

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Aspiring to Enlightenment: Pure Land Buddhism in Silla Korea.* By Richard D. McBride II. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-8260-0.

NASU EISHŌ

Because Pure Land practices in Korea never developed a separate lineage as in China, or diverged into independent Buddhist schools as in Japan, they have remained largely overlooked within scholarship on East Asian Buddhism. Richard McBride's *Aspiring to Enlightenment*, the first book-length work on Korean Pure Land practice, is thus a most welcome addition to the study of the greater East Asian Pure Land tradition generally and its Korean incarnations specifically. The book represents the culmination of twenty years of research and reflection by the author, providing a comprehensive vision, for the first time, of how Pure Land Buddhism was accepted and developed during the Silla period (ca. 300–935) at both the monastic and popular levels. By examining both the doctrinal texts on, and the popular cultic practices of, Amitābha Buddha, together with field research at Silla-period sites, McBride demonstrates how Pure Land Buddhist practice became a vital and vibrant part of Silla society.

The book introduces the subject in the first two chapters by explaining the historical, cultural, and doctrinal background in which Pure Land practices were introduced to the Korean Peninsula. In the first chapter, “The World of Buddhist Scholars in Silla Korea,” the author points out that Silla's royal adoption of Buddhism formed a part of its participation in Sinitic high culture, and, with the construction of the first temples in the mid-sixth century, monasteries worked largely to support the state (pp. 4–5). Pure Land Buddhist texts were introduced to Korea in this sociocultural context. Although Silla Buddhist scholars adopted Sinitic intellectual and cultic understandings of Pure Land Buddhism (pp. 8–12), McBride stresses that “there were no firm scholastic traditions, lineages, or schools of thought” (p. 15), and that the scholar monks of both Korea and China understood Pure Land practice as part of the larger Mahayana path (pp. 15–16).

In chapter 2, “Pure Land Thinkers in Medieval China,” the author provides a concise summary of the development of the Chinese Pure Land tradition from Lushan

Huiyan 廬山慧遠 (334–417) to Fazhao 法照 (d. ca. 830). In this chapter, the author spends much of his efforts introducing the Pure Land thought of major Chinese masters, namely Tanluan 曇鸞 (ca. 476–542), Daochuo 道綽 (562–645), Jiakai 迦才 (fl. 626–649), and Shandao 善導 (613–681). This chapter is particularly useful for readers who are not familiar with the doctrinal foundations of meditative practices focused on the Buddha (Skt. *buddhānusmṛiti*, Ch. *nienfo*, K. *yōnbul* 念仏) developed by Tanluan and the popular vocal “ten intonations” (Ch. *shisheng* 十聲) of Amitābha’s name promoted by Shandao.

Following this background material, chapter 3, “The Pure Land Practice of Silla’s Buddhist Intellectuals,” focuses on Silla scholars’ understanding of the practice of “ten recollections” (Ch. *shinian* 十念, K. *simnyōn*). In contrast to earlier East Asian Mahayana practices, in which the ten recollections were a contemplative form of practice, in the Sinitic Pure Land tradition the ten recollections became popularly identified with the ten vocal recitations of Amitābha’s name, intended for those incapable of performing the advanced contemplative practices discussed in the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經. The author discusses the main Silla scholars, namely Wōnhyo 元曉 (617–686), Pōbwi 法位 (fl. 661–681), Hyōnil 玄一 (ca. late 7th to early 8th c.), Ŭijōk 義寂 (ca. late 7th to early 8th c.), and Kyōnghūng 憬興 (ca. late 7th to early 8th c.). Here, the author focuses particularly on the contributions to Pure Land exegesis made by Wōnhyo and Kyōnghūng. Wōnhyo introduced a novel reading of the Pure Land scriptures, saying that it is not how one practices but rather the arousing of *bodhicitta* (the aspiration to enlightenment) that is the primary cause of birth in the Pure Land (p. 34). He also developed the concept of the Pure Land “esoteric” (*ūnmil* 隱密) ten recollections (pp. 37–40) and used Tanluan’s metaphor of “crossing the river expedient” (*toha pangbyōn* 渡河方便) to demonstrate his idea that salvation is possible even with only “one recollection” (*illyōn* 一念) of *buddhānusmṛiti* (pp. 40–43). In his discussion of Kyōnghūng, McBride makes the significant point that Silla scholars did not necessarily agree with Shandao’s interpretation of “ten recollections” being the same as “ten intonations.” In particular, Kyōnghūng, as a scholar of the Sinitic Yogācāra tradition, rejected Shandao’s simple blending of the “ten recollections” with the “ten intonations.” Kyōnghūng’s critical view is clearly demonstrated in his saying that “You should not wrest the words (*purūng nanōn* 不應難言) [from the sutras]!” directed against liberal interpretations of the scriptures by Shandao and his disciple Huaigan 懷感 (fl. late 7th c.; pp. 54–55).

In chapter 4, “Interaction and Reaction between the Amitābha and Maitreya Cults,” the author introduces doctrinal debates concerning the competing popular cultic practices of Amitābha and Maitreya and demonstrates the ecumenical nature of Silla’s Pure Land practice by examining the writings of Wōnhyo and Kyōnghūng. Both Wōnhyo, who is considered the promulgator of “comprehensive

Buddhism” (*t'ong pulgyo* 通仙教, p. 58), and Kyōnghūng, representing mainstream Korean scholarship on Sinitic Buddhism (p. 61), wrote commentaries on scriptures related to Maitreya worship in which they demonstrated their impartiality to both types of Pure Land practices. Kyōnghūng went even further to suggest that the five kinds of practice prescribed in the *Wangshen lun* 往生論 of Vasubandhu (fl. ca. 4th or 5th c.) for Amitābha worship are also applicable for Maitreya worship (pp. 62–63). In the past, many researchers have been confused by the *Yusim allak to* 遊心安樂道 attributed to Wōnhyo, which has often been used to maintain that Wōnhyo was very sympathetic to Amitābha worship. However, as the author points out, this text was most likely composed by a later scholar and should not be counted as an authentic work of Wōnhyo (pp. 72–75; see also “Epilogue,” pp. 125–26).

Chapter 5, “The Amitābha Cult in Practice,” the last and longest chapter, is devoted to the author’s examination of “icons and images, epigraphy, literature, and traditional narratives” (p. 78) related to Pure Land practices of the later Silla period and their connection to the development of early Japanese Buddhism (pp. 113–15). The number of cases cited in this chapter is impressive, and they amply demonstrate how the Amitābha cult was actually “practiced” in Silla Korea, not only by monasteries but also by people of various status levels in society. However, because of the lack of clear historical records, the author was not able to connect this material evidence with the earlier examination of doctrinal issues, except for brief notes on Wōnhyo’s propagation of the recitation of the Buddha’s name and his composition of a popular poem, titled “Gāthā on Amitābha’s Attaining Buddha-Nature” (*Mit’a chūnsōng ke* 弥陀證性偈, pp. 105–6). These large gaps in the historical record make it difficult to determine connections or large trends in Silla Buddhism. In the end, McBride recommends that it might be helpful to compare Silla Buddhism with that of early Japan in order to overcome the gap in the Korean historical record (pp. 113–15).

In the “Epilogue,” subtitled “The Legacy of Silla’s Pure Land Buddhism,” the author concisely summarizes how the interpretation of *buddhānusmṛti* by Silla Pure Land exegetes continued to be refined by the following generations of Korean Buddhist scholars. As the author points out, while reading the Silla scholars’ Pure Land commentaries, we need to be aware that, though they were written to promote the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, they were meant to propagate the practice as part of the Mahayana tradition and never as a “Pure Land tradition.”

Although there are still many lacunae in our understanding of Pure Land Buddhism in Silla Korea, the author’s examination of the development of ideas about *buddhānusmṛti* combined with his field research greatly advances this gravely understudied area within contemporary academic studies of East Asian Buddhism. One of the most important legacies of the writings of Silla scholars is that their impact was not limited to Korea. Japanese monks were perhaps those most influenced by the

introduction of Pure Land commentaries by Korean scholars (pp. 121–26). Therefore, this book is strongly recommended for those who are also interested in the history of the development of Japanese Pure Land practice.

Given the importance of the book's contents, it is regrettable that it is marred with quite a few unfortunate typographical errors. For example: the title of *Wuliangshou jing youpotishe wangshengjie* 無量壽經優波提舍往生偈 should be read *Wuliangshou jing youpotishe yuanshengjie* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈 (p. 21, l. 19, and p. 168, l. 6); the phrase “people of underminded natures” would be better rendered “people of undetermined natures” (p. 36, l. 12); incorrect characters are given for the phrase *ha samsaeng* 下生下品, which should instead be rendered 下三生 (p. 49, l. 9); and, the heading on the last page of the epilogue is mistakenly rendered as “Chapter 5” (p. 128). These mistakes do not undermine the value of the book, but they do suggest that the reader needs to be familiar with East Asian Buddhist terms and texts to avoid confusion. Fortunately, the primary readership for this book will most likely be academic specialists and advanced graduate students who will be able to exercise the appropriate level of caution in this regard.

*Kindai no bukkō shisō to Nihon shugi* 近代の仏教思想と日本主義 (Modern Buddhist Thought and Japanism). Edited by Kondō Shuntarō 近藤俊太郎 and Nawa Tatsunori 名和達宣 under the supervision of Ishii Kōsei 石井公成. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2020. xiii + 556 pages. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-4-8318-5560-2.\*

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As Kondō Shuntarō, one of the editors of this volume, points out, studies on wartime Japanese Buddhism have focused on pursuing the responsibility of Buddhists in abetting and supporting the Japanese war effort. Such studies condemned wartime Buddhist monks and organizations for distorting the original nature of Buddhism under the influence of “Japanism” (Nihon shugi 日本主義). This approach was dominant among scholars in the field long after the end of the war. Their research praised the exceptional people who “resisted” the system while consigning the rest to the dark “history of submission to the emperor-centered Japanese state” (p. ii). Defined by the two extremes of “resistance” and “submission,” studies on wartime Japanese Buddhism were forced into an impasse without being able to engage in any productive arguments.

\* THIS REVIEW was first published in Japanese, in *Tosho shinbun* 図書新聞 (The Book Review Press), no. 3489, March 27, 2021, p. 5.