The old China

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Its history and culture live on in the Wiant collection

By Steve Sterrett

A discordant symphony of street vendors, artisans, and shopkeepers greeted the Peking dawn. The city's early morning staccato melodies so fascinated American musicologist Bliss M. Wiart that he rushed out of his hotel into the street to join the noisy human traffic.

Wiant approached a roving merchant who was beating a hand-crafted drum to attract buyers for his bolts of cloth. He told the merchant that he wasn't interested in cloth, but he wished to buy his small drum.

The merchant replied that he needed the drum to alert potential customers — many of them in courtyards closed to the street — that he had cloth to sell.

A bargain was struck, however, when Wiant agreed to pay the merchant not only for the cost of replacing the drum but also for the man's loss of business that day. The American paid 40 cents.

That episode took place a half-century ago, on Bliss Wiant's first morning in Peking, China.

A drum was only the beginning

Mildred Wiant, Bliss' widow, smiled as she recalled that the cloth merchant's drum was the beginning of a large collection of Chinese art acquired during the couple's life in China from 1923 to 1951. They agreed before he died in 1975 to donate the collection, estimated now to be worth several hundred thousand dollars, to Ohio State.

The 600-item collection was formally presented to the University in December. In honor of the gift, the Board of Trustees established the Bliss M. and Mildred A. Wiant Professorship in Chinese Literature and Culture. The designated professorship will be appointed for a period of four years either in the College of the Humanities or the College of the Arts.

"The whole collection would best be called a collection of Chinese culture, rather than an art collection," explained John Huntington, associate professor of art history whose specialty is Buddhist art. "These are the kinds of things a literary man of China would have collected."

From cricket cages to paintings

Although the collection includes very valuable paintings, porcelain bowls, and carvings, the Wiants also brought back decorated gourds, cricket cages, musical instruments used by the common people and street vendors, and other objects which would not normally be displayed in an art museum and which are rarely seen outside of China.

Huntington expects that many of the artifacts will be important classroom tools to expose students to Chinese culture.

Eugene Ching, professor of East Asian Languages, said the collection will be used by many disciplines, ranging from history and sociology to art and music, and will be the basis of several research projects. His wife, for example, has expressed an interest in studying a set of items for her doctoral dissertation.

Andrew J. Broekema, dean of the College of Arts, said the whole collection might fit in a six foot by six foot square, but that "you are overwhelmed by the intimacy of the items." The Chinese attitudes toward beauty and utility are revealed in the craftsmanship of even the smallest objects. He pointed out the cloth insignias worn to show civil or military rank which are "exquisite silk tapestries."

"The designated professorship is an important honor," Broekema said. The Trustees are expected to name the first recipient shortly. "For a faculty member, it will be a recognition of exceptional scholarship and achievement."

The Wiants met while both were attending Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware and were married in 1922 when Bliss Wiant was working on a master's degree in music composition at Boston University.

The Wiants went to China in the autumn of 1923 as representatives of the Methodist Church Board of Foreign Missions. During their 28-year stay, he studied Chinese music and taught musicology at Yenching University, just outside Peking, and she taught vocal music after raising three children.

The Wiants were the last American family to leave China after the communist revolution, she said. Life had been made difficult for them, and they finally applied for an exit visa, but even to the end they found friendship and cooperation from many Chinese.

"I think that all of this just indicates that good will is a mighty strong thing, a great power," Mrs. Wiant said. Her hope is that the Chinese collection at Ohio State will deepen American appreciation of that culture and keep alive the good will to which she and her husband dedicated their lives.
Family donates 600-piece ancient Chinese art collection to OSU

By Georgia M. Tackett

A collection of approximately 600 Chinese art and historical pieces will be donated to the university during a dedication reception at the Faculty Club Wednesday, according to Andrew J. Broekema, dean of the College of the Arts.

The family of the late Bliss Want, a missionary and teacher in China from 1923 until 1951, is donating the collection which consists of pieces dating as far back as 1743.

In honor of the Wiants' gift, a designated professor in Chinese literature and culture will be appointed by the University Board of Trustees, Debbie Pierson, assistant in the College of the Arts, said. Ohio State President Harold L. Enarson will present Want's wife Mildred with the Board of Trustees' resolution acknowledging the gift and designating a professorship in both their names.

Usually a donor agrees to provide financial support for a designated professor in a particular field for a minimum of three years, Broekema said. However, this is a special case since the Wiants have donated a valuable collection of Chinese artwork instead of money, he said.

The Wiants, Ohio natives, obtained much of the collection during the Communist takeover of China in 1949, said their son Allen Want, a specialist for the Center for Vocational Education.

"The people were afraid the Communists would destroy art pieces that were passed down for many generations in their families. They preferred to sell them cheaply rather than have them destroyed," Want said.

The collection includes silk costumes, ceramics, porcelain and musical instruments such as white jade flutes contained in gold brocade cases. They will be displayed in a variety of appropriate university facilities since some items have more sociological rather than artistic interest, Broekema said.

"My father was particularly interested in the culture of the country (China) and believed in creating a bond between cultures," Want said.

"He always enjoyed working with college students," he said.

Bliss Want died in 1974.

Chinese artifacts on display

By A.S. Urick

Traditional Chinese paintings, musical instruments and porcelains are on display in the second floor lobby of the Administration Building. The exhibit is sponsored by Ohio State's Art History Department.

The pieces in the exhibit are from the collection of Bliss M. and Mildred A. Want, Ohioans who taught at Yenching University in China for 28 years.

The Wiants devoted their collection to Ohio State in 1979. Jeff McKibben from the Art History department selected the pieces to be shown in the current display. He said most of the 600 objects in the Want collection date from the Ch'ing dynasty, the period from 1644 to 1912.

The musical instruments on display include a minature silver p'i-p'a, or guqin, a seven-string lute and a jade flute. A red and gold lacquered p'ai-hsiao, or 16-pipe flute is also a part of the exhibit.

Several painted silk fans are featured in the display. McKibben said this medium was very popular in traditional Chinese art and said more than 60 fan paintings are in the Want collection.

A large scroll painting done on a piece of fabric, which was then bordered by silk panels, is also part of the exhibit. Called a thang-k'a, the scroll shows a four-faced Buddha surrounded by other deities.

The exhibit includes a selection of Mandarin squares, tapestries worn by Chinese courtiers to indicate their civilian or military ranks.

In China, an individual may commission an artist to design a seal, which can then be used as the person's official signature.

Chinese seals may be carved from various stones. The 16 seals in the current exhibit show some of the shapes and subjects used for the official seals.
"Seventy Times Seven"

ONCE, according to the record, it was the prized possession of Kaiser Wilhelm. Later it was owned by Lord Balfour of England and, more recently, by a Paris dealer. Now it is destined for Ohio State.

The intricately carved ivory pagoda, standing over seven feet tall, is of the style followed by ivory carvers of the Ming dynasty, c. 1400. Skilled craftsmen spent thousands of hours fashioning the lifelike figures on its nine levels.

How is the pagoda finding its way to Ohio State? The story goes back to 1922, when a senior in civil engineering was helped by President William Oxley Thompson.

He had worked his way through Ohio State, spending what money he earned as fast as he made it.

His advisor, Professor Christopher Sherman, had just reminded him that his senior thesis must be completed before graduation. He would have to quit working to finish the thesis in the three months left before graduation.

His fraternity brothers (Triangle) put board and room "on the cuff," but three days before graduation, he needed $42 for cap and gown rental, diploma and railroad fare back home. President Thompson had the answer: a gift of $75 from funds an alumnus had given the president years before for just such emergencies.

"You don't have to repay this $75 immediately," the president said, "but someday, you will help Ohio State students as the alumnus is helping you now, seventy times seven."

It became a debt of honor that Christian E. Burckel, B.S.E.E.'22, never forgot.

There were times he felt he might never be able to repay it:

— Those days in Cleveland after graduation when he started a company to manufacture storage batteries and almost went broke.

— Those days when he taught school and tried to live on the salary a teacher was then paid.

When he took a teaching position in the New York City area, he moonlighted as a magician. As secretary of the Society of American Magicians, he came to know both the greats and would-be greats of show business. (One entertainer who got a helping hand from Burckel was a ventriloquist on his way up: Edgar Bergen.)

He started a neighborhood newspaper and his publishing firm expanded into other community newspapers. Mainly as a labor of love, he published "The College Blue Book," a standard work of reference for higher education throughout the world, when the author, Dr. Huber William Hurt, retired.

The Blue Book rekindled his interest in Ohio State. He was given permission to publish the "Impending Tidal Wave," and "The Problem of Rising Enrollments" by the author, Dr. Ronald B. Thompson, now executive dean, admissions and registrations. Dr. Thompson's efforts in bringing high quali-
ty students to the University has gained Burckel's admiration.

Not long ago, he tried to give The College Blue Book to Ohio State. Officials were impressed with the prodigious effort needed to compile the work and depressed with the amount of profit Burckel had made (he had priced it merely to cover his costs).

His financial success came through his talents as consultant for a number of corporations, including the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., the Pennsylvania Railroad, IT&T, International Harvester, General Electric, the Army, Navy, Air Force and others.

He has an extraordinary ability to solve problems. His job while in school showed that. He intended to apply for a drafting job that was open. On the way in, he noticed the wasted effort moving finished tubes from a second-floor wrapping department to a first-floor shipping dock.

His first words to the interviewer: "Why don't you cut a hole in the floor and slide those tubes down a chute directly to the shipping dock?"

The question won him a job — as production superintendent.

The Pennsylvania Railroad was spending much time and money servicing Diesel-Electric locomotives. Burckel was given the problem. In two days, he suggested: replace faulty components instead of repairing them. Costs and time out of service were greatly reduced.

During WWII he served the Air Force as special adviser to the Chief of the Logistics and Publications Branch of the Air Service Command. He set up production lines that expedited rebuilding plane engines, reduced time needed to get planes back in the air. An appreciative government awarded him one of its highest citations for his contributions.

From this grew the firm of CEBA: Christian E. Burckel & Associates — consultants and publishers of handbooks and technical manuals as well as the College Blue Book and "Who's Who in the United Nations," and "Who's Who in Colored America."

Now retiring at the age of 68, he is fulfilling the prediction President Thompson made nearly a half century ago. Just last March he gave the University Library some two tons of United Nations publications and records, including documents on the UN's birth at San Francisco in 1948. In some areas, the collection is more complete than that of the UN library in New York City.

He and his charming wife are bequeathing their estate in Bronxville, N.Y., its unique Garden of Peace and Tranquility, and their collection of artifacts and antiques to Ohio State. The pagoda alone is insured for $85,000. There are more than 600 netsukes, hand-carved ivory ornaments used by the Japanese. There's a huge Imari vase dating from the Ming dynasty; legends of China carved into an elephant tusk; an ivory takara-bune, ship of good fortune; the Eight Immortals of Taoist philosophy, carved in ivory; and an alabaster Coptic jar dating from the time of Christ and discovered in Jerusalem. These and myriad other treasures gathered through their lifetime will be available to Ohio State students. It's typical of Burckel that he doesn't know what the estate and art collection are worth. The pieces were collected because he and Mrs. Burckel liked them, not because of their value. Says Burckel:

"All that I am or may become, I owe to my mother, my wife, and to The Ohio State University.

"My mother has passed on. I am providing for my wife should she survive me. Our home and collection (for which we consider ourselves only responsible custodians) are to be used to afford future Ohio State students the advantage of higher education and learning."
IVORY TUSK, key display in Mrs. Burckel’s study, has the legends of old China carved into its length. Figures are full-round, not relief carvings.

MRS. BURCKEL is in process of identifying 600 netsukes in the Burckel collection. Netsukes were used to hold drawstrings on money pouches and other Japanese accessories. Only 1 1/2” high, the netsukes are carved from ivory with fine detailing.

INTRICATELY CARVED figurines are displayed throughout house. These are off the recreation room which contains a custom-built billiard table constructed for World Champion Willie Hoppe and not yet finished when Hoppe died. Burckel bought the table, had it moved into the recreation room he designed.

TAKARA-BUNE, ship of good fortune, is displayed in Burckel’s home.

IMARI VASE is outstanding example of the fine porcelained enamels created by craftsmen in Imari, Japan.

BURCKELS also have a collection of American bronzeware that is exceptional. Display is housed in dining room of their home.

SENNIN — one of Eight Immortals, carved completely from a tree root.

PORTION of Burckel collection of netsukes, displayed in hallway of home.
His Plan Brings Community College To Philippines

DR. PEDRO T. ORATA, Ph.D.'27, has seen his dream come true after 20 years of waiting. A community college was opened this year in his hometown of Urdaneta, Pangasinan, The Philippines.

Urdaneta Community College is the result of Dr. Orata's labors in Philippine education since 1943, when he opened his town's first high school.

"For a building we used the Catholic church whose roof had been demolished during the war," he wrote last year to Dr. Donald Cottrell, dean of Ohio State College of Education.

"We had nothing to begin with — no books, paper, pencils, desks or blackboards, and no money to pay teachers' salaries. I called for volunteers among the few college graduates and undergraduates to compose the faculty, with the warning that we probably would not draw any salary for several months.

"Fifteen volunteered. There were some 350 students who enrolled. Since there were no desks or tables, we drew lines on the floor to separate the classes. Teacher and students sat on the floor until the students could bring something to sit on. The instructors lectured to the students on any subject they could think of.

"After three months of this kind of 'teaching' we graduated the first class of 50 students, who were awarded handwritten diplomas."

That inauspicious beginning marked the first of Dr. Orata's efforts to bring quality education to his homeland. Lines for the battles and the tactics to fight them were obtained in the United States, first at the University of Illinois, where Dr. Orata received his baccalaureate and master's degrees; later at Ohio State, where he received the PhD from the College of Education.

After graduation from Ohio State, Dr. Orata returned to The Philippines, where he was a teacher and superintendent of schools. He returned to the United States and taught for two years at Ohio State, then was made a special consultant to the U.S. Office of Education.

He became a curriculum specialist for the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, then a technical assistant to the National Commission on Education, Scientific and Cultural Matters based once more in The Philippines.

Shortly thereafter, in 1949, he was appointed a member of a United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization mission to Siam (now Thailand).

In 1959, he retired from UNESCO to return to his first love — Urdaneta, Pangasinan, The Philippines.

In his 14-year absence, the Urdaneta High School had grown. By 1965, the enrollment was 3,196 and 335 other such high schools had sprung up over the Philippine Islands.

But Dr. Orata was not satisfied. He discovered that only three of 10 elementary school graduates in Urdaneta were going on to enroll at the high school.

So he begged, pleaded and threatened Philippine educators for two years until they allowed him to open three "barrio" — village — high schools in Urdaneta. Now elementary school graduates do not have to travel so far to high school, and are more likely to continue their educations.

The barrio schools offer two years of high school in the same classrooms as the elementary school. The plan worked, and now there are seven barrio high schools in Urdaneta and nine in seven other towns in Pangasinan Province.

Because of the increased number of two-year high schools in Urdaneta, reasoned Dr. Orata, the main high school, which had grown to a 20-acre campus, would have more vacant classrooms.

So . . . the indefatigable Filipino presented a plan for the formation of a community college. He sold the plan to Philippine educators in just two days, compared to the two years it took to establish the high school.

And, unlike the beginnings of the high school, Dr. Orata has classrooms and grounds. But the college still lacked books. Dr. Orata contributed his collection to the college's library, but that wasn't enough. So he turned to his Alma Mater, and she responded.

Last July, members of the Student Education Association sent Dr. Orata about 900 books they had collected from students and faculty members. The 19 boxes of books were valued at $2,500. Associate Deans William B. McBride and Paul MacMinn coordinated the drive.

After receiving word the books were on their way, Dr. Orata wrote to Dean Cottrell: "We were very overjoyed to learn from Dr. McBride of the very successful Philippine Book Drive in Columbus, which resulted in the collection of 19 cartons of books for our library. The number is fabulous, to say the least. We look forward to receiving the books. Our 125 students, who compose the first batch this year, have been notified that the books are on their way to the Philippines. They wish me to convey to you and Dean Paul MacMinn and of course, Dr. William B. McBride, their gratitude for your help and friendship."

"Please convey our gratitude in particular to the leaders of the Student Education Association and their colleagues for undertaking the Philippine Book Drive . . . "

Ohio State University MONT
Burckel Ivories given To the University

A NO INTRICATELY carved ivory pagoda and a rare Imari vase have been added to the extensive donations of art works to the University by Mr. and Mrs. Christian E. Burckel, BCE '22, of Bronxville, N.Y.

The two treasures are now on exhibit in special display cases in the foyer of Mershon Auditorium.

The pagoda, which stands over seven feet tall and took nearly 50 years to complete and assemble, has an appraised value of $85,000.

The Japanese ceramic vase, beautifully hand-decorated in shades of cobalt blue, light blue, Imari red, green, yellow, pink, white and other colors, is appraised at $25,000.

The pagoda is nine graduated stories tall, while most pagodas are three, five or seven stories. It has 1,400 hand-carved pieces of ivory. A Hong Kong factory worker carved it in his spare time at home, devoting much of his lifetime to the effort.

The 19th century vase (named after the seaport of Imari, from which it was shipped) takes its decorative motif from the "Tales of the Genji," a novel about an Oriental Don Juan-type, Prince Genji.

The Burckels, whose extensive holdings of ivory were reported in The MONTHLY in November, 1966, previously gave the College of The Arts a set of ivory sculptures valued at $7,200 and an antique ivory chess set worth $11,250.

Behind the donations is a fascinating story that dates back to Burckel's senior year at the University.

President William Osley Thompson, seeing that Burckel was short of funds as graduation approached, gave him $75 from money an alumnus had contributed.

"Some day," President Thompson told Burckel, "you will help Ohio State students, as the alumnus is helping you now — 70 times 7."

"Burckel has never forgotten this debt of honor," explains Dr. Ronald B. Thompson, executive dean for student statistical services, and a longtime friend of the Burckels. His and Burckel's paths crossed professionally some 20 years ago while Burckel was publishing "The College Blue Book," a standard reference source in higher education.
On holiday
30 July 1979
This leisurely Chinese landscape of people relaxing by a mountain lake is found on a ten-inch, 200-year-old, porcelain vase. The vase, part of the Bliss Wiant Collection, was donated to OSU last quarter.
Above: This bronze bell with gold gilt dates from 1743, during the reign of the Chinese Emperor Ch‘en Lung. Decorated with an overall dragon and cloud bank relief design, the bell is believed to have been crafted as a ceremonial piece representing the dynasty.

Right: The Chinese enjoy the sounds of crickets in their homes. For the complete cricket fancier, a Chinese artisan created this porcelain cricket-raising set. The round box with a top in the center holds a porcelain scorecard (standing on the left) which is used to record the cricket’s growth, two small feeding dishes, and a cricket house on the right.

A framed soapstone relief plaque depicts the emperor receiving a subject bearing a scroll. Created during the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, the plaque was carved during a time of resurgence for Chinese traditions and the arts.