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The Collections of Miraculous Stories on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*

Abstract

This paper examines the three primary Chinese translations of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*—an extensive Mahāyāna text foundational to the Huayan School during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. This study provides a comprehensive introduction to each translation, tracing its dissemination across China, and further investigates the contributions and legacy of the five patriarchs of the Huayan School.

As Buddhism became increasingly secular and accessible, there was a significant rise in literary creativity, notably in the form of miraculous story collections that aided in the propagation of Buddhist beliefs among the general populace. These narratives, often embellished with supernatural elements, were crafted to demonstrate the efficacy of Buddhist practice, with the aim of fostering faith and devotion. Known as ‘stimulus-response’ stories (*ganying* 感應), these accounts illustrate the power of Buddhist practice through the depiction of miraculous events.

This paper reviews nine key collections associated with the *Huayan jing*, including: *Record of the Transmission of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayanjing Zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記), *Account of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayanjing ganying zhuan* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應傳), *Account of the Search for the Profundities of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayanjing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記), *Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayanjing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏), *Sub-commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayan sui shu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義抄), *Account of Chengguan’s Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan xuantan huixuan ji* 華嚴懸談會玄記), *Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayanjing ganying lueji* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應略記), and *Causes of Stimuli and Response Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayanjing ganying yuanqi zhuan* 華嚴經感應緣起傳), as well as the *Chronological Account of the Efficacies of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Lichao huayanjing chiyan ji* 歷朝華嚴經持驗紀). Through this analysis, the paper aims to deepen understanding of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, its miraculous stories, and the collections that preserved these narratives, enriching appreciation for its impact on Chinese Buddhism.

Key words: Chinese Buddhism, *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, three primary Chinese translations, Huayan School, five patriarchs, miraculous stories, eight key collections

The *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* and the Huayan School

The *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* is an extensive collection of Mahāyāna sūtras, which has exerted a profound influence on the development of Buddhism in China, Japan, and Korea. During the Sui (581–619) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, this text became foundational to the Huayan School, which later expanded into Japan and Korea.¹ Most contemporary scholars posit that the compiled version of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* was likely assembled in Khotan (Yutian, 于闐) after previously independent sūtras, produced across different periods and regions, were systematically collected, organised, and revised. Imre Hamar has provided a comprehensive introduction to the origins of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* comparing the Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan versions, noting that the Tibetan translation and the Sanskrit text exhibit considerable similarity.²

There are three Chinese translations of this sūtra. The first was produced by Buddhahadra (359–429) in the 14th year of the Yixi 義熙 period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (418 CE), resulting in a 50-volume translation of the *Huayan Sūtra*, titled *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經. The second translation was undertaken by Śikṣānanda (Shichanantuo, 實叉難陀, 652–710) during the Tang Dynasty, beginning in the first year of the Zhengsheng 證聖 period (695 CE) and completed within five years. This version became known as the ‘*Newly translated Huayan*’ or the ‘*Eighty-fascicle Huayan*’.

The third translation was completed by Tripiṭaka Prajña 般若三藏 in the 11th year of the Zhenyuan 貞元 period (795 CE) of the Tang Dynasty. Tripiṭaka Prajña translated the final chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, which focuses on *Entering the Realm of Inconceivable Liberation* and the *Conduct and Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra* (*Dafangguang fo ru bukesiyi jietuo jingjie Puxian xingyuan pin* 大方廣佛入不可思議解脫境界普賢行願品). This work was also titled *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 and is commonly abbreviated as the *Chapter on the Conduct and Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra* (*Puxian xingyuan pin* 普賢行願品). It corresponds to the *Chapter on Entering the Dharma Realm* (*Ru fajie pin* 入法界品) of the *Eighty-fascicle Huayan* and is also referred to as the *Forty-fascicle Huayan*.

From the time of the first translation of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* by Buddhahadra until the Liang Dynasty (502–557), there was limited scholarly engagement with the *Huayan Sūtra* in the southern regions of China, and Huayan scholars in the north were even rarer. A turning point in Huayan studies in the north occurred with the translation of the *Commentary on the Ten Stages* (*Shidi jinglun* 十地經論) by Bodhiruci and others during the late Northern Wei

¹ For an introduction to the history of the Huayan School, see Hamar 2014.

² For the history of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, see Hamar 2015.

Dynasty (386–534). This commentary, which explicates the *Chapter of Ten Stages* (*Shidi pin* 十地品) in the *Huayan Sūtra*, led to the establishment of the Dilun School, the first Buddhist school in China to promote the teachings of Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha philosophy.³ Together with the Shelun School, another Yogācāra school, the Dilun School laid the foundation for Huayan thought.⁴

Traditionally, Dushun 杜順 (557–640), renowned for his miraculous deeds, is recognised as the first patriarch of the Huayan School.⁵ The second patriarch, Zhiyan 智嚴 (602–668), who became a monk at Zhixiang Monastery on Mount Zhongnan, made significant contributions to Huayan thought. He authored a commentary on the 60-fascicle *Huayan Sūtra* titled *The Mahāvaiṣṭvya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra: A System for Plumbing Its Mysteries and a Model for Its Thorough Understanding* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing souxuan fenqi tongzhi fanggui* 大方廣佛華嚴經搜玄分齊通智方軌, T. 1732). Ūisang 義湘 (625–702) from the Silla Kingdom (modern-day Korea) studied Huayan Buddhism under Zhiyan. Upon completing his studies, he returned to Korea, where he became the first patriarch of Huayan in Korea. Scholar Wei Daoru suggested that Zhiyan was responsible for establishing the overall theoretical framework of the Huayan School.⁶

Zhiyan's disciple, Fazang 法藏 (643–712), is often regarded as the actual founder of the Huayan School and is recognised as the third patriarch. Under the patronage of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705), Fazang elevated Huayan to the status of a major Buddhist school and formulated its classical doctrines.⁷ He also wrote a commentary on the 60-fascicle *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, titled *Exploring the Mysteries of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記, T. 1733).

Although Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839) was not a direct disciple of Fazang, he is recognised as the fourth patriarch of the Huayan school.⁸ Chengguan authored a commentary on the 80-fascicle *Huayan Sūtra*, titled *A Commentary on the*

³ Wei 2001: 65. For the development of Huayan exegesis in China, see, Hamar 2022.

⁴ For the scriptural basis of the Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha teachings, see Paul 1984, Hamar 1994. For the Yogācāra influence on Huayan Buddhism, see Hamar 2010. For the Huayan application of Tathāgatagarbha teachings as nature-origination, see Hamar 2007.

⁵ For the biography of Dushun and his importance in Huayan Buddhism, see Gimello 1976: 57–133.

⁶ Wei 2009: 56. For the biography of Zhiyan and his importance in Huayan Buddhism, see Gimello 1976: 134–446.

⁷ Hua 2005:11. For Fazang's close association with Empress Wu and his service at the court, see Chen 2007.

⁸ For Chengguan's biography and his understanding of *Huayan jing* as perfect teaching, see Hamar 1998, 2019.

Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, T. 1735), and a sub-commentary, *A Record of the Explanation on the Meaning of the Commentary on the Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing suishu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔, T. 1736). Chengguan frequently referenced Chinese classics in his commentaries to clarify the meaning of the sūtra, though he emphasised that he borrowed only the words, not the meanings, from these texts.

Chengguan's disciple, Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), became the fifth patriarch. Notably, Zongmi was also a patriarch of the Chan school, fostering a close relationship between Huayan and Chan teachings.

Four years after Zongmi's death, the Huayan sect, along with other Buddhist schools, suffered devastation during the Huichang Suppression of Buddhism. It was not until the early Song Dynasty that the Huayan tradition experienced a revival. Following the turmoil and religious persecution of the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties period, much of the Huayan literature from the Tang era was lost by the time of the Northern Song Dynasty. However, during the Northern Song period, monks devoted to the study and practice of Huayan teachings spread throughout both northern and southern China.

The Huayan School sustained significant intellectual and religious vitality within the Buddhist circles of the Song Dynasty. This endurance can be attributed not only to a dedicated group of monks specialising in the *Huayan Sūtra*, but also to the strong influence and engagement of Chan (Zen) monks, who held the Huayan teachings in high regard.⁹ Although the Huayan School ceased to exist as an independent sect after the Song Dynasty, its doctrines and practices were gradually absorbed into other schools of Chinese Buddhism, thus continuing to exert a profound influence on the broader landscape of Chinese religious thought.

Miraculous Stories in Chinese Buddhism

Following the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Buddhism flourished, and concepts such as karma and rebirth gained widespread acceptance, becoming integral elements of the literary landscape of the period. These ideas also served as effective tools for promoting Buddhism. The Tang Dynasty, often regarded as the golden age of Chinese Buddhism, was a pivotal era for the Sinicisation, popularisation, and secularisation of the faith. During this time, various Buddhist sects thrived, and the translation of Buddhist scriptures reached unprecedented levels. Buddhism

⁹ Wei 2001: 246.

became increasingly secular and accessible to the general populace, with significant creative output in the form of miraculous story collections, which proved instrumental in propagating Buddhist beliefs.

Such stories, often embellished with supernatural elements, were employed to demonstrate the efficacy of Buddhism, with the aim of inspiring faith and devotion. These narratives, which describe miraculous events brought about by Buddhist practice, are commonly referred to as ‘stimulus-response’ stories (*ganying* 感應). As Campany wrote, ‘*ganying*, or “stimulus-response,” in basic terms, it can be understood as the idea that elements of the unseen world respond—often strikingly, visibly, miraculously—to the stimulus of human devotional activity and karmic merit or lack thereof’ (italics added).¹⁰ Liu Yading 劉亞丁, in his *Study on the Buddhist Miraculous Collections (Fojiao lingyanji yanjiu 佛教靈驗記研究)*, traces the etymology of the term ‘miraculous’ (*lingyan* 靈驗) and clarifies that the word expresses the notion of ‘magical efficacy’ and reflects a ‘religious psychological phenomenon’. Accordingly, the term ‘miraculous’ frequently appears in both Buddhist and Taoist texts. Based on this understanding, ‘miraculous’ can be defined as ‘a phenomenon of efficacy resulting from faith in deities, a manifestation of supernatural achievements.’¹¹ Similarly, Zheng Acai 鄭阿財, in his article ‘A Comprehensive Review of the Buddhist Miraculous Stories in Dunhuang’, explains that works such as books of merit, books of miraculous stories, and records of miraculous retribution recount magical experiences resulting from praying, repenting to the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, chanting the Buddha’s name, reciting scriptures, writing sutras, and creating Buddhist statues.¹²

Synthesising the above analyses, this article defines the core concept of ‘miraculous story’ as follows: a miraculous story is a written account of various miracles, spiritual auspices, and other extraordinary phenomena that occur in the course of spreading Buddhism. Such stories may exist as individual narratives or as part of a larger collection. The ‘miraculous record’ emphasises the description of supernatural events, while the ‘miraculous story’ focuses on the plot and narrative content. In the context of Huayan Buddhism, Huayan miraculous stories refer specifically to accounts of miraculous occurrences and spiritual phenomena that took place during the dissemination of the *Huayan jing*.

In the following section, we will survey the works that contain miraculous stories related to the *Huayan jing*.

¹⁰ Campany 2012: 49.

¹¹ Liu 2006: 1–2.

¹² Zheng 2010: 3.

Record of the Transmission of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (*Huayanjing zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記)

In an effort to encourage veneration of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, Fazang compiled the *Record of the Transmission of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayanjing zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記; hereafter: ZHJ), which provides a comprehensive account of the origins, development, interpretation, and commentaries related to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* in China, as well as the spiritual benefits associated with it. This collection offers detailed descriptions of the texts and prominent masters connected to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, including numerous miraculous tales concerning its recitation and transcription. Fazang's clear intention was to inspire Buddhist devotees to engage with the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* through practices of recitation and copying, much like the widespread reverence for other key Buddhist scriptures such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Diamond Sūtra*.¹³ The ZHJ remains an invaluable source for understanding the historical transmission of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* in China.

The exact date of the ZHJ's compilation is not definitively known, although some scholars have made significant efforts to determine its timeframe. Yoshizu Yoshihide suggests that the work was initiated between 689 and 690 and that Fazang continued revising the text until his death in 712.¹⁴ Chen Shiqiang narrows this timeframe, positing that the ZHJ was written around 712.¹⁵ Chen notes that in the *Biography of Śikṣānanda*, found in the first volume of the ZHJ, it is recorded that Śikṣānanda passed away at Dajianfu Monastery (Dajianfu si 大薦福寺) on 12 October in the first year of the Jingyun 景雲 period (710) of the Tang Dynasty. Since Fazang himself died in November of the first year of the Xiantian 先天 period (712), it is reasonable to assume that the ZHJ was completed in the same year, making it likely the final work of Fazang's life.¹⁶ Wang Song has further contributed to this research, emphasising that the ZHJ was not solely the product of Fazang's individual effort but likely reflects the collective viewpoints of Fazang and his disciples. As such, its composition spanned an extended period, beginning in the 680s and continuing through subsequent additions made after Fazang's death.¹⁷

According to the *Chinese Buddhist History Dictionary* (*Zhongguo fojiaoshi cidian* 中國佛教史辭典), 'it is believed that the initial composition of this work

¹³ Hamar 2011: 190.

¹⁴ Yoshizu 1978: 163–164.

¹⁵ Chen 1988: 15.

¹⁶ Chen 1988: 15.

¹⁷ Wang 2019: 80.

began around 690 when Fazang was 48 years old, and that he continued to expand and refine it until his death in 712'.¹⁸

In the first volume of *Tanxuan ji* 探玄記, Fazang notes that numerous miraculous events are described in detail in the five-volume *Huayan zhuan* 華嚴傳.¹⁹ Based on the inscription in the *Tanxuan ji*, it is known that this text was composed at Weiguoxi Monastery (Weiguoxi si 魏國西寺).²⁰ This could be substantiated by another historical collection, *The History of Chang'an* (*Chang'an zhi* 長安志).²¹ There is only a slight difference between these two works. According to *The History of Chang'an*, Taiyuan monastery was set up in the first year of Xianheng 鹹亨 period (670), whereas in the *Institutional History of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang huiyao* 唐會要) we read that Taiyuan Monastery (*taiyuansi* 太原寺) was set up in the second year of Xianheng period (671).²² This suggests that Fazang began writing the *Tanxuan ji* between 687 and 689 at Weiguoxi Monastery. By extension, it is plausible that Fazang also commenced work on the ZHJ during this period, potentially continuing the project even after the monastery was renamed Chongfu Monastery. Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to assume that the ZHJ's compilation began during the years 687 to 689, with additional material incorporated after Fazang's passing.

The ZHJ is organised into 10 chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the transmission and veneration of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*: 'Versions' (*bulei* 部類), 'Hidden and Manifested' (*yinxian* 隱顯), 'Translation' (*chuanyi* 傳譯), 'Partial Translations' (*zhiliu* 支流), Commentaries (*lunshi* 論釋), 'Preaching' (*jiangjie* 講解), 'Reciting' (*fengsong* 諷誦), 'Chanting' (*zhuandu* 轉讀), 'Copying' (*shuxie* 書寫), and 'Miscellaneous' (*zhuanishu* 轉述).²³ Of particular interest are the seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters, which document miraculous events associated with specific devotional practices. The seventh chapter, 'Reciting', recounts the miraculous deeds of 11 monks and lay practitioners who consistently recited the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The eighth chapter, 'Chanting', details the supernatural experiences of nine monks and laypeople who excelled in chanting the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The ninth chapter, 'Copying', highlights the miraculous acts of six individuals who devoted themselves to transcribing the text.

¹⁸ 《中国佛教史辞典》(027. 374-380) 鎌田茂雄编. 中国佛教史辞典. 东京堂出版, 1981.9.

¹⁹ T35n1733 p0123a25-26.

²⁰ B17n0092_p0605a05.

²¹ 《長安志》卷十又曰“東北隅崇福寺,本侍中觀國公楊恭仁宅。咸亨元年,以武皇后外氏故宅立為太原寺。垂拱三年,改為魏園寺。載初元年,又改為崇福寺。寺額武太后飛白書。

²² Yuan 2013: 67.

²³ Hamar 2011:184-185. The translation of the 10 chapters is cited from Hamar.

The ZHJ holds considerable importance for the study of both the propagation of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and the history of the Huayan School. While it is debated whether or not ZHJ should be classified strictly as a collection of miraculous stories, it is undeniable that the miraculous tales contained within it provided substantial inspiration and material for Fazang's disciples in compiling the *Huayan ganying zhuan* 華嚴感應傳, a two-volume collection of miraculous responses to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. Consequently, ZHJ may be viewed as the foundational work for the tradition of Huayan miraculous tales.²⁴

Account of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Dafang-guang fo huayanjing ganying zhuan 大方廣佛華嚴經感應轉)

The *Account of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Dafangguang fo huayanjing ganying zhuan* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應轉; hereafter: GYZH) was edited by the layman Hu Youzhen in 783.²⁵ In the introduction to this collection, Hu explains his motivation for revising earlier versions:

此傳本花嚴疏主藏公門徒僧惠英，集為上下兩卷。今予鄙其事外浮詞蕪於祥感，乃筆削以為一卷。俾有見聞于茲秘乘，生難遭想，各勉受持。²⁶

This collection was originally authored by Fazang's disciple Huiying in two fascicles. However, in my view, the wording of the stories was impractical and disordered. Therefore, I have condensed it into a single fascicle so that those who encounter it will recognise how rare it is to come across this supreme secret sūtra and will then endeavour to uphold it.

This statement clearly indicates that GYZH is based on Huiying's earlier two-volume version. There has been considerable scholarly discussion regarding the origins of GYZH and related collections. Chengguan noted that the *Collection of Avataṃsaka-sūtra-related Numinous Tales (Zuanling ji* 纂靈記; hereafter: ZLJ) was initially written by Fazang but later embellished by others.²⁷ Although Chengguan identifies Fazang as the original author of ZLJ, he does not explicitly clarify the relationship between ZHJ and ZLJ. However, the scholar Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn (崔致遠, 857-?) suggests that Fazang compiled a five-volume ZHJ based on two earlier biographies and other collections. According to Ch'oe, ZHJ was also referred to as ZLJ, and while it remained incomplete at Fazang's death, his

²⁴ Zhang Xu 2018: 233.

²⁵ T51n2074 p 0177c24–25. 幽貞以有唐建中癸亥紀。敬發此願。為此歸命文。

²⁶ T51n2074 p0173b06–09.

²⁷ T36n1736 p0110a13. 纂靈記說：然此記本是藏和尚製，後經修飾。

disciples (i.e., Huiying, Huiyuan, and others) continued its compilation, adding comments and eulogies but making minimal alterations to the original content.²⁸ Thus, Ch'oe argues that ZHJ and ZLJ are essentially the same collection.

Üich'ön (義天, 1055–1101),²⁹ a Korean monk, further elaborates on this relationship in his *Xinbian zhuzong jiaocang zonglu* 新編諸宗教藏總錄, stating that the five-volume ZHJ was authored by Fazang, while the five-volume ZLJ was compiled by Huiyuan, and the one-volume GYZH was edited by Hu Youzhen.³⁰ However, Üich'ön does not reference the two-volume version of GYZH authored by Huiying. Purui 普瑞 (1254–1329) offers a similar explanation, stating that ZHJ was initially edited by Fazang and later slightly modified by his disciples. According to Purui, Huiyuan, a disciple of Fazang from Jingfa Monastery (*jingfa si* 靜法寺), revised ZHJ into the five-fascicle *Zuanling ji*, while Huiying, another disciple from Jingxing Monastery (*jingxing si* 經行寺), edited the text into the two-fascicle *Huayan ganying zhuan*. Finally, Hu Youzhen from Siming Mountain (*siming shan* 四明山) condensed this work into a single fascicle.³¹ This can be substantiated by another collection, YQZH, which cited Purui's statements mentioned above.³² Purui clearly points out the relationship between these four collections: ZHJ, ZLJ, the two-fascicle GYZH, and the one-fascicle GYZH. *Huayanjing zhuanji* was written by Fazang. Later on, his disciple Huiyuan edited it into ZLJ and another of his disciples, Huiying, edited it into the two-fascicle GYZH. Hu Youzhen reedited it into the one-fascicle GYZH based on the two-fascicle GYZH.

Hamar has also explored the relationship between GYZH and other related collections, concluding that GYZH must have been based on ZHJ.³³ Similarly, Chinese scholar Zhang Xu identifies three distinct categories of Huayan collections of miraculous tales: Fazang's ZHJ as the origin of Huayan miraculous stories, Huiyuan's ZLJ as the five-volume systematic collection, and Huiying's *Huayan ganying zhuan* alongside Hu Youzhen's GYZH as the two- and one-volume versions, respectively.³⁴

Based on this evidence, it is evident that GYZH was derived from ZHJ, which focused exclusively on miraculous stories connected to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The ZHJ can thus be regarded as the first compilation of such tales, which Huiyuan subsequently expanded into the five-volume *Zuanling ji*, Huiying con-

²⁸ T50n2054 p0283a06–08. 由是簡二傳而聚異聞。考百祥而騰近說。緝華嚴傳五卷。或名纂靈記(此記未畢而逝。門人慧苑慧英等續之別加論贊。文極省約所益無幾。

²⁹ T55n2184 p1173a03–11.

³⁰ T55n2184 p1167c12–14.

³¹ X08n0236 p0379b15–21.

³² X77n1533 p0646b05–10.

³³ Hamar 2011: 184.

³⁴ Zhang Xu 2018: 233.

densed into the two-volume *Huayan ganying zhuan*, and Hu Youzhen further reduced to a single volume.

The GYZH itself contains 24 miraculous tales arranged in chronological order, with the editor providing dates and identifying the protagonists of each story. Unlike Fazang's ZHJ, GYZH focuses solely on miraculous stories directly related to the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, a practice later mirrored in other collections such as Zhuhong's *ganying lu yanyi ji* 感應錄演義集 from the Ming Dynasty, Hongbi's *Yuqie zhi* 玉契志, and Zhou Kefu's *chonghua yanyi ji* 崇華演義集 from the Qing Dynasty.

Of the 24 stories included in GYZH, 15 occurred during the reign of Tang Gaozong (628–683) and Empress Wu Zetian in China. Six of these tales involve foreign monks, and all were either narrated or took place during the periods of Tang Gaozong and Empress Wu Zetian. The prominence of stories from this period suggests that both Tang Gaozong and Empress Wu Zetian placed great importance on the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* and contributed significantly to its dissemination. Moreover, their reign encouraged cultural exchanges with the Western Regions (Xiyu 西域), further facilitating the spread of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*.

Account of the Search for the Profundities of the Avatamsaka-sūtra (Huayanjing tanxuan ji 華嚴經探玄記)

The *Account of the Search for the Profundities of the Avatamsaka-sūtra (Huayanjing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記; hereafter TXJ), authored by Fazang, comprises 20 volumes. It serves as a detailed commentary on the 60-volume *Avatamsaka-sūtra* translated by Buddhahadra during the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The first volume provides a general outline, presenting the core doctrines of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* and the theoretical foundation of the Huayan School, focusing on 10 key aspects of its philosophy. Notably, nine of these 10 aspects are discussed in the initial volume. The remaining volumes, from the second to the 20th, offer an in-depth exegesis of the entire 60-volume *Avatamsaka-sūtra*.

This commentary is widely regarded as a seminal work within the Huayan School, providing a comprehensive interpretation of Buddhahadra's translation of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*. Jueshen 覺深 remarks on its significance, stating,

Master Zhiyan wrote the 'Record of the Search for the Profundities of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*' (*Huayanjing souxuan ji* 華嚴經搜玄記), offering a commentary on the 60-volume Huayan. However, his work was somewhat concise. Fazang, the third patriarch of Huayan, later expanded on Zhiyan's commentary

and provided a more detailed explanation of the tenets of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, thereby formulating a complete doctrinal system for Huayan Buddhism.³⁵

In addition to its doctrinal significance, TXJ records six miraculous tales in its first chapter, all of which are associated with the recitation or copying of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.

第十感應者，宋主請西來三藏令講此經，其人恨以方音未通，恐說不盡旨，乃入道場祈請。纔盈七日，遂夢以漢首易己梵頭，因即洞解宋言，講授無滯。又九隴山尼敬重此經，專精轉讀二十餘載，遂感目覩毛端剎海。又五臺山尼常誦此經，從曠至曉一部斯畢，口中光輝遍耀山谷。又北齊炬法師崇重此經，關於師受，專讀祈解十五餘年，遂夢善財授聰明藥，因即開悟造疏十卷，講五十餘遍。又定州中山修德禪師，翹誠護淨鈔寫此經，後開函放光照一百二十里。又闍人劉謙之，因於五臺山專讀此經，遂復丈夫形。諸如此例事極繁廣，具如五卷《華嚴傳》中說。³⁶

The 10th section is the miraculous accounts. The king of Song invited a Tripiṭaka master from the west to preach this sūtra. The master, anxious about his unfamiliarity with the Chinese language and his ability to fully explain the sūtra's meaning, prayed for assistance. After seven days, he dreamt that his Indian head had been replaced with a Chinese one, and upon awakening, he was able to speak Chinese fluently and deliver the teachings without difficulty. There was also a nun on Mount Jiulong (*jiulong shan* 九隴山) who revered this sūtra and spent over twenty years diligently reciting it, eventually gaining the ability to see the entire land and sea with her eyes. Another nun on Mount Wutai (*wutai shan* 五臺山) frequently recited the entire sūtra, completing it each night by morning. A brilliant light would radiate from her mouth, illuminating the entire valley. Similarly, during the Northern Qi period, Master Ju deeply respected this sūtra but lamented the lack of a teacher. He prayed for over 15 years, eventually dreaming of Sudhana giving him a medicine that enhanced his wisdom. This dream enabled him to comprehend the teachings of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, and he subsequently authored over 10 fascicles of commentaries and gave over 50 lectures on the text. In Dingzhou, Chan Master Xiude, with utmost sincerity and purity, copied the sūtra, and when he opened his incense box, it emitted a golden light that illuminated an area of 120 miles. Additionally, the eunuch Liu Qianzhi, who devoted himself to reciting the sūtra on Mount Wutai, experienced the miraculous restoration of his male form. Such accounts, along with many others, are recorded in the five volumes of the *Transmission of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.

³⁵ Jue 2016: 56

³⁶ T35n1733 p0123a13–a26.

This passage demonstrates that many stories in TXJ are either referenced from or directly linked to those in ZHJ, confirming that the compilation of ZHJ preceded that of TXJ.

Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (*Dafangguang fo huayanjing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏) and *Sub-commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayan sui shu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義抄)

The *Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayanjing shu*; hereafter JSH) and the *Sub-commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huayan sui shu yanyi chao*; hereafter YYCH) were both composed by Chengguan during the Tang Dynasty.³⁷ The JSH consists of 60 volumes and was initiated in the first year of the Xingyuan 興元 period (784) and completed in December of the third year of the Zhengyuan 貞元 period (787), as documented in the ‘Biography of Chengguan’ in the *Biographies of Masters from Song* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳).³⁸ Chengguan embarked on this work after observing that earlier commentaries on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* were too lengthy and complicated. The JSH seeks to introduce the primary content of the 80-volume *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and explicate the religious doctrines of the Huayan School in a more concise and accessible manner.

The third volume of JSH includes 23 accounts, which Chengguan categorises into six thematic groups: translation (*fanyi* 翻譯), commentary composition (*luncheng* 論成), sūtra copying (*shuxie* 書寫), recitation (*dusong* 讀誦), meditation (*guanxing* 觀行), and exegesis (*jiangshuo* 講說).³⁹ Two additional accounts, classified as miraculous, detail the extraordinary powers and effects attributed to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. Hamar observes that Chengguan conflated two distinct forms of recitation—*fengsong* 諷誦 and *zhuandu* 轉讀—into a single category, *dusong* 讀誦.⁴⁰ Hamar also notes that Chengguan introduced the new category of ‘meditation’ (*guanxing*), likely due to his study under several Chan masters, reflecting the influence of Chan Buddhism on his teachings.⁴¹

The 90-volume YYCH serves as a comprehensive supplement to JSH, offering further elucidation of Chengguan’s commentary. In the fifth volume, Chengguan provides detailed explanations of the aforementioned 23 miraculous

³⁷ For a partial Hungarian translation of Chengguan’s commentary and subcommentary on the chapter ‘Manifestation of the Tathāgata of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*’, see Hamar 2002.

³⁸ T50n2061 p0737b01–b12.

³⁹ The English translation of the categories is cited from Hamar.

⁴⁰ Hamar 2011: 187.

⁴¹ Hamar 2011: 190.

accounts. The YYCH is considered one of Chengguan's most significant contributions, and it stands as the most celebrated exposition of his doctrinal insights.

Account of Chengguan's Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Huayan xuantan huixuan ji 華嚴懸談會玄記)

During the Yuan Dynasty, Huayan scholars primarily focused on interpreting and disseminating the works of Chengguan and Zongmi from the Tang Dynasty. Although the Yuan Dynasty produced few original theoretical contributions, it played an important role in propagating Huayan Buddhism through the activities of monks engaged in the preaching, chanting, and practical application of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.⁴² Huayan monks were dispersed across various regions, with significant communities on Mount Wutai, in Yuandadu (modern-day Beijing), and throughout southern China.

One noteworthy figure of this period was Shi Purui 釋普瑞, who was affiliated with the Zaiguang Monastery (Zaiguang si 再光寺) in Cangshan 蒼山. Purui played a pivotal role in the spread of Huayan Buddhism in Yunnan following the fall of the Dali Kingdom and the establishment of Yunnan Province, which facilitated increased interaction between the local Buddhist community and the broader Chinese Buddhist tradition.

Xueting Purui 雪庭普瑞, also known as the 'Huayan School Master', is recognised for his contribution to Huayan Buddhism during the Yuan Dynasty.⁴³ Zhang Xilu estimates that Purui was born around 1289.⁴⁴ Purui's most renowned work is the *Account of Chengguan's Enigmatic Discussions on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Huayan xuantan 華嚴懸談)*, which further elaborates on Chengguan's commentary and sub-commentary. Chapter 38 of Purui's work contains miraculous stories related to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, providing additional interpretations and insights into Chengguan's original teachings.

Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Dafangguang fo huayanjing ganying lueji 大方廣佛華嚴經感應略記)

The *Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Dafangguang fo huayanjing ganying lueji 大方廣佛華嚴經感應略記)*, authored by Master Lianchi 蓮池 (1535–1615) during the Ming

⁴² Yang 2017: 298.

⁴³ Zhang Xilu 2018: 59.

⁴⁴ Zhang Xilu 2018: 60.

Dynasty, is an important text within both the Pure Land and Huayan schools. Master Lianchi's original name was Shi Zhuhong 释祿宏, and his secular surname was Shen 沈. Lianchi was one of the four eminent masters of the Ming Dynasty, alongside Zibai Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655).

Xiao Yu's research on Lianchi's name traces its origin to Dao'an (312–385), who advocated for Buddhist monks to adopt the surname 'Shi' 釋 in honor of Śākyamuni Buddha, as outlined in the *Ekôttarikâgama* (*Zengyi ahanjing* 增壹阿含經).⁴⁵ Following this tradition, Lianchi abandoned his secular surname Shen and adopted the Buddhist surname Shi. The name 'Lianchi' 蓮池, meaning 'Lotus Pond', was chosen to reflect his veneration of Master Huiyuan's 慧遠 (334–416) Lotus Society (*lianshe* 蓮社) and his aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land (*jingtū* 淨土). Due to his extended residence in Yunxi Monastery (*yunxi si* 雲棲寺), he was also known as Master Yunxi 雲棲.⁴⁶

Lianchi was the eighth patriarch of the Pure Land School, but he also held an esteemed position within the Huayan tradition, venerated by both schools. His early education in Confucianism, followed by a profound conversion to Buddhism, allowed him to develop a syncretic worldview that reconciled the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism. He famously espoused the view that Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism share a common origin. In addition to his role in promoting Buddhism, Lianchi was a prolific writer, producing over 30 collections, including *Collection on Rebirth* (*Wangsheng ji* 往生集) and *Essays by the Bamboo Window* (*Zhuchuang suibi* 竹窗隨筆). After his death, his disciples, including Daxian 大賢, compiled his works into a 34-volume collection entitled *The Dharma Gathering in Yunxi* (*Yunxi Fahui* 雲棲法匯), one volume of which is the *Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.⁴⁷

This work records 28 accounts of miraculous events, each with its own title, most of which align with the titles given by Chengguan. Of the 28 tales, 22 are abridged versions of stories from Chengguan's commentary, while six are new accounts unique to Lianchi's text.

⁴⁵ Xiao 2002: 35.

⁴⁶ Xiao 1999: 26.

⁴⁷ Xiao 1999: 27.

Causes of Stimuli and Response Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Huayanjing ganying yuanqi zhuan 華嚴經感應緣起傳)

The *Causes of Stimuli and Response Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Huayanjing ganying yuanqi zhuan 華嚴經感應緣起傳)* was authored by Hongbi 弘璧 (1599–1670),⁴⁸ a Chan monk residing at Sheng'en Monastery (*shengensi* 聖恩寺) in Wu prefecture.⁴⁹ His biography is found in the fourth volume of *The Annals of Dengwei Sheng'en Monastery (Dengwei Sheng'en si zhi 鄧尉聖恩寺志)* and also in the 69th volume of *The Complete Collection of Five Chan Books (Wudeng quanshu 五燈全書)*.⁵⁰ Born in Wuxi, Jiangsu, Hongbi became a monk at the age of 17 and devoted five years to the practice of Huayan. By the age of 22, he had studied under the renowned master Sanfeng Fazang 三峰法藏 and led an exceptionally austere life. He passed away at the age of 72.

The *Causes of Stimuli and Response Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* is structured into 10 sections. The first section, 'Nine Assemblies Preaching' (*Jiuhui shuo jing* 九會說經), describes the nine assemblies held in seven locations by the Buddha and various Bodhisattvas. The second section, 'Compiling on Mount Wei' (*Weishan jieji* 圍山結集), focuses on the compilation of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* on Mount Wei, noting that there are 10 versions of the text. The shortest versions were translated into Chinese as the 80-volume *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and the 60-volume *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The third section, 'Nāgās' Preservation' (*Tianlong hu zang* 天龍護藏), recounts how the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* was safeguarded in the Nāgās' palace. It is said that the King of the Nāgās (*longwang* 龍王) brought Nāgārjuna to his palace and transmitted the teachings to him. The fourth section, 'Nāgārjuna Transmits the Sūtra to the Human World' (*Longshu songchu* 龍樹誦出), narrates Nāgārjuna's transmission of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* to the human realm, citing various sources to validate this account.

The fifth section, 'Spreading to the Western Regions' (*Liuchuan xiyu* 流傳西域), describes the spread of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and other scriptures, each comprising 100,000 ślokas, to Zhejupan 遮拘盤, where they were held in high esteem. The sixth section, 'Zhi Faling Receives the Sūtra and Returns It to China' (*Faling qinggui* 法領請歸), discusses how Zhi Faling brought 36,000 ślokas of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* back to China. The seventh section, 'Buddhabhadra's Early Translation' (*Juexian chu yi* 覺賢初譯), presents a biography of Buddhabhadra, emphasising his lifetime achievements and his role in translating the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* into Chinese. The eighth section, 'Śikṣānanda Retr translates'

⁴⁸ 'Hongbi 弘璧.' In: *Person Authority Database*.

⁴⁹ Wujun is Suzhou. 'Monument of Poushi Monk in Mount Deng (Dengshan Poushi Daheshang Daohengbei 鄧山剖石大和尚道行碑).' In: *Archive of Buddhist Temple Gazetteers*.

⁵⁰ X82n1571_069.

(*Xi xue chong fan* 喜學重翻), explains how Empress Wu dispatched envoys to Khotan, who retrieved an additional 9,000 ślokas of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. These, along with 45,000 ślokas, were retranslated into what is now the 80-volume version of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The ninth section, ‘Manifestation of the Miraculous Tales’ (*Zhengzhang ganying* 正彰感應), lists 23 miraculous accounts, all of which are drawn from Chengguan’s sub-commentary. The 10th section enumerates an additional 15 tales drawn from various sources: one from *The Origin and Traces of the Commentaries on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Shuchao yuanqi xingji* 疏鈔緣起行跡), one from *Zhangzhe’s Deeds on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Zhangzhe huayanlun shiji* 長者華嚴論事蹟), four from *The Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, four from Huiying’s *Miraculous stories on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Ganying zhuan* 感應傳), one from *The Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳), one from *The Five Lamps of Transmission* (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元), and three from *Account of Chengguan’s Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan xuantan huixuan ji* 華嚴懸談會玄記). Among these is a repeated story attributed to Deyuan 德圓, a figure from the 6th century.

Additionally, the collection introduces three verses from the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The section titled ‘Miscellanies Collection’ (*Zalu* 雜錄) includes one story from the *Miscellanies Collection of Xitang* (*Xitang zalu* 溪堂雜錄). It is worth noting that three of the cited collections have been lost: *The Origin and Traces of the Commentaries on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Shuchao yuanqi xingji* 疏鈔緣起行跡), Huiying’s *Miraculous stories on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Ganying zhuan* 感應傳), and *Miscellanies Collection of Xitang*. Portions of these lost texts, however, are preserved in Hongbi’s work.

Chronological Account of the Efficacies of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra (*Lichao huayanjing chiyan ji* 歷朝華嚴經持驗紀)

The *Chronological Account of the Efficacies of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Lichao huayanjing chiyan ji* 歷朝華嚴經持驗紀) was authored by Zhou Kefu, who also compiled several other collections of miraculous tales associated with various scriptures, including the *Account of the Efficacies of the Jin’gang Sūtra* (*Jin’gangjing chiyan ji* 金剛經持驗紀), the *Account of the Efficacies of the Fahua Sūtra* (*Fahuajing chiyan ji* 法華經持驗紀), and the *Account of the Efficacies of the Avalokiteśvara Sūtra* (*Guanyinjing chiyan ji* 觀音經持驗紀). According to *The Morning Bell of the Pure Land* (*Jingtu chengzhong* 淨土晨鐘), Zhou Kefu wrote the *Chronological Account of the Efficacies of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* in the year of Shunzhi Yihai (1659), indicating that he lived

during the Shunzhi era (1643–1661).⁵¹ The *Chronological Account* notes that it was written during the Wushu year (1658), after which it circulated widely and garnered popularity.⁵² As a result, Zhou later compiled additional collections of miraculous tales. This strongly suggests that the *Chronological Account* was completed around 1658.

Zhou Kefu hailed from Yangxian 陽羨 during the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and was a disciple of Jingye 淨業.⁵³ While his work bears similarities to earlier collections of miraculous stories, it also presents distinct features. In terms of structure and selection of material, Zhou followed the traditional method of his predecessors, often drawing from the classical hagiographies of earlier masters. However, his work diverges in its purpose, focusing more explicitly on encouraging virtuous practices and promoting the Pure Land path. Zhou's intention in re-editing the miraculous stories was to inspire others to follow the Pure Land teachings. He writes:

況淨土法門，超出生死輪迴，永不退轉，直至成佛而後已。是勸一人修淨土，乃成就一眾生作佛也。凡作佛者，必度無量眾生。彼所度之眾生，皆由我而始。其福報信不可窮盡。故欲勸一切見者聞者，廣大其心，以佛之心為心，使人人知之而盡生淨土。⁵⁴

The gate of the Pure Land Dharma leads beyond the cycle of birth and death, never regressing until Buddhahood is attained. If I persuade one person to cultivate the Pure Land, I am helping one sentient being become a Buddha. Every person who attains Buddhahood will, in turn, save countless sentient beings. Those saved beings have me to thank as the origin of their salvation. The merit of this virtuous cycle is boundless. Therefore, I wish to urge all who see and hear this to expand their hearts and align them with the Buddha's heart, so that all may come to know and ultimately reside in the Pure Land.

From this, it is evident that Zhou Kefu believed that the highest form of Pure Land practice is not merely the individual recitation of the Buddha's name to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land, but the aspiration for universal salvation, ensuring that 'all living beings become Buddhas'. The miraculous stories collected by Zhou serve as evidence for practitioners, demonstrating the efficacy of virtuous practices and motivating them to continue on the path to enlightenment.

The *Chronological Account of the Efficacies of the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* comprises 49 stories, arranged chronologically across various dynasties, beginning

⁵¹ X62n1172 p0033b19.

⁵² X77n1534 p0648b16.

⁵³ Yangxian 陽羨 (now Yixing 宜興, Jiangsu)

⁵⁴ X77n1534 p0648b08–12

with the 2nd–3rd centuries CE and extending to the Ming Dynasty. In many cases, Zhou provides references to his sources, which offer valuable insight into the content of other collections and assist in reconstructing their narratives.

Among the sources cited, two stories are drawn from the *Biography of the Western Regions* (*Xiyu ji* 西域記), two from *Go to the Western Paradise* (*Yunxi wangsheng ji* 雲棲往生集), one from *The Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳), three from *Account of Chengguan's Commentary on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan xuantan huixuan ji* 華嚴懸談會玄記), two from *Compilation of Spiritual Records* (*Zuanling ji* 纂靈記), four from *The Short Record of Accounts of Stimuli and Responses Related to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, three from Huiying's *Miraculous stories on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Ganying zhuan* 感應傳), one from *The Origin and Traces of the Commentaries on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Shuchao yuanqi xingji* 疏鈔緣起行跡), one from *Zhangzhe's Deeds on the Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Zhangzhe huayanlun shiji* 長者華嚴論事蹟), one from *The Five Lamps of Transmission* (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元), and one from *Biography of The Ministry* (*Gongbu ziyou zhuanji* 工部自有傳紀). The remaining tales do not provide explicit references to earlier collections.

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