

# The Practice of Huayan Buddhism

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## Abstract

It has been said by scholars that Huayan Buddhism is the philosophy behind Chan Buddhism and Chan Buddhism is the practice of Huayan. This is expressed in the slogan: “Tiantai and Huayan for theory and Chan for practice.” But my thesis is that Chan has its own textuality and Huayan has its own praxis. For this paper, I plan to explore the practice of Huayan Buddhism, which involves a meditation culminating in an interspectival vision. This vision is articulated in the seminal “Huayan Fajie Guanmen” 華嚴法界觀門 (Meditative Perspectives on the Huayan Dharmadhatu) and its commentaries, which introduce and elaborate on the concept of the 四法界 sifajie “Fourfold Dharmadhatu.” This concept is articulated as a meditational framework, rather than a metaphysical theory, and is linked to other forms of Chinese thought, notably Daoism.

**Keywords:** Huayan, Dharmadhatu, pratityasamutpada, interpenetration, meditation, emptiness

It is often been said by scholars that Huayan Buddhism is the philosophy behind Chan Buddhism and Chan Buddhism is the practice of Huayan. This is expressed in the popular slogan: “Huayan for philosophy and Chan for practice.”<sup>1</sup> But my contention is that Chan has its own textual and intellectual tradition, and Huayan has its own praxis. For this paper, I plan to explore the practice of Huayan Buddhism, which involves a meditation culminating in a comprehensively interspectival vision. This vision is articulated in the seminal Huayan Fajie Guanmen 華嚴法界觀門 (Meditative Perspectives on the Huayan Dharmadhatu, legendarily attributed to Du Shun, 557–640, the traditionally acknowledged initial patriarch of the orthodox Huayan tradition) and its commentaries, which introduce and elaborate on the concept of the 四法界 sifajie “Fourfold Dharmadhatu.”

The first point to make, though it will not be the focus of the paper, is that Chan has its own textual emphasis and theoretical framework. Long associated with an anti-textual and anti-theoretical stance, the paradigmatic Chan narrative, the story of Huineng as it appears in the Platform Scripture, contains several references to the importance of textuality. In the story of Huineng’s initial awakening, the Diamond Sutra figures prominently. According to the standard account, it is upon hearing that text for the first time that the spiritual genius Huineng experiences an initial awakening to the meaning of Buddhism. This is later sealed in a conversation with the Master Hongren, in which Hongren discourses on the Diamond Sutra and Huineng’s awakening is then ostensibly completed and authenticated.

Furthermore, in the stories of the transmission of the Chan Patriarchy, we see that the transmission is validated by the passing down of the master’s

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (Iaswr Series), 1973, p.26

robe and bowl, ostensibly inherited directly from the Buddha. But, according to tradition, in addition to the robe and the bowl, these masters also transmitted the *Lankavatara Sutra*, a complex and historically complicated Buddhist Sutra of ostensibly Indian (though perhaps actually Central Asian) origin. In addition, Chan has its own substantial literary tradition, consisting of narratives like the Platform Sutra as well as other accounts of Masters and Students, often in the context of gongan or koan literature. So the alleged anti-textuality of Chan is clearly overstated, given the importance of text and discourse in the early accounts.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Century Scholar Zongmi managed to find a way to reconcile the increasing iconoclasm of Chan, influenced by the popularity and canonicity of the Huineng stories, and the importance of scriptural study and discourse. Informed by his background with the Dasheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論 (Mahayana Awakening of Faith Treatise), Zongmi associated what is in that text called the initial awakening, the sudden insight into the nature of the problem and its solution, with the spontaneity and iconoclasm of “Southern” Chan, and final awakening as the result of the gradual practice of eliminating the bad habits that formed under our former way of seeing the world, an approach long pejoratively associated with the so-called “Northern” School. Among other sources, Zongmi derived great inspiration from the Huayan Jing, and in fact claimed to be the fifth patriarch of the Huayan tradition. Even though it is simplistic to say that Huayan is the theory and Chan is the practice, based on the work of Zongmi’s predecessors such as Fazang, we can say that Huayan is clearly more willing to engage in what might be seen as speculative metaphysics than Chan. Still, based on the foundational texts of the Huayan tradition, it seems equally clear that this metaphysics is used to inform its own meditative practice, a practice which has solid antecedents in traditional Chinese thought.

Of course, given the context of Buddhist thought, especially as the variety of Buddhist traditions proliferated in India and subsequently in China and elsewhere, all metaphysics is circumscribed by a pragmatic lack of dogmatism. There doesn't seem to be a necessary claim that this is actually how things are, but rather that this is a practical way to look at things if one wants to end existential disease or suffering. It is clear from the examination of scriptural texts that Buddhist soteriology has mostly been extremely pragmatic in its approach to "truth." The notion of a single absolute truth is replaced by the idea of functional utility, known in the *Sanskrit* as *upaya*. The Buddhist tradition thus contains a wide assortment of soteriological approaches.

Given the limitations of possible human experience, and ruling out revelation and knowledge by virtue of authority, there is no way to finally know the answers to metaphysical questions. Therefore the goal is simply to find and adopt a metaphysical stance which contributes to the ending of suffering. Since suffering is traced to attachment, ultimately to the idea of a permanent self and eternal, fundamental realities, Buddhist metaphysics tends to seek alternative ways of understanding our experiences of self and reality, ways which do not require us to posit permanent selves (*atman*) and fundamental realities (*brahman*).

The metaphysics underlying Huayan's philosophy of totality is based on the central Buddhist model of interdependent causality known as *pratityasamutpada* (Ch. yinyuan 因緣), or "dependent origination." In earlier models, *pratityasamutpada* was described as a twelve-link chain of causation, in which each link causes the next in a linear fashion, with the twelfth link causing the first link. In some sense, then, each link is causally connected to all of the other links. In Mahayana thought, particularly Huayan, it comes to be understood as an all-

embracing web of causal relations defining reality: to say that something is real is to say that it participates in causal relations with everything else that can be said to be real. This changes the model from a primarily linear one into a “holographic” one, in which at every moment, everything that can be said to be real is, in some sense, simultaneously the cause and effect of everything else that can be said to be real. This approach acknowledges reality, but not fundamental reality, and acknowledges causality, but not first cause, thus avoiding the kind of ontological commitment which Buddhism generally takes to be the most proximate cause of suffering.

This is expressed most clearly in several Huayan texts and images. Historically, Huayan draws much of its inspiration from a variety of textual sources. We might identify in this regard the Huayan Jing (華嚴 *Avatamsaka* or “Flower Garland” Sutra), the Mahayana Awakening of Faith Treatise (Dasheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論), as well as a number of texts traditionally, though questionably, attributed to a legendary early Chinese Buddhist thaumaturge Dushun, including Meditative Perspectives on the Huayan Dharmadhatu (Huayan Fajie guanmen 華嚴法界觀門) and Cessation and Contemplation in the Five Teachings of Huayan (Huayan wujiao zhiguan 華嚴五教止觀).

The Huayan Jing itself is a voluminous assortment of materials, of diverse and controversial composition. Part of it seems to be Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts, such as the *Gandavyuha Sutra*; parts seem to be translations of other Sanskrit texts; and much of it seems to be of native Chinese composition. It presents a view of reality that can be described as fractal, or even psychedelic, with worlds within worlds within worlds, ad infinitum. In the Huayan Jing, this macro/microcosmic “omniverse” is shaken periodically by earthquakes, which might be seen as reminders to shake up and loosen or deconstruct fixed

ontological commitments, as in the following passage from Thomas Cleary's translation: "Then the ocean of worlds of arrays of flower banks, by the power of the Buddha, all shook in six ways in eighteen manners, that is, they trembled, trembled all over, trembled all over in all directions...(etc.)"<sup>2</sup> Famous and powerful metaphors illustrating this insight include the famous "jeweled net of Indra." Indra is one of the Vedic gods, mentioned in the Huayan Jing as one of an indeterminate number of Indras residing in an indeterminate number of Sumeru Palaces. Book One opens with a vivid description of the site of the Buddha's awakening, representative of many such descriptions:

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was in the land of Magadha, in a state of purity, at the site of enlightenment, having just realized true awareness. The ground was solid and firm, made of diamond, adorned with exquisite jewel discs and myriad precious flowers, with pure clear crystals. ... There were banners of precious stones, constantly emitting shining light and producing beautiful sounds. Nets of myriad gems and garlands of exquisitely scented flowers hung all around. ... There were rows of jewel trees, their branches and foliage lustrous and luxuriant. By the Buddha's spiritual power, he caused all the adornments of this enlightenment site to be reflected therein. ... By means of the ability to manifest the lights and inconceivable sounds of the Buddhas, they fashioned nets of the finest jewels, from which came forth all the realms of action of the spiritual powers of the Buddhas, and in which were reflected images of the abodes of all beings. ... Clouds of radiance of jewels reflected each other.

The text Calming and Contemplation in the Five Teachings of Huayan

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, 1993, p. 55-56.

(Huayan wujiao zhiguan 華嚴五教止觀, T1867) extends this idea into the more elaborate one of an infinitely expansive net which contains a multifaceted jewel at each vertex, each of which reflects and is reflected in every other jewel. In this sense, every “dharma” or “quanta of experience” is contained within every other dharma, even as it contains every other dharma and in fact contains itself as contained within every other dharma. This is what is referred to in the Huayan literature as “mutual containment” and “mutual penetration.” As the text puts it:

The manner in which all dharmas interpenetrate is like an imperial net of celestial jewels extending in all directions infinitely, without limit. ... As for the imperial net of heavenly jewels, it is known as Indra’s Net, a net which is made entirely of jewels. Because of the clarity of the jewels, they are all reflected in and enter into each other, ad infinitum. Within each jewel, simultaneously, is reflected the whole net. Ultimately, nothing comes or goes. If we now turn to the southwest, we can pick one particular jewel and examine it closely. This individual jewel can immediately reflect the image of every other jewel. As is the case with this jewel, this is furthermore the case with all the rest of the jewels – each and every jewel simultaneously and immediately reflects each and every other jewel, ad infinitum. The image of each of these limitless jewels is within one jewel, appearing brilliantly. None of the other jewels interfere with this. When one sits within one jewel, one is simultaneously sitting in all the infinite jewels in all ten directions. How is this so? Because within each jewel are present all jewels. If all jewels are present within each jewel, it is also the case that if you sit in one jewel you sit in all jewels at the same time. The inverse is also understood in the same way. Just as one goes into one jewel and thus enters every other jewel while never leaving this one jewel, so too one enters any jewel while never leaving this particular jewel. Question: Since you said that one enters into all jewels in one

jewel without leaving this jewel, then how can one enter into all other jewels [without ever leaving the one jewel]? Answer: It is only because one does not leave this one jewel that one can enter into all jewels. If one left one jewel to enter into all jewels, it would not be possible to enter into all the jewels. Why? Because outside of this one jewel there are no other jewels. Question: If outside of this jewel there are no other jewels, then the net is made of only one jewel. How can you say that it is strung out of many jewels? Answer: It is only because there are no separate jewels that many can be fashioned into a net. How is this so? Because only this one jewel alone constitutes the whole net. If this one jewel were removed, there wouldn't be any net at all. Question: If there is only one jewel, how can you say that they are woven into a net? Answer: A net woven of many jewels is itself a single jewel. Why is this so? The whole is constituted by its many parts. If there were no whole, the plurality of parts would also be absent. Therefore this net is constituted by each jewel. All entering into each – this is the way to understand this.<sup>3</sup>

Typical of Chinese and especially Daoist rhetoric, there is a fair amount of equivocation at work in these rhetorical paradoxes – to say that things are and are not sounds crazy, but what it actually means is that things are what they are in one sense, and they are not in another sense. Each jewel is identical to every other jewel in some sense, and unique in another sense, and this is what makes these formulations seem so bizarre and oxymoronic. We consistently see language in the Huayan literature which reconciles identity and difference, or part and whole. The whole is identical to the part, in the sense that the whole is nothing but its parts, and the parts are identical to the whole in the sense that they wouldn't be parts if not for the whole. This mutual definition - that the parts and wholes are defined by or in some sense constitute each other - is what is meant by these

<sup>3</sup> Trans. by Alan Fox.



rhetorical paradoxes.

The Huayan Jing also contains many chapters whose titles invoke lists of ten qualities or aspects of some subject, such as “Ten Abodes,” “Ten Practices,” “Ten Inexhaustible Treasuries,” “Ten Dedications,” “Ten Stages,” and others, which have greatly influenced the rhetoric of Huayan literature. For example idiosyncratic formulations of the Huayan school include many lists of metaphors or ways of looking at things, such as the “Ten Mysteries,” the “Perfect Interpenetration of Six Forms,” and so on, but it is the idea of the “fourfold dharmadhatu” that arguably serves as the most central doctrine. The term “dharmadhatu” has been used in many ways throughout the history of Indian and Chinese Buddhist thought.

In the Pali *Nikayas*, there are passages which suggest that meditation or contemplation of dharmadhatu is the most profound method of attaining higher order perspectives. For example, in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, dharmadhatu is one of the eighteen *dhatu*s. These *dhatu*s represent the perceptual manifold, analyzed into subjective, objective, and mediational “realms.” They are, using the visual sense as an example: the physical eye itself, the sensory organ; the ostensible sensory object, such as “color,” which is seen; and the visual perceptive consciousness (*vijnana*) which mediates this sensory event. There are six such senses in this formulation, and in the *Samyutta Nikaya* dharmadhatu is treated as the object of the cognitive sense (*anovijnana*). It is this understanding of dharmadhatu which is found most commonly in the Pali *Abhidharma* materials, and is also dominant in the *Theravada* and *Sarvastivada Abhidharma* traditions.

In the *Prajnaparamita* literature, the term dharmadhatu is expressed in apparently negative formulations such as *sunyata* or “emptiness.” Such expressions seem intended to deconstruct ontological fixation on dharmadhatu as one more thing among other things. The *Madhyamaka* School, also, because of

its deconstructive approach to the problem of contextual dissonance, focused on more cognitive, epistemological concerns. To the *Madhyamaka* tradition, terms such as “*dhatu*” (realm, sphere, context) or “dharmadhatu” are too easily ontologized. Actually, the Huayan notion of an inter-penetrative dharmadhatu is completely synonymous with the equation of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada*.

The term *dharmadhatu* (Ch. fa jie 法界) occurs with great frequency in the Huayan Jing itself. At no point, however, is it “explained” or analyzed. Rather it represents the goal of the *bodhisattva* practice, the end of *Sudhana’s* journey in the final chapter. In most cases, the term ru (入 : “to enter”) is used as the functional qualifier suggesting that the nature of dharmadhatu is such that it must be entered. It is not necessary to ontologize dharmadhatu as any kind of mystical or “spiritual world” when it seems to more likely refer to a particular way of looking at the world, a particular perspective on reality. This understanding seems reflected in early Huayan literature, and especially in one of the most basic models of meditation found in Huayan, that of the “four dharmadhatus.” This might be mistaken for a metaphysical model if dharmadhatu is understood as “world,” as it often is, and so this notion might seem to suggest that there are four separate worlds into which one might enter. In Buddhism, a “world” or dhatu has no independent status apart from a consciousness which apprehends it, and vice versa. In that sense, then, the “four dharmadhatus” are not four separate worlds, but four cognitive approaches to the world, four ways of apprehending reality.

Although it was really Chengguan, the fourth Huayan patriarch (738–839), who first clearly articulated the “fourfold dharmadhatu” analysis, the idea is clearly visible in a work entitled *Meditative Perspectives to the Huayan Dharmadhatu* (Huayan Fajie Guanmen 華嚴法界觀門). It has become a hallmark of the Huayan tradition, and the centerpiece of its theoretical structure.

This work was basically a meditation manual, outlining three approaches to (or “layers” of) meditation on the Dharmadhatu. The three levels of meditation are: 1) meditation on “True Emptiness”; 2) illuminating the non-obstruction of principle and phenomena; and 3) meditation on “universal pervasion and complete accommodation.”

It is in Chengguan’s commentary to the Meditative Perspectives that we first find a clear description of the fourfold dharmadhatu. Here, the three layers of meditation on dharmadhatu found in the Meditative Perspectives are interpreted as the second, third, and fourth dharmadhatu: the first layer becomes the second dharmadhatu, that of “principle” (li 理), the second layer becomes the third dharmadhatu, that of the “non-obstruction of principle and phenomena” (lishi wuai 理事無礙), and the third layer becomes the fourth dharmadhatu, that of the “non-obstruction of phenomena with other phenomena” (shishi wuai 事事無礙). The first dharmadhatu, that of “phenomena” (shi 事), refers to our ordinary, tacit, superficial interpretation of experience, and so it was not initially considered a meditative approach. It is important to emphasize that these dharmadhatus are not separate worlds – they are actually increasingly more holographic perspectives on a single phenomenological manifold.

In some sense, then, similar to certain interpretations of Quantum Mechanics, dharmadhatu refers to the virtually infinite manifold of possibilities, which concretes into an actual reality through the cognitive approach or perspective adopted by a conscious mind. A convenient metaphor is one of those “magic eye” pictures, which seems like visual noise until you focus your eyes to the correct depth into the picture, at which point the image appears. Dharmadhatu or “reality” is like that, except that instead of only one image being available, an infinite number of different images are available depending on the depth and

angle of viewing.

The formula of the Four Dharmadhatus is proposed as a support for meditation practices. Again, although they are often rendered in such a way as to suggest that there are four separate realms, they more properly represent four types or orders of perspectives on experience. The first is the tacit, uncritical, commonsense, lower-order perspective which generally serves as our default perspective, and the others are higher-order or meditative perspectives. The goal seems to be a type of perspectival flexibility, which corrects obsessive-compulsive tendencies to identify with a single perspective by acknowledging the multiplicity of possible perspectives, and by adopting higher-order perspectives which reconcile the inconsistencies and contradictions present between lower order perspectives. This is like standing in the center of a hallway with two people on either end. I can see one or the other, because of my limited perspective, but I can't see both simultaneously. If I were to stand high enough above the hallway somehow and look down on it, I might be able to see both at once. Higher order perspectives similarly circumscribe and sustain perspectives which appear incompatible at surface level.

The first of these types of perspectives is termed "shi," often rendered as "phenomenon" or "event" (事). This is the tacit, ordinary, conventional perspective with which most people identify most of the time. This is why it is not included in the original model – it is not a meditative perspective, it is a mundane one. It takes events at more or less face value – it does not raise questions about metaphysics or ontological or epistemological status. There are a virtually infinite set of possible perspectives at this level. Garma Chang, in *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, offers the example of a glass of water. The water is seen by a chemist as H<sub>2</sub>O, or a universal solvent. It is seen by a firefighter as something used to

extinguish flames. It is seen by a thirsty person as something to drink. It is in fact all of these things, potentially, though at any given time it may function in one or another way. The problem with this perspective arises when it is universally applied, even in cases when other perspectives seem to conflict with it. Although admittedly a silly example, if a firefighter were dying of thirst but could only see the water as a means of extinguishing fires, then he might die of thirst before he would think to drink the water. Obstinate application of disjunctive perspectives is counterproductive and causes frustration or suffering, the elimination of which is the goal of Buddhism in general. Again, the problem is not with this perspective *per se*, but with fixation or attachment to a particular perspective. What we think are the essences of objects are really therefore nothing but mere names, mere functional designations, and none of these contextual definitions need necessarily interfere with any of the others. The significance of an object, and in fact its very reality, at any given moment is a function of the contextual perspective from which it is approached. At rest, all of these potential contextual perspectives interpenetrate, in that each context is at that point still merely a possible approach to functional significance. Functional designations are actualized when the moment of their use for some practical purpose is at hand. And a particular perspective is adopted.

This model correlates with modern Quantum Mechanical views of the universe. Basically a statistical model of reality, Quantum Mechanics suggests that the occurrence of events can be described mathematically by a series of wave functions. As the occurrence of an event approaches, there are wave functions which describe the probabilities of all particular possible outcomes of the event. These probability functions do not interfere with each other, and exist side by side until the event actually occurs. Until the event occurs, it is all of them and none of them. At that moment, one of the wave functions, that which describes

the actual outcome, expands to one hundred per cent probability. While the others collapse to zero probability. The point is that until the wave function collapse and the event actually occurs, all possible outcomes are equally inherent, and it is only when the moment of actualization is at hand that one possible outcome becomes dominant. The process philosopher Whitehead calls this process “concrecence,” or the actual becoming concrete of abstract possibilities.

The second type of perspective is represented by the word “li” (理) which translates as “rule” or “underlying or abstract principle.” In that general sense, li is what all shi have in common. To shift perspective to li is to resolve all distinctions into some commonality. For example, we can either see coffee and tea as separate things, which would be the perspective of shi, or we can see them as all being water, which is the perspective of li. However, in the case of Huayan metaphysics, the li is *sunyata* or emptiness. What all things have in common is that they all lack self-causation or causal autonomy (*svabhava*, 自性 *zixing*). Everything depends on everything else. The Buddhist texts warn us, however, not to reify or ontologize emptiness and thus make it into another kind of a “thing.” It is a way of describing things, not a thing in itself. So whereas in the first dharmadhatu things are seen as distinct things, in the second they are all seen as similarly empty of self-being.

The third dharmadhatu is called “lishi wuai” (理事無礙) or the “non-obstruction of li and shi.” From this perspective, the emptiness of things does not interfere with the “thingness” of things. This would be to experience things as in some sense distinguishable while simultaneously experiencing them as indistinguishably empty.

This does not, however, yet constitute full accomplishment. The final dharmadhatu is “shishi wuai” (事事無礙), or the “non-obstruction between

phenomena and other phenomena.” By realizing that the emptiness of things does not interfere with the “thingness” of things, we are then able to apprehend multiple possibilities within individual things or events. As Zongmi says in his commentary, “all distinct phenomenal dharmas interfuse and penetrate in all ways.” In terms of the example we used previously, the potability of the water does not interfere with the fire-extinguishing properties of the water, which does not interfere with the solvency of water. All of those manifestations are all potential manifestations of the same phenomenon. This is how the Buddha sees the world according to the Huayan tradition, as omnipotentially present in a world of infinitely fractal possibilities. This is liberation from the fixation on a single, lower-order perspective. What we think are the essences of objects are really therefore nothing but mere names, mere functional designations, and none of these contextual definitions need necessarily interfere with any of the others. The significance of an object, and in fact its very reality, at any given moment is a function of the contextual perspective from which it is approached. At rest, all of these potential contextual perspectives interpenetrate, in that each context is at that point still merely a possible approach to functional significance. Functional designations are actualized when the moment of their use for some practical purpose is at hand. And a particular perspective is adopted.

Notably, this last meditative state is actually overwhelming and paralyzing. According to tradition, when the Buddha spoke the Huayan Jing in the throes of this experience, no one understood anything he said. Arguably, the comprehensive and far-reaching vision of the fourth dharmadhatu is useful for seeing the possibilities, but in order to actually act in the world on the basis of this insight, one has to, in some sense, return to the first dharmadhatu, and take things at face value.

The influence of other forms of Chinese thought on Huayan is clear, and explicit from the time of Zongmi on. I will focus on the Daoist influences of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and the earlier Chinese Buddhist text entitled Mahayana Awakening of Faith Treatise (Dasheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論).

In the Daode Jing, we find a precursor of the fourth dharmadhatu in an endorsement of the condition of miao (妙) or “wonder,” which I understand as an enhanced sense of possibility. According to that text, we tend to wear ourselves out struggling against the natural course of events, and what causes us to excessively interfere is our egotistical preference for one outcome over another – we don’t let things take their natural course because we want them to turn out a certain way. This preference is an expression of our self-concern, our attachment to certain outcomes, and our willingness to prioritize our own agendas over the natural course of events. But when we insist on going against the grain in these ways, friction results, things become difficult, we wear ourselves out, and disaster ensues. In this sense, *weiwuwei* (為無為, “non-confrontational action”) teaches us that, rather than beating our heads against the wall of inevitability, we should come to terms with the world, accommodate it, so that we don’t wear ourselves out senselessly and in vain. For instance, when carving wood, one must try to follow the natural grain, or else the wood will chip and splinter. When crossing a river, one must go with the current rather than against it. And so on. Preference is thus like a pair of blinders, which prevents us from seeing subtleties and possibilities. And if preference limits our sense of possibility, then the absence of preference results in a perception of increased possibility, or miao. Therefore the ideal condition of flexibility and adaptability, represented by the idea of *weiwuwei*, involves seeing as many possibilities as possible.

As for “wonder,” this is an attitude of enhanced appreciation for possibility.



This seems to be what Plato is referring to when he says that “philosophy begins in wonder.” It is when we allow the world to resonate in all its uncertain possibility that we can best appreciate the subtle nature of the world. It is in this sense, that the Dao De Jing encourages us to become “mature by once again becoming childlike.” “Childlike” in this sense, refers to the child’s ability to see many possibilities, like the uncarved block of wood which has infinite potential because it hasn’t yet taken on a specific form. A familiar example of this is the father who spends weeks before the holidays staying up late every night putting together an large and elaborate toy for his child. Finally, it is the morning of the holiday, and the child opens the gift, gets excited, plays with the toy for ten minutes, and then spends months playing with the box that the toy came in. Why does the child prefer the box to the toy? Because the toy can only be what it is, but the box can be anything - a spaceship, a house, a submarine, a time machine, or transmogrifier (for those who remember Calvin and Hobbes). When an adult gets a new refrigerator, he or she looks at the box and laments, “Oh, no, what am I going to do with a box this big?” But a child looks at the box and squeals with delight: “Oh, boy! What am I going to do with a box this big?” This is a totally different sense of the possibilities inherent in the box. It is this sense of wonder, this perception of infinite possibility, among other things, that distinguishes the child from the adult.

It must be emphasized that to return to childhood is to regain one’s childlikeness, but to be childlike is not the same as to be childish. The difference is that to be childish, at least in a Freudian sense, implies that one is emotionally immature, unable to delay gratification, impatient, and so on. The mature child is one who has learned to postpone gratification, and yet retains the ability to see infinite possibility. It is in this sense that I initially suggested that the name of the ostensible author of the text, Laozi, might mean “mature child,” and would not

then be merely a paradox or a pun, but might actually refer to the qualities we have described as associated with *weiwuwei*.

The emphasis on non-dogmatic contextual flexibility and perspectivalism sounds strikingly like ideas found in the writings of Zhuangzi (莊子). Various ideas introduced into Chinese thought by Zhuangzi encourage the soteriological transcendence of perspectival fixation through cultivation of higher order, more omni-perspectival viewpoints. We see what the Zhuangzi means by a “partial view” in Burton Watson’s translation of Chapter 17: “Jo of the North Sea said, ‘You can’t discuss the ocean with a well frog - he’s limited by the space he lives in. You can’t discuss ice with a summer insect - he’s bound to a single season. You can’t discuss the Way with a cramped scholar - he’s shackled by his doctrines.’”<sup>4</sup>

Because of the limitations of perspective, significance cannot universally apply across contexts. Particular doctrines and ideological approaches are “shackles” or “blindings” which accommodate only the narrowest range of experience. To paraphrase Hans-Georg Gadamer, there can be no truth through method: method presupposes specific categories of result. Even the merest formulation of a question, by orienting the point of view, determines the nature of the response. By limiting perspective, we are limiting significance, and contextual fixation of this kind restricts what Zhuangzi calls “carefree meandering.” To a certain extent, Zhuangzi (莊子) can be considered the honorary “grandfather” of omni-perspectival soteriology in China. Various ideas introduced into Chinese thought by Zhuangzi encourage the soteriological transcendence of fixed perspective through cultivation of higher order, more omnicontextual viewpoints. It is common to link Zhuangzi with Chinese Buddhism, and particularly with the Chan 禪 tradition. As Francis Cook points out, “there is the persistent,

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<sup>4</sup> Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 1968, p.175..

characteristic tendency on the part of people like Fa-tsang [法藏, the grand expositor and systematizer of the Huayan orthodoxy] to take what might be called a totalistic view of existence. We first notice this tendency in earlier Taoist literature, particularly in the writings of Chuang-tzu and the later Neo-Taoists. ... [The Zhuangzi] ... is a criticism of the partial view of things and an admonition to take a totalistic view of it. With the substitution of some Buddhist terminology, it could easily pass for a passage from a Hua Yen text. It is probably in Chuang-tzu's writings that the totalistic view of existence is urged strongly for the first time in Chinese literature."<sup>5</sup>

We see what Cook means by a "partial view" in Chapter 17 of the Zhuangzi: "Jo of the North Sea said, 'You can't discuss the ocean with a well frog: he's limited by the space he lives in. You can't discuss ice with a summer insect: he's bound to a single season. You can't discuss the Way with a cramped scholar: he's shackled by his doctrines.'" Because of the limitations of perspective, significance cannot apply across contexts. Particular doctrines and ideological approaches are "shackles" or "blinders" which accommodate only the narrowest range of experience. As Hans-Georg Gadamer might say, method presupposes specific categories of result. Even the merest formulation of a question, by orienting point of view, limits the permissible range of the response. By limiting perspective, we are limiting significance, and fixation of this kind restricts what Zhuangzi calls "carefree meandering."

It is this "meandering" which, on the other hand, constitutes the "totalistic view." "Meandering" represents perspectival flexibility in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. "Carefree Meandering" (逍遙遊, Xiaoyaoyou) is the title of the opening chapter of the Zhuangzi, and sets the "totalistic" tone for the rest

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (Iaswr Series), 1973, p.26

of the work. This is seen, for example, throughout Chapter 17, entitled “Autumn Floods,” and also in chapter 33, in which we find what purports to be an (auto-) biographical account of Zhuangzi’s own idea of the “Art of Living”:

The ten thousand things ranged all around us, not one of them is worthy to be singled out as our destination. There were those in ancient times who believed that the ‘art of the Way’ lay in these things. Chuang Chou heard of their views and delighted in them. He expounded them in odd and outlandish terms, in brash and bombastic language, in unbound and unbordered phrases, abandoning himself to the times without partisanship, not looking at things from one angle only.<sup>6</sup>

The perspectival imagery at the end of this passage is impossible to ignore. Zhuangzi wants to see things from multiple points of view. He wants to free himself and others from linguistic and other conventional, conditioned fixations, and play with language in order to expose its inconsistencies and limits.

There are several terms and ideas in Zhuangzi’s writings which refer to what appears to be meditative practice of some kind or another, and sound strikingly reminiscent of later Chinese (and particularly Chan) Buddhist formulations. One is the term “mind fasting” (xinzhai 心齋). This is found in chapter 4, “In the World of Men”: “[Yen Hui asked of Confucius:] ‘May I ask what the fasting of the mind is?’ Confucius said, ‘Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.’<sup>7</sup> The purpose of “mind-fasting” is to turn progressively

<sup>6</sup> Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 1968, p.373.

<sup>7</sup> As above pp. 57-58.

inward, and to observe and “deconstruct” sedimented perceptions and senses of significance. Not to think of any particular thing, not to think of things as being particular: this is the “fasting of the mind.”

Another key term which is closely related to “mindfasting” is “sitting in forgetfulness” [坐忘 *zuo wang*]. Although the term *zuo* suggests that this occurs when seated, Zhuangzi seems to be advocating this as a constant state of mind. We find it described in chapter 6, “The Great and Venerable Teacher”:

Yen Hui said, ‘I’m improving!’ Confucius said, ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘I’ve forgotten benevolence and righteousness!’ ‘That’s good, but you still haven’t got it.’ Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, ‘I’m improving!’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘I’ve forgotten rites and music!’ ‘That’s good, but you still haven’t got it.’ Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, ‘I’m improving!’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘I can sit down and forget everything.’ Confucius looked very startled and said, ‘What do you mean, sit down and forget everything?’ Yen Hui said, ‘I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare [that is, identical with everything]. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything.’ Confucius said, ‘If you’re identical with it. You must have no more likes! If you’ve been transformed, you must have no more constancy. So you really are a worthy man after all. With your permission. I’d like to become your follower.’<sup>8</sup>

It is significant that successful cultivation of *zuowang* is portrayed as resulting in the elimination of partiality and preference. Preference is based on perspectival fixation, and ceases in the absence of such fixation. To successfully

<sup>8</sup> Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 1968, pp.90-91.

“meander,” one must transcend preference. Clearly, freedom is the issue here, and what it refers to is unhindered contextual flexibility and adaptability. Another image used by Zhuangzi to describe this fluidity is that of the hinge, which, when properly fitted into the socket, can respond endlessly. This kind of adaptability and equanimity is also exemplified in the Buddhist notion of *upaya*, exemplified by the skill of the *bodhisattva* who is considered capable of determining and executing appropriate pedagogical or soteriological responses in particular cases.

The influence of the Zhuangzi on the Huayan patriarch Zongmi is certain. As a well-educated Confucian gentleman in his youth, he would have been well-read indeed. Besides, as Peter Gregory points out: “Tsong-mi elaborates his interpretation of spontaneity by piecing together a wide selection of passages from the Chuang-tzu.”<sup>9</sup>

Most notable is the influence of the early, paradigmatic Chinese Buddhist text known as the Dasheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論 or Mahayana Awakening of Faith. According to Buddhist tradition, this text was written in Sanskrit by Asvagosha and translated into Chinese in the year 550 by the famous Central Asian translator Paramartha. This is disputed, however, by many scholars who believe that the text was actually Chinese in origin. According to its translator:

The work is a comprehensive summary of the essentials of *Mahayana* Buddhism, the product of a mind extraordinarily apt at synthesis. ... The Awakening of Faith has exerted a strong influence upon other schools of Buddhism as well. Fa-tsang, the third patriarch and the greatest systematizer of the Hua-yen school of Buddhism, wrote what was regarded as the definitive commentary on the Awakening of Faith, and moreover used this text as a foundation in creating his systematization of Hua-yen doctrine, and

<sup>9</sup> Peter N. Gregory, *Tsong-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, (1991):270.

for this reason the text has often been thought of as peculiarly the property of the Hua-yen School. For example, Tsung-mi, the fifth patriarch of the Hua-yen School, also wrote a commentary on the *Awakening of Faith* and used its doctrines as a foundation in his attempts to synthesize the three religions of China, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.<sup>10</sup>

The core metaphor or model in the *Awakening of Faith* is the idea of the “One Mind” (yi xin 一心). For Zongmi, fifth patriarch of Huayan, this “One Mind” refers to the closure and unity of experience itself, which he characterizes as “intrinsic awareness” or “sentience,” among other things. From a phenomenological point of view, Zongmi sees awareness as the “bottom-line.” It is pre-perspectival, and in that respect is identical to the Dharmadhatu in its most comprehensive aspect. In the *Awakening of Faith*, two meditative perspectives with regard to the One Mind are adopted: those of Suchness (*tathata*, zhen ru 真如) and samsara. It must be kept in mind, however, that these refer to two different perspectives on the One Mind, and do not describe two different entities or realities. According to the *Awakening of Faith*, One Mind includes both the one and the many.

Thus it would appear that such designations as “Suchness,” “Dharmadhatu,” “One Mind,” and so on, all represent various perspectives towards the so-called “omnicontext” or phenomenological manifold, which is itself identified with pre-perspectival, pre-dualistic “awareness.” As far as Zongmi’s own formulation is concerned, the key to the unity of theory and practice lay in the idea of “immediate awakening followed by gradual cultivation.” This also serves as Zongmi’s attempt to reconcile the on-going controversy within the Chan

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<sup>10</sup> Yoshito S. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Asvaghosha* (Translations from the Asian Classics), 2005 pp.3-10..

tradition of his time over the sudden or gradual nature of practice and awakening. As Zongmi himself says in the Chan Preface:

The words ‘awakening,’ ‘cultivation,’ ‘immediate,’ and ‘gradual’ seem to be very far apart [in meaning], and yet they are complementary. This means that [among] the various Sutras and sastras and the various Chan gates, some say that one must first attain success by means of gradual cultivation, and then immediately awaken. Others say that one must first immediately awaken, and then one can practice gradual cultivation. Others say that by means of immediate cultivation, one awakens gradually. Others say that the Dharma is neither gradual nor immediate, and that both gradual and immediate refer to the capabilities [of various individuals]. Each has its intended meaning. To say that they [only] seem to conflict is to say that, since awakening is the accomplishment of Buddhahood, fundamentally there never were any klesas: this is why it is called ‘immediate,’ because one need not practice cultivation in order to eliminate [klesas]. Then why continue to speak of gradual cultivation? Gradual cultivation is for when the klesas are not yet exhausted. The causal practice is not yet complete, so the resultant virtue is not yet ripe. How could it be called ‘immediate’? Immediate is that which is not gradual; gradual is that which is not immediate. Therefore they are said to be in conflict. By reconciling them in the following discussion, I will show that immediate and gradual are not only not contradictory, but are actually complementary.<sup>11</sup>

Later on in the text, Zongmi specifies what he means by “immediate awakening followed by gradual cultivation:” “There are those who say that one must first suddenly awaken and then one can gradually [practice] cultivation.

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<sup>11</sup> Trans. by Alan Fox.



This refers to awakening as ‘insight.’ (In terms of the elimination of hindrances, it is like when the sun immediately comes out, yet the frost melts gradually. With respect to the perfection of virtue, it is like a child which, when born, immediately possesses four limbs and six senses. As it grows, it gradually develops control over its actions.) Therefore, the Hua Yen [Jing] says that when the *bodhicitta* is first aroused, this is already the accomplishment of perfect enlightenment.”

The idea of immediate awakening followed by gradual cultivation rests upon a particular understanding of the nature of “enlightenment,” an understanding which is first formulated in the Awakening of Faith. Here, “enlightenment” is looked at from several different perspectives. To begin with, all sentient beings are regarded as fundamentally already enlightened. As the result of what is termed “beginningless ignorance,” this primordial awakening is forgotten, and the individual finds herself in *samsara*. At some point, one experiences an “initial” awakening, which then matures into a “final” or “ultimate” awakening which is identical to the awakening of the Buddhas. As Zongmi formulates it in the Chan Preface, the so-called “initial awakening” is termed “immediate insight awakening” and refers to the initial sudden insight into “One Mind” and the contextual nature of experience. However, what is being called “insight-awakening” involves more than merely intellectual understanding. In contextual terms, it rather refers to an existential realization of contextuality, or, in other words, the fact that lived experience is indeed a complex of contextual closures. However, even though such insight-awakening has taken place, the habitual energies produced by conditioned fixations have generated a powerful momentum, accruing over the course of, perhaps, an uncountable multitude of lifetimes. Therefore the purpose of “post-insight” practice of gradual cultivation is to gradually break these habits. When this gradual cultivation results in the elimination of habitual, neurotic obsessions and fixations, this is what Zongmi calls “authenticated

awakening.” Together, “insight-awakening” and “authenticated awakening” constitute “comprehensive enlightenment.” Indeed, in the final chapter of the Hua Yen Jing, it is suggested that although the *bodhisattva* path consists of fifty-two distinct stages, as soon as one begins at the initial stage, one has already in a sense, completed all fifty-two stages. Nevertheless, one must still proceed through the stages one at a time, much like a baseball player who hits a home run, and yet still has to run around and touch all of the bases to score a run. Thus, faced with the radical iconoclasm of some of the Chan traditions of his time, Zongmi manages to reconcile the spontaneous nature of awakening as emphasized in Chan with the need for textual study and meditation practice as emphasized in other, more classical forms of Buddhist tradition.

The Huayan tradition, then, clearly has its own meditative practice which operates on the basis of Perspectivalism, and which culminates in a vision of reality as a manifold of infinite possibility. This view has its antecedents in other, earlier forms of Chinese thought, particularly Daoist Literature and the Dasheng Qixin Lun. Although it eventually ceases to function as an autonomous school of Chinese Buddhism, Huayan thought had a significant influence on the development of later forms of East Asian *Mahayana* Buddhism. As indicated, many scholars have linked Huayan to Chinese Chan Buddhism. Although in many cases the link to Huayan is not explicitly stated, nevertheless the rhetoric and categories of later East Asian *Mahayana* are indebted to the Huayan thinkers and texts. 3

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