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**Yuan Tongli: A Chronicle** (袁同礼年谱长编) by Lei Qiang. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2024. xxxiii + 3183 pp. RMB 980.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-7-101-16452-7.

Printed in five volumes with more than three thousand pages, this book documents with great detail the life of Yuan Tongli (1895 – 1965), a prominent figure in modern Chinese librarianship, in a chronological order. Yuan completed the English program in Peking University Matriculation in China in 1916 and went to the United States in 1920. He earned a B.A. degree from Columbia University in 1922 and then a library degree from the New York State Library School in 1924. He was among the early group of Chinese librarians who received formal training in librarianship from the West. In 1929 when National Peiping Library (now National Library of China) was established, Yuan was appointed the Deputy Director (under the directorship of Tsai Yuan-pei) and assumed by in large the administrative responsibilities of the library's daily operation. For the next twenty years, his life was closely intertwined with this great library. That was a time when every aspect of Chinese society including education and culture was undergoing drastic, far-reaching but difficult changes. That was also a time when reform and construction were abruptly interrupted by the Sino-Japanese war, forced evacuations and extremely harsh economic and living conditions. Like those well-known figures in the fields of culture and education of the time, such as Hu Shih and Fu Ssu-nien, Yuan made significant contributions to China's development in the fields of culture and education. He was a major founder of modern Chinese librarianship, a participant of the New Culture Movement, and an avid promotor of academic and culture exchanges between China and the West. However, unlike those well-known figures, he and his many contributions are not widely known, even in the field of Chinese librarianship, let alone to the general public. Not much has been written about him. This is perhaps due to, among other reasons, the following facts: 1) library is by nature a service profession and often perceived by researchers as periphery to focus; 2) Yuan left China in 1949 for the United States and stayed there for the rest of his life, which overlapped with the period of no diplomatic relation and a consequential halt in exchanges and visits in all fields between the People's Republic of China and the U. S.; and 3) it is a daunting task, if not impossible, to conduct a project like this Chronicle even after the normalization of the two countries' relationship, because in addition to China and the U. S., Yuan also stayed in or visited Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, France, and India through his career, and so might the relevant materials be scattered.

The author, Dr. Lei Qiang, took ten years to complete this “long version” chronicle (长编). Following Yuan's footsteps through his life, Dr. Lei searched and consulted a vast amount of published and unpublished sources such as books, journals, newspapers, diaries, chronicles, memoirs, correspondences and a considerable amount of various archives to gather information and documents for this project. These sources are either in Chinese or in English. He meticulously sorted out what he found and placed each piece in the correct chronological order. He continued resorting and making adjustment as new data and materials came in. As a long version, the Chronicle also brought a sizable pertaining text of letters, reports and other documents—many have never been published—into its contents. This was an enormous undertaking to say the least.

Yuan Tongli's professional life could be divided into two periods. The first period was from 1916 when he got his first job as the "English and Library Assistant" at Tsinghua School (former name of Tsinghua University) in Peiping (now Beijing) to the early 1949 when he left China with his family for the United States. The second period was from 1949 to his death in 1965 when he lived in the U. S.

For the first period, the author collected information and documents for the Chronicle not only from obvious sources—where Yuan's footsteps led to—like *Beijing Tushuguan Guanshi Ziliao Huibian (1909 – 1949)* and the archives from National Library of China, the Second Historical Archives of China as well as from Columbia University, Rockefeller Foundation, American Library Association, Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress but also from numerous less obvious yet important sources like the archives in American universities such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell and the University of Pittsburg and from institutions in Taiwan such as Academia Sinica, Academia Historica, and Hu Shih Memorial Hall. In addition, he consulted a large number of seemingly far-fetched sources to the project. These include various types of publications such as 1) collected works like *Zhang Yuanji QuANJI*, *Yao Guang QuANJI* and *Xu Xusheng Wenji*, 2) a good number of diaries from known scholars and historic figures such as *Huang Fu Riji*, *Huang Yanpei Riji*, *Mei Yiqi Riji*, *Gu Jigang Riji* and *Gu Tinglong Riji*, just to name a few, 3) individual chronicles such as *Chiu Kaiming Nianpu*, *Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao* and *Ma Heng Nianpu Changbian*, 4) collected correspondences like *Hu Shih Zhongwen Shuxin Ji* and *Fu Sse-nien Yizha*, and other types like memoirs and biographies. Various newspapers and journals were also frequently used as sources. The author also obtained some correspondences between Yuan and Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, who used to report to Yuan at the National Peiping Library. These letters have been kept in Tsien's family. However, the most important sources for this Chronicle came from Yuan Tongli's family. These are the files—letters, notes, proposals and reports—used to be kept by Yuan himself. They are now located in two places: one part was donated by Yuan's family to the University of Chicago Library and is stored at the Library's Special Collections Research Center as Yuan Tongli papers. This part of files may be defined as more business in nature and includes mainly Yuan's correspondences to and from institutions or personal correspondences focusing on work. The second part contains files of more personal in nature and includes mainly Yuan's correspondences with friends, colleagues and relatives, although many were still related to work. This part is retained by Yuan's family. Ability to access these files was critical to the success of the Chronicle.

With such an extensive net he cast out to gather information and documents, the author obtained impressive result. The Chronicle traced Yuan's early career to be associated with Li Dazhao, the Young China Association, Guangdong University (now Sun Yat-sen University), the Palace Museum, the Library Association of China, Peking University Library, the library science program at Peking University, Peiping Library and Peiping Beihai Library. After taking the position of Deputy Director of the National Peiping Library (NPL) in 1929, Yuan applied what he learned from the West to modernize NPL in management, organization, standards, regulations, procedures and practice. Through the documents put together by the author, the Chronicle exhibits Yuan's significant contributions with convincing details at this post. Illustrative examples include but not limited to: preparation and implementation of the NPL's evacuations in response to Japanese invasion; raised awareness of libraries, educational institutions and their organizations in the U. S. and UK about the devastated losses suffered by Chinese libraries during the Sino-Japanese war and requested for their support and donations of books and academic journals; initiated and organized the transportation of invaluable rare book collections from Japanese

occupied Shanghai to the Library of Congress in the U. S. for safeguard; and dispatched librarians, like Wang Zhongmin and Xiang Da to France, UK and U. S., to search and collect via photo reproduction of unique copies of Taiping rebellion papers, Dunhuang scrolls, and Yongle Encyclopedia.

The Chronicle elaborated the second period of Yuan's career (1949-1965) again with verifiable activities and accomplishments. Although the author continued gathering information from some sources mentioned earlier, he relied heavily on the files kept in the University of Chicago Library and by Yuan's family in this part of the book. Newly used sources include archives at the University of California Berkeley and the unpublished diary of Yang Lien-sheng. In this period, Yuan held seemingly insignificant positions including an advisor to Library of Congress for Chinese materials, the group leader for a cataloging project for Chinese materials at the Stanford Hoover Research Institute, and a formal employee in the cataloging department of Library of Congress, but he spent much of his energy on bibliographical research and published a good number of useful bibliographies. Except for one year he spent in Europe on collecting data for his research, much of the work was done in his spare time, namely evenings and weekends. Here the Chronicle depicts another aspect of Yuan's life: a diligent scholar in addition to a known library leader. The Chronicle also assembled many correspondences between Yuan and numerous scholars and librarians in the West. These include some well-known Chinese-American scholars in the field of Asian Studies such as Chao Yuen Ren, Ho Ping-Ti and Yang Lien-sheng, and the early generation of Chinese-American librarians such as Chiu Kaiming, Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, and Wu Kwang-tsing.

Throughout the Chronicle, Dr. Lei provided several thousands of notations or "*An*" in Chinese (按). Each was added to the pertaining entry when further information or explanation was necessary. Typical notes range from brief biographic information for a person or persons appeared in an entry to further information or background about an event, a place, a correspondence or a publication mentioned. It could also be a simple correction for a typo or misspelling in the original text or a note to some discrepancy found by crosschecking. These notes require not only a great deal of time and effort of the author on research but also knowledge of probable sources and skills and experience in searching, tracking and crosschecking. Deriving from his able research, these notes are extremely useful for readers to better comprehend the entries, and thus added great value to the Chronicle.

In comparison to traditional chronicles, the book carries a distinctive mark of the digital era. Many of the documents—especially those from archives and private collections—are digitized copies of the originals. In the "Afterword" of the Chronicle, the author acknowledges dozens of people who helped him obtaining some of them. These helpers are from libraries and research institutions in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the U. S., and Europe. Presumably, most, if not all, of those needed materials were in or converted to digital form and delivered to the author over Internet. This kind of collaboration is only possible in the digital era. The author also benefited from the availability of various databases, digitized collections, and search engines in collecting, tracking, and crosschecking information. However, this will by no means compromise our assessment on the effort and accomplishment made by the author. Rather, the courage and endurance shown by the author for taking on this project and working on it for ten years are very much admirable. What he has been able to accomplish, despite challenges and difficulties, is beyond impressive. The Chronicle is also another good example for how researches could be done, especially historical research, by taking full advantage of the digital era.

Needless to say, this Chronicle is a must-read for anyone who is interested in Yuan Tongli, especially those who may want to conduct a research on him. The book also provides—on different scales—useful information about the learned world in China in the Republican period, the impact of Sino-Japanese war on Chinese libraries and culture institutions, the exchanges between China and the West in the areas of library and academia before, during, and right after the war. Additionally, in tracing the footsteps of Yuan, the Chronicle gathered a considerable amount of correspondences between Yuan and some government or organization officials, university administrators and many known scholars in both China and the West, including some renowned Chinese-American scholars and librarians of his time. These materials could be potentially beneficial to many related researches. Overall, the Chronicle will be a valuable addition to any library—academic or public—serving a community with some Chinese-reading population, and a must-have for East Asian libraries/collections in North America and in Europe.

--Yuan Zhou, Retired Librarian, the University of Chicago Library