

PREFACE

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I knew Dr. T. H. Tsien when he was still active as both the Curator of the East Asian Library at the University of Chicago and concurrently a professor in our Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. However, my first acquaintance with him happened some forty years ago.

I began my doctoral work at the University of Chicago in the fall of 1963. My field had nothing to do with Chinese Studies, so I had little cause to visit the East Asian library, which was then housed in a building eventually renovated to serve as the undergraduate Harper Library. Nonetheless, the desire to keep up my reading of classical Chinese poetry, as well as other historical material unrelated to my formal schoolwork, led me to be a frequent visitor to the shelved riches of the library. Lacking, however, any rudimentary training in Western sinological scholarship, I hadn't the faintest clue how to search for a particular volume embedded in the many sets of traditional encyclopedic collectanea or how to distinguish the Harvard-Yenching call numbers from those specified by the Library of Congress. It was at one such moment of confusion that I had the great fortune of catching the attention of a gentle, courteous, and soft-spoken scholar of infinite patience. To my unending barrage of ill-informed or ignorant questions on the content of the collections and the methods of their use, he was never less than clear and meticulous in his explanations. When he discovered that I was enrolled in a different academic unit and unable (at least at that time) to attend his acclaimed course on "Chinese Bibliography"—required of all Ph.D. students in that department—he one day provided me with the entire course pack, including a detailed syllabus and voluminous pages documenting crucial reference works in both Chinese and Japanese histories. This precious gift, the first of numerous tokens of his generosity—which came in the form of books, essays, and occasional

pieces in two languages over the next four decades—quickly converted me into a grateful student keen to learn from his ever productive pen.

The miscellaneous publications (originally in two languages) gathered in this volume are eloquent testimony to his amazing and wide-ranging productivity. They include enlightening studies of the distinctive instruments and materials for writing in China's historical culture, the early invention of apparatus and technology for the rapid and large-scale dissemination of written materials, the history, method, and experience of East Asian librarianship in a Western context, and Tsien's personal reminiscences of such enduring masters of sinology as Tung Tso-pin, Herrlee Creel, and Joseph Needham. This volume provides a rich and illuminating context for a greater appreciation of Dr. Tsien's eminent stature and numerous achievements.

Many scholars of China and of the history of science in Europe, America, and Asia have long regarded Tsien as "the Dean of East Asian scholar-librarians in the United States." His first book, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, published in 1962 by The University of Chicago Press (revised edition 2004), has gone through several printings, and it remains the standard work on this subject four decades after its initial publication. Though unavoidably dated in sections now, his *China: An Annotated Bibliography of Bibliographies* (1978) also remains an indispensable reference work. *Paper and Printing* (1985; revised third printing 1987), the much longer masterpiece complementary to his first book, was commissioned by Joseph Needham for his own monumental series on *Science and Civilisation in China*, a series now comprising some thirty large tomes in seven volumes of multiple parts that Cambridge University Press regards as its most important publication in its three hundred plus year history, second only to the printing of the English Bible in various versions. In this series, Tsien's volume enjoys the unique honor of being the first tome published as a single work without Joseph Needham's byline as author.

Paper and Printing has received the most glowing notice from both experts and the educated public, for it succeeds in detailing for the reader in concise and elegant prose the best current knowledge of these two important inventions that have had an enormous, indeed revolutionary, impact on world civilization. While other volumes in the series—though equally

erudite and significant—struggle to break even, Dr. Tsien's volume has become a best seller—a feat tantamount to having one volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* attain such status! Not surprisingly, a Chinese translation was published in Shanghai in 1990, another version was released in Taiwan in 1995, and a new version in Guilin in 2004.

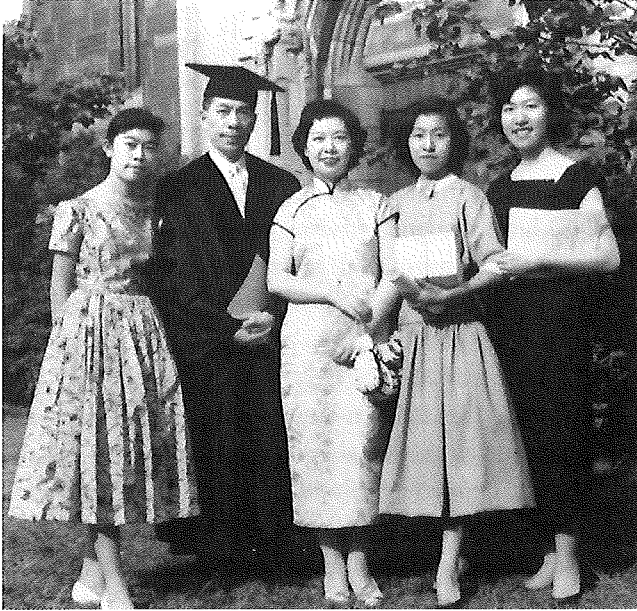
Dr. Tsien's contribution to The University of Chicago and to both the United States and China is not confined to his primary areas of scholarship, although his major books and scores of learned articles (written in both English and Chinese) would have been coveted items on any scholar's bibliography. Even prior to his schooling in the U.S., Tsien already had rendered significant service to the larger world. A distinguished librarian in his native China before arriving at Chicago in 1947, he was recruited by Professor Herlee Creel to come to the Chicago campus to help build the fledgling East Asian collection, after Creel learned of Tsien's pivotal role in the shipping of 30,000 volumes of Chinese rare books from Shanghai to the Library of Congress for safekeeping shortly before Pearl Harbor. Appointed Curator of Chicago's then Far Eastern Library in 1949, Tsien spent the next three decades building it into one of the pre-eminent East Asian collections in the entire U.S.

Teaching in both the Graduate Library School and the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, he helped trained many of today's senior librarians and sinologists in North America and elsewhere, including the current curators of the Harvard-Yenching Library and Princeton's Gest Library. When Chicago alums who had anything to do with East Asian Studies return to campus, the person most frequently sought out again and again is T. H. Tsien. In 1969, he directed the first Summer Institute for Far Eastern Librarianship sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education. In 1966–1968, he was elected chair of the Association for Asian Studies' Committee on East Asian Libraries, and from the same learned society he received its Distinguished Service Award in 1978, the year of his retirement.

Retirement, of course, did not mean the cessation of his scholastic labor and the diffusion of hard-won knowledge. Free from curatorial and teaching chores, Tsien proceeded to garner successive grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the East Asian History of Science Trust, and Chicago's Center for East Asian

Studies. These awards both betokened his scholarly stature and recognition and provided the needed assistance to harvest the fruits of his labor, culminating in the Cambridge volume before he moved on to his other writings. Astonishingly, thirty years after his formal retirement, his publications continue to educate this and future generations. In 1994, he was appointed by China to the Advisory Board for the compilation of the Sequel to the *Siku Quanshu*, an honor reserved for only three scholars outside the mainland. Most people would be proud to claim the accomplishments of just one of Dr. Tsien's three careers. As a librarian, educator, and scholar, he is virtually peerless.

Those acquainted with the history of China realize that the subjects receiving Dr. Tsien's sustained and astute investigation are also highly prized artifacts. The persons entrusted with their custodial care have been similarly honored. After all, the legendary Li Er (Laozi) was reputed to have been a Zhou royal archivist, and subsequent individuals firmly linked to history and charged to oversee imperial libraries and collections were often the most learned officials. T. H. Tsien might not have been engaged in lengthy service to any single government of the modern state, but he stands securely in a grand tradition of the erudite dedicated to the knowledge and preservation of the book. I join Professor Edward Shaughnessy and others in wishing him continual good health, and in the hope that we shall celebrate his hundredth birthday and beyond while commemorating anew his lasting gifts to all students of Chinese civilization.



T. H. TSIEN WITH FAMILY AFTER RECEIVING HIS PH.D. (1957)
(left to right): Mary Tsien Dunkel (Daughter), Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien,
Wen-ching Hsu (Wife), Gloria and Ginger Tsien (Daughters)