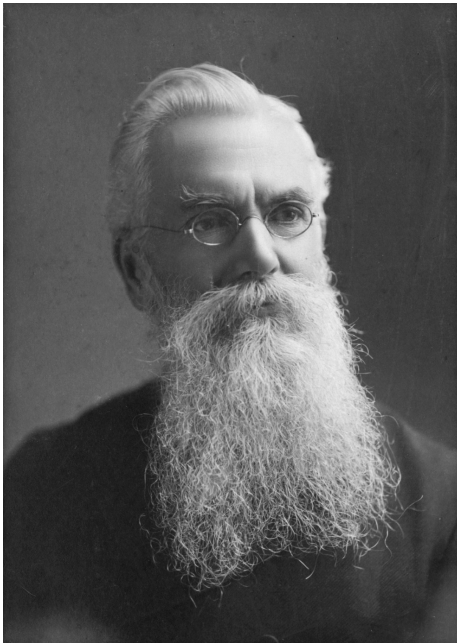


# JOHN FRYER, THE FIRST AGASSIZ PROFESSOR OF ORIENTAL LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE, BERKELEY

*Doris Sze Chun*

LOOKING BACK 133 YEARS LATER, it is quite impressive that attorney and university regent Edward Tompkins (1815-1872)<sup>1</sup> had the vision and courage to endow a professorship of “oriental” studies at the University of California in 1872, only four years after the university was chartered, with a generous gift of forty-seven acres of land in Oakland. Proceeds from the sale of these lands were to make possible the establishment of a professorship. It was the first gift for a professorship to the University of California. Tompkins recognized with incredible foresight that new commerce was opening up between California and Asia—especially China and Japan. He felt an urgent need to prepare Americans for business activities between the United States and East Asia by teaching them the languages, culture, and literature of the region. This incredible understanding and scholarly approach could not be more valid today.

What made Tompkins’s deed extraordinary were the time, place, and cultural context in which he made the endowment. The word “oriental” in the “Agassiz<sup>2</sup> Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature” conveyed a European-centered world view in the United States in the nineteenth century. The perception of the Westerners toward China and the Chinese people, as well as the cultural context of the Wild West in the treatment of Chinese immigrants, was indifferent and discriminatory. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, China had suffered immeasurable humiliation and destruction of lives and properties by the colonial aggression of the Western powers who wanted to control China’s



John Fryer, about 1900. *University Archives (UARC PIC 13:695a)*.

natural resources and commercial products, forcefully exhibited by the Opium Wars of 1840 and 1856.<sup>3</sup> Successive struggles of internal conflicts further contributed to the devastating turmoil and China’s diminishing image in world affairs. In the United States, the political atmosphere and social environment since the California Gold Rush was hostile to the Chinese immigrants who ventured to seek a better livelihood in the new world and to escape political chaos and economic hardships at home. Despite their diligent work in building the transcontinental railroads, developing California’s shrimp and abalone fisheries, and cultivating the agriculture industry, a number of restrictive laws were imposed upon the Chinese. These anti-Chinese laws eventually culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which marked the Chinese as undesirable aliens.<sup>4</sup>

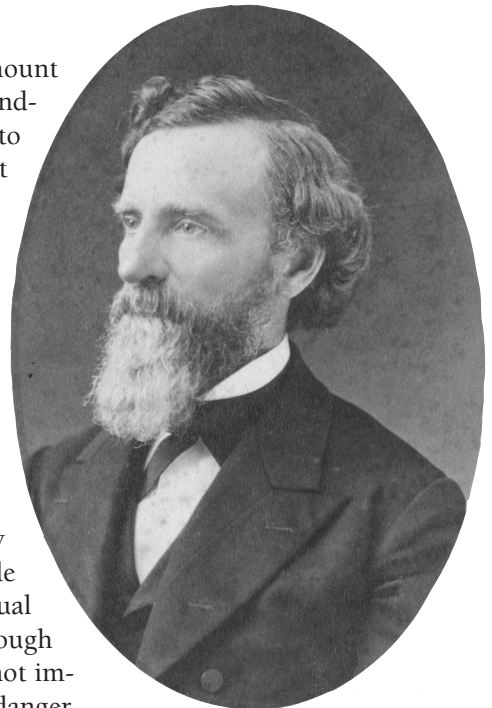
An attorney by training and profession, Tompkins was influential serving as a member of the first Board of Regents of the university and later

as state senator from Alameda County. Practical concerns also motivated his historic endowment of a professorship focused on East Asia. Tompkins worried about the lack of knowledge, skills, and independence of the Americans in commerce and trade with the Asians; he also expressed a sense of distrust of the Asians with whom the Americans were dealing. Tompkins made the following statement in a letter to the regents of the university:

The business between California and Asia is already very great. Its future is beyond any estimate that the most sanguine would now dare to make. The child is now born that will see the commerce of the Pacific greater than that of the Atlantic. It is carried on with people of whose languages we are wholly ignorant, and in all the vast transactions that it involves, we are dependent upon native interpreters, whose integrity will not become more reliable, as the magnitude of their temptations shall increase. It is, therefore, of the utmost consequence for California, that the means shall be provided to instruct our young men, preparing for lives of business activity, in the languages and literature of Eastern Asia. It is the duty of the University to supply this want. It can only be done by a well organized Department of Oriental Languages and Literature, and every day that it is delayed is an injury to the State. Fully believing that it is to become not only an important, but a leading department of the new education that our peculiar circumstances demand, I have hoped that it might be my privilege to endow the first Professorship especially devoted to it.<sup>5</sup>

Tompkins not only believed that it was of paramount importance to prepare Americans for a better understanding of East Asia, he also thought that it was necessary to create a hospitable intellectual environment to attract the Asians who came to the United States to study and teach. He continued in his letter to the regents:

As the department thus organized will at first not be fully employed, I hope that it may also be utilized for the education of such young men as may come here for that purpose from Asia, upon such terms and under such restrictions as the Regents may prescribe. As a lover of California, I feel deeply the humiliation of seeing them pass by us in almost daily procession to the other side of the continent, in search of that intellectual hospitality that we are not yet enlightened enough to extend to them, and yet more, that I cannot impose this as a condition of this trust, without danger of injury to the great interests that I most earnestly desire to promote.



Edward Tompkins, ca. 1870.  
*Bancroft Library (Tompkins  
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In the 1890s, it finally became possible to sell the Tompkins land for an amount sufficient to support the professorship, and the selection of the first Agassiz Professor of Oriental

Languages and Literature was in order. While the applicants' specialties varied widely from the studies of the Semitic group of southwestern Asia to the Indo-Iranian group of India and Persia, Tompkins had had a definite idea: he wanted Americans to learn more about China and Japan. As President Martin Kellogg put it, it was "the languages and literature of the nations still further East, still more populous, and of a like venerable civilization, viz. China and Japan. These countries had already become the commercial neighbors of California, and this was the point emphasized by Mr. Tompkins."<sup>6</sup> Since it was difficult, if not impossible, to find a professor who was equally competent in both Chinese and Japanese studies, the university decided to choose one whose primary interests and strength were in Chinese language and literature. As it turned out, the academic training and major works of the first seven Agassiz Professors all placed their emphasis on Chinese culture, language, and literature.

It is not surprising that the first Agassiz Professorship position was assumed by an Englishman; England was the most extensive colonial power in a greater part of the world in the nineteenth century<sup>7</sup> and thus had strong motivation as well as interest in the acquisition of knowledge about the culture of the people being colonized. John Fryer (1839-1928) had been educated in England and lived and taught in China until his appointment to the professorship position in 1896. During the academic years 1896-1914, Fryer served as the sole professor in the department and directed a curriculum of instruction in both language and lecture courses in the lower, upper, and graduate divisions. In addition to teaching, his responsibilities included assisting students who wished to take up other branches of study connected with China and Japan and acting as advisor to students coming from or going to East Asia. Two years before his appointment, Fryer applied for the professorship and outlined his teaching plan in a letter to the Board of Regents in 1894 as follows:<sup>8</sup>

#### Language

- (1) The Chinese language, its nature, origin, growth, extent, history, structure, modifications and prospects.
- (2) The literary style of book language of China, common to the whole Chinese Empire and Japan.
- (3) The Mandarin or Court language which is the common language of the official and educated classes, and has a literature of its own.
- (4) The Cantonese dialect, spoken by nearly all the Chinese in America being an entirely different language from the Mandarin, and having no literature.
- (5) Chinese philology, showing the connection between the Chinese and Western or Aryan languages

#### Literature

- (1) General Chinese literature, in its different branches, both ancient and modern.
- (2) The Confucian Classics and philosophy.
- (3) The Taoist and Buddhist literature and philosophy.
- (4) The literature of the Arts and Sciences, as known to the Chinese.
- (5) The history and present condition of the Chinese Empire and Japan.

Such a broad-based curriculum of Chinese language, literature, history, and culture opened the door for more specialized research in successive years. It also reflected an informal and less systematic form of scholarship in the study of East Asian cultures by pioneering scholars, mainly through personal experiences and sporadic encounters, as illustrated in the life of Fryer. However, this kind of immersion approach to learning can be practical,

personal, and less intimidating.

John Fryer was born at Hythe, County of Kent, England on August 6, 1839. After serving as a pupil-teacher at St. James School in Bristol, Fryer chose education as his profession and entered the Highbury Government Training College in London on a first-class competitive scholarship. In "Reminiscences of Life in China," Fryer describes his association with China in his early life in England:<sup>9</sup>

A few years before I was born, China and her people had begun to assume much interest in the eyes of the Western world. Robert Morrison did much good pioneer work to start the Protestant Christian missionary propaganda at Canton and the vicinity; though labouring under great disadvantages. Subsequently some of the returned missionaries as well as merchants who were traveling through England were met by my father and mother, who became deeply interested in the opening up of China to Western intercourse and civilization. My father subscribed as much as he was able while my mother for a time adopted rice as a considerable part of her diet. A most curious event took place soon after my birth. A missionary and the son of a wealthy Chinese tea merchant from Canton who were traveling through England to give the Chinese gentleman a good knowledge of Occidental affairs made a visit to our home. The Chinaman insisted on seeing what a newborn English baby was like and upon introduction placed a silver dollar in the baby's hand. Now I wonder whether there was anything prophetic about this circumstance. At any rate I often saw that dollar during the years of my boyhood but I have no idea as to what eventually became of it.

During my boyhood nothing pleased me more than to read all the books that could be obtained about China. If asked to write a piece of composition the subject I always chose was China. In fact I was so full of China that my school-fellows gave me the nickname of "Ching-chong Fy-ung."

After going through the usual branches of an English academic education, I went to a London College to qualify myself for Educational work—with China always in view.

Upon graduation in 1860 from college, although without prior formal education on China, Fryer was selected as a principal of St. Paul's College in Hong Kong by the Lord Bishop of Victoria, who was chairman of the college's hiring committee. He held this position from 1861 to 1863. (Hong Kong had been ceded to England in the unequal Nanjing Treaty in 1842 after the first Opium War.) Just like his contemporary missionaries, merchants, and diplomats from the Western powers working in China, Fryer not only familiarized himself with the physical environment of China but also learned with fascination the Chinese language and culture. It was in Hong Kong that this Englishman's interest toward Chinese studies developed. He had become a curious observer, an extensive traveler, and a diligent writer who recorded many of his experiences in China in his letters, articles, speeches, and diaries. These personal accounts are vivid and sometimes humorous, if not always in depth. He also began to use his leisure time to study the Chinese language (Cantonese) so that he could solve the riddle of the "Chinaman." Fryer had the following impression of his Chinese students and his attitude toward them during his first year in Hong Kong:

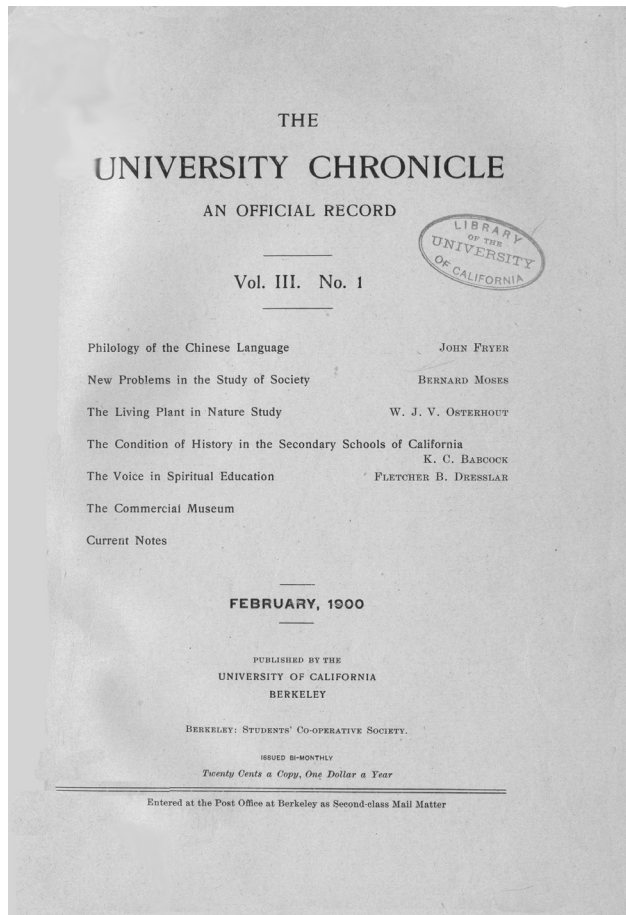
When I first came I could not get near enough to speak to them, they

would all run away; even now I cannot get them to talk, they stand motionless when I call them up to me . . . They take everything with the coolest indifference, whether pleased or displeased one never knows. It is rather discouraging, but I shall adopt an even course of conduct with them, which will break down the barrier between us eventually I hope. Indeed I may say it is fast improving already. . . .

Many of the pupils are still heathens in heart, I trust however that with God's blessing on my labours I may be enabled to do some good among them. It is only by His spirit's influence that the heathen notions and strong prejudices can be wholly extirpated from their minds.<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that Fryer had a sense of moral righteousness to convert the "heathens." Nevertheless, acquiring the ability "to do some good" among the Chinese became a moving force to drive him to have a better understanding of the Chinese people and their culture. From 1863 to 1865, Fryer was professor of English language and literature at Tong-wen College in Beijing, a government college established for the purpose of giving special advantages to the young men who were to represent China to other countries and serve as interpreters. In Beijing, Fryer learned Mandarin and had an exposure to the Chinese classics and literature. Some of his students later became prominent members in the Chinese imperial court and the diplomatic service.<sup>11</sup>

In 1865, Fryer went to Shanghai, reopened an endowed school called the Anglo-Chinese School, and managed it for two and a half years. In Shanghai, he was exposed to the Shanghai regional language and edited the first English-language newspaper in Shanghai, *The North-China Herald* (established in 1850). Having attracted the notice of various Chinese officials by his writings in the Chinese language, Fryer was subsequently asked by the Chinese government in 1867 to organize and serve as head of a department for the translation and publication of books relating to the arts and sciences of the West into Chinese, with the objective of preparing a complete encyclopedia which was to bear some resemblance to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to educate the Chinese people. The headquarters of the department were located at the Imperial Government Arsenal in Shanghai, a very important Chinese



Title page of 1900 *University Chronicle* with article by John Fryer.



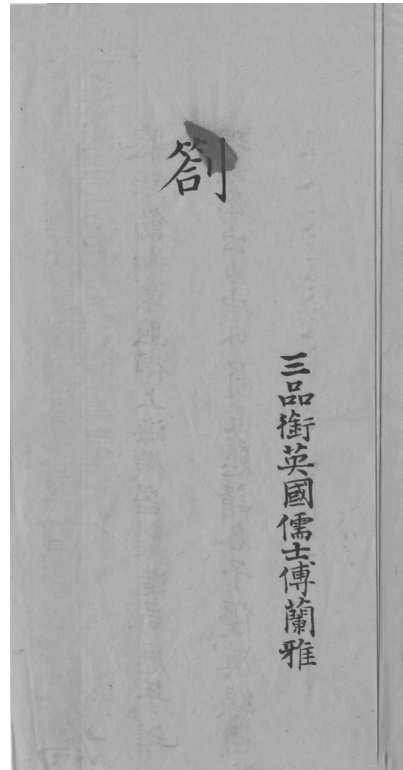
military establishment. For a period of two decades, from 1867 to 1896, Fryer and other European scholars studied various scientific subjects, translated, compiled treatises, and with assistance of Chinese writers, published several hundred Chinese volumes. Although he found translation to be a dull and thankless task, Fryer felt it was a duty to fulfill this responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the publications appeared to be quite satisfactory to the Chinese government and Fryer earned a reputation in the Chinese official and intellectual circles. Some of his translations later became textbooks at Peking University and in mission schools.<sup>13</sup> In 1872, the Chinese imperial court honored him with a “*jin-shi*” degree (“presented scholar”; highest degree in the examination system, awarded to palace-examination graduates) in “acknowledgement of the value of the services.”<sup>14</sup> In 1899 he received “First Rank of the Third Degree of the Chinese Order of the Double Dragon,” possibly the “*zhung-yuan*” degree, first-place of *jin-shi*.<sup>15</sup> These are rare honors, and Fryer was immensely proud of his accomplishments.

From 1870 on, Fryer also played a leading role in work connected with the establishment and building up of the Chinese Polytechnic Institute in Shanghai, of which he later became honorary secretary for many years, even after he had left China. At the Institute, he also taught classes, using the Chinese language to lecture. In addition, he helped to publish the *Chinese Scientific Magazine* in Chinese and served as its editor.<sup>16</sup> In 1884, Fryer founded the Chinese Scientific Book Depot in Shanghai and published the *Scientific and Industrial Magazine* to bring information about modern science, arts and manufacturing in the West to the Chinese. This publishing company, which he owned until 1911, was for years considered “the Mecca of the young students of China.” In 1880, he observed that China<sup>17</sup> must acquire new scientific knowledge in order to gradually transform itself for the future:

It is . . . to the future that we must look for the chief part of the practical utility of all this translation work. Such a vast nation as the Chinese is not to be started into motion, and made to follow in the wake of Western civilization all at once. Generation after generation will have to come and go before the complete transformation will be effected, and the intellectual as well as the physical resources of the country will be turned to the best account. . . . The system of ignoring everything but the Four Books and the Five Classics at the Government examinations, which are the passports to the highest offices in the State, is not destined to last forever. By patiently working on, even the present generation of foreigners engaged in this laborious task of spreading intellectual light may hope to see much good resulting from their efforts.<sup>18</sup>

John Fryer first became interested in coming to Berkeley in 1887 for his children’s



Certificate for Fryer’s honorary third rank, 1872. The last three characters represent his Chinese name: Fu Lan-ya.

education.<sup>19</sup> Although he learned about the opening of the Agassiz Professorship position from President Martin Kellogg, Fryer was not interested at the time. He stated: “Honored with the third degree of Civil Rank and well known among the more progressive of the literary and official classes by my publications in the Chinese language, there seemed no probability that the position in question could ever present sufficient inducements for me.”<sup>20</sup> He believed that he and his work were valued highly in China.

At the age of fifty-three, Fryer applied for the position when he learned it was still open; he wanted to join his family, who had taken up residence in Oakland. In a letter to the Board of Regents, he justified his age and qualification as follows:

It may occur to you, or the Board, that 53 is rather too advanced an age for a man to be eligible for the post in question. It must be remembered, however, that at least a quarter of a century of actual life in China & intercourse with all classes of the people is necessary to enable one to know the language and institutions effectively. You cannot find youth and experience combined in one Professor.<sup>21</sup>

Although it appeared that Fryer’s chief reason for coming to Berkeley was to reunite his family and for his children’s education, he also had a number of complex ideas. He valued the role of his translation work on China’s determination to improve. Fryer also expressed his desire to help modernize China and make her more westernized, like Japan during the Meiji era (1868-1912),<sup>22</sup> and to encourage the Chinese to take up English as a second language so the nation could fit into the modern world. He advocated the importance of learning and teaching Chinese studies in the universities of Western countries because of China’s increasing importance in world affairs. At the same time, he felt both obligated and privileged to help send Chinese students abroad to learn the arts and sciences of the West in order to build their country. He said that he did not want to be in a “sinecure” or just a classroom lecturer and he planned to use his free time to engage in “philanthropic pursuits or studies” to promote cultural interaction and understanding between China and the West. He outlined his view in a letter to President Kellogg dated May 22, 1895:

The recent war between China and Japan has considerably altered the aspect of affairs, and has rendered my position under the Chinese government even more secure than it was before. A strong tide of demand for Western learning has already begun to set in among the better classes of Chinese, who through the easy defeat of their nation are gradually becoming aware of their own gross ignorance of modern arts and sciences. My translations are being bought up as fast as they can be printed, and education conducted on Western principles is becoming the order of the day. It is for this tide that I have waited patiently year after year, and now it has begun to flow; it would seem almost wrong to absent myself from the country that has so long afforded me a home, and for whose enlightenment I have so long been working. There are also not many men in China able to take up and continue the work that has engrossed my whole time and attention and is spread over so extensive a field. Overtures have already begun to be made to me in different directions to superintend educational work in the Chinese language; and I have, of my own accord, just started Chinese free science classes in the Chinese Polytechnic Institution, of which I am the Honorary Secretary, with a view to their gradually expanding

into a large educational establishment, to be endowed by the Government. Various other schemes are in the whole of my energy. . . .

There is however one weak feature in nearly all this work which forces itself on my mind more and more; and it is this feature that makes me willing to entertain the idea of taking up such a position as is vacant at Berkeley. However necessary it may be for China to have the arts and sciences of the West translated into the native language and disseminated throughout the country in the first instance, it stands to reason that this will only succeed up to a certain point. Beyond that point no amount of translation can keep pace with the requirements of this age of progress. Only by the study of foreign languages and by education in foreign schools, colleges and universities can the literary classes ever hope to rise to thoroughness or eminence, and be able to follow the example of their neighbours the Japanese. Not before China has a sufficient body of men educated in Europe and America can she establish efficient systems of education, and carry them out for the benefit of the masses. In short, I recognize three stages as necessary for the complete education of China. First the translation of Western books into Chinese. Second the education of a large body of Chinese in America and Europe. Third, the establishment, by the men thus educated, of schools and colleges all over the Empire, under Government control. Of course this looks to the gradual decay of the Chinese language and literature, and with them the comparative uselessness of my many years of labour. Their doom seems to be inevitable, for only the fittest can survive. It may take several generations to accomplish, but sooner or later the end must come, and English be the learned language of the Empire.

While they last however, the language and literature of China will be subjects of great interest and importance, and especially to the people of the U.S.A. whose relations to China will ere long develop into colossal proportions if I mistake not.

Should the way appear open for me to live in America, I should like to be able to do something towards promoting the education of Chinese in the universities of Western lands. . . . You would not want lectures every day in the year and I should be utterly miserable without plenty to do. Such sinecures as Dr. Legge's at Oxford, & Sir Thos. Wade's at Cambridge would never suit me. Unless you had classes of American students wishing to learn Chinese, I should want to continue much of my literary work both in Chinese and English, and at the same time to try to induce classes of well-to-do Chinese students to come to Berkeley for the thorough and practical education which you provide in the University. Being pretty well known by my various publications over this Empire I should not anticipate much difficulty in inducing numbers of Chinese, who have already studied English for a few years, to finish their education at Berkeley. I should want them to feel that they could with confidence enter the University and find in its faculty and students friends who would help and advise them in all their affairs.

I do not know how your Board of Regents would regard such work on my part, if elected to the Oriental chair. It would be very unsatisfactory after casting in my lot with the University to find them opposed to progressive measures for the benefit of the Mongolian race, and hence it is better for both



parties to state clearly their views at the outset. I regard every well behaved Chinaman that I meet as a friend whom it is a duty as well as a privilege to aid in his pursuit of knowledge to the utmost in my power. A mere course of lectures on subjects that are perfectly familiar to me would not occupy a half of my time, and I should want to feel free to use the rest for the good of humanity, even as I am allowed to do by the Chinese Government. A clear statement therefore of the actual specific duties required of the professor, and of the latitude that would be allowed him engaging in philanthropic pursuits or studies to fill up his time might well be drawn up and forwarded to me with any offer that may be made. I have the idea, however, that you would prefer to leave me pretty much to my own devices.<sup>23</sup>

John Fryer's appointment to the first Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California was announced on September 12, 1895. He left China in 1896 at the age of 57 and brought with him "a large and valuable collection of Chinese books, including over a hundred volumes of [his] own publications together with English, American and other works treating on Chinese matters"<sup>24</sup> to the university for reference and general use.

Realizing that he did not have actual experiences in teaching East Asian languages and literature, John Fryer called on the professors of Chinese at various English and continental universities on his way from China to the United States. James Legge, a well-known professor of Chinese at Oxford University, for example, shared his teaching experience with Fryer.<sup>25</sup>

For the first two years at the university, Fryer offered courses on Chinese culture, history, language, and literature. Having lived in China for more than three decades, Fryer was familiar with the Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shanghai languages. He emphasized the practicality of these language courses and gave exercises in reading, speaking, translation, and composition. He also taught a course on Chinese classical literature that required critical study of selections from English translations of the Chinese classical books. A series of introductory lecture courses on a wide range of topics including language, literature, history, government, law, social conditions, philosophy, and religion of China and Japan were open to all interested students. These courses served the purpose of providing an overview and introduction to them at a time when China and Japan were largely unknown to Americans.

In 1898, when the College of Commerce was about to be opened at the university, Fryer suggested that "Chinese and Japanese should have a conspicuous place" in the curriculum. Consequently, he offered popular courses on

In this course (1082)

- 1) Fu-hsi, Shen-nung, Hwang-ti
- 2) Yao, Shun, Yu
- 3) Confucius, Mencius, Chu-hsi or Chu-tsoo-je
- 4) Ta-hsien, Hsuan-chuang, 9-ching
- 5) Chu-hsue-liang
- 6) Kuo-lai Khan
- 7) Wen-tien-hsiang
- 8) Wu-san-kuei
- 9) Li-tai-po, Su-fu, Su-tung-po

Brief outline for his course, "Great Men of China," introduced in 1912-13. *John Fryer Papers.*

the commerce of China and Japan with Europe and America. It highlighted the historical, geographical, economic, and political features of the commerce of China and Japan. The next year, he added a Cantonese language course to the curriculum to prepare students who had commercial interests in Canton, Hong Kong, and San Francisco.<sup>26</sup>

During the academic year 1905-06, the structure of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature expanded to include lower division, upper division, and graduate school. The lower-division language courses focused on proficiency in Mandarin and Cantonese, and the lecture courses introduced the different Chinese cultural areas (history, law, government, social conditions). A new course on philosophy and religion of China (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc.) was introduced and taught in English. The upper-division courses included commerce of China and Japan, Chinese literature, Chinese linguistics, Chinese Classics, and contemporary literature. The seminar courses in the graduate program focused on Chinese philology and international problems relating to commercial, diplomatic, and educational concerns in East Asia. He introduced a new course "Great Men of China" in 1912-13, a series of historical sketches of significant Chinese personalities from antiquity to Fryer's contemporary period.

Since there were very few textbooks in the field of East Asian studies, Fryer had to write and prepare teaching materials for most of his courses. He continually revised his lecture notes on Chinese civilization; most of them were never published.<sup>27</sup> One published work, *Oriental Studies*, represented the core of all Fryer's lectures. Although he envisioned a complete set, only the first volume, "The Philosophies and Religions of China," was completed and published. This teaching material also reflected the curriculum that he designed for the department at the university. Like his courses that provided an overview of Chinese literature and culture, this textbook was an introduction to Chinese civilization from a historical perspective.

Fryer emphasized the importance of learning Chinese language and literature in a cultural and historical context. This approach is quite Chinese. The Chinese have been proud of having the longest continuous civilization in the world and believe that history is a reservoir from which inspiration and strength can be drawn. Fryer largely derived his knowledge of Chinese language and culture from his association with the Chinese intellectuals and imperial officials. His attitudes about teaching Chinese language and literature were naturally influenced by the traditional methods. The university's curriculum thus placed an emphasis on the teaching of the Chinese Classics with a particular interest in Confucian philosophy. In his *Oriental Studies*, Fryer discussed the life and teaching of Confucius, Lao Zi, and the Buddha as well as their disciples and followers. He also touched upon the Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans in China, and other Chinese popular beliefs, which included Chinese geomancy, the dragon, the fox, myths, and ancestor worship. These topics appear to be widespread, scattered, and often unrelated. Nevertheless, they served one purpose—to satisfy the curiosity of the Americans and their wonder of China.

Fryer's plan for the department also included career preparation and practical training. His unpublished essay, "The Commerce of China," for example, illustrates his desire to prepare Americans who had commercial interests with the Chinese. This idea certainly was in accord with the intent of Tompkins's endowment of the professorship. His lecture notes outlined the history of the earlier commercial exchanges of the Western nations with China, and Chinese commerce in both ancient times and in the medieval period. In "The Economic Features of the Commerce of China and Japan," Fryer offered information on Chinese imperial maritime customs, tariffs, China's exports and imports, commercial methods, banking systems, coinage, tenure and transfer of land and property, taxation, weights and

measures, revenue, population, commercial characteristics of the Chinese, both land and water transportation, railway transit, postal and telegraph systems, as well as the Chinese army and navy. This was concrete and useful information that established a foundation for students getting to know East Asia. However, because Fryer intended to cover an extremely wide range of topics, the depth of discussion was limited.

Besides promoting commercial interest with East Asia, Fryer advocated that the federal government should build a center in the university that would provide adequate training in East Asian subjects to educate prospective official interpreters and missionaries. He stressed that the university's geographical advantages made it an ideal place to build such a center. Although there was no result from his urging, Fryer expressed his view to President Kellogg in 1898:

It appears to others as well as to myself that there ought to be an Oriental Department established by the Federal Government to provide qualified interpreters for the Consular and other branches of the U.S. Civil Service. Such provisions are made and effectively carried out by other governments—notably by the British, French, and German. It is now high time for the U.S. to make a move in this direction! The University of California from its proximity to Oriental lands, and from its endowed Oriental Chair certainly has the greatest claim to be made the centre for the necessary linguistic and general studies which would supply competent official interpreters, well informed in Oriental languages and affairs. The growing importance of the relations between the U.S. and China & Japan renders some such arrangement advisable; before long it will be found indispensable. Those who direct the affairs of the University and have its interests at heart would do well to lose no time in sending an adequate representation of the case to Washington.<sup>28</sup>

Some other published works of Fryer's included "Philology of the Chinese Language" (1900), "Chinese Poetry" (1902), "The Chinese Normal Essays" (1903), "The Mission of the Japanese and Anglo-Saxon Peoples" (1908), and *The Social and Political Aspects of the Chinese Jews* (n.d.).<sup>29</sup> Fryer's "Report to the Regents of the University of California on the Educational Reform in China" in 1909 was the result of his investigation in China as a special

*Topographical.*

<p>31 *Tour in Southern and Central China.  32 *Tour in Northern China and to Great Wall.  33 *Tour in Western China to Borders of Thibet.  34 *My Summer Excursion to the Orient.</p>	<p>35 *Japan and the Japanese.  36 *Corea and the Coreans.  37 *Tour through India.  38 *Tour through the Scottish Highlands.</p>
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*Commercial.*

<p>39 The Earlier Commercial Intercourse of Westerns Nations with China.  40 The Commercial Intercourse of Great Britain and America with China.  41 The Commercial Intercourse of Russia, France, Germany and other Countries with China.  42 Description of the Country and People of China.  50 The Outlook for American and European Enterprise in China and Japan.</p>	<p>43 Railways and Other Means of Communication in China.  44 The Productions and Manufactures of China.  45 The Exports and Imports of China.  46 The Commercial Methods and Currency of China.  47 The Treaty Ports and "Spheres of Influence" in China.  48 The Political and Financial Position of China.  49 Commercial Intercourse with Japan.</p>
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\* These lectures are illustrated by stereopticon pictures. Several others can be so illustrated if desired.

*818-16th St., Oakland, Cal., January, 1900.*

Portion of flyer announcing Fryer's public lectures, 1900. *John Fryer Papers.*

commissioner for the United States named by the university in 1907.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to teaching regular courses at the university, Fryer promoted a free university extension course on China and Japan and was a popular guest speaker, invited by various interested groups to share his experiences and knowledge about China and Chinese culture. Some of his discussions were “comparative sketch of the three great religions of China,” “celebration of the first national day of the Chinese Republic,” “missionary work in China,” “China of today,” “philology of Chinese language,” and “Chinese literature and libraries.” His talk, “Across China from Shanghai to the Borders of Tibet,” delivered at the California Camera Club in 1907, was credited to be “one of the most interesting delivered in the history of the club.”<sup>31</sup> Fryer had a list of “popular lectures on Oriental subjects” (religion, politics, social conditions, the arts and sciences, topography, and commerce) which he said “embody the results of thirty-five years’ observation and experience in China, Japan, and are available for Societies, Clubs and Schools.” In summary, Fryer was the expert on China in town. Although his talks appeared to be generalized discussion rather than in-depth discussions, they met the needs of his audiences, who found them both fascinating and informative.

As the sole professor in the department, with some assistance for the Cantonese and Mandarin classes, Fryer was responsible for teaching, lecturing, advising, preparing teaching materials, and administration work. He was often overwhelmed and his enthusiasm dampened. He also had to deal with students who were heavily occupied by classes in other colleges and could not devote more time to study East Asian languages and literature. Fryer lamented that his courses “could therefore only rank as of secondary character and were taken up by a few enterprising students, either out of curiosity, or as novel and eccentric additions to the ordinary means of general culture.”<sup>32</sup> It was quite discouraging to observe that the inducements to carry on East Asian studies were too small, and “few students can have the courage or the means to undertake this heavily handicapped, up-hill work, or to continue long enough to make it of any practical value.”<sup>33</sup>

To accommodate the students’ schedule, Fryer was forced to simplify or to curtail certain courses, which resulted in their acquiring very limited knowledge of both spoken and written Chinese language at the end of each term. Although a few students tried hard, the majority were discouraged and dropped out. Fryer said: “It [had] therefore been only by dint of my perseverance and persuasion on my part, that these study courses in language and literature [had] been kept at all.”<sup>34</sup> He suggested that students who took Chinese language courses should be allowed more time and credits proportionately, because they were more difficult for American students. He also recommended that Chinese be considered “sufficient substitute” for other required languages.

Fryer was frustrated that the study of Chinese language and literature was given “so little relative importance” in Berkeley, compared with other leading European universities. He urged that students who wished to specialize in East Asian studies be allowed to devote more time to pursue the degree so that they could be fully qualified as interpreters, translators, or proficient linguists in their related fields. He repeatedly advocated that the department “be brought before the notice of the authorities in Washington in connection with diplomatic and consular requirements for thoroughly competent and trustworthy interpreters and translators” in East Asia.<sup>35</sup> He thought that this could help acquire federal funds for the program.

It is interesting to note that Fryer’s learning and teaching of Chinese and East Asia were not by conscious design. He was led by circumstances and events in his life to create a rather successful career in translation for three decades in China. As his understanding about Chinese people, society, and culture deepened, his compassion toward the Chinese people



increased. He had grown out of converting the “heathens” and “Westernizing” the Chinese to demonstrate in his second career as the Agassiz Professor at the university a capacity to care about, to learn from, and to do some “good” for the Chinese. It was in this spirit that he became a Chinese advocate, a Chinese defender, and most of all a humanist who was concerned about better understanding among peoples of different cultures. He helped the Chinese people, both in China and in the United States. For example, Fryer sympathized with the difficulties that Chinese children encountered with racial discrimination that hindered their opportunity for equal educational opportunities. He considered the effort to promote the removal of such difficulties as being one of the duties of his department.<sup>36</sup>



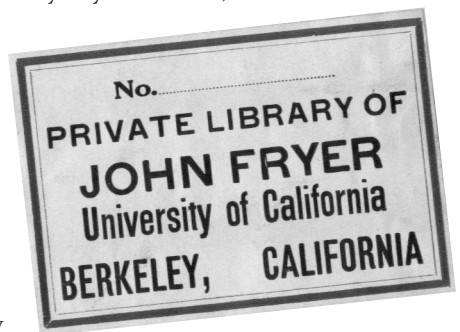
Title page of descriptive booklet about the University of California prepared by Fryer for Chinese students.

In 1901, at the request of the Chinese government, Fryer took charge of a class of Chinese students who had come to the University of California after having graduated from the Tientsin (Tianjin) University.<sup>37</sup> In 1904 Fryer was one of the organizers of the “Boarding School of a Christian,” which became the “Oriental Institute of California.” This institute, ignoring the strong ill-feeling against Chinese at that time and with very little

support, raised money to award scholarships to outstanding Chinese students so that they might carry on their studies at the University of California.<sup>38</sup> The internationally known Institution for the Chinese Blind at Shanghai was founded by Fryer in 1911,<sup>39</sup> and in 1926 the Fryer School for the Chinese Deaf was also founded in Shanghai. The schools were later taken over by one of his sons, George B. Fryer.

While actively working at the University of California and participating in various scholarly organizations, Fryer visited China annually to keep in touch with current Chinese affairs, his friends, and to oversee his business interests. Although he was offered educational positions in China on numerous occasions, including the presidency of universities, he consistently refused them because he envisioned the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature in Berkeley had a potential to expand its usefulness and importance to both Chinese and Americans alike.<sup>40</sup>

For eighteen years, the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature, with Fryer at the helm, grew slowly but steadily with more and more course offerings. Fryer retired



Bookplate for Fryer library.



from his active role and was named Professor Emeritus in 1914. The Carnegie Foundation expressed its appreciation for his academic service by awarding him a retiring allowance.<sup>41</sup>

On July 2, 1928, Fryer died at home in Berkeley at the age of eighty-nine. In his will, Fryer donated to the university more than 2000 books and 5000 slides, which were to form the core of the Oriental studies library and a large part of its holding until 1947. The Fryer Collection, reflecting his interests, focuses on Chinese classics, history, philosophy, and belles lettres.<sup>42</sup>

Fryer was a teacher of tireless energy. He was not only a pioneer in providing scientific and educational literature to educate the Chinese through translating Western publications, but also a pioneer in preparing Americans to learn more about Chinese civilization to help bridge the cultural gaps and promote American commercial relations with East Asia. His interest in China and humanistic attitude towards peoples are best exemplified in a letter that he wrote to President Wheeler in 1914. He suggested, regarding the inscriptions of the bells to be placed on Campanile of Sather Tower, that “in addition to an inscription in English, common to all, on the bells, the chief languages taught in the University should be well represented. Thus one bell, representing the written languages of the Far East might bear such an inscription as *T'ien-hsia T'ai-p'ing* [*Tian-xia tai-ping*] meaning ‘Great Peace to All under Heaven’; or something longer in the way of a Confucian aphorism.”<sup>43</sup> Although his suggestion was not adopted, it reflected Fryer’s humanity and worldly view.

While the university praised Fryer by stating that he “built the Department of Oriental Languages into one of the top ranked among the limited number existing in the country,”<sup>44</sup> the most fitting compliment came from W. E. Soothill, past president in the Imperial University in Shanxi and later Professor of the Chinese Language and Literature at Oxford University. He wrote:

Dr. Fryer . . . [was] a man of handsome bearing, of splendid courage, of profound learning, and of remarkable generosity—a man of whom his country might well be proud.<sup>45</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Edward Tompkins, his life and his contributions, was introduced in “Agassiz Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature” in *Endowed Chairs of Learning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), 1-4. This is a commemorative booklet summarizing the contributions made to the development of the university during its first three-quarters of a century by gifts and bequests from private citizens of the state. Tompkins’s endowment for a professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature was the first significant and most important gift. Also see the copy of a letter from Elizabeth K. Tompkins, daughter of Edward Tompkins, to Ruth K. Roberts in “Editorials,” *Oakland Tribune*, September 15, 1957.
- 2 Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz (1807-1873) was an eminent naturalist, geologist and teacher. He was born in Switzerland, educated in Germany and trained in France. In August of 1872, Agassiz visited California as a guest of Western scientists at which time he gave counsel to those laying the foundation of the university. Tompkins named the professorship as a tribute to his memory. See *Biennial Report of the Regents of the University of California for the years 1894-1896* (Sacramento, CA: State Printer, 1896), 6-7, and “Agassiz, Louis” in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1974), 289-291.
- 3 See “Open Door Policy” in *Dictionary of American History*, revised ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976), 5:158, and William L. Tung, *China and the Foreign Powers; the Impact of and Reaction to Unequal Treaties* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1970), 19-106.

- 4 See Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim and Judy Yung, *Island, Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 10.
- 5 This letter has been copied by the University Accountant on December 12, 1932 from the *Bien-nial Report of the Regents of the University of California for the years 1872-73*, 45-46. The University Accountant stated that the original letter was not able to be found. A copy of the letter was in the Office of the Comptroller. Part of the letter was printed in *Illustrated History of the University of California, 1868-1901*, ed. William Carey Jones, (Berkeley: Students' Cooperative Society, 1901), 185-186.
- 6 William Warren Ferrier, *Origin and Development of the University of California* (Berkeley: Sather Gate Book Shop, 1930), 203.
- 7 Mary Evelyn Townsend, *European Colonial Expansion since 1871* (Chicago: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1941), 19.
- 8 John Fryer to the Board of Regents, January 26, 1894. Regents' records, CU-1 Box 25:1, University Archives, University of California, Berkeley.
- 9 In this typewritten speech draft with his hand-written title "Reminiscences of Life in China" (incomplete, 3 pages, n.d.), Fryer divided his life into twelve periods of seven years. Each was characterized by the addition of change of some feature of importance. John Fryer Papers, BANC MSS C-B 968, Ctn.3, The Bancroft Library. John Fryer's biography was published in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1931), 21, 246-247. A short biography of Fryer can be found in Wellington C. Wolfe, *Men of California, 1900-1902* (San Francisco: the Pacific Art Company, 1901), 438.
- 10 John Fryer, "First Impressions of Hong Kong and the Chinese People," dated August 1861, 21 pages. John Fryer Papers, BANC MSS C-B 968, Ctn.3.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 John Fryer, *An Account of the Department for the Translation of Foreign Books at the Kiangnan Arsenal, Shanghai, with Various Lists of Publications in the Chinese Language* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1880; reprinted from the *North-China Herald*, January 29, 1880). This booklet has a list of publications which includes a large portion of Fryer's works.
- 13 Ibid., 16-17.
- 14 Ibid., 7. Fryer translated it as the "Third Degree of Chinese Brevet Civil Rank." The honorary degree of LLD that Fryer possessed was received from Alfred University, New York, in 1888. *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 21:247.
- 15 Ichisada Miyazaki, Conrad Schirokauer, trans., *China's Examination Hell; the Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).
- 16 For a glimpse of the activities in which the institution was involved, see the *Fourth Report of the Chinese Polytechnic Institution and Reading Rooms, from March 1883 to June 1885* (Shanghai: The North-China Herald Office, 1885).
- 17 "Reception to Dr. Fryer, Fifty Years' Connection with China," *Shanghai Times*, June 26, 1911.
- 18 John Fryer, *An Account of the Department for the Translation of Foreign Books at the Kiangnan Arsenal, Shanghai*, 18.
- 19 John Fryer to the President of the State University in Berkeley, September 17, 1887. President's records, CU-5, Ser.1, Box 1:60, University Archives, University of California, Berkeley.
- 20 John Fryer to President Martin Kellogg, January 12, 1894. Regents' records, CU-1, Box 25:1.
- 21 Nellie Blessing Eyster, *A Beautiful Life: Memoir of Mrs. Eliza Nelson Fryer, 1847-1910* (Berkeley, CA: Press of Lack Brothers, 1912), 61; this was compiled by Eyster and privately published, with additions, by John Fryer. Also see letter, John Fryer to the Board of Regents, January 26, 1894. Regents'

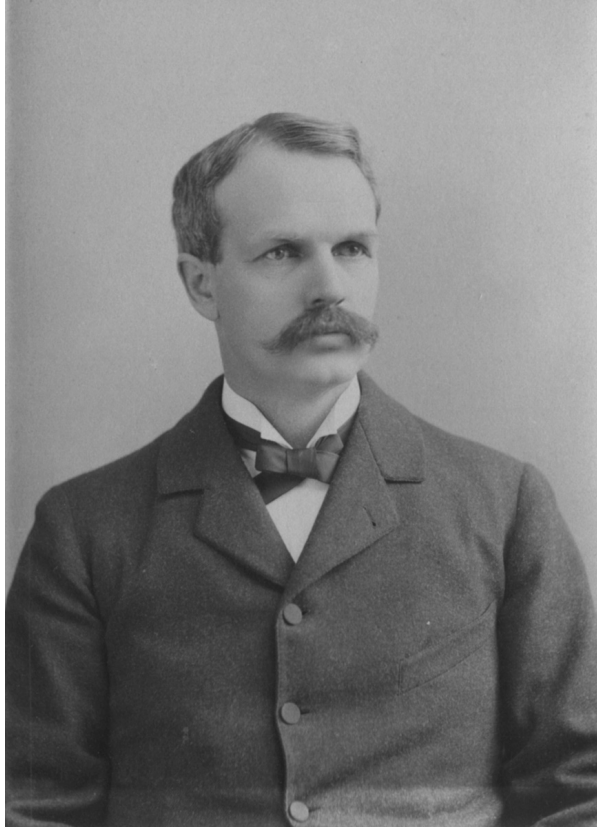
- records, CU-1, Box 25:1.
- 22 Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).
  - 23 John Fryer to President Martin Kellogg, May 22, 1895. Regents' records, CU-1, Box 25:1.
  - 24 All of Fryer's publications were related to the translation of scientific books. Letter, John Fryer to the Board of Regents, January 26, 1894. Regents' records, CU-1, Box 25:1.
  - 25 Fryer stated that when he was in China he had been friendly with a number of Sinologists, including James Legge. Others are Sir Thomas Wade, K.C.E., a British Minister and later Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University, Dr. W.A.P. Martin, the President of the Chinese Government College (Tong-wen) who later succeeded Fryer as Professor of English there, and Dr. Joseph Edkins, a well-known authority in the Chinese language and literature. Letters, John Fryer to President Martin Kellogg, November 2, 1895; and John Fryer to the Board of Regents, January 26, 1894. Regents' records, CU-1, Box 25:1.
  - 26 John Fryer to President Martin Kellogg, April 12, 1898. President's records, CU-5 Ser.1, Box 2:13.
  - 27 John Fryer, *Oriental Studies; A Series of College Textbooks on Subjects Connected with China, Japan and Other Eastern Lands* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Ltd., 1900).
  - 28 John Fryer to President Martin Kellogg, April 12, 1898. President's records, CU-5, Ser.1, Box 2:13.
  - 29 "Philology of the Chinese Language," in *The University [of California] Chronicle* 3:1 (February 1900), 1-12; "Chinese Poetry," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 33 (1902), xcii-xciv; "The Chinese Normal Essay," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 34 (1903), c-ciii; "The Mission of the Japanese and Anglo-Saxon Peoples," in *The University [of California] Chronicle* 10:2 (April 1908), 186-191; *Social and Political Aspects of the Chinese Jews* (San Francisco: New Occident Publishing Co., [1902?]).
  - 30 "Report to the Regents of the University of California on the Educational Reform in China," in *The University [of California] Chronicle* 12:3 (1909). Selections of this report were later printed in the *Report of the U.S. Bureau of Education* in 1909 at the request of the U.S. Commissioner of Education, E. E. Brown.
  - 31 "List of Popular Lectures on Oriental Subjects" prepared by Fryer. John Fryer Papers, BANC MSS C-B 968, Ctn.3.
  - 32 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, March 7, 1904 and February 1911. President's records, CU-5 Ser. 1, Box 18:31 and 40:98.
  - 33 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, December 6, 1905. President's records, CU-5 Ser. 1, Box 21:60.
  - 34 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, March 7, 1904. President's records, CU-5 Ser. 1, Box 18:31.
  - 35 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, February 1911. President's records, CU-5 Ser.1, Box 40:98. Date not filled in, but Wheeler's response is dated February 13, 1911.
  - 36 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, May 11, 1903, President's records, CU-5 Ser.1, Box 14:114; John Fryer to Professor T. W. Page, March 6, 1906. President's records, CU-5 Ser. 1, Box 21:60. In the latter letter, Fryer strongly defended the Chinese who received ill-treatment from contemporary Americans.
  - 37 Official letter [in Chinese], the Imperial Minister of Commerce of the Qing Court Sheng Gong-bao to John Fryer, July 7, 1901. John Fryer Papers, BANC MSS C-B 968, Box 1.
  - 38 The objective of the institute was "to establish, maintain, and conduct a Seminary of Learning for the instruction of Oriental Youth under Christian influence." State official document, No. 42925. This institute in 1915 transferred land to the university as a gift to constitute an endowment,

income from which was to be devoted to aiding Oriental students at the university. See two essays both entitled “The Oriental Institute of California” written by Fryer, dated April 17, 1908, and 1915? John Fryer Papers, BANC MSS C-B 968, Ctn.3.

- 39 For further information, see “Late Dr. Fryer Finds Braille System in China” in *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, April 29, 1929; *About a Blind School That Is Not Blind* (Shanghai: Institution for the Chinese Blind, n.d.); *Institution for the Chinese Blind* (Shanghai: Institution for the Chinese Blind, n.d.); and *It is the Soul That Sees—A Record of Twenty Years’ Work* (Shanghai: Institution for the Chinese Blind, 1932).
- 40 The original documents were not found. See typewritten statement for the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, March 29, 1929. John Fryer’s Files, BANC MSS C-B 968 Ctn. 3.
- 41 President of the Carnegie Foundation Henry B. Pritchett to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, May 15, 1914. President’s records, CU-5 Ser.2, 1914:189.
- 42 Elizabeth Huff, founder and a major contributor in the building and molding of the East Asiatic Library of the university commented that the Fryer Collection was a “perfectly standard” set by the “well-educated not necessarily scholarly collector of the latter half of the 19th century.” Elizabeth Huff, “Teacher and Founding Curator of the East Asiatic Library: from Urbana to Berkeley by way of Peking,” an oral history conducted in 1976 by Rosemary Levenson, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 135-136, 144.
- 43 John Fryer to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, October 27, 1914. President’s records, CU-5 Ser.2, 1914:189.
- 44 *Endowed Chairs of Learning*, 3.
- 45 W. E. Soothill to the editor, “A Chinese Columbus,” *Daily Telegraph*, June 24, 1921.



Hong Kong chapter of the Alumni Association, May 20, 1955.  
*University Archives (UARC PIC 15:481).*



Bernard Moses in 1895.  
*University Archives (UARC PIC 13:3489).*

Bernard Moses was professor of history and political science at the University of California from 1875 to 1911, and an emeritus professor from 1911 until his death in 1930. During his first seven years at the university, Moses was the only lecturer in history, economics, political science, and jurisprudence, and, eventually, became the founder of these departments. Moses also was a founder of the American Political Science Association and was recognized as a forceful and convincing speaker and a distinguished public servant. Bernard Moses greatly influenced the study of Hispanic-American history in the United States. From 1894 to 1895, he was the only professor in the country who devoted his time to Hispanic-American subject matter. In the Philippines, Moses headed the Bureau of Education and became Secretary of Public Instruction in the civil government from 1901 to 1903, appointed by President McKinley. This short account of a visit to Japan is from a volume of miscellaneous writings in University Archives.