

The Transformation of the Pure Land in the Development of Lay Buddhist Practice in China

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Introduction

Around the beginning of the common era, Buddhism entered China from India and Central Asia via the famed Silk Road. This complex and rather philosophical religion found few ready followers in China, although it thrived in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Central Asia. Buddhism, to the extent that it was perceived by the Chinese people, was deemed a foreign religion or at least a religion for foreigners.¹ This rather ethnocentric view, however, was not to last.²

With the break-up of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E., Buddhist development followed two paths in China. In the northern areas, the religion spread by aligning itself with the non-Chinese rulers. To the south, Buddhist literature and philosophy began to attract interest particularly among the literati and officials fleeing the northern "barbarians." By the fourth century, monks from India and the various Central Asian nations had established centers of Buddhist learning, practice and translation in China.³ Particularly in the north, the post-Han emperors in their continuous search to consolidate their dynastic lines made good use of the materials at hand. Buddhism, at once sophisticated and straight-forward, seemed to fall somewhere not quite

in the realm of Taoist concerns or Confucian values. Who can say whether it was genuine piety or part of the delicate balance of political give-and-take that prompted imperial patronage of this erstwhile foreign religion.⁴ One result was the extensive government-sponsored translation center at Ch'ang-an headed by Kumārajīva (344–413).⁵ Within a few centuries Buddhism had become a force to be reckoned with in the Chinese political arena.⁶

The debate continues as to whether Buddhism became Chinese or did the Chinese become Buddhists.⁷ That is to say, had some amorphous Chinese cultural entity taken Buddhism and sinicised it or did Buddhism somehow infiltrate and influence that unique sense of Chinese cultural self and thereby transform the Chinese into Buddhists? Clearly, neither extreme dominates. Suffice to say that by the fifth century Buddhism was well established in China. Monasteries had been founded, lineages detailed, pilgrims dispatched and some even returned.⁸ These intrepid wayfarers brought back not only texts, but also their observations of the state of Buddhism in other lands.⁹ Meanwhile, indigenous Chinese Buddhist monks of no little repute and significance were studying, interpreting, and perhaps even creating¹⁰ *sūtras* on their own. By the latter half of the sixth century, the stage was set for the evolution of two uniquely Chinese forms of Buddhism, Ch'an and Pure Land.

The sixth and seventh centuries in China saw a fascinating innovation in Buddhist practice. This was the increased activities of popular or lay Buddhism. Of course, Buddhism was not completely unfamiliar to the common people even then. Certain Buddhist figures and ideas had been inducted into the pantheon of Chinese folk religion centuries before.¹¹ For example, by the sixth century upon death the pious Chinese expected to descend to the world of the dead beneath the earth where Yen-lo, formerly Yama of Buddhist extraction, would judge the *karma* of the deceased and decide what torment or reward should be administered.¹² Despite such commonly-held notions, I believe a sufficiently clear distinction can be made between the presence of things of Buddhist origin in the folk religious context and the emerging lay practice of Buddhism for the sake of attaining enlightenment.

Prior to the sixth century, Buddhist texts, learning, and practices had been almost completely the province of the professional clergy, the monk and the nun.¹³ Literacy may be considered one of the primary reasons for this specialization. In the south, Buddhist monks had courted the cultural elite with some success.¹⁴ On occasion, gentlemen-scholars and monks discussed doctrine or engaged in academic debate. To the north, the ability to do magic characterized the successful Buddhist monks in the "barbarian" courts.¹⁵ In other times and places, Buddhist ritual might be the object of study of a Taoist master for

comparison purposes. Generally, Buddhist learning remained within the walls of the monastery, since the formal practice of Buddhism required leaving the householder life. However, through the influence of a few more evangelically-oriented monks and in response to the harsh social and political situation of the common peasant, a need was created and lay Buddhism was born in China.¹⁶

The so-called sinicized Chinese Buddhist practice developed primarily along two lines: the Ch'an or meditation style and the devotional Pure Land type. Each is the product of a remarkable shift in the interpretation of a standard feature of Buddhism. The Ch'an emphasized the attainment of enlightenment through meditation. The focus was the meditational experience itself, albeit inspired and guided by a teacher, but without the usual obligatory lengthy scriptural study.¹⁷ The Pure Land followers were exhorted to put their faith and trust in the power of Buddha Amitabha. According to the Pure Land *sūtras*,¹⁸ Amitabha had vowed to have all beings who so desired born into his Pure Land, Sukhavatī, and from there unfailingly attain buddhahood.¹⁹ One expression of this trust vigorously promoted by the monk Tao-ch'o (562–645) was to continuously recite the Buddha's name in the formula: *Namo O-mi-t'o-fo*.²⁰

I contend that a significant factor in the spread of lay Pure Land devotion in China was a shift in the vision of Sukhavatī. Informed by the so-called "visualization" *sūtras*²¹ that had been translated during the fifth century, monastic practitioners tended to employ the Pure Land as a meditational tool. Works such as the *Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng chieh* attributed to Vasubandhu (ca. 420–500) gave detailed instruction for meditational practice.²² The successive visualizations of the features of Sukhavatī, its myriad adornments, as well as the bodhisattvas and Amitabha Buddha in all their respective glory were considered indicative of spiritual progress. However, such elaborate visualization was not a feasible practice for the ordinary person. Moved by the hapless situation of the common person, monks such as T'an-luan (476–542 or 488–554) and his self-proclaimed disciple Tao-ch'o recommended that people should aspire for birth in Sukhavatī as the surest way to enlightenment. To this end, the *Sukhavatīvyūhasūtras* told of Amitabha's vow to save all sentient beings and described faith and prayer as means to attain birth in the Pure Land.

The result of T'an-luan's and Tao-ch'o's propagation particularly among the lay populace was the transformation of the view of the Pure Land from a somewhat esoteric meditational tool to a more concrete and accessible place. Judging by the descriptions of Sukhavatī in the Pure Land *sūtras*, such a view may easily constitute a reversion to Indian concepts of the ontological nature of the Pure Land. The nature of the

Pure Land as form or formless could still be argued by scholars. Yet, the belief in the Pure Land as an objective, ontological entity contributed greatly to its wide acceptance as a primary goal of practice especially for lay followers. For the Pure Land devotee, buddhahood would come later, the first step was to attain birth in Sukhāvati. I believe that it was the adoption of this altered vision of the Pure Land that allowed Chinese Pure Land Buddhism to flourish at the lay level.

In this study, I will discuss monastic and lay Chinese Pure Land practices with particular regard to the view of the nature of the Pure Land and its desirability as a goal of practice. Of additional interest will be the practice of calling the name of Amitabha as a way to attain birth in the Pure Land. The Chinese monk Tao-ch'ō's commentary *An-lo-chi* is of particular significance in promoting exclusive devotion to Amitabha and will be reviewed accordingly. Also, the *An-lo-chi*'s relationship to T'an-luan's *Wang-sheng lun chu* will be briefly noted. The political, social, and religious environment in China during the sixth and seventh centuries of the common era forms the soil in which Pure Land practices take root. Comparisons with Taoist and folk/indigenous practices will help to explain the acceptance of the Pure Land as a viable goal and the recitation of the name of Amitabha as the means to get there.

1. Practice

The Buddhist doctrines that entered China and which were eventually to flourish there were of typically a Mahayana bent. The philosophical evolution of Mahayana Buddhism is marked by the theories of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and the Two Truths (conventional vs. ultimate). The Mādhyamikas espoused the Middle Path delineated by an eightfold negation,²³ while the Yogācārinś dealt in the nature of illusion, leading them to emphasize the mind and the meditational faculty.²⁴ Both these streams are represented in the Buddhist thought in China before the sixth century. In India, continued speculation on the nature of a buddha resulted in a proliferation of buddhas and buddha-lands.²⁵ A Buddhist cosmology based on the Indian articulated this buddha-land called Saha of Śākyamuni Buddha, and also the multifarious systems of other buddhas beyond this world-system (*loka-dhātu*).²⁶ Such a view set the stage for the acceptance of the unseen and intangible as not merely real or actual, but as significant in the quest for enlightenment.

Śākyamuni himself had charged his disciples to go forth and preach the Dharma for the benefit of all beings.²⁷ This sanction may have inspired Buddhism to cross cultural boundaries and opened the missionary door to nations beyond India. Add to this the Mahayana inspiration of the bodhisattva ideal that all beings are able to attain enlightenment

and the propagational zeal of those first early travelers is easy to understand. Not coincidentally, the spread of the Mahāyāna was effected by monks who felt the missionary call. It would be improper to infer that Mahāyāna Buddhism was at this stage anything but a monkly profession. It would also be incorrect to assume that there was a Mahāyāna Buddhism distinct from the so-called Hīnayāna. While some sources imply that the Mahāyāna itself was a lay invention,²⁸ the scope of the task of missionary propagation clearly calls for a trained religious professional. Equally apparent is the need for the missionary monk to tailor his preaching to the available audience of merchants and travelers and alien natives along the Silk Road.²⁹ Naturally, the all-embracing bodhisattva path would find appeal.

Since Śākyamuni Buddha's time, the role of lay people had been primarily to support the monks or as time went on to support the monastic establishment. This was generally through the donation of food, shelter, services and, of course, cash. In return, the lay supporter received the opportunity to listen to the Dharma which predisposed the devout listener to a future birth as a monk himself. Women supposedly had to work up to a masculine birth first. In a more material sense, there was the opportunity to gain merit in direct proportion to the amount spent. Still, this resulted in little more than temporary esteem and again the chance of a better rebirth.³⁰ The monks on their side cultivated spiritual power through their own practices usually by study of *sūtras*, expounding a *sūtra*, or through meditation and the observance of precepts.³¹

The Buddhist monk's itinerant lifestyle including daily begging of alms based on Śākyamuni's example was not well-received in China. This seemingly parasitic monastic system ran counter to the family-based Chinese view of society.³² Following Central Asian precedents, monasteries in China came to operate hotels, moneylending institutions, mills, warehouses, and hospitals.³³ While technically such occupations were often discouraged from monasterial use in China, the power of the corporation was not unknown.³⁴ Also, as a consequence of compassionate concern for all beings, a variety of charitable institutions were associated with Buddhism.³⁵ Monasteries became temples. In China, inspired by Confucian ideals the government has always taken an interest in potential sources of heresy. In such reasoning, heterodox views led to the neglect of the "official" gods, which led to cosmic imbalance. This imbalance could manifest as all types of disasters including possibly the overthrow of the government itself. Thus, there was no separation of state and church in China. The government granted exemption from taxes and corvée labor to monks, yet exercised the authority to grant or rescind monkhood also.³⁶ In return for ecclesiastic

services, the temples might receive government dispensations, even land and serfs. The potential for abuse of this relationship was well attested on both sides particularly during the T'ang dynasty.³⁷

At the national level, ecclesiastic services might include services to protect the nation and the ruling dynasty from such disasters as flood or drought, pestilence and famine, or invasion and rebellion. The Buddhist monks who frequented the court were often more noted for their magical accomplishments than for their spiritual ones.³⁸ At the local level, prevention of natural calamities normally fell under the sway of the area's deities. However, there was ample room in the field of the ancestor cult of China for Buddhist services. Rites for the dead and rituals to improve the rebirth or destiny of the deceased became areas of Buddhist penetration into Chinese society at all levels.³⁹ Any family of standing would like to believe that they were taking proper care of their dearly departed and Buddhist merit was considered legal tender in the hereafter. Buddhist transfer of merit became quickly entangled with the folk and Taoist practices of communication with the spirits (especially of the departed) and the pacification of the same with offerings of food and goods.⁴⁰

Pure land practice, of course, was not a Chinese innovation. Perhaps as early as the inception of the Mahāyāna itself, Pure Land devotions were practiced. Writings attributed to Nāgārjuna (ca.150–250) and Vasubandhu, the great Mahāyāna exponents, mention Amitabha in his buddha-land with the intent to achieve birth there. Two of the so-called canonical texts of Pure Land Buddhism, the *Larger* and the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* are thought to have been compiled around 100 C.E. in northwestern India.⁴¹ They describe the career of the bodhisattva Dharmakara, enumerate his vows that are fulfilled by his Enlightenment and in the establishment of Sukhāvati and describe that buddha-land in detail. The *sūtras* also note how one might attain birth in Sukhāvati and the benefits thereof. Even so, a particular technique of practice is not mandated.

It is through the third of the Pure Land texts, the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*, that visualization and recitation enter the repertoire of Pure Land practice.⁴² The *sūtra* was compiled in the fifth century probably in Central Asia.⁴³ It relates the tribulations of Queen Vaidehi who is imprisoned by her usurper son Ajatāśatru. In the course of the story, Śakyamuni reveals to the queen the Pure Land of Amitabha and the sixteen visualization practices that result in birth there. Recitation of Amitabha's name is addressed in the last of the visualizations as the only practice a person of the lowest rank of the lowest grade of birth is able to do in order to attain birth in Sukhāvati.⁴⁴ Specifically, recitation of the Buddha's name removed the effects of evil karma that bind one to birth-and-death.⁴⁵ Recitation, therefore, became a way to accumulate merit.

Originally, a person's stock of merit or demerit was determined by one's own effort. For lay followers, as noted above, merit derived chiefly from donation. Simple veneration through bowing or offering incense and the like to an image might also be acceptable. On special occasions, providing a banquet for the monks or commissioning an icon to memorialize a deceased ancestor also won merit.⁴⁶ However, in subtle ways, it was made clear that the chanting of a *sūtra* by a monk was worth more than the same act of a layperson. This was due basically to the superior dedication of the religious who had left the householder life to pursue more lofty goals. Donations, in a sense, paid for a service rendered by a skilled professional.

In order to mesh with the bodhisattva ideal, merit created by monks through activities such as visualization or chanting a *sūtra* should technically be transferred for the benefit of all sentient beings in order that they all might eventually attain enlightenment. However, the market for memorial services allowed that merit might be directed to the benefit of a specific deceased among all sentient beings. In reference to memorial services, Tao-ch'ō in the *An-lo-chi* quotes a conveniently worded text:

If a person who is on the verge of death dies and falls into hell; then he will be able to leave hell and attain Birth in the Pure Land if a member of his family or relatives recites the Nembutsu [*Namo O-mi-t'ō-fō*] or repeatedly chants a *sūtra* or offers food to the *bhikṣus* [monks] on behalf of the person who died.

Thus, if that person personally thoroughly practiced the recitation of the Nembutsu while he was alive, then why wouldn't he be able to attain Birth in the Pure Land?⁴⁷

The second part of the quote sounds suspiciously like a personal interpretation on the part of Tao-ch'ō or another unacknowledged source despite being portrayed as part of a quoted text. It does, however, express a significant development for lay Buddhist practice—the possibility of salvation without becoming a monk.

As the notion of merit developed in the Pure Land movement in China under T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ō, and Shan-tao (613–681), there is an increasing reliance on the merit of a Buddha, that is the power that Buddha gained through kalpas and kalpas of practice.⁴⁸ Rather than rely on one's own ability to accumulate merit in this short and uncertain life or even through the many suffering-filled lifetimes to come, the Pure Land follower was encouraged to call on Amitābha who vowed specifically to have all sentient beings who so desired be born into his Pure Land of Sukhāvātī. The eighteenth vow of Dharmakara states:

If the beings of the ten quarters—when I have attained Bodhi—blissfully trust in me with the most sincere mind, wish to be born in my country, and raise (one to) ten thoughts, and if they are not so born, may I never obtain the Highest Perfect Knowledge. Excluded, however, are those who have committed the Five Deadly Sins and who have abused the Right Dharma.⁴⁹

The advantages of this easy approach, especially for the lay follower whose capacity and opportunity for rigorous practice were limited, are obvious.

Another strong recommendation for actively pursuing the Pure Land path was the prevalent rumour that the Last Period of Dharma (*mo-fa*) was imminent. Śakyamuni Buddha had predicted that after his passing the Dharma that he had preached would in the course of time decline and spiritual chaos would reign until the next Buddha, Maitreya, was born.⁵⁰ According to several Chinese calculations, *mo-fa* had arrived.⁵¹ Pure Land Buddhism offered lay followers a way to tap the merit of an established Buddha. According to Tao-ch'o, one need only awaken the Bodhi Mind, that is the mind that desires enlightenment, and sincerely wish to be born in Sukhavatī.⁵² Through the inconceivable power of Dharmakara's vows, one obtains birth in Sukhavatī where mere mortal hindrances would evaporate and the many kalpas worth of practices necessary for enlightenment would become easy in the presence of the Buddha Amitabha. Tao-ch'o also identified birth in Sukhavatī with the attainment of the non-retrogressive state,⁵³ a level of understanding at which it was no longer a danger that the individual might relapse into bad habits and incur evil rebirths.⁵⁴ Thus, salvation was assured through birth in Sukhavatī.

The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the role of Buddhism in China, and the development of the Pure Land movement follow as waves one upon another. The rise of Mahāyāna led to a propagational spirit that brought an Indian religion to China via the Central Asian trade routes. The influence of Buddhism in China began with the benefits to be gained for the family in providing for the ancestors and in the pacification of ghosts. While this was definitely a this-worldly benefit, the thought of other-worldly benefit was creeping into the minds of the Chinese. The consciousness of the theory of the decline of the Dharma which was mirrored in the social and political upheaval of the nation⁵⁵ with the threat of natural disasters prodded perhaps more than one person to assess his or her future. If this were the Last Period of Dharma, then there was need for haste. The overriding concern was that one would be born again and again into the Three Realms⁵⁶ of Saha without hope of release. There was, moreover, a perceived need for desperate measures.

The significance of the Pure Land movement is merely in asserting that rather than the kalpas and kalpas of practice required to achieve the non-retrogressive state, one need merely rely on the merit of Amitabha Buddha to attain birth in Sukhāvati and from there unfailingly attain buddhahood.

2. Texts

The preceding part has dealt broadly with the introduction of Buddhism into China and the effect that the development of the Mahayana had on lay practice with particular focus on Pure Land devotionalism. In China, religious schools tended to be very fluid.⁵⁷ The affiliation between master and disciples was usually strong, but still a monk might study with several masters. Also, disciples of a single master may or may not agree with each other. The doctrinal atmosphere tended to the eclectic, rather than the sectarian. For example, the prolific exegete Ching-ying Hui-yüan (523–592) wrote notable commentaries on a variety of texts including Pure Land *sūtras*.⁵⁸ Similarly, adherents of the T'ien-t'ai school studied the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Prajñāparamita* texts and also practiced Amitabha recitation and circumambulation.⁵⁹ The Pure Land devotion promulgated by the T'an-luan/Tao-ch'o/Shan-tao line is distinctive in that it emphasized the practice of thinking about Amitabha and calling his name in order to attain birth in Sukhāvati. All other practices came to be deemed ineffective, even inferior, particularly for ordinary lay adherents during *mo-fa*, the Last Period of Dharma.⁶⁰

Interestingly enough, the exclusivity of reliance on Amitabha was not to last in China. The practices of chanting the name and desiring birth in Sukhāvati enjoyed widespread popularity at all levels of society from the Sui dynasty and onward. But by the mid-T'ang, the imminence of *mo-fa* had retreated. Inclusion of Amitabha worship in other Buddhist schools, the renewal of confidence that accompanied the political stability of the T'ang period and also syncretic influences all worked to ameliorate the need for immediate birth in the Pure Land.⁶¹ Centuries pass before the Japanese monk Genshin (942–1017) revives Shan-tao; and Honen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1263) found schools based on the exclusive reliance on Amitabha which flourish in the highly sectarian soil of Kamakura Japan.⁶²

Turning once again to Tao-ch'o, one asks how he came to embrace exclusive reliance on Amitabha and birth in Sukhāvati as the best way to attain buddhahood. Clearly, Tao-ch'o relies on his self-acknowledged spiritual predecessor, T'an-luan. T'an-luan, in his turn, appears to draw his inspiration particularly from the *Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng chieh*⁶³ which is also known as Vasubandhu's *Rebirth Treatise*.⁶⁴

A short review of the pertinent texts is in order. Two principle themes of Pure Land practice, visualization and recitation, are treated in the *Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng chieh* attributed to Vasubandhu.⁶⁵ Embraced as canonical within and without the Pure Land fold, Tanaka calls the text "perhaps...the most influential Indian śāstra of Pure Land Buddhism in China as well as in Japan."⁶⁶ However, only a Chinese version of this work has survived and some of its phrasing has led researchers to question its Indian compilation.⁶⁷ The treatise consists of a verse and a prose section in which the author delineates Five Contemplative Gates of practice for birth in Sukhavatī. The gates are, in order, worship, praise, aspiration for birth, visualization, and transference of merit. Oral recitation of the name of Amitabha is classed as praise. A Chinese version of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng chieh* supposedly translated by Bodhiruci in about 529 is the basis of an extensive commentary by T'an-luan called the *Wang-sheng lun chu*.⁶⁸

T'an-luan explains in almost word-by-word detail the meaning of Vasubandhu's treatise and in the process derives Pure Land practice as a distinct path of Buddhism. Perhaps more significant is the fact that T'an-luan takes an assumedly non-Chinese text and, as it were, anoints it with Chinese cultural classics both Taoist and Confucian.⁶⁹ Several phrases from Taoist and Confucian sources appear in the *Wang-sheng lun chu* lending support to Buddhist notions. Unlike the stock biography of an eminent monk, T'an-luan's life includes a Taoist "conversion" and Pure Land "re-conversion."⁷⁰ Initially a Buddhist monk, ill health led him to the pursuit of Taoist longevity. Apparently he proved an apt pupil as his skills as a physician are in later years recognized by the emperor who had him installed at the Hsüan-chung-ssu, a small and somewhat remote monastery in Shansi province. At about forty years of age, T'an-luan is converted to Pure Land Buddhism when Bodhiruci chides him for seeking immortality within *samsāra*, the cycle of birth-and-death. Provided with Pure Land texts by Bodhiruci including possibly Vasubandhu's *Rebirth Treatise*,⁷¹ T'an-luan proceeded to write the *Wang-sheng lun chu* drawing on his own diverse background for examples. Moreover, T'an-luan propagated his Pure Land ideas to the local laity. At his death, some three hundred persons, probably mostly lay people, attended and recited the name of Amitabha Buddha. Thus, T'an-luan seems to have portrayed the Pure Land path in terms especially relevant to Chinese followers.

Inspired by T'an-luan's example, Tao-ch'ö took up Pure Land devotional practices at the Hsüan-chung-ssu. Accounts of his life indicate that he strove to emulate T'an-luan by actively preaching to lay people.⁷² In particular, he practiced and promoted the continuous recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha based on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou*

ching. In fact, the *An-lo-chi* written by Tao-ch'ö presents itself as a commentary on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*. It is indeed a commentary, although its relation to the above *sūtra* is more in name than in substance. Tao-ch'ö comments comparatively little on the *sūtra*, yet does extensively quote a raft of other *sūtras* and commentaries, particularly the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.⁷³ He also draws repeatedly, albeit usually without acknowledgment, on T'an-luan's *Wang-sheng lun chu*. T'an-luan's legacy of Taoist quotes and work among the laity influenced significantly the evangelical flavor of the *An-lo-chi*.

In modern times, the *An-lo-chi* has perhaps not received the scholarly attention it is due,⁷⁴ perhaps because of its evangelical tone or due to the inclusion of a number of so-called "apocryphal" texts. The *An-lo-chi* is rife with obviously apocryphal material and does not hesitate to depend on legend, myth, and folk knowledge to support its points. The English translation that I have used in this paper was prepared by George Eishin Shibata in 1969 for his Master's degree at Ryūkoku University. Shibata in his preface acknowledges that, "there are places where I had to make a free translation in order to clarify the meaning."⁷⁵ This is not a problem except where it might raise questions of post-interpretation. For example, Shibata consistently interprets a variety of phrases as neutral and innocuous as "contemplate", "think", "hold", and "practice" as specifically "recite the Nembutsu". While this is clearly in line with Tao-ch'ö's intent, it is not present in the untranslated text.⁷⁶ The *An-lo-chi* is considered a significant text in the Japanese Pure Land tradition and has generated its own sub-commentaries.⁷⁷

While not written in the precise commentarial form used by T'an-luan, the question-and-answer style of the *An-lo-chi* is well-adapted to expressing what was on Tao-ch'ö's mind. Basically his concern was that the Last Period of Dharma (*mo-fa*) had arrived and that sentient beings of the future (read now) would transmigrate for many kalpas unless they diligently addressed themselves to acquiring birth in the Pure Land of Amitabha, the Land of Peace and Bliss (*An-lo*). The opening pages of the *An-lo-chi* clearly express Tao-ch'ö's sincere and heartfelt desire to save the common person of low spiritual capacity by advocating the only appropriate practice in this Last Period of Dharma. Specifically, one should awaken the Bodhi Mind (*bodhicitta*) and, while sincerely desiring to be born in Sukhāvati, constantly call the name of Amitabha. This was the most that an ordinary person could hope to accomplish in this life.

On the surface, the *An-lo-chi* is the work of a monk writing for monks. Frequent admonishments to the reader to spread the teaching in the future, however, clearly indicate that the intended audience should not stop with the reader. In Tao-ch'ö's time, those able to read would have

been the clerics and scholars. The repeated inclusion of "laymen and laywomen" in the easy path promulgated by Tao-ch'ö clearly indicates his concern for these perceived less fortunates. Tao-ch'ö's biography in the *Hsü kao-seng-chuan* notes his popularity with both clerics and laypersons, even the imperial family.⁷⁸ The exaggerations of hagiography aside, Tao-ch'ö supposedly was able to convert people whom he met on the open road, and when his death was imminent throngs of people came to the mountain in order to pay their last respects.⁷⁹

Since Tao-ch'ö apparently did not feel constrained to follow the standard commentarial format,⁸⁰ the tone of the *An-lo-chi* is almost anecdotal—clearly reflecting Tao-ch'ö's personal convictions. According to him, *mo-fa* was now and all sentient beings should take their faith firmly in hand and wholeheartedly aspire for their next birth in Sukhavatī. In many ways the *An-lo-chi* is more a manual for practice than an exegetical discourse. The exact details of how birth in Sukhavatī was to be obtained were not nearly as important for Tao-ch'ö as the need to convince people that such birth was to be preferred over any other. Purists today may be taken aback to see a collection like the *An-lo-chi* which boldly quotes *sūtra* and folk remedies side by side. The scandal, in their eyes, lies in the fact that Tao-ch'ö assigns equal value to folk cosmology and mythology as he does to the acknowledged word of the Buddha. For example, when Tao-ch'ö attempts to show why Sukhavatī is located in the western quarter, he begins by stating "In Jambu-dvīpa,⁸¹ the spot where the sun rises is called birth and the spot where it sets is called death. Because of this, when a person dies, it is convenient for his spirit to proceed in that direction. For this reason, Dharmakara Bodhisattva established the Vow, attained Buddhahood, and is in the Western Quarter to compassionately receive the sentient beings."⁸² Tao-ch'ö follows with a tale about a dead monk who had recited the *Smaller Sukhavatīvyūha Sūtra* and whose tongue therefore resisted cremation and became an object of veneration. He closes with a cosmological argument that credits Amitabha with sending two bodhisattvas, identified in China as Fu Hsi and his sister,⁸³ to bring light to the world. Thus, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations proceed westward in praise of Amitabha. Tao-ch'ö appears patently unconcerned with the canonical status of his examples, even to the point of not identifying his sources at all. In his defense, it is possible that he considered some items to be common knowledge, whereas other items are simply not covered in Buddhist doctrine. Moreover, it may very well be Tao-ch'ö's literal interpretations of Chinese cosmology that allowed him to reach the common person.

While the tone of the *An-lo-chi* is friendly, its content almost defies organization. Even Chia-ts'ai (ca. 620–680), a fellow Pure Land devotee,

noted that "the ideas of this text are very diverse and the chapters and sections are muddled" and that "those who read the *An-lo-chi* in later times will be filled with uncertainty (about its central meaning)."⁸⁴ One might expect a more sympathetic review from Chia-ts'ai who had admirably included Tao-ch'o in a list of twenty people who had certainly attained birth in Sukhavatī based on miraculous events that accompanied their deaths.⁸⁵ Apparently, the organization of the *An-lo-chi* was no more obvious then than now. Technically, the *An-lo-chi* is conceived in two fascicles. The first fascicle purportedly discusses the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*, the role of *bodhicitta*, and the identification of the Pure Land path. The second fascicle concentrates on the practice of recitation and the comparison of Sukhavatī with other pure lands and with this world-system of Saha. In actually reading the text, however, one finds a variety of topics addressed in apparently haphazard order. Tao-ch'o's view of the Pure Land towards which the present discussion is heading must be drawn piecemeal from throughout the *An-lo-chi*.

Much of the first fascicle of the *An-lo-chi* is a recapitulation of T'an-luan's *Wang-sheng lun chu*. Notably, however, Tao-ch'o neglects to mention any of T'an-luan's discussion on the sixteen objects of visualization which constitute Vasubandhu's fourth gate for entry into the Pure Land. The other gates of practice are similarly ignored.

Briefly, in T'an-luan's rendering of the Five Contemplative Gates, the first four constitute the activities necessary for entering Sukhavatī and attaining enlightenment. The fifth gate portrays the accomplished bodhisattva leaving Sukhavatī in order to save sentient beings who are struggling in *samsāra*. According to Vasubandhu (upper case) and T'an-luan:

ENTERING THROUGH THE FIRST GATE: ONE WORSHIPS AMITĀBHA BUDDHA FOR THE SAKE OF BEING BORN IN THAT LAND, AND THEREFORE OBTAINS BIRTH IN THE REALM OF BLESSED PEACE. THIS IS CALLED, ENTERING THROUGH THE FIRST GATE.

Worshiping Buddha, and resolving to be Born in the Buddha's Land, is what pertains to the first virtue.

ENTERING THROUGH THE SECOND GATE: ONE PRAISES AMITĀBHA ACCORDING TO THE ESSENCE OF HIS NAME, INVOKING THE TATHĀGATA'S NAME AND RELYING UPON ITS CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE TATHĀGATA'S GLORIOUS WISDOM; BY THIS PRACTICE ONE ENTERS INTO THE NUMBER OF THE GREAT CONGREGATION. THIS IS CALLED, ENTERING THROUGH THE SECOND GATE.

Praise which relies upon the essence of the Tathagata's Name is what pertains to the second virtue.

ENTERING THROUGH THE THIRD GATE: ONE PRACTISES ŚAMATHA, THE SAMĀDHI OF QUIET, BY SINGLEMINDEDLY AND RECOLLECTEDLY MAKING THE RESOLVE TO BE BORN THERE; BY THIS PRACTICE ONE ENTERS INTO THE REALM OF THE LOTUS TREASURE. THIS IS CALLED, ENTERING THROUGH THE THIRD GATE.

The practice of quiet "stopping" by means of singlemindedly resolving to be born in that Land, is what pertains to the third virtue.

ENTERING THROUGH THE FOURTH GATE: ONE PRACTISES VIPAŚYANĀ, BY CONTEMPLATING THOSE MARVELOUS DECORATIONS RE-COLLECTEDLY, AND THUS ATTAINS TO THERE WHERE ONE RECEIVES THE JOYS OF THE VARIOUS FLAVOURS OF DHARMA. THIS IS CALLED, ENTERING THROUGH THE FOURTH GATE.

....

LEAVING THROUGH THE FIFTH GATE: BECAUSE OF "TURNING TOWARDS" IN THE POWER OF THE FUNDAMENTAL RESOLUTION, ONE CONTEMPLATES THE SUFFERINGS OF BEINGS AND, OUT OF GREAT COMPASSION, ONE SHOWS TRANSFORMATION-BODIES, TURNING AROUND AND ENTERING THE GARDENS OF SAMSĀRA AND THE WOODS OF THE PASSIONS, WHEREIN ONE PLAYS BY MEANS OF THE SUPERKNOWLEDGES, REACHING THE STAGE OF TEACHING-AND-CONVERTING. THIS IS CALLED, LEAVING THROUGH THE FIFTH GATE.⁸⁸

Clearly, in the first gate physical worship and formulating the desire for birth in Sukhāvātī are necessary to obtain such birth. The second through fourth gates—praise, aspiration for birth and visualization—contain instructions for the practices to be performed in order to enter the upper ranks of bodhisattvas in the Pure Land. Each gate represents a level of accomplishment on the way to the "stage of teaching-and-converting" which is the bodhisattva's ultimate calling. According to T'an-luan, only when the practices of the first four gates have been perfected does the bodhisattva leave Sukhāvātī by the fifth gate. The practices of the first four gates which are described so exhaustively by T'an-luan are done during this life in Saha. By contrast, the fifth gate is definitely achieved from the Pure Land, since one presumably cannot return if one never left. Interestingly enough, both

T'an-luan and Tao-ch'ò warn of the dangers of prematurely attempting the practice of the fifth gate.⁸⁷

While T'an-luan seems almost compelled to enumerate and explicate the gory details of such intricacies as the various furnishings of Sukhāvati with which the fourth gate commences, Tao-ch'ò completely omits any notion of the Pure Land as an object of visualization in the *An-lo-chi*. Such knowledge certainly informs Tao-ch'ò's view of the Pure Land, yet, apparently, he did not consider that material pertinent to his argument that all beings should seek their next birth in Sukhāvati.⁸⁸ Omitting all serious discussion of visualization, however, leaves the first fascicle conspicuously disjointed, like a Western movie without horses. The cowhands and rustlers are still present, but they have nothing to ride. This situation will be ingeniously remedied in the second fascicle of the *An-lo-chi*.

Several of Tao-ch'ò's pivotal ideas in the first fascicle are lifted straight from T'an-luan. Some examples are (1) the argument that Sukhāvati is definitely not part of the three realms of Saha,⁸⁹ (2) the comparatively greater merit of the karma produced through Amitabha's influence as opposed to that produced during a lifetime of delusion,⁹⁰ and (3) the innate power of Amitabha's name as a mantra or spell since in this case the name is the same as that which it denotes.⁹¹ If imitation is indeed flattery, then Tao-ch'ò saw T'an-luan in an extremely complimentary light. In Tao-ch'ò's defense, it must be noted that he did not indiscriminately plagiarize his spiritual predecessor. Often he appends quotations and examples to support his own agenda, namely that Sukhāvati is the most appropriate land and that recitation of Amitabha's name is the most appropriate practice during *mo-fa*.

An interesting aspect of Tao-ch'ò's borrowing is his re-assessment of a point that is mentioned almost in passing by T'an-luan: the countability of oral recitations. T'an-luan supports a view of recitation based on the last meditation in the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*:

When the life of such a foolish person [in the lowest rank in the lowest grade of birth] is about to end, he meets a virtuous and learned teacher who comforts him in various ways, expounds for him the exquisite teachings, and urges him to be mindful of the Buddha. But this person is too tormented by pain to be mindful of the Buddha. Then the virtuous friend says, "If you cannot be mindful of the Buddha, you should say that you take refuge in the Buddha of Immeasurable Life." And so, with a sincere mind and an uninterrupted voice, this person says "Namu Amida butsu" manifesting ten moments of thought; and because he says the Buddha's name, with

every thought-moment, the evil *karma* binding him to birth-and-death for eighty *koṭis* of kalpas is eliminated.

When his life comes to an end, this person sees a sun-like golden lotus appearing in front of him. And in the interval of a single thought-moment, he immediately attains birth inside a lotus flower in the World of Utmost Bliss.⁹²

Thus, even the most incapable and distracted being at death's door could through invoking Amitabha's name obtain the resolve to be born in Sukhāvātī.⁹³ On a more practical note, T'an-luan in the *Lüeh-lun an-le ching-t'u* recommends,

Also several like-minded companions should join together in an agreement so that when the end of life [of one of the companions] approaches, they will take turns until dawn reciting the name of the Buddha Amitabha and wish for the rebirth [of the dying companion] in Sukhāvātī. Voice follows upon voice until the ten-contemplations are accomplished.⁹⁴

Clearly, for T'an-luan, the significance of "ten-contemplations" is as a state of mind, the mind of one who sincerely aspires for birth in the Pure Land. Several *sūtras* mention the efficacy of "ten recollections" of Amitabha or alternatively "ten repetitions" of the buddha's name on the verge of death as efficient cause for birth in Sukhāvātī. Eventually, in the T'an-luan/Tao-ch'o/Shan-tao lineage of Pure Land devotionalism, these "ten contemplations" or "ten recollections" are completely confounded with "ten repetitions."

T'an-luan, albeit unwillingly, begins this process in the *Wang-sheng lun chu*. Attempting to explain how the "ten recollections" are calculated while simultaneously claiming that recollections are uncountable unless they have already been accomplished, T'an-luan says with some aspersion,

Why should you want to know the exact number of recollections? But if you *must* know, there is a method: you must give them out orally, not write them with a brush.⁹⁵

From this passage and with no better than circumstantial proof, I presume Tao-ch'o derived doctrinal support for his favorite practice—constant recitation of Amitabha's name. Tao-ch'o echoed T'an-luan's suggestion of the death-bed recitation pact,⁹⁶ but went beyond that to lead group recitations of Amitabha's name.⁹⁷ Using the metaphor of the

tree which will certainly fall in the direction that it is tilted, Tao-ch'o strongly recommended getting in training now:

Everyone by all means should awaken Faith and personally in advance exhaust the innermost recesses of his heart by accumulating practice and making it a habit to make his good roots of virtue solid.⁹⁸

True to T'an-luan's perspective on the state of mind of "ten-contemplations", Tao-ch'o acknowledges that "ten successive thoughts is simply a figure which the Buddha employed."⁹⁹ However, anxiously aware of *mo-fa* and the morbid fact that ordinary beings simply do not possess great capacities for practice, Tao-ch'o relents:

Again, the sūtras say that if a person practices the continuous thought of the Nembutsu for a long time, then there is no need to remember the number of these thoughts. However, if a person recites the Nembutsu for the first time, then it is all right for him to count the number of times he recites the Nembutsu. This is also stated in the sacred teaching.¹⁰⁰

Just which "sacred teaching" Tao-ch'o refers to here, if it isn't T'an-luan's half-hearted allowance, is a mystery.

To keep track of the number of recitations, quantities of small beans were used as counters. For each recitation, a bean was moved from one pile to another. Advanced practitioners went through up to 90 *shih* of beans, while beginners might do only 20 *shih*.¹⁰¹ Tao-ch'o himself was reported to be able to recite Amitabha's name up to 70,000 times in a day.¹⁰² Further, he drilled and strung the seeds of the *luan* tree together, then gave the strings away to people everywhere in conjunction with his teaching of the continuous recitation of Amitabha's name.¹⁰³ Ninth and tenth century writers credit him with actively promoting what became the tremendously popular use of prayer beads in East Asia. The Buddhist rosary is found throughout East Asia and is Tao-ch'o's most visible contribution to Pure Land practice.

In Fascicle Two of the *An-lo-chi*, Tao-ch'o provides Pure Land followers with both a method and a goal of practice. He begins by listing six "virtuous priests" including T'an-luan who attained birth in Sukhavatī. He goes on to promote what he considered the only effective practice during *mo-fa*—the constant recitation of Amitabha's name. The rest of the fascicle he dedicates to showing the superiority of birth in Sukhavatī over any other land, be they pure or impure. Technically, most of the sources Tao-ch'o uses mention only the very general practice of

buddhānasmṛti, buddha-recollection.¹⁰⁴ *Anusmṛti* may be variously translated as "thought", "remembrance", "reflection", and "recollection". The term has come to signify an even broader array of meanings including "meditation", "contemplation", "visualization", "inspection", "invocation", and "recitation".¹⁰⁵ It is here in Fascicle Two that Tao-ch'ō establishes and defends recitation as a *bona-fide* expression of buddha-recollection. Recall that Tao-ch'ō summarily omitted the elaborate visualizations based on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching* when he composed the first fascicle of the *An-lo-chi*. Even the Five Contemplative Gates as interpreted by Tan-luan were set aside. In their place, Tao-ch'ō champions the practice of reciting the name of Amitabha. Far from being a mere mechanical act, recitation as a form of buddha-recollection claims all the virtues of other methods such as visualization with the additional incentive of being accessible to any person and much easier to perform. Recitation is not expected to produce the same experience as visualization. However, with the support of Amitabha's merit, recitation does lead to birth in Sukhāvati and thus enlightenment. Furthermore, during *mo-fa* recitation constituted for Tao-ch'ō a practice superior to visualization.

To support this position Tao-ch'ō cites several texts which discuss meditation on a single buddha or on the names of buddhas.¹⁰⁶ One of these is the *Pan-chou san-mei ching* which was translated into Chinese by Lokarakṣa in 179 C.E.¹⁰⁷ This *sūtra* reputedly enjoyed wide acceptance in the early centuries of Buddhism in China. It is identified as the most likely text upon which Lu-shan Hui-yūan (334–416) and his associates, both lay and cleric, based their collective vow in 402 C.E. to be born together in Sukhāvati.¹⁰⁸ In retrospect, this event has often been touted as the birth of Pure Land Buddhism in China.¹⁰⁹ However, some modern authors¹¹⁰ note that the vow on Mt. Lu seems to have had a negligible effect on the type of Pure Land devotionism in northern China promulgated by Tao-ch'ō and others.

More significantly, the *Pan-chou san-mei ching* was the first text to provide instruction in *buddhānasmṛti* in Chinese.¹¹¹ In the *Pan-chou san-mei ching*, Śākyamuni instructs the lay bodhisattva Bhadrakṣa and others in the practice of buddha-recollection for the purpose of attaining the samādhi of seeing-all-the-buddhas-standing-before-one. At one point Śākyamuni tells Bhadrakṣa that after one to seven days of ceaselessly "recollecting" Amitabha, he will see that buddha standing before him. In Pure Land circles, the vision of a buddha was usually taken as proof of eventual birth in Sukhāvati. In the *sūtra*, Amitabha indicates that those who wish to be born in Sukhāvati should constantly reflect on himself, Amitabha, or in another version reflect on the buddha's name. Technically, the *Pan-chou san-mei ching* teaches a contemplative method¹¹² the goal of which is "a deep meditative state in

which the practitioner is to envision perfectly clearly the appearances of many Buddhas."¹¹³ Although Amitabha figures only incidentally in the *sūtra*, Tao-ch'ō cites this passage as one more proof for the efficacy of buddha-recollection in general and for recitation in particular.

Chappell notes that the *An-lo-chi* contains an "ambiguous mixture of practices"¹¹⁴ and attributes that fact to Tao-ch'ō's "clever style of preaching whereby he seeks to identify himself with well-known texts which appear to guarantee the absolute effectiveness and superiority of the meditation he is recommending."¹¹⁵ This is in perfect consonance with Tao-ch'ō's agenda. The *An-lo-chi* is meant to emotionally convert, rather than logically convince. Instead of a tightly reasoned and correspondingly narrow exegesis, statistics favor a wide-angle approach to the Pure Land path. Tao-ch'ō's major concern was to smooth out any contradictions that arose in his attempt to promote Sukhāvātī above all other lands. In his personal devotions, however, Tao-ch'ō asserted the recitation of Amitabha's name as the most appropriate form of buddha-recollection practice during *mo-fa*.

Support for Tao-ch'ō's championing of recitation can be found in T'an-luan's *Wang-sheng lun chu*. The second contemplative gate, the gate of praise, states: "AS THE TATHĀGATA'S GLORY IS THE IMAGE OF HIS WISDOM, SO HIS NAME IS [THE IMAGE] OF HIS ESSENCE."¹¹⁶ According to T'an-luan's explication: "the unimpeded glory (amitabha) of that Tathāgata's Name is able to disperse the ignorance of all beings, and bring their Resolution to completion."¹¹⁷ Clearly, the name of Amitabha is nothing less than the essence of the buddha's enlightenment. This idea gathers more support when T'an-luan then claims:

There are ten thousand different things, and they cannot all be ranked alike. There are names which are the same as things, and there are names which are other than things. The Names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the Prajñāpāramitā with its *dharanī*, spells, and suchlike spoken phrases, are all "names which are the same as things."¹¹⁸

Tao-ch'ō concurs fully.¹¹⁹ Incorporated in Amitabha's name was all the merit of Dharmakara's kalpas of bodhisattva practice. The name represented not only the vast store of merit and the inconceivable power of the vows, but also the many and varied adornments of Sukhāvātī as well as the attributes of Amitabha Buddha. Tao-ch'ō had consciously equated the many methods of buddha-recollection in the *An-lo-chi*. Bearing this in mind, recitation of the name should have the same effect as visualization of Amitabha or his Pure Land. Moreover and more importantly for Tao-ch'ō, recitation was a simpler and more accessible

practice for the many sentient beings trapped in *samsāra* during the Last Period of Dharma.

In keeping with the spirit of the Five Contemplative Gates, recitation must still be accompanied by awakening the *bodhicitta* and aspiration for birth in Sukhāvati. But these requirements could be taken almost as given. Tao-ch'ō assumed that "since all sentient beings already possess Buddha-nature in the first place, everybody has the mind for desiring to attain Buddhahood."¹²⁰ Also, once apprised of the unfortunate state of the world in the face of *mo-fa*, the potential convert even once having heard of the Pure Land should naturally desire birth there. Besides, informing everyone of the superiority of Sukhāvati was exactly the problem that the *An-lo-chi* addressed.

This chapter has briefly introduced Tao-ch'ō's only known work, the *An-lo-chi*. Supposedly designated as a commentary on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*, Tao-ch'ō drew on a great variety of sources from within and without the Buddhist textual tradition. Particularly noteworthy is his reliance on T'an-luan's *Wang-sheng lun chu* which is a commentary on the much-esteemed *Rebirth Treatise* of Vasubandhu. T'an-luan's definition of "names which are the same as things" is key to Tao-ch'ō's emphasis on the recitation aspect of buddha-recollection. In an environment which primarily acknowledged the soteriological efficacy of visualization, the substitution of recitation as a way to obtain birth in the Pure Land was quite an innovation especially for lay practice. Another contribution to Buddhist practice in China often ascribed to Tao-ch'ō is the use of a rosary to count repetitions of Buddha Amitabha's name. Recitation proved to be a convenient and concrete practice for even the least able devotee. Today the Buddhist rosary is ubiquitous in East Asian Buddhism. Tao-ch'ō's ability to reach out to the ordinary person and communicate his message to both clerics and laypeople earned him a reputation as a man-of-the-people. At times, his references to folk mythology and cosmology can be disorienting for the doctrinal purist. However, viewed in light of Tao-ch'ō's deep concern for all the sentient beings trapped in *samsāra* during the Last Period of Dharma, the *An-lo-chi*'s evangelical flavor is understandable.

3. Pure Land

The preceding briefly considered some of the texts that contributed to Tao-ch'ō's development of the recitation of Amitabha's name as the most suitable practice during the Last Period of Dharma. The ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, as Tao-ch'ō well understood, is none other than enlightenment. And for Tao-ch'ō, the most suitable path to enlightenment during the Last Period of Dharma lay via Sukhāvati, through the offices of the Buddha Amitabha. This chapter will explore Tao-ch'ō's

view of that Pure Land which he promoted so vigorously. It is largely through Tao-ch'o's instigation and his follower Shan-tao's influence that Sukhāvati became the Pure Land *par excellence* in East Asian Buddhism.

As mentioned previously, Mahāyāna cosmology is marked by the proliferation of buddhas and buddha-lands. Each buddha-body inhabited or influenced its own buddha-land (*buddha-kṣetra*). In China, the continued development of a theory of multiple buddha-bodies and the ensuing classification of buddha-lands were addressed by several Buddhist scholar-monks. David W. Chappell has conveniently summarized some of the views of the pure lands held by Seng-chao (375–414), Ching-ying Hui-yüan, T'ien-t'ai Chih-i (538–597) and Tao-ch'o.¹²¹ The complex relationship between different buddha-bodies and buddha-lands is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some background is necessary in order to appreciate Tao-ch'o's understanding of the status of Sukhāvati within then-current classification systems. Chappell provides a useful definition of concepts:

According to early Mahāyāna doctrines, any particular Buddha was but a temporary manifestation of the one realm of truth (*fa-chieh*, Skt. *dharmadhātu*), also called the true body of ultimate reality (*fa-chen* or *chen-shen*, Skt. *dharmakāya*), or the one eternal *tathagata* Buddha. Thus, particular Buddhas such as Śākyamuni and Maitreya are seen as merely Apparitional Bodies (*hua-shen* or *ying-shen*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) which emanate from the unchanging *dharmakāya*. Each Apparitional Buddha (such as Śākyamuni) also has an Apparitional Buddha Land (such as this present *saha*-world or place of defilement and suffering). Since each Buddha Land was created in "response" to the needs of the beings who occupy it, it was called both an Apparitional Land (*hua-t'u*) and a Response Land (*ying-t'u*). Although the *dharmakāya* is synonymous with the one realm of truth (*dharmadhātu*), it is symbolically stated that the *dharmakāya* "has" a True Land (*chen-t'u*, roughly equivalent to the *fa-chieh* or *dharmadhātu*) from which the temporary Apparitional Lands emanate.¹²²

Thus, early Mahāyāna recognized two of the eventual three bodies of a buddha, the *nirmāṇakāya* and the *dharmakāya*. The key for Tao-ch'o, however, was the concept of the *sambhogakāya* which filled the gap between the limited *nirmāṇakāya* and the ineffable *dharmakāya*. Chappell goes on to cite Bodhisattva Dharmakara who becomes Amitābha Buddha as the seminal example of the *sambhogakāya* concept.

The forty-eight vows that he [Dharmakara] made in order to provide the best conditions for the salvation of beings reflect the compassionate activity of a bodhisattva in "purifying his land" (that is, helping beings in the area of his influence). Thus, when the bodhisattva achieves Buddhahood, his "purified land" becomes a Buddha Land or "Pure Land" (*ching-t'u*). In addition, the resplendent appearance that the heroic bodhisattvas achieve when they reach Buddhahood became known as a Reward Body (*pao-shen*; Sanskrit probably is *sambhogakāya*). The concept of the Reward Body was a later development, however, and did not reach China until the fifth century with the arrival of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.¹²³

Despite the tardy arrival of the *sambhogakāya* concept, Seng-chao, Hui-yüan, and Chih-i mention a Reward Land, sometimes also known as the Recompensed Land, in their classification systems. Interestingly enough, all three of these purportedly non-Pure Land scholars based their views primarily on non-Pure Land texts. Seng-chao and Chih-i particularly referred to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*. Hui-yüan, in addition, drew on the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and treatises by Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Seng-chao and Kumārajīva.¹²⁴ Tao-ch'o as mentioned previously quoted primarily from the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* and treatises by Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu are also often cited. Chappell maintains that Tao-ch'o's use of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is as a source of examples rather than doctrine.¹²⁵ Presumably, then, Tao-ch'o relied on the canonical *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* for doctrinal support of his ideas. Further, this same *sūtra* was the inspiration of T'an-luan's *gāthas* (verses) praising Amitābha which Tao-ch'o quotes several times in the *An-lo-chi*.

Balancing the fragmentation of the universe into various buddha-lands is the notion of the mutual interpenetration of all reality especially as found in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*. According to Chappell, Seng-chao, Hui-yüan, Chih-i and Tao-ch'o seem to have favorably viewed this idea as expressed in the doctrine of Two Truths. Among them, Tao-ch'o perhaps goes furthest towards legitimizing the use of conventional Truth to obtain insight into the ultimate.¹²⁶ This idea will be further discussed in considering Tao-ch'o's understanding of form and formlessness and birth and birthlessness with respect to Sukhāvati.

Chappell¹²⁷ and Tanaka¹²⁸ have rightly observed that the *An-lo-chi* appears to have been written in rebuttal to views of the Pure Land held in particular by Hui-yüan. Unfortunately for Tao-ch'o, his chosen master T'an-luan had had very little to say about the status of Sukhāvati. T'an-

luan says merely that the Pure Land is "subtle" (*wei*) and unlike Saha is not part of the Three Realms of desire, form, or non-form.¹²⁹ Faced with Hui-yüan's detailed classification of pure lands, Tao-ch'ö is reduced to stating his opinion categorically but without much substantiating material or alternatively invoking the inconceivable power of Amitabha's vast merit.

Hui-yüan assigned Sukhavatī to the least of three kinds of pure lands, the Lands of Worldly Purity (*shih-ching-t'u*). Within that category, Sukhavatī and other so-called pure lands such as the Fragrant Land in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* are ranked just slightly higher than the heavens of the Three Realms. Notably, Hui-yüan argues that those sentient beings born into the Lands of Worldly Purity still possess a defiled consciousness and thus have not escaped *samsāra*.¹³⁰ Tao-ch'ö's first volley is to categorically state that,

Amida (Buddha) of the present is the Recompensed Buddha and the Treasure Adorned Country of Utmost Bliss is the Recompensed Land. However, from the past Amida Buddha's Body and Land are said to be the Transformed Body and Land, but this is a big mistake.¹³¹

Next, asserting that a Transformed Body resides only in a Transformed Land and likewise that a Recompensed Body resides only in a Recompensed Land, Tao-ch'ö provides quotations which state that Amitabha is a Recompensed Buddha, while Śākyamuni is a Transformed Buddha. More to the point, he claims that those of defiled consciousness would not be born in a Recompensed Land. In the case of Sukhavatī, all beings are born through the auspices of Amitabha whose vast and inconceivable merit cancels the ill consequences of an individual's *karma*.

Due to the Buddha's vow, those of the upper and lower classes of birth are simultaneously able to attain Birth in the Pure Land as the Vow acts in place of the common beings' good acts and allows them to attain Birth in the Pure Land. Because the Vow also acts in addition to the deeds of those of the upper grade such as Vasubandhu, Nāgarjuna, and the Bodhisattvas of upper rank, they also attain Birth in the Pure Land.¹³²

By allowing all beings, from the lowest of the low to bodhisattvas of upper rank, to attain birth in Sukhavatī, Tao-ch'ö manages to usurp characteristics of Hui-yüan's upper categories of pure lands, namely the Lands Pure in Appearance (*hsiang-ching-t'u*) and the Land of True Purity (*chen-ching-t'u*).

While perhaps not the prolific and brilliant exegete that Hui-yüan was, Tao-ch'o, it should be noted, was capable of slinging some intellectual mud himself. For example, another reason for Hui-yüan's devaluation of Sukhāvati as a mere Land of Worldly Purity was a passage in the *Kuan-shih-ying-p'u-sa shou-chi-ching* that states that Amitabha will eventually be replaced by Avalokiteśvara and then by Mahasthamaprabhata, his chief bodhisattvas in Sukhāvati. For Hui-yüan, this means that Amitabha's life is limited; it will have an end. Therefore, "only because common people and members of the Two Vehicles have inadequate understanding do they say his life is unlimited, *wu-liang*."¹³³ Tao-ch'o in reference to the same passage hastens to point out that the *sambhogakāya* has the ability to conceal itself and that Amitabha's eventual recess from the Pure Land is not the final Nirvāṇa.¹³⁴ He also writes that,

By conducting other practices and transferring them towards Birth in the Pure Land everyone can be born in the Pure Land, but upon the World-Honored One's Extinction [final Nirvāṇa], some of them will be able to see the Buddha and others will not be able to see the Buddha. I recommend to the people of the future that they thoroughly investigate (the sacred teaching) so that they can gain this remote benefit.¹³⁵

Apparently, Tao-ch'o has magnanimously implied that even a monk as accomplished as Hui-yüan could not be expected to understand that Amitabha's life is indeed *wu-liang*, unless he specifically practiced the Pure Land way.

The main difference between Hui-yüan's and Tao-ch'o's approach to the classification of Sukhāvati lies in Tao-ch'o's intent to offer as many beings as possible birth in a pure land. Hui-yüan's classification is geared to exclude any and all that are not distinctly pure. Therefore, he has categories for pure lands that only seem pure. Tao-ch'o, on the other hand, motivated by the inability of most sentient beings to transcend *samsāra* on their own, puts himself in the questionable position of advocating the existence of a Land of Form (*hsiang-t'u*) within the Reward Land (*pao-t'u*).

Because the common beings are shallow in wisdom, most of them attain Birth in the Pure Land by seeking and depending on the many goodness with form. However, as the power of goodness with form is insignificant, it enables men to be only born into the Pure Land with form and only see the secondary manifestation of the Transformed Body of the Recompensed Body.¹³⁶

Not only does Tao-ch'ō postulate a Land of Form, but he also redefines the aspirant for Pure Land birth.¹³⁷ Historically, monastic and lay Buddhists pursued separate practices toward separate goals. Tao-ch'ō emended that assumption by offering birth in Sukhāvātī to all beings who sought enlightenment. And, rather than a specific monastic or lay practice, Tao-ch'ō claimed that dependence on form determined the level of birth in Sukhāvātī.

There is no distinction between the practitioners who desire Birth in the Pure Land whether they be priests or laymen. Those who know that Birth is identical with Birthlessness and do not go against the Twofold Truth are all certainly men of Superior Birth.¹³⁸

Thus, those persons who understood the Two Truths (conventional vs. ultimate) and therefore recognized the non-duality of form and formlessness would attain birth in the Land of Non-form (*wu-hsiang-t'u*), the true province of the *sambhogakaya*.

From the standpoint of the accomplished practitioner, clearly, the existence of a Land of Form provides a tidy solution to the question of practice with form. Such a scheme rewards the superior practitioner with superior birth; the principle of *karma* is served. However, Tao-ch'ō's allegiance to T'an-luan's notion of the compassionate power of a buddha needs must and does find expression in the *An-lo-chi* also. Somewhat to Chappell's chagrin, Tao-ch'ō claims on several occasions that birth in Sukhāvātī is none other than birthless birth, that is birth in the Land of Non-form.

However, this Birth in the Pure Land is Birthless Birth based upon the Pure Original Vow fulfilled by Amida Tathāgata and is not the tainted, unsubstantiated, and attached birth of the sentient beings of the Three Worlds. What is the reason for this? It is because Birth in the Pure Land is as pure as Ultimate Birthlessness.¹³⁹

Thirdly, again, it is like igniting a fire on top of a block of ice. If the fire becomes intense, then the ice will melt. If the ice melts, then the fire will be extinguished. Even if the people of the lower grade birth, who attain Birth in the Pure Land, do not understand the Birthlessness of Dharma-nature, if they rely on the power of reciting the Buddha's Name with a desire to be born in the Pure Land, then they will attain the Birthless world and their flaming desire for birth with form will naturally be extinguished.¹⁴⁰

Thus, despite the creation of a Land of Form, Tao-ch'ō continues to insist on the formless nature of birth in Sukhāvātī.

In his own words, Chappell finds Tao-ch'o's position on birth and birthlessness and form and non-form "somewhat paradoxical"¹⁴¹ both for those of lower and upper birth.

First, because such persons [of a lower rebirth] rely on form, they are reborn in a Pure Land of form and see an apparitional form of the Reward Body of Amitabha. However, because they have invoked the name of Amitabha, they are ultimately destined for a rebirth into birthlessness and a Pure Land of nonform.¹⁴²

Those of a higher rebirth who understand the Ultimate Truth of *śūnyatā* and the identity of form and nonform are reborn in a birthless Pure Land beyond form and see the true Reward Body of Amitabha. However, because they understand the Two Truths and have compassion for other beings, they seek a middle path between form and nonform and reenter the conditioned world to purify that world for the sake of others.¹⁴³

Personally, I find no contradiction in the case of those of upper rebirth. Chappell's description exactly parallels the fifth Contemplative Gate described by Vasubandhu and explicated by T'an-luan. It is to be expected that the accomplished bodhisattva who, having mastered the first four gates of practice, attains birth in Sukhavatī, understands non-duality, and experiences compassion, will at the stage of teaching-and-converting leave the Pure Land in order to help sentient beings in *samsāra*.

With respect to the case of those of lower rebirth, I would simply propose that Tao-ch'o is apparently writing for two audiences in the *An-lo-chi*. I believe that Tao-ch'o was less concerned with presenting a monolithic definition of Sukhavatī than he was determined to convince as many people as possible that such birth was needful. An argument that one person finds convincing may not appeal to another. Thus, for those who questioned the power of virtue with form, such as perhaps non-Pure Land monastics, Tao-ch'o allowed that practice with dependence on form would result in birth in a pure land of form. But, for those unconcerned or even unapprised of the notion of form and formlessness, for example the ordinary lay follower, mere sincerity of aspiration and willingness to trust in Amitabha's inconceivable merit sufficed to obtain birth in Sukhavatī. In so far as Tao-ch'o believed that Amitabha was *sambhogakaya* and that Sukhavatī was certainly a Recompensed or Reward Land, then birth there was attained by means of Amitabha's inconceivable merit. Such birth is by definition birthless birth, since rather than rely on the individual's tainted merit, it is based on the buddha's other-power.

The idea of having two audiences for the *An-lo-chi* can be supported on other points than the non-duality of form and the birthless character of Pure Land birth. Although Tao-ch'o divided Pure Land followers into those who depend on form and those who have transcended form, he often still seems to refer to a division between monastic and lay practice. For example, presumably speaking to monks, Tao-ch'o says that merit from various practices can be transferred towards birth in Sukhavatī.¹⁴⁴ Yet, elsewhere he adamantly claims that the only way to Sukhavatī is by the Pure Land path, in particular by reciting Amitabha's name.¹⁴⁵ Tao-ch'o also adhered to T'an-luan's distinction between self-power and other-power practice. Self-power practice refers to the traditional monastic path of cultivation and meditation, while other-power practice is that accomplished with the help of a buddha, specifically Amitabha. Ordinarily, it takes ten thousand kalpas of practices during the course of many lifetimes per kalpa in order to achieve the non-retrogressive state. By contrast,

If a person unquestionably believes in the Buddha's teaching and desires to be born in the Pure Land, then he will be able to attain the Non-retrogressive (State) at the end of his life whether it be long or short.¹⁴⁶

For those who are able or at least those who believe themselves to be capable, Tao-ch'o does not discourage the various practices. At the most, he defends his idea that recitation is as effective as visualization. For those who, like himself, feel themselves fettered by their own inabilities, trapped during *mo-fa*, he repeatedly recommends relying on Amitabha and aspiring for their very next birth in Sukhavatī.

Of his own state Tao-ch'o says, "As I, personally, dwell in this world of fire, I believe that I actually am apprehensive."¹⁴⁷ His pessimism included the lot of contemporary sentient beings and even those yet to be born.

However, regardless of being a priest or a layman, there isn't a person who has accomplished this [Mahāyāna True Thusness or Hīnayāna Arhathood] as of yet. Although there is the retribution of becoming human or heavenly beings, we must all practice the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds in order to thoroughly incur this reward. However, those who attain this reward are extremely few.¹⁴⁸

Balancing such a pessimistic attitude in the *An-lo-chi* is the message of the buddha's compassion:

For this reason, all the Buddhas with their Great Compassion recommend that we take refuge in the Pure Land. Even if we commit evil in this life, if we only thoroughly sustain our thoughts and continuously recite the Nembutsu with pure and exclusive minds, then all our hindrances will be extinguished naturally and we will unfailingly attain birth in the Pure Land.¹⁴⁹

Clearly, it is the ordinary sentient beings who have already committed evil as well as the multitudes yet to be born to whom the message of the *An-lo-chi* is most particularly addressed. On the one level Tao-ch'o attempts to defend his exalted vision of Sukhavatī from detractors such as Hui-yüan, yet simultaneously his work is equally and overtly directed towards the salvation of an overwhelmingly lay audience.

Eventhough Tao-ch'o never mentions Hui-yüan by name, this doesn't prevent him from using some of the latter's arguments to the advantage of Sukhavatī's image. For example, Tao-ch'o seems to exploit the alleged proximity of Saha and Sukhavatī as given in Hui-yüan's category of Lands of Worldly Purity. First, Tao-ch'o establishes Sukhavatī as the "first gate" of the pure lands. According to Tao-ch'o, other buddha-lands are pure and quite fine, but Sukhavatī has been specially designed for sentient beings like ourselves.¹⁵⁰ As proof he cites the length of a day in Sukhavatī as compared to Saha.¹⁵¹ Then, based on suffering-filled descriptions of lands adjacent to Saha, Tao-ch'o decides that our world is the best of the defiled worlds. Therefore,

As this Saha world and the Pure Land are mutually adjoined in sequence, Birth in the Pure Land is exceedingly convenient. How can one refrain from desiring Birth in the Pure Land?¹⁵²

Even more revealing here is the fact that Tao-ch'o's appeal is directed to a very concrete, albeit spiritually-enhanced, geography. Such ontological tendencies, I believe, support the contention that the perception of the Pure Land as an actual place contributed to its adoption by especially lay followers as a viable and immediate goal in the process of enlightenment. With respect to Saha, Sukhavatī becomes psychologically the place next door.

Of course, physically, even viewed as a concrete entity, Sukhavatī was located "in the westerly direction exceeding the Buddha Lands by a distance of forty-two times the number of sands of the Ganges River."¹⁵³ Psychologically, however, Sukhavatī was no further away than any other land to which a person might travel, be that in life or after death, provided that one had an appropriate means of transportation. In support, Tao-ch'o quotes a passage on memorial services,

If the immediate members of the family or relatives of the person, who has died, conduct a memorial service for him, then this is similar to sending provisions to a person in a distant land as he will surely receive the provisions.¹⁵⁴

Even as the memorial service is the correct way to transfer merit to the deceased, so the devout Pure Land follower upon death was conveyed via lotus immediately to the Pure Land riding on Amitabha's vow that all beings who so desired be able to attain birth in Sukhavatī.

After everybody dies, they must all go to King Yama and receive his judgement (on the next place of birth). If one completely has the cause and condition of having Faith in the Buddha and desires to be born in the Pure Land and transfers all the karma which result from the practice (of the Path to Buddhahood) towards Birth in the Pure Land, then when he is about to die, the Buddha will personally come to welcome and embrace him and he will not have to submit to the judgment of King Yama, the god of death.¹⁵⁵

Bypassing Yama's judgement is a significant benefit for Pure Land followers. The probable punishments commensurate with an individual's *karma* are nullified by Amitabha's intervention. According to Tao-ch'o, one goes immediately to Sukhavatī and instantly attains birth. At worst, the individual can expect to be born in the erstwhile Land of Form which is embedded in Sukhavatī proper.

Interestingly enough, Tao-ch'o never mentions the possibility of birth into the womb-palace, or alternatively the unopened bud of a lotus flower in Sukhavatī. According to the *Larger Sukhavatīvyūha Sūtra*, followers of impure faith or who doubted the power of Amitabha's inconceivable merit were chastised by being confined in a womb-palace for five hundred years unable to see the Buddha and bodhisattvas or hear the Dharma. Tao-ch'o, it seems, was more concerned with the fact of birth itself, rather than the details of delivery.

Accordingly, Tao-ch'o claims, "By attaining Birth in the Pure Land, one becomes a superior person."¹⁵⁶ And, as such, of course, a whole series of benefits accrue to that person.

Once a person has attained Birth in the (Pure) Land, golden lotus flowers will support his feet when he walks, a treasure laden [sic] throne will receive his body when he sits, Indra will precede [sic] him when he leaves, and Brahman King will follow him when he enters. All the sacred beings are our intimate friends and Amida Buddha is our Great Master. Underneath the jeweled trees of the

jeweled forest (in the Pure Land), our minds will be able to easily fly about and our minds will be able to play about in the lake of the eight merits in which our feet can be washed. Our bodies will be the same as the color of gold and our life spans will be equal to that of the Buddha. If we study, then we will proceed to master the teaching of the Buddha and if we stop, then we can experience the two ultimate and secular aspects of Truth without conflict. If we traverse the ten quarters in order to save others, then we avail ourselves of the great transcendental powers and if we stop to relax momentarily [sic], then we will be able to sit in the three śūnyatā gates. If we play, then we will be able to enter the Eightfold Noble Path and if we proceed, then we will attain the Great Nirvāṇa. If all sentient beings would only proceed to the (Pure) Land, then they will all be able to realize these benefits. How can you not help but consider this and immediately desire to go (to the Pure Land)?¹⁵⁷

Tao-ch'o's description of Sukhāvati emphasizes equally the pleasant tangible qualities of the Pure Land and the indescribably joyful state of comprehending the Dharma. However, it is his exhortation to leave behind the defiled world of suffering and affliction and proceed effortlessly to Sukhāvati which firmly identifies the Pure Land as a place and not just a state of mind.

For those who argued that the Pure Land was all in the mind and that nothing exists outside of the mind, Tao-ch'o had a ready answer based on the Two Truths.

If the original ultimate aspect of Truth is observed instead of the secular aspect of Truth, nothing exists outside of the mind. If the ultimate and secular aspects of Truth are divided and their meanings are revealed, then there is no impediment in saying that the Pure Land exists outside of the mind.¹⁵⁸

In short, Sukhāvati is ultimately formless. However, being formless it has the ability to assume whatever form appeals to sentient beings' needs. If that form tended to the literal, concrete, or ontological, so be it. In Tao-ch'o's opinion, it was necessary that the teaching correspond to the time (*mo-fa*) and to man's capacity in order to be effective.¹⁵⁹

Apparently, Tao-ch'o's opponents were not completely convinced by his argument. A similar question crops up later in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*,¹⁶⁰ a Ch'an (Zen) work probably written between 830 and 860 C.E. Their spin was that Pure Land birth was for those of low intelligence, whereas superior persons made their own minds pure

through meditation. Tao-ch'o's lack of further response is somewhat conspicuous, even if he did strongly feel the weight of his own inability to transcend *samsāra* through self-power practices.

By contrast, Tao-ch'o's attack on Tuṣita is concerted and vigorous. Whereas Tao-ch'o's view of Sukhāvātī must be drawn piecemeal from throughout the *An-lo-chi*, his opinion of Tuṣita merits its own little section.¹⁸¹ Tuṣita Heaven is the fourth heaven of the realm of desire and the current abode of Maitreya, the buddha of the future. It is, obviously, a beautiful world filled with delightful and wondrous things, not the least of which is Maitreya himself. Maitreya apparently enjoyed a strong following in China especially during the fifth and sixth centuries. Tabulations by Tsukamoto Zenryū¹⁸² of artifacts at the Lung-men caves show that from 495 to 535 C.E., seventy-eight images of Śākyamuni and Maitreya were made with twenty-seven sculptures of Amitabha and Avalokiteśvara¹⁸³ during the same period. But from 650 to 704, there were only twenty sculptures of Śākyamuni and Maitreya in comparison with one hundred forty-four images of Amitabha and Avalokiteśvara. This set of evidence points to a shift in popularity away from Maitreya and towards Amitabha over the course of two centuries.

Some authors¹⁸⁴ have claimed that the cult of Maitreya and the cult of Amitabha have common roots in a so-called Pure Land cult. Both cults involved significant lay participation, both are definitely Mahayana, and followers of both concentrated on attaining a superior birth into a paradisaical setting. Such similarities made Tuṣita the most obvious threat to Tao-ch'o's exaltation of Sukhāvātī. Superficially, the two paths have much in common. However, there were key differences in the assumptions made about the abilities of the practitioners.

A general product of future-oriented movements is the devaluation of the present life. In the Maitreya scenario this is also true. The present life was of no particular consequence except as a period in which to accrue merit. Maitreya followers were actively encouraged to "make merit." Just as Maitreya was working to become a buddha, so also his followers should work. They proceed in his path, in his image. From the Pure Land perspective, this is the difficult path, not the easy path. A sufficient store of merit would enable the devotee to be born in Tuṣita where Maitreya is now or at least to be born in this world in the future during Maitreya's residence. By contrast, according to Tao-ch'o the Pure Land follower's very next birth was assured in Sukhāvātī based on Amitabha's vast merit. This last point again demonstrates Tao-ch'o's reliance on Tan-luan's distinction between self-power and other-power practice. A specific practice prevalent among Maitreya followers was the use of repentance. The devotee was expected to confess and repent his transgressions as well as perform good acts. Tao-ch'o also mentions repentance, but only

to subsume it in the practice of recitation. "One who always recites the Name is a person who always practices repentance."¹⁶⁵

The lone benefit of birth in *Tuṣita* that Tao-ch'ō concedes is that Maitreya does indeed expound the True Dharma to the sentient beings there.¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, few are able to understand the teaching and therefore few attain the non-retrogressive state. To attain birth in *Sukhavatī*, on the other hand, is to automatically attain the non-retrogressive state. Second, the lifespan of a being in *Tuṣita* is four thousand years. After having exhausted the good merit that brought birth in *Tuṣita*, one must return to the three realms. In *Sukhavatī*, the lifespan is the same as the buddha's. In other words, it is incalculably long. Third, the adornments of *Tuṣita* such as "the graceful, harmonious sounds of water, birds, and the forest"¹⁶⁷ yield only pleasure which inspires attachment and grasping. Whereas,

In Amida's Pure Land, the water (of eight virtues), (the rare) birds (of various colors), and the (seven rows of arrayed) trees continually proclaim the exquisite melodious Dharma and clearly state the teaching which leads to the Path of Buddhahood. Through the possession of the clear, pure good, a person will thoroughly be led to Enlightenment.¹⁶⁸

In fact, *Sukhavatī* contains no defilements. Its adornments are so pure that they are, as it were, immune to likes and dislikes.¹⁶⁹ Fourth, Tao-ch'ō argues that the music in *Sukhavatī* is much better than in *Tuṣita*. Another point that bears mentioning is the fact that since *Tuṣita* is part of the desire realm it is subject to the millenial decline of the Dharma. *Sukhavatī*, on the other hand, "stands aloof from this illusioned world."¹⁷⁰

The particular significance of *Tuṣita* in these comparisons with *Sukhavatī* is that Tao-ch'ō acknowledges *Tuṣita* as an actual place. In fact, Tao-ch'ō almost encourages the rapprochement of *Tuṣita* and *Sukhavatī*, but with a difference. In his view, *Sukhavatī* has all the best qualities of *Tuṣita* and more. Hui-yüan, also, supports a kind of identification between the two by classing both places as Lands of Worldly Purity. Chappell claims that Hui-yüan may have sought to increase *Tuṣita*'s status by raising it to the level of a pure land.¹⁷¹ Conversely, *Sukhavatī* benefited from the reputation and recognition already accorded to *Tuṣita*. Tsukamoto's findings seem to bear out the success of Tao-ch'ō's particular line of propaganda. In short, *Sukhavatī* is like *Tuṣita*, but better. While Tao-ch'ō criticizes birth in *Tuṣita* as temporary and *Tuṣita*'s adornments as superficial, he fully accepts *Tuṣita*'s existence as an ontological entity and strives to imbue *Sukhavatī* with some of that same concreteness.

This chapter has examined the effect of Buddhist influences on Tao-ch'o's view of the Pure Land as an ontological entity. Even as questions of form and formlessness were debated, it is clear that Sukhāvati's role as a concrete place was key to Tao-ch'o's quest to provide a goal for the recitation practice he advocated in the *An-lo-chi*. The not-so-subtle fact standing behind the scholarly classifications of pure lands by Hui-yüan, other scholars, and even Tao-ch'o is that buddha-lands in general could be so classified. Heavens and pure lands were treated as places, objects having certain features and characteristics. At times, Tao-ch'o's statements seem contradictory or "paradoxical." The reason for this, I believe, is that Tao-ch'o was writing for two audiences in a single work. Therefore, even as he set out to answer the criticisms of scholarly monks, yet simultaneously his more basic intent was to exalt Sukhāvati as the most accessible goal of the ordinary sentient beings' practice during *mo-fa*. I believe that Tao-ch'o's creation of a Land of Form is in the nature of a concession, a bone tossed to the doctrinally-impaired. This Land of Form seems to correspond to something like the womb-palace mentioned in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* which in turn bears a suspicious resemblance to heavens such as Tuṣita. Chappell observes that non-Pure Land scholars viewed Sukhāvati as intermediate and unnecessary to doctrinal cohesion.¹⁷² Tao-ch'o, however, much impressed by the effects of *mo-fa*, saw in Sukhāvati a necessary and sufficient place of salvation. Throughout the *An-lo-chi*, Tao-ch'o holds out Sukhāvati as the best of a variety of pure and impure lands. Sukhāvati becomes the soteriological carrot before the eyes of ordinary sentient beings who are unable to transcend *samsāra* on their own. On the one hand, Tao-ch'o defends Sukhāvati as pure, unconditioned, and formless. On the other hand, Sukhāvati is real, concrete, and near. Amitabha's role resolves these two approaches to Sukhāvati. As the quintessential proponent of Mahayāna, operating in accord with the bodhisattva ideal, Amitabha through the power of his inconceivable merit offers Pure Land birth to all who so aspire. Ultimately, Tao-ch'o employs the principle of Two Truths, invoking the nonduality of all reality, to establish Sukhāvati as the soteriological tool of choice of Amitabha Buddha who is the compassionate manifestation of the *dharmakāya* itself.

4. Other Influences

The preceding part primarily examined the Buddhist influences which contributed to Tao-ch'o's view of Sukhāvati as the most pure, most accessible, and most suitable goal of Pure Land devotion. Drawing on Buddhist scriptural and scholarly arguments, Tao-ch'o strove to estab-

lish Sukhavatī as an ontological and concrete place for salvation during *mo-fa*. In addition, I believe, non-Buddhist influences played a significant role in Tao-ch'ō's successful exaltation of Sukhavatī. It seems that previous authors seldom acknowledge the mutual adaptation and accommodation that the introduction of an erstwhile foreign religion had on Chinese cultural patterns.

Too often Buddhist scholars state that the great translator Kumārajīva purged Buddhism in China of magico-Taoist influences and that it has remained pure ever since. Meanwhile, Taoist practitioners claim that their traditions have been handed down unaltered for centuries, noting particularly that this fact precludes any serious Buddhist influence of their beliefs. From as early as ca. 300 C.E., an amusing and apocryphal set of tales bear witness to the growing Taoist-Buddhist rivalry.¹⁷³ In one version, the Taoists claimed that Lao-tzu had in his later years journeyed to India and was there taken (or mistaken) for Śākyamuni. Therefore, Buddhism was just a barbaric misunderstood form of Taoism. In the opposing version, the Buddhists claimed that Lao-tzu was actually Mahākāśyapa, one of the chief disciples of Śākyamuni, and that he had been sent to preach an expedient teaching, Taoism, in preparation for China's eventual conversion to the true teaching of Buddhism. Needless to say, neither side convinced the other with these stories.

In addition, one must consider the role of the state cult practiced by government officials and sanctioned by the imperial court which had its roots in the Shang dynasty.¹⁷⁴ That bureaucratic organization was always watchful for heresy, defined as those practices or beliefs which detracted from the worship of the "official" gods, and wary of any person or group that might challenge the status quo. Often less palatable aspects of each religion were attributed to the opposing side in memorials to the government demanding that such or another be proscribed. At worst, religious excesses were assigned almost by default to that amorphous and disorganized conglomeration designated as folk religion or indigenous practices. Interestingly enough, few people then or now can be considered strictly and solely Taoist or Buddhist or Confucian followers.¹⁷⁵ The vast majority of the populace appear to adhere to a variety of practices, a flexible and personalized religion containing aspects of ancestor cult, regional gods, local heroes, and folk-adopted Buddhist or Taoist figures with many variations in the rituals associated with the significant events of an individual's life such as birth, marriage, sickness, and death.

Clearly the dissemination of Buddhism to the Chinese populace did not take place in a vacuum. Chinese culture was no *tabula rasa* upon which Buddhism imposed a new world order. Of course, there is always

the danger when speaking of generalities regarding China, its people, and culture to treat the topic as a monolithic whole. In truth, China covers a vast area and incorporates several ethnic and regionally-oriented groups. Conceivably, no single idea could be held by all the people all the time. Such diversity, in turn, supports the old axiom that there is nothing new under the sun in China. In other words, if a thought could be thought, then someone somewhere in China had thought it or would soon. However, considering the mere logistics of movement from one area to another of people, material or even information, chances are most ideas were restricted to certain areas or certain groups. The exception that proves the rule is the role of the government official in the Sui, and then Tang, unification of China. By standardizing the civil service examination and posting officials outside of their home turf, the Chinese government managed despite its territory and diversity to establish a kind of national identity which was at least publicly free of local custom.

In this section, I will discuss two indigenous ideas which Tao-ch'o used to support his view of Sukhāvati as a concrete goal of lay aspiration, a place where enlightenment is attained in the next life, in contrast to its more general role as an object of meditation or visualization, a signpost of monastic achievement in this life. First, consider what happened when Buddhist cosmology met the indigenous Chinese world-view. None will dispute the fact that transmigration through the many-layered Mahayāna universe which was based on the cyclic cosmology of the Upaniṣads seems to be much at odds with a rather pragmatic Chinese handling of questions of life and death. Speaking of pre-Buddhist notions of the afterlife, Anna Seidel notes,

The fundamentally this-worldly orientation of ancient Chinese culture placed the world of the dead inside the universe—in the stars, in distant realms on earth, or under the earth. Death was seen not as the separation of two radically different entities like matter and spirit but as the dispersal of a multiplicity of forces (*ch'i*, "breaths"), forces that were graded but basically formed one continuous spectrum. This view accounts for the early, intense, and elaborate search for techniques to attain physical immortality, and also accounts for the vague and fluid boundary between this world and a never radically different hereafter that characterizes all Chinese religion.¹⁷⁸

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Shang royal ancestors of the late second millennium B.C.E. communicated by means of oracles with their living counterparts.¹⁷⁹ Burial furnishings and human sacrifices imply that the dead may have been thought to operate in a style

similar to the living. Around the early Chou period (eleventh century to 256 B.C.E.), there developed the idea that an aristocrat had two souls which separated at death.¹⁷⁸ The *hun* soul characterized as superior, intelligent, and *yang* ascended to the court of Heaven (*T'ien*, an anthropomorphous celestial emperor) and/or was fixed in the memorial tablet to become the object of worship of the ancestral cult. The *p'o* soul being grosser, more physical, and *yin* accompanied the body to the grave or was relegated to the Yellow Springs, an underground nether world. If not properly cared for with ritual and offerings, unhappy *p'o* could become *kuei*, malignant ghosts that returned from the dead to plague the living. Later the idea of two or more souls was extended to include commoners as well as nobility.

The Chinese people as a whole seem to have committed a major portion of their spiritual resources toward two goals. The first is honoring one's own ancestors with appropriate ritual and offerings for the sake of the blessings those ancestors could provide. The second deals with pacifying or in extreme cases exorcizing *kuei*. In a sense, the latter practice is a corollary of the former, since *kuei* are simply somebody else's ancestors. More than once, Tao-ch'ö mentions the this-worldly benefits of Pure Land practice. For example, Pure Land followers are protected by twenty-five bodhisattvas and no evil spirit can harm them.¹⁷⁹ Evidently, Tao-ch'ö recognized that, whether helpful or malicious, the spirits of the dead continued to be present and active in the world of the living.

Thus, well before and even since the advent of Buddhism, the Chinese people seem to have accepted a view of their universe as a single, concrete, unified entity which included both the living and the dead. Maspero relates an anecdote concerning a certain prince Cheng of the eighth century B.C.E.

Estranged from his mother because she had supported one of his brothers who had rebelled, this prince made a rash vow never to see her again in this world. Later, seized with regret, he had a deep subterranean gallery dug and there, in the underground domain of the Count of the Earth, near the Yellow Springs, he was able to meet her again without breaking his vow.¹⁸⁰

This extremely literal interpretation of the Yellow Springs is matched by tales of the paradises of the immortals. Rumors from about 400 B.C.E. claimed that certain adepts usually through unspecified esoteric practices were able to perfect a spectral body such that their *ch'i* did not dissipate when the physical body died.¹⁸¹ These immortals (*hsien*) were thought to inhabit a world of light, holy mountains, or paradises located at the far reaches of the world. Notable among these paradises

are an island called P'eng-lai in the East China Sea and the realm of the Queen Mother of the West associated with Mt. K'un-lun on the Central Asian border.

P'eng-lai is conspicuous among the island paradises as the object of imperial searches from the fourth to second centuries B.C.E. The Han emperor Wu ti who reigned from 141 to 87 B.C.E. is reputed to have sent several expeditions in search of P'eng-lai. He himself visited the east coast hoping to see that elusive land.¹⁸² Michael Loewe describes some of the attributes of such islands.

They were magical islands, where the buildings and the trees were made of precious jewels. Living creatures were marked off from those of this world conspicuously, for they were all clothed in pure white; and they lived from everlasting unto everlasting. But the difficulty lay in achieving access to these islands which tended to disappear, mysteriously, the nearer that an intrepid mariner approached.¹⁸³

In addition, it was alleged that the elixir of long life could be obtained there, which of itself is reason enough for imperial interest.

The Queen Mother of the West, Hsi Wang Mu, was also considered a source of the elixir of long life or in later imagery the keeper of the peaches of immortality. Although she is occasionally mentioned in literature from the fourth to second century B.C.E., it is not until the first century C.E. that she is regularly associated with a mortuary cult.¹⁸⁴ Besides presiding over a magical world in the far west and dispensing the drug of deathlessness, Hsi Wang Mu was also linked to the seasonal meeting of the constellations of the Weaver and the Oxherd which takes place on the night of the seventh day of the seventh month.¹⁸⁵ That astronomical meeting symbolized the continuity of the cosmic cycles of order and in part accounts for Hsi Wang Mu's position as arbiter of the cosmos, especially in relation to her mythic meetings with a few privileged earthly emperors such as Mu, King of Chou, and Han Wu ti. In later iconography she acquires her own consort, the King Father of the East.

A fourth century C.E. description of the realm of Hsi Wang Mu reinforces its concrete and this-worldly aspects.

South of the western lake, by the shores of the flowing sands, behind the Red River and before the Black River there is a great mountain called "The heights of K'un-lun." There are spirits abiding there with human faces and the bodies of tigers, striped and with tails, white in all cases. Below, there are the depths of the Jo River which encircles the spot. Without, there is the mountain of the

flaming fire, and when an object or creature is cast therein it is immediately burnt. There is a person who wears a crown (*sheng*) on the head, with the teeth of a tiger and the tail of a leopard; she dwells in a cave and is named "Queen Mother of the West." On this mountain there are found all manner of living creatures.¹⁸⁶

Other descriptions place Hsi Wang Mu's realm at the "mountains of jade" or "mountains of turtles".¹⁸⁷ Almost invariably it is a realm of numinous and material pleasures where the inhabitants feast on phoenix eggs and honey dew and are surrounded by fantastic animals.¹⁸⁸ Regarding some of Hsi Wang Mu's personal attributes, Loewe writes:

In the earliest texts the Queen Mother of the West is mentioned along with other primeval figures who were associated with the creation of the universe and man, such as Fu Hsi or Huang ti. She is timeless, none knowing her beginning or her end. Sometimes she is described as a hybrid creature, with the tail of a leopard and the teeth of a tiger. She wears a crown, which is the symbol of her power to maintain the continuity of the universal cycles of being; she commands some of the constellations.¹⁸⁹

Elsewhere, Loewe notes that the myth of Hsi Wang Mu developed during the period between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. which is exactly the time when trade routes to the west were opening¹⁹⁰ and Buddhism first entered China. It is interesting to note, however, that the worship of Amitābha is conspicuous by its absence in China during the first few centuries of the common era.

There are some obvious similarities between Hsi Wang Mu in her western realm and Amitābha in Sukhavatī. Hsi Wang Mu is timeless, "has attained the Tao,"¹⁹¹ and can grant immortality. Amitābha whose alternate name is Amitāyus which means "Limitless Life" is a buddha and has vowed specifically to allow all beings to be born in his Pure Land where they will also become buddhas. Both of their lands are located far to the west, provide every material comfort, and are inhabited by deathless beings, be they immortals or non-retrogressive bodhisattvas. More of a reach is Tao-ch'o's attempt to usurp Hsi Wang Mu's cosmological prerogatives. Tao-ch'o goes so far as to claim that Amitābha is responsible for the placement and direction of the constellations through his agents, Fu Hsi and Nu Kua.¹⁹² A modern author has even suggested a connection between T'an-luan's "description of Amitābha, the Buddha of the West, as a compassionate mother who leads to the *yin* state of rest beyond *samsāra*, with the Taoist goddess Hsi Wang Mu, who is *yin*."¹⁹³ An even more abstract link can be drawn between Amitābha and Hsi

Wang Mu on the basis of their respective lay followings. The Han annals record a brief soteriological incident centered on the cult of the Queen Mother of the West in 3 B.C.E. According to the report which also gives "official" causes, the people were unruly, leaving their homes, carrying on (possibly gambling), singing, dancing, and exchanging tokens and talismans in preparation for the advent of the Queen Mother.¹⁹⁴ While the idea of an advent strongly bespeaks later Maitreya cult tradition rather than Amitabha devotionism, the fact that Hsi Wang Mu was seen as the object of a popular lay movement figures however tentatively in Amitabha's role as head of a popular lay movement also.

Parallels are easy to draw from the vantage point of almost two thousand years. It is somewhat more difficult to verify the likelihood of any real connection between Hsi Wang Mu and Amitabha. Therefore, let it suffice to note that the Chinese people beheld their universe as a single, unified, concrete entity both before and after Buddhism's spread and that precedents for concrete paradises possessing some of the characteristics which distinguish Sukhavatī form part of the earliest Chinese visions of their world.

The second topic that I will discuss involves the role of certain Taoist ideas in Tao-ch'o's view of Sukhavatī. In particular, I will consider the idea that Tao-ch'o takes from T'an-luan of names that are the same as the things they represent. I believe that Tao-ch'o uses this concept to support his exhortation for all beings to recite aloud the name of Amitabha as a concrete practice leading to a concrete place of salvation which is none other than Sukhavatī. Specifically, Tao-ch'o writes:

Another question: If it is true that a person thoroughly removes all his hindrances by just thoroughly reciting the Buddha's Name, then this is similar to a person pointing to the moon with his fingers. Doesn't this finger have to transgress darkness?

Answer: All things are different in ten thousand ways and can't be said to be unconditionally the same, because there are things which are the same as its name and things which are different from its name. Things which are the same as its name refer to the Names of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the expressing of incantations, the passages of the *sūtras*, etc.

In expressing the incantation "sunrise in the east, instantly red, instantly black," whether it is incanted between 5-7 p.m. or 9-11 p.m., the afflicted patient will recover. Again, when a person is bitten by a dog, if he warms a tiger's bone (over a fire) and rubs it against the wound, then the person who is bitten will recover. Or if a tiger's bone is not available, by spreading the palm and rubbing the wound while expressing the words "tiger come, tiger come", the person who

is bitten will also recover. Or again, when a person is seized with a cramp in the leg, if he warms a twig of a heath-rose (over a fire) and rubs it against the cramped muscle, then the person seized with the cramp will recover. Or if a heath-rose is unavailable, by warming the hands together (and rubbing the cramped muscle) while saying "heath-rose, heath-rose," the afflicted person will recover.

I, myself, even tried this with success. What is the reason for this? It is because the name and the thing are the same. The name being different from the thing is similar to pointing a finger at the moon.¹⁸⁵

It is immediately evident that the proofs Tao-ch'o cites are all based on a Taoist framework of healing. For the sake of comparison, let us also consider Tan-luan's passage from which Tao-ch'o's words are obviously derived.

Question: A name indicates something, as a finger indicates the moon. If invoking the Name of Buddha causes our Resolution to be brought to completion, then a finger indicating the moon should be able to disperse the darkness; but if a finger indicating the moon cannot disperse the darkness, neither can invoking the Name of Buddha bring our Resolution to completion.

Answer: There are ten thousand different things, and they cannot all be ranked alike. There are names which are the same as things, and there are names which are other than things. The Names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the Prajñāparamita with its *dhāraṇī*, spells, and suchlike spoken phrases, are all "names which are the same as things."

Suppose one wishes to conjure away an oedema; one says, JIH-CH'U TUNG-FANG/CHA CH'IH, CHA HUANG, etc. If one cast the spell between six o'clock and ten o'clock at night, the oedema will go away, without concerning oneself about the sunrise. Again, when set in the front line [of a battle], one merely intones, LIN PING / TOUNG CHE CHIE CH'EN-LIEH TSAI CH'EN through one's teeth: intoning these nine characters, the five weapons will not hit one. The Pao P'u-tzu regards this as quite true. Again, if one suffer from a twisted ligament, a hot quince poultice will cure it: but even if someone merely calls out the word, "quince," he will be cured.

In our own bodies we have obtained these results: they are familiar things, all the world knows of them. How much more true must it be, then, for things in the inconceivable realm! The simile of the antidote-drum is of this latter sort: we need not expand on this, for we have already explained the simile, above.

"Names which are other than things" are like the "finger indicating the moon."¹⁸⁶

While the gist of the passages remains the same, Tao-ch'o has omitted the battlefield protection spell as well as the overt reference to the *Pao P'u tzu* which is a Taoist handbook of prescriptions and cures.¹⁹⁷ The *Pao P'u tzu* has been described as "the famous book of Ko-hung with a pill for everything."¹⁹⁸

Even more interesting is the fact that Tao-ch'o's additional example is merely a cure for dog-bite. It doesn't extend the concept of "names which are the same as things" in any way. Whereas in T'an-luan's passage certain phrases such as *dhāraṇī* can be interpreted as drawing their efficacy from the inconceivable realm, Tao-ch'o refrains from such lofty philosophy and emphasizes the mundane. Given a situation, Tao-ch'o advocates simply substituting the name for the thing itself. Why this process should work is not addressed. For Tao-ch'o, the name of Amitabha is a spell. Spells work because it is in their nature to do so, or as Corless says, "*ex opere operato*."¹⁹⁹ Tao-ch'o's argument is not really surprising given that most of his audience probably already thought the same way.

According to Robinson and Johnson, T'an-luan's propagation among the lay populace was effective because he advocated practices that were already present in people's lives.²⁰⁰ If that is true, then Tao-ch'o shows himself to be a worthy student of T'an-luan. Several authors have noted the Chinese "reverence for the written word"²⁰¹ along with the general respect accorded learned teachers. Social standing, especially in the government hierarchy, was a function of literacy and education. In Taoist ceremonies, the production and reading of the written prayer with an appropriate send-off to the unseen regions demonstrates the status of the master practitioner.²⁰² In folk health practices, the talismanic use of written cures continues to be widespread. Often the "prescription" itself is consumed as a medicine. Also, Max Kaltenmark notes that a well-known Taoist work, the *T'ai-p'ing ching*, recommends recitation or continuous recitation of certain texts in order to "eliminate disasters" and "assure the correctness of all undertakings."²⁰³

Based perhaps on T'an-luan's own admission that Amitabha's name should be recited, rather than written,²⁰⁴ Tao-ch'o replaced the written character with the spoken and thereby established recitation of Amitabha's name as the Buddhist practice of choice during *mo-fa*. Since names of buddhas are clearly included in the category of "names which are the same as things," he had no difficulty in substituting the name for the thing. Using a Taoist-style argument, Tao-ch'o rendered Buddhist practice and therefore Buddhist goals easily accessible to the vocal, if not literate, lay masses.

With the arrival of Buddhism, Mahāyana cosmology was superimposed on the Chinese world-view and over the course of several

hundred years both were reshaped. This is the expected result of mutual adaptation and accommodation. For Tao-ch'ò, failure to praise filial piety or refusal to acknowledge the power of *kuei* is to deny cultural reality. Tao-ch'ò's specific contribution to Pure Land Buddhism, I believe, was to use familiar logic and examples to establish Sukhavatī as an ontological entity in keeping with the concrete Chinese world-view and further to promote recitation of the buddha's name as a spell, the efficacy of which was accepted by the vast majority of the populace. Clearly, more than strictly Buddhist influences were involved in the successful dissemination of Buddhism throughout the Chinese cultural milieu.

Conclusion

My aim in this study has been to demonstrate that the acceptance of Sukhavatī as an objective, ontological, and concrete place contributed to its popularity as the immediate goal of Pure Land devotion, especially among lay followers. Beginning with the arrival of Buddhism and its attendant cosmology and ending with the development of a distinctly Chinese form of Buddhist practice, I have traced the paths of some of the influences, both alien and indigenous, that played a part in the interaction between an erstwhile foreign religion and the Chinese world-view. Both the religion and the culture were changed through their mutual assimilation and adaptation. In the process, Mahāyāna cosmology acquired a concreteness which brought it in line with the this-worldly orientation of the Chinese people. In turn, those individuals who were so disposed saw buddhas such as Amitabha as benevolent and accessible spirits able to directly affect their lives and futures. Buddhism won a wealth of new adherents and the Chinese people gained a new option in immortality—the possibility of enlightenment in this or a subsequent life.

Around the end of the fourth century, natural disasters and political strife lent credence to the theory that the Last Period of Dharma was quickly approaching or had perhaps already begun. Tao-ch'ò was particularly conscious of the effects of *mo-fa* and the inability of ordinary beings, himself included, to transcend *samsāra* on their own. Based on T'an-luan's concept of other-power, Tao-ch'ò's response was to encourage every person to rely on Amitabha's vow and the power of that buddha's inconceivable merit in order to attain birth in Sukhavatī and from there unfailingly attain enlightenment. To this end, Tao-ch'ò advocated the continuous recitation of Amitabha's name and exalted Sukhavatī as the pure land of choice for the next life. Thanks in no small part to Tao-ch'ò's

efforts, Sukhāvati achieved a place of high respect and status in the Chinese spiritual world, at least in the opinion of Pure Land followers.

Given the idea that Tao-ch'o was writing for more than one audience in the *An-lo-chi*, the vision of Sukhāvati presented therein provides a fascinating account from all sides of the transformation of a pure land as it was adopted into the concrete Chinese universe. Even as Tao-ch'o defended Sukhāvati to dissenting scholar-monks as innately pure, unconditioned, and formless, he also portrayed it as real, concrete, and near for the specific benefit, I believe, of lay adherents. Tao-ch'o's grasp of the principle of Two Truths is quite revealing in this regard. Not only did he believe that the two levels of truth were ultimately one, dependent merely on the individual's point of view as an unenlightened or enlightened being, but he goes so far as to support the use of conventional truth in order to obtain insight into the ultimate. For example, in his opinion, dependence on form which is much maligned in monastic endeavors is a positive thing if it leads a person to trust in Amitabha and aspire for birth in Sukhāvati. Any birth in Sukhāvati is good, since due to the buddha's merit and in spite of an individual's heavy *karma*, birth in the Pure Land is none other than birthless birth which is ultimate birthlessness.

Tao-ch'o's lasting contribution to Pure Land Buddhism in China was to conveniently package a simple practice, recitation, with a concrete goal of practice, Sukhāvati, as the only pre-requisites for eventual enlightenment. In order to accomplish this feat, Tao-ch'o took a double-pronged approach. First, implementing Buddhist arguments he equated the virtue of recitation with the accepted virtue of visualization as two forms of buddha-recollection practice. Also, drawing on familiar cultural assumptions, he identified Amitābha's name as a potent spell, the recitation of which invoked the buddha's other-power and granted the benefit of birth in Sukhāvati. Second, he strove to establish Sukhāvati as the Reward Land of the Reward buddha-body (*sambhogakaya*) and as such vastly superior to this Saha world or even a heaven such as Tuṣita. Further, based on a variety of quasi-cosmological arguments, he then carefully insinuated the Pure Land into the Chinese cosmos.

It is impossible to determine with the information available in modern times whether Tao-ch'o initiated a new vision of the Pure Land that was so intensely appropriate to its time that it spread dramatically or whether he simply assembled doctrinal support for an already popular view of Sukhāvati as a not-so-distant and extremely desirable part of the Chinese universe. However, in the absence of actual records, plausible deduction must be made to suffice keeping in mind that speculation is merely speculation. Even supposedly historical sources must be taken with more than a grain of salt when a few centuries have elapsed

between the event and the recording of it. The Sung dynasty biographer Chieh-chu provides an anecdote concerning Tao-ch'ö and the monk Tao-fu.

Tao-ch'ö had a friend called Tao-fu who for a long time lived in the capital. To go to the Hsüan-chung-ssu was quite a distance. Occasionally they met together and always were forced to point to the Pure Land as their permanent meeting place. Three days after Ch'ö died, Fu heard of it and said: "I always thought that I would go before him. How can I go after him?" He also said: "In the space of a breath, the time of my seeing the Buddha will arrive." The same day before the Buddha Image he bowed down and earnestly prayed. Then retiring to his seat, he died.²⁰⁵

Even if the tale is completely apocryphal, it still shows that in the Sung dynasty the idea of meeting one's friends or colleagues after death in the Pure Land was not unimaginable. Apparently, Tao-ch'ö had succeeded in his purpose for writing the *An-lo-chi*. Recitation of Amitabha's name had become the preferred practice of the laity. Sukhāvati had been firmly accepted as an ontological entity by Pure Land followers in particular and by the Chinese people in general. I believe it was especially Tao-ch'ö's success in depicting Sukhāvati as a concrete place that gave lay adherents a tangible goal of their recitation practice and allowed Pure Land devotionism to flourish in China.

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Notes

- ¹ D. Howard Smith, *Chinese Religions*, 112–114.
- ² E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 18–43.
- ³ Kenneth K. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, 57–93 and Zürcher, *Conquest*, 45–85.
- ⁴ Smith, *Chinese*, 114–121 and Zürcher, *Conquest*, 180–239.
- ⁵ For the significance of Kumārajīva's work see Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, 71–77.
- ⁶ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 57–93 and Zürcher, *Conquest*, 254–285.
- ⁷ Ch'en and Zürcher express contrasting views.
- ⁸ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 57–120 and Smith, *Chinese*, 118–121.
- ⁹ Note the career of Fa-hsien in Ch'en's *Buddhism*, 89–93.
- ¹⁰ Creators of apocrypha tended to preserve their anonymity. Bibliographical catalogues determined which texts were acceptable. The status of apocrypha is discussed in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, edited by Robert E. Buswell.
- ¹¹ Several authors have studied the emergence of a syncretic folk religion based on Taoist and Buddhist themes in pre-T'ang China. Henri Maspero's *Taoism and Chinese Religion* is an example.
- ¹² Maspero, *Taoism*, 52.
- ¹³ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 184–209.
- ¹⁴ Zürcher, *Conquest*, passim.
- ¹⁵ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 77–80.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258–296.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 350–363.
- ¹⁸ Three are taken as canonical: the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, and the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*.
- ¹⁹ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 338–340.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 345–346.
- ²¹ Julian F. Pas, "Shan-tao's Interpretation of the Meditative Vision of Buddha Amitayus": 96–115.
- ²² Allan A. Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth: A Study of Genshin's "Ōjōyōshū"*, 18.
- ²³ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 84.
- ²⁴ Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 71–73.
- ²⁵ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 83–85.
- ²⁶ Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology: From Single World System to Pure Land, Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light* gives geographic details.
- ²⁷ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 31.

- ²⁸ Ibid., 74–78.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 102–105.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 57–60.
- ³¹ Ibid., 124–127, on the monastic lifestyle in modern Thailand.
- ³² Kenneth K. Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 14–23.
- ³³ Ibid., 151–177.
- ³⁴ Maspero, *Taoism*, 45.
- ³⁵ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 484.
- ³⁶ Zürcher, *Conquest*, 254–285.
- ³⁷ Ch'en, *Transformation*, passim.
- ³⁸ Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 77–81.
- ³⁹ Ch'en, *Transformation*, 24–36 and 258–261.
- ⁴⁰ Maspero, *Taoism*, 34–35.
- ⁴¹ Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yüan's Commentary on the "Visualization Sutra"*, 3.
- ⁴² Ibid., 9.
- ⁴³ Ryukoku University Translation Center, trans. and annotated, *The Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life as Expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha*, xi.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 107–111.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 109.
- ⁴⁶ Ch'en, *Transformation*, 276–284.
- ⁴⁷ George Eishin Shibata, "A Study and Translation of the *Anraku Shū*", 112.
- ⁴⁸ Many texts including the *Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtras* concur that an enormous amount of time is needed in order to perfect the bodhisattva practices. Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 78 mentions three immeasurable aeons as standard.
- ⁴⁹ *The Shinshu Seiten: The Holy Scripture of Shinshū*, 19–20.
- ⁵⁰ David Wellington Chappell, "Tao-ch'o (562–645): A Pioneer of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," 151–163.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 168–173.
- ⁵² Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 39.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 52.
- ⁵⁴ Usually taken to be rebirth as a hell-being, ghost, or animal. Some interpreters include rebirth as a titan, human or *deva*, since those are still retrogressive states with respect to birth in the Pure Land.
- ⁵⁵ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 47–57.
- ⁵⁶ The three are desire (*kāma*), form (*rūpa*), and non-form (*arūpa*) realms.
- ⁵⁷ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 164.
- ⁵⁸ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 29–30.
- ⁵⁹ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 16.

- ⁶⁰ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 3-4.
- ⁶¹ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 174-175.
- ⁶² Daigan Matsunaga and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*.
- ⁶³ Minoru Kiyota, "Buddhist Devotional Meditation: A Study of the *Sukhavatīvyūhopadeśa*," in Kiyota, ed., *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation*, 249-296.
- ⁶⁴ Tanaka traces the use of the various names of the *Rebirth Treatise* in *Dawn*, 49-51.
- ⁶⁵ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 49.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-49.
- ⁶⁷ Roger Jonathan Corless, "T'an-luan's Commentary on the Pure Land Discourse: An Annotated Translation and Soteriological Analysis of the *Wang-sheng lun chu* (T.1819)," 327-328.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-9.
- ⁶⁹ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 18.
- ⁷⁰ Corless, "T'an-luan," 5-11.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.
- ⁷² Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 79-83.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113-115.
- ⁷⁵ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," i.
- ⁷⁶ In all fairness, Shibata does take a note to gloss "Nembutsu Samādhi" as "the recitation of Amida Buddha's Name", "Anraku Shū," 30 n.34.
- ⁷⁷ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 114.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 92-96.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 92 and 104-105.
- ⁸⁰ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 58-61 on exegetical style.
- ⁸¹ The triangle-shaped country located to the south of the cosmic mountain Sumeru. It is sometimes identified as the Indian sub-continent, but usually taken as this world of human experience.
- ⁸² Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 123-125.
- ⁸³ In Chinese creation mythology, Fu Hsi and Nu Kua are a pair of deities who generate the phenomenal world through their incestuous sexual union.
- ⁸⁴ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 111.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39n.8.
- ⁸⁶ Corless, "T'an-luan," 323-324.
- ⁸⁷ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 49-50 and 137-138.
- ⁸⁸ Given the inconsistencies of record-keeping and the survival rate of even supposedly well-known texts, there is the remote possibility that Tao-ch'o may have addressed the visualization aspects of T'an-luan's work in some lost chapter of the *An-lo-chi*. I have assumed for

convenience that Tao-ch'o had at his disposal a version of T'an-luan's work at least as complete as that translated by Corless.

- ⁸⁹ Corless, "Tao-ch'o," 139 and Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 20.
- ⁹⁰ Corless, "Tao-ch'o," 204–206 and Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 60–62.
- ⁹¹ Corless, "Tao-ch'o," 220–221 and Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 69–70.
- ⁹² Ryukoku University, *Sutra of Contemplation*, 109.
- ⁹³ Corless, "T'an-luan," 261.
- ⁹⁴ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 71.
- ⁹⁵ Corless, "T'an-luan," 209.
- ⁹⁶ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 65.
- ⁹⁷ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 92.
- ⁹⁸ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 65.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 63.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 83–84. Also, one *shih* is supposedly about one peck.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., 85.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 85 and 342.
- ¹⁰⁴ Skt. *buddhānusmṛti*, Chn. *nien-fo*, Jpn. *nembutsu*.
- ¹⁰⁵ Pas makes a valiant attempt to define and relate these concepts in his article "Shan-tao's Vision."
- ¹⁰⁶ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 94–105 and Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 330–332.
- ¹⁰⁷ Andrews, "Ōjōyōshū," 7.
- ¹⁰⁸ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 13–15.
- ¹⁰⁹ Zürcher, *Conquest*, 219.
- ¹¹⁰ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 14.
- ¹¹¹ Neal Donner, "The Mahāyānization of the Chinese Dhyāna Tradition," 53.
- ¹¹² Andrews, "Ōjōyōshū," 1–29 distinguishes contemplative, recitative, and invocational types of *buddhānusmṛti*.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., 8.
- ¹¹⁴ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 332.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 275.
- ¹¹⁶ Corless, "T'an-luan," 218.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., 219.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid., 220.
- ¹¹⁹ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 69.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid., 150.
- ¹²¹ David W. Chappell, "Chinese Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Lands," in Saso and Chappell, eds., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*, 23–53.
- ¹²² Chappell, "Interpretations," 25.
- ¹²³ Ibid., 25–26.

- ¹²⁴ Ibid., 29.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., "Tao-ch'o," 117.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., "Interpretations," 46.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid., 37.
- ¹²⁸ Tanaka, *Dawn*, 46.
- ¹²⁹ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 29 and Corless, "T'an-luan," 139.
- ¹³⁰ Chappell, "Interpretations," 30.
- ¹³¹ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 10.
- ¹³² Ibid., 15.
- ¹³³ Chappell, "Interpretations," 30.
- ¹³⁴ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 11–12.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid., 97.
- ¹³⁶ Ibid., 16.
- ¹³⁷ Chappell, "Interpretations," 39.
- ¹³⁸ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 19.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., 67.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 68. Also, Corless, "T'an-luan," 260–261.
- ¹⁴¹ Chappell, "Interpretations," 42 and 43.
- ¹⁴² Ibid., 42.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., 43.
- ¹⁴⁴ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 97.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 74.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 84.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 122.
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., 54.
- ¹⁵² Ibid., 55.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., 12.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 112.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 156.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 116.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 116–117.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 48.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.
- ¹⁶⁰ Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, 156–159.
- ¹⁶¹ Shibata, "*Anraku Shū*," 52–53.
- ¹⁶² Chappell, "Interpretations," 24.
- ¹⁶³ Avalokiteśvara, Amitabha's chief assistant bodhisattva, becomes Kuan-yin, goddess of mercy, in China.
- ¹⁶⁴ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 172.

- ¹⁶⁵ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 3.
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 52.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 143–144.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 51.
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.
- ¹⁷¹ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 77. Chappell also claims that Hui-yüan was a Maitreya follower. Tanaka is less convinced of this point.
- ¹⁷² Chappell, "Interpretations," 48.
- ¹⁷³ Zürcher, *Conquest*, 290–320.
- ¹⁷⁴ Smith, *Chinese*, 11.
- ¹⁷⁵ Robert J. Smith, "Afterword," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, 337–350. For syncretism in Taoism, see especially Rolf A. Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries," in Welch and Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism*, 53–82.
- ¹⁷⁶ Anna Seidel, "Afterlife: Chinese Concepts," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁹ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 161.
- ¹⁸⁰ Maspero, *Taoism*, 26.
- ¹⁸¹ Seidel, "Afterlife," *ER*.
- ¹⁸² Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith Myth and Reason in the Han period (202 BC-AD 220)*, 30.
- ¹⁸³ Ibid., 28.
- ¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 32.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 62.
- ¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 32–33.
- ¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 32.
- ¹⁸⁸ Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality*, 88–93.
- ¹⁸⁹ Loewe, *Ideas*, 32.
- ¹⁹⁰ Loewe, *Ways*, 95.
- ¹⁹¹ Ibid., 89.
- ¹⁹² Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 124–125.
- ¹⁹³ Roger J. Corless, "Tan-luan: Taoist Sage and Buddhist Bodhisattva," in Chappell, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, 39.
- ¹⁹⁴ Loewe, *Ways*, 99.
- ¹⁹⁵ Shibata, "Anraku Shū," 69–70.
- ¹⁹⁶ Corless, "Tan-luan," 220–221.
- ¹⁹⁷ Corless, "Taoist Sage," *Studies II*, 44n.23.

¹⁹⁸ Corless, "Tan-luan," 7.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 223.

²⁰⁰ Robinson, *Buddhist introduction*, 173.

²⁰¹ Smith, *Chinese*, 137.

²⁰² Kristofer Schipper, "The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies," in *Religion and Ritual*, 309–324.

²⁰³ Max Kaltenmark, "Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*," in *Facets*, 19–52.

²⁰⁴ Corless, "Tan-luan," 209.

²⁰⁵ Chappell, "Tao-ch'o," 91.