

Pure land

A **pure land** is the celestial realm or pure abode of a buddha or bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism. The term "pure land" is particular to East Asian Buddhism (Chinese: 淨土; pinyin: *Jìngtǔ*) and related traditions; in Sanskrit the equivalent concept is called a "buddha-field" (Sanskrit *buddhakṣetra*). The various traditions that focus on pure lands have been given the nomenclature Pure Land Buddhism. Pure lands are also evident in the literature and traditions of Taoism and Bon.

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Discussion

In the Mahayana sutras, there are many pure lands.^{[1][2][3][4]} Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśri would obtain pure lands after they attained buddhahood.^[5]

In the *Lotus Sutra*, Buddha's close followers such as Śāriputra, Mahākāśyapa, Subhuti, Maudgalyāyana and Buddha's son Rāhula would also have pure lands. The relative time-flow in the pure lands may be different,^[6] with a day in one pure land being equivalent to years in another.

Pure lands have been documented as arising due to the intention and aspiration of a bodhisattva such as the case of Amitābha, but other discourse has codified that they are entwined with the theory of the sambhogakāya and are understood to manifest effortlessly and spontaneously due to other activities of a Buddha and the pure qualities and the mysteries of the Three Vajras. The five features of Buddhahood - the attributes of the Sambhogakāya - play a role: perfect teacher, teaching, retinue, place and time. (Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje 2012, p. 1991)

Nakamura (1980, 1987: p. 207) establishes the Indian background of the padma imagery of the field which is evident iconographically, as well as in motif and metaphor:

The descriptions of Pure Land in Pure Land sutras were greatly influenced by Brahmin and Hindu ideas and the topological situation in India. There was a process of the development of lotus (*padma*)-symbolism in Pure Land Buddhism. The final outcome of the thought was as follows: the aspirants of faith and assiduity are born transformed (*anupapāduka*) in the lotus flowers. But those with doubts are born into the lotus-buds. They stay in the calyx of a lotus (*garbhāvāsa*) for five hundred years without seeing or hearing the Three Treasures. Within the closed lotus-flowers they enjoy pleasures as though they were playing in a garden or palace.

— NAKAMURA Hajime (Nakamura 1980, p. 207)

Five Pure Abodes

The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism states that "The heavens of the realm of subtle materiality (rūpadhātu) consist of sixteen (according to the Sarvāstivāda school), seventeen (the Sautrantika school), or eighteen levels (the Theravada/Sthavirakāya school) of devas ... The last five heavens are collectively designated as the five pure abodes, and the divinities residing there are called the Śuddhāvāsakāyika devas."^[7]

Five Pure Abodes (of the form realms) (Wylie: gtsang-ma'i gnas lnga; Sanskrit: pañcaśuddhanivāsa)

- Avṛha — Free from affliction (Sanskrit; Tibetan: མི་ཚེ་བ, Wylie: *mi che ba*)
- Atapa — Without torment (Sanskrit; Tibetan: མི་གདུང་བ, Wylie: *mi gdung ba*)
- Sudṛśa — Perfect form (Sanskrit; Tibetan: གྲུ་ལོ་མ་སྣང་བ, Wylie: *gya nom snang ba*)
- Sudarśana — Perfect vision (Sanskrit; Tibetan: ཤིན་ཏུ་མཐོང་བ, Wylie: *shin tu mthong*)
- Akaniṣṭha — Highest (Sanskrit; Tibetan: འོག་མིན་, Wylie: 'og min)^[8]

The Source

Very important to all pure abodes is the 'Source' (Tibetan: ཚོས་འབྱུང, Wylie: *chos 'byung*; Sanskrit: *dharmodaya*) from which they dwell and which supports them, the 'Wellspring' of myriad fonts as emergent. It may be understood as an interface, portal or epiphany between the Dharmakaya and the Sambhogakaya. It is seminal in the establishment of mandalas governing the outer, inner or secret dimensions. It is the opening and consecration of the sacred space which enfolds and supports the expanse of the pure abode. In iconography it is represented by the six-pointed star, the two interlocking offset equilateral triangles that form a symmetry. This is the 'sanctum sanctorum' (Sanskrit: *garbha gṛha*). It later developed into the primordial purity of the lotus which supports the mandala, *thangka* or the *murti* of the deity. In temple siting it is the power place or 'spirit of place' that was augured or divined in the sacred geometry of 'geodesy' (Sanskrit: *vāstu śāstra*). In yoga *asana*, the 'source' is *Vajrasana*, the 'seat of enlightenment' the ancient name of Bodh Gaya and an alternate name for *mahamudra* or *padmasana*.^[9]

"Source of phenomena or qualities (*chos 'byung, dharmodaya*). Pundarika defines *dharmodaya* as that from which phenomena devoid of intrinsic nature originate. "Phenomena devoid of intrinsic nature" refers to the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, and the other 84,000 aspects of the teachings. Their source, *dharmodaya*, is the pure realm, the abode of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, the place of bliss, the place of birth; it is not the place that discharges blood, urine, and regenerative fluids, i.e., the vagina. Source: *Stainless Light*, Toh. 1347, vol. Da, f237a3-5".^[10]

Śuddhāvāsa worlds

The Śuddhāvāsa (Pāli: *Suddhāvāsa*; Tib: *gnas gtsang.ma*) worlds, or "Pure Abodes", are distinct from the other worlds of the Rūpadhātu in that they do not house beings who have been born there through ordinary merit or meditative attainments, but only those Anāgāmins ("Non-returners") who are already on the path to Arhat-hood and who will attain enlightenment directly from the Śuddhāvāsa worlds without being reborn in a lower plane (Anāgāmins can also be born on lower planes). Every Śuddhāvāsa deva is therefore a protector of Buddhism. (Brahma Sahampati, who appealed to the newly enlightened Buddha to teach, was an Anagami from a previous Buddha^[11]). Because a Śuddhāvāsa deva will never be reborn outside the Śuddhāvāsa worlds, no bodhisattva is ever born in these worlds, as a bodhisattva must ultimately be reborn as a human being through their 'compassion' (Sanskrit: Karuṇā) and bodhisattva vows.

Sukhavati

Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, in discussing the Mind Stream of Lokeśvararāja (Japanese: *Seijizaio Nyorai*) that in fulfillment has come to be known as Amitābha:

According to the sutra known as the *Rolling of Drums*, countless eons ago there was a joyous kingdom whose sovereign had great devotion for the buddha of that time, Lokesvararaja. The king renounced his kingdom, became a monk, and vowed to reach enlightenment. He expressed his bodhicitta intention through forty-eight vows, and promised to refuse buddhahood if any of these vows were not fulfilled. With these words, the earth trembled and flowers rained down from the skies. Praises resounded and with them the prophecy that this monk would surely become a buddha. And so he did, as the Buddha Amitabha.

In his lifetime as this bodhisattva monk, Amitabha saw that countless pure realms existed for realized ones who had been victorious over the mind's delusions, but no such realm was accessible to those still struggling on the path. Among his forty-eight vows was the aspiration to create a pure realm for all those who heard his name, wished to attain that realm, established the roots of virtue, and dedicated their merit in order to be reborn there. So powerful was his intention that he swore to refuse buddhahood if it did not enable him to manifest such a realm.^[12]

Sukhāvātī is by far the most popular among Pure Land Buddhists. There are many old and recent Buddhist texts reporting the condition of its dying believers. Some Buddhists and followers of other religions claimed they went there and came back, and they were viewed as cults.^{[13][14][15][16]}

Some controversial teachings said the successors of Amitabha in Sukhāvātī would be Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta.^{[17][18][19][20]}

Other identified pure lands

- Vulture Peak (靈鷲山釋迦淨土): While Zhiyi was chanting the *Lotus Sutra*, he saw the meeting of Gautama Buddha and bodhisattvas there. Nanyue Huisi (慧思大師) said, "Only you can know that, only I can proof you".^[21]
- Inner Court of Tushita (兜率內院):^{[22][23]} Some Buddhist scriptures have noted that Maitreya is currently teaching at the Inner Court of Tushita, with some Buddhist Masters, such as Xuanzang, expressing a wish to go there.^{[24][25]} Other Buddhist monks have also been known to have dreamt of going to the Inner Court of Tushita.^{[26][27]} Some Yiguandao followers claimed to have traveled there.^{[28][29][30][31][32]} The Inner Court of Tushita was historically a popular place for Buddhists to wish to be reborn in,^{[33][34][35][36]} however, the vast majority of Pure Land Buddhists today hope to be reborn in Sukhavati.^{[33][37][38]}
- Abhirati of Akshobhya in the east is suggested by some scholars to be the earliest pure land mentioned in Mahayana sutras.^[39]
- Vaidūryanirbhāsa (東方淨琉璃世界) of Bhaisajyaguru in the east is compared by some pure land buddhists to Amitabha's pure land in the west.^[40] Bhaisajyaguru is also said to have avatars in six other pure lands.^[41]
- The city Ketumati is described as Maitreya's pure land.^{[42][43]}
- Zangdok Palri (the Copper-coloured Mountain) of Padmasambhava is in the earth. Dudjom Rinpoche said it was prophesied that all who had taken refuge in Padmasambhava or anyone who had any sort of connection with him would be reborn in Zangdok Palri.^{[44][45][46]}
- Shambhala in the Buddhist Kalachakra teachings.
- Dhagpa Khadro of Vajrayogini.^[47]
- Changle (長樂淨土) of Qinghuadadi Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun (青華大帝太乙救苦天尊)^{[48][49]} is a Taoist pure land. Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun also have Avatars in the taoist pure lands in ten directions (eight directions, up, down).^[50]

There are some pure land worlds in controversial sutras and folk religion texts.^{[51][52][53][54][55][56]}

Field of Merit

The Field of Merit (Wylie: *tshogs zhing*) is a pictorial representation in tree form of the triratna and the guru, employed in Tibetan Buddhism as an object of veneration when taking refuge. It is visualized internally as a part of the commencement phase of each *sadhana*.

The Field of Merit is a Pure Land. Each school or sect has its own distinctive form of the tree in which the numerous lineage-holders or vidyadhara and dharma protectors or dharmapala are represented.

In discussing the visualisation of the Merit Field, Namkha'i links the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with the Three Roots of Guru, Deva and Dakini:

The merit field (*tshogs zhing*), that is the source of all the accumulation of merit, designates the manifestation of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and of the Three Roots (Guru, Deva, Dakini) visualised by the practitioner.^[57]

Mandala

Mandalas, especially sand mandalas, are 'pure lands' and may be understood as Nirmāṇakāya, as are all murti, thangka and sacred tools that have consecrated, dedicated and the 'deity' (yidam) invoked and requested to reside. Some namkha are pure lands. According to Nirmāṇakāya (as tulku) theory, nirmanakaya spontaneously arise due to the intention, aspiration, faith and devotion of the sangha.

Notes

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9. Though in modern parlance Vajrasana, Mahamudra and Padmasana may denote different asanas, and indeed other esoteric positions and doctrines, it is understood that they are also synonymous for the meditative 'seal' or 'lock' (Sanskrit: mudra; bandha) of crossed-legs-with-ankles-on-highs-asana which commands the flame of kundalini to rise and unfold.



Pure Land Mandala: "絹本著色淨土曼荼羅圖" in Japan of Kamakura period (1185-1333), Kyushu National Museum.

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