

TO COUNT GRAINS OF SAND ON THE OCEAN FLOOR:
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF BOOKS AND LEARNING IN
THE SONG DYNASTY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is on the ways that the increased availability of books in eleventh- and twelfth-century China affected ways of thinking about the written word. I will begin by quoting a few sources that suggest how widespread and quantitatively significant was the increase in books, owing largely (but not entirely) to the spread of printing. Most of these passages are well known and have been cited in the considerable amount of scholarship in Chinese on the history of printing during the Song.¹ There is first the exchange of 1005 between Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 998–1022) and Xing Bing 邢昺:

The emperor went to the Directorate of Education to inspect the Publications Office. He asked Xing Bing how many woodblocks were kept there. Bing replied, “At the start of our dynasty, there were fewer than four thousand. Today, there are more than one hundred thousand. The classics and histories, together with standard commentaries, are all fully represented. When I was young and devoted myself to learning, there were only one or two scholars in every hundred who possessed copies of all the classics and commentaries. There was no way to copy so many works. Today, printed editions of these works are abundant, and officials and commoners alike have them in their homes. Scholars are fortunate indeed to have been born in such an era as ours!”²

¹ Key works include the following (listed here in reverse chronological order): Zhang Gaoping, “Diaoban yinshua”; several essays contained in *Zhongguo chuban shiliao*, 302–455; Zhou Baorong, *Songdai chuban*; Li Zhizhong, *Gudai banyin*, ch. 5; and Zhang Xiumin, *Zhongguo yinshua*, 53–221. There is also much valuable information on Song printing in *Zhongguo cangshu tongshi*, vol. 1, sec. 5; and Fan Fengshu, *Zhongguo sijia cangshu*, sec. 2, ch. 1. In English, the most detailed study of commercial printing during the Song period is Part II of Chia’s *Printing for Profit*. Also very useful is the article by Cherniack, “Book Culture,” which concentrates on issues related to textual transmission in the period of proliferating imprints, including textual corruption, collation, emendation, and other editorial practices.

² *Xu Changbian* (2), 60.1333.

A similar exchange between Emperor Zhenzong and Xiang Minzhong 向敏中 took place a few years later, in 1010:

[The emperor] again asked Minzhong, “Do students today find it easy to obtain books?” Minzhong said, “At the beginning of our dynasty, Zhang Zhao 張昭 [894–972] was the only person who had copies of *The Three Histories* [*Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Han*), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han*)] in his home. After Taizu 太祖 (r. 960–76) brought peace to all four quarters of the empire and Taizong 太宗 (r. 977–97) promoted Confucian learning, a legacy continued by Your Majesty’s own veneration for the past and fondness for writing, today *The Three Histories*, *Sanguozhi* [三國志 (*History of the Three Kingdoms*)], and *Jin shu* [晉書 (*History of the Jin*)] are all available in printed editions. Gentlemen and scholars, without exerting themselves, are all able to have copies of these early classics in their homes. Truly, ours is the most splendid era in a thousand years.³

Even if there is some quantitative exaggeration in the responses to Zhenzong’s questions (the officials are certainly telling him what he wants to hear), these passages make it clear that within the first fifty years of the Song, that is, between the 960s and 1010, the printing by the central government of the Confucian classics and dynastic histories, together with commentaries on the texts, increased dramatically. The result was to greatly enhance the availability of these texts to those who wanted them. As we know, from the early decades of the Song on, the Guozhi jian 國子監 (Directorate of Education) actively published such works with the explicit aim of making them widely available to the public. Xing Bing says that woodblocks representing over one hundred thousand pages of such imprints were stored in the Directorate’s Publication Office as early as 1005. Later in Emperor Zhenzong’s reign someone memorialized to the throne suggesting that the price charged for Directorate editions could be raised, bringing in more government revenue. Zhenzong’s response is revealing: “The printing is not done to make a profit! It is simply that we desire such books to be widely distributed.”⁴ A decree Zhenzong promulgated at the time stresses the didactic aims of Directorate printing, affirming the emperor’s opposition to any attempt to turn it into a revenue-generating policy:

³ Xu Changbian (2), 74.1694.

⁴ Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi tongjian*, 33.752.

Formerly, we carved many books on square blocks intending that they be transmitted throughout the empire, to spread teaching and learning. Our purpose was to lead people toward the true and proper, and there was no thought of monetary gain. We sought to ensure that students dressed in blue-collared robes would assemble daily in the schools and academies, and that throughout each region of the empire people would attend diligently to our hallowed traditions of learning. We thus intended to solidify what is fundamental and suppress what is superficial: will it not lead to a splendid flourishing? The price of Directorate editions of the classics shall not be increased!⁵

It was not just the Confucian classics and histories that were issued in printed Directorate editions. Four massive encyclopedias and anthologies were also compiled in the early decades of the Song. Emperor Taizong ordered the compilation of *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*Imperial encyclopedia of the Taiping period*) in 1,000 *juan* 卷, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (*Expanded records of the Taiping period*) in 500 *juan*, and the anthology of literary writings *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (*Blossoms from the garden of literature*) in 1,000 *juan*. To these Emperor Zhenzong added *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (*Primal mirrors from the records archives*), also in 1,000 *juan*. *Wenyuan yinghua* seems not to have been printed until the Southern Song (the woodblocks for its intended first printing having been destroyed by fire before the printing could be accomplished), but the other members of this group of the Four Great Compilations of the Song (*Songchao si da shu* 宋朝四大書), as they came to be called, were printed and disseminated. These made available in printed form a much wider quantity and variety of texts than could be printed as separate titles by the Directorate, and they also provided students with a classified or categorized arrangement of the material contained in the classics and histories, facilitating in their own way the spread of learning.

The central government was involved in printing other, less scholarly, types of texts as well. Medical treatises were prominent among its other printing projects, as discussed in detail by TJ Hinrichs elsewhere in this volume. Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1023–63) was particularly diligent in seeing to it that medical works were made available this way. The bibliophile Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (fl. 1211–49) credits him with having established a special office to collate and edit medical works in

⁵ QSW, 255 (Zhenzong 44), Zhenzong, “Guozi jian jingshu geng bu zengjia zhao” 國子監經書更不增價詔, 420.

1057. When the editorial work was finished, each work was sent to the Directorate of Education for printing. Renzong also had commentaries written on major materia medica and related works. When all of these were printed and distributed, “the entire world knew to study ancient medical treatises.”⁶

Beyond the printing done by the Directorate of Education and other bureaus in the capital, printing was carried out by lower levels of the vast bureaucracy outside the capital. Circuit offices, prefectures, and even county administrations all printed texts from time to time. Sometimes they did this in the spirit that Emperor Zhenzong evokes in his decree, to spread learning and inculcate ethical values among the people (or to spread medical knowledge); at other times they printed texts to keep local officials well supplied with texts for their own use or to give as presents to dignitaries who passed through. Still other times they printed texts for the purpose of raising revenue for the local administrations.⁷ Naturally, these motives were not mutually exclusive. Although the cumulative number of texts and editions printed by circuit and prefectural administrations may well have exceeded those printed by the Directorate of Education, these editions were more limited in quantity and may rarely if ever have achieved national distribution. Hence we know much less about these lower levels of Song government printing than about that done directly by the imperial court.

Aside from government printing, of all levels and kinds, there was also commercial and private printing. We hear most about commercial printing in the Song sources. During the Northern Song, when commercial printing was still relatively new, we find mention of it most often in connection with the needs of candidates preparing for the civil service examination, and mostly in the capital.⁸ Examination candidates and would-be candidates must have numbered in the tens of thousands, even in the capital alone, and they would have been desperate crammers, just the kind of clientele a printer would like to have.

⁶ Chen Zhensun, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* (2), 13.387.

⁷ For example, Wang Qi 王琪, when governor of Suzhou in 1059, collated a new edition of Du Fu's poetry and printed ten thousand copies for sale. He used the proceeds to repay a debt his prefecture owed to the Liangzhe 兩浙 Circuit administration, a debt that had been incurred by the expense of building a new official banquet hall. See Fan Chengda, *Wujun zhi*, 6.1b–2a.

⁸ My discussion of this topic has drawn upon the excellent work of Liu Hsiangkwang, “Printing and Examinations.”

Not surprisingly, a range of examination aids and cheat books were prepared, printed, and sold to them. These included model collections (often referred to as *chengwen* 程文), which featured essays and poetic compositions that had earned their author top place in recent examinations.⁹ Another type of examination crib culled sentences from the classics and histories, perhaps arranging them by topical category or rhyme, and intermingled these quotations with passages from essays on current affairs. These compilations, sometimes called ‘policy essays pared down’ (*cegua* 策括), equipped candidates to appear both classically erudite and well-informed about current political issues and debates. Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) pointed out that candidates well versed in these primers need only, once they encountered a real policy question in an examination, to select and choose from paragraphs they had already memorized, perhaps rearranging the ‘head and tail’. Thereby they managed to dazzle the examiners, who mistook this display of brilliance for true mastery of the classics.¹⁰

Yet another type of examination aid consisted of entire essays on contemporary political issues, or selections of the same, many of them passages lifted from documents smuggled out from one or another court archive. Anthologies of these were printed for sale. We hear considerable comment about the existence of such anthologies, almost all of it negative. High officials railed against the existence of such works as a threat to what we today would call national security. Since many of the court policy debates concerned questions of how to deal with the Liao and Xi Xia rival empires to the north, officials worried that the publication of the supposedly confidential court discussions would compromise the Song’s ability to deal effectively with its non-Chinese rivals.¹¹ And there is ample evidence that such works did indeed make their way northward across the borders to end up in Tangut or Khitan hands.¹² Finally, there were the ‘under arm books’ (*xieshu* 挾書, *xiece*

⁹ We hear of the printing and sale of the poetic composition with which Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72) took top honors in the *shengyuan* 省元 examination, see Wenying, *Xiangshan yelu*, C.1428.

¹⁰ Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, “Yi xuexiao gongju zhuang” 議學校貢舉狀, 25.724.

¹¹ SHY (2), “Xingfa” 2/24, entry dated Kangding 1/5/2 (1040). Throughout, references to this work adopt the *juan* and section numbers in the version of the text available on-line.

¹² SHY (2), “Xingfa” 2/16, entry dated Tiansheng 5/2/2 (1027). For a discussion of the transmission of Chinese imprints north to the Khitan empire and government attempts to regulate such circulation, see De Weerd, “What Did Su Che See?”

挾冊), miniature editions of selections from the classics and commentaries meant to be smuggled into the examination compound by insecure degree candidates. Significantly, when Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72) memorialized against these cheat books in 1057 (the year he was put in charge of the examinations), he says that they were written out by hand by copyists who specialized in miniature script and profited handsomely from their skill.¹³ But a few decades later, purportedly by the 1080s and definitely by the 1110s, these same miniature books were printed. The quantities of them were so large that when the examinees discarded them as they left the examination compound they lay in piles in the streets.¹⁴

This is what Su Shi, writing in 1076, said about the abundance of commercial printing intended, primarily it seems, for sale to examination candidates:

I can recall meeting older scholars, long ago, who said that when they were young they had a hard time getting their hands on a copy of *Shiji* or *Han shu*. If they were lucky enough to get one, they thought nothing of copying the entire text out by hand, so they could recite it day and night. In recent years merchants engrave and print all manner of books belonging to the hundred schools, and produce ten thousand pages a day. With books so readily available, you would think that students' writing and scholarship would be many times better than what they were in earlier generations. Yet, to the contrary, young men and examination candidates leave their books tied shut and never look at them, preferring to amuse themselves with baseless chatter. Why is this?¹⁵

It may have been partly because so much of what was being printed by booksellers consisted of examination aids, rather than classics and histories themselves, that the 'real' books remained unread, even after they were purchased. Su Shi was born in 1037. If the old scholars he remembers meeting were, say, seventy when he was ten, they would have been born around 970. So Su Shi was contrasting the paucity of texts in circulation in the last decades of the tenth century with the plenitude of printed books in the 1070s. His remarks fit well with the impression conveyed by other sources of the tremendous change in printing and the availability of books in just that time period.

¹³ Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, *Zouyi* 奏議 15, "Tiaoyue juren" 條約舉人, 111.1677–78.

¹⁴ SHY (2), "Xuanju" 4/7, entry dated Yuanhe 2/1/24 (1112).

¹⁵ Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, "Lishi shanfang cangshu ji" 李氏山房藏書記, 11.359.

The Song court tried time and again to restrict or ban the commercial printing of books of all kinds intended for examination candidates, and frequently directed as it did so that the woodblocks used for printing them were to be destroyed. As early as 1037 we find officials warning about the dire effects examination aids are having, in making candidates ignore the canonical texts in favor of shortcuts.¹⁶ The court was particularly concerned about the printing and circulation of anthologies of court documents on border policy, and repeatedly took steps to stop the practice.¹⁷ The printing and circulation of examination aids seems to have swelled considerably during the last decades of the eleventh century and the first decade of the twelfth. In 1103 one official advised that the only hope for reforming the examination system and making it meaningful again was to gather all the printed examination aids and model essays and burn them, and the court concurred.¹⁸ Similar bans were promulgated in 1108, 1114, and 1117, all one suspects to little or no effect.¹⁹

The new technology of book printing also made it possible for some people to put what the court viewed as even more dangerous and invidious material into wide circulation, right in the capital itself. The climate of viciously partisan politics that dominated the last seventy years of the Northern Song surely factored into the production of such imprints. Just as the controversial New Policies of Wang Anshi 王安石 were being implemented, early in Shenzong's 神宗 (r. 1067–85) reign in the late 1060s, the censor Zhang Jian 張戢 (1030–76) complained that 'wicked' persons had composed writings defaming the court, and had even fabricated imperial decrees (intended, no doubt, to discredit the emperor and his policies), and that printed versions of these were for sale in the market.²⁰ A similar tactic seems to have been used by those out of favor during Huizong's 徽宗 reign (r. 1100–25). We read of spurious copies of the court gazette (*chaobao* 朝報) that were put

¹⁶ SHY (2), "Chongru" 4/7, entry dated Jingyou 4/10/17 (1037), and "Xuanju" 3/18, entry dated Jingyou 5/1/8 (1038).

¹⁷ SHY (2), "Xingfa" 2/38, entry dated Yuanyou 5/7/22 (1090), and 2/41, entry dated Yuanfu 1/3/3 (1098).

¹⁸ SHY (2), "Xuanju" 4/3, entry dated Chongning 2/9/10 (1103).

¹⁹ SHY (2), "Xingfa" 2/48, entry dated Dagan 2/7/25 (1108), 2/62, entry dated Zhenghe 4/6/19 (1114), and 2/67–68, entry dated Zhenghe 7/7/6 (1117).

²⁰ SHY (2), "Xingfa" 2/34, entry dated Xining 1/run11/25 (1068).

into circulation in the capital in 1110, and of the court's efforts to find and punish those responsible for the outrage.²¹

It would be misleading to convey the impression that by the end of the eleventh century, or even on through Emperor Huizong's reign, everything a reader could want was available in a printed edition. That was far from true. Different categories of books were available in starkly disparate quantities. Individual literary collections, especially those from earlier times, mostly continued to circulate in manuscript form, to the extent that they circulated at all. Of course, the works of a handful of the most famous writers, perhaps ten or so, were available in imprints, but those of lesser-known writers appear not to have been available in print. In about 1070, the book collector Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019–79) compiled an anthology of Tang poetry he entitled *Tang baijia shixuan* 唐百家詩選 (*A selection of one hundred Tang poets*), which contained some 1200 poems. Song based the anthology on 108 individual collections of Tang poets that he owned (his personal library was known to be particularly strong in Tang poetry).²² Most of Song Minqiu's Tang poetry collections must have been manuscripts. One curious feature of the resulting anthology was that it omitted any works by the best known Tang poets (including Li Bai 李白, Du Fu 杜甫, Han Yu 韓愈, as well as Wang Wei 王維, Wei Yingwu 韋應物, Yuan Zhen 元稹, Bai Juyi 白居易, Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, Meng Jiao 孟郊, and Zhang Ji 張籍). Rather than to suppose that this omission reflects any negative assessment of those poets by Song Minqiu, it is more likely, as Chen Zhensun suggested in the twelfth century, that Song omitted those poets because their works were already in wide circulation in printed editions.²³ Song Minqiu must have intended that his anthology itself would be printed. His purpose, after all, was to make 'Tang poetry' available to readers in a new way. Indeed, we learn from an early Southern Song source that "the work subsequently circulated abundantly through the world", which certainly implies that it was printed.²⁴ When Sun completed his selection, he showed it to his friend Wang Anshi, who returned the favor by writing a preface for it (consequently, Wang is often wrongly

²¹ SHY (2), "Xingfa" 2/54, entry dated Dagan 4/10/6 (1110).

²² Chao Gongwu, *Junzhai dushu*, 20.1064.

²³ Chen Zhensun, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* (2), 15.444.

²⁴ Xu Du, *Quesao bian* (2), B.4500.

credited with being the anthology's compiler).²⁵ "Those who wish to know Tang poetry," Wang declared in his preface, "need look no further than what is contained here."²⁶

Manuscripts were still important for the existence and transmission of books, and consequently the copying or production of manuscripts remained important and continued in significant quantity. Manuscripts, in fact, were still the *preferred* form of the book in the eyes of elite scholars and collectors. We recall Li Qingzhao's 李清照 (1084–ca. 1155) description of how she and her husband built up their huge private library.²⁷ Each time they acquired a new title, whether it was a manuscript or imprint, after carefully collating it with other versions that could be found, they would make a clean manuscript copy of the entire work. Only then would it be added to their collection, only then was the acquisition complete.

In a perhaps unexpected way, during this era of the advent and spread of book printing, the copying of manuscripts gained new meaning. Ironically, the more imprints there were the more the act of copying was revered and even perceived by some as necessary. In the eyes of the elite, the older generation, or the conservative-minded of any generation, printed books were for those who did not truly care about books. It was opportunistic young men who snapped up print books in the market, then (as Su Shi opines) took them home and never bothered opening them. The real scholar or true connoisseur of books prided himself on copying them, after editing and collating them. The act of copying was important not just to demonstrate one's commitment to books but also, of course, to the process of learning and mastering their contents.

The quotation from Su Shi earlier comes from the dedicatory inscription he composed for his friend Li Chang's 李常 library, housed in Bai-shi an 白石庵 (White Stone Abbey) at the foot of Lu Mountain. This was a manuscript library, made up entirely of manuscripts that Li had personally written out in his own hand, amounting to 9,000 *juan* in all. Subsequently, in accounts of Li Chang's life (e.g., his tomb inscription, his biography that would eventually appear in the Song dynastic history), the fact that he had copied out such a large quantity of books

²⁵ It is Chao Gongwu who points out this mistake, *Junzhai dushu*, 20.1064.

²⁶ Wang Anshi, *Linchuan xiansheng*, "Tang baijia shixuan xu" 唐百家詩選序, 84.883.

²⁷ Li Qingzhao, *Li Qingzhao ji*, "Jinshi lu houxu" 金石錄後序, 3.309.

is mentioned as significant.²⁸ This way of treating that fact is already anticipated in Su Shi's inscription, with his pointed criticism of young men who purchase printed books in the marketplace. Su Shi wants us to appreciate the difference between those men and Li Chang, who went about building up his book collection the old-fashioned way. In Su Shi's eyes, Li Chang's unselfish devotion to learning and scholarship was further illustrated by the fact that when he moved away from his Lu Mountain retreat, he left his library intact in the abbey, specifying that it could be used by anyone who visited the place.²⁹ That a literatus like Li Chang would, first, choose to store his personal library in an abbey and, later, bequeath it to the abbey when he left the area, reminds us of the important role Buddhist institutions still played as repositories of book collections. The history and dynamics of that role are explored by Joseph McDermott elsewhere in this volume.

Li Chang was the exception, as we can already infer from what Su Shi says. For our purposes, the key point is that the production of books, whether by the rapidly expanding method of printing or the traditional method of copying, was multiplying throughout the eleventh and into the twelfth centuries, and multiplying on a scale that was unprecedented in Chinese history. Once a semblance of peace was restored in the south after the Jurchen invasions of the 1120s and early 1130s, book printing became even more prolific through the twelfth century. Although the extant sources do not permit us to accurately measure the rate of increase or to approximate the number of titles printed (much less the total quantity thus produced), it does appear that the increase early in the Southern Song was dramatic, and that the great losses of book collections and entire libraries associated with the Jurchen invasion and chaotic Chinese flight south were instrumental in advancing the cause of book printing once peace was reestablished and in making the elite relax their hostility to the new technology.³⁰

One useful indicator of the proliferation of writings already during the Northern Song is the steady growth in the size of the Palace

²⁸ Su Song, *Su Weigong wenji*, "Ligong muzhiming" 李公墓誌銘, 55.844, adopting the textual variant 'nine thousand' instead of 'several thousand,' since it makes the text match what Su Shi had said in his prose account of Li Chang's library, which Su Song certainly knew of; and SS (1), 344.10929. The point about the significance assigned to Li Chang's book copying in accounts of his life is made by Wang Yugen, "'Ten Thousand Scrolls.'"

²⁹ This is noted at the end of Su Shi's inscription.

³⁰ This point is made by Zhang Gaoping, "Diaoban yinshua," 15–17.

Library collection. We do not have data on the entirety of Palace Library holdings, but we do have information at key points in the period that is revealing on the holdings in the “San guan” 三館 (Three Institutes): Zhaowen guan 昭文館 (Zhaowen Institute), Shi guan 史館 (History Institute), and Jixian guan 集賢館 (Jixian Institute). At the start of the dynasty, the holdings of the Three Institutes are said to have amounted, collectively, to a total of 13,000 *juan* of writings. Over the next sixty-three years, that is, through the end of Emperor Zhenzong’s reign in 1023, the number increased to 39,142 *juan*. Over the ensuing forty-five years, through the end of Yingzong’s reign in 1068, the number swelled to 47,588 *juan*. Through the next fifty-nine years, through the end of the Northern Song in 1127, the number grew to 73,877 *juan*.³¹ There were several other imperial libraries aside from those in the Three Institutes. These included the Longtu ge 龍圖閣 (Longtu Hall), Taiqing lou 太清樓 (Taiqing Tower), Yushu yuan 御書院 (Yushu Pavilion), Yuchen dian 玉宸殿 (Yuchen Palace), Shuji lou 屬籍樓 (Shuji Tower), Qingxin dian 清心殿 (Qingxin Palace), Zizheng dian 資政殿 (Zizheng Palace), Chonghe dian 崇和殿 (Chonghe Palace) among others.³² There were also, of course, the collections housed in the imperial academies. There must have been considerable duplication between these many libraries, but certainly there are likely also to have been individual works held in each, thus further augmenting the number of works available in the Three Institutes collections. Naturally, the total number of *juan*, counting duplicate copies, that must have been held in all the imperial libraries combined would have been several times the number of primary copies housed in the Three Institutes.

Aside from the printing projects of the central government, carried out primarily by the Directorate of Education, the impressive growth in the size of the Three Institutes collections was largely a result of the court policy of actively seeking out books from private collectors, and rewarding individuals who ‘donated’ books to the court either with degrees, cash, or even direct official appointments. Repeatedly throughout the Northern Song, decrees were sent out from the emperor, directed not just to the court but to all circuit and prefectural officials, urging that books be forwarded to the court for addition to

³¹ Figures from Fu Xuancong and Xie Zhuohua, *Zhongguo cangshu*, vol. 1, 312.

³² For a more complete list and description, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, 297–302.

the imperial collections. Sometimes these requisitions were accompanied by lists of book titles that were not held in the imperial libraries. As much as one thousand cash was offered for the donation of a single *juan* of writing, or a degree offered for a donation of three hundred *juan*. If a private collector did not wish to donate his copy of a title, the court would arrange to have a copy made and returned the original to the collector. It appears that every Northern Song ruler issued such decrees. The cumulative effect was that tens of thousands of books were obtained in this way from local government and private collections. The donations swelled the imperial libraries.³³

The impact of the new printing technology and with it the proliferation of written materials of all types (in printed and manuscript form) upon attitudes towards texts, reading and writing, and learning generally, must have showed itself in many ways. The transition from manuscript to print culture, the early stages of which seem to have occurred roughly between 1000 and 1200 in China, likely affected many aspects of the way people thought about and used books. Yet this is a topic that has received little attention to date. The topic is related to print history in the Song period but it is distinct from print history. It is the history of changing attitudes towards writing and learning as affected by the explosion of books ushered in by the spread of print technology.

One effect of the new abundance of books that has been discussed is the impact it had on ideas about poetic composition in the late Northern Song and on into the Southern Song. Both Zhang Gaoping 張高評 and Wang Yugen have written about the Jiangxi School of Poetry (Jiangxi shipai 江西詩派) and the relation of its key precepts to the expanded quantity of written materials available to would-be poets.³⁴ They argue persuasively that the Jiangxi School's insistence that every word in a poetic line have a textual source or precedent, that poets train themselves by reading exhaustively in earlier texts, and that the source of poetic inspiration lies in books rather than the poet's observance of the world—all these are best understood as springing from the print revolution and the new abundance of books from the time of Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), credited with being the founder

³³ Ibid., vol. 1, 315–17.

³⁴ Zhang Gaoping, "Diaoban yinshua," especially 19; Wang Yugen, "'Ten Thousand Scrolls.'"

of the 'school', on through that of later Jiangxi School proponents in the Southern Song.

In the pages that follow, I hope to add to the insights of Zhang Gaoping and Wang Yugen by discussing some other ways in which the new abundance of books seems to have affected thinking about the written word at the time. My topics are discrete and not directly related to each other, although each is drawn from the period between the 1070s and 1200. My effort being a preliminary one, it necessarily has a piecemeal quality, and there are large gaps between the few events and persons I am looking at. But I hope that this effort, incomplete as it is, might be a step towards a more systematic and comprehensive treatment of the subject at some future time. At the least, by selecting distinct and unrelated topics all belonging to the particular historical period, I hope to suggest how ubiquitous was the impact of the new flood of books the period witnessed upon thinking about reading and writing. I am sure that many more examples could be adduced. I would not be surprised to find that, in fact, some influence of the expanded availability of books during the era may be discerned in many topics in the fields of intellectual history and literature of the time.

II. SIMA GUANG CONFRONTS THE EXPANDED RECORD OF THE PAST

It is interesting to think of Sima Guang's 司馬光 *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (*A comprehensive mirror for aid in governance*) in this context. There is more than one way to connect that great project, probably the most important historiographical undertaking of the era and certainly the one with the greatest legacy, to the expanded availability of books at the time. We note that the years Sima Guang worked on the project, during his seclusion in Luoyang (1071–84) correspond to the period that the imperial collection was growing to its most voluminous size, to judge from the figures for the Three Institutes holdings cited earlier. Materials from the imperial libraries were made available to Sima Guang during these years. The key documents that describe the inception and plan of *Zizhi tongjian* repeatedly refer to the surfeit of books that exist as historical sources. The overwhelming quantity of sources is alternately represented as a blessing and a curse: it is positive because it holds out the possibility of detailed understanding of the past in all its complexity. It is negative because the sheer number of works constitutes a daunting challenge to anyone who would gain

mastery of the historical past; notice is also taken of the numerous inconsistencies and contradictions between overlapping accounts of events.

This is what Sima Guang says in the memorial that accompanied his submission of *Zizhi tongjian* to the throne in 1084, when he finally completed the compilation project he had been commissioned by Shenzong to undertake seventeen years before:

I humbly observe: I am obtuse by nature and my learning is uncouth and paltry. In a hundred tasks I always come out beneath other men. But to one field and one field alone I have clumsily devoted my mind, that of historical studies. From my youth to old age, I have had a taste for that field that has never been sated. Yet I have always been troubled that, from Sima Qian and Ban Gu on down to the present, the writings in the field are so numerous. Even a gentleman wearing the cotton cloth of a commoner cannot read all of them. How, then, could a ruler who must daily attend to ten thousand affairs ever have time to peruse them all? Consequently, disregarding my capacity and abilities, I was determined to pare down the ponderous quantity and select the essentials, retaining only what bore upon the rise and fall of dynasties or accounted for the contentment and suffering of the people, that which could be models of goodness and warnings about wickedness, and to fashion them into an annalistic history that was logical in its evaluations and did not indiscriminately mix the coarse with the refined.³⁵

In the preface to the printed edition of Sima Guang's work published by the Yuan court in ca. 1274, Wang Pan 王磐 echoes and expands upon the same theme:³⁶

The quantity of written works from ancient and recent times that are extant in the world today is truly large. If a person does not know how to select among them and wants, instead, to look at them all, he will come to the end of his lifetime before he can scrutinize all the words; he will leave this world behind before he can master their meaning. The task is like counting grains of sand on the ocean floor—what year can one finish?³⁷

In both passages, the achievement of Sima Guang's work is that it tackles the problem of overabundant written sources from the past. By

³⁵ Sima Guang, *Sima Wenzheng*, "Jin Zizhi tongjian biao" 進資治通鑑表, 17.262.

³⁶ On the date of this Yuan edition, see Wang Guowei, "Liang Zhe gu kanben kao," B.4620–21, in *Guantang jilin*.

³⁷ Wang Pan, "Xingwen shu xinkan Zizhi tongjian xu" 興文署新刊資治通鑑序, in Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, xxxi.

culling through the massive number of books, paring away the superfluous and isolating the essentials, Sima Guang managed to make the past intelligible again.

We have seen earlier references to the expanded availability of the early dynastic histories in the first decades of the Northern Song, owing to printed editions of them brought out by the Directorate of Education. By the time Sima Guang began his work on *Zizhi tongjian*, all seventeen of the dynastic histories (from *Shiji* through *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (*New history of the Five Dynasties*)) had been so printed and were in wide circulation. This wide availability of so much of the official canon of historical writing must have already constituted a sea change in historiography. But this was only one type of the material on the historical past that was now readily accessible. The growing tide of written sources included vast numbers of unofficial histories, collections of edicts and memorials, annals, biographical collections, veritable records, collections of statutes, anecdotal collections, and individuals' literary collections. Some of these were printed, others circulated in manuscript form. Equally significant were the enormous and newly compiled encyclopedias and anthologies, mentioned earlier, that quoted from countless more such sources that might not circulate independently or perhaps even still survive.

The multiplication of historical sources may often have been thought of as overwhelming, but it also constituted a great opportunity for the historian to move beyond the standard histories in reconstructing a portrait of the past. This is the other, alternative way that the new abundance of written works is invoked by Sima Guang and others when they describe *Zizhi tongjian*. Sima Guang and his assistants clearly saw themselves as taking full advantage of the new quantity of written works to produce a kind of history unlike any produced in earlier ages. The relevant passage of Sima Guang's submission memorial says this, after referring to his posting to Luoyang in 1072, five years after he had first been commissioned to produce *Zizhi tongjian*, and the permission he received then to take documents from the imperial collection in Kaifeng with him for his project:

I had no other demands on my time, so that I was able to distill the essential, bringing all thought to bear, and to exhaust the materials in my possession. When my efforts during the day were insufficient, I continued working on into the night. I perused all the old histories, and supplemented them by drawing upon collections of anecdotes and tales. Slips and folios were piled high, and were as abundant as the misty sea.

Hidden secrets were plucked out and brought to light, and the tiniest detail was compared and assessed for accuracy.³⁸

There is, here, unmistakable pride in having tackled the voluminous sources with all the diligence needed to realize their full potential.

As is well known, *Zizhi tongjian* departs from earlier historiography precisely in the extent to which it utilizes a range of source types, going beyond the standard dynastic histories, and weaves diverse materials together into a coherent narrative. Sima Guang cast his net wide: he made an effort to consider all available materials. He did not use sources simply because they existed. He evaluated their plausibility and then drew upon what he determined to be the most reliable. Still, the process of initial consideration was as inclusive as possible. From his “Kaoyi” 考異 (“Investigation of discrepancies”) we have some sense of the wealth of sources Sima Guang consulted. There are some 350 sources named in “Kaoyi,” including thirty-five sources for the Han period, twenty for the Jin period, seventeen for the short-lived Sui dynasty, and no fewer than 138 for the Tang period.³⁹ The breakdown by type is as follows: twenty-five *zhengshi* 正史 (standard histories), thirty-eight annals (*biannian* 編年), eight chronological biographies (*pulu* 譜錄), fifty-six unofficial histories (*yeshi* 野史), seventy-five uncategorized histories (*zashi* 雜史), forty-three histories of hegemons (*bashi* 霸史), thirty-two biographies (*zhuanji* 傳記), thirteen funerary inscriptions (*beijie* 碑碣), seventeen collections of memorials and policy discussions (*zouyi* 奏議), eighteen individual literary collections (*bieji* 別集), eleven geographical works (*dili* 地理), eighteen anecdote collections (*xiaoshuo* 小說), and fifteen philosophical works (*zhuzi* 諸子).⁴⁰

So as not to overemphasize Sima Guang’s reliance upon the sources of lower stature such as the unofficial histories and anecdote collections, it must be noted that often he refers to their alternative versions of events only to reject them as unreliable or worse. Still, there certainly are times that he favors such works *over* accounts in the standard histories, and this is remarkable, considering the biases of his era. It is difficult to assess the factors that enabled him to be relatively free of those biases. (A distinction has been noticed in this regard

³⁸ Sima Guang, *Sima Wenzheng*, “Jin *Zizhi tongjian* biao,” 17.263.

³⁹ For the lists of titles, see Cui Wanqiu, *Tongjian yanjiu*, 38–62.

⁴⁰ Chen Guangchong, *Tongjian xinlun*, 130–36, who corrects and supplements the figures in Zhang Xu, *Tongjian xue*, rev. ed., 38–65.

between *Zizhi tongjian* and the imperial encyclopedia *Cefu yuangui*, with the latter—completed some seventy years earlier—significantly less apt to draw upon non-canonical materials.)⁴¹ Was it because the other sources were available to Sima Guang, or was it because he took pains to ensure that they were available and scrutinized? We cannot know. It seems plausible that the great increase in the circulation of non-canonical sources, some in printed editions and some in manuscript form, directly or indirectly affected Sima Guang's way of thinking about such works. At the least, we can say that the possibility for the historian to go beyond the standard histories in a very substantial way existed by the time Sima Guang began his project to an extent that it had never existed in earlier times. Sima Guang clearly relished the idea of taking advantage of that potential, evidently intrigued by the prospect of finding in obscure and previously ignored sources historical facts that could enhance understanding of the past (“hidden secrets were plucked out and brought to light”).

Finally, the “Investigation of Discrepancies” itself marks the entrance with *Zizhi tongjian* into a new stage of historiographical inquiry, in which widespread divergence and even contradiction between primary source texts is acknowledged. No doubt some precedents for the critical evaluation of conflicting sources may be found.⁴² But never before within the field of historiography had such evaluation been carried out so thoroughly and recorded in such detail, with both the conflicting sources and the author's reasons for his final choice among them fully documented. The “Investigation” amounts to the author's own critical commentary on his grand historical narrative (“the tiniest detail was compared and assessed for accuracy”). There could hardly be a clearer indication of a new awareness of how voluminous and conflicted was the textual record of the past than this authorial commentary.

This is not to suggest that Sima Guang works in his “Investigation” as the modern historian, much less the ‘post-modern’ historian, would work. He is much quicker than we would be to reject alternatives he deems unreliable or undesirable, and to affirm the rightness of a single version he prefers. He is seldom able to produce a true synthesis of divergent accounts, and even less apt to give sustained

⁴¹ Wang Debao, “*Zizhi tongjian* yu *Cefu yuangui*,” 65–71.

⁴² I am grateful to Hilde De Weerd for calling my attention to analogous attention to conflicting sources found in writings that accompany maps compiled by court geographers during the Tang period.

consideration to contrary versions of events, or to ask the question how such contradictions could exist and use them to break through to a higher understanding of the deep forces or interests at work that generate historical texts in the first place. Quite to the contrary, that he works his way through the morass of sources with a clear political and ethical agenda is all too evident, and he does not hesitate to alter even the source texts he prefers to make the didactic lessons appear with unmistakable clarity in his ‘mirror.’⁴³ That said, the sense of responsibility Sima Guang had openly to adjudicate the relative merits of divergent source texts, and to articulate his reasons for accepting some and rejecting others was new in Chinese historiography, and has rightly earned for him a special place and stature in the field. The point here is that his innovation in this regard was facilitated by the age in which he lived, when the rapid increase in the quantity of source materials virtually demanded a new historical narrative such as his to try to restore coherence to ‘the past’, and one that would deal openly and explicitly with the enhanced awareness of discrepancies in the quickly multiplying textual record.

III. LI QINGZHAO: TEXTS AND PAGINATION, LOOKING THINGS UP

The next topic I wish to touch on is just a passing reference, a momentary reminiscence really, in Li Qingzhao’s famous epilogue to the notes her late husband, Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129), wrote on the inscriptions he collected, known as *Jinshi lu* 金石錄 (*Records on metal and stone*). Li Qingzhao’s remark is just a brief comment on a guessing game that she and her husband used to play, but her comment has deep implications for the way this singular woman thought about the physical features of books and their contents.

Li Qingzhao’s epilogue, celebrated for the intimate picture it gives of her life together with her husband, provides a detailed and well-known account of how they built up their collection of book and art works. So large did the collection come to be that when they had to flee from the invading Jurchen in 1126, *after* discarding the larger and less precious items, and *apart from* the ten rooms of books they left

⁴³ On Sima Guang’s use and manipulation of his texts, see Tillman, “Textual Liberties.”

behind in their home in Qingzhou 青州, they still traveled south with fifteen cartloads of books.

The most revealing thing Li Qingzhao says about their books is this:

It happens that I have a good memory, and whenever we finished dinner we would sit in our hall named Returning Home and brew tea. We'd point to a pile of books and, choosing a particular event, try to say in which book, which chapter, which page, and which line it was recorded. The winner of our little contest got to drink tea first. When I guessed right I'd hold the cup high and burst out laughing until the tea splattered the front of my gown. I'd have to get up without even taking a sip. Oh, how I wished we could grow old living like that!⁴⁴

Quite apart from the endearing glimpse this provides of Li Qingzhao's domestic life, the passage is interesting for what it suggests about books and reading in her life. We note that the way she has learned the texts she owns is inseparable from the physical format of the books they are contained in. It might have been otherwise, of course. She might have committed the contents of each title to memory as one sustained text, without thought of page and line or even, perhaps, of *juan*. That is presumably the way people memorized texts in the earlier era of scrolls rather than books. But Li Qingzhao thinks of a book's content in terms of its location in a set of numbered pages, and claims even to remember where on each page a certain segment of text or piece of information is recorded. Her thinking is wholly conditioned by the paginated book. Even the game she devised is completely dependent upon the book format. It is a game that could not be played with texts recorded on scrolls, that is, with texts from an earlier age.

But there is something more. Li Qingzhao looked at the pile of books and thought of looking something up in them. She made a game of this, a competition with her husband, to see who knew better *where* to look. But underlying the game there is a presumption that this is one of the uses of books, to store information that can be looked up, whenever one needed to. As we saw earlier, a few decades before, in the 1070s, Su Shi had written disparagingly of the inundation of the marketplace by cheap printed books. The new abundance of books had the untoward effect of undermining people's reverence for them. The old men he remembers talking to in his youth thought nothing, he claims they told him, of writing out a fresh copy of the entire *Shiji*

⁴⁴ Li Qingzhao, *Li Qingzhao ji*, "Jinshi lu houxu," 3.310.

or *Han shu*; they only worried that they could not obtain a text to copy out. But in recent times, Su complains, with tens of thousands of pages of texts being printed by booksellers daily, students and degree candidates take books for granted and leave the printed copies that they can so readily acquire “tied shut and never read them.” Su, who makes these observations in the course of celebrating his friend’s manuscript library, is taking the most negative possible view of the new abundance of printed books. To him it may seem that the lazy young men are not even bothering to read the books they have purchased in the market. But that is partly because they know they do not have to master them and commit them to memory in the old way. Su asserts that the younger generation does not read, but we understand that in reality they do not read the way Su Shi grew up reading (much less the way those a generation older than Su grew up reading). Surely, the younger generation of students and scholars acquire books so that they may turn to them *when they need to look something up*. There is considerably less imperative than in earlier times to digest books in the old way. They are readily acquired, and if they get damaged or lost, they can just as readily be replaced. Books were becoming commodities, mere ‘utensils and things’ (*qiwu* 器物), as Luo Bi 羅璧 (fl. 1176) would say despairingly, and were beginning to be thought of as repositories where things could be looked up whenever the need arose.⁴⁵ Li Qingzhao in her use of books is located somewhere between Su Shi and the young scholars he disparages. She read books through, and did it so thoroughly that she even remembered the chapter and page on which certain passages appeared. But she was also very conscious that books function as repositories of knowledge to which one took recourse in order to recheck, confirm, or refresh one’s memory of a previously read passage.

IV. LITERARY INQUISITIONS

In the long history of literary inquisitions in China, the Song Dynasty probably marks a turning point, when the court became more apprehensive about the threat it perceived in writings by certain individuals and took unprecedented steps to proscribe and destroy such writings.

⁴⁵ Luo Bi, *Luoshi zhiyi*, “Chengshu deshu nan” 成書得書難, 1.3a.

Naturally, the court's heightened sense of paranoia was directly linked to the fact that the dangerous or slanderous writings were now, for the first time, circulating in printed editions that could quickly spread far and wide. No doubt the court was sometimes successful in suppressing written works. But in at least one case what we find is the apparent futility of court efforts at proscription, as popular enthusiasm for one author, supported by booksellers who profited from catering to that enthusiasm, appears to have subverted the imperial decrees of proscription.

As early as 1009, Emperor Zhenzong issued a decree decrying literary writings that were insufficiently steeped in moral values and didactic purposes, and instead indulged in empty ornamentation. What is interesting about this imperial admonition against literary 'shallowness' is the reference it makes to the printing of the offending works. "We have heard that individuals' literary collections are now compiled in large numbers, and the quantity of them that have been engraved and printed is large. If they are permitted to advance heterodox notions, they will lead the younger generation of students into erroneous ways."⁴⁶ The course decided upon to remedy the problem is to have the *zhuanyun shi* 轉運使 (fiscal commissioner) of each circuit assess the separate collections compiled in each area and determine which were fit to be printed. The ones that were acceptable were then to be printed by the fiscal commission itself, and a copy forwarded to the court for its holdings.

Now, we know that the circuit fiscal commissions were major printers of books in the provinces, and so it comes as no surprise that the court wants to entrust them with responsibility to evaluate and eventually to print certain of the locally compiled literary collections. Obviously, the court is attempting to reassert government control over printing projects that had already slipped out of such control, and, interestingly enough, it perceives a need to do this through its regional administrations. The court evidently recognizes that it cannot impose central control upon the apparently rampant printing that is going on in various quarters of the empire.

⁴⁶ QSW, 235 (Zhenzong 24), Zhenzong, "Jieyue shuci fuyan lingyu diaoyin wenji zhuanyun shi xuan wenshi kanxiang zhao" 誠約屬辭浮豔令欲調印文集轉運使選文士看詳詔, 415.

We have it from Shi Jie 石介 (1005–45) that the immediate target of Emperor Zhenzong's decree were the writings of the leaders of the Xikun School (Xikun ti 西昆體), namely, Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020), Qian Weiyan 錢惟演 (962–1034), and Liu Yun 劉筠 (971–1031).⁴⁷ The criticisms of empty ornamentation in the decree match those often leveled at the Xikun writers, even if the decree does not explicitly name the school and appears to be an attempt to exploit dissatisfaction with the Xikun vogue in order to impose government supervision and, ultimately, control over all non-government printing of literary works. If Shi Jie was right, we see in Emperor Zhenzong's decree the surprising lengths the court was willing to go to in order to suppress a manner of expression it deemed unfit and damaging. Admittedly, there was more than literary style at stake in the conflict between the Xikun School and its critics: the very ideological basis and didactic intent of writing is what was really in dispute. Still, it is surprising to see the court take such pronounced steps when there was no outright criticism of court policy involved, either directly or indirectly expressed.

The best known case of proscription of writing from the Song period is that connected with the writings of Su Shi and other Yuanyou 元祐 (1086–94) partisans. This was a movement that could be described as taking place in two acts. In the first, there was criticism of specific court policies involved, and the court moved to stifle and destroy it. It did so by arresting Su Shi for writing prose and poetry that made frequent reference to Wang Anshi's New Policies as misguided and the cause of corruption among officialdom and suffering among the people.⁴⁸ One could say that the court was relatively slow to take action. Su Shi had been sprinkling such policy criticisms into his writings since the New Policies began to take effect, early in the 1070s, and was not arrested for having "slandered the emperor and high officials" until the summer of 1079. He was imprisoned in the Yushi yu 御史獄 (Censorate Prison), held there for some three months, interrogated and required to elucidate the meanings of the politically-charged poems and prose pieces he had sent to friends over the years. Book printing was a key part of this case and the court's decision to prosecute Su Shi. It comes up in the indictment memorial against him by He Dazheng

⁴⁷ Shi Jie, *Culai ji*, "Xiangfu zhaoshu ji" 祥符詔書記, 19.1a–3b; Zhang Gaoping, "Diaoban yinshua," 32.

⁴⁸ On this episode, see Hartman, "Poetry and Politics", and Zhou Baorong, *Songdai chuban shi*, 105–19.

何大正 (fl. 1079), who tied the heinousness of Su Shi's offense directly to how widespread his writings are among the populace now that they exist in printed editions.⁴⁹ The unauthorized printing, for profit, of Su Shi's poems is an issue that was also addressed by Su Shi himself, who declared himself to be exasperated by the practice, especially after the events of 1079. Su told a friend that he would like to destroy the woodblocks used to print his works; as well he might if the pirate printing of his works could get him into such trouble.⁵⁰ We see here that commercial printers were apt to incur enmity from all sides, not from the court alone.

The second act of this literary inquisition occurred over twenty years later. It was part of the larger political repression that began in the early years of Huizong's reign, when the court under Cai Jing's 蔡京 (1046–1126) leadership struck out against the anti-reformers who had dismantled the New Policies during the intervening Yuanyou period. Cai Jing's purges began in 1102 with the publication of lists of Yuanyou faction officials, who were denounced as 'heterodox' (*xie na*).⁵¹ In 1103, stone tablets listing the names of ninety-three offenders were distributed throughout the empire. Dozens of these men were sent into distant exile, barred from official service, and prohibited from coming to the capital. By 1104, the list had grown to 309 men, who were denounced as wicked and treacherous. The purges included the proscription of the literary collections of the most prominent writers of the group, including those of Sima Guang, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), Zhang Lei 張耒 (1052–1112), and Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110). It was not only literary collections that were proscribed. The ban was extended to virtually any work written by a Yuanyou party figure, including Fan Zuyu's 范祖禹 historical work, *Tang jian* 唐鑑 (*Tang dynasty mirror*), Fan Zhen's 范鎮 miscellany, *Dongzhai jishi* 東齋記事 (*Record of events from Eastern Studio*), and even Liu Ban's 劉放 *Shihua* 詩話 (*Remarks on poetry*), and the miscellany by the monk Wenying 文瑩 (fl. 1078), *Xiangshan yelu* 湘山野錄 (*Rustic records from Xiangshan*).⁵² (The decree banning these works, which specified that they were circulating in printed editions,

⁴⁹ He Dazheng, "Jiancha yushi", 1b.

⁵⁰ Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, "Da Chen Chuandao" 答陳傳道, no. 2, 53.1574.

⁵¹ For more information on the purges, see Chaffee, "Huizong, Cai Jing," 43–44.

⁵² Huang Yizhou, *Xu Zizhi tongjian*, 21.741, entry for Chongning 2/4/*yihai*; Zhang Gaoping, "Diaoban yinshua zhi fanrong," 33.

is of additional interest as evidence that such miscellanies and remarks on poetry were already in print early in Huizong's reign.)

As usual, Su Shi was singled out in this campaign (though he had died in 1101) for particularly harsh treatment.⁵³ What we learn from the sources concerning the course and effect of the proscription of his works is somewhat surprising. The draconian climate of the purge era was such that local officials are said to have been scared even to preserve an inscription (on stone or wood) done in Su Shi's calligraphy.⁵⁴ Of course there were many such inscriptions, especially in the various locales where Su Shi had lived and served during his long career. At this point, consequently, a great number of them were destroyed. The governor of Xuzhou is said to have been unable to bring himself to destroy the inscription on Huang lou 黃樓 (Yellow Pavilion) there, a building that Su Shi had constructed while governor thirty years before, for which Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112) had provided the dedicatory inscription, which Su Shi copied out in his calligraphy. So the governor threw the inscribed stone into the moat around the city wall, and at the same time changed the name of the building. Subsequently, toward the end of Huizong's reign, an unscrupulous new governor assigned to Xuzhou had the stone fished out of the moat. He then made "several thousand" rubbings of the inscription. Suddenly, he announced to his subordinates, "The learning of the Sus is still under proscription. What are we doing preserving this inscription?" He had the stone broken into pieces. When people heard that the inscription had been destroyed, the price a rubbing could fetch rose dramatically. Subsequently, this governor took the stack of rubbings back with him to the capital, where he is said to have profited handsomely from his scheme.

Concerning Su's literary works and the way they were affected by the proscription, we find what are seemingly contradictory accounts in the early sources. Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206) reported that booksellers were intimidated by the ban into destroying their copies of Su's work and the woodblocks they used to print them, so that the price a surviving copy of the works could fetch increased.⁵⁵ Yang also quotes an eyewitness who describes how, during the period of

⁵³ See for example the degree that bans Su Shi's works alone, quoted in Huang Yizhou, *Xu Zizhi tongjian*, 21.739, entry for Chongning 2/4/*dingsi*.

⁵⁴ For this and what follows, see Xu Du, *Quesao bian* (2), C.4511–12.

⁵⁵ Yang Wanli, *Chengzhai ji* (1), "Shanxi ji houxu" 杉溪集後序, 84.16a.

the proscription, copies of Su Shi's and Huang Tingjian's works were smuggled into the National University. They were eagerly read on the sly by students through the night, then hidden away at dawn.⁵⁶ But Zhu Bian 朱弁 (d. 1144), who lived through the period of the proscription, tells us something quite different:

Whenever Dongpo finished writing a poem or prose piece, people would immediately circulate and recite it... During the Chongning and Dagan periods (1102–06, 1107–10), the poetry he wrote on the southern ocean [i.e., in Hainan Island] circulated widely. The younger generation no longer spoke about Ouyang Xiu. At the time, although his writings had been proscribed by the court, and rewards given to informers reached 800,000 cash, the stricter the ban became the more numerous were copies of his works in circulation, and individuals boasted of the quantity they managed to collect. If a gentleman could not recite Dongpo's poetry, he felt himself lackluster and sapped of vitality, and other people considered him boorish.⁵⁷

How can these divergent reports be reconciled? There may have been a significant difference in the ways the prohibition was enforced in the capital and the provinces. There probably also was variation every few years, during the twenty-four year duration of the ban (1102–1126), in the stringency of the enforcement of the prohibition. A decree of 1123 points out that printed copies of the writings of Su Shi and Sima Guang from Fujian had recently been forwarded to the Secretariat. The decree directed that all such imprints whether in the capital region, Sichuan, or Fujian, were to be strictly prohibited and specifies punishments for the owners, printers, and sellers of the banned works.⁵⁸ So it is obvious that a considerable amount of printing was being done late in the period of the ban, in flagrant disregard of the court's numerous decrees.

The long-term effect of proscribing Su Shi's works, as well as those by others associated with him, was unquestionably to enhance their stature. Soon after the ban was lifted, there was a tremendous resurgence of outspoken adulation of the late poet, who had become something of a national hero, especially in the wake of the invasions of 1126–31, the loss of the north, and consequent wholesale discrediting of Cai Jing and his politics. Early in the 1130s, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–62) himself, as he restored Su Shi's title posthumously, declared (in inflated rhetoric, to be sure), "Every person transmits the

⁵⁶ Yang Wanli, *Chengzhai ji* (1), 84.15a.

⁵⁷ Zhu Bian, *Quwei jiuwen*, 8.3016.

⁵⁸ SHY (2), "Xingfa" 2/88, entry for Xuanhe 5/7/13 (1123).

learning of the Yuanyou ministers, and every household has a copy of Meishan's (Su Shi's) writings."⁵⁹

Yet what is of particular interest is that even during the period of the proscription, the court's ban seems to have been particularly ineffective not only in suppressing interest in Su Shi's works (as we can readily understand) but also in having any real and lasting effect upon their circulation. In what may have been the first showdown in Chinese history in the era of book printing between the imperial will to eradicate one writer's work and a writer who enjoyed empire-wide repute and admiration, the court clearly was the loser. It would be interesting to compare this case of attempted proscription with later instances during the Ming and Qing periods, for what they tell us about the relative effectiveness of imperial interdiction and commercial printing. One suspects that in Su Shi's case the court did not yet fully understand the power of book printing or its lack of control over the same. Also, the special difficulty of decreeing from above the elimination of writings that commanded the respect accorded to Su Shi's must be taken into account. We read of a man who was found to be carrying a copy of Su Shi's writings as he passed through the gate of the capital's city wall in the later years of Huizong's reign. He was arrested for having the banned book in his possession and turned over to the officials for prosecution. It was noticed that he had added a poem of his own on the back page of the book, a poem that extolled the late poet, alluded to the travesty of having his works fall under proscription, and predicted that the gods themselves would safeguard them if mankind was prohibited from doing so. "The governor of the capital," we are told, "concluded that he was an upright man" and secretly released him.⁶⁰

If this is the way those charged with the enforcement of the proscription behaved, there was no possibility it could ever succeed.

V. LU YOU: THE CHALLENGE OF TRULY UNDERSTANDING A SINGLE *JUAN*

Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) was a member of a prominent family of book collectors. His grandfather, Lu Dian 陸佃 (js 1070), already had a sizable collection, as did his father, Lu Zai 陸宰. Since the ancestral

⁵⁹ Li Xinchuan, *Jianyan yilai*, "Jiaji", "Su Wenzhong zengguan" 蘇文忠贈官, 8.163.

⁶⁰ Fei Gun, *Liangxi manzhi* (2), 7.3412.

home was in Shaoxing 紹興 (modern Zhejiang Province), probably the family collection of books survived relatively intact through the turmoil of the Jurchen invasion, unlike so many other collections in the north. Still, Lu You redoubled his efforts to add further to the collection. It is said that when he returned from his years of service in Sichuan, the only local product he brought back with him were Sichuanese books (presumably, titles and editions that were unavailable at home), and that these added substantially to the size of his collection.⁶¹

Lu You called his studio *Shu chao* 書巢 (Nest of Books) and wrote a humorous essay explaining the odd name. The essay opens with a visitor who questions the appropriateness of the name. The visitor reviews numerous ways the word ‘nest’ has been used in earlier writings, both to designate various types of bird’s nest and, figuratively, to designate various human dwellings that resemble a bird’s in one sense or another (e.g., tree houses used in times of flood, Daoists’ cliff dwellings, etc.) and finds that none of them seems to resemble Lu You’s usage. How, he demands, can Lu You possibly justify the name? This is Lu You’s answer:

Your words are well-reasoned, but you haven’t ever been inside my studio. Inside it, whether they are stored in cabinets or spread out on my desk or lying strewn all over my bed, in all directions wherever I look, there are nothing but books. As I eat and drink, sit or stand, no matter if I am moaning sadly or intoning poems, consumed by grief or overwhelmed with anger, I am always together with my books. Guests do not come calling, and I pay no attention to my wife and children. Wind, rain, thunder, and hail come and go and I am unaware of them. From time to time if I feel like going out, I find that the haphazard piles of books surround me, like bundles of dried twigs, so that sometimes I am actually trapped and unable to move. Whenever this happens I laugh at myself and say, ‘Isn’t this precisely what I mean by ‘nest’? With this, [Lu] led the visitor in to take a look. At first he was unable to find a way inside, and once he got inside he was unable to find a way out. Then he too gave a great laugh and said, “It really is like a nest!”⁶²

What makes this more than merely amusing is the assertion that we find elsewhere in Lu You’s writing that books are mutually illuminating and that, in fact, to understand a single book or even a single *juan*

⁶¹ *Kuaiji zhi* (1), 16.30a; quoted in Fan Fengshu, *Zhongguo sijia cangshu*, 101.

⁶² Lu You, *Weinan wenji*, “*Shu chao ji*” 書巢記, 18.2142–43.

of one you need to have access to a whole collection of books. This idea throws a new light on his account of his Nest of Books. It is not simply that he owns many books, or that he takes them out and never gets around to putting them tidily away. Rather, being surrounded or engulfed in books is a consequence of the way he reads. Here is the relevant passage, from an inscription he wrote for a friend's library, named Wanjuan lou 萬卷樓 (Hall of Ten Thousand Juan):

Learning must be based on books. A single *juan* of a book may at first seem extremely limited. But earlier and later sections shed light on each other, and a passage here yields an insight into a statement there. The essential and trivial points and the refined and ordinary observations are all mutually illuminating. In the end, the subjects and issues broached in a single *juan* will be found to be more than can be enumerated. A single composition or even a single page may have lacunae or words that are out of order. If you do not verify the text by consulting other books, you will accept the mistakes as correct and never realize it. The same character may have different glosses, or the same phrase different meanings. Written forms vary from seal script to ancient script, and pronunciations vary from those of Chu to those of the north. If you do not broadly consult a range of other books, then how could you ever readily master even a single *juan* of text? This is why those whose minds are set on learning value breadth. Books have been passed down from pre-Qin times and the two Han dynasties down through Tang and the Five Dynasties period. But because of the great turmoil that ensued (the fall of Northern Song), the number of books that survived were few. Students, seeing this relative paucity of works, in their careless way use it to indulge their laziness and indifference, saying "I fear that breadth will inundate my mind." Is this not debased? Those who truly excel at learning know that it is enough to master a single classic, and those who collect books are not satisfied even when they possess ten thousand *juan*.⁶³

It is appropriate to mention here that Lu You was also a printer of books, although not in any commercial or professional sense. It is simply that he arranged to have certain titles printed, works that evidently caught his attention or fancy, from time to time throughout his life. He seems mostly to have used personal funds to do this, although he may also have used his authority as prefectural official to divert some government funds to the printing projects he took up. Lu You did not print his own writings, although he did authorize the printing of a collection of his verse by a subordinate official in Yanzhou 嚴州 (modern

⁶³ Lu You, *Weinan wenji*, "Wanjuan lou ji" 萬卷樓記, 21.2179.

Jiande, Zhejiang) in 1187, when he was sixty-three.⁶⁴ Apart from this, the works we know that Lu You arranged to have printed were an interesting and somewhat idiosyncratic collection of types and titles. They include: *Cen Shen shiji* 岑參詩集 (*The poetry collection of Cen Shen* [715–70]),⁶⁵ *Jiang jianyi zouyi* 江諫議奏議 (*The policy memorials of remonstrator Jiang* [Jiang Gongwang 江公望 (js 1073)]),⁶⁶ *Liu Binke ji* 劉賓客集 (*The literary collection of Liu Binke* [Liu Yuxi (772–842)]),⁶⁷ *Huangfu Chizheng wenji* 皇甫持正文集 (*The literary collection of Huangfu Chizheng* [Huangfu Shi 皇甫湜 (ca. 777–ca. 830)]),⁶⁸ *Lushi xuji yanfang* 陸氏續集驗方 (*A continuation of the Lu clan's medical prescriptions*),⁶⁹ and *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*A new account of tales of the world*).⁷⁰ These are just the titles we happen to know about, through Lu You's colophons or chance references that survive. It is likely there were others that now escape our notice.

It is interesting to compare Lu You's activity as a printer of books with the poetic printing project undertaken by Song Minqiu and Wang Anshi, mentioned earlier. Song Minqiu went through his unusually complete holdings of Tang poetry collections and compiled an anthology designed to acquaint the reading public better with the subject. He evidently saw his anthology as a supplement to the printed editions of the small number of first-rank Tang poets that were already in wide circulation. Wang Anshi asserted in his preface that the anthology contained all that anyone needed to read of Tang poetry (beyond the works of the leading poets). Lu You's actions as a printer were considerably more inclusive and ambitious. He brought entire collections of, mostly, second-rank authors into print. We know that by Lu You's time, there were literally hundreds of collections of individual Tang poets circulating in print.⁷¹ Lu You did what he could to add to that

⁶⁴ Zhu Shangshu, *Songren bieji xulu*, vol. 2, 960–61.

⁶⁵ See Lu You's colophon, *Weinan wenji*, "Ba Cen Jiazhou shiji" 跋岑嘉州詩集, 26.2229.

⁶⁶ Jiang Gongwang was a policy critic under Emperor Huizong who ran afoul of the grand councilor Cai Jing. On this work, see Lu You, *Weinan wenji*, "Ba Diaotai Jiangong zouyi" 跋釣臺江公奏議, 27.2240.

⁶⁷ Listed by Zhang Xiumin, *Zhongguo yinshua*, 120.

⁶⁸ Listed by Zhang Xiumin, *Zhongguo yinshua*, 120.

⁶⁹ Lu You, *Weinan wenji*, "Ba xuji yanfang" 跋續集驗方, 27.2235.

⁷⁰ Mentioned by Fan Fengshu, *Zhongguo sijia cangshu*, 101.

⁷¹ Yang Wanli says that in bookstores in the capital and in gentlemen's private libraries he had seen, altogether, over two hundred individual collections of Tang poetry; see Yang Wanli, *Chengzhai ji* (1), "Huang yushi ji xu" 黃御史集序, 80.1a.

number, or, as in the case of Liu Yuxi, he evidently tried to enhance the quality of what editions were already available. Song Minqiu and Lu You were, in this respect, representative of changing circumstances in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. What Song Minqiu did was, for his time, quite a singular thing to do, and it is not surprising that Wang Anshi felt the work exhausted the field and its print possibilities. By Lu You's time, eminent and less-than-eminent literati were putting all manner of works into print, dipping far more deeply into the pool of available manuscripts and turning them into printed editions. Lu You himself tells us that "in recent times gentlemen and officials are fond of carving printing blocks wherever they go."⁷² If anything, he thought that too much of this is being done, and he complains about the fact that most books are printed before the texts are properly edited and collated, so that in fact low-quality works flooded the empire.

With Lu You we reach yet another new stage in the history of attitudes towards printed books and learning itself. Lu You may have objected to low-quality imprints, and as a connoisseur of books he may have valued a fine manuscript over any printed edition. But he accepted book printing as an inevitable fact of the world he lived in, and he even printed certain favorite titles himself, to ensure their wide circulation and survival. More importantly, he generally welcomed the great explosion in the availability of books. He luxuriated in the books he owned, surrounding himself with them in his study to the point he could hardly move. As a reader he pored over not just the page before him but ancillary works as well, using the abundance of his collection to enhance his understanding of any given passage. The surfeit of books available to him made him think of books not as individual titles but as a collective entity consisting of innumerable interconnections. He viewed this not as a daunting circumstance, but as an exciting and challenging one in which he could fully absorb himself.

Already in the generation before Yang Wanli, Xu Du said that there were easily "several hundred" such collections in circulation; Xu Du, *Quesao bian* (2), B.4500. Even if Xu Du is exaggerating (we note that Chen Zhensun's library catalog includes only a total of 203 Tang collections, counting both literary collections (*wenji* 文集) [70] and poetry collections (*shiji* 詩集) [133]), clearly the situation in the mid and late twelfth century is vastly different from one hundred years before, when Wang Anshi compiled his anthology.

⁷² Lu You, *Weinan wenji*, "Ba lidai lingming" 跋歷代陵名, 26.2232.