

commoners in different places constructed kinship in pursuit of their strategies and then mystified or obscured that very construction. Only with many more local studies will the overall picture emerge. Only then will we be able to fully assess Clark's assertion that the institutions of kinship had reached maturity in the Song. In the meantime, this is an important work. It both provides much detail about local culture and community in one Song locality and testifies to the importance of the local perspective in understanding the broader sweep of Chinese history.

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A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China.
By Joseph P. McDermott. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 294.
\$57.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

This book is a collection of essays on printing, book-lending, and book collections in the Yangzi delta in late imperial China from 1400 through 1800. Three chapters 2, 4, and 5 were originally lectures and portions of the first four chapters have been published. Chapters 1, 3, 6 are new additions.

The author offers two theses: first, imprint in China did not triumph over manuscript until the sixteenth century; second, despite the ascendancy of imprint, books continued to be restricted in their circulation; even literati, officials, and collectors had problem acquiring books and gaining access to books down to the eighteenth century. The problems stemmed from the insufficient commercialization of book production, the reluctance of private collectors to share their books, and the absence of "public libraries" whose access did not depend on personal relationship or special ties such as kinship and native place. Consequently, the problem of access to books prevented the literati from forming a community of learning until the eighteenth century when state created large libraries, making books more accessible to scholars. However, even the emergence of a community of learning and greater access to imprints did not contribute to the formation of a public, a national identity, and the promotion and spread of mass literacy. The first thesis confirms current scholarship on the burgeoning of commercial publications since the late Ming. The second thesis substantially qualifies the first one, disputing that expansion of commercial publishing in the late Ming had any significant "liberating" impact on literati culture until the nineteenth century. Except the audacious claim in the second part of the thesis, the book is primarily a synthesis of current scholarship in Chinese, Japanese, and English on the history of book printing, book collection, and lending practices.

Chapter 1 provides a detailed description of the process of preparing woodblocks, carving, transcribing, printing, and binding in the production of the traditional Chinese

book. The author's synthesis confirms the current view that book prices fell in the Ming and Qing and books were inexpensive. The author notes that, despite the invention of printing since at least the mid-eighth century (p. 12), there was no detailed account of the production process until the British missionaries came in the nineteenth century. Exceptional details are given in excerpts from Samuel Milne's reports on the comparative advantages of woodblock printing and European metal movable type printing. It is the simplicity, low initial investment, and low cost for wood carving that explains the longevity of woodblock printing in China. These issues have been well researched by others and Su Jing 蘇精 who wrote his dissertation using extensively the archive of the London Missionary Society.¹

In Chapter 2 the author argues that imprints did not exceed manuscripts until the sixteenth century but the former did not end the use of manuscript. He examines the size of book collections in the imperial libraries and private collections. There were few large private libraries before the sixteenth century. Large libraries hardly exceeded 30,000 *juan* 卷 and it was not easy to build large private libraries until the latter half of the sixteenth century. This clearly formulated thesis confirms current scholarship on the boom of commercial publishing since the sixteenth century, which made books more affordable and accessible as a result of the lowering of book prices.²

While McDermott's ascendancy thesis supports current scholarly views, his qualification of this thesis is disconcerting. He said, "[T]he unprecedented publishing boom of the sixteenth century may have significantly increased the number of texts in print ... But it still did not entirely alleviate book shortages for private collectors relying on the market" (p. 76). As will be explained below, while this conclusion appears to make sense, it misrepresents the so-called "shortage problem."

Chapter 3 further qualifies his "ascendancy of imprint" thesis by arguing for insufficient commercialization of book production even in the Yangzi delta. Literati still depended on gifts and peddlers for acquiring books. The imperial government from Song through Ming gave out books as gifts but this practice declined in the early Ming. He suggests that even though "stores which dealt primarily in the sale of books seem to have first become common in most of the Yangzi delta's cities only in the early sixteenth century," there was a "scarcity of late Ming bookstores" (pp. 98–99, 112). The number of literati involved in publishing increased in the sixteenth century. And yet, these literati did not derive their income entirely from the market and many still depended on patronage. The author concludes that "[t]hus, this kind of circulation of books did not necessarily lead to the rapid dissemination of ideas and information or to any strong awareness among literati that their shared interests as scholars mattered more than their separate family ties" (p. 114).

In Chapter 4, McDermott continues to expatiate on his claim that even after the

¹ Su Ching, "The Printing Presses of the London Missionary Society Among the Chinese" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1996).

² Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

ascendancy of imprint in the sixteenth century, the problem of lack of access to books persisted. Private book collectors were reluctant to lend books. Even there were some beginning to share their books with one another, these groups involved no more than three literati. Such restrictive book sharing did not lend itself to the “formation and maintenance of any broad ‘community of learning’ outside of state institutions” (p. 117). Since books in imperial libraries were easily lost to fire, war, and poor management, they were not “essential centers of learning for much of the Song and for at least the last two centuries of Ming rule” (p. 134).

Based on the purported problem of access to books, he warns that “the liberating impact of print technology and market distribution was far more gradual than sinologists have usually believed” (p. 116). Instead of explaining what he means by “liberating impact,” he concedes in the endnote that he has excluded two type of books—examination aids and entertainment literature (p. 235, n. 5). But then why exclude these two major genres of literary publications when all students of Chinese publishing in the late Ming concur that these two genres were particularly prominent in the explosion of commercial publishing? To further prove that there was no “community of learning” in China between 1000 and 1700 (p. 146), he ventures to make a comparison of libraries in China, Europe, and the Middle East from the medieval period through the eighteenth century. Without producing comparable data, he speculates that “the problem of access to books was, at least in some places and periods until the nineteenth century, nowhere near as acute as in much of late imperial China” (p. 120).

Chapter 5 focuses on what McDermott considers “solutions” to the problem of access to books. Collectors depended on inheritance and began to participate in sharing their books. Through special ties—friendship, teacher-disciple relationship, common place, collectors exchanged books with one another. Drafting book sharing pacts began in the Song and became popular in the Ming. A few owners of large libraries in the Yangzi delta began to participate in pacts to share their books. But such pacts were restricted to no more than three persons. Therefore, even with the ascendancy of imprint, “a world where a large and learned ‘community of learning,’ even in the late Ming, remained an ideal far divorced from reality” (p. 162).

Only in the mid-Qing does McDermott consider that there was improvement in scholarly access to books as evident in four types of activities: correspondence with other scholars, extension of book sharing among collectors, the appearance of reading and book-lending societies, the Qing government efforts in collecting books, making available imperial libraries to scholars, and the growth of collaborative scholarship in the eighteenth century with official patronage (pp. 167–68). Even with this improvement in scholarly access, McDermott again claims, “the problems of book access and borrowing were not fully solved” (p. 169).

Chapter 6 is the only chapter that addresses the question of readership outside the literati circles. The author argues that even with wider circulation of and better access to books, “the problems for the spread of literati learning and an expansion of its readership were far from solved” (p. 171). Literati praised the “moral benefit of literacy” and even formed associations to promote respect for Chinese characters with a religious zeal. But those who promoted and pursued literacy for economic benefits remained few. What is

more serious for McDermott is that the world of learning, including the Confucian ideas and values, was not shared by the literate population outside the “élite circles” (p. 117). Qian Jinren 錢進仁, a poor cobbler, somehow, was able to learn to read through work and had access to books working in Suzhou bookstores, temples, and shrines. But he did not use his literacy to improve his economic and social conditions. This is indeed curious but cannot be used to make a sweeping statement about how Chinese did not acquire literacy for economic reasons in Ming-Qing China. For McDermott, despite the spread of literacy and increase in book production and distribution between 1400 and 1800, woodblock printing failed to foment a concern for mass literacy, “any ‘imagined national community,’ the development of an empire-wide written culture, and even the written language as a means for engaging readers and writers into a public, let alone a national, consciousness” (p. 185). This general conclusion about the impact of Chinese printing bespeaks Eurocentrism.

The author has offered a good synthesis of scholarship on the history of collections in government and private libraries. His second thesis, however, is problematic and the argument flawed. First let us examine his claim that insufficient commercialization resulted in a shortage of books even after the sixteenth century and restricted lending policies of private collectors prevented the formation of a sizable community of learning before the mid-eighteenth century.

There is always a “shortage” of certain texts when one is looking for a rare manuscript or an imprint with few extant copies. It is misguided for the author to cite examples of texts such as rare titles as well as genealogies, geomancy manuals, and ritual texts that have no market value for publishers as evidence for book shortage (pp. 77–78). The author conflates this kind of “shortage” with the shortage of books in general. Only by doing so can he claim that “[t]hese problems persisted well into the eighteenth century” (p. 76). No commercial publisher would publish a book simply because a few collectors were looking for it. Examination aids for Confucian classics, history, statecraft, and entertainment literature were the most expanded genres of commercial publications in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century. But the author deliberately excludes these two largest categories from his study without providing an explanation.

Insofar as book collection and distribution are concerned, the author has left out libraries in private academies and temples, two of the major systems of book collections in imperial China. Song temples not only collected Buddhist scriptures but also other types of texts.³ Private academies in the Song and Yuan periods were not only important places where books were stored, they also published books. The famous Xihu Academy 西湖書院 in Hangzhou had published no fewer than 122 titles during the Yuan dynasty.⁴ During the Ming-Qing periods, academies continued to be places for book collection and publishing down to the late nineteenth century. Unlike private libraries, these were opened to students and scholars.

³ Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 and Xie Zhuohua 謝灼華, eds., *Zhongguo cangshu tongshi* 中國藏書通史 (Ningbo 寧波: Ningbo chubanshe, 2001), pp. 410–16.

⁴ Deng Hongbo 鄧洪波, *Zhongguo shuyuan shi* 中國書院史 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanzhongxin 東方出版中心, 2004), pp. 234–46.

Two cases will suffice to challenge the author's claim concerning a shortage of and restricted access to books in the Yangzi delta between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. A thorough study of the expansion of the book market, libraries, and access to books in Ming-Qing China needs to include books exported to other Asian countries. Japan imported a great number of Chinese imprints during this period. In his attempt to study Ming law, Maeda Tsunanori 前田綱紀 (d. 1724), the daimyō 藩主 of Kaga 加賀藩 had been able to acquire and access to 96 books on Ming law. When Tokugawa Yoshimune 德川吉宗 (1684–1751) became interested in collecting Chinese local gazetteers, he was able to import 264 titles between 1725 and 1728, building the largest collection of Chinese local gazetteers outside China. Today some rare Ming editions of local gazetteers are preserved only in Japan.⁵ Japan has preserved many late Ming and early Qing editions of fiction and examination aid that are not found in China or the United States. Based on the author's definition of shortage, even today we have a problem of shortage of books in China! But Japanese scholars and the Tokugawa government had no problem building "large" collections of books on relatively specialized subjects like law and local gazetteers. These libraries in Japan could not have been built if there was a general problem of book shortage in China.

The publication of the voluminous anthology of essays on statecraft, *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編, in 1638 shows clearly that there was a large community of learning and access to books in private libraries was not a general problem. Chen Zilong 陳子龍 and three other literati compiled the work as members of the Restoration Society 復社, which not only served as an institution for influencing the examinations but also a conduit for sharing information and books. Chen was the chief editor, assisted by 26 other members in editorial work, and over 142 scholars from other provinces in searching for books and proofreading. Essays were chosen from over a thousand books in the private libraries of literati from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, and Beijing. The enormous number of essays by 429 authors in 504 *juan* included in the anthology attested to the extensive reach of the literati network. The types of information included in these volumes range from education, examination, government, taxation, trade, military affairs, agriculture, river conservancy, and famine relief, etc. These issues are considered by McDermott as useful learning (pp. 163–65).

That such an enormous project took only nine months to complete was the result of two factors: first, the existence of regional communities of literati and an empire-wide organization, the Restoration Society, and second, the editors had access to private libraries in the Yangzi delta and beyond. Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 and Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, two of the well-known book collectors mentioned by McDermott, were involved in the project. Other participating book collectors included Chen Longzheng 陳龍正 and the writer-publisher Feng Menglong 馮夢龍. The publication of the *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* is

⁵ Osamu Ōba 大庭修, *Jianghu shidai Zhongguo dianji liubo Riben zhi yanjiu* 江戶時代中國典籍流播日本之研究, trans. Qi Yinping 戚印平 et al. (Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 201–11, 282.

significant in assessing McDermott's argument. First, the editors hoped that the publication would foster a common interest in practical learning relevant to a wide range of knowledge concerning government, education, classics, history, law, taxation, river conservancy, and many economic problems. Second, the hundred of literati involved in producing the work not only shared their own books but also had access to books in private libraries in the Yangzi delta and beyond. Third, the publication is evidence for the growing trend of literati communities forming organizations to pursue common interests. One wonders why McDermott considers this organization of over 700 members not big enough to be called a "community of learning," whose members engaged in and promoted many scholarly trends—statecraft learning, philology, ritual and institutional studies, and notably classical learning—that contributed to the flourishing of *kaozheng* 考證 scholarship since the early Qing. These literati were both writers and readers, constituting a public, and more importantly, they were connected to other social strata, especially the merchants, through kinship, religious, communal, and native place ties. There might be no "national consciousness" but the literati shared a political and cultural identity, as well as a literary culture which had transformed significantly under the impact of commercial publishing since the sixteenth century.

Focusing on book collectors and book catalogues is only one way to understand the complex relationship between book production, dissemination, and consumption. The author can hardly justify the subtitle of his book, "Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China" when he chooses to exclude recent studies of the impact of commercial publishing on knowledge production, literature, arts, religion, ritual, education, examination, gender, power, as well as identity and community formation. In the "Bibliographical Notes on Studies Useful for the Writing of This Book" at the end of the book, McDermott provides an annotated bibliographical essay introducing only studies on book collections and bibliographical studies with a few exceptions. The book makes little or no reference to the studies on the impact of publishing on Chinese culture by Catherine Bell, Katherine Carlitz, Kai-wing Chow 周啟榮, Craig Clunas, Joseph Dennis, Robert Hegel, Dorothy Ko 高彥頤, Julia Murray, Shang Wei 商偉, Patricia Sieber, Meir Shahar, Qitao Guo 郭琦濤, and Ellen Widmer, etc.

The study of book culture in late imperial China cannot be restricted to only the history of libraries and anecdotes about book collectors having problem in obtaining rare titles. An account based primarily on bibliographies and the activities of book collectors presents a distorted view of book distribution and its complex relationship with the dissemination of learning, the formation of scholarly communities, as well as collective identities and consciousness. The book has a few editorial mistakes (pp. 68, 269, 273, 275, 294). Despite the problematic thesis and the exclusion of two major categories of books and library systems from his study, the author provides a good synthesis of current scholarship on government and private collections. Its provocative thesis behooves scholars of Chinese print culture to respond with specific analysis of the complex process whereby printing impacted Chinese culture and society in Ming-Qing China.

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