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CHINESE BOOKS AND LIBRARIES

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Printing from blocks is said to have been invented in China in 592 A. D. However, although printing may have been invented as early as this, printed books did not compete with manuscripts until the middle of the tenth century, when the printing of the Nine Classics was completed. Possibly periods when old precedents could be safely broken favored the rise of revolutionary new inventions. It is worthy of note that the first invention of printing as well as its final successful application took place during unsettled periods of Chinese history.

From the middle of the tenth century block printing developed very rapidly, resulting in a wide diffusion of books and the decline of the copyist's trade. No doubt the rapid dissemination of learning this entailed had much to do with the great intellectual progress made in China during the Sung dynasty, from 960-1280 A. D., which has been called the "protracted Augustan age of Chinese literature." This was contemporaneous with the darkest period of the Middle Ages of Europe, when western learning fell to its lowest ebb. Even the conquest of China by the illiterate Mongols did not lead to the extinction of learning. During the purely Chinese Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 A. D., the writing and printing of books flourished anew, while the early Manchu emperors cultivated literature with zeal and during the reigns of the enlightened Manchu emperors K'ang Hsi (1662-1723) and Ch'ien Lung (1736-1796) a series of great literary and encyclopedic works that would do credit to any country were published under imperial patronage.

The nature of the Chinese printed language is not nearly so favorable to the use of movable type as the vastly simpler alphabetic tongues of the west. Still, movable

types, molded of clay, were invented in the eleventh century. Even metal types were made in Korea a half century before they were "invented" in Europe.

Disregarding the manuscript works of the great T'ang dynasty (618-907 A. D.), which are doubtless tenfold more numerous and more important than the contemporaneous literary works of the whole western world, the Chinese printed books up to the middle of the fifteenth century have no counterpart at all in Europe. They existed in countless thousands of volumes. In 1406, the Imperial Ming Library contained printed works to the extent of over 300,000 books, and more than twice as many manuscripts, and already many printed works of the Sung dynasty had been lost during wars.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the number of printed books extant in China at the time of the "discovery" of printing in Europe exceeded those printed in Europe during the first century after Gutenberg. Printing became very widespread in China, and in addition to innumerable private presses, the provinces, districts and even townships had their official presses. Undoubtedly more books were printed in China than in all the rest of the world up to the middle of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century.*

It is thus evident that there exists in China a vast accumulation of printed books that have been piling up for well-nigh a thousand years. The pertinent question now is, what value, if any, do these Chinese works have? In answer to this query it must be said, first of all, that not only are

*Even now one of the largest printing presses in the world is to be found in China. The Commercial Press at Shanghai as a part of its work prints for the new schools of China elementary textbooks which are often issued in editions of several millions.

the Chinese literary standards very high, but there is a strong prejudice against frivolous works of any character. The great bulk of Chinese works, aside from the Confucian classics, are historical or literary, the latter being mostly essays, short poems or critiques. There exists also a vast Buddhistic literature and very many Taoist works. Novels are not even classed as literature, although famous ones exist and some of them have been translated into European languages. There are also many famous dramas, but these, too, are excluded from literature proper by Chinese bibliographers.

The historical records of the Chinese are of vast bulk. Their study by western scholars cannot fail to yield results of great value to the whole world. In close connection with the historical records proper we should consider the great number of geographic treatises and especially the so-called gazetteers. These latter are official publications issued by the Empire, as well as by every province, district and township and treat not only geography and topography proper, but are often voluminous works of general information, of very direct interest today. No other country in the world has anything to compare with this branch of Chinese literature, either in extent or historical value.

During the past year the writer has been studying the citrous fruits of China. In connection with this work there have been translated chapters bearing on citrous fruits from all the Chinese topographic works available in the Library of Congress and in the John Crerar Library at Chicago. These translations have proved the great value of the Chinese gazetteers in modern agricultural research. Without doubt a great amount of valuable information as to mines, mineral resources and local industrial products, etc., lies waiting in these same rich storehouses of information.

The classified encyclopedias of China, though not so overwhelmingly superior to those of the western countries as are the gazetteers, are nevertheless so ancient, so

numerous and so voluminous as fairly to stagger the imagination. For 750 years at least China has had excellently edited, well arranged and well printed encyclopedic works of reference covering well-nigh the whole range of human knowledge. Emperors vied with one another in encouraging works of this character, and as a result no people in the world have so complete a series of encyclopedic works covering so long a period.

One of these works, the "Yung lo ta tien" completed in 1409, aimed to contain all human knowledge then available in China. The equivalent of 8,000 years' man labor was expended on it and it filled some 23,000 folio volumes. It proved to be too bulky to print and was preserved in manuscript until 1900, when it was burned during the Boxer insurrection in Peking—a catastrophe second only to the burning of the Alexandrian Library.

Another only less gigantic encyclopedia is the "T'u shu chi ch'êng," printed in 1728, in 5,020 volumes, from large movable copper type. This is the largest printed book in the world and is still today invaluable in the study of any phase of Chinese science, political economy or history, and is constantly quoted by all sinologists. Scores upon scores of smaller encyclopedic works, some dating back 600 years or more, and some of the nineteenth century, are of the utmost value to the students of things Chinese.

China has always been proud of her scholars, who have for ages outranked warriors. Over twelve hundred years ago an examination system was devised that placed the highest administrative offices of the Empire within reach of the poorest peasant's son if only he had sufficient ability. This and the absence of any hereditary nobility gave China the first efficient civil service and the first enlightened and pacific government. The arts and sciences were cultivated so assiduously under this favoring condition as to make the whole world a heavy debtor to the great Middle Kingdom.

As was to be expected from a nation of

scholars, we find in China an unrivaled series of historical records of all state matters, and also the earliest comprehensive biographical and bibliographical works known. Besides this, we find every effort made to preserve the writings of famous scholars, usually in the form of collected works, so that as a result there awaits the student of almost every phase of human activity a wealth of authentic documentary material that has as yet been almost entirely neglected.

China has been for millenniums a laboratory wherein political, economic, agricultural, artistic and industrial experimentation has been carried on under unusually favorable circumstances. A wealth of material awaits the investigator competent to utilize these priceless records. Such investigation should be done soon, before the Chinese become so westernized as to lose the power of interpreting the records of their own past. We are living in an age that bids fair to witness the complete transformation of the only remaining ancient civilization.

In China there are very few great libraries. The wide diffusion of learning and the complete decentralization of the printing and publishing industries, and most of all the clan type of family organization, have favored the creation of large private or family libraries scattered all over China. No adequate survey of the library resources of China has ever been made, but there can be no doubt that they are of enormous extent.

The Chinese Imperial Court has always maintained a large library, and sometimes several at the various capitals, and there has recently been established in Peking a national library which a catalog published in 1912 shows to be rich in rare old Chinese books.

Japan is rich in old Chinese works treasured in the private and public libraries during the many centuries when Chinese learning was held in the highest reverence. Doubtless the Japanese libraries rank second only to those of China in their content of Chinese books.

In Europe there are a few good Chinese libraries. The oldest and best is that of Paris, which includes a collection of ancient Chinese manuscripts unsurpassed even in China. The collection at the British Museum ranks second. There are also large collections at Berlin, Petrograd, Cambridge and Leiden.

In America, the Library of Congress was the first to secure a notable Chinese collection which now numbers close to 45,000 volumes, Chinese style. It is by far the largest in the new world and probably ranks second or third among the Chinese libraries outside of China and Japan. The collection is not only pre-eminent in geographical works and gazetteers, but also in treatises on agricultural, botanical and related subjects. It is very rich in biographical and bibliographical literature and has a large and rapidly growing collection of works on Chinese art and archaeology. It includes also a large number of Chinese Collectanea which often contain reprints of works no longer obtainable in the original.

The second largest Chinese collection in America is that of the Newberry Library in Chicago, comprising over 600 works in about 18,000 volumes. The John Crerar Library in Chicago also has a Chinese collection, including about 600 works in about 12,000 volumes. The two Chicago collections so complement each other without duplication as to constitute together a very large and complete Chinese library of some 30,000 volumes, rivaling or even excelling that of the Library of Congress in many fields.

The next largest Chinese library in America is the collection donated to the University of California, by Prof. S. C. Kiang. It is rich in belles-lettres, containing many rare works, and comprises about 1,600 works in 13,600 volumes. Unfortunately about one-fourth of the works are more or less imperfect, as the Kiang family library suffered greatly during the Boxer insurrection.

The New York Public Library contains

a valuable Chinese library collected by Dr. James Legge, the famous translator of the Chinese classics. This special collection is very rich in the Chinese classics and their commentaries, and contains valuable manuscript concordances prepared by Dr. Legge in the course of his monumental translations. The library of Columbia University is now cataloging its small but select collection of Chinese books, which it hopes to expand into a good Chinese reference library in the near future. The Metropolitan Museum of New York City has a good collection of works on Chinese art; and the libraries of Harvard and Yale have some very valuable Chinese works, but none of these collections are as yet complete enough to be of more than very limited service to the student of Chinese books.

The Library of Congress has originated and carried through a plan of classifying Chinese books in accordance with Ch'ien Lung's "Imperial catalog," using modern library notations for the various classes. Then, too, the works reprinted in the collectanea, amounting to nearly 10,000 in all, have been entered in the catalog in the place they would occupy in the classification if they were separate works. No other Chinese library has so many collectanea rendered accessible in this way. The result is a systematic shelf list of all the Chinese works and reprints in the library, some 12,000 in all. A photostat reproduction of the Chinese titles has been made up in the form of a compact small folio volume about an inch and a half thick, including the outline of the classification and forming a valuable guide to the collection.

The hundred thousand or so volumes of Chinese works now in American libraries are only a small part of what should be secured in order to give any adequate idea of the stupendous intellectual activity of the greatest and oldest nation of the Orient. Revolutions, political reorganiza-

tion, and the progress of western education alike threaten the literary treasures of China. If not purchased and stored in our fireproof and wormproof libraries many of them will be lost forever. The quantity of Chinese books now being thrown on the market is so large that no single library can hope to buy more than a tithe of what is offered. It would seem wise to follow here the old adage *divide et impera*. Each purchasing library, after securing such general works as needed for its own special requirements, could specialize on some one field of Chinese literature and become the leader in that branch. By a system of inter-library loans, based on a union catalog, it would be possible to pool the resources of the whole country and thus accomplish by united effort what singly would be impossible. It should be remembered that so many Chinese students are attending our leading educational institutions that it is easy to secure expert help in the cataloging of Chinese books now that a workable system has been devised by the Library of Congress to classify the Chinese works merely by looking up the titles in the "Imperial catalog."

Now, when the Chinese problem looms large, would seem to be a good time to learn something at first hand about China's history, her present needs, and her probable future development. Besides the commercial traveler and the missionary, we need another class in Chinese affairs—the scientifically trained scholar. We need a band of such men who shall make accessible for us the wonderful storehouses of Chinese learning available in the printed records. The effect of adequate investigations would be to arouse general interest in the political, social, moral, religious and agricultural experiences of the most stable nation on earth. It would become apparent that we have as much to learn from China as China has to learn from us.