

Article

Scriptural Exegesis and Doctrinal Authority in Late Ming Buddhism: The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, Literati Interpretation, and Huayan Doctrinal Learning

Siyao Wang ^{1,*} and Qiyuan Wang ^{2,*}¹ Zhedong Culture Institute, Ningbo University, Ningbo 315211, China² The Institute for the Preservation of Chinese Ancient Books, Fudan University, Shanghai 200433, China

* Correspondence: guangxu1870zt814@126.com (S.W.); wqysamuel@126.com (Q.W.)

Abstract

During the late Ming period, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* 楞嚴經 became a prominent site for negotiating the relationship between scriptural interpretation, religious practice, and doctrinal authority. This article examines how literati, lay Buddhists, Chan-oriented readers, and scholastic monks participated in the interpretation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and how these interpretive activities reshaped the place of Huayan doctrinal learning (*Huayan yixue* 華嚴義學) within late Ming Buddhism. Rather than treating the sūtra merely as an object of commentary, the article argues that its reception reveals a broader contest over who could legitimately interpret Buddhist scriptures and define the proper relation between textual understanding and disciplined cultivation. Among literati readers, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* resonated with Yangming learning and Chan-oriented discourses of mind-nature (*xinxing* 心性), giving rise to modes of textual spirituality in which reading, intuitive insight, moral reflection, and claims to interpretive authority became closely connected. At the same time, monastic critics worried that such approaches risked detaching realization from precepts, practice, and doctrinal training. Against this background, Huayan doctrinal learning emerged as a crucial framework for interpreting the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and for reasserting the authority of doctrinal Buddhism. While Li Tongxuan's 李通玄 (635–730) Huayan thought appealed to literati and Chan-oriented circles because of its flexible synthesis of Huayan and Chan, some scholastic monks increasingly emphasized Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839) as a more systematic doctrinal authority. By tracing these intersecting debates, this article shows that late Ming interpretations of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* were inseparable from wider efforts to renegotiate the authority of Chan, literati exegesis, and Huayan doctrinal learning in Chinese Buddhism.



Academic Editors: Wenli Fan and Kai Sheng

Received: 17 March 2026

Revised: 20 July 2026

Accepted: 21 July 2026

Published: 29 July 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

Keywords: *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*; Huayan doctrinal learning; late Ming Buddhism; literati exegesis; doctrinal authority

1. Introduction

Before turning to the late Ming, it is necessary to situate the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* within its longer Chinese Buddhist reception. Although modern scholarship has debated the text's provenance, the sūtra was nevertheless received in China as an authoritative Mahāyāna scripture after its Tang-period circulation. Its appeal lay in its integration of issues central to Chinese Buddhist thought and practice, including mind, meditative vigilance, and the relation between sudden awakening (*dunwu* 頓悟) and gradual cultivation (*jianxiu* 漸

修). In Tang-Song Chan contexts, it provided scriptural support for discussions of the “true mind” (*zhenxin* 真心) and for reconciling sudden awakening with subsequent cultivation (Gong 2023, pp. 118–20). Its emphasis on precepts and deceptive meditative experiences also linked doctrinal reflection with disciplined practice. The late Ming fascination with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* thus intensified and reconfigured an authority the text had already acquired in Chinese Buddhism.

Against this longer background, the late Ming marked a new phase in the reception of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and Huayan thought, serving as paradigms of the integration between Chan and doctrinal Buddhism, as well as between practice and scholastic study, elicited an enthusiasm among late Ming literati and lay intellectuals far surpassing that shown toward other Buddhist texts. In a dream recounted by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) in 1599, he remarked: “The world knows the merit of reciting the *Diamond Sūtra*, but does not realize that the merit of reciting the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is even greater”¹ 世人知持誦《金剛》福德，不知持誦《楞嚴》福德尤大—a statement that may suggest that, at that time, the *Diamond Sūtra* enjoyed greater popularity within the scholarly elite. The contrast is suggestive, for the two scriptures invited different modes of literati reception. The *Diamond Sūtra* had long been valued for its concise prajñā teaching of non-abiding, the emptiness of characteristics, and the merit of recitation. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, by contrast, offered a more expansive field for reflection on mind, desire, cultivation, and the verification of religious insight. This difference helps explain why, in the late Ming, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* could become especially attractive to literati readers who approached Buddhist texts as resources for both philosophical understanding and self-examination. The truth is, during the period spanning the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1573–1620) through the early Qing dynasty, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* became the object of markedly increased attention within literati circles. Wu Jiang has documented no fewer than forty-six commentaries and subcommentaries on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* authored by literati during this period (Wu 2008, p. 25)—an unparalleled number that far exceeds those associated with any other Buddhist scripture in literati exegetical output.

In literati commentaries, this fascination with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* tended to take a Chan-oriented form; yet in the broader landscape of late Ming Buddhism, Chan remained deeply intertwined with doctrinal traditions. This interactivity manifested not only in the influence of Chan on other traditions such as Tiantai, Huayan, and Pure Land, but also in the reciprocal impact of Tiantai, Huayan, Yogācāra, and Pure Land teachings on Chan itself (Chen 2007, p. 206). Among these doctrinal traditions, Huayan doctrinal learning² (*huayan yixue* 華嚴義學) was notably well received among the literati and lay elites, achieving a level of acceptance not matched by other exegetical systems. Several key questions thus arise: How did late Ming literati express their particular affinity for the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*? Why did they choose this text as a primary object of interpretation? What conditions led to the predominance of Huayan thought within literati Buddhist discourse? And how, more broadly, was the relationship between Chan and doctrinal traditions configured within literati and lay Buddhist circles?

These questions cannot be answered by treating the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* as an isolated object of commentary. In the late Ming, the sūtra’s prominence among literati was closely bound up with changing claims about who could read Buddhist scriptures with authority, how realization should be related to discipline, and what place doctrinal learning should occupy in a Buddhist world increasingly shaped by Chan idioms. The following discussion therefore moves from literati readings of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* to the Huayan frameworks through which late Ming Buddhists sought to authorize, correct, or redirect such readings.

2. Why the Literati Chose the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*: Doctrinal and Cultural Dimensions

The strong preference for the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* among late Ming literati was closely linked to its underlying theory of mind-nature (*xinxing* 心性). The terms *xin* 心 and *xing* 性, however, were hardly exclusive to either the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* or Yangming learning. They circulated widely in Buddhist scholastic discourse as well as in Neo-Confucian metaphysics. Their relevance here lies in the late Ming context in which these shared terms enabled literati readers to approach the sūtra through a vocabulary already familiar from Confucian learning and self-cultivation. According to Araki Kengo 荒木見悟, the *Śūraṅgama* occupies a particularly prominent position in the evolution of Chinese Buddhist thought—not only because its idealist orientation (*weixinlun* 唯心論) resonated with lay Buddhist sensibilities, but also because its philosophy of harmonization and integration played a key role in the convergence of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions (Araki 1984, pp. 245–74). For lay Buddhists, this idealist orientation was especially attractive because it located the possibility of Buddhist understanding in the clarification and transformation of mind. Such an approach allowed Buddhist learning to be pursued through reading, reflection, and self-cultivation while remaining compatible with lay social life.

There is little doubt that the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*'s doctrinal core both reflected and actively contributed to the Sinicization of Buddhism. By the late Ming, it had come to be regarded as one of the canonical texts (*neidian* 內典) within the Chan tradition. In his *Ke qixin lun zhijie hou xu* 刻起信論直解後序 (Postscript to the Annotated Straight Explanation of the *Awakening of Faith*), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623) emphatically underscored the importance of textual study for Chan practice, listing the *Śūraṅgama*, *Laṅkāvatāra*, and *Awakening of Faith* as the legitimate “correct path” (*zhengdao* 正道) for cultivating Chan. He argued that such engagement was essential to ensure that “Chan does not fall into heterodox paths.”³ 禪不墮邪途。

In contrast to Hanshan Deqing's emphasis, the literati's interest in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* likely did not stem from an investigation into the “proper path of Chan cultivation” 習禪正道. At the level of philosophical content, the sūtra's central focus on Tathāgatagarbha aligned closely with the mind-nature discourse found in Yangming philosophy and its intellectual legacy. During the Wanli era and thereafter—precisely the period in which commentarial and sub-commentarial works on the *Śūraṅgama* proliferated among the literati—Yangming Learning had already become the dominant current in Confucian thought. Many literati laymen who produced commentaries on the sūtra were directly affiliated with the intellectual lineage of Wang Yangming. In describing the attitude of Song-dynasty literati-lay Buddhists, Halperin coined the term “worldly devotion” (Halperin 2006, p. 4), referring to a mode of spiritual engagement grounded primarily in textual immersion and the affective pleasure it produced—standing in complementary contrast to devotional faith or ritualistic practice. Building on this concept, Wu Jiang characterizes the late Ming literati's appreciation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* in similar terms: their reading experience was shaped less by religious cultivation than by a preference for conceptual insight and the depth of philosophical abstraction found in the text (Wu 2008, p. 57).

This raises a key question: although both the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* were upheld as canonical texts within the Chan tradition, why did the late Ming literati exhibit far greater enthusiasm for the *Śūraṅgama*? Wu Jiang offers a compelling interpretive thesis centered on the figure of Ānanda 阿難. He argues that the *Śūraṅgama* unfolds around the episode of Ānanda's seduction by sensual desire—a narrative that portrays Ānanda as intellectually gifted yet morally weak in terms of *vinaya* and ascetic discipline. This characterization resonated deeply with the temperament and lifestyle of

late Ming literati, many of whom saw in Ānanda a reflective mirror of their own tensions between ethical ideals and worldly indulgence. In this sense, the literati were more inclined to project themselves into Ānanda's role, rendering the *Śūraṅgama* a text of heightened psychological intimacy and personal relevance (Wu 2008, p. 59). This psychological intimacy distinguishes the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* from the more aphoristic textual style of the *Diamond Sūtra*. Whereas the *Diamond Sūtra* repeatedly loosens attachment through formulas such as “one should produce a mind that does not abide anywhere”⁴ 應無所住，而生其心 and “all characteristics are deceptive”⁵ 凡所有相，皆是虛妄, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* draws readers into a narrative of failure, questioning, and correction. For literati readers, Ānanda's predicament gave the problem of mind a concrete dramatic form. A striking illustration of this mindset can be found in a remark by Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1548–1606), a prominent Ming literatus of the Wanli era, who once defended lax moral conduct with the rhetorical question:

Just as we keep a dozen concubines—how could that possibly hinder our rebirth in the Western Pure Land or our attainment of awakening? (Shen 2012, p. 586)

正如吾輩蓄十數婢妾，他日何害生西方、登正覺耶？

Furthermore, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*'s treatment of the relationship between gradual cultivation and sudden awakening—particularly its emphasis on sudden insight into ultimate principle (*liti dunwu* 理體頓悟)—resonated with tendencies associated with “wild Chan” (*kuang Chan* 狂禪) among post-Yangming thinkers. Yet the contrast between conceptual realization (*liwu* 理悟) and practical cultivation (*shixiu* 事修) should not be understood as a simple opposition between practice and the absence of practice. Many late Ming literati did speak of moral transformation, self-cultivation, and ethical refinement. Their tendency, however, was to relocate Buddhist practice into reading, reflection, moral self-examination, and the intuitive recognition of mind-nature. Monastic critics, by contrast, placed greater emphasis on more disciplined forms of cultivation, including precepts, meditation, Pure Land practice, ritual discipline, and doctrinal training. The tension therefore lay not in whether practice mattered, but in what counted as legitimate Buddhist practice and who had the authority to define it. This distinction helps explain Wu Jiang's characterization of late Ming literati religiosity as “textual spirituality”—a form of religious experience grounded in textual engagement rather than ritual or monastic discipline (Wu 2008, p. 53). In terms of practice, this orientation could also take the form of an attraction to *kanhua Chan* 看話禪 (contemplative inquiry based on critical phrases), which used textual elements as meditative triggers. Such a mode of practice appealed to literati not only because of its textual medium, but also because it did not require the same degree of submission to patriarchal Chan authority. As a result, “patriarchal Chan” (*zushi Chan* 祖師禪), though dominant in monastic communities, never gained widespread acceptance within the scholar-official class of the late Ming.

By the time of Ouyi Zhixu's 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) Chan reform, often referred to as “Zhixu Chan”, he advocated replacing “Patriarchal Chan” or “gong'an Chan” (公案禪) with what he termed “Tathāgata Chan” (*rulai Chan* 如來禪)—a form of Chan centered on the Buddhist scriptures themselves rather than the words of Chan patriarchs. This reformist orientation was directly grounded in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, which Zhixu upheld as a core doctrinal authority for meditative practice (Shengyan 聖嚴 1988, p. 408). Given the intellectual and monastic environment in which Zhixu lived—and the various excesses he sought to correct—it is difficult to argue that his reforms were unaffected by the literati and lay Buddhist milieu of the late Ming. As Chen Yongge 陳永革 has observed,

The so-called “wild Chan” followers of the late Ming excessively emphasized ontological sudden enlightenment while neglecting the gradual cultivation of

meditative effort. This led to a monastic culture dominated by silent verification and withered practice, giving rise to widespread dysfunction within the Chan community. These trends provoked strong dissatisfaction among both senior monastics and lay Buddhists, ultimately resulting in a turn toward Chan grounded in scriptural verification, and the recovery of doctrinal foundations through texts—in other words, a return to the principle via the canon. (Chen 2007, p. 232)

Amidst this evolving religious-intellectual landscape, late Ming literati—particularly those in the Jiangnan region—gradually constructed a shared moral and spiritual world, in which concerns found in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* regarding the mind–body relationship, intention, and consciousness were linked to the practical project of “governing the mind” (*zhixin* 治心) as explored in Yangming philosophy (Chen 2009, p. 136). From Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) himself to later thinkers in the Taizhou 泰州 and Zhezong 浙中 schools, many scholar-officials and literati displayed strong interest in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*’s approaches to cultivation and self-transformation. One prominent figure of the Taizhou lineage, Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515–1588), explicitly drew parallels between the *Śūraṅgama* and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean), asserting that the former expressed the very “principle of daily human activity,” 人間日用之理, and that its teachings were fully consistent with the *Zhongyong*’s doctrine of “ming ze cheng” 明則誠之旨—the clarification that leads to sincerity.⁶

As followers of the Yangming school increasingly moved toward tendencies associated with “wild Chan”, their interpretations of Buddhist texts likewise began to take on unorthodox and stylized forms. Among the many literati who interacted with the renowned late-Ming poet-monk Xuelang Hong’en 雪浪洪恩 (1545–1608), one observes in their writings a fascination with moral refinement that gradually evolved into an aestheticized embrace of Chan-inflected qualities such as eccentricity (*pi* 癖), wildness (*kuang* 狂), foolishness (*chi* 痴), and awkward simplicity (*zhuo* 拙) (Xu 2006, p. 14). Monastic critics were alert to the danger that such modes of engagement could turn Chan into a matter of verbal display and cultivated taste. Hanshan Deqing, for example, complained,

Recent scholar-officials mostly prize what passes through the mouth and ears, indulging in talk as a matter of conversational display. They all regard Chan investigation as the highest matter, while looking down on Pure Land practice and failing to cultivate it. As a result, among our own followers, those who seek reputation mostly learn the ready-made phrases of the ancient worthies in order to sharpen their verbal facility. As this becomes the standard of mutual admiration, the Buddhist teaching declines day by day. Not only is genuine practice entirely absent; they even denounce Mahāyāna scriptures as mere words and refuse to approach them. In an age without clear-eyed spiritual teachers, there is ultimately no one able to turn back this wild current. This is greatly to be feared.⁷

近世士大夫，多尚口耳，恣談柄，都尊參禪為向上事，薄淨土而不修。以致吾徒好名之輩，多習古德現成語句，以資口舌便利。以此相尚，遂到法門日衰。不但實行全無，且謗大乘經典為文字，不許親近。世無明眼知識，卒莫能迴其狂瀾，大可懼也。

Hanshan’s criticism shifts the issue from literati style to religious practice. What concerned him was the ease with which Chan language could become a form of verbal capital: phrases of the ancient masters were learned for conversational fluency, while actual practice and scriptural study were neglected. Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615) expressed a similar concern through a recollection of his own early encounter with Chan discourse before ordination:

Before I entered the monastic life, I occasionally read the sayings of the Chan tradition and immediately tried to imitate them using emotional reasoning and conceptual thought. [I] once practiced this with a temple head monk during scripture copying, flailing left and right in dialogue—he found it exhausting. Several years after ordination, [I] encountered that same monk again at a small hermitage. During our conversation, he noticed that I was now wholly devoted to the Pure Land path and made no mention of Chan. Startled, he asked, “Your previous insight seemed quite extraordinary. Why have you now turned to something so lowly and mundane?” I replied with a smile: “As the saying goes, ‘A newborn calf does not fear the tiger.’ But one who truly understands the Dharma becomes cautious—do you understand this?” The temple master gave no reply.⁸

予未出家時，乍閱宗門語，便以情識模擬。與一座主書，左縱右橫，座主憚焉。出家數年後，重會座主於一宿菴，勞問間，見予專志淨土，語不及宗，矍然曰：“子向日見地超卓，今反卑近，何也？”予笑曰：“諺有之：‘初生牛犢不畏虎。’識法者懼，君知之乎。”座主不答。

This passage not only reveals Zhuhong’s personal transition from impetuous Chan enthusiasm to sober Pure Land discipline, but also subtly critiques the naive overconfidence often found among those who engage prematurely with Chan rhetoric without proper grounding in practice or doctrinal understanding. Clearly, monastics with deeper insight within the Chan monasteries tended to reject and worry about the literati’s aestheticized and playful approach to Buddhism.

Such criticisms did not arise in a vacuum. The literati tendency discussed here should be understood as a spectrum rather than as a single position. The following discussion therefore turns first to Tu Long, and then to Yuan Hongdao and Qian Qianyi, in order to show how literati Buddhists themselves negotiated the tension between conceptual realization (*liwu* 理悟) and practical cultivation (*shixiu* 事修). These figures do not represent identical attitudes toward Buddhist practice. Tu Long’s writings reveal the coexistence of aestheticized Chan and genuine concern for faith, practice, and meditative effort; Yuan Hongdao offers an internal literati critique of empty Chan rhetoric and the mutual confusion of Chan and Yangming learning; and Qian Qianyi attempts to reorient literati engagement with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* through Huayan doctrinal learning. The tension between *liwu* and *shixiu* was therefore not a fixed opposition between literati and monks, but a problem debated within literati Buddhist culture itself.

At the same time, this variety of attitudes did not prevent the formation of a broader and increasingly visible pattern. Buddhist scriptures and Chan idioms were often incorporated into literati modes of reading shaped by literary taste, textual connoisseurship, citation, conversation, moral reflection, and discourse on mind-nature. The literati attraction to the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was therefore not merely a matter of doctrinal interest in the abstract category of mind-nature; it belonged to a mode of Buddhist reception in which scripture functioned as a resource for moral reflection, religious self-understanding, and lay participation in the Buddhist interpretive field. Precisely because this pattern had become so visible, it generated different degrees of unease, criticism, and self-correction within literati culture itself. Tu Long’s 屠隆 (1543–1605) writings offer an especially revealing case of this ambivalence. He was widely respected for his poetry and essays, well connected within literati circles, and also an active lay Buddhist who participated in the publication of the Jiaying Canon 嘉興藏. His engagement with Buddhism was therefore not simply ornamental. Yet his writings also show how easily Buddhist language could be absorbed into a cultivated literati world of elegance, leisure, and aesthetic sensibility:

A clean desk, bright windows, fine incense, and aged tea—at times, [I] converse with a venerable monk about Chan. Beneath the bean trellis, beside a vegetable garden, in warm sun and gentle breeze, [I] listen to idle tales of ghosts from wandering storytellers.

To sit in meditation without realizing the mind—is to take bones for one’s task; hence Mazu warned against polishing tiles. To expound scripture without seeing one’s nature—is to live off musty paper; hence Bodhidharma faced the wall in silence.

The grass’s hue, the fragrance of flowers—ordinary visitors enjoy their charm; but when peach blossoms bloom and plum blossoms fall, the enlightened awaken to impermanence.

The Pure Land practitioner purifies the mind—within a single square inch, a lotus realm arises. The Chan practitioner realizes the Dharma—every inch of earth becomes a meditation seat.

To cling to emotions, mistaking bodily kinship for true selfhood—makes human ties difficult to sever. To seek the Way while identifying with both form and spirit—shows the ego has yet to dissolve.

Sticky taffy and greasy foods entangle like the river of craving; the blind leading the blind only perpetuates their fall into the sea of suffering. Who but the Mahāvīra can rescue them? If [one] understands that the principle admits of both sudden and gradual realization, then the Southern and Northern schools of Chan need not conflict. If [one] discerns that rise and fall depend on emotional and conceptual attachments, then the workings of karma—past and present—stand plainly revealed. (Tu 2011, pp. 373–74)

淨幾明窗，好香古茗，有時與高衲談禪；豆棚菜圃，暖日和風，無事聽閒人說鬼。

.....

坐禪而不明心，取骨頭為工課，馬祖戒於磨磚；談經而不見性，鑽故紙作生涯，達摩所以面壁。

草色花香，遊人賞其有趣；桃開梅謝，達士悟其無常。

修淨土者，自淨其心，方寸居然蓮界；學坐禪者，達禪之理，大地盡作蒲團。

立心而認，骨肉太親，則人緣難遣；學道而求，形神具在，則我相未融。

錫黏油膩，牽纏最是愛河；瞎引盲移，展轉投於苦海。非大雄氏，誰能救之？知事理原有頓漸，則南北之宗門不廢；升墮分於情想，則過現之因果昭然。

For Tu Long, Chan was certainly not merely an objectified phenomenon for aesthetic contemplation; indeed, the *Qingyan* includes numerous passages expressing genuine concern for faith, practice, and meditative effort. Moreover, he was deeply troubled by what he perceived as the empty discursiveness that plagued contemporary interpretations of Yangming philosophy.⁹ This makes the passage above especially revealing. Its opening image of “a clean desk, bright windows, fine incense, and aged tea” clearly places Chan conversation within a refined literati setting. Yet the passage does not remain at the level of elegant appreciation. Tu Long criticizes meditation that fails to clarify the mind and scriptural exposition that fails to see one’s nature; he also links Chan, Pure Land practice, sudden and gradual realization, and karmic causality within a shared framework of cultivation. His writing therefore shows the ambivalent character of late Ming literati Buddhist culture: Chan could be framed through leisure, taste, and literary sensibility, while still being connected to concerns about practice, faith, and doctrinal seriousness.

Tu Long is therefore best understood as a reflective participant within this culture: he shared in the literati tendency to aestheticize Chan, while also remaining alert to the need for faith, practice, and doctrinal seriousness. This reveals that the tendency to appreciate and aestheticize Chan had already become a deeply embedded feature of literati culture—one that can arguably be traced as far back as the Song dynasty. What distinguished the late Ming, however, was the intensification of this tendency, brought about by the convergence of political, economic, and Neo-Confucian—particularly Yangming—influences during the period. This embeddedness is important for the present argument, because literati engagement with Buddhist texts did not consist simply of isolated acts of reading. Rather, repeated practices of reading, citation, conversation, and commentary helped produce a shared, though loose, interpretive field. It is in this limited sense that the late Ming literati reception of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* may be understood in relation to theories of textual interpretation and collective self-understanding.

Tu Long is therefore best understood as a reflective participant within this culture: he shared in the literati tendency to aestheticize Chan, while also remaining alert to the need for faith, practice, and doctrinal seriousness. His case also suggests that late Ming literati engagement with Buddhist texts did not consist simply of isolated acts of reading. Repeated practices of reading, citation, conversation, preface writing, commentary, and participation in Buddhist publication projects helped create a shared but loose interpretive milieu. This milieu was not a fixed school, lineage, or organized religious community. It was a field of overlapping textual practices and social networks in which literati readers could claim competence in Buddhist discourse, negotiate their distance from monastic institutions, and test their religious self-understanding through canonical interpretation. In this sense, the late Ming literati reception of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* may be understood as a shared interpretive field and may be placed in dialogue with Ricoeur's account of canonical interpretation and communal self-understanding, as well as Fish's notion that textual meaning is shaped by shared interpretive practices.¹⁰

Many literati readers of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* approached Buddhism from positions shaped by varying degrees of distance from official service, examination success, or monastic training. For them, the sūtra's sustained concern with mind, delusion, desire, and disciplined cultivation offered a language through which literary learning, moral reflection, and religious self-understanding could be brought together. Through commentary on the sūtra, they could bring literary training and cultural authority into the Buddhist interpretive field, while also negotiating their distance from monastic institutions. Their engagement therefore reveals a convergence between social location and doctrinal interest: the sūtra's account of mind and cultivation resonated with literati who sought a Buddhist language for self-understanding and religious authority beyond ordinary official or monastic roles. Their innate cultural capital—including their status as members of the scholar-gentry class, their advanced literary skills, and their access to canonical texts—combined with the cultural influence of figures such as Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), who was venerated by some Chan monks as an awakened teacher¹¹, enabled them to assert symbolic authority within the Buddhist world, especially through the interpretation of canonical texts like the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and the *Diamond Sūtra*. Underlying this phenomenon was a deeper power dynamic between monks and literati. While the monks appeared to be the insiders of the monastic institution, in reality they were often discursively marginalized. Conversely, the literati—outsiders to the monastic system—were increasingly elevated as cultural authorities, sometimes even regarded as spiritual exemplars more than the monks themselves. It is precisely within this context that Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), a literatus and lay Buddhist whose self-positioning closely resembled that of Tu Long and Qian Qianyi, openly criticized

the speculative excesses in late Ming Chan Buddhism. Yuan is particularly significant because his criticism came from within the literati Buddhist milieu itself. He was not an external monastic critic of literati Buddhism, but a literati participant who had become acutely aware of the problems generated by the mutual appropriation of Chan and Yangming learning. Reflecting on the degeneration of Chan into empty rhetoric, Yuan placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the followers of Wang Yangming:

Let us begin with the more accessible texts. The four fascicles of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* are the very scriptures through which Bodhidharma transmitted the seal of the Chan lineage. Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* and Aśvaghōṣa's *Awakening of Faith* are texts wherein the second patriarchs continued to kindle the light of the Buddha's wisdom. The six-fascicle *Treatise on the Wanshan tonggui* (Unity of All Good Practices) by Master Yongming is a work that sought to correct the extreme distortions within the Chan school. Brother, compare these texts with the Chan teachings of contemporary figures like Mao Dao—do you find them the same or not? The degeneration of Chan in recent times began, [I believe,] when Yangming and his followers diluted Chan by interpreting it through Confucian terms. Later, figures such as Huoqu and others diluted Confucianism by interpreting it through Chan. Chan practitioners, upon observing that Confucian scholars remained immersed in worldly affairs without apparent obstruction, came to believe that such involvement posed no hindrance to enlightenment. Thus, Chan devolved into a form that denied karmic causality. Conversely, Confucian thinkers borrowed the Chan view of universal integration to assert insights they claimed surpassed the sages of the past, resulting in a Confucianism devoid of moral restraint. In the end, Chan ceased to be Chan, and Confucianism ceased to be Confucianism.¹²

姑言其近者，四卷《楞伽》，達摩印宗之書也；龍樹《智度論》、馬鳴《起信論》，二祖續佛慧燈之書也；《萬善同歸》六卷，永明和尚教宗門極弊之書也。兄試看此書，與近時毛道所談之禪，同耶非耶？近代之禪，所以有此流弊者，始則陽明以儒而濫禪，既則豁渠諸人以禪而濫儒。禪者見諸儒沒世情之中，以為不礙，而禪遂為撥因果之禪；儒者借禪家一切圓融之見，以為發前賢所未發，而儒遂為無忌憚之儒。不惟禪不成禪，而儒亦不成儒矣。

In sum, the late Ming literati preference for the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* cannot be reduced either to doctrinal affinity or to biographical circumstance alone. It emerged from the intersection of the sūtra's discourse on mind, cultivation, and religious verification with literati practices of reading, commentary, moral reflection, and religious self-positioning within the Buddhist field. The interpretation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* thus became one point at which educated lay readers could enter the Buddhist field, claim interpretive competence, and reshape the relation between textual learning and religious authority. Their particular engagement with Chan and Buddhist scriptures altered the internal balance of traditions within the monastic sphere, thereby contributing to the formation of a new tradition. The interpretation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was only the starting point. Over time, these constructive imaginaries gave way to historical realities. The seventeenth-century revival of Chan Buddhism unfolded in parallel with the apex of Yangming Mind Learning (Wu 2008, p. 245). As the process intensified, literati involvement in Chan Buddhism expanded from the metaphysical to the institutional: what began as textual engagement evolved into active participation in the administrative and ritual affairs of the monastic community (Brook 1993).

A striking example of this shift is seen in Qian Qianyi, the influential Jiangnan literatus and lay Buddhist of the late Ming, whose work *Dafo shou lengyan jing shujie*

meng chao 大佛首楞嚴經疏解蒙抄 (Meng's excerpts from commentarial explanations of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*) reflects his dissatisfaction with both the over-interpretation of the *Śūraṅgama* by literati and their overreach into monastic affairs. Yet, Qian's call for a "return to scripture and clarification of doctrine" 返經明教 did not entail a return to the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* in its original form. Rather, his work itself constitutes yet another interpretive act, offering a counter-reading of the *Śūraṅgama* through the lens of Huayan doctrinal learning, which had by that time become the dominant doctrinal paradigm within late Ming Buddhist thought. Qian therefore occupies an ambivalent position: he criticized the excesses of literati interpretation while continuing to participate in Buddhist exegesis as a literatus. Qian's compilation thus marks a shift from literati reading to doctrinally framed exegesis: the question was no longer only why the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* attracted literati attention, but which doctrinal authorities could stabilize and authorize its meaning.

3. Doctrinal Readings of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*: Huayan Ascendancy and Its Discontents

The rise of Huayan-oriented readings of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was part of a broader contest over the doctrinal frameworks through which the sūtra should be interpreted. According to Gong Jun's study of Huayan thought in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty, the doctrinal landscape—following prolonged contests for interpretive authority over the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* between the Tiantai and Huayan schools—ultimately shifted toward a position of Huayan dominance. It became increasingly common for those aligned with the Huayan tradition to also engage deeply with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and many of these figures, whether consciously or not, saw themselves as continuing the exegetical legacy of Changshui Zixuan 長水子璿 (n.d., d. 1038), a central figure in Song-dynasty Huayan doctrinal learning.¹³ From this perspective, Qian Qianyi's reliance on Changshui's interpretive stance in his *Shujie meng chao* should not be seen as idiosyncratic. Rather, it reflects a broader trend in which Huayan exegetes in the late Ming actively adopted the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* as a key text, further reinforcing Huayan's status as the dominant doctrinal framework in elite Buddhist intellectual circles of the time.

Changshui Zixuan's *Shou lengyan yishu zhu jing* 首楞嚴義疏注經 (Expository Commentary on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*) grounds its interpretation in the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, frequently drawing upon textual material and conceptual frameworks from the *Yuanjue Jing* 圓覺經 (Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra) and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to elucidate the meaning of the *Śūraṅgama*. This hermeneutic method, however, did not originate with Changshui himself. From within the internal trajectory of Huayan doctrinal learning, this integration of non-Huayan texts into Huayan exegesis—what might be called their internal "canonization"¹⁴—was already well underway: Fazang 法藏 (643–712) had written extensive commentaries on the *Awakening of Faith*, and Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) had authored a major commentary on the *Yuanjue Jing*. Although neither text originally belonged to the Huayan doctrinal corpus, their reinterpretation by these masters effectively incorporated them into the Huayan inner canon. In this light, Changshui Zixuan's project continues this trajectory, extending the Huayanization of scripture by bringing the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* into the Huayan fold. Indeed, in his work, the *Śūraṅgama* is often treated less as an autonomous scripture than as a textual elaboration—or gloss—on the *Awakening of Faith*.

In contrast to Changshui Zixuan's Huayan-based hermeneutics of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the Tiantai tradition offered a competing line of interpretation. Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 (1554–1628), a Tiantai scholar-monk of the late Ming, was acutely aware of Huayan exegesis as a rival discourse, and his writings often take the form of direct refutations (*po* 破) of that tradition. In doing so, he deliberately sought to establish the Tiantai lineage

—through figures such as Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), Gushan Zhiyuan 孤山智圓 (976–1022), and Tianru Weize 天如惟則 (c. 1280–1350)—as the legitimate inheritors of the *Śūraṅgama*’s doctrinal authority. This was accomplished through the logic of *panjiao* 判教, the Tiantai system of doctrinal classification, which positioned the Tiantai interpretive framework as both more comprehensive and more faithful to Śākyamuni’s intent. In his own words, Chuandeng writes:

Thus, it is clear that Gushan and Tianru thoroughly grasped the essential purport of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. And our master Zhiyi [智者] likewise deeply aligned with the mind of the Buddha. Without the *Śūraṅgama*, there would be nothing adequate to verify the profundity of the *Mohe zhiguan* (Great Calming and Contemplation). Without the *Yuanjue Jing*, there would be no way to attest to the ineffable resonance between the Buddha and the patriarch—heart to heart, mind to mind. Fortunately, these three teachers had the *Yuanjue Jing* as their corroborating evidence. Otherwise, how could they have defended their views? Now that I have already drawn upon the *Yuanjue Jing* as textual proof, why must Jiaoguang still reject it? Is he prepared to also reject the *Yuanjue Jing* itself?¹⁵

故知孤山、天如，深得《楞嚴》大旨。而吾智者□□，又深合釋迦之心。以若無《楞嚴》，無足以印摩訶止觀之妙；若無《圓覺》，又無足以印一佛一祖心心相契□妙。然則三師者，幸有《圓覺》為之證也，不則其柰□□乎？今既援《圓覺》以為證矣，而交光（交光真鑒）必欲非之，又□□《圓覺》乎？

Doctrinally, Youxi Chuandeng approached the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* through the lens of Tiantai’s meditative system of “calming and contemplation” (*zhiguan* 止觀), seeking to integrate it with the ultimate meaning (*liaoyi* 了義) of the *Yuanjue Jing*. In his own words:

By synthesizing the “calming and contemplation” methods and harmonizing them with the definitive meaning of the *Yuanjue Jing*, I have followed the textual phrasing without abandoning the elegant formulations of past masters. Yet in establishing the doctrinal essence (*ti* 體) and designating the teaching’s core (*zong* 宗), I have ultimately entrusted it to the imprint of my own mind. Committing this to writing, I have titled the commentary *Yuantong* 圓通 (Perfect Penetration). Through carving and circulation, it serves as repayment for the nourishment received from the Dharma. How profound this is! Truly, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is a scripture that lacks nothing—it contains all methods, embraces all teachings. When the wild mind ceases, that very cessation is bodhi. Its supreme purity and subtle luminosity are not obtained from others. To call it a text of the Huayan complete and sudden teaching (*Huayan yuandun* 華嚴圓頓) is entirely appropriate.¹⁶

參同止觀法門，會通《圓覺》了義。隨文釋義既不忍廢於諸師之雅言，立體標宗竟獨挈乎一己之心印。筆以成疏名曰圓通，剗刷流通用酬法乳，大矣哉！《首楞嚴》之為經也，無法不具，無教不收。狂心若歇，歇即菩提，勝淨妙明，不從人得，謂之華嚴圓頓可也。

This passage reflects Chuandeng’s synthetic strategy, wherein Tiantai meditative practice, *Śūraṅgama*-style sudden enlightenment, and Huayan metaphysical language are all drawn together in a unified exegetical vision. He not only honors past commentarial traditions but asserts the primacy of personal insight as the ultimate foundation for doctrinal articulation.

Another important figure who critiqued Huayan-based interpretations of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* from a Tiantai perspective was Ouyi Zhixu, though his sectarian identity was comparatively less pronounced than that of Youxi Chuandeng. In his work *Lengyan jing xuanyi* 楞嚴經玄義 (Doctrinal Essentials of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*), Zhixu does not adopt the kind of explicit “we versus they” doctrinal boundary-setting seen in Chuandeng’s

writings. Nevertheless, he explicitly notes that the title “xuanyi” (Doctrinal Essentials) is modeled after Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義 (Doctrinal Essentials of the *Lotus Sūtra*), thereby aligning himself with the Tiantai exegetical lineage. Furthermore, his conceptual usage reveals a deep reliance on Tiantai metaphysical doctrines—particularly the idea of intrinsic inclusion (*xingju* 性具)—in interpreting the *Śūraṅgama*. For example, he writes:

“Great Buddha-Crown” (*da foding* 大佛頂) refers to the fundamental essence of the mind’s own nature. In its responsiveness to conditions without losing its inherent nature, it integrates the four cognitive layers while remaining grounded in the original reality. In its unchanging nature adapting to conditions, the subtle functions of the seven elements permeate all realms of existence. Just as ice and water share an identical “wetness” throughout their transformations, and the myriad forms within the great void do not hinder expression, so too the Ten Realms are fully encompassed within a single mind. Both phenomena (*shi* 事) and principle (*li* 理) are fully possessed and mutually interpenetrate. In the framework of One Mind and Three Truths—understood both horizontally (simultaneously) and vertically (progressively)—distinction and unity are non-dual. Based on this, the cause and effect of self-practice (*zixing* 自性) are known as the Tathāgata’s secret cause and perfect realization. Likewise, this same foundation produces the cause and effect of benefiting others (*huata* 化他), and thus is called the myriad practices of bodhisattvas. The subtle cultivation of cause and effect taught in the *Śūraṅgama* entirely returns to the intrinsic functioning of benefiting others.¹⁷

大佛頂者，即心自性之理體也；隨緣不變，融四科而惟是本真；不變隨緣，妙七大而各周法界。喻冰水之始終，惟是濕性；譬太虛之群相，不拒發揮。十界一心，事造與理具，遍攝遍含；一境三諦，橫辨與豎歷，非並非別。依此成自行因果，故名如來密因，修證了義；即此為化他因果，故名諸菩薩萬行，首楞嚴因果妙修，全歸性具化他力用。

This passage highlights Zhixu’s hermeneutical integration of Tiantai doctrinal categories into his reading of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, even if he refrains from overt sectarian polemics. In doing so, Zhixu contributes to a broader late-Ming tendency to internalize diverse scriptural lineages through the interpretive lens of Tiantai metaphysics, reinforcing the legitimacy of *panjiao*-based commentary without explicit factional confrontation.

This likely explains Ouyi Zhixu’s fundamental dissatisfaction with Qian Qianyi’s *Shujie meng chao*. Although Qian claimed at the outset of his work that his goal was to “reconcile the cutting edges of the Tiantai and Huayan traditions” 息台賢兩宗之接刃, his actual hermeneutic position was far from neutral: he opted for a Huayan-centered framework to subsume and interpret the text. Zhixu, by contrast, subtly but unmistakably advocated for a Tiantai reading of the *Śūraṅgama* in his own writings. Zhixu does not offer an extended defense of the doctrinal orthodoxy of Tiantai exegesis; instead, he adopts what appears to be an inclusive and non-partisan gesture of doctrinal synthesis. Yet his tone quickly shifts, revealing a clear rejection of Huayan-based interpretations of the *Śūraṅgama*—with the notable exception of Chengguan 澄觀 (n.d.). He writes:

When great bodhisattvas, relying on the power of their vows, expound the true Dharma, they must be like Āśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna, Zhiyi, and Qingliang (Chenguan)—figures who stand as the utmost exemplars throughout the ages. As for the likes of Guifeng (Zongmi) and Changshui (Zixuan), though they each had their attainments, they are still subject to the discerning evaluation of one with true insight—all the more so for everyone else.¹⁸

大菩薩乘願力闡正法，須如馬鳴、龍樹、智者、清涼，立極千古。若圭峰、長水輩，雖各有所得，猶未免為明眼簡點，況其餘哉。

This passage demonstrates that Zhixu's apparent doctrinal impartiality is in fact a rhetorical strategy, cloaking a Tiantai-centered exegetical stance in conciliatory language. His evaluation of Zongmi and Zixuan as falling short—despite their partial merits—further underscores his refusal to accept the authority of the broader Huayan lineage in interpreting the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*.

Zhixu's selective praise of Chengguan and criticism of other Huayan exegetes therefore points beyond the interpretation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* alone. It raises a further question within Huayan doctrinal learning: which Huayan authority could properly regulate the relation between scriptural exegesis, Chan realization, and doctrinal normativity?

4. Reasserting Huayan Doctrinal Authority: Li Tongxuan, Chengguan, and Late Ming Buddhist Exegesis

Ouyi Zhixu's selective praise of Chengguan as one who “stands as the utmost exemplar through the ages” 立極千古 did more than qualify his criticism of Huayan interpretations of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. It also points to a larger question concerning the status of Huayan doctrinal authority in late Ming Buddhism. If the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* had become a contested site where Chan-oriented reading, literati interpretation, and doctrinal exegesis converged, then the authority through which Huayan learning itself was to be represented became equally important. The late Ming preference for Li Tongxuan over Chengguan, especially among literati and Chan-oriented circles, must be understood within this broader context. Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671), in his reflections on doctrinal Buddhism of the late Ming, offers a particularly pointed critique:

With regard to the doctrinal systems of Buddhism: Tiantai's four teachings and Cien's (*Yogācāra*) five positions have both been faithfully transmitted; their adherents dare not elevate their own insights above those of their patriarchs. Only the Huayan school, under the pretext of total interpenetration (*yuanrong* 圓融), has disregarded methodical sequence and ritual structure, as seen in texts such as the *Jiaoyi zhang* 教義章 (Treatise on Doctrinal Classifications), which are now bundled away and ignored. This is akin to a physician who refuses to read the *Lingshu* 靈樞, and when questioned about the *five zang* 五臟 and *six fu* 六腑 organs or the body's channels and collaterals, responds with complete ignorance—yet still dares to parade himself before the public as a “physician by right.” Is this not absurd? (Fang 2011, p. 41)

以佛之教義言之，天台四教、慈恩五位，兩家守其師說，不敢以私智相高。惟賢首宗，借圓融、遺節奏，如《教義章》類，皆束而不觀。譬醫者不讀《靈樞》，扣以藏俞、府俞及諸經絡，茫然不知，乃傲然自號於眾，而曰醫者義也，豈不悖哉？

Here, Fang's critique is not merely rhetorical; it captures the perceived disconnect between Huayan's theoretical grandeur and its lack of pedagogical or practical rigor, especially when compared with the structured transmission lines of Tiantai and Yogācāra. It also reveals the tension between Huayan's intellectual dominance and the practical legitimacy increasingly measured by engagement with Chan or structured meditative praxis.

It becomes evident that the prevailing atmosphere of Huayan scholarship in the late Ming paid scant attention not only to the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* itself, but even to foundational texts such as Fazang's *Wujiao zhang* 五教章 (Treatise on the Five Teachings, another name for *Jiaoyi zhang*), which were rarely read or cited. This raises the question: what texts or

commentarial traditions were actually prioritized within Huayan circles of the time? Qian Qianyi provides a telling answer:

I humbly believe that the current proliferation of heterodox and demonic teachings, the widespread frenzy and blindness, all stem from the decline of true Dharma. Among the three great schools [Tiantai, Yogācāra, Huayan], the one most urgently in need of revival is undoubtedly Huayan. Since the time of Qingliang [Chengguan] and Fangshan [Li Tongxuan], their commentaries and treatises have already shown signs of mutual contradiction, like blades clashing. After Guifeng [Zongmi], those who have further expounded this tradition and served as guiding lights for the human and celestial realms have become exceptionally rare.¹⁹

竊惟今日妖邪熾盛，狂瞽交馳，皆以正法不明之故。而三宗之中，急宜提倡者，尤莫先於賢首。蓋自清涼、方山兩家之疏論，已不免砧錘相向。而圭峰以後，弘演斯宗，作人天眼目者，寥寥乏人。

In this passage, Qian laments not only the lack of doctrinal clarity but also the absence of authoritative Huayan figures capable of guiding Buddhist orthodoxy in his time. His reference to the “clashing blades” between Chengguan and Li Tongxuan suggests a recognition of divergent hermeneutical lineages within the Huayan tradition—an issue left largely unresolved by later generations. In fact, as early as the Song dynasty, Li Tongxuan had already been elevated to near-saintly status in both Chan and scholastic circles. Huihong Juefan 慧洪覺範 (1071–1128) referred to Li and Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) as “teachers for a hundred generations”²⁰ 百世之師, while Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) praised Li by comparing him to Kumārajīva and the four sages of the Kumārajīva lineage.²¹ Notably, in both cases, Chengguan is absent from the conversation, suggesting a long-standing selective valuation of Li’s exegesis over Chengguan’s within certain Buddhist communities. A particularly telling case is that of the Northern Song Chan monk Wenling Jiehuan 溫陵戒環 (fl. 1119–1126). In his *Huayan jing yaojie* 華嚴經要解 (Essential Commentary on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*), Jiehuan explicitly argued that “the authorship and commentarial lineage of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* ought to take Li Tongxuan as principal, and Chengguan only as secondary.” 以方山為正，清涼為助²²

By the late Ming, Li Tongxuan’s influence had clearly surpassed that of Chengguan, particularly within the Confucian literati circles. One telling example is Zhao Dazhou 趙大洲 (1508–1576), a lay devotee of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* who was praised by Qian Qianyi for his doctrinal seriousness. In a letter to a friend, Zhao wrote:

I have recently acquired a fine edition of the *Huayan helun* by Li. I intend to dedicate the frail remains of my body and life to the service of the totality of the Dharma Realm, without considering whether my own spiritual capacities are deep or shallow. Whenever I meet someone of similar inclination, I immediately share with them the marvelous insights contained in this text. This, indeed, is the ultimate discourse on life and mind—and you, my friend, are surely among the most refined of such kindred spirits!²³

僕近得李長者《華嚴合論》善本，擬以衰殘身命，供奉法界總持，不自計其根莖之大小矣。凡遇同好，即以此妙義告之，乃性命之極談也，況公乃同好之極選乎！

Zhao’s words not only convey his personal reverence for Li Tongxuan’s *Huayan helun*, but also reflect the text’s active circulation and influence within late Ming literati Buddhism. The work’s prestige was not limited to Chan-inclined thinkers. Li Zhi—one of the most influential late Ming intellectuals straddling Confucian and Buddhist thought—lavishly praised Li Tongxuan, writing:

The *Huayan helun* is exquisitely profound—not a single character should be changed. It is, in effect, a second *Avatamsaka Sūtra*! (Li 2011, p. 441)

《華嚴合論》精妙不可當，一字不可改易，蓋又一《華嚴》矣也。

Others followed suit. Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540–1620), in his colophon to Qu Ruji’s 瞿汝稷 (1548–1610) printed edition of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, proclaimed:

As for Elder Li Fangshan and his *Huayan helun*, it is the highest and most complete. All that remains is for students to search its depths with their whole hearts.²⁴

若夫方山李長者之《論》，至矣盡矣，在學者剖心以求之而已。

Similarly, Feng Mengzhen recorded his excitement upon receiving a fine edition of the *Huayan helun*, writing that he “held it joyfully in his hands, leaf by leaf.”²⁵ Japanese scholar Araki Kengo has also pointed out that in the Illustrated Compendium of the *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu souchen daquan* 繪圖三教源流搜神大全 (Three Teachings and Pantheon of Immortals), which is believed to have been printed in the late Ming, Li Tongxuan is the only figure listed under Huayan Buddhism, further underscoring his elevated status as the central object of Huayan devotion in this period (Araki 2010, p. 84).

It is evident that within the lay literati community—who wielded far greater discursive authority outside the monastic sphere—Li Tongxuan’s *Huayan helun* held a status vastly superior to Chengguan’s *Huayan shuchao* 華嚴疏鈔 (Commentary and subcommentary on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*), while the works of Fazang were, as Fang Yizhi observed, effectively left to gather dust on the shelf. Several factors contributed to this hierarchy. Most fundamentally, it reflected the broader trend of Confucian-Buddhist synthesis that defined the late Ming intellectual landscape. Li Tongxuan’s interpretive framework offered ample space for such synthesis, and his own identity—as a lay thinker writing in an inclusive and accessible style—closely resembled that of the Ming literati themselves. By contrast, Chengguan, writing as a doctrinally rigorous monk, warned in no uncertain terms that “those who attempt to forcibly merge Confucianism and Buddhism out of deluded desire should be cast into the Avīci Hell.”²⁶ 妄欲和融儒釋者，應墮無間 Such a statement was, unsurprisingly, unlikely to gain traction among late Ming Confucian scholars influenced by Wang Yangming’s philosophy—thinkers such as Li Zhi, Zhao Dazhou, and others, who were actively exploring syncretic paths between the two traditions.

Second, Li Tongxuan’s extraordinary reputation in the Ming period may also be intimately connected to the lived experience of Chan practitioners (Araki 2010, p. 84). In the historical development of Tang-dynasty Huayan Buddhism, it is often said that Fazang resolved the philosophical tension between nature (*xing* 性) and form (*xiang* 相), while Chengguan completed the doctrinal synthesis of Huayan and Chan. This helps to explain why, in the late Ming, Chengguan’s influence exceeded that of Fazang but remained secondary to Li Tongxuan. The Ming Buddhist world exhibited a stronger craving for Chan–doctrine integration than for ontological unity between essence and attributes. However, Chengguan’s *Huayan Shuchao*, while addressing the structural reconciliation between Chan and Huayan, was often criticized for its elaborate scholastic apparatus and terminological density. In contrast, Li Tongxuan offered a far more concise and intuitive hermeneutical approach, building upon the very same Chan–doctrine unity that Chengguan had articulated. Both of them were animated by a shared metaphysical conviction—that the unenlightened mind of the ordinary person and the unmoving wisdom (*buddhi*) of the Buddha are inherently unified. But Li’s *Huayan helun* is shorter in length and more direct in its dialectical strategies, as can be seen in his interpretation of the “Samantabhadra Chapter” (*Xianshou pin* 賢首品):

From the position of an ordinary being, faith comes first—because one decisively aspires to the great enlightenment of the Buddhas. From this same ground, one must have faith that the unmoving wisdom of the Buddhas in all ten directions is not different from one's own innate mind. It is only because of delusion (*avidyā*) that this sameness is obscured; yet delusion and the wisdom-mind of the Buddhas are originally not two. From the standpoint of ordinary beings, one must also have faith that the bodily root-wisdom of the Buddhas is identical to one's own body. Why is this so? Because all are expressions of a single dharma-body (*dharmakāya*), a single root-wisdom. Just as from one tree trunk there may arise many branches and leaves—due to causes and conditions—the various branches may flourish or decay differently, yet all originate from the same root.²⁷

從凡夫位，以信為首，決定取佛大菩提果故。從凡夫地，信十方諸佛心不動智，與自心無異智故。只為無明所迷故，無明與十方諸佛心，本來無二故。從凡夫地，信十方諸佛身根本智，與自身無異故。何以故？皆是一法性身，一根本智。猶如樹枝，一根生多枝葉等，以因緣故，一樹枝上，成壞不同故。

Third, building upon the foundation of Chan–doctrine integration, the debate between sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation remained a persistent theme within the Buddhist discourse of the late Ming. In the context of late Ming monastic reform, figures such as Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603) and Yunqi Zhuhong engaged in theoretical discussions—often through the lens of essential-nature theory—to explore the dynamic interplay between doctrinal texts and Chan realization (Chen 2007, p. 206). In his *Huayan helun*, Li Tongxuan offered a perspective that transcended the binary of sudden and gradual by positing an ontological framework rooted in dharma-nature (*faxing* 法性):

The term “single lifetime” means that one does not perceive the birth of the three times (past, present, future); thus, it is called the doctrine of one lifetime. This teaching encompasses both the ordinary and the saintly, originally of one unified essence, without any difference in nature. One who enters this stage in a single moment of arising is said to have attained in one lifetime, because they no longer perceive the nature of temporal arising in three stages. Such is the true nature of the dharma; all other views are erroneous.²⁸

一生者，不見三世生故，名為一生義也。此乃總攝凡聖，元一體相，無別異性。以一剎那生入此位者，名為一生，更不見三世生性故。實法如是，余見皆非。

This view resonates directly with Chen Yongge's analysis of late Ming literati and lay Buddhist styles of practice. Chen observes: “The tendency toward wild Chan that characterized lay Buddhist cultivation in the late Ming was defined by an overemphasis on sudden realization and metaphysical principle. This gave rise to a mystical discourse on ontological states of being. At the same time, a skewed attachment to the mechanics of spiritual effort (*gongfu* 工夫) risked descending into a mystical discourse on method.” (Chen 2007, p. 232).

Araki Kengo has argued that the widespread popularity of Li Tongxuan's *Huayan helun* in the late Ming, with its accessible and fluid synthesis of Chan and doctrinal discourse, may have served as a catalyst—or at least a contributing factor—to the rise of an increasingly unrestrained and iconoclastic spiritual climate (Araki 2010, p. 87). Returning to this question, it becomes clear that Zhixu's praise of Chengguan and criticism of Zongmi were not simply an attempt to flatter the Huayan tradition by aligning himself with its most prestigious figures, nor was it merely a rhetorical strategy to craft an identity of nonsectarian detachment. Rather, Zhixu had a clear sense of the problematic developments

that had arisen within late Ming Huayan thought, and he viewed them with genuine concern. In his critical assessment, Zhixu writes:

The National Preceptor Fazang of the Huayan school, who had the Empress Wu as his disciple, gained great fame. He wrote a commentary on the Jin-dynasty translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, but since the scripture itself was incomplete, the commentary was also cursory and was therefore not transmitted. His commentary on the *Awakening of Faith* is shallow and fragmentary, greatly deviating from the true intent of Master Āśvaghoṣa and hardly worth reading. The Elder Li of Fangshan authored a New Treatise on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, in which he grasped the general outline of the teaching. Later, the National Preceptor Chengguan of Qingliang produced the *Shuchao*, presenting both structure and substance together—it can be said that he truly entered the hall of the *Gandhavyūha*. Yet monastics and lay followers in later generations often showed exclusive preference for Fangshan, most likely due to their coarse minds and superficial temperament. They failed to realize that although Chengguan is a distant heir to Fazang, he in fact surpassed his predecessor. As for Zongmi, being a disciple of the Heze lineage, his views are riddled with contradictions and incoherence. How could such a person possibly glorify the true path of Chengguan?²⁹

賢首法藏國師，得武後為其門徒，聲名借甚，疏晉譯《華嚴經》，經既未備，疏亦草略，故不復傳。所傳《起信論疏》，淺陋支離，甚失馬鳴大師宗旨，殊不足觀。方山李長者有《新華嚴經論》，頗得大綱；清涼觀國師，復出《疏鈔》，綱目並舉，可謂登雜華之堂矣。後世縑素，往往獨喜方山，大抵是心粗氣浮故耳。不知清涼，雖遙嗣賢首，實青出於藍也。圭峰則是荷澤知見宗徒，支離矛盾，安能光顯清涼之道。

Ouyi Zhixu was acutely aware that the widespread preference for Li Tongxuan in his time was rooted in what he described as a “coarse mind and superficial temperament.” His repeated praise of Chengguan in his own writings was likely a conscious attempt to elevate Chengguan’s status and thereby redirect the trajectory of late Ming Huayan studies. Zhixu was not the only monk dissatisfied with the dominance of the *Helun*; Yunqi Zhuhong recounted his own experience discussing *Helun* and Chengguan’s *Shuchao* with lay followers:

The lay devotee held only Li Tongxuan’s *Helun* in high esteem and denigrated Qingliang [Chengguan], saying that one should not divide the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* into parts based on faith, understanding, practice, and realization, as it would violate the sūtra’s central message.³⁰ Both these great masters are enlightened sages who serve as wings to the Huayan tradition; one should not attempt to weigh them against each other.³¹

彼居士惟崇棗柏之《論》，其詆清涼者，言不當以信解行證分裂全經，大失經旨。……二大士者，皆羽翼華嚴之賢聖，不可得而軒輊者也。

Zhuhong eventually offered the conciliatory advice, but he admitted uncertainty as to whether such words would have any effect. Hanshan Deqing, whose own doctrinal stance was closely aligned with Huayan thought, voiced his concerns about the same trend with even greater candor:

I am deeply concerned for the Huayan tradition, which is the foundational turning of the Dharma wheel in our Buddha’s teaching. Qingliang [Chengguan] is the patriarch of Huayan exegesis in our region. His *Shuchao* is thorough and refined—a true model for a thousand generations. Yet because the subcommentary

strives for completeness, it inevitably becomes overly dense, leading students to withdraw in discouragement. Meanwhile, the gentry take delight in the clarity and directness of *Helun*, and so they tend to disparage Qingliang's work. If this continues, doctrinal scholarship will fall into silence.³²

切念華嚴一宗，為吾佛根本法輪。清涼為此方著作之祖，其疏精詳，真萬世宏規。但鈔文以求全之過，不無太繁，故使學者望洋而退。士大夫獨喜《合論》明爽，率皆讎視，而義學亦將絕響矣。

Amid the tide of doctrinal integration in the late Ming, several discernible patterns emerged: the Confucian-Buddhist synthesis rooted in Confucianism; the unity of essence and form grounded in the doctrine of dharma-nature; the Chan-Pure Land convergence centered on Chan; and the Chan-doctrinal unity also centered on Chan teachings. The tension between Li Tongxuan and Chengguan in the late Ming was, in essence, a dispute over who would serve as the foundation in the evolving ideal of “integration between Chan and doctrine.” Chan monastics such as Yongjue Yuanxian 永覺元賢 (1578–1657) and Zibo Zhenke leaned toward Li Tongxuan, whose thought resonated more closely with Chan sensibilities. Unsurprisingly, literati lay followers—particularly those influenced by Wang Yangming and his intellectual descendants—favored Li as well, given the deep affinity between his ideas and Yangming idealism. In contrast, monastics more devoted to doctrinal exegesis—Xuelang Hong'en, Hanshan Deqing, Yunqi Zhuhong, and Ouyi Zhixu—consistently resisted this trend. Though it claimed to represent “harmony of doctrinal systems,” they saw it as in fact an erasure of Huayan authority through the substitution of Chan for Huayan.

5. Conclusions

The late Ming re-appropriation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* brought questions of hermeneutic authority, religious self-understanding, and doctrinal legitimacy into unusually close contact. In the interpretive contests among literati, Chan monks, and scholastic monastics, scripture served at once as a source of doctrinal meaning and as a medium through which claims to Buddhist authority were made, tested, and revised.

Through commentarial engagement with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, educated lay literati—many of whom stood at some remove from the political mainstream—redefined their place within the Buddhist tradition. Their readings of the sūtra, shaped by Yangming thought, Chan-inflected language of mind-nature, and the discourse of innate awakening, allowed them to enter the Buddhist interpretive field with considerable cultural confidence. In doing so, they blurred the boundary between monastic and lay authority and helped form a mode of textual spirituality in which reading, intuitive insight, literary competence, and moral self-cultivation became closely connected.

The late Ming tension between Li Tongxuan and Chengguan should be understood within this larger transformation. Their reception was more than a matter of preference for one Huayan exegete over another. It pointed to a deeper question about the kind of authority that could anchor Buddhist tradition in an age of syncretic convergence. Li Tongxuan's appeal lay in the immediacy and flexibility with which his Huayan thought could be aligned with Chan-oriented and literati modes of realization. Chengguan, by contrast, represented a more systematic vision of doctrinal order, through which scholastic monks could reaffirm the normative force of Huayan learning.

Taken together, these debates show how canonical interpretation participated in the making and remaking of Buddhist communities. To interpret scripture was also to define the interpreter's place, to redraw the boundary between center and margin, and to turn inherited doctrinal systems toward new historical needs. The late Ming transformation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* thus reveals a significant dynamic in the evolution of Chinese

Buddhism: the reconfiguration of scriptures was bound up with the question of who could speak with authority in the name of the Buddhist tradition. It was a vivid moment in the continuing history of Buddhism's cultural localization, internal plurality, and negotiation between textual learning and lived religious authority.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.W.; methodology, S.W.; investigation, S.W.; resources, S.W. and Q.W.; formal analysis, S.W.; writing—original draft preparation, S.W.; writing—review and editing, S.W. and Q.W.; supervision, S.W. and Q.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, "Foding meng chao mulu houji 佛頂蒙鈔目錄後記," in *Lengyan jing shujie meng chao* 楞嚴經疏解蒙鈔, Scroll 1 (Qian n.d., CBETA 2024.R3, X13, no. 287, p. 502a3–4).
- ² In this article, "Huayan doctrinal learning" refers to a learned exegetical tradition centered on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 華嚴經 and its major Chinese commentaries. It should not be equated with the Huayan school as a strictly institutional or uninterrupted lineage. Rather, the term denotes a broader body of doctrinal resources, interpretive methods, and textual authorities that could be appropriated by monks, literati, and lay Buddhists in different historical contexts.
- ³ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, "Ke qixin lun zhijie houxiu 刻起信論直解後序," in *Hanshan laoren mengyou ji* 憨山老人夢遊集, Scroll 19: "[I] simply wish that students may enter through this single gate; then, with regard to the teachings, they may transcend words and grasp the meaning, while Chan will not fall into deviant paths. This is indeed the great key to rescuing Buddhism in the age of the Dharma's decline." 直欲學者從此一門而入,則教可離言得義,而禪亦不墮邪途,是救末法之大關鍵也。(Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X73, no. 1456, p. 601a1–3).
- ⁴ *Jingang bore boluomi jing*, Scroll 1: (Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 n.d., CBETA 2026.R1, T08, no. 235, p. 749c22–23).
- ⁵ *Jingang bore boluomi jing*, Scroll 1: (Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 n.d., CBETA 2026.R1, T08, no. 235, p. 749a24).
- ⁶ Qian, "Suixi diqi 隨喜第七," in *Lengyan jing shujie meng chao* 楞嚴經疏解蒙鈔, Scroll 10: "Master Jinxi remarked that the *Sūrangama Sūtra* and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) are in accord. It took me a long time, but I gradually came to understand. Zhuangzi understood emptiness, but did not yet realize the nature of eternal abiding. The unshaken suchness—is it not the very principle of unceasingness? The seven probes and eight returns, the four categories and seven great elements, the interfusion of dual appearances, the four delusional bases, the twenty-four types of perfect penetration—none escape even the subtlest analysis. These are, in fact, the principles of everyday life in the human world. They seem to embody the very aim of sincerity once enlightened, the teaching of that which is soundless and scentless." 近溪先生謂《楞嚴》與《中庸》相合,余久而漸悟。莊氏知無無矣,未知常住之性也。如如不動,豈非不已哉?七征八還,四科七大,和合二相,四大狂頭,二十四圓通,微細不漏,乃人間日用之理。仿佛明則誠之旨,無聲無臭之說也。(Qian n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X13, no. 287, p. 866a3–7).
- ⁷ Hanshan, "Shi Xiyin Jing Gong zhuanxiu jingtu 示西印淨公專修淨土," in *Hanshan laoren mengyou ji*, Scroll 8: (Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X73, no. 1456, p. 517a6–10).
- ⁸ Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏, "Tanzong 談宗," in *Yunqi fahui (xuanlu)* 雲棲法彙 (選錄), Scroll 12 (Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, J33, no. B277, p. 33a1–5).
- ⁹ Tu, "Today there are many who speak of cultivating the nature and destiny, yet their habits are deeply ingrained, their old karmic ties too familiar. Worldly illusions, like bubbles and shadows, entangle their hearts, and they cannot let go. Some even indulge in false posturing and boastful cleverness, flaunting their frenzied intelligence. They treat the sagely path of transcending the world and saving sentient beings as mere verbal embellishment, dazzling and resplendent, thinking it can spontaneously evoke the fragrance of blue lotuses. Yet upon close examination of their minds and bodies, they are not connected to the Way in the slightest. This is a major illness among the scholar-officials of our time, especially prevalent in the Wu and Yue regions." 今之談性命者雖多,奈何其結習久深,舊緣太熟。世間泡影無常,種種虛幻纏縛胸中,戀不能割。甚或虛矯誇巧,逞其狂慧,將聖賢度世超劫大道,認作是筆舌間鼓吹,淋漓璀璨,能奕奕生青蓮花香。而徐按其身心,實際與此道了無毛髮干涉。此方今士大夫一大病,吳越間為尤甚。 Cited in: (Xu 2013, pp. 138–39).

- ¹⁰ Here, “shared interpretive field” refers to a historically observable constellation of textual practices, social relationships, and assumptions about Buddhist meaning and authority. Ricoeur’s discussion of canon and community helps illuminate how the interpretation of canonical texts can mediate communal self-understanding, while Fish’s concept of interpretive communities draws attention to the shared practices through which readers come to recognize meaning, coherence, and authority. See (Ricoeur 1995, p. 143; Ricoeur 2002, pp. 7–26; Fish 1980).
- ¹¹ The well-known Chan enlightenment dialogue between Li Zhi and the monk Wunian Shenyong 無念深有 appears in the *Huangbo wunian chanshi fuwen* 黃檗無念禪師復問, and it is grounded in the content of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, scroll 3. Wunian acknowledged Li Zhi as his instructor, a rare case in the historical record where a Confucian literatus plays a decisive role in a monk’s enlightenment narrative. However, the recognition of Li Zhi’s status in this transmission is complicated by the social context of the time. During the late Ming, the Chan dharma transmission system was notoriously fragmented, and monastic authority—especially the right to inherit abbacy or lineage legitimacy—often relied less on realized insight and more on literati prestige, interpersonal networks, and even the composition of lamp records (*denglu* 燈錄). Whether Wunian truly accepted Li Zhi as his genuine master remains difficult to determine. The record reads: “In the year xinsi (1589), the layman Zhuowu [i.e., Li Zhi] came to visit. One evening while sitting in meditation, he asked: ‘Speak to me of your realization.’ From beginning to end, the master [Wunian] explained it all. Zhuowu said, ‘Just let it go.’ The master did not grasp the meaning. They lived together for over forty days and visited the layman Huang An. Daily they conversed, and Zhuowu kept saying, ‘Let it go.’ The master replied, ‘I have nothing to let go of!’ After a month’s stay, he returned to Longhu. As he reflected, the gong’an became unclear. Gradually doubt arose, and he asked the layman Shitan, who said, ‘Still reading sūtras?’ The master said, ‘I’m illiterate. I don’t know what to read.’ Shitan replied, ‘Read the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. Though the *Śūraṅgama* is good, it’s not suitable for you.’ The master asked why. Shitan said, ‘It is the highest teaching—I can’t comprehend it myself.’ On hearing this, the master was struck as if by an arrow in his heart. ‘Is that how he sees me?’ Returning to Longhu, he read the *Śūraṅgama*. When he came to the line: ‘To establish knowledge upon perceptual awareness is the root of ignorance,’ he was suddenly struck with doubt and entered four or five years of elation, eventually becoming disoriented. He hurried to Huang An. On seeing him, Zhuowu asked, ‘How is your practice?’ The master said, ‘I have one doubt.’ Zhuowu asked, ‘What doubt?’ The master answered, ‘“To establish knowledge upon awareness.”’ Zhuowu, with a stern face, replied, ‘That’s not your real knowing.’ Still, the master did not comprehend. Zhuowu gathered a group of friends to Mount Sima. A dharma teacher expounded a teaching, and afterward, Zhuowu asked, ‘If original purity is thus, how then arise the mountains and rivers of the world?’ The master began to answer, but Zhuowu pushed his knee and shouted, ‘Is this it?’ The master was suddenly awakened. Returning to Longhu, he sat in silence for several days, and all of his former understanding vanished without a trace. From then on, his doubts were entirely cleared. Without encountering a true teacher with fierce and incisive methods, one falls into the sea of conceptual views, beating the belly and wagging the lips, mistaking that for realization.” 辛巳，卓吾居士來訪，夜坐問曰：你見處說說看。師從始至終，一一吐露。居士曰：你且放下。師心下沒有會，同住四十餘日，邀過黃安居士請眾友會，每日交談，你只放下。師曰：我沒有什麼放下！得住月余，回龍湖看淆訛，公案不省。漸漸有疑，請問石潭居士，居士曰：你還要看經？師曰：我不識字，不知看什麼經？居士曰：看《維摩經》。《楞嚴經》雖好，你看不得。師曰：如何看不得？居士曰：此是最上一乘的文章，我也理會不來。師聽說，如箭入心，他把我做那樣的人看？回到龍湖，就看《楞嚴》，看到知見立知即無明本。忽然疑病，又發四五年的歡喜，全然失散。疾往黃安，居士一見，問曰：工夫何如？師曰：我有一疑。居士曰：疑個什麼？師曰：知見立知。居士正色曰：這個不是你知見。師又不契。居士邀眾友到馴馬山會，有講僧至，同會夜坐，居士問曰：清淨本然，雲何忽生山河大地？法師講罷，居士曰：無念你說看。師將開口，居士將師膝上一推，曰：這個響！師忽猛省，歸至龍湖，靜坐數日，平生所得的杳無蹤跡。從此以後，疑惑淨盡，不遇本色宗匠，惡辣鉗錘，墮在識見海中，鼓腹搖唇，以為自得。(Wunian Shenyong 無念深有 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, J20, no. B098, p. 527a4–23).
- ¹² Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, “Da Tao Shikui 答陶石簀,” in (Yuan 2008, vol. 21, pp. 790–91).
- ¹³ (Gong 2008, pp. 35–36). In this article, Gong cites late-Ming commentaries on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* to illustrate how they were employed to assert sectarian orthodoxy. For instance, Jingxing 淨行 exclusively “aligned himself with Master Changshui” 獨歸宗長水; Zhenke 真可 referred to Changshui’s commentary as “the patriarchal teaching of a hundred generations” 百代心宗之祖; and Deqing 德清 used it as his standard, “firmly believing without the slightest doubt” 以此為準，的信不疑。
- ¹⁴ As Howard Felperin has argued, canon formation is not a neutral process of preserving intrinsic value, but rather a historically and ideologically situated act of institutional legitimation. In a similar way, the Huayan scholastics in late imperial China undertook a process of internal canonization, whereby texts such as the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*—originally outside the Huayan doctrinal core—were reinterpreted to align with Huayan metaphysics and gradually integrated into its exegetical tradition. See: (Felperin 1985).
- ¹⁵ Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈, *Lengyan jing yuantong shu qianmao* 楞嚴經圓通疏前茅, scroll 2 (Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 n.d.-b, CBETA 2023.Q4, X14, no. 297, p. 702a20–b1).
- ¹⁶ Youxi, “Da foding shou lengyan jing yuantong shu xu 大佛頂首楞嚴經圓通疏序,” in *Lengyanjing yuantong shu* 楞嚴經圓通疏, scroll 1 (Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 n.d.-a, CBETA 2023.Q4, X12, no. 281, p. 690a24–b5).

- 17 Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭, “Lengyan jing xuanyi juanshang Bingxu 楞嚴經玄義卷上並序,” in *Lengyan jing xuanyi* 楞嚴經玄義, scroll 1 (Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 n.d.-a, CBETA 2023.Q4, X13, no. 284, p. 196c5–11).
- 18 Ouyi, *Lingfeng ouyi dashi zonglun* 靈峰藕益大師宗論, scroll 5 (Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 n.d.-b, CBETA 2025.R2, J36, no. B348, p. 343c8–10).
- 19 Qian, “Yu Weixin heshang shu 與惟新和尚書,” in *Muzhai youxue ji* 牧齋有學集, vol. 81, in (Qian 2003, p. 1724).
- 20 Huihong Juefan 慧洪覺範, “Ti long daoren sengbao zhuan 題隆道人僧寶傳,” in *Shimen wenzi chan* 石門文字禪, scroll 26 (Huihong Juefan 慧洪覺範 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, J23, no. B135, p. 706b3–4): “Master Xuan willingly regarded himself as a follower of the Lesser Vehicle, and Zaobai confined his aspirations to the Teaching Vehicle. Yet both became exemplary masters for a hundred generations. This shows that the subtle use of the Chan lineage is what truly matters.” 宣公甘以小乘自居，杲柏止以教乘自志，竟能為百世師者，知宗用妙而已。
- 21 Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲, *Dahui pujue chanshi zongmen wuku* 大慧普覺禪師宗門武庫 (Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, T47, no. 1998B, p. 953a20–24): “Sheng, Zhao, Rong and Rui were eminent disciples of Master Kumārajīva, and were known as the ‘Four-Dependent Bodhisattvas.’ Once, while assisting Kumārajīva in explaining the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, they paused their pens when reaching the chapter on the ‘Inconceivable.’ This realm, being beyond mental cognition and verbal expression, left them unable to write a single word. In contrast, Elder Li’s *Helun* enters the Dharma Realm of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* with such clarity—each sentence and phrase shining like the sun and stars, illuminating all without doubt. How could such insight be possible without a direct encounter with complete realization?” 生肇融叡，乃羅什法師之高弟，號四依菩薩。嘗同羅什釋《維摩經》，至‘不可思議品’皆闕筆。蓋此境界，非心思口議，遂不能措一詞。如李長者《論》，入華嚴法界，詞分句解，皎如日星，泮然無疑。若非親遇了緣，安能如此？
- 22 Wenling Jiehuan 溫陵戒環, *Huayan jing yaojie* 華嚴經要解 (Wenling Jiehuan 溫陵戒環 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X08, no. 238, p. 451a6–12): “[I], Jiehuan, have long found the oceanic vastness of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* difficult to fathom. Thus, I repeatedly reviewed the *Helun* of the elder of Fangshan, producing this essential summary, clarifying the intent of the sūtra through organized exposition and seeking to sketch its outlines. I later drew upon the Practice Manual compiled by Chan Master Qingguo Ming, briefly explaining the symbolic meaning of the sacred names. Frequently questioned by esteemed colleagues, I aspired to fully elucidate the profundity of the Nine Assemblies. Therefore, I compared National Master Qingliang’s [i.e., Chengguan] *Gangyao* with the *Helun*, composing this interpretation. Taking Fangshan as the principal guide and Qingliang as supplementary, I thoroughly examined the entire canon in merely 18,000 characters, hoping that readers might see the entire great sūtra within a single mote of dust, or the entire Dharma Realm in the snap of a finger.” 戒環向以《華嚴》海藏，汗漫難究，遂三復方山長者疏論，述總要敘，疏條經旨，稍辨端倪。繼沿綴緝清果明禪師所集修證儀，略解聖號表法，屢為賢達下詢，願盡九會之奧。因取清涼國師《綱要》，與《論》校讐，別為斯解。以方山為正，清涼為助，洞究全藏才萬八千言，庶幾覽者，無異剖大經於一塵，觀法界於彈指也。
- 23 Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉, “Ji Guangxi Xianzhang Hu Lushan shu 寄廣西憲長胡廬山書,” in (Zhao 1999, vol. 22, pp. 724–25).
- 24 Jiao Hong 焦竑, “Ke da fangguang fo huayan jing xu 刻《大方廣佛華嚴經》序,” in *Danyuan Ji* 澹園集, vol. 16. Quoted in Araki, “Li Tongxuan zai Mingdai 李通玄在明代,” in (Araki 2010, p. 83).
- 25 Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, “Bao zangshi 報藏師,” in (Feng 1997, vol. 36, p. 516).
- 26 This sentence is a citation from Ouyi. Ouyi, “Chuxi dawen 除夕答問,” in *Lingfeng ouyi dashi zonglun*, Scroll 4 (Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 n.d.-b, CBETA 2023.Q4, J36, no. B348, p. 322c10–14): “Question: Why did National Master Qingliang [i.e., Chengguan] say, ‘Those who vainly attempt to reconcile Confucianism and Buddhism are destined to fall into the realm of those without leisure’? Answer: Confucianism pertains to worldly teachings. If one clings to sameness between Confucianism and Buddhism, one thereby slanders the supramundane Dharma, and thus commits a transgression that leads to downfall. Now, however, if one upholds the Huayan teaching of interpenetration of all phenomena—so that even non-Buddhist practices can lead to liberation—or embraces the Lotus Sūtra’s principle of revealing the one true vehicle, then even the language of governing the world accords with the true Dharma, and no offense is incurred.” 進問：何故清涼國師謂‘妄欲和融儒釋者，應墮無間’？答：儒是世間法，執同則謗出世法，所以犯墮。今稟華嚴事事無礙之宗，如遍行外道，同證解脫，又稟法華開顯之旨，治世語言，皆順正法，故無過也。
- 27 Li Tongxuan 李通玄, *Huayan jing helun* 華嚴經合論, Scroll 4 (Li n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X04, no. 223, p. 38c17–23).
- 28 Li, *Huayan jing helun*, Scroll 80: (Li n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X04, no. 223, p. 545b20–23).
- 29 Ouyi, “Ru shi zong zhuan qieyi 儒釋宗傳竊議,” in *Lingfeng ouyi dashi zonglun*, Scroll 5 (Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 n.d.-b, CBETA 2023.Q4, J36, no. B348, p. 347b29–c6).
- 30 Yunqi, *Huayan lun shu* 華嚴論疏, in *Yunqi fahui (xuanlu)*, Scroll 14: (Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, J33, no. B277, p. 58b21–22).
- 31 Yunqi, *Huayan lun shu*, Scroll 14: (Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, J33, no. B277, p. 58b27–28).
- 32 Hanshan, “Da Wu Guanwo taishi 答吳觀我太史,” in *Hanshan laoren mengyou ji*, Scroll 18: (Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 n.d., CBETA 2023.Q4, X73, no. 1456, p. 594c3–7).

References

- Araki, Kengo 荒木見悟. 1984. Mindai ni okeru Ryōgonkyō no ryūkō 明代における楞嚴經の流行 [The circulation of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra in the Ming dynasty]. In *Yōmeigaku no kaiten to Bukkyō* 陽明学の開展と仏教 [The Development of Yangmingism and Buddhism]. Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan 研文出版, pp. 245–74.
- Araki, Kengo 荒木見悟. 2010. Li Tongxuan zai Mingdai 李通玄在明代 [Li Tongxuan in Ming Dynasty]. In *Mingmo Qingchu de sixiang yu fojiao* 明末清初的思想與佛教 [Thought and Buddhism in the Late Ming and Early Qing]. Translated by Zhaoheng Liao 廖肇亨. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 上海古籍出版社, pp. 72–91.
- Brook, Timothy. 1993. *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Changshui Zixuan 長水子璿. n.d. *Shou lengyan yi shu zhu jing* 首楞嚴義疏注經 [Expository Commentary on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra]. In *Taishō Tripitaka* 大正藏. T39, no. 1799. Taipei: CBETA, 2023.Q4.
- Chen, Yongge 陳永革. 2007. *Wanming fojiao sixiang yanjiu* 晚明佛教思想研究 [A Study of Late Ming Buddhist Thought]. Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House 宗教文化出版社.
- Chen, Yongge 陳永革. 2009. *Yangming xuepai yu wanming fojiao* 陽明學派與晚明佛教 [The Yangming School and Late Ming Buddhism]. Beijing: Renmin University of China Press 中國人民大學出版社.
- Chengguan 澄觀. n.d. *Huayan gangyao* 華嚴綱要 [Essentials of the Avatamsaka Sūtra]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. Scroll 56. X09, no. 240. Taipei: CBETA.
- Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲. n.d. *Dahui pujue chanshi zongmen wuku* 大慧普覺禪師宗門武庫 [The Arsenal of the Chan School of Chan Master Dahui Pujue]. In *Taishō Tripitaka* 大正藏. Edited by Daoqian 道謙. T47, no. 1998B. Taipei: CBETA.
- Fang, Yizhi 方以智. 2011. *Yaodi paozhuang* 藥地炮莊 [Yaodi's Commentary on the Zhuangzi]. Collated by Yongyi Zhang 張永義 and Yihai Xing 邢益海. Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House 華夏出版社.
- Felperin, Howard. 1985. *Beyond Deconstruction: The Use and Abuse of Literary Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Feng, Mengzhen 馮夢禎. 1997. *Kuaxue tang ji* 快雪堂集 [Collected Work from the Kuaxue Hall]. In *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 [Series of Works Listed but Not Included in the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries]. Ji bu 集部 (Collected Works). Jinan: Qilu Publishing House 齊魯書社, vol. 164.
- Fish, Stanley. 1980. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gong, Jun 龔隽. 2008. Song Ming Lengyan xue yu Zhongguo fojiao de zhengtongxing: Yi Huayan, Tiantai Lengyan jing shu wei zhongxin 宋明楞嚴學與中國佛教的正統性——以華嚴、天台《楞嚴經》疏為中心 [Orthodoxy and Śūraṅgama Studies in Song–Ming Buddhism: Focusing on the Commentaries from Huayan and Tiantai Traditions]. In *History of Chinese Philosophy* 中國哲學史. pp. 33–47.
- Gong, Jun 龔隽. 2023. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Sudden Awakening and Gradual Cultivation in Chan Buddhism during the Tang and Song Periods. *Studies in Chinese Religions* 9: 117–50. [CrossRef]
- Halperin, Mark. 2006. *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清. n.d. *Hanshan laoren mengyou ji* 憨山老人夢遊集 [Collected Works of the Elder Hanshan's Dream Travels]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. Scrolls 8, 18 and 19. X73, no. 1456. Taipei: CBETA.
- Huihong Juefan 慧洪覺範. n.d. *Shimen wenzi chan* 石門文字禪 [The Literary Chan of Shimen Monastery]. In *Jiaxing Canon* 嘉興藏. J23, no. B135. Taipei: CBETA.
- Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, trans. n.d. *Jingang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 [The Diamond Sūtra]. In *Taishō Tripitaka* 大正藏. T08, no. 235. Taipei: CBETA.
- Li, Tongxuan 李通玄. n.d. *Huayan jing helun* 華嚴經合論 [Combined Commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. Scrolls 4 and 80. X04, no. 223. Taipei: CBETA.
- Li, Zhi 李贄. 2011. *Fenshu, xu fenshu jiaoshi* 焚書·續焚書校釋 [A Book to Burn and Its Sequel: A Collated and Annotated Edition]. Annotated by Renren Chen 陳仁仁. Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House 岳麓書社.
- Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭. n.d.-a. *Lengyan jing xuanyi* 楞嚴經玄義 [Doctrinal Essentials of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. X13, no. 284. Taipei: CBETA.
- Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭. n.d.-b. *Lingfeng ouyi dashi zonglun* 靈峰藕益大師宗論 [Collected Writings of Master Lingfeng Ouyi]. In *Jiaxing Canon* 嘉興藏. Scrolls 4 and 5. J36, no. B348. Taipei: CBETA.
- Qian, Qianyi 錢謙益. 2003. *Qian Muzhai quanji* 錢牧齋全集 [The Complete Works of Qian Muzhai]. Annotated by Zeng Qian 錢曾, Collated by Zhonglian Qian 錢仲聯. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 上海古籍出版社.
- Qian, Qianyi 錢謙益. n.d. *Lengyan jing shu jie meng chao* 楞嚴經疏解蒙鈔 [Meng's Compilation of Commentarial Explanations on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. X13, no. 287. Taipei: CBETA.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1995. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Edited by Mark I. Wallace. Translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- Ricoeur, Paul. 2002. The Canon Between the Text and the Community. In *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*. Edited by Petr Pokorný and Jan Roskovec. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 7–28.
- Shen, Defu 沈德符. 2012. *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 [Unofficial Gleanings from the Wanli Era]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 上海古籍出版社.
- Shengyan 聖嚴. 1988. *Mingmo zhongguo fojiao zhi yanjiu* 明末中國佛教之研究 [A Study of Chinese Buddhism in the Late Ming]. Taipei: Taiwan Student Bookstore 台灣學生書局.
- Tu, Long 屠隆. 2011. *Poluoguan qingyan* 婆羅館清言 [Pure Sayings from the Poluo Hall]. In *Ming Qing qingyan shizhong* 明清清言十種 [Ten Collections of Pure Sayings from the Ming and Qing Dynasties]. Edited by Jianjiang Yang 楊堅江. Hangzhou: Xiling Yinshe Publishing House 西泠印社出版社.
- Wenling Jiehuan 溫陵戒環. n.d. *Huayan jing yaojie* 華嚴經要解 [Essential Commentary on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. X08, no. 238. Taipei: CBETA.
- Wu, Jiang 吳疆. 2008. *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wunian Shenyong 無念深有. n.d. *Huangbo wunian chanshi fuwen* 黃蘗無念禪師復問 [Replies to Questions by Chan Master Wunian of Huangbo]. In *Jiaxing Canon* 嘉興藏. Scroll 6. J20, no. B098. Taipei: CBETA.
- Xu, Lin 徐林. 2006. *Mingdai zhongwanqi jiangnan shiren shehui jiaowang yanjiu* 明代中晚期江南士人社會交往研究 [A Study of Social Interactions among Jiangnan Literati in the Mid-Late Ming]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 上海古籍出版社.
- Xu, Meijie 徐美潔. 2013. Wanming Jiangnan wenren yinyi fengxi de wenhua gongxing: Yi Chen Jiru yu Tu Long wei li 晚明江南文人隱逸風習的文化共性——以陳繼儒與屠隆為例 [The Cultural Commonality of Reclusion among Late Ming Literati in Jiangnan: A Case Study of Chen Jiru and Tu Long]. *Academics* 學術界, 133–39.
- Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈. n.d.-a. *Lengyan jing yuantong shu* 楞嚴經圓通疏 [Commentary on Perfect Penetration in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. X12, no. 281. Taipei: CBETA.
- Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈. n.d.-b. *Lengyan jing yuantong shu qianmao* 楞嚴經圓通疏前茅 [Prolegomenon to the Commentary on Perfect Penetration in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*]. In *Xuzangjing* 卍續新藏. X14, no. 297. Taipei: CBETA.
- Yuan, Hongdao 袁宏道. 2008. *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* 袁宏道集箋校 [The Collected Works of Yuan Hongdao: Collated and Annotated]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 上海古籍出版社.
- Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏. n.d. *Yunqi fahui (xuanlu)* 雲棲法彙 (選錄) [Selected Writings from the Collected Works of Yunqi]. In *Jiaxing Canon* 嘉興藏. Scrolls 12 and 14. J33, no. B277. Taipei: CBETA.
- Zhao, Zhenji 趙貞吉. 1999. *Zhao Zhenji shiwenji zhu*, Vol. 22 趙貞吉詩文集註 (第22卷) [Annotated Collection of Zhao Zhenji's Poetry and Prose]. Annotated by Zhangchi Guan 官長馳. Chengdu: Bashu Publishing House 巴蜀書社.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.