

## Seminar SAW History of Science, History of Text, 2011-2016

May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016

### Printing scholarship

#### Presentation

In continuity with the previous session, the session will explore how we can approach the status of a field of inquiry through the way in which writings are printed, and the various media used for the circulation of knowledge.

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*Mathematical knowledge and the books in which it was printed—Examining mathematics in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) from the perspective of printing*

**Abstract** – Modern studies on the history of mathematics in China have mainly concentrated on assessing the “level” of mathematical knowledge at the time. As a result, this period has generally been regarded as a “declining phase” in the “development of mathematics”. This evaluation has been challenged in the last few decades. Some scholars have called for re-examining the mathematics in this period from the perspective of the practical functions it had at the time. New approaches were accordingly adopted since then. However, “the aim of assessing” still haunts these historians. We suggest that to some extent we need to set this aim aside. Examining the mathematics in the milieu in which they were practised and restoring their original existence appear as two issues that need to be addressed. From this point of view, we not only need to study the mathematical texts, but we must also consider the material features of the writings which recorded these bodies of knowledge. This talk will set the writing and publishing of mathematical works against the backdrop of the flourishing printing activities in the Ming dynasty, to address the issues of for whom these mathematical works were produced, the cost of printing, the tactics the works used to persuade people to learn and purchase the book, the author’s role in the progress of publishing, the inheritance (or “plagiarism”) of knowledge and the anti-counterfeiting of the printing, etc.