RARE MING EDITIONS IN THE BERLIN STATE LIBRARY – THE EXAMPLE OF THE LIEGUOZHI ZHUAN

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ABSTRACT

It is a common knowledge that quite a number of rare Chinese texts survived only outside China proper. European countries play an important role in this respect as books were at first collected as items of curiosity - there was hardly anybody who could actually read the language. For that reason, many such books lay on library’s shelves almost for centuries before anybody recognized their value for historical studies. The Berlin State Library, founded almost 350 years ago, has the distinction of having published a printed catalogue of its Chinese collection as early as 1683. In spite of the destruction of WWII still part of the original collection is intact and features rare editions of such well-known novels as Shuihuzhuan, Sanguo Yanyi, and Lieguozhi Zhuan, which deserve to be presented to a professional audience.

KEYWORDS

Rare Books of Ming Edition
Chinese Collection in Berlin State Library
Chinese Rare Book Edition Study

It is well known that a number of Chinese books did not survive in their country of origin but only in foreign countries, like Japan, and Europe. Europeans in the early times assembled Chinese books mainly as curiosities and considered them exotic rarities. Few people could read Chinese characters, and thus the books survived on the shelves of libraries or museums if they were not destroyed during WWII or transferred to Poland or the Soviet Union afterwards as it happened to the older Chinese collection of the Berlin State Library. The library, originally the Grand Elector of Brandenburg’s private collection, was opened to the public in 1661. Brandenburg was a poor country, there were hardly any natural resources, the soil was sandy, and therefore it was dubbed “The Empire’s Sandbox”. The Grand Elector thought about improving the economic situation, and one way seemed to get into the East India trade which included China. In order to prepare his new venture well he wanted first-hand information about China and concluded that such data could be gathered most reliably from Chinese books. Therefore he or-
ordered his honorary librarian Andreas Müller (1630?-1694), a clergyman, to acquire Chinese books for him and learn the language. This was all but an easy task but Mueller managed to find Chinese books in the Netherlands, and in 1683 the first catalogue of the Grand Elector’s library was printed—a catalogue of the Chinese books! While it was a small collection by today’s standards, it was one of the largest Chinese libraries in Europe. Mueller was a learned Orientalist, and he managed to acquire some basic knowledge of the Chinese script and language. He apparently recognized the graphic patterns of Chinese characters and claimed to have found the *clavis sinica*, the Key to Chinese. In addition he carved what was probably the first major set of Chinese type in Europe—about 2,800 characters which look remarkably well, considering that Mueller was self-taught, and the wood-carvers had no experience with the Chinese script. This Typographia sinica survived to this day and is a testimony to Müller’s ingenuity.

Müller’s successor was the physician Christian Mentzel (1621–1701) who started learning Chinese at the ripe age of 60, and planned on compiling a huge Chinese dictionary which, almost needless to say, remained unfinished. He has the merit of having published a small Latin-Chinese dictionary, and he also arranged for the publication of the first treatises on Chinese medicine in Europe, Jesuit translations from the *Mejue* and other texts. A rather curious item is a portrait of the Grand Elector which he had cut in wood and framed with a Chinese caption which—in somewhat garbled Chinese—identifies the ruler.

After having provided the historical setting let us look at one example of a rare Chinese edition that survived in Germany. While preparing an exhibit of 16–19th century resources in the Duke August Library at Wolfenbüttel (near Braunschweig) a fragment of the well-known Chinese novel *Lieguo zhizhuan* 列國誌傳 came to light. It was difficult to identify the edition as the fragment consisted of 4 fascicles only which all lacked the first folio. Let us look at the bibliographic data:

**Margin title:** Quanxiang Lieguo zhizhuan 全像列國誌傳

4 fascicles. 13.5 x 23.9 cm.

**Call no.:** HAB Cod. Guelf. 117.1 Extrav.

The fragment consists of juan 2, fol. 2–64; juan 3, fol. 2–69; juan 7, fol. 2–37; juan 8, fol. 2–47. There are 15 columns per page, and 26 characters per column. There is no title-page. There is a small illustration in the upper part of each page, with a 6 character caption. The paper is of low quality, and reminds of the editions of Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 (fl. 1588–1609) and other publishers in Jianyang 建杨 in Fujian Province. The author was a certain Yu Shaoyu 余邵魚 (fl. 1566) who was a relative, perhaps an uncle, of the publisher Yu Xiangdou.

The novel deals with the history of the Zhou Dynasty and covers six centuries. It certainly is no rival to the famous Chinese novels like *Shitouji*, or *Shuihu zhuan*, and it is not well known outside of China. Carl Arendt, professor of Chinese at the Oriental Seminar in Berlin translated several chapters into German and characterized the novel as “full of romantic details” and assigned it a high position in lit-
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Literature. He extolled the fresh style of the narrative and the well arranged composition. He could not deny a fair number of repetitions and trivialities, however.

Let us quickly glance at the text tradition:

- The original work by Yu Shaoyu was published during the Wanli era: both a 6 and 12 juan version are known.
- A revision and reworking by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) bears the title: Xin Lieguo zhi 新列國志. It is to be dated after 1627 and comprises 108 hui. Three editions known.
- Cai Yuanfang 蔡元放 prepared a new version under the title Dong Zhou lieguo zhi 東周列國志, during the Qianlong period. There are numerous editions with prefaces of different dates, e.g. 1736, 1744, 1752, or 1767. This version is the most popular one, and all Western translations are made from it as far as I can see:

**Das schöne Mädchen von Pao.** Eine Erzählung aus der Geschichte Chinas im 8ten Jahrhundert v. Chr. (Aus dem Chinesischen übersetzt von C. Arendt.)

Yokohama: Buchdruckerei des Echo du Japon. 34 S. 4°

(Beilage zu Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens 2.1876/80)

[juan 1–3 of Dong-Zhou lieguo zhuan, from an edition with a preface dated 1752]


Yokohama: Buchdruckerei des Echo du Japon. 13 S. 4° (Beilage zu Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens 2.1876/80)

[juan 4.]

*Episoden [....] IV. Die Schlacht bei Hsüko (707 vor Christo).*

*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- u. Völkerkunde Ostasiens. 2.1876/80, 260-267 [juan 5]*

Arendt, Carl: On Chinese apologues.
China review 13.1884/85,23-24 [From juan 82]
Arendt, Carl: Parallels in Greek and Chinese literature.
Greiner, Leo: Chinesische Abende.
Berlin: E. Reiss (1922), p. 1–66
Die Geburt des Kung Fu-Tse
Der Flötenspieler
Die Tochter aus Drachensamen [«Das schöne Mädchen von Pao.»]
Tsung Erl und Kiang
Dschang I und der Minister
Die Freunde
Die Musik des Untergangs
Kuhn, Franz: *Chinesische Staatsweisheit.*
Darmstadt: O. Reichl 1923,37-68
Kuhn, Franz: Die Frau ohne Lachen.[«Das schöne Mädchen von Pao.»]

*Chinesische Meisternovellen.* Leipzig: Insel-Verlag 1941,3-32
Ling Tsü-sen [Lin Quisheng]: Die Phönixmelodie. Aus dem Dung Dschou Liê
Guo Dschï. *Sinica* 5.1930,260-265

Also in Ling: *Chinesische Legenden.* Berlin: A. Metzner 1938,9-11
Wilhelm, Richard: *Chinesische Märchen.* (34.-35.Taus.)
(Düsseldorf, Köln:) Diederichs (1955). 393 S.
No 84: Wei über zwei Pfirsichen drei Helden zu Tode kamen.
No 85: Wie das Heiraten des Flußgottes aufhörte.

There are also a number of translations into English, e.g. by R. W. Hurst, H.
Kopsch, S. Wells Williams, and J. Liao; H. A. Giles gave an excerpt from an
anonymous edition.

The Wolfenbüttel fragment belongs to an original version by Yu Shaoyu, however.
In order to identify it properly, let us look at the known editions of the original text:

– The first edition does not seem to be preserved.
– 8 juan version (Wanli): *Xinkan jingben chunqiu wuba qixiong quanxiang Lieguo zhizhuan*
A reprint was made by Yu Xiangdou, 1606 (Santai guan), with illustrations,
shangtu xiawen. The texts has 13 columns per page, with 20 characters each. Each chapter is introduced by the phrase: Houxue Weizhai Yu Shaoyu bianji.

– 12 juan version (Wanli): *Xinjian Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Chunqiu Lieguo zhizhuan*
Preface by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639). Caption: Yunjian Chen Jiru chongjiao. Gusu Gong Shaoshan zihang (again revised by Chen Jiru from Yunjian. Published by Gong Shaoshan, Suzhou). Each chapter is introduced by 5 fol. of illustrations. 10 columns per page, 20 characters per column. Copy held by Naikaku Bunko, Japan.

There is a 1615 reprint of this edition by the same publisher, with an additional
preface by Zhu Huang. Copy: Beijing tushuguan.
Liu Ts’un-yan who described Chinese fiction in London libraries found another edition:

Xinke jingben chunqiu wuba qixiong quanxiang Lieguo zhizhuan

新刻京本春秋五霸七雄全像列國志傳

Ming period, 8 juan, published by Meiyuan (plum garden). With preface by Chen Jiru. The title given in the reproduction is: Quanxiang chunqiu wuba qixiong Lieguo zhizhuan

The table of contents gives the title: Xinke shigang zonghui Lieguo zhizhuan

Copy held by The British Library, call no. 15334.e.4

Liu proposes to date this edition 1606 and would have the Chen Jiru preface added later.

Getting back to the Wolfenbüttel fragment, it seems to be very similar to the London copy, and a comparison of page 2/2a even suggests that they were printed from the same blocks. E.g. the little gap at the lower margin is identical. The summary collation of the fascicles seems to be different, however. A more detailed comparison of both copies would prove whether they really belong to the same edition, or whether there are differences.

Walter Fuchs who described rare Chinese books in German libraries, mentioned another fascicle of an unidentified Lieguo zhizhuan edition in the Weimar library (Herzogin Anna Amalie Bibliothek). On inspection, it turned out to be part of the same set. It is noticeable that also this fascicle lacks the first folio. It is juan 4, fol. 2–13.

The Wolfenbüttel copy carries a handwritten note: Hunc librum habet etiam bibl. Reg. Dresd. The Dresden library does not seem to have a copy, however.

So as a result of this investigation we may state that a fragment of a very rare Ming edition of the original Lieguo zhizhuan is scattered among two German libraries, with a possible third part (that used to belong to the Dresden library) lost. Further research is necessary to prove whether this belongs to the same edition as the so far unique London copy.

A curious feature of the five fascicles found in Germany is that each of them lacks the first folio. One can only speculate about the reason; possibly these folios were given away as specimens, or souvenirs as the then owners may have been under the impression they were the last folios and therefore less important.

Researching these fragments also led to an examination of the holdings of the Berlin State Library, and it turned out that the library has an edition with a title page: An Jian yanyi lieguo zhizhuan 按鑑演義列國志傳 (call no. Libri sinici 99). The publisher is given as Shulin Yang Meisheng zi. The undated preface by Chen Jiru has the caption Xinke shigang zonghui lieguo zhizhuan 新刻史綱總會列國誌傳 while the caption title of juan 1 runs: Xinke jingben chunqiu wuba qixiong quanxiang lieguo zhizhuan. The text was revised by Yang Meisheng and Yang Yusheng 美生楊瑜校刊羽生楊鴻編集, both belonging to the Sizhiguan
The edition comprises 8 juan and has the same style of illustrations as the Yu Xiangdou edition. There are 15 columns per page, with 26 characters each. A comparison shows that this edition is very close to the London copy. There are minor differences – e.g. on p. 2/13a, line 8 the London copy has 国 while the Berlin copy has 国. What is the relationship of the two editions? It seems that the blocks of one were engraved from the other. We may assume that Yu’s printing blocks were either taken over, or re-engraved, or partly re-engraved by other publishers. It was, however, common practice among the Jianyang printers to share printing blocks, either simultaneously, or consecutively. Chen Jiru wrote his preface (according to Fang Chaoying [Fang Zhaoying]) between 1606 and 1615. So this would be the time frame also for the Berlin edition. The Berlin copy was printed from already worn blocks.

So far no other copy from the same publisher seems to have come to light, and this would make the Berlin copy unique.

The Berlin State Library also owns a Manchu translation of the novel: Geren gurun-i bithe，which was never printed (call no. NS 1540 1–4). The manuscript comprises 23 fascicles and is apparently not translated from the 108 hui edition. The contents corresponds to debelin 10-19 and covers appr. one third of the text. A Chinese version of 30 juan is not known to me, however. The text seems to be close to the 8 juan edition.

Thus even the Manchu translation offers a new challenge ...

Let me conclude with a note on the special importance of the Lieguo zhizhuan for German literature. As indicated, Carl Arendt translated several chapters of the novel, and he probably read the text also with his students. Among them was the writer and poet Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865–1910) who became known through novels like Prinz Kuckuck. He took to the motif of Paosi and turned this into a novel Das schöne Mädchen von Pao (using the title of his teacher’s translation); the book was printed in a numbered deluxe edition, bound in leather and illustrated by Franz von Bayros (1866–1924) who was known for his delicate erotic art. A popular edition apparently had wide dissemination. Later on the writer Hermann Hesse used the same motif - whether he borrowed it from Arendt, subsequent German translations, or from Bierbaum’s novel, is not clear. His fragment is called König Yus Untergang and is dated 1929. The topos itself had been known in Europe already for some time through Du Halde’ Description de la Chine and Thoms’ Chinese courtship.
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Anjian yanyi Lieguo zhizhuan – Title-page of copy in the Berlin State Librar

Figure 2: Text sample

Figure 3: Title-page of Arendt’s translation

Figure 4: Bierbaum’s novel – title-page

Figure 5: Bierbaum’s dedication

REFERENCES


21. Sizhiguan was the name of the printing shop of the Yang family.


29. Peter Perring Thom: *Chinese courtship in verse*. Macao: East India Company 1824. XVI, 339 pp. The appendix, by the way, contains poems to accompany the portraits of 100 beautiful women, which motivated Goethe to write his own poems in Chinese style.

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