

(such as Dōgen 道元 [1200–1253]) uses the idea of dependent arising to proclaim the perfect buddhahood of animals, plants, and rocks, such voices have a tendency to place equal value upon *everything*—toxic waste and oil spills just as much as elephants and plants. As Capper notes, “a clean environment requires difficult choices, and a worldview that values all existents equally provides an unsteady platform for making these value-laden choices” (p. 219). The overall conclusion reached—as one might have predicted from the beginning—is that Buddhism contains ample resources that *might* support a sustainable biosphere, but without adaptation it is incapable of offering a full environmental ethic that can deal with our contemporary ecological crisis.

The conclusion also summarizes the book’s findings on each of its “three touch-points for ecological comparison.” With regard to Buddhist views on vegetarianism, Capper concludes (as expected) that such views are complex and multifaceted, with a general divide between the Theravada and Mahayana worlds—the former often taking meat-eating for granted and the latter having a significant body of scriptural sources that promote vegetarianism, although nowhere in the Buddhist world is this ideal fully realized. With regard to the practice of religion by animals and other natural phenomena, Capper finds that although “the mainstream of the tradition denies the ability of any being other than a human to practice Buddhism” (p. 222), stories from across the Buddhist world suggesting otherwise are frequent and easy to find. Finally, with regard to nature mysticism Capper finds that although it does exist in many places in the Buddhist world, “it does so at best on the margins” (p. 223) and is most likely to appear in either Chinese or Vajrayana contexts.

Overall, *Roaming Free Like a Deer* offers a cohesive and accessible account of Buddhism’s relationship to the natural world. Its coverage of multiple cultural contexts and diverse phenomena, together with a consistent interpretive framework used throughout, makes the book a unique contribution to a burgeoning field. That being said, although it has much to offer to professional scholars of Buddhism and graduate students in Buddhist studies, it is perhaps best suited for an undergraduate or general audience.

*Tanluan: “Commentaire au Traité de la Naissance dans la Terre Pure” de Vasubandhu.* Chinese text compiled, translated, and annotated by Jérôme Ducor. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2021. cii + 474 pages. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-2-251-45089-6.

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Readers who have conducted research on East Asian Buddhism, and especially on the Pure Land tradition, will know that Tanluan 曇鸞 (Jp. Donran; 476–542) is the first

of the five patriarchs of the Jōdoshū 淨土宗 (Pure Land School) and the second of the seven patriarchs of the Jōdo Shinshū 淨土眞宗 (True Pure Land School) in Japan. Among these patriarchs we find some of the most renowned Buddhist thinkers and spiritual leaders of India, China, and Japan. The seven patriarchs of the Jōdo Shinshū school, for example, are Nāgārjuna (fl. ca. 2nd–3rd c.) and Vasubandhu (Ch. Posou-pantu 婆藪般頭, Jp. Basobanzu; fl. ca. mid-4th–mid-5th c.) in India; Tanluan, Daochuo 道綽 (562–645; Jp. Dōshaku), and Shandao 善導 (613–681; Jp. Zendō) in China; and Genshin 源信 (942–1017) and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) in Japan.

The fact that both Vasubandhu and Tanluan are venerated as patriarchs by one of the most important schools of Buddhism in Japan today would in itself have justified Jérôme Ducor's interest in translating Tanluan's *Wuliangshoujing youpotishe yuanshengjie zhu* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註 (Jp. *Muryōjukyō ubadaisha ganshōge chū*; Commentary on the Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land by Vasubandhu; hereafter *Commentary*)—which is also known by the alternate titles *Wangshenglun zhu* 往生論註 (Jp. *Ōjōron chū*) and *Jingtulun zhu* 淨土論註 (Jp. *Jōdoron chū*). In his foreword, Ducor states that his goal in undertaking this translation is first to enable people “to read this work of Tanluan's for what it is, namely, a sixth-century Chinese text, referring systematically neither to the Indian presuppositions of Vasubandhu's treatise nor to the oceanic exegesis of which the *Commentary* has been the object in Japan” (p. x). While recognizing the value of these two tendencies, Ducor concentrates resolutely on the *Commentary*. In other words, he is more interested in helping us understand what Vasubandhu and Tanluan themselves say about birth in the Pure Land, and through that, about themselves, than what is said about them and their thought in the hundreds of books and articles that have treated Tanluan's *Commentary*. While not compromising his primary interest, Ducor does provide much valuable background information about Vasubandhu's and Tanluan's contributions to the development of the Pure Land tradition. He also indicates what forms of Buddhism (and in the case of Tanluan, of Taoism as well) had attracted these figures in the earlier stages of their respective religious and philosophical trajectories.

The limits inherent in a translation of Tanluan's *Commentary* are considerable, which explains why there are not many comprehensive translations available. The translator has to deal with the very complicated structure of the *Commentary*. First there is Vasubandhu's *Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land*, which is actually an abbreviation of the more complex and rich title *Teaching (Upadeśa) on the Canon of Infinite Life with the Poem of the Vow of Birth in the Pure Land* (hereafter *Teaching*). This work consists of a twenty-four stanza poem that, in the words of Vasubandhu, is an “overall presentation of the text of the *Sutra of Infinite Life*” (p. 7), followed by his own commentary, in prose, on this poem. In Ducor's volume, Vasubandhu's text, in Chinese and French, precedes Tanluan's *Commentary*, which explicates both the poem and

Vasubandhu's auto-commentary on it. And then there are the languages—in Ducor's case Chinese and French—with which translators have to struggle constantly to find ways to “translate” words that have no equivalent in their own language, and this is especially true of technical terms. Ducor's translation shows that he has embraced the demands of this task successfully.

Tanluan begins his *Commentary* with a brief but very significant introduction in which he draws attention to Nāgārjuna's distinction between the “path of the difficult practice” (*nanxing dao* 難行道, Jp. *nangyōdō*) and the “path of the easy practice” (*yixing dao* 易行道, Jp. *igyōdō*) in the context of the progression of bodhisattvas toward the stage of nonregression (*butui* 不退, Jp. *futai*). Roughly speaking, this distinction at first concerned the difference between the practices called for in the Hinayana and those demanded of those who followed the “path of the bodhisattva” proposed in the Mahayana. In time it referred to distinguishing Pure Land Buddhist practices from other Buddhist practices. The Pure Land practices include the “five gates of commemoration” mentioned by Vasubandhu in his poem, described in his treatise, and commented upon by Tanluan. The five gates include the gate of veneration, or worship; the gate of praise; the gate of resolution; the gate of contemplation, or visualization; and the gate of the transfer of merit. Much later, in Japan, this distinction was used to differentiate the commemoration of Amida's name, especially in the *nenbutsu* 念仏 (Ch. *nianfo*) formula “Namu Amida Butsu” 南無阿彌陀佛 (Reverence to the Buddha Amida), from all other Pure Land practices. In this way, the “difficult practice” became in reality an impracticable and therefore useless practice. This evolution came with the insights and orientations of later patriarchs of the Pure Land tradition across the centuries. Tanluan goes on to explain that Vasubandhu's work is more than a simple treatise on a sutra, or *jing* 經 (Jp. *kyō*). For him, this teaching (*upadeśa*) on the *Canon of Infinite Life* is the culmination of the most important of Mahayana teachings. He concludes this brief introduction with an explanation of each term used in the title of Vasubandhu's *Teaching*, including that of the term “canon.” All this prepares the way for Tanluan's *Commentary*, which comprises his interpretations of both the poem (part 1, pp. 30–93) and the treatise (part 2, pp. 94–163).

This volume, the fruit of Ducor's many years of research, contains a wealth of valuable detail. The publisher, Les Belles Lettres, has more than a century of experience editing works such as this. The rigorous requirements for texts and translations published in its *Bibliothèque chinoise* series call for a long introduction, and in the work under review, the author provides us with ninety-four pages (ix–cii) consisting of a foreword in which he announces his project (pp. ix–xii), the introduction itself (pp. xiii–xcvii), a map, a chronology, and an explanation of why the author has chosen to prioritize French sources in his notes and commentaries wherever possible. Also required by the publisher for volumes in this collection are a well-developed critical

apparatus, ample footnotes, and a thorough bibliography. Ducor offers a forty-three-page bibliography with references to French, English, and Japanese works dealing with the essential aspects of Buddhism, especially Pure Land Buddhism. An exhaustive index is also a must in the *Bibliothèque chinoise* series, and the reader will find twenty-five pages of names, titles of important texts, and technical terms in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese. The author also adds forty-seven pages of complementary notes that give further explanations about some of the more complex elements provided in the 535 footnotes to the translation and thirty-two pages of “notices” (more detailed notes) on more important, and often lesser-known, technical terms.

The most important part of the book is, of course, the bilingual presentation: the Chinese text on the left-hand side and the corresponding French translation on the right. This presentation allows readers having knowledge of Chinese and/or *kanbun*-style Japanese to more easily navigate the Chinese text. The footnote references are indicated in the French translation, and the notes themselves run across the bottom of each of the 163 double pages of the translation. It should be noted that, including the long introduction, there are in fact 576 pages in the volume, more than the 307 pages often found in online descriptions of the book. This is due to the fact that the smaller total page number does not take into consideration the fact that each double page is counted as a single one.

The key that allows readers to enter into Tanluan’s *Commentary* is Ducor’s introduction. It is divided into several sections containing his comments on Tanluan’s life, Vasubandhu’s treatise, Tanluan’s *Commentary*, Tanluan’s other works on Buddhism, Tanluan’s place in Chinese Buddhist history, and ancient and modern commentaries on both Vasubandhu and Tanluan. The most immediately useful are Ducor’s discussions of Vasubandhu’s treatise (pp. xlii–li) and of Tanluan’s *Commentary* (pp. lii–lxxv). The latter, for example, provides a very useful doctrinal overview in which Ducor highlights some of Tanluan’s most original contributions and includes the three-point summary of his teaching developed in Japan that has become axiomatic in the context of modern academic studies of Tanluan (*Donran kyōgaku* 曇鸞教学). The first point affirms that being born in Amida’s Pure Land is a realization of a superior order. According to the second, all beings, even the most ordinary, can attain rebirth there. The third explains that the apparent contradiction between the first two points is resolved by the excellent but nevertheless easy practice of commemorating Buddha (p. lvi). Keeping these three points constantly in mind will help the reader enter into Tanluan’s very challenging text, which reveals several essential qualities of his approach to Buddhism and to the Pure Land and its buddha, Amida. Ducor sums up two of these qualities in the very first sentence of his foreword: “If we had only two words to qualify Tanluan’s *Commentary*, they would be ‘originality’ and ‘freedom’” (p. ix). He emphasizes that Tanluan did not claim to belong to any formal lineage, his thought being free

of “preestablished doctrinal constraints” (p. ix). His intention is to help people better understand the nature of the Pure Land (also known as the Land of Ultimate Bliss, or Supreme Happiness [Jile 極樂, Jp. Gokuraku]), to show how and why it is important to seek rebirth there, and to explain the practice that will assure that rebirth.

In choosing to compile, translate, and comment on Tanluan’s work, Jérôme Ducor renders a great service to the French-speaking world, which is much less familiar with the works of Tanluan and of Pure Land Buddhism in general than the English-speaking world. This is especially important because in France the lack of any institutional presence (temple, center, school, etc.) of this tradition considerably distorts the perception that French people have of Buddhism in Japan, where it is the largest current of Buddhism. This book should contribute to correcting this distortion and help French-speaking Buddhists see more clearly the real diversity that exists in the Buddhist world. Ducor also renders service to the English-speaking world because his French translation and commentary necessarily express nuances of terms found in the Chinese translation of Vasubandhu’s *Teaching* and in the original Chinese of Tanluan’s *Commentary* that simply have no equivalent in either of these two languages. The efforts that are made in French and English to translate such terms sometimes lead to solutions that approximate the original meanings of the Chinese terms with varying degrees of success. It is seldom that the translation in one of these languages is right and the other wrong. In fact, thanks to these differences those capable of reading the two languages should be able to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the terms in question. Keeping this in mind while reading this French translation and one of the English translations listed in the bibliography side by side would certainly be a very profitable experience for researchers interested in Chinese and/or Japanese Buddhism, especially as expressed within the Pure Land tradition. The principal virtue of Jérôme Ducor’s translation and commentary is that they make this type of “adventure” possible by offering a real treasure of information from which any researcher in the field who has a working knowledge of French will be able to benefit.

One final note: the author has provided a useful supplement to the book on his personal website. The pdf provides additional bibliographical references as well as a list of errata. It can be downloaded from the following link: [http://www.pitaka.ch/Sanlunxuanyi\\_sup](http://www.pitaka.ch/Sanlunxuanyi_sup)