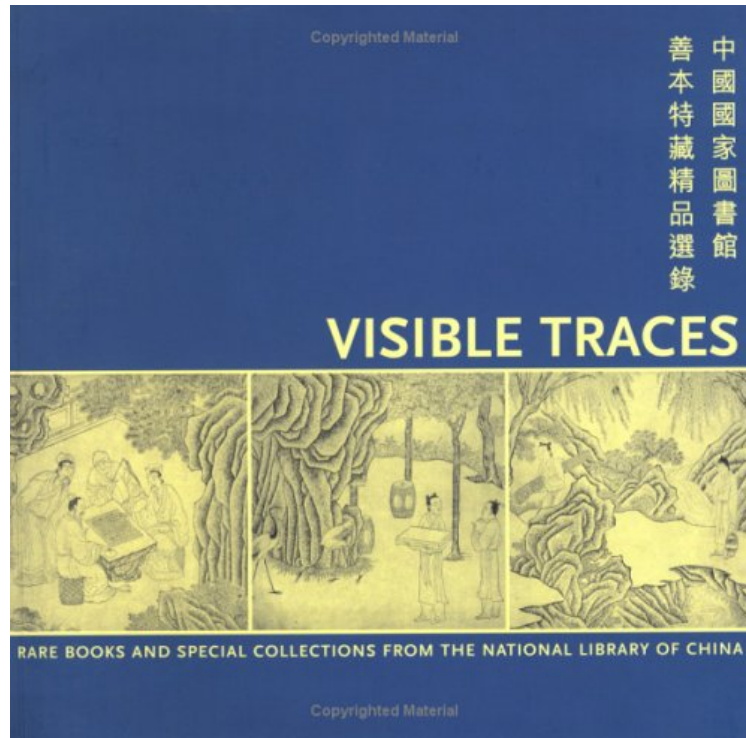


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Philip K. Hu

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[Free] Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China

Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China

Philip K. Hu : Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Must have item for anyone who loves Chinese cultureBy carolyn.ford@univ.ox.ac.ukThis exhibition catalogue is a must have item for anyone who has a serious interest in China's rich textual tradition. I have already put Visible Traces on my Christmas wish list in hopes that my relatives, who have no idea why I have been studying Chinese literature and history all these years, will break down and give me something related to my life's work. And I haven't written a wish list in ages, that's how much I want a copy of this on my bookshelf. And if they don't give me a copy, I'll give one to myself as a gift once I finish my PhD.If you didn't have an opportunity to see these rare books, maps and artefacts when they were on display in New York or Los Angeles, or if you don't feel like buying a plane ticket to visit the National Library of China in Beijing, this catalogue is an economical way to savor what you missed. The editorial review does a wonderful job of summarizing the contents, so I won't repeat that. The color photography certainly does justice to the original works. I enjoyed seeing the photographs of a 1621 manuscript on Tang poetry because it's connected to my own research, but there is something in this volume for anyone who loves Chinese culture. The reader will find scrolls of Buddhist sutras, delicate drawings of gentlemen playing the game of go, specialist monographs on the varieties of chrysanthemums, illustrated manuals on

goldfish, albums of Beijing opera characters, oracle bones, pictorial rubbings and multi-color maps of the Chinese empire, and more. For the specialist the bibliography is detailed enough to start tracking down other extant copies of the items in the exhibition as well as general information to be found in secondary sources. That said, why didn't I rate this book a 5? Only a couple reasons. Some sections of maps and charts have been magnified, and are less distinct than their smaller scale originals, which some readers will find frustrating. Every reader will have a different reason why they love this book. I wanted to be able to see the whole 1621 poetry collection. A chrysanthemum connoisseur will want to see every flower illustration. Map lovers will wish that all the maps had been printed. In other words, every one will wish the book were bigger and that it covered his or her interest in more detail (even at the expense of someone else's). At 337 pages, however, it's already a large volume. After savoring each page, you may find yourself falling for some new aspect of Chinese culture and you'll realize you may have to buy that plane ticket to China after all. *Visible Traces* will whet your appetite, but it won't quench your thirst, which is fine because no one volume could ever contain all the glories of China's print culture. DO NOT show this catalogue to your kids, unless you are happy for them to fall in love with Chinese history and art and study for PhDs instead of becoming a lawyer or getting an MBA.

Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from the National Library of China showcases an integral part of Chinese history as documentation and as works of art. The collection of inscribed oracle bones, rubbings, manuscripts, maps, printed books, and artifacts from minority cultures traces, in broad strokes, the evolution of the written and printed word in China, against the vivid backdrop of Chinese society and history. The exhibition is divided into 4 main sections: "Rare Books and Manuscripts," "Epigraphical and Pictorial Rubbings," "Maps and Atlases," and "Texts and Illustrations from China's Ethnic Minorities." Among the highlights of the exhibition are a Tang-dynasty Dunhuang manuscript of the Lotus Sutra dated 695; examples of color printing, including the "Ink Garden of the Cheng Family" from 1606, "The Ten Bamboo Studio Manual of Calligraphy and Painting" from 1644, and the second series of the "The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting" from 1701. The section on rubbings features many important pieces, including the "Inscription for a Buddhist Image Constructed to Commemorate the Duke of Shiping," well known as one of the "Four Exemplars from Longmen"; a rubbing taken from the monumental "Map of the Prefectural City of Pingjiang", among others. The final section features Buddhist sutras, texts, historical writings, and illustrations in various non-Chinese scripts such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Tangut, Manchu, Yi, Dai, and Naxi (pictographic and Geba). The catalogue includes about 180 color plates, full descriptive essays for every object in the exhibition, notes and references pertaining to each work, and an extensive bibliography listing more than a century of monographs, articles, exhibition catalogues, and reference works related to the exhibits.