



**Name in English:** Yung Wing

**Name in Chinese:** 容闳

**Name in Pinyin:** Róng Hóng

**Gender:** Male

**Birth Year:** 1828-1912

**Birth Place:** Nanping, Guangdong Province, China

## Chinese Reformer and Diplomat

**Profession(s):** Activist, Diplomat

**Education:** B.A., Literature, 1854, Yale University

**Awards:** 1974, Honorary Doctorate of Law Conferred, Yale University

**Contributions:** Schooled in Protestant missionary schools in China, Yung Wing was given the rare opportunity to study abroad when his teacher offered to take him to the U.S. When he graduated from Yale University in 1854, he would become the first Chinese to graduate from an American university. A poor student, the church offered financial assistance to Yung on the condition he returned to China as a missionary, but Yung declined the offer, because he wanted to explore other possibilities in life. Instead, he lived a frugal life, working at a boarding house and librarian at a literary society.

After obtaining his degree, he returned to China. A lifelong supporter of reform in China, Yung would be an integral part of the modernization efforts of China in the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, Yung was sent by the Chinese government to the U.S. to buy the necessary machinery to build an arsenal in China. The machinery he bought became part of the Kiang-Nam Arsenal in Shanghai, China's first modern arsenal. In addition, he advocated for education reforms. After successfully persuading the Chinese government, he organized the Chinese Educational Mission that enabled 120 students to study in East Coast schools beginning in 1872. Unfortunately, the Chinese government terminated the program in 1881, but many of the 120 students went on to become leaders and make significant contributions in engineering, civil services, and the sciences in China. One became the first premier of the Republic of China and another became the foreign minister.

Yung worked to promote cultural understanding and connections between the two countries, and in his later years spoke out against the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1877, he proposed to Yale University to establish a professorship for Chinese Language and Literature and to also create a collection of Chinese books. He donated his 1,237-volume Chinese book collection, the first of its kind in the U.S., to Yale, forming the basis for the university's East Asian Collection, one of the finest collections in the world. In 1878, Yung served as the first Chinese Associate Minister to the U.S., helping normalize U.S.-China relations.

As a leading advocate for reform in China, Yung became a target when the reformist emperor was overthrown in a palace coup in 1898. Many other reformers were executed but Yung managed to escape. While in Hong Kong he applied for documentation from the US consul to return to the United States. For fifty years, he had been a US citizen, but he received a telegram from Secretary of State saying that his citizenship had been revoked because of the changes made in the naturalization laws made by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. He would not be allowed to reenter the country. Yung slipped back into the US illegally and lived near his sons in Connecticut, seeing the youngest graduate from Yale. He died in 1912, still a man without a country.

In honor of Yung, P.S. 124, a public elementary school in New York City's Chinatown, is named in his honor.

**Publications/Patents:**

1909 "My Life in China"

**External Links:**

<http://www.yale.edu/iefp/pku-yale/lectures.html>

<http://www.120chinesestudents.org/yung.html>