

IMRE HAMAR

## The Exegetical Tradition of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*

### Abstract

The *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, which served as an ideological foundation for the establishment and gradual development of the Huayan school, is one of the most influential Mahāyāna sūtras in East Asian Buddhism. This article shows how the exegetical tradition that focused on the study of this scripture was started by the scholar monks of the Dilun school, who highly valued the Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, and was completed during the Tang dynasty by the masters of the Buddhist exegesis, who later were venerated as patriarchs of the Huayan school.

**Keywords:** *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, Chinese Buddhism, Huayan Buddhism, Dilun school, Vasubandhu, *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, Fazang 法藏

### The development of Chinese Buddhist commentaries

In Chinese Buddhist literature the significance of commentaries is well illustrated by the fact that in the Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon they constitute 11.5 volumes, as opposed to the 4.5 volumes of essays expounding the teachings of schools. The formal and essential criteria of commentary writing were formulated gradually, and commentary as a genre attained its final form by the Tang dynasty. This form became the model to be followed by later generations, and no significant innovations were later observed.<sup>1</sup>

The first commentators were the translators who arrived from abroad and were better acquainted with the texts than were the Chinese. The works produced at the early stages of translation, when the newcomers had still not mastered the Chinese language (nor had the Chinese yet learnt to speak the language

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<sup>1</sup> The only detailed study on the Chinese Buddhist commentaries is Ōchō Enichi's early article in 1937, which was republished in his collected works in 1979. See Ōchō 1979. Following in his footsteps, Kanno Hiroshi published articles that survey the tradition of commentary writing in Chinese Buddhism. See Kanno 2003, 2007; Kanno and Felbur 2015.

of the great masters) should be regarded as explanations rather than word-by-word translations.<sup>2</sup> Zchetti's recent studies have shown that a tradition of oral explanation of the translated texts can be traced back to as early as An Shigao (148–180 CE).<sup>3</sup> This is attested to a manuscript of the *Anban shouyi jing* 安般守意經 found in Kongōji in 1999, which turned out to be a commentary and not a different version of the scripture with the same title preserved in the Buddhist canon (T 602).<sup>4</sup>

The indigenous Chinese Buddhist commentaries from the 3rd and 4th centuries are called interlinear (*zhu* 注), and those from the 5th century are called expository (*shu* 疏).<sup>5</sup> In case of the first type, the commentary is inserted right after the relevant passage of the sūtra; thus the commentary also includes the whole text of the sūtra. However, the second type only cites a few passages or refers to a passage by its first and last words. The interlinear commentaries usually were written for shorter sūtras and focus primarily on the explanation of some words, while expository commentaries tend to focus on the underlying meaning of a sūtra.<sup>6</sup> However, the lines between these two types of commentary do not seem to be very fixed, as modern editions of expository commentaries are arranged along with the whole sūtra, divided into sections according to the structure of the sūtra.<sup>7</sup>

Early commentaries include a preface (*xu* 序) that explains the title of the sūtra and the central concept of its content and provides information on the process of the translation. It is a unique feature of Chinese Buddhist commentaries to summarise the central concept of a sūtra in one sentence. The *Commentary on the Diamond sūtra* (*Jin'gang bore boluomi jing zhu* 金剛般若波羅蜜經注), attributed to Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414 CE) but in fact authored by the famous poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433 CE), for example says: 'The principle [of this sūtra] is returning to the Middle Way. Its cardinal purport is the two truths' (*fu li gui zhongdao erdi wei zong* 夫理歸中道二諦為宗).<sup>8</sup> The Xuanxue (Dark Learning) thinkers must have influenced Buddhist exegetes during their inten-

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the translation of Buddhist works into Chinese, see Cao 1989.

<sup>3</sup> For An Shigao's biography and his translation works, see Nattier 2008: 38–72.

<sup>4</sup> Zchetti 2008. Zchetti was able to identify another component of the Kongōji manuscript, the *Twelve Gates* (*Shier men* 十二門) and the long ignored text *Ahan koujie shier yinyuan jing* 阿含口解十二因緣經 (T 1508) as part of the oral tradition related to An Shigao. See Zchetti 2003, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Kanno 2003: 302–307.

<sup>6</sup> Kanno 2003: 302–307.

<sup>7</sup> A good example is the modern edition of Chengguan's commentary and subcommentary along with the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, arranged passage by passage according to the text of the sūtra. See Chengyi 2001–2004.

<sup>8</sup> CBETA, X24, no. 454, p. 395a14.

sive discourse on the similarity between prajñā philosophy and Xuanxue in the 4th century.<sup>9</sup> One of the great Xuanxue figures, Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE), whose commentary on the *Daode jing* became authoritative for future generations, stated that the message of Laozi could be summed up in one single sentence, and if one understands this sentence, it becomes easy for them to interpret the individual parts of the text. This sentence is the following: ‘Emulating the root [by way] of bringing to rest the stem and branches [growing from it], that is all’ (*chong ben xi mo eryi yi* 崇本息末而已矣).<sup>10</sup> The *Daode jing* shows us the way that leads back to the root, to the *Dao*, propagating the abandonment of the phenomenal world that the *Dao* once created.

The first extant expository commentary was written by Daosheng 道生 (360–434) on the *Lotus sūtra* and titled *Miaofa lianhua jing shu* 妙法蓮花經疏.<sup>11</sup> He breaks the tradition of writing a preface to the commentary; instead, he directly inserts his preliminary remarks before the text of the commentary. Later during the Sui dynasty (581–618), the formulation of Profound Meaning (*xuanyi* 玄義) or Profound Treatise (*xuanlun* 玄論), which provides the essential meaning of the sūtra and explains the system of Buddhist teachings before the commentary, must have been indebted to this work. In his commentary on the *Lotus sūtra*, Daosheng reveals the purpose of writing this commentary and emphasises that this sūtra originates from the time of Buddha. He claims that the central concept (*zong* 宗) of the *Lotus sūtra* is the Mahāyāna. The practice of summarising the tenets of a particular sūtra paved the way for the classification of teachings (*panjiao* 判教). In addition, during the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), a great amount of sūtras was translated into Chinese; thus a system for the treatment of their teachings had to be established. In Daosheng’s commentary we find an early classification of teachings, which is a precursor to the elaborate *panjiao* 判教 formulated by the Tiantai and Huayan masters.

Another innovation of Daosheng’s commentary is that each chapter’s commentary is preceded by a synopsis, an explanation of the title, and a reason for the chapter’s particular location in the sūtra. The fact that there is a profound basis for arranging the chapters of a sūtra implies that Buddha’s words are well arranged with a clear intention, even if it does not seem to be obvious to the average reader. Later this method came to be widely used in commentaries, and this section was called ‘meaning of coming’ (*laiyi* 來意).<sup>12</sup> A similar concept

<sup>9</sup> Zürcher 2007: 101–102.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner 2000: 176.

<sup>11</sup> CBETA, X27, no. 577. For its English translation, see Kim 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Kanno and Felbur 2015: 455.

is found in the Christian tradition, as Origen and Eusebius argued that the four Gospels follow one another in an ordered sequence.<sup>13</sup>

The genuine hermeneutical method for structuring the text that Chinese Buddhists invented is the *kepan* 科判 or *kewen* 科文. The invention is sometimes attributed to Dao'an (312–385), but in his extant commentaries it is not found. This is the reason why Ōchō Enichi credits Daosheng, whose commentary on the *Lotus sūtra* includes the structure of the text, with inventing this device.<sup>14</sup> However, the categories of introductory section (*xufen* 序分), the sūtra proper (*zhengzong* 正宗), and concluding section (*liutongfen* 流通分) are not used. Ōchō Enichi surmises that these three categories, which later became the standard scheme for the division of a sūtra, originated with the commentators of the *Lotus sūtra* in the Liang dynasty. Every chapter is divided into passages, and every passage has a heading. These headings provide the outline of the text, which is the *kepan* or *kewen*. When explaining a passage, he does not repeat the whole passage but only indicates the beginning of the passage.

During the Sui dynasty (581–618) the most significant development in terms of commentary-writing was the expansion of the introduction, which became a separate treatise before the commentary. These works were divided into parts called gates (*men* 門) or meanings (*yi* 義). Following the earlier tradition, the explanation of the title and the classification of teachings are found here. However, a new feature of these works is that many Buddhist scriptures are cited, the different explanation of various schools are pointed out, and the tenets of rival schools are refuted. The reason that this kind of work became more elaborate in this period might be that the northern and southern Buddhist teachings merged, and in addition, the new translations of Paramārtha (499–569) in the South and Bodhiruci in the North introduced new ideas that had to be harmonised with the earlier teachings.

From this period we find works that are not word-by-word commentaries of the sūtras, but rather attempts to give an overall meaning of the text. For example, two leading monks, the founder of the Tiantai school Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) and the founder of the Sanlun 三論 school Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), authored these kinds of works (*Fahua xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, T 1716; *Weimojing xuanshu* 維摩經玄疏, T 1777; *Fahua xuanlun* 法華玄論, T 1720; *Jingming xuanlun* 淨名玄論, T 1780; *Fahua youyi* 法華遊義, T 1722). If we look at the content of these texts, it turns out that they are very similar to the previous introductions to the commentaries, but instead of placing them before the commentary as an introduction, probably due their size, they became independent essays. Zhiyi's *The enigmatic meaning of the Lotus sūtra* (*Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義) is divided

<sup>13</sup> Henderson 1991: 109.

<sup>14</sup> For an English translation of this work, see Kim 1990.

into five sections: 1. an explanation of the title (*shiming* 釋名); 2. a discussion of the essence (*bianti* 辨體), which is the description of the final reality of phenomena; 3. an illumination of the central concept (*mingzong* 明宗), which treats the reasons and results of Buddhist practice; 4. a treatment of function (*lunyong* 論用), which describes the function of wisdom that is able to dispel the doubts and awaken the faith; and 5. a classification of teachings (*panjiao* 判教), which evaluates the ranking of the *Lotus sūtra* among Buddha's teachings. It is interesting to note that the explanation of the title constitutes 88 pages out of the total 138 pages.<sup>15</sup> In the course of elaborating the meaning of two characters in the title, the dharma (*fa* 法) and wonderful (*miao* 妙), Zhiyi propounds his new teaching, the third truth, the middle truth, which is a Sinitic innovation.<sup>16</sup>

Jizang's work, *Pondering on the meaning of the Lotus sūtra* (*Fahua youyi* 法華遊義), gives much more information about the exegetical tradition of the *Lotus sūtra*. It is divided into 10 parts or gates (*shi men* 十門): 1. the reason for the origination of the sūtra (*laiyi* 來意), which shows the purpose of Buddha's teaching this sūtra; 2. the central concept of the sūtra (*zongzhi* 宗旨); 3. an explanation of the title (*shi mingti* 釋名題); 4. a classification of the teachings (*panjiao yi* 辨教意); 5. a discussion of the exoteric and esoteric teachings (*xianmi* 顯密), where 'esoteric' means that the real meaning is hidden for the audience; 6. the 'three' and the 'one' (*sanyi* 三一), which discusses the relation between the three vehicles and one vehicle; 7. an efficient function (*gongyong* 功用), which claims that given the 10 inconceivables of the sūtra, it is endowed with a liberating power; 8. the transmission of the sūtra (*hongjing* 弘經), which describes the way the sūtra was transmitted and the persons who were involved; 9. various versions of the sūtra (*budang* 部黨), for comparing different translations; and 10. the history of the exegetical tradition of *Lotus sūtra* (*luanqi* 緣起).

During the Tang period (618–907) the explanation of commentaries and subcommentaries were compiled. For example, Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), the most famous Tiantai patriarch during the Tang, wrote subcommentaries on Zhiyi's commentaries. Commentators authored special works, with charts revealing the outline or the structure. This kind of work is called scriptural cartography by Robert Gimello.<sup>17</sup> They might have served as a kind of visual aid for commentators, or subcommentators, although the real use of these works is not known. Zhanran composed charts to three of Zhiyi's works. The appearance of this genre could be attributed to the increasing importance of the patriarchal lineage by the end of Tang and especially in the Song.

<sup>15</sup> For the outline of the text, its partial translation, see Swanson 1989: 157–259.

<sup>16</sup> For a study on three truths, see Swanson 1989: 115–156..

<sup>17</sup> Based on personal communication with Robert Buswel and Robert Gimello.

### Early Chinese commentaries on the *Huayan jing*

According to Fazang's 法藏 (643–712) *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, after Buddhahadra (359–429) had completed the translation of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* in 422, his scribe Faye 法業 (?–?) studied the scripture for several years, and finally attaining great enlightenment, he composed *Summary* (*Zhigui* 旨歸), which abridges the *Huayan jing* in two fascicles.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, other sources do not substantiate Fazang's record, and this first commentary has not remained. However, a manuscript titled *Summary of the Huayan jing in two fascicles* (*Huayan jing liang juan zhigui* 華嚴經兩卷旨歸) is preserved in the collection of Kanazawa Bunko.<sup>19</sup> Although the second fascicle is attributed to Sanzang Fotuo 三藏佛陀, which could be identified as Buddhahadra, Ishii Kōsei showed that this work cites scriptures translated during the Sui dynasty and refers to the tenets of the Dilun school; thus it could not have been authored by Buddhahadra or Faye. He suggests that it was written during the Sui dynasty by a monk who belonged to a branch of the Dilun school lesser known than the Fashang–Huiyuan lineage.<sup>20</sup>

The translation of Vasubandhu's (4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century) commentary on the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* by Bodhiruci (6<sup>th</sup> century CE) and Ratnamati (5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century) in 511 in Luoyang, the capital of Northern Wei (386–535), and the arising interest in this work from a group of Northern scholars who later were referred to as the Dilun school definitely gave impetus to the spread and study of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>21</sup> As *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* is a chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, the Dilun masters must have become interested in the context of the sūtra that they mainly studied.<sup>22</sup> However, especially the masters of the southern branch of the Dilun school seem to have taken effort in explaining and commenting on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. It must have been Ratnamati's disciple, Huiguang 慧光 (468–537),<sup>23</sup> who especially emphasised the importance of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, as he and his disciples,

<sup>18</sup> CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 158a22–b4.

<sup>19</sup> It was Takamine Ryōshū who discovered this manuscript and first studied. See Takamine 1976: 487–499.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed study on this manuscript and its critical edition, see Ishii 1996: 23–78, 519–560.

<sup>21</sup> Tanaka argues that none of the Dilun masters refers to himself as a Dilun master. Only during the Sui and early Tang periods was this term applied to these masters. See Tanaka 1990: 20. For the history and the main tenets of the Dilun school, see Paul 1984: 46–68.

<sup>22</sup> See Kimura 1977: 36–39, 1992: 39–43, Wei 1998: 64–82.

<sup>23</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 607b18–608b29, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 159a10–b15.



Sengfan 僧範 (476–555),<sup>24</sup> Huishun 慧順 (487–558),<sup>25</sup> Daoping 道憑 (488–559),<sup>26</sup> Tanzun 曇遵 (480–564?),<sup>27</sup> Tanyan 曇衍 (503–581),<sup>28</sup> and Anlin 安廩 (507–583)<sup>29</sup> gave lectures on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. It is likely that their disciples took notes and compiled an expository commentary, which was the prevalent type of Buddhist commentary at that time. The second generation of the Dilun masters, including Lingyu 靈裕 (518–605),<sup>30</sup> Linggan 靈幹 (535–612),<sup>31</sup> and Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592),<sup>32</sup> following the footsteps of their masters studied the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Unfortunately, almost all of the commentaries written on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* by the Dilun masters are lost, or only some parts have remained. Only 600–700 characters from Huiguang’s commentary on the chapter ‘Bodhisattvas answer the questions’ (*Pusa mingnan pin* 菩薩明難品) have survived.<sup>33</sup> Explaining the sūtra sentence by sentence, Huiguang attempts to correlate this chapter with the others. The sixth fascicle of Lingyu’s commentary, which explains the last chapter of

<sup>24</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 483b20–484a10, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 159b16–c18.

<sup>25</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 484b3–23.

<sup>26</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 484b24–c19.

<sup>27</sup> The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* does not say that he wrote a commentary on *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, but the *Huayan jing zhuan ji* states that he did in seven fascicles. For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 484a11–b2. For the information about his commentary, see *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 164b18.

<sup>28</sup> The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* does not say that he wrote a commentary on *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, but the *Huayan jing zhuan ji* confirms that. For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 487b3–c7, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, pp. 159c19–160a11.

<sup>29</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 480b3–c1.

<sup>30</sup> Lingyu played an important role in establishing the famous Buddhist site on Baoshan 寶山 in Henan 河南. The *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 includes his *Verses on comprehensive repentance of the ten evil deeds* (*Zongchan shi’e jiwen* 總懺十惡偈文). CBETA, T53, no. 2122, pp. 918c22–919b17. For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 495b5–498a22, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, pp. 160a12–161a11.

<sup>31</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 518a27–c27, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 161b1–22.

<sup>32</sup> Huiyuan was one of the most outstanding scholar monks of his time, who learnt under the famous Dilun master, Fashang 法上 (495–580), but Tanqian 曇遷 (542–607) also made a great impact on him. Of his several commentaries to Buddhist scriptures, nine have survived, and his *Mahāyāna Encyclopedia* (*Dasheng yi zhang* 大乘義章, T 1851) is also extant. Unfortunately, his commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* is lost. For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 489c26–492b1, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, pp. 156c28–157b5. For his modern biography, see Tanaka 1990: 20–32.

<sup>33</sup> *Huayan jing yiji juan di yi* 花嚴經義記卷第一, CBETA, T85, no. 2756, p. 234a10–c1. This chapter could be especially important for Dilun masters, who investigated the ultimate nature of the mind as at the beginning of the chapter Mañjuśrī poses the question: ‘If the mind nature is the same [for all beings], how various retributions can be produced?’ CBETA, T09, no. 278, p. 427a3

the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, the Gaṇḍavyūha from Sudhana's 10th to 43rd visits is also extant.<sup>34</sup> Another commentary probably authored by a Dilun master,<sup>35</sup> as Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* is often cited, is the *Short commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan lüeshu* 華嚴略疏), which has survived as two manuscripts from Dunhuang (S. 2694 and 北敦 01053),<sup>36</sup> but based on the content and the style of calligraphy they used to belong together.<sup>37</sup> The S. 2694 includes comments on the first eight chapters of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, while 北敦 01053 explains the *Daśabhūmika* chapter. It refers to the text of the *sūtra*, such as the expository commentaries, and includes the exegetical methods of structuring the text (*kewen* 科文) and the 'meaning of coming' (*laiyi* 來意).

Although, as we have seen above, the Dilun masters took great effort in the exegetical study of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, other masters who specialised in other areas in the North also studied this scripture. Tanwuzui 曇無最 (around 520), who was called the eastern bodhisattva by Bodhiruci, studied this *sūtra* along with the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*,<sup>38</sup> and his disciple Zhiju 智炬 (?-?) explained and commented on *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>39</sup> Zhiju is said to have had a vision of Samantabhadra, when the bodhisattva told him to follow him to the South where he was going to give him a medicine to reach deep understanding. Sengda 僧達 (475–556), who was Ratnamati's and Huiguans's disciple, specialised in the Chinese translation of the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya*, the *Four-part Vinaya* (*sifen lü* 四分律) but also studied the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>40</sup> Another master of the *vinaya*, Hongzun 洪遵 (530–608), is said to have written a commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* in seven fascicles.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Huayan jing wenyi ji* 華嚴經文義記, CBETA, X03, no. 211, pp. 21a4–37a2.

<sup>35</sup> According to the catalogue of Buddhist works, *Xinbian zhuzong jiaozang zonglu* 新編諸宗教藏總錄 (CBETA, T55, no. 2184, p. 1166a12), Huiguang wrote a short commentary in four fascicles. However, we find reference to the Northern Zhou (557–581) in the manuscript; thus it must have been written between 557–574, after the death of Huiguang. Fang 2003: 17.

<sup>36</sup> The S. 2694 is included in the Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon (T 2754). The other manuscript was published in the series of extracanonical documents (Fang 2003: 19–52).

<sup>37</sup> Fang 2003: 17.

<sup>38</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 624b22–625a18), and the *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記 states that he wrote a commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, but the number of fascicle is unknown.

<sup>39</sup> For his biography, see *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, pp. 158c27–159a9.

<sup>40</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 552c25–553b24.

<sup>41</sup> For his biography, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 611a26–612a20. The reference for his commentary, see *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 164b26.



Fazang introduced Lingbian 靈辨 (477–522) as a devout worshipper of Mañjuśrī bodhisattva, who after having a visual experience of the bodhisattva on Wutaishan 五台山, the sacred mountain of Chinese Buddhism and the abode of Mañjuśrī bodhisattva, wrote his commentary in 100 fascicles on the mountain. Later, he was called to Luoyang to teach the sūtra in the court.<sup>42</sup> However, Zhang Wenliang showed that Lingbian probably had never gone to this mountain or Luoyang but rather lived all of his life on Xuanwengshan 懸甕山 in Taiyuan 太原, where he had his vision of Mañjuśrī and wrote his commentary.<sup>43</sup> As by Fazang's time Wutaishan gradually rose to the status of a sacred site for Buddhism, being the abode of Mañjuśrī bodhisattva, Fazang intended to give an early example for the Mañjuśrī cult on Wutaishan by linking Lingbian to this mountain.<sup>44</sup>

Twelve fascicles of Lingbian's commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, the *Huayanjing lun* 華嚴經論, have survived; thus they constitute the earliest partially extant Chinese commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that even though most commentaries on sūtras were called *yishu* in Lingbian's time, his commentary is titled *lun*, like most of its contemporary Indian counterparts. Lingbian must have chosen this word deliberately in order to show the very unique style of his commentary being at variance with commentaries prevalent in his time. Lingbian was brave to break the tradition of commenting on the sūtra line by line. Instead, he first proposed his concepts on the sūtra, and then he cited from the sūtra to substantiate his statements. He cites from Indian scriptures and apocryphal sūtras, but he never refers to other Chinese masters or commentators, which makes his work different from most of the commentaries. It is important to note that he does not refer to Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, which seems to imply that he did not have access to this work, and as stated above, he never went to the capital, where

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<sup>42</sup> For his biography, see *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 157b6–c11.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang 2017: 2–17.

<sup>44</sup> For the Mañjuśrī cult on Wutaishan, see Birnbaum 1983. For a recent book on Wutaishan, see Andrews 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Only the 10th fascicle of Lingbian's commentary is preserved in the Chinese Buddhist canon (CBETA, X03, no. 208, pp. 1a5–5b18). Satō Taishun was able to identify six fascicles (51–56) in the Korean Songgwangsa 松廣寺 monastery. See Satō 1951. However, these manuscripts were lost but found again in the Korean royal library, Gyujanggak 奎章閣. These manuscripts were written based on the manuscripts discovered by Satō Taishun. See Chang 2004: 178–179. Another five fascicles (3, 14–18) were discovered in the collection of the Japanese treasure house, the Shōsōin 正倉院. For the edition of the Japanese manuscripts, see Shindō 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d, 1961e. Three Dunhuang manuscripts (S. 3960, S. 3986, S. 3987) are identified as parts from Lingbian's commentary. S. 3986 and S. 3987 consist of pages with handwritings of three or four people from the Tang period. See Ishii 1997.

he would have had a chance to consult this seminal commentary. Like *yishu* commentaries, Lingbian also provides a very detailed structure of the text (*fenke* 分科), often using the number 10 for subdividing Buddhist teachings.<sup>46</sup>

In the South, the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* was studied by the Sanlun masters, which started, according to Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), with master Sheng 勝 (?–?) on Sheshan 攝山. Sheng, who is not known otherwise, was the first to teach this scripture,<sup>47</sup> but early Sanlun masters, including the Korean founder of the Sanlun school on Sheshan, Senglang 僧朗 (494–512),<sup>48</sup> and Sengquan 僧詮 (d. 528), seem to have paid attention to the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>49</sup> Falang 法朗 (507–581),<sup>50</sup> who studied this sūtra from Sengquan, settled down in the Xinghuan 興皇 monastery in 558 and lectured on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramita sūtras* on imperial order. Another disciple of Sengquan, Huiyong 慧勇 (515–583), who preached in the palace on the order of Emperor Chen Wen 陳文 (522–566) in 564, also studied the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.<sup>51</sup> Falang's disciples Huijue 慧覺 (554–606),<sup>52</sup> Luoyun 羅雲 (542–616),<sup>53</sup> and Jizang 吉藏 (549–623)<sup>54</sup> continued lecturing on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Jizang wrote an essay on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* titled *Huayan youyi* 華嚴遊意在 the Huiji 慧日 practice centre (*daochang* 道場) of Yangzhou 揚州 in 600.<sup>55</sup> He explains the meaning of the pure land in terms of the teacher (*huazhu* 化主), the place of teaching (*huachu* 化處), the teaching (*jiaomen* 教門), and the disciples (*tuzhong* 徒眾). Jizang, applying the Madhyamaka method of four phrases (*siju* 四句) and two truths (*erdi* 二諦), discusses whether the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* was preached by the Sambhogakāya form of Buddha, Vairocana Buddha, or the nirmāṇakāya form, Śākyamuni Buddha.<sup>56</sup>

In the region of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, an important centre for the study of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* was the Yiyin monastery (*Yiyin si* 一音寺) in Yuezhou

<sup>46</sup> For a study on the characteristics of Lingbian's commentary, see Zhang 2017: 18–34.

<sup>47</sup> See *Huayan youyi* 華嚴遊意, CBETA, T35, no. 1731, p. 1a20–21.

<sup>48</sup> Senglang studied *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* from his master, Fadu 法度 (507–581). See *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2059, p. 380c15–18.

<sup>49</sup> See Liu 1994: 82–84. For the spread of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* in the South, see Wei 1998: 102–107; Kimura 1977: 40–48, 1992: 44–53.

<sup>50</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 477b1–478a20.

<sup>51</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 478a21–c5.

<sup>52</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 516a7–c18.

<sup>53</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 493a10–c2.

<sup>54</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 513c19–515a8; *Shenseng zhuan* 神僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2064, pp. 985c22–986a10; *Huayan jing zhuan ji* 華嚴經傳記, CBETA, T51, no. 2073, p. 162a12–27.

<sup>55</sup> T35, no. 1731.

<sup>56</sup> See Sun 2019.

越州. Famin 法敏 (579–645),<sup>57</sup> who studied with Falang’s disciple Master Ming 明 on Maoshan 茅山, settled down in this monastery in 628. He lectured on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, and *Huayan jing zhuan ji* credits him with writing a commentary on it in seven fascicles. His disciple Facong 法聰 (586–656)<sup>58</sup> continued studying the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.

The other important school on the South was the Shelun school founded by Paramārtha,<sup>59</sup> but it was overshadowed by the Sanlun school. In escaping the Northern Zhou persecution of Buddhism under Emperor Wu (r. 561–577), many Dilun masters fled to the South, where they learnt Shelun teachings. One of these masters was Tanqian 曇遷 (542–607), who went to the southern capital Jiankang in 577 and mastered the Shelun teachings. With the establishment of the Sui dynasty, he returned north to Pengcheng in 581, and he went to the capital Chang’an in 587, where at the invitation of Emperor Wen of Sui dynasty (Sui Wendi 隋文帝, 541–604), he gave lectures at the court. His membership in the prestigious Taiyuan Wang 太原王 clan must have facilitated his success in Emperor Wen’s court and his participation in the Renshou relic-distribution campaigns, which made him one of the most influential religious leaders in his time.<sup>60</sup>

Tanqian was the first monk who brought the Shelun teachings to the North, and he played an important role in creating a synthesis of Dilun and Shelun doctrines. He wrote commentaries on many scriptures, including one on the chapter ‘Bodhisattvas answer the questions’ (*Pusa mingnan pin* 菩薩明難品) of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Unfortunately, all these works were lost.<sup>61</sup> Other Shelun masters, including Tanqian’s disciples Fachang 法常 (567–645),<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 538b27–539a7.

<sup>58</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 664c3–25.

<sup>59</sup> For Paramārtha, see Paul 1984, Keng 2009.

<sup>60</sup> For a very detailed study of Tanqian’s political and religious career, see Chen 2002. For a short summary of his biography, see Gimello 1976: 191 n. 66, Paul 1984: 44–45.

<sup>61</sup> Only his two texts, the *Repentance of Ten Sins* (*Shi e chanwen* 十惡懺文) and the *Essay on Terminating Opposites* (*Wang shifei lun* 亡是非論). The former work has survived in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, see CBETA, T53, no. 2122, pp. 918b9–919b17, while the latter one is in the *Huayan jing nei zhangmen deng za kongmu zhang* 華嚴經內章門等雜孔目章 written by the second patriarch of the Huayan school, Zhiyan, CBETA, T45, no. 1870, pp. 580c14–581b19. For a study and English translation of the *Essay on Terminating Opposites*, see Lai 1983. His commentary on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* must have had some influence on the exegetes of this scripture in Tang period, as his concept of 10 kinds of profoundness (*shi shen shen* 十甚深) is cited and referred to in later commentaries. See *Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記, CBETA, T35, no. 1733, p. 176c3–16; *Da fangguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, CBETA, T35, no. 1735, p. 601a8–15, CBETA, T35, no. 1735, pp. 612c25–613a3; *Da fangguang fo huayan jing sui shu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔, CBETA, T36, no. 1736, p. 233b15–21.

<sup>62</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 540c14–541b23.

Daoying 道英 (557–636),<sup>63</sup> and Daocan 道璨 (?),<sup>64</sup> also studied and commented on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.

### Commentaries on the *Huayan jing* during the Tang period

During the Tang period, the *Huayan jing* received much exegetical attention by the Huayan school's scholar-monks in the form of sentence-by-sentence text analyses and summaries focused on the sūtra's central concepts. The Huayan school inherited the legacy of the Dilun and Shelun schools (i.e., their interpretation of Yogācāra philosophy), which is reflected in the commentaries of the leading figures of this exegetical tradition, retrospectively canonized as patriarchs of the Huayan school. Zhiyan 智儼 (602–668), the school's second patriarch, contributed *The Mahāvaiṣṭvya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra: A System for Plumbing its Mysteries and a Model for its Thorough Understanding* (*Da fanguang fo huayan jing souxuan fenqi tongzhi fanggui* 大方廣佛華嚴經搜玄分齊通智方軌, T. 1732), which is a commentary on the 60-fascicle Chinese translation.<sup>65</sup>

Fazang 法藏 (643–712), who as the de facto founder of the school and its third patriarch formulated the system of Huayan thought, added another commentary on the 60-fascicle translation, titled *Exploring the Mysteries of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記, T. 1733). Later, probably due to Fazang's close association with Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705), a new version of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* was brought to China, and he assisted in the second translation of this important Mahāyāna sūtra.<sup>66</sup> While Fazang died before he could complete a commentary on the 80-fascicle version, Huiyuan 慧苑 (673–743), his disciple, finished his work.

Unfortunately, this commentary, titled *A Record of Editorial Decisions Made in Continuing [Fazang's] Short Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Xu huayan jing lüeshu kanding ji* 續華嚴經略疏刊定記, X03, no. 221), has only partly been preserved, which probably can be blamed on Chengguan's severe critiques of Huiyuan, who modified Fazang's doctrines in several respects, and therefore the later Buddhists excluded Huiyuan from the patriarchal lineage. A special feature of Huiyuan's commentary is that it includes some references to the sūtra's original Sanskrit words. Huiyuan definitely had expertise in the

<sup>63</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, pp. 654a14–655a4.

<sup>64</sup> For his biography, see *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p. 669c4–14.

<sup>65</sup> For Zhiyan's biography and his teachings, see Gimello 1976.

<sup>66</sup> For Fazang's political role as a religious leader, see Chen 2007.

linguistic analysis of the Chinese translation of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* as is attested by his other work, *The Pronunciation and the Meaning of the Newly Translated Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Xinyi dafangguang fo huayan jing yin yi* 新譯大方廣佛華嚴經音義, CBETA 2020.A091, no. 1057), which lists 1,288 entries collected from the Chinese translation and provides 318 Sanskrit–Chinese transliterations.<sup>67</sup> Huiyuan gives the pronunciation of the characters with the help of the *fanqie* 反切 system, explains the meaning of the expressions, corrects the characters that are wrongly written in the circulated manuscripts, and refers to several linguistic books from earlier times. Some of texts have not survived, and Huiyuan’s citations are the only sources that provide information on them.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635–730), a lay hermit, contributed a commentary on the 80-fascicle version, titled *A Commentary on the New Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Xin huayan jing lun* 新華嚴經論, T. 1739). His commentary includes many innovative concepts on the meaning of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, probably because, as a layman, he was not confined by a monastic education that might suppress individual, creative views in favour of a well-established, transmitted system of thoughts. It is interesting to note that it was the first Buddhist work indisputably attributed to a Chinese author that became a part of the Buddhist Canon in 938.<sup>69</sup>

The fourth patriarch of the Huayan school, Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), was one of the most important Buddhist scholiasts not only during the Tang period but maybe in the whole history of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>70</sup> His magnum opus is a commentary on the 80-fascicle translation of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, titled *A Commentary on the Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, T. 1735), which he wrote on Wutaishan at the request of the Buddhist monks.<sup>71</sup> Regarded highly for his commentary, Chengguan was summoned to the court and served as a teacher of several emperors, and he later received several honorary titles and offices as an acknowledgement of his exceptional talent.

However, when his commentary was later deemed too abstruse, he was asked to elaborate it further. The subsequent subcommentary, which consists of his further explanations that were recorded by his disciples, is titled *A Record of the Explanation on the Meaning of the Commentary on the Mahāvaiṣṭya*

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<sup>67</sup> See Luo 2018: VI.

<sup>68</sup> Luo Zhichun gives a very thorough study of this text and collates the text providing English translations. See Luo 2018.

<sup>69</sup> See Gimello 1983: 327–328.

<sup>70</sup> For his biography, see Hamar 2002.

<sup>71</sup> See Hamar 2002: 50–53.

*Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing suishu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔, T. 1736).<sup>72</sup> Together, his original commentary and subcommentary became the authoritative commentaries on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* in East Asia. Containing references to more than 300 Buddhist and non-Buddhist works, these works are considerably voluminous. In the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, the 80-fascicle *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* itself is 444 pages long, which equates to nearly 1500 pages in Cleary’s English translation.<sup>73</sup> As Chengguan’s commentary and subcommentary are 460 and 700 pages long, respectively, together the three texts constitute more than 1600 pages and occupy 1.5 volumes in the Taishō canon. Altogether, the three works contain approximately 744,000 characters.

Chengguan’s magnum opus is undoubtedly his commentaries, and for this reason he is sometimes referred to as the commentator (*shuzhu* 疏主). Later in his life, Chengguan also authored a commentary on the 40-fascicle *Huayan jing*. The commentary is actually a translation of the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*’s last chapter) completed 796–798 by Prajñā with the assistance of Chengguan.<sup>74</sup> The commentary’s title, *Huayanjing xingyuan pinshu* 華嚴經行願品疏 (X05, no. 227), refers to the Chinese translation of the *Bhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* (*Puxian xingyuan pin* 普賢行願品), which is included at the end of Prajñā’s translation.

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<sup>72</sup> From an inscription on Chengguan’s stūpa. The *Miaojue taji* 妙覺塔記 states that Sengrui 僧睿 and Zhikai 智愷 wrote, in addition to the 40-fascicle *Subcommentary*, another work, *Suiwen shoujing* 隨文手鏡, in 100 fascicles, which unfortunately has not survived.

<sup>73</sup> Cleary 1993.

<sup>74</sup> The colophon of the 40-fascicle *Huayanjing* mentions that Chengguan participated in the translation. See T 279: 10.848c26.



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