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KEGON AND DRAGONS: A MYTHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HUAYAN DOCTRINE

A cursory glance at the abundant scholarly literature reveals that the Chinese Huayan, Korean Hwaōm, and Japanese Kegon schools (whose names are different readings for the same Chinese characters, 華嚴) have been studied until today predominantly through the thought of a handful of patriarchs – essentially Zhiyan 智儼 (602–668), Fazang 法藏 (643–712), Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635?–730), Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), and Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) for China; Ŭisang 義湘 (625–702), Wōnhyo 元曉, and Kyunyō 均如 (923–973) for Korea; Myōe 明惠 (alias Kōben, 1173–1232) and Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321) for Japan. Much less has been done about other aspects – historical, institutional, cultural – of the Huayan tradition. The predominantly philosophical approach taken so far is amply justified by the sheer complexity of Huayan scholasticism. However, I believe that this approach is not sufficient to explain the enduring cultural impact of Huayan in East Asia. I will therefore take here a different approach, as I have already done in the case of another major school of Buddhism, Chan/Sōn/Zen, and also in the case of the Korean master Wōnhyo.¹

In the case of Chan, I tried to show the ideological underpinnings of the doctrine of sudden awakening, and emphasized its “rhetoric of immediacy.” A similar ideological critique remains to be done in the case of Huayan. Clearly, notions such as the interpenetration of principle and phenomena (*lishi wu'ai* 理事無礙) lent themselves to ideological recuperation. It is no coincidence that Mahāvairocana, the cosmic Buddha of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經) was chosen as symbol of imperial centrality and cast into the monumental Buddha of Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara. The Hwaōm doctrine played a similar role in Korean politics. More recently, the Kegon teaching was used in Japan by the so-called Kyoto school to support imperial ideology.² However, I will not attempt such an ideological critique here. I would like to focus instead on some cultural aspects of Huayan in Korea and Japan.

The philosophical teaching of Huayan was summarized in Ŭisang’s famous *Diagram of the Dharmadhātu According to the One-vehicle of Huayan* (*Hwaōm ilsŭng pōpkyedo* 華嚴一乘法界圖, known under its abbreviated title *Pōpkyedo*, Ch. *Fajie*

1 Faure 1991, 1998.

2 Nishida 1990. See also Ishii Kōsei’s contribution to this volume.

tu, *J. Hokkai zu*).³ While the content of Ūisang's poem is standard Huayan metaphysics, its diagrammatic format allegedly points to that which cannot be expressed by words, and more specifically, by analytic discourse.

The poem starts from the center of the diagram, and unfolds in four phases, forming four separate sections of the diagram, before finally returning to the center. The first and last characters, next to each other at the center, are said to show that "the seats of cause and effect each represent the true virtue and the function of the dharma-nature, and that dharma-nature is the Middle Path."⁴ The first four lines are also believed to contain the gist of the poem:

Since dharma-nature is perfect and interpenetrating, it is without any sign of duality.
All dharmas are unmoving, and originally calm;
No name, no form exist, all [distinctions] are abolished.
It is known through the wisdom of awakening, not by any other level.⁵

According to the Sōn master Chinul 知訥 (1158–1210), these lines explain not only the interpenetration of all phenomena (*shishi wu'ai* 事事無礙), but the very origin of that interpenetration.⁶

The diagram is said to have the form of a Chinese seal, and to represent the ocean-seal *samādhi* (*haiyin sanmei*, *J. kaiin zanmai* 海印三昧). In fact, the dynamic nature of the diagram calls to mind a Tantric *maṇḍala* with four assemblies, rather than a Chinese seal. In other words, the gaze of the reader or practitioner, starting from the center, follows the red thread between characters, in four successive centripetal and centrifugal movements, rather like the subsequent processes of emanation and reabsorption described (and instantiated) in *maṇḍalas*.

The name of the *samādhi* represented by the diagram already implies a reference to Indian mythology. As Ūisang himself explains, when the god Indra fought against the Asuras, all the warriors were clearly reflected in the sea and they looked like the characters of a seal. Hence the name ocean-seal *samādhi*.⁷

For all the philosophical insights of Ūisang's poem, its semantic content is not the only thing that matters here. Ūisang himself alerts us to the fact that the Diagram is supposed to represent the three realms of matter, life, and of the ultimate wisdom that includes all dharmas. The white paper – pure potentiality – on which the poem is written is said to represent the realm of matter. The black characters, all different, represent the realm of life in its mind-boggling diversity. Finally, the red line that connects these characters represents the realm of the enlightened mind that links and

encompasses all the multifarious facts of life. The enlightened mind is the one who sees the writing on the wall. The way in which this Diagram was allegedly produced should serve as a model for all the scholars who have to copyedit a manuscript. We are told that Ūisang, on the advice of his master Zhiyan, put a first draft of his text twice into a fire, and that only 250 characters remained, with which he composed his poem.⁸

The diagrammatic form of Ūisang's argument is certainly not, as Yi Chi-kuan argues, a reflection of Ūisang's incapacity to emulate his master's rhetorical flourishes.⁹ To believe that resorting to diagrams is a sign of illiteracy reveals an unjustifiable prejudice in favor of writing. If that were the case, the Shingon master Kūkai 空海 (d. 735) as well, who obviously loved diagrams and *maṇḍalas*, should be characterized as a poor writer of Chinese. This is obviously not the case, and neither is it for Ūisang.

Apart from its attempt to transcend the limits of the written word, Ūisang's diagram, like other similar diagrams (I have in mind here texts such as Dōgen's 道元 *Jike kunketsu* 自家訓決 "Rules for our School", as found in the transmission documents or *kirigami* 切紙 of the Sōtō 曹洞 tradition), probably had a ritual function.¹⁰ It seems that, in some cases at least, these diagrammatic texts also imply a kind of ritual choreography.

At any rate, a purely philosophical understanding of such works falls obviously short off the mark. This may serve here as a metaphor for the broader understanding of Huayan texts. We know for instance that the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, along with many other *sūtras*, was renowned primarily for its apotropaic efficacy. Likewise, the masters who commented on these texts were famous above all for their thaumaturgic powers. As I have argued in the case of Wōnhyo, their "life," as it developed in hagiographic literature, was another aspect – and perhaps the most important – of their "thought," and it is in large part what explains the enduring appeal of that "thought" – rather than its purely doctrinal or philosophical excellence.¹¹

At the formal level at least, my argument will emulate Ūisang's Diagram in its labyrinthine meanders. My central point, however, is that the appeal of Huayan in Korea and Japan, but probably also in China, had much to do with the mythological context of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* and its commentaries. The images of the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra, in particular, have played a fundamental role in the devotion and the imagination of Huayan followers.¹² Another important figure is that of the youth Sudhana, in his vision quest throughout the Buddhist realms. The Kegon *maṇḍala*, representing the fifty-three scenes of Sudhana's pilgrimage as described in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, was the main object of worship in rituals performed in

3 T 1887A.

4 Yi 1994: 82.

5 Yi 1994: 82–83 (slightly modified).

6 Chinul: *Pōpchip pyōrhaengnok choryō pyōngip sagi*. Korean Buddhist Texts 4:759–760; quoted in Yi 1994.

7 Ibid., 718b. This brings to mind another similar seal, said to have been imprinted at the bottom of the sea of Japan by the Buddha Mahāvairocana (Dainichi 大日). See for instance *Shasekishū* 沙石集 1:1, trans. See Morrell 1985: 73.

8 Kyunyō: *Ilsūng pōgyedo wōnt'ong ki* 一乘法界圖圖通記, quoted in Yi 1994: 77.

9 Yi 1994: 87.

10 Nichūiki Tōjō *shitsunai tekiteki hiden mitsuō kirigami* 日域洞上室内嫡女秘伝密法切紙. Sōtōshū zensho, shūi 曹洞宗全書、拾遺, ed. Sōtōshū zensho kankōkai, Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmūchō, 1970, vol. 18: 498–499.

11 For more details, see Faure 1998.

12 Tanabe 1992.

medieval Japan.¹³ This pilgrimage was also probably the model emulated by priests like Ūsang and Myōe, in their desire to go in search of the Dharma in China and/or India. Inasmuch as this representation deconstructs itself, by pointing out that the end of the quest is contained in its beginning, it was also perhaps, as I will argue in the cases of Wōnhyo and Myōe, a reason not to embark on a long and strenuous trip.

Sudhana's pilgrimage is a root-metaphor for Ūsang's Diagram. As Ūsang explains in his Pōpyedo ki: "One day someone fell asleep and dreamt that he was wandering about thirty places. When he awoke, he found that he was lying in the same position as he had started in, without changing. In this way, though we start from the first character "Dharma" [in the Diagram] and return to that same character, passing all others along the way, it is in the same position as if we had never moved at all."¹⁴ This is not quite true, since – as any reader or traveler knows – any word or place is always understood through the context of those that preceded it.

In the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, Ūsang and Wōnhyo appear together to form a contrast.¹⁵ The setting is the famous episode in which the two friends, having started on their journey to China, spend the night in a cave that, in the daylight, turns out to be a grave.¹⁶ During the second night in that place, Wōnhyo is assailed by demons, and realizes that they are the product of his own fear. He thus comes to realize the cardinal tenet of Huayan, namely, that the world is produced by our own mind. He draws the logical conclusion that there is no need to travel in search of the Law, and decides to return home. Ūsang continues alone, and becomes a disciple of the Huayan master Zhiyan. Upon his return to Silla, he becomes the first patriarch of the Hwaōm school, whereas Wōnhyo remains unaffiliated with any particular school.

Perhaps the contrast between the two monks could best be described in the Chan terms of "sudden" and "gradual." Ūsang's pilgrimage represents the gradual process of learning and awakening, whereas Wōnhyo's realization that his mind is fundamentally enlightened represents the position of "sudden," that is "im-mediate" or "un-mediated" awakening.¹⁷

The contrast does not stop there, however. We are told that Ūsang observed scrupulously the Buddhist precepts, in particular the precept regarding monastic celibacy; whereas Wōnhyo was (in)famous for his dissolute behavior – frequenting taverns and brothels, and eventually begetting a son with a royal princess. However, this behavior was widely perceived as a trope for the ultimate freedom of the enlightened person. Paradoxically, the Japanese master Myōe seems to have been more attracted by Wōnhyo's character than by Ūsang's. Although it is not clear whether autobiographical parallels existed between Myōe, "the purest monk of Japan," and

13 Fontein 1967: 78–115, Tanaka 1979.

14 T 1887A: 45.730a; Yi 85–86.

15 T 2061: 50.731.

16 On these two masters, see Tanabe 1992: 131–135; and Girard 1990. On Ūsang's biography, see Durt 1969: 411–422. On the epistolary relation between Ūsang and Fazang, see Forte 2000.

17 On this paradigm, see Faure 1991.

the dissolute Wōnhyo, clear doctrinal affinities can be found between some of Myōe's works and Wōnhyo's *Yusim allak to* 遊心安樂道.¹⁸ Admittedly, Myōe presented in his writings a rather cleaned-up image of Wōnhyo, whom he called a "patriarch of the Kegon sect," while conveniently omitting the latter's frequentation of brothels. He merely states that it is "as if [Wōnhyo] had forgotten propriety and the precepts."¹⁹

The sharp contrast created by the Buddhist historian Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001) in his *Song gaoseng zhuan* between the two biographies is obviously a literary device, and it should not be read as an objective description of reality. As all documents show, Ūsang was also an advocate of the "sudden" approach, while Wōnhyo seems to have advocated a rather conventional morality.²⁰ However, perceptions eventually have more weight than facts, and this contrast explains the fact that, in Japan, the two men's popularity as Kegon patriarchs eclipsed that of their Chinese predecessors.

However, I believe that another hagiographical element has played a fundamental role, not only to explain the two men's role in the Japanese Kegon school, but also in the cultural influence exerted by that school. It is the relation that these two figures entertained with dragons and with the dragon-palace. Even today, the first thing evoked by the word Kegon in the mind of the ordinary Japanese is not the abstruse philosophy of one of the nine schools of Nara Buddhism, but the famous Kegon waterfall near Chūzenji 中禪寺 Lake at Nikkō. This waterfall is usually associated in tourist guides with another nearby one, called Ryūzu no taki 竜頭の滝 (Waterfall of the Dragon Head). This association of Kegon with waterfalls and dragons, in "Japan, the land where dragons dwell" (*tatsu no sumu Nihon* 龍の棲む日本, the title of a recent popular book by the historian KURODA Hideo 黒田日出男), is, perhaps ironically, one of the enduring cultural tributes of Huayan in East Asia.²¹

Waterfalls are usually associated with dragons (or *nāgas* in the Buddhist context), owing to the belief that they often mark one of the entrances to the dragon-palace. The symbolism of the *nāgas*/dragons and the *nāga*-palace plays an important role in the legend of the Huayan school and of its founders. First, there is the belief that the *Avatamsaka*, like other important *sūtras*, was preserved in the *nāga*-palace. According to a widespread tradition, the patriarch Nāgārjuna, having gone to the *nāga*-palace, saw three versions of the *Avatamsaka*.²² In medieval Japan, but perhaps already in Tang China, the *nāga*-palace had become a metaphor for the storehouse-consciousness (Sanskrit: *ālayavijhāna*), the source and repository of all things.²³

18 T 1965.

19 Tanabe 1992: 136.

20 Faure: *Essentials of Observance and Transgression According to the Book on the Bodhisattva Precepts*.

21 Kuroda 2003.

22 *Huayan jing zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記, T 2073.

23 See for instance *Keiran shūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集, T 2410: 624a, 772c, 863b; and Faure 1999: 278–283.

The *nāga*-palace reappears in Wōnhyo's legend (a priest also known by the name "Yellow Dragon," from the name of his monastery, the Hwangnyong-sa 黃龍寺), in the circumstances surrounding his writing of a commentary on the *Jin'gang sanmei jing* 金剛三昧經. According to Robert Buswell, this apocryphal scripture was probably composed in Korea by Pōmnang 法郎 (n.d.), a disciple of the fourth Chan patriarch Daoxin 道信 (580–651).²⁴ As the legend has it, the Korean queen was beset by an apparently incurable illness. Divination revealed that only drugs brought from overseas could cure her. An envoy was therefore sent to Tang China. On the way, the envoy was diverted to the dragon-palace, where he received a *sūtra* (the *Jin'gang sanmei jing*) that could heal the queen's illness. The dragon-king added that this *sūtra* should be the object of a commentary by Wōnhyo. The latter, owing to his eccentricities, had been shunned by his colleagues and by the court, but now, with the dragon-king's support, he suddenly rose to prominence.²⁵

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* adds a discussion to its biography of Wōnhyo, in which it mentions other cases of scriptures hidden in (or revealed from) the *nāga*-palace. "The scriptures state that there is a seven-jewelled *stūpa* in the *nāga*-king's palace. All that all the buddhas have said and all of their profound teachings, such as the twelve-fold chain of causes and conditions, the *dhāraṇīs* and the *samādhis*, are kept there in a seven-jeweled casket."²⁶

It is also a dragon that stands behind the rise of his former companion Ūisang to the rank of first patriarch of Hwaōm. Here again, the legend is well known and I will simply give its outline. While in China, Ūisang stays in the house of Buddhist lay persons, whose daughter, a young girl by the name of Shanmiao 善妙, falls in love with him. Ūisang, intent on keeping his vows, "makes his heart like a stone," and resists the girl's advances. Better, he converts her. Later, when he returns to her town on his way back to Korea, she rejoices at the thought of seeing him again. Then she is stricken with grief when she hears that his boat has already set sail. Finally, she vows to become a dragon to escort him and protect him always. The scene where she throws herself into the sea and turns into a magnificent dragon that carries Ūisang's boat on its back forms the climax of the Japanese illustrated scroll known as *Kegon engi emaki* 華嚴緣起繪卷 (*Illustrated Scroll on the Origins of Huayan/Kegon*).²⁷

Upon returning to Korea, Ūisang intends to take up residence in a monastery. However, he complains about the presence of monks of other schools (described as "heretics" in later documents). Shanmiao then turns into a huge rock that stands in mid-air above the monastery, frightening the "heretics" away.²⁸ Ūisang eventually moves into the monastery, which he renames "Monastery of the Floating Rock." Ūisang's teaching on the *Avatamsaka* prospers from that moment onward.

24 Buswell 1989: 170–177.

25 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T 2061: 50.730a–b29; and Buswell 1989: 44–46.

26 *Ibid.*, 730b25–28.

27 On this scroll, see Brock 1988: 6–31. See also: *Kegon engi* 華嚴緣起.

28 Note in passing the two aspects, ophidian and lithic, of Shanmiao.

This story exerted a great influence on Myōe, the so-called Restorer of Japanese Kegon. Scholars have discussed the role played by Myōe in the production of the *Kegon engi emaki*. While he may not have sponsored it initially, he did write a commentary on it, in which he pays close attention to the story of Shanmiao.

The motif of Shanmiao's transformation into a dragon made a particularly deep impression on Myōe. The latter was acutely aware of the fact that that motif, also found in the famous Dōjōji 道成寺 legend, could have a negative interpretation. In the Dōjōji legend, a young girl falls madly in love with a young monk who stays for a night in her house, on his way to Kumano 熊野. In order to resist her advances, the monk promises that he will visit her again when he returns from his pilgrimage. When she realizes that he has not kept his promise, she runs after him in anger and transforms into a huge snake while crossing a river. She finally catches up with him at Dōjōji, and, coiling around the temple bell under which he has taken refuge, she reduces him to ashes through the burning intensity of her hatred.²⁹

The image of women turning into snakes because of jealousy or hatred was a medieval Japanese topos. Thus, when someone asks Myōe whether Shanmiao's turning into a dragon was not a mark of attachment, he insists that, in her case, things are quite different – because she had previously been converted to Buddhism, not only by Ūisang in her present life, but already in a past life. Her love for Ūisang, Myōe argues, was not an ordinary love that grew out of attachment, but a pure love that stemmed from a deep respect for the Dharma. This is, Myōe concludes, why she became a dragon, and not a monstrous snake like the protagonist of the Dōjōji legend.³⁰ On the surface, Myōe read the story of Shanmiao as an exemplum on moral causality, but at a deeper level, another scene is taking place, and Myōe himself was aware of it when he tried to establish a clear-cut distinction between snake and dragon – a distinction that does not reflect Japanese beliefs of the time. According to the *Jinten ainōshō* 塵添蓋囊抄, a medieval dictionary, dragon and snake are distinct, but the dragon is a former snake.³¹ From the symbolic standpoint, however, the line of demarcation between them is often blurred. Medieval deities are fundamentally ambivalent, as shown for instance by the figure of the goddess Benzaiten 弁財天, who manifests herself as both a snake and a dragon.

In the case of Shanmiao as well, Myōe seems to have been at times more hesitant. In a dream he had in 1203, he sees a Chinese doll that turns into a tearful young woman. Moved, Myōe decides to take her under his protection. When he visits a monastery with her, someone accuses her of mating with snakes. Myōe argues that this is not the case, and that she merely happens to have a snake-body. He concludes that she is none other than Shanmiao (J. Zenmyō).³²

29 On the Dōjōji legend, see Klein 1991.

30 On this question, see Brock 1990: 185–218.

31 *Jinten ainōshō*. See DNBZ 150.204.

32 On that dream, see Girard 1990: 145–146.

Shanmiao was so important for Myōe that he made her the main object of worship (*honzon* 本尊) of Zenmyōji 善妙寺 in Hiraoka 平岡, a nunnery that he founded as a refuge for women widowed by the Jōkyū Disturbance (Jōkyū no Ran 承久の乱) in 1221. This nunnery was a sub-temple of Myōe's Kōzanji 高山寺, near the Kiyotaki 清滝 River, an appropriate place for a dragon-deity. Significantly, owing to her role in protecting Ūisang's monastery, Zenmyō was enshrined as a protecting deity "from Silla" (Korea), not from China.³³

After Myōe's death, some of the nuns who had copied the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* on his behalf (the so-called *Nuns's Sūtra*, *Ama-gyō* 尼經) followed him in death by drowning themselves. One such case is that of the nun Myōtatsu 妙達, who jumped into the Kiyotaki River in 1232, six months after Myōe's death.³⁴ Tanabe has argued that, in doing so, Myōtatsu was following the example of Shanmiao, who sacrificed herself to protect Ūisang. While there may be some truth in this, another explanation has to do with the belief in the *nāga*-palace and the legend of the Empress Kenreimon'in 建礼門院, as spread by the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語. According to this legend, when the Taira were defeated by the Minamoto at the battle of Dan-no-ura 壇ノ浦, the Nun of Second Rank, mother of Kiyomori, jumped into the waves with the child-emperor Antoku 安徳, telling him that they were going to the *nāga*-palace. Kenreimon'in jumped too, but was rescued by Minamoto warriors, and subsequently became a nun at Ōhara 大原, on the northern outskirts of Kyoto. When the Retired Emperor visited her there, she told him of a dream she had had, in which all the Taira had been reborn in the *nāga*-palace. The *Heike monogatari*, describing her saintly death, suggests that she has been reborn into the Pure Land, together with two ladies-in-waiting. However, it adds that these two ladies attained the *nāga*-girl's wisdom.³⁵ The enlightenment of the *nāga*-girl, as found in the *Lotus Sūtra*, was a powerful exemplum of women's liberation, and it merged with the motif of the *nāga*-palace.³⁶

At any rate, the interest of Myōe for the spiritual salvation of women led him to emphasize the figure of Zenmyō as protector of both women and the Kegon teaching, and its relations with dragon-imagery. However, despite his attempt to present Zenmyō in a purely positive light, as a case of salvation through karmic causes, this imagery remains more ambivalent than he would like. The same is true of the *nāga*-palace, which is both a repository of the Dharma and a locus of fundamental ignorance. Likewise, its inhabitants are powerful deities, yet they remain subject to the "three fevers" (*sannetsu* 三熱), the fundamental sufferings that affect all sentient beings. They are protectors of the Dharma, but they can also be at times rather threatening to humans. According to non-dualistic theory of *hongaku* 本覺 ("fundamental awakening"), ignorance (*mumyō* 無明) is actually the source of awaken-

33 *Kōzanji engi* 高山寺縁起 (dated 1253). See DNBZ 117.

34 On this question, see Okuda 1997: 31–51; Faure 2003: 98.

35 McCullough 1988: 433–438.

36 Faure 2003: 91–98.

ing.³⁷ Therefore, the *nāga* realm does not simply belong to one of the six paths (*rokudō* 六道), but it is, as it were, the source and fountainhead of the entire Buddhist cosmos. Along the same line, we recall that the two dragon-kings Nanda and Upanda are coiled around the cosmic axis, Mount Sumeru. In similar fashion, maps of Japan at the time of Myōe showed a huge dragon coiled around the Japanese archipelago.³⁸

The motif of the *nāga*-palace also played an important role in the promotion of "local knowledge" and the elevation of Japan to the status of sacred Buddhist land and of "country of the gods" (*shinkoku* 神国). The *nāga*-palace came to be perceived as a kind of underworld that was not located exclusively in (or below) India, but existed in (or below) Japan as well; indeed, it could be reached from the bottom of any waterfall or from any of the numerous "dragon-holes" (*ryūketsu* 龍穴) scattered all over Japan. It is no longer necessary to undertake a long journey to India to bring back Buddhist scriptures or relics of the Buddha: these may be found in the backyard of one's own monastery, provided there is a waterfall, a pond, or a dragon-hole there.

This revalorization of Japan as "land of the gods" calls to mind another episode in Myōe's life (or rather legend) that came to be connected with dragon imagery. During his visit to the Kasuga 春日 Shrine in Nara in 1203, he received from the Kasuga deity an oracle that told him to abandon his project of pilgrimage to India.³⁹ Significantly, the episode describes, in mythological terms, the same meaninglessness of the vision quest that Wōnhyo had already emphasized. Through the mouth of a female shrine attendant (who happens to be a relative of Myōe), Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神 reveals to him that the essential places of Indian Buddhist lore (the Eagle Peak, etc.) can be found here in Japan, at Kasuga. The name Kasuga Daimyōjin usually refers collectively to the five ancestral deities of the Fujiwara clan worshiped at Kasuga Shrine, but it also sometimes designates other deities that are seen as the "original ground" (*honji* 本地) or the "traces" (*suijaku* 垂迹) of the latter. In this particular instance, the god refers to himself as "this old man" (*okina* 翁), but he is also sometimes identified with the Dragon-King Nanda. It is such that he appears to Myōe, together with the eight great dragons/*nāga*-kings that protect the Dharma, in the retelling of the legend by Zeami in his Nō play "Kasuga Ryūjin" 春日龍神 (The Dragon-God of Kasuga).⁴⁰ In it, the deity reveals its true form to a Myōe still intent on going to China and India, as well as the scenes of Buddha's life that he yearned to see: "Māyā's delivery of Śākyamuni./ His Preaching the Law on Eagle Peak./ His entering *nirvāṇa* beneath the dual teak trees –/ All are revealed in

37 This calls to mind Ūisang's line, in his commentary on the Diagram: "From where does the inverted mind come?/ From ignorance that has no beginning./ From where does ignorance without beginning come?/ From the absolute./ Where is the absolute?/ In the dharma-nature of each person." *Hwaōm ilsūng popkyedo*, T 1887A: 45. 716a.

38 Kuroda 2003: 5–12, and Illustration 2.

39 Brock 2001: 49–113.

40 Morrell 1982: 179–200; 1987: 121.

their entirety./ Now then, Myōe Shōnin, about your plans to go to China?" To which Myōe, having finally reached Wōnhyo's state of mind, replies: "I abandon them."⁴¹

According to Royall Tyler, the figure of the dragon here, instead of the traditional "old man" image of Kasuga Daimyōjin, stands simply as a generic image of the deity in Nō plays, and "says less about the Kasuga deity than about the conventions of Noh."⁴² This may be so, but precisely it shows the prevalence of dragon symbolism in medieval imagination, and more specifically in Myōe's imagination. Not only the origins of the *Avatamsaka*, but also the subsequent fate of the Huayan school in Korea and Japan were intimately connected with dragon-lore. As Frédéric Girard and George Tanabe have shown, the case of Myōe, whose teaching is nourished by a rich visionary imagery, provides a paradigmatic example of the mental world of medieval Buddhists.⁴³ Without that imagery, that is, without due attention to the concrete mythological aspects that constitute, together with the philosophical abstractions, the warp and woof of the Huayan teaching, one risks losing the red thread that connects doctrinal developments, not to mention the "oceanic feeling" in which practitioners like Ūisang and Myōe immersed themselves.

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- 41 Other dragon-kings were believed to dwell in the Sarusawa Pond near Kasuga and in the dragon-palace under the Main Hall of Kōfukuji. See Tyler 1990: 124–126.
- 42 Tyler 1990: 143.
- 43 Girard 1990; Tanabe 1992. Another interesting case is that of the Zen master Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 (1268–1325); Faure: 1996.
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