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A Talk by Dr. Darui Long at UBC, March 8, 2018

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On March 8, the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia hosted Dr. Darui Long, University of the West, to share some of his discoveries and challenges of researching the *Yongle Northern Canon* (*Yongle beizang* 永樂北藏). Dr. Long's findings will be published in a book. He began his presentation by sharing some photos and physical copies of different sets of canons that he has found, including a Jin-edition illustrated scroll with a Korean woodblock print, and a photo of a rare Tangut script *Lotus Sutra*. He provided a short timeline of when sutras and other scriptures were engraved and compiled into editions of canons, including the *Yongle Northern* edition. Dr. Long returned to these objects throughout his talk, sharing the process through which he came to learn of and gain access to these editions.

The *Yongle Northern Canon* is one of four editions of the Buddhist canon that were constructed in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Three of these four were imperially commissioned. The first, the *Hongwu Southern Canon* was ordered by Emperor Hongwu (r.1368-1398) and completed in 1399. Following a fire that destroyed the woodblocks of this canon, the

Emperor Yongle (r.1403-1424) ordered new engravings of the canon in Nanjing. Upon relocating the capital to Beijing in 1416, he commissioned new engravings again, which are known to us as the *Yongle Northern Canon*. Lay people also supported the construction of these new canons through merit-making donations, as Dr. Long's research reveals through careful readings of prefaces and additions to the texts.¹

Dr. Long emphasized the “detective work” required in his field. It is often difficult to date the printed canons, as the preface writers and printers may make changes or paste over original text. Dr. Long shared some ways that readers might identify the people and places involved in the making of these canons. In one example, Dr. Long pointed to the presence of “taboo” characters in the preface of some editions, in which one stroke is removed to avoid using the emperor's name, as a sign that the text was written under Kangxi or Qianlong reign.

Dr. Long's research has led him to the libraries and monasteries that own versions of the *Yongle Northern Canon* throughout China, Europe, and North America. As collections of these texts are still being discovered, part of his task is to trace what institutions own what editions, and how he can gain access to them. Dr. Long shared some stories about the challenges of accessing and recording some of these texts, noting that getting access to texts like these requires patience and good relationships with a variety of institutions. In one case, Dr. Long almost missed a train to another research location because he was waiting for a monastery to allow him to view their canon. In another, Dr. Long arrived at an institute's archives and unexpectedly had to pay for access and photographs. Because many of these editions are made from delicate materials and are already damaged, institutions are careful to protect

¹ Darui Long, “The Yongle Northern Canon and its donors,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 2, no. 2 (2016): 173-185.

these resources through restricting access and treating the materials with proper care.

In sharing the process behind his research on the Yongle Northern edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, Dr. Long hopes to encourage younger scholars to examine the ways that canons have been compiled, printed, and distributed. He emphasized the importance of the material cultural aspect of Buddhist texts, which can teach scholars just as much as the texts within. Dr. Long's presentation gave the audience a sense of the travel, networking, and analytical skills required to study Buddhist canons and material culture.

Bibliography

Long, Darui. "The Yongle Northern Canon and its donors." *Studies in Chinese Religions* 2, no. 2 (2016): 173-185.