CATEGORIES, FEATURES AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE EXISTING WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING IN CHINA

Xiao Dongfa, Professor of Journalism and Communication School, Peking University

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with wood blocks for printing, and the important remains of ancient Chinese printing techniques. It gives a brief introduction to various kinds of extant wood blocks for printing in different parts of China according to three categories: wood blocks for printing books, religious sutras and pictures. It also gives a comparative study of official collections and private collections. The characteristics and social backgrounds of various wood blocks for printing are also analyzed in this paper.

KEYWORDS

Wood Blocks for Printing
Printing History
Buddhist Sutras Printing
Wood Blocks for Printing Pictures
Preservation of Wood Blocks for Printing

As the basic sources of book printing, the wood blocks for printing are not only an important media of spreading and preserving the cultural inheritance by the rulers of the past ages, publishers, book collectors, famous scholars, but also the symbol of the materials and spiritual wealth in ancient China. From the central government to folk book collectors, academies, the book manufacturing factory, and Buddhist temples, the people in history made great efforts to preserve these wood blocks for printing and handed them down from generation to generation. They made a great contribution in extending cultural heritage, which is now still the priceless fortune of the Chinese Nation, though the traditional wood block printing skill has already been replaced by modern printing techniques.

Generally speaking, the existing wood blocks for printing in China can be classified into three categories, which are wood blocks for printing books, for printing Buddhist Sutra, and for printing pictures. These wood blocks for printing were mainly collected in public institutions and by private individuals. The public institutions include the different museums, libraries, and publishers. The private individuals include the private publishers, the folk people’s collection and printing
workshop. Since I started this program, I have paid visits and made the investigation at the Imperial Palace in Beijing, Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing House in Yangzhou, Wood blocks Buddhist Sutra- Engraving Place in Nanjing, Yunju Temple in Beijing, Rongbaozhai Old bookstore in Beijing, Cathay Bookstore, Yangliuqing in Tianjin, etc., where are collected many wood blocks for printing books, printing Buddhist Sutra, and printing the Chinese Spring Festival pictures.

These collections of wood blocks for printing are exactly correspondent to the public, private, Buddhist Sutra, and book store engraving the wood blocks and printing in Chinese printing history. It is not difficult to analyze the social background in studying these wood blocks for printing. I believed that it is necessary to have a study program on the categories, features of the existing wood blocks for printing, and to have further investigation and study the statistics, and to formulate the measurements for preservation. On the basis of preservation, we have to make these valuable, cultural heritage in order to play more functions in the new era.

1. WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING BOOKS

1.1 To Analyze the existing wood blocks for printing in the Beijing National Palace Museum and the Central Government Publication

There are two different statements concerning the quantity of the existing wood blocks for printing in the Beijing National Palace Museum.

According to Mr. Zhu Saihong, curator of the Palace Library, there are about 200,000 pieces of wood blocks, which are still in the course of rearrangement. However, in the latest article published by Mr. Weng Lianxi, a librarian of the Beijing National Palace Museum, he said that there are about 190,000 wood blocks were remaining, which included the Tripitaka in Tibetan and Manchu characters, etc. The earliest Tibetan language wood blocks printing are the books printed by the royal court in the Ming Dynasty, such as *Xing Li Da Quan* (性理大全 The Complete Works of Human Nature), *Wen Xiang Tong Kao* (文獻通考 Comprehensive Textual Research of Historical Documents), *Wu Jing Si Shu Da Quan* (五經四書大全 The Five Classics and Four Books). Most of the collected wood blocks for printing are the books of the *Wu Ying Dian* (武英殿 Military Prowess Hall) in the Qing Dynasty. The edition of the Wu Ying Dian was a wood blocks printed book in the Qing Dynasty’s government internal court in Kang Xi, Yong Zheng and Qian Long Emperors’s period (1662–1785AD). Though only a small portion of the wood blocks remain today, we still can trace the situation and the background of the book printing represented by the Military Prowess Hall from these rare documents that were handed down.

During the period of the Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong (1662–1795), the edition of Wu Ying Dian (Military Prowess Hall) was developed into its flourishing and prosperous time. It was also fraught with serious contradictions and danger and crisis at that time.
Firstly, as the minority, since the Manchu aristocratic takeover of the central part of China, they paid special attention to the fields of ideology and culture by promoting Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism orthodox energetically in order to strengthen the autocratic reign. Books that preached Neo-Confucianism took up a large proportion in the Wu Ying Dian edition, while the compilation and release of other publications, like the scientific and technological books, and literary works were strictly confined.

Secondly, the Literary Inquisitions that started in the early Qing Dynasty were becoming more serious. It became cruel and made peoples’ hair stand on end. During the Qian Long Emperor period (1736–1795 A.D.) in the Qing Dynasty it was decreed to compile the *Si Ku Quan Shu* (四库全书 Four Vaults of Classics, History, Philosophy and Collected Works of Literature). From 1774 to 1793, about 3,100 titles, around 151,000 copies and more than 80,000 prices of wood blocks for printing were banned and ruined. The countless books were destroyed and damaged among the common people. It was also harmful to the social ideology and culture at that time. Being afraid of the despotic power in the Literary Inquisition policies, the intellectuals immersed themselves in textual research to escape the social reality.

Thirdly, the corrupt officials acted in a foolhardy manner and tried to seize every opportunity in order to sabotage the advanced techniques in printing work at that time. For example, 200,000 pieces of moveable copper-letters for printing were produced in the Kang Xi Emperor period (1662–1922 A.D.). They were for printing the *Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng* (古今图经 The Collected Books From Ancient Till the Present Time) and only 100 sets were printed (each set had 10,000 Juan). Later on, these copper-letters were stored in the Wu Ying Dian warehouse, asking only one warehouse man to preserve them. Unfortunately, this warehouse man stole what was entrusted to his care. But fearing exposure and punishment, he made a suggestion to melt down these copper-letters in order to cast coins, which were in extremely short supply in the early Qian Long Emperor (1736–1750 A.D.). Therefore, the Qian Long Emperor was overcome with regret and wrote a poem to show his thousand pities for losing these copper-letters. He had to ask the people to engrave the moveable wood letters to print the *Wu Ying Dian Ju Zhen Ben* (武英殿珍本 Accumulated Treasure Books in Wu Ying Dian). These moveable wood letters also suffered from the same tragic lot. They were burned to warm the warehouse men instead of being made full use.

By the end of the Qian Long to Jia Qing Emperors’ period (1790–1820), the book printing in Wu Ying Dian (武英殿 Military Prowess Hall) was in declin, especially after the Dao Guang Emperor (1821 A.D.-), the quality and quantity of book printing decreased sharply. During the Dao Guang, Xian Feng, Guang Xu to Xuan Tong Emperors (1821–1911 A.D.), there were only 39 titles of imperial editions of books published, which amounted to only 7.5% of the whole imperial editions in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 A.D.). In June 1867, the Yong Ding River in Beijing flooded and the Wu Ying Dian (Military Prowess Hall) suffered from a
conflagration. This fire disaster had destroyed almost all the wood blocks and wood letters for printing, which were preserved since the Kang Xi Emperor (1622 A.D.–). Although some other wood blocks for printing were stocked in another warehouse, it could be compared with that of in Wu Ying Dian (Military Prowess Hall), and even it was rebuilt later.

Another factor, which caused the decline of engraving the wood blocks and wood letters for printing in the Wu Ying Dian (Military Prowess Hall) was the introduction of western mechanized letter press printing technology, with which the traditional engraving wood blocks and letters for printing were unable to compete. They were replaced by the advanced letter press or lithography technology.

From the above historical documents, we can understand that it was really not easy to preserve the existing wood blocks and letters for printing in the Wu Ying Dian, which suffered from various misfortunes. In 1924, the last emperor Pu Yi moved out of the Beijing Imperial Palace and the Beijing Imperial Palace Museum was established in 1925 for the proper preservation of these extremely valuable cultural treasures. On Jul 27th, 1950, the Administration of the Cultural Heritage Bureau approved gathering together all the scattered 190,000 pieces of wood blocks and letters for printing in the Imperial Palace Wall watchtower. A detailed list was compiled by the librarian in the library of the Beijing Imperial Palace Museum, which included the engraved wood blocks by President Xu Shichang (1855–1939 A.D., a warlord, and the President of the Republic of China in 1918–1922 A.D.).

In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 A.D.), the Literary Inquisitions prevailed everywhere for almost twenty years. It was really difficult to preserve these wood blocks for printing in Wu Ying Dian (Military Prowess Hall), which was unparalleled for its prominence and privilege, both politically and economically and culturally. We should treasure these first hand materials of wood blocks and letters for printing in order to make study further printing culture in the Chinese ancient central government.

1.2 Wood Blocks for Printing Collected in Local Libraries

Large quantities of wood blocks for printing were collected for engraving and printing in well developed area, such as the famous cultural provinces of Zhejaing, Sichuan, Jiangsu and Fujian, which included Jian Yang (in Fujian Province), and Si Bao. Some of them had already been transferred to collections in the local libraries.

For example, the Zhejiang Provincial Library: this library had collected wood blocks for printing since the late Qing Dynasty (1909 A.D.-). In 1951, Mr. Liu Chenggan, the owner of the Jiaye Library in the Huzhou area, donated all his wood blocks for printing (about 50,000 pieces) to the Zhejiang Library, which included the *Shi Yuan Series* (适适丛经), the *Si Ming Series* (五四丛经), etc. These wood blocks were sent to the Guang Ling Printing House in Yangzhou, Jiangsu
Province for reprinting books. After that, they were returned, and still collected in
the Zhejiang Provincial Library until the present day.

Other than the Zhejiang Provincial Library, the Nanjing Library (Jiangsu Pro-
vincial Library) also collected wood blocks for printing two masterpieces, Collective Notes to Chu Ci (楚楚古楚) and Collating Notes on Li Ji Zheng Yi (礼礼礼记勘). They were reprinted in 1979 by Guang Ling Printing House and won the first prize of Excellent Ancient Books Award in 1992.

1.3 Yangzhou Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House

The Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House in Yangzhou has a history of 45
years. It has collected more than 200,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing (an-
other saying is about 300,000 pieces) from the Ming to the Qing Dynasties.

There is a historical origin of the Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House,
which collected so many wood blocks for printing. According to the historical re-
cords engraving wood blocks for printing in the Yangzhou area, had been going
on since the Tang Dynasty. Mr. Yuan Zhen (779–831A.D., a great poet in the
Tang Dynasty) wrote a preface for a book entitled Bai Si Chang Qing Ji, and
which was written by Bai Juyi (772–846A. D., a great poet in the Tang Dynasty),
described that people in Yang Zhou engraved the wood blocks for printing
Mr. Bai’s poems to sell or exchange for wine and tea. The earliest edition of Meng
Xi Bi Tan (梦梦梦谈), the masterpiece forever written by Mr. Shen Kuo (1031–
1095A.D.), who was one of the greatest scientists in the North Song Dynasty.
Meng Xi Bi tan was engraved and printed in Yangzhou by Mr. Tang Xiunian. This
dition became the master copy afterward. The following three dynasties of Yuan,
Ming, Qing, saw the succession of the printing industry in Yangzhou. It is neces-
sary to mentioned that Mr. Chao Yin, who was a famous Chinese fiction writer
and author of Red Chamber’s, Mr. Chao Xueqin’s grandfather, set up the Yang-
zhou Poetry Bureau to engrave and print the imperial court books in the Tian Ning
Temple. In the 44th year of the Kang Xi Emperor (1705A.D.), the Yangzhou Po-
etry Bureau carried out the emperor’s order to engrave and print a set of books,
Quan Tang Shi (全唐诗 A Complete Poetry in the Tang Dynasty), and werehighly
appreciated and praised by Kang Xi Emperor. Other than the Quan Tang Shi (The
Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty), the Yangzhou Poetry Bureau had engraved
and printed great numbers of master books of high quality.

Together with Mr. Dong Hao, Mr. Ruan Yuan (1764–1849A.D.), who was a
great scholar of the Qian Jia school, received an order from the Jia Qing Emperor
to compile QuanTang Wen (全唐文 Complete Essays of the Tang Dynasty). This
set of wood blocks for printing was also engraved and printed in the Yangzhou
Poetry Bureau.

Other than The Complete Poetry in the Tang Dynasty and the Complete Essays
in the Tang Dynasty, there were also The Collected Works of Mr. Dong Xin, which
were compiled by Mr. Jin Nong and engraved andprinted in the Yong Zheng Em-
Xiao Dongfa

Hai Guo Tu Zhi (Illustrated Records of Overseas Countries), written by Wei Yuan (1794–1857 A.D., a famous thinker, historian, literati) was printed in Yangzhou. Some of the Yangzhou salt merchants with lofty ideals, devoted themselves to cultural work. Mr. Ma Yue and Mr. Ma Yuelu (brothers), had printed many popular books, such as Shuo Wen Jie Zi (Explanation and Study of Principles of Composition of Chinese Characters), that were called “Ma Edition” for their high quality of printing.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the people’s government paid a great deal of attention to the ancient cultural heritage of wood block printing. In 1960, according to the former premier Zhou Enlai’s instruction, the ancient tradition of using wood blocks to engrave and print books, which was kept up in the Jiangsu, Anhui, and Zhejiang provinces was gathered together in the Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House in Yangzhou, for its careful preservation. Experts and technicians on engraving and printing gathered in Yangzhou to make investigations, to study, and to preserve the tradition. They made great contributions toward the rescue and preservation of these ancient cultural books and records without violating their original styles and features. In the meantime, they also accumulated many valuable experiences. Generally speaking, the current collection of wood blocks for printing in the Yangzhou Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House are mainly from the private collectors of wood blocks for printing in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and the Anhui provinces.

On Dec, 2002, the National Press and Publishing Bureau, ratified the Guang Ling Engraving and Printing House to the Yangzhou Guang Ling Publishing House, which mainly publishes wood block printed books with traditional techniques, photocopying and copying the precious books and periodicals, imitating Chinese traditional calligraphy and painting, as well as Chinese thread-binding books.

At present, the Guang Ling Publishing House still maintains a whole set of traditional wood blocks for the engraving craft. As the largest production base for thread-binding books, it has adopted all the traditional processes of sorting out, editing, engraving, printing binding and the other twenty steps. There are more than eighty craftsmen having the relationship of masters and apprentices. From selecting ancient documents, to fine manufacturing and workmanship, to the format of simplicity, sophistication, and elegance, the whole set of processes has received a reputation of “The Unparalleled Technique in China”. Meanwhile, they also carried out research on restoring the five types of ancient movable type letters or printing technique from the Song Dynasty (960 A.D.-) in copper, tin, clay, porcelain and wood letters.

Now, the annual production capacities of the Guang Ling Publishing House have attained over 300,000 copies of the thread-bound books. About 5,000 titles have been printed, which have many famous works, such as Li Tang Dao Ting Lu written during the Qing Dynasty, 300 poems of the Tang Dynasty, which was blended with five different kinds of letter press printing materials. Of course, you
can find large quantities of classical works and documents of value in a collection with an aesthetic like Si Ming Series, Collective Notes to Chu Ci, etc.

1.4 Cathay Bookshop – A State Owned Professional Bookshop for Antiquarian and Used books

Founded in Nov. 4th/1952, the Cathay Bookshop was the first state-owned, professional bookshop for antiquarian and used books in China. This bookshop has collected 230 titles of engraved woodblocks for printing and 46,000 titles with thread-bindings for antiquarian and old books, which included many of academic value such as Long Xi Jing She Series and The Book of Rites with Commentaries, etc.

In the past fifty years, the Cathay Bookshop accomplished its mission successfully by rescuing cultural relics and antiquarian books by purchasing, sorting out or repairing them. More than 30,000 copies of the first grade antiquarian and rare books were purchased by the China National Library, the Museum and academic research Institutions for permanent preservation. The Cathay Bookshop also did a lot of work repairing and rescuing more than 20,000 copies of antiquarian and rare books, and helped different libraries and private book collectors repair antiquarian and rare books like Mao Zedong, an other old generation of revolutionaries. Up to now, Cathay Bookshop has distributed more than 120 million copies of old and new books, which included reprinting and distributing 2,035 titles with 18.16 million copies of old books.

2. WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING THE BUDDHIST SUTRA

2.1 Wood Blocks for Printing Collected in Buddhist Temples

There are thousands of Buddhist temples in different parts of China. Almost all the temples have library halls, which mainly collect the Buddhist Sutras. Some of them still collected the wood blocks for printing the Buddhist Sutra. It is necessary to mention the Yunju Temple in the Fangshan District, Beijing City. This temple has the collection of so called “Three Uniques”, which includes stone inscriptions, wood blocks for printing the Tripitaka, and the Sutras on paper. The stone tablets date to 605 A.D. (the 12th year of Daye, Sui Dynasty) and were started by Monk Jing Wan, who was afraid of persecution against Buddhism and carved all the Buddhist scripture on the stone tablets. The work went on for 1,039 years through the Sui, Tang, Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties, and had produced 14,278 stone tablets with 1,122 titles (3,572 Juan) for Buddhist scriptures. The practice of inscribing the Buddhist scriptures on stone tablets, the quality of the editions used, the quantities of the scriptures, and the duration of this work are all but unparalleled in China and any other countries in the world. The sutras on paper, which were printed and hand-copied in the Ming Dynasty, amount to a collection of
22,000 Juans (chapters), and is rarely seen in other domestic temples. In Yunju Temple, more than 77,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing the *Qianlong Tripitaka*, which were engraved from the 11th years of Yong Zheng Emperor (1733AD) to the 3rd year of the Qian Long Emperor (1738 A.D.). These are the most important and famous wood blocks for printing the Buddhist Scriptures in China.

There are many other temples collecting wood blocks for printing, which are still well preserved. The outstanding ones are in Lhasa and Lhapuleng Temple in Ri Ka Ze of Tibet, Taer Temple in Qinghai Province, Labrang Temple, Grand Zhuonui Temple in the Gansu Province, etc. The Dege Sutra Printing House in Sichuan Province is the most famous one for its earliest history, largest scale and largest collection of Buddhist scriptures.

2.2 The Dege Sutra Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing House

The Dege Sutra Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing House, also called Dege Auspicious and Wisdom-Gathering House, was located on the east slope of Dege County of Sichuan Province. It was built in the 7th year of the Yong Zheng Emperor (1730 A.D.) for Chokyi Tenpa Tsering (1687–1738 A.D.), who was the 12th headman and 6th dharma-raja of Dege. This Printing House was one of the largest of three Sutra-printing houses (Lhasa Sutra-Printing House in Tibet, Lhapuleng House in Gansu Province and Dege Parkhang in Sichuan Province). The monks and scholars from different countries, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan etc., often came here to study Buddhist Sutras. The main building of the Dege Sutra-Printing House covered an area of 1500M² with two floors, which was typical Tibetan architecture. The wood blocks for printing were stored on the first floor with six rooms where the wood blocks were put in order on the shelves. The second floor was used for the management office and the printing workshop.

During the Emperor Guang Xu Emperor period (1875–1908 A.D.), there were more than 300,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing in the Dege Sutra-Printing House. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, these wood blocks for printing suffered heavy losses in the disturbance of the chiefs struggle among the local tribes. According to the statistics in 1978, there were only 217,000 pieces of these wood blocks for printing remaining. Another saying is that there are 259,600 pages of these wood blocks with a few for printing the local maps, and also there are about 140 pieces for printing the local customs, decorative arts etc. The sizes of these wood blocks differ. The bigger ones are about 3Chi x 2Chi (100 cm. x 66 cm.). The small ones are about 1Chi x 0.2Chi (33 cm. x 6 cm.). They can be printed on both sides. Though these wood blocks for printing have been used for about 200 years, their characters are still very sharp and clear when printed. The materials for these wood blocks were selected from the knotless red birch produced in Dege, and they were processed by cutting into sections, drying by fire-cure, soaking in water, boiling, baking and planing, and made ready for use. Moreover, the printers were also very fastidious about the paper in printing the sutras. The paper was
made from the root tassels of the local medical herbal plant. Therefore, the paper had the characteristics of being anti-vermin and worms and of good fiber quality for long term preservation.

According to the traditional classification, the collections of these wood blocks for printing in the Dege Sutra Engraving and Printing House mainly included the following six categories: Kanjur, Tanjur, selected works, book series, comprehensive and separate books of the Tri-pitaka in Tibetan (The Great Tibetan collection).

From February to October in 1979, the Relics Management Institute of the Dege County, Sichuan Province, used these wood blocks and printed 4,073 titles with 1,180,440 pages from different categories of works. They were warmly welcomed, ordered, and purchased by concerned institutions, schools, hospitals, temples of Beijing, Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Xingjiang etc. and also by purchasers in the USA, Japan, Great Britain, France, Germany, Bhutan, India, Sikkim etc.

2.3 Jinling Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing Buddhist Scriptures House

Jinling Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing Buddhist Scriptures House is located in Nanjing City of Jiangsu Province and was founded on Buddhist Enlightenment Day (Dec. 8, 1966). This publishing house is a center for printing Buddhist Sutras with wood blocks and also collects great quantities of precious resources for the study of the Chinese Buddhist culture. It has a collection of total 125,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing Buddhist Sutras, which includes nearly 1,000 titles of ancient and rare books including many influential Buddhist classics, such as Buddhist Scriptures Translated by Xuanzang, Mahaprajaparamita-castra, Saddharapundarika-sutra, the dissipated books written in the Sui or the Tang Dynasty, Dazang Buddhist Scriptures in a reduced form from Japan, etc. Besides, there are lots of fine pictures and printing sculptures, among them the filling color printing Picture of Buddhist Ceremony, one of the masterpieces of the Buddhist sculptures.

The Jinling Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing Buddhist Scriptures House is not only a workshop for engraving Buddhist scriptures, but it is also an academic center for Buddhism study. Wood block engravings and printing the Buddhist Sutras not only met the needs of the popular monks, but they also developed the general mood of the study of Buddhism and promoted the vigour of Buddhist teachings. They made a great contribution to the rejuvenation of Chinese Buddhism in the 20th century.

Mr. Yang Renshan, the founder of the Jinling Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing Buddhist Scriptures House, decided to leave his house/property as a platform and place for Buddhist preaching, instead of leaving it to his next generation. As a model of patriotism ideology, Mr. Yang Renshan had printed and distributed more than one million Juan (chapters) of canon books and more than 100,000 pieces of Buddhist Figures, in which some of them had been lost for more than
1,000 years since the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The quality of these products enjoyed a very good reputation in the Buddhist community because they had to go through strict selection and proofreading, and the engraving was done with care and precision by the engravers.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, 73,538 pieces of wood blocks for printing were gathered together from Ma Nao Jing Fang in Suzhou, Dong Ting Xi Shang, Jiang Bei Ke Jing Chu, Zhi a Nei Cue Yuan, Pi Ling Ke Jing Chu, San Shi Hui in Beijing, Jin Gan Dao Chang in Shanghai and Tianjin. So there were about 150,000 pieces of wood blocks, which were stored in this Publishing House. Unfortunately, only 125,000 pieces have survived after the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976 A.D.), which include the Picture of Buddhist Ceremony (灵图), and 18 kinds (69 pieces) of GuanYin Buddhist Figures, 1,640 titles of canon books (about 10,000 Juan). Therefore, the Jinling Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing Buddhist Scripture House became one of the most important relic centers for wood block engraving and printing of the Buddhist Scriptures and Figures.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Jin ling Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing House recovered and the traditional ancient techniques of engraving and printing also resumed, and continued to provide the wood block printed materials for Buddhists and intellectuals. According to the introduction of Mr. Guan Enkun, the chief of the printing house, this printing house had printed more than 200 titles of 800,000 copies of Sutras, include the “Jing Tu Si Jing”, “Zang Yao”, “Jin Gan Jing,” etc. As the printing center of wood blocks for printing Buddhist Sutras, it attracted and won a great reputation from world Buddhists and intellectuals, who came here and paid visits here. It also has an active significance for Chinese religious policy and promotes the cultural intercommunications between China and foreign countries.

2.4 Yangzhou Library of Wood Blocks Printing Buddhist Sutra

The Yangzhou Library of Wood Blocks Printing Buddhist Sutras is located west of the Wanhong Bridge on Pisi Street, Yangzhou City. It was established for preservation of Buddhist scriptures in the Wan Li Emperor period (1573–1620 A.D.). Since the Tong Zhi Emperor period (1862–1874 A.D.), more than 1,000 Juan (chapters) of the Buddhist Sutras and classic works were printed and distributed far and wide, to places like Beijing, Shanghai, Changchun, Hong Kong and foreign countries. These printed materials were engraved and printed with a vigorous, scientific approach, and careful collation. Therefore, the library enjoyed a good reputation at home and abroad and was appraised as the “Yangzhou Wood Blocks Printing Edition.” The quantity of the existing wood blocks for printing Sutras is about 20,000 pieces that were preserved in the Yangzhou Guan Ling Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing House.
3. WOOD BLOCKS FOR PICTURES PRINTING

3.1 Local Museum

To take the Yangzhou Museum for example, it collected 60 sets with 189 pieces of wood blocks for printing the pictures for celebrating the Chinese Luna New year. According to the collation by the experts of this museum, these wood blocks are the heritage of several workshops of the Yangzhou Wood Blocks of Engraving and Printing House in modern time. Among them Yunlan Workshop was the most famous with its fine woodblock engraving and printing, and its work was popular and unparalleled. Thus, my introduction to chromo xylographs in Yangzhou focuses on the Yunlan Pavilion, which is typically representative. Generally speaking, current woodblock printing is of different chromatography editions with five colors, sometimes seven to eight or nine colors, which include red, yellow, green, blue, purple, peach, blue, straw yellow, etc. The wood blocks for printing the pictures can also be categorized into four types according to their contents, namely figures of Buddha, blessings, historical stories and drama posters. In today’s Yangzhou Museum, we can still find over 40 pieces of wood blocks for printing the illustrations, which were the relics of the Yuanlan Pavilion, called “Yuanlan Pavilion Qian Po”.

3.2 Rongbaozhai Water-color Woodblock Printing Workshop in Beijing

The Rongbaozhai Water-color Woodblocks Printing Workshop was set up in 1894 A.D. in Beijing. According to Mr. Feng Pengsheng, who was the vice-general manager, the Rongbaozhai Workshop had collected ten thousand pieces of multicolor woodblocks for printing color pictures with more than 4,000 titles. After 1949, Rongbaozhai decided to make improvements and innovations in water-color printing techniques. The Workshop got great support from the government leaders, Mr. Guo Moruo, Mr. Qi Yanming, Mr. Dengtuo, and Mr. Xu Beihong. Rongbaozhai carried on its traditional arts and produced more than 200 titles of paintings of ancient and modern masterpieces. Since the 1960s, the traditional watercolor wood block printing has achieved more and more delicacy and a larger-size, which included the traditional freehand brushwork of “Bamboo and Cymbidium” painted by the great painter, Mr. Zheng Banqiao, “The Running Horses” by Mr. Xu Beihong, the silk copy fine brushwork paintings “Beautiful Lady with Flowers” by Zhou Fang in the Tang Dynasty, and “Painting of Han Xi-zai's Evening Banquet” by Mr. Gu Hong-zhong in the South Song Dynasty. Through eight years of hard work, this painting used 1,776 pieces of wood blocks for printing, which had to be printed more than 6,000 times, and finally, was successfully completed.

3.3 Pictures Printed by Wood Blocks in different Parts of China.

There has always been four centers of wood block printing of New Year pictures, which include Yangliuqing in Tianjin City, Taohuawu in Suzhou City, and Yang-
jiapu in Weifang City of Shandong Province. However, others have a different opinion, and say there are other centers such as Mianzhu in Sichuan Province, Wuqiang in Hebei Province, Zhuxian Township in Henan Province, Tantou in Hunan Province and Fengxiang in Shanxi Province, etc.

According to historical records, Chengdu and Mianzhu in Sichuan Province are some of the earliest centers of wood blocks for printing pictures. Chengdu saw numbers of unearthed pictures from the Tang dynasty. Mr. Zhao Bian of the Song Dynasty (1008–1084 A.D.) wrote a book of *Chengdu Gu Jin Ji* (成都古今記, The Ancient and Present Records of Chengdu), which said there had been special markets for selling and purchasing the New Year pictures in Chengdu in the Song Dynasty. They were also transferred to the nearby Mianzhu county and developed into “large scale market and “small scale market.” Until the Tong Zhi Emperor (1862–1874 A.D.), more than 300 workshops with more than 1,000 people were engaged in producing more than 12,000,000 New Year pictures per year. On Dec. 1st each year, people would witness an unprecedented increase in New Year picture sales, attracting peddlers from Shanxi Province, Gansu Province, Yunnan Province, and Guizhou Province, etc., to Mianzhu for trading.

The Yangliuqing Wood Blocks for Printing New Year Pictures in Tianjin was started in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A.D.). It mainly printed the monochromatic wood block pictures of Door-God, Kitchen God and the Masters in Heaven etc. Since the 13th years of the Yong Le Emperor (1415 A.D.), China’s Grand Canal was open from Beijing to Hangzhou (Note: originally the Grand Canal was from Kaifeng to Yangzhou in the Sui Dynasty of 589–618 A.D.). As a place of strategic importance of Tianjin City, Yangliuqing enjoyed a prosperous economic development and the great convenience in shipping Xuan Paper (a high quality paper made in Xuancheng of Anhui Province, especially for traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy) and dyestuff from the South Yangtze River area. During the Wang Li Emperor Period (1573–1619 A.D.), wood block color printing appeared. The New Year picture printed art was printed by chromatography with various colors of red, green yellow, black, etc.

In the period of great prosperity, wood block printed New Year pictures of Tao-huawu in Suzhou City were sold more than one million per year, in which the people could collect more than 70 titles of the pictures with drama figures. There popularity lay in being close to the common people's lives, decorative, inexpensive and good quality. In the engraving skill and color printing techniques, these Tao-huawu New Year pictures used the experience of China’s traditional painting style, absorbed the process printing techniques of Hui style (in Anhui Province) and the Jinling style (in Nanjing City). They were also imitating the engraving skill of Western copper letters. The colors used were never confined to only those as one sees through the eyes in real life, and this resulted in a gay, bright and striking style.

During the Qianlong Emperor Period (1736–1795 A.D.), Weifang Yangjiabu in Shandong Province appeared as well as Yong Sheng, Gong Mao and other ten
large scale shopping centers for printing and selling the various kinds of New Years pictures. Although they were destroyed several times because of social disturbance, 519 sets of the original wood blocks for printing the New Year pictures still survived. At present, 186 out of 240 households are continuing to produce the New Year pictures producing a yearly total income of 370,000 yuan.

Originating from the early Ming Dynasty and flourishing in the Qianlong and Jiaqing Periods, New Year pictures of Wuqiang is rooted in folk customs and the local color of the civilization. Until the late Qing Dynasty, there had been 144 picture shops, with 500 working staff and annual sales of 3,000 pictures. The picture inherited the engraving technology, one of the four ancient inventions, all in handwork. The New Year picture of Wuqiang is close to life and diversified in technique, with a plump composition of the picture and a broad line. Compared with the redundant and ravishingly decorative New Year pictures of Tianjin Yangliuqing, Wuqiang New Year pictures are celebrated for their homochromatic features. With the basic tone of three primary-colors and black-white, the colors of the Wuqiang New Year pictures are of strong contrast, creating a joyful atmosphere.

The Zhuxian Township Engraving Wood Blocks Printing Pictures are mostly made in water-color wood block prints supplemented by screen printing technology, a traditional fine art uniquely found in Zhuxian Township.

The Tantou New Year picture in Hunan Province relies on the paper industry and fine handmade paper produced in Tantou. Every year, picture salesmen came to Tantou, distributing Tantou New Year pictures to Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangdong, Guangxi, even Shanxi, Yunnan and the Southeast Asia area, with annual sale of 7,000,000 pictures.

Fengxiang Wood Blocks Printing New Year Picture in Shanxi Province was started in the Zheng De and Jia Jing Emperors Period (1506–1566 A.D.). The most famous one was the wood block printed picture on drama in the South Xiaio Li Village.

In the article “The Characteristics of Chinese Folk Woodblock New Year Pictures”, the author Li Lei came to the conclusion by comparison that Tianjin Yangliuqing and Suzhou Taohuawu pictures are characterized by an elegant style, popularized by the civilian class, while wood block New Year pictures of Hebei Wuqiang and Hennan Zhuxianzhen are popular with Chinese farmers for their deep folk traditions, strong color and entertaining atmosphere.

All these historical records indicate that there are great numbers of wood blocks for printing in collections in folk China, and the techniques have been handed down from generation to generation and also are still being printed and published. For example, Fengxiang Woodblocks Printing New Year Picture held an exhibition the printing techniques and its products. It received visitors from home and abroad to enjoy the engraving and printing skill, and demonstrations by the peasant artists.
4. **SORTING OUT, PRESERVATION AND UTILIZATION OF WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING**

Looking through the ancient documents, we can easily find lots of ancient practices of preservation and utilization of the wood blocks for printing. According to *Records of the Imperial College*, the wood blocks for printing collected in the Imperial College and Military Prowess are compiled into volumes and checked from time to time in case of mixture with the different subjects and different titles. In order to protect the wood blocks for printing from the humidity and mildew, it is necessary to put these wood blocks under the shady sun, especially in the rainy season (usually in May and June in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River). By the end of each year, these wood blocks should be checked, an inventory made, and repaired partially. On the other hand, we should also notice that these ancient wood blocks for printing were not attractive enough for their preservation which brought serious damage to these unduplicated cultural heritage materials.

Fortunately, in recent years, these existing wood blocks for printing, whether in the imperial palace museum, in local libraries and museums, or scattering in folk China, have been improved in terms of collection environment, preservation condition, sorting out and their utilization and so on. In my opinion, there are the following various reasons for this: (1) The people’s sense of recognition on the importance of the cultural relics and the historical heritages; (2) With the rapid development of China’s economy, the government is paying more attention to cultural undertakings; (3) More and more people (including the men of insight of officers and intellectuals) began to realize the cultural value and contribution of these ancient wood blocks for printing for the world of engraving and printing history. These are the masterpieces of the common efforts of painters and calligraphers, folk artists, and wood block engravers. Not openly it has high valuable cultural heritage, but also a new property for us. Mr. Weng Lianyi made an account on the value of these wood blocks and the printed books, and made a clear conclusion that wood blocks for printing are apparently more valuable than the books because the books can be reprinted but the wood blocks can never be regained if they were destroyed.

4.1 **Open up Special Show Room for Long-term Exhibition**

Cooperating with the Forbidden City Publishing House, the Imperial Palace Library reprinted *Manchu Kanjur*, which has found an effective way to preserve and to make use of the wood blocks for printing. In my ideal, these wood blocks for printing should be kept on shelves or be placed in special show rooms for exhibition. Hence, visitors can imagine to be in the sea of such a great number of wood blocks for printing of the knowledge ocean.
4.2 To Establish “Chinese Traditional Papermaking and Printing Culture Village”

Huabaozhai in Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province is a typical example, which is the only group of ancient book publishing industry, and it is the only company in the country engaged in papermaking, printing, publishing, even photocopying of the traditional thread binding. At present, Huabaozhai has developed into a group of eight businesses including a papermaking mill, a printing plant, an ancient book subsidiary registered in Hong Kong, a cultural village that showcases the ancient printing and papermaking technology and processes. Until now, Huabaozhai has published 3,300 titles of thread binding ancient books, totaling 16,000,000 copies. Furthermore, the specialized printing paper for ancient books has received a Reward of Science and Technology Achievements award from the Light Industry Ministry, whereas its culture village is ranked as one of the Patriotic Educational Bases by the Hangzhou Municipality. The development of Huabaozhai has been taken into account by the government and society, while its contribution in rescuing our national culture heritage has been highly praised by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Government, like Jiang Zemin, Li Ruihuan, Wen Jiabao, etc.

4.3 To Set up the Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing Museum

To take Yangzhou Guangling Gu Ji Publishing House as an example, this publishing house has been suffering a lot of problems for many years, such as the limitation of its facilities and shortage of funds. Due to poor preservation conditions, 200,000 engraved wood blocks of only-existing copies were partially damaged by worms. To protect this valuable cultural heritage, Yangzhou city decided to construct a new Yangzhou Museum and Yangzhou Wood Blocks Engraving and Printing Museum with an investment of 120,000,000 Yuan. In July 2004, when I visited the new museum under construction, Mr. Wang Chunpeng, vice-director of the museum, told me that this new museum will be equipped with constant temperature and humidity control to preserve these wood blocks for printing in the hope they will last longer and longer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Xiao Dongfa is the director of the Modern Publishing Research Institution of Beijing University, professor of Journal and Media School, adviser of PhD, and Chair of Academic Degree Committee of the School. He is a standing committee member of the China Yearbook Research Publishing Association and vice-chairman of its academic committee, vice-chairman of the China Educational Committee of Editorial Society. He was invited to present lectures to South Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia. He lectures and does research on China history of book publi-
cation, on information retrieval and application, and yearbook research, communication media in China and abroad, on publication management and administration, etc. He has published nineteen titles of professional works, tool books, text books and teaching materials, and 160 academic papers. He has received six times the Excellent Teaching Achievement Award of Provincial, Educational Ministry and University Level, and also has the honor of winning more than ten times the Excellent Scientific Research Award from the National Level, Provincial and Ministry Level, and University Level.