A Cultural Envoy Who Should Not Be Forgotten:
American Sinologist Charles S. Gardner and His Chinese Collection

by Li Wang

In recent times, as the Sinology (Chinese Studies) attracts greater academic interest overseas outside of China, there is one pioneering figure in the discipline from the 20th century that is seldom mentioned and lacking in focused study. That figure is Charles Sidney Gardner (1900-1966), a noted Sinologist and former Harvard University professor who has become attached to Brown University Library since the 1960s. Gardner was not only an avid Chinese historian and bibliographer himself, but he also contributed to further learning by future scholars. As a devotee of Chinese traditional culture, especially ancient print books, in his later years, Gardner donated his entire collection, a total of more than 35,000 books and other literary materials, to Brown University. His generous donation then became the cornerstone of the Brown University’s East Asian Collection. Among the Chinese books donated, 9,000 volumes of these are thread-bound in the traditional Chinese-style and housed in engraved wooden bookcases, comprising the East Asian Collection’s most treasured works.

My office is in the antique collections of the “Gardner Room.” In the early days of working in the East Asian Collection at Brown University, whenever I passed the bookcases upon bookcases of classical Chinese works, I was struck with a sense of admiration and curiosity for the devoted Sinologist that Gardner was. These books are of utmost cultural and research value and, therefore, should be publicized and promoted. In recent years, I have had the opportunity to oversee various research projects relating to Brown University’s rare Chinese books and gain further insight from publications of various memoirs and other overseas Sinology resources. As a result, Gardner’s life, scholarship, and contributions to the Collection have been further understood. I have also gained a deeper understanding of the academic exchanges he had with many Chinese and foreign scholars at the time by discovering various autographed materials that

* The original article in Chinese (attached) was published on China Reading Weekly, April 3, 2019. The English translation (with a few updates) was assisted by Whitney Su, Brown ’20.
were given to him. It is quite fortunate for Brown’s East Asian Collection to acquire numerous rare, precious family photos from Gardner’s descendants and relatives. I would like to especially thank Gardner’s granddaughter, Professor Sarah Beckjord of Latin American Studies at Boston College, for her support of the project. Noting that next year is 120th anniversary of Gardner’s birth, I wrote this article in the hopes of commemorating Gardner and his pioneering role as a cultural envoy who contributed tremendously to cross-cultural exchange between China and the United States. (Note: Due to limited space, only a few key annotations are included.)

![Prof. Charles S. Gardner (1900-1966)](image)

**A Lifetime Linked to China**

C. S. Gardner was born January 1, 1900 in Toledo, Ohio, U.S.A. His father, Charles Gardner, was an architect who later worked in real estate and as an investor in the stock market. His mother, Anna B. Gardner, was the daughter of a judge. Gardner was the youngest of four children in the family. He and his family moved to Massachusetts in his early childhood. Coming
from a well-off family, Gardner was very well-educated. He studied at Harvard University, receiving his bachelor's degree there in 1922, and his master's degree in 1923. Later in 1935, he received his Ph.D. in history, also from Harvard University. His doctoral dissertation was a study of the history of China’s Qing Dynasty and its border frontier, entitled “A Chapter of the Basic Annals from the ‘Draft Tsing History.’”

As for scholarly activities, from 1930 to 1933, he served as Director of ACLS Survey of Materials for Chinese Studies, the China Council of Learned Societies. From 1933-1937, he was an Instructor in Chinese at Harvard University. From 1937 to 1941, he worked as an Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. After the outbreak of the Pacific arena of World War II, Gardner served as Assistant Director of Chinese Language and Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania Army Special Training Program from 1943 to 1945. After the end of World War II, he taught History of Japan at Columbia University and History at Wellesley College respectively from 1944 to 1945. From 1948 to 1949 he served as a consultant for Chinese history at the Yale University Library.

Even as an undergraduate student at Harvard, Gardner had a keen interest in Far Eastern civilizations, specifically Chinese history and traditional culture, and was determined to conduct relevant research. From 1922 to 1923, he studied under the famous Chinese scholar Zhao Yuanren (Chao Yuen Ren), who taught Chinese at Harvard University. Under Zhao’s guidance, Gardner was able to establish a fundamental understanding of both Chinese culture and history and also learn the basics of the Chinese language. Zhao Yuanren later recalled that three students studied Chinese with him at the time: one was Professor Woods, former Head of the Harvard Philosophy Department, the other was from Russia, and then there was Gardner. Of these three, only Gardner went on to further pursue Chinese Studies and become a Sinologist. In 1924, Gardner studied at the University of Paris, France, focusing specifically on the works of Edouard Chavannes (1865-1918), Henri Maspero (1883-1945), and Paul Pelliot (1878-1945). The perspective of these academic influencers of the “French School” of thought who led the international Sinology community at that time had a great influence on Gardner’s later scholarship. Gardner would visit China twice: once from 1925–1928 and again from 1938-1939 (if there were brief visits besides these, they are not known). During his visits, he studied at Peking University and other such academic institutions.
Gardner’s two visits to China were very fruitful. The first time he visited China was early on in his marriage to his wife Margaret. To help Gardner focus on studying Chinese and work on his doctoral thesis, the couple lived in No. 21, East Biaobei Hutong, Beijing. Their eldest daughter, Sarah, was born in Beijing the following year. Located in Chongwenmen, adjacent to the Gongyuan (the examination hall), East and West Biaobei Hutong were named together as Biaobei (literally meaning “mount and past”) Hutong by the time of the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty. This district was famous for its rich tradition in the mounting and pasting of paintings and calligraphic works a place where the arts and humanities flourished during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As Beijing was a long-established capital of many Chinese dynasties, its residential neighborhoods have always been a place for the gathering of scholars and flourishing of ideas. Gardner traveled across the vast Pacific Ocean to be in Beijing, so naturally he was very excited to be immersed in a Beijing neighborhood so rich in Chinese culture and history. When he first arrived, he sent a postcard from Beijing to his parents, who lived on Highland Ave., Newtonville, M.A., about his life there.

Gardner’s postcard from Beijing on Nov. 18, 1925 to his parents who lived in Massachusetts, U.S.A.
Sent on November 18, 1925, the card featured on the front a picture of a knife-sharpener calling out onto the street, being lively and amusing. On the back, he wrote, “Very busy moving into new house. Carpenters, screen makers, window covers all thru. Painters & electricians still at work. Hope to move into our living room in 3 more days – now living in our bedrooms. Coal stoves give us plenty of heat. Excellent food. …… Korean chests sent to Tientsin – hope to have them in few days.”

Gardner's second visit to China was in the 1930s. He and several other American Sinologists came to China for scholarly studies. Gardner settled in Nanchizi area of Beiping (Beijing) during this trip. At the time, Yenching University, Fu Jen University and the Sino-German Society actively hosted visiting scholars from abroad. According to the German Sinologist Wolfgang Franke (1912-2007) and others, Gardner invited about once a month foreign Sinologists who settled in Beiping to meet at his home. Gardner's book holding is also mainly from collections of this period. He was devoted to Chinese culture, well-trained in Chinese and Western bibliography, and had an understanding of ancient Chinese literary classics. He not only purchased a large number of books for the Harvard-Yenching Library, but also collected various precious works and established a personal collection of Chinese research and academic books.

**A Pioneer of American Sinological Studies**

Harvard East Asian Studies was still in its infancy in the 1930s, consisting only of Serge Elisséeff (the first director of Harvard-Yenching Institute), and Sinology scholars James R. Ware and Gardner, who taught Chinese and Japanese language courses, respectively. At that time, only three graduate students were studying Chinese Studies (there were no students pursuing Japanese Studies). The interdisciplinary course that Gardner opened in 1936 was titled “Introduction to Chinese History: The Evolution of Politics, Institutions, and Culture from Ancient to Modern.” That same year, Dr. John Fairbank (1907-991), who received his Ph.D. from Oxford University, was hired as a Harvard History Department lecturer. He opened a course titled “The History of the Far East since 1793.”
Gardner's masterpiece is *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Harvard University Press, 1938, 2nd Ed., 1961). This is the first work regarding literary texts on ancient Chinese history by an American or any individual from the Western World. The book is not long, only 120 pages, divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the origin, development and influence of China since the 18th century, with a focus on developments of the early 20th century. The latter six chapters discuss the motivations, textual criticism, historical materials criticism, synthesis, style and classifications of history, respectively. Most of the materials used in the book are taken from Western sources, although there are also many Chinese scholarly sources referenced. The work is considerably detailed and summarizes some of the characteristics of traditional Chinese historiography, including a brief comparison of the differences between Chinese and Western historical writing and research methods. At the end of the book, Gardner points out how Chinese texts are unique in the extent of detail and thoroughness in their recording of historical events by using primary sources. He also notes the synthetic method and the insistence on intellectual integrity of inquiry is truly a respectable and admirable feat. "No other ancient nation possesses records of its whole past so voluminous, so continuous, or so accurate."

Gardner’s work was very well received by the international Sinology community. It is considered to be an essential work in understanding Chinese historiography and is of useful guidance to the scholarly training of those interested in the study of Sinology. This book has become a “must-read” for Chinese history researchers in the West. Gardner’s good friend Yang Liansheng (Yang Lien-sheng), a scholar who is well-known among Western Sinology circles, wrote in the preface of the book’s reprint in 1961: “Now, after some twenty-three years, this pioneer work is still found to contain much information and insight that students in the field cannot afford to overlook, and from which more advanced scholars continue to profit.”

Nevertheless, this pioneering work in Western Sinology is not without flaws. Some Chinese scholars have pointed out certain partialities, omissions, and misunderstandings in the work. Because Chinese is history is long and dotted with numerous events, it is difficult to summarize the content in a singular work. In addition, the book fails to discuss important Chinese history classics, such as Liu Zhiji’s *Shi Tong* (Comments on Works of History) and Zhang Xuecheng’s *Wenshi Tongyi* (General Interpretation of Historiography). Consequently, it can be said that this is an apparent shortcoming of the research. Nonetheless, the pioneering significance of this work
and the method of comparison between Chinese and Western are still very instructive. In particular, through this example, we can see that Chinese and Western scholars have different views on Chinese traditional culture, research methods, perspectives, and material selection. Though they are different and each has its own strengths, East and West should be used to complement each other. In general, Gardner was deeply influenced by European, especially French, academic traditions. He also read a lot of Chinese historiography, both ancient and modern. Incorporating his own understanding and creativity, he was able to publish his own book, which became a cornerstone work in Sinological studies in the United States.


Besides his writings, Gardner actively participated in and organized various academic activities. He spared no effort to advance Chinese research projects. In 1936, together with Serge Elisséeff and James Ware, he became one of the founding editors of the newly published Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, which was dedicated to the development of Chinese studies in America. Because of his outstanding knowledge, contributions, and fame, Gardner was elected Chairman of the Far Eastern Association (the predecessor of the Association for Asian Studies) in 1949.

Friendship Across the Pacific Ocean

Gardner was not only learned and tireless in teaching, but also very honest and modest. He was always willing to help others and spared no effort. He was deeply esteemed and admired by people from all walks of life around the world. William Hung, a scholar at the Harvard, once commented that among a few who can enter the heaven in the future, Gardner must be one of them.
During Gardner’s second visit to China, young scholars Zhou Yiliang and Yang Liansheng had been his research assistants in succession, helping him look up Japanese materials and Chinese ancient books. Professor Zhou in 1988 read and inscribed *Xinkan Quanxiangcheng Zhai Xiaojing Zhijie* (A Direct Interpretation of New Print “Book of Filial Piety” at the Quanxiangcheng House), which was given to him by Gardner about 50 years ago. He pondered a lot about the book and Gardner. As the closest Chinese scholar friend of Gardner, Yang recalled his friendship with Gardner, his “best friend from a foreign land” in a memoir in the *Hafo Yimo (Posthumous Writings from Harvard)*. He was especially grateful to Gardner for personally sponsoring him to study at Harvard University in 1941. Gardner was a “great benefactor” for allowing him to advance his studies in the United States. He recalled that, “When Gardner returned to the U.S. in 1939, he knew that I was going to be left unemployed. He specifically left me a comprehensive edition of the *Song Shi* (History of the Song) and *Hou Han Shu* (History of the Late Han), and he asked me to insert punctuation marks and proofread for him. For this work, I still got paid.” I have looked for these two books in our Collection and really did see the red brush-pen marks on them! Seeing Yang’s handwriting attests to this anecdote among scholars. When Gardner came back to the U.S., he paid Yang as his personal secretary until Yang got a scholarship and was able to pursue a Harvard degree officially. Gardner also invited Yang several times to live at his home at Berkley Street, Cambridge, taking care of Yang in many aspects.

With regards to their relationship, Yang was both Gardner’s student and a friend. Gardner helped Yang in improve his language skills in English and French, as well as in Western scholarship; Yang assisted Gardner to read Japanese scholarly resources even after he completed his Ph.D. degree. Yang was especially helpful to Gardner when Gardner became afflicted by a serious illness that prevented him from revising his works by himself. Yang contributed to the revised edition of Gardner’s *Chinese Traditional Historiography*, supplying several pages of the “Additions and Corrections” section at the end of the book.

Yang wrote in a letter to Hu Shih on January 14, 1947: “Mr. Gardner wants to write ‘Introduction to Sinology,’ but he has not started it yet, I am really anxious for him. This gentleman is too good and enthusiastic. He always helps others and prioritizes others before himself.” It can be seen here that Gardner is generous, indifferent to fame, and always willing to
help others, putting others before himself. In particular, he is a noble role model for future
generations of scholars.

Gardner had deep, lifelong friendships with many famous Chinese scholars. Sinologists
from around the world would go to Gardner’s home in Cambridge (near Boston) for scholarly
exchange. According to Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao (The First Draft of the
Long Chronicle of Mr. Hu Shizhi’s Life), on February 10th, 1945, Gardner had a gathering at his
place in which renowned scholars from all around the world, like Hu Shih, Paul Pelliot, S.
Elusséeff, J. Ware, Zhang Qiyun (a geographer and historian), Zhao Yuanren, Hong Ye
(William Hung), Zhang Fuyun (a jurist, the first Chinese student who studied at Harvard
University in the 1910s), Qiu Jaiming (Kaiming Alfred Chiu, the first Librarian of Harvard-
Yenching Library), Zhou Yiliang, Yang Liangsheng, and so on attended and engaged in scholarly
dialogue.

I recently sorted out old files and surprisingly found some books and articles given to
Gardner by scholars around the world (most are in English). There were signatures of authors,
including Hu Shih, Zhao Yuanren, William Hung, Qi Sihe, Yuan Tongli, Zhang Qiyun, Chen
Rongjie (Chan Wing-tsit), Zheng Dekun, Zhou Yiliang, Yang Liangsheng, Zhu Shijia and so on.
The article by Hu Shih was an English piece published in 1944, entitled “A Note on Ch’uan Tsu-
Wang, Chao I-ch’ing and Tai Chen: A Study of Independent Convergence in Research as
Illustrated in Their Works on the Shui-Ching Chu.” Zhao Yuanren gave Gardner two textbooks
in Chinese and English: ”The Romance of the Mandarin Language Dialogue: Guoyu Luomazi
Duihuaxi Xipu: Zuihou Wufenzheng (Romanization Mandarin Dialogues in a Play: The Final
Five Minutes) (1929) and Xin Guoyu Liushengpian Keben (A New Mandarin Textbook with
Phonograph Records). It is worth noting that a student named Jim I. Crump, Jr. gave Gardner an
English article about “pinghua”(storytelling with dialects) and the early history of the Sanguo
Zhi (History of the Three Kingdoms). He wrote in Chinese on the cover of the pamphlet:
“Teacher Gardner, please keep it, tudi (‘disciple’) Jim.” Those exchanges are evidence of the
friendly academic communications and network Gardner had at that time, which give us
invaluable insights into Gardner’s life in the present day.
The Gardner Collection and the Brown University Library

French Sinologist Paul Pelliot put forward: “The governance of ‘Chinese Studies’ must have three aspects: 1. Bibliography and books; 2. Collection of physical antique objects; and 3. Establishing contact with Chinese scholars.” Among Western Sinologists, Gardner played a prominent role in contributing to the compilation of bibliographies and the collection of classics. In his early years, he led the ACLS survey of materials for Chinese Studies and later compiled the union catalogues to guide Chinese collections in university libraries. Because of his special focus on the collection of Chinese books and documents, Gardner became a pioneering figure in the establishment of East Asian libraries in North America. In these ways, he has made distinctive contributions on China Studies in North America, which, although trailed behind studies done by Europeans initially, eventually managed to surpass that of their European counterparts.

Gardner was not only interested in Sinology, but also had a sincere vision for Sino-American cultural exchange. In an article published in 1944, “The future of Chinese Studies in America,” he writes insightfully:

“Whatever of evil has emerged from the present world conflagration, one good at least may be set against it: a new and rather startled awareness on the part of multitudes of Americans of certain fundamental similarity of outlook shared by the Chinese and ourselves. That bond may be in part expressed in terms of self-restraint, moderation, practical common sense, and respect for individual human dignity. There has come too a new awareness of our national ignorance, our insularity, provincialism; and with it a desire for light, for study of the Chinese civilization which we now increasingly see is superficially strange, but underneath so basically like our own. It is becoming clear that tomorrow will bring ever more insistent demands for those who can speak the national language of China, for those who can read her new living written tongue, and for those who possess the science to translate with precision her vast traditional literary heritage of twenty-five centuries’ growth. Against such demands of the morrow it is prudent to take thought and prepare today. The Chinese Library of the University will be the indispensable instrument of scholarship.”
Gardner suffered from Alzheimer’s disease in his later years and his health declined greatly as a result. But he was still thinking about Chinese Studies, his collection of Chinese books, and his dream of donating his collections to libraries in order to help future scholars make greater contributions to the field. His son, John B. Gardner, a former professor of English and Assistant Dean of the College at Brown University, helped donate all of Gardner’s book collections, along with their original Chinese bookcases. On October 30th, 1959, he signed the Original Deed of Gift, and on June 21, 1961, the majority of the books were transported to Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Some other books were added afterwards, fulfilling the Gardner’s wishes. Gardner passed away peacefully at his home on November 30th, 1966.

*Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* published an obituary in the issue of 1967, deeply mourning the scholar who dedicated his life to the study of Chinese history and bibliography, in which it is emphasized:

“Those who knew Charles Sidney Gardner will remember him for the unstinting gift of his time, help, and money to whatever students, colleagues, and friends sought it, a generosity exemplified by the donation of his extensive Chinese library to Brown University in 1962. Younger generations of students, who have not known him, may still be thankful that he has shared with them his knowledge in that useful manual that stands as his chief work, Chinese Traditional Historiography.”

The Gardner collection is mainly composed of Chinese books, but also includes a number of Japanese and Western books. Its contents span across a broad range of humanities and social sciences, such as but not limited to linguistics, literature, history, philosophy, religion, art, and archeology, with a focus on Qing dynasty history, which was Professor Gardner’s specialty. These books are located in the open stacks area as well as the Gardner Room on the third floor of the John. D. Rockefeller Library. The room is square in shape, occupying approximately 36 square meters. Though this space is limited in size, every detail is carefully planned. The sides facing the south, west, and north are composed of a complex of Chinese book cabinets, with a height of approximately 220 cm and a width of 37 cm. These cabinets are carved with traditional Chinese characters of the book titles, holding over 5,000 volumes (77 titles) of ancient texts from the Ming and Qing dynasties, and about 4,100 volumes (360 titles) of various thread-bound
books, chiefly the *Sibu Congkan* (A Series of Four Categories), published during Republican-era China. Therefore, the Gardner Collection, with its unique elegant antique-styled bookcases, has formulated one of the finest Chinese text depositories outside of China. As Harvard University Professor Francis W. Cleaves remarks, the Gardner Collection is “perhaps the best private Sinological collection in the United States.” Ever since the 1960s, the curators in charge of the collection such as Mr. I-min Chiang, Dr. Wen-kai Kung, and Ms. Annie Lin, have all dedicated significant time and care to the development and the preservation of these ancient Chinese books. Additionally, many East Asian Studies professors and scholars at Brown University have also been very helpful in maintaining the Gardner Collection.

As the Brown East Asian Collection progressed into the twenty-first century, many of its research facilities, as well as the Collection itself, underwent significant expansions. It is clear now that the original Gardner Collection includes approximately 250 titles (7,500 volumes) of classical books from the Ming and Qing dynasties and 590 titles (5,300 volumes) from the Republican period. Hence there are a total of 840 titles (12,800 volumes) of classical Chinese books, accounting for more than a third of the entire Gardner Collection. The Collection also encompasses the most celebrated works of nearly all prominent Chinese scholars of the time, and as such, rather comprehensively reflects the academic history of China. Categorically, the collection includes books on Confucian classics (*Jing*), history (*Shi*), the philosophical schools (*Zi*), and the collection of essays and poems (*Ji*). Taking the category of history as an example, the collection encompasses such sub-categories as biographies, annals, epigraphy, and catalogs. Although works dating back to the Song and Yuan dynasties are not part of the holding, finely selected and maintained Ming and Qing editions are well-represented in the Collection. Uniquely composed of both traditional Chinese styled bookcases that embody both artistic taste and practical function, the Gardner Room is the only one of such that exists outside of China, making it so precious. Indeed, it reflects the scholarly vision and appreciation for traditional Chinese classics that Gardner had as both a Sinologist and a bibliographer. Therefore, the academic and historical value of this Collection is of immeasurable worth.
On April 29, 2015 the author introduced the Gardner Room to President Peng Long and the delegation of Beijing Foreign Studies University (photo: Jenny Li)

In order to promote teaching, research, and international cultural exchanges, we have welcomed students, researchers, and visitors from a wide range of academic disciplines to access works or to tour the library. The Collection has also organized several public exhibits of the Chinese literary texts and manuscripts, sharing with members of the Brown University community and beyond aspects of traditional Chinese culture. When I was teaching a graduate seminar on Chinese bibliography and research methods, I incorporated some rare books from the Collection in the coursework. I have also had the opportunity to guide a graduate student in Art History in the writing of her Master’s thesis on the Guoxue Liyue Lu (Record of the Ritual Paraphernalia and Musical Instruments of the Imperial College), a rare book from the Qing Dynasty found in our Collection. Furthermore, the digital humanities project “Asia-Pacific in the Making of the Americas: Toward a Global History” launched by several Brown professors in American Studies Department such as Professor Evelyn Hu-DeHart also used information from the Collection’s copies of Dongxiyang Kao (Eastern and Western Continents: an Investigation), a book of the Ming Dynasty, and Liuqiuguo Zhilue (The State of Ryukyu: a Brief Record) from the Qing Dynasty. The works in the Collection have been also studied as part of an international project on surveying and cataloging classical Chinese books. In these ways, the Gardner
Collection has greatly aided many research projects over the years, fulfilling Gardner’s wish for his collection to help others interested in Chinese Studies.

Following the general trend of globalization, Chinese Studies outside of China has flourished and is increasingly popular, giving hope to continued scholarly inquiry in this field. Today, Chinese Studies in the United States has surpassed that of the last century, both in scholarly resources, in the lineup of scholars, and in the breadth and depth of research. However, we should not forget the perseverance, hard work, and dedication of the Chinese and Western scholars who pioneered the field of Sinology. Gardner is one of them. He studied endlessly, worked tirelessly, and persevered over a lifetime. Here, we commemorate his efforts to develop and advocate for Chinese Studies. In particular, his love for traditional Chinese culture and deep affection for the Chinese people are reflected in his writings, sayings, and deeds. His determination to learn, passion for knowledge, and selfless character have left a rare spiritual wealth for further development of Chinese Studies, and is just as valuable as the tangible collection of books he donated for future generations. Therefore, here, we commemorate Gardner’s dedication to promoting cross-cultural exchange and hope his legacy will live on in a flourishing Sino-American friendship.
他担任美国学术团体理事会。

1923年获哈佛大学学。

贾德纳是家里四个孩子中最年。

其父是一位建筑师兼房地产商。

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室助理主任。

任宾夕法尼亚大学。

大学中文讲师。

在英法文和西方。

史通。

书的篇幅不长。

等。