

Dependent Arising and Mutual Identity in Fazang's Huayan Thought

Professor, The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Nicholaos (Nick) Jones

Abstract

The teaching of dependent arising (緣起) is that when one conditioned thing (行) arises in dependence upon another, the one does not exist without the other. The meaning of this teaching is a matter of scholarly debate. Some scholars interpret the teaching as meaning that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon some but not all other conditioned things. Other scholars interpret the teaching as meaning that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all other conditioned things.

This paper has three goals. The first goal is to explain how Huayan Buddhism (華嚴佛教) supports the interpretation that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all other conditioned things. This explanation has two parts. The first part explains the meaning of mutual identity (相即) in Huayan writings by the Chinese monk Fazang (法藏, 643-712). The second part of the explanation derives an interpretation of dependent arising from Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity.

The second goal of this paper is to explain an objection to Fazang's interpretation of dependent arising. The objection derives from *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (中論) by the Indian monk Nāgārjuna (龍樹, circa 150-250). Nāgārjuna's objection is nothing with self-nature (自性) arises in dependence upon another. A slight modification of Nāgārjuna's objection demonstrates that interdependence is inconsistent with mutual identity.

The third goal of this paper is to refute the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. The refutation has four parts. The first part distinguishes two meanings for one thing being prior to another. The second part explains why only one of these meanings applies to dependent arising. The third part uses this meaning to identify the error in the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. The fourth part provides textual confirmation from Fazang's writings.

The paper concludes by discussing what the refutation of the objection shows about Indra's Net (因陀羅網) as a metaphor for dependent arising. The discussion has four parts. The first part gives a reason for discussing the metaphor of Indra's Net. The second part examines a popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net. The third part examines Fazang's interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net. The fourth part argues that Fazang's interpretation is superior to the popular interpretation.

Keywords: dependent arising (緣起), Fazang (法藏), Indra's Net (因陀羅網), mutual identity (相即), Nāgārjuna (龍樹)

1. Interpreting Dependent Arising

Early Pāli discourses define dependent arising (P. *paṭicca-samuppāda*; Skt. *pratītya-samutpāda*; Ch. *yuán qǐ* 緣起) with a standard formula.

When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. (MN 79, SN 12.21, SN 12.37; translated in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 655; Bodhi 2000, 552; Bodhi 2000, 575)

Early Chinese translations of these discourses have a similar formula.

Depending upon this, there is that; with this arising, that arises...with this ceasing, that ceases; this not being, that is not. (T 2.125.776a24-27, author's translation)

因是有是，此生則生……此滅則滅，此無則無。

This not being, that is not; through the cessation of this, that ceases.... (T 2.99.92c22-23; translated in Lamotte 1993, 6)

此無故彼無，此滅故彼滅…。

When one arises in dependence upon another, the one does not exist without the other. For example, a house arises in dependence upon timber, mud, and reeds, because there is no house without timber, mud, and reeds enclosing an empty space.

Depending upon timber, mud, and reeds covering and wrapping empty space, there arises that which is named 'house.' (T 1.26.466c29-467a1, author's translation)

因材木，因泥土，因水草，覆裹於空，便生屋名。(For an alternative translation, see Bingenheimer, Anālayo, and Bucknell 2013, 232. See also MN 28, translated in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 283.)

There is no house without timber, mud, and reeds, because empty space becomes a house only when the timber, mud, and reeds provide a locus or context for the house arising (see Macy 1991, 52-53).

Buddhism teaches that dependent arising applies to all conditioned things (P. *sankhārā*; Skt. *samskara*; Ch. *xíng* 行). Early Pāli discourses apply this teaching to houses and other material things (see Anālayo 2021, 1096). But the paradigmatic application is the twelve links of dependent arising (Skt. *dvādaśa-astanga pratītya-samutpāda*; Ch. *shí èr yīn yuán* 十二因緣). Figure 1 gives names for each of the twelve links (see also SN 12.1, translated in Bodhi 2000, 533-534; Williams 1974).

English	Sanskrit	Chinese
delusion	<i>avidyā</i>	無明
conception	<i>samskāra</i>	行
consciousness	<i>vijñāna</i>	識
materiality and mentality	<i>nāmā-rūpa</i>	名色
six sense-spheres	<i>ṣaḍāyatana</i>	六處
contact	<i>sparśa</i>	觸
feeling	<i>vedanā</i>	受
craving	<i>tṛṣṇā</i>	愛
clinging	<i>upādāna</i>	取
becoming	<i>bhava</i>	有
birth	<i>jāti</i>	生
old age and death	<i>jarāmaraṇa</i>	老死

Figure 1: Twelve Links of Dependent Arising

Buddhism teaches that, depending upon the twelve links, there arises a "whole mass of suffering" (P. *dukkhakkhandhassa*; Skt. *duḥkha-skandha*; Ch. *kǔ yùn* 苦蘊). Just as a house ceases with the cessation of timber, mud, or reeds, Buddhism also teaches that the mass of suffering ceases with the cessation of any one of the twelve links. Because the mass of suffering arises in dependence upon each one of the twelve links, each link is suffering (P. *dukkha*; Skt. *duḥkha*; Ch. *kǔ* 苦). Because suffering ceases with the cessation of any one of the twelve links, each link arises in dependence upon the remaining eleven.

The scope of the teaching of dependent arising is a matter of scholarly debate. Some scholars restrict the scope of the teaching to the twelve links of dependent arising. For example, according to the Buddhist studies scholar Eviatar Shulman, the teaching "addresses the workings of the mind alone [and] should be understood to be no more than an inquiry into the nature of the self (or better, the lack of a self)" (Shulman 2008, 299).

One of the main challenges for this interpretation is how to accommodate examples, from early Pāli discourses, about houses and other material things.

Other scholars maintain that the teaching applies beyond the workings of the mind. For example, the Tibetan monk Geshe Lhundub Sopa (1923-2014) distinguishes between general and specific teachings, such that the specific teaching applies only to the twelve links in the working of the mind while the general teaching applies also to things beyond the workings of the mind (Sopa 1984, 140). Evidence for interpreting the teaching as having a general scope typically derives from citing examples from texts. For example, in Chapter 17 of *Path of Purification* (P. *Visuddhimagga*), the Indian Theravādin monk Buddhaghosa (5th century) provides an example of milk and curds.

[17.167] And with a stream of continuity there is neither identity nor otherness. For if there were absolute identity in a stream of continuity, there would be no forming of curd from milk. And yet if there were absolute otherness, the curd would not be derived from the milk. And so too with all causally arisen things. (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 574)

A similar example appears in *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, or *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*; Ch. *Dà zhìdù lùn* 大智度論), attributed by tradition to Nāgārjuna (Ch. *Lóng shù* 龍樹, circa 150-250).

A truly existent dharma cannot be the result of causes and conditions. Why? If the cause (*kāraṇa*) pre-exists in the cause, there is no effect (*kārya*); if the cause does not pre-exist in the cause, there is no result either. Thus, if cream (*dadhi*) pre-exists in milk (*kṣīra*), the milk is not the cause of the cream, for the cream pre-exists. If the cream does not pre-exist in the milk, everything would happen as in water (*udaka*) where there is no cream: the milk is not the cause of the cream. If the cream existed without cause, why would water not produce cream? If the milk is the cause of the cream, the milk, which itself is not independent, also comes from a cause; it derives its origin from the cow (*go*); the cow takes its origin from water (*udaka*) and grass (*trṇa*), and thus there are infinite (*ananta*) causes. This is why it cannot be said that the result (*kārya*) exists (*bhavati*) in the cause (*kāraṇa*), or that it does not exist (*na bhavati*) in the cause, or that it both exists and does not exist (*bhavati ca na bhavati ca*), or that it neither exists nor does not exist (*naiva bhavati na na bhavati*) in the cause. Dharmas resulting from causes and conditions

(*pratītyasamutpanna*) do not have self-nature (*svabhāva*). They are like a reflection in a mirror. (T25.1509.104c23-105a4; translated in Chödrön 2001, 310)

若法實有，是亦不應從因緣生。何以故？若因緣中先有，因緣則無所用；若因緣中先無，因緣亦無所用。譬如，乳中若先有酪，是乳非酪因，酪先有故；若先無酪，如水中無酪，是乳亦非因；若無因而有酪者，水中何以不生酪？若乳是酪因緣，乳亦不自在，乳亦從因緣生；乳從牛有，牛從水草生，如是無邊，皆有因緣。以是故因緣中果，不得言有，不得言無，不得言有無，不得言非有非無，諸法從因緣生，無自性，如鏡中像。

This example also appears, with less detail, in Chapter 13 of Nāgārjuna's *Fundamentals of the Middle Way* (Skt. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; Ch. *Zhōng lún* 中論). In all of these examples, there is an inference that because curds and cream arise in dependence upon milk, all conditioned things arise in dependence upon others. This is evidence in favor of interpreting the teaching of dependent arising as having a broad scope and applying to all conditioned things. Whether there is any significant difference between this broad interpretation and the narrow interpretation depends upon whether some conditioned things are not workings of the mind. For example, are curds and cream separate from the workings of mind, or are they projections or constructions of mind? This is a difficult question to answer. But the question does not need to be resolved in order to address the meaning of the teaching of dependent arising, because the phrase “conditioned things” can be understood as referring to whatever falls within the scope of the teaching of dependent arising.

The meaning of the teaching of dependent arising is also a matter of scholarly debate. Some scholars interpret the teaching as meaning that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon some but not all other conditioned things.

Limited Dependent Arising: Every conditioned thing arises in dependence upon only some others.

For example, according to the Buddhist studies scholar Lambert Schmithausen,

the idea of a *mutual* dependence, inter-connectedness or interrelatedness, *here and now*, of *all* things and beings does not seem to be expressed in the canonical texts of Early Buddhism. They only teach that not only suffering and rebirth but all

things and events, except *Nirvāṇa*, arise in dependence on *specific* (complexes of) causes and conditions, which in their turn have also arisen in dependence on causes and conditions, without any primary, absolute cause at the beginning. (Schmithausen 1997, 13-14)

The American Tibetologist Jeffrey Hopkins gives a more specific example as evidence for this interpretation.

A calf depends on its causes, cow and bull, etc., and the cow and bull as parents depend on their calf though they were not born from the calf. Still, a calf and a pony are not dependent on each other. (Hopkins 1996, 434)

Similarly, according to the Theravādin monk Bhikkhu Anālayo, apple trees arise in dependence upon seeds and moisture, but apple trees do not arise in dependence upon computers (Anālayo 2021, 1095).

Other scholars interpret the teaching of dependent arising as meaning that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all other conditioned things.

Unlimited Dependent Arising: Every conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others.

For example, according to the religious studies scholar Alice Keefe,

The Buddha's doctrine of *pratitya-samutpada* [dependent arising] teaches that ... everything arises in dependence upon everything else.... (Keefe 1997, 63)

The most famous proponent of *Unlimited Dependent Arising* is the Vietnamese Thiền monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (see Holst 2021, 19).

Because canonical texts of early Buddhist tradition do not purport to provide exhaustive teachings, the absence of one interpretation from those texts is not evidence for incorrectness. But both interpretations cannot be correct. If all conditioned things arise in dependence upon some but not all others, then no conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others. So one of the interpretations is an error. Erroneous cognition arises in dependence upon delusion. Examples can succumb to delusion. For instance,

according to the Mīmāṃsā scholar Kumāṛila, the locution ‘my self’ (Skt. *mamātmeti*) refers to a self that is separate from its bodily qualities and its mental qualities (Ram-Prasad 2011, 227). If the Buddhist teaching of no-self (P. *anattā*; Skt. *anātman*; Ch. *wú wǒ* 無我) is correct, Kumāṛila's example relies upon a delusional view of grammar. Similarly, if *Unlimited Dependent Arising* is correct, Anālayo's example about apples trees and computers relies upon a delusional view of causality. So examples cannot determine which interpretation of dependent arising is correct.

This paper has three goals. The first goal is to explain how Huayan Buddhism (華嚴佛教) supports *Unlimited Dependent Arising*. The second goal is to explain an objection to this interpretation of dependent arising. The objection derives from an argument about interdependence by Nāgārjuna. This objection is stronger than Bhikkhu Anālayo's objection about apple trees and computers because it relies upon general principles rather than specific examples. The third goal is to refute this objection. I conclude the paper by discussing what the refutation of the objection shows about Indra's Net as a metaphor for dependent arising.

2. Mutual Identity in Huayan

The goal of this section is to explain how Huayan Buddhism interprets the teaching of dependent arising to mean that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all other conditioned things. (The introductory section names this interpretation *Unlimited Dependent Arising*.) I focus on writings by the Chinese monk Fazang (法藏, 643-712). The explanation has three parts. The first part defines some technical terminology. The definitions derive from *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. The second of the explanation part defines the meaning of mutual identity in Fazang's Huayan thought. The definition specifies the relation between emptiness, existence, and Fazang's meaning of identity. The third part of the explanation derives an interpretation of dependent arising from Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity is that each conditioned thing is identical with all others. I argue that if all conditioned things are mutually identical, then each arises in dependence upon all others.

2.1. Technical Terminology

Fazang uses technical terminology to interpret the teaching of dependent arising. He does not always explain the meaning for this terminology. *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* provides the missing explanations. The missing explanations concern the term *characteristic* (Skt. *lakṣaṇa*; Ch. *xiāng* 相) (see T 25.1509.194b5-6, b23-

c6, translated in Chödrön 2001, 848-850). When something has a characteristic, some predicate designating the characteristic is true of the thing. For example, because earth *dharmas* are solid, earth *dharmas* have the characteristic of solidity (Skt. *dr̥ḍhatva*, Ch. *jiān xiāng* 堅相). Similarly, because *dharmas* of loving-kindness (Skt. *maitrī*, Ch. *cí xiāng* 慈相) are promoters of friendship, they have the characteristic of friendliness.

According to *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, characteristics are specific (Skt. *sa* or *sva*; Ch. *zì* 自) or general (Skt. *sāmānya*; Ch. *gòng* 共). When a characteristic of something is specific, the characteristic marks the thing as different in kind from some other things. When a characteristic of something is general, the characteristic is common to many kinds of things. For example, all *dharmas* of earth have solidity (Skt. *khakkhaṭatva*; Ch. *jiān* 堅) as their specific characteristic and all *dharmas* of fire have heat (Skt. *uṣṇatva*; Ch. *rè* 熱) as their specific characteristic. By contrast, because all conditioned things are prone to rise and fall, impermanence (Skt. *anitya*; Ch. *wú cháng* 無常) is a general characteristic common to *dharmas* of earth and *dharmas* of fire.

According to *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, characteristics are also determinate (Skt. *niyata*; Ch. *jué dìng* 決定) or indeterminate (Skt. *aniyata*; Ch. *bú dìng* 不定). When a characteristic of something is determinate, the thing has that characteristic in all situations and regardless of its relation to others. When a characteristic of something is indeterminate, the thing has that characteristic in some but not all situations or only by virtue of its relation to others. For the sake of illustrating this distinction, consider the example of diamond (Skt. *vajrā*; Ch. *jīngāng* 金剛) and its firmness (Skt. *sāratā*; Ch. *jiān gù* 堅固) from *Commentary on the Greater Perfection of Wisdom*.

Because being firm and not being firm are indeterminate, they are empty. Why? What some people regard as firm, others regard as not firm. For example, people consider diamond to be firm, but Indra (Śakra) grasps it—like a person holding a staff—and considers it as not firm. Also, because of not knowing the causes and conditions for breaking diamond, it is considered to be firm; but those who know to fasten it atop a tortoiseshell, and use a goat horn to smash it, know that it is not firm. (T25.1509.290b3-8, author's translation)

堅固、不堅固不定，故皆空。所以者何？有人以此為堅固，有人以此為不堅固。如人以金剛為牢固，帝釋手執，如人捉杖，不以為牢固。又不知破

金剛因緣，故以為牢固；若知著龜甲上，以山羊角打破，則知不牢固。
(For an alternative translation, see Chödrön 2001, 1718.)

This example conceptualizes the firmness of diamonds as a matter of piercing others and resisting destruction. If diamond pierces whoever touches it and resists destruction in all situations, its firmness is determinate. By contrast, if diamond does not pierce Indra's hand, or if it does not always resist destruction when struck with force, its firmness is indeterminate.

According to *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, anything with a determinate specific characteristic is self-natured (Skt. *svabhāva*; Ch. Ch. *zì xìng* 自性), and anything that lacks a determinate specific characteristic is empty (Skt. *śūnya*; Ch. *kōng* 空). For the realm in which there is dependent arising, *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* explains that being empty means having specific characteristics but lacking determinate characteristics.

Causes and conditions are also empty, because they are indeterminate. Consider, for example, fathers and sons. Because [the son] is born from the father, he is called son. Because the father gives birth [to the son], he is called father. (T 25.1509.290a10-12, author's translation)

因緣亦空，因緣不定故。譬如父子，父生故名為子，生子故名為父。(For an alternative translation, see Chödrön 2001, 1717.)

In the realm of dependent arising, things arise in dependence upon causes and conditions and there are different kinds of causes and conditions. Sons arise in dependence upon their fathers. Because anything that arises in dependence upon another is empty, sons are empty. Sons also differ in kind from fathers. For example, a son is a kind of child and a father is a kind of parent. Because specific characteristics mark differences among kinds, sons also have specific characteristics. If being empty means lacking determinate specific characteristics, and if sons are empty despite having specific characteristics, the specific characteristics of sons are indeterminate. This example generalizes. In the realm of dependent arising, something is self-natured if it has a determinate specific, and something is empty if it has specific characteristics but all of these characteristics are indeterminate.

2.2. The Meaning of Identity

Fazang's definition of emptiness agrees with definition from *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. According to Fazang, being empty means lacking self-nature.

From lacking self-nature, there is being empty. (T 45.1866.502a11-12, author's translation)

由無自性故是空也。(For an alternative translation, see Cook 1970, 449.)

Fazang contrasts being empty with existing (Skt. *bhava*; Ch. *yǒu* 有). When something arises in dependence upon another, that which arises is empty. Yet, for Fazang, nothing can arise in dependence upon what is nonexistent. So when something arises in dependence upon another, that other must be existent. For example, a son arises in dependence upon his father. But there are no sons without fathers. So the son arises only if the father exists. This example generalizes. In the realm of dependent arising, when one arises in dependence upon another, the one is empty and the other is existent.

Fazang uses the terms *empty* and *existent* to characterize the things related when one arises in dependence upon another. To explain the relation of dependence something empty and something existent, he uses the terms *making* (Ch. *zuō* 作) and *identity* (Ch. *jí* 即). When one arises in dependence upon another, the one is empty of determinate specific characteristics. The one that is empty has specific characteristics. The reason it has specific characteristics is that it belongs to the realm of dependent arising. The reason these characteristics are indeterminate is that the one has them by virtue of some relation to the other from which it arises. This relation is akin to the relation between a painting and its painter. The reason is that painters make paintings. This is why, when one arises in dependence upon another, Fazang says that the other makes the one. The relation is also unlike a painting and its painter. The reason is that a painting and its painter are separable. For Fazang, when one arises in dependence upon another, the one and the other are inseparable or non-dual (Skt. *advaita*; Ch. *bú èr* 不二). This is why, when one arises in dependence upon another, Fazang also says that the one is identical with the one.

First: [One] as existing necessitates the others lacking [self-nature], so that the others are identical with [the one]. Why? The others lack self-nature because [the one] makes [them]. Second: [One] as empty necessitates the others existing, so

that [the one] is identical with the others. Why? Because [the one] lacks self-nature, therefore the others make [it].¹ (T 45.1866.503b10-13, author's translation; for an alternative translation, see Cook 1970, 473)

For example, if fire has the specific characteristic of hotness by virtue of its relation to fuel, fire is identical with fuel and fuel makes fire. Similarly, if *nirvāṇa* has the specific characteristic of cessation (Skt. *uccheda*; Ch. *duàn miè* 斷滅) by virtue of its relation to *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa* is identical with *saṃsāra* and *saṃsāra* makes *nirvāṇa*. For Fazang, one is identical with another when the other makes the one. When the other makes the one, the one is empty, the other is an existing maker, the maker makes what is empty, and what is made is inseparable from its maker.

Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity (Ch. *xiāng jí* 相即) is that, in the realm of dependent arising, each conditioned thing is identical with all others. This doctrine entails that all conditioned things are existent and empty. Fazang maintains that each conditioned thing exists because it makes all others. Because each one makes all others, all others are identical with each one. Fazang also maintains that each conditioned thing is empty because each is made by all others. Because each one is made by all others, each one is identical with all others.

2.3. From Mutual Identity to Unlimited Dependent Arising

Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity entails that every conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others. When one is identical with another, the other makes the one. One makes another by determining the specific characteristics of the other. So when one is identical with another, the other determines the specific characteristics of the one. A standard Buddhist teaching is that things are inseparable from their characteristics. So when one determines the specific characteristics of another, the other arises in dependence upon the one because the other has its specific characteristics by virtue of its relation to the one. Hence, when one is identical with another, the one arises in dependence upon the other.

The preceding argument demonstrates that one is identical with another only if the one arises in dependence upon the other. Hence, when the one and the other are mutually identical, each arises in dependence upon the other. Fazang's doctrine of mutual

¹ In translating, I take the liberty of interpreting the character 自 as designating "one" among many others, rather than as designating something that is a self. This follows a recommendation from Lamotte (see Chödrön 2001, 1641).

identity is that, in the realm of dependent arising, each conditioned thing is identical with all others. So Fazang's doctrine entails that, in the realm of dependent arising, each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others. This is the thesis of *Unlimited Dependent Arising*.

3. Mutual Identity and Interdependence

The prior section explains why, according to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity, the mutual identity of all conditioned things entails *Unlimited Dependent Arising*. This section explains an objection to Fazang's doctrine. The objection derives from *Fundamentals of the Middle Way* by Nāgārjuna. The explanation of the objection has two parts. The first part presents Nāgārjuna's argument for why things with self-nature cannot arise in dependence upon each other. The second part modifies Nāgārjuna's argument into an argument for why mutual identity prohibits interdependent arising. The second part also explains why the modified argument is an objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity.

3.1. Nāgārjuna's Analysis of Interdependence

In Chapter 10 of *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna argues that nothing with self-nature (Skt. *svabhāva*; Ch. *zì xìng* 自性) arises in dependence upon another.

8. If fire depends on fuel and fuel depends on fire, which of the two is arisen first, fuel or the fire that is dependent upon that?
9. If fire is dependent on fuel, then there is the establishing of an already established fire. If so then also fuel would come to be without relation to fire.
10. If an entity x is established in dependence [on something else y], and in dependence on that very entity x there is established that y on which x 's establishment depends, then what is dependent on what?
11. The entity that is established in dependence [on something else], how does it, before being established, depend [on that]? But if it is not something established that is dependent [on something else], it is not right to say that it depends [on something else]. (Siderits and Katsura 2013, 114-116)

Nāgārjuna's metaphor targets an anonymous interlocutor who maintains that one of fire and fuel is self-natured despite each arising in dependence upon the other (Garfield 1995, 191-192; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 114). Nāgārjuna's critique relies upon two principles.

The first is that anything that establishes, or brings about, another is prior to that other. For example, if fuel establishes fire, the arising of the fuel must be prior to the arising of the fire. The second principle is that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other. For example, if fuel is prior to fire, then the fuel does not arise in dependence upon the fire.

Both of Nāgārjuna's principles are plausible for those who, like the anonymous interlocutor, maintain that one of fire and fuel is self-natured. Suppose, for example, that fuel is self-natured. Then, because fire is the burning of fuel, fire can arise because, prior to its arising, fuel's self-nature establishes the fuel as something available for burning. Or suppose, instead, that fire is self-natured. Then, because fuel is that which fire burns, fuel can arise because, prior to its arising, fire's self-nature establishes the fire as burning. In both cases, that which does the establishing, by virtue of being self-natured, is prior to that which is established. This is Nāgārjuna's first principle. Similar considerations motivate the second principle. If fuel is self-natured, then any fuel that is prior to fire does not arise from the fire because it is established by its self-nature. Also, if fire is self-natured, then any fire that is prior to fuel does not arise from the fuel because it is established by its self-nature.

Nāgārjuna's first principle entails that fire and fuel are mutually dependent only if each is prior to the other. His second principle entails that if each of fire and fuel is prior to the other, neither arises in dependence upon the other. So both principles together entail that fire and fuel are mutually dependent only if they are not mutually dependent. This means that it is contradictory to suppose that fire and fuel are mutually dependent. So Nāgārjuna's principles entail that fire and fuel do not arise in dependence upon each other. This example generalizes. Nothing in the argument concerns specifics about fire or fuel. Nāgārjuna's principles entail that there is no mutual dependence if things are self-natured. Because endorsing one of fire or fuel as self-natured supports both principles, it follows that Nāgārjuna's anonymous interlocutor should either deny that fire and fuel are self-natured or else concede that they are not interdependent. (Nāgārjuna prefers the first option because he accepts that fire and fuel arise in dependence upon each other. See Garfield 1995, 193).

3.2. An Objection to Mutual Identity

Nāgārjuna's argument about fire and fuel targets the view that some things are self-natured. A slight modification of the argument targets Fazang's view that things empty of self-nature are mutually identical. The modification concerns Fazang's relation of identity.

For Fazang, when one is identical with another, the other makes the one. This making relation is an asymmetric relation. The reason is that the other making the one is akin to a painter making a painting. When a painter makes a painting, the painting does not make the painter. By analogy, when the other makes the one, the one does not make the other. So the making relation is asymmetric. The making relation is also a priority relation. The reason is similar. When a painter makes a painting, the painter is prior to the painting. By analogy, when the other makes the one, the other is prior to the one. Fazang's relation of identity is the converse for his relation of making. So Fazang's relation of identity is also an asymmetric priority relation.

Because Fazang's relation of identity is an asymmetric priority relation, Fazang is committed to an analog of Nāgārjuna's first principle in the argument about fire and fuel. The analog is that anything with which another is identical is prior to that other. Joining this analog with Nāgārjuna's second principle—that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other—entails that identity requires an absence of dependent arising.

1. Anything with which another is identical is prior to that other.
2. Nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other.
3. Therefore, when one is identical with another, the other does not arise in dependence upon the one.

For example, suppose that fire is identical with fuel. Then the analog principle entails that fuel is prior to fire. This result, together with Nāgārjuna's second principle, then entails that fuel does not arise in dependence upon fire.

The preceding argument is an objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. For Fazang, mutual identity entails mutual dependence. But the preceding argument demonstrates that when two things are mutually identical, neither depends upon the other. The reason is that if identity requires an absence of dependent arising, mutual identity requires mutual independence. For example, suppose that fire and fuel are mutually identical. Then, according to Fazang, fire and fuel arise in dependence upon each other. But, according to the preceding argument, if fire and fuel are mutually identical, then fuel does not arise in dependence upon fire and fire does not arise in dependence upon fuel.

4. Priority and Dependent Arising

The prior section develops an objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. This section refutes the objection. The refutation has four parts. The first part distinguishes two

meanings for one thing being prior to another. The second part explains why only one of these meanings applies to the teaching of dependent arising. The third part uses this meaning to identify the error in the objection from the prior section. The fourth part confirms the diagnosis of the error with textual evidence from Fazang's *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan* (*Huáyán wǔjiào zhāng* 華嚴五教章).

4.1. Two Meanings of Priority

The objection, from the prior section, to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity relies upon the principle that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other. The meaning of this principle is ambiguous. The reason is that there are two meanings of priority.

The first meaning interprets priority as determinate (Skt. *niyata*; Ch. *ding* 定). If priority is determinate, one thing being prior to another does not depend upon situational context.

Determinate Priority: If one is prior to another in one situation, then it is prior to that other in all situations.

An instance of determinate priority is temporal ordering in Newtonian physics. In Newtonian physics, if one event occurs prior to another in one frame of reference, it occurs prior to that other in all frames of reference. The reason is that, in Newtonian physics, true time is absolute. If true time is absolute, the time at which an event occurs does not vary across different frames of reference. Hence, in Newtonian physics, true temporal ordering is determinate.

The second meaning interprets priority as indeterminate (Skt. *aniyata*; Ch. *bú ding* 不定). If priority is determinate, one thing being prior to another depends upon situational context.

Indeterminate Priority: If one is prior to another in one situation, then it need not be prior to that other in all situations.

An instance of indeterminate priority is temporal ordering in Einstein's special theory of relativity. According to the special theory of relativity, one event might be prior to another in one frame of reference, but these two events might be simultaneous in another frame

of reference. Consider Einstein's train example (Einstein 1961, 29-31). Einstein's example involves a speeding train and two people. One person is a passenger on the train. The other person is on a stationary platform and observing the train as it approaches the platform. Einstein imagines that two bolts of lightning strike. One bolt strikes the front of the train. The other bolt strikes the back of the train. Einstein claims that, in the frame of reference for the observer on the platform, the lightning strike at the front of the train occurs prior to the lightning strike at the back of the train. Einstein also claims that, in the frame of reference for the passenger on the train, the two lightning strikes occur at the same time. So, in Einstein's train example, temporal priority is indeterminate.

4.2. Priority in the Teaching of Dependent Arising

When one arises in dependence upon another, there is a sense in which the other is prior to the one. What is this sense? Because there are two meanings of priority, there are two potential answers to this question. The first potential answer is that when one arises in dependence upon another, the other is prior to the one in all situations. The second potential answer is that when one arises in dependence upon another, the other is prior to the one in some situations even though the one might be prior to the other in other situations. The first potential answer interprets priority as determinate. The second potential answer interprets priority as indeterminate. There are two strong precedents to favor the second potential answer over the first potential answer.

The first precedent is from the Indian Theravādin monk Buddhaghosa. In Chapter 17 of *Path of Purification*, Buddhaghosa likens the twelve links of dependent arising to a creeping vine (P. *māluvā*; Ch. *màn cǎo* 蔓草). This metaphor derives from a passage in *Dhammapada*.

The craving of a person who lives heedlessly grows like a *māluvā* creeper. (Dhp 334, translated in Carter and Palihwadana 2000, 59)

A similar metaphor appears in the earliest Chinese translation of *Dhammapada* (Ch. *Fǎjù jīng* 法句經).

If one's mind is set on sexual activities,

One's craving increases, like a [creeper's] branches

Spreading and growing ever more luxuriantly;

And the mind keeps leaping, like a monkey greedy for fruits. (T 4.210.570c17-18; translated in Dhammajoti 1995, 241)

心放在婬行，欲愛增枝條，分布生熾盛，超躍貪果猴。

Just as the twelve links of dependent arising cause a mass of suffering, creeping vines spread until they destroy the trees on which they grow. Buddhaghosa imagines that the creeping vine has three sections. The sections are root, middle, and tip (Ñānamoli 2010, 540). Buddhaghosa likens the root to delusion (Skt. *avidyā*; Ch. *wú míng* 無明). He likens the middle to clinging (Skt. *upādāna*; Ch. *qǔ* 取). He likens the tip to old age and death (Skt. *jarā-marāṇa*; Ch. *lǎo sǐ* 老死).

Buddhaghosa uses the metaphor of the creeping vine to explain the teaching of dependent arising. His explanation derives from a passage in *Discourse on Roots* (*Mūla Sutta*, AN 3.69).

Suppose a tree was choked and enveloped by three *māluvā* creepers. Then a man would come along bringing a shovel and a basket. He would cut down the creepers at their roots, dig them up, and pull out the roots.... (Bodhi 2012, 293)

Cutting down the roots destroys the middle and tip. So the middle and tip arise in dependence upon the roots. Pulling the middle destroys the tip and root. So the tip and root arise in dependence upon the middle. Yanking the tip destroys the root and middle. So the root and middle arise in dependence upon the tip. Hence, the parts of the creeper vine are interdependent. Each arises in dependence upon all others. For Buddhaghosa, the twelve links of dependent arising are interdependent in the same way. Destroying any link suffices to destroy all others. So each link arises in dependence upon all others (see also Olendzki 2010, 109-110; Anālayo 2021, 1096).

Buddhaghosa's metaphor of the creeping vine also explains the relation between dependent arising and priority. Buddhaghosa addresses a question about his metaphor.

[17.33] Why does he teach it [dependent arising] thus? Because the dependent origination is wholly beneficial and because he has himself acquired elegance in instructing. For the dependent origination is entirely beneficial: starting from any

one of the ... starting points, it leads only to the penetration of the proper way.
(Ñāṇamoli 2010, 541)

Buddhaghosa's answer conceptualizes each part of the creeper vine—root, middle, tip—as a starting point. But if priority is determinate, only one part of the creeper vine is a starting point. The reason is that starting points are prior to subsequent points. For example, if the root is the starting point for removing the middle and tip, then the root is prior to the middle and tip. But if the root is prior to the middle and tip, and if priority is determinate, then neither the middle nor the tip can be a starting point for removing the root. Hence, if each part of the creeper vine is a starting point, priority is indeterminate. Buddhaghosa explains why. The explanation is that different parts of the creeper vine are starting points for different audiences. This means that the root can be a starting point for people who excel at cutting but the tip can be a starting point for people who excel at yanking. By analogy, when there is mutual dependent arising between one and another, the one can be prior to the other in one situation but the other can be prior to the one in another situation. So Buddhaghosa's analogy supports *Indeterminate Priority*.

There is a second precedent for the claim that when one arises in dependence upon another, the other is prior to the one in some situations even though the one might be prior to the other in other situations. This precedent is from the Chinese monk Jizang (吉藏, 549-623). Jizang's writings contain two important insights. Introducing two technical terms help to state the first insight. The first technical term is *ground for a specific characteristic*. The ground for a thing's specific characteristic is that which makes the thing have its specific characteristic. For example, if fire makes wax fluid, then fire is the ground for the fluidity of wax. The second technical term is *rigid ground*. A rigid ground is a ground that makes a thing have its specific characteristic in all situations. Jizang's first important insight, stated with these technical terms, is that anything with a rigid ground for its specific characteristic thereby has a determinate specific characteristic (see Ho 2014, 405-410). Jizang's second important insight derives from the Indian Madhyamaka tradition of Buddhism. The second insight is that all conditioned things are empty of determinate specific characteristics (see Chödrön 2001, 1752, translating T 25.1509.294b18-25).

Jizang's two insights entail that the ground for anything's specific characteristic is not rigid. That is, Jizang's insights entail that the ground for something's specific characteristics is the ground for those characteristics in some situations but not all situations. If the ground of a thing's specific characteristics is not rigid, the ground makes

the thing in some situations but not all situations. Because making is a priority relation, Jizang's insights entail that even if one is prior to another in one situation, it need not be prior to that other in all situations. So Jizang's insights also support *Indeterminate Priority*.

4.3. The Error in the Objection to Mutual Identity

According to *Indeterminate Priority*, even if one is prior to another in one situation, it need not be prior to that other in all situations. There is strong precedent for Fazang to endorse *Indeterminate Priority*. (For evidence that Fazang makes this endorsement, see T 45.1866.505b14-19.) Endorsing *Indeterminate Priority* makes Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity consistent with mutual dependent arising. The reason is that endorsing *Indeterminate Priority* allows for the relations of identity and dependence to be situational. When one is identical with another in one situation, the other does not arise in dependence upon the one in that situation. If *Indeterminate Priority* is correct, the other not arising in dependence upon the one in one situation is consistent with the other arising in dependence upon the one in a different situation. This means that the one and the other can arise in dependence upon each other if the situation in which the one is identical with the other differs from the situation in which the other is identical with the one.

An example helps to illustrate how *Indeterminate Priority* makes Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity consistent with mutual dependent arising. For the sake of illustration, suppose that fire and fuel are mutually identical. Suppose that the relations of identity and dependence are situational. Suppose also that the situation in which fire is identical with fuel differs from the situation in which fuel is identical with fire. (See Figure 2.)

situation 1	fire is identical with fuel	fuel is prior to fire	fire arises in dependence upon fuel
situation 2	fuel is identical with fire	fire is prior to fuel	fuel arises in dependence upon fire

Figure 2: Mutual Identity and Interdependence of Fire and Fuel

The modification of Nāgārjuna's first principle, from the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity, entails that the situation in which fire is prior to fuel differs from the situation in which fuel is prior to fire. Nāgārjuna's second principle, from the same objection, further entails that the situation in which fire does not arise in dependence upon fuel differs from the situation in which fuel does not arise in dependence upon fire. But

nothing forbids the situation in which fire does not arise in dependence upon fuel from being a situation in which fuel arises in dependence upon fire, and nothing forbids the situation in which fuel does not arise in dependence upon fire from being a situation in which fire arises in dependence upon fuel. So fire and fuel being mutually identical is consistent with fire and fuel arising in dependence upon each other.

This example about fire and fuel shows that mutual identical things are independent only if priority is determinate. If priority is determinate, and if fire and fuel are mutually identical, then any situation in which fire is identical with fuel must be a situation in which fuel is identical with fire. If this is a requirement for mutual identity, then the mutual identity of fire and fuel prohibits one arising in dependence upon the other. There is no such prohibition if priority is indeterminate. There is also good precedent for denying that priority is determinate. This precedent shows that the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity does not succeed.

4.4 Textual Confirmation for Fazang's Interpretation

Fazang does not directly address the objection that mutual identity prohibits mutual dependence. However, in *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan*, he answers a question about mutual identity that confirms the preceding response. The relevant question appears in Fazang's discussion for the topic of "all *dharma*s freely identified [with each other]" (Ch. *zhū fǎ xiāng jí zì zài* 諸法相即自在) (T45.1866.505a27).

Question: With respect to same body, when one gateway is identical with and takes in the whole without limit, does this manifest simultaneously or one after another?

Answer: One gateway simultaneously clearly manifesting the whole belongs to the subtle category. Hidden and reflected mutually manifesting again and again belongs to the category of [the realm of] Indra. There are also the meanings of sameness and difference, many and few, existence and nonexistence, start and finish. Hence, *dharma* gateways are freely endowed with the whole without limit. Accordingly, choosing one to act as chief, the others act as attendants. (T45.1866.505b14-19, author's translation; for an alternate translation, see Cook 1970, 501-502)

Fazang conceptualizes mutual identity among *dharma*s through gateways. Each gateway is a vehicle for cognizing the relation between *dharma*s of one kind and *dharma*s of all other kinds, and there is a unique gateway for each kind of *dharma*. For Fazang, mutual

identity is a matter of there being a gateway, for each kind of *dharma*, in which *dharmas* of that kind are mutually identical with *dharmas* of all other kinds. Cognizing this identity through the concept *same body* (Ch. *tóng tǐ* 同體) is then a matter of cognizing, within each gateway, each group of other *dharmas* as a unified whole.

The question from the anonymous interlocutor asks for clarification about how—or, better, when—to cognize various groups of *dharmas* as wholes. Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that there are three kinds of *dharmas*. Label these kinds, respectively, A, B, and C. Then mutual identity involves three gateways. Each cognizes one kind of *dharma* in relation to some whole that is all *dharmas* together. In the first, A is mutually identical with this whole. In the second, B is mutually identical with the whole. In the third, C is mutually identical with the same whole. Label this whole W. So mutual identity among A, B, and C is, in part, a matter of A relating to W and B relating to W. Part of what Fazang's anonymous interlocutor is asking is whether these relations are simultaneous or sequential. Cognizing the relations as simultaneous requires cognizing B as both unified with C (because, in relation to A, both are parts of W that do not make W) and not unified with C (because, in relation to C, B makes W but C does not). By contrast, cognizing the relations as sequential seems to entail that *dharmas* of one kind are mutually identical with other *dharmas* only insofar as no *dharmas* of some other kind are mutually identical with other *dharmas*. Both options are problematic. The former seems to require a conceptual impossibility. The latter seems to entail that gateways obstruct each other.

Rather than choose among problematic options, Fazang answers the anonymous interlocutor's question by maintaining that neither option is problematic. Fazang agrees that the first option—cognizing the various gateways simultaneously—is a conceptual impossibility. He adds that simultaneous cognition of multiple gateways is subtle (Ch. *wēi xì* 微細). Subtle cognition, for Fazang, is cognition within the realm of Mañjuśrī (Ch. *Wénshū* 文殊), cognition that is inexpressible and inconceivable. So the conceptual impossibility of the first option is not problematic, because simultaneous cognition of the various gateways is cognition of *dharmas* as such apart from conceptualization. For the second option of cognizing the various gateways sequentially, Fazang denies that the gateways obstruct each other. Sequential cognition of multiple gateways belongs to the realm of Indra—or, in more familiar terminology, to the realm of Samantabhadra (Ch. *Pǔxián jìngjiè* 普賢境界). Because this cognition is conceptual, Fazang maintains that the gateways do not obstruct each other. His likely justification is that gateways obstruct

each other only if differences among the gateways are real rather than conceptual (or nominal), but cognizing the gateways as real involves cognizing each gateway as having some time during which it grounds mutual identity and others do not. Insofar as cognition of this sort invests each gateway with a determinate characteristic, such cognition is delusional. Because cognition in the realm of Samantabhadra is free from delusion, it follows that differences among the gateways are merely conceptual and so the gateways do not obstruct each other. This is the sense in which mutual identity among *dharmas* in the realm of Samantabhadra is free (Ch. *zì zài* 自在).

Although Fazang's answer to the anonymous interlocutor does not address the topic of priority relations among mutually identical and interdependently arising *dharmas*, Fazang's strategy for answering motivates a twofold response to the concern that mutual identity requires mutual independence. Recall that two principles drive this concern. The first is that anything with which another is identical is prior to that other. The second is that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other. For mutual identity among *dharmas* in the realm of Mañjuśrī, the first principle is incorrect. *Dharmas* in the realm of Mañjuśrī are mutually identical. But there are no distinctions among prior and subsequent in this realm because those distinctions are conceptual and cognition in the realm of Mañjuśrī is non-conceptual. Fazang makes a similar observation elsewhere in *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan*, albeit regarding relations of causality rather than relations of identity.

Cause and result being simultaneous, there is no distinction of prior and subsequent. (T45.1866.505c7, author's translation)

因果俱齊無前後別。(For an alternative translation, see Cook 1970, 504.)

For mutual identity among *dharmas* in the realm of Samantabhadra, the second principle—that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other—is incorrect. Just as differences among gateways in the realm of Samantabhadra are conceptual rather than real, so too are distinctions among prior and subsequent. If distinctions among prior and subsequent were real, the prior would be established independently of the subsequent. But if these distinctions are merely conceptual, correctly cognizing one as prior for one gateway does not preclude correctly cognizing the same one as subsequent and dependent for other gateways.

5. Indra's Net as a Metaphor for Dependent Arising

I conclude by discussing what the refutation of the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity shows about Indra's Net as a metaphor for dependent arising. The discussion has four parts. The first part gives a reason for discussing the metaphor of Indra's Net. The second part examines a popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net. The third part examines Fazang's interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net. The fourth part argues that Fazang's interpretation is superior to the popular interpretation.

5.1. Indra's Net

In his *Commentary on the Flower Ornament Discourse* (*Huáyán jīng zhǐguī* 華嚴經旨歸), Fazang likens the realm of dependent arising to a lattice-like array of mirror-like pearls.

It is like Indra's palace covered by a net of precious pearls. The pearls, because they are bright, penetrate each other in manifesting their reflections. The manifestations of these reflections are reflections that can manifest further reflections. In this way, the manifold is inexhaustible. (T 45.1871.594c3-5, author's translation)

Each pearl of Indra's net hosts reflections of all others. Because each pearl hosts a subtly different mass of reflections, the pearls differ from each other. These differences model the specific characteristics that mark *dharmas* into different kinds. Because there is mutual reflectivity among the pearls, any mark added to one pearl manifests in the reflections hosted by all other pearls. This relationality models the emptiness of *dharmas*—the indeterminacy of their specific characteristics. Because the reflections in any one pearl arise in dependence upon all other pearls, the array of pearls exhibits thoroughgoing interdependence. This interdependence models the mutual identity of *dharmas*.

Fazang also mentions the metaphor of Indra's Net (Ch. *yīn tuó luó wǎng* 因陀羅網) in *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan*.

Perceive [Indra's net] in accordance with wisdom. Select one [*dharma*] as chief, and the others are attendants. Insofar as the chief is central, the others surround it as followers. All thereby realize unhindered freedom.... Returning to the prior

categories of free and unhindered mutual identity and mutual inclusion, know that each takes in every *dharma* of the boundless *dharma*-realm and realizes Indra's Net. (T 45.1866.506b5-10, author's translation; for an alternative translation, see Cook 1970, 512)

The metaphor of Indra's Net is not prominent in this text. Instead, in this text, Fazang uses the metaphor of counting ten coins (Ch. *shǔ shí qián* 數十錢) to explain the doctrine of mutual identity, and he uses a metaphor about a building to explain a corollary to the doctrine of mutual identity. (The corollary is Fazang's theory of six characteristics (Ch. *liù xiāng* 六相).

Despite its relatively minor role in Fazang's explanation of mutual identity, the metaphor of Indra's net is one of the most prominent metaphors in contemporary explanations of interdependence within Western Buddhism (see McMahan 2008, 158; Owens 2022). Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覺三 (1863-1913, a Japanese art critic, introduces the metaphor to English-speaking audiences in 1904, comparing art to “the diamond net of Indra [that] reflects the whole chain in every link” (Okakura 1904, 9). Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), an American art historian of Japanese art, relies upon the metaphor to articulate an approach to interpreting Chinese poetry that takes relations among words, rather than individual word meanings, as the bearers of poetic meaning (Saussy 2009). The American poet Gary Snyder, following Fenollosa, also uses the metaphor as inspiration for his ecologically-oriented poetry (Barnhill 1990, 20-21; Takahashi 2002, 314-315; Stalling 2010, 16). These critical and poetic invocations of Indra's net allude to the net as a metaphor for interdependence, but they provide minimal details about the metaphor. But in a posthumously published survey of Japanese Buddhism from 1935, Sir Charles Eliot (1862-1931), British ambassador to Japan from 1920 until 1926, provides what might be the first English-language description of Indra's net.

In the heaven of Indra there is said to be a network [of] pearls so arranged that if you look at one you see all others reflected in it. In the same way each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object and in fact *is* everything else. (Eliot 2013, 109)

D.T. (Daisetsu Teitaro) Suzuki 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (1870-1966) provides a similar description in 1938, as part of the introduction to a survey of Mahāyāna Buddhism by Beatrice Lane Suzuki (1878-1939).

This net, made of precious gems, hangs over Indra's palace. In each of these gems are found reflected all the other gems composing the net; therefore, when it is picked up, we see in it not only the entirety of the net but every one of the gems therein. (Suzuki 1981, 11)

Garma C.C. Chang (1920-1988), a scholar of Buddhism, briefly mentions the metaphor in his ground-breaking survey of Huayan writings (Chang 1971, 165-166). The physicist Fritjof Capra further popularizes the metaphor in 1975 (Capra 1975, 296-298; see also Zukav 1979, 239). Then Francis Cook, a Buddhist studies scholar, constructs the now-standard English-language description of Indra's Net in the first English-language monograph about Fazang.

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. (Cook 1977, 2)

(For a similar but less ornate description, see Chang 1971, 165.) Cook claims that Indra's Net, as he describes it, symbolizes the kind of mutual identity that Huayan Buddhism teaches. Many contemporary Western Buddhists and scholars cite Cook's construction when explaining Buddhist teachings about interdependence. Cook's construction is also the basis for the contemporary popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net. I will argue that this popular interpretation differs from Fazang's interpretation. I also will argue that Fazang's interpretation is preferable. The reason is that Fazang's interpretation provides a better response to the objection to mutual identity from previous sections of this paper.

5.2. Popular Interpretation

The popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's net maintains that the metaphor depicts the total absence of hierarchical relations. Cook makes this point explicitly.

The Hua-yen universe...has no hierarchy. There is no center, or, perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere. (Cook 1977, 4)

David Barnhill, an environmental scholar, claims that Indra's net illustrates that "there is no hierarchy among the interdependent things of life" (Barnhill 1990, 21). Linda Olds, an American psychologist, claims that Indra's Net depicts reality in a way that emphasizes "compassion for all the interrelated aspects of existence, each deserving full valuation rather than judged according to a hierarchy" (Olds 1992, 408). David Loy, an American Zen priest, claims that because there is no hierarchy in Indra's Net, reality is groundless and the search for ultimate reality is a manifestation of attachment (Loy 1993, 484). Ann Fisher-Worth, an American poet, interprets Indra's Net as a metaphor for "interrelatedness and connectedness, for the universe as a multiple series of systems rather than a hierarchical structure" (Holmsten and Fisher-Worth 2005, 133). Other examples are available, especially in literature about Buddhist ecology. (For one of many examples, see Allendorf and Byers 1998.)

If Indra's Net depicts a reality without hierarchy, then no pearl or jewel of Indra's Net is prior to any other and, more generally, nothing is prior to anything else. The reason is that priority relations are hierarchical. When one is prior to another, the one is higher in the hierarchy of reality.

5.3. Fazang's Interpretation

Fazang explains his interpretation for the metaphor of Indra's Net in *Contemplations on Exhausting Delusion and Returning to the Source by Cultivating the Mysteries of Huayan*.

The ... contemplation of Indra's Net is of chief and attendant manifesting each other. This means that one acting as chief views others acting as attendants; or perhaps one *dharma* acting as chief [views] all [other] *dharms* acting as attendants; or perhaps one body acting as chief [views] all [other] bodies acting as attendants. So one *dharma*, selected as chief, receives [the other] attendants all

together, one after the other without limit. This models the nature of *dharmas* as manifesting reflections one after another, each thing [including all others] within itself without limit, just as compassion and wisdom also multiply one after the other without limit. (T 45.1876.640b27-640c03, author's translation)²

六者、主伴互現帝網觀。謂以自為主、望他為伴，或以一法為主、一切法為伴，或以一身為主、一切身為伴，隨舉一法即主伴齊收，重重無盡，此表法性重重影現，一切事中皆悉無盡，亦是悲智重重無盡也。(For an alternative translation, see Cleary 1983, 168.)

Fazang does not mention the doctrine of mutual identity in this passage, but he connects Indra's Net to this doctrine in other writings. One example of this connection, from *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan*, is Fazang's discussion of "all *dharmas* freely identified [with each other]" (Ch. *zhū fǎ xiāng jí zì zài* 諸法相即自在), where Fazang notes that mutual identity pertains to the realm of Indra.

Fazang's interpretation for the metaphor of Indra's Net is similar to the popular interpretation. Both interpretations agree that Indra's Net depicts a realm in which everything is related to everything else. Fazang expresses this by claiming that everything is mutually identical. Popular interpretations express the same teaching by claiming that everything is interconnected.

Fazang's interpretation for the metaphor of Indra's Net also differs from the popular interpretation. According to Fazang, Indra's Net depicts a heterarchy of hierarchical relations. Each pearl or jewel is prior to all others because there is a situation in which each is chief (Ch. *shǒu* 首 or *zhǔ* 主) and all others are attendants (Ch. *bàn* 伴). Keiji Nishitani 西谷啓治 (1900-1990), a Japanese scholar belonging to the Kyoto School 京都學派, characterizes this kind of relationality as "circuminsessional."

That beings one and all are gathered into one, while each one remains absolutely unique in its 'being,' points to a relationship in which...all things are master and servant to one another. We may call this relationship... 'circuminsessional.'

² In the second English sentence, I translate 自 (*zì*) as "one" rather than "self." This follows a recommendation from Lamotte (see Chödrön 2001, 1641).

To say that a certain thing is situated in a position of servant to every other thing means that it lies at the ground of all other things, that it is a constitutive element in the being of every other thing, making it to be what it is and thus to be situated in a position of autonomy as master of itself. It assumes a position at the home-ground of every other thing as that of a retainer upholding his lord. The fact that A is so related to B, C, D... amounts, then, to an absolute negation of the standpoint of A as master, along with its uniqueness and so, too, its 'being.'...

Seen from the other side, however, the same could be said respectively of B, C, D... and every other thing that is. That is to say, from that perspective, they all stand in a position of servant to A, supporting its position as master and functioning as a constituent element of A, making it what it is. (Nishitani 1982, 148)

For Fazang, a pearl or *dharma* acts as chief by virtue of making, by itself, all others. Those others act as attendants to that which makes them. But for any pearl or *dharma* that acts as chief to others, there are alternative situations—different gateways—in which it also acts as attendant to those others. Because the status of being chief and the status of being attendant vary with situation, they are indeterminate. Because all things, whether pearls or *dharmas*, have both statuses, they are interconnected. Because chiefs are superior to their attendants, the relation between chief and attendant is hierarchical. So Fazang accepts that Indra's Net depicts hierarchical relations. This is precisely what the popular interpretation denies. (For a more extensive examination of Fazang's interpretation of Indra's net, see Jones 2022.)

5.4. Evaluating Interpretations

The objection to the doctrine of mutual identity, from a previous section of this paper, is that mutual identity is inconsistent with interdependence. Fazang's response to this objection is to reject the objection's presumption that priority is determinate. The response to the same objection by the popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net is to accept the presumption that priority is determinate and reject Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. This difference makes Fazang's interpretation of Indra's Net superior to the popular interpretation.

The popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net accepts the second assumption of the objection to Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity. (The second

assumption is that nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other.) The reason is that the popular interpretation denies that anything is prior to anything else. If nothing is prior to another, then nothing prior to another arises in dependence upon that other. Whether the popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net accepts the first assumption of the objection—that anything with which another is identical is prior to that other—is ambiguous. The reason for the ambiguity is that the popular interpretation often does not clarify what it means by *identity*.

If the popular interpretation means what Fazang means by *identity*, then the popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net accepts the first assumption of the objection. This means that, if the popular interpretation means what Fazang means, then the popular interpretation accepts that mutual identity is inconsistent with interdependence. Because the popular interpretation accepts interdependence, it follows that if the popular interpretation means what Fazang means by *identity*, then the popular interpretation must reject Fazang's doctrine of mutual identity.

If the popular interpretation does not mean what Fazang means by *identity*, then it does not mean what Fazang means when he teaches that everything is mutually identical. But it is not clear what else it might mean to teach that everything is mutually identical. The meaning cannot be that everything is *numerically* identical. The reason is that Indra's Net depicts a realm that contains more than one thing. Francis Cook seems to presume that identity means being empty (Skt. *śūnya*; Ch. *kōng* 空). He claims, for examples, that when “looked at purely from the standpoint of essence, *dharmas* are identical in their emptiness” (Cook 1977, 72). David seems to endorse a similar presumption. He asserts, for example, that “Indra's net, in which everything functions as cause for everything else, is a more ‘positive’ and metaphysical way to restate Nāgārjuna's denial that anything has self-existence” (Loy 1993, 485, italics omitted). But *mutual identity* cannot mean being empty. The reason is that everything being empty is consistent with every conditioned thing arising in dependence upon only some others (*Limited Dependent Arising*) but Indra's Net depicts a realm in which every conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others (*Unlimited Dependent Arising*). (For a similar criticism, see Williams 1989, 132-133.)

There is no obvious alternative meaning of *identity*. If there is an alternative, consistency with the popular interpretation of the metaphor of Indra's Net must ensure that when one is identical with another, neither is prior to the other. The reason is that, if

a meaning does not ensure this, then the first assumption of the objection to mutual identity will be true. If the first assumption is true, then the popular interpretation must accept that mutual identity is inconsistent with interdependence. But if the popular interpretation rejects the doctrine of mutual identity, it loses a theoretical justification for supposing that each conditioned thing arises in dependence upon all others (*Unlimited Dependent Arising*).

Abbreviations

AN *Āṅguttaranikāya* 增支部經典

Ch. Chinese

Dhp *Dhammapada* 法句經

MN *Majjhimanikāya* 中部經典

P. Pāli

Skt. Sanskrit

SN *Samyutta Nikāya* 相應部經典

T Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. *Taishō Shinshū Daizokyo* 大正新修大藏經 (Revised Tripiṭaka of the Taishō Period). <https://www.cbeta.org/>

References

- Allendorf, Fred W. and Bruce A. Byers. 1998. "Salmon in the Net of Indra: A Buddhist View of Nature and Communities." *Worldviews* 2, no. 1: 37-52.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2021. "Dependent Arising and Interdependence." *Mindfulness* 12: 1094-1102.
- Barnhill, David L. "Indra's Net as Food Chain." *Ten Directions* (1990): 20-29.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Bingenheimer, Marcus, Bhikkhu Anālayo, and Roderick S. Bucknell. 2013. *The Madhyama Āgama (Middle-Length Discourses), Volume I*. Moraga, CA: BDK America.

- Capra, Fritjof. 1975. *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Carter, John Ross, and Mahinda Palihwadana. 2000. *The Dhammapada*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chang, Garma C.C. 1971. *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hua Yen Buddhism*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Chödrön, Gelongma Karma Migme. 2001. *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom by Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)*. Pleasant Bay, NS: Karma Changchub Ling.
- Cleary, Thomas. 1983. *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Cook, Francis H. 1970. *Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines: An Annotated Translation*. Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Wisconsin.
- Cook, Francis H. 1977. *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Dhammajoti, Bhikkhu Kuala Lumpur. *The Chinese Version of the Dhammapada*. Colombo: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 1995.
- Einstein, Albert. 1961. *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Eliot, Charles. 2013. *Japanese Buddhism*. New York: Routledge.
- Fazang 法藏. *Commentary on the Flower Ornament Discourse (Huáyán jīng zhǐ guī 華嚴經旨歸)*. In T, volume 45, number 1871.
- Fazang 法藏. *Contemplations on Exhausting Delusion and Returning to the Source by Cultivating the Mysteries of Huayan (Xiū Huáyán ào zhǐ wàng jìn huán yuán guān 修華嚴奧旨妄盡還源觀)*. In T, volume 45, number 1876.
- Fazang 法藏. *Treatise on the Divisions within the One Vehicle Doctrine of Huayan (Huáyán yīchéng jiàoyì fēnqī zhāng 華嚴一乘教義分齊章)*. Also known as *Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan (Huáyán wǔjiào zhāng 華嚴五教章)*. In T, volume 45, number 1886.
- Garfield, Jay L. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅. *Connected Discourses (Samyukta Āgama 雜阿含經)*. T, volume 2, number 99.
- Chien-hsing Ho. 2014. "The Way of Nonacquisition: Jizang's Philosophy of Ontic Indeterminacy." In *A Distant Mirror: Articulating Indic Ideas in Sixth and Seventh*

- Century Chinese Buddhism*, edited by Chen-kuo Lin and Michael Radich, 397-418. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press.
- Holmsten, Elin and Ann Fisher-Worth. 2005. "Shifting Boundaries: An Interview with Ann Fisher-Worth." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 12, no. 1: 131-137.
- Holst, Mirja Annalena. 2021. "'To Be is To Inter-Be': Thich Naht Hahn on Interdependent Arising." *Journal of World Philosophies* 6: 17-30.
- Hopkins, Jeffrey. 1996. *Meditation on Emptiness*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Jones, Nicholas. 2022. "Interpreting Interdependence in Fazang's Metaphysics." *The Journal of East Asian Philosophy* 2, no. 1: 35-52.
- Keefe, Alice A. 1997. "Visions of Interconnectedness in Engaged Buddhism and Feminist Theology." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 17: 61-76.
- Lamotte, Étienne. 1993. "Three Sūtras from the Saṃyuktāgama Concerning Emptiness," *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, no. 1: 1-23.
- Loy, David. 1993. "Indra's Postmodern Net." *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3: 481-510.
- Macy, Joanna. 1991. *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- McMahan, David L. 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Middle-Length Discourses (Madhyama Āgama 中阿含經)*. In T, volume 1, number 26.
- Numbered Discourses (Ekottara Āgama 增壹阿含經)*. In T, volume 2, number 125.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu 2010. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Kandhi: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi. 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Nishitani, Keiji. 1982. *Religion and Nothingness*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Okakura, Kakasū. 1904. *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co.
- Olds, Linda E. 1992. Integrating Ontological Metaphors: Hierarchy and Interrelatedness. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 75, no. 2/3: 403-420.
- Olendzki, Andrew. 2010. *Unlimiting Mind: The Radically Experiential Psychology of Buddhism*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

- Owens, Alex. 2022. *Inventing Indra's Net: The Modern Construction of an Ancient Metaphor*. Ph.D. Dissertation: Lancaster University.
- Ram-Prasad, Chakravarthi. 2011. "Situating the Elusive Self in Advaita Vedānta." In *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, edited by Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, 217-238. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saussy, Haun. 2009. "Buddhist Modernism." Lecture, Fundacio CIDOB. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, January.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. 1997. "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4: 1-74.
- Shulman, Eviatar. 2008. "Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 2: 297-317.
- Siderits, Mark, and Shoryu Katsura. 2013. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Sopa, Geshe. 1984. "The Tibetan 'Wheel of Life': Iconography and Doxography." *The International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 7, no. 1: 125-145.
- Stalling, Jonathan. 2010. *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Suzuki, Beatrice Lane. 1981. *Mahayana Buddhism*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Takahashi, Ayako. 2002. "The Shaping of Gary Snyder's Ecological Consciousness." *Comparative Literature Studies* 39, no. 4: 314-325.
- Williams, David M. 1974. "The Translation and Interpretation of the Twelve Terms in the Paṭiccasamuppāda." *Numen* 21, no. 1: 35-63.
- Williams, Paul. 1989. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. New York: Routledge.
- Zhu Jiangyan 竺將炎 and Zhi Qian 支謙. *The Dhammapada (F ǎ jù jīng 法句經)*. In T, volume 4, number 210.
- Zukav, Gary. 1979. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. New York: Bantam Books.

