

The Reception of *Lotus Sūtra* Thought in China

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1. Problem

WHEN considering the reception of *Lotus Sūtra* Thought in China, we encounter two problems: the first is the identification of the characteristics of the reception of *Lotus Sūtra* Thought seen in the Chinese commentaries on the *Lotus Sūtra* (I will take up commentaries during the Northern and Southern Dynasties and Sui Period); the second the consideration of the various forms of faith and methods of practice based on the *Lotus Sūtra*. As for the latter, further delimiting the problem, I will discuss the devotion to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva based on the *Guanyin jing* 觀音經, which is the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and folk-oriented faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*, which is shown in tales of miraculous response (the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 and *Fahua zhuanji* 法華傳記), which discuss numerous worldly benefits to be gained from faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

2. The Reception of *Lotus Sūtra* Thought Shown in the Chinese Commentaries on the *Lotus Sūtra*

I would suggest that the core thought of the *Lotus Sūtra* may be summarily grasped from three basic points of view: the idea of the “one Buddha vehicle”; the idea of Buddha Śākyamuni’s “age-old existence”; and the idea of the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth.” I will investigate how each idea was interpreted in the Chinese commentaries on the *Lotus Sūtra*.

2.1. The Idea of the “One Buddha Vehicle” of the *Lotus Sūtra*

The idea of the “one Buddha vehicle” expounded in the second “Skillful Means” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* is that the Buddha appeared in the *sahā* world for one great purpose, which was to bring about the equal salvation of all sentient beings. There are embedded within this notion two complementary motifs: one is the idea that sentient beings may

have equal access to Buddhahood,¹ and the other, an emphasis on Śākyamuni Buddha's existence and role as a savior figure.² I examine the reception of the "one Buddha vehicle" in China, analyzing various issues.

2.1.1. A Foundational Rubric for "Doctrinal Classification"

Mahāyāna and Nikāya scriptures were haphazardly introduced to China almost at the same time. In order to make sense of this broad range of incoming materials, Chinese commentators began to develop elaborate systems for categorizing them. This practice, known as "doctrinal classification" (Ch. *panjiao* 判教) which came to flourish during the fifth century, just after the period when translation of the most important Mahāyāna scriptures had been completed, is considered to be one of the most distinctive features of Chinese Buddhism. Some rudimentary doctrinal classifications were produced from among Kumārajīva's (344–413/350–409) disciples. At that time the idea of "elaborating the three and revealing the one" (*kaisan xianyi* 開三顯一) expounded in the "Skillful Means" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, namely, the idea that the three vehicles of *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and bodhisattva are provisional skillful teachings to mature sentient beings' capacities, became a criterion of forming doctrinal classification. As an example, we might introduce the sudden, gradual, and five-period classificatory scheme of Huiguan³ 慧觀 (Huiguan's dates are uncertain, but he was a disciple of Kumārajīva, and his brief *Fahua zongyao xu* 法華宗要序 still survives), which was especially prominent in the southern regions during the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period.

To begin with, Huiguan distinguishes the two categories of the sudden teaching and gradual teaching as the most basic division in the Buddha's teachings. The former (the "sudden teaching") corresponds to [the preaching of] the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, which expounded directly the Buddha's enlightenment. The latter ("gradual teaching") is conceived as a progressive exposition of the Dharma that advances gradually from shallow to profound for the sake of sentient beings who cannot understand the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. The gradual taxonomy is divided accordingly into five sub-categories or phases of teaching. They comprise: (1) the teaching that expounds the three vehicles individually or separately, which corresponds to the Nikāya doctrines found in works such as the *Āgama* sūtras, (2) the teaching wherein the three vehicles are expounded conjointly or in common, which corresponds to the *Dapin bore jing* 大品般若經 or *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, (3) the evangelical teaching, which represents the *Vimalakīrti* and *Brahmaparipṛcchā*

sūtras, (4) the teaching that reverts to commonality or sameness, which corresponds to the *Lotus Sūtra*, and (5) the teaching of eternal abiding, which corresponds to the Mahāyāna *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.

According to this doctrinal classification, the *Lotus Sūtra* is relegated to a position that is lower in status than both the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* as the sudden teaching and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, which occupies the highest place among the five gradual teachings. However, the first, second and fourth gradual teachings were conceived on the basis of the idea of the “elaborating the three and revealing the one.” Therefore, we can see how Chinese practitioners of doctrinal classification (such as Huiguan) gave form to their classificatory systems by consulting the *Lotus Sūtra*. Because the Chinese exegetes on the *Lotus Sūtra* did not succeed in organizing the instructional content of the Buddha’s career sufficiently by relying solely on the progression from the three vehicles to the one vehicle, they sought to develop even more detailed arrangements by making use of such parables as the tale of the prodigal son told in the fourth, “Belief and Understanding” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

This five-period scheme of doctrinal classification placed the *Lotus Sūtra* in a position lower than that of the *Avatamsaka* and *Nirvāṇa* sūtras, and for this reason it was severely criticized by the likes of Zhiyi 智顛 and Jizang 吉藏. However, one could say that, even for Zhiyi and Jizang, the enduring tendency to look to the *Lotus Sūtra* as a basic foundation for doctrinal classification in itself remained unchanged.

In summation, the *Lotus Sūtra*’s concept of the one Buddha vehicle—the first of our three core concepts—was appropriated in China as a foundational rubric for the formative development of Chinese Buddhist doctrinal classification. In so far as the attention given to the second and third core concepts of the *Lotus Sūtra* was never comparable to it in scope, one could also argue that this first of three concepts was the primary point of concern for Chinese Buddhists.

2.1.2. The Three Vehicles as Expedient, the One Vehicle as Real, and the Distinctive Interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* Found in the Faxiang School

Even though “the three vehicles as expedient and the one vehicle as real,” which in the specialized terminology of Chinese exegetical discourse becomes “elaborating the three to reveal the one,” was specifically appropriated as one of the elemental concepts of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Kuiji 窺基 of the Faxiang 法相 school interpreted it from a perspective that is diametrically opposite to the explanations of both the *Lotus Sūtra* and previous exegetes. He held that sentient beings could be

divided into five basic categories according to their salvific natures or dispositions (*zhongxing* 種性). They include: (1) individuals endowed with the fully determined disposition of a *śrāvaka*, (2) individuals endowed with the fully determined disposition of a *pratyekabuddha*, (3) individuals endowed with the fully determined disposition of a bodhisattva, (4) beings whose salvific disposition is yet to be formed or determined and (5) beings who are deprived of salvific disposition altogether. Among these five, beings of the first, second and fifth disposition cannot attain Buddhahood. According to Kuiji, the *Lotus Sūtra* preached the idea that “the three vehicles are expedient and the one vehicle is real” merely in order to direct beings of undetermined disposition (category 4) away from the path of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* and toward the path of the bodhisattva. This is because the defining position for Kuiji presumed “the three vehicles to be real and the one vehicle to be expedient.”⁷⁴ Such an interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* neglects the intentional meaning of the *Lotus Sūtra* at the time when it was compiled, but changing our perspectives, we can say that Kuiji proposed an interpretational system of Buddhism different from that of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

In Japan problems of this sort were renewed in the form of a controversy between Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and Tokuichi 徳一 (date unknown) over the “expediency and reality of the three and the one.” In the end, the idea that one vehicle is real survived in the world of East Asian Buddhism.

2.1.3. Zhiyi’s “Three Benefits” of “Sowing, Maturing and Reaping”

As we have indicated, the idea of the one vehicle not only contains an implicit emphasis on sentient beings having equal access to Buddhahood, but also places an emphasis on the role of the Buddha as a savior of sentient beings. This issue, in turn, intersects with certain discrepancies that occur between the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* regarding the attainment of Buddhahood. For example, the Mahāyāna *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* asserts that “all sentient beings are endowed with ‘Buddha-nature’ (*foxing* 佛性),” or an inherent disposition to Buddhahood. The basis for sentient beings’ attainment of Buddhahood is posited on the basis that this Buddha-nature is intrinsically present in all sentient beings. However, the *Lotus Sūtra* was completed before the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. When the *Lotus Sūtra* professes that all sentient beings will attain Buddhahood, it develops this idea from the position that “Śākyamuni Buddha, in order to enable all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood, beneficently appeared in this *sahā* world. That, in itself, was the World Honored

One's sole, great purpose." Thus it combines universal attainment of Buddhahood with a profound religious connection that exists between the Buddha and sentient beings themselves.

This religious connection between Śākyamuni Buddha and sentient beings is given expression in Zhiyi's views on the three benefits of "sowing the seed, maturing the seed, and reaping the fruit." Specifically speaking, the "benefit of sowing the seed" refers to the process through which the Buddha forges the initial karmic connections—the first religious connections—with sentient beings; the "benefit of maturation" refers to the process of maturing the salvific capacities of sentient beings; and the "benefit of reaping the fruit" correlates to the act of bringing about their final liberation and realization of Buddhahood.⁵ Zhiyi took the story of the Buddha Excellence of Great Penetrating Wisdom in the seventh chapter, "The Parable of the Phantom City" to be an illustration of the idea that the salvific process has a beginning and an end. Accordingly, he conceived the idea that the Buddha actively provides sentient beings with the three benefits of "sowing the seed, maturing the seed, and reaping the fruit" of Buddhahood.

2.1.4. The Question of whether the *Lotus Sūtra* Expounds or Does not Expound the Notion of Buddha-nature

The Mahāyāna version of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* was compiled in India sometime during the fourth century of the Common Era. As its core concept, the sūtra teaches the ever-abiding of the Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) and the universality of Buddha-nature. One will notice right away that, on this point, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* closely resembles the ideas of the one vehicle and the age-old existence of the Buddha that are so central to the *Lotus Sūtra*. However, the *Lotus Sūtra* proper does not emphasize the ever-abiding of the Dharma-body to the extent seen in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* and nor does the term "Buddha-nature" appear in the *Lotus Sūtra*. Therefore, the conviction was widespread during the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period that notions of intrinsic Buddha-nature and the eternity of the Buddha as they appeared in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* were not expounded in the *Lotus Sūtra*.⁶ The so-called three great masters of the Sui Dynasty—Jingying Huiyuan, Zhiyi, and Jizang—managed to prove that the *Lotus Sūtra* expounds Buddha-nature in principle.⁷

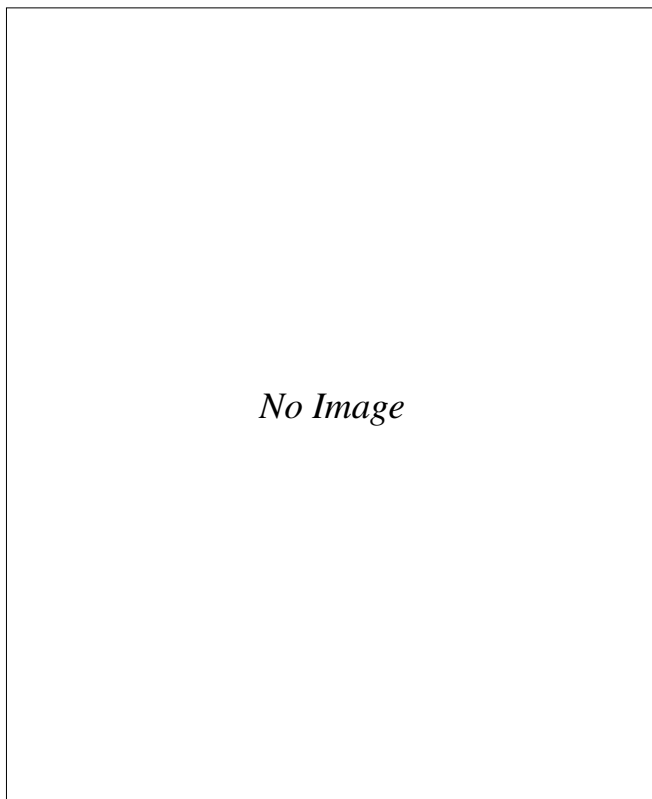
2.2. The Idea of the "Age-old Existence of the Buddha" of the *Lotus Sūtra*

The second of our three core concepts from the *Lotus Sūtra*, the

“age-old existence of the Buddha,” is expounded in the sixteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, “The Life Span of the Thus Come One.” There are three major points in this chapter: the first is that Śākyamuni’s life span as a Buddha is eternal; the second is that his entry into nirvāṇa at the age of eighty was merely intended as an “expedient display of nirvāṇa”⁸ (the idea that the Buddha provisionally showed himself to enter final nirvāṇa merely as a skillful measure to arouse a keen resolution on the part of sentient beings to seek the enlightenment); the third is that the eternal Buddha will appear to persons of deep faith (from the perspective of sentient beings themselves, this is to grant the possibility that one may “see or meet the Buddha”).

The concept of the “age-old existence of the Buddha” was relatively insignificant in China. Because the preaching of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* was equated with the fifth-period doctrine of the Buddha’s eternal abiding, which we introduced above, and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* itself was affirmed as the sūtra that revealed the true eternity of the Buddha. On the other hand, the first major theme of the *Lotus Sūtra* was regarded as “elaborating the three and revealing the one” and the eternity of the Buddha was regarded as the unique idea of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.

Looking back historically at the interpretations of the concept of the “age-old existence of the Buddha,” Sengrui 僧叡 (date unknown), who was a disciple of Kumārajīva, understood the representation of the Buddha in the sixteenth “The Life-Span of Thus Come One” chapter to be something that symbolized an eternal and limitless life-span. As he saw it, the use of hyperbolic similes to express vast stretches of time (such as, “eons equivalent to motes of dust contained in five hundred thousands of tens of thousands of millions of *nayutas* of *asaṃkheyas* of trichiliocosm world-realms”) made it possible to strongly impress the idea of the Buddha’s eternity on its audience. Be that as it may, Fayun offered an interpretation from the perspective of the five-period scheme that was diametrically opposed to this idea. According to Fayun’s *Fahua yiji* 法華義記,⁹ representations of the Buddha’s life span in scriptures prior to the *Lotus Sūtra* assign it a duration of either eighty years (as in the more familiar biographies of the Buddha) or seven hundred *asaṃkheyas kalpas* (as in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra*). By contrast, the duration of the Buddha’s life asserted in the *Lotus Sūtra* is considerably longer than that in these other works. This excessive length is attributed to the idea that the Buddha simply used his supernatural powers to extend his life span in order to save sentient beings. Therefore, the representation of the Buddha’s life-span found in the *Lotus Sūtra* is still considered by Fayun to be nothing more than a relative period of



Ceiling painting of the Bodhisattvas emerging from the Earth. Cave 31, Dunhuang Mogao Caves; High Tang Dynasty period, 8th century (*Dunhuang shiku quanji*, Vol. 7, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2000)

duration. If we look at this situation from the perspective of the eternity of the Buddha as taught in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, we can only conclude that, in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the existence of the Buddha is still presented as impermanent.

Jingying Huiyuan, Zhiyi, and Jizang managed to prove that the *Lotus Sūtra* taught a doctrine of the eternity of the Buddha criticizing the theory of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s representation of the Buddha as impermanent, of which Fayun is representative.¹⁰

2.3. The Idea of the “Bodhisattvas Emerging from the Earth” of the *Lotus Sūtra*

The third idea, the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth,” is expounded in the *Lotus Sūtra*'s tenth chapter, “The Teacher of the Law” and the fifteenth chapter, “Emerging From the Earth.” The bodhisattvas emerging

from the earth are those who are born on the basis of their vows. They have realized enlightenment in a past age, and appear in the impure and evil *sahā* world after Śākyamuni Buddha's death, out of their compassion for sentient beings.¹¹ It seems plausible that the persons responsible for compiling the *Lotus Sūtra* during its formative period seized on the idea of the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth for purposes of expressing their own self-image as devotees.

As the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth were regarded as mythical figures appearing in a sūtra, they have not been interpreted as bodhisattvas, who actually appear in the historical world.¹² This fact is different from the fact that the theory of Maitreya's manifesting form and transforming body appeared many times in various ways.

The idea of severely subduing sentient beings who are intractably evil appears in Nanyue Huisi's 南嶽慧思 (515–577) *Fahua jing anle xing yi* 法華經安樂行義,¹³ but we do not find his subjective interpretation of the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth. Further, Xinxing 信行 (540–594), founder of the Three Stages Teaching (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教) incorporated the veneration practice of Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging, which actualizes the idea of the one Buddha vehicle of the *Lotus Sūtra*, directly into his own practice of universal reverence (*pujing* 普敬), but he did not have the direct relation with his self-awareness of a bodhisattva emerging from the earth.

3. The Folkish Faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*

There are various forms of faith on the basis of the *Lotus Sūtra* such as recitation, copying, hearing the teachings, lecturing, self-immolation by burning, and meditation.¹⁴ I will discuss the devotion to Avalokiteśvara and folk faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*, which is shown in tales of miraculous response speaking of numerous worldly benefits to be gained from faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

3.1. The Devotion to Avalokiteśvara

Various records of tales of miraculous response 應驗記 were authored in China with the earliest concerning Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Needless to say, he is a central character of the *Guanyin jing*, which was taken from the twenty-fifth chapter on “the Universal Gate of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” of the *Lotus Sūtra*. What is called, “record of tales of miraculous response” is a record of verification that buddhas or bodhisattvas appear in this world to save sentient beings. From the standpoint of unenlightened people who receive a responsive manifestation from

buddhas or bodhisattvas, it is a record that their experiences of benefits on the basis of faith in buddhas or bodhisattvas are written down. Even though such stories of the experiences include preposterous ones, from the viewpoint of ordinary people at the time, even mystic phenomena can actually appear and their compilation and distribution seemed to have a significant impact on the spread of Buddhism.

The popularity of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is based mainly on three kinds of Chinese translations of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which includes the “Avalokiteśvara” chapter. Further, the facts that esoteric Buddhist sūtras like the *Qing Guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluonizhou jing* 請觀世音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼咒經 translated by Zhu Nandi 竺難提 in the Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty and the *Shiyimian Guanshiyin shenzhou jing* 十一面觀世音神咒經 translated by Yaśogupta 耶舍崛多在 Northern Zhou 北周 Dynasty appeared and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was valued as a bodhisattva, who is bound up with Amitāyus Buddha, along with Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva in sūtras connected to Pure Land Thought such as the *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 and *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經, might have imparted a certain influence on his popularity. Also along with escalation of the devotion to Avalokiteśvara, lots of apocryphal scriptures, a central character of which is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, such as the *Gaowang guanshiyin jing* 高王觀世音經, *Guanshiyin pusa wangsheng jingtu benyuan jing* 觀世音菩薩往生淨土本緣經, and *Guanshiyin sanmei jing* 觀世音三昧經¹⁵ added impetus to the devotion to Avalokiteśvara. And the commentaries on the *Guanyin jing* and *Qing Guanyin jing* and the formation of Avalokiteśvara confessional must have also made an impact on the devotion to Avalokiteśvara.

The *Guanyin jing* expounds twelve worldly benefits (escaping seven calamities, getting away from three poisons, and having a baby boy and baby girl). As for records of tales of miraculous response concerning Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the fact that Lu Gao’s 陸杲 (459–532) *Ji Guanshiyin yingyan ji* 繫觀世音應驗記, which was lost for a long time in China, was stored at the Kissuizō 吉水藏 of the Shōrenin 青蓮院 in Japan was reported and thorough research on the text was published by Makita Tairyō.¹⁶ Lu Gao’s *Ji Guanshiyin yingyan ji* included seven miracle stories compiled by Fu Liang 傅亮 (374–426), ten miracle stories compiled by Zhang Yan 張演 (the former half of the fifth century) in the Liu Song 劉宋 Dynasty, along with sixty-nine miracle stories compiled by Lu Gao himself. Needless to say, these miracle stories are connected to the twelve benefits of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva mentioned above.

In addition, even though the book title does not include the name of Avalokiteśvara, Wang Yan’s 王琰 *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 (its fragments are

included in Luxun's 魯迅 *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉) and Tang lin's 唐臨 *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (3 volumes, written during the era of Yonghui 永徽 [650–655]) also recorded the miraculous response of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

3.2. The *Hongzan fahua zhuan* and *Fahua zhuanji*

As mentioned above, the records of tales of miraculous response based on the *Guanyin jing* were compiled first among such records, and then records based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and the *Diamond Sūtra* were compiled later. As for the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Fazang's 法藏 (637–714) *Huayan jing zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記 (five volumes),¹⁷ Jingfa Huiyuan's 靜法慧苑 (date unknown) *Huayan jing zuan lingji* 華嚴經纂靈記 (fragments), and Hu youzhen's 胡幽貞 (date unknown) *Huayan jing ganying zhuan* 華嚴經感應傳 (one volume, compiled in 783) were compiled and as for the *Diamond Sūtra*, Meng Xianzhong's 猛獻忠 (date unknown) *Jingang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記 (compiled in 718) were compiled.¹⁸

As for the *Lotus Sūtra*, Huixiang's 惠祥 *Hongzan fahua zhuan* (ten volumes) and Sengxiang's 僧祥 *Fahua zhuanji* (ten volumes) were compiled.¹⁹ We do not know the exact date of compilation of the two texts and nor do we know their antero-posterior relation. These texts seemed to make a big impact on Jeok's 寂 *Fahuajing jiyuan ji* 法華經集驗記²⁰ (Kor. *Beophwagyeongjip heomgi*) in Korea and Chingen's 鎮源 *Dai Nippon koku hokke genki* 大日本國法華驗記²¹ (compiled approximately in 1004) in Japan.

The *Hongzan fahua zhuan* is divided into eight categories of image, translation, explanation, contemplation, abandoning the body, recitation, quick sūtra recitation, and copy. Here I will introduce the layman Wang Fanxing 王梵行 under the category “recitation.”²² Wang Fanxing lost his sight in his childhood and his mother taught him the *Lotus Sūtra* from her own lips. By the time he was thirteen years old, he was to be able to recite the *Lotus Sūtra* in its entirety. And then he went on to recite the *Lotus Sūtra* 17,000 times. Even though he could not see anything, he could walk along the street alone, weave, sew, and write better than people with normal vision. He was vegetarian, never got married, and passed away at the age of seventy-one. His dead body was abandoned at the field, but beasts and birds did not approach it and it became skeletonized. Then, it is said that his tongue, which had so often recited the *Lotus Sūtra*, extended thirty centimeters from his mouth and did not decay for a long time.²³

The *Hongzan fahua zhuan* is divided into twelve categories. The sixth

category “the collection of prefaces by various masters” includes *Fahua fanjing houji* 法華翻經後記 attributed to Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414?).²⁴

Here I will introduce the episode of Wulong 烏龍 and Yilong 遺籠, who were father and son, respectively, which was taken up under the eighth category “saving sufferings by copying.”²⁵

Wulong, whose family business was calligraphy, disliked Buddhism and did not copy Buddhist scriptures all through his life. He also prohibited his son Yilong from copying Buddhist scriptures and passed away throwing up blood. Then, a Minister of War of Bingzhou 并州 was a fervent follower of Buddhism and he asked Yilong, who was very good at calligraphy, to copy the *Lotus Sūtra*, but Yilong refused his request according to his father’s will. However, he was finally forced to do it by a powerful person and wrote sixty-four characters from the *Miaofa lianhua jing juan diyi* 妙法蓮華經卷第一 to the *Miaofa lianhua jing juan diba* 妙法蓮華經卷第八. He regretted that he betrayed his father’s will, but his father appeared in his dream and said to him, “The sixty-four characters, which you wrote, became sixty-four transformation buddhas and saved me from the sufferings of the hell. From now regret the former evil deeds and make copying the Buddhist scriptures your occupation.” Yilong awoke from his dream, regretted his shedding tears, and reported this matter to the Minister of War. All the people exulted to hear that and praised, “As long as to write only the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* brings about such big benefits, to copy the *Lotus Sūtra* by oneself and make others copy it can bring about immeasurable benefits.” As its result, copying the *Lotus Sūtra* became very popular.

4. Conclusion

This paper is composed of two parts of “the reception of *Lotus Sūtra* Thought shown in the Chinese commentaries on the *Lotus Sūtra*” and “the folk faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*.”

In the first part I have clarified how the three core concepts of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which are the “one Buddha vehicle,” the “age-old existence of the Buddha,” and the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth,” were interpreted and accepted on the basis of its commentaries of Fayun, Zhiyi, Jizang, and Kuiji.

I explained the idea of the “one Buddha vehicle” in four sections. In the first section “A Foundational Rubric for ‘Doctrinal Classification,’” I pointed out that the idea of the “one Buddha vehicle” was appropriated in China as a foundational rubric for the formative development of Chinese Buddhist doctrinal classification and that the attention given to

the second and third core concepts of the *Lotus Sūtra* was never comparable to it in scope. In the second section “The Three Vehicles as Expedient, the One Vehicle as Real, and the Distinctive Interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* Found in the Faxiang School,” I introduced the Faxiang school’s idea that the three vehicles are real and the one vehicle is expedient on the basis of five kinds of salvific dispositions. According to the doctrine of the Faxiang School, the *Lotus Sūtra* is an expedient teaching that cultivates only beings of undetermined disposition. In the third section “Zhiyi’s ‘Three Benefits’ of ‘Sowing, Maturing and Reaping,’” I took up Zhiyi’s theory of three benefits. It interprets adequately “sole great purpose for the Buddha’s appearance in this world,” which values the religious connection between Śākyamuni Buddha and sentient beings. Zhiyi took the story of the Buddha Excellence of Great Penetrating Wisdom in the “The Parable of the Phantom City” chapter to be an illustration of the idea that the salvific process has a beginning and an end and he thought the Buddha actively provides sentient beings with the three benefits of “sowing the seed, maturing the seed, and reaping the fruit” of Buddhahood. In the fourth section “The Question of whether the *Lotus Sūtra* Expounds or Does not Expound the Notion of Buddha-nature,” I pointed out that even though Huiyuan’s five-period doctrinal classification regarded the *Lotus Sūtra* as not expounding the Buddha-nature, Zhiyi and Jizang managed to show the Buddha-nature doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Concerning the idea of the “age-old existence of the Buddha,” I pointed out the following three points: the first is that the concern to the second idea in China was quite subtle compared to the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, which exactly expounds the eternity of the Buddha; the second is that Fayun, who adopted five-period doctrinal classification, interpreted the Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* as impermanent; the third is that Zhiyi and Jizang managed to prove the Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* to be eternal.

Concerning the idea of the “bodhisattvas emerging from the earth,” I pointed out that in China the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth were not interpreted as those who actually appear in the historical world probably because they are regarded as mythical figures appearing in the sūtra. On this point, the fact that the Japanese monk Nichiren recognized himself to be an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who is one of leaders of the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth, and possessed a keen religious self-awareness is out of common in the history of *Lotus* Thought.

In the second part I took up the devotion to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva on the basis of the *Guanyin jing* and introduced various

sūtras, which brought about the popularity of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and apocryphal scriptures, a central character of which is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and further introduced the compilation of records of the tales of miraculous response of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Then, I took up the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* and *Fahua zhuanji*, which emphasized actual beneficial experiences of various practices expounded in the *Lotus Sūtra* such as hearing the teachings, recitation, copy and lecture.

This folk faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* is very different from the theoretical concerns regarding the *Lotus Sūtra* shown in the sūtra commentaries. Both research areas are important for the historical research of the whole reception of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Philosophical research on the *Lotus Sūtra* by eminent monks was respected by common people, who could not understand it, and yet had greatly supported the propagation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but tales of common people's experiences must have attracted much more interest.

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Notes

¹ The idea of sentient beings' universal attainment of Buddhahood is demonstrated in the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's practice of bowing in obeisance. See my previous paper on this topic, "The Practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in the *Lotus Sūtra* and its Reception in China and Japan," in *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 12 (2002): 104–122.

² The emphasis on Śākyamuni Buddha seems to have connection with the idea of a savior figure of the threefold world shown in the "Simile and Parable" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "But now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others" (T9. no. 262, 50c19–20; Translation by Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras* [Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009], pp. 105–106) and the idea of Buddha Śākyamuni's "age-old existence."

³ See Jizang's *Sanlun xuanyi* (T45. no. 1852, 5b3–14).

⁴ See Kuiji's *Dasheng fayuan yilinzhang* 大乘法苑義林章 vol. 1, "Further, the *Lotus Sūtra* talks only about beings whose salvific disposition is yet to be formed or determined and so it is expedient teaching" (T45. no. 1861, 266b13–14).

⁵ *Fahua wenju* 1A, T 34. no. 1718, 2c1–9.

⁶ See Liuqiu's 劉虬 (438–495) systems of five-period classification as discussed in the section on "Doctrinal Traces of the Sūtras" (*zhongjing jiaoji yi* 衆經教迹義) contained in Jingying Huiyuan's 淨影慧遠 *Dasheng yizhang* 大乘義章 (T44. no. 1851, 465a11–25).

⁷ As for Jingying Huiyuan, see the *Dasheng yizhang* vol. 1 (T44. no. 1851, 466a–b); as for Zhiyi, see the *Fahua xuanyi* vol. 5B (T33. no. 1716, 744c–746a); as for Jizang, see the *Fahua xuanlun* vol. 1 (T34. no. 1720, 367a–b).

⁸ See the *Lotus Sūtra* (T9. no. 262, 43b16).

⁹ See *Fahua yiji*, vol. 1 (T33. no. 1715, 573c–574a).

¹⁰ As for Jingying Huiyuan, see the *Dasheng yizhang* vol. 1 (T44. no. 1851, 466b); as for Zhiyi, see the *Fahua xuanyi* vol. 10A (T33. no. 1716, 802c–803a); as for Jizang, see the *Fahua xuanlun* vol. 2 (T34. no. 1720, 374c–378b).

¹¹ See my previous paper on this topic, “The Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the *Lotus Sūtra*: Involvement in the Human Society,” in *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 20 (2010): 108–128.

¹² The Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282) recognized himself to be one of the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth and possessed a keen religious self-awareness. It is uncommon in the history of *Lotus Thought*.

¹³ See the *Fahua jing anle xing yi*, “As for the third meaning, [when confronted with] sentient beings who are intractably evil, the bodhisattva in order to subdue them and cause them to have a change of heart sometimes uses harsh words, slander, reviling, and humiliation to arouse remorse and enable them to foster wholesome mentalities. This is [also] known as ‘forbearance toward sentient beings’” (T46. no. 1926, 701b26–29).

¹⁴ See Michihata Ryōshū, “Chūgoku Bukkyō to *Hokekyō* no shinkō,” in Ōchō Enichi (ed) *Hokke shisō* (Kyoto: Heirakuji, 1975: 506–523); Shengyan, “Zhongguo yi *Fahua jing* wei jichu de xiuxing fangfa,” in *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 7, 1994; Shengkai, “Lun zhongguo zaoqi yi *Fahua jing* wei zhongxin de xingyang xingtai (shang),” in *Fayin* 215, 2002; Shengkai, “Lun zhongguo zaoqi yi *Fahua jing* wei zhongxin de xingyang xingtai (xia),” in *Fayin* 216, 2002.

¹⁵ As for the *Guanshiyin Sanmei jing*, see Makita Tairyō, *Rikuchō koitsu kanzeonōgenki no kenkyū*, Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1970.

¹⁶ The existence of that text was reported by Shibuya Ryōtai, *Shōwa genzon tendai shoseki sōgōmoku* (1943) and its explanation was made by Tsukamoto Zenryū (“Koitsu rikuchō kanzeon ōgenki no shutsugen: Shin Shafu Sō Furyō no *Kōzeon ōgenki*,” in *Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo sōritsu nijūgo shūnen kinen ronbunshū*, 1954 and its transcription, annotation and research was published by Makita Tairyō (*ibid*). Also see Wang Zhizhong, *Han Wei liuchao xiaoshuo shi* (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1997: 261–274) and Kinugawa Kenji, “Furyō *Kōzeon ōgenki yakuchū*” in *Hanazono daigaku bungakubu kenkyū kiyō* 29, 1997.

¹⁷ See Yoshizu Yoshihide, “*Kegonkyō denki* ni tsuite,” in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 27–1, 1978 and Nakajō Michiaki, “*Kegonkyō denki kenkyū* (1) (2),” *Komazawa daigaku daigakuin bukkyōgaku kenkyūkai nenpō* 12/13, 1978/1979.

¹⁸ See O Gwanghyeok, “*Kongōhannyakyōjūgenki kenkyū*,” Gim Jigyeon and Chae Inhwan (ed) *Shiragi bukkyō kenkyū*, Tokyo: Sankibō busshorin, 1973: 470–503.

¹⁹ See Matoba Yoshimasa, “Chūgoku ni okeru *hokekyō* no shinkō keitai (1): *hokkedenki*,” in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 31–1, 1982 and “Chūgoku ni okeru *hokekyō* no shinkō keitai (2): *hokkedenki* to *gusanhokkeden* ni okeru *hokkekyō* no dokuju to reigensetsuwa ni tsuite,” in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 32–2, 1984.

²⁰ See Ōta Shōjirō, “Jyaku hosshi no *Hokekyō* no genki wa genson suru,” in *Nihon rekishi* 390, 1980 and Mitomo Kenyō, “Jyaku sen *Hokekyō jūgen ki* no yichi kōsatsu,” in *Watanabe Hōyō sensei koki kinen ronbunshū: Hokke bukkyō bunkashi ronsō*, Kyōto: Heirakuji shoten, 2003 and Takahira Myōshin, “*Hokekyō jūgen ki* ni kansuru yichi

kōsatsu,” in *Indogaku bukkōgaku kenkyū* 56–2, 2008. As for the text, see *Tokyō daigaku toshokan zō Hokekyōjūgenki* (Kichō kotenseki kankōkai daisanki kankō: Shōwa gojūroku nen roku gatsu).

²¹ See *Dai Nippon koku hokke genki* (included in Inoue Mitsusada and Ōsone Shōsuke [collation and annotation] *Ōjōden Hokke genki*, Iwanami shoten, 1974) and Gim Gyeonghui, “*Dai Nippon koku hokke genki no seiritsu to tokushitsu*” (the dissertation submitted to Tokyō daigaku daigakuin sōgōbunka kenkyūka).

²² See T51. no. 2067, 32c.

²³ Liu Ading took up “only tongue does not decay” as the first of the characteristics of records of tales of miraculous response concerning the *Lotus Sūtra*. See Liu Ading, *Fojiao lingyanji yanjiu: yi Jin Tang wei zhongxin*, Sichuan chubanshan jítuan bashu shushe, 2006: 202–209.

²⁴ As for the *Fahua fanjing houji*, see Kim Byungkon, “Sōjō ki *Hokkehonkyōgoki gisensetsu no zenbō to kaimei*,” in *Bukkyōgaku ronshū* 27 issued by Risshō daigaku daigakuin bukkō gakkai, 2009.

²⁵ See T51. no. 2068, 83c–84b.

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