The Japanese Myth of the Battle of the Wen River – And Its Implications for the History of Printing

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SOAS
17 February, 2016 (Wednesday), 5pm, Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES (tea served at 4:45pm)

In 955 the king of Wuyue in China dispatched five hundred miniature pagodas to Japan, each containing a printed text. The Japanese monk and former student in China who was asked to explain the significance of this gift provided an explanation in terms of a Chinese historical background that has long been recognised as complete nonsense. Even so a closer reading of this account reveals an important motif that can help to explain not only this instance of printing but also at least one earlier one besides.

T. H. Barrett was Professor of East Asian History in SOAS, University of London, for over a quarter of a century, retiring in 2013. He has mainly been interested in the religious history of East Asia, particularly China, on which he has published a number of monographs and shorter studies. A full bibliography of his writings up to the time of his retirement is available with his valedictory lecture, The Three Things I Learned About China, London: Minnow Press, 2013.