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The Five Contemplative Gates of Vasubandhu's *Rebirth Treatise* as a Ritualized Visualization Practice¹

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INTRODUCTION

The *Rebirth Treatise*² is one of the central texts in the development of Pure Land Buddhism in East Asia. For example, Hōnen included it as one of “the four texts which directly expound the Pure Land teaching,”³ and because the text is attributed to Vasubandhu, he is counted as one of the seven patriarchs of Jōdo Shinshū.⁴ The work comprises two parts, a set of *gāthās* and an autocommentary, and is generally understood to be related to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. The work presents a set of five practices which are called the five contemplative gates (Ch. *wu nien men*; Jpn. *go nen mon*).⁵ These five are:

1. bodily worship;
2. praise of Amitāyus, interpreted as verbal recitation of Amitāyus' name;
3. mental resolve to be born in the Pure Land;
4. visualization of the Pure Land, Amitāyus, and his retinue of bodhisattvas; and
5. transfer of merit.

Prior to examining the five contemplative gates, the traditional understanding of the *Rebirth Treatise* as specifically linked to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* will be discussed.⁶ A close examination of the *Rebirth Treatise* in comparison with the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* seems to indicate that this association is problematic. Second, the structure of the practices prescribed by the *Rebirth Treatise* is analyzed in order to demonstrate that the five contemplative gates form a single visualization practice, i.e., a *sādhana*. The third section seeks to explicate the assumptions concerning the soteriological efficacy of the kind

of visualization practice described in the *Rebirth Treatise*, particularly in connection with the Yogācāra associations of the text.

THE REBIRTH TREATISE AND THE LARGER SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA SUTRA

The *Rebirth Treatise* is often described as having a special connection to the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*.⁷ One of the meanings of *upadeśa* in the Sanskrit reconstruction of the title of the *Rebirth Treatise* (*Sukhāvātīvyūha upadeśa*) is commentary, yet the *Rebirth Treatise* is not a commentary in the ordinary sense of an exposition of the meaning of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*. It does not seek to expound the meaning of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*, nor are explanations of terms, phrases, or other sections of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra* to be found in the *Rebirth Treatise*. Also, it is much shorter than the text upon which it is supposedly commenting, giving it the superficial appearance of a condensation, abridgement, or summary.

An examination of the contents of the text reveals further difficulties with viewing the *Rebirth Treatise* as specifically focused on the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*. If that were the case, then one would expect the description of Sukhāvātī in the *Rebirth Treatise* to match that found in the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*. This is not the case, however. Indeed, the description of Sukhāvātī found in the *Rebirth Treatise* is closer to the description of pure lands in general which is found in the *Mahāyānasaṅgraha*.

The *Rebirth Treatise* focuses on three sets of “merits.”⁸ These are the seventeen merits of the Pure Land, the eight merits of Amitāyus, and the four merits of his retinue of bodhisattvas. These twenty-nine merits are first presented in the verse section, then summarized and explained in the prose section.⁹ Paraphrasing the verses, these are:

Seventeen Merits of the Pure Land:

1. That world surpasses the ways of the three worlds.
2. It is broad and limitless, like space.
3. Wholesome roots which transcend *saṃsāra* produce great compassion of the right path.
4. It is filled with pure light, like a mirror, or the sun or moon.
5. It has the qualities of precious jewels, and is complete with sublime glories.

6. Its undefiled lights are vigorous and bright, purifying the world.¹⁰
7. The grasses there have jewel-like qualities and when touched produce an ecstatic experience like touching soft cloth.
8. There are ten million kinds of jewel flowers, covering all things; from the towers there one has an unimpeded view of the trees which emit lights and the jewel-railings which surround the trees, the colors of all blending together; Indra's net covers the entire sky with bells at every knot ringing out the sound of the true dharma.
9. Glorious flower-ropes rain down, perfuming all things.
10. The Buddha's wisdom shines forth like the sun, eliminating the world's delusions, darkness, and ignorance.
11. The sacred words heard here are subtle, and no matter how faint are heard everywhere.
12. Amitāyus abides there as the *dharmarāja*.
13. Bodhisattvas are born there.
14. The bodhisattvas enjoy the "flavor of the *buddhadharma* and nourish themselves on *dhyāna* and *samādhi*."¹¹
15. Their enjoyment is unbroken.
16. All born there are equal: no one is born there as a woman, having defective sense organs, or as a member of the lineages of the two lower vehicles (*śravakayāna* and *pratyekabuddhayāna*).
17. All that is wished for is fulfilled.

Eight Merits of the Buddha:

18. The king is adorned with innumerable jewels and sits on a lotus throne.
19. His marks shine to the distance of an arm's length.
20. His voice is heard everywhere in the Pure Land.
21. He makes no discriminations.
22. The bodhisattvas are born from the sea of his wisdom.
23. He stands exalted and unsurpassed.
24. The bodhisattvas "pay homage, surround, and adore"¹² him.
25. He is available to all.

Four Merits of the Bodhisattvas:

26. The wheel of the dharma is constantly turned by the bodhisattvas.
27. The beneficial light of the Pure Land penetrates everywhere.
28. The offerings and praises are made without discrimination.
29. The bodhisattvas seek rebirth in worlds lacking the buddha and dharma jewels.

I have detailed these merits of the three objects of visualization as described in the *Rebirth Treatise* so as to highlight the discrepancy which exists between this description of Sukhāvātī and the descriptions found in the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra*. The most specific description of Sukhāvātī in the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra* is in the vows of Amitāyus. Vow number four is that humans and *devas* will be of one appearance, having no difference in beauty.¹³ This is somewhat similar to the sixteenth merit above, that all are born equal. The sixteenth merit goes on to say that no one is born there as a woman, which is also similar to vow thirty-five: that women who have heard the name of Amitāyus rejoice, awaken the desire for awakening and choose to renounce womanhood will not be born again as women.¹⁴ Also somewhat similar are the twenty-fourth vow, that bodhisattvas may “perform meritorious acts of worshipping the buddhas with the offerings of their choice,”¹⁵ and the twenty-eighth merit, that offerings and praises are made without discrimination. Again, there is a marginal similarity between vow number twenty-five, that bodhisattvas will “be able to expound the dharma with the all-knowing wisdom,”¹⁶ and the twenty-sixth merit, that the bodhisattvas constantly turn the wheel of the dharma. There is a general similarity between the descriptions of the magnificence of Sukhāvātī found in vow number thirty-two¹⁷ and merit eight, though none of the specifics actually match. Finally, there is some similarity between vow number thirty-eight,¹⁸ that fine robes are spontaneously provided for humans and *devas* in Sukhāvātī, and merit nine, that flower-ropes rain down, perfuming all things.

The *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra* also contains additional descriptions of Sukhāvātī in later sections.¹⁹ However, these at best can only be considered to have a general similarity to the descriptions found in

the *Rebirth Treatise*, similarities which might be expected in almost any description of any buddha's pure land.

It is also worth noting some of the significant differences between the *Rebirth Treatise* and the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. While vow number two declares that there will be no evil rebirths²⁰ in Sukhāvātī, i.e., no hell-beings, animals, or hungry ghosts, the *Rebirth Treatise* does not. The *Rebirth Treatise* makes no mention of being reborn as the result of even as few as ten *buddhānusr̥ti*, i.e., vow eighteen. Similarly, vows nineteen, that adherents will see Amitāyus at death, and twenty, that all adherents who desire rebirth will attain it, are not mentioned in the *Rebirth Treatise*.²¹ These three vows together constitute the core for later Pure Land soteriology, especially as formulated by Shinran. If the *Rebirth Treatise* were so specifically linked to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* as it has been understood to be in East Asian Pure Land Buddhism, one would expect that at least a mention of these central ideas would be made. Another difference is the treatment of the rebirth of the bodhisattvas. Vow number twenty-two asserts that all bodhisattvas born in Sukhāvātī reach the stage of becoming a buddha in one more lifetime, except those “who wish to teach and guide sentient beings in accordance with their original vows.”²² What is described as an exception in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* is somewhat similar to the twenty-ninth merit of the *Rebirth Treatise*, which says that all of the bodhisattvas seek rebirth in worlds lacking the buddha and dharma jewels. What is the norm according to the *Rebirth Treatise* is the exception according to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. Other differences are even more pronounced. The *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* makes at least three references to the presence of *śrāvakas* in Sukhāvātī,²³ whereas the *Rebirth Treatise* specifically denies the presence of either *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* in merit sixteen. The two bodhisattvas who are described as the “most dignified”²⁴ in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* and who come to play an important role for Pure Land piety are Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Yet the *Rebirth Treatise* makes no specific mention of these two bodhisattvas, nor does it name any other bodhisattvas. As a final example, vow twelve says that Amitāyus' light illuminates “at least a hundred thousand koṭis of nayutas of Buddha-lands,”²⁵ whereas, while it may not be exactly the same thing, the *Rebirth Treatise* asserts in merit twenty-seven that it is the beneficial light of the Sukhāvātī itself which penetrates everywhere, while according to merit nineteen Amitāyus' marks shine (only) to a distance of an arm's length.

The absence of identity or consistency, and the many significant differences between the descriptions of Sukhāvātī in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* and the *Rebirth Treatise*, make it appear highly unlikely that the latter is particularly linked to the former. A similar comparison with the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* leads to the same conclusion.

There is another source which describes the characteristics of pure lands generally, i.e., not specifically Sukhāvātī, and which is firmly in the Yogācāra tradition with which the *Rebirth Treatise* is associated: the *Mahāyānaśāṅgraha* of Asaṅga.²⁶ While not a perfect match, we do find here several characteristics which are very similar to those given in the *Rebirth Treatise*. These include: (1) The fourth characteristic listed by Asaṅga is “Its domain transcends the triple world,”²⁷ which seems almost identical with the first characteristic given by the *Rebirth Treatise*: that world surpasses the ways of the three worlds. (2) Asaṅga’s third characteristic is “Its horizon is unlimited,”²⁸ which matches the second characteristic of the *Rebirth Treatise*: it is broad and limitless, like space. (3) Asaṅga’s fourth characteristic is “It arises from good roots that are transcendent and [good roots] even beyond those”²⁹ which is at least similar to the third characteristic of the *Rebirth Treatise*: wholesome roots which transcend *saṃsāra* produce great compassion of the right path. (4) Asaṅga’s first characteristic is “The Buddha dwells in a great palace which is ornamented with seven luminous gems, and there emits a great light, completely filling immeasurable world-realms.”³⁰ This is similar to the fourth and fifth characteristics of the *Rebirth Treatise*: it is filled with pure light, like a mirror, or the sun or moon, and it has the qualities of precious jewels, and is complete with sublime glories. (5) The tenth of Asaṅga’s characteristics is “It is sustained by great enjoyment and delight in the taste of the doctrine,”³¹ which is similar to the first part of the fourteenth characteristic described in the *Rebirth Treatise*: [bodhisattvas who are born there] enjoy the “flavor of the *buddha-dharma*.” (6) And, finally, the eleventh characteristic given by Asaṅga is “It is the foundation for bringing about all benefit for sentient beings”³² has at least a similar ring to the seventeenth characteristic given by the *Rebirth Treatise*: all that is wished for is fulfilled.³³ In terms of these six items, then, the *Rebirth Treatise* appears to be at least as close to the *Mahāyānaśāṅgraha* of Asaṅga as to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. This has two implications. First, the idea that the *Rebirth Treatise* is a commentary on the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha*

Sutra is made more doubtful, and the association of the *Rebirth Treatise* with the Yogācāra tradition is strengthened.

At one place the *Rebirth Treatise* does say that it is an exposition of the “sutra of Limitless Life” (*Wu-liang-shou hsiu to lo*). This seems to have been interpreted to mean the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* because of the Chinese rendering of the title of the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* as the *Sutra of the Buddha of Limitless Life*, i.e., Amitāyus. However, there are two points of ambiguity. First, it is possible that it is not the singular, *sutra*, which is meant, but rather the plural, *sutras*. In fact, Nishu Utsuki does read the text as meaning the plural,³⁴ as does Roger Corless in his translation of T’an-luan’s commentary on the *Rebirth Treatise*.³⁵ Second, *Wu-liang-shou* is itself ambiguous, being not only a translation of Amitāyus, but also a translation of Aparimitāyus.³⁶ Aparimitāyus is another Pure Land buddha whose cult appears to have been virtually contemporaneous with Amitāyus in India.³⁷ There is a corpus of about a dozen works extant in Tibetan and three works in Chinese devoted specifically to Aparimitāyus. Hence, it certainly seems possible that the *Rebirth Treatise* is oriented to several sutras including not only the *Larger* and *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sutras*, but also the Aparimitāyus corpus as well.³⁸

If the *Rebirth Treatise* is neither a commentary on the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* in the normal English sense of commentary as explaining the meaning of a text, nor specifically linked to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*, how then can it be understood? Kiyota notes that another meaning of *upadeśa* is “instruction,”³⁹ and the *Rebirth Treatise* seems to focus on the practices of an Amitāyus cult. Further, the practice described in the *Rebirth Treatise* constitutes, I believe, a single five-fold, ritualized visualization practice.

STRUCTURE OF THE PRACTICE OF THE FIVE CONTEMPLATIVE GATES

The *Rebirth Treatise* itself distinguishes the first four of the contemplative gates, which are described as being for one’s own benefits, from the last, which is described as being for the benefit of others. This distinction has led to a division of the five contemplative gates into two groups, the first four being interpreted as preparatory to the final gate, the transfer of merit, which is seen as being the most important of the five. However, an examination of the relative amount of attention given to each of the five contemplative gates in the *Rebirth Treatise* itself calls this interpretation into question. A comparison of the five

contemplative gates with the Shingon Jūhachidō ritual shows a structural similarity between the two. The similarity may indicate both that a three-fold division of the five contemplative gates reveals the third gate, the visualization gate, to be the most important, and that the five contemplative gates constitute a single, ritualized visualization practice, a *sādhana*.

The five contemplative gates are presented by Vasubandhu in the following order: bodily worship, verbal recitation, mental resolve, visualization, and transfer of merit. The autocommentary distinguishes the first four of these from the last, explaining that the first four “perfect the virtue of Entry. The fifth Gate perfects the virtue of virtue of Departure.”⁴⁰ This distinction between “Entry” and “Departure” is explained as the first four contemplative gates are directed toward the benefit of oneself, while the last is directed toward the benefit of others. T’an-Iuan’s commentary on the *Rebirth Treatise* says, “The first four Recollections are the *Entrance Gates* to Sukhāvātī, while the last Recollection is the *Exit Gate* of teaching and converting [beings] out of compassion.”⁴¹ On the basis of this twofold division, Minoru Kiyota has interpreted the practice as culminating in the final act, the transfer of merit: “The four (worship, praise, vow, and meditation) are prerequisites to the final practice, the transferring of merit.”⁴² Purification of body, speech, and mind are “preparatory items to perfect the bodhisattva practices,”⁴³ i.e., the transfer of merit. In Kiyota’s interpretation, both resolve and visualization only serve to purify the mind in preparation for the transfer of merit. This manner of dividing the five contemplative gates does not mean, however, that transfer of merit was itself originally understood as the soteriologically effective part of the practice.

Certainly Vasubandhu views the transfer of merit as important in the development of the qualities of a bodhisattva: wisdom, compassion, and skillful means. According to Yuichi Kajiyama, Vasubandhu’s view is that “the transfer of merits by a Bodhisattva in Sukhāvātī is his skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) by which he, transferring merits accumulated by his five kinds of practices to all suffering sentient beings, lets them all be born in Sukhāvātī, without using the merits for the benefit of his own happiness.”⁴⁴ The transfer of merit is of course a very common Mahāyāna practice, manifesting the compassion of a bodhisattva. However, this does not necessarily mean that the transfer of merit is considered to be the most important aspect of the five

contemplative gates, only that as a Mahāyāna practice it needs to include the transfer of merit.⁴⁵ If the transfer of merit were the most important element in the practice, one would expect it to receive the greatest amount of attention. This, however, is not the case.

The weight of attention is given to the fourth contemplative gate, visualization. Vasubandhu's description of the visualization is much more developed and complex than any of the other four contemplative gates, clearly indicating that the visualization is the key item in the five contemplative gates. Just how important the visualization is considered to be is indicated by the fact that almost seven times as much space is devoted to detailing and explaining the visualization than is to introducing the five contemplative gates in their entirety. Later in the text there is a discussion of the transfer of merit per se, but again, the amount of space devoted to describing the details of the visualization is about six times as much as is devoted to the discussion of transfer of merit. Additionally, other than the opening and closing stanzas, the *gāthās* are entirely devoted to describing the merit of the Pure Land, which is the visualization.

In addition to the relative amount of attention Vasubandhu gives to the visualization section, a comparison with Shingon rituals suggests a three part division of the five contemplative gates. The Jūhachidō (“eighteen ways,” referring to the original form which utilized eighteen *mudrās*) provides a useful comparison, both because it is a relatively concise practice and because it is the paradigmatic Shingon ritual. It is the first ritual a Shingon priest in training learns to perform, and the rest of the training rituals and the majority of other Shingon rituals have the same structure—they can be analyzed either as expansions upon or abbreviations of the Jūhachidō. Traditionally, the ritual has been divided into five parts: purification, construction, encounter, identification, and dissociation. Purification involves the preparation of the practitioner, including prostrations. Construction is the preparation of the ritual site, as well as reiteration of vows and the assertion of one's intention to achieve full awakening. Encounter involves the invitation, greeting and feasting of the deities evoked, and recitation of their mantras. Identification is the ritual identification between the practitioner and the chief deity.

Dissociation includes separation from the deity, the leave-taking of the deities, transfer of merit, dissolution of the ritual site, and departure of the practitioner.⁴⁶ Several of the specific actions of the Jūhachidō are

the same as those of the five contemplative gates: prostrations, vows, mantra, and transfer of merit, though the order is slightly different and they are embedded in a more complex ritual.

Identification is held to be the most important part of the Jūhachidō, as it is with all tantric rituals. Despite being the fourth of the five parts just described, identification is structurally central because the final part, dissociation, replicates in reverse order and in abbreviated form the actions in the first three: purification, construction, and encounter. Given that identification is central—both in terms of Shingon soteriology and in terms of the structure of the ritual—everything prior to identification is preparation, while everything subsequent is termination of the ritual.⁴⁷ By analogy, this would serve to explain why if the visualization is the most important part of the practice it is not the central action, i.e., the third gate. Abbreviation of the terminal actions is very common in Shingon rituals and may serve to explain why in the five contemplative gates the visualization is preceded by three preparatory actions and followed by only one terminal action.

Thus, there is a structural similarity between the five contemplative gates and the Jūhachidō: both have five components, of which the first three are preparatory, the fourth is the main activity and the fifth terminates the ritual practice. There is an important difference, however, in soteriological conceptions indicated by the difference in the two central actions—identification and visualization. While the five contemplative gates are a practice associated with the cult of Amitāyus, the Jūhachidō is a tantric Buddhist practice.⁴⁸

PRACTICE AND SOTERIOLOGY⁴⁹

What soteriological preconceptions are implicit in the practice of the five contemplative gates? First, one interpretation of the *Rebirth Treatise* as centering on “faith” will be examined. While the use of such connotatively laden terms as “faith” in English translations of Buddhist works has been the subject of much discussion,⁵⁰ our attention here will be on the difference between the East Asian Pure Land use of the concept and the meaning coming from the Indian sources. Second, the five contemplative gates will be examined against the background of other visualization practices. Finally, a suggestion concerning the relation to Yogācāra soteriology will be explored.

It has been asserted by Kiyota that “Birth in the Pure Land is realized through faith,”⁵¹ and, that faith is the meaning behind the five

contemplative gates. The phrase which leads Kiyota to place faith as central to the *Rebirth Treatise* is at the beginning of the prose auto-commentary: “How should we meditate and awaken Faith?”⁵² The term Kiyota is translating as “Faith” is *hsin hsin* (*shinjin*), which of course becomes central to East Asian, and especially Japanese, Pure Land Buddhist thought. However, the term only appears once in the text, and furthermore, Kiyota’s translation is itself informed by T’an-luan’s commentary. While the Buddha Amitāyus is the central figure of the visualization practice prescribed by the *Rebirth Treatise*, this does not automatically entail a soteriology of faith in the vow, as developed through the works of such later figures as T’an-luan, Shan-tao, Hōnen, and Shinran, nor a kind of Buddhist devotionism, as Kiyota and others have taken it. In the case of the *Rebirth Treatise*, it would seem to be more appropriate that the term *hsin hsin* be understood within the context of soteriological concepts which predate the *Rebirth Treatise*, e.g., Yogācāra, rather than by reference to soteriological concepts which postdate it.

The Sanskrit for *hsin hsin* is *prasāda* (or, *cittaprasāda*⁵³), which according to Monier-Williams primarily means “clearness, brightness, pellucidness, purity,” and also “calmness, tranquillity, absence of excitement, serenity of disposition.”⁵⁴ This is the meaning in which Vasubandhu himself uses the term in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* when he defines *śraddhā*, another term often translated as “faith,” as “clarification of the mind.”⁵⁵ In other words, what is sought is a calm mind, a clear mind, i.e., one which is not disturbed by anxiety. This would seem to point to understanding the opening question of the auto-commentary by reference to the meanings which Vasubandhu makes explicit as the import of the third and fourth of the contemplative gates respectively: *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. *Śamatha* is the mental tranquillity attained through meditative practices. Not only then do (*citta*-)*prasāda* and *śamatha* have almost identical meanings, but the first part of the question which opens the auto-commentary concerns how to “meditate.” The term Kiyota renders as “meditate” is *kuan*, a common translation for *vipaśyanā*,⁵⁶ i.e., insight, which carries the sense of directly seeing the true nature of all of existence—either its emptiness or its identity with the *dharmadhātu*.⁵⁷ The opening question then is “How can we see [what is true]? How can we [even⁵⁸] produce a calm mind?” The five contemplative gates, then, are Vasubandhu’s answer to the

question of the means for calming the mind in order to perceive what is true, in this case the *dharmadhātu* manifest as the Pure Land.

The soteriology of seeing the Pure Land points to the significance of this ritual as a visualization practice. The origins of the Pure Land tradition seem to share in the use of visualization common to a wide variety of Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism.⁵⁹ The *Visualization Sutra* is an important source for understanding Mahāyāna visualization practices. In the *Visualization Sutra* Śākyamuni Buddha describes a series of visualizations to Queen Vaidehī in response to her expressed desire to “perceive a place where one can be born by performing pure and undefiled acts.”⁶⁰ Śākyamuni explains the purpose of visualizing the Buddha Amitāyus, the eighth visualization, saying:

Each *buddha-tathāgata*, as the body of the *dharmā*-realm, pervades the mind of all sentient beings. Therefore, when you perceive a buddha in your mind, it is your mind which possesses the thirty-two prominent features and the eighty secondary attributes; your mind becomes buddha; your mind is a buddha; and the wisdom of the buddhas—true, universal and ocean-like—arises from this mind. Therefore, you should single-mindedly fix your thoughts and clearly perceive the *Buddha, Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyak-sambuddha*.⁶¹

In other words, the visualization is not something derivative from sensory experience and therefore ontologically lesser, but rather is a way of making present to consciousness that which is most fundamental to consciousness, that which is ontologically greater than the discriminative consciousness, the enlightened consciousness which can be seen as the Pure Land, Amitāyus and his retinue of bodhisattvas.⁶² Malcolm David Eckel has discussed this relation as understood by Bhāvaviveka: “When a lesser person contemplates the Buddha, the Buddha’s crucial characteristic is not his own seeing. It is his ability to illuminate the minds of others who have not yet seen.”⁶³

Thus, the *Rebirth Treatise* shares with the *Visualization Sutra* a soteriology of visualization, i.e., of seeing the Pure Land, the Buddha and the bodhisattvas, as a means of being reborn there.⁶⁴ This is in keeping with a story concerning the monk Hsüan-tsang who, when facing death at the hands of pirates intending to sacrifice him to Durgā, visualizes Tuṣita Heaven.⁶⁵ Alan Sponberg has summarized the soteriological assumptions of Hsüan-tsang’s actions, saying, “Clearly Hsuan-tsang’s aspiration is to gain a vision of Maitreya now, the best guarantee of being reborn later with him in Tuṣita after one’s death.”⁶⁶

This conception of the soteriological efficacy of visualization may in turn point to the more psychologically formulated soteriology of the Yogācāra. If visualization of the Buddha realizes the fundamentally enlightened quality of pure consciousness, then is this practice a means of achieving the “fundamental transformation” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*)⁶⁷ which plays a central role in the soteriology of the Yogācāra school?

Even if the attribution of authorship to Vasubandhu is not accepted, it must at least be accepted that there was some good reason as to why the text was so attributed. As Kiyota says, “The *Upadeśa* displays strong traces of Yogācāra thought.”⁶⁸ The concept of fundamental transformation seems to have been central to the soteriological theories of the Yogācāra throughout its history, both in Indian Asia and in East Asia. For example, in his study of the early origin of the *ālayavijñāna* concept, Schmithausen notes that, according to the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*, *āśrayaparivṛtti*⁶⁹ is not “a form of mind on its own,” despite the fact that for *arhats* it has entirely replaced the *ālayavijñāna* and the “badness” (*dauṣṭhulya*) with which the *ālayavijñāna* “is bound up or of which it consists.”⁷⁰ According to the *Ch’eng Wei-shih Lun* of Hsüan-tsang, “That which the Bodhisattva acquires as a result of revelation by Paravṛtti is Mahāparinirvana.”⁷¹ Further, while *mahāparinirvāṇa* is revealed by *āśrayaparavṛtti*, *mahābodhi* is produced by it.⁷² Fundamental transformation, which leads to full and total awakening, is the proximate goal of practice in the Yogācāra.

In the *Rebirth Treatise* Vasubandhu initiates his explanation of the visualization by saying that one should visualize the “merits which glorify Buddha-land,” because such visualization perfects “the power [*bala*] beyond conceptual thought [*acintya*], which is like a wish fulfilling jewel.”⁷³ The power beyond conceptual thought can also be identified as consciousness beyond discrimination. Discussing this latter concept in the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*, Florin Sutton says that “all discrimination is entirely due to mental functioning, and its spurious nature becomes evident only in the higher state of self-absorption, when the mind turn[s] back upon itself (*parāvṛtti*).”⁷⁴ Here Sutton understands *parāvṛtti* as the mind turning back upon itself, i.e., taking itself as its own object.

This, then, provides one way of understanding the soteriological concepts underlying the visualization practice of the *Rebirth Treatise*. By creating a mental image of the Pure Land, Amitāyus and his retinue of bodhisattvas (which is the mind’s own inherently awakened form)

to meditate upon, the mind is turning back upon itself, taking itself as its own object. This turning back upon itself reveals the fundamentally awakened character of mind to itself, leading to a fundamental transformation of mind.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Thus, the *Rebirth Treatise* can be seen as a Yogācāra text describing a single, five part practice which employs Pure Land symbolism as a means of leading the mind to confront itself, producing a fundamental transformation. This understanding of the *Rebirth Treatise* accords with the soteriology of its own time, rather than being created retrospectively through interpretations based on the later developments of the Pure Land tradition in China and Japan. Seeing the text in this light also gives us access to the question of what did the Yogācāra practitioners actually do? A great deal has been written on Yogācāra philosophic theories, but little seems to be available on the practices in which Yogācāra followers engaged. Rather than seeing the *Rebirth Treatise* as representing a third stage in the life of Vasubandhu,⁷⁵ I think that it can be understood as a manifestation of the practical side of Yogācāra thought.

One objection to my reading may be that there are inadequate details concerning the actual performance of the ritualized visualization practice to see the five contemplative gates as such a practice. For example, the autocommentary does not specify what kind of “bodily action [*kāya-karma*]”⁷⁶ is to be performed. Nor does it specify what form of “vocal action [*vāk-karma*]”⁷⁷ one should perform, other than reciting the name of the *tathāgata*. By analogy with contemporary practices, one can assume that full-body, or “five point,” prostrations were meant, and that recitation of the name was in the form of a mantra. The lack of details in the section of the autocommentary in which the five contemplative gates are described as a set may indicate that Vasubandhu assumed that the reader shared a common body of knowledge concerning the performance of such a practice, and that it was not necessary for him to specify these aspects of the practice. If this is the case, then what is highlighted is the visualization of the Pure Land, Amitāyus and his retinue of bodhisattvas, which is the novel aspect of the practice prescribed. Perhaps future research will reveal more information about the specifics of ritual practices in late Indian Buddhism which will shed light on this question.

Related to this is the question of the setting in which the ritual was performed. For example, toward the end of the autocommentary, there is a description of five “entrance gates,” “five teachings which gradually [enable the bodhisattvas to] perfect merits.”⁷⁸ These five are an expansion on the five contemplative gates. The first is nearing the Pure Land, which is the result of bodily worship. The second is joining the group of bodhisattvas praising Amitāyus, which is the result of verbal recitation. The third is entering Amitāyus’ domain, which results from mental resolve to be born in the Pure Land and from *śamatha-samādhi*. The fourth is entry into the palace, resulting from *vipaśyāna*, i.e., the visualization. The fifth is entry into the garden of *samsāra* and working as a bodhisattva for the benefit of others, which results from the transfer of merit. The spatial characteristics of the metaphor and the kind of stages which it describes—nearing the Pure Land, joining the retinue, entering the domain, entering the palace, and entering the garden—are similar to what one might find if one were describing movement through a mandala. It may be that the practice prescribed in the *Rebirth Treatise* was associated with a visual representation of Amitāyus’ Pure Land in the form of a mandala.

Also left unanswered is the question of the model upon which the five contemplative gates of the *Rebirth Treatise* was based. As Kiyota says, “The textual source on which the five items are based is uncertain.”⁷⁹ He goes on to point in a general way to a similarity with

the general practice-prescription of the *Ta chih tu lun* (Nagārjuna’s commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), the *Bodhicitta-śāstra* (*The Awakening of Enlightenment*), and many other Mahāyāna texts: i.e., the purification of body (*kaya*), speech (*vāc*), and mind (*manas*) as preparatory items to perfect the bodhisattva practices.⁸⁰

Kajiyama has suggested the *triskandhaka*, a ritual practice found in early Mahāyāna, as the basic model of practice which was expanded into the five contemplative gates.⁸¹ The three parts of the *triskandhaka* are expressions of repentance, gratitude, and entreating the Buddha to remain in the world.

Although additional research is needed, there is another possible source for the structure of the five contemplative gates—the five paths. Vasubandhu seems to have been very familiar with the five paths system.⁸² The five paths describe the progress of a practitioner from the most basic level found in the path of accumulation of merit, through the paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation, until he/

she reaches the path of no more learning.⁸³ First, there is a correlation between the number of contemplative gates and paths.⁸⁴ Second, the structure of the two is similar:

“Accumulation of Merit” corresponding to “Prostrations”: the path of the accumulation of merit (*sambhāramārga*) is marked by activities which establish a relation between the practitioner and the lineage of “holy ones.”⁸⁵ Similarly, prostrations are actions which serve to establish such a relation.

“Preparation” corresponding to “Recitation of Amitābha’s Name”: in the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*), the practitioner acquires “the four ‘wholesome roots contributing to penetration’ . . . [which are] of a higher quality whose object is no longer the general marks of dharmas, but the four noble truths and their sixteen aspects.”⁸⁶ Recitation of the name of Amitāyus Buddha would similarly give the practitioner an object of meditation whose status is higher than mundane dharmas.

“Seeing” corresponding to “Mental Resolve to Be Reborn”: entry into the path of seeing (*darśanamārga*) is considered to be the point at which the practitioner shifts from being an ordinary, foolish person (*prthagjana*) to being a holy one (*ārya*).⁸⁷ In the Mahāyāna this would correspond with the arising of *bodhicitta*, and hence here to the resolution to be reborn in the Pure Land.

“Meditation” corresponding to “Visualization of the Pure Land”: the path of meditation (*bhāvanā-mārga*) is “defined as repeated confrontation” and “prolonged effort” in relation to the four noble truths, by which one’s innate passions are destroyed.⁸⁸ Certainly the Pure Land would be thought to be free from such innate passions, and—as discussed above—visualization of the Pure Land would give rise to that purified condition within the mind of the practitioner.

“No More Learning” corresponding to “Transfer of Merit”: traditionally, the path of no more learning (*aśaikṣamārga*) is understood as the attainment of the status of *arhat*.⁸⁹ Again, however, as understood in the Mahāyāna, the goal is the bodhisattva who acts compassionately for the benefit of all sentient beings. The transfer of merit (*pariṇāmana*⁹⁰) as the closing portion of the ritualized visualization engages the practitioner in just such a compassionate action, one which can only be effective because at the end of the visualization practice—by the very act of having gained entry into the Pure Land—the practitioner has become a bodhisattva.

Beyond these considerations of similarity between the two structures, there is what I believe to be a fundamental psychological principle underlying the construction of at least some of the meditative and visualization rituals in the Buddhist tradition. This is the idea that ritual practice is a replication in miniature of the entirety of the path. As Stephan Beyer has noted in passing, “The ritual act takes on the dimensions of the entire Bodhisattva Path.”⁹¹ Buddhist ritual practice is in this way complete, and it is the repeated practice of the visualization ritual which provides the stimulus for movement along the path as such. The study of Buddhist ritual and its relation to soteriology is an area requiring further exploration, but one which deserves much greater attention than it has been given in the past. Despite the common tendency of much of Buddhist studies scholarship to focus on doctrines, most Buddhists have been primarily concerned with ritual and practice. Hence, the reading of texts needs to give proper attention to the ritual and practice implications of the text.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was originally presented at the 1991 meeting of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies in Berkeley. That version was translated into Japanese by Atsushi Yoshida, “A Structural Analysis of Vasubandhu’s *Ching tu lun*,” *The Study of Western Shin Buddhism*, vol. 1 (July 1993): 12–27. This present version is a thorough revision of the earlier one as several of the ideas I put forward there are, I now believe, mistaken.
2. *Wang-sheng lun*, also called *Ching t’u lun* the “Pure Land Treatise,” and in full the *Wu-liang-shou ching yu-po-t’i-she yüan-sheng chieh*, “The Treatise on the Sutra of the [Buddha] of Immeasurable Life and the Verses on the Aspiration for Rebirth,” Skt. reconstruction: *Sukhāvativyūha Upadeśa* (T. 1524). Cf. Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yüan’s Commentary on the Visualization Sutra* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 49–50. No Sanskrit or Tibetan version is extant. I know of three English translations: Nishu Utsuki, trans., “The Discourse on Buddhist Paradise,” in *Selected Texts of Shin Buddhism*, ed. Nishu Utsuki, posthumously compiled by English Publication Bureau, Buddhist Publication Series, no. 1 (Kyoto: Honpa Hongwanji, 1953), 31–63; David Matsumoto, trans., “*Jōdoron*: Discourse on the Pure Land,” *The Pure Land*, n.s., no. 3 (December 1986): 98–120 [reprinted in this issue of *Pacific World*]; and Minoru Kiyota, trans., “Buddhist Devotional Meditation: A Study of the *Sukhāvativyūhopadeśa*,” in *Mahayana Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Minoru Kiyota (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), 249–296. Regarding the Chinese rendering of the title, see Roger Corless, “T’an-luan: The First Systematizer,” in *The Pure*

Land Tradition: History and Development, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 111, where he discusses Tan-luan's reservations about using *lun* to translate *upadeśa*. Also, note that the five contemplative gates differ from Shan-tao's five right practices. see David W. Chappell, "The Pure Land Movement in China" in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 162.

3. Quoted in Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras: A Study and Translation from Chinese* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1994), 70.

4. There continue to be disagreements, however, as to whether the work is properly attributed or not. Since the issue of attribution is not the main issue addressed in this paper, I am at this point content to accept the traditional attribution, and will, therefore, refer to the author as Vasubandhu.

5. Corless translates these as the "recollection teaching-gates"; cf. "T'an-luan," 112.

6. I am grateful to Atsushi Yoshida (cf. n1) for the suggestion to more closely examine this aspect of the *Rebirth Treatise*.

7. See, for example, Kiyota, "Buddhist Devotional Meditation," 274; and Inagaki, *Three Pure Land Sutras*, 71.

8. This term is usually explained as focusing attention on the origin of the qualities described in the meritorious actions of Amitāyus, rather than on the characteristics per se, or "Those adornments are not material objects, but instead constitute phenomena arising out of and giving expression to dharma-nature itself" (Matsumoto, "Jōdoron," 101 [this issue of *Pacific World*: p. 25]).

9. Kiyota gives charts of the merits, showing their groupings ("Buddhist Devotional Meditation," 261-262).

10. Kiyota interpolates that the world purified is *saṃsāra*, though this seems to be an assumption on his part.

11. *Ibid.*, 276.

12. *Ibid.*, 277.

13. Inagaki Hisao, trans., "The Larger Sutra: The Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life Delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha," in *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, ed. Inagaki Hisao (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1994), §7, 241.

14. *Ibid.*, 246-247.

15. *Ibid.*, 245.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 246.

18. *Ibid.*, 247.

19. See, for example, §11 through §17, and §20 through §23.

20. Inagaki, trans., “*The Larger Sutra*,” 241.

21. There is mention of the “power of the primary vow (*pūrva-praṇidhāna-bala*) of the Buddha” in the eighth merit of the Buddha in the *gāthās*. However, even in the autocommentary, there is no mention of the content of the vow. Kiyota notes that “The *Upadeśa*, however, does not identify the eighteenth vow as the primary one. That, as said, is a view entertained by Shan-tao, Hōnen, and Shinran, and endorsed by Japanese Pure Land believers.” Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 256.

22. *Ibid.*, 244.

23. *Ibid.*, 243, 257, and 261.

24. *Ibid.*, 275.

25. *Ibid.*, 242.

26. The association between the *Rebirth Treatise* and the *Mahāyānasamgraha* being suggested here might be questioned, given Fujita Kōtatsu’s discussion of what he calls “a major criticism of Pure Land Buddhism” found in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (“Pure Land Buddhism in India,” in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996], 33). The section of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* cited by Fujita (Étienne Lamotte, *La Somme du Grand Véhicule d’Asaṅga*, 2 vols. [Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1973], 1:41; 2:130), however, does not seem to support this understanding. The section referred to by Fujita is a discussion of the varieties of the Buddha’s speech, which includes *kālāntarābhiprāya*, “reference to another time.” The two examples of this kind of speech given in the text do include invocation of the name of a *tathāgata* and vowing to be reborn in *Sukhāvātī*. There is not, however, any criticism of Pure Land Buddhism. Perhaps the criticism Fujita discusses both drew its name from this kind of speech and claimed the authority of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* simply because of the examples given. Indeed the tenor of the criticism as described by Fujita sounds as if it were in response to Chinese developments of Pure Land thought, rather than having arisen in the India of Asaṅga.

27. Paul J. Griffiths, trans., et al., *The Realm of Awakening: A Translation and Study of the Tenth Chapter of Asaṅga’s Mahāyānasamgraha* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 211.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 212.

30. *Ibid.*, 209.

31. Ibid., 215.
32. Ibid.
33. Immediately preceding the description of the “perfectly purified Buddha land” Asaṅga also lists seven recollections of the Buddha (ibid. 198–207), but these do not match the eight merits of the Buddha as given in the *Rebirth Treatise*. There appears to be no section specifically devoted to the bodhisattvas, at least in the tenth chapter of the *Mahāyānasāṅgraha*.
34. Utsuki, “The Discourse,” 40.
35. Roger Jonathan Corless, “T’an-luan’s Commentary on the Pure Land Discourse: An Annotated Translation and Soteriological Analysis of the *Wang-shêng-lun chu* (T. 1819),” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1973), 197.
36. See *Répertoire du Canon Bouddhique Sino-Japonaise*, ed. Paul Demiéville, Hubert Durt and Anna Seidel (Paris and Tokyo: L’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres Institut de France, 1978), s.v. 360, 363. Cf. also, 361, 362.
37. Assuming that these are in fact two separate cults, and not simply two different names for the same figure.
38. Note that Fujita Kōtatsu states that “The scriptural basis of this work [i.e., the *Rebirth Treatise*] is unclear” (“Pure Land Buddhism in India,” 34). For further information on Aparimitāyus, see Richard K. Payne, “The Cult of Ārya Aparimitāyus: Similarities and Differences Between Proto-Pure Land and Vajrayāna in Indian Buddhism,” presented at The First Conference of The International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, North American Branch, September 24, 1994, Berkeley, California.
39. Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 249.
40. Matsumoto, trans., *Jōdoron*, 116 [this issue of *Pacific World*: p. 39].
41. Corless, “T’an-luan’s Commentary,” 214.
42. Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 257.
43. Ibid.
44. Yuichi Kajiyama, “Transfer of Merits in Pure Land Buddhism: Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and T’an-luan,” in *Y. Kajiyama: Studies in Buddhist Philosophy (Selected Papers)*, ed. Katsumi Mimaki, et al. (1986; repr., Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., Ltd., 1989), 31. For general background on the development of the idea of transfer of merit, see also Yuichi Kajiyama, “Transfer and Transformation of Merits in Relation to Emptiness” (an original essay appearing in the same volume).
45. The only exceptions to the general practice of ending a ritual with the transfer of merit within the Shingon ritual corpus of which I am aware are

some of the rituals for feeding the hungry ghosts, which are in a sense already in their entirety for the benefit of others.

46. For more a detailed description of the Jūhachidō, see Taisen Miyata, *A Study of the Ritual Mudras in the Shingon Tradition* (Sacramento: Northern California Koyasan Temple, 1984). For further information on the structural analysis of the ritual and its relation to other Shingon rituals, see Richard K. Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan*, Śata-piṭaka series, no. 365 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Adityaprakashan, 1991).

47. For a similar analysis, cf. Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā*, Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions, no. 1 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1973), 30–31.

48. Roger Corless (“Pure Land and Pure Perspective: A Tantric Hermeneutic of Sukhāvātī,” *The Pure Land*, n.s., no. 6 [December 1989], 205–217) has also suggested that the five contemplative gates form a single unified practice. Working from Tan-luan’s commentary on the *Ching t’u lun*, he attempts to reconstruct the outline of the five contemplative gates as a *sādhana* by comparison with a Tibetan tantric ritual. Corless makes two specific points of comparison. First, there is a loose similarity in structure and content. Second, a similarity between Tan-luan’s explanation of the soteriological efficacy of the five contemplative gates and the explanation of the soteriological efficacy of the tantric *sādhana* given by the lama who taught it to Corless, Khenpo Karthar Rimpoche. While Corless’ comparison of the five contemplative gates and the tantric *sādhana* directed to Amitābha is suggestive, his main concern is with a more general comparison between Pure Land Buddhism and Buddhist tantra.

49. In the absence of a more neutral term, “soteriology” is employed here—despite its association with Christian conceptions of salvation from sin—with the meaning “the goal of life as understood by a religious system.”

50. Matsumoto, *Jōdoron*, 118–119n5 [this issue of *Pacific World*: p. 41n5].

51. Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 256.

52. *Ibid.*, 278.

53. Hisao Inagaki, *A Trilingual Glossary of the Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtras: Indexes to the Larger and Smaller Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtras* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1984), 236.

54. Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), s.v. “prasādhā.”

55. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, trans., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, English trans. Leo M. Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 191. De La Vallée Poussin explains that the calm quality of the mind, i.e., *cittaprasāda*, is the result of *śraddha*: “In other words, *śraddha* is the *dharma* by which (*yadyogāt*) the mind, troubled by the *kleśas* and *upakleśas*, becomes clear, as

troubled water becomes clear by the presence of a gem which purifies water (*udakaprasādakamaṇi*). Same example in *Atthāsalinī*, 304.” *Ibid.*, 336n20. I wish to thank Steven D. Goodman for calling my attention to this source.

56. See Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher’s Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (1992; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 137.

57. Regarding the relation of these two understandings of what is seen, see Paul M. Harrison, “Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvathita-Samādhi-Sūtra,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978): 46–52.

58. Taking the order here as rhetorical, since it is the reverse of the two gates to which the question is referring.

59. The practices actually go back to the *āgamas*. See Paul M. Harrison, “Buddhānusmṛti,” 36–38. For a related discussion, see the first two chapters of George J. Tanabe, Jr., *Myōe the Dreamkeeper: Fantasy and Knowledge in Early Kamakura Buddhism*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, no. 156 (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992).

60. I.13. Ryukoku translation, p. 17.

61. III.8. Ryukoku translation, p. 51.

62. It is worth noting that Julian F. Pas, discussing Shan-tao’s commentary on this section of the *Visualization Sutra*, dismisses the understanding developed here. Pas, however, assumes that mental images are ontologically lesser than “objective reality” (“Shan-tao’s Interpretation of the Meditative Vision of Buddha Amitāyus,” *History of Religions* 14, no. 2 [November 1974]: 114). (One wonders if there is not some resonance of St. Anselm in Pas’ comments.) This assumption is not necessarily shared by the author(s) of the *Visualization Sutra*. Pas also seems to confuse what is true with what is realized. The sutra is referring to something which is fundamentally true of human consciousness, rather than of something which “would only happen in the highest form of *samādhi*” (pp. 114–115). Such an understanding of the soteriological efficacy of visualization is in keeping with the assumptions basic to *Yogācāra*. Conze summarizes these assumptions, saying that:

when in a prescribed and disciplined manner and with spiritual intent we move in a trance away from the empirical reality of a given stimulus, we do not thereby move off into a realm of mere phantasy, but come into contact with something ... truer to what is really there than that which we found in the sensory world. (Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* [1967; repr., Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperback, University of Michigan Press], 254)

63. Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 139.

64. Another early source which emphasizes visualization is the *Pratyutpanna samādhi sūtra*. While in the *Visualization Sutra* the goal is rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitāyus and the means by which it is achieved is a vision of that Buddha and his Pure Land, this complex is only referred to once in the *Pratyutpanna samādhi sūtra*. In general “the desire for fortunate rebirth is criticised as being immoral; the goal of the good bodhisattva is nothing short of Buddhahood and the salvation of his fellow-beings.” Harrison, “Buddhānusmṛti,” 52. In the case of the *Pratyutpanna samādhi sūtra* the goal is being able to hear the teachings of those buddhas who do exist even now, despite the absence of Śākyamuni in this present time. *Ibid.*, 52–54.

65. The story is repeated in Alan Sponberg, “Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism,” in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism, no. 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 23–24. The story is also discussed by Eckel in his *To See the Buddha*, 131–137.

66. Sponberg, “Meditation,” 26.

67. Ronald Mark Davidson’s translation, “Buddhist Systems of Transformation: Āśraya-parivṛtti/parāvṛtti among the Yogācāra” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985), 154. Eckel translates the term as “change of standpoint” (*To See the Buddha*, 105). This is suggestive in that visualizing being in the Pure Land would involve visualizing a “change of standpoint.” Further research on the relation between *āśrayaparāvṛtti* as an element of Yogācāra soteriology and Pure Land praxis should include an examination of the place and function of *prañidhāna* in the systems of *bhūmis* and *pāramitās*. (I wish to thank Steven D. Goodman for this suggestion.)

68. Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 254.

69. For a discussion of the variant forms, *āśrayaparāvṛtti* and *āśrayaparivṛtti*, see Davidson, “Buddhist Systems of Transformation,” 151–155.

70. Lambert Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*, *Studia Philologica Buddhica*, Monograph Series IVa, b (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987), 1.81.

71. Hsüan Tsang, *Ch’eng Wei-Shih Lun: The Doctrine of Mere Consciousness*, trans. Wei Tat (Hong Kong: The Ch’eng Wei-Shih Lun Publication Committee, 1973), 759. The *Ch’eng Wei-Shih Lun* devotes an extensive section to discussing *āśrayaparāvṛtti* (pp. 749–759).

72. *Ibid.*

73. Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 279; note that Kiyota understands this phrase differently, interpolating that interpretation with

the opening phrase “We speak of....” I believe that my interpretation is better supported, given the context of the question to which this is the reply. The question is a practical one concerning meditation.

74. Florin G. Sutton, *Existence and Enlightenment in the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra: A Study in the Ontology and Epistemology of the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 198.

75. See for example, Kiyota, “Buddhist Devotional Meditation,” 252–253.

76. *Ibid.*, 278.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, 289.

79. *Ibid.*, 257.

80. *Ibid.*

81. Personal communication, 1 July 1991. It has also been pointed out that the first three of the gates correspond to body, speech, and mind (James Sanford, personal communication, ca. 1992), and may therefore have been organized as a means of purification or preparation prior to entry into the visualization.

82. See Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor*, Religions of Asia Series, no. 4 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 200, where Anacker notes that knowledge of the five paths “is presupposed in the *Commentary on the Separation of the Middle from Extremes*.” Also, as Paul Williams notes, “The schema of five ‘paths’ to enlightenment is known from non-Mahāyāna sources” (*Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* [London and New York: Routledge, 1989], 205), i.e., from sources predating Vasubandhu. If the five paths are not the structure upon which the five gates is based, then perhaps the discussion given here may be considered an exegesis of the five gates in terms of the five paths. Such exegeses are of course common in the history of Buddhism.

83. Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 206; also, Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śāka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, no. 36 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988), 613–618.

84. However, there are many groups of five. As Alex Wayman has noted in relation to tantric Buddhism, “five-fold symbolism is ubiquitous in the Buddhist Tantras” (“The Five-Fold Ritual Symbolism of Passion,” in Alex Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism* [New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973], 204).

85. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 613.

86. Ibid., 614.

87. Ibid., 613.

88. Ibid., 616.

89. Ibid., 617.

90. For further discussion of this concept, see Gadjin M. Nagao, "Usages and Meanings of Pariṇāmanā," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, trans. and ed. Leslie S. Kawamura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 83–90.

91. Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā*, 30. The idea that the ritual practice recapitulates the whole of the path does provide one possible way of linking the five paths to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha*: the description of Dharmākara's actions. He gives bodily reverence to Lokeśvararāja, praises Lokeśvararāja, vows to become a buddha, is shown eighty-one hundred thousand *niyutas* of *koṭis* of buddhahlands and visualizes his own (followed by the detailed description in the vows), and accumulates a huge stock of merit which he uses for the benefit of living beings. If not the source of the five gates structure, such an interpretation would not be incompatible with the five paths as the source described *supra*.