

1 Introduction

Within the corpus of manuscripts associated with the “Donglin Faction” (*Donglin dang* 東林黨) of the early seventeenth century, a handwritten copy of the *Shiding lu* 事定錄 (“Records of Settled Affairs”) kept in the Fu Ssu-Nien Library of Academia Sinica is of particular interest in the study of book culture in late imperial China.¹ On the second page of the copy, the text is divided into eight lines: four are aligned with the upper border line while a space of two characters is left blank before the head of the other lines, including the name of the original author. It is remarkable that in the lines with inserted space, although there are still abundant spaces for other characters, the text is artificially cut and the following characters are intentionally shifted to the head of the next line. A closer examination reveals that all lines with top alignment begin with particular characters related to the emperor, in accordance with the strict regulation of *pingque* 平闕: In order to connote respect for the mentioned person a full-width space needs to be left before a person’s name or the name has to be shifted directly to the head of the next line. This unique feature can be observed in some pre-Tang manuscripts, yet its usage became more rigid and institutionalized during the Ming 明 (1368–1644) as *pingque* was practiced in almost all formal writings and imprints in which the emperor, his imperial relatives, or their decrees and edicts were mentioned.² In compliance with *pingyue* regulations, terms specifically used for the emperor, *ci* 賜 (imperial bestowment), *yugao* 予告 (grant a leave of absence), and *chi* 敕 (imperial decree), were all shifted to a new line and aligned at the top.³

1 For detailed discussions of the “Donglin Faction,” see among others Hucker 1957; Dardess 2002; Miller 2006; Miller 2008, 95–124.

2 *Pingque*, also known as *taitou* 抬頭 (raised head), appears already in some early manuscripts in Dunhuang. The first official regulations concerning *pingque* in formal writings were promulgated later in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907), however, they became more strict and detailed in the Ming. On *pingque*, see Wu Liyu 2002, 229–232.

3 See also Nagata (forthcoming), 11.

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 人峯岫爲承意人房寰所整在廷聞暗不
 敢發一語俄有顧季時進士振臂而起同
 榜彭諸兩公應之遂合疏指寰七罪且曰
 人固有食穢自肥反欲攻人之廉于君父
 之前而無忌者第爲寰甚易爲瑞甚難寰
 誠巧而合俗瑞誠拙而忤世然天理常存

Shiding lu, handcopy, size: 19 x 11.5 cm. Fu Ssu-nien Library, Academia Sinica

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 榜彭諸兩公應之遂合疏指寰七罪且曰
 人固有食穢自肥反欲攻人之廉于君父
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Shiding lu imprint. Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Gugong zhenben congkan*

What particularly stands out is that the calligraphic style the copyist adopted is not the standard script (*kaishu* 楷書), nor the “academic script” (*guange ti* 館閣體 or *taige ti* 台閣體) popular in Ming and Qing 清 (1644–1912) official writings. Slightly rectangular in shape and with sharply defined strokes, the style does not present the flowing brushstroke of a calligrapher but was in close imitation of the so-called “Song style” (*songti* 宋體), a common script used for contemporary wood-block imprints.⁴

Although no further information about the manuscript is available, neither on the date of its production nor on its author, it is quite probable that the current manuscript is a facsimile hand-copy of a 1613 print version of the *Shiding lu*. A comparison of the manuscript with a photolithographic reprint of the 1613 imprint reproduced in the *Gugong zhenben congan* 故宮珍本叢刊 shows that not only are their formats identical – eight lines per page with eighteen characters per line and the same *pingque* practices, but also the styles of the scripts are noticeably similar.⁵ Yet a question arises as to why this manuscript bears such a likeness to the imprint. In fact, all the above-mentioned features observed in the *Shiding lu* are not rare but also quite common in other Donglin manuscripts. A proper answer to the question requires a more comprehensive look into the broad context of book culture in late imperial China, while this hand-copy, compiled by Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612),⁶ one of the leading figures of the “Donglin Faction,” is a shining example which exhibits a number of distinctive features leading to the strong influence and intersecting boundaries between manuscript and printing in the late Ming dynasty.

4 Interestingly, the current manuscript may be a work of collaboration between two scribes, since the second half of the manuscript appears in another calligraphy different to that of the first half, though both of them are clearly of the “Song style”.

5 See *Gugong zhenben congan*, vol. 541, 93–128.

6 See *Mingshi* 231.6029–6033, for a biography of Gu.

2 Manuscript and Printing in the Ming

The Chinese have printed their texts in form of books for more than eleven centuries. During the seventh or eighth century, the Chinese invented xylography to reproduce text by cutting written characters onto woodblocks.⁷ Although the method was originally utilized for religious purposes, in particular for the replication of Buddhist sutras and illustrations, the technology was soon adopted by commercial publishers and the state, who printed large numbers of medical manuals, almanacs, private calendars, dictionaries, and works on astrology, divination, and geomancy.⁸ Although some of the early prints prior to the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1276), such as the Diamond Sutra (*Jin'gang jing* 金剛經), dated 868, were very well produced, printing before the tenth century had some way to go before attaining the level of Song imprints, in quality and in quantity. Thanks to early Song government printing projects, the increasing popularity of the civil service examinations, and the growing demand for imprints, printing spread widely. There is a well-designed format of leafs to be observed in the Song imprints, including size and placement of various components, and most of these imprints used calligraphic characters which consciously imitated the style of famous calligraphers' brush stroke. The development of Chinese printing reached a turning point in the eleventh and twelfth centuries during the Song. If the Tang 唐 (618–907) and the following Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960) can be labeled as the formative period in the history of Chinese printing, the Song can certainly be called the first “golden age of Chinese printing”.⁹

After a falling-off in imprint production and a slow retreat of print culture in the fourteenth century, printing experienced an enormous boom from the late fifteenth century onward. Although it is widely believed that most printing from the Ming did not observe the high standards established in the Song, Ming printing was distinguished

7 Timothy H. Barrett (2001) argues that printing had already been invented by the late seventh century. In a later publication (2008), he goes further to claim that it was Empress Wu (625–705) who actually discovered the technology of printing. Cynthia J. Brokaw (2007, 253) suggests that printing was probably invented sometime in the eighth century. Our still sparse knowledge about the early history of print in China is enriched by works such as Thomas Francis Carter 1925, 37–45; Zhang Xiumin 1958, esp. 27–63; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 10–22; Drège 1991, 77–112; Cao Zhi 1994.

8 For some speculative observations on the earliest use of print in China, see for instance Strickmann 1993; Barrett 1997, 538–540. See also Tsien 1985, 146–159, for the early commercial prints. It is fairly hard to identify how numerous or widespread these works were, because surviving examples of such prints are extremely rare.

9 Tsien 1985, 159.

by the flourishing of commercial printers, especially those in Jianyang, which made print books inexpensive through adoption of technical innovations for woodblock carving, and produced imprints for a mass market by extending the scope of subject-matter and building up far-flung distribution networks.¹⁰ The boom of commercial publishing and the drastic increase in both numbers and varieties of texts published from the early sixteenth century on had a cultural impact much greater than in the Song: declining prices of printed books enabled a wider access to knowledge; well-edited printed texts (official Confucian canons and unofficial examination aids) established a new standard of scholarly accurate reference. It seems certain that thereafter there would have been little practical reason to continue making manuscript copies of books.

This assumption, or rather intuition, seems, at least at first sight, to be supported by the quantitative evidence collected by modern scholars as they notice an explosive increase in imprints, governmental or commercial, dating from late Ming China.¹¹ The rapid progress of imprints during this period has been well studied, so I shall not dwell too much on the historical development of printing.¹² Those data notwithstanding, it ought to be noted that print is emphatically not “an agent of change” that eliminated a flourishing manuscript culture in imperial China.¹³ In fact, the tradition of producing and using of manuscripts in many parts of China, in particular in the Yangzi delta,

10 See Tsien 1985, 172; Chia 2002, esp. ch. 5 and 6, for a profound study of the Jianyang imprints and book trade during the Ming. See also Minoru Katsuyama 2004.

11 See, for instance, Chia 2001, 69 and Chia 2007, 146, for a graphic examination of the significant increase for Jianyang and Jiannan imprints from late Ming in the seventeen categories of the *Siku* system. Chia's calculation of extant Jianyang imprints shows that “slightly less than 10 percent” of all extant commercial publications from the Ming were printed in the first half of the dynasty; see Chia 2003, 303–304. Chia's data on imprints in Ming Nanjing reveal that nearly all imprints produced in Nanjing during the Ming were printed from the late sixteenth century onward; see Lucille Chia 2005, 128, table 3.2. Through an extensive examination of extant Ming imprints held in the National Central Library in Taipei, Inoue Susumu (1990, 427–428, table 1 and 2) notes that almost twice as many imprints were produced within the 34 years from 1522 to 1566 as in the first and a half centuries (1368–1521) of the Ming.

12 Rather than attempting an exhaustive listing of these works, I refer to two thorough bibliographical articles in the special section on book history in China in *Book History* 10 (2007) and the references therein, as well as Tobie Meyer-Fong's comprehensive introduction to the field published 2007, too. Studies will be cited below, as they relate to the discussion at hand.

13 In studies of the impact of printing on Western book culture, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein (1979) has shown that printing can be “an agent of change” to effect a revolution in communications with far-reaching and unexpectedly complex consequences.

continued to have a life of its own, even long after printing had come to dominate book culture. The prolonged flourishing of manuscript culture is attested in the number of handwritten copies in the holdings of Song and Ming libraries. The imperial collection of the Song seems to have consisted largely of manuscript texts since according to John Winkelman, in 1177, only about 9 percent of the texts in the Imperial Library were imprints.¹⁴ The Imperial Library of the Ming, despite the increase in print in the second half of the dynasty, had up to 70 percent of its holdings in form of manuscripts.¹⁵ The celebrated *Tianyi ge* 天一閣 collection, established in about 1560 by Fan Qin 范欽 (*jinsshi* 1532) in Ningbo, was composed of up to 50 percent manuscripts.¹⁶ It is thus quite evident that manuscripts were still important for the existence and transmission of books, and consequently the copying or reproduction of manuscripts remained important and continued in significant quantity, despite the growing dominance of the imprint in the late Ming.

Although having long been overlooked, the durability of manuscripts and the extended coexistence of books in both handwritten and printed forms have received a steady scholarly attention over the past decades. To be sure, the cluster of substantial studies by Ming-sun Poon, Susan Cherniack, and Jean-Pierre Drège on manuscript culture prior to and in the Song undoubtedly laid an important foundation for our comprehension of the issue.¹⁷ But more in-depth insight into manuscript publishing in the Song is offered by recent works: Joseph Dennis vividly illustrates the life circle of a gazetteer, noting that the majority of gazetteers existed as partial or complete manuscripts and even most of the printed ones continued to exist in the original manuscript plus additional handwritten copies;¹⁸ in her recent paper Hilde De Weerdts investigates

14 A less detailed breakdown puts the hand-copy share at 91 percent of the *juan* 卷 and 92 percent of the *ce* 冊. Cf. Ōuchi Hakugetsu 1944, 31; Winkelman 1974, 32.

15 *Mingshi* 96.2343; Wu 1944, 184; Tsien 1985, 175; Vogelsang 1998/1999, 155, citing Ho 1962, 212.

16 Yao Boyue 1993, 115; Li Ruiliang 2000, 277; McDermott 2005, 77. Fan himself claimed that the collection consisted of 80 percent imprints and 20 percent manuscripts; see Inoue Susumu 1990, 419; Brokaw 2005, 153. However, Fan's numbers appear to be an exaggeration, while 50 percent imprints and 50 percent manuscripts ought to be a more accurate calculation. A detailed table which describes the *Tianyi ge* catalogue is provided in Stackmann 1990, 97–107, table 7.

17 Poon 1979; Drège 1991; Drège 1994, 409–442; Cherniack 1994.

18 Actually it is hard to simply identify titles and label them “manuscript” or “imprint” or count numbers, because quite often sheets or blocks of handwritten texts were inserted into printed works. See Dennis 2011.

how hand copying and printing were discussed in a selection of Song notebooks to emphasize personal copying in relation to professional copying.¹⁹ Within the past ten years in particular, there has also developed a growing community of researchers who have been focusing particularly on the social, political, and cultural aspects of the increase in print after the Song. In his overview of the history of Chinese printing, Inoue Susumu 井上進 rethinks the history of the manuscript book as well as the imprint up through the late Ming and points out that until the publishing boom of the late Ming, hand-copying of texts had been the normal mode of transmission.²⁰ Joseph P. McDermott forcefully argues that manuscripts remained the dominant tool for disseminating texts in China until the sixteenth century and emphasizes the crucial role of manuscript in facilitating private collections throughout the course of the Ming.²¹

These inspiring works have laid the cornerstone for our understanding of the interrelationship between manuscripts and prints in China in the age of print, however, there are still some considerable gaps waiting to be filled: first, as handwritten manuscripts had long been the principle mode for transmitting books, even eight centuries after the invention of printing, any hypothesis that they were replaced by imprint copies at a specific date should be questioned. It is naive to assume that manuscripts suddenly disappeared or stopped begetting further copies, but what happened to them? Second, if hand-written copies did not become extinct but continued to thrive through the late Ming, there ought to be some practical explanations for that. It seems illogical to produce hand-written copies if printed works could meet all the requirements, qualitative and quantitative, of both the publisher and the reader. Thus we may wonder, what were the reasons for the persistence of manuscripts?²² What factors had influenced the decision to choose carving woodblocks for printing? Third, although there is a consensus among scholars that there have been mutual interactions between manuscripts and prints since the late Ming as print versions could be hand-copied and then in turn become the basis for a reprint, several questions remain unanswered: Was there a specific boundary which clearly separates print from manuscript? Or did the two to some extent interpenetrate? How did manuscripts influence the appearance of printed books and vice versa? Unfortunately, despite their ongoing importance in the transmission of

19 De Weerd 2010.

20 Inoue Susumu 2002, 165–177; 2009, 2–9.

21 McDermott 2006, ch. 2.

22 Joseph P. McDermott (2005, 77–85) has touched upon this question, but there he focuses mainly on the conditions which led to the ascendance of print, whereas other factors in regards to the persistence of manuscripts are largely overlooked.

Chinese culture up to the twentieth century, very little systematic research has been undertaken on the history of manuscripts after the “golden age” of Chinese printing.

This paper aims to tackle the above-mentioned questions through an analysis of manuscripts and imprints dating from the late Ming. With an inquiry into the social and intellectual history of late Ming through these works, I attempt to identify the relevant factors that may decide the inevitable choice between hand-copy and print and to explore the reasons why manuscripts could persist in spite of the proliferation of printing. An investigation of manuscripts and imprints from the period, along with their handwritten copies, shows that manuscripts and imprints did not challenge or restrict, but interrelated and influenced each other. The comparison with extant printed versions of manuscripts further illustrates the enormous interaction between the two: woodblocks were carefully carved to produce calligraphic characters in imitation of the works by renowned calligraphers in Yuan 元 (1271–1368) and the Ming; not few hand-copies, on the other hand, strictly followed the format of previous printed versions, even though it was unnecessary. I shall demonstrate that the persistence and flourishing of manuscripts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, regardless of the historical ascendance of imprints over manuscripts, highlights the intersections between as well as the interdependence of the two media in Chinese book culture.

3 Manuscripts or Imprints: Choices and Reasons

It is true that the last one and a half centuries was the time when imprints first outnumbered manuscripts as the primary form of textual transmission and dissemination, but this rise and even conquest of imprints, as mentioned above, did not entail the demise of manuscripts and the thriving manuscript culture doggedly persisted. Printing had become an increasingly welcomed and preferred form in the reproduction and multiplication of all sorts of textual and visual knowledge since the late fifteenth century, yet under certain circumstances one preferred to pick up a writing brush or to commission a copyist, instead of turning to a printer.

3.1 Restricted Availability of Books

Despite the increasing numbers of imprints resulting from the invention and the development of woodblock printing, there was a constant restricted availability of books in general which is revealed in the nature of the demands imposed by literati and scholar-officials for copies of books. There is abundant evidence about the difficulty early Ming scholars encountered trying to see or acquire imprints of books, forcing them to rely largely on handwritten copies. Ye Sheng 葉盛 (1420–1474), the largest book collector of his time in the Yangzi delta, needed over twenty years to complete a full version of

the non-historical writings of Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), by making copies from separate editions owned by his friends.²³

The unprecedented publishing boom in the following century did not alleviate the restricted availability of books for private collectors relying on the market and both rich and poor constantly bemoaned their inability to find books, although the situation began to improve at the end of the fifteenth century.²⁴ Such bleak conditions in the intellectual life of the late Ming are noticed by Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), lamenting that “as for what circulated among the people, it was no more than the Four Books, the Five Classics, the [*Zizhi*] *tongjian*, and books on moral nature. If any other books were printed, then they were kept only by families who were fond of the past.”²⁵ The travails of some late Ming collectors give ample evidence of such claim. For instance, up to the mid-sixteenth century, literati readers in the Yangzi delta repeatedly had trouble locating or owning a copy of the *Wenxuan* 文選 (“Anthology of Literature”) even after the fourth round of printing of the work in 1549.²⁶ It even took a wealthy Suzhou collector like Yang Xunji 楊循吉 (1458–1546) years to acquire a complete copy of this anthology. He first transcribed an edition at the National University (*guozijian* 國子監) in Beijing, only to discover that this copy was incomplete. He bought a version in the marketplace, but it consisted only of the latter half of the full text. Eventually, only after hand-copying the first half from a copy held by his friend Wang Ao 王鏊 (1450–1524) did he finally put together a cumulative and complete copy.²⁷

The standard dynastic histories proved no different for late Ming collectors and most of them suffered long neglect even until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the first half of the Ming, complete copies of the *Songshi* 宋史, for instance, were few, and even as late as 1534, the devoted Suzhou collector and painter Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508–1578) found that a copy of it made by the notable Suzhou scholar Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509) was missing thirty-four *juan*. Qian then spent years

23 Inoue Susumu 1990, 419; Ding Yao 2004, 81; McDermott 2005, 77, quoting *Cangshu jishi shi* 2.117–118. For a biography of Ye Sheng, see *Mingshi* 177.4721–4724.

24 Yao Boyue 1993, 115; Li Ruiliang 2000, 363. As Inoue Susumu (1990, 418–419) notes, book printing began to increase in the Chenghua reign-period (1465–1587) and reached a peak in the Jiajing reign-period (1507–1567). This trend is confirmed by Lucille Chia’s study of non-governmental Ming imprints; see Chia 2001, 69, chart 1a and 1b; Chia 2002, 186, figure 29; Chia 2003, 303.

25 *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji* 2.31–32.

26 Inoue Susumu 2002, 217–218.

27 Inoue 1990, 417–418.

copying from another incomplete copy in a vain effort to complete his version.²⁸ This seems to resonate with Gu Yanwu's rueful observation that the dynastic histories began to enter the libraries of scholar officials only after they were printed in Nanjing during the Jiajing Period (1521–1567) and in Beijing during the period (1573–1620).²⁹

It is probably because of such ongoing shortage of books that many book owners continued earlier habits of how to lend and share books: books were considered so valued and precious that access to private collections was often restricted. Book collectors repeatedly reminded themselves and their descendants that “to lend books is unfilial,” “to loan a book is stupid,” or “to lend a book is foolish, while to return a [lent] book is also foolish.”³⁰ Some improved access was provided since the mid-Ming by governmental school libraries, circulation libraries, and private libraries of friends, yet as Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) lamented after decades of trying to visit major private libraries in the Yangzi delta, “people do not easily show their books to others.”³¹ These incidental details, however inconclusive when looked at separately, eventually add up to a general confirmation of an overall shortage of books.

3.2 Producing Manuscript as Scholarly Devotion

Such a conclusion merits our belief that the proliferation of printing in the sixteenth century did not end the dearth of books, but we must keep in mind that the choice of titles which suffered shortage mainly reflects the concerns of literati interested more in writings of supposedly lasting value than other genres that must have constituted the bulk of printing in the late Ming. In other words, arguably more attention of scholars was caught by works by celebrated past literati and scholar-officials, in particular the refined historical versions, rather than the contemporary creations such as vernacular novels. The avid book collector and publisher Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659), for example, endeavored to make available modern versions of rare Song and Yuan editions of literature of ancient authors, Confucian classics, and historical titles for a literati readership,

28 Ji Shuying 1991, 76.

29 *Rizhiliu jishi* 18.642–643.

30 The seal of the scholar-official Tang Yaochen 唐堯臣 (*juren* 1528), for example, reads exactly “To loan a book is unfilial” 借書不孝; the seal of Shi Dajing 施大經 (ca. 1560–1610) also contains the phrase “To loan or sell a book is unfilial” 出借鬻為不孝. Fang 1950, 156, quoting Ye Dehui's *Cangshu shiyue* 藏書十約, notes that “one fool lends a book, another fool returns it” 借書一痴, 還書一痴; see also Ōuchi Hakugetsu 1944, 147–148. On these habits of thought and practice about loaning and sharing books, see Nagasawa Kikuya 1982, 288–292; Xiao Dongfa 1983, 56.

31 *Huang Zongxi quanji*, vol. 1, 389.

so that his *Jigu ge* 汲古閣 editions of both print and manuscripts copies were highly valued.³² When Lü Liuliang 呂留良 (1629–1683) found twenty Song and Yuan editions of books in the holdings of his friends in Nanjing, he stayed over half a year there copying the works and even forgot the time.³³ In contrast, imprints of examination manuals and cribs, as a consequence of the boom in demand by the greatly increasing number of candidates sitting for the civil service examinations, were never lacking, and the publication of examination aids resulted in an expansion of the commercial printing sector which sought to meet this demand.³⁴ The late Ming scholar Li Lian 李廉 (*jinsbi* 1514) explicitly linked the growing availability of examination manuals to an unwelcome explosion of print culture as he complained:

In recent years, unless a book is for the examinations, the commercial publishers will not print it [...] the market stores will not sell it [...] and the scholars will not look at it.³⁵

Li's approaching of his contemporaries for failing to appreciate the unprecedented wealth of learning available to them echoes the view of many earlier scholars and therefore should not be accepted entirely at face value. For Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in the twelfth century, for example, books had become almost too readily abundant and such a widespread reliance on imprints led to the neglect of the tradition of memorization through transcription. As the price of books decreased and they became more accessible to a larger audience, "students no longer had to commit texts to memory since they now had easy access to them. Their reading, thus, has become far less disciplined and penetrating."³⁶ He then lamented:

The reason people today read sloppily is that there are many printed texts. [...] It would seem that the ancients had no written texts, so only if they had memorized a work from beginning to end would they get it. Those studying a text would memorize it completely and afterwards receive instruction on it from a teacher. [...] For people today, even copying down a text has become bothersome. Therefore their reading is sloppy.³⁷

32 *Cangshu jiyao*, 9a; Ding Yao 2004, 82. On Mao's publishing activities, see Wu 1943, 244–246; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 373–374; Chia 2002, 187.

33 *Lü Wancun wenji* 1.32; Chen Guanzhi 2009, 120.

34 McDermott 2006, 57. For further information on this key factor in the Ming publishing boom, see Chow 1996.

35 *Ming wenhai* 105.1034. My translation follows McDermott 2006, 67. See also Inoue Susumu 1994, 323–326.

36 Gardner 1989, 148. See Cherniack 1994, 45–55; McLaren 1998, 75, for Zhu Xi's concerns and complaints.

37 *Zhuzi yulei*, 10.10a–b.

No doubt, with the increase of printing, books had become widely available, and thus accessible to a larger number of people, and it may well have abetted a rise in literacy. Manuscripts, however, were still the preferred form of the book in the eyes of many elite scholars and bibliophiles. Special merit was seen to lie in the careful copying of scholarly texts as a devotional act. Each time when the erudite Song scholar Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1155) and her husband acquired a new title, whether it was a manuscript or an imprint, they would carefully collate it with other versions that could be found and then make a clean manuscript copy of the entire work. For them, only then would it be added to their collection, and only then was the acquisition complete.³⁸ The twelfth-century wealthy collector You Mao 尤袤 (1127–1194) even insisted that the best way of mastering a text was to make a brush copy of it.³⁹ In the eyes of many late Ming literati, printed books were for those who did not truly care about books, while the real scholar or true connoisseur of books prided himself on copying them, after editing and collating them, just as Li and her husband did.⁴⁰ The act of copying was important not just to demonstrate one's commitment to books but also to the process of learning and mastering their contents. Gu Yanwu, in his remarkable discussion of the role of copying in the course of his own studying, makes a tangentially related point when he cites with approbation his grandfather's injunction that "it is better to copy a book than to compose one."⁴¹ The special value and significance of handwritten copies for scholars in "the age of print" is clearly expressed by the late Ming scholar Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635). Recalling the story of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), he grieved:

Dongpo (Su Shi) hand-copied the two Han histories by himself. After he finished, he showed off by saying that [he] felt like a poor guy getting rich overnight. [This is because,] by copying the text with your own hand and by collating and checking it carefully, one commits his attention to it several times and naturally he can understand it better and is able to memorize it by heart. It also prevents him from making reckless mistakes. People of today simply purchase printed books and [even] entire halls and houses are filled with them. Although books are abundant, people don't read them; even they do read them, they do not read carefully. Books are getting increasingly nu-

38 Li Qingzhao, "Jinshi lu houxu" 金石錄後序 (Postscript to the "Epigraphic Collection"), in *Li Qingzhao ji jianzhu* 3.309; Egan 2011, 41.

39 McDermott 2006, 76.

40 In fact, many late Ming scholars and book collectors such as Lu Shen 陸深 (1477–1544), Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507–1571), Shi Zhaodou 史兆斗 (1576–1663) devoted themselves to editing and collating early scholarly works through copying them. On their activities, see Chen Guanzhi 2009, 124–127.

41 *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, 2.37; Campbell 2006/2007, 8.

merous, but the learning become increasingly superficial and sloppy and later generations are becoming more stupid. This is truly lamentable!⁴²

Resonating Li's concern, Sun Congtian 孫從添 (1692–1767), an early Qing licentiate and bibliophile, therefore again reminded his contemporaries of the special importance of manuscripts in the proliferation of print:

The reason why manuscript copies are valued among books is that they are convenient for reading and reciting. [...] Draft manuscript (*diben* 底本) copies are convenient for correcting textual errors, while [their] manuscript copies (*chaoben* 鈔本) carry the correct text. Therefore books copied by hand are more valued and precious than printed books.⁴³

3.3 Comparative Prices and Economical Competitiveness

Despite the great boom of printed books in the late Ming, and despite the information we can glean from them and other sources, there is a frustrating lack of data on production costs of books and book prices, both in print and manuscript form.⁴⁴ Even the few prices we do know refer on the whole to works that were somewhat special: a rare imprint of Song or Yuan edition, a deluxe hand-copy made by a particular connoisseur in taste, or books produced for foreign customers, especially from Korea and Japan. In his exploration of the cost of printing gazetteers between the Song and Ming dynasties, Joseph Dennis highlights the problematic nature of cost and price data, but at the same time suggests some new ways in which the economic history of book production can be written despite the absence of systematic quantitative data.⁴⁵ Thus based on judicious extrapolations from what we know about imprints and hand-copies in the late Ming, though not much, we may arrive at some speculations.

With the above-mentioned caveats in mind, we can start to observe some implications of prices and costs recorded in some late Ming imprints and manuscripts. In the course of several decades of examining Chinese rare books, Shen Jin [Chum Shum] had the uncommon opportunity to collect data on prices of extant late Ming imprints. From a total of twenty-seven titles marked with prices, sixteen were sold for a price of less than

42 *Cangshu jishi shi*, 1.19.

43 *Cangshu jiyao*, 8a; Fang 1951, 229.

44 Most recent editions of provincial gazetteers contain a section on “publishing history” (*chubanzhi* 出版志) which represents the most accessible source of information on printing and publishing in different areas of China during the Qing and Republican periods. Although some of them include a bit of information about publishers of earlier periods, they tend to devote most attention to publishing activities since late Qing.

45 See Dennis 2011.

one silver tael.⁴⁶ When Mao Yi 毛扆 (1640–1713) son of Mao Jin, sold some of his and his father's holdings to the eminent book collector Pan Lei 潘耒 (1646–1708), he deliberately composed a catalogue with prices of the sold books (some as imprints and some as manuscripts). Although only about one-fourth of the printed titles in the catalogue were priced less than one silver tael, they were still invariably cheaper than their hand-written counterparts.⁴⁷ It should also be borne in mind that works in Mao Yi's catalogue were largely refined productions of earlier rare books which were of much better quality than the common ones, and therefore, they must have commanded a far more steep price. Based on data from the sixteenth to early seventeenth century, Kai-wing Chow has reconstructed the range of book prices and wages of late Ming officials and artisans to argue that books below one silver tael became affordable as daily commodity even to poorer literati and craftsmen.⁴⁸ However, I remain somewhat skeptical about his conclusion, because although Chow does point out that officials normally received various allowances and miscellaneous charges,⁴⁹ yet he fails to take into account the expenses of the official's household, which mostly relied solely upon the income of the official. It should be safe to suggest that books were more accessible for the better-off educated elites rather than the common craftsmen and book collecting was the privilege of the wealthy few.

Other information can also be extracted from the few extant data to help better clarify the relative price difference between imprints and manuscripts during the period. A glance at the costs of making woodblocks may give us with an idea of the production costs of imprints in the late Ming. The simplification in the carving method widely introduced in the mid-sixteenth century through the adoption of the "craftsmen style" (*jiangti* 匠體), to which I will come back later, apparently reduced the cost of carving, one of the major procedures in the production of imprints. When a book, consisting of 160 sheets, was carved and printed in 1554, a total of twenty-four silver taels were paid to the carvers – that is, 150 *wen* for each sheet.⁵⁰ In his effort to produce fine imprints of Song and Yuan rare books, Mao Jin paid his carvers twenty *wen* for each hundred characters – each sheet containing 400 to 500 characters then cost eighty to one hundred

46 Shen Jin 1996, 110–115; Chow 2004, 260–261, appendix 3. See also Chia 2002, 190–191, and 378, note 143, for a discussion of some of the cases in Shen's study. All book prices are given in silver taels and each silver tael equals 10 *qian* or 1000 *wen* of copper cash, but in consequence of the inflation in the late Ming, one tael could only be changed for 700 *wen*.

47 *Shulin qinghua*, 6.33a–37a. For the prices of printed works in the catalogue, see also Chow 2004, 255–257, appendix 1. For prices of manuscript works, see *Jigu ge zhencang miben shummu*, 16–17.

48 Chow 2004, 48–50; Zhou Qirong 2010, 14–16.

49 Chow 2004, 48.

50 *Shulin qinghua*, 7.14a–14b; Li Ruiliang 2000, 366.

wen.⁵¹ This impression of the low cost of late Ming carving work is echoed by other data from Suzhou, where it cost twenty-five to thirty-five *wen* to carve one hundred characters in around 1600.⁵² Suffice it to say that the costs of paper and ink accounted for the major proportion of the production expenses.⁵³

Labor costs of scribal works, on the other hand, were probably even lower in the period. The examination system in the Ming helped to raise the literacy level and the high failure rate created a large pool of potential scribes that inevitably reduced the price of hand-copying. For instance, during the childhood of the literatus Li Xu 李誦 (1506–1593), he could not afford to purchase any printed works for his study. He only used manuscript copies transcribed by copyists for two or three *wen* of cash for twenty to thirty sheets.⁵⁴ Li's figures are attested in the record of Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864–1927), the avid late Qing bibliophile, as he has noted that during his time a hand-copied sheet of 440 characters cost about 200 *wen*, a price sixty times more expensive than in the late Ming – that is about three *wen* each sheet.⁵⁵ The relatively low price of scribal copying compared to its alternative persuaded readers to turn to hand-copies. At the same time, the making of a printed copy could consume much more time than that of a scribal copy, since a proficient copyist could write about ten thousand characters a day, whereas during the same time even a skilled carver could only produce up to 150 characters, let alone the printing and binding that followed.⁵⁶ Thus, unless at least a few thousand copies of a book were expected to sell, it would not be profitable at all for publishers to shift from copying to printing. If only single copies were to be reproduced, the scribal production proved both more cost-effective and time-effective, and thus remained competitive even when printed versions were readily available: a reader who could not afford to print a book or buy a printed book might find it less time-consuming and cheaper to have the work copied.

51 *Shulin qinghua*, 7.14b. For Mao's printing activities, see also Wu 1943, 244; Chia 2002, 187 and 376, note 132.

52 Zhang Xiumin 1989, 474; Inoue Susumu 1994, 314–315; McDermott 2006, 37.

53 For a profound study of the costs in printing a book in late Ming China, see Zhou Qirong 2010, 10–13.

54 *Jie'an laoren manbi*, 8.334.

55 *Shuling qinghua*, 10.22a–22b.

56 Poon 1979, 67. Ye Dehui has noted that a skillful scribe in Hunan at the beginning of the twentieth century could copy five thousand characters a day. The difference between the figures may result from the different styles of calligraphy a scribe used; see Fang 1950, 148; Vogelsang 1998/1999, 157. Observing a printing workshop in the mid-nineteenth century, William Milne (1820, 239–240) recorded that a good carver could cut 150 characters a day. Medhurst (1838, 105) and Chia (2002, 37) lowered the figure to 100.

3.4 Artistic and Aesthetic Preference

Certainly, hand-copying was not only an option exercised by those too poor to purchase an imprint. The artistic and aesthetic value of a book written in elegant calligraphy could make a manuscript more valuable than a shoddily produced imprint. One prominent change which drove, and was shaped by, the proliferation of commercial printing in the late Ming was the style of scripts used for the printing. Extant Ming books printed before the mid-sixteenth century give us a clear impression that they largely inherited the traditional format of the Song and Yuan, and their characters were in the style of earlier accomplished calligraphers such as Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785), Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), and in particular Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322), whose calligraphy is famous for being soft and feminine.⁵⁷ While the so-called “Song style” was widely used in imprints, from the late sixteenth century on, the style of characters adopted in the printing became more rigid and straight, and eventually shifted to the homogenized “craftsmen style,” which lacks swift movement and is more square in construction.⁵⁸ Each stroke in a character functioned as a reproducible part within what Lothar Ledderose has aptly termed “the module system” of Chinese script and art.⁵⁹ The widely used “craftsmen style” characters allowed the publisher to squeeze more characters onto the surface of a woodblock and the severe restriction it placed on the range of a scribe’s strokes and carver’s cuts further lowered costs. Both greatly reduced the range of carving skills and therefore cut costs.⁶⁰ The scale of savings in labor costs of the two relatively expensive stages of book production is found in the wages prescribed for the scribes and carvers engaged to write or carve three different calligraphy styles for the Imperial Household Department (*neifu* 內府) in the eighteenth century. As Joseph McDermott cogently shows, the “craftsmen style” could decrease the costs of scribing and carving by roughly 40 percent (from *kaishu* 楷書 to *jiangti*) and 50 percent (from *outi* 歐體 to *jiangti*) in the cost of scribing and carving.⁶¹

57 Tsien 1985, 183; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 508. See Mote and Chu 1989, 113–132, for a number of finely printed books showing various degrees of Zhao’s impact on book design in the early Ming.

58 Wu 1943, 250–251; Mote and Chu 1989, 169. But Zhang Xiumin (1989, 508) argues that the scripts in the late Ming imprints are not identical to the authentic “Song style” and such scripts should be better called “Ming style” (*mingti* 明體 or *mingchaoti* 明朝體). For a comparative study of the aesthetic value of the two scripts, see Heijdra 2006.

59 Ledderose 2000, 16–18 and 139–161.

60 Chia 2002, 11, 39, and 197.

61 McDermott 2006, 28–29.

In the meantime, this change of calligraphy style had clear implications for scribal and carving work beyond the concerns of cost saving. Nondescript and impersonal, the “craftsmen style” relied on the manipulation of a brush to form square-like characters, presenting uniformity and facilitating legibility. Nonetheless, individualistic liveliness and expressiveness of calligraphies waned because the mediocre and box-like “craftsmen style” paid little attention to the dynamic interplay in the original brushstroke order and style of the calligraphy. Predictably, the eyes of literati readers, who regarded calligraphy as an important art form that demonstrates the writer’s virtuous disposition, were not pleased. Bemoaning the use of such dull brushstroke and its deplorable impact on the quality of the scripts found in late Ming imprints, the devoted late Qing scholar Qian Yong 錢泳 (1759–1844) lamented that “since the mid-Ming scribes [for wood-block carving] used square-like strokes, which were neither *yanti* (style of Yan Zhenqing) nor *outi* (style of Ouyang Xun), and [the characters] transmogrified into non-scripts.”⁶² Although occasionally some excellent calligraphies can be observed in some exquisite imprints, in particular the so-called “palace editions” (*neifuben* 內府本) produced by the imperial printing workshops in the capitals, more often than not the distinctive features of traditions in calligraphy were lost.

The situation was further deteriorated by the tendency, especially among the commercial publishers, to cram as many characters on a sheet as possible, sometimes far more than is normally feasible on a hand-written sheet. In other cases, hackneyed illustrations accompanied the texts and misprints scattered. Insomuch as such features are most commonly found in the shoddily produced imprints produced in Masha 麻沙 in northern Fujian, a special derogatory term, *mashaben* 麻沙本, was created to describe those Ming imprints of relatively bad physical quality – poor paper, pallid ink, badly printed characters, and smudgy appearance.⁶³ No wonder, these *mashaben*, of low costs but lacking aesthetic considerations, were not valued by literati cognoscenti. These shortcomings by commercial printers militated against the development of a set of aesthetics for evaluating the look of imprints in comparison to that of a manuscript, opposed to the traditional Chinese view that the finest imprint was the one that most closely resembling a beautiful manuscript.

62 *Lüyuan conghua*, 12.15a–15b; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 508–509.

63 In fact, *mashaben* already appeared during the Song and Yuan periods and were often condemned by Song and Yuan writers. This term was commonly used in the Ming to exemplify all the abuses found in earlier imprints. See Chia 2002, 116–126 and Chia 2003 for a detailed study of the *mashaben*.

4 Interplay between Manuscripts and Imprints

4.1 Facsimile Calligraphy in Late Ming Printing

The most evident result of the wide-spread use of the “craftsmen style” as the principle calligraphic style for the scripts of the imprints was a widening gap between pre-1500 books employing an older calligraphic style and those later printed with “craftsmen style” scripts, and even a much wider gap between manuscripts and imprints. Accompanying such developments in the late Ming, however, was a backhanded acknowledgement among the educated readers of the specific value of elegant calligraphy. It is thus interesting to find that some late Ming printers, in contrast to most of their counterparts who produced large numbers of cheap and shoddy imprints, tried in various ways to escape these trends. In an attempt to bridge the gap between the printed and the written word, some publishers consciously imitated the high standards of treasured Song books by using *xieke* (寫刻, carved as written) – that is, carving printing blocks by faithfully emulating the author’s handwritings in grass, running, or standard script.⁶⁴ In a broader sense, *xieke* can generally describe the process of printing by facsimile woodblocks in which the hand-copy is placed face down on the block to be carved.⁶⁵ But this term eventually implicates that the writing is not of nameless craftsmen calligraphers, but executed by having printing blocks cut from pages written in distinctive calligraphy done by both well-known and unknown calligraphers.⁶⁶ Despite the unavoidable slight jaggedness of the printed characters resulting from cutting through wood with a knife, scripts in *xieke* versions vividly approached the flowing brushstroke of the handwritten counterpart. All the idiosyncratic and stylistic variations of the calligrapher’s hand could then be duplicated in printing. Although *xieke* was not new to Ming printers, this trend was taken up since the mid-Ming with new enthusiasm.

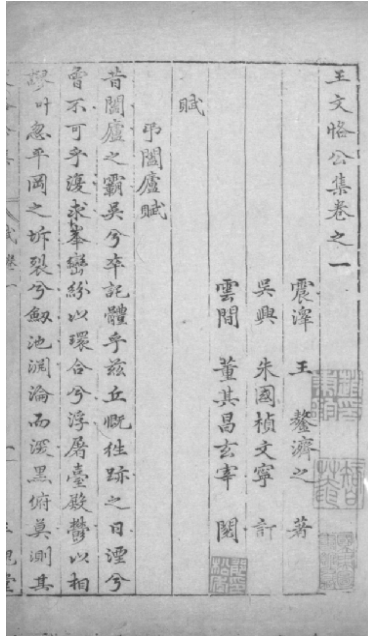
One of the most artistic *xieke* books printed in the late Ming is the *Wang Wenke gongji* 王文恪公集, the literary anthology of Wang Ao. Cut on the basis of a late 1530s edition with the same content but a different title, this work was printed by Wang’s

64 *Shulin qinghua*, 7.2b–3a, notes that *xieke* was already used during the Yuan to imitate the calligraphy of Zhao Mengfu.

65 Tsien 1985, 197, provides us with a succinct yet vivid description of the preparation of blocks for printing.

66 Sören Edgren goes further to believe that *xieke* indicates that the carver was also the calligrapher; see Chia 2002, 367, note 57.

great-great-grandsons sometime in the Wanli period in the Sanhuai tang 三槐堂 of the Wang family, as recorded in the block center of the page.⁶⁷



Wang Wenke gongji, size: 21.8 x 14.2 cm.

National Central Library (Taiwan), coll. nr. 11504

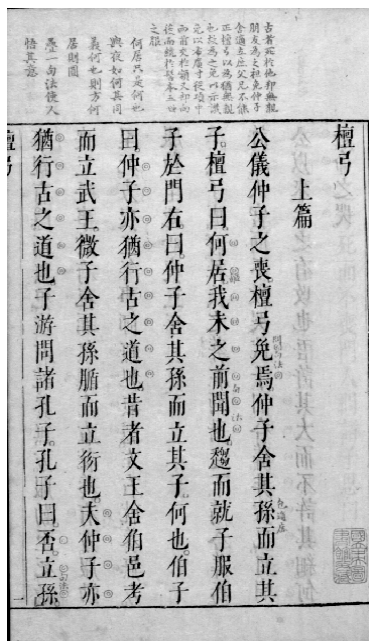
Next to a preface written by Huo Tao 霍韜 (1487–1540) in 1536 for the earlier edition, the latter version of the anthology also bears two undated prefaces by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1556–1637) and Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (d. ca. 1625). The work does not give any information about the actual calligrapher, yet through a comparison of the calligraphy in this work to that in Shen Zhou's literary anthology, *Shen Shitian ji* 沈石田集, whose calligraphy is identified, Wang Chongmin asserts that the beautiful calligraphy, with a touch of the lively style of Zhao Mengfu, must have been executed by Chen Yuansu 陳元素 (fl. 1590–1630), a respected artist excelling in Ouyang and Zhao styles.⁶⁸ It is not clear whether the original copy for the printing block was carved in

67 The earlier edition of the work carries the title *Zhenze xiansheng ji* 震澤先生集 ("Collection of Essays of Wang Ao"). On Wang Ao and his *Wang Wenke gongji*, see *Mingshi* 97.2384 and 181.4825–4837; Goodrich and Fang 1976, 1343–1347; Guoli zhongyang tushuguan 1965/1966, 575.

68 Wang Chongming 1983, 575; Mote and Chu 1989, 171.

facsimile of Chen's own hand or whether his calligraphy was simulated. In any case it is obviously an effort to reassert the individuality and liveliness of calligraphy, opposed to the increasing tendencies in Ming printing to standardize character styles.

More often, however, not the entire book was printed in the real or simulated calligraphy of the artist. Even when the main text was copied in the "craftsmen style" by professionals, publishers used more distinctive calligraphic styles for certain sections set off from the main text, such as the cover page, the preface, marginal comments, and the publishers' colophons and notices.⁶⁹ A number of books from the late Ming, frequently printed with multi-color printing, have marginalia added throughout the work.⁷⁰ Long well-known to collectors of Ming books is the *Tangong* 檀弓, a chapter in the *Book of Rites*, printed by Min Qiji 閔齊伋 (1580–1661).



Tangong, size: 20.3 x 15.2 cm.

Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, coll. nr. B1603720.

69 Tsien 1985, 225.

70 The multi-color printing is a facet of Ming printing. Although color printing can be dated to the early twelfth century, it was further developed toward the end of the sixteenth century. On the multi-color printing in the Ming, see *Shulin qinghua*, 14a–15a; Tsien 1985, 277–283; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 448–453; Edgren 2001.

Dated 1616, this version of *Tangong* is printed with text in black and with comments in red on the top margin, as well as red circles and oblique dots highlighting noteworthy phrases.⁷¹ It is remarkable that while the main text is printed in the more rigid “craftsmen style” typical of late Ming imprints, the comments display a cursive handwriting evidently bearing the influence of Zhao Mengfu. The calligraphy and pungent comments enhance a sense of realism, as if the book had been personally annotated by a scholar as he was reading it.

A more prevailing trend is to insert artistic tone into the front matter of a printed book, first appearing in the books printed by family publishers and connoisseurs, it then soon became a fashion imitated by commercial printers. The use of these varieties of calligraphies, as Lucille Chia aptly argues, also flattered a reader by implying that he belonged to the educated elite with the learning and aesthetic cultivation to decipher and appreciate these more sophisticated styles.⁷² Thus these sections executed in personal calligraphy were expected to lend flavor with the intention to attract literati buyers. The preface by Dong Qichang, one of the greatest calligraphers and painters of the Ming, to the above-mentioned *Wang Wenke gongji* represents a good example of this strategy.

The prefaces to the *Fangshi moku* 方氏墨譜 (“The Fang Family Chart of Ink Illustrations”), an ink specimens manual brought up by Fang Yulu 方于魯 in Huizhou in 1589, give a vivid example of collaboration between writer, calligrapher, and publisher.⁷³ Bound in eight volumes, the work illustrated some four hundred specimens of ink-cakes made by Fang and reproduced in facsimile scores of eulogies by noted scholars and literati.⁷⁴ Among a total of four complimentary prefaces, all by Fang’s contemporaries, in a well-preserved copy in the holdings of the Kyoto University Library, one was printed in facsimile of the original handwriting of Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), the recognized Ming scholar and book collector.⁷⁵ Sometimes a preface might not be written by the author himself but by a noted calligrapher on his behalf.

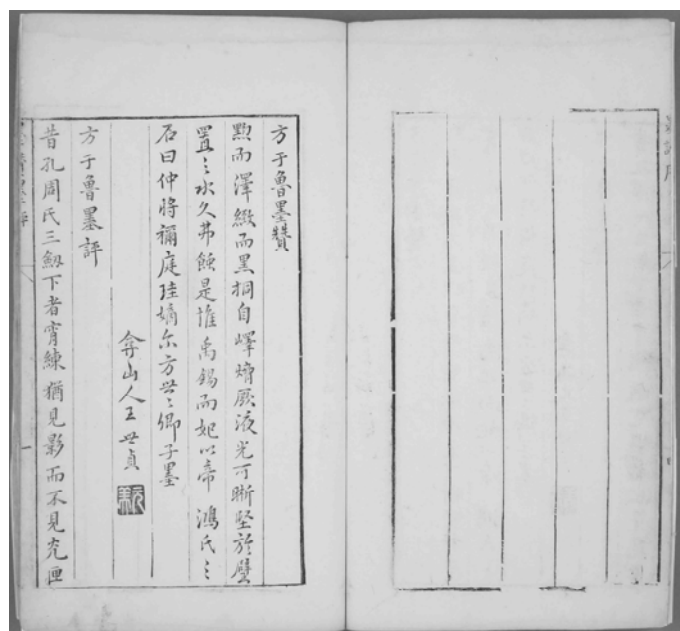
71 Wang Chongmin 1983, 20. For details of a copy of the work kept in the Gest Collection of the Princeton University Library, see Qu Wanli 1975, 27; Mote and Chu 1989, 145–148.

72 Chia 2002, 200.

73 On Fang Yulu, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, 438.

74 For a detailed discussion of *Fangshi moku*, see Wang 1930, 126–128; Edgren 1984, 102–103; Lin 1998, 65–77, 92–102.

75 Qu Wanli 1975, 274; Mote and Chu 1989, 178. For a biography of Wang Shizhen, see *Ming-shi* 287.7379–7381.

Wang Shizhen's preface to *Fangshi moku*. Kyoto University LibraryLi Weizhen's preface to *Fangshi moku*. Kyoto University Library

Another preface to the *Fangshi mopu* is such a distinctive collaboration between Li Weizhen 李維楨 (1547–1626), a preeminent versatile and prolific writer, and Zhu Duo Zheng 朱多炅 (1541–1589), an acclaimed calligrapher.⁷⁶ The impression that with these prefaces in authentic calligraphy of renowned personalities Fang aimed to attract the interest of literati cognoscenti is reinforced by another contemporary work on designs of ink-cakes. Printed in 1606 by Cheng Dayue 陳大約, who had originally taught Fang his craft, the *Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑 (“The Cheng Family Compendium of Ink Illustrations”) attempted to surpass Fang’s effort other than sheer quantity.⁷⁷ The great interest of this work lies not just in its exquisite illustrations, but also in its accompanying texts and inscriptions. All these writings were carved in careful tracings of the original beautifully executed calligraphic works, most of them done by the authors. With contributions of almost two hundred well-known scholars, Cheng tried to showcase his extensive circle of acquaintances. Dong Qichang, for instance, wrote a preface to the book in his beautiful calligraphy. It is also interesting to note that Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), the Jesuit priest who had helped to introduce Western science and propagate Christian doctrine in China, furnished Cheng’s book with four biblical illustrations and a postscript – presumably in Ricci’s own handwriting.⁷⁸

Certainly it must have been very hard for publishers to find celebrated persons to write prefaces or postfaces for every publication. In such cases, the publisher would hire someone to compose a false writing by simulating the calligraphy of renowned scholars. A typical example is the preface to the 1623 edition of the *Nanyou gao* 南游稿 (“Draft of the Travel to the South”) by Chen Zhaoji 陳兆基 (fl. 1620s), an obscure person from Putian, Fujian. Although the preface bears a signature of the established scholar Zhu Zhifan 朱之蕃 (1546–1624), who had been first in the palace examinations in 1595, an observation of the calligraphic style and the content of the text suggest cogently that this attribution is probably spurious.⁷⁹ Such intended false attributions to famous literati of

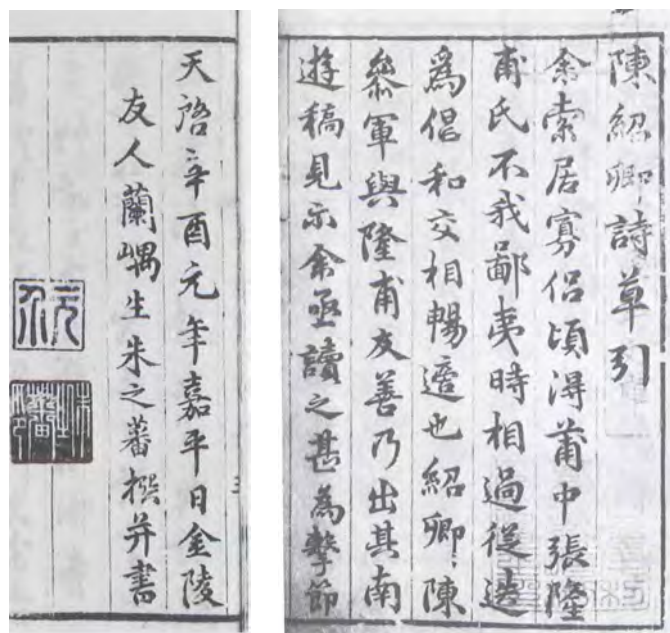
76 Qu Wanli 1975, 274 and 465; Mote and Chu 1989, 175–176. For a biography of Li Weizhen, see *Mingshi* 288.7385–7387.

77 On the work, see Wang 1930, 128–130; Wu 1943, 204–205; Zhao Wanli 1946; Lin 1998, 51–64 and 92–153.

78 The section with Ricci’s illustrations and postscripts was entitled “Xizi qiji” 西字奇蹟 (Western Scripts and Miracles). The four illustrations are: “信而步海, 疑而即沉,” “二徒聞寶, 即舍空虛,” “淫色穢色, 自速天火,” and “天主”. The postscript, written in parallel columns of Chinese tradition, presented a Chinese text with its romanized version. See Wang 1930, 128; Wu 1943, 205–206; Edgren 1984, 104–105; Guarino 1997; Lin 1998, 200–224, for a detailed discussion of Ricci’s illustrations.

79 See Mote and Chu 1989, 188, for a profound study of the authenticity of this preface.

the day can quite often be found in late Ming imprints, especially in the relatively sloppily produced imprints by commercially oriented printers from Jianyang. In fact, they reflect a common practice of late Ming publishers to add credibility and marketability to their products by satisfying the aesthetic desire of late Ming literati readers, even in fraudulent ways. At the same time, the persistent inclination to draw upon the personalizing presence of fine calligraphy in printed books, not the standardized and mechanized printing scripts, transmitted to later readers a continuous aesthetic sensibility for the elegance of individual handwritten calligraphy, just like in manuscripts.



Nanyou gao. Photographic copy of the original kept in Naikaku Bunko

4.2 Handwritten Manuscripts Imitating Imprints

As has been shown above, even in the time of the great ascendance of imprints, the persistent manuscript tradition continued to shape the appearance of woodblock imprints with the highly calligraphic styles that grace not only frontispieces and prefaces but also the contents of Chinese books. It becomes clear that the most valued of printed books, not the shoddily printed *mashaben*, were those that displayed the same characteristics of well-made manuscripts. This is closely related to the Chinese tradition of using woodblocks for printing, since blocks can be carved by tracing handwritten texts so that it is easier to remain true to the original calligraphy. It is interesting to observe, however, that this interplay between manuscripts and imprints did not take place as a

one-way interaction. In fact, the aesthetics and appearance of manuscripts have greatly influenced the design of imprints, while printed books also found direct expression in the creation of manuscript books vice versa.

The drastic printing boom since the mid-sixteenth century marked an unprecedented flourish of printed books, yet most of them, in particular those cheaply produced by commercial printers in Fujian, did not observe the high standards set up in the earlier editions produced in the Song period. Books printed in the Song, as the late Sun Congtian has remarked, had become invaluable treasures by the late Ming.⁸⁰ The value of Song imprints was reinforced by their rarity, because only very few had survived the destructive invasions of the Jurchens and the Mongols. Eager to restore the earlier standards of book production, some literati and connoisseurs found new ways to reproduce Song works, through both reprint and scribal copy. It is certainly not just to produce the letters of the original, but also to duplicate the original with special care and fine craftsmanship, and as closely as possible in terms of size, page layout, format, as well as calligraphic style. These facsimile duplications, in highest approximation of their Song predecessors, even became a special category in the history of book in China, dubbed *yingsong chao* (影宋鈔, facsimile of the Song).⁸¹ Invented by the avid book collector and publisher Mao Jin, these hand-copies made through *yingsong chao* represent a high level of manuscript production and are held in high esteem, as Sun Congtian commented:

The fine manuscript copies in facsimile of Song imprints produced in the *Jigu ge* [of Mao Jin] have no precedent in the history. The script, the paper, the black lining [of the border], and the seals are exact replica of [original] Song edition.⁸²

In the imperial catalogue compiled in 1775, 208 of such *yingsong chao* works are listed, next to 70 imprints of the Song, 81 of the Yuan, and 251 of the Ming.⁸³ One of the very few well-preserved *yingsong chao* that were originally produced in the *Jigu ge* is the *Sanli cuoyao* 三歷撮要 (“Brief Points of the Three Calendars”), a manual-like directory for good and ill luck days in each month, kept now in the National Central Library, Taiwan.⁸⁴ Information about the work is scarce, neither its authorship nor the precise publishing date, except for a broad identification that it was first printed in the late Southern Song period.

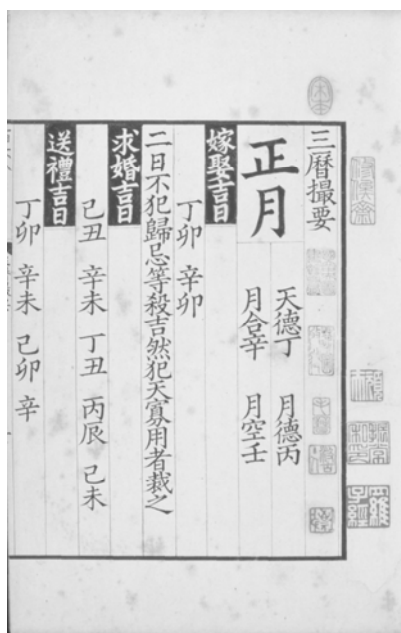
80 *Cangshu jiyao*, 4a; Fang 1951, 224.

81 On the *yingsong chao*, see *Cangshu jiyao*, 9a; Yao Boyue 1993, 120–121.

82 *Cangshu jiyao*, 9a; Fang 1951, 230.

83 *Tianlu linlang shumu*, 1.

84 Another book, entitled *Zeri cuoyao li* 擇日撮要歷 (Calendar of Brief Points for Choosing Dates), has almost the same content. On the *Sanli cuoyao*, see *Shijia zhai yangxin lu*, 304.



Sanli cuoyao, size: 21 x 16.1 cm.

National Central Library (Taiwan), collection nr. 06264

Three seals on the first page of the current copy, *Mao Jin* 毛晉, *Jigu zhuren* 汲古主人, and *Songben* 宋本, all typical in the *yingsong chao* of the *Jigu ge*, demonstrate the origin of this copy.⁸⁵ Another printed version of the book, a 1927 facsimile of the original Song edition kept in the Peking University Library, invites for a vivid comparison of the two works. Just as the printed version, the hand-copy also has a black border and the title of each entry is carefully performed in imitation of the printed version, with the background drawn black and leaving the characters in white. Both the calligraphic style and the editorial format of this hand-copy suggest it to be a faithful facsimile of the Song printing. Slightly rectangular in shape, with sharply defined strokes, the characters are written in the “Song style” in vertical columns identical with the printed one. All these features are in perfect accordance with the requirements for appreciating fine *yingsong chao* set by a late Qing connoisseur:

85 *Shulin qinghua* 10.15a–15b, notes that the hand-copies of *Mao Jin* have the characters “Jigu ge” 汲古閣 in the block center and the phrase “Maoshi zhengben Jigu ge cang” 毛氏正本汲古閣藏 outside the block line. These features, however, are only found in the hand-copies other than the *yingsong chao* editions.

The style of script employed in printed works of the Song is especially exquisite. If the script [in the hand-copies] imitates the printed characters in the Song editions, if every stroke is well balanced, without any omission or mistake, and the paper has black borders, so that the appearance of the whole is orderly yet alive, then the copy is extremely delicate and perfectly beautiful.⁸⁶

Apart from the *yingsong chao* produced by Mao Jin, a large variety of fine hand-copied facsimiles of earlier printed books were made by collectors and connoisseurs in the Ming and early Qing, in particular in the lower Yangzi delta.⁸⁷ There has developed, in conjunction with the high regard for the beauty of Song imprints, a respect also for their hand-copies that had been made by celebrated literati book collectors such as Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), and Qian Ceng 錢曾 (1629–1701).⁸⁸ Collecting manuscripts by these men was greatly in vogue, so that the price for their works also increased somewhat. When Mao Yi was selling parts of his father's collection in the late seventeenth century, the *yingsong chao* versions, due to their likeness to the Song imprints and their fine craftsmanship, were in average over twice as expensive as the common hand-copies.⁸⁹ Observing the price tag on an extant *Jigu ge* copy in the late Qing, Sun Congtian was astonished to find that the contemporary price for this work was already sixty times higher than the original in the late Ming.⁹⁰

The unique tradition started by Mao Jin to produce facsimile hand-copies of earlier imprints continued in and even after the Qing. An incomplete copy of *Dongdu shilue* 東都事略 ("Short Account on the Eastern Capital") in the Gest Collection of the Princeton University Library represents a good example of these handwritten replicates.⁹¹ This exemplar, scribed during reign of the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662–1722), is a facsimile of a Song printing, both in calligraphic style and page layout. Although there are no ruled columns, the text is written in unmistakable "Song style" characters, and at the end of each sentence a place is intentionally left blank.

86 *Cangshu jiyao*, 10a–10b; Fang 1951, 232.

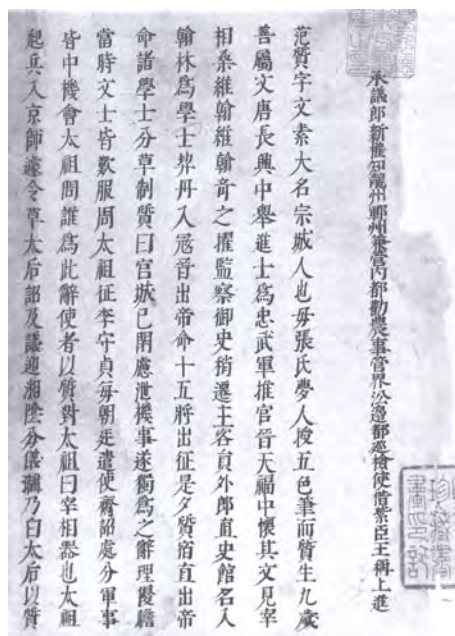
87 See *Shulin qinghua* 10.13a–17a, for an extended list of the most famous producers of fine hand-copies in imitation of Song and Yuan imprints. See also Ding Yao 2004, 81; Chen Guanzhi 2009, 122–123.

88 Ōuchi Hakuetsu 1944, 74–75.

89 In *Jigu ge zhencang miben shummu* details of prices of 68 *yingsong chao* works and 190 other hand-copied are offered. See also Zhou Qirong 2010, 9.

90 *Shulin qinghua* 10.22a–22b.

91 Qu Wanli 1975, 106; Mote and Chu 1989, 85–87.

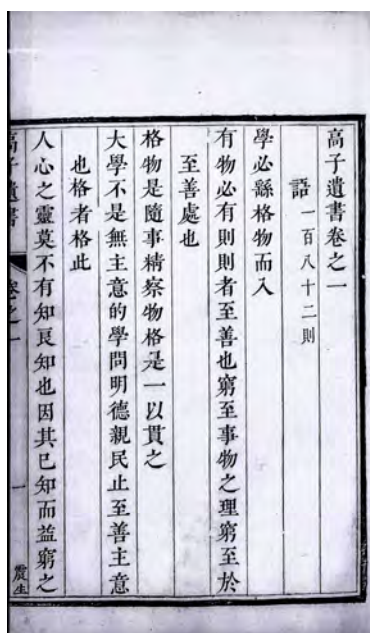
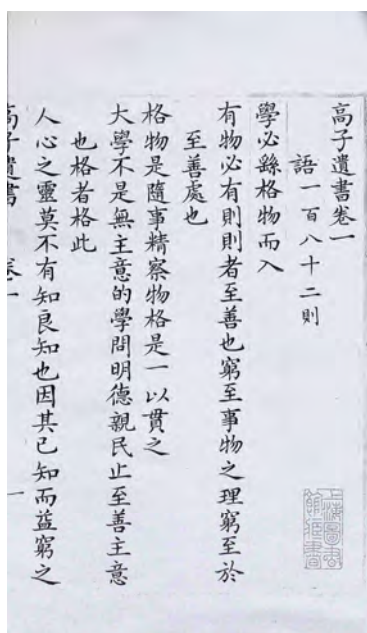
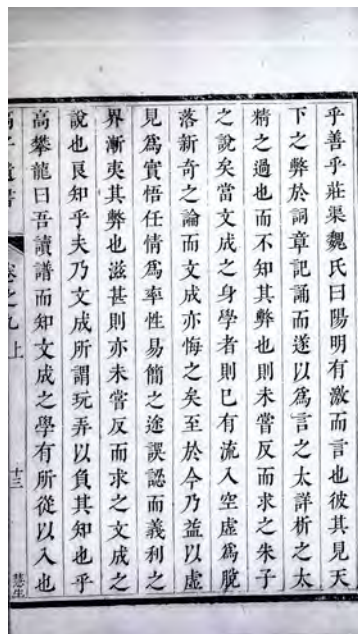
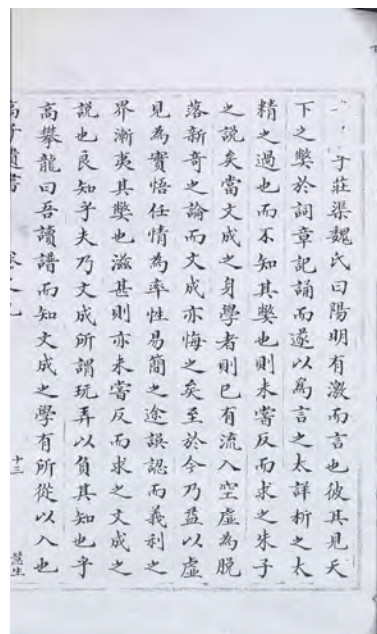


Dongdu shilue. Size: 25.6 x 20.5 cm. Gest Collection of the Princeton University Library

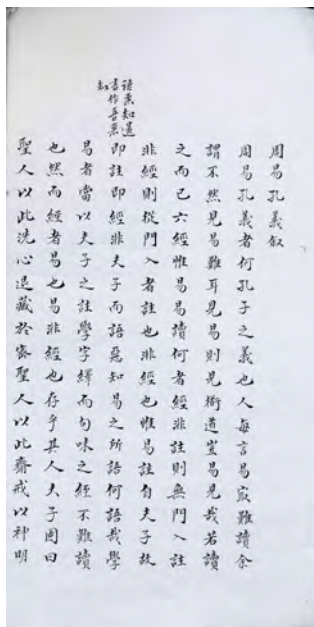
Among six different versions of *Gaozi yishu* 高子遺書 (“Writings from Master Gao’s Bequest”), the literary anthology of Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562–1626), in the holdings of the Shanghai Library, one hand-copy and a 1690 print version show great resemblance.⁹² Although the “Song style” characters are used for the print version while the calligrapher-copyist of the manuscript version wrote standard script (*kaishu* 楷書), both works bear the same meticulous formatting requirements: heads of columns precisely aligned and the same number of characters in each column. No exact information on the date of the hand-copy is available, yet it is not impossible that it is a handwritten duplicate of the print, since on many pages the names of block carvers are also transcribed in the “white mouth” (*baikou* 白口) at the corner of the page (which is the lower part of the centerfold of a printing sheet), a common practice of Ming and Qing publishers.⁹³

92 On Gao Panlong and his *Gaozi yishu*, see *Mingshi* 98.2429 and 243.6311–6314.

93 The first pages of the print version have Zhensheng 震生 printed in the “white mouth,” whereas the first pages of the manuscript copy bear no names. However, later pages of both the print and the manuscript version have the name that reads Huisheng 慧生, whose identity is unfortunately unknown. It is not impossible that Zhensheng and Huisheng were brothers and each was responsible for a part of the carving. See Wu 1943, 229–230; Chia 2002, 34–37, for the practice of inscribing the name of block carvers in the centerfold of the sheet.

Hand-copied and printed versions of *Gaozi yishu*, 1.1a. Shanghai LibraryHand-copied and printed versions of *Gaozi yishu*, 9.13a. Shanghai Library

Of special interest is the phenomenon that as late as the twentieth century, a period that witnessed the introduction of lithography and the advanced European methods of typography in China, hand-copied manuscripts of imprints were still produced. The preface of a handwritten copy of Gao Panlong's *Zhouyi kongyi* 周易孔義 ("Confucius' Explanations to the *Book of Changes*"), now kept in the Wuxi Library, reveals that the current manuscript, commissioned by the Wuxi Library to be produced in 1921, is a duplicate of another hand-copy made in 1916, which in turn is again a facsimile of a 1636 print version.⁹⁴



Preface to *Zhouyi kongyi*. Shanghai Library

In faithful imitation of the original print, each sheet has eighteen lines (nine per page), with nineteen characters in each line, and the scribe restricted himself to a formal calligraphic style neatly formatted on the page, adopting the precise layout of equal space for each character. There was careful collation done to this copy, appearing in corrections made on the top margin of the sheets. The preface notes that this copy was made in preparation for a new publication, yet in all likelihood it has never been printed. But we may expect that if there had been an imprint based on this manuscript, then it must have been identical to this copy.

94 See the preface of the copy and *Wuxi xianli tushuguan xiangxian bu shumū*, 13a. According to *Wuxi xianzhe yishumu* (Jingbu, 1a), the imprint was published in 1636 by Jianguangge 劍光閣.

5 Concluding Remarks

The sixteenth century marked a critical conjuncture in the historic transition from manuscript to print in China. It was during this period that printed books finally outnumbered their manuscript counterparts and the printing boom brought up by commercial publishers significantly lowered the price. Yet the focus on imprints alone, however tempting, only fosters the false assumption that the popularity of the imprint inevitably resulted in a corresponding decline and even demise of manuscript production. In fact, this flourish of printed works did not eliminate either the use or the influence of manuscripts in the late Ming, and manuscripts coexisted with printed books as “an important vehicle for textual transmission well into the twentieth century”.⁹⁵ Quite probably, the manuscript copy of the *Shiding lu*, and possibly also copies of this work, were read and kept parallel to their imprint counterparts. Like this *Shiding lu* copy, new manuscript copies of books continued to be produced for different reasons in a range of various contexts.

During the rise and after the ascendance of the imprint, manuscripts existed for a long time in parallel with imprints and hand-copies were valued for reasons inextricably intertwining economic, aesthetic, and scholarly motives. The role of manuscripts in Chinese book culture parallels the Japanese cases, which is vividly described by Peter Kornicki.⁹⁶ At the same time, it should be noted that although print culture may have evolved and interacted for centuries with a flourishing manuscript culture, manuscripts now functioned, similar to the European experience recently observed by revisionist scholars on the history of printing in the West, for the most part as complements, not alternatives, to imprints.⁹⁷ There was a rich manuscript culture in China that has persisted far longer and more pervasively in the world of Chinese books than many of us have suspected, yet the print now replaced the manuscript to become the primary form of textual transmission and this ascendance has never been reversed.

Nonetheless, it is evident that manuscripts, regardless of the declining importance as means of textual dissemination, were active begetters of other manuscripts copies as well as of imprint copies and therefore remained an important ongoing contributor to the formation of books. The artistic considerations kept alive by the learned elite's broad involvement with calligraphy as high art found expression in the design of books. Although the relatively mediocre “craftsmen style” dominated Ming printing, many high-

95 Meyer-Fong 2007, 789–790.

96 See Kornicki 2001, 100–105; 2006.

97 Love 1993; McKitterick 2003; Brokaw 2005, 155. For a collection of case studies of the persistence of manuscripts and their interaction with prints in Europe, see Dicke and Grubmüller 2003.

quality imprints were carved and printed in facsimile of handwritten texts to keep the individually distinguishable styles of calligraphy. In consequence, woodblocks for printing were carefully carved to emulate the handwriting of the calligrapher and many books were printed in full or part in facsimile of a fine calligrapher's original, resembling a well-executed manuscript. Moreover, the influence of the manuscript on the imprint, as Joseph P. McDermott cogently suggests, may have even gone beyond the physical appearance to shape its contents. Quite often there is a remarkable textual fluidity, which is typical in the Chinese manuscript culture, to be observed in the imprint.⁹⁸ At the same time, there also developed a trend to make facsimile reproductions of existing imprints, in particular the honored Song editions. A number of late Ming and early Qing connoisseurs, among them Mao Jin as the most avid and famous one, collected rare Song imprints, stimulated scholarly attention to the subject, and duplicated masterworks. Not only the calligraphic style of characters but also editorial formats and details of the page layout were delicately executed to emulate the original print version. Print versions could be hand-copied and then in turn become the basis for a reprint. So persistent and pervasive was this interplay that quite often no sharp or absolute demarcation can be drawn between the manuscript and the imprint. In other words, imprints and manuscripts meshed to a considerable extent and there were often blurred boundaries between the two in the Chinese book culture.

This active interaction between the manuscript and the imprint is determined by the subservience of the book to calligraphy. Meanwhile, it is also closely related to the printing method which has long dominated printing in China and East Asia – xylography, or woodblock printing. The very uniqueness that woodblocks for printings are carved by tracing handwritten texts means manuscripts are constantly needed for printing. Accordingly, the more books are printed and the more extensive their distribution, the more likely that manuscript copies of a text are produced, in at least one stage of the whole process. This marks a great advantage of woodblock printing in comparison with movable-type printing. Although movable-type printing had been invented in China as early as the eleventh century, woodblock printing remained the preferred method for at least two reasons.⁹⁹ Firstly, the nature of the Chinese script succeeded in imposing its demands on the forms of printing technology, because at least several thousand types of different characters are needed for the printing of a relatively simple book, let alone the large and voluminous ones. The use of movable-type fonts was thus financially unattractive for most printers.¹⁰⁰

98 McDermott 2006, 78.

99 For the invention and development of movable-type printing in the Song, see *Shulin qinghua* 8.1a–1b; Zhang Xiumin 1958, 70–79; Tsien 1985, 201–203; Zhang Xiumin 1989, 663–668.

100 See Tsien 1985, 220–221. Wooden movable-type printing increased in popularity from the late

While woodblocks could be relatively easily carved when needed so that they became, as Denis Twitchett has noted, “equivalent of an infinite stock of different typefaces in an infinite number of sizes.”¹⁰¹ Secondly, because calligraphy has always been a widely practiced and highly esteemed art to the literati, the relationship of calligraphy to the book was much deeper and far more enduring in China than in Europe. The uniformity of movable types, no matter of metal, wooden, or clay, can hardly suffice for all aesthetic needs for changing strokes of different calligraphic styles, whereas with the woodblock it is possible that anything the calligrapher writes can be transferred precisely to the block and, depending on the skill of the carvers, can then be printed as written. Woodblocks could therefore be used to print faithful facsimiles of distinctive calligraphy and to keep the liveliness and individuality of calligraphy.

Finally, we need to recognize that the field of manuscript culture in late imperial China, in particular the interrelation between the manuscript and the imprint, is still in its formative stages, and, not surprisingly, the associated terminology is still in flux. The terms such as manuscript, print, book history, and publishing history are borrowed from works on the early modern West, especially England, while precise boundaries of these terms remain ill-defined in the Chinese context. The Chinese usually use *gaoben* 稿本, *chaoben* 鈔本 or 抄本, and *xieben* 寫本 to describe draft manuscripts, hand-copies, and hand-written works, respectively, yet a generic term for them as the exact equivalent of the English word “manuscript” is lacking.¹⁰² Moreover, even all these terms are not clearly defined and not infrequently their usage intersects or overlaps with each other. On the other hand, while *yin* 印 is the most direct equivalent of “print,” and it does appear in some imprints, the more monnonly used word is *ke* 刻 (carve) as the alternative for print, since most imprints were printed by woodblocks. In some cases, neither *yin* nor *ke*, but *kan* 刊 (carve/publish), *juan* 鐫 (cut, carve) or *zixing* 梓行 (carve and publish) is used to indicate the printer of the imprint. Consequently, any inquiry into the related subjects would require a careful and multifaceted examination of the meaning and the promiscuous use of these terms.

Ming on, but it was mainly used for highly formulaic texts such as family genealogies, which employed relatively few different characters or frequently repeated ones. For examples of such genealogies printed by using wooden movable-types, see Xu Xiaoman 2005. See Heijdra 2004, for a bold attempt to explore the technical and economic aspects of Chinese movable-type printing.

101 Twitchett 1983, 85.

102 For a succinct yet thought-provoking discussion of the definition of these terms, see Xiao Dongfa 1984. Because of the complexity of terminology mentioned above, a proper translations of these terms are hard to reach, and the translation for the title of the article is my own and only tentative.

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