ONE OF THE GREAT WONDERS IN THE LIBRARY’S COLLECTION – A CASE STUDY ON WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING IN THE ZHEJIANG LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

Since the Zhejiang Official Publishing House (1867–) was merged with the Zhejiang Library in 1909, the Zhejiang Library started to collect wood blocks for printing. Although it had experienced a nearly 100 year vicissitude, it still preserves 150,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing in this library. The author of this paper exposes the history of these wood blocks for printing. It includes their characteristics, the present situation, the usage as well as their preservation, which is rarely known by common readers. The author hopes that it would be of interest and get a response from our colleagues.

KEYWORDS

Wood Blocks for Printing Library Media Collection Publishing History

1. THE ORIGIN OF CHINESE WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING

In the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A.D.), China’s famous scholar, Mr. Hu Yinglin said: “Wood blocks for printing was started in the Sui Dynasty (589–618 A.D.), popularized in the Tang Dynasty (618–906 A.D.), expanded in the Five Dynasties Period (907–960 A.D.), and constantly improved in the Song Dynasty (960–1279 A.D.).” According to the records of the historical documents and many existing material objects have shown that Mr. Hu Yinglin’s view of “wood blocks for
printing was started in the Sui Dynasty”, which can hold water. In the book of “Li Dai San Bao Ji” (历代三宝记, Records of Three Treasures in the Past Dynasties), it described that there was an order by the Emperor Sui Wendi (隋文帝) 13th year of Kai Huang (593 A.D.), when he advocated the Buddhism: “To give up the old bible, and made an order to engrave the articles and printing”. Therefore, we believe that China’s wood block printing was started in the Sui Dynasty (589–618 A.D.). After making many investigations, the author of this paper found that it is not occasionally, but there are three factors for the appearance of wood block printing in the Sui Dynasty.

1.1 Social demand was one of the important factors for the development of wood block printing in the Sui Dynasty (589–628 A.D.)

There are more then 1,000 years of China’s feudal society since the beginning of the Warring States Period (475–221 B.C.) to the Sui Dynasty. Only the social condition in the Han Dynasty of 426 years was relatively stable. After 360 years of social disturbance in the Epoch of the Three Kingdoms, the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasties, the Division Between North and South (220–589 A.D.), the Chinese people were in extreme need of social stability. Therefore, the Emperor Sui Wendi (581–604 A.D.) pushed forward two policies, which were beneficial to the development of wood block printing after he unified the whole nation. One was to encourage the popularization of Buddhism. The other was to initiate the feudal imperial examination system.

1.1.1 To encourage the popularization of the Buddhism.

According to the records in the historical documents, Buddhism was brought into China at the 10th year of Yong Ping of Emperor Mingdi in the East Han Dynasty (67 A.D.). Since then, Buddhism had a very fast development for more then 500 years (67–589 A.D.). According to the incomplete statistics, only in Zhejiang Province, there were 186 temples before the Sui Dynasty (589–618 A.D.). There are more then ten of them that still exist even now, like the Yan En Temple in Lin Hai City (临海的延恩寺 founded in 284 A.D.), the Tian Tong Temple in Ningbo City (宁波的天童寺 founded in 300 A.D.), the Lin Yin Temple in Hangzhou City (杭州的灵隐寺 founded in 328 A.D.), the Jing Yan Temple in Jiaxing City (嘉兴的精严寺 founded in 340 A.D.), the Wan Nian Temple in Tian Tai County (天台的万年寺 founded in 363–365 A.D.), the Da Fu Temple in Xin Chang County (新昌的大佛寺 founded in 486 A.D.), the Guo Qing Temple in Tian Tai County (天台的国清寺 founded in 538–598 A.D.) etc. The temples developed rapidly and spread everywhere. The monks needed the scriptures to read and to recite. To recite the scriptures they needed a large amount of scriptures, Buddha portraits and pictures, etc. This social condition created a very favorable situation for the development of wood block printing.
1.1.2 To carry out the system of feudal imperial examination for the selection of government officers.

There was a temporary measure to select qualified persons for government officers through examination in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 A.D.). In the 7th year of the Kai Huang Emperor Period (587 A.D.), the emperor declared and made known publicly to abolish the hereditary system and established the system of feudal imperial examination for the selection the government officers. The contents of this examination were divided into several subjects. It set up a candidate in the highest imperial examination in the period of Emperor Sui Yandi (605–617 A.D.). Since then, this feudal examination system lasted more then 1400 years until the 31st year of the Guangxu Emperor in the Qing Dynasty (1905 A.D.). Therefore, a large quantity of books were demanded by the common people, who sought the imperial examination for the selection government officers. This situation provided a very good opportunity for improving and developing the technique of wood block printing.

1.2 To have the necessary materials and conditions for wood block printing. These basic materials are paper, ink and the writing brush, etc.

1.2.1 The invention and development of Chinese paper making technique

Many people know that Mr. Cai Lun (蔡伦) initiated the paper-making technique at the 1st year of Yuan Xing Emperor (105 A.D.) of the East Han Dynasty (25–220 A.D.). In recent decades, Chinese archaeologists have found many papers of about 300 years older than Mr. Cai Lun’s paper in Shanxi, Gansu and other provinces. This shows that the technique of Mr. Cai Lun’s paper-making was a summary of our ancesters’ experiences and made further improvement. After 400 years of development since Mr. Cai Lun’s invention, the paper-making technique became exquisite and made it easy to print in the Sui Dynasty.

1.2.2 The invention and development of ink powder in China.

The invention of ink in China can be traced to the era of bamboo and wooden slips documents (from the Warring States Period to the East Jin Period, 475 B.C.- 420 A.D.). It is because the bamboo or wooden slips documents were written on with ink. It was probably that the early ink was processed by mixing graphite or charcoal powder with adhesives and water. Ink balls were unearthed in the tombs of the Warring States Period (475–221 B.C.) in Changsha City, Hunan Province, and in the tomb of the West Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–8 A.D.) in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province. In the 3rd century A.D., of China a great master ink-maker, Mr. Wei Dan (韦诞), another name of Zhong Jiang (仲将) appeared. There was a saying: “Zhong Jiang’s ink, is exactly like the pitch-black.” His ink was made of smoke powder from pine wood. During the Bei Wei Period (北魏 386–534 A.D.), Mr. Jia Sixie (贾思勰) published a book of “Qi Min Yao Shu” (齐民要术, the E-
sentential Knowledge for the Common People), which recorded the ink processing methods in detail. Since the Sui and the Tang Dynasties (589–907 A.D.), the technique of ink manufacturing became excellent workmanship, and also produced various ingot-shaped tablets. Therefore, ink provided a very good and necessary condition for the invention of wood block printing.

1.2.3 The invention of Chinese writing brush

Anyone who has read the documents on bamboo and wooden slips may understand that these documents were written with the Chinese writing brush. The Chinese writing brush, which was unearthed in the tomb of the Warring States Period (475–221 B.C.) in Changsha City, Hunan Province, is similar to the modern Chinese writing brush. The strokes in Chinese characters were written on the bamboo slips and on silk, which were unearthed in the Warring States Period and the Han Dynasty, show the high quality of manufacturing of the writing brush. Mr. Meng Tian (蒙恬), a general and famous person in designing and manufacturing the Chinese writing brush in the Qin Dynasty (221–206 B.C.). Qin Shi Huang (First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, 221 B.C.–210 B.C.) made an order to Mr. Meng Tian to sum up their ancestors’ experiences in writing brush-making, and set the standards for using certain materials for manufacturing the writing brushes, like rabbit hair, weasel’s hair, sheep’s wool, pig hair, fawn hair, etc. He also used wood or the bamboo sticks as writing brush holders. Until now, Mr. Meng Tian’s technique of manufacturing the Chinese writing brush has been handed down from generation to generation. For commemorating this great cultural forefather, Meng Tian’s Temple still exists in Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China.

In a word, the materials which are absolutely necessary for manufacturing wood block printing, were all in readiness. There were paper, ink powder, and Chinese writing brushes, etc. All these material objects were produced in high quality for more than 1,000 years of development (from the Warring States Period to the Sui Dynasty 475 B.C.–589 A.D.) No wonder the technique of wood block printing seemed ready to appear at the right time and the right opportunity.

1.3 The invention and development of the engraving technique of wood blocks for printing

There has been a long history of engraving Chinese characters and pictures. The engraving technique was developed from crude, roughly made and lousy workmanship to proficient, superfine and exquisite objects. The earliest engraving technique in China can be traced back to the “Painted-Pottery Culture” of the Late Neolithic Period (新石器彩陶文化 c.5000 B.C.) to the Shang Dynasty (c.16–11th Century, B.C.), from the inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells, and bronze ware. Stone carving was another great technique for the preparation of Chinese wood block printing, which was started in the Shang Dynasty (c.16–11th Century, B.C.), and flourished in the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BC- 220 A.D.). The engraving
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technique had been developed for more than 1500 years and created a very good condition for the invention of the wood block printing. Therefore, the culture of wood block printing had sprung up vigorously in the Sui Dynasty, like “the water flows, and the channel is formed.”

In a word, during the period of the Sui Dynasty, the material objects needed for wood block printing were all in readiness, the techniques were improved and regulated, and the society demanded a vast quantity of printed matter. All these favorable conditions had pushed the rapid development of the wood block printing. It is not an illusion, but fact, which has been handed down from generation to generation and makes a great contribution to the world’s cultural development.

2. A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF THE WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING COLLECTED IN THE ZHEJIANG LIBRARY.

2.1 The collection of wood blocks for printing after the Zhejiang Official Publishing House merged with the Zhejiang Library

In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 A.D.), after the peasant’s uprising of Tai Ping Tian Guo (太平天国 1851–1864 A.D.), the Emperor Tong Zhi (1861–1874 A.D.) ordered some provinces to establish Official Publishing Houses for promoting cultural heritage. The Zhejiang Official Publishing House was one of the most important provincial publishing houses. According to the records in the book of «A Textual Research on Zhejiang Document” by Mr. Hong Huanchun: “Zhejiang Official Publishing House had published more then 200 titles of books from the 6th year of Tong Zhi Emperor to the 11th year of Guangxu Emperor (1867–1885 A.D.).” Mr. Zeng Yun, Governor of Zhejiang Province, delivered a memorial to the Emperor Xuan Tong «A Memorial to the Emperor on Establishing Zhejiang Provincial Library” in 1909. This memorial stated: “Look at the original Official Publishing House in the provincial capital, it had published more then 110 titles of the books on classics, history, philosophy and collected works of literature. But recently the publishing work could not be extended because of the various reasons…..” Although different scholars had various statistical data, the fact of 150,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library shows its historical position for nearly a hundred years. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to have a brief account of the origins of this collection.

In the 1st year of Emperor Xuan Tong (1909 A.D.), Mr. Zeng Yun, Governor of Zhejiang Province, delivered a memorial to the Emperor «A Memorial to the Emperor on Establishing Zhejiang Provincial Library”. He suggested that the Zhejiang Official Publishing House should be incorporated into the Zhejiang Library and be made an extension of the scale and strengthen of the library’s collection in order to encourage and to develop education and to hope the Emperor would pay attention to it……. After the Zhejiang Official Publishing House was merged with
the Zhejiang Library, it continued the work of engraving wood blocks and publishing books. In 1932, the new library building for the Zhejiang library was completed, and the main library was moved to the new building. Mr. Chen Xunci, director of Zhejiang Library, asked Mr. Mao Chunxiang to gather together all the wood blocks for printing, and to make an inventory of them, which was handed down from the Zhejiang Official Publishing House, donated by a country gentlemen, and deposited in the Zhejiang Library. Through the hard work of Mr. Mao Chunxiang and his colleagues, they sorted out and counted all the materials. The total number is 163,690 pieces of wood blocks for printing. Among them, 40,151 pieces came from donation, and 1,053 pieces were from the depository at that time.

### 2.2 The collection of the wood blocks for printing donated by the Zhejiang Ancient Libraries

The news of the sorting and preservation work of the wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library spread and got a very good reception from the community. Therefore, many owners of the Zhejiang Ancient Libraries donated their collections of wood blocks for printing to the Zhejiang Library.

#### 2.2.1 The wood blocks for printing donated by Mr. Ding Xuzhi and Ding Lifang, descendants of the Hangzhou Ba Qian Juan Library

On July 1933, Mr. Ding Xuzhi, a descendant of Mr. Ding Bing, the owner of Hangzhou Baqianjuan Library, donated all the 18,400 pieces of wood blocks for printing to the Zhejiang Library. There were a lot of precious materials, like “The Selected Works of Poetry on Hangzhou” (杭郡诗正辑, engraved in 1874 A.D.), “The Selected Works of Poetry on Hangzhou, 2nd vol.” (杭郡诗续辑, engraved in 1876 A.D.), “The Selected Works of Poetry on Hangzhou, 3rd vol.” (杭郡诗三辑, engraved in 1883 A.D.), “A Series Works on Historical Anecdotes About Hangzhou” (武林掌故丛编, engraved in 1883 A.D.), “The Posthumous Papers by the Sages of Old in Hangzhou” (武林往哲遗书), “Records on Hangzhou’s Streets and Lanes” (武林坊巷志), and so on.

#### 2.2.2 The wood blocks for printing donated by Sun Kanghou, descendant of Hangzhou Sun’s Shousong Tang Library

In 1933, Mr. Sun Kanghou (孙康侯), a descendant of Sun’s Shousong Tang Library (孙氏寿松堂藏书楼), donated a group of very precious wood blocks for printing to the Zhejiang Library. Among them, there are: ”An Exquisite Book on the Local Records of Lin An (Hangzhou City now) in Emperor Qianlong” (影宋精刻本乾道临安志, engraved in 1774 A.D.), “A Supplementary to the Late Han Dynasty” (后汉书补遗, engraved in 1868 A.D.), etc.
2.2.3 The wood blocks for printing donated by Mr. Wang Yunian, descendant of the Hangzhou Wang’s Zhenyi Tang Library

In 1922, Mr. Wang Yunian (汪玉年), a descendant of Wang’s Zhenyi Tang Library in Hangzhou, donated his most valuable 22 titles of wood blocks for printing to Zhejiang Library. Among them, there are: “Monthly Words and Phrases of Cang Lang Hong” (沧浪虹月词, engraved in 1804 A.D.), “A Supplementary to Zuo Tong” (左通补释, engraved in 1929 A.D.), “The Local Records of Lin An (Hangzhou City now) in Xian Chun Emperor Period” (1265–1274 A.D.) (咸淳临安志, engraved in 1830 A.D.), and ten other titles engraved in the Dao Guang Emperor Period (道光年间 1821–1850 A.D.).

2.2.4 The wood blocks for printing donated by Mr. Liu Chenggan, owner of Jiaye Library at Nanxun Township, Huzhou City

On Nov. 19, 1951, Mr. Liu Chenggan, owner of Jiaye Tang Library at Nanxun Township, Huzhou City (湖州南浔嘉业藏书楼), delivered a document to Zhejiang Library: “Willing to donate the Jiaye Tang Library’s building, the land around the building, books in the building as well as the wood blocks for printing and all the library equipments to Zhejiang Library in order to keep preservation and serve the public.” During 1912–1933, the owner of Jiaye Tang Library, Mr. Liu Chenggan organized, engraved and printed 184 titles of books. Like: “The Series of Jiaye Tang” (嘉业堂丛书), “The Series Books of Qiushu Zhai” (求恕斋丛书), “Shadow Engraved Song Edition of Four Series of Books on History: Shi Ji, Han Shu, Hou Han Shu, San Guo Zhi” (影宋四史:史记、汉书、后汉书、三国志), and so on and so forth. The collection had total number of more than 50,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing.

2.2 The wood blocks for printing were deposited by Zhejiang prominent countrymen

Before and after 1933, there were many people who donated and deposited large amounts of wood blocks for printing to the Zhejiang Library. Like Mr. Fan Shupu (樊澍圃), Mr. Wang Xiu (王修), Mr. Feng Qingrui (冯庆瑞), Mr. Xiang Lansheng (项兰生), Mr. Tang Liu (谭馏), Mr. Hu Zhongmao (胡宗楙) and others.

3. THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE ZHEJIA NG LIBRARY’S WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING

The Zhejiang Library has collected and preserved more than 200,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing during its history. In spite of social disturbance, it still has kept well preserved more than 150,000 pieces. Through a detailed study, I consider that there are several characteristics as follows:
3.1 These wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library have a long history

During 1862–1874 A.D., the Emperor Tong Zhi ordered Zhejiang Province, and Jiangsu, Sichuan, Anhui, Guangdong, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Shandong, Shanxi, and Hebei provinces to establish the provincial level of Official Publishing Houses. The Zhejiang Provincial Official Publishing House was one of the most important ones, It was established on Apr. 26, 1867 of the 6th year of Tong Zhi Emperor. This publishing house used pear wood blocks for engraving and printing books. During the same year, this publishing house printed and published of “Qin Ding Qi Jing” (钦定七经, used 6,128 pieces of pear wood blocks, total 10,610 pages), Yu Pi Tong Lan Ji Lan” (御批通览辑览, used 2,807 pieces of pear wood blocks, total 5,209 pages), etc.

Around 1932, socially prominent persons donated a large number of wood blocks for printing with high quality to the Zhejiang Library. For example: “Yi Xian” (易宪, engraved in 1748 A.D., 8th year of Qianlong Emperor), “Ying Song Jing Ke Ben Qian Dao Lin An Zhi” (影宋精刻本乾道临安志, engraved in 1774 AD, 39th year of Qianlong, which was donated by Mr. Sun Kanghou 孙康侯, descendant of Shou Song Tang 寿松堂), “Can Lang Hong Yue Ci” (沧浪虹月词, engraved in 1804 A.D., 9th year of Jiaqing Emperor, which was donated by Mr. Wang Yunian 王玉年, descendant of Zhen Yi Tang 振绮绮), and others. The earliest wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library have a history of more than 260 years. A good portion of them date from before the Tong Zhi Emperor Period (1862–1874 A.D.), and have a great value in the library’s history.

3.2 The contents of the wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library represent a great variety

The contents of the wood blocks for printing, which are collected in the Zhejiang Library, are of different aspects. There are the editions by the emperor’s personal orders, the rare (or the only existing one) volume and precious volumes, and bibliography, like “Table of Bibliography in History” (史史史) “Bibliography of Wenhuan Ge Library” (文澜经), etc. Moreover, there were some large pieces of wood blocks for printing maps, like the “Map of Zhejiang Province” (浙浙海浙), “The General Map of the Capital City of Zhejiang Province” (浙浙浙浙浙), “The New Map of the Seawall of Zhejiang Province” (浙浙海浙), and so on. It is quite a pity that these wood blocks for printing maps were all lost.

3.3 The special high quality of the materials of these wood blocks for printing

The material of the wood blocks in the Zhejiang Library is pear wood, which is extremely hard in quality and it will never become deformed or out of shape and has not broken and been spoilt or eaten by insects. According to the introduction by the botanist in the Tropical Botanical Garden in Hunan Province, the pear
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wood tree grows very slowly and the quality of the wood is very hard. Therefore, this kind of tree is categorized as first class in China’s National Society for Botany. These pear wood blocks for printing, which were collected in the Zhejiang Library, have their own standard sizes, which are 12 cm. x 22 cm.; 19 cm. x 28 cm.; 20 cm. x 29 cm.; 25 cm. x 35 cm.; 14.3 cm. x 17.8 cm., etc. There were also some oversized pear wood boards for printing maps, like “The New Map of the Seawall of Zhejiang Province” (浙江海岸图). Of course, there are some wood blocks made from Chinese tallow tree wood, which was not as good as the pear tree wood. An example is the book, “New Method in Breeding the Silkworm” (养蚕新法, engraved in the 28th year of Guangxu Emperor, 1904 A.D.).

3.4 The large quantity of wood blocks for printing

As we know, the quantity of the Zhejiang Library’s wood block collection at its height reached more than 200,000 pieces. Some of the wood blocks had a history of more than 260 years since the Qianlong Emperor Period (1736–1795 A.D.). China had experienced so many setbacks in the last 260 years. There are about 100 years since the Zhejiang Provincial Official Publishing House merged with the Zhejiang Library. During this hundred years, China had suffered from the great disturbance of a lot of historical events, which were the anti-Japanese War, the Civil War, a large scale mass movement of “Abolishing Superstitions” in 1950s and “To Destroy the Old and Establish the New” in the Great Cultural Revolution. All these historical incidents have been a great threat to the preservation of this culture heritage. So, it has really not been easy to preserve 150,000 pieces of the wood blocks for printing during circumstances of foreign aggression and internal disturbance, as well as the social vicissitudes.

4. PRESERVATION OF THE WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING COLLECTED IN THE ZHEJIANG LIBRARY

On July 1864, the Tai Ping Tian Guo (太平天国, peasants’ uprising of Tai Ping Rebellion), which lasted fourteen years, was suppressed by Zeng Guofan’s Xiang Army (曾国藩的湘军). Taking the name of the Tai Ping Rebellion destroyed the Chinese traditional historical culture, Mr. Zeng Guofan delivered a memorial to the Tong Zhi Emperor (1862–1875 A.D.), and asked for the establishment of the Jiang Nan (South of the lower reaches of Yangtze River) Official Publishing House. From then on, Zhejiang, Fujian, Sichuan, Shanxi and nine other provinces established the provincial level of official publishing houses. After 150 years, almost all the materials and equipment in these publishing houses has disappeared, with only the exception of the Zhejiang Province. The author of this paper surveyed a lot of materials in the archive and draws this conclusion from the following reasons:
4.1 It attracted great attention of the government officers

In 1907 (33rd year of Guangxu Emperor), Mr. Zhang Henjia, director of the Zhejiang Provincial Educational Department and the Provincial governor delivered a memorial to Guangxu Emperor. It stated: “Your servants happened to know that all the other eight provincial official publishing houses had published a large quantity of the books in classics, history, philosophy and literature collection, and hope to have a duplication of each book for Zhejiang Provincial Library. So it will become and grow into an impressive sight in library collection” (On Oct.27,1907, the Guangxu Emperor wrote an instruction of agreement with the application). This matter showed that the Zhejiang people paid special attention to the books published by all the other provincial level official publishing houses.

In 1909 (the first year of Emperor Xuan Tong), Mr. Zeng Yun, the Zhejiang provincial Governor delivered a memorial of “Establishing and Expending Zhejiang Provincial Library.” It stated: “There was a good idea to combine the Provincial Official Publishing House with Zhejiang Library. All the materials, included the woodblocks for printing, will be collected together in order to develop the educational undertakings. It is earnestly hoped that the Emperor will accomplish this matter … We were informed that the official publishing house, which had published more then 110 titles of books in classics, history, philosophy and the collection of literature. In recent years, this publishing house had been in difficult situation and could not expend their business. Your former servant in Educational Department, Mr. Zhang Henjia, established the library, which was also in difficulties with poor facilities, lack of rich collection and unable to satisfy the social intellectualists, and scholars. So, we hope to discuss the publishing house merging with Zhejiang Library. To take this as the basic foundation, it will acquire all the library materials including Chinese and western books…” From this memorial, we can understand that the Official Publishing House was in a hopeless situation at that time. Therefore, we considered that this act, which combined the official publishing house with the Zhejiang Library, is one of the most important reasons for preservation of the wood blocks for printing.

4.2 The preservation of the wood blocks for printing collected in the Zhejiang Library during the Anti-Japanese War

During the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945 A.D.), the safety of the library collection of wood blocks for printing became one of the most anxious things for Mr. Chen Xunci, director of the Zhejiang Library. He made painstaking efforts to preserve the “Wenlan Ge Si Ku Quan Shu” (文澜阁四库全书) and other rare books and manuscripts, but he always kept in his mind the collection of these wood blocks for printing. From the record of his diary, we can understand all the facts.

“Dec. 16, 1937 (Thursday). In order not to be destroyed by the Japanese invaders, we have to moved hundreds of thousands of volumes of library collection of rare books including the “Wenlan Ge Si Ku Quan Shu” (文澜阁四库全书). Unfor-
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Unfortunately, some of the library materials of local historical records and western books were not be able to move out from the Hangzhou City. It was awfully pity that more than 170,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing, which were kept from the Provincial Official Publishing House and collected recent years, were unable to move out and protect them …… ”

“On Nov. 9 1940 (Saturday), … about 9:00 PM last night, Mr. Sha Menghai and Mr. Zhu Jialiu paid a visit to my house. When they asked me about the library collection, I was so regret for unable to move out of the collection of wood blocks for printing, which I was on pins and needles for been destroyed by the Japanese invaders. It was still left in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province and it was too late for regrets. I only can excuse myself for “without experiences”.

4.3 The leaders of the Zhejiang Library organized, sorted, and protected the wood blocks for printing in the 1950s

On Nov. 19, 1951, Mr. Liu Chenggan, owner of the Jiaye Library in Nanxun Township, wrote a donation letter to the Zhejiang Library. This donation letter states that the owners was willing to donate all the collection including the rare books, wood blocks for printing, the library’s facilities as well as the land and garden around it. After that, Mr. Zhang Zongxiang, director of Zhejiang Library (1950–1965 A.D.), made a plan to reorganize, and to utilize this cultural heritage of wood blocks. He assigned the librarians to assemble all the wood blocks for printing together in the Jiaye Tang Library and put them in order. After the great cultural revolution (1976 A.D. -) the director of the Zhejiang Library assigned a librarian to the Jiaye Tang Library and reorganized all these wood blocks for printing in order to make them useful.

4.4 Preparation for designing a new building for the collection of the wood blocks for printing in the Zhejiang Library

On Feb. 2004, together with Mr. Wang Wenzhong, professor of the Zhejiang Institute of Technology, Mr. Xu Xiangdong, professor of Zhejiang University, Mr. Zhong Jiarui, senior research librarian and Mr. Chen Shuyu from Ningbo City, the author of this paper delivered a proposal to the Chinese People Political Consultation Conference of the Zhejiang Provincial Committee. This proposal asked for the provincial government to design a building to store these 150,000 pieces of wood blocks. The answer for this proposal is positive and initiative. It stated: “the proposal for preparing and constructing a building for storing and protecting these cultural heritage is necessary and valuable. It is necessary to design a building of 3000m² for storing, exhibition, social education and scientific research of the Chinese printing history. It will create a better condition for the preservation of these cultural heritages. The Cultural Department of Zhejiang Provincial Government will urge Zhejiang Library to establish a managed system for the preservation the these valuable wood blocks for printing.” We believe that due to the great concern
of the Zhejiang Provincial People’s Government, the Zhejiang Library’s collection of wood blocks’ condition of preservation will be improved, and the collection will make a great contribution to the valuable cultural heritage.

5. MAKING USE OF THE WOOD BLOCKS FOR PRINTING IN THE ZHEJIANG LIBRARY

Keeping the library’s collection is not only for preservation of historical cultural heritage but also for making use of them. The idea is not only for the library to collect ordinary books and periodicals, but also to collect rare books as well as the wood blocks for printing. In 1950, Mr. Zhang Zongxiang, director of the Zhejiang Library, asked several librarians to assemble all the collected wood blocks for printing and to sort them out in order to make them usable.

5.1 In 1964, organized and published the books of “Zi Zhi Tong Jian Xu Bian” (资治通鉴续编 Supplementary of the Reference Book for Governing the Country), etc.

On June 1964, together with the Hangzhou Old Book Shop and the Guanglin Old Book Publishing Society of Jiangsu Province, the Zhejiang Library used the collection of wood blocks for printing to publish the ancient books of “Zi Zhi Tong Jian Xu Bian” (资治通鉴续编 Supplementary of the Reference Book for Governing the Country), “Shi Yuan Congshu” (适适丛经 Series Book of Shi Yuan), “Si Ming Congshu” (五四丛经 A Series Books of Si Ming Area) and another eleven titles.

5.2 On August 1980, organized and published the books of “Jiaye Tang Congshu” (嘉业堂丛书, A Series Books of Jiaye Tang), etc.

On Aug. 29, 1980, the Zhejiang Library signed a contract with Beijing Relic Publishing House to have a joint publication of “Jiaye Tang Congshu” (嘉业堂丛书, A Series Books of Jiaye Tang), “Wuxing Congshu” (吴兴丛经 A Series of Wuxing County), and another 207 titles of ancient and rare books. A total number of 56,000 wood blocks, which were collected in the Zhejaing Library, were used.

5.3 On October 1980, organized and published the books of “Wulin Zhang Gu Cong Bian” (武林掌故丛编, The Collection of Historical Anecdotes About Hangzhou City), etc.

On Oct. 30, 1980, the Zhejiang Library had a cordial talk with the representatives of the Hangzhou Old Book Shop and the Guanglin Ancient Book Publishing Society of Jiangsu Province and decided to have a joint publication of the books of “Wulin Zhang Gu Cong Bian” (武林掌故丛编, The Collection of Historical Anecdotes About Hangzhou City), “Jin Hua Congshu” (金华丛经 A Series Books of Jin
Hua City.), and another twenty titles of ancient books. Thirty-seven thousand wood blocks were used in publishing this work.

5.4 In 2000, organized and published the book of “Jing Song Si Shi” (景宋四史, Four History Books of Song Edition), etc.

On October 2000, the Zhejiang Library cooperated with Guhang Cultural Lit Co. of Zhejiang Hua Bao Zhai to use the wood blocks to publish an ancient Chinese thread binding book. This time, we used the wood blocks from the Jiaye Tang Library of “Song Si Shi” (宋四史, Four History Books of Song Edition), which included “Han Shu” (汉书), “Hou Han Shu” (后汉书), “Shi Ji” (史记), “San Guo Zhi” (三国志). A total number of 6,000 wood blocks were used in this work.

6. CONCLUSION

Just as Mr. Hu Yinglin said above: “The technique of wood blocks for printing was much improved in the Song Dynasty”. Through nearly 400 years of the Sui, Tang and the Epoch of the Five Dynasties, wood blocks for printing had entered a new era of letter board printing, which had happened at Hangzhou by Bi-Sheng in 1040–1048 A.D. of the Song Dynasty. They had a rapid development with exquisite high quality. The Song edition books, which spread in the libraries of China and abroad are the evidences of these facts. The Zhejiang Province was one of China’s most important centers of wood blocks in the Song Dynasty (there were four centers in China’s Zhejiang, Sichuan, Fujian, and Shanxi Provinces in the Song Dynasty). Early in the North Song Dynasty (960–1127 A.D.), Hangzhou was an important center of wood board engraving and printing in China, Mr. Ye Mengde (1072–1148 A.D.) stated in his book of “Shi Lin Yan Yu” (石林燕语, Twisting in the Stone Forest). It said: “The whole nation’s quality of book printing, Hangzhou is the best, Sichuan follows up, and Fuzhou (in Fujian Province) is the last one. The quantity of the printing matter in the capital city is almost the same as in Hangzhou, but the quality for paper printing could not be compared with that of Hangzhou. The soft wood boards in Fujian and Sichuan provinces are easy engraved, but the printing quality can’t be matched with that of Hangzhou.” After the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties, until the mid-Qing Dynasty (c.960–1740), the wood blocks for printing in China had reached their summit. Especially in the period of peace and prosperity of the Kangxi Emperor and the Qianlong Emperor (康乾盛世1662–1795 A.D.). The social conditions were stable. The traditional culture was developing and book printing and publishing were flourishing. Therefore, wood blocks kept improving, and their makers sought for even greater perfection. The results became better and better.

The valuable wood blocks collected in the Zhejiang Library are the essential articles since the middle-Qing Dynasty of Qianlong Emperor (1733–1795 A.D.).
They are the cream of China’s national culture. These valuable wood blocks are treasures of human cultural heritage. They have been well preserved in spite of a hundred years of China’s internal disturbances and foreign aggression. We should never forget our ancestors’ great contribution, and we also must carry forward and develop this spirit of service for our later generation and for mankind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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