

The Theoretical Structure of “Birth in the Pure Land”: Based on the Meaning of T’an-luan’s “Birth through Causal Conditions”¹

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I.

IN THE PRESENT DAY, religion itself has become a question mark. That is to say, the very foundation upon which religion is established has itself come into question. No longer can any discussion of religion take place in the absence of a harsh realization of its present situation.² Of course “the present day” does not refer to some generalized period of time as an “entity” (*das Ding*), which can be coolly objectified in a manner unrelated to one’s own presently existing self.³ Rather, the “present” of this presently existing self must become none other than the “present” of the present day. Only in this way will we truly be able to speak for the first time of the “present day.” Thus, to say that in the present day religion is being brought into question from its very foundations means that religion itself is becoming a fundamental question mark at the locus of one’s own present existence.

Furthermore, such a situation inevitably implies the need to inquire into the bases of various traditional religious ideologies. This is because the very fact that religion is becoming a fundamental question mark connotes an inquiry into what the essence of religion is. The manner in which various religious ideologies have been traditionally understood must also be brought into question⁴ through an inquiry into their essential core. This questioning of the ideological essence must also, at the same time, unflinchingly illuminate and reveal the basis of the present existence of this self. Only in this way can the inquiry become a fundamental question.

The concept of “birth in the Pure Land” (*ōjō*), long considered to be one of the principal ideas in the study of the Pure Land teachings, must also be re-examined in this manner. That is to say, one must inquire into “birth” from within the situation of the present day and in a way that brings the essence of religion into question. In such a way the true state of one’s own present existence will naturally and clearly come to be revealed. I believe

that this is the very question regarding "birth in the Pure Land" that T'an-luan raises, based on Nāgārjuna's philosophy, in his *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*.⁵ That is to say, his question as to "birth," which he sought to explicate from the standpoint of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, is imbued with the power to overcome the present situation in which religion itself has become a question mark at its very foundation.

It has been said that T'an-luan's interpretation of birth did not receive sufficient doctrinal development in later Pure Land teachings, particularly in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.⁶ As Ishida Mitsuyuki has pointed out, in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism "there were all too few occasions in which consideration was given to the most important and fundamental ideological and creatively fulfilled point of the Pure Land teachings."⁷ In that situation, T'an-luan's interpretation of birth bore the key that might have been able to provide its fundamental ideological and creative fulfillment.

In this article, I will attempt a "creative fulfillment" of the meaning of birth in Pure Land Buddhism, based on an examination of T'an-luan's interpretation of it. This will probably be criticized as being some kind of reckless radicalism that deviates from traditional understandings. However, for my present self, further developing T'an-luan's interpretation of birth will for the first time approach the very brink of my own birth (and life) in a manner that can relate directly to the present existence of this self.

Today in Japan, the word "ōjō" (birth in the Pure Land) has come to stand for death or to mean being at a standstill. Traditionally, the teaching, "abandon this world, go to that world and be born transformed within a lotus blossom"⁸ was interpreted only to mean that one dies in this world and then is born in that world beyond. However, in the present situation, as long as this interpretation of birth remains, then even modern, secular explanations will not bear any greater religious significance for modern persons. That is, as long as "birth in the Pure Land" is comprehended as taking place somewhere along a straight line upon which one dies in this world and is then born in that world, it could not possibly mean anything within the religious existence of modern persons. Of course, I do not entirely deny that there is a linear aspect to the idea of birth.⁹ However, ultimately that represents nothing more than just one aspect of it. In the present situation, we cannot help but think that such a linear aspect, as it verges upon the locus of the religious existence of modern persons, can no longer display the power to bring about a conversion¹⁰ (*die Kehre*) of that existential structure.

Further, T'an-luan attempted to clarify the principles of Mahayana Buddhism immanent in the idea of "birth in the Pure Land" from the standpoint of fundamental Mahayanistic ideology. In this respect, this explication of birth constituted the basis for the establishment of the Pure Land teachings. Clearly, this bears important, contemporary significance for us, who are directly confronted today with the encounter with world

religions in which there is a tendency to regard Pure Land Buddhist doctrine as identical, or at least analogous, to the theoretical structure of Christian salvation.

II.

T'an-luan attempts in his *Commentary* to explicate the idea of "birth in the Pure Land" from the standpoint of Mahayana Buddhist notions of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). His explanation could be summarized as follows: birth through causal conditions is the same as being unborn; it cannot definitely be referred to as the same nor different, and so it accords with the principles of causality and continuity. This explanation appears once in both the first and second fascicles of his work respectively. In both places his discussion relates to the notion of birth in the context of the notion of "aspiration for birth," which is set forth in the opening verse of Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*,

Single-heartedly I take refuge in the Tathagata of unhindered light
filling the ten quarters and aspire to be born in the land of happiness.¹¹

The two *Commentary* passages that pertain to birth are as follows, designated respectively as passage (A) and passage (B).

(A) First Fascicle: Section on the Overall Explanation, the Gate of Aspiration.

Question: In the Mahayana sutras and treatises it is frequently taught that sentient beings are in the final analysis unborn, like empty space. Why does Bodhisattva Vasubandhu express his aspiration for "birth"?

Answer: The statement, "Sentient beings are unborn, like empty space," is open to two interpretations. First, what ordinary people see—such as sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real—is ultimately nonexistent, like imaginary "tortoise fur," or like empty space. Second, since all things are "born" from causal conditions, they are actually unborn; that is, they are non-existent, like empty space.

The "birth" to which Bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires refers to being born through causal conditions. Hence it is provisionally termed "birth." This does not mean that there are real beings or that being born and dying is real, as ordinary beings imagine.

Question: In what sense do you speak of birth in the Pure Land?

Answer: For the provisionally-called "person" in this world who practices the five gates of mindfulness, the preceding thought is the cause of the succeeding thought. The provisionally-called "person" of this defiled world and the provisionally-called "person" of the Pure Land cannot be definitely called the same or definitely called different. The same is true of preceding thought and succeeding thought. The reason is that if they were one and the same, then there would be no causality; if they were different, there would be no continuity. The principle is the gate of contemplating sameness and difference; it is discussed in detail in the treatises. Here ends the explanation of the three gates of mindfulness manifested in the first stanza.¹²

(B) Second Fascicle: Section on the Explication of the Meaning, the Chapter on the Objects of Contemplation.

(a) A question arises concerning this remark: Birth is the origin of one's existence and of various afflictions; if one abandons this life to seek rebirth in another state of existence, how can one's series of births be terminated?

In order to clarify this doubt, one should contemplate the glorious merits of the Pure Land and clearly realize that birth in the Pure Land is the "birthless birth" brought about by Amida Tathagata's Primal Vow that is pure. This is not one of the delusory births as seen in the three worlds.

How can you say this? In the first place, the Dharma-nature is immaculate and is the state of ultimate non-birth. It is simply in accordance with the feeling of those who seek birth in the Pure Land that we speak of "birth." Since birth is non-birth, how can you deny such birth? Should you deny "birth," speaking with reference to a higher spiritual realization, there would be no Bodhisattva's body of activity which accords with inactivity; also, speaking with reference to a lower spiritual realization, there would be a danger of the disease of the threefold voidness, which is not the true voidness. The result would be that the root of Bodhi is destroyed forever and that the Theravāda cry out, shaking the entire universe. Since they could not turn around and convert to Mahayana, they would bring disgrace upon themselves. In order to make them realize the principle of birthless birth, the Pure Land has been established. The abode of the Pure Land is shown by the seventeen objects of contemplation.¹³

(b) Question: When you said above that “birth” in the Pure Land was “non-birth,” you must have been referring to the aspirants of the highest grade. In the case of those of the lowest level of the lowest grade, who are said to be born in the Pure Land through ten Nembutsu, do they not conceive of actual birth? If so, they meet with two difficulties: (1) they will, in all probability, not attain birth and (2) even if they are born in the Pure Land, they will continue to hold a delusory view of “birth.”

Answer: It is like putting a luminous mani-gem into muddy water; the water instantly becomes clear. If a person, though defiled with karmic evils which would cause him/her to transmigrate for countless births and deaths, hears the supreme, luminous gem of the Name of Amida Tathagata, which accords with the principle of “non-birth,” and holds it in mind, his/her karmic evils will be destroyed and his/her mind purified, and so he/she will quickly attain birth in the Pure Land.

Secondly, if a luminous mani-gem is wrapped in black or yellow cloth and put into water, the water instantly becomes black or yellow. In the Pure Buddha-land there is the most excellent gem of Amida Tathagata. If it is wrapped in the cloth of the immeasurable glorious merits and put into the water of the aspirant’s mind, how could the gem not turn his/her view of actual birth into the wisdom of non-birth? It is also like making a fire on ice. If the fire is fierce, the ice melts; when the ice melts, the fire is extinguished. Similarly, even though aspirants of the lowest level of the lowest grade are ignorant of the principle that the intrinsic nature of existence is non-birth, if they repeat the Buddha’s Name and aspire to be born in his Land while holding the view of actual birth there, the fire of the view of actual birth is spontaneously extinguished, because the Land is the realm of non-birth.¹⁴

From an overall perspective of these *Commentary* passages, it could be said that passage (A) sets out the theoretical structure of “birth in the Pure Land,” while passage (B) presents an explanation, based on that principle, of how birth is related to the dynamic working of Amida Buddha’s salvation.¹⁵ Further, when these two aspects—the theoretical aspect and the active aspect—are closely examined, the significance of birth, which brings about a conversion (*die Kehre*) within one’s religious existence, is revealed for the first time. In addition, the on-going relationship between these two aspects is such that each would lose all meaning if either of the aspects were to exist by itself. Further, even if one were able to separate the two aspects¹⁶ in order to clarify them by discussing each one individually, this would bring about the destruction of the true significance of the two and, ultimately, make both aspects and their establishment impossible.

Accordingly, the relationship between both aspects (this expression itself contains a contradiction) is that the active aspect is already discussed within the context of the theoretical aspect, while the theoretical aspect is always contained within the active aspect as its basis. When we examine the theoretical aspect, the active, essential cause of its activity must be found. If the active, essential cause could not be found it could not be regarded as the theoretical aspect of birth. Also, in order to establish truly the active aspect of birth, the theoretical foundation, which T'an-luan develops in (A), must lead to that activity. Accordingly, when experiencing the theoretical foundation, inevitably, the manifestation of the active aspect must come about as a result. One could say that the form taken by that inevitable manifestation was the historical reality (*Geschichte*) of the emergence of Pure Land Buddhism in Kamakura Japan.

For *nembutsu* practitioners like Hōnen and his disciples, many of whom were the so-called founders of various Pure Land schools, this kind of theoretical foundation was experienced as the basis for the arising of their religious existence. The active aspect, which was an historical and inevitable consequence of that experience, was driven forth, passing through the locus of the individual religious existence of those various founders. This was expressed in their religious declarations. Accordingly, it is natural that the active aspect was strongly manifested in their writings, which represented the crystallization of that activity. However, the point that must be considered here is the fact that these school founders had already come into possession of the theoretical foundation through their experiences of seeking the enlightenment of Mahayana Buddhism.¹⁷

However, in succeeding generations, it appears that the active aspect, which had been so clearly visible in the writings of these school founders, came to be removed from its theoretical foundation, which had completely pervaded and been embodied within their religious existence. It was just as if the basic essence of their assertions had been organized and systematized in that way. The most notable and typical feature of this doctrinal system has traditionally been referred to as "topics related to practice and faith" (*gyōshinron*).¹⁸ There the theoretical foundation was reduced and changed entirely into one involving "dharmic virtues," "endowed virtues," "virtues of that Land," as well as a focus upon the attainment to be realized in the Pure Land. It was as if it were confined within a secret chamber of true emptiness, which bore no relationship whatsoever to the foundations of religious existence. This could mean nothing other than an estrangement from and annihilation of that theoretical foundation. At the same time, it also brought about an estrangement from and annihilation of the active aspect as well.¹⁹ The fact that, in the present day, no form of active working seems able to arise from the traditional doctrinal studies (in spite of the fact that it originally represented the organization and systematization of the active aspect) speaks volumes regarding the matter.

III.

Anyone seeking to achieve a so-called “creative fulfillment” of the meaning of birth in Pure Land Buddhism on the basis of T’an-luan’s interpretation of birth would unavoidably have to move in the direction of arguing against a traditional understanding that has long been intractable. Of course, such an attempt at an overthrow must not itself succumb to dogmatism. The germination of such criticism must be guided to the very end by T’an-luan’s understanding of birth itself. However, it should not remain fixed upon T’an-luan either. Rather, such criticism must be meaningful for the religious existence of this currently existing self.

Because of limitations on the length of this article I will place the focus only on the question and answer portion of passage (A) above, which as I have mentioned sets forth the theoretical foundation of “birth in the Pure Land.” I will engage in an examination and criticism of the traditional understanding of that passage, and through that process attempt to clarify the theoretical structure of birth. I will attempt this examination and criticism by organizing the essential points of the question and answer portion of (A) into three areas:

1. T’an-luan’s purpose for developing the questions and answers.
2. The relationship between the two interpretations of the statement, “sentient beings are unborn, like empty space.” This includes the issues of “birth through causes and conditions,” “provisional” birth, and “the relationship between non-birth and aspiration for birth.”
3. Birth that cannot definitely be called the same nor different, and so accords with the principles of causality and continuity.

1. T’an-luan’s Purpose for Developing the Questions and Answers

There have been many different interpretations as to what T’an-luan’s purpose for developing the questions and answers in his *Commentary* might have been. As a result, interpretations of the meaning of birth have also greatly differed. Traditionally five different positions have been taken.²⁰ I will discuss the two of them that are the most relevant to this article.²¹

The first takes the position that, because T’an-luan’s explanation of birth is solely an explication with respect to the commentary master, Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, it rejects the feelings of ordinary beings. Hence, it is real birth, “not as ordinary beings imagine.” According to this view, birth is interpreted to be ultimately without form, that is, it is synonymous

with emptiness and interdependent origination. Since the discussion is framed in relation to practitioners of the highest stages of bodhisattva-hood, it refers to a realm that is utterly unfathomable by foolish, ordinary beings such as ourselves.

Certainly, the explications regarding birth in both passages (A) and (B) do refer to the “aspiration for birth” set forth by the commentary master, Vasubandhu. However, the words in the question, “sentient beings are in the final analysis unborn,” surely reflect a standpoint that seeks to penetrate into the heart of the nature of “non-birth,” which lies at the universal ground of existence of all sentient beings. Thus, it is not necessary to limit it to a discussion regarding this one commentary master. In addition, the words in the answer, “The statement, ‘Sentient beings are unborn, like empty space,’ is open to two interpretations,” seek to explain that the nature of “non-birth” for sentient beings is of two kinds. One must not forget that this discussion is in regard to all sentient beings.²²

T’an-luan’s statement that, “The ‘birth’ to which Bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires refers to being born through causal conditions,” might pose a problem. However, there is no need whatsoever to regard this as an assertion that the birth for which the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires alone possesses the meaning of “birth through causal conditions.” Rather, if one regards the teaching of the true state of “birth in the Pure Land” to be birth in accordance with the principle of interdependent origination—the fundamental idea of Mahayana Buddhism—then one must conclude that it seeks to explain the state of birth that is true and real for all sentient beings.

Also, what could be the meaning of the question in part (b) of passage (B)?

When you said above that “birth” (in the Pure Land) was “non-birth,” you must have been referring to the aspirants of the highest grade. In the case of those of the lowest level of the lowest grade, who are said to be born in the Pure Land through ten Nembutsu, do they not conceive of actual birth? If so, they meet with two difficulties.

Does it really mean that the true meaning of birth as viewed from the standpoint of interdependent origination cannot be discussed at the level of the lowest grade of beings in the lowest level of birth? By no means could this be the case. No, rather, the meaning of birth that is “non-birth” is indeed being discussed at the foundations of present existence—at the level of the person who is at the lowest rank in the lowest level of birth. Here the discussion directly verges on the religious existence of the self, in a manner that is much more real than any discussion regarding the birth of the highest grade of beings. It is exactly because the meaning of birth as “non-birth” exists at the lowest level of existence that the three functions

concerning the Name—hearing the Name, the adornments of the Buddha’s Land, and saying the Name—which is developed later in the text, can be established. These are authenticated by three metaphors: (1) the pure mani-gem that makes defiled waters pure; (2) the pure mani-gem wrapped in yellow or black cloth that turns the waters yellow or black; and (3) the fire burning fiercely on the ice. If the meaning of birth as “non-birth” were not to be established at the level of the lowest rank of beings in the lowest grade of birth, then what meaning would the Name hold?

However, a rebuttal from the traditional standpoint might be appended here. That position would be that the meaning of birth as “non-birth” is not established at the level of the lowest rank of being in the lowest grade of birth. Rather, it is simply that persons in the lowest rank of being in the lowest grade of birth can only rely upon the working of the Name, without having any understanding as to the meaning of “birth that is non-birth.” Yet, then, what could the meaning of the working of the Name possibly be? It would be that it lies directly beneath the present existence of the self amidst the immeasurable samsaric sins and defilements as the lowest rank of being in the lowest of grade of birth. Although such beings are not capable of understanding the “dharma-nature that is non-birth,” the working of the Name brings us to understand that “non-birth” is the true state of birth. Through that understanding, the nature of our sins and defilements, which are immeasurable within our samsaric existence, are revealed existentially. In this manner, such existential knowing itself signifies the simultaneous realization of knowing that one is oneself removed from sinfulness and defilement, and the existential transcendence of those sins and defilement.

According to the traditional interpretation, the working of the Name is explained in terms of the so-called “virtues of that Land,” or, virtues said to be attained upon realizing birth in the Pure Land, which is the realm of “non-birth.” In this view, such working of the Name does not become manifested in the state of beings in this life. Rather, it remains immanently possessed within the Name as “dharmic virtues” or “endowed virtues.” If that were so, however, then it could no longer be called “working” or “power.” Instead, its only significance would be to reveal our estrangement from or the annihilation of the Name. If that were so, T’an-luan’s utilization of his three metaphors to reveal the reality (*sache*) of a singular non-duality and his efforts to stress the importance of it would have amounted to nothing.

Furthermore, we must speculate on how much authenticating, persuasive power the three metaphors must have had for persons living during T’an-luan’s time. In the present day, aside from the metaphor about the bonfire burning atop the ice, the metaphors seem irrational and fail to exhibit any kind of persuasive power. Instead, they might even engender a counter-reaction. Today, we would relegate such metaphors, which

might have been able to reveal the greatness of the working of the Name during T'an-luan's time, to the place of irrelevance. (I have previously referred to this as "estrangement.") Or, we might even consider them to smack of superstition. It is likely that this estrangement would be deepened by the tendency to comprehend the Name in terms of "dharmic virtues," "endowed virtues" or "virtues of that Land." What we need to do in the present day is to inquire into how we could attain the same deep understanding of the real working of the Name at the locus of our religious existence that persons of T'an-luan's age were able to realize through those three metaphors. This realization must come about not by using the same three metaphors, but by encountering it at the locus of this self presently existing as the real working of the Name in the present day.

When one considers it from this point of view, any attempt to limit the meaning of "birth that is non-birth" to the highest rank of being in the highest grade of birth would provide it with no meaning whatsoever. It would make implausible the idea of the birth of persons in the lowest rank of being in the lowest grade of birth. To do so would amount to nothing more than exalting the principle of "birth that is non-birth" as some kind of false icon.

The second standpoint relevant to our discussion describes the basis for the formation of the essential meaning of "birth in the Pure Land." This stance is represented by Jinrei's consideration of the criticism directed against the Pure Land teachings during T'an-luan's time.²³ According to Jinrei, the criticism was based in the ideas held by teachers of the Path of the Sages in Mahayana Buddhist schools generally, and particularly in the San-lun school.²⁴

If this criticism were not thoroughly addressed in a general Buddhist manner, it might have resulted in the destruction of the teaching of birth in the Pure Land.²⁵

Jinrei's stance was not that T'an-luan was critical of the question for representing the false belief in nihilism arising from the deluded passions of sentient beings.²⁶ Instead, on the contrary, Jinrei believed that T'an-luan was deeply cognizant of the encounter between the Pure Land teachings and general Mahayanist schools. In his view T'an-luan was seeking to explain the way in which one could establish the "one great, essential" Pure Land Buddhist teaching of "aspiration for birth in the Pure Land," based on the doctrines of general Mahayana Buddhism. We might surmise that T'an-luan's attitude was that of seeking to examine thoroughly the truth and ultimacy of the Pure Land teachings from an even more universal and fundamental place.

However, unavoidably we must say that there is a sense that Jinrei's approach does not quite take the final step. By this I mean that the true basis

for the establishment of the essential meaning of "birth in the Pure Land" did not simply remain in the form of a defense against the criticism of general Mahayana Buddhist schools. It did not come about simply through a confrontation with general Buddhist schools (an opposition between general versus particular schools) or with the San-lun school (an opposition between sectarian schools). Rather, it must be said that the true meaning of "birth in the Pure Land" can become really established only when it is grounded in its most fundamental source (which precedes the division between the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path) that enables Mahayana Buddhism to be Mahayana Buddhism.²⁷

This is a locus that transcends T'an-luan. Implied in this locus of transcendence is a sense of history, which means we cannot be T'an-luan; nor can we be persons who lived during his time. However, although we cannot be T'an-luan, the locus of transcendence means that we must at all times be transcended by the line of T'an-luan's intent. The beginnings of this line of intention must always be found within T'an-luan. In the present case, this inception point can be found in his interpretation of birth as birth that cannot definitely be called the same nor different, and so accords with the principles of causality and continuity. The true meaning of birth reveals this most fundamental source, which precedes the division between the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path. At the same time, the true meaning of birth must ultimately bring about the manifestation of its most fundamental source within the ground of religious existence, which is this self. As a result of such manifestation, it might be said, the true meaning of birth reveals its fundamental source for the first time. In other words, the actual manifestation of this fundamental source is essentially none other than birth itself.

2. The Relationship between the Two Interpretations of the Statement, "Sentient Beings are Unborn, Like Empty Space."

In interpreting the relationship between the two meanings of "non-birth," we can point to three principal traditional standpoints. First is the view that, in accordance with the three natures in consciousness-only doctrine, there is a pair of meanings of "non-birth" as one aspires for perfection fulfillment: (1) "non-birth" in the sense that it is birth produced by one's feeling or imagination, and (2) "non-birth" in the sense that birth arises through interdependent origination. Thus, the conclusion that "sentient beings are like empty space."²⁸ One might expect, however, that there is some question as to whether T'an-luan's conception of "non-birth" may be understood through consciousness-only thought. One author states, "Non-birth that is dependent on others is without hindrance. How could (it be obstructed by the aspiration for birth?)."²⁹ Although this view seeks

to resolve the contradiction between “non-birth” and “aspiration for birth” with the concept of “non-birth that is dependent on others,” this seems to be quite superficial. I will further discuss the relationship between “non-birth” and “aspiration for birth” later on.

Secondly, there is a view that brings the notion of “non-birth” into consonance with the negations, “no permanence” and “no annihilation,” from the eightfold negation of the dedicatory verse at the outset of the *Mūla-mādhyamika-kārikā*.³⁰ The first meaning of “non-birth” is thought to be to remove the false belief in eternalism in which ordinary beings cling to the view that sentient beings are real and that being born and dying are real. The second meaning of “non-birth” is regarded as being to remove the false belief in nihilism through the teaching that birth exists because it is “birth from causal conditions.” One must lay stress upon the fact that this seeks to relate the two within the mutual correspondence of the two teachings of existence and non-existence. In this regard, Jinrei states that the mutual correspondence of the two teachings of existence and non-existence is synonymous with the mutual identity of the two-fold supramundane and mundane truths (*paramārtha-satya* and *saṃvṛti-satya*):

*Because all things are born from causal conditions, they are provisionally said to exist: this is to establish all things by means of the mundane truth. The substance of all things that are provisionally said to exist is empty: this is at the level of the supreme principle—ultimate emptiness. The mundane truth and the supreme truth are mutually identical. Hence, existence is in itself emptiness; emptiness is in itself existence. This is the meaning of the teaching that “form is the same as emptiness; emptiness is the same as form.” All things and teaching of the dharma are always based on the two truths.*³¹

Further, Jinrei discerns that the notion of birth from causal conditions exists within the first meaning of “non-birth.”

The meaning that “since birth occurs through causal conditions it is said to exist” is embodied within the supreme principle of non-birth as well.³²

Although he seems to take the standpoint in which he surmises that the two meanings of “non-birth” intersect and have some bearing on each other, it is difficult to say whether the relationship between the two meanings of “non-birth” has as yet been clarified.

In Jinrei’s view of the second meaning of “non-birth,” the teaching that birth exists because it is “birth from causal conditions” removes the false

belief in nihilism. Here, the term “exists” is completely different from “existence,” which is the content of the negation contained within the first meaning of “non-birth” (existence as “existence, which beings view as real”). This is not an “existence” that serves as the basis for removing the belief in nihilism, which simply stands in parallel counter-point with the false view of eternalism. We can say that, from Jinrei’s standpoint, it indicates that the two meanings of “non-birth” are viewed within a relationship of the mutual opposition of nihilism and eternalism.

However, the relationship between the two meanings of “non-birth” is not an oppositional or dualistic one. Rather, it is a relationship in which the locus of the establishment of the first meaning of “non-birth” is the basis from which ontological “existence” (indicated by the phrase “birth from causal conditions”) actually arises as this kind of “existence.” It is from this view that Jinrei could state, “The meaning that ‘since birth occurs through causal conditions it is said to exist’ is embodied within the first meaning of non-birth as well.”

In addition, in the *Commentary* are the passages, “sentient beings are unborn” and, “The statement, ‘Sentient beings are unborn, like empty space,’ is open to two interpretations.” Despite that, however, it would appear that the first meaning of “non-birth” concerns “ordinary beings,” while the second meaning of “non-birth” seems applicable to “all things.” Is the intended meaning here simply to eliminate one’s attachment to either person or things? That is not likely.

“All things” is a universal concept. “Ordinary beings” is a specific limitation of it. Accordingly, the negation of the universal “all things” is located at the base of the negation of “ordinary beings” in the first meaning of “non-birth.” Taking this universal negation as its direct basis, the negation of “ordinary beings,” or, “sentient beings, which they conceive of as real” is established. Further, through the medium of this negation of “sentient beings, which they conceive of as real,” “being born and dying, which (ordinary beings) view as real” is also negated. This is the dual structure of the first meaning of “non-birth.”

This, then, is what we can see from the content of the negations within this dual structure: if we consider “birth” in the first meaning of “non-birth” to point to “birth” in the phrase “being born and dying,” then “being born and dying, which ordinary beings view as real” is negated. However, this is not “real birth” or “real death” itself, but rather “being born and dying that is viewed as real by ordinary beings” who are transmigrating in real birth-and-death. Thus, although the first meaning of “non-birth” states that beings are “non-existent,” it is not a negation of “birth” itself. This “non” points to the negation of “as viewed by ordinary beings.” Further, we should not overlook the fact that at the base of that negation lays the negation of “sentient beings, which they conceive of as real.”

What on earth is being discussed here? In a word, it ends with the negation of the notion that all things possess substance (*substantia*).³³ This negation is no longer a negation as the content of the false belief in nihilism. That is to say, it is not a negation of “all things” themselves. Rather, it is a negation of the view, or the attachment that views all things as having substance. Furthermore, the basis from which this negation arises is the “reality” that “all things are devoid of substance.” It is this “reality” that is symbolized as “birth from causal conditions,” which is the second meaning of “non-birth.” The negation seen in the phrase “all things are devoid of substance” is naturally implied here. The words giving expression to this negation here are “they are actually unborn.” It is also expressed by the words, “they are non-existent, like empty space.” This differs from the content of the words “like empty space” in the first meaning of “non-birth.” The content of “like empty space” in the first meaning of “non-birth” means “as viewed by sentient beings.” Hence, T’an-luan employs the metaphor of imaginary “tortoise fur.” We do not find this expression in the second meaning of “non-birth.” In sum, it can be concluded that the negation of “all things possess substance (*substantia*)” is the basis for the establishment of both meanings of “non-birth.”

The third traditional standpoint views both the first and second meanings of “non-birth” as discussions taking place from the perspective of “beings” and the perspective of “dharma” respectively.³⁴ In this viewpoint, the two are separated from each other, and there is absolutely no inquiry into the relationship between them. Here, no relationship between the two is in any way presumed. This view does nothing more than simply rephrase the explications in the text, making distinctions between them. The tendency to do so is also not limited to this issue. In my own biased view, such a trend is particularly obvious among traditional sectarian scholars of Hongwanji-ha.

“Birth through Causes and Conditions”

My standpoint in regard to “birth from causal conditions” is like my stance regarding the relationship between the two meanings of “non-birth” in the preceding discussion. “Birth from causal conditions” is a symbol of the ontological and epistemological negation of the substantial nature of all things, a negation is referred to by T’an-luan with the words, “they are actually unborn.” This is how I wish to comprehend it.³⁵ It could also be said that “birth from causal conditions” signifies that state of all things that accords with reality, that is, the state of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). The negation is immanent within this interdependent arising of all being; it becomes the condition for its “existence.” The real state of all things indicates that which becomes affirmed as “real”

while embodying that negation. In fact, it is able to become real as a result of that negation. This manner of existence is referred to as “birth from causal conditions.”

Within the traditional interpretations, “birth from causal conditions” has been considered to correspond to the notions of “non-existence” or “apparent existence” in the context of the nature of existence that arises from interdependent origination.³⁶ It has also been concluded that, since it is a profound matter, “birth takes place without any reason for being born.”³⁷ In addition, it has been interpreted to mean that one’s birth in the Pure Land is called “birth through causal conditions” because it occurs through the interdependence of “solely entrusting oneself to the Buddha” as the cause and “the power of the Buddha’s Primal Vow” as the condition.³⁸ A commentary can also be seen which states that one aspires to be born through the causal conditions of Name and Light, based on Shinran’s “twofold analysis of the cause of birth.”³⁹ Further, some have considered the difference between “birth from causal conditions” and “non-birth” to correspond to the difference between the “mundane” and the “supramundane,” or between phenomenon and noumenon.⁴⁰ In addition, others have made a distinction between “is not born” (*fushō*) and “non-birth” (*mushō*).⁴¹

“Provisional Birth”

In T’an-luan’s original text is a passage in which he explains that, “it refers to being born through causal conditions; hence, it is provisionally termed ‘birth.’” “Provisional” is a concept in regard to which sages and teachers of the ancient past have give a variety of commentaries.⁴² Based on its linguistic context within the passage, the adverbial usage of the word “provisionally” would likely give it the meaning of “for some period of time,” “temporarily,” or “for the time being.”⁴³ However, the problem lies in taking the word to mean “provisionally.” That is to say, since the phrase is a reference to “being born through causal conditions,” it must mean that the basis of “provisionally termed birth” can be found within “birth through causal conditions.” That being so, it no longer simply means “for the time being.”

Therefore, existence arising through causal conditions must necessarily come to be referred to with the noun, “provisionality,” or “provisional birth” (thus, going beyond its mere adverbial sphere). In the same sense, the term “provisionally-called person,” as taken up in the context of “birth in the Pure Land,” is also utilized in a way that would imply a similar expansion of meaning. While originally this concept lay hidden within the adverbial sense of the word “provisionally,” it can also be viewed affirmatively as a synonym of the notion of “birth from causal conditions.” Thus,

we must not forget that the conditions for negation are implied within the idea of "provisionality" itself.

"Relationship between Non-birth and Aspiration for Birth"

In the traditional interpretations the relationship between "non-birth" and "aspiration for birth" was considered problematic, and great effort was exerted to interpret them in a harmonious way. Some have considered that "birth that is non-birth," which constitutes "birth from causal conditions," is based on the standpoint of mundane truth, and therefore it can become the object of one's aspiration.⁴⁴ There has also been the view that, since it is not "ultimate emptiness, in which essential nature is void" it does not prevent one from aspiring for it.⁴⁵ Also, there has also been the interpretation that, "It is provisionally-called birth through causal conditions. Hence, aspiring throughout the day to be born means that one constantly takes the principle of "non-birth" to be essential. This is the meaning of 'aspiration for birth.'"⁴⁶

T'an-luan's *Commentary* does not clearly inquire into this problem. However, I would surmise that for him "birth" meant that, "since all things are 'born' from causal conditions, they are actually unborn." However, such "birth" is not birth in the sense that "there are real beings or that being born and dying is real, as ordinary people imagine." This negation of the birth in the sense that "being born and dying is real" must bring into question the notion of "aspiration for birth." Just what could it mean? It must first of all be pointed out that, as long as the "birth" in the sense of an "aspiration for birth" is not "birth" in the sense that "being born and dying is real," then this "aspiration" will not take place at the level at which ordinary beings imagine that they are real or that birth and dying are real. Then, what kind of "aspiration" is it? I believe that it should be viewed as a concept indicating a directionality toward the negation of "birth" in the conventional sense. What this means is that "aspiration for birth" is none other than the negation of "birth" in the sense that "there are real beings or that being born and dying is real, as ordinary people imagine." Hence, since it constitutes the negation of ordinary secular life, it is referred to as "aspiration for birth."

Did the traditional standpoints not comprehend "aspiration for birth" as taking place at the level where being born and dying is taken to be real by ordinary beings (that is, the ordinary, secular level)? I believe that this had its origin in the ambiguous interpretations concerning (1) T'an-luan's purpose for developing the questions and answers, and (2) the relationship between the two interpretations of "sentient beings are unborn, like empty space" that we have previously discussed.

3. Birth that Cannot Definitely be Called the Same nor Different, and So Accords with the Principles of Causality and Continuity.

In the second question and answer, T'an-luan makes mention of "birth" (*ō-jō*, literally, "go-to be born") in his question, "In what sense do you speak of birth in the Pure Land?" However, the essence of his answer contains his explanation of the meaning of "going" (*ō*). Since, in the first question and answer the meaning of "being born" (*shō*) has been clarified, naturally he here undertakes a thorough discussion of the meaning of "going."

The most striking special feature of the traditional understanding could be seen in its dualistic comprehension of the notion that birth is "neither the same nor different, and so accords with causality and continuity."⁴⁷ As we have previously pointed out, where the content of a single idea was considered to include two or more categories, within the traditional standpoint each category was likely to be seen as completely independent of other categories. For that reason necessarily, each individual category could be clarified only from its own isolated standpoint. Further, any attempt at a harmonizing interpretation would result in an erroneous, composite idea.

That being the case, just what does it mean that T'an-luan viewed the meaning of "going" as "neither the same nor different, and so accords with causality and continuity?" First of all, the notion of "going" speaks to the "relationship" between the "provisionally-called 'person' of this defiled world" and the "provisionally-called 'person' of the Pure Land." That is, their relationship is such that they are "neither the same nor different." (This is identical to the principles of causality and continuity. The content of "neither the same nor different" is identical to, and "so accords with causality and continuity.") It is not a composite conjoining of two relationships, "not the same" and "not different." "Neither the same nor different" is a contradictory statement from the standpoint of formal logic. The attitude of logic would be to seek to grasp "not the same" and "not different" from a static and superficial perspective. However, "going" cannot be comprehended from that perspective. The impossibility of comprehending it in this way is indicated by the form of the expression, "neither the same nor different." (It is not "not the same" and "not different.") It also seeks to give expression to "real" movement, or activity.

The subject of this "real" active movement, moreover, cannot be possessed of substance (*substantia*). This is clearly indicated by T'an-luan's use of the notion of "definiteness." The text does not state, "cannot be called the same" and "cannot be called different." Rather, it states, "cannot be *definitely* called the same or *definitely* called different." What is the significance of the word "definitely"? It is tied to the idea of "real" in the passage, "sentient beings, which they conceive as *real*, or the acts of being

born and dying, which they view as *real*." This is none other than a reference to substantialism. It is, in other words, the ordinary and mundane view (at the level of feeling and reason) of the locus of self-identity that, when a certain thing is said to exist, seeks to "definitely establish" the thing as that thing. Such a view of substance must be negated in the notion of "going."

What negates substance is movement, or activity. T'an-luan's words, "if they were one and the same, then there would be no causality; if they were different, there would be no continuity," indeed refer to this activity. It is unavoidable, perhaps, that it is expressed as "movement." However, in this case, it does not refer to movement in the sense that a single substance proceeds across a period of time that joins together a point in time A and a point in time B. If that were so, it would not achieve a negation of "actual substance." Movement in the sense that some substance moves within time is nothing more than locational movement, which is viewed from the ordinary perspective of feeling and reason.

The meaning of movement as "going," as it is being discussed now, is on the contrary that of an "actual, present arising." In this sense, movement enables "substance" or "time," as comprehended at the level of feeling and reason, to presently arise as "substance" or "time." (Of course, this arising takes place at the level of feeling and reason.) This is not the locus of either "substance" or "time." However, as a consequence of this negation of substance and time, the negation becomes, on the contrary, the locus that enables them to arise as substance and time. This notion of "presently arising," or movement, is what is meant by "going," which is being discussed now. Indeed the true meaning of "going" can be expressed in the notion of the "activity of emptiness."

IV.

Based on the literature to the extent possible, I have above presented my own views through an examination and criticism of the traditional standpoints. However, this was performed within the limitations of critical negation, that is, it was done "through the traditional standpoint." Of course, while such examination and criticism must be considered the starting point, the discussion here must go a step further and be developed comprehensively in a manner related to the religious existence of this self. I refer to this as the theoretical structure of birth, and will now attempt a thorough examination of it.

Prior to that, however, we must first confirm the points gleaned from the preceding discussion.

(1) The meaning of the idea of birth has been defined in T'an-luan's text as "birth through causal conditions," which is the same as not being born; it is neither the same nor different, and so accords with the principles of causality and continuity. This refers to the birth of all sentient beings, and not just of the commentary master, Vasubandhu, alone.

(2) The second meaning of "non-birth" sets out a manner of existence that is the basis for the first meaning of "non-birth."

(3) The basis for the establishment of the notion that "since all things are born from causal conditions, they are actually unborn" is the state of reality that presently arises, even while embodying ontological and epistemological negation (expressed by the phrase, "all things are devoid of substance").

(4) The locus of this state of reality is the negation of the perspective of ordinary feelings and reason (that is, the locus of "sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real").

(5) "Aspiration for birth" is none other than a manner of existence that includes within it the negation of birth in the sense of "sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real."

(6) Despite its original adverbial usage as the word "provisionally," the notion of "provisionality" or "provisional birth" indicates its inevitable development in a manner similar to that of "provisional truth" (within the perfectly interfusing three truths (*satya*): that existences are empty, existences are provisional, and the middle way). The basis for this development can be found in the meaning of causal conditions, which T'an-luan expresses as, "(it) refers to being born through causal conditions. Hence it is provisionally termed "birth."

(7) The meaning of "birth" that is defined as, "neither the same nor different, and so it accords with causality and continuity," is the inevitable consequence of the meaning of "birth" set out in points (2) to (6) above.

(8) "Birth" that is "neither the same nor different, and so accords with causality and continuity" implies "relationship" or "movement," which can be seen within the meaning of the phrase, "since

all things are "born" from causal conditions, they are actually unborn."

(9) "Relationship" and "movement" represent the manner of existence that is expressed as "going." This is implied by the meaning of "since all things are 'born' from causal conditions, they are actually unborn." Hence, it refers to activity that involves the negation of "substance" (*substantia*), or, that is, to the activity of negation itself.

(10) "Relationship" and "movement" refer to that activity that, on the contrary, enables "substance" and "time," which have been comprehended from the perspective of feeling and reason (the perspective of "sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real") to presently arise from their foundation. Accordingly, it must be said that the issues of "substantiality" (the problem of the subject that goes to be born) and "temporality" (the problem of when birth arises: in this life? or after death?),⁴⁸ both of which arise when the meaning of birth is developed from the perspective of feeling and reason, in fact are issues that lie opposite the direction of the inquiry that would reveal the theoretical structure of "birth."

These ten points comprise the essential elements that make up the fundamental form of my standpoint, which I have attempted to develop in the discussion above "through examination and criticism of the traditional standpoints." That being the case, what then forms the content of a theoretical structure of birth, which can be constructed from the basis of these essential elements?

The starting point for the theoretical structure of birth must always exist within the present existence of this self, which exists now within the perspective of feeling and reason (the locus of "sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real"). If it were to be located in any other place, or if it were to be sought within a dualistic opposition to any place outside of it, the only consequence that would be perceivable would be that of "self-estrangement."

T'an-luan refers to this present existence as "the provisionally-called 'person' of this defiled world."⁴⁹ The theoretical structure of birth, which takes this as its starting point, moves in two directions from such "provisionally-called 'persons' of this defiled world." That is to say, one movement is toward negating "the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real." The other movement is toward the foundation of "being born and dying, which they view as real." The two correspond to the two senses of "sentient beings are unborn," which T'an-luan develops in the first

question and answer in passage (A). The movement toward negation represents the locus of the second meaning of "non-birth," while the movement toward the foundation represents the first.⁵⁰

The movement toward negation breaks through and destroys our attachment to "substance," that is, it negates the ignorant view that takes the existence of ordinary beings as the authentic existence of ordinary beings. This is referred to as "purification" (*vyavadāna*).⁵¹ As the negation of ignorant views, which negates the existence of ordinary beings from its very foundations, this movement points the currently existing self toward the realm of "non-birth," which is the "other shore," or, the realm of the provisionally-called "person" of the Pure Land. The basis for this negation is located in the universality of the state of reality expressed in the phrase, "since all things are 'born' from causal conditions, they are actually unborn." This, it could be said, indicates its universal direction.

The movement toward the foundation is toward the place in which "sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real" are realized as just that. It is the movement toward the locus of "birth from causal conditions" itself, that is, toward the locus of "non-birth" as the foundation of "birth" (not birth in the sense of "the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real"). That "the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real" come to be revealed as just that, means that this is the direction pointing toward the realization of birth that is "birth through causal conditions." In this movement, the "present" of this presently existing self is revealed as itself. That is, it is an ontological movement toward the farthest "other shore" that points toward the source of this self. In this direction "the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real" are realized in all places as themselves. Such realization does not refer epistemologically to a simple kind of discriminative thought. Rather, it refers to the ground that completely becomes "the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real."

This has been a broad summary of the two movements inherent in the theoretical structure of "birth in the Pure Land." The relationship between the two is that the movement toward the foundation truly becomes the foundation when the movement toward negation truly becomes negation. Conversely, the movement toward negation truly becomes negation because the movement toward the foundation truly becomes the foundation. Further, negation's truly becoming negation and the foundation's truly becoming the foundation both take place as "going." The relationship between the two movements lies within the "relationship" (set forth above), which is also one of "going." Here we see the manifestation of "relationship" and "movement" that is expressed as "it is neither the same nor different, and so accords with causality and continuity."

This relationship of "going" is identical to the notions of "extinction" or "transformation" in Mahayana Buddhism, which currently exist at the

locus of praxis within one's religious existence. We are brought to enter here by Amida Tathagata, the power of the Primal Vow, and the Name, all of which constitute the "decisive cause" of birth. T'an-luan teaches us that the states of "extinction" and "transformation" are also represented by the ideas of "holding it in mind" (seen in the metaphor of the luminous mani-gem) and "spontaneously" (from the metaphor of the fire burning on ice).

Further, in order for the theoretical structure of birth to become established in the manner that we have discussed up until now the entire structure itself must be established at the locus of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). At this place the act of the self, called "birth," in which present existence fundamentally becomes present existence, takes on the structure of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). There, we find that birth becomes established as the fundamental idea of Mahayana Buddhism. Furthermore, within the religious existence called "present existence," we become able to understand what kind of activity that birth really is, as it reveals to us the living state of "birth."

Finally, I would like to point out that, when we carefully enter into an examination of this kind of theoretical structure of birth, we are able to surmise the reason why Shinran had to speak of birth in terms of "entry into the stage of true settlement in this life"⁵² from the standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism. His perspective was entirely different from the viewpoints of the discussions that have been undertaken traditionally, and even now.

I have attempted in this article to comprehend the theoretical structure of birth, based upon the explications in T'an-luan's *Commentary*, as well as through a review of the literature setting out the traditional viewpoints regarding them.⁵³ Further, by going beyond T'an-luan, I have sought to examine how birth relates to religious existence in which the present existence of the self fundamentally becomes this present existence. If, as a result, I am able to receive the reader's critical response, I would be extremely grateful.

Translated by David Matsumoto

NOTES

1. Originally published in Japanese as “*Ōjō no genriteki kōzō: Donran no innesshōgi wo konkyo to shite,*” in *Shinshūgaku* 50 (1965): pp. 57–81. The text of this article and, unless otherwise noted, all of the quoted passages have been translated into English by David Matsumoto.
2. In his text, *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* [What is religion?] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1961), Nishitani Keiji attempts to overcome this situation in the present day, while at the same time remaining grounded in it.
3. This is the meaning of “*Da sein*” in Heidegger’s philosophy. I have not taken up a consideration of later Heidegger in this article.
4. It might be said that this was Nietzsche’s stance in his text *Der Antichrist*, 1895.
5. T’an-luan, *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land* (Ch. *Ching-t’u-wang-sheng-lun-chu*; Jpn. *Ōjō ronchū*; also *Jōdō Ronchū*, hereinafter *Commentary*), *Taishō*, vol. 40, p. 826; *Jōdo Shinshū seiten shichisohen: Chūshakuban* (hereinafter, *JSS II*), *Jōdo Shinshū seiten hensan iinkai*, ed. (Kyōto: Hongwanji Shuppansha, 1996), p. 47; see also, Hisao Inagaki, trans. *T’an-Luan’s Commentary on Vasubandhu’s Discourse on the Pure Land* (hereinafter, Inagaki trans. *Commentary*) (Kyōto: Nagata Bushōdō, 1998), p. 121.
6. Among Chinese Pure Land thinkers, the question of whether or not the Pure Land idea of “aspiration for birth” is in accord with the Mahayana Buddhist teachings was taken up in T’an-luan’s *Commentary*, Tao-ch’o’s *An-lo-chi*, Yen-shou’s *Wan-shan-t’ung-kuei-chi*, and Wōnhyo’s commentaries on the *Contemplation* and *Amida Sutras*. However, in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, while Chikō’s *Muryōjukyō ronshaku* is based on T’an-luan’s line of thought, there are virtually no references to this issue in Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū*, or Yōkan’s *Ōjōjūin*. For reference, see Ishida Mitsuyuki, “*Chūgoku jōdokyō shisō no kenkyū,*” *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 349 (1955): pp. 38–62.
7. Ishida Mitsuyuki, *Shinran kyōgaku no kisoteki kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1970), p. 95. Further, the unique features of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism as a whole is critically examined through a comparison with Chinese Pure Land thought. *Ibid.*, pp. 235 and 239–40.
8. In Hōnen’s *Kurodani shōnin gotōroku*, vol. 6, *Ōjōyōshū taikō*, Chpt. 7, it states, “*Birth* means that one abandons this world, goes into a lotus blossom in that world and is there born transformed; in the brief instant it takes to close one’s eyes, one comes to sit cross-legged within a lotus

pedestal). Following the sacred assembly, in one thought-moment, one is able to attain birth in the world of ultimate bliss in the western direction. Thus, it is called *birth*" (*Taishō*, vol. 83, p. 133b). As Professor Ishida Mitsuyuki has pointed out (op. cit. pp. 236–7), Hōnen focused solely on the "assertion of the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu, as aspiration to be born in the Pure Land of form." As an inevitable consequence, Kōben (Myōe) criticized this as a "non-Buddhist view that emphasizes the existence of substance" in his *Zaijarin*. This has deep significance as a contemporary issue as well.

9. I believe that this assertion lies in the direction of an "exclusive practice of the Nembutsu, as aspiration to be born in the Pure Land of form."

10. This refers to something like "*die keine*," as set out in Martin Heidegger's, *Die Technik und die Kehre*, 1962. Heidegger explains that the *Wesen* of *Technik* is *Gesell*, which comes to exist as *Gefahr*. After that, it is *sich kehren* to *Geviert*.

11. Vasubandhu, *Treatise on the Pure Land* (Skt. *Sukhāvati-vyūhopadeśa*; Jpn. *Jōdoron*), cited in *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereinafter, *CWS*), (Kyōto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 26–7.

12. *Commentary*, *Taishō*, vol. 40, 827b-c; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 1 (hereinafter, *SSZ I*), (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), pp. 283–4, cited in *CWS*, pp. 27–28.

13. Inagaki trans. *Commentary*, pp. 239–240; *Taishō*, vol. 40, 838c; *SSZI*, p. 327.

14. *Ibid*, pp. 243–4; *Taishō*, vol. 40, 839a-b; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 2 (hereinafter, *SSZ II*), (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), p. 328.

15. In regard to the concept of "salvation," it is easy to call to mind the notion of salvation (σωτηρια in Greek) in modern Christianity. However, today it is doubtful whether or not ("salvation") is able to express truly the notion of "shō, jō" (save) in the same sense that is evident in this passage from the *Larger Sutra*, "I have appeared in the world and expounded the teachings of the way to enlightenment, seeking to save the multitudes of living beings by blessing them with the benefit that is true and real." *SSZ I*, p. 4, *CWS*, p. 8. We could also say that it is the same for such concepts as "tasuku," "tasuke sukū," and "gusai."

16. According to this view, the logic of (A) is in relation to beings of the highest grade of birth, whereas (B) represents a logical proof of the possibility of birth for beings of the lowest grades. The following passages are presented as bases for the argument: the question in passage (B) (b), the explanation of the metaphor of the fire burning fiercely on the ice, the idea of unhindered light in the passage on the gate of praise, the explanation that saying the Name is the act that destroys the darkness of ignorance, and the eightfold questions and answers. However, should the theoretical struc-

ture set out in passage (A) be limited only the birth of the highest grade of beings? Further, would the view that passage (A) constitutes a theoretical principle of birth that is applicable to all beings contradict the explanation found in passage (B) (b)? In relation to that, see the discussion regarding T'an-luan's purpose for developing the questions and answers in this article.

17. Examples of this in Shinran's writings would include the weight given to T'an-luan's *Commentary* (particularly the mutual interfusion of extensive and abbreviated features of the Pure Land and the two aspects of Dharma-body) and the *Nirvana Sutra* (the notion that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature), as well as his emphasis on the logic of transformation found in his explication of the Ocean of the One Vehicle in the Chapter on Practice of his *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, the idea of "identity" (*soku*) as seen in the expressions "samsara is the same as nirvana," and "defiled passions are identical with enlightenment," his explication of the realm of *jinen hōni*, and his notion of the "great bodhi mind of the Pure Land."

18. This tendency can be perceived throughout the logical developments of the three great doctrinal debates in traditional sectarian studies: "the topic of faith and aspiration" (*shingan ron*) "the topic of practice and faith" (*gyōshin ron*), and "the topic of auxiliary versus right practices" (*joshō ron*).

19. If that were not so, would this be going in the direction, in which, for instance, the idea of "the teaching that is difficult to believe," which is mentioned in the concluding portion of the *Amida Sutra* (SSZ I, p. 72), would be said to reveal the "sacred eminence of the dharma"? Here, it all too often happens that a path toward indolence and lethargy, in which a severe attitude regarding the self is forgotten, lies concealed.

20. Standpoint (I) views it as a discussion regarding the "birth" of the commentary master, Vasubandhu. See Ryōe, *Jōdoronchū shūishō*, in *Jōdoshū zensho*, vol. 1, Jōdoshūten kankōkai, ed. (Tokyo: Jōdoshūten Kankōkai, 1928), p. 620; Chikū, *Ronchū yokuge* (Kyoto: Nishimura Kurōemon, 1661), p. 43: "Birth of ordinary beings and bodhisattvas' not being born."

Standpoint (II) views it to be a question based on the false belief in nihilism arising from the deluded passions of sentient beings. See Eun, *Ōjō ronchū fukushūki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 19 (Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin, 1913), p. 27: "It is delusory, and thus empty." Dōon says, in *Ōjō ronchū kikigaki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10 (Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin, 1913): "Because there are beings who are submerged within the void of non-birth as the highest truth of the future, and are disdainful of birth in the Pure Land." See also Daiei, *Ōjō ronchū genyō*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10, p. 218; Sōei, *Ōjō ronchū kaiganki*: "The question reflects a false belief and loses the meaning of

provisionally-called birth, which is through causes and conditions. Hence, it is difficult.”

Standpoint (III) views it as a discussion of “dharmic-virtues.” See Dōshin, *Ōjō ronchū kakuhonketsu*, vol. 1, *Shinshū sōsho*, Shinshū sōsho hensansho, ed., vol. 5 (Kyoto: Maeda Koreyama Ryōwajō Koki Kinenkai, 1929), p. 23.

Standpoint (IV) views it as setting out the basis for the establishment of the essential meaning of birth in the Pure Land, from the standpoint of the fundamental philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism. See Enen, *Ronchū kenjingiki*, in *Shinshū taikei*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Shinshū Tenseki Kankōkai, 1917), p. 60; Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, in his *Ōjōronchū kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 88.

Standpoint (V) views it as taking the position that the teaching of birth in the Pure Land corresponds to the principles of the Mādhyamika eightfold negation, in order to draw followers of the Path of Sages into the Pure Land way. See Jinrei, *Kōjutsu* in the *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 102. Although Jinrei states that, “These two questions and answers fully explicate the Mādhyamika teaching of the eightfold negations,” he does not consider them to be intended to draw followers of the Path of Sages into the Pure Land path. See also Yoshitani Kakuju, *Ōjō ronchū kōhan* (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtani Daigaku, 1936), p. 15.

21. The two standpoints that will be discussed are represented by standpoints (I) and (II) in note 20 above. (Editor’s note.)

22. Enen, *Kenjingiki*, p. 55: “You should know that this addresses the intentions of the commentary master, and those of all beings as well.” Thus, it is related to the births of all beings.

23. Although Jinrei’s stance is also similar to standpoint (II) in note 20 above.

24. Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, p. 89: “The primary school of the Master T’an-luan was the San-lun School.”

25. Ibid.

26. This is point which distinguishes Jinrei’s view from that of standpoint (II).

27. Traditionally, the attribution of the basis of reality or ultimacy took place by way of obedience or non-opposition, as seen in the phrase, “Obey dharma-nature; do not oppose the fundamental dharma.” However, at the locus of the religious existence of the self this attribution would undergo a severe examination in a related way. Here, we see the expression “as the basis,” but just what would this mean at the existential locus? We will discuss this later in the section on the theoretical structure of birth.

28. Ryōchū, *Ronchūki*, vol. 1, in *Jōdoshū zensho*, vol. 1, p. 270; Chikū, *Yokuge*, p. 44.

29. Chikū, *Yokuge*, p. 44.

30. Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, in *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 95. Yamaguchi Susumu states in *Seshin no Jōdoron* (Kyoto: Hōzokan, 1963), p. 96, "In this second question and answer the meaning of the eightfold negation in the opening gatha of the *Mūla-mādhyamika-kārikā* is accepted entirely. It can be surmised that this means that T'an-luan sought to restore and re-establish the "aspiration for birth in the Pure Land" and "birth in the Pure Land" on the basis of the fundamental standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism." This, however, seems to be a rather negative view. We must also ask what the meaning of "restore" would be in the present reality.

31. Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, in *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 95. He expresses the development of the state of the "mutual identity" of the two truths, as this reading of the Chinese characters would imply. However, with such an expression the fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism, which is the meaning of "mutual identity," could not be sufficiently conveyed within the current state of contemporary thought. An examination from a different angle will be required.

32. Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, in *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 94.

33. *Substantia* (Jpn. *jittai*), an unchanging self that assembles and maintains within oneself some generic attributes, is the most important concept considered in the study of comparative thought in Eastern and Western philosophy. If a meticulous study is made of it, through Eastern and Western philosophy, the unique features of both would become all the more clarified, and it would bring about a deeply significant dialogue between them.

34. Sōe states in the *Kaiganki*, "From the perspective of sentient beings, it indicates that birth does not arising due to obstructing passions; from the perspective of the Dharma, it signifies that birth arises through causal conditions." Engetsu states in the *Ōjō ronchū ryakuge*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 16, p. 472, "birth in the sense of feeling and birth through causal conditions."

35. Enen takes more or less the same standpoint, as he defines it in this way, "Birth through causal conditions is the same as being unborn," and goes on to say, "When many diverse conditions come to be harmoniously conjoined, it brings about the birth of all things. Both birth and extinction, arising and destruction, are simply due to causal conditions. Then the future form of birth would immediately become 'unborn.'" *Kenjingiki*, p. 57. However, what is the meaning of "many diverse conditions"? What is the manner of existence of "conditions" themselves? (Are they akin to the essential elements that serve as the basis for the construction of all things?) Further, how does one treat the problem of distinguishing between "emptiness that is known through the analysis of existing things" (*shakkū*) versus "emptiness in which things themselves are seen in their entirety as

empty" (*taikū*)? I believe that this problem represents a departure from the sphere of the content that was traditionally comprehended through the concept of interdependent co-origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*).

36. Ryōchū, *Ronchūki*, vol. 1, in *Jōdoshū zensho*, vol. 1, p. 270.

37. Hōun, *Ōjō ronchū hikki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10, p. 352. Hōun relies upon Ryōchū to criticize Chikū's *Yokuge*. Hōun himself takes the viewpoint of Shōben.

38. Jinrei, *Kōjutsu*, in *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 97.

39. Senmyō, *Ōjō ronchū kikigaki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 11 (Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin, 1913), p. 36.

40. Dōshin, *Kakuhonketsu*, Chpt. 1, *Shinshū sōsho*, vol. 5, p. 23.

41. Senmyō, *Kikigaki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 11, p. 36.

42. Chikū enumerates four meanings for the phrase, "provisionally-called" (*kemyō*) (1) All things are without names, and so are provisionally given names; (2) taking another as provisional and obtaining a name; (3) a provisional appellation; (4) all things provisionally take names and then exist. However, he considers the present notion of "provisionally-named" to mean, "All things are empty and still, and nothing at all has any substance. The Pure Land and this defiled land both are born from causal conditions. Hence, they are referred to as 'provisionally-named'" (*Yokuge*, pp. 45-6).

Enen states, "The *Mūla-mādhyamika-kārikā* explains that 'Dharmature does not exist within the many diverse conditions. Yet, when the many conditions become harmoniously conjoined, they attain a name.'" Based on that he states, "The wood of the bamboo does not possess the form of the house. Hence, the future form of the house is itself the bamboo wood. The house has no form. Thus, 'house' is simply a provisional name" (*Kenjingiki*, vol. 1, p. 57).

Jinrei states, "If substance existed and was born, then birth would exist as birth forever. However, since all things which are born from causal conditions and are provisionally said to exist are empty and without self-nature, it is called 'no-birth'" (*Kōjutsu*, in *Kōsan*, vol. 3, p. 87).

Sōe's view is based on the meaning of "provisional" as it is explained in Sōjō's *Fushinkūron*.

Hōun states, "However, there is no real birth. Since it is just a name, it is called 'provisionally-called birth'" (*Hikki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10, p. 358).

43. In the *Daikanwajiten*, Morohashi Tetsuji, ed., vol. 1 (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1960), p. 853, four meanings are set out for the word "provisionally" (*karini*): a. not real; b. currently not so; c. take in; d. moreover.

44. Senmyō, *Kikigaki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 11, p. 36.

45. Hōun, *Hikki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10, p. 353.

46. Engetsu, *Ryakuge*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 16, p. 472.

47. Ryōchū, *Rinchūki*, in *Jōdoshū zensho*, vol. 1, p. 610; Chikū, *Yokuge*, p. 46; Senmyō, *Kikigaki*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 11, p. 36; Daiei, *Ōjō ronchū genyō*, in *Shinshū zensho*, vol. 10, p. 219: "In this discussion, the dharmic principle is not to be understood in relation to sentient beings. What are we to surmise as to the inconceivable Vow power?"

48. Nishitani Keiji, "Shinran ni okeru toki no mondai" in *Shinran zenshū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Futsūsha, 1958), pp. 76–86. He inquires closely into what he calls the present arising of fundamental time. It is at that locus that it can become an essential issue for the first time.

49. However, Pure Land, birth through causes and conditions, and provisionality are all presupposed in the concept of the "provisionally-called person of this defiled world." Strictly speaking, it is not identical to present existence. "Provisionally-called person of this defiled world" is an expression that is imbued with an inclination toward the Pure Land and birth through causes and conditions. The question of why one could possess this inclination in the midst of present existence must be asked within the ontological structure of present existence itself.

50. Previously, the first meaning of non-birth was comprehended as a negation of being born and dying, which beings perceive as real. Therefore, it can be seen that one should be in accord with direction (a). However, in my view, the negation of beings, which they perceive as real, and being born and dying, which beings perceive as real (as explicated in the first sense of non-birth) is the inevitable consequence of the second meaning of non-birth. I view the negation of being born and dying, which beings perceive as real, as a directionality that arises out of the second sense of non-birth as its basis. I wish to view the first meaning of non-birth as an expression of a deepening self-realization (as a view) of the view in which "sentient beings are perceived as real by ordinary beings."

51. A number of expressions in the *Commentary* include the word "pure," including "the pure ocean of the Tathagata's wisdom" (Fasc. One, the Virtues of the Great Assembly, *SSZ I*, p. 302), "pure light" (Fasc. One, Virtues of Form, *SSZII*, p. 288), "birth of non-birth through the pure Primal Vow" (Fasc. Two, Chpt. On the Objects of Contemplation, *SSZ I*, p. 327), "the pure Buddha land" (Fasc. Two, Chpt. On the Fulfillment of the Vow, *SSZ I*, p. 343), and "the Name, which is like a pure mani jewel" (Fasc. Two, Chpt. On the Objects of Contemplation, *SSZ I*, p. 328). In addition, "pure" is often affixed to "wisdom," "light," "Primal Vow," "Buddha land," and "Name." "Purity" in these cases is not simply an expression of the character or nature of those things. Rather, it must be understood as having the meaning of "purification" (*vyavadāna*), in the sense of the negation the

attachment to substance, as well as the negation of false and deluded views, which form the basis of the present existence of ordinary beings.

52. Two viewpoints exist. The first views the assurance of birth realized by the practitioner whose faith is settled in the stage of true settlement as being the meaning of "they then attain birth." The second view recognizes an additional aspect in which the practitioner who has entered the stage of true settlement is said to have already realized birth in this life. What is important in the present case is that Shinran's position was to view birth (from the perspective of either standpoint and attained by whatever means) as being somehow related to the locus of "the stage of true settlement in this life." (Here, "this life" does not refer simply to the relative notion of the present being.) Further, it could be said that Shinran's phrase, "Concerning birth, the *Larger Sutra* states, 'All receive the body of naturalness (*jinen*) or of emptiness, the body of boundlessness,'" (*True Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, Chpt. On the True Buddha and Land, SSZ II, p. 141, CWS, p. 203) can also be truly viewed from this standpoint.

53. For the most part, interpretations and criticisms of the *Commentary* during T'an-luan's era have not been included in this article. Neither, have we engaged in a direct examination of texts such as the *Mūla-mādhyamika-kārikā*, *Dvadaśa-dvara*, or *Prajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, which make mention of "this principle is the gate of contemplating sameness and difference; it is discussed in detail in the treatises." While this examination should be based upon the standpoint of the *Kārikā*, the notion of *pratītya-samutpāda* does not reach perfect completion in that text.