



Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures
Polish Academy of Sciences

ACTA ASIATICA
VARSOVIENSIA

No. 29

Warszawa 2016

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Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2016
PL ISSN 0860-6102
eISSN 2449-8653
ISBN 978-83-7452-091-1

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA is abstracted in
The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Index Copernicus, ProQuest Database

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The Late-Qing Illustrated *Shujing* from the Sinology Library in Moscow¹

Abstract

The article deals with the 1905 lithographic illustrated edition of *Shujing tu shuo* (*The Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary*), kept in Moscow. This edition of the ancient Confucian Classics is rather special, since it was designed as a comic book implementing principles of “explanation through pictures”. The canonical Ancient Chinese text is available in the book but is hardly simplified for an unprepared reader. The comments explain the engraved line drawings following and representing separate portions of the canonical text. Being the last official Qing edition of *Shujing*, it was destined to become a popular version of the Confucian classic.

Key words: *Shujing*, *Shangshu*, Confucian classic, book illustration, Qing dynasty.

Introduction

Several years ago, when preparing for publication of the Russian translation of the Chinese classic *The Esteemed Book* (*Shangshu*), also known as the *The Book of Historical Documents* (*Shujing*), I found two copies of the 1905 late-Qing lithographic edition of *Shujing tu shuo* (*The Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary*).² These books have been preserved by the Sinology Department of the Institute for Scientific Information on Social Sciences at the Russian Academy of Sciences located in another academic institution also in Moscow – The Institute for Far Eastern Studies. The Department is popularly known as The Sinology Library. Some illustrations from this specific edition were subsequently included in a book with the Russian

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¹ The research was granted a financial support by The Russian Foundation for Humanities (research project No.15-34-01301).

² *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo* [The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary], 16 Vols., in 2 casings. S. 1., 1905.

translation of *Shangshu* along with a brief description of the Qing edition, although not without some inaccuracies.³

The 1905 illustrated *Shujing* occupies a special position in the traditional Chinese canonical studies (*jing, xue*). Moreover, not so many of its copies survived in China and around the world. The two books in the Sinology Library in Moscow are valuable Chinese book-printing artefacts and are a good chance for the study of book illustrations in China.

The Moscow copies of *Shujing tu shuo* hold conventional book set features. Both consist of 50 *juans* (scrolls) in 16 brochures (*ce*) kept in two book casings (*tao*). The brochures are provided with paper jackets of a yellow colour (which was probably originally close to lemon). The book casings are covered with yellow (now rather brownish) tussore. The page dimension (half of a printed paper sheet) is 32x21.5 cm. The Imprint frame dimension is 16x23.8 cm. Each page is ruled out into 10 columns respectively with up to 22 standard sized Chinese characters. The Chinese-made paper is thin.

Printing is executed by lithography technique. The sheet is bi-fold (folded into halves in the middle), with the clean side of the sheet facing inwards and the brochures are stitched over the free edges of the folded sheets (creased edge facing outside). The illustration usually takes one page of the sheet (i.e. it does not pass over the fold of the sheet). In most cases, the printing paint is black, however, there are several pages (sheets) in chapters 2-1 and 6-0 containing maps of the Twelve and Nine Ancient Regions; on those, the outlines of geographic items are printed in red, and geographic names are in black. In these cases, the illustration occupies the whole sheet and is located on both sides of the bi-fold.

There is an inscription “Guangxu 31st year” on the top of the side running title (along the fold) showing the year of the printing. The middle part of the running title is occupied by the title of the book “*Qin ding shu jing tu shuo*” and the number of *juan*. Still lower after an extended blank there is the sheet number inside the *juan*.

The condition of the books is good. The Moscow book sets look identical to the other known imprints of this book. A representative

³ Vladimir Mihaylovich Mayorov (trans., ed., comment., afterword), Lidiya Vladimirovna Stezhenskaya (ed., afterword) and Chtimaya Kniga, *Drevnekitayskie teksty i perevod* [The Esteemed Book: Ancient Chinese Texts and Translation], Moskva: IDV RAN, 2014. Vide List of illustrations on pp. 1093–1103.

sample of this edition can be seen on the website of Academia Sinica, Taiwan.⁴

Since the 2nd century BC, *Shujing* had been an integral part of Confucian learning and education for more than two thousand years. The fact that its illustrated official edition saw the light of day precisely in 1905, when the national examination system based on the Neo-Confucian doctrine, was abolished, raises a number of questions for a researcher. The idea promoted by some Chinese bibliographers, that the weakened Qing political regime of Manchu nobility allegedly tried to resist reforms and to maintain its ideological influence, by means of this publication is hardly acceptable.⁵ It is quite enough to look through the list of the eight major participants who prepared the future illustrations' synopses and text interpretations. Here we see Sun Jianai (1827–1909), the “great dignitary” (minister) of education at that time; Zhang Baixi (1847–1907) – “Father of the Chinese University” and main contributor to the new educational system in China; Zhang Hengjia (1847–1911) – first president of the Capital (Beijing) University; as well as other five high-ranking officials of the Qing government, who were all adherents of the “new policies” faction (see *Zhiming (Designations)* section in the beginning of the first brochure).⁶ Out of these eight men, only Rong Qing (1859–1917) was an ethnic Mongol, and the rest were all Han Chinese.

According to the memorial by Sun Jianai and others, the work on the book began in 1903. However, a year before that, the throne had been presented with the first draft of the education system reform. Additionally, the final version of the educational regulations of the Qing Empire had already been published in 1904. Both the project and the final version of the regulations were drawn up by Zhang Baixi, Sun Jianai and the others. Thus, it is much more reasonable to believe that the illustrated *Shujing* is a reformist book.

This is also evident from the memorials of the editors directed to Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Guangxu. These memorials are included in the book as a sort of preface (sections: *Biao wen*

⁴ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo* [The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary]: http://ebook.teldap.tw/ebook_detail.jsp?id=52 (accessed on August 9, 2016).

⁵ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo* [The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary], Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001, p. 2.

⁶ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zhiming* [Designations], p. 1a.

(*Memorials*), *Zou zhe* (*Reports*), *Tiao li* (*Regulations*)). Here we find the objective of “studying [Confucian] canons for [practical] application” – a popular slogan of the “New Policies” movement.⁷ In addition, the book fits well into the program of Confucian canonical literature teaching as part of the new educational system. The main emphasis on illustrations (there are more than 570 of them in the book) in learning content; the simple style of interpretations and explanations, understandable even to “women and children”; and at last, the distribution of the book among all provincial schools – all these suggest that the book was meant to be used in primary and secondary levels of the new education system. In compliance with the same educational system, teaching hours for Confucian classics in the higher school were to be considerably reduced.

Shujing remained the only book from the Confucian canon which was prepared by the Qing government as a popular illustrated edition. This happened in spite of the fact that, as the editors pointed out, there already was quite a custom of illustrating *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*) and the three canons of Ritual (*Liji*, *Zhouli*, *Yili*).⁸ It is clear that the importance of its content dictated the choice of this particular classic, rather than technical or other reasons. The nature of *The Book of Historical Documents* had always been an important issue in/to the Chinese “canonical studies” (*jing xue*). Actually, the question precisely why this classic was chosen for publication in such a form remains an unresolved problem in modern historical scholarship.

The main issue is whether *Shujing* should be considered as a book reflecting a rather narrowly understood, but quite real political history of the country, or rather as an exposé of an ancient political doctrine, still not fully shaped and relayed in a certain way, later modified by Confucians and only indirectly related to history.

The Qing official *jing xue* belonged to mainstream Cai Chen (1167–1230/1232) commentary of the Neo-Confucian tradition, which, in turn, was based on the approach of Zhu Xi (1130–1200). The founder of Neo-

⁷ Ibid. *Tiao li* [Regulations], pp. 2b and 3a. The New Policies were reforms in various spheres of Late-Qing government, undertaken after the Boxer Rebellion in 1901 and carried on roughly until 1908, the year of Dowager Empress Cixi’s death.

⁸ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Biao wen* [Memorials], p. 2a; *Zou zhe* [Reports], p. 1a. Various diagrams, tables and images of ancient artefacts are meant. Traditional illustrated editions of these canons, due to understandable reasons, did not have narrative illustrations.

Confucianism proposed taking into account – first and foremost – a conceptual fidelity of *Shujing* to the teachings, and left the issues of textual authenticity and the book's related historicity for the future. *The Book of Historical Documents* in the teachings of this school represented the true “Way of a Sovereign”.⁹

The official Qing teachings fully shared this approach. In the second half of the XVIII century, the new Manchurian version of *Shujing* did not transcribe its title, but gave an interpretation of its meaning, rendered as *Dasan-i nomun*, i.e. the book (*nomun*) of a sovereign government, public administration or government (*dasan*).¹⁰ However, when discussing the first chapter, the commentators of the 1905 illustrated *Shujing* called this book “the first Chinese history since the ancient times”, and the “unity of the Way” of the ancient rulers is only mentioned in the explanation of the first section *Yu shu* (*Yu Writings*) and is provided by purely historiographic grounds.¹¹

The relation of the *Shujing tu shuo* canonical text interpretation to the previous *jing xue* tradition should be the subject of a separate study. Hopefully, it will show both the common grounds of modernity and tradition in studies and presentations of *Shujing* to the reader as well as the disruption of this tradition. In their prefacing memorials, the Qing

⁹ Mayorov and Stezhenskaya, *Chtimaya kniga...*, pp. 965–974.

¹⁰ For further elaborations on this, see: Nikita Yakovlevich Bichurin (transl.), Vladimir Mihaylovich Mayorov, Mariya Aleksandrovna Smirnova and Lidiya Vladimirovna Stezhenskaya (transcrib.), V. M. Mayorov (ed.), “*Drevnyaya kitayskaya istoriya*” N. Ya. Bichurina [The Ancient Chinese History (translated by) N. Ya. Bichurin], Moskva: IDV RAN, 2015, p. 521. The Russian Academician V. P. Vasiliev (1818–1900) used Manchurian translations as an argument in his judgement on the content of *Shujing*. For more detail, see: Vasilij Pavlovich Vasiliev, *Ocherk istorii kitayskoy literatury. Pereizdanie na russkom i kitayskom yazykah* [Review of Chinese Literature History: Reprint in the Russian and Chinese Languages], Sankt- Peterburg: Institut Konfuciya v SpbGU, 2013, p. 168. A. M. Karapetyants does not consider *Shujing* a historical source. In his opinion, the canonical character of *Shangshu* in the Confucian school was seen as «the system of reality reflection, its classification by specific language means, and not as a simply historical document”. In this sense, it stood close to *Yijing* [The Book of Changes], which was seen by the Confucians as “the list of standard situations”. See: Artemiy Mihaylovich Karapetyants, ‘Formirovanie sistemy kanonov v Kitae’ [‘Canons’ System Forming in China’] in *Etnicheskaya istoria narodov Vostochnoy i Yugo-Vostochnoy Azii v drevnosti i srednie veka* [Ethnic History of the East and South-East Asia Peoples in Antiquity and Middle Ages], Mihail Vasilievich Kryukov and Mihail Viktorovich Sofronov (eds.), Moskva: Nauka, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoy Literatury, 1981, pp. 240–241 and 245.

¹¹ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, juan (scroll) 1, p. 1a.

compilers stated their absolute devotion towards the official tradition. The 1730 official Chinese edition of *The Book of Historical Documents with comments and their continuation in the collection of interpretations* (*Shujing zhuan shuo hui zuan*) was called the “highest authority”.¹² However, a close acquaintance not only with the interpretations, but also with the canon texts proves that in practice, this requirement was not always fulfilled. A stretch of the canonical text is missing in the text of the second chapter *Yao dian* (*Yao’s Statutes*).¹³ Unlike the official Chinese examination version of *Shujing zhuan shuo hui zuan*, but in compliance with the popular Chinese and official Manchurian-Chinese examination versions,¹⁴ the first paragraph of Chapter 37–14 *Kang gao* (*Address to Kang*) a total of 48 characters is missing, but unlike those editions it is not inserted in the beginning of Chapter 41–18 *Luo gao* (*Declaration on Luo*).¹⁵ We believe that the situation concerning the interpretations (*shuo*) in this edition will not prove to be better. At least part of the explanations in the first chapter *Yao dian*, containing “six simple interpretations” and 20 illustrations which “served as a model for the whole book”, are very sloppy. Explanations regarding the Chinese calendar and astronomy are given with such omissions that their meaning can be restored only by referring to the original writings they had been borrowed from.¹⁶

In spite of all the diligence the editors declared in the prefacing memorials, their comments could hardly be understood by “the uneducated and minors”. They are written in classical Chinese (*wen yan*). Many explanations contain quotations or paraphrases from the works of ancient and medieval authors, and the reader could hardly understand them without knowledge of their original context. It is obvious that the interpretations within the book should be read with a lecturer. This requirement is also stated by the compilers of *Shujing tu shuo*.¹⁷ The Brief explanations after each subsequent passage of the canonical text, describing individual characters were meant for the schoolteachers, so that they “would not come to confusion and would

¹² *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zou zhe* [Reports], p. 3a.

¹³ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, juan (scroll) 2, p. 39b.

¹⁴ For more discussion on these editions see: Bichurin, *Drevnyaya kitayskaya istoriya...*, p. 513–518.

¹⁵ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 11, juan 29, p. 3a; Vol. 13, juan 33, p. 4b.

¹⁶ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, juan 1, p. 16a.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Tiao li* (*Regulations*), p. 2b–3a.

not [incline towards] non-canonical interpretation”.¹⁸ In this capacity, the illustrated *Shujing* continued the tradition of this classic’s popular educational editions, started under the Ming dynasty as early as the 1670s.¹⁹

It is clear that the haste in preparing the edition affected the quality of the text, but it was not the only reason. The concept of the new edition was different. The text occupied a subordinate position in it. The book applied “explaining through image” as its main method.²⁰ The compilers hoped that the “common understanding [of a passage] would result in immediate visual impressions” just as “a drawn illustration has an effect of the coverage of all at once with a single glance”.²¹ The memorials informed of the 570 illustrations, but as our own calculations show, the Moscow copies have 591 illustrations each (chapter illustration lists show in total 586 pictures).²² Some illustrations were added during the cutting and printing of the book. Illustrations stand at the beginning of each chapter and the reader first sees a lithographic image of a line drawing. After one or several full-page illustrations (*tu*) he or she sees the text of a passage from the canon, then follow brief notes on some characters mentioned in this passage, and after that comes the text of the commentary (*shuo*). Our contemporaries may think that the explanation-*shuo* simply explains the illustration-*tu*. The compilers also foresaw the function of “illustration explanation” for the commentary-*shuo*,²³ but according to the original draft, their relations ought to be somewhat different. They were supposed to supplement each other: “reality” (*shi*, i.e. events, things, people etc.) was to be represented in illustrations, and “imagination” (literally: emptiness,

¹⁸ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 1b.

¹⁹ See further details of these editions in *Chimaya, Drevnkitayskie teksty...*, p. 987–989; Bichurin, *Drevnyaya kitayskaya istoriya...*, pp. 513 and 517–518.

²⁰ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 1a.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1a–1b.

²² *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zong mu* [General Contents], p. 1a–4b.

²³ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 1b.

xu),²⁴ implied in “speeches” (*yan*), was to be explained in the textual commentaries (*shuo*).²⁵

Descriptive, anecdotal pictures, presenting some events or situations constitute the main body of the illustrations in *Shujing tu shuo*. It is easy to anticipate that they very often show ancient rulers with their advisers and subordinates, but also display multiple images representing the daily life of common people and so on. All persons are depicted on a background of some particular setting: the palace quarters, cities, countryside or natural landscapes. Owing to this variety *Shujing tu shuo* can be used (and is actually used) for illustrations of present-day and other scholarly works on Chinese history by Chinese and foreign authors. For instance, brick laying and other themed illustrations have been borrowed by Joseph Needham for his renowned *Science and Civilisation in China*.²⁶

The illustrations are drawn in line drawing technique without shading. Two artists by the name of Zhan created the drawings for this edition. As a rule, auction catalogues with *Shu jing tu shuo* descriptions call them “renowned” or “well-known” artists, but in fact, nothing is known of their other works. In the list containing the names of participants (*Zhi ming* Section), one of them is introduced as a student of the National School (*jian sheng* 監生) Zhan Xiulin (詹秀林), and the other is a man without social estate registration (*jun xiu* 俊秀) named Zhan Bukui (詹步魁).²⁷ It is also believed that the artists were hired in Southern China, although the memorials in the preface only mention *nan sheng* (南省), as to where or from where the artists had been hired.²⁸ *Nan sheng* indeed can mean “southern provinces”, but in an elevated style expression, it can also mean government and, even more specifically, the *Li bu* (Ritual Collegium), in whose competence

²⁴ For a little different interpretation of these terms see: Tatiana Igorevna Vinogradova, *Mir kak “predstavlenie”*: *Kitayskaya literaturnaya illyustratsiya* [Universe as “Imagination”: Chinese Literature Illustration], Sankt-Peterburg: Biblioteka Akademii Nauk, Al'faret, 2012, pp. 178–179.

²⁵ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zou zhe* [Reports], p. 1b; *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 1b–2a.

²⁶ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 4, *Physics and Physical Technology*, Part 3, *Civil Engineering and Nautics*, Cambridge: University Press, 1971, pp. 41, 44, 83 and 233.

²⁷ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zhzi ming*, p. 2a.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Zou zhe* [Reports], pp. 1b and 3b; *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 3a.

education matters had been assigned. In addition, there is a passage in the memorial which directly speaks about hiring an artist “in the capital city” (of Beijing).²⁹

The sequence of anecdotal drawings used to relay Confucian classics, is the novelty that singles out *Shujing tu shuo* from the main body of the traditional illustrated Confucian classics. Illustrations in the form of charts, tables, maps, as well as images of ancient material objects had already been used in the past. *Shujing tu shuo* does have them too, but the principal idea of “narrative illustration”³⁰ brings the type of this edition close to comic books. These illustrations grant us the possibility of opening a new research field for Confucian *Shujing* studies, using many-figure compositional image and series analysis. As we know, this point of view present attributes, and many other details which are significant for a common understanding of traditional Chinese picture content. The original synopsis, written by editors for the artists perusal, could provide good base for such research.³¹ An additional search for these materials in PRC and Taiwan archives will be required.

The lithography used for *Shujing tu shuo*, was a relatively new method of printing in early 20th century China. Usually, books in China were produced by wood block printing. Lithography was first used during the Qing empire in 1876 under Western influence. Due to this fact, there are some assumptions that *Shujing tu shuo* was printed not in Beijing, but in Shanghai where better technical conditions were available. However, we have not found any reliable information about the place of its printing. At the same time, it is well known that the imperial printing shop Wuyingdian in Beijing used lithography.

Xu Fu, Zhang Baixi, Lu Runxiang and Zheng Yuan dwelt on the principles of the *Shujing tu shuo* compilation in their final memorial. At the end of the text, they specified that the expenses for editorial preparation, printing, and distribution of books among schools would be covered by a budget assigned for national schools expenditures.³² That might mean that the new illustrated *Shujing* was not meant for sale, and

²⁹ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zou zhe* [Reports], p. 3b.

³⁰ Narrative illustration is a conventional term in Western fine arts studies designating one of the categories of traditional Chinese painting, see: Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, p. 1.

³¹ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, Vol. 1, *Zou zhe* [Reports], p. 3b.

³² *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo*, *Tiao li* [Regulations], p. 3a.

its circulation outside the school system was rather limited. A small number of the books which have survived to our times seems also to confirm this hypothesis. However, one of the Moscow copies, which was probably bought in a book store in China, holds a stamp print in red, stating: “*mei bu jing ping zu yin ba liang*” (each set 8 pure capital taels) on the verso of the blank sheet between the paper cover and the body of the first brochure (a sort of fly title but without title inscription) carrying stock number K-18207 –³³ this tells us the price of a 16-brochure newly illustrated *Shujing* set in two book casings, which was rather pricey. For sake of reference, we should probably mention that the annual salary of the sixth rank official (somewhere in the middle of official hierarchy) in Qing China was about 45 taels, which means that the official would have had to spend a bit more than his two-month salary to buy the book. The present-day auction price of the original copies of the book can amount to tens of thousands of US dollars.

The history of the illustrated *Shujing* did not end in 1905. In China, in recent years, the interest in this particular edition and principle material presentation has been growing significantly. In 1968 a three-volume facsimile reprint of *Shujing tu shuo* was issued in Taiwan. Judging solely by its physical dimensions, the size of the images in it was slightly decreased.³⁴ As part of a book series, another facsimile reprint was issued in Hefei in 2002.³⁵ The exact copy of the Qing edition, created in the style of the original, but not following the colour choice of original brochure covers and book casings, was published in Tianjin in 2007.³⁶ The less intense black colouring of the text and illustrations proves that an available imprint of the old book was used, but not the original lithographic plates, which, we suppose, could not have survived until today. These are, to say as much, benchmarks of *Shujing tu shuo* bibliographical history in the last and current centuries.

³³ The same print inscription is available on the copy kept by Academia Sinica in Taiwan. The other copy in Moscow does not have it.

³⁴ *Qin ding Shujing tu shuo* [The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary], 3 Vols., Taipei: Wenhai, 1968.

³⁵ ‘Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo’ [‘The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary’] in *Zhongguo Qingdai gongting banhua* [Chinese Qing Dynasty Printed Pictures from the Palace Collection], Vol. 40, Hefei: Anhui meishu chubanshe, 2002.

³⁶ *Qin ding Shu jing tu shuo: 50 juan* [The Highly Approved Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary in 50 Juans], 16 Vols., in 2 casings, Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2007.

The trend to use the Qing edition to make up new popular versions of *Shu jing* (for which the contemporary Chinese compilers invariably prefer *Shangshu* (*The Esteemed Book*) title) is also quite remarkable. The earliest 2001 Shanghai edition was in fact nothing else but an abridged version of the *Shujing tu shuo*.³⁷ Some illustrations, belonging to the non-aneccdotal or non-narrative type, were excluded from the book. The publication of this abridged version was justified thanks to the historical source material and aesthetic value of the Qing original. The extensive editing of the original material required the changing of the book title, which is why it became *The Esteemed Book with Visual Explanations*. The term “visual explanation” (*tu jie*) was of very good use for the subsequent popular editions. *Shangshu and Li ji* (*The Notes on Ritual classic*) bound together and with these “explanations” saw the light of day in 2008.³⁸ *Shangshu* was only represented by the “modern script” (*jin wen*) chapters, which is why the number of illustrations borrowed from *Shujing tu shuo* decreased considerably. On the other hand, the *Tu jie Shangshu*, issued in 2016³⁹ not only includes all chapters of both versions of the canon, but also the *Preface to Shangshu* (*Shangshu xu*) by Kong Yingda (574–648). The explanations to illustrations were written anew by present-day scholars and the chapters of the “ancient script” (*gu wen*) version were supplied with the note *wei* – forged. The topical collection of *Shangshu* materials was published in 2014 in Beijing, “with illustrations and comments” (*tu zhuan*). The collection was devoted to the political doctrine of ancient Chinese rulers, as reflected in its title – *The main methods of government according to The Esteemed Book*.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the material was arranged according to specific topics and does not follow *Shangshu* chapters and the book includes 358 illustrations, with the majority being borrowed from the last Qing official *Shujing*.

The Book of Historical Documents with Illustrations and Commentary was published 111 years ago, when China was standing on

³⁷ *Shangshu tu jie* [The Esteemed Book with Illustrations and Commentary], Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001.

³⁸ *Tu jie Shangshu – Li ji* [The Esteemed Book and The Notes on Ritual with Illustrations and Commentary], Shenyang: Wanjuan chuban gongsi, 2008.

³⁹ *Tu jie Shangshu* [The Esteemed Book with Illustrations and Commentary], Chong Xian (transl.), Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2016.

⁴⁰ Zhou Dianfu (ed.), *Shangshu zhi yao* [The Main Methods of Government According to The Esteemed Book], Beijing shidai huawen shuju, 2014.

the threshold of Modernity. This edition in a very peculiar way, embodied both features of the departing and incoming epochs. This assures its value for Chinese studies in various fields. Our primary objective for the nearest future should be to find out how and when this rare edition happened to reach Russia to become such a valuable item in the depository of the Sinology Library in Moscow.