



Erik J. Hammerstrom. *The Huayan University Network: The Teaching and Practice of Avatamsaka Buddhism in Twentieth-Century China.* The Sheng Yen Series in Chinese Buddhist Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 288 pp. \$64.99, e-book, ISBN 978-0-231-55075-8.

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Over the past decade, there has been a burgeoning of English-language scholarly literature on Buddhism in modern and contemporary China. These studies have explored a broad range of topics on Chinese Buddhism, including reformer Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), discussions about science, reconstruction of monasteries, lay practitioners, and Buddhism’s rise in the post-Mao period.[1] Erik J. Hammerstrom’s *The Huayan University Network* reads like a sequel to his first book, *The Science of Chinese Buddhism* (2015). While *The Science of Chinese Buddhism* considers how Chinese Buddhists negotiated the relationships between Buddhism and science during the early twentieth century, *The Huayan University Network* examines the lesser known—yet no less historically important—Huayan University (Huayan daxue 華嚴大學) and the larger Huayan School (Huayan zong 華嚴宗) by situating them in the wider context and concerns of Buddhism in Republican China. Taken together, Hammerstrom’s two books, published five years apart, are a significant contribution to the intellectual history of Buddhism in twentieth-century China.

The Huayan University Network aims to move beyond the so-called Taixu paradigm[2] in the

study of modern Chinese Buddhism by engaging in a “microhistorical study” (p. 2) of Huayan-centered educational networks that originated from the first Huayan University during the Republican period. The Huayan University, as Hammerstrom suggests, was built on the foundation of the *Huayan Sutra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經) and based on an educational network that considered Yuexia 月霞 (1858–1917) as their source of authority. In other words, the Huayan University network was not a traditional form of monastic lineage, but a religious connection forged through education and scholarship on Huayan Buddhism. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including introductory texts to Buddhism, textbooks and general histories on Buddhism, and Buddhist periodicals, Hammerstrom explores the history of Huayan University and the broader Huayan School, focusing on individual monks, academic programs, university curriculum, and intellectual networks that propagated Huayan doctrine and mediation throughout the twentieth century.

Following the introductory chapter, the book is organized into two parts. Part 1, which consists of chapters 1 through 4, explores the individuals and institutions of the original Huayan University

and the intellectual network it inspired. Chapter 1 examines the notion of “Huayan School,” presenting its emic meaning and understanding attributed to it by propagators of Huayan doctrine and historians of Buddhism during the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter summarizes the name and founders of the school, popular practices of the *Huayan Sutra*, and the emergence of Huayan sectarianism in modern Japanese scholarship. Hammerstrom concludes the chapter by emphasizing the absence of Huayan sectarianism in Republican China. As he points out, promoters of Huayan such as Yuexia, Yingci 應慈 (1873–1965), and Changxing 常惺 (1896–1939) may have preferred the scripture, but they did not propagate it in a sectarian manner at the expense of other forms of Buddhism. Chapter 2 begins by tracing the establishment of the original Huayan University by Yuexia and Yinci in 1912, which led to the formation of a Huayan Buddhist network in twentieth-century China. After the first Huayan University closed its doors in 1916, graduates of the original university founded three Huayan universities in the Wuhan region, contributing to a furthering of Huayan Buddhism. In the absence of a strong vertical relationship between teachers and students in new monastic education in modern China, Hammerstrom observes, the Huayan network was generally fluid and built upon horizontal relationships among students from the universities. It was these peer relationships that contributed to the expansion of the intellectual network.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at the legacy of the Huayan University by tracing the subsequent flowering of the Huayan network during the twentieth century. Chapter 3 presents the career of Yinci and the development of the Huayan network and programs during the 1920s and 1940s. The faculty and graduates of the original Huayan University founded several second- and third-generation programs to promote the study of Huayan, including the Dharmadhātu Institutes (Fajie xueyuan 法界學院 or 法界學苑), Zhulin Buddhist Institute (Zhulin

foxue yuan 竹林佛學院), Jiaoshan Buddhist Institute (Jiaoshan foxue yuan 焦山佛學院), and Guangxiao Buddhist Institute (Guangxiao foxue yuan 光孝佛學院). This period also saw the advent of several unaffiliated programs, such as the Huayan University of Yangzhou, which were inspired by, but not affiliated with, the original university. Chapter 4 tells the history of the Huayan network after the end of the Chinese Civil War, between 1950 and 2000. Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Nationalist government’s retreat to Taiwan, Buddhist monks brought Huayan out of mainland China to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the United States. When Buddhism was restricted in the PRC, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), these monastics established new institutions in the diaspora and continued to promote the teaching and practice of Huayan Buddhism. After the Cultural Revolution, monastics affiliated with the Republican Huayan network who remained in the PRC, as well as those who went abroad, sought to revive the promotion of Huayan in mainland China.

Part 2, which contains chapters 5 and 6, shifts the focus to the doctrine and practice of Huayan Buddhism. Chapter 5 relies on journal articles, textbooks, and general histories of Buddhism to offer a survey of the emic understanding of Huayan education in Republican China. The dense chapter begins with a discussion of prominent premodern texts by Japanese monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321) and Chinese monk Xufa 續法 (1641–1728), as well as the Five Teachings (*wujiao* 五教) classification scheme by Fazang 法藏 (643–712), which had a profound influence on Buddhist understanding of Huayan in modern China. Hammerstrom then summarizes the “most commonly cited Huayan doctrines” (p. 134): Fazang’s doctrine of the Six Characteristics (*liuxiang* 六相); Fazang and Chengguan’s 澄觀 (738–839) doctrine of the Ten Profound Gates (*shixuanmen* 十玄門); and Chengguan’s doctrine of the Four Dharmadhātu (*sifajie* 四法界). During the Republican period, the leading Buddhist

educator and publisher Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911) played a pivotal role in recovering and printing lost Huayan texts from Japan. Nevertheless, as Hammerstrom notes, Yang’s endeavor to recover the lost texts had little impact during the Republican period. Chapter 6 draws from program bylaws (*zhangcheng* 章程 or *jianzhang* 簡章) to outline the shared curriculum and common contemplation practices of Huayan universities that had their roots in the original Huayan University. These Republican era institutes generally shared a common Huayan curriculum based on, first, *Huayan Sutra* commentaries of Chengguang and, to a lesser extent, lay scholar Li Tongxuan (李通玄 645–740); second, Fazang’s doctrinal classification and Xufa’s texts; and third, the practice of Huayan meditation, commonly known as the Contemplation of the Dharmadhātu (*fajie guan* 法界觀).

Meticulously researched and analytically sophisticated, *The Huayan University Network* adds greatly to our understanding of Huayan doctrine in Chinese Buddhism and the vibrant Buddhist educational projects and networks in Republican China. The author effectively demonstrates that, on the one hand, the Huayan University network was not a sectarian movement, but “one part of larger, unified Chinese Buddhism” (p. 38). Prominent Huayan scholars, such as Yuxia and Yingci, favored the propagation of Huayan, but they did not favor it in a sectarian fashion at the expense of other forms of Buddhism. On the other hand, although the Huayan University network was not a sectarian enterprise, it was a unique network of programs based on the original Huayan University promoted by faculty and graduates devoted to Huayan doctrines. The Huayan-centered educational program shared a common curriculum and practices that were distinct from other Buddhist educational programs during the Republican period.

In his discussion of Buddhist affiliations in modern China, Holmes Welch notes that Chinese Buddhist monks and devotees were connected by

“a series of networks of affiliation, superimposed haphazardly one upon the other.”[3] Welch identifies three forms of Buddhist networks of affiliation, namely, religious kinship, loyalty to a charismatic monk, and regionalism. Hammerstrom should be congratulated for uncovering a fourth form of Buddhist affiliation: education. The Huayan University network is a case in point. As the book convincingly illustrates, alumni of the original Huayan University have formed a network connected by a common educational heritage and doctrinal interest.

I have two minor quibbles with this otherwise impressive book. First, despite the outstanding content of the book, its presentation could be improved. I echo the two earlier reviews that the lack of diagrams, figures, and tables has made this empirically rich book sometimes hard to follow.[4] In addition, Hammerstrom mentions several photographs, such as the program’s students in their martial art class (p. 103) and participants at the end of a Huayan recitation period (p. 154) but fails to reproduce any images in the book. The inclusion of these photographs, which I suspect are readily available in the Buddhist periodicals, would greatly enhance the effectiveness of these chapters for upper-level undergraduate courses. Second, given my interest in Chinese Buddhist migration, I wish Hammerstrom could have provided more discussion on monastic migration and the establishment of Huayan institutions in Southeast Asia and the United States, which he briefly mentions in chapter 4. Coming from Singapore, I secretly hoped that the author could indulge my curiosity on the Hua Giam Si (Huayan si 華嚴寺) that promotes Huayan along with Shingon Buddhism in the Southeast Asian country.[5] But this, of course, is no fault of the author. In fact, the book opens new ground for those interested in further exploring Huayan networks in the Chinese diaspora.

All in all, *The Huayan University Network* is a welcome addition to the fast-growing literature on modern Chinese Buddhism and provides new in-

sight for scholars in the field of Huayan studies. The study offers an intriguing case of how the “old boys” alumni network operated in the Buddhist context, shedding much-needed light on the overlooked Huayan-centered educational programs within and beyond China. The book will therefore be of great interest to scholars and students interested in East Asian Buddhism in general, as well as those interested in the history of monastic education. Without doubt, more histories of Buddhist educational and alumni networks remain to be told.

Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Justin Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Erik J. Hammerstrom, *The Science of Chinese Buddhism: Early Twentieth-Century Engagements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Gregory Adam Scott, *Building the Buddhist Revival: Reconstructing Monasteries in Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); Jan Kiely and J. Brooks Jessup, eds., *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Ji Zhe, Gareth Fisher, and André Laliberté, eds., *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

[2]. Stefania Travagnin, “Buddhist Education between Tradition, Modernity and Networks: Reconsidering the ‘Revival’ of Education for the Saṅgha in Twentieth-Century China,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3, no. 3 (2017): 220–41.

[3]. Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 403.

[4]. Nicholaos Jones has created an excellent diagram to visualize the Huayan University network discussed in the book. See Nicholaos Jones,

review of *The Huayan University Network: The Teaching and Practice of Avatamsaka Buddhism in Twentieth-Century China*, by Erik J. Hammerstrom, *Journal of Chinese Religions* 49, no. 1 (May 2021): 154. See also Gregory Adam Scott, review of *The Huayan University Network: The Teaching and Practice of Avatamsaka Buddhism in Twentieth-Century China*, by Erik J. Hammerstrom, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 28 (2021): 52.

[5]. The monastery’s website is <http://hgs.sg/hgs/index.shtml>.

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