

## Abstract

### PHILOSOPHY OF THE AVATAMSAKA-S ŒTRA: AN ANALYSIS

The Avata saka S tra (Chinese: 華嚴經; Huayen Jing; Japanese: Kegon Ky ) in full Mah vaipulya-buddh vata saka-s tra (The Great and Vast Buddha Garland Sutra) is one of the most influential scriptures in East Asian Buddhism. The Avata saka S tra is an enormous and fascinating Buddhist scripture depicting the path of the Bodhisattva (or Buddha in training) and the mystical vision of reality that he sees as his mind approaches that of a Buddha.

The very first chapter of the thesis delineates the origin and development of the Avata saka S tra (Huayen S tra). The Avata saka S tra is the second longest sutra in the Mah y na canon. It consists of large important, independent sutras, namely: Ga avy ha S tra, Da abh mika S tra, Amit yurdyh na S tra, etc. It records the higher teachings of the Buddha to Bodhisattvas and other high spiritual beings.

Chapter two depicts the special feature of the Avata saka S tra which offers human beings, the way of the life or conception of life. The central teaching of the Huayen S tra is the dharmadh tu doctrine, or more specifically, the dharmadh tu-prat tyasamutp da (fa-chieh yuan-ch'i). The Sanskrit term dharmadh tu<sup>1</sup>, which is a compound consisting of dharma and dh tu, has been variously translated as "the Element of the Elements," "The Realm of All Elements," "the Dharma-Element," the "Reality or Essence of Dharma-s," "the Nominal Ground of Phenomena," "the Essence of Reality," "the Ultimate Reality," "Supreme Reality," "Totality," and so on. It is, in

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<sup>1</sup> *Dharmadh tu* (Chinese:Fa Chieh): the realm of *dharma*-s. Here, *Dharmadh tu* refers to the realm of Totality or Infinity in the light of the highest insight and spiritual perspective of Buddhahood.

short, a designation of the "Ground of all Being." The term *prat tyasamutp da* means "dependent co-origination."

"The Conception of the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva" is the third chapter of the thesis. The most important sections are the *Da abh mi*ka, which describes the levels (*bh mi*) traversed by a Bodhisattva, and the final chapter, the *Ga avy ha*, which depicts the journey of a youth named Sudhana as he visits one teacher after another, eventually seeing a total of fifty three.

These ten stages are given in the 'wreath' text and are special to the Mah y na Buddhism. Although they are an enumeration of the ascending stages of the Bodhisattva, they can be used for practical purposes by any aspirant who is studying or practicing meditation in order to proceed to the holy stages in the future.

Next, chapter four, is the "Conception of the Universe in the *Avata saka S tra* (*Huayen S tra*)". The proper attitude and the point of view of the universe have been discussed in this chapter. "Dharmadh tu is the realm of reality in which all dharma-s or things in the universe arise simultaneously. In other words, it is the creation of the universe by the universe itself. All phenomena are the manifestations of noumenon, and each individual phenomenon embraces every other phenomenon. The doctrine of the Absolute *nyat* has also been discussed in this chapter.

The final chapter of the thesis is the conclusion. In this chapter the summary of the studies done in the previous chapters has been presented. It also includes the discussion related to the different aspects of our life.

*Avatamsaka* places great importance on awakening the aspiration to Enlightenment (*Bodhicitta*). Perhaps the best-known saying in the Sutra itself is that "the moment the aspiration to Enlightenment arises, perfect

Buddhahood has already been attained.” If we believe that Enlightenment is something separate from us, a distant goal to be aimed at, we will never achieve it. But if we can understand that Enlightenment is our own true nature, we will come to see that all our activities should be Buddha-activities and that their sole purpose is to enable all other beings to realize this same enlightened nature. This understanding is what Bodhicitta really means, and it is only in its realization or manifestation in the world through practices grounded in wisdom and compassion that Enlightenment is to be found.