
Badly Wanted, but Not for Reading: The Unending Odyssey of *The Complete Library of Four Treasures* of the Wensu Library

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese book project *Siku Quanshu* (*The Complete Library of Four Treasures*) was conducted at the Emperor Qianlong's command starting in 1772. Thirteen thousand two hundred fifty-four books were collected nationwide and thousands of scholars were involved; 3,462 books were selected to make up the *Siku Quanshu* proper. Over 4 million pages were transcribed by thousands of copyists. Out of the seven copies made, only three copies survived the dramatic historical changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries almost intact. This article traces the odyssey of the Wensu Ge copy, particularly in the rapidly changing sociopolitical and economic contexts of the twentieth century. The emphasis of the article is placed on the description and analysis of its relocation in the early 1920s soon after China was transformed into a republic; in the 1960s at the height of the Cold War when China split from and confronted the USSR; and in particular, in the new era of reform and opening up for economic development since the late 1970s. After the turn of the century, the two-decade competition between Liaoning Province and Gansu Province for physically keeping the copy has become increasingly intense at the national, provincial, and local levels, and the competition has created significant impacts on library building and cultural development in the two provinces and beyond. The article examines important factors of culture, tradition, preservation, and modernization associated with the fate of the copy in hopes that the perplexing realities of Chinese history and society will be better understood as China has entered a new era.

INTRODUCTION

Si Ku Quan Shu (or *Siku Quanshu*, *The Complete Library of Four Treasures*, hereforth referred to as *SKQS*) was completed in 1787 in the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1796) during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).¹ It is considered to be the largest single publishing project in Chinese history. The four treasures (sometimes called the four branches or four categories) represent the major categories of traditional Chinese knowledge, namely, classics, history, philosophy, and literary writing. By “complete” was meant that the works represented the most comprehensive knowledge related to these categories. Seven official copies were made of the original manuscript of *SKQS*, but only three copies, including the copy of the Wensu Library, have survived. In general, post-Qing Chinese and Western scholars on Chinese classical texts regarded the project of book collection and publishing involved in the compilation of *SKQS* as a campaign of censorship known as “the literary inquisition of Qianlong Emperor” (Goodrich, 1935; B. Guo, 1937). Yet some researchers have analyzed the project from a different perspective, arguing that the book project was primarily a literary enterprise that coincided with what were largely independent censorship events (Guy, 1987, 1984; Mote, 1987). In East Asian librarianship, however, there is a unanimous consensus that *SKQS* is an essential resource for Chinese humanities scholarship, and the searchable electronic version that has been made of the copy of *SKQS* of Wenyuan Library in the Forbidden City is considered to be a resource of great importance to researchers (Guoqing Li, 1998; Mote, 1987).

The Wensu Library copy of *SKQS* was relocated in the early 1920s soon after China’s transformation into a republic. It survived changing hands to the Russians and then the Japanese during the period of the Second World War. It suffered further relocation at the height of the Cold War when China split from and confronted the Soviet Union in the 1960s. In China’s era of reform and opening up since the late 1970s, two provinces have fought each other to retain the copy. This article focuses on the nature of the collection and the odyssey of the Wensu Library set of *SKQS* from the eighteenth century to the present. It also examines the changing sociopolitical and cultural forces behind the recent struggle over the copy’s ownership and analyzes the unexpected results and impacts of the struggle on library development in China.

SKQS COLLECTION

The project to create *SKQS* was initiated by Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799), perhaps the strongest ruler in Chinese history. During his long reign of sixty years from 1736 to 1796, the Qing Empire experienced unprecedented expansion. Most countries or regions neighboring current China were conquered and incorporated into the empire. The population

increased significantly to 300 million, and agricultural productivity and output grew dramatically. Social and political stability and economic and commercial prosperity were achieved (Woodside, 2002). Emperor Qianlong, an intelligent, diligent top-notch scholar himself, believed in historical exceptionalism in cultural rather than military terms and dreamed of cultural superiority over all past emperors. He sought partnership and cooperation with intellectuals, who cherished Confucian ideals to advance social order and public interests and wished to use the authority and power of the emperor to serve their own agendas (Guy, 1987; Wu, 1990; Woodside, 2002). Thus, cultural prosperity was also encouraged under Emperor Qianlong by the creation of numerous scholarly, publishing, and educational enterprises. The *SKQS* project may be the greatest of them.

“Much of the intellectual activity of the eighteenth century was carried on in the shadow of the imperial institution” (Fairbank & Reischauer, 1989, p. 232). In the *SKQS* project, Emperor Qianlong’s role was instrumental and crucial. His edicts and detailed guidelines were of vital importance for the development of such an unprecedented large-scale collection and publishing enterprise. Early in 1741, the sixth year of his reign, he issued an edict calling on provincial officials to search the nation for rare and valuable books in order to improve the collection of the imperial library. There was no response to this edict. Occupied by other priorities in his new reign, the emperor did not try to enforce it. However, in 1772, the thirty-seventh year of his reign, having turned sixty years old, he felt more strongly than ever a mission to expand his imperial library collection and improve knowledge transmission in China (Qi & Han, 1997). He wished to create a publishing project that would be even greater than the grand encyclopedia completed during the reign of his grandfather Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722). This project, *Gu jing tu shu ji cheng* (*Imperially Approved Synthesis of Books and Illustrations Past and Present*, or *Grand Encyclopedia of Ancient and Modern Knowledge*), had been undertaken by Chen Menglei (1650–1741) under the patronage of the emperor. It included 10,000 *juan* (chapters), plus a 40-*juan* index, and involved some 60 million characters. Its printing of sixty-four copies in movable copper-type started in 1720 and was not completed until 1728.

In the spring of 1772 Emperor Qianlong issued an edict ordering provincial officials to institute a search throughout the country for books of particular value for the imperial library. He reiterated the major points of his earlier edict of 1741 and elaborated his rationale for expansion of the collection of the imperial library. He noted that he looked to the writings of the past for inspiration in governance and worked hard everyday to master and apply the precepts of the classical canons. Though he had supported publishing classic literary and historical works and the current imperial library collection was already rich, he believed that there must

be other useful books not included in the collection, which a nationwide search might reveal and which could then be ordered or copied for inclusion in the imperial library.

He specified collection criteria. All classic works of the past dynasties that dealt with human nature and improving the social order should be collected and reviewed as the top priority. Various types of commentaries, annotations, and verifications of the classics, as long as they had practical value or significance, were to be selected for inclusion. Works of literature and criticism by scholars present and past should be searched for exhaustively and assessed carefully. Sample examination essays prepared for sale in bookstores, unimportant genealogies, and collections of correspondence, along with books of decorative calligraphy, should be excluded. Works by authors of little scholarship or whose writing was libelous, intended to frighten, devoted to flattery and praise, or simply trivial were to be excluded.

The edict also specified selection procedures. Books from bookstores were to be purchased at a reasonable price. Books with printing blocks from private libraries were to be printed and bound at the government's costs. Manuscripts without printing blocks were to be taken for copying and returned after copying. Officials were ordered to seek out books in a careful way, without placing undue burdens on book owners. Because it was expected that the number of books to be collected from each province would be extremely large, to avoid duplication in what was sent to the capital each province was to submit lists of the titles of the books that had been collected along with abstracts of their contents for review by the court officials (B. Guo, 1937; Guy, 1987).

This edict was once again ignored. In the fall of 1772 the now eager emperor issued yet another edict emphasizing the importance of the collection project and ordering provincial officials to take action to collect books immediately. At the end of the year, Zhu Yun (1729–1781), a leading scholar official who held the position of Anhui Province education commissioner, submitted seventeen books representing the best scholarship of Anhui Province. Soon, other provincial officials followed suit. Zhu also submitted a palace memorial suggesting four publishing projects that should be undertaken in association with the imperial library collection project. In 1773 the emperor accepted and modified Zhu's suggestions and gave the project the name, *SKQS*. He ordered the establishment of "SKQS Guan" (the Commission on *SKQS*). The commission created a number of positions under twenty-one carefully designated categories to which the emperor assigned 362 officials. They represented nearly all the important officials and leading scholars at that time, including those who had initially opposed the project. The *SKQS* project lasted nearly twenty years and employed as many as 15,000 intellectuals as copists (Fairbank & Reischauer, 1989, p. 233).

Included in *SKQS* were mainly books selected or reassembled from the imperial collections and books submitted by provincial officials or indi-

vidual book owners. Some of the rare books in the library were created by reassembling excerpts included in the *Yongle da dian* (*Yongle Encyclopedia*), the largest encyclopedia in Chinese history, which was kept in the imperial library. This encyclopedia, initiated by the Emperor Yongle (1403–1425) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) at the beginning of his reign, was compiled under the general editorship of Yao Guangxiao (1335–1418), involved 2,169 scholars working for four years, and was completed in two copies in 1408. It included excerpts of 7,000–8,000 works compiled into 22,877 *juan*, plus a 60-*juan* index, with an estimated total of 370 million characters. In all, 522 rare works were recovered from assembling the excerpts in the encyclopedia, and 385 of them were selected for inclusion in *SKQS*. The rest were included in its byproduct, *SKQS Cun mu* (*List of Works Mentioned but Not Included in SKQS*). In addition to these works the imperial library contributed 327 titles to *SKQS* and 420 titles to *SKQS Cun mu*. Another 149 books created as a result of the emperor's direct orders were also included.

As expected, however, the largest proportion of materials used in *SKQS* came from what was submitted by the different provinces. In the two years following 1772, a total of 10,519 titles were submitted for review, of which over 1,500 were selected for inclusion. Private book owners, particularly those with famous private libraries, submitted books of special value. Some wealthy businessmen also submitted rare books that they purchased. About 100 popular titles were also bought or borrowed from bookstores for inclusion (Qi & Han, 1997).

In all a total of 13,254 titles were collected for consideration for inclusion in the *SKQS*. Of these 3,461 titles were actually used for *SKQS* proper. Bibliographic information for 6,793 titles was listed in *SKQS Cun mu*, and about 3,000 titles were rejected or destroyed, mainly because they were deemed politically "incorrect." The censorship that this seemed to involve and the persecution of book owners and authors, sometimes related to these books, sometimes not, have led to the project being described as a literary inquisition. The completed copy of *SKQS* was presented to the emperor in 1782, in over 79,000 *juan*, 6,140 cases, and over 36,000 volumes. In the next five years, 3,826 copists were hired to make seven copies by hand of the original manuscript copy.

The final product was the seven copies of *SKQS* proper, about 36,500 *juan* long each. In addition, several byproducts were created. A shorter version of the collection was compiled into *Essentials of SKQS* (*SKQS hui yao*). This contained the most important works in 11,170 *juan*, in 200 volumes. A total of 134 extremely rare and valuable titles form a separate work, *Wuying Dian ju zhen ban cong shu* (*Collectanea Printed From Assembled Pearls in the Wuying Hall*). These were in fact printed in moveable copper type, which was an innovation at this time. *SKQS zong mu ti yao* (*An Annotated General Catalog of SKQS*) was also compiled and printed. A list of titles and authors,

with abbreviated reviews, became *SKQS jian ming mu lu* (*Shortened Catalog of SKQS*) in 100 volumes. Finally, the scholarly apparatus of commentaries and notes arising from collating and verifying texts and editions was systematized into *SKQS kao zheng* (*SKQS Textual Verifications*) in 100 volumes.

While the books of *SKQS* were being compiled, Emperor Qianlong ordered seven specially designed library buildings to be constructed in his palaces to be ready to house the work when it was finished. Four of the buildings were in the north: the Wenyuan Library in the Forbidden City; the Wensu Library in the old Qing capital in Shengjing, now Shenyang City (formerly Fengtian City) of Liaoning Province (formerly Fengtian Province, or loosely Manchuria); the Wenyuan Library in the Imperial Garden, or Yuanming Yuan, in Beijing; and the Wenjin Library in the imperial summer retreat at Rehe, now Chengde in Hebei Province. Three of the library buildings were in the south: the Wenzong Library in Zhenjiang and the Wenhui Library in Yangzhou, both in Jiangsu Province, and the Wenlan Library in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. The three in the south were intended to allow scholars to access the imperial collection. Of the seven copies, two (Wenzong and Wenhui) in the south and the copy of the Yuanming Yuan in Beijing were lost in war. One copy in the south (Wenlan) was severely damaged when the building was destroyed in war in 1861; the building was rebuilt in 1880. Only the Wenyuan of the Forbidden City and Wensu and Wenjin Libraries, all in the north, have survived intact.

HISTORY OF THE WENSU LIBRARY COPY OF *SKQS*

Each extant copy of *SKQS* has had a distinctive history in the turbulence of the centuries since it was completed and shipped to its library. Compared to other extant copies, whose locations are generally settled now, the Wensu Library copy suffered more relocations and changing of hands than the others. Unlike the others its fate is still not settled in that there is currently intense competition over its ownership. The odyssey of the Wensu Library copy began at the start of the twentieth century when China went through a series of radical events that impacted every aspect of Chinese society and culture. There were civil wars, changes of government, foreign wars, the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and the opening up and reform of the country since 1979. These social upheavals were reflected in the fortunes of the Wensu Library copy of *SQKS*.

In October 1900 the eight-power Allied Forces of the United States, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria-Hungary took over Beijing to suppress the anti-West Boxer Rebellion. Soon after this, Russia occupied much of Manchuria in northeast China and took control of the city of Shengjing, former capital of the Qing court and later Shenyang. Russian soldiers took custody of the palace of the Qing court in Shengjing, which included the Wensu Library and its collections. It was later reported that a number of volumes were damaged under Russian custody.

In 1911 the Qing Dynasty was overthrown by revolutionaries led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) and the Republic of China was founded. In 1914 Duan Zhigui (1869–1925), the army superintendent of Manchuria, moved the Wensu Library copy of *SKQS* from Manchuria to Beijing simply to please his boss, Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), the first provisional president of the Republic of China, then the most powerful figure in China. Notorious for using women to bribe higher authorities, Duan intended the use of the old and rare books of *SKQS* to glorify his master's military and political success. In December 1915 Yuan abolished the republic and declared himself the new emperor of China. He was widely opposed and the republic was restored in March 1916. After Yuan's death in June 1916, *SQKS* was stored at the Beijing Antiques Exhibition Institute in the Wuying Hall of the Forbidden City for eleven years (Tu Guo, 2001).

In 1922 Japanese representatives secretly negotiated with the Qing Dynasty royal family to buy the copy for 1.2 million dollars. When Shen Jianzhi (1887–1947), a celebrated professor of linguistics and history at the Peking University, learned of this he wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education to express his strong objection, and the deal was then aborted (Chu, 2004).

In 1925 the authorities of Fengtian requested the return of the copy. This request was approved by Duan Qirui (1864–1936), the chief executive administrator, then the highest administrative authority of China during the period 1924–26. The work was shipped back to Manchuria in nine fully loaded trucks. An inventory conducted upon receipt revealed that many volumes had been damaged or lost. The Education Ministry of Fengtian Province completed the set by copying the contents of the damaged or missing volumes from the Wenyuan Library copy stored in the Forbidden City.² That year, the Forbidden City was renamed the Palace Museum and the Qing royal family was forced to move out.

In Manchuria the returned books were first stored in the Confucius Temple in Shenyang for two years before they were moved to the newly renovated Wensu Library in 1927. In January of that year, the Fengtian Committee for Protecting *SKQS* hired a curator for the books and a servant for the curator.³ It was reported that Japanese representatives approached the Shenyang Palace Museum for the purpose of making a copy of the set by paying 100,000 dollars. In February the Fengtian authorities announced that the troops stationed in the palace were to move out and the palace was opened to the general public, along with the Wensu Library and its collection.⁴

In a meeting in late September 1927, the Fengtian Education Association promulgated seven regulations for opening the library to visitors:

1. Hours: 9 AM—3 PM
2. People may not visit the library without the recommendation of the Education Association members

3. Smoking is prohibited during the library visit
4. Books may not be opened without the approval of the Education Association
5. Visitors must behave in the library as instructed by the guard
6. The rules shall be changed at anytime when necessary
7. The regulations take effect immediately⁵

The regulations were very restrictive. But this was probably the only occasion that Chinese library authorities provided access to rare books from the imperial collection to general library visitors; no official documents suggesting systematic access to such collections before or after this period can be found.

In November 1928 it was reported that the Fengtian-based Culture Society of the Northeast headed by Zhang Xueliang (1901–2001), the young ruler of Manchuria, planned to publish a reprint of the Wensu Library copy and offer the reprint copies to Chinese academic libraries.⁶ In December Zhang earmarked 200,000 dollars to begin the reprint project; he put Jin Liang (1878–1962), curator of the Liaoning Museum in charge of the project.⁷ In March 1929 Zhang convened a preparatory meeting of advisers, which decided that 500 copies, each of 36,000 volumes, were to be published in three years; printing costs were estimated to be about three million dollars.⁸ Zhang also sent a telegram to leading academic institutions in China to announce the ambitious plan that now included publishing the copy in photo facsimile, continuing the *SKQS* project by collecting and compiling books published after Emperor Qianlong, and emending and verifying texts (Guoqing Li, 2004). He convened another meeting in March 1929 on the project. However, no records have been found suggesting that the project went beyond this planning meeting. Publication plans were suspended probably as a result of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and Zhang's humiliating retreat from Manchuria and the larger northeast in 1931, leaving the Wensu copy of *SKQS* behind for the Japanese.

A brief report by the *Central Daily* on October 1, 1931, suggested erroneously that the copy along with other treasures had been stolen by Japanese soldiers.⁹ When Manchuria was turned into Manchukuo (1932–45), or the Great Manchu State, a puppet state established by the Japanese military government, the Wensu copy of *SKQS* was placed in the custody of the Manchuria Library of Manchukuo. Although the Japanese had long been interested in this set of books, the army did not remove them to Japan, perhaps on the assumption that Manchukuo would be permanently controlled by the Japanese.

In August 1945, as the Second World War drew to a close, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. The Soviet Red Army invaded Manchukuo and attacked the Japanese army, which offered little effective resistance.

The Soviet army took control of the whole of Manchuria. In 1946 the Chinese Communists in their turn moved quickly to try to replace the Soviet Army, with which they had cooperated for a short time before the ruling Nationalist government could arrive. However, the Soviet Army transferred administrative authority of the regions to the Nationalist Army and withdrew from China according to the provisions of the treaties signed between the Soviet and the Nationalist Chinese government. Following this withdrawal, Jiang Fucong (1898–1990), director of the Nationalist Central Library of China, went to investigate the situation of the Shenyang Palace Museum and the Wensu Library *SKQS*. He reported that the Chinese Communists had taken some museum objects but left the *SKQS* books intact because they were ignorant about ancient rare books.¹⁰ This is probably not true in that a great number of renowned classical Chinese scholars had been recruited by the Chinese Communists.

In 1948, following their fierce offensives in Liaoning Province, the Communists successfully took the regional cities back from the Nationalists and eventually won control of the whole northeast. It was reported that the Ministry of Education planned to move *SKQS* away from the war zones to Beijing for safety and until the northeast was pacified. Later this plan was put on hold.¹¹

On October 1, 1949, at the end of the 1946–49 civil war, the decree creating the People's Republic of China was formally promulgated. However, the very next year, already devastated by war, China entered the Korean War, hoping to stop the allied UN troops headed by the United States from occupying Korea and bringing war to the Chinese border. In October 1950, while tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers secretly crossed the Yalu River Bridge to participate in the war, the Wensu Library copy of *SKQS* and other rare materials were shipped out of Liaoning. It was feared that American troops would attack China, especially the Liaoning Province, which neighbors Korea, and would endanger the copy stored in the provincial capital. The books were shipped to China's northernmost province, Heilong Jiang Province, on the border with the Soviet Union, then considered a close ally. *SKQS* was first moved to a temple used as a makeshift school in Nahe County by the Nahe River. In summer 1952, when the river flooded and threatened the books, they were shipped to Beian County along with other rare books. In the middle of 1953, with a ceasefire between the United States and China and North Korea, the Chinese government basically achieved its original goal to check American military advancement. *SKQS* was then shipped back to Shenyang, but it was stored in a new facility near the Wensu Library (Chu, 2004).

Turning sour in the late 1950s, China-Soviet relationships underwent a further deterioration in the 1960s. Now there were not only ideological disagreements but also military confrontations on the border. With increasing military buildup by each side along the border and a large-scale Chinese-

Soviet war expected to break out at any moment, it was decided in 1965 that all the rare and special collections of the Liaoning Province Library and the Palace Museum in Shenyang would be moved to safe places in the countryside. The Wensu Library copy of *SKQS* was relocated secretly by train to Lingyuan County, now Lingyuan City, over 340 kilometers southwest of Shenyang (He, Mu, & Liao, 2004). In October 1966 the Ministry of Culture decided to move the copy secretly to a presumably safer site near Lanzhou, the capital of northwestern Gansu Province, where it was placed under the care of the Gansu Province Library. It was reported that Premier Zhou Enlai personally approved this move. The new site for the books was a military storage area in Gancaodian Township in Yuzhong County, a suburban area over one hour's drive from the capital and over 4,000 kilometers from Shenyang. In 1970, at the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), a special fund of 400,000 yuan, a significant amount then, was allocated to building the improved storage facility for the copy (Tu Guo, 2001). During most of the Cultural Revolution, the regular library operations were discontinued, and it was impossible for both researchers and the general public to access the copy.

FIGHTING OVER THE WENSU LIBRARY COPY OF *SKQS*

The Culture Revolution ended in 1976. In 1979, isolated, autarkist China started implementing its national policies of economic reform. The hyperpoliticization and centralization characteristic of the socialist planned economy that had gripped Chinese society for decades gradually gave way to depoliticization and decentralization after the introduction of a market economy. China began to open up to the outside world. Economic development became China's top priority. The commercial value and economic benefits that might be generated from historical relics and items of cultural heritage became of increasing interest.

Partly driven by such considerations, in 1983 the provincial authorities in Liaoning Province first made it known to their counterparts in Gansu Province that they wanted to have the Wensu copy of *SKQS*. This request was repeated for a number of years. Liaoning Province offered to pay a mutually agreed upon amount of money in compensation to Gansu Province for the care it had taken of the copy since 1966. Yet, hesitant to return the copy, Gansu Province either did not respond or stated that the decision to return the copy had to be made by authorities at the national level.

Liaoning Provincial authorities claimed the Wensu copy of *SKQS* should be returned from Gansu because it had been sent there only for "temporary keeping," or *dai guan*. It should be "returned to reunite with the Wensu Library," so as to achieve *shu ge tongyi* ("unity of book and library"). Liaoning Province pointed out that the books had been stored in caves during the period of military confrontation between China and the Soviet Union.

Later, it had been housed for decades in makeshift storage facilities in Gansu that were inadequate to conserve and protect the books. In addition, given the fact that the relatively industrialized Liaoning Province lagged far behind other economically higher-performing coastal provinces, it was argued that regaining such an item of cultural heritage as *SKQS* would help its economic revival, particularly that of Shenyang City, the provincial capital.

Gansu Provincial authorities, however, believed that the ownership of the copy, like that of any important historical and cultural relic in China, belonged to nobody but the state, as stipulated by the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics.¹² According to this law, only executive departments of the cabinet, such as the State Council, had the authority to arrange the transfer, exchange, and loan of all cultural relics in China. Gansu Provincial authorities claimed that it held the original paperwork from the State Council when the Wensu copy of the *SQKS* had been sent to Gansu in 1966 for protection/management, or *bao guan*, not for temporary keeping, or *dai guan*, as Liaoning Province authorities had claimed (Chou, Shi, & Zheng, 2004).

Furthermore, Gansu Province pointed out that all the extant copies of *SKQS* had been separated from their original libraries, so that the Liaoning Province's rationale of "unity of book and library" did not agree with the reality of the situation of the other copies. Moreover, adopting its rival's argument, the Gansu Province was more economically underdeveloped than Liaoning Province, and having the Wensu copy of *SKQS* could help the economic and cultural development of Lanzhou City, its capital, and the province more generally. Last but not least, Gansu Province claimed that its natural environment, particularly its dry climate and high plateau, was the best for storing and protecting the copy from physical deterioration.¹³ This claim was even inscribed on a piece of public art in Yuzhong County!¹⁴

In 1992, when the new Liaoning Province Library was completed and opened to the public, Liaoning Province's Department of Culture submitted a request to the central Ministry of Culture for the return of the copy. Ignored again for four years, in 1996 the provincial authorities, having begun the construction of a small special facility in the basement of the new provincial library for storing the copy, submitted their proposal once again to the ministry. The Ministry of Culture then sent fact-finding teams to both Liaoning Province and Gansu Province. The ministry's decision was in favor of Liaoning Province. In April 2000, the Ministry submitted its opinion to Vice Premier Li Lanqing of the State Council, who was in charge of national educational and cultural affairs, for approval and final action. In May 2000 Mr. Li approving the recommendation that the copy be returned to Liaoning Province but also commented: "It was critical for Liaoning Province to improve the housing conditions in an efficient and

scientific way." In 2001 the small *SKQS* basement storage facility, which was claimed to meet conservation standards, was completed in the provincial library (Diao, 2004; Chen, 2004).

The long struggle over ownership of this copy of *SKQS* is interesting in that both sides utilized political resources and mass media in their campaign. In addition to the executive departments of the government at different levels, they appealed to the high-profile China National People's Congress (CNPC) and the China Political Consultative Conference (CPCC). CNPC is the legislative organ of government while the CPCC is like the upper house in the Western parliamentary system. Each body had a network of offices from the national level down to the township level. Though they traditionally worked as "rubber stamps" of the Chinese Communist Party, in the reform era the two systems increasingly gained influence and power. Both Liaoning Province and Gansu Province, though utilizing the government, CNPC, and CPCC at city, provincial, and national levels, differed in their strategies.

Liaoning Province focused more on working to obtain favorable orders and decisions from above. Aside from managing to win the positive decision of the Ministry of Culture and State Council, Liaoning Province representatives to CNPC and CPPC repeatedly submitted official proposals (*ti an*) to request that the copy of *SQKS* be transferred (Diao, 2004). As late as the national conference of the CPPC in 2004, more than twenty-seven representatives from Liaoning Province submitted proposals calling on the Ministry of Culture and the State Council to order Gansu to return the copy of *SQKS*. As in earlier proposals they also agreed that the province should compensate Gansu Province financially for protecting the books for nearly four decades (Guo, Yu, & Gao, 2004). It was also pointed out that Liaoning Province had made an investment of about 450,000 U.S. dollars to build a new library facility to house the copy on its return. In fact such an investment was relatively humble and the construction of the small-scale basement facility in the Liaoning Province Library took almost six years to complete.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Gansu Province responded passively to Liaoning Province's offensive. Later the province improved its strategies and began to utilize the CNPC and CPCC at the provincial level. To the surprise of Liaoning Province and others, on December 2, 2000, the "Decision on Further Protecting the Wensu Library *SKQS*" was passed by the Gansu Province branch of the CNPC. This local law was designed to keep *SKQS* permanently in Gansu. Emphasizing the copy's significance for the economic and cultural development of the province, the law stipulated that the copy should be properly housed and ordered the planning and building of a new library specifically for the copy. The construction of this library began in 2003, and the elegant ancient-style library was completed in 2004, taking only one year and three months. The main library facilities met cutting-edge conservation standards. The complex also contained a

Guest Reception Building, a Storage Facility, and the traditional-style Stele and Pavilion bearing calligraphic inscriptions eulogizing the creation of the library. The new library represented an investment that totaled 50 million yuan, or more than 6 million U.S. dollars.¹⁵ This was a major investment for underdeveloped Gansu Province. It was reported that Gansu managed to obtain a significant amount of funding from the central government to help build the library. This is thought to have overshadowed Liaoning's small-scale underground facility and to make Liaoning's efforts to get the copy back less effective.

Gansu Province also founded the Society for Studies of *SKQS* on July 1, 2005. A national conference was immediately organized and hosted in the name of the society in Lanzhou on July 8–9, with participants invited from academic institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Though the number of participants was relatively small, Gansu Province made the conference look national in scope. Mr. Li Ying, vice governor of Gansu Province, opened the conference and endorsed the society on behalf of the provincial government. In his welcoming speech, he reiterated that the rare natural environments, particularly the cool climate, dry air, and small degree of temperature variation in Gansu, were major factors for keeping the copy of *SQKS* there (Y. Li, 2005).

Partly because of the increasing decentralization and localism associated with the deepening economic reform in China at this time, decisions from the executive departments at the national level could not be implemented immediately or effectively without much coordination, negotiation, or compromise. The law enacted by Gansu Province contradicted the decisions of the central government's Ministry of Culture and the State Council about the return of *SKQS* to Liaoning Province, and the local government prevailed. The national CNPC law committee was unable to turn into a bill the proposals that had been presented by representatives from Liaoning Province, in part because of an increasing number of more pressing issues that a rapidly changing China placed on the agenda of the law makers. According to law, proposals from the CPCC have to be responded to by administrative departments at the national level. The Ministry of Culture repeatedly responded to CPCC proposals about the copy of *SKQS* with nearly the same rhetoric every time: proposals were welcome and would be studied; more investigation was needed; and cultural relics should be protected as effectively as possible. Officials of the ministry admitted that they could do nothing to solve the dilemma.¹⁶ Thus, the fight goes on.

CONCLUSION

Two centuries after the publishing of *SKQS*, Chinese history in the late twentieth century is to some extent repeating the late eighteenth century's flourishing economy, relative relaxation of ideological and political control, growing interest in ancient classics and cultural relics, and booming

publishing projects. However, in the highly centralized Qianlong reign of the late eighteenth century, the collecting, emending, publishing, and sharing of texts that the creation of *SKQS* involved represented a high degree of coordination, compromise, and unity of effort between government and intellectuals. In the late twentieth century the rapid rate of economic growth has not necessarily benefited the development of scholarship and libraries. Copyright violation, plagiarism, and commercialization have besieged scholarly publishing; public libraries have suffered from underinvestment and neglect by the government. The other three extant copies of *SKQS* (Wenyuan, Wenjin, and Wenlan) have been published but with much more in mind than making them available for library collections.¹⁷ Furthermore, the ongoing fight for the Wensu copy shows no signs of an emerging compromise between Liaoning Province and Gansu Province, nor any evidence of innovative coordination by the Ministry of Culture and the State Council to resolve the conflict and benefit library development.

From 1949 to the reform era, which started over two decades ago, cultural and library operations were generally centralized and often hyperpoliticized. The fight we have been witnessing over the Wensu copy of *SQKS* was unimaginable then. The intensifying competition over the last two decades reflects the extent to which the national priority of economic development has galvanized China and affected Chinese library development. According to officials from the Ministry of Culture, the fight suggests that China, while experiencing relatively fast economic growth and creating more wealth, continues to place emphasis on the value of traditional culture and library development.¹⁸ However, the levels of expenditure suggest a contrary view. The per capita acquisition expenditures for the country's public libraries reached an historic high in 2002, the most recent year that such data are now available, but the expenditure was only 0.33 Chinese yuan, or four U.S. cents. Liaoning Province's per capita expenditures were 0.43 Chinese yuan, or about five U.S. cents; Gansu's were 0.14 Chinese yuan, less than two U.S. cents.¹⁹ The number of public libraries at the county level in 2004 without a penny for acquisitions increased from 534, or 23.8 percent, in 2003 to 720, or 32.5 percent (Guoxin Li, 2005).

As discussed above, both Liaoning Province and Gansu Province were motivated by and fought for ownership of *SKQS* for purposes of local economic development. Paradoxically, except for the possibility that the provincial library, because it houses this set of rare books, may be used as a cultural heritage tourist attraction, it would be hard to understand how difficult-to-read ancient books could generate significant economic benefits and boost local development directly or indirectly. On the contrary, the conservation and management of these books and the provision of access service to researchers entail significant inputs of human and financial resources. Given the chronic underinvestment in public libraries and the lukewarm interest of political authorities in public library development

in the two provinces and in the country as a whole, the fight suggests how public resources can be used in high sounding but essentially misguided and counterproductive initiatives.

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NOTES

1. This article draws on newspaper accounts in the period involved using two databases made in Taiwan: the non-proprietary database of *Shi jie ri bao* (*World Daily*), or *SJRB* (<http://icd.shu.edu.tw/search2/index.php>), created by the Department of Information and Communications, Shixin University; and a portion of the *Zhongyang Ribao* (*Central Daily*), or *ZYRB*, of the proprietary database of Taiwan Newspapers of the TTS Group (<http://hunteeq.com/km.htm>). Most newspaper articles are without authors and some are without clearly identifiable headings but appear as simple news items. The old Chinese newspapers generally had so few pages and were paginated by *ban* (block/edition) or *ban ci* (block/edition sequence), which are equivalent to page numbers.
2. "Fengtian Wensu Ge *SKQS* can que bu shao, xian zheng she fa chao lu tian bu" [Fengtian Wensu Library *SKQS* lost many volumes, copying efforts are now made to complete the set], *SJRB*, June 26, 1926, p. 7.
3. "Fengtian *SKQS* you yi hui Wensu Ge, tian she guan li yuan yi ren fu ze bao guan" [Fengtian *SKQS* was moved back to the Wensu Library, a curator's position is opened for the books' protection], *SJRB*, January 19, 1927, p. 7.
4. "Fengtian jiu huang gong huang ling jiang kai fang" [The old Qing Palace and Mausoleum in Fengtian will open to public], *SJRB*, February 22, 1927, p. 7.
5. "Fengtian Sheng Jiao yu hui gong bu kai Si ku quan shu de zhang ze, jun zhang ze qi ze" [Fengtian Province Education Commission announces seven rules for viewing *SKQS*], *SJRB*, September 24, 1927, p. 6.
6. "Si ku quan shu Dongbei wen hua she yi ji hua kai yin" [The Culture Society of the Northeast plans to reprint *SKQS*], *SJRB*, November 10, 1928, p. 3.
7. "Ying yin Si ku quan shu Zhuang Xueliang wei Jin Liang ban li" [Zhuang Xueliang entrusts Jin Liang to facsimile reprint *SKQS*], *SJRB*, December 22, 1928, p. 2.
8. "Zhang Xueliang chou bei ying yin Si ku quan shu" [Zhang Xueliang prepares to publish *SKQS* in facsimile reprint], *SJRB*, March 1, 1929, p. 6. "Zhang Xueliang chou yin Si ku quan shu" [Zhang Xueliang prepares to publish *SKQS*], *ZYRB*, March 3, 1929, p. 3.
9. "Xi zai, Si ku quan shu bei Ri ren dao qu" [What a pity! Japan stole *SKQS*], *ZYRB*, October 1, 1931, p. 3.
10. "Jiang Fucong Shenyang gui lai, tan jie shou Dongbei wen wu, tu shu guan nei Si ku quan shu wu yang, gong jun jie gu wu, bo wu guan shou sun" [Jiang Fucong returned from Shenyang, revealing the receipt of transferred cultural relics in the Northeast: *SKQS* in the library intact; Communists robbed museum objects], *ZYRB*, September 3, 1946, p. 4.
11. "Wensu Ge *SKQS* cun Shenyang zhan bu yun Jing" [Wensu Library *SKQS* is to stay in Shenyang for now, not moved to Beijing], *ZYRB*, August 31, 1948, p. 4.
12. *Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics. Section IV Cultural Relics of Museums/Libraries*, retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://law.sach.gov.cn/>.
13. "Decision on Further Protecting the Wensu Library *SKQS*," *The Application Network of Gansu Local Laws and Regulations*, retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://www.jqh315.gov.cn/falv/gsfq/LAW/rd02-1-21.htm>.
14. *Gancaodian wu niu qun diao* [Gancaodian Township five-cow group sculpture], retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://www.gsdc.gov.cn/mxqy/yzx/cxjs.htm>.

15. "2004 nian Gansu xuan chuan si xiang zhan xian shang shi jian da shi" [Gansu's ten achievements in the front of propaganda and ideology]. *Gansu Daily*, January 10, 2005. Retrieved from the propriety database of China Core Newspapers created by the Tsinghua Tongfang Network Co., China.
16. The author conducted an informal interview with the library delegation officials from the Social Culture and Library Division of the Ministry of Culture when he received them at Columbia University and arranged their visits and accompanied them to other organizations in the city (September 15–19, 2005). He also conducted a telephone interview with a representative of Liaoning Province Library on September 25, 2005.
17. "SKQS san ge ban ben san di jing zhen" [SKQS: Three big editions for three publishers to compete], Retrieved October 25, 2005, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/book/2005-02/07/content_2556804.htm.
18. Author's interview.
19. "1984–2002 ge di qu gong gong tu shu guan ren jun gou shu fei qing kuang" [Public libraries acquisitions expenditures per capita by province, 1984–2002], in China Society for Library Science (2003, p. 557).

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