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19. History of Mathematics

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On the myth of an ancient Chinese theorem about primality

A problem, commonly attributed to the ancient Chinese, is about the primality of n and the congruence between 2^n and 2 modulo n. This myth seems to have been caused by a note published by the British missionary Alexander Wylie in 1869 in a journal in Hong Kong, which reported on a theorem of Li Shanlan. We will examine this story in more details.