THE P'AN-CHIAO SYSTEM OF THE HUA-YEN SCHOOL IN CHINESE BUDDHISM*

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We owe such eminent scholars as Garma C. C. Chang and Francis H. Cook 1) a great debt for introducing to the West the teaching of the Hua-yen School 華嚴宗, one of the main streams of Chinese Buddhism. While their contribution in this area is beyond dispute, it is regrettable that they have not treated in detail in their writings on Hua-yen Buddhism the subject of p' an-chiao 判教 (classification of doctrines), even though most Chinese Buddhist schools, the Hua-yen School included, have considered their p' an-chiao systems to be the core of their teachings. This is unfortunate, because the Hua-yen School arrives at its “teaching of totality” largely by way of its critique of the Buddhist traditions of the past, and any attempt to elucidate its ideas without taking this fact into due consideration would easily result in a loss of perspective. The objective of the present study is to demonstrate how important the problem of p' an-chiao is to a correct comprehension of the teaching of the Hua-yen School, largely based on the works of Fa-tsang 法藏, its third patriarch 2). As for my own interpretation of the Hua-yen teaching of totality, I prefer to leave it to another article.

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2) The word “school” in Chinese Buddhism often indicates no more than a general trend or tradition, whose members are related to each other only by their common interest in some particular Buddhist texts, ideas or practices. In the case of the Hua-yen School, none of its first three patriarchs were conscious that they were founding a new "school". The term “Hua-yen School” first appeared in the Ta-fang-kuang fo-hua-yen ching shu 大方廣佛
(1) THE ORIGIN OF THE PRACTICE OF P’an-Chiao

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Buddhism does not have a definite set of texts which are acknowledged by all followers of the religion to be canonical. Strictly speaking, only the words of the Buddha are regarded as sacred; but given the hazy history of Buddhism and its oral method of transmission, it is not surprising that by the end of the first century A.D., there already existed a huge volume of literature embodying the most diverse forms of teaching, all of them claiming to be from the mouth of the Buddha himself. Subsequent centuries witnessed not only the rapid augmentation of this body of literature but also the emergence of a number of famous Buddhist figures (such as Aśvaghośa and Nāgārjuna), who attained position of such eminence that their words were also considered as authoritative. Soon, their names became attached to a long list of texts of the most varied forms and content, and these texts in time also gained general acceptance. Thus, when this body of literature was imported into China, the Chinese were naturally puzzled by the numerous discrepancies and contradictions they found in it. This fact, together with the Chinese penchant for syncretism, accounts for the inception of the practice of “classification of doctrines” in China 3).

華嚴經疏 and the Ta-fang-kuang fo-hua-yen-ching sui-shu yen-i ch’ao 大方廣佛華嚴經疏演義妙 by Ch‘eng-kuan 澄觀, the so-called fourth patriarch. But even then, Ch‘eng-kuan did not speak of the presence of a lineage. The line of succession: Fa-shun 法順—Chih-yen 智顒—Fa-tsang, was first put forth by Tsung-mi 宗密 in his Chu fa-chiēh kuan-men 註法界觀門. However, Tsung-mi never mentioned Ch‘eng-kuan as the fourth patriarch, nor claimed himself to be the fifth one.

As for the meaning of the word “patriarch” in this article, it suffices to borrow the remarks of F. H. Cook:

I have, from time to time, used the word “patriarch” with reference to leading figures in the development of Hua-yen, but these early figures in the history of the school did not consider themselves to be anything like patriarchs of a new school. They were just Buddhists who were especially attracted to one particular scripture. The patriarchal tradition of Hua-yen, like that of Ch‘an and other Chinese forms of Buddhism, was established much later than the time of the “patriarchs”, when some need arose to base the teachings of the school squarely on an unbroken line of masters stretching far back into Chinese history and often beyond to a line of Indian masters who in turn were descended in authority from the Buddha himself (op. cit., pp. 23-24).

3) Though the practice of p’an-chiao is a distinctive feature of Chinese Buddhism, it has its theoretical basis in the idea of “skilful means 方便” in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Thus, broadly speaking, we may also say that p’an-