“Cataloging and Preservation of Chinese Rare Book Collections in the U.S.” is not a topic that can easily be compressed into a three-hour seminar. For our purposes Chinese “rare books” will refer to all bound books and manuscripts produced in China in the traditional manner, primarily before the twentieth century. Books published before 1912 are commonly called guji, and among them are real rare books (shanben), which nowadays generally refers to books published before 1796. The workshop will have three themes: (a) special characteristics of Chinese rare books, (b) handling and preservation of Chinese rare books, and (c) the history and cataloging of Chinese rare book collections in the United States.

The participants will be asked to briefly describe the origins and status of Chinese rare book collections in their own institutions. Some broad questions will be discussed. For example, what distinguishes traditional Chinese books from their Western counterparts? Why do Chinese rare books matter, if indeed they do, in the twenty-first century? How do Chinese rare book collections in the U.S. differ from those in China, or in other parts of the world? In addition to the following suggested reading list, participants should feel free to pursue any relevant reading and introduce it during the workshop.


For the care and binding of traditional Chinese books, read Edward Martinique, Chinese Traditional Bookbinding (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1983) and David Helliwell, “The Repair and Binding of Old Chinese Books” (The East Asian Library Journal, 8:2, pp. 27-149). A contemporary practitioner, Pan Meidi, describes the subject in Guji xiufu yu zhuangzheng (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995). For illustrations of the materials and processes see Du Weisheng, Zhongguo guji xiufu yu zhuangbiao jishu tujie (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2003).

Concerning the cataloging of Chinese rare book collections in the United States, principal reference will be made to Cataloging Guidelines for Creating Chinese Rare Book Records in Machine-Readable Form (Mountain View: Research Libraries Group, 2000). Each participant will receive a complimentary copy of Cataloging Guidelines before the Luce Summer Institute begins. For examples of modern manual cataloging, compare catalogs such as Zhongguo guji shanben shumu (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985-96) and Beijing tushuguan guji shanben shumu (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1989. For examples of traditional descriptive cataloging of Chinese rare books in American collections see Wang Chung-min and T. L. Yuan (ed.), A Descriptive Catalog of Rare Chinese Books in the Library of Congress (Washington: Library of Congress, 1957), also found in Wang Zhongmin’s Zhongguo shanbenshu tiyao (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), as well as Shen Jin, Meiguo Hafó daxue Hafó Yanjing tushuguan zhongwen shanben shuzhi (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999).

N.B. Reading copies of the articles cited above will be available at the Luce Summer Institute.