‘AT NO DISTANT DAY’:

Shanghai, U.S. Imperial Aspirations, and the Construction of a Future Pacific Empire, 1842-1863

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to complicate the conventional narrative of U.S. empire—that it was restricted to the North American continent before its international expansion with the 1898 Spanish-American War—by exploring the ways mid-nineteenth century Americans like Daniel Webster first imagined and then sought to construct a Pacific route of empire. It focuses on the end point of this route, the Chinese city of Shanghai, as the reason for the linking of the North American Pacific Coast, Hawaii, and Japan into such a route and as a site of U.S. territorial empire and imperial competition with Britain. These early Americans were driven by imperial anxiety and the two worries of the possible but preventable British domination of the Pacific Ocean and, more regionally, the China trade. This thesis, in telling such story of imperial imagination, aspiration, and construction, adds contemporary newspaper articles, travelogues, and maps to twentieth and twenty-first century scholarly publications to bring to light an often downplayed presence of the United States in nineteenth century China and the ignored or forgotten place of China in nineteenth century U.S. empire.
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Introduction

When Caleb Cushing arrived in Macau on February 27, 1844, his job had already been done.\(^1\) While Cushing was on his 211 day journey aboard four different ships (the U.S.S. Missouri, the British steam packet Oriental, the British steamer Cleopatra, and the U.S.S. Brandywine), Great Britain had negotiated a supplemental treaty to the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the treaty that ended the First Opium War and that which after Cushing was supposed to negotiate a U.S. replica.\(^2\) Named the Supplemental Treaty of the Bogue (1843) after the waterway (more often called the Boca Tigris) that connected Canton to the wider world, it gave the other nations of Europe and the United States most-favored-nation status, meaning U.S. citizens gained all of the benefits of the Treaty of Nanking, like the right to trade in the five treaty ports of Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai, without the need of a treaty of their own.\(^3\)

Cushing only received this “disappointing piece of ‘good’ news” upon his arrival with his legation in the Portuguese colony from the man initially chosen to lead the mission, the ambassador to Great Britain Edward Everett.\(^4\) But Cushing, the ever motivated senator who would go on to become attorney general under Franklin Pierce, had to have something to show for his journey. He had to attempt obtain “privileges above and beyond those granted to Britain” even though the resident U.S. merchants thought they could not be made “better off” and were already in an advantageous position relative to the British.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) John Belohlavek, *Broken Glass: Caleb Cushing and the Shattering of the Union* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2005), 161.


\(^4\) Haddad, *America’s First Adventure in China*, 146.

\(^5\) Belohlavek, *Broken Glass*, 162.
The result of this wholly unnecessary, individual crusade, the Treaty of Wanghia, was surprising to both the U.S. merchants and the British.\(^6\) Signed on July 3, 1844, sixty years after the arrival of the *Empress of China* marked the beginning of a U.S. presence in China, the treaty not only elaborated "the privilege of extraterritoriality in connection with various Treaties of Peace, Amity, and Trade" but perfected it, as "it was the American, rather than the British, extraterritoriality provision that became the model for the other European nations that entered into their own treaties with China in the following years."\(^7\) And this was all despite the fact that the State Department had not even asked for extraterritoriality.\(^8\) A high-ranking British official had to admit that the U.S. "evinced far better diplomacy...than we have done."\(^9\)

And thus, the U.S. empire extended its bounds eastward during a period when the conventional narrative states U.S. empire was only concerned with westward, "continental expansion."\(^10\) My contention that Cushing's Treaty of Wanghia—the opening of U.S. diplomatic and imperial relations with China—and the American enclaves that it allowed for was an eastward expansion is perhaps more contentious, and yet completely related to, my contention that it was a moment of U.S. imperialism within a broader narrative of U.S. empire that did not only begin with the Spanish-American War and the concessions won by the United States in the Treaty of Paris. It is unconventional, perhaps, yet also patently obvious: Caleb Cushing reached China from the east coast of the United States by traveling east, following in the wake of the China merchants who had been plying this route for sixty years and would continue to travel

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\(^6\) The treaty was officially titled the "Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce between the United States and China."


\(^8\) Haddad, *America's First Adventure in China*, 158.

\(^9\) Haddad, *America's First Adventure in China*, 158.

along it into the near future. His route took him from Washington D.C. through Norfolk, Virginia, the Azores, Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Macau.\textsuperscript{11} The ship on which he finished his direct yet totally roundabout journey to China, the U.S.S. \textit{Brandywine}, which traveled ahead of Cushing between Gibraltar and Bombay, avoided the overland trek between Port Suez and Port Said by taking the historic route of empire around the Cape of Good Hope.\textsuperscript{12} I believe Cushing’s route to China is evidence enough that “the teleological narrative that imperialism tells about itself” that “westward the course of empire takes it way,” is not an inherent truth but an invented fiction.\textsuperscript{13} The story of empire, and in this case U.S. empire, is just that: a story. A story in which said empire is usually completely ignored or hidden behind a layer of euphemism.

It is important to note, though, that this narrative of western expansion, a narrative critical in broader U.S. history (or at least 19\textsuperscript{th} century U.S. history), is not just a narrative created after the fact by historians like Frederick Jackson Turner (though he did contribute to its perceived significance), but was doubly believed in and ensured by earlier historical actors like one central to my thesis, Daniel Webster. From the beginning, the opening of China, or at least the opening of ports outside of the one at Canton at which foreign trade had been restricted since 1757, was imagined as part of a larger opening of the Pacific to U.S. empire and as a westward extension from the future western edge and Pacific coast of the United States.\textsuperscript{14} China, or more specifically Shanghai, was to be the end point of a “Great Chain” across the Pacific, from ports in the Oregon Territory (and then later San Francisco), through Hawaii and/or Japan.\textsuperscript{15} Shanghai’s imagined

\begin{itemize}
\item Belohlavek, \textit{Broken Glass}, 159-161.
\item Belohlavek, \textit{Broken Glass}, 160.
\item Kaplan, \textit{The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture}, 18.
\end{itemize}
future place in a U.S. empire of the Pacific shifted it from being at the end of an unknown
eastern frontier, to the end of the well-known, mythologized, and loved frontier of the west.

Shanghai’s, and more broadly China’s, place in a larger, imagined Pacific empire is quite
poetically made clear by Secretary of State Daniel Webster’s instructions to his long-time friend
and financial supporter Cushing.¹⁶ Before explaining to Cushing that “the leading object of the
Mission...is to secure the entry of American ships and cargoes” into the treaty ports of Canton,
Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai “on terms as favorable as those which are enjoyed by
English merchants” (an “object,” as mentioned earlier, that was taken care of by the Treaty of the
Bogue), Webster made sure Cushing knew—and would inform his Chinese diplomatic
counterparts—that his mission was “entirely pacific.”¹⁷ Now, Webster obviously meant “pacific”
as in “peaceful” or, per the Oxford English Dictionary, “not employing force or violence,” but I
think Webster’s use of the word, which in its proper, capitalized form designates the world’s
largest ocean and the object of many of his diplomatic dealings, speaks to the grasp the Pacific
had over Webster’s mind, and more specifically, imperialist imagination. It is unsurprising that
when Webster was looking for a word meaning peaceful, he found “pacific.”

The city that would quickly become central to this “Great Chain” and affect its shape and
component parts for geographic, political, and commercial reasons was Shanghai. Mythologized
as being nothing more than a “backwater” before the arrival of foreigners after the First Opium
War and the Treaty of Nanking, Shanghai was in fact “a regional market town of around two
hundred thousand people hailing from all over China.”¹⁸ Built along a narrow section of the
Woosung or Huangpoo river, along shores that to a member of Commodore Perry’s Japan

¹⁷ Remini, Daniel Webster, 579.
Expedition in 1853 "were low and white, and resembled the coast of Florida." Shanghai derived its commercial significance from its closeness both to the Yangtze river, the river into the heart of China, and to the Pacific Ocean, China's means of connection with the outside, western world.  

It was, in the early 1840s, a perfectly unremarkable city politically (it was but "a heen or district city within the department of Sun-keang-foo [Jiangsu]" whose capital was the more inland Nanking), commercially (Canton was still "the cradle of our commerce with this wonderful country), and aesthetically ("like most Chinese cities [but unlike Canton], its exterior appearance is not calculated to impress the approaching traveler with the wealth or grandeur of the place").

But what the city did have was potential. Geographic potential. Daniel Brook, writing in _A History of Future Cities_, proclaims that "if geography is destiny, the city where the Yangtze meets the Pacific—the gateway to the world of one-tenth of humanity—is, by rights, the leading city on the planet." The city was deemed destined to surpass Canton and "become the permanent emporium of trade between [China] and all nations of the world." Reverend George Smith, in his 1847 _Narrative of an Exploratory Visit to each of the Consular Cities of China_, wrote quite presciently about Shanghai:

As an entrepot for the commerce of Shantung and Tartary on the north—as the outport of all the central provinces of the empire—as the grand emporium for the trade of the Fokeen [Fujian] and Formosa from the south—as the port and usual access to Soo-chow-foo, the metropolis of fashion and native literature—as a rendezvous for the trade of the Yangtze-keang and Grand Canal, the main arteries of inland commerce—as connected with numerous neighboring mercantile cities by the canals which divide the surface of the country—and as the great emporium for the European and American trade in the north of

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20 George Smith, _A narrative of an exploratory visit to each of the consular cities of China, and to the islands of Hong Kong and Chusan, in behalf of the Church Mission Society, in the years 1844, 1845, 1846_ (London: Seeley, Burnside & Seeley, 1847), 136. Brook, _A History of Future Cities_ 62.
21 Brook, _A History of Future Cities_, 55.
22 Brook, _A History of Future Cities_, 62.
China—it assumes an importance of which its local size and limited population would seem at first glance to divest it.23

What both Smith then and Brook now hit at is that Shanghai was viewed as significant—and became the city it was—not for any particular advantages of its site,24 but for its place in between other significant places or its place at the edge of key linkages like the Yangtze River and Pacific Ocean. Like the Chicago of William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* (a city with which Shanghai has much in common), Shanghai derived its importance and grew less from being “central than from being peripheral.”25 In the same way Chicago in the mid-nineteenth century became “the gateway city to the Great West” by being at the edge of both the interconnected waters of the Great Lakes and the expansive lands of the western frontier and by being the place where “western roads...were built from and eastern ones [were built] to,” Shanghai, it was hoped, would become the West’s gateway into China, and China’s gateway26 out to the world by linking, through the Yangtze River, the Chinese interior with its estimated “300 to 360 million”

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24 For if anything, everything about Shanghai and its immediate surroundings was quite undesirable. Stella Dong, in her book *The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City* details on page 10 that the land the foreigners would come to occupy was “so porous that one American engineer described it as “not much more solid than dirty water,”” meaning the construction of river front buildings was difficult. The Whangpoo river, connecting Shanghai to the Yangtze River and Pacific Ocean, was also less than ideal: it’s narrowness and shallowness made it difficult for large boats to traverse and, according to Robert Erwin Johnson in *Far China Station*, disqualified it “as a potential base site” for Commodore Perry in 1853. And man, was it drab. Perry is quoted in Kemp Tolley’s *Yangtze Patrol*: “nothing can be less picturesque than the scenery...in the approach to Shanghai...the poetical observer is sadly disappointed in a view which represents a dead level of landscape, without a mountain, a hill-side, or even a tree to relieve the monotony....The muddy waters of the Yang-tse-Kiang, looking more muddy still in the yellow light of a foggy atmosphere, and the dull constraint of a tedious anchorage, presented a sad prospect to the eye, and a wearisome sensation to the feelings, which made all anxious for departure.”
26 The trope of Shanghai as a gateway is still prevalent. So prevalent that, in the last ten years, the trope has found its way into the titles of two books, Marie-Claire Bergere’s translated *Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity* (2009) and Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren’s *Building Shanghai: The Story of China’s Gateway* (2006) along with a paper, by John D Kasarda, in the edited volume *Shanghai Rising: State Power and Local Transformations in a Global Megacity* (2009) entitled “Aviation Infrastructure, Competitiveness, and Aerotropolis Development in the Global Economy: Making Shanghai China’s True Gateway City.”
potential consumers of western goods and producers of silks, teas, and porcelain with the Pacific Ocean and, for Americans, a future route of U.S. empire.27

I do not, however, mean to argue for any sort of environmental or geographical determinism with regards to the rise of Shanghai. For even if, perhaps, "geography is destiny" as Daniel Brook claims, geography alone will not—and in the case of Shanghai, did not—allow a city to achieve that destiny.28 It is abundantly clear that Shanghai would not have replaced Canton as the center of Sino-Western commerce if it were not for the Taiping Rebellion, itself perhaps caused by the Opium War treaties, their ending of the restriction of Western trade to Canton, and the resultant unemployment in and around Canton.29 The Rebellion, led by a man, Hong Xiuquan, who studied Christianity under a U.S. missionary, Issachar Roberts, in 1847, began in this zone of suddenly increased unemployment in late 1850 and incentivized westerners to make the initial capital investment to install offices or new headquarters in Shanghai before the rebels reached Shanghai's doorstep in 1853 with the March 19 capture of Nanking.30

But the Rebellion affected Shanghai in another (somewhat derivative) way that points towards Shanghai's quick rise being less about destiny and more about coincidence. The Taiping move into Nanking and its hinterlands in March, 1853 and the Short Swords rebels' capture of the walled, or Chinese, city of Shanghai on September 7, 1853, drove hundreds-of-thousands of refugees into the foreign settlements and concessions of Shanghai.32 Other than forever ending the distinction between the Chinese walled city and the once foreign (yet now, except by name.

28 Brook, A History of Future Cities, 55.
30 Deng, Americans and the Taiping Rebellion, 27.
31 The Short Swords were a related but distinct rebel group that was part of "the Triad Secret Society." Its capture of the walled city of Shanghai seems to be its only remembered action during this era.
all but completely Chinese) districts of the city, this influx created an enormous land boom that
drove land prices from fifty pounds an acre in 1850 to twenty thousand pounds an acre in 1862
and led to Chinese lilongs33 outnumbering western-style houses 8,740 to 269 in 1860.34 Even
Daniel Brook, the man who placed so much importance in Shanghai’s geography, cannot ignore
that the end of the Taiping Rebellion, usually dated to July 19, 1864, the day when the Qing took
back Nanking, and the subsequent return of many of the refugees to their old homes outside of
Shanghai, caused a bust that mirrored the previous decade’s boom.35 It was not just Shanghai’s
place on a world map or in western commerce that allowed for its rise from regional market town
to magnetic metropolis but hundreds of thousands ordinary Chinese, driven out of their homes
and into Shanghai by a rebellion that was, it could be said, originally caused by a Western
perceived right of free trade, and a British want to fight for that right two decades earlier.

The fact that the First Opium War was a British-fought war (and not a war in which the
United States explicitly partook) has contributed to a historiography of U.S. involvement in
China in which historians, like the renowned John King Fairbank, have sought to minimize the
United States imperial role. In The United States and China, first published in 1948 and
repeatedly revised and republished, culminating with a fourth edition in 1979, Fairbank does not
write about the United States until page 307 of the 478 page book, after he speaks of “The
Western Invasion,” an invasion that Fairbank therefore places the United States outside of and
behind.36 For supposedly being about the United States, much of Fairbank’s book reads as if it

33 On page 64 of A History of Future Cities, Daniel Brook describes the lilong as a Chinese style house (hutong-like)
made out of western material (stone). It is a form of housing born in and unique to Shanghai and a great example of
the East-meets-West (or West-meets-East) nature of the city.
Future Cities, 64.
35 Brook, A History of Future Cities, 74.
xxii.
were titled *The West and China*. But, again, for Fairbank, this monolithic West, most discussed in chapter 6, “The Western Invasion,” the first chapter of “Part II *The Revolutionary Process*,”\(^{37}\) is often monolithic precisely because it comprises of just nation: Great Britain.\(^{38}\) The perpetrators of the “Western Invasion” into China turn rather quickly (on the first page of the chapter, in fact) from “Western invaders” into the “invading British.”\(^{39}\) For the first two-thirds of the book, the title of *Britain and China* would have been more fitting than *The United States and China*.

These issues speak to the first way Fairbank minimizes, and defines as non-imperial, the U.S. presence in China: by placing the United States underneath and as part of “Britain’s informal\(^{40}\) empire.”\(^{41}\) In Fairbank’s view, the United States let Britain lead the way. Occasionally Americans would play “a minor part,” but, importantly, this “minor part…was largely carried on by individuals or private agencies; the United States government seldom led the way.”\(^{42}\)

Similarly, “the Western position in East Asia…was maintained by force, but the force was usually European, seldom American.”\(^{43}\) For Fairbank, the main feature of U.S. power in China was its ‘seldom’-ness. This conclusion indicates either Fairbank’s ignorance or active hiding of U.S. power in China. For in Shanghai, the city most prominent in the minds of U.S. architects of

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\(^{37}\) The placement of “The Western Invasion” at the beginning of “The Revolutionary Process” is problematic. It perpetuates the idea of China as a stubborn, stupidly unchanging, content-with-the-status-quo kingdom/nation that needed the West to set it straight and onto the path of modernity. It also re-narrates the Opium Wars (a subject that, bizarrely, is barely mentioned by Fairbank), as necessary and good and as win-win situations rather than as wars started for the explicit benefit of a moneyed few “of one nation,” as Stella Dong says quite nicely, “to foist a poisonous drug upon another” with, for China, disastrous results.

\(^{38}\) Fairbank, *The United States and China*, xx.

\(^{39}\) Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 143.

\(^{40}\) The phrase “informal empire” is silly. Denotatively meant to mean ‘non-colonial,’ ‘informal’ has, I think, the added connotative effect of also meaning ‘less imperial.’ This is ridiculous. The British Empire in China may not have been colonial, but it was certainly as imperial. It still held “primary or major economic, political, and military power and influence” (William Appleman William’s requirement of empire) in the treaty ports along the coast of China, making, in the eyes of Williams (and in mine), Britain equally (if less apparently) imperial as Britain in the Raj.

\(^{41}\) Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 312.

\(^{42}\) Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 311.

empire like Daniel Webster, acts of U.S. power were hardly seldom and were made not by individuals or private agencies but by the U.S. military, a not-so-private agency. As William Appleman Williams shows in his appendices of “American interventionist Activity” in his critical book *Empire as a Way of Life*, the United States Navy thrice placed marines on the ground at Shanghai “to protect American interests.”

This documented U.S. intervention gives an alternate answer to a question Fairbank asks: “Why even speak of the multiform impact of a multifaceted West? Why be so simplistic?” Fairbank speaks of this “multifaceted West” rather than its contingent nations because, despite its impact on China not being “a single, simple thing,” it was the “homeland...of progress that convulsed the globe.” But his real reason for speaking of the West for much of the book is to hide the United States and its lust for empire and imperial supremacy in China.

And in the aforementioned last third of the text in which he finally writes of the United States, the country he avoided discussing for as long as possible, Fairbank finds two more excuses: we didn’t do it first, and, I mean, we’re different anyway. As is, again, readily apparent from Fairbank’s table of contents, the United States policies were not in any way original: they were “inherited” from, of course, the British. Fairbank writes that “Sino-American relations developed within the shadow of older Sino-European relations” and though this is true, Fairbank makes it sound like the United States was much later to China then it actually was. As mentioned earlier, a U.S. merchant ship reached Canton four years before even the Constitution

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45 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 145.
46 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 145.
47 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, xxii.
48 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 145.
of the United States was ratified and Caleb Cushing signed the Treaty of Wanghia a mere two years after the Treaty of Nanking.

But the United States stretching its horizons to China was not, in the eyes of Fairbank and any other historian who believes in American exceptionalism, an act of imperialism, but just an act of expansion. U.S. empire, acts of imperialism, and a broader culture of U.S. empire (what William Appleman Williams calls “empire as a way of life”), have been hidden by an insidious mythology of expansion. The Monroe Doctrine and manifest destiny have allowed writers like Fairbank to totally un-ironically write titles of subsections to chapters like “American Expansion and Britain’s Empire.” The apparent lack of cognitive dissonance is remarkable.

Fairbank is correct with regards to one thing: the possible cleavages between expansion and the perceived nature or direction of that expansion. He rightly points out that it was only as U.S. citizens further “moved westward to explore and settle [not imperialize and colonize, of course!] the American continent [that] we began...to see our trans-Pacific contact as a natural extension of America’s ‘manifest destiny’” and as the end point of a distinctly westward march. It was not always common sense to see China as part of or related to the westward advance of the United States across the North American continent. And nor did a U.S. presence in China follow the filling out of the continent or a Turnerian disappearance of “the frontier.”

The United States presence in China, and principally Shanghai, predates the end of continental expansion, the Spanish American War (and the resultant Treaty of Paris), and John Hay’s Open Door Note. Shanghai was the western-most point of a now forgotten route of U.S. empire across the Pacific Ocean, home to a key outpost of that empire, an empire that was, in that historical moment, widely discussed and hardly disavowed.

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49 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 308.
50 Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 310.
In my first section, *Believing in Empire*, I will focus on the distinction between colonialism and imperialism and a discomfort with empire pressed onto nineteenth century Americans by historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when prior to 1898 and the Spanish American War there was not a problem with openly talking about or advancing U.S. empire. I will focus on parts of the first imagined and then quickly created westward route of U.S. empire, the Sandwich (or Hawaiian) Islands and Japan, and on the imperial rhetoric used by diplomats, journalists, and travelogue writers with regards to these refueling stations of empire that, it was hoped, would connect the west coast of the North American continent with Shanghai.

In my second section, *U.S. Neutrality and the Battle over China*, I will further work against historians like John King Fairbank who place the United States as merely—and contentedly—following in the footsteps of imperial Great Britain by revealing how the United States and its citizens were always worried about whether or not they were losing imperial ground to the British or if they were giving up opportunities to get ahead of the British in the race for the Chinese market. In section three, *The (Not so) British Settlement*, I will recount moments in the famous district’s history that show it to be less than British and also home to U.S. power and empire. In my final section, *A Distinct and Competing American Settlement*, I will narrate a history of the American Settlement of Shanghai as, even in its very form, being an example of U.S. empire and its competition with British empire.
Believing in Empire

On December 22, 1820, Daniel Webster gave a 110 minute speech at “the old First Church in Plymouth for the bicentennial anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock.”

At the site “where the first scene of our history occurred” (leaving out of his national myth Jamestown and Roanoke), Webster gave “the American people...something they did not have at this time, something they desperately needed: a history of their origins as a nation.” In the eyes of his biographer, Robert V. Remini, Webster was the only man of his time who “could articulate the history of the United States.”

In this same speech, a speech in “he was asked, in effect, to speak to the origins of the nation, its basic foundations,” Webster also spoke to the nation’s future. He predicted (it turned out, quite accurately) that, in less than thirty years “the sons of the Pilgrims will be on the shores of the Pacific.”

But Daniel Webster did not restrict himself to just speaking of the future. He went on to attempt to build the future of the United States and those same “sons of the Pilgrims.” Webster should not be remembered as the lawyer who won Dartmouth College v. Woodward and McCulloch v. Maryland. He should be rememberd as the two-time secretary of state who, during both stints (the first under Tyler, the second Fillmore), first imagined a Pacific route of U.S. empire working in the name of Chinese commercial dominance and greater Pacific territorial hegemony.

51 Remini, Daniel Webster, 17 and 182.
52 Remini, Daniel Webster, 187.
53 Remini, Daniel Webster, 9.
54 Remini, Daniel Webster, 182.
55 Remini, Daniel Webster, 182.
56 Remini, Daniel Webster, 17.
57 Webster was actually first Secretary of State under William Henry Harrison’s one month presidency but stayed on (he was the only member of Harrison’s cabinet not to resign) as Secretary of State under John Tyler.
The Pacific that Webster was stepping into was not one untouched by empire, European or American. "England annexed New Zealand in 1841, and France seized the Marquesas [a group of islands 2400 miles southeast of the Hawaiian Islands] in 1842." The U.S. Navy was active in the Pacific as early as 1813 (also at Marquesas), intervened in the Fiji Islands and Samoa in 1840 and 1841. Most importantly, the United States was such a strong presence in Hawaii in the early nineteenth century that Prince Timoteo Haalilio, accompanied by American Reverend William Richards, visited the U.S. capital in December, 1842 to either discuss the possibility of annexation or "secure recognition for Hawaiian independence."

Hawaii was one of three key intermediary points on this Pacific route of empire, the others being the Oregon Territory and Japan. Daniel Webster was heavily involved with establishing U.S. power in all three locations to connect the continental United States with the route's end point, Shanghai.

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59 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 74 and 103.
60 Belohlavek, Broken Glass, 151. Remini, Daniel Webster, 579.
“Forging the ‘Great Chain’”

Webster’s “Great Chain” was born as much out of competition with and anxieties over British empire as U.S. desires for expansion. In fact, John R. Haddad argues, in his recent book America’s First Adventures in China, poor relations with Britain was the “main obstacle blocking a [U.S.] mission to China.”

Ironically, the mending of relations occasioned by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, signed on August 9, 1842 and credited by “everyone” as having “spared the country from a third possible war with Great Britain,” only opened the door for greater potential squabbles in China and the greater Pacific region. “British forces, [it was] warned, would next proceed to Japan to force that nation [open]. Already well positioned in the Pacific Northwest, Britain would only

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61 I take this phrase from Kenneth E. Shewmaker and his article “Forging the ‘Great Chain’: Daniel Webster and the Origins of American Foreign Policy toward East Asia and the Pacific, 1841-1852” in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 129. Shewmaker himself takes the metaphor for the Pacific route of empire (or, for him, the euphemism “foreign policy”) from Webster’s instructions to the John H. Aulick, the commander of the East India Squadron and man who, before being relieved of his position, was going to lead the naval expedition to open Japan: “When the last link in the chain of oceanic steam-navigation is to be formed . . . Steps should be taken at once, to enable our enterprising merchants, to supply the last link in that great chain (emphasis my own), which unites all nations of the world, by the early establishment of a line of Steamers from California to China.” It is, I think, a good metaphor because it reveals the “linked” nature of the route, that there were many parts and pieces to this Pacific route of empire. It was not as simple as securing a deepwater port on the Pacific coast of the North American continent and a U.S. presence in Shanghai. Webster had to make imperial rest stops and refueling stations out of the Hawaiian Islands and Japan.

62 Americans were concerned with Russia, too. In a letter to the editor printed in the May 15, 1854 New York Times and titled “The Encroachments of Russia,” a concerned reader remarked that “the growing power and ambition of Russia [is] as fearful as it is unquestionable.” From “this overgrown despotism of the North, rational liberty will find no other refuge and defence but in the American Empire.”

63 Haddad, America’s First Adventures in China, 138-139.

64 The Treaty sought to resolve three boundary disputes: “the northeastern boundary problem” in Maine, “the area between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods in the Old Northwest, . . . and the Oregon country, which Britain and the United States had jointly occupied since 1824.” The border issue that Webster most wanted to resolve was the one over the Oregon Country, “as he desperately wanted a ‘window,’” as in a deepwater harbor, “to the East in order to advance the nation’s trade around the globe.” But this was the one dispute that the two men, Daniel Webster and Lord Ashburton (also known as Alexander Baring), were unable to resolve. As Remini recounts, “the two negotiators discussed it, got nowhere, and decided to leave it alone since it was not an immediate problem.” Ashburton’s instructions only allowed him to offer “a boundary consisting of the forty-ninth parallel to the Columbia River and thence to ocean,” an offer that did not include any of the deepwater ports that Webster so desired. See Robert V. Remini’s Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time for further reading on the Treaty and other of Daniel Webster’s diplomatic accomplishments.

65 Remini, Daniel Webster, 20 and 565.
have ‘to seize’ Hawaii ‘to have a complete belt of fortresses environing the globe,’ much to the
‘peril’ of our vast commerce on the Pacific." The United States was at the risk of losing the
opportunity to decisively seize power in the Pacific.

The Tyler Doctrine, “a foreign policy statement...found in [President] Tyler’s message to
Congress, written by Webster and delivered on December 30, 1842,” makes much sense in this
atmosphere of heightened imperial anxiety over the Hawaiian Islands. The origins of this
document lie in Webster’s letter in response to the requests of the Hawaiian envoys, Prince
Timoteo Haalilo and Reverend William Richards, who visited Washington earlier that month. They
delivered an ultimatum to the Secretary of State who “appeared to know little about the
islands” even though an earlier emissary named Peter A. Brinsmade “had informed the secretary
about the ‘numerous and obvious’ benefits to be gained in Hawaii,” it stated that, “if they failed
to secure recognition for Hawaiian independence, they would place the islands under the formal
protection of Great Britain.” All of a sudden, with the mention of Great Britain, Webster was
interested.

His letter in response in many ways reads like the Insular Cases, a group of post-Spanish-
American War Supreme Court decisions that “legislated the juridical and political terrain of
Puerto Rico as a dependency of the United States,” as “foreign in a ‘domestic sense.’” John
Quincy Adams summarized the letter, characterized by Reverend Richards as “not quite what I
wanted: “[it is] in language not very explicit, evades a direct acknowledgement [of Hawaiian
independence], and declines the negotiation of a treaty, but argues the right of the Sandwich

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66 Haddad, America’s First Adventures in China, 140.
67 Remini, Daniel Webster, 580.
68 Remini, Daniel Webster, 580.
69 Remini, Daniel Webster, 579.
70 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture, 3.
Islands to be recognized as an independent State, and against the right of any European power to colonize or take possession of them."

The United States desired "no peculiar advantages, no exclusive control over the Hawaiian Government" except the right to be the only power to attempt "to take possession of the islands, colonize them, and subvert the native Government." The United States was the final arbiter of the Hawaiian Islands’ independence. Webster’s letter defined the Hawaiian Islands as neither “domestic in the domestic sense” (as part of the nation), nor “foreign in the foreign sense” (as an autonomous nation). The Kingdom would remain in this state of imperial limbo, for the benefit of the official-colony-avoiding United States over their imperial rivals, Great Britain, until its inevitable annexation by the U.S. in 1898.

The last key place along the imperial route to Shanghai is Japan. I contend that one cannot understand the opening of Japan without an understanding of the Pacific U.S. empire and U.S. involvement in China in this era. Critically involved in this venture, again, was our protagonist Daniel Webster. Serving his second stint as Secretary of State, this time under President Millard Fillmore, Webster wrote the instructions for the Japan mission on June 10, 1851. Although he died (on October 24, 1852 at the age of seventy) before he could see the successful culmination of the project during Franklin Pierce’s presidency, it is abundantly clear that Webster was the key architect and initiator of the Japan mission.

The addition of Japan to the “great chain,” in addition with a few other events, lessened the importance of Hawaii with regards to Shanghai and U.S. empire in China. Hawaii was more

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71 Remini, Daniel Webster, 580.
72 Remini, Daniel Webster, 580-581.
73 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture, 3.
74 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture, 54.
75 Remini, Daniel Webster, 20.
76 Remini, Daniel Webster, 21 and 710.
important to a slightly different route of empire, one that originated on the east coast of the
United States, crossed over from the Atlantic Ocean to Pacific Ocean at the Panamanian Isthmus,
and passed through the Hawaiian Islands before reaching the final destination of Shanghai. In
this route, laid out in a March 2, 1854 article in the *New York Times* on “The Sandwich Islands:
Their Geographical Position and Extent, and their Geognostic Character and Scenery,” the
Hawaiian Islands were the “Half-way House of the Pacific.”77 But since Webster’s penning of
the Tyler Doctrine and weaving of the Hawaiian Kingdom into the quilt of U.S. empire the
United States had gained control of four deepwater ports fronting the Pacific: Seattle, Portland,
San Francisco, and San Diego.78 The route beginning at any one of these ports, the route that
Webster had imagined (nay, dreamed!) and helped to establish, no longer required Hawaii.

Webster made sure two things made it across to the Japanese emperor and his cabinet
when Japan was opened: that Japan was not the ultimate destination for U.S. steamers and was
rather needed for its abundant coal for refueling and “that the United States are connected with
no government in Europe.”79

The former was put across in Fillmore’s letter to the emperor. In this new age of steam
powered ships, coal was critical to the quick transfer of goods and information across oceans.
Japan had a lot of coal, and as long as the United States’ steamers could purchase it, Webster
would have been content (if he had still been alive) with Japan remaining closed off. In his
instructions to Aulick (which were unchanged when Perry took the reigns), Webster suggests,
that in the case that “the Japanese persisted in their isolation, ‘you might perhaps induce them’ to
consent to bringing the coal to a neighboring island where the steamers could purchase it.”80

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78 Remini, Daniel Webster, 710-711.
80 Remini, Daniel Webster, 712.
Webster's desire to open Japan to the United States had everything to do with Shanghai and future control of the China trade and nothing to do with Japan itself.

The treaty that came out of Perry's second visit to or interaction with Japan in early March, 1854, the Treaty of Kanagawa opened two Japanese ports, Hakodate and Shimoda, as refueling stations for American China merchants and North Pacific whalers. It was thought Shimoda, because of its relative closeness to Edo, would become the main coal depot for steamers passing between San Francisco and Shanghai, but J. W. Spalding discovered, while accompanying Perry on his missions, that Hakodate, at the southern tip of the northern island of Hokkaido, though seemingly much out of the way, was in fact incredibly on the way and therefore much more suitable as the main coal depot:

"The bay of Hakodadi is most spacious and majestic in its sweep, and for facility of entrance and security of anchorage it can scarcely be surpassed by any other in the world. The width of its mouth is so great that no two fortifications could command or protect it, yet the curvature of the highland around is such as to afford the greatest shelter. For all the uses of Americans it is worth fifty Simodas; here our enterprising whalers, after being buffeted about in the rude seas of Ochotsk and Japan in its vicinity, may ere long repair to recruit and refit, and procure supplies of wood and water, instead of being compelled as hitherto, to make the long stretch to the Sandwich Islands. Besides this, a line drawn on the arc of a great circle from California to North China, passes...by Hakodadi; and here, and not at Simoda, which has been mentioned as a depot, would coal have to be placed for the use of steamers between San Francisco and Shanghai." 

Proximity to Edo did not matter to Spalding nor, he thought, to U.S. traders and whalers. What mattered for China merchants plying the route between California and North China was proximity to the ideal route. And Hakodate, according to Spalding, was essentially right on it.

The opening of Japan, it was imagined, would prove very useful to future traders who would

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82 Spalding, The Japan Expedition, 295-296.
only increase in number with the added convenience of Hakodate. The stage was set for U.S. control of the Pacific and supremacy in the China trade.

**Imperialism not Colonialism**

_Say, shall we ask what empires yet must arise, . . . and_  
_Where melancholy sits with eye forlorn_  
_And hopes for the day when British sons shall spread_  
_Dominion to the north and south and west_  
_From th' Atlantic thru Pacific shores._

Philip Freneau and Hugh Breckenridge

Early Americans (or in the case of the poem above written by two of James Madison's close friends from Princeton University, late British colonial subjects), were excited about empire. Unlike many historians of U.S. 'expansion,' “our Revolutionary and Founding Fathers...came increasingly to employ [the words empire and imperialism] in speaking of their own condition, policies, and aspirations. It became, indeed, synonymous with the realization of their Dream.” Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, in the 1820 case _Loughborough v. Blake_, was perfectly comfortable using the term when he asked: “Does [United States] designate the whole, or any particular portion of the American Empire? Certainly this question can admit but of one answer. It is the name given to our great republic, which is composed of States and territories.” For Chief Justice Marshall, American empire was the United States. The United States was American empire.

Thomas Jefferson saw no problem in using the word 'empire,' either. In fact, he was quite excited about empire. In an April 27, 1809 letter to James Madison, Jefferson expressed

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83 Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*, 44.  
84 Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*, 43-44.  
85 Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*, viii.  
that he was “persuaded no constitution was never before as well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.” Madison, in an earlier letter (1787) to Jefferson, writing before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, was convinced that it was not only well suited for empire but needed empire in order to work: “This form of government [The Constitution], in order to effect its purposes, must operate not within a small but an extensive sphere.” Empire was critical in making the Constitution work. Empire was essential for a vigorous United States.

It is understandable that the Founding Fathers liked empire. Just as for twentieth century Americans, empire “provided [eighteenth and nineteenth century Americans] with renewable opportunities, wealth, and other benefits and satisfactions including a psychological sense of well-being and power.” They were happy to rob Amerindians of their land and force them beyond the boundaries of or deny admission to the United States. Daniel Webster voted for Indian removal on April 26, 1830; Caleb Cushing, the same man who, when inquired by his diplomatic counterpart Keying during negotiations prior to the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia “whether the U.S. sought territorial acquisition...assured him his country had no such ambition.” rejoiced, in 1838, “in the spectacle of the Anglo-American stock extending itself into the heart of the Continent...taking the place of the wild beasts and roaming savages of the Far West.”

Cushing’s 1838 quote might seem to suggest a level of comfort with colonialism, but this is not the case. Nineteenth century Americans, much like nearly all U.S. historians, saw continental expansion as something different. It was not colonialism because it was their right, their religious right. Herman Melville in 1850 captured this religious feeling: “We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time,” Americans in this case, of course, meaning

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87 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, vii.
88 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 35.
89 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 13.
90 Haddad, America's First Adventures in China, 141.
United States citizens.⁹¹ “Americans” were unlike any of their European predecessors. What may have been colonialism for Britain was God-given expansion for the United States.

It is therefore incorrect to read U.S. disdain for and rejection of the European colonial model as discomfort with empire or to project back on earlier Americans a discomfort empire first expressed by some in the post-Spanish-American War period.⁹² That the “whole policy of [the U.S.] government has been opposed to colonial possession,” did not mean it was opposed to empire.⁹³ The event that J. W. Spalding, the writer of that last quote, witnessed, the opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew Perry, is evidence enough as to why he wrote “colonial possession” and not “empire” or “imperial coercion.”⁹⁴ The United States was well involved in imperialism and empire beyond the bounds of the North American continent decades before 1898.

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⁹¹ Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 77.
⁹³ Spalding, The Japan Expedition, 126.
⁹⁴ Spalding, The Japan Expedition, 126.
The Taiping Rebellion

While the United States and Great Britain were battling for imperial and commercial supremacy in China, the Chinese were fighting amongst themselves. The Taiping Rebellion, spanning from 1850 to 1863 with an estimated death toll of twenty million lives (making it the bloodiest civil war in world history), further thrust the once stable country, ruled for over three centuries by the Great Qing, into a state of political instability.

The future of China was up in the air. And with it so was the balance of foreign power in China. Whether or not the United States chose to side with the enterprising rebels, the incumbent Qing, or stay neutral (and have the ability to discreetly play both sides) could mean the difference between losing all trade concessions and treaty privileges (in the case of the Taipings winning and the U.S. siding with the Qing) and gaining access to the whole Chinese market (in the case of the U.S. siding with the winner). But it was not only the result of the Rebellion that mattered. U.S. diplomatic decisions would impact its place in the revolutionary now and whether or not the United States would lose or gain ground on their British imperial counterparts.

Americans fell on all sides of the Rebellion. Those who wished for the success of the Taiping rebels tended to do so because of the Taipings’ Christianity and the possibility, therefore, that they were led by foreigners. Some Americans, like Commodore Matthew Perry, also aligned with the Taipings because of their revolutionary project, a project that reminded those Americans of their nation’s origins: the Taipings were “an organized revolutionary army

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gallantly fighting for a more liberal and enlightened religion and political position." It was
easier to side with revolutionaries than with a suppressive empire.

Other Americans, in this case those in positions of high political power in China, favored
interventions to support the Qing government. Two consecutive U.S. ministers to China,
Humphrey Marshall and Robert McLane, called for explicit, sanctioned military action to assist
the Qing. Marshall, writing to Washington soon after the Taiping capture of Nanking on March
19, 1853, called for “an interference by the U.S. to ‘quiet and tranquilize China in support of the
Ch’ing government.’” Putting down the Rebellion was the best course of action.

Similarly, “McLane advocated a strong policy whereby the U.S. would resort to armed
forces in order to command Chinese respect for U.S. interests in that empire.” They would
assist the Qing, and the Qing would be grateful for the U.S. assistance in suppressing the
Taipings and give greater concessions.

But perhaps knowing that Washington would never sign off on explicit military action for
anything other than “protection... in all cases, where citizens of the U. States are concerned.”
resident Americans, especially those in the merchant community, favored a policy of neutrality.
They did so for a few reasons. The first reason was that it was good for their bottom line: “the
prolonged civil war created new commercial opportunities and profits for American and other
merchants.” A divided China was best for their interests; assisting either side would most
likely end the Rebellion quicker and mean less money in their pockets.

Merchant proponents of neutrality experienced one episode of pro-Qing intervention by a
U.S. government representative that affirmed their beliefs. In the wake of the capture of the

97 Deng, Americans and the Taiping Rebellion, 26.
98 Deng, Americans and the Taiping Rebellion, 27 and 57.
99 Deng, Americans and the Taiping Rebellion, 96.
100 Deng, Americans and the Taiping Rebellion, 104.
walled city of Shanghai by the Small Swords Society (a separate rebel group that sided with the Taiping cause) in 1853, the Qing government "had become unable to fulfill its stipulations or to collect the export duties we [Americans] had agreed to pay." Humphrey Marshall, true to his pro-Qing leanings, stepped in as the collector of the duties so that the Qing government would not lose out on a key source of revenue in their battle with the Taipings.

This action infuriated U.S. merchants because it placed them at a commercial and financial disadvantage to British merchants. The British consul, in the eyes of U.S. merchants, had done the sensible thing: "he refused to recognize the imperial authority when it proved unable to maintain itself." British merchants therefore had the advantage of not having to pay any export duties, duties the U.S. consul Marshall was still collecting from U.S. merchants.

The Taiping rebels were unhappy with Marshall as well. According to the New York Times, the Taipings' "chief...published an address to the foreign representatives, complaining of this as a violation of the neutrality which the Americans had promised to observe between the contending parties." This violation of neutrality by the U.S. consul and the maintaining of neutrality by the British consul meant that "if the insurgents should succeed in dethroning the present dynasty, and in establishing a new order of things, our Government may have serious difficulty in procuring from them as favorable a treaty as will be accorded to the British." U.S. merchants and the New York Times journalist agreed that maintaining neutrality to keep even with the British was more important than assisting in reestablishing Chinese political stability.

102 "The U.S. Consul in China."
103 "The U.S. Consul in China."
104 "The U.S. Consul in China."
105 "The U.S. Consul in China."
The Arrow War and the Treaties of Tianjin

On October 8, 1856 the lorch A Arrow was boarded by Chinese police and had twelve of her fourteen crew arrested.\(^{106}\) Although it sounds quite routine, this event caused another Sino-Western war, called both the Arrow War and the Second Opium War. The issue was that the captain of the A Arrow was a British citizen, Thomas Kennedy.\(^{107}\) The seizure of most of his crew was, in his eyes, an infringement of his extra-territorial rights and “an outrage on the British Flag” which the boat was flying.\(^{108}\) Kennedy’s local government representatives agreed, and fifteen days later Great Britain had opened a second war against the Chinese, only fourteen years after the closing of the first.\(^{109}\)

The United States was officially uninvolved in this war. Like with the Taiping Rebellion (which was still in full swing), the U.S. was meant to be strictly neutral. The United States, along with the other “neutral power” Russia, would sit on the sidelines and let “the belligerent powers” of France and Britain fight with China.\(^{110}\)

One source, though, suggests that perhaps, the U.S. did not let the French and British do all of the fighting. In a Thursday, October 30, 1856 correspondence entitled “Very Interesting Details of the China News” printed in the February 23, 1857 New York Times, “Our Canton Correspondent” recounted the first hostilities of the War.\(^{111}\) After first mentioning the “presence of a large American naval force” led by “the U.S. war vessels Portsmouth and Levant,” the correspondent “[regretted] to add that one or two American officials were very unduly conspicuous in accompanying” a British landing party on Wednesday the 29th that “planted their

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\(^{107}\) Costin, Great Britain and China, 206.


\(^{109}\) Costin, Great Britain and China, 208.


\(^{111}\) “Very Interesting Details of the China News.”
flag on the walls of Canton...[marking] the first time that a European flag [had] ever been unfurled in [the] great city."112 The U.S. Consul at Hong Kong, a General Keenan, and “one of the seamen from the Levant” not only accompanied the 250 strong British flag-planting party but “[advanced] further towards the heart of the city than any other foreigner” and planted an American flag, “displaying it publicly within the walls,” while “several other American citizens [who] also accompanied the expedition...joined...in the pillage of the Governor’s palace.”113

The United States quite publicly violated its position of neutrality.

This was a problem, and invoked a strong response from Andrew H. Foote, the commander of the sloop-of-war Portsmouth and most senior naval officer present in Canton.114 In a paper written the day of the event sent to the British and American consuls, British Rear Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, and the offending General Keenan, Foote sought to reaffirm—and remind key members of the foreign community of—U.S neutrality:

The undersigned has been informed that the American Flag was this day borne upon the walls of Canton through the breach effected by the British naval forces. This unauthorized act is wholly disavowed by the undersigned, in order that it may not be regarded as compromising in the least degree the neutrality of the United States.

The United States naval forces are here for the special protection of American interests; and the display of the American flag in any other connection is here by forbidden.115

The strange thing about Foote’s notice is that it shows an anxiety over the maintaining of an appearance of neutrality rather than true neutrality. The issue with Keenan’s action was that it was so public. The problem was that he displayed the American flag in a way that could be “regard as compromising...the neutrality of the United States.”116 It is unclear if Foote would

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112 "Very Interesting Details of the China News."
113 "Very Interesting Details of the China News."
114 "Very Interesting Details of the China News."
115 "Very Interesting Details of the China News."
116 "Very Interesting Details of the China News."
have written his note if the United States flag had not been flown. The issue was not the U.S. role in the military action. The issue was the visible nature of U.S. participation.

The United States wanted to maintain an image of neutrality to stay in the good graces of the Qing for future treaty revisions. Their neutrality would set them apart from the “belligerent” British, and would hopefully lead to future advantages over their imperial adversaries.  

This neutrality, strangely, somehow won the United States an invitation to a seat at the negotiating table. Naturally, so as not to fall behind the British (or French or Russians), the United States accepted the offer, though not with a certain degree of reluctance and a fair amount of criticism.

The negotiator of the U.S. copy of the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), William Bradford Reed, addressed such criticisms in a speech at “The Board of Trade, in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday, May 31, 1859,” reprinted in full in the June 1 New York Times. Reed notes, in reference to the Treaty, that

The policy of the United States in China, by unfriendly people abroad, and some inconsiderate ones at home, has been much criticized. We have been censured because we chose, having no earthly ground with China, to stand off, to look on the conflicts of others, and then to accept from the Chinese the ready offer of all the advantages, which by means of war, other parties had extorted for themselves.

It is understandable that people, especially non-Americans, would be unhappy with the United States accepting “all the advantages, which by means of war, other parties had extorted for themselves.” What right did they have to such privileges?! They didn’t even fight!

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117 “The Chinese Treaties.”
118 “American Policy in China: Speech of the Hon. William B. Reed at the Board of Trade, in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday, May 31, 1859.” New York Times (June 1, 1859).
119 “American Policy in China.”
120 “American Policy in China.”
Reed saw the Treaty differently. In his mind, it was not British and French belligerence and aggression that secured the United States the ability to sign a new treaty and reap new advantages but the United States' "friendly and neutral position."\textsuperscript{121} The alternatives were much worse: the official participation "in a distant and expensive war, to the destruction of trade and sacrifice of material interests" or the rejection of the offer of treaty revision when United States traders had been negatively affected by war-related blockades and trade disruptions.\textsuperscript{122} It would have done undue harm to U.S. residents in China and disrupted imperial aspirations in the Pacific to reject the well-deserved Chinese offer. To not sign a new treaty would have been to fall behind the British.

Things worked out perfectly for the United States. Their neutrality had still won them a new treaty (obtained before either the French or the British because of the U.S.'s "lesser demands") and, through an "exemption...from the threats of the Braves, ...an admirable opportunity to secure an entrance where the French and English can only through a protracted struggle obtain a pacific footing."\textsuperscript{123} The United States did not just let the English win them new trade concessions in China; they attempted to be viewed as neutral during the Arrow War to get a step ahead, to gain imperial ground.

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\textsuperscript{121} "American Policy in China."
\textsuperscript{122} "American Policy in China."
\textsuperscript{123} "American Policy in China."
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The commercial importance of Shanghai can hardly be overrated. As an entrepot for the commerce of Shantung and Tartary on the north—as the outport of all the central provinces of the empire—as the grand emporium for the trade of the Fokeen and Formosa from the south—as the port and usual access to Soo-chow-foo, the metropolis of fashion and native literature—as a rendezvous for the trade of the Yangtze-keang and Grand Canal, the main arteries of inland commerce—as connected with numerous neighboring mercantile cities by the canals which divide the surface of the country—and as the grand emporium for the European and American trade in the north of China—it assumes an importance of which its local size and limited population would seem at first glance to divest it.  

Rev. George Smith, 1847.

The Bund

When Reverend George Smith visited Shanghai in the summer of 1845 as part of a trip "to each of the consular cities of China, and to the Islands of Hong Kong and Chusan, in behalf of the Church Missionary Society," the city of Shanghai consisted of just the old walled city. Situated on a bend in the Huangpu River, Shanghai was a "district city within the department of Sun-keang-foo [Jiangsu]." It was also a drab city, an unexciting one to meet from either land or water: "like most Chinese cities, its exterior appearance [was] not calculated to impress the approaching traveler with the wealth or grandeur of the place." What Smith did like was "a line of river frontage, extending half a mile, and occupying part of the suburbs on the northeast side of the city, from which it is distant a quarter of a mile." This was the area "granted as building sites for the foreign merchants," the area where "the situation [was] good, the air salubrious, and the locality convenient for the shipping." It was the future site of the grand

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125 Smith, *A narrative of an exploratory visit*, front cover.
British Settlement of Shanghai, the home of what would come to make Shanghai known as “the Paris of the Orient,” that line of river frontage that which “imported cockneyism” would come to call the Bund.¹³⁰

One cannot write about Shanghai without writing about the Bund. “The single most important spatial reminder of an entire social system and lifestyle,” the Shanghai Bund (define as “waterfront street” by Thomas F. Millard of the New York Times) increasingly shifted the center of gravity of Shanghai away from the walled Chinese city towards itself as large banks and trading houses, both British and American, established themselves along the riverside road.¹³¹

But the Bund would not have been as prominent as it was (and still is) if it was just a “waterfront street” with a non-aesthetic, practical past as “a sedgy swamp bordered by a towing path for junks.”¹³²

The Bund was the massive buildings lined up along the waterfront—with only the path in between—built in the “ubiquitous treaty-port architectural style that came to be known as ‘compradoric’” (“a pun referring on the one hand to the use of Doric architectural elements, and on the other hand to the Chinese compradors who served as the intermediary agents of Western merchant firms on the China coast”).¹³³

The Bund meant having, in 1855, over half of the noteworthy buildings in the city on it.¹³⁴ The Bund meant having a crowded river front anchorage where one could “count the flags of a dozen nations.”¹³⁵ The Bund meant a bright spot amidst a landscape of flat dreariness, the

¹³² H. Lang, Shanghai Considered Socially: A Lecture (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1875), 35.
¹³⁴ Shanghai in 1855 [map], in: F. L. Hawks Pott, A Short History of Shanghai (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1928).
jewel hidden away along the Huangpu River. But most importantly, the Bund meant a space “transplanted from the subcontinent and other colonial settings,” allowing for residents “to make sense of and control their built environments.” It made the foreign residents of and visitors to Shanghai comfortable by being both similar and different. The Bund was strikingly similar to what some had witnessed or lived in elsewhere, and was markedly different from their relatively immediate surroundings in Shanghai. The Bund was critical to a good life in the foreign settlements of Shanghai.

One could almost live in Shanghai without ever leaving the Bund. It was a place of business with its banks and trading houses. It was a place of government with the British Consulate at the northern end. It was also a place of leisure with its “pleasant promenades” and the Club, the center of social life at the southern end of the Bund. It was so nice that even after both the unofficial and official establishments of the American Settlement in Hongkew north of the Soochow Creek, many U.S. citizens kept their businesses on and residences near the Bund.

The Flag “Incident” and the Settlement’s American Beginnings

U.S. residents were as much a part of the British Settlement of Shanghai as British residents. What made the settlement British in name was not that it only had British residents but rather that when its limits were first agreed upon with Chinese officials in a document called the

139 *Shanghai in 1855* [map].
140 *Shanghai in 1855* [map]
141 Lang, *Shanghai Considered Socially*, 35. Plan of the English Settlement at Shanghai [map].
Land Regulations of 1845 (which would be quite importantly revised in 1854), "all land leased by foreigners in the settlement [had to] be registered in the British Consulate." Although ultimate sovereignty still lay with the Chinese government (at the basest level, it was still Chinese land), Local British government representatives effectively controlled who lived on the land and for how long.

Again, this did not prevent Americans from living in the British Settlement. One key resident was Henry G. Wolcott, the man named U.S. merchant consul (the community-appointed leader of the local U.S. community) in 1846 and who had had a house on the Bund since late 1844 (likely making him on one of the earliest U.S. residents of Shanghai). To celebrate the occasion of his appointment, Wolcott did something that no one had ever done in the very short history of the British Settlement, an act that drew a negative response from both the British consul and the Shanghai taotai (the head regional diplomatic Chinese official): he raised his nation’s flag.

Both the British and the Chinese saw Wolcott's flag-raising as an image of an imperial ownership, as laying claim to lands to which the Stars and Stripes had no right. It was the British Settlement for goodness sake! The United States, along with all other present western nations, was not supposed to act out of step with Britain and compromise the British image of the settlement. But Wolcott stuck by his action and eventually won the right to keep his flag raised, owing in large part, it seems to the presence of the U.S. warship “the U.S.S. Vincennes” that

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146 If this name rings a bell, it is probably because a newer U.S.S. *Vincennes* was in the news in 1988 for shooting down an Iranian civilian aircraft and killing 290 people.
was at the time visiting Shanghai,” the implication being that the U.S. naval presence at Shanghai was greater than that of the British.  

Ernest Hauser in *Shanghai: City for Sale* called it “one of the quirks of history” that it was “not the British but the American flag [that] was the first ever to be raised over the Shanghai Settlement.” But it was not a “quirk” that “for a considerable time the American was the only national flag displayed in the Settlement.” It was more the outcome of the fact that, at the time of the flag raising, “the British Consulate was still situated in the native city.” The fact that the early U.S. consuls were also members of the merchant community meant that there was a U.S diplomatic presence (albeit one not too connected to Washington) in the British Settlement before there was a British one.

The true “quirk” was that Wolcott, in the same year as the flag incident, received an offer from a local Chinese government official (perhaps the same taotai that was angered by his flag-raising), “to set aside an area for the Americans” only to turn it down, citing that “he thought the site disadvantageous.” Wolcott was either holding out for a better offer or content with his position on the British Bund, in the future commercial heart of the city, closer to both the Yangtze River and Pacific Ocean than he would have been if he had accepted the Chinese government’s concession.

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149 F. L. Hawks Pott, *A Short History of Shanghai* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1928), 17.
150 Pott, *A Short History of Shanghai*, 17.
151 As Montalto de Jesus recounts, this area, a strip of land with little waterfront, was not seen as disadvantageous by the French and became the French Concession which, like the International Settlement, remained in place until 1943.
From British to Foreign

In 1854, the British Settlement was made international.\textsuperscript{153} It kept its original name, but lost most of its particular British-ness. Owing to a few occurrences, the British ceded some of their power in and over the settlement and set the stage for greater competition and contention within the settlement.

The internationalization of the British Settlement was in the recognition of "the rights of all other nationalities."\textsuperscript{154} No longer did all foreigners have to register their leased land with the British Consulate; "foreign owned land was [now] to be registered at the office of the purchaser's own Consul."\textsuperscript{155} The new Land Regulations, in applying "not only to the British, but to the French and Americans," were inclusive enough that they changed the character of the settlement from British to foreign.\textsuperscript{156}

Not included under the term "international" were the Chinese. A massive influx of Chinese refugees arrived from Shanghai's hinterlands (caused by the Taiping Rebellion) and the old walled city (caused by the Small Swords Society occupation) from the early 1850s. They caused a new need for land and housing that had not existed prior to the rebellions, and some westerners were eager to meet this need and profit mightily in so doing. The 1854 revision of the 1845 Land Regulations allowed for the potential filling of this need by permitting "Chinese citizens to rent and occupy houses."\textsuperscript{157} This was when the city of Shanghai lost any semblance of demographic division or national segregation. Shanghai was now a Chinese city, through and through, and it was now going to boom.

\textsuperscript{153} Johnstone, "International Relations," 947.
\textsuperscript{154} Lang, \textit{Shanghai Considered Socially}, 27.
\textsuperscript{155} Lang, \textit{Shanghai Considered Socially}, 26-27.
\textsuperscript{157} Cranston, "Shanghai in the Taiping Period," 155.
A Distinct and Competing American Settlement

1848, 1854, 1863. All these years marked a new beginning for the American Settlement in Shanghai. The first its casual founding by missionaries and less-capitalized businessmen, the latter two its redefinitions, from “unofficial” to “official” and boundless to bounded, respectively.\textsuperscript{158} Although the settlement grew and expanded during the years between 1848 and 1863, the site of the settlement and its relative position to the British Settlement to its southwest (which it was physically separated from by the Soochow Creek) never changed.\textsuperscript{159} From its beginning, in its siting and physical, built form, the American Settlement showed itself to be competitively minded and as cognizant of its place at the end of a Pacific route of U.S. empire. Americans had greater goals that went beyond the mere settlement of Shanghai.

\textit{Establishment}

The American Settlement’s beginnings lie with Bishop Boone, the leader of the American Episcopal Church Mission, and his decision to move “from their temporary station near [the] South-Gate [of the Chinese walled city] to a newly built house, and Chapel at Hongkew.”\textsuperscript{160} The old walled city was over-proselytized and the British Settlement was too expensive, so “they purchased property in the outskirt.”\textsuperscript{161} And Bishop Boone and his following did so in a different way from the British or the French when they set up their settlement and concession, respectively. It “was not arranged in writing with the Taotai, but by private

\textsuperscript{160} Hudson, Manley O. “International Problems at Shanghai,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} 6 (1927), 77. Lang, \textit{Shanghai Considered Socially}, 40.
\textsuperscript{161} Pott, \textit{A Short History of Shanghai}, 19.
agreement with the Chinese land-owners” in the area. It is therefore also unlike the British Settlement and French Concession in that it did not start with defined boundaries.

From a restricted, localized point of view, the choice of Hongkew, meaning the Rainbow Mouth in Chinese, makes little sense. Eliza J. Gillet Bridgman, the daughter of “the pioneer of American Missions in China,” Elijah Coleman Bridgman, wrote in her memoir Daughters of China that her “situation in Shanghai [was] remote from the foreign community.” Perhaps this distance from the heart of Shanghai would have been bearable if the land that the American Settlement sat upon was clean and nice. But it was not. “When the tide was high, the contaminated, fetid waters of the river flooded most of Broadway,” the first—and for a while only—street that U.S. citizens built, “and some of the shabby and already dilapidated buildings that lined the ‘American’ shore—sailors’ joints, wharves, and a few modest homes.” It “remained for years in a condition of primitive wildness and insecurity,” a condition that made it more like the surrounding Chinese area of Chapei than the British Settlement. The American Settlement was a world away from the British Settlement and “its wealth, its good order, [and] neatly laid out streets.” It is no wonder that most U.S. merchants chose to stay in the British Settlement.

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163 Hudson, “International Problems at Shanghai,” 77.
164 Eliza J. Gillet Bridgman, Daughters of China: Or, Sketches of Domestic Life in the Celestial Empire (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 114.
165 Hauser, Shanghai, 60.
167 Hauser, Shanghai, 60. Pott, A Short History of Shanghai, 19.
A map of Shanghai in "about 1853"\textsuperscript{168} (fig. 1 above) shows just this gap. The map's maker did this in a few ways. Firstly and most obviously, in the zoomed-out inset map in the bottom right corner, the shaded square that signifies the location of the city of Shanghai is placed roughly over the combined area of the British Settlement and French Concession and does not include any part of the American Settlement.\textsuperscript{169} Secondly, he made the "American Ground," a group of rectangles on the inland side of Broadway surrounded by thin-lined distorted oval, smaller than it could have been.\textsuperscript{170} He excluded from this circling a cluster of "American houses" to the east, sited between the Huangpu River and Broadway and closer to the British Settlement.

\textsuperscript{168} The map actually cannot be from any earlier than 1854 because in the bottom right corner it displays the American Consulate (marked by a black flag) which was not established until the arrival of the first official, picked-by-Washington consulate and his choosing of a site for the consulate building.

\textsuperscript{169} Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].

\textsuperscript{170} Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
and its Bund, thereby exaggerating the distance between the strictly bounded British Settlement and the still officially-unbounded American Settlement. 171

The unequal placement of text and use of line is significant as well. The labels “Shanghai walled city,” “French Ground,” and “English Ground” all lie completely within their defined bounds. 172 The label “American Ground,” not fully capitalized like the British Settlement’s label, barely lies within the arbitrary boundary line of the settlement: the letter ‘A’ is intersected at its left leg and the letter ‘G’ is vertically bisected. 173 Twelve of the fourteen letters lie outside of the settlement’s boundaries, running north towards yet unoccupied (by westerners) land, perhaps reflecting the British perception of “the passion for territory which characterizes...our American friends.” 174

Subtleties in the drawing of lines also show the mapmaker’s interpretation of the American Settlement as less important—or at least less established—than the British Settlement. The British Settlement’s limits are well fixed by natural boundaries, 175 yes, but the mapmaker’s use of double lines along the edge of the settlement reinforces this fixity and permanence. 176 Within the unbroken line that stands for both the settlement’s physical and political boundaries is another line, this one dashed, that gives the edge of the settlement greater thickness and greater eye-catching value. 177 In contrast, the American Settlement’s boundary line, thin and charting a strange, unnatural shape, makes the settlement’s boundaries seem not real but made up by the mapmaker. Which is completely the case, since the settlement was not delimited until July 4,

171 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
172 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
173 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
174 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map]. Lang, Shanghai Considered Socially, 28.
175 The British Settlement was in this period, before it expanded eastward further inland, surrounded on four sides by water.
176 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
177 Shanghai and Its Suburbs, about 1853 [map].
1863, the same day as the eighty-seventh anniversary of the United States declaration of independence from Great Britain. Setting boundaries and establishing a grid-system were not priorities for the residents of the American Settlement of Shanghai. It’s local, physical shape was not as important as its place in the greater Pacific imperial puzzle of the United States.

*Achieving Imperial and Maritime Supremacy*

"During the year ending September 30, 1852, the total tonnage moored in the harbor of Shanghai was 182 vessels of 78,165 tons. Of these 102 were British, tonnage 38,420; 66 American, tonnage 36,532; other nations, not more than two vessels each, with an average tonnage of 500." The U.S. was Britain’s only commercial rival at Shanghai and, going by tonnage, nearly its commercial equal.

The American Settlement’s advantages lay in its relation to water. This closer tie to the water is manifest in its overall shape (much more elongated and thin than the square British Settlement) and the kinds of buildings that called the settlement home.

First, it’s shape. Compared to the square British Settlement quite accurately represented in the map in Lethbridge’s guidebook (figure 1, above), the American Settlement, at least immediately before it became part of the International Settlement, was much more rectangular. It was long and thin, with perhaps twice as much valuable coastline than the British Settlement (see

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178 Seward, “U.S.A. Consular Notification.”
figure 2, below). Paired with the fact that the American Settlement started without fixed limits and just “growed” through further private agreements between westerners and Chinese landowners, it is abundantly clear that the pattern of expansion, eastward along the coastline rather than northward towards Shanghai’s hinterlands, was a product of a greater want or need of waterfront property. While “the great commercial houses, banks, and insurances offices constructed buildings along the Bund, …shipyards, drydocks and repair shops for all manner of shipping were built along the river bank in Hongkew.” The American Settlement was suited for and catered to the needs of the transient, the British Settlement the more permanent.

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180 Shanghai Municipal Council, Plan of the Hongkew (Hong Que.) or American Settlement at Shanghai, [map], 1 inch = 200 feet.
181 Pott, A Short History of Shanghai, 19.
182 Johnson, Shanghai, 329.
Conclusion

Almost as soon as it was officially delimited, the American Settlement was officially disappeared. At a September 28, 1863 meeting, British and U.S. officials decided to amalgamate the American Settlement and British Settlement into what was officially named the Foreign Settlement at Shanghai North of the Yang-King-Pang but would come to be called the International Settlement. Like in the case of the official delimiting of the American Settlements three months prior, the news was announced in the *North China Herald*. With the U.S. Civil War raging, the U.S. territorial presence in Shanghai was hidden behind the guise of the international.

Despite this official disappearance, the American Settlement in Hongkew was still often viewed as American for decades to come. In an 1886 *New York Times* article entitled “Foreigners in Shanghai: Social Life in the Model Settlement,” the journalist relayed to his U.S. audience that the “American Settlement” is at the northern extremity of the quay.” Similarly, Mark B. Dunnell, in an article for the *Overland Monthly and Out West magazine* in 1894, still described “the foreign city [as being] divided into what are known as the American, English, and French settlements,” even though those divisions had not officially existed in over thirty years.

More interestingly, though, Shanghai was also treated as American well after 1863. In the same 1894 article entitled “The Republic of Shanghai,” Dunnell discovered that “Shanghai is the only place out of the U.S. where a letter may be posted with an American stamp.” An international stamp was not needed. In the eyes of the U.S. Post Office Department, Shanghai

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183 Hudson, “International Problems at Shanghai,” 78.
184 “Amalgamation of the English and Hong-que Settlements.” *North China Herald* 690 (October 17, 1863).
was part of the United States, a little piece of America thousands of miles away. The American Settlement, or at least a recognizable American-ness, far outlived its official disappearance.

What was seemingly so easily remembered or treated as American by residents, visitors, and foreign government offices was as equally easily forgotten, ignored, or never known of by late nineteenth century imperial planners and twentieth and twenty-first century historians. Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the influential military theorist who stressed the importance of sea power in the race for worldwide influence (read imperial supremacy) in his canonical The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783, expressed just prior to the circulation of Secretary of State John Hay’s Open Door Note his “anxious speculation toward the Chinese hive.”188 Mahan never “dreamed that in my day I should see the U.S. planted at the doors of China, advancing her outposts and pledging her future, virtually to meeting the East much more than half way.”189 The only reason, in my mind, Mahan, a historian and high ranking officer in a navy with an Asiatic Squadron that frequented the open ports of China, never “dreamed...[of] the U.S. planted at the doors of China” is because the United States already was planted at China’s doors.190 It wasn’t the stuff of dreams, it was the imperial reality. How he was ignorant of such a reality is unclear, though Eric T. L. Love points to a “lack of basic knowledge about the Pacific that was detectable throughout the nation” as reflected in a statement supposedly said by President McKinley “that he could not have guessed the position of the Philippines within two thousand miles.”191

188 Love, Race over Empire, 159.
189 Love, Race over Empire, 159.
191 Love, Race over Empire, 162.
Secretary of State John Hay was similarly bizarrely ignorant of his country's earlier imperialisms in China. In his well-studied and well-remembered Open Door Note, Hay laid out a few objectives for the United States in China. One "was to open the way for the endless expansion of the American frontier in the name of self-determination, progress and peace."\textsuperscript{192} But both Caleb Cushing's Treaty of Wanghia and William Bradford Reed's U.S. version of the Treaty of Tianjin had already completed such an objective, perhaps with a lesser focus on "peace" but with equal attention paid to "progress" (or at least that of their own).

Another objective, the second of my interest, involved "affording all possible protection everywhere in China to American life and property" and "guarding and protecting all legitimate American interests."\textsuperscript{193} But, again, American-elaborated ideas of extra-territoriality, codified in the Treaty of Wanghia, and the long presence of the ships of the East India Squadron (renamed the Asiatic Squadron after the U.S. Civil War\textsuperscript{194}), ever ready to land marines in the name of the protection of local U.S. citizens and U.S. interests (as they did three times at Shanghai between 1854 and 1858\textsuperscript{195}), already gave resident Americans all the protection they would ever want. Hay's objectives were only objectives if one ignored past diplomatic actions and a continued military presence. John Hay thought he was being revolutionary. He was not.

The fact that John Hay's Open Door Note is so well remembered is not because it was truly revolutionary but rather because it was written during the one (and only) accepted moment of empire in U.S. history. Recognizing the Open Door Note as mostly redundant unsettles the narrative that 1898 was the moment the U.S. expanded outside of the North American continent.

\textsuperscript{192} Williams, \textit{Empire as a Way of Life}, 128.
\textsuperscript{193} Williams, \textit{Empire as a Way of Life}, 129.
\textsuperscript{194} Feller, "The China Trade and the Asiatic Squadron," 292.
\textsuperscript{195} Williams, \textit{Empire as a Way of Life}, 104-106.
and became a world power. It complicates the narrative that this expansion came only when the frontier had closed, turning the expansion from one that was preemptively okayed and legitimized by Frederick Jackson Turner’s emphasis on the now gone frontier as critical to the nation in his paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” to one that was not. There was a U.S. presence in Shanghai before there was a U.S. controlled deepwater port on the Pacific coast of the United States. Great Britain and Mexico still possessed parts of the future United States. The frontier was hardly closed.

And yet historians have bought and repeatedly retold these narratives and have continued to make invisible U.S. empire before 1898. Too few have studied empire as a way of life. Too many have studied empire only in terms of official annexations, an act which is “rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line.”

Underneath that water line lies an undeclared naval war with France from 1798-1800. Underneath that water line lies the punishment of natives in Sumatra in 1832. Underneath that water-line lies Shanghai and a Pacific route of empire prior to the annexation of Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines. Underneath that water-line lies U.S. empire today, the largest, most controlling empire in the history of the world.

John L. Sullivan, editor of the Democratic Review, asked in 1839, “who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?” Although the question then was a rhetorical one with the implied answers of “no one” and “nothing,” I ask the question now seriously. My answer, made manifest in this thesis, is that only we can limit U.S. empire by first uncovering and

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196 Love, Race over Empire, 1.
197 Remini, Daniel Webster, 574.
198 Ruskola, “Canton is Not Boston,” 861.
199 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 73.
200 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 102.
acknowledging its existence. I echo William Appleman Williams in saying, “I do not want the empire.”202 And neither should you.

202 Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, 226.
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