
Introduction: Publishing for Daily Life in Early Modern East Asia

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The proliferation of “encyclopedias” (*leishu* 類書, literally “category books”) purporting to provide readers with the basic knowledge needed for the conduct of daily life was one of the major trends of the early-modern publishing boom of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China. Dubbed “daily-use encyclopedias” (*riyong leishu* 日用類書) by modern scholars to distinguish them from the scholarly and imperially sponsored encyclopedias that had formed part of the literary tradition since the second century BCE, these works offered — or claimed to offer — practical information essential to everyday life.

Before the late Ming (1368-1644), most encyclopedias collected and categorized information on the Confucian Classics, the classical literary tradition, institutions of the imperial state, or the natural world; they were published, sometimes at imperial command, for an elite, often an official, readership. The first known encyclopedia intended for daily use, the *Expansive Record of the Forest of Literati* (*Shilin guangji* 事林廣記), was produced in the late thirteenth century. But this work and others produced through the fourteenth century still emphasized classical learning. In both their contents and formats, they were, as Cheng-hua Wang explains in her essay, designed for the “daily use” of aspiring officials among the gentry elite.

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In contrast, the “comprehensive compendium of myriad treasures” (*wanbao quanshu* 萬寶全書) — also referred to as works that “free one from the need to ask the advice of others” (*buqiuren* 不求人) — of the late Ming and Qing (1644-1911) were explicitly produced for “all under heaven.” They included (in addition to some basic information on Confucianism and imperial officialdom) purportedly useful and up-to-date instructions on how to write letters and contracts, how to cure illnesses in both animals and people, how to conduct oneself in a brothel, how to play chess and other games, how to play the zither, how to paint and perfect one’s calligraphy, how to cast charms, etc. In sum, they claimed to offer the literate everyman both guidance in the practices of everyday life and access to elite knowledge (e.g., how to paint and play the zither) that would allow them to “act like a *shi*” 士 — that is, a cultivated man of high social status — even though they had not been born into the elite. In valorizing ordinary, mundane knowledge and practical technologies they were promoting a kind of knowledge marginal — if not anathema — to the elite scholarly class dedicated to the study and implementation of the constant and universal principles of Confucian teaching.

In sum, the *wanbao quanshu* and *buqiuren* — these two phrases, which often appear in the titles of the works, came to be used to refer to the genre of daily-use encyclopedias — are emblematic of a new kind of commercial publication that emerged in force in the early modern period and remained popular through the remainder of the imperial era and Republican period: works that promote — in a way that elite works of the past did not — the importance of everyday knowledge and that are, in their language, formats, and subject matter, clearly targeting non-elite readers. They represent, too, an effort to help these readers manage the flood of print the publishing boom produced -- “the multitude of books that are as vast as the ocean,”¹ as one editor put it — by collecting and condensing useful information in one text.

¹ Yu Xiangdou 余象斗, “Leiju Santai wanyong zhengzong yin” 類聚三台萬用正宗引, 1a, *Xinke tianxia simin bianlan Santai wanyong zhengzong* 新刻天下四民便覽三台萬用正宗 [1599] in *Mingdai tongshu*

These works represent just one of several types of texts that appeared in the late Ming to meet the social and cultural needs of a burgeoning commoner² and largely urban readership. The monetization of the economy, the resulting commercial growth and greater importance of the merchant class, and the expansion of cities and market towns created the economic and social conditions for a growth in the reading public: more people below the very top scholar-official and wealthy merchant elite had the means to purchase luxuries like books. And city life stimulated demand for news, information, and entertainment, as well as for guidance on how to appear a knowledgeable and sophisticated urbanite.

Intellectual and literary trends also both supported the increase in literacy that would have given newly prosperous potential book purchasers the skills necessary to read and, at the same time, aroused elite interest in popular knowledge. The movement inspired by Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472-1529) teachings that "anyone could become a sage", even "ignorant men and women", produced reading primers, vernacular commentaries on the Confucian Classics, morality books, and other works of popular literacy and moral education. While followers of Wang Yangming urged the education of commoners through what we might call a top-down approach to the dissemination of knowledge, other literati, with a somewhat different take on the processes of moral improvement, were engaging happily in the "popular" culture of urban commoners, particularly in the pleasures of vernacular fiction—and recommending, implicitly if not explicitly, a bottom-up integration of popular and elite culture. Both trends — the sense that commoners could and should be educated in orthodox Confucian values *and* the sense that commoner culture had something to offer the elite — doubtless spurred the production of daily-use encyclopedias.

riyong leishu jikan 明代通俗日用類書集刊, edited Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan Lishi yanjiusuo Wenhua shi 中國社會科學院歷史研究所文化室 (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011, 6:211.

² In the context of early modern Chinese society, a commoner was someone without an examination degree or official position. One could be literate, yet still identified as a commoner (*min* 民).

These dual impulses are reflected not only in the daily-use encyclopedias but also in many other commercial publications of the late Ming. In addition to educational texts and encyclopedic guides to daily life, the period witnessed the production of a flood of other works apparently aimed at a growing literate public of merchants, petty shopkeepers, lower gentry, clerks and other sub-officials, students, transport workers, and perhaps even some better-off peasants and some women. News sheets (*dibao* 邸報) transmitted news of the court and gossip about contemporary scandals. Merchant handbooks advised sojourning traders on the best routes to travel and warned against the dangers of the road. Medical manuals and prescription collections provided people — aspiring and even practicing medical technicians and physicians among them — with the means of diagnosing disease and dispensing medicine. Guides to good taste advised *nouveaux riches* and other social climbers how to appear artistically and culturally knowledgeable. All sorts of manuals educated readers about sex, *weiqi* 圍棋 (chess), calligraphy, painting, etc. Geomantic and fortune-telling handbooks gave families and individuals the skills necessary to invite good fortune and ward off evil. But perhaps most impressive was the outpouring of *xiaoshuo* 小說, the “petty” fictions that, because of their distance from “the truth,” were viewed with at least pretended disdain by the highly educated elite.

Of course, one of the prerequisites for the production of these texts was the existence of commercial publisher-booksellers who recognized the profits that could be made in this book market. The late Ming was in fact the first time in Chinese publishing history that *commercial* publishers dominated the world of books. Although commercial publishing had begun as early as the late Tang dynasty (618-907), it was not until the seventeenth century that commercial production outstripped government and private or literati publishing. The growth of commercial publishing was very much part of the overall commercialization of the economy that began in the late sixteenth century. It was at this time that the wages for woodblock-cutting, the part of the publication process that required the heaviest capital investment, declined; as paper industries flourished, particularly in south China, the costs of paper, too, fell. And the growing demand for

books also made it easier to earn profits from publishing. In sum, it might be an attractive business for entrepreneurs, particularly those in the highly urbanized and culturally advanced Jiangnan area (the lower Yangzi River delta), where the large population of unemployed or under-employed literati provided both a ready supply of authors and editors, and an eager audience for new publications. The great cities of Jiangnan — Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Suzhou — became the greatest publishing centers and book markets of the day.

It was not Jiangnan, however, but Jianyang (in northern Fujian province), one of the most prolific publishing sites of the Ming, that took the lead in the production of *wanbao quanshu*. The commercial houses of Jianyang, although notorious for the production of often shoddily edited and pirated popular texts, were among the most innovative publishers of the day. Their *wanbao quanshu* reflect both these characteristics of Jianyang publishing. They are in effect pastiches of other texts, composed of scraps of information lifted from either specialized handbooks or other *wanbao quanshu* and presented as new and original. Yet they are also imaginatively designed and advertised; the Jianyang shops employed a rich array of paratextual devices to organize (and repeatedly re-organize) “daily-use” information and to promote their texts as not only new but also easy to use. They were brilliantly successful. The *wanbao quanshu* became very popular, so much so that other commercial publishers, most notably in the Jiangnan area, began to turn them out as well. They remained a staple of commercial publishing through the Qing and even into the Republican period; the phrases *wanbao quanshu* and *buqiuren* are still used today in the titles of contemporary daily-life manuals.

Modern Japanese scholars were the first to take the *wanbao quanshu* seriously. The great legal historian of China, Niida Noboru 仁井田陞 (1904-1966), drew on these works in his study of legal knowledge in the Ming and Qing, using the model contracts in the daily-use encyclopedias to make arguments about land and commercial transactions. Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫 (1912-2010) produced the first serious study of the works as a genre, calling attention to their usefulness for an understanding of daily life in early

modern China. These scholars are the first to refer to the texts as a group as “riyong leishu.”

In the first essay here, however, Cheng-hua Wang 王正華 challenges their notion that *wanbao quanshu* provide valuable evidence of the real practices of daily life.³ On the basis of close readings of the “Calligraphy” and “Painting Manual” sections, she suggests instead that the most popular of these works are best seen as efforts by Jianyang commercial publishers to take advantage of the new group of consumers eager for information that would give them some window on — if not genuine access to — the cultural and social lives of the elite. In the process, she argues, the works opened up new social spaces and new discourses on calligraphy and painting that, although they might have overlapped with mainstream elite spaces and discourses, nonetheless remained distinct from them.

Hsu Hui-lin 許暉林 similarly challenges the notion that the *wanbao quanshu* offered practical information for everyday use, focusing on their role in creating imaginative rather than social spaces. In particular he argues that, although the “Barbarians” sections of the encyclopedias did not offer practical information, they nonetheless served a practical function by helping readers negotiate a new understanding of geography.⁴ The ways in which information about foreign peoples was organized in the texts — in particular the ways in which accounts of fantastic creatures taken from ancient Chinese texts were mingled with solid information from “real” travel records — encouraged readers to preserve a vision of the tributary system (in which all

³ Wang Cheng-hua (Wang Zhenghua). “Shenghuo, zhishi yu wenhua shangpin: wan Ming Fujianban riyong leishu yu qi shuhuamen” 生活知識與文化商品：晚明福建版日用類書與其書畫門 in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 (Journal of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica) 41 (September 2003): 1-85.

⁴ Hsu Hui-lin (Xu Huilin). “Chaogong di xiangxiang: wan Ming riyong leishu <Zhuyi men> di yiyu lunshu” 朝貢的想像：晚明日用類書《諸夷門》的異域論述 in *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu tongxun* 中國文哲研究通訊 20.2 (2010): 169-192.

outlying lands offered tribute to China) just at the time when the system was in decay. This effort to reimagine tributary relationships was also, Hsu argues, a way of resisting the western geographical information introduced to China by the Jesuit missionary Mateo Ricci in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

As the last two essays reveal, the *wanbao quanshu* circulated beyond the borders of imperial China, in both Korea and Japan, within decades of their production in Jianyang and Jiangnan. Both Chosŏn Korea (1392-1897) and Tokugawa Japan (1601-1868) looked to China as a source of learning. The literary traditions of both countries were heavily influenced by Chinese literature; and the written language of the elites in each country was classical Chinese. Chinese texts, particularly texts of Confucianism and Buddhism, were highly valued, and, as these essays make clear, official Korean visitors to Beijing, the Chinese capital, eagerly sought out a wide range of works to bring back home, while Japanese scholars relied on shipments of texts from China through the port of Nagasaki. While the circulation of elite knowledge from China to Korea and Japan has been relatively well studied, the two essays published here are among the first to examine the ways in which *wanbao quanshu* in particular made their way to and were understood and appropriated for different ends in the two countries.

Lin Kuei-ju 林桂如 surveys the uses they were put to in seventeenth-century Japan, during the early Tokugawa or Edo period (1603-1868).⁵ Here their reception was rather different from that in China, in that the *wanbao quanshu* seem to have been taken as quite respectable digests of information on Chinese culture; at least one was included in the Chinese library of a distinguished scholar and member of the Tokugawa ruling elite. The encyclopedias were seen as particularly useful in the compilation of educational works for students. Famous stories from Chinese history and literature, excerpted from the encyclopedias (which had excerpted them from other sources) taught children of the Japanese elite the Chinese language — but also allusions to Chinese stories that had been

⁵ Lin Kuei-ru (Lin Guiru). “Cong Jianghu chuqi qimeng cishu bianzuanlun *Wanbao quanshu* zhi dongchuan” 從江戶初期啟蒙辭書編纂論《萬寶全書》之東傳.

incorporated into Japanese literature in classical Chinese. Many of the stories were also didactic, teaching Confucian ethical principles — and even standards of official conduct for future shogunate officials — in an entertaining fashion. Eventually the *wanbao quanshu* spawned a new genre of Japanese “daily-use” texts, whose titles mimicked the “myriad treasures” (C. *wanbao*, J. *banpō*) phrase of the Chinese titles.

In Chosŏn-dynasty (1392-1897) Korea, as Ch’oe Yongch’ŏl 崔溶澈 explains, the *wanbao quanshu* seem to have been accorded a similar degree of respect.⁶ Korean readers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were attentive to the sections of the *wanbao quanshu* on calculation as a guide to fiscal management (particularly useful for officials) and on medicine and gestation as guides to reproductive health. They also accepted the works at least in part as practical guides to elite culture, for portions of the *wanbao quanshu* were copied into manuals for playing the zither and following the Way of tea — very much preoccupations of the elite — and used as guides to the writing of proper ritual documents. Yet no self-respecting member of the Chinese literati class would have accepted instruction in these matters from works aimed at “all classes of the people.” When a *wanbao quanshu* was partially translated into vernacular Korean, the sections selected for the fullest treatment were the summaries of Chinese history; and in these sections, the copyist chose to indicate, in his method of referring to the (Chinese) Ming dynasty and the (foreign, Manchu) Qing dynasty, his loyalty to the Ming — suggesting the powerful hold that China had on the Korean worldview. But he also felt the need to clean up the section on jokes by deleting the lewd quips that dominated that section in the Chinese original.

Together the four essays in this issue illuminate the multiple ways readers in not only China but also Japan and Korea could use the perhaps shoddy and hastily produced but also richly heterogenous *wanbao quanshu*.

⁶ Ch’oe Yongch’ŏl. “Hanguo Chaoxian shidai *Wanbao quanshu* de chuanbo jiqi fanyi” 韓國朝鮮時代《萬寶全書》的傳播及其翻譯.

NB: All essays have been abridged and revised in the process of translation and editing.

Chronologies

<i>China</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Korea</i>
Tang dynasty (618-907)		
Song dynasty (960-1279)	Northern Song (960-1126)	
	Southern Song (1127-1279)	
Yuan dynasty (Mongol rule; 1279-1368)		Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897)
Ming dynasty (1368-1644)		
	Tokugawa shogunate/Edo period (1603-1868)	
Qing dynasty (Manchu rule; 1644- 1911)		