

# **Buddhist Art, Texts & Culture: A Study of the Avataṃsaka sūtra**

## **《華嚴經》經典、圖像與文化傳播**

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### **BACKGROUND**

#### **BUDDHIST ART, TEXT & CULTURAL VALUE**

The Avataṃsaka sūtra is one of the most important Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. It was first translated into Chinese in southern China in the early fifth century by Fa Ye. Following its propagating by some eminent Buddhist monks, it was widely spread to other regions and there was an increasing demand of the texts and artifacts associated with the Avataṃsaka sūtra. With the influence of its doctrine, which was promoted by Buddhist master Du Shun (557–640) in northern China, it was then established as the Avataṃsaka school in the Tang dynasty. The Avataṃsaka school or Huayan school is influential in Eastern Asia, in countries such as Korea and Japan. One of the reasons for this is because the doctrine of the Avataṃsaka sūtra was adopted and assimilated into Chinese society through Confucius and Daoist thoughts. The theory that was created from the late Tang dynasty known as “three teachings harmoniously merged as one” (三教合一), which was the syncretism of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, then strongly impacted the lifestyles in Eastern Asian cultures. This project will investigate how, who and what the reasons were that enhanced the transmission of this sūtra from southern to northern China. We will pay particular attention to the Buddhist monks from central Asia who went to China via the Silk Road.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

This project aims to investigate of the art and texts of the Avataṃsaka sūtra in Buddhist caves, and its cultural transmission from India to China before the seventh century. Specifically, it will:

- 1) identify the design and engraving of the art in caves associated with the Avataṃsaka sūtra;
- 2) analyze the function and meaning of images and inscriptions in various caves;
- 3) investigate who the influential figures were who impacted the development of the

Avataṃsaka sūtra in southern and northern China; and

4) investigate the cultural interactions between northern and southern China, mainly focusing on the Buddhist doctrines of pure land Buddhism and the Avataṃsaka sūtra.