

Alfred Kaiming Chiu and Chinese American Librarianship

A sketch of the life of Alfred Kaiming Chiu (1898–1977) and his contributions to librarianship shed light on the achievements of Chinese American librarians in the United States. During the half-century of his professional career, Dr. Chiu devised a classification scheme for Chinese and Japanese books; built three libraries; trained young librarians, thus developing a group of competent Chinese American librarians; and published countless scholarly works. He can be seen as one who epitomizes the concept of the "ideal librarian," one who combines practical experience with scholarly endeavor.

ON NOVEMBER 13, 1977, Alfred Kaiming Chiu died, thus bringing to a close a distinguished half-century career of service to librarianship. Anyone familiar with the contributions of Chinese American librarians in the United States would agree that through his labors Dr. Chiu earned a special place of honor among Chinese American librarians.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "There is properly no history, only biography," and more than thirty years ago Jesse Shera indicated that a neglected area of research in library science has been biography.¹ Only recently Edward G. Holley regretfully noted that our profession has entered its second century without a definitive biography of Melvil Dewey.² Since thorough and comprehensive biographies of pioneer librarians are essential in understanding the motivating forces behind the rise and development of our profession, this paper is offered as a brief description of the life of Alfred Kaiming Chiu and his activities in librarianship.

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Strictly speaking, Alfred Kaiming Chiu was neither the first Chinese to receive a diploma or degree from an American library school, nor was his work as a Chinese in an American library unprecedented.³ The history of several Oriental vernacular language collections in the United States can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, but there was no significant growth of East-Asian collections until the 1930s. If the organization of the Harvard-Yenching Institute Library in 1927 had been Dr. Chiu's sole contribution to the field, it alone would have earned him a position as a major leader in Chinese American librarianship.

Furthermore, the long span of his professional career and the various contributions he made to American librarianship appear to be unmatched among his colleagues.

As one who combined practical experience with scholarly achievement, Alfred Kaiming Chiu epitomizes the concept of an "ideal librarian." During his career Dr. Chiu devised a classification scheme for Chinese and Japanese books, built three libraries, worked nearly forty years as librarian of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, trained young librarians, helped develop a group of competent Chinese American librarians, and published countless scholarly and professional works.⁴

Born into a merchant family of modest means in the town of Chen-hai in Chekiang

Province on March 11, 1868, Alfred Kaiming Chiu studied the traditional Confucian curriculum as a young boy, interned in a large bookstore, went on to study in a modern school, and enrolled in the first class that would graduate from China's initial library school. He received his B.A. degree from the Boone Library School at Boone University (later called Hua-chung or Central China College), Wuchang, Hupeh Province, in January 1922.

After graduation he became the first librarian at Amoy University in Amoy, Fukién Province, and it was here he came into contact with Japanese culture, studied the Japanese language, and increased his knowledge of Chinese literature and bibliography. He traveled to the United States, first for advanced study in library science and, later, graduate work in economics. In 1924 he attended the Library School of the New York Public Library where he received a diploma. A year later he enrolled at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University, majoring in economics while working as a volunteer at Widener Library on the Cambridge campus. He received his master's degree in February 1927 and continued working toward a doctorate, which was conferred in 1933.

In January 1927 when Harvard's librarian offered him a full-time position processing Chinese and Japanese language materials at the college library, he happily accepted and proudly began his career as a Chinese American librarian.⁵

CATALOGING AND CLASSIFICATION

Drawing upon the experience and knowledge gained in China and the United States, Dr. Chiu devised a unique classification scheme for Chinese and Japanese books, which was subsequently adopted by many American libraries with collections in East Asian languages.

The feature of the scheme was the use of a four-digit notation, except for classics, instead of the common practice of three digits. The nine main divisions are: 100-999, Chinese classics; 1000-1999, philosophy and religions; 2000-3999, historical sciences; 4000-4999, social sciences; 5000-5999, language and literature; 6000-6999, fine and recreative arts; 7000-7999, natural sciences,

8000-8999, agriculture; 9000-9999, generalia and bibliography.

Developed originally from the traditional Chinese systems of book classification, the scheme had definite advantages in handling traditional literature and scholarship. It was, perhaps, less well adapted to the treatment of contemporary subjects. Since Dr. Chiu was instrumental in developing this classification scheme, his name became closely associated with its broader title, "Harvard-Yenching Library Scheme." Thus when Tsuen-hsuei Tsien conducted his survey on East Asian collections in America in 1965, he referred to this system simply as the "Chiu scheme."⁶

As the availability of the Library of Congress printed catalog cards increased, bearing LC classification numbers, more and more of the newly established small and medium-sized East Asian collections, which had used the Harvard-Yenching scheme, shifted to the LC system. However, seven of a dozen major collections with more than 60 percent of the total resources of East Asian collections in the United States have kept their classification scheme unchanged.

The major East Asian collections using the Harvard-Yenching Library scheme are the University of California at Berkeley and at Los Angeles, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Hoover Institution, and Princeton University.⁷

Chinese or Oriental collections outside the United States that are using the Harvard-Yenching classification include the Australian National Library; Australian National University; Bibliotheque Nationale; Hamburg University; the University of Malaya; Sinological Institute, Leiden; Oxford University; Yenching Collection of the Peking University; and the University of Singapore.

While it is true that the number of libraries using the Harvard-Yenching scheme is decreasing, the number of books cataloged by that scheme continues to increase.⁸ Thus the importance of Chiu's Harvard-Yenching scheme for the future cannot be ignored.⁹

Early in 1885 the Transliteration Committee of the American Library Association issued a report on romanization in library cataloging. Subsequently, in 1908, the

Anglo-American Code was compiled by committees of the Library Association and the American Library Association, adopting the romanization rules. The first romanized catalog of a Chinese and Japanese collection came into being at the Harvard-Yenching Library in 1928. Dr. Chiu introduced the use of romanization on catalog cards written in Chinese characters, and this has become the standard form in all American libraries.¹⁰ He was, indeed, the first librarian to apply modern library techniques to classifying and cataloging Chinese and Japanese materials in American libraries.

Among Dr. Chiu's other achievements are his personal involvement in building East Asian libraries at Harvard University, at the University of Minnesota, and at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

HARVARD-YENCHING INSTITUTE

As a result of his work at Harvard, Dr. Chiu became involved in developing what was to become the library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute—an independent corporation created to promote higher education in East Asian affairs on the Cambridge campus. He was officially appointed the institute's first librarian in 1931. During the next thirty-five years, he singlehandedly built this collection into the largest and best among all East Asian collections in American university libraries.

He had the opportunity to visit all the important East Asian collections in Europe. He further visited and studied the cataloging systems of the major libraries in China and reorganized the cataloging and classification system of the Yenching University Library in Peking. At the Harvard-Yenching Library, he was able to draw upon these experiences in developing a catalog, printed in both book and card form, which was sold to libraries in China, the United States, Canada, and Europe. Through his many personal contacts and unceasing efforts, he was able to build the collection from fewer than 7,000 volumes in 1931 to as many as 400,000 at the time of his retirement in 1965.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Retirement from Harvard was by no means a signal that Dr. Chiu was ready to

give up his energetic lifework or his love of libraries. In July 1965 he joined the staff of the University of Minnesota Library at Minneapolis as consultant and was responsible for establishing a new East Asian library.

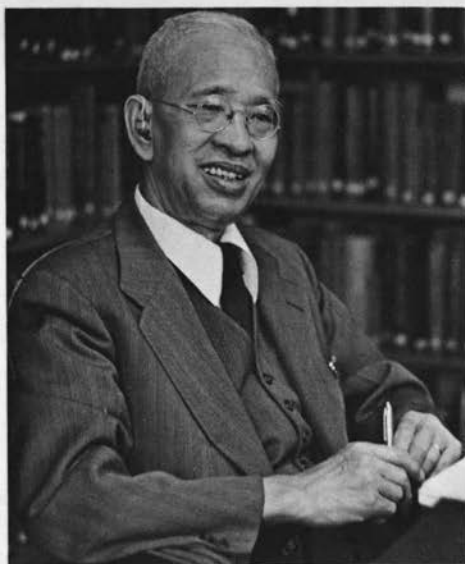
His life in Minnesota was no different from that of the old Harvard days. Working as diligently as a man in his thirties, he participated in every detail of the library's operation—from negotiations to acquire private book collections in Paris to the marking technique on book spines. In the area of collection development, Dr. Chiu first determined the objectives of the library, set up book selection guidelines, and finally worked out strategies for acquiring materials. He indicated that an acquisitions policy should reflect the educational needs, subject emphases, regional conditions, and long-range plans of a particular library.

His policy was based on his professional judgment, together with subject bibliographies, reference works, catalogs, and book lists of other libraries. He also considered the recommendations of faculty, staff, and other clientele. A desiderata list of specific subject materials was compiled. In this manner, he was able to obtain the most wanted items and use funds efficiently. While favoring the acquisition of valuable duplicates from other libraries, he also realized that the purchase of scholars' private collections is the most economical way to acquire good quality books.¹¹

With his expertise and experience the library was able to develop from a very small nucleus into a solid collection in the language-subject area within just one year. This was to lay the groundwork for an increasing flow of teaching and research in Chinese and Japanese studies in the northern United States. The East Asian library of the University of Minnesota now constitutes one of the richest resources of its kind in the Midwest and has served as a model for developing new area studies libraries elsewhere in the United States.

CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

At the age of 68, Dr. Chiu accepted an even more challenging job—that of creating a larger library for a larger academic community. The job meant building his third



Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Alfred Kaiming Chiu, 1898–1977

library. This time he traveled to Hong Kong to create a central library facility for a newly established federation of colleges in the British colony—the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Again he participated in every aspect of development—from choosing the library's site to the building's design and from policy formulation to daily operation. As a result of Dr. Chiu's efforts, the holdings of this library grew rapidly over a period of four years. Today the library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong houses one of the largest and best Chinese collections in Asia outside of Japan, Taiwan, and the mainland of China.

Returning to the United States in 1970, Dr. Chiu resumed his lifework at the Harvard-Yenching Library, where as consultant on Chinese rare books he worked at least four hours a day examining, describing, and classifying the centuries-old volumes he previously acquired for the library.

TRAINING OF LIBRARIANS AND RESEARCH

Another of Dr. Chiu's accomplishments has been the training of young Chinese American librarians. In the 1930s he

brought a group of young librarians with expertise in Sinology from China to the Harvard-Yenching Library for training and work. Some of them have been instrumental in developing East Asian collections throughout the United States.

Chinese American librarians who worked with Dr. Chiu at the Harvard-Yenching Library included Chaoying Fang of Columbia University, Liang Hsü of the Library of Congress, James S. K. Tung of Princeton University, and Zunvair Yue, Kai-hsien Liu, and Daisy J. Tao of the Harvard-Yenching library.

Last but not least among Dr. Chiu's contributions as a Chinese American librarian are his many academic and professional publications. A bibliography of his published works compiled in 1965 lists fifty titles.¹² His monumental work, *A Classification Scheme for Chinese and Japanese Books*, was published by the American Council of Learned Societies, Washington, D.C. in 1943. His *Cataloguing Rules for Chinese Books*, published in 1931 by the Commercial Press in Shanghai, has been used as a textbook by library schools and as a working tool by librarians throughout China. His articles dealing with Far Eastern librarianship have appeared in such professional journals as *ALA Bulletin*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *Library Journal*, and *Library Quarterly*.

In March 1976 Dr. Chiu presented a paper entitled "Chinese Rare Books in the Harvard-Yenching Library" at the 28th annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Toronto. This paper shed new light on connoisseurship and on the subject of *pan pen hsüeh*, a traditional Chinese study of editions and printing. It also offered useful information on the history and growth of the Harvard-Yenching Library. Appropriately, in light of the above mentioned need for biographies of librarians, he also wrote a biography of Mary Elizabeth Wood (1862–1931), the teacher of library science during his college years in Wuchang and the founder of the Boone Library School.¹³

Alfred Kaiming Chiu often remarked somewhat ruefully that an academic librarian who is not a scholar risks the contempt of his colleagues on the faculty, while a li-

brarian whose greatest love is scholarly research will probably neglect his responsibilities as a librarian. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of his career was his successful balancing of these potentially con-

tradictory elements. Thus he was not only a distinguished librarian but, at the same time, a scholar's scholar and a librarian's librarian—and, above all, a whole and very human person.

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