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‘Traces in Red’: Chinese Book Collectors’ Seals as a Means to Track the Transmission History of a Manuscript

1 Introduction

This paper focuses on one type of paratext: ownership marks. Ownership marks are commonly found in many manuscript cultures. They usually furnish valuable information on a manuscript’s provenance and transmission and thus offer an important means to locate manuscripts in time and space. Ownership marks usually do not stem from the original production of the manuscript but are later additions, often done consecutively at different times by various holders of the manuscript, and therefore, drawing on Gérard Genette’s terminology, could be referred to as “belated paratexts”.¹

Of course inscribing one’s name, as the most common way of marking ownership, is not restricted to manuscripts alone but is also found in printed books, a practice continued until today. In Western Europe such inscriptions are attested at least since the twelfth century. Besides a simple signature various forms such as monograms, initials, ciphers, or mottoes, but also printed book labels and book stamps may be found. Most widely known and studied are probably bookplates or *ex libris*, which came up only around 1470 and are almost exclusively found in printed books.² Also in the Islamic world various ownership statements may be found on manuscripts, often complemented with a seal impression.³ In China there is a long tradition of using seals to mark books (manuscript and print)

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1 Genette 1991: 264.

2 Pearson 1994: 12–96. On ownership marks or statements in Greek manuscripts, sometimes referred to as bookplates or *ex libris*, see the contribution by Vito Lorusso in this volume.

3 Gacek 1987; Liebrecht 2011.

and other collectibles dating back at least to the sixth century CE.⁴ In Chinese art history this is a well-known and often considered feature found on paintings and pieces of calligraphy,⁵ which may also be applied to the study of manuscripts in general. Chinese book collectors' seals (*cangshuyin* 藏書印) are often compared to bookplates or *ex libris* in the European tradition. And some Western scholars use the term *ex libris* seals.⁶ Indeed the two share common features. Both are not mere marks of ownership, but have developed into a form of art in its own right, which could be used by collectors to express their personality.⁷ From a paratextual perspective they are not just purely “textual” but at the same time “iconic”.⁸ In bookplates the illustration is no doubt the central element whereas the text is only secondary. Although there are examples of Chinese book collectors' seals with legends that use pictorial designs, either in combination with Chinese characters or without, they for the most part consist of Chinese characters only. However, because of the specific character of the most frequently used script, the so-called seal script (*zhuan shu* 篆書), and its close connection to calligraphy, these seals are equally not mere texts. The seal script is not easy to decipher as it emulates ancient forms. Furthermore, design and execution of seals legends are done on the basis of aesthetical considerations. Despite these similarities there are some important differences. Bookplates are a product of the age of printing in Europe, whereas Chinese book collectors' seals are not exclusively confined to the printed book.⁹ What further makes them quite unique is the common practice of collectors to add their seal imprint to those of previous owners,¹⁰ which sometimes results in large numbers of imprints in one single book. In extreme cases one may find more than 100 such imprints, although they are not necessarily all

4 For a general introduction into the history, use and function of Chinese book collectors' seals see Fölster 2015.

5 There are special reference works for seals found on paintings as these are an important means of authentication: Contag / Wang 1966; Zhuang Yan et al. 1964.

6 Van Gulik 1958: 425; Edgren 1997: 59; Edgren 2006: 197.

7 There are a number of studies comparing the two: Huang Zhiguang 2011; Liu Zhong et al. 2001; Wang Dongming 1987; Qian Jun 1998: 78–101. *Ex libris* (*cangshupiao* 藏書票) only came into use in China in the early twentieth century (Li Yunjing 2000).

8 For the differentiation between “textual” and “iconic” paratexts, see Genette 1991: 265.

9 Regarding the origin of bookplates it has been argued that since “printed books had lost their unique character, it was now necessary to provide a designation of individual possession to protect them from theft or even only confusion” (Wolf 1993: 14). Chinese seals, however, have been identified as technical precursors of the printing technology (Tsien 1985: 136–139).

10 This use is not only restricted to China. It can be said that book collectors' seals are characteristic of East Asian books in general (Kornicki 1998: 398).

from different collectors as it is not uncommon for collectors to have and use multiple seals. This allows us to trace the book's transmission history and to pursue its journey through time and space by identifying the seal imprints on it.

Hereafter, I will present the example of one late imperial manuscript and trace the history of its transmission by scrutinising the seal imprints found on it. Before turning to the individual seal imprints, it will be necessary to introduce this particular manuscript, describe it and discuss its date of production.

2 Description of the manuscript

The manuscript under examination is held by the National Central Library (*Guoli zhongyang tushuguan* 國立中央圖書館, since 1996 *Guojia tushuguan* 國家圖書館), in Taipei 臺北, Taiwan (shelfmark: 204.26 02205). Neither executed in a lavish calligraphic style, nor bearing a work penned by an especially esteemed author, it is an example of an average manuscript from the eighteenth/nineteenth century. There are numerous places throughout the manuscript where the copyist inserted characters in a smaller script between the lines. These are presumably later additions executed by the copyist as he obviously had forgotten to insert them.¹¹ It is not an example with a great number of seal imprints. There are just five imprints, which are situated, rather typically, above and below the title in the first line of the first folio and arranged in chronological order from bottom to top (Fig. 1). The seal imprint at the top is that of the current owner, the National Central Library in Taipei.¹²

11 Taipei, National Central Library 204.26 02205: 1B, 2A, 3A/B, 4B, 5A, 9B, 10A, 11B, 12B. There are also cases of obvious corrections, where a character is crossed out and the correction is placed next to it. National Central Library 204.26 02205: 7A, 8B, 11B. The here given page numbers are my own, since the manuscript itself has no pagination. I am indebted to Jörg Huesemann who provided me with a photocopy of the entire manuscript. Fölster 2013b offers a brief presentation of the manuscript and the history of its transmission.

12 All five seal imprints are described and transcribed in the rare books catalogue of the National Central Library: *Guojia tushuguan* 1997: 245.

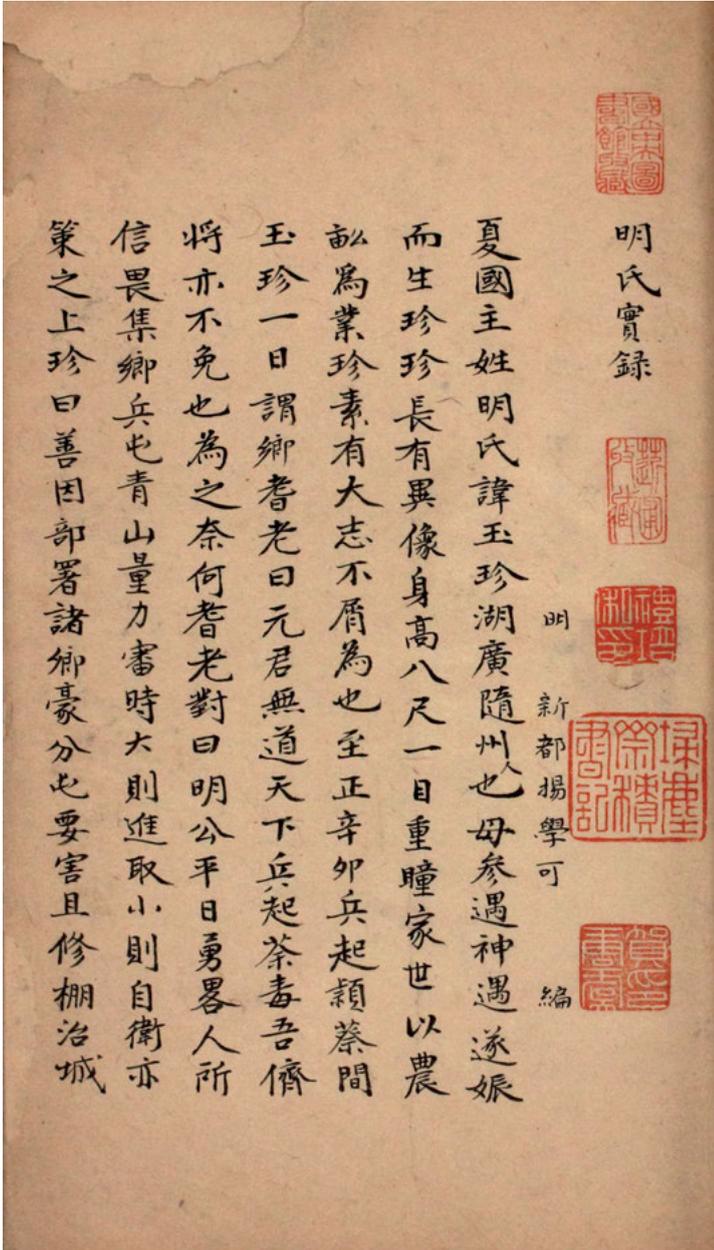


Fig. 1: *Annals of the Ming Family* (Taipei, National Central Library: 204.26 02205), folio 1 recto. © National Central Library 國家圖書館.

The manuscript is written in black ink on paper (size: 28.7 x 17.8 cm) and has a total of seven bifolios with an average of nine lines per folio. It contains a historiographical work on the short-lived Great Xia 大夏 dynasty, which ruled over Sichuan 四川 in the southwest of China from 1362 to 1371. The title *Annals of the Ming Family* (*Mingshi shilu* 明氏實錄) was chosen, because the ruling house’s family name was Ming. The Great Xia are one of the many local regimes that came to power in the wake of the downfall of the Mongolian empire (Yuan 元 dynasty) in the middle of the fourteenth century. Short-lived and locally confined rules like the Great Xia were deemed illegitimate by traditional Chinese historiography and thus, other than legitimate dynasties, did not receive an officially sponsored history, usually compiled under the succeeding dynasty. Nonetheless, it was not uncommon for scholars to privately write unofficial histories of these kinds of rules. The compiler of the *Annals of the Ming Family*, Yang Xueke 楊學可, a native of Xindu 新都 (Sichuan), was eyewitness to the events surrounding the rise and fall of the Great Xia. He obviously had access to their archives, because he regularly quotes edicts and the like. Since the text does not carry a date, we can only assume that it was compiled sometime after the end of the Great Xia in 1371 and before the author’s death, probably sometime around the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹³

As the text it contains, this particular manuscript is also undated. For the dating of the manuscript’s production the seal imprints do not offer any meaningful help. For this another paratext, the author’s name, does yield some information, but above all certain features of the main text offer important evidence to narrow down the production date.

The author’s name, Yang Xueke, is given in the second line directly following the title. The name is complemented by both spatial and temporal information. Besides an indication of his hometown Xindu, the author is further identified as a person living during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644) by the character *Ming* 明 at the top. This would not be the case if the manuscript were produced during Ming times. And indeed, another textual witness to the *Annals of the Ming Family*, a manuscript that can be dated to Ming-times, has no such character before the

13 For a detailed study on the Great Xia and questions concerning the *Annals of the Ming Family* as the main source see Fölster 2013a.

author's name.¹⁴ Furthermore, there are six cases of blank spaces, where characters were deliberately omitted (Fig. 2).¹⁵ From the comparison with the just mentioned Ming-time manuscript it can be seen that the omitted characters are pejorative expressions for non-Chinese people, which in the text refer to the Mongolians – *hulu* 胡虜 “northern barbarians” or just one of these two characters. The rulers of the Qing 清 (1644–1911), the dynasty following the Ming dynasty, were Manchu and were, like the Mongolians, of non-Chinese origin. The Manchu rulers feared the subversive potential of such terms as this could undermine their political legitimacy to rule China. Entire works were banned, for the most part these were writings directly treating the Manchu conquest of China and thus the conflict between these and the Han-Chinese. If not directly aiming against the Manchu but insulting “previous dynasties which were, in a sense, ancestral to the Qing”¹⁶ like the Mongolian Yuan, altering certain characters would suffice.¹⁷ This is exactly what can be observed in the two printed versions of the *Annals of the Ming Family*. In these the characters in question are not left out, but instead replaced by more neutral ones, such as *Yuan ren* 元人 “people of the Yuan”.¹⁸ This kind of censorship is said to have been most severe during the first 150 years of the Qing rule under the Kangxi 康熙 (reigned 1662–1722), Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1722–1735) and Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796) emperors.¹⁹ However, it has been pointed out that “the Kangxi emperor [...] was very tolerant of accounts in unofficial histories (*yeshi* 野史), local histories and other historical sources”, because he wanted these to be used for the compilation of the official history of the Ming

¹⁴ This manuscript is held at the National Library of China (*Guojia tushuguan* 國家圖書館) in Beijing, shelfmark: 002300262. A facsimile is found in: *Zhonghua lishi renwu biezhuanj* 2003: 577–583. Besides the missing indication of the author as a person living during Ming times the fact that, wherever the Ming dynasty's name is mentioned (“Great Ming” *Da Ming* 大明), this is written at the top of line, is clear evidence for its production during this dynasty. This practice is called “shift head” (*taitou* 抬頭) and can also be observed with the character “Heaven” (*tian* 天) in this manuscript. On this practice, see Lei Rongguang 2006. See also the contribution of Hang Lin in this volume.

¹⁵ National Central Library: 204.26 02205, 1B, 3B, 4A/B, 6A.

¹⁶ Goodman 1966: 45.

¹⁷ Chen Zhenghong / Tan Beifang 2004: 228–229.

¹⁸ The two prints are: (1) *Mingshi shilu, ju yingshi qianqibaishijiu quezhai congshuben paiyin* 據仰視千七百二十九鶴齋叢書本排印, Xu Song 徐松 (*jiabu* 校補), in: *Congshu jicheng xinbian* 103: 81–87 (First printed in 1875?). (2) *Mingshi shilu*, in: *Xuehai leibian* 1977 (first printed in 1831): 1269–1276. This rules out the possibility that the manuscript was copied from these prints.

¹⁹ Chen Zhenghong / Tan Beifang 2004: 194–195. For studies on the censorship in this period see: Goodman 1966; Okamoto 1998.

(*Mingshi* 明史).²⁰ For the reigns of Yongzheng and Qianlong there is evidence for the practice of omitting characters instead of altering them.²¹ Especially under Qianlong avoiding characters like *hu* 胡, *lu* 虜, *di* 狄, etc. (all meaning barbarians) seems to have been very common. This can be seen from the imperially sponsored editions of the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), the largest of all collections in the history of imperial China, for which starting in 1773 books from all over the country were sent to the capital.²² This would suggest that the manuscript was produced in the eighteenth century, probably after 1722. Therefore, it cannot be an autograph.

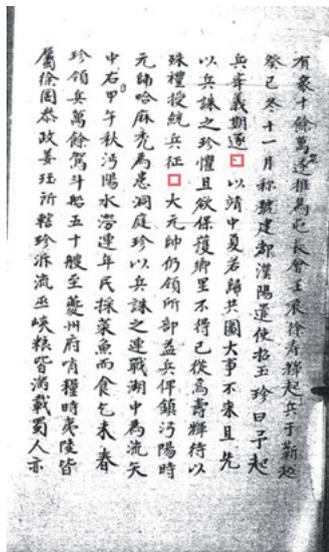


Fig. 2: The two red boxes mark blank spaces deliberately omitting characters in *Annals of the Ming Family* (Taipei, National Central Library: 204.26 02205), folio 1 verso, Photocopy. Courtesy of the National Central Library.

The date may be further narrowed down by looking at the use of taboo characters (*bihuizi* 避諱字).²³ The frequent observance of name taboos offer an important

²⁰ Okamoto 1998: 50.

²¹ Chen Yuan 1996: 24–25.

²² Wang Jian 2002: 255. On the history of the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*, see Guy 1987.

²³ For taboo characters see also Hang Lin’s contribution in this volume.

hint in the dating of manuscripts from late imperial China. In this manuscript one can observe that the character *ning* 寧 is invariably written in the abbreviated form *ning* 寧, omitting the element *xin* 心.²⁴ The character is part of the Daoguang 道光 emperor's (r. 1821–1850) personal name, Minning 旻寧, during whose reign it was ordered to use the abbreviated *ning* 寧 instead, in compliance with the name taboo practice on emperors' personal names. This would suggest that the manuscript was produced during the reign of Daoguang and not later than 1854, when the taboo was changed to yet another variant of the character, *ning* 甯.²⁵ However, there are actually many abbreviated or simplified characters found throughout this manuscript. The use of the character *ning* 寧 might therefore just reflect the copyist hand and not be due to the observation of the name taboo.²⁶ Excluding this possible restriction, one may suggest that the manuscript was produced before 1854. Putting all the information together, the manuscript was most likely produced between 1722 and 1854.

3 Seal imprints

Seal imprints might not offer meaningful help in dating this manuscript, due to the fact that they are later additions to it, but they do yield much information about the history of its transmission. However, in general they do not contain explicit temporal and spatial information. Although seal imprints bear a whole range of contents, they for the most part give names of owners. Examples with place names (e.g. the hometown of an owner) and dates (e.g. an owner's birthdate or the date of acquisition of a book) exist but are not the rule. So the seal imprints itself are just the starting point and it is only by further inquiry about the owners and their collections that we will be able to retrieve more detailed temporal and spatial information.

²⁴ Taipei, National Central Library: 204.26 02205, 6B, 9A, 11A. In one case (4A) the character *ping* 平 is used, where all other textual witnesses use *ning* 寧. Another striking deviation in this manuscript is the use of *xi* 禧 instead of *xi* 熙 (11A/B, 12A), but this cannot be explained as a name taboo.

²⁵ Li Guoqiang 2007: 103. On the use of taboo characters for authenticating manuscripts see Chen Xianxing / Shi Fei 2009: 71–72.

²⁶ In the other manuscript version of this text one also invariably finds the abbreviated form *ning* 寧 (*Zhonghua lishi renwu biezhuanj* 2003: 578, 579, 581, 582), this clearly cannot be due to this very name taboo as it was produced in Ming-times.

3.1 He Tangyu

The lowest and therefore oldest of the five seal imprints is a square formed intaglio-seal (*baiwen* 白文) with the reverse style legend “He Tangyu’s seal (賀唐虞印)”. Unfortunately this He Tangyu has not left many traces in historical records. There are two poems accredited to a person of this name in the local gazetteer of Wuyi 武義 county (Zhejiang 浙江) and three paintings attributed to an artist of the same name that have been auctioned in recent years in Shanghai 上海 and Ningbo 寧波.²⁷ Poems and paintings are either dated to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) or the Republic of China (1912–1949). This sparse information suggests that he was a native of Wuyi and lived sometime during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Nothing can be said about how the manuscript came into his possession. It also cannot be completely ruled out that he himself copied it, but the evidence on the production date presented above rather speaks against this.

3.2 Wang Lipei

The next two imprints above both belong to Wang Lipei 王禮培 (1864–1943), about whom there is much more information. The upper imprint is of a square intaglio-seal with the legend “Lipei’s private seal (禮培私印)”, while the lower one is of a relief-seal (*zhuwen* 朱文) with Wang’s studio name “Book collecting seal of the Dust Sweeping Studio (掃塵齋積書記)”. The studio name expresses the joys and pains of collating books which already in the eleventh century has been compared to sweeping dust – eliminating errors is like sweeping dust, as soon as it is swept away new dust settles down.²⁸ The use of two seal imprints, relief and intaglio, reflects a common convention as it has been observed for collectors’ seals used on paintings and calligraphies, which surely stems from aesthetic considerations.²⁹

Wang Lipei was a native of Xiangxiang 湘鄉 (Hunan 湖南). Born into a well-respected local family he attended school in Changsha 長沙 (Hunan) and took on

²⁷ Zhu Heshen 1990: 822, 824–825. For the auctions, see <http://pmzp.findart.com.cn/author/_lknimmmgndnn_1.html> (last checked 23/09/2015).

²⁸ Zhao Wenyou 2010.

²⁹ Van Gulik 1958: 437. However, there is a little, yet important difference. According to van Gulik the upper seal imprint should be an intaglio-seal giving the style name and the lower one a relief-seal with family and personal name. In this case the upper imprint bears just the personal name.

the traditional path of education by sitting the civil service examinations. He passed the provincial examination in 1893, but failed the imperial examination at the capital. While he was staying in Beijing Wang supported the call for reforms initiated by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) in 1898. After the abolition of the traditional examination system in 1905 and the subsequent introduction of modern schools Wang became educational inspector (*Xuejian* 學監) for middle schools in his home town. As a combined result of his involvement in one of China's first student protests against the misuse of educational funds and his membership in a revolutionary organisation, the China Revival Society (*Huaxinghui* 華興會), whose explicit aim was to overthrow the Qing dynasty, he had to escape to Japan in 1906. After having learnt Japanese, he studied politics and law at the Imperial University (*Teikoku daigaku* 帝國大學) in Tokyo 東京. There he also made the acquaintance of Sun Yat-sen and joined the Chinese United League (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會), an underground resistance movement founded by Sun in 1905 in Tokyo. After the Chinese revolution in 1911, in which the imperial order was overthrown, Wang, like many Chinese students in Japan, returned to China. Back in his home province he took up an official post, but resigned after less than a year, because he was frustrated with the chaotic situation of the time. Together with some friends he decided not to pursue an official career anymore. In the following years he spent his time collecting and editing old books as well as writing poetry. Only in 1931 he took up a position as professor for literature at Henan University (*Henan daxue* 河南大學), but already resigned the following year to return to Changsha. Back in Hunan he was appointed vice-director and soon after director of a private academy (*Chuanshan xueshe* 船山學社) devoted to the study of the ideas of Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), whose writings had been rediscovered in the late nineteenth century and were deemed to offer remedies in the confrontation with “Western” ideas. He remained in this post until resigning in 1938, after the academy had to move elsewhere due to an air-raid by the Japanese air force. Some time later, he returned to his native town Xiangxiang, where he stayed until his death in 1943.³⁰

Wang was a very passionate book collector, who also annotated, collated and copied books, and even personally travelled to Beijing 北京, Shanghai and other places to buy books. He is considered one of the most important collectors from Hunan of the early twentieth century, the size of his collection only being second

³⁰ Yi Xinxia 2010 offers the most detailed biography of Wang Lipei. See also Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1318–1321. There are also short entries in *Minguo renwu da cidian* 1991: 108 and Wang He 1991: 25. On Wang Lipei as a poet, see Yi Xinxia 1988. On the rediscovery of Wang Fuzhi and the academy devoted to his ideas see Platt 2007.

to Ye Dehui’s 葉德輝 (1864–1927), author of the influential manual for book collectors *Decalogue of Book Collecting* (*Cangshu shiyue* 藏書十約), who was also from Hunan.³¹ Since Wang could not afford extremely rare and sought-for editions from the Song (960–1279) and the Yuan (1279–1368) epochs, he resorted to collecting fragments of those – single folios which he rescued from paper-making manufactures. However, the largest part of his collection consisted of more “ordinary” manuscripts from the more recent Ming and Qing periods. The catalogue of his collection, *Catalogue of Books Hidden in a Double-Wall* (*Fubi cangshu mulu* 復壁藏書目錄),³² lists a total of 325 works. The catalogue, unlike those of many other collectors, was never printed, but at least three different manuscript versions of it survive nowadays – two in Changsha and a third in Beijing.³³ All have an entry on the *Annals of the Ming Family* manuscript. The entries are basically the same and do not yield much information. Other entries frequently mention seal imprints but this only records title, extent and author’s name: “*Annals of the Ming Family*, no division in chapters, one booklet, Ming [dynasty], Yang Xueke (明氏實錄不分卷 一冊 明楊學可).” From a statement in the colophon found at the end of the catalogue (Fig. 3) it can be deduced when the catalogue was compiled:

此就舊目草草編成，鄉城避兵搬徙，恐尚有出入刻本。各書大半在鄉喪失，尤多去年廖軍據舊宅。³⁴

This was hastily compiled based on an old catalogue, when I had to flee from soldiers leaving my home town. I am afraid there are still some inconsistent entries of block-print editions. More than half of the books were lost in my home-town, particularly many last year when Liao’s troops occupied my old house.

³¹ Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1319. Fang 1950 offers a complete translation of the *Decalogue of Book Collecting*.

³² The title very likely alludes to the famous retrieval of old books from a wall of Confucius’ estate in the second century BCE (*Hanshu* 30:1706–1707; 36:1969).

³³ Hunan Provincial Library (*Hunan sheng tushuguan* 湖南省圖書館) in Changsha: 298.3/96. National Library of China in Beijing: 450\9096\pgl. The further version held by the Hunan Provincial Library has a slightly different title, *Fubi shulu* 復壁書錄 (294.3/35). Here the entry on the *Annals of the Ming Family* mistakenly names a certain Xiao Xun 蕭洵 as author. I am indebted to my colleague Wang Bin 汪斌 who was so kind to consult the two manuscripts in Hunan for me.

³⁴ Hunan Provincial Library: 298.3/96; National Library of China: 450\9096\pgl. The text of the whole colophon is identical in both manuscripts.

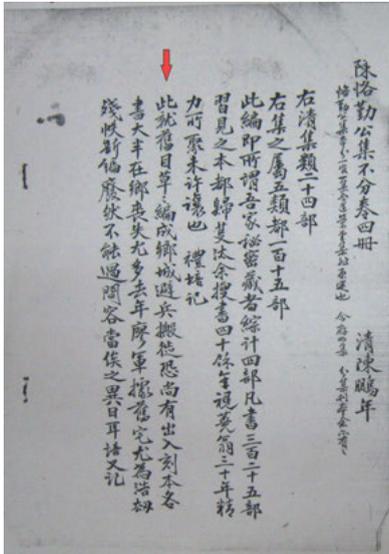


Fig. 3: Colophon in Wang Lippei's *Catalogue of Books Hidden in a Double-Wall*. Changsha, Hunan Provincial Library: 298.3/96.

“Liao’s troops” plausibly refers to Liao Lei 廖磊 (1891–1939), who is undoubtedly mentioned because he was in a leading position, but no specific rank is mentioned. From 1917 on Xiangxiang was repeatedly occupied by different armies in the ongoing conflict between north and south over the control of the central government. Xiangxiang’s local chronicle on military affairs gives a detailed list of the troops coming and going. Together with the information about Liao Lei’s military career it may be concluded that Wang’s colophon probably refers to July 1926, when during the so-called Northern Expedition (*beifa* 北伐), led by Chiang Kai-shek with the objective of gaining control of the entire country, Xiangxiang was conquered by the 8th army of the National Revolutionary Army (*Guomin geming jun di ba jun* 國民革命軍第八軍), in which at the time Liao Lei was serving in quite a high position as major general and deputy division commander in the 4th division (*di si shi shaojiang fushizhang* 第四師少將副師長).³⁵ This would mean that the catalogue was compiled in 1927, one year after the occupation by “Liao’s troops”.

35 For Liao Lei’s biography see Mo Fengxin 1981 and *Minguo renwu dacidan* 1991: 1338. *Xiangxiang junshizhi* 1989: 74–76. Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1320 puts the date around 1921 without giving further evidence.

Wang Lipei must have acquired the manuscript before this time and probably after he had quit his political career in 1912. However, the additional character “supplemented” (*bu* 補) on top of the entry found in one of the Changsha manuscripts (Fig. 4) could mean that it was added at a later stage together with the preceding three entries all marked with the same character.³⁶ As the entry includes no information on former owners – He Tangyu’s seal probably was not recorded because he was no reputable collector – one can only speculate on how the manuscript came into Wang’s possession. Wang obtained a number of manuscripts from other collectors with the family name He 賀, as can be known by the recorded seal imprints in the catalogue, above all from He Yuan 賀瑗 of Shanhua 善化 (Hunan).³⁷ Implying that He Tangyu was related to He Yuan this might be, albeit extremely speculative, a link between the two collectors.

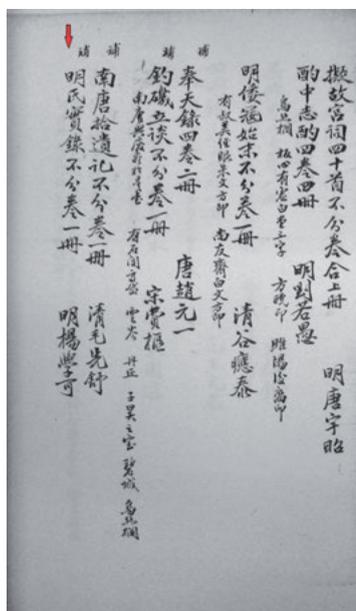


Fig.4: Entry on the *Annals of the Ming Family* in Wang Lipei’s *Catalogue of Books Hidden in a Double-Wall*. Changsha, Hunan Provincial Library: 298.3/96.

³⁶ Hunan Provincial Library: 298.3/96.

³⁷ There are 13 entries with imprints of He Yuan and another three from other collectors with the family name He. This is based on my examination of the Beijing manuscript, National Library of China: 450\9096\pgl. On He Yuan see Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1322.

Fleeing his home-town part of Wang's collection was brought to Nanjing 南京, where his son lived, and later to Shanghai. It is known that Wang refused to donate his collection to the state library and also did not want to sell to the Shanghai Commercial Press (*Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan* 上海商務印書館), the major publishing house of the time, whose representatives had approached him. However, he did sell some of his holdings to Yi Peiji 易培基 (1880–1937), a similar ardent book collector and fellow Hunanese from Changsha. These books were destroyed in 1932 during the first Japanese bombing of Shanghai, where Yi Peiji held a university position.³⁸ Our manuscript obviously was not among them. The fate of Wang's other books is illuminated through a short note by Lun Ming 倫明 (1875–1944),³⁹ another book collector and chronicler of the book collectors of the period. He writes:

巳巳，余居瀋陽通志館，王君以書目一冊，寄金息侯求售，凡三百二十五部，皆抄校本，皆有名人收藏圖記。⁴⁰

In the year *yisi* (1929), when I dwelled at the Shenyang Local Archive, Mr Wang (i.e. Wang Lipei) sent a catalogue in one booklet to Jin Xihou (1878–1962)⁴¹ seeking to sell [his collection]. It listed a total of 325 works, all copied and collated manuscripts⁴² and all with seal imprints of well-known collectors.

Apparently Wang was in need for money and therefore offered his collection to other collectors by sending them a list of his books. This was probably also the reason for him to finally take up the position as professor for literature at Henan University in 1931. Altogether it is safe to assume that the manuscript was sold around this time. However, it was not sold to Shenyang in the very north, but rather to Nanxun 南潯 in the southwest of Shanghai.

3.3 Zhang Naixiong

The seal imprint above those of Wang Lipei is a rectangular intaglio-seal with the legend “Collected by Qinpu (蒞圃收藏)”. It belongs to Zhang Naixiong 張乃熊

³⁸ Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1320. On Yi Peiji see Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1537–1538.

³⁹ Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1467–1470.

⁴⁰ Lun Ming 1990: 118.

⁴¹ I.e. Jin Liang 金梁, a Manchu who at the time was director of the museum in Shenyang (Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1502–1503).

⁴² This is not true for the *Annals of the Ming Family* manuscript in question, which shows no signs of collation.

(1890–1945), whose *zi* 字, name adopted when attaining majority, is Qinqu. Zhang was born into a rich merchant family from Nanxun (Zhejiang). The source of the family’s wealth was the salt business, but they also owned much land in different parts of the country. Moreover Zhang Naixiong was involved in Shanghai’s banking industry. Following the example of his father Zhang Junheng 張鈞衡 (1871–1928), he had passed the lowest state examination in 1905, the year in which the official state examinations were abandoned for good. Father and son were both generally fond of literature and scholarship. They can be seen as typical representatives of what is called Confucian-businessman (*rushang* 儒商), combining scholarly and entrepreneurial activities.⁴³ His father was also a passionate book collector and according to the catalogue of his collection, which he had compiled by the well-known scholar and bibliophile Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 (1844–1919) and printed in 1916, he possessed 920 books. About half of these were manuscripts, which he collected with the aim to have them printed. The manuscript in question is not among them though.⁴⁴

Zhang Naixiong inherited the better part of his father’s collection – the second half went to other sons. He shared his father’s passion for book collecting and continued to enlarge the collection. Allegedly he only spent half day in his business office, so he could have time during the other half of the day to pursue his passion for old books. Zhang’s descendants described him to have been more of a scholar than a businessman.⁴⁵ By 1940, the year Zhang Naixiong catalogued his collection, he possessed 1486 books, of which 581 came from his father’s collection.⁴⁶ This handwritten catalogue has an entry on the *Annals of the Ming Family*: “*Annals of the Ming Family*, one chapter, written by Yang Xueke, Ming [dynasty]” (明氏實錄一卷, 明楊學可撰). It is classified as an “old hand-copy in one booklet” (舊抄本一冊) and finally it is also indicated that it once belonged to Wang Lipei’s collection by referring to Wang’s studio name, the one found on one of Wang’s seals mentioned above (Fig. 5).⁴⁷ Furthermore, this is not the only manuscript originating from Wang Lipei’s collection. There are another 23 entries, except for two all indicating manuscripts, which point at Wang Lipei as the former

⁴³ On Zhang Naixiong see Su Jing 2009: 213–214; Huang Ting-pei 2009: 13–21; Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1434–1435. On Zhang Junheng, see Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1404–1405; Su Jing 2009: 211–214.

⁴⁴ On the history of Zhang Junheng’s collection see Liu Hecheng 2008; Zhao Congcheng 2008. Zhang Junheng’s catalogue: Miao Quansun 1968. On Miao Quansun see Zheng Weizhang 1999: 1136–1142. See also Campbell 2009.

⁴⁵ Huang Ting-pei 2009: 14.

⁴⁶ Huang Ting-pei 2009: 31.

⁴⁷ Zhang Naixiong 1969: 117. This is a photographic reproduction of the original manuscript.

owner.⁴⁸ Although it cannot be entirely excluded that the manuscript was bought by Zhang Junheng after the compilation of his catalogue in 1916 and before his death in 1928, it seems more likely that the son purchased this manuscript. Firstly, because there is no seal imprint of Zhang Junheng on the manuscript. Secondly, Wang Lippei's efforts to sell can be dated to 1929 when he sent his catalogue to Jin Xihou, and that is after Zhang Junheng's death in 1928. However, whether Zhang Naixiong bought it directly from Wang Lippei or via an intermediary is impossible to say.

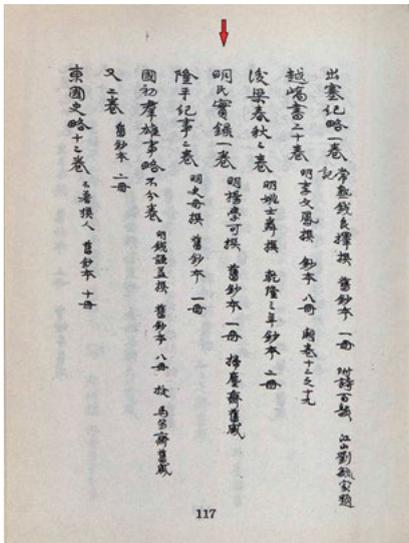


Fig. 5: Entry on the *Annals of the Ming Family* in Zhang Naixiong's catalogue. Facsimile print of the original manuscript: Zhang Naixiong 1969, p. 117.

3.4 National Central Library

Zhang Naixiong's catalogue was compiled for the purpose of selling his collection. Due to the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 Zhang's business suffered severely and he seems to have been in need for money. Furthermore, he had heard rumours that the Japanese were interested in his collection and he was quite aware that it would be very difficult to keep his collection together and in safety

⁴⁸ Huang Ting-peï 2009: 43–44.

in the light of the increasingly oppressive war situation. In the end he preferred to sell his collection to the Chinese government.⁴⁹

Zhang Naixiong was not the only collector, who had to sell his collection in these years. Many people sold their books due to financial constraints. Huge amounts of old and rare books flooded the book markets in Shanghai, where they were often bought by representatives of foreign libraries. Some Chinese scholars were very concerned about this situation. They feared that future generations of Chinese would then have no access to these materials anymore. To counteract this development they contacted the Chinese government, which in 1937 had retreated from the Japanese army to Chongqing 重慶 in the western part of China, to find a remedy. As a reaction to this the Ministry of Education sent a representative to Shanghai, where under the leadership of Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958), at the time professor of literature at Shanghai Jinan University (*Shanghai ji'nan daxue* 上海暨南大學), they formed the Association for the Preservation of Documents (*Wenxian baocun tongzhihui* 文獻保存同志會) to secretly purchase precious books and documents for the Chinese National Central Library in the area occupied by the Japanese. Zheng was the key-figure of this undertaking, which lasted only two years, but in the end secured more than 4,800 valuable prints and manuscripts. He was responsible for selecting and appraising the books as well as for negotiations with book dealers and collectors. Many of the letters he wrote in this time to Jiang Fucong 蔣復璁 (1898–1990), director of the Chinese National Central Library from 1940 to 1949, as well as others, have been preserved and they inform quite in detail about their activities. The money used to buy the books, a total of 1,800,000 *yuan*, came from the Chinese English Boxer Indemnity Fund (*Zhong-Ying gengkuan* 中英庚款). The so-called Boxer rebellion (1898–1900), an anti-imperialist uprising that also found support by the ruling Qing government, was quelled by an international coalition, which then imposed the payment of 450 million *taels* of silver as indemnity on the Chinese government. Other than the United States, which already in 1909 had given up on their share using it to set up a scholarship program for Chinese students, Great Britain decided to use the reparations to support cultural and educational projects in China not until 1931.⁵⁰

In November 1941, after intricate and protracted negotiations lasting over half a year, Zhang Naixiong finally sold his collection (with the exception of a few

⁴⁹ Huang Ting-pei 2009: 83–84.

⁵⁰ Huang Ting-pei 2009: 83–84; Su Jing 2009: 235–240. On the activities of the Association for the Preservation of Documents see Gu Liren / Ruan Jingling 2010.

books he wanted to keep for himself) for the price of 700,000 *yuan* to the Association for the Preservation of Documents. In the beginning Zhang demanded 500,000 *yuan* or 30,000 USD, but he kept changing his mind and the negotiations were further complicated by the raging inflation of the Chinese currency. Zhang only reluctantly separated from his collection and clearly planned to repurchase it some time later, for which he applied a total of four seal imprints – two with his own and two with his sons names – to those books he treasured most. The *Annals of the Ming Family* manuscript obviously was not among these since it only shows one imprint by him. Zheng Zhenduo, on the other hand, as the negotiator for the Association for the Preservation of Documents faced the obstacle that his funds were not large enough and there were problems to transfer the money from Chongqing to Shanghai. In the end he managed to obtain more money and they agreed on a first payment of 100,000 *yuan* with the rest to be paid a month later. The deal was sealed only shortly before the Japanese, after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, took possession of the whole city of Shanghai. Until then the International Concessions had not been occupied by the Japanese. This also brought an end to the activities of the Association for the Preservation of Documents.⁵¹

Attempts to transport all purchased materials via Hong Kong to Chongqing were not successful. After one batch sent to Hong Kong had fallen into the hands of the Japanese it was decided to keep and hide the remaining books in Shanghai, among them also Zhang Naixiong's collection with the *Annals of the Ming Family* manuscript. The many books were probably stored in different places, among them private homes and foreign banks. In 1949, after the Republican Party of Chiang Kai-shek had lost the civil war against the Communists under the leadership of Mao Zedong, which followed the war against the Japanese, they retreated to Taiwan taking many valuable cultural objects with them, e.g. many items of the Imperial Palace Collections in Beijing, which today are housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Also Zhang Naixiong's collection was shipped to Taiwan. It was personally brought there by Jiang Fucong, the aforementioned director of the National Central Library. In Taiwan it was first temporarily stored in Taichung 臺中 and then shortly after transferred to the new site of the National Central Library in Taipei.⁵² This institution is the so far last to have added a seal

⁵¹ Gu Liren / Ruan Jingling 2010: 143–146; Su Jing 2009: 241.

⁵² Su Jing 2009: 243–246; Huang Ting-pei 2009: 102–104. On the Imperial Palace Collection see Li 1958. Today the Zhangs' collection is the largest intact family collection in the holding of the National Central Library (Su Jing 2009: 243–246), which has stimulated a number of studies: Zhao Congcheng 2008; Liu Hecheng 2008; Huang Ting-pei 2009; Lin Jinghui 2010.

imprint to the manuscript, a rectangular intaglio-seal reading “from the collection of the National Central Library (國立中央圖書館藏)”. The manuscript is recorded in the rare books catalogue of the library, published in 1997, and the entry also includes a description of all five seal imprints.⁵³

4 Conclusion

This example of one late imperial manuscript shows clearly that seal imprints enable us to track its transmission in much detail. The imprints itself did not offer explicit spatial and temporal information, but just the names of the different owners. It is by further research on these men and their collections that we were able to pursue this manuscript through time and space. For this, their biographies and especially their book catalogues, if available, proved to be useful.⁵⁴ At the same time, one has to admit that the information on this particular manuscript for the most part remained rather limited. This is likely due to the fact that this manuscript was not considered exceedingly precious. There is no evidence that any of the collectors studied the manuscript in detail or that they might have been particularly interested in its content. No preface or colophon was ever attached to it, nor is there any hint in this regard mentioned in the catalogues.

The spatial and temporal information obtained can be used to visualise the transmission of this manuscript both geographically and chronologically (Fig. 6). However, such a representation cannot be but partial since it cannot be ruled out that the manuscript was brought to other places or was even held by other persons, e.g. book dealers serving as intermediates. Also the temporal information remains fragmented, neither were we able to find out the exact date of production, nor can we always be sure about the exact time when the manuscript changed owner.

Furthermore, the history of this particular manuscript vividly reflects the broader development of book collecting in China in the first part of the twentieth century. In general, historiographical texts such as this manuscript received increased attention from collectors, while the interest in canonical writings waned, due to the abolishment of the traditional examination system in 1905, in which

⁵³ *Guojia tushuguan* 1997: 245.

⁵⁴ Following Genette's thoughts catalogue entries might also be understood as paratext or more precisely as “epitext”, the spatial category which Genette gives to paratexts situated “outside the book” (Genette 1991: 264).

they formed the subject matter. This interest in historiographical texts is said to have further increased in the late 1920s. At the same time, more and more books circulated among book collectors and became regarded as commercial commodities. While in earlier times the main worry of collectors was that their descendants would not be able to keep the collection together, in the first half of the twentieth century it was not uncommon for a collector to lose the collection he had built up all by himself. The unstable political situation and the frequent armed conflicts of this period put many collectors into financial difficulties causing them to sell as was the case for Wang Lipei and Zhang Naixiong. At the same time, there was a general shift in the type of collectors, from scholars like Wang Lipei to rich businessmen like Zhang Naixiong, and a trend away from private collectors to public collections of the newly established state and public libraries.⁵⁵ Notably though the practice of adding collectors' seals was, despite all differences, held up by all of the owners.

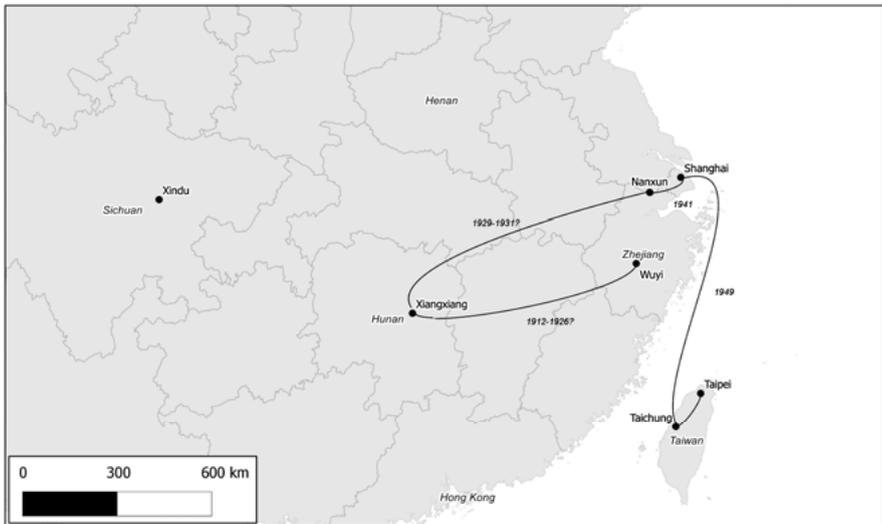


Fig. 6: Geographical and chronological transmission of the *Annals of the Ming Family*. Taipei, National Central Library: 204.26 02205. © CHGIS Harvard Yenching Institute.

⁵⁵ Li Xuemei 1999: 7, 67, 122, 137–143.

Manuscripts

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- Fubi cangshu mulu* 復壁藏書目錄, Beijing: National Library of China (*Guojia tushuguan* 國家圖書館). shelfmark: 450\9096\pgl.
- Fubi shulu* 復壁書錄, Changsha: Hunan Provincial Library, shelfmark: 294.3/35.
- Mingshi shilu* 明氏實錄, composed by Yang Xueke 楊學可, Taipei: National Central Library (*Guojia tushuguan* 國家圖書館). shelfmark: 204.26 02205.
- Mingshi shilu* 明氏實錄, composed by Yang Xueke 楊學可, Beijing: National Library of China, shelfmark: 002300262 (facsimile print in: *Zhonghua lishi renwu biezhuanj* 2003).
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