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East Asian Library Pioneers: A Continuing Series

Cheuk-woon Taam and the Chinese Collection at the University of Hawaii Library

Kuang-tien Yao

University of Hawaii at Manoa Library



Dr. Cheuk-woon Taam 譚卓垣 (also known as Zhuoyuan Tan, Chao-yüan Tam, Cho-yüan Tan) was born in Xinhui 新會, Guangdong Province, China, in 1900. He graduated from Lingnan University in 1922, received a MLS degree from Columbia University in 1931, and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago in 1933. His Ph.D. dissertation, *The Development of Chinese Libraries under the Ch'ing Dynasty, 1644-1911*, was published in 1935 in Shanghai. The Chinese edition (清代圖書館發展史, 1664-1911) was also published in the same year in Shanghai. Both editions were later reprinted (San Francisco : Chinese Materials Center, 1977). After completing his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, Dr. Taam returned to Lingnan University, where he served as Chief Librarian from 1933-1937. In December 1937, Dr. Taam became the Curator of the Oriental Collection of the Oriental Institute at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.¹

According to Tsuen-hsuei Tsien 錢存訓, who was the fourth Ph.D. student to graduate from the University of Chicago Library School. Dr. Taam was the second.² Prior to Dr. Taam's publication of *The Development of Chinese Libraries under the Ching Dynasty, 1644-1911*, books and articles on the history of Chinese libraries were scarce. Dr. Taam's work was one of the very few English books introducing the history of Chinese libraries under the Qing Dynasty to the Western world. Some notable books and articles on Chinese libraries published prior to Dr. Taam's 1935 publication include Mary Elizabeth Wood's books on the Boone Library in Hankou³ and libraries movement in China,⁴ Yuan Tongli's 袁同禮 on libraries in China,⁵ and Chiu Kai-Ming's 秋開明 articles on the National Library in China.⁶

Dr. Taam was one of the prominent Chinese librarians in the 20th century; however, there is very little information about his life in Hawaii after he left China in

¹ *Ka Leo O Hawaii: Voice of Hawaii* 16, no.20 (December 17, 1937): 1.

² Tsien, Tsuen-hsuei 錢存訓. *Liu Mei za yi: lisu shi nian lai Meiguo sheng huo de hui gu* 留美雜憶:六十年來美國生活的回顧. Taipei: Zhuan ji wen xue chu ban she, 2007. p. 35.

³ Wood, Mary Elizabeth. *The Boone Library and Its Outlook for the Future*. Wuchang, China, 1919.

⁴ _____. *The Boxer Indemnity and the Library Movement in China. A Collection of Official Documents Pertaining to Boxer Indemnity and Public Libraries in China*. Hankou, Central China, 1924.

⁵ Yuan, Tongli 袁同禮. *Libraries in China*. Peiping, Library Association of China, 1929.

⁶ Chiu, Kai-Ming 秋開明. "National Library in China", *Library Quarterly* .3, no. 2 (April 1933): 146-169.

late 1937. This article intends to describe some of Dr. Taam's activities in Hawaii and his contributions to the Chinese collection at the University of Hawaii Library, and to recognize him as the first Chinese Librarian appointed to serve as Curator of the Oriental Collection.

The Chinese collection of the University of Hawaii at Manoa was started in 1922, the same year the Chinese Department was established and Professor Shao-chang Lee 李紹昌 was hired to teach Chinese language and literature courses. The collection began with a modest 350 titles (1,500 volumes) in Chinese and another 650 titles in English on China and Japan.

In 1936, Gregg M. Sinclair founded the Oriental Institute, and Professor Lee was made responsible for the development of the Chinese collection in the Institute's new Oriental Library. He helped build a China Studies Program within "Oriental Studies" and envisioned that it would make the University an exemplar in the field among universities outside of Japan and China. That same year Professor Lee took a sabbatical leave to travel in China in search of book donations from prominent Chinese. Upon his return, he reported that he had acquired more than 20,000 Chinese stitched, bound volumes for the Oriental Library. A majority of these gifts were traditional materials on rice paper, including encyclopedias, collectanea, and publications on history, literature, and philosophy, which formed the core of the Chinese collection.



Photo from University of Hawaii Library Archives

In 1938, Dr. Taam, in addition to his curatorship, cataloged Chinese books with the assistance of his staff. By June 1938, within the first six months of his appointment, he had ordered 5,000 volumes of Chinese books from Beijing. In July 1939, Dr. Taam reported that 9,629 stitched volumes of Chinese books had been cataloged, bringing the total number of Chinese books to 24,284. After checking against Gardner's *Union List of Selected Westerns Books on China*, he reported that the Oriental Library possessed 203 out of those 330 titles listed in Gardner's book. He further stated, "As a whole our Chinese library represents a small nucleus of a well picked collection for Sinological studies. We are fairly well equipped with books on Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and art."⁷ By June 1943, the Chinese Collection had increased to 41,073 Chinese stitched volumes.⁸

⁷ "A Review of Three Year's Development, as Reported by the Director, Gregg M. Sinclair," *University of Hawaii Bulletin* 18, no. 9 (July 1939): 11.

⁸ The Report of the President for Fiscal Year July 1, 1942 to June 30, 1943," *University of Hawaii Bulletin*, 23, no.1 (December 1943): 39.

In 1938, during Dr. Taam's curatorship of the Oriental Collection at the Oriental Institute, several renowned scholars of China studies taught at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. In addition to Prof. Shao-chang Lee 李紹昌 who taught Chinese language and literature, there were Dr. Shou-yi Chen 陳受頤 who taught Chinese history and Dr. Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷 who taught Chinese philosophy. In the summer of 1939, Dr. Yuan-ren Chao 趙元任 of the Academia Sinica, Nanking, joined the Oriental Institute and offered intensive Chinese language courses for graduate and upper division undergraduates. Dr. Taam was a pioneer in building up the collection of Chinese literature, history and philosophy at the Oriental Library to support faculty research and teaching. His efforts made the Chinese collection at this local university library in Hawaii outstanding in America at the time.

By July 1938, the Chinese collection began to receive from China on a regular basis the English-language journals *The People's Tribune* and *The Chinese Recorder*. During World War II, an arrangement was made to obtain Chinese books published in China. Also at this time the Oriental Institute's library was absorbed by the University Library to become the Oriental Library. Over the next two decades, the University Library continued to collect materials in both Chinese and Western languages on Asia.

Dr. Taam not only devoted his energy to building up the Chinese collection at the Oriental Library, he also helped Lingnan University Library to acquire Western language books from the United States. From 1938 to 1941, before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Lingnan University Library requested Dr. Taam's assistance to acquire Western language books to build up its own collection because he was formerly the Chief Librarian of Lingnan University and knew the collection very well.⁹

According to the May 7, 1939 *Honolulu Advertiser*, at the annual meeting of the Hawaii Library Association a committee was appointed to select and send books to the libraries of the universities in China. Dr. Taam was appointed to be in charge of selecting and packing the books, working with committee members from the Library of Hawaii and the Honolulu Academy of Arts Library. The committee also urged the public to contact them if they had books to contribute to the Chinese universities.¹⁰ Although there is no record of which Chinese university libraries received gift books from Hawaii, in 1940, the library report published by *Lingnan da xue xue bao* 嶺南大學學報 recorded that the University of Hawaii had sent 473 volumes of Western language books and 19 Western journals (total of 104 volumes) to the Lingnan University Library.¹¹ Based on the time frame of these events, it is reasonable to infer that Lingnan University Library was one of the Chinese university libraries that received gift books from Hawaii. It is very likely that Dr. Taam was the first Chinese librarian in Hawaii to send Western

⁹ Zhou, Yi 周漪. "Shi kun you cun jie jie hou shu: kang zhan shi qi Liangnan da xue tu shu guan de cang shu huo dong 時困憂存劫候書：抗戰時期嶺南大學圖書館圖的藏書活動," *Tu shu qing bao zhi shi* 圖書情報知識, v.1 (2010): 60-69.

¹⁰ *Honolulu Advertiser*, May 7, 1939, 10.

¹¹ Zheng, Jinhui 鄭錦懷. "Tan Zhuoyuan sheng ping yu tu shu guan xue cheng jiu kao cha 譚卓垣生平與圖書館學成就考察," *Zhongguo tu shu guan xue bao* 中國圖書館學報, No. 6, 2011:83.

language books to the libraries in China, including Lingnan University Library, which showed his attachment to Lingnan University Library.

In the 1953-1954 University of Hawaii Annual Report, Carl Stroven, the University Librarian, acknowledged Dr. Taam's contribution to acquiring and cataloging *Daozang* 道藏, stating that it was among the year's most important acquisitions added to the Oriental Collection. The report further indicated that "the curator of the collection continued his project of compiling a bibliography of periodical literature on China, which now contains about 16,000 entries on cards. During a leave of absence next semester [spring 1956], he will visit mainland libraries in order to complete the bibliography and enlist support for its publication."¹² Unfortunately, Dr. Taam passed away on October 23, 1956.¹³ As of this writing, I have been unable to locate those completed entries due to the 2004 flash flood that occurred on October 30, 2004 and washed away all card catalogs and thousands of books located in the basement of University of Hawaii at Manoa Library.

During Dr. Taam's 18-year tenure as Curator of the Oriental Collection and Associate Professor of Chinese Studies,¹⁴ in addition to compiling a bibliography of periodical literature on China, he also published several articles including "The Discovery of the Tun-Huang Library and Its Effect on Chinese Studies" in *Library Quarterly*¹⁵ and "On Studies of Confucius" in *Philosophy East and West*.¹⁶ Two years after his appointment as Curator, Dr. Taam started his teaching career as Associate Professor of Chinese Studies. According to the *University of Hawaii General Catalogue*, he offered two courses, "First-year and Second-year Chinese for Occidental Students" 1940 to 1941.¹⁷ He taught "History of China" in the History Department 1944 to 1945.¹⁸ From 1940 to 1956, he taught "Methods and Bibliography in Chinese Studies" and "Direct Reading or Research" for graduate students.¹⁹

The year of 2012 marked the ninetieth anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese Collection at the University of Hawaii at Manoa Library. Although the Chinese

¹² "Annual Report, University of Hawaii, 1953-1954," *University of Hawaii Bulletin*, 34, no. 1 (December 1954):55.

¹³ *Honolulu Advertiser*, October 24, 1956: A5.

¹⁴ *Directory of the University of Hawaii and of Affiliated, Independently Supported Institutions of the Campus* (Published November 1946 for the College Year 1946-1947):18.

¹⁵ Cheuk-Woon Taam. "The Discovery of the Tun-Huang Library and Its Effect on Chinese Studies," *Library Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (July 1942): 686-705.

¹⁶ _____. Associate Professor of Chinese Studies. "On Studies of Confucius," *Philosophy. East and West* 3 (July 1953):141-165.

¹⁷ *University of Hawaii. General Catalogue, 1940-1941*.

¹⁸ *University of Hawaii. General Catalogue, 1944-1945*.

¹⁹ *University of Hawaii General Catalogue, 1940-1956*.

collection was begun in 1922, it was not fully attended until Dr. Taam was hired as the first Chinese Curator by the Oriental Institute. It was under his curatorship that the library collection on Chinese literature, history and philosophy at the University of Hawaii grew rapidly and became an outstanding early East Asian library in North America. His contributions to the Chinese collection are undeniable and deserve recognition not only by the University of Hawaii at Manoa Library but also by the field of East Asian librarianship.