

The Cause and Conditions of Entrusting to the Buddha

—The Fundamental Perspective of T'an-luan's
Commentary on the *Pure Land Treatise*—

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In this paper, I would like to consider the significance of T'an-luan's work of composing a commentary on Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise*.

Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise* is the only extant commentary on the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. However, since it is short and simple, there remained the possibility that the path for the “aspiration to be born in the Pure Land” described in this treatise could be understood as referring to a path for superior Yogācāra bodhisattvas. However, he clearly states that central topic of the sutra is the “aspiration to be born in the Pure Land” for “all sentient beings in suffering.”

In his *Commentary on the Dasabhumī*, Nāgārjuna argued that the Pure Land path, i. e., the path of entrusting to the Buddha, was lost by people who stood within the self-power tradition which considered it possible to approach Buddhahood in stages. He pointed out that the Pure Land path signifies the recovery of the path of entrusting to the Buddha in which people sought to live their lives in response to the Buddha's call (i. e., within the meaning of life discovered in the Primal Vow of the Buddha).

These two works provided T'an-luan with the fundamental standpoint from which to discuss the way to be born in the Pure Land. He understood

the *Pure Land Treatise* as teaching the way in which all sentient beings in suffering can become a true disciples of the Buddha. From this perspective, T'an-luan composed a commentary on the *Pure Land Treatise* in which he clarified that the Buddhist path outlined in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* was for beings fully possessing defilements.

I focus on the following passage from the commentary on the *Pure Land Treatise* as best representing T'an-luan's fundamental standpoint: "In the path of easy practice, one aspires to be born in the Pure Land with solely cause and conditions of entrusting to the Buddha." This passage is found at the beginning of T'an-luan's commentary, where he clarifies his own position before he begins a line-by-line commentary on the *Treatise*.

Before T'an-luan converted to the Pure Land path, he followed the practices of the path of sages. However, it is not clear in the path of sages as to what is meant by a disciple of the Buddha. Indeed, the path which does not make clear the meaning of being a Buddha's disciple is the difficult path of self-power.

In contrast, T'an-luan understood that the path of easy practice leading to birth in the Pure Land is the path which clearly indicates the cause and conditions of being a disciple of the Buddha. This is because the Buddhist path founded on the desire to be born in the Pure Land is based on a tradition which sought to recover thoroughly the cause and conditions which enable one to become a disciple of the Buddha.

In this sense, T'an-luan's work consisted of the following: (1) showing that entrusting to the Buddha is the only condition as cause for the Buddha's disciple, (2) revealing the true cause and conditions for entrusting to the

Buddha, and (3) eliminating elements of self-power from the condition of the Buddha's disciple.

My paper consists of two sections. In the first section, I discuss the background of T'an-luan's fundamental standpoint. In the second section, I examine the path of entrusting to the Buddha.