



Some Observations about Book Collecting in the 18th Century China

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Received 4 February 2011; accepted 10 May 2011

POZNATKY O SBĚRATELSTVÍ KNIH V ČÍNĚ V 18. STOLETÍ

ABSTRAKT Formování knižních sbírek bylo v Číně nahlíženo jako sběratelství (analogické sběratelství umění) a těšilo se vážnosti, ať už je podnítilo vědecké bádání, shromažďování vzácných tisků či obchodování. Významné sbírky byly při císařském dvoře, kde v letech 1772 až 1784 zkompletovali *Sebrané písemnictví ve 4 dílech*; pro tento projekt se využilo soukromých knihoven po celé zemi. Soukromé knižní sbírky byly tehdy zdaleka nejvýznamnější a zastínily i knihovny státních akademií. Soukromí sběratelé zaštiťovali související projekty: stavbu knihovných budov, katalogizaci sbírek, vydávání reedic a kolektanů (mnohosvazkových edičních řad vycházejících z jejich fondů). Rozmístění knihoven však nebylo rovnoměrné, největší a nejhodnotnější se nalézaly v Jiangnanu. Přístup byl rovněž omezen a pokud je majitelé otevřeli učencům, kteří si nákup knih nemohli dovolit, bylo to za badatelské protislužby nebo ve snaze pozvednout vlastní společenskou prestiž.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA Čína; 18. století; knižní sbírky; soukromí sběratelé; *Siku quanshu*; knižní kultura v Jiangnanu

ABSTRACT The formation of book collections in China was regarded as analogical to the collecting of arts and enjoyed high respect, no matter whether it had been initiated by scholarly research, by amassing of fine books, or business. Important book collections had been at the imperial court, where the *Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* was compiled, in the years 1772 to 1784; this project made use of private book collections from all over the empire. The private book collections were by far the most important at the time and overshadowed the libraries of state academies, too. Private book collectors sponsored relevant projects: construction of library buildings, cataloguing of collections, publishing of new editions or *collectanea* (multi-voluminous series based on the library funds). The lay out of the libraries in China was uneven though; the most valuable ones were located at Jiangnan. The access to the libraries also had limits and if the owners opened them to scholars who were not themselves able to buy books, it was in exchange of research or in the aim of increasing their own social prestige.

KEY WORDS China; 18th century; book collections; private collectors; *Siku quanshu*; book culture in Jiangnan

EDITORIAL NOTE Chinese characters are given for personal names, book titles, or terms in Chinese after the first appearance; characters for most geographic names and for imperial dynasties are not given.

The dynasties, mentioned in the text, ruled in the following years (alphabetically): Han (206 BC–220 AD), Ming (1368–1644), Northern dynasties (386–581), Qin (221–206 BC), Qing (1644–1911), Song (960–1279), Southern Song (1127–1279), Yuan (1271–1368).

Chinese book culture presents a well studied field, not all its aspects, however, are being paid equal attention. Whereas a number of works so far is devoted to the formal features of books, to printing technologies, and to the study of editions, *banbenxue* 版本學 (Brokaw 2007, 5), this article scrutinizes the relatively less studied topic of collecting books and forming libraries. It focuses on the 18th century when the private book collecting reached an unprecedented boom.



Fig. 1. Traditional Chinese book may comprise of several thin paperback volumes wrapped in a hard cover, made of carton or even wood, to protect it.

GENERAL TRAITS OF BOOK COLLECTING

What did a book once mean and represent? It is self evident that along with the Chinese bureaucratic system, made of highly albeit one-sidedly educated personnel, a book, as the kernel and symbol of learning, opened the way leading to official career, and was adequately esteemed. Books were needed as the material for studying (for state examinations); this was the first and common purpose of amassing and collecting them. On a higher level of learning then followed the necessity of specialized books, required by research. Creating libraries with holdings of valuable and rare books, which is the topic of this article, ensued. The phenomenon did not spread equally throughout the Chinese empire, in some provinces, men were more inclined to book collecting than in other ones. The reason behind it is chiefly seen in the long tradition of local learning and scholarship; that was the case of Anhui province, for example, where philosophy of *lixue* 理學 developed in Song and Ming, and ‘unadorned’ research *puxue* 樸學 in Qing dynasties,¹ bringing along excellent individual results in state examinations, participation in the editorship of various important projects, etc. (Fig. 1, 2).

The prestige of book collecting was very high – collecting classical texts was regarded higher than collecting historic artefacts. The treasured core of any such collection was carefully chosen rare books, the prerequisite of which was connoisseurship. One should be reminded, however, that only a fraction of the educated elite could afford to assemble libraries. Those who amassed books, distinguished by both quantity and quality, had to house them, bind them, stamp them and catalogue them. Major collectors also collated and published new series or ‘collectanea’ (*congshu* 叢書) based on their holdings; the editor would often select some particular works he was especially fond of, or re-edit various rare books, and so forth.

1 Alphabetical list of the dynasties mentioned in the text, with dates, appears in the editorial note at the head of this article.



Fig. 2. The way of storing traditionally bound Chinese books on library stacks. The books are not “standing”, but laying down in wrappers. Photo taken in Lu Xun Library, Prague, by Lucie Olivová, 2011.

Thus, the collection and related activities reflected contemporary cultural trends as well as the owner’s personal character. Publishing collectanea actually was the characteristic of Qing book culture.

WHO WERE THE COLLECTORS?

It is an irony that the earliest occurrence of the term ‘book collecting’ (*cangshu* 藏書), in the ancient text *Han Fei zi* 韓非子, section *Yulao* 喻老, is used in a parable which on the whole belittles the amassing of books.² Book collecting nonetheless was regarded positively over the centuries, and so were book collectors. However, the definition of a book collector alone is unequivocal. Should he pursue the spiritual content or the possession of a valuable object? Is the collector of print blocks equal to a book collector? Does the man who collects for financial gain deserve to be called a collector?

The reputed scholar Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746–1809) observed in *Beijiang’s Talks on Poetry* (*Beijiang shihua* 北江詩話)³ that ‘there are several types of book collectors. When men like Qian Daxin 錢大昕 or Dai Zhen 戴震 got hold of a book (text), they sought its origin, and questioned its genuineness; this is called textual criticism (*kaoding* 考訂). Next are men like Lu Wencho 盧文弨 or Weng Fanggang 翁方綱, who scrutinize the editions, and pay attention to wrong characters; this is called collating (*jiaochou* 校讐). Next comes searching for unusual books, from items left in stone caves and golden caskets, down to anything a and erudite would find interesting to glance over; such collections (*shoucang* 收藏) rest in

2 The parable goes: Wang Shou 王壽, carrying books on his back, met on the road with Xu Feng 徐馮 who told him, ‘Knowledge does not require storing books (*cangshu*), so why do you walk loaded with them?’ Then Wang Shou burnt the books, and danced (Huang – Gao 2002, 6).

3 *Beijiang* was Hong Liangji’s pseudonym (*hao* 號).

[the library building] Tianyi ge 天一閣 founded by Mr. Fan 范 at Yinxian 鄞縣, in Pinghua zhai 瓶花齋 founded by Mr. Wu 吳 at Qiantang 錢塘, or in Chuanshi lou 傳是樓 founded by Mr. Xu 徐 at Kunshan 崑山. Next are those who look for exquisite books, their delight are books produced in the Song dynasty; they are called connoisseurs (*shangjian* 賞鑑), eg. Huang Pilie 黃丕烈 of Wumen 吳門, or Bao Tingbo 鮑廷博 of Wuzhen 鄔鎮. Still next are those who go to old shops, buy cheaply whatever there is hidden, then move on to book lovers in rich houses, and demand a favourable prize, they can distinguish true and false, they recognize what is antique and what is present, they can never be fooled about a book from Fujian or a book from Sichuan, they discern in one glance a Song edition and a Yuan edition; they trade aggressively (*lüefan* 掠販) like Qian Jingkai 錢景開 and Tao Wuliu 陶五柳 from Wumen, or Shi Hanying 施漢英 from Huzhou 湖州' (Huang – Gao 2002, 33).

Hong Liangji sketched a befitting picture of book hunting in his times, and did not hesitate to bring up the names of concrete men, some of whom were his peers. Clearly, the definition was perceived as positive. Soon, his amusing definition of the five groups of scholars, collators, bibliophiles, antiquarians and booksellers was in the vogue. One would imagine that in reality, the barriers between the five groups were rather loose. Hong Liangji omitted assembling books in pursuit of learning – perhaps it seemed too obvious and basic. Yet the term *cangshu* does imply assembling books for the practical reason of studying and researching. Hang Shijun 杭世駿 (1696–1773), says his biographer, 'disregarded Qian Zunwang 錢尊王⁴ as someone who collected books for the sake of collecting, and not for the sake of studying [as Hang Shijun himself would do]. In the field of learning, there was nothing Dongpu 董浦 (ie. Hang Shijun) would not have scrutinized. His books were piled up on sofas and stools, and were not fewer than hundred thousands. When reading or writing, he would quite forget day and night. At times, he visited friends at their homes, and once he got hold of an unusual text or concealed volume, he sat down in an upright posture, and quietly acquired knowledge from its content' (Hang Shijun 1845, 1:12). The fact that one half of the short unofficial biography of Hang Shijun, just quoted, relates to his affection for books, reveals how much assumed meaning an information about books and studying carried. Books were held in esteem, and by the same token, 'bookworms' were revered.

Hang Shijun had the means to buy books, but there are many more examples from the opposite extremity. Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709), historian and poet, used to copy the books which he could not afford to buy, spending several days in library until his task was completed (Huang – Gao 2002, 3). It is also said that as a poor student, Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), another scholar of note, would memorize a book in a bookshop and write it down as soon as he arrived home (*Yangzhou minjian* 1989, 43–44). Even such 'copyists' were considered –

4 Qian Zunwang, ie. Qian Zeng 錢曾, a noted bibliophile, see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 1970, 157.

in general terms – book collectors (*cangshu*). For economic reasons, their aim was not the rare and valuable objects, but the immaterial knowledge recorded in the texts.

Major collectors naturally had to draw on sufficient financial resources. They mostly were active or retired officials, or men who became wealthy through their enterprise or inherited family estates. Contrary to social prepossessions, collectors and connoisseurs not necessarily were degree holders, although many were former students who had not passed examinations. As such they were not classified intellectuals, even if they pursued learning and cultural endeavours. Two portraits which follow fall to this group, and confirm the odd nature which, in consequence, was assumed to be theirs. Jiang Chun 江春 (1721–1789?) was native of Shexian 歙縣, the place of a strong cultural tradition. Like many others he nevertheless departed from that region, engaged in salt trade, and eventually gained a high post at the Yangzhou Salt Administration; he held it for forty years. He became one of the wealthiest men of his days, and his wealth made anything possible, including a series of cultural enterprises. Jiang Chun turned a mercenary and supported men of letters and poets: he used to entertain them in a newly built library named 'Reading under the moonlight' (*Suiyue dushu lou* 隨月讀書樓). Besides, he himself composed two collections of poetry. Over and above, he kept two theatrical troupes, one each specialized in a different performing style, the refined and the vulgar respectively. He built several houses and gardens in Yangzhou, one of which the Emperor personally visited – the recognition was undoubtedly in appreciation of Jiang Chun's financial subsidy of imperial military campaigns. In spite of Jiang Chun's involvement in a bribery case in 1769, the emperor invited him to the celebration of the sixty year old ones held in Beijing / Peking. Thus, popular sources nicknamed him 'a commoner (*buyi* 布衣) whom the emperor Gaozong befriended'. This is not quite correct, since Jiang Chun did gain the title *zhusheng* 諸生, but failed further attempts, and thereafter turned to the salt trade (Zhu Zongyu 1991, 17–20). Obviously, book collecting was not his chief occupation, just an expensive pastime which nevertheless led to substantial social prestige.

In contrast, Ding Jing 丁敬 (1695–1765) never counted among rich men and always remained poor (Fig. 3). He was well known as a poet and mainly as a respected connoisseur of books and antiques. His social origin was surprisingly low: his father was a mere liqueur vendor. As a youngster, Ding Jing became ardently interested in studying, broke away from the family tradition and devoted himself to studies, but failed official career. By the age of forty two, he gained enough reputation for poetry, calligraphy, and seal carving as to recommend him to the special examination (*boxue hongci* 博學鴻詞) held in 1736. He did not succeed again, and continued his bohemian life unchanged. 'He became an expert on epigraphy, able to recognize Qin and Han seals, Song and Yuan calligraphies, antiques and rare books. Although he could not buy anything in the market, he frequently went, looked around and discerned true and false ...' (*Zhongguo meishu* 1987, 215). The social recognition of Ding Jing signalizes a liberal change of



Fig. 3. Portrait of Mr. Ding Jing 丁敬, painted around the year 1760 by Luo Pin 羅聘. Ink and colours on paper, 108.1x60.7 cm. Kept in the Museum of Zhejiang.

social conventions under the Qing dynasty. In a similar vein, Jiang Chun's activities illustrate that merchants increasingly assumed cultural roles, especially along the developed south-eastern sea coast. This area, as will be described later on, corresponded with the concentration of important book collections, too.

IMPERIAL, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Although private collectors of the Jiangnan 江南 region were the most conspicuous group in the 18th century book collecting, the role played by the imperial collection may not be disregarded, and the example, past and present, which it set. The first notion of imperial libraries relates as far as to the Han dy-

nasty: the Weiyang 未央 palace comprised two depositories of books, Tianlu ge 天祿閣 and Shiqu ge 石渠閣. We may note that their ancient names were borrowed for similar buildings and institutions in the future. The palaces of Sui, Tang and Song emperors also had libraries which need not be listed here. The Forbidden City in Beijing, since its foundation in the early 15th century, had a depository of woodblocks produced in Song and Yuan dynasties, named Wenyuan ge 文淵閣. It is interesting to note that the Qing court ran no official institution specifically dedicated to book collecting (Huang – Gao 2002, 7), however, several libraries existed on the palace premises, namely Lizao tang 摛藻堂 in the Imperial garden (Yu huayuan 禦花園), Zhaoren dian 昭仁殿 in the eastern wing of Qianqing gong 乾清宮 palace, Neifu daku 內府大庫, ie. the library of the Imperial household office, and Guoshi guan 國史館, ie. the library of books on history (Ru Jinghua 1995, 31).

A new library was built between the years 1774 and 1776, just north of the complex Wenhua dian 文華殿 where princes were educated. Its construction was inspired by the Tianyi ge 天一閣 library at Ningbo,⁵ which had impressed the emperor during his tour to the South, but in fact is much larger than the model (Fig. 4). It was named Wenyuan ge (literally, 'the source of letters / literature') after the old woodblock depository, and housed the 36 thousand volumes of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, or *Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature*, as the title goes. *Siku quanshu* was not a collection of books, but a newly compiled series encompassing all Chinese literature of worth. The inspiration of this enormous project must have at least partly come from private social circles. The emperor decided to compile, and make available for himself, the largest collectanea ever. The process in which many scholars were involved took twelve years (1772 to 1784); it is astonishing that it came to a completion, and in a relatively short time, too. More than ten thousand titles were amassed either from imperial libraries, including the *Yongle Encyclopaedia*, *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典, or submitted from private libraries from all regions of China; provincial authorities who carried out the task offered the reasoning that it was positive to make private possessions publicly available (Li Dou 1979, 88). The amassed material then underwent a critical review which is notoriously known in the West as the 'Qianlong inquisition'; the ensuing censorship found some 3000 books offensive and had them destroyed, making the *Siku quanshu* project a sad episode of the history of book collecting. Finally, some 3,450 works were selected, collated, transcribed and bound. The series was not printed, but a manuscript was produced in seven sets, the first one being deposited in this palace library and the other six in various places where the emperor used to dwell⁶ (*Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 1970, 121). One ought

5 Mentioned earlier. Tianyi ge was privately built by Fan Qin 范欽 (1506–1585) to house the family book collection.

6 Three were in the north (Shenyang, the summer palace Yuanming yuan, Chengde) and three in the south, or Jiangnan (Yangzhou, Nanjing, Hangzhou).



Fig. 4. Wen Yuan ge, Forbidden City, Beijing. The roof of the library was covered with black tiles which symbolically protected it against fire; black colour stands for water. Photo by Lucie Olivová, 2009.

to be reminded that *Siku quanshu* conformed to the Qing political strategies. The Qing (ie. alien, Manchu) conquest of China was carried out on both the military and cultural levels. Like the former Chinese rulers, they too supported Confucianism, state schools, examination system, and employed Chinese scholars. With the use of both politics and culture, Manchus tried to win their Chinese subjects over.

Imperial collections are usually labelled *guancang* 官藏, ie. 'state collections' (*guan* means in Chinese 'governmental / state / official' etc.). Alongside existed many private collections (*sicang* 私藏), as the reader already knows. Their history was incited by the development of paper production and printing technology from Song onward, and reached the peak during the Qing dynasty, in the 18th and 19th centuries. This period was the hey-day of private book collecting: the number of collectors by far exceeded the summary number of those active from Song to Ming. Libraries were built at many more places than ever before, the quantity of kept volumes was the highest, and the question of storing and cataloguing became ever more important. Some key factors which made this rise possible were the burgeoning book publishing, the example

given by imperial collecting and printing, and the development of the 'unadorned' *puxue* and the evidential *kaoju xue* 考據學 schools of learning.

Private libraries were supported in various ways. As long as they belonged to a private person, they were maintained by him, a high official or a man of rich background; some are spoken of in sections 2 and 5 of this article. However, there also existed the so called 'public collections' (*gongcang* 公藏), attached to academies (*shuyuan* 書院) and other regional schools. For political reasons, academies had declined since the late 17th century, but were revived in the reign of Yongzheng 雍正 (1723–1735), and partly regulated by state. By the end of the century, they numbered two thousand. In Huizhou 徽州⁷ alone, the number of local academies reached one hundred in the eighteenth century (Liu 2003, 5). Traditionally perceived as private, some nonetheless received subsidies from the state; others were financed by the means of individuals such as the local merchants' organizations. Not only academies, but all the district and prefectural schools

7 Huizhou is the historic name of Shexian.

had libraries, too. In most cases, however, no relevant documentation about them survives. This concerns several influential academies, eg. the Wenzheng 問政 academy, founded in 1770 in Huizhou by the magistrate Zhang Peifang 張佩芳, or the case of the Ziyang 紫陽 academy, jointly re-established in 1790 by the minister of revenue Cao Wenzhi 曹文埴 and the salt merchant Bao Zhidao 鮑志道. It should be remembered that these three founders themselves owned book collections (Liu 2003, 261). Of the libraries which were documented, no unique characterization can be made. Ruan Yuan who served as the official administrator in Hangzhou and then in Guangzhou / Canton, established there new academies: Gujing jing-she 詁經精舍, and Xuehai tang 學海棠, respectively. Both lived on, gaining reputation and meaning. Both also possessed relatively rich and valuable library holdings; we may note in passing that whereas Hangzhou had a rich cultural history, Guangzhou at the time still had been a place of cultural limitations. On the other hand, the holdings of Zunjing ge 尊經閣 library, attached to the Huizhou prefectural school (founded in 1664), conformed to the official ideology and had no special titles, in spite of the fact that the province had become the cultural centre, as earlier noted.⁸ But the regional school at Xiuning 休寧, also in Anhui province, reportedly had an excellent library. Obviously, the key to the quality of a collection, private or public, was the person who built it, or enlarged it.

Finally, libraries and book collections in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries deserve a short comment. Inasmuch they were relatively independent of classical learning, there existed contacts between the secular and religious world of letters. The monastery libraries not only kept their respective canon, but also acquired non-Buddhist and non-Daoist literature. They contributed to Chinese librarianship, especially in the field of cataloguing. Their contribution to printing technology is generally acknowledged, and they played an important role in education (Huang – Gao 2002, 100–101).

RARE BOOKS AND RELATED ENTERPRISES

As already mentioned, book collecting usually implied and was further accompanied by other undertakings, namely the publication of other books than the necessary library catalogues. A book publisher who owned woodblocks could make new printings, he who owned rare books could produce new editions. And so, book publishers turned collectors in pursuit of commercial profit, as well as in pursuit of social reputation. According to the contemporary Chinese scholar Liu

8 The catalogue of Zunjing ge, published within the *Gazetteer of Huizhou, Huizhou fuzhi* 徽州府誌 of the Daoguang 道光 reign (1821–1850), list mere 38 titles, among them writings by the Emperor such as the *Moral instructions* (*Sheng xun* 聖訓), the philosophical and historical treatises which formed part of the canon (*jingshi* 經史), governmental directives, regulations about examinations etc. (Liu 2003, 258).

Shangheng 劉尚恆, they fell into three categories. First, they were former artisans who at one point established their own publishing houses, and also collected books. Their goal was financial gain. Such was the Huang family of Qiucun 虬村 (in Huizhou, a region noted for production of books) which bore several publishers across generations, among them Huang Lizhong 黃利中 (1652–1738), Huang Qigao 黃啓高 (1709–1787), and Huang Dingrui 黃鼎瑞 (1758–1824). The second category was represented by officials who published and collected books partly for profit and partly for reputation. They are exemplified by Wang Qishu 汪啓淑 (1728–1800) from Shexian who had served as a secretary (*langzhong* 郎中) at the ministry of war. Having enriched himself, he built the residence called ‘Establishing myriads [of books]’, Kaiwan lou 開萬樓 in the town of Hangzhou and settled there. A rich entrepreneur engaged in plentiful activities, he also published and collected ‘thousands of rare books and myriads of seals’ (*Zhongguo meishu* 1987, 215). The third category was made of the so called ‘merchants and good Confucians at the same time’ (*jia er hao ru* 賈而好儒), who collected and published works of their relatives, their friends, as well as their own works regardless of profit, eg. the above mentioned Jiang Chun or his brother Jiang Fang 江昉 (1727–1793), both residents of Yangzhou, and many others. Men from the second and third categories amassed valuable and large collections, and they published beautiful and expensive books (Liu 2003, 8).

Qing scholars were ardent publishers of personal ‘collectanea’ *congshu*, which oftentimes counted dozens of volumes. They either presented their collected writings, or re-published various titles from their collections. As to the latter, there usually was a unifying topic; Li Tiaoyuan 李調元 (1734–1803), for example, compiled and printed in 1778–1784 *Hanhai* 函海 made of works about his native province Sichuan, or writings by his fellow provincials. The first edition included 142 titles (including some rare works copied from the imperial *Siku quanshu* library), but it was several times re-printed and enlarged; the 1882 edition had eighteen titles more (*Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 1970, 487). Collectanea were often expensively produced and printed on fine paper, imitating the best editions of Song and Yuan book production, in other words the most desirable items of a collector. The trend reached its peak under the Jiaqing reign (1796–1820), and continued intensively until the middle of the 19th century. Side by side, surveys of book collecting and other works which would fall into the field of ‘library studies’ emerged. To give one example for many: excellent and still useful are the *Questions to Answers Concerning Bibliography* (*Shumu dawen* 書目答問), compiled and annotated by Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909). Published in 1875, they surpass our time focus, however they introduced the titles this article is concerned with. Approaching book collecting yet from another angle, the poet and bibliophile Wu Qian 吳騫 (1733–1813) who possessed a large library Baijing lou 拜經樓 at Haining, Zhejiang province, compiled a collection of calligraphic colophons about rare books *Baijing lou congshu tiba ji* 拜經樓叢書提拔記 (*Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 1970, 341).

Once published, books are offered on market. Bookshops (*shupu* 書鋪) flourished at the places where men of letters gathered for official examinations, many months before the term. The busiest place, in this respect, was the capital where students from Jiangnan and other regions of the empire went to participate in the highest examination rounds. Beijing's best known book market Liuli chang 琉璃廠 would not be left out of any visitor's itinerary. The Korean writer Pak Chiwon 朴趾源 (1737–1805) who visited Beijing in 1780 recorded names of the four biggest bookshops at Liuli chang. They were Wencui tang 文粹堂, Wuliu ju 五柳居 (its name alludes to the penname of the 5th century poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明), Xianyue lou 先月樓, and Mingsheng tang 鳴盛堂. He further noticed that scholars both from China and abroad preferred lodge in the vicinity (Pak Chiwon 1997, 334).⁹ The annual book fair at Liuli chang took place on the first two weeks of the New Year, and on that occasion, booksellers from all China 'prayed and gave their thanks' at the nearby temple Wenchang guan 文昌館, dedicated to their patron the god of literature (Naquin 2000, 442, 628). The situation in other towns where examinations were given was comparable, and it has to be stressed that not only books, but also antiques were traded on the occasion. Collecting of rare books is, after all, closely connected with collecting of antiques (*wu* 物), since rare books were also regarded as antiques. Since Ming dynasty, the city of Nanjing has had a street named Qiwan jie 奇玩街, literary the 'Curio & Antiques street' (the current name is Jiakang lu 健康路). This street was adjacent to the Examination hall (*gongyuan* 貢院), and close to Temple of Confucius. In the Qing dynasty, various state offices were newly situated to the north of Qiwan jie, a fact which increased the security, but also the importance of that area. The biggest shop, on the intersection of Gongyuan xijie and Qiwan jie, was subsequently called Qiwan ge 奇玩閣, 'Pavillion of Curios & Antiques', and had the reputation of solid and reliable dealing (Yu Yunyao 1990, 260).

From the second half of the 18th century onward, a growing number of collectors plunged into the so called epigraphic studies, *jinshi xue* 金石學, and sigillography. They focused on the ancient forms of script, and in particular admired the bold writing and (seal) carving, a trend which increasingly continued throughout the nineteenth century (Fig. 5). It comes as no surprise that some book collectors of note, such as Wang Qishu, themselves carved seal chops and collected bronze seals of Qin and Han dynasties – we may note the proximity of carved seals, and engraved woodblocks, the basic tools of producing a book. Others collected bronze vessels with special regard to the inscriptions incised.⁹ Still others collected the inscriptions, which conveniently need not be collected together with the vessel, but separately in the form of a rubbing. The bold calligraphy of Han and Northern dy-

9 One may wonder why would they not rather stay in the vicinity of the examination hall and colleges. Those places, however, were situated in the 'Tatar City', reserved for Manchu and Mongolian students only (Pak Chiwon 1997, 337).



Fig. 5. This rubbing, known as Xia Cheng bei 夏承碑, was made from a stone tablet (*bei* 碑) which is not extant anymore; a fact that increases the value of the rubbing. The inscription dates from approximately 170 AD, and is one of the earliest examples for the then developing cursive writing style, *xingshu* 行書. Kept in the Shanghai Museum, China.

nasties, which was so pleasing to the 18th and 19th century epigraphists, made epigraphers travel to wilderness in search of inscriptions on rocks and stelae, and take rubbings, as Ding Jing used to do. The pride of such a collector finally was a catalogue of his rubbings, illustrated with reproductions; the seal carver or seal collector would, on the other hand, produce an album stamped with the original seals from his possession. The above mentioned Wang Qishu, for example, published twenty albums with seals from his collection, the first one being *Bronze Seals of Han*, *Han tongyin cong* 漢銅印叢, 12 *juan*, in 1766 (*Zhongguo meishu* 1987, 220). Wealthy collectors of calligraphy had copies of famous inscriptions carved in stone blocks, not only for eternal preservation, but also for further reproducing of more rubbings. These calligraphic blocks were usually applied to the walls of their garden palaces.

THE LOCATION OF BOOK COLLECTIONS

A cultural activity of negligible commercial effect, such as collecting of books, was concentrated at regions with long tradition of learning and book publishing, and above all, at regions with strong economy. As ever, economy in various parts of

China was uneven, thus the occurrence of book collections was uneven too. The following table (Zhou 1999, 192) gives the number of Qing book collectors stationed in (current) provinces:

Zhejiang 267, Jiangsu 247, Anhui 158,
Fujian 74, Beijing 36, Shanxi 34, Guangdong 26,
Shandong 17, Shanghai 12, Jiangxi 9, Hubei 9, Sichuan 8,
Hebei 6, Henan 5, Shaanxi 4, Hunan 4, Liaoning 3, Guizhou 3

Clearly, the region which provided best material and social conditions for book collectors was Jiangnan ('the southern flow of Changjiang'), comprising of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and parts of Anhui. Book collecting in Jiangnan had been prominent already under the Southern Song dynasty, and since the Ming, it hosted the highest number of remarkable book (and art) collections. The place where book collecting flourished the most was Zhejiang province. Statistics provided by Zhou Shaochuan 周少川 tell that 30 percent of the collectors in Song China were based there. During the Ming dynasty they represented as much as 65 %, ie. 262 out of the total 405, and in the Qing dynasty they represented 57 %, ie. 526 out of the total 922 (Zhou 1999, 173). The finest private library was Tianyi ge in Ningbo, the second best was probably Wugui lou 五桂樓, built in 1807¹⁰ by Huang Chengliang 黃澂量, a scholar resident in Yuyao 余姚, a hilly, therefore a safe region. The location of the two collections is indicative of the geo-economic division of Zhejiang into the accessible eastern, and the isolated western parts. What made Zhejiang so attractive for this kind of undertaking? As Mao Zhaoxi 毛昭晰 argues, the flourishing book collecting was due not only to the flourishing economy, but also to the presence of educated men, and the 'spirit of librarianship and bookcollecting.' This spirit is reflected in the fate Wenlan ge 文瀾閣, one of the three depositories of *Siku quanshu* in Jiangnan (the so called *Jiangnan san ge* 江南三閣). All were destroyed during the Taiping insurgence in the 1860s, but of the three, only the one in Zhejiang had been rebuilt, in 1881, through the private sponsoring of the brothers Ding Shen 丁申 and Ding Bing 丁丙 from Hangzhou. This editing of a new set of *Siku quanshu* was directed by Zhang Zongxiang 張宗祥 who in fact put together a better version than the original imperial one: he additionally included some of the texts which the censors had avoided in the original edition (Huang – Gao 2002, 2).

The other place of China which became central for book collecting was the neighbouring province Jiangsu. The local cultural tradition was based on the Ming legacy. In fact, some centres of intense book collecting had remained unchanged since the Ming dynasty, eg. Suzhou prefecture with book collectors rounded in the towns of Changshu 常熟, Changzhou 常州, and Yuanhe 元和, all sites of scholarship and of learning. Jiangning 江寧 (ie. Nanjing) and Zhenjiang 鎮江 prefectures

in Jiangsu province were equally important to book collecting. The third province strong in book collecting was Anhui, specifically the historic Huizhou prefecture in its southern part. Separated by mountains, and suffering from insufficient agricultural production, the locals had early turned to trade which eventually resulted in much higher incomes than agriculture would have yielded. Typically, the Huizhou merchants moved from their original station to relatively distant regions where they founded a secondary basis for their trade, and stayed for several years. While amassing collections, it seemed practical to keep them at the place of their temporary residence, but at the end, they moved them to their ancestral home. In his recent article about Huizhou, Liu Shangheng 劉尚恆 lists 54 'relocated' and 63 residing book collectors of Huizhou origin. Most of them stayed and made money in Yangzhou, followed by Suzhou, Hangzhou, Jiaxing 嘉興, and some other places. They made living in commerce, but led the lifestyle and adopted the ambitions of the learned elite. It is not true that they were vulgar and uneducated; several qualified as holders of the highest examination degree *jinshi*, eg. Li Fu 李紱 in 1709, Huang Zhijuan 黃之雋 in 1721, Wang Kanggu 汪康古 in 1766 and his son Wang Ruzao 汪如藻 in 1770, Cheng Weiyue 程維岳 and Wu Weiguang 吳蔚光 in 1780, etc. (Liu 2003, 273–284). Thus, the impulse for book collecting among merchants from Huizhou originated from their education – but no less from the tradition of the book publishing industry. We may note in passing that Huizhou is also well known for production of writing tools: paper, ink, ink stones, and writing brushes.

For a long time, Huizhou had been the key region of book production in China: its qualitative peak occurred during the Longqing 隆慶 (1567–1572) and Wanli 萬曆 (1573–1620) reigns. The most obvious reasons behind this were environmental: there was enough timber for the production of woodblocks and paper. In the 18th century, some excellent editions appeared under the influence of the *puxue* learning, perhaps the best known undertaking are the poems by the 8th century Bai Juyi 白居易, published under the title *Baixiangshan shiji* 百香山詩集 by Wang Liming 汪立名 in 1703 (Liu 2003, 104). Like other Huizhou publishers, Wang Liming collected rare books, and used them not only as the basis for new editions, but also as the reference for research and writing. Publishers like him were assisted by reputed scholars who were permitted to study books from their collections, some even had the privilege of borrowing their books. This phenomenon opens another issue: that of the access to private book collections.

THE AVAILABILITY OF BOOK COLLECTIONS

The availability of books is an important social aspect of cultural history. State and school (academy) libraries were open to students and scholars enrolled or were employed there. Next, there were libraries of rich individuals, however they formed only a fraction of the society. Furthermore, who,

10 This field was an old one. Inscriptions cast on bronzes were recorded and deciphered since Western Han, when a reign era was named *Yuanding* 元鼎 in 116 BC, marking a discovery of an ancient tripod.

and how many had the access to the privately owned collection? The collector who generously opened his door to a poor scholar was the ideal model, based on real personages such as the merchant Wang Wufeng 汪梧鳳 (1726–1771). At the beginning, Wang Wufeng tangled official career and earned the *xiucai* 秀才 degree, but instead of attempting higher examinations, dealt in trade. When he became quite rich, he still continued to study for his own enjoyment, and collected rare books. He is known to have entertained scholars in his garden, and indeed was nicknamed ‘one of the five friends’, another member was no lesser figure than the thinker Dai Zhen (Liu 2003, 264). Next, the fabulously rich merchant Ma Yueguan 馬曰琯 (1688–1755) was regarded as a lover of antiques, a publisher of literature, a commentator on histories, a student of epigraphy etc. In Yangzhou, he built a secondary residence ‘Small and exquisite mountain lodge’ (*Xiao linglong shangguan* 小玲瓏山館) ‘at the backyard of which there stood two buildings with hundreds of books’ (Li Dou 1979, 88). Ma Yueguan proudly befriended some foremost scholars of the day to whom he willingly offered books from his excellent library – to a very limited circle of outsiders, though. Since old Chinese lore held education in esteem, but disregarded merchants, a reputation of the men who maintained refined airs and scholarly interests certainly increased their social standing.

Book collections were often praised, but words remained empty and notion vague, had they not been introduced with some degree of precision. A catalogue with the description of its holdings was the definite step to make one’s collection palpable, although making a collection visible by a catalogue may not have implied its availability. Moreover, not all catalogues were published and publicized; descriptions of many collections may have been intentionally hindered. Wang Fu 汪紱, originally from Wuyuan 婺源 in Huizhou, taught at the prestigious Ziyang 紫陽 academy in the late 18th century. He had a fine collection of scholarly books which he kept for himself, yet almost nothing had been known about it until his unpublished writings, *Wang Shuangchi xiansheng yishu* 汪雙池先生遺書, appeared in print eighty years after his death. They included the list of titles from his library, too, but this happened at the time when his book collection had already been scattered (Liu 2003, 93). Wang Fu did not need to show off contacts with famous scholars, himself being one; his students could read books at the Ziyang academy and did not borrow from their master, therefore he did not share his collection with nobody but his sons.

The possibility and advantage of commonly sharing books had been raised in China long time ago. For example, Zhou Yongnian 周永年 (1730–1791) elaborated with some particularity on the early idea of producing a Confucian canon (*Rucang shuo* 儒藏說), similar to Buddhist and Daoist canons. He suggested, among other things, that the purpose of such a compilation would be to make the texts available publicly: in schools, academies, monasteries etc. (Huang & Gao 2002, 17). Clearly, his plan is an expression of dissatisfaction with a limited availability of books. True, there were collectors who did lend books to others, who then copied whatever they needed, thus enlarging their

own libraries. The contemporary scholar Lai Xinxia 來新夏 contemplates on lending books out, and praises the owners who did so. They loved their rare books (ie. the precious objects from their collections), but at the same time had consideration for others (*ren ren ai wu* 仁人愛物). Being an owner of a book collection gives the person a chance to bring this considerate, humane feature into effect. In this way, book collecting becomes an act of humanity and enacts friendship (Huang & Gao 2002, 10). Once again, the attitude of *ren ren ai wu* was not common in the real life. On the contrary, the most obvious way of protecting a collection was to keep it closed. As historians commonly note, the legendary library in Tianyi ge survived over centuries thanks to Fan Qin’s ‘lack of *ren* 仁’ transformed into efficient strictness about his books (Zhou 1999, 233).

In this respect, I shall bring up once more the issue of Qianlong inquisition. In the light of what has been said about the editorial process of *Siku quanshu*, it not only had a facet of confiscations, but also the facet of opening private libraries locked until then. By the words of a contemporary source, ‘In the 39th year of Qianlong 乾隆 (1774), it was ordered that all old books must be transferred to the prefectural offices ... Transferred from all provinces, they were deposited at the Court. Most book collections came from Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Court officials were asked to collate them and prepare them for publishing, so that the circulation would become larger. The books were then stamped and returned. [In Jiangnan], the biggest amount of books came from four collections: that of Bao Shigong 鮑士恭, Fan Qin and Wang Qishu from Zhejiang, and Ma Yu 馬裕 from the Lianghuai 兩淮 region. They counted four or five or six hundred titles, and had been collected for generations. Sons and grandsons continued the task. Is it not wonderful?’ (Li Dou 1979, 88) The positive tone of this short quotation, and the way of seeing the matter, of course may have been dictated by respect of the Emperor, and fear.

THE DEATH OF BOOK COLLECTIONS

This sad but important part of our story should not be excluded. Book collections perished in historical and natural disasters, such as confiscations, wars, and fire. More common, however, was the model situation when grave economic conditions forced owners to sell them. Books, even the rare ones, were at the end offered on market and no matter how welcome it could have been for an individual buyer, the collection became ultimately scattered. To avoid such a fate, the truly valuable collections were first offered as an entity to an established library. For example, the reputed *Cehai lou* 測海樓 library in Yangzhou, which comprised 8020 titles (in 247.759 volumes), was sold to the distant Beijing library, a fact which caused much discontent among the educated Yangzhou inhabitants (Wei 2001, 232, 262). Interestingly, the building, a part of the residential complex of the family, still stands and has been recently renovated as a tourist sight. The two-storey building, built in a modern, western style, with a pond in the front (to be used in the case of a fire), stands empty.

CONCLUSION

Book collecting was an important part of Chinese book culture throughout its long history. The eighteenth century which profited from the relative political stability and strong economy, stands out as its golden age. It should be noted that this period witnessed flourishing of the private book collecting, with Jiangnan region at the lead. Book collectors may have been men of various background and profession, but they all enjoyed social prestige which is evident from the biographical anecdotes jotted in this article. Private book collecting has not necessarily resulted in the establishment of libraries accessible to the public, but it prompted many related activities such as collating and editing texts, and – in accord with the growth of philological and evidential studies – commenting on them. The trends which had then begun were zealously continued in the following nineteenth century, albeit somewhat transformed by new scholarly interests at the time.

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