My topic for today, “the place of the Tiantai tradition in Chinese Buddhism,” was given me by Mr. Lan Jifu. To begin with, I would like everyone to understand that it would be hard to convey the full doctrine (教義 jiaoyi) of the Tiantai tradition in such a short time. All I can do is to give a summary. But the only way for me to undertake this is to suppose that everyone here is already fully acquainted with the development of Sui and Tang Buddhism and the doctrine of the Tiantai tradition itself.

It is a very difficult thing to understand the long-term development of Chinese Buddhism throughout the five or six centuries extending from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) to the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907). Truly thorough study of it is an endless process, but even so, there is still a place for a narrative overview. [However,] this overview can only amount to a heuristic convenience, not a full account.

And even if one has a rudimentary understanding of Buddhism’s development from the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the Sui and Tang, it is still a difficult thing to then go on and understand the entire Tiantai system because of the multitude of documents involved and the depths of its doctrines, making it even harder to understand than other schools. All I can do today is to give a sketchy narrative overview based on my own understanding.

To begin with, let us get a bird’s eye view of the Buddha’s various dispensations of the dharma. After his enlightenment the Buddha taught for forty-nine years. According to the critical examination of the teachings (教判 jiaopian) of the Tiantai figure Zhiyi, this consisted of five periods:

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2 藍吉富 (b. 1943), Taiwanese historian of Buddhism.
3 天台智顗 (538–597), remembered as the founding figure of the Tiantai tradition. As is common among Chinese Buddhists, Mou refers to Zhiyi as “Wise One” (zhizhe 智者), the honorific title he was granted by his patron, Emperor Yang of the Sui.
1. The “Flower Garland” (*Huayan* 華嚴, Skt. *Avatamsaka*) period, when the Buddha preached the so-called Perfect Sutra.\(^4\)
2. The Āgama (*ahan* 阿含) period, also called the Deer Park\(^5\) period, when the Buddha taught the Lesser Vehicle (*xiaosheng* 小乘, Skt. *Hīnayāna*), or what is called primitive Buddhism (*yuanshi fojiao* 原始佛教).
3. The universal (*fangdeng* 方等, Skt. *vaipulya*) period, when the Buddha taught the universal Mahāyāna sutras.
4. The Perfection of Wisdom period,\(^6\) in which was taught the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.\(^7\)
5. The Lotus and Nirvana period, of the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra.\(^8\)

These five periods of preaching encompassed the entirety of the Buddhas' teachings, and their content underwent a sort of development over the long process of their absorption and digestion in China. The Tiantai perfect teaching (*yuanjiao* 圓教) should be approached from two aspects, corresponding to the two ways in which the Buddha preached the dharma: through discriminating explanation (*fenbie shuo* 分別說) and non-discriminating explanation (*fei fenbie shuo* 非分別說). We have to grasp these ideas before we can understand the Tiantai tradition. So in trying to gain an overview today of the place of the

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\(^4\) That is, the Flower Garland Sutra (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經, Skt. *Avatamsaka-sūtra*). Instead of following a modern historical chronology, which would tell us that the Flower Garland Sutra only began to be composed five or more centuries after the historical Buddha, Mou follows the traditional Chinese Buddhist periodization by Tiantai Zhiyi. According to that myth, upon awakening the Buddha first spoke the Flower Garland Sutra over a period of two weeks to advanced bodhisattvas, only to find that even they could not understand its profound doctrines. Thereupon he started all over with his preaching and began by dispensing his most basic teachings. On Mou's use of Zhiyi's periodization scheme, see *FB*, 619–624. In English see Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist*, 70ff.

\(^5\) After the deer park in which the Buddha is said to have delivered his (historically) earliest teachings.

\(^6\) *bore 般若*. Here Mou is using this as a contraction of *bore boluomi* 般若波羅蜜 (Skt. *prajñā-pāramitā*), a distinctive genre of Buddhist sutra which dwells on the sixth and highest of a bodhisattva's “perfections,” the Perfection of Wisdom.

\(^7\) There is a large body of Perfection of Wisdom sutras, but as becomes clear below, Mou is speaking specifically of the *Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* (*Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜, Skt. *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā-sūtra*), commonly called the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (*Da bore jing* 大般若經, *Dapin bore jing* 大品般若經, or, as Mou also calls it here, simply *Bore jing* 般若經).

\(^8\) To give them their complete titles, these are the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma* (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, Skt. *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*) and the *Great Parinirvana Sutra* (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, Skt. *Mahā-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*).