

The 64<sup>th</sup> Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs  
Presidential Panel Notes on *Print Culture in East Asia* (Part I)\*

**Book and Print Culture in Pre-Modern China\*\***

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Studies of the history of the book in China are multifaceted and now, thankfully, quite numerous. The best general introduction is a lengthy essay by Cynthia Brokaw.<sup>1</sup> Since I cannot do justice to all contributors to the present state of knowledge—much of their work neatly summarized by Brokaw—I will focus on the vernacular literature of the late imperial period that I know best, with only passing comments on studies of other types of books.

**Foundational Studies**

Over the past century scholars have had great difficulty tracing books from their producers to their consumers, with the consequence that

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\* Editor's note: Professor Kai-wing Chow at the University of Illinois, then President of MCAA, invited three colleagues to join his Presidential Panel on print culture in East Asia at the 64<sup>th</sup> Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs in Washington University in St. Louis. The editor is grateful for the permission to include the two excerpts which Drs. Chow and Hegel presented at the venue on October 17, 2015 and revised subsequently. In addition to the selected pieces here, "*Lienz zhuan* in Japan" by Jamie Newhard and "Women and Reading in Joseon Korea" by Ji- Eun Lee were also presented in the panel.

\*\* The presentation was delivered under the title "Reflections on the State of the Field: History of the Book in Pre-Modern China" at the venue.

<sup>1</sup> Cynthia J. Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 3-54. See also Tobie Meyer-Fong's excellent piece, "The Printed World: Books, Publishing Culture, and Society in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (2007): 787-817.

these questions have been addressed obliquely. Studies of fiction production and distribution developed on the basis of learned but random comments on rare books by avid Qing period collectors. But only a few of that generation had deigned to comment on works of fiction.<sup>2</sup> Systematic studies began in the 1920s and 1930s. The pioneers include Sun Kaidi 孫楷弟 (1898-1989), who catalogued and commented on editions of vernacular fiction found all over China and in Japan, and Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1897-1958) who traced the early history of several important novels.<sup>3</sup> Contemporaries including Wang Zhongmin 王重民 (1903-1975) expanded this sort of bibliographic work with notes on rare books of all categories in the Library of Congress and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) wrote the path-breaking and still standard (although superseded by more recent scholarship) history of fiction, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略, in the early 1920s. Recent studies of the novel have been facilitated by the much more extensive knowledge of editions of pre-modern Chinese novels such as the guide compiled by the Japanese scholar Ōtsuka Hidetaka 大塚秀高 (1949-), the product of years of travel to major collections around the world.<sup>5</sup> And of course the numerous reprints

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<sup>2</sup> The last great traditional collection of notes on rare books is probably Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864-1927), *Shulin qinghua* 書林清話 (Changsha, 1920; rpt. Beijing, 1959, 1961, Taipei: Wen Shi Zhe, 1973). For early comments on novels, see Qian Jingfang 錢靜方, *Xiaoshuo congkao* 小說叢考 (1912; rpt. Taipei: Xin Wenfeng, 1982) and Jiang Ruizao 蔣瑞藻 (1891-1929), *Xiaoshuo kaozheng* 小說考證 (1919; Shanghai, 1935; rpt. Taipei: Wannianqing shudian, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> See Sun's *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目 (1933; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beijing: Zuoja, 1958) and *Riben Dongjing suojian Zhongguo xiaoshuo shumu* 日本東京所見中國小說書目 (1932; rpt. Hong Kong: Shiyong shuju, 1967), and Zheng's various essays in *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 (Beijing: Zuoja, 1957), vol. 1. Patrick Hanan also contributed greatly to this area.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Zhongmin, *Zhongguo shanbenshu tiyao* 中國善本書提要 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Ōtsuka Hidetaka, comp., *Chūgoku tsūzoku shōsetsu shomoku* 中国通俗小說書目 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1987).

produced since the 1980s have made available to readers around the world fictional texts previously known only to the bibliographers listed above.<sup>6</sup>

Major studies of printing technology began with the work of T. H. Tsien 錢存訓 (1909-2015), in particular his contribution to the ongoing history of science and technology begun by Joseph Needham (1900-1995).<sup>7</sup> Chinese woodblock artist and scholar Zhou Wu 周蕪 (1921-1990) produced path-breaking studies of printers and illustrators of vernacular fiction; this work was significantly augmented by the broader historical studies of book production centers by Lucille Chia, Cynthia J. Brokaw, and others.<sup>8</sup> Ming-Qing printers who produced works of fiction have been exhaustively traced by Wang Qingyuan 王清原 and his collaborators.<sup>9</sup> Joseph McDermott has provided studies of book collectors and their libraries as well as of the appreciation shown to books through time.<sup>10</sup> How works of fiction were read can now be gleaned through studies of prefaces and commentaries; in studies of the latter, David Rolston edited a

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<sup>6</sup> The largest are *Guben xiaoshuo congkan* 古本小說叢刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987-1991), 205 vols., and *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1990-1992), 378 vols.

<sup>7</sup> Tsien, *Paper and Printing*, Part I of *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, vol. 5 of *Science and Civilisation in China*, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Other important studies are Zhang Xiumin 張秀民, *Zhongguo yinshua shi* 中國印刷史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1989), and Zhang Xiumin and Han Qi 韓琦, *Zhongguo yinshua shi* 中國印刷史, 2 vols. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Guji, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Zhou Wu, *Huipai banhua shi lunji* 徽派版畫史論集 (Hefei: Anhui renmin, 1982) and his *Jinling gu banhua* 金陵古版畫 (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu, 1993) among others. Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002). Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). See also Wang Cheng 王澄, *Yangzhou keshu kao* 揚州刻書考 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Wang Qingyuan, Mou Renlong 牟仁隆, and Han Xiduo 韓錫鐸, eds. *Xiaoshuo shufang lu* 小說書坊錄 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

collection of major premodern interpretive essays and has written a comprehensive introduction to fiction commentaries.<sup>11</sup> And Kai-wing Chow has produced an excellent study of print culture in general in his *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* and subsequent publications.<sup>12</sup> Anne McLaren has worked tirelessly in interpreting various versions of story cycles, various adaptations, and their differing cultural implications.<sup>13</sup>

### **Recent New Directions**

Over the last two decades scholarship on book history and print culture has taken significant strides toward exploring particular facets of the book that will better illuminate the general field. One such focus is on book illustrations, their production as well as their interpretation. This area has attracted specialists from a variety of disciplines: historians, students of literature and theater, critical bibliographers, and art historians as well.<sup>14</sup> Zhou Wu was a leader in this effort.

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<sup>11</sup> Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); see also Rolston, ed., *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, her *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> See Robert E. Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Michaela Bussotti, *Gravures de Hui: Etude du livre illustré chinois de la fin du XVIe siècle à la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2001); Li-Ling Hsiao, *The Eternal Present of the Past: Illustration, Theater, and Reading in the Wanli Period, 1573-1619* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); J. P. Park, *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and the Leisure Life in Late Ming China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Peter J. Golas, *Picturing Technology in China From Earliest Times to the Nineteenth Century* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015); and Julia K. Murray, "Buddhism and Early Narrative Illustration in China," *Archives of Asian Art* 48 (1995): 17–31, and her "Illustrations of the Life of Confucius: Their Evolution, Functions, and Significance in Late Ming China," *Artibus Asiae* 57, no. 1/2 (1997): 73-134.

A raft of new publications and doctoral dissertations address the interpretation of texts by examining their paratextual materials, prefaces, commentaries, and printed formats as well.<sup>15</sup> Other areas of recent interest include the relationships between books and ways of thinking or particular functions of books. I refer to the collections of essays on the relationship between book culture and knowledge, *Thinking with Cases* and *Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print*.<sup>16</sup> Synthesizing some of these new understandings is a hallmark of He Yuming's *Home and the World: Editing the "Glorious Ming" in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*.<sup>17</sup>

### Areas for Further Research

Although earlier studies of printing technology and the commerce of the book trade are devoted to the study of the book as a material object, many salient questions remain to be explored. Among them are the circulation of books in particular parts of the Chinese cultural sphere: leaving rare Song and Yuan period imprints and manuscripts by famous people aside as the concern of specialist collectors, how did *other* books (novels, classical language and vernacular story collections, play scripts, books for information and entertainment such as *riyong leishu* 日用類書) circulate: were all simply thrown away or their paper recycled after reading, or did some families prize them and preserve them? How extensive was the used book market for fiction during the Ming and

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<sup>15</sup> Outstanding in this regard is Joseph R. Dennis, *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100-1700* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2015); recent dissertations include those by Alexander C. Wille and Wu Yinghui at Washington University in St. Louis.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Furth, Judith T. Zeitlin, and Ping-chen Hsiung, eds., *Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Lucille Chia and Hilde De Weerd, eds., *Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print: China, 900-1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> He, *Home and the World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).

Qing?<sup>18</sup> (Many editions of pre-modern novels are preserved only in one or two copies scattered around the world: Why so few—when hundreds or thousands of copies were printed—has puzzled me.) What were their prices, new or used? Librarian Shen Jin 沈津 has done pioneering work in this area, but we can only hope that further evidence will be discovered to facilitate our understandings of the book trade.<sup>19</sup> To what extent did vernacular fiction actually reach beyond those innumerable young men who spent years preparing for the civil service examinations? Did books circulate back and forth between the cultural strata of Chinese society? Certainly further studies of printer families and printing enterprises are needed, along with research on particular book illustrators, commentators, and, to the extent that they can be reliably identified, authors. The relationships between authors, printers, and booksellers have heretofore been largely a mystery; any light that could be shone upon such questions would be very welcome.

We are not without resources for such explorations, however. New collections of old books do come to light, some through archaeological excavation, others when cataloguing library holdings around the globe. Comparative studies of book history and print culture in the other East Asian cultures might be particularly productive in this regard.<sup>20</sup> New information is becoming available about copies of Chinese books in libraries abroad; those found in Korea and Japan reveal what books were seen as important enough for travelers to take home with them or for

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<sup>18</sup> Important studies of audiences and circulation are Ōki Yasushi 大木康. *Min-matsu Kōnan no shuppan bunka* 明末江南の出版文化 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2004) and Ellen Widmer, *Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Shen Jin, “Mingdai fangke tushu zhi liutong yu jiage” 明代坊刻圖書之流通與價格, in *Guojia tushuguan guankan* 國家圖書館館刊 85, no. 1 (1996): 101-18.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Kornicki, “Korean Books in Japan: From the 1590s to the End of the Edo Period,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133, no. 1 (2013): 71-92 is an example of cross-cultural study that illuminates both sides of the exchange.

booksellers to reproduce there.<sup>21</sup> How did Chinese books circulate in Korea and Japan, in their original formats before reprinting or only after being adapted to more closely align with cultural and commercial practices there? How were they changed? How were paratextual materials—prefaces, commentaries, illustrations—modified in Korea and Japan? Comparative religious, intellectual, and legal history may well reveal new insights about the place of books, particular titles and books in general, in the circulation of knowledge and entertainment in the societies of East Asia. And, as the study of book history and print culture develops there, comparative studies of the relative costs and value of books, their cultural significance and the like would certainly illuminate the histories of all three cultures. In sum, the study of book history and print culture in China is a flourishing field, one that holds great promise for further thoughtful and resourceful research.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Li Fuqing 李福清 (Boris Rifkin, 1932-2012), *Haiwai guben wan Ming xiju xuanji sanzong* 海外孤本晚明戲劇選集三種 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1993); and Min Kwan-dong 閔寬東 and Chen Wenxin 陳文新, comp. *Hanguo suojian Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo shiliao* 韓國所見中國古代小說史料 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue, 2011).