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Georgios Halkias, Richard K. Payne, eds. *Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts: An Anthology.* Pure Land Buddhist Studies. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019. 808 pp. $80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-7309-7.

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Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts is both a treasure chest of thoughtfully selected, beautifully translated primary sources and a major methodological intervention in the form of an anthology, rewarding especially those readers who make their way through the volume from beginning to end. The anthology aims to approach Pure Land Buddhism as a "coherent theme within the history of Buddhist praxis, rather than a unique or special kind of Buddhism" (p. 3), to suggest what working with the notion of "Pure Land" in such a way might make possible (p. 5), and so to "stimulate additional research that neither marginalizes the category of Pure Land Buddhism nor perpetuates preconceptions that question the validity of Pure Land as a form of Buddhist praxis" (p. 15). To this end, editors Georgios Halkias and Richard Payne have collected twenty-six texts representing a wide range of what the editors refer to as "Pure Land cults," here using "cult" in its classical sense as the "complex of deity and those practices considered either to care for the deity or to cultivate one's relation with the deity" (p. 11). In keeping with their stated goal of expanding the horizons of Pure Land Buddhist studies, the editors have been expansive in their selection of primary sources: Sukhāvatī jockeys for space here with Abhirati, Tuṣita Heaven, Śambhala, and the pure lands of the ten directions. The range and type of sources collected in the volume, and the length of the volume itself, mean that any review attempting to diligently summarize the contributions would quickly become little more than a long list of compliments, praising the contributors for their lucid introductions and accessible translations. This review will thus focus instead on the work Halkias and Payne have done to create a context for the individual contributions and try to draw out the terms of an argument that surfaces within the volume itself. The disadvantage of this approach is that many superb individual pieces in the anthology will go unmentioned here.

Halkias and Payne come to this project having each already made influential arguments for the plurality of Pure Land thought and practice. Payne earlier took up the language of "cult" as an entry point for challenging narrow visions of Pure Land in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha*, coedited with Kenneth K. Tanaka (2004); in his role as founding chair of the editorial committee of the Pure Land Buddhist series at the University of Hawai'i Press, he has likewise pursued a catholic understanding of what should count as Pure Land Buddhism. One of the books appearing in this series was Halkias's own

first monograph, ***Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet*** (2012). Drawing on a rich set of literary, archaeological, and ethnographic sources, ***Luminous Bliss*** serves as an outstanding example of the kind of scholarship that a more capacious understanding of "Pure Land" as an organizing category makes possible. The diversity of sources brought together under this category in ***Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts*** likewise represents another significant contribution to the editors' ongoing efforts to push at the internal boundaries that structure Buddhist studies as a field.

Reflecting this interest in destabilizing some of the organizing principles that Buddhist studies takes for granted, ***Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts*** is not organized in terms of modern nation-states but (mostly) by textual genres: ritual practices, contemplative visualizations, doctrinal expositions, life-writing and poetry, and ethical and aesthetic explications, with a sixth and final section taking up "worlds beyond Sukhāvatī." This approach is valuable in at least two ways. First, it makes room in the volume for certain kinds of literature that are central to Buddhist tradition but which are not often selected for translation. Second, it creates generative openings for thinking across time periods and traditions as well as national borders. This is the case both within the individual sections as the editors have organized them and across sections. For example, Clark Chilson's translation of excerpts from the autobiography of Yoshimoto Ishin, the originator of Naikan therapy (found in the section on doctrinal expositions) could be very generatively read alongside Natasha Heller's selection of contemporary Pure Land miracle tales (found in the section on life-writing and poetry). Tana Daishō's "The Future of American Buddhism," translated by Michihiro Ama, is exciting to read in conversation with the similarly practically minded twelfth-century text, the ***Longshu jingtu wen***, translated by Daniel Getz. And then, on the other hand, Getz's framing of Longshu's treatise as a "'Confucian' version of Pure Land faith" (p. 603) also makes Longshu a natural conversation partner for the medieval Daoist author of the ***Jingtu sheng shen jing***, which translator Henrik H. Sørensen characterizes as an example of "Buddho-Daoism" (p. 666), and for the Chan monk Zhongfeng Mingben, whose Pure Land poems are translated here by Natasha Heller. The emergence of the lines of shared interest that appear when reading across the volume serves perhaps as evidence that the editors are right to claim that there is a "polythemic unity" present in "pure lands across and beyond Buddhist Asia" which comes into focus when sources are juxtaposed in new ways (pp. 1-2).

If one of the pleasures of this volume is the surprising harmony between disparate primary source texts, another is the occasional frisson of dissent. In critiquing the positioning of sectarian Japanese Pure Land traditions as normative, scholars of Chinese and Indian Buddhism have suggested that "Pure Land" does not seem to mark off a distinctive area within the broader religious landscape; some of these arguments are helpfully summarized by Gábor Kósa's introduction to his translation of a Manichaean hymn, "In Praise of the Realm of Light" (pp. 709-710). Reflecting these arguments, in his review of Halkias's ***Luminous Passage***, Charles B. Jones (who contributes a translation of the Ming dynasty patriarch Yunqi Zhuhong's lively and interesting "Answers to Forty-Eight Questions about Pure Land" to this volume) wonders if "Pure Land" is indeed broadly useful as an organizing category: "Why characterize ***any*** Tibetan literature or practice as 'Pure Land' at all? Why segregate out texts dealing with Sukhāvatī and Amitābha from, say, other instances of ***dhāraṇī*** or ***gter-ma*** literature?"[1] In its construction, the anthology itself represents Halkias and Payne's answer to Jones's questions as to the value of Pure Land as a heuristic device. But a similar provocation about the heuristic usefulness of Pure Land is present within the anthology itself, in Jonathan Silk's substantive introduction to his translation of "The Praise of the Name of the

Tathāgata Amitābha." As Silk explains, "Praise of the Name" is plainly not a "Pure Land" text in a narrow sense—it has "as much affinity with generalized medieval Mahāyāna doctrines as it does with anything justifiably labeled Pure Land in … [an] exclusivistic sense" (p. 502). Is it, however, a "Pure Land" text in the sense Halkias and Payne have in mind? Silk seems to hold open the possibility that widening the Pure Land net in order to capture to texts like the one he has translated is in fact not productive: the advantage of decentering sectarian forms of Pure Land, he suggests, is not that we can expand the boundaries of what counts as Pure Land but that it "frees us from the responsibility of seeking everywhere in Indian Buddhism"—and perhaps elsewhere—"for Pure Land elements" (p. 503). The anthology's inclusion of a slightly skeptical voice gives the reader a welcome opportunity to reflect on the nature and stakes of the anthology's methodological approach.

There is some irony in the fact that the volume's success in making the case for an expansive understanding of Pure Land as a category will encourage readers to identify additional topics and themes that might be more fully represented here. The editors mention some of the future directions they hope will be explored: Pure Land visual and material culture, and Pure Land thought and practice in Southeast Asia (pp. 15-16). I would add to this list a wish for more on Pure Land thought and practice in contemporary Korea and in the Americas, including Latin America, and on women's engagements with Pure Land thought and practice. This should register not as a criticism but as an acknowledgment of the ways in which the materials readily available to scholars in Buddhist studies continue to be shaped by the limitations of area studies on the one hand and religious studies on the other (p. 2), and as an affirmation of Halkias and Payne's suggestion that turning "to an inclusive sense of Pure Land Buddhism" may prompt new lines of inquiry (p. 14). In terms of both the primary texts it makes available and the force of its methodological intervention, ***Pure Land in Asian Texts*** represents a vital, enlivening contribution to the field. It should be essential and deeply enjoyable reading for scholars in every area of Buddhist studies.

Note

[1]. Jones, review of ***Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet*** by Georgios T. Halkias, H-Buddhism, ***H-Net Reviews***, February 2014.

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