of desperate literati who abused their positions. Salaries were small because these schools were not funded through the official budget. Local administrators thereby had to finance them through their own salaries or money raised from the people, which is why confiscating local religious establishments was such a tempting alternative way of sponsoring the schools.

Based on local gazetteers that display significant local influence in their creation, in the last chapter, which covers the late Ming (1530–1644), Schneewind explores how local people reacted to the community schools. She indicates that, in many localities, after the community school founder was transferred, members of the community brought images out of hiding and reestablished the religious temples. In other places, local residents themselves founded community schools. In these instances, the schools frequently served as academies where elite men gathered to engage in literary pursuits. The weakness of this chapter is that it is based on a small number of records that come almost entirely from either Guangdong or Fujian province.

Overall, Schneewind's argument is convincing. Through the case study of the community schools, she has shown that Ming officials and subjects did not merely obediently follow imperial decrees. Throughout the dynasty, officials freely chose how and to what degree to implement those charges. Oftentimes, they reinterpreted the instructions in a manner that suited their private interests. One might wonder, though, whether this was merely the case with community schools because they were not at all important. Perhaps, if we looked at an educational institution that was more important to the emperor, we would see officials feeling more pressure to closely follow the imperial directives. Even so, the author's findings are instructive for anyone who is interested in the functioning of the pre-modern Chinese state at the local level.

Schneewind's book has made two other significant contributions. Her contention that community schools were not universal and usually short-lived is important because it casts doubt on the widely held belief that literacy was fairly widespread in late imperial China. Her portrait of Neo-Confucian religious zealots confiscating temples to establish schools to indoctrinate commoners with Confucian religion also shatters the rosy image of Ming society as one in which many people were trying to peacefully reconcile the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教). In sum, Schneewind's finely crafted book will be of great interest to scholars of Chinese history, culture, education and religion.

A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China.
By Joseph P. McDermott. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006. Pp. 294. ISBN -10: 9622097820.

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As Joseph McDermott argues in his "Introduction", the study of the history of the Chinese book is by no means a bookish topic. After all, book learning has played a crucial role in the political and cultural life of China for at least the last thousand years and was central to the identity of the country's elite. Even more broadly, transmission of all kinds of scholarly, technical, and popular information; religious ideas and practices; and entertainment in manuscript and printed forms meant that books found readers and lookers and listeners throughout all socioeconomic groups. But to address some of these issues more thoroughly than many earlier studies, McDermott limits the scope of his book to the official and literati elite in the lower Yangzi delta and concentrates on the Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644) and the earlier part of the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. There are good reasons for McDermott's choices – he examines a group that has left behind the most information on its own uses of books, in an area that has long been a heartland of Han Chinese high culture, and the tightened geographical focus allows for a more feasible analysis of economic

variables like book production costs – no small consideration when such data are so hard to find before the last two centuries. Even with these constraints, McDermott's study is an ambitious one, for which he has relied heavily on previous scholarship.

In Chapter 1, McDermott summarizes information on how woodblock printing, or xylography, developed in China. Ironically, the very simplicity of this technology made its earliest developments occur largely unnoticed – possibly sometime in the seventh century CE – such that we lack any detailed step-by-step description of the printing process and the making of a multiple-page book until more than eleven hundred years later, in an account by an English missionary in 1820. McDermott goes on to discuss the changes that occurred, notably in the mid-to late Ming, when the decrease in the two major costs in the production of xylographic books – paper and blockcarving – finally made such imprints as cheap as or cheaper than manuscript copies of the same work and allowed for the tremendous growth of commercial publishing.

Finding the quantitative evidence to prove this "ascendance of the imprint", however, is not so easy because data on the production of Chinese manuscripts and imprints throughout the ages are sparse. Thus in Chapter 2, McDermott uses several ways of comparing the numbers of surviving manuscripts and imprints for each period, by looking at the sizes of book collections from the Song through the Ming, by estimating the number of imprints produced and the number of commercial publishers in each period, as well as by marshalling an abundance of anecdotal information. In particular, he draws abundantly from the work of two Japanese scholars, Inoue Susumu[1] and Katsuyama Minoru, and their quantitative tabulations of some of the largest Chinese rare book holdings in the world for the Song, Yuan, and part of the Ming. McDermott admits that although many individual pieces of evidence alone may be contested, the sum of these data points convincingly to a lasting dominance of imprints over manuscripts by the late sixteenth century, when far more books were printed than in any earlier period, including a greater variety of non-scholarly popular works (e.g. household references, fiction, drama, almanacs), and important private libraries on the average were significantly larger than those of the Song and Yuan.

In Chapters 3 and 4, however, where McDermott focuses even more on the literati's use and access of books, the "ascendance of the imprint" seems less clear. During the Ming, acquisition of scholarly works remained a struggle for many readers. Gifts of books were of limited use, even for the sufficiently high-ranking officials and well-connected literati involved in this practice. Books were generally more procurable through purchase from the increasing number of bookstores and book peddlers, and also occasionally from collectors themselves. But the problem was that many titles, including some basic scholarly works, remained scarce. In fact, how *could* readers see and perhaps make copies of scholarly works? After painting a dismal picture of the government book collections during the Ming, which suffered from damage, theft, and general neglect, McDermott describes how inaccessible private collections were to most outsiders, who were not close members of the owners' families or acquaintances with their own books to share. Such difficulties did lessen gradually, as discussed in Chapter 5, but it was only in the eighteenth century when access to scholarly works through far-flung correspondence networks, growth from individual to group exchanges of books, and perhaps above all the more than 150 imperially sponsored and funded editorial and literary projects that made many heretofore rare works available to far more scholars. Indeed, the philological *kaozheng* (evidential scholarship) movement that required rigorous textual analysis could not have flourished during the Qing without this significantly greater access to books and epigraphic materials.

1 McDermott depends very much on information from the work of Inoue Susumu 井上進 and agrees with a number of the latter's important conclusions. Thus many of the same questions about Inoue's analysis and conclusions can be asked of McDermott's ideas. For a detailed critique, see Cynthia Brokaw's review of Inoue's *Chūgoku shuppan bunkashi: shomotsu to chi no fūki* 中国出版文化史: 書物と知の風景 in *IJAS* 2:1 (2005), esp. pp. 155–60.

Nevertheless, McDermott ends on an ambiguous note in Chapter 6, where he argues that as the reverence for learning together with a rather fetishistic way of cherishing the written word spread to the less educated, the attitude toward written culture did not broaden to encompass the many uses of literacy – that there was no concern expressed for any "'imagined national community', the development of an empire-wide written culture, and even the written language as a means for engaging readers and writers into a public, let alone a national consciousness".

McDermott's last three chapters imply that the "ascendance of the imprint" starting in the late Ming is somewhat problematic in the context of scholarly learning, if access to books remained as limited as he describes. His meticulous corrective is certainly welcome in the face of a current and sometimes under-researched enthusiasm for the "late Ming publishing boom", but perhaps his concern about the private book collectors actually leads him to overestimate the difficulty of access to books. For the most privileged elite, books represented cultural, political, and even economic capital to be jealously guarded. But for the less privileged though still highly educated (e.g. poorer, with lower or no official status, living in remote areas), the growth of printing did mean greater access to books, if not all the books they wanted. Consider, for example, the significant expansion of the public literary and political discourse and the challenge to government authority and standards for the civil service examinations that came about through the establishment of literary/political groups and the contributions of many educated men working as authors, editors and printers in commercial publishing.[2] Their new books were published to be disseminated rather than hidden away in private libraries.

In a different vein, we could argue that for print to achieve a signal impact on cultural and political developments, it need not attain an overwhelming numerical ascendance over manuscript, especially in Chinese literati culture, where the intimate and intricate relationship between handwritten and printed materials persisted until modern times. Hence, even if we accept that imprints were far scarcer than manuscripts in the Song and fewer in absolute numbers than imprints in the Ming, we can still clearly see how printing affected important aspects of the political and intellectual life of the scholar-official elite during the Song – in the government-sponsored publications, in the examination literature published officially and commercially, and in the triumph of Neo-Confucian ideas disseminated in print (and manuscript) – some of the same ideas that would undergo a challenging scrutiny in the late Ming, again in print.

Finally – though this is *not* the subject of McDermott's book – there are the many questions on how the printing of the wide variety of non-scholarly works affected their many consumers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The print cultures that thus evolved differed sufficiently such that I am uncertain about McDermott's suggestion (p. 78) that his findings on literati culture in the Yangzi delta may "prove valid for ordinary readers, right up until recent times".

It is useful to point out some of the small problems of this fine book. First, McDermott sometimes uses a bit too uncritically information, especially quantitative data, from his secondary sources, which have already been questioned by other scholars. Second, the copy-editor could have been more vigilant. Since parts of the book began as lectures and published papers, there are a few passages repeated from one chapter to another, and in one case within a chapter. Lastly, a bibliographic essay at the end of the book provides much useful information on many of the important primary and secondary sources McDermott used, but others are cited only in the endnotes. But the addition of a complete "Works Cited" would have been welcome as a convenience to the reader. These, however, are quibbles about a thoughtful work full of rich details and insights. And even McDermott's interpretations with which readers may disagree will certainly stimulate them to think of how to continue exploring the social history of the Chinese book.

2 Studied by a number of scholars, including Kai-wing Chow. *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.