

Article

Syncretism in Exegesis: The Integration of Confucian Texts in Chengguan's Huayan Commentary

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Abstract: Commentarial literature constitutes a cornerstone in the edifice of Chinese Buddhism, providing critical exegesis of Indian Buddhist texts. This paper examines the pivotal role of Chengguan (738–839), the fourth patriarch of the Huayan school, revered for his extensive commentarial work on the Chinese translations of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Chengguan not only composed a written commentary but also engaged in discourses with the monastic and lay communities at Wutaishan, prompting the creation of a sub-commentary derived from these oral elucidations. The study posits that the composition of Chengguan's audiences, comprising Confucian-educated scholars and Buddhist monks, necessitated a pedagogical strategy that integrated Chinese intellectual traditions into the Buddhist narrative to enhance comprehension. This analysis focuses on Chengguan's citations of the *Analects*, showcasing how he interweaves Confucian maxims into the fabric of his commentary to illuminate Buddhist doctrines. The research articulates the method he employed to make the Buddhist texts resonate with a Chinese audience.

Keywords: Buddhist commentary; *Analects*; Chengguan; Huayan



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1. Introduction

The Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism is one of the distinct Chinese schools that emerged as a result of a specific Chinese interpretation during the adoption of Indian Buddhism. The fundamental teachings of the school were developed during the exposition and interpretation of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*, *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, one of the most extensive Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, which was presumably prepared as a compilation of the Mahāyāna teachings that were widespread at the time.¹ Similar to the masters of other exegetical schools of Indian works, the first masters of the Huayan school were scholar-monks who specialized in the interpretation of Buddhist works, often composing commentaries on the original scriptures that were longer and more complex than the original text itself.² In explaining individual expressions and exploring the connections between different parts of the *sūtra*, they developed a unique terminology that laid the groundwork for thoughts that were later summarized in independent, shorter treatises. These treatises later became the most important sources for understanding Huayan philosophy as their length and abstract summarizing nature made them relatively accessible to the contemporary reader, especially when compared with the several hundred pages of more technical commentaries.³

In Chinese Buddhism, commentaries have historically played a significant role. Most of the Chinese works preserved in the Buddhist canon are commentaries on Indian texts. Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), the fourth patriarch of the Huayan school, is also known as “the Master of Commentary (*Shuzhu* 疏主)” because he wrote several commentaries on the Chinese translations of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.⁴ According to the author's biographies, his first commentary titled *A Commentary on the Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, T. 1735; hereafter: *Commentary*) was written at Wutaishan in response to a request from local monks.⁵ In fact, a dedicated building was

even constructed for the purpose of his writing. The *Commentary* was completed between 784 and 787, after which the author took the time to explain it to the monks, nuns, and laypeople at Wutaishan. It was at this point that they requested further elaboration on his teachings. Chengguan supplemented his *Commentary* with oral explanations, which his disciples recorded, thus creating the sub-commentary titled *A Record of the Explanation on the Meaning of the Commentary on the Mahāvaiṣṭhīya Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Da fangguang fo huayan jing suishu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔, T. 1736; hereafter: *Record*). His biography sheds light on the role of commentaries in Buddhist practice. These works are meant to clarify the Buddhist *sūtras* for believers and, therefore, were used as tools for Buddhist teaching and proselytizing.

Throughout his life, Chengguan expounded the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* fifty times. Having gained great fame, he became a teacher to emperors and was recognized as a religious leader. At the request of leading officials and Confucian scholars of his era, he also wrote shorter essays to summarize the teachings of the Huayan school.

It can be assumed that among the audience of the *Commentary* were scholars educated in Chinese classical works and monks who had received a Confucian upbringing before joining the Buddhist community. An appropriate method of Buddhist proselytizing relied on Chinese classics. An excellent example of this is the apologetic work titled *Mouzi Removing Doubts* (*Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論), in which a Confucian scholar named Mouzi, a defender of Buddhism, uses quotes from the Chinese classics to refute the arguments of Confucian scholars critical of Buddhism.⁶ He contends that the scholars are not acquainted with Buddhist works; thus, it would be pointless to quote them. Instead, he searched the Chinese classics for passages that support his own Buddhist stance against Confucian accusations.

Chengguan interprets the text of the *sūtra* and maps out the work's structure (*kepan* 科判), assigning distinct designations to each passage, thereby revealing the *sūtra's* hidden interconnections, which may not be immediately apparent to the reader, and shedding light on the rationale behind the order of the *sūtra's* chapters. In addition, he cites approximately 500 Buddhist *sūtras*, Indian, and Chinese commentaries, Chinese Buddhist treatises, and Chinese classics, including philosophical, historical, literary, and linguistic works.⁷ In the *Record*, he specifies the sources of his quotations, allowing for the identification of the texts he utilized in his *Commentary*. By drawing on both Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources, the author does not merely clarify the original text, but he also provides an encyclopedic knowledge to his audience.

In terms of interpreting the *sūtra*, these quotations serve the purpose of contextualizing the words of the Buddha, that is, situating them within the appropriate Buddhist and Chinese contexts. On the one hand, as Buddhism evolved, various teachings emerged, so the commentator places the text of the *sūtra* within the system of Buddhist doctrines. In explaining the text, he does not merely elucidate the contents of this single sacred scripture, which is generally not too challenging to comprehend, but he reveals to the believers the entire system of Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, by employing quotations from Chinese works, he brings the work, originally produced for a distant culture, closer to the Chinese audience, situates it within the Chinese context, and thus, significantly facilitates the understanding of foreign concepts.

However, it is important to emphasize that by utilizing quotations from Chinese classics, Chengguan does not place Chinese religions on an equal level with Buddhism. As he clearly declares, even the simplest Buddhist teaching is superior to the deepest teachings of non-Buddhist beliefs. Despite borrowing extensively from the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, he articulates a strict philosophical critique of them and underscores that Buddhism, which teaches the consequences of actions, is far superior to Daoism, which advocates spontaneity. In his *Commentary*, he asserts that he merely borrows the words of the classics but does not adopt their meanings; thus, he endows well-known expressions and sentences with new Buddhist significance.⁸

From the beginning of the spread of Buddhism in China, the followers of Buddhism found it relatively convenient to draw parallels between Buddhism and Daoism; indeed, many similarities can be found between them. It is not surprising that the two religions have had a significant influence on each other, borrowing extensively from one another. Yet at the same time, they were fierce rivals, competing for the devotion of followers and support from the imperial court. In Chengguan's *Commentary*, references to Daoist works are most frequent, but quotations from Confucian classics are also present. In this article, we demonstrate how he refers to one of the seminal books of Confucianism, the *Analects*, which preserves the sayings of Confucius, and how he embeds Confucius' words into his analysis explaining the text of the Buddhist *sūtra*. I have identified fifteen quotations from the *Analects* in Chengguan's *Commentary* and *Record*, eight of which I examine here. In order to form a complete picture of the method by which Chengguan employs Confucius's words, we must understand the context of the quotations by examining both the text of the *sūtra* and its interpretation.

2. Analysis of Chengguan's Text

2.1. "Ji Wenzi Always Thought Three Times before Taking Action" 季文子三思而後行 (Translation Modified from Lau 1992, p. 43)

One of the most famous chapters of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, which has been preserved in Sanskrit, is the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*. This *sūtra* describes the spiritual development of the bodhisattva, dividing it into ten stages or levels. The second stage is the *Separation from Defilement* (*ligou di* 離垢地), where the bodhisattva practices the ten virtuous deeds (*shi shanye dao* 十善業道): not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying, not speaking harshly, not speaking divisively, not speaking idly, not being greedy, not being angry, and not having wrong views.⁹ The seventh virtuous deed, not speaking idly, is introduced by the following text.

In terms of nature, a bodhisattva [at the level of being free from defilements] does not flatter. The bodhisattva always joyfully considers and examines their words so that they may speak at the appropriate time, speak the truth, have meaning in their words, speak properly, logically, and for the benefit of beings. They carefully choose their words according to the right time. Even during moments of entertainment, the bodhisattva always considers his words. How would he intentionally speak in a confused manner?

性不綺語，菩薩常樂思審語、時語、實語、義語、法語、順道理語、巧調伏語、隨時籌量決定語，是菩薩乃至戲笑尚恒思審，何況故出散亂之言！(T10, no. 279, p. 185b16–19)

Commenting on the last two sentences, Chengguan writes:

"Even during moments of entertainment, the bodhisattva always considers his words"; therefore, the bodhisattva is constantly blissful. He thinks three times before speaking, so his speech is not disorderly.

戲笑尚恒思審，是以菩薩常樂。三思而後言，則無散亂矣。(T35, no. 1735, p. 773c15–16)

In the *Record*, Chengguan identifies the phrase "thinks three times before speaking" as a quote taken from the *Analects*. The original text in the *Analects* reads as follows:

Ji Wenzi always thought three times before taking action. When the Master was told of this, he commented, "Twice is quite enough." (The translation is modified from Lau 1992, p. 43)

季文子三思而後行。子聞之、曰。再、斯可矣。

Chengguan modified the text of the *Analects* by replacing the character for "taking action" (*xing* 行) with the character for "speaking" (*yan* 言) to better align the quote with the *sūtra* text. Furthermore, according to the original text, Ji Wenzi thinks three times about everything, but Chengguan interprets the three as referring to three things that the bodhisattva considers before speaking. These are teaching conversion to awaken faith in be-

ings, teaching Buddhist doctrines to make beings understand the Buddha's teachings, and finally, teaching Buddhist precepts so that beings can realize Buddhist practice. In Chengguan's interpretation, the bodhisattva never speaks unnecessarily because when he speaks, it is always for the sake of Buddhist teachings—to convert beings to Buddhist faith, make them understand Buddhist doctrines, and encourage them to engage in Buddhist practice.

The “thinks three times before speaking” comes from the *Analects*. “Briefly, we can speak of three things” means the following: 1. Teaching conversion to awaken faith; 2. Teaching doctrines to make them understand; 3. Teaching precepts for the realization of practice.

三思而後言者，出論語。略說有三者：一教化生信，二教授生解，三教誡成行。(T36, no. 1736, p. 473c25–27)

2.2. “The Master Said, ‘Barbarian Tribes with Their Rulers Are Inferior to Chinese States without Them’” 夷狄之有君不如諸夏之亡也 (Lau 1992, p. 19)

In the beginning of the chapter on the ten stages, the bodhisattva Diamond Treasury (*Jin'gang Zang* 金剛藏) lists the names of the ten stages but does not elaborate on them. The assembly of bodhisattvas desires a detailed explanation, wondering why Diamond Treasury does not provide it. In response, Diamond Treasury explains that this teaching is very profound and difficult to understand, fearing that it may cause suffering to those who are unable to comprehend it. Subsequently, the bodhisattva Moon Liberation, along with all bodhisattvas, requests a detailed explanation of the ten stages. The Buddha radiates light from his eyebrows, blessing the bodhisattvas, and under this influence, Diamond Treasury begins to elaborate on the ten stages. Chengguan comments on this part as follows:

In the request, three individuals make separate appeals. Hence it divides into three stages. First, Moon Liberation bodhisattva; second, the assembly; third, the Tathāgata. The reason for asking three times is to reveal the profound and mysterious nature of the teaching and to request to hear the explanation. The leader of the bodhisattvas discloses that they have the appropriate capacity and desire for the teaching. The teacher of conversion, the Buddha, encourages, completing the process. If the Dao is great, it surpasses the capacity of those who do not possess it (*dao da jian wang* 道大兼亡); hence the need to request the teaching so that the response is adequate for the one who asks.

請中三家請殊，即分三段。謂初解脫月請，二大眾請，三如來請。所以要三家者，顯法深妙，令聞解故。眾首顯揚，當機渴仰。化主加勸，事方周故。道大兼亡，法應請故，為順請主。(T35, no. 1735, p. 744b7–11)

In the *Record*, Chengguan explains the expression *dao da jian wu* 道大兼亡 by stating that where the Dao is insignificant, individuals can manage on their own, while where the Dao is great, individuals surpass those who lack it. As evidence, he quotes a passage from the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘Barbarian tribes with their rulers are inferior to Chinese states without them’” (Lau 1992, p. 19). Here, the passage evidently serves to illustrate that the teaching of the ten stages is difficult to understand, and many are not suitable to hear it, similar to how barbarians may not comprehend Chinese ethical teachings, which still maintain order in Chinese states even without a king on the throne.

It is interesting to note that Chengguan mentions, in the context of the *jianwu* 兼亡 expression, that the heart (*xin* 心) element is missing from the character *wu*, signifying “none.” He continues by suggesting that if it included the heart element, it would be *jianwang* 兼忘, from the *Zhuangzi*, meaning “forget both”, the forgetting of oneself and others (*zita liang wang* 自他兩忘). This draws an association with the *Zhuangzi*'s “The teacher who is the ultimate ancestor” chapter, which states that fish forget each other in the waters of rivers and lakes, and that people forget each other when dwelling in the Dao. Finally, he notes that this reference has a very deep meaning, but it is not used in that sense here. The *Zhuangzi*'s *jianwang* 兼忘 expression from the “Heavenly revolution” chapter was likely well known

among the literati audience, being similar to the *jianwu* 兼亡 expression in the *Commentary*, and Chengguan draws attention to this difference (Mair 1994, p. 132).

If the Dao is small, then people can manage with it on their own; if the Dao is great, then [those who possess it] surpass those who lack it. In the character *wu*, the heart element is absent, therefore its meaning is “none.” It surpasses those who do not possess the Dao. Hence, the *Analects* states: “The Master said, ‘Barbarian tribes with their rulers are inferior to Chinese states without them’” (Lau 1992, p. 19). If we add the heart element to the character, it becomes the two characters for “forgetting everything” (*jianwang* 兼忘), originating from *Zhuangzi*. It means forgetting oneself and others, as in “men forget all about each other in the lore of the way, fish forget all about each other in the Yangzi and the Lakes” (Graham 1981, p. 90). Although it has a profound meaning, it is not used in that sense here.

道微則自濟，道大則兼亡。亡字無心，此訓無也。兼於無道之人。故論語云：「夷狄之有君不如諸夏之亡也。」若加於心，兼忘兩字出於莊子，意於自他兩忘。若人相忘於道術，魚相忘於江湖。雖有深意，非此所用。(T36, no. 1736, p. 429a13–19)

2.3. “Nan Rong Repeated over and over Again the Lines about the White Jade Sceptre” 南容三復白圭 (Lau 1992, p. 97)

In the eighteenth chapter of the *sūtra*, “Explanation of the teaching”, the bodhisattvas are praised for contributing to the sustenance of the Buddha, the teachings, and the Buddhist community through their activities. Regarding their actions, it states:

The bodhisattvas thus embellish the three precious jewels; all their actions are flawless, dedicating every deed to omniscience. Therefore, their actions on all three levels (physical, verbal, mental) are impeccable (*wu xiadian* 無瑕玷). Being impeccable, all their virtuous deeds, every action, the conversion of beings, and the teaching of appropriate doctrines to beings, right up to a mere thought, are entirely faultless. The wisdom of skillful means guides them. All of these point towards the wisdom of omniscience, and none are superfluous.

菩薩如是紹隆三寶，一切所行無有過失，隨有所作，皆以迴向一切智門，是故三業皆無瑕玷。無瑕玷故，所作眾善，所行諸行，教化眾生，隨應說法，乃至一念，無有錯謬，皆與方便智慧相應，悉以向於一切智智，無空過者。(T10, no. 279, p. 98a4–9)

In his *Commentary*, Chengguan analyzes the term “impeccable” as follows:

The internal ailment (*bing* 病) of jade is referred to as a crack (*xia* 瑕). A crack means that the body of the jade is broken. Its external ailment is called a blemish (*dian* 玷). A blemish means that its color is stained. Because what it wants to express is that there can be no fault, neither outside nor inside, in the threefold action. The blemish on white jade can still be polished away. However, there is nothing to be done about the blemish of the threefold action.

玉之內病曰：瑕，瑕謂體破。外病曰：玷，玷謂色污。以顯三業內外無失故。白珪之玷尚可磨也。三業之玷不可為也。(T35, no. 1735, p. 653b22–25)

In Chengguan’s explanation, he suggests that, in the case of jade, small flaws arising from contamination can still be rectified through polishing. However, in the case of bodhisattvas, even the slightest error cannot be found in their actions. In the *Record*, Chengguan indicates that he borrows (*jie* 借) this part from the *Analects*, although he only partially quotes it. The entire passage from the *Analects* reads:

Nan Rong repeated over and over again the lines about the white jade sceptre. Confucius gave him his elder brother’s daughter in marriage. (Lau 1992, p. 97)

南容三復白圭。孔子以其兄之子妻之。

He then explains that in the Mao tradition of the *Book of Odes* (*Mao shi* 毛詩), compiled by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), this text is found in the “Yi” 抑 poem, which Zheng Xuan deemed important, possibly because Confucius himself referred to it. (Knechtges 2014) The verse suggests that a flaw (*dian* 玷) in jade can still be corrected through polishing, but if one makes errors in speech, it cannot be rectified. Chengguan refers to Zheng Xuan’s work, *Correct Meaning of the Mao Poems* (*Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義), where the term *dian* is explained as incomplete (*que* 缺), which differs from Chengguan’s interpretation as a kind of contamination, but both agree that this flaw can still be corrected. Finally, Chengguan notes that the *Commentary* does not quote the entire verse, as he replaces the original term for speech (*yan* 言) with the threefold actions. This adjustment aligns better with the *sūtra*’s text, which discusses the threefold action of bodhisattvas. In this section, Chengguan begins with an explanation of a single word in the *sūtra*, then refers to the *Analects* and reinterprets a verse from the *Book of Odes* to make it applicable to the Buddhist text, emphasizing that there can be no errors in the bodhisattvas’ threefold action:

We borrow from the *Analects* when we say that Nan Rong repeatedly returned to the lines about white jade. This text is part of the Mao tradition of the *Odes* in the “Yi” poem. While reading the *Book of Odes*, Nan Rong, upon reaching this section, read it multiple times. Therefore, Zheng deemed this part important.

“A blemish on the white jade
Can still be polished away;
A blemish on these actions
Cannot be removed at all.” (Lau 1992, p. 97)

According to the Mao tradition of the *Odes*, the term “blemish” (*dian* 玷) means incomplete (*que* 缺). Now, the *Commentary* uses only part of the verse, so we add the threefold action.

此借論語，說：「南容三復白珪」。謂毛詩抑篇文也。南容誦詩，至此三復讀之。故鄭重也。「白珪之玷，尚可磨也，斯言之玷，不可為也。」毛詩傳云。「玷缺也。」今疏側用故加三業。(T36, no. 1736, p. 315a22–26)

2.4. “Zizhang Was Studying with an Eye to an Official Career” 子張學干祿 (Lau 1992, p. 15)

In the “Vairocana” chapter, the Buddha expounded all the teachings of all previous Buddhas in order to reconcile all beings. As a result, the bodhisattva named Very Powerful Light, present in the assembly, attained various radiant brilliances. Each light has a distinct name; the name of the second light is “the brilliance of wisdom, which is found in the initial thought of enlightenment that encompasses all teachings.”¹⁰ Commenting on the name of this light, Chengguan says:

The brilliance of the great awareness of wisdom means that the successive causes and effects are already present in the initial consciousness. In short, it has three aspects. 1. The later cause is acquired from the beginning; hence it is said that everything is contained within it. When religious practice sets out with the first step, “the future position is already included in the learning.” 2. Bodhi means thinking correctly about suchness (*zhenru* 真如). Suchness encompasses all dharma. 3. The appearance of the three virtues (*sande* 三德): the initial and the subsequent completely merge. When a bodhisattva takes the vow, he experiences perfect enlightenment.

大心智明，謂後後因果，皆入初心。略有三義：一、後因初得故，言一切悉入。若修塗至在初步，學者祿在其中。二、菩提直心正念真如，真如門內攝一切法。三者、三德開發，初後圓融。初發心時便成正覺故。(T35, no. 1735, p. 586b11–16)

Here, explaining the name of this light, Chengguan refers to another very famous passage of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, which states that the bodhisattvas at the beginning of their religious practice, who are generating the thought or determination of enlighten-

ment, experience enlightenment, which means that this early stage of practice includes all the causes and results of later stages. When the thought of bodhi is created, the mind focuses on *tathatā*, or suchness, which is the real state of all existent dharmas. Therefore, it includes all dharmas, as is claimed by the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*, the seminal Chinese Buddhist treatise.¹¹ In this passage, Chengguan borrows the words from the *Analects*: “the future position is already present in the learning.” In his *Record* he provides the whole passage of the *Analects* with Zheng Xuan’s commentary.

The later can be attained through the initial; hence we say it is contained in the beginning. In learning, the later position is inherent. This meaning is the same as that which we mentioned earlier. According to the *Analects*: “Zizhang was studying with an eye to an official career. The Master said, ‘Use your ears widely but leave out what is doubtful; repeat the rest with caution and you will make few mistakes. Use your eyes widely and leave out what is hazardous; put the rest into practice with caution and you will have few regrets. To make few mistakes and to have few regrets in action: therein lies an official career’” (Lau 1992, p. 15). [Zheng’s] commentary says, “To act here means to seek, and the official payment refers to the official position. Although one does not attain the office yet, he is on the path of an official.” In this sense, the official position is obtained later, but due to learning, it is acquired, so it is found in the process of learning. This is the meaning in all sacred texts and commentaries.

後由初得故曰在初。學者祿在其中矣。意亦同於上。即論語：「子張學干祿。子曰：多聞闕疑，慎言其餘則寡尤。多見闕殆，慎行其餘則寡悔。言寡尤行寡悔，祿在其中矣。」注曰：「干求也。祿位也。雖未得祿，得祿之道也。」故得祿在後，由學而能得故居學中。此上一義通諸經論。(T36, no. 1736, p. 207a24–b2)

Based on Zheng Xuan’s commentary, Zizhang studied in order to seek a job as an official, but Confucius informed him that he could receive an office through proper speech and action. However, Chengguan explains that “the office is included” (*lu zai qi zhong* 祿在其中), as he receives an office in or due to learning (*ju xue zhong* 居學中). Consequently, receiving a position as an official in the future depends on learning; in other words, his potential to become an official is included in the process of learning. This is very similar to the bodhisattva, whose final enlightenment is included in his initial generation of the thought of enlightenment. It is interesting to see Chengguan’s endeavor to reinterpret the passage of the *Analects* in order to associate it with the meaning of Buddhist scripture.

2.5. “They Can Be Summed Up in One Phrase” 一言蔽之 (Lau 1992, p. 11)

In the “Vairocana” chapter, after the first Buddha passed away, the second Buddha, named King Adorned with Prajñā’s Excellent Eyes (*Boluomi shanyan zhuangyan wang* 波羅蜜善眼莊嚴王), appeared in the world. At that time, a youth named Great Powerful Light saw that the second Buddha had attained enlightenment and demonstrated his supernatural powers. As a result, the youth received and understood the 10,000 teachings, including the following 10: the *samādhi* of mindfulness of the Buddha (*nianfo sanmei* 念佛三昧, *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*); the *dhāraṇī* (*tuoluoni*, 陀羅尼); great compassion (*daci* 大慈, *mahā-maitrī*); great mercy (*dabei* 大悲, *mahā-karuṇā*); great joy (*daxi* 大喜); great renunciation (*dashe* 大捨); *prajñā-pāramitā* (*bore boluomi*, 般若波羅蜜); supernatural powers (*shentong*, 神通, *abhijñā*); eloquence (*biancai*, 辯才, *pratibhāna*); and the brilliance of wisdom (*zhiguang*, 智光). Each of these ten teachings has its own name; among them, the first one, the *samādhi* of mindfulness of the Buddha, is called the Infinite Gate of Oceanic Treasury (*wubian haicang men*, 無邊海藏門).¹² Chengguan explains this *samādhi* as follows:

Infinite excellent virtues arise from the remembrance of the Buddha. This gate is profound and vast. Why? Contemplating on the body of Dharma-nature, one can realize the truth of suchness. Contemplating on the merit-body, infinite merit arises. Contemplating the primary and secondary characteristics of the Buddha’s body, infinite distinctive qualities can be realized. There is no obstacle that does

not cease, and there is no merit that does not arise. “Summarizing in one phrase”: everything comes from the remembrance of the Buddha. One can attain enlightenment through this gate, which is why it is called a gate. The description of this gate is inexhaustible.

無邊勝德由念佛生故。此一門深廣蘊積。何者？念法性身，則契如理。念功德身，成無邊德。念相好身，證無邊相。障無不滅，德無不生。一言蔽諸，總由念佛。從此通悟，所以稱門。即此一門說不可盡。(T35, no. 1735, p. 587a1–6)

The first teaching that the youth Great Powerful Light receives is the *samādhi* of remembering the Buddha, which first appears in the Mahāyāna *sūtra* titled *Sūtra on the Samādhi for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present* (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經; *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*). In this *sūtra*, which is the earliest source of the Amitābha cult, Amitābha encourages practitioners who wish to be reborn in his Buddha-land to always think of him.

The practice of mindfulness of the Buddha is closely related to the Amitābha cult, but Chengguan does not mention Amitābha in his *Commentary*, presumably because the central figure in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* is Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha. He refers to the physical appearance of the Buddha using the expressions “body of Dharma-nature” (*faxing shen* 法性身) and “merit body” (*gongde shen* 功德身) indicating the extraordinary excellence of the Buddha’s body. Through this, the practitioner can understand the deepest truth, such as thusness (*ruli* 如理), and attain all merits. By contemplating the thirty-two primary and eighty secondary characteristics of the Buddha’s body, the practitioner can acquire these excellent qualities. All obstacles will be eliminated, and he will attain all merits. Every goal of the Buddhist religious practice can be achieved by contemplating the Buddha’s body. Therefore, he says that “everything can be summarized in one phrase” (*yiyan bi zhu* 一言蔽諸)—mindfulness of the Buddha.

In his *Record*, Chengguan refers to the *Mahāvaiṣṭya-mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra-bhadrāpāla-parivarta*, which is a version of the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* translated into Chinese by Jñānagupta in 595 (See Harrison 1990, pp. xv–xvi), saying that Buddha claimed that all merits originate from the practice of mindfulness of the Buddha. Next, he explains that “everything can be summarized in one phrase” (*yiyan bi zhu* 一言蔽諸),¹³ which comes from the *Analects*, and he quotes the relevant passage from the *Analects*. The passage underlies that the famous Chinese Classic the *Book of Odes* can be summarized in one phrase from Ode 297: “Swerving not from the right path.” This must refer to proper moral conduct in the Confucianist context, which should be regarded as the most important religious practice according to Confucius. Indeed, this can be parallelly asserted with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness of the Buddha, which is considered the foremost practice in Buddhism according to the *sūtras’* testimony, and ultimately, all merits arise from this practice. Chengguan quotes Bao Xuan’s commentary for this passage: “this means ‘returning to the right path.’” However, he does not mention the commentator’s name.

In the *Mahāvaiṣṭya-mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra-bhadrāpāla-parivarta* (*Da fangdeng daji jing xianhu fen* 大方等大集經賢護分), various merits are discussed in great details, and when inquiring about their causes, Buddha responds that all merits arise from mindfulness of the Buddha. The expression “summarizing this in one phrase” comes from the *Analects*. The Master said, “The Odes are three hundred in number. They can be summed up in one phrase, Swerving not from the right path” (Lau 1992, p. 11). This means returning to the right path. Reciting the Buddha’s name can also be considered a phrase. If we highlight just one word, it is the character for “Buddha.” From the fourth patriarch onward, only the word “Buddha” is repeated.

賢護中廣列諸德，以徵其因。佛答皆從念佛而生。一言蔽諸者，即論語。子曰：詩三百一言以蔽諸。曰思無邪。謂歸於正也。念一佛號亦名一言。直取一言只一佛字故。自四祖唯稱佛言。(T36, no. 1736, p. 208a9–15)

In Chapter Eleven, titled “Purification Practice” (*Jingxing* 淨行), the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī provides practical advice to the bodhisattvas on how to increase their virtues. Much of the chapter describes what the bodhisattva should think about during daily activities and the wishes they should make for the benefit of other beings. For example, when practicing filial piety by serving their parents, they should wish that all beings serve the Buddha and nourish everyone. Before the practical descriptions, Mañjuśrī says that all the virtues of a bodhisattva come from using their mind well (*shanyong qixin* 善用其心) and then lists the ten virtues of the bodhisattva.

Sons of the Buddha! The bodhisattvas make good use of their mind, and as a result, they acquire all excellent virtues: [1] in understanding the Buddha’s teaching, there are no obstacles before their consciousness; [2] they dwell on the paths of the past, future, and future buddhas; [3] they stay with beings and never abandon them; [4] they are able to understand the distinguishing characteristics of dharmas; [5] they are free from all evil; [6] they possess all virtues; [7] they are like Samantabhadra, their physical appearance is most excellent; [8] all their actions and wishes are fulfilled; [9] there is no dharma in which they are not free; [10] they serve as the second master for all beings.

佛子！若諸菩薩善用其心，則獲一切勝妙功德；於諸佛法，心無所礙，住去、來、今諸佛之道；隨眾生住，恒不捨離；如諸法相，悉能通達；斷一切惡，具足眾善；當如普賢，色像第一，一切行願皆得具足；於一切法，無不自在，而為眾生第二導師。(T10, no. 279, pp. 69c25–70a2)

Chengguan explains in the *Commentary* that the cause of every virtue is that the bodhisattva uses his mind well, since the enlightened mind represents the most mysterious, pure, and divine level of consciousness, where all virtues spontaneously appear. Explaining the text, he emphasizes that the bodhisattva uses different life situations to help beings with their wishes, wishing for them to be freed from their desires and to practice the Buddha’s teaching. As a general cause of all virtues, he points out that a bodhisattva uses their mind well, then he lists one by one the ten virtues that the bodhisattva possesses.

The [*sūtra*] first names the cause, which is the following: “they make good use of their mind.” The enlightened consciousness is the divine and mysterious consciousness. If [the consciousness] is orderly, all virtues return. That “they make good use of it” means that when [the bodhisattva] experiences different situations, they skillfully, through their wishes, reach the mysterious [level], as we have explained, and thus obtain the virtues presented below. First, it summarizes, then names [the virtues] one by one. In summary, we say that the cause of every virtue is that they use their mind well. Why would it be difficult to obtain one hundred and ten ways of virtue? We can say: “one expression encompasses everything.”

先標其因，謂善用其心。心覺神明之奧心，正則萬德攸歸。言善用者，即後歷緣巧願觸境入玄如上所辨，則獲下顯所成德。初總後別，總謂一切勝妙功德，皆因用心，一百一十門德何足難就？可謂一言蔽諸。(T35, no. 1735, p. 614c24–29)

In the *Record*, Chengguan quotes the relevant paragraph of the *Analects* in full and provides Bao Xian’s commentary. Unlike in the previous example, the name of the commentator is included.

In the *Commentary*, “they can be summed up in one phrase” is the following quote from the *Analects*: “The *Odes* are three hundred in number. They can be summed up in one phrase, Swerving not from the right path”* (Lau 1992, p. 11). Bao [Xian’s commentary]: “The meaning of ‘bi’ is to correspond. It signifies returning to the correct [path]. The meaning of all (*zhu* 諸) is those [odes].”

疏：「一言蔽諸」，者即論語云：「詩三百一言以蔽諸，曰思無邪。」包曰：「蔽猶當也。謂歸於正。諸，之也。」(T36, no. 1736, p. 264b5–7)

2.6. “Do Not Worry about Your Lack of Official Position” (Lau 1992, p. 33). “Seek to Be Worthy of Appreciation 不患無位, 患己不立” (Analects 4: 14)

The introductory section of Chengguan’s *Commentary* is titled the “Enigmatic discussion” (*xuantan* 玄談), which extensively analyzes the teachings of the *sūtra* and situates it within the system of the Buddha’s teachings.¹⁴ This introductory section, which was later independently published and distributed, is divided into ten parts, with the seventh being the causes and conditions of the *sūtra*’s teachings (*jiaoqi yinyuan* 教起因緣). The seventh condition is the presentation of excellent practice (*shuo sheng xing zhe* 說勝行者), which involves describing the practice of the bodhisattva. Without referring directly to one of the main works of Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), the Tiantai school’s founder, the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe Zhiguan* 摩訶止觀), Chengguan quotes a passage from this work, stating that one who wishes to ascend to the marvelous level (*miaowei* 妙位) must engage in the practice of the bodhisattva.¹⁵ This level is the last of the fifty-two levels of the bodhisattva path, the level of marvelous awakening (*miaojue* 妙覺).¹⁶ Following this, the text quotes from the *Analects*: “The noble person does not worry about his official position but worries about not establishing himself” (*huan ji bu li* 患己不立).

We can say about excellent practice that if you want to reach the marvelous level, if you don’t act, you cannot rise there. Therefore “the noble man does not worry about not having a position, but worries about not establishing himself.”

七說勝行者, 欲登妙位, 非行不階。故君子不患無位, 患己不立。(T35, no. 1735, p. 504b28–c1)

This quote is not entirely identical to the traditional text of the *Analects*, which is as follows:

The Master said, “Do not worry about your lack of official position. Worry about what would earn you a position.” (Lau 1992, p. 33)

子曰。不患無位、患所以立。

This text is the traditional version. However, Wang Fu 王符 (90–165 AD), a Confucian philosopher of the Han dynasty, also uses the version quoted by Chengguan in his work *Comments of a Recluse*.¹⁷

In the *Record*, Chengguan provides the entire passage, but here too, this version appears. It is important to note that he refers to the *Analects* as an external source, as evidence taken from non-Buddhist matters (*waishi zheng* 外事證) to justify his assertion. He also includes the second part of the *Analects* passage, citing the commentary of Bao Xian 包咸 (6 BC–65 AD), who expresses a standpoint similar to Buddhist moral conduct: one should seek the path of virtue (*shandao* 善道) and practice virtues (*xing* 行).¹⁸ This interpretation aligns with how a practicing bodhisattva should practice virtues, thus attaining enlightenment, the highest spiritual level defined by Buddhism. Chengguan thus presents the second part of the passage and Baoxian’s commentary with the intention of supporting Buddhist teachings with Confucian words. In the original *Analects* quote, *wei* 位 refers to official position, while in the Buddhist context, it refers to the level of a bodhisattva. Hence the goal to be attained differs. Chengguan himself analyzes the text of the *Analects*, stating that the first part of the passage emphasizes practice acquired for the sake of position, while the other part points to practice performed for the sake of reputation. He adds that, in the Buddhist sense, the first part of the passage supports the *sūtra* text, as the sole aim of the bodhisattva is religious practice for the sake of other beings to achieve complete enlightenment, while reputation is not important to them.

The last two sentences are evidence taken from external matters, originating from Chapter Four of the *Analects*. The following two sentences of the quote are as follows: “Do not worry about the lack of appreciation of your abilities on the part of others. Seek to be worthy of appreciation” (Lau 1992, p. 33). Bao comments as follows: “If you seek the virtuous path and learn to practice it, then others will appreciate you.” We now refer to this as evidence. “Seek to be worthy of appreciation”, and you can establish yourself. All this pertains to practice. The

first two sentences illustrate that if the practice is fulfilled, then one attains the position. The second two sentences claim that if the practice is fulfilled, then one gains reputation. We only wanted to prove the acquisition of the position, so we quoted only the first part.

後二句引外事證, 即論語第二。彼下二句云: 「不患莫己知, 求為可知也。」包氏注曰: 「求善道而學行之則人知己。」今引證此。「求為可知, 」及所能立, 皆是行也。上兩句行成得位, 下兩句行成得名。今為證位故, 但引前耳。(T36, no. 1736, p. 21c13–18)

2.7. “The Wise Find Joy in Water; the Benevolent Find Joy in Mountains” 仁者樂山, 智者樂水 (Lau 1992, p. 53)

In the forty-third chapter, “The Abode of Bodhisattvas” (*Zhu pusa zhuchu* 諸菩薩住處), the bodhisattva King of Mind (*Xinwang* 心王) names twenty-two places where bodhisattvas reside. He mentions places corresponding to each of the eight cardinal directions and one more in the ocean, where he also lists the names of the bodhisattvas who teach the doctrine. He then goes on to give the names of another place in the ocean and twelve other cities or countries where bodhisattvas also live, but he does not give details of the leading bodhisattva. It is worth noting that this chapter is significant for the development of Chinese Buddhism as it asserts that Mañjuśrī resides on Cool Mountain (*Qingliang shan* 清涼山) in the northeast. According to historical records, this text was used in China to establish that Wutaishan, located in northeastern China and also known as Cool Mountain, was the same as the Cool Mountain mentioned in the *sūtra*, and therefore the abode of Mañjuśrī was in China.¹⁹ This served as the foundation for the development of a Mañjuśrī cult in China, and consequently, Wutaishan became a popular pilgrimage site for both Chinese and foreign Buddhists. Many pilgrims reported having encountered Mañjuśrī in some form. The *sūtra* begins the list of bodhisattva abodes as follows:

Towards the east, one can find the Mountain of the Immortals, a place where bodhisattvas have been residing since ancient times. At present, the current bodhisattva, Diamond Victorious, is accompanied by a retinue of three hundred bodhisattvas and teaches the Dharma.

佛子! 東方有處, 名: 仙人山, 從昔已來, 諸菩薩眾於中止住; 現有菩薩, 名: 金剛勝, 與其眷屬、諸菩薩眾三百人俱, 常在其中而演說法。(T10, no. 279, p. 241b8–11)

In his *Commentary*, Chengguan posits that the chapter enumerates a total of twenty-two locales. The first ten are seas and mountains, categorized according to the eight cardinal directions as listed in the text. He believes that these sites are inaccessible to the average person; hence, the text does not provide a detailed description of these areas. The strength of mountains and seas encompasses much; thus, they are regarded as emblematic of humanity and wisdom (*ren zhi* 仁智), because a mountain has the ability to retain and hold things (*neng zhi* 能止), while the sea brightly reflects (*neng zhao* 能照). Together, the mountain and sea symbolize the vastness and depth of wisdom. The text enumerates the names of cities and countries as the abodes of bodhisattvas to demonstrate that the compassion of bodhisattvas can be found everywhere. Finally, the first mentioned dwelling, the Mountain of Immortals, is identified with the mythological Penglai Mountain known in Chinese mythology.

There are twenty-two abodes. The first ten are mountains and seas in the eight directions. Since ordinary people have not visited these places, we do not know them precisely. Mountains and seas encompass things, and these are locations where benevolence and wisdom manifest, thus expressing the greatness and depth of great wisdom (*dazhi* 大智), capable of abiding and shining. The next twelve places are cities and various other residences, thoroughly detailed. This expresses that nothing is left out of great compassion (*dabei* 大悲); thus we know that there is no place where there is no bodhisattva. Now, speaking of [mountains and seas], the sixth place is a mountain in the sea, and the tenth is a cave

in the sea; the rest are all mountains. The first is the Mountain of the Immortals (*xianren* 仙人). According to tradition, this is Mount Penglai 蓬萊 in the Eastern Sea. If so, then it is also located in the sea.²⁰

有二十二處，前十依八方山海，以上下非凡至，故不明之。山海包藏，仁智棲止，表大智高深故，能止能照故。後十二處，城邑雜居，曲盡物機。表大悲無遺故，則知菩薩無不在矣。今初。第六是海中之山。第十海中之窟。餘皆是山。一仙人山者。相傳是東海蓬萊山。若爾則亦兼海。(T35, no. 1735, p. 859b26-c4)

In the *Record*, with regard to the notions of benevolence and wisdom, the author leans on an external classical saying (*ji waidian shuo* 寄外典說) and cites the following passage from the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains’” (Lau 1992, p. 53). The author then elucidates that this means (*yi yun* 意云) that the benevolent person favors the mountain for its solidity and steadfastness, while the wise take pleasure in the sea for its pure cleansing waters, which behaves in accordance with the circumstances: flowing when possible and halting when obstructed. He cautions that this understanding is purely symbolic, and it is not to be taken literally that the benevolent must dwell in the mountains, while the wise must be by the sea. It is reaffirmed that the mountain and the sea together symbolize wisdom, which is as grand as a mountain and as deep as the sea. Thus, the mountain retains, while the sea reflects.

In the *Commentary*, the phrase “mountains and seas encompass things” explains the meaning of mountains and seas. This sentence, from the perspective of different phenomena, states that the mountain encompasses, and the sea contains. The statement “the locations where humanity and wisdom manifest” relies on a saying from an external classical work. The Master said, “The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains” (Lau 1992, p. 53). This means that the benevolent loves mountains because mountains are solid and immovable; the wise loves water because its virtue is to shine brightly and cleanse, flowing or remaining still according to circumstances. Therefore, it does not mean that the benevolent should reside in mountains and the wise should be close to water. The phrase “thus expressing the greatness of great wisdom” refers directly to what [mountains and seas] signify. The great wisdom alone unites these two: great like a mountain and deep like the sea. It stands firm like a mountain and reflects like the sea.

疏山海包藏下釋山海意，此句約事山藏海納。言仁智棲止者，寄外典說。夫子云：「仁者樂山，智者樂水。」意云：仁者好山，如山之安固不動；智者好水，如水之德清鑑洗滌，流止從緣。故非要仁即住山，智即近水也。從表大智下，正約所表。唯一大智雙合上二。高如山，深如海。止即是山，照即是海。(T36, no. 1736, p. 600a28–b6)

3. Conclusions

Above, we have examined eight quotations from the *Analects* within Chengguan’s *Commentary* and *Record*, analyzing how he assimilates the words of Confucius into his own Buddhist context to elucidate the meaning of the Indian *sūtra*. The *Commentary* directly incorporates the words of the *Analects* into the interpretation of the *sūtra* without referring to the *Analects*, and only the *Record* clarifies that these words are taken from the *Analects*, often quoting the appropriate entire passage from the Confucian text. We were able to identify only those *Analects* quotations that the *Record* explicitly identifies; however, it is conceivable that the *Commentary* cites the *Analects* more frequently, but because these quotations are integrated into Chengguan’s text, they are difficult to recognize if not identified in the *Record*. It is also important to note that Chengguan does not only quote from the *Analects* but also cites from the classical commentaries on the *Analects*, demonstrating his proficiency in the classical works.

As Chengguan elaborates elsewhere in his *Commentary*, he borrows (*jie* 借) these classical quotations to convey the Buddhist meaning. He refers to these sayings as external classical sayings (*waidian shuo* 外典說). However, this also implies that these quotations

may not carry the same meaning in the Buddhist commentary as they did when Confucius originally expounded his teachings. He changes the words of the *Analects* or cites only the part that can be integrated into the Buddhist context. For example, when the phrase “he thinks three times before he acts” is applied to the text of the *sūtra* to show the bodhisattva’s way of careful speech, he deliberately changes the text to “he thinks three times before he speaks.”

At times, a single identical expression triggers Chengguan to seek parallels, as in the case of the word “blemish” (*dian* 玷) in the *sūtra*, which prompts him to associate with a section of the *Analects* that refers to the *Book of Songs*, where the same character appears. There, it implies that a gentleman’s words cannot contain falsehoods, while in Chengguan’s interpretation, it refers to the flawlessness of a bodhisattva’s actions. Similarly, the character for position or level (*wei* 位) in the original text refers to an official position, while Chengguan interprets it as the bodhisattva’s position or level on the path of spiritual development. In the same way that a scholar’s potential for official appointment can be anticipated during his education, a bodhisattva experiences enlightenment upon taking the bodhisattva vow. When referring to the abode of the bodhisattvas, the mention of mountains and seas in the *sūtra* leads him to quote a passage from the *Analects* where Confucius speaks of mountains and seas, emphasizing that these are symbols of humanity and wisdom, which are significant attributes of the bodhisattvas.

With the help of these quotations from the *Analects*, Chengguan might have intended to bring Buddhist thoughts closer to an audience educated on the classics, thereby placing the content of the Indian text within a Chinese context to facilitate the reception of foreign teachings. Despite his criticisms of Chinese philosophy articulated elsewhere, he acknowledged the authority of these words, referring to them as evidence derived from external teachings (*waishi zheng* 外事證), that corroborate the truth of his claims.

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Notes

¹ This is a Mahāyāna *sūtra* that was compiled in India or Central Asia.

² For the development of the Chinese Buddhist exegesis, see Kanno (2003, 2007), Kanno and Felbur (2015) and Ōchō ([1937] 1979). For the formation of the Huayan exegetical school, see Hamar (2022).

³ Thomas Cleary translated several important Huayan treatises; see Cleary (1983).

⁴ For a treatment of Chengguan’s biography and the translations of his major biographies, see Hamar (2002).

⁵ Wutaishan has been an important sacred site for East Asian Buddhist culture. For various aspects of this culture, see Andrews et al. (2020).

⁶ According to the introduction, the work titled *Mouzi lihuo lun* was written by a scholar named Mouzi (Master Mou) during the Later Han Dynasty period, following the death of Emperor Ling 靈 (189 AD). However, the earliest Buddhist catalog compiled by Daoan 道安 (312–385), the *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 總理眾經目錄, makes no mention of this work. Due to the lack of historical evidence, modern scholars often question the authenticity of the work. Henri Maspero dates it to around 250 AD, while Pelliot fully believes in the preface and thus dates the work to 190–194 AD; see Maspero (1901) and Pelliot (1920). However, Erik Zürcher believes that Mouzi is merely a fictional character created by the author of the work, who provided him with a credible historical background to make him seem real; see Zürcher (1959, p. 15). Based on the above, John Keenan concludes that it is possible that there was a historical figure named Mouzi who wrote this work, but it is also possible that it was written by an unknown author from the Han period under the pseudonym Mouzi; see Keenan (1994, pp. 6–7).

⁷ To identify the various quotations in Chengguan’s *Commentary*, see Chengyi (2001–2004).

⁸ For Chengguan’s critics against Chinese philosophy, see Hamar (1999). For further study on the influence of Daoist thought on Chengguan, see Kamata (1959) and Kojima (1998).

⁹ See Muller: Digital Dictionary of Buddhism.

¹⁰ See T10, no. 279, p. 55c4–18.

¹¹ For the latest English translation of this work, see Jorgensen et al. (2019).

- ¹² See T10, no. 279, p. 56b19–28.
- ¹³ Chengguan uses the character *zhu* 諸 (all) instead of *zhi* 之 (this, those), which is found in the original text of the *Analects*, presumably because he wanted to emphasize *all* merits.
- ¹⁴ For a translation and explanation of Chengguan’s preface to the introductory section, see Guo (2014).
- ¹⁵ T46, no. 1911, p. 11a22.
- ¹⁶ The fifty-two stages: ten stages of faith (*shixin* 十信), ten abodes (*shizhu* 十住), ten practices (*shixing* 十行), ten dedications of merit (*shihuixiang* 十迴向), ten grounds (*shidi* 十地), virtual enlightenment (*dengjue* 等覺, also known as *wugou di* 無垢地), and marvelous enlightenment (*miaojue* 妙覺).
- ¹⁷ <https://ctext.org/confucianism?searchu=%E6%82%A3%E5%B7%B1%E4%B8%8D%E7%AB%8B> (accessed on 20 January 2024). For Wang Fu, see Twitchett and Loewe (1986, pp. 789–94) and Kinney (1990).
- ¹⁸ Bao Xian’s commentary is the second most frequently cited in the Collected Explanation; see Makeham (2003, p. 381).
- ¹⁹ For the beginning of a Mañjuśrī cult in China, see Birnbaum (1983).
- ²⁰ Fazang identifies the Mountain of Immortals with Penglai; see *Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記 (T35, no. 1733, p. 391a10–11).

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