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Grand Opening of T. H. Tsien Library in Nanjing University: an International Celebration

On November 1, 2007, the opening of T. H. Tsien Library was formally held in Nanjing University, Nanjing, China. To celebrate this event, Nanjing University and the University of Chicago Library co-organized a two-day international symposium on November 1-2 in Nanjing University. A total of forty-seven scholars, librarians, and university administrators from China, Taiwan and the United States attended the celebration and symposium by invitation. A good number of graduate and undergraduate students from Nanjing University also participated in this festive event.

Professor Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, Curator Emeritus of the East Asian Library and Professor Emeritus of the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, is one of the most accomplished and respected scholar-librarians in the field of East Asian librarianship of all time. He came to the University of Chicago in 1947 and has stayed on campus ever since for more than 60 years. From 1949 to 1978, Dr. Tsien served as the first Curator of Chicago’s East Asian Library and taught as a faculty member both in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Graduate Library School in the University. During his tenure at the University of Chicago, Tsien not only built successfully one of the finest East Asian collections in North America but also trained a generation of East Asian librarians and scholars. Many of his students are library leaders and faculty members today in institutions of higher education in the U. S., Taiwan and elsewhere.

Dr. Tsien also made great achievements in research and scholarship. He is the author of more than 150 scholarly publications including two very influential monographs on the history of Chinese books, paper and printing, Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginning of Chinese Books and Inscription (University of Chicago Press, 1962; 2nd revised edition, 2004) and Paper and Printing (Cambridge University Press, 1985) in Joseph Needham’s Science and Civilisation in China series. Tsien is also well-known for his initiation of statistical surveys in 1950-1970s on East Asian library resources in North America, the predecessor of today’s CEAL statistics.

Nanjing University (formerly University of Nanking) is Tsien’s Alma Mater—he graduated from the University in 1932 with a major in history and minor in library science. In 2006, Professor Tsien decided to donate his life-long private collection to Nanjing University. The Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (IAS), a newly established research institute in Nanjing University, was chosen to home Tsien’s donation, which contains more than 6,000 volumes of publications in Chinese, Japanese and English. The donated books were shipped to China from New York through the “Books-for-China Project,” organized by John Ma, formerly librarian of Cornell, the Hoover Institute, and Amsterdam. To honor Dr. Tsien’s distinguished long career, renowned scholarship, and generous donation, the IAS of Nanjing University decided to name its new library “T. H. Tsien Library”.

To celebrate the grand opening of the Tsien Library, the University of Chicago Library and Nanjing University worked together to organize an international symposium held in Nanjing with a grant from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange program. This meeting, entitled the International Symposium on Sino-American Cultural Exchange and Library Development, was co-hosted by the University Library, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (IAS), the Institute for Publishing Research, and the Department of Information Management of Nanjing University.

The two-day conference began with a keynote speech by Professor Choyun Hsu, Professor Emeritus of the University of Pittsburg and Guest Professor of the Nanjing University’s IAS. His introduction was followed by welcome remarks and opening speeches made by Professor Zhang Yibin, Vice President of Nanjing University, Professor Hong Xiuping, Director of Nanjing University Library, Mr. James Cheng, Librarian of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, and Ms. Xiaoshan Qian, Professor Emeritus of Nanjing Normal University and the representative of the Tsien family. Vice President Zhang and Professor Qian unveiled the name plaque of the T. H. Tsien Library and announced its opening.
Twenty-four papers were presented in the two-day conference. Among them, nine were given by the participants from the United States including Dr. Hwa-wei Lee, Chief of Asian Division, Library of Congress, Mr. James Cheng, Librarian of Harvard-Yenching Library, and Dr. Tai-loi Ma, Director of East Asian Library, Princeton University. Four presentations were made by the attendees from Taiwan, and the rest (eleven) were given by scholars and librarians from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Nanjing, China. The papers were well received by the audience and generated interesting discussions in the sessions as well as during the tea breaks, lunches and dinners. The conference was concluded by Dr. Tsien’s video presentation. The Symposium was a great success where various topics on or related to Sino-American cultural exchange and library development were discussed. It also offered a wonderful opportunity for participants from China, Taiwan and the United States to get to know each other, to interact, and to develop professional ties and scholarly networks.

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