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Review of Visions of Sukhavati: Shan-Tao's Commentary On the Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching, by J.F. Pas

Paul K. Nietupski
John Carroll University, pnietupski@jcu.edu

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Visions of Sukhāvātī: Shan-tao's Commentary on the Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching. By JULIAN F. PAS. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. xviii, 452 pp. \$24.95.

This book contains solid scholarship on Shan-Tao's (613–81 C.E.) teachings, with a concentration on and discussion of the *Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching*, Shan-Tao's major Pure Land Buddhist writing, a commentary on the *Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra*. The methodology is textcritical, but it is concerned with the religious and social conditions in the classical Chinese Buddhist world of 613–81 C.E. Pas uses canonical texts to describe, in Shan-Tao's words, a religious system that was popular among ordained monks and lay people alike, though these different groups practiced to levels according to their circumstances.

The book is text-focused, but presents a wide range of theoretical points for further discussion, and provides an excellent description of the intellectual history of seventh century Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. The incomplete Sanskrit diacritical marks are minor relative to the amount of authoritative information about the problems and historical evolution of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist etymologies of Sanskrit and Pali terms, and the clear expositions of Shan-Tao's teachings and thought. The volume explains why Shan-Tao represents a significant development in Pure Land praxis.

Shan-Tao's method includes the practice of Pure Land ethics and the diverse meditation or mental practices. The precise nature of this mental meditation is the main theme of Pas's book, for he says on several occasions that he is studying Chinese Pure Land religions as known and practiced by the educated and lay people regardless of specifics of doctrine. Indeed, he elaborates on the Buddha's *upāya* of teaching different disciples different things at different times, and shows that Shan-Tao's apparent eclecticism is due to a combination of scholarly maturity, breadth of knowledge and teaching methods, and an effort to reconcile or at least demonstrate the resonance between the imported Buddhist thought and native Chinese religious beliefs and practices.

Pas divides meditation practices and ethical conduct, which he describes as normal divisions of the Eightfold Path. To the contrary, the Eight are taught as being inseparable, in spite of Pas's report that Shan-Tao divided ethical conduct and meditation. This is inconsistent with other Indian and Chinese sources, and even with Shan-Tao's writings and career as presented in Pas's book (See John C. Holt, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinayapīṭaka* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995]; S. T. Katz, "Ethics and Mysticism," in L. S. Rouner, ed., *Foundations of Ethics* [University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], p. 188). Pas and Shan-Tao are very likely concerned with the divisions of the Eightfold Path into ethics, concentration, and wisdom, and deal with them separately here.

The first chapter, the author admits, is a rather speculative retrospective on the possible co-emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Hindu *bhakti*, and devotional Buddhism. Chapter 2 is an excellent essay on the structures of Shan-Tao's Pure Land meditation system. Pas makes the important point that Shan-Tao did not advocate mere repetition (*nien fo*) for any but uneducated beginners or lay persons. Rather, in chapter 2 and later in the book Pas details Shan-Tao's method of "visualizing" Amitābha in Sukhāvātī (*kuan fo*) (pp. 50–51. For some related remarks cf. Susan Naquin and Chun-fang Yu, eds. *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992], p. 15). Both methods are aimed at the goal of rebirth in Sukhāvātīvyūha, Amitābha's paradise. Chapters 3 and 4 are excellent studies of Shan-

Tao's life, and the texts ascribed to him. These chapters contain copious references to Shan-Tao's sources, the Buddhist Canon, and related writings in Japanese and other languages. Chapters 6 and 7 are analyses of the structures of Shan-Tao's meditation system, and his ethical system. His meditation system is eclectic and, as Pas shows, sometimes ambiguous on a few subtle points of doctrine. Chapter 9 is a short discussion of the *summum bonum*, rebirth in Sukhāvātī. Pas does mention, and it should be noted, that to be reborn in Sukhāvātī one had to come to the level of a *bodhisattva*, or a being who would eventually become a *bodhisattva*. In this section he deals with the Buddhist hermeneutic of the "three levels of religious persons" that has been made popular elsewhere. Pas concludes his work in chapter 10 with concluding remarks and a fascinating discussion of topics for further research. He begins chapter 10 with the interface of Confucian ethics and Shan-Tao's method, continues with a discussion of the coexistence of Nestorian Christianity and Pure Land, discusses the later transmissions of Pure Land to Japan, and concludes the chapter with a discussion of the similarities and differences between Christian and Pure Land practitioners.

For all it contains, this book is an excellent reference tool for students of Chinese Buddhist history and the history of ideas. Its minor errors and the problem of the book being a little outdated will be recognized by scholars, but these difficulties are far outweighed by the accurate picture of Shan-Tao, a preeminent Tang Dynasty scholar, practitioner, and teacher of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism.

PAUL NIETUPSKI
John Carroll University

Prescriptions for Saving China: Selected Writings of Sun Yat-sen. Edited by JULIE LEE WEI, RAMON H. MYERS, and DONALD G. GILLIN. Translated by JULIE LEE WEI, E-SU ZEN, and LINDA CHAO. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1994. xlv, 328 pp. \$42.95.

Although Sun Yat-sen's ideas receive frequent praise from Chinese writers, Western scholars usually depict Sun's ideology as shallow and inconsistent. The influential text *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* by John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), pp. 746–47 is perhaps typical when it portrays Sun as "a man known for conspiracy and desperate action rather than for literary production, and indeed intellectually rather superficial." Sun, we are told, "could not assume the role of modern sage to guide the thinking of his generation" (Fairbank et al, 746–47).

The editors of the volume under review, however, have a much different assessment of Sun and his intellectual legacy. Indeed, in this work sponsored by National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan, they seek to place Sun's ideas at the center of Taiwan's recent achievements. In the introduction the editors state that Taiwan's success has not merely been in economic modernization but in developing a civil society under Kuomintang tutelage which contains three marketplaces—economic, ideological, and political. Whatever the People's Republic has achieved in economic growth (and it is still far behind Taiwan), it has yet to create an open political or ideological marketplace. The crux of the editors' argument is that a key to the Kuomintang's success on Taiwan has been the implementation of Sun Yat-sen's vision. "We believe that the KMT leadership always regarded Sun's ideas as important in building a wealthy and democratic Chinese society and that it took Sun's