

The Grandeur of Dependent Retribution and Primary Retribution in the Pure Land and Its Significance for Constructing Pure Land Faith

Changding*, Qingyuan, Nengcheng, Huiru, Huihang

Lingyanshan Branch, Buddhist Academy of China, Suzhou, Jiangsu, 215101, China

*Corresponding author: Changding, a572817292@163.com

Copyright: 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-NC 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, and explicitly prohibiting its use for commercial purposes.

Abstract: Pure Land Buddhism regards the descriptions of dependent retribution (yibao) and primary retribution (zhengbao) as foundational pillars of its faith system. This paper systematically compares how the three foundational Pure Land scriptures—the Sutra on Immeasurable Life (Wuliangshou jing), the Amitabha Sutra (Emituo jing), and the Contemplation Sutra (Guan wuliangshou jing)—each emphasize distinct aspects of the two retributions. Drawing upon the interpretive traditions of the patriarchs Tanluan, Daochuo, Shandao, Lianchi, Ouyi, and Yinguang, the study analyzes the two retributions across four dimensions: the grandeur of dependent retribution, the grandeur of primary retribution, the originary power of the Primal Vow, and the non-duality of the two retributions. The study demonstrates that the three scriptures offer complementary descriptions that collectively constitute the scriptural foundation of Pure Land faith; that successive patriarchs translated the two-retributions doctrine into the core basis for practitioners' establishment of the faith-aspiration-practice structure; and that the doctrine of non-duality bridges the idealist Pure Land and the realist Pure Land, providing solid theoretical support for both the philosophical depth and the practical operability of Pure Land faith.

Keywords: Pure Land; Dependent Retribution and Primary Retribution; Other-power and Primal Vow; Faith-Aspiration-Practice; Pure Land Faith Construction

Published: Jul 9, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/apbs.v1i2.1496>

1. Introduction: The Doctrinal Foundations of Dependent and Primary Retribution in Pure Land Faith

1.1 The Buddhist Philosophical Content of the Two Retributions

The dyad of dependent retribution (yibao) and primary retribution (zhengbao) constitutes a core category of Buddhist cosmology and philosophy of life. Its theoretical provenance may be traced to the mind-only doctrine of dependent origination articulated in the Avatamsaka Sutra's famous verse: "The mind is like a skilled painter who can depict all five aggregates; there is nothing in any world that it does not create." The term "dependent retribution" (yi) refers to the existential environment upon which sentient beings depend, encompassing the land, nature, and the vessel-world (qi shijian); "primary retribution" (zheng) denotes the bodily form of sentient beings themselves, including body, mind, lifespan, and merit. Dependent and primary retribution are not two isolated entities; they are the retributive fruits of collective and individual karma, mutually conditioned and together constituting the complete mode of sentient existence within the cycle of rebirth.

Within the Pure Land doctrinal system, the theory of the two retributions acquired a distinctive theological significance. Master Daochuo (562–645) provided in the *Collection on the Land of Bliss* (Anle ji) the classical definition of the two retributions^[2]: “Dependent retribution refers to the lotus flowers, the seven-jeweled trees arrayed in rows, and the waters of eight meritorious qualities of the Pure Land; primary retribution refers to Amitabha Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta, and all the holy multitudes.” This definition not only delineated the concrete content of the grandeur of the two retributions in the Land of Ultimate Bliss but also established the theoretical framework of Pure Land grandeur: both retributions are accomplished through the vow-power of Amitabha Buddha and are beyond the capacity of ordinary beings’ self-power, thereby laying the theoretical foundation for Master Shandao’s doctrine of other-power and the Primal Vow.

Master Tanluan (476–542) further emphasized in his *Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth* (Wangsheng lunzhu)^[1]: “The karmic fruits of the Pure Land: dependent and primary retribution are mutually accomplished,” thus revealing the wholeness and indivisibility of the two retributions. Master Lianchi (1535–1615) in his *Amitabha Sutra: Commentary and Subcommentary*^[8] elevated this relationship to the philosophical plane of Huayan’s “unobstructedness of principle and phenomena,” advancing the thesis: “dependent and primary retribution are non-dual; body and land are one and the same.”

1.2 Research Focus: Comparative Scripture Analysis and Patriarchal Interpretation

Existing scholarship on Pure Land Buddhism has concentrated largely on historical origins, intellectual developments, or the practical cultivation of particular patriarchs; comparative studies of the core doctrine of the two retributions across the three foundational scriptures remain insufficient. The three scriptures—the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* (hereafter “the Great Sutra”), the *Amitabha Sutra* (hereafter “the Small Sutra”), and the *Contemplation Sutra* (hereafter “the Contemplation Sutra”)—constitute the scriptural foundation of Pure Land Buddhism and each emphasizes distinct aspects of the two retributions: the Great Sutra focuses on the process of fulfillment of Amitabha’s vows and the vow-power origin of the two retributions’ grandeur; the Small Sutra presents the dependent retribution of the Land of Ultimate Bliss in a direct and concentrated manner; the Contemplation Sutra transforms the two retributions into objects of systematic contemplation practice.

This paper proposes to analyze four dimensions: first, a systematic comparison of the differences and complementarity in the three scriptures’ descriptions of dependent retribution; second, a survey of the interpretive tradition of patriarchs Tanluan, Daochuo, Shandao, Lianchi, Ouyi, and Yinguang regarding primary retribution; third, an elucidation of the vow-power origin of the grandeur of the two retributions and its intrinsic connection with the faith–aspiration–practice structure; and fourth, an exploration of how the doctrine of non-duality bridges the idealist and realist Pure Land traditions to provide theoretical support for contemporary practice.

1.3 Review of Scholarship and Contributions of This Study

A substantial body of scholarship exists in both China and internationally, spanning historical documentation, intellectual history, and practice. Guo Hua’s study of the Pure Land thought in Daochuo’s *Anle ji*^[11], Zhu Fenlan’s analysis of the distinctive features of Master Shandao’s Pure Land thought^[22], Zhai Jiangling’s investigation of Master Ouyi Zhixu’s Pure Land thought^[15], and Wang Wei’s systematic survey of Pure Land belief in the Jin and Tang periods^[19] each contribute important perspectives. Yang Mingzhang’s compilation of Amitabha Sutra lecture texts provides an essential reference for understanding the popular transmission of Pure Land scriptures^[23]. Xia Quanli’s examination of Hanshan Deqing’s Pure Land thought further illuminates the rich diversity of Ming dynasty Pure Land interpretation^[14].

In the international academic context, Tanaka’s (1992) study of the formation of Chinese Pure Land doctrine^[25] and Livia Köhn’s (1996) translation and research on the Contemplation Sutra^[26] have established important foundations for international Pure Land studies. Nevertheless, a systematic structural analysis of the two retributions’ doctrinal function using the three-scripture comparative framework, together with a tracing of its development through the patriarchal interpretive tradition, remains an underexplored area warranting further inquiry.

The contributions of this study are threefold: first, it employs a horizontal comparison of the three scriptures as its principal framework to reveal differences in expression and functional emphases across the canons; second, it traces the creative interpretations of six patriarchs as a vertical narrative to demonstrate the historical accumulation of this doctrine; and third,

it positions the intrinsic relationship between the two retributions and the faith–aspiration–practice structure as a theoretical entry point for contemporary reflections on Buddhist practice.

2. A Comparative Analysis of Dependent Retribution in the Three Scriptures

2.1 The Amitabha Sutra: Sensory Description and the Stimulation of Faith

The Amitabha Sutra, translated by Kumarajiva of the Yao Qin dynasty in 402 CE^[4], depicts the dependent retribution of the Land of Ultimate Bliss in the most direct and concentrated manner, making it the most widely familiar canonical text among Pure Land practitioners. The sutra opens with: “From here, passing westward beyond one hundred thousand million Buddha-lands, there is a world called ‘Ultimate Bliss,’” thereby establishing the Land of Ultimate Bliss as a concrete, directionally situated object of faith.

Descriptions of material dependent retribution in the sutra are concentrated in three dimensions: first, the physical environment composed of seven jewels—“In that land there are ponds of seven jewels, filled with waters of eight meritorious qualities; the bottom of each pond is spread with pure golden sand”—symbolizing absolute purity that transcends mundane defilement; second, multicolored lotus flowers—“The lotus flowers in the ponds are as large as chariot wheels: blue-colored with blue radiance, yellow-colored with yellow radiance, red-colored with red radiance, white-colored with white radiance, marvelously fragrant and pure”; and third, the absence of suffering—“The beings of that land have none of the many sufferings; they experience only pleasures. Hence it is called ‘Ultimate Bliss.’”

A particularly distinctive feature of the Small Sutra is its emphasis on the quality of the six sense-objects expounding the Dharma. The sutra describes the birds of the Pure Land: “Day and night, in the six time-periods, they emit harmonious and elegant sounds; their songs give voice to the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the eightfold noble path.” Wind blowing through jeweled trees and nets produces “a sublime sound comparable to hundreds of thousands of instruments all played simultaneously; those who hear this sound naturally give rise to mindfulness of the Buddha, mindfulness of the Dharma, and mindfulness of the Sangha.” This depiction of the six sense-objects expounding the Dharma transforms the dependent environment itself into a continuous condition for practice.

2.2 The Sutra on Immeasurable Life: Primal Vow Fulfillment and the Complete Picture of the Two Retributions

The Sutra on Immeasurable Life, translated by Sanghavarman of the Cao Wei dynasty in 252 CE^[3], is the longest of the three scriptures and provides the most comprehensive account of both retributions. The Great Sutra’s singular contribution lies in directly connecting the grandeur of the two retributions to the forty-eight great vows made by Bodhisattva Dharmakara in his causal ground, thereby disclosing the vow-power origin of the Pure Land’s grandeur.

In its description of dependent retribution, the Great Sutra supplies more detailed accounts than the Small Sutra. Particularly noteworthy is its emphasis on the spontaneity of resources: “The beings of that land, when they wish to eat, the seven-jeweled bowls spontaneously fill with hundreds of flavors of food and drink; when the meal is finished, they spontaneously disappear; when they wish for clothing, it arrives in accordance with thought, without requiring tailoring.” This design eliminates altogether the mundane obstacle of laboring for food and clothing.

Master Daochuo provided an important exegesis of the bliss described in the Great Sutra in his *Anle ji*^[2], distinguishing three levels: “the bliss of spontaneity,” “the bliss of meditative concentration,” and “the bliss of enlightenment.” Gao Renxiong^[13] analyzed the literary qualities of Sanghavarman’s translation from a literary perspective, noting that the narrative style of the Great Sutra possesses both religious majesty and literary expressive power.

2.3 The Contemplation Sutra: Meditative Stages and the Contemplability of the Two Retributions

The Contemplation Sutra, translated by Kalayashas of the Liu Song dynasty between 424 and 442 CE^[5], transforms the dependent retribution grandeur of the Pure Land into an object of contemplation and cultivation through a systematic sequence of sixteen contemplations. The first thirteen contemplations—the sun contemplation, water contemplation, ground contemplation, jeweled tree contemplation, jeweled pond contemplation, and others—guide practitioners step by step in observing the grandeur of dependent retribution.

Master Shandao offered the most influential interpretation of the dependent-retribution contemplations in the Contemplation

Sutra in his Four-Fascicle Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra^[6], advancing the methodological principle of “pointing to a direction and establishing a form” (zhifang lixiang). Shi Yanjue’s research further shows that Shandao’s interpretation of the Contemplation Sutra played a pivotal role in the popularization of Pure Land Buddhism during the Tang dynasty^[24].

A comparative examination of the three scriptures’ descriptions of dependent retribution reveals: the Small Sutra employs sensorially intuitive language to arouse practitioners’ longing for the Pure Land; the Great Sutra grounds the grandeur of dependent retribution theologically through the logic of vow fulfillment; the Contemplation Sutra transforms dependent retribution into a concrete object of meditative cultivation. The three are complementary and collectively sustain the establishment and deepening of Pure Land faith.

3. The Doctrinal Content of Primary Retribution and Its Patriarchal Interpretations

3.1 Lotus-Flower Apparitional Rebirth: Symbolic Significance of the Mode of Rebirth

The grandeur of primary retribution in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is first manifested in its distinctive mode of lotus-flower apparitional rebirth (lianhua huasheng). The eighteenth vow of the Sutra on Immeasurable Life proclaims: “If there are sentient beings who wish to be born in my land, who with sincere mind delight and trust, and with even ten recitations [of my name] are not born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment—excepting those who have committed the five heinous acts or slandered the true Dharma.”

Lotus-flower apparitional rebirth carries profound symbolic meaning: the lotus flower grows from mud yet remains unstained, symbolizing that practitioners who have accumulated karmic deeds within the Saha world are nonetheless able to attain a pure body through recitation-based rebirth. The Contemplation Sutra describes in detail the different lotus grades of the nine classes of rebirth, embodying Pure Land Buddhism’s inclusive doctrine of “rebirth while carrying one’s karma” (daiye wangsheng)—the depth of one’s practice affects the grade of rebirth but not the actualization of rebirth itself.

Master Shandao offered a poetic interpretation of lotus-flower apparitional rebirth in his Hymns of Praise for Rebirth^[7]: “Those born through the apparition of the lotus flower are free from the defilement of carnal desire, pure and undefiled.” Master Lianchi, in his Amitabha Sutra: Commentary and Subcommentary^[8], interpreted lotus-flower apparitional rebirth from the Huayan philosophical perspective of “unobstructedness of events and events” as “accomplished by the inconceivable vow-power of Amitabha Buddha, manifesting the unobstructed interpenetration of events and events in the realm of one truth (yi zhen fajie).”

3.2 Immeasurable Lifespan and Non-Retrogression: The Dual Structure of Practice Assurance

The most supreme feature of primary retribution in the Pure Land is the attainment of immeasurable lifespan and the stage of non-retrogression (Sanskrit: *avaivartika*; Chinese: *abibaizhi*). The Amitabha Sutra explicitly states: “The lifespan of that Buddha and of his people is immeasurable, boundless, incalculable kalpas.”

Master Tanluan in his Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth^[1] regarded immeasurable lifespan as the fundamental prerequisite for “entering the treasury of the Buddha-Dharma.” Master Daochuo further emphasized: “The beings of that land have a lifespan of immeasurable duration, equal to that of the Buddha; hence they are able to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.” Zhao Jiamin’s research further demonstrates that Daochuo’s discourse on immeasurable lifespan reflects the shift in Pure Land thought during the Northern and Southern Dynasties from abstruse metaphysics toward practical application^[17].

Non-retrogression encompasses three levels: non-retrogression from a stage, non-retrogression from conduct, and non-retrogression of mindfulness. Master Yinguang (1861–1940) in his Expanded Collected Writings of Master Yinguang^[10] provided a succinct elucidation: “In the Saha world, practitioners advance and then retreat, advancing and retreating, and non-retrogression is hard to achieve; in the Pure Land, relying on the compassionate power of the Buddha, one is reborn while carrying one’s karma and immediately attains non-retrogression.”

3.3 The Dialectical Tension Between Karma-Carrying Rebirth and Ultimate Liberation

One of Pure Land Buddhism’s most distinctive doctrines is “rebirth while carrying one’s karma.” Master Tanluan in his Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth^[1] cited the account of the lowest of the low grade in the Contemplation Sutra: “If there is a person who has committed the five heinous acts and ten evils ... at the moment of death, encounters a good spiritual friend completes ten recitations, and thereby is reborn in the Pure Land of Bliss; immediately entering the group of those

correctly established in the Mahayana, ultimately irreversible.”

Master Daochuo’s inheritance and development of this thought in the *Anle ji*^[2] more clearly displays the lineage of Pure Land thought from Tanluan to Daochuo. Zhao Jiamin and Cui Tao’s research further demonstrates that Daochuo’s karma-carrying rebirth thought, by simplifying the mode of practice, laid the theoretical foundation for the broad propagation of the Pure Land school in Sui-Tang society^[18].

Master Ouyi (1599–1655) in his *Essential Explanation of the Amitabha Sutra*^[9] provided a precise logical definition of karma-carrying rebirth, proposing: “Whether or not one is reborn depends entirely on whether one possesses faith and aspiration; the height or depth of one’s grade depends entirely on the depth or shallowness of one’s recitation practice.” Zhai Jiangling’s research demonstrates that Ouyi’s positioning of faith and aspiration at the core of the criterion for rebirth means that the key to Pure Land practice is no longer merely the depth of single-minded effort but whether faith and aspiration are genuine and complete^[15].

4. The Vow-Power Origin of the Two Retributions and the Faith–Aspiration–Practice Structure

4.1 Bodhisattva Dharmakara’s Forty-Eight Vows and the Fulfillment of the Pure Land

The grandeur of the two retributions in the Land of Ultimate Bliss originates from the karmic fruits of the forty-eight great vows made by Amitabha Buddha (the Bodhisattva Dharmakara in his causal ground) before the Buddha Lokeshvararaja. The *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* provides a detailed account of Dharmakara Bodhisattva’s process of deliberation over five kalpas to select and absorb the qualities of the pure lands of all Buddhas.

The forty-eight vows may be divided into three categories: vows to embrace the Dharmakaya (e.g., the twelfth vow for immeasurable radiance), vows to establish the Pure Land (e.g., the thirty-first vow for the purity of the land), and vows to embrace sentient beings (e.g., the eighteenth vow for rebirth through recitation). Among these, the eighteenth vow is regarded as the “fundamental great vow”: “If I attain Buddhahood, and the sentient beings of the ten directions who with sincere mind delight and trust, wish to be born in my land, with even ten recitations, are not born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.”

4.2 The Historical Construction of the Doctrine of Other-Power and the Primal Vow: From Tanluan to Shandao

Master Tanluan, drawing upon Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on Rebirth* in his *Commentary*, proposed “other-power” to correspond to the empowering support of Amitabha’s vow-power. Guo Xiaocui’s research demonstrates that Tanluan’s doctrine of other-power, through its exposition of the “easy practice path,” laid the theoretical foundation for the Pure Land school’s practical cultivation in subsequent generations^[12].

Master Daochuo further distinguished Buddhist practice into “the Path of Sages” (*shengjiao men*) and “the Pure Land Gate” (*jingtu men*) in the *Anle ji*^[2]. Zhao Jiamin’s research demonstrates that Daochuo’s doctrinal classification both inherited Tanluan’s other-power theory and provided systematic justification for the independent status of the Pure Land school through the “Path of Sages–Pure Land” twofold categorization^[17].

Master Shandao (613–681) provided the most systematic exposition of the doctrine of other-power and the Primal Vow in his *Four-Fascicle Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*^[6]. Zhu Fenlan’s research demonstrates that Shandao’s doctrine of other-power and the Primal Vow, through its emphasis on the vow that “ten recitations ensure rebirth,” transformed Pure Land practice from aristocratic metaphysical discussion to mass religious belief, exerting a far-reaching social influence^[22].

4.3 The Practical Connection Between Faith–Aspiration–Recitation and the Grandeur of the Two Retributions

The grandeur described in the two retributions is not purely objective knowledge but directly serves the establishment of the faith–aspiration–practice structure. Master Lianchi in his *Amitabha Sutra: Commentary and Subcommentary*^[8] explained why faith–aspiration–recitation is able to connect with Buddha-power: the fundamental reason is “mutual response in the path of stimulus and response” (*ganying dao*): the practitioner’s faith, aspiration, and recitation constitute the “stimulus,” and Amitabha’s compassionate reception and embrace constitute the “response.”

Zhou Tiance's research demonstrates that Master Lianchi's synthesizing methodology, while preserving the distinctiveness of Pure Land Buddhism, absorbed the intellectual resources of Huayan, Tiantai, and other schools, enabling Pure Land doctrine to gain broader recognition within the intellectual circles of Ming dynasty Buddhism^[21]. This observation is of significant importance for understanding the development of the two-retributions doctrine in the Ming period.

Master Yinguang offered a concise summation of the relationship among faith, aspiration, and practice: "Faith, aspiration, and practice: these three are the guiding principles of the recitation school." Zhao Zunxun's research demonstrates that Yinguang's faith-aspiration-practice thought, through its emphasis on "sincerity" (cheng) and "reverence" (jing), grounded Pure Land practice in every detail of daily life, providing practitioners of the modern period with a practically feasible guide for cultivation^[20].

5. The Non-Duality of the Two Retributions: Harmonizing the Idealist and Realist Pure Land

5.1 The Theoretical Tension Between the Idealist and Realist Pure Land

The most significant theoretical challenge facing the two-retributions doctrine in the history of Pure Land thought is how to address the tension between the "idealist Pure Land" (weixin jingtu) and the "realist Pure Land" (shiyou jingtu). In Mahayana Buddhism, "when the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure" is an eminently representative Pure Land concept. The Huayan and Yogacara traditions explain from a "all dharmas are mind-only" perspective that the Pure Land should not be understood as an external space entirely separate from the nature of mind.

However, if the Pure Land is interpreted solely as a symbol of the purity of one's own mind, then the grandeur described in the two retributions loses its substantive significance. Successive Pure Land patriarchs sought, within this tension, to find solutions to the unification of principle and phenomena and the non-duality of self and other through various approaches.

5.2 Tanluan's Dialectic of Being-Born and Non-Arising, and Daochuo's Classification of the Pure Land Gate

Master Tanluan inaugurated the early form of the non-duality doctrine through his dialectical interpretation of the relationship between "rebirth" and "non-arising." His Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth^[1] emphasizes that rebirth in the Pure Land is not a falling into real arising-and-ceasing but an entry into the forbearance of the unborn Dharma (wusheng faren) within a pure realm accomplished through the Buddha's vow-power. Zhengcheng's research demonstrates that Tanluan's dialectic of being-born and non-arising successfully resolved the apparent contradiction between "the real existence of the Pure Land" and "Prajnaparamita emptiness," providing an important argument for the metaphysical legitimacy of Pure Land Buddhism^[16].

Master Daochuo in the Anle ji^[2] advanced the formulation: "Although one speaks of 'mind-only,' this does not mean the Pure Land does not exist; although the Pure Land exists, it does not lie outside mind-only." This discourse provides a solid theoretical foundation for Pure Land faith.

5.3 Lianchi's Body-Land Non-Duality and Ouyi's Six-Faith Integration

Master Lianchi in his Amitabha Sutra: Commentary and Subcommentary^[8] provided the most systematic philosophical interpretation of the non-duality of the two retributions using Huayan's "unobstructedness of principle and phenomena," advancing the thesis: "dependent and primary retribution are non-dual; body and land are one and the same." Zhou Tiance's research demonstrates that Lianchi's body-land non-duality thought played an important role in elevating Pure Land Buddhism's standing within Ming dynasty Buddhist doctrine^[21].

Master Ouyi in his Essential Explanation of the Amitabha Sutra^[9] systematically integrated the tension between the idealist and realist Pure Land through the "six faiths" (liu xin)—faith in self, faith in the other (the Buddha), faith in cause, faith in effect, faith in phenomena, and faith in principle. Zhai Jiangling's research demonstrates that Ouyi's six-faith doctrine not only resolved the theoretical tension between idealism and realism but, more importantly, elevated the faith-aspiration-practice structure to a systematic philosophical plane^[15].

6. Contemporary Interpretation and Practical Value of the Two-Retributions Doctrine

6.1 The Scholarly Pathway of Doctrinal Interpretation

In the context of contemporary Buddhist academic research and Buddhist college education, study of the two-retributions doctrine cannot remain at the level of affective faith but must advance toward scholarly interpretation. With respect to terminological standardization, contemporary Pure Land research must establish accurate correspondences between the depth of Chinese doctrinal meaning and international academic expression, avoiding the impairment of scholarly exchange through inadequate translation.

6.2 The Scholarly Deepening of the Three-Scripture Comparative Perspective

A comparative study of the three foundational Pure Land scriptures' distinct emphases regarding the two retributions constitutes an important pathway for deepening Pure Land doctrinal research. The Small Sutra employs sensorially evocative language to arouse practitioners' longing for the Pure Land; the Great Sutra provides theological grounding for the grandeur of the two retributions through the logic of vow fulfillment; and the Contemplation Sutra transforms the two retributions into concrete objects of meditative practice through its systematic sequence of contemplations.

At the level of international academic research, Tanaka's historical examination of the formation of Chinese Pure Land doctrine^[25] and Livia Köhn's translation and research on the Contemplation Sutra^[26] can each provide reference frameworks for domestic three-scripture comparative research.

6.3 The Implications of the Grandeur of the Two Retributions for Contemporary Recitation Practice

In the context of contemporary society, the two-retributions doctrine carries multi-layered practical implications for recitation practitioners. First, knowledge of the grandeur of dependent retribution reminds practitioners to attend to the cultivation of their practice environment. Second, the thought of the non-duality of the two retributions indicates to practitioners that improvement of the external environment must proceed in tandem with the purification of the inner mind.

Third, the doctrine of karma-carrying rebirth bestows immense confidence on contemporary practitioners. Master Yinguang's analysis of the obstacles to practice in modern society—"The beings of the present age are of inferior and dull faculties, burdened with thick afflictions; if they cultivate other Dharma methods, it is difficult to hope for accomplishment; only by relying on the Pure Land school, drawing on the compassionate power of the Buddha, can one be reborn while carrying one's karma"—retains profound contemporary relevance.

7. Conclusion

The two retributions, as the complete description of the mode of existence in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, constitute both the theoretical foundation and the faith pillar of the Pure Land belief system. Through a systematic survey of the three-scripture comparison and the patriarchal interpretive tradition, this paper has revealed the multiple functions of the two-retributions doctrine: at the level of scripture, the three scriptures' distinct emphases regarding the two retributions are complementary; at the doctrinal level, the grandeur of dependent retribution provides a condition for the enhancement of practice (*zengshang yuan*), while the grandeur of primary retribution ensures the non-retrogression of practice; at the practical level, the two-retributions doctrine directly serves the establishment of the faith-aspiration-practice structure.

The creative interpretations of the two-retributions doctrine by successive patriarchs—Tanluan, Daochuo, Shandao, Lianchi, Ouyi, and Yinguang—demonstrate how Pure Land thought, while maintaining its foundation in the Indian Buddhist canon, has continuously deepened and refined itself within the Chinese cultural and philosophical context, forming a Pure Land belief system with distinctively Chinese Buddhist characteristics.

Looking toward the future, research on the two-retributions doctrine may be further expanded in the following directions: first, deepening the reception-history research of the three scriptures within East Asian Pure Land traditions; second, exploring from a comparative religion perspective the similarities and differences between Pure Land grandeur descriptions and concepts of the "ideal land" in other religious traditions; and third, introducing the research findings of modern Buddhist psychology into the understanding framework of Pure Land cultivation practice.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Reference

- [1] Tanluan. (6th century). Commentary on the ‘Treatise on Rebirth(T40n1819). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 40, pp. 825–844). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [2] Daochuo. (7th century).Collection for a Land of Peace and Bliss (T47n1958). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 47, pp. 1–22). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [3] Saṃghavarman (Trans.). (3rd century).Sutra of immeasurable life as spoken by the Buddha(T12n0360). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 12, pp. 265–279). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [4] Kumārajīva (Trans.). (5th century). Sutra of Amitābha as spoken by the Buddha(T12n0366). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 12, pp. 346–348). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [5] Kālayāghas (Trans.). (5th century). Sutra on the contemplation of immeasurable life as spoken by the Buddha(T12n0365). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 12, pp. 340–346). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [6] Shandao. (7th century). Commentary on the Sutra of contemplating the Buddha of immeasurable life(T37n1753). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 37, pp. 245–278). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [7] Shandao. (7th century).Collection of liturgical hymns for rebirth(T47n1980). In Ōtagawa, K. (Ed.), Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (Vol. 47, pp. 438–452). Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
- [8] Zhuhong [Master Lianchi]. (1973). Commentary and subcommentary on the Amitabha Sutra. Complete works of Master Lianchi. Zhenshanmei Press. (Original work compiled Ming dynasty)
- [9] Zhixu [Master Ouyi]. (1989). Essential explanation of the Amitabha Sutra.Complete works of Master Ouyi (Vol. 20). Buddhist Bookshop. (Original work compiled Ming dynasty)
- [10] Yinguang. (1940). Expanded collected writings of Master Yinguang (4 vols.). Honghua Society. (Original work composed Republican era)
- [11] Guo, H. (2005). A study of the Pure Land thought in the Ānle ji [Master’s thesis, Jilin University]. CNKI.
- [12] Guo, X. (2012). A study of Tanluan’s Pure Land thought[Master’s thesis, Southwest University]. CNKI.
- [13] Gao, R. (2015). The literary quality of Saṃghavarman’s translation of the ‘Sutra on Immeasurable Life’. Lanzhou Xuekan, (11), 38–45.
- [14] Xia, Q. (1999). The Pure Land thought of Hanshan Deqing.Wutaishan Yanjiu, (3), 20–25.
- [15] Zhai, J. (2009). A study of Ouyi Zhixu’s ‘Three studies, one source’ Pure Land thought [Master’s thesis, Nanchang University]. CNKI.
- [16] Zhengcheng. (2006).An inquiry into Tanluan’s ‘Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth’. Foxue Yanjiu, (00), 198–206.
- [17] Zhao, J. (2016). A study of Daochuo’s Pure Land thought [Master’s thesis, Shanxi University]. CNKI.
- [18] Zhao, J., & Cui, T. (2016). A brief analysis of the theoretical features of Daochuo’s Pure Land thought. Sheke Zongheng, 31(3), 145–147.
- [19] Wang, W. (2016). A study of Pure Land belief in the Jin and Tang periods [Master’s thesis, Northwest University]. CNKI.
- [20] Zhao, Z. (2013). An elucidation of Master Yinguang’s Pure Land thought [Master’s thesis, Shandong University]. CNKI.
- [21] Zhou, T. (2018). An analysis of Master Lianchi’s synthesizing methodology. Fayin, (6), 17–23.
- [22] Zhu, F. (2012). Master Shandao and the distinctive features of his Pure Land thought. Foxue Yanjiu, (00), 138–147.
- [23] Yang, M. (2018).The ‘ten auspicious signs’ and the Amitabha Sutra lecture texts. Dunhuang Xue Jikan, (3), 149–159.
- [24] Shi, Y. (2016). Recitation shining across a thousand years, illuminating the human world: A brief discussion of Master Shandao and the Pure Land patriarchal temple]. Fayin, (12), 24–29.
- [25] Tanaka, K. K. (1992). The dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yuan’s commentary on the Visualization Sutra. State University of New York Press.
- [26] Köhn, L. (1996). Visions of sukhavati: Shan-tao’s commentary on the Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching. State University of New York Press.