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Wang Zeng-yu, "The Yung-lo Collectanea as a Source of Materials for the Study of Sung History", The Gest Library Journal 4, no. 2 (1991): 91-99, accessed January 14, 2017, https://library.princeton.edu/eastasian/EALJ/zengyu_wang.EALJ.v04.n02.p091.pdf

The *Yung-lo Collectanea* as a Source of Materials for the Study of Sung History

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A country of high culture, China has preserved a voluminous written record of its long history. However, dynastic changes in China often brought about war and chaos, destroying much of that historical record. The extent of this loss is evident in the difference between the quantity of extant historical works and those listed in the bibliographical section of Chinese dynastic histories.

Among the extant historical records, Sung, Ming, and Ch'ing works are in the majority. Sung works alone exceed the extant historical record from the earliest time to the T'ang dynasty in both titles and volumes. Modern scholars are often overwhelmed by the huge amount of Sung primary sources. They can hardly browse through all these source materials, let alone examine them in detail. Ming works are even more voluminous than Sung works. As for Ch'ing historical works, they are as vast as the open sea, surpassing the total amount of all the pre-Ch'ing historical record.

Thanks to the continuing development of printing technology during the Sung dynasty, bookstores and individuals were able to print books in quantity. And some of the Sung works are still extant today. On the other hand, compilers of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* (*Yung-lo ta-tien*) should also be credited with preserving much of the Sung historical record.

The *Yung-lo Collectanea* was completed in the sixth year of the Yung-lo reign period (1408). It comprises 22,877 *chüan*, and was at that time the

largest compilation in the world. The compilers made good use of the imperial book collections in the former Yüan court and transcribed many works into their collectanea. Many of these works had been held by the imperial library of previous dynasties: the Five Dynasties, the Liao, the Chin, and the Northern and Southern Sung.[1]

Although the *Yung-lo Collectanea* was compiled during the Ming, most of the works included in this collectanea are not Ming works, but Sung works. This is because Ming officials and writers had not yet produced a large amount of writing when the compilation of the collectanea was imperially commissioned in 1403, the Ming dynasty then being only about forty years old. Neither do Yüan works take up a major portion of the collectanea, since the Yüan dynasty lasted less than one hundred years and contemporary works held by the Yüan imperial library were also limited. Nomadic regimes built on military strength, the Liao and the Chin did not produce many poets and writers either, so that works of these two dynasties available to the compilers of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* must have been few indeed. The same is true of T'ang and pre-Tang works. As time passed, many of them were lost or destroyed. As a result, writings in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* are predominantly Sung works, even though Sung China also had suffered great losses when the Chin troops chased the Northern Sung court south of the Yangtze River in 1127, and again when the Southern Sung dynasty collapsed in 1279.

The complete version of the *Yung-lo Collectanea*, with its 60 *chüan* of table of contents, amounts to 22,937 *chüan*. But only 797 *chüan* have survived into our time. In these 797 *chüan*, there are some works of the T'ang, the Five Dynasties, the Liao, and the Chin, to which modern scholars can also gain access from other sources. But in these 797 *chüan* there are also Sung historical documents. Whereas Ming scholars could still read these Sung works in the original version, modern scholars can acquire only limited knowledge of these works through the transcriptions preserved in the *Yung-lo Collectanea*. The major contribution of the compilers of this Ming collectanea is therefore that, to an extent they could not have foreseen, their efforts have preserved Sung historical documents that would otherwise have been totally lost.

Upon its completion, the *Yung-lo Collectanea* was considered too large for engraving and printing. For years, this Ming encyclopedic compendium was stored in the palace in Nanking and Ming scholars had no access

to it. In 1562, two more sets of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* were produced on imperial order, and both were stored in Peking, the new capital of the Ming dynasty. It is generally believed that the original version and one of the two sets produced in 1562 were completely destroyed when the Ming court collapsed in 1644. The other set survived into the Ch'ing dynasty with some damage. When Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 1736–1795), the fourth emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty, ordered the compilation of *The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*), compilers started to transcribe ancient works from the *Yung-lo Collectanea* into *The Complete Library*. At that time, about nine-tenths of this set of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* was available to them. According to the *General Table of Contents of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu*), works transcribed from the *Yung-lo Collectanea* total 4,926 *chüan*. Among them, 66 are classics, 41 are historical works, 103 are works by various philosophers, and 175 are literary collections.[2] These works, however, account for only a small portion of the *Yung-lo Collectanea*, making modern scholars wonder why the compilers of *The Complete Library* did not transcribe more works from this Ming collectanea. The compilers themselves offered an explanation, claiming that they had already incorporated the best writings from the Yung-lo encyclopedic compendium into *The Complete Library*. The rest were simply works of no literary value and should be totally ignored. This explanation is ambiguous and unconvincing. The real reason might well have been that transcribing all the works in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* was simply too burdensome a job for the compilers, since about nine-tenths of this Ming collectanea was still extant in the early Ch'ing times when the compilation of *The Complete Library* was under way. These transcriptions would also have taken up too much space, making *The Complete Library* too long. As a result, the *General Table of Contents of the Complete Library* created only a brief entry for the *Yung-lo Collectanea*, which explained the compilation and the major contents of this work and served as a symbolic recognition of the efforts made by the compilers of this Ming collectanea to collect and edit ancient works.

After the completion of *The Complete Library*, efforts to transcribe ancient works from the *Yung-lo Collectanea* continued. But so far such efforts are far from exhaustive. Many ancient works scattered throughout this Ming collectanea are still in need of being reassembled and studied by scholars.

It is truly regrettable that now only about three percent of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* is still extant. This is a great loss, particularly for scholars of Sung and Yüan studies, who would otherwise have obtained valuable information about these two dynasties. For example, in their research on Sung history, scholars of the Ch'ing dynasty used to depend mainly on the *Dynastic History of the Sung* (*Sung shih*), which is the most voluminous standard history of the twenty-four dynastic histories and provides systematic records of the Northern and Southern Sung dynasties. Valuable as it is, though, the *Dynastic History of the Sung* also contains serious defects, which crippled contemporary scholars' research and invited much criticism from them. Research into Sung history conducted by Ch'ing scholars did not advance much until three important Sung primary sources were made available to them: the *Collected Data for a Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Hsü Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien*), the *Draft of Documents Pertaining to Matters of State in the Sung Dynasty* (*Sung hui-yao chi-kao*), and *A Record of Important Affairs since the Beginning of the Chien-yen (1127–1130) Period* (*Chien-yen i-lai hsi-nien yao-lu*). These scholars found that records about the Sung dynasty preserved in these three works were not only original, but more detailed and more precise than those in the *Dynastic History of the Sung*. And all three of the works were collected and transcribed by Ch'ing scholars from the *Yung-lo Collectanea*, the greater part of which still existed in early Ch'ing times. Certain portions of the *Collected Data for a Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* and the *Draft of Documents Pertaining to Matters of State in the Sung Dynasty* are missing. But these three works provide modern scholars with critical new materials and are now regarded as the essential primary sources for the study of Liao, Sung, and Chin histories.

Even the remaining parts of the *Yung-lo Collectanea*, despite their representing only three percent of the original, complete version, prove invaluable to the study of Sung history. For instance, the table of contents of this Ming collectanea indicates that it includes all the early Ming local gazetteers. These Ming gazetteers are important source materials for the study of Sung history since they preserved many accounts of the Sung dynasty.

The origin of Chinese local gazetteers can be traced to earlier times. But these earlier gazetteers, which were compiled before the Southern Sung dynasty, predate the development of specific rules of compilation, and they

did not contain detailed, systematic records of local history. *The Gazetteer of Ch'ang-an* (*Ch'ang-an chih*) compiled by Sung Min-ch'iu, a Northern Sung scholar, is typical of such local gazetteers. In a sense, it is the Southern Sung local gazetteers that set the rules of compilation and the scope of contents for Chinese local gazetteers. Compilers of later times usually followed these rules. One such rule was to copy word for word any existing gazetteers of previous dynasties into a new local gazetteer. Thanks to this practice, compilers of Ming local gazetteers copied and therefore preserved many Southern Sung historical records in their works. Many such Ming gazetteers were subsequently included in the *Yung-lo Collectanea*.

As historical records, the Southern Sung local gazetteers preserved in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* contain useful information on local administration in the following prefectures in southern China: Nan-hsiung (Kwangtung),[3] Lu-chou (Szechwan),[4] Hu-chou (Chekiang),[5] Wu-chou (Kwangsi),[6] Ch'ao-chou (Kwangtung),[7] Ch'ang-sha (Hunan),[8] Chiu-chiang (Kiangsi),[9] T'ing-chou (Fukien),[10] Nan-ning (Kwangsi),[11] Heng-chou (Hunan),[12] Ho-nan Administrative Commission,[13] Fu-chou (Fukien),[14] and Kuang-chou (Kwangtung).[15] Maps of the prefectural seat of Ho-nan during T'ang and Sung times in the gazetteer of the Ho-nan Administrative Commission are particularly interesting. Although quite simple, these maps are helpful in understanding the traditional Chinese city. However, gazetteers in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* do not contain many records of the Liao, the Chin, and the Yüan dynasties. This is not the fault of compilers of this Ming collectanea. The Chin and the Yüan dynasties were founded by nomadic people who had no tradition of compiling local gazetteers. When Ming scholars started compiling gazetteers of the northern provinces, which used to be the territories of the Chin and the Yüan, they had to start from scratch. These Ming gazetteers of the northern provinces are therefore original works of the Ming compilers, not continuations of any works done in previous dynasties. Almost no gazetteers of the Chin and the Yüan dynasties that might have allowed them to transcribe some accounts of previous dynasties into their own works were handed down to them.

Other works in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* also deserve modern scholars' attention. For instance, in *chüan* 10877 there is a transcription of the *Illustrated Description of the Sung Embassy to the Barbarians during the Hsi-ning Reign Period* (*Hsi-ning shih-lu t'u-ch'ao*), which was originally a segment of a work

by Shen Kua (1031–1095), the *Collection from the Western Brook* (*Hsi-hsi chi*). As the title suggests, this is an account of the Sung embassy dispatched to the Liao regime during the Hsi-ning reign period (1068–1077). Given that few written records of the Liao regime are available to modern scholars, this account has special value.[16]

For scholars of Sung economic history, *The Complete Inquiries by the Imperial Secretariat* (*Chung-shu pei-tui*) of ten *chüan* by Pi Chung-yen (1040–1082) may be of interest. It contains statistics and quantitative records from Emperor Shen-tsung's reign (r. 1068–1085). The original work is lost. Only segments of the work exist in the form of quotations in the *General Investigation on Important Writings* (*Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao*), the *Draft of Documents Pertaining to Matters of State in the Sung Dynasty*, and some other works. *Chüan* 7507 of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* also includes certain portions of the *Complete Inquiries by the Imperial Secretariat*, which have detailed figures concerning the revenue and expenses of some important governmental branches under the Ministry of Revenue: the Price Stabilization Fund Office (Ch'ang-p'ing shu), government granaries, and Shops and Yards Section (Fang-ch'ang an), all of which were charged with regulating the economy. The figures reflect from one aspect the economic situation during the period of economic reforms initiated by Wang An-shih (1021–1086). Another segment of the *Complete Inquiries by the Imperial Secretariat* also appears in *chüan* 15948 of the *Yung-lo Collectanea*. This segment deals with the tax on grain transportation and contains basic and important statistics.

The *Diary of Master Tseng* (*Tseng-kung i-lu*) preserved in the *Yung-lo Collectanea* is useful to textual studies. This is the diary of Tseng Pu (1035–1107), a high-ranking court official trusted by Wang An-shih. But Tseng became a controversial figure when he later expressed doubts about Wang An-shih's reform measures. His diary is a systematic record of his administrative activities during the reign of Emperor Che-tsung (r. 1086–1100), during which he was associate administrator of the Bureau of Military Affairs (t'ung-chih shu-mi-yüan shih). A late Ch'ing scholar, Miao Ch'üan-sun (1844–1919), was the first to make this source material from the latter half of the Northern Sung dynasty available to contemporary scholars. He transcribed *chüan* 7–9 of the *Diary of Master Tseng* from the *Yung-lo Collectanea* and published them as a separate work. However, Miao's edited version of Tseng Pu's diary seems to be inferior to the version preserved in *chüan* 19735 of the *Yung-lo Collectanea*. The latter is not edited and therefore

preserved the original form of Tseng-pu's diary. But this version is not perfect, containing only *chüan* 8 of the diary.

Chüan 14620 to 14622 and 14624 to 14629 of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* are segments of another important Sung historical work, the *Codified Law of the Ministry of Personnel* (*Li-pu t'iao-fa*). This work, which is a mine of information about Southern Sung governmental organization, was for quite a long time unknown to contemporary scholars and has only recently come to light. Even the compilers of the *Dynastic History of the Sung* (*Sung shih*) failed to notice it and therefore did not have an entry for it in the bibliographical section of their work. But now both the *Regulations and Ordinances of the Ministry of Personnel* and the *Diary of Master Tseng* have been incorporated in a modern collection of Sung historical works, the *Sung-shih tzu-liao ts'ui-pien*.[17]

Segments of an introductory work on the styles and forms of address used in official correspondence during the Sung, the *Ch'i-cha yün-chin shang*, are instrumental to the study of Sung institutional history. These segments shed some light on the usage of the simplified forms of Sung official titles, the meaning of which is sometimes ambiguous to modern scholars.[18] For scholars interested in the Sung granary and postal systems, the *Chin-yü hsin-shu* provides some interesting accounts.[19]

Military tension and conflicts between the Sung court and its formidable enemies in the north are the major themes in Sung history. Scholars of Sung military history will find quite detailed discussions of the tactics for defending cities and accounts of the use of firearms among Sung troops in the following military works: the *Yü-chang hsüan-shu*, the *Hsing-chün hsü-chih*, and the *Shou-ch'eng lu*.[20] At the same time, the *Yung-lo Collectanea* also preserves memorials of some Southern Sung officials who presented to the throne their strategies for defending Sung China.[21]

Other Sung works, such as the *Chung-hsing sheng-cheng ts'ao* and the *Chung-hsing pei-lan*, are preserved only in this Ming collectanea in the form of quotations or transcriptions. This unique feature of the *Yung-lo Collectanea* has made it an important source for the study of Sung history. It now draws more attention from Sung scholars around the world, and thanks to their efforts, some previously unknown Sung works have been discovered and introduced to the scholarly world. But more efforts are needed to explore the *Yung-lo Collectanea* further and to made good use of its invaluable information about Chinese history.

NOTES

1. See Wang Liqi, "The *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* and One of Two Newly Discovered Volumes of the *Yung-lo ta-tien*," *Gest Library Journal* 4:1 (Spring 1991), pp. 27–39.
2. *Ssu-ku ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965), vol. 137, p. 1165.
3. *Yung-lo ta-tien*, 665–666.
4. Ibid., 2217–2218.
5. Ibid., 2275–2283.
6. Ibid., 2237–2343.
7. Ibid., 5343–5345.
8. Ibid., 5769–5770.
9. Ibid., 6697–6701.
10. Ibid., 7889–7895.
11. Ibid., 8506–8507.
12. Ibid., 8647–8648.
13. Ibid., 9561.
14. Ibid., 10949–10950.
15. Ibid., 11905–11907.
16. This record has been punctuated and annotated by Chia Ching-yen. See his "Hsi-ning shih Ch'i-tan t'u-ch'ao shu-cheng kao," *Wen-shih* 22 (1984), pp. 121–152. It is worth noting, however, that the author, when annotating this record, took the liberty of changing the word "*lu*" (barbarians) in the original title to "*Ch'i-tan*" (Khitan). In my opinion, the original word "*lu*" should be preserved to maintain the authenticity of the record; such a revision is quite unnecessary.
17. See Wang Min-shin, ed., *Sung-shih tzu-liao hui-pien* (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, 1981), vols. 3–4.
18. This work is found in *chüan* 22749 and 22750 of the *Yung-lo ta-tien*.
19. Ibid., 7512 and 14575.
20. Ibid., 8339.
21. See, for example, ibid., 8339 and 10876.

GLOSSARY

Ch'ang-an chih 長安志
Ch'ang-p'ing shu 常平署
Ch'ang-sha 長沙
Ch'ao-chou 潮州
Che-tsung 哲宗
Ch'i-cha yün-chin shang 慈劄雲錦裳
Chien-yen i-lai hsi-nien yao-lu 建炎以來繫年要錄
Chin 金
Ch'ing 清
Chin-yü hsin-shu 金玉新書
Chiu-chiang 九江
Chung-hsing pei-lan 中興備覽
Chung-hsing sheng-cheng ts'ao 中興聖政草
Chung-shu pei-tui 中書備對
Fang-ch'ang an 坊場業
Fu-chou 福州
Heng-chou 衡州
Ho-nan 河南
Hsi-hsi chi 西溪集
Hsing-chün hsü-chih 行軍須知
Hsi-ning 熙寧

Hsi-ning shih-lu t'u-ch'ao 熙寧使虜圖抄
Hsü Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien 續資治通鑑長編
Hu-chou 湖州
Kao-tsung 高宗
Kuang-chou 廣州
Liao 遼
Li-pu t'iao-fa 吏部條法
Lu-chou 瀘州
Miao Ch'üan-sun 繆荃孫
Ming 明
Nan-hsiung 南雄
Nanking 南京
Nan-ning 南寧
Pi Chung-yen 畢仲衍
Shen Kua 沈括
Shen-tsung 神宗
Shou-ch'eng lu 守城錄
Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu 四庫全書
Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu 四庫全書總目
Sung 宋
Sung hui-yao chi-kao 宋會要輯稿
Sung Min-ch'iu 宋敏求
Sung shih 宋史
Sung-shih tzu-liao ts'ui-pien 宋史資料萃編
T'ing-chou 汀州
Tseng-kung i-lu 曾公遺錄
Tseng Pu 曾布
tung-chih shu-mi-yüan shih 同知樞密院事
Wang An-shih 王安石
Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao 文獻通考
Wu-chou 梧州
Yüan 元
Yü-chang hsüan-shu 玉帳玄樞
Yung-lo ta-tien 永樂大典