

BOOK REVIEWS

***THE DAWN OF CHINESE PURE LAND BUDDHIST DOCTRINE: Ching-ying Hui-yüan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra.* By Kenneth K. Tanaka. SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies, Kenneth Inada, editor. Published by State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1991, 304 pp. with appendix, notes, glossary, bibliography and index. ISBN 0-7914-0298-3**

Ken Tanaka has given us a helpful study of the first known commentary of the *Kuan wu-liang shou ching* written by Hui-yüan (523–592) of the Ching-ying temple. This reader was puzzled by the use of the word *Dawn* in the title, as sūtras expounding the message of the *sukhāvati* myth associated with Amitāyus/Amitābha began to appear in China more than three centuries before Hui-yüan, and Tanaka himself states that the first significant treatise on the Pure Land teaching was written by T'an-luan, who himself was born 50 years earlier than Hui-yüan. Since the dissertation upon which this book is based contained no such imagery in the title, one can only conclude that this wording is the product of a fertile imagination active in the editing room of SUNY Press.

Be that as it may, Tanaka's study is important for many reasons, not the least of which is a full translation of Hui-yüan's commentary. To my knowledge, this is the first to be made into a Western language of this important work, and the specialist will appreciate the well-placed page references to the *Taishō* editions of both the commentary and the sūtra passages it quotes. The translation is accompanied by brief notes pointing out Hui-yüan's parsing of the sūtra as well as errors in his citations.

But the author has also done us the great service of presenting a detailed analysis of a text that would otherwise too easily escape the attention of most contemporary students of the Pure Land Buddhist tradition. Regardless of the recognition by the scholastic Buddhist tradition that Hui-yüan's work set the format for all later commentaries of this pivotal sūtra (and Tanaka counts 19 known works in Ono Genmyō's *Bussho Kaisetsu Daijiten*—far more than any other Pure Land sūtra), modern discussions have instead focused on a later commentary by Shan-tao which put forth somewhat unique interpretations that proved more influential in the later development of the so-called Pure Land school in China and Japan. There is scant mention of the Korean com-

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

mentarial tradition here except to restate Etani Ryūkai's conclusion that at least during the Silla dynasty, the mainstream of Korean thought on this subject seems to have followed Hui-yüan, notably Wōnhyo, Ūisang, Ūijōk and Hyōnil. It would be interesting to ascertain if indeed Hui-yüan had more of an impact than Shan-tao in the Korean peninsula.

The references to Japanese scholarship are extensive in Tanaka's work and on page xix of the introduction he explains how Hui-yüan's work has been seen in modern Japanese sectarian scholarship (*shūgaku*) as representing the very tradition that should be rejected. Later (p. xxiii), the author attempts to draw a clear distinction between what he calls "orthodox Pure Land Buddhists" and "Pure Land Buddhism." This discussion will probably be somewhat difficult to follow for someone not intimately familiar with the particular concerns of *shūgaku*, although for the specialist it will be meaningful. To wit, the *raison d'être* of the Pure Land path is the rejection of the so-called traditional monastic, or *jiriki*, approach to liberation. Basic to this attitude is the devaluation of the usual language to describe states of attainment, such as *bodhicitta*, and a corresponding valuation of language which recognizes the significance of direct mediation by the Buddha upon that experience.

The origins of the Japanese attitude that has produced so much scholarship in this field lies undoubtedly with Hōnen, who was first to draw attention to Shan-tao's position on the *Kuan ching* as significant. So far-reaching was Hōnen's influence that in the ensuing centuries history afforded Shan-tao the recognition due a saint and Hui-yüan that of a "mere" scholar. No doubt this double standard was fueled by an undercurrent of anti-intellectualism which swept the Kamakura (and late T'ang) Period. Insofar as Hui-yüan and Shan-tao came to some very different conclusions about how this sūtra should be understood, later scholars depicted them as adversaries. However, I do not know of Hōnen expressing any felt need to denigrate Hui-yüan's writings, except by way of including him in the group of "traditionalists" (those of the "path of saints," *shōdōmon*). Nevertheless, subsequent writers tended to emphasize the differences between the two thinkers in their zeal to legitimate Hōnen's vision of a Pure Land School which was based largely upon the viewpoint of Shan-tao. Yet despite the overwhelming influence of Shan-tao's commentary in Kamakura Japan, one is struck by the fact that contemporary works display detailed knowledge of other commentaries on the *Kuan ching*, especially those of Hui-yüan and Chih-i. In this regard, Tanaka's stated goal of providing a more objective picture of Hui-yüan's contribution both to the understanding of the *Kuan ching* and Pure Land thought draws on the philological work of the Japanese exegetical tradition but at the same time tries to remain free of its values, thus offering a welcome addition to an often narrow view of history too heavily influenced by sectarian considerations to be

BOOK REVIEWS

completely credible.

The overview in Chapter One of the origins and development of Pure Land thought up to the time of Hui-yüan provides the necessary background to appreciate Hui-yüan's creative input. There is also a chapter giving a biographical sketch of the monk himself, a brief discussion of his writings, as well as an introduction to his doctrinal interpretations of Buddhist issues on topics other than Pure Land. In this regard, Hui-yüan's role in the development of *tathāgatagarbha* theory stemming from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is important and Tanaka correctly notes his influence on the Hua-yen school as seen in the works of Fa-tsang.

In his discussion of Hui-yüan's possible ambivalence toward the dual goals of Amitābha and Maitreya's paradises, the author also includes a section on the modern controversy regarding the apocryphal roots of the *Kuan ching*. Indeed, if the author's argument is true that Hui-yüan was the first person to "legitimize" the *Kuan ching* by grouping it together with the so-called larger *Sukhāvati Sūtra* and Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*, then his contribution to the development of Chinese Pure Land thought would be quite significant. Given a similar orientation by T'an-luan two generations earlier, however, it is somewhat difficult to accept this idea as originating with Hui-yüan, though he may have been the first to express it so succinctly.

The mere inclusion in Hui-yüan's commentary of a section on resolving differences between the teachings in this and other sūtras does not convince this writer that Hui-yüan was doing any more than describing in an intelligent fashion many of the concerns of the educated Buddhist community as a whole. The need for "resolving differences" has its roots deep in Chinese Buddhist culture and can be traced back to the period before Kumārajīva when efforts were made to see Buddhist thought in terms of Taoist ideas. That Hui-yüan does this so skillfully should be recognized as a real achievement, however. The author also makes the point that Shan-tao's equation of Amitābha's Pure Land with the *sambhoga-kāya* of that Buddha would not have been possible without Hui-yüan's earlier detailed discussion matching different Pure Lands with different *kāya* of Buddhas. Though it may be true that this provided the structural framework for Shan-tao's later doctrinal interpretations, if one compares the creativity required to affirm that the location of a form of a Buddha (*buddhakṣetra*) can also be understood as an ideal "pure land" (*ching-t'u*), with Shan-tao's conception seeing "ordinary people" as having access to a realm hitherto restricted to advanced bodhisattvas, I think Shan-tao stands out clearly as the more revolutionary of the two.

There are some small editing mistakes, such as on page 103 where in the middle of the quotation of Shan-tao, the sentence explaining Yūki Reimon's commentary, beginning "Yūki describes . . .," has not been placed outside the

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

quotation. The third *mārga* scheme outlined in "Appendix 1" (there is only one appendix) could certainly have been made more specific and its origins identified (Hui-yüan?).

But despite these minor shortcomings Tanaka's study of what Hui-yüan had to say concerning the *Kuan ching* is a welcome breath of non-sectarian fresh air trailing through the stale confines of the inevitably pejorative interpretation of this great scholar at the hands of modern *shūgaku* scholars. And it is unlikely that another translation of this commentary will appear for a long, long time. Although one would have appreciated a more extensive bibliography, this work should be required reading for any student of Pure Land Buddhist thought. One only hopes that Tanaka's next project will be Hui-yüan's *Ta-ch'eng ta-i-chang*.

MARK L. BLUM

BUDDHA NATURE. By Sallie B. King. State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1991. xi + 205 pp. with notes, glossary, and index. ISBN 0-7914-0427-7 (hardback), 0-7914-0428-5 (paperback).

Given the prominence of the concept of Buddha nature in East Asian Buddhism, it is perhaps surprising that there have not been more studies in Western languages dealing directly with this subject. The book under review is a philosophical/textual study of the *Buddha Nature Treatise* (BNT), an early and important work on the subject attributed to Vasubandhu and extant only in the Chinese translation (*Fo xing lun*) of Paramārtha.¹

Rather than the general pattern of academic works in Buddhology, which would involve heavy textual and conceptual discussions followed by a complete annotated translation, this book is instead a series of essays focussing on the *Buddha Nature Treatise* and the meaning and implications of the Buddha nature concept. Although a full translation of the text is not provided, references to the text are clearly identified with the Taishō page number, making it easy for those who wish (like the reviewer) to refer to the original Chinese. The book provides a solid introduction to the basic ideas involved in the Buddha nature concept, and good discussions of the philosophical prob-

¹ Sallie King also contributed an article on "Buddha Nature, Thought and Mysticism" to a recent collection of essays on the same subject, *Buddha Nature: A Festschrift in Honor of Minoru Kiyota*, Paul J. Griffiths and John P. Keenan, eds. Reno, Nevada: Buddhist Books International, 1991.