29 August 1839, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 38: It is important to note that Williams was not warlike by nature and that he truly believed the Opium War was orchestrated by God. In fact, later in the 1840s, he expressed his strong objection to the U.S. war with Mexico. Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 29 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 30 November 1840, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 29 August 1839, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 29 August 1839, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, 29 May 1843, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, 15 June 1843, box 1, series 1, SWWFP.

[Back.](#)

Note 44: Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 20 November 1843, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Before his death, Samuel Dyer engaged in making steel type for his Chinese press in Singapore. In fact, Williams had entertained hopes of adding Dyer's type to the older set he had been using in Macao. Unfortunately, on arriving in Singapore, Williams discovered that after Dyer's death much of the printing apparatus had been "dispersed" beyond the possibility of recovery. This disappointment increased the urgency of his need for new types, which he planned to have made in Germany. Frederick Wells Williams, 128–32. [Back.](#)

Note 47: William Williams died in 1850. Frederick Wells Williams, 129–30, 176. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Frederick Wells Williams, 131. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Samuel Wells Williams to Peter Parker, letter, 25 November 1844, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 50: Samuel Wells Williams to James Dana, letter, 6 December 1845, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 51: William H. Goetzmann, *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 273, 291–93. [Back.](#)

Note 52: In a letter to his brother, Williams commented optimistically on revivalism. Samuel Wells Williams to Frederick Williams, letter, 1 July 1841, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 53: D. P. Kidder, ed., *The Chinese; or, Conversations on the Country and People of China* Department of Rare Books, Library of Congress (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1846), 5–6, 14–17, 34–39, 75–77, 80, 81–91, 101, 113, 136. [Back.](#)

Note 54: *Chinese Repository* (March 1840), 585, and (November 1843), 582. [Back.](#)

Note 55: Frederick Wells Williams, 147. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Citizens of Rochester to Samuel Wells Williams, letter, March 1846, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 57: "Lecture on China," *Dollar Newspaper* (24 February and 10 March 1847). [Back.](#)

Note 58: Frederick Wells Williams, 147–48. Although preferring western New York and Ohio, Williams did not avoid the East Coast altogether. He offered lectures in New York, New Haven, and probably other cities as well. James Dana to Samuel Wells Williams, letter, 10 October 1846, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Frederick Wells Williams, 151. Samuel Wells Williams, "The Present Position of the Chinese Empire"; John Russell Bartlett, "The Progress of Ethnology"; and Albert Gallatin, "Introduction to 'Hale's Indians of North-west America and Vocabularies of North America,'" *Transactions of the American Ethnological Society* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1848), clxi, 148, 279. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 23 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Samuel Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Education, Social Life, Arts, Religion, &c., of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848), 1:xiii-xiv. A perusal of the work's footnotes reveals that the *Chinese Repository* was one of the more frequently cited sources for information. [Back.](#)

Note 62: Frederick Wells Williams, 152. [Back.](#)

Note 63: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 29 May 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Samuel Wells Williams to Peter Parker, letter, 19 May 1846, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, 21 June 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, 10 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 23 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 68: To introduce Sarah to Chinese culture, Williams sent her Chinese literature translated into English and offered his personal assessment: "You will see that the Chinese have some imagination and fancy, though their novels are hardly equal to *Ivanhoe* or *Last of the Mohicans*." Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letters, 13 and 19 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 23 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 70: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 10 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 71: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 23 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 72: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 30 August 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 21 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 27 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 75: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 11 November 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Samuel Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* (1848), 1:xiv. [Back.](#)

Note 77: *Ibid.*, 1:xvi. [Back.](#)

Note 78: *Ibid.*, 2:99. [Back.](#)

Note 79: *Ibid.*, 2:95–99. [Back.](#)

Note 80: *Ibid.*, 2:95. [Back.](#)

Note 81: Samuel Wells Williams to Sarah Walworth, letter, 29 September 1847, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Frederick Wells Williams, 163. [Back.](#)

Note 83: Samuel Brown to Samuel Wells Williams, letter, 10 February 1848, box 1, series 1, SWWFP. [Back.](#)

Note 84: Samuel Brown to Samuel Wells Williams, 10 February 1848, box 1, series 1, SWWFP (emphasis in original). [Back.](#)

Note 85: *North American Review* (October 1848), 269. Another reviewer agreed with the first that "the number and variety of his sources . . . are too abundantly exhibited" (*United States Magazine and Democratic Review* [April 1848], 319–20). [Back.](#)

Note 86: Frederick Wells Williams, 162–63. [Back.](#)

Note 87: *Ibid.*, 162. [Back.](#)

Note 88: Rev. Dr. Scott, "Lecture on the Chinese Empire," delivered in New Orleans before the Mechanic's Institute, 26 January 1854. New York Public Library. [Back.](#)

[The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture: 1776-1876](#)