A Study of Chinese Hua-Yen Buddhism With Special Reference to the Dharmadhātu (Fa-Chieh) Doctrine

Title: A Study of Chinese Hua-Yen Buddhism With Special Reference to the Dharmadhātu (Fa-Chieh) Doctrine
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Abstract: Hua-yen Buddhism is generally considered as the most theoretical and systematic presentation of Buddhist ideas among the various Buddhist schools that appeared in China during the Sui-T'ang period (589-900 A.D.). Furthermore, its philosophico-religious teachings played a significant role in the religious history of East Asia. In spite of such an importance, very little is known about Hua-yen Buddhism in the Western world. This thesis, therefore, attempts to achieve a proper understanding of Hua-yen Buddhism through an extensive investigation of its central doctrine of dharmadhātu (fa-chieh) as it occurs in the writings of the patriarchs of the Hua-yen school. Part One, as a background study, examines first of all the etymological and contextual meaning of the term dharmadhātu. It also surveys the Avatamsaka-sūtra (Hua-yen ching), the canonical scripture from which the Hua-yen school derived the idea of dharmadhātu as the central theme for teaching and meditation. In addition, it discusses the background and development of the Hua-yen school. Part Two, the main body of the study, the dharmadhātu doctrine of the Hua-yen school is examined in terms of its development. The basic writings of its five patriarchs and their ideas concerning "the dharmadhātu doctrine is systematically analyzed in detail. It is demonstrated that the dharmadhātu doctrine can be said to have been, by and large, founded by Tu-shun, formulated by Chih-yen, systematized by Fa-tsang, and elucidated by Ch'eng-kuan and Tsung-mi. Part Three, the concluding part, embarks upon an inquiry into the significance of the Hua-yen dharmadhātu doctrine. It is argued that the dharmadhātu doctrine is not "a pointless exposition of empty words," as characterized by some outside critics, but that it contains solid "philosophical," "religious," and "historical" significance within it. First, it is clarified that the dharmadhātu doctrine is meant to lead man toward an insight into the interrelatedness, that is, the "mutual identification and "interpenetration," of all the dharmas — an insight which liberates him from all kinds of rigid philosophical preconceptions and dogmatism concerning reality. Second, it is also discovered that the dharmadhātu doctrine of mutual identification and interpenetration is relevant to the formulation of the religious conviction of the "instantaneous attainment of Buddhahood" upheld by the Hua-yen school. Finally, it is verified through concrete evidence that the dharmadhātu doctrine exerted a significant influence on the religious thought of China, especially on the Ch'an(Zen) and the T'ien-t'ai traditions, Taoism, and Neo-Confucianism.

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(From a Study of Hua-yen Buddhism With Special Reference to the Dharmadhātu Doctrine, Fa-Chieh, pg. 58). Indeed, the sutra itself is aligned with instances of acquiring profound spiritual powers. Ch’an Masters, too, were well attuned with the Avatamsaka. Whoever, hearing this teaching, Respects and has faith in it, Shall forever escape all the miseries Of the states of woe. Can you, dear reader, see how the entire sutra, and Buddhism itself for that matter, is summed-up in this potent extraction from the Whole? This entry was posted in Entry into the Dharmadhātu and tagged Avatamsaka Sutra, Buddhāvatamsaka-mahāvaipulya-sūtra, Sagaramudra-samadhi, Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki. To have a general background for the discussion of the Taoist influence on Hua-yen, it would seem appropriate to give a brief sketch of Hua-yen philosophy.[8] The central teaching of the Hua-yen school is the dharmadhātu (fa-chieh) doctrine, or more specifically, the dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda (fa-chieh yuan-ch’i). This idea of dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda which was [p281] originally found in the Avatamsaka-sūtra or Hua-yen ching,[10] was fully developed by the Hua-yen school into a systematic doctrine palatable to the Chinese intellectual taste. Hua-yen was influenced by Taoist philosophy, but obviously Hua-yen is not identical with Taoism in every respect. Includes bibliographical references. I. Hua-yen Buddhism-Doctrines. 1. Title. These masters of Hua yen teachings produced extensive commentaries and analyses relating to the principles and practices dealt with in the enormous Hua yen scripture, and they codified the essential principles in a number of compact treatises. These commentaries and treatises clarify the integral relation between what is unique in the Hua-yen perspective and what is generally shared in common with other Buddhist for mats. Hua-yen Buddhism is famed for its intriguing philosophy, but it is perhaps most useful to consider Hua-yen metaphysics primarily in terms of instrumental value.