

## A THOUSAND GRACES:

*Freer's Pilgrimage to the Buddhist Cave Temples of Longmen  
and his Collection of Chinese Art*

An exhibit from the historic Charles Lang Freer House  
Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute  
Wayne State University



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Charles L. Freer with Mrs. Dallam in Hangzhou, China, February 1911. *Photograph by Yütai.*

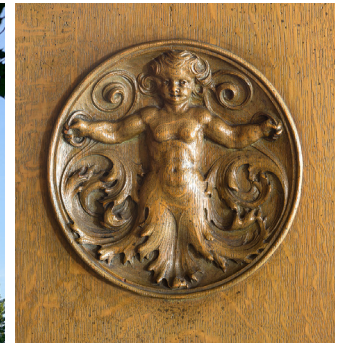


## THE FREER HOUSE

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PHOTOS BY  
ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF



## THE FREER HOUSE

The Freer House is considered to be one of the most important historic buildings in Michigan with its outstanding architecture and history as “the original Freer Gallery of Art.” Today, parts of the building continue to serve as offices for child and family development faculty of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute/WSU, while major sections of the house serve as space for visitors, meetings and events.

The Freer House features quarter-sawn oak paneling, built in cabinets and seating, and ornate decorative light fixtures and hardware. Reproductions of 11 paintings by the American artists, Dewing, Tryon and Thayer, have recently been installed in their original locations. Restoration goals include the revitalization of Freer’s historic courtyard gardens, restoration of the 1906 Whistler Gallery as an exhibition and meeting space, and creation of a public welcome and interpretative center for visitors in the former carriage house.



## THE FREER HOUSE

### A THOUSAND GRACES:

*Freer's Pilgrimage to the Buddhist Cave Temples of Longmen  
and his Collection of Chinese Art*

Exhibit by:

Catherine Blasio, Exhibit Designer / William S. Colburn, Editor / Meghan Urisko, Exhibit Coordinator  
Freer House, Merrill-Palmer Skillman Institute, WSU

and

Keshav Prasad, Contributing Writer, University of Michigan /  
Michael D. Coleman, College for Creative Studies

All images courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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Created in conjunction with the Freer House lecture:

*A Thousand Graces:*

*Freer's Pilgrimage to the Buddhist Cave Temples of Longmen  
and his Collection of Chinese Art*

by

Daisy Yiyou Wang, PhD

Curator of Chinese and East Asian Art, Peabody Essex Museum

and

David Hogge

Head Archivist, Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution

Presented at the Detroit Institute of Arts, on October 20, 2013.

Program Hosts

Ed and Jeanette Sui

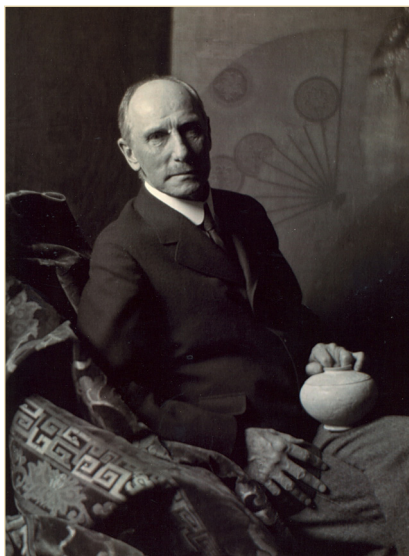
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**Charles Lang Freer, 1915.**  
 Photograph by Edward Steichen.  
 George Eastman House,  
 International Museum of  
 Photography and Film.



**Freer House, 1906.**  
 Photograph by C.M. Hayes.  
 Freer Gallery of Art Archives,  
 Smithsonian Institution.



**Freer Gallery of Art, 1950.**  
 Library of Congress.

## Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919)

Born in Kingston, N.Y., Freer came to Detroit in 1880 to establish the Peninsular Car Works, a railroad freight car manufacturing company, with Frank J. Hecker. In 1890, the young industrialist and art collector commissioned Wilson Eyre, Jr., of Philadelphia, to design his Ferry Avenue home. A collaboration of client, architect and artists, the house reflected Freer's ideals of harmony, simplicity, and surface beauty.

His fortune secure, Freer devoted his life to the study of art. His acquisitions included paintings by the American artists Dewing, Tryon and Thayer, and the largest collection of works by James McNeill Whistler. Encouraged by Whistler to explore aesthetic points of contact between East and West, Freer expanded his interests to Asia and the Middle East, establishing one of the world's greatest collections of Asian art.

Visitors from around the world came to Detroit to meet Freer and view his home and collection. Freer was a major cultural force in the city, actively supporting Pewabic Pottery, the Detroit Museum of Art (today's DIA), the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts (today's College for Creative Studies), and the University of Michigan. In 1906, Freer signed an agreement with the Smithsonian to bequeath his collection to the nation. From 1906-1919, his Detroit home served as the original Freer Gallery of Art. Upon his death in 1919, Freer's collection was moved to Washington, D.C., to be housed at the Freer Gallery of Art, America's first national art museum.

Freer's home was acquired in 1921 by the Merrill-Palmer School. Today, the house is listed on the City of Detroit, State of Michigan and National Register of Historic Places. Freer House Members, Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute and Wayne State University are dedicated to preserving and restoring this internationally significant historic structure.

To help support the Freer House or join as a member,  
 please call 313.664.2500, or contact

William Colburn at [william.colburn@wayne.edu](mailto:william.colburn@wayne.edu)

or Rose Foster at [rmfoster@wayne.edu](mailto:rmfoster@wayne.edu).





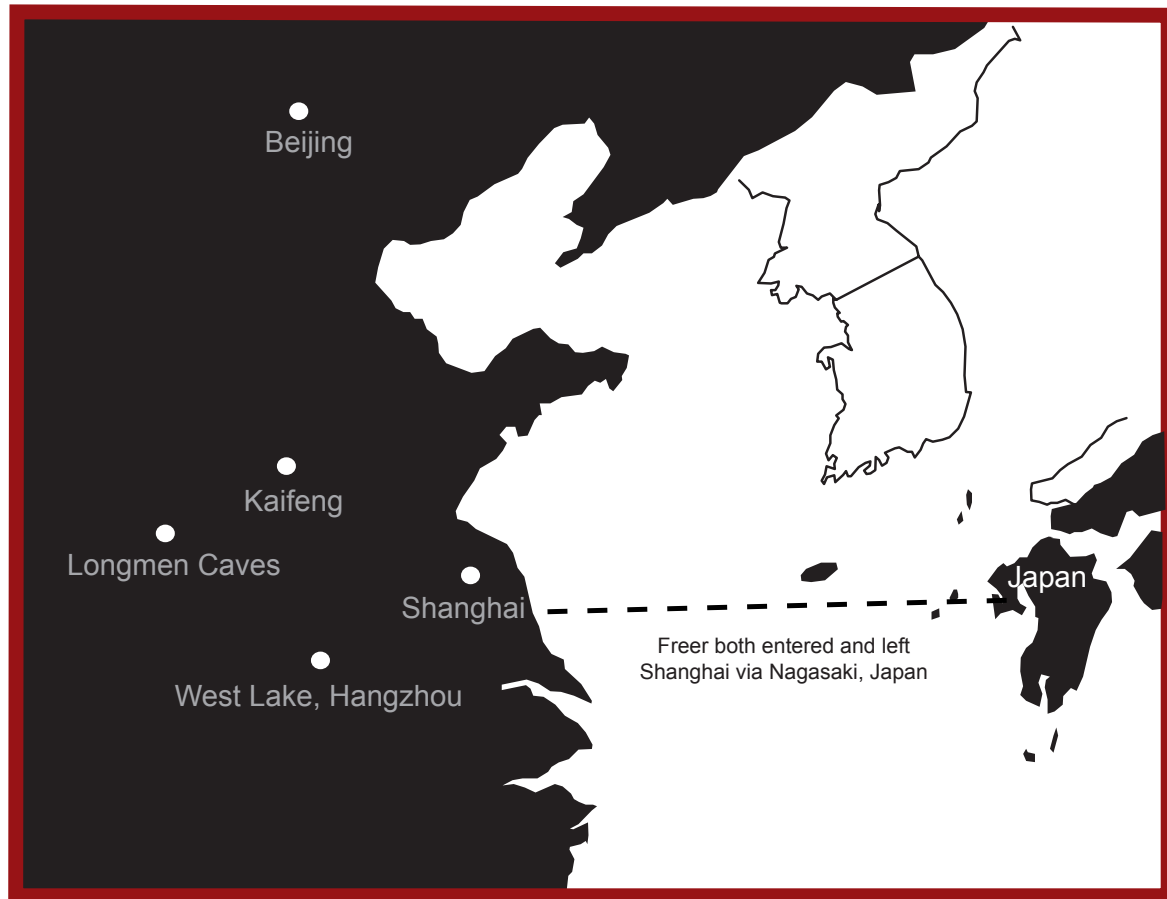
**Charles L. Freer with Mrs. Dallam in Hangzhou, China, February 1911. Photograph by Yütai.**

Freer's travels to China's interior in 1910-11 exerted a profound influence on his art collecting in the last decade of his life. Intent on seeing the great cultural centers of China, Freer traveled to the ancient capitals of Kaifeng, Luoyang, Shenyang and Hangzhou – with photographers in tow. The Charles L. Freer papers contain over 230 original glass plate negatives taken at his instruction during these travels. Their recent high resolution digitization is the basis of this exhibition. Freer is photographed here with Mrs. Dallam, who, with her husband Capt. Samuel Field Dallam, US Army, met Freer in Shanghai and traveled with him to Hangzhou and Japan. The young Chinese boy is unidentified.



## Map of China with Freer's key 1910-11 travel destinations

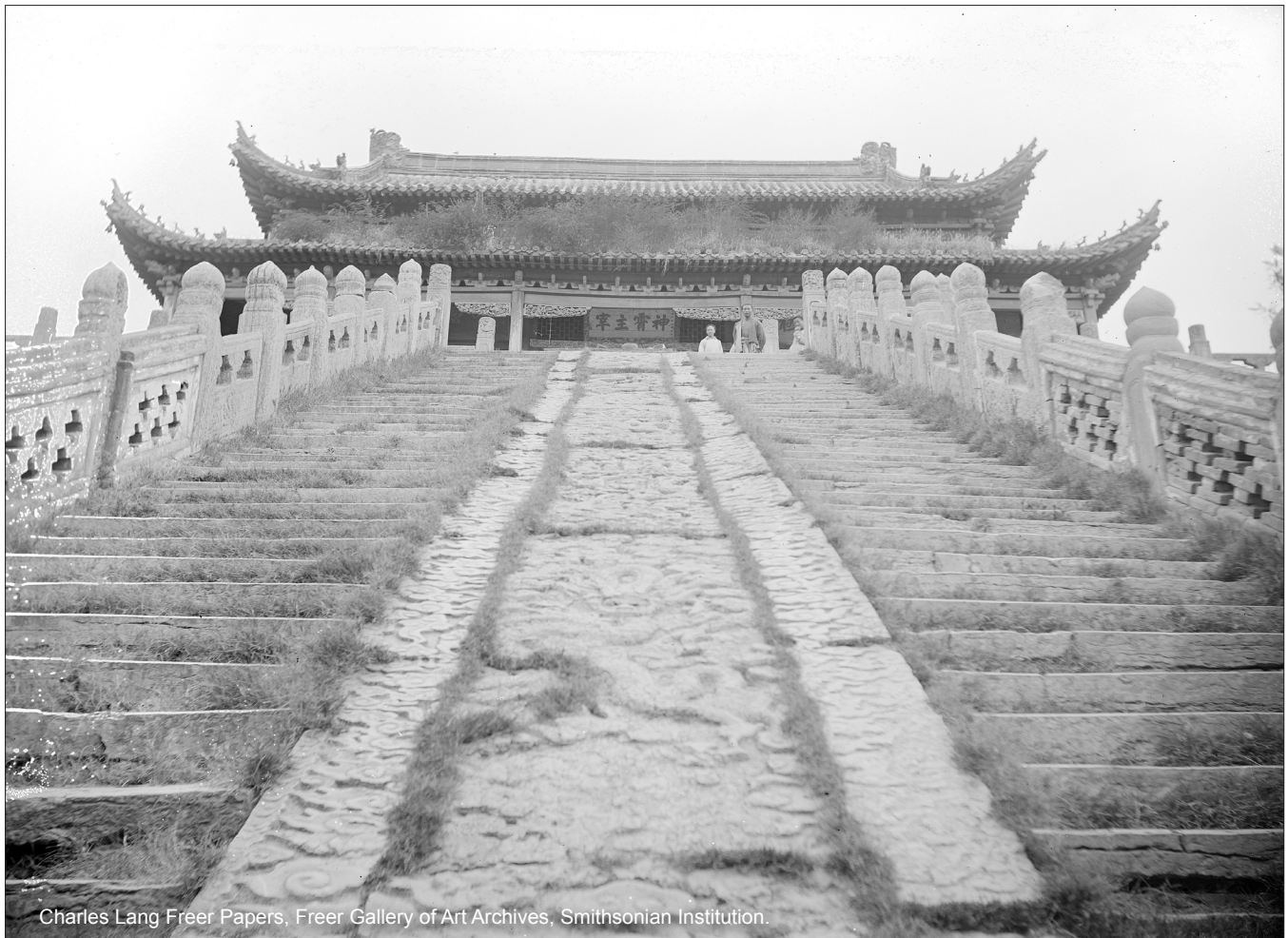
Charles Lang Freer's 1910 -1911 voyage was his fifth and final trip to Asia. He spent over five months in China visiting small villages, out of the way temple complexes, ancient capitals of former dynasties and major cities with the purpose of seeing the finest intact examples of sculpture, art and architecture. This map highlights Freer's key destinations such as Kaifeng, the Longmen Caves, Hangzhou, as well as Shanghai and Beijing. Freer's dedication to authentic cultural interactions took him to places rarely visited by Westerners.





*"This city is to me what Horiuji was to Fenollosa at the time of his first visit. I am filled with wonder. Pages would frighten you and their telling would be futile, but when I am back home again I'll let the photographs tell the story."*

Letter from Freer to Detroit business partner, friend, and neighbor  
Frank J. Hecker, October 24, 1910.

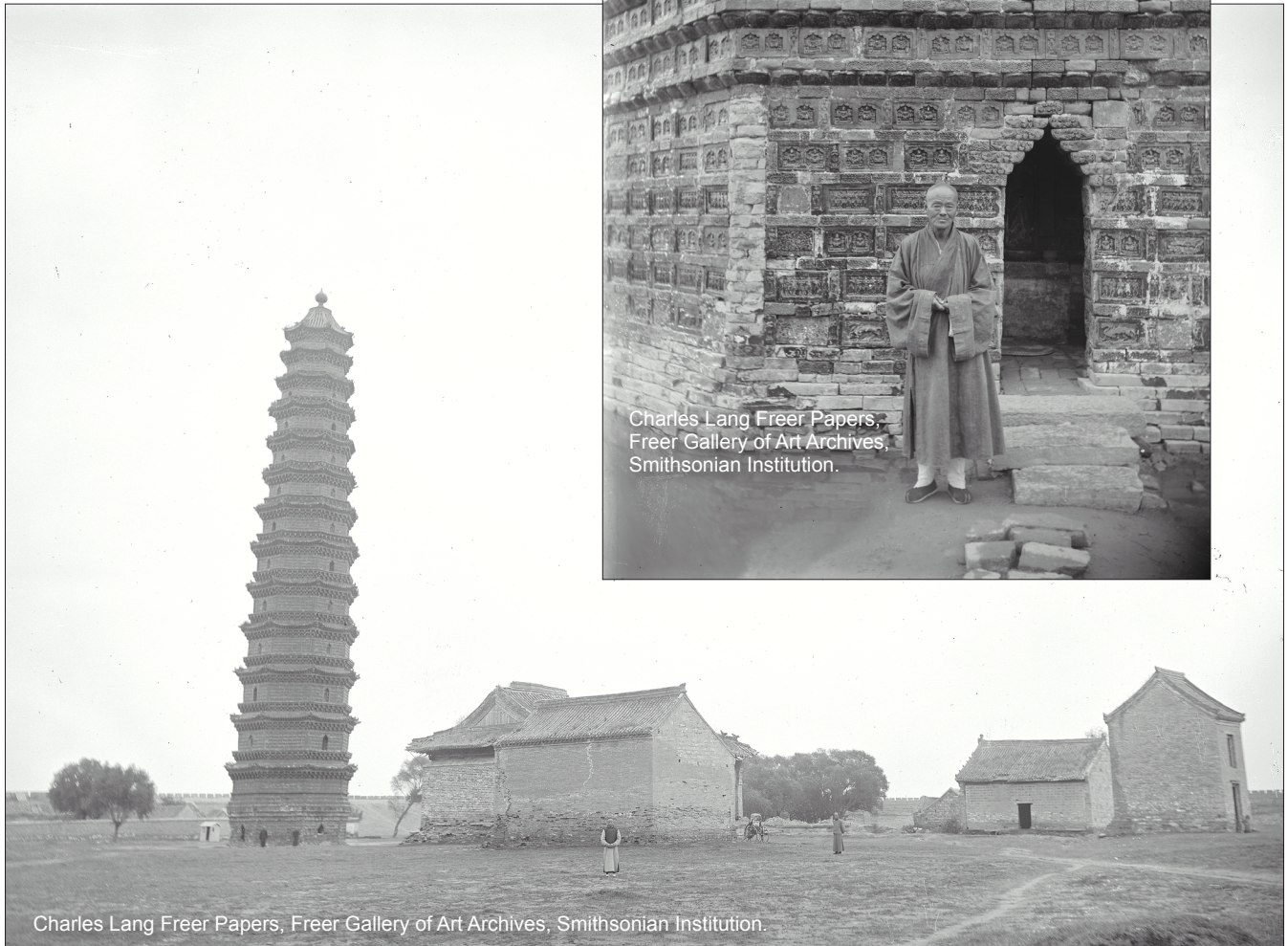
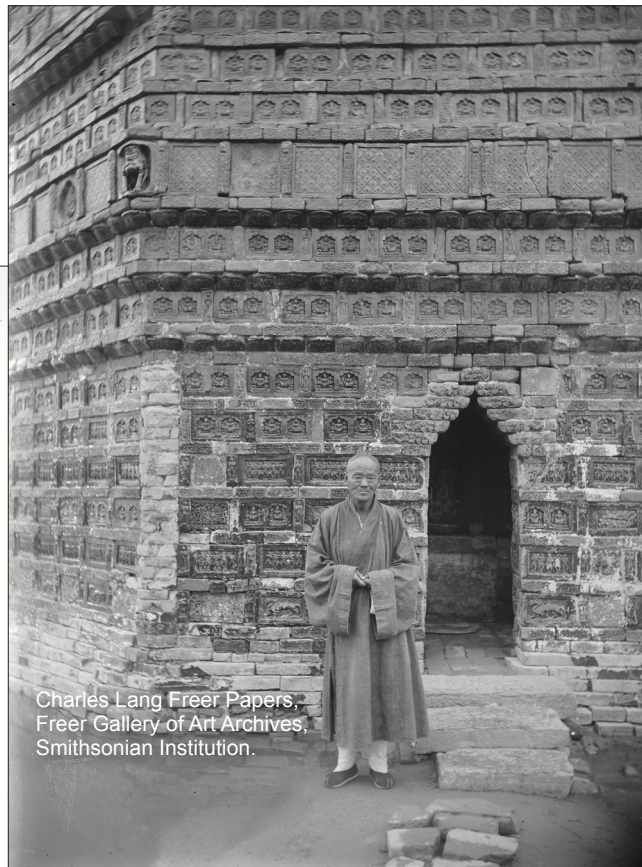


**Longting (Dragon Pavilion) in Kaifeng, October 1910. Photograph by Yütai.**

The Song Dynasty capital of Kaifeng was Freer's first destination during his 1910 travel to the interior of China. Freer spent five days visiting its architectural monuments. With his photographer Yütai, Freer accumulated an extensive visual record of the city.



**Priest (Fan-ming Tun-ger)  
at entrance of Iron Pagoda,  
*Photograph by Yütai***



**Youguosi temple complex with Iron Pagoda, October 1910. *Photograph by Yütai.***

*“Saturday P.M. – visited Iron Pagoda... built during late Tang and Five Dynasties... priest Fan-ming Tun-ger, now 70 years old – began in this temple when a boy 9-years-old and has never since been outside of Kai Feng Fu nor out of sight of the pagoda. This pagoda is very beautiful seen nearby or from a distance. Its low toned colors are very fine and at a distance resemble ancient iron with exquisite patinas.”*

Charles Lang Freer's journal entry, October 22, 1910.







Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution

**Stone gateways Baishazhun near Gongxian October 26, 1910, Photograph by Yütai.**

*“At 7 A.M. Utai and I each took chairs with twelve men and started for the famous rock temples of ‘Shir gu su’ which are situated about a half mile back from the Lo Ho en route we found two ancient stone archways before a river, near Kunghsien, small modern temple, which we examined and found the tops to be of delightful Sung workmanship...”*

Charles Lang Freer's journal entry, October 26, 1910.





*"The untilled burial ground is warm in colored grass, wild flowers and vines abound, which together with the great rows of sculpture, the fair plain, the blue hills mingled with the dreams of glory cut into stone, make it seem a serene little world apart from the whirl of men and strife. A nirvana by itself."*

Charles Lang Freer's journal entry, October 27, 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution

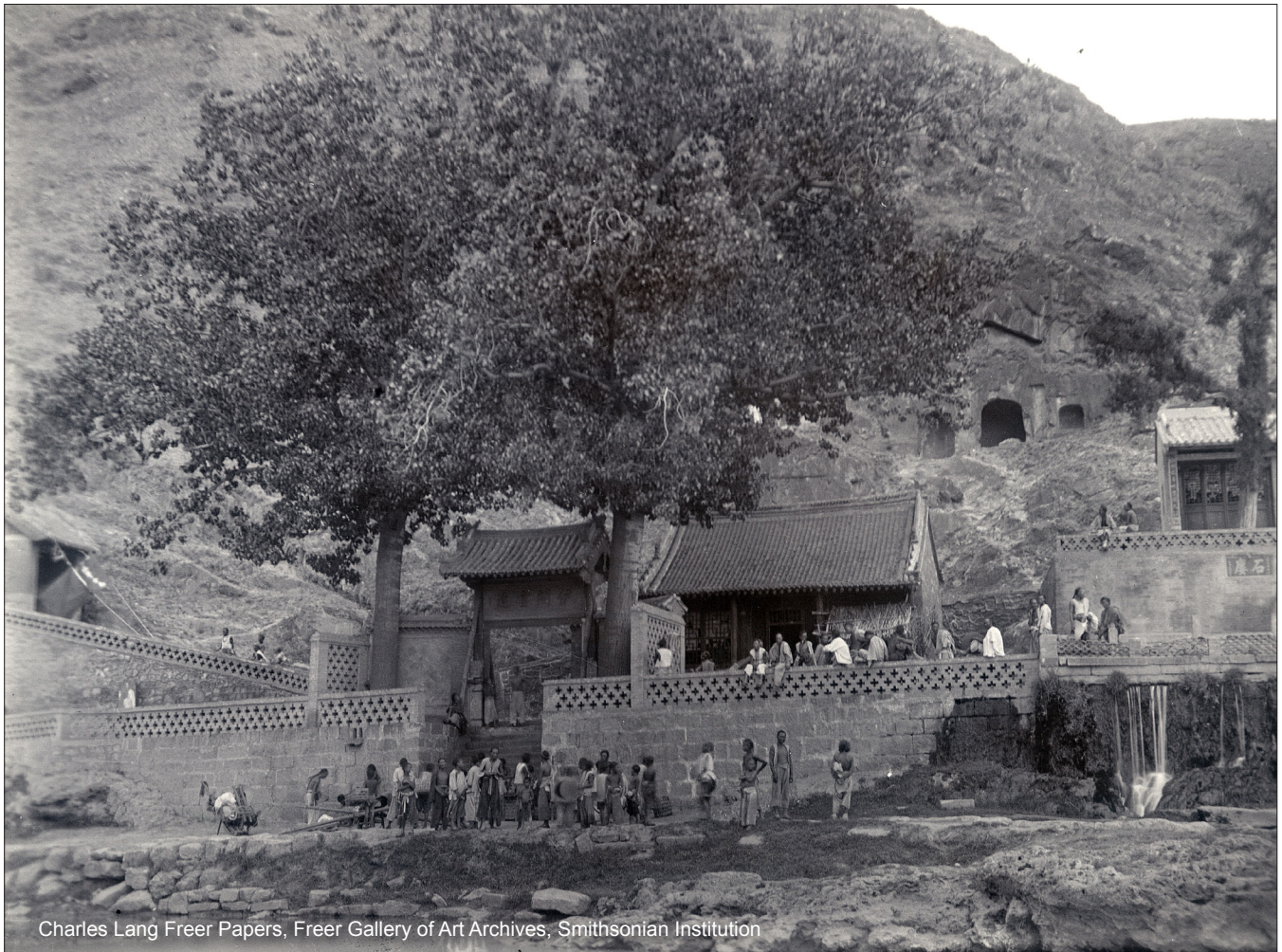
**Guardian figures at the Song Imperial tombs, Gongyi, 1910, Photograph by Yütai.**





*“A delightful situation, with full view of the entire gorge and mountains opposite, a magnificent place to live and study.”*

Charles Lang Freer's journal entry, October 27, 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution

**Qianxisi Temple, Longmen, 1910. Photograph by Yütai.**

While at Longmen, the temple compound of Qianxisi was given over to Freer as his headquarters. The temple was ideally situated, directly in front of the Binyang caves where he spent several days. Judging from the frequent photographs taken of the compound itself, Freer was strongly attached to his quarters.



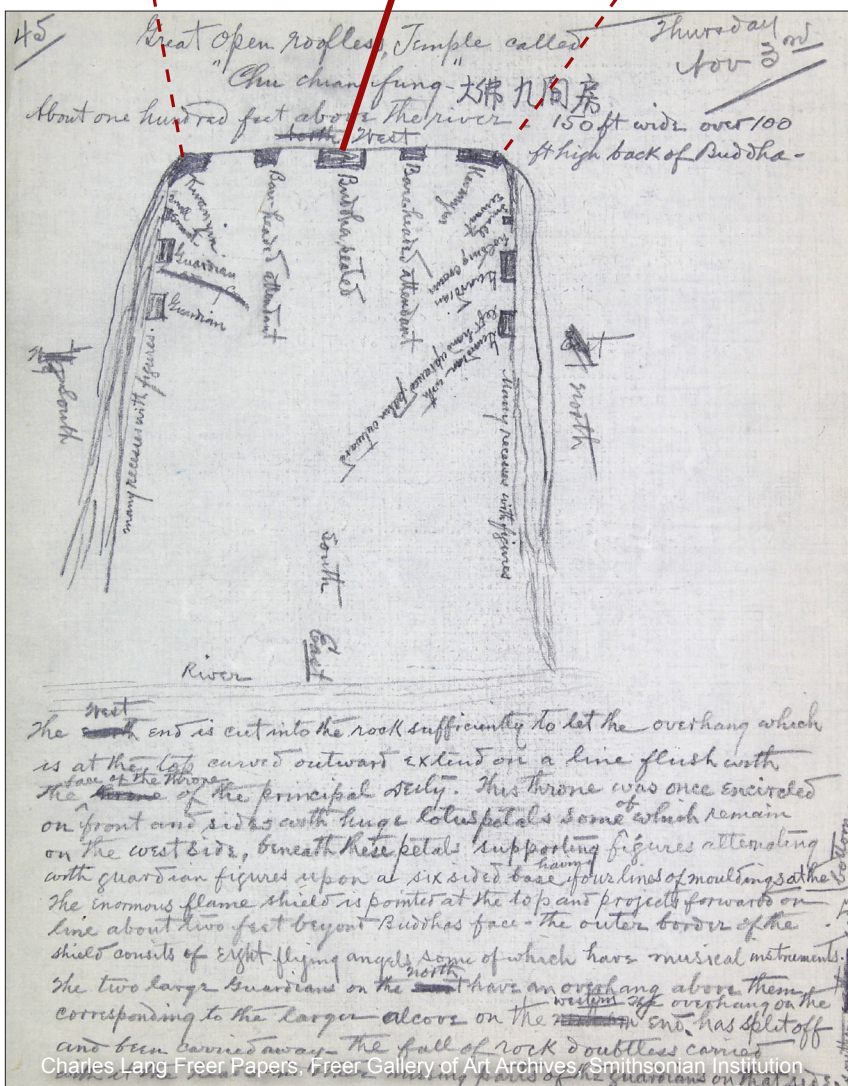




Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution

"At his right stands an attendant with keen narrow thoughtful head, hairless and with both hands missing. The water that often flows out of large crevices in the mountain wall behind him have worn away a part of his face and done much other damage, but his perception of all things remains."

Charles Lang Freer's journal entry, referencing the Buddha and attendant figures at Fengxiangsidong, Longmen, November 2, 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution

**Charles Freer's travel journal with sketched plan of Fengxiangsidong at Longmen November 2, 1910.**

The 65 page travel journal from Beijing to Longmen and back comprises the largest extant writings by Freer. His original purpose in keeping a journal is unclear but many portions show redaction and reworking. In these less guarded writings, Freer the humanist and visionary emerges.





**Guyandong, south wall, Longmen Caves. November, 1910. Photograph by Yūtai.**

*“The crown of the seated Kwannon has been brutally pounded off, the tips of her slender fingers have been broken, vandals have written ink inscriptions beneath and beside her, but there she sits unmindful of insult, an angel of mercy, a marvel of loveliness, an example of beauty beyond beauty, a seer who looks without peering into a world beyond our world.”*

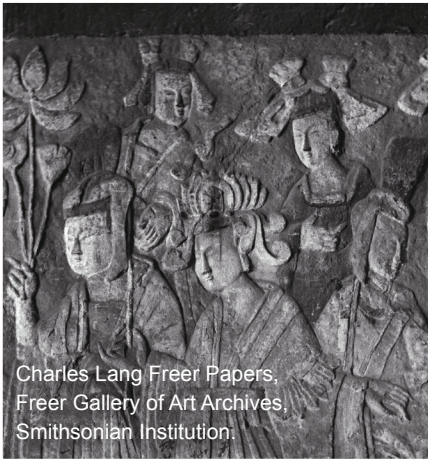
Charles Lang Freer’s journal entry, November 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution.







**Longmen, Binyan Center Cave,  
northwest wall detail showing  
removed donor relief paired with  
rubbing.**

**Nan Mingyuan, left, and servant  
with rubbing, November 1910.**  
*Photograph by Charles Lang Freer.*

Freer directed a team of workers at Longmen to make large scale rubbings of sculptural reliefs. The photograph, taken by Freer, shows his translator, Nan Mingyuan, on the left, next to the servant holding one of the Longmen rubbings. Together with the photographs, the Longmen rubbings in the Freer collection are important documents of early Buddhist sculptural programs that were subsequently damaged or removed by looters.





*"This morning while the sunlight was bright Utai made a photo including Nan, Tsung his helper from Kai Feng-fu, the priest of this temple, Chia our cook, Tsai our Peking servant, another local servant, Mr. Tsung's servant, Shuto our coolie and four soldiers, the two other soldiers being on duty at the gate. I hope it will turn out alright."*

Charles Lang Freer journal entry, November 9, 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

**Qianxisi Temple, Longmen, 1910. Photograph by Yütai.**

At Longmen, Freer was surrounded by assistants, laborers and soldiers with whom he developed close friendships in spite of the language barrier. On top of the quiet isolation and powerful aesthetic impression of the caves themselves, these simple friendships endeared Freer to his stay at Longmen and the men accompanying him.

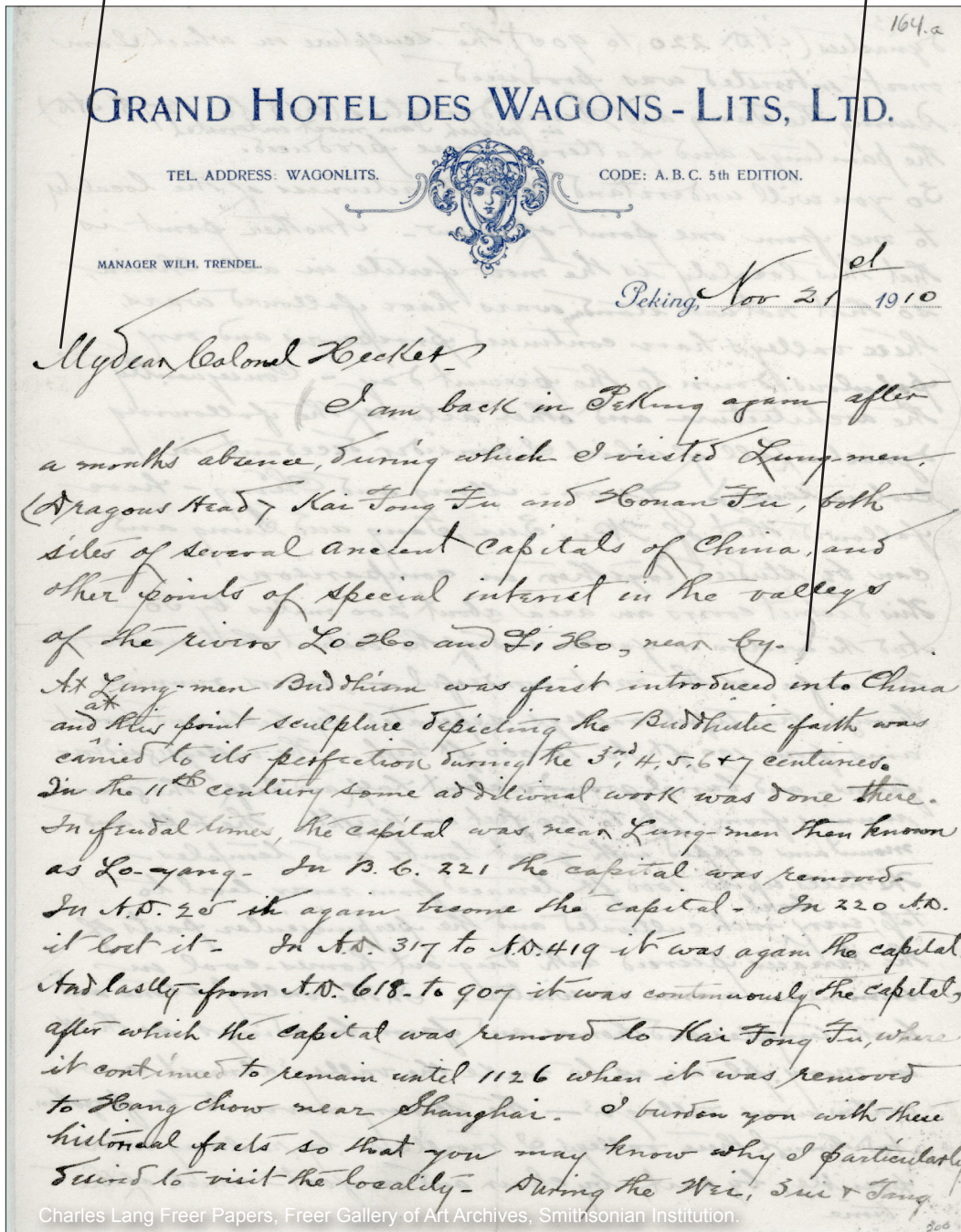




Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits, LTD.  
Peking (Beijing), China, November 21, 1910.

My Dear Colonel Hecker,

I am back in Peking again after a months abandon,  
during which I visited Long-men. (Dragons Head, Kai  
Fong Fu, and Honan Fu, both sites of several ancient  
capitals of China, and other points of special interest  
in the valley of the ruins Lo Sho and Fi Ho, nearby.

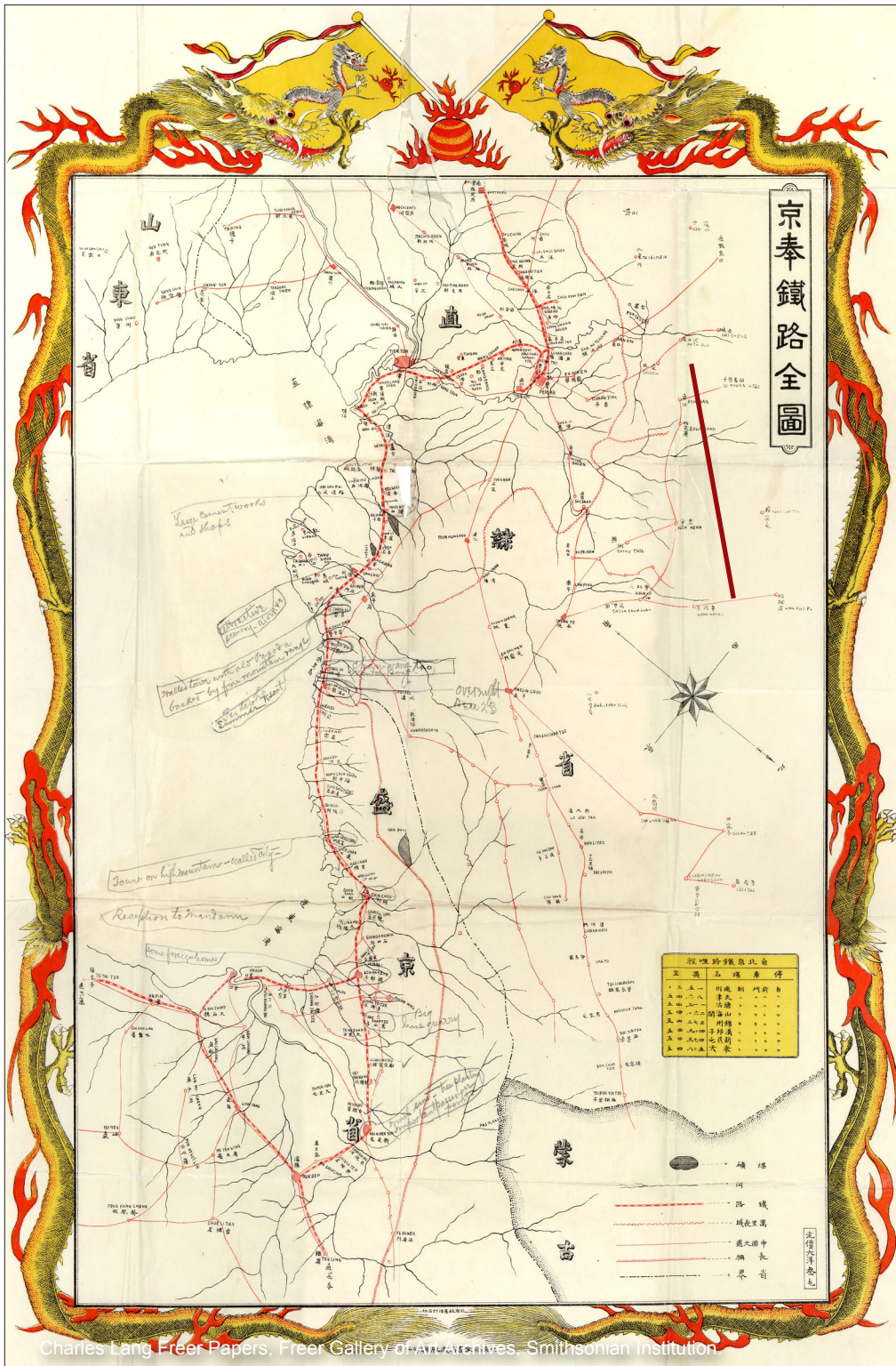


Letter to  
Frank J. Hecker,  
November 21, 1910.  
Page 1.

Following his return to Beijing, Charles Freer wrote a jubilant letter to Frank Hecker, describing the basis for his visit to Kaifeng and Longmen. Freer rarely kept extensive journals or diaries; therefore, his frequent, candid letters to his close friend and business partner in Detroit are a critical source for understanding his personal responses to the places, people and art that he encountered.







**Late Qing Dynasty map  
of the Beijing- Fengtian  
Railroad, with annotations  
by Charles Freer, 1910.**

In late December, Charles Freer made a brief trip to the early Qing dynasty capital of Mukden (modern day Shenyang). This late Qing map owned by Freer includes penciled notes about his journey. During his travels Freer made numerous notes on maps and travel guides. The Freer | Sackler Archives and Library are currently compiling and documenting these sources to gain further understanding of his travels.



*“Capt. Dallam and wife of the USA in one house-boat and Baron von Wurmb, a collector, and myself in another house-boat towed by a steam tug left Shanghai and went by river and canal to old Hangchow to study the ancient art and famous lake.”*

Charles Lang Freer journal entry, November 9, 1910.



Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

**Hangzhou, unidentified canal, February 1911.  
Charles Freer visible in lower right corner (circled.)**





**Leifeng Pagoda, Hangzhou, February 1911.**



Charles Freer brought two photographers with him from Shanghai to document the 10th century pagoda shown here, a prominent feature on the bank of West Lake. When Freer visited in 1911, the pagoda was largely abandoned. It collapsed in 1924, to be rebuilt in concrete and steel in 2001.

