

Using On-line Public Digital Libraries and Free Databases for Research on Late Imperial China

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Scholars of late imperial Chinese history are increasingly able to make use of digitized books and documents. More books have been digitized and many institutions, including both libraries and archives, are offering open access to their newly digitized holdings. In China, Japan, and the United States, major libraries and archives have put at least some of their digital holdings into searchable databases making them not only abundant and accessible but remarkably easy to use and making possible research of a type that would have been unimaginable even in the relatively recent past. Even were one to have had the financial wherewithal to visit all of these institutions in person, locating specific information in unpunctuated string-bound books would have been a daunting task. Because these resources have been made available relatively recently, they may not be familiar to colleagues. Here, I offer a brief introduction to the open-source on-line digital libraries and databases which I have found useful for research on the history of late imperial China.

(1) 漢籍電子文獻 (Hanji Digitized Materials)

<http://hanji.sinica.edu.tw/index.html>

This group of databases of classical materials is provided by Academia Sinica. It includes databases like the *Hanji Digitized Materials Database* (漢籍電子文獻資料庫), which I

will discuss in detail in the following paragraph, *Collected Qing Documents on Statecraft* (清代經世文編), *Collection of Taiwan Local Materials* (台灣文獻叢刊), etc. All of them are full-text keyword searchable.

Hanji Digitized Material Database <http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihp/hanji.htm> was recently made available to readers worldwide. It describes itself as the largest Chinese full-text database. According to the website, it includes “more than 460 titles and 402,000,000 characters of material pertaining to the traditional Chinese classics,” like *Shisan jing zhushu* (十三經注疏), *25 Dynastic Histories* (二十五史), *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記, and a number of novels and drama scripts of the late imperial period. The books are organized under traditional Chinese *sibu* (四部) categories.

(2) 東洋文化研究所漢籍善本全文影像資料庫(Chinese Materials and Rare Book Full-text-and-image Database, The Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo)

<http://shanben.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>

This free, full-text, on-line database is provided by the Institute of Oriental Culture at the University of Tokyo. It contains 4019 titles, including a large number of rare books from the late imperial period, such as many different Ming and Qing novels, classics, legal treatises, and drama scripts. All of them are searchable by title and can be read on-line or downloaded as full-text. There are two indexes on-line for the materials in the database. One is a “subject index,” organized according to traditional Chinese *sibu* (四部) categories; the other is a “title index,” organized according to the name of books.

(3) 早稲田古典籍総合データベース(Waseda Kotenseki Sogo Database)

<http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/index.html>

This database is provided by the Waseda University Library. It includes 300,000 volumes of Japanese and Chinese classics. Although most of them are Japanese books, the library has also digitized a large number of Chinese books published in the late imperial period. All books are searchable by title as well as being full-text readable and downloadable. It is also useful to use the database's catalog to find books. One collection featured in this database is "Popular literature and folk religion in China" which includes hundreds of *nianhua* 年畫, *baojuan* 寶卷 and other valuable materials in genres that are relatively under-represented in other collections.

(4) Hathi Trust Digital Library

<http://www.hathitrust.org/>

There are a large number of books related to late imperial Chinese history available on this large, full-image, on-line digital library. Readers can either go through its homepage or Worldcat to access the digital books in this on-line library. Many major universities in the United States are participating in this project. Scholars may need to login through an account at a partner institution in order to have full access to the materials. The title of the materials is keyword searchable and the full-image of the books are usually downloadable. Some major libraries in the U.S., like the Harvard University Library, have digitized a part of its collection of Chinese rare books and put them in this on-line

library. Because there is no general information or index, readers may have to try searching for the books by title.

(5) Princeton East Asian Library Digitized Medical Texts

<http://eastasianlib.princeton.edu/diglib.php>

This small full-image database contains about 55 rare medical books in Chinese. The titles of the books are listed on the website and all of the books are keyword searchable.

(6) China-US Million Book Digital Library Project (CADAL)

<http://www.archive.org/details/cadal>

This open-source digital library contains over one million scanned books. Currently, it has about 80,000 volumes of rare Chinese books available for reading on-line. Most of these are from Beijing University Library and Zhejiang University Library. Sometimes it can be difficult to locate books because the title search system does not work well with Chinese characters. Going through the list of book titles

(<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=%28sponsor%3A%22China->

[America%20Digital%20Academic%20Library%20%28CADAL%29%22%29%20AND](http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=%28sponsor%3A%22China-America%20Digital%20Academic%20Library%20%28CADAL%29%22%29%20AND)

[%20-mediatype%3Acollection&sort=-publicdate](http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=%28sponsor%3A%22China-America%20Digital%20Academic%20Library%20%28CADAL%29%22%29%20AND%20-mediatype%3Acollection&sort=-publicdate)) is a better choice.

(7) 中國國家圖書館數字方志 (National Library of China Digitized Local Gazetteers)

<http://res4.nlc.gov.cn/home/index.trs?channelid=8>

This open-source full-text database of Chinese local gazetteers is provided by the National Library of China. It contains gazetteers compiled before the Republican period.

The titles of the gazetteers in this database are keyword searchable.