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ARTICLES

The Huayan Philosophers Fazang and Li Tongxuan on the “Six Marks” and the “Sphere of Edification”

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TRADITIONALLY, Huayan 華嚴 (Jp. Kegon; K. Hwaōm) scholasticism has been characterized by a grandiose metaphysical edifice formulated by some pioneering figures during the Sui 隋 (581–618) and Tang 唐 (618–907) periods. Led by this stereotyped depiction, scholars tend to pay a little too much attention to the thought of the so-called “five Huayan patriarchs,” to the point that they fail to notice diverse facets of the tradition.¹ As pointed out by Robert M. Gimello, such an attitude can be labelled as a “drastic over-simplification of the actual complexity of its history.”² He

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¹ According to Yoshizu Yoshihide (1984, pp. 264–65), the theory of “five Huayan patriarchs” was introduced by Changshui Zixuan 長水子璿 (965–1038) and Jinshui Jingyuan 晉水淨源 (1011–1088) during the Song 宋 period (960–1127). Before they set forth their theory, Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), who was later recognized as the fifth patriarch, presented a Huayan lineage that identified Dushun 杜順 (557–640) as the first patriarch and Fazang 法藏 (643–712) as a de facto founder of the Huayan school. As Zongmi was active during the mid-Tang period and saw the flourishing of Chan 禪 Buddhism, he might have been influenced by the Chan notion of lineage which emphasized the unbroken succession of teachings between masters and disciples. Zixuan and Jingyuan then associated Fazang with Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839) in a master-disciple relationship despite the lack of any historical evidence of such relationship. Thereafter the Chinese Huayan tradition focused on the thought of Fazang and Chengguan.

² Gimello 1983, pp. 321–24.

thus suggests that we take due notice of “its great diversity” and “innovation and disjuncture.”

In this respect, a comparative study of two Huayan thinkers, who were contemporaries but responsible for presenting quite different frameworks for the interpretation of the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (hereafter, *Flower Garland Sutra*), could redress the abovementioned stereotyped understanding of the tradition. In this paper, I will mainly draw on important passages from the works of Fazang 法藏 (643–712) and Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635–730), thereby hoping to give a nuanced picture of the tradition and counter the one-sided emphasis on the “orthodox” lineage.³ An exhaustive comparison of the philosophies of the two masters would go beyond the scope of this paper, however. My focus will thus be limited to an analysis of two key concepts, namely the “six marks” (*liuxiang* 六相) and the “sphere of edification” (*shehua fenqi* 攝化分齊 or *shehua jingjie* 攝化境界), which were adopted by the two figures but used in different ways.

Since Li Tongxuan made extensive allusions to Fazang’s interpretations of the *Flower Garland Sutra* in his *Xin huayan jing lun* 新華嚴經論 (A Treatise on the Newly Translated Flower Garland Sutra; hereafter, *Xin lun*), it is evident that he was well aware of Fazang’s treatises and commentaries. What strikes us when we read Li’s works is that he had a tendency to read the *Flower Garland Sutra* more intuitively and boldly than the “orthodox” Huayan masters did. This attitude could possibly be attributed to his status as a layman who was free from any rigid doctrinal grid. Whereas a professional scholar-monk like Fazang would examine a scriptural passage on the basis of established theories, especially those of the Yogācāra and Dilun 地論 schools, a layman like Li Tongxuan could perhaps have had more room to bring his own intuition and practice into the explication of the same passage. If the former might be in danger of satisfying himself with presenting doctrinal theories that are well argued but lack fresh insights, the latter may more easily present an interpretation that can fit better with the “literary texture and imagery” of the scripture in question.⁴

In what follows, I will first introduce the two masters’ different exegetical styles, which can be dubbed as “literalism” and “intuitivism” respectively,

³ After the establishment of the five patriarchs theory, Chinese and Japanese scholar-monks generally followed the ideas presented in the works of these five Huayan masters and regarded the works by other thinkers as “heterodox.” The legacy of this orthodox-heterodox dichotomy can be found in Yusuki (1975, p. 227), where he severely criticizes Huiyuan 慧苑 (ca. 673–743) and Li Tongxuan.

⁴ Gimello 1983, pp. 338–39, 360.

by quoting some representative passages from their works. Next, I will examine their different interpretations of two important scholastic concepts: the six marks and the sphere of edification. In this manner I would like to reveal their opposing practical orientations and stress the fact that diverse perspectives existed within the Huayan tradition.

Literalism vs. Intuitivism

As is well known, Fazang's scholastic activities were inextricably associated with the political situation of his time. The *Jin shizi zhang* 金師子章 (A Treatise on the Golden Lion), one of his later works, is a record of his lecture delivered to Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (625–705) in order to offer a succinct overview of Huayan philosophy to her. Although historical sources show discrepancies concerning the exact date of this work,⁵ all of them agree that Fazang's lecture, which employed the simile of a golden lion standing at the corner of a royal palace, aroused great enlightenment in Wu Zetian's mind. Here it should be noted that the backdrop against which this treatise was composed clearly shows Fazang's active involvement in court politics. His ascent to prominent status as a religious leader may also be ascribed to his close ties with the contemporaneous polity.

Whereas this short treatise uses a simile that can be easily understood by a person who has no expertise in Buddhist philosophy, his other works are replete with rather daunting philological analyses. For instance, the *Dasheng qixin lun yiji* 大乘起信論義記 (The Commentary on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) frequently provides sophisticated ways of breaking down Buddhist compounds even in the context of introducing such basic Buddhist terms as “basket of scriptures” (Ch. *jingzang* 經藏; Skt. *sūtra-piṭaka*) and “basket of discipline” (Ch. *lüzang* 律藏; Skt. *vinaya-piṭaka*).⁶ Besides such a pedantic style shown in his explication of Buddhist terms, we can also discern “literalism” in this work. In the *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana), for instance, the term “ultimate enlightenment” (*jiujing jue* 究竟覺) is defined as “being aware of the initial

⁵ For instance, the *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (Chronological Record of the Buddhas and Patriarchs; ca. 1614) dates the composition of the *Jin shizi zhang* to 699. But the *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 (Annals of the Buddhas and Patriarchs; 1341) says that the *Jin shizi zhang* was written in 702. See *Fozu tongji*, fasc. 39, T no. 2035, 49: 370c6–11; *Fozu lidai tongzai*, fasc. 12, T no. 2036, 49: 585b23–c2.

⁶ *Dasheng qixin lun yiji*, fasc. 1, T no. 1846, 44: 241b27–c18. Here Fazang adopts diverse technical terms such as “descriptive compound” (Ch. *zhiye shi* 持業釋; Skt. *karma-dhāraya*) and “dependent compound” (Ch. *yizhu shi* 依住釋; Skt. *tat-puruṣa*).

arising of the mind and [coming to understand that] the mind is devoid of that initial characteristic [of arising]” (*juexin chuqi xin wu chuxiang* 覺心初起心無初相). Previous stages of “actualized enlightenment” (*shijue* 始覺) are, to the contrary, defined as “being aware of the changing and abiding of thoughts and [coming to understand that] thoughts are devoid of those characteristics of changing and abiding” (*jue yu nian yi nian wu yixiang . . . jue yu nian zhu nian wu zhuxiang* 覺於念異念無異相 . . . 覺於念住念無住相).⁷ Regarding the replacement of the word “thought” by “mind” in the definition of “ultimate enlightenment,” Fazang says:

Although the previous three stages have something to be aware of, the wavering thoughts are not yet extinguished. Therefore those stages are just defined as “[coming to understand that] the thought is devoid of that characteristic of abiding, and so on.” Now, in this stage of ultimate enlightenment, the wavering thoughts are completely extinguished and only one mind exists. Therefore the expression “[coming to understand that] the mind is devoid of that initial characteristic” is used.⁸

Here we can clearly see that Fazang takes meticulous notice of the different expressions in the text and explicates the scriptural passage in question on the assumption that a subtle change in wording leads to a complete difference in the meaning.

Such an attitude that keeps a careful eye on each and every word in a given text can also be found in Fazang’s commentary on the *Flower Garland Sutra*. The most salient example that shows Fazang’s literalism is his interpretation of the phrase “first attainment of right enlightenment” (*shicheng zhengjue* 始成正覺), which appears four times at the beginning of important chapters of the scripture. In the *Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記 (An Investigation into the Profundity of the Flower Garland Sutra; hereafter, *Tanxuan ji*), Fazang asserts that the scripture was preached during the second week (*dier qi ri* 第二七日) after the Buddha’s first attainment of right enlightenment.⁹ In order to justify his identification of the Buddha’s initial teaching as having occurred in the second week after this first attainment, he distinguishes the Buddha’s first appearance in the world (*xianshi zhi shi* 現世之始) from the actual initiation of his preaching (*shuofa zhi shi* 說法之始).¹⁰ Here Fazang

⁷ *Dasheng qixin lun*, T no. 1666, 32: 576b20–23.

⁸ *Dasheng qixin lun yiji*, fasc. 2, T no. 1846, 44: 258c5–8.

⁹ *Huayan jing tanxuan ji*, fasc. 2, T no. 1733, 35: 127b24–c12.

¹⁰ *Tanxuan ji*, fasc. 2, T no. 1733, 35: 128a6–9.

refers to a passage from Vasubandhu's *Shidi jing lun* 十地經論 (A Treatise on the Sutra of the Ten Grounds), according to which the Buddha remained silent during the first week because he was involved in the practices of contemplation and causation (*siwei xing yinyuan xing* 思惟行因緣行).¹¹ From the examination of this example, it is evident that Fazang takes the expression "first attainment of right enlightenment" literally, as denoting the initial moment of awakening, and that he regards the Buddha's initial teaching career, as is described in the *Flower Garland Sutra*, as temporally separate from that moment. Here it is also to be noted that Fazang bases his reasoning on authoritative Buddhist scriptures and commentaries.

Although Fazang's expertise in Buddhist classics and Sanskrit grammar must have been conducive to his becoming a professional exegete, his rigid literalism might have prevented him from penetrating the profound meaning of the passage in question. In relation to this, it would be helpful to see how Li Tongxuan criticizes Fazang's explication of the same passage. In the *Xin lun*, Li summarizes various theories concerning the initiation of the Buddha's sermons, including Fazang's.¹² But he does not agree with Fazang and says that any effort to locate the beginning of the Buddha's preaching would fail, because such an effort is based on our sense-bound conceptualization (*qingliang* 情量), not on wisdom (*zhi* 智). According to him, if we base our understanding on wisdom, we will see that the teaching of the One Vehicle (i.e., the *Flower Garland Sutra*) is without beginning and end (*wushi wuzhong* 無始無終) and goes beyond all temporal limits (*wushi* 無時).¹³ Thus he suggests that we should understand the phrase "first attainment of right enlightenment" in the following manner:

The phrase "first attainment of right enlightenment" means that the Buddha, with¹⁴ his own mind and body, realized the fact that all objects of old and new in the three time periods are contained in a single moment [of thought] without any marks of distance. . . . This is what is meant by the sentence in the scripture [that reads], "Wisdom enters three time periods without coming or going" (*zhi ru sanshi er wu lai wang* 智入三世而無來往). . . . All

¹¹ *Shidi jing lun*, fasc. 1, T no. 1522, 26: 124a11–12.

¹² *Xin lun*, fasc. 6, T no. 1739, 36: 759a3–14; fasc. 9, T no. 1739, 36: 776a22–b8.

¹³ *Xin lun*, fasc. 3, T no. 1739, 36: 737b2–4; fasc. 6, T no. 1739, 36: 759a15–29; fasc. 9, T no. 1739, 36: 776b9–25.

¹⁴ The *Xin lun* has *yi* 已 (already) but this character should be amended to *yi* 以 (with), following the character appearing in the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing helun* 大方廣佛華嚴經合論. See fasc. 7, X no. 223, 4: 56a13–23.

forty chapters of the scripture are imprinted (*yin* 印) at once in the moment of the Buddha's first attainment of right enlightenment through the *samādhi* of the wisdom-seal of the ocean-like dharma realm. . . . The interpenetration of past and present (*gujin xiangche* 古今相徹) is what is meant by the word "first" (*shi* 始). Conforming to the truth just as it is (*xiefu rushi* 契法如是) is what is meant by the word "attainment" (*cheng* 成). Relying upon the truth just as it is without mental manipulation (*yifa rushi fei xin zaozuo* 依法如是非心造作) is what is meant by the word "right" (*zheng* 正). Penetrating this principle through wisdom (*zhi da si li* 智達斯理) is what is meant by the word "enlightenment" (*jue* 覺).¹⁵

Unlike Fazang who takes the word "first" literally and understands the expression "first attainment of right enlightenment" as being related to the Buddha's initial enlightenment experience, Li Tongxuan reads the former as indicating the Buddha's time-transcending wisdom and the latter as denoting sentient beings' attainment of insight into this pervasive wisdom.

Because Li Tongxuan does not provide any textual references for his interpretation of the expression "first attainment of right enlightenment," we should say that such an innovative interpretation could possibly be ascribed to his own intuition into the pervasiveness of the Buddha's time-transcending wisdom and the fundamental equality between the Buddha and sentient beings. While there are many other cases that show Li Tongxuan's insightful interpretation of the *Flower Garland Sutra*, this one example should suffice to label his exegetical attitude as "intuitivism."¹⁶

The "Six Marks"

The doctrine of the six marks had been accorded a central place in Huayan scholasticism since the time of Fazang's master, Zhiyan 智儼 (602–668). Fazang's *Huayan jing chuanji* 華嚴經傳記 (A Record of the Transmission of the Flower Garland Sutra) states that Zhiyan studied various Buddhist texts and scholastic systems under many masters and finally selected the

¹⁵ *Xin lun*, fasc. 7, T no. 1739, 36: 761c11–23.

¹⁶ Li Tongxuan gained an intuition into the fact that our phenomenal world is none other than the one true dharma realm (*yizhen fajie* 一眞法界). On the basis of this intuition, he justified his adoption of non-Buddhist Chinese symbolism or secular philosophy to explicate the *Flower Garland Sutra*, arguing that there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane in this unitary realm. For an analysis of Li's adoption of Chinese symbolism, see Koh 2010, pp. 141–58.

Flower Garland Sutra as his lifelong guide. Subsequently, Zhiyan is said to have encountered a mysterious monk, who encouraged him to study the concept of the six marks and led him to attain great enlightenment at the age of twenty-seven.¹⁷ Since the doctrine of the six marks had been widely adopted by the Dilun school as a useful interpretative tool, the “mysterious monk” seems to have been associated with this school.¹⁸

Fazang’s short treatise *Jin shizi zhang*, which is divided into ten sections, also contains a section devoted to the explication of the six marks. As Fazang intended the treatise to be a brief compendium of Huayan philosophy, the fact that he included the doctrine of the six marks in this text along with that of the “ten profundities” (*shixuan* 十玄) attests to the importance of these doctrines.¹⁹ In this treatise, a lion as a whole is compared to the “mark of universality” (Ch. *zongxiang* 總相; Skt. *aṅga*); its having distinct sense organs is compared to the “mark of particularity” (Ch. *biexiang* 別相; Skt. *upāṅga*); that these organs combine to form a holistic unity is referred to as dependent origination and is identified as the “mark of identity” (Ch. *tongxiang* 同相; Skt. *salakṣaṇa*); that a particular organ is distinguished from another is identified as the “mark of difference” (Ch. *yixiang* 異相; Skt. *vilakṣaṇa*); the assemblage of these organs represents the “mark of formation” (Ch. *chengxiang* 成相; Skt. *saṃvartra*); their retaining distinctiveness represents the “mark of dissolution” (Ch. *huaixiang* 壞相; Skt. *vivarta*).²⁰

While we may get some idea about the doctrine’s role in Huayan philosophy from this short simile, we can appreciate its soteriological implications more fully from the detailed explanations given in Fazang’s earlier work *Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenqi zhang* 華嚴一乘教義分齊章 (also known as *Huayan wujiao zhang* 華嚴五教章 [A Treatise of the Five Teachings]; hereafter *Wujiao zhang*). As the definitions of the six marks given in this text are not so different from those given in the *Jin shizi zhang*, it would suffice to quote Fazang’s explicit statement on the practical purport of the doctrine:

This teaching [of perfect interfusion of the six marks (*liuxiang yuanrong* 六相圓融)] is intended to reveal the perfect teaching of the One Vehicle and the [thesis of] dependent origination of the dharma realm, in which perfect interfusion is infinitely [manifested] and

¹⁷ *Huayan jing chuanji*, fasc. 3, T no. 2073, 51: 163b25–c20.

¹⁸ For Dilun masters’ understanding of the six marks, see Narikawa 1960, pp. 132–33.

¹⁹ For the Chinese translations of the six marks and their Sanskrit equivalents, see Hino 1953, pp. 152–53; Kim 2006, pp. 24–27.

²⁰ *Huayan jing jin shizi zhang zhu* 華嚴經金師子章註, T no. 1881, 45: 670b7–10.

[phenomenal objects] stand spontaneously in a mutually identical relation. . . . When this meaning is manifested, . . . the destruction of one hindrance of affliction (Skt. *kleśa*) entails the destruction of all hindrances (*yi duan yiqie duan* 一斷一切斷). . . . As for the quality of practice, once one is accomplished, all will be accomplished (*yi cheng yiqie cheng* 一成一切成).²¹

As seen above, Fazang understands the doctrine of the six marks as exemplifying Huayan soteriology, according to which the first small step of practice that destroys afflictions or accumulates merits will contribute to the ultimate attainment of perfect enlightenment. He then presents a detailed explanation on how a pair of these six marks can accomplish that which is indicated by the words “perfect interfusion” in the following series of questions and answers:

If [a causal condition such as] a rafter is not distinguished [from a whole such as a house], then the meaning of universality is not established. When there is no particularity, there is no universality. What is meant by this? Universality is originally accomplished on the basis of particularity. . . . Therefore when it comes to the mark of particularity, we regard universality as particularity.

Question: If universality is none other than particularity, we should say that it cannot accomplish universality, shouldn't we?

Answer: Because universality is none other than particularity, it can accomplish universality. For instance, a rafter is none other than a house, which is thus called universality. [Likewise,] a house is none other than a rafter, which is thus called particularity. If something is different from a house, it cannot be a rafter. If something is different from a rafter, it cannot be a house. You should think of [the relation between] the marks of universality and particularity in this way.

Question: If the two marks are identical, why do you talk about the mark of particularity?

Answer: Only because they are identical can the mark of particularity be accomplished. If they are not identical, universality would exist outside of particularity and could not be universality. [If so] particularity would also exist outside of universality and could not be particularity.²²

²¹ *Wujiao zhang*, fasc. 4, T no. 1866, 45: 507c10–14.

²² *Wujiao zhang*, fasc. 4, T no. 1866, 45: 508a23–b4.

In the above quotation, Fazang compares a house as a whole to the mark of universality and parts of the house, such as a roofing rafter, to the mark of particularity. He then asserts identity between universality and particularity by alluding to the relation between a house and a rafter. Since Fazang's argument in the above quotation may sound unintelligible to some modern readers who are reluctant to accept this simple identification, it might be helpful to introduce an analysis made by Nicholaos John Jones. According to a reconstruction of Fazang's argument,²³ for an object to be a part (i.e., the mark of particularity) of a whole (i.e., the mark of universality), that object must rely on the whole for its existence. At the same time, the whole should be composed of parts including that object. As both the part and the whole need each other, we could say that "for each part of a whole, the existence of that part is a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the whole." If A is a "necessary and sufficient condition" for B, we can identify A with B. We can further argue that the identity relation holds true for the other two pairs of the six marks: identity and difference, and formation and dissolution. As Fazang does not apply his identity thesis to the relation of particularity and identity, or to that of difference and formation, and so on, it would be safe to say that his "perfect interfusion" just denotes the relationship that obtains with regard to the above-mentioned three pairs of the six marks.

Li Tongxuan also makes frequent references to the six marks in his works²⁴ but provides a full-scale analysis of the doctrine in his commentary on chapter 26, "Ten Grounds" (*Shidi pin* 十地品), of the *Flower Garland Sutra*. Whereas other references to the doctrine just summarize Fazang's thesis, the explanation given in this chapter shows his own unique interpretation of the doctrine. In the first few lines, he emphatically states that the concept of six marks will corroborate his vision of sudden enlightenment (*dunwu* 頓悟) as follows:

If you examine what is said in the [*Flower Garland*] *Sutra* concerning the way to enter the first ground (Ch. *di* 地; Skt. *bhūmi*), [you will see that] even ordinary people in the initial stage [whose faith is] fully accomplished (*juzu fanfu* 具足凡夫) can arouse vast vows and practices and enter that stage. It is not the case that they reach that stage through the practices and understanding [required

²³ Jones 2010, pp. 361–62.

²⁴ It has been pointed out that Li Tongxuan is more concerned with the doctrine of the six marks than with that of the ten profundities. See Kimura 1972, p. 289.

in] the stages prior to the ten grounds. . . . An aspirant [for enlightenment] would cultivate those practices completely all at once (*zongdun* 總頓) and abide in one moment and one practice; they do not need to go through the practices predicated on procedures and order. You will see this [principle] on the basis of the perfect interfusion of the six marks: universality, particularity, identity, difference, formation, and dissolution.²⁵

Although Fazang accepts the possibility of attaining sudden perfection of wisdom and practice, he makes his statement in a rather abstract manner. By contrast, Li Tongxuan states that ordinary people's access to the higher stages of the ten grounds is guaranteed *here and now* in a more plain fashion without adopting any polemical phrases or any scholastic terms such as "dharma realm" and "dependent origination."

Having introduced the purport of the doctrine, Li applies the doctrine to phenomenal objects, just as Fazang did. But we need to take note of one important difference between the two masters. Whereas Fazang takes a material object such as a house to represent the identity relation between its parts and that entire object, Li Tongxuan refers to diverse modes of sentient beings to highlight their fundamental equality with the Buddha. Thus he correlates sentient beings as a whole with the mark of universality and their different ways of existence with the mark of particularity. He then regards their common foundation, that is, the Buddha's wisdom, as the mark of identity and their different attachments and karma as the mark of difference. He further associates their rebirth caused by karma with the mark of formation and the emptiness of karma with the mark of dissolution.²⁶

Here it is noteworthy that his explanation of the marks of identity and dissolution is based on the principle of emptiness (Ch. *kongxing* 空性; Skt. *śūnyatā*). Since the thesis of universal buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性) presupposes that sentient beings' karmic afflictions are just an illusory by-product of their ignorance, the mark of identity has something in common with that of dissolution. Whereas the principle of emptiness is implied in the former, it is made explicit in the latter. We can also discern a similar symmetry in Li Tongxuan's explanation of the marks of difference and formation, as these two marks are concerned with sentient beings' varied conditions. In this respect, we can say that unlike Fazang, who applies his thesis of "perfect interfusion" just to the three fixed pairs of the six marks, Li Tongxuan

²⁵ *Xin lun*, fasc. 24, T no. 1739, 36: 885c23–28.

²⁶ *Xin lun*, fasc. 24, T no. 1739, 36: 886a7–10.

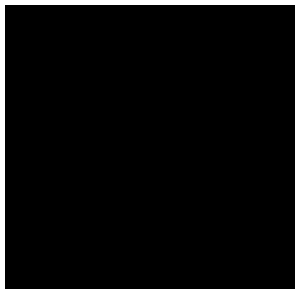


Figure 1. Li Tongxuan's diagram of the six marks.

expands the same thesis beyond the boundary of the pairs. His analyses of the diverse manifestations of the Buddha, the stages of practice and their results, and temporal distinctions—all of which apply the concept of the six marks to the sphere of practice—also follow the same pattern.²⁷ Here again, if the mark of difference, namely diversity, is denoted by explicit expressions (e.g., “*different* bodies and lands adorned by *varied* gems” [*zhongbao suo yan shentu chabie* 衆寶所嚴身土差別]; emphasis added), diversity implied in the mark of formation is discernible from the context (e.g., “Accomplishing [*varied* wishes and goals of] sentient beings” [*chengjiu zhongsheng* 成就衆生]; emphasis added).

As seen above, Li Tongxuan's explication of the six marks is illustrated by concrete examples directly related to a sentient being's practice. Having provided diverse ways to see the relations between those six marks, he concludes his analysis by drawing a diagram (see fig. 1) and saying:

This one [diagram of] characters contains the six marks. All the characters and all the dharmas include these six marks. If you penetrate [the truth] well, you will obtain an unhindered *dhāraṇī* gate of wisdom and will not be obstructed by any objects or hindrances such as [the views of] being, nonbeing, annihilation, and eternity.²⁸

The fact that this diagram served as a useful visualization tool also suggests the practical bent of Li Tongxuan's thought. Be that as it may, it is intriguing to note that the abovementioned twofold symmetry, which is established between the marks of identity and dissolution and between the marks of

²⁷ *Xin lun*, fasc. 24, T no. 1739, 36: 886a10–22.

²⁸ *Xin lun*, fasc. 24, T no. 1739, 36: 886a26–b2. Diagram slightly edited.

difference and formation, is clearly seen in this diagram as these two pairs may possibly be considered as facing each other with the mark of universality as an axis.

The “Sphere of Edification”

In the *Wujiao zhang*, Fazang makes every effort to assert the superiority of the Huayan school, which in his opinion, sets forth the separate teaching of the One Vehicle (*yisheng biejiao* 一乘別教). Therefore in the section entitled “Sphere of Edification,”²⁹ which constitutes the ninth “gate” of the chapter “Different Explanations of Diverse Teachings” (*zhujiao suoquan chabie* 諸教所詮差別), he deliberately draws on his scheme of doctrinal classification (*jiaopan* 教判). In this scheme, he distinguishes between the five teachings, namely the Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana), the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) in its initial phase, the Great Vehicle in its matured phase (or the final teaching), the sudden teaching, and the perfect teaching of the One Vehicle. Since the sudden teaching is said to be beyond the reach of our verbal expressions, this text does not go into detailed discussion of the Buddha’s bodies and the sphere of edification here. Hence in the following lines, we will only summarize the other four teachings. It should suffice to give a general outline of Fazang’s doctrinal classification and the sectarian attitude underlying it.

According to Fazang, the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle identifies only this *sahā* world of impurity as the place where the Buddha’s reward body (Ch. *baoshen* 報身; Skt. *saṃbhoga-kāya*) abides. Yet, it also acknowledges the manifestation of the Buddha’s transformation bodies (Ch. *huashen* 化身; Skt. *nirmāṇa-kāya*)—as many as ten billion in a great trichilocosm (Ch. *sanqian daqian shijie* 三千大千世界; Skt. *trisāhasra-mahāsāhasra-loka-dhātu*). In the initial teaching of the Great Vehicle, which is identified as the teaching of the Three Vehicles, the Buddha’s reward body is situated in a purified land in the highest heaven of the realm of form (Ch. *se jiujiing tian* 色究境天; Skt. *akaniṣṭhā*) and his transformation bodies are manifested in ten billion Jambudvīpa realms. But Fazang thinks that the reference to

²⁹ Kamata Shigeo (1979, pp. 487–89) comments that while the preceding eighth gate titled “Meanings and Characteristics of Buddhahood” (*foguo yixiang* 佛果義相) describes the Buddha’s bodies that depend (Ch. *nengyi* 能依; Skt. *āsrita*) on the lands (Ch. *guotu* 國土; Skt. *kṣetra*), the ninth gate describes those lands that support (Ch. *suoyi* 所依; Skt. *āśraya*) the Buddha’s bodies. He also adds that, in this gate, only the abodes of Śākyamuni, who represents the Buddha’s transformation body, are explained. In this respect, the character *hua* 化 used in the title “Sphere of Edification” (*shehua fenqi* 攝化分齊) means “transformative manifestations” as well.

the realm of form and the number ten billion still indicates the limitations of this teaching, as it is predicated on the spiritual faculties of the Lesser Vehicle.³⁰

In contrast, the final teaching of the Great Vehicle locates the Buddha's reward body outside the three realms (Ch. *sanjie* 三界; Skt. *tri-dhātu*). Here the sphere in which the Buddha manifests his transformation bodies is called "world-nature" (*shijie xing* 世界性), "world-ocean" (*shijie hai* 世界海), or "world-seed" (*shijie zhong* 世界種), depending on its scale. In this cosmic system, the most elementary number is ten billion. This number is then multiplied by the number of sands in the Ganges to constitute one world-nature; one world-nature is again multiplied by the number of sands in the Ganges to form one world-ocean. Moreover, one world-seed contains ten billion worlds multiplied by the cube of the infinite number of sands in the Ganges. Finally, this teaching defines the sphere of one Buddha's edification as infinite world-seeds in the ten directions. Although the sphere of the Buddha's edification in this teaching is much more extensive than that in the previous teachings, Fazang points out that it is still confined to the worldview that posits Mount Sumeru at the center and asserts that for this reason the final teaching of the Great Vehicle is still not entitled to be called the One Vehicle.³¹

As for the One Vehicle, it is divided into the common teaching (*tongjiao* 同教) represented by the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (hereafter, *Lotus Sutra*) and the separate teaching (*biejiao* 別教) revealed in the *Flower Garland Sutra*. In the former, Vulture Peak (Skt. *Ḡṛdhrakūṭa-parvata*) is identified as the place where the Buddha's reward body abides and where his teaching is delivered. In the latter, too, the Buddha's site of enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi-maṇḍa*) is understood to be the true abode of his reward body and the place of his initial teaching. But Fazang maintains that the former is still inferior to the latter in that the *Lotus Sutra* neither refers to the infinite bodies of the Buddha, which is symbolized by the number ten, nor alludes to the principle of mutual inclusion (*xiangru* 相入), which is represented by Indra's net in the *Flower Garland Sutra*.³²

When Li Tongxuan deals with the same theme, he also distinguishes between the true teaching (*shijiao* 實教) and the provisional teachings (*quanjiao* 權教). But his presentation is not as polemical as Fazang's

³⁰ *Wujiao zhang*, fasc. 3, T no. 1866, 45: 497c26–498a8.

³¹ *Wujiao zhang*, fasc. 3, T no. 1866, 45: 498a8–20. Cf. *Tanxuan ji*, fasc. 3, T no. 1733, 35: 158a13–27.

³² *Wujiao zhang*, fasc. 3, T no. 1866, 45: 498a20–b8.

scheme. The following citation clearly shows his exegetical orientation, which puts more emphasis on the soteriological reading of the *Flower Garland Sutra* than on a scholastic and sectarian understanding of the scripture:

Regarding the stages in step-by-step practice (*xingbu* 行布), this scripture (i.e., the *Flower Garland Sutra*) states that [a bodhisattva] in the stage of the first ground will see many hundreds of buddha fields (Ch. *focha* 佛刹; Skt. *buddha-kṣetra*). Since this number clarifies the meaning of fulfillment, it is not identical with the simple “hundred” preached in the Three Vehicles. The number “hundreds” (*duobai* 多百) is identical with “infinite number.” . . . [Ellipsis a: passage referring to the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (Brahma’s Net Sutra) as scriptural evidence for the teaching of the Three Vehicles.] Vairocana’s sphere of edification as preached in the *Flower Garland Sutra* is established on the basis of the great ocean of the Lotus-Treasury World (Ch. *lianhua zang shijie* 蓮華藏世界; Skt. *padma-garbha-loka-dhātu*), which is so vast and limitless that its [extent] is identical with that of the sky and the dharma realm. It is only in order to edify sentient beings that [the scripture] describes its shape and causes them to enlarge their narrow minds and arouse [the aspiration for enlightenment]. In this great lotus flower are included world-seeds as unutterably numerous as particles of dust in ten buddha fields. Because the scripture’s text is limited, 121 [*sic.*, should be 111] world-seeds are presented in total with 11 world-seeds placed in the center. Each [of these world-seeds] is composed of twenty-layered Lotus-Treasury Worlds. . . . [Ellipsis b: illustration of the Lotus-Treasury World; definitions of “world-nature,” “world-ocean,” and “world-seed” in the Three Vehicles.] In the Three Vehicles, only the number of grains of sands in the Ganges is referred to. This scripture always takes the number of particles in one to ten buddha fields to show the limitlessness [of the sphere of edification]. In this manner [the scripture] gradually enlarges sentient beings’ narrow [minds] and causes them to know the sphere of the Buddha’s edification, thereby making them arouse the aspiration for enlightenment. As for the sphere of the Buddha’s edification, each and every particle is identical with the [entire] dharma realm and the sky. [This teaching of the One Vehicle] does not say that [the Buddha] just edifies the trichilocosm.³³

³³ *Xin lun*, fasc. 7, T no. 1739, 36: 760b24–761a2.

In this passage Li Tongxuan compares the Three Vehicles with the One Vehicle and asserts the superiority of the latter, just as Fazang does. In the omitted section of the quotation above (ellipsis b), Li Tongxuan also introduces the definitions of numeric units such as “world-nature” and so on, which, as we saw above, are presented in Fazang’s explanation of the teaching of the Three Vehicles. However, unlike Fazang, who does not provide a detailed depiction of the sphere of the Buddha’s edification regarding the One Vehicle, Li Tongxuan vividly illustrates the unfathomable dimension of the numeric unit “world-seed” here. According to his depiction, each world-seed is composed of twenty layers of worlds and each layer is again surrounded by the worlds whose number equals that of dust particles in a buddha field multiplied by the number of that layer (i.e., 1, 2, 3, . . . 20). Such a complex system of the sphere of the Buddha’s edification regarding the One Vehicle is illustrated in the diagrams in figure 2, below.

Since this system acknowledges just 111 world-seeds, the scale of the One Vehicle may appear smaller than that of the Three Vehicles, which identifies *infinite* world-seeds as the sphere of the Buddha’s edification. As indicated above, however, the most elementary unit in this system is the number of dust particles in ten buddha fields and each buddha field is surrounded by smaller buddha fields whose number equals that of the dust particles in ten buddha fields. Moreover, each and every dust particle in this system is identified with the entire Buddhist universe. In this respect, it is clear that the sphere of the Buddha’s edification in the One Vehicle is beyond our imagination and expands itself infinitely.

At a first reading, we would be hard-pressed to say that Li Tongxuan’s explanation above—which is actually his summary of the “Huazang shijie pin” 華藏世界品 (Lotus-Treasury World Chapter) of the *Flower Garland Sutra*—is more practice-oriented than Fazang’s. However, his repeated expression “enlarge sentient beings’ narrow minds” clearly shows that he is more concerned with the mindset of the practitioner than with the dharma realm or the universe itself. Moreover, even if Li Tongxuan implicitly underscores the Huayan vision of mutual identity (*xiangji* 相即) and mutual inclusion, he does not express this vision by using such technical terms. He simply emphasizes the limitless expansion of the sphere of edification in the *Flower Garland Sutra* by saying that each and every dust particle is identical with the sky and the dharma realm. Thus his explication should be understood as a reflection of his exegetical attitude that seeks to interpret the scripture’s words with the intention of clarifying the practitioner’s aim: one should visualize the vast sphere of the Buddha’s edification

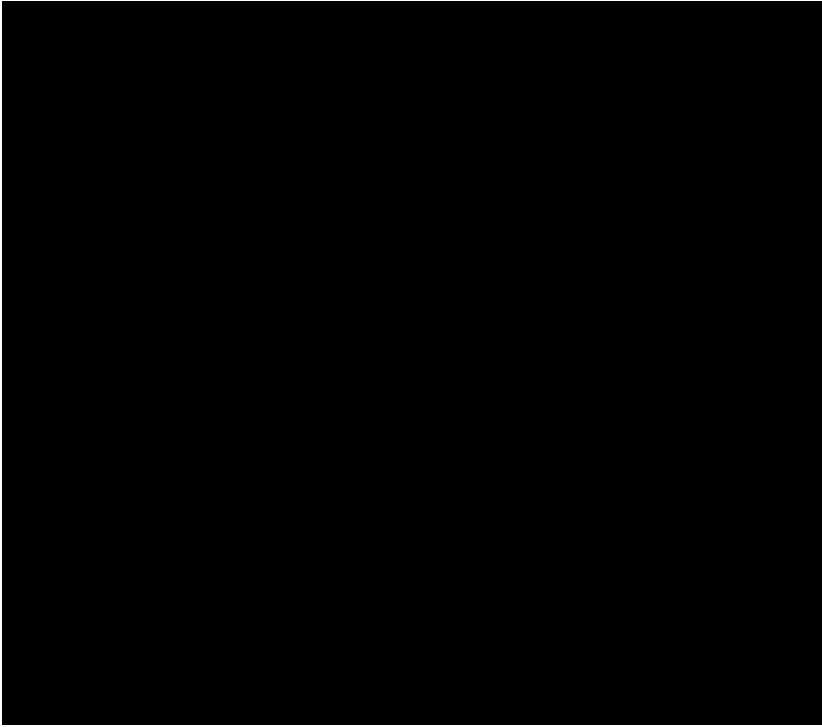


Figure 2. Graphic illustrations of the sphere of edification represented in the *Flower Garland Sutra*. The above diagrams appear in the *Fajie anli tu* 法界安立圖, fasc. 3 (X no. 972, 57: 481d1–485a16). These three diagrams, here slightly edited, depict a twenty-layered world-seed (*left*), eleven world-seeds placed in the center of the Lotus Treasury World (*above right*), and 111 world-seeds in total (*below right*).

and devote oneself to limitless activities to save sentient beings just as the Buddha does.

Concluding Remarks

As we saw above, Li Tongxuan's text stands in stark contrast to Fazang's in terms of its exegetical style. Whereas Fazang's *Tanxuan ji* and *Wujiao zhang* exemplify a professional Huayan master's attempt to construct an abstruse metaphysical edifice, Li Tongxuan's *Xin lun* shows a lay practitioner's insightful vision into the one true dharma realm.

Although Li Tongxuan refers to many philosophical concepts such as the six marks formulated by Fazang and other scholar-monks, he is not showing that these concepts are the hallmark of Huayan metaphysics. Rather, since he is more interested in the practical implications of Huayan philosophy, when he refers to the concept of six marks, it is in order to clarify the fundamental equality between sentient beings and the Buddha. But we have also seen that, whereas Fazang posits the relationship of perfect interfusion only between three fixed pairs of the six marks, Li Tongxuan intuitively expands the identity relation beyond these pairs and provides a useful visualization tool (i.e., the diagram of the six marks) for the understanding of that relation.

When it comes to the sphere of edification, Li Tongxuan accepts the overall explanations given in Fazang's texts. But unlike Fazang who is bent on formulating a polemical scheme that serves to show the supreme status of the *Flower Garland Sutra*, Li Tongxuan is interested in describing the practical purport of the scripture in plain language. Thus he provides a detailed depiction of the Lotus-Treasury World and emphasizes that practitioners should enlarge their minds and act like the Buddha whose liberating activities are constantly and eternally expanding.

In this comparative study of two Huayan masters, we have focused on the notions of the six marks and the Buddha's sphere of edification to see how Li Tongxuan developed Huayan scholasticism in a different direction from Fazang—even while Li was heavily influenced by Fazang's scholasticism. As they show different exegetical and practical orientations in their works, the reader might get the impression that they are diametrically opposed to each other. However, we need to be cautious so as not to exaggerate their differences. Since these two masters equally esteem the *Flower Garland Sutra* as embodying the ultimate truth, their attitude toward this scripture is fundamentally identical. The differences between the two are found in the linguistic (or sometimes graphic) apparatus they adopted and the manner in which they evaluated other scriptures or presented some important doctrinal concepts. Nevertheless, these differences would suffice to show the existence of diverse trends in the seemingly unitary Huayan tradition.

ABBREVIATIONS

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–32.
- X *Shinsan dainihon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經. 90 vols. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai. 1975–89.

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