

Where is the Pure Land?: Controversy in Chinese Buddhism on the Nature of Pure Land

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BACKGROUND

According to the Pure Land sutras, Sukhāvati Pure Land is a realm located billions of Buddha lands to the west, established by Amitābha (Ch. O-mi-t'o; Jpn. Amida) Buddha as a result of his compassionate bodhisattva vows to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment.¹ The sutras depict Sukhāvati in glorious splendor, describing the bejewelled ground, trees, lakes and palaces, where mellifluous music is heard, and where the majestic appearances of Amitābha (or Amitāyus) and his attendant bodhisattvas can be seen.² Appealing to both monks and laity alike, the sutras exhort aspirants for rebirth in the Pure Land to engage in a broad range of practices which include meditation, precepts, virtuous acts, *stūpa* building and contemplation. Those reborn in the Pure Land, an ideal environment in contrast to this world for consummating their practices, are assured of not retrogressing to lower spiritual levels and of realizing the ultimate Mahayana goal of perfect enlightenment (*saṃyaksambodhi*).

In China from the mid-sixth to early ninth century, known as the "golden age" of Pure Land Buddhist doctrinal development, the idea of rebirth in the Pure Land came under attack from other Buddhist schools, notably by Ch'an (Jpn. Zen) and Maitreya (Jpn. Mikoku) followers. The Pure Land proponents vigorously defended its position by referring to earlier Indian Mahayana concepts and scriptural authority. These controversies afford us with a glimpse at the process of refining and clarification that the early Pure

Land Buddhists went through in their own understanding of the nature of Pure Land. Some of the issues are just as alive today as they were 1,400 years ago, particularly the question concerning the location of the Pure Land to which this paper is devoted.

The polemics as to "where is the Pure Land?" centered upon two conflicting interpretations of the Pure Land, which this paper will refer to as "objective" and "subjective." There are other related sets of terms that characterize this relationship, for example, form and formless, mythological and demythological, celestial and psychological, futuristic and present, transcendent and immanent, phenomenal and noumenal, prescriptive and descriptive, poetic and philosophical, ontic and epistemological, and hypostatized and non-substantial. Each of these carry varying shades of meaning and perspective to express a particular dimension of the relationship between the two interpretations of Pure Land. I have, however, for this paper chosen "objective" and "subjective" on account of their comprehensive character and relevancy to the subject matter at hand.

The objective position, based on a *literal* reading of the Pure Land sutras, sees Sukhāvati as an independent realm outside the mind, epitomized by the stock phrase, "There exists a realm called Sukhāvati billions of Buddha lands to the west."³ It denotes a specific location in the universe where practitioners actually go to be reborn upon death.

Sukhāvātī is just one of the billions of such lands that fill the universe in the ten directions, among which are included other Buddha lands such as Buddha Akṣobhya's Abhiratī and Buddha Bhaisajyaguru's Vaidūryanirbhāsā. The subjective interpretation, in contrast, regards Pure Land as an analogical expression of the purified or enlightened mind of the bodhisattvas and rejects the idea that it has an independent existence outside the mind. The scriptural authority most often cited in support of this view as noted also below, is the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*.

CH'AN (ZEN) CRITICISM

In the *Platform Sutra*, a major Ch'an text attributed to Hui-nêng (638-713), is the following dialogue between a Ch'an master and his disciple:

The prefect bowed deeply and asked, "I notice that some monks and laymen always invoke the Buddha Amitābha and desire to be reborn in the West. I beg of you to explain whether one can be born there or not, and thus resolve my doubts."

The Master said: "Prefect, listen and I shall explain things for you. At Śravastī the World-Honored One preached of the Western Land in order to convert people, and it is clearly stated in the sutra, '(The Western Land) is not far.' It was only for the sake of people of inferior capacity that the Buddha spoke of farness; to speak of nearness is only for those of superior attainments. . . . The deluded person concentrates on Buddha and wishes to be born in the other land; the awakened person makes pure his own mind. Therefore the Buddha said: 'In accordance with the purity of the mind is the Buddha land pure.'"⁴

Based on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, a

non-Pure Land but a major Mahayana scripture, this position regards Pure Land as none other than an expression of the enlightened state, and refutes the assertion that Pure Land has an ontic existence in the distant corner of the universe. This finds full support as we read the entire section of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* passage cited by the Ch'an master, "If a Bodhisattva desires to obtain Pure Land, he must purify his mind. In accordance with the purity of the mind, the Buddha Land is pure."⁵ The Master in the *Platform Sutra* proceeds to elaborate, "There is no doubt that the Western [Pure] Land can be seen here in China."⁶ D.T. Suzuki, perhaps the most famous modern Zen interpreter in the West, echoes the same view:

The Pure Land is not many millions and millions of miles away to the west. According to my explanation, the Pure Land is right here, even in this very hall (New York Buddhist Academy in the Spring of 1958). Amida is not presiding over a Pure Land beyond our reach. His Pure Land is this dirty earth itself.⁷

Also, for the Ch'an master, the objective Pure Land that existed "far to the West" was a provisional teaching meant to convert people of inferior capacity. Such a view of Pure Land from the Ch'an position was acceptable only as a provisional position but not as the ultimate teaching. The Pure Land proponents did not object to this. Concreteness, they would assert, was the very hallmark of the Pure Land teaching. The anonymous Pure Land Buddhist author of the *Ten Doubts Concerning the Pure Land*, compiled in the late eighth century, expresses this in the metaphor of constructing a house, a favorite among Pure Land advocates. The metaphor extolls the effectiveness of a tangible example that rests firmly on the ground but not in thin air.

The *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* states, "Even though the Buddha knows that the Bud-

dha Land and sentient beings are empty, he perpetually establishes the Pure Land in order to convert the multitude." Also, the [*Ta-chih tu-lun*] says, "A man who in constructing a mansion is successful when he builds it on a vacant ground, but fails when he tries to build it in space."

In the same way, the [Buddhas] always rely on the two truths to explain ultimate reality without destroying the provisional name.⁸

However, the subjective Ch'an interpretation of the Pure Land did not go unchallenged. One of the influential Pure Land figures of the mid T'ang was Hui-jih or T'zū-min (d. 748), whose faith was strengthened by a revelation of sorts in Gandhara during his thirteen years in India.⁹ In his only surviving work *A Collection of Scriptural Passages on the Pure Land Teaching*, Hui-jih responds to a host of Ch'an criticisms by citing an array of sutras and commentaries in support of the Pure Land position. In it, presumably a Ch'an antagonist is quoted:

There is a group of monks and nuns and laymen and lay women who truly believe that the Pure Land really exists. The Pure Land is none other than the time when the mind is pure. There does the Western Pure Land exist separate [from the mind]?¹⁰

Hui-jih refutes the criticism by reminding the antagonist of the traditional Buddhist acceptance of 84,000 equally legitimate paths for attaining the Buddhist goal. The Pure Land path is not only one of them but also a superb and important one at that. Hui-jih continues the argument primarily on the basis of the swiftness of Pure Land teaching in leading all beings to Bodhi, thereby enlisting a common Pure Land theme of universal salvation and speedy attainment frequently cited by the Pure Land proponents.¹¹

A more convincing rebuttal than Hui-jih's is found in the second of the 10 doubts, cast presumably by a Ch'an adherent, in the *Ten Doubts Concerning the Pure Land*:

Since *dharmas* (fundamental psycho-philosophical elements that constitute human experience) are by nature empty and essentially do not arise, they are equanimous and tranquil. But now you have abandoned this and seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha; how could it not go against the truth? Moreover, the [*Vimalakīrti-sūtra*] says, "if one seeks the Pure Land, first purify the mind because when the mind is pure the Buddha Land is pure." How do you reconcile this?¹²

To this, the Pure Land author responds:

You claim we are not in accord with the truth when we seek the Western Land of Amitābha's Pure Land since we seek one [position] while abandoning another. But you also are at fault for not being in keeping with the truth, for in adhering to your position of not seeking the Western Land, you have abandoned one position while becoming attached to another position.¹³

In the classic Mādhyamika mode of reasoning that rejects any and all positions (*dr̥ṣṭi*) as ultimately not real, he attempts to disqualify the Ch'an argument by rendering it simply another self-serving, limited position. As one limited position among equals, the Ch'an position lacks the authority and justification for nullifying the Pure Land position. Then he proceeds to say, in so many words, that his position transcends all positions in the same manner expounded in the *Diamond Sutra*; when one aspires to be reborn in the Pure Land, he understands the essence of rebirth to be "non-birth," which is another way of expressing the extraordinary nature of rebirth in the Pure Land.¹⁴ His argu-

ment does not appear convincing, for he unilaterally elevated his position to a level which only those with wisdom are capable of comprehending but not the ordinary unenlightened beings, the very audience of Pure Land teaching.

While we must reserve judgement, for another occasion, on the effectiveness of the refutations against Ch'an criticism, it is clear that the Pure Land apologists did not subscribe to the subjective interpretation of the Pure Land as advocated by the Ch'an proponents. However, this did not then imply that the Pure Land advocates subscribed to the opposite view of an objective Pure Land. This becomes more evident as we now look at their controversy with the followers of Maitreya Buddha.

AMITABHA'S SUKHĀVĀTĪ VERSUS MAITREYA'S TUṢĪTA

Until the early T'ang period, Maitreya worship—at least in North China—had competed and even exceeded Amitābha worship in popularity. This observation rests primarily on tabulations of dated Buddha images found in the caves of North China, such as Lung-mên. They revealed that images of Maitreya far exceeded those of Amitābha during the Six Dynasties and Sui periods (ca. 386?-618). Not until well into the T'ang period (ca. 700) did the number of Amitābha images come to surpass those of Maitreya.¹⁵

The competition was fueled partly by the tendency during this period, despite the distinct historical and doctrinal background of the two traditions, to regard both Maitreya and Amitābha worship as one and the same practice. The syncretic tendency is supported by numerous inscriptions on stone images that express concurrently salutations to Maitreya and the desire to be reborn in Amitābha's Land.¹⁶ The rivalry was intensified in part to the elevation, by some, of Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven to the status of a Pure Land, though

this deviated from the Indian Understanding.¹⁷ According to the original Indian Buddhist cosmology, Tuṣita is one of the heavens of the Desire Realm within the Sahā World-Realm (*lokadhātu*), the "galaxy" in which we dwell. However, Sukhavatī Pure Land exists far beyond the Sahā World-Realm.

During the seventh century, Pure Land advocates such as Tao-ch'ō (Jpn. Dōshaku, 562-645), Chia-tsai (Jpn. Kazai, ca. seventh century), and Huai-kan (Jpn. Ekan, d. 701) asserted the superiority of Sukhāvātī over Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven. Their arguments relative to the present discussion can be summarized as follows:

1) While Sukhāvātī transcends the Sahā World-Realm, Tuṣita (as one of the heavens of the Desire Realm) still lies within the Sahā World-Realm.

2) While the life span in the Sukhāvātī is limitless like that of the Buddhas and transcends *samsāra* (realm of births and deaths), life span in Tuṣita lasts 4,000 heaven years and at the end of that time, one is forced back into the stream of *samsāra*.

3) While Sukhāvātī is a realm of non-retrogression, Tuṣita is not. Rebirth in Sukhāvātī assures not only attainment of Buddhahood but also no retrogression to lower levels on the cultivational path (*mārga*).¹⁸

The argument for the superiority of Sukhāvātī rested primarily on the Sukhāvātī's transcendence of Sahā World-Realm in contrast to Tuṣita Heaven which occupied a specific locus within the Sahā World-Realm. The Pure Land proponents stressed Tuṣita's proximity and affinity to the human realm in order to point out Tuṣita's ties to *samsāra*. Chia-ts'ai, for example, claims in an interesting analogy that in Tuṣita, boys are reborn on the laps of their fathers and girls on the laps of their mothers, while in the

Sukhāvātī one is reborn among the lotus flowers.¹⁹ The symbolism of mother and father was intended to strengthen the fact that life in Tuṣita does not differ qualitatively from the human realm.

RECONCILIATION OF THE EXTREMES

We have seen the Pure Land proponents reject what they perceive to be two extreme views of Pure Land: the subjective and the objective. If the Pure Land is neither, how was it understood? One of the principle heuristic methods was to employ a major Mahayana concept of the two-fold truths: ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) and conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*). In this scheme, the Pure Land possessed both an ultimate as well as a conventional dimension. The ultimate dimension was none other than the ultimate realm (*tathatā, dharmatā*), which was absent in Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven as we examined above. On the other hand, the conventional dimension proved to be the objective Pure Land, the very interpretation which the Ch'an Buddhists criticized.

The Pure Land commentators expended much energy in trying to reconcile these two dimensions. T'an-luan expressed this mode of existence as "subtle" (*wei*) and explained, "Though it is extra-phenomenal, it exists."²⁰ The question that now demands asking concerns the manner in which the Pure Land exists extra-phenomenally. Shan-tao expressed this relationship in the concept of "Giving Direction and Establishing Form" (*shih-fang li-hsiang*; Jpn. *shihō rissō*).²¹ T'an-luan called it the "Interpenetration of the Expanded and the Essential" (*kuang-lüeh hsiang-ju*; Jpn. *kōryaku sōnyū*). The expanded refers to the 17 decorated forms of the Pure Land, Amitabha and the two Bodhisattvas described in the *Treatise on the Pure Land* attributed to Vasubandhu. These are of forms that are in accord with the emotional and intellectual comprehensive ability of the unenlightened.

The essential refers to "One Dharma Phrase" (*i-fa-chu*; Jpn. *ichihokku*), which constitutes another term for the ultimate truth. The two are mutually dependent. The decorated forms of Pure Land (expanded) and the ultimate truth (essential) are mutually dependent. The former emerges based on the latter, while the latter is expressed through the former.²²

From the ultimate standpoint, the Pure Land is not to be taken as an existent place, in the way ordinary beings are predisposed to understanding it. The admonition against such a view of the Pure Land is found in the following passage:

A foolish person in hearing "birth" [in the Pure Land] understands it as "birth" and in hearing "non-birth" understands it as "non-birth." He, thus, fails to realize the identity of "birth" and "non-birth" and of "non-birth" and "birth."²³

T'an-luan, almost two centuries earlier, similarly described, "That [Pure] Land is the Realm of Non-birth."²⁴

Having said that, however, the Pure Land proponents acknowledge that the capacity of ordinary, unenlightened people is such that they have no choice but to regard the Pure Land as ontically existent, namely, to take a literal reading of the *Larger* and *Smaller Sukhāvātī Sutra*. Tao-ch'o, for example, asked rhetorically:

If those of the lowest grade attain rebirth through reciting [the name of Amitabha] ten times, how can they possibly not grasp it as real birth?²⁵

The objective presentation of the Pure Land accords with the emotional and intellectual make-up of ordinary beings whose capacity affords only a literal understanding of the sutra description. What is often ignored is that for these seekers, initially at least, the ob-

jective Pure Land as described in the sutras was taken literally at face value as an absolute; for them there is no ultimate reality to be found "lurking behind" the Pure Land of cool breezes and bejewelled palaces. Direct insight into ultimate truth for them is beyond their ability, and only through their relationship with the Pure Land of form can the ultimate reality be realized.

But the question remains as to how beings are able to realize enlightenment through "grasping at forms" of Pure Land, which strikes as being antithetical to the fundamental Buddhist practice. Tao-ch'o again argues:

Therefore, although this is grasping onto form, such grasping does not constitute binding attachment. In addition, the form of the Pure Land being discussed here is identical to form without defilements, form that is true form. . . .²⁶

T'an-luan had earlier explained that, based on the theory of the "arising of *dharmatā*" as taught in the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, the Pure Land is a manifestation commensurate with ultimate reality, the *dharmatā*.²⁷ The Pure Land emerges based on ultimate reality, while the latter is expressed through the former. Hence, the "grasping at form" is permitted on the strength of the form being "form that is true form".

The mechanism of the soteriological process is explained by Tao-ch'o in an ingenious metaphor of fire and ice:

It is like lighting fire on top of ice. As the fire intensifies, the ice melts. When the ice melts, then the fire goes out.

Those of the lowest grade of rebirth who are intent on attaining rebirth based solely on the power of reciting the Buddha's name with the resolve to be reborn in his land, even though they do not

understand the birthlessness of the dharma nature, will attain the realm of birthlessness and will see the fire of rebirth spontaneously disappear at that time.²⁸

The fire and ice refer to the ignorant, passion-ridden people who aspire to be reborn in an existent, objective Pure Land. The melting of the ice refers to the soteriological process of their single-minded resolve to be reborn in Sukhāvati, which eventually leads them to the attainment of wisdom. This attainment automatically extinguishes the fire of the false notion that the aspirant actually is reborn in an objective Pure Land.

According to this explanation, an ordinary being is able to engage the ultimate realm without that person fully understanding the ultimate nature. This process skillfully utilizes the form (rooted in truth) to transcend form in order to enter the formless. When the formless is attained, the previous attachment to form disappears. The form is skillfully utilized so that the beings of low ability are catapulted to attain the realm of ultimate even though they themselves do not possess the wisdom about the nature of reality. The eminent Buddhist scholar Edward Conze has aptly described this process in terms of faith and wisdom:

As soon as we judge it by the standard of self-extinction, the "Buddhism of Faith" is in the direct line of Buddhist orthodoxy. Surrender in faith involves a high degree of extinction of separate selfhood, partly because one does not rely on oneself, or one's own power, partly because one sees the futility of all conscious and personal efforts and allows oneself to be 'carried' to salvation, and partly due to superior merit or wisdom. . . . For it must never be forgotten that that which is represented to the relatively ignorant in the form of a personal savior and of a paradise is exactly the same thing as that which is taught to the

relatively learned as the Absolute itself. . . . A sincere heart and belief, unaware of the merit of its sincerity, is all that is needed. The Buddha's demand that, in order to be saved, one should learn to do nothing in particular, is fulfilled in this way as perfectly as in any other.²⁹

In a sense the Pure Land proponents steered a middle path to advocate that Sukhāvātī Pure Land was not simply subjective (Zen position) or simply objective (Tuṣita Heaven). It could not simply be subjective because the Pure Land teaching was directed to those incapable of realizing enlightenment in the present life. Their aim in the Pure Land was the attainment of Buddhahood and was not an escape to an eternal paradise to enjoy the extension of pleasures of this life. In this respect, Pure Land Buddhists made no false claims of enlightenment in the present life and thus remained faithful to the Mahayana Buddhist goal. But at the same time, the Pure Land was more than just another celestial body for it was rooted and enveloped in ultimate reality. Thus, It was quality not found in Maitreya's Tuṣita, that allowed those reborn to transcend the cycle of births and deaths and be guaranteed Buddhahood.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM "PURE LAND"

These controversies in China were occasioned because each school assumed that their own version of the Pure Land was more authentic than the others', when in fact we now know that, besides those expounded by Amitābha, Ch'an and Maitreya advocates, other kinds of Pure Land also generated their followings in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in East Asia. First, some have regarded Grdhrākuṭa (the Vulture Peak where the Buddha preached in the *Lotus Sutra*) as a Pure Land. Second, the Pure Land that the Chinese Hua-yen and Japanese Kegon schools advocated is the Vairocana Buddha's Padmagarbha, in which the entire world is

enveloped in a lotus flower. Third, the Japanese Shingon school regarded the Gaṇḍhavyūha realm that appear in the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* as Buddha Mahāvairocana's Pure Land that was none other than our present Sahā realm. Fourth, Potalaka Mountain, where Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara dwells, is sometimes referred to as Pure Land. Unlike Sukhāvātī and other objective Pure Lands, all five are Pure Lands that are located primarily in the Sahā world.³⁰

The term "Pure Land" is an English rendering of a Chinese term "ching-t'u" (Jpn. *jōdo*), which has no one determinative Sanskrit original. The Chinese translators, including Kumārajīva (344-413), are believed to have coined the term based on the concept of "purification of the land," which found expression in such Sanskrit terms as *buddhakṣetra-parisuddhi* (the purification of the Buddha land), *parisuddham buddhakṣetram* (purified Buddha land) and *kṣetram parisodhayati* (to purify the land). The concept of the purification of the Buddha is found in the earliest Mahayana sutras including the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (in 8,000 verses) and *Lotus Sutra*. As an integral element in the bodhisattva practice, "purification" was achieved when a bodhisattva had expounded the teaching to lead all beings in his land (*kṣetra*) to enlightenment.³¹

It is often taken for granted that Amitābha's Sukhāvātī was a Pure Land from its origin, but the earliest Pure Land sutras do not refer to Sukhāvātī as a Pure Land. Apparently the identification of a Buddha land, Sukhāvātī, and Pure Land began in China among commentators of Pure Land scriptures. One of the earliest textual evidence for this occurs in T'an-luan's commentary, *Wang-shêng lun-chu* (Jpn. *Ōjōron-chu, Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth*) which speaks of a "Pure Land of Sukhāvātī" (*an-lo ching-t'u*; Jpn. *anraku jōdo*).³² This identification constituted a significant step in the development of the idea of Sukhāvātī, since

Buddha lands (*Buddha-kṣetra*) and Pure Land were two independent ideas.

Through this assimilation the Amitābha's Sukhāvātī gained depth and broadened its scope; for example, an idea originally relevant only in the Sahā World-Realm context was applied to a transcendent, celestial body. However, it also, as we witnessed in this paper, invited inevitable clashes with other Buddhist schools which had similarly integrated the idea of Pure Land into their own doctrinal framework. In essence, Amitābha's Pure Land was one of many forms of Pure Land that competed in China for acceptance and, supremacy at times, around the early Tang period.

POSTSCRIPT: SHINRAN'S VIEWS IN THE MODERN CONTEXT

From the standpoint of presenting the Pure Land as a soteriological concept in the modern Western context, new approaches and adaptations will undoubtedly become increasingly necessary. In order for the Pure Land to be a viable religious idea, I believe it must have the following qualities: 1) it maintains the objective dimension as a realm that transcends the present life, 2) it provides symbols and imagery that appeal to the modern mind, 3) it offers the subjective dimension so that the Pure Land can be identified in one form or another with the present life, and 4) it contains values that transcend individual needs to play a role for the collective good.

All four points are found, albeit in varying degrees, in the position reached by Shinran (1173-1261), the founder of Jōdo Shinshū of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Shinran arrived at a radical interpretation in the historical process of reconciliation and synthesis that was initiated by his Chinese predecessors some 600 years earlier. According to his view, Pure Land is identified with the ultimate reality itself, for he calls it the "Land of Immeasurable Light" and cites

passages that describe it as the "Land of Uncreated Nirvana."³³ While his Chinese predecessors had identified Sukhāvātī Pure Land with the nirvana on the level of ultimate truth, it took Shinran to present "Pure Land as nirvana" on the level of conventional truth for the benefit of ordinary, unenlightened beings.

The identification of the Pure Land with nirvana poses a challenge to the second point alluded above concerning the need for appropriate imagery and symbolism. It opens up more possibilities for presenting the Pure Land, unshackled by traditional scenes of Pure Land sutras. One such possibility would be to simply depict the Pure Land as a "realm of uncreated nirvana" in accord with Shinran's understanding, especially now that "nirvana" has earned its status as a standard English term and some understanding within the religious and learned circles in the West. I believe "nirvana" carries sufficient meaning for generating positive responses as a religious symbol, just as the mythic adornments had, in Shan-tao's words, "met the emotional and intellectual needs of the aspirants" of the traditional, largely agricultural Asian societies.

It must be qualified here that in presenting the Pure Land as a "realm of uncreated nirvana," it in no way implies that the modern aspirants realize nirvana or enlightenment in the *present* life. The aspirants continue to be "passion-filled, ignorant foolish beings" (*bonnō guzoku no bonbu*) while alive, until they enter Pure Land upon death.

There will be those who find this rationalized presentation emotionally unsatisfying and thus prefer the traditional presentation rich in imagery. For such people, Pure Land as nirvana can be presented, for example, as a "realm of ideal relationship." Pure Land Buddhism has regarded the Pure Land as an ideal forum for hearing the teaching and cultivating practices. Hence, rather than emphasizing its physical features, we may focus

on the supportive relationship among those reborn in the transcendent sangha. Liberated from the demands of self-preservation, physical needs and familial and social responsibilities, one overcomes self-centeredness in the Pure Land. Based on the absolute trust and respect for one another based on the newly-acquired other-centeredness, total harmony and mutual support prevail. Everyone works sincerely and earnestly for the enlightenment of all in accord with the yearning to liberate all beings, which is none other than the dynamic compassionate dimension of nirvana.

Needless to say, the Pure Land cannot fully be appreciated or understood apart from the soteriological process of a Jōdo Shinshū seeker. The Pure Land comes to hold a deep personal meaning only within the deep self-introspection and struggles of a sincere religious search, not as an outcome of a detached intellectual inquiry. In this context, Shinran advocated that with the realization in this life of *shinjin* (the mind of true faith and insight), the aspirants, upon death, no longer spent any time in the Pure Land for cultivation but immediately attain perfect enlightenment:

There is no discrimination based on hierarchical grades of rebirths in the purified recompensed land, established by [Amida's] great vow. In the moment [of rebirth] one immediately attains the highest true path.³⁴

His position, in one sense, can be interpreted to mean that for a person with *shinjin* the Pure Land *begins in this life*:

[The passage "Then they attain rebirth in the Pure Land"] means that when a person realizes *shinjin*, he is born immediately. To be born immediately is to dwell in the stage of non-retrogression. To dwell in the stage of non-retrogression is to become established in the stage of the truly settled.

This is also called the attainment of the equal of perfect enlightenment.³⁵

Further, for Shinran, the Pure Land is not an end in itself or an abode of eternal rest, but part of a universal process of saving all other sentient beings in the transmigratory cycle of birth and death. Although he does not describe in detail the mechanism of this process of returning from the Pure Land to the Saha World-Realm, Shinran speaks of the dynamics of the "phase of returning" (*gensō*) to fulfill the Mahayana ideal of working to benefit others. The Pure Land is, thus, the dynamic realm of enlightenment that encompasses both the present life and realm as well as the other realm in which the reborn become part of the compassionate primal vow (*hongan*) that not only originally established the Pure Land, but now relentlessly aspires to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment.

FOOTNOTES:

1. The primary Pure Land sutras are the so-called *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*, *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* and *Meditation Sutra*. Their Chinese translations are in *Taishō shinshū saizōkyō* Vol. 12, no. 360-367. Originally in these sutras, Sukhāvati as a Buddha land (*buddha-kṣetra*) is not regarded as a "Pure Land"; it is only in the hands of the commentators, beginning with T'an-luan (ca. mid-sixth century) that the two came to be identified. See below in the text for section "Historical Perspective and the Origin of the Term Pure Land" for detail. The use of the phrase "Sukhāvati Pure Land" thus follows the practice of the commentators. For best English translation of all three sutras, see F. Max Müller ed. *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* (1894. Reprint. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), Sacred Books of the East Series Vol. 49, pp. Part II, 1-107 and 161-201.

2. See Fujita Kotatsu, *Genshi Jōdoshisō*

no Kenkyū, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), pp. 307-309. These two names "Amitābha" (immeasurable light) and "Amitāyus" (immeasurable life) are used interchangeably to refer to the one and the same Buddha.

3. In the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*, *Taishō*. 12.270a5-6 and in *Smaller Sutra*, *Taishō*.12.346c10-11.

4. Philip Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 156-157.

5. *Taishō*. 14.538c5.

6. Yampolsky, p. 158.

7. Daisetz Suzuki, "Shin Buddhism: Part 1," *The Eastern Buddhist* 17-1 (Spring, 1985): 2.

8. *Taishō*.47.78a22-26.

9. Mochizuki Shinko, *Chūgoku Jōdo Kyōrishi* (1942. Reprint. Kyoto: Hozokan, 1964), pp. 260-261.

10. *Taishō*, 85.1236-1242.

11. For example, see *Taishō* 47.122c21-123a2; 128b12-c28.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 78a2-4.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 78a7-9.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 78a26-27.

15. Tsukamoto Zenryu, *Shina-bukkyō-shi Kenkyū: Hokugi-hen*, (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1942), pp. 564-595.

16. Matsumoto Bunzaburo, *Shina-bukkyō Ibutsu*, (Tokyo: Daichokoku, 1911), pp. 286-299. He cites numerous examples of stone engravings that reflect the syncretic view.

17. Ching-ying Hui-yüan, for example, in his encyclopedic *Ta-ch'êng I-chang* includes

the heavens (Tuṣita being one of the heavens) among the pure lands. *Taishō*, 44.834b5.

18. *Taishō*, 47.9bff; 100a-b; 53b.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.100b14-15.

20. *Ibid.*, 40.830a20.

21. *Ibid.*, 37.267b10.

22. *Ibid.*, 40.841b10-15.

23. *Ibid.*, 47.78a27-29.

24. *Ibid.*, 40.839b6.

25. *Ibid.*, 47.11c16-17.

26. *Ibid.*, 47.18c15-17.

27. *Ibid.*, 40.828cb27.

28. *Ibid.*, 47.11c27-12a2.

29. Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, (1951, Reprint. New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 159-160.

30. Kotatsu Fujita, "Pure and Impure Lands," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12 (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 91.

31. Fujita, "Pure and Impure Lands," p. 90; see also his *Genshi jōdoshisō no kenkyū*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), pp. 506-511.

32. *Taishō*.40.829a24. See Fujita, *Genshi jōdoshisō*, p. 507.

33. *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* Vol. 2, pp. 120:4 & 139:14; Shinran elsewhere states, "In arriving in the land of immeasurable light, one attains complete nirvana," pp. 35:5.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 73:13.

35. Yoshifumi Ueda, general editor, *Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone"*, Shin Buddhism Translation Series. (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1979), pp. 34-35.