

# Light of Dharma Treasure—Collation, Preservation, Research, and Promotion of Tripitaka

## Report on My Six-year Experience of Propagating the Tripitaka

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### 1. Preface

The Tripitaka, just as was described in the Forum booklet, is the sacred scriptures of Buddhism, treasures of ancient Asian culture exchanges, and the indispensable material for oriental cultural studies. Its collation, preservation, research, reproduction, propagation, and promotion have been both the responsibility and aspiration of all Buddhists since ancient times. In China and other countries, they were the life-long focus of many patriarchs.

Since 2002, I have had the good fortune to participate in and contribute to the donation and distribution of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* as well as the Tripitaka in other languages to organizations worldwide. From my six years of propagating the canon, I have gained some experience and thus have some personal observations. I would like to take this opportunity of attending the forum to make this report and share my experiences. This is a very special opportunity for me to do so. Your feedback and corrections are warmly welcomed.

### 2. Collation, Reproduction, and Preservation of the Tripitaka throughout the Dynasties

It is believed that the collation and editing of the Tripitaka began during the Northern and Southern dynasties. With the collection of many translated sutras in the Tienjen years of Emperor Liang Wudi, the collation of the Tripitaka was begun. According to *Sui Su Jing Jie Zhi*, Shi Zhenyou compiled *Tzu San Zan Jie Ji* in the Liang dynasty. This is the earliest catalog of Buddhist texts, which is still in existence. Prior to the Sui and Tang dynasties, all copies of the sutras were hand-written. While the majority of them have been lost, a few of the hand-written copies have survived till today.

While there have been stone-carved and hand-written Buddhist texts throughout the Chinese history, carving the sutras on wood blocks to be used for printing was begun in the ninth century, late in the Tang dynasty. The earliest known wood-carved Buddhist text was uncovered in the caves at Dunhuang. It was a carved printed copy of the *Diamond Sutra* from the ninth of the Xiantong years of Emperor Tang Yizong (868) and was funded by Wang Jieh. This is the earliest printable version of a wood-carved sutra with the actual date recorded.

According to verified records, the practice of wood-carving the Tripitaka began with the *Kaibao Zan* in the Kaibao years of Emperor Song Taizu in the Northern Song dynasty in Sichuan (also known as *Shu Zan*). So generally speaking, the Tripitaka collation began in the Northern Song dynasty. Before that, carved sutras were all individual sutras and not collections of Buddhist texts.

The recorded Tripitaka collations in China include eight editions in the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties, two in the Yuan Dynasty, four in the Ming dynasty, and one in the Qing Dynasty. Outside of China they included three editions in Korea, and seven in Japan (Please refer to the information in the attachment.) The primary ones are briefly described below.

In the Tang dynasty, Chishen edited *Kai Yuan Shi Jiao Lu*, a very detailed catalog of Buddhist texts. In the Northern Song dynasty, Emperor Song Taizu decreed that carving of the *Kaibao Zan* in Yizhou (Sichuan) was to begin. This was the first set of the Tripitaka from the carved woodblocks. *Kaibao Zan* was based on the catalog of *Kai Yuan Shi Jiao Lu*, and the Tripitaka editing in later dynasties were all based on the *Kaibao Zan*. It was also taken to Korea in the Song dynasty and became the basis for *Gaolizang*.

Several Tripitaka collations were completed during the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. There were as many as four editions of the Tripitaka by the Wanli years of Emperor Ming Shenzong. They included the *Nanzan*, which was edited during the Hungwu years of Emperor Ming Taizu (carved in Nanjing), and the *Beizan* edition in the Yungle years of Emperor Ming Chengzu (carved in Beijing). In the eleventh of the Yungzheng years of Emperor Qing Shizong (1733), the emperor decreed that several officers in his cabinet and over 130 Han and Tibetan monastics were to begin another Tripitaka collation and editing version based on the *Beizan* version from the Ming dynasty. The emperor established a Tripitaka center in Xianliang Temple. This edition is also called *Qingzan* and was completed in the third of the Qianlong years of Emperor Qing Gaozong (1738). The *Qingzan* edition is also called the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon*, or simply the *Longzan*. This was the last official Tripitaka carving and edition in China, and is the most complete collection of Buddhist texts in Han ideograms. Also, its carved woodblocks are the only complete set still in existence.

The Tripitaka contains systematically collated Buddhist sutras and treatises. These have been the reliable sources for the authentic Dharma teaching since the Buddha; they are the home of wisdom. Thus, the importance and profound influence of the Tripitaka is indescribable. The editing of the Tripitaka over the dynasties preserved the translated sutras. Also, the collators discovered additional Buddhist literature and related information and included them in the Tripitaka. These efforts not only preserved the Dharma, but also made it possible for people at those times and later to learn the Dharma from reliable sources.

Upon examination of the carved woodblocks of the only extant complete set of the Tripitaka, the *Longzan*, we can see how much effort our ancestors invested in preserving this Dharma treasure. Today, some of the *Longzan*'s stone steles are kept at Yunju Temple in Beijing. When I visited the temple in 2003, I had the opportunity to see some of them, including the only wood-engraving in the *Longzan*—All Buddhas Engraving.

The wood on which the *Longzan* was carved was a superior grade of leimuk. Every carved woodblock was from a single piece. A hard wood, leimuk is very dense, sturdy, flat, and will not warp. Although movable-type printing technology was invented as early as in the Song dynasty, the printing of the *Longzan* in the Qing dynasty used fixed-type printing. It was chosen because the fixed woodblocks are easier to preserve. Perhaps, this is exactly why the carved woodblocks of the *Longzan*—the only extant complete set of the Tripitaka in Han ideograms—have been preserved successfully.

With regard to the preservation of Dharma treasures, we have to praise the *Fang San Shi Jin* stone-carving work. In the Han dynasty, Si Maqian said: “Preserve this book to wait for the right people to have it.” The work on *Fang San Shi Jin* was the epitome of such spirit!

Buddhism underwent two major persecutions during the Northern and Southern dynasties; once during the years of Emperor Taiwudi of the Northern Wei dynasty and the other during the reign of Emperor Wudi of the Northern Zhou dynasty. During the persecutions, a large number of Buddhist texts were destroyed. Also, civil war repeatedly broke out during the Northern and Southern dynasties, and it was difficult to safeguard the hand-written sutras. To protect and preserve

Dharma treasures, Patriarch Huisi conceived the idea of carving the sutras in stone and safeguarding the stone-carved steles in caves. This way the preserved steles could be used to reproduce sutras in the future.

The *Fang San Shi Jin* stone-caving was begun in the twelfth of the Dayeh years of Emperor Suiyangdi (605) by Patriarch Jinwan who carried out the will of his teacher, Patriarch Huisi. The stone carving continued through six dynasties, student after teacher and generation after generation, through the Ming dynasty (1368—1644) for a total of 1034 years. The carving resulted in a total of 1,122 Buddhist texts in 3,572 volumes on 14,278 stone steles. The effort and the scale of the work will surely never be surpassed.

When I visited Yunju Temple in 2003, I first saw the carved stone steles stored in the underground section of the Buddhist Palace at a constant temperature and moisture level. Then, favored by some special and unexplainable conditions, I also visited the cave where the carving work was conducted (regular visitors were not permitted to enter). Looking at the thousands of stone-carved steles, an intense feeling of praise arose from deep within my heart for the patriarchs for their great vows to preserve the Dharma and their hard work to carry out those vows.

### **3. Report on the Participation in the Donation and Distribution of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon***

It was an unbelievably wonderful condition that enabled me to participate in and contribute to the donation and distribution of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* as well as the Tripitaka in other languages to organizations worldwide. In the middle of 2002, I heard that Venerable Master Chin Kung and his followers respectfully advocated the reproduction of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon*. I also learned about his plan to donate the reproduced sets to national libraries and university libraries worldwide for preserving the Dharma treasure and propagating the Dharma.

As a student of the Buddha, I deeply praised this intent. On the one hand, widely propagating the Canon throughout the world would help to preserve the Dharma and prolong the Dharma life. On the other hand, where the Dharma is present Buddha is present. Also, as was said in the *Jin Yin Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon Yuan Chi*, I was also hoping that the accrued merits from propagating the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* could help eliminate or lessen the disasters in the world and bless the world with peace. At that time, I never thought that I would be involved in this work.

In the autumn of 2002, I learned from some Dharma friends on the East Coast of the United States that the donation program was not progressing well and that it was difficult to find the right approach for the donations. They wondered if I could help. At that time, I did not think I had the ability. But propagating the Dharma and prolonging the Dharma life is the inherited responsibility of every Buddhist; therefore, I was willing to give it a try. At the time they contacted me, I had just successfully coordinated and donated one set of Zen texts to the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago. With this, the network began to develop, and I contacted a few friends and formed a “Canon Donation Working Group.” We wrote to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Chicago.

The donation group succeeded on the first try! The two universities replied quickly and indicated that they were happy to receive the *Longzan* donation. This encouragement strengthened our confidence. We decided to try the Ivy League universities next. First, we delivered the Canon set to the University of Pennsylvania as an alumna donation. Then we delivered another set to one school after another, including Harvard University.

With the above accomplishment, I developed greater confidence and began to contact national libraries of many countries, selecting the United States Library of Congress as the first. Director Chen of the Library of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois provided me with the contact information of Dr. Wang, the chair of the Asian Division of the United States Library of Congress. With dedication, I wrote him long letters explaining the goal of the donation. Finally, I successfully delivered the *Longzan* to the Library of Congress after a series of security procedures. This was a big step for the donation program.

What came next was the busy inquiry and coordination work for the *Longzan* donation. It almost kept me working around the clock to write letters and then reply to letters, to arrange deliveries, and to resolve custom, catalog, and inventory issues, etc. Nevertheless, the program execution progressed smoothly. In just a few years, the organizations who accepted our donations included almost all the reputable universities and libraries in the United States, Canada, and many other countries.

The national libraries, in addition to the United States Library of Congress, included: the Royal Library of Denmark; the Jewish National and University Library; the National Library of India; the National Library, Singapore; the National Library of Estonia; the National Library of the Czech Republic; the National Library of China, and many others. A few national libraries, in Syria and Poland for example, could not make use of the Tripitaka in Chinese. Instead they requested large numbers of other Buddhist texts in English.

The universities who accepted our donations became worldwide. In the Southern Hemisphere, they included the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil and The Australian National University. In Europe, those who accepted the Canon included the University of London, Cambridge University, Oxford University, and many universities in Germany, Holland, France, Spain, and other countries.

In Asia, sets of the Canon went to the National Taiwan University in Taiwan; in China, many libraries and research centers in Peiking University, Zhejiang University, Sichuan University, and many others; as well as many academic and research institutes in Nepal, India, and Singapore.

Donating the *Longzan* was the initial focus when we began the program. Gradually, the scope was extended to include the *Taisho Tripitaka*, the *Burmese Pali Cannon*, the *Indian Pali Cannon*, a wide range of extensive sets of Buddhist literature and articles written by ancient patriarchs, and many other Buddhist texts in English and other languages. Over the six years, the number of the Dharma treasures and Tripitakas (*Longzan*, *Taisho*, and *Pali*) that have been delivered has been truly impressive, and the range of recipients very broad. I believe there will be a positive impact on the propagation and preservation of the Dharma treasures, and on promoting academic and cultural exchange in the world.

#### **4. The Outlook of Promoting the Tripitaka: My Six Year Experience of Propagating the *Longzan***

Although my donation work was not without difficulties, I was fortunate to be blessed by the Triple Jewels and guardian Bodhisattvas and to be supported by the work group volunteers and those in the organization who actually delivered the materials. Thus, all issues were resolved finally.

During the six years of donating the *Longzan*, I have gained some experience, which is briefly described below for your reference.

A. *To promote and propagate the Tripitaka and Dharma treasures requires teamwork.*

To execute this type of program, not only must the team leader have good connections, excellent communication skills and the ability to quickly adapt to and react in different situations, but there must also be an efficient support team in which every member is highly cooperative in supporting the team leader and one another in acting together and resolving difficulties. Good connections are always helpful to realize any type of program. For propagating the Tripitaka and Dharma treasures to different cultures, religions, and languages, good connections are especially important.

The experience from donating the *Longzan* indicates that finding the right person to contact in a candidate organization is the most difficult task. Good connections greatly facilitate this. For example, the chair of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library at the University of London contacted me through the introduction by the University of Illinois. Then, the chair of the Chinese Studies Library at Oxford University also contacted me through the introduction by the SOAS Library; and on it went. From such connections, the task of finding the right persons to contact in an organization became much easier through the introductions and recommendations by other organizations. This was an example and function of what the Buddhists advocate as “widely develop good affinities with people.”

Additionally, the organization to propagate and promote the Tripitaka must have strong financial support. Purchasing or printing of the Tripitakas and the extensive sets of Buddhist texts, as well as the associated costs for the overseas or inter-continental freight, storage, and custom duties are all extremely costly. Although a good number of recipients can afford the costs, many others cannot.

When I contacted the National Library of the Czech Republic shortly after the flood disaster in the Eastern Europe, they honestly told me that they wished to have a set of the *Longzan*, but they could not afford the freight and customs fee. Therefore, they could not accept the offer. I prayed for them and wished for them to soon recover from the flood damage and tried my best to make them feel better. I also committed to paying the freight for them so that the *Longzan* could be delivered.

Another example was the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil. The organization sending the books enthusiastically shipped tens boxes of Dharma books in addition to the *Longzan*. Consequently, the University of Sao Paulo declined the delivery, which would have caused these precious books to be either returned or discarded. I was on a trip when I was informed of this and immediately contacted friends in Sao Paulo for help so these Dharma books could go through customs and be delivered. I also promised to pay all the associated fees. In this way all the issues were resolved and the *Longzan* and other books were delivered to the University of Sao Paulo.

Therefore, if we want to successfully preserve, promote, and propagate Tripitaka and Buddhist texts, we really need to have dedicated Buddhists, based on the spirits of material giving, Dharma giving, and fearlessness giving, to serve and complete this task.

- B. *To promote and propagate the Tripitaka and essential Buddhist texts requires catalogers with specific expertise.*

The catalogers must be able to meet the current needs of libraries and research institutes and determine multi-lingual cataloging information in Chinese and English, as well as in other widely-used languages to help promote the research of the Tripitaka and other Buddhist texts.

Early in the donation program, Northwestern University in the United States replied to my writing and courteously declined the offer. The reason was because they did not have personnel capable of handling cataloging the Canon in Chinese and therefore would not be able to place the volumes on the shelves for public use. I felt very sorry to hear this, but I was not able to help, either.

Later on, the National Library of Estonia requested assistance to translate the bibliography of the donated Buddhist materials into English. With the lesson learned from the Northwestern University, I gathered several volunteers. We translated the bibliography into English and organized them such that the books could be placed on the shelves for use.

In the first Buddhist Forum, I made a suggestion in my article which advocated “The forum could seek support from Buddhist societies worldwide and from the Chinese government to establish a national institute of sutra translation to continue the sutra translation done by patriarchs in the past. People could gradually translate the sutras and other collections in the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* into English. Then they could properly select a few fundamental sutras and other collections and translate them into Spanish and other widely-used languages.”

This suggestion is especially important to the promotion and propagation of the Tripitaka and essential Buddhist texts. While the translation work will take a long time to complete, a cataloging system in English of the Tripitaka and Buddhist materials becomes urgent in preserving and propagating the Dharma treasures.

C. *Digitizing the Tripitaka and other extensive sets of books (for example Siku Chuansu, the Complete Library of Four Books of Literature) is imperative.*

While it is necessary to have printed Buddhist texts for circulation and preservation, we only need to have an adequate number of copies. Digitization is actually the best method for the preservation, propagation, and research of the Tripitaka and other Buddhist texts.

In the second half of 2004, I received a set of elegantly made data DVDs of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* and liked them very much. The electronic version of the *Taisho Tripitaka* has been circulating for quite some time, but it does not contain the complete set of the *Taisho Tripitaka*. The data DVDs of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* contain the complete set of the scanned files. Although there are some inconveniences when we search for information on these DVDs, they contain the entire Canon. It is already much more convenient than turning pages of paper copies.

I quickly secured the support from the DVD manufacturers in Taiwan. With a few volunteers' help, through the end of 2004, we sent two additional sets of the data DVDs plus an extensive set of the Buddhist literature by the ancient patriarchs (either Master Ouyi or Great Master Yinguang) to those organizations who had received the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* donation. This delivery of DVDs was much appreciated. In the beginning of 2005, I received additional thank-you letters from the majority of the receiving organizations. They not only thanked us again for our Canon donations, but also for the DVDs because they would greatly assist researchers in their use of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon*.

In April of 2005, the East Asian bibliographer at the University of Oregon Library wrote me a letter. In addition to thanking us for donating the data DVDs of the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* and other Dharma literature by the patriarchs, he expressed interest in designing a website to have the Canon in their university's intranet and wanted my permission to do so. I

suggested that he contact the Digital Buddhist Studies Library and Museum at the National Taiwan University and also quickly obtained the permission from the DVD manufacturer for him. Very quickly, the University of Oregon published an elegantly designed and easy-to-use online library.

Today, there are many Tripitakas and other Buddhist literature in many different languages on the internet; the quantities are beyond what many can describe. As an ancient proverb says: "Too much is as bad as too little." How to wisely utilize the information, combine available human resources and financial resources, and digitize the Tripitaka and other essential Buddhist texts with the establishment of a cataloging system becomes an important topic in the preservation, propagation, and study of the Tripitaka. Success in this topic will definitely avoid redundant work and a waste of resources. It will also help resolve the issue of where to start when a researcher faces too much information.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Tripitaka, whether it is the Tripitaka in Han ideograms, the Tibetan Kanjur, or the Pali Tripitaka, is the priceless repository of wisdom and the epitome of human civilization. "When the Buddha was with us, I sank; when the Buddha is no longer with us, I was born; I repent I have had so severe karma that I have not been able to see the golden body of the Tathagata." The Buddha is no longer with us, but luckily his Dharma treasure is still in existence and available and his relics are also still with us. Our wisdom life still has something to rely on. We, as the students of the Buddha, think of the superior actions of those ancient sages, Faxian, Xuanzang, and Paramiti, as well as others who considered their lives as secondary to the promotion and propagation of the Dharma treasure. Although our practice and meritorious conduct are far from theirs, how can we not emulate them and assume as our own responsibility the preservation and propagation of the Dharma treasure?

Please allow me to sincerely share my vow with all the participants of the Forum and the Buddhists in all directions. Let's encourage one another! Amitabha Buddha!!

*February 8, 2009 in Chicago, U.S.A.*



## Pictures

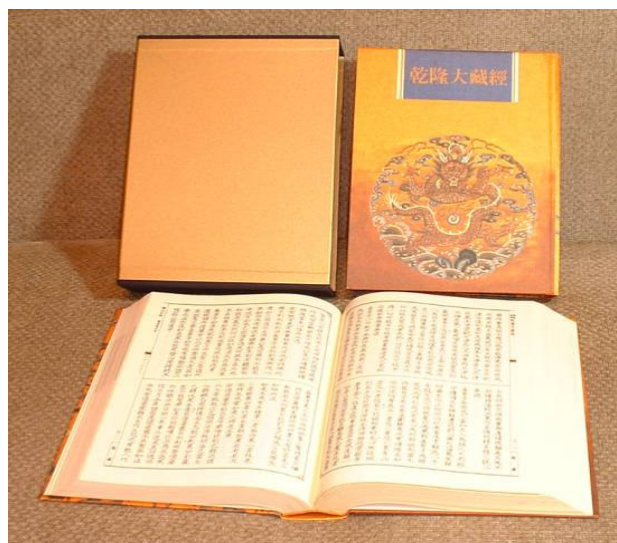
### 1. Wood-engraving in the *Longzan*—All Buddhas Engraving



### 2. Fang San Shi Jin—Stone-carved stele



### 3. Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon





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