

The Contribution of the Kyujanggak Version of Wen Xuan to Chinese Ancient Literature

Linggang Kong^{1,*}

¹College of Chinese Language and Literature, Henan University, Kaifeng, 475001, China

*Corresponding author

Abstract: *Wen Xuan is the earliest collection of poems and essays in China. Due to its special status and value, it was widely distributed throughout the East Asian region after it came out. Wen Xuan remains the most popular object of study for scholars in China, Japan, South Korea and other countries to this day. Over a period of more than 1,500 years, several versions of Wen Xuan were formed through handwriting and printing. In the historical development of the various versions of Wen Xuan, the Xiuzhou version is a milestone version with transitional meaning. Unfortunately, the Xiuzhou version that had historical and transitional significance was lost, which is a great pity for the academic circle of Wen Xuan. However, the Kyujanggak version is a block-printed edition based on the master copy of the Xiuzhou version. This version is extremely important in the research history of Wen Xuan and even the history of Chinese ancient literature. The most fundamental and important value of the Kyujanggak version is that it preserves the basic features of the three versions of Wen Xuan, with epoch-making significance in the historical development of Wen Xuan. Thus, it is important to carry out detailed research on the text. The Kyujanggak version faithfully reflects the original Xiuzhou version, and hence it can be used as a representative of the Xiuzhou version. Therefore, to study the Kyujanggak version is to study the Xiuzhou version.*

Keywords: *Wen Xuan, Kyujanggak Version, South Korea, Chinese Ancient Literature*

1. Introduction

Chinese literature, has existed for more than 2,000 years, with poetry being the earliest form of literature. *The Book of Songs* edited by Confucius is the earliest anthology of poetry in China; the earliest form of these poetries was published in the 11th century BC. With the evolution of Chinese civilisation, literature is constantly developing and changing. Besides poetry, there is prose that had the advantage of beautiful diction, narrative and reasoning; and the Songs of Chu, which originated from southern China, that convey feelings of passion and romance. These three are the main forms of Chinese literature before the 3rd century BC.

From the 2nd century BC, the first unified and powerful dynasty, the Han Dynasty, appeared with a new literary form, Fu, which had the advantage of the features of poetry, prose and Songs of Chu at the same time. The scale of Fu is huge, the structure is magnificent, the vocabulary is gorgeous and it has the same temperament as the powerful Han Empire. It replaced the Songs of Chu and, together with poetry and prose, became the main form of Chinese literature between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD.

As a nation that loves to record history, Chinese people did not have the concept of 'literature' at the beginning, and literature initially was merely a paragraph of words that record history or a passage that conveys truth. No one realised that literature could exist as an independent entity. This situation began to change in the 3rd century AD when China entered the Three Kingdoms period (220–280 AD), where people lived with constant wars and suffered throughout their lives as a result. Poems were used by literati to express feelings such as pain, sadness and worry. Thus, literature was utilised to communicate personal thoughts and feelings and did not exist as only a tool to record history anymore. Meanwhile, literary consciousness arose, which indicated that Chinese literature stepped onto a path of independence and innovation, which was like a baby, after the long-term gestation of its mother, it was finally born and became an independent individual. Japanese scholar, Suzuki Torao (1926) called it 'literary consciousness' ^[1], while famous Chinese writer, Lu Xun (1973) called it 'art for art's sake' ^[2].

Since the 3rd century AD, the development of Chinese literature had accelerated, and a large number

of literary works sprung up. These literary works were not only numerous but also vary considerably in quality. In order to make it easier and more convenient for people to read excellent literary works, in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, anthology was making its first appearance in China. *Sui Shu* (656), a Chinese history book, was the first to provide the definition of anthology. In the book, it explained that 'because of the prosperity of literature, there is a growing number of writers' literary works. For the convenience of reading, the literary works that were completed with high quality were selected and edited in a certain order, which is anthology'. Since then, there had been many anthologies. Many emperors and nobles had an enthusiasm for compiling anthology 'to boast about their scholarship as well as to show the prosperity of the dynasty. According to the textual criticism of *Sui Shu Jing Ji Zhi Kao Zheng* by Yao Zhenzong of the Qing Dynasty, there were 336 anthologies in China from the end of the 3rd century AD to the beginning of the 7th century AD^[3].

The concept of anthology has changed with the times as well. According to *Si Ku Quan Shu Zong Mu* in the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the anthology not only plays the role of selecting and gathering excellent works but also collects scattered, incomplete and single articles and gathers them together^[4].

It can be seen from the concept of anthology that it plays an essential role in the preservation and reading of literary works. Chinese people have always attached great importance to the compilation of anthology. Until today, people are still passionate about buying and reading anthologies.

2. The most influential and significant anthology in China

Hence, what is the most influential and significant anthology in China? Most Chinese scholars will give the same answer, which is *Wen Xuan*, also known as Selections from Zhao Ming. *Wen Xuan* (Selections of Refined Literature) is the earliest collection of poems and essays in China. It was compiled by Xiao Tong, the prince of Liang of the Southern Dynasties (502–557 AD) during the 6th century AD. It brings together more than 700 works from the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–256 BC) to Liang of the Southern Dynasties (502–557 AD) for nearly a thousand years, which has always been regarded as the most important anthology. The articles are profound and have a far-reaching influence on ancient Chinese literature. Once it came out, it was regarded as a guideline by scholars and soon became a research object. The research and annotation of *Wen Xuan* have also become a special discipline— 'Study of Wen Xuan'. Because of its special status and value, it was widely distributed throughout the East Asian region after it was published. *Wen Xuan* remains the most popular object of study for scholars in China, Japan, South Korea and other countries to this day. Moreover, as one of the representatives of ancient Chinese literature, it has attracted the attention of European and American sinologists, and there have been several translations and introductions about it.

Over a period of more than 1,500 years, various versions of *Wen Xuan* were formed through handwriting and printing. According to incomplete statistics, there are now more than 30 versions of *Wen Xuan* circulating in the world. Most of them are stored in China, Japan and South Korea, while others are collected in the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Russia.

The Tang Dynasty was the first peak for studying *Wen Xuan*, and there were two famous annotated versions called 'Gemini Constellation' that appeared. One version is Li Shan's annotations (annotated by famous scholar Li Shan during the reign of Emperor Taizong) and the other is Wu Chen's annotations (annotated by five scholars during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong). With the appearance of these two versions, the original text of *Wen Xuan* gradually decreased, and the version has been popular with Li Shan's annotations and Wu Chen's annotations. With the popularity of *Wen Xuan*, the scholars found that both Li Shan's annotations and Wu Chen's annotations have their own advantages and disadvantages. The cross-reference reading of these two versions is more appropriate, and the combination of Li Shan's and Wu Chen's annotations has become the call of history. Thus, Yuanyou ninth years of the Northern Song Dynasty (1094 AD), the Xiuzhou version (published by Xiuzhou Education Authority) was created at the right moment. In the historical development of the *Wen Xuan* version, the Xiuzhou version is a milestone version with transitional meaning. It is the first merged annotation version of Wu Chen's and Li Shan's annotations in China. Since then, the merged annotation version has replaced the single annotation version. It became a popular version for scholars to study *Wen Xuan*. Unfortunately, the Xiuzhou version that had historical and transitional significance was lost, so modern people are unable to see it, which is a great pity for the academic circle of *Wen Xuan*.

3. The discovery of the Kyujanggak version of *Wen Xuan* in South Korea

When history closes a window, it always opens another one for us. With the discovery of the Kyujanggak version of *Wen Xuan* in South Korea, we can finally see the first merged annotation version of Li Shan's and Wu Chen's annotations. The Kyujanggak version is a block-printed edition based on the master copy of the Xiuzhou version in Sejong ten years (1428 AD) Korea. It showed the layout and style of the first merged annotation version of *Wen Xuan* in history. Its value and historical significance are huge. In case the Xiuzhou version was lost, the Kyujanggak version replicated the contents of the Xiuzhou version, thus the literature value of the Kyujanggak version is particularly important. According to Kim (1998), most Korean scholars believe that the Kyujanggak version is 'the most beautiful and best version in the world'^[5].

According to the postscript attached to the Kyujanggak version, it should have been first printed between the second year (1420 AD) and the tenth year of Sejong's reign (1428 AD). Since then, during the reign of Jungjong (1506–1544 AD), Myeongjong (1545–1567 AD), Seonjo (1567–1608 AD), Gwanghae-gun (1608–1623 AD), Renzu (1623–1649 AD), Injo (1674–1720 AD) and other times of Korea, it has been reprinted several times. According to Jung's investigation in 1998, the first print of the Kyujanggak version had been lost and there are more than 30 reprints from different times, which are collected in the National Library of Korea, Kyujanggak of Seoul University, Korea University Library and Keimyung University Library^[6]. Because this book was found in Kyujanggak of Seoul University, that is why scholars called it the 'Kyujanggak version'.

After the Kyujanggak version was discovered, it soon attracted the attention of the East Asian anthology academic circles. Japanese scholars studied the Kyujanggak version earlier than other countries. It indicated that there was a Japanese scholar named Kuroda Ryo who wrote 'Study on *Wen Xuan* of Wu Chen's annotations' is documented in 'Korean Old Books Study', which was published in 1940. The main content of Kuroda's work was to investigate the characteristics of Wu Chen's annotations and merged annotation version of Li Shan and Wu Chen. According to Korean scholar Kim (1998), the merged annotation version should include the Kyujanggak version.^[5] However, it is a pity that the age is far away and the original text has not been found.

South Korean scholars such as Kim Nun-su, Baek Sen-sek and Jung Og-jun conducted preliminary research on the Kyujanggak version. They investigated its source, publication, circulation and existing situation, and analysed version features and the master copy used. However, there was no in-depth exploration of its value.

The earliest scholar in China to mention the Kyujanggak version is Zhang Yuanji, who indicated it in his publication *Han Fen Lou Jin Yu Shu Lu*. He believed that there are four versions of Song Dynasty block-printed editions of *Wen Xuan*, namely the Mingzhou version, Guangdu Pei's version, Ganzhou version and Xiuzhou version. He indicated that the 'Xiuzhou version was published in the 9th year during the reign of Emperor Zhezong of the Song Dynasty, but today, we can only see the Korean version reprinted with the Xiuzhou version as the master copy'^[7]. The 'Korean version' here refers to the Kyujanggak version.

Qu Shouyuan was the first Chinese scholar who investigated the Kyujanggak version. He read an article written by Korean scholar Baek Sen-sek, which indicated that there was one merged annotation version of Li Shan and Wu Chen found in Kyujanggak, South Korea. However, Baek only mentioned that it was collected by the Kyujanggak, without studying its origins in detail or mentioning its relationship with the Xiuzhou version of the Song Dynasty. As the Xiuzhou version no longer exists, this Kyujanggak version is very important for academic circles. Qu started to study it; his findings mainly include the following three aspects: first, Qu found an article attached to the Kyujanggak version that was printed by the prefectural school in Xiuzhou of the Northern Song Dynasty in China, which means the master copy of the Kyujanggak version was the Xiuzhou version. Second, he explained why there was no historical record of the Xiuzhou version in China. The probable reason is that Xiuzhou was under the jurisdiction of Hangzhou at that time, the Xiuzhou version was block-printed when Su Shi served as the prefectural governor of Hangzhou. However, due to Su Shi's failure in his political struggle, all books and literature related to him, including the Xiuzhou version, were banned and destroyed. Third, he speculated on the time when the Xiuzhou version was introduced into Korea. According to *History of the Song Dynasty*, in the 14th year during the reign of Emperor Zhezong of the Song Dynasty, the Korean envoys were sent to the Song Dynasty on a diplomatic mission. The envoys purchased a large number of books, including the Xiuzhou version. The Xiuzhou version was then brought back to Korea and printed in Korea over 300 years later^[8].

4. The value and status of the Kyujanggak version of *Wen Xuan*

The reason the modern versions of *Wen Xuan* can give rise to one climax after another is the constant emergence of new versions. The discovery of the Kyujanggak version collected in South Korea symbolises a major breakthrough in the study of *Wen Xuan*. This version is extremely important in the research history of *Wen Xuan* and even in the history of Chinese ancient literature.

First, for a long time, scholars believed that the Guangdu Pei version was the first merged annotation version of Li Shan and Wu Chen on *Wen Xuan* in the Chinese academia. The discovery of the Kyujanggak version has overturned the conclusion that the Guangdu Pei version was the first merged annotation version of Li Shan and Wu Chen on *Wen Xuan*. The earliest record concerning the merged annotation of Li Shan and Wu Chen on *Wen Xuan* was found in the *Interpretation of Zhizhai Books*. According to *Interpretation of Zhizhai Books*, the first 30 volumes were annotated by Wu Chen and the remaining volumes were annotated by Li Shan, so it was known as the merged annotation version of Li Shan and Wu Chen. However, as for the specific details about the merged version, this book did not mention the details on when and where it was merged. According to records by Zhu Yizun and Qian Zunwang of the Qing Dynasty, the block-printed Guangdu Pei version in 1111 AD was considered by academia to be the earliest merged version. Nonetheless, when the Kyujanggak version was discovered, people found the attached article, which is the record of the ‘merged version’ by the prefectural school in Xiuzhou in 1049 AD. That means the Kyujanggak version replicated the contents of the Xiuzhou version. The Xiuzhou version was block-printed 17 years earlier than the Guangdu Pei version, which thereby corrected this cognitive error in the academia that was engaged in the study of *Wen Xuan*.

Second, the Kyujanggak version preserved three versions of *Wen Xuan* that had disappeared for a long time. These three versions are of special status and turning significance in the historical development of *Wen Xuan*.

The Kyujanggak version preserved the basic content of Pingchang Meng’s version. In the 6th year of the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty (718 AD), Wu Chen’s annotations were finally completed and presented as a gift to Emperor Xuanzong, who spoke highly of this book. Since then, exerting an influence outweighing that of Li Shan’s annotations, Wu Chen’s annotations had been widely circulated. The first block-printed edition of Wu Chen’s annotations was Wu Zhaoyi’s version, which existed as early as during the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. After that, another version of Wu Chen’s annotations appeared in East and West Zhejiang, though its details remain unknown. In the 4th year during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Northern Song Dynasty (1026 AD), a person whose surname was Meng from Pingchang (the name of a place) chose the precise master copy, hired knowledgeable scholars for careful proofreading and then republished Wu Chen’s annotations, which is the Pingchang Meng’s version. Since no record of the version of Wu Chen’s annotations appeared in East and West Zhejiang, no one knows when it was printed. It can be concluded that Pingchang Meng’s version was the earliest block-printed edition of Wu Chen’s annotations in the Song Dynasty. Even though Pingchang Meng’s version cannot be found, it was the master copy of Wu Chen’s annotations in the Kyujanggak version. Therefore, the Kyujanggak version has preserved the basic features of Pingchang Meng’s version, providing valuable information for investigating the source of Wu Chen’s annotations.

Li Shan’s annotations in the Kyujanggak version preserved the basic content of the version inscribed by the Imperial College, the highest educational administration in feudal China during the Northern Song Dynasty. The version inscribed in the 7th year during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Northern Song Dynasty (1029 AD) was the first edition of Li Shan’s annotations. Unlike the Xiuzhou version and Pingchang Meng’s version, the version inscribed by the Imperial College can still be found in the world, but only 35 of the 60 volumes have been passed down from generation to generation. However, only 3 volumes are completed, 8 volumes are not partially damaged and the other 24 volumes are too blurred to be read. This situation leads to much inconvenience when using the version inscribed by the Imperial College of the Northern Song Dynasty. Nevertheless, the version inscribed by the Imperial College was the master copy of Li Shan’s annotations in the Kyujanggak version that has basically preserved the original characteristics of Li Shan’s annotations. Hence, the Kyujanggak version has significant value in restoring the original appearance of Li Shan’s annotations and proofreading other versions of Li Shan’s annotations.

From the Kyujanggak version, people can get to know the three versions of *Wen Xuan* that have been lost in China. It helps scholars resolve the outstanding issues in the study of *Wen Xuan*. These are rare phenomena in the study of ancient books, so the Kyujanggak version is precious.^[5] The Kyujanggak version has preserved the basic features of the Xiuzhou version. The Xiuzhou version no longer exists

today, which is a great pity. However, with the discovery of the Kyujanggak version, the scholars are relieved to some extent. Since the Kyujanggak version duplicated the Xiuzhou version, while the Korean government has strict requisitions on the publication of books, requiring the books to be consistent with the master copy, the Kyujanggak version faithfully reflects the original Xiuzhou version, which allows the merged version of Wu Chen and Li Shan's annotations to be passed down. Hence, the Kyujanggak version serves as an alternative version for studying the first merged version of *Wen Xuan*.

The most fundamental and important value of the Kyujanggak version is that it preserves the basic features of the three versions of *Wen Xuan* with epoch-making significance in the historical development of *Wen Xuan*. Thus, it is important to carry out detailed research on the text. The Kyujanggak version faithfully reflects the original Xiuzhou version, and hence it can be used as a representative of the Xiuzhou version. Therefore, to study the Kyujanggak version is to study the Xiuzhou version.

First, by summarising the evolution of *Wen Xuan* from the single annotated version to the merged annotation version, we can promote the study of the different versions of *Wen Xuan*. Before the Xiuzhou version was printed, Li Shan's version and Wu Chen's version had been circulated as a single annotated version. The two had never been merged until the Xiuzhou version came into being. The Xiuzhou version can no longer be found today. By faithfully reflecting the original Xiuzhou version, the first merged version of *Wen Xuan* in Chinese history, the Kyujanggak version marked the transition of *Wen Xuan* from a single annotated version to a merged version. By studying the text, we can understand changes in the content and form of *Wen Xuan* during its transformation from a single annotated version to a merged version, so as to figure out the process and pattern of *Wen Xuan*'s evolution from a single annotated version to a merged version.

Second, the Kyujanggak version can provide an important basis for exploring the original features of Wu Chen's version and Li Shan's version. Since the publication of Wu Chen's version and Li Shan's version in the Tang Dynasty, there have been many versions with different contents. Researchers have been arguing about the original content of Wu Chen's version and Li Shan's version. Wu Chen and Li Shan's versions collected by the Kyujanggak were printed quite early, so they are closer to the original version. Therefore, the Kyujanggak version is not only an authoritative master copy for studying Wu Chen's version and Li Shan's version but also an important reference for evaluating other versions.

Third, the Kyujanggak version can serve as a master copy and basis for forming the definitive edition and new annotated versions of *Wen Xuan*. Since there are many different versions of *Wen Xuan*, there has not yet been a universally accepted definitive edition of *Wen Xuan* in the academic circles. Besides, the new annotated versions of *Wen Xuan* have also become a problem that is difficult to solve. The key lies in how to accurately select the correct master copy. According to a detailed textual study, the Kyujanggak version is qualified to be the reliable master copy and basis for the definitive edition and new annotated versions.

5. Conclusion

Printed in the 10th year during the reign of Emperor Sejong of Korea (1428 AD), the Kyujanggak version has a history of nearly 600 years. Although it remained unknown for a long time, instead of disappearing, it was handed down to generations. As time went by, the Kyujanggak version kept accumulating power until it could finally give off a dazzling light on the day when it was discovered. It not only disproves the conclusion generally accepted by the majority of researchers studying the versions of *Wen Xuan* and provides rich resources for promoting further research on *Wen Xuan*, but also greatly contributes to the preservation of important books in the history of ancient Chinese literature. Such a book of special value and significance deserves to be further explored throughout East Asian academia.

References

- [1] Suzuki, T. (1928). *The History of Chinese Poetry Theory*. Beixin Shuju.37-38.
- [2] Lu, X. (1973). *Er Xin Ji: Za Wen Ji. The People's Literature Publishing House*.5-6.
- [3] Yao, Z.Z. (1955). *Sui Shu Jing Ji Zhi Kao Zheng*. Zhong Hua Book Company. 863.
- [4] Yong, R. (1965). *Si Ku Quan Shu Zong Mu*. Zhong Hua Book Company.1685.
- [5] Kim, N.J. (1998). *Printed Version of Wen Xuan in Joseon Dynasty*. In: *A Collection of Wen Xuan from Chinese and Foreign Scholars*. Zhong Hua Book Company.1112–1116.
- [6] Jung, O.S. (1998) *The Study of Kyujanggak Version of Wen Xuan in South Korea*, *Journal of Ancient Books Collation*,1,86-93.

[7] Zhang, Y.J. (1951) *Han Fen Lou Jin Yu Shu Lu*. The Commercial Press.98-99.

[8] Qu, S.Y. (2000) *Postscrip of Liu Chen's Annotations on Wen Xuan*. *Literary Heritage*, 1, 40-47.