THE P'AN-CHIAO SYSTEM OF THE HUA-YEN SCHOOL IN CHINESE BUDDHISM*

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We owe such eminent scholars as Garma C. C. Chang and Francis H. Cook 1) a great debt for introducing to the West the teaching of the Hua-yen School 華嚴宗, one of the main streams of Chinese Buddhism. While their contribution in this area is beyond dispute, it is regrettable that they have not treated in detail in their writings on Hua-yen Buddhism the subject of p'an-chiao 佛教 (classification of doctrines), even though most Chinese Buddhist schools, the Hua-yen School included, have considered their p'an-chiao systems to be the core of their teachings. This is unfortunate, because the Hua-yen School arrives at its “teaching of totality” largely by way of its critique of the Buddhist traditions of the past, and any attempt to elucidate its ideas without taking this fact into due consideration would easily result in a loss of perspective. The objective of the present study is to demonstrate how important the problem of p'an-chiao is to a correct comprehension of the teaching of the Hua-yen School, largely based on the works of Fa-tsang 法藏, its third patriarch 2). As for my own interpretation of the Hua-yen teaching of totality, I prefer to leave it to another article.

* This article is based on Part II of my Ph.D. dissertation titled “The Teaching of Fa-tsang—An Examination of Buddhist Metaphysics” (University of California, Los Angeles, 1979). I would like to take this occasion to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Kenneth K. S. Chi’en, my advisor, for his diligent guidance and constant encouragement.


2) The word “school” in Chinese Buddhism often indicates no more than a general trend or tradition, whose members are related to each other only by their common interest in some particular Buddhist texts, ideas or practices. In the case of the Hua-yen School, none of its first three patriarchs were conscious that they were founding a new “school”. The term “Hua-yen School” first appeared in the Ta-fang-huang fo-hua-yen ching shu 大方廣佛
(1) The Origin of the Practice of P’an-Chiao

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Buddhism does not have a definite set of texts which are acknowledged by all followers of the religion to be canonical. Strictly speaking, only the words of the Buddha are regarded as sacred; but given the hazy history of Buddhism and its oral method of transmission, it is not surprising that by the end of the first century A.D., there already existed a huge volume of literature embodying the most diverse forms of teaching, all of them claiming to be from the mouth of the Buddha himself. Subsequent centuries witnessed not only the rapid augmentation of this body of literature but also the emergence of a number of famous Buddhist figures (such as Aśvaghosa and Nāgārjuna), who attained position of such eminence that their words were also considered as authoritative. Soon, their names became attached to a long list of texts of the most varied forms and content, and these texts in time also gained general acceptance. Thus, when this body of literature was imported into China, the Chinese were naturally puzzled by the numerous discrepancies and contradictions they found in it. This fact, together with the Chinese penchant for syncretism, accounts for the inception of the practice of “classification of doctrines” in China.

The P’an-kuang and the Ta-fang-kuang fo-hua-yan-ching sui-shu yen-i ch’ao 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義抄, the so-called fourth patriarch. But even then, Ch‘eng-kuan did not speak of the presence of a lineage. The line of succession: Fa-shun 法順, Chih-yen 智顗, Fa-tsang, was first put forth by Tsung-mi 宗密 in his Chu fa-chieh kuan-men 註法界觀門. However, Tsung-mi never mentioned Ch‘eng-kuan as the fourth patriarch, nor claimed himself to be the fifth one.

As for the meaning of the word “patriarch” in this article, it suffices to borrow the remarks of F. H. Cook:

I have, from time to time, used the word “patriarch” with reference to leading figures in the development of Hua-yen, but these early figures in the history of the school did not consider themselves to be anything like patriarchs of a new school. They were just Buddhists who were especially attracted to one particular scripture. The patriarchal tradition of Hua-yen, like that of Ch‘an and other Chinese forms of Buddhism, was established much later than the time of the “patriarchs”, when some need arose to base the teachings of the school squarely on an unbroken line of masters stretching far back into Chinese history and often beyond to a line of Indian masters who in turn were descended in authority from the Buddha himself (op. cit., pp. 23-24).

4) Though the practice of p’an-chiao is a distinctive feature of Chinese Buddhism, it has its theoretical basis in the idea of “skilful means 方便” in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Thus, broadly speaking, we may also say that p’an-
It is not known just when the practice of p'an-chiao began in China; but by the second half of the fifth century, the analysis of the Buddha's teaching into categories had become quite popular 4). Most of the authors of the early p'an-chiao systems had left no work of their own, and in order to reconstruct their ideas, we have to depend on accounts of later Buddhist masters, notably those of Chi-tsang 吉藏 5), Chih-i 智頴 6), and Fa-tsang 7). From those accounts, we can see that these early masters approached the problem of p'an-chiao mainly from three points of view:

i. Some divided the Buddha's teaching chronologically into periods, each period with its distinctive tenet.

ii. Some divided the Buddha's teaching according to the different methods the Buddha employed in delivering it.

iii. Some divided the Buddha's teaching according to its doctrines.

As we shall see, in classifying the Buddha's teaching, the Hua-yen School in general follows the third approach. In this respect, it is less circumspect than the p'an-chiao system of the T'ien-t'ai School 天台宗, whose scheme of "the five periods and the eight teachings" have taken into consideration all the aforementioned three perspectives 8).

chiao has its beginning in India; and in a number of Mahāyāna texts, such as the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, the Lankāvatāra-sūtra and the Saṃdhinir- mocana-sūtra, there can even be found passages which come close to an explicit statement of the concept.


5) In his San-lun hsüan-i 三論玄義, Chi-tsang relates a fivefold p'an-chiao scheme of the master Hui-kuan 慧觀, a follower of Kumārajīva. See Taishō kinhō daiizōkyō 大正新脩大藏経 (henceforth abbreviated to T), vol. 45, p. 5b.


7) Fa-tsang's account of the early p'an-chiao systems has been discussed in my Ph.D. dissertation, op. cit., pp. 140-148. A more exhaustive study can be found in Sakamoto Yukio 坂本幸男, Kegon kyōgaku no kenkyū 華厳學の研究 (Kyoto: 1964), pp. 149-265.

8) L. Hurvitz has made a very thorough study of this p'an-chiao scheme of the T'ien-t'ai School in Chih-i, op. cit., pp. 229-271. For a summary account, consult Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, op. cit., pp. 305-311.
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(2) THE FORMATION OF THE P'AN-CHIAO SYSTEM OF THE HUA-YEN SCHOOL AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Hua-yen School, as its name suggests, bases its teaching on the Hua-yen ching 華嚴經 (henceforth abbreviated to HYC), which was first translated into Chinese at the beginning of the fifth century 9). Between the years of the first translation of the sūtra and the formation of the Hua-yen School, the study of the HYC was mainly carried on by the Ti-lun masters 地論師 and the She-lun masters 攜論師, whose teachings represent the initial Chinese response to Yogācāra Buddhism when the latter was introduced into the country in the early sixth century 10). Despite the

9) The Sanskrit original of the HYC, if there had ever been one, is no longer extant, but two of its chapters are handed down to posterity as two vastly popular independent works, i.e., the Daśabhūmika-sūtra and the Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra. There still exist three complete translations of the sūtra, one in Tibetan and two in Chinese, which differ considerably from each other. A succinct account in English of the sūtra and its various translations can be found in G. P. Malalasekera, ed., Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, vol. 2 (Colombo: Government Press, Ceylon, 1966), pp. 435-442. There are two theories regarding the original Sanskrit title of the sūtra, one based on Chinese and the other on Tibetan sources. According to the former, the sūtra is originally named the Mahāvaipulyayuddhagandavyūha-sūtra; whereas according to the latter, the sūtra should be called the Buddhāvataansūkanāmamahāvaipulya-sūtra. No agreement has yet been reached on this controversial problem. Partly for the sake of convenience, I shall refer to the work by its Chinese title throughout the following discussion.

10) The Ti-lun School based its teaching on Vasubandhu's commentary on the Daśabhūmika-sūtra. Several different accounts have been given of the translation of the commentary, which we need not go into here. On the whole, it is safe to say that Bodhiruci and Ratnamati had in one way or another contributed to the translation, which was completed around 511. The translation marked the beginning of the Ti-lun School. However, its two translators disagreed on their reading of the text, and came to an early parting of the way. Tao-ch'ung 道寵 inherited Bodhiruci's interpretation and founded the Northern Branch of the Ti-lun School, while Hui-kuang 慧光 accepted Ratnamati's teaching, and he and those who followed him were usually referred to as the Southern Branch of the Ti-lun School.

The founder of the She-lun School was Paramārtha, the most important translator and propounder of Yogācāra texts in China before Hsüan-tsang. His translations of the Mahāyānasangraha-lāṭṭra by Asaṅga and Mahāyānasangraha-bhāṣya by Vasubandhu were completed in Canton in 563. Comparison of the second work with later translations by Dharmagupta (590) and Hsüan-tsang (649) shows that it is considerably longer than the rest, and many have suspected that these extra portions are in fact Paramārtha's lectures on the text, which somehow found their way into his translation. Nevertheless, these two translations provided the nucleus for the formation of a new Buddhist tradition in China, the so-called She-lun School.
heated conflicts which are said to have existed among these early Chinese Yogācārins, they seemed to agree with each other on one very important issue, i.e., they all maintained that there exists in all sentient beings a perfectly pure consciousness, (sometimes referred to as the lathāgatalagarbha,) which gives rise to the world of myriad phenomena under the permeation of ignorance. In this respect, they differed from the Fa-hsiang School founded by Hsüan-tsang玄奘 on his return from India in 645, which does not recognize the existence of an originally pure consciousness, and regards the ālaya-consciousness as the storehouse of both pure and impure seeds, while in itself is neither pure nor impure. With this distinction in mind, historians frequently classify Yogācārism in China into two traditions, i.e., the “old Yogācāra tradition” including the Ti-lun School and the She-lun School, and the “new Yogācāra tradition” represented by the Fa-hsiang School. Under imperial patronage, the new Yogācāra tradition quickly replaced the old Yogācāra tradition in the seventh century, and in its being closer to the form of Yogācāra Buddhism taught by Asanga and Vasubandhu, is still regarded as orthodox in China to-day. But the old Yogācāra tradition and its doctrine of pure consciousness continued to influence the later development of Chinese Buddhism, and provided the general ontological framework for the Hua-yen teaching of totality. I hope that subsequent discussion would bear out this very important point.

The p’an-chiao system of the Hua-yen School as fully developed in Fa-tsang’s writings consists of many different schemes, but

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1) Since most of the works by the early Chinese Yogācārins had been lost, we are very much in the dark on the exact nature of their dispute. It is now generally believed that the Southern Branch of the Ti-lun School maintained that the ālaya-consciousness (the eighth consciousness) was perfectly pure, and attributed all impurities to the seventh consciousness, while the Northern Branch held that the ālaya had both pure and impure elements. The She-lun School came close to the Northern Branch of the Ti-lun School in maintaining that the ālaya comprises both pure and impure elements, but the She-lun School went further to assert the existence of a perfectly pure consciousness, which it called the amala-consciousness or the ninth consciousness. For a systematic account of the teachings of these schools and branches, see Katsumata Shunkyō 華峯静慮 Bukkyō no oheru shin-shiki-setsu no kenkyū 佛教における心識說の研究 (Tokyo: 1961), pp. 639-745 & 767-818.

2) Ishii Kyōdō 石井敬道 in his Kegon kyōgaku seiritsu shi 華厳経學成 formulists lists no less than eight p’an-chiao systems of Fa-tsang (Tokyo: 1964), pp. 345-368.
three of them are commonly considered by Hua-yen masters as most representative of their position:

i. The common teaching and the distinct teaching (of the one vehicle) (t'ung-pieh erh-chiao p'an 同別二教判).
ii. The five teachings (wu-chiao p'an 五教判).
iii. The ten tenets (shih-tsung p'an 十宗判).

As (i) and (iii) are proposed chiefly out of propagandistic consideration and are not indispensable to a general understanding of the p'an-chiao system of the school, we shall devote our attention primarily to the scheme of the five teachings in this article 13).

If we give credence to the prevailing opinion that the Wu-chiao chih-kuan 五教止觀 is the work of Fa-shun 法順 (557-649), the first patriarch, the scheme of the five teachings would date back to the very beginning of the history of the school, for the five teachings are neatly set out and expounded in this treatise. However, since the Wu-chiao chih-kuan has been proved a forgery 14), the credit of first completing this scheme should be given to Chih-yen 聰嚴 (602-668), the second patriarch 15). This is obvious if we take a look at the different p'an-chiao schemes found in Chih-yen's works:

i. In the Hua-yen sou-hsüan chi 華嚴搜玄記 (628), Chih-yen puts forth two p'an-chiao schemes. One is the scheme of gradual,

13) Discussion on these two schemes can be found in my Ph.D. dissertation, op. cit., chap. 7 & chap. 9.
15) A large portion of the Wu-chiao chih-kuan is identical with the Yu-hsien jia-ch'ieh chi 焦心法界記 by Fa-tsang, and recent scholars have suspected that the former is a late compilation based upon the latter. For some discussion on the authenticity of the Wu-chiao chih-kuan, consult:


14) The most complete biography of Chih-yen is found in Fa-tsang, Hua-yen-ching chuan-chi 華嚴經傳記, T, vol. 51, pp. 163b-164a. Also see Garma C. C. Chang, op. cit., pp. 234-237.
sudden and round teaching, which he obviously takes over from Hui-kuang 慧光 (468-537) and Chih-cheng 智正 (559-639), both being eminent Ti-lun masters 16). The other is the scheme of the one vehicle, three vehicles and small vehicle, which he himself claims to be derived from Paramārtha’s translation of the Mahāyānasamgraha-śāstra and was most probably a p’enchiaoshchē scheme prevalent among the members of the She-lun School of his time 17).

ii. In the Wu-shih-yao wen-la 五十要問答 (around 660), Chih-yen mentions only the latter of the two schemes described in (i) above. Of special significance is the fact that he further divides the teaching of the three vehicles into two categories: the elementary and the final 18).

iii. The scheme of the five teachings first appears in the K‘ung-mu-chang 孔目章, written about five years before his death (around 663). In this work, Chih-yen is not very consistent in the naming of the doctrines 19), but the scheme is there, and the characteristics of each doctrine are also discussed.

It is not difficult to retrace the gradual evolution of the scheme of five teachings in Chih-yen’s writing based on the brief outline given above. A scheme of four teachings can be obtained by combining the two schemes in stage (i), namely, the teaching of the small vehicle, gradual teaching, sudden teaching and round teaching. This is done by adding “the teaching of the small vehicle” in the second scheme to the first scheme and leaving out the rest, for it is obvious that “the teaching of the three vehicles” is equivalent to the “gradual teaching”, while “the teaching of the one vehicle” is equivalent to the “sudden teaching” and the “round teaching”. When the “gradual teaching” is further considered under two headings, i.e., the elementary and the final (as in stage ii), a scheme of five teachings is arrived at. This is most probably how

16) See T, vol. 35, pp. 13c-14b. This is borne out if we compare relevant passages in the Hua-yen sou-hsüan chi with extant fragments of Hui-kuang’s and Chih-chang’s commentaries on the HYC. Refer to Umetsuki Shōgon 梅恵信, “Chigun no kyōhan ni tsuite 禅譜の敎訓について”, Indogaku bunkyōgaku henkyō 印度學佛敎學研究, 6.2 (1958), pp. 105-106.
18) For an example, refer to T, vol. 45, p. 519c.
19) For example, he sometimes calls the final teaching “mature teaching”, and the round teaching, “one vehicle teaching”. See the table in Ishii Kyōdō, op. cit., p. 354.
Chih-yen gets his scheme of the five teachings which he outlines in the *K'ung-mu-chang*.

To be noted also is that since the two schemes in stage (i) are adopted from former sources, the chief innovation on Chih-yen’s part seems to lie in his distinguishing two categories in the teaching of the three vehicles (or the gradual teaching). The question which naturally follows is why he considers such distinction necessary.

Before this question can be answered, we have to look at Chih-yen’s description of the five teachings. Chih-yen’s exposition of the five teachings is brief and cryptic. Roughly, by the teaching of the small vehicle (Hinayāna teaching), Chih-yen refers to the doctrine that both the self and physical objects are without self-essence and so are unreal. This teaching is “small” for it does not go on to expound that the *dharmas* which constitute the self and physical objects are unreal as well. The latter is the doctrine of “emptiness” which characterizes the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna.

The final teaching of the Mahāyāna maintains that there is an ultimate reality (which Chih-yen refers to as the *tathātā* or *tathāgatagarbha*) from which all things arise. The sudden teaching stresses that this ultimate reality is inexpressible and incomprehensible. Finally, the round teaching teaches the infinite mutual penetration of *dharmas*, the most perfect vision of reality embodied in the HYC [20]. As we shall see, Fa-tsang’s exposition of the five teachings follows closely this rudimentary outline.

The final teaching clearly is none other than the form of Buddhist teaching propounded by masters of the old Yogācāra tradition. That Chih-yen often refers to the elementary teaching as “the teaching of emptiness” seems to suggest that by elementary teaching, Chih-yen has chiefly the teaching of the Mādhyamika School in mind. However, in the *K'ung-mu-chang*, we find a comparison of the theories of causality of the five teachings:

(The teaching of the small vehicle is brief in its causal analysis and cannot reach the conclusion that *dharmas* are empty. Since it fails to penetrate this important truth, its teaching of causality is incomplete. The elementary teaching of the three vehicles can perceive the empty nature of dharmas to a certain extent. Noting the complex [nature] of dharmas, it gives them detailed analysis accordingly. From the mature [final] teaching [of the three vehicles] onward, the truth of the empty nature of dharmas gets its fullest expression. However, since [these teachings] focus on the nomenclature underlying the phenomenal, they do not dwell much [on the nature of dharmas][21].

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Since causal analysis is not a prominent feature of Mādhyamika philosophy, Fa-tsong is here clearly alluding to the new Yogācāra tradition by the term “elementary teaching”. Moreover, in his discussion on the elementary teaching in the Wu-shih-yao wen-ta and the K’ung-mu-chang, Chih-yen quotes several times doctrines found in Yogācāra texts such as the Yogācāryabhāmi-sāstra, the Abhidharmasamuccaya-vyākhyā, the Ta-ch’eng kuang-pai-lun shih-lun 大乘廣百論釋論 and the Ch’eng wei-shih-lun 成唯識論, all of which were made popular in China by Hsüan-tsang. It should also be noted that the years between the compilation of the Hua-yen sou-hsüan chi (628) and the first division of the teaching of the three vehicles into elementary and final in the Wu-shih-yao wen-ta (660) coincide with the most active and productive period of Hsüan-tsang’s career as a translator 22). Chih-yen was very much a child of the old Yogācāra tradition. Nearly all the masters he associated with in the early part of his life were of the Ti-lun School or the She-lun School 23). Moreover, he had a deep interest in the tathāgatagarbha doctrine, and had written a commentary on the Lankāvatāra-sūtra as well as two works on the Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun 大乘起信論 24). It is therefore quite natural that he would view this new development which came to dominate the Buddhist scene of China in the latter half of his life with some suspicion. All these facts together seem to indicate that the distinction of the elementary and the final in the teaching of the three vehicles was introduced by Chih-yen, a master of the old Yogācāra tradition, as a response to the sudden influx of the huge mass of Yogācāra literature, which gave a picture of Yogācārism very different from what had formerly been envisaged in China.

(3) “Mind” and “Reality” in the Five Teachings

The person who, more than anyone else, has been responsible for putting the Hua-yen tradition in Chinese Buddhism on firm theoretical basis is Fa-tsong (643-712), the so-called third patriarch

22) Hsüan-tsang left Ch’ang-an for India in 628 or 629. He returned in 645 and died in 664.
24) The Lankāvatāra-sūtra is well-known for its identifying the ālaya with the tathāgatagarbha. The Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun is perhaps the single most influential work preaching the idea of the existence of an originally pure consciousness in all sentient beings.
of the school 25). Living at a time when the T’ang dynasty was at the zenith of its power and enjoying lavish imperial patronage most of his career, Fa-tsang left behind him a series of writings and exegeses, which reveal a breadth of scriptural knowledge and a depth of philosophical insight equalled by few other Chinese Buddhist masters before or after him.

Though Fa-tsang does not mention Chih-yen’s p’an-chiao system in his works, their schemes of five teachings so closely parallel each other that there is little room for doubt that Fa-tsang has adopted his scheme from Chih-yen. However, in Fa-tsang’s writings, the scheme of five teachings has been raised to such a position of eminence that henceforth, it has been regarded as the most characteristic feature of the Hua-yen school.

Among Fa-tsang’s works, the Hua-yen wu-chiao chang (Treatise on the Five Teachings, henceforth abbreviated to Treatise), as its title suggests, has the exposition of this particular p’an-chiao scheme as its subject matter 26. The first half of the Yu-hsin fa-chiieh chi (Reflection on the Dharma-Realm, henceforth abbreviated to Reflection) and portions of the first chapter of the Hua-yen t’an-hsüan chi (Exposition of Mysteries, henceforth abbreviated to Mysteries) are also devoted to this theme. These are the principal sources for our present study. It should be noted that the concept of “five teachings” also comes up frequently in a number of Fa-tsang’s other compilations, such as the Hua-yen isa-chang men. On the whole, since the material in these works does not add much to the elucidation of the five teachings, they can be left aside without seriously affecting the accuracy of our account.

i. Hinayåna Teaching:

The expositions given of the Hinayåna theory of the mind in the Treatise and the Mysteries are very terse. From the Treatise, we learn that its main shortcoming, compared to the Mahåyåna


26) F. H. Cook has translated the entire Treatise in his “Fa-Tsang’s Treatise of the Five Doctrines: An Annotated Translation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1970).
teachings, is that its analysis of the components of the mind is incomplete. It knows only the existence of six consciousnesses (eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body consciousness and mind-consciousness); and even though it also speaks of the ālaya-consciousness, it does not bother to examine its nature in detail \(^{27}\). In the Mysteries, the criticism extends to the Hinayāna doctrine of dharmas as well. The various analyses of dharmas given by the Hinayānists, such as the Sarvāstivāda scheme of seventy-five categories of dharmas, are deficient, and have led to all sorts of disputes \(^{28}\).

In the Reflection, a far more elaborate account of the Hinayāna ontological position is provided, which basically agrees with that given by Chih-yen. Fa-tsang calls the Hinayāna teaching “the teaching of the existence of dharmas and the non-existence of the self”, for its main interest is to demonstrate the illusory nature of the self through analysing it into its constituents, i.e., the dharmas. Fa-tsang considers here three orthodox schemes of dharmas put forth for this purpose: the five skandhas (matter, sensation, perception, predisposition and consciousness), the twelve āyatanas (the six bodily organs eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, and their corresponding objects colour, sound, smell, taste, touch and ideas) and the eighteen dhātus (which include the six organs and their six objects as mentioned above, as well as their corresponding consciousnesses). The eighteen dhātus in turn can be subsumed under two categories, i.e., matter and mind. “Matter” includes eleven of the twelve āyatanas less the “mind”. “Mind” includes the āyatana “mind” and the six consciousnesses. These are the basic dharmas which together form the “self”. Since the self is no more than a conglomeration of dharmas, it does not enjoy independent existence and is therefore “unreal”. As for how the conglomeration comes to be mistaken as a self-subsisting entity called the “self”, Fa-tsang attributes this to the discriminating activities of the “mind-consciousness” \(^{29}\).

ii. The Elementary Teaching (of the Mahāyāna):

While Fa-tsang characterizes the elementary teaching (of the Mahāyāna) as a doctrine of emptiness in division four of the Treatise, his depiction of it in subsequent divisions of the work

\(^{27}\) T, vol. 45. p. 484c.

\(^{28}\) T, vol. 35. p. 115c.

\(^{29}\) T, vol. 45. p. 643b-c.
indicates little intention to follow up the Mādhyamika overtone of this definition 29). In division nine, the essence of the elementary teaching is said to lie in its concept of alaya-consciousness, which is taken to be the final source of all forms of existence and the repository of kārmic effects generated by deeds of the past. According to Fa-tsang, the main shortcoming of this teaching is that it considers the alaya as existing apart from the tathātā, so that the latter becomes something inactive in the realm of the noumenal, while the former, despite the central position it occupies in the system of thought of the Yogācārins, is nevertheless still an entity in the realm of the phenomenal. Fa-tsang describes this teaching as “fang-pien 方便”, “shun-ch'iao 聲巧” and “mi-i 密意”, implying by these designations that it is a form of teaching which should not be taken literally but should only be regarded as a pointer to a higher truth, which will be unfolded in the final teaching (of the Mahāyāna).

The account given in the Mysteries also indicates that by “elementary teaching”, Fa-tsang mainly has the Yogācāra system of eight consciousnesses in mind. There, Fa-tsang claims that the elementary teaching’s analysis of the world has many things in common with the Hinayānists. It is only different in being more thorough and less open to objections. Fa-tsang cites the Yogācāryabhāmi-śāstra and the Abhidharmasamuccaya-vyākhyā, works popular among members of the Fa-hsiang School, as examples of texts of this category 31).

However, a very different picture of the elementary teaching is found in the Reflection. There, it is called “the teaching that the conditioned is without self-nature”, and instead of Yogācāra texts, the Prajñāparamitā-sūtras and Mādhyamika works such as the Mālamadhyamakakārikās and the Śata-śāstra are mentioned as exemplifying this particular teaching.

The elementary teaching (of the Mahāyāna), as is put in the Reflection, comprises two basic insights, i.e., the “insight into no-birth” and the “insight into no-form”. So it is said of the insight into no-birth:

We speak of the “insight into no-birth”, because dharmas are without self-essence and originate out of each other. Since what originate [out of others] are not real, they are empty. Since [all dharmas] are empty down to the minutest part, we say that there is “no-birth” 32).

29) Ibid., p. 481b-c.
32) T, vol. 45, p. 643c, ll. 8-10.
As for the insight into no-form:

Secondly, we speak of the "insight into no-form", for all forms are in fact no-form. Why do we say so? Because dharmas are devoid of forms 33).

He continues to write;

Dharmas actually do not exist, and it is out of error that they are conceived of as existent. Due to the erroneous view of real-existence, people then claim that there are the tathatā and nirvāṇa to be attained; and that there are birth and death to be abandoned. Because of such views, there is sickness. Now, on realizing that all dharmas are empty and formless, the [erroneous] view of real-existence will not arise, and the curing [of the sickness of attaching to dharmas] is achieved 34).

It is obvious that by "dharmas" here, Fa-tsang refers to dharmas in whatever mode of existence, from dharmas which are the basic constituents of all things, to nirvāṇa and the tathatā which are the goal of all spiritual endeavours. Thus, the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna is superior to the Hinayāna teaching, for it regards as unreal not only the "self", but also beings in whatever mode of existence. Attachment to dharmas of whatever form is equally a sickness, and the doctrine of emptiness of the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna is most efficient in the correction of this form of mistake. This Madhyamika bent in the characterization of the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna becomes even more pronounced in the Hua-yen chin-shih-tzu chang 華嚴金剛子章, where the elementary teaching is summed up in one sentence as the teaching which maintains that "every dharma, being the product of dependent origination, is devoid of self-nature, and in the final analysis, is nothing but emptiness" 35).

iii. The Final Teaching (of the Mahāyāna):

In division four of the Treatise, Fa-tsang asserts that the final teaching is expressed in "profound texts" which propound the "eternal nature of the tathāgatagarbha" 36). The exposition of the final teaching in division nine of the Treatise is accompanied by quotations from the Śrīmaddevīśimhaśāstra, the Lankāvatārasūtra, the Ratnagotravibhāgamahāyānottaratantrasāstra, the Mahāyānasangraha-sāstra, the Daśabhūmikasūtra-sāstra and the Ta-

33) Ibid., p. 643c, ll. 13-14.
34) Ibid., p. 643c, ll. 23-26.
36) Ibid., p. 481c.
Thus, there is little room for doubt that by the final teaching, Fa-tsang refers to the tathāgatagarbha doctrine, i.e., the doctrine of the existence of a pure consciousness in all sentient beings, a legacy of the old Yogācāra tradition.

According to the Treatise, the final teaching is superior to the elementary teaching, for in the final teaching, the tathatā is no longer conceived of as existing apart from conditions in the noumenal realm, but under the influence of ignorance, it may also assume a phenomenal aspect, which is the ālaya-consciousness. As a consequence, the ālaya-consciousness is also no longer conceived of as merely the repository of seeds generated by deeds of the past as is the case with the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna. Rather, it becomes the point of interaction between the “noumenal” (īś) and the “phenomenal” (shih 等), linked to the tathatā on the one hand and constituting the ground of the phenomenal order on the other hand.

The focus also shifts when we come to the final teaching. While the central concept in the elementary teaching is the ālaya-consciousness, the central concept in the final teaching is the tathatā or the tathāgatagarbha. The tathatā is viewed here from two aspects: noumenal and phenomenal. In its noumenal aspect, it is eternal and perfectly pure. In its phenomenal aspect, it responds to conditions and so takes on the features of defilements. However, since it never loses its essence even amidst all changes, it is “changeless” even in the midst of changes. Since it never loses its original nature even amidst defilements, it is “pure” even though it is not separated from impurities. In its noumenal aspect, it exemplifies the “absolute truth”. In its phenomenal aspect, it exemplifies the “mundane truth”. Thus, in the tathatā, the two levels of truth become one.

The Mysteries characterizes the final teaching of the Mahāyāna as “brief in its explanation of the characteristics of things, and elaborate in its exposition of the nature of the real”, and has nothing significant to add to the account of the Treatise. The account in the Reflection is somewhat different in approach, but there is no basic disagreement with those of the Treatise and the Mysteries, as the title it gives to the final teaching “The Teaching of the Perfect Harmony of the Two Aspects of the Phenomenal and the Noumenal” readily suggests. However, since it has characterized the teaching

27) Ibid., p. 485a-b.
of the Hinayānists as the teaching of "the real existence of dharmas" and that of the elementary teaching, the teaching of "the absence of self-nature [in dharmas]", the superiority of the final teaching of the Mahāyāna over the former two is ascribed here to its incorporating the two aspects of "being" and "emptiness". Thus, it says the following on the purpose of this teaching:

It cures the sickness of attaching to "being" and "emptiness" associated with the first [two teachings]. Why? For "being" and "emptiness" are non-dual, and yet they regard them as dual. As a consequence, there are some who renounce "being" and devote their attention to "emptiness", and following this inclination, they falsely grasp at the [one-sided] view of "emptiness". Those who on the contrary renounce "emptiness" and devote their attention to "being" [err] in like manner. Due to the existence of these perverted views, this doctrine [of the perfect harmony of the phenomenal and the noumenal comes into being] 39).

Such passages, together with such statements as "form is emptiness" and "emptiness is form", which come up constantly in the description of the final teaching in the Reflection, may easily mislead us into taking the "oneness of emptiness and being" taught here as similar to the "oneness of emptiness and being" taught by Mādhyamika masters. However, the way Fa-tsang opens the section on the final teaching in the Reflection cautions us that by "emptiness" and "being" here, Fa-tsang has something quite different in mind:

This teaching in turn consists of two aspects, first, the mind in terms of the tathātā, and secondly, the mind in terms of birth and death. The mind in terms of the tathātā is the noumenal, i.e., truth in its absolute aspect. The mind in terms of birth and death is the phenomenal, i.e., truth in its mundane aspect. This teaching aims at establishing that [these two aspects of] "emptiness" and "being" are non-dual, but merge freely with each other; and that though [they are different in] one being obscure and the other being distinct, they complement each other completely without obstruction 40).

In Mādhyamika philosophy, "emptiness" sometimes has the meaning of "absence of self-nature" while "being" refers to phenomena which have "tentative existence". Thus, "Form is emptiness" means that "Phenomena are without self-nature". "Emptiness is form" requires further explanation. It evidently should not be interpreted as "Emptiness is a type of phenomenal existence", for that would be the error of grasping "emptiness". Rather, it

40) Ibid., p. 644a, ll. 1-5.
means that “Emptiness should not (and cannot) be understood apart from phenomenal existence, for emptiness mainly indicates the absence of self-nature in phenomenal existence, nothing besides or beyond.” Now, since it has been shown that “Form is emptiness and emptiness is form”, the conclusion of course is that “being” and “emptiness” are not opposites, i.e., the oneness of “being” and “emptiness”.

If the above picture of the Mādhyamika position is correct, the transcending of the dichotomy of “being” and “emptiness” in Mādhyamika philosophy is achieved largely by interpreting “being” not literally as “existence” but as “tentative existence” or “phenomenal existence”. In taking “being” in that manner, the dichotomy of “being” and “emptiness” is more apparent than real, for though “being” and “emptiness” are opposites, “tentative existence” and “emptiness” are not. If we are right that Fa-tsang takes Mādhyamika Buddhism as representing the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna in the Reflection, Fa-tsang is perhaps justified in charging the elementary teaching as being one-sided in its emphasis on “emptiness”, for the oneness of “being” and “emptiness” is arrived at in the elementary teaching by compromising the sense of actual existence which is usually associated with the term “being”.

The final teaching needs not reject this understanding of “being” and “emptiness” and its argument for their oneness. However, in the final teaching, “being” and “emptiness” can also take on another level of meaning, which is at once more positive and richer in metaphysical implication. In the final teaching, “emptiness” is sometimes understood as meaning “devoid of all differentiations”. In this sense, it refers to the absolute aspect of the pure mind, i.e., the tathātā or the tathāgatagarbha, which exists beyond distinctions.

41) In centring its teaching upon the concept of “emptiness”, Mādhyamika Buddhism has often been labelled as Nihilistic; and Fa-tsang is not entirely innocent of this popular misconception. That Mādhyamika Buddhism is not Nihilistic is clear if we realize that “emptiness does not refer to some undifferentiated essence, nor to the negation of an assumed essence; rather, emptiness is the dynamic which avoids making essential differentiations.” (F. J. Strang, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning [Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1967], p. 78.) That is, emptiness is not primarily a term describing an ultimate Reality or a physical state of affairs, but denotes an attitude which allows one to become detached from all claims of allegiance. In short, it is basically an epistemic and not an ontological concept.
“Being” still refers to phenomenal beings. However, since they are regarded here as the transformation of the pure mind, they are not totally non-existent. On this level, we can also speak of the oneness of “being” and “emptiness”, for “being” and “emptiness” are two aspects of the one mind. It should be added that these two levels of meaning of “the oneness of being and emptiness” are both acceptable to the final teaching of the Mahāyāna, for the ground of the second interpretation of the statement, i.e., that the pure consciousness has two aspects, on the surface at least does not contradict the ground of the first interpretation, i.e., that phenomenal existence is without self-nature. However, in the final teaching, the second interpretation is preferred to the first, for it amends and transcends the negative undertone of the first.

iv. Sudden Teaching:

The Treatise gives the following characterization of the “sudden teaching”:

According to the sudden teaching, all dharmas are [the transformation of] the true mind in which all distinctions vanish. It is beyond words and thoughts, and is ineffable ⁴⁴).

The Mysteries says something very similar:

The sudden teaching is entirely silent on [the matter of] the characteristics of dharmas, and devotes itself only to the clarification [of the nature] of the real essence. It does not contain [any discussion of] the different characteristics of the eight consciousnesses, for [it sees] all distinctions as merely false thoughts, and all truths as solely ineffable ⁴⁵).

The Reflection begins its discussion of the sudden teaching as follows:

After having comprehended the aforementioned [teaching of the oneness of the] two aspects of “emptiness” and “being”, one transcends the realm of language and mental activities, and [reaches the state] when only the tathātā and the wisdom of the tathātā remain. Why? Because [in this state of] the perfect harmony and mutual incorporation of emptiness and being, all [particular] appearances vanish. All moments of thought become [the embodiment of] the ultimate truth, and there is no longer the distinction between subject and object ⁴⁶).

The sudden teaching, like the final teaching, has the true mind, i.e., the tathātā, as its centre of interest. Moreover, both of them affirm

the ultimate reality of this "real essence", which they both agree to be indeterminate, incomprehensible and ineffable. Nevertheless, the final teaching resorts to language to convey this message, and since language is used to mark distinctions, the final teaching seems to be making distinctions in what is understood to be above distinctions. To illustrate the difference between the final and the sudden teaching, all three sources cite the famous discourse in chapter nine of Kumārajīva’s translation of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra, in which thirty-two bodhisattvas one after another come forth to express their view on the truth of non-duality. When it comes to Vimalakīrti’s turn, he remains silent and does not utter a single word. Thereupon Mañjuśrī exclaims, “Excellent! Excellent! To be without words and names! That is called the genuine initiation into the truth of non-duality” 49). According to Fa-tsang, the way of the thirty-two bodhisattvas is the way of the final teaching, whereas the way of Vimalakīrti is the way of the sudden teaching.

v. Round Teaching:

Most of Fa-tsang’s writings are dedicated to the exposition of the meaning of the HYC, where the round teaching finds its fullest expression. The consequence is that an adequate understanding of the round teaching presupposes acquaintance with the HYC and all aspects of Fa-tsang’s thought. For example, the Treatise describes the final teaching as follows:

As for the round teaching, it concerns with the perfectly bright ocean of essential nature. [Its doctrine of] “dependent origination of the dharma-realm” (fa-chieh yüan-ch’i 法界緣起) teaches the unimpeded and free functioning of all dharmas], [the truth of] one in all and all in one, and the perfect harmony of the primary and the secondary ... Again, as taught in the “Chapter on the Origination of Essential Nature” [of the HYC], the one mind, which is the origination from the essential nature of the dharma-realm, also possesses ten excellent qualities 49).

To explain such basic tenets of the Hua-yen School as “the dependent origination of the dharma-realm” and “origination from essential nature” would each require a separate article, and is clearly out of place at this juncture. Since the account given of the round teaching in the Mysteriæ is essentially the same, it is not of much help at the present point either. But leaving aside for the time being

49) T, vol. 45. p. 483b, ll. 7–11.
all the theoretical justifications which Fa-tsang has brought in to illumina the insight represented in the round teaching, the picture of reality as conceived in this highest teaching is roughly as follows:

This is the truth revealed when all false feelings are removed and when [all forms of existence] are seen to merge into one. Despite the profusion of great functions, [things] always [reflect] completely the true source from which they arise. Despite the varied forms of myriad phenomena, they interfuse each other without disarray. The all is the one because both are empty in nature. The one is the all, and yet the distinction between cause and effect remains perfectly clear. In their power and function, [the one and the all] incorporate each other, taking in and flowing out into each other with perfect ease. [That is why] it is called the round teaching of the one vehicle 47).

Superficially speaking, this picture of a universe whose members penetrate and reflect each other "with perfect ease" bears some resemblance to the monadology of Leibniz, according to which the universe is a composite of primary units called "monads" each mirroring the rest from its own point of view 48). This picture of reality is considered to be superior to the picture given in the final and the sudden teachings, for it advances beyond the idea of the oneness of the noumenal and the phenomenal to proclaim the oneness of each element of the phenomenal with the rest. In Hua-yen terminology, the final and sudden teachings hold the truth of "the non-obstruction of the noumenal and the phenomenal" (li-shih wu-ai 理事無礙), whereas the round teaching holds the higher truth of "the non-obstruction of elements of the phenomenal with each other" (shih-shih wu-ai 事事無礙). The most often cited illustration of this doctrine of "one in all and all in one" is the net of Indra. The Reflection has a long passage elaborating this metaphor:

It is like the net of Indra which is entirely made up of jewels. Due to their brightness and transparency, they reflect each other. In each of the jewels, the images of all the other jewels are [completely] reflected. This is the case with any one of the jewels, and will remain forever so. Now, if we take a jewel in the southwestern direction and examine it, [we can see] that this one jewel can reflect simultaneously the images of all other jewels at once. It is so with the one jewel, and is also so with each of all the others. Since each of the jewels simultaneously reflects the images of all other jewels at once, it follows that this jewel in the southwestern direction also

47) Hua-yen chin-shih-tzu chang, T, vol. 45, pp. 664c, l. 27 - 665a, l. 15.
48) For a more elaborate comparative study of the two, refer to my article "The Harmonious Universe of Fa-tsang and Leibniz—A Comparative Study", forthcoming in Philosophy East and West.
reflects all the images of the jewels in each of the other jewels [at once]. It is so with this jewel, and is also so with all the others. Thus, the images multiply infinitely, and all these multiple infinite images are bright and clear inside this single jewel. The rest of the jewels can be understood in the same manner. If one enters one jewel, one has in fact entered all the layers upon layers of jewels in the ten directions. Why? For in this one jewel are the layers upon layers of jewels in the ten directions. For, in the layers upon layers of jewels in the ten directions is this one jewel. Thus, [it is said that] if one enters one jewel, one has in fact entered all the layers upon layers of jewels in the ten directions. This is the case with all the other jewels, [the relation of each of which to the rest] can be comprehended in the same manner. Thus, while remaining in one jewel, one can enter all the infinite layers of jewels without actually leaving this one jewel. While remaining in the infinite layers of jewels, one can enter this one jewel without actually departing from these infinite layers of jewels 45).

Of special interest is the manner Fa-tsang concludes the illustration, when he cautions his readers against taking the analogy between the "jewels" and "dharmas" too literally:

We can think of [the nature of] dharmas along the line of this illustration, but dharmas are not actually like this; for [we are only using] an imaginary case as example. We say so because the illustration bears only a slight resemblance to what it illustrates. In the illustration, each jewel only embodies the images of all the other jewels, while they do not interfuse in substance. How do we know this [to be true]? Because that is what the HYC means when it says that [the tathāgatas] use illustrations to explain things which [by nature] cannot be illustrated. [Illustrations of] similar significance should be regarded in like manner 46).

The latter half of the quotation seems to imply that the dharmas in Fa-tsang's universe (unlike the monads of Leibniz) are not distinct in substance. If so, what does Fa-tsang have in mind when he talks about the mutual interfusion and immanence of dharmas? If dharmas are not distinct in substance, how can it be said that "the distinction between cause and effect remains perfectly clear"? In other words, how can Fa-tsang reconcile his teaching of the harmonious co-existence of dharmas with the orthodox Buddhist tenet that all dharmas are without self-essence?

(4) SOME PROBLEMS

How well one understands Hua-yen Buddhism hinges very much on how well one tackles the queries posed at the end of the last.

45) T, vol. 45, p. 647a, l. 17-647b, l. 2.
46) Ibid., p. 647b, l. 27-647c, l. 2.
section; but instead of going into these highly intricate questions which would inevitably lead us far beyond the scope of our present study, we shall address ourselves to only a number of immediate problems which arise from the above account of the five teachings:

i. Fa-tang has placed under the category "elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna" two distinct forms of Buddhist teaching, i.e., Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. How does he see their relation and what is his attitude towards them?

ii. What exactly is the place of the "sudden teaching" in the scheme, for so far as our exposition has shown, it does not seem to differ materially from the "final teaching of the Mahāyāna"?

iii. How exactly are the five teachings related to each other? For example, are they mutually exclusive, or do they represent successive stages in the unfolding of the Buddha's teaching?

iv. What evaluative criterion has been brought into play in Fa-tang's assessment of the five teachings?

We shall leave the last, and obviously the most important, question to the next section, and will concentrate our attention on the first three questions in this section.

i. The Two Forms of Elementary Teaching of the Mahāyāna and Their Relation:

Hua-yen masters generally call the two forms of elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna "the elementary teaching on the characteristics [of dharma]" (hsiang-shih-chiao 網始教) and "the elementary teaching on emptiness" (k'ung-shih-chiao 建始教). By the first, they refer to the kind of Yogācāra teaching made popular by Hsuan-tsang and his followers. The word "emptiness" in the second obviously refers to the concept of "emptiness" central to the teaching of the Mādhyamika School. These two traditions in Buddhism are found on quite different assumptions and have quite different historical backgrounds, and on the whole, they remain distinct both in India and China. It is typical of Fa-tang with his predilection for syncretism to insist on their compatibility. Thus, in the Mysteries, he attributes the divergence in the p'an-chiao systems of Śīlabhadra and Jñānaprabha not so much to their respective Yogācāra and Mādhyamika upbringings but to the different perspectives they have brought to their analyses of the
problem 53). According to Fa-tsang, there are two ways to evaluate a teaching, namely, its usefulness as a means of salvation and its exactness as an expression of truth. Śīlabhadra adopts the first approach. So he regards Yogācārism as superior to Mādhyamika, for the latter is purely Mahāyāna and is only suitable for bodhisattvas, while the former contains both Hinayāna and Mahāyāna elements and so is efficacious for the deliverance of all. On the other hand, Jñānaprabha takes the second approach. Thus, he regards Mādhyamika as superior to Yogācārism, for the latter’s understanding of the truth of emptiness is still incomplete in that it still regards the eight consciousnesses, the basis of all forms of existence, as real, while Mādhyamika masters go further to teach the empty nature of all dharmas, whether material or immaterial. Moreover, in its being a purely Mahāyāna teaching, Mādhyamika teaching can lead its listeners to the attainment of the great bodhi, a spiritual state inaccessible to followers of Yogācārism 54).

In spite of his avowed intention to “reconcile the difference” between the two systems, the final impression we get from the above account is that Fa-tsang is more in favour of the “k’ung-shih-chiao” than the “hsiang-shih-chiao”. The “hsiang-shih-chiao” is characterized as a mixture of Hinayāna and Mahāyāna elements and of only limited validity and power. Fa-tsang indeed recommends it for the broadness of its applicability, but it is obvious that in the case of Fa-tsang, the purity of a teaching is much more important than its “skilfulness” 55). Here is another indication of Fa-tsang’s ingrained aversion to the new Yogācāra tradition, a feeling which he inherited from Chih-yan.

ii. The Place of the Sudden Teaching in the Scheme of Five Teachings:

It is obvious that in classifying the teaching of the Buddha into five types, Fa-tsang mainly has the matter of doctrine in mind. Thus, of the three approaches we have mentioned in section 1, it is the third approach which Fa-tsang has adopted for his scheme of

53) Fa-tsang’s account of the p’an-chiao systems of the two masters is found in the Mysteries, T, vol. 35, pp. 111c-112a.


55) This attitude is most clearly expressed in Fa-tsang’s analysis of the common and special teaching of the one vehicle. Discussion of this p’an-chiao scheme can be found in my Ph.D. dissertation, op. cit., chap. 7.
five teachings. This partly accounts for the resemblance people see between this p’an-chiao scheme of Fa-tsang and Chih-i’s scheme of “the four teachings according to the content of instruction”, to the extent that some Hua-yen masters regard the former as a development of the latter. This speculation started with Hui-yüan 慧苑, who wrote in his K’an-ting chi 判定記:

There was a worthy of the past who also drew up a fivefold p’an-chiao scheme: (1) Hinayana teaching, (2) elementary teaching, (3) final teaching, (4) sudden teaching, and (5) round teaching. This scheme is greatly influenced by [the p’an-chiao system of] the T’ien-t’ai School, only that the category of “sudden teaching” is added to distinguish it [from the latter] [4].

The same idea has also been entertained by Ch’eng-kuan 誠觀 and Tsung-mi 宗密, the fourth and the fifth patriarch of the Hua-yen School [5].

This theory does not have much historical basis, though there exist close parallels between Fa-tsang’s description of the Hinayana, elementary, final and round teachings in Fa-tsang’s scheme on the one hand, and the description of the Tripitaka, common, distinct and round teachings in Chih-i’s scheme of “the four teachings according to the content of instruction” on the other hand. The major discrepancy seems to rest with the sudden teaching. In Chih-i’s p’an-chiao system, “sudden” is taken to denote a special method of teaching rather than a particular doctrine, and “sudden teaching” is a category in another p’an-chiao scheme, which tackles the p’an-chiao problem from the perspective of method of instruction [6]. In including “sudden teaching” into a primarily doctrinal p’an-chiao scheme, has Fa-tsang erred in confusing “method” with “doctrine”? [7]

[4] (11) Hsü tsang-ching 謝藏經 vol. 5 (Hong Kong: Ying-yin Hsü tsang-ching wei-yüan-hui 影印藏經委員會, 1967), p. 9c, l. 17 - p. 9d, l. 1. By “a worthy” here, Hui-yüan undoubtedly had Fa-tsang in mind. Being a follower of Fa-tsang, he must have felt the need to exercise discretion, and could not openly make his master the target of the sharp criticism which is to follow.


[6] In Chih-i’s p’an-chiao system, “sudden teaching” is a category under “the four teachings according to the method of instruction”. It refers to the method the Buddha employed when he was preaching the HYC. It consists of an immediate and direct exposition of the truth, and is suitable only for beings of the highest intellectual capacity.
If we look back to the account we have given of the final and the sudden teaching above, it does seem that Fa-tsang has been so mistaken. Both the final and the sudden teachings take the pure mind, or the tathātā, as their central theme. Moreover, texts most representative of the final teaching, such as the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* and the *Ta-ch'eng ch'ê-hsin lun*, all agree that the tathātā is in itself ineffable and incomprehensible. That they still choose to talk about it, while Vimalakirti in the *Vimalakirti-nirdeśa-sūtra* does not, does indicate a divergence, but it is a divergence in the representation of the understanding, not a divergence in the content of the understanding itself. That is, it is a divergence in method, not a divergence in doctrine. Hui-yuán has something similar in mind when he gives the following criticism of the scheme of five teachings:

It should be understood that [the essence of the sudden teaching] lies in its abandoning the use of language to reveal [directly] the truth. How can it again be taken [as a kind of teaching] which can be expressed in words? If it is [indeed] a kind of teaching, what [particular] truth does it convey? If it is argued that it comes closest to the truth in maintaining its inexpressibility, do the final and the round teaching not [also] hold that the truth is inexpressible? If it is allowed that all teachings [which hold that the truth is] inexpressible should be called “sudden”, how come that there are “five” teachings?

So far, we have confined our attention only to the philosophical aspect of the final and the sudden teachings, and to all appearances, the difference between the two in this respect is not so significant as to warrant the postulating of two separate categories of teaching. However, there are other aspects which may serve to differentiate the sudden teaching from the rest, so that the sudden teaching can truly be said to constitute a realm of discourse of its own? The view that there is such a realm becomes more convincing if we turn our eyes to the other aspects in which the five teachings differ, such as the aspect of religious practice. According to the *Treatise*, whereas both the elementary and the final teachings conceive of spiritual cultivation and enlightenment in the form of stages, the sudden teaching preaches the formlessness of all practices and the instantaneous attainment of Buddhahood. Whereas the elementary and the final teachings relate different stages of spiritual practice to different types of “body”, the sudden teaching does not make such distinctions. Whereas the elementary and the final teachings

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87) *K'au-ting chi, op. cit.*, p. 12a, ll. 4-6.
make careful analysis of the nature of defilement as well as the process towards its elimination, the sudden teaching sees defilement as foreign to the original pure nature of all beings, and concludes that in such circumstance, talks of "eliminating" and "not eliminating" are inapplicable 69). Thus, even though the sudden teaching may not have a particular doctrine of its own in the sphere of Metaphysics, that is not the case in the area of religious practice. That is why Ch'eng-kuan attributes Hui-yuan's misgivings about the sudden teaching to the latter's inadequate understanding of the practice of meditation, and cites the Ch'an School with its doctrine of "direct transmission from mind to mind" and "independence from external aids" as an instance of this form of teaching 69). The fact that the Ch'an School, which was formed around the time of Fa-tsang and had ideas of religious practice similar to the sudden teaching in Fa-tsang's scheme of five teachings, could develop into an independent tradition of its own and is unanimously regarded as a separate Buddhist school, also gives ground to Fa-tsang's contention that the sudden teaching should be regarded as a separate teaching.

Nevertheless, a number of observations have to be made:

a. If our account of Fa-tsang's conception of the sudden teaching is correct, by "sudden teaching", Fa-tsang means something quite different from the sudden teaching of Chih-i. While in Chih-i's scheme of "the four teachings according to the method of instruction", sudden teaching and gradual teaching are two different ways of instruction adopted by the Buddha out of consideration of the different intellectual capacities of his listeners, Fa-tsang characterizes the gradual teaching (under which Fa-tsang subsumes the elementary and the final teachings) as follows:

Since in both the elementary and the final teaching, [the process of] understanding and practice are described in words and [the career of the bodhisattva] is presented in successive stages according to the relation of cause and effect and their degree of subtlety, they are described alike as "gradual" ... In the case of the sudden teaching, all words are suddenly annulled, the nature of the truth is suddenly revealed and understanding and practice are suddenly perfected. [It teaches such doctrines as] a moment of non-production of [false] thoughts is [the attainment of] Buddhahood 69).

The last sentence of the above passage and our discussion in the preceding paragraph all indicate that in the terminology of Fa-tsang, “gradual” and “sudden” indicate different understandings of the nature and process of spiritual cultivation. It is a classification based on difference in doctrine, and not on difference in the method of instruction.

b. Both Ch'eng-kuan and Tsung-mi cite the Ch'an School to support the contention that the sudden teaching stands for an independent Buddhist teaching. It should be observed that when Ch'an masters try to vindicate the kind of intuitive and spontaneous religious practice which they advocate, they invariably evoke such ideas as “the presence of the Buddha-nature in all beings”, “the oneness of the Truth” and “the absence of distinction between the Buddha and sentient beings”, etc., ideas which are also acknowledged by the final teachings, and are essential elements of the latter’s theoretical make-up. That in the case of the Ch'an masters, these ideas are applied more directly to the realm of religious practice and as a consequence new implications have been drawn cannot be denied. Yet we also should not forget that even concepts most often associated with the Ch’an School, such as “sudden enlightenment” and “instruction through silence”, can be found in the HYC itself, the paragon of the “round teaching” 4).

c. Since this article deals mainly with the philosophical aspect of the five teachings, especially with their conception of reality, the sudden teaching is not of much importance to our purpose, for it does not have a well defined metaphysical position of its own. On the other hand, the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna embraces two distinct lines of Buddhist thought, i.e., Yogācāra and Mādhyamika. Thus, even if we discount the sudden teaching, we still have five different systems of thought in Fa-tsang’s account of the five teachings, i.e., Hinayāna, Yogācāra, Mādhyamika, final and round, arranged in ascending order with respect to their doctrinal purity 5).

4) The above remarks should not be taken as implying that the Ch’an School and the Hua-yen School is of one opinion in their conception of reality. The terms “tathāgatagarbha”, “tathātā”, “Buddha-nature”, etc., may assume different significance in different contexts. For a highly illuminating discussion on this problem, consult Mou Tsung-san 莫宗三, Fo-hsing yū pan-jo 佛性與般若, vol. 2 (Taipei: 1977), pp. 1039 ff.

5) In the Hua-yen wen-ta 華嚴問答, an early work, Fa-tsang has actually given us an alternative fivefold p’an-chiao scheme which resembles the one outlined here but does not include the sudden teaching. Refer to T, vol. 45, p. 599b.
iii. The Relation of the Five Teachings:

Fa-tsong’s evaluation of the Hinayāna teaching does not pose any particular problem, for most Chinese Buddhists, being Mahāyānists, agree that Hinayāna doctrines reflect the most inferior type of Buddhist mentality. Preceding discussion has also clarified to some extent the place of Yogācāra and Mādhyamika teachings within the category of elementary teaching as well as the relation between Yogācāra and Mādhyamika teachings on the one hand, and the final and the round teachings on the other hand. Our discussion of the elementary teaching above has shown that Fa-tsong has included under this heading two Buddhist traditions, i.e., Yogācāra and Mādhyamika. In some cases, such as in the Treatise, the term “elementary teaching” is conceived of as mainly referring to the former. On the other hand, in the Hua-yen chin-shih-tzu chang, it is used exclusively to refer to the latter. When the two traditions are mentioned together, such as in the account on Śīlabhadra and Jānапrabha in the Mysteries, the Mādhyamika tradition is always given priority, largely due to Fa-tsong’s inherent aversion for the teaching of the new Yogācāra tradition, a feeling which has become part of the Hua-yen tradition ever since the time of Chih-yen. Thus, as we have pointed out at the end of (c) above, if we set aside the sudden teaching for a moment for it is not directly relevant to our purpose, and divide the elementary teaching of the Mahāyāna into two teachings, i.e., Yogācāra and Mādhyamika, we would have a scheme of five teachings, i.e., Hinayāna, Yogācāra, Mādhyamika, final and round, arranged in ascending order according to their degree of validity.

However, with respect to historical development and philosophical affinity, it is apparent that Yogācārism is more closely allied to the tathāgata-garbha theory and the kind of doctrines found in the final teaching than to the teaching of the Mādhyamika School. It is appropriate at this juncture to introduce another p’er-chiao scheme of Fa-tsong, i.e., the scheme of the four tenets (szu-tsung p’er 四宗四, the “four tenets” being the first four teachings in our modified scheme of five teachings. In the course of discussion, the close connection between the final and the round teaching will also become clear.

This scheme of four tenets is laid out most fully in the Ju Leng-chieh-hsin shu 入楞伽心疏. 63)

63) Refer to T; vol. 39, pp. 426b-427a.
a. The tenet that the phenomenal is real (yu-hsiang tsung 有相宗):
It holds that the universe is composed of seventy-five basic categories of dharmas. Regarding the mind, it only mentions six forms of consciousness. It is the form of Hīnayāna teaching taught by masters such as Dharmatrāta.

b. The tenet that the phenomenal is unreal (wu-hsiang tsung 無相宗):
It maintains that all dharmas and all forms of consciousness as proposed in the first tenet are empty and unreal. It is the kind of teaching found in the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras and the Mālamadhyamakakārikās, and is taught by masters such as Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva.

c. The tenet which expounds the characteristics of dharmas (fa-hsiang tsung 法相宗):
Instead of the seventy-five categories of dharmas and the six forms of consciousness of the Hīnayānists, it has a more complete scheme of one hundred categories of dharmas and eight consciousnesses. This tenet is found in the Saṃdhinirmochana-sūtra and the Yogācāryabhāmi-sāstra, and is taught by Yogācāra masters such as Asanga and Vasubandhu.

d. The tenet which expounds the nature of the Real (shih-hsiang tsung 實相宗):
It regards all dharmas and consciousnesses as the product of the activities of the tathāgatagarbha when it comes under the influence of various conditions. This tenet is found in the Lankāvatāra-sūtra, the Ghanavyāha-sūtra, the Ratnagotrāvibhāga-sāstra, the Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun and the Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun, and is taught by masters such as Asvaghosa and Chien-i.

Comparing this scheme of four tenets with our modified scheme of five teachings, we can see that the positions of the second and the third teaching have been reversed. The picture Fa-tsang gives of Yogācārism here, though basically not mistaken, is to some extent

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4) Mochizuki Shinko’s 望月信芳 Bukkyō daijiten 佛教大辭典 (Tokyo: 1954) records three Sarvāstivāda masters with this name. See vol. 4, pp. 3543-3544. It is not certain which of them Fa-tsang has in mind.

5) Chien-i is often taken to be the same person as Chien-hui 堅慧 (Sārmati/Shiramati), who is believed to be the author of the Ratnagotrāvibhāga-sāstra and the Fa-ch’ieh wu-ch’u-p’ieh lun 法界無差別論. Some discussion on this obscure Buddhist figure can be found in D. S. Ruegg, La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1969), pp. 33, 41-42 & 46-50.
unfair, for it does not differ from the Hinayāna teaching merely in giving a more exhaustive analysis of the phenomenal world as Fa-tsang’s account suggests. Nevertheless, the grounds of Fa-tsang’s complaints over (a) and (c) are similar. In their fascination over analysis, they have taken the conditioned for the unconditioned. To demonstrate that the everyday world is conditioned, they reduce it to a number of basic constituents, i.e., several fundamental types of dharmas (Hinayāna teaching) or consciousness (Yogācārism), not knowing that these constituents are themselves elements of the phenomenal world, and from the viewpoint of the final teaching, are no more than the manifestations of the tathāgatagarbha.

It is obvious that to turn from Reality as pictured in the Yogācāra teaching to Reality as pictured in the final teaching is to turn from one level of existence to another. The ontological gap between the concept of the ālaya and the concept of the tathāgatagarbha is great indeed, but it is certainly far smaller than that which divides the latter from the teaching of emptiness in (b). In refusing to accept any level of existence as ontologically primary and in refraining from making metaphysical judgement of any form, the Mādhyamika tradition is generally referred to in China as the tradition of “true emptiness” (chen-k’ung 真空), in contrast to which both the Yogācāra and the final teaching are called the tradition of “perfect being” (miào-yu 妙有). That Fa-tsang is not entirely blind to this general distinction is demonstrated by the very presence of the scheme of the four tenets in his secondary works, where Yogācārism is placed right before the final teaching instead of the Mādhyamika teaching.

Also to be noted about the scheme of four tenets is that it does not have a category corresponding to the round teaching in our modified scheme of five teachings. The explanation most often given is that the scheme of four tenets appears only in Fa-tsang’s commentaries on the Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun, the Fa-chieh wu-ch’ia-pieh lun 法界無差別論 and the Lankāvatāra-sūtra, and it represents the position of these compilations rather than the position of Fa-tsang himself. However, another reason may well be that Fa-tsang does not see as many disparities between the final and the round teachings as between, for example, the elementary and the final teachings. Besides his high esteem for the HYC, Fa-tsang has shown throughout his life a lively interest in texts dealing with the tathāgatagarbha doctrine. Moreover, in the Reflection, we find
the following response to the question what distinguishes the final teaching and the sudden teaching from the round teaching:

[The truths taught in] the sudden and the final teachings are found in the round teaching. Why do we say so? For when it is taught that “emptiness” and “being” are non-dual, and are harmonious with and include each other, that is the final teaching. [When it is taught that “emptiness” and “being”] mutually interfuse and take in each other so that both extremes are transcended, that is the “sudden teaching”. When the relation of the one and the many [is also viewed] in that manner, that is the round teaching. The three teachings are [actually] one, but [are conceived of as] different only because of the different ways [this one meaning] is presented. Thus, [the truth of] the HYC (the round teaching) is [also] conveyed in the other two teachings (final and round teachings) ⁴⁴).

Thus, despite the great care spent on differentiating the last three teachings in the scheme of five teachings in the Reflection, Fa-tsang concludes his discussion with an unexpected note that they are but different expressions of the same truth. When the unity of “being” and “emptiness” in the tathāgatagarbha is taught, we have the final teaching. When the tathāgatagarbha is seen as transcending all discriminations and modes of expression, we have the sudden teaching. When each element of the phenomenal world, looked upon as manifestation of the tathāgatagarbha, is recognized as one with all other elements, we have the round teaching. It is thus not difficult to see why Fa-tsang asserts that “the truths taught in the sudden and the final teachings are found in the round teaching”, for the round teaching is built on a particular understanding of the relation between the noumenal and the phenomenal, which is embodied in the final and the sudden teachings.

Fa-tsang of course is not always so lucid regarding the close connection between the final teaching and the round teaching. Most of his works are devoted to the exposition of the relation between the one and the many of the phenomenal without specifying the “particular understanding” of the relation between the noumenal and the phenomenal underlying that exposition. However, this “particular understanding” is always at the background, an understanding which was (as it should be clear by now) provided by the old Yogācāra tradition in which Hua-yen Buddhism has its roots.

⁴⁴) T. vol. 45. p. 650b, ll. 19-23.
(5) THE IDEAL OF THE ROUND AND HUA-YEN BUDDHISM: A DISCOURSE ON METHOD

Our reply to the fourth question posed at the end of section 3, i.e., the question what evaluative criterion Fa-tsang has evoked in assigning the five teachings to their respective positions in his p'an-chiao scheme, will take us directly to the heart of the present study, i.e., to the question of general context, a correct apprehension of which is indispensable to a correct understanding of Hua-yen Buddhism.

Fa-tsang has not stated the criterion explicitly, which is understandable, for it is a criterion employed by most Buddhist masters in their evaluation of each other’s teachings and so is something that can be taken for granted. This criterion can be discerned from the very name Fa-tsang and many other Buddhist masters choose to call what they consider to be the most perfect form of Buddhist teaching: “round teaching”. “Round” (yüan-jung 阿含) as an evaluative term in Chinese Buddhism has the double senses of “all-inclusiveness” and “freedom from all extremes”. The Fo-hsiêh t'ai-te'ü-tien 佛學大辭典 of Ting Fu-pao 丁福保 gives the following definition of the term “yüan-jung”:

“Yüan” means “all-inclusiveness”. “Jung” means “harmony” and “oneness”. If myriad phenomena are considered from a discriminating and erroneous standpoint, they are all separate from each other. However, in their originally endowed and real nature, all dharmas whether noumenal or phenomenal co-exist in complete harmony without mutual obstruction. They are one and non-dual, like the relation between the ocean and its waves. Thus, we describe [their relation with each other] as “yüan-jung”. All such statements as “Defilements are the bodhi”, “Samsāra is nirvāṇa”, “Sentient beings are the original mind”, and “The sahā-world is the Buddhland” are [but various ways of expressing] the essential meaning of “yüan-jung”.

This ideal of the “round” in Buddhism has its origin in the doctrine of the middle way, which is believed to be the first doctrine taught by the Buddha and so is accepted as authoritative by all Buddhist schools, Hinayāna and Mahāyāna alike. The classical statement of this middle doctrine is found in the Sutta of the Setting-

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47) A number of remarks in this section also appear in my article “The Harmonious Universe of Fa-tsang and Leibniz—A Comparative Study”, op. cit.

Rolling the Wheel of the Law, which is generally taken as the record of the Buddha’s first sermon:

Then the Exalted One thus spake unto the company of five Monks:

"Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth as a wanderer. What two? Devotion to the pleasures of sense, a low practice of villagers, a practice unworthy, unprofitable, the way of the world [on the one hand]; and [on the other] devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable. By avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata has gained knowledge of that middle path which giveth vision, which giveth knowledge, which causeth calm, special knowledge, enlightenment, Nibbāna" ⁴⁴.

In this passage, the idea of the middle way is applied to the area of religious practice, i.e., one should avoid the extreme of indulgence in sense pleasure on the one hand, and the extreme of asceticism on the other. When the idea of the middle way is applied to the area of metaphysical discourse, we find something like the following:

While the Exalted One was staying at Sāvatthī, Jānussoni the brahmin came into his presence and exchanged greetings with him . . . Seated at one side, Jānussoni said:—

"What [say you] here, Master Gotama:—everything is?"

"Everything is:—this brahmin, is one extreme."

"Well then Master Gotama: nothing is?"

"Nothing is:—this, brahmin, is the other extreme. The Tathāgata, not approaching either of these extremes, teaches you a Doctrine by a middle way:—conditioned by ignorance activities, conditioned by activities consciousness, . . . Such is the uprising of this entire mass of ill. But from the utter fading away and ceasing of ignorance activities cease, from the ceasing of activities consciousness ceases . . . Such is the ceasing of this entire mass of ill ⁴⁹)."

The Buddha eschews the two extremes of “being” and “non-being” in his view of the nature of things, and only teaches the doctrine of dependent origination with the aim of leading sentient beings out of the “mass of ill”. The same attitude is taken by the Buddha on the problem of the self. In the Saṃyutta-nikāya, it is recorded that Vacchagotta the Wanderer once approached the Buddha and asked whether the self existed or not. Having repeated the question three times and still not receiving any answer, Vacchagotta

departed. Ananda, who was fanning the Buddha from behind at that time, was surprised by the Buddha's reticence. Thereupon, the Buddha explained to him:

“If, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer: ‘Is there a self?’ I had replied to him ‘There is a self’, then, Ananda, that would be siding with the recluse and brahmīns who are eternalists. But if, Ananda, when asked, ‘Is there not a self?’ I had replied that it does not exist, that, Ananda, would be siding with those recluse and brahmīns who are annihilationists. Again, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer: ‘Is there a self?’ had I replied that there is, would my reply be in accordance with the knowledge that all things are impermanent?”

“Surely not, lord.”

“Again, Ananda, when asked by Vacchagotta the Wanderer: ‘Is there not a self’ had I replied that there is not, it would have been more bewilderment for the bewildered Vacchagotta. For he would have said: ‘Formerly indeed I had a self, but now I have not one any more’”.

The middle doctrine constitutes one of the central themes of such important Hinayāna works as the Abhidharma-abhidhāsa-sāstra, the Satyasiddhi-sāstra and the Abhidharma-kōsa-sāstra, and is one of the dominant principles underlying the compilation of the early Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras, which stand for the first flowering of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Thus, it is said that the prajñāpāramitā should be approached through “non-attachment to all dharmas” (10), and that a bodhisattva “courses in perfect wisdom if . . . he does not course in the skandhas; or if he does not course in the conviction that the skandhas are impermanent, or that they are empty, or that they are neither defective nor entire” (11). The very name “Mādhyamika School” indicates that it takes the propounding of the middle way as its primary concern. The Chinese version of the Mālamadhyama-hā-rākas opens with a declaration of principle which has become almost proverbial:

Nothing comes into being, nor does anything disappear. 
Nothing is eternal, nor does anything have an end. 
Nothing is identical, nor is anything differentiated. 
Nothing moves hither, nor moves anything thither.

11 (3) Ibid., p. 145.
This is put forward by Nāgārjuna as “the foremost of all teachings”\textsuperscript{14).}

The \textit{Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras} and the works of the Mādhyamika School are among the early Mahāyāna texts to be translated into Chinese. The middle way they teach found a ready audience among Chinese intellectuals, as witnessed by the content of some of the earliest works on Buddhism written by the Chinese themselves, such as Hsi Chao’s \textit{Feng-fa-yao} 奉法要 and the \textit{Treatises} of Seng-chao 僧肇. This is of course not surprising, for the Chinese always have an almost instinctive dislike for all forms of extremes. Instead of seeing nature as a hostile power to be conquered and God as a stern judge quick to punish as in the West, in such ancient Confucian texts as the \textit{Shih Ching} 詩經, \textit{Shu Ching} 書經 and \textit{I Ching} 易經, a very different view of man’s relation to the natural and the supernatural is found. The Supreme God (most often referred to as “Heaven” or “Lord of Heaven”) was conceived of as a benevolent being, almost a spiritual reality, who was essentially moral in character and whose will was always open to the influence of the wishes of mankind. Human process was regarded as analogous to the natural process, and happiness was to be attained not by manipulating the forces of nature, but by living in harmony with it.

Also to be remembered is that Buddhism was introduced into China at a time when the influence of Taoism was on the ascent, and the nature of “non-being” (\textit{wu} 無), a Taoist concept somewhat analogous to the Buddhist concept of “emptiness”, formed one of the most popular topics of philosophical debate. Just as the \textit{Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras} distinguish between a false understanding of emptiness and a true one, the Neo-Taoists also had their idea of what constituting a true understanding of the meaning of “\textit{wu}”. Thus, Wang Pi 王弼 writes:

\begin{quote}
The sage understood [the true nature of] “\textit{wu}”. However, since “\textit{wu}” cannot be explained, he did not talk about it. Lao-tzu was one [who still remained on the level] of “\textit{wu}” (being). Since he constantly harped on “\textit{wu}”, his knowledge of “\textit{wu}” was imperfect\textsuperscript{15).}
\end{quote}

Lao-tzu has always been acclaimed as the first and foremost proponent of the concept of \textit{wu} in Chinese philosophy. Wang Pi, however, argues that Lao-tzu’s knowledge of \textit{wu} was imperfect,

for in believing that the idea of \wu can be discussed and making it
the central thesis of his philosophy, Lao-tzu had reduced “non-
being” to a form of “being”, and showed that he still had not freed
himself from the dichotomy of “being” and “non-being”. Para-
doxically, Confucius ("the sage"), just because he did not talk
about \wu, demonstrated that he had a perfect knowledge of the
nature of \wu, for his silence reflected his understanding that the
true “non-being” is not a “non-being” opposed to “being” (which
would then still be a form of “being”) but one that synthesizes the
two extremes, and thus cannot and should not be expressed in
language.

To express their ideal of the middle way, the Neo-Taoists, the
Buddhists and later the Neo-Confucians all resort to the dichotomy
of “essence” (\i 體) and “function” (\ung 用). All of them agree
that the true “essence” always expresses itself in “function”, and
outside “function”, there is no “essence” to be found. Interpreted
metaphysically, this dichotomy is equivalent to the dichotomy of the
“noumenal” (\li) and the “phenomenal” (\shih), the latter
pair of concepts are also said to be inseparable from each other.
Another pair of concepts used in similar manner are “origin”
(\pen 本) and “derivative” (\no 末). ⑦Ⅳ.

Of course, the starting-points from which the Confucians, Taoists
and Buddhists develop their ideas of the middle way are quite
different, and even though all of them talk of “\i”, “\li”, “\pen”, etc.,
what they refer to by these terms are not the same, and by no means
are they to be confounded with each other. This digression into the
tradition of the middle way in the history of Chinese thought is made
to show why the Buddhist concept of “the round” found such easy
acceptance among Chinese intellectuals and was taken with such
seriousness, so much so that every major Buddhist school, such as the T’ien-t’ai School, The Hua-yen School and the Fa-hsiang

⑦Ⅳ All these three pairs of concepts are used extensively in Fa-tsang’s
writings. Articles in English relevant to the problem of the middle way in
Chinese thought include:

i. D. Bodde, “Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy”, in Studies
in Chinese Thought, ed. A. F. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press; 1953), pp. 19-75.

ii. B. Schwartz, “Some Polarities in Confucian Thought”, in Confucianism

iii. C. Y. Cheng, “Towards a Dialectic of Harmonization”, Journal of
best picture not because it is aesthetically the most appealing, nor because it is logically the most consistent, nor because it is verified by empirical observation, nor because it explains the possibility of human knowledge, nor because it brings forth most vividly the divine design underlying all forms of existence; but because it comes closest to the Buddhist ideal of the middle way or the round, an ideal which considers all discriminations whether in thought or in action as signs of attachment, which all followers of the religion are constantly enjoined to give up.

ii. It also warns against the employing of extraneous standards in the appraisal of Fa-tsang’s thought. In judging the validity of Fa-tsang’s teaching, our cardinal consideration should always be how closely it approaches the ideal of the middle way or the round, an ideal in its being acknowledged by nearly all Chinese Buddhist schools alike provides part of the common background essential for meaningful discourse and constructive criticism among Chinese Buddhists themselves. Whether Fa-tsang has succeeded in giving convincing expositions of such topics of common interest to Buddhist and Western philosophers as the problem of causality, the nature of space and time, etc., on the basis of his “teaching of totality” doubtlessly would affect the credibility of his account, but even if he falters in some of these attempts, it should not be counted as a fatal weakness of his system, nor would this imply that his vision of a harmonious universe is in need of a total overhaul. But it would be a very different matter if his teaching of totality violates the very fundamental rule of the middle way, a rule which has been held up by Fa-tsang himself as the justification of the particular picture of reality which he favours.

In other words, Fa-tsang’s teaching of universal harmony is not a conclusion which comes with his investigation into the afore-mentioned philosophical problems, but is rather a consequence of his p’an-chiao. Equipped with the ideal of the round, he examines a number of traditional theories of the nature of reality and finds them wanting, which in turn prompts him to search for a solution of his own. It is only after the solution has already been found that he turns his attention back to various philosophical problems current in Buddhism, with the intention of throwing new light on them based on this new understanding. If this ambition of his has not been completely fulfilled, it would not necessarily invalidate his new understanding, for this may simply be a case of failure to perpetuate his new insight. Thus, in evaluating Fa-tsang’s system
of thought, our primary consideration should not be its uniformity or its overall consistency. The foremost questions to ask are: "Has it transcended such dichotomies as the phenomenal and the noumenal, essence and function, origin and derivative, etc.?" "Has it succeeded in synthesizing being and emptiness?" "Has it achieved the goal of harmonizing all elements of existence?" In short, how far has it fulfilled the ideal of the round?
School, has found it necessary to justify its teaching by evoking the standard of the "round". It also explains why even such an acute thinker as Fa-tsang would deem it a sufficient argument for his world-view on its being the most perfect embodiment on this ideal. His main complaint against other systems of Buddhist thought is that they fail to conform to the Buddhist ideal of the middle way. The Hinayana teaching is one-sided in its emphasis on "being", while the elementary teaching of the Mahayana is one-sided in its emphasis on "emptiness". The final teaching regards "being" and "emptiness" as two aspects of the pure consciousness and unites them in one. However, there still remains in it one defect: The elements of the phenomenal aspect of the kathagataagarbha are still considered in this teaching as separate from each other. This is a shortcoming which is overcome only in the round teaching.

This is the principal argument which Fa-tsang has brought forth in support of the Hua-yen picture of a universe of interrelated dharmas co-existing in perfect harmony. Recognition of this very plain fact establishes two very important points:

i. It warns against the drawing of easy parallels between Hua-yen teaching and the teachings of Western philosophers, a fallacy which even such respected Buddhist scholars as Nakamura Hajime are not entirely innocent of. Even admitting that there is a certain degree of resemblance between the Hua-yen vision of Reality and those of Plotinus \(^7\), Leibniz \(^8\) and Whitehead \(^8\), we must always bear in mind that their teachings are built on entirely different assumptions and serve very different purposes.

In the West, it is logical, epistemic or theodicean considerations that dictate a philosopher's choice of his metaphysical system. However, to Fa-tsang, his picture of a harmonious universe is the

\(^7\) See Nakamura Hajime, "Kegonkyo no shisō-shiki toki iji 華厳経の思想 史的意義" in Kegon shisō 華厳思想, ed. Nakamura Hajime (Kyoto: 1960), pp. 127-134.

\(^8\) See Murakami Shunko 村上俊江, "Raibunitsu-shiki to Kegonshū ラ ブニッツ氏と華厳宗", in Kegon shisō, op. cit., pp. 453-483.

\(^9\) Refer to:


ii. F. H. Cook, Hua-yen Buddhism, pp. 44 & 73.
