

Britain's Perception of China and the Chinese
— T. T. Meadows (1851-1868), interpreter and cultural mediator

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China's early encounter with the West in general, Britain in specific has attracted much attention. As the product of the Treaty of Nanking, the initial five British consulates in China were established along with the opening up of five treaty ports. Therefore China was brought into the international order of communism, and Sino-foreign relations went into a new era.

During the history of China's early encounter with Britain, British consulates stand out not only because of its diplomatic function, but also its influence on the intellectual and cultural exchange between two countries.

In order to investigate that, this paper mainly focuses on a British sinologue T. T. Meadows (1815-1868). Meadows began his study of Chinese language at the Royal University of Munich, under Karl Friedrich Neumann in 1841. In 1843, he arrived in Canton, appointed the interpreter to the British Consulate in Canton. In 1852 he was transferred to Shanghai, worked as Interpreter to the British Consulate in Shanghai. Later consequently, he was Consul and Vice Consul in Ningpo and Shanghai. In 1859, Meadows became president of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society. He was also the first Westerner who had met the leader of Taiping Rebellion.

Looking at Meadows, this paper aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of British interpreter as a cultural mediator in general, and their understanding of formation of Britain's perception of China and the Chinese in specific.