

LI Zhengfen 李正奮¹

Yongle Dadian or Investigations Concerning Yongle's Compendium of Chinese Literature 永樂大典考

Translated by M.J. Hagerty and H.C. Ho. Berkeley, California
Edited and published by Hartmut Walravens

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Abstract: The *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 is considered the largest and most comprehensive traditional encyclopedia of the world; it had 22937 chapters (*juan* 卷) and was clearly and beautifully written and drawn, in large size format. It was commissioned by the Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (reigned 1402–1424, with the reign title 永樂, perpetual happiness), the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, in 1403 and completed in 1408. For unknown reasons it was never printed and disappeared without leaving a trace, fortunately only after a copy had been made in 1557. Even this copy was ill-fated, it was gradually decimated by the Second Opium War, the Anglo-French invasion of Peking and the Boxer Rebellion so that today only around 400 volumes are known to exist. The *Yongle dadian* is not arranged by subjects like the much better known and still extant *Tushu jicheng* 圖書集成 with “only” 10.000 *juan*, of 1726/28 (date of printing), but by phonetical criteria, namely by the rhymes of the 洪武正韻 *Hongwu zhengyun* rhyme dictionary (1375, named after the reign period of the founder of the dynasty). In contrast to European encyclopedias, like the French *Encyclopédie*, or the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it did not consist of explanatory texts written by scholars for that purpose, but consisted of quotations of the original texts, the sources, often giving the full text of a book (this type of reference is known in China as *leishu* 類書). The story of the *Yongle dadian* is well known in outline. When the Chinese Republic was established, the cultural heritage as preserved in the imperial palaces, was surveyed and evaluated. Efforts were also made to track down the remaining extant volumes of the *Yongle dadian* which were dispersed in a number of countries. Today many are available in electronic format on the Internet. Scholars mainly focused on studying the contents of the individual volumes which presented in many cases quotes from sources no longer extant. The investigation of the compilation of this huge “encyclopedia” was left to the librarians, and there were several instructive articles by book experts like Yuan Tongli 袁同禮 (1895–1965; director of the Peking Library, later National Library) and Li Zhengfen 李正奮. The latter article is given here in English translation by Michael J. Hagerty (1876–1951),² of the US Department of Agriculture, and his lettré H.C. Ho.³ They worked on the campus of

¹ For the original Chinese publication see Li 1926.

² On him see the introduction to HAGERTY 2024.

³ No information on H.C. Ho was found.

the University of California, Berkeley, under the supervision of the botanist Walter Tennyson Swingle (1871–1951),⁴ and Hagerty was mainly kept busy with translating Chinese source material on cultivated plants, like citrus and lychee. Swingle worked in close connection with the Library of Congress and for a number of years supplied the descriptions of new acquisitions in East Asian languages.⁵ Thus, library matters were also of importance for his small research unit. The present paper (preserved among the Michael Joseph Hagerty papers of the Bancroft Library, University of Berkeley, California, call. no. BANC MSS 79/113 zLOCAL) was revised for publication, and the transcription was changed to the pinyin system. While the paper is now a historical document, it still gives a reliable picture of the compilation and development of *Yongle dadian*, not easily available otherwise in Western languages.

Key words: *Yongle dadian* — compilation and history; *leishu* — history; China — bibliography

About the author: Walravens Hartmut, Dr. habil., Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Free University of Berlin (ret.) (Berlin, Germany) (hwalravens@gmx.net).

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Down through the successive dynasties, the literary works suffered the greatest during the Qin period (B.C. 255–209) and they flourished most abundantly in the Sui and Tang periods (A.D. 581–905). During the flourishing time of the Sui dynasty, there were in the palace library 270.000 *juan* or books. During the period of Kaiyuan 開元 (A.D. 713–741) there were 80.000 or more. In the beginning of the Song period there were 10.000 or more books; and during the reigns of Zhen 真 and Ren 仁 [Zhenzong, A.D. 997–1022, and Renzong, 1023–1063] they continued this interest, attaching greater importance to the making of an extensive collection. See in the book catalogue entitled *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目, where there were 30.669 books in all. Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (A.D. 1100–1119) had already purchased the preserved books from the scholars and people and had supplied the works missing from the Sanguan 三館 or Three Libraries. The books in the Bige 秘閣 or Imperial Library then became very abundant [For all of the above, see the *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 or Bibliographical section of the History of the Song dynasty.]

After the fall of Emperor Jingkang 靖康 [the last emperor of the Northern Song] all the preserved books in the libraries called Taiqing-lou 太清樓 and Longtu-ge 龍圖閣, within the Xuanhe Palace 宣和殿 fell into the hands of

⁴ Walter Tennyson Swingle, 1871–1952. On his life and works see VENNING 1977.

⁵ WALRAVENS 2021.

the Yan 燕 [the Yuan or Mongol dynasty] [see Rongzhai suibi 容齋隨筆 or Random notes from the Rong Studio]⁶. The period of the Yan [Yuan dynasty] really combined all that were preserved in the Song, Jin, and Yuan — three dynasties and formed them into a collection of the books of one dynasty. The number was estimated at 1,000,000 *juan* [see Chunmingmeng yulu 春明夢餘錄 or Description of Beijing].⁷ Then those preserved during the period of the Yan [Yuan dynasty] were about two or five times greater than those of the Sui and Tang periods.

When the Ming dynasty first conquered Yan [Yuan dynasty], Emperor Hongwu 洪武 ordered his Commander-in-Chief, XU Da 徐達 to gather all the books preserved in the Big or Imperial Library and transfer them to Nanjing. When the Yan [Yuan dynasty] was entirely subjugated he also issued an edict requesting the people to give him the preserved books. At that time, of the Song dynasty carved editions, there were sometimes ten or more copies [of each work] obtained [see Yehuobian 野獲編 or Inofficial matters of the Wanli era and: Chunmingmeng yulu 春明夢餘錄 or Description of Beijing].⁸ Therefore, we see that the preserved books of the Ming dynasty again surpassed those of the Yan period. Shortly after Emperor Jianwen 建文 ascended the throne, civil wars broke out and the Prince of Yan⁹ entered Nanjing, proclaimed himself emperor and changed the reigning title to Yongle 永樂. At that time, an unsettled state of affairs existed throughout the empire and the Prince of Yan, realizing that he could not pacify by force, tried to neutralize these contentions by means of books. Lu Wenyu 陸文裕 compares him to Emperor Taizong (A.D. 976–997), who he very closely approached.

The *Chengzu shilu* 成祖實錄 or Veritable records concerning the reign of Chengzu (Yongle, 1403–1424) state: «On the *bingzi* 丙子 day of the 7th month of autumn in the 1st year, there was a sacrificial ceremony in the Imperial Temple when the emperor issued an edict to the Chancellor of the Hanlin 翰林 Academy, Xie Jin 解縉 [1369–1415], which read: «The ancient and modern affairs of the world have been recorded here and there in the various works but the books are very many and it is not easy to carefully read them. I desire to gather and classify all materials from all works and ar-

⁶ See HONG Mai.

⁷ See SUN Chengze.

⁸ See SHEN Defu & SUN Chengze.

⁹ [This is the fourth son of Emperor Hongwu, whose claim to the succession was set aside in favor of the grandson, who reigned as Emperor Hui. Yanwang 燕王, the Prince of Yan, by force of arms seized the throne from Huidi and began to reign as Chengzu, with the *nianhao* or reigning title Yongle].

range them according to rhyming characters so that to search will be as convenient as taking an object from a bag. I once saw the *Yunfu* 韻府 and *Huiqi* 回溪,¹⁰ two works in which the subject matter was orderly, but the selections were not extensive and the records were too abridged, therefore I desire that you follow me. From the time contracts were made in writing down to the classics, histories, philosophical works and belles-lettres, and the works of all the various writers down to the writings dealing with astronomy, geography, divination by use of *yin* and *yang*, medicine, divination by lot and tortoise, Buddhism, Taoism, arts and crafts, etc., all these are to be prepared and compiled into one work. Do not become tired because of its immensity¹¹».

On the *dingsi* 丁巳 day of the 11th month of the 2nd year [1404] the Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, with the annexed title, Supervisor of Instruction, Xie Jin and others, presented the work which they compiled and arranged according to rhymes. The emperor gave it the title *Wenxian dacheng* and after presenting XIE Jin and the other one hundred and forty-seven men with their respective awards, he spread a banquet in the Libu 禮部 or Board of Ceremonies building.

After the presented work had been reviewed many parts were found to be imperfect therefore the emperor ordered it revised and instructed the Junior Preceptor of the Heir Apparent, Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 [1335–1418] and the Vice-President of the Board of Punishments, Liu Jichi 劉季箎 and XIE Jin to superintend the work. He also ordered the Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, Wang Jing 王景, the Reader of the Hanlin Academy, Wang Da 王達, the Libationer Hu Yan 胡儼, the Groom of the Library, Yang Pu 楊溥, and the Literatus Chen Ji 陳濟 to be Chief Compilers. The Reader of the Hanlin Zou Ji 鄒緝, the Hanlin Compilers Wang Bao 王褒, Liang Qian 梁潛,

¹⁰ The *Siku zongmu* catalogue states that this [Huiqi] is identical with the *Huiqi shiyun* 回溪史韻. [The Yunfu referred to here is the *Yunfu qunyu* 韻府羣餘 by Yin Shifu 陰時夫 of the Song dynasty].

¹¹ In the biography of Chen Ji 陳濟, given in the *Ming waishi* 明外史, it states that when Chengzu was preparing the *Yongle dadian* Chen Ji, a scholar without any degrees, through the recommendation of a high official, was summoned to be Duzongcai 都總裁 [chief compiler?]; and Zeng Qi 曾棨 and others to be Vice Chief Compilers. Those in charge of the compiling and the students of the Imperial Academy of Learning employed, amounted to several thousand persons. Those who were to examine the several million *juan* or books found them so vast that there seemed to be no beginning or end. Chen Ji and the Grand Preceptor of the Heir Apparent, Yao Guangxiao and several other persons prepared the Introductory rules for using the work and classified and examined the whole so that it became systematized. When the copyists had doubts they often asked Chen Ji when he would answer them without hesitation. When finished he was promoted to be Assistant Secretary of the Supervisorate of Instruction.

Wu Pu 吳溥, Li Guan 李管, Yang Gou 楊覲, Zeng Qi 曾棨, the Hanlin Compiler Zhu Hong 朱紘, the Hanlin Graduates Wang Hong 王洪, Jiang Ji 蔣驥, Pan Ji 潘畿, Wang Cheng 王稱,¹² Su Bohou 蘇伯厚, Zhang Boying 張伯穎, the Recorders Liang Yongxing 梁用行, the Hanlin Bachelor Yang Xiang 楊相, the Secretary of the Supervisorate Yin Changlong 尹昌隆, the Registrar of the Imperial Clan Court Gao Deyang 郭得陽,¹³ the Secretary of the Board of Civil office Ye Di 葉砥, the Provincial Judge of Shantung Yan Bi 晏璧, were all made Vice Chief Compilers. The Emperor ordered the members of the Libu 禮部 or Board of Ceremonies¹⁴ to select from the officials within the capital and outside, profound scholars of literary ability to be compilers; and to choose from members of the Guozijian or Imperial Academy of Learning and from scholars and students in the schools in outside prefectures and districts those who were good in penmanship to serve as calligraphers. He then opened a bureau in the Wenyuange 文淵閣 and ordered the Guanglusi 光祿寺 or Banqueting Court to supply the daily food.

On the *yichou* 乙丑 day of the 11th months of the 5th year [1407], the Junior Preceptor of the Heir Apparent, Yao Guangxiao, and others presented the revised edition of the *Wenxian dacheng*. In all they numbered 22,211 *juan*, and 11,095 volumes.¹⁵

Again [the Emperor] gave it the title *Yongle dadian* 文獻大成. The Emperor personally wrote a preface to head the whole work, which reads as follows: «In ancient times the saintly rulers in their government of the world fully carried out the principles of penetrating the purpose of all phenomena and bringing to fruition the affairs of the universe, and to the highest degree

¹² [The second character of Wang Cheng's name 稱, is written 侑 *fu* but this is an error. See Imperial catalogue j. 137:7, and account given by SUN 1929: 209].

¹³ [The first character of Guo Deyang's name is written 尙, but this is an error. See the two above works].

¹⁴ [Our text gives Lidu, but this is an error and should be Libu].

¹⁵ As given by SUN Chengze, the number of *juan* and volumes is the same. The *Gujin tushu jicheng* or Chinese Imperial Encyclopedia, quoting the *Minghuang zhaoyun ji* 明皇肇運紀, writes 22,927 *juan*. The *Yehuobian* 野獲編 gives 22,900 or more *juan* and 11,095 volumes. The *Yunshizhai bitan* 韻石齋筆談 by JIANG Shaoshu gives 22,011 *juan* and 11,095 volumes. The *Mingshi yiwenzhi* 明史藝文志 gives 22,900 or more *juan*. Yao Guangxiao and others presented a memorial and original preface; in both the number was given as 22,937 *juan*. The *Siku zongmu* 四庫總目 or Catalogue of the Imperial Library of Emperor Qianlong of the Manchu dynasty, and the *Xu tongkao* 續通考 by Ji Huang 嵇璜, the *Rixia jiuwenkao* 日下舊聞考 by YU Minzhong, *Mingji* 明紀 and LONG Wenbing's *Ming huiyao* 龍文彬明會要 all give the same number. The *Shijiazhai yangxinlu* 十駕齋養新錄 by QIAN Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804) quoting the statement by Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 also gives the same number. Therefore, we rely upon this number [22,937].

fulfilled the duty of perfecting and assisting. They cultivated manners, ceremonies and music and illumined culture. They expounded the supreme principles and propagated civilization.

Fuxi 伏羲 (the first of the legendary emperors) first drew the *bagua* 八卦, penetrated the transcendental virtues and classified the natures of physical phenomena. He made books in order to change from the knotted-cords methods of dealing. Shennong 神農 conferred the benefits of the law in order to teach the world. When Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 succeeded to the throne, they changed the methods in order to avoid tiring the people; they inspired and converted them so that they grew accustomed to these changes. They let fall their robes and the world was governed. When Emperor Yu 禹 promulgated his *jiuzhou* 九州 (Nine Divisions of the Great Plan of the Book of History), Tang 湯 [Cheng Tang, founder of the Shang dynasty, who reigned B.C. 1766–1752] established the bonds that hold men together. The saintly men continued the extreme supernatural mysteries and were rulers of creative ability. All that could be called formulating doctrines and promoting benevolent rule's principles had not been mentioned by man. When Wenwang 文王 and Wuwang 武王 succeeded to the throne, what the father (Wenwang) did, the son recorded. When these two preceding dynasties [Xia and Shang] are examined, one sees how refined was their civilization. Confucius was born at the end of the Zhou 周 dynasty. He possessed virtues but held no office. He came after several saintly men, and the creation of principles had been already completed. Therefore, he eulogized the *Yijing* 易經, prefaced the *Shujing* 書經, and wrote the *Chunqiu*, collecting together the great achievements of the sages. One may call this performance really greater than that of the creators. When the Chou dynasty came to an end, it was succeeded by the Zhanguo 戰國 or Contending States, when the spacious words of those who advocated alliance and isolation, and militarism and pacifism [between states] were influential.

The writers were heterodox; the people were heretics; and the traces of benevolent rulers' principles were entirely lost. When we come to the Qin dynasty, there was the disaster of the burning and prohibiting of the books, so that these principles were brought to an end, while in the middle of the course. When the Han dynasty arose the teaching of the six arts gradually spread and the classics which were saved could be studied. From the Han to the Tang, and from Tang to the Song, the writings were continuous and prolific, and of this we have sufficient proof. But since the three dynasties [Xia, Shang, and Zhou], the brilliant civilizations worthy of praise were none other than those of the Han, Tang, and Song. Lofty and great was our Taizu gao

huangdi 太祖高皇帝 [founder of the Ming dynasty]. When he received the divine decree he united the empire, using the gift of divine virtue to extend the profundities of writings. He created decorum and music and established the standards of literature, so that they were comparable in their thoroughness and comprehensiveness to the effects of the principles of the enlightened and saintly emperors. Since I have inherited the foundation of the empire, I have given intense thought to compilation and narration.

In a time of great confusion there must be a literary work of systematic character to make orderly political affairs; to standardise human customs; to record the transmitted teachings of the hundred benevolent rulers and to summarize the writings of the successive dynasties. The period covered is remote and of long duration, and as the books and writings are abundant, we often regret the difficulty of making them into one. Even in the study of an insignificant thing, the extensive reading necessary, one cannot cover. In seeking the realities of a thing, even though one exhausts his energy, he cannot exhaust the truth. This is comparable to washing out gold from sand, and gathering pearls from the sea — things difficult to do. Therefore, I have ordered the officials in charge of literature to compile together the books of the *Siku* 四庫 [Four treasuries of Literature] and to purchase the transmitted books of the world. Beginning with those of ancient times and continuing down to the present, they were widely gathered and extensively selected. Some were classified and some were separated and compiled into a comprehensive work. *Qi* 氣 [vapor?] was the beginning of the universe. When there was *qi* they began to have sound. When there was sound, they began to have words, therefore, the rhymes should be used to link up the characters, and characters used to tie together the facts. When the essentials are brought out, the details must necessarily be clear. If one makes the beginning clear, the end will become manifest. This work comprehends the immensity of the universe and in it are systematically gathered the similarities and differences between the ancient and the modern, the important, and insignificant, the refined and coarse — all being included. The rest, including the words of miscellaneous writers, are also added for reading so as to gather everything and preserve all for research. By means of rhymes, the reader can search for the characters, and by means of the characters he may investigate the facts. From the source one traces the stream as surely as the arrow hitting the target. When one opens the volumes nothing will be hidden. The work was started in the autumn of the 1st year [1403] and completed in the winter of the 5th year [1407], the total number amounting to 22,937 *juan*. The work has been given the title *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典, and at the request of my

subordinate officials, I have written a preface to head the work. I have formally maintained that before there were saintly men, the principles of righteousness pervaded the universe; and before we had the Six Classics, the principles of righteousness were embodied within the saintly men. As soon as the Six Classics came into being, the principles of the saintly men became manifest. The so-called principles of righteousness put the universe in order, and they influenced the ancient and modern periods. When systematized, they became but a single truth; when scattered, they become a myriad things. When separated and diffused, they are in a state of confusion. When there is nothing to systematize them, they cannot be unified. When the scattered parts are gathered together and the various ramifications have been summarized, we realize the vastness of the principles of righteousness in which all in the universe are included. I have made a deep study of the precepts of the sages, aimed at the principles which are manifested, and I have also discussed them. However as the government of all things is very complicated, it is really worthy of careful and repeated study. Therefore, I attempt a description of it and place it at the head of this work. This I hope will be transmitted to eternity, so that it may be of some trivial service».

The emperor gave to Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 and others, 2169 in all, salaries of different amounts.¹⁶ While it would seem that those employed at that time were of this number, still SUN Chengze 孫承澤 gives the following: «Directors general, 3; Vice Directors general, 25; Compilers, 347; additional hired Compilers, 5; Bianxie 編寫 [Editors of the Manuscript], 332; Kanxiang 看詳 [Proofreaders], 57; Copyists, 1381; Xusong jiaoshou 續送教授 [alternately employed Directors of Studies?], 10; Banshi guanli 辦事官吏 [managing officials], 20; making a total of 2180 men» [see Chunmingmeng yulu 春明夢餘錄 or Description of Beijing].¹⁷ Compared with the total given in the *Shilu* 實錄 [*Chengzu shilu*], this is 11 more. Is this difference due to the fact that at the time the 10 jiaoshou were regarded as *xusong* and were not given salary? However, search in various other works shows that among those who filled the positions of Vice Directors General there also were the two persons, Wang Jin 王璉 and Zhao Youtong 趙友同 [see Yehuobian 野獲編 or Inofficial matters of the Wanli era],¹⁸ Xu Xu 徐旭 [see Yehuobian 野獲編 or Inofficial matters of the Wanli era],¹⁹ Hu Guang 胡廣

¹⁶ In Wang Shihan's 汪師韓 work entitled *Hanmen zhuixue*, the number given is 2119 men. In Shen Defu's *Yehuobian*, it is the same.

¹⁷ See SUN Chengze.

¹⁸ See SHEN Defu.

¹⁹ See SHEN Defu.

[see Yunzhizhai bitan 韻石齋筆談 or Brush notes on rare books],²⁰ Jin Shi 金實, Wang Ruyu 王汝玉, Zheng Ci 鄭賜, Chen Jingzong 陳敬宗, Wei Ji 魏驥, Li Changqi 李昌祺, Huang Zongzai 黃宗載, Zhang Hong 張洪, Lin Hong 林鴻, Wang Cheng 王稱, Shen Du 沈度 [see Inofficial Ming history],²¹ Seng Dahui 僧大回 [see Documents of the year bingchen from the Zhangbao Studio]²² (a Buddhist named Dahui), Jiang Qi 姜啓, Jing Xiuru 敬修如, Gui Zhinan 珪指南 [see Hanmen zhuixue 韓門綴學 or Studies of Wang Shihan whose pseudonym was Hanmen, on different subjects]²³, and others, 19 in all.

Of those from schools in outside prefectures and districts engaged in copying drafts who may be identified, there were only Mr. Gao Ming 高明 and others from Nanyang, Jiaxian and such districts [see Veritable Records of Emperor Chengzu].²⁴ Therefore, it is clear that what has been stated by JIANG Shaoshu 姜紹書 concerning Emperor Chengzu's ordering scholars and officials to revise the *Yongle dadian* and its completion within ten or more years; and what has been stated in ZHU Yunming's 祝允明 work concerning the incompletion of the compilation were merely the echoes of statements by others and, therefore, quite untrustworthy.

In the 6th year of Yongle he ordered that one copy be written [see Xu tongkao 續通考 or Sequel to General History].²⁵ But afterwards due to the enormous expense this plan was abandoned [see Chronicle of the Hanlin Academy in Beijing in Ming times].²⁶ Then the statements by ZHAO Youtong that the emperor also ordered the whole set to be copied; that it was taken to be printed; and that it was finished in the 10th month of the 7th year of Yongle [see ZHAO Youtong's collected works],²⁷ were really regarding a tentative plan which was in fact never carried out. Note Mr. SHEN Defu's 沈德符 statement: «In the 23d year of Wanli (1595), the Nan[jing] jjiu 南京祭酒²⁸ or Libationer of Nanjing Lu Kejiao 陸克教 published a memorial to the emperor which read: «The *Yongle dadian* which was compiled by Wen-

²⁰ See JIANG Shaoshu.

²¹ See *Ming waishi* 明外史.

²² See *Zhangbaozhai bingchen zhapei* 章寶齋丙辰割配.

²³ See WANG Shihan.

²⁴ See the *Chengzu shilu* 成祖實錄.

²⁵ See Ji Huang.

²⁶ See the work *Jiujing cilin zhi* 舊京詞林志.

²⁷ See ZHAO Youtong's collected works entitled *Cunxuan ji* 存軒集, where he requests Liu Gongfu 劉公復, the Second Class Secretary of the Board of Ceremonies, to write a preface.

²⁸ [In this context, as given by SUN 1929: 211, this title is given as *Nanjing jjiu*, therefore, we have supplied a word here].

huangdi [Yongle] is never seen by people in the world. The work should be apportioned among the travelling censors, each to be responsible for one kind of function, and they should collate and completely classify it. Copies should be kept in the Liang Yong 兩雍 [Two Imperial Colleges of Antiquity], thereby completing a magnificent achievement for this dynasty. The emperor agreed to put this plan into effect, but up to the present time it has not been published». Regarding this, the books written reached to 20,000 or more *juan*. Coming to the time of Emperor Shizong 世宗 (1522–1566), it was again copied in order to provide against some unforeseen calamity. Not until the time of Muzong 穆宗 (1567–1572) was it completed. From this we can be relieved of doubt [regarding its printing].

Now examine the following from the *Shizong shilu* 世宗實錄: «On the *yichou* 乙丑 day of the 8th month of the 4th year of Jiajing (1562), the Emperor ordered that the *Yongle dadian* be again copied. He ordered the Senior Vice-President of the Board of Ceremonies, Gao Gong and the Secretary of the Supervisorate of Instruction, with the additional titles of Chancellor of the Imperial Academy and Tutor, Zhang Juzheng 張居正, each to resume their original duties [in the compilation of the *Yongle dadian*] and enter the bureau to compare the manuscript copies. Gao Gong 高拱, Vice-President of the Board, still using his title with the annexed title, Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, together with the Secretary of the Supervisorate of Instruction and Attendant and Reader to the Emperor with the annexed title Sub-Reader of the Hanlin Academy, Qu Jingchun 瞿景淳, were appointed to fill the positions of Zongjiao-guan [Proofreaders-in-Chief?]. Zhang Juzheng retaining his title of Secretary of the Supervisorate of Instruction had annexed the title, Hanlin Compiler, 7a Class, and together with the Hanlin Compilers, 6b Class, Lin Lian 林謙, Ding Shishan 丁士善, Xu Shixing 徐時行 and the Hanlin Compilers, 7a Class, Lü Min 呂旻, Wang Xilie 王希烈, Zhang Siwei 張四維, Tao Dalin 陶大臨, Hanlin Graduates of the 3rd degree, Wu Kexing 吳克行 and Ma Zijiang 馬自強, filled the positions of Fenjiao-guan 分校官 [Associate Editors].²⁹ In the early part of the reign of Wenhuangdi [Yongle], he ordered the scholars and officials to make selections from the books in the Imperial Library and classify this material according to rhymes in order to make it convenient to examine. In this task of compiling, there were in all

²⁹ At that time, among those additional men who filled the position of *zongjiao* [Editor in Chief], there were in fact, Chen Yiqin 陳以勤, Wang Daren 王大任, Qin Minglei 秦鳴雷, and Hu Zhengmeng 胡正蒙: while among the names of those filling positions of proofreader, there were in addition Sun Ting 孫鯁, Hu Jie 胡杰, and Ding Shimei 丁士美. These facts may all be seen in the fragmentary volumes of the *Yongle dadian* which are at present preserved.

3,000 or more men and the *juan* or books numbered in all 30,000 and some odd. It was entitled *Yongle dadian*. When the work was finished it was stored in the library called Wenlou 文樓.³⁰ The book covers were very large. The emperor in the early years liked matters concerning the ancient rites and literature, and at that time he made investigations and had a very high regard for them. Henceforth, when he had doubts he would carefully search [in the *Yongle dadian*], using the index of rhymes. On his table there were always one or two cases of books.³¹

When the three palace halls were on fire the emperor heard of it and was startled. He at once ordered those about him to quickly ascend to the Wenlou Library and rescue the *Yongle dadian*. Within the *jiaye*³² or first night watch [7–9 p.m.], he had this order transmitted three or four times and as a result the books were not destroyed. The emperor wished to have another set copied and stored in a different place in order to provide against another catastrophe; and of this he very frequently spoke to the library officials. Now he ordered³³ the Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, Xu Jie in the following: «Formerly I planned to again copy the *Yongle dadian* so that it would be in two places. Now, being in the cool of autumn, this may be done». Then he selected from among the scholars in the Board of Ceremonies those who were clever in writing each kind of the *jieshu* or clerky style, such as CHENG Daonan 程道南, and others — a hundred or more men, to go to the Historiographers Library to share in the copying and ordered GAO Gong and others to proofread it. On the *jiawu* day of the 3rd month of the 45th year (1566), the Chief Proofreader, QU Jingchun 瞿景淳 died. On the *jiayin* 甲寅 day he changed the Imperial Academy Tutor HU Jie 胡杰 to the position of Secretary in the Supervisorate of Instruction and had him share in the proofreading of the *Yongle dadian*».

JIANG Shaoshu 姜紹書 also says: «In the 36th year (1557) of Jiajing there was a fire in the imperial palace. Emperor Shizong wrote an order to rescue the books from the fire and fortunately they were not burned. He also issued an imperial decree to the library official named Xu Jie 徐階 [1503–1583],

³⁰ The *Siku zongmu* catalogue says that this is identical with the present Hongyige 宏義閣. [A pavilion annexed to the Throne Hall of the Imperial Palace known as the Taihedian].

³¹ The work *Yehuo bian buyi* 補遺 by Shen Defu says: «Of the former emperors none have been known to care for opening and reading books, excepting Shizong (1522–1566) who sincerely liked them. Glancing inside the palace one would always find several tens of cases of books on the top of his table».

³² The *Yunmen zhuoxue* writes it [八+申]夜 [which is the old form of 甲夜]. [Typographic character not found].

³³ The original text erroneously wrote *lun* 論 [instead of *yu* 諭, order, decree, etc.].

with the posthumous title Wenzheng 文貞, ordering him to have the literati copy the work according to the style of the original. At that time the copyists were 108 in number, and each man daily copied three folios. During the time from the 41st year (1562) of Jiajing down to the 1st year (1567) of Longqing 隆慶 they first announced the completion of the work» [see Yunzhizhai bitan 韻石齋筆談 or Brush notes on rare books].³⁴ Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 also says: «When the three palace halls were on fire, Emperor Shizong ordered his officials to immediately go into the Wenlou Library and rescue the books. During the night he issued these orders three or four times and accordingly the books were saved from destruction. Also, in the following year they again wrote a copy and stored it in another place [see Shijiazhai yangxinlu 十駕齋養新錄 or Qian Daxin's reading notes].³⁵ The statement of the *Siku zongmu*, «He again made an authentic (*zheng* 正) and a duplicate (*fu* 副) — two sets»,³⁶ evidently based upon the above, is an error. Also, the following statement from the *Jiujing cilin chih* 舊京詞林志: «Then they sent the original set to Nanjing», I fear cannot be entirely relied upon; for if at that time they already had made two additional copies, they surely would first send the recopied set away because they certainly would not place the valuable things of the imperial ancestors in such a remote and abandoned place. Moreover, the *Shilu* or Veritable Records, clearly mentions one copy. But the *Siku zongmu*, in its desire to combine or harmonize the statement in the *Chunmingmeng yulu* 春明夢餘錄, «The *zheng* [first authentic copy made from the original] was kept in the Wenyuange and the *fu* [or duplicate copy] was stored in the Huangshicheng 皇史宬 or Imperial Archive» did so without making careful investigation, but merely mentioning the recopied *zheng* and *fu* sets — two copies. Subsequent people accepted this entire statement and wrongly regarded it as meaning that at that time they already had three sets, that is, the *yuanben* or original, *zhengben* [or a first authentic copy of the *yuanben*], and a *fuben* or a second copy [either made from the *yuanben* or *zhengben*]. They certainly did not know that the *zhengben* was identical with the *yuanben* and that the *fuben* was identical with the recopy [of the original set]. The things could not change, but those who recorded these matters, in their quotations, used these terms [*yuan*, *zheng*, and *fu*] interchangeably so that the meanings were not the same.

³⁴ See JIANG Shaoshu.

³⁵ See QIAN Daxin.

³⁶ A note states that this incident may be seen in the *Ming shilu*; but all the present editions of the *Shilu* or Veritable Records are lacking this text.

The copy was first stored in the Bige 秘閣 or Imperial Library [see Ye-huobian buyi 野獲編補遺 or Supplement to Inofficial matters of the Wanli era];³⁷ and after the capital was removed to Peking, the books were removed and kept in the Wenlou.³⁸ In the time of Hongzhi (1488–1505) they were kept in metal boxes [in the Imperial Ancestral Temple?] [see Yunzhizhai bitan 韻石齋筆談 or Brush notes on rare books].³⁹ In Jiajing's time they were again removed to the Wenlou. When the three palace halls were burned, they were removed to the Shiguan or Historiographers Library [see Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong].⁴⁰ When the duplicate copy was finished, one set was stored in the Wenyuange and one was stored in the Huangshicheng [see Rixia jiuwenkao 日下舊聞考 or Research on old news on Beijing, and: Shuntian fuzhi 順天府志 or Gazetteer of Shuntian Prefecture].⁴¹ This coincides with what was said about the storing of the books in two places. Since the reigns of Long and Wan [Longqing, 1567–1572, and Wanli, 1573–1619] troubles with bordering countries were frequent. The rulers were corrupt and the officials degraded and no one seemed to care about these matters. If one reads Li Weizheng's 李維楨 condemnations of the official corruption [see Hanmen zhuixue 韓門綴學 or Studies of Wang Shihan],⁴² he may see all about this. As a result of this laxity there were 12 volumes badly damaged and 15 stolen. Although it does not clearly speak of the *Dadian*, still it could hardly be expected that the *Dadian* was kept intact.⁴³ Fang 方以智 Yizhi and Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 were both born during the latter part of the Ming dynasty, and were regarded as men of unusual learning. Mr. FANG sighed because he was unable to see this [*Yongle dadian*] [see *Tongya*].⁴⁴ Mr. GU regarded all

³⁷ See SHEN Defu, *buyi*.

³⁸ See previous note.

³⁹ See JIANG Shaoshu.

⁴⁰ See *Shizong shilu*.

⁴¹ See YU Minzhong and the *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志.

⁴² See WANG Shihan.

⁴³ The *Siku zongmu* says: «Since the overthrow of the Ming dynasty, the Nanjing original copy and the Huangshicheng or Imperial Archive copy were both damaged by fire». But Li Qinqiang's 禮親王 work entitled *Xiaoting zalu* 嘯亭雜錄 says: «I heard Xu Kunshan 徐崑山 and Li Mutang 李穆堂, the Vice President of a Government Board, speak of the Huangshicheng having a complete set of the *Yongle dadian*, which, compared with the set kept in the Hanlinyuan, contained over 1000 volumes more. This is the first one which Yao Guangxiao and Xie Jin 解縉 compiled. The copying was of fine workmanship and the Longqing copy could not equal it. It is pitiful that in those days they were careless in observing the proprieties and did not carefully investigate whether the books were really preserved or not».

⁴⁴ See *Tongya* 通雅, an encyclopedic linguistic work by Fang Yizhi 方以智 of the Ming dynasty.

the sets as lost. So, the real condition at that time is not difficult to imagine. At the downfall of the Ming dynasty, the original copy of the *Yongle dadian* could not be seen; while the duplicate copy also lacked 2422 *juan* [see Critical catalogue of the Imperial Library *Siku quanshu*].⁴⁵ When the Manchu dynasty scholars compiled the Ming history they mentioned this [*Yongle dadian*] but gave no details, one merely seeing its title among the *Leishu* or Encyclopedias in the Bibliographical records section. Qian Daxin 錢大昕 has said: «What Guozhen [ZHU Guozhen] speaks of as being recopied, is identical with the one stored in the Hanlin Imperial Academy; but they do not mention Hanlin, but speak of another place. So, really the copy first written was kept in the Imperial Palace. In the Manchu dynasty period it was removed from the Hanlin Academy and now it has been again removed and is kept in the Wenhua-dian 文華殿» [see *Shijiazhai yangxinlu* 十駕齋養新錄 or Qian Daxin's reading notes]⁴⁶.

An investigation shows that Mr. QIAN 錢 won his *jinshi* degree in the 19th year (1754) of Emperor Qianlong, being about the same time as Liu Tongxun 劉統勳, Xu Zujing 許祖京, ZHU Yun 朱筠, Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, and various other men. In the 38th year (1763) of Qianlong, ZHU Yun, the Director of Studies, of Anhui Province, sent a memorial to the emperor as follows: «Your servant in the Hanlin Academy has constantly read the *Yongle dadian* of the former Ming dynasty. The books' collation is lacking in order, sometimes they are separated from the various books in order to classify under another system. But of old works in their complete form, which the people of the world do not ordinarily see, many are in this collection. I request that a selection be made of the old works which are complete in so many copies; that they be separated and copies be written in order to prepare them for publication». When Gaozong read this memorial he marveled at it;

⁴⁵ See *Siku zongmu*. The *Xu tongkao* 續通考 by Ji Huang says, «...At present the original work is still preserved, and the part lacking is a bare one-tenth». Now if we reckon the entire work according to this, a tenth part should be about 2422. The *Ciyuan* says: «The Manchu Emperor Shizu (1644–1661), removed the *zheng* copy to the Qianqing-gong. In Jiaqing *ding-si* (1797), the Qianqing-gong was burned and the *zheng* copy was also destroyed by fire». This is also without fact. In the Manchu dynasty among the leaders with a liking for ancient literature, there was no one equal to Emperor Gaozong (Qianlong 1736–1795). In Gaozong's time he established a bureau for compiling the books of the *Siku* (*Siku quanshu*), practically all the works being examined and selections made; therefore, after one glance at the petition of Zhu Yun 朱筠 requesting the *Dadian* to be examined, he immediately pushed aside all other proposals and sent persons who carefully investigated it. Ji Yun and other frequently sighed because of its missing parts and incompleteness. Could they have had stored at that time the original copy in the palace and not one official appointed to select and compile from this collection?

⁴⁶ See QIAN Daxin.

he gave it to a Minister of the Council of State for deliberation and action, and wrote a seven-character line poem in eight rhymes [or sixteen lines] in order to commemorate this event [see Zhu Sihe ji 朱笥河集 or Zhu Sihe collection].⁴⁷ The Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, Liu Tongxun delegated Xu Zujing to go and investigate this matter. Xu Zujing went to the Hanlin Academy and examined several tens of volumes, and reported back to LIU Tongxun as follows: «These books, although very extensive, yet many [most?] are works written after the Tang period. Furthermore, they have been cut and mutilated causing the material to be scattered and diffused so that it cannot be again compiled» [see Collection of the Jianzhishui Studio].⁴⁸ Liu Tongxun, following this, sent a petition to the emperor, in which he maintained, «that this has been removed and kept for many years, and since then many have become damaged or lost. Also, the plan of arrangement of the original work was according to a division of the rhymes». Really at that time the *Yongle dadian* was certainly kept in the Hanlin Academy building and I do not know what authority Mr. QIAN had when he spoke in this manner. Shortly after, Gaozong issued an edict to Liu Tongxun and others ordering that the original work be examined in detail and carefully compared, as a result of which Liu Tongxun and others again petitioned the emperor as follows: «Now we have examined the prefaces and first part of the *juan* or books of the original copy; and its writings have been selected and examined. It may with certainty be called extensive and be regarded as a link to connect with the *Siku quanshu*. An examination of the contents of the books shows that they separated the whole into *bu* or sections and divided the parts in boxes. The material was compiled according to rhymes and subdivided according to characters, their sole purpose being to compile the utmost bulk. It is nothing more than an imitation of the encyclopedias, therefore, it resulted in confusion and contradiction, and owing to its style of compilation, it is inadequate. Even in their use of rhyming characters for arranging their material they did not follow the old rhyming characters of the Tang and Song periods, but selected the rhymes of the *Hongwu zhengyun* 洪武正韻 as their determinants, so already one perceives the evil of disorderly arrangement. Moreover, the classical teachings comprise the root and source of all books; but in this arrangement of material according to rhymes there is confusion, as in the *Yi[-jing]* or Book of Changes, the first entry is Menggua; in the *Shi[-jing]* or Book of Odes, the first entry is Dadong; and in the *Zhouli*

⁴⁷ See ZHU Yun. See also *Zhizuzhai ji* 知足齋集 (Collection of the Zhizu Studio) 10

⁴⁸ See *Jianzhishui-zhai ji* 鑑止水齋集.

or Ritual of the Zhou dynasty period, the first entry is Dong-guan.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in using the characters [to make their subdivisions of the material under each rhyme] they do not have regard for the natural order of the *Yijing*, *Shijing*, *Shu[jing]* or Book of History, *Li* or Rituals and *Chunqiu* or Spring and Autumn Annals, therefore, there is misarrangement. Still worse in their entries the *liushu* 六書 or six scripts,⁵⁰ the *zhuan* or seal, *li* or ancient official, *zhen* or clerky, and *cao* or grass style of characters, they have added the patterns of these as written by Mi Fei 米芾 and Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫⁵¹ as if in sketching a head to add horns. It is absurd and nonsensical. In the works outside the Confucianist writings, there is entered without authority the Buddhist canon and Taoist Classics; and under entries on the ancient censors comes care of library books. Judged by the principle of orderly arrangement, it is very much like a case of the hole and the handle not matching». Emperor Gaozong, because of its vastness, only selected what could be recorded as useful and what might serve to enlarge the collections in the Imperial Library. Then, from each department he appointed the following Hanlin Compilers: Liu Jiaozhi 劉校之, Liu Yoyun 劉躍雲, Chen Changtu 陳昌圖, Li Shouqian 勵守謙, Lan Yingyuan 藍應元, Zou Yuzao 鄒玉藻, Wang Jiazong 王嘉曾, Zhuang Chengjian 莊承錢, Wu Shouchang 吳壽昌, Liu Mei 劉湄, Wu Dian 吳典, Huang Xuan 黃軒, Wang Zeng 王增, Wang Erle 王爾烈, Min Sizheng 閔思誠, Chen Changqi 陳昌齊, Sun Chendong 孫辰東, Yu Dayou 俞大猷, Ping Shu 平恕, Li Yaodong 李堯棟, Zou Bingtai 鄒炳泰, Zhuang Tongmin 莊通敏, HUANG Shouling 黃壽齡, YU Ji 余集, Shao Jinhao 邵晉涵, Zhou Yongnian 周永年, Dai Zhen 戴震, Yang Changlin 楊昌霖, Mo Zhanlu 莫瞻菴, Wang Tanxiu 王坦修, Fan Zhong 范衷, Xu Zhaochun 許兆椿, Yu Ding 于鼎, Wang Chunxu 王春煦, Wu Dingwen 吳鼎雯, Wu Shenglan 吳省蘭, Wang Ruyang 汪如洋, Chen Wanqing 陳萬青, Zhu Kun 祝堃 — thirty nine men in all, to go ahead and examine and to fill the positions of Jiaokan [Comparers and Collators] of the *Yongle dadian* and

⁴⁹ [This happened because *dong*, the first rhyme in the *Hongwu zhengyun* dictionary is the rhyming character of *meng* and *dong*. What the critic has in mind is that these entries are necessarily random, whereas the study of the Classics should be progressive from the beginning of the *Yijing* or Book of Changes to the end of the last of the Classics].

⁵⁰ [These are the six classes of Chinese characters. See GILES 1912, under *liu*, for explanation concerning these].

⁵¹ [Mi Fei, 1051–1107, and Zhao Mengfu, 1254–1322, were two of China's famous calligraphers. As given in this context, this reference is terse; but in the *Yongle dadian kao* article by SUN 1929 a similar account is accompanied by an explanatory footnote which enables us to make this part clearer].

to compile and share in the work of editing.⁵² He also additionally appointed Wang Jihua 王際華 and Qiu Yuexiu 裘日修 Directors General. He also ordered «both to select assistants to share in the comparing and correcting and with one mind deliberate concerning the rules and regulations to be used in a careful and detailed comparison and revision of the *Yongle dadian*. Also, those works at present in current circulation and all works which, although classed with the ancient books, still have import lacking connection with the classical essentials, must not again be extracted and copied. Those works of which there are few in circulation, but are such as to open up the minds of future scholars and extend knowledge and information, should have their titles selected and their main essentials extracted and presented to me with an arranged catalogue to be deleted and arranged by me and then handed over to the printer. Of those works in the [*Dadian*] which cannot be extracted, and the titles of which should not be entirely ignored, it is only necessary to make an abridged analysis of their contents in order to help those from generation to generation to investigate and do research».⁵³ At that time, those parts which men extracted from the *Yongle dadian* and compiled into complete works altogether amounted to 66 classical works, 41 historical works, 103 philosophical works, and 175 belles-lettres, a total of 365 works and 4926 *juan*.⁵⁴ Emperor Gaozong also thought that the *Siku [quanshu]* was too voluminous and could not be carved, therefore, he accepted the proposal of Jin Jian 金簡 to use movable type and select those writings which concerned governmental affairs for the use of future scholars, which totalled 122 works. These were to be printed with the font of type called Wuyingdian juzhenban 武英殿聚珍版 and to be entitled *Juzhenban congshu*, and the title *Yongle dadian* was to be added in the *Leishu cunmu* 類書存目 (Preserved encyclopedias) section of the *Zibu* or Philosophical works in the *Siku zongmu* catalogue. From this time on the custom of compiling missing works daily increased; and Hanlin scholars such as Shao Jinhan, Sun Xingyan, and others, according to their personal likes, compiled collections from time to time. Those which may be examined today total 554 kinds.⁵⁵ Mr. Sun furthermore said: «I consider that these old works which were quoted in [the *Dadian*] were the books in the palace of the Northern Song rulers which

⁵² See names of officials in charge of compiling in the *Siku zongmu* catalogue.

⁵³ See edicts concerning this in the *Siku zongmu* catalogue.

⁵⁴ In different parts of the *Siku zongmu* catalogue these are now preserved. [See in the Imperial catalogue, Dadong shuju edition, 1926, j. 137:7, where the total given is 4946].

⁵⁵ A detailed catalogue of these has been separately published.

were seized by the Jin Tartars». I suspect that we still have some other transmitted works in the world from which quotations were not made [see Collectanea of Wenjing Hall].⁵⁶ But it is to be regretted that the *fuben* or duplicate set kept in the Hanlin Academy was destroyed in the catastrophe of the *gengshen* year (1860) of Emperor Xianfeng.⁵⁷ When it was examined in the *yihai* year (1875) of Emperor Guangxu it was found that there were no more than 5000 volumes. In the *bingzi* year (1876) there were only 3000 or more volumes; and in the *kuisi* year (1893) there were barely 600 or more volumes.⁵⁸ During the disorder in the *gengzi* year (1900),⁵⁹ the whole work was scattered and lost and nothing can be learned about them.⁶⁰ When the allied armies of eight nations entered the capital, some took the works to barricade themselves against the rain of bullets; and some of the books were abandoned in the gutters.⁶¹

When conditions gradually became peaceful, the people of each country that gradually came to know the value of these books in many instances took some back to their own countries as mementos. Now the libraries in Europe, United States, and Japan, each contain from one to up to ten or more volumes.⁶² At the end of the Manchu dynasty, the Department of Education delivered to the Metropolitan Library 60 volumes. Later on this library also obtained 3 volumes from a certain bookstore. The Department of Education has 4 volumes still in its possession, and at present the bookstore [in Peiping] known as the Liulichang Shugutang 琉璃廠述古堂 also has 2 volumes. All these are of the set again copied during the Jiaping period (1522–1566).⁶³ During the 8th and 9th years (1919–1920) of the Republic, Zhang Zongxiang 張宗祥⁶⁴ was Superintendent of the Library. He borrowed copies from Fu Yuanshu 傅沅叔, Ye Yuhu 葉玉虎, and the Department of Education and

⁵⁶ See *Wenjing-tang congshu* 問經堂叢書.

⁵⁷ [This is a reference to the capture of Peking by the joint French and English forces].

⁵⁸ All mentioned above may be seen in the *Ciyuan* 辭源.

⁵⁹ [This is the year of the Boxer uprising and consequent reprisals by foreign troops].

⁶⁰ See *Jingshi tushuguan shanben shumu zhi* (Catalogue of fine editions in Metropolitan Library, Peiping, China).

⁶¹ At present there are many venerable men in the capital who can relate the story of this.

⁶² See the contemporary writer Liang Qichao's *Zhongguo shixue yanjiu fa* (Methods of research in Chinese history).

⁶³ At the end of each *juan* there is the name of the *zongjiao* [chief editor] and *fujiao* [assistant editor], copyist, and punctuators, with their official titles. But as there is no distinction made between the *zhonglu zhengben* [first recopied authentic set] and a *zhonglu fuben* [second recopied duplicate set], this is further proof that during those days there was but one set recopied.

⁶⁴ [Former Chinese Minister to Japan].

recopied anew 10 volumes. At the same time the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Putnam of the United States Library of Congress, also sent a photostat copy of one volume. Altogether the Metropolitan Library has 74 volumes. Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 of Shangyu [district in Shaoxing Prefecture, Zhejiang], in his edition of the *Jishian congshu* 吉石菴叢書, also has a photographic copy of a volume. Mr. Luo states in his postface: «During the coup d'état in the *xinhai* year (1911), this volume circulated into Japan, and by chance was purchased by my friend, Mr. Fukuoka 富岡. Of the other [volumes of the *Dadian*], some are in libraries in private families, and they are unwilling to allow me to see them. Some are in the hands of booksellers who keep them as rarities and are waiting for a high price. Of all these we have been unable to obtain any information».

The number of *juan* of the *Yongle dadian* kept in Europe, United States, and various countries, may be seen in the article by Yuan Tongli 袁同禮 entitled “Yongle dadian kao” (in the *Xueheng zazhi* 學衡雜誌 No. 26) and the *Zhonghua tushuguan xiehui huibao* 中華圖書館協會會報 (Bulletin of the Library Association of China), no.4.

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