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### Absolutely not a business

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Absolutely Not a Business:  
Chinese Buddhist Scriptural Presses and Distributors, 1860s - 1930s\*

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This paper argues that several of the Buddhist xylographic scriptural presses that emerged in late nineteenth and early twentieth century China adopted many practices from commercial publishing enterprises, while strongly maintaining the position that their religious publishing endeavours were fundamentally different from that of business-oriented publishers. Through a brief examination of the budgetary procedures and financial reports of a few presses, I aim to demonstrate that even these types of religious presses, which on their face were highly conservative, adopted specific material and social technologies of the modern era to expand the size and reach of their printing enterprise. In doing so they did not radically break with the patrimony of Chinese Buddhist print culture, but rather extended it with new technologies and methods.

## 1. Introduction

Buddhist scriptural presses (*Fojing kejingchu* 佛經刻經處) were a new form of Chinese publishing institution that were first organized by groups of Buddhists in the latter part of the nineteenth century to produce and distribute religious texts. Their core aims were to spread the Buddhist teachings (the Dharma) and to generate religious merit, and in this they resembled earlier, largely monastery-based scriptoria, even continuing to use traditional xylographic (woodblock) printing (*diaoban yinshua* 雕版印刷) during an era when mechanized movable type was giving rise to an unprecedented volume and variety of printed works. Yet while most of them remained expressly not-for-profit and saw themselves as categorically different from businesses, nearly all of them selectively adopted aspects of the modern commercial publishing enterprise. They joined networks of product distribution, organized boards of directors, maintained business assets and

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1 This chapter is based in part on Gregory Adam Scott, “Conversion by the Book: Buddhist Print Culture in Early Republican China” (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2013) as well as subsequent research presented at the workshop on “Asian Buddhism: Plural Colonialisms and Plural Modernities” at Kyoto and Ryukoku Universities in December 2014.

investments, published financial reports, and some even issued stock and paid dividends to investors. By means of book catalogues and postal orders, Buddhist publications became available for purchase across China and in Chinese communities overseas, greatly expanding the size of their reading market.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I briefly review a selection of Buddhist xylographic printing and distribution institutions that were in operation from the 1860s to the 1930s, examining how they used commercial technologies from the world of commercial publishing in their meritorious and religious enterprises. Elizabeth Eisenstein famously called the printing press an “agent of [historical] change”; in the case of Chinese Buddhist scriptural presses, it was not the press itself but rather a cluster of social and organizational print ‘technologies’ that enabled their development and the emergence of a network through which tens of thousands of Buddhist scriptural texts were transmitted.<sup>3</sup> Examining how these publishers integrated new techniques into their print traditions, and how those traditions were re-imagined as a result, provides a revealing window on the cultural and religious history of modern China.

In this essay I focus on six Buddhist publishing institutions: The Jinling Scriptural Press, the Beijing and Tianjin Scriptural Presses, the Beijing and Tianjin Scripture Distributors, and the Central Scriptural Press. All were engaged in the task of producing and/or distributing printed Buddhist texts, and the latter five all had strong institutional and cultural connections to the Jinling press, which provided the model for much Chinese Buddhist publishing in this period. While these presses were immensely productive, they normally only appear at the margins of histories of publishing and print culture in modern China, if they are mentioned at all. Recently a series of reprinted book catalogues and a number of researchers working on religion in this period have started to reveal the full scope of Buddhist publishing during this era. My discussions in this chapter will outline how these publishing institutions came about, and how they integrated longstanding patterns of publishing for merit with new models of management, distribution, publicity, and economics.

## 2. Textual Culture and Print Culture in Chinese Buddhist History

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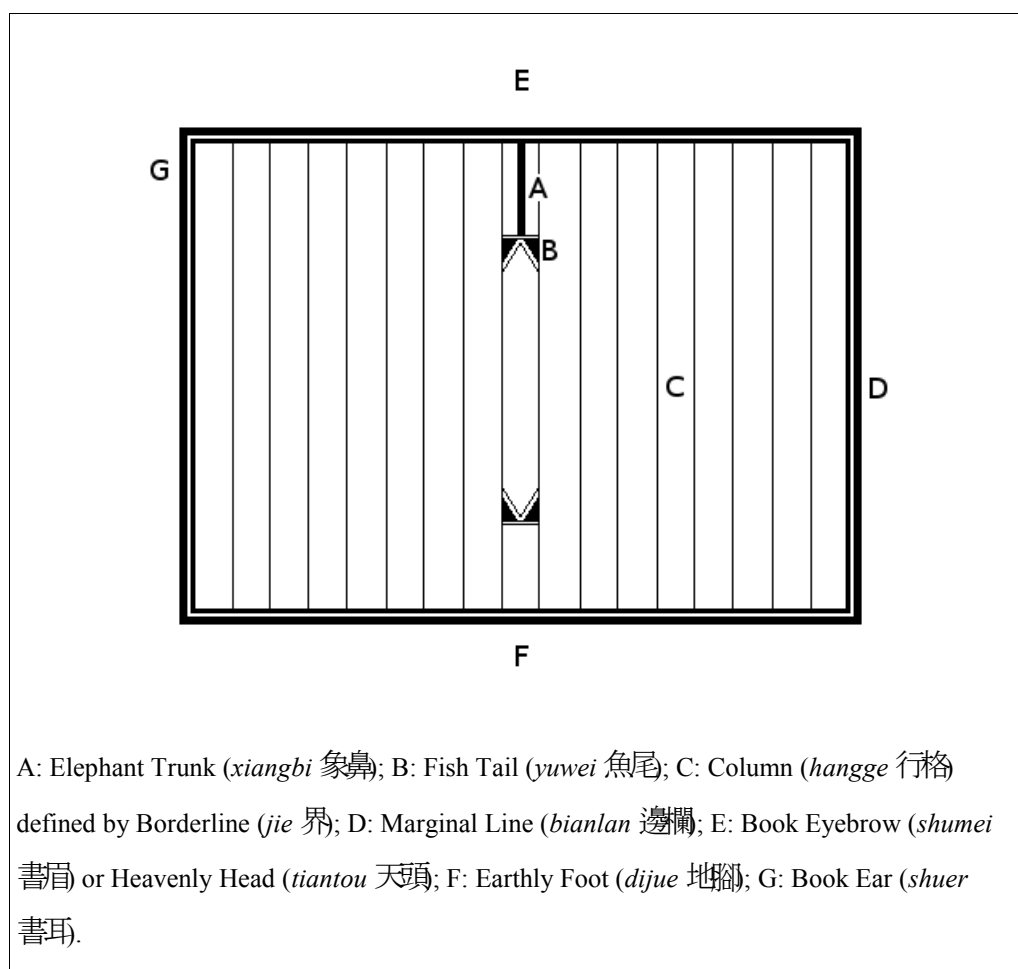
2 The Imperial Post was founded in 1896 and began to replace longstanding networks of private and official courier networks. See Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Trade and Administration of China* (London, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913), 392-409.

3 Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-modern Europe*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991 [1979]).

Textual culture was already well-established in China by the time that Buddhism was introduced around the beginning of the common era, and by the middle of the second century CE the capital city of Luoyang 洛陽 had become an important center of scriptural translation. The types of Buddhist scriptures in circulation embodied a type of power that Alan Cole has termed a ‘displaced paternal authority,’ and were further understood to function as engines of merit-generation, bringing unrivaled benefits and blessings to those who produced and disseminated them.<sup>4</sup> Xylography, first used to reproduce small motifs, was quickly adopted to print Buddhist scriptural texts, with the earliest dated printed work in history being a scroll of the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jin'gang boreboluomiduo jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜多經) from 868 CE.<sup>5</sup> Printing was still used on a relatively limited scale, primarily for reproducing religious and almanac works, up to about the tenth century CE, when the Chinese book market began to expand rapidly and its greater cost effectiveness for larger print runs gave rise to a much greater availability of printed texts.<sup>6</sup> The essential technical procedures of xylography have likely changed little over most of its history: Wood blocks, usually from a pear, jujube, or catalpa tree, are soaked in water or boiled, then dried, planed and polished on both sides, so that two pages can be printed from a single block. The manuscript is transcribed on to thin sheets of paper and the inked text transferred to one face of the block, and a variety of tools are used to carve away the surface of the wood, leaving characters and images in relief. Mistakes in carving can be corrected by replacing a small wedge-shaped area of the block surface or by inlaying a new piece for a larger area. Once cleaned and washed, the block is ready for printing; it is held on a table and inked with a brush, then a sheet

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- 4 E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Third Edition with Foreword by Stephen F. Teiser (Leiden: Brill, 2007[1959]), 23-24, 28-36; Alan Cole, *Text as Father: Paternal Seductions in Early Mahāyāna Buddhist Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4-7; Gregory Schopen, “The Phrase *sa prthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet* in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna” and “On Sending the Monks Back to Their Books: Cult and Conservatism in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism” in his *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005): 25-62, 108-153; John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8-10.
- 5 Other printed works discovered in Japan and Korea may predate the *Diamond Sūtra* scroll, but they cannot yet be dated conclusively. See Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 151-152. This *Diamond Sūtra* edition is held in the British Library, item Or.8310/P.2.
- 6 Edward Martinique, *Chinese Traditional Bookbinding: A Study of its Evolution and Technique* ([San Francisco]: Chinese Materials Center, 1983); Cynthia J. Brokaw, “On the History of the Book in China”, in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23-24; Susan Cherniack, “Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 54, no. 1 (June, 1994): 5-125.

of paper is placed over it and a pad rubbed against the blank side to transfer the image to the paper. A block may be printed some 15,000 times before needing minor repairs, after which another 10,000 to 25,000 prints can be made, and blocks can be stored indefinitely between printings.<sup>7</sup> Xylographic books in China have a distinctive page layout, with the text matrix spanning two pages so that the center column straddles the folded edge.



**Figure 1: Xylographic Page Layout<sup>8</sup>**

Xylographic print technology was used to produce countless individual scriptural volumes, as well as most major editions of the Sinitic Buddhist scriptural canon. The first time xylography

7 Description based in part on Tsien Tsuen-Hsuein 錢存訓, *Paper and Printing*, in *Science and Civilisation in China, Volume 5: Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, edited by Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 194-201. For a first-hand account of xylographic printing, see Hedda M. Morrison, "Making Books in China," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 38-39 (1949): 232-243.

8 Figure based on Tsien, *Paper and Printing*, 222-223.

was used to print a complete Buddhist canon occurred a century after the printing of the *Diamond Sūtra* scroll mentioned above. The publication of the Buddhist canon in China was a monumental task that entailed the collecting, selecting, editing, organizing, cataloguing, and printing of thousands of fascicles of text, and involved the coordinated mobilization of donors, translators, editors, libraries, and printers.<sup>9</sup> The earliest printed Chinese Buddhist scriptural canon, the Kaibao 開寶 Canon, was carved in the late tenth century CE. It included some 1,076 titles, involved a large team of translators, editors and other craftspeople to produce, and is said to have required 130,000 blocks that took twelve years to produce. At least seven other major canon collections were printed during the Song dynasty (960 – 1279), but the technology and means to undertake large publishing projects were still limited to few urban centers and temples.<sup>10</sup> Xylographic technology was likely not widespread in China until as late as the Jiajing 嘉靖 era (1522 – 1567) of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368 – 1644). Along with a rapidly expanding population and economy, the Ming also saw the rise of new regional centers of printing, especially in Fujian 福建 province and the Jiangnan 江南 region of eastern China.<sup>11</sup> During the Qing 清 dynasty (1644 – 1911) the publishing world in China became dominated by a large number of regional workshops and a nationwide network of printer-retailers, who were producing a remarkably homogeneous core of best-sellers to a much broader readership.<sup>12</sup>

Thus by the middle of the nineteenth century, xylographic printing was a well-established technology in China. Printing expertise was available through local craftspeople and specialist workshops, literacy was relatively common, and publishing religious works was a widely-accepted form of generating merit. Participants in Buddhist print culture had established their own open corpus of texts, bibliographic studies, and catalogues of canonical works. Apart from editions of the canon, most Buddhist publishing was the product of temple scriptoria (*jingfang* 經房坊), where monastic publishers drew upon extensive temple libraries and storehouses of

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9 The fascicle (*juan* 卷; a scroll or curl) is a section of text whose name is derived from when long manuscripts spanned multiple scrolls of material. Its length in characters varies widely.

10 Shi Dao'an 釋道安, *Zhongguo dazangjing diaoke shihua* 中國大藏經雕刻史話 ([n.p.]: Zhonghua dadian bianyin hui, 1978), 61-72.

11 Brokaw, "History of the Book in China", 24-27. On the Ming-dynasty expansion of print, see Joseph McDermott, "The Ascendance of the Imprint in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 57-93.

12 Brokaw, "History of the Book in China," 27-30; Brokaw, "Commercial Woodblock Printing in the Qing (1644-1911)", 40-44.

printing blocks to compile their new editions.<sup>13</sup> One of the most important areas for Buddhist scriptural printing was Jiangnan 江南, where the wealth of regional elites had, particularly from the Ming dynasty onward, supported the construction of temples and the livelihood of monastics.<sup>14</sup> When the rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (Taiping Tianguo 太平天國) erupted from 1850 to 1864 causing the deaths of millions, many temples in the Jiangnan region were destroyed in battles between Taiping and Loyalist forces. Many major Buddhist monastic libraries and scriptoria were lost, and although the major ordination centres such as Jinshan 金山 were rebuilt within a decade after the rebellion was suppressed, the libraries and storehouses of woodblocks were rather more difficult to replace than bricks and stone.

### 3. Yang Wenhui and the Jinling Scriptural Press

Since the volumes of the Jiaying-era Lengyan temple were destroyed in the conflagration of war, those who research Buddhism have suffered from a lack of good editions. During the former Qing dynasty, Layman Yang Wenhui from Chizhou worked together with scriptoria in Yangzhou and elsewhere to carve and print scriptures. For forty years now, well-edited and well-carved, [they] have long been spread widely across the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Buddhist publishers, editors, authors, and historians of Buddhism in modern China widely credit the lay publisher Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837 – 1911) with inaugurating a post-Taiping resurgence in Buddhist xylographic publishing.<sup>16</sup> His Jinling Scriptural Press (*Jinling kejing chu* 金陵刻經處), and more than a dozen later presses that emulated it, were organized unlike anything that had

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13 While *jingfang* 經房 is often used to refer to the printer of scriptural texts, the term more precisely refers to the scriptural hall or repository within a temple. *Jingfang* 經坊, on the other hand, indicates a ‘workshop for [producing] scriptures.’

14 Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1994.)

15 『自嘉興楞嚴寺書本藏經燬於兵燹，研究佛學者苦乏善本。池州楊仁山居士，於前清時，會同揚州等處經房，刊刻藏經。垂四十載，校刻精好，久已風行海內。』 Punctuation added. *Foxue congbao* 佛學叢報, issue 12 (June 15, 1914), reprinted in Huang Xianian 黃夏年, ed., *Minguo Fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成, 209 Vols (Beijing: Quanguo tushiguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2006), 4:551. Hereafter cited as MFQ.

16 On Yang see Gabriele Goldfuss, *Vers un bouddhisme du XXe siècle. Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), réformateur laïque et imprimeur* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2001) and Luo Cheng 羅琤, *Jinling kejing chu yanjiu* 金陵刻經處研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2010.)

preceded it in East Asian Buddhist history. The Jinling imprint was first used in 1866, when Yang raised the funds to print an edition of *Jingtu sijing* 淨土四經 (Four Pure Land Scriptures) edited by the scholar Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794 – 1857).<sup>17</sup> Two years later Yang and his partners formally inaugurated the press with the composition of a charter (*zhangcheng* 章程) that required each member to contribute 5,600 cash per month; with ten partners the operating budget was 56,000 cash per month, the bulk of which would support a calligrapher and eight carvers, the remainder going to a monastic director and two assistants. In the Jinling press were combined several elements of scriptural publishing outlined in the previous section. In the past, canons had been published by imperial printers and temple presses, and laypeople had sponsored the printing of individual scriptures, often for the purpose of generating religious merit. Yang's press, however, was established outside of the state apparatus, and was financed by lay people and managed by monastics. The press itself was not intended to function as a monastic space; it did not require resident monks to perform confession (*jingchan* 經懺), nor did it have facilities to host visiting monastics as in a public monastery.<sup>18</sup> The press thus established a model of combining lay and monastic leadership into an organization with a published corporate charter, a set funding structure, and permanent non-temple physical structures such as offices and workshops. The first major project planned for the Jinling imprint had been the publication of the complete Buddhist canon (*quan zang* 全藏). A Jinling canon would take the place of the *Longzang* edition, one that Yang and his partners regarded as a “museum piece,” and would help make up for the loss of Jiangnan-area temple libraries described above. Such a canon would not, however, be produced during Yang's lifetime; the capital and labour requirements were simply too high. The Jinling Scriptural press did, however, produce hundreds of individual titles of scriptural publications.<sup>19</sup>

Yang had received a traditional education based on the Chinese classical corpus, but he took full advantage of the new possibilities offered by the nineteenth century: new modes of learning, international travel, and interactions with foreigners. In 1878 he was invited to join a diplomatic mission to England and France, and in 1886 Yang visited England again, where he

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17 On Wei and Buddhism, see Li Jianguang 李建光, “Wei Yuan xuanze jingtu zong de dongyin ji dui jindai jushi Foxue de gongxian” 魏源選擇淨土宗的動因及對近代居士佛學的貢獻, *Qiusuo* 求索, no. 6 (2007): 136-137.

18 Goldfuss, 54.

19 Goldfuss, 52. On scriptural printing at Jingshan, see “Jingshan kezang nianbiao” 徑山刻藏年表, *Honghua yuekan* 弘化月刊, Oct 25, 1955, reprinted in Huang Xianian 黃夏年, ed., *Minguo Fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng bubian* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成補編, 83 Vols (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2008), 72:316. Hereafter cited as MFQB. The Jinling press printed at least 400 titles up to 1949.



met the Oxford orientalist scholar Max Müller (1823 – 1900) and his then-student the Japanese Buddhist priest Nanjō Bunyū 南条文雄 (1849 – 1927). Yang and Nanjō would remain in contact with each other via written correspondence, and through Nanjō Yang was able to procure copies of Buddhist scriptures from Japan that had been lost in China to reprint through his press.<sup>20</sup> In 1884 Yang met the Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845 – 1919) while the latter was in Nanjing collecting Buddhist texts to support his study of Chinese religions. In 1894 the pair collaborated on a translation of the Buddhist text *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起論 (Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith) into English, but Yang was reportedly unsatisfied with Richard's interpretation of the scripture through a Christian lens.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the previous year Yang had met with Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933) while the latter was en route to Sri Lanka, coming from having attended the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Yang came from Nanjing especially to hear Dharmapala speak at Longhua Temple 龍華寺 in Shanghai 上海, and remained in touch with him in the years that followed.<sup>22</sup> After 1897 when the Jinling press was given its own dedicated buildings on Yang's Nanjing estate, Yang made use of the site to establish an experimental school for lay and monastic Buddhists. The Jetavana Hermitage (Qihuan jingshe 祇園精舍), inaugurated in 1908 and only in operation for one academic year, was notable in that it included both laypeople and monastics as teachers and students. Yang compiled a primer of Buddhism in 1906 for use in the school's classes, the first of an entire genre of Buddhist books for beginners that would be issued in the Republican period.<sup>23</sup>

Before Yang died in 1911, he instructed that the Jinling press should continue as a public enterprise (*gongye* 公業) entrusted to a group of managers rather than becoming the private property of his descendants, who would instead be provided with housing and a stipend until they were able to contribute financially to the enterprise. Directorship of the press was entrusted to three of Yang's students, all Buddhist laymen. Of the three, Ouyang Jian 歐陽漸 (1871 – 1943) took the leading role in running the press after Yang's death. Ouyang took over as manager of the press in 1918 upon the death of Chen Xi'an 陳燁庵 (18?? – 1918), who had served as Yang's

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20 Goldfuss, 68-79. Welch, *Buddhist Revival*, 4.

21 See Gregory Adam Scott, "Timothy Richard, World Religion, and Reading Christianity in Buddhist Garb", *Social Sciences and Missions* 25 (2012): 53-75.

22 Goldfuss, 105-112. Welch, *Buddhist Revival*, 6-8.

23 See Gregory Adam Scott, "The Publishing of Buddhist Books for Beginners in Modern China from Yang Wenhui to Master Sheng Yen 中國近代歷史上的佛學入門書籍出版事業 – 從楊文會居士至聖嚴法師而言," *Shengyan yanjiu* 聖嚴研究 (Sheng Yen Studies), Vol. 5 (2014): 51-107.

assistant at the press for thirty years, and the resignation of the other main manager.<sup>24</sup> Over the next few years Ouyang struggled to keep the press on a sound fiscal footing while dealing with Yang's family, with whom he argued over living and stipend arrangements. Perhaps in response to these difficulties, in 1919 he established the Zhina neixue yuan 支那內學院 (Inner Studies Institute) within the organizational structure of the Jinling press but under his sole control.<sup>25</sup> In spite of these difficulties in securing new leadership, the press' output did not slow following the death of its founder. In the first eight years after Yang's death in 1911 the Jinling Scriptural Press produced 115 titles whose dates of publication are recorded. In contrast, in the final fourteen years of Yang's life from 1898 to 1911, the press produced only 72 titles.<sup>26</sup>

In many fundamental ways Yang's Jinling Scriptural Press operated within the established scope of Chinese Buddhist publishing: it used xylographic printing blocks and never experimented with other print technologies, it produced mainstream Buddhist scriptural texts almost exclusively, and, if resources had allowed, Yang would have produced a new edition of the Buddhist canon. There were, however, already significant innovations being introduced to the presses during Yang's lifetime, including the formal organization of an independent, internally-regulated social and economic body to run the press that was separate from monastic institutions. He also established the press as an independent financial entity, a 'public enterprise' that was distinct from both his family and any monasterial institution, but never sought to generate a profit from his press. Balancing the merit-generating function of Buddhist publishing with the financial and operational procedures of a publisher, however, would become more difficult in the three decades following his death.

#### **4. The Beijing and Tianjin Scriptural Presses, and Scripture Distributors**

The first Chinese Buddhist scriptural presses founded in the Republican era (1912 – 1949) were the Beijing Scriptural Press 北京刻經處 and the Tianjin Scriptural Press 天津刻經處, established by Xu Weiru 徐蔚如 (1878? – 1937) in 1918 and 1921 respectively. Xu had contact with a number of Buddhist monastic and lay figures of the early Republic before helping to found these presses. After failing the civil service exams in 1898, Xu found work in Beijing as a low-level

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24 Goldfuss, 213; Welch, *Buddhist Revival*, 177-118, 319fn28.

25 Eyal Aviv, "Differentiating the Pearl From the Fish Eye: Ouyang Jingwu (1871-1943) and the Revival of Scholastic Buddhism" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2008), 58-75.

26 Luo Cheng, 171-200. Goldfuss, 154-155.

government functionary, and later served for a short time as a representative in the Zhejiang provincial government. Xu was later put in contact with the monk Yinguang 印光(1861 – 1940), whom he later met in person at Putuoshan 普陀山<sup>27</sup> When Xu returned to Beijing to work for the Ministry of Finance he met a number of fellow bureaucrats who were then studying and practicing Buddhism, and in 1917 Xu was chosen as the head of a scripture recitation society that included Mei Guangxi 梅光羲(1880 – 1947), latterly of Yang's Jinling press.<sup>28</sup> That same year a mutual friend brought him a set of letters by Yinguang, which Xu personally had republished.<sup>29</sup> Publishing and editing publications were core aspects to Xu's Buddhist engagement; in the early years of the Republic he had also helped fund some publications of the Jinling Press, and although he never met Yang Wenhui in person, he considered himself a pupil of the lay publisher.

In 1918 Xu Weiru traveled to Guanzong Temple 觀宗寺 in Ningbo 寧波 and returned accompanied by the Tiantai 天台 patriarch Dixian 諦閑(1858 – 1932).<sup>30</sup> Dixian lectured to the Beijing-based recitation group, accepting many of them as his lay disciples. After Dixian returned to Ningbo, Xu, Mei Guangxi, Jiang Weiqiao, Jiang Weinong 江味農(1872 – 1938) and others collaborated to establish the Beijing Scriptural Press, with Xu acting as general manager and responsible for overseeing the proofreading. After Mei was posted to Shandong and Jiang Weiqiao and Jiang Weinong returned to Shanghai, Xu was left alone in charge of the press.<sup>31</sup> In its early years the Beijing press often collaborated with the Jinling Scriptural Press, sharing staff and reprinting each others publications. Initially the printing work was handled by a private studio, and as the number of its printing blocks increased they were moved to a storeroom in a

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27 Yu Lingbo 于凌波, *Zhongguo jinxindai Fojiao renwu zhi* 中國近現代佛教人物志 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1995), 467-468. Some accounts claim that it was Xu who initially brought Yinguang's manuscripts back to Shanghai to be published in the periodical.

28 Shi Dongchu 釋東初 *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai shi* 中國佛教近代史 2 Vols, in *Dongchu laoren quanji* 東初老人全集 (Taipei: Dongchu, 1974), 2:699-701; Yu Lingbo 于凌波, ed., *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian* 現代佛教人物辭典 (Sanchong: Foguang, 2004), 2:1580-1582; Jiang Weiqiao, “Xu Weiru jushi zhuan” 徐慕哉居士傳, *Foxue banyuekan* 佛學半月刊, October 16, 1938, MFQ 54:349-350

29 Xinxi jushi 信西居士, *Yinguang fashi nianpu* 印光法師年譜, entry for 1917.

30 Dixian had previously taught at the Buddhist Normal School for Monastics 佛教師範僧學校 in Nanjing, and in 1919 had established the Guanzong School 觀宗學舍 and the Guanzong Research Society 觀宗研究社 at his temple in Ningbo. Dongchu, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai shi*, 2:757-761. Yu, *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian*, 2:1621-1624.

31 Dongchu, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai shi*, 2:730-732; Jiang, “Xu Weiru jushi zhuan”. Dixian's lectures to the group in Beijing were recorded by Jiang Weiqiao and Huang Youxi 黃幼希 (d.u.), and Xu discusses them at some length in his eulogy for Dixian. See MFQ 22:198-201.

private residence.<sup>32</sup> Xu later moved to Tianjin to work as a clerk for the Qixin Cement Company 啟新洋灰公司, and in 1921 he, Zhou Zhifu 周志輔(d.u.), and Zhou Shujia 周叔迦(1899 – 1970) collaborated to found the Tianjin Scriptural Press. The Beijing and Tianjin presses appear to have remained linked together on the management level, and the two are normally discussed together as a pair in primary and scholarly sources.

An accounting report for the fiscal year 1921 – 1922 gives us an invaluable look into the internal organization and functioning of the Beijing Scriptural Press.<sup>33</sup> Funds remaining from the previous year were just over 4,000 yuan in cash, and income per annum totaled 6,070 yuan, mostly from donations but also from interest on bonds. Expenditures for the previous fiscal year had totaled just over 7,000 yuan, leaving the press with 2,714.37 in cash.<sup>34</sup> The expenditure for each set of blocks carved and each print run is listed as a separate line item in the account. For one example, the *Renwang huguo jing jiaxiang shu* 仁王護國經嘉祥疏, carving cost 260 yuan, while printing was a mere 33.89 yuan. A note at the beginning of the list of outgoing funds states: “Every expenditure for printing scriptures paid out by this press represents the cost of printing and distributing meritorious (*gongde* 功德) books.”<sup>35</sup> I interpret this to indicate a sense of responsibility on the part of the press to channel its funds solely into the work of religious publishing, rather than toward other commercial possibilities such as profit generation, investments, or capital improvements. A number of people and groups are listed as having donated funds to the press, with many giving money earmarked for the publication of a particular title. The assurance that such donations were being used solely for meritorious acts, rather than enriching the managers or investors in the press, was thus an important one to make. The report lists 84 titles totaling 170 fascicles that had been completed in the previous year, and 30 titles totaling 74 fascicles for which printing blocks had been carved but which were not yet printed.

The detail and precision of the report likely reflects Xu Weiru’s background as a government bureaucrat and corporate clerk. Based on its contents we can learn that the Beijing and Tianjin scriptural presses were run as not-for-profit operations, with no funds being

32 Yang Zhifeng 楊之峰, “Xu Wenwei yu Beijing kejingchu” 徐文霽與北京刻經處, *Tushuguan yanjiu yu gongzuo* 圖書館研究與工作, no. 122 (2010): 69-71; Luo Cheng, *Jinling kejing chu yanjiu*, 259-264.

33 *Beijing kejing chu disan ci zhengxin lu* 北京刻經處第三次徵信錄 (Beijing: Beijing Scriptural Press, 1922).

34 The currency used is mainly silver dollars (*xianyang yuan* 現洋元), with the exception of some promised donations in Beijing Script (*jingchao* 京鈔), issued by the Beiyang Government. The press also held \$4,000 in U.S. bonds.

35 『凡本處所開支之印經費均係印送功德書之價。』 *Ibid.*, 1.

distributed to owners or shareholders; income was primarily from donations, and donated sums were earmarked for specific print runs. So far, this model follows closely that established by earlier Buddhist woodblock printers. It did, however, maintain convertible investments and derived a small amount of interest profit from them, and could also transfer capital between branches and between types of investments to maximize productivity or to respond to changes in the operating plan. Finally, simply producing detailed public records such as this was not a hallmark of earlier presses, but rather reflects modern accounting procedures. Thus in this early example we can see the core of the Buddhist merit-generating and economic publishing model being supplemented by some new accounting tools to help strengthen the fiscal health of the organization, and to help it be more flexible in the face of changing circumstances.

Buddhist scriptural presses in China, at least fifteen of which had been founded by the 1920s, were linked together by networks of shared personnel, donors, and textual circulation. This last aspect was facilitated by another new form of Buddhist print institution, the scripture distributor (*Fojing liutong chu/suo* 佛經流通處所). ‘Scripture distributor’ was a highly mutable designation; in some cases it could refer to one function of a larger press, temple, or lay association. Yang’s estate in Nanjing, for example, was in at least one source referred to as a scripture distributor, and in its broadest sense the label was applied to any publisher, bookstore, or printer that included Buddhist scriptures in its catalogue.<sup>36</sup> One example of this is the series of book lists published by Youzheng Press 有正書局 in early issues of the Buddhist periodical *Foxue congbao* 佛學叢報 (Buddhist Miscellany). By 1914 this catalogue had grown to include about 680 entries from several scriptural publishers, whereas Youzheng’s commercial catalogue from the early 1920s, in contrast, lists only sixteen Buddhist titles.<sup>37</sup> From the early 1920s, however, the term came to be used more specifically to designate an institution specializing in the sale and local distribution of xylographic Buddhist texts that had been printed at a scriptural press. Many of these distributors are listed under the name of a particular temple, while others appear as independent, and often also lay-managed, institutions, the largest of which had their own retail and office locations, regulations, and published catalogues. A brief look at two distributors active

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36 *Haichao yin* 海潮音, issue 8, MFQ 148:433.

37 *Youzheng shuju faxing Fojing liutong suo shumu* 有正書局發行佛經流通所書目, in MFQ 4:549-569; *Youzheng shuju mulu* 有正書局目錄, ([1921? - 1923?]), reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai guji chubanshe faxing shiliao congkan, xubian* 中國近代古籍出版發行史料叢刊·續編, selected and edited by Yin Mengxia 殷夢霞 and Li Shasha 李莎莎 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 8.

in the 1920s will show that while they shared the scriptural press' mission of proselytization and the spread of the Buddhist teachings, they appear to have functioned more as a retail and public space than the presses, which show no indication of welcoming ordinary customers to visit in person. While they had embraced many of the procedures of commercial bookstores, however, these early examples held close to the scriptural press' ideals of merit generation without profiteering.

The Beijing Scripture Distributor 北京佛經流通處 first appears in primary sources from 1919, and was based at Wofu Temple 臥佛寺 just west of the Forbidden City in Beijing.<sup>38</sup> From as early as 1923, which is the date of the earliest distributor catalogue of which I am aware, it had a close relationship with the Tianjin Scripture Distributor 天津佛經流通處. A typeset book catalogue from 1923 lists approximately 3,300 titles on offer by the Beijing and Tianjin distributors, the printing of which is credited to a number of scriptural presses, including Jinling, Jiangbei, Beijing, Tianjin, Changzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and others. This wide range of suppliers is an early example of the highly connected networks of Buddhist print culture that would further develop later in the Republican era.<sup>39</sup> These distributor catalogues also list for sale a variety of Buddhist images printed on different grades of paper and with different types of inks, which were also produced by the scriptural presses. Also listed are photographs of Buddhist sites, religious images of deities, prayer beads, other religious implements such as the wooden fish-shaped drum (*muyu* 木魚) used for liturgies, and many different types and styles of incense.<sup>40</sup>

Crucially, however, unlike earlier catalogues where book prices are absent, this one lists a “cost of printing” (*yinjia* 印價) for each item that would be charged to the consumer. The Beijing Distributor was thus among the first Chinese Buddhist publishers to flip the traditional economic model of scriptural publishing on its head; instead of the donor providing the funds up front then distributing the texts for free in exchange for religious merit, the press or distributor becomes responsible for the cost of production, which is then recouped through sales at cost. A printer's charter and an advertisement near the end of the catalogue outline the intended purpose and function of the distributor. The charter states that while the purpose of the distributor is to

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38 See *Jueshe congshu* 覺社叢書 (Jan., 1919), MFQ 7:164-165.

39 *Foxue shumu biao* 佛學書目表 (Beijing: Beijing Fojing liutong chu, 1923), in *Zhongguo jindai guji chubanshi faxing shiliao congkan bubian* 中國近代古籍出版發行史料叢刊·補編, edited by Wei Li 韋力, collected by Zhilanzhai 芷蘭齋 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2006) 5:439-564, 6:1-211.

40 *Foxue shumu biao*, 6:151-170.

distribute books, it “is not of a commercial character, and should not be seen as a ‘bookstore.’”<sup>41</sup> Yet its structure and its day-to-day operations do in fact resemble those of a commercial publisher and bookstore: it had a centralized distribution network with a main distributor, local branches, and local resellers independent of the press; it invested any donations as permanent capital rather than using them as circulating capital; and it actively solicited new products to be reprinted. The advertisement mentions that people are welcome to visit the distributors whether they intend to buy anything or not, and that staff would be on site to greet them during the day. Books could also be ordered, paid for, and delivered by post.<sup>42</sup> These practices are very much in line with business procedures of the time, the one key difference being that this company sought not monetary profit but rather the generation of merit. This balancing act between merit and profit would be further developed by other Buddhist print enterprises later in the 1920s.

### 5. The Central Scriptural Press

The Central Scriptural Press 中央刻經院 was established in Beijing in the autumn of 1925 and was located in the Ganhua alleyway 感化胡同 outside Xuanwu Gate 宣武門 to the southwest of the Forbidden City. Its founder was Wan Shuhao 萬叔豪 (fl. 1920s – 1936). Wan had initially come to Beijing to work for Xiong Xiling 熊希齡 (1870 – 1937), a scholar and philanthropist who had briefly served as Premier and Finance Minister under Yuan Shikai before resigning in 1914. While working at Xiong's Ganhua Hall 感化院, a philanthropic school which took in “juvenile delinquents” from all over China, Wan compiled textbooks for use in their instruction, and started also to print morality books and Buddhist scriptures. In 1925 he established the Central Scriptural Press to continue his work.<sup>43</sup> The press' first catalogue, published in 1926, lists ten great benefits to be gained from having scriptures printed and images made, including the effacement of transgressions, the protection of auspicious spirits, freedom from others seeking revenge on you, and abundant food and clothing in a harmonious household.<sup>44</sup>

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41 *Foxue shumu biao*, 6:207.

42 *Foxue shumu biao*, 6:210. The advertisement also lists phonographic records of chanting 念佛留聲機片 for sale. The distributor had a policy of not extending credit to customers, likely a wise rule given the unsettled economic climate of 1920s China.

43 “Zhongyang kejing yuan Wan Jun jushi lai han” 中央刻經院萬鈞居士來函, *Guanzong hongfa she kan* 觀宗弘法社刊, no. 18 (Feb., 1931), MFQ 144:491.

44 *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu* 中央刻經院書目 [1926], in *Minguo shiqi chuban shumu huibian* 民國時期出版書目彙編, edited by Liu Hongquan 劉洪權 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2010), 20:78.

According to the origin story printed in the catalogue, the press specialized in printing portable, pocket-sized (*xiuzhen* 袖珍) editions of scriptural texts. The account notes that modern people live busy lives, and unfortunately they cannot carry around copies of Buddhist scriptures and morality books, which are large and heavy. It then recalls that in earlier times, some scholars made manuscript copies of the classics in very small print so that they could have them at hand day and night. Later when xylographic printing was introduced, the standard editions of the classics were quite large so smaller editions were printed as well. These Confucian practices form the model for the press' publication strategy:

Thus this press made a point of following this example. From among all types of Buddhist scriptures and morality books we selected those that were best suited to be consulted morning and night in daily life. Copying the example of the *Sibu congkan*,<sup>45</sup> we planned on using movable type to print one thousand titles in a pocket-sized edition. Organized by category, we would package them into a small box which was bound in a cloth cover for ease of portability. The entire work was divided into ten print runs, with one hundred titles per run, each called a "collection" [*ji* 集], to be printed in series. At present, the first collection has been decided, and will be printed at the end of December, 1926. Its means of distribution will be by the book catalogue detailed below. Please take a look. If we can be of any help, it would truly be our pleasure.<sup>46</sup>

Initially one thousand copies of each title were to be printed, at a total cost of 9,995 yuan. The titles listed in the catalogue that follows include author or translator information, a detailed précis for its content, and two sets of prices: the first quotes expected labor and materials costs per one thousand copies, and the second prices individual copies. In the case of the Diamond Sūtra, for example, the cost of printing a set of one thousand copies is listed as 56 silver yuan, while individual copies would be sold for 6.8 cents each, a 21.5% markup compared to the cost per copy of the set.<sup>47</sup> This system of planning an entire 1000-title, limited-run collection of

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45 *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 (Collectaneum of the Four Categories), edited by Zhang Yuanji 張元濟 (1867 – 1959), was a collection of classical texts printed via lithography, first published in 1919 by the Commercial Press.

46 『故本院特師其意。選擇各種佛經及勸善書籍之最切於人生日用宜於朝夕閱覽者。得一千種。仿四部叢刊例。用鉛版排印袖珍本各一千冊。分類裝入小箱中。以期束之中筭。便於攜帶。全書分十次刷印。每次一百種。名為一集。絡續付印。茲第一集選印之書。已行決定。期於十五年十二月底印成。其流通辦法暨印書目錄。另詳於後。請賜覽觀。如蒙加以扶助。實為至幸。』 Punctuation as in original. *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu*, 81-82.

47 *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu*, 82, 84. At the end of the catalogue is a small list of works offered for sale on consignment (*daishou* 代售) on behalf of other printers, including a number of pocket-sized scriptures, Buddhist



works, advertising for it in advance, and then selling the works for more than the cost of printing appears unprecedented among scriptural presses, who would normally receive a lump-sum donation to print a given title, then make copies of that work available at or below cost.<sup>48</sup>

The Central Scriptural Press had further plans for their financial backing, appending an outline stock prospectus to their catalogue. The document likens the enterprise of printing and distributing scriptures to “opening up the Dharma bridge” (*kaitong faqiao* 開通法橋), and calls it an endeavour that brings incalculable merit. Income for the enterprise is generated through a 20 percent markup on books, although purchases of 100 or more titles would receive a 10 percent discount, and stock holders would be entitled to a 15 percent discount. The business model for the press is explained as “in general conducted according to practices of commercial stores, especially in taking [internal] checks and restraints as our principle.”<sup>49</sup> The press is reported as seeking an initial capitalization of 20,000 yuan divided into ten large shares of 2,000 yuan each, each of which is further divided into ten small shares of 200 yuan; anyone holding one small share or more would be recognized as a stockholder. One half of the stock would be formally underwritten, the other issued in smaller 50 yuan certificates and personally guaranteed by a generous donor. The authors foresaw that once all the shares were sold the press could move out of their temporary location, establish retail branches in temples to help with distribution, and reorganize themselves as a limited liability company to ensure its permanence.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, they planned on using some donations to hire twenty to thirty destitute orphans, teaching them literacy and mathematics for six months, after which they would be dispatched to ferry ports and train stations to sell the company’s products. While this would have likely improved the lives of the children involved, it exemplifies the hybrid philanthropic-commercial tone adopted by distributor’s directors, where even a humanitarian plan is ultimately intended to support their bottom line.

In its 1926 report, the press lists 5,200 yuan of debt, and its income from printing was 27,197.65 yuan, of which over 15,000 yuan came from donations, with 432,000 copies of their

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images, and one work by Taixu. *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu*, 103-104. On p. 113, the back cover of the catalogue, the other printers for whom the press distributed scriptures are listed as 北京天津長沙南京蘇州杭州成都磚橋等處.

48 See, for example, the accounts of the Beijing Scriptural Press above.

49 『概照商店慣例辦理。專以核實摺節為主。』 *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu*, 105-107.

50 *Zhongyang kejing yuan shumu*, 107-112.

own titles printed that year. The press is listed as owning its own printing capital, such as steel, zinc, paper, wood, and cast type printing blocks. At the end of that year, the press owed nearly as much as it had in assets.<sup>51</sup> For 1927, they had earned 8,200 yuan from sales of stock, and had borrowed another 8,000 yuan. Print income was 24,632.55 yuan, with 381,000 copies of 74 different titles printed, and again the press owed outstanding loans in an amount equal to their assets. A two-page catalogue that follows lists titles in the first and second collections of the planned 1000-title print run, but prices are only given per single copy.<sup>52</sup> A short advertisement from 1928 reports that they had already printed and distributed over 1,400,000 copies of over 170 titles across China, and a Buddhist association in Taiwan reported receiving 21 books and 30 printed images from the press that year.<sup>53</sup>

Adopting the structure and practices of commercial publishers was intended to help the Central Scriptural Press to fulfill its mission of spreading the Dharma, and given the numbers of books they were able to distribute it would appear to have been a factor in their success. We might contrast their expressly business-oriented approach with that of the Beijing Gengshen Scripture Distributor 北京庚申佛經流通處, founded in 1920. In 1934 the Gengshen distributor produced the largest catalogue of Buddhist scriptural texts I have yet seen, running to 216 pages and listing approximately 3,120 entries. The catalogue also lists a wide range of religious implements for sale, such as drums, bells, wall hangings, and incense.<sup>54</sup> The directors of the Gengshen distributor, however, saw their enterprise in an entirely different light to that of the Central Scriptural Press: they describe it as “absolutely not of a business character,” and that they “do not extend credit, discount or deduct [prices].”<sup>55</sup> In this case, a Buddhist publisher was adamant in distancing their work from that of commercial presses, and yet they were evidently successful in distributing a massive catalogue of printed Buddhist works.

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51 *Foguang she shekan* 佛光社社刊, no. 3, MFQ 16:478-480.

52 *Foguang she shekan*, 480-486.

53 *Xizai zhuan* 息災專刊, no. 4 (May 24, 1928), MFQ 134:59; *Nanying Fojiao* [Nan'ei Bukkyō] 南瀛佛教, Aug. 21, 1928, MFQ 109:322. Another press advertisement from 1927 is in *Chenzhong tekan* 晨鐘特刊, year 1 no. 2 (Feb., 1927), MFQB 32:306.

54 *Foxue shumu* 佛學書目 (Beiping: Gengshen Fojing liutong chu, Jan. 1934), in *Zhongguo jindai guji chubanshe faxing shiliao congkan xubian* 中國近代古籍出版發行史料叢刊·續編, selected and edited by Yin Mengxia 殷夢霞 and Li Shasha 李莎莎 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 10: 191-410.

55 *Foxue shumu* (1934), 192.

## 6. Concluding Thoughts

This brief survey of Chinese Buddhist scriptural presses and distributors has only been able to outline some of the highlights of how their enterprises were understood and operated. Two themes, however, stand out: first, that the managers and directors of Buddhist scriptural enterprises were often from a bureaucratic or business background, so commercial procedures would have likely been familiar to them, but they applied them to their religious publishing work with some unease, taking pains to explain their use of them in their advertisements, charters, and other publicity materials; and second, that the profit-driven motives of business were not always easy to reconcile with the merit economy of Buddhism. The problem with being seen as operating too much like a commercial business was that it interfered with peoples' motivations for supporting Buddhist publishing: if the directors and investors were in the business of Buddhist publishing for personal gain, it would poison the well for gaining additional donation support in exchange for merit. Buddhist publishers who wished to use modern business practices thus had to carefully balance the different elements of their work so that this connection to the merit economy would not be severed.<sup>56</sup>

I understand these kinds of developments in Chinese Buddhist print culture in part as one indication that the new features of Chinese Buddhism during this period cannot be understood as part of a false dichotomy of 'tradition' and 'modernity.' The core of Buddhist publishing remained the production and distribution of texts for merit and for spreading the Buddhist teachings, and this core was not jettisoned even by the most 'modern' of Buddhist publishing enterprises. What happened instead was a selective integration of modern technologies into longstanding procedures of textual production and merit generation, a grafting of new onto old. This helped to produce an era of exceptionally productive publishing, even while it held within it a number of internal and unresolved contradictions.

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56 We can see this most clearly in the case of the Shanghai Buddhist Books Company, one of the most successful Buddhist publishers of the early twentieth century. See Shi Ruige 史瑞戈 [Gregory Adam Scott], "平衡功德與利益—上海佛學書局股份有限公司的經歷" [Balancing Merit and Profit: The Case of the Shanghai Buddhist Books Company, Limited,] in 《改變中國宗教的五十年，1898-1948》 [1898-1948: Fifty Years that Changed Chinese Religion], edited by Kang Bao 康豹 [Paul R. Katz] and Gao Wanseng 高萬桑 [Vincent Goossaert] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2015): 193-223.

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