

Interdisciplinary Lunchtime Seminar

Semester 1, 2017-18

The Sacred Fonts of the American Mission Press: Printing Mongolian in Canton between the Opium Wars

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Date: 12 September 2017 (Tuesday)

Time: 12:00 noon - 1:00 pm

Venue: Room 201, 2/F, May Hall, The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Before and after the First Opium War, the missionary printer Samuel Wells Williams collaborated in publishing millions of pages while striving to augment the Mission Press's technological capacities in South China. The monthly *The Chinese Repository* (1832-1851) is one result of his extraterritorial print endeavors and holds great potential for new scholarly directions in American Studies. Consider the journal's 1850 republication of two thirteenth-century letters by ruling Khans to the King of France. They are topically fascinating for proposing a Franco-Mongol alliance against Islam in a war for Jerusalem. However, the letters' typographical appearance is more important: they appear in traditional Mongolian script, rendered from metallic Manchu fonts. This essay explains how these letters' appearance reflects the international circuitry of American extraterritorial printing, the world historical scope of missionaries' evangelical print ambition, and their awkward accommodation of free trade imperialism in China. Finally, the letters' republication registers the term Mongolian as a cultural and racial category with enduring significance for Williams. The term resurfaced in state and federal policies restricting Chinese immigration—policies that Williams protested in writings that register both his racist sense of culture and his disillusionment with print evangelism in the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion.