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Yuwai Hanji: The History of Publications and the Interchange of Literature in the Chinese Cultural Sphere

Zhang Bowei 张伯伟, *Yuwai Hanji yanjiu lunji* 域外汉籍研究论集 [*A Collection of Research Essays on Foreign Writings in Chinese*]. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2011.

Reviewed by Yongchul Choe, Korea University

In *A Collection of Research Essays on Foreign Writings in Chinese* (域外汉籍研究论集), Zhang Bowei compares Chinese-language publications from South Korea, North Korea, and Japan based on the notion of *Yuwai Hanji*, a classification that has been broadly used during the last decade to refer to “foreign writings in Chinese.” Composed of three sections—a general introduction, a section on Korean literature, and a section on Japanese literature—the book is a collection of articles published or presented between the late 1990s and late 2000s on the topic of Chinese writings published in areas of East Asia outside of China. In his introduction to the book, Zhang explains the purpose of his research as follows:

I would like to conduct synthetic research about the *Yuwai Hanji* in bibliographies, literature, history, thought, and religion. In addition, I wish to clarify the historical influences of Chinese culture on surrounding countries by examining such matters as the spread of books, relationships and exchanges between literary people, permeation of ideas, changes in the reading of books, and the establishment of a canon while examining each country’s individual characteristics.¹

In fact, the research topics Zhang discusses in his book on the subject of Korean literature—such as the code of Silla chivalry (花郎道), literary selections (文选), the writings of Neo-Confucian scholar Song Si-yeol (宋时烈), and the bibliographies of Joseon—are very familiar to Korean scholars. What is significant about Zhang’s

book is that exposure to a new perspective, such as the *Yuwai Hanji*, enables Korean scholars to take a fresh look at material and subjects that are so familiar to them from an outsider's point of view.

A supplemental section at the end of the book, "Questions and Answers about the *Yuwai Hanji*," is perhaps the most important and controversial part of the book. Zhang defines the concept and the research scope of the *Yuwai Hanji* as follows:

Hanji (汉籍) refers to documents written in Chinese (mainly classical Chinese), and *Yuwai* (域外) means outside of China. Thus, the *Yuwai Hanji* means all kinds of documents written in Chinese by people outside of China before the twentieth century. (284)

Specifically, it includes all sorts of books and records written in Chinese by writers in Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Ryukyu, and the Malay Peninsula, as well as by missionaries from Europe after the seventeenth century. The majority of these books were published in northeastern and southeastern Asia, areas largely under Chinese cultural influence. Chinese books that were reprinted or hand copied outside of China are also included in the category of the *Yuwai Hanji*. In this sense, Zhang argues that numerous Japanese editions of Chinese classics (和刻本), Joseon and Vietnamese editions of classic Chinese writings, as well as anthologies of classic Chinese writings and annotated editions published outside of China should all be considered part of the *Yuwai Hanji*. The contents of the *Yuwai Hanji* include history, literature, philosophy, religion, and art.

As Zhang writes, there is no doubt that these comprehensive Chinese books are "a tremendous repository of literature" (285). In the early 1980s, Chen Qinghao (陈庆浩), a Chinese scholar in France who has studied the relationship between Chinese novels and East Asian novels written in Chinese, proposed a project titled "A Study of Standard Chinese Culture" (汉文化整体研究). Since then, the Library of Ancient Chinese Literature at the *United Daily News* in Taiwan (台湾联合日报国学文献馆) has held ten international conferences on the *Yuwai Hanji* from 1986 to 1995. Referring to the *Yuwai Hanji* as an academic field that "recognizes every document that ever existed in the history of written Chinese as a whole and furthers the research on Chinese writings in East Asian countries and its immanent relations,"

Zhang concludes that “the value and significance of this new and rising study surely surpasses Dunhuang studies in the early twentieth century” (1).

Research on the *Yuwai Hanji* is carried out in both Taiwan and mainland China. According to Zhang’s introduction (4–5), National Taiwan University (NTU) established the Institute of East Asian Civilization in 2002 for scholars researching East Asian literature, documents, education, and Confucianism. NTU also founded the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences in 2005 for research projects on East Asian scriptures, culture, democracy, and the formation of legal systems. Finally, NTU opened the Graduate Institute of Chinese Documentation and Folk Arts program. Since the 1990s, numerous research institutes of Korean studies or Japanese culture have been established in mainland China as well. For example, Nanjing University founded the Research Institute of the *Yuwai Hanji* in 2000. This institute pursues research projects and organizes foreign documents written in Chinese on such diverse topics as bibliographies, literature, history, philosophy, education, medicine, art, and religion. Shanghai Normal University established the Research Center for Old Documents of the *Yuwai Hanji* (域外汉文古文献学研究中心) in 2005, whose work focuses on the research of Dunhuang studies, Buddhism, and novels. Lastly, the Zhonghua Book Company (Zhonghua shuju 中华书局) has published *Collected Research on the Yuwai Hanji* (*Yuwai Hanji Yanjiu Jikan* 域外汉籍研究集刊) annually since 2005. A total of seven volumes have been published so far; each contains articles about Chinese writings in Korea, China, Japan, and Vietnam written by diverse scholars from different countries in East Asia.

As for the future of research on the *Yuwai Hanji*, Zhang says that “Chinese scholars should be the most dedicated group in the field of the *Yuwai Hanji*” (293), because these documents are written in Chinese. This is inevitable, Zhang argues, given that Japanese and Korean scholars are not native Chinese speakers and thus perhaps do not have the capability to fully comprehend Chinese documents. Moreover, according to Zhang, research on the *Yuwai Hanji* is seen as the particular mission and responsibility of Chinese scholars.

However, the boundaries of the *Yuwai Hanji* are still up for debate. Korean and Japanese scholars do not fully agree with Zhang’s ideas about understanding

classical Chinese writings in East Asia. Chul-sang Park, an archival document specialist, points out that “Korean books exported to China are easily noticeable and they should be included in the category of Korean documents. However, [Korean] scholars of Chinese literature do not seem to have interest in them.” Such a lack of interest in Korean documents on the part of Korean scholars outside of Korea clearly contrasts with the perspective of Chinese scholars who attempt to expand the boundaries of the *Yuwai Hanji*. Zhang published *Compilation of Korean Books during the Joseon Period* (朝鲜时代书目丛刊), which includes twenty-six out of the existing eighty Korean books, explaining that “this series is selected based on the relationship with Chinese writings.” The series shows that Koreans and Chinese have different ideas about how to define the same document, whether as a Korean book or as a Chinese book.

It is important to recognize that the concept of the *Yuwai Hanji* came to be widely circulated at the same time that “the heat for Chinese Studies” (国学热) appeared in the early 2000s. The popularity of traditional Chinese culture brought with it the popularization of Chinese classics and an expansion of the humanities, but it also had negative impacts, such as the misreading of classics and controversies over China-centered perspectives and nationalism in China.

The cover of every issue of *Yuwai Hanji Yanjiu Jikan* features an old painting of a traditional ship, which references the long-term exchange of books and culture between East Asian countries. There is no doubt that the *Yuwai Hanji* is a precious mirror reflecting East Asia in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, a period when knowledge and culture were exchanged between countries by means of letters and publications. Zhang repeatedly emphasizes the “East Asian perspective” of Chinese books and records. Our perspective (looking at China from the outside) seems opposed to, but sometimes also similar to, the Chinese perspective looking outside of China from the inside. Beyond the competition and rivalry, we need more discussions and deliberations to understand Chinese writings as one entity.

About Zhang Bowei:

Professor Zhang Bowei (张伯伟) is distinguished research professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, professor in the literature school,

and director of the Research Institute of the Yuwai Hanji (域外漢籍研究所), all at Nanjing University. He has been a visiting professor at the Graduate School of Letters at Kyoto University, the College of Chinese at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea, the Chinese Literature Department at National Taiwan University, and the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Hong Kong Baptist University. He is the author of *Zhongguo shixue yanjiu* (中国诗学研究), *Zhongguo gudai wenxue piping fangfa yanjiu* (中国古代文学批评方法研究), *Quan tangwudai shige huikao* (全唐五代诗格汇考), *Qingdai shihua dongzhuan luelungao* (清代诗话东传略论稿) and has edited several important books, such as *Zhonghua dadian, wenxue lilun* (中华大典, 文学理论), *Chaoxian shidai shumu congkan*, (域外汉籍研究集刊), *Zhongguo shixue* (中国诗学), and *Zuowei fangfa de han wenhuaquan* (作为方法的汉文化圈).

Professor Yongchul Choe is professor of Chinese Literature and director of the Research Institute of Korea Studies (RIKS) at Korea University.