



15 October 2015

Ref. Prof. Imre Hamar's application to the title of "Doctor of the Academy".

To the attention of the Doctoral Council of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Dear members of the Doctoral Council,

I have been asked to write a review of the thesis submitted by Prof. Imre Hamar to obtain the title of "Doctor of the Academy". This thesis, entitled "The *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* and its Chinese Interpretation: The Huayan Understanding of the Concepts of *Ālayavijñāna* and *Tathāgatagarbha*", is constituted by a series of chapters devoted to various aspects of the literature and thought of the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism. As such, the thesis (though apparently more a collection of essays than a systematic study) provides a rich and multifaceted account of this important and extremely complex tradition.

One of the main positive features of this work is the attempt, in the discussion of some important aspects of Huayan philosophy, to bring into focus also its main scriptural antecedents, that is the texts belonging to the extended scriptural family known as *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, which survive for the most part only in Chinese and Tibetan translations. This interpretative approach, which characterizes several parts of the thesis, has sometime been neglected in modern scholarship on the Huayan school and is certainly a welcome feature of this work.

These fruitful aspects of Hamar's work are particularly apparent in chapter IV.4: both the long and detailed discussion of the influence by Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha ideas on Huayan thought (pp. 112-ff.), and the discussion of "Nature Origination" (one of the central tenets of Huayan thought), are good examples of careful contextualization and analysis. The latter section, in particular (pp. 219-241), constitutes in my opinion one of the most interesting parts of Hamar's thesis.

There is, however, a point of criticism to be made concerning this aspect of the thesis: while generally well-informed on the secondary literature concerning the Huayan school, at times it seems not to take sufficiently into account studies relevant to other important aspects of this research. So, for example, it would have been useful to refer to Lambert Schmithausen's fundamental works on Yogācāra thought in the discussion of basic categories such as *ālayavijñāna* (on which see L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*, 2 vols., Tokyo, 2007 [2nd edition]; Id., *The Genesis of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda: Responses and Reflections*, Tokyo 2014) and *cittamātra* (on which see Schmithausen, *On the Problem of the External World in the Ch'eng wei shih lun*, Tokyo, 2005; and Id. *Plants in Early Buddhism and the Far Eastern Idea of the Buddha-Nature of Grasses and Trees*, Lumbini 2009).

The treatment of *cittamātra* ("nothing but thought") in Schmithausen 2009 is of particular relevance in this context, as it provides, *inter alia*, also a detailed and enlightening discussion of the *cittamātra* passages found in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* (Schmithausen 2009, pp. 140-161; 163-166), which are also dealt with in Hamar's thesis (pp.116-ff.). In fact, this work by Schmithausen is of particular interest to scholars of Huayan Buddhism because it discusses, in quite a detailed way, also East Asian Buddhist texts and ideas (including Huayan), albeit from a very specific angle (the issue of Buddha-nature in plants). While the focus of Prof. Hamar's study is clearly on the Chinese side – which in itself is, of course, a perfectly legitimate approach – I think that, ideally, in dealing with a tradition as complex (in terms of doctrinal background) as the Huayan school, a more robust and systematic engagement with research on the Indian side would have been desirable.

Another strength of this work lies in the fact that it includes important aspects of *Buddhāvataṃsaka* and Huayan literature that are often neglected in research on these subjects. One could mention, for example, the chapters devoted to Huayan texts in Dunhuang (II.2) and to miracle stories on the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, which constitute a valuable and innovative contribution to this research area.

In a similar vein, Hamar's thesis is to be commended for the attention it pays to the practical sides of the Huayan teachings (see, for example, the brief but perceptive discussion of meditative practices based on the teaching of consciousness-only). This is noteworthy, as certain specialists tended to give a one-sided picture of Huayan thought, regarding it as being, predominantly, a philosophical system.

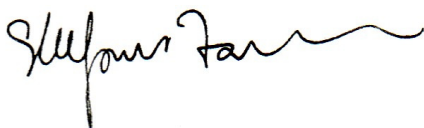
I have also appreciated the attention paid by the author to Chinese Buddhist commentarial literature, both from the point of view of its historical development (pp. 85-ff.), and of its exegetical strategies (e.g. pp. 227-ff.).

In short, there is no doubt much to be praised in this thesis, especially for its original investigation of aspects of the Huayan school which have not always received the attention they deserve in western scholarship on this subject. That said, this appears to be, as already observed, more a collection of essays – though certainly a very comprehensive one – than a systematic analysis of Huayan thought, and occasionally this makes the argument less clear or cogent. For example, I think that the thesis would have benefited from a detailed discussion of the fundamental and highly complex notion of *dharmadhātu* – a concept which plays a key role in defining Huayan view of reality/experience – at the beginning of the thesis, in the first chapter. Instead, while this term is indeed introduced there (pp. 18-26), it is only on pp. 104-ff. that the meaning of *dharmadhātu* is defined (and rather cursorily at that). I think that this is not enough for such an important category, which, ideally, should be analysed against the backdrop of its use in the wider Buddhist context: in *Buddhāvataṃsaka* corpus, but also in other scriptural traditions, both non-Mahāyāna (e.g. the Pāli canon and *Āgamas* translated into Chinese) and Mahāyāna texts (e.g. *Prajñāpāramitā* literature).

However, I should stress that my criticism does not detract from the considerable merits of Hamar's work, which forms a valuable contribution to the field. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, a general study of comparable scope on the doctrines of the Huayan school has not been produced in English since Robert Gimello's 1976 masterful thesis on the formation of the school.

For all these reasons, I would recommend that Prof. Hamar be awarded the title of Doctor of Academy.

Yours sincerely,



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