

A Study on the Textual Formation, Transmission, and Collation of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* (A Handbook of Copper Administration)*

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The *Tongzheng Bianlan* (A Handbook of Copper Administration) is a significant work among Qing Dynasty documents on Yunnan's copper administration. It systematically records regulations concerning copper mine locations, transportation, casting, procurement, and other aspects, holding irreplaceable value for research on Qing economic history, fiscal history, and Yunnan local history. However, academic understanding of its textual transmission has long been vague, its relationship with another crucial text, the *Yunnan Tongzhi* (Records of Yunnan Copper), remains ambiguous, and the two existing modern collated editions contain various degrees of errors. Based on a survey and examination of library holdings domestically and abroad, this paper systematically sorts out the major extant versions of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* for the first time. These include a Jiaqing-era manuscript held in Taiwan, the Guangxu 13th-year (1887) engraving by Zeng Jifeng held in the Yunnan Provincial Library, and other scattered manuscripts, establishing a genealogy of its textual transmission. Through in-depth textual comparison, this paper proposes that the *Tongzheng Bianlan* was an "administrative handbook" derived from the *Yunnan Tongzhi* compiled by Dai Ruizheng. It was streamlined and supplemented with practical regulations by secretarial staff within the Yunnan Provincial Administration Commission, representing two distinct yet related texts with different emphases. Building on this, the paper provides an academic critique of the punctuated edition by Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong (2013) and the annotated edition by Chen Yanli (2017), assessing their achievements and shortcomings in base text selection, textual emendation, and punctuation. Finally, from multidisciplinary perspectives including philology, economic history, and institutional history, the paper argues for the unique historical value of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* and proposes a comprehensive collation and research plan aimed at producing a more refined and reliable text for the study of Qing copper administration.

Keywords: *Tongzheng Bianlan*, textual formation, version transmission, comprehensive collation

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Introduction

The mining and transportation of copper in Yunnan during the Qing Dynasty (known as “Dian Tong Jingyun”) constituted a core pillar of the state’s fiscal and monetary systems. Its massive scale and complex institutional framework were unparalleled. Centered on this major economic activity, a specialized corpus of “copper administration literature” emerged. These works meticulously documented the distribution, extraction, smelting, transportation, coinage, performance evaluation of copper mines, and the associated fiscal revenues, expenditures, and administrative regulations. They serve as invaluable primary sources for studying the lifeline of the Qing state’s economy, its resource management systems, and frontier development history. Among these copper administration texts, the *Tongzheng Bianlan* (A Handbook of Copper Administration) stands out for its comprehensive, systematic, and practical content. Comprising eight volumes divided into six sections—“Mine Sites”, “Capital Transport”, “Land Transport”, “Mint Casting”, “Provincial Procurement”, and “Miscellaneous Items”—it details not only the geographical locations, operational history, and production quotas/taxes of various copper mines but also meticulously stipulates the routes, costs, personnel for copper transportation, and procurement quotas and regulations for various provinces. Its content often includes appended regulations from the Board of Revenue and established precedents, giving it a strong administrative guidance and archival compilation character.

Despite its practical utility and historical importance, fundamental philological research on the *Tongzheng Bianlan* has long been inadequate. Not only is its transmission history unclear, often with omissions or errors in records, but its textual formation has also been persistently blurred or conflated with other works. Furthermore, an ideal modern collated edition remains lacking. Therefore, conducting a systematic, in-depth investigation into the collection, collation, and study of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*’s versions is not only a basic task in philology but also an urgent need for deepening research on Yunnan’s copper administration and Qing economic history. This study aims to: first, clarify the version system and transmission lineage of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* through extensive library surveys and version comparisons, addressing deficiencies in existing bibliographical and version studies; second, elucidate its relationship with the *Yunnan Tongzhi* through detailed textual collation, clarifying its unique compilation nature and documentary value; third, based on comprehensive version information, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing collated editions and explore a more robust collation paradigm, with the goal of producing a “refined later edition” to provide a solid and reliable textual foundation for related academic research. It is worth noting that the Yunnan Provincial Library has digitized and made available online a collection of rare ancient texts, including the *Tongzheng Bianlan*, in recent years. This provides unprecedented convenience for the version collection and comparison work of this study, enabling comprehensive research on versions scattered across different institutions.

Literature Review: Three Dimensions and Limitations in *Tongzheng Bianlan* Research

Academic attention to the *Tongzheng Bianlan* has primarily focused on three aspects: authentication of the text itself, its transmission history, and its modern collation, forming the basic vein of research on this document.

Authentication of Textual Authenticity and Value

Since the *Tongzheng Bianlan* does not name an author and its content highly overlaps with the *Yunnan Tongzhi*, its identity as a distinct document was initially blurry. Early scholars sometimes simply regarded it as an alternative title for the *Yunnan Tongzhi*. A turning point in this understanding came with the publication of “A

Textual Criticism of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*” by Wang Detai and Qiang Wenxue (2007). Their article compared specific records in the *Tongzheng Bianlan* concerning mine sites, capital transport, and performance evaluation with authoritative archives such as the *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*, palace memorials with vermilion rescripts, and memorials from the Board of Revenue. They found most of its records to be accurate and reliable, with some content supplementing archival gaps. Consequently, the academic community largely confirmed the *Tongzheng Bianlan*’s status as an independent, credible historical source for Qing copper administration, and its research value gained proper recognition.

Research on Bibliographical Records and Transmission History

Compared to textual authentication, research sort out the versions of this text has been scattered and weak. While Fang Guoyu mentioned it in his *General Description of Yunnan Historical Materials*, he did not provide an in-depth systematic examination. Liu Zhaoyou, editing the *Collection of Chinese Historical Studies*, included and reproduced a Qing manuscript held in Taiwan, referring to it as a Jiaqing-era manuscript. Major ancient book catalogs like the *General Catalog of Chinese Ancient Books* (2009) and the *Bibliography and Abstracts of Yunnan Series* (2010) list the work, but the information is brief, and the version details recorded across different catalogs are inconsistent, failing to reflect the complete picture of its transmission. For instance, the claim of a “Daoguang-era engraved edition” has been questioned by scholars. Overall, existing research has failed to construct a clear genealogy of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* versions. A comprehensive survey and argumentation regarding what manuscripts and engraved editions exist domestically and abroad, their interrelationships, and their respective characteristics is lacking. This directly affects the selection of base texts and reference versions for textual collation, constituting a bottleneck. Constrain its collation and research standards.

Modern Collation and Publication

In 2013, the punctuated edition *Tongzheng Bianlan (Punctuated Edition)*, collated by Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong, was published by Hunan Science and Technology Press. This marked the first modern punctuated collation of the text, initiating a new phase in its study. In 2017, building on prior work, Chen Yanli published *Tongzheng Bianlan (Annotated Edition)* with Southwest Jiaotong University Press. Chen’s work explicitly uses the Guangxu 13th-year (1887) edition, engraved under the supervision of Yunnan Provincial Administration Commissioner Zeng Jifeng and held by the Yunnan Provincial Library, as its base text and provides annotations, furthering its accessibility and utility. However, preliminary assessments indicate that both collated editions, due to various reasons and limitations such as reliance on a single version or insufficiently rigorous collation, have room for improvement in character recognition, punctuation, handling of variant readings, and the inclusion of supplementary research materials. For instance, current collation tools may not have fully corrected the numerous technical terms, place names, personal names, silver sums, and document formats. Punctuation and annotations may also not accurately reflect the intended meaning. Therefore, utilizing newly discovered multiple versions for comprehensive collation to produce a definitive critical edition has become an academic expectation.

In summary, while the importance of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* is widely acknowledged and preliminary collation achievements exist, significant gaps remain in deep research concerning its versions, textual origins, and precise collation. Unclear versions undermine the basis for collation; unclear origins obscure its value; and imprecise collation hinders its reliable use. These are the starting point and focus of this study.

Sort out the Versions of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*

In textual sort out, version investigation comes first. Deep research on the *Tongzheng Bianlan* must establish a comprehensive survey and systematic sort out of its extant versions. Based on existing research achievement, catalog records, and online resource clues, the versions of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* can be preliminarily categorized into the following systems:

Qing Manuscript System

Manuscripts were the primary form of early transmission. At least two significant Qing manuscripts are currently known.

- Jiaqing-era manuscript held in Taiwan (Complete, Volumes 1-8): This manuscript is held by a relevant library in Taiwan. It was later reproduced by Taiwan Student Bookstore in 1986 and included in Liu Zhaoyou's edited *Collection of Chinese Historical Studies (Third Series)*. This is currently the earliest known complete version. Its reproduction provides great convenience for researchers domestically and abroad. Judging from the "Jiaqing" reign period, this manuscript reflects the state of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* during the mid-Qing, the peak period of Yunnan copper production, holding key value for examining the early form of this document. Notably, as a "complete version", it is an important reference for collating later versions. However, it contains omissions, errors, and numerous typos, with average penmanship. The punctuated edition by Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong uses this manuscript as its base text for collation.

- Qing manuscript held by Yunnan Provincial Library (Incomplete, Volumes 2-8): This is an incomplete manuscript missing Volume 1. As a local document held by the Yunnan Provincial Library, it offers geographical convenience. Comparing it with the Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript allows for examining differences between manuscripts, judging whether different transcription lineages exist, or identifying errors and additions introduced during transcription. Comparison with the Jiaqing manuscript reveals this copy has neat and elegant handwriting, but some content shows significant discrepancies, and omissions and misordering are relatively severe.

- Other scattered manuscripts: Beyond the two relatively clear manuscripts mentioned, the possibility cannot be ruled out that other institutions or private collections hold manuscripts from different periods. The advancement of the national ancient books census and the release of digital Ancient books resources provide opportunities to discover more scattered manuscripts. For instance, uncataloged ancient texts in some local libraries, university libraries, or museums may contain manuscripts of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*.

Qing Engraved Edition System

The appearance of engraved editions signifies broader recognition and dissemination of the text.

- Guangxu 13th-year (1887) engraving by the Yunnan Provincial Administration Commission: This is the most well-known edition and the one most commonly used as a base for later collations. According to records, in Guangxu 13th year (1887), Chen Xianrong, the magistrate of Lunan County, purchased a manuscript copy of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* on the market. Subsequently, Zeng Jifeng, then the Yunnan Provincial Administration Commissioner, oversaw its engraving, and it was stored in the Provincial Administration Commission. This engraved edition is now held by the Yunnan Provincial Library, and Chen Yanli's *Tongzheng Bianlan (Annotated Edition)* uses it as the base text. This engraving can be seen as an authoritative Qing Dynasty official consolidation and formalization of this administrative reference work. Collating it with the Jiaqing manuscript

allows observation of whether copper administration institutions changed between the Jiaqing and Guangxu periods (nearly eighty years) and whether the text was consciously revised during engraving. Comparison shows this Guangxu edition has relatively complete content and fewer typos.

- The questionable “Daoguang-era engraved edition”: Some bibliographies have recorded a “Daoguang-era engraved edition”, but this claim lacks support from physical evidence or reliable records and contradicts the common account of the first engraving by Zeng Jifeng in Guangxu 13. It is likely a misrecord or misjudgment in bibliographic entries and needs clarification or refutation through actual investigation.

Modern Collated Edition System

The emergence of modern collated editions makes this ancient text more accessible to contemporary scholars, and they themselves become part of version study.

- Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong, *Tongzheng Bianlan (Punctuated Edition)* (2013): As the first punctuated edition, it has pioneering merit. However, its version collation is not meticulous, there are quite a few proofreading errors and omissions. Additionally, typesetting introduced several character misidentifications and input errors, affecting its academic standardization and authority.

- Chen Yanli, *Tongzheng Bianlan (Annotated Edition)* (2017): Explicitly uses the Yunnan Provincial Library’s Guangxu 13th-year engraved edition as the base text and provides annotations, making it the currently most accessible edition. However, during collation, it did not extensively consult other important versions (e.g., the Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript). Some punctuation and content annotations also remain debatable.

Through the above sort out, it is evident that the version transmission of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* presents a clear lineage from manuscripts to engraved editions, then to modern collated editions. The primary task of current research is to conduct firsthand examination and comparison of the above versions in domestic and international library collections, create detailed records of version characteristics (including layout, format, taboo, seals, marginalia, etc.), and, through collation, clarify the textual variations and inheritance relationships between versions. This will enable the creation of as accurate a version genealogy as possible, laying an unshakable foundation for the next step of refined collation and annotation.

Tracing Textual Genesis: Examining the Relationship Between the *Tongzheng Bianlan* and the *Yunnan Tongzhi*

Clarifying the relationship between the *Tongzheng Bianlan* and Dai Ruizheng’s *Yunnan Tongzhi* is key to understanding its nature and value. The fact that both works consist of eight volumes with essentially identical section divisions and substantial content overlap is no coincidence. Based on internal textual evidence and related records, it can be inferred that the *Tongzheng Bianlan* is a practical document derived and adapted from the foundation of the *Yunnan Tongzhi*.

Textual Homology and Structural Inheritance

Dai Ruizheng’s *Yunnan Tongzhi* was compiled earlier. It is systematic, comprehensive, meticulously researched, and possesses the compilation characteristics of a “treatise” or “record”. The high degree of similarity in the *Tongzheng Bianlan*’s volume structure and category setup constitutes the most direct evidence of their common origin. This relationship of inheritance indicates that the compiler(s) of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* had access to the text of the *Yunnan Tongzhi* and used it as a template for re-creation.

Content Differentiation and Compilation Intent

Despite sharing a common origin, the two works exhibit significant differences in specific content, reflecting distinct compilation purposes.

- Streamlining and emphasizing utility: The *Yunnan Tongzhi* extensively cites sources, investigates origins, and possesses relatively high scholarly value. In contrast, the title *Tongzheng Bianlan* itself declares its “handbook” nature—meant for convenient consultation and reference. It likely significantly reduced the cumbersome historical research, historical narratives, and source citations found in the *Yunnan Tongzhi*, concentrating instead on preserving and strengthening regulations, Constitution, data, transportation stages, and other information directly relevant to the contemporary (at the time of its compilation) practical operations of copper administration. Its goal was to become an “administrative manual” kept on the desk for ready reference in handling procedures.
- Supplementing new regulations, reflecting changes: As a later work, the *Tongzheng Bianlan* to some extent supplemented new copper administration regulations and precedents issued by the Qing government after the compilation of the *Yunnan Tongzhi*, as well as new rules and data generated from the practical implementation of copper administration in Yunnan. For example, in the “Mine Sites” section, it might add information on newly opened or closed mines; in the “Capital Transport” and “Land Transport” sections, it would update transportation routes and cost standards; in the “Mint Casting” and “Provincial Procurement” sections, it would record the latest casting quotas and procurement allocations. These supplements hold unique value for researching the evolution of copper administration institutions in the mid-to-late Qing period.
- Standardization and formatting of text: To facilitate execution by officials, the *Tongzheng Bianlan* likely undertook more standardized sort out and formatting of relevant document formats, report styles, and calculation formulas, making it more aligned with the daily office needs of government bureaus.

Inference Regarding Authorship and Compilation Context

The *Tongzheng Bianlan* does not name an author, yet its content is highly relevant to the responsibilities of the provincial fiscal agency (the Provincial Administration Commission). Considering its practical “handbook” nature, it is speculated that the compiler(s) were likely secretarial staff or clerks within the Yunnan Provincial Administration Commission familiar with finances, grain, and mining affairs. Based on the latest official archives and regulations, they excerpted, simplified, and updated comprehensive works like the *Yunnan Tongzhi* to compile this operational guidebook for colleagues or newly appointed officials to quickly familiarize themselves with their duties. Its formal engraving in Guangxu 13 under Provincial Administration Commissioner Zeng Jifeng precisely indicates that it received recognition from the highest local fiscal authority, possessing a semi-official character.

Therefore, the *Tongzheng Bianlan* is not a simple copy or alternative name for the *Yunnan Tongzhi*. Rather, it is a secondary compilation product based on the latter, serving specific administrative purposes. The two share a “source” and “derivative”, “treatise” and “handbook” relationship. Acknowledging this relationship does not diminish the value of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*; instead, it highlights its unique significance as a “record of institutional operation”. During collation and research, meticulous collation between the two texts is essential. On one hand, the *Yunnan Tongzhi* can be used to collate the text of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*; on the other hand, it clearly identifies the unique content in the *Tongzheng Bianlan* that reflects institutional changes.

Analysis of Existing Collated Editions and Vision for Comprehensive Collation

The successive publication of Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong's punctuated edition and Chen Yanli's annotated edition marks the entry of *Tongzheng Bianlan* research into a new stage, for which they deserve credit. However, viewed from the perspective of "producing a refined later edition" in textual collation, both are significant room for improvement. This study aims to build upon previous research findings through more comprehensive inter-version collation and more meticulous academic processing, promoting the creation of a more perfected collated edition.

Analysis of the Two Existing Collated Editions

- Wei Mingkong and Wei Zhengkong, *Tongzheng Bianlan (Punctuated Edition)* (2013): As a pioneering work, this edition first made the text available in typeset form with punctuation, lowering the barrier to entry. It also reproduced the Jiaqing manuscript, which is difficult to access on the mainland, preceding the punctuated text, facilitating reading and verification by researchers. However, its shortcomings are also apparent. First, it lacks a dedicated collation statement; only a brief explain in the "preface" mentions the selection of the base and reference texts, and the reference versions used are limited (according to the preface, it uses the Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript as the working base text and the *Continued Siku Quanshu* reproduced Guangxu engraved edition as a Reference). Second, while the punctuation is generally serviceable, its handling of complex official document language, listings of financial data, etc., is sometimes inappropriate, potentially leading to ambiguity. Third, being purely a punctuated edition, it has few collation notes and no annotations. It provides no necessary explanation for difficult characters, technical terms, historical place names, etc., still posing some obstacles for researchers.

- Chen Yanli, *Tongzheng Bianlan (Annotated Edition)* (2017): This work represents a significant step forward from the previous punctuated edition. It explicitly uses the Yunnan Provincial Library's Guangxu 13th-year engraved edition as the base text. It also references works like the *Comprehensive Geography of the Qing Empire*, *Comprehensive Examination of Qing Documents*, *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*, *Imperially Approved Regulations of the Board of Revenue*, related archives, and local gazetteers to annotate part place names, official titles, institutions, copper mining locations, and specialized copper administration terms mentioned in the text. Its strengths lie in having a clear version basis and relatively detailed annotations. However, its collation mainly limited to correcting obvious textual errors in the base text. It did not systematically and comprehensively collate with other important versions like the Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript or the other Qing manuscript in the Yunnan Provincial Library, focusing primarily on collating with Similar literature like the *Yunnan Tongzhi*. Consequently, there are quite a few omissions and missed collations. While the annotations are relatively detailed, the language can be cumbersome and lacks conciseness. Furthermore, some important content remains unannotated, or the annotations provided are sometimes inappropriate.

Principles and Proposed Path for Comprehensive Collation

Based on the above analysis, a new, more refined collated edition of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* should adhere to the following principles and path:

- Comprehensive version search, refined base text selection: It is essential to break free from the limitation of a single version and conduct comprehensive version collection and comparison. The core task involves using the complete Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript and the Clear dated Guangxu 13th-year engraved edition as dual focal

points for thorough collation. Simultaneously, the incomplete Yunnan Provincial Library manuscript and other potentially discovered versions should serve as important Reference versions. When necessary, the collation results of the two modern editions can also be consulted. Through comprehensive collation, detailed collation notes should be produced, objectively presenting the variations between versions and carefully judging correctness, striving to restore or approach the original textual state.

- Intertextual verification, clear origins: The *Yunnan Tongzhi* should be treated as the most important text for comparison. In the collation notes, not only should variant readings between different versions of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* be listed, but their corresponding differences with the *Yunnan Tongzhi* should also be marked. This not only addresses textual collation issues but also visually demonstrates the inheritance and variation relationship between the two texts, providing researchers with deeper philological information.

- Detailed annotations, integrating new knowledge: The text is rich in content and involves numerous specialized terms, place names, and institutions, making annotation highly challenging. For effective annotation, efforts should extend beyond explaining difficult words and phrases to include:

- a. Institutional annotations: Explaining specialized copper administration systems mentioned, such as “advancing operating capital”, “tax levies”, “rewards for exceeding quotas”, “expedited transport”.

- b. Geographical annotations: Researching and explaining place names, post stations, and transport stages in Yunnan and other copper-transporting provinces mentioned, potentially correlating with historical maps.

- c. Personnel and official title annotations: Briefly researching mentioned officials and handling personnel, clarifying their titles and tenures.

- d. Data and measurement annotations: Explaining or calculating complex silver taels computations and copper catty conversions.

- e. Regulatory source annotations: Indicating possible sources for cited “Board of Revenue regulations” or “established precedents”.

- Compiling appendices to enhance value: An excellent collated edition should include practical appendices, such as:

- a. A descriptive catalog of *Tongzheng Bianlan* versions.

- b. A comparison table aligning major events in Qing Yunnan copper administration with *Tongzheng Bianlan* content.

- c. Indexes of important place names, mine names, and official titles from the text.

- d. Statistical tables of major silver tael and copper catty data.

- e. Excerpts from important related documents (e.g., imperial edicts, memorials).

Through this compound collation methodology, the final product will be more than just a readable text. It will be a research-oriented collation outcome rich in academic information and combine both reference work utility, maximizing the historical value of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*.

The Multifaceted Value and Academic Significance of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*

The ultimate purpose of conducting meticulous philological collation of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* is to more effectively exploit its inherent multifaceted academic value. This document’s worth extends far beyond that of a local administrative manual; it serves as a prism through which to view Qing state economic governance, resource allocation, and frontier society.

An “Operating Manual” for the Qing State’s Copper Administration System

Unlike the macro-level stipulations in central institutional compilations like the *Collected Statutes of the Qing Dynasty* or *Regulations of the Board of Revenue*, the *Tongzheng Bianlan* details how institutions were concretely implemented in Yunnan, the key production region. From the management of mine “workings” (tunnels) and charcoal supply, to the organization of overland transport of copper from the mountains and the setup of checkpoints along the route, to the water transport arrangements for the “capital transport” along the Yangtze River after concentration in Luzhou, and finally to the delivery and acceptance in the capital and various provinces, the book provides a complete, executable process and standard. It is an excellent specimen for studying the practice of the Qing “government-supervised merchant operation” or “government operation” economic model in the mining sector, vividly illustrating how state administrative power deeply penetrated every link of production and transportation.

A Treasure Trove for Yunnan Regional Economic History and Local Social History

The records of the geographical locations, operational history, and production levels of hundreds of large and small copper mines form the cornerstone for studying Qing-era Yunnan mining geography, resource distribution, and economic development. The detailed stipulations on transport routes, freight costs (“water fees”, “travel allowances”), and labor wages for various types of workers reflect the logistics costs, price levels, and labor market rates in Yunnan and the provinces traversed at the time. Records of various fees, contributions, donations, rewards, and compensations in sections like “Miscellaneous Items” reveal the complex network of interest distribution and the operational realities of local finance within the copper administration system, providing rich clues for understanding the local social structure, official-merchant relations, and grassroots governance in Yunnan under the influence of the mining economy.

New Source Material for Environmental History and Historical Geography Research

The large-scale mining and smelting of copper had significant environmental impacts, a point already noted in modern research. The *Tongzheng Bianlan*’s records of the amounts of charcoal required by mines and charcoal collection locations indirectly reflect the consumption of forest resources due to mining activities. The detailed descriptions of transport routes are valuable materials for studying the transportation network and river shipping conditions in the southwestern region during the Qing. Integrating this information with local gazetteers, archives, and modern environmental science research can deepen the understanding of historical human-environment interactions.

A Model for Ancient Text Digitization and Philological Research

Currently, ancient text digitization projects are in full swing. The dispersal of *Tongzheng Bianlan* versions across the Strait presents a typical case where digitization technology can facilitate resource sharing and academic cooperation. The process of its version collection, comparison, and collation research itself constitutes an exploration of methods for utilizing digitized ancient text resources. The resulting critically collated digital text can be incorporated into larger databases like a “Qing Economic Literature Database”, enabling text structuring, data searchability, and facilitating quantitative historical research.

In summary, the collation and research of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* are a systematic project that starts with foundational philological work and ultimately serves multidisciplinary, multidimensional historical research. It concerns not only the fate of a single book but also our understanding of a core Qing economic institution and the complex social and environmental systems in which it was embedded.

Conclusion

As a crucial link in the chain of Qing Yunnan copper administration Literature, evolving from a “treatise” to a “handbook”, the philological value and unique historical significance of the *Tongzheng Bianlan* urgently need to be revealed through systematic collation and research. This study, through a literature review, points out that despite scholars’ contributions in textual authentication and preliminary collation, a large number of foundational, critical work remains to be done regarding the version genealogy, textual genesis relationship with the *Yunnan Tongzhi*, and refined, in-depth collation of this document.

Through obtaining professional certificates of extant versions domestically and abroad, this paper preliminarily constructs a version system framework for the *Tongzheng Bianlan* centered on the Taiwan-held Jiaqing manuscript and the Yunnan Provincial Library’s Guangxu 13th-year engraved edition. These two versions represent the document’s state during the mid and late Qing, respectively, serving as the cornerstone for textual collation and research. Through detailed textual comparison, this paper argues that the *Tongzheng Bianlan* is a “derivative text” based on the “source text” of Dai Ruizheng’s *Yunnan Tongzhi*, streamlined and supplemented with new cases to meet the practical needs of administrative bureaus. Clarifying this relationship not only resolves a long-standing academic question but also more accurately positions the *Tongzheng Bianlan*’s unique nature and value as an “administrative handbook” or “record of institutional operation”.

Building on this, the paper evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the two existing collated editions and proposes a more comprehensive and in-depth collation research plan. This plan emphasizes the comprehensiveness of version collation, the meticulousness of textual comparison (especially with the *Yunnan Tongzhi*), and the scholarly nature of annotations and appendices, aiming to produce a “research-oriented collated edition” integrating version information, collation results, specialized annotations, and research materials. This work will fundamentally change the current situation of blurry text and inconvenient utilization of the *Tongzheng Bianlan*.

Ultimately, a critically collated and annotated *Tongzheng Bianlan* will serve as a key, unlocking multiple research fields including Qing state finance, mineral resource management, long-distance logistics, regional economic development, ecological environmental change, and southwestern frontier social history, providing a reliable, detailed, and deeply explorable primary historical source. This research is not merely emergency sorting and compilation of an obscure and specialized disciplines document; it is also an active attempt, through solid philological work, to promote related historical disciplines towards refinement and deepen. At a time when ancient books protection and utilization are increasingly valued, conducting in-depth collation and research on specialized characteristic literature like the *Tongzheng Bianlan* holds significant academic meaning and cultural value.

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