

A Short Essay on the Pure Land

COMPOSED BY THE DHARMA MASTER T'AN-LUAN

TRANSLATED BY LEO PRUDEN

Introduction

T'an-luan's life. According to the earliest complete biography of T'an-luan 曇鸞 preserved in Chinese sources, Tao-hsüan's *Hsü Kao-seng ch'uan*¹ (compiled in 645), T'an-luan was a native of Yen-men 雁門 (in present-day Tai-chou, Shansi), close to the foothills of Mt. Wu-t'ai, a mountain sacred to the Buddhist for its many monasteries and as the site of many reported miracles. At age ten T'an-luan climbed Mt. Wu-t'ai and visited all of its sacred sites; being filled with awe and wonder he entered the ranks of the Buddhist clergy and so began his study. He studied both Buddhist and non-Buddhist classics, and specifically concentrated on the Ssu-lun or Madhyamaka tradition, as well as on the *Fo-bsing lun* of Vasubandhu.²

Sometime during this period of his career T'an-luan began the undertaking of writing a complete commentary on the *Ta-chi ching*³ 大乘經 (the *Mahā-saṃnipāta* literary corpus), but when he was well along with this work he suddenly became gravely ill. He eventually recovered his health but the experience left a deep impression on him; he became impressed with the frailty of human life, and so he began his search for immortality. In this search he determined to travel to South China, to search out Taoist masters in the art of prolonging life, and in Chien-k'ang he is reported to have had an audience with an emperor famous in Buddhist hagiography for his pro-Buddhist sentiments, the Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (ruled 502–549). Travelling on, T'an-

¹ T. 50, p. 470a–c.

² T. 31, no. 1610.

³ T. 13, no. 397.

luan met and studied with one T'ao Hung-ching⁴ 陶弘景 (452-536), a Taoist master on Mt. Chü-jung 句容山, from whom he received the texts (and the oral transmission?) of some ten scrolls of Taoist scriptures 仙經十卷.

After being initiated into the Taoist practices reputed to lead to greater length of life, he then began travelling to various famous mountain retreats, visiting famous Taoist masters, and learning and practicing their various techniques.

On his eventual way home to the north, T'an-luan chanced to pass through Loyang where he met the Indian Buddhist master Bodhiruci.⁵ T'an-luan told Bodhiruci of what he had attained in his Taoist practices, to which Bodhiruci is reported to have replied that the (true) attainment of long life, and the deathless state, had never yet been attained in China. Bodhiruci then gave T'an-luan a copy of the *Kuan Wu-liang sbou ching*⁶ as the embodiment of the teaching of the great ("Taoist") sage 大仙法; T'an-luan had an immediate awakening to the purport of this text, and burning his Taoist texts, he returned to his monastery and from that time on devoted his religious practices exclusively to Pure Land practices. Thereafter he is reported to have converted many clerics and laymen to his beliefs.

Eventually T'an-luan's fame was recognized by a Wei dynasty emperor and he was given the title of *shen-luan*,⁷ the "divine" or "heavenly" (T'an)-luan 神鸞; by Imperial decree he was installed as abbot of the Ta-yen ssu 大嚴寺 monastery in Ping-chou 并州, to be later transferred to the Hsüan-chung ssu 玄中寺 monastery in the Pei-shan section of Fen-chou 汾州 (present-day Chiao-ch'eng *hsien*, Shansi), a monastery the establishment of which in one place is credited to T'an-luan.⁸ Here it is that T'an-luan gathered together a

⁴ Mentioned in *chüan* 35 of the *Sui Sbu* (p. 29 verso), and *chüan* 205 of the *Sung Sbu* (p. 13 recto) where he is credited with writing a two *chüan* work, the *Tang-hsing yen-ming lu* 養性延命錄 "Records on Nourishing the *Hsing* and Prolonging Life." (All references to the Standard Histories are to the T'ung-wen shu-chü edition, Shanghai, 1895).

⁵ Bodhiruci arrived in Loyang in 508; dates otherwise unknown. His biography is preserved in the *Hsü KSC*, T. 50, p. 428a.

⁶ T. 12, no. 365, a scripture translated in the period 424-442 by Kälāyāśas.

⁷ Viz T. 50, p. 470c5.

⁸ Viz T. 50, p. 593c19, in the biography of Tao-ch'ao. See also Michibata Ryōshū, *Cbūgaku no jōdokyō to genchūji* (Kyoto 1949).

congregation devoted to the religious practice of the *Nien-fo*, and so it is with this temple that later Buddhist hagiography most intimately connects him.

T'an-luan is reported to have died in the fifth month of the fourth year of Hsing-ho (A.D. 542) at the age of sixty-seven, passing away in a "mountain monastery" in the area of Ping-yao 平遙.

This account is the earliest continuous, coherent account of the life of T'an-luan. There are, however, serious problems connected with various aspects of this account. This same *Hsü Kao-seng-ch'uan*⁹ (as well as a later work, the *Wang-sheng Hsi-fang Ching-t'u shui-ying shan-ch'uan*,¹⁰ written in 805) mentions the "Dharma master T'an-luan, of the Ch'i dynasty,"—which dynasty, the Northern Ch'i 北齊, lasted from 550 to 559. Chia-ts'ai's *Ching-t'u lun*¹¹ (written before 627) speaks of T'an-luan as still living at the end of the Wei and at the start of the Kao (i.e., the Northern) Ch'i dynasty. Also there is preserved an inscription on an image erected by the Crown Prince of this Ch'i dynasty, dated the second month of the fifth year of T'ien-pao (A.D. 554), and in this inscription the names of some 27 persons are listed, one name being given as the *pi-ch'iu seng T'an-luan* 比丘僧曇鸞, "the bhikṣu monk T'an-luan."¹² If this inscription refers to our Pure Land master—and the name T'an-luan is fairly unique—then T'an-luan's date of death can be reasonably put at 554 or later.

The date of composition by Tao-hsüan of his *Hsü Kao-seng-ch'uan*, 645, is in any case approximately ninety years after the date of T'an-luan's death. In this period, the Pure Land cult grew and spread rapidly, and this Pure Land tradition, in its exclusivist form, came eventually to regard T'an-luan as its first patriarchal master. As an attempt to thus glorify its reputed founder and early thinker, the Pure Land tradition maintained the story of T'an-luan's audience with the southern Emperor Wu, and his later awards and honors bestowed by the Imperial house of northern China. A further attempt to glorify T'an-luan clearly resulted in the invention of the encounter with Bod-

⁹ T. 50, p. 593c19, in the biography of Tao-ch'o.

¹⁰ T. 51, p. 104a.

¹¹ T. 47, p. 97c.

¹² See Omura Seigai's *Shina bijitsu shi: Chōsaku-ben*, p. 318.

hiruci. There are two monks in the history of Chinese Buddhism named Bodhiruci. The one referred to in T'an-luan's biography is an Indian who arrived in Loyang in 508 and who was known for his translation activities; specifically important for the Pure Land tradition, he is credited with translating, in either 539 or 529, a reputed work by Vasubandhu, the *Wu-liang sbou ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sbeng cbi*¹³ 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈 (*Sukhāvati-vyūha-upadeśa: Verses on Desiring Rebirth in the Pure Land*), more popularly called the *Wang-sbeng lun*, a work upon which T'an-luan later wrote a commentary, the *Wang-sbeng lun cbu*.¹⁴ This commentary is T'an-luan's most famous work.

There is however no external evidence to verify the *Hsü Kao-seng-cb'uan*'s account of T'an-luan's meeting with Bodhiruci. Further, there are passages in T'an-luan's *Wang-sbeng lun cbu* which ostensibly criticize Bodhiruci's poor choice of words used in his translation of Vasubandhu, and his obscurity in one passage,¹⁵ criticisms by a pupil of his master, a master who if the *Hsü Kao-seng-cb'uan* account were accurate led T'an-luan to enlightenment, a type of criticism unthinkable to traditional Chinese Buddhists. Such an argument sounds strange to Western ears, but given the Asian context, might actually have some validity to it.

Tao-ch'o, in his *An-lo cbi*¹⁶ (written between 562 and 645) gives a succession of six masters and pupils for the Pure Land tradition. His succession is: 1) Bodhiruci, 2) Hui-ch'ung 慧寵, 3) Tao-ch'ang 道場, 4) T'an-luan, 5) Tai-hai 大海, and 6) Fa-shang 法上. Tao-ch'ang was a renowned scholar-monk of the Northern Wei period. Tao-ch'ang studied for a while under Bodhiruci, and then went into seclusion for some ten years during which time he read the *Ta-chib-tu lun*¹⁷ (the *Prajñā-pāramitā-upadeśa*, a work traditionally ascribed to Nāgārjuna). Leaving the mountain he went to Loyang where he lectured on the *Ta-chib-tu lun* to ever larger numbers of students. In his biography he is also credited with having drawn five pictorial representations of the Buddha

¹³ T. 26, no. 1524.

¹⁴ T. 40, no. 1819; also *Zoku-zōkyō*, vol. 71, p. 112 ff.

¹⁵ Viz T. 40, p. 832a2-3: 譯者以尋而言·何其晦乎.

¹⁶ T. 47, p. 14b.

¹⁷ T. 25, no. 1509. Partially translated into French by Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Louvain 1944, 1949, 1970.

Amitābha accompanied by fifty bodhisattvas, pictures so beautiful and popular that they were copied and circulated.

Tao-ch'ang's dates are unknown; he met Bodhiruci after he came to China in 508; and one young monk, a certain Ming-chan 明瞻, is reported to have attended Tao-ch'ang's lectures in the Ta-chi ssu monastery in the provincial capital city of Yeh sometime after the first year of Lung-hua (A.D. 576) when this Ming-chan was seventeen years of age.¹⁸ Thus Tao-ch'ang's period of activity may have begun from approximately 520 at the earliest, and lasted to 576 or later. Thus it is quite feasible that Tao-ch'ang (–520–576–) was the teacher of T'an-luan (475–542, or post-554). Further, T'an-luan's biography credits him with studying the Madhyamaka school, a major text of which—the *Ta-chih-tu lun*—was Tao-ch'ang's major text for instruction; likewise Tao-ch'ang is noted for his connection with Bodhiruci and for his devotion to Pure Land deities—the Buddha Amitābha and his attendant bodhisattvas, two features that predominate in the life of T'an-luan.

T'an-luan's devotion and study of Pure Land doctrines are undoubted: his extant Buddhist writings are all without exception works concerned with exposition of Pure Land doctrines; there is Madhyamaka influence in his writings, but what Madhyamaka references there are, are subordinated to T'an-luan's interest in the Pure Land.

T'an-luan's encounter with Bodhiruci serves several purposes. Primarily it connects this first Chinese "patriarch" of the exclusivist Pure Land tradition with an Indian master, a master who presented him with one of the sect's major scriptures, and who led him to an enlightenment experience. Further, T'an-luan publicly denies his Taoist past, burns his Taoist scriptures, and rejoins the spiritual fellowship of the Buddhist Sangha.

T'an-luan's identification with Taoism was and is widely known outside Buddhist circles. Both Buddhist and non-Buddhist secular sources record several different titles attributed to T'an-luan. The *Hsü Kao-seng-ch'uan*¹⁹ mentions one *Tiao-ch'i lun* 調氣論 (*An Essay on Regulating the Breath*), the section on biblio-

¹⁸ T. 50, p. 632c. For a study of this problem, see Mochizuki Shinkō, *Cbūgaku Jōdo-kyōri-shi* (Tokyo 1964), p. 63 ff.

¹⁹ T. 50, p. 470c12.

graphy (the *ching-chi chib* 經籍志) of the *Sui Shu*²⁰ records two works, a *Liao Pai-ping tso wan fang* 療百病雜丸方 (*Prescriptions for Various Pills to Cure Hundreds of Diseases*), and a *Lun Ch'i chib liao fang* 論氣治療方 (*A Discussion on How the Breath Cures and Heals*); and the *I-wen chib* section of the *Sung Shih*²¹ lists one *Fu Ch'i Tao Chüeh* 服氣要訣 (*Essential Instructions for Controlling the Breath*). Thus the incident of the encounter with Bodhiruci and the supposed burning of the Taoist scriptures serves as a convenient means by which the early Pure Land Buddhists severed once and for all any incipient connection that the Pure Land sect—with their chief Buddha, the Buddha of Unlimited Life (Amitāyus) and Light (Amitābha)—had with native Taoist techniques of prolongation of life and breath control, a connection which undoubtedly continued longer in popular imagination than among educated clerics on both sides.

His literary works. Three literary works, attributed to T'an-luan, have been preserved in toto for us: the *Wang-sheng lun chü*, the *Tsan O-mi-t'o Fo chü*, and the *Lüeh-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i*.

The *Wang-sheng lun chü*²² 往生論註 is a two *chüan* commentary on Vasubandhu's *Sukhāvati-vyūha-upadeśa*, translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci under the title of *Wu-liang-shou ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng-chü*, an abbreviated and variant title being the *Wang-sheng lun*. The first *chüan* of T'an-luan's work is a commentary on the twenty-four line *gāthā* that makes up the first half of Vasubandhu's work, and the second *chüan* serves as a commentary on the prose section of Vasubandhu's work. The *Wang-sheng lun chü* is T'an-luan's most important doctrinal work, presenting the major features of his doctrinal system (see below).

The *Tsan O-mi-t'o Fo chü*²³ 讚阿彌陀仙偈 is a poem in praise of the virtues of the Buddha Amitābha and his Pure Land, following fairly closely the description of Sukhāvati as given in the *Wu-liang shou ching*. There are one hundred and ninety-five lines in this poem, each line consisting of seven words or characters each. Each stanza begins with the words, "Namas! We most sincerely go for refuge and venerate the Buddha Amitābha, of the Western Land,"

²⁰ In *chüan* 34 (p. 32, verso).

²¹ In *chüan* 205 (p. 13, verso).

²² T. 50, no. 1819.

²³ T. 47, no. 1978.

and ends with the line, "We vow to be reborn, together with all creatures, into the Land of Ease and Happiness (*An-lo*: *Sukhāvati*)," a structure which would hint at the work being used in congregational reciting. Two variant titles for this work are the *Wu-liang shou ching feng-tsan* 無量壽經奉讚, and the *Ta-ching feng-tsan* 大經奉讚.

The *Lüeb-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i*²⁴ 略論安樂淨土義 is a work in catechical form taking up questions of a doctrinal nature such as might be asked by interested Buddhists after having read T'an-luan's more basic work, the *Wang-s beng lun chu*. Such an order of composition is nothing more than hypothesis, but the internal structures of these two works easily lend themselves to such an interpretation.

Of these three works of T'an-luan, the *Lüeb-lun* is the only work the authenticity of which has ever been called into question. The Sillan scholar-monk Wōn-hyō (617-ca. 713) was the first to indirectly doubt the originality of the parable in the *Lüeb-lun* of the man fleeing robbers (see Question IX), by attributing the tale to Kumārajīva.²⁵

In Japan, the Tendai scholar-monk Shōshin (ca. mid-12th century to early 13th century), in his *Hokke-gengi sbiki*²⁶ attributes the *Lüeb-lun* as a whole to Kumārajīva, and the Edo period Tendai monk Ryōkū Kōken (1653–1739) composed a work entitled the *Ryaku-ron Anraku Jōdo-gi Donran-sen ni arazu*²⁷ ("The *Lüeb-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i* is not the work of T'an-luan") which argued that the *Lüeb-lun* was the work of an anonymous, and very ignorant, Japanese!

However unlike many works purporting to date from this period, the *Lüeb-lun*'s antiquity and its Chinese authorship are fairly well attested. Chia-ts'ai (died 627) in the second *chüan* of this *Ching-t'u lun*²⁸ lists three works written by T'an-luan, the *Wang-s beng lun chu*, the *Wu-liang shou ching feng-tsan*, and one *chüan* of *Wen-ta* 問答 ("Questions and Answers," i.e., the *Lüeb-lun*), and Tao-ch'o (562–645) mentions T'an-luan and quotes the *Lüeb-lun* in his *An-lo*

²⁴ T. 47, no. 1957. The *Hsiü KSC*, p. 470c, attributes a two *chüan An-lo chi* to T'an-luan!

²⁵ T. 47, p. 1152.

²⁶ *Dai-Nippon Bukkyō-zensho*, vol. 21, p. 233.

²⁷ *Dai-Nippon Bukkyō-zensho*, vol. 98, p. 378; see also pages 12, 262, and 317.

²⁸ T. 47, p. 97c.

chi.²⁹ More recently early manuscripts of the *Lüeb-lun* have been discovered in Tun-huang,³⁰ manuscripts dating back to the second year of Ching-yün (A.D. 711), proving that the *Lüeb-lun* is a Chinese composition, and that within less than one hundred years after T'an-luan's death, the work, in a form very close to the form in which we have it today, had circulated in scholarly clerical circles and was in turn coming to be quoted as an authoritative work of T'an-luan.

(Text)

I. *Question*: The land of Sukhāvati (the Pure Land) is included within which of the Three Realms?

Answer: As the *Ta-chih-tu lun*¹ says, "The Pure Land is not included within the Three Realms. Why is this? There is no desire therein, so it is not in the Realm of Desire; it is of a Bhūmi 地居, so it is not in the Realm of Matter; and it has form, so it is not in the Non-Material Realm."

The *Wu-liang sbou ching*² says, "When the Buddha Amitābha was originally practicing the way of the bodhisattva, he was a bhikṣu by the name of Dharmākara. In the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja, Dharmākara asked concerning the practices leading to the Pure Land of all the Buddhas. At that time the Buddha taught to him all the lands of the two hundred and ten billion Buddhas, as well as the good and bad of men and devas, refinement and crudity of the lands and he manifested them all to him. Thereupon the bodhisattva Dharmākara, in the presence of the Buddha, made a great vow to take to himself all these Buddhalands. During numberless Asaṃkheyya Kalpas, he practiced all the Pāramitās, as he had vowed he would. When all of these

²⁹ T. 47, p. 10c; see also p. 14b21.

³⁰ Viz *Meisba-yōin*, entry no. 100. The authorship of the *Lüeb lun* has been discussed by Mōri Kemmyō, "Ryakuron sakusha no kenkyū," in *Sbinsū-kenkyū*, vols. 14 to 18 (1927); Oyama Hōjō, "Ryakuron-anraku-jōdogi no shingi ni tsuite," in *Rakujō-gakubō*, vol. 198 (1918); and by Nabata Ōjun, *Ryakuron-anraku-jōdo-gi kōgi* (Kyoto, Higashi Honganji Shuppan-bu 1966). For an extensive bibliography on T'an-luan, see Ryūkoku-daigaku Shinshū Gakkai, *Donran kyōgaku no kenkyū* (Kyoto 1963) p. 225-233.

¹ T. 25, p. 340a.

² T. 12, p. 267a.

practices were perfected, he attained highest Bodhi." Since the Pure Land is what he obtained by his specific actions, it is not of the Three Realms.

II. *Question*: How many types of adornments does Sukhāvātī have, that it is termed the Pure Land?

Answer: If we rely on the Scripture for their meaning, we see that they are the Forty-eight Vows of the bodhisattva Dharmākara. Since this can be known from the *Tsan O-mi-t'o Fo cbi*,³ we need not repeat them here. If we look to the *Wu-liang shou lun*,⁴ we see that there are two kinds of purities which include the twenty-nine adornment-attainments. The two kinds of purities are: first, the purity of the physical world, and second, the purity of all the various creatures.

There are seventeen kinds of adornment-attainments in the purity of the physical world: 1) the characteristics of this land surpass any sphere of rebirth within the Three Realms; 2) the breadth of this land is, in its dimension, equal to space, having no limits; 3) it has arisen from the transcendental roots of good of the great compassion of the bodhisattva on the correct path; 4) it is perfectly adorned with pure lights; 5) it possesses the finest jewel-like nature, and so gives forth marvellous treasures; 6) its clear light perpetually illumines this world; 7) its treasures are supple and pliant, and whoever touches them feels pleasant, producing a great joy; 8) thousands and tens of thousands of bejewelled flowers adorn the lakes and waterways; jewelled pavillions and towers, and row upon row of jewelled trees co-mingle their colors and lights and so reflect this world; numberless bejewelled nets cover the sky, and from their four sides hang bells which always give forth the sounds of the Dharma; 9) from the sky there always spontaneously rains forth heavenly flowers, heavenly vestments, and heavenly incense, perfuming all the various adornments; 10) the light from the Wisdom of the Buddha illumines and dispels the darkness of ignorance; 11) the Brahma-like voice of the Buddha bringing enlightenment is heard at a great distance in all the ten directions; 12) the unexcelled Dharma King, the Buddha Amitābha, with his good strength, maintains this land; 13) the inhabitants of Sukhāvātī are born through transformation in the

³ T. 47, p. 420c.

⁴ I.e., the *Wu-liang shou ching Yu-po-t'i-she Yuan-sheng-chieb*, T. 26, p. 231b ff.

pure lotuses of the Tathāgata's Enlightenment; 14) the inhabitants delight in the taste of the Buddha-dharma, and Dhyāna and Samādhi are their food; 15) they are for long separated from all the various afflictions of both body and mind, and they receive uninterrupted happiness; 16) and the names of those of the two Yānas, of women, and those of defective organs are not even heard, and 17) there is nothing in which the inhabitants are not perfectly satisfied, in whatever their minds and hearts may desire. These seventeen types of adornment-attainments are called the purities of the physical world.

There are twelve types of adornment-attainments in the purity of all the various creatures: 1) numberless rare jewels and a marvellous flower terrace form the seat of the Buddha; 2) numberless major and minor marks, and unlimited lights adorn the body of the Buddha; 3) the unlimited eloquence of the Buddha preaches the Dharma according to each inhabitant's individual capacities; this teaching contains all purity and causes people to desire to hear it, and those who hear this necessarily attain understanding, for these words are not in vain; 4) the Absolute Wisdom of the Buddha, like unto Space, thoroughly illumines both the general characteristics and the specific characteristics of all the dharmas, for his mind is without discrimination; 5) devas and men form an immovable multitude, expansive and adorned, likened to Mount Sumeru which reflects on its sides the four great seas, and who possess all the attributes of the Dharma King; 6) they attain the unsurpassed result which no one else can equal, let alone surpass; 7) they are the guides and the teachers of both devas and men, and they are surrounded in reverence by the multitudes, as the king of the lions is surrounded by other lions; 8) the power of the Buddha's vows adorns and maintains all merits, and no one encounters them in vain. This power causes the speedy perfection of all the sea-like merits; those who have not yet attained to the rank of a bodhisattva of pure mind, ultimately attain the Dharmakāya of sameness, and together with bodhisattvas of pure minds and with bodhisattvas of advanced stages, they ultimately all together obtain quiescence and sameness; 9) all the bodhisattvas of Sukhāvātī are able to extend to all the ten directions without moving their bodies, and with their variously transformed bodies, they correctly practice the religious life and so always perform the work of the Buddha; 10) the transformed bodies of the bodhisattvas, at all times without beginning or end, emit in a single moment of thought a great light which permeates every world

in the ten directions and there teaches the inhabitants, and since this land was created by their various expedient means and through the attainments of their practices, it destroys the sufferings and the defilements of all creatures; 11) these bodhisattvas, in all these various worlds, illumine the assemblies of all the Buddhas without exception, offer them all without exception extensive and unlimited offerings and reverence, and they praise the virtues of all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas; and 12) all these bodhisattvas, in all the worlds in the ten directions where there are not the Three Precious Ones, do establish and adorn the Precious Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha in their great sea-like virtues, and they everywhere manifest and cause understanding so as to truly practice the religious life.

These are the eight types of adornment-attainments and the merits of the Dharma King and these are the four types of adornment-attainments and merits of the bodhisattvas. These are called the purity of the creatures.

The Land of Sukhāvati includes all these twenty-nine attainments of adornments and merits, and so it is termed the Pure Land.

III. *Question*: In all, how many types of persons are there, and through how many causal conditions are they born into the Land of Sukhāvati?

Answer: In the *Wu-liang sbou ching*,⁵ there are only three types of persons mentioned: the Superior, the Mediocre, and the Inferior. In the *Wu-liang sbou kuan ching*,⁶ each one is further divided into Superior, Mediocre, and Inferior, thus making altogether nine different types of capacities. Now then, we have relied upon the *Wu-liang sbou ching* in composing the *Tsan O-mi-t'o Fo cbi*, so we shall again look to this Scripture and discuss this matter with reference to the three types of persons.

The Superior person is born into the Pure Land through five actions. First, he discards the householder's life, and separating himself from desires, he becomes a Śrāmaṇa; second, he generates the unexcelled Bodhi-mind; third, he concentrates exclusively on the Buddha of Unlimited Life (= Amitāyus); fourth, he practices various virtues; and fifth, he desires to be born in the Land of Sukhāvati. When he completes these five actions, the Buddha of Un-

⁵ T. 12, p. 272b.

⁶ T. 12, p. 344c.

limited Life, together with his assembled followers, appears before this person at the approach of his death. He straightaway accompanies the Buddha and is reborn into Sukhāvātī, and he is born by spontaneous transformation on a seven-jewelled lotus, and there abides in non-regression. This person's wisdom is in a flourishing state, and he has total mastery over supernormal powers.

The Mediocre person is born into the Pure Land through seven causal conditions. First, he generates the unexcelled Bodhi-mind; second, he exclusively concentrates on the Buddha of Unlimited Life; third, he practices greater or lesser good by observing the precepts of abstinence; fourth, he erects stūpas and images; fifth, he feeds Śrāmanas; sixth, he hangs up banners, lights lights, scatters flowers, and burns incense; and seventh, he transfers the merit from such activities to his desire to be born into Sukhāvātī. When the end of his life approaches, the Buddha of Unlimited Life manifests his transformation body 化現其身 with light and his major and minor marks, exactly like a True Buddha. Together with his assembled followers he appears before this person. He then straightaway follows this transformation Buddha and is reborn in Sukhāvātī where he abides in non-regression. His virtue and his wisdom rank after that of the Superior person.

The Inferior person is born into the Pure Land through three causal conditions. First, even if he is unable to perform any of these merits, he must generate the unexcelled Bodhi-mind; second, he exclusively concentrates his mind, and even ten times thinks on the Buddha of Unlimited Life; and third, with a most sincere mind he desires to be born into Sukhāvātī. When the end of his life approaches, he sees in a dream the Buddha of Unlimited Life. He also obtains rebirth, and his virtue and wisdom rank after that of the Mediocre person.

But there is furthermore a type of rebirth into Sukhāvātī which is not included among these three types of persons,⁷ namely the practice of these various virtues accompanied by a vow to be born in Sukhāvātī, done with a doubting and deluded mind 疑惑心. Such persons do not understand the Buddha's wisdom, his incomprehensible wisdom, his indescribable wisdom, his broad, Mahāyāna wisdom, his unequalled, incomparable, most distinguished wisdom, and with regard to such wisdom, such persons have doubts and delusions,

⁷ T. 12, 278a.

and no faith. Yet nevertheless they believe in retribution as a natural consequence of transgression and of goodness, so they practice a basic amount of good, and desire to be born into Sukhāvātī. They are indeed born into Sukhāvātī, in seven jewelled palaces of either one hundred Yojanas or of five hundred Yojanas in breadth, and each one, in these palaces, receives all pleasures, as in Tuṣita Heaven: and all this spontaneously so. For a five hundred year period, they never see the Buddha, nor hear the teachings of the Scriptures, nor do they see the saintly assembly of bodhisattvas and Śrāvakas. In the Land of Sukhāvātī this is called the 'remote area,' and it is also called 'birth from a womb.' 'Remote area' means that for five hundred years, they do not see or hear of any one of the Three Precious Ones, and so in meaning this is the same as 'the difficulty of being in a remote area'. Also they are in the most remote corner of the Land of Sukhāvātī. This is also termed 'birth from a womb' because this is likened to when a man is first born from out of the womb, he is not yet perfectly formed and complete. 'Remote' refers to its difficulty. 'Womb' refers to its darkness. These two words are both borrowed from this world, so how much less do they apply to that world, Sukhāvātī! This is not the 'remote area' referred to as one of the Eight Difficulties, nor is this 'born from a womb' as from a physical womb. How do we know this? The Land of Sukhāvātī has births only by transformations, so we thus know that this is not a real womb birth. After this five hundred years, they get to see and to hear of the Three Precious Ones, so we thus know that this is not the remote place referred to as one of the Eight Difficulties.

IV. *Question*: Those who are born from a womb and who dwell in the seven jewelled palaces, do they receive pleasures therein, or not? And what do they think about?

Answer: The *Wu-liang shou ching*⁸ says by way of a parable, "It is as if there were a son, the prince of a Cakravartin Rāja, who incurred a transgression before the King, and so was bound by a golden chain within the back rooms of the palace. All things were provided for him, and he lacked for nothing, exactly like the King. Now this prince, although he had all the various fine things needed to give him pleasure, yet his heart was not happy, and he only

⁸ T. 12, p. 278b.

thought of devising various means to gain his release, and so to escape. They who are born from the womb are like unto this. Although they dwell in seven jewelled palaces, and have fine objects, smells, tastes, and sensations, yet they do not regard this as pleasure. Rather, they regard it as suffering that they do not see the Three Precious Ones and that they cannot revere them and practice all of the various kinds of good deeds. They recognize their basic transgressions, and deeply repenting of them, seek only to leave that place. They gain their desires, and become like those three types of persons who are born into Sukhāvātī, for at the end of the five hundred year period, they then recognize their transgressions, and repent of them.”

V. *Question*: Those who, with doubting and deluded minds, are reborn into Sukhāvātī are termed “born from a womb.” How does their doubt arise?

Answer: In the Scripture it only speaks of doubt, (delusion), and lack of belief⁹; it does not give the reason for the doubt. If we examine the Five phrases which they do not understand, we might then speak of them with reference to their overcoming (that is, we may understand the nature of their doubts if we understand what it is that overcomes these doubts). “Not to understand the wisdom of the Buddha” means to be unable to understand through belief 不能信了 the Buddha’s wisdom of all things. “It is because they do not understand that their doubts arise.” This one phrase discusses in general the object of their doubts; each one of the next four words puts down the object of their doubts.

There are four types of doubt:

First is to doubt that one can attain rebirth in Sukhāvātī by merely thinking of the Buddha Amitābha. Why is this? A scripture says, “The way of Karma is like a scales: the heavier side is pulled down first.” Why is it then that regardless if for the length of one’s whole life, or for one hundred years, or for ten years, or for one day, there is no evil that one has not done, yet with but ten continuous thoughts, one will then attain rebirth and shall enter into the company of those truly assured of enlightenment 入正定聚 and shall never again regress, and for long one shall be freed from all the pains of the three painful realms of rebirth?

⁹ T. 12, p. 278a.

If such be the case, how can one believe in the teaching that the heavier side of the scales is pulled down first? Also, from many Kalpas in the past up to the present we have done all types of actions, and our defiled actions bind us fast to the Three Realms. How can we by not cutting off the binding delusions of the Three Realms yet immediately escape these Three Realms by thinking of the Buddha Amitābha for but a short time? What then does "binding Karma" really mean?

It is to overcome this doubt that they speak of the Buddha's incomprehensible wisdom. "Incomprehensible wisdom" refers to the power of the Buddha's wisdom which is able to make many out of few, and few out of many; to make what is near, far, and what is far, near; to make what is light, heavy, and what is heavy, light; and to make what is long, short, and what is short, long. Such wisdom of the Buddha is unlimited, endless, and incomprehensible. It is as if one hundred men were to pile up kindling for one hundred years until it reached a height of one thousand *jēn*, and then when a tiny ball of fire, only as large as a bean, is added to it, it would be totally consumed in only half a day. How can one say that the kindling, piled up for one hundred years, would not be consumed in half a day!

This is also like a crippled man who rides on another man's boat; because of the strength of that boat's sails, he can travel even up to one thousand *li* in a single day. How can one say that it is possible for a cripple to travel one thousand *li* in a single day!

This is also like a very poor man who obtains a marvellous object and who presents it to the King; the King is pleased with what he has obtained and again rewards him greatly for it, so that, in a very short span of time, his wealth becomes abundant and overflowing. How can one say that, since there can be somebody who through several decades of service wherein he thoroughly exhausted himself, returns to his home in vain without such a reward! Such a thing cannot happen!

Further, this is like a weak man who is not able to even mount up and whip a donkey by his own strength, but who by following in the train of a Cakravartin Rāja is able to ride through the sky, and to fly at will. So how can anyone say that a weak man is necessarily not able to ride through the sky!

And again, this is like unto a rope, ten strands thick, which a thousand men cannot manage, but which one small child, brandishing a sword, can cleave

into two in an instant. How can one say that the strength of a small child cannot cut a rope!

Further this is like the poisonous *chen* bird 九鳥,¹⁰ that when once it goes into the water, the fish and the crustaceans all die immediately. But when a rhinoceros horn is stuck into the water, all these dead creatures arise. So how can one say that when life is once cut off, there can never be life again?

And yet again, this is like when the yellow *ku* bird 黃鸝 called to Tzu-an 子安, Tzu-an was restored to life.¹¹ So how can one say of one who has been in the grave for a thousand years, that he will never be resurrected?

All things have a self-power and an other-power, and are included within themselves and are included by others. For one thousand openings, there are ten thousand closings, without limit and without end (= the permutations and the possibilities of all things are infinite). How can one, with his limited intelligence, doubt such unlimited things?

From among the five incomprehensibilities, the Buddha-dharma is the most incomprehensible. So one should not think that one hundred years of evil is heavy, and one should not doubt that thinking of the Buddha for ten thoughts is trivial, and that by this one will not obtain rebirth in Sukhāvati and enter into the company of those truly assured of enlightenment, for such a doubt is not the case.

Second is to doubt that the wisdom of the Buddha is not totally transcendent to man 於人不為玄絕. Why is this? All words and terms proceed from relative relationships 相待. For example, enlightenment proceeds from non-enlightenment, and to be deluded as to direction arises from remembering a direction. If one were to cause a delusion to never function as a delusion, then the delusion would not soon be dissolved. If a delusion can be resolved, then it is none other than the resolution attained by the deluded person. Also, one could say that it is the enlightened person's understanding of delusion. To be deluded and to understand, to understand and to be deluded—these are like the two sides of a single hand. Now understanding and ignorance can be taken as different, so how can they be transcended? And because this

¹⁰ A bird, the feathers of which were considered to be poisonous.

¹¹ For a later reference to this incident, see Li Po's poem, the "Teng Ching-ting-shan nan-wang huai-ku ts'u Tou-chu Fu shih," *SPPY* edition of Li Po, *chūan* 12 (p. 15 verso).

doubt arises, doubt is generated with regard to the wisdom of the Buddha, and one does not believe. It is in order to overcome this doubt that the Buddha's indescribable wisdom is spoken of.

'Indescribable wisdom' means that the Buddha's wisdom transcends words and descriptions 絕於稱謂, and is not dependent on external forms and characteristics. How can we verbalize this? If a dharma is existent, there would then have to be a wisdom which knows existence. If a dharma is not existent, there would have to be a wisdom that knows non-existence. Now all the dharmas are separate from both existence and non-existence, and the Buddha merges into all the dharmas, and his wisdom transcends relative dualities 智絕相待.

Your quoting of "understanding of a delusion" by way of analogy constitutes however yet another mistake. That it never constitutes a dissolution of illusion is like explaining to someone what a dream is in a dream: although you say you have explained what a dream is, yet this itself is nothing but a dream. To grasp what the Buddha is by means of (worldly, conventional) knowing cannot be said to know the Buddha, but to grasp what the Buddha is by means of not such knowing is also not to know the Buddha. To grasp what the Buddha is by means of neither knowing nor not knowing is also not to know the Buddha, and to grasp what the Buddha is by means of neither not knowing nor by not not-knowing can also be said not to know the Buddha. The wisdom of the Buddha is apart from these four alternatives. The function of the mind of one who conceives this (wisdom) comes to an end, and the words and speech of one who points to this (wisdom) comes to be of no avail. It is because of this that the *Ta-chih-tu lun*¹² says, "If a man perceives Prajñā, this means that he is bound; if he does not perceive Prajñā, this also means that he is bound. If a man sees Prajñā this means that he is liberated; if he does not see Prajñā, this also means that he is liberated." In this stanza the author says that not being free from these four alternatives constitutes being bound, and that being free from these four alternatives constitutes liberation. You doubt that the wisdom of the Buddha is not the most profound transcendence with regard to man, but such is not the case.

Third is to doubt that the Buddha cannot really save all creatures. Why is this? In the past the world has had Buddhas as unlimited and as endless as

¹² T. 25, p. 190c.

the number of grains of sand in an Asamkheyya number of Ganges, and in all the present worlds of the ten directions there are also Buddhas as unlimited and as endless as the number of grains of sand in an Asamkheyya number of Ganges. Now if the Buddha could truly save all creatures, then there would not have been the Three Realms for a long time now. A second Buddha would not again, for the sake of creatures, have to generate the Bodhi-mind, to fully practice Pure Land creating practices and so embrace all creatures. And yet there really was a second Buddha who embraced all creatures, and there are indeed even unlimited numbers of Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three periods of time who do embrace all creatures. Thus do we know that the Buddha cannot really save all creatures, and because this doubt arises, persons have concepts of limitation 作有量想 with regard to the Buddha Amitābha.

It is in order to put down this doubt that we spoke of “the broad, Mahāyāna wisdom” of the Buddha. “Broad, Mahāyāna wisdom” means that there is no dharma unknown, no defilement not cut off, no good not accomplished, and no creature unsaved. There are five reasons why there are Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three time periods. First, if there were not the second Buddha, and so no Buddhas as numerous as the number of grains of sand in an Asamkheyya number of Ganges, the Buddha could then not be able to save all creatures, and it is because he truly can save all creatures that there is then all the unlimited number of Buddhas in the ten directions. The unlimited Buddhas are those creatures saved by the previous Buddhas. Second, if one Buddha had already totally saved all creatures, there would then be no necessity for there being any further Buddhas. Why is this? Because they would not enlighten any other person. And again for what reason do we speak of there being Buddhas in the three time periods? Because they enlighten others, we speak of the Buddhas totally saving all creatures. Third, the later Buddhas’ ability to save creatures is exactly like the ability of former Buddhas. Why is this? It is because we have former Buddhas that we have later Buddhas. This is likened to the armor of a king which is passed down to his successor—the latter king has the ability of the former king. Fourth, although the Buddha’s power is able to save all creatures, there must necessarily be a Karmic relationship 因緣 between the two. If creatures have no relationship with a former Buddha, there must necessarily be later Buddhas. Now if these creatures should pass by a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand Buddhas, and not hear or see

them, this is not due to any inferiority of the Buddha's power. This is like unto the sun and the moon which circles the whole, four-continent world, destroying all obscurity and darkness, and yet the blind cannot see them. This is not because the sun is not bright. The crash of thunder rents the ears, and yet the deaf do not hear it. This is not because the noise is not deafening. Now someone who is enlightened to the principles underlying all these various relationships is called a Buddha, and anyone whose passions are strong and who opposes the principles underlying these relationships is not perfectly enlightened. For this reason such creatures are numberless, and the Buddhas are likewise numberless. It would be unreasonable to ask, apart from the question of being karmically related to Him or not, why the Buddha does not deliver all sentient beings. Fifth, if all creatures are extinguished, the world would then fall into the extreme of limitation. Because of this, there are unlimited Buddhas, who save all beings.

VI. *Question:* If creatures cannot all be exhausted, then the world would again fall into the extreme of unlimitedness 無邊. Since it is unlimited, does it follow then that the Buddha would not be able to truly save all creatures?

Answer: The world does not have the extreme of limitation, nor the extreme of unlimitedness. Further, it transcends the four alternatives. When the Buddha causes creatures to become separated from these four alternatives, this is termed saving them. This is truly not saving them, nor is it not saving them; it is not extinguishing them, nor is it not not-extinguishing them. This is likened unto dreaming that one is crossing the sea and encounters giant waves and similar difficulties. This man becomes terrified, and shouts out of his dream. An outsider calls to him and awakens him, and he then becomes quite without fear. But he has merely crossed over from the dream, and he has not crossed over the waters!

VII. *Question:* You say that he has crossed over and that he has not crossed over; and that both these fall into extremist views. Why is it that you only say that he has saved all creatures by means of his broad, Mahāyāna wisdom, and you do not say that he has *not* saved all creatures by his broad, Mahāyāna wisdom?

Answer: There is no creature that does not abhor suffering and enjoy

pleasure, who does not fear bondage, and strive for liberation. If they hear of salvation, then they turn in allegiance to him; if they hear of non-salvation, they do not know the reason for this non-salvation, and they will then say that the Buddha is not very compassionate, and they will not turn in allegiance to him. Thus will they sleep and dream long, there being no reason for their so stopping. It is for such people that there is much teaching of salvation, and no teaching of non-salvation. And further, the *Cbu-fa wu-bsing ching*¹³ 諸法無行經 also says, "The Buddha does not attain the way of the Buddha, and he does not save creatures. Ignorant men have strong discriminations, and so create a Buddha who saves creatures." To speak of saving creatures is a therapeutic Siddham (Teaching). To speak of not saving creatures is the ultimate Siddham. Both expressions have their reasons for being so stated, and they do not contradict one another.

VIII. *Question*: Like a dream which has its end, how can this not be salvation? If the dreams of all creatures come to an end, how would the world not be extinguished?

Answer: We say that the dream is the world. So if the dream comes to an end, then there is no one dreaming. If there is no one dreaming, we also do not say that there is anyone saved. If in this way you know that this world is identical to the transcendental world 世間即是出世間, then although numberless creatures are saved, yet there is no falling into distorted views.

Fourth is to doubt that the Buddha does not attain a wisdom of all things. Why is this? If he were able to totally know all dharmas, all dharmas would then fall into the extreme of eternalism 有邊. If he is unable to totally know all phenomena, then he does not possess a wisdom of all things. It is to overcome this doubt that we say that the Buddha has unequalled, incomparable, and most distinguished wisdom. The reason that it is so called is that the wisdom of common persons is false and empty, whereas the wisdom of the Buddha is true. Now falsity and truth are profoundly different: in principle they cannot be equal, so we term it "unequalled." If Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas want to know something, they enter into Samādhi and then they know it, and when they leave this Samādhi, they do not know it. Furthermore,

¹³ T. 15, p. 760b.

their knowledge has limits. The Buddha has attained a true Samādhi, and so he is always in a deep Samādhi and has universal knowledge, reflecting both the duality and the non-duality of all the dharmas. The depth of the dharmas is without compare, so his wisdom is called incomparable. Even though bodhisattvas of the eighth Bhūmi and above have attained recompense-birth Samādhi 報生三昧 (Samādhi as a result of their previous practices) and do not need to enter into a Samādhi or leave it, yet they are still slightly perfumed by their remaining influences, and their Samādhis are not ultimately purified. Compared with the wisdom of the Buddha, there are still Samādhis, wisdoms that are superior to them. The wisdom of the Buddha has completely cut off all defilements and illuminates all things as they truly are. Since the number of dharmas is unlimited, their illumination is also unlimited. This is likened to a box which is large, so its lid is also large; this it is called 'the highest' (wisdom). These three terms (unequaled, incomparable, the highest) are sequentially interdependent one upon the other. Because the wisdom of the Buddha is without equal, so is it incomparable; because it is incomparable, it is the most distinguished; because it is the most distinguished it is unequaled; and because it is unequaled, it is incomparable. If we were only to say unequaled, this would suffice. The reason we need the two following terms is to be likened to the wisdom of the Śrota-āpanna which is not equal to that of the Arhat, yet is of the same kind. From the first Bhūmi to the tenth Bhūmi is like this also. Although their wisdoms are not equal, yet they are not of different kind. Why is this? Because they are not the highest.

You regard knowledge having a limit as a (philosophical) difficulty, and so doubt that the Buddha does not have all wisdom, but such is not the case.

IX. *Question:* In the passage regarding the birth into the Pure Land by an Inferior person, it speaks of his having ten continuous thoughts 十念相續. What are these ten thoughts?

Answer: This is likened to there being a man who, going through an empty area on his way to a certain place, encounters bandits; drawing their spears they rush upon him to kill him. The man begins to run and sees a river he can cross. If he crosses this river he will be completely safe. At this time he is only thinking of the means by which he may cross the river, thinking "When I cross to the other bank of the river, I can either wear my clothes and

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cross over, or I can take my clothes off and cross over. But if I wear my clothes I fear I won't be able to cross over, and if I take off my clothes I fear I won't have the time to do so." He has only this thought, being influenced by nothing else. All his thoughts are on how he might cross the river, and he has nothing but this thought. Ten such thoughts which are not mixed with any other thoughts are termed "ten continuous thoughts."

This applies to the devotee, also. Thinking on the Buddha Amitābha is like this thinking of crossing the river, done up to ten times. Thinking on the Name of the Buddha, thinking on the major and minor marks of the Buddha, thinking on the Light 光明 of the Buddha, thinking on the spiritual powers of the Buddha, thinking on the merits of the Buddha, thinking on the wisdom of the Buddha, thinking on the original vows of the Buddha, without any other thoughts intervening—such thoughts succeeding one another up to ten thoughts are termed "ten continuous thoughts." When we speak of ten continuous thoughts, it appears not to be difficult. Yet the thoughts of common persons are like a wild horse, and the consciousness is more restless than an ape at play. It runs about to the six objects of sense perception, without resting for a moment. One should better attain faith, control his thoughts, cause habits to accumulate which form his character, and strengthen the roots of good. As the Buddha told King Bimbisāra,¹⁴ when a man accumulates good acts, at his death he will have no disturbing thoughts. This is like a tree which leans to the west and will necessarily fall in that direction in which it has been bent. If a sharp wind comes, a hundred pains afflict the body, for if one's habits were not previously in existence, how could you tell, at such a moment, the nature of one's inner thoughts. Also one should have several like-minded companions join together in an agreement that when the end of one's life approaches, one will spell another every morning in calling upon the Name of the Buddha Amitābha, desiring birth in Sukhāvātī. Voice follows upon voice until the ten thoughts are accomplished. This is likened unto a wax-seal being pressed into clay, so when the seal is destroyed, the inscription remains. When this life is cut off, this is the time when one is born into Sukhāvātī. Once one has entered into the company of those truly assured of enlightenment, what more is there to worry about?

¹⁴ T. 25, p. 193a.