

# **The Historical Formation of the Amitābha Thoughts in India**

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**Ven. Unagalawe Anomadassi**

## **Abstract**

Pure Land as a proper school name, is an early affiliation that historically originated from Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. The initial formation of this school, as its mainstream tradition, Mahāyāna, is still subject to ambiguity to the current academic world. Due to the scarcity historical evidences and lineage sources in ancient India Pure Land, understandings of the emergence of Amitabha thought in academia are divergent and complex. Unlike some schools of Indian Mahāyāna tradition, such as Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra, not many comprehended and thorough studies have been accomplished regarding the initial development of fundamental thoughts of this school systematically.. Generally, Pure Land as a belief, its formation can be traced back approximately to the 1st BCE to 1st CE, and its practitioners aspired exclusively in the faith of the Buddha Amitābha (eq., Buddha Amitāyus) and his Pure Land, Sukhāvātī that is an ideal spiritual paradise where the Buddha Amitābha dwells. Following these doctrinal premises, believers could experience rebirths in Sukhāvātī as non-returners and attain nirvāṇa as Buddhas in Pure Lands. Such a set of thoughts was later evolved as the Amitābha cult and further promoted as a soteriological path after death. This present study is concerned with the Indian establishment of the Pure Land school with extant Sanskrit scriptural evidences, scholarly opinions, archaeological discoveries, travelogues of Chinese pilgrims, and doctrinal

accounts indirectly mentioned in affiliation counterparts.

**Keywords:** Pure Land School, Amitābha or Amitāyus, Sukhāvātī, Pure Land Sūtras, Historical formations

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ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහම මනාව ස්ථාපිත බෞද්ධ නිකායක් ලෙස එහි ඓතිහාසික මූලාරම්භය ඉන්දියානු මහායාන බුදුදහමට සම්බන්ධ වුවකි. කෙසේ නමුත් මෙම බෞද්ධ සම්ප්‍රදායේ ස්ථාපනය එහි මූලික ශාඛාව වන මහායාන බුදුදහමේ මූලාරම්භය මෙන්ම අයදනන ශාස්ත්‍රීය ලෝකයට තවමත් තරමක් අපැහැදිලි කාරණාවකි. ප්‍රමාණවත් පෞරාණික සාධක නොමැතිතම නිසාත් ඉන්දියානු ශුද්ධ භූමි බුදුදහමේ පාරම්පරික තොරතුරු කිසිවක් එහි මූලාශ්‍රය තුළ සඳහන් කර නොමැති නිසාත් අධ්‍යයන ලෝකය තුළ ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහමේ ඓතිහාසික වින්තනයේ ඇතිවීම පිළිබඳ පරස්පර විරෝධී මෙන් ම සංකීර්ණ අදහස් සමුදායක් මෙම විෂය ක්ෂේත්‍රයේ ප්‍රාමාණිකයන් අතර සාකච්ඡාවට බදුන් වී ඇත. මධ්‍යමක හා යෝගාවාර වැනි ඉන්දියානු මහායාන සම්ප්‍රදායේ කතිකායික ශාඛා මෙන් නොව ශුද්ධභූමි වින්තනයේ ඓතිහාසික සමාරම්භය සම්බන්ධයෙන් ක්‍රමානුකූල හා ගැඹුරු අධ්‍යයනයක් සිදුකර නොමැත . විශ්වාසයක් ලෙස ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහම ඉන්දියානු ජනසන්තානයේ ස්ථාපිතවීම ආසන්න වශයෙන් ක්‍රි.පූ. පළමු සියවසත් ක්‍රි.ව. පළමු සියවසත් අතර කාලයේ සිදු වූ බව සාමාන්‍යයෙන් පිළිගැනේ. ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහමේ විද්‍යමාන වන සුවිශේෂ කාරණයක් වනුයේ බුද්ධ භක්තියයි. මෙම බෞද්ධ සම්ප්‍රදාය අනුගමනය කරන සියල්ලන් විශේෂයෙන් අමිතාහ බුදුන් වහන්සේ පිළිබඳ හා උන්වහන්සේගේ බුද්ධභූමිය වන සුඛාවතිය පිළිබඳ විශ්වාස කිරීම මනාව අවධාරණය කරයි. අමිතාහ බුදුන් වහන්සේගේ ශ්‍රද්ධාවන්ත අනුගාමිකයන් මරණින් පසු සුඛාවතී නම් බුද්ධභූමියේ අනාගාමී ලෙස උපත ලබන අතර ඔවුන් එහි දී බුදුවරුන් ලෙස නිර්වාණයට පත්වන බව තරයේ විශ්වාස කෙරේ. මෙම විශ්වාස සමුදාය අමිතාහ බුද්ධ ඇදහිල්ල ලෙස පසුකාලීනව ක්‍රමානුකූලව වර්ධනය විය. මෙම අධ්‍යයනයේ ප්‍රධාන අපේක්ෂාව වනුයේ ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහමේ ඉන්දියානු පසුබිම පිළිබඳව අධ්‍යයනය කිරීමයි. ඒ සඳහා දැනට

සංරක්ෂිත සංස්කෘත සුඛාවතීවෘත්ත සූත්‍රයන්හි විද්‍යමාන වන කාරණා, පුරාවිද්‍යාත්මක සාධක, චීන දේශාටක භික්ෂූන්ගේ සංචාරක සටහන් සහ පසුකාලීන විද්වතුන්ගේ අධ්‍යයනයන් තුළනාත්මකව අධ්‍යයනය කෙරේ.

යතුරුපද : ශුද්ධභූමි බුදුදහම, අමිතාහ, සුඛාවතිය, ශුද්ධභූමි සූත්‍ර, ඓතිහාසික සමාරම්භය

## **Introduction**

Pure Land faith and practice are indisputably deemed as the most widespread and influential soteriological practice in Mahayana Buddhism, generally acknowledged as the second phase of Indian Buddhism, and the Buddha Amitābha (immeasurable light) or Amitāyus (immeasurable life) is probably the most beloved and revered Buddha in the prolonged Mahayana history. Unlike the other schools of Buddhism, the Pure Land inclusively emphasises divergent soteriology which is only to be achieved in an after-death destination known as Sukhāvātī, an ideal and a spiritual paradise which is also widely known as the Western Paradise, where the Buddha Amitābha dwells and believers are reborn after their demises and accomplish non-sectarian liberation as Buddhas. For over its long religious history, the specific practice of Amitābha, as a salvific path after death, broadly disseminated in East Asian and some Asian countries where Mahayana Buddhism is particularly embraced and the veneration of Amitābha predominantly enjoys. It is generally believed that the historical origin of Pure Land thoughts and scriptures were occurred in India or its border regions, particularly in Gandhāra, approximately 1st to 2nd centuries CE , and it was known in China as early as the 3rd century CE. Subsequently, this renewed Buddhist movement has been widely embraced and dominated by people in Japan and then Korea as well.

It is out of space here to go into more details about the subsequent diffusion of the Pure Land devotion and practice in different geographical regions, nevertheless, this paper is examines the origins of the Amitābha faith in India through the analysis of basic terms of Pure Land for etymological meanings, the overview of the two Sanskrit sūtras, the Larger and Shorter Sukhāvāṭīvyūha or Amitābha sūtras (henceforth the LSV and SSV respectively) as well as several speculations and academic studies regarding the subject matter. Unlike China, India did not have a practice of recording the historical significances, and therefore, we have to significantly rely on other materials and studies done by foreign intellectuals to study Indian Buddhism.

### **Research Question and importance of the study**

Although Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most embraced Buddhist schools withing the mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism, the emergence of this sub-school is still a mysterious puzzle for academia. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the history of the Pure Land School. In this present study, I have mainly focused on how was the Amitābha thoughts initially established in the Indian solid before it was opened out the other parts of the East Asian countries. It would be vaslty beneficial for the history of Indian Buddhism if the initial origins of the Amitābha Buddha thoughts were unearthed.

### **The Aim of This Study**

the main objective of this study is to understand the early development of the Amitābha concept assumed by various Buddhist scholars, and to observe the evidence revealed in its doctrines and archaeological artefacts to find out the validity of those contradictory scholarly premises. This present study is concerned with the Indian establishment of the Pure Land school with extant Sanskrit scriptural evidence, intellectual opinions,



archaeological discoveries, travelogues of Chinese pilgrims, and doctrinal accounts indirectly mentioned in affiliation counterparts.

### **Methodology**

This is a fundamentally text-based historical study aiming at constructing a comprehensive understanding of the historical development of the Amitābha Buddha concept. Firstly, the subjects are clearly defined and secondly, directly observe the subject based on primary and secondary accounts. In particular, the interpretations of specific doctrinal terminologies seen in the two Sanskrit Sūtras will be addressed here. Secondly, secondary sources are examined pertinent to the well-established terminologies, early Chinese translations, scholarly assumptions and archaeological discoveries.

### **Etymological analysis of basic Sanskrit terms in Pure Land Sūtras**

The following passages will examine the several key terms of the Pure Land sūtras, accordingly, “pure land” is the first terminology that needs to be discussed here. It is widely acknowledged that the term “pure land” was first invented by Central Asian translators because the equivalent expression cannot be found in the original sutras, in other words, “pure land” has not known in Sanskrit antecedent (Tanaka 1990: 1). As is stated by Fujita Kotatsu and Jan Nattier, the Chinese term “Ching-t’u” or “jingtu” (literally “pure land” or “purify the land”) is the initial terminology used by the earliest translators. In the Chinese translations, this phrase refers to the meanings of “the arrangement of good qualities and decorations of the Buddha-land” and therefore, it is not an exact translation of its original phrase. Hence, they concluded that the term ‘pure land’ was devised by Chinese scriptwriters (Fujita, 1996: 33; Nattier

2000: 73). Regarding this matter, some counterargue that the Pure Land thought at its first place occurred in China, yet there has no ground for this argument, however, Fujita thoroughly manifested that though the term “pure land” was coined in China during the 2nd century CE, this particular thought system initially appeared in India.

Amitābha or Amitāyus (Chi: Amito, Jap: Amida) are two designations that doctrinally denote the same Buddha of the Pure Land or the Western Paradise. These names are derived from the Sanskrit root, “a-mṛta”, in Pāli: “amita”, (immortal, deathless, or ambrosia = nirvāna), and “abha” means ‘light’, ‘radiance’ or ‘splendour’ and “āyu” means literally ‘life’ or ‘lifespan’. Therefore, the former can be translated into English as “infinite, endless, or immeasurable light”, The latter means ‘infinite, endless or immeasurable life’. As stated by Georgios Halkias, “these are not epithets, but they are theologically referred to the same Buddha worshipped in two complementary aspects as light-giver and life-giver, conqueror over darkness and death” (Halkias, 2012: 16) . The Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra discloses that the Buddha was named Amitābha as his light is boundless which illuminates myriads of Buddha-fields in ten directions and later on Pure Land commentators state that this immeasurable light refers to his limitless wisdom. In contrast, this Buddha is also called Amitāyus (endless life) because he lives innumerable aeons of years for the benefit of sentient beings, therefore, commentators correspondingly indicate that his infinite life signifies his boundless compassion (Williams, 2000: 240). Hence, these two names are not employed as epithets, however, they have denoted two separate remarkable insight qualities of the Buddha Amitābha as the integral practices of a Bodhisattva and Buddha of Mahayana Buddhism.

The last term to be expounded in this paper is “Sukhāvati” or “Sukhāvativyūha”. This terminology is also derived from the Sanskrit noun stem “sukha” + ‘vat’, and “Sukhāvati” is

the feminine form of the “sukhāvat”. Literally, “sukha” means “happy, pleasure, comfortable, joy, delight, etc. and “vat” is a possessive suffix. Accordingly, the term “Sukhāvati” is formed to mean “possessing happiness, the blissful, joyful”. The later part of the terminology “vyūha” is a masculine stem by which the numerous connotations can be drawn depending on its different contextual utilizations. As it is defined in Sanskrit dictionary, that means “arrangement, resolution, section, description, aggregate, multitude, formation”. From the Buddhist point of view, the full term “Sukhāvativyūha” can be defined as ‘the earnest resolution or vow to arrange or manufacture happiness’ or ‘endowed with happiness or bliss’. However, the study of these terminologies is to discover that the initial thought of Pure Land was not a matter of origin in China but rather in India or near its border regions. Careful observation of those terms and their explicit meanings indicates that those terms are more related to Indian thoughts and culture rather than Chinese.

### **Overview of Chinese Translations of the Two Sanskrit Sūtras**

Although India was a cradle for the emergence of Amitābha thought, there is no evidence for an established tradition or lineage in its native place, nevertheless, it offers two earliest Indian Pure Land scriptures written in Sanskrit and probably compiled in Northwest India around the 1st to 2nd century CE (Fujita, 1996: 10; Halkias, 2013: 20-24; Williams, 2000: 238-239). Those texts are the earliest surviving Mahayana sources to understand how Indian Buddhists conceptualized Pure Land thoughts. There are three texts, the Larger Sūtra, the Smaller Sūtra and the Visualisation Sūtra, which are considered as the most important scripts in the tradition, but only the first two manuscripts were preserved in their original versions, which are in Sanskrit. The two scriptures bear the same epithet in Sanskrit (Sukhāvativyūha).

However, their contents differ significantly and they are recognized as two independent compositions. The textual and philosophical studies on the two sūtras and their subsequent Chinese translations imply that chronologically, the Larger Sūtra is slightly earlier than the Smaller Sūtra dated its origins between the 1st century CE during Kuṣāṇa Dynasty (50-250 CE) (Lamotte, 1995: 575; Halkias, 2012; Nakamura, 1980: 205). Furthermore, it is said the original language of these sūtras might be Gandhāri or Kharosthi (Prakrit or Hybrid-Sanskrit) or a related dialect of Northwest India or Central Asia existing from the 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE. As Williams stated comparing the language and style of the two Pure Land sutras with the Akṣobhyavyūha Sūtra, which is regarded in earlier text that describes another pure land called ‘Abhirati’ or Pure Land of the Buddha Akṣobhya, Japanese intellects say that it may have composed by a group of monastics of Mahāsāṅghika sect, probably by Lokottaravādins, in the Greater Gandhāra during the period of Kuṣāṇa .

### **The Longer/Larger Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra**

The LSV (Ch. Wu liang shou jing; Jap. Muryōju kyō) can in many aspects be considered as the key doctrine of the Pure Land Buddhism and bears great significances concerning the historical evolution of Mahayana sūtras. The original Sanskrit manuscript of this and five Chinese translations are extant today. “Foshuo amituo sanyesanfo saloufotan guodu rendao jing” (T. 362) is generally believed to be the first Chinese translation retributed to Lokakṣema (147-189? CE). Though it was traditionally attributed to Zhi Qian (222-252 CE), scholars stress that this translation is a work of Lokakṣema or his disciple or it might be a follower of his tradition (Harrison, 1998: 556-557; Nattier 2008: 86). This assumption was drawn because of the parallel manner of language usage. The second translation

of this text is “Foshuo wuliangqingjing pingdengjue jing” (T. 361) traditionally attributed to Lokakṣema, however, this has been assigned to Dharmarakṣa (c. 308 CE) and Bo Yan (220-265 CE). As it is stated by Fujita and some other intellects, this text is likely to be a work of Zhi Qian (222-252 CE). Foshuo wuliangshou jing (T. 360) chronologically is the third translation that is traditionally ascribed to Saṅghavarman. This version is by far the most popular and frequently used today among the Pure Land adherents. Nevertheless, this version is generally believed to be the work of two active scholars, Buddhahadra (359-429 CE) and his assistant Baoyun (376-449 CE) (Fujita, 1970: 62-96). The fourth translation is “Wuliangshou rulai hui” (T. 310) presented as a part of the Mahāratnakūṭa, the work of Bodhiruci II was an active monk who lived in the 6th to 7th century. “Foshuo dasheng wuliangshou zhuangyan jing” is the last translation of the LSV retributed to Faxing (991 CE). Although the attribution of the translations seemingly discloses a bit of ambiguity, the time periods of the translations are unequivocal. Hence, a straightforward assumption can be brought forth that observing the time period of the first translation, the original Sanskrit text may have possibly been composed in between the 1st BC to 2nd CE.

### **The Smaller/Shorter Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra**

This text is known as the Smaller Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra (Ch. Amituo jing; Jap. Amida kyō) which is the Sūtra on Amitābha Buddha that too pronounces the vast significance similar to the Lager scripture. This text has been preserved in two Chinese translations apart from its original Sanskrit version. The first existing Chinese translation is known as the “Foshuo amituo jing” (T. 366) that is the most frequently use and better-known text of the two translations and this was translated by Kumārajīva (344-413 CE). The “Chengzan jingtu fo sheshou

jing” (T. 367) is the second extant translation that is typically believed to be a work of Xuan Zang (602-664 CE). In contrast to the work of Kumārajīva which is widely respected as an elegant work, the translation of Xuan Zang is not well-celebrated among the Pure Land followers.

### **The Hypothesis on the Emergence of the Amitābha Cult**

The origin of the Amitābha cult is as equivocality as the birth of Mahayana Buddhism. Numerous theories have been put forth and the presence of those premises indicate the increasing academic concentrations in this field. Some assume that the development of the Amitābha faith occurred as a consequence of the diffusion of Buddhism in the religious and cultural environment within Indian Buddhism, while, on the other hand, others postulate that the initial concept of Amitābha cult and his Pure Land evolved due to some foreign religious influences. However, regarding this matter, some mere suppositions, as well as systematic studies, have been presented recently. The following passages will focus on those divergent assumptions of the origins of Pure Land thoughts based on those Indian and Non-Indian theories and archaeological detections.

As observed by Fujita, the non-Indian theories of origins are as follows: “the Zoroastrian Sun-god origin, the Socotra Island origin theory, Garden of Eden origin theory, the Amente of Egypt and sium of Greece origin theories, and recently, a theory which ancestral form of this concept in the caves of Taqi-Bustan on the Iranian Plateau” (Fujita, 1996: 39-40). Though he has stated several hypotheses, some of these have no further elaborations thus they are deemed as mere groundless and unjustified ideas, and even some contend that none of his theories is worthy of academic consideration. Nonetheless, hypothesis like “Garden of Eden” and “Zoroastrian Sun-god” (Ahura

Mazdā), to some extent have developed scholarly criticisms since the fundamental devotional conceptions of Sukhāvātī share religious and ritual performs with those religions which were once celebrated religious and cultural practices in ancient Gandhāra kingdom. Hence, the Kuṣāṇa empire, which is marked as a golden period of Indian history and equally significant in the history of Mahayana Buddhism, was a multi-cultural and multi-religious region, sharing with Greek, Persian, Indian and Central Asian. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Amitābha cult may have a substantial influence on those religions.

Moreover, recent studies done on the Chinese translations of the Pure Land doctrines have demonstrated that the original language of those preliminary sūtras would have been composed in a similar language to Gandhārī (Kharoṣṭhi) or a similar dialect. Thus, being concerned with this, several hypotheses have been put forward regarding the formation of Amitābha and Sukhāvātī concepts. Some state that “It has been assumed that there are unambiguous features in the heliocentric formation of the Amitābha Buddha on the basis of shared fundamental themes with the Zoroastrian Sun God and resemblances have been drawn between Zravanakarana and Amitābha” (Fujita, 1996: 8-9; Halkias, 2013: 22).

Some Japanese scholars further emphasises that the notion of Sukhāvātī was developed in reference to the Aramaic word “Eden”, therefore, the early view of Sukhāvātī may have been constructed based on the pre-existed idea of “Garden of Eden” (Fujita, 1996: 40; Tanaka 1990). Accordingly, these suppositions indicate that the name and cult of Amitābha and the symbolic idea of Sukhāvātī came into being as a result of the influence of the light worship of the Iranian god. Interestingly, this seems to link with fundamental ideas of Pure Land thoughts such as the formation of the Buddha’s name, Amitābha, and the



direction of Sukhāvātī, Western Paradise. The initial notion of “immeasurable light” (Amitābha) may have developed from the fire (light) worship of the Iranian Sun God. Although there seems to be some slight connections between the preliminary concepts of Amitābha faith and his Buddha-land, however, from the scholarly point of view, these suppositions are not sufficiently convincing since the various Indian components are apparent in the earlier Pure Land doctrines. Therefore, the aforementioned assumptions have no strong evidence to be proven. However, they are not entirely ignorable and utterly unrelated ideas in terms of the growth of Pure Land thoughts. Fujita concluding his theories affirms that “I must add, however, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that I am not saying that the concept of Amida Buddha is utterly unrelated to the religious thought system of Iran. Since Early Pure Land thought is considered to have arisen around A.D. 100 in northwest India during the Kuṣāṇa dynasty, it is, of course, plausible that thought systems imported from areas to the west should have provided a cultural and intellectual basis for the development of Amida” (Fujita, 1996: 43).

Another widely discussed postulation of the origins of Amitābha thought is the influence of Hindu mythologies of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva particularly. In contrast to foreign-influenced theories, the inception of Amitābha and extravagant descriptions of his Buddha-land may have been established by employing Hindu devotion to gods and their heavenly realms (Fujita, 1996: 39-40; Tanaka, 1990; Hirakawa, 1990: 290). According to Tanaka, the concept of Amitābha and Sukhāvātī may have occurred as a result of contemporary religious competition led by Brahminic devotional cults centred on the god Siva and Viṣṇu. Similarly, Akira Hirakawa claims that in terms of devotional (bhakti) practice, Pure Land and Hindu god Kṛiṣṇa or Viṣṇu share some common elements (Hirakawa, 1990: 290). This idea is also, however, not acknowledged as

a well-defined theory, and they argue that the concept of gods and heavenly realms have been broadly discussed in the Pāli Canonical texts broadly, hence, such notions are not to be hired from Hindu myths. Therefore, they emphasise that the emergence of the Amitābha cult would exclusively have occurred within the mainstream Buddhism as a result of its evolution in the Buddhist communities themselves rather the absorption and assimilation of the other religious components neither local Hindu nor foreign Iranian (Fujita 1996; Williams, 2000: 238-239; Halkias, 2012; Nattier, 188).

Another influential hypothesis put forward by Hirakawa is linked with the cult of the stūpa which is a well-discussed notion regarding the origins of Mahayana Buddhism. Observing Hirakawa's assumption, Halkias states that Hirakawa came up with this theory by comparing the stūpa's sevenfold vedikā (stage or platform) designs with the architectural layout of Sukhāvāṭī adorned with seven terraces. Though this idea has not widely taken intellectuals' attention, some argue that it seems to have some substantial points. Supporting Hirakawa's premise, a Jātaka story called "Amitābha Jātaka tale" (Inagaki, 1999: 13) and Amitābha legends that linked with the origin of the 'Svayambū Stūpa' in Newār tradition (Lewis, 1996) have been presented. However, this thesis has not drawn sufficient scholars' criticisms.

### **Archaeological Discoveries**

Archaeological evidence is crucially paramount concerning the emergence of any form of historical things. Fortunately, there are two archaeological artefacts of Amitābha that have been ungrounded. The earliest epigraphical evidence regarding Amitābha is a stone pedestal (āsana) on which the words Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara engrave were discovered

in 1982 at Govindanagar near Mathurā. Although dating of this inscription is unclear since it is written in Kharoṣṭhī script scholars possibly assign it to the Kuṣān period of 104 or 171 CE (Tanaka, 1990: 3; Halkias, 2012: 18; Fujita, 1996: 44). This Amitābha sculpture in Mathurā is by far the earliest archaeological verification for the existence of the Amitābha cults in India, as well as this is also the first archaeological artifact proving the presence of Mahayana Buddhism in India. For the second time, Amitābha's name reappeared in an inscription unearthed in Sānci that is dated from the late 7th century CE (Tanaka, 1990: 3; Schopen, 1987: 127). Hence, many scholars unanimously suggest that the initial formation of the Amitābha faith and sūtras may have occurred in India during the 1st to 2nd centuries.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion the earliest formation of the Pure Land thought in India is itself a historical puzzle due to lacking archaeological artifacts, non-existence of ethnographic evidence from its native place as well as no historical accounts recorded by Indians or early Chinese pilgrims. Hence, the socio-religious background of the emergence of Amitābha devotion has not yet been elucidated, nevertheless, thanks to scholars' tremendous studies, some reliable assumptions can be put forward though it is hard to come up with a definitive conclusion. As discussed earlier, based on the studies done on Chinese translations and archaeological discoveries, it is obviously manifested that the earliest Pure Land doctrinal compilations would have taken place in Northwest India or the Gandhāra region during the 1st century CE. Of course, it cannot provide us with the precise chronological development of its doctrines, however, such linguistic and philosophical scholarships are sufficient to arise such a conclusion. Furthermore, another

possible conclusion to come up is that, as many intellectuals agree, the early establishment of the Amitābha cults and its doctrinal compositions would have occurred as a result of an ongoing gradual process of series of contemporary Buddhist socio-cultural and socio-religious circumstances that happened within the Buddhist communities themselves rather than being influenced by foreign religions that respected in Gandhāra region or non-Buddhist borrowing like local Hindu god concepts.

I do not disregard any of those remarkable studies here, rather this paper is to appreciate those notable works of scholars, yet, based on aforementioned original Pure Land textual evidence and archaeological discoveries, I assume that the Pure Land thought system may have been preserved orally in the hearts of pious monastic or lay groups and passed down through few generations before they were written down somewhere in Northern India or Gandhāra. However, there is no evidence to support this assumption. Nevertheless, since the emergence of the Amitābha faith is still unclear and no unanimously acknowledged theory is being presented, in the future, many new leading suppositions may appear in this field.

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