

Two Rare Buddhist Books in the End of the Ming Dynasty

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This paper discusses two rare books of Chinese Buddhist literature in the end of the Ming dynasty and early Qing dynasty. One is called *Fangce Zang* 《方册藏》 (The Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon) and the other is *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* 《刻藏缘起》 (The Story of How a Buddhist Canon was Engraved).

The Chinese have produced more than 18 editions of Buddhist canons since the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) to the early 20th century. The earliest edition, called *The Kaibao Edition* 《开宝藏》, was made in the format of rolls during the fourth year of the Kaibao period (971) and completed in the eighth year of Taipingxingguo (太平兴国 982). Later they constructed Buddhist canon in the format of folded edition. *The Chongning Wanshou Dazang* 《崇宁万寿大藏》 was the first one made in such a folded format.⁶

First we discuss *The Fangce Zang* 《方册藏》, also known as the earliest sewn edition. It was constructed by monks and local people in Zhejiang Province in the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and in the earlier period of Qing dynasty (1644-1911). They started the whole project in the seventh year of Wanli (万历 1579) and continued the carving until the sixteenth year of Kangxi (康熙 1677). It took more than 88 years to accomplish this huge project.⁷

People call this edition of Chinese Buddhist canon with a number of titles. First, it is called the *Jingshan Edition of the Buddhist Canon* 《径山藏》 because the woodblocks were kept in Jingshan Monastery (径山寺). It is also entitled *Jiaying Edition of the Buddhist Canon* because the Lengyan

⁶ This *Chongning Edition of the Buddhist Canon* was started in the third year of Yuanfeng (元丰 1080) and completed in the third year of Chongning (崇宁 1104).

⁷ Lü Cheng says that it took more than 88 years. See his essay "Ming ke Jingshan Fangceben Zangjing," (明刻径山方册本藏经) in *Lü Cheng Foxue Lunzhu Xuanji* 《吕澂佛学论著选集》 (Ji'nan: Qilu Shushe, 1996), p.1486. This could be verified in the Chronicle Records of the Second edition of the *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* in 1932, p.68. Yang Yuliang claims that it took more than 120 years for the project to be accomplished. He says that the carving of project started in the seventh year of Wanli (1579) and ended in the forty-sixth year of Kangxi (1709). However, he does not show which scriptures were engraved in the years after 1709. As he was accessible to the copy in the Imperial Palace Museum, his conclusion sounds reliable. See Yang Yuliang 杨玉良, "Gugong Bowuyuan Cang Jiayingzang Chutan" ("故宫博物院藏《嘉兴藏》初探" A Study on the Jiaying Edition of the Buddhist Canon Preserved in Palace Museum), in *Gugong Bowuyuan Yuankan* (《故宫博物院院刊》 *Journal of Imperial Palace Museum*), no. 3, 1997, pp.13-24.

Temple (楞严寺) in which the business of circulation of this canon was dealt with was located in Jiaxing County, Zhejiang Province (浙江嘉兴). The third title is *Fangce Dazang* 《方册大藏》 or the *Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon* due to its format. The designers of this edition changed the old format of rolls or folded ones into the sewn edition. Thus, the cost of the canon was reduced to one-fifth of the folded edition. This edition of the Buddhist canon paved the way for the later sewn editions of the Buddhist canon.

A number of libraries in China keep a copy of this edition. *Zhongguo Guji Shanben Mulu* (《中国古籍善本目录》 A Catalogue of Rare Chinese Books) records that nine libraries in China keep this edition of the Buddhist canon. They are: Yunnan Provincial Library, Guangdong Provincial Library, Library of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Sichuan Provincial Library, Qinghai Provincial Library, Chongqing Municipal Library, Fayuan Temple in Beijing, Xiyuan Temple, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province and Imperial Palace Museum, Beijing. In addition, the Central Library of Taipei also keeps a set of this Buddhist canon.⁸ Mr. Bai Huawen says that the copy that Yunnan Provincial Library keeps is comparatively complete with 9500 *juan* 卷 when duplicates are counted. Other libraries and temples may have kept an incomplete set of this edition.⁹

From *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* 《刻藏缘起》, we know that it was in the seventh year of Wanli (1579), Zibai(紫柏), one of the four eminent monks in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), made a vow to engrave a new edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon. He told his disciple Mizang (密藏), also called Daokai (道开), to take charge of this project. A group of high officials and local gentry supported this initiative. These people included Yuan Liaofan (袁了凡), Lu Guangzu (陆光祖), and Feng Mengzhen (冯梦禛), Guan Zhidao (管志道), etc. They decided to engrave this new Buddhist canon in the format of sewn edition for the seek of low cost and easy circulation in spite of the fact that some people opposed to this change of rolls or folded bindings into sewn binding. They criticized the change as simply making slight of the sacredness of the Buddhist canon.

Many Buddhists, both monks and lay people alike, responded to their call for this project by offering money and things. The organizers planned to appoint Lu Guangzu and other lay Buddhists and a group of monks to do the proofreading. They also planned to raise funds of 30000 liang silver to accomplish the whole project in ten years. *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* 《刻藏缘起》 recorded how they started fund-raising, how they made arrangements of the carving and how the Buddhist canon was bound.

⁸ Yang Yuliang claims that the set kept in the Imperial Palace Museum in Beijing has 225 additional kinds of scriptures after comparing the catalogues of two libraries. Besides, the Catalogue of Central Library in Taipei lacks 95 kinds of books in *You Xu Zang* (《又续藏》 The Second Continuation of the Tripitaka) after the 25th *han* 函. Ibid.

⁹ Bai Huawen 白化文, *Hanhua Fojiao yu Siyuan Shenghuo* (《汉化佛教与寺院生活》 Sinicized Buddhism and Temple Life) (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), p.130

After more than ten years' hard work in the first stage, Buddhist monks started carving the *Fangce Zang* 《方册藏》 (The Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon) in Miaode An (妙德庵) at Mount Wutai (五台山), Shanxi Province. They engraved more than 500 *juan* (卷) in four years. However, cold climate of Mt Wutai prevented them from completing the canon. The winter was too long -- more than two-thirds of the year was inefficient in carving. In addition, the transportation of the carved woodblocks was a problem. In the twentieth year of Wanli (1592), the organizers decided to move the workshops of carving from Mt. Wutai to Jizhao An Temple (寂照庵) in Xingsheng Wanshou Chansi Monastery (兴圣万寿禅寺) in Jingshan, Jiaxing County, Zhejiang Province (浙江嘉興徑山). To their disappointment, they found that it was cloudy and damp in this Jizhao An Temple. The woodblocks were liable to get rotten due to the heavy humidity. In the thirty-eighth year of Wanli (1610), they decided to rebuild Huacheng Monastery (化城寺) as a storehouse for woodblocks. This temple was situated in a flat area at the foot of eastern part of Jingshan Mountain 徑山. It was not shrouded with clouds or fog. Apparently, this location was an ideal place for both the storage and transportation of the woodblocks.

In the thirty-first year of Wanli (1603), Venerable Zibai, one of the earlier organizers of the Sewn Edition, died in Beijing. There were not so many rich lay Buddhist supporters as before. The enterprise of construction of the Buddhist canon encountered many difficulties. They organizers were unable to focus their investment at Jingshan alone. Now they changed the policy. They decided to allow local temples in Jiaxing (嘉兴), Wujiang (吴江), Jintan (金坛) and others to continue the engraving where they could raise sufficient enough funds. Then they sent the carved woodblocks to Lengyan Temple (楞严寺) in Jiaxing County where they could circulate the Buddhist canon. In the thirty-seventh year of Wanli (1609), the printing house of Lengyan Temple again made a catalogue for the woodblocks. This brought the enterprise for the engraving to a halt for the time being. The managers of the printing house accepted the suggestions made by Mr. Wu Yongxian (吴用光) and Mr. Bao Shijie (包世杰) that they use the money made from the circulation of the engraved scriptures to carve more woodblocks for other scriptures. For instance, the five vinayas (rules or regulations for Buddhists) were constructed with the money made from the circulation in the Boruo Hall of Lengyan Temple.¹⁰

The significance of this *Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon* lies in the fact that the sewn pattern of books were more economic in printing, binding and easier in transporting as organizers anticipated before starting their project. It included commentaries on different Buddhist sects. Many recorded saying of Chan masters were collected. The editors incorporated two supplementary parts: *Xu Zang Jing* 《续藏经》 (Continuation of Buddhist Canon), and *You Xu Zang* 《又续藏》 (The Second Continuation of Buddhist Canon). In fact, it consisted more Buddhist texts than any other editions of the Buddhist canon since the Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127). In the end of each *juan* 卷, a short paragraph of vow to make the project of construction of the Buddhist canon possible offers detailed information on the name

¹⁰ Lü Cheng, "Ming Ke Jingshan Fangceben Zangjing," in *Lü Cheng Foxue Lunzhu Xuanji* (《吕澂佛学论著选集》) Ji'nan: Qilu Shushe, 1996), volume 3, pp. 1484-1489

of the donator, the names of persons who copied the texts, who carved the characters, when, where, how many characters were carved, how much money was paid for the expenses and so on. This information is useful for the study of history of socio-economy in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

As editors used *The Northern Yongle Edition of the Buddhist Canon* as the master copy and other earlier editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon for proofreading, they made reasonable corrections for the sewn edition. Whenever they encountered problems, discussions were held in their regular meetings. The editors followed this rule strictly before 1603, thus the quality of editing was guaranteed.

In the end of the Ming dynasty and early Qing dynasty, Venerable Yinyuan (隱元 1572 – 1673) of the Wanfu Monastery, Huangbo Mountain, Fuqing County, Fujian Province crossed the sea to propagate Buddhism in Japan. He brought a set of *The Jiaxing Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon* from China. Tetsu-Gen, his follower, felt the want of Buddhist Canon in Japan. He made a vow to make an edition of the Buddhist canon in Japan. Japanese monks set up a printing house in Kyoto and raised fund for the printing enterprise. They used *The Jiaxing Sewn Edition* as a master copy to produce a Japanese edition of Buddhist canon. It was called “*Ōbaku Edition*” (《黄檗藏》) The format, the wrapped-ridge binding and other styles were similar to those in *Jiaxing Sewn Edition* engraved in Zhejiang Province in China. In the end of the 20th century, this *Sewn Edition of the Buddhist Canon* was reprinted in 40 volumes by Xinwenfeng Chuban Gongsi (新文豐出版公司) in Taipei. It is entitled *Ming Ban Da Zang Jing* (《明版嘉興大藏經》The Ming Edition of the Buddhist Canon).

Now we come to the second rare book entitled *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* (《刻藏缘起》The Stories of the Sewn Edition of Chinese Buddhist Canon), which is classified as a rare book in the Zhongguo Guji Shanben Mulu (A Catalogue of Rare Chinese Books) published by Shanghai Guji Chubanshe in 1996. According to this catalogue, only four libraries in China have kept this *Ke Zang Yuan Qi*. They are: Beijing National Library, Fujian Provincial Library, Hunan Provincial Library and Sichuan Provincial Library.

Ke Zang Yuan Qi starts with Lu Guangzu’s “Preface to the Sponsorship for the Donation for Carving the Buddhist Canon” and ends with the Qu Ruji’s “Preaching to People for the Donation of the Tripitaka.” The appendix contains Guan Zhidao’s “Regulations for the Examination of the Scriptures,” “The Guide to the Construction of the Buddhist Canon,” “The Regulations for the Engraving of the Buddhist Tripitaka,” and “The Pay and Food for the Carvers at the Workshop.” The appendix offers useful information on how the Buddhist canon was copied, engraved and how the carvers were paid for their work.

This *Ke Zang Yuan Qi* has more than two editions. The first one was engraved in the twenty-ninth year (1602) of the Wanli Period (1573-1620). The calligraphy was beautiful in Ouyang Style (欧体) and Zhao Style (赵体). The last part of appendix was engraved in Song Style. Each page has 10

lines and each line has at most 16 characters. The appendix in Song Style has 20 or 16, or 18 characters for each page. The first edition has recorded the prefaces written by 18 writers. In addition, it has four records of regulations for the engraving of the Buddhist canon. They all demonstrated how the project of engraving the Buddhist canon was going on in the first phase. The book has 87 (x 2) pages in all.¹¹

The other edition was re-engraved by Zhina Neixue Yuan (支那内学院 Inner Studies Institute) in Nanjing in August 1932. The reprint was sponsored by General Liu Xiang (刘湘) of Sichuan Province. This edition was engraved in Song style, with 20 characters in each line, and each page has 10 lines in 68 (x2) pages. It is easier to read because it was punctuated. This reprint is not regarded as rare book. However, it contains three more articles and one chronicle record, offering more detailed information on the practical work for the construction of the Buddhist canon. In the end, it tells us that the book has 26,907 Chinese characters and General Liu Xiang donated 185 yuan for the carving of the book.

¹¹ Books in the old days are marked by a whole page, unlike the format of present books that a piece of paper is printed in two pages.