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[General View of Water Control]  
On the Book *He fang yilan* 河防一覽  
Published by Pan Jixun<sup>1</sup> 潘季馴  
in 1590

Preliminary

This paper might as well start on a personal note that will help us organise the material to be presented and develop the right tone to deal with it. I first became aware of the existence of the *He fang yilan* through a long note in a book I read in 1978.<sup>2</sup> At that time I was, and still am, working on mathematical and physical models of biological processes occurring over a wide range of scales, from bacteria to multinational corporations and the history of the solar system.

The note described the story of Pan Jixun (1521–1595) who was responsible for the management of the Huanghe (“The Yellow River”) and the Grand Canal in the late sixteenth century. By the end of his career he had written an eleven-volume treatise on water control at the scale of a 4000-km-long river and a watershed of 752,000 km<sup>2</sup>. I had to see that book, and made many friends over two decades trying to find it. In 2002, in the archives of Academia Sinica in Taipei, I finally had the opportunity to see a copy of the 1590 edition of the *He fang yilan* that Pan Jixun had supervised.<sup>3</sup> The great surprise was that the first volume contained a series of 48 maps—96

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1 All Romanisation will be changed to Pinyin except for modern authors’ own Romanisations of their names.

2 Chi Ch’ao-Ting, *Key Economic Areas in Chinese History* (London, 1936). The Italian translation I read is: *Le zone Economiche Chiave Nella Storia della Cina* (Torino, 1972), p. 164.

3 It was thanks to Chi Hua Tsou of the Institute of Botany, Regina Llamas and John Kieshnick of the Institute of History and Philosophy at Academia Sinica, and Dr. Tsai Tai-Bing of the National Changhua University in Taiwan that a functional illiterate like myself could gain some insight on the work of Pan Jixun and the *He fang yilan*. All mistakes are mine.