

A Study of the Tools Used for Woodblock Printing at Shrines and Temples in Ōmi (Shiga) and Wakasa (Fukui) Areas.

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This study is probably the first systematic research into types of ancient tools for woodblock printing that continues to be used in Japanese temples and shrines. As such, the project sheds light on old styles of printing that face the danger of extinction. In an attempt to analyze primitive methods, materials, and tools of printing, we, the Woodblock Print Research Group from the Print Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Kyoto Seika University, investigated religious centers in Ōmi (Shiga prefecture) and Wakasa (Fukui prefecture) areas, where we recorded the few printing tools that have been preserved.

Unlike Europe, Japan and China have continued to practice orthodox woodblock printing till today. Fortunately both countries still have practitioners of old techniques, making it possible to probe into traditional methods, materials and tools, and thus to learn something about the variations in the evolution of printing techniques over time and place. In Japan, for instance, printing tools with quite different constructions from those generally known can be found at certain shrines and temples.

Unaffected by technical improvements and developments in the world at large, these printing tools retain old forms that have been shielded from change by regional factors, by habitual respect for traditions, and by special religious precepts. Hopefully, our study of these soon-to-be-forgotten printing tools in the shrines and temples will expose their existence and elucidate the implications of their original invention and continuing use.

As director of the Research Group, I plan to publish the report in three parts. The first gives general background and sets out our research goals, the second reports on the findings derived from our questionnaire and onsite investigation, and the third presents interpretive implications of the findings.