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II. REVIEWS

The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yüan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra, by Kenneth K. Tanaka, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. 304 pages, Appendix, Notes, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

This book is an important study in the history of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. It clarifies the role of the oldest surviving commentary on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching* (*Visualization Sūtra*, *Contemplation Sūtra*, or *Meditation Sūtra*),¹ the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching i-shu*, compiled by the sixth century Buddhist exegete Ching-ying Hui-yüan (523–592). It corrects a biased assessment of Ching-ying Hui-yüan and of his relation to the better known Pure Land master Shan-tao (613–681). It raises several interesting issues in the history of Chinese Pure Land piety, some intentionally and some unintentionally. And it contributes an accurate and readable translation of an influential Chinese Buddhist text, Ching-ying Hui-yüan's commentary on the *Kuan ching*.

Ching-ying Hui-yüan was one of the most prominent clerics of his age. He is called Ching-ying Hui-yüan—Hui-yüan of Ching-ying Temple—to distinguish him from his more illustrious predecessor, Lu-shan Hui-yüan (334–416), Hui-yüan of Mount Lu. A disciple of Saṅgha Supervisor Fa-shang (495–580), Ching-ying Hui-yüan was a prolific writer and important thinker. His works include commentaries on a number of important texts such as the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrti*, the *Śrīmālādevī*, the *Sukhāvativyūha* and the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, and, of course, on the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching*. In addition, he compiled a large encyclopedia of Buddhist terms, the *Tā-ch'eng i-chang*. He survived the suppression of Buddhism during the years 577–580 to emerge as one of the so-called Six Worthies of the early Sui Dynasty (581–618). While Ching-ying Hui-yüan has traditionally been associated with the She-lun or Ti-lun schools, Tanaka maintains that this ascription is inaccurate and that he is more correctly described as an eclectic thinker interested in Yogācāra thought who preceded and provided a transition to the more narrowly focused founders of the Buddhist schools of the early T'ang period (618–906).

Although Tanaka translates the title of the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching* (“*Sūtra of Contemplation/Visualization on [the Buddha of] Immeasurable Life*”) as *Visualization Sūtra*, we will refer to this text

as the *Contemplation Sūtra*, a title used by Tanaka himself elsewhere (Fujita 1990).² Ching-ying Hui-yüan's *Commentary on the Contemplation Sūtra* is the oldest surviving commentary on this text, and is a work which, as Tanaka demonstrates, had a major impact on Pure Land devotionalism in China. It is one of two Pure Land works produced by Ching-ying Hui-yüan. The other, as mentioned above, is a commentary on the *Sukhāvativyūha* or *Larger Pure Land Sūtra*, or more exactly, on the fifth century translation of the *Sukhāvativyūha* titled *Wu-liang-shou ching*.

In spite of his impact on Chinese Pure Land piety, the character of and the motivation for Ching-ying Hui-yüan's interest in Pure Land devotionalism—a subordinate interest at most—remains obscure. According to Tanaka, Ocho Enichi and others have proposed that the severe persecution of Buddhism to which Hui-yüan was subjected convinced him of the arrival of the final age of the *dharma*, and that this stimulated his interest in Pure Land piety. Tanaka rejects this motivation, however, because Hui-yüan's writings do not express a belief in the advent of the final age of the *dharma*. Tanaka proposes instead that Hui-yüan's association with the Hui-kuang lineage helps account for his interest in Pure Land piety. Hui-kuang (468–537) was a disciple of Bodhiruci—the same Bodhiruci who converted the well-known Pure Land master T'an-luan (c. 488–554) to Pure Land faith—and a teacher of Fa-shang, Ching-ying Hui-yüan's teacher. Although both Fa-shang and Hui-yüan were more interested in Yogācāra teachings than any other, Hui-kuang apparently aspired to rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land, and Tanaka points out that Hui-kuang and his lineage had considerable interest as well in another important Pure Land text, the *Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-po-t'i-she yuan-sheng chieh* ("Discourse on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life and Verse on Rebirth") ascribed to Vasubandhu, the eminent Yogācāra master. Tanaka does not discuss, however, the character of Hui-yüan's Pure Land piety. We will return to this point below. (In passing, we should note that in his Glossary Tanaka mistakenly assigns the graphs for Hui-ch'ung to Hui-kuang. In fact, the whole sequence of graphs between "Hui-ch'ung" and "Hui-kuang" is misaligned.)

The major contribution of Tanaka's book is to show how Ching-ying Hui-yüan's *Commentary on the Contemplation Sūtra* enhanced the status of the *Contemplation Sūtra* and contributed substantially to the subsequent discourse on Pure Land themes derived from that *sūtra*. The *Contemplation Sūtra* is a well-known text, interesting for both its origins and contents. Tanaka, summarizing the researches of Fujita Kotatsu and Yamada Meiji, presents convincing evidence that it is an apocryphal work.³ Although Tanaka does not come to this conclu-

sion, it seems clear from his discussion of the research on the subject that this text was compiled in China by the Central Asian missionary-monk Kalayaśas and a Chinese assistant between 424 and 442, using several kinds of pre-existent Central Asian and Chinese materials. Tanaka points out that while this *sūtra* was widely used for liturgical purposes, prior to its treatment by Ching-ying Hui-yüan it had as yet attracted little scholarly interest. In the approximately one hundred years between its compilation and Hui-yüan's commentary it had received only the attention of T'an-luan, who refers to and discusses it several times in his commentary on the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life and Verse on Rebirth* of Vasubandhu, and of Ling-yu (518–605), who apparently authored a commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra* which may have preceded Hui-yüan's commentary but no longer survives.

The *Contemplation Sūtra* opens with a dramatic prologue on the tragic situation of Lady Vaidehi, presents Śākyamuni Buddha's instructions to her on forming thirteen contemplations on various aspects of the Pure Land, Amitābha Buddha and his *bodhisattvas*, and then presents three additional "contemplations," which are actually descriptions of the rebirths into the Pure Land of nine grades of persons. The first thirteen contemplations are instructions in contemplative *buddha*-reflection (*kuan-fo*), and the nine grades present various means or causes of rebirth, such as meritorious acts, types of faith and especially invocational *buddha*-reflection (*ch'eng-ming nien-fo*). It is thus a text very rich in instructions on praxis, including forms of ethical conduct, the cultivation of devotional attitudes and descriptions of *buddha*-reflection, and moreover praxis ranging in difficulty from detailed visualizations culminating in *buddha*-reflection *samādhi* [*nien-fo san mei*] to simple utterance of the name of Amitābha just ten times.

Subsequent to Ching-ying Hui-yüan's commentary, the *Contemplation Sūtra* became the subject of considerable scholarly attention. Commentaries and treatments by Chi-tsang (549–623), Tao-ch'ö (562–645), Shan-tao and others followed in rapid succession. Tanaka lists twelve extant commentaries or treatments dating through the Sun period (960–1279). And from the Sui period on, the *Contemplation Sūtra* became a basic scripture of the lay devotional movement led by Tao-ch'ö, Shan-tao and their successors. The *Contemplation Sūtra* was therefore at the very center of the development of Pure Land piety in China.

Tanaka's study of Ching-ying Hui-yüan's *Commentary on the Contemplation Sūtra* clarifies the process of this development in a number of ways. Tanaka claims that Hui-yüan's commentary interjected the

Contemplation Sūtra into Buddhist scholarly discourse. In spite of the fact that this *sūtra* had not received much scholarly attention heretofore, Ching-ying Hui-yüan gave it the same careful treatment and subjected it to the same formal commentarial format as he had already applied to several major Mahāyāna texts. Tanaka points out that this tended to give to the *Contemplation Sūtra* the same high status as these major texts and bring it to the serious attention of other scholars. Tanaka further claims that Hui-yüan's commentary integrated the *Contemplation Sūtra* into Mahāyāna doctrine, first by giving it a "doctrinal classification" (*p'an-chiao*)—a position within a systematic schema of all Buddhist doctrines—and secondly by assigning to the persons of the nine grades of rebirth locations upon traditional Buddhist soteriological path-structures.

In addition to enhancing the status of the *Contemplation Sūtra*, Tanaka points out that in his *Commentary* Hui-yüan made important contributions to Pure Land thought as well. One type of contribution was in defining the major problems or issues to be treated in the *sūtra*. Another was devising the nomenclature utilized in his own and subsequent commentaries on the *sūtra*. Some of the major problems or issues defined by Hui-yüan were the essential teaching (*tsung*) of the *sūtra*; the soteriological status of the interlocutor, Lady Vaidehi; the types of sentient beings for whom the *sūtra* was preached; the causes of the rebirth of the nine grades of persons; the soteriological status of the nine classes of persons reborn; and the ontological status of the Pure Land and its Buddha. Nomenclature utilized by Hui-yüan which subsequently became standard for Pure Land doctrinal discourse include such terms as "ordinary person" (*fan-fu*) and "saint" or "sage" (*sheng-jen*), and meditative good works (*ting-shan*) versus non-meditative good works (*san-shan*). These issues and terms were utilized not only in subsequent commentaries on the *Contemplation Sūtra* which agreed with Hui-yüan's interpretation, such as the Chi-tsang and T'ien-t'ai commentaries, but also in commentaries and treatments such as the Shan-tao commentary and Tao-ch'o's *An-lo chi* which disagreed with many of the conclusions of the Hui-yüan commentary.

Finally, a third form of influence wielded by Hui-yüan's commentary upon the Pure Land movement was to offer interpretations of the *sūtra* which endured and became widely accepted, even by the popular or lay Pure Land movement led by Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao. Tanaka points out, for example, that contrary to the view of most modern scholars, Ching-ying Hui-yüan considered the *Contemplation Sūtra* a teaching for ordinary persons and not for saints or sages, and moreover that he designated invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha as one of several possible causes of rebirth in the Pure Land.

An additional concern of this book is to clarify the relation of Ching-ying Hui-yüan's commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra* to the better known commentary of the T'ang period Pure Land Buddhist Shan-tao. Shan-tao is the most important Chinese Pure Land thinker and evangelist. From around 650 C.E. he took up residence in the capital and vigorously propagated Pure Land piety. In addition to composing several liturgical works setting out hymns and rituals for congregational worship and painting dozens of depictions of Amitābha and the Pure Land as objects of devotion, he produced an extensive commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra*. This commentary and Shan-tao's other writings vigorously propagated Pure Land faith and also clarified and systematized Pure Land doctrines and practices.

Shan-tao's commentary presents a quite different interpretation of the *Contemplation Sūtra* than that found in the Hui-yüan commentary. Tanaka discusses in detail the major differences between the two. From this discussion and an examination of the two commentaries it is clear that whereas Ching-ying Hui-yüan interpreted the *sūtra* primarily as instruction in meditation for advanced practitioners, though also as encouragement to aspiration for rebirth, Shan-tao interpreted it as a revelation of the availability of Pure Land rebirth for even the most unworthy, as well as instruction in meditation. Yet, although Shan-tao's view of the soteriological import of the *sūtra* was quite different from Hui-yüan's, Tanaka points out that the Shan-tao commentary owes a great debt to Hui-yüan. First of all, since Hui-yüan's commentary had established the *Contemplation Sūtra* as the primary vehicle for discourse on Pure Land themes, Shan-tao's very choice of the *Contemplation Sūtra* as a text to elucidate was probably influenced by the Hui-yüan commentary. Moreover, consistent with the influence of Hui-yüan's work on subsequent treatments of the *Contemplation Sūtra*, Shan-tao's commentary utilizes nomenclature devised by Hui-yüan, treats many of the same problems as had Hui-yüan, and even adopts some of Hui-yüan's interpretations.

The above points constitute the major contributions of this book. While making these observations, Kenneth Tanaka also endeavors to correct a bias in Pure Land Buddhist studies which has not only obscured Ching-ying Hui-yüan's contributions to the Chinese Pure Land movement, but has also distorted our understanding of the scope and process of development of that movement. Tanaka points out that most modern scholarship on Chinese Pure Land has been conducted by Japanese scholars, and by Japanese scholars affiliated with the major Japanese Pure Land denominations, the Jōdo Shū and the Jōdo Shinshū. For these denominational scholars authentic or "orthodox" Chinese Pure Land tends to be con-

ined to the thinkers who have been designated as the patriarchs and forerunners of these denominations. Consequently, figures, not included in this lineage, such as Ching-ying Hui-yüan, have been neglected or misunderstood. For most Japanese Pure Land Buddhist scholarship, Ching-ying Hui-yüan has been seen as merely a mistaken interpreter of the *Contemplation Sūtra* whose views were subsequently corrected by the Pure Land patriarch accepted by the Japanese, Shan-tao.

This study thus applies a valuable corrective to a field which has long been dominated by biased sectarian scholarship. Unfortunately, however, Tanaka's study itself is cast in a sectarian mold. In reaction to the sectarian bias he so laudably and capably corrects, Tanaka shapes his own study around a distinction between figures he calls "orthodox Pure Land Buddhists" and "those of Pure Land Buddhism." (Tanaka defines Pure Land Buddhism as "a set of beliefs and practices that espouses for its aspirants the realization of the stage of non-retrogression... either in the present life or through rebirth in a Buddha land or realm... called 'Sukhāvati'...") The orthodox Pure Land Buddhists, he identifies as T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao. Those categorizable under "the larger rubric Pure Land Buddhism" he designates as Lu-shan Hui-yüan, Fa-chao (c. 763-804), and other figures such as Ching-ying Hui-yüan who, though not related to the Japanese denominational lineages, wrote Pure Land commentaries or treatises. While Tanaka realizes that the "orthodox Pure Land Buddhists... neither espoused a uniform set of ideas... nor constituted a direct line of transmission," nonetheless his application of this terminology to Chinese Buddhist history is distorting.

The problem is partly that the term orthodox means much more than "espousal of a uniform set of ideas," or constitutive of "a direct line of transmission." It means true teachings and implies normative status within an established religious community. While the figures Tanaka labels orthodox Pure Land Buddhists are certainly accorded such status by Japanese Pure Land Buddhists, they held no such position in China. Quite the contrary, the three figures called orthodox Pure Land Buddhists by Tanaka were in general not well-known in their own times, were not patronized by the state as were the founders of T'ang period schools, and their thought was criticized as deviant by exponents of other Buddhist traditions.⁴ The use of the term orthodox to describe these Chinese figures tends to shape Chinese religious history according to a Japanese paradigm and to that extent to distort the Chinese phenomena. Though Tanaka has adopted this terminology primarily for purposes of providing "con-

tinuity with past scholarship and a common framework for carrying out the objectives of this analysis," nonetheless its use is regrettable.

Tanaka's larger goal is to broaden our understanding of the Pure Land tradition by including within its boundaries figures such as Ching-ying Hui-yüan who have generally been excluded by sectarian scholarship. This is commendable and a necessary corrective. Yet here again there is a problem. While both the "orthodox Pure Land Buddhists" and "those of Pure Land Buddhism" were no doubt participating in the same broad movement, there remain important differences between them. That Hōnen and Shinran perceived their origins in the thinkers Tanaka refers to as "orthodox Pure Land Buddhists" reflects not only their subjective judgments, but also actual differences in the religious messages of these "patriarchs" versus the teachings of other figures not accorded patriarchal status. In other words, perceptions are not substance, but can—and in this case do—reveal substance. It is becoming increasingly clear that in the history of Chinese Buddhism there was a broad movement characterizable as Pure Land devotionism which encompassed a spectrum of views and practices ranging on the one extreme from those who were concerned primarily with the Pure Land rebirth of the vast majority of humankind, the laity, through the agency of the compassionate savior Amitābha Buddha, to those on the other extreme who utilized Amitābha-centered meditative or devotional practices chiefly as a propaedeutic—as a preparatory or preliminary means—for achieving personal religious objectives more highly valued than Pure Land rebirth. The former orientation we can tentatively call lay Pure Land piety, the latter, monastic Pure Land piety. In more detail, these orientations differed in the following ways:

(1) In the breadth of their concern: Lay-oriented Pure Land piety, though led by clergy, focused on the spiritual well-being of the average person involved in the ordinary life of society, whereas those who participated in monastic Pure Land piety were clergy concerned primarily with their own spiritual progress.

(2) In their views of history and the human condition: Whereas lay Pure Land piety was convinced that the final age of the *dharma* had arrived and that almost all contemporary persons were ordinary mortals destined, unless they availed themselves of Amitābha's compassion, to endless *saṃsāric* suffering, those involved in monastic Pure Land piety either rejected the identification of their age with the final age of *dharma* or, in the conviction that spiritual-realization through self-effort was nonetheless quite possible, insisted on the necessity for even greater effort during such a degenerate time.

(3) In their practices, especially forms of *buddha*-reflection (*nien-fo*): While both forms of Pure Land devotionism valued a broad

array of devotional practices centering on *buddha*-reflection, lay oriented piety emphasized the availability and effectiveness of invocational *buddha*-reflection, the practice of calling on the name of Amitābha, and monastic piety favored contemplative *buddha*-reflection, i.e., meditating upon an icon or a mental image of Amitābha.

(4) In their soteriology: Pure Land piety addressed to the laity sought first and foremost Pure Land rebirth, emphasizing the vows of Amitābha as the primary enabling condition, a soteriology which can be characterized as posthumous and bestowed; monastic Pure Land piety sought a hierarchy of soteric goals, first and foremost a transforming mystical insight characterizable as an immanentist soteriology, but also Pure Land rebirth as a lesser objective.

This is an ideal typology, and very few historical figures would conform exactly to either orientation. Even Shan-tao, a typical representative of lay Pure Land piety, was very interested in *buddha*-contemplation (*kuan-fo*).

The final point we would like to make is that the Pure Land piety of Ching-ying Hui-yüan was clearly of the monastic orientation, and was thus quite different from that of Shan-tao. Yet, in spite of their differences, we must be cognizant, as Kenneth Tanaka has so ably demonstrated, that these two leaders of differing orientations to Pure Land piety interacted in a creative fashion.

This book enhances our understanding of Pure Land Buddhism in China in a number of ways, and this reviewer for one is grateful for the insights and valuable resources it provides for thinking and rethinking the character and history of this field of study.

Allan A. Andrews

NOTES

1. See References for bibliographic details.
2. While Tanaka renders *kuan* as "visualization," *nien-fo* as "Buddha-contemplation" and *ch'eng* (-*ming*) as "recitation" ("of the Buddha's name"), we prefer "contemplation" for *kuan*, "*buddha*-reflection" for *nien-fo* and "invocation of" or "calling on" ("the name of the Buddha") for *cheng* (-*ming*).
3. This research is summarized in Fujita 1990 and Ryukoku 1984.
4. Though Shan-tao was given a governmental appointment late in his life, it seems that is was in recognition of his stature as an artist and not as a leader of lay Pure Land piety.

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See *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching*.
- Wu-liang-shou ching* ("Sūtra of [the Buddha of] Immeasurable Life"), T #360.
- Wu-liang-shou-ching yu-po-t'i-she yuan-sheng chieh* ("Discourse on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life and Verse on Rebirth"), T #1524.

CHARACTER LIST

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| ch'eng-ming nien-fo | 稱名念佛 |
| fan-fu | 凡夫 |
| Hui-ch'ung | 慧龍 |
| Hui-kuang | 慧光 |
| kuan | 觀 |
| kuan-fo | 觀佛 |
| nien-fo san-mei | 念佛三昧 |
| nien-fo | 念佛 |
| p'an-chiao | 半教 |
| san-shan | 散善 |
| sheng-jen | 聖人 |
| ting-shan | 定善 |
| tsung | 宗 |