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(English summary)
Shandao and Hōnen. Apropos of Julian F. Pas’s book *Visions of Sukhāvatī*

Julian PAS’s *Visions of Sukhāvatī* is to be welcomed as an important contribution to our knowledge of Shandao’s life and main work. His use of original Chinese sources fills a major gap in Western studies of Chinese Buddhism. However, the book advocates an unprecedented thesis: that Shandao’s interpretation of nembutsu as the oral pronunciation of Amida Buddha’s name is a misunderstanding on the part of Japanese Jōdo-Shinshū scholars going back to Shinran himself. Nevertheless, this interpretation was first advanced not by Shinran but by his teacher Hōnen, who himself considered his founding of the Pure Land school (Jōdo-shū) to be the mere continuation in Japan of Shandao’s original doctrine. The real question then is: was Hōnen’s interpretation legitimate? The core of his reasoning is the definition by Shandao of the nembutsu as the right determining action “because it is in keeping with [Amida] Buddha’s vow”. But the main point discovered by Hōnen is that Shandao does not refer to the vow as it appears in the *Larger Sūtra*, where Amida’s name is not even mentioned. Shandao’s originality lies in his own rewording of the vow as “If... beings pronounce my name (shō ga myōgō 稱我名號)”. The weakness of PAS’s argumentation is partly due to his failure to refer to the original Japanese sources, even to those written in Chinese, such as Hōnen’s *Senchaku-shū*. In his rare use of Western-language sources PAS is also misled: one wonders how it is possible to mistake YAMAMOTO Kōshō’s English translation of Hōnen’s *Sansen-mon* with Shandao’s definition of practices (PAS, p. 271). Still the main flaw lies in PAS’s systematic misreading of Shandao’s real intention: that the *Contemplations’ Sūtra* is to be read in the light of the *Larger Sūtra*. It is noteworthy that in this fashion Shandao removed the *Contemplations’ Sūtra* from the group of the so-called “meditation sūtras” – like the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* – to include it in the group of the “birth-in-the-

* English Summary, see article on p. 93.

Pure-Land sūtras,” together with the Larger Sūtra and the Amida Sūtra. PAS’s misreading of Shantao’s intention also explains why he (p. 242) cannot understand Shandao’s interpretation of “deep mind” (jinshin) as “faith” (shinjin). Nor does he see that Shandao interprets the meditative parts of the Contemplations’ Sūtra as mere “skilfull means” (hōben), provided by Šākyamuni only at the request of Vaidehī. On the contrary, Hōnen found a clear confirmation of his interpretation in the treatment by Shandao of the concluding part of the Contemplations’ Sūtra where Amida’s name is entrusted to Ānanda\(^2\) – one of the parts of Shandao’s Commentary used by Hōnen but ignored by PAS. Also neglected by PAS are some original views of Shandao clearly emphasized by Hōnen, i.e., that the vocal nembutsu is both easy and quick and still excellent, thus allowing rebirth in the Pure Land for all ordinary beings, even the worst criminals on the verge of death.

While PAS’s translations from Shandao are generally correct, some need amendments, such as the passages related to Vaidehī (p. 290-291) or to the length of practice (p. 295-296). When quoting from the sūtra passage concerning the lower rank of the lower beings to be born in the Pure Land, PAS (p. 264) refers to the Taishō edition of the Contemplations’ Sūtra instead of its vulgate used by Shandao – this is not without consequences for PAS’s interpretation.

\(^2\) T.37, 1753, k.4, p.278a23-26.