Literary Learning: Encyclopedias and Epitomes

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Chapter 10

Literary Learning: Encyclopedias and Epitomes

<1> Lazy King and Fatigued Prince

In Chinese antiquity, reading was a rare, and cumbersome, activity. It was a privilege of the ruling class, and yet a ruler might not always have the time, or patience, to engage in it. Knowing this to be the case, the tutor of a Chu king made an epitome of the *Springs and Autumns*, a work of history, for his royal pupil. The "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 ("Monograph on Arts and Writings") of the *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) from the first century CE records a title *Duoshi wei* 鐸氏微 (*Mr. Duo's Subtleties*) in three scrolls. No longer extant, it is believed to be the very epitome made by Tutor Duo for King Wei of Chu 楚威王 (d. 329 BCE), who was "unable to read the entire *Springs and Autumns*" (*Shiji* 14.510).

One might attribute the king's "inability" to royal lethargy, but ever since the increasing use of paper from the first century CE on, there simply have been too many books. Even in an age when people were producing and reproducing books without word processors, printers, and copiers, the sheer volume of books could seem overwhelming. In the words of a sixth-century prince, one of the greatest book collectors of the time and an avid reader since his early teens:

Philosophers emerged during the Warring States, and literary collections first flourished in the Han. Nowadays, each family produces writings, and every person has a collection. What is well written may give voice to the author's feelings and purify customs; what is poorly written proves no more than a waste of sheets that will only wear out the later-born. The texts of old pile up high, with more texts being produced ceaselessly. A person raises a foot and walks down the road of learning, and yet, even when one's hair turns white, one will not have exhausted everything (Xiao 2011: 164).

Although the two types of work discussed in this essay—encyclopedia (*leishu* 類書) and epitome (*chao* 鈔)—emerged in response to many needs, they both are, first and foremost, expedient ways of dealing with the problem of the quantity of books. Encyclopedias and epitomes are closely related and yet remain distinct. A crucial part of the educational and literary tradition in premodern China, they were two of the most important forms of organization and dissemination of knowledge in the period covered by this volume and beyond.

<1> "Imperial View": Toward a Definition of *Leishu*

Leishu is literally a "classified book." In the simplest definition, it consists of extracts that are taken from a variety of earlier writings and classified under different categories. Beyond this simple definition, however, complications arise. Chinese scholars have debated for a long time about the origin, nature, and scope of *leishu*. From *Erya* 爾雅, the oldest surviving Chinese "dictionary," Masters texts (*zishu* 子書), to the *Classic of Poetry* or the sixth-century literary anthology *Wen xuan* 文選, almost anything and everything has been regarded as either a source

of or an associate with *leishu*, based on the recognition that all of the above-mentioned works, broadly speaking, have two things in common: they contain in themselves an "assembly of all sorts of things," and they represent a certain order of arrangement and classification (Sun 2007: 3-4). The confusion about what constitutes or, more precisely, what does *not* constitute a *leishu* is tied to the ironically troubled classification of a "classified book" according to the traditional Chinese bibliographical scheme of the "four parts" (classics, histories, Masters texts, and literary collections; see Chapters 11 and 12-15). The eighteenth-century editors of the grand *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 *(The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries)* exclaim with some exasperation: "A 'classified book' may incorporate classics, histories, Masters texts, and literary collections, but it is not a work of any of the four and cannot be classified under the four parts" (*Siku* 135.2781).

Despite these vagaries and contestations, there is a general consensus that the first real *leishu* was the *Huang lan* 皇覽 *(Imperial View)* from the early third century. We will begin with this work, for its compilation embodies several important characteristics of the Chinese *leishu* and demarcates the boundaries of a typical *leishu* as discussed in this essay.

The central figure in the project was Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226), also known as Emperor Wen of the Wei 魏文帝, his posthumous title. The son and heir of warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220), the real power behind the throne in the last years of the Han empire, Cao Pi had grown up as a *de facto* prince, if not one in name until 217. Cao Pi took a passionate interest in literary writings and cultural matters. To him is credited the first extant discussion about literary genres in his *Dian lun* 典論 *(Normative Discourses)*, a work of Masters Literature. Such a work usually consists of a number of chapters on social, ethical, and political issues, each chapter under a subject heading. While from Eastern Han on it was customary for such a work to include a

chapter on rhetoric or some aspect of writing, Cao Pi presented a slightly permuted version by devoting a chapter to textual literature, in which he famously praises literary works as "the grand achievement in the management of state, a splendor that never decays," and evaluates contemporary as well as past writers (Yan 1987b: 8.1098).

The great plague of 217 that took the lives of many of his literary friends provided an impetus for Cao Pi to intensify his cultural pursuits. Judging from an assortment of brief mentions in historical sources, Cao Pi had commissioned the compilation of *Imperial View* in 220, after he succeeded to his father as the King of Wei but before he founded the Wei dynasty in place of the Han. The project involved a number of scholars, including Wang Xiang 王象 (d. after 222), Huan Fan 桓範 (d. 249), Liu Shao 劉劭 (d. 240s), Wei Dan 韋誕 (179-251), Miao Xi 繆襲 (186-245) and a Miao Bu 繆卜, and took several years to complete. *Imperial View* was a compilation of extracts from "the five [Confucian] classics and various works," which were "classified and divided into different sections" (*Sanguo zhi* 21.618). The "various works" presumably include both histories and Masters texts. The compilation, when completed, "had altogether over forty categories [*bu*], each category consisting of several dozen chapters [*pian*], totaling over eight million characters" (*Sanguo zhi* 23.664). Another comment affirms that *Imperial View* had "over a thousand chapters" (*Sanguo zhi* 2.88). In the first half of the sixth century, this work might still have been largely intact, in a bulky 680 scrolls, in south China; but after the massive destruction of books during the fall of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557), it seems that only abridged versions produced in the fifth century had survived (*Sui shu* 34.1009; *Xin Tang shu* 59.1562), and not many scholars had seen even these. Sima Zhen 司馬貞, an eighth-century scholar, regarded *Imperial View* as a book that "records the tombs and mausoleums of historical personages," perhaps based on the citations of the book in that particular category in

later encyclopedias (*Shiji* 1.5). Ironically, the reconstituted *Imperial View*, pieced together from

citations in commentaries and encyclopedias by the eighteenth-century scholar Sun Pingyi 孫馮

翼, indeed mostly consists of entries on mausoleums and tombs (*Huang lan* 1-7). This is perhaps

because the rest of *Imperial View* largely overlaps with other early sources, including the

numerous encyclopedias compiled from the sixth century onward, with only the section on tombs

and mausoleums being a unique source of information.

The above account of the *Imperial View* epitomizes a number of crucial characteristics of

a typical *leishu*. Commissioned by a ruler who was deeply concerned with cultural matters, it

was a large-scale project that required the participation of more than one scholar, and whose

completion spanned several years; it was classified into many topics; and, judging from its size,

it had aimed to be comprehensive and encyclopedic. Compiled for the sake of "imperial view," it

was also designed to reflect the vista of the imperial person. Although the ruler himself did not

have a hand in the compilation, the fact that he employed many scholars at his court to

accomplish this project is significant: while the work itself becomes a gathering place for earlier

writings, the process of compilation, too, involves the collaboration of the finest scholars in the

empire.

The first direct descendants of *Imperial View* that appeared in the late fifth century

inherited every aspect of the original work in terms of royal sponsorship and large scope.

Between 480 and 482, the founding emperor of the [Southern] Qi 齊 (479-501) commissioned

scholars at his court to compile a *Shi lin* 史林 (*A Forest of Histories*) in thirty scrolls "in the

tradition of Emperor Wen of the Wei's *Imperial View*" (*Nan shi* 4.113). If this work seems

relatively modest, then the emperor's grandson, Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 (460-494), the Prince of

Jingling 竟陵, commissioned men of letters to compile a much better known work that was

explicitly "modeled upon the example of the Imperial View." Consisting of the "extracts of the five classics and works of a hundred schools" and spanning a thousand scrolls, this work was entitled *Sibu yaolue* 四部要略 (*An Epitome of Books of the Four Categories*) (*Nan Qi shu*, 40.698). With this work, we see the first golden age of the premodern Chinese encyclopedia, which coincided with the rule of the sophisticated Liang dynasty and in many ways represented the highest point of the cultural and literary development of early medieval China.

The compilation of *leishu* in the Liang dynasty reveals an acute awareness of the cultural prestige and authority associated with the compilation of an encyclopedia. Xiao Xiu 蕭秀 (475–518), the brother of Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502-549), had supplied a learned scholar Liu Jun 劉峻 (better known as Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標, 462-521) with books and asked him to put together a compilation of extracts from the books, which was subsequently named *Lei yuan* 類苑 (*The Garden of Classified Extracts*). The compilation proved so popular that it already went into wide circulation even before it was completed. It was said that upon the completion of the work, which stood at 120 scrolls, Emperor Wu felt so competitive that he commissioned five scholars to compile something grander based on the imperial book collection. The project began in 516 and was finished eight years later; the end result was entitled *Hualin bianlue* 華林遍略 (*The Comprehensive Extracts of the Park of Flowering Groves*) in 700 scrolls (*Nan shi* 49.1220, 72.1782–1783).

Buddhist encyclopedias also flourished. Emperor Wu commissioned the compilation of the *Fo ji* 佛記 (*Record of the Buddha*) in the early 500s and then the *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 (*Differentiated Manifestations of Sutras and Laws*) in 516, the latter now the only extant encyclopedia from before the seventh century. Prefaces to both compilations stress that they aim to facilitate retrieval of information from a vast number of sutras. A third Buddhist encyclopedia,

Fabao lianbi 法寶連璧 (*Joined Jade-Disks from the Treasures of Dharma*) in 220 scrolls, was commissioned by prince Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551) and completed by about forty courtiers in 534. In interesting contrast, no Daoist encyclopedia was commissioned during this period, although the famous Daoist Tao Hongjing 陶宏景 (456-536) had initiated a general *leishu* named *Xue yuan* 學苑 (*The Garden of Learning*) that reportedly contains 150 topical headings (*Yunji qiqian* 107.371). A Daoist encyclopedia, *Wushang biyao* 無上秘要 (*Supreme Secret Essentials*), supposedly compiled (more likely commissioned) by Emperor Wu of the Zhou 周武帝 (r. 560-578), is preserved in the *Daozang* 道藏 (*Daoist Canon*). There is, however, only a single mention of the Zhou emperor's involvement with such a work (Ren and Zhong 1991: 888); it is impossible to say whether the extant *Wushang biyao* was the same one commissioned by Emperor Wu of the Zhou, especially considering the fact that, as has been pointed out, the Daoist scriptures cited in the compilation were largely from scriptures of the Shangqing and Lingbao textual traditions that were embraced by the southern elite (Zhou 2011: 60).

Copies of the *Hualin bianlue* were clearly not limited to an exclusive audience in the Liang court but could be accessed by anyone with the financial means to hire a scribe and make a copy of it. A copy was carried over by traders to north China that was ruled by non-Han peoples at the time, and offered for sale to Gao Cheng 高澄 (521–549), the powerful minister of the Eastern Wei 魏 (534-550). Gao Cheng asked the seller to leave the book with him for browsing first, and summoned an army of scribes to copy out the whole volume within a day and night. He then returned the book to the seller, saying: "I have no need for it" (*Nan shi* 47.1737).

At the Eastern Wei court, Pei Jingrong 裴景融 (495-546) was put in charge of making an encyclopedia also to be called *Sibu yaolue*, but the project was never brought to a finish (*Wei shu*

69.1534). It was not until the last years of the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577), the most cultured of the northern dynasties, that a *leishu* of more or less comparable scope and length with the southern encyclopedias was commissioned and produced in the north; it took a group of scholars about sixth months to complete, and was presented to the throne in the winter of 572. The accompanying memorial states:

> In the past, Emperor Wen of the Wei [ordered] Wei Dan and others to compile the *Imperial View*, which incorporated various discourses and was divided into thematic categories. When enjoying some leisure from affairs of the state, Your Majesty is fond of the silk scrolls [books] and has thoroughly browsed the writings of the Magnolia Terrace and the storehouse of bundled bamboo slips [i.e. the imperial library]. Your Majesty believes that in reading one prizes wide-ranging scope, but within the wide-ranging scope one must prize obtaining the essentials; to save time and yet double the results, one requires ease and simplicity. Previously, at the Hall of Promoting Culture, Your Majesty commanded us to research the former canon and compile from various books. We humbly applied our shallow talent and immediately set to work. Emulating the numbers of heaven and earth, we came up with fifty categories; reproducing the sum of yarrow stalks needed to form the Qian and Kun Hexagrams, we completed three hundred and sixty scrolls…. (Yan 1987a: 7.3865)

Like the other encyclopedias cited above, this compilation, known as *Xiuwen dian yulan* 修文殿御覽 (*Imperial View at the Hall of Promoting Culture*), was put together for the practical

purpose of helping a reader navigate in the sea of books and facilitate the retrieval and reuse of information by organizing it under appropriate headings. The references to the numbers of heaven and earth and to the sum of yarrow stalks in the above passage deserve special attention. Taken from the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), a divination manual that has come to be regarded as the most important work in Chinese intellectual history, these references indicate the deliberate matching of the numbers of categories and scrolls of a *leishu* with the mystical cosmic numbers. A *leishu* is thus much more than just a chest of drawers serving as a repository of knowledge and material aids to memory: it possesses in miniature the dimensions of the cosmos. Like the imperial garden, from which a *leishu* frequently takes its name, it is supposed to present an organized system of knowledge of the world, reflecting an orderly universe in its comprehensive, structured arrangement of ideas, concepts, and things. Its compilation, imperially commissioned, is also a means of demonstrating the state's cultural power and political legitimacy.

<1> The Earliest Surviving Encyclopedias

Two of the oldest encyclopedias to have survived are both from the early seventh century: *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (*Extracts from the North Hall*) and *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚(*Classified Extracts from Literature*). *Beitang shuchao* was compiled by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638) when he was working in the imperial library of the Sui 隋 (581-618); it had reportedly consisted of eighty main categories in 801 scrolls, but now only nineteen categories and 160 scrolls are extant, and these fragments can hardly represent the original version because of heavy interventions and interpolations during the book's vexed history of textual transmission (Zhu 1981: 30-37). *Yiwen leiju*, on the other hand, is preserved in a much better shape and remains largely intact. Spanning

one hundred scrolls, it was commissioned by the founding emperor of the Tang dynasty in 622, and completed two years later by a team of leading northern and southern scholars, including Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), Chen Shuda 陳叔達 (d. 635), Yuan Lang 袁朗 (?-?), Pei Ju 裴矩 (d. 627), Zhao Hongzhi 趙弘智 (572–653), and Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (563–666). A quick review of the structuring of *Yiwen leiju* will illustrate the way in which a *leishu* organizes knowledge and the values and beliefs reflected in the organization.

Yiwen leiju includes forty-six categories (or forty-eight depending on how one counts) and 727 sub-categories. It begins with the concepts of heaven, earth, and man, followed by social, political, cultural and religious institutions, and moves on to things of nature such as plants, minerals, birds, beasts, fish and insects, ending with auspicious and inauspicious omens manifested in the world of nature. The first thirty-seven scrolls are arranged as follows:

Scroll 1-2	Heaven
Scroll 3-5	Seasons
Scroll 6	Earth; Prefectures; Commanderies
Scroll 7-9	Mountains; Rivers
Scroll 10	Imperial Signs
Scroll 11-14	Emperors and Kings
Scroll 15	Imperial Consorts
Scroll 16	Crown Princes
Scroll 17-37	Human Beings

The encyclopedia predictably opens with heaven and earth. Scroll 10 "Imperial Signs" (i.e. heavenly signs portending a ruler's enthronement) transitions from heaven and earth to the human realm; and yet, it is clear that the imperial family constitutes a special category above ordinary human beings. It is also interesting that administrative units—prefectures and commanderies—precede the two categories of natural landscape. The world is envisioned, first and foremost, in terms of empire. Much can be gleaned about medieval Chinese views of the world from the way in which the encyclopedia is conceived: the arrangement of the categories and sub-categories, and the inclusions and exclusions. The eighteenth-century editors' criticism of the "omissions" and "mis-categorization" is based on a lack of understanding of the historical forces at work in the compilation of a *leishu* and on an implicit assumption that cultural values never changed. For instance, they complain that the sub-category of "princess" is appended to the category of "Crown Princes" while the sub-category of "princes" is placed under the category of "Offices" (*Siku* 135.2783), without realizing the immense power and influence of the female members of a family—imperial family included—in the northern culture during the period of disunion (317-589), and that the Tang, though ruling over a unified China, was very much a northern dynasty. The female dominance at the Tang court culminated in Empress Wu Zhao's 武 曌 (624-705) establishment of her own dynasty from 690 to 705 and only gradually faded after the eighth century. The princes, on the other hand, were regarded as officers of the empire, albeit the officers at the very top, above the prime minister, because unlike princesses who could wield political power invisibly, the princes could and did hold public offices. Modern Chinese scholars often attribute such "*mis*-categorization" to the *leishu* compilers' "historical limitations," and yet, it might be the critics who have failed to historicize values and beliefs behind the compilation of an encyclopedia.

After making the customary declaration of the overwhelming quantity of existing books, the preface by Ouyang Xun states:

> [The emperor] puts martial concerns to rest and promotes cultural matters, establishes schools and opens seminaries, desiring for every family to be rich in Sui pearls and everybody to hold the Jing jade. In the view of His Grace, previous compilers each executed his own plan: the [*Collection of*] *Literature Divided by Genre* [*Wenzhang liubie*] and *A Literary Anthology* [*Wen xuan*] only include literary writings; *Imperial View* and *Comprehensive Extracts* [*of the Park of Flowering Groves*] straightforwardly record the plain facts [about a given category]. As their editorial principles differ, it is difficult for the reader to consult and research. Thereupon He issued an edict that we compile both plain facts and literary compositions….(*Yiwen leiju* 27)

Two things are worth noting here. One is that it makes a point of systematically including extracts from literary writings—poetry, poetic expositions, and so forth—under all categories, which, according to its preface by Ouyang Xun, is a new feature compared with earlier encyclopedias that only "record plain facts [about a given category]" (*zhi shu qi shi* 直書其事). Although the writings are in most cases excerpts instead of complete texts, *Yiwen leiju* has preserved numerous pre-seventh-century literary compositions that would have otherwise been lost. For writings of which we do have alternative sources, it presents us with some of the earliest textual variants available, thus enabling us to catch a glimpse of different versions of a text and of the messy state of manuscripts in circulation from the age of manuscript culture. The other

remarkable point about *Yiwen leiju* is its manifest purpose of public consumption and education. It is meant to be a treasure-chest open to all, or at least all members of the elite.

Nowhere is the pedagogical value of a *leishu* better revealed than in *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (*A Primer for Beginners*), an encyclopedia of thirty scrolls with 23 categories and 313 sub-categories. Commissioned by the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756) to help his young sons in their literary compositions, it was presented to the throne in 725. Ironically, the earlier *leishu* were now considered by the emperor as too large and cumbersome for quick retrieval of information, who wanted something smaller for easy use and speedy results (Liu 1984: 137). Though condensed, *Chuxue ji* remains just as comprehensive in terms of its coverage as *Yiwen leiju*. It also has a distinguishing feature: besides extracts offering basic information ("plain facts") about a given category and extracts of pertinent literary writings, it includes a section known as "parallel allusions" (*shidui* 事對). For instance, in the category of "Seas," the "parallel allusions" section gives a number of paired allusions related to ocean lore:

> *tong tian* / *dong di* 通天 / 動地 (joining heaven / moving earth)
>
> *busi cao* / *fanhun shu* 不死草/返魂樹(death-defying plant / soul-returning tree)
>
> *qingxie baichuan* / *huifu wanli* 傾瀉百川 / 迴洑萬里(water pouring from a hundred rivers / currents whirling for ten thousand leagues)

These phrases, ranging from two to four characters, all appear in pairs; a slash is inserted here to separate the two parts of a pair, which form a perfect grammatical parallel with each other. Each pair is followed by relevant quotations from the textual sources. The parallel both constitutes a mnemonic aid and can be readily used in the composition of "regulated verse"

(*lüshi* 律詩), which requires two parallel couplets in the middle, or of a piece of parallel prose, both forms in vogue in the Tang and for centuries to come. As traditional Chinese lyric theory stresses that poetry comes directly from the historical experience of an individual poet, *Chuxue ji* structures one's experience as much as it structures one's utterance of it. The inclusion of the "parallel allusions" section, providing an aspiring writer with essential building blocks, thus establishes a *leishu* firmly at the heart of literary learning: it teaches one how to conceive the world and how to articulate the world, and the two mutually reinforce each other.

The section of "parallel allusions" is reminiscent of a contemporary children's primer entitled *Meng qiu* 蒙求 composed by Li Han 李瀚 (fl. mid-eighth century) (Fu 2004: 58-64). This rhymed work, in the tradition of earlier primers like the *Jijiu* 急就 of the Han and spawning many similar works in later times, is a series of parallel four-syllable phrases featuring anecdotes of well-known historical figures, designed for easy memorization and primary education (see Chapter 6). Although it has no discernible order or classification, it has been catalogued under *leishu* since the Song (960-1279) apparently because of the pedagogical aspect of a *leishu*. The other precedents of the "parallel allusions" section are compilations of parallel phrases that were produced as an aid to literary composition, especially poetry writing. One such precedent is *Yu dui* 語對 (*Phrases in Pairs*) in thirty scrolls by Zhu Danyuan 朱澹遠 (fl. mid-sixth century), who also compiled *Yu li* 語麗 (*Lovely Sayings*) ("li" also means "parallel") (*Sui shu* 34.1008). Neither is extant; but according to Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (ca. 1179-ca. 1262), *Lovely Sayings* was classified into forty categories (Chen 1987: 423). The other precedent, whose fragments with doubtful authenticity are extant, is *Bian zhu* 編珠 (*Strung Pearls*), which was reportedly compiled by Du Gongzhan 杜公瞻 in 611 at the command of Emperor Yang of the Sui 隋煬帝

(r. 605-618) (*Song shi* 207.5293; *Siku* 135.2782). A fragmentary Tang dynasty *leishu* from the Dunhuang manuscript trove, given the name *Yu dui* 語對 by the modern scholar Wang Sanqing 王三慶, also adopts a similar format (Wang 1985).

<1> Pearls, Blossoms, "Minced Meat for Pye," and "Private Rubbish of Sorts"

Chuxue ji, like *A Forest of Histories*, is a "forest" that will supply the woodcutter with felt trees to be reused to construct a new edifice, just as Ben Jonson (1572-1637) had called his commonplace book *Timber*. During the Tang, there were many vast encyclopedias compiled under imperial auspices, such as the *Sanjiao zhuying* 三教珠英 (*Pearls and Blossoms of the Three Teachings*) commissioned by Empress Wu, although nothing else besides *Yiwen leiju* and *Chuxue ji* has survived. There are also a number of privately compiled *leishu* listed in the bibliographic chapters of *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (*Old History of the Tang*) and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New History of the Tang*). Only a small portion has survived, such as the famous poet Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772-846) *Jing shi shilei* 經史事類 (*Classified Allusions to Classics and Histories*, better known as *Baishi liutie shilei ji* 白氏六帖事類集) in thirty scrolls; *Lei lin* 類林 (*Forest of Categories*) in ten scrolls by Yu Lizheng 于立政 (627-679), which resurfaced in Dunhuang (Shi 1993); Du Sixian's 杜嗣先 (633-712) *Tuyuan cefu* 兔園策府 (*Storehouse of Bundled Bamboo Slips from the Rabbit Garden*), a fascinating compilation commissioned by a Tang prince and adopting the form of "Q and A" as in the civil service examination (Qu 2001: 126-129).

There are also a number of compilations discovered among the Dunhuang manuscripts and generally referred to as "*leishu*" by modern scholars for convenient labelling. Compared with the imperially sponsored and collectively produced *leishu*, these private compilations are all

on a small scale and do not aspire to be comprehensive. For instance, one of the largest, best preserved compilations of this lot, known as *Li zhongjie chao* 勵忠節鈔 (*Extracts Encouraging Loyalty and Integrity*), focuses on moral and ethical values and codes of political conduct (Qu 2007). *Shi lin* 事林 (*Forest of Facts*) and *Shi sen* 事森 (*Grove of Facts*) look like individual notebooks made by a man with some basic education for his personal use (Bai 1999: 53-54). *Shi lin* begins with two lines of a doggerel: "You must establish yourself, / Don't get intimate with the ale-house." It records nothing more than a few anecdotes about the diligent studying of eight historical figures. The fragmentary *Shi sen* records forty stories on various types of virtuous conduct; an inscription at the end reads: "*Shi sen*. On the tenth day of the fourth month in the *wuzi* year, Yuanyi recorded them while copying books." This is followed by another doggerel, which begins with: "If one does not drink ale while copying books, / one often sees the brush drying up." Clearly Mr. Yuanyi was constantly feeling pulled by a desire for ale. On the back of the paper were copied a few miscellaneous poetic expositions (*fu*), signed by "Student Lang Yuanyi 郎員義 of the Jingtu Temple at the Dunhuang Commandery on the fifth day of the eighth month in the *guisi* year, the fifth year of the Changxing era." There was no "fifth" year of the Changxing era, which stopped with the fourth year in 933; but it was quite common that people living far from the capital did not learn of the change of reign titles in a timely manner.

There are similar types of texts from Dunhuang that are no more than notebook collections of copied passages, such as *Yingji chao* 應機鈔 and *Qin dushu chao* 勤讀書鈔. Although scholars loosely refer to them as "Dunhuang *leishu*," the passages in these notebooks are not even always grouped under different headings, defying the basic sense of a *leishu*. Insomuch as these texts fulfilled the needs of primary education at lower levels of society in a provincial region, they evoke the "poetry manuals" that became popular in the Tang (see Zhang

2002). Those manuals claim to teach a beginner the "know-how" in poetic composition or promise to unravel the secrets of writing good poetry, which became a required part of civil service examination in the seventh century (see Chapter 6). If the Dunhuang notebooks demonstrate how people on the lower strata of society obtained knowledge, then a work like *Jin yue* 金鑰 (*Golden Key*), a small collection in two scrolls put together by the famous writer Li Shangyin 李商隱 (ca. 813-858) and divided into four categories, seems to represent the other, elitist end of the spectrum of note-taking (*Song shi* 207.5293; Chen 1987: 424).

These notebooks are not unlike the numerous specimen of the Western commonplace book from the Renaissance period onward. Indeed, it has been suggested by scholars of medieval Chinese literature that *leishu* bears a similarity to the commonplace book in the Western tradition. *Leishu* has also been occasionally translated as a commonplace book. For this reason, a closer look at commonplace books may prove helpful in highlighting some of the unique characteristics of *leishu* proper, i.e. the kind that is imperially commissioned and sponsored.

"Commonplace" in the Western tradition had had a prestigious origin in Aristotle's works; its original usage, whether the *topos koinos* in Greek or the *communes loci* in Latin, was closely associated with the rhetoric and oratory of ancient Greece and Rome. Commonplaces were "the general and universal ideas used in all argumentation and persuasion" (Lechner 1962: 228). In the Renaissance period, scholars such as Erasmus developed elaborate methods for keeping a notebook of excerpts in a structured arrangement to aid one's discussions and debates (Havens 2001: 28). However, the term "commonplace book" went through many changes over centuries of development. From 1700 onward, commonplace books are often no more than scrapbooks, with copied quotations that "first defined their purposes" forming only one part of their diverse contents. They were sometimes neatly written and sometimes scribbled, on material ranging

from folders of loose sheets to printed almanacs, often mixed with a drawing or even a pressed flower (Miller 1998: 35). After 1800, with cheap newsprint, some people even used clippings from newspapers to replace hand-copied notes (Allan 2010: 29). An English squire William Congreve (not the earlier playwright) describes his commonplace book as "private rubbish of sorts," and a Mrs. Piozzi wrote simply on the cover of one of her commonplace books, "Minced Meat for Pyes" (Allan 2010: 28). One notable trait these commonplace books have in common is they were privately, individually compiled and more often than not were intended for one's own use only. They were also made as often by women as by men after the Renaissance. Most important, even the printed commonplace books from the Renaissance do not aspire to be encyclopedic, but usually focus on one area, be it literature, law, science, or theology.

In contrast, premodern Chinese *leishu*, beginning with *Imperial View*, are distinguished by their public, comprehensive nature; that is, they were more often than not imperially commissioned, large-scale group projects that aspired to be encyclopedic in coverage; they were also intended to be circulated, not restricted to private use or even to a small audience. From the tenth century onward and throughout imperial China, colossal *leishu* continued to be commissioned by imperial rulers and collectively compiled, and were meant to demonstrate the state's role as the custodian of culture.

Chinese scholars sometimes trace the origin of *leishu* to early philosophical treatises, specifically the so-called syncretic works from late Warring States and early Han such as *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Mr. Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and *Shuo yuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Tales*). Here again a cursory comparison sheds light on the unique features of a *leishu*. *Lüshi chunqiu*, also known as *Lü lan* 呂覽 (*Lü's View*), was compiled under the direction of the powerful chancellor Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE). Its "comprehensive nature of the

material" and its "systematic presentation" have led to the suggestion that it was "an encyclopedia of knowledge for the time" (Loewe 1993: 325). *Huainanzi* is a monumental work compiled at the court of the Han prince Liu An 劉安 (ca. 179-122 BCE); *Shuo yuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Tales*), composed by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE), is a collection of material taken from earlier texts and arranged in twenty thematic chapters. Despite inner inconsistencies and diversity, *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Huainanzi* are both synthetic works with an inner coherence; even *Shuoyuan* contains Liu Xiang's own creations, adaptations, and comments, with each chapter beginning with his prefatory remarks expounding the chapter's theme.

Compared with these works, a *leishu* merely presents existing material. The relation to earlier texts underwent a radical change from *Lü's View* to *Imperial View*: if a philosophical treatise like *Lü's View* or *Huainanzi* seeks to integrate, then an encyclopedia preserves extracts as they are. This shift is a complicated indication of several interrelated cultural phenomena emerging from the third to the fifth century. The age of massive encyclopedic Masters texts was gradually replaced by the age of literary writings much shorter in length (Tian 2006; also see Chapter 15); those shorter literary writings required an adroit, artful use of allusions to earlier texts, and the need to make use of earlier writings in one's own compositions could be satisfied by consulting a *leishu*. This is particularly true in poetic writings from the fifth century onward, coinciding exactly with the boom of encyclopedias. The importance of *leishu* as a writing aide was tied to the value being placed on one's literary writings, and one can easily understand why, as such, it first emerged in the early third century under the auspices of a prince who was passionately interested in literature.

<1> The Making of an Epitome

The modern scholar Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946) noted the important relation between *leishu* and literary compositions long ago (Wen 1998); yet, as Teng and Biggerstaff point out, "encyclopedias have never been in very high repute among Chinese scholars, both because of their nature as secondary sources and because most scholars have considered it degrading to resort to short cuts to knowledge" (Teng and Biggerstaff 1971: 84). The attitude has changed in recent years, as the significance of *leishu* in literary and intellectual history has been increasingly recognized (Ge 2001; Tang 2008). Nevertheless, the practice of copying out extracts from a work to make an epitome, known as *chao* 抄/鈔, *chaoshu* 抄書, or *chaocuo* 鈔撮, has received little attention. Although a *leishu* is entirely made from extracts, an epitome is not necessarily a *leishu*. A *leishu* consists of many extracts from different works arranged by category, but an epitome (as noun, *chao* or *shuchao* 書抄) is usually based on either one work or one type of work. For instance, scholar and writer Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343) once made a *Shiji chao* 史記鈔 (*An Epitome of Shiji*) in fourteen scrolls (*Xin Tang shu* 58.1463); Cao Cao, father of Cao Pi, was credited with making an epitome of various works of military strategies and named the epitome *Ji yao* 接要 (*Assembly of the Essentials*), which subsequently circulated as an independent title (*Sanguo zhi* 1.2; *Sui shu* 34.1013-1014).

In modern Chinese *chaoxie* 鈔寫 has become a compound simply indicating "copying," but in early medieval times *chao*, used as a verb (to make an extract) or as a noun (extract), is defined against *xie* 寫, to copy (Tian 2007: 79-82). The former requires active selection: one chooses what are considered important passages from a work for copying, and sometimes summarizes or paraphrases in one's own language the content of a work. The practice of *chaoshu*, a prized act of learning, spread far beyond the making of an encyclopedia, and accounts of

chaoshu abound in early medieval times (see Tian 2007: 82-83). Strikingly, in dynastic histories, the epitomes produced by a biography subject are frequently listed next to, and on a par with, his own writings as part of his textual accomplishments. The passage from Yu Zhongrong's 庾仲容 (477-ca. 550) biography in *Liang shu* 梁書 (*History of the Liang*) is typical:

> Zhongrong made an epitome of Masters texts in thirty scrolls, one of various literary collections in thirty scrolls, one of various geographical works in twenty scrolls, and one of women's biographies in three scrolls. He also authored a literary collection in twenty scrolls. All went into circulation (*Liang shu* 50.724)

Yu Zhongrong's *Zi chao* 子鈔 (*Epitome of Masters Texts*) was reworked by Ma Zong 馬總 (fl. early ninth century), who renamed the epitome *Yi lin* 意林 (*Forest of Ideas*). A large part of it is extant and proves a precious source of many Masters texts that have been lost since.

A passage from Zhang Mian's 張緬 (490-531) biography is also illustrative of the status of epitome-making in this period:

> Mian reconciled the differences of the various histories of the Later Han and of the Jin dynasty, and subsequently produced a *Record of the Later Han* in forty scrolls and an *Epitome of the Jin* in thirty scrolls. He also set out to make an epitome of the literary collections from the south, but did not get to finish it (*Liang shu* 34.492).

Again, Zhang Mian's epitomes were treated as his unique accomplishments, and his failure to finish the epitome of the literary collections by southern authors was considered a regrettable loss. Indeed, a popular phrase in the Southern Dynasties histories is *chaozhuan* 抄撰, literally to produce extracts and compile (e.g. *Liang shu* 25.381, 49.689; *Nan shi* 50.1246; *Chen shu* 27.353). The only "original" aspect of *chaozhuan* is to exercise one's judgment in reconciling differences of one's sources; otherwise, *chaozhuan* is a scholarly activity that does not involve creative writing, as can be seen clearly in the statement that Emperor Wen of the Song 宋文帝 (r. 424-453) once ordered scholar He Shangzhi 何尚之 (382-460) to *chaozhuan wujing* 抄撰五經 ("produce extracts from the Five Classics and compile them") (*Nan Qi shu* 54.943).

Nevertheless, *chaozhuan*, unlike a professional copyist's copying of a book (*xie shu* 寫書), is not an entirely passive process. Zhang Mian's epitomes of the histories of the Later Han and the Jin were based on a variety of sources that clearly contained differences and conflicts, and he had come up with a synthetic work of his own—one might even call it a "critical edition." As the *Sui shu* historian stated, "Since the Later Han, scholars have often made an epitome of earlier histories and therewith produced a historical work of their own" 自後漢已來, 學者多鈔撰舊史, 自為一書 (*Sui shu* 33.962).

Many titles recorded in the bibliographic chapters of the *Sui shu* are entitled "X or Y chao," indicating that they are epitomes made from X or Y; the names of the epitome-makers are frequently noted whenever they are known. Such is no longer the case in Tang dynastic histories. While occasionally a biography still mentions epitome-making, it no longer constitutes a common feature. Values had changed.

Apparently, however, the practice of epitome-making had remained. People in the Tang continued to make epitomes, and this is nowhere more clearly seen than in the case of *bieji*,

literary collections of individual authors (see Chapter 15). The evidence can be seen in the process of the Northern Song scholars putting together a critical edition of a Tang author's literary collection. As Owen demonstrates, a complete collection of a Tang author more often than not had to be assembled from many manuscript copies of an author's partial writings by Song editors, and it was the norm to copy out selections from a collection—known as *xiaoji* 小集, the "little collection" or an "anthology" of a single author's work—based on the reader/copyist's individual taste and preference rather than reproducing the entire tome (Owen 1997: 303-312). From copying extracts and making an epitome of a lengthy work—be it a single title or a single author's literary collection—to collecting "anthologies" of a single author's work and assembling them together to rebuild a complete collection, we have come full circle.

<1> Coda

Encyclopedias and epitomes are important ways of organizing and transmitting knowledge in medieval China. Though overlapping, the two remain distinct. Their popularity was closely associated with the proliferation of books and the difficulty of obtaining and/or reading many books, and with the need of literary composition. As regards the classics, histories, and Masters texts, one wanted to obtain the "gist" (*yao* 要); as to literary collections, one followed personal taste and preference and copied selectively. People did not always, or even generally, reproduce and/or read a work in its entirety. The making of encyclopedia and epitome and their circulation (*xing* 行) raise a number of important questions in intellectual and literary history, about what and how people were reading in medieval Chinese society. The imperial commissioning of a large-scale encyclopedia is also a way of demonstrating the state's cultural power and political legitimacy.

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Abstract

     This chapter discusses two important ways of organizing and disseminating knowledge in premodern China, namely, compiling an encyclopedia and making an epitome. An encyclopedia, *leishu*, literally a "classified book," consists of extracts that are taken from a variety of earlier works and classified under different categories. An epitome (*chao* or *shuchao*), on the other hand, is usually based on either one work or one type of work; in making an epitome one chooses what are considered important passages from a work to copy down, and sometimes summarizes or paraphrases in one's own language the content of a work. The making and circulating of encyclopedia and epitome raise a number of important questions in intellectual and literary history, about what and how people were reading in medieval Chinese society. A *leishu* is ultimately much more than just a chest of drawers serving as a repository of knowledge and material aids to memory, for it is supposed to present an organized system of knowledge of the world, reflecting an orderly universe in its comprehensive, structured arrangement of ideas, concepts, and things. The imperial commissioning of a large-scale encyclopedia is also a way of demonstrating the state's cultural power and political legitimacy.

Keywords: encyclopedia (*leishu*); epitome (*chao* or *shuchao*); epitome-making (*chaoshu*); knowledge organization; knowledge transmission; history of reading; history of books