Chapter 4

RELIGION AND THE DEMAND FOR PRINTING

Art is not the only expression of human genius which has been dependent for its greatest manifestations on strong religious feeling. It can be said with equal truth that every advance into new territory made by printing has had as its motive an expanding religion. In the whole long history of the advance of printing from its beginnings in China down to the twentieth century, there is scarcely a language or a country where the first printing done has not been either from the sacred scriptures or from the sacred art of one of the world's three great missionary religions. China began by printing Buddhist pictures and texts. Japan had printed for six centuries and brought the printing of books to the highest degree of perfection before the printing of anything but Buddhist sacred literature was attempted. The great mass of printed literature found in Central Asia continuing up to the time of the Mongol conquest is almost exclusively religious, consisting of Buddhist pictures and Buddhist books. The printing that was going on in Egypt through the time of the Crusades consists of verses from the Koran and of prayers. The block printers of Europe produced biblical pictures and the Poor Man's Bible, while Gutenberg printed the Bible itself. And in the nineteenth century the languages of Africa and the islands of the sea have been reduced to writing and to printed form almost wholly by missionaries, for the purpose of printing the scriptures. Even in China herself after the use of movable type had been almost forgotten, it was missionaries who reintroduced them to the land of their birth.

If we expect, then, to find a strong religious impulse back of the invention of printing in China, we shall not be disappointed. The time when all sorts of experiments were being tried in various forms of reduplication—experiments that finally led the way to printing—was the one strongly religious period in Chinese history. Under the powerful Han dynasty that ruled China for two centuries before and two centuries after Christ, men had not felt so strongly the need of religion. Reverence for the masters of the classical age just gone by seemed to be enough. True, there are records of Buddhism in China during the first century of our era, but so long as the united empire remained, the new religion made rather slow progress. About the beginning of the third century, however, the Han empire broke up and four hundred years of anarchy set in, sometimes compared to the Dark Ages in Europe, and caused by that same restlessness among the populations of Central Asia that spread such terror in Europe. For four centuries war was chronic—civil war and war with the northern barbarians. This age of anarchy may be roughly divided into the time of the Three Kingdoms, when three warring Chinese dynasties strove for the mastery; the Tsin dynasty, when China was again rather weakly united and fighting a losing battle against the barbarians on the north; and the period of division between North and South, when North China was in the hands of various Tatar dynasties. During this time literature went backward, and the settled, rather static culture of the Han times was broken up. It was no time for the conservative virtues of Confucian society. A religion that offered a way of escape from this sinful, distressed world had more chance. Buddhism steadily advanced throughout these four centuries. Wherever there was an especially beautiful spot or a location hallowed by some sacred memory, a temple or a pagoda was built, and the religious life, the life of retirement from the world, came to be the ideal of an ever-increasing multitude. A number of the pagodas of this period are still standing—among the oldest monuments we have of China's Buddhism. The age of anarchy, especially its last century, was also an age of faith.

With Buddhism came art. Not that all Chinese art is of Buddhist origin, as has sometimes been claimed. There was an art, of purely Chinese growth, that formed the foundation for the development of this and the succeeding age. But it was the new life that came in with Buddhism which touched that old art and made it great. All through the Dark Ages, while literature languished, art
grew. For the "barbarians" who ravaged China were not the rude hordes of Attila. They had become strong Buddhists and, as Buddhists, were the inheritors of that Greco-Indian art which had flourished in the wake of Alexander's armies. Ku K'ai-chih, the father of Chinese painting, lived in the fourth century. Through the fifth and sixth centuries most of the little dynasties that strove for mastery have more names of artists recorded than they have years to their credit. The painters were in the Chinese South rather than in the Tatar North. Their art was Chinese. But it was the new religion, pouring in through the North and seen first in the sculptures of Northern Wei, that transmuted it and gave it new life. Soon after the establishment of the T'ang dynasty, Chinese art entered upon its greatest, most creative period. With religion had come art. With religion and art came the impulse to print.

NOTES

1. It seems quite possible, as already pointed out, that this Buddhist activity was preceded by a practice among Taoist charm makers that was very closely akin to block printing. After the period of more or less primitive Buddhist printing, the next great step forward was the printing of the Confucian Classics by Feng Tao in 953, which marked a new stage in the art. Each of China's three religions seems, therefore, to have had its part. But the greatest part, at least during the early centuries, was that of Buddhism.

Taoist literature has suffered much destruction in the course of its history, which explains in large part why there is less evidence of the contribution of Taoism to the beginnings of block printing than there is of Buddhism. Besides being frequently under attack by the court during certain reigns of the T'ang dynasty, the Taoists suffered great losses in two conflagrations of Taoist books and woodblocks ordered by Mongol emperors during the third quarter of the thirteenth century (see Chapter 10).

2. It is possible that a critic may cavil over the importance assigned here to religion. (Cf. Peake, 1935:44-15, and Wu, 1935, 147-44.) It is true that the first secure reference to printing in Chinese literature is in the petition in 815 of an official in Szechuan province asking the court to order that there be no more printing of private calendars in the Yangtze valley, from Szechuan to Kiangsu. We are informed, too, of the printing before 805 of two dictionaries, the T'ang yün in five chüan and Yü pien in thirty chüan. (See Chapter 8.) Nevertheless there is mounting evidence that without the religious impulse the development of printing might well have been measurably delayed.
Chapter 5

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOCK PRINTING, INK, AND THE METHOD USED

Europe reckons the date of the invention of printing from the time when typography was invented, and considers block printing as merely an important step in preparation. The Far East reckons the invention of printing from the time when block printing began, and considers movable type as rather an unimportant later addition. This distinction lies in the difference between ideograph and alphabet. The writing of the languages of Europe is based on an alphabet: for them the invention of typography is the invention of printing. The writing of the languages of the Far East is based on some forty thousand separate symbols: for them, until the large wholesale printing of recent years, movable type have seldom been practical or economical. For any land, the invention of printing is the invention of that form of printing which transforms the education and culture of the nation. China invented movable type, Korea and Japan made great use of them—all glory to the courage of the inventors who applied typography to a language of forty thousand signs when it had not yet been applied to an alphabet. But the printing on which the renaissance of the Sung era was based, the printing which both in quality and quantity has always been pre-eminent in the Far East, is printing from wooden blocks. The invention of xylography, or block printing, is the truly significant form of the invention for China.

Block printing in Europe was always a more or less rude art as it was at first in China, an art down among the common people, that won scant attention from scholars. When the finer work of Gutenberg appeared, the ruder art naturally came to an end. In China early block printing was equally rude. It was displaced, how-
ever, not by type but by a better form of block printing. Féng Tao, who a century or more after the beginning of block printing improved the art and applied it to new uses, is usually regarded by the Chinese as the inventor of printing, and holds much the same place in Chinese history that Gutenberg holds in that of Europe. From his day printing became a fine art. The books of the Sung dynasty have never been surpassed in printing skill. Chinese books printed from movable type cannot compare with them. In fact, one reason why movable type never succeeded in displacing the block book is Chinese love of calligraphy as a fine art. In the making of pictures, too, the wood engraver’s art has been carried to a very high degree of perfection, especially in Japan. The invention of printing from wooden blocks was therefore the invention of printing in China. It is the invention that by quantity production has largely transformed China’s culture. It is the invention that in its quality has produced China’s finest books.

A necessary prerequisite for printing is ink. Scholars have long pointed out how large a part the discovery of an oily ink played in preparing the way for Gutenberg’s invention. In the same manner, the way was prepared for the invention of block printing in China by the use of an ink which is known in English as India ink, but is described more accurately by the French encre de Chine.

The history of this ink, known as chī, is obscure but there are indications that it may have been known in classical times, possibly even in the Shang period (or end of the second millennium B.C.), according to Professor Wang Chi-chên. He quotes Hsin Hsi (d. A.D. 289), editor of one of the Bamboo Books, to the effect that the writing on the Chu shih chi men, dating from 299 B.C., was in ink. Popularly, however, the Chinese ink used both for writing and for printing has been ascribed to Wei Tan, who died in A.D. 254. Although there have been many improvements and fancy inks described, especially by Sung dynasty writers, there has apparently been little change since Wei Tan’s time in the main constituents of the ink which is ordinarily used.

This ink is made by placing a number of well-lighted wicks in a vessel full of oil, while over this is placed a dome or funnel-like cover of iron. When this is well coated with lampblack, the lampblack is brushed off and collected on paper. It is then well mixed in a mortar with a solution of gum or gluten, and, when reduced to the consistency of paste, is put into little molds. The best ink is produced from the burning of particular oils, but the common and cheaper kinds are produced from fir wood. This ink is sold in sticks or elongated cubes. To prepare it for writing, it is rubbed in water on a smooth ink stone.

Chinese ink is excellent for printing from wooden blocks. It makes a clean neat impression and is peculiarly indelible—so indelible in fact that on certain blocks of paper found in Central Asia, which have lain so long under water that they have become mineralized, the writing is still clearly legible. The ink used in block printing, whether in China, in Central Asia, in Egypt, or in Europe is practically uniform. The makers of the primitive block prints of Europe were not so accustomed to the making of this sort of ink, and most of their work has faded into a sort of brown, but the essential elements are the same. It is too early as yet to determine whether this uniformity of ink indicates a line of connection or whether it indicates merely that block printers everywhere used the ink that would make a clear impression.

On the other hand, Chinese ink is not satisfactory for taking impressions from metal. It stands in globules on the metal surface and makes a rough impression. The first typographers of Europe, faced with this problem, solved it by using an ink whose pigment was dissolved in oil—after the analogy of the early oil painters. China also experimented with printing from metal blocks, and in Korea printing with metal type was done on an extensive scale. It seems probable that there too the use of an oily ink for printing from metal must have been discovered, although no evidence of such use has yet been found. For use with wooden blocks—which
BLOCK PRINTING IN CHINA

constituted the great bulk of all China's printing—Chinese ink was eminently satisfactory.

There is no indication that the method of block printing has greatly changed through its long history. A description of the art as it is now carried on will give some idea of what block printing in China means and has meant at least for the past thousand years—since the time of Feng Tao.

The material used is generally pear or jujube wood. The wooden plate or block, of a thickness calculated to give it sufficient strength, is finely planed and squared to the shape and dimensions of two pages. The surface is then rubbed over with a paste or size, occasionally made from boiled rice, which renders it quite smooth and at the same time softens and otherwise prepares it for the reception of the characters. The future pages, which have been finely transcribed by a professional person on thin transparent paper, are delivered to the block cutter, who, while the above-mentioned application is still wet, unites them to the block so that they adhere, but in a reversed position, the thinness of the paper displaying the writing perfectly through the back. This paper being subsequently rubbed off, a clear impression in ink of the reversed writing still remains on the wood. With his sharp graver the workman then cuts away with extraordinary neatness and despatch all that portion of the wooden surface which is not covered by the ink, leaving the characters in fairly high relief. Any slight error may be corrected, as in our woodcuts, by inserting small pieces of wood. But the process is on the whole so cheap and expeditious that it is generally easier to replate the block and cut it again; for this mode of taking the impression renders the thickness of the block an immaterial point.

Strictly speaking, the press of China would be a misnomer, as no press whatever is used in their printing. The thin paper receives the impression with a gentle contact, and a harder pressure would break through it. The printer holds in his right hand two brushes

NOTES

1. What this cējī was is uncertain. The character pictures drops of water falling from a tree, and means today the varnish made from the sap of the lacquer tree. With this varnish a pigment made from iron sulphate is often used, and it seems reasonable to suppose that some such material constituted China's ancient ink. Such an ink would never have been satisfactory for block printing.

2. Wang Chi-chêng, 1907:119-21. Professor Wang believes that varnish or cējī writing meant in early times black-ink writing, and was later misinterpreted (p. 122).

3. There was another form of ink—red ink—that might have been satisfactory for printing. This is made of red oxide of mercury or cinnabar. It was apparently used by the Chinese of Shang times (end of second millennium B.C.). See Irvin, 1937:2-3, and 1940:7. It was generally produced in Shu (modern Szechuan). Chi, Wang Yü-ch'un, 1931:25-26. Later it was produced in Hunan and it seems not to have been rare. Mr. Wang notes that Li Sê (d. 208 B.C.), in his memorial of 237 B.C. to the prince of Chi, asserted that it was the chief material used for red paint. Subsequently it was much used by magicians of the Taoist cult. See Johnson, 1928:59, 79 ff. It is still used for taking impressions from seals (see Chapter 2).

4. "In the most ancient times a bamboo twig was dipped in lacquer for writing. In mid-ancient times there was an ink stone (mō-chik) from which
ink could be produced by rubbing. In the time of the Tsin and Wei dynasties, ink in blocks was first made. It was made from the smoke of lacquer and from lampblack produced by burning pine wood. So the people of the Tsin dynasty commonly used a concave stone for rubbing the ink stick and collecting the dissolved ink.” Tsung chiu ch‘ing lu by Chao Hsin-k’un (fl. first half of 13th century). (Unhappily this passage, quoted from Chi’en Yien-lung’s Ko chih ch‘ing yuán 37/20a, does not appear in the collection of reprints entitled Shuo fu, edition of 1847, 95. But it does appear in the Cho k‘eng lu 29/449 of T‘ao T‘ung-i [ca. 1320-99].) Dr. Fu Lo-shu provided this reference.

“In ancient times there were two forms of ink, one from lampblack of pine and one from ‘ink stone.’ After the Tsin and Wei dynasties we hear no more of ‘ink stone,’ as the making of ink from lampblack became general.” Ch‘ao Kuan-chih (Sung dynasty), Mo ch‘ing (Ts‘ung shu chi ch‘eng edition No. 3194) 1a. Prof. Wang Chi-ch‘en, 1930:124, explains the term mo shih or ink stone as “one of three things, namely, coal, graphite, and petroleum.”

The name Wei T‘an as the inventor of ink is given on the authority of Lu Yu (first half of the fourteenth century). See Wang Chi-ch‘en, 1930:124, 124. Actually he is the first ink maker of whom we have reliable record.


6. Black ink of lampblack and red ink of cinnabar were both used in Egypt from the dynastic period down through Greek, Roman, and Byzantine times, as well as later. The usual ink for writing on papyrus was made much like the Chinese ink and was also kept in a dry condition. There is a curious parallel between the use of cinnabar for imperial decrees in the early Byzantine empire and in China. The restriction of the use of cinnabar to the emperor began in Constantinople about A.D. 470.

7. This description is taken in the main from Davis, 1897:II, 176-77. We have preferred to make use of this early description, as the method here described is less likely to be influenced by changes brought from the West.

Chapter 6

THE BEGINNINGS OF BLOCK PRINTING

The period of the T‘ang dynasty (618-906)—the period during which Chinese printing had its birth—was one of the most glorious in the history of China. The four centuries of disunion and weakness—China’s Dark Ages—had been brought to an end some thirty years before the T‘ang era commenced. Under the first emperors of the new dynasty, during the seventh century and the early part of the eighth, the ancient glory of the empire was revived and enhanced. Not only China itself, but East Turkestan, Korea, and a large part of Indochina were at one time or another brought under the control of the court at Ch‘ang-an, while armies were sent over the passes of the Himalayas into Kashmir against certain Indian states and over the Tien Shan range into the region of Samarkand against the rising power of the Arabs. The early T‘ang emperors of the century or more before Charlemagne did in China much the same work that Charlemagne did in Europe in restoring the old Empire on a new basis and bringing to an end the long era of chaos and disorder. But the chaos of China’s Dark Ages had never been so complete as that of Europe, and classical civilization was first restored, then surpassed, far more quickly than in the Western world.

The early emperors of the T‘ang dynasty were great patrons of literature, of art, and of religion, and ruled over a people whose mental vision was rapidly expanding. Under T‘ai T‘ung (627-49), a library was erected at the capital which contained some fifty-four thousand rolls. At the same time, China’s attainment in the domain of painting was rapidly approaching its high-water mark.

For impartiality in religious toleration, T‘ai T‘ung and his immediate followers have seldom been surpassed in history. While they themselves leaned toward Taoism and considered their family
to be of the lineage of Lao-tzu, they were liberal patrons of Confucian scholarship and welcomed with open hand every foreign faith. Within the space of thirty years, in the early part of the seventh century, the court at Ch’ang-an had the opportunity to welcome the first Christian missionaries, to give refuge to the deposed king of Persia and his Mazdean priests, and to do honor to Hsian-tsang, the greatest of all the apostles of Chinese Buddhism, who returned from India to give new impetus to the Buddhist faith. All received the heartiest welcome. All propagated their respective faiths with the emperor’s favor and help. Contact with men of many lands and of varied opinions produced an alertness, a renewing of youth in the land, such as China had never before known.

This Augustan age lasted for more than a century. It culminated in the reign of Ming Huang (712–56) in whose time the Hanlin Academy was founded, and about whose court gathered such men as Li Po and Tu Fu, Wu Tao-tzu, and Wang Wei, the greatest poets and the greatest artists whom China in all her long history has known.

During this golden age of Chinese genius, a great variety of devices was being evolved in the Buddhist monasteries and elsewhere for the reduplication of sacred books and texts—an activity that reached its climax in block printing some time before the end of the “golden age.”

One of the earliest indications of the multiplication of illustrations in the East comes from the great Chinese Buddhist pilgrim I-ching (635–713). After a long sojourn in India (673–85), he spent several years translating Sanskrit texts on the island of Sumatra, whence in 692 he sent to China his report. One sentence of the report runs as follows: “The priests and the laymen in India make Kaityas or images with earth, or impress the Buddha’s image on silk or paper, and worship it with offerings wherever they go.”

It is puzzling to find I-ching applying this practice to India, where there was silk but where paper was rare. For China and its nearest neighbors, however, it seems entirely reasonable.

This activity in devising methods of multiplication can best be studied from the finds of Tun-huang and those of Turfan, the two places where the manuscript records of early Buddhism on the borders of China have been preserved. (See Chapters 8 and 14.) Here are found not only rubbings from stone inscriptions, but also stencils and pounces, printed textiles, seals and seal impressions, and a great profusion of little stamped figures of Buddha, all of which led the way directly to the art of the block printer.

The rubbing from stone was in the main the Confucian preparation for printing. But discoveries at Tun-huang show that the Buddhists used the device, too, and by means of it printed one of their favorite scriptures, the Diamond Sutra. (See Chapter 3.)

The stencil or pounce was a means of reduplication of which the Buddhist monasteries were especially fond. Several of these paper stencils have been found, with large heads of Buddha first drawn with a brush, then outlined with needle pricks like a modern embroidery transfer pattern. Among the finds are also stenciled pictures—on paper, on silk, and on plastered walls.

Printed textiles appear in considerable number at Tun-huang. These are sometimes in two colors, sometimes in several. The designs are all conventional and nonreligious, an entire contrast to all other early printing and pre-printing in the Far East. Conventionized animal designs—horses, deer, and ducks—are popular. There is also one example of design-printing on paper. It looks like heavy modern wallpaper, with a dark blue geometric design.

Small stamped figures of Buddha mark the transition from the seal impression to the woodcut. Thousands upon thousands of these stamped impressions have been found at Tun-huang, at Turfan, and at other places in Turkestan. Sometimes they appear at the head of each column of a manuscript. Sometimes great rolls are filled with them—one such roll in the British Museum is seventeen feet long and contains four hundred and sixty-eight impressions of the same stamp. The only difference between these Buddha figures and true woodcuts, other than the primitive workmanship shown, is that the impressions are very small, and hence were evidently made by hand pressure like the impressions from seals. The stamps found have handles for this purpose. When the idea occurred to some inventive genius to turn his stamp upside down,
lay the paper on it, and rub it with a brush, the way was open for
making impressions of any size desired, and the way was open also
for such improvement of technique as made the new invention a
force in the advancement of civilization. But first it seems to have
brought about only the making of better Buddha figures. One roll
at London, though similar in many respects to the others, was evi-
dently made not by stamping but by rubbing, for it shows much
larger and better Buddha impressions. A perfected woodcut in the
Louvre shows a still further advance—a number of Buddha figures
in concentric circles of varying form, and all made from one block.10

Such are some of the steps—rubbing from stone, printed silk,
stencil, seal, and stamp—that were leading at the same time toward
the block print. All these objects have been found in Buddhist mon-
asteries, and back of all, or most of them, lies that duplicating im-
pulse that has always been a characteristic of Buddhism. That these
actual objects found at Tun-huang and Turfan are earlier than the
first block books is by no means certain. None bears clear indication
of date except one stone rubbing and one stamp.11 But there is
every indication that those which are not themselves earlier than
the first block printing at least represent survivals of earlier and
more primitive processes.

The exact date at which true block printing began is shrouded
in mystery. A supposed reference to printing as having taken place
under the emperor Wên in 594, before the beginning of the T'ang
dynasty—a statement that has found its way into almost everything
that has been written in European languages on the subject of
Chinese printing—is apparently based on an error by a Chinese
writer of the sixteenth century.12

At this point it is necessary to mention that one fragment of
paper, found near the then Chinese frontier, which bears a date
equivalent to A.D. 594, has recently been reported as a printed item.
Discovered by Sir Aurel Stein during his third expedition to Central
Asia in the years 1913–16 amongst the ruins of a Buddhist temple
at the village of Toyuk (or Toyukh) in the neighborhood of Kara
Khoja,13 it was turned over for study—after World War I—to Pro-
fessor Henri Maspero, along with all other documents on wood and
paper. Unfortunately for the world of scholarship, Maspero's manuscript of some 600 pages, completed in 1950 and sent to London that same year, has only just been published.29 But a few years ago Dr. Bruno Schindler was entrusted with the preparation of a résumé of Maspero's findings and announced that this was a poster, printed in Chinese, "complete at top and bottom, but cut on right and left side. . . . The text reads (in translation): '. . . 34th year yen-ch'ang (= a.d. 594), year chia-yin. There is a vicious dog in the house. Passers-by to take care.'"30 This astounding information now appears to be in error. On the authority of Dr. Harold James Penderleith, Keeper, Department of Research Laboratory, The British Museum, who has examined it, the document shows no indication of printing.31 Dr. Schindler too has withdrawn his earlier assertion, and considers that Maspero made a mistake.32

The difficulty of dating the beginning of block printing is enhanced by the fact that the evolution of the art was so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. The earliest well-defined block print extant dates from 770 and comes from Japan. The earliest printed book comes from China and is dated 868. But that printed book is a highly developed product. It is evident that the feverish activity in devising new ways of reduplication, which was going on in the Buddhist monasteries and elsewhere before this time, must have culminated in some sort of block printing before 770, and long enough before that date to have been by that time carried across to Japan. Perhaps the nearest approach to an approximate date that can be given would be the reign of Ming Huang (712–56), the time when China's national greatness and China's cultural achievement reached their height.

The reign of Ming Huang ended in a disastrous revolution. The glories of the T'ang dynasty from that time began to fade. The policy of perfect toleration for all religious faiths that marked the reigns of T'ai Tsung and Ming Huang was abandoned, and in its stead there grew up a policy of persecution of foreign faiths, including Buddhism. This persecution culminated in the famous edict of 845, by which 4600 Buddhist temples were destroyed and 260,900 Buddhist monks and nuns forced to return to lay life.33 It is
owing to this destruction of temples, as well as to the civil wars of the last century of the T'ang dynasty, that most of the great works of art of the T'ang period have perished. It is doubtless due to the same cause that no Chinese printing earlier than the Diamond Sūtra of 868 has survived, and that for the earliest extant block prints it is necessary to turn to Japan.

NOTES

1. In the first edition Carter, who gave no source, wrote that under T'ai Tsung a library was erected containing 200,000 volumes. This figure apparently comes from the T'ang k'ai yao 64/144 where in a discussion of the Hong wen kuan (College for the Development of Literature) it is reported that in the early years of his reign there were deposited in the palace books totaling over 200,000 chüan. In spite of the immense authority of this work, completed in 961, one may question the accuracy of the figure. Does it include duplicates? If so, no more need be said. If, however, it means distinct works it seems too large by several fold.

According to the Sui bibliography (Sui shu 35/37b) there were in this period (A.D. 590-618) 3,127 works (pu) in 36,708 chüan, lost and duplicate works not counted. It must be mentioned here that the T'ang bibliography in the New History (Hsin T'ang shu 57/22) gives a figure for the beginning of the Sui of 370,000 chüan. Surely some scribe slipped this point. The second emperor of the Sui set about having fifty duplicate sets made. (Sui shu 34/6b.) He had most of this library taken to his capital at Yangchow, where they were lost in the destruction of the palace in 618. When the remainder (8,000 plus) were started north under the care of Sung T'ai-kuei all but 10 or 20 per cent were lost in a shipwreck. (Sui shu 32/7a, Chüa T'ang shu 47/4b, Hsin T'ang shu 37/2a.)

At this point one must insert a word about Buddhist literature. According to Fa-hsiian (577-640), Pien ch'ung lu 3, forty-six collections of sûtra and laitra in 132,686 rolls were copied, and 5,853 old copies of sacred books were repaired during the reign of Sui Kau-tun (581-604). Wright, 1931:33-36, draws attention to a Confucian lament, issued after the edict of 518 which ordered the copying of Buddhist texts at the expense of the state, "Among the people Buddhist scriptures are more numerous than the Six Classics by several thousand fold." (Sui shu 35/6a.)

At the beginning of the T'ang (618) the imperial army subdued Wang Shih-ch'ung, who had seized Loyang together with its palace treasures, which included a library of over 80,000 chüan, some of them duplicates, some incomplete texts. These were transported by water to the capital at Ch'ang-an.
8. A wooden stamp found by Pelliot at Kucha in Eastern Turkestan dates—according to the deposit in which it was found—from not later than 800. That the use of these stamps had spread as far west as Kucha by 800 indicates a very early date for China itself. Metal stamps of uncertain date have been found at Turfan.

9. Size 4 x 3.4 inches. Only the bare outline is printed. Details are filled in by hand in colors. The workmanship of this sheet of heads bears a striking resemblance to the most primitive European block prints.

10. Size 13 x 20 inches.

11. This rubbing dates from the reign of T'ai Tsung (627-49); see Chapter 3. The stamp dates from before 800; see note 8 above.

12. Julien, 1847-50, 7, was the first to introduce to European readers the view that printing was carried on in China in the year 593 (actually 594; see below), and from Julien the statement found its way into the Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica and most histories of China in Western languages. (Two others may also be held responsible for this assertion: Alexander Wylie in his Notes on Chinese Literature [Shanghai, 1887], p. xviii, and in his essay "Chinese Language and Literature," reprinted in Chinese Researches [Shanghai, 1897], p. 237, and The Archimandrite Palladius in his Chinese-Russian Dictionary, Vol. I, p. 264. See Lauffer, 1927-72.)

The origin of this theory is interesting. Julien quotes it from the Ko chih ching yüan, published in 1735. The statement in this encyclopedia is quoted from Lu Shên (1477-1544) and from the book Pi t'ü'ung. Lu Shên's statement, contained in his book Yen hien lu fol. 29b, is: "Under the Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty, in the thirteenth year of K'ai-huang, the eighth day of the twelfth month [January 5, 594], on orders from the emperor, all neglected huang [the word means either images or pictures] and scattered ching [Classic texts or sutras] were carved and composed. This is the beginning of the printing of books. It was thus earlier than Pêng Ying-wang [i.e., Pêng Tao, 881-954]." This reference of printing to Wen's reign is clear and explicit and indicates that the theory went back as far as the sixteenth century. The statement in the book Pi t'ü'ung (full title of the book is Shan shih shan feng pi t'ü'ung), by Hu Ying-lin (1551-1602), is apparently based on that of Lu Shên. It reads simply: "Block printing had its birth at the beginning of the Sui dynasty, it expanded greatly under the T'ang, took a leap forward under the Five Dynasties and finally came to its fullest development under the dynasty of Sung."

Against these two statements is the weight of the older Chinese tradition (the very form of Lu Shên's statement shows that he is propounding something contrary to the general opinion), and also the explicit authority of at least three prominent writers of the Sung dynasty, whose statements follow:

"Under the T'ang dynasty block printing, though carried on, was not fully developed. Under Pêng Ying-wang [Pêng Tao] first the Classics and then all the ancient canonical works were printed." Shên Kuo, Meng chi pi fans i 28/9.

"Before the T'ang dynasty all books were manuscripts, the art of printing not being in existence. . . . According to popular report the cutting of blocks and printing of books from them was commenced by Pêng Tao. This is not the fact. . . . Printing certainly existed in the T'ang dynasty, but I apprehend it was not equal in workmanship to the present." Yeh Meng-te (1277-1418), as quoted by Ma Tuan-lin in Wen hien t'ung k'uo. Translation by Meadows, in Curzon, 1886.

"There was no printing before the T'ang dynasty. Inked blocks were first used at I-chou at the end of the T'ang dynasty." Chu Yê, I chiao hao ta chi 2/61.

In the face of such conflicting evidence it is necessary to discover where Lu Shên got his information, which has so remarkably dominated European writings on the subject. There is apparently nothing about printing in the annals of the Sui dynasty. In the Buddhist Tripitaka, however, in the volume by Fei Ch'ang-fang entitled Li t'ai suan pao chi 12/666 stands the passage from which Lu Shên's statement is a word for word (though abbreviated) quotation. This book was written in 597, only three years after the event related. The last two sentences of Lu Shên's statement ("This is the beginning -") are not quotation but Lu Shên's comment. A critical examination of the whole passage, without this gloss and in the context, leaves little doubt that printing was not referred to at all, the true interpretation being that damaged images were recarved and that scattered sutras were collected. This interpretation of the passage was first proposed by Yuan Tung (1697-1761) in the book Shu yin t'ung shuo, and accepted by the Japanese investigator, Kamesh, 1903-5. Schindler, 1949-52 (Fig. 4). Personal communication to L.C.G., dated May 16, 1953. In Dr. Pen-
derleith's words, "the evidence is entirely in favour of calligraphy."

"Under the T'ang dynasty block printing, though carried on, was not fully developed. Under Pêng Ying-wang [Pêng Tao] first the Classics and then all the ancient canonical works were printed." Shên Kuo, Meng chi pi fans i 28/9.


15. Schindler, 1949-52:39 and Fig. 4.

16. Personal communication to L.C.G., dated May 16, 1953. In Dr. Pen-
derleith's words, "the evidence is entirely in favour of calligraphy."


18. Certain of the later emperors of the T'ang dynasty were completely under the influence of Taoist superstition, and to this, together with other influences such as the urgency of the economic situation, was due the persecution of Buddhism that lasted from 845 to 859. In 845 Buddhism was restored to its former position. It is well to note that the persecution was not enforced to any degree during the later years. The Ch'ing-lung monastery was restored in Ch'ing-an in 845 and the Fo-kung monastery at Wu-t'ai shan in 857. Add to this the fact that certain monasteries in distant parts of the empire, such as Shzechuan and Chekiang, completely escaped damage.
Chapter 7
THE EMPRESS SHÔTOKU OF JAPAN AND HER MILLION PRINTED CHARMS
ca. 764–770

For a century and a half before the making of the first block-printed charms, Japan had been undergoing a process of complete transformation under the influence of China. It was a period similar to that which Japan passed through during the latter half of the nineteenth century, except that China was the model instead of the West. A steady succession of Buddhist missionaries from China poured into Japan, and a steady succession of Japanese students went to China for study and on their return brought about sweeping changes in the customs of their native land, bringing Japan gradually abreast of what was then the world's most cultured country. In 701 the annual celebration in honor of Confucius began, and in 708 the first mint was established for the making of coins in Japan. In 735 a Chinese scholar became head of the newly established university at Nara, Japan's new capital, which was seeking in every way to mold itself after the pattern of the Chinese capital at Chang-an. In the same year Kibi no mabi (d. 776) returned from Chang-an after nineteen years of study and, entering into the service of the government, introduced information about the Chinese calendar and laws and other Chinese customs. To him is ascribed (doubtfully) the invention of katakana, the Japanese syllabary or script. He was the tutor of the Empress Shôtoku, by whose order the first recorded block printing was done.

A recent Japanese writer has given the following account of the seal with which Japan was at this time adopting Chinese ways and culture:

In Japan as in China, block printing was preceded by the use of seals. As early as the year 629, reference is made in the Nihongi to the imperial seal. In 704 official seals for the provinces were established, and it was stated that they were to be two inches square (a little more than two inches). In 739 a seal of the same size was granted to the Ise shrine. These seals without doubt followed the fashion that was already in use in China and were used for making impressions with ink. That some of them, at least, were made of wood is indicated by the statement in the Nihongi that in 692 the office of the Shinto cult gave a wooden seal to the empress.

Japan, the country that was never conquered until the last decade, is remarkable for the careful way in which ancient antiques have been preserved. This is particularly true of the town of Nara, where the capital was established from 710 to 784, and where a large variety of objects from this Nara period have been kept. Among the precious objects preserved at Nara are a number of pieces of printed silk fabric which were apparently made by the use of wooden blocks. The patterns include plants, flowers, willow trees, pheasants, small birds, and butterflies. Two of the pieces of silk have the date printed into the design—dates corresponding to the years 734 and 749. Printed textiles, or surigawara, are mentioned in the Shoku Nihongi under the date of 743.

Armors belts of leather, with designs in blue, red, and purple dye printed upon the leather, were produced at various times in the provinces of Hizen and Higo in the southern island of Kyushu, and some of them have been preserved. One is dated the eighth month
of the twelfth year of the period Tempyo, which corresponds to 740. It is even more close to being a true block print than are the textiles, for the printing includes not only design but also a picture of the divinity Fudo and a number of words in Chinese and Sanskrit as well as the date.7

During the whole of the Nara period (710-84) the control of the Buddhist hierarchy over the affairs of the state was very strong. The resources of the state were drained for the casting in 732 of the forty-nine ton bell—the fourth in size in the world—and for the erection in the years 739-49 of the great bronze statue of Buddha at Nara, weighing over five hundred and fifty tons and covered with fifty pounds of gold. The priest Gembo, who returned from China in 735 after an eighteen years' stay,8 and who brought back with him five thousand Buddhist books and many holy images, had a large share in managing the affairs of state until his death in 746. But it was under the Empress Shōtoku, who reigned, with interruptions, from 748 to 759, that priestly control reached its climax. This empress, remembering the terrible smallpox epidemic of 735-37, kept a hundred sixteen priests attached to her court for the driving out of disease demons, in addition to those employed for other purposes. Dokyo, the head of the Buddhist priesthood, was her chief physician and adviser and had a controlling voice in all state decisions. He was emperor in everything but name, was even given several of the titles usually reserved for the emperor, and was lodged in the palace.

To the zeal for Buddhism of the Empress Shōtoku, the world owes its first certain and clearly attested record of printing with copper blocks upon paper.9 The empress ordered the printing of one million charms to be placed in a million tiny wooden pagodas, and some time before the year 770 the work was finished and the pagodas and the charms distributed. This event, so important in the history of the world, rests fortunately on as clear evidence as any event in early Japanese history. It is described both in the dynastic annals and in the records for the temple where many of the prints were deposited. More than that, a number of the original prints are still extant.

The account in the official history, the Shoku Nihongi, is as follows:

In the fourth month of the year 770, after the eight years of civil war had been brought to an end, the empress made a vow and ordered the production of one million three-story pagodas, four and a half inches high and three and a half inches in diameter at the base. Within each of the pagodas was placed a single copy of one of the four dhāraṇī (here follow the names of the four charms). When this work was finished, the pagodas were distributed among various temples.

The record in one of the temples is more explicit with regard to the means by which the charms were made:

In the year 767 there were built two small halls for pagodas on the east and west sides of the temple. There were made one million pagodas, which were divided among the following ten temples (names of the temples). In each was preserved a charm (dhāraṇī) from the Musō-ji-ko Sūtra in block print.10

Not only do we have these two clear contemporary accounts of the printing of a million charms but we also have the charms themselves. A number of the original impressions are preserved in the Horyū-ji, a monastery in the province of Yamato, together with at least 109 of the little pagodas in which they were contained. Nine public libraries and museums and several private collections in the United States have these charms.11 One museum in Canada also has a charm, together with its reliquary or pagoda, and two private collectors likewise have reliquaries. The charms are about eighteen inches long by two wide. Each one contains about thirty columns of five characters each. They are not at all alike, as four different charms were printed.12 Two different kinds of paper were used, one thick and of a woolly texture, the other thinner and harder, with a smooth surface, which did not absorb the ink quite so readily. All the charms, on both kinds of paper, are brown with age.

The text of these earliest block prints and of the whole Sūtra from which they are taken indicates clearly the incentive that was back of their production, and sheds light on the powerful impulse
that Buddhism gave to early printing. This Buddhist classic consists of six sections, each of which in turn contains a narrative portion and a charm, the narrative portion indicating the use of the charm. When, sometime prior to 704, the Sūtra was translated into Chinese by Mi-čo-śien—sixty years before the printing of the charms in Japan—only the narrative portions were translated. The charms were merely transliterated, the Sanskrit sounds being represented as nearly as possible by Chinese characters. It is these Sanskrit characters that were printed and rolled up and placed in the wooden pagodas. A small section from the narrative portion of the Sūtra, which forms as it were the introduction to the charms, is enough to indicate how this printing naturally fitted into the Buddhist scheme of salvation:

A Brahmin who was sick went to visit a seer in a garden. The seer said, "You must die in seven days." So he went to Buddha, pleading that Buddha would save him, and offering to become his disciple. Buddha said to him, "In a certain city a pagoda is fallen. You must go and repair it, then write a dhāraṇī [charm] and place it there. The reading of this charm will strengthen your life now and later bring you to Paradise." The disciples of Buddha then asked him wherein the power of the dhāraṇī charm lay. The Buddha said, "Whoever wishes to gain power from the dhāraṇī must write seventy-seven copies and place them in a pagoda. This pagoda must then be honored with sacrifice. But one can also make seventy-seven pagodas of clay to hold the dhāraṇī and place one in each. This will save the life of him who thus makes and honors the pagodas, and his sins will be forgiven. Such is the method of the use of the dhāraṇī. . . . The size of the pagodas shall be from an inch to a cubit in height or yet ten feet. From these pagodas, if the heart is set at rest by contemplation, shall come forth a wonderful perfume." The Bodhisattva, Buddha, said, "I will speak of the impressing of the law of the dhāraṇī upon the heart. This dhāraṇī is spoken by the ninety-nine thousand koji of Buddha and he who repeats it with all his heart shall have his sins forgiven. . . . So shall ninety-nine copies be made of each of these dhāraṇīs, and they shall be placed within the pagodas. . . . These shall be honored with offerings and incense and flowers and there shall be a procession around them seven times while the dhāraṇī is recited. Then will great salvation be wrought."
7. See Kokushi daijiten (edition of 1916), p. 1395, and last plate in supplement.


9. Sakamichi, 1937:147, in reviewing Kazuma Kawase's studies on old movable type printing in Japan, wrote in part as follows, "After a painstaking comparative study, Mr. Kawase concludes that the characters of the dhāraṇī were written on a soft medium, probably a clay tablet, and a copper plate was cast from this tablet. Each casting brought about a slight variation in the impressions."

There is an earlier passage, dating from 751, which is claimed as a reference to block printing in Japan, but the interpretation is uncertain. The passage is as follows: "In the second year after the death of Osono Akamato [governor of the district of Tama in the province of Musashi, died 750] there was born a calf with black marks on its back. These marks had the appearance of an inscription on stone. They were interpreted to mean that Akamato had appropriated to himself temple property and had died before punishment had overtaken him, and that as retribution he had been reborn in the form of this calf. At this all his family mourned deeply and feared, saying, 'It is a fearful thing to commit sin. Can such a crime remain without punishment?' This event was announced in a katagi and in the sixth month of the same year was published abroad in order that those who should read it should repeat of their sins and do good." Nihon-oki gempō sen aku rei kō, middle section. A katagi in later writings means a block print. The fact that this event was only a few years before the first known block printing and that the statement here referred to was "published abroad" by this means, has led certain Japanese writers to regard this katagi as a block print. The question is discussed by Asakura, who gives the text in full. Kawase discredit this passage; cf. also Sakamichi, 1930.

10. There is some confusion about the exact date of this event. The Empress Shōtoku ruled for the second time from 765 to 769. The account in the Shoku Nihongi gives the year equivalent to 770 as the date when the printing of the charms was ordered. On the other hand the temple record Tōdai-ji yōrōku gives the year 764 as the one in which the pagodas, containing the charms, were made and distributed. To add to the confusion, the name of the ruler is here given as Kōken, who reigned from 749 to 758. This same temple record gives 767 as the date when halls for the pagodas were built in the temple. For text of the Shoku Nihonji statement and the temple record, see Asakura, 1909:8.

Satow, 1885, gives the date 764 as the year when the work was begun and 770 as the year when it was completed, and his reckoning may be taken as at least approximately correct. Kawase believes that the printing was done between 768 and 770. Cf. Sakamichi, 1939.

11. Ta fein.


13. Slight variations among the impressions of the same charm have led some to question the fact that the charms were actually printed from blocks at all. In answer to this, it has been correctly pointed out that such a large number of impressions would have required several blocks for each charm, as only about ten thousand impressions can be taken from a wooden block before it is worn down.


15. A kōji is variously put at one hundred thousand, one million, and ten million.

Chapter 8

THE DIAMOND SŪTRA OF 868,
THE OLDEST EXTANT PRINTED BOOK

A glance at the map of China will show a slender arm of the province of Kansu—a peninsula, so to speak—extending far out into the desert of Turkestan. The historical reason for this peninsula of Chinese civilization is the great trade route and military road, along which a narrow line of Chinese settlements grew up, extending far into the Northwest. Here on this "panhandle," as it would be called if it were in America, lies the city of Tun-huang, near which are the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. While in China itself, on account of the climate, very few manuscripts of ancient date have been preserved, Eastern Turkestan, like Egypt, has a climate which preserves intact all that is buried beneath its sands. Turkestan is therefore one of the world's great treasure houses of archaeology, and in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, in a region that combines the cultural heritage of China with the climate of Turkestan, there has been found the greatest store of ancient Chinese manuscripts that has yet been unearthed.

The setting in which the manuscripts of Tun-huang have been found is unique. Cut into the rock in the side of a cliff are a very large number of caves, some of which have served continuously as Buddhist shrines for more than fifteen hundred years. Several of these caves are very large, and two of them contain colossal images of Buddha, each ninety feet high. A stone inscription in one of the caves, itself dated A.D. 698, describes the founding of this cave colony in the year 356.

While the whole series of caves is of archaeological interest, the supreme interest for our study lies in the sealed manuscript chamber. This was discovered in the year 1900 by a mendicant Taoist priest, who by begging had collected money for the pious act of restoring one of the caves to its ancient magnificence, and who was actually engaged in beautifying (as he thought) one of the early frescoes. In so doing he found that the plaster of a part of one of the frescoes was laid on a background not of stone but of brick. Removing a bit of the fresco, and cutting into the brick, he found behind it a secret walled-up chamber piled high with manuscripts. How Dr. (subsequently Sir Aurel) Stein on his visit to Tun-huang seven years later learned of the secret chamber, obtained access to it, and finally was able to transport a part of its contents to India and to the British Museum, is told in a vivid narrative in the second volume of his work Serindia.

The chamber proved to be about nine feet square and piled solid some ten feet high with the precious manuscript rolls. Examination showed that the dates ranged from the beginning of the fifth century to the end of the tenth. There is good reason to believe that this chamber was walled up about the year 1050, in order to prevent its contents falling into the hands of enemies, and that it was so effectually sealed that its existence was altogether forgotten until it was rediscovered in 1900. (But doubts have been cast on this assertion by Amedroz in 1913 and by Pott in 1948?) The manuscripts within were in almost as good condition as if written yesterday, though the whole library of fifteen thousand or more books—all written on paper—was closed and sealed a century before the first introduction of paper into Europe.

Within this small room were piled 1130 bundles, each carefully sewed up in cloth and each containing a dozen or more manuscript rolls. Of these, Dr. Stein succeeded in purchasing from the Taoist priest and in transporting to London some three thousand rolls, together with five or six thousand detached pieces and fragments. The next year, Professor Pelliot visited the cave and procured for France about an equal number. These books are in the main Chinese. There are, however, many rolls in Tibetan and a certain number in Sanskrit, Sogdian, Eastern Iranian, and Uigur (Turkish), and even a book of selections from the Old Testament in Hebrew.

It was among the manuscripts of this ancient library, sealed up
more than nine hundred years ago, that the world’s oldest extant printed book was found by Dr. Stein in 1907. This book, the *Diamond Sūtra,* 2 is almost perfectly preserved and shows an advanced technique behind which there must have been a long evolution. It is less crude than any of the European block printing of pre-Gutenberg days. The book consists of six sheets of text and one shorter sheet with woodcut, all neatly pasted together so as to form one continuous roll sixteen feet long. Not only the excellent technique, but the size of the sheets as well, shows that this is no primitive bit of printing like the charms from Japan. Each sheet is two and a half feet long by nearly a foot wide, indicating the large size of the blocks used. At the end, printed into the text, is the statement that the book was “reverently made for universal free distribution by Wang Chieh on behalf of his two parents on the 15th of the 4th moon of the 9th year of Hsien-t’ung [May 11, 868].” 4

Of Wang Chieh nothing is known except this statement. It is possible, however, to see something of his motive in undertaking this printing project. The *Diamond Sūtra,* the section of the Buddhist scriptures which appears in this roll, was a favorite book with early devotees and printers 4 whether in China, in Japan, or in Central Asia. It consists of a number of discourses by the Buddha to his aged disciple Subhuti on the subject of the nonexistence of all things. While concerned in the main with very abstruse teachings, the author has a very high opinion of the importance of the book that he is writing. Over and over again the Buddha is represented as describing to Subhuti the infinite merit and rewards to be gained by him who transcribes the book and thus spreads abroad its doctrine. “Whatever place,” he says, “constitutes a repository for this sacred scripture, there also the Lord Buddha may be found.” Again,

If a good disciple whether man or woman, in the morning, at noonday and at eventide, sacrificed lives innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, and thus without intermission throughout infinite ages; and if another disciple, hearing this scripture proclaimed, steadfastly believed it, his felicity would be appreciably greater than the other. But how much greater must be the felicity of a disciple who transcribes the sacred text, ... and repeats the scripture that others may be edified thereby.
The transcription of the sacred text of the *Diamond Sūtra* became a favorite method of acquiring merit among Buddhists, and so it still remains. We have known a Chinese student at Columbia University who, on the eve of his coming to America, made a vow that if his mother should be cured of a serious illness he would transcribe five copies of the *Diamond Sūtra*. His mother recovered and he fulfilled his vow. It is easy to imagine the pious delight of Wang Chieh in the new invention that enabled him to order the transcription not of a mere five copies but of a multitude of copies for free and general distribution, with the purpose of doing honor to his parents.

The printing of books did not, however, immediately supersede the making of manuscripts, even among the Buddhists. For, although the manuscripts of the Tun-huang cave did not come to an end for nearly a century and a half after the time of the *Diamond Sūtra*, there were found among the great mass of manuscript rolls only four other printed books in roll form and one small folded book.

The making of single-page block prints would seem to have progressed rather more rapidly than the making of books, judging from the fact that several score of these were found at Tun-huang. They are of various forms, but all are religious. The larger number are either votive offerings or charms. The votive offerings are the more numerous and include many duplicates. While it was evidently the custom for people of wealth to present paintings at the shrine in payment of vows, and many of these paintings have been preserved, each with a picture of the donor at the base, it seems that those who could not afford a painting wanted something that could be produced more cheaply—and so these prints came into being. They are usually about a foot high by seven or eight inches wide. The top half is a picture of Kuan Yin or some other divinity. The lower half consists of text, usually an ascription of praise. Sometimes the whole sheet appears to have been printed from one block; sometimes it is clear that the picture and the text are from separate blocks. A few of these votive offerings are hand colored and present an appearance strikingly like the early image prints of Europe.
eral of them still have tabs pasted at the top for suspension on the wall.

A number of the prints from Tun-huang are charms, and of these there is considerable variety. The text is always Sanskrit or a cabalistic script allied to Sanskrit, with some words of explanation in Chinese. One of them is marked as having power to blot out sins—not so far removed in idea from the Latin indulgences which was one of the first things printed by Gutenberg. Akin to the charms is a calendar, illustrated by many woodcuts, and containing full information about lucky and unlucky days.

One roughly printed little Buddhist sûtra is of interest as marking the transition to a new form of book. It is not a roll, but a tiny folded book, one of the first of its kind. Chinese records tell us that books first took the form of rolls when writing on silk began, a century or two before Christ, and that this form of book continued after the invention of paper and down to the end of the Tang dynasty when, under the influence of printing, paged books began to appear. A transition stage between the roll and the stitched book was the folded book, a continuous piece of paper like the roll, but folded in pages like a modern railroad timetable. This little sûtra is such a folded book. It consists of eight pages. It is printed like all block prints on one side only, then folded, and finally has the folds at one edge all pasted together, so that it opens quite like a modern book. The feeling of modernness is enhanced, when one sees the name of the printer and the date clearly printed on the inside of the outer sheet. The date is 945.

While the Diamond Sûtra bears the date of 868, and the three other roll books found at Tun-huang have all been assigned with a fair degree of probability to the ninth century or the opening decade of the tenth, those of the single sheets that bear dates, as well as the folded book just described and a seven-page charm from Paris (excluding duplicates, there are altogether nine books and sheets bearing dates) range from 947 to 971. (To these must be added two block-printed calendars, one assigned to the year 877 and one dated 882.) On the other hand, these sheets are far more primitive than the rolls. This fact leads to the suggestion that the books were importations, probably from the province of Szechuan, while the single sheets were of local manufacture. If this is the case, it is not unlikely that these votive offerings and charms represent survivals in this far western outpost of a form of printing which in China proper had already preceded the Diamond Sûtra, and that they make it possible to reconstruct still further the development that led up to the printing of that book.

Meanwhile, from an entirely different set of sources comes documentary evidence that parallels the evidence of archaeological discovery. The first clear reference to block printing in Chinese literature is a communication approved by the court, recommending that an edict be promulgated forbidding the printing of calendars by means of wood blocks. The edict was issued on December 29, 835, and is confirmed in the dynastic annals. Feng Su (or Hsü), 707–836, who memorialized the throne, was a native of Chekiang. An official text of the early eleventh century runs as follows:

On December 29, 835, the chieh-tzu-shih (imperial commissioner) of Eastern Szechuan, Feng Su, proposed in a memorial that an imperial edict forbid the printing of calendars by wood block. The two Ch'uan of Chien-nan (modern Szechuan) and Hsi-nan (lower Yangtze valley) print all calendars by means of wood block and sell them in the market places. Each year, before the Bureau of Astronomy has memorialized the Throne suggesting the promulgation of the new calendar, these printed calendars are already everywhere. That is contrary to the rule of respectfully handing up [the new calendar approved by the Emperor]. Consequently an order was issued forbidding these private printings.

The second clear reference follows by less than fifteen years. A poet and writer named Fan Shu (fl. 860–74) left a work of which one paragraph reads:

The president [of a board] Hsiao Chi had given more than fifteen years arduous study to the cinnabar of the dragon and tiger [part of the yan-yung cult]. When he was in charge on the right bank of the Yangtze he sent invitations to a large number of magicians. He composed the Biography of Liu Hung and had seven thousand copies printed, which he sent to those who, both in the court, and within the four seas, gave themselves up to alchemy.
Ho-kan is known to have served in a post in Kiangsi province during the years 847–50.

Third and best known among the early references to printing in Chinese literature is an account of printed books which were seen by the official Liu P'ien in the province of Szechuan in the year 883, just fifteen years after the appearance of the Diamond Sūtra. Liu P'ien accompanied the emperor Hsi-tsong into temporary exile in Szechuan during the troubles that were rife in the last years of the T'ang dynasty. His statement reads:

In the third year of the Ch'ung-ho period, that is the year kuei-mao (883), during the summer, it was the third year in which the imperial chariot had been in Shu [Szechuan]. I was then a member of the imperial secretariat. One day on one of my holidays [taken every ten days] I was examining the books by the southeast of the second encincte [of the city wall]. These books consisted mostly of work on divination of dreams, geomancy, the nine [heavenly] palaces, the five planets, and various [other] themes of the yin-yang [school}; there were also dictionaries and [other books] of lexicography. For the most part they had been engraved on blocks and printed on paper. [But the ink] had blotted, and one could not [always] make out everything.21

Fourth among the references to printing under the T'ang comes from Japan. A Japanese monk named Shūhei (or Shūei) visited Ch'ang-an in the latter half of the ninth century, residing at a monastery named Hsi mên seü, which seems to have accommodated several Japanese pilgrims at this time, among them Ensei (d. 887/8). After a stay of about three years he left China in 865, returning with a considerable collection of Buddhist rolls, the catalogue of which is entitled (Shim) Shōsha chūrei hōmon-tō mokuroku.22 Among the rolls, probably collected in Ch'ang-an, the last two works listed bear titles which indicate that they were printed. The title of the first means the T'ang yün (a rhyming dictionary published originally in 711 in five chüan). Done by a printer in western Ch'uan (i.e., Szechuan), it is a work of five rolls. The title of the second means the Yü p'ien (an older dictionary in thirty chüan compiled in 543 by Ku Yeh-wang; 519–80/1), a work by the same printer in thirty rolls. One recent Japanese scholar, Kimiya Yasuiko,23 considers
that Shüyei made handwritten copies of the works listed in the catalogue. Even so, he thinks that the two items mentioned last were printed works which Shüyei acquired at the T'ang capital. It is worth noting in conclusion that both of them are secular works.

One more early text remains to be considered before we leave the T'ang. It was written by the poet Su-k'ung Tu (875-908) concerning a Buddhist monk named Hui-ch'üeh, who gave instruction in the canon at the Ching-ai sō, a well-known monastery at Loyang. In this account we are informed that the printed copies of the vinaya (or manuals of discipline) each on eight hundred sheets of paper were burned during the troubles at Loyang, and the author expresses the hope that the blocks may be recut for a fresh printing. Just what affair at Loyang is referred to is uncertain, but possibly it was the destruction which occurred during the rebellion of Huang Ch'ao, in December 880, or the proscription of 845. There are two significant things about this text: We learn for the first time of printing in the eastern capital, and we are told of a printed text of great length which it is hoped will be reprinted.

These descriptions of Chinese printed books bring out several important facts. It is evident that printing was confined to noncanonical works and, in the main, to the books of the ignorant and the poor, to whom the cheapness of the new method appealed. It is also clear that Taoists as well as Buddhists were making use of the new art, and that though their work was still crude, it had progressed far since the days of the charm seals described in Chapter 2.

But “there were also dictionaries and lexicons.” Here may be seen the beginning of the emergence of the art of printing from the realm of Buddhist lore and Taoist magic. Not until printing began to emerge into the secular field did it find its way into literature, for the Confucian historians—those who were chiefly interested in the progress of civilization—had a wholesome contempt for what was going on behind the doors of monasteries. It is not without significance that Liu P'ien was usually ignored by Sung and Yüan writers who tried to trace the origin of printing, and that when he was quoted, the “books on divination of dreams, geomancy, etc.” were omitted and only the dictionaries and lexicons remained. It is these
latter that prepared the way for the great advance of the next century—the printing of the Confucian Classics.

Some leaves of a dictionary found at Tun-huang are believed to have been produced by the early secular printing activity of Szechuan. They are not dated, but there are certain indications that have led Pelliot to assign to them a date of about 900. They are almost the only bits of non-Buddhist printing that have been found at either Tun-huang or Turfan.

Although Buddhist printing was already highly developed during the ninth century, as indicated by the Diamond Sūtra, the art of printing had still awakened little interest in the empire at large, and at the end of the T'ang (906), it was apparently confined to three localities: Szechuan, the lower Yangtze valley, and Loyang. The printing activities of T'ang times made little impression upon the official Chinese world. Feng Tao, whose publication of the Classics occupied the years 932-93, just after the T'ang dynasty came to a close, has almost universally been regarded in China as the inventor of printing. Only a few writers have pointed out the earlier printing that formed the foundation of this work, and not until the discovery of the Diamond Sūtra was anything definite known of the character of that early printing. Several scholars have assumed that copies of the Court Gazette may also have been printed in the T'ang period. Lin Yutang, for example, refers to a printed copy, still extant, from the years 713-41. Others who have written on the question are not so sure. K. T. Wu sums up this opinion in the following words: "The seven leaves of the K'ai Yuan Tsa Pao dated 720, owned by a certain Yang family of Hupeh, are so smeared with ink and illegible that some people doubt whether they were really printed." 31

NOTES

1. The earliest date on any document corresponds to the year A.D. 406. The latest dated document found by Stein belongs to the period 990-95, according to L. Giles, 1943:173; and L. Giles, 1944:46. The latest of those found by Pelliot is of the period 995-96, according to letter of Prof. P. Demenieville, dated 1 March 1952, to Dr. Giles. This date appears on the reverse of No. 350 of "Pelliot chinois Tun-huang," the obverse of which has census data of A.D. 995.

2. See Amedro, 1937:694-95 and especially Pott, 1948:305-11. The latter wonders how a painting which seems to come from the mid-fifteenth century could have been found at the bottom of a six-foot pile of manuscripts found in the walled-up chapel. This is undoubtedly disquieting. One can take comfort only in the fact that no dated manuscript or printed piece in the pile is later than 996.

3. Ordered and paid for by Wang Chih. Now on exhibition in the British Museum, this is the oldest printed book known that is dated, or of which the date can be ascertained. Some undated book from Turfan or elsewhere may conceivably be older, but it seems unlikely.

4. This quotation is the sentence with which the printed text of the roll ends. The same sentence in abbreviated form appears, with the name of the sūtra, on a little paper tab written by hand and pasted on the outside of the roll—evidently for convenience in filing. The translation is that of L. Giles, 1937:1950.

5. Known in Sanskrit as Prajñā Paramitā, and in Chinese as Ch'in-k'ang ching. This sūtra was a favorite one with Chinese Buddhists. The two most important translations into Chinese are by two of the most famous men in the history of Chinese Buddhism. The one is by the monk Kumārajīva (b. 344), who came to China as a missionary at the end of the fourth century from Kucha in Chinese Turkestan, and the other by the Chinese pilgrim, Hsien-tsang (b. 602), who went to India and returned in the seventh century. This printed edition of 658 is the translation of Kumārajīva (cf. Hōbō-gein, fascicule annexe, No. 235). The oldest printed book from Japan is a portion of Hsien-tsang's translation (cf. Hōbō-gein, No. 220 [9]). The most beautiful example of printing found at Turfan is a Sanskrit edition of this same sūtra, printed during Mongol times (see Chapter 17). The Diamond Sūtra has twice been translated into English, the better translation being that of Gemmell, 1912.

6. L. Giles, 1943:150, 152; and 1944:46, makes Lei Yen-nai "the first known printer, or rather block-cutter." His name appears as articifer on a printed prayer sheet dated 947, and again in 949 at the end of a printed copy of the Diamond Sūtra dated 949 (possibly 950).


8. These are: (1) a dictionary (fragments only) now at Paris (see end of this chapter); (2) a roll, similar in form to the Diamond Sūtra, written by a Buddhist abbot, and containing twenty-four examples of filial piety in verse (attributed, according to Giles, 1944:46, to the "late Grand Master Yüan-chien"); (3) a Buddhist work (a dhāraṇī charm now in Paris), which
can be definitely ascribed to the period before the end of the T'ang dynasty by the fact that before the character 藝 a space is left blank out of respect (cf. Pelliot, 1931:49); (4) an undated printed roll, a copy of the Kuan Yin Siara, more than six and a half feet long (said by Giles, 1944:45, to be "possibly the earliest as well as the most beautiful of the printed documents").

9. "In the Three Dynasties [i.e., before a.d. 255] the writings made with black ink on bamboo were heavy and difficult to read. From the time of the Ch'in and Han dynasties, the use of paper and ink came to be generally known. The simplification of writing as compared with the earlier method was very great. However, from the Han dynasty through that of T'ang, rolls were in use... Whenever one read a roll, or wished to look up anything, it was necessary to open up the whole roll, which was very inconvenient. It was also necessary constantly to roll up the books and keep them in order, which entailed still more difficulty. At the time of the end of the T'ang dynasty and the beginning of that of Sung, the making of manuscripts came to a sudden end and printing came in. At the same time rolls came to an end and books came in. They were easy to produce, difficult to destroy, cheap, and convenient." From Shuo shih shu men jing pi t'ung 4/8ab by Hu Ying-lin (1551-1622).

See also quotation to the same effect from Ou-yang Hui (1007-72), in Kuei pien lu (Shuo fu edition) 2/13a-14b. Ou-yang ascribes the beginning of the paged book to Peng Tao, who was contemporary with this little booklet from Tun-huang.


11. Two other printed books, purporting to come from the T'ang dynasty, and found not at Tun-huang but elsewhere in China, are described by Liu-an, 1962:3. Of these the first is certainly a forgery and the second needs further substantiation.

12. The dated documents are as follows:

At Paris: 947. Single sheet with Buddhist pictures and text. Hand colored. 947. Another similar sheet given as votive offering by the same man. (Many copies, one of which has been presented by Pelliot to the Morgan Library in New York.)

949. A dhāraṇī charm, seven pages long, all printed at once from one block.

951. A dhāraṇī charm, the text of which had been corrected by Chi-hsing, a monk from India.


877. Calendar assigned to this date; see illustration in L. Giles, 1947: Plate 7.

882. Dated "family calendar of Fan Shang of Ch'eng-tu Fu" (in modern Szechuan).

947. A single sheet similar to those of the same date at Paris, but not colored. (Three duplicate copies.)


14. The suggestion that the Diamond Sūtra was imported from somewhere else and books came in. They were easy to produce, difficult to destroy, cheap, and convenient. From Shuo shih shu men jing pi t'ung 4/8ab by Hu Ying-lin (1551-1622).


16. Certain Chinese and Japanese authorities have maintained, on the basis of a preface to his works by his friend Yüan Chên (779-851), that some of the poetry of Po Chü-i (772-846) and of himself was printed. This preface bears a date equivalent to January 2, 845. Pelliot (1932:33-33) vigorously disputes their understanding of Yüan's words, while Dr. Hu (1954:72) strongly supports it. Until archaeological evidence can be educed to settle the question, Yüan's preface cannot be used as certain proof of printing in the early years of the ninth century.

17. Po Chü-i, 1953:34-36, points out that the original text, now written Ho-yü Ch'üan, has been transmitted faithfully, as shown by the researches of Kuwabara.

18. Po Chü-i, 1953:34-36, points out that the original text, now written Ho-yü Ch'üan, has been transmitted faithfully, as shown by the researches of Kuwabara.

19. Shih-ma Kuang's History, in the records of the T'ang dynasty, has the following account of Lin Pien's life: "In 905 Liu Pien was made governor of Li-chou. The Liu family from the time of Liu Kung-cho had been held in honor by scholars and officials for its adherence in every generation to filial, fraternal, and social duties... The eunuchs hated him, and hence he was long punished by being kept in provincial posts. He wrote a book of admonitions for the junior members of his family." Translated by Meadows, in Curzon, 1860:16.

20. An astrological concept.

21. This statement is found in a book entitled Chia hsien hsü by Liu Pien. It is quoted in full in the Older History of the Five Dynasties in an editorial note in the edition of 1739, 43/1—a note in which many of the earliest sources on the history of printing are gathered together. It is also quoted in full by Yeh Tê-hui in Shu lin ch'êng kua 1/18-19. In abbreviated form it is quoted by Yeh Meng-t'ieh in a book entitled Yen yü (T'ung shu shi k'ung edition No. 375-4) B/78, written about 1170, which in turn is quoted by Ma Tuan-lin in the book Wên hsiang T'ung Kuo. Other abbreviated versions are found in the Ko
Chapter 9

THE PRINTING OF THE CONFUCIAN CLASSICS
UNDER FENG TAO, 932–953

Up to the end of the T'ang dynasty, the Empress Shōtoku of Japan had printed a million charms to insure a lengthening of her days. Feng Su had asked the emperor to suppress the printing of calendars up and down the Yangtze valley, Ho-kan Chi had scattered abroad thousands of copies of his biography of a certain Liu Hung, and Wang Chieh had ordered the printing of the Diamond Sutra to honor his parents. Together with three other references in Chinese and Japanese literature and chance finds at Tun-huang, these constitute all that is known definitely of block printing up to the beginning of the tenth century. The next great name in this history is that of Feng Tao, who as prime minister ordered the printing of the Confucian Classics.

It is necessary first to see the background of Feng Tao’s work, and for that background to turn again to West China, to the province of Szechuan. During the whole T’ang dynasty the cultural center of gravity in China was in the West rather than in the East as much of the greatness of the empire was due to its relations with peoples beyond the western border. The T’ang capital was at Ch’ang-an or Si-an-fu in Shensi. The Chinese culture which entered Japan was the culture of Ch’ang-an, for Japanese students, seeking to learn what China had to teach, passed by the eastern provinces and studied in the western capital.

As the T’ang dynasty neared its close, there was a tendency for this cultural center to move still farther west. In 881 the emperor, pursued by rebels, moved to I-chou, now Ch’eng-tu, the capital of Szechuan. Though he resided there only five years, his presence gave to the people a feeling that theirs was the imperial city—a