

## Reflections in the Jeweled Net of Indra

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### Abstract

This paper focus on the metaphors presented in the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra, to reflect upon the concepts of interdependence, interpenetration, identity and non-obstruction. The profound and immense vision of the nature of reality is illustrated in Indra's Net. It portrays a universe where everything is both composed of and coexists within each other simultaneously. This stands in stark contrast to the anthropocentric view, which is a major cause to our current environmental issues. Can Huayan's reality enable us to not only dismantle anthropocentrism but also provide new ways to relate to each other and everything else? The metaphors in the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra need to realized and brought into existence by radically altering one's ethical foundation and manifest in every act one undertakes. In Huayan's universe our responsibility extends to every little thing and being. In this interdependent and interpenetrating reality our decisions are honouring the welfare of all and our acts are the expressions of gratitude and compassion for all that is.

**Keywords:** Indra's Net, Huayan universe, contemporary, significance

## Introduction

Among hundreds of world class art pieces in the 53rd Venice Biennale, the International Art Exhibition 2009, hung several bright glittering “crystals” in a dark black room and I paused only because of the installation’s simplicity. It was one of my first real encounters with Buddhism, an installation based on Indra’s Jeweled Net. My grandmother praying to Guan Yin and the 14th Dalai Lama’s calls for compassion flashed in my mind, as I read the description of Indra’s Net by the artist. I was taken aback by the concept. Even though I was familiar with New Age sayings like “all in one and one in all” and “the universe within” I had not considered it seriously, until now. This was a Buddhist teaching on the true reality and as my mind went silent, all I could hear was an inner “is it true then?” My mind struggled with the vision, as my notion of reality could not encompass its vastness and the implications this concept would have if it was realized. As the vision became clearer, I felt an expansion but also great concern. My life was following the world views that caused damage wherever it went, and my personal life was grounded on the belief of myself as an independent entity. What if this vision of Indra’s Net was true? How different our society would be if it followed and embodied this concept. And how would we live our personal lives? The radical shift in perspective brought me relief from the notion of myself as only embodied in this physical body. But it also left me with questions, that would alter my life in fundamental ways, what did I truly know about the nature of reality? How can I find out? And what should I base my life upon?

## Purpose and Aim

The main purpose of this paper is to research the visions presented in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra* (Ch. *Huayan jing* 華嚴經) and to introduce the underlying ideas they represent and to ponder upon the possible implications these concepts have if they are acted upon. I aim to do so by firstly introducing the setting in which the vision of Indra’s Net is presented in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra* and briefly touch upon the role God Indra has from a Buddhist perspective. Then follow descriptions of the Jeweled Net of Indra and other metaphors found in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra*. The central thoughts behind the metaphors are outlined and the final part reflects on how these concepts are significant to us in our contemporary times.

## The Context

### The Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra

The Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra is the shortened name for Buddhāvataṃsaka-nāma-mahāvaiṣṭya-sūtra, and it is also known as the Avataṃsaka sūtra, or as the Flower garland sūtra or Flower ornamental scripture (Ch. *Dàfāngguǎng Fóhuāyán Jīng* 大方廣佛華嚴經). It is one of the most influential texts in the history of East Asian Buddhism. It offers a cosmic vision of infinitely infused worlds and depicts the all-encompassing realm of reality which inspired several Buddhist schools and led to the formation of the Huayan school in the Tang dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Its philosophy shows the nature of reality from the perspective of an enlightened being. These insights later came to influence Chinese philosophy and Chinese religions. The masters of this school of thought played major roles in the religious and social worlds in East Asia.<sup>2</sup> According to the legend, the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra was brought to humans by the Buddhist monk and philosopher Nāgārjuna, around 1st to 3rd century, who found it in the Nāga king's palace. But most likely it was compiled from independent sources and several chapters circulated independently before being integrated into the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra.<sup>3</sup> According to some scholars the scripture might have been compiled in Khotan, in central Asia. Yet other scholars point to Indian origin.<sup>4</sup>

The two main themes in the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra is firstly an appraisal of Buddha's capacities and his appearance as an enlightened teacher in this world. And secondly it provides an extensive description of the bodhisattva path. The Daśabhūmika sūtra "The Chapter on the Ten Stages of the Spiritual Path" (Ch. *shí dì jīng* 十地經) and Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra, "The Chapter on the Entry into the Reality-Realm" (Ch. *rù fǎjiè pǐn* 入法界品) are the two most well known chapters in the sūtra and have both been used widely independently. The Gaṇḍavyūha describes the bodhisattva's practice and the Daśabhūmika depicts the bodhisattva's path in ten stages, beginning with the vow to liberate all beings from suffering to the goal of perfect enlightenment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Buswell Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Macmillan Reference, 2004), 340–41.

<sup>2</sup> Imre Hamar, "Huayan Explorations of the Realm of Reality," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism*, ed. Mario Poceski (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Imre Hamar, "Buddhāvataṃsaka," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Volume One*, ed. Jonathan Silk (Brill, 2015), 122.

<sup>4</sup> Hamar, "Huayan Explorations of the Realm of Reality," 149.

<sup>5</sup> Hamar, "Buddhāvataṃsaka," 115–16.

## Indra the King of Gods

The Vedic king of the gods in the sky is named Indra (Ch. *Yintuoluo/Di-Shi* 因陀羅/帝釋). Indra is an abbreviation for Śakra devānām indrah (“Śakra” means the king of the gods). Indra later became the head over all divinities in Indian popular religion and was incorporated into Buddhism as the King of the Deva realm and as a Dharma protector. In Buddhist iconography Indra is depicted as subservient to Buddha. He is seen as worshipping Buddha, protects him from the sun and carries Buddha’s alms bowl.<sup>6</sup> Indra is the one who receives the baby Buddha when he is born and bathes him. And later stories tell how Indra together with Brahma convinces Buddha to teach and that he accompanies Buddha to the heaven of the thirty-three Gods to teach his mother. In legends Indra appears frequently as a “deus ex machina,” a power or being that unexpectedly solves a seemingly hopeless situation. Indra appears sometimes in disguise to put the bodhisattvas through trials but more frequently he assists the devotees in their merit making. He is also invoked at festivals and important ceremonies for the protection of all the beings gathered.<sup>7</sup>

## The Metaphors

### Indra’s Net

A metaphor and vision often used by the Huayan school in East Asian Buddhism is Indra’s Net (Ch. *Yintuoluo wang/Di-Shi wang* 因陀羅網/帝釋網). It is used in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra* to describe the nature of reality which is called the Dharma-dhātu (Ch. *fajie* 法界). The Tang Dynasty scholar and translator Fazang’s (Ch. *Fazang* 法藏) “Cultivation of the Inner Meaning of Huayan: The Contemplations that End Delusion and Return to the Source” (Ch. *xiu Huayan aozhi wangjin huanyuan guan* 修華嚴奧旨妄盡還源觀) the meditation on Indra’s Net is the last of six contemplations. Indra’s Net is a meditation tool to assist the students to visualize the Dharma-dhātu that shows the unimpeded interpenetration between phenomena and phenomena (Ch. *shishi wu ai fajie* 事事無礙法界).<sup>8</sup>

Francis Cook poetically describes the Jeweled Net of Indra:

<sup>6</sup> Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 372.

<sup>7</sup> Buswell, ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 374.

<sup>8</sup> Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 373.

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in the "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.<sup>9</sup>

In each and every jewel, not only do we see all the infinite numbers of jewels but everything in the whole universe. And in each of the reflected jewels one would see everything in the universe and every other jewel. Each jewel in the net is therefore simultaneously reflecting and being reflected by the infinite numbers of jewels. This metaphor illustrates how all things in the universe are defined by their interconnections yet without losing their own distinctive identity.<sup>10</sup> Here one notices that not only interdependence is illustrated but also another dimension is introduced, that of interpenetration. In each distinct jewel are all the other jewels and everything in the universe. In this world everything consists of dharmas which are irreducible units of all the phenomena and contemporary scholars equate dharmas to atoms.<sup>11</sup> In the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra*, the self and the other interpenetrate in each atom, therefore everything in this reality is in a relationship of mutual interdependence and interpenetration.<sup>12</sup>

Indra's Net was one of the similes used to demonstrate concepts that were difficult to comprehend in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra*. Several metaphors are used to illustrate the characteristics of interdependence, interpenetration, identity and non-obstruction.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Francis H. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 372.

<sup>11</sup> Chün-Fang Yü, *Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History* (University of Hawaii Press, 2020), 161.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. Shambhala Publications (Shambhala Publications, 1993), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Yü, *Chinese Buddhism*, 164.

The Jeweled Net of Indra is a vision that points to the ultimate reality in the Huayan school, which is also illustrated in Vairocana's Tower.

### Vairocana's Tower

In Entering the Dharma-dhātu (Ch. *Ru fajie pin* 入法界品) the youth Sudhana journeys far and wide on his quest for enlightenment. He meets 53 teachers who are Buddhists, non-Buddhists, wizards, a prostitute, night spirits and other good friends. Each one of them shares their insights of the ultimate truth and sends him onward on the bodhisattva path. Towards the end of the journey, he meets the bodhisattva Maitreya who brings him to Vairocana's Tower, which represents the cosmos as it is perceived by the enlightened bodhisattvas.<sup>14</sup> As Sudhana enters Vairocana's tower, he sees to his amazement that the interior is as measureless as all of space and adorned with infinite attributes. And inside the great tower he sees hundreds of thousands of towers infinitely vast, each one sublimely decorated and evenly arranged in all directions. Each one being distinct and not mixed up with one another yet appearing reflected in each and every object of all the other towers.<sup>15</sup> As Sudhana saw this magnificent and miraculous manifestation of the inconceivable realm of the great tower, he was flooded with joy and bliss. His mind was clear, free from all conceptions and freed from all obstructions.<sup>16</sup>

### The Ocean and the Wave

Another vision presented in the Huayan treatises is the Ocean and the Wave. The entire ocean exists in one wave, still the ocean does not diminish and even though the wave contains the whole ocean it does not expand. The ocean extends itself to all waves at the same time, but it does not diversify itself. And although all waves include the great ocean, they are not one. "When the great ocean embraces one wave, nothing hinders it from embracing all other waves with its *whole* body. When one wave includes the great ocean, all other waves also include the ocean in its entirety. There is no obstruction whatsoever between them."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Yü, *Chinese Buddhism*, 161.

<sup>15</sup> Cleary, *Flower Ornament Scripture*, 1490.

<sup>16</sup> Li Tongxuan, *Entry into the Realm of Reality: The Gaṇḍavyūha*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Shambhala Publications, 1989), 365–66.

<sup>17</sup> Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 214–15.

## The Ocean Mirror Samadhi

At the moment of enlightenment, the innate Mind reflects as a vast infinite mirror all the phenomena in the whole cosmos. Our minds and this oceanic mirror are not separate, they reflect each other infinitely and every object in the whole cosmos is at the same time a reflector and a reflection.<sup>18</sup> The Mind is illustrated as a vast ocean mirror in which the infinite numbers of phenomena in the universe are simultaneously reflected. Here each and every phenomenon in the whole universe is both a mirror that reflects everything and an image reflected by everything. The Mind only doctrine in Huayan philosophy is altered from a one-way projection to a kaleidoscope of mutual projections and interpenetrations.<sup>19</sup>

## The Concepts

### The Four Dharma-dhātus

In this paper, Dharma means the upholding law and Dhatu has two meanings. From the perspective of principle, Dhatu means “the nature” (Ch. *xing* 性) and from the perspective of phenomena it stands for “that which is divided” (Ch. *fen* 分).<sup>20</sup> The two meanings intermingle as the principle is manifested through the phenomena and the phenomena come into being while attached to the principle.<sup>21</sup> The Huayan school created its own vocabulary and concepts which previously did not exist in Buddhist scriptures, to establish their philosophy. In the Huayan thought, ultimate reality is called Li (Ch. *li* 理) which stands for universality, the underlying essence of phenomena or principle. And the term Shi (Ch. *shi* 事) which represents phenomena, the outward manifestation of Li. One can also describe Li and Shi as two sides of emptiness, Li the static aspect and Shi the dynamic aspect. The Huayan patriarchs discussed four Dharma-dhātus (Ch. *si fajie* 四法界) from different angles and in detail so as to enhance the understanding of it.<sup>22</sup> The teachings of the four Dharma-dhātus are tools for meditation and used for classifications of teachings. They form the basis of Huayan Buddhist practices and theories, which are intimately joined.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Franck, “The Mirrors of Mahayana,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 19, no. 2 (1986): 107.

<sup>19</sup> Chang, *Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Imre Hamar, “The Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra and Its Chinese Interpretation: The Huayan Understanding of the Concepts of Ālayavijñāna and Tathāgatagarbha” PhD diss., (Eötvös Loránd University, 2014), 24

<sup>21</sup> Imre Hamar, “Chengguan's Theory of Four Dharma-dhātus,” *Acta Orientalia Hung* 51, no. 1–2 (1998): 4.

<sup>22</sup> Yü, *Chinese Buddhism*, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Hamar, “Chengguan's Theory of Four Dharma-dhātus,” 17.

1. **The Dharma-dhātu of Shi, phenomena** (Ch. *shì fǎjiè* 事法界 Eng. the realm of all matters and phenomena)
2. **The Dharma-dhātu of Li, principle** (Ch. *lǐ fǎjiè* 理法界 Eng. the realm of the one principle)
3. **The Dharma-dhātu of the non-obstruction of Li and Shi, principle and phenomena** (Ch. 理事無礙法界 *lǐshì wú'ài fǎjiè* Eng. the realm of non-obstruction between principle and phenomena)
4. **The Dharma-dhātu of the non-obstruction of Shi and Shi, phenomena and phenomena** (Ch. *shìshì wú'ài fǎjiè* 事事無礙法界 Eng. the realm of non-obstruction between phenomena)

For the bodhisattvas the great enlightenment is to understand the identity of phenomena and principle. Form and emptiness are the original terms for Shi, phenomena and Li, principle.<sup>24</sup> In the metaphor the Ocean and the Wave the all-embracing principle that Shi embrace Li is illustrated. Shi, phenomena have limitations and boundaries while Li, the principle is limitless and without boundaries. Yet Shi is completely identical with Li. How can it be so? because Shi has no substance, and is the same as Li. Therefore, without any hindrance an atom can embrace the whole universe. And if one atom can do so, all the other dharmas can do so.<sup>25</sup> One of the pinnacles in Huayan philosophy is the Dharma-dhātu of non-obstruction of phenomena and phenomena (Ch. *shìshì wú'ài fǎjiè* 事事無礙法界 Eng. the realm of non-obstruction between phenomena). Previously Shi embraces all by reducing itself to the omnipresent and non-differentiated Li. Shi has to lose its own identity to fuse with Li first, in order to embrace all. In the non-obstruction between phenomena, Shi remains as it is and still embraces all, one atom does not expand its form and yet it embraces the infinite cosmos. Shi doesn't depart from its position and yet it extends to all atoms. To return to Indra's Net, if we were to sit in any one jewel, we would simultaneously be sitting in all the infinite jewels in all the directions. And if one enters one jewel, one enters all the others jewels without leaving the original jewel.<sup>26</sup>

To further illustrate the four Dharma-dhātus, the story of the Golden Lion of Huayan (Ch. *Huayan jin shizi zhang* 華嚴金獅子章) was invented by Fazang. When he taught Empress Wu (Ch. *Wu Zetian* 武則天) the four Dharma-dhātus, she got confused and Fazang

<sup>24</sup> Hamar, "Chengguan's Theory of Four Dharma-dhātus," 9.

<sup>25</sup> Chang, *Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 214.

<sup>26</sup> Chang, *Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 220–21.

pointed to the statue of the golden lion in the palace and used it to clarify the concepts. The Dharma-dhātus is represented by the golden lion which can be seen from four different perspectives. When one focuses on the aspect of gold and not on the lion, one perceives the principle, the Li. Changing perspective to the lion and not the gold, one sees the particular phenomenon, the Shi. As one realizes that the gold cannot be separated from the lion, one sees the interrelationship between the two. Without the gold the lion cannot be and without the lion the gold is not manifested. Finally, one realizes that each part of the lion is identical and interpenetrates with every other part of the lion, one understands the non-obstruction between phenomena. It is so because the whole lion is made of gold. And since their nature is the same, they interpenetrate into each other and the whole lion.<sup>27</sup>

All parts of the lion to even the smallest hair, all contain the whole lion, as they are all made of gold. The eyes are the ears, the ears are the organs, and altogether they are the body. They are all freely established and do not impede each other. In the lion's eyes, in its organs and in each separate hair strands are the golden lion. The lions found in all the single hairs is simultaneously found in one single hair. Therefore, these many hairs have an infinitude of lions and this infinitude of lions of these hairs is again contained in a single hair. In this way there's an endless process of doubling and redoubling, as the infinite process of reflections in Indra's Net.<sup>28</sup>

### **Living in Indra's Net**

The prevalent paradigm in the "Western countries" is based upon the anthropocentric view, in which humans are considered to have the highest value and therefore have the rights to use everything else for their convenience. This idea can perhaps be traced back to the Genesis narrative, where one is told that God created humans in his own image and gave them the right to use and rule over the land and all other beings. Although secularization brought about a powershift from the Christian God to science, still humans kept their God-given position as the most important species in this world. This anthropocentric view was also spread and developed by many Western thinkers.

In distinct contract is the Jeweled Net of Indra. Here there is no hierarchy between phenomena but instead it portrays a universe in which all things are made of each other and exist in each other simultaneously. It presents a more comprehensive and intricate

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<sup>27</sup> Yü, *Chinese Buddhism*, 166–67.

<sup>28</sup> Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy, Vol. 2: The Period of Classical Learning (From the Second Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.)*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton University Press, 1953), 350.

interdependency, a way of “interbeing,” than many of us have ever conceived. It would extend our relationships and responsibilities beyond our family and nation to the little creature on the roadside and to the red planet far away. If I don’t feel related to the green sea turtle, then its destiny has no importance and the ongoing overfishing in the seas wouldn’t matter.<sup>29</sup> But seen through Indra’s Net, when the green sea turtle gets caught in the fisherman’s net and in terror struggles to escape, I would be in pain too.

Can this vision enable us to not only deconstruct the anthropocentric view and our sense of separateness but also provide ways to relate to each other and everything else?

According to Loy, Huayan’s thought of “cosmic ecology” is perhaps more relevant today than ever. The environmental destruction, extinction of species and climate change which were threatening us, are now taking place. This reveals that the essentialist thinking, the anthropocentric bias where human beings are valued higher than all other life forms and the Cartesian myth of an autonomous self-consciousness, is not sustainable. Humans cannot separate themselves from the web of life without causing damage to it and themselves.<sup>30</sup> For these reasons, awareness of the mutual identity and interpenetration of this web of life can be the doctrine that helps us reconsider our conceptual framework.

What scientific evidence is there to support the visions presented in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra*? Mendel Sachs, the physicist stated, that if among all the matter in the whole universe, one bundle of matter ceased to exist, the mass of the remaining matter would be reduced to nothing. This implies that mass is a function of the total environment and dependent on it.<sup>31</sup> And perhaps so too does the finding in physics which states that “each electrically charged particle exerts its charge everywhere in the universe and is affected by every other charged particle.”<sup>32</sup>

Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese Zen master and poet, writes that our interconnectedness can be understood by reflecting deeply on a flower:

Imagine, for a moment, a beautiful flower. That flower might be an orchid or a rose, or even a simple little daisy growing beside a path. Looking into a flower, we can see that it is full of life. It contains soil, rain, and sunshine. It is also full

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<sup>29</sup> Overfishing also has an effect on the climate change. “Plenty of Fish?” United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, last modified June 10, 2022, <https://unfccc.int/news/plenty-of-fish>.

<sup>30</sup> David Loy, “Indra’s Postmodern Net,” *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3, (1993): 483.

<sup>31</sup> Mendel Sachs, “Space, Time and Interaction in Relativity,” *Physics Today* 22, no. 2 (February, 1969): 59.

<sup>32</sup> Loy, “Indra’s Postmodern Net,” 482.

of clouds, oceans, and minerals. It is even full of space and time. In fact, the whole cosmos is present in this one little flower. If we took out just one of these “non-flower” elements, the flower would not be there. Without the soil’s nutrients, the flower could not grow. Without rain and sunshine, the flower would die. And if we removed all the non-flower elements, there would be nothing substantive left that we could call a “flower.” So our observation tells us that the flower is full of the whole cosmos, while at the same time it is empty of a separate self-existence. The flower cannot exist by itself alone. We too are full of so many things and yet empty of a separate self. Like the flower, we contain earth, water, air, sunlight, and warmth. We contain space and consciousness. We contain our ancestors, our parents and grandparents, education, food, and culture. The whole cosmos has come together to create the wonderful manifestation that we are. If we remove any of these “non-us” elements, we will find there is no “us” left.<sup>33</sup>

Our sense of separateness gives rise to conflict and sorrow. And this division is here juxtaposed with the illustration of being full of everything in the whole cosmos. However, these beautiful visuals need more than conceptualizing. Francis Cook points out that these visions are to be used for meditation, as they illustrate the philosophy, and their result is the transformation of our perception of reality. The concepts must be realized and made real in one’s daily life; by altering one’s ethical stance as one attempts to live according to the interdependent and interpenetrating nature of reality.<sup>34</sup> The function of these visions and concepts is to bring people to practices which ultimately validate what previously only existed as theory. And at the same time, they function as a model to which the practitioners can align themselves.

If I am to live in accordance with Huayan’s thoughts, then I should act in such a way that all beings benefit from my acts. I choose for all when I choose for myself, and my acts have consequences far beyond what I can perceive and think of. As our lives are intricately interdependent, I should protect and care for others in the same way I care for myself, without discrimination. And to treat all objects and beings, sentient and insentient, with respect and gratitude. Francis Cook also speaks of cultivating an attitude of fairness, that we were made to be used by others in the same way we use them. I am to be eaten by the tiger in the same way I eat blueberries.

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<sup>33</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in the Here and Now* (Parallax Press, 2017), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism*, 15.

And finally, great compassion which is inseparable from the insight of emptiness. That means to treat the other as what they are in reality and not through conceptual frameworks, inference, conventions and so forth. Stated in all simplicity, to act compassionately means to act in accordance with reality. And the great compassion is not the compassion of the ordinary kind, but the compassion that occurs through all space and time and pervades the ten thousand galaxies and realizes itself through it.<sup>35</sup> In Indra's Jeweled Net, the universe and every little being in it, are in their nature interdependent and interpenetrating. This reality calls for care and protection with responsibility towards everything and everyone. And every choice and act we do should be for all, and be imbued with utmost gratitude, respect and compassion.

## Conclusion

The visions in the Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra, of Indra's Net and Vairocana's Tower, The Ocean and the Wave and the Golden Lion, have been illustrated in this paper. The underlying concepts of these metaphors have been briefly outlined. The metaphors bring about visualizations that show the characteristics of interdependence, interpenetration, identity and non-obstruction. These are used as meditation tools to realize the Dharmadhātu, the ultimate nature of reality and they are intended to be used as manuals and guidelines. In the final part of this paper, the validity and the results of the anthropocentric views, underlying our paradigm, are questioned. Huayan's concepts can enable us to not only deconstruct the anthropocentric view but also provide new ways to relate to each other and everything else. The endlessly vast and intricate vision of reality found in Huayan would fundamentally alter our ethical stance and transform every aspect of our lives. In Indra's Net everything is interconnected and has the same identity, from the little insect sleeping on my writing desk to everything in this universe, all is within our responsibility and care. Out of honoring and appreciating all there is, our decisions are made. And our acts are born out of compassion, working for the good of all.

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