

Book Recommendations in the Past: A Preliminary Case Study on the Woodblock Printing Calligraphy of Wei Liaoweng (1178-1237)

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Abstract

In Song edition rare books, the typeface in prefaces or colophons sometimes differs from the main body type by revealing a distinctive style of a specific person. This article aims to define this type of font as “woodblock printing calligraphy” and relates its origin with the publishing culture of the Song dynasty. Focusing on Wei Liaoweng (1178-1237), a Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) Neo-Confucianist whose handwriting has been preserved both in prints and manuscripts, the present study is based on four books either prefaced or commented on by Wei. These are: *The Poetry of Wang Anshi* annotated by Li Bi (1159-1222), *Selected Essays on Chinese Calligraphy* compiled by Chen Si (active ca. the first half of 13th century), *Commentaries on the Book of Rites* collected by Wei Shi (active ca. the first half of 13th century), and *The Annotation of Master Heshan's [Wei Liaoweng's] Poems Composed During His Relegation in Quyang* by Wang Dewen (1190-1246).

By observing the typography of woodblock printing calligraphy, reading the forewords composed by Wei, relating people's connections, and classifying the contents of woodblock printing calligraphy, it is speculated that woodblock printing calligraphy is connected to book promotion. Also, Wei's forewords written for different book authors might have reflected his connections with them. Through discussing the social function of woodblock printing calligraphy, we can further contemplate the role calligraphy played in Chinese society and culture.

Keywords: Wei Liaoweng, woodblock printing calligraphy, Song edition rare books, prefaces and colophons, publishing culture