

Shan-tao's Exposition of the Method of Contemplation on Amida Buddha, Part 2

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THIS IS A REVISED translation of Part 2 of *Shan-tao's Kuan-nien o-mi-t'o fo hsiang-hai san-mei kung-te fa-men* (Jpn. *Kannen Amidabutsu sōkaizanmai kudoku bōmon*), commonly known as the *Kuan-nien fa-men* (The Method of Contemplation on Amida Buddha, Jpn. *Kannenbōmon*).

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EXPOSITION OF THE MERIT OF THE SAMĀDHI OF CONTEMPLATION ON THE OCEAN-LIKE FIGURE OF AMIDA BUDDHA

**Compiled by
Bhikṣu Shan-tao**

PART TWO: FIVE KINDS OF MERIT

12 Exposition of the five kinds of superior conditions based on sutras (one fascicle):

1. Based on the *Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life*,
2. Based on the *Sixteen-Contemplation Sutra*,
3. Based on the four-sheet *Amida Sutra*,¹
4. Based on the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*,²
5. Based on the *Sutra on the Ten Methods of Attaining Birth*,³
6. Based on the *Sutra on the Pure Salvation Samādhi*.⁴

13 Respectfully based on Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching, as shown in the six sutras that teach the way of birth in the Pure Land, I will clarify that those who desire to be born in the Pure Land by being mindful of Amida Buddha and calling his Name will, while in the present life, have their life-spans prolonged and escape the nine calamities.⁵ Details of those benefits will be given in the part below where the five conditions will be explained.

Question: The Buddha urges all sentient beings to awaken the Bodhi-Mind and desire to be born in the Western Land of Amida Buddha. He also urges them to build statues of Amida, praise and worship him, offer incense and flowers to him and contemplate him day and night without interruption. He further urges them to call Amida's Name single-mindedly many times—from ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand, fifty thousand up to a hundred thousand times. He also urges them to chant the *Amida Sutra* many times—from fifteen, twenty, thirty, fifty up to a hundred times, and further chant it until they reach a hundred thousand times. If they perform those practices, what benefit will they gain in the present life and what benefit will they gain when their lives, a hundred years at the longest, come to the end? Will they surely attain birth in the Pure Land or not?

Answer: Both in the present life and after death they will certainly attain great merit and benefit. In connection with this, I will reveal, according to the Buddhist teaching, the causal relations which bring about five kinds of superior benefit. They are: 1. the dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils, 2. the dominant force effecting protection and longevity, 3. the dominant force enabling one to see the Buddha, 4. the dominant force embracing beings, and 5. the superior condition enabling one to attain birth.

14 [1] The dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils:

Those who attain birth on the highest level of the lowest class in the *Contemplation Sutra*⁶ have completely committed grave offenses of the ten evils. When they become ill and are about to die, they may have a chance to meet a good teacher and receive from him the teaching that urges them to call the Name of Amida Buddha. Each time they recite it, the grave karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for five billion kalpas will be destroyed. This shows the dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils.

Further, those who attain birth on the middle level of the lowest class⁷ have committed all sorts of offenses against the Buddha-Dharma, violating the rules of abstinence and other precepts, appropriating properties of the Sangha or utilizing the Buddha-Dharma without repenting or feeling ashamed of such acts. When they become ill and are about to die, a mass of fire of hell besieges them all at once. At that time, they may meet a good teacher, who will tell them about the meritorious physical characteristics of

Amida Buddha and the splendors of his land. No sooner have they heard this, their karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for eight billion kalpas will be destroyed and [the fire of] hell will disappear. This also shows the dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils.

Further, those who attain birth on the lowest level of the lowest class⁸ have committed fully the gravest offenses of five deadly acts throughout their lives, and so they are destined to hell where they will suffer interminable pain. When they become ill and are about to die, they may meet a good teacher, who will urge them to call the Name of Amida Buddha ten times. With each calling, the heavy karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for eight billion kalpas will be destroyed. This also shows the dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils.

15 Furthermore, if there are persons who draw paintings of the grandeur of the Pure Land in accordance with the *Contemplation Sutra*, etc., and contemplate the jewel-ground day and night, the karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for eight billion kalpas will be destroyed with each contemplating thought. Also, if there are persons who draw paintings [of the Pure Land] in accordance with sutras, and meditate on the splendors of the jeweled trees, jeweled ponds and jeweled towers, their karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for innumerable koṭis of incalculable kalpas will be destroyed in the present life. Further, if one contemplates day and night in accordance with the [prescribed method of] visualization of the splendors of the lotus seat,⁹ then, while in the present life, one's karmic evils which would otherwise bind one to transmigration for fifty billion kalpas will be destroyed with each contemplating thought. Further, if people practice, in accordance with the sutra, visualization of the image, the true Buddha body, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta,¹⁰ then, while in the present life, their karmic evils which would bind them to transmigration for innumerable koṭis of kalpas will be destroyed with each contemplating thought.

The above references show the dominant force effecting destruction of one's karmic evils.

16 [2] The dominant force effecting spiritual protection:

As stated in the twelfth contemplation,¹¹ if a person concentrates and visualize the two kinds of recompense, i.e. the splendors of Amida's body and the Pure Land, at all times, day and night, wherever he is, then the innumerable transformed Buddhas manifested by Amida Buddha and also innumerable transformed bodies manifested by Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will come to this practitioner, even though he may or may not see them. This shows the dominant force effecting spiritual protection in the present life.

Also, it is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*:¹²

If a person concentrates and is always mindful of Amida Buddha and the two bodhisattvas, then Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will be constantly with him, become his good friends and teachers and follow him in his steps just as a shadow follows an object.

This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

Further, it is stated in the ninth contemplation¹³ of the true Buddha body:

Amida Buddha has a body of golden color. The light emanating from the white curls of hair between the eye-brows shines on the sentient beings living in the worlds throughout the ten quarters. The light from each hair-follicle also universally shines on the sentient beings. So does the circle of light about his head. Also the light from each of the eighty-four thousand physical characteristics universally shines on the sentient beings. Each of the lights issuing forth from the physical characteristics mentioned above universally shines on the worlds throughout the ten quarters. If there are sentient beings who single-heartedly think of Amida Buddha, his light always shines on them, embracing and protecting them and never abandoning them.

There is no mention of the light shining on practitioners of the other miscellaneous acts. This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

17 Further, it is stated in the *Sutra on the Ten Methods of Attaining Birth*:

The Buddha said to Mountain-Ocean-Wisdom Bodhisattva and Ānanda: "If there is a person who is single-heartedly mindful of Amida Buddha of the west, wishing to be born in his land, I will henceforth dispatch twenty-five Bodhisattvas,¹⁴ so that they may, just as a shadow follows an object, protect this practitioner, keep evil spirits and evil devas from tormenting him and thus enable him to dwell in peace during the day and the night."

This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

18 Further, it is stated in the *Amida Sutra*:¹⁵

If there is a man or a woman who single-heartedly and is exclu-

sively mindful of Amida Buddha, desiring to be born in his land, for a period of seven days and nights, or during the whole lifetime, innumerable Buddhas of the six quarters, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, will come and protect him or her always. For this reason, this sutra is called “the sutra of protection.”

“The sutra of protection” means that they will also keep various evil spirits and devas from approaching this person and also enable him or her to escape unexpected illnesses and untimely death. Thus all calamities and hindrances will naturally disperse. Excepted, however, are those who lack single-heartedness. This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

19 Further, it is stated in the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*, Chapter on Practice:¹⁶

The Buddha said to Bhadrāpāla, “If there is a person who confines himself in a hall for practicing the Way, dissociating himself from all engagements and single-heartedly contemplates Amida Buddha’s body of golden color, for seven days and seven nights, without lying down to sleep, or if a person single-heartedly contemplates the Buddha, recites his Name and is mindful of him, for a day, three days, seven days, or two weeks, five, six or seven weeks, or for a period of a hundred days, or throughout his life, then the Buddha will take him in his embrace. Once he is embraced, he certainly knows that, with his karmic evils destroyed, he will attain birth in the Pure Land.”

The Buddha continued, “If a person exclusively practices this Amida-Recollection Samādhi, then all devas, the Four Heavenly Guardian Kings, and the eight groups of demi-gods, including dragons, will follow him like a shadow follows an object and will enjoy seeing him. Thus they will keep various evil spirits, hindrances and calamities from waywardly tormenting and vexing him.”

This benefit is explained in detail in the Chapter on Protection. This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

20 Further, it is stated in the *Abhiṣeka Sutra*, third fascicle:¹⁷

If there is a person who keeps the three refuges and the five precepts, the Buddha orders Indra, the Lord of devas, to dispatch sixty-one heavenly beings to this precept-abiding person so that

they may protect him day and night throughout the year and keep various evil spirits from waywardly harassing and tormenting him.

This also shows the dominant force effecting spiritual protection in the present life.

21 Further, it is stated in the *Sutra on the Pure Salvation Samādhi*:

The Buddha said to the Great King Bimbisāra, “If there is a man or a woman who, on the six precept-observing days of the month and the eight-king days [of the year], confesses any transgressions or faults to deities of the heaven, of the underworld and of all other realms, and seeks to abide by the precepts, then the Buddha will order the kings of the six heavens of the realm of desire each to dispatch twenty-five good deities¹⁸ to this person, so that they may always follow and protect this precept-abiding person, keep various evil spirits from waywardly tormenting and harming him or her, and enable this person to escape unexpected illnesses, untimely death and calamities, thereby enabling this person to live in peace and comfort at all times.”

This also shows the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

22 Again, I would like to urge you, practitioners: If you, while in the present life, wish to think single-heartedly of Amida Buddha continuously, day and night, single-heartedly chant the *Amida Sutra*, worship and praise the holy beings who serve as adornments of the Pure Land, thereby wishing to attain birth there, and if you daily chant the sutra fifteen times, twenty or thirty times or more, or if you are chanting it forty, fifty, a hundred times or more, then you should strive to chant it a hundred thousand times. Also glorify and worship the two kinds of splendors of Amida’s Pure Land, i.e., the dependent and principal rewards. Also, except when you are in the meditation hall, call Amida’s Name without interruption for ten thousand times a day, until your life ends. If you do so, you will receive the benefit of Amida’s remembrance, and the hindrances of your karmic evils will be eliminated. Also you will receive the benefit of constant accompaniment, protection and remembrance by Amida and holy beings, so that your life-span will be extended and you will enjoy a long life in peace and comfort. Detailed accounts of the benefit are given in the *Parable Sutra*,¹⁹ the *Sutra of Samādhi on the Contemplation of Nothingness*,²⁰ the *Sutra on the Pure Salvation Samādhi*, etc. This is further evidence of the dominant force effecting protection in the present life.

23 [3] The dominant force enabling one to see the Buddha:

It is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*:²¹

The queen of Magadha, named Vaidehī, while dwelling in the palace, always desired to see the Buddha. Facing towards the Vulture Peak, she wept with grief and bowed in worship. The Buddha, knowing this from afar, disappeared from the Vulture Peak and manifested himself in the palace. Upon raising her head, the queen saw the Buddha. His body was the color of purple gold, and he was sitting on a jeweled lotus throne, attended by Maudgalyāyana and Ānanda on his left and right. Above him in the sky were Śakra and Brahmā, scattering flowers as offerings. Having seen the Buddha, the queen threw herself on the floor, wept bitterly and pleaded and repented herself to the Buddha, saying, “I pray, O Tathagata, please teach me how to visualize the land of pure karmic perfection.”

By this scriptural evidence is shown not only that through sincerity of heart the queen was able to see the Buddha, but also that the method [of Buddha contemplation] was expounded for the sake of ordinary people of the future. If there is a person who cherishes a desire to see the Buddha, he should sincerely think of the Buddha as the queen did. Then there is no doubt that he will see the Buddha. It is due to Amida Buddha’s three mindful Vow-Powers working on this person from outside that he will be able to see the Buddha. The three powers, according to the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*,²² are as follows: (1) Because [the Buddha] remembers this person with the great Vow-Power, he is able to see the Buddha; (2) because [the Buddha] remembers him with the Samādhi-Power, he is able to see the Buddha; and (3) because [the Buddha] remembers him with the original Merit-Power, he is able to see the Buddha. This significance will be further exemplified below when the dominant force enabling one to see the Buddha are explained. This is called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

24 Question: Since the queen had a strong and superior merit-power, she was able to see the Buddha. How can sentient beings of the last Dharma age, who have deep and heavy karmic evils, be compared with the queen? As this implication is extremely profound and broad, please show me clear evidence by quoting extensively from the Buddhist sutras.

Answer: The Buddha is a sage of the three transcendental knowledges,²³ possessed of the six supernatural powers²⁴ which know no obstructions. After observing the people’s capacities, he gives them [appropriate] teachings. Whether the teaching [one practices] is shallow or deep, if only one

devotes oneself sincerely to it, there is no doubt that one will see [the Buddha]. It is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*:²⁵

The Buddha praised Vaidehī, saying: “It is good that you have asked me about this matter. Ānanda, keep the Buddha’s words and expound them widely to the multitudes of beings. I, the Tathagata, will teach Vaidehī and all sentient beings in the future how to contemplate the Western Land of Utmost Bliss. Through the Buddha’s Vow-Power they will be able to see that land as clearly as if they look into a clear mirror and see their own images in it.”

This quotation from the sutra is further evidence showing that, due to Amida Buddha’s three powers working from outside, one is able to see the Buddha. Hence, we call this the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha and the Pure Land.

25 Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra*:²⁶

The Buddha said to Vaidehī: “You are an ordinary person, and your mental faculty is inferior, and so you are not able to see far. Buddhas, Tathagatas, with a special expedient enable people like you to see [the Pure Land].” The queen said to the Buddha, “Now I have seen the Buddha’s Land through his power. How can sentient beings, who come after the Buddha’s death and, being defiled and evil, are tormented by the five pains, see the Land of Utmost Bliss?” The Buddha said, “Vaidehī, you and other sentient beings should single-mindedly fix your thoughts and contemplate the lapis lazuli ground of the Western Land, all the jewel-bannered pillars under it, manifold jewels on the ground, decorations inside the buildings, etc.”

If one single-mindedly concentrates one’s thought, one will be able to see [the Pure Land] just as the queen saw it, as stated above. Hence, it is said:²⁷

Visualize them very clearly, one by one, so that you can see them whether you close your eyes or not. If you have accomplished this contemplation, it is said that you have roughly seen [the Pure Land].

As this is a visualization in the state of conscious thought, it is said ‘roughly seen.’ If you have attained a meditative samādhi or a recitation samādhi, your mind’s eye will open and you will see with it all the splendors of the Pure Land, which no words can fully describe. This quotation from the sutra is further evidence. All ordinary beings can certainly see [the Pure

Land] if only they concentrate their thoughts. You should realize this. If you have heard of someone who has seen [the Pure Land], you should not be surprised or entertain doubt. The reason is that, due to Amida Buddha's Samādhi-Power working on him from outside, he can see it. For this reason, we call this the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha's Pure Land.

26 Again, it is stated further down in the contemplation of the lotus seat:²⁸

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī: "I will teach you a method of removing suffering. You should discern and expound it to multitudes of beings." When those words were uttered, the Buddha of Infinite Life, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta responded to them by appearing in person and standing in the midair. Seeing them, Vaidehī worshiped them. After worshiping them, she said to the Buddha: "Now I have seen the Buddha of Infinite Life and the two Bodhisattvas through the Buddha's power. How can sentient beings who come after the Buddha's death see Amida Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas?" The Buddha said: "If you and other sentient beings wish to see that Buddha, you should concentrate and form an image of a lotus flower. When you have formed an image of a lotus flower, you should next imagine the Buddha. When you imagine the Buddha, let your thought form his image with thirty-two physical characteristics. Imagine parts of his body, one by one, from the top of the head down to the cross-legged posture. In correspondence with your contemplating thought, the Buddha will manifest his body."

This shows that, due to Amida's three powers working from outside, one is able to see the Buddha. This, again, is called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

27 Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:²⁹

When you perceive the Buddha, you should first perceive his image. Perceive a golden image sitting on the [lotus] flower. When you have seen this, your mind's eye will open, and with it you will be able to see clearly and distinctly all the splendors of that Land.

This shows that, due to Amida's three powers working from outside, one can see the Buddha. This is called the dominant force enabling one to see the Buddha.

Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:³⁰

Next, perceive the two Bodhisattvas and various forms of light. See them clearly. When you have seen them, you, the practitioner, will be able to hear in the samādhi the flowing water, light, adornments, and so forth, proclaiming the Dharma. Whether in or out of the samādhi, you will be able to hear the excellent Dharma always.

This also shows that, due to Amida's three powers working from outside, one is able to see the Buddha. This is called the dominant force enabling one to see the Buddha.

28 Further, it is stated [in the *Contemplation Sutra*] below in the section on the visualization of the true body:³¹

The Buddha said to Ānanda: "When you have accomplished the contemplation on the image, next perceive the Buddha of Infinite Life. His body is of the color of genuine gold. Perceive and see with your mind's eye the white curls of hair between the eyebrows, the circle of light, the transformed Buddhas and the rays of light which shine forth from his physical characteristics and minor marks of excellence. When you have seen them, you will be able to see all Buddhas of the ten quarters. Hence, this is called Buddha-Contemplation Samādhi."

This passage is further evidence showing that, due to Amida Buddha's three powers working from outside, one is able to see the Buddha. Hence, this is called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:³²

The Buddha said: "For this reason, a wise person should single-mindedly and clearly perceive the Buddha of Infinite Life. You should enter into the contemplation through one of his physical marks. One who clearly perceives the white curls of hair between the eyebrows will spontaneously perceive all the eighty-four thousand physical marks. Having seen them, he will see all the Buddhas of the ten quarters and personally receive from each of them the prediction of his attainment of Buddhahood."

This passage of the sutra also testifies that, due to Amida Buddha's three powers working from outside, the ordinary beings who single-mindedly meditate on him are definitely enabled to see the Buddha. This is also called

the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

29 Further, [we find similar expositions in the sections on] contemplation of Avalokiteśvarara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the over-all aspect, miscellaneous aspects, etc., and also below in the section on the nine grades of aspirants:³³

Those who practice throughout their lives or practice even for seven days, one day, or call the Name ten times or even once, desiring to see the Buddha at the time of death,—if they meet good teachers in this life and think of Amida Buddha and call his Name, the Buddha will appear before them with a host of sages, holding lotus pedestals. The practitioners will see the Buddha and also the host of sages and the lotus pedestals.

This passage of the sutra also testifies that, due to Amida Buddha's three powers working from outside, one is able to see the Buddha. Hence, we call this the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

30 Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:³⁴

The Buddha said to Ānanda: "This sutra is called the Sutra of Contemplation on the Land of Utmost Bliss, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattvas. You should hold this and not forget this. Those who practice this samādhi will be able to see in the present life the Buddha of Infinite Life and the two Bodhisattvas."

This passage of the sutra also testifies that, due to Amida Buddha's three powers working from outside, ordinary beings who meditate on him are made to avail themselves of their own three-mind power and are, therefore, enabled to see the Buddha. [The aspirants'] sincere mind, believing mind and aspiring mind are the internal cause; and Amida's three kinds of Vow-Power on which they depend are the external condition. Through the coordination of the external condition and the internal cause one can see the Buddha. Hence, this is called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

31 Further, it is stated in the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*:³⁵

The Buddha said to Bhadrupāla Bodhisattva: "There is a samādhi called 'all Buddhas of the ten quarters appearing before one's

eyes.' If you wish to attain this samādhi quickly, you should always hold fast to it and not allow doubt, even as minute as a hair, to creep in. If monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen wish to practice this samādhi, they should keep awake for seven days and nights and keep their minds free of all distracting thoughts. They should concentrate on one point, that is, meditate on the body of Amida Buddha of the west, which is of the color of genuine gold and possesses thirty-two characteristics; his body emits penetrating light and is incomparably majestic."

If they single-mindedly contemplate with uninterrupted thoughts and practice oral recitation [of his Name], the Buddha says:

They will see him after seven days. It is like observing stars at night. Let us suppose one star is one Buddha. Anyone of the four groups of Buddhists who practices this meditation can see all the Buddhas just as they see all the stars.

The passage of this sutra also testifies that, due to Amida Buddha's three powers working from outside, one can see the Buddha. "Samādhi" means that the Nembutsu practitioners think [of the Buddha] in their minds and recite [his Name] with their mouths, without having miscellaneous thoughts; if the thoughts [of the Buddha] continue to be present in their minds and the utterances [of the Name] follow one after another, their mind's eyes will open and they will see the Buddha manifest himself clearly. This is called concentration and is also called samādhi. When one sees the Buddha properly, one also sees the host of sages and various adornments. Hence, this is called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha and the Pure Land.

32 Further, it is stated in the *Moon-Lamp Sutra*:³⁶

If one meditates on the Buddha's physical characteristics and his virtuous conduct, keeps one's senses from being disturbed and keeps one's mind free of delusion and in agreement with the Dharma, then what one can learn by hearing and what one can know will be like the great ocean. If a wise person dwells in this samādhi and performs practices while keeping his thoughts well under control, then he will be able to see, at the place of his walking practice, a thousand kotis of Tathagatas and also meet Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges.

The passage of this sutra is further evidence. This is also called the dominant force enabling one to attain the samādhi of seeing the Buddha.

33 Further, it is stated in the *Mañjuśrī Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*:³⁷

Mañjuśrī said to the Buddha: “Why is it called ‘Single Practice Samādhi’?” The Buddha replied: “If a man or a woman, while dwelling at a quiet place, discards all distracting thoughts and, facing towards the place where the Buddha resides, sits in the proper upright position; then, without forming in the mind any image [of the Buddha], he or she single-mindedly recites his Name. If the recitation continues uninterrupted, then he or she will be able to see in the recitation practice all the Buddhas of the past, present and future.”

The passage of this sutra is further evidence testifying that one can see the Buddhas, due to the working of their thought powers, which arise from ‘the great compassion of looking on all as of the same body as oneself.’ This is again the dominant force enabling ordinary beings to see the Buddha.

34 [4] The dominant force embracing beings:

One of the Forty-eight Vows³⁸ in the *Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life* says:

The Buddha said: “If, when I become a Buddha, the sentient beings of the ten quarters who desire to be born in my land and say my name even ten times should not be born there through my Vow-Power, then may I not attain perfect enlightenment.”

This shows that the practitioners aspiring for birth, when they die, are enabled to attain birth by being embraced by the Vow-Power. Hence, this is called dominant force embracing beings.

Further, it is stated in the same sutra, fascicle 1:³⁹

Those beings who attain birth in the Western Land of the Buddha of Infinite Life all avail themselves of Amida Buddha’s karmic power, such as the Great Vow, as the dominant force [for that purpose].

This is further evidence. This is indeed the dominant force embracing beings.

Again, it is stated in the same sutra, fascicle 2:⁴⁰

The Buddha said: “All sentient beings are different in their spiritual capacities, and so they may be divided into upper, medium

and lower classes. The Buddhas all urge them to say the Name of the Buddha of Infinite Life single-heartedly, each according to his own spiritual capacity. When their lives end, the Buddha personally comes to welcome them with a host of sages and enable them all to attain birth."

This also shows the dominant force embracing beings.

35 Further, it is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*, sections on the first eleven contemplations⁴¹ and the nine grades of aspirants⁴² below, which are all the Buddha's own exposition: When those who perform either meditative or non-meditative practices die, Amida, the World-Honored One, will come to each one of them in person with a host of sages, offering his hands to help him mount a lotus-dais and thus welcoming him to be born [in the Pure Land]. This also shows the dominant force embracing beings.

36 Further, it is stated in the four-sheet *Amida Sutra*:⁴³

The Buddha said: "If a man or a woman single-heartedly and exclusively recites Amida's Name for one to seven days, when his or her life is about to end, Amida Buddha will come in person to welcome him or her, thus enabling him or her to be born in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss." Śākyamuni Buddha continued: "As I see this benefit, I have spoken these words."

This is further evidence. This shows the dominant force embracing beings.

37 Further, it is stated in one of the Forty-eight Vows:⁴⁴

If, when I become a Buddha, those sentient beings of the ten quarters who awaken the Bodhi-Mind, perform various meritorious practices and desire with sincerity of heart to be born in my Land, should not, when they die, see me appearing before them with a host of sages, then may I not attain the perfect enlightenment.

This again shows the dominant force embracing beings.

Further, another Vow below⁴⁵ says:

If, when I become a Buddha, those sentient beings who, having heard my Name, fix their thoughts on my Land and turn their merits towards it, aspiring for birth in my Land, should not fulfill their desire, then may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

This again shows the dominant force embracing beings.

Further, still another Vow below⁴⁶ says:

If, when I become a Buddha, those women in the worlds of ten quarters who, having heard my Name, rejoice in serene faith, awaken the Bodhi-Mind and seek to abandon women's bodies, should, after their death, be born again as women, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

The meaning of this vow is that, due to Amida's Power of the Primal Vow, those women who call the Buddha's Name will, at their death, be transformed into manhood; Amida will take their hands and Bodhisattvas will hold their bodies to enable them to sit on the jeweled lotus-daises. Then, following the Buddha, they will be born in his Land, join the Buddha's great assembly and realize the insight into the non-arising of all things. Again, unless they rely on Amida's Name and Vow-Power, women will not be able to leave their female bodies even after a thousand or ten thousand kalpas or a period of kalpas as innumerable as the sands of the River Ganges. If a monk or a layman says that women will not be able to be born in the Pure Land, this person is telling a lie. You should not believe him. The above quotation of the sutra is further evidence. This also shows the dominant force embracing beings.

38 [5] The dominant force enabling one to attain birth:

Question: You have said that Amida's Forty-eight Vows embrace all sentient beings and enable them to be born in the Pure Land. It is not yet clear what sort of sentient beings attain birth and who testifies to their birth.

Answer: It is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*:⁴⁷

The Buddha said to Vaidehī: "Do you know that Amida Buddha is not far from here? You should fix your thoughts and visualize that Land. Then your pure act will be accomplished. I will also enable all ordinary beings of the future to attain birth in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss."

The above passage of this sutra is further evidence. If ordinary beings who will come after the Buddha's death take advantage of [Amida] Buddha's Vow-Power, they will definitely attain birth. This indeed shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

39 Question: Śākyamuni's sermons were meant to enlighten sentient beings. Why are there people who believe in them and those who do not, each abusing the other?

Answer: Moral natures of ordinary persons are of two kinds: good nature and evil nature. Those of good nature are again of five kinds: (1) good persons who, having heard the teaching, abandon evil and do good; (2) good persons who abandon the wrong and perform the right; (3) good persons who abandon the untrue and perform the true; (4) good persons who abandon the unrighteous and perform the righteous; and (5) good persons who abandon the false and perform the true. Those five kinds of persons are able to benefit both themselves and others if they take refuge in the Buddha. At home they perform filial duties; outside, they bring benefit to others. Among the people, they perform sincerity; in the imperial court, they are called 'gentlemen,' being loyal to the king and bent on fulfilling their duties as loyal subjects. Hence, they are called persons who are good in their own nature.

Persons of evil nature are: (1) evil persons who slander the true and engage in the false; (2) evil persons who slander the right and engage in wrong-doings; (3) evil persons who slander the righteous and engage in unrighteous deeds; (4) evil persons who slander the true and engage in the untrue; and (5) evil persons who slander good and engage in doing evils. Even if those five kinds of persons wish to take refuge in the Buddha, they are not able to attain their own benefit, nor bring benefit to others. At home they do not perform filial duties; among the people, they have no sincerity. At the court, they are called 'petty-spirited persons'; when they serve the king, they always entertain flattery and insidious thoughts; hence, they are called 'disloyal persons.' Furthermore, in their attitudes towards wise, virtuous and good people, those persons deny righteousness and fabricate unrighteousness; they see only evils in others. Hence, they are called persons who are evil in their own nature. All the good and righteous people among human and heavenly beings as well as Buddhas and sages are slandered and shamed by those evil persons. Wise people should be aware of this. I have above given detailed explanation of the persons of good nature and those of evil nature, thereby clarifying the way things are. I have thus answered your question.

40 Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:⁴⁸

The Buddha said to Vaidehī: "You and other sentient beings should concentrate and fix the thoughts on one point, contemplating the golden bannered pillars under the ground of the Western [Pure Land] and also the various jeweled adornments above it."

From here to the end of the thirteenth contemplation is generally [the Buddha's] reply to Vaidehī's two requests as mentioned above. This is clear evidence of the fact that [Śākyamuni Buddha] desired to rouse good and evil ordinary persons to convert their thoughts and perform practices so

that they might all attain birth. This also shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:⁴⁹

In the land made of various jewels there are five hundred koṭis of jeweled towers. In those jeweled towers there are innumerable heavenly beings, who play heavenly music and proclaim in it mindfulness of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. If you have accomplished this contemplation, you will, after death, surely be born in his Land.

This passage of the sutra is further evidence. This also shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

Further, it is stated in the [*Contemplation*] *Sutra* below:⁵⁰

The Buddha said to Ānanda: "This wondrous flower has originally been produced by Dharmākara Bhikṣu's Vow-Power. If you want to contemplate on that Buddha, you should first form an image of this flower-seat. Contemplate each part of it until you can see the whole thing clearly. If you have accomplished this meditation, you will definitely be born in the Land of Utmost Bliss."

This passage of the sutra is further evidence. This again shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

41 Further, it is stated in the *Larger Sutra*:⁵¹

The Buddha said to Ānanda: "If sentient beings have been born in his Land, they all join the group of the right established state. All the Buddhas of the ten quarters praise that Buddha. If sentient beings, having heard his Name, rejoice with a heart of absolute trust and think of him even once, desiring to be born in his Land, then they will attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression."

This passage of the sutra is further evidence. This also shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

42 Further, it is stated in the *Contemplation Sutra*, section on the nine grades of aspirants, that the sentient beings mentioned in each grade are ordinary persons of the period of the five defilements when the Buddha was still in the world and after his death. They may meet good teachers, who urge them to awaken faith, observe the precepts, think of the Buddha, chant sutras, worship and praise him, and then they will definitely attain

birth. Due to the Buddha's Vow-Power they will all attain birth. This again shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

43 Further, the *Amida Sutra* says [to the effect]:⁵²

There are in each of the six quarters Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges. They all produce tongues, covering the entire universe with them and proclaiming the words of sincerity and truth: 'All ordinary persons, whether they live during the time of the Buddha or they come after his death, should convert their thoughts and think of Amida Buddha, desiring to be born in his Pure Land, and call his Name continuously until their lives of a hundred years, at the longest, come to an end, or call his Name for seven days, one day, or even ten times, three times or only once. When they die, the Buddha will come to the aspirants in person with a host of sages and welcome them, thus enabling them to attain birth.

Those Buddhas of the six quarters manifested broad tongues and gave testimony to ordinary persons that their karmic evils would be destroyed and they would attain birth. If, in spite of the testimony, they should not be born, the Buddhas' tongues that were manifested out of their mouths would not have returned to their mouths and would have naturally decayed and perished. This also shows the dominant force enabling one to attain birth.

44 Respectfully I urge you, all aspirants: When you have heard those words, you should accordingly shed tears of anguish like rain and resolve to repay your indebtedness to the Buddhas even by grinding your bodies into powder and breaking your bones for many kalpas to come. Then you will come into accord with their original intent. Why should there be doubt, even as minute as a hair, which keeps you from accepting these words? I also urge you, all followers of the Way: All ordinary persons of karmic evils can still have their evils destroyed and realize attainment of birth; how much more so with sages? How could they desire birth and yet fail to reach [the Pure Land]?

I have summarily answered the question as to what sort of sentient beings can be born in the Pure Land. Here ends my explanation of the five kinds of dominant force.

NOTES

1. *O-mi-t'o ching* (Jpn. *Amida-kyō*), popularly known as the *Smaller Sutra*, covers four sheets in old Chinese editions. *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 366.
2. The *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra* (Chn. *Pan-chou-san-mei-ching*; Jpn. *Hanju-zammai-kyō*) exists in two Chinese versions, 1-fasc. (*Taishō*, vol. 13, no. 417) and 3-fasc. (*Taishō*, vol. 13, no. 418) texts; the sutra explains how one can practice concentration and visualize Buddhas, especially Amida. For my translation of this sutra from Chinese, see "*Pan-chou-san-mei-ching*: Translation with Notes," in Fujita Kōtatsu Hakushi Kanreki Kinen Ronshū Kankōkai, ed., *Fujita Kōtatsu hakushi kanreki kinen ronshū: Indo tetsugaku to Bukkyō* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1989), pp. 49–88.
3. *Shih-wang-chu-ching* (Jpn. *Jūōjō-kyō*); the full title is *Shih-wang-chu-sheng-e-mi-t'o-fu-kuo-ching* (Jpn. *Jūōjō-amidabukkoku-kyō*). This sutra has been considered apocryphal, but Tao-ch'ō (562–645) frequently quotes from this in his *An-le chi* (Jpn. *Anrakushū*; *Taishō*, vol. 47, no. 1958).
4. The Chinese title is *Ching-t'u*[淨度]-*san-mei-ching* (Jpn. *Jōdo-sanmai-kyō*); the text here reads *Ching-to*[淨土]-*san-mei-ching*, "Pure Land Samādhi Sutra," but in the quotation from it which occurs below, *Ching-t'o*[淨土] is replaced by *Ching-t'u*[淨度], "Pure salvation." This sutra has been considered apocryphal.
5. According to the *Ta-kuan-ting-ching* (Jpn. *Daikanjō-kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 21, no. 1331) the nine calamities are as follows: 1. unexpected illness, 2. being involved in unreasonable disputes, 3. encountering wicked governmental officials, 4. having an inferior and meritless body and being possessed by evil spirits, 5. being deprived of one's possessions by bandits, 6. floods and fire, 7. attacks by a beast or bird of prey, 8. evil spells, magic, etc., and 9. being deceived by superstitious arts of longevity, curing illnesses, etc., thereby increasing suffering and misery (*Taishō*, vol. 21, p. 535c). The *Yao-shih-ching* (Jpn. *Yakushi-kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 14, no. 450) gives the following nine untimely causes of death: 1. death caused by failure to obtain medical care, 2. execution by a penal law of the state, 3. death caused by evil spirits that take advantage of one's unruly acts, 4. death by fire, 5. death by drawing, 6. death by attacks by a beast, 7. death by falling off a cliff, 8. death by spell or poisoning, and 9. death by hunger and thirst (*Taishō*, vol. 14, p. 408a).
6. Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras: A Study and Translation from Chinese*, 3rd edition (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 2000), pp. 345–6.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

8. *Ibid.*, p.348.
9. Refers to the seventh contemplation, *ibid.*, pp. 328–330.
10. Refers to four contemplations, from the eighth to the eleventh, *ibid.*, pp. 330–337.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 337–8.
12. The reference is made to a passage near the end of the sutra, *ibid.*, p. 350. This and most of the quotations which follow are either extracts or adaptations from the original passages.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
14. The twenty-five Bodhisattvas are: Kanzeon (觀世音), Daiseishi (大勢至), Yakuō (藥王), Yakujō (藥上), Fugen (普賢), Hōjizaiō (法自在王), Shishiku (獅子吼), Darani (陀羅尼), Kokūzō (虛空藏), Tokuzō (德藏), Hōzō (寶藏), Konzō (金藏), Kongōzō (金剛藏), Kōmyōō (光明王), Sankaie (山海慧), Kegon'ō (華嚴王), Shubōō (衆寶王), Gakkōō (月光王), Nisshōō (日照王), Sanmaiō (三昧王), Jōjizaiō (定自在王), Daijizaiō (大自在王), Byakuzōō (白象王), Daiitokuō (大威德王), and Muhenshin (無邊身). This passage was also quoted in Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* (*Taishō*, vol. 84, p. 47b and 74a). This contributed to the popularity of the idea of the twenty-five Bodhisattvas' welcoming the Nembutsu practitioners at the time of death to take them to the Pure Land.
15. Cf. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 359.
16. A modified quotation from *Pan-chou-san-mei-ching*, *Taishō*, vol. 13, p. 899a.
17. The title of the sutra referred to as the third fascicle of the *Kuan-ting-ching* (Jpn. *Kanjō-kyō*) is *Fo-shuo-kuan-ting-san-kuei-wu-chieh-ti-fei-hu-shên-ch'ou-ching* (Jpn. *Bussetsu-kannjō-sanki-goki-taihai-goshinju-kyō*, *Taishō*, vol. 21, no. 1331). The sutra says to the effect that if there is someone who observes the three refuges and the five precepts, thirty-six kings of the heaven and twenty-five good deities will be sent to this person to protect him (*Taishō*, vol. 21, pp. 501c–502c).
18. The names of the twenty-five good deities appear in the *Abhiṣeka Sutra* (*Taishō*, vol. 21, pp. 502c–503a).
19. *Pi-yü-ching* (Jpn. *Hiyu-kyō*, *Taishō*, vol. 4, no. 217) is quoted in the *An-le chi* as saying: There was a rich man, who did not believe in the law of karma. When he was fifty, he saw a dream that a demon came to snatch his tablet, which was interpreted as taking his life in ten days. Horrified, he went to see the Buddha. The Buddha said to him that if he believed in the three treasures he would be able to escape death. He followed the Buddha's teaching and actually lived to be a hundred years old. See *An-le chi*, *Taishō*, vol. 47 p. 16a, and *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* (hereafter, *SSZ*), vol. 1 (Kyoto:

Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), pp. 419–420.

20. *Wei-wu-san-mei-ching* (Jpn. *Yuimusanmai-kyō*). See *An-le chi* (*Taishō*, vol. 47, p. 16a; *SSZ*, vol. 1, 419.)

21. Cf. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, pp. 319–320.

22. *Pan-chou-san-mei-ching*, 1 fasc., *Taishō*, vol. 13, p. 899b, where it is said that one is able to see the Buddha due to the three powers: (1) the power of taking refuge in the Buddha, (2) the samādhi power and (3) the original merit-power. According to another version of the sutra (3 fasc.), the three are as follows: (1) the Buddha's majestic power, (2) the Buddha's samādhi power and (3) the original merit-power, *Taishō*, vol. 13, p. 905c.

23. The three transcendental knowledges (Skt. *tisro vidyāḥ*), are: (1) knowledge of the former lives of oneself and others, (2) ability to know the future destiny of oneself and others and (3) ability to destroy all evil passions. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arhats are said to be all possessed of those three knowledges.

24. The six supernatural faculties *sad* (Skt. *abhijñāḥ*) are: (1) ability to go anywhere at will, (2) ability to see anything at any distance, (3) ability to hear any sound at any distance, (4) ability to know others' thought, (5) ability to know the former lives of oneself and others, and (6) ability to destroy all evil passions.

25. Cf. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 322.

26. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 322, ff.

27. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 324–5.

28. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 328–9.

29. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 330–1.

30. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 330–1.

31. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 332–3.

32. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 333–4.

33. For the section on the nine grades of aspirants in which the practice of reciting Amida's Name is mentioned, see *ibid.* pp. 345 and 348.

34. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 349.

35. A modified quotation from *Pan-chou-san-mei-ching*, 3 fasc., *Taishō*, vol. 13, p. 906b-c. See also another version, 1 fasc., *Taishō*, vol. 13, p. 900a.

36. *Yüeh-têng-san-mei-ching* (Jpn. *Gattō-zanmai-kyō*), *Taishō*, vol. 15, p. 553a-b.

37. A modified quotation from *Wên-shu-pan-jo-ching* (the full title is *Wên-shu-shih-li-so-shuo-mo-ho-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ching* [Jpn. *Monjushiri-shosetsu-makahannyaharamitsu-kyō*]), *Taishō*, vol. 8, p. 731a-b.

38. Refers to the Eighteenth Vow with the text modified according to Shantao's interpretation.
39. There is no passage in the *Larger Sutra* which exactly corresponds to the quotation but it is said in the sutra that the Pure Land has been established and sustained by Amida's karmic power. This exposition of the sutra seems to be interpreted here to mean also that we are enabled to be born in the Pure Land by his karmic power.
40. Refers to the section on the three groups of aspirants, *Taishō*, vol. 12, p. 272b-c.
41. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, pp. 323-337.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-348.
43. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 356.
44. The nineteenth vow.
45. The twentieth vow.
46. The thirty-fifth vow.
47. Cf. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 321.
48. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 324.
49. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 328.
50. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 330.
51. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 268.
52. The *Amida Sutra*, in the section on the Buddhas of the six quarters, *ibid.* pp. 356-8