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## **Bibliographical Notes on the Early-Ming Copy of the *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan* at the Edinburgh University Library**

*Stephen McDowall*  
*University of Edinburgh*

### Abstract

*The earliest printed item in the collection of the Edinburgh University Library is an incomplete early-Ming copy of the Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan, dated 1440. Although it was acquired in 1628, its precise bibliographical details and wider significance have thus far remained obscure to most library users, and at present the volume does not have its own catalogue entry. In these notes, I provide a brief description of the volume and its early-Ming context, and I argue for the continued importance of such lesser-known imprints for our understanding of late-imperial Chinese cultural history.*

**Keywords:** *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan; examinations; Ming dynasty; Hu Guang; Yongle; printing; imprints; Jianyang; Yu Hui.*

### **Introduction**

The earliest printed item in the collection of the Edinburgh University Library, an incomplete copy of the *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan* 周易傳義大全 [Complete Commentaries on the Changes of Zhou; hereafter ZYZYDQ], is an early-Ming Jianyang imprint dated 1440 (Hu, 1440a). The copy was acquired in 1628, but its precise bibliographical details, its political significance, and the context of its publication have remained obscure to most library users, and at present this volume does not have its own catalogue entry. The ZYZYDQ exists in a number of distinct extant editions, and the significance of one particular early-Ming imprint might therefore be considered marginal, particularly given this imprint's relative textual inferiority. I would argue, however, that regardless

of any textual limitations (explicitly not my concern here), the very existence of this edition, and the stated rationale for its publication, are in fact highly significant dimensions of the broader cultural history of this book. This essay, a set of bibliographical notes in the widest sense of the term, provides a brief overview of the contents of the volume, a description of its physical properties, and an attempt to place both its publication and reception within its Ming cultural and political context. The primary intention here is simply to document the existence of this copy of the 1440 imprint here at Edinburgh, but in doing so I also argue for the continued importance of such lesser-known imprints for our understanding of late-imperial Chinese cultural history.

### The 1415 Edition of the *ZYDYDQ*

The *Zhouyi* 周易 [Changes of Zhou], also known as the *Yijing* 易經 [Classic of Changes], and better known in English as the *Book of Changes*, remains one of the most important works of the Confucian tradition. The sixty-four hexagrams that form the basis of the work are traditionally thought to have been revealed to Fuxi 伏羲, a mythological figure of early antiquity, whose work was continued by King Wen of Zhou 周文王, and subsequently edited by Confucius himself in the fifth century BCE. Although interpretations varied over the course of many centuries, it was generally held that the work contained certain truths about the architecture of the universe, which would be made manifest by the application of proper exegesis. The present version of the text, on which all the major commentaries are based, is believed to have been collated by the great Han scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE), but as with many of the early works, the major commentaries became, over time, as important as the original text, and were themselves subsumed into the canon.

The *ZYDYDQ* of 1415 (Hu, 1415) asserts as authoritative the interpretations of two particular Song-dynasty commentators: the *Yichuan yizhuan* 伊川易傳 [Yi River Commentary on the Changes] by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), and the *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義 [Original Meanings of the Changes of Zhou] by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200).<sup>1</sup> In very broad terms, the Cheng commentary interprets the *Zhouyi* as a moral and philosophical treatise, while the Zhu commentary reads

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<sup>1</sup> The *zhuanyi* 傳義 (lit. 'transmitted meanings') in the title of the *ZYDYDQ* refers to the titles of the Cheng and Zhu commentaries.

it as a manual of divination. The significance of the ZYZYDQ was the method by which these two very different commentaries were reconciled within a single work (Hon, 2008).

The ZYZYDQ was produced as part of the *Wujing sishu daquan* 五經四書大全 [Complete Commentaries on the Five Classics and Four Books], commissioned by the Yongle 永樂 Emperor (Zhu Di 朱棣; r. 1403-1424) in 1414, the twelfth year of his reign (Lin, 1991). It bears the names of forty-two compilers, principal among them being Hu Guang 胡廣 (1370-1418), Yang Rong 楊榮 (1371-1440) and Jin Youzi 金幼孜 (1368-1432), members of the newly-organised grand secretariat of seven senior Hanlin Academy 翰林院 scholars. All three of these men had received their *jinshi* 進士 degrees under the ill-fated Jianwen 建文 Emperor (Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆; r. 1399-1402), with Hu Guang, who served as editor-in-chief of the project, having been placed first in the year 1400 (Zhang, 1974: 4124-25; Goodrich & Fang, 1976: 627-29). In 1414, these three men had just returned from the second of the Yongle Emperor's northern campaigns, a four-month expedition to Mongolia during which the group had been responsible for the education of the young Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基 (later the Xuande 宣德 Emperor; r. 1426-1435) (Jin, 1991). As Anne Gerritsen (2007: 124-27) has shown, the bond between a handful of highly-successful scholar-officials hailing from Ji'an 吉安 prefecture in Jiangxi province, a group that included both Hu Guang and Jin Youzi, was an important dimension of early fourteenth-century political history.

Imperial sponsorship of the *Wujing sishu daquan* was a key part of the Yongle Emperor's attempt to regulate the textual knowledge available in the early fifteenth century, an attempt that had manifested itself most evidently in the enormous *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 [Encyclopaedia of the Yongle Reign], compiled by Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 (1335-1418) et al. between 1403 and 1408. The initiation of such literary projects so soon after 1402 links them inextricably to issues surrounding the legitimacy or otherwise of the Yongle Emperor's succession. Anxious on the one hand to be seen as a patron and guardian of culture within the empire, the emperor probably also considered the early re-deployment of the educated scholar class on projects such as these to be critical to his sustained ability to rule (Elman, 1997: 70-5). Most importantly, perhaps, these compilations, and their application within the examination system, were designed as a means to define and control 'the official version of acceptable knowledge' (Elman, 2000: 122).

The ZYZYDQ was completed and presented to the throne in the ninth month of the thirteenth year of the Yongle reign (1415), a scarcely-believable nine months after its initiation the previous year (Huang, 1773-82: 13.16b-17a). Thereafter, as the standard text of the civil service examinations, it defined the way the classic was read for at least the next two centuries. The work was officially superseded in the Qing Dynasty by another imperially-authorised edition: *Zhouyi zhezhong* 周易折中 [Balanced Annotations on the Changes of Zhou], compiled by Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642-1718) et al. in 1715, and in which, significantly, the order of the Cheng and Zhu commentaries is reversed (Hon, 2011). But a spike in the proliferation of new commentaries after 1572 had caused the Ministry of Rites 禮部 to issue warnings to examiners against accepting readings of the classics that deviated from the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy (Chow, 2004: 163-66), suggesting that the ZYZYDQ was already losing its authority by the end of the Ming.

Under the microscope of later centuries, neither the *Wujing sishu daquan* in general nor the ZYZYDQ in particular fared well. Some late-Ming scholars considered Hu Guang's collaboration with the Yongle Emperor to be an improper rejection of the favour shown him during the Jianwen reign (Elman, 1997: 80). Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682), in typically grumpy mood, equated the damage caused by using badly-compiled editions of the classics to test examination candidates to that of the burning of books during the Qin period (Gu, 2012: 54-57). In a scathing assessment, later endorsed by the editors of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 [Complete Library of the Four Treasuries; 1773-82], the pre-eminent early-Qing literary historian Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) accused Hu Guang and the other editors of simply cobbling together the works of other scholars and removing their names (Zhu, 1773-82: 49.17a-19b). For Zhu, the whole enterprise 'made manifest the impurity of Hu Guang's heart and the careless negligence of his official colleagues' 可見胡廣心術之不純而同事諸臣亦苟且游戲甚矣 (ibid.: 19b).

### **The 1440 Edition of the ZYZYDQ**

If the Palace edition of 1415 represents imperial authority, the 1440 edition of the ZYZYDQ, a copy of which is now in the Edinburgh University Library collection (Hu, 1440a), may be said to inhabit a very different world. This edition was published in Jianyang 建陽, northern Fujian (Minbei 閩北), at the Shuanggui shutang 雙桂書堂 [Twin Cassia Book Hall], a commercial publishing

house operated by the Yu 余 family, the most prominent name in publishing at that time (Chia, 2002). It is dated the fifth year (1440) of the Zhengtong 正統 reign period, the first reign of the young Zhu Qizhen 朱祁鎮 (r. 1436-1449 and 1457-1464), great-grandson of the Yongle Emperor. Despite the availability of movable type from the eleventh century onwards, xylography (woodblock printing) remained the dominant method of publishing in China, a situation that would continue throughout the Ming period (Chow, 2004: 59-71). By 1440, Jianyang had firmly established itself as one of the most important centres of woodblock publishing in the empire. The Twin Cassia Book Hall edition of 1440 seems to be extremely rare; it does not appear in the *Zhongguo guji shanben shumu* 中國古籍善本書目 [Catalogue of Chinese Rare Books] (1985-96: *Jingbu* 經部 64-65), and it predates any dated imprint listed in that catalogue published after the Palace edition of 1415. This includes a later Twin Cassia Book Hall edition dated 1496.

Commercial publishers such as the Twin Cassia Book Hall clearly derived enormous benefit from the examination system and the state's publishing endeavours. Officially-compiled and published works such as the *ZYZYDQ* tended to be prohibitively expensive; their re-publication commercially met the short-term demands of examination candidates, but also both fed off and into a broader scholarly interest in comparing editions, re-collating texts and writing new commentaries. As Lucille Chia (2002: 125) has observed, commercial printing on such a large scale tended to act as a leveller of textual authority, and imperially-authorized text risked being altered, either by accident or by design, almost as soon as it was released into the public domain.

Such concerns regarding the stability of texts occupied the minds of the literati élite over a number of centuries, with Song-dynasty critics such as Ye Mengde 葉夢德 (1077-1148) already complaining of a publishing industry disseminating faulty editions of works by using woodblocks riddled with errors (Cherniack, 1994: 49). In this regard, the reputation of Jianyang publishers was particularly poor. Since the Song, the area had been notorious for producing poor-quality editions, referred to rather disparagingly as 'Masha editions' 麻沙本, which were characterised by badly-printed text, a cramped page layout, poor-quality paper, and, most worryingly, a large number of textual errors (Chia, 2002: 116-26). The continuing market for such imprints over several centuries attests to the fact that book acquisition extended far beyond

connoisseurs, but the lack of regard paid to Masha editions by literati has also tended to result in a low survival rate relative to numbers produced. By the late Ming, collectors could afford to be discriminating, so, for example, while the catalogue of the great bibliophile Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) lists 165 distinct versions or editions of the *Changes* (Qian, 2002: 323-25), it also reflects Qian's reputation for 'collecting only Song- and Yuan-dynasty editions, and not touching anything published by men of recent times' 所收必宋元板不取近人所刻 (Cao, 2002: 322).

### **Description of the Edinburgh University Library Copy**

The Edinburgh University Library copy of the 1440 edition shows several of the characteristics typical of an early-Ming Jianyang imprint, including misaligned and occasionally indistinct characters, particularly where interlineal commentary meets the text proper. The bamboo pages of the volume are extremely thin and have become brittle over time; a number of damaged pages were evident when I first examined the volume in 2012, although these were repaired during extensive conservation work (including rebinding) undertaken in 2013. The brittleness of the paper has also caused splits along the centre strips (*banxin* 版心) of the leaves, making it difficult to read page numbers, a characteristic typical of Jianyang imprints (Chia, 2002: 26-27). The seventeenth-century technology manual *Tiangong kaiwu* 天工開物 [Exploitation of the Works of Heaven's Manufacture] describes bamboo paper as being a speciality of Fujian (Song, 1978: 325), and for Jianyang publishers, this type of low-quality paper would have helped to keep production costs down. The centre strips of this edition also display double 'fish-tail' (*yuwei* 魚尾) markers and broad 'elephant trunk' (*xiangbi* 象鼻) lines both above and below. Each half leaf contains eleven columns of nineteen main text (*zhengwen* 正文) characters, typical of an averaged-sized Ming-dynasty Jianyang imprint (Chia, 2002: 42-43).

Until 2013, the volume was bound upside down, having apparently been illegible to the Edinburgh University Library staff of the day, and its spine read: 'BIBLIOTHECÆ EDINENSIS. CHINESE'. An earlier, handwritten inscription appears on the final page (i.e. what was thought to have been the first page), with brief details of the acquisition recorded in Latin: 'Liber xxxxx Edinburgenae ex dono Roberti Ramsay. 1628' (the second word is illegible to me). Robert Ramsay of Woodston (d. 1643), who later became minister of

Ecclesgreig (St. Cyrus), graduated as Master of Arts in July 1628 (Morgan, 1933-34: 1.1; Scott, 1925: 481), and the book was probably donated to the Library to mark that occasion, a common practice among students at that time.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, how Ramsay might have acquired the volume, remains unknown.

A complete copy (in ten volumes) of the 1440 imprint is held at the Harvard-Yenching Library in Cambridge, MA, and a comparison of that copy (Hu, 1440b) and the Edinburgh copy (Hu, 1440a) yields the following observations:

The Edinburgh copy is missing its table of contents (*zongmu* 總目), beginning at what would have been page 3b of the editorial principles (*fanli* 凡例). This means that it is missing eleven pages or half leaves (1a-3b of the contents; 1a-3a of the notes) at the beginning of the volume. It then ends, abruptly, at page 21a of *juan* 2, which should run on to page 34b. *Juan* 3 to 24 are missing entirely. The Edinburgh copy, therefore, at 323 half leaves, is now less than one fifth of its original extent. The missing title and table of contents accounts for its sometimes being attributed to Cheng Yi, whose preface is indeed the first complete essay to appear; the description 'Essay by Ch'eng-tze on the Yi King' is written at the beginning of the volume in what appears to be a twentieth-century hand.

Although so much of the book is missing, the vital early preliminary essays by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi are all present in the Edinburgh copy, which consists of: General [Editorial] Principles 凡例 (incomplete); [Cheng Yi's] Preface to the Changes 易序; Preface to Master Cheng's Commentary 程子傳序; [Cheng Yi's] Meanings of Upper and Lower Divisions [of the Hexagrams] 上下篇義; Master Zhu's Diagrammatic Explanations 朱子圖說; [Zhu Xi's] Five Treatises 五贊; [Zhu Xi's] Divination Rituals 筮儀; [Cheng and Zhu's] Principal Teachings on the Changes 易說綱領 (to which is attached an essay by the Southern Song scholar Dong Kai 董楷 [js. 1256], which does not appear in the table of contents); *Juan* 1 卷之一; *Juan* 2 卷之二 (incomplete).

One interesting observation is that the order of the preliminary essays does not match that of the table of contents in the Harvard-Yenching copy, which has the two Cheng Yi prefaces reversed. That anomaly is repeated in the

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<sup>2</sup> For this information I am indebted to Joseph Marshall, Rare Books Librarian at the Edinburgh University Library.

Harvard-Yenching copy itself, which additionally has the General Editorial Principles appearing later than its own table of contents suggests it should. Such irregularities were possible in part because page numbers are never given in the tables of contents of early Chinese books, and restart from page 1 at the beginning of each new section. This practice reflects the fact that individual sections would usually have been produced by different craftsmen working on short-term jobs, perhaps even at different workshops, with an individual block carver able to produce somewhere between 100 and 150 characters per day (Chia, 2002: 37; McDermott, 2006: 36-37). Nevertheless, it is precisely this type of error of production, and therefore of transmission, that earned Masha editions the scorn of contemporary critics.

### **Rationale and Significance of the 1440 Edition**

The 1440 edition contains two publisher's colophons (*paiji* 牌記, on which see Zhang, 2000), enclosed within distinctive boxes (cartouches), only one of which survives in the Edinburgh copy. The first is a brief line that should appear on page 3b of the missing table of contents, reading (from the Harvard-Yenching copy): 'Newly printed in the *gengshen* year [1440] of the Zhengtong reign at the Twin Cassia Book Hall of the Yu Family' 正統庚申余氏雙桂書堂新刊. The second, which is retained in the Edinburgh copy on page 2b of the Preface to the Changes, is a fascinating note, also dated 1440, and signed by a man named Yu Hui 余惠, presumably the owner of the Twin Cassia Book Hall at that time. Yu touches on the relationship between the official and commercial sides of the industry, and his colophon, which almost makes commercial publishing sound like a philanthropic venture, is worth translating in full here:

Shulin [lit. 'Forest of Books'; the book district of Chonghua 崇化, Jianyang] has been producing books like Cheng's *Commentary* and Zhu's *Original Meanings* for many a year now. In our dynasty the various scholars' commentaries on the *Changes* were again sought and collated, and detailed explanations of them were made. These were called the *Complete Commentaries*, which were distributed to the academies. But Yu Hui, considering that scholars of the hills and groves would have difficulty examining these, has transcribed the original texts, and sponsored the appointment of craftsmen to carve the blocks. Now, therefore, each scholar of the hills and

groves will be able to obtain and examine a copy for himself.

書林程朱易傳本義等書行之久矣我朝復旁搜諸家之說而詳釋焉斯謂大全  
頒降學校惠慮山林之士艱於觀覽乃謄原本捐貲命工鋟梓庶山林士子皆得  
鑑焉。

Yu Hui's explicit self-portrayal as a respectable facilitator of scholarly endeavour is a fascinating counter to the usual complaints about the Jianyang publishing industry, and it anticipates by over a century a similar claim made by one of Yu's descendants, and discussed by Lucille Chia (2002: 158-59). In a culture in which all educated men – not only those studying at the academies – had an obligation with regards to the proper criticism and transmission of the canonical texts, Yu reminds us of the significant role played by commercial publishers in widening access to such works. No doubt such self-promotion was primarily a marketing tool, but there is some validity to Yu's claim regarding access to books, which, as Joseph McDermott (2006: 43-81) has shown, remained expensive and scarce throughout the first century of Ming rule. From this perspective, one might (or at least Yu Hui might have us) view the 1440 edition of the *ZYZYDQ* as a small step towards the 'construction of new reading publics' that occurred during the sixteenth-century publishing boom (McLaren, 2005; Ko, 1994).

In recent years, the availability of an electronic version of the *Siku quanshu* has revolutionised scholarship in pre-nineteenth-century Chinese humanities, while at the same time scholars have rightly cautioned against an overreliance on that database on the grounds of textual inferiority (Egan, 2001). I would want to add that the privileging of *any* particular imprint over all others, even if that imprint *were* textually superior, has the potential to impoverish our understanding of the book in its wider cultural context, and I would strongly argue against the proposition that certain imprints are of 'no value for research' (Ji, 1988: 163) due to low production values. Whatever its limitations in terms of quality, the very existence of a commercially-published 1440 imprint of the *ZYZYDQ*, and the fascinating rationale for its publication as articulated by Yu Hui, are important components of a more nuanced 'sociology of texts', and a reminder of 'the human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission, and consumption' (McKenzie, 1986: 6-7). The incomplete copy of that imprint that somehow

found its way to Edinburgh is also a small but significant fragment of early-Ming history, to which we are very fortunate to have access.

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**Stephen McDowall** is Chancellor's Fellow in History at the University of Edinburgh, and the author of *Qian Qianyi's Reflections on Yellow Mountain: Traces of a Late-Ming Hatchet and Chisel* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009).