

Master Yu of Shuangfeng tang has corrected the text and added commentary, removing anything inconveniencing its perusal and eliminating anything extraneous. It contains poems with incorrect rhymes that he wished to edit out, but he feared that readers would say it was lacking so they have been included in the upper register. Furthermore, there are no mistakes whatsoever in a single sentence of the book's twenty-plus volumes (*juan*). Gentleman customers can trust in the

Shuangfeng tang trademark.<sup>2</sup>

水滸一書，坊間梓者紛紛，偏像者十餘副，全像者止一家。前像板字中差訛，其板蒙舊。惟三槐堂一副，省詩去詞，不便觀誦。今雙峰堂余子改正增評，有不便覽者芟之，有漏者刪之。內有失韻詩詞，欲削之，恐觀者言其省漏，皆記上層。前後卅餘卷一書一句並無差錯。士子買者可認雙峰堂為記。

The quality of its print, the accuracy and completeness of its text, and its commentary, Yu wrote, made this edition superior to the dozen or more competitors.

The *Shuihu zhuan* was not the only title to see this kind of growth in the late sixteenth century: this was a time when books in general had become more widely available than ever before. While commercial printers had existed since the Northern Song era, it was in the late Ming they thrived as never before by catering to literate and at least moderately wealthy populations of readers.<sup>3</sup> Yu Xiangdou himself is a perfect example of this expansion of print activity. His clan had been in the business for hundreds of years, and he was an eleventh-generation publisher. Yet whereas his ancestors had only published a handful of titles each, Xiangdou published more than seventy, mostly between the years 1588 and 1609 but as late as 1637, and his contemporary cousin Yu Zhangde 彰德 published fifty-seven.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the

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see Irwin, *Evolution*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel notes this final line in his *Reading Illustrated Fiction*, pp. 433-4.

<sup>3</sup> There is precious little data concerning the prices of books in the late Ming. For a summary of that data, see Shen Jin, "Mingdai fangke tushu zhi liutong yu jiage." However, Lucille Chia notes that even this data may be problematic (*Printing for Profit*, p. 323n18). It can be inferred from the editions themselves that prices varied. Robert Hegel, Anne McLaren, and others have also argued that late Ming publishers could target publications for specific niche audiences. See Hegel, "Niche Marketing," and McLaren, "Ming Audiences," on different editions of the *Sanguo yanyi* aimed at different audiences.

<sup>4</sup> Lucille Chia has written extensively on the Yu publishing clan and Jianyang printing in general. See her *Printing for Profit*, *passim.*, esp. pp. 87-93. Chia includes detailed information concerning their publishing output as well. She has identified 20 Yu clan imprints from the Song, 43 from the Yuan, and 371 from the Ming. Of those 371, she counts 72 as being Yu Xiangdou's. Others attribute a slightly higher number to Yu Xiangdou. See Chia, p. 155, pp. 298-302, p. 364n24. See also Xiao Dongfa, "Mingdai xiaoshuojia, keshujia Yu Xiangdou," in *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo luncong*, vol. 4, pp. 195-211.

*Shuihu zhuan*, titles printed by Xiangdou fall into a range of genres including other works of vernacular fiction, classics, encyclopedias for daily use, and almanacs.<sup>5</sup>

This surge in commercial printing, often called the late Ming “printing boom,” has received much attention from scholars in recent years. Studies have focused on wide-scale topics such as the long-term development of print and print culture, studies of the industry in specific locales, the examination of the imprints themselves, and the eventual domination of the imprint over the manuscript. Others have examined the influence of print culture on the formation and reception of texts, including commercial commentary editions of the classics, the targeting of “niche” audiences by commercial publishers, and the functions of various editions of a text aimed at audiences of varying literacy levels. Closely related to these studies are yet others that have focused on the materiality of the book in the late Ming period, and the function of the book as a symbol of status and taste among merchant classes who were newly affluent yet filled with anxiety over their lack of traditional literati status.

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the particular effect the late Ming printing boom had on the *Shuihu zhuan* in particular, a title typical of the commercial imprints of the period. I will show the changing significance of the *Shuihu zhuan* as it was consumed during the printing boom, and how the printing boom influenced its reception. I will also show what the commercialization of the *Shuihu zhuan* demonstrates about the wider phenomena of late Ming commercial printing and channels for disseminating information. First, I will provide a brief description of the celebrated late Ming printing boom and the socioeconomic factors that fostered it, and draw some comparisons between the print culture of the late Ming and that of

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<sup>5</sup> The latter includes his well-known 1599 almanac *The Correct Source for a Myriad Practical Uses* (*Wanyong zhengzong* 萬用正宗), discussed in Timothy Brook’s *Confusions of Pleasure*, pp. 213-14.

seventeenth century Europe. In particular, I will argue that, while in the West the commodification of the text gave rise to the author figure and the concept of copyright ultimately derived from it, in the Ming it was the editor and the closely related commentator who were products of the commercial print industry.

This leads to the second point. I will show the ways that the editor/commentator figure that rose from the commercial print industry shaped commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* through the addition of prefaces and commentaries. The first commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* was created by Yu Xiangdou, the very same edition of 1594 that is quoted above. In the early seventeenth century, a handful of other commentary editions appeared, most notably two purporting to be by the infamous iconoclast Li Zhi. These commentary editions attempted to frame understandings of the work by remarking not only on the quality of its prose but also the moral qualities expressed within it. Here I focus on the problem of expressions of loyalty and righteousness (*zhong yi* 忠義) and their role vis a vis official state ideology.

Finally, with comparison to historical precedents, namely the *Tales While Trimming the Lamp* (*Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話, *Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話) collections that are frequently cited as the first “banned” works of literature in the Ming, I examine the extent to which non-canonical literature and its spread through commercial channels could be perceived as a danger to the state. I argue that, while it may not be the case that a fully-developed “public sphere” arose out of print and “print culture” in the Ming, there was a large degree of freedom and range of ideology expressed in “printing boom” era books in general and commentary editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* in particular.

## Commercial Publishers, Authors, and Editors

By the time commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* such as Yu Xiangdou's appeared, commercial circulation of texts was already a phenomenon with a long history. The commercial circulation of texts in China was not sparked by the advent of printing: Texts were sold in manuscript form long before the woodblock imprint became the dominant medium for textual transmission. Records of marketplace stalls selling (or possibly, as Joseph McDermott has suggested, renting out) manuscripts exist as early as the Latter Han dynasty (22-220). The biography of Wang Chong 王充 (27-100 CE) in the *Book of the Latter Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), for example, contains the following:

His family was poor and without books. He would frequently roam the market stalls of Luoyang, reading the books sold there.  
家貧無書，常游洛陽市肆，閱所賣書。<sup>6</sup>

There are records of permanent shops dedicated to the sale of manuscripts by the sixth century in the north and the south.<sup>7</sup> As for printing technology, it was in use in East Asia at least 700 years before Gutenberg famously “revolutionized” communications in the West with his invention. It also had a widely used precedent in the form of official seals used to denote the authenticity or ownership of documents or items. It is because printing was so early and widespread that there is not an East Asian figure equivalent to Gutenberg in the West, an inventor who changed the world in one stroke. The “inventor” of printing in East Asia is not known, and such a concept is perhaps not even applicable. In any case, it can be surmised that East Asian printing was driven by religious rather than (purely) commercial concerns. In Mahayana Buddhism, sutras became the equivalent of relics, and the copying and transmission of them were understood to be a

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<sup>6</sup> Hou Han shu, book 49.

<sup>7</sup> See McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book*, pp. 94-100.

means of creating merit. Timothy Barrett has speculated that Wu Zetian used printing to disseminate large numbers of Buddhist texts in order to create merit and legitimacy for her Zhou dynasty (690-695), establishing herself as an equivalent to Ashoka, the Indian ruler who created 84,000 relic stupas throughout his territory. Printing, Barrett claims, allowed Wu Zetian to do this work more quickly and effectively than employing scribes would.<sup>8</sup> A lack of contemporary references to woodblock printing of books complicates this claim, however there is some physical evidence to back it up: a Buddhist *dharani* text discovered in a Korean temple features characters developed during Wu Zetian's rule. The temple's construction suggests that the text was placed within it between 704 and 751.

Early printing techniques were used by Daoists as well, including the printing of iconography onto paper. The Daoist heavenly hierarchy mirrored the earthly bureaucracy, and as such Daoists employed stamps and seals as well. Daoists also used stamp-like techniques to create forms to be filled in. These uses predate the Wu Zetian reign, raising the possibility that by they influenced the Buddhist usage. The printing of entire texts by Wu Zetian would simply have been a case of taking a familiar technique to new lengths.<sup>9</sup>

As for entire "books," the famed Diamond Sutra acquired by Aurel Stein in 1907 and held by the British Library is frequently regarded as the earliest printed book. The British Library qualifies that title, referring to it as "the world's earliest complete survival of a dated printed book."<sup>10</sup> Dated 868, it features a colophon stating that one Wang Jie 王玠 had it printed

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<sup>8</sup> See Barrett, *The Woman who Discovered Printing*, passim, on the influence of religion on early printing in China.

<sup>9</sup> On Daoist printing, see also Barrett, "The Feng-tao k'o and printing on paper in seventh-century China," in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1997), pp. 538-40.

<sup>10</sup> It is described as such on the British Library's website: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html>, accessed 2/27/12.

for distribution to gain merit on behalf of his late parents.<sup>11</sup>

There are records of booksellers dedicated to selling printed materials in Chengdu and other major cities as early as the ninth century.<sup>12</sup> The birth of the *shidafu* 士大夫 class spurred the development of bookstores in the Song, as candidates sought out printed materials that would assist them in preparing for the civil examinations. Inoue Susumu has argued that commercial printing in the Song was a factor in Su Shi's fame as a poet, as it was at this time that one could be a commercial author. Susan Cherniack has also argued that Song commercial printing led to a re-evaluation of the Confucian classics in that it exposed textual instability and brought various commentaries into circulation, factors that gave rise to textual criticism.<sup>13</sup>

While print was a major cultural force by the Song, spurring the growth of textual criticism and making texts increasingly widely available, the manuscript continued to be the dominant form of textual transmission until the late Ming. Several surveys of existing and historical collections of books have come to the same conclusion, that print only began to outpace the manuscript in the sixteenth century. The dominant force behind the rapid growth of the woodblock imprint in the sixteenth century is the growth of the commercial print industry at that point in history. The majority of the imprints from the era were the products of commercial publishers such as Yu Xiangdou.

Several factors spurred this rapid expansion of the commercial print industry. First was economic expansion and urbanization. With the silver trade bringing the precious metal into the Ming from the New World via the Philippines and Japan, domestic economic activity became

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<sup>11</sup> For a lavishly illustrated introduction to this sutra, see Wood, *The Diamond Sutra: the Story of the World's Earliest Dated Printed Book*.

<sup>12</sup> See Inoue, *Chūgoku shuppan bunka shi*, pp. 95-100.

<sup>13</sup> Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," in *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 5-125.

monetized to a greater extent than ever before. Coupled with the urbanization process, this meant that cities became hubs of economic activity. Trade routes allowed commerce between the nodes, and the widespread use of silver as a means of exchange brought a greater range of products to local markets.<sup>14</sup>

The second factor was an increase in population. While the precise numbers remain a subject of much debate, it is agreed upon that the sixteenth century was a period of rapid population growth. This combined with the economic growth allowed for greater investment in the educational preparation for the civil examinations. More families could afford to put their money into the education of one or more of their boys in the hopes that one day he would be able to become an official, traditionally the most prestigious of careers. The educated “sub-elite” who did not take places in the traditionally esteemed hierarchy of officialdom formed the audience for commercial publishers. In addition to the classics, these audiences sought out a range of printed material that ran from encyclopedias for daily use, calendars and almanacs, and trade route guides to dramas, joke books, literary collections, and, of course, vernacular fiction.

The odds of success in the exams, however, became increasingly minuscule with respect to to the number of candidates: while the number of examination hopefuls grew wildly, the number of positions to be won remained mainly stable. Yet rather than being deterred, candidates took heart in the increasing number of alternatives that remained open to them should they fail to win a spot in the government bureaucracy. Among these fall-back careers were those of professional publisher, writer, editor, and commentator. Their ranks bolstered the previously existing commercial publishing industry.

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<sup>14</sup> On silver and international trade, see Atwell, “Time, Money, and the Weather,” “Another Look”; von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*.

It was not the printing of “new” texts that allowed publishers to thrive: as I have shown above, the *Shuihu zhuan* was available from at least a dozen publishers in the last decade of the sixteenth century. This is a typical example of vernacular fiction in the late Ming. Encyclopedias for daily use, joke books, and other such genres of printed material also contained previously extant content, repurposed and repackaged into “new” collections. There was no formal legal copyright apparatus as there developed in seventeenth century Europe. However, that is not to say that publishing was seen as a complete free-for-all by all parties involved. Here again, Yu Xiangdou’s editions serve as an example. In a note preceding his edition of the *Baxian zhuan*, he complains about those who have reprinted his work without his permission:

Works such as *Huaguang zhuan* and others I’ve edited all came from my heart at great expense of labor and money. Those many who print in search of profit and those who would even copy this establishment’s works are only walking in the tracks others have made and following in others’ dust. Now, this house has many works of its own and has no shame about attempting to profit from them. But there are bastards and running slaves from elsewhere who would only re-cut printings already made by others. They seize upon others with their musings and obtain something without putting their heads down and working up a sweat—shameless in the extreme!

不佞門自刊《華光傳》等傳，皆出予心胸之編集，其勞鞅掌矣！其費弘鉅矣！乃多為射利者刊，甚諸傳照本堂樣式，踐人轍跡而逐人塵後也。今本坊亦有自立者，固多，而亦有逐利之無恥，與異方之浪棍，遷徙之逃奴，專欲翻人已成之刻者。襲人唾餘，得無垂首而汗顏，無恥之甚乎？

Yu’s protestations might seem hypocritical in light of the fact that he was himself guilty of reprinting the work of others: his publications *Tang guo zhizhuan* 唐國志傳 and *Da Song zhongxing Yue wang zhuan* 大宋中興岳王傳 were reprinted works by Xiong Damu 熊大木. Yet it is important to note that Yu is not bemoaning unauthorized copying of his “original” work. He speaks here not as an author but as an editor/compiler. The activity in which he claims to have invested his money and labor is editing (*bianji* 編輯) rather than “creating” or “writing,” terms that do not figure into his lamentation at any point. In the division of labor that the commodification of the book has created, the editor is responsible for shaping the text and



becomes the basis of authority over it.

This is in contrast with the history of the book in the West. Unlike in China, where woodblock printing techniques remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years, the West saw sudden adoption of mechanical printing technology. This technologically based origin led to the forerunner of the copyright, the mechanical patent that granted the rights to print books in a certain language or, later, books of a certain kind. The situation soon became untenable, and booksellers sought exclusive legal rights to print specific texts. Those rights derived from the author, whose labor—authorship—brought the text into existence. As the product of labor, the text was the property of its author, and the author held property rights to it accordingly. The booksellers claimed that those property rights were transferred to them exclusively by purchase of texts from their authors.<sup>15</sup> These claims became the basis of the modern copyright system.

In the commercial publishing of the late Ming, it was editing rather than authoring that was the main labor that went into creating a text for publication as a book. In this light, Yu Xiangdou is justified in his complaint that others have profited from his labor. He sees his labor as honest work by which he should be able to make his fair profit. This sort of labor is on display in the first Yu Xiangdou quotation above as well: though the base texts of the *Shuihu zhuan* in the market editions most likely shared a line of textual filiation, they were transformed through editing. Yu's claim is to have created the most accurate, readable edition through his labor of editing. He also pioneered another, related strategy for improving upon the text, adding commentaries. The commentator, similar to the editor, labors to create an edition that can be read accurately.

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<sup>15</sup> For an account of the rise of the figure of the “author” in the West and its relation to copyright law, see Rose, *Authors and Owners: The invention of copyright*; Johns, *Piracy*.

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