

Guangxiao Temple (Guangzhou) and its Multi Roles in the Development of Asia-Pacific Buddhism

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Abstract

Guangxiao Temple is located in Guangzhou (a coastal city in Southern China), and has a long history. The present study conducted an onsite investigation of Guangxiao's precious Buddhist relics, and combined this with a textual analysis of *Annals of Guangxiao Temple*, to discuss its history and multi-roles in Asia-Pacific Buddhism. It is argued that Guangxiao's 1,700-year history can be seen as a microcosm of Chinese Buddhist history. As the special geographical position, Guangxiao Temple often acted as a stopover point for Asian missionary monks in the past. It also played a central role in propagating various elements of Buddhism, including precepts school, Chan (Zen), esoteric (Shingon) Buddhism, and Pure Land. Particularly, Huineng, the sixth Chinese patriarch of Chan Buddhism, made his first public Chan lecture and was tonsured in Guangxiao Temple; Esoteric Buddhist master Amoghavajra's first teaching of esoteric Buddhism is thought to have been in Guangxiao Temple. It was also a translation center in Southern China, where Buddhist scriptures were translated by Yijing and the Shurangama-sūtra was translated by Paramitiin – these texts served to promote the establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism as the mainstream philosophy of Chinese (even Asia-Pacific) Buddhism. With the development of globalization, Guangxiao Temple is now exerting even more positive effects on the propagation of Buddhism via international communications and Buddhist tourism. Our onsite investigation also identified the words in the mantra pillar (826 C.E.). This significant finding suggests the popularity of esoteric Buddhism in Southern China, and will be helpful for Buddhist study in the future.

Keywords: Amoghavajra, Asia-Pacific Buddhism, Guangxiao Temple, Huineng, Mahāyāna Buddhist, Shurangama-sūtra

1. Introduction

Guangxiao Temple (光孝寺, Figure 1) is located in Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, a coastal city in Southern China. As the largest Buddhist temple in Guangzhou, Guangxiao Temple covers an area of 30,000 square kilometers (Chen, 1994; Wang & Li, 2003). The extensive surrounding vegetation and elegant buildings of the temple create a serene and pleasant environment (Figure 2).

According to the temple's annals (Gu & He, 1769) (Figure 3A), Guangxiao originated from the residence of Zhaojiande (趙建德), a descendant of Zhaotuo (趙佗), the king of Nanyue (南越國, 203–110 B.C.E). During the period of the Wu Kingdom (229–280 C.E.), an officer and scholar named Yufan (虞翻) was banished to live at the residence. After Yufan passed away in 233 C.E., his family donated the house as a temple, and it was called Zhizhi Temple (制止寺, 制旨寺). The temple was subsequently renamed Wangyuanchaoyan Temple (王苑朝廷寺), Wangyuan Temple (王園寺), Qianmingfaxing Temple (乾明法性寺), Chongningwanshou Temple (崇寧萬壽寺), and Baenguangxiaochan Temple (報恩廣孝禪寺). In 1482 C.E., Emperor Mingxianzong (明憲宗, 1447–1487 C.E.) renamed it Guangxiao Temple and personally recorded the new name on a stele (Figure 3B). Since then, the temple has kept the name "Guangxiao". Because the Yufan family donated the temple around 233 C.E., Guangxiao Temple can be said to have a history of more than 1,700 years.



Figure 1. Guangxiao Temple (光孝寺) in Guangzhou, Southern China



Figure 2. The pleasant and serene environment of Guangxiao Temple, Guangzhou

Between the 4th and 10th centuries C.E., many monks from South Asia (especially India) or mainland China came to the coastal Guangxiao Temple. During the period, Guangxiao Temple reached its peak. In the subsequent centuries, some eminent Chinese monks also visited or lived at Guangxiao Temple to propagate Buddhism, such as Danxiatianran (丹霞天然) and Yangshanhuiji (仰山慧寂).

After the late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 C.E.), Guangxiao Temple fell into decline, although it underwent minor restoration several times. In the last two centuries, Guangxiao Temple was fatally damaged by the “Requisition Temple Property to Promote Education” (廟產興學, 1898–1931 C.E.) movement and “Great Cultural Revolution” (文化大革命, 1966–1976 C.E.) movement in China. Over this period, most of the buildings of Guangxiao Temple were either destroyed or occupied for secular usage.

In the 1980s, Guangxiao Temple was reoccupied by Buddhist monks. Since then, some of its main halls have been rebuilt, such as the Mahavira Hall (Figure 1A), Samghrama Hall (Figure 4A), and Ksitigarbha Hall (Figure 4B). ‘Dharma pillars’ (Figure 5A) have also been erected in front of each hall. In addition, an animal liberation pond has recently been built near these structures (Figure 5B). These reconstructed buildings have restored the beautiful scenery of Guangxiao Temple to some extent. However, the scale of the temple today is much smaller than in the past.

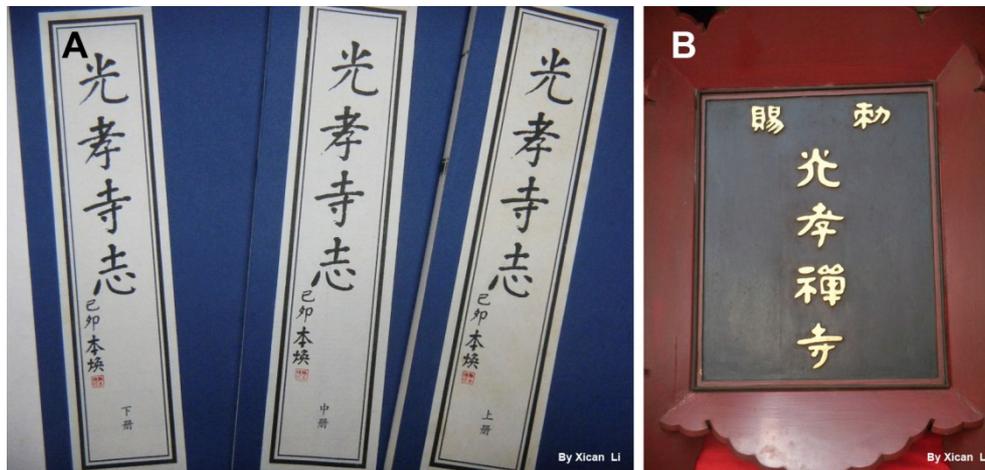


Figure 3. *Annals of Guangxiao Temple* (A); hand-written stele by Emperor Mingxianzong (明憲宗) (B)



Figure 4. The Samghrma Hall (A) and Ksitigarbha Hall (B) of Guangxiao Temple

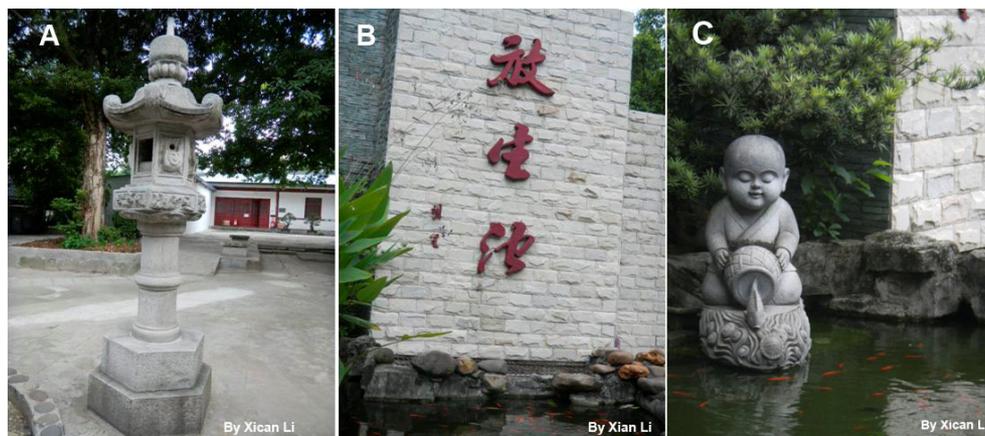


Figure 5. Dharma pillar (A) and animal liberation pond (B) in Guangxiao Temple

Obviously, Guangxiao's 1700-year history is actually a microcosm of the history of Chinese Buddhism. Its historical affairs, however, are faithfully recorded in a precious thread-bound edition named *Annals of Guangxiao Temple*, which was written in 1769 C.E (Gu & He, 1769).

As a precious thread-bound edition, *Annals of Guangxiao Temple* (Figure 3A) is usually enshrined in Guangxiao Temple. To most ordinary people, it is difficult to access it. Hence, the introduction to Guangxiao Temple (especially its history) is usually incomplete and even unreliable (Wikipedia, 2015a; China's Foreign Trade Commette, 2006). Thus, the author went to Guangxiao Temple and personally asked the librarian in Guangxiao Temple for help, then copied some important texts and diagrams (see below) from the temple's annals for

publication. The publication will be an important approach for ordinary people to deeply understand the history of Guangxiao Temple (even Asia-Pacific Buddhism). Subsequently, as the temple's annals was written in 1769 C.E., it does not keep an account of the recent history, the present study tries to update the relevant information. More importantly, there has been no study concerning the contributions of Guangxiao Temple to Asia-Pacific (especially Chinese) Buddhism until now. The present study therefore conducted an onsite investigation of the relics of Guangxiao Temple, combining it with a textual analysis of ancient Chinese texts (especially *Annals of Guangxiao Temple*), to further explore its roles in the development of Asia-Pacific (especially Chinese) Buddhism.

2. As a Stopover Site for Missionary Monks

As is generally known, Chinese Buddhism was introduced by missionary monks via sea and land routes. Its geographical position made the coastal Guangxiao Temple an ideal stopover site for missionary monks. Our textual analysis suggests that there are at least 13 records of missionary monks staying in Guangxiao Temple in the literature (Table 1).

Table 1. Records of missionary monks staying in Guangxiao Temple

Year	Name	Chinese name	Origin	Route	Buddhist affiliation	Resource
397 C.E.	Dharmayasas	曇摩耶舍	Kashmir	From India to China	Precepts school	Gu & He, 1769; Huijiao, 1992a
435 C.E.	Gunabhadra	求那跋陀羅	Central India	From India to China	Precepts school	Gu & He, 1769; Huijiao, 1992b
502 C.E.	Zhiyao Tripitaker	智藥	Western India	From India to China	Chan (Zen)	Gu & He, 1769; Huineng, 2014
527 C.E.	Bodhidharma	菩提達摩	India	From India to China	Chan	Gu & He, 1769; Huineng, 2014
539 C.E.	Paramārtha	真諦	India	From Funan to China	Yogācāra	Gu & He, 1769; Daoxuan, 2014
558-569 C.E.	Paramārtha	真諦	India	From Northern China to Southern China	Yogācāra	Gu & He, 1769; Daoxuan, 2014
671-693 C.E.	Yijing	義淨	China	From China to India	Precepts school	Zanning, 1987a; Yijing, 1995
676 C.E.	Huineng	惠能	China	From Northern China to Southern China	Chan	Gu & He, 1769; Huineng, 2014
705 C.E.	Paramiti	般刺蜜帝	Central India	From Indian to China	Esoteric Buddhism	Gu & He, 1769; Zanning, 1987b
732 C.E.	Amoghavajra	不空	Northern India	From China to Sri Lanka and India	Esoteric Buddhism	Zanning, 1987c; Zhao, 1924
750 C.E. (Approx.)	Jianzhen (Ganjin)	鑑真	China	From China to Japan	Precepts school	Zanning, 1987d
754 C.E.	Amoghavajra	不空	Northern India	From China to homeland	Esoteric Buddhism	Zanning, 1987c; Zhao, 1924
1598 C.E.	Hanshandeqing	憨山德清	China	From Northern China to Southern China	Chan Pure Land	Gu & He, 1769

Note: Funan (扶南) Kingdom: an ancient Kingdom (late 1st century-early 7th century C.E.) in modern Cambodia, Southern Laos, Southern Vietnam, and Southeastern Thailand; Amoghavajra: his nationality is recorded as Sri Lanka in other literatures; In 754 C.E., he wanted to return to his homeland, however, he was persuaded to stay in Guangzhou; Precepts: also called sila-vinaya; Esoteric Buddhism: also called Shingon Buddhism.

3. As a Buddhist Preaching and Scriptural Translation Center in Southern China

3.1 Preaching Buddhist Precepts (*Sila-vinaya*)

In 397 C.E., a monk named Dharmayasas (曇摩耶舍) came to China from Kashmir and stayed at Guangxiao Temple until the year of Yixi (義熙, 405–418 C.E.). During this period, he built the temple's first Mahavira Hall. Undoubtedly, this laid the foundation for subsequent Buddhist preaching. The current Mahavira Hall was rebuilt in 1980s but retains the architectural style of Dharmayasas' original (Figure 1A) (Gu & He, 1769). In 435 C.E., the monk Gunabhadra (求那跋陀羅) from Central India arrived at Guangxiao Temple and set up a precept platform (戒壇) in the temple. The site is shown in a depiction in Figure 6A and the architectural style may have been similar to the hall in Figure 6B. This was the first Buddhist precept platform in Southern China. It is worth mentioning that: (i) the Chinese monk Yijing (義淨), during his pilgrimage to India to seek Buddhist scriptures (671-693 C.E.), also stayed in Guangxiao Temple three times. During these visits, he may have propagated Buddhist precepts (*silav-vinaya*) (Zanning, 1987a), which formed Yijing's focus within Buddhism; (ii) In about 750 C.E. Jianzhen (or Ganjin, 鑿真), a Chinese monk who helped to propagate Buddhism (especially precepts) in Japan, stayed in Guangxiao Temple for 3 months, after his fifth attempt to travel to Japan (Zanning, 1987d).

3.2 Preaching Chan (*Zen*) Buddhism

In 527 C.E., Bodhidharma (菩提達摩), the first Chinese patriarch of Chan Buddhism (i.e. the 28th Indian patriarch), undertook a 3-year voyage by sea to China. He landed first on the western bank of the Pearl River (珠江) in Guangzhou. The landing site is now commemorated by Hualin Temple (華林寺). Next, Bodhidharma moved to Guangxiao Temple, in which he taught the residents how to dig a well for drinking water. Therefore, the well was named 'Dharma Well'. Unfortunately, no trace of the well remains. Bodhidharma was then invited by Emperor Liangwu (梁武帝, 464–549 C.E.) to the capital Jiankang (建康), and finally lived in Shaolin Temple (少林寺) as a hermit for many years. His Chan Buddhism was subsequently inherited by the second Chinese patriarch Huike (慧可, 487-593 C.E.), the third Chinese patriarch Sengcan (僧璨, 510–606 C.E.), the fourth Chinese patriarch Daoxing (道信, 580–651 C.E.), the fifth Chinese patriarch Hongren (弘忍, 601–675 C.E.), and the sixth Chinese patriarch Huineng (惠能, 慧能, 638–713 C.E.) (Gu & He, 1769; Huineng, 2014).

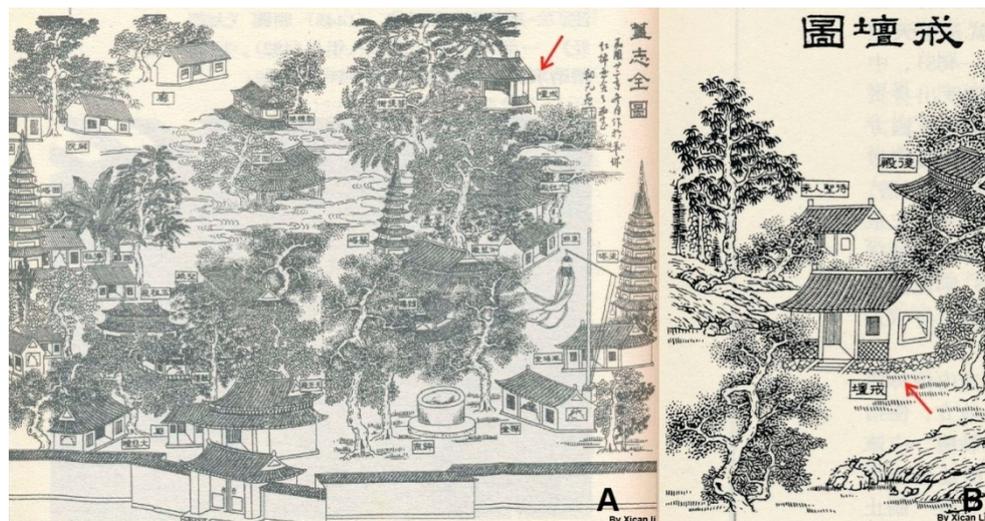


Figure 6. The site (A) and architectural style (B) of the precept platform of Guangxiao Temple (Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 C.E.)

After ending his retreat in 676 C.E., Huineng came to Guangxiao Temple, in which he observed an argument about a flag and the wind. At the time, a flag was being blown by the wind (Figure 7A) (Gu & He, 1769). One monk said the movement was from the flag; however, another argued that the wind was blowing the flag, causing it to move. Huineng arrived and said, "The movement is neither from the flag (幡) nor the wind (風), but from your heart" (Huineng, 2014). It must be noted that this was his first public Chan lecture. At the site, a hall named Fengfangtang (風幡堂) was later built (Figure 7A, arrow); however, it cannot be found now. Subsequently, Huineng took the vows of a Buddhist monk under a Bodhi tree (Figure 7B & C), and his hair was buried and preserved in Liuzuyifa Pagoda (六祖瘞發塔, Figure 8A). In order to memorize Huineng, another hall named Liuzu Hall (六祖殿, Figure

9) has been founded beside the Bodhi tree between 1008 and 1016 C.E. In addition to these sites, Xiboquan Spring (Figure 8B & C) is also regarded as a relic relevant to Chan. It is said this was the site of a well where Huineng washed his bowl.

It is worth mentioning that, earlier in 502 C.E., another Indian monk Zhiyao Tripitaka (智藥三藏) carried a sapling of the original Bodhi tree from India to Guangxiao Temple, and planted it there (Figure 7B). He prophesied there would be an incarnate bodhisattva to preach the highest Dharma (i.e. Chan enlightenment) after 170 years (Huineng, 2014). The appearance of Huineng in 676 C.E. apparently answered Zhiyao's prophecy.

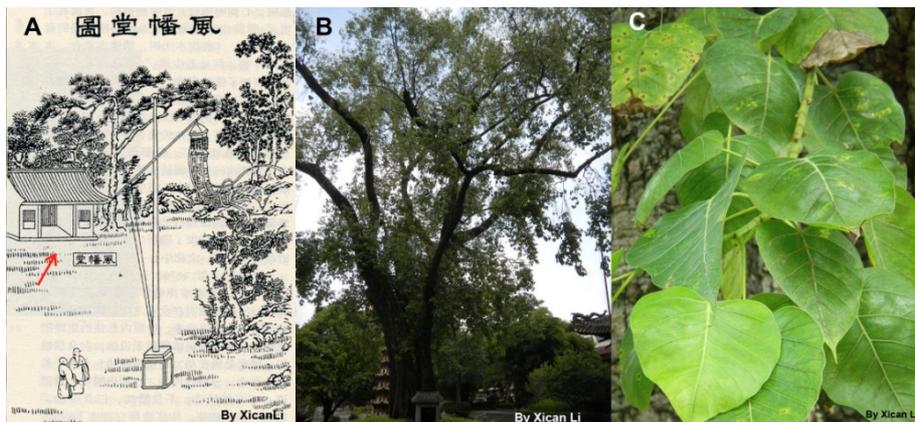


Figure 7. Fengfang Hall (A); the Bodhi tree planted by Zhiyao (B); and its leaves (C)

Note: The Bodhi tree planted by Zhiyao was transplanted to several places, such as Shaoguang Nanhua Temple (韶關南華寺) and Zhaoqing Baiyun Temple (肇慶白雲寺). The original died in 1798 C.E. but was then replanted from the Nanhua Temple transplant. The transplanted one is shown here; it has grown for over 200 years and the leaves are a little old. The background of Figure C is the bark of the Bodhi tree.



Figure 8. Buddhist relics relevant to Chan Buddhism in Guangxiao Temple: (A) Liuzuyifa Pagoda (六祖瘞發塔); (B&C) Xiboquan Spring (洗鉢泉)

Note: In Figure B, the stele reads three Chinese characters “洗鉢泉”, the well is behind the stele. Figure C is its diagrammatic sketch in *Annals of Guangxiao Temple* (Gu & He, 1769).

In summary, the first Chinese patriarch Bodhidharma had ever stayed at Guangxiao Temple, and the sixth Chinese patriarch Huineng preached his first Chan sermon and became a Buddhist monk at the temple. About ten centuries later, another Chinese Chan master, Hanshandeqing (Table 1), in the Ming Dynasty, wrote a couplet hanging at Guangxiao's gate to summarize the role of Guangxiao Temple in the development of Chan Buddhism. The first line of the couplet reads “Chan enlightenment has now widely spread around China, however, Guangxiao Temple was the origin of Chan public preaching” (“禪教遍環中茲為最初福地”). Now, it has been further spread into Japan, Korea (Christoph, 2011), Viet Nam (Wikipedia, 2015b), USA (Buster & Paul, 2008), Canada (Campbell, 2010), and other Asia-Pacific countries.



Figure 9. The Liuzu Hall (六祖殿) in Guangxiao Temple

Note: Liuzu refers to the Chinese patriarch Huineng in Zen Buddhism; The hall was founded by a lay Buddhist named Guochonghua (郭重華) in the year of Dazhongxianfu (大中祥符, 1008-1016 C.E.); It has subsequently been damaged and rebuilt several times; The current hall was built in 1692 C.E. (Gu & He, 1769); The top left corner is the branch of the Bodhi tree in Figure 7B.

3.3 Preaching Esoteric (Shingon) Buddhism

In 732 C.E, Amoghavajra, an esoteric Buddhist master, decided to search out and collect Buddhist scriptures for India, after his guru Vajrabodhi died. However, he had to stay at Guangxiao Temple for about one year for the commercial vessel. During the period, he taught thousands of people esoteric Buddhism in Guangxiao Temple. This is thought to be Amoghavajra's first teaching of esoteric Buddhism. Since then, Amoghavajra had widely spread the esoteric Buddhism in China for over 40 years. When Amoghavajra died in 774 C.E., the Tang governor erected a monument to memorialize his distinguished preaching activities (Figure 10) (Zanning, 1987c; Zhao, 1924). As we know, the type of Buddhism introduced by Amoghavajra was later introduced by Kūkai (空海) into Japan (Royall, 1987) and has been introduced to the USA (Buster & Paul, 2008), Canada (Campbell, 2010), and other Asia-Pacific countries. Guangxiao's role as the original place that Amoghavajra taught the esoteric Buddhism, obviously becomes more outstanding now. However, it must be noted that it differs slightly from Tibetan esoteric Buddhism.

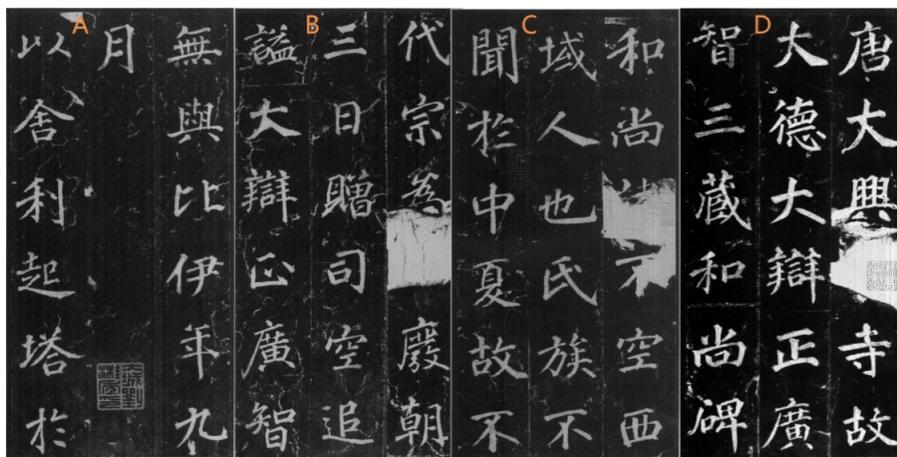


Figure 10. Some of texts of monument memorializing Amoghavajra (Contributed by Baidu encyclopedia, www.baidu.com)

3.4 Preaching Pure Land Buddhism

As mentioned above, Hanshandeqing also stayed in Guangxiao Temple and there propagated a fusion of Chan and Pure Land in 1598 C.E. This obviously accelerated the transmission of Pure Land Buddhism in Southern China.

As shown, Guangxiao Temple played a center role in propagating Buddhism, including the precepts school, Chan, esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land Buddhism.

3.5 Translating Buddhist Scriptures

In accordance with the records (Gu & He, 1769), dozens of Buddhist scripture have been translated in Guangxiao Temple (Table 2).

The above mentioned monk Dharmayasas, while at Guangxiao Temple, finished his translation of the Chamojing (差摩經), a section of Samyuktagama-sūtra. This was the first Buddhist scripture translated in Guangxiao Temple (Gu & He, 1769).

In 539 C.E., an Indian monk named Paramārtha (真諦) came to Guangzhou from the Funan Kingdom, and was soon invited by Emperor Liangwu to the capital Jiankang. Because of a civil war, he had to return to Guangzhou in 558 C.E., and settled in Guangxiao Temple for about 10 years. During this period, along with his assistants, he finished translating over 40 Buddhist scriptures (Gu & He, 1769), notably including the Mahāyāna-samgraha-śāstra and Abhidharmakosa-śāstra, which systematically introduced Indian Mahāyāna Yogācāra to China, and greatly influenced Chinese Buddhism. Paramārtha is regarded as a great translator of sūtras in Chinese Buddhism and to memorialize him, Guangxiao Temple set up a library called the Paramārtha Audiovisual Library in 2007 (Figure 11).

Table 2. Buddhist scriptures translated in Guangxiao Temple

Year	Name	Chinese name	Resource
397 C.E.	Dharmayasas	Chamo-Sūtra (差摩經)	Huijiao, 1992a
558-569 C.E.	Paramārtha	Mahāyāna-samgraha-śāstra (攝大乘論), Abhidharmakosa-śāstra (阿毗達摩俱舍論), Mahāyāna Cittamatra (大乘唯識論), Generalized Dharma-mukha Sūtra (廣義法門經), Anuttarāśraya-sūtra(無上依經), Buddha-nature śāstra(佛性論), Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sūtra (金剛般若波羅蜜經), etc.	Gu & He, 1769; Daoxuan, 2014
705 C.E.	Paramiti	Śūraṅgama-sūtra (楞嚴經)	Zanning, 1987b; Zanning, 1987e



Figure 11. Guangxiao Paramārtha (Chinese 真諦) Audiovisual Library

In 705 C.E., another Indian monk, Paramiti, recited the Shurangama-sūtra in Guangxiao Temple and it was translated into Chinese (Figure 12A) (Zanning, 1987b; Zanning, 1987e). As is generally known, the Shurangama-sūtra became a central sūtra in Chinese Buddhism for over 1000 years. The fact that it was later translated into several additional languages, such as Tibetan, Manchu, and Mongolian, indicates that the Shurangama-sūtra considerably influenced Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, including Chan Buddhism, esoteric Buddhism, and Yogācāra. Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, further influenced the Buddhism of its neighbouring countries, such as Japan, Korea (Christoph, 2011), and Viet Nam (Wikipedia, 2015b).

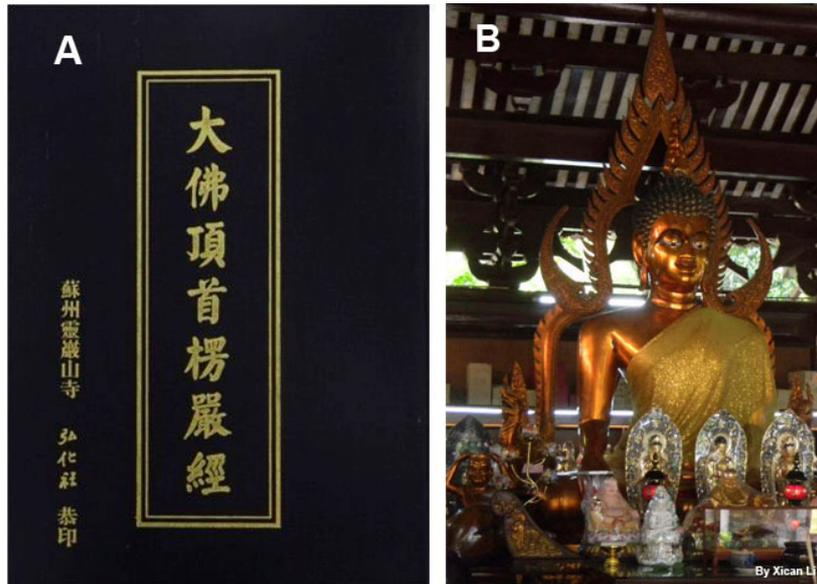


Figure 12. A version of Shurangama-sūtra (A); the Thai-style Buddha statue in Guangxiao Temple (B) (Figure A was contributed by Linyanshan Temple, Suzhou, China.)

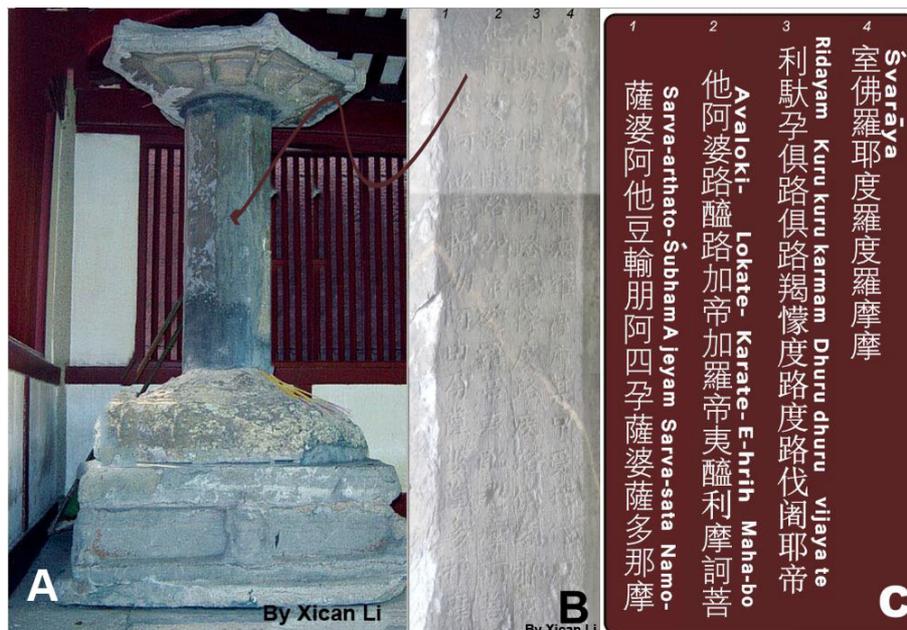


Figure 13. The ancient mantra pillar (大悲陀羅尼經幢, A) built in 826 C.E. at Guangxiao Temple; some of original words in the pillar (B), and the transcribed and annotated words (C)

The direct evidence for the popularity of Mahāyāna Buddhism (especially esoteric Buddhism), is an ancient mantra pillar (大悲陀羅尼經幢, Figure 13A) at Guangxiao Temple. According to the temple's annals (Gu & He,

1769), and the words inscribed in the pillar, the mantra pillar was built in 826 C.E. Therefore, it is the oldest Buddhist relics in Guangxiao Temple, and older than Shanghai Songjian (松江) mantra pillar (An, 1987). Unfortunately, it is often neglected by the previous reports (Wikipedia, 2015a; China's Foreign Trade Commette, 2006). Some researchers however just mentioned the pillar itself and gave up the further identification of the words in the pillar (He, 2003; Wang & Li, 2003), because most of them are blurry (Figure 13B). Our onsite investigation however successfully identified some of words, then further copied and marked them with phonetic symbols in Figure 13C. Obvioulsy, these words are from Mantra Dharani Sūtra (Bhagavaddharma, 1924), a Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture. This is regarded as a significant finding, and will provide more information for the study on the mantra and Guangxiao Temple in the future.

In short, the achievement of Buddhist preaching and scriptural translation by these eminent monks (Table 2), led to Guangxiao Temple to become the center of Southern Chinese Buddhism.

It can be further confirmed by becoming Western Iron Pagoda, the earliest iron pagoda of China (Figure 14A). The pagoda was originally a seven-story Buddhist pagoda coated with gold, in which many Buddha statues were inlaid in niches (Figure 14B). It was ever protected by a Buddhist attic (Figure 14C). As the gold coating was gradually removed, the iron beneath was exposed. In the 1930s, a typhoon destroyed four stories, leaving three remaining. Since the pagoda was originally built to the west of Guangxiao Temple, it is usually called the Western Iron Pagoda. Based on the temple's annals (Gu & He, 1769), it was built in 963 C.E. by the eunuch Gongchengshu (龔澄樞), to please Liuchang (劉鋹, 942–980 C.E.), the last king of the Nanhan (南漢, 917–971 C.E.) (Gu & He, 1769). The Kingdom of Nanhan, however, was the biggest Kingdom in Southern China at that time (Yi, 2013). The fact that the Western Iron Pagoda was originally deposited in Guangxiao Temple, suggests Guangxiao as the center of the Southern Chinese Buddhism.

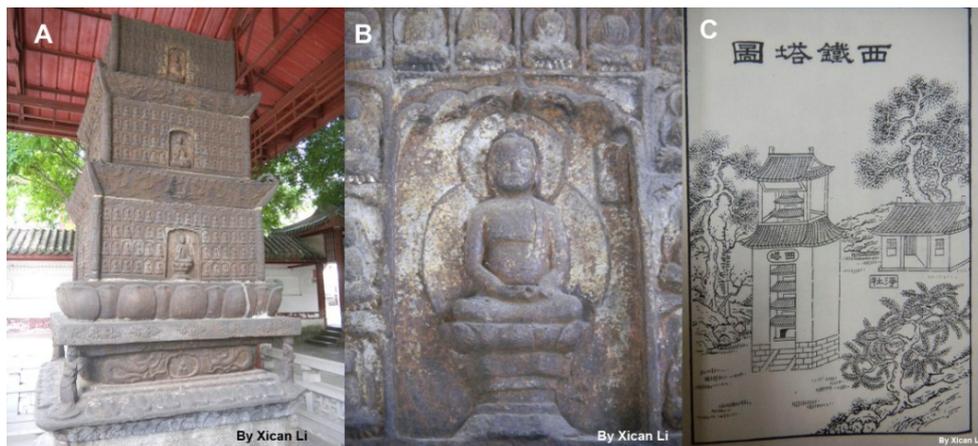


Figure 14. The Western Iron Pagoda (A&B), and its diagrammatic sketch in *Annals of Guangxiao Temple* (C) (Gu & He, 1769)

Note: Figure C is a diagrammatic sketch of the original pagoda, which was coated with gold and protected by a Buddhist attic

4. As a Platform for Governmental or Non-Governmental Communications

As the most important temple in Southern China, Guangxiao Temple is often visited by governmental or non-governmental organizations from around the world, especially South East Asia. For example, the Educational Department of Thailand Kingdom donated a Thai-style Buddha statue (Figure 12B) to develop friendly relations between China and Thailand in the 1980s (He, 2003). In 2013, a delegation of the Federal Parliament of Burma visited Guangxiao Temple for a Buddhist and cultural exchange (Miaoying, 2013). In addition, as a stopover site in Maritime Silk Road, Guangxiao Temple also played a critical role in international trade (China's Foreign Trade Commette, 2006). This shows that Guangxiao Temple has acted as a platform for governmental or non-governmental communications in recent years.

5. As a Buddhist Tourist Attraction

Besides the above Buddhist or cultural relics, some modern buildings have been built in recent years, including the Paramārtha Audiovisual Library (Figure 11) and a group of modern sculptures (Figure 15A), which presumably

express the fusion of the precepts school, Chan, esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land Buddhism. Today, these Buddhist relics and modern buildings attract many tourists every year. Guangxiao Temple also holds occasional lectures in the Buddhist lecture room (法堂) (Figure 15B&C).



Figure 15. The modern buildings in Guangxiao Temple: A, a group of sculptures; B & C, Buddhist lecture room (Fatang, 法堂)

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the textual analysis of *Annals of Guangxiao Temple* indicates that Guangxiao Temple has a history of more than 1,700 years and its history is actually a microcosm of the history of Chinese Buddhism. During the history of over 1700 years, Guangxiao Temple played multi roles in the development of Asia-Pacific Buddhism.

(i) Guangxiao Temple often served as a stopover point for Asian missionary monks in the past, it can be attributed to its special geographical position.

(ii) As the center of Southern Chinese Buddhism, Guangxiao Temple played a critical role in propagating Buddhism, including precepts school, Chan, esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land Buddhism. Especially, the distinguished preaching activities of the sixth Chinese patriarch of Chan Buddhism Huineng and the esoteric master Amoghavajra have greatly influenced the Chinese (even Asia-Pacific) Buddhism. In addition, Guangxiao Temple was regarded as the center of Buddhist scriptural translation in Southern China, and has undertaken the translation of dozens of Buddhist scriptures, among which Shurangama-sūtra, Mahāyāna-samgraha-śāstra, and Abhidharmakosa-śāstra served to promote the establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism as the mainstream philosophy of Chinese (even Asia-Pacific) Buddhism.

(iii) With the development of globalization and the increase in international tourism, Guangxiao Temple is now exerting even more positive effects on the propagation of Buddhism via international communications and Buddhist tourism.

Our onsite investigation also identified some words in the inscribed mantra pillar built in 826 C.E. This significant finding suggests the popularity of esoteric Buddhism in Southern China in ancient China, and will provide more information for the study on the mantra and Guangxiao Temple in the future.

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