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Yü Sung-nien and His Rare Book Collection

MATSUURA AKIRA

During the Tao-kuang reign period (1821–1850) of late Ch'ing times, the *Collection from the I-chia Hall* (*I-chia t'ang ts'ung-shu*) was published in Shanghai. Included in this important collectanea are seven works by Sung and Yüan authors, totaling 256 *chüan*. Two of them are histories of the state of Shu-Han (A.D. 221–263) during the Three Kingdoms period (220–280). These two works have the same title: *A Continuation of the Dynastic History of the Later Han* (*Hsü Hou-Han shu*), compiled by Hsiao Ch'ang of the Southern Sung dynasty and Hao Ching (1223–1275) of the Yüan dynasty respectively. There are also three works on mathematics, *A Mathematical Work of Nine Chapters* (*Shu-shu chiu-chang*) by Ch'in Chiu-shao (1202–1261),[1] the *Expositions of the Nine Chapters of Mathematical Arts* (*Hsiang-chieh chiu-chang suan-fa*), and *The Mathematical Arts by Yang Hui* (*Yang Hui suan-fa*), both by Yang Hui.[2] Works of two eminent Yüan literary figures also appear in the collection: the *Complete Work of Yen-yüan* (*Yen-yüan chi*) by Tai Piao-yüan (1244–1311) and the *Complete Work of Recluse Ch'ing-jung* (*Ch'ing-jung chü-shih chi*) by Yüan Chüeh (1266–1327), which was the first of these seven works to be printed. The editor of the collection wrote a preface for each work. The earliest preface dates from the fourth month of the twentieth year of the Tao-kuang reign period (1840), and the last one from the winter of the twenty-third year of the same reign period (1842). Judging from the date of the last preface, it seems that the collection was published about 1843.[3]

The outstanding feature of this collection is that works in the collection are transcribed from Yüan and Ming editions, which were very difficult to

come by even during the editor's time. In particular, the two histories of the state of Shu-Han and the mathematical works are important and rare publications, giving particular significance to this collectanea.

Hsiao Ch'ang's *A Continuation of the Dynastic History of the Later Han* comprises forty-seven *chüan* and covers the period from A.D. 221 to 263. It took Hsiao twenty years to complete this work. He regarded Emperor Chao-lieh (r. 221–223) of the state of Shu-Han as the legitimate successor of the Later Han dynasty (25–220) and his own work as a continuation of the *Dynastic History of the Later Han* (*Hou-Han shu*). Hao Ching's work, as stated, also carries the title *A Continuation of the Dynastic History of the Later Han*, consists of ninety *chüan*, and covers roughly the same period as Hsiao Ch'ang's work. It was completed in 1272 and was first published in 1318 under the auspices of the Kiangsi Branch Secretariat (hsing-sheng) during the Yüan dynasty.

Ch'in Chiu-shao's work was a major contribution to the mathematics of his time. His process for numerical equations of higher degrees established him as the leader in this field, and he was at least three centuries ahead of his Western counterparts.[4] His work also deals with the application of mathematical approaches in a wide range of fields, such as astrology, surveying, taxation, construction, and business. This work, however, was not widely circulated even during Sung times. So far, no printed Sung edition of this work has ever been found.

Yang Hui was another mathematical giant in the thirteenth century. He and Ch'in Chiu-shao were credited with working out "full-blown decimal fractions applied to all operations." In China, the first occurrence of decimal fractions is to be found in a writing of the mid-third century A.D., whereas it was not until the sixteenth century that the Arabs and Europeans began to comprehend the significance of decimal fractions. In this field, Europe lagged behind China by over one thousand years.[5]

Works included in the *Collection from the I-chia Hall* are not only important and rare, but meticulously edited as well. In some cases, volumes of textual study of the works are attached to the original text. The person who collected, edited, and published these works in a collectanea is Yü Sung-nien, and the collectanea is a monument to his achievements as a scholar-collector.

Yü Sung-nien was a celebrity in Shanghai County during the T'ung-chih reign period (1862–1874). A biographical entry for him in the local gazet-

teer describes him as the younger son of a successful local businessman and millionaire, Yü Jun-kuei. Sung-nien had an older brother, P'eng-nien, who is said to have been very resourceful and good at assigning his subordinates jobs commensurate with their abilities. Yü P'eng-nien was also a businessman, perhaps spending much of his time helping his father with the family business. Yü Sung-nien was, however, different from his brother. He was both a scholar and book-lover and a businessman. During the T'ung-chih reign period, he was a "tribute student by grace" (*en kung-sheng*), a designation used by the Directorate of Education (Kuo-tzu chien) to enable candidates, who were chosen through a specially arranged examination, to participate in the provincial civil service examination and be considered at least the equal of a national university student (*chien-sheng*).

The family wealth enabled Sung-nien to acquire a sizable private collection of books, said to have amounted to tens of thousands of *chüan*. He was an enthusiastic collector of Sung-edition books, especially those that either had never been engraved or for which the wood printing blocks had been destroyed. His collection also included rare Yüan and Ming editions. To acquire these books, Sung-nien spared no time or money. During the Tao-kuang reign period (1821–1850), Sung-nien traveled all the way to Yang-chou to purchase from a local salt merchant a Yüan edition of the *Sea of Jade* (*Yü hai*), a Southern Sung encyclopedia of two hundred *chüan*. For this encyclopedia alone, Sung-nien paid as much as six hundred *liang* of gold.[6]

The price that Yü Sung-nien paid for that one encyclopedia, and his expensive hobby of purchasing rare Chinese books over a long period, indicate that the Yü family must have been extremely wealthy. In a late Ch'ing diary (*Jen Mo-shu t'ui-chih chai jih-chi*), the Yü family was also referred to as "Yü Sen-sheng."[7] The term "Sen-sheng" seems to have been used as the name referring to the entire Yü family business, since it was also used by Sung-nien's brother P'eng-nien. The family had been in commercial shipping for at least two generations. When Sung-nien was in charge of the business, his fleet expanded to more than fifty ships.[8] And among the twenty-four shipping businesses in Shanghai, the Yü family's ranked number two. That business provided Sung-nien with the funds to purchase his rare book collection.

The protective trading policy of the Ch'ing court facilitated the Yü family's establishment of its dominant position in the lucrative coastal shipping business. This policy forbade foreign ships to sail or to transport goods

along the Chinese coast and inland rivers, thus shielding the Yü family from foreign competition. The financial resources of the Yü family steadily increased. One measure of their unusual position in the business world is that in 1856 the family cast three types of silver coins.[9] Their privately issued silver dollars were among the earliest silver coins cast and circulated in Shanghai, or in China.[10] The casting and issuance of silver coins by the Yü family and other wealthy families in the commercial shipping business marked the apex of their economic strength.[11] But this strength was to be significantly weakened two years later, in 1858, when the Ch'ing court signed a series of treaties with Western powers after its disastrous defeat in the Second Opium War, allowing foreigners various economic, political, and economic privileges in China. Four years later, in 1862, when the Ch'ing court eventually lifted the ban on foreign ships engaging in transportation in China, the Yü family and other Chinese shipping business suffered great losses from foreign competition.[12] In the same year, Yü Sung-nien died.

After the death of Yü Sung-nien, perhaps out of economic pressure or lack of interest in collecting traditional Chinese books, members of the Yü family began to sell Sung-nien's rare book collection. It was the kind of opportunity other collectors are always waiting for. Some of his Sung and Yüan rare books were purchased by Ting Jih-ch'ang (1823–1882), governor of Kiangsu, but the majority of Yü Sung-nien's collection, which totaled forty-eight thousand *chüan*, was sold to Lu Hsin-yüan, salt distribution commissioner in Fukien and a famed late Ch'ing book collector. Yü's rare book collection, however, was not to remain in Lu Hsin-yüan's private library. In 1907, the collection was again sold, this time to Japan; it became the major holding of the Seikadō bunko,[13] originally a private library but now a branch of the Japan Diet Library in Tokyo.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The loss of Lu Hsin-yüan's great private library to a Japanese buyer in 1907 created such a shock in Chinese government and elite circles that steps were taken to prevent other collections from leaving the country. In particular, it led to the founding of the Kiangsu Provincial Library, when the government in 1909 intervened to keep the famed library of Ting Ping (1832–1899) from being sold to another Japanese buyer.

NOTES

1. The work appears under different titles in various places. In the *Chih-chai shu-lu chieh-t'i* (Shanghai: Shanghai ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1987), 12, p. 368, the title for this work is *Shu-shu ta-lüeh*. In the *Kuei-hsin tsa-chih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1988), p. 170, it is referred to as *Shu-hsüeh ta-lüeh*, and in the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965), 107, p. 905, as *Shu-hsüeh chiu-chang*. It is believed that the current title, *Shu-shu chiu-chang*, was given to it by Chao Ch'i-mei in about 1616, when he wrote the preface for a transcription of this mathematical work.
2. Besides the edition preserved in the *I-chia t'ang ts'ung-shu*, the *Hsiang-chieh chiu-chang suan-fa* also exists in a Korean edition of 1482, which is now held by Beijing Library, China, and is considered a better edition than the *I-chia t'ang ts'ung-shu* edition. The earliest extant edition of the *Yang Hui suan-fa* is a 1433 Korean edition.
3. In a newly published catalogue of the Chinese collection in Gest Library, there is a bibliographical entry for the *I-chia t'ang ts'ung-shu*; see Ch'ang Pi-te, Wu Che-fu, *P'u-lin-ssu-tun tai-hsüeh Ke ssu-te tung-fang t'u-shu-kuan chung-wen chiu-chi shu-mu* (Taipei: Taiwan shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1990), p. 385. The Gest Library holds a copy of the original edition of this collection. But the catalogue dates it 1842.
4. Robert Temple points out that the mid-sixteenth century Western mathematicians "considered that equations of higher degree were not relevant to the real world. . . . By and large, Europeans were far less willing to consider higher equations in the sixteenth century than the Chinese were in the thirteenth." See his *The Genius of China*, introduced by Joseph Needham (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 142. For more detailed discussions of the Chinese contributions to mathematics in premodern times, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), vol. 3.
5. Temple, *The Genius of China*, p. 143.
6. "Shang-hai hsien-chih," in *Chung-kuo fang-chih ts'ung-shu* (facsimile rpt. of 1871 edn.; Taipei: Ch'eng-wen ch'u-pan-she, 1975), 21, pp. 43b–44a; *Ch'ing pai lei-ch'ao* (Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1917), 72, p. 120.
7. See "Jen Mo-shu t'ui-chih chai jih-chi," the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, 1855, in the *Ch'ing-tai jih-chih hui-ch'ao* (Shanghai: Shang-hai jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1982), p. 240.
8. These ships were referred to as "*sha-ch'uan*." In G. R. C. Worcester's *The Junks and Sampans of the Yangtze* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1911), pp. 162–167, the "*sha-ch'uan*" is illustrated and called a Kiangsu trader.
9. For a description of the inscriptions on these coins, see Chiang Chung-ch'uan, *Chung-kuo chin-yin nieh-pi t'u-shuo* (rpt.; Hong Kong: Lung-men shu-tien, 1966), pp. 37–39.

10. For a discussion of these silver coins, see L. S. Yang, *Money and Credit in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), paragraph 5.31, p. 49.
11. For a discussion of other families engaged in the casting and issuance of silver coins, see Katō Shigeshi, *Shina keizaishi kōshō* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1952), vol. b, p. 455. The Chinese central government did not mint silver coins until after the Revolution of 1911.
12. Akira Matsuura, "Shindai makki no shasengyō ni tsuite," *Kansai daigaku bungaku ronshū* 39:3 (1990), pp. 1–71.
13. Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 545–546.

Glossary

Chao-lieh 昭烈
chien-sheng 監生
Ch'in Chiu-shao 秦九韶
Ch'ing 清
Ch'ing-jung chü-shih chi 清容居士集
en kung-sheng 恩貢生
Fukien 福建
Hao Ching 郝經
Hsiang-chieh chiu-chang suan-fa 詳解九章算法
Hsiao Ch'ang 蕭常
hsing-sheng 行省
Hou-Han shu 後漢書
Hsü Hou-Han shu 續後漢書
I-chia t'ang ts'ung-shu 宜稼堂叢書
Jen Mo-shu t'ui-chih chai jih-chi 忍默愚退之齋日記
Kiangsi 江西
Kiangsu 江蘇
Kuo-tzu chien 國子監
Lu Hsin-yüan 陸心源
P'eng-nien 彭年
Seikadō 静嘉堂
Sen-sheng 森盛
Shu-Han 蜀漢
Shu-shu chiu-chang 數書九章
Sung 宋
Tai Piao-yüan 戴表元
Tao-kuang 道光
Ting Jih-ch'ang 丁日昌
Ting Ping 丁丙
T'ung-chih 同治
Yang Hui 楊輝
Yang Hui suan-fa 楊輝算法
Yang-chou 揚州
Yen-yüan chi 剡源集
Yü hai 玉海
Yü Jun-kuei 郁潤桂
Yü Sen-sheng 郁森盛
Yü Sung-nien 郁松年
Yüan 元
Yüan Chüeh 袁桷