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It is commonly known that the Chinese have printed their books for over eleven centuries, but despite such a long history of woodblock printing in China and the importance of this technology in the history of Chinese publishing, no detailed Chinese descriptions of the process of block cutting or printing are extant from before the late nineteenth century. Western observers in nineteenth-century China occasionally supplied illuminating descriptions of the cutting and printing process.\(^1\) In his overview of woodblock printing in the *Science and Civilisation in China* series, Tsien Tsuenshuiin also notes that “the technical procedures of printing have scarcely been documented in Chinese literature” and relies in his study on interviews conducted in 1979 with craftsmen who were still producing woodblock imprints in traditional ways.\(^2\) The interest of Western scholars in the history of Chinese printing and books has grown steadily over the last decade or so, however, this interest has focused overwhelmingly on the publishing boom in the late Ming (1368-1644) and the early Qing (1644-1911).\(^3\) Until now, only very limited attention has been paid to explore printing in the Song, the “first ‘golden age’ of print in China” (p.1), and its long-term impact on the social and intellectual history of Song China, although the bibliographic range of Song (960-1276) printing has been the topic of some very fine earlier studies, such as works by Ming-sun Poon, Denis Twitchett, Jean-Pierre Drège, Susan Cherniack, and Lucille Chia.

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\(^1\) See Medhurst (1838); Williams (1882), vol. 1, pp. 599-603; Hunter (1885), pp. 213-215.

\(^2\) Tsien (1985), pp. 194-201. See also Chia (2002), chap. 2, for a profound examination of the materials and procedures of woodblock print technology, in particular as practiced by Jianyang printers from the Song to the Ming.

\(^3\) See among others Wu (1943); Chow (2004); Brokaw and Chow (2005); McDermott (2006).
respectively. In this respect, the volume under review here, the product of a conference held at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University in 2007, is a major contribution to filling this lacuna.

In each of the nine chapters in the volume the contributors offer a comprehensive study of a special application of print technology during the period this book covers. In his opening essay ‘To Count Grains of Sand on the Ocean Floor: Changing Perceptions of Books and Learning in the Song Dynasty’, Ronald Egan examines Song scholars such as Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-1155), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), and Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210) to show “how ubiquitous was the impact of the new flood of books the period witnessed upon thinking about reading and writing” (p. 45). In the following essay ‘Book Collection in Jiangxi during the Song Dynasty,’ Joseph P. McDermott explores in detail the role the book collections of Song literati played as the basis for Confucian institutions and centers of learning. Concentrating on seventy known book collections in Jiangxi during the Song, McDermott convincingly demonstrates that the majority of these collections were imprints rather than manuscripts, and that their owners differed from their contemporaries in the lower Yangzi delta by their interest to “build an institution around the presence of a book collection” (p. 92). The continuity and interrelationship between manuscript and print is also a concern in ‘Early Printing in China Viewed from the Perspective of Local Gazetteers’ by Joseph Dennis, as he deliberately discusses the permeability of manuscript and print by emphasizing that in fact every gazetteer was first compiled in the form of handwritten manuscript and that the number of its imprints was often very small.

Under the title ‘Early Buddhist Illustrated Prints in Hangzhou,’ Shih-shan Susan Huang, focusing on “a local tradition of visual printing culture” (p. 136), traces the printing and distribution of Buddhist prints produced in the Wu-Yue 吳越 kingdom (907-978) and the Song, and analyzes the spread of sutra recital as part of repentance rites. These prints were closely related to a growing market for sales of texts in the Song. Lucille Chia, in her ‘The Use of Print in Early Quanzhen Daoist Texts,’ forcefully demonstrates how printed texts contributed to the spread of this Daoist teaching between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, a topic rarely studied until now. The following two essays by T. J. Hinrichs (‘Governance through Medical Texts and the Role of Print’) and Hilde De Weerdt (‘The Cultural Logics of Map Reading: Text, Time, and Space in Printed Maps of the Song Empire’) explore the role of medical manuals and historical atlases as instruments of political power in Song China. For Hinrichs, these

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texts “aimed not to assist individuals in aligning themselves with powers of the cosmos, but to educate and transform the common people en masse” (p. 237). In De Weerdt’s words, they were “part of a broader cultural strategy to make sense of spatial disorder” (p. 260). It is worth noting that De Weerdt cogently points out that paratext, a term initiated by Gérard Genette to refer to seventeenth century French imprints, shapes reading in Song China in multiple ways.² She argues that even though paratextual components such as headings and running titles were commonly used in manuscripts, it was the fierce competition in commercial printing in the latter half of the Song that led to their normalization and standardization.

The last two essays, ‘Chen Jun’s Outline and Details: Printing and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Pedagogical Histories’ and ‘Challenging Official History in the Song and Yuan Dynasties: The Record of the Three Kingdoms,’ by Charles Hartman and Anne E. McLaren, respectively, put the world of texts and the world of empire and politics in close connection. Centering around Chen Jun 陳均 (1174-1244), a disciple of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), Hartman lucidly surveys how Chen brought together and edited his “pedagogical” histories, which substitute a firm Daoxue moral narrative of Song history for the earlier chronological treatments. McLaren turns her attention to the intense interest on rewriting Sanguozhi 三國志 (Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms) during the Song and the Yuan (1271-1368).³ As the issue of political legitimacy became thorny again under the political and military pressure of the non-Han peoples from the north, the attempts by Song revisionist historians is especially noteworthy because “the increasing use of print led to the proliferation of historical texts, shaped their reception, interpretation, and social status” (p. 318).

This volume marks a collaborative effort of the contributors to “further flesh out the diversity of Song printing and book history by exploring the social and political relations that shaped the production and reproduction of printed texts, the impact of new intellectual formations on book production, the interaction between print and other media, implied readership and reading instructions, and the increase of collectors and the growth of collections resulting from the expansion of textual production” (p. 27). In this sense, the volume adds important new dimensions to our knowledge of this pivotal period, and the authors effectively place their meticulous studies at the intersection of several subfields of history, including but not limited to cultural history, social history, and history of

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² See Genette (1997).
³ See also McLaren (2006) and McLaren (2012) for a more detailed investigation of the subject.
science and technology. Without doubt, it significantly advances the field both in terms of content and theoretical sophistication.

As someone whose focus is further north, I can only feel deeply envious! Although historians have begun to venture into the history of the book and publishing under non-Chinese rule, the topic still deserves more comprehensive examinations. From the tenth to the late fourteenth century, exactly the same time span this volume covers, China was partially or wholly occupied and ruled by the Khitans, Tanguts, Jurchens, and Mongols. These peoples were conventionally considered as “barbarians,” unlettered and culturally inferior, and most of them have been for a long time largely overlooked by historians. However, they formed an important chapter in Chinese history and contributed, mainly through the Chinese under their rule, toward the extension and improvement of the art of printing. In addition, the specific multi-state relations during the period also clearly shaped intellectual attitudes toward and government policy on the production and circulation of books, because certain information about the geopolitical situation or astrology might pose an intrinsic threat to the rule and the legitimacy of the reigning regime if they were allowed to be distributed freely. These topics have been touched upon in previous scholarship, yet how and to what extent such particular historical contexts influenced the history of the Chinese book, and what long-term impact it had on the development of print technologies and circulation networks, are still questions to which no clear answers are available. In this respect, Evelyn S. Rawski’s pioneering studies of printed literature in non-Han languages (Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan) under the Qing and the social and cultural effect of non-Han publishing in the period may serve as a paradigm for future scholarship to follow.

Certainly, this should not detract from the remarkable originality and richness of this book. There is no doubt that Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print: China, 900-1400 is a splendid achievement. Both scholars of Chinese cultural and social history and historians of Chinese science and technology will find skillful syntheses, intriguing observations, and provocative arguments. Another recent publication by Yugen Wang, which probes into the impact of print technology and the resulting increased availability of books on poetic practice in the Song, is warmly recommended to be read in combination with this volume. One may also refer to Inoue Susumu’s profound study for a sustained and deep focus on the

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7 See, for example, Wu (1950); De Weerdt (2006).
8 Rawski (2001); Rawski (2005).
emerging connections between literary genres and their material aspects in an age of print.10

References


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