

MICHAEL CONWAY

(Ōtani University)

Practice and Other Power in Daochuo's Pure Land Buddhism

Abstract

Daochuo 道綽 (562–645) is revered as a patriarch of both the Pure Land and the True Pure Land schools of Buddhism in Japan. In his *Anleji* 安樂集 he makes a variety of arguments about the necessity and importance of relying on the 'path of easy practice' whereby one aspires to enlightenment through birth in the Amituo's Pure Land based on the working of the other power of Amituo's vows. Daochuo's prioritization of the Pure Land teachings is well known both inside and outside of Japan, but previous scholarship has focused particularly on Daochuo's arguments that the Pure Land teachings should be taken as the centerpiece of Buddhism due to the degenerate nature of the age and the inferior capacities of the people. Therefore, previous scholarship in both Japanese and English on Daochuo has primarily characterized him as offering an easy practice for incompetent people who were unlucky enough to have been born at a time far removed from Śākyamuni.

Through a careful analysis of passages in the second fascicle of the *Anleji*, in the first section of this paper I show that this understanding of Daochuo's view of the 'path of easy practice' fails to take into account the severity of his criticisms of the Buddhist practices that were preached in the Buddhist scriptures and prevalent at his time and therefore mischaracterizes the nature of his choice of Pure Land Buddhism as the most effective and excellent form of Buddhism and the only avenue for anyone at any time, regardless of their individual capacities or temporal relation to a Buddha, to genuinely fulfill the Mahayana ideal.

Although Daochuo took a very broadminded stance toward practice, holding that any practice undertaken with a desire to be born in the Pure Land would qualify the practitioner to receive the benefits of the other power of Amituo's vows, there are also several points in the *Anleji* where he singles out the practice of the *nianfo* 念佛, particularly vocal recitation of the *nianfo*, as the most appropriate and effective practice for people to engage in. In the second section of this paper, I introduce the passages where Daochuo encourages the practice of the *nianfo* and show that he prioritized it both because he held it was most appropriate for the sentient beings of the Latter Days of the Dharma and because it afforded practitioners with a variety of benefits that were not available to those who sought after birth in the Pure Land through other practices.

Keywords: Daochuo, Pure Land School, True Pure Land School, *Anleji*, Amituo, Amituo's vows, Amituo's Pure Land, other power, *nianfo*, Latter Days of the Dharma

Daochuo 道綽 (562–645), who is revered in Japan as an important patriarch of both the Pure Land and the True Pure Land Schools, is particularly famous for his attempt to situate Pure Land Buddhism—the teachings about the Buddha Amituo and the Pure Land that was created based on his vows as described in the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (hereafter, *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*)—as the centerpiece of the Buddhist teachings. In his *Anleji* 安樂集 (Collection on [the Land of] Peace and Contentment), he makes a variety of arguments regarding the superiority of a path of Buddhist practice that seeks birth in that Pure Land as a primary goal over against the traditional path of Buddhist practices, such as the six *pāramitās*, which he refers to as the ‘path of sages’ (*shengdao* 聖道). Through these arguments, Daochuo is attempting to convince his audience primarily of the importance of aspiring for birth in Amituo’s Pure Land because of the power of that Buddha’s vows which make the goal of enlightenment much more immediately available than any other form of practice. He argues that practices undertaken with such a goal in mind benefit from the addition of the other power (*tali* 他力) of those vows, which makes them more effective, and thus more true, than any other Buddhist practice. Daochuo does not, however, directly prioritize any single practice the way that his successors Shandao 善導 (613–681) and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) would, although he does make three arguments regarding the centrality of the practice of calling the name of Amituo over other forms of practices aimed at birth in the Pure Land, which they in turn picked up upon and amplified in their discussion of the primacy and superiority of verbal recitation of that name over any other form of Buddhist practice.

In this chapter, after showing how Daochuo prioritizes ‘Pure Land practices’ (practices aimed at birth in Amituo’s Pure Land) over other, more traditional forms of Buddhist practice, I will consider how he attempts to carve out a special place for calling the name amongst the various Pure Land practices that he encourages.

The Paths of Difficult and Easy Practice

Daochuo’s primary aim in writing the *Anleji* was to argue that the Pure Land teachings should be seen as the central message that Śākyamuni intended to preach and thereby encourage a broad range of Buddhist practitioners to follow those teachings. In the course of that argument, Daochuo distinguishes between the traditional Buddhist practices set forth in most Mahayana sutras and those practices undertaken with the aim of attaining birth in Amituo’s Pure Land. Following on Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?) and the *Shizhupiposhalun* 十住毘婆沙論 (Treatise Expansively Interpreting the Ten Stages) attributed to Nāgārjuna, Dao-

chuo characterizes the former as 'the path of difficult practice' (*nanxingdao* 難行道) and the latter as 'the path of easy practice' (*yixingdao* 易行道). Daochuo strongly encourages his readers to abandon the path of difficult practice—which he also refers to as the 'path of sages'—in favor of the path of easy practice, because those who engage in that practice also receive the benefit of the power and maintenance of Amituo's vows which ensure that they achieve Buddhahood quickly and efficiently.

Although most previous studies on Daochuo in English have pointed out his reference to the latter days of the Dharma (*mofa* 末法) as the primary reason he proposes for adopting the Pure Land teachings and engaging in the path of easy practice,¹ a careful reading of the *Anleji* reveals that Daochuo was in fact stringently critical of the traditional Buddhist practices, going so far as to say that the six *pāramitās* and other practices said to be part of the traditional bodhisattva path lead only to 'false results' and are difficult, not because of the limitations of the current time period, but because they encourage practitioners to go against the very nature of the world and the human beings in it. In this section, after first introducing Daochuo's delineation of these easy and difficult paths, I will show that the primary reason that he encourages taking up the path of easy practice is the working of Amituo's vows that accrue to those who chose it which allows them to quickly attain Buddhahood and not the fact that the Dharma has degenerated to the point where the difficult path has become impossible. That is, I will show that Daochuo did not call people to choose the path of easy practice because they were so unlucky as to have been born as incompetent people in an unfortunate time period, but because the path of difficult practice is, by its very nature, fundamentally flawed. We will see that Daochuo actually held that the path of difficult practice is impossible regardless of the time period and that he encourages people to immediately abandon it because it only makes false promises of Buddhahood.

The most immediate scriptural basis for Daochuo's presentation of the two paths of practice is the 'chapter on easy practice'² in Nāgārjuna's *Shizhupiposhalun* and Tanluan's interpretation³ of that chapter presented at the beginning of his *Jingtulunzhu* 淨土論註 (Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land). In the

¹ The central organizing theme of David Chappell's dissertation, 'Tao-ch'o (562–645): A Pioneer of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism' (Yale University, 1976), is Daochuo's use of the teachings of the latter Dharma. Works such as Kenneth Tanaka's *Pure Land Buddhism: Historical Development and Contemporary Manifestation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004) also present the latter days of the Dharma as the primary feature of Daochuo's presentation of Pure Land Buddhism.

² *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書 (hereafter, SSZ) 1:253–265; *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (hereafter, T) T 26.1521: 40c28.

³ SSZ 1:279; T 40.1819: 826a28–b11.

Shizhupiposhalun, Nāgārjuna says that the program of bodhisattva practices laid out in the presentation of the ten stages of practice set forth in the *Huayan* 華嚴 *Sutra* is ‘more difficult than picking up the trichiliocosm,’⁴ and asks if there is not a faster, easier path to Buddhahood.⁵ After admonishing his readers that such a question is not appropriate for true bodhisattvas, he responds saying that calling the names of the Buddhas in the ten directions is a quick and easy way to attain the stage of nonretrogression (a state where one is assured of ultimately reaching the goal of Buddhahood). He lists a variety of Buddhas whose names allow those who call them to enter into the stage of nonretrogression and then specifically references the eighteenth and eleventh vows of Amituo—which promise that those who think of Amituo will be born in the Pure Land and that those who are born there will join the company of the rightly settled, or those assured of ultimately attaining Buddhahood—and goes on to praise the virtues of Amituo at length.⁶ Thus, although Nāgārjuna treats Amituo as one among many Buddhas whose name can lead to nonretrogression, he clearly features Amituo as one important element of the path of easy practice that he sets forth.

Tanluan, at the beginning of his *Jingtulunzhu*, refers to this chapter in the *Shizhupiposhalun*, but he does not mention the Buddhas of the ten directions at all and entirely omits Nāgārjuna’s admonition that says that seeking after the easy path is something not befitting to the true spirit of a bodhisattva that only the ‘timid, weak, lowly, and degenerate’⁷ do. Through this selective presentation at the start of a work devoted to a consideration of Amituo and his Pure Land, Tanluan not only highlights the role of that Buddha in the attainment of nonretrogression, he also accords this easy path a far higher status than Nāgārjuna did. Tanluan closes this introductory section of this work saying, ‘this *Upadeśa on the Sutra of Immeasurable Life* [i.e., Vasubandhu’s treatise that he is commenting upon] is the consummation of the excellent vehicle [i.e., the Mahayana],’⁸ intimating that the path of easy practice laid out in Vasubandhu’s treatise is the consummation of Mahayana Buddhism and not simply an expedient path for those incapable of engaging in the practices of the traditional bodhisattva path. In this way, Tanluan’s interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s presentation of these two paths significantly alters their meaning. Not only does Tanluan take the path of easy practice as the proper way to consummate the bodhisattva ideal, in the *Jingtulunzhu* the path of easy practice is redefined to mean specifically aspiring

⁴ SSZ 1:254; T 26.1521: 41a27–28.

⁵ SSZ 1:253; T 26.1521: 41a13–14.

⁶ SSZ 1:259–261; T 26.1521: 43a10–c18.

⁷ SSZ 1:254; T 26.1521: 41b1.

⁸ T 40.1819: 826b11; SSZ 1:279. The manuscript that serves as the base text in SSZ has a different character, but most other manuscripts agree that the term translated here as ‘excellent vehicle’ is *shangyan* 上衍, *yan* being a transliteration of *yāna* in Mahayana.

for birth in Amituo's Pure Land and entering into the state of nonretrogression through the working of his vows. Tanluan defines the path of easy practice saying, 'one simply, though the causes and conditions of entrusting oneself to the Buddha, aspires to be born in the Pure Land; riding on the power of the Buddha's vows, one then attains birth in that pure land; maintained by the power of the Buddha, one immediately enters into the company of those rightly settled in the Mahayana.'⁹ The path of easy practice defined here by Tanluan clearly refers to the path of aspiring for birth in the Pure Land of Amituo and reaching there—and ultimately Buddhahood—through the power of his vows.

Daochuo quotes this introductory portion of the *Jingtulunzhu* at the beginning of the first section of the third chapter of the *Anleji*.¹⁰ This third chapter is where he makes the famous argument regarding the priority of the Pure Land path in the latter days of the Dharma that is quoted by Hōnen in the first chapter of his *Senjaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選択本願念仏集.¹¹ Daochuo quotes Tanluan's passage to lay the foundation for the distinction that he makes there regarding the 'path of sages' and 'birth in the Pure Land' as two methods for attaining Buddhahood preached in the Buddhist scriptures. Rather than attributing the passage to its author, however, Daochuo quotes the passage as though it was a statement by Nāgārjuna himself. This portion of the *Anleji* reads:

Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva states, 'In seeking the *avinivartanīya*, there are two types of paths. The first is the path of difficult practice. The second is the path of easy practice. To describe the path of difficult practice, I would say that in a world of the five defilements and a time without a Buddha, seeking the *avinivartanīya* is difficult. In this difficulty, there are many facets, [but] in briefly describing, there are five. First, the apparent good of the heterodox paths upsets the Dharma of bodhisattvas. Second, *śrāvakas* only benefit themselves and obstruct great compassion. Third, people who do not reflect upon their own evil destroy the excellent virtues of others. Fourth, the so-called upside-down good results of the actions of human and heavenly beings ruin people's pure practices. Fifth, there is only self power, and there is no maintenance by other power. Everything that one sees are these sorts of things. For example, it is like traveling by foot over land, which is trying. Therefore, it is called the path of difficult practice. To describe the path of easy practice, I would say that through the causes and conditions of entrusting to the Buddha, when one aspires to be born in the Pure Land, gives rise to the mind [that seeks enlightenment], establishes virtues, and cultivates various practices, because of the power of the Buddha's vow, one then is born.

⁹ SSZ 1:279; T 40.1819: 826b7–9.

¹⁰ SSZ 1:405–406; T 47.1958: 12b13–25.

¹¹ SSZ 1:929–930; T 83.2608: 1b7–26. The passage in the *Anleji* is at SSZ 1:410; T 47.1958: 13c2–22.

Through the maintaining power of the Buddha, one then enters into the company of the rightly settled of the Mahayana. The company of the rightly settled is the *avinivartanīya*, the stage of non-retrogression. For example, it is like traveling on water routes by boat, that is, because it is enjoyable, it is called the path of easy practice.¹²

Excluding some cosmetic changes to the expressions and the underlined portion, on the whole, Daochuo's quotation is quite true to Tanluan's original. Tanluan provides five reasons for the difficulty of the path of difficult practice, but for our purposes, it is the fifth—the lack of support from other power—that is most important. For Daochuo, the primary distinguishing factor between the path of difficult practice and the path of easy practice is the presence or absence of this support from Amituo's vows. Practices undertaken with a desire to be born in the Pure Land all qualify for this support and thus fall under the rubric of the path of easy practice, whereas any practice undertaken with a different intention—say the liberation of sentient beings or the attainment of Buddhahood in this world—ends up being a part of the path of difficult practice. We will see several examples of Daochuo's broadly inclusive stance toward practice in the following, but here it is important to note that it follows on Tanluan's position and differs considerably from that of Daochuo's successors such as Shandao and Hōnen.

This inclusive stance is particularly apparent in the major change that Daochuo did make to Tanluan's original (the underlined portion in the quotation above). Daochuo has considerably revised Tanluan's definition of the path of easy practice. While Tanluan only refers to aspiring to be born in the Pure Land through the causes and conditions of entrusting oneself to the Buddha, Daochuo adds the statement that one 'gives rise to the mind [that seeks enlightenment], establishes virtues, and cultivates various practices.'¹³ Through this addition, Daochuo signals that a wide variety of practices are included in the path of easy practice. Further, by going on to say, 'because of the power of the Buddha's vow, one then is born' he is emphasizing that it is not the content of the practice that is the deciding factor leading to birth in the Pure Land, but the working of the Buddha's vows. This revision that Daochuo makes to Tanluan's definition of

¹² SSZ 1:405–6; T 40.1819: 826b7–9.

¹³ The phrasing of this passage, which echoes the nineteenth vow of Amituo in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, led Shin exegetes in the Edo period to argue that Daochuo's soteriology did not make a clear distinction between the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth vows, in the way that Shinran did. A full discussion of the merits of that argument falls outside the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say that it seems unfair to project categories created by Shinran onto a thinker who predates him by almost six hundred years. See, for instance, *Anrakushū kōgi* 安樂集講義 (Kyoto: Gohōkan, 1912) by Kōgatsu-in Jinrei 香月院深勵 (1749–1817), 4:30r–31r.

the path of easy practice not only points out the decisive role of the vows as the agent of birth in the Pure Land, it also emphasizes the importance of aspiring for birth in the Pure Land whatever practice one might happen to engage in. Daochuo's phrasing seems to be intentionally vague. By only speaking of 'cultivating various practices' and 'establishing virtues,' he leaves open the possibility of engaging in a broad range of practices, holding that what is more important than the specific content of any given practice is the aspiration on the part of the practitioner which qualifies them to receive the other power of Amituo's vows.

After quoting from the *Jingtulunzhu*, Daochuo further highlights the importance of the other power of Amituo's vows in a question and answer. There, he states:

Question: There is only one *bodhi*, so there should also not be two ways to cultivate its cause. What is the reason that being here and cultivating the cause to move toward the result of Buddhahood is called difficult practice, while just being born in the Pure Land and expecting to attain great *bodhi* is called the path of easy practice? Answer: The various Mahayana sutras delineate that all practices have self power, self maintenance, other power, and other maintenance. [...] Therefore, the *Larger Sutra* states, 'The heavenly and human beings of the ten directions who wish to be born in my country all take the karmic power of the great vows of Amituo Tathāgata to be the excelling condition. There is none who does not. If this is not so, the forty-eight vows have been made in vain.' I say to those subsequent ones who study, there is already the other power upon which one can mount. You must not rely solely on your own abilities and meaninglessly stay in the burning house [of transmigration].¹⁴

In the question, Daochuo asks why it is that there can be two separate paths to Buddhahood—an easy one and a difficult one—when in fact the enlightenment attained must be the same. In answering, he refers to the 'other power and other maintenance' that is bestowed on the practitioner through the working of the forty-eight vows of Amituo, saying that it is this power that is the distinguishing factor between the two paths. In the closing lines of this section, he then encourages his readers to access that power and not rely solely on their own self power, cautioning them that such a choice will simply lead to the continuation of transmigration.

The distinction that Daochuo makes in section 1 of chapter 3 is extrapolated upon in section 3 of that same chapter, where Daochuo speaks of the 'path of sages' and 'birth in the Pure Land'—which he characterizes as 'two excellent methods for doing away with birth and death'¹⁵—and argues that birth in the

¹⁴ SSZ 1:406; T 47.1958: 12b25–c11.

¹⁵ SSZ 1:410; T 47.1958: 13c5.

Pure Land is the only appropriate path to Buddhahood in the latter days of the Dharma, saying ‘The present time is the latter Dharma and is in fact a world of the five defilements. There is only the gate of the Pure Land which is a path that can be entered and completed.’¹⁶ Since Hōnen quotes this passage at the beginning of his *magnum opus*, Japanese Pure Land Buddhists have generally taken it to be the clearest expression of Daochuo’s understanding of the reason for choosing the gate of the Pure Land and aspiring for birth in the Pure Land rather than engaging in the cultivation of the path of difficult practice. That is to say, much Japanese scholarship on Daochuo has presented him as arguing that the primary reason one should abandon the path of difficult practice and take up that of easy practice is that the current age is one where the Dharma has degenerated to the extent that the path of difficult practice is no longer possible.¹⁷ That stance has also been reflected in the English language scholarship on Daochuo, as well. Although Daochuo does indeed make that argument in section 3 of chapter 3 of the *Anleji*, in the second fascicle of that work, he also makes two other, more stringent criticisms of the path of difficult practice which indicate that his motivations for encouraging the Pure Land path had less to do with the degeneration of the Dharma after the passing of Śākyamuni and far more to do with problems inherent within the path of difficult practice itself—problems that are far more fundamental than just the issue of the time period.

In the second fascicle of the *Anleji*, Daochuo repeatedly returns to the theme of the two paths of practice—one undertaken to attain Buddhahood in this defiled world, and one that aims to attain Buddhahood in Amituo’s Pure Land with the assistance of his vow power. In most of these instances, Daochuo takes the same broad inclusivist stance toward the type of practice that we saw in section 1 of chapter 3, above, arguing that what is more important than the content of the practice is the aspiration behind it. Practices aimed at birth in the Pure Land are classified as part of the path of easy practice and said to be more excellent and effective than practices aimed at attainment of enlightenment in this world because these former ‘easy practices’ benefit from the addition of the other power and maintenance from Amituo’s vows.

In section 2 of chapter 5 of the *Anleji*, for instance, Daochuo contrasts meditative contemplation focused on this defiled land and the same sort of meditative

¹⁶ SSZ 1:410; T 47.1958: 13c10–11.

¹⁷ *Dōshaku kyōgaku no kenkyū* 道緯教学の研究 (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1959), the seminal post-war study of Daochuo by Yamamoto Bukkotsu 山本仏骨, presents his thought this way, as does the volume on Tanluan and Daochuo in Kōdansha’s series, *Jōdo bukkyō no shisō* 浄土仏教の思想 (vol. 4; 1995). Although two works are the most representative large-scale introductions to Daochuo’s thought in contemporary Japanese, there are also countless other, shorter works, such as commentaries on the seven Shin patriarchs that also characterize his contribution to the development of Pure Land thought in this way.

practice focused on the Pure Land. In that section, he argues that not only is it more difficult to achieve the states of meditative calm that would allow one entry into the higher heavens of the realm of form and non-form in this world than to complete the meditative practices contemplating the features of the Pure Land, because the former, difficult practices only lead to rebirth in those heavenly realms—from which one will eventually necessarily regress—meditative practices focused on the Pure Land lead to far more excellent results, far more quickly. He states: ‘If one wishes to turn westward and engage in practice, the phenomenal object [of concentration] is luminescent and pure and it is easy to achieve contemplative concentration. Karmic results of the transgressions of many *kalpas* are removed, one is eternally settled [in the state of nonretrogression], and one quickly progresses, ultimately reaching the cool purity [of nirvana].’¹⁸ In the closing portion of this section, Daochuo writes:

In discussing the cultivation of meditative concentration at the level of cause, [meditation focused on] this world and on that one are generally equivalent. However, that realm is one of nonretrogression and includes maintenance by other power. Therefore I say it is excellent. In this place, although one also endeavors to cultivate meditative concentration, one only has one's own individual cause and lacks the support of other power. When the [good] karma [from meditative practice] is exhausted, one cannot avoid retrogressing, so I hold that [meditative practice] here is not equivalent.¹⁹

Here, Daochuo holds that even if the practice is essentially the same in terms of content—in this case, the same sort of meditative concentration is cultivated—the presence or lack of other power leading to nonretrogression is the decisive factor distinguishing between the two types of practice. The same sort of meditative practice can belong to either the path of difficult practice or to the path of easy practice. For Daochuo what makes that practice easy or difficult has nothing to do with the nature of actions the individual practitioner performs—in both cases, the practitioner is focusing their mind. It is the working of other power that makes meditation focused on the Pure Land lead to greater and more immediate results: one ‘quickly progresses’ to nirvana thanks to that other power. In that sense, Daochuo not only holds that the path of easy practice is easier from the perspective of the individual practitioner, he also says that it is better (or more ‘excellent’ to use his language) because of the benefits bestowed upon the practitioner through the working of other power. In that sense, from Daochuo's perspective the path of easy practice is the most efficient way to Buddhahood: One can make far greater progress along the path to nirvana with much less

¹⁸ SSZ 1:424; T 47.1958: 1b10–12.

¹⁹ SSZ 1:424; T 47.1958: 17b14–17.

investment at the level of individual practice. While traditional Buddhist meditative practices only promise entry into the heavens of form and non-form, Pure Land meditative practices give one entry into the state of nonretrogression and ultimate Buddhahood, a far higher and more certain goal on the Buddhist path. To use a colloquial phrase, from Daochuo's perspective, one gets far more bang for one's meditative buck, provided that meditation is aimed toward Amituo's Pure Land.

This stance of Daochuo's is not limited simply to meditative practice. In other parts of the second fascicle of the *Anleji*, Daochuo speaks broadly of 'Pure Land practices' and contrasts them with the traditional Buddhist practices encouraged in the Mahayana sutras and treatises. These easy, Pure Land practices benefit from the other power of Amituo's vows, while the difficult, traditional practices do not. Here I would like to take particular note of the contents of two parts of the *Anleji*—section 1 of chapter 5 and section 2 of chapter 7—where Daochuo not only displays an inclusive attitude toward the type of practices that are included in the path of easy practice, but also severely criticizes the traditional practices in the path of difficult practice (practices that were broadly held to be essential elements of the Mahayana Buddhist path to Buddhahood). These strict criticisms have not been noted in much previous scholarship on Daochuo, which has led to an overemphasis on his references to the latter Dharma in his arguments for adoption of the Pure Land path. It seems to me that this overemphasis has distorted the picture of his Pure Land Buddhism significantly, causing it to be presented as an inferior teaching for inferior beings in an inferior time period. As we saw above, however, unlike Nāgārjuna, Daochuo clearly viewed this Pure Land path of easy practice as an excellent one. The arguments that we will consider in the following show even more clearly that he chose this Pure Land path not because it was a last resort in an extremely unfortunate situation, but because it offered the clearest, most immediate path to the ultimate goal of Mahayana Buddhism. Further, we will see that he held that the path of difficult practice does not actually even lead to that goal.

In the first section of chapter 5 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo focuses specifically on the issue of the speed with which one is able to achieve Buddhahood in the two paths of practice. He forcefully argues that the path of easy practice is superior to the difficult one because it allows one to enter into the stage of nonretrogression in the span of just one lifetime, rather than the many *kalpas* that are said to be necessary to reach that stage based on traditional practices in the Buddhist scriptures. This argument appears to be a stringent denial of the efficacy of the path of difficult practice, so I would like to quote it at length and consider it in detail here. The first portion of this section can be divided into three parts: In the first, based on the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經,

Daochuo describes the path of difficult practice as requiring ten thousand *kalpas* of consistent, strenuous practice before one can attain the certainty of nonretrogression. In the second, he criticizes that path as inappropriate for unaccomplished people because of the difficulty of attaining that assurance and strongly encourages people to instead aspire for birth in the Pure Land. In the third part, he further refers to the *Abhidharmakośa* as supporting evidence regarding the enormous amount of time required to reach the stage of nonretrogression and reiterates his exhortation to aspire for birth in the Pure Land because it will lead to the quick attainment of Buddhahood. Let us look at the first two of these parts in turn. (For considerations of space, I will have to omit a discussion of the third part.) Daochuo starts this section saying:

To clarify the speed [of the path of practice]: Among all sentient beings there simply are none who do not dislike suffering, seek contentment, fear bondage, and seek liberation. All who desire to quickly realize unsurpassed enlightenment must necessarily first give rise to the mind that seeks enlightenment and take it as primary. Yet, it is difficult to know and difficult to give rise to this mind. Even if one were able to give rise to it, then based on the sutras, ultimately, they will have to cultivate ten types of practices—so called entrusting, endeavor, concentration, precepts, meditation, wisdom, renunciation, protection of the Dharma, establishing vows, and merit transference—as they move on toward enlightenment. In this way, they must continue from body to body in their practice without interruption over the course of ten thousand *kalpas* and then for the first time will they achieve the stage of nonretrogression.²⁰

Daochuo begins by noting that all sentient beings are naturally inclined to disdain suffering and seek after liberation. In spite of that natural inclination toward the Buddhist path, however, he says that not only is it extremely difficult to authentically begin walking that path by giving rise to a proper aspiration toward enlightenment, even those who are able to do so are told in the scriptures that they must engage in ten strenuous practices over an unthinkable long period of time ('ten thousand *kalpas*') before they can have any certainty that they will reach their goal. The sutra that preaches about these practices leading to nonretrogression is the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*, which was held to be important in East Asian Buddhism as a comprehensive description of the fifty-two stages in the bodhisattva path.²¹ That sutra lays out the ten practices that Daochuo

²⁰ SSZ 1:421; T 47.1958: 16b22–29.

²¹ The Tiantai 天台 patriarch Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) notes that the names and significance of the fifty-two stages presented in this sutra are particularly well presented in the *Fahuaxuanyi* 法華玄義 (T 33.1716: 731c24) and since then they have served as a standard representation of the bodhisattva path in East Asia, referred to by most of the subsequent commentators on it.

refers to here as necessary for those ordinary beings in the first ten stages (the ten faiths).²² The sutra says that only those ordinary beings who can continually encounter good teachers and Buddhas over the course of many, many *kalpas* and maintain these practices will be able to eventually reach the stage of nonretrogression, which it situates at the seventeenth of the fifty-two stages.²³ Although the sutra does not specifically state that it requires ten thousand *kalpas* to reach this stage the way that Daochuo does, it does refer at length to the dangers facing those who have not yet reached this stage and says that only those who have maintained the above ten practices, as well as the six *pāramitās*, over the course of several *kalpas* in order to progress to the sixteenth stage and there encounter a good teacher will be able to reach the stage of assurance of continued progress on the path to Buddhahood.²⁴

From Daochuo's perspective, this path of difficult practice should be abandoned in favor of the easy one, because Amituo's vows promise to welcome all who practice with a desire to be born in the Pure Land into that land at the end of their life in this world²⁵ and assure that all who are born in the Pure Land will dwell in a state of nonretrogression. He makes that argument in the following way:

The foolish, ordinary human beings of the current age are presently called 'those whose thought of faith is as light as a feather,' they are also said to be 'provisionally named,' and further referred to as the group of the unsettled and unaccomplished ordinary beings. They have not yet left the burning house [of the world of transmigration]. How can we know this? Based on the *Pusa yingluo jing* 菩薩瓔珞經, where it delineates the stages of practice of entry into enlightenment, it says, 'Because of its very nature (*faer* 法爾), this is called the path of difficult practice.' Further, one cannot count the number of bodies one takes on in birth and death in even the span of one *kalpa*, let alone the burning suffering one would meaninglessly experience over the course of ten thousand *kalpas*. If one can clearly believe the Buddhist sutras and aspire for birth in the Pure Land, then in accord with the length of their lives, in just one lifetime, they can reach [the Pure Land] and attain nonretrogression, such that one attains the same virtues as one does through those ten thousand *kalpas* of practice. All Buddhists and others, why do you not weigh this [difference], abandon the difficult, and seek the easy?²⁶

²² The two lists vary slightly, but the ten practices appear in both the first and second fascicles of the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*: T 24.1485: 1011c4–6 and T 24.1485: 1017a12–15.

²³ See T 24.1485: 1011b10.

²⁴ T 24.1485: 1014b27–c13.

²⁵ SSZ 1:9–10; T 12.0360: 268a26–b5.

²⁶ SSZ 1:421; T 47.1958: 6b29–c7.

Daochuo first confirms that he and his contemporaries are all novices on the bodhisattva path—ordinary beings who have not progressed beyond the first ten stages laid out in the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*. That is to say, he is stressing to his audience that they all are subject to the uncertainty of ‘backsliding at times and progressing at others’²⁷ that that sutra says all ordinary beings in these early stages face. Although Daochuo does reference ‘the current age,’ we should note that this status on the bodhisattva path has little to do with the problem posed by the absence of a Buddha in the latter days of the Dharma. Because the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* states clearly that only those who have ‘practiced the practices of the ten stages of faith and believed in the three treasures for one or two *kalpas* before Buddhas as many as the sands of one or two or three Ganges Rivers’²⁸ can possibly overcome the problem of intermittent regression and progress, the problem here for Daochuo is not with the time period, but with the fact that he and his contemporaries have simply not made sufficient progress on this long path to Buddhahood to become accomplished bodhisattvas. Based on the path of difficult practice, these ‘unsettled’ and ‘unaccomplished’ ordinary beings will have to be subject to at least ten thousand *kalpas* of transmigration, without slipping up on the path at all, before they will reach the same state of nonretrogression that Amituo promises to those who take the path of easy practice for just one lifetime. In section 3 of chapter 3 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo quotes a variety of sutras to show that one is reborn innumerable times even in the course of one *kalpa*, saying that ‘The bones of one’s bodies that pile up in one *kalpa* are [as tall] as Mount Vipula’²⁹ and ‘[The amount] of mother’s milk that one drinks within one *kalpa* is greater than the water of the four great oceans.’³⁰ In the quotation above, he refers back to that imagery, vividly evoking the ‘burning suffering’ that awaits those who wish to follow the difficult path.

Those who walk that path are not necessarily assured that the suffering will be limited to just ten thousand *kalpas*. Only those who are lucky enough to continuously engage in the practices outlined above and encounter good teachers will be able to reach the stage of nonretrogression in that time. Those who are not will end up regressing, setting the clock back and making their arduous journey even longer. Both the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*³¹ and the *Anleji*³² refer

²⁷ T 24.1485: 1014b27.

²⁸ T 24.1485: 1017a24–25.

²⁹ SSZ 1:408; T 47.1958: 13a23–24. Based on the passage in the *Nirvana Sutra* at T 12.0374: 496b15–16 and T 12.0375: 739c28–29.

³⁰ SSZ 1:408; T 47.1958: 13a22–23. Based on the passage in the *Nirvana Sutra* at T 12.0374: 496b16–17 and T 12.0375: 739c29.

³¹ T 24.1485: 1014c10.

³² SSZ 1:436; T 47.1958: 21a7.

to the story of Śāriputra's retrogression, which I would like to introduce here because it will give us an idea of just how impossible the task of maintaining consistent devotion to these traditional practices stipulated by the sutras over the time. The story appears in the *Dazhidulun* 大智度論.³³ It relays that having engaged in bodhisattva practices for a full sixty *kalpas*, Śāriputra was attempting to perfect the practice of giving when he encountered a beggar who asked for his eye. Although Śāriputra once attempted to dissuade him, the beggar insisted on receiving his eye, saying, 'If you are really going to practice giving, then give me your eye,'³⁴ so Śāriputra complied with the request. Having received the eye, however, the beggar smelled it, made a face at the foul smell, spat, threw Śāriputra's eyeball on the ground, and stomped on it. Śāriputra felt discouraged at how difficult it would be to genuinely save people like the beggar and thought, 'It is impossible to save people like this. It would be better for me simply to take care of myself and quickly attain liberation.'³⁵ This selfish thought disqualified Śāriputra as a bodhisattva, sending him back into a Hinayana form of practice, thus ruining the sixty *kalpas* of progress that he had made. This simple thought in disappointment was enough to set Śāriputra back sixty *kalpas*, so from Daochuo's perspective, the demands of treading the path of difficult practice as laid out in the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* are virtually impossible to meet.

There are two expressions in the above quotation from section 1, chapter 5 of the *Anleji* that seem to indicate this impossibility and that I believe can be taken as Daochuo's strict criticism of this path of difficult practice. First, he attributes the statement, 'Because of its very nature (*faer* 法爾), this is called the path of difficult practice' to the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*. This phrase 'very nature' has both the sense of the nature of the path and the sense of 'the way things are,' or 'the way that the world works.' Daochuo's choice of this term—which does not appear at all in the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*—to characterize the path of difficult practice clearly indicates that the path is not difficult because Śākyamuni passed away some fifteen hundred years ago, but because of the nature of the path itself. That is to say, this expression shows that the problem lies not with the time period, but with the path of difficult practice itself. When we understand the term with the second, broader meaning, this passage can be read to say that 'because of the very make up of the world, this is a difficult path.' That is, the difficulty of the path lies not with contingent factors like when or where one is practicing it, but with how the world itself works, so that path is in fact difficult at all times and in all situations—regardless of whether Śākyamuni is alive or has already passed away in the far distant past. Therefore, this phrase

³³ T 25.1522: 145a18–29.

³⁴ T 25.1522: 145a22–23.

³⁵ T 25.1522: 145a27–28.

can be read as a stringent criticism of the path of difficult practice as essentially impossible based on 'its very nature' and the nature of the world and human beings within it. This impossibility—which attempts to surmount the nature of the world and human beings (Who would not be discouraged after having their eyeball stomped upon?)—is the reason that Daochuo also says in the above passage that attempting to progress on the path of difficult practice will lead to 'meaningless' repetition of birth and death in the burning house of transmigration. Daochuo's characterization of the suffering that one would endure while attempting to make enough progress on the path of difficult practice to attain nonretrogression as 'meaningless' is the second profoundly critical statement in the passage above. Since Amituo's vows promise nonretrogression after just one lifetime to those who choose the path of easy practice and aspire for birth in the Pure Land, of course, choosing to transmigrate any more than that is ultimately a choice of avoidable and therefore meaningless suffering that will not necessarily lead to Buddhahood.

Daochuo takes this critical stance toward the path of difficult practice one step further in section 2 of chapter 7 of the *Anleji*, where he argues that the results one gains from the path of difficult practice are in fact 'false' because they do not lead to the goal of Buddhahood, but only to continued transmigration. In this section, as well, Daochuo makes reference to the immense amount of time required to be assured of not retrogressing on the traditional bodhisattva path and says that because that path of difficult practice lacks the promise of nonretrogression, it is actually a false path. Daochuo writes:

In the second section, to clarify that in the two paths of practice [those focused] here and [those focused on] the Pure Land, there is a difference in the weight of the virtues expended and a difference in the truth and falsehood of the recompense gained: For those who wish to give rise to the *bodhi* mind and take refuge in the West, if they simply use the reverences, contemplation, meditation, etc., that they perform in just a little bit of time, in accord with the length of their lives, when they come to their ends, the dias of light greets them and they quickly reach that land, attaining the stage of nonretrogression. Therefore, in the *Larger Sutra*, it states, 'If the human and heavenly beings of the ten directions who come to be born in my land all do not ultimately reach complete extinction and retrogress, then I will not obtain perfect enlightenment.' In this world, over the course of much time, one must completely practice giving, precepts, endurance, effort, meditation, and wisdom for over ten thousand *kalpas* while one still is not freed from this burning house. One goes against nature and falls back on the path, so it is said that one expends extremely heavy virtues and the recompense that one attains is false. The *Larger Sutra* states, 'Those who are born in my country all abruptly cut off the five evil ways of existence.' [...] If one is able

to be born in Amituo's pure country, then the five paths of this *sahā* world are abandoned suddenly, all at once. [...] If one can make one's intention clear, turn one's desires toward the West, whether exhausting one's lifetime, or even down to just ten thought moments, then all go, none are not born. Once reaching that country, one enters the group of the rightly settled and attains virtues equal to the practice of the path for ten thousand *kalpas* in this world.³⁶

Here again, Daochuo contrasts the two paths of practice, but his criticism of the path of difficult practice is even more stringent than before. We can see that he maintains his inclusive attitude about the content of practice here, saying, 'they simply use the reverences, contemplation, meditation, etc.' to refer broadly to the Pure Land practices in the path of easy practice. Quoting Amituo's eleventh vow, Daochuo argues that those who engage in those practices in this life will be assured of entering a state of nonretrogression upon reaching the Pure Land, making these practices an extremely efficient way to reach the goal of Buddhahood. As he says in the concluding sentences, whether one spends the rest of one's life engaging in these practices, or simply does the *nenbutsu* for ten thought moments, those who engage in these Pure Land practices are assured of attaining Buddhahood after having been born in the Pure Land. That is what he means when he says that the 'virtues expended' on the part of the practitioner are light, in contrast to the 'extremely heavy virtues' expended by those who attempt to walk the path of difficult practice. In that sense, Daochuo is simply reiterating his arguments about the path of easy practice that we have seen already.

In contrast, his criticism of the path of difficult practice is far more direct and severe than the ones we have seen up to this point. Daochuo refers specifically to the six *pāramitās*—which are held to be the central practices of Mahayana Buddhism in virtually all Mahayana scriptures—and says that the results one obtains from practicing them are 'false' or 'deception' (*wei* 偽).³⁷ He is saying that because those scriptures present the six *pāramitās* as a path to Buddhahood—a path out of transmigration—while also preaching that one cannot actually attain any assurance of really reaching that result unless one maintains those practices for an unthinkable long period of time, the six *pāramitās* do not lead to the results that they have promised. One only gets continued transmigration in this 'burning house' from the six *pāramitās*, not Buddhahood, so Daochuo says that the 'recompense' one receives from those practices is 'false.' The radical nature of this assertion cannot be understated. Daochuo is calling the system of practice preached in all of Mahayana Buddhism 'lies.' This stance clearly

³⁶ SSZ 1:429; T 47.1958: 18c18–19a8.

³⁷ T 47.1958: 18c25.

has nothing to do with the fact that Śākyamuni passed away one thousand five hundred years ago. These practices would have led to the same false results when he was alive as they will today or at any other time. This bold rejection of the efficacy of traditional Buddhist practice was clearly radical by the standards of the Buddhist community of his day.³⁸ When we remember that Hōnen and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) were subject to exile in Kamakura Japan for encouraging people to abandon traditional Buddhist practices in favor of the *nenbutsu*, Daochuo's statement that the 'recompense one attains' from the six *pāramitās* 'is false' should strike us as jaw-droppingly audacious. Here, Daochuo is definitely not encouraging people to take up the Pure Land path because they are inferior beings in an unfortunate time. Instead, he is calling into question the efficacy of the whole of the Mahayana Buddhist path and the validity of the traditional notions of practice held by virtually all of his contemporaries. His position is that those notions are mistaken and that the only Buddhist path that truly leads to the promise of Buddhahood is the Pure Land one. Because of the other power of Amituo's vows, those who choose this path of easy practice quickly and easily attain the results promised by Buddhism: enlightenment and freedom from transmigration.

The phrase that I have translated above as 'one goes against nature' (*diandao* 顛倒) provides a clue about the nature of the problem that Daochuo perceived in the traditional notions of practice in Buddhism. The term literally means 'upside-down' or 'backwards.' Tanluan uses it at the beginning of the *Jingtulunzhu* when he describes five difficulties involved in the path of difficult practice, saying 'Fourth, upside-down good results can ruin pure practices.' In Daochuo's quotation of this passage in the *Anleji* that I introduced at the outset of this section, he adds a few words so that it reads, 'the so-called upside-down good results of the actions of human and heavenly beings ruin people's pure practices.'³⁹ These 'upside-down good results' refer to the positive results sought for and gained when unenlightened beings engage in Buddhist practice.

³⁸ See, for instance, the commentary on the *Guanwuliangshoujing* 觀無量壽經 by Daochuo's contemporary Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592), a patriarch of the Dilun 地論 school, where he applies the categories related to the bodhisattva path presented in the *Shidijinglun* 十地經論 to the nine grades of birth described at the end of that sutra (T 37.1749: 182a12–c22). In this discussion, Huiyuan is clearly positing the stages on the bodhisattva path as a system of practice that all those who intend to attain Buddhahood must engage in step by step. Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), another contemporary of Daochuo's who was influential in the Sanlun 三論 school, also presents the bodhisattva path as one that practitioners naturally must follow to attain Buddhahood (see, for instance, his *Fahuaxuanlun* 法華玄論 [T 34.1720: 420c27–421b4]). Also, Zhiyi makes a detailed introduction to the different scriptural presentations of the stages on the bodhisattva path in his *Fahuaxuanyi* 法華玄義 (T 33.1716: 731c1–732b13) which also indicates that he viewed them as stages that all practitioners had to pass through on the way to Buddhahood.

³⁹ SSZ 1:406; T 47.1958: 12b18–19.

Deluded beings' engaging in practices aimed at specific results can lead to a variety of unwholesome, delusory states—attachment to the results, arrogance and self-congratulation at having attained them, etc. Therefore, Tanluan calls these good results 'upside-down' and says that they 'ruin pure practices' in that they move one away from the Buddhist goals of being freed from attachment, arrogance, and expectations. Tanluan also uses the term when he distinguishes between true virtues and untrue virtues, writing: 'There are two types of virtues. The first arises from a defiled mind and does not accord with Dharma nature. The so-called myriad goods of ordinary beings and heavenly and human beings, the resultant recompense of heavenly and human beings, be they cause or effect, are all upside-down, they are all false. Therefore, they are referred to as untrue virtues.'⁴⁰ Since the language in this passage is echoed in Daochuo's quotation from the beginning of the *Jingtulunzhu*, it is likely that he had this passage in mind when he revised Tanluan's original. When ordinary beings—those who have not made progress on the bodhisattva path to the extent that they have had an insight into the truth of Buddhism that allows them to accord with Dharma nature—engage in practice, they necessarily attain these 'upside-down' and 'false' results and therefore are incapable of making genuine progress on that path. In that sense, the Mahayana sutras that encourage practitioners to engage in practice over the course of thousands of *kalpas* are making an impossible order, because the deluded people who engage in that practice 'do not accord with Dharma nature' and only attain 'upside down' results that move them away from Buddhahood and not toward it.

It is based on this background in Tanluan's work that Daochuo boldly calls the six *pāramitās* 'false.' Those ordinary beings who engage in them with the expectation of making progress toward Buddhahood are actually only attaining these 'false,' 'upside-down good results' which end up ruining their pure practice. This difficulty is a far more serious problem that adheres to the path of difficult practice than the simple fact of the distance in time since Śākyamuni's passing—it is a problem that lies in the very structure of the notion of practice (the deluded thought that specific acts will lead to specific results). The Mahayana Buddhists who formulated the path of bodhisattva practice laid out in scriptures like the *Huayan Sutra* or the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* were clearly aware of the problem, since they all hold that bodhisattvas of high attainment have overcome such specific expectations, using terms such as *wugongyong* 無功用⁴¹ to describe that state. Both Tanluan and Daochuo take the stance that the only way to overcome this difficulty was to rely on the other power of Amituo's vows. Although encountering a Buddha and benefiting from their guidance is

⁴⁰ SSZ 1:284; T 40.1819: 827c17–20.

⁴¹ See, for instance, T 10.0279: 196c22–23; T 24.1485: 1015b9–12.

held to be critical for resolving this problem inherent within practice, we can see that Daochuo is certainly not framing the problem nor proposing a solution to it primarily in reference to the latter days of the Dharma. Instead the problem lies with the nature of practice itself and the deluded people who work within the paradigm of 'If I do this good act, I will get this good result.' From the perspective of Tanluan and Daochuo, that paradigm itself is an 'upside-down' and 'false' one that leads one away from—not toward—enlightenment.

In this section, we have seen that Daochuo posited the path of easy practice as the only genuine path to Buddhahood, very much going against the grain of his contemporaries in that he concludes that the traditional modes of practice are fundamentally flawed. Not only do they not lead quickly to the state of non-retrogression, they also do not actually lead the people who practice them to the intended results. Daochuo sets the path of easy practice alongside this difficult, false path as the only true alternative that genuinely fulfills the promise of Buddhism to lead people to enlightenment. This way of looking at Daochuo's stance presents it very differently from the way it has been described in the past. This more stringent, nuanced criticism is clearly present in the *Anleji*, so it seems it is necessary to consider it to paint a more accurate picture of Daochuo's prioritization of Pure Land Buddhism within the myriad teachings of Śākyamuni.

We also saw that Daochuo did not make any specific statements delimiting the type of practices that belonged to the path of easy practice. For him, it was the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land that was the decisive factor in making that determination, because that aspiration is what qualified practitioners to receive the benefits of Amituo's vow power. That stance is apparent in all the portions of the *Anleji* that I introduced in this section and is echoed elsewhere in the work, as well.⁴² While showing this very inclusive attitude throughout the *Anleji*, there are three instances where Daochuo does indicate that the *nianfo* 念佛, or chanting the name of Amituo, is the most appropriate and effective practice. Because this position strongly influenced Daochuo's successors, such as Shandao and Hōnen, in the next section, I will introduce them.

⁴² For instance, at the end of the opening portion of section 1, chapter 5 ('The merit of all one's practices has been transferred to bring about birth there. If one is simply exclusively straightforward, then when one's life ends, one will necessarily be born. When one attains birth in that country, then ultimately one reaches the cool purity [of nirvana].'), SSZ 1:421–22, T 47.1958: 16c13–15; in a quote from the *Shifangsuivyuanwangshengjing* 十方隨願往生經 in section 2, chapter 2 ('If one can rely on the aspiration, and cultivate practices, there is none who does not attain benefits.') SSZ 1:397, T 47.1958: 9c21–22; the list of eight practices for birth from the *Hailongwangjing* 海龍王經 quoted in chapter 4, section 2, SSZ 1:417; T 47.1958: 15b23–c1; and the list of ten practices for birth from the *Shiwangshengjing* 十往生經 in chapter 12, SSZ 1:438–439, T 47.1958: 21b15–c4.

Daochuo's Three Arguments to Prioritize Calling of the Name

As we saw in the previous section, at the pivotal points in Daochuo's discussion of the paths of difficult and easy practice, he does not specify any particular practice as particularly belonging to the path of easy practice, but instead posits a broad category of practices, from meditative to devotional ones, as 'Pure Land practices.' This inclusivity regarding a variety of practices has led later Shin Buddhist exegetes to criticize his thought as immature or underdeveloped, because it contrasts sharply especially with Hōnen's stance in the *Senjakushū* and also Shinran's detailed distinctions regarding the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth vows of Amituo Buddha. In spite of this broadly inclusive stance, there are three points within the *Anleji* where Daochuo clearly argues that the *nianfo*, and particularly vocal recitation of the name of Amituo, is the best practice for people to engage in. Shandao picks up on these arguments and further develops them in his works, which in turn had a strong influence on Hōnen's proposing exclusive practice of the *nianfo* because it is the practice stipulated in Amituo's eighteenth vow. Let us consider those three arguments in the order that they appear in the *Anleji*.

Daochuo makes his first argument about the appropriateness of vocal recitation of Amituo's name in section 1 of chapter 1. There, he argues that the *nianfo* as the calling of the name is the proper practice for people of his age to engage in. In this section, Daochuo explicitly states that the *nianfo* should be prioritized because the current age is one far removed from Śākyamuni's time and influence. Having stated that the topic under consideration in this section is to describe the reasons that the *Guanwuliangshoujing* 觀無量壽經 (hereafter, *Contemplation Sutra*) was preached, Daochuo begins the discussion with the declaration, 'If a teaching is aligned with the time period and the object of liberation, it is easy to practice and easy to realize. If the object of liberation, the teaching and the time period are turned against each other, it is difficult to practice and difficult to enter.'⁴³ Here, Daochuo is signaling his intention to discuss the merits of a teaching based on the nature of the time period. He goes on to quote a passage from the *Zhengfanianjing* 正法念經 which emphasizes the importance of considering the time period in order to be effective in the employment of expedient means.⁴⁴ He follows that with a passage from what he calls the *Dajiyuezangjing* 大集月藏經 which states that the practices which people can engage in will degenerate over time after Śākyamuni passes away in the course of five-hundred-year stages.⁴⁵ In the first five hundred year period,

⁴³ SSZ 1:378; T 47.1958: 4a27–28.

⁴⁴ SSZ 1:378; T 47.1958: 4a28–b3.

⁴⁵ SSZ 1:376; T 47.1958: 4b3–8.

people will be capable of practicing and attaining wisdom, while in the next they will lose that ability and only be able to practice meditative concentration. After those five hundred years have passed—that is, from the time one thousand years after the passing of the Buddha—people will only be able to engage in the practices of chanting and listening to the teachings in the sutras. In the fourth five hundred year period, even that becomes impossible and people will only be able to construct temples and *stūpas*, perform meritorious deeds, and recognize and admit sins. By the fifth five hundred year period—now two thousand years from Śākyamuni's passing—Buddhists will come to engage in dissentious argumentation and only 'the slightest good Dharma'⁴⁶ will remain. Through this quotation, Daochuo is showing that as time passes from Śākyamuni's entry into complete nirvana, the Buddhist teachings will slowly lose their influence and effectiveness, such that eventually people will no longer be able to engage in practices that will lead to enlightenment. Next, Daochuo quotes another text—without providing a clear attribution—which describes how Buddhas liberate sentient beings through four different methods: (1) dispensing the Dharma through preaching, (2) serving as objects of contemplation, (3) through the use of supernormal abilities, (4) through their names.⁴⁷

These three quotations are presented as the evidence for the following conclusion:

Considering the sentient beings of the present time period, it is [now] the fourth five-hundred-year period since the Buddha has left this world. Truly, [they] are this: those who recognize and admit their sins, perform meritorious deeds, and should chant the name of the Buddha. If one calls the name of Amituo Buddha for one thought-moment, then the sins of eight billion *kalpas* of birth and death are completely removed. One thought-moment is already this way. How much more so [the one who] constantly practices thinking on the Buddha. [He] is the person who continuously recognizes and admits his sins. Further, if the passing of the Sage is near [in time], then the former, the practice of meditation and the cultivation of transcendental wisdom, is the proper study and the latter is secondary. If the passing of the Sage is already far [in the past], then the latter, the calling of the name is proper, and the former is secondary.⁴⁸

Based on the passage from the *Dajiyuezangjing*, Daochuo holds that since it is the fourth of the five five-hundred-year periods since the passing of Śākyamuni, sentient beings should engage in the practices of 'admitting their sins, performing meritorious deeds, and should chant the name of the Buddha.' Although

⁴⁶ SSZ 1:378; T 47.1958: 4b8.

⁴⁷ SSZ 1:378; T 47.1958: 4b8–16.

⁴⁸ SSZ 1:378–379; T 47.1958: 4b16–22.

neither the original text nor Daochuo's quotation of it make specific reference to chanting the name of the Buddha, in this conclusion, Daochuo adds that phrase, likely in light of the third quotation, as well as the content of the *Contemplation Sutra*, which encourages chanting the name and is also the subject of discussion here (the reference to the chanting of the name as eliminating the sins of eighty *kalpas* is a clear reference to that sutra⁴⁹). Daochuo clearly states that chanting the name of Amituo is the appropriate practice because the current age is distant in time from the Buddha. In earlier times, meditative practice would have been the correct practice to engage in, but given the limitations of the time period and the lack of a teacher who can guide one in those practices, Daochuo says that the proper practice to engage in is the chanting of the name.

This first prioritization of the chanting of the name of Amituo over against other types of Buddhist practices is made based on the criteria of the amount of time that has passed since Śākyamuni entered complete nirvana. In other words, in this section, Daochuo is arguing that people should recite the *nianfo* because so much time has passed between them and the Buddha's time that it is no longer possible to engage in other practices. This stance is quite different from—and far more conciliatory than—the one that we saw above in section 1 of chapter 7. It is likely that Daochuo chose to take this more readily understandable and acceptable position at the start of the text (and leave his radical declaration far closer to the end) in order to have his work appeal to a broad audience of Buddhist practitioners. At the time, there were many criticisms of Pure Land Buddhism as inauthentic and of verbal recitation of the name of the Buddha as ineffectual,⁵⁰ so it is likely that Daochuo appealed to the doctrine of the decline of the Dharma, which had considerable currency among his contemporaries,⁵¹ in order to make his radical message more palatable to them. That is to say, this discussion about the degeneration of the Buddhist teachings is not the central message of the *Anleji*, but instead an expedient Daochuo employed to draw in a broad range of Buddhist practitioners who did indeed believe that the six *pāramitās*—especially meditation—were the authentic, proper practices for Buddhists to engage in. The doctrine of the latter days of the Dharma, which had plenty of scriptural precedents that Daochuo could cite, provided a common

⁴⁹ See SSZ 1:65; T 12.0366: 346a19–20.

⁵⁰ Daochuo takes up nine of these criticisms in section 2 of chapter 2 of the *Anleji*. SSZ 1:391–399; T 47.1958: 8a22–10b11. The *Xugaosengzhuan* 續高僧傳 by Daochuo's contemporary Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) also relays several incidents where Daochuo was criticized by other monks for his Pure Land devotion. See T 50.2060: 641b27–c11 and T 50.2060: 583b28–c5.

⁵¹ See Takao Giken 高雄義堅, 'Mappō shisō to shoke no taido' 末法思想と諸家の態度, part 1, in *Shina bukkyō shigaku* 支那仏教史学, vol. 1, no. 1, 1–20 (1937) for an introduction to how the doctrine of the latter Dharma was understood by major Buddhist thinkers in the Sui and early Tang dynasties.

ground that Daochuo could conveniently employ to draw Buddhists skeptical of the message of the path of easy practice into the Pure Land fold. That does not mean, however, that it was the salient feature of his Pure Land thought.

Daochuo next prioritizes chanting of the name of Amituo as the most appropriate practice in section 3 of chapter 3, where he imbeds a reference regarding vocal recitation into a creative quotation of Amituo's eighteenth vow. This interpretation of the content of the eighteenth vow as calling the practitioner to chant the Buddha's name is perhaps Daochuo's most influential contribution to the development of Pure Land Buddhism in East Asia, because it served as the basis for both Shandao's and Hōnen's arguments regarding the exclusive practice of chanting Amituo's name rather than engaging in any other Buddhist practices. The eighteenth vow as it appears in the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* reads as follows:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings of the ten directions extend their minds, hopefully entrust, and wish to be born in my land up to ten thought moments, and are not born there, I will not obtain perfect enlightenment.⁵²

Here, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, Amituo in his causal phase before becoming a Buddha, promises he will insure that all sentient beings who fulfill the simple condition of having faith and wishing to be born in his Pure Land up to ten times will definitely be born there. The original text does not make any reference to vocal recitation of Amituo's name, but instead just speaks of 'ten thought-moments.' Daochuo's quotation of this vow in section 3 of chapter 3 reads:

The *Larger Sutra* states, 'If there are sentient beings, even those who created evil for their entire lives, who when they come upon the end of their lives, continue for ten thought moments calling my name, if they are not born, I will not obtain perfect enlightenment.'⁵³

Daochuo has considerably revised the original in this creative quotation. For our purposes here, the phrase 'calling my name' is what is most important. Daochuo has interpreted the eighteenth vow to mean all those, however evil they may be, who call Amituo's name for ten thought moments will necessarily be born in the Pure Land. The text of the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* does not explicitly state that the 'ten thought moments' mean vocal recitation, but Daochuo's quotation very clearly does.

The idea that Amituo himself chose calling the name as the most appropriate practice for sentient beings is the basis for the arguments that Shandao and Hōnen make encouraging people to specifically practice chanting Amituo's

⁵² SSZ 1:9, T 12.0360: 268a26–27.

⁵³ SSZ 1:410, T 47.1958: 13c11–13.

name as opposed to any other practices. Shandao makes several interpretive quotations of the eighteenth vow that all follow closely on Daochuo's.⁵⁴ Shandao also writes, 'Single-mindedly, exclusively considering Amituo's name when walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—regardless of the length of time—thought after thought, without abandoning it: This is what is referred to as the rightly settled act, because it accords with that Buddha's vow.'⁵⁵ Here he argues that chanting the name is the rightly settled act because it is the act that Dharmākara set forth as the condition for birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen was moved by this passage of Shandao's to devote himself exclusively to the practice of chanting the name of Amituo. In the second chapter of the *Senjakushū*, Hōnen poses the question as to why Shandao specifically takes chanting the name as the 'rightly settled act' and responds by saying, 'Vocal recitation of the *nenbutsu* is the practice [stipulated] in that Buddha's original vow. Therefore, those who practice it will, based on that Buddha's vow, necessarily attain birth in the Pure Land.'⁵⁶ Needless to say, without Daochuo's creative rereading of the eighteenth vow—where he clearly states that the practice Dharmākara called for in the eighteenth vow was vocal recitation—these interpretations by Shandao and Hōnen would not be possible. Therefore, we can say that it is this second prioritization where Daochuo says that the *nianfo* is the appropriate practice because it was chosen by Amituo himself is the most historically significant of the three.

The third prioritization comes in the fourth part of section 2 of chapter 4. There Daochuo calls the *nianfo* 'the essential path' and argues that, although all who turn over the merits of their myriad practices toward birth in the Pure Land will unfailingly be born there, certain benefits adhere to those who practice the *nianfo* that are not enjoyed by people who aim for birth in the Pure Land through other practices. He writes:

Fourth, relying on the *Contemplation Sutra* and other various scriptures, based on the myriad practices performed, if one just turns one's aspiration [to the Pure Land], then all are unfailingly born. However, the single practice of the *nianfo* 念仏 is taken to be the essential path. Why? In investigating the various scriptures, it is clear that there are two benefits, initial and final. If one wishes to give rise to good and perform practices, then [the *nianfo*] entirely encompasses the various *pāramitās*. If one wishes to destroy evil and cause misfortune to cease, then [the

⁵⁴ See Michael Conway マイケル・コンウェイ, 'Zendō kyōgaku no gensen to shite no Anrakushū: Honganron to gyōgōron o chūshin ni' 善導教学の源泉としての『安樂集』: 本願論と行業論を中心に, *Shinran kyōgaku* 親鸞教学 vol. 97, 68–71 (2011), for a discussion of these passages.

⁵⁵ SSZ 1:538, T 34.1753: 272b6–8.

⁵⁶ SSZ 1:935–936, T 83.2608: 3a29–b1.

nianfo] comprehensively cures the myriad obstructions. Therefore, below in the sutra, it states, 'The sentient beings of the *nianfo* are taken up, never to be abandoned. When their life runs out, they necessarily will be born.' This is referred to as the initial benefit. About the final benefit, based on the *Guanyin shouji jing* 觀音授記經, it states, 'Amituo Buddha will remain in the world for a long time, immeasurably many *kalpas*, yet he also has complete extinction. When he enters into *parinirvana*, only Avalokitēśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will be present and maintain the Land of Peace and Bliss, guiding those in the ten directions. The length of that Buddha's complete extinction will be the same as the amount of time he spent in the world. In this way, the sentient beings of that world will not see the Buddha at all. Only those who are born by exclusively thinking solely of Amituo Buddha will constantly see Amituo in the present, not having become extinct.' This is the benefit of the final time. The other practices that one performs, all lead to birth if one transfers the merit for that purpose, but there is a difference between those who see the complete extinction of the World-honored One, and those who do not. I encourage later generations to consider this carefully, so that they will be able to attain the far-off benefit.⁵⁷

Here, Daochuo says that although all who wish to be born in the Pure Land and devote their practices to that purpose will be born there, there are two major benefits that practitioners of the *nianfo* receive which those people who do other practices do not. Before describing those two benefits, he also notes that in terms of practice, the *nianfo* is particularly effective, in that it 'encompasses the various *pāramitās*' and 'comprehensively cures the myriad obstructions.' He says that because of this effectiveness, the *Contemplation Sutra* speaks of sentient beings who do the *nianfo* as necessarily receiving the benefit of being grasped by the light of Amituo and never abandoned. Daochuo calls this the initial benefit that only those who do the *nianfo* receive. He then makes reference to the *Guanyin shouji jing* which describes how in the distant future Avalokitēśvara will take the place of Amituo as the Buddha in the Pure Land Amituo created.⁵⁸ Daochuo creatively quotes from that sutra to make it a text that proves that only those who do the *nianfo* will be assured of seeing Amituo forever.⁵⁹ Those who are born in the Pure Land through other practices will ultimately have to part with Amituo and continue their practice in the Pure Land

⁵⁷ SSZ 1:415–416, T 47.1958: 15a6–19.

⁵⁸ The sutra appears at T 12.0371: 353b5–357c17. The portion that Daochuo is referring to appears at T 12.0371: 357a5–10.

⁵⁹ Although the original states that 'bodhisattvas who have attained the *nianfo samādhi* will receive the benefit of always seeing the Buddha' (T 12.0371: 357a10.), Daochuo rephrases that statement in his quotation based on the language in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* (T 12.0360: 272b17, 272b26–27, 272c6).

under the direction of Avalokitēśvara. In this way, Daochuo argues that there are two important benefits that are available only to those who do the *nianfo* and therefore he encourages his readers to particularly engage in that practice as ‘the essential path.’

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Through the course of this chapter, we have seen that Daochuo took a broad, inclusive stance toward the content of the practice in the path of easy practice that he encouraged his readers to take. He also argued for the importance of the *nianfo* as an essential path that is appropriate for a variety of reasons: (1) because it accords with the needs of the time period, (2) because it was chosen by Amituo himself as the practice for sentient beings to perform, and (3) because it affords its practitioners more benefits than other practices aimed at birth in the Pure Land.

This inclusive stance likely stems from two sources. First, Daochuo’s understanding of the decisive role played by other power in effecting the liberation of sentient beings led him to not lay much weight on the issue of individual practitioners’ activities. More important than the content of the practice for him was the intention behind it. If the practice is engaged in with the hopes of attaining birth in Amituo’s Pure Land, that is sufficient to qualify the practitioner to receive the benefits of the working of Amituo’s vows, so Daochuo probably felt no strong need to make strict declarations about exclusively chanting the name of Amituo the way his successors did.

From section 2 of this chapter, however, we can clearly see that Daochuo did hold the *nianfo* to be ‘the essential path,’ so we have to look for a second source that kept him from making that argument consistently throughout the *Anleji*. It seems that one major reason that Daochuo chose to take such a broad, inclusive stance toward the type of practice was in order to avoid alienating his audience. At the time that Daochuo was writing, Pure Land Buddhism was certainly an object of interest for a large number of lay and monastic Buddhists, but it was not accorded the sort of central position that Daochuo held it should be afforded. There was not only a great deal of criticism of Pure Land Buddhism as not authentically Buddhist, there were many influential people who treated the *nianfo* as little more than an expedient practice for inferior practitioners. With that sort of an audience, Daochuo had to first convince them that Pure Land Buddhism was indeed worthy of attention. If he were to present only the sort of radical stance we saw in section 1 above, or make a bold argument about exclusive practice of the *nianfo*, it is likely that he would not have been taken

seriously by the clerics he was attempting to win over to the Pure Land path. It seems that these sorts of concerns led him to make reference to the doctrine of the latter days of the Dharma as well as downplay the essential role of the *nianfo* in Pure Land soteriology.

Before closing, however, it seems important to revisit Daochuo's assertions about how the results one obtains from the six *pāramitās* are 'false' and 'upside down' and ask what significance that holds for our understanding of Buddhist practice and what the Pure Land meant to him. It is truly quite jarring to be told that the six *pāramitās* are 'false' and that any practice that a foolish ordinary being engages in is necessarily 'upside-down' and does not lead to—but instead away from—Buddhahood. It challenges the validity of our very concept of practice. Daochuo and Tanluan took this stance and based on it, discouraged engaging in self power practice, instead calling people to rely on the other power of Amituo's vows. It will require further research to be able to prove this fully, but it seems that the flaw that Daochuo and Tanluan perceived in practice as conceived by the unenlightened being—the flaw that makes the path of difficult practice impossible—was actually broadly recognized by Mahayana thinkers in India and China.⁶⁰ Tanluan and Daochuo's choice to attempt to resolve that flaw with reference to Amituo and his Pure Land is surely unique, but it seems that a great many Buddhist thinkers wrestled with the problem that they were attempting to address. When we consider Buddhist practice simply as actions that people perform in hopes of attaining Buddhahood, we run the risk of obscuring the issues that our objects of study were attempting to address. It seems, therefore, that an important question that needs to be addressed going forward is how exactly did Mahayana Buddhists understand the systems of practice laid out with such a vast time scale in scriptures like the *Huayan Sutra* and the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*.

A second, and perhaps more pressing, question has also become apparent over the course of these considerations. This study has focused on what practices Daochuo held would qualify one for birth in the Pure Land, but the fact is that for Daochuo, birth in the Pure Land is a multivalent concept, so although we have seen that Daochuo held a wide variety of practices would indeed lead to birth in the Pure Land, it is highly likely that he saw that 'birth' to be an expedient one. In section 8 of chapter 1 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo writes as follows:

Question: You have already said that the pure country of Amituo takes in [people both] high and low; that all equally go [there to be born] without questioning

⁶⁰ For instance, both Tanluan (T 40.1819: 840b27–29) and the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* (T 24.1485: 1016a12) refer to the stages in the path of bodhisattva practice set forth in scriptures like the *Huayan Sutra* as 'a path of transformed response' (*yinghuadao* 応化道), indicating that it is an expedient that does not necessarily express ultimate truth, or the true path to Buddhahood.

whether they are ordinary human beings or sages. I still do not know if one gains birth only through practicing no-set-form or, on the other hand, if the [relying on] set form of the ordinary human being is also able to be born. Answer: The ordinary person, whose wisdom is shallow and often seeks relying on set form definitely attains birth in the Pure Land. However, because the strength of good with set form is weak, [they] are only born in a land with form and see a transformed recompense Buddha.⁶¹

All the various practices that we have discussed above, since they are practiced by the ‘unaccomplished ordinary beings’ who have not made progress along the bodhisattva path are ultimately what Daochuo here calls ‘good with set form’—that is, good that takes a specific form and is thus said to not accord with the ultimate, formless, Buddhist truth. Thus, from his perspective, they do not qualify one for a true birth in the true Pure Land, only an expedient birth in an expedient land ‘with form,’ where one only encounters a ‘transformed recompense Buddha.’ In light of this passage, I have to say that although in the above I have been able to make a presentation of the superficial aspects of Daochuo’s understanding of the role of practice in the Pure Land path, this presentation really only deals with the expedient level of birth in the Pure Land. That is to say, I have not actually managed to address the way in which what Daochuo held to be true birth in the Pure Land actually resolves the flaw in practice and allows ordinary beings to fulfill the Mahayana ideal without arduous progress along the fifty-two stages of the bodhisattva path.

In that sense, this chapter has led to more questions than answers, but I am out of space, so I will have to address those questions at another opportunity.

⁶¹ SSZ 1:386, T 47.1958: 6c1–5.

References

Abbreviations

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