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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON THE HISTORY OF BOOKS IN CHINA: AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR T. H. TSIENT

Chang Pao-san<sup>1</sup>

Trans. by Zhijia Shen

*In the summer of 2002, the author of this interview was invited by the Center for East Asian Studies of the University of Chicago as a Visiting Scholar for one year to conduct research and had the opportunity to meet Professor Tsien. Firmly believing that his outstanding scholarship and professional experiences constitute an invaluable asset to the scholarly world, the author interviewed Professor Tsien to discuss scholarship and research methods concerning the history of books in China. The interviews took place at his home in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago between November 7, 2002, and January 9, 2003.*

### I. SCHOOL AND WORK IN CHINA

**Q. Professor Tsien, before coming to the United States, you had completed your college education and had also worked in China. Would you please talk about your education and work experience in China?**

A. I started my early education at home with a private tutor. Later I entered the Second Elementary School of Taizhou and in 1926 graduated from Huidong Middle School (now Taizhou Middle School, where Chinese president Hu Jingtao was graduated in 1953). In 1927, I entered the University of Nanking (now Nanjing University) while working part time in the library of Ginling Women's College. This marked the beginning of my involvement with the library profession.



*T. H. Tsien at his home study*

At that time, President Wu Yi-fang of Ginling College granted me the privilege of taking classes in her College for credits of my university. I took Chinese History course taught by Professor Miao Fenglin and the Translation course by Professor Zeng Xubai. As assignments for his class, I translated Bertrand Russell's "The Different Concepts of Happiness between the East and West" and Dorothy J. Orchard's "China's Use of Boycott of Foreign Goods as a Weapon." These translations were published in the popular journals of that time and were the beginning of my translation work.

At the University of Nanking, my major was in history and minor in library science. I took courses on the histories of Europe, Russia, India, and Japan given by Dr. M. S. Bates, History of Sino-Japanese cultural relations, and History of modern China by Chinese professors. In addition to the required courses in Chinese, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and so on, I also elected Chinese philology, political Science, sociology, population study and social survey, History of books, and other library science courses. The combination of library and history courses has had a significant influence on my career and research

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<sup>1</sup> Professor in the Department of Chinese Literature at National Taiwan University.

interests. Later, I spent most of my life with books and wrote my M.A. and Ph.D. theses on this subject at the University of Chicago; all can be attributed to the courses I took during my undergraduate years.

After graduation from college in 1932, I joined the library of National Jiaotong University in Shanghai, where I gained much experience in library management and techniques under the guidance of Du Dingyou, director of the library. Five years later, I was appointed head of the Engineering Reference Library in Nanjing and later of the Shanghai office of the National Library, which were established for moving rare materials southward before the Sino-Japanese War. The Shanghai branch of the National Library kept some 60,000 volumes of Chinese rare books, 9,000 rolls of Dunhuang mss, several hundred items of stone and bronze rubbings, in addition to some 10,000 volumes of the complete sets of science and oriental studies journals in Western languages. At that time, my work in Shanghai, besides the custody of these rare materials, included publishing work for the *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography*, collecting materials in the Japanese-occupied areas, and serving as liaison with libraries abroad.

Before long, security inside the foreign settlements in Shanghai increasingly became a problem. Therefore, the Chinese and U.S. governments agreed that part of these cultural treasures were to be moved to the U.S. Library of Congress for temporary custody and microfilming for preservation and circulation. Although the agreement was in place, the books could not be moved out of Shanghai because the customs service was under the control of the Japanese army. Fortunately, I was able to contact a field inspector of the Shanghai Customs secretly, who helped me ship these rare materials in 100 cases by commercial cargos, and two more that were sent by the U.S. Consulate-General in Shanghai. This very difficult task was successfully completed just five days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Upon the conclusion of the War, I was assigned by the Chinese government to go to Washington, D.C. to bring these books back to China, but the outbreak of the Civil War prevented this plan. I was, however, invited to Chicago, where I have now lived for over half a century.

## II. WORK AND STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Q: Under what circumstances did you come to the University of Chicago?**

A: I came to the University of Chicago as an exchange librarian from the National Library of Beiping in the autumn of 1947 to catalog the Chinese materials acquired by the Far Eastern Library since its founding in 1936, as well as to engage in advanced studies at the Graduate Library School of the University. After a year, Professor Herrlee G. Creel, who invited me to the University, asked me to extend my stay and to teach courses in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures and offered to help bring my family to America. Upon the approval of Beiping Library, the University of Chicago offered me a Professorial Lectureship at the Department with a concurrent appointment as Curator of the Far Eastern Library. Soon my family joined me in Chicago; this was a most peaceful time that allowed me to settle down with my family and engage in my work and studies after eight years of hardship in Shanghai during the war.

**Q: How were your studies at the University of Chicago?**

A: My plan was to spend most of my time working in the Far Eastern Library and taking classes part time in the Graduate Library School. The University of Chicago was under the quarter system, which required three courses each quarter for full-time students with four quarters a year. Because I worked full-time and studied part-time, I could take only one course each quarter with four courses per year including the summer quarter. Therefore, it took me five years to earn my master's degree in 1952 and another five years for the doctorate in 1957.

**Q: Would you please talk about the professors who influenced you the most during your studies at the University of Chicago?**

A: I became interested in library science mainly because during my college years I worked in the library while studying. I was also greatly inspired by a History of Books course with Professor Liu Guojun.

Therefore, after coming to the University of Chicago, I soon decided to focus on the history of books and printing. My first teacher who taught the history of printing was Professor Pierce Butler, whose book *The Origins of Printing in Europe* was a classic in the field. Unfortunately, he retired a year after I arrived, and most of the classes I took were taught by other professors.

Among these classes were Jesse H. Sherra's Theory and Practice of Classification, Leon Carnovsky's Library Survey, Herman H. Fussler's College and Research Libraries, and Lester E. Asheim's Readability of Books, Popular Media, and Content Analysis, as the focus of librarianship at that time was switching from the humanities to the social sciences. These new trends and methodology had significant impact on my master's thesis, which was entitled "Western Impact on China through Translation: a Bibliographical Study."

When I started my doctoral program, Professor Howard W. Winger, whose specialization was in the history of Western libraries, books and printing, was appointed to the Graduate Library School in 1953 and became my advisor. His scholarly background and his manner with his students influenced me very greatly in my studies, research, and personal conduct. In addition, my doctoral program consisted of a double major in library science and East Asian Studies and I, therefore, had seminar courses with Professor Creel and wrote a paper on *Zhanguo Ce: Strategies of the Warring States*, (later published in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Study*, edited by Michael Loewe. Berkeley, CA, 1993.) Subsequently, I completed my doctoral dissertation, "The Pre-printing Records of China: a Study of the Development of Early Chinese Inscriptions and Books," also under the advice of these two professors.

### III. LIBRARY AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Q: You were the Curator of the Far Eastern Library for many years. Could you please talk about your work experience?**

A: The Far Eastern Library (now the East Asian Library) of the University of Chicago was established in 1936 to collect basic references and materials to support the needs of Chinese teaching and research. Because the founder of the program, Professor Creel, emphasized ancient Chinese history and culture, the collection was especially rich in Confucian classics and ancient documents as well as such materials as collectanea, classified encyclopedias, local gazetteers, and complete sets of academic journals. In 1945, it also acquired the original collection of the Newberry Library of over 20,000 volumes of Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan books collected by Dr. Berthold Laufer, a German Sinologist, during his trip to the Far East in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When I arrived in late 1947, the total collection had grown to over 70,000 volumes. I spent about ten years completing the cataloging of the entire original collection. I accomplished this work all by myself from verification of the contents, cataloging, classification, making catalog cards, writing and attaching labels to book cases, and shelving. Five years later, my wife, Wen-ching, came to the library to assist me, but soon she was appointed Lecturer to teach spoken Chinese in the Department of Far Eastern Languages, established in 1958. Up until then, Chinese language at the University of Chicago had focused on classical Chinese; this was the beginning of teaching modern Chinese as a result of changing academic disciplines in U.S. higher education.

The Far Eastern Library was originally located in the basement of the Oriental Institute, moved to the second floor of the Harper Library in 1958, and to the newly completed Joseph Regenstein Library in 1970. Now the East Asian Library has a collection of over 600,000 volumes, including over 15,000 volumes of editions and manuscripts from the Yuan and Ming Dynasties as well as about five hundred titles or seven thousand volumes of early Qing editions printed in or before the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



*T.H. Tsien in his office in the Regenstein Library*

Since World War II and especially after 1949, Chinese studies in the United States have expanded from the traditional disciplines of language and history to modern politics, society, economy, law, and other social science areas. After 1958, the Far Eastern Library received funding from the U.S. federal government, the Ford Foundation, as well as special support from the University administration. In addition to classical materials, it also acquired journals, government documents, and publications of the social sciences and new literary works published since the 1920s. Due to the Korean War and anti-China attitude in the U.S., acquisition of Chinese books ran into many difficulties in the 1950s, when the Library began to expand. However, we worked hard to overcome the difficulties and to acquire important titles from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Europe, and all other possible sources.

Since the present collection of modern publications in the East Asian Library of this University has no particular political affiliation and is without regional bias, numerous important research materials have been collected, many of which are perhaps not in Mainland China or Taiwan. This is the principle of collection development of the East Asian Library of the University of Chicago, which also reflects the acquisition policy of other collections in Western libraries.

**Q: Would you please tell us about your teaching experience?**

A: From 1949, I began teaching courses on Chinese Bibliography and Chinese Historiography in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures. The purpose of these two courses was to train graduate students to collect source materials for writing dissertations.

The course on Chinese Bibliography includes three parts: Part I with definition, scope, history of books and printing, and the terminology of bibliology. Part two was on research methods, including acquisition, classification, cataloging, indexing systems for Chinese characters, styles of writing, and organization of materials. Part three was on reference tools, including bibliographies, indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and collectanea, all of which were intended to lead students' understanding and ability to collect materials for research. In addition to class discussions, there were assignments for each part to provide exercises for the students.

The second quarter focused on methods of Chinese historical research. Because the graduate students of Chinese studies at that time usually wrote their dissertations about literature or history, this course was focused on the review of major historical works and reference tools. Actually, these two classes were the

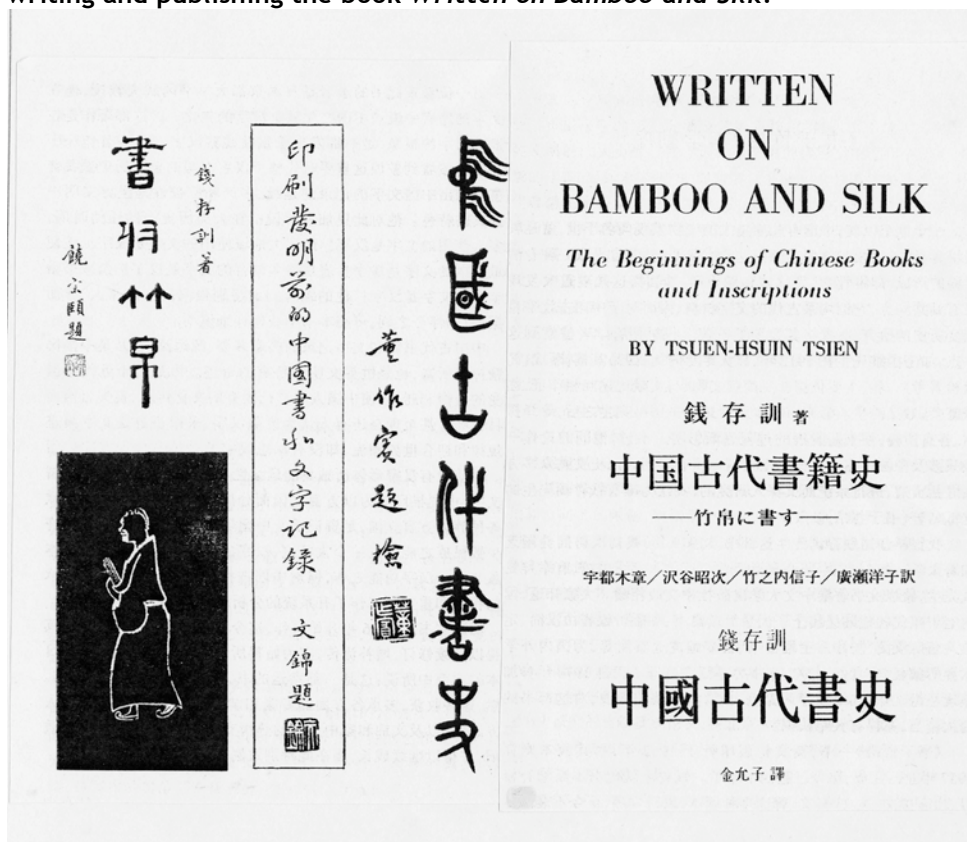
introduction of Sinological methods, which would help students in selecting a research topic, collecting sources, making detailed outlines, understanding writing styles, and compiling bibliographies for a proposed topic in standard format. Since 1958, the Department of Far Eastern Languages and Literatures has made these courses required for doctoral students. So the initial stages of their dissertation research usually started with exercises in these two courses.

I also offered seminars on the History of Chinese Printing at the Graduate Library School in the 1970s, through which I shared with the graduate students the research materials that I collected for writing *Paper and Printing* and at the same time trained a group of young scholars engaged in advanced studies of the subject. This is the only course on this subject ever offered in any American university.

In 1958, the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures was divided into Far East (later changed to East Asian), Near East, and South Asian departments. The interdisciplinary Center for Far East (later East Asian) Studies was established. I was promoted to associate professor in 1959, and full professor of the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Graduate Library School in 1962, spending half of my time on teaching and research and the other half on library administration until my retirement in 1978. The university has continued to provide an office for me in the Library, so I could continue my research after retirement.

#### IV. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Q: Other than library work and teaching, you also emphasize research and publishing, and thus have enjoyed a distinguished reputation in the field. Would you please talk about your experience in writing and publishing the book *Written on Bamboo and Silk*?



Cover titles of editions in English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean of *Written on Bamboo and Silk*

A: *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginning of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, was first published in English by the University of Chicago Press in 1962. This book was based on my doctoral dissertation, "Pre-printing Records of China: a Study of the Early Development of Chinese Inscriptions and Books," which was intended to provide information about the dissemination and continuation of ancient Chinese culture for understanding the Chinese contributions to the world history of books. After completion, it was recommended for publication by the Graduate Library School to the University of Chicago Press.

At that time, however, the study of China in the West received little attention. The press was very reluctant to accept it and was concerned that the book was too specialized to have many readers. But the press finally accepted its publication after the GLS paid one-third of its cost for printing. Surprisingly to many, the first edition was sold out within three months of its publication, and reprinted twice in 1963 and 1969. It was highly regarded in the international academic world and recognized as the companion piece to Thomas Carter's classic work *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward*. Moreover, interest in it has been demonstrated by scholars in such disciplines as Chinese archaeology, paleography and cultural history, as well as book history, and designated it as required reading and a reference work. The English edition was recently revised with a long Afterword by Professor Edward Shaughnessy as a classic of Chinese paleography and published by the University of Chicago Press in 2004.

Over the past forty years since the book was first published in 1962, it has circulated widely and has been translated into other languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Korean, that were not originally foreseen. As Professor Hiraoka Takeo comments in the preface of the Japanese translation, the book "can be regarded as the entire history of Chinese writing during the significant period between the Yin Dynasty ruins and Dunhuang. . . . It aims at revisiting the culture of Chinese characters. . . . This is a fortunate book that continues to grow. In other words, it is a book filled with life."

**Q:** You have also written other books such as *Paper and Printing; Studies on the History of the Chinese Book, Paper, Ink and Printing, Sino-American Cultural Relations*, and so on. Would you please talk about the writing of these books?

A: *Written on Bamboo and Silk* covers the period from about 1300 B.C. to 700 A.D. in the early Tang Dynasty. After its publication, I considered writing a sequel to this volume to cover the entire history of the Chinese book. Coincidentally, in 1967 I received an invitation from Dr. Joseph Needham of Cambridge University to contribute parts on paper and printing for the series *Science and Civilisation in China*. At that time, he was approaching retirement age and hoped someone could collaborate with him in the remaining years of his life to complete his monumental work. So I accepted his invitation to visit Cambridge in the autumn of 1968 to discuss the plan of the work and also to visit the libraries and museums in Britain and other European countries where I began to collect materials for writing the book. Later I visited many other places in the world to collect materials, which accumulated immensely, and therefore the scope of the project was very much broadened. Consequently, it took me fifteen years from drafting the outline to completing the whole book, and the length was extended from the original plan of 100 pages for a chapter to a full-length monograph of 300,000 words. This was far beyond our original expectations.

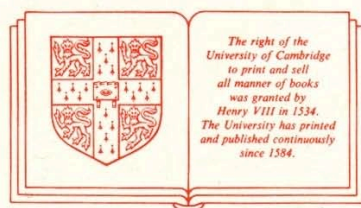
JOSEPH NEEDHAM  
SCIENCE AND  
CIVILISATION IN  
CHINA

VOLUME 5  
CHEMISTRY AND CHEMICAL  
TECHNOLOGY

PART I: PAPER AND PRINTING

BY  
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LIBRARY SCIENCE AND CURATOR EMERITUS  
OF THE FAR EASTERN LIBRARY AT THE  
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Title page of *Paper and Printing*

This volume has ten chapters, with three chapters each on paper and printing (including ink-making and book-binding), dissemination and one chapter as the introduction. In addition to the overview and introduction to source materials, the book discusses the reason why the two major inventions of paper and printing took place in China instead of other civilizations. The last chapter concludes the book by discussing the functions and impact of both inventions. I point out specifically that the functions of



printing in China and the West are similar, but their impact is different. Although my conclusion disagrees with that of many others, Dr. Needham praised it and believed it would provide him with good ideas for his overall conclusions in the series.

The writing of this volume was performed on and off during my spare time and took many years to complete. It was only after my retirement that I was able to concentrate on this work. Thanks to grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for Humanities, I was able to hire research assistants to help with the work. Two years after my retirement, I finally completed the first draft of ten chapters. In addition, two hundred illustrations and a bibliography of about two thousand entries are included.

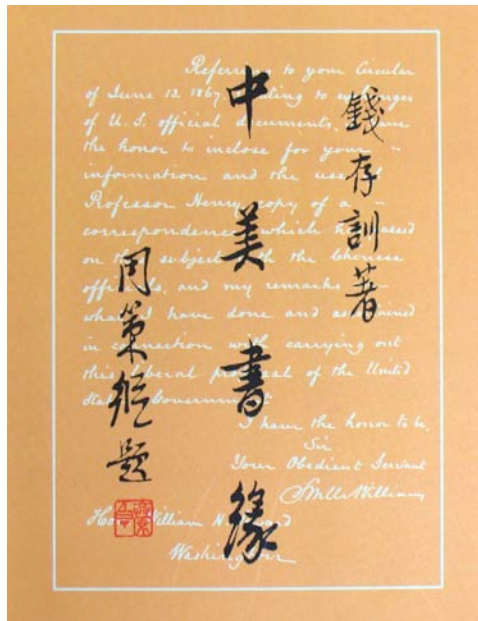


In September 1982, upon completion of the book, I visited Cambridge again to discuss its publication of the manuscript with Dr. Needham. Then, after editing, typesetting and printing, proofing, and other technical aspects, the book was finally published by Cambridge University Press in 1985 as a volume of the *Science and Civilisation in China* series. It was priced at 66 pounds, equivalent to US\$100 at that time, which was very expensive, but the first edition of fifteen hundred copies was sold out before the book was actually on the market, with three more printings since then. This volume became the best seller of the whole series. Dr. Needham was very happy about our successful collaboration on this volume and, with the approval of the board of trustees, he appointed me Research Fellow *en permanence* of his Institute. This was a special honor for me, and I happily accepted it. Meanwhile, the book received very positive reviews internationally, and was regarded as the authoritative work in the field as well as an encyclopedia on the subject of paper and printing.

*Studies on the History of the Chinese Book, Paper, Ink and Printing* with calligraphy by Prof. Tseng Yu-ho of the University of Hawaii.

Soon, the Chinese Academy of Science in Beijing had the volume translated into Chinese, published jointly by Shanghai Guji Press and Beijing Science Press in 1990, for presentation as a gift to Dr. Needham for his 90th birthday. About the same time, another translation was published in Taiwan. A third Chinese version, based on my draft in Chinese, was published in 2004. Japanese and Korean translations were also published recently.

*Studies on the History of the Chinese Book, Paper, Ink and Printing*, published in Chinese by the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press in 1992, includes articles that were mostly byproducts of the research for my two monographs, which are limited by scope and style and so could not include individual details of various studies. Yet, certain issues must be explored before a conclusion can be made in the monograph. For example, the discussion on book knives takes only two pages in *Written on Bamboo and Silk*; but in the anthology, the article "A Study on Book Knives in Han China" comes to more than 12 pages in length. This book was revised and enlarged into two parts with 20 articles each and was published by Beijing Library Press in 2004.



Cover of *Sino-American Cultural Relations* with calligraphy by Prof. Chow Tse-tsung of the University of Wisconsin

*Sino-American Cultural Relations*, published in Taiwan in 1998, includes articles, reports and essays relating to the cultural exchange between China and the United States or East and West. On the whole, this book is about another theme of my research and writing. They not only record and report historical facts but also include my personal experience and opinions on this subject. I have also co-edited two other books: *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, which includes twelve articles on pre-Qin, Qin and Han thoughts and systems, to celebrate the 70th birthday of Professor Creel, and *Area Studies and Libraries*, which includes proceedings of the conference discussing the problems of libraries and the impact of area studies such as East, South, and Southeast Asia, Near East, Latin America, the Soviet Union and East Europe upon the traditional management of Western collections.

## V. SCHOLARSHIP, METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIENCES

**Q: What is the impact of the University of Chicago on your scholarship?**

A: When I was in China, I published a few articles and translations, but they were mostly class assignments of my college years and could not be considered serious research. Since I arrived at the University of Chicago, I have made some significant progress in writing, including selecting research topics, collecting research materials, and research methods and especially writing in English. In addition, I have had years of teaching experience, which has helped with my scholarship and research. For example, in selecting a research topic, I was able to take new approaches in depth and identify topics that had not been explored by others, so that I could fill in gaps or expand on less studied and seemingly less significant topics.

For example, my M.A. thesis, "Western Impact on China through Translation" used quantitative methods to analyze about 8,000 book titles listed in the bibliographies of translations from the 16th to the 20th centuries, and analyze the subjects, where the originals came from, quantity of translations, their publication dates, and so on in order to understand the impact of Western culture on the changes in modern Chinese society. This study was actually inspired by E. W. Hulme's *Statistical Bibliography* (London, 1924), which used statistical methods to analyze the contents of over 20,000 incunabula to determine the impact of printing on Western civilization. The Chinese concept of bibliography emphasizes the recorded

contents of the books, which is actually the method of content analysis, i.e., through the analysis of the contents of the bibliography to further track the origins of cultural growth. The use of quantitative method for the study of modern Chinese history was new in the field and it was highly regarded by the editor of *Far East Quarterly* that published the abstract of my thesis.

Another article, "A History of Bibliographical Classification in China," discussing the similarities and differences of classification concepts between China and the West, also used such comparative methods. In this article, I point out that the chart of learning of the British philosopher Francis Bacon (1560-1626), dividing human knowledge into three categories of Memory, Imagination, and Reason, formed the triad foundation of Western classification systems. This is almost the same as the Chinese fourfold classification of classics, history, philosophy, and belles-letters, except for that of classics. Bacon further divided philosophy into Divine, Natural, and Human, which is very much in accord with the Chinese thought of Heaven, Earth, and Man. Bacon frequently cited Chinese inventions and other developments in his works. Consequently, I believe that Bacon's trichotomy might be influenced by the idea of Chinese classification.

Another article that discusses printing also uses comparative methods. The question is why printing was invented in China instead of in the West. It has been generally accepted that the foundation of printing technology is the use of stamps. But the use of stamps in the West occurred earlier than in China and might have already been popular in Mesopotamia and Egypt before the invention of writing. Why, then, did Western stamps not lead to the invention of printing? Detailed comparative studies show that the Chinese stamps not only used the same materials but that they were also used for similar purposes. Whereas Western seals were mainly cylindrical in shape and had to be rolled on the surface of clay or wax to produce impressions, the Egyptian seals were flat and were mostly graphics without any writing. Chinese seals, nevertheless, were mostly square or rectangular in shape, flat on the bottom with reversed characters carved on them and applied to silk or paper. Sometimes a stamp could have more than 100 characters carved on it. Since this process is very similar to printing, that it paved the way for printing technology is not difficult to understand.

**Q: What are the principles and research methods you believe to be the most important gains from your experience and scholarship?**

A: My scholarship and research methods are chiefly learned from experiences in writing my dissertations in graduate school. Before writing, I had to read extensively the related materials, and my writing was more or less influenced and illuminated by the viewpoints and methods of these references. My writing style perhaps was inspired and influenced by my daily reading of newspapers. Journalistic style is usually a succinct, fluent, and clear narrative. The opening generally presents the theme and a concise summary, followed by detailed factual elaborations, which lead to a conclusion. Such a three-parts style is also common for scholarly writings. Reading newspapers has perhaps influenced me to organize my writing systematically and coherently and thus became a writing habit.

Some readers think that the content of my writing is rich in sources and well-structured; chapters are organically connected and classic material is represented in the author's own words. I think this kind of comment is pertinent. As for sources, I first collect all materials related to the theme and then make selections for a reference bibliography. As for the structure, I usually plan the overall layout of the book from chapters to paragraphs. Once the first draft is completed, I go back to revise, polish, and adjust each chapter so that each part is reasonable in length. The beginning and ending of each chapter also correlate to each other, so narratives of the text will be continuing. As for the content of each chapter, it is mostly arranged according to the amount of material available and the nature of the discussion.

For example, I was aware when I wrote *Written on Bamboo and Silk* that bronze and stone inscriptions are traditionally treated as one group, but the amount of material on these two was substantially too much to balance with the other chapters. Therefore, I combined bronze with pottery inscriptions and stone with jade inscriptions to make two chapters of about equal size. Although pottery and bronze are very different materials and it seemed improper to group them together, I explained in the opening of the chapter the relationship and origins of the two so that it does not sound farfetched. As for citing Chinese classics,

when writing in English, one must fully understand the original texts to be able to translate each word and sentence and then represent it in one's own words. This is different from writing in Chinese, where when citing classics, even if you do not fully understand, you still can cite it. Therefore the degree of difficulty of writing in non-Chinese is very different.

In summary, I believe the principle of scholarship is to open a new area of research to avoid repetition. Therefore, the use of bibliography becomes the first step of any research. From selecting a topic, to drawing an outline, searching for materials, writing and even compiling references, all must start with the bibliography to determine if others have done similar works. Thus we can avoid duplication and also finalize our themes and adjust the scope. When drawing an outline, a bibliography can lead to similar works and studies to enrich the content of one's research. As for collecting materials, we must rely on the various types of bibliographies; otherwise, it is impossible to have a complete idea of the sources. To use bibliographies, the first thing to do is to look into the bibliography of bibliographies. Bibliography is the foundation of scholarship and guide to research, so when using any bibliography, we must first consult the instructions of the bibliographies. In that way, we will not miss the point.

When I compiled the teaching materials for the course "Chinese Bibliography," I collected over 2,500 titles of bibliography of bibliographies about China in various languages. Later, this part was developed into a monograph, entitled *China: An Annotated Bibliography of Bibliographies*, which was annotated by James Cheng and has become an important reference tool for any study about China. The sources I use in my writings are considered by others to be relatively complete; an important reason for that is my full use of bibliographies.

**Q: In your research area, what are the other questions that still need exploration? What directions should future research take?**

A: My research mainly touches upon two major areas, i.e., the history of writings in China and the cultural exchange between China and other countries. The combination of the two, if looked at from a perspective, may lead to conclusions regarding the characteristics of Chinese culture and its position among the world civilizations. In the conclusion of *Writing on Bamboo and Silk*, I pointed out that the continuity, productivity, and universality of Chinese writings are the cornerstone of Chinese culture. This is unique in the history of world cultures. This is the conclusion that I have drawn through my study, observation, and analysis. But limited by the overall style of a monograph, I was only able to briefly address these points instead of fully elaborating on them. I believe there is much room for further investigation about this issue, and more detailed analysis, examples, and comparison may discover more on these points. This is a great project, which I hope aspiring future researchers will continue to explore.

Previous Chinese scholarship on the history of books and printing can be generalized into two major trends. One is the traditional approach of bibliography or bibliology, which emphasizes the recording, discerning, circulation as well as textual criticism of books. The other main trend, under Western influence, is contemporary scholarship on the origin, development, technology and dissemination of printing. I think future research should focus more on the issues of the cultural aspects of printing history, especially the relationship between printing and social developments. I have raised this question in my *Paper and Printing* and compared the functions and impact of printing in traditional Chinese and the Western societies. My conclusion is that they had the similar social functions but to a different degree.

The impact of printing produced in Chinese and Western societies, however, is not only different but also completely opposite. In the West, the invention and spread of printing promoted the development of national languages and literatures, which encouraged nationalism and the establishment of new nation-states. Yet in traditional Chinese society, printing united with the civil-service examination system, which not only assisted in the continuity and dissemination of Chinese writing but also became an important factor for the relative stability of traditional Chinese society; it is also an important device to maintain Chinese culture. Although my viewpoint differs from those of others, this question must be further analyzed from social, economical, and political perspectives in order to arrive at a final conclusion. I think this is a new direction that warrants emphasis in the study of the history of books and printing.

The last question worth mentioning here is whether the methods for recording human thinking are related to the media materials used to do so. In my conclusion of *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, I state that the invention of paper and printing did not change the depth and significance of the contents of the books. The traditional thoughts that influenced Chinese society for thousands of years, including Confucianism, Daoism, and the Legalist school, for example, are all immortal works written on bamboo and silk. Another example is *Shi Ji*, or *Records of the Grand Historian*, an important work written perhaps on some 50,000 bamboo strips, that generations of historians looked up to as the top standard in history. None of the works produced since the invention of paper and printing have surpassed these great thoughts and doctrines that have circulated broadly through the ages. Even today in the computer age, we still have not seen one historical work that in style, scope, and creativity that can surpass the style of the record created by Sima Qian that covers all aspects of history from surface, line, and point, or the style of record, chronology, and biography. What exactly is the relationship between the ability of human thinking and the media of writing? This is also an important topic that warrants continued deliberation.

**Q: Thank you for allowing me to do this interview.**

A: Thank you for your interesting questions.

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