Chapter Four identified two distinctive elements in the dramatis personae of Li Gonglin’s *White Lotus Society Picture*. Huiyuan’s marginalized Buddhist identity in the painting reflected the Song inclination to revere the Eastern Jin master both as a Pure Land patriarch and as a symbol of the rapprochement among the Three Religions. The legend that epitomized this rapprochement—the Three Laughers of Tiger Stream, with Huiyuan as its principal figure—originated in the Donglin Chan circle. A painting of the White Lotus Society, made during the Song period, was charged with historical and religious significance, and referred specifically to Pure Land Buddhism. Because Amitābha Buddha is the primary icon of worship in Pure Land Buddhism, Huiyuan’s and his followers’ vow before an image of Amitābha to practice *banzhou sanmei nianfo* 般舟三昧念佛, in hopes of being born into this Buddha’s Western Paradise, was viewed as the dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism.

Yet the one icon that Li Gonglin included in his *White Lotus Society Picture* is not Amitābha but the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. In depicting Mañjuśrī in a Pure Land setting, Li revealed a Buddhist ideology unfamiliar to the contemporary spectator, which cannot be fully comprehended without recognizing that the scenes inside and outside the Society work in a continuum to illustrate the three-tiered “Sudden Enlightenment followed by Gradual Cultivation (*dunwu jianxiu*)” scheme of the bodhisattva path, which was the most prevalent form of practice among Huayan, Chan, and Tiantai Buddhists during the Tang and Song. This three-tiered scheme encompasses the three steps of achieving Buddhahood—(1) recognition of one’s innate *tathāgatagarbha*, (2) vow (mental initiation) to embark on and practice the bodhisattva path, and (3) the final attainment of Buddhahood—embedded in the three Buddhist scenes inside the Lotus Society. The three steps correspond, respectively, to (1) Daosheng preaching, (2) Mañjuśrī worship, and (3) sūtra translation. The pair of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun outside the Society connotes ideology and conduct reproved by advocates of
the doctrinal bodhisattva Pure Land cultivation, thus presenting a clear contrast in the painting between purity (inside) and impurity (outside). The guardian at the threshold between the two is the illusion-catcher, the Snake Expeller.

This reading of White Lotus Society Picture challenges its interpretation as a Pure Land document, since current scholarship tends to identify Chinese Pure Land Buddhism solely with the Amitābha cult, and to exclude practices not directly related to worshiping, visualizing, or intoning the name of Amitābha. Consequently, the traditional Chinese view of Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904–975) and Xingchang 省常 (959–1020) as Pure Land masters has been called into question by modern scholars. If Pure Land entails Amitābha, Li Gonglin’s White Lotus Society Picture is also excluded from the Pure Land genre—the painter having replaced Amitābha with Mañjuśrī. The latter part of this chapter will demonstrate that what Li Gonglin depicted matched the fundamental Chinese Mahāyāna bodhisattva Pure Land cultivation ideology as it had existed ever since the Northern Wei. It will also reveal how Yongming Yanshou’s teachings contributed to the Song redefinition of this Pure Land practice and to its intense popularity as reflected in Xingchang’s achievement and in Li Gonglin’s White Lotus Society Picture.

**White Lotus Society Picture as a Diagram of the Bodhisattva Path**

The bodhisattva path is the most important component of Mahāyāna ideology. It embodies the unity of great compassion (dabei 大悲) and great wisdom (dazhi 大智)—a unity essential to attaining Buddhahood while assisting all sentient beings in reaching the same goal. Chinese Buddhists adopted this concept out of the conviction of Mahāyāna superiority over the Two Vehicles (Ercheng 二乘). Though the concept of the bodhisattva path had been introduced to China early in the Common Era in several translated sūtras, it was the Avatāraṃsaka Sūtra, translated for the first time in the fifth century, and retranslated during the Tang dynasty, that offered the most comprehensive delineation of this ideology. As discussed in previous chapters, the Avatāraṃsaka Sūtra and Huayan ontology played a vital role in Li Gonglin’s Buddhist faith, and Mañjuśrī is a major deity in this sūtra. Mañjuśrī in lieu of Amitābha in White Lotus Society Picture fits the context of the bodhisattva path.