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Chinese Rare Books in the Modern Research Library

F. W. MOTE

ANOMALIES

Most research libraries have a division for rare books and special collections, and these often hold the items by which an institution's library is best known. Their importance for scholarship, as well as their value as rare objects, justifies specially qualified curators, preservation and conservation facilities, special reading and seminar rooms, and a full range of support facilities. In some, like New York's famed Morgan Library, rare books and manuscripts plus priceless prints and drawings comprise almost the entire library collection. In the Princeton University Library, as in most research libraries, recent and more ordinary publications form the bulk of the collection, although Princeton's Firestone Library too has truly grand collections of Western rare books and manuscripts. Grand as those special collections are, the Rare Books Division does not account for a large percentage of the total library holdings, yet it would be difficult to imagine our university functioning without that invaluable and well-served asset. Nor could that asset serve the university and the scholarly world if it were not provided the space, the specialized curatorial staff, the maintenance and acquisitions budgets, and all the other rather elaborate supports that it possesses.

In those spheres of East Asian scholarship in which we at Princeton participate, there are both similarities and differences. On the one hand, the Gest Collection possesses one of the two or three largest and most important Chinese rare books collections in the Western world. Its "rare books,"

depending on how one defines the term, constitute 25 or 30 percent of the entire East Asian Library, and it possesses significant beginnings of collections in Japanese, Korean, Manchu, Tibetan, Mongolian, and other East Asian fields as well. That library serves a strong group of resident scholars as well as many who come from elsewhere just to use the library. It is an unusually well staffed library. Its physical space in Palmer Hall, until it began to run out of space two or three years ago, was one of the most pleasant places on campus to study, or to enjoy oneself just quietly reading for recreation. Everyone who uses the Gest Library, as the East Asian Research Library is usually called, knows that behind the locked doors of the special collections room there is a rare books collection of fabled richness. Yet that collection has no curator, no seminar rooms or study spaces, no supports such as photographic equipment, no conservator in a conservation workshop, not even its own microfilming shop. On Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons during the school year a member of the library staff sits behind the locked door, prepared to open it at the knock of anyone who may wish to use the books, but it is well known that the librarian assigned to that task is not there to service that collection.

Compared with the place of the Rare Books Division in the university's main library, the rare books collection in its East Asian Research Library appears to be a curious anomaly. On the one hand, it is at the very least of comparable importance in size and quality to the university's Western rare books holdings. Moreover, thanks to the devoted support provided by the Friends of the Gest Library in recent years, the rare books collection in the Gest Library has acquired (I would estimate) more, and more important, new additions to its holdings than any other East Asian university library in North America. Moreover: (1) it has been the base for a just concluded (with outside funding) four-year bibliographic project for Chinese rare books; (2) its curator has headed a national project just now getting underway to compile a union register of all Chinese rare books in North America; (3) it is alone among American university collections in having published a scholarly catalogue of its rare books holdings (as of 1972) and has a supplement to that now in press; and (4) it publishes the *Gest Library Journal*, the only specialized East Asian library journal in this country. The rare books section of the Gest Library, on that evidence, seems to be a rather lively place. Yet it languishes without the physical and staff supports that it clearly would need to function the way the library's Western Rare Books

Division functions in the life of the university and of the scholarly world. Moreover, no other university collection of East Asian rare books in the country fares a great deal better, and few fare as well. The problem is not unique to Princeton. One thus is forced to bring into review the question, What is the proper place of the East Asian rare books collections in the operations of the research library? *Is it enough* that we collect (through the generosity of special Friends) and house (in cramped and not very usable space) and preserve (but without the services of conservators) our rare books? Or is our field of study diminished by our undeniable failure to service more fully, and to exploit more thoroughly, the priceless resource represented by the rare books collections? The way that question is phrased of course leaves little doubt about this writer's answer; *it is not enough*.

Some of the responsibility for that state of affairs rests above all with the scholars in the field. East Asian scholars, in general, are not themselves well trained in the uses of rare books, and even when they are they seldom train their students thoroughly in their uses. First of all, the truism that rare books collections have high utility for scholarship must be meaningfully demonstrated to a student audience for which that is but one among many difficulties to be faced in becoming highly competent. The dilemma is that while one cannot expect all scholars in the field also to be their own experts on this subject, neither can scholars dispense with that expertise. The way that Chinese and Japanese scholars in the past have always used their highly specialized bibliographic knowledge is still the way by which sound scholarship should be done, yet many younger scholars (here and in Asia) do not feel that they have the luxury of doing scholarship in that way. That means, simply, that they are not being trained to be good scholars.

There is another important dimension to the utility of rare books collections. Beyond allowing scholars to get at the content of our rare books, rare books collections also must help students of the East Asian civilizations understand the relevance of the traditional book for the life of the society that produced them. Simply as material objects, old books whether rare or not are cultural artifacts. As such, they reveal the aesthetic, intellectual, technological, and practical aspects of the great East Asian civilizations. If that seems to be an obvious point, it is nonetheless one that is not well established in scholarship. To confine these remarks to China, the society that produced most of the Gest Library's present rare books holdings (though important Mongolian, Korean, and Japanese holdings have re-

cently been added), there as yet exists no social history of the Chinese book, or of Chinese printing, in any language. Most of what we might call the social aspects of books, including the technology and the organization of book production; the nature of specialized skills in book production and distribution, and their transmission; the place of books in commerce and in the local and national economy; their market value; cultural and psychological aspects of their significance for collectors; their changing functions in learning and in the transmission of knowledge; and their aesthetic importance — all these and other aspects of the problem remain to be fully understood.

But which must come first? Must the field generally acquire the sophistication in this subdivision of its scholarly activities that will lead scholars to demand a fully functioning rare books library operation, at Princeton and at comparable research centers? Or must those scholarly librarians and specialists who are responsible for our rare books collections first demonstrate the books' undeniable (but often ignored) importance and intrinsic value, in order to bring the field along to a higher standard? In my view, libraries are always far ahead of scholars in anticipating needs and preparing the means by which scholarship functions. This clearly is a task that the library must perform, for the future soundness of the field. This is made especially important because East Asian studies is a recent implant in our society's life. It is a field in which we have expected intellectual standards and scholarly leadership to come from the countries studied, not from our own society. But that no longer provides an adequate basis for the greatly expanding scope and importance of our nation's East Asian studies. There are now aspects of this field in which leadership must come from within our own society. That is true in many developing fields of East Asian research, and it also is true in many aspects of East Asian librarianship. A new era for the rare books divisions of our East Asian libraries is with us. We must give thought to the implications of this fact.

The present writer is not competent to address the full range of issues facing East Asian rare books collections, and hopes that others may offer thoughts on the special problems of Japanese, Korean, Inner Asian, and Southeast Asian rare books. The issues confronting the place of Chinese rare books collections in our libraries, seen from the vantage point offered by our experience in our Gest Library, form the subject of the discussion that follows.

THE PRIMARY CONCERN — BOOKS AS TEXTS

As scholars using libraries, we all know that books are valued for their content, for the meaning of the words on their pages. Rare books may be texts of intrinsic importance that exist in no other edition. That is especially the case for Chinese rare books. Often, however, we have modern standard editions that make it possible, if not wise, to skip the steps of determining facts about the transmission of a text, and deciding whether modern standard editions are adequate for our purposes. For in many cases, our older editions (including of course our rare editions) may have words, passages, whole items, that do not appear in other more ordinary editions. These may be writings not otherwise preserved, or variant versions that can be used for correcting standard texts, or they may preserve alternative traditions of explanation and interpretation of classic texts. Exploiting these features of rare books are the straightforward scholarly uses of rare books; they represent what we may call the concern for the text.

For these uses, a modern facsimile reproduction or a microfilm would seem to serve as well as the original. If we could systematically procure such reproductions when we needed them, would that not obviate the need for research libraries to have their own rare books collections? Good efficient managerial types in library administrations (who, usually, do not themselves use books) have been known to say that we should film all of our bulky, difficult-to-manage old editions and give the originals away, or just place them in some form of inaccessible storage where they will be out of the way. That logic might turn the Morgan Library into a very small museum, or might transform the Folger Library of Shakespearean rare books into a few feet of shelves containing rolls of microfilms. Microfilming indeed is desirable for preservation (although there is as yet no clear evidence that film will last nearly as long as the paper on which our thousand-year-old books are printed), but microfilm and other facsimile reproductions in any event can spare rare books the wear from handling and reading that fragile old books and manuscripts may suffer. Yet they will never replace all the uses to be realized from examining the original objects, even for scholars narrowly concerned with the texts per se.

Beyond these narrowly focused concerns with their content, all rare books and especially East Asian rare books and manuscripts have other kinds of relevance, as objects, not as texts. Some, especially Western and

Middle Eastern rare books antedating the use of printing, possess inestimable value as works of art. Even more prosaic rare books, including most Chinese rare books, reveal to us central aspects of the civilizations that produced them. The shelves filled with sixteenth- to nineteenth-century European and American editions of the Greek and Latin classics in Firestone Library's Rare Books Division, with their fine paper, outstanding typography, and elegant bindings, as objects indeed reveal much about Western civilization in those centuries. But it may be fair to say that the scholarly concerns with their texts — as preserved in those rare editions — have been heavily worked over and are more or less exhausted, hence not often at the forefront of current scholarly attention in the late twentieth century. That does not diminish their value, nor should it suggest that they should be preserved only in the form of readily stored rolls of microfilm.

A large portion of our Chinese and other East Asian rare books are the cultural analogues to those sixteenth- to nineteenth-century editions of the Greek and Latin writers, but they have different and perhaps somewhat larger scholarly significance for East Asian scholarship. Our concerns with them as texts have not been exhausted. To a larger extent than in comparable Western scholarship, whole works exist that are not otherwise preserved in modern editions. There also are many variant versions of texts, of high significance for basic scholarship, that have not been studied. Scholars can be expected to come to the Gest Library to gain access to rare or even unique versions of the Chinese classics in their two-thousand-year-old exegetical traditions, and of the later writers whose place in history is subject to ongoing reevaluation. To continue the comparison with the Western classics, the uses to which the Chinese rare books in the Gest collection can be put undoubtedly have larger and more important significance for students of Chinese civilization than have the comparable Greek and Latin classics in their rare books editions for Western students of our classical history. The texts of Herodotus and Cicero, as well as the traditions of their explication, probably draw few scholars to the rare books divisions of our research libraries. The well-developed scholarly bases for such study are to be found in the regular stacks of the research library. The Chinese rare books in the Gest and similar collections themselves represent the well-developed scholarly bases for comparable study of the East Asian civilizations. Yet these traditional bases of modern scholarly effort have been only

partially and imperfectly utilized in recent times, and only in small proportion have they been transferred into the formats of ordinary modern books.

The scholarly concern with the texts per se thus gives the rare books divisions of the East Asian research library a central place in its functioning. These concerns are the essential justification for properly housing, staffing, and supporting our East Asian rare books collections.

OPENING NEW VISTAS

The place of what we now call “rare books” — though it would seem more correct just to say “books” — in the life of Chinese civilization is an important adjunct to our study of China. This gives our rare books collections a further realm of meaning. The book in its traditional formats, as object, and the lore associated with it, become evidence for the character of the civilization itself. Our libraries, and especially our rare books collections, must be able to present this aspect of the civilization to their users. For this they might best combine the methods of both museums and libraries, as adjuncts to teaching. Collections must be studied with this function in mind, and the books must be regularly displayed and discussed, as well as being catalogued and safely stored.

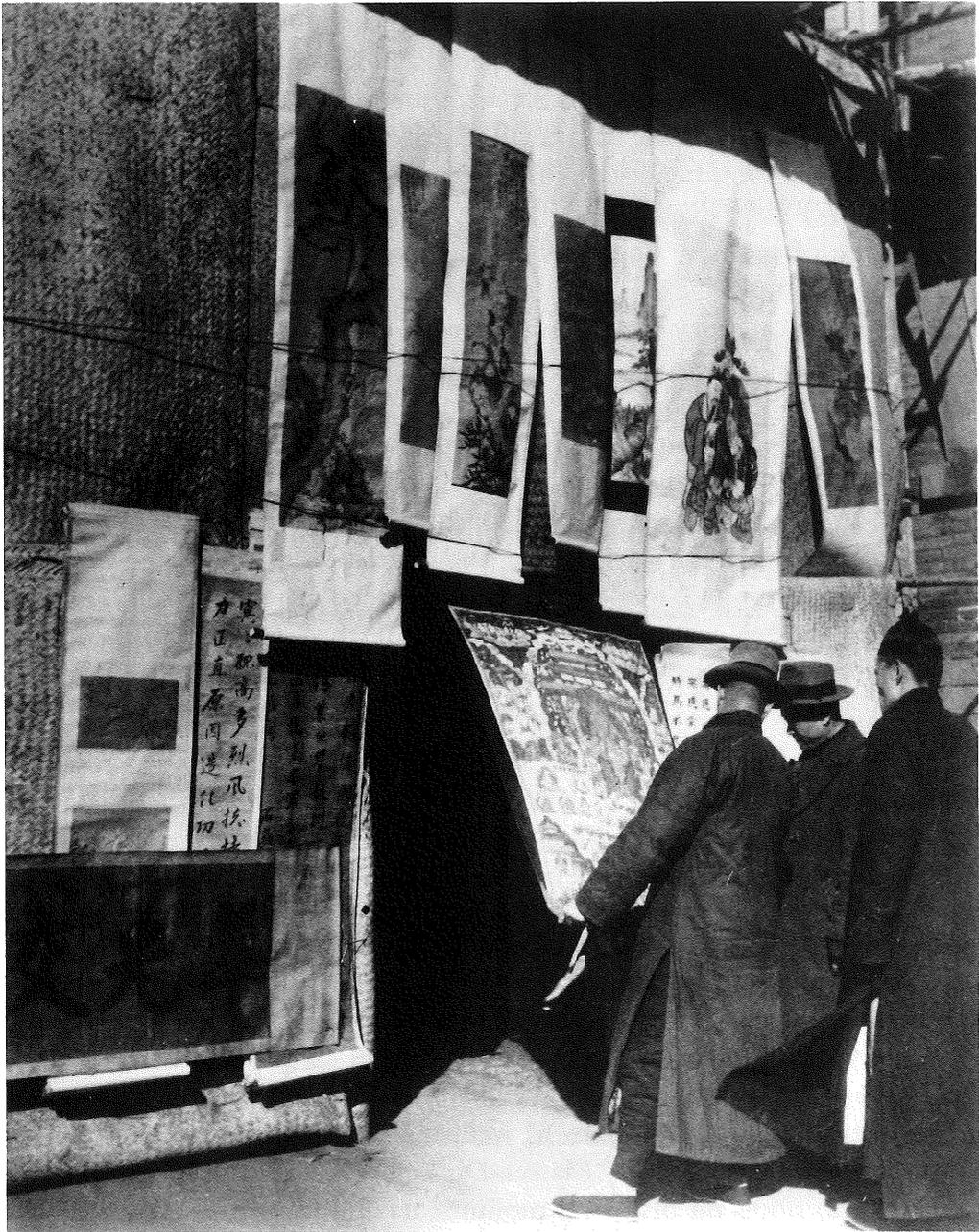
To establish my point more clearly, I would like to digress from the foregoing argument long enough to discuss at some length two scholarly studies that offer valuable insights into the importance of books and book collecting in the life of China from late imperial days to the mid-twentieth century. One, produced in mainland China, offers absorbing accounts of the national rare books market in late Ming and Ch’ing times at Peking. The other, produced in Taiwan, tells of the collectors who created the most important collections from the closing decades of the last dynasty through the mid-twentieth century. They unexpectedly open new vistas on the entire civilization of China. By revealing to us those aspects of the place of books in the old Chinese society, they can help us understand how the research library must be prepared to make the entire subject of the East Asian book accessible to students of those civilizations.

I begin with the book whose title may be translated *A Small Gazetteer of the Liu-li-ch’ang*.¹ The Liu-li-ch’ang, literally “the glazing workyard,” is a

district within the city of Peking. It takes its name from the workyard and kilns where glazed roof tiles for the imperial palaces were manufactured, from the fifteenth century when Peking was being rebuilt to serve as the Ming capital, until the tile factory was moved away in the nineteenth century. The main street running through that quarter was called simply Liu-li-ch'ang, and that name was extended to the surrounding quarter, with its many side streets, temples, gardens, open spaces, and bridges over a small stream. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the end of the Ming, it was becoming the location for book dealers. It also attracted dealers in other things that book buyers might appreciate, such as brushes, paper and ink, rubbings, paintings, and antiques. There were two or three other sites within Peking where some bookstores existed, but by the eighteenth century, at the height of the Ch'ing dynasty under the Ch'ien-lung emperor (r. 1736–1796), the Liu-li-ch'ang dominated the book trade at the capital.



1. This photograph, entitled "Beijing's Antique Alley: Liulichang Street," appeared in *MOR China Letter* 2.11 (Detroit, December 1988). It was taken by Barbara Kelley in September 1988 and is used with her kind permission. In her article in that issue of *MOR China Letter* she describes how the Liu-li-ch'ang (in mainland romanization: Liulichang) has become a street of small businesses, mainly selling antiques and art products to tourists. The street is preserved for its unusually elegant shop buildings, but these no longer hold any old Chinese books.



2. The New Year Fair at Liu-li-ch'ang was of special importance for the sale of paintings and other works of art. This picture and the one of the bookshop (Illustration 4), with their captions, are taken from Hedda Morrison, *A Photographer in Old Peking* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1985), with the permission of Oxford University Press.

Some of the booksellers also became small-scale publishers. Many of them were recognized as experts whose specialized knowledge drew the scholarly elite of the nation into contact with them. The book world that centered on the Liu-li-ch'ang was a principal element in the life of Chinese scholar-officialdom, hence one of the keys to our understanding of the society in which they lived.

The title of the new book about the Liu-li-ch'ang in Ch'ing and later times uses the term "*hsiao-chih*," loosely translated "small gazetteer." That places it in the category of *chih* or gazetteers, the distinctive format for local histories. "Small gazetteers" were local histories of localities smaller than a county ("*hsien*"), the base unit in Chinese administrative geography. A "small gazetteer" might focus on the history of a sub-county district, a quarter of a city, a temple or an academy, or some other feature of special interest. Sun Tien-ch'i, the compiler of this small gazetteer, was himself the owner of a bookstore in the Liu-li-ch'ang district called the Studio of Comprehensive Learning (T'ung-hsüeh chai), founded in 1919 (page 121).² Earlier he had been an apprentice in another bookstore, founded in the 1880s, called the Majestic Capital Hall (Hung-ching t'ang). The old bookstores all had elegant names of that kind, suggesting an aura of learning and elite lifestyles, not one of crass commerce. In his prefatory comments, Sun states that over the years he collected writings about the Liu-li-ch'ang, drawing on old books, diaries, magazines, even the modern newspapers. The writings range from formal essays to snippets from larger works, from poems to scholarly notes. To that he has added systematic information based on his own experiences and observations. His "small gazetteer" thus is a fairly large work in six chapters: (1) a general historical introduction; (2) "The Cultivated Tastes of the Times," consisting largely of poems by Ch'ing-dynasty persons recording experiences in the Liu-li-ch'ang; (3) "Changes in the Book Trade," with the most detailed essays on the stores in the district at different times, as well as discussions of the other refined businesses located there; (4) "Master-Disciple Traditions among the Book Dealers"; (5) notes on historical monuments and sites within the district; (6) notes on scholars and important books they owned, or bought in the district.

The detailed data in Chapter Three on the individual stores in the Liu-li-ch'ang provide some of the most intriguing information. This chapter opens with a memoir on the Liu-li-ch'ang written in 1769 by Li Wen-tso,³

a scholar-official, when he spent several months in Peking awaiting a new assignment in provincial government. He arrived in the capital in the fifth lunar month of 1769, was formally received at court in the tenth month (after the Bureau of Personnel had decided on his next posting), was given the new posting three weeks later, and departed the capital on the long journey to his new post early in the eleventh month. A confirmed and quite expert bibliophile, he writes in his memoir:

On this occasion I resided in the capital for more than five months. I had few social obligations, and I am not fond of theatricals. My feet never crossed the doorways of tea-houses or wine-shops. My only activity was borrowing books to copy, and, when idle, to walk to the Liu-li-ch'ang to look at books. Although I did not buy so many books, there were few stores that I did not visit. During the long and sleepless nights while traveling away from the capital [he was posted to far-off Kwangtung Province] I would recall the name and location of each bookstore, and the general character of the books it sold, and I recorded that. The Liu-li-ch'ang takes its name from the kilns located there for firing glazed tiles. From east to west the street is more than two *li* in length [about two-thirds of one mile]. Just before entering the gate at its east end, there is a shop called The Hall of Far-off Sounds whose books are ragged and worn and often incomplete. Among those I nonetheless found a few items to buy, including *New Tales about Kwangtung* (*Kuang-tung hsin-yü*), perhaps an omen about the new post I was to receive.

Then he goes on to describe a walk from the east end of the street to the west, listing in sequence the names of twenty-nine bookstores and their owners, adding comments on their specializations, where they procured the books they sold, and in some cases, the books he acquired from them. For one example:

Next, to the west, on the north side of the street, one comes to the Hall of Treasured Name, owned by Mr. Chou. It originally specialized in selling printed lists of officials, laws and precedents, route books, and the like, but now has suddenly bought up the books from the residence of Prince Kuo,⁴ more than two-thou-



3. The gate over the western entrance to the Liu-li-ch'ang as it appeared in the earlier part of the present century. From Andō Kōsei, *Peking annai ki* (Peking: Shin min yinshokan, 1941).

sand *t'ao* [stiff wrappers for sets of stitched volumes], all displayed there on shelves and racks, with gorgeous bindings and all bearing his seal.

He goes on to name some of the books he bought at that shop, including manuscript copies of rare items, and two Sung editions among several printed works. He mentions seeing there manuscript copies of the Ming-dynasty *Veritable Records* for certain reigns, and the manuscripts of some of the writings of the eminent scholar-litterateur Fang Pao.⁵

On the north side of the street the next store to the west is the Five Willows Residence of Mr. T'ao. It has only recently opened, yet its old books are particularly numerous. Every year he goes with the owner of the Hall of Literary Purity to Soochow to buy books which they transport back by the boatload.

Many of the bookstore owners were natives of Soochow or other places in the lower Yangtze region at the southern end of the Grand Canal; another large contingent was from Kiangsi Province. Those from the Peking region all seem to have been natives of one or two counties. Expertise in the book trade appears to have been highly localized, for reasons that social historians have not yet explored. The Peking region, except for the imperial printing works in the palace, was not a principal publishing center, nor could the North compare with the rich South in numbers of book collectors and book publishers. Yet all scholar-officials were compelled to reside in Peking while sitting for the examinations, and on several occasions later in their careers while awaiting new postings in the provinces. It was that repeated circulation of the scholar-official elite through the capital that enabled Pe-

king to play a central role in the book trade. Of course, those scholar-officials whose careers developed in the central government could form even closer associations with the book experts there, acquiring collections that eventually would be taken back to their native places when they retired. Thus one can see how the Liu-li-ch'ang functioned as the major book distribution and redistribution center for books from all over China used by the elite.⁶

A century-and-a-half later Li Wen-tsao's memoir inspired a similar description of the Liu-li-ch'ang, written by the famed bibliophile Miao Ch'üan-sun (1844-1919) in Shanghai in 1911 while Miao was sitting out the revolution that ended the Ch'ing dynasty. Miao states that during forty years' residence in Peking he developed close connections with the booksellers of the Liu-li-ch'ang. Following Li Wen-tsao's course through the booksellers' street from east to west, he listed twenty-seven notable bookstores within the Liu-li-ch'ang and three elsewhere in the city.⁷ In the autumn of 1914 he returned to Peking to reside for a year, during which he noted many changes attendant on the new order following the revolution, and added a supplement to record the changes in the Liu-li-ch'ang. This time he listed and described thirty-nine bookstores, but he was not encouraged by that evidence of change; he commented: "The ways of the world change, each passing day a decline from the previous day; who knows where it will lead?" His comments on bookstore owners who were experts on rubbings, or manuscripts, or other bibliophile concerns as well as on old books, are often of great interest, and they show that the old standards still largely prevailed in 1914. Here is one example:

Next to the west is the Hall of the Precious Forest belonging to Li Yü-t'ing. He and Hsü Ts'ang-yai are now the doyens of the bookstore quarter. From him, in the past, I have purchased the writings of . . . ; as for what are called Sung-engraved or Yüan-engraved printings, he could distinguish them at a glance; as for Szechwan editions or Fukien editions, under his eyes no deception was possible.

And he goes on to tell how Mr. Li had once handed him a book and asked, "Is this a genuine Sung edition?" Miao wanted to say yes, on the basis of its elegantly antique appearance, but was not sure the paper looked that old, so hesitated to reply. Mr. Li then told him how to identify this particular



4. The bookshop. Old Chinese literary texts were frequently reprinted with or without additional commentaries, resulting in an enormous literary output and a great volume of work for booksellers, bibliophiles, and librarians.

pseudo-Sung piece of fakery.⁸ Such skill was a major element in the mystique of rare book identification, a skill that all learned persons should attempt to know something about, yet one in which the most learned scholars could be confounded by the best book dealers.

Sun Tien-ch'i, the compiler of this "small gazetteer," adds a third account of the Liu-li-ch'ang written by himself about 1946. The great changes in the modern publishing industry had induced the virtual demise of block printing, and the mass production of cheap new books printed by typography also brought about new ways of book selling; these modernizing changes are clearly reflected in Sun's account. He lists all the bookstores on all the side streets as well as the main Liu-li-ch'ang thoroughfare, including all those known to have existed after 1911 whether or not still in existence. His list, which appears to be exhaustive, thus runs to 218 stores in the Liu-li-ch'ang quarter, as well as 85 in other parts of the city. He does not rigorously distinguish those specializing in old books from all those now selling ordinary modern mechanically produced editions; thus his long list does not necessarily imply an expansion of the old book trade. But the information about each store's owners and staff as well as comments on noteworthy books that passed through their hands is more detailed than in the previous accounts. Finally, a further supplement (page 231) by Lei Meng-shui, described as a disciple of Sun, brings the account up to 1958, the year that the nationalization of all private businesses finally brought an end to the existence of the old bookstores. In that ninth year of the Communist state (pages 140-157), Lei still could describe 47 bookstores in the Liu-li-ch'ang, a few of which represent continuations from stores listed in Miao Ch'üan-sun's 1911 list. It is of interest to me that the Lai-hsün Ko store (that name means something like "approach and immerse yourself in noble fragrance"), at which I purchased books in the mid-1940s, and which was founded in 1911 (pages 128, 145), was still in existence in 1958, and its owner is described as one of the most knowledgeable old-style experts still in the trade. I have a copy of that store's two-volume catalogue of their stock in hand, printed in 1944; now when I look through the tens of thousands of listings, and note the prices, I am forced to sigh with regrets that echo those of Miao Ch'üan-sun in 1914 (above). There is no bookstore like that in all of East Asia today. The trade in old books has virtually ended, there being no longer the possibility of going to Soochow to "transport them back by the boatload." The few rare, or even "ordinary" old-

style books that come on to the market now are treated like antiques. None can be legally exported from China. It is no longer possible to create important new collections, and the few extensive collections in existence at places like Princeton, practically speaking, must serve the needs of the entire growing field of East Asian studies in the West, now and for all time.

The second recent book that brings the nature of the Chinese rare book clearly into focus is called *Thirty Book Collectors of Recent Times* (*Chin-tai ts'ang-shu san-shih-chia*), and is written by Su Ching.⁹ This elegantly written collection of thirty studies of eminent book collectors, born between 1844 and 1907, brings us to the middle of the present century. Their collections have virtually all been dispersed, most of their holdings going, in one way or another, into public collections. These studies show us the last phase of private rare book collecting in China. The thirty individuals range from aesthetes who looked upon rare books as beautiful objects of admiration, to scholars who looked upon them as tools for collating and emending texts of old writings, to other scholars who valued them for their historical and literary content. Some were old-style scholar-officials of the late Ch'ing and the Republican era, some were politicians who carried on family traditions of book collecting but were not themselves knowledgeable, some were new-style scholars who helped to establish the modern critical uses of old texts for scholarship. In all these widely varied kinds of careers, we see the continuing if changing importance of old books in the life of the society. They were objects of a highly specialized form of commerce in a nationwide organization of buying and selling. They were objects of pride in maintaining the forms and values of elite life. They were objects of a new kind of national interest, to be protected and collected by the modern nation-state in competition with foreigners (especially the national enemy in the first half of this century, the Japanese) who would like to buy them and take them away. Above all, they were indispensable tools of a critical scholarly activity, a changing activity at once heir to old traditions in learning and a vehicle for intellectual modernization. The most valued rare books prior to about 1900 were still the ancient classics, the histories, and the classical writings of the later scholar-official elite. After the early part of the century the new trends in scholarship led to the search for old editions of novels and entertainment literature, dramas and storytellers' prompt books, and tracts of popular religious sects. The focus of what could be termed "rare books" was broadened, in tandem with the broadened view of what was to be valued in traditional China.

Su Ching's book is not just an account of the collecting careers of a few notable personages. In fact it should be read as a richly informative view of Chinese society in the period from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Many aspects of history are revealed in his brief studies of thirty families that, in different ways and for widely varying reasons, collected old books. Parallel accounts of important book collectors in Western countries in that same century (or at any other time) probably would not reveal that their rare books collections constituted so central a set of concerns in the life of the entire society. The careers of the thirty collectors were played out in a wide variety of contexts. Those collectors touched a full range of the nation's life and work. A fascinating appendix to the book reveals something of that. It recounts the underground effort to acquire important rare books after Pearl Harbor in 1941 when the foreign concessions were taken over by the Japanese, so that collections that previously had been transported to the International Settlements in Shanghai or Tientsin to avoid Japanese confiscation had become vulnerable. The government enlisted patriotic scholar-bibliophiles in a grand conspiracy to secretly buy up and conceal rare books, singly or in important collections, in order to prevent this part of China's national treasure from falling into enemy hands. Nonetheless, the Japanese did acquire some important holdings, a portion of which were returned to China at the end of the war. The return of those items was considered an important part of the peace settlement.

To return to the central argument, the social history of the book in China must be seen as importantly different, and thus it becomes one of the essential keys to our understanding of China. Two dimensions of the rare books phenomenon thus emerge; both must be given consideration as we plan for the care of our rare books collections. One dimension is that of the texts per se: the content of Chinese rare books is indispensable to scholars in diverse fields of Chinese studies. In addition, there is the fact that as objects rare books (and all old books) further provide us with clues to many aspects of Chinese life and values, and the patterns of behavior by which those were maintained. Old books must thus play a considerably larger role in the study of China, and of all East Asia, than we at present grant to them.

A RARE BOOKS STRATEGY FOR THE RESEARCH LIBRARY

"Rare books" is the usual translation for the Chinese term "*shan-pen*," more literally meaning simply "excellent editions." In conventional usage that

term has been applied to all books whose blocks were engraved before the beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1645. Recently the use of the term has been broadened to include many books of excellence, including some important manuscripts, produced as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term "rare books" now should be further broadened to include virtually all books printed in traditional formats, even up into the present century, all manuscripts of scholarly interest, and certain other exceptionally important recent books produced by typography. For, in point of fact, all are now increasingly "rare." The changes in China during the past forty years have greatly reduced the quantity of such materials in China, and have essentially eliminated China as a further source of such materials. We must strive to add to our collections of rare books, broadly defined, whenever the occasional opportunity presents itself. Above all, we must protect and preserve all such rare books in our collections, and strive to make them more conveniently and properly usable. A strategy for adequately accomplishing those objectives will not emerge of itself. We must produce such a strategy, and we must devote ourselves to achieving it.

The place of our Chinese rare books, as broadly defined here, should be a matter of high importance to university and library administrators, as it is to all users of the research library. To express a quite general sense of the problem, with no specific case in mind, it seems unlikely that university administrators and heads of large library systems will come forth eager to devote new funds to this objective. Improved space and facilities, enhanced staff, and enlarged supporting activities in this field cannot lay a claim to solving the pollution problem or restoring our inner cities. Nor will it support scholars who might win the Nobel Prize or produce lucrative patents. It is purely a matter of intellectual engagement, of scholarship for its own sake. Nonetheless, it is learning of greatest relevance for the understanding of East Asian civilizations as we encounter them today. Indeed, we must be quite realistic about the likelihood of gaining the means to deal with this problem. University library administrators will not welcome this set of claims on their limited resources; they will not assume the lead in increasing commitments to the East Asian divisions of their libraries. The necessary next steps in the development of our East Asian rare books collections may have to proceed without their active encouragement, without, in fact, their understanding. Nonetheless, by defining our objectives we may help to create an impulse toward the eventual realization of those necessary next steps.

In my view, the essential next steps are:

1. To formulate specific plans for space and equipment, so that whenever problems of space are being considered, clearly defined needs can be articulated and justified. East Asian faculty, library staff, students, and other users should assume some initiative in requesting that their views be heard in all situations where space and funding allocations are being considered. They should not assume that library administrators or other members of the administration will have represented these needs in such situations.

2. Faculty and student users of the library should place active demands on the East Asian library that will be met only by the establishment of a separate rare books division, staffed by an expert curator and a conservator-photographer, as a minimum.

3. Faculty and student users and other concerned persons should organize extramural support for the upgrading of the East Asian library in general, and specifically for its rare books division.

4. Scholarship should be encouraged that draws attention to the need for East Asian scholars in all fields to become more conversant with old books, with traditional bibliography, with the history of printing, and with the uses of specialized collections in various fields of research.

5. Owners of East Asian books, especially old or unusual items, should be encouraged to recognize their importance and donate or sell them to libraries equipped to make good use of them.

6. In urging university or library administrators to provide for these needs, the users of special collections should make a practice of never taking an official "no" for more than a temporary answer.

Those six points may constitute something like a strategy for achieving needed progress in our East Asian research libraries, but they are not intended to imply criticism of university and library administrators for past leadership, nor irritation with the realities of university financing at the present. If the strategy here proposed can be carried out, that will place burdens on all of us interested in its success; such stresses are implicit in the vigorous life of a vital university community.

NOTES

1. *Liu-li-ch'ang hsiao-chih*, comp. Sun Tien-ch'i about 1946, with a supplement by Lei Meng-shui, first published 1962, rev. ed. (Peking: Ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1982), p. 524.
2. The author, Sun Tien-ch'i, is best known for his book *Fan-shu ou-chi* (A bookseller's random notes), Peking, 1936. See Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *China: An Annotated Bibliography of Bibliographies* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978), p. 20.
3. Li was a native of Shantung who lived from 1730 to 1778; see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, ed. Arthur W. Hummel (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943-1944; hereafter referred to as *ECCP*), p. 175.
4. The Imperial Prince Kuo, named Yin-li (1693-1738), was one of the sons of the K'ang-hsi emperor; see *ECCP*, p. 331.
5. Fang Pao (1688-1749) of T'ung-ch'eng in Anhwei had died twenty years earlier; all of his writings had been published in many editions by this time.
6. This appears to have still been true in the early years of the Republic, when many of the reasons for Peking's earlier dominance had vanished. See the comment on this by the important scholar-collector Lun Ming (1875-1944), as quoted in *Liu-li-ch'ang hsiao-chih*, p. 13.
7. I assume that neither Li's list of 1769 nor Miao's of 1911 is an exhaustive list of all booksellers in Peking, but are confined to those stores in the Liu-li-ch'ang and elsewhere in the city that had a certain standing as dealers in good books.
8. It was a facsimile recutting of a Sung printing made by the great scholar-collector Huang P'ei-lieh (1763-1825). See Fang Chao-ying's biography of Huang in *ECCP*, pp. 340-341; there it tells that Miao Ch'üan-sun later became a collector of Huang's editions and an expert on his bibliographic notes on other rare books. See also Su Ching, *Chin-tai ts'ang-shu san-shih-chia* (Taipei: Chuan-chi wen-hsüeh ts'ung-kan, preface date 1982), pp. 206-207.
9. Su Ching, *Chin-tai ts'ang-shu*, p. 262.

GLOSSARY

chih 志	Hung-ching t'ang 宏景堂
<i>Chin-tai ts'ang-shu san-shih-chia</i> 近代藏書三家	Kiangsi 江西
<i>Fan-shu ou-chi</i> 販書偶記	<i>Kuang-tung hsün-yü</i> 廣東新語
Fang Pao 方苞	Kwangtung 廣東
Fukien 福建	Lai-hsün ko 來薰閣
hsiao-chih 小志	Lei Meng-shui 雷夢水
hsien 縣	Li Wen-tso 李文藻
Hsü Ts'ang-yai 徐蒼厓	Li Yü-t'ing 李雨亭
Huang P'ei-lieh 黃丕烈	Liu-li-ch'ang 琉璃廠

Liu-li-ch'ang hsiao-chih 琉璃殿小志

Lun Ming 倫明

Miao Ch'üan-sun 繆荃孫

shan-pen 善本

Soochow 蘇州

Su Ching 蘇精

Sun Tien-ch'i 孫殿起

Szechwan 四川

t'ao 套

T'ung-ch'eng 銅城

T'ung-hsüeh chai 通學齋

Yin-li 胤禮