

 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

東亞圖書館  
*East Asian Library*  
and the *Gest Collection*

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THE  
GEST LIBRARY  
JOURNAL



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# On Launching a New Journal

## THE EDITORS

Libraries surely are among the most genial of places and it is no surprise that they have friends. Even so, it seems that today libraries can never have friends enough. Some of the friends of the East Asian Library at Princeton therefore resolved to organize the Friends of the Gest Library—"The Gest" being a traditional Princeton nickname for the East Asian Library. The Friends hope to enlarge the circle and, at the same time, to give all those with interests in the civilizations of East Asia a journal which will remind, inform, and perhaps even entertain them.

We might play a bit with the word "journal," which we have chosen for our title. Despite its obvious derivation via Old French "*jur-*" and "*journal*," and late Latin "*dies*" and "*diurnalem*," meaning "day" and "the record of the day," at least since the year 1728 the English word "journal" (according to that awesome authority, the OED) has been used in the sense of "any periodical publication containing news in any particular sphere." In deciding to call this new publication *The Gest Library Journal* we have hoped immodestly to associate it in the readers' minds with learned journals which contain news in a "particular sphere." But we also have in mind something close to the other sense of the word, the fact that our East Asian Library (the Gest) is an element of the University's daily activity. To be sure, we do not intend to make this a log of all of our library's activities. The Gest's day by day existence challenges a devoted staff and draws grateful users throughout long hours; far more goes on there than ever could be recorded. The editors hope that this slight journal will contain high quality scholarship concerning traditional and modern East Asia, as well as reflect some sense of the daily labors, the discoveries, the problems and the excitement that the Gest Library generates.

## ON LAUNCHING A NEW JOURNAL

### THE GEST LIBRARY

Guion Moore Gest (1864-1948) was an engineer and international businessman who became interested in the East. He visited China in the early 1920s and decided to have his friend Commander Irvin Van Gorder Gillis (1875-1948), a retired American naval officer living in Peking, acquire rare and valuable books for him.

G. M. Gest's story has been well told elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> however, one curious aspect of it has special meaning for us here. Mr. Gest suffered from glaucoma. Commander Gillis urged him to seek relief from the painful condition of his eyes by consulting a traditional Chinese medical specialist in eye diseases. Immediate relief resulted and Mr. Gest was deeply impressed. Here was something of practical value. He conceived the idea of collecting old Chinese medical works so that they might be studied in the West. At that point his friend Commander Gillis interposed crucial advice: the traditional medical knowledge of China could not be studied in isolation from the lore of the entire civilization. Books on all aspects of Chinese life must be acquired to provide the perspective that alone would make the medical knowledge intelligible. Thanks to that profound advice the Gest collection became a magnificently rounded core collection of 102,000 volumes, many exceedingly rare and valuable. In 1937 it came to Princeton from Toronto with the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, intended, incidentally, for the Institute of Advance Study.

### LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

In East Asia, World War II commenced in the mid-nineteen-thirties. International tensions and other problems forced Mr. Gest to cease his collecting, but under Princeton University's stewardship the Gest Library began to grow again in the nineteen-fifties. It has now become a systematic collection of almost half-a-million volumes in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other languages. As the collection has grown to serve the ever-changing needs of modern scholarship, the advice given by Commander Gillis to Mr. Gest has continued to guide Gest Library librarians. As he pointed out, even though our focus may be immediate, practical, and contemporary, our research capacity must be broad and deep. One may go to the library seeking to learn something about disputed claims to petroleum resources in Northeast Asia,

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and discover that he needs to know first about the Manchu conquests in the seventeenth century, and the incursions of the Great Powers in the nineteenth. One may seek the meaning of the current political leader's latest speech, only to discover that its pungent allusions will take him back to some ancient philosopher. In short, to understand any problem in contemporary East Asia one may have to fathom rather remote, but still resonant, points of its origins.

In this last regard generally, the United States has benefited from East Asian librarians who have set strong standards and built our collections. One need think only of the late great Alfred K'ai-ming Ch'iu at Harvard-Yenching Library, Dr. K. T. Wu at the Library of Congress, and T. H. Tsien at the University of Chicago. Among those who have made landmark contributions at Princeton, one must mention first of all Nancy Lee Swann, who came to us with the collection when it was moved from McGill University in Toronto in 1937. She guarded and studied the collection, wrote books in its midst, and guaranteed that the rare treasures would be properly preserved. Her spirit lingers on. Dr. Hu Shih bore the title of curator for two years, 1950-52, but his principal role was to advise President Dodds on how best to utilize this resource in building Chinese studies at Princeton. He left his indelible mark on the Library and the University, including numerous slips inserted in rare books with scholarly notes in his distinctive calligraphy. Dr. Hu introduced James S. K. T'ung to Princeton. Mr. T'ung became the Gest Library's curator in 1951, and on his retirement in 1978 President Bowen cited him, in remarks delivered to the graduating class of that year, for his long and faithful direction of the Gest, during which time it acquired its staff, created the excellent Japanese collection, and trebled the holdings overall. The T'ung years also witnessed three semesters-in-residence of Prof. Ch'ü Wan-li of the Academia Sinica (Taiwan) who prepared the catalog of the Gest's rare books published in 1974.<sup>2</sup> These great librarians and scholars have set the standards for the Gest Library in our time. The Gest's Friends must honor their memories.

Guiding both the young student and the senior scholar to the right books is all in a day's work for Gest librarians. To be successful they must have long anticipated the many directions in which research may turn, so that the needed books will be there, in place, ready to use. They are the usually unsung heroes and heroines of scholarship.

*The Gest Library Journal* will bear witness to the ongoing achievements of

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our librarians. It will try to arouse all who value books, knowledge, and scholarship to take an interest in the life of this great library, and of others like it. Libraries do not compete, or should not. All the resources of any of them must be made freely available to all the others. The progress of one great research collection is a boon to all. Just as we hope to draw friends to Princeton's Gest Library and to join in supporting it, so we hope to enlarge the appreciation of all libraries in the East Asian field, and to encourage their friends to assist them.

We hold those truths to be self-evident; we shall not preach them, but they will be implicit in all that our journal offers.

## COLLECTORS AND COLLECTING

Guion Moore Gest, the international businessman, had true collector's instincts. Commander Irvin Van Gorder Gillis was his expert technical advisor. Gillis was a romantic expatriot living in Peking in the afterglow of the Manchu dynasty. He was steeped in the lore of the East Asian book, a participant (through his Manchu wife's highly-placed, if impoverished, ex-aristocrat associates) in the world of book-collecting, and a master of scientific methods which he gleaned from his knowledge of military cryptography. He used these methods for detecting authentic rarities. The fortuitous conjunction of personalities, resources, and skills impelled the collecting spirit of both men. The result is the unmatched core collection of the Gest Library. The time and the place were right; no such collection could be assembled today. Yet the avid collector still plays an indispensable role in the building of libraries—as he does for museums and other public collections. Someone with the means to indulge his or her particular imagination might be struck by an opportunity, or might see what others have not seen. That is how collections are created, and thus remain very personal monuments to the individual's unique gifts.

One collector we know has been fascinated by the importance of East Asian writing systems, as art and as technology. He has acquired items not seen by others as possessing any coherent logic, yet we are now able to appreciate that (among their other values) they fill in the history of the book during the era when printing slowly superseded hand-copying. Within the context of a rare-books library and an art museum, this assemblage of

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graphic data illuminates an important aspect of the development of art, and also of the technology for transmitting and preserving knowledge.

Another friend of the Gest, his collector's instincts highly tuned, heard from a friend about an underground political movement in a corner of East Asia. He learned that complete runs of the movement's suppressed publications might be donated by one of the members to a North American library, through an intermediary who works in Asia. No other runs of these serials are known to exist outside of the East Asian country. Would the Gest Library accept them, the donor asked, but on condition that they not be accessioned and catalogued for ten years? They are now sitting in a Princeton professor's office marked for eventual donation to the Gest Library. Current issues mysteriously arrive from a postal address in a third country. Someday they may be recognized as important research material, or they may prove to be of little value. The important thing about this true story is that someday in the near future we shall have the opportunity to judge their value, to add them to our collections, and to use them. The event illustrates collecting at its best. It isn't costing any money, but it did require a sensitive ear to the ground, a concern for the purposes of libraries, and a self-effacing collector's sharp instincts.

Collectors understand the passion to see their collections grow. More important, their own appreciation for books and documents often leads them to want their collections eventually to be preserved in libraries. Where, indeed, would we be without collectors?

## FINALLY, AN INVITATION

The purposes to be served by the Friends of the Gest, whose journal this is, have perhaps been made clear enough in the foregoing paragraphs. They are the perennial purposes of all who learn and who teach, who collect and who care for collections, here made specific to the needs of East Asian fields. We invite you to join the Friends by subscribing to their *Journal*, and additionally to visit the Gest Library and Princeton's other libraries and museums, to join in the occasional activities of the Friends, to write to the editors about your interests, to submit short articles and news items for possible future publication here, and to contribute to the support of Princeton's East Asian research activities by whatever means you choose. For advice on how

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to do all or any of those admirable things, please turn to the last page of this issue.

Now hoping we may call you "friend," we invite you to enjoy this first issue of our new *Gest Library Journal*. (And keep it—it will be a collector's item!)

### NOTES

1. Hu Shih, "The Gest Oriental Library at Princeton University," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. XV, Spring, 1954, pp. 1-27.
2. Ch'ü Wan-li, *A Catalog of Chinese Rare Books in the Gest Collection of the Princeton Library* (Taipei, Yee-wen Publishing Company, 1974).