

Li Tongxuan and Huayan Buddhism*

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Abstract

Huayan Buddhism (華嚴佛教) is often understood as Chinese Buddhism's effort to bring phenomena to the forefront of Buddhist discourse. The Huayan fourfold worldview (華嚴四法界), a trademark of the Huayan School, well illustrates this aspect of the school. Developed by the Huayan patriarchs, Dushun (杜順 557-640), Fazang (法藏, 643-711), and Chengguan (澄觀, 738-839), the paradigm was meant to demonstrate the harmonious interpenetration of all phenomena. Compared to these Huayan thinkers, the lay Buddhist Li Tongxuan (李通玄, 635-730) has been known as an unorthodox thinker in Chinese Huayan Buddhism, although the applicability of expressions such as *orthodox* and *unorthodox* in this context is debatable.

This paper discusses the Huayan Buddhism of Li Tongxuan. At the core of Li's Huayan Buddhism rests the claim that the sentient beings are equipped with exactly the same quality with the Buddha. In his analysis of the Eighty Fascicle Version of Huayan Buddhism, Li claims that Huayan teaching is a Subitist teaching that proposes the awakening in this lifetime. In this context, unlike "orthodox" Huayan thinkers, Li claims that the "Entering into the Realm of Reality" chapter is the core of the *Huayan jing* and that Sudhana's pilgrimage in the chapter demonstrates the importance of practice as opposed to the theorization.

This paper discusses these issues by examining Li's concept of time which I identify as "non-temporality." The first section discusses the concept of non-temporality in connection with the Buddhist themes of existence and non-existence and Li's doctrinal classification. The second section deals with Li's discussion of nature-arising and subitism. The third section discusses Li's comparative interpretation of Sudhana in

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the *Huayan jing* and the Dragon Girl in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The paper concludes with a consideration of the ontological and existential implications of Li's Huayan phenomenology and its relevance to our time.

Keywords: Li Tongxuan, subitism; Buddhist nature; Huayan jing; *Exposition of the Huayan jing*; faith; nature-origination; nonduality; “Entering the Realm of Reality”; Sudhana; enlightenment in a single lifetime

Huayan Buddhism (華嚴佛教) is often understood as Chinese Buddhism's effort to bring phenomena to the forefront of Buddhist discourse. The Huayan fourfold worldview (華嚴四法界), a trademark of the Huayan School, well illustrates this aspect of the school. Developed by the Huayan patriarchs, Dushun (杜順 557-640), Fazang (法藏 643-711), and Chengguan (澄觀 738-839), the paradigm was meant to demonstrate the harmonious interpenetration of all phenomena. Compared to these Huayan thinkers, the lay Buddhist Li Tongxuan (李通玄, 635-730) has been known as an unorthodox thinker in Chinese Huayan Buddhism, although the applicability of expressions such as *orthodox* and *unorthodox* in this context is debatable. By examining some of the major concepts in Li's Huayan thought, we find what Li shares with those thinkers in the orthodox tradition with regard to the Huayan Buddhist vision and where he diverges from other Chinese Huayan thinkers.

This article examines Li's Huayan Buddhism with special attention to his concept of time, which I characterize as "non-temporality." I will first discuss the concept of non-temporality in the context of perennial Buddhist themes of existence and non-existence in relation to Li's doctrinal classification, and then in relation to the Huayan theory of nature-arising and subitism which I consider as the core of Li's Huayan Buddhism. I conclude with a consideration of the ontological and existential implications of Li's Huayan phenomenology.

1. Existence and Non-existence in Buddhist Philosophy

Fazang, the third patriarch of Huayan Buddhism, has been credited as a major architect of the Huayan Buddhist philosophy. In his *Essay on the Five Teachings of Huayan Buddhism* (*Huayan wujiao zhang* 華嚴五教章), he offers a fivefold doctrinal classification of the Buddha's teaching. To put it simply, the five categories are (1) Hīnayāna Teaching (小乘教 *xiaochengjiao*), (2) Mahāyāna Inception Teaching (大乘始教 *dasheng shijiao*), (3) Mahāyāna Final Teaching (大乘終教 *dasheng zhongjiao*), (4) Sudden Teaching (頓教 *dunjiao*), and (5) Complete Teaching (圓教 *yuanjiao*).¹ Complete Teaching refers to the Huayan School, and through this classification Fazang tries to demonstrate the superiority of the Huayan teaching over the teachings of other Buddhist schools. In offering this doctrinal classification, Fazang did not take much time to explain why this should be the case.²

Li Tongxuan offers his own classification of the Buddhist teachings in his *Exposition of the Eighty Fascicle Version of the Flower Ornament Scripture* (*Xin*

¹ Fazang, *Huayan wujiao zhang* (Essay on the Five Teachings of Huayan), T 45.1866.447a-509a, p. 481b.

² For a discussion of Fazang's doctrinal classification, see Liu, 1979.

Huayan jing lun 新華嚴經論; henceforth *Exposition of the Huayan jing*). The Huayan school has a tendency to consider ten as the perfect number,³ and Fazang employed ten as the entirety of the imaginary numeric system in explaining major Huayan concepts. Li was even more faithful to the idea of ten being the perfect number and the number representing Huayan Buddhism. Most of his hermeneutical devices elaborating Huayan philosophy take the form of ten. Hence we find a tenfold doctrinal classification proposed by Li Tongxuan.⁴

Like other doctrinal classifications in Chinese Buddhism, Li's classification claims the superiority of Huayan Buddhism over all preceding Buddhist teachings. It is also true that the layout of the ten different teachings is suggestive of some of the main themes of Li's Huayan thought. At the first level of the tenfold classification, Li locates (1) the Hinayana precept scriptures (*xiaosheng jiejing* 小乘戒經), which Li claims are teachings directed at the capacity of sentient beings. The main aim of these teachings is to edify sentient beings. At the second level, Li places (2) the *Sūtra of the Bodhisattva Precepts* (*Pusajie jing* 菩薩戒經). The goal of this stage of teaching is to make truth visible to sentient beings while at the same time keeping to the goal of the first level. At the third level lie the teachings of (3) the Prajñāpāramitā (般若教). This is the stage at which the Buddha teaches emptiness in order to demonstrate reality. After the teaching of emptiness through the Prajñāpāramitā literature comes the stage of (4) *The Sutra Explaining the Underlying Meaning* (*Jieshenmi jing* 解深蜜經), in which the Buddha teaches neither emptiness nor existence. The fifth stage is assigned to (5) the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (*Leng qie jing* 楞伽經), whose main teaching Li defines through the Five Laws, Three Self Natures, Eight Consciousnesses, and Twofold No-self. (6) The *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* complements the teaching of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* by emphasizing

³ T 45.1866.503b

⁴ One source of Li's biography appears in Robert M. Gimello's essay "Li T'ung-hsüan and the Practical Dimensions of Hua-yen" (Gimello 1983). In the Appendix of his essay, Gimello offers "A Translation of the Earliest Surviving Hagiography of Li T'ung-hsün," which is a translation of "A Record of the Life of the Elder Li" (*Li zhangzhe shiji* 李長者事跡) by Mazhi 馬支 around 770 (*Xuzangjing*, vol. 4, n 225-B, p. 832a-833a).

Extant records on Li's biography offer mixed information: some say that Li was from Beijing and was member of the royal family of Tang China, and others record him merely as a person from Cangzhou. The year of his birth was also recorded either as 735 or 746. See Inaoka 1981. For a list of existing records of Li Tongxuan's biography, see Yim 2008. For a discussion of Li's biography, see Koh 2011.

According to a hagiographical record of Li Tongxuan, Li began his study of the eighty fascicle *Huayan jing* around 709, at the age of 74. For the next thirteen years he would peruse the scripture in seclusion, and only after that did he begin writing the exposition. The exposition was discovered at the Shidou hermitage in 774, several decades after Li's death, by a monk named Guangchao (廣超), who then distributed it to his own disciples. Not much is known about Li's biography before he began his study of the eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing*, which was translated into Chinese in 699. Both Zhiyan and Fazang based their discussions of Huayan Buddhism on the sixty-fascicle version translated in 420.

the nonduality of purity and impurity and the state of inconceivability. Following the *Vimalakīrit-sūtra* in Li's classification are the teachings of (7) the *Lotus Sūtra*, which offers a way to reach truth through skillful means. Li assigns (8) *The Great Collection Scripture* (*Daji jing* 大集經) to the eighth stage, the goal of which is to protect the teachings of the Buddha. (9) The *Nirvana Sūtra* (*Niepan jing* 涅槃經) reveals the Buddha-nature in sentient beings, and finally, (10) The *Huayan jing* comes at the final stage, its main teachings characterized by the ideas that “the cause is perfect and effect complete, one and many are mutually interpenetrating, principle and phenomena in the realm of reality are self-reliant, and there is no obstruction in dependent arising. Therefore it is called the Buddha-vehicle.”⁵

The tenfold doctrinal classification offers a structure that is suggestive of the philosophical foundation of Li's Huayan Buddhism. Being a non-substantial mode of thinking that rejects the existence of unchanging essence as an underlying reality and a reference for epistemological and ontological reality, Buddhism has long been aware of the problems that it faces in demarcating appearance and reality. In appearance things exist with seemingly visible duration, whereas in reality, beings do not have an enduring essence. The vision is counterintuitive: if things do not maintain enduring identity, how do they attain identity at all? Moreover, the use of language and discourse to impart the Buddha's teaching ironically challenges the fundamental thesis of Buddhist thought. A linguistic system and a discourse become possible through the sustainability of their constituents, whereas Buddhism negates such durable identities. The evolution of Buddhist schools in the history of Buddhist philosophy reflects this dilemma that Buddhist thinkers of the past had to deal with: how can one construct and present a discourse using language when what is being presented through that medium challenges the sustainability inherent in the construction of a discourse? One noticeable technique that different Buddhist thinkers have employed in the effort to overcome this problem of the gap between what has come to be called, in the Buddhist tradition, “conventional” and “ultimate realities,” is an alternating emphasis on existence and non-existence. The Buddha's claim for non-self opposes the idea of emphasizing the existence of the self in the form of Atman; the Abhidharma discourse, especially that of the Sarvāstivāda School, makes efforts to present something that exists in the Buddha's theory of no-self (*anatman*) and consequently claims that dharmas exist, whereas the self does not; Madhyamika philosophy reveals the

⁵ Li Tongxuan, *Xin Huayan jing lun* (Exposition of the Eighty Fascicle Version of Flower Ornament Scripture), T 36.1739.721-1007, p.721c. From now on, citations from this text will be marked in the text. Translations from Classical Chinese in this essay are mine, unless otherwise noted.

emptiness of all dharmas, warning of the risk that Sarvāstivādin's efforts introduce, and so on.

Li's tenfold doctrinal classification well reflects this back-and-forth movement with regard to existence and nonexistence in Buddhist philosophy. At the first stage of teachings in the Hīnayana precepts, the Buddha teaches what is right and what is wrong, and which acts should be performed and which should not. Li explains that this is because the goal of the teachings at this stage is directed at the capacity of sentient beings, who understand reality in the dualistic way of good and bad, and right and wrong. This stage, however, contains its own limitations. The discourse relies on the dualistic postulation of right and wrong, and good and bad as if these binary opposites have their own substance. The bodhisattva precepts discussed in *The Sūtra of Brahma's Net* also say what to follow and what to avoid in Buddhist practice. But compared to the precepts in the Hīnayana tradition, Li claims, bodhisattva precepts aim at practitioners with a greater capacity. Both the first and second levels, however, risk the danger of reification: practitioners might consider the precepts and Buddhist teachings to exist independently of their environments, which could lead practitioners to a misconception of the reality of the world and their own existence.

The third-stage teaching of emptiness is introduced for the purpose of preventing any reification of established thought at the first two stages. The core of the teaching of the Prajñāpāramitā literature claims, in Li's words, that "[t]hree treasures, four noble truths, and three worlds are all empty, and emptiness itself is empty" (T 36.1739.722a). From Li's perspective, however, the teaching of emptiness at this stage cannot be the final and perfect teaching, because in this teaching, construction and destruction are constantly repeated: a discourse is set up, and then in order to prevent the reification of categories established by the discourse, a discourse emphasizing emptiness should follow. The discourse of emptiness, according to Li, presupposes subject-object dualism in that first there should exist the object to be destroyed; then the discourse of emptiness should destroy it. The question of whether emptiness can be understood as a synonym for destruction calls for further elaboration. However, since Li's major goal is to elaborate the Huayan vision—and he was not very sympathetic to the discourse of emptiness—Li does not dwell on this issue. What is noteworthy in this context is the temporality involved in the evolution of the first three stages. The way construction and destruction are demonstrated through the teachings of these stages follows a temporal scheme: the first two stages occur before the third stage. Li dissociates Huayan teaching from this scheme of temporality and claims that Huayan Buddhism is different from the teaching of Prajñāpāramitā, which understands that "construction and destruction occur at different time periods, and thus [in this teaching] cause comes before and fruition

after” (T 36.1739.722b). Li claims that Huayan Buddhism is not based on temporality as is employed in the Prajñāpāramitā teaching; instead, the ground of Huayan Buddhism is the concept of non-temporality (*wushi* 無時).

In the course of the evolution of Buddhism, different claims have been made by different Buddhist schools, which sometimes contradict one another. There are, however, some fundamental ideas shared by most Buddhist schools. One such idea is the understanding of the world as non-substantial reality. Buddhism holds that the fundamental structure of the world is interaction. There is no unchanging ground that serves as the source or beginning point of the world. The same applies to the existence of a being, be it a living organism or an insentient being. This structure, which, however, is not the source of the world, is known as dependent-arising.

Dependent-arising is a causal theory and is thus inevitably connected with the temporal dimension of existence. The substantialist worldview presupposes an unchanging foundation as a starting point in explaining the world and beings. The non-substantial stance underscores change as the fundamental structure of the world. The three marks of existence as taught in early Buddhism—no-self, suffering, and impermanence—are all marked by the existence of the temporal dimension in the structure of the being. However, Li points out that if the theory of dependent-arising is understood as a temporal causal theory, a blind spot exists in that approach to causality. Dependent-arising as a causal theory does not indicate linear progress from cause to effect (or its fruition). Dependent-arising does not assume that cause A will produce effect B. The understanding of dependent-arising as a single-line temporal process also generates a theory of karma based on a simple logic of accounting, which postulates that a good deed is rewarded and a bad deed is punished. On an ultimate level, this might not be a misunderstanding, but the actual accounting should be understood as much more complicated. One way of avoiding this simplistic understanding of dependent-arising and karma is to underscore the conditionality involved in the Buddhist theory of causality. Things occur on the basis of both causes and conditions. For example, if one adds a spoonful of salt to the water in a coffee mug, the water will definitely become saltier. If one adds the same amount of salt to the ocean, the increase in the degree of saltiness in the ocean water would not be recognizable by the human palate. The example demonstrates the fundamental ambiguity involved in the Buddhist concept of causality. Buddhist causal theory, in this sense, functions in a way opposite to what one might expect: it acknowledges a relationship between cause and effect, but to the degree that there are certain underlying structures of existence and that individuals are responsible for their own actions, it also indicates that the exact details of this structure are beyond one’s grasp.

Li Tongxuan's Huayan thought challenges the temporal understanding of existence, even in the context of causal theory, and claims the simultaneity of cause and effect, which Li proposes as the fundamental difference between the teachings of the Huayan School and those of other Buddhist schools. Li states,

If there were cause, which was followed by effect, the cause itself could not be established, and therefore effect also breaks down. That is because, in the law of dependent-arising, there exists no continuity; there is immediate eradication; there is no self and others. When counting one cent, if other coins that come after that one cent are not counted, because there are no two cents, [the concept of] one cent cannot be established. ... It is necessary to wait to count the second coin in order for the first count to take meaning; cause and effect are like that as well. It is necessary to realize that because there is no gap in temporality, the relationship of cause and effect come to be established. If that is the case, it is like when counting two coins, two are counted simultaneously and there is no before or after [in counting]. Which one will be the first and which the second? Likewise, in indicating two with fingers, which finger is the cause and which one the effect? Between the two fingers, following the counting in one's mind, one finger will be the cause, and the finger counted afterward will be effect. If, like this, there exists before and after, there should be the middle. In turn, there exists a disconnection between moments. If there is a disconnection between moments, cause and effect cannot be established. If simultaneity means like counting two with fingers, without before or after, what would be the cause and what the effect? Neither can be established (T 36.1739.740b).

Li's interpretation of causality and temporality requires further discussion. The theory of causality presupposes a temporal process of events happening; the present event cannot exist without the action that caused it. Li notes that the seeming temporal scheme involved in causal thinking is not logically sustainable, as a cause does not function in this way until its effect becomes apparent. For example, if one throws a ball and it breaks a window, throwing the ball is the cause, and the broken window is the effect. However, throwing the ball cannot be considered the cause until the window is broken. Similarly, when numbering 1–10, 1 comes before 2, 2 before 3, and so on. But the sense of before and after is delusive because the concept of 1 does not exist without the concept of 2 even when 1 comes first. If one insists on appealing to the idea of temporality here, time seems to move backward; the effect becomes the cause of the cause.

Logical problems also arise from the designation of cause and effect as separate units, according to Li. If cause comes at the beginning and effect at the end, there must be something in between, which indicates an interruption in events. If a gap exists between the cause and effect, the causality cannot be sustained, as the effect is influenced by what happens in between. These issues with temporality and identity occur because of the non-substantial nature of Buddhist thinking; that is, no being has an identity of itself. In his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li pays special attention to this issue and the simultaneity of cause and effect. The concept of time that aligns with the Buddha's teaching is not temporality but non-temporality, which becomes the basis of Li's Huayan soteriology.

Li was not the only person to highlight the inconsistency between causal theory and temporality in Buddhism. In his *Essay on the Five Teachings*, Fazang also uses a series of 10 coins to explain the fundamental philosophy of Huayan Buddhism, especially with regard to the Huayan concept of identity. When counting the coins, each number attains its identity because of the existence of the other numbers. As in Li's interpretation, the first of two coins counted gains its identity of "1 cent" only when the meaning of the second coin is established. In the structure of 1–10, the relationship of each number is characterized by a "reliance on dependent-arising." Neither 1 nor 10 exists by itself, and each has an identity dependent on the 1–10 system. For Fazang, this mutual dependency is key in the relationship between the part and the whole and the coexistence of existence and emptiness. Number 1, the part, exists in separation from the other nine numbers, but its identity also has emptiness to it because it only exists in relation to the 1–10 system, or the whole. Because an entity includes the nature of both existence and emptiness, or identity and non-identity, Fazang calls this "mutual identity" (*xiangji* 相卽). The concept of the part and the whole in this case differs from the common understanding of the whole as the collection of individual parts. For the collective whole, each constituent exists separately, and the whole contains these fragmented individuals. In Fazang's Huayan Buddhism, a part cannot establish its identity without already encompassing the whole in it. Fazang calls this "mutual inclusion" (*xiangru* 相入).

Mutual identity and mutual containment are also explained through the concepts of "simultaneous sudden arising" (*tongshi dunqi* 同時頓起) and "simultaneous mutual containment" (*tongshi hushe* 同時互攝), respectively. Through these, Fazang demonstrates the Huayan concept of interpenetration between noumena and phenomena and among phenomena.⁶

⁶ See especially T 45.1866.503a-505.

It is useful to compare simultaneous sudden arising and simultaneous mutual containment with the simultaneity of cause and effect. For Fazang, simultaneity is employed mainly to address two issues: the relationship between the part and whole and between existence and emptiness. These ideas are important to Fazang's explanation of the dependent-arising of the realm of reality (*fajie yuanqi* 法界緣起). Li rarely mentions the relationship between the part and whole in his discussion of Huayan Buddhism. He discusses existence and emptiness, but they are not his main concern. For Li, the non-temporality of the temporal dimension of dependent-arising is important because it demonstrates the relationship between the Buddha and the sentient being.

2. Non-Temporality and Nature-Origination

Philosophical discourses generally take one of two positions with regard to time. For convenience, I will loosely identify them as inclusive and exclusive stances toward temporality. The former considers time to be an element inseparable from a being's existence. The latter assumes that a being is intact from a temporal dimension. Buddhism belongs to the first category. In the Buddhist worldview, existence means change, and existence is inevitably temporal and spatial. Non-temporality, which Li Tongxuan takes as the core of his Huayan thought, is distinguished from both positions.

In his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li refers several times to the concept of non-temporality as he emphasizes the differences between the teaching of "the three vehicles" and that of "the one vehicle." According to the teaching of the three vehicles, Li claims, one attains enlightenment temporally; in teaching of the one vehicle, temporal duration does not apply. Li understands temporality as an aspect of subject-object dualism because the idea of temporal movements is anchored on the assumption of separable identity. In a temporal understanding of causality, the cause comes before the effect, and the effect after the cause. The negation of temporal duration in Li's philosophy, however, does not negate time and create a static reality. Rather, temporality without duration represents the constellation of all the time schemes of past, present, and future at a single moment. The world, or existence, according to Li, does not move toward a goal for its completion. It is complete as it is at each moment.

One way of explaining the difference between simple temporality and the non-temporality of temporality to compare Li's concept of nature-arising (*xingqi* 性起) with the doctrine of dependent-arising (*yuanqi* 緣起). Dependent-arising contends that things arise by depending on other things. This concept rejects the identity principle, as identity in this case is possible only by virtue of the existence of non-identity. The concept of "A" becomes possible through the participation of "non-A"; by this logic, the alleged independent status of "A" loses its ground.

If we apply the same idea to the doctrine of dependent-arising, we find that both the “arising” and the “others” on which the dependency takes place are, in fact, provisional concepts. There are no independent “others” to be dependent upon, and by the same token, no arising is taking place to lead to the identity of that which is arising. “Arising”—as the gerund form of the word suggests—indicates a process, a happening, rather than a simple arising to generate a fixed identity. This means that even though arising happens dependently, in the ultimate sense, there is non-arising. In this sense, Huayan Buddhism understands dependent-arising as non-arising, and this non-arising is called nature-arising. Zhiyan, the second patriarch of Chinese Huayan Buddhism, states, “Nature-arising clarifies the ultimate sense of dependent-arising of the realm of reality in the one vehicle. [A thing is] originally in its ultimate state, and this is not something that can be attained through cultivation. Why is it so? [It is because things] do not have forms. . . . By virtue of the nature of dependent-arising, it is called ‘arising,’ but this arising is non-arising, and non-arising is nature-arising.”⁷

Dependent-arising, non-arising, and nature-arising can thus be understood as three aspects of the same phenomenon. Dependent-arising explains the structure of a being from the perspective of existence, whereas non-arising looks at the movement from the ultimate perspective and sees no arising in the sense of the occurrence of a separate identity. However, the impossibility of establishing the identity of the event of arising is the very nature of things, whose existence is subject to dependent-arising, and hence nature-arising.

In theory, the source of the doctrine of nature-arising can be traced to the chapter “Appearance of Tathāgata (如來出現品)” of the eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing* or the chapter “Arising of the Nature of Tathāgata, the Jewel King (寶王如來性起品)” of the sixty-fascicle *Huayan jing*.⁸ Like the doctrine of dependent-arising, the concept of

⁷ Zhiyan, *Huayan kongmu zhang*, T 45.1870.536a-589b, p. 580c.

⁸ *Huayan jing* exists in three different translations which are also three different versions: (1) the sixty-fascicle version was translated by Buddhahadra 佛馱跋陀 around 420; (2) the eighty-fascicle version was translated by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 around 699; and (3) the forty-fascicle version was translated by Prajñā 般若 around 800. The sixty-fascicle is also known as the *Old Sūtra* (*Jiujing* 舊經) and the eighty-fascicle as the *New Sūtra* (*Xinjing* 新經). The forty-fascicle version contains only the “Entering the Realm of Reality” (*Ru fajie pin* 入法界品) chapter which is the thirty-fourth chapter of the sixty-fascicle *Huayan jing*, and the thirty-ninth chapter of the eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing*. It is important for our discussion to be aware of the existence of three different versions of the *Huayan jing*, since Li Tongxuan’s discussion of Huayan Buddhism is based on the eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing*.

For a discussion on the composition and circulation of the three versions of *Huayan jing*, see Haeju sunim 1999: 23–24. Haeju points out that the *Huayan jing* was not composed as one unified *sūtra*, but the *sūtra* was created over a period of time; also see Kyehwan 1996: 17–37; and Cook 1977. In Cook’s book, see especially Chapter 2, which discusses the translation of the *sūtra*, and Chapter 3, which discusses the Indian background of Huayan Buddhism. It seems that scholars generally agree that at least two

nature-arising risks assuming a certain reified concept of “nature.” When nature is understood as the specific characteristics that exclusively belong to Tathāgata, the theory of nature-arising becomes an idealist and essentialist philosophy that assumes a certain quality beyond phenomenal reality and takes this as the foundation for the understanding of other beings. Li challenges this potentially idealist twist to the theory of nature-arising and identifies it with “great wisdom” and also with “the Buddha of the Unmoving Wisdom” (*Budong zhifo* 不動智佛), another important concept of his Huayan Buddhism.

At the core of Li’s Huayan thought lies the contention that there is no difference between the Buddha and the sentient being. For Li, the sentient being and the Buddha are fundamentally made of the same material, which he calls wisdom, fundamental wisdom, or the unmoving wisdom. This wisdom is the ground of both the Buddha and the sentient being. Li states, “Between the Tathāgata and all the sentient beings, there is originally no difference. They are both one mind and one wisdom. All the Buddhas, with the wisdom in the mind of sentient beings, attain the correct enlightenment. All sentient beings are confused about the wisdom of all the Buddhas and make themselves sentient beings” (T 36.1739.853c).

Li repeatedly emphasizes that no ontological difference exists between the Buddha and sentient beings; the alleged difference arises from epistemological confusion about the ontological reality of one’s existence. Li presents the Buddha of the Unmoving Wisdom as the grounds of his claim for this identity. The Buddha of the Unmoving Wisdom is one of the ten Buddhas of Wisdom who appear in the chapter “The Tathāgata’s Epithets” in the *Huayan jing* (both in the 60-fascicle and 80-fascicle versions). For Li, the Buddha of the Unmoving Wisdom is the body or essence of the Buddha’s wisdom, and this is the original wisdom of universal bright light (*genben puguangmingzhi* 根本普光明智) of the Buddha. Here, “unmoving” means that “the wisdom of one’s mind recognizes the differences [in the world] but is not affected by it, and thus does not move” (T 36.1739.766b). Li understands wisdom, the content of this unmoving reality, as the essence of the Buddha, which also means that, for Li, wisdom is the essence of the sentient being. Wisdom is the essence of both the Buddha and the sentient being, but this “original wisdom” is not a certain essence with substantial features. As Li emphasizes, the wisdom that is the foundation of the Buddha and the sentient being has no self-nature. Li’s identification of nature-arising with fundamental wisdom, which does not have self-nature, negates any possibility of reifying “nature” in

chapters of the *Huayan jing* exist in Sanskrit: the chapter on “Ten Stages” (*Shidi pin* 十地品 *Daśabhūmika*) and the chapter “Entering the Realm of Reality” (*Ru fajie pin* 入法界品 *Gaṇḍavyūha*). For major themes of Huayan Buddhism, see Nakamura 1960; Kamata 1988; and, in English, Chang 1971.

“nature-arising” as an essence of some sort. Li explains this absolute non-substantiality of wisdom through its relation to ignorance, the cause of the sentient being’s unenlightened status. One might think that upon attaining awakening, ignorance would be completely removed. However, Li states that awakening does not eradicate ignorance because ignorance itself does not have self-nature and cannot be removed.

Li contends that in the teachings of the three vehicles, one demonstrates that it hates suffering and attachment and embraces cessation and the path leading to the cessation. In the teaching of the one vehicle, one realizes that suffering and path, attachment and cessation are the same, since none of them has self-nature. Wisdom, which is the fundamental element of both the Buddha and the sentient being, is for Li the same as ignorance, the cause of the sentient being’s delusion. Wisdom does not have self-nature and thus cannot have any binding effect to lead the sentient being to enlightenment.

The non-temporality of temporality, nature-arising qua non-arising, is the theoretical foundation of Li’s claim for the simultaneity of cause and fruition. This simultaneity is important for Li because it is the grounds of the absolute identity of the Buddha and the sentient being. Here lies the difference between Li Tongxuan’s Huayan thought and that of “orthodox” Huayan thinkers. For Fazang, Huayan is about the dependent-arising of the *dharmadhātu* (or the realm of reality), which, for him, demonstrates the unobstructed interpenetration among phenomena by virtue of each phenomenon’s sharing the same principle, which is emptiness. For Li, phenomena are important in order to demonstrate the sameness of identity between the Buddha and the sentient being.

Li’s analysis of the structure of the *Huayan jing* also demonstrates Li’s emphasis on the absolute identity of the Buddha and the sentient being and his claim that the *Huayan jing* is about this sameness so as to lead the sentient beings to the realization of their original nature. The 80-fascicle *Huayan jing* consists of 39 chapters, with the chapter “Entering the Realm of Reality” at the end. In his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li claims that there is one chapter missing in the existing 80-fascicle *Huayan jing*, and therefore, the *Huayan jing* should have 40 chapters instead of the current 39. He bases this interesting claim on passages from the *Bead-Ornamented Primary Activities of Bodhisattvas* (Pusa yingluo benye jing 菩薩瓔珞本業經). Li addresses the section in the sūtra in which the Buddha states that he would teach the eleventh stage, after having taught the Ten Stages. The eleventh stage would be the stage involving entering the realm of reality, in which the Buddha would teach how to open up the minds of sentient beings to the teachings of the Buddha. Li proposes that this

chapter on the eleventh state of equal awakening should be called “Chapter on Buddha Flowers” (*fohuapin* 佛華品) and should have been placed after the chapter “Ten Stages” (T 36.1739.761c-762a).

This claim accords well with another of Li’s claims regarding the structure of *Huayan jing*. In his structural analysis of *Huayan jing*, Zhiyan proposes the three sectional divisions of introduction, main body, and distributional sections.⁹ Based on the 60-fascicle *Huayan jing*, Zhiyan identifies the sections following the “Chapter on Vairocana” as the main body of the *Huayan jing*. In other words, the first chapter serves as an introduction, and chapters 2 to 34 variously discuss the main themes of the sūtra. Zhiyan states that the *Huayan jing* does not contain a dissemination section.¹⁰ Fazang follows Zhiyan’s structural division in his commentary on the *Huayan jing* and declares that the first chapter is the introduction and the second chapter and onward is the main section of the *Huayan jing*.¹¹ In his own structural analysis, Li Tongxuan suggests a division that is radically different from those proposed by Zhiyan and Fazang. Li claims that “Entering the Realm of Reality,” the last and 39th chapter of the *Huayan jing*, is the main section of the scripture and that the rest are accompanying chapters. This difference between Zhiyan and Fazang’s structural analysis of the *Huayan jing*, and that of Li, is not a mere structural issue but directly relates to the difference in their understanding of the essence of Huayan philosophy. In the following section, we will discuss Li’s interpretation of the “Entering the Realm of Reality” chapter in more depth and will examine how this last chapter of *Huayan jing* demonstrates the core concepts in Li’s Huayan philosophy.

3. Non-temporality and Sudden Enlightenment: Dragon Girl and the Youth Sudhana

Li Tongxuan interprets “Entering the Realm of Reality” as the core of the *Huayan jing*, which places Li in a different position in his reading of the *Huayan jing* in comparison with Zhiyan and Fazang. In the *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li emphasizes that “Entering the Realm of Reality” is the main chapter of this scripture and that the youth Sudhana, the main character of the chapter, is the “primary marker that demonstrates the teachings of this scripture” (T 36.1739.731c). In discussing the “Entering the Realm of Reality” chapter and Sudhana’s pilgrimage, Li compares Sudhana with the dragon girl who appears in the *Lotus Sūtra*. For Li, both Sudhana and

⁹ Zhiyan, *Suxuan ji* (Record of Searching the Profound Meaning [of the Flower Garland Scripture]) T 35.1732.13b-106b, p. 16a.

¹⁰ Zhiyan, T 35.1732.16b.

¹¹ Fazang, *Huayan tanxuan ji*, T 35.1733.107a-492b, p. 125a.

the dragon girl demonstrate the subitist nature of enlightenment, the primary teaching of the one vehicle of Huayan Buddhism.

The story of the dragon girl in the *Lotus Sūtra* has recently attracted scholars' attention, mostly in the context of "gender trouble" in the Buddhist tradition. Whether the body transformation discourse of Mahāyāna Buddhism, including that of the dragon girl, supports the idea that women can attain Buddhahood has been at the center of scholars' interpretation of the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. As expected, gender was not what sparked Li's interest in the dragon girl's story. However, his repeated mentioning of the dragon girl in comparison with the youth Sudhana suggests the importance of this story in Li's philosophical paradigm. In his tenfold doctrinal classification, the *Lotus Sūtra* is located at the seventh level, which comes after the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* and before the *Nirvana Sūtra*. Though the *Nirvana Sūtra* is located at the ninth stage, just before the *Huayan jing*, Li pays more attention to the *Lotus Sūtra*, and more specifically, to the story of the dragon girl. The *Nirvana Sūtra* confirms that the Buddha-nature exists in all sentient beings. For Li, the confirmation of the existence of the Buddha-nature is not sufficient to inspire the practitioner, since what needs to be confirmed is the happening of this Buddha-nature, which Li sees taking place in the dragon girl in the *Lotus Sūtra* and in Sudhana in the *Huayan jing*.

The dragon girl of the *Lotus Sūtra* is a figure who combines various unfavorable conditions for enlightenment: She is a female, she is a child of only eight years, and she is a sub-human creature. These features promote the efficacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* for attaining sudden enlightenment. Asked about a case that proves the speedy enlightenment taught by the *Lotus Sūtra*, Mañjuśri presents the story of the dragon girl, stating that "at the very moment she aroused the mind to achieve enlightenment, she attained the state of non-retrogression and unimpeded eloquence."¹² Hearing this story of the marvelous enlightenment of the dragon girl, Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation, the dialoguer of Mañjuśri, expresses his suspicion about the idea that enlightenment can take place in such a short time, when various scriptures mention the kalpas of time that Tathāgata had to go through before attaining enlightenment. At that moment, the dragon girl herself makes a sudden appearance and confirms through a gatha that she has attained enlightenment. Having heard the dragon girl's confirmation of her achievement, Śāriputra, the wise disciple of the Buddha, expresses his doubts. Śāriputra says, "You state that in no length of time you attained the supreme Way. This thing is hard to believe. Wherefore? [Because] the body of a woman is filthy and not a vessel of the Law.

¹² Miaofa lianhua jing, T 9.262.35b.

How can she attain supreme Bodhi? The Buddha-way is so vast that only after passing through innumerable kalpas, enduring hardship, accumulating good works, and perfectly practicing the Perfections can it be accomplished.”¹³ Śariputra, though number one in wisdom among the Buddha’s disciples, is an arhat who follows the gradual teaching. In Śariputra’s view, a certain gender has the capacity to attain enlightenment—the male gender—and the female gender does not; and enlightenment cannot but be a gradual process that requires kalpas of time for completion. According to Li Tongxuan, these views were exactly what the *Lotus Sūtra* is challenging. Li states,

That the dragon girl is only eight years old indicates that her knowledge is attained only this life time, but not that which was accumulated in previous lives; that she was a sub-human creature means that she has not accumulated practice in the past. This indicates that the principle of the law that she believes in this life is straightforward and without stagnation, that the essence of the realm of reality is not reaped through three worlds, but that when one thought corresponds to truth, then the discrimination of the three worlds is all exhausted. Wisdom neither appears nor disappears, which is the fruition of the Buddha. (T 36.1739.768b-c)

For Li, the dragon girl is the very manifestation of the absolute suddenness of enlightenment. The dragon girl’s enlightenment, for Li, is the enlightenment of a moment (*chana chengfo* 剎那成佛). The idea that enlightenment can be attained not through gradual progress over kalpas of time, but in a moment, is counterintuitive. If enlightenment can be attained in a moment, why has everybody not already attained enlightenment? The moment (*chana* 剎那) is the shortest measure of time in Buddhism. The moment, however, does not imply actual length or duration of time here, because the dragon girl is eight years old; however short these eight years might be compared to the “innumerable kalpas,” eight years is not a “moment” either. Hence the moment designates, rather than the length of time, the non-temporality of time in Buddhist enlightenment.

Like the dragon girl, who attained enlightenment in a moment, the youth Sudhana represents the idea that enlightenment can be attained in this lifetime, rather than only through kalpas of practice. The dragon girl’s enlightenment is the enlightenment of a moment, and the youth Sudhana’s enlightenment is enlightenment

¹³ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. 9.262.35c; English translation by Katō, Yoshirō Tamura, and Kōurō Miyasaka, p. 213.

in a single lifetime (*yisheng chengfo* 一生成佛). In identifying Sudhana's pilgrimage as the attainment of Buddhahood in a single lifetime, Li explains the meaning of "a single lifetime" as follows: "Once an unenlightened person raises faith, at the beginning of the ten stages, the person accords with no-life. In other words, this is a single lifetime based on the wisdom of the realm of reality not based on one's karma" (T 36.1739.768c). Both the one moment of the dragon girl's enlightenment and Sudhana's enlightenment of a single lifetime challenge the common sense concept of time and introduce Li's vision of non-temporality. This is the concept of temporality in which the shortest measure of time (a moment) has the same meaning as non-temporality with duration. Sudhana's enlightenment is attained in a single lifetime, in the sense that there is only one and not two, three, or four lifetimes, and in the sense that this single lifetime is eternal, as is demonstrated in the journey of Sudhana in "Entering the Realm of Reality."

In the chapter "Entering the Realm of Reality," a young truth seeker named Sudhana is determined to learn to practice the bodhisattva path, having been encouraged by Mañjuśrī's (Manjushri's) recognition that he has accumulated the roots of goodness. Sudhana asks Mañjuśrī,

Noble One, please give me a full explanation of how an enlightening being [bodhisattva] is to study the practice of enlightening beings, [of] how an enlightening being is to accomplish this. How is an enlightening being to initiate the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to carry out the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to fulfill the practice of enlightening beings? ...How can an enlightening being fulfill the sphere of the universally good practice?"¹⁴

Instead of offering answers, Mañjuśrī directs the young pilgrim to a monk named Maghaśrī. Mañjuśrī tells the young truth seeker,

Go to him and ask how an enlightening being [bodhisattva] should learn the conduct of enlightening beings, and how to apply it; how one is to fulfill, purify, enter into, carry out, follow, keep to, and expand the practice of enlightening beings; and how an enlightening being is to fulfill the sphere of universally good action. That spiritual friend will tell you about the sphere of universally good conduct.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Huayan jing*, T 10.279.1a-444c, p. 333c. English translation by Cleary, 1993, p. 1178.

¹⁵ T 10.279.334a; English translation by Cleary, 1993, p.1179.

When he heard this, Sudhana was “pleased, enraptured, transported with joy, delighted, happy, and cheerful, laid his head at the feet of Manjushri in respect, circled Manjushri hundreds and thousands of times, and looked at him hundreds and thousands of times, with a mind full of love for his spiritual friend, unable to bear not seeing his spiritual friend; and with tears streaming down his face, he wept and left Manjushri.”¹⁶ This description might be exaggerated, but it is clear that the young pilgrim was joyful at the thought that he might finally complete his search for truth and learn about the way of the bodhisattva practice “once and for all.”

When he meets Maghaśri, however, Sudhana realizes that Maghaśri is not the only teacher he needs to learn from. Each of Sudhana’s teachers, beginning with Maghaśri, refers him to yet another after sharing the truth about spiritual practice that he or she has learned. In Sudhana’s pilgrimage to find the bodhisattva path, meaning and truth are continually deferred, so that no final goal is promised, unlike in a teleological progression that always moves toward a fixed destination. The youth Sudhana, who was directed to monk Maghaśri by Mañjuśri, is then referred to the monk Sagaramegha; Sagaramegha refers him to the monk Supratishthita; and so on until Sudhana has met fifty-three dharma teachers. Interestingly, his spiritual benefactors are not exclusively monks and nuns. They include a grammarian (Megha), a distinguished man (Muktaka), a laywoman (Asha), a seer (Bhishmottaranirghosha), a girl (Maitrayai), a boy (Indriyeshvara), a perfumer (Samantanetra), a king (Anala), a mariner (Vaira), a nun (Sinhavijumbhita), a bodhisattva (Avalokiteshvara), and an earth goddess (Sthavara) in addition to Manjushri, Maitreya, Vairocana, and Shamantabhadra, the spiritual benefactors of traditional Buddhism. Using a modern expression, one might call this list politically correct: it includes monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, kings, goddesses, girls, boys, and regular workers.

Both the dragon girl and the youth Sudhana represent the enlightenment of non-temporality. Li, however, claims that there is a significant difference between the two, and this, for him, is why Huayan teaching is the complete teaching despite the fact that both the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Huayan jing* demonstrate the teachings of the one vehicle. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, the dragon girl goes to the world of purity in the “southern quarter,” as she attains the correct enlightenment,¹⁷ and the whole gathered assembly is “watching” her attain enlightenment. Li interprets this process as a gap between the dragon girl, who attains the sudden enlightenment, and other beings who are yet to attain enlightenment. In this reading, the dragon girl’s story

¹⁶ T 10.279.334; English translation by Cleary, 1993, pp. 1179-1180.

¹⁷ Miaofa lianhua jing, T 9.262.35c.

demonstrates its own contradiction: Enlightenment is sudden, and no temporality is involved, which for Li is because the Buddha (the enlightened) and the sentient beings (the unenlightened) are both grounded on the Buddha of the Unmoving Wisdom. In the dragon girl's story, however, the duality between the two remains until the end of the chapter.

The case of Sudhana, in Li's view, is exactly the opposite. One reason Li claims that "Entering the Realm of Reality" is the main chapter of the sutra is that the earlier chapters are addressed to bodhisattvas, voice-hearers, and the lords of the world, but in this chapter the teaching is finally open to lead the sentient beings to enter the realm of reality (T 36.1739.948c).

At the beginning of the *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li defines the *Huayan jing* as follows:

The Great Essential and Extensive Flower Garland Scripture illuminates the original reality of the sentient being and demonstrates the source of fruition of all the Buddhas. The original reality cannot be accomplished through meritorious deeds; the source [of the fruition of all the Buddhas] cannot be attained through practice; when meritorious deeds are removed, the original reality would be attained; when the practice is exhausted, the source will be accomplished. (T 36.1739.721a)

Huayan Buddhism is usually understood as a gradualist paradigm that suggests a step-by-step cultivation toward Buddhahood. The five positions of bodhisattva practice offered in the scripture explain the advancement of bodhisattva practice through Ten Faiths, Ten Abidings, Ten Practices, Ten Dedications of Merits, and Ten Stages. These are the stages at which causes and the fruition of causes take place in the bodhisattva's path toward enlightenment. However, another aspect of the *Huayan jing* contradicts and challenges the temporal progress innate in the Huayan Buddhist soteriology. One passage frequently cited as the epitome of the Huayan vision reads, "At the first moment of arousing of the bodhisattva mind, correct enlightenment is immediately attained" (*chū fāxīn shí biān chéng zhèngjué* 初發心時便成正覺).¹⁸ At the beginning of the *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li presents this idea as the fundamental tenet of the Huayan teaching, and thus locates the *Huayan jing* at the tenth level of his tenfold doctrinal classification (T 36.1739.731a). The passage demonstrates the subitist nature of enlightenment. But how do these two visions, the one gradual and the other subitist, work together? If correct

¹⁸ *Huayan jing*, T 9.278.449c.

enlightenment is attained at the very first moment of arousing the mind to practice the bodhisattva path, why are all 52 stages necessary?¹⁹

In the case of Li's Huayan Buddhism, it is possible to answer this by referring to his emphasis on phenomena. In his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li declares: "The *Huayan jing* demonstrates the law through phenomena; there is no phenomenon that does not represent the law" (T 36.1739.752a). The orthodox Huayan thinkers underscore the relationship between noumena and phenomena. The fourfold worldview, which is the hallmark of Huayan Buddhism, calls for unobstructed interpenetration among phenomena. Li rarely mentions noumena, but he constantly emphasizes phenomena as the basis of Huayan teaching. As his concept of non-temporality demonstrates, the phenomena are the reality and there is no principle that exists apart from them. However, each phenomenon is itself a representation of the noumenon—if we insist in using that expression. Phenomena are characterized by their multiplicity and diversity; unlike the noumenon, which can subsume all diversity into one principle that represents its manifestation, phenomena are innumerable.

Li interprets Sudhana's journey as opening the way to lead sentient beings into the realm of reality, which consists of diverse sentient beings. The bodhisattva's vow recognizes the innumerableness of the sentient beings for whom bodhisattvas should exercise their vows. This can only be an endless journey, because, as the vow says, there will be no end to the existence of sentient beings, and thus no end of the bodhisattvas' work.

In this case, sentient beings should be understood not simply as unenlightened beings, and the "end" is not meant in the sense of a teleological linear paradigm. Instead, it is the awareness of the phenomenality of reality, in which no phenomena ever have a closed identity and no two are ever the same. Sudhana's pilgrimage is a journey through the phenomenal world in which each phenomenon must be understood in its own context, new contexts are always created by different causes and conditions, and there will be no end to new conditions and causes. Apart from contexts generated by conditions and causes, there is no essence of a being in the Buddhist paradigm of ontology. In other words, phenomena are subject to absolute openness. Fazang characterizes this open context through its "inexhaustibility" (*chongchongwujin* 重重無盡).

¹⁹ The 52 stages of the Huayan practice includes Ten Faiths, Ten Abidings, Ten Practices, Ten Dedications of Merits, Ten Stages, and Perfect Enlightenment (等覺 51st stage) and Marvelous Enlightenment (妙覺 52nd stage).

The Huayan Buddhist subitist-gradual paradigm insists that each moment is complete as it is; this is meant in the sense that each phenomenon represents the law. At the same time, each moment is also subject to change, and these changes represent the nature of existence in Buddhism. Each moment of life is complete as it is, but it also immediately opens to changing reality. The sense of completion here does not last to turn it into a realm of reification.

4. Returning to the Phenomenal World Once Again

In Li Tongxuan's Huayan philosophy, one finds that the Buddhist concept of nonduality and Huayan Buddhism's emphasis on phenomena reach their apex. For Li, the fundamental value of these theories lies in illuminating to sentient beings their ontological foundation, which is the sameness between them and the Buddha: There is no difference between the Buddha and sentient beings, and this is so ontologically. The existential reality, however, is that because sentient beings are constantly and consistently generating dispositional discriminations, a gap exists between the ontological and existential realities of the sentient beings who fail to face their own reality that they are Buddhas as they are. If sentient beings and the Buddha are absolutely identical, but also in reality, the sentient beings make themselves into sentient beings, how do sentient beings become awakened to their ontological reality? How does this transformation occur? Li answers this question by resorting to the idea of nonduality and at the same time no-self, the two fundamental concepts in Buddhism. The following dialogue between Li and his questioner helps us understand this issue.

Question: All sentient beings originally possess the unmoving wisdom. Why then do they not naturally follow truth and always maintain clarity? Why do they tend toward defilements?

Answer: All sentient beings have this wisdom and thus give rise to the three realms. Wisdom does not have self-nature, and thus it is not possible to know by itself correct or wrong wisdom, good and evil, pain and pleasure. The essence of wisdom does not have self-nature; in accord with conditions it appears, as echoes in the air make sounds in response to things. (T 361739.813a)

This portion of the dialogue explains why even though sentient beings possess the same quality as the Buddha, the quality does not seem to be activated in the sentient being. What is called wisdom—the original wisdom, or the unmoving wisdom, which Li time and again emphasizes as the foundation of both the Buddha and the sentient being—does not have a self-nature. The linguistic illusion that so

naturally attaches a positive or even moral connotation to the word *wisdom* needs to be put on hold in order to understand Li's concept of wisdom. Buddhism dictates that nothing in the world has an unchanging essence. The rule also applies to wisdom: wisdom does not have self-nature. This might not be a surprising claim in the context of Buddhist philosophy. However, such a claim could still be confusing. Having no character of its own, "wisdom" cannot generate a guiding power for the subject. The familiar concept of "should" or "should not" that edifies individuals and forces them to move toward a certain direction in their soteriological and existential journeys cannot apply, because in the case of Li's wisdom, it lacks such regulatory power. After having emphasized that all sentient beings always possess the unmoving wisdom, Li warns, referring to the passage from the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, which states that wisdom generates both suffering and joy:

This passage means that all sentient beings are deluded by the original wisdom, and thus there exists suffering and joy in the world. Since wisdom does not have self-nature, in accordance with conditions, when one does not attain awakening, suffering and joy are created. Since wisdom does not have self-nature, suffering fetters [one]. In the meantime one comes to be able to realize that there is originally no self-nature, and all *dharmas* [things] are quiet. As the person who falls on the ground stands up with the support of the ground, so do all the sentient beings fall because of the original wisdom in their minds; and because of the original wisdom in their minds, they arise. (T 36.1739.812b-c)

Wisdom does not have self-nature and cannot function as an active guiding force. Various environments of the subject's reality create pains and pleasures following the conditions generated by the situation. Pain and pleasure occur because wisdom, which is the inner state of sentient beings and marks the quality and character of their minds, has no self-nature and thus stays neutral. This non-quality or non-characteristic character of wisdom also makes it possible for sentient beings to overcome the state called the sentient-being. That is because if wisdom is marked by wisdom-ness, which sentient beings possess, this wisdom-qua-sentient-being-ness should be removed in order for sentient beings to move toward Buddhahood. However, in Li's Huayan Buddhism, the movement from the status of sentient being to Buddhahood occurs with great suddenness because no wisdom-ness or sentient-being-ness exists: what caused the fall of the sentient being (the wisdom that lacks the regulatory power to guide the sentient being because of its lack of self-nature) is also what makes the rise possible (the wisdom that lacks the self-nature; hence, that the sentient beings do not need to newly acquire). Since there exists no essence of sentient being or of the Buddha, Huayan

Buddhism claims that at the moment when one first arouses the mind to attain enlightenment, one attains perfect enlightenment.

How does the sudden turning point from the sentient being to the Buddha occur? How do sentient beings come to realize the original nature of all things, which is no-self-nature? In answering this question, Li resorts to the fundamental theme of Buddhist philosophy: the awareness of existential suffering. Li states,

With life and death, the suffering of the sentient being is endless. Since suffering is endless, one comes to search for the way of no-suffering. If one is confused and is not aware of suffering, one is not capable of arousing the mind [to overcome suffering and thus to attain enlightenment]. If one is aware of suffering and searches for truth, one returns to this original wisdom. Realizing the conditions of suffering [or the conditionality of suffering], one is capable of knowing suffering; not realizing the conditions of suffering, one is not capable of knowing suffering. Knowing the conditions of suffering, one becomes capable of arousing the mind and searching for the unsurpassed path [to enlightenment]. (T 36.1739.813a)

After all, Li's Huayan thoughts are anchored to the very first teaching of Buddhism, the first noble truth of suffering. The sequence of life and death occurs according to the twelve chains of the dependent-arising of Buddhism and as a consequence of one's failure to see the reality of the non-self of things. This is the source of suffering, and Li claims that this suffering should enable sentient beings eventually to turn around the flow of their habitual life and search for the way to overcome suffering. It is not just suffering per se that makes this transition possible, but the realization that suffering itself does not have its own independent identity. When subjects become aware of the existence of suffering in their lives, they search for a way to overcome it and come to realize that suffering, the object that they try to avoid and remove from their lives, in fact does not have an essence to be removed, but arises in accordance with conditions. Knowing the conditions and conditionality of suffering leads subjects to the very conditionality of their own existence and that of other things in the world.

Does this mean that we need to experience a maximum level of suffering before turning around the flow of life as an unenlightened being? How much suffering is enough to facilitate this turning point? Li's emphasis on non-temporality also applies here. The intensity of the suffering that Li mentions as being the facilitator of a turning point does not involve the actual quantity of suffering one has to deal with in life.

Rather, one can interpret Li's position as a claim that a certain form of inner transformation of the subject is required for an awakening to take place. This is the fundamental requirement for awakening in Li's Huayan Buddhist philosophy. This is why, as has been recognized, Li's Huayan thought has been well received by Chan Buddhists compared to Huayan Buddhists in the orthodox tradition. This is also why Li emphasizes that awakening is not a matter of the cultivation of the kalpas of time, but is rather an occurrence in a moment of life.

Another fundamental element is required in Li's paradigm of awakening through internal revolution. Li calls it "faith." Faith for Li is a gate that leads the sentient being to the awareness of the ontological sameness between the Buddha and the sentient being. For Li, faith does not indicate faith *in* external objects; faith is an awakening or happening in the individual's ontological reality, and in this sense, it should be distinguished from the concept of faith that requires external power as the object of one's faith. Robert Gimello describes the meaning of faith according to Li as follows:

The grounds for such confidence [on the identity between the Buddha and the sentient being] ... lie in the realization that what is called "faith," even its merest incipience, is in fact not just a means to a distant end but rather the proleptic presence of that end within the very precincts of ignorance and suffering. "Faith" or confidence in the possibility of enlightenment is nothing but enlightenment itself, in an anticipatory and causative modality. Were sentient beings themselves incapable of successful pursuit of the goal, were that capability not resident in their very natures, there would, on standard Buddhist premises, be no external agency to endow them with that capability. (Gimello, 1983, p. 337)

Another characteristic of Li's Huayan thought is "absolute nonduality." Nonduality between cause and effect (fruition) is the foundation of his concept of simultaneity of cause and effect, which appears as the non-temporality of temporality. Nonduality between the Buddha and the sentient being is also the foundation of his Buddhist soteriology, and this nonduality is the grounds of individual salvation or enlightenment. If sentient beings are not the Buddha themselves, there is no way for them to attain enlightenment in the process of causal theory, upon which the Buddhist worldview lies.

Within this context, we can summarize two major issues as the core of Li's inquiry. First is the existential awakening of the subject to the reality that unmoving wisdom is the foundation of both the Buddha and the sentient being, the realization of which Li

characterizes as sudden enlightenment. The second is the emphasis of Huayan teachings that what demonstrates phenomena embodies the very mark of the law. As an example of the former, Li presents the dragon girl and the youth Sudhana, and for the latter, he describes Sudhana's pilgrimage through the realm of reality where he encounters the 53 dharma teachers. The former made it possible for Chan Buddhists to adopt Li's theory in the Chan vision of sudden enlightenment, which is grounded in the identity between the mind of the sentient being and the Buddha. The latter connects Li with more orthodox Chinese Huayan thinkers, whose fourfold worldview accentuates the unobstructed interpenetration among phenomena.

With regard to the awakening of sentient beings to their original wisdom, one might still ask whether the realization of suffering actually generates faith in the identity between the Buddha and sentient beings, leading the sentient beings to arouse their minds. Or, more specifically, one might ask whether that turning point occurs as naturally as Li indicates it does. Chan Buddhists must have felt that Li's theory falls short of being practical, even though they welcomed Li's claim about the identity between the sentient being and the Buddha. The 13th-century Korean Sōn Master Pojo Chinul (普照知訥 1158-1210) provides an example for looking at the Chan/Sōn/Zenist position on this issue. As has been well recognized, Chinul adopted Li Tongxuan's philosophy of Huayan Buddhism, especially that articulated in his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, and employed it as a philosophical grounds for his Sōn Buddhism. However, despite all his admiration for Li's Huayan Buddhism, Chinul does not contend that the sentient being's awareness would naturally occur through the realization of suffering, as Li proposed. Instead, in a treatise introducing Kanhua Chan,²⁰ Chinul emphasizes that Huayan and Chan schools are not different in their teachings but Huayan Buddhism demonstrates the law of the world from the perspective of the one who has already attained the law, whereas Chan/Sōn Buddhism tells the sentient being how to get to that world of the enlightened.²¹

From the Chan Buddhist perspective, the subitist nature of awakening that claims the sentient-being-qua-the Buddha does not change the status of the sentient being until the "moment" of inner transformation actually takes place. This "moment" of transformation requires either a significant duration of time with constant and consistent practice or a radical measure such as *gongan* (公案), as was developed by the Chan

²⁰ Kanhua Chan is a branch of the gongan Chan tradition. Dahui Zonggao (大慧宗杲 1089-1163) is credited to have developed this form of meditation. The Gonggan Chan employs the case story (*gongan*) for meditation. In the Kanhua Chan, practitioners employ one word or a phrase in a gongan and relying on that word or phrase in meditation practice. The Korean Sōn master Chinul adopted this meditation at the later period in his life and credited it as the most effective form to attain awakening.

²¹ Pojo Chinul, *Kanhwa kyōrui ron, Han'guk Pulgyo Chōnsō*, vol. 4 (pp. 732c-737c), p. 733c.

Buddhist tradition. Compared to the fourfold worldview and the vision of the unobstructed interpenetration of the realm of reality proposed by other Huayan thinkers, Li's Huayan Buddhism focuses more on the sentient being and how the Huayan emphasis on phenomena illuminates the sentient being's ontological reality so it can provide the grounds for the sentient being's awakening. However, throughout his *Exposition of the Huayan jing*, Li rarely addresses the issues of differences and diversities among different beings. Phenomenal diversity for Li, as for other Huayan thinkers, is addressed only to be remolded into a frame of harmony. The ontological claim of the sameness of all beings, which negates even the differences between the sentient being and the Buddha, might offer an ultimate case of an egalitarian vision if we translate Li's Huayan Buddhism into the language of modern philosophy. However, such a claim could also serve as a source of conformity that negates individual differences. In the case of Li's Huayan Buddhism, such a leveling of diversity and differences without addressing the existence of difference generates contradiction, given Li's emphasis on the *Huayan Jing*'s celebration of diversity in the chapter "Entering into the Realm of Reality" and Sudhana's journey. Unlike the vision in which principle, or noumenon, dominates and functions as a controlling power that generates a seemingly unified vision from diverse phenomena, when phenomena are the focus of a discourse, one expects more awareness of diversity than of unity. Li's concept of "non-temporality" and the idea of the "enlightenment in a moment" challenge the very idea of unification by control. The fact that Li singled out the "Entering the Realm of Reality" chapter as the core of Huayan thought, out of the 39 chapters of the vast *Huayan jing*, as well as his consistent focus on Sudhana and his pilgrimage, reveal the specific way that Li looks at existence, a being's position in the community of existence, and how Huayan envisions it.

If we consider the existential meaning of Li's non-temporality, we are led to the idea that existence, for Li, is a non-replaceable fullness. This is so without moral or ethical connotation involved. Not surprisingly, social and political levels of human existence are not explicitly addressed in his philosophy, even though one might construct them based on his Huayan thought. Whereas the Huayan fourfold worldview addresses the world of things, or the world of objects, through its emphasis on phenomena, Li's Huayan Buddhism sees phenomena from the position of each subject—the individual—like each knot in Indra's net, which requires embracing the entire net within one's own existence. If Indra's net, the hallmark image of Huayan Buddhism, envisions, through spatial imagination, the inter-subsumption of all the causes and conditions of existence, Li's non-temporality offers a temporal (through non-temporality) equivalence to Indra's net. By the same token, whereas Indra's net

envisions the inseparable relationship between the part and the whole in the identity of a being, Li's non-temporality, without ignoring this part-whole relationship, still focuses on each being, and thus illuminates the ontological and existential reality of the sentient being. In this sense, Li's Huayan Buddhism can be considered an existential phenomenology, in which each phenomenon (the sentient being) represents the very reality of existence: There is no outside. Non-temporality as the nature of this existence indicates the non-substantiality of existence, when each moment is the accumulation of all the moments without a final goal to achieve. In Li's Huayan Buddhism, no sense of direction is visible. There are only two points in the journey of the life of a being: one, the Buddha, and the other, the sentient being, and they are not two dots in one line, but a pair, like the simultaneity of cause and effect in Li's non-temporality. Life is full, and at the same time, empty, in Li's Huayan philosophy, and this is so in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist senses. The issues of how we should deal with the problems of the world in which sentient beings live and how those problems might delay their awakening to ontological reality remain to be resolved.

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