

# THE *YONGLE NORTHERN CANON* AS BESTOWED BY THE IMPERIAL COURT TO BUDDHIST TEMPLES IN ZHEJIANG PROVINCE

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The *Yongle Northern Canon* 永樂北藏 was an imperial court edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. It was constructed in Beijing in the nineteenth year of Yongle (永樂 1421) on the decree of Emperor Chengzu 明成祖 (r. 1403 – 1424). A number of temples in Zhejiang received the copies of the *Yongle Northern Canon*. Most of these copies have been destroyed in the wars and natural disasters in the last five hundred years. An incomplete copy, 6334 volumes, is kept at Zhejiang Provincial Library. Other 56 volumes are kept at Lanxi Museum 蘭溪博物館 and Qizhen Monastery 栖真寺 in Lanxi. Zhao Zhigao 趙志皋 (1524-1601), a native of Lanxi who became Grand Secretary of the court, asked Empress Chen to donate a copy to the temple where he studied for the preparation for the imperial civil examination. The paper aims at providing a panoramic picture of the presentation of the *Yongle Northern Canon* in Zhejiang area.

## I. Introduction

The *Yongle beizang* 永樂北藏 (*Yonle Northern Canon*) was made in accordance with the decree by Empror Chengzu (r.1403 – 1424). The emperor decided to move the capital from Nanjing to Beijing . It was constructed in Beijing in the nineteenth year of Yongle (永樂 1421) on the decree of Emperor Chengzu 明成祖 (r. 1403 – 1424). It was not completed until the fifth year of Zhengtong (正統 1440). As many copies were printed and presented to great temples in China, this court edition of the Buddhist canon has been comparatively well preserved. It has

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636 *han* 函(cases). The *Qianzixwen* 千字文( *A Thousand Word Primer*)<sup>1</sup> starts from “tian” 天 to “shi 石” with 1621 works, totaling 6361 volumes. In the twelfth year of Wanli 萬曆(1584), more than 36 works were added, totaling 41 *han* ( 函 cases) with 410 volumes. To it were also added 5 works, totaling 15 *han* (cases) with 153 volumes which were appendices to the *Yongle nanzang* 永樂南藏(Yongle Southern EDITION of Buddhist Canon<sup>2</sup>). The final *Yongle Northern Canon* contains 678 *han*, with 6771 volumes.

Three scholars have examined the temple gazetteers, local provincial and county gazetteers, epigraphy, and other historical records to illustrate temples that received the copy of the *Yongle Northern Canon*. Nozawa Yoshimi 野沢佳美 wrote an essay entitled “Mindai hokuzō kō 1: kashi jōkyō o chūshin ni” 明代北藏考(一): 下賜狀況を中心に in 2003. This paper provides a table in which lists the names of 139 temple that were bestowed with the *Yongle Northern Canon*.<sup>3</sup> More than fourteen temples in Zhejiang province received the *Yongle Northern Canon* from the tenth year of Zhengtong 正統 (1445).

Dr. Dewei Zhang in his Ph.D. dissertation also touches on the topic of the bestowal of the *Yongle Northern Canon* in mid-Ming dynasty, particularly the Wanli era (r.1573-1620). As he focuses on the Wanli period (1573-1620), he lists fourteen temples that received the canon in this period.<sup>4</sup>

In another paper, Zhang raised a number questions as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The monks designed this *Qianzixwen* 千字文(*Thousand Word Primer*) as the catalogue order. In ancient times, all Chinese boys started their education by learning this primer reader. They learned these one thousand characters by heart. Since all educated Chinese were familiar with it, Buddhist monks began to use it to catalogue the huge number of scriptures.

<sup>2</sup>The *Yongle nanzang* 永樂南藏 (*Yongle Southern Edition of Buddhist Canon*) was constructed much earlier than *Yongle Northern Edition of Buddhist Canon*. The construction started in the second year when the *Hongwu Southern Edition of the Buddhist Canon* was destroyed in a fire in 1406. Emperor Chengzu decided to construct it following his father Emperor Hongwu (洪武 r.1368 – 1399). My paper “The *Hongwu Nanzang*, a Rare Edition of Buddhist Canon was published in *Journal of East Asian Libraries*, volume 2, Autumn, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Yoshimi, Nozawa 野沢佳美, “Mindai hokuzō kō 1: kashi jōkyō o chūshin ni” 明代北藏考(一): 下賜狀況を中心に, *Rissbō daigaku bungakubu ronsō* 立正大學文學部論叢 117 (2003), pp. 81–106.

<sup>4</sup> Zhang Dewei, *A Fragile Revival: Chinese Buddhism under the Political Shadow, 1522-1620*, Ph.D. dissertation, the University of British Columbia, 2010, pp.268-271.  
<https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubetheses/24/items/1.0071069>

The imperial bestowal, as a major way of distributing the Buddhist canon, profoundly affected the

contours of Buddhism in late imperial China. But why did the inner court engage in the distribution?

How did it choose the recipient from the outside world? How was it possible for an aspirant to the canon

to win out among the competitors? These questions concern the dynamics and mechanism behind the

diffusion of the canon. They also cast new light on the relationship between Buddhism and the state

and local society by revealing how the two otherwise separated worlds interacted.<sup>5</sup>

In her MA thesis, Miss Deng Shujun 鄧淑君, an MA student of Taiwan National Normal University, claims that more than twenty temples have been found to have received the *Yongle Northern Canon*. She lists twenty temple that received the copy of the *Yongle Northern Canon* from the tenth year of Zhengtong 正統 (1445) to the fourth year of Tianqi 天啟 (1624).<sup>6</sup> She reports her finds that in the 139 temples that Nozawa Yoshimi listed, some were found repeated. Therefore, she deletes 4 repetitive records and adds 13 temples to the list, totaling 147 temples.<sup>7</sup> She follows three mistakes made by Nozawa Yoshimi on the geographical locations on page 55 and page 66. Two temples, No.51 lists Lingyan Temple 靈岩寺 in Mt. Emei 峨眉山 and No.79 Cao'an Temple in Mt. Emei, are listed to be located in Dali fu, Yunnan Province 雲南大理府.<sup>8</sup> Mount Emei is well-known in

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Dewei, "Where the Two Worlds Met: Spreading a Buddhist Canon in Wanli (1573-1620) China," in *Journal of Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Issue 3, July 2016, pp.487-508.

<sup>6</sup> Deng Shujun 鄧淑君, *Mingdai guanban fojiao dazangjing Yongle beizang kanyin yu banci yanjiu* 明代官版佛教大藏經《永樂北藏》頒賜研究, MA thesis, Taiwan National Normal University, 2017, pp.55-77.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>8</sup> Nozawa Yoshimi 野沢佳美, "Mindai hokuzō kō 1: kashi jōkyō o chūshin ni" 明代北藏考(一): 下賜狀況を中心に, *Risshō daigaku bungakubu ronsō* 立正大學文學部論叢 117 (2003), p.86.

Lingyan Temple received a set of *Yongle Northern Canon* in the fourth year of Tianshun 天順四年 (1460). See *Emeishan zhi* 峨眉山志, *juan* 6, in *Sida mingshan zhi* 四大名山志, edited by Yinguang 印光, Volume 3, Taipei: Fojiao chubansh, 1978, p.252 and p.229. Miss Deng Shujun follows these mistakes in her thesis on pages 61 and 66. Typing mistakes are found with the name of Professor Bai Huawen 白化文 on p.67 and p.71.

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Sichuan Province. One mistake is the name of Qizhen Temple in Lanxi in Zhejiang Province 浙江蘭溪棲真禪院. Nozawa puts it as Qixia Temple 棲霞寺. It is likely that both scholars got confused with the names of Qixia Temple in Nanjing 南京棲霞寺 and the Qizhen Temple in Lanxi.<sup>9</sup>

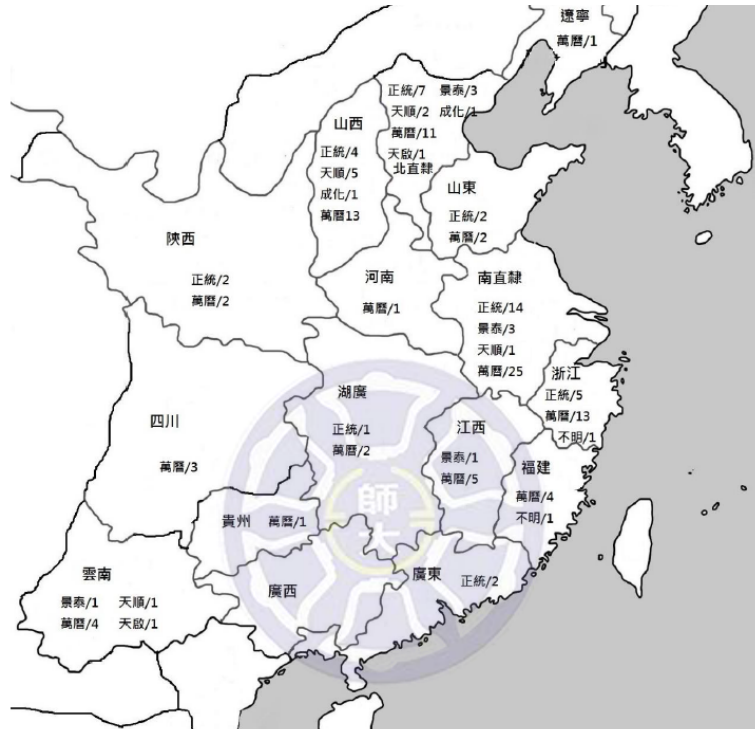
The author makes attempt to narrow the bestowal of the *Yongle Northern Canon* in Zhejiang Province in this paper. It contains four chapters:

1. Introduction
2. A Survey of the Bestowal of the *Yongle Northern Canon* in Zhejiang Province
3. The Qizhen Temple in Lanxi County 浙江蘭溪棲真禪院 and Zhao Zhigao 趙志皋, Grand Secretary of the Ming
4. Conclusion.



The *Yongle Northern Canon* as bestowed to the whole state. This map was made by author.

<sup>9</sup> See Nozawa's paper on page 85 and Deng's paper on page 60. Both are in No.33 in their lists.



Map indicating the number of sets of the *Yongle Northern Canon* as bestowed in China. Courtesy of Deng Shujun.

## II. A Survey of the Bestowal of the *Yongle Northern Canon* in Zhejiang Province

When Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (also named Zhu Di 朱棣, r.1402-1425) ascended the throne in Nanjing, he fully understood that he obtained the throne from his nephew Emperor Jianwen (r.1399-1402). He did everything he could to eliminate the traces of his predecessor and claimed that he was the legitimate successor to his father Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368-1398). For instance, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang initiated a new edition of the Buddhist canon entitled *Hongwu Southern Canon* 洪武南藏 in the fifth year of his reign (1372). The project was probably not accomplished until the third year of Emperor Jianwen 建文 (1401).<sup>10</sup> Six years later, a mad monk set fire to Baoen Monastery 報恩寺

<sup>10</sup> The author disagrees with the calling *Jianwen Southern Canon* 建文南藏. When Emperor Jianwen 建文 (r.1399-1402) came to the throne, he immediately got bogged down in the mire –