

# An Ideal Scholar-Monk: Chengguan

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When I started to study Chengguan 澄觀 (the fourth patriarch of Huayan Buddhism, 738–839) fifteen years ago, I thought it would be appropriate to begin my research by reconstructing his biography before I went on to study his doctrines, which were my primary concern from the very beginning. After all, the ideas of philosophers are closely linked to their life experience, so it is worth finding out about their educational background and religious experiences, the circumstances under which they wrote and so on. My aim was very clear: I wanted to discover as much as possible by collecting and collating all the primary sources related to this giant figure of Chinese Buddhism. This became a philological study which uncovered many discrepancies in the sources; sometimes, indeed, it is difficult to judge which source to believe.<sup>1</sup> However, it is not only the errors and inconsistencies in biographies that make it difficult for us to reconstruct Cheng-guan's career and to have a clear picture of the main events in his life but also the very genre of biography per se, which has its own agenda: On the one hand there are set examples or ideals of monastic life for those who follow the teachings of Buddha and on the other the presentation of the outstanding representatives of Buddhism as acceptable options for elite society.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is necessary to view Chengguan's life from another point of view as well: we must investigate why this monk was interesting for the historians of Buddhism and which ideals he seemed to comply with.

In his *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, which established a model of biographical writing for later generations, Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554) distinguishes between the notions of 'famous' (*ming* 名) and 'eminent' (*gao* 高), arguing that a person can be famous in his own time without necessarily being eminent in terms of virtue and knowledge and *vice versa*: an

1 See Imre Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang: Chengguan's Biography* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies of The International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies, 2002. *Studia Philologica Buddhica Occasional Paper Series*; 12).

2 See Arthur F. Wright, »Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks« [first published in *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Jimbun-Kagaku Kenkyusho*, 1954], in Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 73–111.

eminent monk might be unknown to the public but represent real Buddhist values. This is why Huijiao used the term ‘eminent’ in the title of his book, as he intended to record the lives of those monks who could be idealized and remembered in the future.<sup>3</sup> Of course, this reason for compiling a biography is closely linked with the Chinese tradition of historiography, as biographies of officials in secular historical works share this feature. Chengguan, however, is a figure to whom the distinction between eminence and fame certainly does not apply. He did not acquire his reputation undeservedly: his opus magnum, the commentary and sub-commentary to the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, has remained the most complete exegetical work on this very lengthy Mahāyāna *sūtra* and has been used to explain its hidden meaning ever since Chengguan wrote it. Recently, a new edition of the *sūtra* along with his commentary and sub-commentary has been issued by the Huayan Society at Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> This is a full-fledged example of the genre commentary which had already developed from the early introductions of the translators to sophisticated works which discuss the main tenets in the *xuantan* section and give the outline of the text, the *kepan*, before Chengguan began to compose his work at the request of his fellow monks at Wutaishan in 784.<sup>5</sup> He asked the monks to construct a building for him at Huayansi 華嚴寺 where he could fully dedicate himself to writing. The fact that his request was granted very clearly indicates that he enjoyed a high reputation before he composed his commentary. Visitors to Huayansi, now called Xiantongsi 顯通寺, are shown a building identified as the place where Chengguan is said to have written his commentary. Even if it is quite evident that the building cannot be the same, it is interesting that the tradition has survived. His reputation undoubtedly increased after the success of his commentary: he was summoned to the capital and started his career as a leading ‘official’ of Buddhism.

As we shall see below, Chengguan can be presented as an ideal scholar-monk. He was outstandingly well-versed in Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts, wrote a work of exegesis which is still influential and served as a high-ranking Buddhist official who was invited to court to give lectures to the emperors and had close ties with other high-ranking officials. However, the term »exegete« as a category of biographical works might—intentionally or unintentionally—suggest a false picture of the monks whose biographies can be found in this section. Robert Sharf boldly claims that these exegetes were armchair philosophers immersed in sophisticated philosophical problems, who

3 See Wright, »Biography and Hagiography«, 83.

4 See Chengyi 成一 (ed.), *Xinxiu huayanjing shuchao* 新修華嚴經疏鈔 (Taipei: Huayanshe 華嚴蓮社, s.a. [2001–04]).

5 For an introduction to Chinese Buddhist commentaries, see Ōchō Enichi 橫超慧日, »Shakkyō shikō« 釈經史考 [first published in *Shina bukkyō shigaku* 支那佛教史学, 1937], *Chugoku bukkyō no kenkyū* 中国佛教の研究 3 (1979), 165–206; and Hiroshi Kanno, »Chinese Buddhist Sutra Commentaries of the Early Period«, in *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2002* (2003), 301–320; for Chengguan’s commentary, see Imre Hamar, »Hermeneutical Methods in Chengguan’s Commentary to the Avataṃsaka-sūtra«, *Ars Decorativa* 23 (2004), 9–16.

had very little influence on ‘real’ religious happenings. I disagree with this view and have a very different understanding of the role played by these monks in society. Chen Jinhua, in his article on Fazang, has shown very clearly that the third patriarch of the Huayan school, who is regarded as the de facto founder of the abstruse system of Huayan philosophy on the basis of Zhiyan’s teaching, was very far from being an armchair philosopher.<sup>6</sup> He executed esoteric rituals to elicit rain or victory in battle. It is also widely known that he burnt one of his fingers out of devotion. I will show that Chengguan, whose enormous intellectual capacity is substantiated by a commentary which encompasses an encyclopaedic knowledge for his age, was not merely a philosopher who escaped from a public role and duties but one who had a similarly great impact on the society and religious life of his time. In addition, religious practice and meditation played a crucial role in his life. In the West, Huayan Buddhism is introduced as a complex system of thought which is often paralleled with Whitehead’s process philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the religious side of Huayan Buddhism has been neglected. As I have shown elsewhere, the classical Huayan tenets such as nature-origination (*xingqi* 性起) were invented during the exegesis of the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經, thus the *sūtra* is not only a pre-text of these doctrines but is closely related to them.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the complex system of Huayan Buddhism was produced in the religious process of exploring and understanding the *buddhavacana* and was not created as an independent system of thought. We know about special Huayan assemblies during which this *sūtra* was recited and explained and offerings were made. Huayan Buddhism also established its own Pure Land, which was called »Lotus-womb world«. In addition, Huayan might have had its own meditation practice, known as »ocean-seal *samādhi*«.

#### Sources

We have two major biographies of Chengguan: his Stūpa Inscription and his biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*.<sup>9</sup> The title of the inscription is The Inscription of the Stūpa of Marvellous Awakening, which was rebuilt in the Huayansi during the Yuan Dynasty, and which [is made for] the Cool National Teacher of the Great Tang Dynasty, who was the Commentator of the Old and New *Huayanjing*, the Great Master of Translation

6 See Chen Jinhua, »Fazang (643–712): The Holy Man«, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28,1 (2005), 11–84.

7 See Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hua Yen Buddhism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971); Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982).

8 See Imre Hamar, »Manifestation of the Absolute in the Phenomenal World: Nature Origination in Huayan Exegesis«, *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 94 (2007), 229–252.

9 For their translation, see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 71–82.

of Buddhist Scriptures, and Served as the Controller of the Monks in the Capital (*Dayuan Huayansi chongxiu Taitang Huayan xinjiu liangjing shuzhu fanjing da jiaoshou chong shangdu sengtong qingliang guoshi miaojue taji* 大元華嚴寺重修太唐華嚴新舊兩經疏主翻經大教授充上都僧統清涼國師妙覺塔記). This invaluable inscription is not treated with enough care, as it is placed on the floor of the Huayansi without any protection.

As the title indicates, Chengguan's *stūpa* was rebuilt during the Yuan dynasty in 1272. The authorship is dubious, but it is most likely to have been composed by Xing Jixiang 行吉祥 of Longchuan 龍川,<sup>10</sup> who was of Jurchen origin. The emperor conferred on him the red *saṅghāṭī* robes (*chi seng qieli* 赤僧伽梨) and the title of Great Master of Preaching the Teaching (*fuzong hongjiao* 扶宗弘教), in recognition of his merit in the Buddhist-Daoist debate. After the Mongolian conquest of South China, he was appointed supervisor of Buddhist affairs in all circuits of South China (*zongshe jianghuai zhulu sengshi* 總攝江淮諸路僧事). At the request of the Imperial Preceptor he managed the reconstruction of Baimasi, where he later became abbot.<sup>11</sup> He died in 1296.

Chengguan's biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (988/996) is titled The Biography of Chengguan who lived during the Tang Dynasty in the Qingliang Monastery of Wutaishan of Daizhou. Zanning 贊寧 (919–1002), a monk of the Vinaya school, wrote under imperial auspices, but his work has been criticized for its unreliability. Unfortunately, the criticism is justified in the case of his biography of Chengguan, as events from the career of another Chengguan found their way into the life of the Huayan patriarch.

Next, we should investigate what sources were available to the compilers of his biographies. Usually, the first biography of a monk is the account of his conduct (*xingzhuang* 形狀) written by a disciple or a close friend.<sup>12</sup> Zanning quotes from the account of Chengguan's conduct written by Qingmian 清沔 when listing the ten vows he took:

His disciple, Qingmian, recorded his usual behaviour in the *account of conduct*, saying: »Chengguan took the following ten vows: 1) I shall always reside in a monastery, possessing only three robes and an alms bowl, and not accumulating wealth. 2) I shall not seek the fame of my time. 3) I shall not look at women. 4) I shall not stay at a lay household. 5) I shall not give up reciting the *Lotus Sūtra*. 6) I shall always read the *Mahāyāna* scriptures, and benefit

10 For a report on this discovery of the tomb of the Monk of Longchuan, see Xu Zhiya 徐治亞, »Yuandai Longchuan heshang mu de faxian he Baimasi nei de youguan shike« 元代龍川和尚墓的發現和白馬寺內的有關石刻 [The Discovery of the Tomb of the Yuan Dynasty Monk Longchuan and Related Stone Inscriptions in the White Horse Temple], *Wenwu* 文物 3/1983, 94–95 and 20.

11 For a detailed account of his life, see Chikusa Masaaki 竺沙雅章, »Gendai Kahoku no kegonshū—gyōiku to sono kōkeisha tachi« 元代華北の華嚴宗——行育とその後繼者たち, *Nanto Bukkyō* 南都佛教 74/75 (1997), 1–32.

12 See Shinohara Koichi, »Two Sources of Chinese Buddhist Biographies: Stupa Inscriptions and Miracle Stories«, in *Monks and Magicians. Rebellious Biographies in Asia*, ed. by Phyllis Granof and Shinohara Koichi (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988), 121–122.

living beings. 7) I shall always explain the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. 8) During day and night, I shall not lie down throughout my life. 9) I shall not seek fame to delude others by boasting of my goodness. 10) I shall not give up compassion to save the *dharmadhatu*. To the end of his life, he lived in accordance with these vows.<sup>13</sup>

However, according to the Stūpa Inscription the account of his conduct was not the first biography written of him. This is another indication that Chengguan was well-known and held in high esteem by his contemporaries, especially since his first biography was in fact composed by a high-ranking official, Zheng Yuqing 鄭餘慶 (746–820), with whom Chengguan was closely associated. It is interesting to note that this biography was composed while Chengguan was still alive, as Zheng Yuqing died earlier than Chengguan. It is unfortunate that this early biography is not extant, as it must have been very detailed if it consisted of ten *juan* and certainly would have included many aspects or events of Chengguan's life that were not preserved in his later official biographies. However, the author of the inscription must have had access to it, as he says:

It is not necessary here to praise Qingliang's masters, his virtue and his meritorious deeds, as these are completely recorded in the ten *juan* text of Zheng Yuqing, the Minister of State, and on the stele of the [stūpa of] Marvellous Awakening [written] by Pei Xiu.

若夫序清涼之世系師承，美清涼之道德功行，已具載於相國鄭公餘慶十卷之文，裴公休妙覺之碑矣，茲毋庸贊云。

He means that he does not praise Chengguan as such things can be read in Zheng's work; consequently, it must have been extant in his time. The other source, Pei Xiu's stele, was extant too and has been preserved in *Quan Tang Wen*. Pei Xiu's text is a eulogy and does not provide any biographical data. The existence of this eulogy made Kamata Shigeo and others believe that the Inscription was made by Pei Xiu. The Inscription says:

Emperor Wenzong ordered Pei Mei to compose his epitaph, and Shen Yuanji to make his statue. The pagoda was called Marvellous Awakening.<sup>14</sup>

If this is true, then either Chengguan never had a Stūpa Inscription or it had been destroyed by the time Xing Jixiang wrote his inscription under the Yuan dynasty. The latter is confirmed by his own statement: »The *stūpa* was ruined and the stele was lost, they became scattered, thus there was nothing to examine« (*ta fei bei wang man bu ke kao* 塔廢碑亡漫不可考). It is possible that Pei Xiu's original stele included Chengguan's biography, as his other steles include both eulogies and biographies. In addition, Song sources referring to Pei Xiu already quote some sentences from the Stūpa Inscription.

The *Song Gaoseng zhuan* relies on Lu Changyuan's 陸長源 (d799) biography in his preface to Chengguan's Commentary to the *Huayanjing*, quoting it almost word for word. This is the earliest extant biography of Chengguan. It was handed down through a manuscript of Chengguan's Commentary in Japan. It dates back to the Kamakura

13 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (hereafter SGZ); see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 82.

14 Stūpa Inscription (hereafter SI); see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 76.

period and is among the holdings of the Kanazawa Library.<sup>15</sup> Lu Changyuan is mentioned in Chengguan's biographies as one of the high-ranking officials with whom he was associated; it is therefore entirely possible that he wrote a preface to the Commentary. After explaining the title of the *sūtra* character by character, Lu summarizes Chengguan's life from the very beginning to the time when, having completed the Commentary, he preached at the Great Chongfu monastery of the Northern Capital (Taiyuan) by invitation from Li Ziliang. First of all, we have to consider the date of the Preface. In it Lu Changyuan is referred to as the Prefect of Ruzhou, and his official biography states that he held this office before 794. Thus, he must have composed the Preface before this time, much earlier than Chengguan's death.

There must also have been some kind of collection of legends that the Inscription refers to by recording the following story:

Not long thereafter an Indian monk from the Western Region happened to see two [spirit]-messengers whose feet did not touch the earth. With magic spells he made them stop and questioned them. They answered that they were the spirits of a *Mañjuśrī* shrine in Northern India, and had come to the Eastern Land to receive the front tooth of the Huayan Bodhisattva in order to worship it. When he arrived in China, they opened the cavern to verify this, and his front tooth was actually missing. He had only thirty-nine teeth,<sup>16</sup> and [his body] was the colour of ice and frost.<sup>17</sup>

Although this legend is not mentioned by Zanning, he relates that while Chengguan explained his Commentary on the forty-fascicle *Huayan jing* translated by Prajñā, »in front of the hall there was a pond where five lotuses grew, and each of them had three joint flowers. The people admired and praised it.«<sup>18</sup>

The Extended History of Mount Qingliang (*Guang qingliang zhuān* 廣清涼傳) describes the monasteries on Wutaishan and the eminent monks who lived there. It was written in 1060 by Yanyi 延一 who sojourned on Wutaishan at that time. As Chengguan lived on Wutaishan for ten years, and wrote his commentary on the Huayan jing there, he became associated with the mountain to such an extent that he was called the National Preceptor Qingliang. His biography adds much detail to the circumstances in which he composed his commentary, thus Yanyi must have had access to some local oral or written sources. Yanyi relates that upon writing his Commentary, Chengguan moved to the Prajñā Hall and posed the following question to the monks. »It is a rare chance for me through the kalpas to come to this sacred region. I would like to retreat

15 See Takahashi Shūei 高橋秀榮, »Roku Chōgen ga senjutsu shita Daihōkō butsu kegonkyō sho jo ni tsuite« 陸長源が撰述した大方廣佛華嚴經疏序, *Kanazawa Bunko Kenkyū* 金沢佛教研究 11 (1975), 15–18.

16 Having forty even teeth is one of Buddha's thirty-two major physical perfections. See Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha. The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1994), 99–100.

17 SI; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 76.

18 SGZ; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 81.

in order to compose the Commentary with a clear mind. Could you build a pavilion for me where I could write the Commentary?» His request was granted, and the pavilion was completed within a short period of time. Wuzhu 無著 of Wenzhou 溫州 performed calligraphy in the style of Wang Xizhi on the ridge. Chengguan established his hall for writing the Commentary (*zhishu daochang* 制疏道場), and in the first year of the Xingyuan 興元 period (784) on the eighth day of the fourth month he prayed for good signs. It is possible that Yanyi could even see the calligraphy of Wuzhu while staying at Wutaishan.

The following sources can therefore be identified in chronological order:

- 1) Lu Changyuan's preface
- 2) Zheng Yuqing's biography
- 3) Qingmian's account of conduct
- 4) Pei Xiu's stele
- 5) Legends
- 6) Wutaishan local sources

### *Education*

Chengguan became a monk at the age of nine. Thus he learnt Buddhism first and turned his attention toward secular works only after he had established himself as a Buddhist scholar. The most important thing is that he became well-versed in both Buddhist and secular literature: a scholar-monk would be expected to share the knowledge of the elite<sup>19</sup> in order to be an equal partner of Confucian officials. This is how a scholar-monk could play his role as a propagator of Buddhist teachings. In fact, Chengguan often emphasizes when referring to a secular work that he »only borrows the words but not the meaning« in order to facilitate the understanding of Buddhist teachings for the literati. Chengguan's outstanding talent is described in the following way: »after one year he completely understood the Tripitaka«,<sup>20</sup> »he could see the truth with his penetrating mind«,<sup>21</sup> »he handled these works as the dragon plays with a pearl«<sup>22</sup> and »he was a man of exceptional talent, he was exempted from trivial duties«. Most scholar-monks were famous for their memories: one of the best-known examples is Dao'an 道安 (312–385), who could learn the text he received from his master in a day. Chengguan was no less talented: »what he heard once, he could lecture the next time«. He studied vinaya under Tanyi 曇一, Chan under Wuming 無名 (722–793)<sup>23</sup>, the

19 SGZ; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 77.

20 SI; see *ibid.*, 71.

21 SGZ; see *ibid.*, 77.

22 SI; see *ibid.*, 72.

23 For his biography in SGZ, see T 50.2061: 817a18–b9; and Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism. A History*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 1 (»India and China«): 329.

disciple of Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (670–762), who represented the southern school of Chan and under Huizhong 慧忠 (683–769) and Faqin 法欽, the masters of Niutou shan 牛頭山 school. In addition, he studied Sanlun under Xuanbi 玄璧 and Huiliang 慧量, Tiantai under Zhanran 湛然 (711–782) and Huayan under Fashen 法洗 (718–778). In short, he visited several of the famous monks of his time and spent some time with them. It is interesting to note that even if Chengguan is regarded as the patriarch of the Huayan school, he did not have a particularly sophisticated relationship with Fashen, who merely praised his talents and said: »The whole *dharmadātu* is found in you.«<sup>24</sup> We learn for example that the teachings of Sanlun spread due to his efforts, but his Huayan learning does not seem to have been very influential in the early period. His personal religious experience or devotion must have played a key role in his choice of Huayan as the cardinal teaching under which he arranged all the other teachings he had learnt. The inscription might refer to this turning point in his life:

When he came to the chapter of »The Abodes [of the Bodhisattvas]«, he mused upon the idea that in the world of phenomena *Mañjuśrī* illuminates the Wutai[shan]. Thus, he did not regard ten thousand *li* as distant, and was not afraid of the hazards of the journey. He took up residence at the Great Huayan monastery, and lived there for ten years.<sup>25</sup>

Presumably, he established his reputation as the exegete of *Huayan jing* on Wutaishan and that is the reason why the abbot of Huayansi asked him to write a commentary. Anyway, we can only surmise this awakening of Chengguan, as the historical sources are not explicit about this very important question and I have been unable to find any relevant passages in his works.

### *Offices*

As a Confucian scholar was expected to serve as an official, and biographies in the standard histories enumerate these assignments, a scholar-monk should also play an important role in society and act as the leader of Buddhist sangha. In 799 the title Cool Imperial Preceptor (*Qingliang guoshi hao* 清涼國師號) was conferred on Chengguan. After the new translation of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* had been completed, Emperor Dezong 德宗 (reg. 780–805) ordered Chengguan to explain the central concept of the scripture. The emperor was so delighted with his teaching that he conferred on him the purple robe and the title of Master of Buddhist Teaching (*jiāoshou beshang* 教授和尚). In the fourth month of 799, on his birthday, Emperor Dezong invited the Huayan master to the palace to lecture at court. Chengguan is said to have been able to cool the emperor's mind, therefore the title, Cool Imperial Preceptor was conferred on him. In 810 Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (reg. 805–806) summoned Chengguan and asked him about the meaning of *dharmadātu*. After this audience, Chengguan was appointed

24 SI; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader of the Tang*, 72.

25 SI; see *ibid.*

Controller of Monks (*sengtong* 僧統). As we see, Chengguan was a respected teacher of the emperors; it is said that »he lived under nine emperors, and was the teacher of seven.«<sup>26</sup> At the command of the emperor, he authored the *Revelation of the Truth* (*Liaoyi* 了義) in one *juan*, *The Essence of the Mind* (*Xinyao* 心要) in one *juan* and *The Reason Why Eating Meat is Sinful* (*Shi rou dezui yinyuan* 食肉得罪因緣) also in one *juan*.

In the second half of the Tang, the power of the central government decreased and the influence of the military governors grew, sometimes becoming independent of the Court. Therefore, it was not enough to gain the support of emperors to ensure the prosperity of the Buddhist community, but religious leaders like Chengguan had to be on good terms with these rural officials, whose attitude toward Buddhism must have had a bearing on how it developed in China. Chengguan gave teachings to high-ranking officials and in response to their questions wrote several works to elucidate Buddhist doctrines. He wrote seventeen *juan* at the request of the following high-ranking officials: the minister of state (*xiangguo* 相國) Zheng Yuqing 鄭餘慶 (746–820),<sup>27</sup> the prince of Nankang 南康 Wei Gao 韋皋,<sup>28</sup> the surveillance commissioner in Yuezhou (*Yuezhou guancha* 越州觀察) Meng Jian 孟簡 (824),<sup>29</sup> the famous poet of Tang, who served as left reminder (*zuoshiji* 左拾遺) and Bai Juyi 白居易.<sup>30</sup> The extent to which Chengguan was revered also emerged when he died: »The emperor suspended business at Court, and the high-ranking officials wore mourning garments.«<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, we learn from the biographies only that Chengguan gave lectures at Court and wrote works at the request of emperors and officials. We have no details about the way in which Chengguan could use his influence for the benefit of the Buddhist community or what he actually did as the controller of monks. He could probably have influenced the Court in the Buddhist-Daoist debate, which was on the agenda throughout the whole period of the Tang dynasty. He could have persuaded the emperors and high-ranking officials to favour some Buddhist teachings and to reject others. Although debate is often described in the biographies of scholar-monks, we find no mention of it in the biography of Chengguan.<sup>32</sup> We have to investigate his works to find out about this aspect of his career.

26 SI; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 75

27 For his official biography, see *Jin Tangshu* 舊唐書 (hereafter JTS), 158.4163–4167; and *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (hereafter XTS), 165.5059–5061.

28 For his official biography, see XTS, 158.4933–4937.

29 For his official biography, see JTS, 163.4257–4258, and XTS, 160.4968–4969.

30 Bai Juyi was influenced by Buddhism. See Burton Watson, »Buddhism in the Poetry of Bo Chū-ia,« *The Eastern Buddhism* 21,1 (1988), 1–22.

31 SI; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 76.

32 For debates related in biographies, see John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk. Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian

As we saw above, Chengguan intended to draw on non-Buddhist Chinese works to assist the understanding of Buddhist teachings. In his lifetime the adepts of Buddhism and Daoism often debated fiercely with each other, so he was not inclined to formulate a synthesis of the three teachings; he rather attempted to claim the primacy of Buddhism over Confucianism and Daoism. He stated that even the most superficial Buddhist tenet overshadowed the most profound non-Buddhist one. Chengguan brings ten critiques against Confucianism and Daoism: 1) the beginning or lack of beginning, 2) the recognition or non-recognition of the vital force, 3) the existence or non-existence of the three worlds, 4) deeds either have or do not have influence, 5) the acceptance of causality or the vital force, 6) origination from inside or from outside, 7) phenomena do or do not depend on conditions, 8) fortune does or does not originate from Heaven, 9) activity is defiled or not defiled and 10) returning or not returning.<sup>33</sup> In elaborating the differences between Buddhist and non-Buddhist religions, Chengguan points out that these differences are essential and thus the three teachings cannot be regarded as one system of doctrines. Elsewhere, in connection with Cheng Xuanying's application of Buddhist, especially Madhyamaka and terminology to explain Daoist philosophy in his commentaries to *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi*, Chengguan warns against mixing the ideas of the three teachings, since it leads to birth in Hell and is the source of ignorance which blocks the mystical way of wisdom.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Religious Aspects*

As we saw above, Chengguan is depicted as an ideal scholar in terms of his education, offices and association with high-ranking-officials and emperors. However, he was also a religious figure, even if this is not as well articulated as his scholarly character. First of all, we find hagiographical descriptions of Chengguan: »He was thirteen *chi* tall, his hands reached over his knees.<sup>35</sup> During the night his eyes emitted light, and during the day he did not blink.«<sup>36</sup> Similarly to the biographies of other monks, dreams played an important role in his life. Before he started to write his commentary he had the following dream:

[In his dream] he saw a golden image straight like a mountain, its face like the full moon, standing lofty in the firmament. He held it up with both hands and swallowed its forehead, and then he awoke. After that he started to write, and he felt as if spirits were assisting him.

Buddhism; 10), 123–127.

<sup>33</sup> See Hamar 1999.

<sup>34</sup> T 1736.107a11–13.

<sup>35</sup> The collection of biographies of eminent monks contains a few examples of this being extremely tall. See Elisabeth Kenney, »Big Fat Monks in Further Biographies of Eminent Monks«, *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 49,2 (2001), 61–65.

<sup>36</sup> SI; see Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang*, 75.

After he finished his commentary, he had another dream:

[Upon completing his work] he held a feast to celebrate. He was about to explain the commentary, when he suddenly had a dream in which he became a dragon. His head was lying on the Southern Terrace, his tail coiled around the Northern Terrace, his scales and mane illuminated the sky. It was brighter than the shining sun. After a while the dragon put forth effort, and transformed into many dragons, scattering light everywhere. [Chengguan] regarded this dream as a good sign for the spread of his teaching.<sup>37</sup>

Chengguan studied under several Chan masters; thus we can surmise that he was an expert in Buddhist meditation. His biographies do not discuss it in great detail, but the fact that his body did not decay after his life can be attributed to his achievement in Buddhist praxis:

Due to his power of meditation, in the twenty-one days after he was liberated from his corpse, the colour of his body remained glossy, and sat straight like a mountain.<sup>38</sup>

Chengguan gave lectures at court and wrote works at the request of officials, which clearly shows that he spread the Huayan teachings in elite society. However, he was not only involved in proselytism at high levels but also at the level of the wider population. We learn that after he finished his commentary, he started to lecture to the public: »Then he started to preach his new work. Clouds of five colours condensed in the sky, and the four groups of believers gathered.«<sup>39</sup> After he finished his commentary on the forty-fascicle *Huayan jing* he was ordered to preach in both halves of the capital. He explained the *Huayan jing* over fifty times and held Huayan assemblies fifteen times. »He explained the *Great Sūtra* from beginning to end over fifty times, and held open assemblies (*pañcavarṣikā pariṣad*) fifteen times.«<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusions

The sources agree that Chengguan was a scholar-monk who was well versed in both Buddhist and secular texts, wrote influential works himself and was an active member of society through his close ties with the elite and through the offices that he held. However, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* contains much less information on the hagiographical part: his religious activity and his proselytism of the populace. This biography seems to emphasize those events in his life that could qualify him as a scholar-monk who was comparable to the Confucian scholars. The other biography, his Stūpa Inscription, provides us with a picture of Chengguan drawn from a much broader perspective. Even if they are not very detailed, we do find a few references to his religious life which go beyond the framework of a scholar. Using these data we can draw bold conclusions or

37 SI; see *ibid.*, 73.

38 SI; see *ibid.*, 75–76.

39 SI; see *ibid.*, 73.

40 SI; see *ibid.*, 75.

we can supplement this knowledge with other information from his writings and other sources. Yet, there are many questions in his biography which we cannot answer on the basis of our primary sources. Nonetheless, Chengguan seems to have been much more than a scholar-monk, a mere 'book-worm' who was concerned only with theoretical approaches to Buddhism. Practice, proselytism and politics were also essential aspects of his life, even if these aspects were not emphasized by his biographers, who were more interested in using him as he could be used as a model of a scholar-monk who could easily be accepted and appreciated in Confucian society.

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