

## A Study of Publishing of Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature and its Cultural Importance

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**The Purpose of the Research:** The “Complete Imperial Library in the Four Branches of Literature” (欽定四庫全書, hereafter abridged to CIL) is an unprecedented huge collection of Chinese classics, compiled by the royal order of Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799), Qing Dynasty, China. It contained 3,458 titles, 79,224 volumes. They were classified in four categories of academic discipline. It has been called a manuscript collection because its seven sets were duplicated by hand, and placed in seven large cities. The present study intends to clarify the cultural significance of the huge collection, by the author’s detailed examination of the process of its collecting books, additions of new ones, and their photo-duplication, digitalization, and publication of original books. Based on these findings, the author clarifies the significance of the CIL by comparison between the CIL and other type collections including present day libraries from the viewpoint of the broad construct of “Knowledge Accumulation.”

**The Establishment of the CIL:** For collecting books, Emperor Qianlong issued his prescript in 1772 to the provinces throughout the country and ordered the governors to send books to him. He appointed Ji Yun as the general editor, and hired 360 scholars and workers as his staff for collecting, collating, cataloging, annotating, copying and binding. It took 23 years to complete the project. The CIL contains almost all academic books in China. However, there was a strong censorship based on the politics and racial pride of the Manzhou ruler. Many books were excluded from the collection and banned ones were destroyed. The CIL, therefore, became a target of criticism in modern China.

**The Byproduct of CIL:** The *General Catalog of the Complete CIL Collection* (四庫全書總目提要) was edited by Ji Yun. It is not only an annotated general catalog but includes a list of 6,766 titles, 93,558 volumes of books which were not included in the CIL. By this editorial policy, it became the most systematic bibliography ever published by the Chinese government. It helped scholars in finding books for their research and government officials for pursuing their duties.

**Continuing Efforts for Further Revisions and Publishing Related Books:** Plans for adding new books to the CIL were initiated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but unstable situation in politics and economy did not allow them to materialize. From 1920’s through early 40’s, the Combined Committee of China and Japan on Cultural

Affairs in East Asia (東方文化事業總委員會) started to compile the *Further Revised Annotated Catalog of the CIL* (續修四庫全書總目提要). The work was discontinued by World War II, but the drafts were preserved in Kyoto and in Beijing respectively, and they were effectively utilized in the projects after the war.

In 1972 and 93, Taiwan and mainland published respectively the *Further Revised Annotated Catalog of the CIL* (續修四庫全書總目提要). Subsequently investing enormous manpower and financial resources, some large scale series were published in the mainland including the *Series of Books Listed in the Catalog but not included in the CIL* (四庫全書存目叢書), *Series of Banned and Burned Books in the CIL* (四庫禁毀書叢刊), etc. By these publications, the original defects of the CIL were alleviated. These efforts helped developing greatly the study of Chinese classics, their restoration and preservation.

**The Projects of Photo-duplication and of Publishing Books in the CIL:** From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people began to show their interests in photo-reproduction and publication projects of CIL books because the scarcity of original collections. On the other hand, these books should widely be offered to users for the development of academic research. From 1910's to 30's, seven different projects were advocated, but none of them was materialized. A new plan of reproducing selected rare books was advocated in 1934. *Rare Books in the CIL, the First Issue* (四庫全書珍本初集) was published in 1935 by the effort of Chinese government. It contained 231 titles. Until 1951, reproduction plans were not materialized because of the Cino-Japanese War and the succeeding civil war. In 1970's, the project was revived by the Taiwan Commercial Press (台灣商務印書館), and its photocopy version from the first to the twelfth issue was finished



publishing in 1982. It contains 54% of whole CIL collection. In 1986, Taiwan publishers reproduced the original collection of the CIL, which was preserved in the royal palace in Beijing but took shelter in Chungchin and later removed to Taiwan. Moreover, after 2000 CE, three publishers in the mainland decided to publish reproductions of CIL collections. Such continued efforts with great zeal are an absolute proof of the deep concern Chinese intellectuals has had for transmitting their own cultures.

**Digitalization of the CIL Books and their Use:** From the middle of the 1990's, the rapid development of the



information technology introduced digitalization to the domain of Chinese classics. Three different projects of publishing the CIL books were advocated. Moreover, the digitalized versions of CIL catalogs and of related books were published. By these publications, the information retrieval system of Chinese

classics was greatly developed, and helped researchers to pursue their study. Practical experiences accumulated in developing digitalization of these books also helped developing further digitalization of Chinese classics in general.

**Cultural Significance of the CIL:** In China, preserving and transmitting cultures has been regarded as the source of national identity. From the ancient times, Chinese were eager to preserve and transmit their cultures to the later generation. Present day libraries can also be regarded as the similar type organization. In order to find the cultural significance of the CIL, the present writer adopted a construct of “Knowledge Accumulating,” and from this view point, various CIL activities were examined. The following four points were the results of his examination.

1. The CIL as one of the Knowledge Accumulation: Its acquisition, collation, cataloging, annotation, reproduction and facilities of reading can be regarded as a careful and extensive realization of the Knowledge Accumulation and it offered a firm foundation for future development of the library and of the study of Chinese Cultures. Even the censorship could be a good research topic for studying about the present-day problems against the freedom of reading.
2. Knowledge Accumulation as the Cultural Significance of China: Even alien conquerors recognized the Chinese cultural tradition and ruled the country in the Chinese way. Compiling the history of former dynasties and establishment of the CIL were just few examples produced by the culture.
3. Great Zeal of Inheriting the Chinese Cultures: Chinese people placed their strong faith on their culture rather



than on politics. They have had a great zeal of inheriting their cultures. Various efforts devoting to the CIL in later days were derived from the zeal. It could be a clue to understand the Chinese cultures.

4. The Concept of “Growing CIL”: Despite the disasters of continued wars, three sets of CIL out of seven barely survived. The remained CIL collections were revived and have been growing by the continued efforts of intellectuals, scholars and governments. This ‘growing’ concept could be one of the leading concepts toward developing “World Knowledge Accumulation,” and will develop mutual understanding among different cultures.