

Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia: The Formation and Transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, edited by Jiang Wu and Lucille Chia. Columbia University Press, 2016. XXII + 405pp. Hb. £52.00. ISBN-13: 9780231171601.

Reviewed by T. H. Barrett, SOAS, emeritus, tb2@soas.ac.uk

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The Buddhist Canon in Chinese is one of the great wonders of Asian civilisation. Collected, transcribed, and eventually printed thanks to over a millennium of dedicated effort by translators, scribes and editors, it contains texts from every period of the development of Buddhism, including translations from schools of Buddhism whose work survives in no other language, and its ensemble of what long ago already stood at over a thousand texts has had an immense cultural impact, not least in inspiring the creation of another notable body of literature in the Daoist Canon. Yet teachers of East Asian Buddhism, while well provided with catalogues and historical studies in East Asian languages, have hitherto almost entirely lacked anything to assign in English more detailed than Mizuno Kōgen's very introductory *Buddhist Sutras: Origins, Development, Transmission* (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing, 1982). The volume under review therefore constitutes a major advance, and since it is no mere textbook but a collection of detailed essays by acknowledged experts, it will no doubt also stimulate more publication in English on the multifarious aspects of the history of the canon.

The preface (pp. xi–xv) by the distinguished pioneer of East Asian Buddhist canon studies, Lewis Lancaster, points out that academic fashion has been somewhat against the study of canons lately, on the grounds that they are exclusionary. But while he acknowledges the importance of looking beyond the canon – for the need to collect and preserve extra-canonical material of every sort in East Asia could not be more urgent – his characterising it as ‘event’ rather than ‘object’ gives an excellent idea of the fluidity and openness that the volume in fact reveals. After a brief Introduction from the editors (pp. 1–11) surveying the contents, two important general essays by Jiang Wu follow. The first of these, on the ‘Chinese Buddhist Canon through the ages’, in the first instance gives an authoritative chronological survey of developments from early manuscript through to modern editions, starting from the frank admission that ‘The origin of the Chinese canon is still a mystery’ (p. 18), as indeed holds true also for the origin of the Buddhist canons of early South Asia overall. This certainly allowed later Chinese Buddhists some freedom in imagining what had happened. I have not seen the unpublished paper by the author on this theme, but the one case I have studied myself seems highly revealing of the insecurities and rivalries the situation gave rise to.¹ Jiang Wu's survey also provides a conspectus of other topics ranging from the technologies used and design features of the canons on to questions of canonicity and broader comparison with other canonical collections; and even if here the

1. T. H. Barrett, *From Religious Ideology to Political Expediency: in Early Printing: An Aspect of Buddhist-Daoist Rivalry* (London: Minnow Press, 2012), pp. 6–33.

parallels with the Daoist Canon, whose origins seem to lie very much within the same rapprochement between state and religion that inspired the work of Dao'an (312–385) within Buddhism, are passed over without mention.

The second major survey concerns the 'Cult of the Canon', something that is rightly identified by the author as a 'neglected tradition', one involving ritual and devotional practices but also other cult features extending to architecture and forms of reading practice. This depiction of the canon's place in lived religion provides a ground-breaking complement to the inescapably bibliographical emphasis of the preceding chapter — and, indeed, of most accounts of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. At times the treatment still seems a little conservative, as when it is asserted that the ritual use in both Buddhism and Daoism of simulacra representing the revolving bookcases in which the canons were stored 'has nothing to do with the Buddhist Canon' (p. 75, n. 46). Admittedly the deployment of these simulacra in funerary rites involving live poultry is a little unexpected, but the fieldwork cited on this point, by Kamata Shigeo, does explicitly make a connection with the revolving canon of real books.

After these two valuable overviews, a further two chapters follow on the canon before printing, by Stefano Zacchetti, who addresses the 'notions and visions' of the canon in early Chinese Buddhism, and Tanya Storch, who explores the work of the problematic late sixth century cataloguer Fei Changfang. The former opens up intriguing areas of research into the way the Chinese first thought about general questions as to the interrelationships between bodies of Buddhist literature — a major topic to which the author will no doubt return. I trust that in due course he will be able to comment therefore on the background of canon formation and codification on stone in late Han Confucianism, and also on the very interesting reference apparently from circa 300 CE to the four *Āgamas* having been transcribed onto sixty bolts of silk (*sic!*) each at the time of the Buddha's decease in a text already translated, albeit sometimes rather freely, into Italian as long ago as 1911.² I would also of course be intrigued to know what he makes of my own suspicions concerning the possible editing by Dao'an or others of the texts that passed through their hands. I see no case for thinking that wholesale changes took place, yet there are some indications both of editorial glosses and of tampering with one or two items of terminology.

In fact the prospects for further work raised by Stephano Zacchetti may serve as a typical example of an important aspect of the book as a whole, since all the contributors are confronted with topics of great complexity on which much more could be said in every case. The editors have thus shown great discrimination in producing a collection that serves to inform without entirely overwhelming the newcomer.

The third part of this volume contains three chapters on the advent of the printed canon, comprising studies of the first printed canon of the Kaibao period by the editors and Chen Zhichao; of the long history of the Qisha Canon by Lucille Chia; and a chapter by Darui Long on the woodblock canons of late imperial China. A fourth section then adds chapters on the Korean Canon by Jiang Wu and Ron Dziwenka, and on the Taishō Canon by Greg Wilkinson. Finally two appendices follow, one a general survey of the printed editions of the canon drawing on

2. *Fo bannihuan jing* 佛般泥洹經 2, Taishō Canon vol. 1, no. 5, p. 175c03; cf. Carlo Puini, *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* (Genova: I Dioscuri, 1990), p. 101.

the standard monograph in Chinese by Li Fuhua and He Mei, and the second an account of the electronic CBETA resource produced in Taiwan.

All these elements in the book are useful, to students and researchers alike. Even so, a case might still be made for another, slightly different work, a handbook of the Chinese Buddhist canon providing readily accessible information as a research aid. The dual purpose format the editors have adopted has somehow meant that no place has been found for practical details on such topics as the modern catalogues and other reference works concerning the canon. One work of this sort would certainly be the second edition of Yasuhiro Sueki, *Bibliographical Sources for Buddhist Studies* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2008), which contains pages of relevant listings, including entries for major works not mentioned in the volume under review like Fang Guangchang's 1997 two volume catalogue of Buddhist bibliographies among the Dunhuang manuscripts, which provides a fascinating insight into the practical problems of dealing with such a large corpus of sacred literature, dating to the time of the advent of printing. Also of value to the researcher would be an indication of the results of scholars who have attempted to use the published canonical resources now available to produce fully collated editions of specific texts, for it would seem that both Stefano Zacchetti and Florin Deleanu have in such studies reported significant findings concerning problems in using the collation notes included in twentieth century editions.

Finally, the size of the Buddhist canon in Chinese meant that an important role was also played by smaller collections, of which at least two types may be distinguished. The first was the 'small canon', in which four major and rather bulky texts were taken to stand for the whole, as is explained on p. 37. At least one article exists on this phenomenon, by Ogawa Kan'ichi, in *Shina Bukkyō shigaku* 5.1 (1941), but more remains to be done to trace its history. The second would be the commercial printing of groups of Buddhist texts from the Ming onwards, evidently for sale to those who wanted their own private scriptural resources rather than having recourse to the vast canonical sets that were inevitably held by monasteries rather than individuals. Such sets existed for Daoism also, but as far as I am aware no studies have been carried out to delineate the origins and progress of this development, despite its obvious relevance to twentieth and even twenty-first century Chinese Buddhism.

It is part of the function of a breakthrough volume like this one to illuminate how much remains to be done, and this is the aspect of *Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia* that has been explored in this review. But anyone seeking to add to our knowledge in this area in future will certainly be grateful to the editors and other contributors for this much needed and well-presented collection. They merit the heartfelt thanks of everyone working on East Asian Buddhism, and their work will, one trusts, attract the attention of many interested in other bibliographic and Buddhological topics too.