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THE FOUNDING OF THE HARVARD-YENCHING LIBRARY

Eugene W. Wu

Harvard-Yenching Library

The confluence of unrelated events sometimes creates situations of which history is made. The Harvard-Yenching Library is a good case in point. Three separate events, spanning almost half a century, made possible the creation of an East Asian collection at Harvard which was to develop into a preeminent library for East Asian research in the West. They were the introduction of Chinese in Harvard's curriculum in 1879, the decision of A. Kaiming Chiu to come to Harvard for graduate study in 1925, and the establishment of the Harvard-Yenching Institute in 1928.

In 1879 a group of Boston businessmen engaged in the China trade thought it would be useful to train up their successors with a knowledge of the Chinese language and, for that purpose, invited Ko K'un-hua, a Chinese scholar from the city of Ningpo with a *hsiu-ts'ai* degree, to give instruction in Chinese at Harvard. A contemporary newspaper hailed Harvard's "courage and enterprise in becoming a pioneer in this new sea of learning," and predicted that "the day is probably coming when the hieroglyphics on tea chests and firecracker boxes will be intelligible to the average Yankee boy as the signs over the shops of his native village are now." The small collection of books that was bought for Mr. Ko's courses, the first acquisitions in any East Asian language by the Harvard College Library, marked the beginning of a Chinese collection. In 1914 two Japanese professors, Hattori Unokichi, a leading Sinologist, and Anesaki Masaharu, a well-known Buddhologist, both of Tokyo Imperial University, came to lecture at Harvard and donated several important groups of Japanese publications on Sinology and Buddhism to the Harvard College Library, thus launching Harvard's Japanese collection. These two collections became the nucleus of Harvard's East Asian library, but they were not properly organized for use until 1927, when A. Kaiming Chiu, then a graduate student at Harvard, was asked to help catalog them.

Dr. Chiu was born in 1898 in the town of Chen-hai, near the treaty port of Ningpo, from which Ko K'un-hua had come to teach Chinese at Harvard twenty years earlier. As a boy, Dr. Chiu went to an old-fashioned village clan school run by the family of his maternal uncle, and then became an apprentice in a bookstore in Hankow, where, according to his own account, he "acquired a taste for books, learned the rudiments of economics and the essentials of business management." Following the 1911 Revolution, he was sent to study "Western learning" at a mission school in Changsha, and from there he went to Boone College in Wuchang, a missionary college established by the American Episcopal Church. At Boone he was taught foreign languages, history, and mathematics by professors from England, the United States, and Canada. When in 1920 Boone established the first library school in China under the leadership of Mary Elizabeth Wood, he enrolled in the first class of six students. Upon graduation from Boone Library School and Central China College (later Hua Chung University) in 1922, he was appointed the first Librarian of the University

of Amoy, where he also studied Japanese and came to know such foreign luminaries in Sinology as Gustav Ecke and Paul Demièville, as well as Chinese writers, among them Lu Hsün and Lin Yutang, both of whom would later become famous. In 1924 the University of Amoy sent him to study library science at the Library School of the New York Public Library (later the School of Library Science at Columbia University), from which he graduated a year later. In the fall of 1925 he entered Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, with a major in economics. While pursuing his graduate work, he also worked a few hours a week at Widener Library to gain cataloging experience. At that time Professor Archibald Coolidge was Director of Harvard University Library, and he also taught Far Eastern history. In the fall of 1927, after A. Kaiming Chiu had taken his M.A. and begun work toward a Ph.D. degree (which he received in 1933), Professor Coolidge asked him "to do something about the Chinese and Japanese books in the Harvard College Library," to organize and catalog the books as he would do it in China and not to worry about his short American training. He accepted the invitation with great enthusiasm and was appointed Custodian of the Chinese-Japanese Collection of the Harvard College library. Thus began his forty-year stewardship of what was to become the Harvard-Yenching Library.

The Harvard-Yenching Institute was established a year later, in 1928, as an independent corporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by the estate of the late Charles Martin Hall, the founder of the Aluminum Company of America, with the dual purpose of promoting higher education in Asia, particularly the study of the histories and cultures of that region, and Asian studies at Harvard. As part of that program, the Institute assumed full responsibility for the Chinese-Japanese Collection, and the Collection, then numbering 4,526 volumes in Chinese and 1,668 volumes in Japanese, was transferred in 1929 from Widener Library to Boylston Hall in the Harvard Yard, where the Institute was located. In 1931 the name of the Collection was changed to Chinese-Japanese Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University, and A. Kaiming Chiu was appointed its first librarian. (The present name, Harvard-Yenching Library, was adopted in 1965 in order to reflect the Library's wider geographical coverage, and administrative responsibility for the library reverted to the Harvard College Library in 1976.)

While the events described above had given birth to a library, managing the Library was a major challenge. East Asian librarianship in the United States at that time was an uncharted territory, with no suitable classification schemes or cataloging rules. Even in China and Japan there were no comprehensive and generally accepted system that could be transplanted. The first task Dr. Chiu set out to accomplish was to devise a classification scheme that would be suitable for an American library and yet accommodative to the basic requirements of traditional bibliographical practice in East Asia. As he recalled, "it was a period of transition [in Asia] during which three trends were dominant. The first was to cling tenaciously to the old *ssu k'u* (fourfold) classification of the eighteenth century. The second, diametrically opposed to it, was to abandon the old system completely and to adopt some western scheme such as Dewey's. The third was to divide old and new books into watertight compartments, using the *ssu k'u* scheme for the old and some modern system for the new." What he finally devised was a compromise between east and west, between old

and new, a synthesis that embodied the best of both worlds. In its main outline, the system is based on the *ssu k'u* division into Classics, History, Philosophy, and Belles-lettres, but expanded into nine classes: Chinese Classics, Philosophy and Religion, Historical Sciences, Social Sciences, Language and Literature, Fine and Creative Arts, Natural Sciences, Agriculture and Technology, and Generalia and Bibliography. In the construction of subdivisions with each class, he turned to old Chinese and Japanese classification systems for many headings in the humanities and social sciences, and the Library of Congress Classification Scheme and the Classification Scheme of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome for headings in the natural sciences and in agriculture and technology respectively. A device was introduced to accommodate subjects underrepresented in the tables by adding to the relevant main number decimal numbers from .0 to .9, so that ten entirely new places could be created between any two existing main numbers in the tables. In anticipation of new subjects which were not represented at all in the scheme, a large number of spaces were purposely left blank throughout the classification. The notation consists of straight arabic numerals without any decimal connotation, and the "Four-corner" numeral system is used in assigning book numbers. The "Cutter-Sanborn Author Table" is not used.

The scheme, which came to be known as the "Harvard-Yenching System," represented not only Dr. Chiu's first major accomplishment at the Harvard-Yenching Library, but also a milestone in the development of East Asian librarianship in the United States. Following its publication in 1943 by the Committee on Far Eastern Studies (the predecessor of the Association for Asian Studies) of the American Council of Learned Societies under the title of *A Classification Scheme for Chinese and Japanese Books*, the Harvard-Yenching system was adopted for use by twenty-two East Asian libraries, mostly in the United States, but also in Canada, England, the Netherlands, and Australia. For the next forty years it was the preferred system for classifying publications in the East Asian languages at major American university libraries.

While the classification scheme was being developed, other matters also had to be attended to. Cataloging was one of them. The rules were kept simple. Only essential bibliographical information was recorded in the vernacular, and romanization was added for the name of the author and the title. There was no subject cataloging, but analytics were liberally provided for the multivolume *ts'ung shu* (or *sōsho*) sets. All cards were originally handwritten, but that proved to be too slow and time consuming. The unit card system was borrowed to produce a master card from which multiple copies were made, using a "Ditto" duplicating gelatin roll, but without the Ditto machine itself. In his first annual report as Librarian of the Chinese-Japanese Library, Dr. Chiu wrote: "Instead of the machine, which costs about ninety dollars, we use a baker's roller from one of the ten-cent stores. The gelatin roll costs about six dollars a piece, and it can be used for sixty or seventy printings." The use of the unit card was a first in American East Asian libraries, and Dr. Chiu envisioned this as a "first step forward toward cooperative cataloging of East Asian books." (This vision was partially realized when Harvard-Yenching Library distributed in the late 1930s more than 12,000 printed cards, a byproduct of its book catalog project in Peking, to

some twenty libraries in the United States, Canada, and Europe. When the Library of Congress (LC) sponsored the Card Reproduction Project for East Asian publications between 1949 and 1958, Harvard-Yenching Library contributed 28,000 of the 83,000 cards LC received from and reproduced for all participating East Asian libraries. While these two groups of cards were not produced under any cooperative cataloging program, they were made extensive use of nevertheless by other libraries in their cataloging work in those years.)

Rejecting the traditional filing system by radicals and strokes as too cumbersome, Dr. Chiu opted for a dictionary catalog, separated by language and filed according to the romanized main entry. Both are now standard practice in East Asian libraries in the United States, but they were novel experiments at that time. Because of the lack of subject cataloging, a classified catalog, following the traditional practice in East Asia, was also created for each language. In addition, a "four-corner" catalog was introduced to provide easier access to the Chinese and Japanese collections by readers who possessed a reading knowledge of the languages but might not know the exact reading of the author's name or the book title in romanization. It was thought that when Chinese characters were frozen in a unique form using the four-corner system, it would be easy to find one's way around the catalog. However, this experiment was not a success. Readers were not familiar with the four-corner system and they avoided using the catalog. The catalog was finally dismantled.

Another task facing the Library was acquisitions. Although a number of books had already been acquired at the time the Chinese-Japanese Library was established, they were by no means a coherent collection because collecting had not been carried out systematically. Conspicuous by their absence were many standard reference works and basic publications in Sinology, the Library's focus at that time. Fortunately, the Library was able to enlist the help of the Yenching University Library in Peking to purchase those and other publications on its behalf, with many reference works being personally selected by the late Professor William Hung. Direct purchases were also made from the two main publishing houses in Shanghai, the Commercial Press and the Chung Hua Book Company, and from Isseido Book Store in Tokyo. The acquisitions budget approved by the Trustees of the Harvard-Yenching Institute for 1929 was \$10,000, a large sum in those days.

In addition to these purchases, the Library entered into exchange agreements with libraries and research institutes in China and Japan, including the Peking Metropolitan Library, the Catholic University (Fu Jen), Yenching University, the National Central University through the Academia Sinica, and the Ryukoku University Library. Chinese students at Harvard also donated publications they had received from home and contributed to a subscription for the Library to the well-known newspaper *Shen Pao*, published in Shanghai. Thus the Library's acquisitions program was off to a good start.

As for personnel, the Library employed in 1927-28 two part-time assistants in addition to Dr. Chiu. The morning assistant, working from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., was paid 50 cents an hour, and the evening assistant, working from 7 to 10 p.m., was paid 25 cents an hour. The hours

in between were covered by Dr. Chiu himself. The situation changed for the better when the Library moved to Boylston Hall in 1929 and three more part-time persons were added to the staff, making a total of 3.45 FTE, at slightly higher wages. Even with this limited manpower, Dr. Chiu and his staff accomplished a great deal. By the end of June 1930, two years after the establishment of the Library, the Library's total holdings had increased seven and a half times from 6,194 to 46,186 volumes (44,103 in Chinese and 2,083 in Japanese), more than 42,000 volumes were cataloged, and an author/title catalog, a classified catalog, and a four-corner catalog were organized for use. Such exemplary accomplishments would not have been possible without Dr. Chiu's leadership and dedication and the Harvard-Yenching Institute's support.

The founding of the Harvard-Yenching Library was a historic event in the history of East Asian librarianship and East Asian studies in the United States. It was a true pioneering effort to which all in the field will remain deeply indebted.