

A Hermeneutic Approach to the *Lotus Sutra* —On Tiantai Zhiyi's Work, *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra**

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Abstract: The actual founder of the Tiantai Buddhist School – Zhiyi made a great contribution to the development of Chinese Buddhism. In his masterpiece, *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, he presented his philosophical system of Buddhism, a comprehensive picture of the Buddhist doctrines and practices, with his Five Sections as an exegetic device to interpret the *Lotus Sutra*. This paper outlines the whole structure of this work in order to explore how his system of Buddhism is presented through his hermeneutic approach and to deepen our understanding of his philosophy.

Key Terms: Tiantai Buddhism, *Fahua Xuanyi*, Five Sections Threefold Truth, Ultimate Truth

Introduction

In history of Chinese Buddhism, the establishment of Tiantai Buddhism, as the first established Chinese Buddhist School, is one of the most significant events marking a milestone transforming Indian Buddhism to Chinese Buddhism. The actual founder of the Tiantai Buddhist School is Zhiyi (538-597). His thoughts and theories laid solid foundation for the school. Among Zhiyi's work, his masterpiece *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa Lianhua Jing Xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義; hereafter abbreviation *Xuanyi*)¹ contains most of his philosophical system concerning Buddhism,

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¹ For a study of this work, see Haiyan Shen, *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra: Tiantai Philosophy of Buddhis* (India: Originals (an imprint of Low Price Publication), 2005). 沈海燕, 《法華玄義的哲學》(上海:上海古籍出版社, 2010)。

and thus can be regarded as the key text in understanding deeply his Buddhist philosophy.

The work *Xuanyi* is composed of ten fascicles, and the interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* follows the five categories of analysis named “Five Sections” (*Wuzhang* 五章) or “Five Layers of the Profound Meaning” (*Wuchong Xuanyi* 五重玄義) as a general guideline. These Five Sections are Zhiyi’s own system of interpreting Buddhist sutras.

With the means of the “Five Sections”: Name (*Ming* 名), Substance (*Ti* 體), Gist (*Zong* 宗), Function (*Yong* 用), and Teaching (*Jiao* 教), the interpretation is no longer passively following the scripture chapter by chapter. Rather, the interpretation is made according to these categories, and the revelation of the themes of the scripture is also revolved around these categories. These five meanings serve as an exegetical device to interpret the *Lotus Sutra*. The first meaning “Name” concerns an explanation of the title of the *Lotus Sutra*. The second meaning “Substance” concerns the fundamental theory the *Lotus Sutra* is based on, and refers to the Ultimate Truth. The third meaning “Gist” concerns the essential teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*, and takes the practice for attaining Buddhahood as cause, and the attainment of Buddhahood as effect. The fourth meaning “Function” displays the power the *Lotus Sutra* exerts in benefiting living beings. The fifth meaning “Teaching” classifies the various teachings of the Buddha, so that all teachings of the Buddha are incorporated and confirmed as valid.

Consequently, the work *Xuanyi* is no longer limited to the nature of a commentary. It becomes the medium to express Zhiyi’s own thought. Moreover, the Five Sections, that are applied for the systematic interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*, refer to the structure of the text *Xuanyi* itself. Within the domain of the Five Sections, a vast and complex structure of illustrations is laid out, focusing on the themes of the *Lotus Sutra*. David Chappell has also pointed out the distinctive feature of the *Xuanyi*:

Zhiyi’s *Xuanyi* was totally interpretative and did not follow the individual chapters at all — a very different hermeneutical orientation from that of the textual exegesis that had been the dominant method of Canonical Buddhism in the fifth and sixth centuries when the central aims were accuracy, authenticity,

and comprehensiveness.²

The issue of the interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* is not only about presenting the theme of the *Lotus Sutra*, but is also about Zhiyi's presentation of a comprehensive picture of Buddhism. The interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* is well guided by Zhiyi's own system of classifying the teachings of the Buddha. That is to say, every single notion of Buddhism that is illustrated in the text is under the scrutiny of the Fourfold Teaching (*Sijiao* 四教).³ Therefore, the interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* is actually the systematic expression of Zhiyi's own thought. Along with this interpretation, various Buddhist theories and systems are enumerated and elucidated, making the *Xuanyi* into an encyclopedic compendium of Buddhism. However, the Buddhist theories and concepts are enumerated as part of the illustrative discourse for Zhiyi's own system of thought, indicating comprehensive nature of his views and all-embracing nature of his perfect and harmonization philosophy (*Yuanrong zhexue* 圓融哲學).

With this philosophy, one sees no conflict among different things and theories. All existing things are complimentary to each other. They are not separate entities and do not

² David Chappell, "Hermeneutical Phases in Chinese Buddhism." In *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, edited by Donald Lopez (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 184.

³ In his scheme of classifying the teaching of the Buddha, Zhiyi divides the Buddha's teaching in terms of content into four types, including Tripitaka (*Zang* 藏), Common (*Tong* 通), Separate (*Bie* 別) and Perfect Teachings (*Yuan* 圓). The Tripitaka (collection of writings in Buddhism) Teaching refers to Śrāvakayāna Buddhism, which consists of the teachings of the three *pitakas*, including *sutras* (i.e., the teachings of the Buddha), *vinayas* (i.e., discipline) and *abhidharmas* (i.e., commentaries on Buddhist doctrines), and is designed for the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. The Common Teaching is common to both Śrāvakayāna and elementary Mahāyāna, and caters to *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas* of lower faculties. The Separate Teaching means that the teaching caters to the capability of the *bodhisattvas* only, and is separate from the former two teachings, and is also separate from the last teaching of the Perfect, for the doctrine of the Separate Teaching does not yet enable one to perceive an integrated reality. The Perfect Teaching addresses all the Three Vehicles (*śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*), and expounds the Middle Way of mutual identification, recognizing the fundamental identity among all entities. Therefore, the Perfect Teaching is regarded by Zhiyi as the ultimate teaching of the Buddha. Bruno Petzold's monumental work *The Classification of Buddhism* is entirely devoted to the subject of various classifications in India, China, and Japan. Cf., Petzold, Bruno. *The Classification of Buddhism: Comprising the classification of Buddhist doctrines in India, China, and Japan* (Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 1995).

exclude one another. Confirming one thing and negating the other can only result in partiality. Not only nothing is separated, but also all entities are ultimately identified with each other. They are merged into one entity, but at the same time, each of them represents different characteristics of the Ultimate Truth. This philosophy is embodied in the theory of the Middle Way-Ultimate Truth (*Zhongdao shixiang* 中道實相), which consists of the three aspects⁴: Emptiness (*Kong* 空), the Provisional (*Jia* 假), and the Middle Way (*Zhong* 中). Emptiness is spoken of in terms of the illusory nature of existence, since things are originated depending on causes and conditions. The Provisional conveys the characteristic of things from the angle of conventional existence. Although things are illusory, they do bear certain names and temporally exist.

The Middle Way is to identify Emptiness with the Provisional, or vice versa, transcending both views, but at the same time embracing both of them. This Middle Way philosophy is the perfect perception of comprehensiveness, which is meant not to be limited by any viewpoint and not to dwell on any definite conception. Any rigid and fixed form of thinking is doomed to be extreme and partial, and does not enable one to reach the Ultimate Truth.

The Five Sections, as the exegetical categories of interpreting Buddhist texts can, therefore, be considered as Zhiyi's hermeneutical strategy. Moreover, the Five Sections are also applied as an instrument to organize his own discourse. Hence, the interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* in the framework of these Five Sections is also the systematic expression of Zhiyi's own thought. The interpretation of the Five Sections consists of two levels: "General Interpretation" and "Specific Interpretation".

⁴ Swanson's *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy* is devoted solely to the subject of the Threefold Truth (*Sandi* 三諦), and he considers this concept as the central concept of Zhiyi's philosophy. Cf., Paul Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989). For a brief survey of different meanings of the Middle Way (*Zhongdao*) in various schools, see Chih-fu Lee, 《妙法蓮華經玄義研究》(臺灣:中華佛敎文獻編纂社, 1997), 頁 30-32. For a study of Zhiyi's understanding of the Middle Way and Buddha Nature, see Yu-Kwan NG, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Madhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

The Primary Structure of the *Xuanyi*—General Interpretation

The “General Interpretation” (*Tongshi* 通釋) as the first level of the *Xuanyi* is to set up and to present the Five Sections as the legitimate exegetical categories for interpreting the *Lotus Sutra* as well as all other sutras. The Five Sections are discussed in seven parts: (1) introductory definition (*Biaozhang* 標章), (2) quotation and verification (*Yinzheng* 引證), (3) origination and arising (*Shengqi* 生起), (4) unfolding and folding (*Kaihe* 開合), (5) measuring and selecting (*Liaojian* 料簡), (6) contemplating mind (*Guanxin* 觀心), and (7) converging differences (*Huiyi* 會異). The seven headings, as a whole, makes clear the significance of the Five Sections as an exegetical device.

(1) The first heading “introductory definition” (*Biaozhang* 標章) categorizes the Five Sections by defining them. “Explaining the name” (*Shiming* 釋名) is to reveal the subtle *dharmā* that is expounded in the teaching of the Buddha. This subtle *dharmā* refers to the Threefold Truth as a merging entity. “Distinguishing the substance” (*Bianti* 辨體) is to convey that the Ultimate Truth is the foundation of the teaching of the Buddha, and is the substance of the *Lotus Sutra*. This Ultimate Truth is characterized by the Middle Way that is non-extreme, non-distinctive, and permeates everywhere, and reveals that Emptiness and the Provisional Existence are identical to each other. “Clarifying the gist” (*Mingzong* 明宗) is to convey that the cause and effect of Buddhahood is the essential teaching of the Buddha, since the cause and effect of Buddhahood is what constitutes the whole teaching. “Discussing the function” (*Lunyong* 論用) is to demonstrate that the powerful function exerted by the knowledge of the Buddha can illuminate truth and benefit others. “Classifying the teaching of the Buddha” (*Jiaoxiang* 教相) is to present various types of the teaching systematically.

(2) The second heading “quotation and verification” (*Yinzheng* 引證) is to cause people to gain faith with scriptural support so that the Five Sections can be legitimized as Zhiyi's device for interpreting scriptures.

(3) The third heading “origination and arising” (*Shengqi* 生起) explains the sequence and the order of these Five Sections, which is to cause people not to be distracted, so that their concentrated minds can arise. Each section is related to the next section: the preceding one is a necessary step for the following one to arise.

The necessity to have name is to name the *dharma* (truth in Buddhism), because in order to express *dharma*, language is an indispensable instrument. When *dharma* bears name, it is legible and can guide one to recognize the substance, since *dharma* as truth is taken as the substance of the *Lotus Sutra*. However, this substance of the Ultimate Truth relies on the insight of the Buddha to be perceived. The insight of the Buddha is the outcome of the gist (the practice of the Buddha and his attainment of Buddhahood as the cause and effect). Only when the gist is taken into account, can the substance as the Ultimate Truth be understood and realized. Seeing that this substance embraces all entities, it is perfect. The perfect substance results in powerful function. This is to say that the powerful function is derived from one's knowledge that concerns the Ultimate Truth. This is because when the Buddha realizes the Ultimate Truth, the Buddha's knowledge that concerns this Ultimate Truth exerts the power to function in fulfilling his soteriological goal of liberating all living beings. Consequently, the realization of this function in liberating living beings results in numerous benefits in terms of the teaching of the Buddha. Since there are various types of the teaching of the Buddha in terms of benefiting living beings, it is necessary to categorize these teachings so that the validity of all types of the Buddha's teaching can be acknowledged.

(4) The fourth heading "unfolding and folding" (*Kaihe* 開合) discusses the Five Sections in terms of various Buddhist concepts in order to convey that the meaning of the Five Sections is subsumed in these concepts. This is to cause people to attain wisdom by analyzing differences and summarizing similarities among various doctrines.

(5) The fifth heading "measuring and selecting" (*Liaojian* 料簡) is to cause people to attain wisdom by clarifying questions of audiences about the definition of the Five Sections, and the choice of using the numerical five as an exegetical device. By doing so, the Five Sections are confirmed as universal for interpreting all Buddhist scriptures, as they allow one to see the common attribute that is shared by all *sutras* as well as the particular attribute of each *sutra*. As Zhiyi puts it:

"[Applying the Five Sections to interpret all *sutras* is because,] if each *sutra* is interpreted separately, one can only obtain the particularity but not the commonality. Presently, when the five meanings are discussed together,

[one] will obtain the commonality without losing the particularity.”⁵

(6) The sixth heading “contemplating mind” (*Guanxin* 觀心) is to cause people to simultaneously gain a mind that diligently acquires knowledge and carries out practices. In fact, the above five headings concern nothing else but mind contemplation and to introduce the method of contemplating mind. By asserting that mind contemplation can incorporate all previous five headings, Zhiyi demonstrates the most accessible and practical method of realizing truth.

1) With regard to the Name, “mind is called neither origination nor extinction.”⁶

2) With regard to the Substance, “mind is the Ultimate Truth.”⁷ 3) With regard to the Gist, “the initial contemplation is the cause, and the accomplishment of the contemplation is the effect.”⁸ 4) With regard to the Function, “because of mind contemplation, evil consciousness does not arise.”⁹ 5) With regard to the Characteristics of the Teaching, “[because of mind contemplation,] the *dharma* of mind and defilement, whether similar or different, are all transformed and changed. Therefore, [the teaching] is called mind contemplation.”¹⁰

(7) The seventh heading “converging differences” (*Huiyi* 會異) is Zhiyi's endeavor to integrate the Five Sections as a new category of uncovering the profound meaning of the teaching of the Buddha with the established category of the Four *Siddhāntas* (*Si Xitan* 四悉檀). These are the four methods of the Buddha's teaching: Worldly *Siddhānta* (*Shijie xitan* 世界悉檀), *Siddhānta* for Each Person (*Gege weiren xitan* 各各為人悉檀), *Siddhānta* of Counteraction (*Duizhi xitan* 對治悉檀) and *Siddhānta* of the Supreme Truth (*Diyi yi xitan* 第一義悉檀). The Four *Siddhāntas* are elaborated in order to converge what seem to be different teachings of the Buddha, and to resolve tension between the truth that is explainable and unexplainable. With regard to the truth itself, the common view held by Buddhists is that it is indescribable and inexpressible, and can only be reached by intuitive insight through contemplation. What is the point then for the

⁵ 「若經經別釋，但得別不得同。今共論五義，得同不失別。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

⁶ 「心名不生亦復不滅。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

⁷ 「心即實相。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

⁸ 「初觀爲因，觀成爲果。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

⁹ 「以觀心故惡覺不起。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

¹⁰ 「心數塵勞，若同若異，皆被化而轉，是爲觀心。」 *Xuanyi*. T33.685c.

Buddha to teach truth? Zhiyi argues that the Buddha's teaching is necessary for the sake of liberating sentient beings. Truth has to be delivered when there is need for it, namely, living beings have a need to hear the teaching in order to eliminate suffering and attain liberation. For Zhiyi, this is exactly the point for the legitimacy of the Five Sections – they are necessary since they can be applied to interpret all *sūtras*. In view of the Four *Siddhāntas* that incorporate all *dharma*s and various types of the Buddha's teaching, and in view of the Five Sections that are the general instrument to elucidate Buddhist scriptures, these two obviously correspond with each other.

Moreover, the introduction of the Four *Siddhāntas* demonstrates that, even though there is only one single reality, the methods of expressing this reality can be multifarious. Various ways of the Buddha's teachings can be summarized in Four *Siddhāntas*, which give rise to meditation, doctrines, and twelve types of scripture. The Four *Siddhāntas* are so fundamental in understanding various teachings of the Buddha that they are also asserted by Zhiyi as the core expression of the Five Sections, i.e., the Five Sections are nothing but the expression of the Four *Siddhāntas*. Since the Four *Siddhāntas* are regarded as the established method of the Buddha that incorporates all Buddhist teachings; correspondingly, the Five Sections can also be sustained as the universal category for the interpretation of all Buddhist scriptures.

The primary structure of the *Xuanyi* — Specific Interpretation

The “Specific Interpretation” (*Bieshi* 別釋) as the second level of the *Xuanyi* further elaborates the Five Sections by explaining each of the Five Sections separately, and thus forming five parts. The theme of the first part concerns the meaning “Name,” which explains the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in terms of the five words *Miaofa Lianhua Jing* 妙法蓮華經. The theme of the second part concerns the meaning “Substance,” which distinguishes the substance of the *Lotus Sutra* from that of other *sūtras*. The theme of the third part concerns the meaning “Gist,” which is to display the unique gist of the *Lotus Sutra*. The theme of the fourth part concerns the meaning “Function,” which is to discuss the powerful function possessed only by the *Lotus Sutra*. The theme of the fifth part concerns the meaning “Teaching,” which is to classify the characteristics of the teaching

of the Buddha into three types: sudden, gradual, and indeterminate. Among these five parts, the first part “Explaining the Name” is the most elucidated and richest in content. It is addressed in four headings.

I. “Judging the common and the unique feature of the *Lotus Sutra*” (*Pan tongbie* 判通別) examines the common features the *Lotus Sutra* shares with other sutras, and the unique features that are only possessed by the *Lotus Sutra*, so that the superiority of the *Lotus Sutra* is confirmed.

II. “Determining the order between ‘Subtle’ and ‘Dharma’” (*Ding miaofa qianhou* 定妙法前後) clarifies why the word “*dharma*” is interpreted before the word “subtle”, instead of interpreting the two words in accordance with the order of the title, i.e., “*Miaofa*” 妙法.

III. “Summarizing previous expositions of the *Lotus Sutra*” (*Chu jiuji* 出舊解) summarizes previous expositions of the *Lotus Sutra* that were made by other Buddhist masters. By such comparisons between the expositions of others and his own, Zhiyi highlights his exposition as more comprehensive and coherent.

IV. “Correct Interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*” (*Zhengjie miaofa lianhua jing* 正解妙法蓮華經) is to formally present Zhiyi's own interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*. With the above three headings as the prelude, Zhiyi begins in this one an extensive interpretation of the title of the *Lotus Sutra* as follows:

1. The Interpretation of the Word “Fa”

First of all, the word “*dharma*” (*Fa* 法) is interpreted. Zhiyi considers *dharma* as having three aspects: *dharma* of sentient beings (*Zhongsheng fa* 眾生法), *dharma* of Buddha (*Fo fa* 佛法), and *dharma* of mind (*Xin fa* 心法). By these three aspects, Zhiyi intends to include all categories of the *dharma* that the Buddha has addressed in his teaching.

(1) “*Dharma* of Sentient Beings” explains the *dharma* from the perspective of vastness, concerning precisely the Ten Suchnesses (*Shiru* 十如) in relation to the Ten Dharma-realms (*Shi fajie* 十法界). The Ten Suchnesses are: appearance (*Xiang* 相), nature (*Xing* 性), substance (*Ti* 體), power (*Li* 力), function (*Zuo* 作), causes (*Yin* 因), conditions (*Yuan* 緣), effects (*Guo* 果), retributions (*Bao* 報), and beginning-and-end

-ultimately-alike (*Benmo jiujiing deng* 本末究竟等). They are taken by Zhiyi to describe the characteristics of the Ultimate Truth or the True Reality (*Shixiang* 實相), and they are embraced by each of the Ten Dharma-realms (hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, *asuras*, humans, heavenly beings, *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and Buddhas).

(2) “*Dharma of Buddha*” expresses the *dharma* from the perspective of superiority. That is, the Ten Dharma-realms and the Ten Suchnesses are viewed in terms of the Relative (*Quan* 權) and the Ultimate (*Shi* 實). Relatively speaking, every realm is different and the nine realms (as the relative) are distinguished from the Buddha-realm (as the ultimate). Ultimately speaking, all realms and the Ten Suchnesses in different realms are nothing but the Buddha-state. In principle, the state of Buddhahood is possessed by all realms, and it is neither relative nor ultimate, and is all-embracing. This state of non-distinction of neither relative nor ultimate can therefore, reflect the relative of the nine realms and the ultimate of the one Buddha-realm.

(3) “*Dharma of Mind*” elucidates the *dharma* from the perspective of penetration. That is, it can penetrate all aspects of the *dharma* and makes no distinction between mind, Buddha, and sentient beings. Hence, it incorporates *Dharma of Buddha*, and *Dharma of Sentient Beings*.

2. The Interpretation of the Word “*Miao*”

Secondly, the word “subtle” (*Miao* 妙) is interpreted. The interpretation is drawn in two parts: “general interpretation of the subtlety” and “specific interpretation of the subtlety”. The “general interpretation of the subtlety” divides the subtlety into two types: relative subtlety (*Xiangdai miao* 相待妙) and absolute subtlety (*Juedai miao* 絕待妙). On the one hand, “relative subtlety” sustains its subtlety in opposition to the coarse teaching. The coarse teaching does not convey the full truth in Buddhism, and the real intention of the Buddha for universal salvation is not displayed. The subtle teaching, i.e., the *Lotus Sutra*, conveys the full truth, in which the real intention of the Buddha is revealed. This means the *Lotus Sutra* is considered to be relatively subtle when it is compared with the coarse teaching. On the other hand, the “absolute subtlety” does not need to depend on coarseness to sustain its subtlety. This means, when the *Lotus Sutra* is

looked upon as the ultimate teaching of the Buddha, which unifies the Three Vehicles (*śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*) into the One Vehicle of Buddhahood, it is absolutely subtle. The “specific interpretation of the subtlety” elaborates the subtlety extensively in terms of the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces, the commonality and the difference between the Traces and the Origin, and the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Origin. The elaboration of these two categories of the Ten Subtleties is Zhiyi's endeavor to incorporate all existing theories in the teaching of the Buddha in order to draw a complete and coherent system of Buddhism.

2.1 The Ten Subtleties in the Door of the Traces

The elaboration begins with the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces (*Jizhong shimiao* 跡中十妙).

(1) The Subtlety of Objects (*Jing miao* 境妙) is concerned with various truths that are either stated by the Buddha, or formulated by Zhiyi himself, including the Ten Suchnesses (*Shi rushi* 十如是),¹¹ the Twelvelfold Causality (*Shier yinyuan* 十二因緣),¹² the Four Noble Truths (*Sidi* 四諦),¹³ the Twofold Truth (*Erdi* 二諦),¹⁴ the Threefold

¹¹ The Ten Suchnesses are Zhiyi's scheme of characterizing the ultimate truth, including: appearance, nature, substance, power, function, causes, conditions, effects, retributions, and beginning-and-end-ultimately-alike.

¹² The “twelve links of dependent origination” are: ignorance, volitional activity, consciousness, name-and-form, six senses, contact, sensation, desire, attachment, existence, rebirth, and old age-and-death. Zhiyi illustrates the truth of the Twelvelfold Causality in terms of four types of understanding this truth, including (i) the Twelvelfold Causality of Origination and Extinction of the Conceivable, (ii) Twelvelfold Causality of Neither Origination Nor Extinction of the Conceivable, (iii) Twelvelfold Causality of Origination and Extinction of the Inconceivable, and (iv) Twelvelfold Causality of Neither Origination Nor Extinction of the Inconceivable. For details, see *Xuanyi*. T33.698c-700a.

¹³ The Four Noble Truths consist of the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the extinction of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the extinction of suffering. Zhiyi illustrates the Four Noble Truths in terms of four types, including (i) Four Noble Truths of Origination and Extinction, (ii) Four Noble Truths of Neither Origination Nor Extinction, (iii) Four Noble Truths of the Immeasurable, and (iv) Four Noble Truths of Non-function. For details, see *Xuany*. T33.701a-b.

Truth (*Sandi* 三諦),¹⁵ and the One Truth (*Yidi* 一諦).¹⁶

This category of Subtlety reflects Zhiyi's endeavor to systematize various truths taught by the Buddha or implied in scriptures, and to interpret them with his own system

¹⁴ The Twofold Truth refers to the Worldly Truth and the Absolute Truth. The Worldly Truth concerns empirical existence, and the Absolute Truth concerns emptiness of existence. Zhiyi enumerates the Two Truths in terms of seven types, including: (i) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Real Existence belongs to the level of attainment of the Tripitaka Teaching. (ii) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Emptiness of Illusory Existence belongs to the level of attainment of the Common Teaching. (iii) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Illusory Existence being Empty and not Empty belongs to the level of attainment of the Separate Teaching entering the Common. (iv) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Illusory Existence and all *dharma*s tending toward Emptiness and Non-emptiness belong to the level of attainment of the Perfect Teaching entering the Common. (v) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Illusory Existence and Emptiness, and neither Existence nor Emptiness belong to the level of attainment of the Separate Teaching. (vi) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Illusory Existence and Emptiness, neither Existence nor Emptiness, and all *dharma*s tending toward neither Emptiness nor Non-emptiness belong to the level of attainment of the Perfect Teaching entering the Separate. (vii) The Twofold Truth that is understood as Illusory Existence and Emptiness, all *dharma*s tending toward Existence, Emptiness, and neither Existence nor Emptiness belong to the level of attainment of the Perfect Teaching. For details, see *Xuanyi*. T33.702c-703b.

¹⁵ For Zhiyi, true reality consists of the Threefold Truth: Emptiness as non-substantiality of things, the Provisional as the conventional existence, and the Middle Way as the synthesis of Emptiness and the Provisional. Therefore, Zhiyi regards the Middle Way as the best and most succinct formula in expressing the Ultimate Truth. According to Zhiyi's scheme, there are five types of the Threefold Truth, including: (i) The Threefold Truth that is understood as Outflow, No-outflow, and Neither Outflow Nor No-outflow belongs to the level of attainment of the Separate Teaching entering the Common. (ii) The Threefold Truth that is understood as Outflow, No-outflow, Neither Outflow Nor No-outflow that embraces all *dharma*s belongs to the level of attainment of the Perfect Teaching entering the Common. (iii) The Threefold Truth that is understood as Existence and Emptiness, Neither Existence Nor Emptiness, and the Middle Way posited at the Absolute Truth belongs to the level of attainment of the Separate Teaching. (iv) The Threefold Truth that is understood as Existence and Emptiness, Neither Existence Nor Emptiness, and specifying the Absolute Truth as the Middle Way belongs to the level of attainment of the Perfect Teaching entering the Separate. (v) The Threefold Truth that is understood as an integrated unity of three in one and one in three belongs to the Perfect Teaching. For details, see *Xuanyi*. T33.704c-705a.

¹⁶ The One Truth is Zhiyi's ultimate understanding of truth, which demonstrates that there is only one Ultimate Truth regarding the true nature of reality. For details, see *Xuanyi*. T33.705a.

of thought, namely, the Four Teachings.¹⁷ By doing so, not only are these truths presented systematically, but also this system of truth in turn sustains his system of thought, and becomes the foundation of his philosophy of Buddhism.

(2) The Subtlety of Knowledge (*Zhi miao* 智妙) provides guidance for one to penetrate objects as truth (that are stated in the Subtlety of Objects), and to carry out corresponding practices (that are stated in the Subtlety of Practice) in reaching these objects. The twenty kinds of knowledge concerning objective reality are Zhiyi's systematization in terms of the four levels of understanding of the four categories of truth. By exposing knowledge in terms of objective reality, he informs us that the four levels of understanding of truth (such as four types of understanding of the Twelfefold Causality, four types of understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and so forth) result from the four groups of knowledge one possesses. Therefore, Zhiyi provides one with a practical orientation on how to gain a supreme understanding of reality with supreme knowledge.¹⁸

(3) The Subtlety of Practice (*Xing miao* 行妙) incorporates all types of practice in Buddhism by explicating the content of these practices in terms of the three major principles: precepts, meditation, and wisdom. It is worth noting that by illustrating *bodhisattva* practice of saving living beings in the twenty-five kinds of existence with the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths of No-function (*Wuzuo sidi* 無作四諦), Zhiyi has also

¹⁷ The Four Teachings refer to the Tripitaka, the Common, the Separate, and the Perfect Teachings, in terms of the content of the teaching of the Buddha, and they are formulated by Zhiyi. The

Tripiṭaka (collection of writings in Buddhism) Teaching refers to Śrāvakayāna Buddhism, which consists of the teachings of the three *pitakas*, including *sutras*, *vinayas* and *abhidharmas*, and is designed for the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. The Common Teaching is common to both Śrāvakayāna and elementary Mahāyāna, and caters to *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and the *bodhisattvas* of lower faculties. The Separate Teaching means that the teaching caters to the capability of the *bodhisattvas* only, and is separate from the former two teachings, and is also separate from the last teaching of the Perfect, for the doctrine of the Separate Teaching does not yet enable one to perceive an integrated reality. The Perfect Teaching addresses all the Three Vehicles (*śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and the *bodhisattvas*), and expounds the Middle Way of mutual identification, recognizing the fundamental identity among all entities. The reason these Four Teachings can incorporate all teachings of the Buddha is because they are in an ascending order, in which the first three teachings (Tripitaka, Common, Separate) can lead to the Perfect Teaching of attaining Buddhahood.

¹⁸ For a study of Zhiyi's theory of Knowledge, see Haiyan Shen, "The Means of Penetrating Truth—T'ien-t'ai Theory of Knowledge," *Asiatische Studien* 4 (2005): 1189-1266.

drawn a full picture of Buddhist cosmology.¹⁹

(4) The Subtlety of Position (*Wei miao* 位妙) incorporates theories of all levels of attainment in Buddhism. Zhiyi groups these positions into six categories from the lower level ascending to the high level in order to build up a system of attainment according to different levels of practice.²⁰

(5) The Subtlety of the Threefold Dharma (*Sanfa miao* 三法妙) addresses the Three Tracks (*Sangui* 三軌) in terms of the Buddha-nature as the Threefold Cause of Buddhahood (*Sanyin foxing* 三因佛性). The Track of Real Nature (*Zhenxing gui* 真性軌) corresponds to the Fundamental Cause (*Zhengyin foxing* 正因佛性), which refers to the fact that all beings are inherently endowed with the true nature of reality. The Track of the Illumination of Wisdom (*Guanzhao gui* 觀照軌) corresponds to the Understanding Cause (*Liaoyin foxing* 了因佛性), which refers to the inherent potential for wisdom in all sentient beings that allows them to eventually uncover their true Buddha-nature from within. The Track of Accomplishment (*Zicheng gui* 資成軌) corresponds to the Conditional Cause (*Yuanyin foxing* 緣因佛性), which refers to the inherent potential and propensity for Buddhahood within all sentient beings that allows them to perform meritorious deeds in order to attain wisdom. Therefore, the Three Tracks refer to the same aspects concerning objective reality, knowledge, and practice. These are the three major components in religious cultivation in Zhiyi's philosophy of Buddhism, equivalent to realization, teaching and practice in traditional Buddhism respectively. Zhiyi's point is that, these three components are in fact imbedded in the nature of all sentient beings, by which Zhiyi strongly argues that all beings are able to attain Buddhahood. The theory of the Three Tracks concludes the previous four categories of Subtlety that are concerned with religious cultivation, and indicates that this religious cultivation can be accomplished by the power of self-practice. To further prove the significance of the Three Tracks in attaining Buddhahood, Zhiyi correlates them with the ten categories of the triple *dharma* that are related to the attainment of Buddhahood, and by which the

¹⁹ For a study of Zhiyi's theory of practice, see Haiyan Shen, "Subtlety of Practice — Zhiyi's illustration of Religious Practice," *Asiatische Studien* 1(2006): 149-207.

²⁰ For a study of Zhiyi's system of position, see Haiyan Shen, 〈天臺智者的果位論〉, 《戒幢佛學》2 (2002): 357-388.

major concepts of Buddhahood are presented.²¹ With the fifth category of Subtlety, the process of attaining Buddhahood by the power of self-cultivation is completed. The following five categories of Subtlety (from the sixth to the tenth ones) refer to one's religious achievement by the power of the Buddha.

(6) The Subtlety of Empathy and Response (*Ganying miao* 感應妙) concerns the Buddha's power of saving sentient beings by responding according to the capacities of their empathy. It demonstrates how sentient beings in different realms can strive to be in unity with the Buddha, and the Buddha's response to them with his kindness and compassion. This theory sustains the theme of universal salvation stressed in the *Lotus Sutra*, for the system of empathy and response allows all beings to be saved by the Buddha sooner or later.

(7) The Subtlety of Supra-mundane Power (*Shentong miao* 神通妙) exposes the Buddha's use of supra-mundane powers in waking sentient beings up from their deluded state in order to implement his teaching. This category presents the transcendental phenomena that are frequently ascribed to the Buddha in Buddhist scriptures, and is incorporated by Zhiyi with his theory of supra-mundane power. This theory is essential, as it is Zhiyi's statement of emphasizing the Buddha's skillful means in teaching and transforming sentient beings.

(8) The Subtlety of Expounding the Dharma (*Shuofa miao* 說法妙) is a next step the Buddha takes to guide sentient beings with his teaching. Zhiyi's aim is to explain that the twelve types of scripture that constitute Buddhist canon are representative of the teaching of the Buddha. Regardless of whether it is Mahāyāna or Śrāvakayāna teaching, all divisions of the Buddha's teaching can be incorporated by the twelve types of scripture.

(9) The Subtlety of Retinues (*Juanshu miao* 眷屬妙) is the category resulting from the Buddha's teaching. This category is concerned with varieties of retinues that are connected to the Buddha. By grouping retinues into five kinds, Zhiyi assures us that all beings are retinues of the Buddha, and will all be salvaged by the Buddha sooner or later.

(10) The Subtlety of Benefits (*Liyi miao* 利益妙) is the result of being a retinue of

²¹ For a study of Zhiyi's theory of the Threefold Track, See Haiyan Shen, "A Core of Enlightenment: The Threefold Track forms a great Buddha-vehicle." *BC Asian Review* 14(2004): 26-57, <http://www2.arts.ubc.ca/bcar/currentissue.htm>

the Buddha. This category concludes the fact that all beings with different capacities are benefited by the corresponding responses of the Buddha. This system of benefit incorporates all benefits derived from the teaching of the Buddha, and explains why there are different kinds of benefits, which are arranged on a hierarchical scale. The scale is arranged according to the benefit beings enjoy in different realms that can reduce suffering to the benefit beings enjoy that can eliminate defilements and accomplish different levels of attainment. With this hierarchical scale, Zhiyi provides more evidence to support the theme of universal salvation, seeing that all beings are equal in finding their place in universe.²²

In terms of the structure of the text, the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces are discussed under five headings. The first heading “introductory definition” (*Biaozhang* 標章) defines each of the Ten Subtleties. The second heading “quotation and verification” (*Yinzheng* 引證) provides a scriptural support to legitimize these Ten Subtleties. The third heading “origination and arising” (*Shengqi* 生起) explains the sequence of the Ten Subtleties. The fourth heading “wide-ranging interpretation” (*Guangshi* 廣釋) presents the central theme of the whole text *Xuanyi*, involving minute descriptions of each of the Ten Subtleties. The fifth heading “concluding into relative and ultimate” (*Jie quanshi* 結權實) clarifies that the three relative teachings (Tripitaka, Common, and Separate) are not coarse teaching only. In fact, these three teachings contain both coarse and subtle elements, since they contain the ultimate purpose of the Buddha, and are the skillful means for the revelation of the ultimate teaching of the Perfect. According to Zhiyi’s system, the Four Teachings (i.e., Tripitaka, Common, Separate, and Perfect) are classified into relative and ultimate. The former three teachings are relative and the last one is ultimate. They correspond to the five flavors of dairy products (i.e., milk, cream, curdled milk, butter and ghee). The three relative teachings are coarse or a mixture of both coarse and subtle, and are analogous with the first four flavors. The Perfect Teaching is subtle only, and is compared with the ultimate flavor of ghee.

²² For a study of Zhiyi’s view of liberating others in terms of the last five categories of Subtlety, see Haiyan Shen, 〈五種度眾之妙——天臺智顗有關『化他』的理論〉,《吳越佛教》2(2007): 97-139.

2.2 The Ten Subtleties in the Door of the Origin

The next elaboration Zhiyi focuses on is the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Origin (*Benmen shimiao* 本門十妙). This is to point out that the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces are actually derived from those in the Origin, and are their manifestations. Although the Traces and the Origin appear to be separate categories, both are inseparable. Since the Traces are the manifestation of the Origin, and the Origin as the source sustains the Traces, they are contained within each other, and are in fact one entity. What Zhiyi demonstrates, by distinguishing differences and equalities of the Traces and the Origin, is that the Buddha-dharma is subtle and inconceivable, and cannot be pinned down in a fixed term. Although the Traces are supposed to represent the Relative Truth, and the Origin the Ultimate Truth, fundamentally speaking, the Relative is not only relative, for the Traces contain the Origin; the Ultimate is not only ultimate, for the Origin contains the Traces. Thus, from the perspective of their inseparability, the Traces are not really the traces, and the Origin is not really the origin. Both the Traces and Origin are subtle and inconceivable, considering that they are neither the Relative nor the Ultimate, but at the same time, they represent the Relative Truth and the Ultimate Truth respectively.

(1) The Subtlety of the Original Cause (*Ben yin miao* 本因妙), as the Buddha's initial practice at the very beginning in an incalculable past, indicates that the first three Subtleties (Objects, Knowledge and Practice) in the Traces are the manifestation of this original cause.

(2) The Subtlety of the Original Effect (*Ben guo miao* 本果妙), as the Buddha's initial attainment of Buddhahood, indicates that the Threefold *Dharma* in the Traces is the manifestation of this original effect.

(3) The Subtlety of the Original Land (*Ben guotu miao* 本國土妙), as the result of the Buddha's original attainment of Buddhahood, is unique, for this original land, called *Sāha* land, is where the Buddha attained original enlightenment, and is only attributed to the door of the Origin. The land *Sāha* where the Buddha's teaching takes place in the door of the Traces is derived from this original land, which indicates that the Buddha eternally abides in the original land in teaching and transforming sentient beings in the Traces.

(4) The Subtlety of the Original Empathy and Response (*Ben ganying miao* 本感應

妙), indicates that the empathy of living beings and the response of the Buddha in the Traces are the continuation of the empathy and the response that took place in the door of the Origin. This demonstrates that the Buddha's activities of saving living beings (beginning from the Origin and carrying on to the Traces) are consistent.

(5) The Subtlety of the Original Supra-mundane Powers (*Ben shentong miao* 本神通妙), as the Buddha's original use of supra-mundane powers to liberate beings, indicates that his use of supra-mundane powers in the Traces is his endless manifestations of kindness and compassion to save sentient beings.

(6) The Subtlety of the Original Proclamation of the *Dharma* (*Ben shuofa miao* 本說法妙), as the Buddha's initial teaching, indicates that his teaching in the Traces is the manifestation of this Origin.

(7) The Subtlety of the Original Retinues (*Ben juanshu miao* 本眷屬妙), as the earliest formation of retinues of the Buddha, indicates that sentient beings are always the children of the Buddha, and are benefited by the teaching of the Buddha through the Origin and the Traces.

(8) The Subtlety of the Original *Nirvana* (*Ben niepan miao* 本涅槃妙), as the Buddha's initiation of entering into *nirvana*, is the unique subtlety that only attributes to the door of the Origin, and reveals the fact that the Buddha constantly abides in original *nirvana*. The Buddha's declaration of entering into *nirvana* in the Traces is only skillful means for the sake of taming and transforming living beings.

(9) The Subtlety of the Original Life-span (*Ben shouming miao* 本壽命妙), as the result of the Buddha's entering into *nirvana*, is also unique and only attributes to the door of the Origin. This indicates that the Buddha's original lifespan is ever lasting. The Buddha's manifestation of different life spans of either long or short in the Traces are derived from the Buddha's original lifespan.

(10) The Subtlety of the Original Benefits (*Ben liyi miao* 本利益妙), as the original result of the Buddha's teaching and transforming sentient beings, indicates that sentient beings are continuously benefited by the teaching of the Buddha through the door of the Origin and the Traces.

In terms of the structure of the text, the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Origin are illustrated under these ten headings. (1) "Brief explanation" (*Lueshi* 略釋) explains the meanings of each of the Ten Subtleties. (2) "Origination and arising" (*Shengqi* 生起)

explains the sequence of the Ten Subtleties. The order of these Ten Subtleties is like that in the Traces. The Ten Subtleties are connected in sequence, and each category is the precondition to the following one. (3) "Similarity and dissimilarity between the Traces and the Origin" (*Jiben tongyi* 跡本同異) illustrates the correspondence between the Ten Subtleties in each of the two doors of the Traces and Origin. (4) "Quotation and verification" (*Yinwen zheng* 引文證) quotes various passages from the *Lotus Sutra* to verify that the meanings of the Ten Subtleties of the Origin are implied in the *Lotus Sutra*. (5) "Wide-ranging interpretation of the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Origin" (*Guangjie benmen shimiao* 廣解本門十妙) explains the Ten Subtleties one by one. (6) "Measuring and selecting in terms of the three periods of time" (*Sanshi liaojian* 三世料簡) emphasizes that the Buddha's initial enlightenment in an incalculable past is the "door of the Origin," the rest of the Buddha's activities in the present and in the future are the manifestation derived from this eternal Buddha in the Origin. (7) "Discussing the coarseness or the subtlety" (*Lun cumiao* 論粗妙) clarifies that the door of the Traces is coarse, for it is derived from the door of the Origin. The door of the Origin is subtle, because it is the original enlightenment of the Buddha. (8) "Concluding into the Relative or the Ultimate" (*Jiecheng quanshi* 結成權實) is to state that the door of the Traces contains both the Relative and the Ultimate Truth, and the door of the Origin contains only the Ultimate Truth. Regardless of the Relative or the Ultimate Truth, Zhiyi emphasizes that fundamentally speaking, they all bear the principle of Dharma-nature, which is neither the Origin nor the Traces, and is neither the Relative nor the Ultimate. This principle indicates that they are unexplainable (since they cannot be differentiated), but conventionally, they have to be differentiated and explained in order for one to gain knowledge and understanding of them. (9) "Benefits" (*Li yi* 利益) is to enumerate various benefits that are derived from the door of the Origin. (10) "Contemplating mind" (*Guanxin* 觀心) is to stress that the attainment of Buddhahood is not apart from mind, and the contemplation of mind is the most accessible way for one to reach enlightenment.

3. The Interpretation of the Word "*Lian-hua*"

Having elaborated extensively the word "subtle," the third word to be interpreted is the compound word "lotus flower". The lotus, for Zhiyi, is either the representation of the

dharma, or the metaphor for the *dharma*. Since truth (consisting of the Relative and the Ultimate) cannot be conceptualized, the lotus flower must be employed as a metaphor for the subtlety of the *dharma*. In Zhiyi's discourse, the lotus flower is mainly employed to analogize the two doors of the Traces and the Origin, and the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces and in the door of the Origin respectively. The metaphor of the lotus legitimates Zhiyi's interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* concerning the two doors and the Ten Subtleties in the two doors.

4. The Interpretation of the Word “*Jing*”

The fourth and the last word in the title of the *Lotus Sutra* to be interpreted is “Sutra” (*Jing*). *Jing* is interpreted as having various meanings. The first view is that *Jing* contains five different meanings, and can, therefore, not be directly translated (*Wufan* 無翻). These meanings are explicated by Zhiyi in three perspectives: “teaching” (*Jiao* 教), “practice” (*Xing* 行), and doctrine (*Yi* 義).

(1) The meaning “foundation for the *dharma*” (*Faben* 法本) indicates that *Jing* is the result of the Buddha employing skillful means (represented by the Four *Siddhāntas* as the methods of the teaching) to expound truth.

(2) The meaning “slight emanation” (*Weifa* 微發) indicates that the teaching of the Four *Siddhāntas* contains a gradual progress leading beings to reach final salvation in terms of understanding the teaching, in terms of practice, and in terms of realizing the doctrine from shallow to deep levels.

(3) The meaning “gushing spring” (*Yongquan* 湧泉) indicates that the meanings which stem from the teaching of the Four *Siddhāntas* are endless, and what flows out of the *dharma* is inexhaustible.

(4) The meaning “line marker” (*Shengmo* 繩墨) indicates that the teaching of the Four *Siddhāntas* functions as the rule for one to follow, whereby one eradicates heretic views, alters from the wrong path to the correct path, severs false views within this shore of the mundane world, and reaches the other shore of liberation.

(5) The meaning “garlands tied together” (*Jieman* 結鬘) indicates that the three aspects (teaching, practice and principle) that *Jing* contains, are tied together as a coherent whole.

The second view is that *Jing* can be translated (*Youfan* 有翻), since it is the Word of the Buddha, and it also contains five meanings. Each of the five meanings is elaborated by Zhiyi in three aspects: teaching, practice, and doctrine.

(1) With regard to the teaching, the meaning “*Jing*” (*Jing* 經) (Chinese literary meaning: “warp”) refers to the Buddhist scriptures that are recorded in the Buddhist canon. With regard to practice, the meaning *Jing* refers to all practices that penetrate truth, which are derived from the mind and speech of the Buddha. With regard to the doctrine, the meaning *Jing* refers to the truth that is derived from the mind and speech of the Buddha.

(2) The meaning “tallying with” (*Qi* 契) refers to the Worldly *Siddhānta* that tallies with the conditions of circumstances, the *Siddhānta* for Each Person that tallies with the origination of wholesomeness, the *Siddhānta* of Counteraction that tallies with the destruction of evil, and the *Siddhānta* of the Supreme Truth that tallies with the doctrine of truth.

(3) The meaning “foundation for the *dharma*” (*Faben* 法本) refers to the same thing as the above-stated in the first view.

(4) The meaning “thread” (*Xian* 線) refers to linking teaching, practice, and doctrine together to form a whole.

(5) The meaning “teaching of wholesome words” (*Shanyu jiao* 善語教) indicates that wholesome words, wholesome practice, and wholesome principle are represented by the Four *Siddhāntas*.

In addition, *Jing* can be interpreted differently by different beings. This is to extend our common understanding of Sutra as being constituted by the Buddha's teaching to the understanding that Sutra is actually embedded in all elements. Some take the sound – the voice of the Buddha as Sutra; some take the form that is related to ink and paper that record the Word of the Buddha as Sutra. For the beings with sharp six sense-organs, they may take any of the six objects (i.e., form, sound, fragrance, taste, touch, and mind) as Sutra. When *Jing* is exposed in the context of contemplating mind, it signifies that, fundamentally, there is no separation or contradiction between the Ultimate Truth and any entity in the empirical world, since mind can absorb everything. This points out that all the meanings signified by “*Jing*” can be explained with regard to the mind without any hindrance, and all minds embody nothing but Sutra.

The above is a brief overview of the content and the structure of the text *Xuanyi* that

consists of two levels. Appropriately, Zhiyi also considers the *Lotus Sutra* as consisting of two primary parts to explain the Buddha's activity: the Traces and the Origin. The Traces are concerned with the manifestation of the eternal Buddha, and is the extended activity of the eternal Buddha. The Origin is the initial attainment of Buddhahood the Buddha had achieved in an incalculable past, and is the foundation from which the Traces are derived. The corresponding structure of the *Xuanyi* with that of the scripture it interprets designates the *Xuanyi* an organic entity of Zhiyi's perfect and harmonizing philosophy in terms of its completeness.

As we read through the text *Xuanyi*, it might be quite puzzling that there are so many different sections, divisions, parts, and aspects in addressing certain issues or concepts. We may ask: is there a clue or some kind of formula we can trace and follow? Indeed, there is a formula Zhiyi incorporates for his field of discourse. What constitutes this formula concerns different aspects of discourse that are in an ascending order, and can be generalized as follows:

The formula of Zhiyi's field of discourse

The formula of Zhiyi's discourse usually consists of three steps. The first step is to enumerate and explain various existing theories related to certain issues that are representative of contemporary views of Buddhism in sixth century China under the heading "general discussion" (*Tonglun* 通論) or "clarification" (*Ming* 明). Apparently, Zhiyi's enumeration of these theories is not just a simple reiteration of them. They are generalized and outlined under the heading "wide-ranging interpretation" (*Guangshi* 廣釋), or "explanation" (*Shi* 釋) according to Zhiyi's own system of classification, namely the Four Teachings (*Sijiao* 四教) in terms of the doctrinal aspect of the teaching of the Buddha. Therefore, these theories are presented in various categories of a hierarchical scale, and they correspond to the Four Teachings: beginning with the Tripitaka, proceeding to the Common, to the Separate, and ending with the Perfect Teaching. Zhiyi's presentation of these theories provides a new outlook of Buddhism that reflects the Chinese effort of indigenizing Buddhism to Chinese soil. The usual procedure for Zhiyi to carry out a discussion is to introduce various Buddhist concepts that are related

to the topic in question, and to define them clearly in various contexts under the heading “introductory definition”.

In most cases, various passages in Buddhist scriptures are cited by Zhiyi under the heading “quotation and verification” (*Yinwen zheng* 引文證) to support his system of thought so that it can be legitimated and integrated with traditional Buddhism. The second step is to make distinctions among various categories presented, so that the relation among them can be revealed. In most cases, the relation of these categories shows an ascending order. There are several ways of providing such an examination. First of all, with the gradual ascending order of the Four Teachings that represents a religious progress in perceiving truth, all corresponding notions are also examined in terms of their interdependent relations. Zhiyi calls it as “origination and arising” (*Shengqi* 生起). Secondly, the Four Teachings and their corresponding notions are distinguished in terms of their coarseness and subtlety so that the inferiority and superiority of the Four Teachings is made clear, and the Perfect Teaching as the Ultimate Truth for universal salvation is asserted. Zhiyi terms it “measuring and selecting” (*Liaojian* 料簡), or “unfolding and folding” (*Kaihe* 開合) and or “classifying into coarseness or subtlety” (*Pan cumiao* 判粗妙). Bearing this standard of classification in mind, the practitioner is informed what he/she must strive for. In other words, if one is at the level of the *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* of the Tripitaka Teaching, one is warned not to be attached to this teaching, and one is advised to pursue further the Common Teaching, the Separate Teaching, and ultimately the Perfect Teaching. Likewise, the *bodhisattvas* of the Common and the Separate Teachings must continue to practice until they can finally reach the Perfect Teaching.

The last step that constitutes the formula in Zhiyi's field of discourse is to unify all theories and ideas by revealing the fact that the Ultimate Truth is embedded in all things. For him, knowing the coarseness or the subtlety of the Four Teachings is not sufficient, whereas the ultimate state of Buddhahood is quiescent and non-distinctive, embodying reality of identification and integration of all entities. However, why is it necessary to differentiate things in the first place before transcending them? Can one directly reach the last stage without going through the former procedure of differentiation? Our understanding of Zhiyi's procedure is that, one's ability to make further progress to transcend distinction should be based on the recognition of differences, which is again an

ascending procedure of gaining insight into truth in religious practice. Making distinctions are a necessary step for one to reach non-distinction. The practitioner must be aware that making distinctions would be invalid if the state of non-distinction were not introduced, for mental discrimination is an obstacle and has to be overcome in order to attain Buddhahood. Hence, differentiation is a bridge of religious progress to reach the ultimate goal of non-distinction, and it should be confirmed as long as it is not mistaken as the final goal of liberation.

How can one transcend the distinction between the coarseness and the subtlety? Zhiyi introduces the method “opening the coarseness and revealing the subtlety” (*Kaicu xianmiao* 開粗顯妙), or “concluding in terms of the Relative and the Ultimate” (*Jie quanshi* 結權實), or “contemplating mind” (*Guanxin* 觀心), or “concluding in terms of the Four *Siddhāntas*” (*Jiecheng si xitan* 結成四悉檀).

(1) Opening the coarseness and revealing the subtlety is Zhiyi’s approach to reveal fundamental reality of various teachings of the Buddha, by claiming that the Buddha’s real intention of expounding the coarse teachings is for the sake of preparing listeners to receive the subtle teaching. When this intention is displayed, the coarse teaching is dissolved into the subtle teaching, since the Ultimate Truth is made known to be the underlying principle of all teachings, by which all beings will be eventually led to the attainment of Buddhahood.

(2) By concluding issues in discussion in terms of the Relative and the Ultimate, the Ultimate Truth is conveyed as consisting of both the Relative and the Ultimate: Relative serves to manifest the Ultimate, and the revelation of the Ultimate depends on the Relative. When the Ultimate Truth is displayed, the polar concept of Relative and Ultimate is converged into one true reality.

(3) Concluding in terms of the Four *Siddhāntas* is Zhiyi’s method of explaining existence of different teachings of the Buddha. The one single reality as the principle of all *dharma*s Zhiyi upholds does not prevent him from acknowledging simultaneous existence of diverse phenomena as the facts. With this comprehensive view of entities, the Four *Siddhāntas* are introduced to demonstrate that even though there is only one single reality, the manner of expressing this reality can be multifarious depending on the faculties of living beings and different circumstances. In addition, in view of the attainment of Buddhahood being the ultimate purpose of the teaching of the Buddha, the

Four *Siddhāntas* can be looked at as the four steps in guiding beings to attain Buddhahood.

The first step is to cater to the capabilities of beings by expounding the worldly truth; the second step is to arouse wholesomeness within beings; the third step is to treat evil of beings, and the last step is to convey the supreme truth of attaining liberation with the One Buddha-vehicle. With this One Buddha-vehicle as the ultimate goal, one transcends differences between the coarse teaching and the subtle teaching by gaining insight into their fundamental identity. In short, regardless of whether the teaching is coarse or subtle, all of them are integrated to form a single reality of Buddhahood.

Chart: The Formula of Zhiyi's Field of Discourse

The first step	introductory definitions	quotation and verification	explanation	clarification
	general discussion	wide-ranging interpretation		
The second step	origination and arising	measuring and selecting	unfolding and folding	Classifying into coarseness or subtlety
The third step	opening the coarseness and revealing the subtlety	concluding into relative and ultimate		
	concluding in terms of the Four <i>Siddhāntas</i>	Contemplating mind		

The above-described formula of Zhiyi's field of discourse can now be applied to examine each major part of the text. For example, with regard to the first level of the text "General Interpretation" (*Tongshi* 通釋) that consists of seven parts, the first part "introductory definition" (*Biaozhang* 標章) and the second part "quotation and verification" (*Yinzheng* 引證), that are concerned with the definitions of various concepts and the quotations from scriptures, belong to the first step. The third part "origination and arising" (*Shengqi* 生起) and the fourth part "unfolding and folding" (*Kaihe* 開合), that are concerned with making distinctions of the Five Sections, belong to the second step. The fifth part "measuring and selecting" (*Liaojian* 料簡), sixth part "Contemplating mind" (*Guanxin* 觀心), and seventh part "Converging Differences" (*Huiyi* 會異) are related to the third step, since they aim at diminishing differences among various categories by stressing that the Five Sections are the unifying force for the coherence of the whole Buddhist canon.

Division One: General Interpretation

The first step	1.introductory definitions	2.quotation and verification
The second step	3. origination and arising	4. unfolding and folding
The third step	5. measuring and selecting	6. contemplating mind
	7. convergence of difference	

The second level of the text "Specific Interpretation" (*Bieshi* 別釋) that consists of five parts fits Zhiyi's formula with the arrangement of the five parts in an ascending order. All entities must have a name, and therefore, "Explaining the Name" (*Shiming* 釋名) is the first category, and can be taken located at the bottom of a hierarchical scale. When truth has a name, this truth is called the "ultimate truth", which is taken as the substance. Therefore, "Distinguishing the Substance" (*Bianti* 辨體) is the second category. With the substance as the foundation, "Displaying the Gist" (*Mingzong* 明宗) can be established as the third category to reveal the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* as the cause and effect of

Buddhahood. As the result of this essential teaching, “Discussing the Function” (*Lunyong* 論用) is presented as the fourth category in order to demonstrate the powerful function of the *Lotus Sutra*, which indicates the Buddha's intention to lead sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. The last category “Classifying the Characteristics of the Teaching” (*Pan jiaoxiang* 判教相) is the concluding section, in which all the teachings of the Buddha are unified as a whole, and are classified into three types: sudden, gradual, and indeterminate. These three characteristics of the teaching indicate that, despite the fact that the Buddha teaches the *dharma* according to different faculties of beings, the underlying goal of his teaching is one, which is to lead beings to attain the Ultimate Truth of Buddhahood. The purpose of distinguishing the characteristics of the teaching is to demonstrate that reality is an integration of all entities or *dharma*s, and this reality is realized with the establishment of the supremacy of the ultimate teaching in the *Lotus Sutra*.

Division Two: Specific Interpretation

The first step	1. explaining the Name	
The second step	2. distinguishing the Substance	3. displaying the Gist
	4. discussing the Function	
The third step	5. characteristics of the Teaching	

With regard to the interpretation of the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Traces that consists of five headings, the first heading “introductory definition” (*Biaozhang* 標章) and second heading “quotation and verification” (*Yinzheng* 引證) that define the meaning of the Ten Subtleties and provide quotations of scriptures in further legitimizing the categories of the Ten Subtleties, incorporate the first step. The third heading “origination and arising” (*Shengqi* 生起) and the fourth heading “wide-ranging interpretation” (*Guangjie* 廣解), that reveal the sequence of the Ten Subtleties and explain each of them individually, fit the second step. The fifth heading “concluding into

relative and ultimate" (*Jie quanshi* 結權實), that unifies differences of the Ten Subtleties by concluding them in terms of the relative and the ultimate, belongs to the third step in Zhiyi's discourse.

Ten Subtleties in the door of Traces

The first step	1. introductory definitions	2. quotation and verification
The second step	3. origination and arising	4. wide-ranging interpretation
The third step	5. Concluding into relative and ultimate	

With regard to the interpretation of the Ten Subtleties in the door of the Origin that consists of ten headings, the first five headings are within the sphere of the first step in Zhiyi's discourse. The first heading "brief interpretation" (*Lueshi* 略釋) explicates the meanings of the Ten Subtleties. The second heading (*Shengqi* 生起) explicates the sequential order among the Ten Subtleties. The third heading (*Kaihe* 開合) elucidates the correspondence between the Ten Subtleties in the doors of the Origin and in the door of the Traces. The fourth heading (*Yinzheng* 引證) presents the meanings of the Ten Subtleties that are indicated in the *Lotus Sutra*. The fifth heading (*Guangshi* 廣釋) presents an extended interpretation of each of the Ten Subtleties. The second step in Zhiyi's discourse finds its equivalence in heading six (*Liaojian* 料簡) and heading seven (*Lun cumiao* 論粗妙), and are concerned with distinguishing differences between the coarseness and the subtlety. Headings eight, nine, and ten are equivalent to the third step, concerning the presentation of a single reality. The eighth heading (*Jie quanshi* 結權實) presents the Origin as the Ultimate Truth from which the Traces as the Relative is derived. The ninth heading (*Li yi* 利益) stresses further the superiority of the Origin by enumerating various benefits pertaining to it. The tenth heading (*Guanxin* 觀心) asserts that enlightenment is the same reality as contemplative insight into mind, wherefore enlightenment can be reached by contemplating mind.

Ten subtleties in the door of Origin

The first step	1. brief interpretation	2. origination and arising
	3. similarity and difference between the Traces and the Origin	4. quoting the texts for verification
	5. wide-ranging interpretation	
The second step	6. measuring and selecting in terms of three periods of time	7. discussing the coarseness or subtlety
The third step	8. concluding into relative and ultimate	9. benefits
	10. contemplating mind	

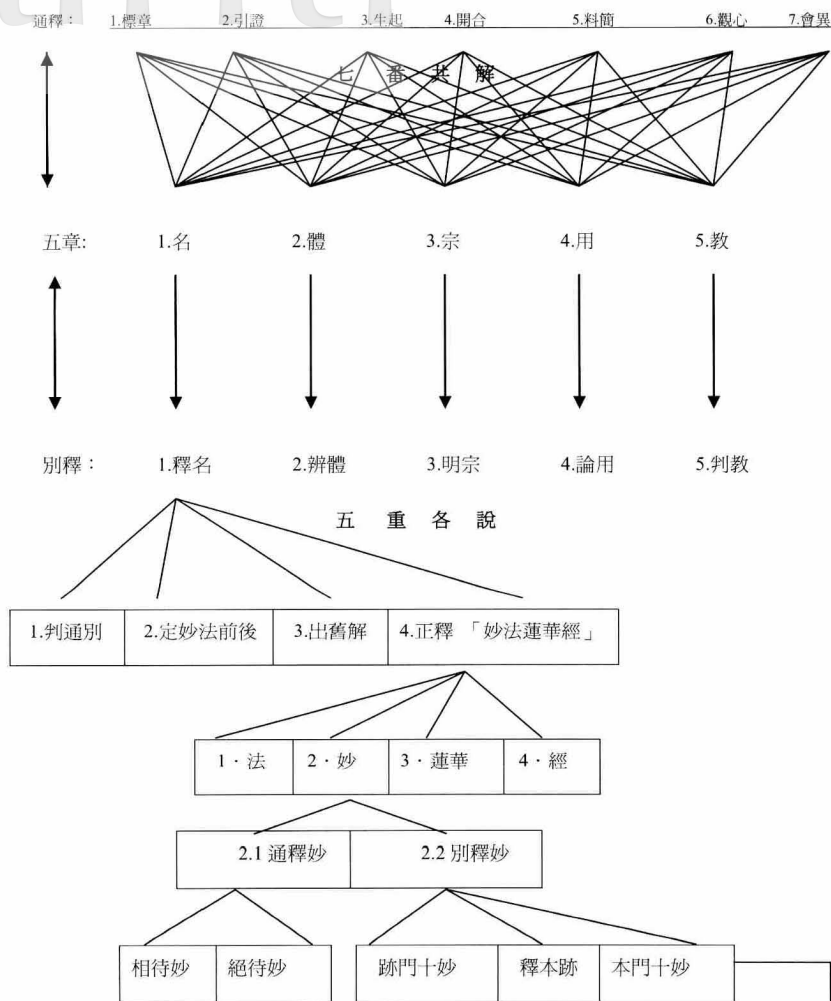
Conclusion

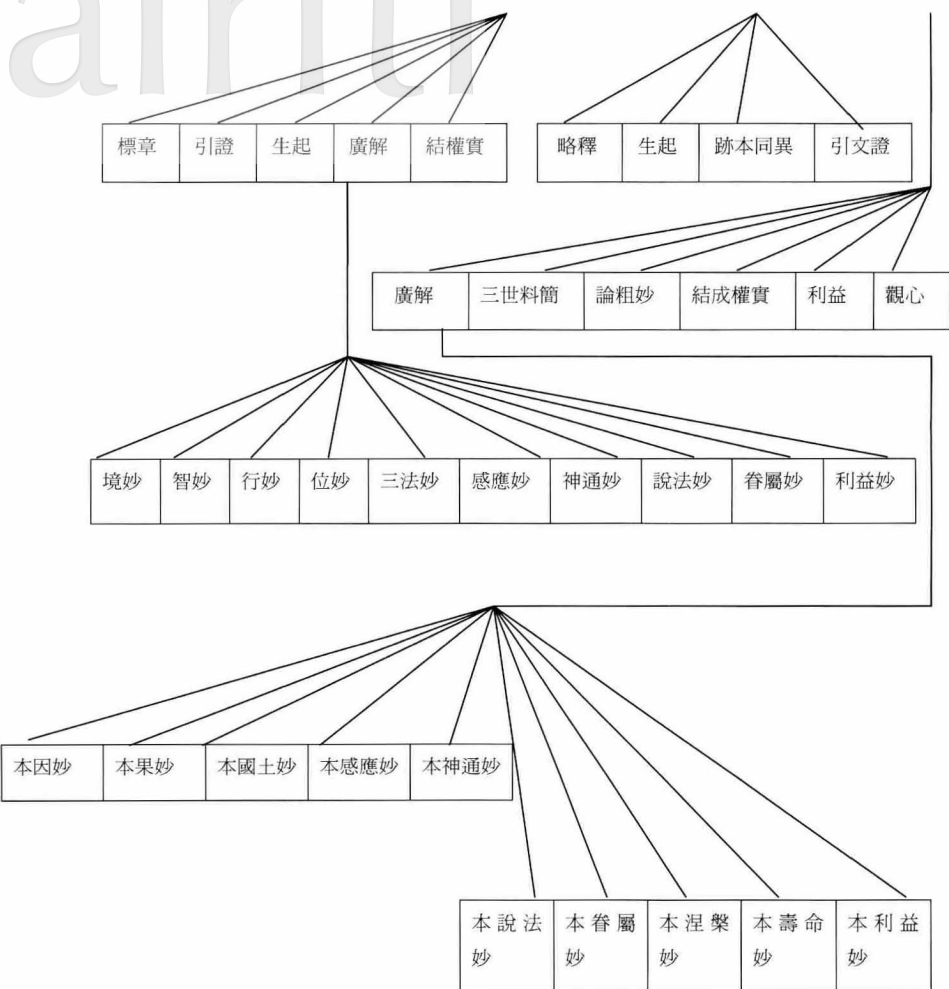
The above is an overview of the primary structure of the *Xuanyi*, which demonstrates that the whole interpretation in the *Xuanyi* is like a flowing stream: every part of discussion is connected to the next in a pattern of expansion. The two levels in the text are connected in terms of the general and the specific characteristics of the *Lotus Sutra* in Five Sections. The second level is the further elaboration of the subject in Five Sections that are presented in the first level. Moreover, the textual structure and the theoretical structure constitute the *Xuanyi*. The textual structure of the *Xuanyi* is constituted by two levels of interpretation: “General” and “Specific”. The theoretical structure of the *Xuanyi* is represented by the Four Teachings. That is, the Four Teachings is the standard principle applied to scrutinize every part of the interpretation.

Thus, the Fourfold Teaching is the representation of the theoretical structure of the *Xuanyi*, and is also the system linking Zhiyi's theories about Buddhism together to make

various doctrines of Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna coherent and complete. In other words, every part of his interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* is presented in terms of the Fourfold Teaching. This system of classification is significant, because it unifies the teachings of the Buddha, serves as an instrument to judge the subtle or the coarse doctrines, and reveals the Relative and the Ultimate Truth. As well, the system resolves the disputes over various doctrines that belong to various divisions in Buddhism, such as the dispute between Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna, in view of all the doctrines taught by the Buddha that contain the real intention of the Buddha for liberating all living beings. By introducing the Four Teachings, various doctrines are not only categorized as belonging to different teachings of the Buddha, but are also converged into the Perfect Teaching, in which an integrated reality is presented as the Ultimate Truth. When the Four Teachings are viewed separately, they can be categorized as either coarse or subtle, or either relative or ultimate. When these teachings are scrutinized together from the perspective of the Ultimate Truth (indicating that all teachings of the Buddha aim at the universal salvation of sentient beings), they are of no distinction, are identified with each other, and are merged into the same subtle reality. Furthermore, the Five Sections that constitutes the textual structure are the foundation for the coherence of Zhiyi's system of thought. In terms of the structure, the Five Sections secure the huge body of literature of the *Xuanyi*. In theoretical term, the Five Sections organizes the whole field of discourse, and allow Zhiyi's interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* to be developed into completion.

Chart: The textual structure of the work *Xuanyi*





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詮釋《法華經》的路徑： 天臺智顗《妙法蓮華經玄義》之體例

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內容摘要：天臺智者大師的五重玄義理論，乃是其詮釋《法華經》的體例方法，亦可以推而廣之，用以貫穿所有對佛經的詮釋。本文探討了智顗在其巨著《法華玄義》中具體是如何建立其五重玄義的理論，又是如何通過五重玄義來詮釋《法華經》的宗旨並藉以呈現其自身的佛學體系的。

關鍵詞：五章、天臺佛學、三諦、實相、《法華玄義》