

ON PURE LAND BUDDHISM AND CH'AN/PURE LAND SYNCRETISM IN MEDIEVAL CHINA

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It is rare to find a modern account of medieval Chinese Buddhism¹ that does not organize the subject in terms of various “schools” or “traditions,” such as Ch’an 禪, T’ien-t’ai 天台, Hua-yen 華嚴, Fa-hsiang 法相, and Ching-t’u 淨土. The Ching-t’u or “Pure Land” school, like the others, is typically presented as a more-or-less indigenous Chinese development, complete with its own set of privileged scriptures and its own line of esteemed patriarchs. Thus, while T’ien-t’ai is based on the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (Lotus Scripture), Hua-yen on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (Flower Garland Scripture), and Ch’an on the *Vajracchedikā* (Diamond Scripture) or on the discourse records of past masters (*yü-lu* 語錄), Chinese Pure Land is based on the authority of three or four Pure Land scriptures as interpreted by a handful of Pure Land patriarchs, notably T’an-luan 曇鸞 (476-542), Tao-ch’o 道綽 (562-645), and Shan-tao 善導 (613-681).² The Pure Land school is known for its emphasis on faith in the power of Amitābha’s vows, on the practice of the recitation/invocation of

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¹ In this essay I use “medieval” quite loosely to refer to the period extending from the Six Dynasties through the Sung.

² The category “Pure Land scriptures” comprises two Indian texts: the Larger and Smaller *Sukhāvāṣīyūha-sūtras* (Scriptures on the Land of Bliss), which exist in various Chinese translations, as well as the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching* 觀無量壽佛經 (Scripture on the Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life), which is likely of Central Asian origin. The *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* (*Pan-chou san-mei ching*, 般舟三昧經), another Indian work that survives in multiple Chinese translations, is sometimes added to the list.

Amitābha's name (*nien-fo* 念佛), and on the goal of rebirth in Amitābha's Western Pure Land.³

The Ch'an and Pure Land schools came to dominate post-T'ang Buddhism, we are told, because both were better able to survive the An Lu-shan 安祿山 rebellion of 755 and the Hui-ch'ang 會昌 persecution of the 840s than were other more scholastically oriented traditions.⁴ (Traditions such as Hua-yen, Fa-hsiang, and T'ien-t'ai were supposedly more dependent on state patronage and thus more vulnerable to the vagaries of government policy and political crises.) By the early Sung the doctrinal foundations for a synthesis of Ch'an and Pure Land were in place, and Ch'an-Pure Land syncretism became the dominant form of Buddhism in China from the end of the Sung down to the present day. This, in brief, is the account repeated in numerous reputable contemporary sources.

While few scholars of East Asian Buddhism have explicitly questioned this narrative, many are aware of certain problems, particularly with the designation of Pure Land as a discrete school. One can speak of medieval Chinese monasteries being affiliated with Ch'an, Lü 律 (*vinaya*, monastic discipline), or Chiao 教 (teachings, i.e., T'ien-t'ai) lineages, and yet the same cannot be said of Pure Land; there was neither a mechanism nor a precedent for officially designating a monastery a Pure Land establishment.⁵ This is not surprising, as there were no official Pure Land monks to oversee such establishments: there was neither an ordination rite nor a dharma-transmission ceremony that would render a monk a member of a distinctively Pure Land lineage. And while modern scholars refer to monks such as T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao as Pure Land patriarchs, there is little evidence that these clerics envisioned themselves as members of or advocates for an independent Pure Land school. There was, in

³ I use the Sanskrit name "Amitābha" throughout this paper as a convenient shorthand. The Chinese treated the Sanskrit Amitāyus ("immeasurable life," C: Wu-liang-shou 無量壽) and Amitābha ("immeasurable light," C: Wu-liang-kuang 無量光, but frequently rendered Wu-liang-shou) as two names for one and the same buddha, and they transliterated both as O-mi-t'o 阿彌陀; see Fujita 1996b: 12-13.

⁴ See, for example, Ch'en 1964: 398-399; Weinstein 1987: 63; and Yü 1981: 4-5.

⁵ In the Sung period, monasteries that emphasized devotional practices oriented toward Amitābha, many of which had T'ien-t'ai connections, were often named "White Lotus Monasteries," a practice that continued well into the Ming. But as far as I am aware, such a designation had no formal institutional ramifications. For references, see ter Haar 1992: 18 n. 7. On the three-fold classification of Chinese Buddhist monasteries, see Yü 1981: 147-150.

short, nothing that could be construed as a Pure Land ecclesiastical organization in medieval China.

Accordingly, in their pioneering studies of T'ang "Pure Land" figures such as Tz'u-min 慈愍 (Hui-jih 慧日, 680-748), Ch'eng-yüan 承遠 (712-802), and Fa-chao 法照 (d. circa 820), the Japanese scholars Sasaki Kōsei and Tsukamoto Zenryū studiously avoided the term "Pure Land school" (*jōdo shū* 淨土宗), preferring instead to speak of "Pure Land teachings" (*jōdo kyō* 淨土教) or "Pure Land belief/worship" (*jōdo shinkō* 淨土信仰).⁶ Sasaki and Tsukamoto understood that there was no simple way to characterize the sectarian affiliation of these T'ang figures. Tz'u-min, Ch'eng-yüan, and Fa-chao may have been esteemed as Pure Land masters in Japan, but Chinese sources depict them as involved in a wide array of religious activities, many of which are more commonly associated with the Ch'an, T'ien-t'ai, or Vinaya traditions (see below).

A number of Western and Chinese scholars have followed suit: they acknowledge that Pure Land never emerged as an independent school or sect per se in China, but they continue to treat it as a discrete "movement," "teaching," or "tradition."⁷ Was there not,

⁶ See esp. Sasaki 1925; Tsukamoto 1976a and 1976b. The date for Fa-chao's death is taken from Ono 1966: 2.432.

⁷ Chün-fang Yü notes that it is misleading to speak of a Pure Land school in the same way as we speak of the T'ien-t'ai or Ch'an schools: "To be sure, there were several Pure Land traditions, but there was no single Pure Land school with a genuine patriarchal transmission" (Yü 1981: 31; see also *ibid.*: 38). Kenneth Tanaka also recognizes the difficulty and tries to distinguish "orthodox Pure Land," by which he means the Pure Land of T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ō, Shan-tao, and their intellectual heirs, from the more generalized phenomenon of "Pure Land Buddhism" (1990: xxiii). Tanaka, however, continues to treat "orthodox Pure Land" as an independent school based primarily on the doctrinal distinction between the difficult and the easy path (*ibid.*: 12). Julian Pas is more cautious, and argues that Pure Land is better thought of as a "movement" than a school, which "during the Sung (if not before) and afterwards, was integrated into all the other schools, even into Ch'an Buddhism" (Pas 1995: 58). David Chappell draws a similar conclusion: "Chinese Pure Land sectarianism was neither based on an exclusive organization nor limited to particular religious practices, but was a loosely knit association of those who were committed to single-minded devotion to Amitābha and rebirth in his Pure Land as the only guaranteed source of salvation" (Chappell 1996: 145). In the most nuanced English treatment of the problem to date, Daniel Getz states: "If . . . by school we mean a distinct community that traces its origins to a founding patriarch from whom descends a continuous lineage, then it is questionable whether Pure Land in China was ever a school. In the Northern Song . . . Pure Land was regarded and practiced as an integral part of the existing schools, primarily the T'ien-t'ai and Vinaya (Lü) schools as well as, to a varying degree, the Chan school" (Getz 1994: 4; see also *ibid.*: 245-246, and Getz 1999a: 477). This is also the approach

they would argue, a specifically Pure Land doctrinal, soteriological, or devotional orientation toward Buddhist thought and practice that stood in marked opposition to other Buddhist systems? Surely, the monks we now regard as Pure Land patriarchs sought to exalt Pure Land practices as superior to other forms of Buddhism or at least as more appropriate to the times. And surely, the apologetics of figures such as Yung-ming Yen-shou 永明延壽 (904-975)—the Sung prelate who actively sought a fusion of Ch’an and Pure Land—are only intelligible in so far as one can talk of two independent traditions to be so fused.

The question as to whether it is appropriate to use “Pure Land” to refer to a self-conscious school, movement, or tradition in China is not, as I hope will become clear below, a mere terminological quibble. Unless we can clarify what exactly we might mean by Pure Land, notions such as “Ch’an/Pure Land syncretism” will remain problematic at best.⁸

I was first led to explore this topic while working on the *Pao-tsang lun* 寶藏論, a late eighth-century text apocryphally attributed to Seng Chao 僧肇 (374-414).⁹ The third chapter of this somewhat obscure work contains a passage on the status of buddhas that appear to practitioners of *nien-fo*. The passage reads in part as follows:

Let us suppose a person contemplates the Buddha and the Buddha appears, or contemplates the *sangha* and the *sangha* appears. It is actually neither Buddha nor is it not Buddha, and yet it appears as Buddha. . . . Why so? It appears because of that person’s desire [for such a vision] while contemplating. Such people are unaware that the visions are products of their own minds. . . . The dharma-body is neither manifest nor not manifest. It transcends both intrinsic nature and the absence of intrinsic nature, it is neither existent nor nonexistent, and it is devoid of mind and intention. It cannot be measured against any standard. It is only that the ordinary person, following [the caprice of] his own mind, gives rise to the thought of seeing the Buddha. Having always believed that the Buddha exists outside his own mind, he does

of the Chinese scholar Liu Ch’ang-tung, who treats what he calls “Amitābha Pure Land worship” (*Mi-t’o ching-t’u hsin-yang* 彌陀淨土信仰) and “Pure Land thought” (*ching-t’u ssu-hsiang* 淨土思想) as a phenomenon that permeated virtually all the early Buddhist schools in China, including San-lun 三論, Hua-yen, T’ien-t’ai, Ch’an, and Wei-shih 唯識 (Liu 2000: 309-347).

⁸ The application of the term “syncretism” to any historical phenomena is problematic and, in the end, rhetorical and ideological rather than descriptive, since it presupposes the existence of genetically pure prototypes. For references to the scholarly literature on the term “syncretism” and its application to Chinese religious phenomena see Sharf 2002: 290 n. 26 and 27.

⁹ Sharf 2002.

not understand that it is through the coalescence of his own mind that [the Buddha] comes into being.¹⁰

I initially assumed that this critique was aimed at Pure Land practitioners, and I thought that a clearer understanding of late eighth-century Pure Land might provide a clue to the provenance of this text. But as I began my investigations I soon came to realize that there is no clear historical referent for the locution “Chinese Pure Land tradition,” and that scholars, assuming otherwise, have misconstrued the notion of “Ch’an/Pure Land syncretism.” This article will review the relevant evidence and go on to address the larger question as to why scholars were misled in the first place.

The Pure Land Patriarchate

Chinese Buddhists, both monastic and lay, have, throughout their history, aspired to rebirth in the Pure Land, whether conceived of in metaphorical or in literal terms. The Pure Land is both a world of “ease and bliss” as well as a place wherein one may easily progress along the Buddhist path unencumbered by physical and mental impurities. To those born in the Pure Land, final liberation is assured.

The aspiration to attain future birth in such a marvelous realm was not, of course, a uniquely Chinese development. Gregory Schopen has shown that the desire for rebirth in Sukhāvātī—the Land of Bliss—was an important aspect of Mahāyāna in India as well, although this realm was not necessarily associated with the cult of Amitābha. A careful reading of passages mentioning Sukhāvātī in a variety of early Mahāyāna scriptures reveals that “rebirth in *sukhāvātī* became a generalized religious goal open to the Mahāyāna community as a whole,” and this development most likely occurred earlier than the second century A.D.¹¹

Nevertheless, the notion of a Pure Land, specifically Amitābha’s Pure Land, played a central role in Chinese Buddhism virtually from its inception. One of the earliest Indian *sūtras* rendered into Chinese was the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, first translated by Lokakṣema (Chih Lou-chia-ch’an 支婁迦讖) in 179 A.D.¹² This scripture details the

¹⁰ T.1857: 149a21-24 and b10-13; Sharf 2002: 252-253.

¹¹ Schopen 1977: 204; for a comparison of the Pure Land of Amitābha with that of Akṣobhya, see Nattier 2000.

¹² Translated as the *Pan-chou san-mei ching* 般舟三昧經 (T.417). For a compre-

practice of contemplating the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*) which leads to a vision of the Buddha before one's very eyes. The text seems to have inspired Lu-shan Hui-yüan 廬山慧遠 (332-416) and his followers to devote themselves to Amitābha on Mount Lu (Lu-shan 廬山). According to later tradition Hui-yüan's group, comprised of both monastic and lay followers, was called the White Lotus Society (Pai-lien she 白蓮社), and a vow taken by Hui-yüan and the 123 members of this group in 402 A.D. is often celebrated as the origin of the Pure Land school in China.¹³

The four scriptures most closely associated with the Pure Land gained wide currency in China and, as I shall review below, representatives from virtually every major exegetical tradition of Buddhism in China wrote commentaries to one or more of them. The wide variety of practices that went under the general rubric of *nien-fō* are to be found in the ritual manuals of all the principal liturgical traditions. A survey of the Chinese art-historical and archaeological record would further testify to the central importance of Amitābha in particular and the invocation of buddhas in general. It should not be necessary to belabor the central position occupied by Amitābha and his Pure Land in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

Yet scholars are also accustomed to thinking of Pure Land as an independent tradition. Scholarly presentations of this tradition, in both Japanese and Western language sources, are frequently organized around a succession of Pure Land patriarchs. Although the list of figures varies, it invariably includes T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ō, and Shantao;¹⁴ another half-dozen or so monks also make occasional appearances in such lists, including Lu-shan Hui-yüan, Tz'u-min, and Fa-chao.¹⁵ Given that these monks constitute a mere fraction of those who wrote commentaries on Pure Land scriptures or essays on Pure Land themes, we might ask how but a handful came to be designated "Pure Land patriarchs." Our search for the Pure Land school will begin with this question.

hensive analysis of the various Tibetan and Chinese versions of this text, see Harrison 1978 and 1990.

¹³ The appearance of the term White Lotus Society cannot, however, be dated earlier than mid-T'ang. For an overview of Hui-yüan's activities, see Zürcher 1972: 1.217-223.

¹⁴ See, for example, the seminal Japanese studies by Mochizuki 1942 and Ogasawara 1951, as well as the recent English language discussions in Amstutz 1998: 24-29, Chappell 1996: 159, and Corless 1996, all of which foreground these three monks as the preeminent patriarchs of the Chinese Pure Land school.

¹⁵ This particular list is taken from Ch'en 1964: 342-350.

Scholarly attempts to trace the sources of the Pure Land patriarchate often begin with Tao-ch'o's *An-le chi* 安樂集, composed in the first half of the seventh century.¹⁶ This text contains an enumeration of "six worthies" (*liu ta-te* 六大德), namely Bodhiruci 菩提流支, Hui-ch'ung 慧寵, Tao-ch'ang 道場, T'an-luan, Ta-hai 大海, and Fa-shang 法上 (495-580).¹⁷ Tao-ch'o apparently considered each of these figures to be an exemplar of Buddhist devotion and a major source of personal inspiration. Yet taken in and of itself it is difficult to construe Tao-ch'o's list as a proto-Pure Land lineage; it is not presented as such, and the relationship between some of these figures and Pure Land thought or practice is far from clear. Bodhiruci may well have contributed to Pure Land doctrine through his translation of the *Ching-t'u lun* 淨土論 attributed to Vasubandhu, and he was supposedly responsible for T'an-luan's "conversion" to Pure Land practice.¹⁸ T'an-luan is well known for his contributions to Pure Land exegesis; his *Wang-sheng lun chu* 往生論註 (T.1819), for example, clearly distinguishes the "difficult path" (*nan-hsing tao* 難行道) from the "easy path" (*i-hsing tao* 易行道), the latter of which depends on the powers of Amitābha's vows. But the final four persons on Tao-ch'o's list are another matter. While Tao-ch'o may have viewed them as exemplary Mahāyāna practitioners who aspired to rebirth in the Pure Land, the historical record contains next to nothing about their interest in or contributions to a Pure Land tradition.¹⁹ In any

¹⁶ We will see below that scholars are influenced in this choice by the writings of the Japanese cleric Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212).

¹⁷ T.1958: 47.14b11-18.

¹⁸ The *Ching-t'u lun* is also known as the *Wang-sheng lun* 往生論 (T.1524).

¹⁹ Virtually nothing is known of Hui-ch'ung, although Mochizuki Shinkō attempts to identify him as the monk Tao-ch'ung 道寵, a disciple of Bodhiruci (Mochizuki 1942: 64). Even if the identification is correct, there is still no evidence of any particular connection with Pure Land practice or exegesis. Tao-ch'ang is best known as a student of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* 大智度論. The only surviving evidence of an interest in the Pure Land is found in the *Fa-yüan chu-lin* 法苑珠林, which reports that Tao-ch'ang drew an image of Amitābha accompanied by fifty bodhisattvas that was popular in the capital (Mochizuki 1942: 64-65). Ta-hai is another figure about whom nothing is known. Mochizuki tries to identify him as the monk Hui-hai 慧海 (541-609), who was known to have engaged in Pure Land devotions. One problem with this identification is that Hui-hai lived later than Fa-shang, the last person on this list that is otherwise in chronological order (Mochizuki 1942: 65). Finally, Fa-shang was Chief Controller (*shang-t'ung* 上統) of the *saṃgha* during the Ch'i Dynasty and was teacher of Ching-ying Hui-yüan 淨影慧遠 (523-592). But again, there is no evidence of any particular interest in Pure Land thought or practice.

case, Tao-ch'o does not present them as patriarchs in any particular lineage.²⁰

Another source sometimes cited as influential in the construction of the Pure Land patriarchate are collections of biographies of Buddhist practitioners whose fervent devotion resulted in their rebirth in the Pure Land. The earliest extant collection is found in the third fascicle of the *Ching-t'u lun* 淨土論 compiled around 650 by Chia-ts'ai 迦才 (620-680?).²¹ This text lists the biographies of twenty persons in all, six monks, four nuns, five laymen, and five laywomen, each of whom is said to have "attained birth yonder in the Pure Land" (*te wang-sheng ching-t'u* 得往生淨土).²² The individual biographies bear witness to the religious fervor of these early practitioners of *nien-fo*, as well as to the miracles that occurred at the time of their death signaling their ascent to the Pure Land. Moreover, the list includes T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o (listed second and sixth respectively), two monks who occupy a prominent place in our modern conception of the Pure Land tradition. However, the remaining figures are rather obscure; many would be lost to history were it not for the brief biographies provided in this text. Given the nature of this list, it is difficult to mistake it for a patriarchal lineage in any sense of the word.

Chia-ts'ai's work served as a prototype for what was to emerge as a distinct genre, namely, collections of biographies of pious monastics and laypersons who attained rebirth in the Pure Land. Chia-ts'ai's *Ching-t'u lun* is believed to have influenced the first true biographical collection of this kind, the *Wang-sheng hsi-fang ching-t'u jui-ying chuan* 往生西方淨土瑞應傳, compiled in the ninth century.²³ This text, attributed to Wen-shen 文諗 (9th c.) and Shao-k'ang 少康 (d. 805)²⁴ but probably completed toward the end of the Five Dynasties, con-

²⁰ On the "six worthies," see Mochizuki 1942: 63-67; Chappell 1976: 70-79; and Tanaka 1990: 48-51.

²¹ This work should not be confused with the treatise of the same title attributed to Vasubandhu (see above). On Chia-ts'ai's collection of Pure Land bibliographies, see esp. Mochizuki 1942: 165-168; and Ogasawara 1951: 81-82.

²² T.1963: 47.97a-100a.

²³ T.2070: 51.104a-108b. This text is considered extremely important by Japanese Pure Land scholars. There are many problems of dating, however, since at least one of the figures appearing in the text—Emperor Hsi-tsung 僖宗帝 (r. 873-888)—was born after the death of Shao-k'ang, one of the putative authors. While Wen-shen and Shao-k'ang contributed an introduction to the text, it appears that the compilation continued to expand at the hand of the editor Tao-hsien 道詵; see Mochizuki 1942: 317-318, 382-383; Mizuno et al., eds. 1977: 221; Ogasawara 1951: 91-94.

sists of the biographies of forty-eight figures. The beginning of the collection, which consists solely of “eminent monks,” is organized chronologically, starting with Hui-yüan, T’an-luan, and Tao-chen 道珍, and working its way down to Tao-ch’o and Shan-tao. The chronological organization found at the start of the work, however, breaks down as the figures become more obscure and the compilers move on to pious kings and empresses, women and youths. Most of the monks are noted for their fervent practice of *niên-fo* and for the miracles surrounding their death. Once again, there is no indication that this collection was intended to record a lineage of teachers or even an independent tradition of “Pure Land adepts.”

The next extant work of this type is the *Ching-t’u wang-sheng chuan* 淨土往生傳 by Chieh-chu 戒珠 (985-1077), published in 1064.²⁵ This work, comprised of seventy-five biographies in three fascicles, is based on materials found in Tsan-ning’s *Sung kao-seng chuan* 宗高僧傳. Again, this cannot be construed as either a lineage history or a work with a particularly sectarian agenda. Like the *Wang-sheng hsi-fang ching-t’u jui-ying chuan*, only considerably larger, this is a collection of biographies of pious figures whose devotions culminated in their rebirth in the Pure Land. The collection includes a variety of eminent monks associated with diverse traditions, including such notable T’ien-t’ai figures as Nan-yüeh Hui-ssu 南岳慧思 (515-576), T’ien-t’ai Chih-i 天台智顛 (538-597), and Kuan-ting 灌頂 (561-632).²⁶

Chieh-chu’s work went through a number of transformations at the hands of later editors. Shortly after its publication it was expanded to 115 biographies in four fascicles by a certain Wang Ku 王古 and renamed the *Hsin-hsiu wang-sheng chuan* 新修往生傳. In the middle of the twelfth century a layman Lu Shih-shou 陸師壽 added again to the work, bringing the total number of biographies up to 209. The now eight-fascicle collection was called the *Pao-chu chi* 寶珠集. Finally, the monk Hai-yin 海印 of Ssu-ming 四明 (near modern Ning-po) expanded the work to twelve fascicles under the title *Ching-t’u wang-sheng chuan* 淨土往生傳. Of these four works, Chieh-chu’s alone is preserved in its entirety.²⁷

Another important collection of “Pure Land biographies” is found

²⁴ For Shao-k’ang’s biography see Liu 2000: 432-433.

²⁵ T.2071; see also Iwai 1951.

²⁶ See T.2071: 51.114b26-115a26, 115a27-116a22, and 118b10-c1, respectively. Note that Hōnen quotes sections from the *Ching-t’u wang-sheng chuan* in his *Ruiju jōdo goso den* 類聚淨土五祖傳 (Iwai 1951: 64).

²⁷ Hai-yin’s work is lost, and only one of the eight fascicles of Lu Shih-shou’s collection survives, as do bits and pieces of Wang Ku’s work (Iwai 1951: 68-69).

in the *Lung-shu tseng-kuang ching-t'u wen* 龍舒增廣淨土文 (T.1970) by the layman Wang Jih-hsiu 王日休 of the Sung.²⁸ Wang states that he chose 30 out of over 200 accounts available to him of those who attained rebirth: “Thirty accounts of men who succeeded through purification, the mediocre who achieved, the wicked who achieved, and the diseased and suffering who achieved are chosen from it for the purpose of arousing piety among the people.”²⁹ The Ch’an master Ta-hui Tsung-kao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163) wrote a laudatory postscript to this collection, a point whose significance will become evident below.³⁰

The Sung Buddhist historian Chih-p’an 志磐 (fl. 1258-1269) apparently consulted several of these works as he compiled his own chapters on exemplars of Pure Land piety and devotion in his *Fo-tsu t’ung-chi* 佛祖統紀 of 1271.³¹ But Chih-p’an made a clear distinction between the profusion of biographies of those who attained rebirth on the one hand (the text contains 262 biographies in all), and the “patriarchs of the Lotus Society” (*lien-she tsu* 蓮社祖) on the other.³² In this latter category, Chih-p’an mentions only seven figures, all of whom were monks.

But we have to back up for a moment. Chih-p’an was not the first to construct an unambiguous list of “Lotus Society patriarchs”; that honor goes to an earlier Sung Dynasty T’ien-t’ai historian, Shih-chih Tsung-hsiao 石芝宗曉 (1151-1214). In his *Le-pang wen-lei* 樂邦文類, published in 1200, Tsung-hsiao records the “biographies of the five dharma teachers in the succession of patriarchs of the Lotus Society” (*lien-she chi-tsu wu ta-fa-shih chuan* 蓮社繼祖五大法師傳), namely Shantao, Fa-chao, Shao-k’ang, Sheng-ch’ang 省常 (959-1020) and Tsung-tse 宗謁 (d.u.), author of the *Ch’an-yüan ch’ing-kuei* 禪苑清規.³³ In addition, Hui-yüan is placed at the head of the list as the “Founding Patriarch” (*shih-tsu* 始祖).³⁴ This appears to have been the first attempt to create a lineal succession of patriarchs committed to Lotus Society or Pure Land teachings.³⁵

²⁸ On the date of this text, variously given as 1173, or 1161-1162, see Iwai 1951: 70.

²⁹ T.1970: 47.265c7-9; trans. Iwai 1951: 69.

³⁰ The postscript is preserved in T.1969: 47.172c21-28.

³¹ Jan 1964: 372-373.

³² The biographies of the “patriarchs” are found in the first half of fascicle 26 (T.2035: 49.260c-265a), while the sections on “those who attained rebirth” comprise fascicles 27 and 28 (T.2035: 49.271b-290c).

³³ *Le-pang wen-lei*, T.1969a: 47.192c18-193c26.

³⁴ T.1969a: 47.192b6-c17.

³⁵ The term “White Lotus” is by no means always synonymous with Pure Land

Chih-p'an modified Tsung-hsiao's list in his *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi*, omitting Tsung-tse and adding Ch'eng-yüan³⁶ and Yen-shou to arrive at a total of seven patriarchs. The number seven is significant as it follows earlier Ch'an models, which themselves harken back to ancient imperial prototypes.³⁷ The number seven is also preserved in the list of "lotus society patriarchs" (*lien-she li-tsu* 蓮社立祖) found in the *Ching-t'u chih-kuei chi* 淨土指歸集, a text compiled in 1393 by another T'ien-t'ai cleric, P'eng-an Ta-yu 蓬庵大佑. Ta-yu modifies Chih-p'an's list only slightly: he restores Tsung-tse, yet retains the number seven by separating Hui-yüan, heralded as the "first patriarch" (*shih-tsu* 始祖), from the list of seven "succeeding patriarchs" (*chi-tsu* 繼祖).³⁸ This enumeration remained more-or-less intact until the Ch'ing dynasty, when Buddhist historians began to add later figures such as the influential Ming prelate Chu-hung 祿宏 (1535-1615).³⁹

We have now arrived at a patriarchate of sorts, although to be precise the figures mentioned above are not referred to as "Pure Land patriarchs" but rather as patriarchs of the "Lotus Society." Even more curious is the conspicuous absence of two key figures featured in every modern discussion of Chinese Pure Land: T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o.⁴⁰ And then there is the question of why it was left to members of the T'ien-t'ai school to construct the so-called Pure Land patriarchal line. On the surface, one would assume that Tsung-hsiao, Chih-p'an, and Ta-yu, being T'ien-t'ai monks, would have viewed Pure Land practice as one alternative among many within the broad framework of T'ien-t'ai soteriology; why did they feel the need to present the Lotus Society or Pure Land as an independent tradition? Also note that there is no consistent attempt to

(see ter Haar 1992), but scholars have assumed that the two were closely associated in the minds of Sung T'ien-t'ai historians; see below.

³⁶ For his biography, see Sasaki 1925: 68-72; Tsukamoto 1976a; Ui 1939: 175-177; and Robson 2002: 540-545.

³⁷ Jorgensen 1987: 10; Foulk and Sharf 1993/94: 175-176.

³⁸ *HTC*. 108.120b; Mochizuki 1942: 459-450; Ogasawara 1963: 182.

³⁹ Chu-hung shows up as the eighth or ninth patriarch, depending upon whether Tsung-tse is included. For an account of developments in the Ch'ing that culminate in expanded lists of ten and thirteen patriarchs, see Ogasawara 1963: 183-185.

⁴⁰ T'an-luan does appear in P'u-tu's 普度 (1255-1330) Yüan period *Lu-shan lien-tsung pao-chien* 廬山蓮宗寶鑑. This text contains a section entitled "An account of the orthodox sect of *nien-fo* [practitioners]" (*nien-fo cheng-p'ai shuo* 念佛正派說, *T*.1973: 47.319bff.) that includes T'an-luan (*T*.1973: 47.322a23-b23). But this expanded group of biographies, which includes T'ien-t'ai Chih-i as well as a number of lay persons, does not constitute a patriarchate proper.

structure the lineages around an unbroken transmission from master to disciple; Shan-tao, the second patriarch, was born some two hundred years following the death of the first patriarch Hui-yüan. Finally, three of the figures mentioned in the lists—Ch'eng-yüan, Yen-shou, and Tsung-tse—were well known as members of Ch'an lineages, and thus it is difficult to imagine that these figures were meant to be considered leaders of a Pure Land school in any exclusive sense.

Daniel Getz has done extensive work on Sung T'ien-t'ai Pure Land in general and the construction of the Pure Land patriarchate in particular. According to his detailed reconstruction, the attempt to delineate such a patriarchate must be understood in terms of the relationship between the T'ien-t'ai school and the profusion of lay Buddhist societies in the Sung period. These societies posed a threat to the religious authority of the ordained *sangha*, and the attempt to establish a bona fide clerical patriarchate for these societies was, according to Getz's astute analysis, an attempt to reinforce ecclesiastical control. I take no issue with Getz's well-documented argument concerning the ideological and institutional agendas underlying the compilation of these patriarchal lists. The issue that remains to be clarified is the relationship of these lay societies to Pure Land practice.

Such lay societies were themselves not a new phenomenon in the Sung; historical documents mention three such societies in the T'ang and there may have been many more. However, none of the founders of the societies known to us—Chih-yen 智琰 (564-634), Shen-kao 神皓 (716-790), and Shen-ts'ou 神湊 (744-817)—had any particular affiliation with Pure Land or, for that matter, with T'ien-t'ai; both Shen-kao and Shen-ts'ou were best known as Vinaya specialists.⁴¹ Nor did Sheng-ch'ang, founder of the first such society in the Sung and a member of the Lotus Society patriarchate according to both Tsung-hsiao and Chih-p'an, have any particular Pure Land or T'ien-t'ai associations. Despite the fact that Sheng-ch'ang's group was apparently inspired by the Lotus Society collective established by Lu-shan Hui-yüan, there is little evidence of Pure Land devotional practices in surviving documents.⁴²

⁴¹ See Getz 1994: 260-261. References to the societies established by Chih-yen, Shen-kao, and Shen-ts'ou can be found in *Hsü kao-seng chuan* 續高僧傳, T.2060: 50.532a20-23; *Sung kao-seng chuan*, T.2061: 50.803a5; and *ibid.*, T.2061: 50.807b, respectively.

⁴² See Getz 1994: 275-294; 1999a: 485-488; 1999b. Getz writes that Sheng-

The next two societies dating to the Sung were indeed founded by T'ien-t'ai clerics. Tsun-shih 遵式 (964-1032) established a relatively modest group in 996, and Chih-li 知禮 (960-1028) followed on a grander scale in 1013. According to Getz, these groups, especially the one founded by Chih-li, served as models for later societies organized by their lineal descendents. Even several hundred years after Chih-li's death one still finds an emphasis on the oral recitation of the *nien-fo* as a means of gaining merit, on the use of charts to record recitations, and so on, all of which may be traced to Chih-li. At the same time, the place of the clergy in general, and of the T'ien-t'ai clergy in particular, becomes ambiguous as such societies proliferate in the Sung. Many of the societies that had monastic affiliations were associated with Vinaya or Ch'an rather than with T'ien-t'ai establishments, and many more appear to have been run by pious laypersons with little or no clerical sponsorship or assistance.⁴³

Getz argues that for both Tsung-hsiao and Chih-p'an the "defining theme" of the Pure Land patriarchate was precisely the proselytizing of Pure Land practice among the laity through the founding of such societies, despite the fact that there is little evidence that a number of the figures they deem to be patriarchs were ever involved with such groups.⁴⁴ This would explain the presence of Hui-yüan at the head of the list (his assembly on Mount Lu became the model for later societies), and Shan-tao as the second patriarch (he became associated with the advocacy of the oral *nien-fo* recitation among the laity). Getz speculates that Tsung-hsiao and Chih-p'an's efforts to delineate an independent Pure Land patriarchate—a lineage that conspicuously omits T'ien-t'ai figures such as Chih-li—was a concession to the fact that many of the societies had no formal T'ien-t'ai connections and were essentially communal in nature, possessing their own institutional validity.⁴⁵ But there were complex doctrinal issues involved as well, as the status of the Pure Land and the soteriological mechanism involved in Pure Land practice became

ch'ang was "not an advocate of Pure Land belief per se but was concerned primarily with justifying and spreading Buddhist belief among scholar-officials in the Hangzhou area. Furthermore, even though Pure Land belief was most certainly an element in the group that [Sheng-ch'ang] organized, it was not central to this society's purpose and function" (1994: 276).

⁴³ Getz 1994: 425-426, and 1999a: 501-502. On Tsun-shih's society, see also Stevenson 1999.

⁴⁴ Getz 1999a: 503. Getz finds no evidence that Shan-tao, Fa-chao, or Shao-k'ang ever established Pure Land societies.

⁴⁵ Getz 1999a: 504-505.

one flash-point in the so-called *shan-chia/shan-wai* 山家山外 debates.⁴⁶ According to Getz, the doctrinal issues that preoccupied several generations of T'ien-t'ai polemicists can be traced to the fundamental discord between the system of T'ien-t'ai doctrine and meditative practices on the one hand and the nature of popular Pure Land devotion on the other. Speaking of Tsung-hsiao's *Le-pang wen-lei*, Getz believes it reflected the recognition that "Pure Land belief and devotion could not be seamlessly woven into the doctrine of any one school. These doctrinal and cultivational issues, coupled with the prominence of Pure Land societies, might have revealed to Tsung-hsiao a need to recognize the Pure Land tradition as possessing a separate identity requiring its own patriarchy."⁴⁷ This autonomy was then, according to Getz, reinforced in the patriarchy of Chih-p'an.

For the moment I will put aside the issue of a fundamental incompatibility between Pure Land and other forms of Buddhism in China, including both T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an. The issue at hand is the status of these T'ien-t'ai constructions in our search for the "Chinese Pure Land school." As mentioned above, the figures touted as "patriarchs of the Lotus Society" by T'ien-t'ai monks were not ardent advocates of the exclusive practice of Pure Land. And two of the monks most closely associated with the Pure Land school in modern scholarship—T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o—are not recognized as patriarchs by Tsung-hsiao or Chih-p'an at all. Getz, following well-established Buddhological precedents, views the term "White Lotus society" as more-or-less synonymous with "Pure Land society." The evidence suggests, however, that the term "White Lotus" was a common appellation for lay Buddhist societies that may or may not have been under monastic leadership. Since these societies were devoted to proselytizing among the laity, it would be natural to find that many of them focused on devotion to Amitābha, practice of *nien-fo* recitation, and the aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land. But there is little evidence that such elements were a defining or even prominent characteristic of *all* the societies associated with the "White Lotus" rubric. While Amitābha was a popular deity among both monks and the laity from the time of T'ang, devotion to other deities, notably Kuan-yin, remained widespread. (Note that when dealing with monastic institutions or lay societies that centered on devotion to

⁴⁶ For an overview of these debates, see esp. Chan 1999; Getz 1994: 71-128; and Ziporyn 1994.

⁴⁷ Getz 1999a: 508.

Kuan-yin, scholars do not refer to a Kuan-yin “school” or “tradition.”)

Besides, our modern notion of a Pure Land patriarchy has more to do with a particular strand of Pure Land exegesis than it does with the proliferation of lay societies. T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, and Shan-tao are better known for their contribution to Pure Land thought than for spreading the faith among the masses. But then why focus on these particular figures? Any comprehensive survey of Pure Land doctrine in China would surely have to include the writings of the She-lun exegete Ching-ying Hui-yüan 淨影慧遠 (523-592),⁴⁸ the San-lun exegete Chi-tsang 吉藏 (549-623),⁴⁹ the Fa-hsiang monk Tz’u-en 慈恩 (632-682),⁵⁰ the Hua-yen patriarch Chih-yen 智儼 (602-668),⁵¹ and virtually every major T’ien-t’ai figure, from Chih-i⁵² and Chan-

⁴⁸ On Ching-ying Hui-yüan’s Pure Land thought, see Chappell 1977, and Tanaka 1990. Hui-yüan’s most influential Pure Land work was his commentary to the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching*, the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching i-shu* 觀無量壽經義疏 (T.1749).

⁴⁹ He is author of the *Wu-liang-shou ching i-shu* 無量壽經義疏 (T.1746), and the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching i-shu* 觀無量壽經義疏 (T.1752). According to biographical sources, there is evidence that Chi-tsang worshipped twenty-five images associated with Amitābha’s Pure Land, and at the time of his death he requested that his attendants offer incense to and invoke the name of the Buddha (*Hsü kao-seng chuan*, T.2060: 50.513c-514c; and Mochizuki 1942: 115).

⁵⁰ Putative author of the *Hsi-fang yao-chüeh shih-i t’ung-kuei* 西方要決釋疑通規 (T.1964), the *O-mi-t’o ching shu* 阿彌陀經疏 (T.1757), and the *O-mi-t’o ching t’ung-tsan shu* 阿彌陀經通贊疏 (T.1758). Mochizuki disputes the attribution of the first work, and the others are somewhat suspect as well (Mochizuki 1930: 463-480).

⁵¹ For Chih-yen’s biography, see the *Hua-yen ching ch’uan chi* 華嚴經傳記, T.2073: 51.163b-164a; for his understanding of the Pure Land, see, for example, the sections on the “ten kinds of Pure Land” (*shih-chung ching-t’u* 十種淨土) and the “meaning of yonder birth” (*wang-sheng i* 往生義) in the *Hua-yen ching k’ung-mu chang* 華嚴經孔目章 (T.1870: 45.541a6-b7 and 576c8-578a6, respectively; see also the discussion in Mochizuki 1942: 153-157). Note that according to Chih-p’an’s *Fo-tsu t’ung-chi*, Tu-shun 社順 (557-640), putative founder of Hua-yen, was also a devotee of the Pure Land (T.2035: 49.292c). On the Pure Land theories of later Hua-yen patriarchs, including Fa-tsang (643-712) and Tsung-mi (780-841), see Mochizuki 1942: 303-314.

⁵² Among the texts traditionally attributed to Chih-i are the *Ching-t’u shih-i lun* 淨土十疑論 (T.1961), the *Wu-fang-pien nien-fo men* 五方便念佛門 (T.1962), the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching shu* 觀無量壽佛經疏 (T.1750), and the *O-mi-t’o ching i chi* 阿彌陀經義記 (T.1755). Scholars now believe that the extant *Ching-t’u shih-i lun* is a later work, probably dating to the period 695-774 (Pruden 1973: 129), but a work of that name was clearly associated with Chih-i in the T’ang; see Robson 2002: 557, who references a stele inscription by Liu Tsung-yüan 柳宗元 (773-819). The authenticity of Chih-i’s Pure Land commentaries is similarly in doubt. However, Chih-i did make a significant contribution to Pure Land thought; see esp. his analysis of the Pure Land in the *Wei-mo ching lüeh-shu* 維摩經略疏, T.1778: 38.564a-565b (Mochizuki 1942: 104-113; Chappell 1977: 32-36), and his detailed analysis of the

jan 湛然 (711-782)⁵³ down through Chih-li⁵⁴ and Chih-yüan 智圓 (976-1022).⁵⁵ Not only did every one of these monks contribute to Pure Land doctrine, but each was, according to tradition, the author of a commentary on one or more of the Pure Land scriptures. (It is true that the attributions of some of the commentaries—notably those by Tz'u-en and Chih-i—are no longer accepted by modern scholars; nonetheless, the attributions were accepted by the medieval Chinese ecclesiastical community. In other words, no one raised eyebrows at a Fa-hsiang or T'ien-t'ai monk writing commentaries on Pure Land scriptures.)

Some are wont to distinguish, on doctrinal grounds, the writings of “orthodox” Pure Land patriarchs such as T'an-luan and Shan-tao from the many others who commented on Pure Land scriptures or wrote on Pure Land themes. Such orthodoxy would entail the belief that Pure Land was a distinct (if not superior) practice with its own soteriological logic predicated on the power of Amitābha's fundamental vow. The supposedly crucial distinction between “self-power” and “other-power,” first clearly articulated by T'an-luan, would then serve as one defining mark of orthodoxy. Another might be the belief that reliance on self-power was inappropriate or misguided in the latter days of the dharma (*mo-fa* 末法), or that the oral recitation of Amitābha's name was to be favored over other forms of practice, or that Amitābha is a *sambhogakāya-buddha* rather than a *nirmāṇakāya-buddha* and that his Pure Land transcends the triple realm. The problem is that any attempt to isolate the unique doctrinal characteristics of “orthodox” Chinese Pure Land exegesis is to put the cart before the horse. The more basic question is whether the Chinese tradition itself ever distinguished “orthodox Pure Land” from a more generic variety, on doctrinal or any other grounds. So far we have found little evidence that medieval Chinese Buddhists viewed T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao as belonging to a unique school or even to a distinctive tradition of Pure Land exegesis. Their contributions to the evolution of Pure Land exegesis and Amitābha devotion were acknowledged, but traditional Buddhist historians treated them not

pratyutpanna-samādhi—the centerpiece of the “constantly walking samādhi” (*ch'ang-hsing san-mei* 常行三昧)—in the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 (Stevenson 1986: 58-61).

⁵³ On his laudatory comments on Amitābha, the Pure Land, and Pure Land practice, see, for example, his *Chih-kuan fu-hsing-chuan hung-chüeh* 止觀輔行傳弘決, *T.1912*: 46.182c, and the *Fa-hua wen-chü chi* 法華文句記, *T.1719*: 34.355b.

⁵⁴ Author of the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching shu miao-tsing ch'ao* 觀無量壽佛經疏妙宗鈔 (*T.1751*).

⁵⁵ Author of the *O-mi-t'o ching shu* 阿彌陀經疏 (*T.1760*).

as exponents of a singular form of Buddhism but rather as accomplished scriptural commentators and/or specialists in *dhyāna*.

So we return to our question as to the source for *our* notion of the Chinese Pure Land patriarchate. As it turns out, the answer lies not in China but in the Japanese Jōdoshū 淨土宗 and Jōdo Shinshū 淨土真宗 traditions. The first person to explicitly construct a “Pure Land patriarchate,” as modern scholars have come to understand the notion, was the founder of Japanese Jōdo Buddhism, Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212). And there is little doubt that Hōnen’s conception of the Pure Land school was unprecedented at the time.

The novelty of Hōnen’s position is apparent from the self-conscious and somewhat apologetic manner in which he sets about his task. Near the beginning of Hōnen’s influential *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū* 選擇本願念佛集 of 1198,⁵⁶ the question is raised concerning the absence of any reference to a “Pure Land school” (*ching-t’u tsung* 淨土宗) in Chinese sources:

Question: As for establishing the name of this school, originally there were eight or nine schools such as Kegon, Tendai, and so on. But I have never heard that the followers of the Pure Land established a name for their school. Thus what evidence is there for what you now refer to as the “Pure Land school”?

Answer: There is more than one reference to the name “Pure Land school.” Wōnhyo’s 元曉 *Yusim allak-to* 遊心安樂道 states: “The Pure Land school was originally intended for both common people as well as sages.”⁵⁷ Moreover, Tz’u-en’s *Hsi-fang yao-chüeh* 西方要訣 says: “We rely on this single school.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Chia-ts’ai’s *Ching-t’u lun* says: “This single school is the essential way.”⁵⁹ With evidence like this there is no room for doubt.⁶⁰

I have translated the passage above in accordance with Hōnen’s reading, but it is clear that, intentionally or not, Hōnen was taking his proof-texts out of context. Note that in only one of the examples—namely Wōnhyo’s (617-686) *Yusim allak-to*—do we actually find the phrase *ching-t’u tsung*; the other two texts refer only to the *i-tsung* 一宗 or “single school.” Moreover, in each passage cited by Hōnen the more natural reading of the term *tsung* is not “school,” “sect,” or “lineage,” but rather “essential tenet” or “central doctrine.” In other words, Hōnen is only able to cite three texts (two of which are of questionable provenance)⁶¹ to support his claim for the existence of

⁵⁶ An alternative date for publication is 1204; see Hōnen 1998: 163 n. 125.

⁵⁷ T.1965: 47.119b20.

⁵⁸ T.1964: 47.110a22-23.

⁵⁹ T.1963: 47.83b8-9.

⁶⁰ T.2608: 83.1c10-12; Ishii ed. 1955: 511; cf. Hōnen 1998: 58.

⁶¹ Note also that the attribution of the *Yusim allak-to* to Wōnhyo has been called

a “Pure Land school” in China, yet on examination the passages do not refer to a school at all and thus fail to buttress Hōnen’s argument.

That the question is placed at the beginning of the *Senchakushū* is tacit admission that Hōnen was staking out new territory in his attempt to forge an East Asian Pure Land school. This becomes obvious later in the same text, as he attempts to situate his “Pure Land school” within the larger field of Chinese Buddhism. First, in identifying the three “Pure Land scriptures,” Hōnen freely admits that he is innovating, since there is no Chinese precedent for this particular bibliographic category.⁶² Hōnen makes the same admission when he posits, for the first time, a patriarchal tradition for his school. He declares that just as all other Buddhist schools such as T’ien-t’ai and Shingon have a patriarchal succession (“inheritance of the bloodline,” *sōjō kechimiyaku* 相承血脈), his Pure Land school should have one as well.

In the *Senchakushū* account of the Pure Land patriarchate, Hōnen begins by noting that there are three different lineages within the single Pure Land school, namely those of (1) Lu-shan Hui-yüan, (2) Tz’u-min, and (3) Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, etc. There are, according to him, two alternative ways of conceiving of the third lineage: the first is comprised of the six “worthies” taken from Tao-ch’o’s *An-le chi* (see above), while the second consists of Bodhiruci, T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, Huai-kan 懷感 (d. ca. 689), and Shao-k’ang.⁶³ The latter five—T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, Huai-kan, and Shao-k’ang—are featured as the “five Pure Land patriarchs” in Hōnen’s *Ruiju jōdo gosoden* 類聚淨土五祖傳, and this becomes the standard enumeration of the Jōdo patriarchate in later sectarian works.⁶⁴

Hōnen is at pains to justify his choice of patriarchs in general and his exaltation of Shan-tao in particular. Toward the end of his *Senchakushū* he explains why, given the many important Pure Land scriptural exegetes in China, he depends primarily on Shan-tao:

Question: In each of the Kegon, Tendai, Shingon, Zen, Sanron, and Hossō [traditions], there were masters who composed essays and commentaries on

into question, and it likely postdates the traditional seventh-century dating (Buswell 1989: 67-68 n. 60). Scholars have also raised doubts concerning the authorship of the *Hsi-fang yao-chüeh*; see Mochizuki 1930: 466-480.

⁶² T.2608: 83.2a7-14; Ishii ed. 1955: 312.

⁶³ T.2608: 83.2b28-c13; Ishii ed. 1955: 313; Hōnen 1998: 62; see the similar discussion in the *Gyakushu seppō* 逆修說法, Ishii ed. 1955: 263-266.

⁶⁴ See the *Ruiju jōdo gosoden*, Ishii ed. 1955: 843-857.

the Pure Land teachings. Why do you not rely on those masters but make use of Shan-tao alone?

Answer: Although all those masters composed essays and commentaries on the Pure Land, they did not take Pure Land as their central tenet 宗. Rather they took the Path of the Sages 聖道 as their central tenet. Therefore I did not rely on those teachers. Shan-tao took the Pure Land as his central tenet rather than the Path of the Sages, and thus I rely on him alone.

Q: There are many Pure Land patriarchal teachers 淨土祖師 such as Chia-ts'ai of the Hung-fa temple or the Tripiṭaka Master Tz'u-min. Why do you not rely on masters such as those but make use of Shan-tao alone?

A: Although those masters made Pure Land their central tenet, they did not attain *samādhi*. Shan-tao is someone who attained *samādhi* and thus attested to the way. Therefore I use him.

Q: If it is a matter of relying on one who has attained *samādhi*, then you must allow that the *dhyāna* master Huai-kan also attained it. Why not use him?

A: Shan-tao was the master and Huai-kan the disciple. I rely on the master, not the disciple. Moreover, there are numerous instances where [Huai-kan] runs contrary to his master's teaching, and thus I do not use him.

Q: If you rely on the master and not the disciple, then the *dhyāna* master Tao-ch'o was Shan-tao's master and he is also a Pure Land patriarch. Why not use him?

A: Although Tao-ch'o was indeed [Shan-tao's] master, he did not attain *samādhi* and thus did not personally know whether he would attain rebirth or not.⁶⁵

The thrust of the discussion is then the criteria by which one could identify "orthodox" Pure Land masters from among the dozens of Pure Land exegetes and accomplished adepts in China. Hōnen's particular defence of his emphasis on the teachings of Shan-tao would have been unnecessary had Shan-tao's stature and authority as a Pure Land exegete been a matter of broad consensus at the time. Hōnen's reading of Shan-tao—his insistence, for example, that Shan-tao advocated the *exclusive* reliance on Pure Land teachings, or that he championed the oral recitation of the *nien-fo* over other methods—was so influential that only recently have Western scholars begun to question it.⁶⁶ We can also now appreciate why texts such as Tao-ch'o's *An-le chi* and Chia-ts'ai's *Ching-t'u lun* have been presented as if they constituted early attempts to construct a Pure Land patriarchate; this too is due to Hōnen's enduring legacy. It would seem that the modern reconstruction of a Chinese Pure Land school with its own patriarchate has its roots not so much in China as in the writings of Hōnen.

⁶⁵ T.2608: 83.19a5-24; Ishii ed. 347-348; cf. Hōnen 1998: 148-149.

⁶⁶ For an attempt at reappraising Shan-tao's writing free of the influence of Japanese sectarian concerns, see Pas 1995.

The final stage in the intellectual genealogy of the “Chinese Pure Land patriarchate” lies in the writings of Hōnen’s disciple Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1262), founder of the Jōdo Shin school. Shinran proposed a line of succession that comprised seven figures in all, namely Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, Genshin 源信 (942-1017), and Hōnen.⁶⁷ Shinran’s innovation was to involve Indian and Japanese patriarchs in the succession, with the clear implication being that his teaching represents an authentic transmission originating with the foremost exponents of Mahāyāna thought in India.

The patriarchs who take center stage in contemporary presentations of Chinese Pure Land—T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, and Shan-tao—are derived, it would seem, from the Japanese tradition; they are precisely the three Chinese patriarchs on whom both the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin traditions agreed. My thesis, in short, is that a reading of the Chinese sources wholly unbiased by Japanese sectarian developments would not yield the same list of figures. Indeed, were it not for the legacy of Hōnen and Shinran, it might never have occurred to us to conceive of an autonomous Chinese Pure Land tradition with its own line of patriarchs in the first place.

***Nien-fo* and Early Ch’an**

I would emphasize once again that faith in Amitābha was an ubiquitous feature of Chinese Buddhism and that desire for rebirth in the Pure Land was virtually universal among Buddhist practitioners regardless of their ordination lineage, their ecclesiastical education (or lack thereof), or their institutional affiliation. The practice most closely associated with Pure Land thought is *nien-fo* (*buddhānusmṛti*), a cover term for a variety of practices extending from a single utterance of the name of a buddha—often, but by no means necessarily, Amitābha—to an elaborate ritual involving chanting, prostration, and visualization. Thus the term can be translated, depending on the context, as “recollection of the buddha,” “contemplation of the buddha,” “recitation of the name(s) of the buddha,” “invocation of the buddha,” and so on.⁶⁸ Many *nien-fo* practices are associated with granting the aspirant a vision of Amitābha in this life and/or assur-

⁶⁷ Ishida 1976.

⁶⁸ On the early use and meaning of *nien-fo*, see Ujitani 1954; Yoshioka 1961; Harrison 1978; and Shih 1992: 26-71.

ing that the aspirant will receive such a vision at the time of death. But in China, a more rarefied, “demythologized” understanding of *nien-fo* is as old as the practice itself, and as I will show below, it would be wrong to assume that the more literalistic understanding of the mechanism of *nien-fo* and the status of the Pure Land can claim historical or scriptural precedence.

In various forms *nien-fo* has always been an important component of the Chinese Buddhist *dhyāna* tradition, and many of the so-called Pure Land patriarchs mentioned above, including Tao-ch’o and Shan-tao, are classified as “meditation masters” (*ch’an-shih* 禪師) in early biographies or as “practitioners of meditation” (*hsi-ch’an* 習禪) in T’ang hagiographical collections.⁶⁹ Moreover, documents recovered from Tun-huang confirm that masters associated with early “patriarchal Ch’an” continued to instruct their disciples in *nien-fo* practice.

Some scholars have suggested otherwise, drawing attention to passages criticizing Pure Land practices in Northern Ch’an texts. In the introduction to this essay I quoted a passage in the *Pao-tsang lun* belittling those who practice *nien-fo* in order to attain a vision of the Buddha, and a similar critique is found in the *Chüeh-kuan lun* 絕觀論, a text associated with the Ox-head (Niu-t’ou 牛頭) lineage of Ch’an.⁷⁰ Typical of such criticism is this exchange taken from the *Hsiu-hsin yao lun* 修心要論, a text traditionally attributed to the fifth Ch’an patriarch Hung-jen 弘忍 (601-675): “Question: Why is it said that one’s own mind is superior to mindfulness of the Buddha 何名自心勝念彼佛? Answer: One cannot escape from the rounds of life and death by constantly being mindful of the Buddha. Only by constantly maintaining awareness of your own original mind can you reach the other shore.”⁷¹ In his study of Northern Ch’an, John McRae comments: “This section is obviously directed against the Pure Land practice of *nien-fo*.”⁷² But such a reading may not be as obvious as it first appears. The passage may be directed against a

⁶⁹ This is the case in the *Wang-sheng hsi-fang ching-t’u jui-ying chuan*, the *Hsü kao-seng chuan*, and so on.

⁷⁰ Sharf 2002: 44-46.

⁷¹ T.2011: 48.377b17-18; cf. trans. McRae 1986: 123. The *Hsiu-hsin yao lun* was published in Korea in 1570, and re-discovered in several manuscripts from Tun-huang (S.2669, S.3558, S.4064, S.6159, P.3559, P.3434, P.3777). It is traditionally attributed to the fifth patriarch, although this remains a matter of dispute among Japanese scholars. Detailed notes on the history of the text can be found in McRae 1986: 309-312, and an edition is included at the end of that volume.

⁷² McRae 1986: 315.

particular *understanding* of *nien-fo*, rather than against *nien-fo* practice per se. In other words, the passage may be of a kind with the oft-noted Ch'an rejection of sitting meditation (*tso-ch'an* 坐禪), or more dramatically, with the injunction to "burn the scriptures and kill the patriarchs." Such passages were not intended to be taken literally; T'ang Ch'an monastic life was preoccupied with sitting meditation, chanting scriptures, and worshipping patriarchs. Rather, passages disparaging seated meditation, scriptural recitation, or indeed *nien-fo* are better viewed in the context of Mahāyāna soteriology: they were injunctions against attachments that would have been particularly intransigent within a monastic setting. The rhetorical as opposed to the literal rejection of *all* forms of practice became a hallmark of orthodoxy in Ch'an.

Thus a casual reading of the teachings of the fourth-patriarch Tao-hsin 道信 (580-651), as recorded in the *Leng-ch'ieh shih-tzu chi* 楞伽師資記, would seem to support a negative valuation of *nien-fo* practice and Pure Land ideology among teachers now identified with Northern Ch'an:

[Question:] "How is it possible to attain understanding of the characteristics of dharma and to purify the mind?" [Tao-]hsin said: "Not by contemplating the Buddha, nor by seizing the mind, nor by observing the mind, nor by calculating thought, nor by deliberation, nor by the practice of discernment, nor by being scattered and confused. Just allow things to go naturally." 云何能得悟解法相、心得明淨。信曰：亦不念佛、亦不捉心、亦不看心、亦不計心、亦不思惟、亦不觀行、亦不散亂。直任運。⁷³

And again:

Question: "In each moment, how does one practice discernment?" Hsin said: "You must just allow things to go naturally." Question: "Should one turn in the direction of the West [facing the Pure Land] or not?" Hsin said: "If you understand that the mind originally neither arises nor passes away, that it is ultimately pure, *this* is the pure buddha-land. There is no further need to face West." 問：臨時作若爲觀行？信曰：真須任運。又曰：用向西方不？信曰：若知心本來不生不滅、究竟清淨、即是淨佛國土。更不須向西方。⁷⁴

But curiously, we find other passages in the same text, ascribed to the same master Tao-hsin, that support a different conclusion:

Do not grasp hold of appearances, but bind the mind to one buddha and exclusively invoke his name. Wherever that buddha may be, straighten the body and face in that direction. If you are able to continually contemplate this

⁷³ T.2837: 85.1287b17-20; Yanagida 1971: 205.

⁷⁴ T.2837: 85.1287c7-10; Yanagida 1971: 213-214.

one buddha, in the midst of your contemplation you will be able to see all buddhas of past, present, and future. Why? The merit of contemplating a single buddha is immeasurable and boundless. 不取相貌、繫心一佛、專稱名字。隨佛方所、端身正向。能於一佛念念相續即是念中能見過去未來現在諸佛。何以故？念一佛功德無量無邊。⁷⁵

And again:

Contemplate the Buddha continuously in each moment of thought. Suddenly there will be clarity and serenity, without any object of contemplation. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: “Being without an object of contemplation is called ‘contemplating the Buddha.’”⁷⁶ What is meant by being without an object of contemplation? This very mind that is contemplating the Buddha is what is known as “without an object of contemplation.” Apart from mind there is no buddha, apart from buddha there is no mind. To contemplate the Buddha is to contemplate the mind; to seek the mind is to seek the Buddha. Why so? Consciousness has no form and the Buddha has no form or appearance. To understand this principle is to bring peace to the mind. With constant contemplation of the Buddha there is no grasping at objects, and everything is utterly without marks, equal, and nondual. 念佛心心相續、忽然澄寂更無所緣念。大品經云：無所念者是名念佛。何等名無所念。即念佛心名無所念。離心無別有佛。離佛無別有心。念佛即是念心。求心即是求佛。所以者何？識無形、佛無形。佛無相貌。若也知此道理即是安心。常憶念佛攀緣不起、則泯然無相平等不二。⁷⁷

The extended instructions on the topic of *nien-fo* suggest that Tao-hsin not only advocated *nien-fo* but that *nien-fo* was a cardinal practice among his community. In that case, Tao-hsin’s cautionary comments are best read not as injunctions against the practice of *nien-fo* but rather as reminders not to conceive of the Pure Land or the Buddha dualistically. The object of the contemplation is ultimately mind itself, and the Pure Land to be attained is the fundamental purity of mind.

Similarly, the *Kuan-hsin lun* 觀心論, a text that current scholarship attributes to the Northern Ch’an master Shen-hsiu 神秀 (605?-706), distinguishes between the empty recitation of a buddha’s name and true contemplation.⁷⁸

Question: What about the scriptural teaching that if you wholeheartedly contemplate Buddha you are certain to attain liberation? Answer: When it comes to contemplation of the Buddha, you must make correct contemplation into your rule and not understand it falsely. Correct contemplation will certainly

⁷⁵ T.2837: 85.1286c28-1287a2; Yanagida 1971: 186.

⁷⁶ *Ta-p’in ching* 大品經 (*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-sūtra*), T.223: 8.385c5.

⁷⁷ T.2837: 85.1287a9-15; Yanagida 1971: 192.

⁷⁸ T.2833. For textual information and a bibliography on the *Kuan-hsin lun*, see McRae 1986: 325.

yield rebirth in the Pure Land, but how could false contemplation lead one there? “Buddha” means “awakening.” This means to awaken and penetrate the source of mind and not allow evil to arise. “Contemplation” means “reflect upon.” This is to firmly maintain the practice of morality and not to forget to diligently seek to understand the Tathāgata’s teaching. This is called “correct contemplation.” Therefore understand that contemplation resides in the mind, not in words. You use a fish trap to catch fish, and when you have the fish you can forget about the trap. You use words to get at the meaning,⁷⁹ and when you have grasped the meaning you can forget about the words. To praise contemplation of the Buddha is to say that one must practice the very essence of contemplation of the Buddha. If the mind is not true, one’s utterances will be empty and one’s contemplation will be wasted effort. 又問：經所說言至心念佛必得解脫？答曰：夫念佛者、當須正念爲正。不了義即爲邪。正念必得往生淨國、邪念云何達彼。佛者覺也。所爲覺察心源勿令起惡。念者憶也。謂堅持戒行不忘精勤了如來義。名爲正念。故知念在於心不在於言。因筌求魚、得魚妄筌。因言求言、得意忘言。既稱念佛云名須行念佛之體。若心無實、口誦空言、徒念虛功。⁸⁰

The text does not say to abandon *nien-fo*. On the contrary, it spends considerable time elucidating the proper attitude toward what was apparently an important component of monastic ritual.

Evidence of *nien-fo* practice among Northern Ch’an practitioners can be found in another Tun-huang text associated with Shen-hsiu, the *Ta-sheng wu-sheng fang-pien men* 大乘無生方便門.⁸¹ This unusual document begins with a record of a public precept ceremony followed by a lecture on the dharma. At one point in the ceremony the assembly, following the lead of the preceptor, engages in a period of *nien-fo* recitation (*i-shih nien-fo* 一時念佛).⁸² And the *Ta-mo ch’an-shih kuan-men* 達磨禪師觀門, yet another Tun-huang document associated with early Ch’an, declares the value of *nien-fo* practice in no uncertain terms. After an exposition of the seven discernment-gates of Ch’an, the text says: “The invocation of the Buddha in a loud voice (*ta-sheng nien-fo* 大聲念佛) will bring ten kinds of merit: (1) evil voices will not be heard; (2) your invocation of the Buddha will not be scattered; (3) it eliminates sleepiness; (4) it brings courage and energy; (5) it pleases all the devas; (6) it scares away demons; (7) your

⁷⁹ Emend 言 to 意.

⁸⁰ T.2833: 85.1273a5-13.

⁸¹ Various versions of this text, under differing titles, have been recovered at Tun-huang, the most important being S.2503, P.2058, and P.2270, and it has been published as T.2834. Textual information can be found in McRae 1986: 327-330. Editions are available in Ui 1939: 447-510, and Suzuki 1968-71: 3.153-253. For a composite translation of the various manuscripts, see McRae 1986: 171-196.

⁸² T.2834: 85.1273c3.

voice will stir the ten directions; (8) it eliminates suffering; (9) all *samādhis* appear before you; (10) rebirth is attained in the Pure Land.”⁸³

Pure Land practice is also mentioned in one of the earliest extant “Ch’an lineage histories,” the *Ch’uan fa-pao chi* 傳法寶紀, composed ca. 713 (*T.2838*). This text records that Hung-jen along with others of his generation taught a form of *nien-fo* practice: “Coming to the generation of [Hung-]jen, [Fa-]ju and Ta-tung, the dharma-door was wide open to followers, regardless of their capacities. All immediately invoked the name of the Buddha so as to purify the mind.”⁸⁴ This record is corroborated by documents associated with the disciples of the fifth patriarch. The *Ching-t’u wang-sheng chuan*, for example, records that Hung-jen’s disciple Fa-ch’ih 法持 (635-702), “devoted his thought to the Pure Land for some nine years, and in all his daily activities he always relied upon the contemplation [of the Buddha].”⁸⁵

Many years ago the Japanese scholar Ui Hakuju, in his important work on early Ch’an history, drew attention to the ubiquity of what he called *nien-fo ch’an* 念佛禪 in the various lineages stemming from Hung-jen.⁸⁶ Ui noted that while there is no explicit mention of *nien-fo* practice in documents associated with Hung-jen’s disciple Chih-shen 智誥 (or 侁, 609-702)⁸⁷ or Chih-shen’s disciple Ch’u-chi 處寂,⁸⁸ Ch’u-chi’s own dharma heirs, notably Wu-hsiang 無相 (K: Musang)⁸⁹

⁸³ *T.2832*: 85.1270c1-5. For a discussion of this text, see Sekiguchi 1957: 295-316. The origin of this list of ten benefits is unclear, although roughly the same list appears in Yen-shou’s *Wan-shan t’ung-kuei chi* 萬善同歸集 (*T.2017*: 48.962b7-11). It is possible that this passage concerning the invocation of the Buddha is a later addition to the *Ta-mo ch’an-shih kuan-men* (Sekiguchi 1957: 299-300).

⁸⁴ Yanagida 1971: 420. For a discussion of the origins of the text, see Yanagida 1967: 47-58, and McRae 1986: 86-88 and *passim*.

⁸⁵ *T.2071*: 51.119c29-120a1; trans. Ui 1996: 211 with minor changes. Fa-ch’ih is also known as the fourth patriarch of the Ox-head school. His biography can be found in the *Ching-t’u wang-sheng chuan*, *T.2071*: 51.119c24-120a9; see also Sekiguchi 1957: 314-316; and Ui 1939: 172-173.

⁸⁶ Ui 1939: 169-194. Ui’s analysis is compromised by his assumption, still common among Japanese scholars, that the monastic use of *nien-fo* represents a departure from “pure Zen” (*junsui zen* 純粹禪; Ui 1939: 171 and *passim*).

⁸⁷ According to what is likely an apocryphal story in the *Li-tai fa-pao chi*, Chih-shen received Hui-neng’s robe as a sign of transmission from the Empress Wu (Yanagida 1976: 137). In addition to a short biography and scattered references in the *Li-tai fa-pao chi*, information on Chih-shen can be found in *Sung kao-seng chuan* biographies of Ch’u-chi and Wu-hsiang; see Ui 1939: 172-173.

⁸⁸ Ch’u-chi’s dates are given variously as 648-734, 665-732, and 669-736. For his biography, see Ui 1939: 174.

⁸⁹ The dates for Wu-hsiang, a native of Silla, are uncertain; 680-756 and 684-

and Ch'eng-yüan, are closely associated with Pure Land style practices. And if you add the line of Hsüan-shih 宣什 to those of Wu-hsiang and Ch'eng-yüan, you end up with three lineages, all centered in Szechwan, all tracing themselves to Hung-jen, and all propagating *nien-fo*.⁹⁰

Wu-hsiang was founder of what became known as the Ching-chung 淨衆 school, and he is remembered for an elaborate ordination ceremony called *k'ai-yüan* 開緣 that he administered on a regular basis. The ceremony is recorded by Tsung-mi in his *Chung-hua ch'uan-hsin-ti ch'an-men shih-tzu ch'eng-hsi t'u* 中華傳心地禪門師資承襲圖,⁹¹ as well as in the *Li-tai fa-pao chi*. The description in the latter text reads as follows:

Reverend Kim [Wu-hsiang], in the first and twelfth months of every year, would administer the precepts for the sake of thousands of monks, nuns, and lay people. He would prepare and adorn the sanctuary and then discourse upon the dharma from the high seat. First he taught the *nien-fo* wherein one drew out the sound to the point of exhausting a single breath. When the sound died down and thoughts ceased he said: "No remembering, no thought, no forgetting. No remembering is morality, no thought is concentration, no forgetting is wisdom. These three phrases are the *dhāraṇī* gate."⁹²

Wu-hsiang's "dharma brother" Ch'eng-yüan is said to have taught the *nien-fo samādhi* 念佛三昧 in the tradition of Tz'u-min, and Ch'eng-yüan's residence in Nan-yüeh was known as the Amitābha Terrace (Mi-t'o-t'ai 彌陀臺).⁹³ Moreover, the "Pure Land" credentials of one of Ch'eng-yüan's disciples, Fa-chao, are beyond doubt, as he appears on various Sung T'ien-t'ai lists of "Lotus Society patriarchs" (see above). In emulation of Hui-yüan, Fa-chao built a Hsi-fang tao-ch'ang 西方道場 (Sanctuary Facing the Western [Pure Land]) on Mount Lu; sitting in the sanctuary he entered into meditation and

762 have been proposed. He arrived in China in 728. Despite later accounts, Wu-hsiang may have had no connection with Chih-shen, but he most likely did study under and receive transmission from Ch'u-chi. His disciples included Wu-chu 無住 (714-774) of the Pao-t'ang-ssu 保唐寺; see Ui 1939: 174-175.

⁹⁰ On the Szechwan schools, see esp. Broughton 1983. On the use of *nien-fo* in these schools, in addition to Ui 1939, see Sekiguchi 1957: 303-316.

⁹¹ Kamata 1971: 305.

⁹² T.2075: 51.185a11-15; Yanagida 1976: 143; cf. Broughton 1983: 37.

⁹³ Ui 1939: 176; Ui notes that emperors also bestowed the names Pan-chou tao-ch'ang 般舟道場 (Pratyutpanna Hall) and Mi-t'o-ssu 彌陀寺 (Amitābha Temple) on the site. On Ch'eng-yüan's activities on Nan-yüeh—a combination of strict Ch'an asceticism and the practice and propagation of *nien-fo*—see also the sources mentioned in note 36 above.

reached the Land of Happiness (An-le kuo 安樂國) wherein he saw an old monk in attendance before Amitābha.⁹⁴ Fa-chao was particularly well known for his teaching of the five-tone *nien-fo* (*wu-hui nien-fo* 五會念佛) and authored a number of texts on the subject, including the *Ching-t'u wu-hui nien-fo sung-ching kuan-hsing i* 淨土五會念佛誦經觀行儀 (T.2827), the *Ching-t'u wu-hui nien-fo lüeh-fa-shih-i tsan* 淨土五會念佛略法事儀讚 (T.1983), and the *Ching-t'u fa-shen tsan* 淨土法身讚. The latter text, recovered at Tun-huang, proclaims the identity of “no-thought” (*wu-nien* 無念) and the invocation of the Buddha.⁹⁵ This is yet another way of saying that “ch’an” practice and *nien-fo* are one and the same—the goal of the Pure Land is to be found nowhere but in the mind.⁹⁶

Hsüan-shih, also active in the Szechwan area, is reported by Tsung-mi to have been a disciple of the fifth patriarch.⁹⁷ Like Wu-hsiang, he practiced an ordination ceremony that included a Ch’an transmission and *nien-fo* recitation.⁹⁸ In his *Yüan-chüeh ching ta-shu ch’ao* 圓覺經大疏鈔, Tsung-mi refers to this school as the “*nien-fo ch’an* lineage of South Mountain” (*nan-shan nien-fo ch’an-tsung* 南山念佛禪宗) which specialized in the transmission of incense and the preservation of the Buddha (*ts’un fo* 存佛). The ceremony is described as follows:

The “preservation of Buddha” means that, when transmitting the dharma, [the teacher] first discourses upon the meaning and significance of the various doctrines and practices. Then the Buddha is invoked in a single word 一字念佛. First the sound of the invocation is protracted; then gradually the voice becomes increasingly subtle until there is no sound at all. Although the [invocation] of the Buddha has shifted [from speech] to ideation 意, invocation through ideation is still coarse. [The invocation] then shifts to mind 心, abiding in each moment of thought 想. The Buddha dwells within the mind constantly until one reaches the point of no-thought and attains the way.⁹⁹

All available evidence suggests that early Ch’an masters did not reject the practice of *nien-fo* per se; on the contrary, *nien-fo* was widely

⁹⁴ Ui 1939: 176. Comprehensive studies of Fa-chao can be found in Sasaki 1925: 73-79; Tsukamoto 1976b; and Liu 2000: 376-420.

⁹⁵ On the latter text, found in multiple versions at Tun-huang (notably P.2690; P.2963), see Tsukamoto 1976b: 458-459; Ueyama 1976; and Broughton 1983: 34-36.

⁹⁶ Ch’eng-yüan and Fa-chao also had close connections with T’ien-t’ai and Lü monks and practices; see the studies mentioned in notes 6 and 36 above.

⁹⁷ Kamata 1971: 289.

⁹⁸ See Sekiguchi 1957: 303; and Broughton 1983: 36-37.

⁹⁹ Sekiguchi 1957: 303; Ui 1939: 191; cf. translations in Jan 1972: 49; and Ui 1996: 233-235.

practiced in their communities. When T'ang Ch'an masters did discourse on the subject, they emphasized an approach to *nien-fo* that was consonant with fundamental Mahāyāna tenets of detachment, nonduality, and emptiness.

Sung Ch'an and *Nien-fo*

Our sources for early Ch'an history consist primarily of manuscripts recovered at Tun-huang supplemented by the surviving works of Tsung-mi. Both sources suggest that monks associated with the nascent Ch'an movement of the seventh and eighth centuries engaged in various forms of *nien-fo* as well as in other ritualized forms of worship and meditation typical of medieval Chinese Buddhist monasteries. When we turn to the monastic life of the late T'ang, however, historical reconstruction is hampered by a lack of reliable documentation. Virtually all of the vulgate *yü-lu* or "discourse records" of the so-called golden age of T'ang Ch'an—beginning with the records of Ma-tsu Tao-i 馬祖道一 (709-788) and his disciples—were redacted during the Sung. The Sung editors had a vested interest in propagating the myth of T'ang Ch'an as an independent movement that lived to the letter of its iconoclastic and antinomian ideology.¹⁰⁰ The late T'ang masters are presented accordingly as if they *literally* rejected seated meditation, scriptural recitation, worship of images and relics, and even adherence to the Vinaya. As such the discourse records are of limited value in reconstructing the monastic life of the T'ang monks whose lives they document. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the elaborate ritual and liturgical practices characteristic of Chinese Buddhist monastic life did not continue on as before. Ch'an iconoclastic rhetoric is parasitic upon a highly ritualized lifestyle.

Despite the efforts of Sung editors to consolidate the myth of a pure T'ang Ch'an, the records of Sung monastic institutions themselves indicate that little attempt was made to imitate the supposed iconoclasm and anti-ritualism of their predecessors. By the Sung, most public monastic establishments had come to be affiliated with one or another Ch'an lineage, i.e., the abbots traced their ordination lines back through Pai-chang 百丈 (749-814), Hui-neng 惠能 (638-713), and Bodhidharma to Śākyamuni. But such affiliation did not

¹⁰⁰ On the Sung construction of T'ang Ch'an, see esp. Foulk 1987 and 1993.

entail abandoning the full panoply of practices that we find in earlier T'ang institutions. The most compelling evidence for the conservatism of the Sung establishments is to be found in the extant Ch'an monastic codes of the period. Codes such as the *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* (1103) and the *Ju-chung jih-yung ch'ing-kuei* 入衆日用清規 (1209) offer us a rich and detailed glimpse into the day-to-day functioning of Sung monasteries.¹⁰¹ Among other things, these texts testify to the ubiquitous use of *nien-fo* in a variety of ritual settings.

The *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* proved to be the single most influential Ch'an monastic code in East Asia. As mentioned above, the *Le-pang wen-lei* proclaims its author, Tsung-tse, to be the last of five patriarchs in the lineage of the Lotus Society. We learn that he was not only active in proselytizing but that he also founded a Lotus Society (*lien-hua sheng-hui* 蓮華勝會) to promote the universal cultivation of *nien-fo samādhi*. He taught a practice through which one could attain birth in the Pure Land by repeated invocations (from one hundred to ten thousand repetitions per day) of Amitābha's name.¹⁰²

The *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* contains a number of casual references to *nien-fo*. The recitation of the names of the ten buddhas is incorporated into the pre-meal liturgy,¹⁰³ and *nien-fo* is also mentioned in conjunction with the ceremonial reading of scriptures at the request of a patron.¹⁰⁴ As one would expect, *nien-fo* was used at various points in the funerals of both common monks and abbots. The *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* explicitly mentions the recitation of Amitābha's name ten times in conjunction with monastic funerals, and during the more elaborate rites for a deceased abbot, the invocations of Amitābha's name are followed by the distribution of money called *nien-fo ch'ien* 念佛錢.¹⁰⁵ Finally, at the end of the funeral for a monk, after auctioning the monk's robes the following proclamation is made:

¹⁰¹ The *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* (*HTC*. 111.438a-471c) has been edited and translated by Kagamishima et al. 1972; see also the English study and translation in Yifa 2002. The *Ju-chung jih-yung ch'ing-kuei* is found in *HTC*. 111.472a-474b; see also Foulk 1995. The *Ju-chung jih-yung ch'ing-kuei* has also found its way into fascicle 6 of the *Ch'ih-hsiu pai-chang ch'ing-kuei* under the title *Jih-yung kwei-fan* 日用軌範 (*T*.2025: 48.1144b5-1146b8).

¹⁰² *T*.1969a: 47.193c13-24.

¹⁰³ Kagamishima et al. 1972: 48 and 219. The recitation of the names of the ten buddhas prior to meals is still practiced today by monks in many sects of East Asian Buddhism.

¹⁰⁴ Kagamishima et al. 1972: 207.

¹⁰⁵ Kagamishima et al. 1972: 239 and 261.

“May all the merit accrued from the preceding invocations performed by the assembly and the [auction] of the robes [of the deceased monk] be transferred to the deceased and assist his awakened spirit to attain birth in the Pure Land. I trouble the assembly to once again invoke all the buddhas of the ten directions and the three worlds.” Thereupon everyone sincerely invokes the buddhas, without any frivolous joking around or horseplay. 上來大眾念誦并唱衣物功德、並用迴向歿故某人 資助覺靈往生淨土。再煩大眾念十方三世一切諸佛。並以志誠念佛、不得戲笑語話乖角。¹⁰⁶

The *Ju-chung jih-yung ch'ing-kuei*—a code that focuses on monastic etiquette and minor daily rituals rather than administration and major ceremonies—also mentions *nien-fo* in a variety of contexts. The instructions for folding the surplice (*chia-sha* 袈裟), for example, include the admonition not to do so in the middle of the hall lest one block the passage of the officers, and not to recite the *nien-fo* so loud as to disturb the assembly.¹⁰⁷ This text too incorporates *nien-fo* into the recitations preceding meals.¹⁰⁸

Finally, the *Ch'ih-hsiu pai-chang ch'ing-kuei* 敕修百丈清規 (compiled between 1336 and 1343) provides further evidence for the continued practice of *nien-fo* in Ch'an institutions. In the instructions for services for an ill monk (*ping-seng nien-sung* 病僧念誦), for example, the monks are directed to recite the *nien-fo* one hundred times, along with verses praising the virtues of Amitābha and his Pure Land. At the same time they are enjoined to maintain the desire that the ailing person be reborn in the Pure Land.¹⁰⁹

It would appear that, despite shifts in ideology and rhetorical conventions brought about by the ascendancy of Ch'an in the Sung, liturgical practice in Ch'an establishments remained largely traditional. This, it would seem, gave rise to an *apparent* tension between the iconoclastic ideals enshrined in T'ang Ch'an records on the one hand and the lived realities of monastic life on the other. Some Sung Ch'an exegetes and apologists responded to this tension by rationalizing the widespread use of *nien-fo* as well as other “Pure Land” and “esoteric” liturgical and ritual forms. The writings of such monks have contributed in no small way to our view of Sung and post-Sung Buddhism as syncretic.

The prolific Sung monk Yung-ming Yen-shou is typical in this

¹⁰⁶ Kagamishima et al. 1974: 246.

¹⁰⁷ *HTC*. 111.472b15-16.

¹⁰⁸ *HTC*. 111.472d8.

¹⁰⁹ *T*.2025: 48.1147b18-29. The *Ch'ih-hsiu pai-chang ch'ing-kuei* also contains instructions for the invocation of Amitābha during the rites for a deceased monk; *T*.2025: 48.1148c12.

regard. He is considered a pioneer of Ch'an-Pure Land syncretism and is remembered as both the third patriarch of the Fa-yen 法眼 lineage of Ch'an and the sixth Lotus Society patriarch in the *Fō-tsu t'ung-chi*.¹¹⁰ Known as an ardent practitioner of *nien-fō*, Yen-shou was simultaneously a tireless advocate of Ch'an teachings. He is thus considered to have laid the foundation for the kind of practice that came to dominate Chinese Buddhism down to modern times.

A cursory examination of the biographies and voluminous writings of Yen-shou reveals that he was involved in the entire spectrum of medieval Buddhist monastic practices.¹¹¹ The *Chih-chüeh ch'an-shih tzu-hsing lu* 智覺禪師自行錄 by Wen-ch'ung 文沖 records the 108 practices performed daily by Yen-shou.¹¹² They include the recitation of a number of Mahāyāna scriptures, including the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, *Ratnakūta*, *Lotus Sūtra*, and *Heart Sūtra*, the performance of the *fa-hua* 法華 repentance, recitation of *dhāraṇī*, worship of a variety of buddhas and bodhisattvas, releasing living beings (*fang-sheng* 放生), feeding hungry ghosts, *nien-fō*, seated meditation (*tso-ch'an*), and scriptural exegesis.¹¹³ Each of these practices was undertaken, according to the *Tzu-hsing lu*, with the intent to benefit and liberate all sentient beings.

In the preface to his monumental compilation, the *Tsung-ching lu* 宗鏡錄 of 961, Yen-shou explains his approach: "I will now examine in detail the orthodox doctrine of the scriptures and treatises [that record] the great teaching of the patriarchs and Buddhas. I will eschew ornate writing and investigate only the essentials, making use of [the rhetorical device of] questions and answers to elicit clarity, raising the one-mind as the principle 宗 that illuminates all dharmas like a mirror."¹¹⁴ Yen-shou's exegetical strategy—approaching all Buddhist doctrines in terms of the principle of one mind—is in evidence throughout the *Tsung-ching lu*. In both dialectical form as well as substance, this hermeneutic procedure has much in common with earlier exegetical schemes in which all forms are understood as fin-

¹¹⁰ T.2035: 49.260c23-24.

¹¹¹ Recent studies of the life and thought of Yen-shou can be found in Shih 1992, and Welter 1986 and 1988. Shih's study is marred by an uncritical reliance on traditional accounts of Yen-shou's life, a shortfall remedied by Welter. Both scholars accept the notion that Pure Land was a "school" in China, doctrinally at odds with Ch'an, and thus in need of "synthesis."

¹¹² *HTC*. 111.77b-84d.

¹¹³ Shih 1992: 104-118.

¹¹⁴ T.2016: 48.417a19-21.

gers pointing to the one moon. Japanese scholars have referred to this strategy, typical of the many early Ch'an texts mentioned above, as "mind-discerning exegesis" (*kanyin shaku* 觀心釋), in which one approaches "each line of scripture as a function or component of the 'contemplation of the principle of the True Characteristic of One Mind.'" ¹¹⁵ Yen-shou, although unoriginal, is perhaps more dogged than most in his reliance on this method.

Thus, like his predecessors Yen-shou insists that the Pure Land is to be sought only in the mind—a position known as "mind-only Pure Land" (*wei-hsin ching-t'u* 唯心淨土). Yen-shou explains it as follows: "Know that if you become conscious of mind, you will be born into the Pure Land that is naught but mind, but if you are attached to external objects, you will fall into the midst of those objects with which you associate. If you are clear that there is no difference between cause and effect, you will understand that there is no dharma apart from mind." ¹¹⁶ The Buddhas that appear to the *nien-fo* practitioner as well as the Buddhas that manifest to the Pure Land devotee at death are a manifestation of the *dharmakāya* and are none other than mind. *Nien-fo* is an effective *upāya* for those of inferior faculties, but the ultimate goal is the illumination of mind. ¹¹⁷ For Yen-shou, *nien-fo* is but one path to the apprehension of emptiness (*śūnyatā*, *k'ung* 空), and to attain birth in the Pure Land is to consummate the bodhisattva vows: "The *Treatise on Yonder Birth* [*Wang-sheng lun* 往生論] says: "Those who are able to roam freely in hell are those who have been born in the [Pure] Land and who have obtained the "patience of no-birth." They then return to the realm of birth and death in order to teach and transform [those in] the hell realm and to save suffering sentient beings. It is for this reason that they seek to be born in the Pure Land." ¹¹⁸

Yen-shou is following a tried-and-true exegetical strategy that may be as old as Mahāyāna itself. He argues that the doctrine of the identity of mind and Buddha, which had become a central tenet in Ch'an, does not mitigate the efficacy of *nien-fo*. The realization that

¹¹⁵ McRae 1986: 202. This term is actually borrowed from Chih-i's analysis of different styles of *Lotus Sūtra* exegesis, where "mind-discerning exegesis" (*kuan-hsin shih*) refers to the fourth and highest mode of interpretation; see the first fascicle of the *Miao-fa-lien-hua ching wen-chü* 妙法蓮華經文句 by Chih-i, T.1718. See also McRae 1986: 201-205 and 339-340; and Faure 1984: 101-102.

¹¹⁶ T.2017: 48.966c3-5; cf. Shih 1992: 146-147.

¹¹⁷ T.2016: 48.506a; Shih 1992: 149.

¹¹⁸ T.2017: 48.966c16-19.

the Pure Land is identical with mind does not render the Pure Land a *mere* metaphor, somehow less substantial than the phenomenal world of daily existence. Nor does the Buddhist monk abandon desire for birth in the Pure Land upon realizing the identity of mind and the Pure Land. On the contrary, his desire to “save all beings” is fulfilled precisely through such a rebirth.

Yen-shou’s extensive writing on the subject, in which he draws from dozens of Buddhist scriptures, reiterates the point again and again: Ch’an, correctly understood, is not antagonistic to *nien-fo* practice. This should not be seen as an attempt to forge a new synthesis between Ch’an and Pure Land but rather as a way to legitimize well-established liturgical precedents. His position was, to my knowledge, never seriously refuted, and despite continuing to pay lip-service to the “rhetoric of immediacy” (to use Bernard Faure’s felicitous phrase), most Ch’an monks continued, as they had always done, to practice the full panoply of Pure Land “mediations” free of any apparent pangs of ideological guilt.¹¹⁹

“Ch’an Pure Land” or Simply “Pure Land”?

Textual evidence suggests that Ch’an teachers regularly propagated *nien-fo* practices during the T’ang and Sung dynasties. At the same time, numerous passages in Ch’an documents caution against a crudely literal or simple-minded approach to Pure Land teachings. The Pure Land, we are told *ad nauseam*, is the original purity of one’s own mind that must be sought here and now. To understand this is

¹¹⁹ Yen-shou’s mastery of the dialectics of the two truths is still in evidence half a millennium later, in the recorded sayings of Yung-chüeh Yüan-hsien 永覺元賢 (1578-1657), considered by later historians to be a “spiritual descendent” of Yen-shou: “There are two aspects with regard to the faith in the Buddha’s words. One is faith in the principle 理; the other is faith in the phenomenal. Faith in the principle means to believe that one’s mind is the Pure Land and one’s nature is the Buddha Amitābha. Faith in the phenomenal means to believe that the Pure Land lies in the Western Region, and that Buddha Amitābha resides there. From the aspect of the principle, the aspect of the phenomenal manifests. It is like the ocean-seal’s ability to manifest myriad phenomena. From the aspect of the phenomenal, the aspect of the principle manifests, for the myriad phenomena are inseparable from the ocean-seal. These two aspects of faith are both one and two, yet neither one nor two. To have faith in this manner is called true faith” (*Chiao-hu chi* 角虎集, *HTC*. 109.269c7-12; trans. follows Shih 1992: 188 with minor changes). The *Chiao-hu chi*, edited in 1770 by Chi-neng 濟能, records the teachings of some fifty-nine Ch’an masters who followed in the tradition of Yen-shou.

to realize the goal of *niēn-fo*—to “see the Buddha” (*chīēn-fo* 見佛). Chanting the Buddha’s name is but one method of coming to understand the emptiness of phenomenal reality.

This doctrine should not be viewed as a Ch’an innovation—as a novel attempt to demythologize “traditional” Pure Land cosmology or as a rear-guard effort to impose Yogācāra and Mādhyamika principles on a resistant body of popular Pure Land myths and practices. On the contrary, this understanding of the Pure Land is maintained in a plethora of Indian Mahāyāna texts, antedating more “literal” approaches to the subject.

Although the Chinese term *ching-t’u* or Pure Land has no clear Sanskrit equivalent,¹²⁰ it is closely associated with the Indian notion of a *buddhakṣetra* or “buddha-field.” According to the *Mahāvastu*, a buddha-field is that realm where “a tathāgata, a holy one, fully and perfectly enlightened, is to be found, lives, exists and teaches the Law, for the benefit and happiness of the great body of beings, men and gods.”¹²¹ Bodhisattva practice is then construed as culminating in the creation of a purified “buddha-field” through the elimination of defilements, both in oneself and in others. A buddha-field is the phenomenal manifestation of a bodhisattva’s accumulated merit and wisdom, placing that merit in the service of others.

Although sources enumerate three classes of buddha-fields—pure, impure, and mixed—a number of Mahāyāna *sūtras* insist that all such differences are illusory; the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, the *Śatasāhasrikā*, the *Lotus*, and the *Laṅkāvatāra*, to mention just a few, teach the ultimate purity of this very world.¹²² The first chapter of the *Vimalakīrti* is perhaps the clearest articulation of this venerable Buddhist tenet: “The bodhisattva who wishes to purify his *buddhakṣetra* should, first of all, skillfully adorn his own mind. And why? Because to the extent that the mind of a bodhisattva is pure is his *buddhakṣetra* purified.”¹²³

In China, this approach to Pure Land doctrine was established

¹²⁰ On the absence of a single or precise Indic antecedent for *ching-t’u*, see Fujita 1996a: 33-36; 1996b: 20; and Nattier 2000: 73-74 n. 6.

¹²¹ Cited in Lamotte 1976: 276. Lamotte discusses the *buddhakṣetra* concept at length in 1976: 275-284. See also Demiéville et al., eds. 1929- : 3.198-203 (s.v. “*butsudo*” 佛土); and the comprehensive if somewhat dated study in Rowell 1934-37.

¹²² See the full discussion in Lamotte 1976: 275-284.

¹²³ Lamotte 1976: 21-22; note that in Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation *buddhakṣetra* is rendered *ching-t’u* (T.475: 14.538c4-5). This passage is found quoted in a number of early Ch’an-related texts, including the *Leng-ch’ieh shih-tzu chi* (T.2837: 85.1283b; Yanagida 1971: 67), and the *Pao-tsang lun* (T.1857: 145c10-11).

well before the emergence of Ch'an in the seventh century. Seng-chao 僧肇 (374-414), for example, affirms the identity of the Pure Land and mind in his *Chu wei-mo-chieh ching* 註維摩詰經, the earliest extant Chinese commentary to the *Vimalakīrti*.¹²⁴ Seng-chao explains that the distinction between purity and defilement is an illusion—all buddha-fields are empty and interpenetrate each other.¹²⁵

A number of scholars have emphasized the importance of writers such as Seng-chao and Ching-ying Hui-yüan in the evolution of Pure Land thought, despite the fact that they were never drafted into the ranks of recognized "Pure Land patriarchs."¹²⁶ Hui-yüan's elaborate analysis of the status of various buddha-lands is based firmly on Mahāyāna scripture and Mādhyamika dialectic; he draws on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, and on treatises such as the *Ta-chih-tu lun* 大智度論. His most systematic treatment of the Pure Land, found in the *Ta-sheng i chang* 大乘義章, declares that while various buddha-lands may appear different to those of differing capacities, they are in essence the same, and therefore "all buddha-lands are in fact but one buddha-land, and one is all."¹²⁷ Quoting from the *Shih-ti ching lun* 十地經論, Hui-yüan says: "Although we know that the various buddha-lands are empty, yet we still practice the discernment of the lands of immeasurable adornments."¹²⁸

Chih-i is another important figure who, following Seng-chao and Ching-ying Hui-yüan, emphasizes the distinction between "ultimate" and "contingent" in his analysis of Pure Land tenets. Chih-i draws a series of dialectical oppositions between the true-land (*chen-t'u* 眞土) and the response-land (*ying-t'u* 應土), between principle (*li* 理) and phenomena (*shih* 事), between source (*pen* 本) and traces (*chi* 跡), and so on. But in the final analysis, Chih-i too insists that the Pure Land is this very world seen from the perspective of wisdom. Ultimately the Pure Land is the *dharmakāya*, and it is only from the perspective of contingent truth that we distinguish multiple varieties of Pure Lands with differing attributes.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ T.1775: 38. This commentary was composed sometime between the translation of the *sūtra* by Kumārajīva in 406 and Seng-chao's death in 414.

¹²⁵ T.1775: 38.334b; see Liu 2000: 61-66; and Chappell 1977: 27-28.

¹²⁶ In addition to the discussions found in Liu and Chappell see Tanaka 1990. On Hui-yüan, see also Mochizuki 1942: 89-103.

¹²⁷ T.1851: 44.835c15-16.

¹²⁸ T.1851: 44.835a24-25, quoting from T.1522: 26.174a5-6. See the discussion in Chappell 1977: 28-32.

¹²⁹ Mochizuki 1942: 104-113; Chappell 1977: 32-36.

It would appear, then, that an *upāyic* analysis of the Pure Land, in which the Pure Land is understood as identical with the mind free of delusion, did not originate with Ch'an. Even those who were deemed orthodox patriarchs by Japanese Pure Land scholiasts resisted any simple or literalistic understanding of the Pure Land. The expositions offered by T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao are consistently structured around Mādhyamika and Yogācāra principles.

T'an-luan, who may have been as much a Taoist as a Buddhist master,¹³⁰ did not engage in the kind of classification characteristic of Hui-yüan or Chih-i, wherein all distinctions between the Pure Land and our Sahā realm ultimately collapse. But he did emphasize that Sukhāvātī is "transcendental" —it exists outside the triple realm of *saṃsāra* (*kuo san-chieh* 過三界). Commenting on a passage from the *Ta-chih-tu lun* in his commentary to the *Ching-t'u lun*, T'an-luan writes: "The *Shih lun* 釋論 [i.e., the *Ta-chih-tu lun*] says: 'This Pure Land is not subsumed within the three realms.' Why does it say so? Since [the Pure Land] is without desire, it is not a realm of desire. Since there is ground on which to stand 地居, it is not a realm of form. Since there is form, it is not a formless realm. . . Its existence is extraphenomenal 出有而有 and we call it subtle."¹³¹

T'an-luan's commentary further affirms this standard tenet of Mahāyāna epistemology and soteriology. Quoting from the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching* 觀無量壽佛經 he says: "All buddhas and tathāgatas are the bodies of the dharma-realm. They enter into the minds and thoughts of all sentient beings. Therefore, when you are thinking of the Buddha, this very mind is identical with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks [of the Buddha]. This mind produces the Buddha (*tso-fo* 作佛); this mind is the Buddha."¹³² T'an-luan goes on to declare, quite unambiguously: "It is the mind that is able to produce the Buddha. This mind is the Buddha; outside mind there is no Buddha."¹³³ It is hard to imagine a more "Ch'an-like" explication of the Pure Land, yet this comes from the brush of an early sixth-century monk whose orthodox Pure Land credentials were accepted

¹³⁰ See Corless 1987: 41-42 and *passim* for a discussion of the manner in which T'an-luan's understanding of the Pure Land and the visualization practices he advocates may have been influenced by Taoist cosmology and inner alchemy.

¹³¹ *Wu-liang-shou ching yu-p'o-t'i-she yüan-sheng chieh-chu* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註, T.1819: 40.830a17-20; trans. follows Corless 1987: 38, with changes. The quoted passage is found in T.1509: 25.340a20-21.

¹³² T.1819: 40.832a8-11.

¹³³ T.1819: 40.832a24-25.

without question by the later Japanese tradition. But there is more to T'an-luan's thought than any simple reduction of the Pure Land to mind. According to T'an-luan, the Pure Land adept is transformed at death into a dharma-body called the "dharma-body that is everywhere equal" (*p'ing-teng fa-shen* 平等法身), and through the power of the "fruition [of practice] *samādhi*" (*pao-sheng san-mei* 報生三昧; Sk. *vipākaja samādhi*) such a bodhisattva is instantly able to manifest in innumerable universes, making offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions and their assemblies without ever moving from the Pure Land.¹³⁴ Once again this appears to be an application of Mādhyamika dialectic to the Pure Land: *saṃsāra*, in so far as it is empty, is of the same ontological status as *nirvāṇa*. The Pure Land is the realm of *saṃsāra* seen from the vantage point of the awakened. Birth in the Pure Land is tantamount to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, with the caveat that the bodhisattva who attains such a birth can, in accordance with his or her vows, return to *saṃsāra*. (This calls to mind the vivid image from chapter 11 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which the Tathāgata Prabhūtaratna is revealed dwelling in eternal *samādhi* within his magnificent *stūpa*. Although Prabhūtaratna has attained *nirvāṇa*, he has not left the world of sentient beings.)

A similar analysis of the Pure Land can be found in the works of Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao, but I will forgo an extended treatment here.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ See *T.1819*: 40.833a23-26, 840a23 ff.; and Corless 1987: 41.

¹³⁵ For an English treatment of Tao-ch'ō's understanding of the Pure Land, see Chappell 1976a and 1977. Tao-ch'ō, like his predecessors, insists that the Pure Land, understood in terms of its essential nature, is neither pure nor defiled (Chappell 1977: 37-38, referring to the *An-le chi* 安樂集, *T.1958*: 47.6b7-8). On Shan-tao, see esp. Pas 1995; and Liu 2000: 277-309. Pas explicitly attempts to free Shan-tao from the fetters of Japanese sectarian scholarship, demonstrating that Shan-tao was far less revolutionary than had been previously thought. There is no evidence, for example, that Shan-tao rejected more traditional meditation and contemplation (*kuan* 觀) exercises in favor of an exclusive emphasis on *nien-fo*, or that he held *nien-fo* to be the exclusive path to rebirth, or that he emphasized oral recitation of the Buddha's name over other methods of *nien-fo*. Shan-tao emphasized a full range of contemplative practices in accord with the detailed instructions outlined in the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-fo ching*, as well as ethical and moral action. (He placed particular emphasis on filial piety.) Shan-tao does not make a clear distinction between the *nien-fo samādhi* and the *kuan-fo samādhi*, and both are explained as leading to the realization of the Pure Land in this very world. Shan-tao was, however, instrumental in making the practice of *nien-fo* more accessible to all; he argued that Pure Land practices can and should be pursued by laypersons as well as by monks. Thus while he did not, pace Japanese Jōdo and Jōdo Shin readings, hold the oral recitation of the *nien-fo* to be a superior practice, he did feel it to be the most appropriate practice for those of inferior faculties.

Suffice it to say that their understanding of the Pure Land does not constitute the radical departure from “mainstream” Chinese Buddhist exegesis that some would suppose. Far from advocating the simple oral recitation of Amitābha’s name, both Tao-ch’o and Shan-tao follow their predecessors in promoting a rigorous extended invocation practice intended to bring about a *samādhi* wherein one comes face to face with Amitābha. Only when this vision is attained is rebirth assured. It is true that, unlike some of their contemporaries, Tao-ch’o and Shan-tao tended to underscore the reality of the Pure Land—they resisted the reduction of the Pure Land to *mere* mind. But then they were well schooled in Mādhyamika,¹³⁶ and their emphasis on the reality of the Pure Land must be understood as related to the affirmation of the phenomenal realm. To deny the existence of either everyday reality *or* the Pure Land would be to err on the side of nihilism or naive idealism. Ultimately the Pure Land is no less real, and no more real, than this Sahā realm.

It would seem that we are forced to abandon not only the notion of a distinctive and self-conscious Pure Land school comprised of an orthodox lineage of patriarchs, but also the idea of a distinctive Pure Land approach to Buddhist soteriology. To reiterate, *nien-fo* practice, coupled with the aspiration for rebirth in Amitābha’s realm, was a central feature of Chinese monasticism irrespective of a monk’s institutional affiliation. The exegetes who devoted their energies to an analysis of the Pure Land differed significantly on many issues, giving rise to a host of scholastic controversies: Is Amitābha a *nirmānakāya* or a *saṃbhogakāya* Buddha? Is Amitābha’s life-span eternal or not? What is the most efficacious form of *nien-fo* practice? How is it that sinners are reborn in the Pure Land? Debates concerning the ontology of the Pure Land and the soteriological mechanism behind *nien-fo* were the domain in which Chinese exegetes worked through fundamental problems in Mādhyamika and Yogācāra doctrine. But it is misleading to divide the contestants in these debates into two clearly defined camps or “schools,” namely, Pure Land monks who affirmed the efficacy of *nien-fo* and the ontological reality of the Pure Land versus Ch’an monks who denied them.¹³⁷ Virtually all medi-

¹³⁶ Shan-tao’s first teacher was Ming-sheng 明勝 (d.u.) who, according to Japanese sources, was a disciple of the San-lun master Fa-lang 法朗 (507-581); see Pas 1995: 81.

¹³⁷ This is what David Chappell appears to do in his otherwise excellent article on T’ang Pure Land doctrine; see Chappell 1986.

eval prelates viewed *nien-fo* practice and Pure Land doctrine as central to the Mahāyāna tradition, and at the same time few if any seem to have opted for the simple “other-power” analysis of Pure Land ontology and soteriology that makes its way into so many modern textbook accounts.¹³⁸

It would seem that the so-called “Ch’an” approach to Pure Land thought and practice characteristic of Sung and post-Sung Chinese Buddhism does not constitute a doctrinal departure from the positions of earlier exegetes. There was, in short, no need for a synthesis of Ch’an and Pure Land. The claim that the Ch’an school “read its presuppositions into the Pure Land tradition so as to synthesize Pure Land teachings with its own”¹³⁹ misconstrues the relationship between practice and ideology in China. Ch’an masters reworked classical Mādhyamika rhetorical strategies such that all Buddhist forms became mere “fingers pointing to the moon.” But the use of such rhetoric by Ch’an practitioners in and of itself reveals little about their day-to-day monastic regimen.

Final Thoughts

I have argued that (1) there was no independent Pure Land school in China, that is, no historical lineage of Pure Land patriarchs and no distinctively “Pure Land” approach to Pure Land scriptures or practice. Rather, (2) Pure Land cosmology and practice were part and parcel of Chinese Buddhism virtually from its inception. There were, needless to say, exegetes who specialized in Pure Land scriptures, meditation masters who emphasized *nien-fo*, and lay persons whose devotions were centered on Amitābha and the aspiration for rebirth in his Pure Land, but they did not constitute anything resembling an independent tradition, much less a school. Our closest encounter with a “Pure Land movement” was with the lay-oriented Lotus Societies that proliferated during the Sung, but even then we found that these societies were often affiliated with monks or monasteries belonging to Ch’an, Lü, or T’ien-t’ai lineages. Moreover, their devotional activities were not necessarily centered around Amitābha or his Pure Land. The term “Lotus Society” should not,

¹³⁸ Chinese commentators typically explain “other-power” as a response (*ying* 應) to one’s own karmic conditioning, such as faith (*hsin* 信), vows (*yüan* 願), and practice (*hsing* 行); see Shih 1992: 158.

¹³⁹ Ingram 1973: 185.

therefore, be treated as an equivalent for “Pure Land Society,” but rather as a generic locution for a society of lay Buddhist practitioners.

I went on to argue that (3) Ch’an monastic life always involved so-called Pure Land elements such as *nien-fo* and the aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land; and (4) Ch’an monks did not offer a radically new interpretation of Pure Land thought—the supposedly “ch’annish” identification of mind and Pure Land has ample precedent in Indian Mahāyāna scriptures as well as in pre-Ch’an Chinese commentaries. I concluded that (5) the notion of “Ch’an-Pure Land syncretism” is historically and doctrinally misleading.

I have intentionally avoided the complex topic of post-Sung Buddhism in this article. As is well known, many of the leading figures of Ming and Ch’ing Buddhism, such as Chu-hung and Chi-hsing Ch’e-wu 際醒徹悟 (1741-1810), followed the precedent of Yung-ming Yen-shou: they were ordained in Ch’an lineages and at the same time advocated a “synthesis” of Ch’an and Pure Land in order to legitimize their active involvement with Amitābha worship and *nien-fo* recitation. They were responding in part to a perceived tension between “popular” conceptions of *nien-fo* practice and a “pure Ch’an” that spurned mediating or contingent structures. But their exegetical leanings were not motivated by doctrinal issues alone. They were, first and foremost, Buddhist reformers who were highly critical of the Ch’an monastic institutions of their day. The priesthood was widely viewed as moribund if not degenerate and corrupt, and the reformers sought greater lay involvement in Buddhist worship and practice as one means to revitalize the tradition. As such they were led to forge a Buddhism that would more closely integrate monastic and lay practice, and the solution lay in a renewed emphasis on *nien-fo* practice among the clergy, along with an insistence that *nien-fo* was conducive to Ch’an awakening even among the laity. Accordingly, many later teachers would promote what they called *nien-fo kung-an* 念佛公案, in which the practitioner would recite Amitābha’s name while asking him or herself: “Who is doing the recitation?”¹⁴⁰ Variant forms of this practice have dominated the monastic curriculum down to the present day.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ On the use of *nien-fo* and other Pure Land practices among Ch’an teachers in the Ming and Ch’ing, see esp. Ogasawara 1963: 173-238; Yü 1975 and 1981; Hurvitz 1970; and Jones 2000.

¹⁴¹ On the use of *nien-fo* as the focus for Ch’an meditation in the early twentieth century, see Welch 1967: 89-104, 398-400.

Thus while it is true that Ming and Ch'ing prelates drew on Yen-shou to promote a "synthesis" of Ch'an and *nien-fo*, this should not be viewed as a synthesis of two competing soteriological schemes, so much as a synthesis of monastic and lay forms of practice. There does not appear to be any fundamental *doctrinal* discrepancy between Chu-hung's approach to *nien-fo*, for example, and that of the early T'ang Ch'an masters discussed above. What was new, perhaps, was the notion that monks and laypersons could engage in the same practice and aspire to the same religious goals, and that *nien-fo* was not a mere *upāya* for those of limited faculties but was rather the single most effective method to attain Ch'an enlightenment.

The notion that later Chinese Ch'an came to be adulterated through the admixture of Pure Land elements might seem to be supported by the reaction of the Tokugawa period Zen establishment to the émigré Ch'an priests who arrived in Japan following the collapse of the Ming. By the Tokugawa period Japanese Zen had more-or-less purged itself of the more overt forms of "Pure Land" practice—i.e., practices such as the extended recitation of *nien-fo* that had become closely associated with the Tendai, Jōdo, and Jōdo Shin traditions. Japanese sectarianism encouraged Zen leaders to accentuate what they believed to be distinctive to their tradition.¹⁴² The Ch'an brought to Japan by the Ming master Yin-yüan Lung-ch'i 隱元隆琦 (1592-1673) and his disciples (later known as the Ōbaku shū 黃檗宗) was, as we would expect, suffused with Pure Land elements including *nien-fo* recitation, all of which proved disconcerting to the Japanese Zen authorities.¹⁴³ Not a few Zen abbots were threatened by the influx of eminent Chinese prelates, and the fact that the Chinese Ch'an monks engaged in "Pure Land" practices gave the Japanese an excuse to castigate Ming Ch'an as impure or corrupt. This misleading caricature of late Chinese Buddhism continues to find its way into textbooks even today. In fact, the supposedly "syncretic" Zen propagated by Ōbaku priests was closer in many ways to the Ch'an of Sung dynasty China than was anything preserved in Tokugawa Sōtō or Rinzai establishments.

If the analysis presented above is correct, we must ask why the scholarly literature continues to approach locutions such as "Chinese

¹⁴² In fact, by the early Tokugawa period few Zen establishments maintained anything resembling traditional Chinese monastic practice. The arrival of the Ōbaku monks spurred major monastic reforms in both the Rinzai and Sōtō orders.

¹⁴³ Baroni 2000.

Pure Land” and “Ch’an-Pure Land syncretism” as if they were descriptive historical terms rather than ideological (or at best, heuristic) constructs. There are, no doubt, a number of factors at play. For one, there is the suspicion that the seeming simplicity of Pure Land doctrine—the teaching that the power of Amitābha’s vows coupled with the oral recitation of Amitābha’s name will result in rebirth in a land of ease and bliss—is fundamentally at odds with the more sophisticated doctrinal and soteriological programs associated with T’ien-t’ai, Hua-yen, and Ch’an. Yet this conception of Pure Land thought is derived not so much from a critical reading of the Chinese documentary record as from the weight of the Japanese Pure Land tradition. Moreover, our belief that Ch’an is somehow antagonistic to Pure Land piety emerges not from an unbiased appraisal of Ch’an and Zen monastic life, but from the polemics of Zen apologists such as D. T. Suzuki.¹⁴⁴

The historiography of Chinese Pure Land turns out to run parallel in many respects to the historiography of Chinese Tantra or Esoterism (*mi-chiao* 密教). As I have argued elsewhere, there is little evidence that the Chinese conceived of an independent Tantric “school” during the T’ang when Esoterism was supposedly at its height.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, there is simply no evidence that the so-called patriarchs of Chinese Tantric Buddhism—Śubhakarasiṃha (Shan-wu-wei 善無畏, 637-735), Vajrabodhi (Chin-kang-chih 金剛智, 671-741), Amoghavajra (Pu-k’ung 不空, 705-774), and so on—conceived of themselves as such. The category “Esoteric Buddhism” arose in the tenth and eleventh centuries, long after these masters had passed from the scene, and even then the Sung understanding of the term bears little resemblance to how the term is used by religious historians today. As in the case of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, our contemporary understanding of Chinese Tantric Buddhism is inordinately influenced by developments in Japan. In both instances, scholars have come to view the Chinese materials through the long lens of Japanese Buddhist sectarian history.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Sharf 1995.

¹⁴⁵ Sharf 2002: 263-278.

¹⁴⁶ Japanese influence on Chinese Buddhist thought is not limited to the modern period; there is suggestive evidence that the Chinese construction of the category “esoteric teaching” during the Sung was influenced by their knowledge of the success of Buddhist Esoterism in Japan (Sharf 2002: 275-276). I know of no such evidence in the case of Pure Land, but it is possible that here too knowledge of Japanese institutional developments seeped back into China and influenced the manner in which the Chinese came to view their own tradition.

In arguing that belief in the Pure Land was a fundamental feature of Chinese Buddhism irrespective of one's doctrinal or institutional affiliation, I do not mean to imply that Chinese clerics agreed on the details. As mentioned above, there were interminable controversies over virtually every aspect of Pure Land doctrine and practice. In staking out increasingly sophisticated and abstruse positions vis-à-vis recurring doctrinal issues—the ontological status of Amitābha and his Pure Land, for example, or the most efficacious method of *nien-fo*—individual exegetes sought to lay claim to orthodoxy in contradistinction to the erroneous views of their benighted rivals. The game proved beguiling precisely because the one thing all parties had in common was their abiding fascination with and aspiration for Amitābha's land of ease and bliss.

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Abstract

Modern studies of Buddhism and Chinese religion often refer to an indigenous Chinese Pure Land "school" that arose in the medieval period. This school is typically characterized as a distinct tradition with its own teachings and its own line of patriarchs, including T'an-luan (476-542), Tao-ch'ō (562-645), and Shan-tao (613-681). In the Sung, exegetes such as Yung-ming Yen-shou (904-975) are credited with creating a synthesis of Pure Land teachings and Ch'an, and the result—"Ch'an/Pure Land syncretism"—emerged as the dominant form of Buddhist monastic practice from the end of the Sung down through the present day.

In this article I argue that there is little evidence of anything resembling an independent or self-conscious Pure Land tradition in medieval China. Pure Land cosmology, soteriology, and ritual were always part-and-parcel of Chinese Buddhism in general and Ch'an monasticism in particular. Accordingly, there was no need for a "synthesis" of Pure Land and Ch'an. The modern conception of a Chinese Pure Land school with its own patriarchate and teachings, and the associated notion of Ch'an/Pure Land syncretism, are inordinately influenced by historical developments in Japan and the enduring legacy of sectarian polemics in contemporary Japanese scholarship.