

# *The Time-space Conversion of Ancient Printing Centers in China from the Eleventh to the Seventeenth Century*

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**Abstract:** During the eleventh and seventeenth century, gradual development of China's ancient printing industry were made in fields of printing technology, quantity and quality of publications, and market expansion. The author attempts to conduct a macroscopic investigation of the time-space conversion of China's traditional printing centres during this period of history with adopting the method of comparative analysis of successive time-space sections. By taking a number of time coordinates as specific time-space nodes, and making horizontal and vertical comparisons, we can roughly sort out the important development process of the history of printing and publishing in ancient China.

It is believed by many scholars that China's ancient printing originated from the early Tang Dynasty. After the initial development for hundreds of years during the Tang, Five Dynasties and even the Northern Song Dynasty, the ancient printing industry in China, which was dominated by woodblock printing, entered the golden age of vigorous development in the Southern Song Dynasty. In a “long period” from the Southern Song Dynasty in the eleventh century, through Yuan and Ming Dynasties, and even in the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasty in the seventeenth century, the ancient printing industry in China continued its traditional succession and development path. Thus, the ancient printing occupied an important historical position in the process of ancient Chinese culture. Before the eleventh century, China's ancient printing was in its initial period with limited technology and small scale. However, as in the early Qing Dynasty in the seventeenth century, China's printing industry had evolved into a mature industry with large scales, broad markets, and intertwined with many fields such as social politics, economy and culture. Its own technical level and cultural characteristics. Besides, the technical level, cultural characteristics, market audience and other trends have already reached the peak of traditional China's later period. Therefore, the combining of the main context and basic features of the significant period for the sustainable development of China's ancient printing from the Southern Song Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty ranging from the eleventh to the seventeenth century became an important topic for historical and cultural scholars.

The bibliography of archeography focuses on the research of version systems in the traditional research vision, or it is based on the three systems of official printing, home printing, and private engraving, or with the basis of conventional research scopes specifically including the Zhe version

of Song Dynasty, the Jian version of Song and Yuan Dynasties, the Shui version of Jinping, and the block-printed edition of Minghui. Comparatively, the more obvious research of publishing history at home and abroad tends to integrate the regional society with historical and cultural background, so that the macro trend and microscopic details of the printing history research can be made in a multi-angle and multilevel way through the binary dimension of time and space. For example, Lucien Febvre and Henry Jean Martin, French Yearbook scholars, coauthored *The Coming of the Book*, who once adopted a comprehensive analysis of successive time-space sections through a number of time points in the book to study the development and diffusion of early European publishing history.<sup>[1]</sup> the development and diffusion of early European publishing industry. Historical process. This article is the attempt of the author using this analysis method to sort out the historical process of the development and change of the ancient printing centers in China.

The time span from the Southern Song Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty is great, ranging from the eleventh century even to the seventeenth century. For the time-space conversions of China's traditional printing centers in this historical period, the author firstly intercepts several time coordinates as nodes for specific investigation. The time nodes selected by the author are several special years separated by hundred or fifty years: Year 1100 (the 3rd year of Zhezong in the Northern Song Dynasty), Year 1200 (the 6th year of Ningzong in the Southern Song Dynasty), Year 1300 (the 4th year of Chengzong in the Yuan Dynasty), Year 1400 (the 2nd year of Minghui Emperor in the Ming Dynasty), Year 1500 (the 13th year of Xiaozong in the Ming Dynasty), Year 1600 (the 28th year of Chanzong in the Ming Dynasty), Year 1650 (the 7th year of Shun-Tze in the Qing Dynasty), and Year 1700 (the 39th year of Emperor Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty). Therefore, with the several nodes as the time coordinate X-axis and the vast space of China in the historical period as the Y-axis, we can sort out the time-space conversions of ancient printing centers in a new perspective.

In 1100 (the 3rd year of the Northern Song Yuanfu), the East Asia continent presented a political structure in which several regimes rose up. The most powerful ones were undoubtedly the Song Dynasty and the Liao Dynasty. In addition, the Xixia Dynasty was also powerful in the East Asian inland. The Northern Song Dynasty, with the Han nationality as the main body, was the historical continuation of the traditional Chinese central dynasty, and it also inherited the main essence of the Chinese culture since the Han and Tang Dynasties. The block printing, originated from the Tang Dynasty, gradually became an important method for the continuity of social culture in the Northern Song Dynasty, and the movable-type printing was also created and firstly used in this period. In the 1100 AD and for a long period of time, Hangzhou, south of the Yangtze River, was always the center of the printing industry in ancient China and even the world. In addition, in the Northern Song Dynasty, a large number of four books published by the official cultural and educational institutions of the State Council were published in Hangzhou, and the publication of official books in this period occupied a large number of early prints.<sup>[2]</sup> Although before and after 1100, the early printing industry also presented their own appearances in other places of the Northern Song Dynasty, such as Sichuan, Fujian, Dongjing, and even within the ruling of Liao and Xixia regimes, the status of printing center of Hangzhou was extremely significant.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1200 (the 6th year of the Southern Song Qingyuan), the theme of the East Asian continent was the confrontation between Jin and Southern Song. However, from the historical perspective, the Jin Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty, as well as Xixia, were in decline. After the long-term

chaos, the northern Mongolian in the grassland gradually integrated into a unified Mongolian nation (completed in 1206), and would soon unveil the unprecedented power of conquest of the nomadic people. Southern China in the Southern Song Dynasty was known for its distinctive commodification and urbanization characteristics. Moreover, behind the highly developed cultural consumption, the national (South China) traditional printing industry network began to form. Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty was renowned for abundant official, private and civil publications. In addition, several regional printing centers were also leading the way – the official institutions and wealthy persons in Shaoxing and Jiankang (now Nanjing) near Hangzhou was more enthusiastic in printing. Except that, Jianyang, in the northern mountainous area of Fujian, became an important representative of the social and folk printing industry with its advantages of raw materials and transportation. What's more, Meishan, a major town in southern Sichuan, became the printing industry center in the southwestern part of the Southern Song Dynasty, and radiated to the Dali regime which dominated in the Yunnan and Sichuan in the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties. In contrast, the development of the printing industry in northern China under the rule of the Jin Dynasty and Xixia was still slow. Today, Pingyang, a small town in the southwestern part of Shanxi, has a mild development, but the quantity and quality of its prints are far less than that of the south.

Although the unprecedented "Mongolian peace" was realized in the Eurasian continent in the Mongolian era, traditional China once again moved toward the great unification. However, due to the alienation and exclusion of the Mongolian rulers from the Han nationality culture, Chinese traditional culture was in its trough in the Yuan Dynasty. For the East Asian publishing world of 1300 (the 4th year of the Ming Dadei), the wealth left over in 1200 is extremely precious. Hangzhou continued its position as a printing center. The Yuan Dynasty government set up the West Lake Academy here to receive the remains of the printing industry of the Southern Song Dynasty and continued to move forward. Jianyang, in Fujian, is still a national "workshop printing capital". The Pingyang government in the north also continues its unique engraving style, while the Meishan printing industry in Sichuan was destroyed in the early days of the Yuan Dynasty. Dadu (now Beijing), the capital of the Yuan Dynasty, officially entered the ranks of the printing industries for the first time. With the sliding of the national political center of the autocratic society to the Beijing area, the printing industry in the north of Beijing was gradually launched.

In 1400 (the 2nd year of the Ming Jianwen), the capital of the Ming Dynasty was still in Yingtian Prefecture, Nanjing. With the brief southward shift of the political center and the threat of Mongolia in the early Ming Dynasty, and more importantly the tension in the north caused by the rebellion of Zhudi (1399~1402), made the printing industry in the Central Plains and even the North stop in this year. Pingyang, the only regional printing center in the north of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, was also declined rapidly in such a context. While in the south, the status of Hangzhou's national printing industry center ceased to exist under the intervention of the powerful regime. The capital Nanjing accepted the government publishing resources of the Song and Yuan Dynasties and continued to develop under the guidance of the central government. Folk publications were still full of vitality. The concept of "workshop printing", which was performed by Masha, out of the Jianyang city and Chongren Bookshops in Fujian, become the standard term for all commercial or folk publications.

In 1500 (the 13th year of the Ming Hongzhi), it was the In 1500 (the 13th year of Ming Hongzhi), it was in the watershed of the early and middle-aged history of the Ming Dynasty. Whether it was political or social and cultural, the early 16th century (Hongzhi and Zhengde in the Ming Dynasty) was the third tradition of the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties.<sup>[4]</sup>From the perspective of publishing history, the Ming Dynasty undoubtedly occupied the dominant position in the East Asia in 1500. The ancient printing industry introduced from China to the North Korea and Japan began to form an independent system, while there were new sprouts of printing industry in the inland border areas, such as Mongolia, the Weituer, and Tubo, but it was rather rudimentary. From a national perspective, Beijing, the capital of the Ming Dynasty, and Nanjing, the secondary capital, were undoubtedly the centers of the two major printing industries. With the economy and culture of the south of the Yangtze River gradually moving towards the historical prosperity of “late Ming”, the traditional printing industry in the famous Jiangnan cities such as Hangzhou and Suzhou gradually led the trend of private engraving and commercial engraving in the country. In addition, the printing industry in the rest of the Jiangnan region should not be underestimated. For example, the bronze movable type printing activities of Huajia and Anjia in Wuxi before and after 1500 were an important breakthrough in the traditional printing technology during this period. Besides, the Fujian Jianyang Workshop Printing Center, which flourished for hundreds of years in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, began to show signs of technical stagnation, declining quality, and shrinking markets.

The late period of the Ming Dynasty became a striking historical stage in the history of ancient Chinese social culture development with its distinctive era and regional characteristics. The ancient printing industry developed into the late Ming Dynasty and showed an extremely prosperous situation. Before and after 1600 (the 28th year of the Ming Wanli), the ancient printing center of China began to break through the "point" restrictions, and began to form a central area composed of central cities and a number of municipalities, multi-level exchanges and interactions. Along with the influx of commercial capital such as Huizhou merchants, several major printing centers in the south of the Yangtze River continued to show development trends. The commercialization of the three major bookmaking centers in Nanjing, Hangzhou and Suzhou was very strong, the citizen literature and publishing industry were closely integrated, and publications of workshop printing were popular.<sup>[5]</sup>Furthermore, relying on the influence of Huizhou merchants, Huizhou region rapidly emerged as a new printing industry center. At the level of traditional printing technology, the printing industry in the Jiangnan region also led the trend of the country, representing the highest level of the traditional printing industry. The Huizhou prints, represented by the popular literary publications of Jinling Shidetang, the Huizhou Fangshi and Cheng's block-printed editions, were flourishingly published before and after 1600; and the chromatograph edition overprints represented by Min Qiji and Ling Mengchu's private publications were also available in quantities at this time. In the seventeenth century, the Changshu Mao's ancestral prints in the history of Chinese printing was famous around 1600. At the same time, the publication of the popular literature of Jianyang Bookstore, represented by Yu Xiangdou, became the last bright color of the publishing industry in Jianyang, Fujian.

The middle of the seventeenth century was in the important historical turning point of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. For the historical interpretation of the alterations of Ming and Qing Dynasties, the historical scholars have not been able to reach a deep consensus on the inheritance and variation of China's social and political aspects, economic models, and cultural traits during the late Ming

Dynasty and even the early Qing Dynasty.<sup>[6]</sup> In 1650 (the 7th year of Qing Shunzhi), on the founding of the Qing Dynasty, the Mongolian grassland, Xinjiang, Qinghai-Tibetan and other frontier regions had not really surrendered to the Manchu regime, and the various political regimes in the southern part of China with the banner of the Ming Dynasty were still fighting for death. Affected by the war, many printing towns in southern China became ruins, including Hangzhou, Nanjing (now renamed Jiangning), Suzhou and other important publishing centers in the late Ming Dynasty which were hit hard in a short period of time. However, with the improvement of the social order and the recovery of the economy, the printing industry centered on Jiangning quickly recovered to the prosperity of the late Ming Dynasty. In the end of the Ming Dynasty, the Changshu Mao's antique publishing industry continued to develop because it was far from the political whirlpool, and the Huzhou engraving industry had declined after being attacked by the Qing army until the attack of "Mingshi case" in the early of Kangxi, and finally collapsed. In 1650, it was still a crisis that some printing centers were disappearing. The Jianyang engraving books experienced many wars and catastrophes in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, and its development history finally ended; while some printing centers were temporarily experiencing slow development. In the Qing Dynasty with Beijing as the new capital, the central and private printing had not yet been taken into shape in the Shunzhi generation, so there was still some time for its re-emergence. Along with the maturity of traditional printing technology, various publications that met the needs of all sectors of society emerged. The most prosperous historical stage of the ancient Chinese publishing industry can be said to be the century around 1650.

At the end of the seventeenth century, ie. 1700 (the 39th year of the Qing Kangxi), the East Asian printing world had already exhibited a large historical pattern of technological diffusion and market radiation, especially in southern China under the rule of the Qing Dynasty that the type and quality of publications reached the highest level of traditional technical conditions at the time.<sup>[7]</sup> In the late Ming Dynasty, the printing in Jiangsu and Zhejiang was the most developed in China, whose compilation, collection and trade activities were still extremely prosperous. Although the Manchu rulers imposed a conservative cultural policy on the Jiangnan cultural circle, various new changes and new attempts in the printing industry under the wave of commercialization in the late Ming Dynasty continued their development. Through a lot of literature, we can find that in the Jiangnan area around 1700, not only the printing "fashion" including the chromatography edition, the water color block printing, and the corrected edition, etc., were still prospered in the early Qing Dynasty, and all kinds of "prohibited" books, workshop printing novels and other publications were also popular at the time. Jiangning (Nanjing), Suzhou, Hangzhou, and even cities such as Yangzhou which rose with the commercial prosperity of the southeastern Ming and Qing dynasties, led the trend of the national printing and publishing industry. Jingshi (Beijing), the capital of the Qing Dynasty, also became one of the most important printing centers in the North and even the whole country in the early years of Emperor Kangxi. With the Hall of the Martial Valor as the core, the scale and influence of the central engraving in the early Qing Dynasty spread throughout the country and far beyond the previous generation,<sup>[8]</sup> while the Beijing Liulichang became the northern center of the national business book printing. In addition, with the continuous development of social economy and culture and the influence of Western modern culture on the coast of China, Guangzhou, in the Lingnan area, gradually started in the printing industry and laid the foundation

for it to become an important national printing center in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China.

From the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, the traditional Chinese printing industry has been booming for hundreds of years, accumulating and improving in the fields of printing technology, quantity and quality of publications, market expansion, etc., and finally formed a comprehensive and prosperous sociocultural situation in the early Qing Dynasty. Through the horizontal investigation and vertical comparison of some specific historical endpoints, we can roughly sort out the important development of the history of Chinese ancient printing and publishing. The author believes that based on the analysis of the time-space conversion of ancient printing centers in China, it helps us to grasp the emergence, development and the historical appearance of the ancient printing industry to be an important part of the ancient social and cultural process from a macro perspective.

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