

The Publication of the Piling Canon in the Late Qing^{*}

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Piling Canon refers to a woodblock-printed Chinese Buddhist Canon during the late Qing Dynasty. Despite its historical significance, it has received limited attention from the academia, as its discovery took place after the turn of the 21st century. This study explores the background, supervisor, proofreader, engravers, donors, and other factors that contributed to the publication of the Piling Canon. It was supervised by Buddhist monk Qingrong in Changzhou Tianning Monastery from 1908 to 1926, due to the commission of Yang Wenhui. By investigating the historical records in the colophons of Piling Canon, we found that engraving locations are distributed in Hubei, Yangzhou, and Danyang which engravers operated in groups; the majority of donors were found to be individuals and group forms, social fundraising was included as well. It is noteworthy that Sheng Xuanhuai made a significant contribution in terms of funding. Furthermore, the production of the Piling Canon confirms to the commence of Buddhism revival, as Buddhist scriptures in Jiangnan regions were almost destroyed after the Taiping Rebellion. The research shed light on extensive participation of cultural celebrities, diverse donation forms, and excellent engraving, offering a vivid depiction of Buddhist belief and social landscape in Jiangnan region.

Keywords: Piling Canon, Buddhist scriptures, Tianning Monastery, donors, Jiangnan

Introduction

The Piling Canon (毗陵藏) is a woodblock-printed Buddhist Canon produced by Tianning Monastery (天寧寺) in Changzhou (常州) during the late Qing Dynasty. Regarding its discovery, Fang Guangchang (方廣鎔) gave a report on “Pilingzang Chutan” (毗陵藏初探) at the International Academic Seminar of Chinese Tripitaka held in Shanghai in 2007, designating the newly discovered Buddhist scriptures engraved in Changzhou Tianning Monastery as “Piling Canon” (Fang, 2010, p. 335). Later, Li Jining (李際寧) mentioned it in the article “Jinsanshinian Xinfaxian de Fojiao Dazangjing jiqi Jiazhi” (近三十年新發現的佛教大藏經及其價值) (Li, 2007). Afterwards, the only relevant research was Deng Ying (鄧影) and Yin Heng’s (尹恒) (2018, pp.146-152) article “Pilingzang Suojian Yinbengailu Ji banke Shulue” (毗陵藏所見印本概錄及版刻述略), which introduces information about 19 volumes of Piling Canon. Since the Piling Canon first came to light, there has been little research on it, so further exploration is needed.

According to Fang and Deng, the Piling Canon can be identified as follows: At the bottom of type area, there is a Thousand-Character Classic (千字文) number, and the end of the colophons records “Changzhou Tianning Monastery” (常州天寧寺). Based on its format characteristics and identification standards, we found

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over one hundred volumes of Piling Canon in recent years. As a folk private-printed Buddhist canon, the colophons of Piling Canon are highly detailed, including donors, donation amount, donation wish, supervisor, engravers, carving time, and location. The research on historical materials of Piling Canon not only unveils the contributed factors of Piling Canon, but also provides valuable insights into religion, folk customs, and the dissemination of Buddhist scriptures in the Jiangnan (江南) region during the late Qing Dynasty, which is worth exploring and utilizing.

Background: The Period of Decline in Buddhism

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Buddhist theories had no special achievements and Buddhism sects had been sluggish. The number of monasteries and monks was restricted during the reign of Kangxi (康熙) (r.1654-1722) in Qing Dynasty, however, in Yongzheng (雍正) era (r.1723-1735), that official permit lost its power due to the negligence of management. It was unavoidable to have both good and bad monks in a large Buddhist community, accelerating the decline of Buddhism. In that circumstance, many Buddhists devoted to the collation and circulation of Buddhist scriptures, as important means and channels to promote the Dharma. After the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国运动), the Buddhist scriptures in Jiangnan region were almost destroyed. In view of this, Qingrong (清鎔, 1852-1922) was commissioned by Yang Wenhui (楊文會, 1837-1911) to engrave and print Buddhist scriptures.

Qingrong was the key figure behind the initiation of the Piling Canon. Qingrong, also known as Yekai (冶開), was born in Yangzhou (揚州), Jiangsu Province, who formerly served as the abbot of Tianning Monastery and the president of the Chinese Buddhist Association. He had good friendship with the famous Buddhist scholar Yang Wenhui. The biography of Qingrong recorded his relationship with Tianning Monastery:

When Qingrong was a child, he reached the Tianning Monastery for the first time and went away after lodging. Several years later, he entered the meditation hall in Tianning Monastery, keeping in deep meditation with enlightenment. He had stayed and studied in temple for five years. When he was thirty-eight years old, he returned to Tianning Monastery, then became the abbot and rebuilt the palace. (Yu, 2023, p. 276)

Qing Rong was lifelong devoted to Buddhist culture and social welfare, he raised funds for the construction of Wenbi Pagoda (文筆塔), Zhengcheng Bridge (政成橋), Taiping Monastery in Changzhou (常州太平寺), the palace of Lingyin Monastery in Hangzhou (杭州靈隱寺), Xingfu Monastery in Changshu (常熟興福寺), and established the Buddhist chanting association at the Jade Buddha Monastery (玉佛寺) in Shanghai.

The beginning of the scripture carving in Tianning Monastery was closely connected with the Jinling Buddhist Scripture Carving Office (金陵刻經處) which was set up by Yang Wenhui. Yang deeply felt that it relies solely on the circulation of Buddhist scriptures to benefit all sentient beings during the degenerated period of Buddhism. Consequently, he gathered in Nanjing to vow to carve the Buddhist scriptures. Here is a quotation from *Weikuan che chanshi taming* (惟寬徹禪師塔銘, Pagoda inscription of monk Weikuan):

Since the Ming Dynasty, monk Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603) began to print canon with thread binding instead of Chinese Pothi blinding to facilitate printing and circulation. After the Taiping Rebellion, the Buddhist scriptures were almost destroyed. Those who aspired to promote Buddhism donated to the production of Buddhist scriptures privately, with the most influential in Jinling (modern Nanjing). Qingrong's disciple, Xingshi 行實 (d.u.), was hired to proofread scriptures at the Jinling Buddhist Scripture Carving Office and received high praise from Yang Wenhui. However, Yang Wenhui was getting old and had difficulty managing the project of scripture carving alone, so he asked Tianning Monastery to cooperate

with. Therefore, Qingrong established the Piling Buddhist Scripture Carving Office 毗陵刻經處, with the assistance of Wei Kuan 惟寬 (1868-1937) and Ying Ci 應慈 (1873-1965). (Du, 1980, p. 240)

Piling Buddhist Scripture Carving Office of Tianning Monastery¹ (Fang, 2010, pp. 372-74) had a large scale with rich scriptures, which can be compared to Jinling although established relatively late.

In addition, it is inferred that the publication time of Piling Canon was from the thirty-fourth year of the Guangxu (光緒) era (1908) to the fifteenth year of the Republic of China (1926) based on existing data² (Fang 2010, p. 352). In Qingrong's letter to Gao Hengsong (高恒松) on the day of October 24th, 1919, it mentioned that "The Monastery where I stay (Tianning Monastery) has started the carving of Buddhist scriptures...the sample of the scriptures has been finished, 20 volumes of the Fahuajing Yaojie 法華經要解 was engraved firstly." (Huang, 2002, p. 125). The engraving time of the Fahuajing Yaojie was recorded in the thirty-fourth year of the Guangxu era (1908), which indicated the official start of the carving process. According to the existing scriptures, the latest engraving time was the fifteenth year of the Republic of China (1926) recorded on the Yoga Yigui Jing (瑜伽儀軌經), the specific time on the colophon is:

In two thousand nine hundred and fifty-three years in Buddhist calendar, fifteen years of the Republic of China, the year of bingyin, on the fourteen day of June in lunar calendar, the twenty-third day of July in Gregorian calendar, the day of Great Heat 佛曆兩千九百五十三年中華民國十五年紀次丙寅陰曆六月十四日陽曆七月廿三號屆大暑節.

In addition, Wujin Tianning Sizhi (武進天寧寺志, *the History of Wujin Tinaning Monastery*) recorded that:

the process of carving had lasted for over ten years and had been produced thousands of volumes. If it weren't for the misfortune of the social changes, the engraving process of Buddhist Canon might had not been incompleted. 天寧寺所刻經籍, 歷時十餘年, 成書數千卷, 苟非厄於世運, 全藏或以告成. (Pu, 1948, p. 1)

The social changes mentioned should refer to the establishment of the Nanjing Nationalist Government in 1927. In the same year, the interior of Tianning Monastery also experienced difficulties. It was an incident that the villagers were incited to rebel against the Tianning Monastery rental which caused negative impact, and to some extent made it difficult for the scripture carving to continue. Based on these considerations, we can confirm that the engraving progress was ended before 1927.

Condition: Clear Division of Labor and Excellent Engravers

As mentioned above, the engraving project of the Piling Canon was supervised by Qingrong. Remarkable words can be seen such as "常州天寧寺清鎔謹識 Qingrong of Changzhou Tianning Monastery" recorded in the colophons, however, it had been changed to "常州天寧寺刻經處謹識 Changzhou Tianning Monastery Scripture Engraving Office Recorded" since he died in 1922.

Additionally, the proofreading task was carried out by Weikuan³ with the assistance of Wu Jingyu (吳鏡予, 1883-?) and Tu Jingshan (屠敬山, 1856-1921) (Wu, 1947, p. 1). Weikuan was rigorous and meticulous in his work of proofreading. The History of Tinaning Monastery recorded that Weikuan concurrently inherits the

¹ The initial purpose of establishing the Piling Buddhist Scripture Carving Office was to assist Jinling in completing the publication of Buddhist Canon, but later it changed to independent scripture carving (Fang, 2010, pp. 372-374).

² Fang Guangchang speculated that the upper limit of its engraving time was between 1904 and 1911, approximately near 1910, and the lower limit time did not exceed 1927 (Fang, 2010, p. 352).

³ Wei Kuan, also named Xianche (顯徹), was a Zen monk of the Linji school (臨濟宗). He lived in the Tianning Monastery of Changzhou for over forty years with a simple and frugal life.

aspirations of Qingrong to print and engrave Buddhist scriptures, and serves as a proofreader. He was busy with proofreading text in the midst of crowd throughout the day, and you can see deep concentration and purified mind by his diligent work (Du, 1980, p.90).

On the basis of historical records, the original copy of Piling Canon was the Long Canon (龍藏), and the scriptures were proofread in terms of the Yongle Southern Canon (永樂南藏). According to *Qing neiwu qingzhun shuayin longzang yuanzou* (清內務請准刷印龍藏原奏, Request for Printing Long Canon from the Qing Dynasty Internal Affairs)⁴ (Li, 2007, p. 137), Qingrong went to Beijing to print Long Canon in Berlin Monastery (柏林寺) in the twenty-ninth year of the Guangxu era (1903) (Du, 1980, p. 27). The Long Canon, also called the Great Qianlong Canon (乾隆大藏經), is the last official Buddhist Canon in the history of Chinese Buddhism. It was first carved in Yongzheng era and completed in Qianlong era. Long Canon was well-known as rich content, strict selection, precise verification, and neat calligraphy. Official and private printing had been continued in more than 100 years since the carving was completed (Li & He, 2003, p. 523).

Moreover, the participation of renowned engravers such as Tao Zilin (陶子麟, 1857-1928) provided a guarantee for the quality of engraving.⁵ He was one of the four great engravers in late Qing Dynasty, and held an important position in the field of calligraphy carving. Tao Zilin was born in Huanggang (黃岡), Hubei (湖北) Province. Throughout his life, Tao engraved over 170 types and 800 volumes of books, specializing in imitating song-dynasty-style typeface (仿宋體) and soft font (軟體字). In the twelfth year of the Guangxu era, Tao set up a carving workshop in Wuchang (武昌), known as Tao Zilin's carving workshop (Qu, 1999, p. 513). Later, the workshops successively established in Three Buddha Pavilions (三佛閣) of Wuchang (武昌) and Lanling Street (蘭陵街) of Hankou (漢口), which involved not only book engraving but also publishing, printing, and sales. The engraved books by Tao's carving workshop were mostly family-private carved, many celebrated scholars, and book collectors such as Miao Quansun (繆荃孫, 1844-1919), Yang Shoujing (楊守敬, 1839-1915), Xu Naichang (徐乃昌, 1869-1943), Fu Zengxiang (傅增湘, 1872-1949), Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷, 1844-1916), Liu Shiheng (劉世珩, 1874-1926), Gan Pengyun (甘鵬雲, 1861-1940), and Liu Chenggan (劉承幹, 1881-1963), all invited Tao Zilin to engrave books before. The Shulin Qinghua (書林清話) praised his contributions:

Tao Ziling from Hubei was renowned for its imitation Song-dynasty-style typeface in book engraving, he engraved books for Miao Quansun, Yang Shoujing, Sheng Xuanhuai and other cultural celebrities. This was the pinnacle of development of engraved book endeavour in Jinling, Suzhou and Hangzhou. (Ye, 1999, p. 211)

Including Tao, other 11 engravers participating in carving process of Piling Canon are as follows: Tao Fangxi (陶舫溪)⁶ (Zhang 1996, p. 268), Tao Fushan (陶福山), Tao Zhouying (陶周楹), Zhou Chujiang (周楚

⁴ Since the Kaibao Canon (開寶藏) in the Northern Song Dynasty, the printing of Buddhist scriptures had been transferred to the management of Monasteries, which can be requested by Buddhist monks, making it more convenient to print and circulate. For further information about printing and circulation of Buddhist scriptures, see (Li, 2007, p. 137).

⁵ The engraved scriptures of Tao Zilin includes two volumes of She dacheng lun (攝大乘論), at the time of "two thousand nine hundred and forty-three years in Buddhist calendar, the fifth years of the Republic of China, in the year of Bingchen, Lunar May (佛曆兩千九百四十三年中華民國五年太歲丙辰蒲月)".

⁶ Among these engravers, Tao Fangxi had participated in carving work for the longest time and his output was the highest. Tao Fangxi was an engraver at Tao Zilin's bookstore. His carving career began in the twenty-third year of the Guangxu era (1897) with 2 volume of *Deguo Xuexiao Luelun* (德國學校論略, The Brief Comment on German Education).

江)⁷, Zhang Xudong(張旭東)⁸, Zhang Zhaochang (張肇昌), Zhang Zhaosheng (張肇升)⁹, Liang Youxin (梁友信), Zhu Tirong (朱禔榮), Zhuge Minghai (諸葛明海), and Chen Guozhen (陳國楨). The geographical distribution of these engravers is relatively concentrated: Tao Zilin, Tao Fangxi, Tao Fushan, and Tao Zhouying came from the Tao Zilin's carving workshop in Hubei; Zhou Chujiang, Zhang Zhaochang, Zhang Xudong, Zhang Zhaosheng, and Liang Youxin were carving workers in Yangzhou; Zhuge Minghai, Chen Guozhen, and Zhu Tirong were from Danyang (丹陽)¹⁰. These engravers operated in groups, either from a family or from one same region, forming cooperative bonds through blood or geographical relationships. The form of engraving operation was adopted to Jike (寄刻), which means entrusting the carving business to engravers afield and on delivery. It was not uncommon in the late Qing Dynasty, for instance, when Ye Changchi (葉昌熾) engraved Zuozhuan Buzhu (左傳補注, *Supplement Annotation*), he delivered it to Jiang Xiangsheng (蔣薌生) in Fujian for engraving (Zheng, 1995, p. 215). Another example, the Jiaye Hall (嘉業堂), a private library in Huzhou (湖州), once hired Tao Zilin and Zhou Chujiang to carve scriptures, also adopted the method of delivery so as to quickly complete through seven workshops in six places (Chen, 2009, p. 77). These operating methods had greatly improved the efficiency of carving work, enabling the Piling Canon to be produced with thousands of volumes over a decade.

Donation: Diverse Forms, Together with Monks and Laymen

As a folk private Buddhist Canon in late Qing dynasty, the donation of Piling Canon exhibits main characteristics with other canons: diverse donation forms, wide range distribution of fundraising locations, large difference in donation amount, and donors included monks and laymen.

The donation forms involve individual donations, group donations under the name of temples, and collective fundraising.

There are 56 individual donors in total that have been seen so far, some of whom have unknown birthplaces or locations. The donors consist of monks and laymen as follows: Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷), Zhuang Shanyue (莊善月), Sheng Guanyue (盛觀月), Gao Henian (高鶴年), Mi Shanlian (宓善蓮), Zhou Jihui (周寂慧), Shanshi (善世), Yang Jingchang (楊景昌), Yang Jinglv (楊景呂), Xia Fushen (夏福申), Liu Yaoshang (劉堯裳), Zou Xizeng (鄒希曾), Wei Tongchan (衛桐禪), Li Zengling (李增齡), Li Chengde (李成德), Lu Bangyou (魯邦有), Yang Yunxi (楊雲西), Zhu Shunnian (朱舜年), the above are Lay Buddhists; old monk Jishan of Yangzhou

⁷ Zhou Chujiang was the owner of the Zhou Chujiang's carving workshop in Yangzhou. The Zhou Chujiang's workshop had a wide range of business in the Jiangnan region, which not only operated engraving, but also undertook the crafts such as sample handwriting, printing, and binding.

⁸ Zhou Chujiang and Zhang Xudong both participated in the engraving process of series books of Longxi Jingshe Congshu (龍溪精舍叢書), which was charged by Zheng Guoxun (鄭國勳) and edited by Tang Yan (唐晏, 1857-1920), compiling totally 445 volumes and 60 kinds of books from the Han Dynasty to the Republic of China.

⁹ Based on the available information, the only joint engraved scriptures of the Piling Canon is the Lushan Lianzong Baojian (廬山蓮宗寶鑒) carved by Zhang Xudong and Zhang Zhaosheng together in the fourth year of the Republic of China (1915). The engraving time of Zhang Zhaosheng was recorded on October 9th, in the fourth year of the Republic of China, and Zhang Xudong's engraving time was November 21st in the same year. The two dates are near enough to indicate that it was completed by co-operation, which was more common in one carving workshop. With the same surname of Zhang Zhaochang and Zhang Zhaosheng, we can speculate that Zhang Zhaochang, Zhang Zhaosheng, and Zhang Xudong came from the same family carving shop in Yangzhou area.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, there are no relevant records of these three engravers of Danyang. However, there is a great correlation of engraved scriptures between in Danyang and Yangzhou. From the perspective of the format, only Zhu Tirong (Danyang), Zhou Chujiang (Yangzhou), Liang Youxin (Yangzhou), and Zhang Zhaochang (Yangzhou) engraved in the Xuanton (宣統) era that has the rectangular border composed of a single line in the colophons. As for geographical location, Danyang is very close to Yangzhou. Therefore, we may infer that the scripture carving work in Danyang is likely to operate together with Yangzhou.

Wanshou Monastery (揚州萬壽寺寂山老和尚), old monk Yangzhai of Dongtai Shousheng Monastery (東臺壽聖寺養齋老和尚), monk Jingquan of Jintan Jingtū Monastery (金壇淨土寺靜泉和尚), monk Qizheng of Shanghai Xuanshou Sheng Temple (上海懸壽勝庵起證和尚), monk Xilian of Zhulin Monastery (竹林寺西蓮和尚), Huilang of Taizhou Beita Monastery (泰州北塔寺慧朗), Yuanlian (元蓮), Liansheng of Siming Guangshan Monastery (四明廣善寺蓮生), abbot Yunzong of Jinshan Monastery (金山監院蘊宗), reverend Yinming (隱明首座), monk Yuanzhao (圓照和尚), monk Congpei (從沛和尚), monk Huashan (華山和尚), master Mingzhen (明真師), master Liaowu (了悟師), Zen master Xiu (修禪師), Vinaya master Dalin (大霖律師), old monk Yuedong Huanren (粵東幻人老法師), monk Jingxin (比丘淨心), monk Yingshen (比丘英參), monk Yinchī (比丘印池), monk Xiuyin (比丘修印), monk Zhanfen (比丘湛芬), monk Weikuan (比丘惟寬), monk Yangyue (比丘仰月), monk Cirong (比丘慈榮), Canyuan of Nanjing Wenshu Temple (南京文殊所燦圓), Changhai (常海), Lingchuan (靈川), nun Lianxin of Jinling Jieyin Nunnery (金陵接引庵比丘尼蓮心), nun Puhui of Shanghai Guanyin Nunnery (上海觀音庵比丘尼普慧), abbess Yunxi (雲西師太), abbess Benzhi (本智師太), abbess Lianjing (蓮淨師太), nun Yuanwu (比丘尼圓悟), Daokui (道魁), Jie'an (戒安), Jiezhen (戒珍), the above are Buddhist monks and nuns.

In addition to personally donation, the colophons also mentioned the form of group donations under the name of Fayun Hall (法雲堂) and Tranquil Lotus Temple (寧靜蓮院). According to the History of Wujin Tinaning Monastery, both of them belonged to Tianning Monastery. Fayun Hall is located behind the dining hall with six immense pillars, which was built by Daru (達如) during the Kangxi era and reconstructed by Zhenchan (真禪) during the Tongzhi (同治) era (Du, 1980, p. 22). Tranquil Lotus Temple is affiliated to Tianning Monastery that was purchased by Sheng Xuanhuai. It is located in Huanxiu Lane (環琇巷), Ximen Street, Changshu County, formerly known as Peng Jiachang (彭家場) and originally owned by the Zhao's family (Du, 1980, p. 38).

On the other hand, there are also two special donation forms, that is collective fundraising. The first one is initiated by influential Buddhist figures which can be called the sponsor (*Jingmu ren*, 經募人). The sponsors and followers of specific volumes are as listed below with the donation amount and other details.

Volume 9 of *Shenseng zhuan* (神僧傳): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, monk Jifu and Daorong each donated 40 yuan, monk Wenguo, Benquan, Jincong, Guangzhi each donated 20 yuan, monk Minyuan, Chongguang, Longzhi, and Peigui each donated five yuan, laywoman Gaomen Nan with dharma name called Congchao donated 20 yuan. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募, 機福和尚、道融和尚各助洋四十元, 文果和尚、本泉和尚、今聰和尚、廣智和尚各助洋二十元, 敏元大師、崇光大師、隆智大師、沛桂大師各助洋五元, 優婆夷高門南氏法名從超助洋二十元.)

Volume 5 of *Benshi jing* (本事經): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, monk Zeyuan donated 40 yuan, may bear good fruits to my father Jiang Peifeng and mother Jiang Chen's. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募, 比丘則願師施洋四十元, 願為本生父蔣沛豐府君、母蔣陳氏孺人同證善果.)

Volume 6 of *Benshi jing* (本事經): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, monk Qinxian and Dong'an's nephew Dasheng donated 20 yuan, may all four beings and nine places ascend to the profound entrance of Huazang world, and all eight difficulties and three paths enter the sea of Pulu Buddha together. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募, 比丘欽賢、東安侄達勝施洋二十元, 伏願四生九有同登華藏玄門, 八難三途共入毗盧性海.)

Volume 7 of *Benshi jing* (本事經): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, monk Ze donated two yuan, laywoman Xie Xu's with dharma name Huilian donated 20 yuan to pray for deceased father

Zhugong qingfo and deceased mother Wang's Qingfa to ascend the lotus realm together. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募，比丘則法師施洋二元，超薦先考朱公慶佛、先妣王氏慶法二位尊靈同登蓮域，信女謝徐氏法名慧蓮施洋二十元。)

Volume of *Dafangguang pusa shidi jing* (大方廣菩薩十地經): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, abbot master Liansheng of Siming Guangshan Monastery donated 40 yuan. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募，四明廣善寺蓮生監院大師施洋四十元。)

Volume of *Dafangguangfo huayanjing busiyi fojingjiefen* (大方廣佛華嚴經不思議佛境界分): initiated by reverend Dixian of the Toutuo Monastery in Wenzhou, layman Zhu Yiming with son Lilun of Siming Yin County donated 20 yuan. (溫州頭陀寺諦閑法師經募，四明鄞縣居士朱義明率子禮倫施洋二十元。)

Volume 1 of *Daji piyu wang jing* (大集譬喻王經): initiated by old monk Benci of Fanchuan Shuilu Monastery, old monk Shaoyun of Taizhou Guangxiao Monastery donated 20 yuan. (樊川水陸寺本慈老和尚經募，泰州光孝寺少雲老和尚施洋二十元。)

Volume 2 of *Daji piyu wang jing* (大集譬喻王經): initiated by old monk Benci of Fanchuan Shuilu Monastery, old monk Yangzhai of Dongtai Shousheng Monastery donated 100 yuan. (樊川水陸寺本慈老和尚經募，東臺壽聖寺養齋老和尚施洋一百元。)

The sponsors mentioned above, monk Dixian, Chuquan, and Benci¹¹, are all reputable monks during that period. It is worth highlighting that there are also those who initiate fundraising under the name of monastery, however, this form is seldom seen.

Another form of collective fundraising has no sponsor. The funds received and the names of the donors are detailed in the colophon. For example, in Volume 4 of *Foshuo daguanding shenzhou jing* (佛說大灌頂神咒經), the fundraisers are on the list: faithful followers Wu Rongda, Shen Dafu, Zhao Ziyi, Zhao Genlin, Hua Wu, and Yang Shifu, each donated two yuan; Kuanjing, Hongguang, Zhao Yonghuai, Gu Rongguan, Wu Hongdian, and Sun Wu, each donated one yuan; Master Zhicheng of Huacheng Monastery donated five yuan; Wu Yu's with dharma name called Migao donated four yuan; Huang Jiyuan donated six yuan, and nurture deceased father Mingrui Fujun and deceased mother Li Ruren to bear lotus; Zhao Nian'en donated two yuan, pray for deceased uncle Pizhougong to bear lotus; Huang Shitao donated two yuan to produce lotus; Hua Xihuan, donated two yuan, pray for parents to ascend lotus realm. (信善吳榮達、沈達夫、趙子義、趙根林、華吳氏、楊實甫，已以各施銀洋二元；寬靜、宏廣、趙詠懷、顧榮官、吳鴻典、孫吳氏，已上各施洋一元；化城寺智成大師，施銀洋五元；吳於氏法名彌高，施銀洋四元；黃吉園，施銀洋六元，並答先父明睿府君、母李老孺人資冥生蓮；趙念恩，施洋二元，超薦叔考丕周公生蓮；黃石濤，施洋二元，祈超生蓮；華錫煥，施洋二元，祈超父母早登蓮臺。)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the colophons also provide insights into the donors' wishes. In general, most of the desires for devout men and women are focused on personal matters concerning themselves and their loved ones, so as to accumulate merit, pray for afterlife blessings, seek liberation, and go to the Pure Land after death. For instance:

¹¹ Dixian (諦閑, 1858-1932) was born in Huangyan (黃岩), Zhejiang Province, a famous monk of Tiantai school (天臺宗). Dixian devoted his entire life to promoting Dharma, and many lay disciples such as Ye Gongchuo (葉恭綽), Jiang Weiqiao (蔣維喬), Xu Weiru (徐蔚如) came to convert. Chuquan (楚泉) was a disciple of Dixian and had close interactions with the famous scholar Ma Yifu (馬一浮). He was known as the Five Elders of Jiangnan Buddhist school in the late Qing Dynasty (清末江南宗門五老) along with Qingrong and other three monks. Benci (本慈) was the abbot of Fanchuan Shuilu Monastery.

Volume 6 of Foshuo daguanding shenzhou jing (佛說大灌頂神咒經0: With this merit and virtue, hope to find the way of Buddha dharma with childlike innocence, constantly turn the wheel of the dharma. (以此功德伏願世世童真入道在在常轉法輪.)

Volume 1 of Dafangguangfo huayanjing busiyi fojingjiefen (大方廣佛華嚴經不思議佛境界分): May the light of the triad of the Buddha add to me, so that I can free my soul with Bodhi citta. (惟願三寶慈光加彼使我闔門發菩提心同登解脫.)

Volume 1 of Foshuo wenshushili xianbaozang jing (佛說文殊師利現寶藏經): May see the Buddha in the end of life and find the way to the Pure Land. (伏願臨終見佛往生淨土.)

The analysis shows that donors including government officials, entrepreneurs, Buddhists, and even ordinary followers, spread throughout the great Jiangnan region such as Changzhou, Shanghai, Jinling, Yangzhou, Ningbo (宁波), Wenzhou (温州), Suzhou (苏州), etc. It also appears that the donation amount varies from different people, ranging from a few yuan to several hundred yuan. What is more important, the widespread influence of Buddhism on various social classes can be seen from these donors. On the one hand, the form of collective fundraising is a powerful proof of the popularity of Buddhist beliefs among ordinary people in the Jiangnan region; On the other hand, the donations from Sheng Xuanhuai as well as other prominent social figures reflect the recognition and support of Buddhism by high-level society during the Republic of China period. Therefore, despite the social turmoil and economic recession in the late Qing Dynasty, the active participation of each personage impelled the publication of thousands volumes Buddhist scriptures.

Among the several hundred volumes of the Piling Canon that we have seen, more than one-third were donated by the Sheng Xuanhuai and his wife. The Sheng's family provided abundant funds with the amount of several hundred yuan per book or volume, which extended a reliable economic condition to the production of Piling Canon.

Conclusion: The Revival of Buddhist Culture in Late Qing

As the latest woodblock-printed Chinese Buddhist Canon, the significance of Piling Canon in Chinese Buddhism history is self-evident. Formerly, scholars considered that the Kaibao Canon (開寶藏) in the Northern Song Dynasty is the earliest woodblock-printed Buddhist Canon¹² (Li & He, 2003, pp. 69-91) and continued until the Long Canon in the Qing Dynasty. However, the discovery of the Piling Canon extended the history of Chinese woodblock-printed Canons for nearly 200 years. In addition, the publication of Piling Canon is a significant supplement to the thread bound canon system. Since the Ming Dynasty, Monk Zibo Zhenke began to print canon with thread binding instead of Chinese Pothi binding to facilitate printing and circulation. On the basis of inheriting traditional techniques such as woodcarving, ink printing, and thread binding, the engraving and printing of Piling Canon in Tianning Monastery was characterized by rigorous proofreading and exquisite carving techniques. Subsequently, under the Republic of China, the two major Canons Pinjia Canon (頻伽藏) and Puhui Canon (普慧藏) were both printed with stereotype instead of woodblock, signifying the withdrew of the woodblock-printed scriptures from the historical stage.

In conclusion, this research not only shed light on contributed factors such as specific context, motivations, donations, facilitation, which reproducing a well-organized structure of Piling Canon, but also provided historical

¹² Kaibao Canon was the first official Chinese Tripitaka that carved in the fourth year of the Kaibao era of the Northern Song Dynasty (971). For further information, see (Li and He 2003, pp. 69-91).

evidence for future investigations. The Chinese Buddhist Canon is a comprehensive compilation of scriptures that has been engraved over an extensive historical period, exhibiting distinct characteristics across different sections (Li, 2023). During the late Qing Dynasty, the Piling Canon had a significant impact on the development of Buddhism in Jiangnan region. It was a joint effort of monks and laymen who played specific roles such as supervisors, proofreaders, engravers, and donors. Among these individuals, lay Buddhists especially Sheng Xuanhuai was a crucial part in the production of Piling Canon, utilizing its political and economic advantages to make important contributions. Indeed, in the turbulent society of the late Qing dynasty with extremely severe economic conditions, the project of Piling Canon was definitely a commendable cultural feat. There is no doubt that the Piling Canon carried the hope of Buddhism revival during the period of late Qing dynasty.

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