

The Meaning of Vairocana in Hua-yen Buddhism

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[p. 403] As the Buddha who occupies the center of the maṇḍala in esoteric Buddhism, Vairocana is well known to students of Tibetan Buddhism and Japanese Shingon. He also shares with such Buddhas as śākyamuni, Amitābha, and others a wide circle of devotees among the exoteric forms of Buddhism in Japan and China. In Sino-Japanese Buddhism outside Shingon, he is most often associated with the Hua-yen (in Japanese, Kegon) school. This article is limited to the Hua-yen concept of Vairocana, and I do not presume to imply that my conclusions apply to his esoteric form.

Vairocana is, of course, the cosmic Buddha of Great Illumination, whose body is infinitely large and whose life is infinitely long. A pamphlet given to the visitor at Tōdai-ji, the headquarters of Japanese Hua-yen, in Nara, tells us, "... Vairocana Buddha exists everywhere and every time in the universe, and the universe itself is his body. At the same time, the songs of birds, the colors of flowers, the currents of streams, the figures of clouds – all these are the sermons of Buddha." [1] We are also told that this great Buddha is preaching constantly and eternally for the salvation of all beings.

The past practices of the Buddha Vairocana Cause oceans of Buddha-lands to be purified, immeasurable, incalculable, infinite. He freely pervades all places. The Dharma-body of the Tathāgata is inconceivable; it is formless, markless, and beyond comparison. He manifests a form and marks for the sake of living beings. And there is no place he is not manifested. In all the atoms of all the Buddha-lands, Vairocana displays his sovereign might. He vows with the earth-shaking sounds of oceans of Buddhas To tame every kind of living being. [2]

These passages, and others which will be quoted later, seem to be clear enough. Vairocana is, in some sense, the universe. But in what sense are we to understand such passages? Do they mean literally that the universe is in the shape of a huge man, like the cosmic puruṣa of some of the older non-Buddhist Indian texts? Do they rather mean that Vairocana is a spirit who inhabits the forms of men, stones, grass, stars, and so on? We seem to be confronted here, in short, in the figure of Vairocana and the Hua-yen view of existence, with some form of that dread pantheism which is so abhorred by spokesmen for the great monotheistic religions. Certainly the language leads to that conclusion. These passages, as well as numerous others in Hua-yen literature, lead us to [p. 404] believe that Vairocana is a substance which is immanent in phenomenal things. A corollary of this, that the phenomenal world itself is an emanation of some prior existing world stuff, grows out of the language of Hua-yen texts.

Let us dispose first of the matter of pan-theism, because it is no real issue here. Buddhism is not, of course, a theistic religion, and so, strictly speaking, we are certainly not confronted with pantheism. Whatever Vairocana ultimately is, he has very few of the functions of deity. He is not the creator of the universe, though the language of Hua-yen texts do give that impression. He is not the stern judge of good and bad, though he is law itself. One cannot pray to Vairocana, petition him for favors, make deals with him, or love or fear him. Vairocana is not that kind of being. In short, he is not a god. However, he is a Buddha, and therefore we can raise the question of whether Hua-yen teaches pan-Buddhism. It is clear that Hua-yen does claim that in some sense everything is Vairocana, and so, flatly stated, without qualification, Hua-yen is a species of pan-Buddhism. However, having said that, the real question remains: In what sense is the universe identical with Vairocana? The question is, simply put, what, or who, is Vairocana?

We are led astray at the very beginning with the language used in the systematic texts of such writers as Fa-tsang (643-712), the third patriarch and de facto founder of the Hua-yen system. His treatises are the beginning and end of any study of Hua-yen, and his terminology easily leads us to some wrong conclusions. [3] One of the best examples of this can be found in his *Hua-yen i ch'eng chiao i fen-ch'i chang* [a] (hereafter translated as "Treatise on the Five Doctrines," [4]) which is, in its overall intent, devoted to demonstrating two things:

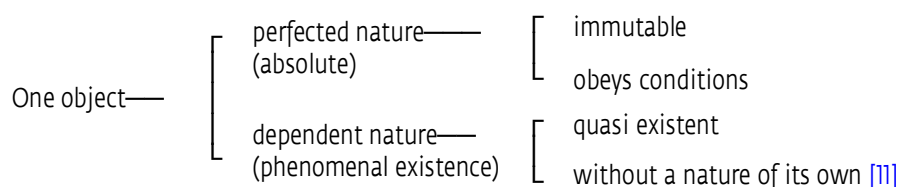
- (1) the essential identity of all phenomena, and
- (2) the interpenetration, or interdependence, of these same phenomena.

His success in showing the former depends on his ability to demonstrate first that all the apparently diverse and distinct things which comprise the phenomenal universe are at heart identical because of essential emptiness (*śūnyatā*). He accomplishes this through a highly unusual treatment of the well-known theory of the three natures (*tri-svabhāva*). [5] The three natures of any one thing are *parikalpita-svabhāva*, which is the imagined, false nature of a thing; *paratantrasvabhāva*, [p. 405] which is the thing in its nature of being dependent on other conditions for its existence; and *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*, the perfected or absolute nature of the same thing. A common treatment of the three natures in Buddhist literature consists of interpreting the first as impure, the third as pure, and the middle as a mixture of impure and pure. [6] What this means, of course, is that the dependent nature, which is phenomenal existence resulting from conditions, itself is a compound of the impure and pure, because if the imagined, false aspect of that dependent nature is removed through meditational practices, the purified dependent nature will be revealed as the perfected, absolute nature. This is possible because Buddhist practice involves primarily a change in one's way of viewing existence. What is unusual in Fa-tsang's treatment is that he shows that each of the three natures is itself composed of two parts, which may be called the

absolute and relative, and that because of this mixture, although things may be different in function, appearance, and so on, they are all identical in being ultimately and essentially absolute. Since the first nature, parikalpita, is not really germane to this discussion, I will restrict myself to an analysis of the other two natures. For this discussion it is important to remember that although two (or three) natures are being discussed, they occur in any one object.

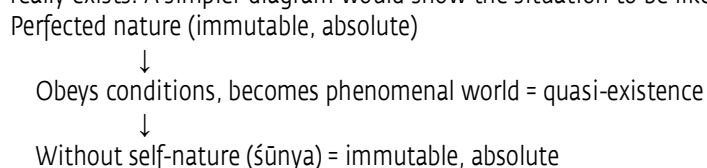
In discussing the perfected nature of the object at hand, Fa-tsang says that this nature has two aspects. First, it is immutable, or nonchanging. [7] This is, of course, to be expected of the absolute. It never changes under any conditions, and is by definition eternal, unmoving, unchanging, and, in general, always exactly what it is. This is a common description of the Dharma kāya in all schools of Buddhism. However, next, Fa-tsang says something which is not only uncommon in Buddhism, but which seems to be a logical contradiction of his first statement. He says that this perfected nature "obeys conditions"; that is, it is conditioned by things outside itself, and, under the sway of these conditions, changes and manifests itself as the phenomenal world of discrete objects. [8] While the immutability and the devolution into phenomenal forms seem to contradict each other, the reason this is not really a self-contradiction will be clear when we have settled the precise meaning of the two terms.

Next, Fa-tsang turns to the dependent nature, and here, too, he finds a dual aspect. First, it has the aspect of quasi-existence. [9] By this he means that it appears to the senses to be absolutely existent, but because it is a result of conditions, it has no ultimacy. It is evident from his discussion that this [p. 406] conditioned, quasi-existent phenomenon is nothing other than the conditioned aspect of the perfected nature. Now, he says, if we scrutinize this apparently really existent thing, we will discover that it is completely lacking in any nature of its own. [10] In Buddhist terminology, it lacks a svabhāva, which can be translated as "own-being," "self-nature," and "nature of its own." It is therefore empty and has only a contingent existence. Thus, though it appears before us as a really existing thing, it does not have an ultimate existence at all, since, according to Buddhist axiom, only something with a svabhāva is really real. The two aspects of each nature will be clearer if they are shown in a simple chart.



The purpose of this sort of treatment of the two natures, as was remarked above, is to show that when we examine all sides of the world of things that confront us, we find that these things have a mixed nature. Fa-tsang now says that the naturelessness of phenomena is identical with the immutable aspect of the absolute, and the quasi-existent aspect of things is identical with the conditioned aspect of the absolute. Whether we examine the absolute or the phenomenal, we arrive at the same two aspects, the absolute and the phenomenal. Things are thus a mixture of these two, and this is a common treatment of the dependent nature; that is, the universe of conditioned things. It is not my intention to dwell on Fa-tsang's reason for doing this sort of thing or the consequences for Hua-yen philosophy. What concerns me more here is to try to determine what Fa-tsang means by "immutable," "obedience to conditions," and so on.

At this point, several remarks are in order for the sake of clarity. The peculiar method of subdivision used by Fa-tsang may seem to show that in the discussion of the perfected nature, for instance, the two aspects of immutability and obedience to conditions are distinguishable aspects of an underlying ground. But, the subdivision is merely meant to show that, on the one hand, the absolute remains the absolute, which is what "immutable" means [p. 407] there, and, on the other hand, that it also obeys conditions which cause it to manifest itself as the world of phenomenal objects. Then, when we turn to the dependent nature, we are, in fact, not really leaving the conditioned, manifested aspect of the perfected nature; the "obedience to conditions" of the perfected nature and the "quasi-existence" of the dependent nature are the same thing. The aspect of self-naturelessness in this quasi-existence is simply the way in which this quasi-existent phenomenality really exists. A simpler diagram would show the situation to be like this:



From this, we rightly conclude that if the emptiness of phenomenal reality is identical with the immutable absolute, the real reality of phenomena must be its noumenous, perfect nature.

At this point, some of the problems involved in determining what Buddhists really mean by 'Vairocana' must already be apparent. This is repeated in almost identical language in other works by Fa-tsang as well as in the writings of other Hua-yen masters. The same picture is to be found also in the "Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna," where it is said that "As a result of the winds of ignorance, Mind, which is intrinsically pure, becomes agitated and becomes impure mind." [12] This is not mere coincidence, as can be seen in the many times in Fa-tsang's "Treatise" when he quotes the "Awakening of

Faith." It is evident that Fa-tsang has used the elaborate and round-about method of manipulating the three-nature theory to establish on his own grounds a picture of existence which is identical with that of the "Awakening of Faith." [13] Both Fa-tsang's description of the structure of existence and that of the "Awakening of Faith" have been referred to as species of tathāgata garbha thought, which they are, and the problem of language is a major obstacle in trying to figure out what this kind of system is getting at.

The problem with Fa-tsang's description of existence begins with his insistence in speaking of the absolute in terms of immutability. "Immutability" has the strong connotation of stasis, and when we are told that this immutable absolute forms the real essence of phenomenal reality, our natural tendency is [p. 408] to conceive of it as a static entity lying immanent in things. We therefore conceive of it as a substance of some sort, which constitutes the eternal and unchanging core beneath the constant flux of external features. Fa-tsang is emphatic about the point that although the absolute obeys the force of conditions and becomes the phenomenal world, it never loses its aspect of immutability. However, at the same time, to speak of the absolute as becoming conditioned and forming phenomenal reality gives the strong impression that the absolute must have existed prior in time to the things it later became, and along with the impression of the absolute as substance we get the corollary impression that we are dealing here with a theory of emanation, similar to that found, for instance, in the Lao-tzu.

Another passage from another of Fa-tsang's commentaries shows the same language, with the same connotations. In speaking of the two aspects of the absolute, he uses the analogy of gold:

Gold has the two aspects of immutability and obedience to conditions. It has the meaning of immutability because it does not lose its weight [i.e., it is not diminished]. It has the meaning of obedience to conditions because it easily becomes finger rings [and other things]. Also, the ring has the two aspects of emptiness and manifestation. It has no essence apart from the gold, so it is empty. It appears before us because the ring looks like a ring. Because the emptiness of the ring is dependent on the immutability of the gold, even though the ring may lose its form of a ring, the gold is not diminished. Consequently, living beings are the Dharma-body [of the Buddha]. Also, because the manifestation of the ring is dependent on the gold's obedience to conditions, the gold's whole essence manifests as a ring. Therefore, the Dharma-body is beings. [14]

What does this sort of language mean?

Fortunately, in the above description of the structure of existence, Fa-tsang makes another series of equations which will help us determine more accurately what he means by "immutability" and "obedience to conditions." Shortly after discussing the two aspects of each of the three natures and having asserted an essential identity of phenomenal existence, Fa-tsang makes the following series of equations:

Tathatā [i.e., the perfected nature] means existence, because it is the basis of error and enlightenment. Also, it means non-empty because it is indestructible... Also, tathatā means emptiness, because it is divorced from characteristics, because it obeys conditions, and because it is opposed to impurity... Also tathatā both exists and does not exist, [i.e., is empty] because it is endowed with [both] qualities [of existence and emptiness]...

The nature which is dependent on the other (paratantra-svabhāva) means existence, because it is formed by conditions, since it lacks a nature of its own Also, [it] means non-existence, because that which is created from conditions has no nature of its own... [p. 409] [It] also both exists and does not exist, because it is formed from conditions and has no nature of its own... [15]

Keeping in mind that Fa-tsang frequently substitutes the term "nonexistence" for "emptiness," his equations will look like this:

Perfected nature	[Immutability =existence
		Obeys conditions = nonexistence (empty)
Dependent nature	[Quasi-existence = existence
		Without its own nature == nonexistence (empty)

Whatever Fa-tsang means by "immutability" and "obedience to conditions," they are equated with existence and emptiness respectively. The same equation is made with reference to the aspects of the dependent nature, and since, as we noticed earlier, the naturelessness of the dependent nature is identical with the immutability of the perfected nature, and the quasi-existence of the dependent nature is also identical with the conditionedness of the perfected nature, Fa-tsang is also saying that existence and emptiness are identical, a sound śūnyavādin statement. Now, if we can learn how Fa-tsang understands "existence" and "emptiness," we should be able to discover what he means by "immutability," and so on.

The solution to this problem can be found in a number of Fa-tsang's writings, but one of the best sources is his commentary on the famous and vastly important "Heart Sutra," where he is not ostensibly concerned with demonstrating the truth of Hua-yen. [16] As is well known to students of Buddhism, this brief sūtra is remarkable because it presents in the space of about one printed page the gist, or "heart," of the vast prajñāpāramitā teaching on emptiness. Concerned as it is, therefore, with the relationship between form (Fa-tsang's "existence") and emptiness, Fa-tsang's commentary on it

should give us a good index of his understanding of these two terms. In commenting on the lines of the sutra which say, "Oh, śāriputra, form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Form is identical with emptiness and emptiness is identical with form. The same is true concerning feelings, ideas, volition, and consciousness," Fa-tsang says this with regard to form and emptiness:

These doubts [by the small vehicle] are as follows: [the adherent to the small vehicle says,] 'Our small vehicle sees that while the psycho-physical being still persists, the constituents of personality [skandhas] are without a self. What is the difference between this and the emptiness of dharmas?' Now we explain this by saying that your belief is that the absence of a self among the [p. 410] constituents of personality is called 'emptiness of the person.' It is not that [each of] the skandhas themselves are empty. Here, the skandhas are different from emptiness. Now we show that the skandhas themselves are empty of own-being (svabhāva), which is different from what you hold. Therefore, the sūtra says, 'Form is not different from emptiness, etc.'

Also, they doubt thus: 'In our small vehicle, when one enters the state (nirvāṇa) in which there is no psycho-physical being, body and mind [lit. 'knowledge'] are both terminated. What is the difference between this and "emptiness is without form?"' The explanation is this: in your tenet, form is not [in itself] empty, but only when form is destroyed is there then emptiness. This is not, however, so. Form is identical with emptiness; it is not an emptiness which results from the destruction of form. Therefore, this is not the same [as what you teach]. [17]

Further on, the same explanation is given to the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva, and a third point is added:

The third doubt [entertained by the Bodhisattva] is that he believes that emptiness is a thing, [K] and he seizes on emptiness as an entity. Now, [the sutra] shows that emptiness is identical with form. One should not seize emptiness with [the concept of] emptiness. [18]

Several conclusions can be drawn from these comments. First, Fa-tsang knew that emptiness does not refer merely to the absence of a self considered to be an underlying personal unity in the five skandhas, as understood by Hīnayānists, but that it means that each of the five skandhas itself has no nature of its own. Thus, for instance, there is no form essence, or "formness," in form. While the Hīnayānists denied the existence of a real self as the core reality of the psycho-physical being, they felt that the building blocks of the being, the five skandhas, were realities. Now, in line with the "Heart Sutra," Fa-tsang says that each of the skandhas is also lacking in a nature of its own. Second, Fa-tsang knew that emptiness was not merely the absence of a thing in a locus. Emptiness is not something which occurs when matter and mind are absent, but is something said of existing things. Emptiness, therefore, is completely inseparable from form. Finally, Fa-tsang knew that emptiness was not a thing. The aspirant was not to reify emptiness and in this way try to grasp emptiness with the concept "emptiness." In this respect, Fa-tsang had inherited the work done by such predecessors as Seng-chao, who demonstrated that emptiness was not simply a more spiritual thing among a lot of other things. [19] He obviously knew that emptiness was not just another order of reality, albeit a more spiritual one, existing along side the phenomenal order, but that it was inseparable from form, or existence, itself.

Later, Fa-tsang discusses existence and emptiness in such a way that we [p. 411] can clearly see that emptiness is not something apart from form itself. He says that form and emptiness are related to each other in three ways. First, they are opposed to each other. A passage a little further on says, 'In emptiness there is no form,' etc., because emptiness injures form. In accordance with this, it can be said that 'in form there is no emptiness,' because form opposes emptiness. The reason for this is that if they preserve each other, they also necessarily destroy each other. Second, they are not mutually opposing. This means that since form is illusory, form does not necessarily obstruct emptiness. Because emptiness is true emptiness, it does not necessarily obstruct illusory form. If emptiness obstructed form, then this would be a destructive emptiness, and not real emptiness. If [form] obstructed emptiness, then it would be real form, not illusory form. Third, they are mutually creative. [I] That is, if this illusory form were to show an essence, then it would not be empty and would not become illusory form. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra* says, 'If all dharmas were not empty, there would be no religious practices, no religious result,' etc. The *Mādhyamikakārikās* [of Nāgārjuna] say, 'Because there is the principle of emptiness, therefore all dharmas are able to be perfected.' [20]

Fa-tsang's comments show the following points. (1) To say that dharmas are empty is to negate the absolute reality of form. (2) In negating form, emptiness does not literally destroy form. The object that possesses a material existence and appears before my very eyes is empty. To say that my pocket is empty does not mean that there is no pocket. The pocket is empty. By the same token, form does not cancel out the emptiness of that form. (3) Form and emptiness are mutually creative. There is form because there is emptiness, and there is, concomitantly, emptiness because there is form. Notice here that while it is true that form can only be form because there is emptiness, it is equally true that if there were no form, there would be no emptiness. Emptiness, therefore, is not something existing independently of form itself. Fa-tsang concludes this passage by saying that "... even though this true emptiness is the same as form and so forth, still, *form arises from conditions*. True emptiness does not produce form. In accordance with conditions, it [form] perishes. True emptiness does not extinguish [form]." [21] (Italics mine.) Here again, Fa-tsang takes pains to deny that although form and emptiness are identical, emptiness either creates form or destroys it. Form results from conditions.

In his essay called "Tranquility and Insight According to the Five Doctrines," Fa-tsang discusses the early doctrine of emptiness as taught by Nāgārjuna and his contemporaries, and makes these remarks:

All dharmas have the mark of emptiness, without exception... First, they are contemplated as being birthless. Second, they are contemplated as markless. 'Contemplated as being birthless' means that dharmas have no nature [p. 412] of their own [svabhāva]. They are mutually causative [m] and therefore are born. In their birth, they do not exist in reality, and so they are empty. They are as empty and non-existent as anything can be. Therefore, they are said to be birthless. A sūtra says, 'They are conditioned and therefore exist; they are without a nature of their own and are therefore empty.' This means that being natureless is identical with being conditioned. Being conditioned is identical with being natureless. [22]

This is a particularly revealing commentary. It adds to the former denial of substantialism the positive assertions with regard to existence and emptiness that (1) the existence of dharmas consists of their being formed by conditions or mutual causation. As the previous passages also noted, phenomenal reality comes into being as a result of conditions. (2) The conditionedness of phenomenal existence is precisely its emptiness, and Fa-tsang says explicitly that "Conditionedness is naturelessness"; that is, things are without nature, or empty because they are conditioned. This is in complete keeping with Nāgārjuna's dictum: "It is declared that dependent origination is emptiness..." (Mādhyamikakārikās, 24:18). It is clear from this passage, as well as others in the same treatise, that Fa-tsang realized quite well that not only was emptiness not a substance in existent things but that existence and emptiness are not two different things. Emptiness is merely the mutually conditioned manner in which phenomenal existence exists. Therefore, it can be said that if there were no form, or existence, there would be no emptiness, since there would be nothing of which it could be said that it is empty.

With these considerations in mind, we can now return to the original question. What is Vairocana? It can be seen now that when Fa-tsang says that the emptiness of things is identical with the immutable absolute, he is not in any sense conceiving of this emptiness as a substance in phenomenal objects. If emptiness is simply the interdependent nature of phenomenal existence, then "immutability," must refer to the empty, interdependent nature of things which constitutes what may be called their transcendental aspect. In other words, it is the transcendental "ever-thus" quality of interdependence, which is never found apart from interdependent thing themselves, which is called "immutable." Moreover, the Buddhist axiom that emptiness does not occur apart from phenomena means that this immutability cannot be static but must be dynamic, since phenomena are dynamic. It is just this "thusness" of things which is the religious goal of Buddhism to reveal to the practitioner. On the other hand, the obedience to conditions by the absolute indicates not an emanation of things out of a preexistent spiritual Being, but rather the [p. 413] immanence in phenomenal existence of this transcendental aspect. This will be clear if it is remembered that according to Buddhism, the problem for human beings begins with the habit of superimposing (āropa) constructs of a purely subjective nature on the immediacy of concrete experience, thus investing experience with meanings it does not really possess. Conversely, liberation is achieved through the expunging of this superimposition from the immediate apprehension of existence. This is, in fact, the whole point of the emptiness doctrine. It would seem therefore that the absolute obeys conditions and appears as form, or existence, in the sense that it is our inveterate ignorance (avidyā) which conditions the absolute and makes it appear as "form," and so on. In Buddhist terms my ignorance results in tathatā (= emptiness) being subjected to false imagining (vikalpa), and this is the way in which the absolute is conditioned. The world is born of ignorance and desire. However, the true nature of things, their emptiness, is not a thing apart from the things I falsely imagine; emptiness is immanent in the world of form, and seeing it involves only a changed perspective on my experience, that is, seeing it as interdependent.

Thus, we may speak of the absolute as existent from the point of view of the absolute itself. It is, as Fa-tsang says, the ground of error and wisdom, and therefore exists. Seen, on the other hand, as mere "things," or as form, we may speak of it as empty, for while it may seem to have an ultimate reality and existence, it has no essence which truly makes it so, and its real existence is only its dependent existence. Because form is empty, the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa can say that "Beings are identical with nirvāṇa, and do not have to enter nirvāṇa again," [23] and because emptiness is form, the "Sūtra on Neither Increase Nor Decrease" can say that "The Dharma-body [of the Buddha] transmigrating in the five paths [of sentient existence] is called 'sentient beings.'" [24] Seen falsely, as possessing svabhāvas, things are only things and are the source of dukkha; seen correctly, as empty and interdependent, things are nirvāṇa and the body of Vairocana.

We can directly answer the question of who Vairocana is by giving an equation such as Fa-tsang is so fond of: emptiness = interdependence = Vairocana. "Vairocana," in short, is a mere name for the interdependent way in which things really exist. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra, which is the scriptural basis for the Hua-yen school, says,

Clearly know that all dharmas
Are without any existence in their own being.

[p. 414] To understand the nature of dharmas in this way is to see Vairocana. [25] It is the special mission of the Hua-yen school of Buddhism to teach a view of the universe which is called, in Sanskrit, dharmadhātupratītyasamutpāda, which may be translated as "the dependent origination of the universe." According to this view, the universe is an eternally existing organism of interdependent parts. Fa-tsang's elaborate manipulation of the three natures, in the tenth chapter of his "Treatise on the Five Doctrines," is done in order to first demonstrate the identity of things on the basis of their common emptiness. Following this, he proceeds to discuss their dynamic interdependence. In this way, he arrives at the distinctive philosophy of Hua-yen, dharmadhātupratītyasamutpāda, or shih shih wu ai, [n] the completely free

interrelationship of all phenomena. This means that any single object in the infinite dharmadhātu which we may choose to examine will be seen to exert sole and complete responsibility for creating and supporting all the other infinite number of objects in the universe. Since all things are simultaneously related in the same manner, we have a view of existence as mutually dependent and mutually creating. However, identity and interdependence are one and the same thing. Identity is their static relationship, and mutual support, or interpenetration, is their dynamic relationship. [26] They both mean that things are empty of a svabhāva and exist only through interdependence. It is this view of existence which Hua-yen calls "Vairocana."

Hua-yen is thus a form of pan-Buddhism if by that term we understand that "Buddha" is not a substance in things, nor the material and sufficient cause of a material universe which emanated from him. Everything is the Buddha because there is nothing which is not empty, as Nāgārjuna said centuries before Fa-tsang's time. There is not, I believe, any form of Sino-Japanese Buddhism which interprets the Buddha in a substantialistic manner, and if we think there is such a form, it is doubtless our own shortcomings in understanding which makes us think so. For 2,500 years, Buddhism has rested, in all its forms, on the bedrock teaching that it is the erroneous belief in a svabhāva which lies at the bottom of human turmoil. This applies not only to belief in a personal self, but to any form of self, including a divine one. Fa-tsang gives every sign in his writings of having understood this basic Buddhist teaching. Despite his penchant for the terms I have discussed earlier, his view of the universe as one of strict interdependence is pure, classic Buddhism. This view of existence may be called "Vairocana," "God," or [p. 415] anything else, since words cannot be taken seriously in Buddhism. Therefore, "Vairocana" is as good a word as any for that kind of existence which led the Sung poet, Su Tung-p'o, to write

The sounds of the valley streams are his long, broad tongue;
The forms of the mountains are his pure body.
At night, I hear the myriad hymns of praise;
How can I explain what they say?

1. "Toodai-ji" (Nara: Toodai-ji, nd.).

2. Hua-yen wu chiao shih kuan, attributed to Tu-shun. Number 1867, page 513c, in Taishoo shinshū daizokuyoo. Hereafter, all references to the latter will be indicated by the letter T, followed by the number of the text, page, and register.

3. Among these are the long commentary on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, the T'an hsiian chi, T, no. 1733, and the Hua-yen i ch'eng chiao i fen-ch'i chang, T, no. 1866, which is his most systematic and detailed treatise on the structure of Hua-yen. I have also used his commentary on the "Heart Sutra," Pan-lo-po-lo-mi-to hsin ching lio shu, T, no. 1712, as well as the work mentioned in the note just preceding.

4. The shorter title, commonly used by Japanese Buddhologists, is Wu chiao chang. [b]

5. Discussions of the three natures can be found in the following works: La Somme du Grand Véhicule (Mahāyānasamgraha), trans. Étienne Lamotte (Louvain: Museon, 1938), 2:107-152; Le Siddhi de Hiuan-tsang (Vijñaptimātratā-siddhi), trans. Louis de La Vallée Poussin (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1928), p. 561; "Le petit traite de Vasubandhu-Nāgārjuna sur les trois natures" (Trisvabhāva nirdeśa), trans. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques (1932-1933), 2:147-161.

6. Mahāyānasamgraha, T, no. 1593, p. 193. See also, La Somme du Grand Véhicule, trans. Étienne Lamotte (Louvain: Museon, 1938), ii:125.

7. pu pien. [c] The following discussion is based on pages 499a-503a of Fa-tsang's "Treatise on the Five Doctrines," T, no. 1866.

8. sui yüan. [d] I have sometimes translated this simply as "conditionedness."

9. ssü yü. [e] He says that it can also be called "phenomenal existence," chia yü. [f]

10. wu hsiang. [g] "Without nature" means "without self-nature." It has no svabhāva because it exists only in its parabhāva.

11. The third nature, parikalpita (imagined), is said to have the two aspects of "existing to the senses" ch'ing yü [h] and "nonexisting in reality" li wu. [i]

12. Quoted in the "Treatise on the Five Doctrines," p. 500b.

13. One reason for the elaborate device of the three natures is that during Fa-tsang's life, the new and influential Fa-hsiang school of Hsuan-tsang and his disciples was gaining strength in China, and Fa-tsang probably felt that he had to account for it. The three natures are usually associated with the Fa-hsiang school.

14. Ta-ch'eng fa chia wu ch'a pieh lun shu. [j] T, no. 1838.

15. "Treatise on the Five Doctrines," p. 501b-c.

16. Pan-lo-po-to-mi-to hsin ching lio shu ("Brief commentary on the Prajñāpāramitāh.rdaya Sūtra"), T, no. 1712.

17. Ibid., p. 553a.

18. Ibid., p. 553a.

19. Chao-lun, "Emptiness of the Non-Absolute," in Richard Robinson, Early Mādhyamika in India and China (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 140.

20. Pan-lo-po-lo-mi-to hsin ching lio shu, p. 553a-b.

21. Ibid., p. 553c.

22. Hua-yen wu chiao shih kuan, T, no. 1867, p. 511a. This is assigned to Tu-shun, the first patriarch of Chinese Hua-yen, but his authorship is doubted by various Japanese scholars, who tend to believe it is by Fa-tsang. Stylistically, it looks like Fa-tsang's writing. See, for instance, Kamata Shigeo, Chūgoku Kegon Shisoo Shi no Kenkyū (Tookyo: Zaidan Hoojin Tookyoo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1965), pp. 69, 135, 561.

23. T, vol. 14, p. 542. Quoted by Fa-tsang in the "Treatise on the Five Doctrines."

24. T, vol. 16, p. 467. Quoted by Fa-tsang in his treatise. The "five paths" are those of the being in purgatories, pretas, animals, human beings, and devas.

25. T, no. 279, translated during the T'ang dynasty by śik.sānanda. The passage occurs in the chapter called "Peak of Sumeru." Fa-tsang usually used the older translation by Buddhahadra which is no. 278 in the T.

26. Identity is hsiang chi, [o] interdependence or interpenetration is hsiang ju. [p]

a 華嚴一乘教義分齊章 b 五教章 c 不變 d 隨緣 e 似有 f 假有 g 無性 h 情有 i 理無 j 大乘法界無差別論疏 k 物 l 相作 m 相由 n 事事無礙 o 相即 p 相入