

# Pure Land Buddhism in China: A Doctrinal History Chapter Seven: T'an-luan

Shinkō Mochizuki

Translated by  
Leo M. Pruden

Edited by  
Richard K. Payne  
Institute of Buddhist Studies

IN THIS ISSUE WE continue with the publication of selections from Leo Pruden's translation of Shinkō Mochizuki's *Pure Land Buddhism in China: A Doctrinal History*. Given the theme of this issue, we have chosen to publish chapter seven, on T'an-luan, out of order. As mentioned in the previous issue, editing of Pruden's typescript has been limited to improvements in the readability and updating some of the terminology employed.

We again wish to express our appreciation to everyone who contributed to initiating this project, especially the Pruden estate for their permission to publish the work.

## CHAPTER VII: T'AN-LUAN

### 1. T'an-luan's Life and Writings

T'an-luan was counted by Tao-ch'ō as one of the "Six Pure Land Worthies. His influence over later generations of Pure Land thinkers was considerable, due to his commentary on the *Wang-sheng lun* of Vasubandhu, his *Wang-sheng lun chu*, and his teaching in this work with respect to the "other-power" of the Fundamental Vows of Amitābha.

Hōnen, in his *Senchaku-shū* (the *Senchaku-hongan-nembutsu shū*), divides the Chinese Pure Land movement into three major traditions. First is the tradition founded by Hui-yuan of Mt. Lu, second is the tradition represented by the Tripiṭaka Master Tz'u-min, and third is the tradition represented by the two masters, Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao. The first patriarchal master of this third tradition was the master T'an-luan.

As we have mentioned earlier, Hui-yuan's tradition centered on the cultivation of the visualization, in meditation, of the form of Amitābha, a meditation based upon the teachings of the *P'an-shou san-mei ching*. In opposition to this practice, T'an-luan stressed rebirth in the Pure Land after one's death, that one attained this rebirth by means of the powers inherent in the Fundamental Vows of the Tathāgata, and that once there, one could speedily attain to the state of non-regression.

In later years, these three traditions came to merge with one another in China, but in Japan, largely through the influence of Hōnen, the third tradition (that of Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao) came to be the mainstream tradition of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. It is due to this that the master T'an-luan has come to be esteemed in Japan as the first of the five Chinese Pure Land patriarchs, whereas in China itself the master Hui-yuan is regarded as the first Pure Land patriarchal master.

According to his biography in the sixth volume of the *Hsü Kao-seng ch'uan*, T'an-luan was a native of Ying-men (present-day Tai-chou, Shansi). Another source states that he was a native of Wen-sui, in Ping-chou. His family home was located close by the sacred mountain of Wu-t'ai shan (located in present-day Wu-t'ai hsien, Shansi), and when he was a little over ten years of age he climbed this mountain and there visited its monasteries and holy sites. This left a lasting impression on him, and soon thereafter he left the householder's life and joined the Sangha. He read widely in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist writings, specializing in the *Ssu-lun* (the Madhyamaka Tradition) and the *Fo-hsing lun* (The Treatise on Buddha-nature by Vasubandhu). Subsequently, he planned to write a commentary on the *Ta-chi ching* (the *Mahā-sarṇipata* corpus), but became gravely ill in the middle of his work. He recovered, but had now become intensely aware of the transience of human life. He then began to search out and study various Taoist formulas for long life. In this search he traveled to the south, to the capital city of Chien-k'ang, where he is reported to have had an audience with the Liang Dynasty Emperor Wu. He departed the capital city and traveled to Mt. Chü-yung, where he met the adept T'ao Hung-ching, from whom he received instruction in ten volumes of Taoist texts. He then left the company of T'ao Hung-ching and visited a number of other famous mountains, visiting the masters there and cultivating the different Taoist arts of prolonging life.

While traveling home, he passed through the city of Loyang, where he met the Indian master Bodhiruci. He is reported to have told Bodhiruci of his Taoist studies, to which Bodhiruci responded that the deathless state could not be attained in China, and then presented T'an-luan with a copy of the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*, as being a scripture of the Greatest Sage, the Buddha. Reading this scripture, T'an-luan became suddenly awakened, and burned his Taoist texts. He subsequently returned home, where he began to cultivate the Pure Land teachings, converting many clergy and

laity. His fame spread, and he came to the attention of the Emperor of the Wei Dynasty, who bestowed the title of "shen-Luan" (the divine Luan) upon him. The Emperor gave over the Ta-yen ssu Monastery, in Ping-chou, to T'an-luan. Later, T'an-luan moved to the Hsüan-chung ssu Monastery, at the foot of the Pei-shan cliffs, in Fen-chou (present-day Chiao-ch'eng hsien, Shansi). Here he gathered around him a group of disciples, and together they cultivated the Nien-fo practice. T'an-luan is reported to have died in the year 542, at the age of sixty-six, in a "mountain monastery" in Ping-yao.

As we have mentioned above, the account of T'an-luan meeting Bodhiruci and receiving a copy of the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching* from him, is highly doubtful. Furthermore, in his composition, the *Wang-sheng lun chu*, T'an-luan criticizes the choice of words used by the translator of the *Wang-sheng lun* (i.e., Bodhiruci). Especially, in a note to the passage "one searching out" in the *Wang-sheng lun*, T'an-luan says, "The translator uses the word 'to search out.' How obscure this meaning is!" Now if Bodhiruci were T'an-luan's master, who introduced him to the Pure Land teachings, then these words would have been extremely rude. In a word, we do not know who the teacher was, who introduced T'an-luan to the Pure Land teachings and their practice.

However, it is recorded in his biography that T'an-luan was a student of the Ssu-lun Tradition (the Madhyamaka Tradition), which was based on four treatises: the *Chung-lun*, the *Pai-lun* and the *Shih-erh lun*, plus the *Ta-chih-tu lun*. Also, among the "Six Pure Land Worthies" listed in the *An-lo chi*, the order Tao-ch'ang and T'an-luan is given, so perhaps T'an-luan studied under the master Tao-ch'ang, who was the leading authority on the *Ta-chih-tu lun* of his day. We have also mentioned above that Tao-ch'ang had received a copy of the Maṇḍala of the Five Bodhisattvas of Supernormal Powers, so perhaps T'an-luan may have received his introduction into the Pure Land faith from this master.

The *Hsü Kao-seng ch'uan* places T'an-luan's date of death in the year 542 (the fourth year of Hsing-ho, of the Eastern Wei Dynasty). However the name of a bhikṣu Seng T'an-luan appears among some twenty-seven names listed on an inscription carved in the second month of 554 (the fifth year of T'ien-pao, of the Northern Ch'i Dynasty). Assuming that this Seng T'an-luan is this same T'an-luan, then his death must be placed some time after the year 554.

Furthermore, the last volume of Chia-ts'ai's *Ching-t'u lun* gives the biography of T'an-luan, and mentions that he was still alive "at the end of the Wei, and at the beginning of the Kao-Ch'i Dynasties." The biography of Tao-ch'o in the twentieth volume of the *Hsü Kao-seng ch'uan*, as well as the *Wang-sheng Hsi-fang Ching-t'u shui-ying shan-ch'uan*, lists him as "the Dharma Master T'an-luan of the Ch'i era." It is clear from the above that T'an-luan did not die any time during the Eastern Wei Dynasty, but was alive well into the Ch'i Dynasty.

Only three works have come down to us from the hand of T'an-luan: the two-volume *Wang-sheng lun chu*, the one volume *Ts'an O-mi-t'o Fo chieh*, and the one-volume *Lüeh-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i*.

The first work, the *Wang-sheng lun chu*, is a commentary on Vasubandhu's *Wang-sheng lun*. The first volume of his work comments on the twenty-four lines of *gāthā* in this work, and the second volume comments on the prose section. In various places throughout this work T'an-luan presents his Pure Land philosophy.

The *Ts'an O-mi-t'o Fo chieh* (*Gāthās in Praise of the Buddha Amitābha*) is a short work, consisting of 195 seven character lines. This work is a collection of praises of the various qualities of Amitābha and his Pure Land, based largely on the *Wu-liang-shou ching*. This work is also variously entitled the *Wu-liang-shou ching feng-ts'an* (Praises Offered to the *Wu-Liang-shou ching*) or simply the *Ta-ching feng-ts'an* (Praises Offered to the Greater Sūtra).

The *Lüeh-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i* raises, and answers, several questions with respect to the Pure Land:

- whether it is within the three dhātus or not,
- how many adornments it has,
- what are the various types of capacities of devotees who can be reborn therein,
- the nature of womb birth in the peripheral areas of the Pure Land,
- the doubts and delusions of the Five Wisdoms, and
- the problem of ten continuous recitations.

This work's authenticity has been called into question by a number of writers. In his *Yanggwŏn Muryang-gyŏng jong'yo*, the scholar-monk Wŏnhyŏ—from the Silla dynasty in Korea—claims that the simile of crossing the river employed in the *Lüeh-lun* can be traced back to Kumārajīva. The Japanese Tendai scholar-monk Shōshin, in the sixth volume of his *Hokke-gengi shiki*, claims that Kumārajīva composed this work. However, the *Lüeh-lun* quotes a number of works, specifically the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*, and the *Wang-sheng lun*, which were translated into Chinese only after the death of Kumārajīva, so the work cannot possibly be his work.

In the Edo period the scholar-monk Reikū Kōken composed a work entitled *The Lüeh-lun An-lo Ching-t'u i is not a Work by T'an-luan* (*Ryaku-ron Anraku Jōdo-gi Donran-sen ni arazu*). In this he claimed that the *Lüeh-lun* was composed in Japan by someone very uneducated, and that it was not really from the hand of T'an-luan. However, in the last volume of his *Ching-t'u lun*, Chia-ts'ai mentions, in addition to the *Wang-sheng lun chu* and the *Wu-liang-shou ching feng-ts'an*, one volume of *Questions and Answers*, and here refers to the *Lüeh-lun*, which is written in a catechical

form. The *Lüeh-lun* is also quoted many times in Tao-ch'ó's *An-lo chi*. In addition to this, an old manuscript copy of the *Lüeh-lun* has been discovered among the finds in Tun-huang, so it is clear that the *Lüeh-lun* is not a Japanese composition.

Besides the above three works ascribed to T'an-luan, his biography in the *Hsü Kao-seng ch'uan* also mentions a work entitled the *Tiao-ch'í lun* (An Essay on Regulating the Breath). Additionally, *The Monograph on Bibliography* (the *Ching-chi chih*) in the *Sui Shu* mentions two other works by T'an-luan, the *Liao pai-ping tsa-wan fang* (Prescriptions for Mixing Pills for the Cure of All Illnesses), and the *Lun liao-fang* (A Discussion of the Role of Breath in the Curing of Illnesses). Finally, the *Monograph on the Arts and Literature* (the *I-wen chih*) of the *Sung Shu* mentions a work entitled the *Fu ch'í yao-ch'ueh* (Essentials for Regulating the Breath). We can see from this that T'an-luan was considered to have been very learned in the homeopathic sciences. These works are probably the result of his own studies in recuperative techniques, carried out in the period early in his life when he was gravely ill.

## 2. The Two Paths

T'an-luan's major teachings are to be found in his *Wang-sheng lun chu*. At the very beginning of this work, he quotes the "Chapter on Easy Practice" from the *Shih-chu pi-p'o-sha* (the *Daśa-bhūmi vibhāṣā*), traditionally ascribed to Nāgārjuna. There are two paths by which the Bodhisattva can search out the stage of non-regression (Skt: *avaivartika*), the path of different practice (*nan-hsing-tao*) and the path of easy practice (*i-hsing-tao*). To search out the stage of non-regression in this world, which is full of the five defilements, and in this present age, which is without the living presence of a Buddha, is regarded as the path of difficult practice. But to be born in the Pure Land due to one's faith in the Buddha (lit.: by means of the causes and conditions of believing in the Buddha), to be empowered by the Buddha and so enter into the Mahāyāna assembly of those definitively assured [of such a rebirth] is termed the path of easy practice.

In a world full of the five defilements and without a Buddha, the non-Buddhists propagate doctrines of tangible, existent characteristics. These teachings disturb the characteristic-less cultivation of the Bodhisattvas, and the self-centered discipline and the self-benefitting teachings of the Hīnayāna śrāvakas cause the Bodhisattva to turn away from his own practice of great compassion and benevolence. Also, evil and unreflective beings destroy the distinguished qualities of the Bodhisattva, and, seeing the perverted, defiled results of these beings disturbs the mind of the Bodhisattvas, and so brings about a disruption of their religious cultivation.

Furthermore, in a world without a Buddha, one cannot rely on the power of the Buddha, and one must cultivate religious practices through his own powers. For these reasons, then, it is extremely difficult to attain the state of non-regression. Therefore, the author likens this path to walking on land, and so terms it "the path of difficult practice."

In opposition to this, however, the path of easy practice takes advantage of (lit.: rides on) the power inherent in the Buddha's Fundamental Vows, and leads to rebirth in the Pure Land. Furthermore, by being empowered by the Buddha, the devotee enters into the Mahāyāna assembly of those whose rebirth is assured, and thus abides in the stage of non-regression. That is to say, he attains the stage of *avaivartika* by means of "another power," a power that is not his own, and this is likened to riding a ship over the water (and not walking on land). This is termed "the path of easy practice."

The theory of the two paths, the difficult and the easy path, is originally borrowed from Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna holds that to strenuously cultivate religious practices in this world for a long time, and to thus attain the stage of non-regression, constitutes the path of difficult practice. However, calling upon the Names of the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will allow the devotee to speedily attain the stage of non-regression. These would include the Names of the Buddhas of the ten directions, such as the Buddha Sugaṇa (Fine Qualities) in the East, etc., and the Names of other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, such as Amitābha and Lokeśvararāja. Thus, this path is called the path of easy practice. In other words, according to Nāgārjuna, both paths allow the devotee to attain the stage of non-regression, the only difference being in the time that it takes to reach the goal. However, T'an-luan modified this teaching slightly, and taught that the attainment stage of non-regression in this world is the path of difficult practice, whereas attaining the stage of non-regression through rebirth in the Pure Land constitutes the path of easy practice. In other words, he discusses the differences in these two paths by virtue of the difference between this world and the Pure Land. To Nāgārjuna, the problem of the attainment of the stage of non-regression did not especially give rise to the necessity for rebirth in the Pure Land. For T'an-luan, however, the attainment of the stage of non-regression within the path of easy practice was considered to be one of the benefits (*teh-i*) attained after one had been reborn in the Pure Land. According to his teaching, then, in order to attain the stage of non-regression, one must first be reborn in the Pure Land, and rebirth in the Pure Land became a necessary condition for the attainment of the stage of non-regression.

Also, Nāgārjuna held that calling on the Names of the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas constituted, in its totality, the easy practice, whereas T'an-luan, in opposition to this, held that faith in one Buddha, the Buddha Amitābha, constituted the path of easy practice. Furthermore, T'an-luan

strongly stressed the power inherent in the Fundamental Vows of Amitābha, and that such attainments as rebirth in the Pure Land, and the attainment of the stage of non-regression once one is reborn in the Pure Land, were all due to the empowerment (*chu-chih*) derived from these vows. It is in these points, then, the teachings of T'an-luan differed greatly from those of Nāgārjuna. T'an-luan drew these teachings from both the *Wu-liang shou ching* and the *Wang-sheng lun*, and it was he who first introduced this theory of the two paths into the Pure Land faith. From that time onward, this theory came to be used very frequently in subsequent Pure Land writings.

T'an-luan deeply revered Nāgārjuna, for we find in his *Tsan O-mi-t'o Fo chieh* the phrases:

The Great Master Nāgārjuna, the Mahāsattva,  
 was born at the beginning of the period of the Counterfeit Dharma,  
 and served as a model of Truth.  
 He closed and locked the doors of error, and opened the pathway  
 of Truth. For this reason, all eyes in Jambudvīpa  
 look to him in reverence, he who is enlightened in the Stage of Joy.  
 I go to Amitābha for Refuge, that I may be reborn in Sukhāvātī.

And in another passage:

In the manner that when the dragons move, clouds must follow  
 in Jambudvīpa, he gave off hundreds of rays of light.  
 Homage to the Venerable One, the most compassionate Nāgārjuna,  
 we bow down to him in reverence.

In the above passages, the phrase "He who is enlightened in the Stage of Joy" (Skt. *pramuditā-bhūmi*) refers to a passage in the ninth chapter, the chapter "On Stanzas" in the *Ju Leng-chia ching*, translated in 513 by Bodhiruci. In this chapter, the Buddha predicts the eventual rebirth of Nāgārjuna into Sukhāvātī. T'an-luan had studied the Ssu-lun Tradition (the Madhyamaka Tradition), and it was probably at this time that he first became a devotee of Nāgārjuna. His faith was deepened by this reference in the *Ju Leng-chia ching*, and it was probably based on this that his faith in the Pure Land teachings became as firm as it did. In addition, the Chapter on "Easy Practice" mentions the Fundamental Vows of Amitābha, and Amitābha and his Pure Land are praised in a *gāthā* of some thirty-two lines in this same work. T'an-luan clearly got his inspiration from these works of Nāgārjuna, and so developed his theory of easy practice with respect to this one Buddha only, as well as the teaching that the stage of non-regression is attained only after the attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land.

### 3. The Other Power of the Fundamental Vows

Needless to say, T'an-luan's stress on the power of the Fundamental Vows of Amitābha is based on the teachings of the *Wu-liang-shou ching*, but we also get some hints for this theory from the writings of Nāgārjuna.

The *Wu-liang-shou ching* circulated early in South China and we know from the monastic biographies that the monk Fa-tu of the Chi-hsia ssu Monastery and the monk Pao-liang of the Ling-wei ssu Monastery lectured frequently on this scripture. However, we do not have any idea what their views on these Fundamental Vows were, since no works from their hands, or from their disciples exist. Nevertheless, it was T'an-luan who was the first person to employ this scripture in the north, and to stress the power of these vows in his teaching. It is for this reason that he exercised a great influence on all later Pure Land writers and thinkers.

T'an-luan teaches the greatness of the power of these Fundamental Vows of Amitābha in the last volume of his *Wang-sheng lun chu*. In this passage, he states that cultivating the practice of the five types of *nien-fo*, benefiting oneself and others, and speedily attaining *samyaksambodhi* (supreme, perfect enlightenment), is due basically to the Tathāgata Amitābha. In this way, Amitābha is considered the "predominating condition" (*ts'eng-shang yuan*, Skt: *adhipati-pratyaya*) for all these attainments. The power of the Fundamental Vows of the Tathāgata Amitābha also conditions birth in the Pure Land, and the performance of all types of good deeds by bodhisattvas, humans, and devas. If these powers of the Buddha did not exist, then his forty-eight vows would have been set up in vain. Hence, what T'an-luan teaches is that birth in the Pure Land, etc., is made possible by means of the power of the actual attainment (*ch'eng-chiu*, Skt.: *siddhi*) of these forty-eight vows by Amitābha.

Of these forty-eight, T'an-luan lays particular stress on the eleventh, eighteenth, and twenty-second vows. It is by means of these vows that one can be reborn in the Pure Land, attain the stage of non-regression, and can speedily attain Buddhahood.

The eleventh vow is the fundamental vow that the devotee will abide in the assembly of those definitively determined [to be reborn in the Pure Land]. T'an-luan holds that it is by means of the power of this vow that those reborn in the Pure Land all abide in the assembly of those definitively determined, and are able to attain this stage of non-regression.

The eighteenth vow is the fundamental vow of rebirth in the Pure Land, and T'an-luan holds that it is by means of the power of this vow that all beings in the ten directions are able to attain rebirth in the Pure Land.

The twenty-second vow is the vow that the devotee will certainly go to the abode just before the stage of total enlightenment. It is by means of this vow that, when the devotee is reborn into the Pure Land, he will do so by



jumping over all of the various religious practices of the different bhūmis, and will presently cultivate the qualities of the Universally Auspicious One (Samantabhadra). T'an-luan teaches that it is by means of the power of this vow that the devotee who is to be born into the Pure Land does not need to gradually traverse all the different bhūmis in sequence. Rather than going from the first bhūmi to the second, from the second bhūmi to the third, and so on, the devotee is enabled to jump over all of the various practices of these different bhūmis, and speedily attain the stage of "only one more rebirth" (*i-sheng pu-ch'u*).

In a word then, T'an-luan borrowed heavily from the thought of Nāgārjuna, taking for his point of departure the problem of non-regression. Since it was his aim to attain Buddhahood as quickly as possible, he laid special emphasis on the eleventh and the twenty-second vows. But all of these benefits are benefits attained only after the devotee's rebirth in the Pure Land, so as a preparation for the attainment of these benefits, T'an-luan also stressed the eighteenth vow, the vow that enables the devotee to attain rebirth by calling on the name of Amitābha. T'an-luan then constructed his theory of the "other-power" of these Fundamental Vows, centering on these three vows. The path of difficult practice is a path centered on one's own power, and the cultivation of this path is not supported by any other power. The path of easy practice takes advantage of the power of the Buddha's Vows, and one is able to be reborn in the Pure Land and, sustained by the power of the Buddha, to speedily attain Buddhahood. In this manner, T'an-luan taught what he considered to be the true message of the Pure Land faith. In later years, the theory of the Fundamental Vows propounded by Shan-tao will be seen to derive directly from the theories first taught by T'an-luan.

#### 4. The Five Teachings of Nien-fo

In his teachings, T'an-luan stressed the power of the vows of the Buddha, and centered his theories on the concepts of birth, non-regression, and the speedy attainment of Buddhahood. Of these three, non-regression and the attainment of Buddhahood were automatically realized by virtue of the power of the vows of the Buddha. However, in order to attain rebirth, a specific type of religious practice was demanded of the devotee: these were the Five Nien-fo Teachings (*wu nien-fo men*), which were ultimately based on the *Wang-sheng lun* of Vasubandhu.

These five are: "Prostrations" (*li-pai men*), "Singing Praises" (*tsan-t'an men*), "Making Vows" (*tso-yuan men*), "Insight Meditation" (*kuan-ts'a men*), and the "Transfer of Merits" (*hui-hsiang men*). The treatise attributed to Vasubandhu explains these practices, but T'an-luan explains them in greater detail, and gives many of his own opinions in these explanations.

“Prostrations” means that one should always turn his thoughts to the desire for rebirth and make prostrations to the Tathāgata Amitābha. T’an-luan’s understanding of this item does not differ from that of Vasubandhu.

“Singing Praises” means to recite the names of “the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light in all the Ten Directions” (*chin-shih-fang wu-ai-kuang ju-lai*: Amitābha). In explanation of this practice, the *Wang-sheng lun* states: “One’s verbal actions sing the praises of, and recite the Name of the Tathāgata. / The wisdom and glory of the Tathāgata / are the meaning of his Name; one should want to truly cultivate its aspects.” T’an-luan understands this passage as saying that light (the glory, Skt.: *ābha*) is the mark of the Buddha’s wisdom, so he is called “the mark of wisdom and glory.” This light illumines all the worlds in the ten directions. It removes the darkness of ignorance from all beings, and fulfills all the vows and aspirations of all creatures. Thus, if one truly cultivates this practice, and if one is in union (*hsiang-yin*, yogic union) with the meaning of the Name of the Tathāgata, the darkness of ignorance will be destroyed, and all aspirations will be satisfied. However, if beings should call on the Name, and their ignorance is not destroyed and their aspirations remain unsatisfied, this is only because they are not in union with the significance of the Name in their practice. They do not know that the Tathāgata is the “true aspect body” (*shih-hsing shen*), and that he is a form for the benefit of living beings (*wei-wu shen*). Furthermore, it is because their faith is not honest, sometimes being there and sometimes not: their faith is not one-pointed and definitive, and is not continuous, being interrupted by other thoughts. For these reasons, then, their practice is not correct, and they are unable to attain a yogic union with the significance of the Name of the Buddha. If, however, the devotee’s faith is sincere, if it is definitive and continuous, he will be able to attain a yogic union with the significance of the Buddha’s name, and will be able to fulfill his every aspiration.

This theory owes much to the *Ta-chih-tu lun*. In the thirty-fourth volume of the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, it is taught that the Buddha has two bodies or modes of appearance. First, there is the body arisen from Dharmatā (*fa-hsing sheng-shen fo*). Second, there the transformation body manifested, in either a superior or an inferior manner, in accord with the world in which it arises (*sui-shih chien-yü lieh hsien-hua fo*). The first type of Buddha, the body arisen from Dharmatā, is without limits, and is able to fulfill all aspirations. It is taught that if one but hears the Name of this Buddha, one will be able to attain enlightenment. Since the Buddha Amitābha is the Buddha whose body has arisen from Dharmatā, when one truly (correctly) cultivates these practices, all of one’s aspirations should be fulfilled.

The *Wang-sheng lun* also has the passage: “With oneness of mind I go for refuge to the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light, which fills all the ten directions.” If one’s faith is definitive and continuous, one will be in a yogic

union with the significance (the light) of the Name of Amitābha, and will be able to destroy the darkness of ignorance.

Of these various theories, the teaching that one's faith must be "definitive and continuous" (*hsin-hsin ch'üeh-ting hsiang-hsu*) was later elaborated by Shan-tao, and came to be regarded by him as the primary cause (*ch'eng-yin*) for one's rebirth into the Pure Land. Nevertheless, this portion of the explanation is T'an-luan's own understanding of the problem, and we would do well not to consider this theory as part of the original intention of the *Wang-sheng lun*. In any case, the phrase in the section on "Singing Praises"—"one should want to truly cultivate its aspects"—is parallel to similar phrases in other sections. For example, in the section "Making Vows", we have "one should want to truly cultivate śamatha," and in the section "Insight Meditation," we have "one should want to truly cultivate vipaśyana." From these remarks we can clearly see that, according to T'an-luan, the purport of these passages is that one should want to correctly cultivate the religious practice of yogic union. If this is the case, then the Chinese phrase *hsiang-ying* must be considered a translation of the Sanskrit word *yoga*. The sense of this section, then, is that singing the praises of Amitābha is for the purpose of correctly cultivating the religious practice of a type of yoga.

There are four types of yoga (union): yoga with respect to the external sphere of sense perception (*viśaya*), yoga with respect to the religious practice (*cārya*), yoga with respect to the resultant state (*phala*), and yoga with respect to the Teaching (*deśanā*). Singing the praises of Amitābha's qualities corresponds to the yoga of the resultant state. The practice of śamatha and vipaśyana is the yoga with respect to religious practice. The passage describing the ornaments of the Pure Land corresponds to the yoga with the *viśaya*. The whole of the five nien-fo teachings is largely arranged as the yoga with respect to the teaching. We have already discussed this in detail in the thirteenth chapter of my *Jōdo-kyō gairon* (An Outline of the Pure Land Teachings), and so will not go into it here. We must conclude in any case, that T'an-luan devised the teaching of the yogic correspondence of the significance of the Name (light) because he was dissatisfied with the explanation given by Vasubandhu.

The third teaching, that of "Making Vows," means that the devotee, with one-pointedness of mind and a full and exclusive concentration of thought, makes the vow to attain rebirth in the Pure Land; he correctly cultivates stilling of the mind, or śamatha. T'an-luan explains this word "stilling" as "the stilling of evil," the ending of evil deeds. He divides this into three aspects. First, if one thinks only of the Buddha Amitābha with one-pointedness of mind, and so desires to be reborn in the Pure Land, the Name of this Buddha and the Name of his land are able to put an end to all manner of evil. Second, since the Pure Land of Sukhāvati transcends the Three Dhātus, if one is reborn into this land, all the evils generated by his

body, speech, or mind, will automatically be stilled. Third, the power of the Tathāgata Amitābha, which is maintained through his enlightenment, will naturally still the striving after the Two Vehicles (that is, striving for the stage of Arhat or Pratyekabuddha) on the part of those beings who are reborn in the Pure Land. These three types of stilling all arise from the true and actual (*ju-shih*) meritorious qualities of the Tathāgata, and so the text speaks of the correct or true cultivation of the practice of śamatha.

The fourth teaching is that of "Insight Meditation." This means that with "right thought" (*ch'eng-nien*, part of the Eightfold Path), one is to visualize or meditate upon the twenty-nine different types of adornments of the Pure Land. That is, one should correctly cultivate the practice of vipaśyana, or insight. T'an-luan divides this vipaśyana into two different types. First, in this world the devotee should direct his thought to, and visualize the qualities of the ornaments of the Pure Land. Since these qualities are real and true (*ju-shih*), the person who cultivates this visualization will also attain (through yogic union) these true qualities, and thus will certainly attain birth in the Pure Land. Second, when one is reborn in the Pure Land, he will then be able to see Amitābha, and a Bodhisattva who has not yet been awakened to his own pure mind will be able, exactly as the Bodhisattvas of pure mind, to realize his own Dharmakāya. This is why the author speaks of the correct (*ju-shih*) cultivation of the practice of Vipāśyana. In his explanation of the word śamatha as "putting an end to evil," and not as mental stilling, he was clearly in opposition to the accepted understanding of this word. This is also the case with his understanding of the word Vipāśyana as meaning to see the Buddha after one had attained rebirth in the Pure Land. Both of these explanations are at variance with the understanding of the original author of the *Wang-sheng lun*, Vasubandhu. Rather, we must understand that T'an-luan is concerned primarily with the Buddha himself, and with the power inherent in the Buddha and his Name, and that he explains the whole of this text in this light. Although there are passages which are inconsistent with the meaning of the original text, T'an-luan is himself consistent throughout the whole of his commentary.

The fifth teaching is that of the "Transfer of Merits." This means that the devotee transfers the merits that he has accumulated through the practice of "the roots of good," his good deeds, not for the attainment of his own personal enjoyment, but for the relief of the sufferings of all sentient beings. He should desire to take all beings to himself so they may be reborn into the Pure Land with him.

T'an-luan also divides the transfer of merits into two different aspects: "The aspect of going" (*wang-hsiang*), and "the aspect of returning" (*huang-hsiang*). The "aspect of going" means that one gives his own stock of merits to all sentient beings, with the vow that he may, together with them, be reborn in the Pure Land. The "aspect of returning" means that, after he has been born in the Pure Land, he attains śamatha and vipaśyana. Then, if he

attains success (*siddhi*) in the power of expedient means, he will return to this Saha world to work for the conversion of all sentient beings, so that together they may follow the path of the Buddha.

The intention to transfer these merits (the *hui-hsiang hsin*) is none other than the “unsurpassed Bodhicitta” (*wu-shang p’u-t’i-hsin*) spoken of in the *Wu-liang-shou ching*, in the passage describing the three types of persons who are reborn into the Pure Land. This unsurpassed Bodhicitta is identical with the aspiration to attain Buddhahood (the *yuan tso-fo hsin*). This aspiration to attain Buddhahood is identical with the thought to save all beings (the *tu chung-sheng hsin*), and the thought to save all beings is identical to taking all beings to oneself and causing them to be reborn in a land that has a Buddha. Consequently, if one desires to be reborn in the Pure Land of Sukhāvati, one must generate this Bodhicitta. If one does not generate this Bodhicitta, but seeks rebirth in this Pure Land only in order to enjoy the pleasures of this land, then, it is argued, he will not be able to do so. In other words, if one does not generate Bodhicitta, one will not be able to be reborn in the Pure Land. The teaching of the necessity of the Bodhicitta for rebirth is termed “the theory of the Bodhicitta being the primary cause” (*p’u-t’i-hsin ch’eng-yin shou*; Japanese: the *bodai-shin shōin setsu*).

In this way, then, T’an-luan taught that all of these five Nien-fo teachings constitutes the means by which the devotee could attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Borrowing from the ideas of Vasubandhu’s *Wang-sheng lun*, it appears that he taught that the most essential of these five teachings was the fourth teaching, that of insight meditation (*kuan-ts’a*). However, as we have mentioned above, he firmly believed in and taught the importance of the “easy practice of calling on the Name” (*ch’eng-ming i-hsing*), a teaching based ultimately on the *Shih-chu p’i-p’o-sha lun*. T’an-luan thus stressed the recitation of the Name of the Tathāgata in the second teaching, that of “singing the praises” of the Buddha. He laid great stress on the calling on, or the recitation of, the Name of the Buddha, for he believed that the very Name itself contained a profound number of merits, and exhorted Pure Land devotees to hear it frequently, and to believe in it.

In the beginning of his *Wang-sheng lun chu*, T’an-luan says that the Name of the Buddha Amitābha constitutes the “nature” (*t’i*) of the *Wu-liang-shou ching*. He explains that the Name of the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light possesses the “function” (*yung*) of destroying the darkness of ignorance. Also, the Name of the Tathāgata and the name of his land (Sukhāvati) are able to put an end to all forms of evil. Additionally, even if the devotee has transgressions and impurities from countless numbers of births and deaths, when he hears the “highest, unarisen, pure and pear-like gem of the Name of the Tathāgata Amitābha, and when this Name is cast into his defiled mind, his transgressions will be extinguished from thought

to thought, his mind will become pure, and he will attain rebirth." His *Wu-liang-shou ching feng-tsan* also states that

If all who hear the meritorious Name of Amitābha  
but have faith in, and take joy in what they have heard,  
and if for one instant of thought they have utmost sincerity,  
and if they transfer these merits and desire rebirth, then they shall  
attain rebirth.

T'an-luan taught that ten continuous recitations (*shih-nien hsiang-hsü*) constitute the cause by which one attains rebirth. He based this on two passages. First, there are the words of the eighteenth vow in the *Wu-liang-shou ching*, "If one is not reborn into the Pure Land with but ten recitations, then I shall not attain to Supreme Enlightenment." Second, there is the passage describing the lowest rank of the lowest grade of rebirth in the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching*. This latter states that if one recites "Na-wu O-mi-t'o Fo" ten times, all his transgressions will be extinguished and he will attain birth. T'an-luan interpreted this phrase as signifying that the work necessary for birth had been accomplished.

As he states in the first volume of his *Wang-sheng lun chu*, the word *nien* (here "recitation") signifies calling to remembrance (*i-nien*) the Buddha Amitābha. This is further divided into its "general aspect" (*tsung-hsiang*) and its "specific aspect" (*pieh-hsiang*). Whichever of these two one chooses to visualize, he is not supposed to have any other thoughts in his mind. It is these ten continuous thoughts which T'an-luan terms "the ten recitations," and this is also the case for ten continuous recitations.

In illustration of this one-pointedness of mind, T'an-luan employs, in his *Lüeh-lun An-lo ching-t'u i*, the example of "taking off one's clothes in crossing the river." Suppose that there is a man walking through a deserted land, and bandits rush upon him, intent upon killing him. He begins to flee, but suddenly in front of him appears a river that he must cross. If he crosses the river, he will escape the danger of the bandits: so this person is concerned only with a way to cross the river, and no other thoughts preoccupy him. He thinks, "When I get to the bank of the river, should I throw myself into the river with my clothes on, or should I take them off? If I go into the river with my clothes on, I shall perhaps drown, but if I try to take my clothes off, I probably will not have the time to do so." At the time, this person has only the thought of how to cross the river, and he has no other thoughts. It is in this manner, then, that the devotee should with singleness of mind think on the Buddha Amitābha, and his mind should be interrupted with no other thoughts: when ten such thoughts succeed one another, this is what is termed "the ten continuous thoughts." This also applies to the recitation of the Name of the Buddha, or the visualization of the major and minor marks of the Buddha. In both of these cases the

devotee should exclusively and totally concentrate his mind, and should have no other thoughts in his mind, and if ten such thoughts succeed one another, this is termed “the ten thoughts or recitations.” If in this manner he concentrates his mind and visualizes the marks of the Buddha, etc., the devotee will be unable to know just how many thoughts have elapsed, since he will not be concerned with any other thoughts, such as counting the thoughts from one to ten. But if initially he remembers the Buddha, and then thinks of something else, and then thinks on the Buddha again, and then thinks of another thing, he will in this manner be able to know the number of his thoughts, but his thoughts will be interrupted, and so these thoughts cannot be termed continuous.

In opposition to this, however, T’an-luan holds that these full ten thoughts (*chü-tsu shih-nien*) signify the completion of the work or practice necessary for rebirth, so it is not absolutely necessary for the devotee himself to know the number of his thoughts. The cicada is born in the summer and dies in this same summer, so he does not know spring or autumn (the passage of time, a quotation from *Chuang-tzu*). However, if someone who does know the passage of longer periods of time views the cicada, it becomes clear to the viewer that his lifespan is very short. In this same way, then, we unenlightened beings are unable to know the successful completion of these ten thoughts, but when we are viewed by someone who has attained the supernormal psychic powers (*ṛddhi*), it is clear to him whether we have done so or not. The devotee need only recollect the Buddha with one-pointedness of mind, with a mind undisturbed by any other thing, and he need only continuously accumulate such thoughts. If, however, he feels the need to know the number of thoughts that he has accumulated, T’an-luan teaches that there is a special method for knowing their number, but this method is only transmitted orally, and cannot be written down. Based on this, then, T’an-luan lays great stress on the continuation of concentrated thoughts, for this constitutes the essential truth of the completion of the work necessary for rebirth.

## 5. Amitābha and the Pure Land

In the period in which T’an-luan lived, there had not yet developed any teachings or theories with respect to the classification of the Pure Lands. Drawing on the teachings of the *Wang-sheng lun* and the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, T’an-luan states that the Pure Land of Amitābha transcends the Three Dhātus. The *Lüeh-lun* states that the land of Sukhāvati is not included within any of these Three Dhātus, for this is the teaching of the *Ta-chih-tu lun*. And why is this the case? It is not within *kāmadhātu* (the realm of desire) since there is no desire in Sukhāvati. On the other hand, it is a real abode, a *bhūmi*, so it is not included within the *rūpadhātu* (the realm of

form). Finally, because there are shapes and colors in the Pure Land, it is not included within the *ārūpyadhātu* (the formless realm).

The *Wang-sheng lun* contains a passage stating that “it far transcends the realms of rebirth of the Three Dhātus.” T’an-luan comments on this passage in the first volume of his *Wang-sheng lun chu*. He states that while viewing these Three Dhātus, the Buddha saw them all to be illusory and unsubstantial, constantly revolving and endless in and of themselves, like a caterpillar in its wanderings, and like a cocoon enmeshing itself in its own bonds. For this reason, the Buddha initially gave rise to these pure qualities. Taking compassion on the living beings who were bound in these Three Dhātus and subject to perverted views and much impurity, so the Buddha wished to establish a place that was not illusory and insubstantial, nor in a constant state of Samsaric flux and endlessly cyclical. In short, he desired a place that was pleasurable (*sukhā*) and pure, and it is for this reason that he gave rise to these qualities of pure adornment.

Furthermore, T’an-luan does not list any names for the various bodies of the Buddha—Sambhogakāya, Nirmanakāya, etc. In his *Wang-sheng lun chu*, T’an-luan says that the Bodhisattva Dharmākara attained the stage of non-regression (*anutpādadharmakṣānti*) in the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja. His stage of spiritual development at this time was that of the Ārya-gotra, “the clan of the Āryans” (he was now bound for eventual full enlightenment). In this Ārya-gotra, he set up forty-eight vows, which in turn gave rise to the Pure Land. This land was attained while he was still in the causal state (the state of a Bodhisattva, and not a Buddha).

In his *Lüeh-lun An-lo ching-t’u i*, T’an-luan further writes that the Bodhisattva Dharmākara made these great vows in the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja, taking for his purview all the different Buddha Lands. These vows were completed during the course of numberless *asamkhyeya* kalpas, during which time, too, he cultivated all the Pāramitās, eventually perfecting good and attaining unsurpassed Bodhi. This Pure Land was thus something attained by means of a specific karmic action, and for this reason, this Pure Land is not included within any of the Three Dhātus. Based on this, then, T’an-luan without doubt holds that the Buddha Amitābha was a Sambhogakāya, and that his Pure Land was a Sambhoga Land.

Chi-tsang, in his *Kuan-ching i-shu*, says that a master (or masters?) of the north holds that Amitābha’s Pure Land is not included within any of the Three Dhātus. Instead, the claim is that the Bodhisattva Dharmākara made his vows while in the stage of Dharmakāya, a stage above the eighth bhūmi. It was by means of these vows that he created his Pure Land, termed a Sambhoga Land. This North Chinese master may, of course, be T’an-luan.

T’an-luan was also the first to attempt to reconcile two contradictory teachings within the Pure Land corpus. The *Wu-liang-shou ching* says that countless numbers of (Hinayāna) śrāvakas dwell in Amitābha’s Pure Land.



In apparent contradiction, the *Wang-sheng lun* teaches that beings in (lit.: the seeds of) the Two Vehicles (*śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*) are not born into the Pure Land. T'an-luan attempts a reconciliation on two points: first, in this world of the five impurities, the one (the One Vehicle teaching) is divided into three (the Three Vehicles). In the Pure Land, these five impurities do not exist, so there is no distinction between these Three Vehicles, and beings in the two lower vehicles therefore do not dwell in the Pure Land. When the *Wu-liang-shou ching* says that *śrāvakas* dwell in the Pure Land, this is referring only to the Arhats (those who have reached the goal of the *śrāvaka* path), and does not refer to *real śrāvakas*. The Arhat has cut off the defilements (*fan-nao; kleśas*), and is no longer reborn in any of the Three Dhātus, but has not yet—which is outside of the Three Dhātus—and it is here that he must now continue to seek out unsurpassed Bodhi. When the Arhat is born into the Pure Land, he merely keeps his original name of “*śrāvaka*” without actually being one.

The second point that T'an-luan makes is that the seeds (*chung-tzu; bījas*) of the Two Vehicles do not arise in the Pure Land. Thus the *Wang-sheng lun* can say that the “seeds of the Two Vehicles do not arise” (*erh-ch'eng chung pu-sheng*) in the Pure Land. However, this does not prevent beings in the Two Vehicles here on earth from being reborn in the Pure Land. For example, the orange tree does not produce any fruit in North China, but its fruit can be seen in the market places of South China. In this way, the seeds (beings) of the Two Vehicles do not arise in the Pure Land, but this does not mean that beings who are *śrāvakas* in this world cannot go to the Pure Land. In this hypothesis, then, real *śrāvakas* are allowed to dwell in the Pure Land. This problem was also examined in later years by Shan-tao, as well as by various other masters. It is clearly Vasubandhu's teaching in the *Wang-sheng lun* that the Pure Land is the abode of Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas only, and that there are no *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* there under any guise. Despite this, a large number of these masters adopted this latter explanation, holding that actual *śrāvakas* dwelt in the Pure Land.

