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Chan Buddhism and Huayan: Yongjue Yuanxian (1578–1657) on the “Five Positions” (*wu wei*) Theory of Dongshan Liangjie

Early Chan Buddhism (in particular the so-called Northern Chan School) is often said to have heavily relied on Huayan 華嚴 thought, as developed by Fazang 法藏 (643–712) and his disciples on the basis of the Avatamsaka-sūtra. With the demise of that school, and the rise of its rival, the Southern School, in the mid-eighth century, the importance of Huayan thought was downplayed.¹ It nevertheless continued to influence some trends of Chan. Guifeng Zongmi 圭峯宗密 (780–841), a patriarch of the Huayan School, played for instance a significant role as author of one of the first Chan “histories”.² Even after Zongmi, and despite Chan’s alleged “anti-intellectualism”, Huayan continued to influence certain trends of Chan, in particular the more intellectual Caodong 曹洞 (J. Sōtō) school, founded by Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良價 (807–869) and his disciple Caoshan Benji 曹山本寂 (804–901).

A case in point is the theory of the “five positions” (*wu wei* 五位) developed by Dongshan Liangjie.³ This rather obscure system of speculations on the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal aspects of reality has always attracted commentators and scholars, who gave widely divergent explications of the theory from various points of view. Mediaeval commentators as well as modern scholars mainly comment on the “positions” as different modes of experiencing reality in terms of the proper discernment of the mutual relationships between “the right” (*zheng* 正) and “the biased” (*pian* 偏). According to this basic interpretation, “the right” and “the biased” are observed at various “positions” as two inseparable aspects of the same reality, where their “real” relationship is, according to the “level” of the awakening, more or less revealed or concealed; they are also thematized through an analogy with the “four *dharma dhātus*” (Chn. *fajie* 法界) of the Huayan School.⁴

In this article, I will use the example of the commentaries on the “five positions” by the Chan master Yongjue Yuanxian 永覺元賢 (1578–1657) to try to show that the traditional comparison of the Chan “five positions” with the Huayan’s “four *dharma dhātus*” is plausible. I have chosen this master not only because, unlike mediaeval masters, he lived much

¹ Faure B. The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Early Chan. Stanford, 1997. P. 37–49.

² Gregory P.N. Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism. Honolulu, 2002. P. 368.

³ The teachings of the “five positions” philosophy are found mainly in three texts usually appended to the “recorded sayings” (*yulu* 語錄) of either Dongshan Liangjie or Caoshan Benji as independent treatises — *Wu wei jun chen song* 五位君臣頌 (Gāthā on Five Positions also called Lords and Vasals) see: *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (New compilation of Tripitaka from the Taishō era — Takakusu Junjirū 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al (eds.), Tokyo, 1924–1932 (100 vols.) / hereafter T); T 1986B. 47.525c1–8, *Dongshan wu wei xian jue* 洞山五位顯訣 (Verses Elucidating Dongshan’s Five Positions), T 1987A; 1987B and the poem *Baojing sanmei* 寶鏡三昧 (Precious Mirror Samādhi), T 1986B.47.525c23–526a19.

⁴ Powell W.F. The Record of Tung-shan. Honolulu, 1986. P. 11–12. About the theory of the “four *dharma dhātus*” see below.

later than Dongshan, but also because I think that his thought, especially regarding the relationship between the essence and its function, suggest a strong Huayan influence on the “five positions”.

Generally speaking, the “five positions” represent five perspectives or modes of experiencing reality in terms of discernment of the mutual relationship between “the right” and “the biased”. Regarding the term *wei* 位 itself, which I translate as “position”, Whalen W. Lai suggests that in Chinese this character also evokes the meaning of “occupying a proper position” (*zhengwei* 正位) and can mean “taking a proper orientation toward reality”, which in a Buddhist context can imply the idea of taking a proper “position” in observing reality.⁵

The “positions” in question are believed to be a kind of altered modes of discerning reality, which, resulting from awakening and cultivation, represent different “forms” in which reality is given in the experience of the awakened mind.

According to Dongshan Liangjie, the “five positions” can be formally expressed as follows:

1. *zheng zhong pian* 正中偏 — “the biased within the right”
2. *pian zhong zheng* 偏中正 — “the right within the biased”
3. *zheng zhong lai* 正中來 — “coming from within the right”
4. *jian zhong zhi* 兼中至 — “arriving at within together [the right and the biased]”
5. *jian zhong dao* 兼中到 — “going within together [the right and the biased]”.⁶

In his short introduction to Dongshan’s “five positions” William Powell translates the term *wu wei* as “five ranks”. He writes that the first “rank” suggests an experience of reality in which “form is ‘emptiness’” and that such an experience of reality might, for example, result from the conceptual reduction taught by Nāgārjuna;⁷ the second “rank” presents the experience from the opposite perspective, i.e., as the truth of “emptiness” manifested in phenomenal events; metaphor and poetry are ideally suited to function in this way. The third “rank” suggests the experience of reality that results from an absorption into “emptiness”, as in meditation. In the fourth “rank”, attention is redirected to phenomena, which are now totally identified with “emptiness”. In other words, when experienced in a particular frame of mind, phenomena are not merely metaphorical representations of the ultimate, but they are directly experienced as the ultimate. Finally, the fifth “rank” seems to be an attempt to account for a completely harmonious experience of reality that transcends the previous four.⁸

As mentioned above, the “five positions” were traditionally considered to be a kind of Chan-like “version” of the “four *dharma dhātu*”⁹ in Huayan, the “right”/“biased”

⁵ Lai W.W. Sinitic Mandalas: The Wu-wei-t'u Of Ts'ao-shan. // Lancaster L.R. and Lai W.W. (eds.). Early Ch'an in China and Tibet (Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series). Berkeley, 1983. P. 231.

⁶ Ruizhou Dongshan Liangjie chanshi yulu 瑞州洞山良價禪師語錄 (Recorded Sayings of the Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie of Ruizhou), T 1986B.47.519–526.

⁷ For Nāgārjuna see note 24.

⁸ See also: Chang C. Ts'ao-Tung Ch'an and its Metaphysical Background // The Ching-hwa Journal of Chinese Philosophy, 1965. No. 1, P. 33–65.

⁹ The theory of the “four *dharma dhātu*” was formed and elaborated in China by the fourth patriarch of the Huayan tradition, Chengguan 澄觀 (783–839). The Sanskrit term *dharma dhātu* literally means “the realm of the Dharma”. The term also meant the principle of truth and was one of eighteen *dhātu*s in the so-called Hīnayāna (or rather, Nikāya Buddhism) and the Absolute or the *tathāgatagarbha* in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the teachings of the Huayan school it might refer to a “realm” where the total “mutual pervasion of all phenomena by the principle, without any obstruction” and the “mutual inclusion” of all phenomena is observed by the awakened mind. The term *dharma dhātu* (its name and essence) describes Chengguan in his *Da Huayanjing lüece* 大華嚴經略策 (Manual of the Avatamsaka-sūtra) as follows:

paradigm being analogous to the Huayan principle/phenomena (*li* 理/*shi* 事) paradigm.¹⁰

The philosophy of the Huayan school is based on the notions of the total “mutual pervasion of all phenomena by the principle, without any obstruction” and the “mutual inclusion of all phenomena, without any obstruction”. As far as I understand the concept of “the mutual pervasion of all phenomena, without any obstruction”, it is essentially based on the knowledge that every phenomenon is absolutely devoid of self-nature (Chn. *zixing* 自性, Skt. *svabhāva*).¹¹ The theory of the “empty” nature of phenomena does not claim that nothing exists, but rather that nothing inherently given is observable in our human experience. The Huayan notion that phenomena are absolutely devoid of self-nature should not be construed “negatively” as implying that “nothing exists”, but rather “positively”, as a claim regarding the lack of self-nature in every phenomenon: the total “exclusiveness” of self-nature in every phenomenon means the “inclusiveness” of all others with no self-nature involved. Every phenomenon is pervaded by the lack of self-nature, all phenomena are mutually *included*, because they are “all others with no self-nature involved”. This does not mean, however, that there is no differentiation between phenomena, but rather that, in the process of origination, none of the “things”, “entities” or “events” that we empirically experience as “units” is manifested at the same moment (of linear time) and in the same space as any other; and yet every phenomenon is a total manifestation of the principle in its entirety.¹²

Question: What is the *dharma-dhātu*? What is the meaning of the *dharma-dhātu*?

Answer: *Dharma* means the upholding law. *Dhātu* has two meanings: from the standpoint of phenomena it means something that is divided (*fen* 分), because phenomena are divided and different. On the other hand, from the perspective of the *dharma-dhātu* of principle, it means the nature (*xing* 性), because the nature of the *dharma*s [things] is immutable. These two meanings intermingle, and thus the *dharma-dhātu* of phenomena and principle comes into being. Phenomena are produced while attached to the principle, the principle is manifested through the phenomena. If the phenomena and the principle cease to exist together, then both the phenomena and the principle perish. If the phenomena and the principle arise together, then they are the permanent phenomena and the permanent principle. The fourth [*dharma-dhātu*] is the *dharma-dhātu* of the non-obstruction of phenomena, which means that the principle includes phenomena. (T 1737.36.707c9–15). English translation according to Hamar I. Cheng-guan’s Theory of the Four Dharma-Dhātus // Acta Orientalia, 1998. Vol. 51 (1–2). P. 4.

Chang C. states: “Each particularity, besides being itself, penetrates all other particularities, and is, in turn, penetrated by them. This harmonious interplay between particularities and also between each particularity and universality creates a luminous universe. This world of luminosity is absolutely free from spatial and temporal limitations, and yet it is no less the world of daily affairs. This is called *dharma-dhātu*. In *dharma-dhātu* the boundaries of each particularity melt away and the reality of each becomes infinitely interfused with every other being” (Ts’ao-Tung Ch’an and its Metaphysical Background. P. 34).

¹⁰ For example, C. Chang states that when we study the basic teachings developed by the Caodong (and Linji 臨濟) school of Chan, we cannot neglect the metaphysical speculations of Huayan thinkers like Fazang or Cheng-guan and their elaborations on the “identification of the reality and appearance” and the “fourfold dharmadhātu”. (Ts’ao-Tung Ch’an and its Metaphysical Background. P. 33).

¹¹ Generally speaking, the term *svabhāva* in Mahāyāna designates “self-nature”, and can be said to be an opposite to the term *laksana* (Chn. *xiang* 相) — “phenomenal mark”. Any “real” arising, i.e., an arising that could be understood as arising of a “real thing” — inherently having its own nature and not understood as arising of mere phenomenon, is not tenable.

¹² To illustrate the notion in a more lapidary way, C. Chang, in his book “The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism” (London, 1971. P. 121) gives an example of a cup of water of which he says that it can be viewed in many ways, for example, as merely a form of liquid to quench one’s thirst, as a compound H_2O , as aggregates of molecules, as a fleeting particles in the sub-atomic field, as a manifestation of causality, etc. Thus all “things”, “entities” or “events” which we empirically experience as “units”, are mutually totally pervaded by anything else which is not self-nature, without impeding each other (all these ways in which we view a cup of water exist simultaneously without impeding each other) — but none of them is manifested (to our mind which is the co-constituent of them) in the very same moment (of a linear time) at the very same place as the other.

The four “levels” of the *dharma-dhātu* (that is, the realization of the “non-obstruction of principle and phenomena [*li shi wu ai* 理事無礙], and the “mutual non-obstruction of phenomena [*shi shi wu ai* 事事無礙]) are sketched in Huayan texts like the following:¹³

1. *shi fajie* 事法界 — the *dharma-dhātu* of phenomena

Chengguan depicts this *dharma-dhātu* [mode of discernment of the reality where phenomena are seen] as conditioned (*congyuan* 從緣), without true *essence* (*wu shiti* 無實體)¹⁴ nor nature (*wu xing* 無性), with its [phenomenal] marks empty [unreal] (*qi xiang zi xu* 其相自虛).¹⁵

Thus, the level of discernment of reality can be characterized here as follows: nothing inherently given (*svabhāva*) is observable in (and through) human experience.

2. *li fajie* 理法界 — the *dharma-dhātu* of principle

Chengguan argues that *dharma-dhātu* of principle is a [mode of discernment of the reality where the principle] is [seen] identical with true nature (*tong zhen xing* 同真性). In every phenomenon the principle can be discerned.

Here, of course, we should emphasize that, although the principle is “discernable”, it is only in the sense that no inherently given implication of the principle is observable.

3. *li shi wu ai fajie* 理事無礙法界 — the *dharma-dhātu* of the non-obstruction of phenomena and principle

In Chengguan’s *Dafang guang fo huayanjing suishu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔 (Subcommentary to the Avatamsaka-sūtra) we read:

Question: If phenomena are different in many ways and principle has only one flavour, why does the sūtra declare that principle and phenomena are non-obstructed and identical?

Answer: To seek for principle beyond phenomena is the partial deviation of two vehicles toward reality (*zhen* 真). To understand the identity of principle and phenomena is the great awakening of the bodhisattvas. There is no emptiness beyond form, the whole form is emptiness; there is no form beyond emptiness, the whole emptiness is form. The conditionally originated *dharma*s [things] are called forms and the principle of their lack of self-nature is called emptiness. Being conditionally originated, possessing no self-nature, is identical with forms and phenomena: it is real emptiness. Possessing no-self nature, conditional origination is identical with the principle of emptiness: these are forms and phenomena. These are two terms (*yi* 義) but one *essence* (*ti* 體), so they are called phenomena and principle. They can be interfused because these are two terms but one essence.¹⁶

As we could see from this excerpt, Chengguan mainly emphasizes that the whole existence is totally pervaded by the principle of possessing no self-nature.

4. *shi shi wu ai fajie* 事事無礙法界 — the *dharma-dhātu* of the non-obstruction of phenomena and phenomena

In the passage translated as a part of the definition of the term *dharma-dhātu* by Chengguan (see above), the fourth *dharma-dhātu* of non-obstruction of phenomena and phenomena was said to mean that “the principle includes the phenomena”. Again, this note can be roughly paraphrased by saying that all phenomena are mutually included in each other in a

¹³ Chengguan’s explanations of the theory are very comprehensive, of course, and are beyond the scope of this short study. Thus, I only choose a few of his comments on the *dharma-dhātus*, just to give the reader an idea of Chengguan’s basic approach.

¹⁴ T 1735.35.668c19.

¹⁵ T 1735.35.857a15.

¹⁶ T 1736.36.707b3–9. English translation according to *Hamar I. Chengguan’s Theory of the Four Dharmadhatu*. P. 9.

way that “the lack of self-nature includes all phenomena” — every phenomenon is everything that is devoid of self-nature. This does not imply a lack of differentiation between the manifested phenomena. Rather, it means that all things are mutually and totally pervaded by everything that is not self-nature, but none of them is manifested in one moment (of linear time) nor in the same space as any other.

Yongjue Yuanxian

I now turn to Yongjue Yuanxian’s commentaries. These commentaries can be found in the *Yongjue Yuanxian chanshi guang lu* 永覺元賢禪師廣錄 (Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Yongjue Yuanxian), sections *Dongshan wu wei* 洞山五位 (Dongshan’s Five Positions),¹⁷ *Wu wei tu shuo* 五位圖說 (Explanation of the Diagram of the Five Positions)¹⁸ and a section titled *Dongshan wu wei song zhu* 洞山五位頌注 (Commentary on the Gāthā on Dongshan’s Five Positions).¹⁹ They explain, comment on or reinterpret many aspects of Dongshan’s teachings explicated, commented or reinterpreted in Yuanxian’s commentaries. I will focus here on three tenets thematized in them, which seem to be of primary interest for Yuanxian — namely, the influence of the Huayan teachings, the influence of the Book of Changes dialectics and the implementation of the important Buddhist notion of accumulation of merits in the “five positions”.

Yuanxian seems to emphasize the Huayan-like notion of the inseparability of the principle and phenomena in the theory of the “five positions”, mainly in the elaborations on the mutual relationship between the essence and the function (or principle and phenomena) in certain “positions”.²⁰ In Chinese Buddhism, the essence and its function are often rephrased as “nature” and “practice” — only the Buddha perfectly actualizes his essence and completely unfolds it, while the enlightenment experienced by other beings remains caught in the attributes of the purity of the enlightened nature.²¹ Generally speaking, in Mahāyāna, human beings are seen to be pure with regard to essence and to differ with regard to function.

Proceeding from this basic Buddhist understanding of the essence / function paradigm, in my discussion of the relationship between the essence and its functioning in different “positions”, analyzing concrete commentaries by Yuanxian in the final part of the article, I am also going to try to apply a more general understanding of the terms essence and function, as used in Western philosophical discourse, yet, because I believe that they may be valid for

¹⁷ *Xu zangjing* 繢藏經 (Supplement to the Tripitaka), reprint edition of *Dainippon zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經 (The Kyoto supplement to the Manji edition of the Canon. Kyoto, 1905–1912). Taipei, 1968–1970. (150 vols.) (hereafter XZJ), vol. 27. P. 355.

¹⁸ XZJ, vol. 27. P. 355a–356a.

¹⁹ XZJ, vol. 27. P. 356.

²⁰ C. Muller argues that in various East Asian Buddhist schools the essence/function construction appears in other analogous forms, one of the most prominent being the *li/shi* (principle/phenomena) terminology used by the philosophers of Huayan. (*Muller C.A. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment. Korean Buddhism’s Guide to Meditation. N. Y., 1998. P. 12.*)

²¹ For example, Guifeng Zongmi, traditionally honored as a patriarch in both the Huayan School and Heze 荷澤 Branch of Chan, even assimilates the essence/function paradigm into that of root/branch (*ben/mo* 本末) — it entails a notion of religious practice as a return to a more basic state, the primordial condition of the mind before its bifurcation into subject and object attendant upon the first subtle movement of thought. And, it is only through a direct experience of the essence that its functioning can be validated as true — see: *Gregory P. N. Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism. P. 237.*

Zongmi introduces a critical distinction between two levels of functioning: 1. intrinsic functioning of the self-nature (*zixing benyong* 自性本用) and 2. responsive functioning in accord with conditions (*suiyuan yingyong* 隨緣應用) — see: *Gregory P. N. Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism. P. 239.*

Buddhism as well: the function is “the appearing (in some space) when the (regulative) principle sets it”.

According to Yuanxian, the symbolic representation of Dongshan’s “five positions” can be shown by the following diagram:²²

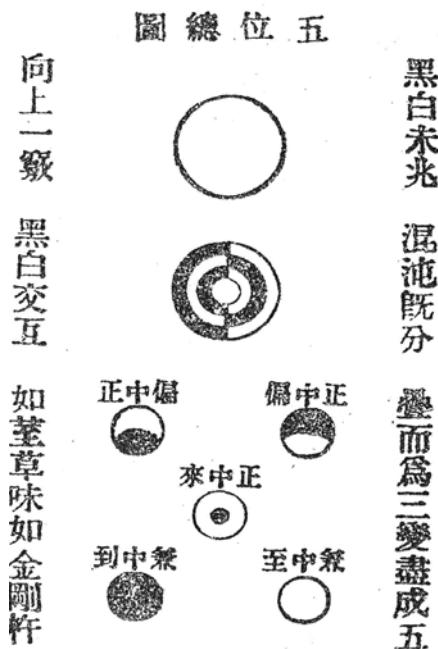


Diagram of the “five positions” by Yongjue Yuanxian
(XZJ, vol. 27. P. 355c)

Here, the black color represents “the right”, the white color “the biased.” Citing the verses from a song entitled Precious Mirror Samādhi,²³ Yuanxian seems to suggest the connection of the “positions”, which are expressed in terms of the mutual “interaction” (*jiaohu* 交互 or *huihu* 回互) of “the right” and “the biased”, with the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). Ancient commentators and modern scholars alike have speculated

²² Caoshan Benji, a direct disciple of Dongshan Lianjie, is traditionally credited with a *Wu-wei tu* 五位圖 (“Diagram of the Five Positions”) that depicts Dongshan’s “five positions”. However, as W. Lai points out, although Caoshan basically created the “five forms” (*wu xiang* 五相), a set of five circles, the latter have always been thought to depict Dongshan’s “five positions”, and have been thus considered to be the “Diagram of the Five Positions”. For the sake of historical clarity, however, we should distinguish the “five forms” and the later version as a “Diagram of the Five Positions” — see: *Lai W. W.* Sinitic Mandalas: The *Wu-wei-tu* of Ts’ao-shan. P. 241.

²³ The verses of Precious Mirror Samādhi also read:

In the six lines of the doubled *li* hexagram

The biased and the right interact

(see diagram’s bottom part):

Piled up to become three

In completing the transformation, the [variations] become five

Like the taste of the [five-flavored] *chi* grass

Like the [five-pronged] diamond *vajra*.

(T 1986B.47:526a4–5).

on the ways in which the “tree” and “five” were derived from the hexagram “doubled *li*” (*chong li* 重離), and certain trigrams or hexagrams came to represent each of the “positions”. At any rate, we can only play with the dialectics of the *Book of Changes*, and ponder on the obscure meanings of the transformations of the *yin* and *yang* lines in the trigrams or hexagrams as expressing the operations sketched in the poem. Yuanxian formally states that each of the “positions” represents a certain hexagram that was in some ways derived from the hexagram “doubled *li*”, central in the Precious Mirror Samādhi, but, instead of “taking a proper orientation toward reality”, as suggested in the Books of Changes or other Chinese philosophical systems, he seems to emphasize that our Buddhist “positions” are meant as modes of experiencing reality—not in the sense, however, of wisely following some kind of given reality spontaneously engendered by the interaction of two forces determined by some kind of ontological substance. In Buddhism, the human mind is perceived as a co-constituent of the “outer” reality, “qualitatively” equivalent to the “objective” conditions that give rise to phenomena. Accordingly, the classical Chinese notion of the spontaneous origination of things contradicts one of the cardinal Buddhist tenets, the theory of the “conditioned origination” (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Chn. *yuanqi* 緣起). This theory argues that any “real” arising — i.e., any arising that could be understood as that of a “real thing” (inherently having its self-nature — *svabhāva*) and not as that of a mere phenomenon — is not tenable.²⁴ We cannot postulate any ultimate or absolute state of things and we should comprehend *reality per se* as a set of “conditioned meanings” devoid of any attributive or axiological structure. In our experience we should give up any attempt to model any absolute reality, since, basically, no criteria, according to which we can judge whether this particular nature of the phenomenon is its absolute and independent nature or not, can be confirmed in human experience.

Chinese Buddhists widely criticized non-Buddhist teachings for their “erroneous” theories regarding ontological models, causality and origination of phenomena. For example, the above-mentioned Huayan thinker Chengguan, in his introduction to his commentary and subcommentary on the Avatamsaka-sūtra, quoting from the *Book of Changes*, *Daodejing* 道德經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and commentaries written to them and interpreting them from a Buddhist standpoint, concludes that the *Daodejing*, which claims that the Dao 道 originates the One, proposes an erroneous causality (*xie yin* 邪因), whereas the *Zhuangzi*, by stating that all things are engendered spontaneously, falls into the fallacy of acausality (*wu yin* 無因). Chengguan argues that, if the *Zhuangzi*’s views were right, then anything could be white like a crane, or black like a crow. Regarding the *Book of Changes*’ notion that the transformation of *yin* and *yang* creates the myriad things, he calls it the fallacy of erroneous causality, especially when the commentaries on this text gloss the One as a Nonbeing, a case of error of acausality that is typical of Chinese philosophy.

The dialectics of the *Book of Changes* imply the notion that the outer reality is somehow structured and that human beings should take a proper orientation in this net of inherently given meanings, which are expressed schematically in the texts appended to the oracles. On the other hand, while Buddhists do not absolutely reject the notion of a structured reality,

²⁴ Two terms are central in the analysis of the “conditioned arising”: “cause” (Skt. *hetu*, Chn. usually *yin* 因) and “condition” (Skt. *pratyaya*, Chn. usually *yuan* 緣). The prominent Indian Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna (2nd–3rd centuries A.D.) shows the principal contradiction in any attempt to postulate the existence of an ontological cause (for example *causa sui*) for the existence of a “thing”, saying that only different kinds of “conditions” can be appealed to when talking about a “thing” — which we in a certain moment of our experience conceive as a “unit”. Whereas *causes* are, according to Nāgārjuna, unobservable, he speaks about *conditions* as inherent parts of our experience. We can say that Nāgārjuna understands “conditions” as “forms of our empirical experience”, without any metaphysical commitment.

for them these structures are not inherently fixed, as we tend to observe the outer reality in our everyday experience. Of course, everything, including possible structures, is totally devoid of the *svabhāva* implications and we should always remember that a human mind is a co-constituent of the reality. Unlike other Chinese philosophical systems, Buddhism claims that no inherently fixed or inherently given structures are observable in human experience. Therefore, to take a proper orientation toward reality means — unlike in the world of hexagrams — to abolish structures generated in our ordinary experience.

Thus, when Yuanxian interprets the first verse of the Precious Mirror samādhi — “the biased” and ‘the right’ interact” — as transformations of *yin* and *yang* (*pian zheng huihu wei yin yang bianyi ye* 偏正回互謂陰陽變異也),²⁵ he probably means that “the biased” and “the right”, like *yin* and *yang*, are two corresponding aspects of the same reality that exist exclusively in mutual dependance and “interaction”, but that, unlike *yin* and *yang*, are not comprehended as aspects of the inherently given reality.

The theory of the accumulation of merits is an important and mainly soteriological implication of the teachings of many Buddhist schools. Its basic, explicitly stated significance is that a bodhisattva, an awakened being endowed with the marks of the Buddha, never enters *nirvāṇa* before all beings are saved from ignorance. Here we should point out that, although the aspect of the “accumulation of merits” imports the idea of “deserving” into Buddhism—while alluding to the natural effect of certain action—from the point of view of the awakened mind of the bodhisattva it is perceived as a power that is “automatically” generated in the process of awakening, without any axiological commitment. In the following text the term *gong* 功 will be mentioned in relation to the “positions”. Generally speaking, in Buddhism it holds meanings like the merit of achievement; to do meritorious deeds or actions leading to beneficial results; skill or ability; and especially in the compound *gongli* 功力 it means earnest effort after the good, or meritorious power gained through religious practice. This latter meaning seems to be most suitable in the context of the “positions”. Moreover, the “meritorious power” mentioned in Dongshan’s “positions” is also related to the “skilfull means” (Skt. *upāya*, Chn. *fangbian* 方便) of the bodhisattva, where it is comprehended as an inseparable implication of any deeds of the awakened mind, but it can be unobserved in certain “positions”, when some aspects of the reality are not yet fully revealed to the awakened mind.²⁶

In the following text I will try to show that tenets and assumed implications of the “five positions” mentioned above can be found in or derived from Yuanxian’s glosses on each of the “positions”.

1. The commentary on the first “position” (depicted by Dongshan like *zheng zhong pian* 正中偏 — “the biased within the right”) reads:

“The biased within the right” comes when [one] for the first time awakes to this principle (*chu wu ci li* 初悟此理). The principle is “the right”, the awakening is “the biased”. “At the beginning of the night’s third watch”²⁷ [stands for] black and not [yet] clear. It ex-

²⁵ *Baojing sanmei zhu* 寶鏡三昧注, XZJ, vol. 27. P. 353–355.

²⁶ In one of Dongshan’s *gāthās* (T 1986B47.525c9–22) the author specifies five stages of the “meritorious activities”: *xiang* 向 (“to take orientation”), *feng* 奉 (“to serve”), *gong* 功 (“merits”), *gong gong* 共功 (“common merits”) and *gonggong* 功功 (“merit of merit”). See also Verdi A. Dialectical Aspects in Buddhist Thought. Kansas, 1974. P. 140–155.

²⁷ The first stanza in Dongshan’s Gāthā on the Five Positions (also called) Lords and Vassals reads:

At the beginning of the night’s third watch, before there is moonlight

Don’t be surprised to meet yet not recognize

What is surely a familiar face from the past.

(T 1986B.47.525c1–2; English translation according to Powell W. F. The Record of Tung-shan. P. 61).

presses the principle. Nevertheless, [the verse] “before there is moonlight” [expresses the meaning that] its blackness is manifested. When this blackness is manifested, there is brightness inside. Just like the principle [that is] inevitably manifested by the awakening (理必有悟而顯). When the principle is manifested, there is awakening inside.²⁸

“The principle is inevitably manifested by awakening. When the principle is manifested, there is awakening inside”. Here, awakening seems to be defined as a function, or as an appearing of the phenomena. Generally speaking, I think that in the “five positions” the term “the biased” is not strictly confined to meaning of either the *shi* 事 (“phenomenal event”) or the *yong* 用 (“function”) and can be explained as having connotations of both, depending on the “position”. At any rate, this initial level of the “true” comprehending of reality can suggest that the process of “awakening” is equivalent to that of the “appearing of phenomenal events when the principle sets it”.

But, in the subsequent lines we can read: “[When] there is a principle that can be realized, this [implies that] the traces of the awakening are not eliminated. [But] the principle [that we are able to comprehend] is still not the true [principle].”²⁹ Here we can ask: when the principle “realized” (and its functioning) is not “true”, why did Chan masters relate it to awakening? Perhaps what they had in mind was the negligence of the merits in this “position”. In the context of “meritorious deeds” developed by Dongshan, here Yuanxian seems to underscore that the true principle is not yet observed in connection with the performing of meritourious deeds, which are characterized in the following “positions” as inevitable manifestations of the principle in its totality.

In the final part of his commentary, Yuanxian criticizes other masters who consider this “position” to express that the “function is initiated within the essence” (*ti zhong fa yong* 體中發用),³⁰ whereby they convey the meaning, according to Yuanxian, that “the biased is produced after the right” (*zheng hou qi pian* 正後起偏).³¹ Yuanxian argues that the relationship between “the biased” and “the right” should be like “there is the biased within the right” (*zheng zhong bian you pian* 正中便有偏).³²

Here we learn that “there is awakening in the principle” and that “awakening is not produced after the principle”: thus, they come into being together and cease to exist together.³³ And if, playing with the words, we operate the substitution suggested above (regarding the meaning of the term “function”), we can conclude that here “the appearing when the principle sets it” does not come *after* the principle *itself* and that “the principle” and “the appearing (of the phenomenal events) when the principle sets it” come into being together and cease to exist together (the Huayan-like notion).³⁴

2. The second “position”, in Dongshan’s scheme characterized as *pian zhong zheng* 偏中正 — “the right within the biased”, is commented like the following:

“The right within the biased” comes when, after seeing the path [of perfect understanding], the merits come (*jian dao hou yong gong* 見道後用功). The [accumulation] of the

²⁸ XZJ, vol. 27: 356a13–16.

²⁹ XZJ, vol. 27: 356a16.

³⁰ XZJ, vol. 27: 356a18.

³¹ XTJ, vol. 27: 356b1.

³² XZJ, vol. 27: 356a18.

³³ Chenguan in his Manual of the Avatamsaka-sūtra (T 1737.36.707c13–14) states: “[If] they both [phenomena and principle] cease to exist together, then both phenomena and principle perish. If they come into existence together, then they are permanent phenomena and permanent principle”.

³⁴ Again, just like in the case of “the biased”, Yuanxian does not firmly mark the difference between the basic connotations of the term — “essence” or “principle”. At the beginning of the commentary he labels “the right” as a “principle”, a few lines later as an “essence”. Anyway, I think that in Chan Buddhism the insistence on the strict differentiating between them can be questioned in regard to the “absolute lack of self-nature” aspect of the reality.

merits (*gongxun* 功勳) is “the biased”, the principle we serve is “the right” (所奉之理正也).³⁵

In this sentence, Yuanxian indicates that the state of mind (or the way of understanding reality) representing this second “position” can be characterized as an effort to follow an already realized principle, here functioning as a meritorious power gained through awakening and religious practice.

Yuanxian continues his comments saying that:

The way many masters often explain this position as “transforming the function by returning to the essence” (*zhuan yong gui ti* 轉用歸體) is incorrect. Because, according to Dongshan’s meaning, “the biased dwells in the right”. It does not mean that “after [truly comprehending] ‘the biased’ one returns to ‘the right’ [principle]”.³⁶

In his gloss on this “position”, Yuanxian points to the “fact” that every phenomenal event (including the performing of meritorious deeds) is nothing but a direct manifestation of the principle and that there is no reality beyond the phenomenal world. Here the awakened mind knows that every phenomenon, regardless of its assumed axiological value, is a direct manifestation of the principle but, at the same time, no fixed implication of the principle can be observed. In this sense, we can say that in the process of origination nothing originates that had not “existed” before — but different phenomenal marks appear in any different moment (of a linear time) and space. Thus, the second “position” presents the experience of reality from a perspective that is the opposite of that of the first “position”: the principle in its totality is directly discernable in every phenomenal event and does not mean that “after [truly comprehending] the ‘appearing of the phenomenal manifestations of the principle’ one returns to the principle”.

3. The 3rd position: *zheng zhong lai* 正中來 — “coming from within the right”

Unlike Dongshan, Yuanxian does not formally depict this “position” as “coming from within the right”, but simply as “the position of the right” (*zheng wei* 正位), and he says that “the position of the right is the attaining the *dharma* (*dharmakāya* (*de fashen* 得法身))”.³⁷ On the other hand, in his *Diagram* above, the circle representing this “position” is white with a black core, thus corresponding to the following lines from the commentary:

“In the midst of nothingness” is the right position. “There is a path” is the biased.³⁸ ... This noble position cannot be defiled. [“The right” and “the biased”] should interact (*huihu* 回互), [they] can “interact” (*neng huihu* 能回互).³⁹

These seemingly contradictory notions present this intermediary “position” as a kind of state of mind, in which the relationship between “the right” (absolute aspect of the reality) and “the biased” (phenomenal aspect of the reality) is already discerned “without defilement” as mutually dependent and mutually manifesting each other — that is, phenomena are produced while attached to the principle, and the principle is manifested through the phenomena.⁴⁰

³⁵ XZJ, vol. 27: 356b3.

³⁶ XZJ, vol. 27: 356b7–9.

³⁷ XZJ, vol. 27: 356b12.

³⁸ In Dongshan’s *Gāthā* on Five Positions (also called) Lords and Vassals (T 1986B.47.525c4) we read: “Coming from within the right. In the midst of nothingness there is a path far from the [red] dust” (正中來無中有路隔塵埃).

³⁹ XZJ, vol. 27: 356b14–17.

⁴⁰ Regarding the “accumulation of merits” aspect of the “positions”, Yuanxian states: “The first half [previous two positions] is the “transformation of the merits by the attaining of the position” (*zhuan gong jiu wei* 轉功就位), the second half [the next two positions] is the “transformation of the position by the merits” (*zhuan wei jiu gong* 轉位就功)” (XZJ, vol. 27: 356b12–13).

4. The 4th “position”: *jian zhong zhi* 兼中至 — “arriving at within together [of the right and the biased]”

In the gloss on the fourth position, we also read: “the total essence is the function” (*quan tiji yong* 全體即用).⁴¹

If we use the definition of the term “function” I introduced earlier, we can read these four characters as follows:

“The essence in its entirety is ‘the appearing (in some space) when the principle [of the essence] sets it’ ”.

From this short sentence, explaining the “fourth level” of the experience of the reality, I believe that we can derive the following notion: the essence in its entirety is (nothing but) its own functioning. Thus, the essence in its entirety and the appearing of the phenomena are one and the same thing. This notion of the unity and inseparability of the essence and the appearing evokes the idea that the essence is a kind of a process — a process of appearing — and that the essence in its completeness and its functioning (the appearing of the phenomena when the principle sets it) come into being together and cease to exist together.⁴²

5. The 5th “position”: *jian zhong dao* 兼中到 — “going within together [the right and the biased]”

As a complement to the fourth level, we read: “the total function is the essence” (*quan yong ji ti* 全用即體).⁴³

Thus, in our paraphrase: “The appearing in whatever space whenever the principle [of the essence] sets it” is [nothing but] the essence”.

Here the commentary suggests that all the functioning of the essence is nothing but the essence itself. There is no difference between the appearing of the phenomena (when the principle of the essence sets it) and the essence itself. The appearing is essence. And, again, they come into being together and cease to exist together. This is how the awakened mind can discern the outer reality.

Conclusion

The basic implications of the terms “the right” and “the biased” and their mutual relationship formally elaborated in the Yuanxian’s commentaries mentioned can be schematized as follows:

正 the right	偏 the biased
1. 理 principle	悟 awakening
2. 所奉之理 principle we serve	功勳 merit
3. 無中有路來 amidst nothingness there is a path to come [from]	

⁴¹ XZJ, vol. 27: 355d3.

⁴² In XZJ, vol. 27, p. 356c9 we also read: “Arriving at within together [the right and the biased]” comes when merits and position are equally conspicuous (*gong wei qi zhang* 功位齊彰).

⁴³ XZJ, vol. 27, p. 355d4–5.

4. 正既來偏
 the biased has already come [from within] the right
 偏正交至
 the biased and the right mutually arriving
 偏必兼正
 the biased inevitably together with the right
5. 無偏正之跡
 no traces of the biased and the right

It is difficult to judge to what extent the “five positions” of Chan were influenced by the Huayan teachings of the “four *dharma-dhātu*s”. Obviously, both systems share the basic ambition to formally express the four or five different modes in which the awakened mind discerns the “real” relationship between the absolute and the phenomenal aspects of the reality. And, from this point of view, both schemes reveal affinities in their implications, by emphasizing the unity of principle and phenomena, or of essence and function, mainly in the aspect that they do not come into existence (and cease to exist) *before* or *after* each other, and that they manifest each other. All phenomenal existence is the principle (essence) itself. Of course, this conception, expressed here in a very simplified way, deserves much more theoretical elaborations than I am able to provide in this short article. (Let us keep in mind, however, that the text analyzed is a Chan commentary.) In the case of the Huayan, there is a bulk of texts that can suggest the meaning of the unity of the principle and the phenomena, or that of the mutual inclusion of all phenomena. Regarding the Chan “positions”, however, although we derived some similar notions from the Yuanxian’s commentaries, the Chan masters do not provide us with texts theoretically focusing on the philosophical implications of the sketched formulations. Therefore, we can only make some general observations. In the present case, I have tried to show that the commentator of Dongshan’s “five positions” emphasized, like Huayan masters, the inseparability of principle and phenomena (or of essence and function), mainly in the sense that they come into being (and cease to exist) together. The principle does not mean that all phenomena are the same, but rather that different phenomenal marks appear in any different moment (of a linear time) and in any different space, while they remain included by the principle in its entirety. And no positive implication of the principle itself can be confirmed—there are only phenomena that are its perfect manifestations, indeed, they are the principle itself.

Regarding the hexagrams corresponding to the “positions”, we can only infer with the way they are derived, since the explanations presented in the Precious Mirror Samādhi or in other works by Chan masters are too obscure. Be it as it may, I think, that the main reason why a theory of hexagrams was elaborated into a system of the “five positions” was probably the ambition to stress the fact that, although the human mind is basically caught in the net of the meanings given (as in the *Book of Changes*), the proper Buddhist orientation in this net of objectively given meanings should be undertaken only in the realm of “empty” temporal phenomenal marks — i.e., absolutely devoid of self-nature.

Finally, regarding the meritorious aspects of the awakened mind, the various levels are depicted as follows:

1. 初悟此理 for the first time to awaken to this principle
2. 見道後用功 after seeing the path [of perfect understanding in the first “position”] the [accumulation] of the merits is applied
 (first two *positions*: 轉功就位 — transformation of the merits by attaining the position)
3. 得法身 to attain a Buddha body
 (final two *positions*: 轉位就功 — transformation of the position by attaining merits):

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- 4. 功位齊彰 merits and position equally conspicuous
 - 5. 功位俱隱 merits and position both hidden

It seems that here Yongjue Yuanxian was intent on pointing to the traditional Buddhist emphasis on the “automatically” generated aspect of the awakened mind — a sense of compassion and the performance of the meritorious deeds, while the mind of the bodhisattva is already impervious to the “defilements” resulting from an axiological approach to the things of the outer world.

All in all, these observations by a Chan master sound very Huayan-like indeed.⁴⁴ Of course, this begs the question of the extent to which, by the turn of the seventeenth century, sectarian divisions like “Chan” and “Huayan” remained operative, and of whether or not we can still conceive a thinker like Yuanxian as a “pure” Chan master. But these are questions for another time and another article.

Яна Беничка

Буддизм чань и хуаянь:

Юнцзюэ Юаньсянь (1578–1657) о теории «пяти положений» (у вэй)

Дуншань Лянцзе

Чань и хуаянь являются двумя важнейшими школами китайского буддизма, возникшими как синкетические учения, уходящие своими корнями в китайскую философскую традицию. Принято считать, что хуаянь является самой умозрительной (теоретической) системой китайского буддизма, в то время как чань традиционно представляется как «вне-интеллектуальная» практика, свободная от систематических теоретических размышлений. В основе статьи лежат философские тексты, приписываемые учителям школы чань и относящиеся к различным уровням восприятия действительности. Анализ этих текстов показывает, что обе школы, чань и хуаянь, значительно ближе друг к другу по своим теоретическим положениям, чем это обычно представлялось.

⁴⁴ Regarding the final “position” Yuanxian also claims: “Going within together [the right and the biased]” comes when merits and “position” are both hidden (*gong wei ju yin* 功位俱隱)” (XZJ, vol. 27, p. 356c16).