

# The Origin of the Pure Land

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## 1. THE TERM "PURE LAND"

WHAT IS THE Pure Land? To answer this question, it is necessary to trace the origin of this word. The actual Chinese term *ching-t'u* 淨土 (literally, "pure land") is a rendering which may encompass several different corresponding Sanskrit words. In the Chinese versions, the term is used as a translation of such phrases as "the arrangement of good qualities and decorations of the Buddha-land" (*buddha-kṣetraguṇavyūhālaṃkāra*) in the Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*<sup>1</sup> or simply as "land" (*kṣetra*) in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*,<sup>2</sup> and is not a literal translation of the original words. There are cases as well in which the Chinese translators simply added the word in the course of their work. From these points, doubts may arise as to whether the thought system expressed in the Chinese word *ching-t'u* ever really existed in India in the first place. At present, some claim that Pure Land thought per se first appeared in China and not in India at all. But this is not so. It is true that the term for Pure Land arose in China; but it cannot be said

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<sup>1</sup> For *ching-t'u* in the *Wu-liang-shou ching* 無量壽經 (*Taishō*, Vol. 12, p. 267b), see Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha* (ed. A. Ashikaga), p. 9.8.

<sup>2</sup> For *ching-t'u* in the *Miao-fa lien-hua ching* 妙法蓮華經 (*Taishō*, Vol. 9, p. 43c), see *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (ed. H. Kern and B. Nanjio), p. 325.5.

that the particular thought system expressed by this word did not exist in India. It is the same with the Chinese idioms for *fo-tao* 佛道 (Buddha's enlightenment; way to Buddhahood) and *ch'êng-fo* 成佛 (attainment of Buddhahood). These words also have no precise Sanskrit equivalents, but it would be very peculiar if we were to conclude from this that the actual ideas expressed by these words did not exist in India.

The Chinese word *ching-t'u* means "pure land" and can also mean "to purify the land." In this latter meaning it originates in the early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of "purifying the Buddha-land," commonly rendered in Chinese as *ching fo-kuo-t'u* 淨佛國土, which refers to a world which has been realized according to this idea. The phrase "to purify the Buddha-land" refers to the idea that the bodhisattvas of Mahāyāna Buddhism will purify all the lands in which they are to appear as Buddhas in the future. By purification is meant the leading of all sentient beings inhabiting these lands into the pure way, in other words, the way to nirvāṇa, and the perfecting of the way to Buddhahood in these lands. This is the realization of the vow and practice of the Mahāyāna bodhisattvas known as "the self-benefit and benefiting others"; that is, reaching enlightenment oneself by helping others to reach it. It refers to the realization of the ideal of the bodhisattva way. In effect, this is none other than the basic thought system of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This same subject is taken up in various places of the early Mahāyāna sūtras, whether in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, or the *Daśabhūmika*, where expressions referring to the purification of the Buddha-land are found, such as *buddhakṣetrapariśuddhi*, *buddhakṣetrapariśodhana*, *kṣetraṃ pariśodhayati*, *kṣetraṃ viśodhayati*, etc.<sup>3</sup> Also, for example, in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, are found the words *pariśuddha-kṣetra*, *kṣetraṃ viśuddham*, etc.,<sup>4</sup> which mean "purified land"; these expressions could be regarded as corresponding literally to the Chinese word for "pure land." Although there are few instances of the actual use of this word in the Chinese translations of Pure Land sūtras such as the *Wu-liang-*

<sup>3</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (ed. R. Mitra), pp. 362.9, 363.10; *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, pp. 201.3, 204.2; *Gaṇḍavyūha* (ed. D.T. Suzuki and H. Idzumi), pp. 82.26, 129.16; *Daśabhūmika* (ed. J. Rahder), pp. 15.22, 56.4, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, pp. 68.2, 151.8, 152.6, 153.11, 217.11.

*shou ching* 無量壽經 (the so-called Larger Sūtra) and the *A-mi-t'o ching* 阿彌陀經 (the so-called Smaller Sūtra), still, needless to say, the idea of the purification of the Buddha-land finds concrete expression in the Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmākara and the descriptions of the magnificence of Amida Buddha's world. The fact that the splendor of Amida's world represents the purification of the Buddha-land has been clearly explained long ago by Nāgārjuna 龍樹 in the *Ta chih-tu lun* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*).<sup>5</sup> According to the Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*, Dharmākara achieved *buddhakṣetra-parisuddhi* (the purification of the Buddha-land)<sup>6</sup> by fulfilling his Vow; here also, a term common to all Mahāyāna Buddhism is used to express the idea of "the purification of the Buddha-land." Thus it is that the Buddha-land created by Dharmākara came to be associated with the Chinese word *ching-t'u* and to be called by that name, in what we should probably describe as a natural course of events.

Indeed, there is one theory which holds that since Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413 or 350–409), who often used the term *ching-t'u*, did not use it in the Smaller Sūtra translated by him, and since the pure quality of Amida's world is not discussed in this sūtra, this means that Amida's world is to be distinguished from Pure Land. According to this theory, Pure Land was an idea formulated after the period of Indian Buddhism; indeed, Pure Land grew to be referred to as such during the time of Chinese Buddhism, after Kumārajīva's time. However, this is doubtful. Even conceding that Amida's world became known as Pure Land after the time of Kumārajīva, we cannot accept this as a reason why this occurrence should be unconnected with the notion of "the purification of the Buddha-land," nor as a reason why the pure quality of Amida's world should not be mentioned in this sūtra. It is clear that the expression, "the arrangement of good qualities of the Buddha-land" (*buddhakṣetraguṇavyūha*)<sup>7</sup> found repeatedly in all versions of the Smaller *Sukhāvattvyūha* including Kumārajīva's translation, refers to the idea of "the purification of the Buddha-land," and is meant to express the pure quality of Amida's world. We should not overlook the essential point of this entire sūtra merely because of the

<sup>5</sup> *Taishō*, Vol. 25, p. 708c.

<sup>6</sup> Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*, p. 23.23.

<sup>7</sup> Smaller *Sukhāvattvyūha* (ed. F. Max Müller), pp. 93.12, 94.7, etc.

presence or absence of such words as "pure land" or "purification."

Amida's world was referred to in Chinese as *ching-t'u*. This word is a name which compressed the terms *ching fo-kuo-t'u* 淨佛國土 (purifying the Buddha-land), and also *ching fo-t'u* 淨佛土 (the pure Buddha-land), *yen-ching fo-t'u* 嚴淨佛土 (the splendidly pure Buddha-land), etc. There are references to *ching-t'u* in a few sūtras translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 between 266 and 308, but it was up to Kumārajīva to decide on the use of the word *ching-t'u* to refer to the world realized by the idea of "purifying the Buddha-land." Originally, the word *ching-t'u* as used by Kumārajīva meant the pure lands of all the Buddhas, and was not intended to be particularized as the world of Amida Buddha. However, shortly after, use of the word *ching-t'u* to denote Amida's world appeared in the work of the celebrated Southern dynasty poet-scholar Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運 (385-433), entitled *Verses of the Buddha of Infinite Life (Wu-liang-shou fo sung 無量壽佛頌)*,<sup>8</sup> and this led to the even wider usage of this term. If we examine the works of Chinese Buddhist scholars beginning with T'an-luan 曇鸞 (476-542?) of the Northern Wei dynasty, the concept of Amida's world as the Pure Land is clearly mentioned. Or, perhaps it would be better to say that the trend of expressing the concept of Amida's world by the word *ching-t'u* became notable. This was in accordance with the flowering of faith in birth in Amida Buddha's Land, which was representative among the "pure lands" of all the Buddhas. With the T'ang dynasty, the "Pure Land" had actually become Amida's Land, and the terms *ching-t'u chiao* 淨土教<sup>9</sup> and *ching-t'u tsung* 淨土宗<sup>10</sup> began to be created. Later, in Japan, the terms *Jōdoshū* 淨土宗 and *Jōdoshinshū* 淨土真宗 were promulgated, where they came to be used as secular terms to designate two representative Pure Land sects. The expression *chi-lê ching-t'u* 極樂淨土 (Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss), an amalgam of the two terms, had already appeared in T'ang writings.<sup>11</sup> In the present day, reference to the Pure Land is commonly taken to mean Amida's Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, and it is common knowledge that this usage is also accepted in English writings.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Kuang hung-ming-chi* 廣弘明集 (*Taishō*, Vol. 52, p. 200a).

<sup>9</sup> E.g., *Fa-shih tsan* 法事讚 (*Taishō*, Vol. 47, p. 428b).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *Ching-t'u lun* 淨土論 (*Taishō*, Vol. 47, p. 90c).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., *Yu-hsin an-lê-tao* 遊心安樂道 (*Taishō*, Vol. 47, p. 111a).

## 2. SUKHĀVATĪ

The original word for Amida's world in Sanskrit is Sukhāvātī, literally, "endowed with bliss." This was variously translated in the Chinese sūtras as *an-lê* 安樂 (Peaceful Bliss), *chi-lê* 極樂 (Ultimate Bliss), and *an-yang* 安養 (Peaceful Rest). Of these, *chi-lê* was first used by Kumārajīva in the Smaller Sūtra. Other instances in the three Pure Land sūtras include repeated use of *an-lê* and *an-yang* in the Larger Sūtra purported to be translated by Saṃghavarman 康僧鑑 about A.D. 253. I myself would hypothesize that this translation is actually the joint work of Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅 (359–429) and Pao-yün 寶雲 (376–449), dated A.D. 421,<sup>12</sup> in other words, subsequent to that of Kumārajīva; but the word *chi-lê* is not used at all in this sūtra. (It does actually appear in the translation in the Korean Tripiṭaka, the *Koryō-dae-jang-kyōng* 高麗大藏經,<sup>13</sup> but this is a later revision.) The *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* (the so-called Meditation Sūtra) translated by Kālayāśas 曇良耶舍 (383–442?) is of an even later date, and makes use of the term *chi-lê* in accordance with the translation in the Smaller Sūtra.

What, then, is the origin of this word Sukhāvātī, which is translated as "Ultimate Bliss"? It seems that, on this point, most of the theories hitherto advanced seem to have ignored the most basic and vital argument. This is the fact that many words closely resembling this appear in both Mahāyāna and Theravāda sūtras, and that this is not at all an uncommon formation from the point of view of Sanskrit etymology. For example, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* mentions the eastern realm of the Buddha Ratnākara known as Ratnāvātī ("endowed with treasure"),<sup>14</sup> the realm of the Buddha Samantakusuma known as Padmāvātī ("endowed with lotus"),<sup>15</sup> and the castle city in the east known as Gandhavātī ("endowed with fragrance").<sup>16</sup> Going back further, in the Early Buddhist sūtras are mentioned many palaces, such as that of the

<sup>12</sup> For the translator and date of the Larger Sūtra, see K. Fujita, *Genshi Jōdo shisō no kenkyū* 原始浄土思想の研究 (A Study of Early Pure Land Buddhism; hereafter referred to as *Genshi Jōdo*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), pp. 62–96.

<sup>13</sup> *Taishō*, Vol. 12, p. 271b.

<sup>14</sup> *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (ed. N. Dutt), p. 12.18; *Śatasāhasrikā* (ed. P. Ghōṣa), p. 29.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, p. 17.17; *Śatasāhasrikā*, p. 55.12.

<sup>16</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, p. 485.13ff.

royal father of Buddha Śikhin, Aruṇāvatī (“endowed with dawn”) and that of King Mahāsudarśana, Kuśāvatī (“endowed with meadow”). Also, mention of a royal palace of the time of Buddha Dīpaṃkara known as Dīpāvatī (“endowed with light”) is common to both Mahāyāna and Theravāda sūtras. Not only this, but there are among these not a few instances of places whose descriptions resemble that of Sukhāvatī.<sup>17</sup>

Viewed in this way, it would seem that Sukhāvatī was a term coined by the Mahāyāna Buddhists as a standard for many similar words. It is true that a Japanese scholar who strongly insists that the idea of Ultimate Bliss originated in the Garden of Eden says that the word Sukhāvatī is a construction which owes something to the name “Eden” as known in Judaism and Christianity.<sup>18</sup> This, however, is a supposition which completely ignores the existence of other etymologically similar words in Buddhist writings; it is simply an absurdity with no literary basis. From the point of view of Buddhist thought, the *sukha* of Sukhāvatī, meaning “bliss,” has been used consistently since the Early Buddhist sūtras to refer both to worldly bliss and to otherworldly bliss (*nirvāṇa*). Thus, it can be said that the use of this word to describe the land of Buddha shows remarkable insight and consideration on the part of the Mahāyāna Buddhists. This point will be further explored later.

There is probably no need to reiterate that the Pure Land sūtras contain detailed descriptions of the nature of the world known as Sukhāvatī. I have used the term “Early Pure Land Buddhism” to refer to Pure Land thought as it is estimated to have been in earliest times, according to the original form of the Larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha* and the Smaller *Sukhāvatīvyūha*. In order to find out how Sukhāvatī was viewed during this period, it is necessary to make an exhaustive comparison of descriptions appearing in the various versions of these two sūtras. By this means, it is possible to reconstruct the concept of a majestically beautiful ideal world crafted by Buddhists in the process of constructing the Early Pure Land system of thought.

How, then, did this concept evolve? We must first take careful note of the fact that ideas closely resembling that of Sukhāvatī are frequent-

<sup>17</sup> *Genshi Jōdo*, pp. 438–440.

<sup>18</sup> Y. Iwamoto, *Gokuraku to Jigoku* 極楽と地獄 (Sukhāvatī and Hell) (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1965), pp. 114–119.

ly to be found in Mahāyāna sūtras other than the Pure Land ones. For example, there are the above-mentioned castle city of Gandhavatī in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, the various Buddha-lands of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the gardens and cities mentioned in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, and the Buddha-land called Abhirati (“wondrous joy”) in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*.<sup>19</sup> The descriptions of these places show remarkable consistency with that of Sukhāvātī. No matter how much we try to clarify the chronology of these references, we cannot conclude that all of them arose subsequent to the creation of the concept of Sukhāvātī. And therefore, we must acknowledge that this concept was not at all particular to the Pure Land sūtras, but was rather an idea common to all Mahāyāna sūtras in general. Of course, the descriptions of Sukhāvātī are the most detailed and carefully explained of all; however, this concept is to be grasped within the context of the entire flow of Buddhist thought as a thread running through the Mahāyāna and not peculiar to the Pure Land. We must not overlook this fact when discussing the origin of the world known as “Ultimate Bliss.”

### 3. THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF ULTIMATE BLISS

The question of the origin of this concept is one of the main causes of confusion in the process of clarifying the origin of the Pure Land, with many different opinions existing in the academic world, and also at present numerous speculations among the lay intelligentsia. In order to examine this question, it is necessary to organize the various opinions hitherto advanced. My own view is that these can be roughly divided into those placing the origin outside India, and those placing the origin within India.<sup>20</sup>

Among theories favoring a non-Indian origin, there are the Zoroastrian sun-god origin theory, the Socotra Island origin theory, the “Garden of Eden” origin theory, the Amente of Egypt and the Elysium of Greece origin theories, and recently, a theory which seeks the ancestral form of this concept in the caves of Taq-i-Bustan on the

<sup>19</sup> *Genshi Jōdo*, pp. 474–486.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 464–474. See also K. Fujita, *Dai-muryōjūkyō kōkyū* 大無量壽經講究 (A Study on the *Ta wu-liang-shou ching*) (Kyoto: Higashihonganji Shuppanbu, 1990), pp. 114–116.

Iranian Plateau. However, none of these theories stands up to scholarly criticism, as in each of them either the name or the description of Ultimate Bliss is completely set apart from the mainstream of Buddhist thought. Indeed, the advocate of the Garden of Eden theory, as previously mentioned, claims that the term *Sukhāvātī* is based on the Aramaic word *Eden*, and takes the view that both *Sukhāvātī* and the Garden of Eden are symbols of the concrete phenomenon of the desert oasis, thus strenuously insisting on the terms as "historical images." However, this advocate himself admits that he has no proof of this. We can only evaluate such a theory as farfetched.<sup>21</sup>

As to the theories claiming an origin for this concept within India, these may be further divided into Buddhist-based and non-Buddhist-based (that is to say, based on Hindu mythology). In the former category, there are theories based on Buddhist mythology, such as the myth of King Mahāsudarśana's royal city *Kuśāvātī*, the myth of the Northern Kurus (*Uttarakuru*) and the myth of the heavenly realms; and also a theory which attempts to discover the origin in accounts of Early Buddhist stūpas. In the latter category are the Hindu myths of *Brahmā*, *Varuṇa*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Yama*.

These theories which place the origin of the Ultimate Bliss concept within India have more persuasive power than the "import" theories mentioned above, at least in that they attempt to grasp the concept of Ultimate Bliss from within the stream of Indian or Buddhist thought systems. Here a critical examination of the various theories based in India becomes necessary. I think that reference to these theories goes a long way toward clarifying the essential elements on which the concept of Ultimate Bliss itself is built. One of the myths of the early period of Buddhism is that of the universal monarch (*cakravartin*). Among the many items of folklore, such as the description of the *Kuśāvātī* palace of King Mahāsudarśana, instances of extremely close resemblance to descriptions of Ultimate Bliss have been noted. Again, many similar ideas have been found in the myth of *Uttarakuru*, which had existed in India from ancient times and was adopted from the time of Early Bud-

<sup>21</sup> Professor J. W. de Jong states in his review article on my *Genshi Jōdo* as follows: "M. Fujita énumère toutes les opinions émises, même les plus aberrantes comme, par exemple, celle de Beal qui avait trouvé la *Sukhāvātī* dans l'île Socotra et celle d'Iwamoto qui l'a rapprochée du paradis judéo-chrétien" (*T'oung Pao*, LVIII, 1972, p. 362).

dhism; also, in the myth of Brahmā in the old *Upaniṣads* are found descriptions which resemble those of Ultimate Bliss. On the other hand, contemporary accounts of Buddhist stūpas found in the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, which are texts dealing with monastic rules, when idealized and expanded, may be found to have a connection with the idea of Ultimate Bliss.

However, it is difficult at this time to resolve satisfactorily the question of why Sukhāvātī was conceived to be located to the west of this present world. Some would say that the derivation of this western direction itself is unclear. This question is not limited to a discussion of Sukhāvātī: in the same way, the reason for location in the east of Abhirati of the Buddha Akṣobhya is also unclear. According to the Smaller *Sukhāvattvyūha*, many Buddhas besides Amida Buddha (Amitāyus) are mentioned as being in the western realm, such as Amitaskandha, Amitadhvaja, Mahāprabha, Mahāratnaketu and Śuddharaśmiprabha; but the reason why these Buddhas inhabit the west is even less clear than in the case of Amitāyus himself. Thus it is futile to be obsessed with the idea of Sukhāvātī in the west and to be impatient in trying to solve the problem of its origin. Of course, even granted that a clear solution is very difficult, it is possible to put forward various hypotheses from the viewpoint of Indology and Buddhology.<sup>22</sup> It is certainly possible to consider the question of location of Sukhāvātī in the west without reference to an origin in an actual westerly direction outside India. In any case, it is enough to say that the compilers of the Pure Land sūtras drew upon various Indian elements, combining them in a complex way to form a picture of an ideal realm.

Indeed, this whole matter is an attempt to search for the origin of Sukhāvātī in a "realm as vessel" (*bhājana-loka*), a realm of inorganic existence. As for descriptions of the "realm of living beings" (*sattvaloka*), a realm of organic existence, that is, the Buddha, disciples, and bodhisattvas who inhabit the *bhājana-loka*, this point must await another consideration. In conclusion, it is safe to say that the concepts of these realms were based on the idealized forms of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and the concept of the disciples, which were coming to fruition at that time in Mahāyāna Buddhism in general. It is, however,

<sup>22</sup> *Genshi Jōdo*, pp. 502-505.

necessary to give an account here of the Lord of Sukhāvātī, Amida Buddha.

#### 4. THE ORIGIN OF AMIDA BUDDHA

“Amida” has been used throughout this paper because of its popular usage and currency in Japan. The original name of this Buddha is twofold: Amitāyus, “possessor of infinite life,” and Amitābha, “possessor of infinite light.” The Chinese characters *A-mi-t'o* 阿弥陀 are thought to be a complete transliteration referring to either of the two. Naturally enough, there are numerous theories regarding the origin. This question also gives rise to confusion in regard to understanding the origin of the Pure Land itself. To arrange the theories to date, they fall into two groups, in the same way that theories of the origin of Sukhāvātī do: those based outside India (in particular, the Zoroastrian origin theory), and those based within India (theories based on Vedic and Buddhist mythology). However, minute examination of these theories reveals points of difficulty in all of them, so that they cannot possibly be supported. Obviously, a reexamination from an entirely new point of view is necessary. In my opinion, the most appropriate course is to search for the origin of Amida Buddha in the development of the concept of Buddha, as seen from the original names of Amida and the stories of his previous lives. If we trace the historical development of the concept of Buddha from Early Buddhism to Sectarian Buddhism (especially the Mahāsāṃghika school), concepts corresponding to the original names of Amitāyus and Amitābha can indeed be discerned. Further, the content and character of the various accounts of Amida’s previous lives can be analyzed in conformity with the development of the concept of Buddha. From these points it can be surmised that Amida arose against the background of such developments from Early Buddhism.

It has been twenty-five years since I expressed these opinions in my work.<sup>23</sup> In that time, no other theory worthy of academic attention has appeared, and among scholars who deal with the subject there has been no open refutation of my opinions. Certain scholars insist on the idea, based as before on the Zoroastrian origin theory, that the name

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-360.

Amitābha came into being due to influences or sources from the light-worship of Iran, west of India. This assertion seems to be connected in some strange way with the concept of the location of Sukhāvātī in a westerly direction, and would appear to win easily acceptance among the lay public. However, it is extremely dubious from a scholarly viewpoint to say that the idea of "light" in Buddhism has its origins in Iran to the west and cannot be found in India. Examination of this idea in Early Buddhist sūtras reveals that it has deep connections with the concept of light in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially Amitābha. Thus it is difficult to support the view which asserts that the religio-historical background of Amitābha is not to be found within India. I believe that it is most appropriate to look for its origin in Early Buddhism.<sup>24</sup>

I must add, however, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that I am not saying that the concept of Amida Buddha is utterly unrelated to the religious thought system of Iran. Since Early Pure Land thought is considered to have arisen around A.D. 100 in northwest India during the Kuṣāṇa dynasty, it is of course plausible that thought systems imported from areas to the west should have provided a cultural and intellectual basis for the development of Amida. Still, the imported-origin theory of Amida contains many grave difficulties, and the particular argument that the sole influence was non-Indian is untenable. In the case of the Amida concept, imported thought systems must be considered as a tributary; any hypothesis which completely ignores the most important viewpoint that seeks to trace the origin to the mainstream of Indian Buddhist thought cannot be lightly permitted.

Apropos of this, in 1976 there appeared news of the discovery, in the ruins of Govindnagar west of Mathurā in India, of a pedestal of a statue of Amitābha engraved in Brāhmī characters with the year of the monarch Huviṣka of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty. Opinions differ on the hypothetical date and deciphering of this inscription, but as there is general agreement that it is from the second century A.D., this artifact

<sup>24</sup> See K. Fujita, "Jōdo shisō to Ishūkyō no mondaiten—Amitābha to kōmyō shisō" 浄土思想と異宗教の問題点—アミターバと光明思想 (Pure Land Buddhism and the Other Religions—The Problem of the Origin of Amitābha), in *Bukkyō to Ishūkyō* 佛教と異宗教 (Buddhism and Its Relation to Other Religions: Essays in Honour of Dr. Shozen Kumoi on His Seventieth Birthday) (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1985), pp. 413–426.

gives substance to the fact that Amitābha faith was already promulgated in India itself at that time.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in 1982, there was news of the existence of an artifact on which the words Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara could be discerned, on the pedestal of a sculpture depicting three figures of Gandhāra. The dating of this object is unclear, but from the fact that it is written in Kharoṣṭhī script, it is possible to guess that it too dates from the second century. However, as some doubts remain in part as to the inscription and its reading,<sup>26</sup> it cannot as yet be clearly deduced from this that a statue of Amitābha existed in Gandhāra. The artifact discovered in the region of Mathurā is the only clear proof of the existence of a statue of Amitābha, and the fact that this is actually in India is of great significance.

#### 5. THE PURE LAND AS A WORLD OF ANOTHER DIMENSION

Sukhāvātī is named the Pure Land, and the Buddha of that Sukhāvātī is named Amida (Amitāyus and Amitābha). Nevertheless, to discuss the terms Sukhāvātī or Amida by themselves, completely cutting them off from the mainstream of Buddhist thought, would result in unreasonable suppositions. We must not forget that to understand these terms correctly, it is necessary to consider them as a part of Buddhist ideological development.

As mentioned above, Sukhāvātī is a Pure Land which arose based on the idea of "the purification of the Buddha-land," and this is interpreted as a world of form situated far in the west, away from this corrupt world of ours (Sahā world). In other words, it is a Pure Land existing

<sup>25</sup> B. N. Mukherjee, "A Mathura Inscription of the Year 26 and of the Period of Huvishka," *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. XI (1979), pp. 82-84; R. C. Sharma, "New Buddhist Sculptures from Mathura," *Lalit Kalā*, No. 19 (1979), pp. 25-26; idem, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā* (Delhi, 1984), pp. 28, 232; *The Splendour of Mathurā, Art and Museum* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 142-143; also G. Schopen, "The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1987), pp. 99-137.

<sup>26</sup> Schopen, op. cit., p. 130. Cf. Y. Kajiyama, "Shoki Jōdokyō o meguru saikin no jōhō" 初期浄土教をめぐる最近の情報 (Recent Pieces of Information about Early Amitābha Worship), *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies*, No. 15-II (1992), pp. 95-110.

as a “world of another dimension” in the cosmos. This indicates that it is one of many Pure Lands in every direction (the eight points of the compass, zenith and nadir), each with its own Buddha, which arose in Mahāyāna in accordance with the rule, fixed in Early Buddhism, that it stood to reason that one world would not contain two Buddhas at the same time.

This concept of the Pure Land as a “world of another dimension” is very similar in content to that of the “other world” (*paraloka*). This “other world” is conceived not as a mere extension of “this world,” or our present world of existence, but spatially as a faraway and separate world, and temporally as different from this one; in fact, a world of life after death. The Pure Land conceived as a “world of another dimension” is the same in these points. As another example, Heaven, the abode of the gods, is represented as an other world to be distinguished from the human world, and a “world of another dimension,” like Heaven, is described materially as a separate realm far away. The Smaller *Sukhāvattvyūha* states that the world named Sukhāvātī exists “to the west, from this Buddha-land, passing over a hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands,”<sup>27</sup> and there, the Buddha Amitāyus is actually engaged in preaching. The phrase “a hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands” is an expression used by the Sanskrit recension, and is not necessarily the same in other versions or in versions of the Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*. Of course, it was not a matter of geography, but was intended to convey that the Pure Land was so to speak infinitely separated from this world. Therefore, although the Pure Land is conceived of as spatially to the west, it must actually be viewed as a world which transcends space.

Again, temporally speaking, the Pure Land as a “world of another dimension” is conceived as a world of the afterlife, which is also the same in the case of Heaven. Even though the world of the gods is positioned spatially in a heaven with dwelling-places, it is still a world which human beings cannot reach by ordinary means; there are also some heavenly realms, such as that of *ārūpya-dhātu* which are without material dwelling-places, and the distinction from this world is still unclear in some points. This is clarified, however, by the fact that seen from a temporal perspective, Heaven is depicted as an other world,

<sup>27</sup> Smaller *Sukhāvattvyūha*, p. 93.1-3.

different from this one. The line dividing it from this present world is clearly drawn by death. It first becomes possible to reach Heaven after death, when one departs from the human world. In the same way, the Pure Land is clearly distinguished by death from this Sahā world. This is what is meant in the Pure Land sūtras when they describe the crossing to Sukhāvātī as a passage “to birth” (*ud-√pad; upa-√pad; praty-ā-√jan*) and teach that this is achieved in the state after death.<sup>28</sup> Sukhāvātī, temporally speaking, is a world which may be reached not in this life, but in the next.

Thus, while there are similarities between the concepts of a “world of another dimension” and the “other world,” we must take care to notice that great differences exist in significance and content. According to the Early Buddhist sūtras,<sup>29</sup> the light and voice of Śākyamuni were said to reach the trichiliocosm (triple-thousand-great-thousand worlds), or the limits of view. Other realms such as Heaven and Hell were thought to be the smallest units within the trichiliocosm. In other words, even these “other worlds” were continuous with our human world, part of the same cosmos, a cosmos in which living beings repeated the cycle of birth-and-death or transmigration (*saṃsāra*) throughout its expanse.

A “world of another dimension,” on the other hand, is outside the trichiliocosm which has the land of Śākyamuni. According to the understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism,<sup>30</sup> the world where Śākyamuni actually teaches is only one unit of the trichiliocosm among an uncountable number of such units. In these other units of the trichiliocosm, other Buddhas are appearing. Therefore, a “world of another dimension” is a world which transcends the cycle of birth-and-death; in terms used since the beginnings of Buddhism, it corresponds to the “other shore” (*pāra*) in contrast to “this shore” (*apāra*). The other shore is synonymous with nirvāṇa or *amṛta* (the immortal), and thus is none other than a world which transcends both this world and other worlds, both this present life and the next life.

The Sukhāvātī in the west is commonly used these days in a comparative sense (Hell versus Ultimate Bliss), but originally it was not at all

<sup>28</sup> *Genshi Jōdo*, p. 519.

<sup>29</sup> *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, I, pp. 227-228.

<sup>30</sup> *Genshi Jōdo*, pp. 356-360.

explained as being in opposition to Hell. What is to be compared to Hell is Heaven, whereas Sukhāvātī is a world completely separate from both of these. In such a world, we are told, there are no evil realms such as Hell, the animals, or the hungry spirits; no distinction between male and female; no sun, moon, stars, or Mount Sumeru.<sup>31</sup> In fact, it is a world which cannot be understood even by extensions of our images of the ideal society, because Sukhāvātī is a Buddha-land where emancipation and nirvāṇa are fully realized. Many accounts in the Pure Land sūtras describe this fact, but the most straightforward of these is the phrase, “the bliss of the nirvāṇa-realm” (*nirvāṇadhātusaukhya*)<sup>32</sup> used to describe Sukhāvātī in the Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*. The word Sukhāvātī actually refers to the place where the absolute and other-worldly bliss of nirvāṇa reigns. It is thought that this word skilfully describes this in material terms, making use of images taken from the relative and worldly plane of human desire. In this way, by expressing Sukhāvātī in material and concrete terms, the world of enlightenment taught in the Pure Land sūtras was made easily accessible to the common people, and the teaching of receiving the bliss of nirvāṇa by birth in the Pure Land could be widely promulgated. The Pure Land is not simply the “other world”; it is none other than the world of the “other shore,” which transcends the cycle of birth-and-death.

As explained above, the Pure Land as a “world of another dimension,” while sharing many points in common with the concept of the “other world,” is actually very different, having the character of the “other shore.” As to the question of where this world of the other shore could be attained, it was a fundamental tenet of Early Buddhism that this was possible in this world and this present life. However, in case it could not be attained in this life, the good effect of the practices performed for the purpose of attaining it would be carried over into the next life, and at the same time it was also taught that attainment of the other shore was promised there. Thus, traditional thinking ever since the time of Early Buddhism was that, although the other shore

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 440–463.

<sup>32</sup> Larger *Sukhāvattvyūha*, p. 8.10. Here *nirvāṇalokadhātusaukhyaṃ* should be amended to *nirvāṇadhātusaukhyaṃ*. See K. Fujita, *The Larger Sukhāvattvyūha: Romanized Text of the Sanskrit Manuscripts from Nepal*, Part I (Tokyo: The Sankibo Press, 1992), p. 161.

could certainly be sought after during this lifetime, it was actually to be attained in the next life, after this life was past.<sup>33</sup> This idea has certainly been inherited by the Pure Land doctrine. The “other world” as conceived as the next life is not itself the Pure Land Sukhāvātī, but it does have great significance as the path by which the Pure Land may be reached, because to go to another world via death is to approach the Pure Land Sukhāvātī as the other shore. This is why the doctrine of being welcomed by Amida Buddha at the moment of death gained popularity along with the idea of birth in the Pure Land Sukhāvātī. The Pure Land as a “world of another dimension” is a mixture of the concept of “other world” which richly expressed a sense of the next life.

#### 6. DIVERSE ASPECTS OF THE PURE LAND

With the promotion of the Pure Land as a “world of another dimension,” another problem emerged: how to understand the standpoint of Śākyamuni who appeared in this Sahā world. If it is emphasized only that bodhisattvas who made the vow of purifying the Buddha-lands will attain Buddhahood in the “distant” Pure Land, it is possible that the significance of Śākyamuni’s appearance in this world may be lost. This is how a Pure Land conforming to the ways of this world, as distinguished from the “distant” Pure Land, came to be taught in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The prototype of this is the doctrine of the so-called Pure Land of Vulture Peak (Gṛdhrakūṭa), which teaches that the mountain where Śākyamuni preached the Lotus Sūtra<sup>34</sup> is a Pure Land where he eternally dwells. This is an idea of the same thought-system lineage as the doctrine of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*<sup>35</sup> that when bodhisattvas purify their mind this world itself becomes a Pure Land, which can also be seen as a teaching which limited the Pure Land to a particular location in this world.

<sup>33</sup> See K. Fujita, “Genshi Bukkyō ni okeru Nehan—nibbāna to parinibbāna” 原始佛教における涅槃—nibbāna と parinibbāna (*Nibbāna and parinibbāna in Early Buddhism*), *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1 (1988), pp. 1–12.

<sup>34</sup> *Miao-fa lien-hua ching* (*Taishō*, Vol. 9, pp. 42a–44a). Cf. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, pp. 315–326.

<sup>35</sup> *Wei-mo-chieh so-shuo ching* 維摩詰所說經 (*Taishō*, Vol. 14, p. 538a–c). Cf. É. Lamotte, *L’Enseignement de Vimalakīrti* (Louvain, 1962), pp. 111–119.

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Even a Pure Land situated in this world, however, remains the "other shore," and as such is separate from the cycle of birth-and-death. While existing spatially on the earth, it nevertheless transcends both this world and the other world. This is why it would perhaps be better to call it a Pure Land which conforms to this world. This idea is well expressed in the phrase "this Sahā world is itself the land of tranquil light" (娑婆即寂光土) which could be described as a concretization of the basic Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of "birth-and-death is itself nirvāṇa" (生死即涅槃). This idea is rooted in the concept that nirvāṇa is attainable within this present lifetime, and has thus inherited the basic viewpoint of Early Buddhism, in a form in which the this-worldly character is made yet more clear.

As well as these, another principal Pure Land in Mahāyāna is the Padmagarbha (Lotus Storehouse) world of the Buddha Vairocana in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.<sup>36</sup> This is a doctrine which sees all the worlds as a Pure Land encased within a lotus flower. There is also the Ghana-vyūha (Mystic Splendor) world explained in the *Ghanavyūha Sūtra*,<sup>37</sup> which later came to be regarded as the Pure Land inhabited by the Buddha Mahāvairocana in the Shingon sect, and it came to be taught that the world of this present life was itself the esoteric Pure Land. It may be said that all these are part of the tradition of Pure Lands conforming to this world, whose tone is somewhat different from the Pure Land mentioned previously.

In this article, in exploring the origin of the Pure Land, we have considered the Pure Land as a "world of another dimension" with the focus on Sukhāvātī, and have also touched on the Pure Lands which are thought to conform to this present world. These various doctrines of the Pure Land have been interpreted in many ways over the years. In conclusion I would like to give a very brief account of the most important of these.

First of all, Sukhāvātī, as representative of the Pure Land as a "world of another dimension," is, according to the Pure Land sūtras and as explained above, a mixture of the concept of "other world" and

<sup>36</sup> *Ta-fang-kuang fo hua-yen ching* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (*Taishō*, Vol. 9, pp. 404a-418a; also Vol. 10, pp. 39a-53c).

<sup>37</sup> *Ta-ch'êng mi-yen ching* 大乘密嚴經 (*Taishō*, Vol. 16, pp. 723b-724a; also pp. 747c-748b).

of a rich next-life character. However, with the advent of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) of Japan, these same Pure Land sūtras take on a rather more this-worldly character. According to Shinran, the basis of the possibility of birth in the Pure Land in the next life is the faith in Amida's Vow which is held in this present life; this moves the focus from the next life to this one. In order to be born in the Pure Land in the west, the possession of true faith and entering into the company of right definite assurance (*shōjōju* 正定聚), where one is certain of salvation by Amida, has greater significance than leaving this Sahā world in death. Therefore, it is considered unnecessary to wait in anticipation for the moment of death or to rely on Amida's welcoming.<sup>38</sup> This indicates that the Pure Land of the "other shore" is considered from a present-life point of view rather than that of the next life. Needless to say, this does not mean that the Pure Land was brought into the present life in its entirety. The distinction between entering into the company of right definite assurance and nirvāṇa is still authoritatively pointed out,<sup>39</sup> and the next-life character of the Pure Land is preserved. It would be safe to say here that the Pure Land as a "world of another dimension" has come to include this life from the viewpoint of the next.

On the other hand, what of the Pure Land of Vulture Peak, which is a Pure Land conforming to this present world? This certainly exhibits a rich this-worldly character which transcends the concept of "other world." But when interpreted by Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) of Japan, it later came to be charged with a sense of the next life. After his exile to Sado island at the age of fifty, Nichiren began to preach frequently about reaching the Pure Land of Vulture Peak after death.<sup>40</sup> It seems that this was explained not as a Pure Land to be sought, as in the ordinary Pure Land faith. The attainment of Vulture Peak was not an object of faith, but a reward bestowed in the next life upon those who be-

<sup>38</sup> See *Mattōshō* 末燈鈔, No. 1. Cf. *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Mattōshō*, ed. by Y. Ueda (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978), p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> See *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信證, Chapter on the True Realizing. Cf. *The Kyōgyōshinshō*, tr. by D. T. Suzuki (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtaniha, 1973), p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> See *Shijō Kingo dono gosho* 四條金吾殿御書. Cf. *Shōwa Shinshū Nichiren Shōnin ibun zenshū* 昭和新修日蓮聖人遺文全集 (A Collection of the Complete Works of Nichiren Newly Compiled in the Shōwa Era) (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 13th ed., 1976), p. 692. See also *Bekkan* 別卷 (a separate volume to this Collection), pp. 507–508.

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lieved in the Lotus Sūtra in this life. At any rate, we can say that in this case, a Pure Land which conformed to this life came to include the next life from the viewpoint of this one.

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