Meetings and Conferences

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Exhibition and Symposium on Books and Printing in China

A symposium, held at the China Institute in America, New York, on November 2, 1984, celebrated an important exhibition entitled Chinese Rare Books in American Collections. The exhibition, the first of its kind in the West according to the program announcement, was on view at China Institute's China House Gallery from October 20, 1984, through January 27, 1985.

Organized for the Institute by Sören Edgren, antiquarian and Chinese book specialist, the development of printing in China from the tenth century to the eighteenth century is handsomely represented in forty of the finest examples of woodblock and movable-type printed books lent by eleven American institutions and four private collectors. The superb installation and mounting of the exhibit set off the striking elegance of these rare Chinese books that are, in their own right, works of art.

The morning and afternoon sessions of the symposium, attended to capacity by an appreciative audience of those who study, take pleasure in, or work with Chinese materials, were occupied by an agenda of several lectures, some illustrated with slides. Covered were A Brief History of Chinese Printing by Wan-go Weng, President of the China Institute; Chinese Background of the Beginning of European Printing, read by Lily Kecskes of Freer Gallery of Art Library for Tsuen-hsueh Tsien, Professor Emeritus and former Curator, Far Eastern Library, the University of Chicago; Printed Buddhist Images from Dunhuang by Roderick Whitfield, Professor of Chinese, London School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Chinese Bibliography and Rare Book Collections by Soren Edgren; Chinese Rare Books in Beijing, Hong Kong and American Collections by Wang Chi, Head, Chinese & Korean Section, Library of Congress; Calligraphy and Chinese Type Design by Wan-go Weng; and Late Ming Multicolor Printing by Wang Fang-yu, Professor Emeritus, Seton Hall University.

A panel discussion on the impact of Chinese printing on painting, ceramics and the decorative arts, conducted by James Cahill, Professor of Art History, University of California; Stephen Littel, 1983-84 Guest Curator, China House Gallery; and Anne Burkus, Assistant to the Curator, Yale University Art Gallery, completed the program.

A splendid catalog bearing the same title as the exhibition, with full- and half-page illustrations of the books and various printing tools, has been published as Chinese Rare Books in American Collections (New York: China House Gallery, China Institute in America, cl984. $17.50).

The exhibit catalog, in a handsome layout, is edited by Judith Smith, with an introduction by Soren Edgren and essays by Tsuen-hsueh Tsien, Fang-yu Wang and Wan-go Weng. In his introduction, Edgren points out that the focus of the exhibition was on the artifactual value of the rare books used as touchstones
in demonstrating the history of books and printing in China. Next he discusses briefly the history of block printing and that of Chinese book collecting in the United States, giving credit to the collecting activities of knowledgeable and energetic individuals that actually built the foundation of American collections of Chinese books. In his essay entitled "Technical Aspects of Chinese printing," Tsien explains in detail, with illustrations, the use of materials and tools and the process of block printing and movable-type printing. In "Chinese Type Design and Calligraphy," Weng deals with the most often used Chinese typefaces and the influence of Chinese language and calligraphy on the art of printing. Professor Wang Fang-yu, in his "Book Illustration in Late Ming and Early Qing China," gives a glimpse of various categories of secular illustrated books in late Ming and early Ch'ing dynasties, such as illustrated literature, painting and calligraphy manuals, design books, erotic pictures, etc.

Each of the forty rare books under consideration is illustrated in the catalog and accompanied by a detailed text describing the history of the book with bibliographic notes. Included in the catalog are a brief chronology of printing in China, a map of China, a bibliography of printing in China and a list of names and terms used in the catalog, romanized in pinyin with corresponding Chinese characters.

(Jack Jacoby & Lily Kecskes)
An International Meeting Concerning Rare Chinese Books

Organization

From November 19 to December 8, 1984, twenty internationally recognized scholars in the field of authentication or preservation of rare books gathered in Taiwan to present the latest knowledge and techniques of their discipline to thirty curators of rare Chinese materials and specialists with appropriate knowledge and experience. The fifty participants in this conference, sponsored by the Library Association of China (ROC), whose chair is Wang Chen-Ku, head of the National Central Library, represented nine countries: France, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, the Republic of China, Singapore, Sweden, the United States, and West Germany.

The conference, known as the first international Workshop on Authentication and Preservation of Rare Chinese Materials, was organized by a committee chaired by Ch'ang Pi-te, Deputy Director of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; and its program was developed by Wu Che-fu of the Museum staff. The Workshop's Secretariat was under the direction of Teresa Y.C. Wang Chang of the National Central Library of Taiwan.

Among the participants from foreign institutions who made presentations were Helmut Bansa (Bavarian State Library, Munich), Kaneko Kazumasa (Tenri Library), Ozaki Yasushi (Shido Bunko, Keio University), Raymond Tang (East Asiatic Library, University of California, Berkeley), Tsuen-hsuin Tsien (University of Chicago), Eugene Wu (Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University), and Yu Tak-il (Busan National University, South Korea). Other participants from abroad included Christa Chow (East Asiatic Library, University of California, Berkeley), Lars Erik Fredriksson (Sinological Library, Stockholm University), Kok-wah Hui (Chinese Library, National University of Singapore), Jane Hwang (Bavarian State Library, Munich), Hsing-feng Liu (Gest Oriental Library, Princeton University), Diane Perushek (Gest Oriental Library, Princeton University), and Heng-yu John Wu (University Library, The Chinese University of Hong Kong).

Objective

A rare book may be so defined for several reasons. One is its physical nature: those with superior editing, printing, and binding may be called rare merely because they are the epitome of the bookmakers' art. A more complex definition, however, adds the principle of antiquity and scarcity of the book to that of its physical beauty. It was to this more complex definition that the Workshop directed its attention.

One function of the Workshop was to survey Chinese books in this category throughout the world. In 1974 a survey revealed that there are 98,755 volumes
of pre-1644 printed books and 10,031 volumes of manuscripts in the ten largest
collections in the United States and Canada. Another survey disclosed that
there are 266,000 rare volumes in Taiwan, including some printed between 1644
and 1912. There is probably a comparable number in Japan; Japan also has a
large collection of Chinese erotic fiction which was banned in China during
the Ch'ing dynasty. Two of the largest collections of Chinese rare books in
Korea total 8,683 volumes. Among the ten European libraries holding at least
100,000 volumes, several that began to collect Chinese books as early as the
fifteenth century have many rare items. Smaller specialized libraries in the
West, such as the Library of East Asian History of Science (Needham Library)
in England, possess priceless works. Workshop participants concluded that
there is a need to compile an international union catalog of rare Chinese
books. This enormous task might be started on a small scale as, for example,
with a union catalog of Sung editions.

Participants in the Conference had the opportunity to visit a number of
important collections of rare materials in Taiwan. In the National Palace
Museum they saw the wooden crates used to transport many of the rare books
from Shanghai to Washington, D.C., for safekeeping and preservation during the
Second World War and later used again to ship the books to Taipei. Many of
the books continue to be stored in these crates. Each time a crate is opened
two authorized staff members must be present. When the books are returned to
the crate it is sealed with a strip of paper on which the date and staff
members' names are registered. The most advanced storage stacks in the Palace
Museum consist of rows of wooden cabinets with sliding doors. There are
shelves in the cabinets on which the books are neatly stacked in the
traditional way for storing soft-back, thread-bound volumes, some contained in
cloth cases and others in insect-repellent wooden cases. Camphor tablets
strategically placed in the cabinets also keep insects out. The rooms are air
conditioned and equipped with a Halon fire-prevention system, and the cabinets
sit on legs about eighteen inches high to promote air circulation. The Fu
Ssu-nien Library of the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica
houses an impressive number of rare books. Sung, Yuan, and Ming editions,
Tun-huang scrolls, stone rubbings, manuscripts, and scarce folk literature are
on display for visitors. In one of the exhibition halls is a display of
wooden slips (Han-chien 漢簡) from the Western Han so fresh in appearance and
in such good condition that they look to have been made only recently.

The National Central Library is the depository of all domestic publications;
but beside current imprints, more than 15,000 rare books in over 143,000
volumes are preserved here. The staff explained their project for the
systematic microfilming of this rare book collection. A set of color slides
of rare books in the NCL in five binders together with five accompanying
narrative cassettes were produced in 1979 entitled Kuo li Chung-yang t'u shu
kuan shan pen t'u shu huan teng p'ien 國立中央圖書館善本圖書幻
燈片. Participants were shown and encouraged to try the library's online
cataloging system, a Wang computer system which will contain bibliographic
records of NCL's rare books as well as new acquisitions.

By special arrangement, the participants were also allowed to visit the
Archives of the Nationalist Party housed in Yang-ming Shan Chuang 陽明山莊,
a villa where President Chiang Kai-shek stayed. His notes, documents, and
memorabilia constitute part of the exhibitions. Some workshop participants also visited the National Taiwan University Library, Tunghai University Library, Tamkang University Library, and other collections on Chinese studies.

Authentication

Workshop participants were given an introduction to the art of dating and verifying books. They had the opportunity to examine, feel, and even smell a variety of ancient books since different kinds of inks and papers do have different smells. An informed intuition for authenticating can develop through years of experience handling and comparing books. At present all known Sung (960-1279) editions have been identified conclusively except for some controversial cases, and even the discovery of additional Chin (1114-1234) and Yuan (1280-1367) editions rarely takes place. Thus the work of librarians today in identifying editions is confined largely to volumes produced during the Ming (1368-1643) and Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasties. It was on these volumes, therefore, that the Workshop speakers concentrated.

There are more ways of authenticating texts which are closer to scientific than merely feeling a book. One examines the style of calligraphy, taboo characters, the engravers, the quality of paper and ink, seals of collectors, and the general format, that is, the frame of the printing blocks, designs of books edges, and numbers of columns on a page and of characters to a column. All of these vary with time, whether a book was printed by official or private printers and the localities in which books were produced. Prefaces and texts must be checked for later accretions and false attributions. Finally pages should be examined against the light to detect physical alterations.

Political unrest and wars prevented the publication of many books during the early Ming, but the middle of this dynasty enjoyed more calm during which to produce large numbers of titles, including classics and fiction, dramatic and scientific works. To authenticate these books scholars have sought to associate styles of design with the periods in which the books were produced. For example, early Ming books follow the Chao Meng-fu style of calligraphy popular during the Yuan period. During the middle Ming calligraphy reverted to that of the Sung, when the prevailing styles were those of Ou-yang Hsün and Liu Kung-ch'uan. After the reign of Cheng-te (1506-1521) a new style of calligraphy, called the "hard character" style, took shape. Hard characters began as an imitation of the Sung style, using square, strong strokes, but gradually became more stiff and mechanical. Artisans preserved this style in woodblocks, making it the one which remains the most popular today.

Scholars may use other subtle clues to authenticate rare Chinese books. They may identify a middle Ming book, for example, in part by the border, the single line of outline which surrounds the calligraphy on any given page. In addition the name of the engraver is often printed on the edges of middle and late Ming books. The quality of paper in a book is another important clue. Generally during the early Ming publishers used white wood pulp paper on which to print, but during the middle Ming they began to use bamboo paper. Though books printed by the government or produced by fine private printers...
contained better quality paper, those produced by cheap commercial printers were on the less expensive bamboo paper through the end of the dynasty.

There were five main sources of books during the Ming Dynasty. These were the central government, local governments, fan-fu (houses of feudal princes), private scholars, and commercial printers. Each of these five is important to the scholar seeking to authenticate rare books in the following ways:

1) Central government editions. These were of two main kinds. The Kuo tzu chien, the equivalent of the national university, produced one kind in Nanking during the early Ming. Its chief products were known as "Three Dynasties Editions" because they were made with wood blocks that had been cut during the Sung, repaired in the Yuan, and used again during the Ming. The Kuo tzu chien in Peking during the middle Ming began printing books with new blocks because the old ones no longer existed. The second kind of central government edition was produced by the Ssu li chien, an official agency one of whose functions was to print the works of emperors. Ssu li chien books were physically beautiful, with fine white paper, large Chao-style characters, and excellent binding; but their editing and general accuracy was so poor that scholars have little regard for these books.

2) Local government or shu p'a editions. These were produced by officials as gifts to friends and associates. They were smaller and poorly printed because they served no scholarly purpose, but they had substantial value because they preserved the works of obscure authors.

3) Fan-fu (houses of feudal princes) editions. Unique in Chinese history, these books were produced only by Ming princes who, having been granted land and money but assigned no duties or powers, spent much of their leisure time making fine books. Fan-fu editions are respected by scholars for their reliable texts and beauty.

4) Private scholar editions. The best of these works were made in Kiangsu province during the reigns of the emperors Cheng-te (1506-1521) and Chia-ching (1522-1566).

5) Commercial editions. This type of publication centered around Fukien province during the early Ming and around Kiangsu province in the late Ming. Few good editions were produced by commercial printers, with one exception. The printing house Chi ku ko, owned by Mao Chin, was productive and famous for its beautiful, well-edited books.

In sum, Ming books were often badly edited, for their printers frequently changed book titles, cut texts, falsified earlier editions, and supplied redundant prefaces. Moreover, they proliferated the useless works of local officials who flattered themselves by issuing commemorative vanity editions. However, there were advances in printing during the Ming: printers perfected new mechanical techniques, including the use of wood and bronze movable type and the art of multi-colored printing for text and illustrations.

Scholarship during the Ch'ing dynasty contrasted sharply with the excesses and superficial quality of the Ming. Emphasizing simplicity and authenticity,
some of the educated class dedicated itself to the art of bookprinting, creating editions considered brilliant both for their editing and their physical composition. With few exceptions Ch'ing editions contain Sung-style calligraphy (hard characters) and have double vertical lines framing both sides of a page. They also have black fish-tail designs on the edges and are often printed on bamboo paper.

Private editions from the Ch'ing are especially notable. Scholars often copied and cut blocks of their own works or asked famous calligraphers to prepare the material for carving. These scholars printed many facsimile editions of Sung and Yuan works. With their fine editing and printing, the works of Ch'ing private scholars will no doubt always be treasured.

Ch'ing emperors, with their great wealth and desire to glorify their achievements, supported book publishing. Many of their books were printed in the Wu ying tien (Wu ying Palace) from 1673 on, when substantial sums were spent on the production of books known for meticulous editing and fine paper and inks. Publication in the Wu ying Palace reached its zenith in the Chien-lung period (1736-1795). All Wu ying Palace editions are beautifully bound in silk. Their prefaces are generally written in soft-style characters, while their texts are written in Sung-style characters.

Two famous sets were produced by the Wu ying Palace. One, printed with bronze movable type in 1726, is the Ku chin tu shu chi ch'eng (Collections of Ancient and Contemporary Books) which comprises 5,020 volumes. Another made with movable wooden type is the Wu ying tien chü chen pan ts'ung shu (Wu ying Palace Gem Collection), which was a selection of works from the Ming dynasty manuscript of the Yung-lo tien. Wu ying Palace also printed editions in the Manchu language and miniature, multi-color books.

The third and final type of Ch'ing editions was produced by local governments. These were begun when a general of the army, Tseng Kuo-fan, who was also a famous scholar, determined to seek out and reprint whatever important books remained after the destruction of libraries during the Tai-p'ing Rebellion (1850-1864). After he established the first famous local government printing house, the Chiang-nan kuan shu chu, thirty similar printing houses sprang up throughout the country, financed by government surpluses, tax revenues or officials' own income.

Local government printing houses produced books designed for practical use, including those designed for the medical and agricultural sciences, as well as for public officials. Usually run by highly literate administrators, they produced volumes of high quality, accurate in text and editing, with skillful engraving and printed in Sung-style characters; they were sold at a very low price.

Restoration

Of all the Chinese rare book collections in Taiwan the National Palace Museum has the best preservation and restoration program. Not only have its storage
area and book stacks the best modern equipment protecting against fire, flood, insects, and changes in humidity, but it also has storage caves carved into a nearby mountain as shelter in the event of military conflict.

Lin Mao-sheng, head of the Museum Laboratory for Restoration, and his staff have been carrying out specialized work for many years. The high quality of their work chiefly depends on their personal experience and ability rather than the tools and methods of restoration, which are basic and traditional. They use tools such as needles, sharp knives, scissors, drills, hammers, brushes, paper cutters, and heavy book presses.

The restoration staff relies upon simple tools because the books upon which they work were made hundreds of years ago and are better restored using techniques and materials which have proven effective through the ages. Only experienced masters can repair the most valuable books; amateurs and apprentices might well damage the treasures they seek to protect.

Before restoration can begin, a rare book must be evaluated thoroughly as to its paper (is it made of bamboo or of mulberry, for example?) and ink (is it first press or left-over ink? Waterproof or apt to run?) and the kind or degree of damage. A few of the processes used are outlined below:

1. To remove stains

   Stains which are not oil based can be washed away with 70–80 degree Centigrade water mixed with two per cent lye (or ashes of wheat stalks). Oil-based stains must be removed by commercially available solutions. Sometimes it is better to excise the area where a stubborn spot is found and to patch the hole with matching paper.

2. To repair damage

   A. Patch worn-holes, rat-bites, and torn leaves with matching paper.
   B. Reinforce thoroughly damaged book leaves by mounting each individually on new paper.

Dry mounting is used for less damaged paper. This method first sprays the book leaf with water to smooth out wrinkles, spreads thin paste on mounting paper; puts the book leaf on the mounting paper and carefully brushes it so that it adheres to the paper. Finally, the mounted leaf is transferred to a 5-by-7-foot drying board to dry naturally.

For badly damaged book leaves, wet mounting is used. Instead of putting the book leaf on mounting paper, the mounting paper is laid on the fragile page. This is a more difficult technique.

The staff of the laboratory also demonstrated how to make a cloth case (t'ao) for books and how to bind books with needle and thread in the traditional way.

(Christa Chow)