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Defining the Chinese Buddhist Canon: Its Origin, Periodization, and Future

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Abstract

This article is written by an eminent Chinese author of the Chinese canon and provides the author's insights on how to understand the history of the canon in relation to Chinese Buddhism. Fang discusses the issues of historical periodization of the canon in history and various possibilities for the future development of the canon. This paper examines the history of the Chinese Buddhist canon by reflecting upon various essential issues. Fang first clarifies the origin of various name of the canon and proposes a working definition for the study of the canon. He also provides a periodization scheme of the canon and divides the history of the canon into the period of manuscript editions, the period of printed editions, the period of printed editions in modern times, and the period of digital editions. The author provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the canon during different periods and also makes suggestions for future studies.

Keywords:

Chinese Buddhist canon, Dunhuang manuscript, periodization, printing, digitization

關於漢文大藏經的幾個問題

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摘要

本文由中國大藏經研究的著名學者撰寫，詳述了中國佛教史中大藏經的演變。方廣錫教授通過對漢文大藏經研究中的一些根本問題的反思，提供了一個關於漢文大藏經歷史的全景考察。作者首先釐清了大藏經的名稱和來源，並提出了一個關於大藏經的定義以利進一步研究。本文還將大藏經的歷史進行了如下分期：寫本時期、刻本時期、近代刻本時期，以及數碼化時期。作者對每個時期大藏經的特點進行了具體分析，並指出了今後的研究方向。

關鍵詞：

漢文大藏經、敦煌寫本、分期、印刷史、數字化

There have been different views on the specific time when Buddhism was first transmitted into China. One relatively credible version says in the first year of the Yuanshou reign (2 B.C.) of Emperor Aidi 哀帝 in the Han dynasty, Yi Cun 伊存, an envoy from the central Asian state of Scythia, dictated the *Buddha Sūtra* (*Futu Jing* 浮屠經) to Jing Lu 景盧, a student of the Imperial College. While Yi Cun followed the Indian tradition of transmitting the sūtra orally, Jing Lu wrote it down according to the Chinese custom. Therefore, this text is the first translated Buddhist scripture in writing, suggesting that Buddhist scriptures and the Buddhist religion were transmitted into China simultaneously (Fang 1998b, 24–7).¹

Central Asian monks came for missionary work, and Chinese monks also went to Central Asia and India for Buddhist scriptures. As a result, Buddhist scriptures were translated into Chinese one after another. No longer subordinated to the mainstream teachings such as Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism gradually became an independent and organic component of Chinese thought and culture. In response, Chinese Buddhist scriptures have developed into a massive collection of the canon, which has been called *Dazangjing* 大藏經 (Jpn. *Daizokyo*, Kr. *Daejanggyeong*) or literally the “Great Storage of Scriptures.” The content of the Chinese Buddhist canon is related to many academic fields such as philosophy, history, sociology, language, literature, astronomy, geography, medicine, and so on. As a result of cross-cultural communication, the Chinese Buddhist canon influenced the entire Chinese cultural sphere profoundly. It also contains abundant information for studying Chinese and East Asian culture.

In this paper I will offer a panoramic view of the history of the Chinese Buddhist canon by reflecting upon various essential issues. I will first clarify the etymological origin of the term *Dazangjing* and propose a working definition for the study of the canon based on my identification of three essential elements in canon formation: selection criteria, structural system,

¹ The original Chinese title of this paper is “Guanyu Hanwen Dazangjing de jige wenti” 關於漢文大藏經的幾個問題 (Several issues concerning the Chinese Buddhist canon), which has been incorporated as the introduction to Fang (2006, 1–38). The current translation was prepared by Xin Zi 自信 for the First International Conference on the Chinese Buddhist Canon held in Tucson, Arizona, March 20–21, 2011. Stylistic changes have been made and certain detailed discussions about primary sources are omitted to save space. The translators want to thank the two reviewers for their meticulous reading of the manuscript to help us avoid many errors. A few notes were added by the translators for clarification.

and external markers. This chapter also provides a periodization scheme of the canon based on my working definition and divides the history of the canon into the period of manuscript editions, the period of printed editions, the period of printed editions in modern times, and the period of digital editions. In addition, I will provide a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the canon during different periods and make suggestions for future studies.

Etymology of the Term *Dazangjing*

The Chinese Buddhist canon was often referred to as *Dazangjing*, a Buddhist term invented by Chinese people and without a counterpart in Sanskrit. The creation of the term *Dazangjing* resulted from the synthesis of Chinese and Indian cultures and the development of Chinese Buddhism. In my view, the evolution of its meaning is related to three factors: Chinese views on translating Buddhist scriptures, the popular devotion to the Three Refuges (*sanbao* 三寶) during the Southern and Northern dynasties, and the massive production of Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

Etymologically, *dà* 大 (great) is a modifier that signifies the scope of the canon, suggesting that its content reaches the limit of time and space. *Zàng* 藏 (storage) is a paraphrase of the Sanskrit word *piṭaka*, which means “cases” or “baskets” for storage. Because paper was not introduced in ancient India, scriptures were carved or written on palm leaves, which were made into the so-called “palm-leaf Buddhist scriptures.” Indian monks usually put these palm-leaf scriptures in cases or baskets, namely, *piṭaka*. Therefore, *piṭaka* has gradually become a measuring unit and an alternative name for Buddhist scriptures. Scriptures of different categories were stored in different *piṭakas*. For example, scriptures under the categories of *sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma* were stored in three separate “baskets,” which is where the name *Tripiṭaka* comes from.

Jīng 經 (scripture) is translated from the Sanskrit word *sūtra*, whose original meaning is “running through.” Buddhists in ancient India believed that if flower petals were bound with strings, they would not be blown away by the wind. Similarly, collecting the words of Buddha’s teaching would preserve them forever so that they could be handed down to later generations. Therefore they were called *sūtras*. The Chinese character *jīng* 經 originally referred to vertical lines in fabric, with an extended meaning of “constancy.” Thereupon, the word *jīng* embodies the Chinese traditional thought that truth can last forever, as Heaven does. As Kumārajīva’s 鳩摩羅什 (334–413)

famous student Sengzhao 釋僧肇 (384–414?) says in his *Commentary to the Vimalakīrti Sutra* (*Zhu Weimo jing* 注維摩經), “*Jīng* means being constant. Although things have been changing from ancient times to the present, the cardinal truth does not change at all. Neither nonbelievers nor Buddha’s disciples could make any changes. That’s why *jīng* is considered constant and eternal” (T 38: 327c). It seems that *jīng*, the Chinese translation of *sūtra*, reflects Chinese Buddhists’ boundless devotion to and faith in Buddha’s teaching, though this translation does not correspond exactly to the original meaning of the word.²

In ancient India, the word *sūtra* only refers to one of the three “baskets,” comprising *sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma*. However, in Chinese, the meaning of *jīng* has been expanded gradually. There are three usages of this word. First, it is equivalent to *sūtra* in Indian Buddhism, referring to all the translated Buddhist scriptures transmitted from India. Second, since the beginning of the transmission of Buddhism into China, Chinese people always called all the texts *jīng*, including *vinaya* and *abhidharma*. Third, it has been used in phrases such as *Dazangjing*, which includes Chinese Buddhist works written and edited by Chinese people.

The Chinese Buddhist canon has been a research subject since the twentieth century. Scholars attempted to find out when the word *Dazangjing* first appeared and usually assumed that this phrase was created during the Sui dynasty (Daizōkai 1990, 22). According to the record written by Guanding 灌頂 (561–632), *Separate Biography of Tiantai Master Zhizhe of the Sui Dynasty* (*Sui Tiantai Zhizhe dashi biezhuān* 隋天臺智者大師別傳), Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) “copied fifteen sets of *Dazangjing*” (T 50: 197c) throughout his life. This suggests that the word *Dazangjing* appeared during the Sui dynasty. I used to hold this opinion as well. However, at the suggestion of Japanese scholar Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃, I carefully examined the nuanced meaning of the few lines at the end of this biography and found that this paragraph is actually not Guanding’s original writing, but supplementary remarks added by a Master Xian 銑法師 (d.u.). Furthermore, all the information on this Master Xian needs further study. So we cannot take the appearance of *Dazangjing* in

² It must be also mentioned that *jing* is a term by which Confucian classics were known for centuries, long before the arrival of Buddhism. In their attempt to establish the textual authority of Buddhist texts, Chinese Buddhist scholars regarded all Buddhist translations as *jing*, or Buddhist classics, whether they belonged to the *vinaya*, *sūtra*, or *abhidharma* type of a text. For a detailed discussion, see Storch (2014, esp., 57–8). —Translator’s note.

Guanding's biography of Zhiyi as the evidence proving that the term first appeared in the Sui dynasty.

To clarify the origin of the first use of the term *Dazangjing*, I have examined a number of sources. My findings suggest that the term *Dazangjing* 大藏經 must have been invented before the Buddhist persecution around 845, or during the Zhenyuan 貞元 reign of Emperor Dezong 德宗 (785–805) in the Tang dynasty at the latest.

In the first place, when collating Dunhuang manuscripts, I found the occurrence of this term in two obscure manuscripts: first, *Catalog of the Indian Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Sūtra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma in the Great Tang* (*Xitian daxiaocheng jinglulun bingjian zai Da Tang guonei dushu mulu* 西天大小乘經律論並見在大唐國內都數目錄), which appeared in both the Pelliot and the Stein collections as P 2987 and S 3565, respectively; second, *Number of Scriptures in the Great Storage of the Great Tang* (*Da Tang Dazangjing shu* 大唐大藏經數), which was preserved only in the Pelliot collection as P 3846. Based on the scribal style, the former two Dunhuang manuscripts must have been written during the period when the Allegiance Army (Guiyi Jun 歸義軍) controlled Dunhuang (851–1036). However, after analyzing the contents, I believe that these two documents date back no earlier than Emperor Xuanzong's 唐玄宗 period (712–756) and no later than the Buddhist persecution around 845. As for the manuscript numbered P 3846, it must have appeared after the Buddhist persecution around 845. Therefore, I concluded that the word *Dazangjing* appeared in the period between Emperor Xuanzong's time and the Buddhist persecution during the Huichang reign (Fang 2002a, 1).

Second, when I was searching the Chinese Buddhist canon in electronic format, I found a sentence saying, "those hundreds and thousands of copies of liturgy were again abbreviated from the Bodhisattva *Dazangjing*" (其百千頌本，復是菩薩大藏經中次略 T 39: 808a), in the first fascicle of *Commentary on Essential Secret Teachings of the Great Yoga of the Adamantine Crown* (*Jingangding jing dayujia mimi xindi famen yijue* 金剛頂經大瑜伽秘密心地法門義訣). Although this text is not contained in any edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon in Chinese history, *Taishō Canon* collects it based on a Japanese reprint. The Japanese version originated from Kūkai's 空海 (774–835) collection during his visit to China in the Tang dynasty from 804 to 806.

Finally, I found a record in the book *Record of Inheritance of Two Sets of Great Teaching* (*Liangbu dafa xiangcheng shizifufaji* 兩部大法相承師資付法記), written by Haiyun 海雲 (d.u.) of the Tang, saying that "according to the

Sanskrit version, this text was translated into six scrolls. In addition, one comprehensive scroll was compiled to teach the procedure of practice and chanting. In total, there were seven scrolls, which were made into one whole set to be put into *Dazangjing*” (T 51: 785c). Haiyun’s work was written in the eighth year of the Taihe 太和 reign (834) of Emperor Wenzong 唐文宗 (809–840) in the Tang dynasty, before the Buddhist persecution during the Huichang reign.

Both documents mentioned before, P 2987 and S 3565 in the Dunhuang manuscripts, contain the phrase *Xitian Dazangjing* 西天大藏經 (the Indian Buddhist canon), which is a massive collection of 84,500 scrolls. From this we know that the Chinese who created the term *Dazangjing* did not limit it to meaning the Chinese Buddhist canon, but actually used it as a common term for all Buddhist literature. Nonetheless, in ancient times, Buddhist communities in other traditions continued to transmit their own scriptures and use their own traditional terms. For example, Hīnayāna³ Buddhist literature is called Tripiṭaka; Tibetan Buddhist literature is named Ganggyur 甘珠爾 or Tanggur 丹珠爾. The phrase *Hanwen Dazangjing* 漢文大藏經 (the Chinese Buddhist canon) was first used by Japanese scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chinese Buddhists, focusing on the integration of Buddhist literature written in different languages, also used a series of new terms, such as the Pāli Buddhist canon (*Bali Dazangjing* 巴利大藏經), the Southern Buddhist canon (*Nanchuan Dazangjing* 南傳大藏經), the Tibetan Buddhist canon (*Zangwen Dazangjing* 藏文大藏經), the Mongolian Buddhist canon (*Mengwen Dazangjing* 蒙文大藏經), the Manchu Buddhist canon (*Manwen Dazangjing* 滿文大藏經), the Tangut Buddhist canon (*Xixia Dazangjing* 西夏大藏經), and so on. For the purpose of comparison, the term *Dazangjing* in Chinese Buddhism naturally evolved into *Hanwen Dazangjing* 漢文大藏經 (Chinese Buddhist canon). Therefore, *Hanwen Dazangjing* and *Dazangjing* are only different names from different historical and linguistic backgrounds that actually have the same referent: that is, the Chinese Buddhist canon.

The Definition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon

In China, people at first called the Buddhist canon *zhongjing* 眾經 (Myriad Scriptures), *yiqiejing* 一切經 (All Scriptures), and *zangjing* 藏經 (Storage

³ The term “Hīnayāna” is no longer in use by American scholars, for it is a normative Mahāyānist term that is considered incorrect and derogatory toward the early schools of Buddhism. See Storch (2014, XXI). —Translator’s note.

of Scriptures). The term *Dazangjing* only appeared in the Tang dynasty. If we examine these terms carefully, we can see that their emergence and changes reflected the Chinese conception of Buddhist scriptures. However, when they first appeared, these names were not clearly defined but simply followed longtime conventions of usage. In modern times, along with the development of scholarly research on Buddhism, the Buddhist canon has increasingly attracted people's attention, and scholars have attempted to define the meaning of the Chinese Buddhist canon.⁴

What is “the Chinese Buddhist canon”? Twenty years ago, my definition was “the whole collection of Chinese Buddhist literature” (Fang 2002a, 3). When I review that definition now, I find it not very accurate. The connotation of the so-called “whole collection of Chinese Buddhist literature” should be the Buddhist literature written in Chinese, and the extension should be all Chinese Buddhist literature. However, the fact is that all the literature collected in the Chinese Buddhist canon is written in Chinese, but not all of it is Buddhist literature. For example, there are works such as *Sāṅkhya kārikā* (*Jin Qishi Lun* 金七十論) and *Vaiśeṣikadaśapadārthasāstra* (*Shengzong Shiju Yilun* 勝宗十句義論), which belong to the Sāṅkhya school 數論派 or Vaiśeṣika school 勝論派 in India. In addition, not all Chinese Buddhist literature was collected into the Chinese Buddhist canon. A large number of Buddhist texts exist outside it. Moreover, the formulation “a whole collection of the Chinese Buddhist literature” cannot demonstrate the fact that the Chinese Buddhist canon is an organic unity with fixed content, internal logical structure, and external appearance, such as case number.

When ancient scholars were compiling the Chinese Buddhist canon, they had certain selection criteria, structural designs, and identification methods. Based on this fact, twenty-six years ago I proposed the theory of “three essential elements” of the Chinese Buddhist canon: selection criteria, structural system, and external identification markers. My definition did not highlight these elements, so now I improve it and express it as follows:

Including essentially the translated Buddhist scriptures of past ages as the core of its content, the Chinese Buddhist canon is the collection of

⁴ For some of these definitions, see Ding (1984, 215b, 3b); Mochizuki and Tsukamoto (1984, vol. 4, 3311b); Daizōkai (1990, 5–6); *Zhongguo dabaikē* (1988, 56–7); Ciyi (1993, 893); Lan (1994, 628a); Ren (2002, 161, 440); Ren (1998, 157a, 302a); Chen (2000, 392); Li and He (2003, 1). A long discussion of these definitions by Chinese and Japanese scholars has been omitted by editors. —Translator's note.

the Chinese Buddhist classics and related literature organized according to certain structures and with some external identification markers.

Here, I add the “three essential elements” to the above definition as modifiers. First, I use the wording “including essentially the translated Buddhist scriptures of past ages as the core of its collection” to indicate the selection criteria because the Chinese Buddhist canon has incorporated all the translated Buddhist scriptures as its core. I also put in a quantitative limit, expressed as “including essentially,” to distinguish the Chinese Buddhist canon from the collections of abridged scriptures such as *Essential Texts from the Canon* (*Zangyao* 藏要). In addition, I use the phrase “related literature” to show that the Chinese Buddhist canon includes some non-Buddhist literature. Historically, the Chinese Buddhist canon collected scriptures of the Indian Sāṅkhya and Vaiśeṣika schools. *Taishō Canon* also has a catalog of “Non-Buddhist Religions” (*Waijiaobu* 外教部), including Taoist, Manichean, and Nestorian scriptures.

My definition does not stress the structure of the Three Baskets (*tripiṭaka*)—sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma—which form a specific structure. In the history of Indian Buddhism, this structure never became a universal way of classifying Buddhist scriptures. It was the same in the history of Chinese Buddhism, and this way of classification was given up long ago. For example, *Taishō Canon* totally abandoned it. To look forward to the future, there is no possibility of it surviving. Therefore, I did not stress the traditional structure of Tripiṭaka as the core of the canon.

One of the functions of a definition is to explain the essential aspects of the research subject by its connotations and extensions. A definition should be able to describe every single stage in the development of the subject. A formulation such as “take the Tripiṭaka as the core” is only suitable for a certain historical period, and therefore cannot define the entire history of the canon. Unlike this narrow definition, my formulation—“including essentially the translated Buddhist scriptures of past ages as the core of the canon”—already covers the contents of the traditional Tripiṭaka.

Periodization Criteria

For thousands of years, the content, structure, and appearance of the Chinese Buddhist canon has been changing. In order to study the canon, dividing its

history into historical periods is necessary. To determine these periods, we need a set of feasible criteria.

Most scholars take dynastic change as their criterion for determining the periods of Chinese Buddhism. I do not agree with that. Instead, I prefer to determine the periods of Chinese Buddhism by the inherent logic of its development (Fang 1998a). And I do not think that we can apply the periodization standard of Chinese Buddhism to the history of the Chinese Buddhist canon, because the Chinese canon exists independently and has its own history.

To explore the inherent logic of the development of the Chinese Buddhist canon, we have to examine the various factors that stimulated its transformation. The following five factors have affected the evolution of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

Chinese Buddhism

As a collection of books that has recorded and reflected the history of Chinese Buddhism, the Chinese Buddhist canon is conditioned by the development of Chinese Buddhism from beginning to end. Therefore, the canon evolves with the changes in Chinese Buddhism. (See below for details.)

The Factors Irrelevant to Buddhism

The Chinese Buddhist canon was also affected by Chinese feudal dynasties. China had been a highly centralized autocratic empire since Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 united the country in 221 B.C. The state power had the supreme position, which could not be counterbalanced by other forces. In history, the Chinese ruling class supported or suppressed Buddhism based on their own interests. Dominating the relationship, the state power imposed its own will upon Buddhism. After the 1911 Revolution, the power of Chinese feudal dynasties over Buddhism no longer existed. However, political and intellectual factors outside Buddhism continued to affect the compilation of the Chinese Buddhist canon to some extent.

The Compilers

Different editions of the canon were compiled by different people. All the differences of time, place, compilers' guidelines, principles, scholarship, and method determine the differences among various editions. It is also necessary to consider the gaps between the compilers' subjective expectations and objective realities, and the interactions arising from them.

Physical Form and Printing

After Buddhism was introduced to China, the physical form of Chinese books changed from bamboo and wooden slips to silk, and then to paper. The way of producing books shifted from handwritten to block printing and to typographic printing. A series of printing technologies, such as photocopying and laser typesetting, has emerged since the end of the nineteenth century. Along with the development of digital technology, a revolution of form and book production has taken place in recent years. All this has brought about major changes in book format and the appearance of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

Bookbinding and Layout

Since Buddhism was transmitted into China, there have been various ways of binding in the history of the Chinese book, such as butterfly binding, stitched binding, whirlwind binding, concertina binding, wrapped-back binding, modern paperback and hardcover, and even the e-book. Bookbinding and layout have thus become unavoidable topics in research on the Chinese canon.

Due to these five factors, the Chinese Buddhist canon has shown different physical appearances as time has gone by. In my opinion, these five factors affected the Chinese Buddhist canon in five different ways. If we plan to study the Chinese Buddhist canon from one perspective, then we should consider one of these factors as the criterion for periodization. To some extent, most of these could serve as the criterion. However, in practice, the five factors are not compatible and thus cannot be integrated. Since the twentieth century, scholars have mainly focused on researching block-printed editions. Later, the study of handwritten manuscript editions appeared on scholars' horizon. Because the Chinese Buddhist canon is a kind of book collection, taking the historical development of the Chinese book as the periodization criterion for the canon is also a convenient choice.

Considering all these factors, I divide the development of the Chinese Buddhist canon into four periods: hand-writing, block-printing, modern printing, and digital. In the following, I will outline the evolution of the canon in each stage and its characteristics.

The Hand-writing Period

The hand-writing period is the beginning and foundation of the Chinese Buddhist canon, which can be divided into six stages.

The Preparation Stage: First to Fifth Century

This stage corresponds roughly to the period from the transmission of Buddhism into China to Daoan's 道安 (312–385) time, during which Buddhism was first considered equal to “the Daoist Learning of Emperor Huangdi and Master Laozi” (*Huang-Lao zhi xue* 黃老之學) and then was subordinated under Neo-Taoism. Despite the emergence of some excellent Buddhist scholars, Chinese Buddhism had not become independent due to lack of clear self-consciousness. Although Daoan once questioned the practice of “matching the meaning” (*geyi* 格義), which could be considered a vague sense of self-consciousness, he himself could not completely get rid of the influence of “*geyi*” because of the historical conditions.

The Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures was also in a chaotic situation during this stage. The quantity of translated scriptures was considerable. Some translators intentionally translated sectarian scriptures and some monks even traveled to Central Asia and India to seek new scriptures. The overall situation was that the translators would translate whatever scriptures they came across, whether complete or not. From Daoan's catalog, *Comprehensive Catalog of Scriptures* (*Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理眾經目錄), we can see that Chinese Buddhists did not realize or perceive the necessity to distinguish and collate Buddhist scriptures under the categories of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. The transmission of scriptures also varied geographically. There was no unified or standardized edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon all over the country. This accorded with the level of development of Chinese Buddhism and the political situation of the sixteen separate states in the Eastern Jin dynasty (316–420).

Daoan was the first person to raise the issue of apocryphal scriptures in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In addition, Daoan's catalog, *Zongli zhongjing mulu*, following the elaborate Chinese bibliographical tradition, attempted to record detailed information about translators and the time and place of translation of every scripture in chronological sequence. This shows that the formation of the Chinese Buddhist canon has been closely connected to traditional Chinese culture and thought since the early time.

Daoan would not have thought in terms of “the three elements of the Chinese Buddhist canon” that I have used in the definition. But in fact, the issue of apocryphal scriptures in his work did involve the first element—criterion of selection. Therefore, the chaotic state of Chinese Buddhist scriptures was also the preparation stage of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

The Formation Stage: Fifth to Sixth Century

This stage corresponds to the period from Kumārajīva coming to China to Fei Changfang’s 費長房 (dates unknown) compilation of the *Record of the Three Jewels through the Ages* (*Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記) in the Sui dynasty. During his stay in China, Kumārajīva translated Nāgārjuna’s 龍樹 (d.u.) Mādhyamika theory systematically and introduced a new world to Chinese monks, allowing them to study authentic Indian Buddhism. From then on, Chinese Buddhism obtained a clear self-consciousness and developed independently, and conflicts among Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism began to take place.

Based on a deepened understanding of Buddhism, Kumārajīva’s disciple Huiguan 慧觀 (d.u.) developed the theory of “Classification of Teaching into Five Periods” (*wushi panjiao* 五時判教). After him, different classification theories emerged. Their purpose was to organize different concepts from Indian Buddhism that had been transmitted into China into an organic system. The emergence of the “Classification of Teaching” was a significant event in the history of Chinese Buddhism because it helped to spread Buddhism in China and stimulated the creation of indigenous Buddhist schools in the Southern and Northern dynasties and the Sui and Tang dynasties. Such classifications involve the second element of the Chinese Buddhist canon that I have defined—the structure. Therefore, “Classification of Teaching” meant much to the formation of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

It was the *Separate Catalog of All Scriptures* (*Zhongjing bielu* 眾經別錄), by an anonymous author, that introduced the “Classification of Teaching” into the organization of Buddhist scriptures. The author of this catalog absorbed Huiguan’s “Classification of Teaching into Five Periods” and developed many categories such as “Catalog of Mahāyāna Scriptures” (*Dacheng jinglu* 大乘經錄), “Catalog of Hīnayāna Scriptures” (*Xiaocheng jinglu* 小乘經錄), “Catalog of Universal Teachings of Three Vehicles” (*Sancheng tongjiaolu* 三乘通教錄), “Catalog of the Great Vehicle of Three Vehicles” (*Sancheng zhong Dacheng lu* 三乘中大乘錄), and “Catalog of Undecided Scriptures of the Great and Lesser Vehicle” (*Daxiaocheng bupanlu* 大小乘不判錄). This was a

tentative but helpful attempt to determine a structural system for arranging Buddhist scriptures. Around that time, Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518) catalog, *Compilation of Notes on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka* (*Chusanrang jiji* 出三藏記集), appeared and made great contributions to the preservation of documents by separating original scriptures from apocryphal ones. But in the classification of Buddhist scriptures, Sengyou's catalog retrogressed to the level of Daoan's catalog (*Zongli zhongjing mulu*), not adopting the new classification scheme developed in the anonymous *Separate Catalog of All Scriptures*.

Later on, many catalogers, such as Li Kuo 李廓 in the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), Baochang 寶唱 in the Liang dynasty (502–557), and Fashang 法上 in the Qi dynasty (550–577), compiled their own catalogs. This shows that Chinese monks tried to grasp the essential characteristics of the Chinese Buddhist canon in order to collate and distinguish Buddhist scriptures and to design an organizational structure. In these catalogs, we can see clearly that the development of Chinese Buddhism, the organization of the Indian Buddhist canon, and the Chinese cataloging tradition influenced the canon profoundly.

According to the documents handed down from ancient times, Wei Shou's 魏收 (507–572) "Tripiṭaka Prayer of the Northern Qi Dynasty" (*Beiqi sanbu yiqiejing yuanwen* 北齊三部一切經愿文) and Wang Bao's 王褒 (513–576) "Tripiṭaka Prayer of the Zhou Dynasty" (*Zhou zangjing yuanwen* 周藏經愿文) prove that in the Southern and Northern dynasties (420–589), the governments of the Northern Qi (550–577) and Northern Zhou (557–581) had compiled the Chinese Buddhist canon. In the Southern dynasties, Baochang's 寶唱 *Catalog of All Scriptures* (*Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄) was written under the command of Emperor Wudi 武帝 (464–549) in the Liang dynasty (502–557), with the purpose of compiling the Chinese Buddhist canon.

According to Dunhuang manuscripts, governments began compiling the Chinese Buddhist canon even earlier. There is a batch of Buddhist scriptures copied by Dunhuang official scribes from 511 to 514 in the Northern Wei dynasty.⁵ The official scribes employed in Dunhuang copied scriptures for years. What they were copying could not be one single volume, and it must be

⁵ According to incomplete statistics, there are about fifteen scrolls extant. See Ikeda (1990, 101a–105b). The paper and transcription style of these scrolls are similar and the colophons at the end have the same style. Ink seals on the colophons, perhaps the earliest such seals in Chinese history, are also the same although the content of the seals is still unidentifiable.

part of the Chinese Buddhist canon. The remaining volumes mentioned above include both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Sūtras and Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Abhidharma. Most of these are ordinary Buddhist scriptures rather than those that one could gain merit by copying, such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Diamond Sūtra*. This could also prove that the scriptures copied by official scribes in Dunhuang are components of the Chinese Buddhist canon. After 1,500 years, these fifteen scrolls survived, and there were two copies of fascicle 14 of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) *Discourse on the Establishment of Consciousness-only* (*Cheng Weishilu* 成唯識論). This shows that these remaining scrolls belong to at least two sets of the canon. If we consider the year recorded in fascicle 8 of *Discourse on the Establishment of Consciousness-only*, they could have belonged to three different sets of the canon. The discovery of the transcriptions in Dunhuang also proves that Buddhist beliefs flourished there during the Northern Wei dynasty. At least, copying scriptures had become an official undertaking west of the Yellow River, showing that Buddhism was a significant social force at that time.

Some documents in Dunhuang manuscripts also demonstrate that as early as the later fifth century, private sponsorship of the canon was a trend in north China. Evidence can be found in fascicle 6 of *Samyuktābhidharmahrdaya* (*Za apitan xinlun* 雜阿毗曇心論, S. 00996): a colophon attached to the end of that volume records that a person named Feng Jinguo 馮晉國 created ten sets of the canon (*Yiqiejing* 一切經, All scriptures), each including 1,464 scrolls. These figures indicate the size of the Chinese Buddhist canon at this time. It is a pity that only one of the 1,464 scrolls in total made by Feng Jinguo has been discovered.⁶

During the formation stage of the handwritten manuscript canon, popular devotion to the Three Treasures or Refuges, which includes the Dharma, became another driving force for the creation of the Chinese canon. Traditionally, the Three Refuges—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—are essential components of Buddhism. Therefore, all three are worshipped by Buddhists. As the embodiment of “Dharma Treasure,” Buddhist scriptures are worshipped as well. Here, the dividing line between philosophical Buddhism and faith-based Buddhism had been very clear. The ordinary people's major Buddhist activities were confession and merit accumulation. Specifically, making private copies of Buddhist scriptures and reciting and upholding the

⁶ The transcript of the colophon of S.00996 in Fang's original article has been omitted here. For the complete document, see Fang (2006, 19). —Translator's note.

scriptures constituted their daily Buddhist practice. Descriptions of copying, reciting, and worshipping Buddhist scriptures, and the merit that those activities could create, can be found in many scriptures. Those descriptions helped to promote the activities of faith-based Buddhism. The apocryphon, *Sūtra of Avalokiteśvara [Promoted by] Lord Gao* (*Gaowang guanshiyin jing* 高王觀世音經) is one of the products and proofs of those activities. Stronger physical evidence of the worship of Buddhist scriptures is the twenty-fascicle version and sixteen-fascicle version of *Buddhabhāṣita-buddhanāma Sūtra (Foming jing)* (佛名經) found in Dunhuang, which show how the initial twelve-volume version translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (d.u.) during the years of Zhengguang's 正光 reign in the Northern Wei dynasty (520–524) was developed into the thirty-fascicle version in *Tripitaka Koreana*. As devotion to the Three Jewels (*sanbao* 三寶) spread, more and more people valued Buddhist scriptures and took their veneration as an important Buddhist practice, thus promoting the creation of the Chinese Buddhist canon (Fang 1990, 470–89).

China's profound cultural heritage was another important factor in the formation of the Chinese Buddhist canon, as the Chinese have a strong consciousness of being a great civilization. China has self-awareness and a sense of superiority, which Chinese people consciously spread and perpetuated by all kinds of methods. This high self-consciousness of civilization has been manifested in collecting, maintaining, and preserving the books from the past in order to sort out, analyze, and integrate different thoughts, by which later generations can “cultivate themselves, regulate family, govern the country, and pacify the world.”⁷ Following Confucius, scholars engaged in compiling books, generation by generation. After the great unification achieved during the Qin and Han dynasties, all Chinese emperors took it as an essential activity to collect, compile, and catalog books. This cultural tradition was profound and magnificent, and formed certain social conditions ready to absorb and digest foreign cultures such as Buddhism.

After Indian Buddhism was introduced into China, it went through confrontation and domestication within Chinese traditional culture. Indian Buddhism transformed Chinese traditional culture greatly and also changed itself, gradually developing into Chinese Buddhism, which was tightly connected with Chinese traditional culture and became one of the three major

⁷ Quoted from the Confucian classic *Great Learning (Daxue)* (大學). —Translator's note.

Chinese traditions, together with Confucianism and Daoism. It was against this background that the unified Chinese Buddhist canon—corresponding to the unified political empire—took form. In contrast to India, which was never truly unified, every unified Chinese dynasty would compile a standard history for the previous dynasty and as well as its own edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

Fei Changfang's catalog, *Records of the Three Jewels through the Ages* (*Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記), compiled in 597, marks the end of the formative period of the Chinese Buddhist canon. Judging from its title, one can easily tell that this work is a direct product of the "Cult of Three Jewels." Scholars of later generations criticized this work for not following the stylistic rules and layout of scriptural catalogs, and *Taishō Canon* even put his work into the category "History and Biography" rather than "Catalogs." This happened because those scholars did not fully understand the social and historical background against which Fei's work was compiled. Fei Changfang invented the classificatory rubric of *Register of Canonical Texts* (*Ruzang lu* 入藏錄) and corrected the previous convention of listing titles under categories such as "Derivative Scriptures" (*Biesheng* 別生, meaning excerpts from a complete scripture), "Doubtful Scriptures" (*Yihuo* 疑惑), and "Apocrypha" (*Weiwang* 偽妄). Fei's innovation shows that the Chinese Buddhist canon had evolved from the stage of spontaneous dissemination to that of theoretical sophistication. Therefore, the canon had taken shape in both practice and theory. The stylistic rules and layout of Fei's catalog (*Lidai sanbao ji*) were adopted by later influential scriptural catalogs such as Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Neidian lu* 內典錄, *Da Zhou lu* 大周錄, Zhisheng's 智昇 (d.u.) *Kaiyuan lu* 開元錄, and *Zhenyuan lu* 貞元錄, and they became the most basic catalogs.⁸

The Stage of Structural Systematization: Sixth to Ninth Century

This stage corresponds to the time period from the completion of Fei Changfang's catalog to the Buddhist persecution in 845, during which scholar-monks who were in charge of the compilation of scriptural catalogs tried to work out the structure of the Chinese Buddhist canon from different angles. Zhisheng's *Catalog of Buddhist Works Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period* (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄), which integrated the accomplishments of

8 For a recent study of Fei's catalog, see Storch (2016). —Translator's note.

earlier scholars, became a model for later generations. Zhisheng's contribution to the structural system of the canon and the catalog of Buddhist scriptures represented the highest level of Chinese Buddhist bibliographical study in ancient times.

As the Chinese Buddhist canon was developed, especially with the appearance of “combined cases” (*hezhi* 合帙), the issues of “external markers” of the canon were put on the agenda. In the formation period, the “title-label method” (*Jingming biaozi fa* 經名標誌法) employed one character from the title of the text in the canon to label each individual scroll or case. The “fixed shelf storage method” (*dingge chucun fa* 定格儲存法) was also invented. In the Dunhuang region ruled by Tibetans, there appeared the “verse-based case number method” (*jisong zhihao fa* 偈頌秩號法), which employed characters in popular liturgical verses to mark each case.⁹

At that time, scholar-monks studied further translated scriptures and Buddhist thought, writing a large number of works in response. Different Chinese Buddhist schools took form, and scholars from these schools wrote many works in order to elaborate their own doctrines. In addition, a variety of Chinese Buddhist writings, such as annals, liturgical texts, catalogs, translations, scripture extracts, and other faith-based works, appeared in great numbers. Some of these Chinese works were collected into the canon, but most were excluded by monk-compilers because the Chinese Buddhist canon mainly collected the translated scriptures. If it is said that in the first two stages, the development of the canon coincided with that of Chinese Buddhism, after this stage of structural systematization, the orthodox canon tended to be fixed and could not really reflect the progress of Chinese Buddhism. To supplement the main canon and make up for this deficiency, there appeared “separate canons” (*Bieyang* 別藏). The Vinaya school compiled their own *Vinayapīṭaka* 毗尼藏, while the collection of doctrinal works of the Tiantai school was also popular. In addition, the Zen school also collected works on Chan, naming their collection “Chan Canon” (*Chan yang* 禪藏).¹⁰ These phenomena deserve our attention.

⁹ For details of these labeling methods, see Fang (2006, 403–513). —Translator's note.

¹⁰ For a detailed study of “Chan Canon,” see Fang (2006, 242–79). —Translator's note.

The Stage of National Unification: Ninth to Tenth Century

This stage corresponds to the period from the Buddhist persecution in 845 to the printing of *Kaibao Canon* 開寶藏 in 983. Before the persecution, the development of the canon was relatively stable. Both the main canon and the separate canons mentioned above were expanding in scale. However, the 845 persecution was a heavy blow to Chinese Buddhism. Almost all the scriptures and images were destroyed in most regions of the country. Afterward, Buddhism recovered gradually. Temples all over the country used Zhisheng's catalog as the standard to rebuild the canon for themselves or for local regions, which in fact promoted the unification of different editions of the canon and created opportunities and the social environment for the appearance of printed canons. However, such a unification based on Zhisheng's catalog also resulted in a dilemma for including translated scriptures, such as the Tantric scriptures translated by Bukong 不空 (705–774, Amoghavajra), because these were translated after Zhisheng's catalog was written.

Another important factor that facilitated the unification of the canon was the appearance and spread of the court editions. These were compiled to accumulate merits for the imperial families. Relying on abundant human and material resources, the court editions were usually carefully copied, well-collated, produced with fine paper, and well-made. Because they often contained the new scriptures translated in official translation bureaus, they were ranked highest in quality among all editions of the canon. The imperial family also bestowed the canon to different regions. Therefore, compilers from different regions built up new canons or supplemented local canons according to the court edition. As a result, the court edition in fact helped to unify and regulate the Chinese Buddhist canon in different regions.

The intervention by the imperial court should be considered another important factor in the formation and unification of the canon. Before the Kaiyuan period (713–741), issues about how the canon was compiled or what kind of canon was going to be created were only relevant to local Buddhist groups and were never considered by the court. Even though there was a court edition, the court was only responsible for funding it and left monks to compile it. The imperial family had little effect on the structure, the content, or the methods of compilation of the court editions. After the Kaiyuan period, Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762) in the Tang dynasty prevented some scriptures from being included in the canon. This practice was adopted and strengthened by emperors from later generations. The scriptures translated by

monks had to be approved by the court or they would not be collected into the canon.

Since the Qin and Han dynasties, China had been basically under unified political power, and emperors had the supreme authority. The imperial intervention in canon formation was, actually, a kind of guided control of political power over divine power. To perpetuate their own long-term stability, Chinese feudal rulers would never have approved the rise of any independent religious power; instead, they had to integrate religious power into their power structure and put it under their control. The imperial intervention in the contents of the canon was a sign that the political power controlled the development of Buddhism and made it part of the imperial bureaucratic system.

As for external markers of the canon, during this stage, the “Labeling Method by the Thousand Characters Classic” (*Qianziwen zhihao fa* 千字文祇號法) was adopted. This character-based call number system quickly replaced the storage-based method, verse-based method, and other methods. It spread further after the national unification of the canon and was adopted by the editions after *Kaibao Canon*. From another perspective, the appearance of the “Labeling Method by the Thousand Characters Classic” also helped to promote the progress of the national unification of the canon.

After the 845 persecution, different editions of the canon were gradually unified under the framework of *Register of Canonical Texts* in Zhisheng’s catalog, while editions from different places still showed differences. This situation was caused by regional variations of local Buddhism in different places, the distinction between doctrinal and faith-based devotional traditions, various needs for having a canon, the unstable nature of handwritten manuscript editions, and so on. Due to these reasons, various editions of Zhisheng’s catalog appeared. The situation was different from that before the 845 persecution during the Huichang 會昌 reign, since the various editions were based on a standard checklist, namely Zhisheng’s catalog. Because of this variety, three canonical systems, representing the “Central Plain” region, the northern region, and the southern region, appeared in the block-printing period.¹¹

¹¹ The three systems were first proposed by Chikusa Masaaki. Fang Guangchang worked out similar ideas independently in his early work. See Chikusa (2000, 271–362). Professor Fang Guangchang confirmed this in an e-mail to Jiang Wu, October 13, 2010. —Translator’s note.

The Stage of the Coexistence of Handwritten and Block-Printed Copies: Tenth to Early Twelfth Century

This stage corresponds to the period from the printing of *Kaibao Canon* to the end of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), during which, even though block-printed copies of the canon first appeared, handwritten copies were still popular. As the block-printed copies became more numerous, the number of handwritten copies began to decline. Therefore, during this period, block-printed and handwritten copies coexisted. In China, this lasted from the printing of *Kaibao Canon* to the end of the Northern Song dynasty; in Japan, this period was much longer, lasting until the Edo period (1615–1868). We have found several handwritten editions from this period, such as the Jinsushan edition 金粟山藏經, the Faxisi edition 法喜寺藏經, and the Daheningguo edition 大和甯國藏經. In addition, there are many copies written in gold or silver ink. Extant handwritten manuscripts handed down from the Northern Song dynasty are now considered first-rate cultural relics for their fine paper and elegant handwriting. Thus it can be seen that the form and function of this type of canon tended to be more and more faith-based.

The Stage of Pure Merit Accumulation: Early Twelfth to Early Twentieth Century

This stage roughly corresponds to the period from the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), during which block-printed editions of the canon completely replaced handwritten ones in China and became the major means of production and circulation. However, the handwritten editions did not disappear completely. Although their philosophical function declined, their faith-based function was highlighted. The handwritten editions in this period were mainly written in gold or silver ink. According to the research materials we have now, people did not stop making gold or silver-lettered canons until the Qing dynasty. Nowadays, although no one tries to make any complete gold or silver-lettered copies of the canon, there are still some people making handwritten, gold- or silver-lettered, and even blood-written copies of scriptures, in order to gain merit. All the above can be seen as evidence of purely merit-oriented devotion. In recent years, people have been making copies of scriptures for the sake of calligraphic demonstration, which is a sign of the popularity of Buddhist culture. We can expect that the art-oriented and merit-oriented copy-making will be long-standing traditions.

As discussed above, in the first four stages of the history of handwritten editions, there were only handwritten copies, while in the last two stages, editions of other forms coexisted with the handwritten ones. Our division of such stages can only provide an overview; the actual situation is much more complicated. In some cases, when a stage had already ended, the following one did not start immediately. Or sometimes two stages overlapped. The disparity among regions in China added much more complexity. Thus, this kind of periodization is only for convenience.

The very fact that handwritten canons were copied by particular groups of people gives rise to some basic features, that is, the uniqueness of each individual copy. This means that each copy of the canon or scripture copied by hand is the only one extant in the world. This contrasts sharply with block-printed canons, for copies printed from the same set of blocks are totally the same. Thus, there must be differences in the copies of the same scripture that were hand-copied by different people, and copies of the same scripture copied by the same people at different times. This formal uncertainty—or, in other words, scribal/textual fluidity—is another feature of the handwritten canon. The combination of uniqueness and fluidity determines its basic characteristics, summarized in the following:

1. Differences in number of lines and number of characters in each line (*xingkuan* 行款), design of boundary lines (*jielan* 界欄), and calligraphic style;
2. Differences in scribal style such as redaction of the content and the use of different kinds of Chinese characters;
3. Differences in textual content of different editions due to addition, deletion, accidental omission, and scribal errors;
4. Differences in the division of fascicles and chapters due to the use of different master copies;
5. Differences in the scope of inclusion and structure of the canon due to regional, temporal, and personal variations in their creation.¹²

Because of the uniqueness and fluidity of the handwritten canon, we have to seek commonalities while preserving minor differences by temporarily ignoring details and searching for a system of textual transmission based on the original master copies. Here we must establish the concept of “text lineage” (*chuanben* 傳本, literally “transmitted texts”). For every handwritten copy,

¹² Detailed explanation about manuscript morphology is omitted. —Translator’s note.

whether it is a copy of scripture or a whole set of the canon, if it is not the original, it must have a master copy from which it was made. Both original copies and later copies form a system of text lineage. The handwritten copies that belong to the same text lineage are considered the same edition of the canon.

Then, the question is how to distinguish different systems of text lineage. Here I rely on the “three essential elements” of the canon proposed in 1988, namely selection criteria, structural system, and external marker, to solve the issue. These three elements focus on content, structure, and physical markers of the canon respectively. The internal characteristics of the canon can be presented in the aspects of content and structure, while the external ones are shown by physical markers. We can use these three elements to evaluate and examine any handwritten edition of the canon. If all the three elements are changed, the edition of the canon is changed and will be considered a new edition. If only external markers are changed, the canon is still considered unchanged. But if the content or structure is changed, the edition of the canon with the new internal elements will be considered a new one. Therefore, the decisive factors distinguishing the editions of the handwritten canon are their internal characteristics.

To study an edition of the handwritten canon, the most important procedure is to analyze its catalog, because the content and structure of that edition are presented in the catalog. No matter how different the handwritten editions’ external markers are, they are considered to belong to the same system of text lineage if they are based on the same catalog. Because of the uniqueness and fluidity of handwritten editions, even when there are subtle differences in structure or content between two sets of a canon, we still consider that they belong to the same system of text lineage. For example, compared with *Great Kaiyuan Canon* 開元大藏, the several sets of the canon on which *Kehong’s Phonetic Glossaries of Buddhist Sūtras* (*Kehong yinyi* 可洪音義) is based, included editions of scriptures that were not in Zhisheng’s catalog (*Kaiyuan lu*). However, we still consider the canon Kehong worked on as a variation of *Kaiyuan Canon*. For another example, although a canon compiled at Longxing Monastery 龍興寺 in the Dunhuang region under Tibetan rule added several new scriptures not contained in Daoxuan’s catalog (*Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄), we still consider it to belong to the system of Daoxuan’s catalog.

Because of the role catalogs played in the study of manuscript canons, we must study various Buddhist catalogs in depth and among them identify the catalogs for the canon. As for the text lineages of manuscript scriptures or

canons and their transformation, there are very few people who have done serious research, and it should become a focus in the future.

In order to determine if a copy of manuscript scripture belongs to a canon or not, we need to examine the physical copy by first checking if there are external markers such as the case number (*zhihao* 秩號). If there is a case number, this copy must belong to a canon. Then we can look at the colophon and see if it mentions whether the creation of the copy was for a canon or not. Finally, we can establish links within a group of copies through comparison and thus establish their identity.

The Block-Printing Period

More research is needed to determine when the earliest printed materials first appeared in Chinese history. The earliest block-printed canon was *Kaibao Canon*, printed in the early Song dynasty; the latest was *Piling Canon* 毗陵藏, printed in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican China.¹³ During the 1,000 years in between, more than twenty editions of the block-printed canon were produced. However, despite the number and size of the court editions and private editions, the development of the Chinese Buddhist canon was declining along with Chinese Buddhism. New editions such as the *First Supplement to Jiaxing Canon* (*Jiaxing Xuzang* 嘉興續藏) and the *Second Supplement to Jiaxing Canon* (*Jiaxing you xuzang* 嘉興又續藏) collected more Chinese Buddhist works than ever before. During the block-printing stage, the overall structure of the canon did not change very much. In external form, the Chinese canon evolved from the scroll style (*juanzhouzhuang* 卷軸裝) to the accordion-folding style (*jingzhezhuang* 經折裝), and then to the stitched-booklet style (*xianzhuang* 線裝).¹⁴

Compared with the handwritten canon, the most important feature of the block-printed canon is its uniformity. The copies made from the same set of

¹³ This is an unfinished edition sponsored by Sheng Xuanhuai and recently discovered by Fang Guangchuang. In the last few years of the Qing dynasty, the famous official merchant and entrepreneur Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 (1844–1916) sponsored the carving of a new canon based on the Dragon edition as a project with Yang Wenhui's 楊文會 (1837–1911) printer in Nanjing (*Jinling kejingchu* 金陵刻經處). This project was never finished. Fang Guangchang recently discovered a few copies in a library and named it *Piling Canon* 毗陵藏, after Sheng Xuanhuai's dharma name. See Fang (2007). —Translator's note.

¹⁴ For these binding styles, see Tsien (1985, 64, 86–8, 227–34). —Translator's note.

carved wood blocks have the same format and layout. Therefore, the engraved blocks on which the copies are based become the most persuasive basis for distinguishing different editions of the block-printed canon. Once the blocks are engraved, the internal characteristics such as content and structure are fixed. Because of the enormous scope of a whole set of the canon, a considerable number of blocks were used in the printing process. For example, *Kaibao Canon* used 130,000 blocks. In order to manage them systematically and to identify each individual block, engravers created block numbers and carved them to create “external markers” of a canon on the blocks as well. Thus, the blocks, which reflect all “three elements of the canon,” become the basis for us to distinguish different editions of the block-printed canon, just as catalogs are the basis for the study of the handwritten canon.

We can therefore establish a principle that if the blocks are different, even though two sets of the canon were compiled under the same catalog, they are different editions. This is very important for clarifying the confusion of several editions of the block-printed canon. For example, there is a question about how many Liao dynasty (916-1125) texts recently found in a wooden pagoda in Ying County 應縣, Shanxi Province, belong to the canon. Although scholars have been debating it for a long time, there is still no consensus. They did not realize that a common criterion of evaluation is needed. If we pay more attention to the blocks and compare them carefully, we can discover that only copy No. 7 belongs to the canon. Also, the Liao edition has a bigger-character version and a small-character version. In addition, printed copies from *Fangshan Stone Canon* (*Fangshan shijing* 房山石經) were produced during the Liao and Jin dynasties but were based on *Liao Canon*. Questions remain about how the three were related. After we consider blocks as the only criterion to distinguish different editions of the canon, we can declare confidently that the bigger-character edition, the small-character edition, and the *Fangshan Stone Canon* edition existed simultaneously but belong to different editions of the canon (Fang 2004). In a similar vein, although *Zhaocheng Canon* (*Zhaochengzang* 趙城藏) and the *First Korean Canon* (*Chuke Gaoli zang* 初刻高麗藏) were reprints of *Kaibao Canon*, these were all independent editions because they have their own blocks.

Analyzing the blocks for an edition not only covers details such as the size of the blocks, number of characters in a line and number of lines, boundary design, and block numbers, but also refers to the overall condition of a whole set of blocks. Many editions of the canon had been repaired and supplemented. For example, the blocks of *Qisha Canon* (*Qisha zang* 磧砂藏) were engraved in the Song dynasty, supplemented in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), and

repaired in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Puning Canon* (*Puning* 普寧藏) was supplemented with scriptures of the esoteric tradition. *Yongle Southern Canon* (*Yongle nanzang* 永樂南藏) was supplemented in the Wanli reign (1572–1620) in the Ming dynasty. In addition, damage cannot be avoided, and blocks used for a long period need repairs. For example, *Chongning Canon* (*Chongning zang* 崇寧藏) was repaired several times. When the Cultural Relics Publishing House (*Wenwu chubanshe* 文物出版社) reprinted *Qing Canon* or *Dragon Canon* (*Qing Long Zang* 清龍藏) in recent years, original blocks were rearranged, supplemented, and repaired on a large scale. If the main body of a set of blocks is not changed but only repaired and partly supplemented, we consider it a new version of the same edition. That is to say, one edition of the canon may have different copies made from the same blocks and different versions caused by supplements and repairs. Thorough studies of different versions of one edition of the canon will be an important task in canon research. For example, it is significant to clarify the relationship among the original version, the supplemented version, and the repaired version of *Zhaocheng Canon* carved during the Jin dynasty. If the alleged *Hongfa Canon* (*Hongfa zang* 弘法藏) is indeed a supplemented version of *Zhaocheng Canon*, it will not be considered an independent edition.¹⁵

The Modern Printing Period

The modern printed editions can be classified into two types based on the method of production: typographic printed and photographic printed.

Typographic Printed Editions

There are two kinds of typographic printed canons—metal-type printed editions and laser-typeset printed editions. The metal-type editions are printed with movable metal type and conform to modern book standards. The editions of this type include the Kōkyō edition (*Kōkyōzō* 弘教藏), the Zōkuzōkyō edition (*Dai Nihon Zōkuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經), and the Taishō edition (*Taishōzō* 大正藏) in Japan. In China, there were the Pinjia edition

¹⁵ In Japan, the Tenkai edition produced in the early Edo period was printed with movable wooden type, and it is the only movable wooden-type printed edition. Although both wooden-type printing and block-printing belong to the scope of ancient printing, they are two different technologies. Thus I will not discuss it further in this paper.

(*Pinjiazang* 頻伽藏) and the Puhui edition (*Puhuizang* 普慧藏). Laser typesetting uses the technology of laser plate-making. In China, canons printed in this way include the Wenshu edition (*Wenshu dazangjing* 文殊大藏經), which was aborted halfway through, and the Foguang edition 佛光大藏經, which is in progress.

The modern printed editions have the advantages of sharp fonts, practical bookbinding style and layout, and a large amount of information. What deserves special mention here is that the appearance of the modern printed canon is connected to the rise of modern academic research on Buddhism. The Taishō edition, an example of the newly compiled canons, has high academic value not only in its collation and punctuation but also in its unique design of a classification system and its scientific and practical index. With such advantages, the modern printed editions replaced the block-printed ones as soon as they appeared.

Although the level of technology used in metal-type printing and in laser-typeset printing is different, both require manual input and typesetting by computer. Because it is hard to avoid typos even with careful collation, there is no essential distinction between these two types of modern printing in terms of accuracy.

Photographic or Facsimile Editions

There are also two types of photographically printed editions. The first type does not make any changes to the original copy. The modern photographically printed versions of *First Southern Canon* (*Chuke nanzang* 初刻南藏), *Yongle Northern Canon* (*Yongle beizang* 永樂北藏), *Qing Dragon Canon* (*Qing Long Zang* 清龍藏), and *Pinjia Canon* are all of this type. The second type resets and reedits the original copies. Editions of the second type include the modern Taiwan edition and the Beijing edition of *Chinese Tripitaka* (*Zhonghua Dazangjing* 中華大藏經).

Now the ancient block-printed canons have become cultural relics and the photographic printed editions can present photocopies of the original canon. Although the photocopies are not the same as the original blocks, they are convenient for researchers studying ancient editions of the canon. The photographically printed copies usually employ modern bookbinding and layout, making reading more convenient. Therefore, the photographically printed copies are very popular.

Determining the Independent Status of Modern Printed Editions

The catalog on which a particular edition is based is the main criterion used to determine whether a modern printed edition is an independent one or not. If the catalog shows independent content and structure, we will consider the edition a new one. In addition, we have to focus on the historical transmission of that edition, namely, the original version and collated version.

According to these two criteria, all the typographically printed editions are new editions. Because the cost of typesetting is high and the process provides more room for rearranging the content, modern compilers take the opportunity to compile a new edition of the canon. In terms of text lineage, for example, the Taishō edition is very different from the Pinjia edition, mainly because they used different master copies for printing and different copies for collation.

The status of photographically printed editions is more complicated to determine. As mentioned above, there are two types of photographically printed editions. The first one does not make any changes to the original copies, while the other resets and reedits their content and structure. The first type follows the original catalog and keeps the original form, so we consider the photographically printed editions of this type the same edition as the original copy. The Qisha edition, which was photographically printed in the 1930s, is a special edition. Because the original copy was missing a number of volumes, some scriptures from other editions were added to this reprint, as explained by the compilers in the instructions and catalog attached to the end of this edition. The photographically printed version of the Qisha edition did not cause confusion in the recognition of editions and did not change the arrangement of the original, reflecting the true face of the ancient block-printed Qisha edition. So we still consider the photographically printed version the same edition as the original Qisha version. The supplemented part in the photographic printed version resembles the supplemented engravings in ancient block-printed editions. The Beijing edition of *Chinese Tripitaka* can be taken as an example of the other kind of modern printed canon that rearranges the order of the original content. Although the Beijing edition of *Chinese Tripitaka* is based on *Zhaocheng Canon*, the whole collection of *Chinese Tripitaka* contains about 10,000 fascicles of texts. The total number of texts in *Zhaocheng Canon*, however, accounts for half of the content in the Beijing edition of *Chinese Tripitaka*. The rest includes texts taken from other editions of the canon and even texts input through computer. Compared with *Zhaocheng Canon*, the structure and order of content of the Beijing edition

were changed enormously, and it made many supplements and repairs to *Zhaocheng Canon*. What's more, its catalog is different. Therefore, it is not a simple photographic version of *Zhaocheng Canon* but a new edition. (Some people still believe, inaccurately, that the Beijing edition of *Chinese Tripitaka* is a photographic version of *Zhaocheng Canon*.) We have to admit the independent status of this edition, which inherited the contents of *Zhaocheng Canon* and eight other editions. So, when we evaluate the Beijing *Chinese Tripitaka*, we cannot ignore its legacy from *Zhaocheng Canon*. In sum, in the study of modern printed editions, we have to take both their catalogs and their text lineages into consideration.

The Digital Period

With the rapid development of technology, the digital age of books has come, and the Chinese Buddhist canon entered the digital world in the 1980s. The digitization of the canon has greatly progressed in the past twenty years. The process can be divided into two stages.

Initial Stage

The major feature of the initial stage is “media transformation,” in which the paper medium of the Chinese Buddhist canon was transformed into digital data. Correspondingly, similar to the division of typographic and photographic printings, the digital canon in the initial stage also has two types: one is manual input, and the other OCR (Optical Character Recognition) input.

In the mid-1990s, *Tripitaka Koreana* completed the digital transformation first. This success laid a solid foundation for future works. After the completion of the digital version of *Taishō Canon*, the digital transformation spread to Chinese Buddhist academic communities throughout the world. The major advantage of the digital canon is its full text retrieval system through which instantaneous retrieval, storage, and spread of information brings great convenience for researchers.

OCR scanning of a whole collection of the canon was first finished in the late 1990s. Now the scanned editions of the canon include *Taishō Canon*, *Yongle Northern Canon*, and *Qing Dragon Canon*. Although the scanned canons cannot realize the function of full-text retrieval, the information contained in paper copies that would take several bookshelves to store can be condensed on a small hard disk. Compared with photographically printed

editions, the scanned ones indeed have more advantages. Completion of the scanning paved the way for the advanced stage of the digital period.

Although the electronic texts created in this initial stage have many advantages, the deficiencies of the typographic and photographic printed versions still exist in them because they are basically simple transformations of media. In addition, there are two more problems in the electronic canon:

(1) Textual variations in different electronic versions

Early in the initial stage of the digital period, there was great enthusiasm for textual input of scriptures and the entire canon, as many people were working in this area. However, the quality of text input by different people or groups is different. Therefore, there might be several electronic versions of different quality for *Taishō Canon*. However, in the past seventeen years, after resource integration and competition, the version of *Taishō Canon* created by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA) in Taiwan has been recognized by the public, while other versions have disappeared gradually.¹⁶

The early electronic texts input by CBETA contain many mistakes, but the texts were gradually collated and corrected. Thus, early texts are different from later texts. Since the electronic texts created by CBETA were released gradually, different versions of the same electronic texts have been spread around the world. Due to lack of information about when the texts were input, ordinary readers may have difficulty distinguishing different versions.

(2) Public credibility of electronic texts

It can be either an advantage or a disadvantage that electronic texts are easy to revise. By revising, electronic texts may be perfected. However, revision can cause instability of these texts, negatively affecting their public credibility. The electronic version of *Taishō Canon* created by CBETA has been widely accepted among Buddhist researchers, despite its mistakes and typos. Because the electronic version has corrected many typographical errors in the original, we consider its quality better than or as good as the original *Taishō Canon*. But when careful scholars search CBETA's electronic version, they still have to check against the original *Taishō Canon* when they need to indicate the sources of quotations. Therefore, we have to determine how to establish public credibility of electronic texts. This is of course not a problem Buddhist scholars have to deal with alone. Rather, it is linked to public opinion about electronic texts in the whole society. In my opinion, one way to gain public

¹⁶ For an overview of CBETA and its projects, see Tu (2016). —Translator's note.

trust in electronic texts of the Chinese Buddhist canon is to number the published texts, build databases for different versions of electronic texts, and keep records of revisions.

All electronic versions that appeared in the initial stage are simple transformations of certain original editions of the canon. Since they all depend on the original editions, they do not have independent status and do not belong to new editions of the canon. Catalog is still the criterion for distinguishing different editions.

The Advanced Stage

The major feature of the advanced stage of the digital canon is the hypertext link, namely, showing the hyperlinks of different data resources on the same screen in order to meet different readers' demands. There are two levels of hyperlinks in the canon: the ordinary hypertext at the low level and the interactive hypertext at the high level.

One representative of the so-called ordinary hypertext is the *Chinese Buddhist Tripiṭaka Electronic Text Collection* 電子佛典集成 created by CBETA in April 2004.¹⁷ Its basic content includes the first fifty-five volumes and the eighty-fifth volume of *Taishō Canon*, and ten volumes under the category of historical biography in the *Newly Compiled Japanese Supplemented Canon* (*Shinsan Dai-Nihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經). The desktop structure of this collection is designed according to the principle of "combining texts and their commentaries together" (*yishu lishu* 以疏隸書) first proposed by Yang Wenhui 楊文會, thus changing the content and structure of the canon and providing new functions that the traditional canon does not have.

The so-called interactive hypertext is a new form of the canon based on active reader participation on the Internet (Fang 2002b). The future development of the digital canon remains to be seen. In my opinion, in the next few years or decades, a newly collated digital canon with the scanned images on the top and electronic texts below will appear; so will a hypertext canon with an interface that can accommodate multiple editions and allow switching back and forth among them. The new digital canon will not only be a simple database but also provide researchers with different kinds of research tools.

¹⁷ This was the latest edition when the author wrote this paper. —Translator's note.

As new forms of the canon appear, the criteria for evaluating different editions in the digital era will change as well. They will be neither internal content and structure, nor external markers; the “three elements” of the Chinese Buddhist canon will be abandoned in the advanced stage of the digital period. The amount of information contained in the digital canon and the types, numbers, and functions of the research tools that the digital version can provide will be the criteria to evaluate different versions of the canon. This is a leap forward in quality.

In the digital era, the traditional paper-based canon will never disappear, and will develop toward the format of luxury bookbinding and layout to enhance its faith-based functions. The ideal canon should have three functional forms—the philosophy-oriented type, the faith-based type, and the research database type (Fang 1997). It is very difficult for the previous versions of the canons to achieve all three. The combination of digital and paper-based editions will realize this ideal.

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