This volume and the conference from which it resulted were supported by the Joint Committee on Chinese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council.

Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley  Los Angeles  London
Niche Marketing for Late Imperial Fiction

Robert E. Hegel

APPROACHING THE QUESTION

Recent studies by scholars in China, Japan, and North America have opened new doors in the study of print culture in late imperial China: they have demonstrated the complexities of publishing by exploring such questions as the specialization of particular booksellers or of regional publishers in specific varieties of books and the trade in books. Many of their findings address the question of marketing by demonstrating that certain types of books were produced for particular groups of book buyers at different levels of society. Essays in this volume by Cynthia Brokaw, Joseph McDermott, Anne E. McLaren, and others provide more information and new perspectives relevant to this question.

My purpose here is to demonstrate configurations of niche marketing for works of fiction, a generally less well studied category of books, during the late Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) periods. By correlating available data about printed novels and short story collections with what we know of publishers and booksellers, some inferences can be drawn about the reading audiences for whom vernacular narratives were printed. Even more, however, these data suggest a “target public” (McLaren’s term; see Chap. 4), or rather several levels of intended buyers for these books. If extant examples are to be trusted as representing the full range of late Ming printing practices, then we may conclude that the fiction-buying public of the seventeenth century included relatively affluent readers, probably those who had studied for the civil service examinations. This conclusion is based on a recognition that many late Ming editions of fiction produced in the Jiangnan cities, Jiading (Nanjing; for more on the Nanjing publishing scene, see Chapter 3 by Lucille Chia) in particular, were relatively fine; their superb illustrations and clearly printed text surpassed books from other categories such as phi-
losophy, history, and literary collections. Through the Qing and especially from the Qianlong reign (1736–96) onward, the fiction-buying public broadened to include readers lower on the social scale, as evidenced by the increasing number of smaller-format editions of novels and stories bearing crude and simple block-printed illustrations. Even though accessible material is insufficient to identify with greater precision the determining factors in these changing markets—and the role of printers in their creation—available data suggest general answers to some of the more interesting questions about who read what and how the expectations of the reading audiences of late imperial China were served by its printers and booksellers.

READERS OF FICTION?

To determine potential readers, one must gain some sense of the extent and composition of the literate population of late imperial China. Available information is limited; scholars have had to address the question from theoretical perspectives.² Kai-wing Chow has suggested that there were several overlapping reading audiences during the early seventeenth century: students for the examinations, general urban readers, and women. The first was a large, perhaps the largest, of these groups, to judge from the number of titles (editions of the Classics, sample examination essays, and the like) intended to address this need; contemporary novels and plays include among their characters booksellers who catered to this reading public. Many such books may well have been relatively inexpensive.³ On the other hand, trade-route guides, gazetteers, medical books, and almanacs seem to have been produced for professional and other social groups not subsumed under this classification. Moreover, it has often been claimed that women constituted an important segment of the novel-reading public, but since Brokaw has addressed literacy and writing among women in her introductory chapter (and McLaren in her contribution), I leave that question aside here. Instead I try to determine the outlines of the buying habits of the fiction-reading public at large, an audience probably overlapping to a degree with Chow’s “general urban readers.”

Of course, all approaches allow only hypothetical reconstructions of reading audiences; an individual buyer might purchase books from a number of these categories and of a range of prices on different occasions. Keeping all the inherent limitations of this approach in mind, here I focus primarily on the commercial value of books as reflected in the relative degree of care and expense with which they were produced. I use the contents of the books, and their intrinsic artistic level, only to confirm conclusions reached from the objects themselves, if at all. And from this sort of relatively objective information I speculate on their intended buyers in the aggregate.

Without belaboring the point, it is intuitively true that wealthy book buy-

ERS could afford to buy any book they wished; contrarily, people with limited funds for nonessential items like books would restrict their purchases to the less expensive editions (or buy only a very few books, regardless of price). This relatively affluent book buyers could have been the historical customers for any edition that attracted them and should be included among the theoretical buyers and readers of every book produced. Financially straitened readers, however, would generally have had to limit their purchases to the cheaper editions, if they could afford books at all. Poorer book buyers constituted a subset of all book buyers, a targeted audience who consumed books but were probably far less likely to collect them for their value as objects. As Brokaw demonstrates in Chapter 5, these less affluent and less well educated readers might be found in remoter and economically less well developed areas. Although this wealthy/poor division is a crude one, it allows for some refinement of the concept of book-buying audiences.

BUYERS OF FICTION

In an earlier study I traced the decline in the quality of fiction imprints from the late Ming through the Qing period by observing specific changes in the size and quality of paper, the density and clarity of print on the page, and the complexity and artistic refinement of their illustrations. These criteria include several identified by the late Ming writer Hu Yinglin (1551–1602) as the bases for determining book prices. Comparing editions of fictional works from the middle Ming through the late Qing demonstrates that this decline in the physical format and appearance of books was neither regular nor consistent. Even though many Qing printers used ever smaller paper to produce pages bearing ever more characters, certain publishers also frequently reprinted earlier large-format editions, as during the Qianlong period, when such reprints seem to have been common. Despite the difficulty in dating many imprints, their sheer numbers indicate a large and active market for works of vernacular fiction, particularly during the Qing; a quick glance at the listings in Ōtsuka Hitokata’s extremely useful Zōka Chūgoku isūzoku shōsetsu shamoku (Bibliography of Chinese popular fiction, expanded edition) and Han Xiduo’s and Wang Qingyuan’s Xiaoshuo shuyōng lu (A record of printers of fiction), for example, provide a vivid sense of just how vigorous sales of vernacular fiction were.⁴

The physical appearance of the books themselves suggests the following conclusions about the marketing of fiction in late imperial China.

1. Although regional or individual bookseller specialization came about during the early stages of popular commercial publishing, these differences were moderated as craftsmen, artists, and the already carved printing blocks circulated among booksellers and even from city to city. Increas-
ing standardization of printed characters, page layout, and illustrations through the late Ming and early Qing furthered the elimination of trademark printing house and even regional printing styles. As a product of market competition, at least modest diversification in the categories of books they printed became the rule for commercial publishers.

2. The seventeenth century was probably the high point for the publication of fiction in terms of the artistic quality of the books themselves. During the last few decades of the Ming and the first decade of the Qing, a greater number of large-format (with pages measuring approximately 15 × 25 cm) and relatively fine editions of fiction were published than previously or thereafter. Labor costs for high-quality craftsmanship dictated higher prices, which in turn indicate the existence of a book-buying public who valued works of fiction enough to pay relatively dearly for them. Even during the Wanli era (1573–1620), however, both fiction and plays were printed in editions that differed quite radically from that standard. The reasons for this may well have been commercial: it would appear from the range in printing quality of their imprints that, already by 1600, printers were consciously targeting economic strata of consumers among the book-buying public.

3. Through the Qing period, book publishers came to consider fiction less worth the expense of printing in large, fine-quality editions. Qing large-format editions of fiction were probably reprints (using older printing blocks) or reissues (reincarnated versions of older printings). Most newly carved editions of fiction produced after around 1800 were small (e.g., 13 × 18 cm or less) in page size; most were of the quality that Chia terms “chapbook” and thus comparable to the low-cost Fujian titles discussed by Brokaw. Without question, the literate segments of the population were growing in magnitude through the Qing; the changes in the quality of fiction imprints seemly reflect a desire to expand the buying public to include those who were less affluent than the cultural elite.

It appears that changes in fiction-printing practices can be correlated with a variety of other historical factors. In political terms, the fall of the Ming brought ruin to commercial enterprises in a number of cities. The publishing industry was not aloof from this destruction, and it recovered only slowly during the first decades of the Qing. Likewise, conservative Confucians reacted negatively to the conspicuous consumption of goods, including art, by both merchants and high officials during the late Ming. Surely expensive books of a “frivolous” nature would have been similarly rejected as the conservative reaction spread during the early Qing. Thus, in cultural terms, this disdain for vernacular fiction apparently grew among certain elite groups to produce the official scorn expressed particularly vociferously late in the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, audiences of what might be termed “general” nonscholarly readers who sought recreational, rather than aesthetic or educational, pleasure in reading grew rapidly as literacy spread. This meant that there was less impetus during the Qing to produce large and fine—and hence expensive—limited editions so common during the Ming, and many reasons to produce rough and crude editions in small formats and in large quantities, to be sold at lower prices. I expect, too, that the late Qing slippage in fiction print quality was involved in what Richard John Lukens has termed “the broader trend toward homogenization beginning in the eighteenth century,” the growth of commercial demand for cultural artifacts at the lower end of the price—and artistic—scale. One may assume that the middle-level merchants who formed the audience for cheaply printed merchant manuals during the Qing may well have sought similarly inexpensive works of fiction for their entertainment during this period.

FICTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS
Likewise, general economic changes may have been implicated in this general decline in fiction print quality. From the twelfth through the early nineteenth century, the “lower Yangzi macroregion” became increasingly commercially developed and prosperous. It is little wonder that the leisure arts flourished there as urban culture became distinct, appealing to the literati, wealthy landlords—more and more of whom moved to Jiangnan cities—and the growing numbers of handicraft workers drawn there by employment opportunities. Suzhou was the center of this cultural and economic development during the Ming, and it became a major port, given its location on the Grand Canal. Merchant life there was lively and diverse. Many important publishers of fine editions of books were established in Suzhou. However, economic stagnation during the last decades of the Ming caused a decline in the maintenance of waterways, the Grand Canal among them. Economic recovery late in that century saw the resurgence of the interregional trade in food and other goods that brought financial strength back to the lower Yangzi cities. During the period from the beginning of the Qing through 1785, there was an increase in the silver supply from the New World; silver became the medium of exchange even for land rent payments in the countryside. Surely the circulation of silver contributed to commercial development in the major cultural centers. Fluctuations in the price of this metal currency forced growing numbers of farmers into the market economy, spurring urban growth and perhaps increasing the reading audiences there.

However, this initial prosperity was not to last. A period of economic crisis late in the eighteenth century was heralded by the concentration of land and water rights in the hands of large landlords who moved to urban centers in increasing numbers. Likewise, a series of natural disasters contributed
to the decline of the water transportation system; the involvement of foreign trade in the fluctuating value of silver currency also had major ramifications for the cities and urban culture. The economic crisis was in part the result of a dramatic decline in "Nankeen" cotton exports from Shanghai during the period from 1826 to 1835 as British power-loom textiles came to be produced in much greater volume—and at half the price of imported Chinese fabrics. Likewise, the end of the British East India Company monopoly on China trade in 1834 allowed Americans to import their own cottons, further weakening the once-flourishing Jiangnan industry. The subsequent wars with the British over the sale of opium and the Taiping rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century severely damaged the lower Yangzi economy while building Shanghai into its major port. Not surprisingly, the printing of vernacular fiction was to flourish there during the final decades of the Qing as foreign lithographic techniques facilitated the production of cheap books for its rapidly growing population. Were these economic factors of central importance in the decline of print quality for novels and collections of stories? This question lies far beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, my present concern is to exemplify the marketing of the novel during the late Ming and the Qing by examining the imprints of several publishing houses that specialized in the production of fiction.

EXAMINING BOOKS

Lacking reliable data on retail prices for most works of fiction, one can only distinguish relatively expensive editions from comparatively cheap ones. To that end I have examined such qualities as the size, precision of detail, accuracy, and style of the printed graphs, the number, location, stylistic complexity, and definition in carving of the illustrations, and the size, color, and finish of the paper. (The general clarity of the imprint is of importance as well: one might assume that the prints pulled from well-worn printing blocks were not appealing to discriminating book buyers—or likely to fetch more than modest prices.) Not too surprisingly, the quality of paper parallels the quality of the printing; most small-format woodblock editions were printed less carefully. Curiously, it appears that there is only a general correlation between the artistic level of the fiction as literature and its price as a printed text; certain dull historical narratives appeared with fine illustrations during the sixteenth century, and, as we will see, one of the finest novels of the Qing has been printed with the shoddiest of workmanship. To limit subjectivity in evaluating the quality of imprints, I confine my data to the physical dimensions of books and the number of characters per page. These are themselves crude instruments for evaluating the quality of an edition. Even so, they do suggest identifiable buying, if not reading, audiences, or niches in the book market of late imperial China.

THE STANDARDS SET BY FUJIAN PUBLISHERS BEFORE 1600

By the middle Ming, private printing establishments in the Jianyang area of Fujian dominated the book trade. These printers had set the standards in content, materials, and format for books of all types: Fujian or "Min" editions of popular encyclopedias (lei shu), of annotated editions of classical texts, and even of vernacular fiction dominated the book markets. One physical characteristic of Min editions was the division of the printed page into several registers, with illustrations at the top and text below, as in the Yuan period pinghua, the earliest long vernacular fiction to be discovered to date.

But throughout the Ming, Fujian editions were often known for their shoddy workmanship. The low quality of many Min texts, a product of questionable business practices, can be seen already in Yuan period (1279–1368) publications. Figure 15 is a double page from butterfly-bound Sangou zhi pinghua (Pinghua from the Annals of the Three Kingdoms), one of the well-known quanxiang pinghua, or fully illustrated plain [ly told] tales, dated 1321–23. Here simplified forms of characters are common and the paper is quite small (8.0 x 13.8 cm). Even so, the quality of the carving is high, with the result that both the nicely executed illustrations and the lined type (twenty lines of twenty characters each) are easy to read. Was this an expensive edition? When compared to contemporary editions of history, it surely cost less, if for no other reason than its modest length. Even so, the illustrations were carefully and skillfully carved; given the extra production expense these illustrations would have entailed, this book must have been comparatively high in price, hence destined for a relatively affluent book buyer.

Figure 16 is a cheap Min reissue of the Sangou zhi pinghua titled Sanfen shilie (Historical outline of the tripartite division). This is a puzzling text. It has been assumed, given the fact that several wrong characters from the Sangou zhi pinghua are corrected in the Sanfen shilie, that the latter is the original version, and the standard Pinghua was a later edition that improved the pictures at the expense of the text. However, the date jia wu here contradicts this assertion (it has been read as 1294; it was meant to indicate 1354), as does the technique by which it was reproduced. A copy of the Pinghua apparently was used as a model for carving new blocks of about the same size; this much can easily be discerned from a comparison of both the illustrations and the text of the two: what had originally been curving or complicated lines were simplified for Sanfen shilie, as if executed by a less skilled carver. Consequently, the Sanfen shilie text is harder to look at, much less to read, and the illustrations are crude and ugly by comparison. (Note that ground plants in the earlier illustration become incongruously tiny mountains here!) The differences between these two versions are instructive for our purposes. Technologically, there is no reason that a second edition could not have been virtually identical to the first. But the publisher of Sanfen shilie
clearly chose to cut his costs by hiring less expert craftsmen and, probably, rushing their work to such a degree that the result is only a rough imitation of the relatively fine original. Regardless of the intended buyers for the first edition, the reissue was a less expensive book: the publisher of Sanfen shilü was targeting buyers interested in spending less money for such works of historical fiction. In a similar vein, some Ming period Jianyang publishers subsequently went so far as to truncate texts to cut costs; others forced greater numbers of graphs of smaller size onto the page for the same purpose.

By the Wanli era, books produced by Yu Xiangdou (ca. 1560-after 1637) of Jianyang had set a standard for page format in books for general readers. The narrow horizontal illustrations of his imprints (in shangtu xiaowen, or illustration above/text below format), with characteristic stylistic elements such as thick outlines of human figures and other features, characterize the “Jianyang school” of book illustration. This standardized style may well have been intended to enhance sales. So, too, was his appropriation of titles published by other Jianyang publishers.

Middle and late Ming Fujian imprints of fiction are unattractive, although less so than Sanfen shilü. Fu Xihua’s Zhongguo gudian wenxue banhua xuanji (Selected block-printed illustrations from classical Chinese literature) gives an interesting selection of pages from these works; all are in the shangtu/xiaowen format. They include the illustrated poetry collection Tangshi guchai (The pleasures of Tang poetry) published by Sanhua tang (managed by Jiang Zisheng), the adventure novel Shuihu zhizhuan pinglin (Chronicles of the water margin, heavily annotated) published by Yu Xiangdou’s Shuangfeng tang in 1594, and the Wanli period religious novel Tianfu chushen zhuan (The rise of the Empress of Heaven) published by Xiong Danmu (Xiong Zhonggu,
More books intended to attract this stratum of buyers can be found when one examines the imprints of specific publishing houses. The Qingbai tang in Jianyang was managed by Yang Xianchun. Active during the second half of the Wanli era, the firm produced the following novels: *Jingben tongshu yanyi hurun quan Han zhizhuan* (Chronicles of the entire Han, a popular narrative based on the Comprehensive Mirror for Government, capital edition), 12 juan, dated Wanli 16 (1588); *Xinshen quanxiang Ershihisun dedao Luohan zhuan* (Tales of enlightenment of the twenty-four arhats, newly carved and fully illustrated), 6 juan, dated Wanli 32 (1604); and undated editions of *Damo chushen chuan-deng zhuan* (The Rise of Bodhidharma and his transmission of the dharma) and *Dingjie jingben quanxiang Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West, exquisitely carved, fully illustrated capital edition). All three books are printed with illustrations in the upper register; they vary in density of print from 15 × 27 graphs (Xiyou ji) through 14 × 22 graphs (the historical fiction) to 10 × 17 graphs (the novels on religious figures). The titles of these novels used elements common among other novels printed during the Wanli period in Fujian—jingben, or capital edition, for example—and were concerned with topics popular at the time, historical and religious or fantastic figures. Furthermore, another historical novel dated Jiaping 31 (1552) bears the Qingbai tang mark, *Da Song zhongxing tongshu yanyi* (The restoration of the great Song, a popular narrative), in 8 juan. Both works contain internal references to Yu Xiangdou and Xiong Danu, respectively, placing them firmly in the same category as the inexpensive popular fiction being produced by other Fujian printers. Thus perhaps we can conclude from their choice of books that this Yang family operation meant to satisfy popular tastes in reading. Examining illustrations from these books reveals great similarities in quality, that is, low quality, that again suggest undiscerning, relatively less affluent buyers—in marked contrast to the fine printing accorded the linguistically much more complex chuanqi (southern drama) at that same time in the lower Yangzi cities.

What else did Qingbai tang publish? Du Xinfu’s *not always reliable* Ming-dai banke songshu (A comprehensive bibliography of Ming imprints) includes the following: *Xinshen pinglin Dansui dong gao* (Works of Wu Guolun, newly carved, with ample commentary), 26 juan, Wanli 16 (1588); *Qilin ji* (Unicorn wool), 2 juan, by Chen Yujiao, Wanli period; *Chajiu zhengqi* (Outstanding teas and wines), 2 juan, by Deng Zhimo, Tianqi 4 (1624); 17 *Shanshui zhengqi* (Outstanding scenic spots), 3 juan, also by Deng Zhimo, Tianqi 4 (1624); and *Du Yi siji* (Private reading notes on the Classic of Changes), 10 juan, by Dong Guangsheng, Chongzhen 4 (1631). Why these works? *Dansui dong gao* is the collected writings of Wu Guolun (1524–93); Dansui dong was a small from made by decorative rocks in the private garden he enjoyed in his retirement). In 1602 Wu was appointed vice-prefect of Jianping in Fujian. He served capably, hence his name would have been rather familiar in this area. 18 Chen Yujiao (1544–1611) was a minor bureaucrat who collapsed

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14 All of these imprints used the same format; the latter is similar to other Fujian novels in print size (ten lines of sixteen graphs), although these are relatively easy to read. One might infer from their physical similarity that all were produced for the same broad stratum of book buyers who had limited financial means.
and died after an unsuccessful attempt to free his son from imprisonment when he was charged with murder; this is one of his four chuanqi plays, a revision of an earlier play that he wrote under a pseudonym. Chen seemingly was involved in the compilation of Gumingjia zaju (Comedies by famous playwrights of the past) and other collections of popular plays; this may have been why his work was reprinted by this publishing house.¹⁹ That the works of Deng Zhimo should have been produced by a Fujian printer of popular reading material is hardly surprising; Deng served as a tutor at the school founded by the Yu family of printers; consequently, his many writings were published and republished in Fujian, especially by the Yu printing houses. It would appear that in addition to popular fiction, Qingbai tang was producing books of local interest, another niche in the general book-buying market.

Figure 19. Yangjiu yanyi, a Suzhou edition of the Wanli period. Reproduced from Fu Xihua, ed., Zhongguo gudian wenxue banhua xuanji, 175–77. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

It is well known that fiction was not published only in such inexpensive and unattractive editions during the late Ming, however. While Fujian publishing houses were producing fiction primarily for less affluent readers, Hangzhou and Suzhou printers were producing very fine editions. The Rongyu tang Zhongyi Shuihu zhuans (Water margin: of loyalty and generosity), famous for its fine and widely reproduced illustrations (Fig. 18), was the work of a Hangzhou printer of plays. This large-format edition (15.5 × 26.0 cm), like other fine Jiangnan imprints of novels, was visually as aesthetically pleasing as were the plays (also approx. 16 × 25.5 cm) that must have been sold at high prices. In some editions the names of the best-known printing block carvers can be found, members of the Huizhou Huang and Liu families.²⁰ A number of the most carefully printed novels were produced by individual literatus publishers; many of these illustrated editions were annotated as well. Examples include the first editions of Sui Yangdiyanshi (The merry adventures of Emperor Yang of the Sui, 1631, 15.5 × 24.0 cm) and Yangjiu yanyi (Narrative of the [generals of the] Yang family, printed area 13.6 × 21.2 cm; Fig. 19), both pub-
lished in Suzhou. Their intended audience must have been relatively affluent and discriminating book buyers, the same group who would have purchased the albums of printed landscapes and bird-and-flower illustrations produced during the late Ming by a number of Jiangnan printers.\(^{23}\)

SPECIALIZATION AND MARKETING AMONG JIANGNAN PUBLISHERS

Nanjing’s Sanshan jie (Three Mountains Street) book market district was home to the Fuchun tang and the Shide tang, two firms owned by members of the Tang family of booksellers, including most notably Tang Fuchun. The first was famous for the printing of plays in moderately well illustrated editions, some of which bear traces of having been reprinted from blocks carved by other publishing houses in the family. It also produced editions of classical fiction, medicine, and verse. All, however, were similar in size of paper, density of text on the page, and illustrations (in the case of the plays); we can infer that all were intended for buyers of the same middle economic range. An example of these is the Fuchun tang edition of *Jindiao ji* (The golden marten, approx. 16.0 × 25.4 cm; Fig. 20).

Another Nanjing bookshop, the Wenlin ge managed by Tang Liyao, also offered a range of titles while specializing in drama. However, this time Tang’s imprints were considerably more attractive. In contrast to the Fuchun tang illustrations, Wenlin ge pictures have long, gently curving, narrow lines, finer decorative details such as the stars on the inside of the tent, and a more successful representation of mass through the texture of the rock and graceful draperies on the figures. Surely these more labor-intensive productions would have been more expensive than their Fuchun tang counterparts—and hence intended for a more upscale buying public (see Fig. 21, *Yanzhi ji* [Rouge, approx. 15.7 × 24.7 cm]). Wenlin ge also published a large collection of Song documents, a zither tutor (revised from a Fuchun tang edition of lower quality), and a 1607 album of practice images for painters titled *Tuhui songyi* (The royal design for illustrations), edited by Yang Erzeng (fl. 1600–1620). These, too, seem designed to appeal to more affluent book buyers.\(^{22}\)

To judge from available copies, during the late Ming, most Jiangnan fiction editions were produced by publishers who had diversified their types of imprints. This suggests that fiction publishers sought to attract a broader range of book buyers than did the purveyors of refined libretti. For example, the earliest edition of *Journey to the West* in its complex version was produced by Shide tang in Nanjing, a printing house operated by the owner of Fuchun tang. Yet it would appear that the two bookshops were not competitors; only rarely can one discover a title that was published by both. Shide tang printed a relatively small number of plays and two philosophical classics, *Chongzi zhide zhenjing* (The true scripture of emptiness and perfect virtue, or *Liao*) and *Xunzi*.\(^{23}\) But Shide tang did produce annotated editions of several early historical novels that may have been obtained from the Fujian publisher Yu Xiangdou. *Tangshu zhizhuan tongzhu yuan yi ting* (Chronicles from the History of the Tang; a popular narrative, with marginal commentary, 1593), had been published first by Qingjiang tang in 1553. The text was recarved for this Nanjing edition, however. Some of these and several illustrations for *Nan Bei liang Song zhizhuan ting* (Chronicles of the two Song courts, South and North, with marginal commentary) were signed by Wang Shaozhuai of Shangyuan (Nanjing). The Daye tang edition of *Dong Xi liang jin zhizhuan ting* (Chronicles of the two Jin courts, East and West, with marginal commentary) also bears illustrations by Wang Shaozhuai; this imprint is also dated 1593. Given

![Figure 20. The Fuchun tang edition of *Jindiao ji*. Reproduced from Zhou Wu, ed., *Jinling gu banhua*, 32, from a copy in the Beijing University Library. Reprinted by permission.](image-url)
the similarities in appearance of these two novels, it may be that Shide tang reprinted a Daye tang imprint. Alternatively, Daye tang might well have used the Shide tang blocks for its edition. One can infer that Tang Fuchun meant these three historical novels to be a matched set, of interest to the sort of relatively discriminating buyers who bought plays in sets produced by Fuchun tang or its more upscale competitors.

Other Jiangnan publishers of fiction were similarly diversified during the late Ming. The Nanjing bookseller Zhou Yuejiao published books on medicine and leishu. He also produced collections of gong’an, or crime-case fiction (Xinjuan quanxiang Bao Xiaosu gong baijia gong’an yanyi [A hundred cases for Lord Bao Xiaosu, a narrative newly carved and fully illustrated] and Hai Gangfeng xiansheng yuguan gong’an [The cases of Master Hai Gangfeng in office]), as well as a supernatural novel (Xinjuan saomei dantun Dongdu ji [Salvation in the East, through scourging the demons and strengthening morality, newly carved]), in addition to works of historical fiction concerning the Han, the Three Kingdoms, the Jin, and the Tang dynasties—in a style very similar to that of Shide tang imprints (see Fig. 22, Sanguo zhizhuan tongsu yanyi [Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms, a popular narrative], printed area 13.9 x 22.4 cm). Either some of these novels were reprints of books initially issued by other Nanjing publishers or Zhou was attempting to profit from the Shide tang’s success by imitating its format and hiring the same illustrator. Given the fact that some of the crime-case and supernatural novels were initially produced in Fujian in relatively low-quality editions, it may be that Zhou Yuejiao was attempting to bring fiction to the attention of the generally wealthier Nanjing book buyers.

Through even this brief look at a few Jinling publishers we can glimpse how late Ming booksellers specialized. (For more detail, see Chap. 3, above.) Clearly there was collaboration as well as competition among them. Texts of novels made their way from Fujian to Nanjing; and printing blocks seemingly circulated among publishers who shared generally the same market, either for plays or for novels. We can also infer that the Tang family of publishers made conscious marketing choices on the question of specialization: Wenlin ge produced fine editions that must have been relatively expensive, hence appealing to the relatively affluent; Fuchun tang editions were seemingly
his imprints to book collectors. As was the case with the Nanjing printer Tang Fuchun, Wang Tingna’s imprints were all physically similar regardless of authorship or content. The illustrations in these Huancui tang imprints were of the highest quality, of the sort to attract book connoisseurs. What is noteworthy about them is their degree of detail. See, for example, Figure 23, an illustration from the play Yi Pei ji (Righteous heroes): notice that all available space is taken up with fine lines, most of them curved, hence involving more painstaking carving. Given the skilled labor such illustrations involved, these can only have been very expensive editions designed for a limited audience of buyers.

CHANGES IN THE MARKETS FOR FICTION DURING THE QING

The late Ming had been a high point in the artistry of woodblock printing; the Wanli and subsequent reign periods had also been a time of expansion in numbers of imprints produced and in the techniques for printing illustrations. Color printing reached a level of perfection during that time, although such pictures—with shading in many colors—appeared primarily in albums and on single sheets during the seventeenth century. After the brutal political and economic transition to the Qing, the publishing trade emerged changed from its previous situation of multilevel marketing. In the genre of fiction, book producers in the Qing seem to have targeted two very different readerships and groups of book buyers: a large number of consumers of limited means, able to purchase only inexpensive (and thus relatively low-quality) editions; and an elite of literati aficionados who, disdainful of print and the indiscriminate circulation of texts that it made possible, produced works in manuscript for distribution to a select circle of like-minded readers.

Qing commercial publishers could be characterized as discriminating against general buyers, with fewer middling-quality imprints for the shengyuan, or the middle-level book-buying public (see Chapter 2, by Joseph McDermott, for a discussion of shengyuan book culture and its impact on Ming literary production). In sheer numbers of volumes printed, of course, Qing period publishers far outstripped the production of their Ming predecessors. But, in contrast to the late Ming practice of including pictures in books of all categories, many Qing period imprints had no illustrations. Only novels were exceptions to this rule, although, as we have seen, the artistic standards for novel illustrations fell precipitously during the Qing. Likewise, editions of fiction on poor paper with crowded text and large numbers of crudely drawn and poorly carved pictures became ever more frequent, apparently produced for book buyers of modest means. Older novels, including “classics” such as the si da qishu (four masterworks) of the Ming joined the ranks
of new popular romances written during the Qing for a growing audience of readers and book buyers; all appeared in cheap, low-quality editions regardless of the artistic merit of the text itself.

At the same time, however, the new, more introspective literati novels of the Qing, and literati plays as well, circulated for decades, sometimes even a century or more, in manuscript only. Thus, to forestall the uncontrollable distribution of his work of fiction through inexpensive printing, a literatunovelist or his sympathetic friends might permit his book to circulate only in manuscript copies. This would restrict its circulation to a closed circle of aficionados who could truly appreciate its artistic profundity. Works of this category include Rulü waishi (Unofficial history of the literati, also known as The Scholars, ca. 1750), Honglou meng or Shitou ji (Dream of the Red Chamber or Story of the Stone, 1760s–1790s), Yesou puyan (The humble words of an old rustic), and Qilu deng (Lamp at the crossroads, ca. 1785). Similarly, many literati plays also circulated in manuscript among restricted circles of readers during the Qing.30

Examples of poor-quality Qing editions of novels can be found in virtually any Chinese collection. In place of the elaborate settings for action, including buildings and landscapes, that are found in the best late Ming imprints, these Qing editions of many of the same works characteristically have only a few rough portraits of major characters. Generally these figures are deprived of all background and are clustered at the head of the first volume. An example is shown in Figure 24, from the 1850 Wuyun lou or Guanghua tang edition of Dream of the Red Chamber; notice, too, the low quality of the text itself in this imprint. These editions, like many of the books produced by the Sihao publishers discussed by Brokaw in Chapter 5, were prepared by artisans of little skill (who were also working as quickly as possible, I would expect). Individual copies must have been comparatively inexpensive, thus designed for buyers who cared little for the physical appearance of the book and certainly not for bibliophiles.31

Relatively fine editions of fiction continued to be produced throughout the Qing, but many were simply reprints of earlier editions, either pulled from well-carved blocks brought out of storage or from new blocks that used an earlier edition as the model. In both cases the quality was degraded from the original, either by wear on the older blocks or by the imprecision of using printed pages as the models during recarving.32

A few exceptional fiction imprints did appear during the Qing, however. Late in the seventeenth century novels were still occasionally being produced by literati printers, such as Chu Renhuo (ca. 1630–ca. 1705), with all the care lavished on the finest books of the Wanli period. Chu's Sui Tang yanyi (Narrative of the Sui and the Tang, 1695) was heralded then and has been ever since as an exemplar of the printer's art; unquestionably he intended it for book buyers from the highest cultural level who had the funds to spare on lavish editions—and who were fans of vernacular fiction. Some literati printers also produced fine editions of more formal writings, but Chu's own collected jottings were produced on paper that was smaller in size and far inferior in quality to that used for his novel.33

Examining the imprints of a relatively active printer of fiction during the middle Qing demonstrates the general decline in quality of printing even in relatively large format editions. The firm Shuyue tang was active in Suzhou over a period of several decades, to judge from the dates of extant titles. Although there is no convenient way to know what other types of books they may have published, at least fourteen novels produced there between 1775 and the early 1820s bear the Shuyue tang mark. (It seems likely that editions bearing this name dated after about 1830 were produced by a different firm or firms in other cities, including Taiyuan and Beijing.) For easy comparison, I include the fourteen Suzhou imprints in Table 6.1.34

It would appear that many of the Shuyue tang imprints are large-format editions; both Hou Xiyu ji (The later Journey to the West) and San Sui pingyao zhuan (The three Sui suppress the demons' revolt) measure about 15.5 × 24 cm, and Ying Yun Meng zhuang (Ying [miang], [Wang] Yun, and Meng [yun]) measures 14.7 × 23.6 cm, with a printed area of 12.8 × 19.5 cm. Yunhe qisong (Remarkable events from a gathering of heroes) measures 16.0 × 25.5 cm. These
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Graphs/ Illustrations</th>
<th>Paper size</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longtu Shenduan gong’an, 1775</td>
<td>9 × 20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guotu, CU</td>
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<tr>
<td>([Bao] Longtu's inspired judgments on crime cases)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ji Dian dashi zuiputi, 1777–80</td>
<td>9 × 20</td>
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<td>Tøyō</td>
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<td>(Drunken Bodhisattva: Chan Master Crazy Ji)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shuo Hu quanzhuan, 1779</td>
<td>9 × 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Guotu, CU</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Complete tales of the Hu family of generals)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doupeng xianhua, 1781</td>
<td>10 × 25</td>
<td>15.0 × 19.5</td>
<td>Nantu, Guotu</td>
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<td>(Idle talk under the bean arbor)</td>
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<td>Tøyō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hou Xiyou ji, 1783</td>
<td>11 × 24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tøyō</td>
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<tr>
<td>(The later journey to the West)</td>
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<td>Jin'gu qiguan, 1785</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>CASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Strange sights new and old)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yishuo Fan Tang yanyi, 1803</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>CASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Rebels against the Tang, a new version)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ying Yun Meng zhuanshu, 1805</td>
<td>11 × 22</td>
<td>14.7 × 23.6</td>
<td>Nantu, Tøyō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ying [niang], [Wang] Yun, and Meng [yun])</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yangjiafu...zhizhuanshu, 1809</td>
<td>10 × 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Narrative of the [generals of the] Yang family)</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Sui pingyao zhuanshu, 1812 (Three Suis suppress the demons' revolt)</td>
<td>10 × 22</td>
<td>15.3 × 23.7</td>
<td>LC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pai'an jingqi, 1812 (Striking the table in amazement)</td>
<td>12 × 24</td>
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<td>CASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yuanshen Hai Gong da hongpao, 1822</td>
<td>9 × 19</td>
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<td>Guotu</td>
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<tr>
<td>(The great red-robed Lord Hai, original version)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dong Hai, Xi Han yanyi zhuanshu, n.d. (Biographical records of Eastern and Western Han)</td>
<td>10 × 22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tøyō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Remarkable events from a gathering of heroes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yunte huzong, n.d.</td>
<td>11 × 24</td>
<td>16.0 × 25.5</td>
<td>Nantu</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Abreviations: Tøyō = Tøyō bunka kenkyūjo, Tokyo University; Guotu = National Library of China; Beida = Beijing University; Nantu = Nanjing Library; CASS = Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing; CU = Columbia University; LC = Library of Congress.


Books are all near to the physical size of Sui Tang yanyi, which set the standard for fine Qing imprints of fiction, at 17.0 × 24.5 cm. Even so, the quality of craftsmanship is considerably lower in the middle Qing imprints; the difference is clear when one compares illustrations from Chu Renhuo's 1695 first edition of Sui Tang (Fig. 25) and the 1812 edition of San Sui pingyao zhuanshu (Fig. 26). The disparity in quality of text carving between the two editions is equally great.
though these imprints are considerably more attractive than cheap editions such as the Dream of the Red Chamber (see Fig. 24). Shuye tang nonetheless was producing novels and story collections for a broad range of buyers, rather than exclusively serving those at the high end of the economic scale. The same firm clearly could produce fine editions when it chose to; its fiction imprints did not come up to that standard of quality, and they probably cost considerably less than the painter’s manual.

CHANGES IN BOOK PRODUCTION, CHANGES IN FICTION IMPRINTS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

During the nineteenth century, technological change revolutionized the book publishing industry. Movable type came to be used for fiction as well as for books in other categories, but lithography (shiyin) enabled publishers to print using ever smaller type with ever more characters per page while maintaining legibility. Shanghai shuju printed 130 different fiction titles using this new equipment and techniques between 1875 and 1930, for example; Guangyi shuju printed 35 titles by this method between 1879 and 1925. These small-format editions, on very cheap, high-acid paper, sold widely and at reasonably low cost. The new technology had simply amplified the tendency that had begun during the Ming, to target particular segments of the book-buying public with editions of fiction designed to suit their purses. Likewise, the number of characters per page increased as the size of the paper was diminished to produce tiny print in late Qing works of fiction. The extremely small print of lithographed editions produced around the turn of the twentieth century—some requiring use of a magnifying glass to be legible—thus came as the logical conclusion of a process discernible throughout the Qing. One may safely conclude, I am persuaded, that the decrease in size of the medium and the increasing number of written characters per page through the Qing reflects a continuing decline in the costs of popular reading materials. These changes likewise heralded a similar social process: vernacular fiction was attracting a growing audience of socially more diverse readers. And as it became more popular, the cultural status of fiction—as defined by the social elite—declined: fiction came to be widely scorned by the more conservative members of China’s dominant stratum as it became accessible to ever more of the urban populace in general.

Let us consider some broader implications of these conclusions. In my earlier work, Reading Illustrated Fiction, I suggested that although publishers specialized in certain types of books by content, there was a range of titles that each publisher might publish over a relatively short time, a decade or two. However, these publishers also adopted a variety of formats and styles. That is, while the Tang family’s Fuchun tang might publish an extensive list of drama titles that are very similar if not identical in appearance, they might

Wang Zhongmin indexes a nonfiction imprint by this firm that deserves at least a brief consideration. The Shuye tang edition of Juzi yuan huazhuan (The mustard seed manual of painting) was printed in spring 1782, about the same time as Duoheng xianhua (Idle tales from the bean arbor) and Hou Xiyue ji. Its pages had nine columns of twenty characters each, as did two earlier Shuye tang editions of fiction; the printed area of its pages measures $14.0 \times 22.5$ centimeters, and the pages are only slightly larger than the printed pages of the fiction texts. This is a fine edition compared to the firm’s works of fiction, however. We may safely conclude, then, that even
also print books in quite different formats for a variety of commercial reasons. But not, I think, to reach separate audiences—or for distinguishable market niches, in other words. I base this conclusion on similarities in quality of imprints from late Ming publishers, the relatively fine quality of illustrations and their number, and the accuracy of carving of the text itself. Developments in book marketing and in technology were to create clearer markets for fiction as the publishing industry burgeoned during the late nineteenth century. But I leave the study of lithographed editions of fiction to someone else; my concerns here have been to observe significant trends in the production of woodblock-printed fiction.

In summary, then, was there niche marketing of vernacular fiction? When one examines both text and illustrations of any collection of fiction imprints, complications to any neat generalizations about niche writing may immediately appear—but not so about niche marketing. To judge from the books as physical objects, there can be little question: the quality of the imprints clearly varies through time and among publishing houses; these quality differences can be interpreted to reflect prices relatively, in the absence of extensive data on actual costs. And to the extent that the relative prices of books limit the range of potential buyers, book production costs can broadly serve as the basis for identifying intended purchasers. In my earlier study and here as well I have demonstrated that the printing quality of novels and story collections fell during the Qing period; one can safely infer as well that the prices decreased apace. Perhaps most significantly, these changes came about as increasing numbers of China’s population became literate, thereby making even more potential buyers for more readily affordable books. Significant changes occurred in the realm of popular print culture from the middle Ming through the end of the Qing, especially in terms of the numbers and social levels of its participants. These changes are probably nowhere more clearly reflected than in the printing of vernacular fiction.

NOTES


2. I refer to important studies by Evelyn S. Rawski (Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979]) and David Johnson (“Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China,” in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., Popular Culture in Late Imperial China [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985], 34-72), and the further investigations of women readers in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, Writing Women in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); see also Susan Mann, Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Kai-wing Chow’s identification of reading audiences is as speculative as David Johnson’s; see Chow’s “Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change in Late Ming China,” Late Imperial China 17, 1 (June 1996): 120-57. I also discuss reading audiences in “Distinguishing Levels of Audiences for Ming-Ch'ing Vernacular Literature,” in Johnson, Nathan, and Rawski, eds., Popular Culture in Late Imperial China, 112-42.

3. Kai-wing Chow, “Writing for Success,” 124-26; for an excellent window into late Qing publishing, see Brokaw, Chapter 5, this volume.

4. A number of conclusions about the printing of fiction were presented in my Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Portions of this chapter summarize sections from Chapter 5; see especially Reading Illustrated Fiction, 90-95, Table 3.6; and Otsuka, Zîbô Chûgoku tsûizoku shosetsu shomon. For Han and Wang, see note 1 above.

5. Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, chap. 3, esp. 155. For Lucille Chia’s use of this term, see Chapter 3, this volume.

6. These generalizations do little justice to the complexities of Ming and Qing thought or cultural change; for detailed studies, see Timothy Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); John B. Henderson, The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Kai-wing Chow, The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Stephen J. Reddy, Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. pt. 1, chaps. 1-3; Richard John Lufrano, Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China (Honolulù: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997); and, for one literatus’s scorn for the commodification of culture and the commercialization of the arts trade, Kenneth J. Hammond, “The Decadent Chalice: A Critique of Late Ming Political Culture,” Ming Studies 39 (spring 1998): esp. 41-43. It should be noted that Hammond’s subject, Wang Shizhen (1526-90), was as critical of the uses of art objects in central administration manipulations of favor as he was of merchants’ assumption of literati culture.

7. Lufrano, Honorable Merchants, 185, 31-34. Cynthia Brokaw summarizes information on the growth of the reading public and their geographic distribution in Chapter 1 of this volume.


10. The Sanguo zhi pinghua was reprinted by Shionoya On in 1926; two years later a Chinese scholarly delegation came to Japan to photograph rare books, including the rest of the pinghua collection. These books were in the process of being reprinted in China, during 1929 and 1930, when hostilities with Japan interfered; a few copies of Sanguo were printed, and the rest were lost during Japanese bombardment. Subsequently, four of the pinghua were produced in a lithograph edition in Tokyo at the original size and bound butterfly style. Copies of this edition are hard to find; James I. Crump Jr. obtained one in Tokyo in the 1950s. Both this illustration and the next, from Sanfen shilie, were kindly supplied by Professor Crump; he took photographs of the latter at the Teneri Library in 1955. See also Zhong Zhaohua, ed., Yuankuan quanshang pinghua wuxian jiaochu (Yuan editions of the fully illustrated pinghua, five titles, annotated versions) (Chengdu: Ba Shu shudian, 1989). “Qianyan,” 1, for more information about pinghua reprinting. Recent pinghua reprints generally divide the pages for rebinding just opposite to the original intention. That is, double pages were carved from a single block with a single illustration extending across both leaves; only when these sheets were bound with the printed faces inward could one appreciate the illustration fully.

11. I am indelibly indebted to Sören Edgren for clarifying how the first served as model for the second. The Sanfen shilie is the only one of the earlier pinghua series to have been reproduced at that time, it would appear. It has been reprinted as volume 1 in Guben xiaoshuo congkan (Old editions of vernacular fiction, collected and reproduced), edited by Liu Shide, Chen Qingbao, and Shi Changyu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987–91). Collection 7. I realize that my judgments concerning the artistic merit of book illustrations are to a degree subjective. However, I base them in large part on the technical difficulty of execution, thanks to lessons in appreciation provided by the late scholar and woodblock artist Zhou Wu (d. 1990).

12. For more comments on Fujian publishers, see Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 135–37. For more information on the decline of publishing standards there, see Xiao Dongfa, “Jiangyuan Yushi keshu kaolue” (A study of imprints by the Wu family of Jiangyang), Wenzian (Documents) 21 (1984): 241–43; and especially, Chia, Printing for Profit, 80–93.

13. See Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 139–40, for examples.

14. Fu Xihua, ed., Zhongguo gudian wenxue banhua xuanji (Selected woodcut illustrations from classical Chinese literature) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 58–63, 64–67, 68; the latter is reproduced here as Fig. 19.

15. See Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 21–51, esp. 48–51, for a synopsis of the data suggesting that various genres of vernacular fiction came into or fell out of fashion, judging from their publishing records. For Ötsuka’s notes on the novels on religious figures, see Ötsuka, Zho Chügöko isetsuzoku shiinsetsu shomoku, 151–39; novels numbered 22003–22017 all appeared originally in Fujian in shangtu/xiaoren format. Ötsuka, Zho Chügöko isetsuzoku shiinsetsu shomoku, 133, identifies Dama chushen chuandsang zhuang as a Qingbai tang imprint; for the other titles, see Xu Xinfu, Minxiao banke zenglu (A comprehensive list of Ming imprints) (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guji keyinshu, 1983), 430b.

16. Erisiszun dedao Luohan zhuang was reprinted in the Ming Qing shenben xiaoshuo congkan (Rare editions of Ming and Qing fiction, collected and reproduced) (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1985) series; a page of Quan Han zhishuan is reprinted in Chügöko Min Shên no ehon (Chinese illustrated books of the Ming and Qing) (Osaka: Osaka seiritsu bijutsukan, 1987), 23, Fig. 43; a page of this Xiuji edition appears on Fig. 65, Brokaw observes a number of shared features among books designed for marginal readers in Chapter 5, above.

17. Biographical information in Zhuang Yifu, comp., Gudian xiaxi xuanmu huiku (Collected notes on extant classical plays) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 606–61. A number of his chuanyi plays exist, see Zhaung, 1061–62.

18. DMB, vol. 2, p. 1490, lists this title, his collected works, in 54 juan. Wang Zhongmin, Zhongguo shanbenshu tiyao (Notes on Chinese rare books) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 630, lists a Wanli edition that was relatively large in size (13.9 × 19.7 cm in printed area, with pages of 10 × 20 graphs); the Qingtang edition may well have been incomplete. Interestingly, Xu had been involved in abridging at least one other book himself (see Wang, p. 622), and had edited a medical text later published by a Yang family firm, perhaps Qingtang (Wang, p. 264, cf. the note quoted in Du, Mingdai banke zenglu, 5.42b–43a).

19. Chen Yujiao’s plays are collected in GBJQ, Series 2; see DMB, vol. 1, p. 189, for notes on his plays, see GCXH, pp. 439–42, 858–860. For a summary of this play, see GCXH, p. 859.

20. Du, Mingdai banke zenglu, 4.2a; GCXH, pp. 890–99; Fu, ed., Zhongguo gudian wenxue banhua xuanji, vol. 1, pp. 372–411. All of the Rongyu tang editions have commentary attributed to the unorthodox Li Zhi (1527–1602); see the explanatory headnote in the recent reprint Ming Rongyu Tang ke Shuiku shuaan tu (Illustration from the Ming period Rongyu Tang edition of Water Margin) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1985). An illustration of a Rongyu tang edition of a play can be found in Chügöko Min Shên no ehon, 11, Fig. 21; for notes on this play, see 111.

21. Zhou, himself a woodblock artist, has written most extensively about the She-

29. On the differences between Ming and Qing printing practices, see Tsien Tsuen-Hsuin, Paper and Printing, vol. 5, pt. 1, of Science and Civilisation, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 269. On the numbers of books produced, see Tsien, p. 190, note f: “It is estimated that 253,435 titles are registered in various dynastic and other bibliographies from the Han to the 1930s; 126,649 were produced under the [Qing].”

30. On manuscript editions, see Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 153–54; Zhuang Yifu lists many plays in the manuscript editions collected by the Shenghengshu, the Qing court Theatrical Office.

31. Compare this illustration with the portrait of Shi Xiangyun by Gai Qi in the very fine 1879 Honglou meng tuoyug (Illustration, with verse, for Dream of the Red Chamber, 1879 [rp. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi, 1965]), reproduced in Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 242. Guanghua tang imprints include Huaqu shuan (The fortunate union, 1860); jingfu xinshu (New tales to admonish the wealthy; a fictionalized version of a murderous Guangdong feud, 1720), and, presumably, jing gu guguan (Strange sights new and old, a collection of stories; the blocks for this work were “released” by the Guanghua tang for an 1868 printing by Qingyun lou); see Otsuka, Zho Chugoku tsuzoku shosetsu shomonoku, 81, 169, 18. For a synopsis of jingfu xinshu, see Zhongguo longsheng xiaoshuo zongmu, 614–15; it is a small edition having six illustrations and a text density of 11 x 21 characters. The jin gu’s stories were also printed as a small-format edition on pages having 11 x 25 characters with 20 illustrations. The location of this printing house has not been determined; the Honglou meng title page indicates that Wuyuan lou stored the printing blocks (cangban), but distribution (fudian) was handled by the Guanghua tang. Clearly the Guanghua tang paralleled the publishers of Sibao, Fujian, in producing books intended for customers of modest means and low aesthetic expectations. For prices of Sibao publications, see Brokaw, Chapter 5, this volume.

32. For an explanation, with photographs, of the printing process, see Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 97–110.

33. For biographical information concerning Chu Renhuo, see Robert E. Hegel,
Printing as Performance

Seven

Literati Playwright-Publishers of the Late Ming

Katherine Carlitz

In the 1630s or 1640s, someone known to us only as the Master of the Silkworm Studio (Jianshi zhuren) published a finely illustrated edition of the play Xiang dang ran (How it must have happened).1 The cover page advertised it as a work by the sixteenth-century eccentric Lu Nan, with commentary by the early-seventeenth-century poet Tan Yuanchun (d.1637). The critics were not convinced. The connoisseur Qi Biaojia (1602–45) dismissed the attribution to Lu Nan, noting that the arias sounded like recent productions; and with regard to Tan Yuanchun, he observed that false claims were becoming all too typical of commentary editions.2 The prefaces themselves undermine the claims of the title: the preface attributed to Tan admits that Lu Nan may not in fact be the author, and the preface attributed to Lu is given a calendrically impossible date.3 As for the “Master of the Silkworm Studio,” his identity remains completely obscure to us. No contemporaries list any other editions from a Ming dynasty (1368–1644) “Silkworm Studio,” and in fact “Silkworm Studio” is still best known as the studio name of the Song dynasty (960–1279) poet Wang Qiao.4

Why did the Master of the Silkworm Studio, whoever he was, expend so much effort on his “Lu Nan” and his “Tan Yuanchun”? We can intuit the answer by looking at another late Ming drama edition, a masterpiece of Ming publishing. A decade or so before the appearance of Xiang dang ran, the celebrated man of letters Ling Mengchu (1580–1644) brought out a “red-and-black” (zhu mo) critical edition of the late Yuan (1279–1368) play Pipa ji (The lute), including textual variants and a careful evaluation of the place of Pipa ji in late Yuan drama. With its superstructure of prefaces, commentary, fine illustrations, and dianban (rhythmic) notation, this edition of Pipa ji was an authoritative text for readers and an exquisite object for connoisseurs.5 Ling Mengchu, whose father had passed the highest or jinshi level of the civil ser-