

Kōgatsuin Jinrei's "Introduction to *The Ronchū Lectures*"

Introduction and
Translation by
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KŌGATSUIN JINREI (1749–1817) regarded the systematizer of the "East Academy" (i.e., the academy of Higashi Hongwanji), was the epitome of the Academy Lecturer, the highest title attainable by the son of a temple family during the Edo period. A prolific writer he produced upward of a hundred works, some of which are read and studied even today, such as the *Ronchū Lectures* introduced here. He was also a popular speaker who traveled the country to give talks, a strategy that no doubt helped to promote the Academy, as well recruit new students from among the thousands of Pure Land temples in Japan.

Early on in his career, Jinrei was just another name among hundreds of contenders. There were people like Hōrei (1748–1816) who was a year older and had similar ambitions but different ideas. There was also Senmyō (1749–1812) who was the same age and with whom he would later work closely. But it was Jinrei who had a knack for bringing people together on academic matters about which they could not at first agree. He thus excelled in the role of systematizer not only by his writings but by these personal qualities as a mediator. By this time Jinrei became Senior Lecturer and his popularity must have been at its zenith. One record shows the student enrollment in his Suitensha society in Kyoto had over a thousand names at one point. Sheer numbers alone guaranteed his lineage would somehow survive into future generations, as indeed it has.

The interest Jinrei had in promoting Shinshū literacy among the people is also seen in his role of co-editing with Senmyō an affordable, easy-to-read version of the Shinshū teachings called *Shinshū kana shōgyō*, completed in 1812, a work commemorating the 550th year of Shinran's passing. This thirteen volume edition contained the exact same selection of thirty-nine Shinshū works as in the elegantly printed thirty-one volume *Shinshū hōyō* published by the Nishi Hongwanji in 1765. However, its compact size no doubt contributed to its popularity among Shinshū followers for many generations, until it was replaced by the modern versions used now.

The short talk that follows is the introductory portion from Jinrei's voluminous *Lectures on [T'an-luan's] Commentary on [Vasubandhu's]*

Treatise, which in the modern Hōzōkan edition totals over seven hundred pages. Its size notwithstanding, it has undergone numerous printings, at least five times in the past century alone, the most recent edition in 1981 being supplied with an index to the work. Its popularity is due in part to the fact that the published text of these talks are in plain, modern Japanese, not Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*), and scholars interested in this text will find them highly accessible.

There are literally hundreds of commentaries on T'an-luan's *Commentary* that have been produced by Japanese Pure Land scholars over the centuries, attesting to the strategic importance of this work. During the Kamakura period (1185–1333) most of the commentaries were by Jōdoshū scholars. With the establishment of the two Hongwanjis in Kyoto at the start of the Tokugawa period in 1603 and the subsequent formation of their respective Academies, the Nishi Hongwanji being the first in 1638, *Ronchū* commentaries by Jōdo Shinshū scholars began to appear as well.

The *Ronchū* has a special place in Jōdo Shinshū because of the emphasis Shinran places on it. Interestingly, the earliest sample we have of a printed version of the *Ronchū* in Japan is a copy with Shinran's annotation; that is, it is an undated woodblock print edition of unknown provenance to which Shinran, in 1256, indicated where to parse the unpunctuated medieval Sino-Japanese text. It is also from this time on that *Ronchū* commentaries began to appear in the Japanese Pure Land community.

The number of modern studies on this text are considerable, with the lion's share being done by Nishi Hongwanji-related scholars. At the same time it should be noted that modern Buddhist scholarship in Japan has always relied heavily on early Tokugawa studies by scholars such as Jinrei. While all of what he has to say may not stand up to modern scholarship, much of what he says presents the *Ronchū* in a way relevant to understanding the larger textual context in which it appears.

As to why T'an-luan's *Commentary* is so important to the Pure Land tradition, as a commentary on a discourse traditionally associated with the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* it brings out in simple terms the significance of the latter. The *Commentary* clearly provides categories that express this Other Power-generated movement from the world of Buddha to the world of believer reflected in this numinous experience of the infinite Buddha light.

Introduction to *The Lectures on T'an-luan's Commentary* ¹

by
Kōgatsuin Jinrei

This work, [T'an-luan's] *Commentary on the Discourse [Ronchū]*, is the master key that unlocks the secrets of the Pure Land teaching, it is the hinge on which the doors of the Shin school turn. Those who seek to enter the portals of the Pure Land must make every effort to come to terms with this document.

First of all, the translation of the *Discourse on the Pure Land* [attributed to Vasubandhu] in the Land of Han [China] was done by the Tripitaka Master Bodhiruci during the Northern Wei. He produced his translation in 529, when Master T'an-luan (476–542) was in his fifty-fourth year.

If we look at the *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Master T'an-luan's taking refuge in the Pure Land way through Bodhiruci's teaching occurred in the two or three year period when [Vasubandhu's] *Discourse on the Pure Land* was being translated. Thus it was through receiving instruction from the Tripiṭaka Master that [T'an-luan] composed this *Commentary on the Discourse*.

This *Commentary* came into being when Japan was under the reign of her twenty-[sixth] emperor Keitai. Thus it is truly an ancient treatise, and it is sometimes said that, among the various commentaries on discourses, this must be the first, or so we are led to think. But this is not the case.

It is said that, in Tsan-ning's *Brief History of Monks*, upper scroll [kan], the very first commentary on a Buddhist sūtra in the Land of Han was on Saṃghavarman's translation of the *Dharma Mirror Sūtra* during the time of Sun-ch'uan (182–252) in the Wu dynasty. However, it would seem that the first commentary on a discourse [rather than a sūtra] was unknown [to Tsan-ning], as the *Brief History of Monks* has no such record.

In the sixth scroll of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* of the Liang it says that someone named T'an-ying wrote a treatise on the *Mūlamadhyamaka Śāstra*. T'an-ying was one of the ten philosophers of the Kumārajīva (350–409) assembly. Kumārajīva died sixty-seven years before Master T'an-luan. Generally, Kumārajīva rendered a considerable number of works, the Tripitaka Master translating the *Three Treatises*, the *Mahāprajñāparamitā Upadeśa*, the *Daśabhūmivibhāṣā Śāstra*, the *Sattayasiddhi Śāstra*, and so on. Thus, it is impossible to imagine that the

[heralded] four or ten philosophers of the Kumārajīva assembly did not produce commentaries on these discourses.

We can surmise from this that this *Commentary on the Discourse* is not the very first of a vast number of such commentaries. At the same time it goes without saying that this *Commentary on the Discourse* is indeed an ancient commentary. In later generations, there is none among such commentaries that is earlier than the *Commentary on the Discourse*. As a consequence, although Ching-ying [Hui-yüan, 523–592] and T'ien-t'ai [Chih-i, 538–598] were his contemporaries in the same world, by dint of the fact he was their senior by a great number of years, these masters all relied on him.

In the introductory dedication of Ching-ying [Hui-yüan]'s *Lectures on Ten Stages*, in one scroll, there is a passage thought to be modeled after the *Commentary on the Discourse*, where it gives the analogy of the filial son [who thinks of his parents] and the loyal retainer [who thinks of his lord]. Further, in T'ien-t'ai [Chih-i]'s *Passages from the Lotus*, scroll 1, section 1, it says, "T'an-luan says," and cites the passage, "Fine distinctions are like smoke in the wind, what is hard to polish ends up as so much dust blown away." While these are not the words of the *Commentary on the Discourse*, it appears that they were Master T'an-luan's words from his commentary on the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*. This is a metaphor to the effect that, if we were to translate all of the sūtra literature, there are so many fine distinctions they make that we stand in danger of getting lost in the tangle of words and losing the sense of what these passages mean.

The reason why these words are cited here is the *Lotus Treatise* of Master Yun-fa of Kuang-che is so finely divided into categories, where it presents evidence that breaks new ground it cites Chang-an [561–632, the fourth T'ien-t'ai patriarch]. In the third scroll of the *Subtle Praise of the Lotus*, by T'zu-en [Kuei-ki, 632–682], it directly cites from the *Treatise's* latter scroll on upaya. From this we can surmise that the *Commentary on the Discourse* was not adopted exclusively by the patriarchs and masters of the Pure Land way such as Hsi-hua [Tao-ch'o, 562–645] and Kuang-ming [Shan-tao, d. 662, 681]. We can see evidence that it impressed the various eminent masters of the Sui and T'ang and was adopted by them.

But what strikes us as rather strange is the fact that, when it comes to the *The Essentials of Birth* of Yokawa [Genshin, 942–1017] of our [native] Japan, [Vasubandhu's] *Discourse on the Pure Land* is quoted but [T'an-luan's] *Commentary on the Discourse* is not cited even once. From the standpoint of our [Jōdo Shinshū] school, in order to preserve the transmission of the seven eminent patriarchs, the *Commentary on the Discourse* should be cited but it is not. As I ponder the matter, it would seem that the *Commentary on the Discourse* was at that time not included among the works in the sūtra collection transmitted to this Northern Citadel [Mount Hiei] of Japan, hence Yokawa [Genshin] had no opportunity to examine it.

In this regard, if we look to a cause we should consider the sūtra catalogues in the Land of Han. Firstly, in the thirteenth scroll of the *Record of Transmission of the Three Treasures*, [by Fei Ch'ang-fang, late 6th century,] there is the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, in one scroll. While this would normally indicate the *Discourse on the Pure Land* alone without the *Commentary on the Discourse*, the possibility exists that this is a compilation of both the *Discourse* and the *Commentary* together. The reason I say this is because in the [lexicon] *Hui-lin Yin-i*, scroll 47, [by Hui-lin, 737–820,] at the beginning of the entry there is an explanation of the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, scroll 1, but if we look toward the end it includes an explanation of a passage from [T'an-luan's] *Commentary on the Discourse*. From this we can assume that the *Commentary* as a whole is a running commentary on the translation of the original *Discourse*.

I would especially point out that since the *Commentary* cites the original *Discourse* in its entirety leaving out not a single word, it would seem that despite the title, *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, it is a work that contains the *Commentary* as well. From this we can speculate that the title *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life* in the *Record of Transmission of the Three Treasures* could well be a work that contains the original *Discourse* and the *Commentary* together.

Next, in the fifth scroll of the *Sūtra Catalogue of Schools of the Sui*, [by Fa-ching, ca. 594,] the original *Discourse* is listed as the “*Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, one scroll,” and then in scroll 6, the *Commentary* is listed as “Annotation to the Verses in *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, one scroll, as explained by T'an-luan.” From this piece of evidence it is clarified that, during the Sui, this *Commentary* was transmitted as a document contained in the sūtra canon.

Now, it is noteworthy that in the sūtra records of the T'ang, in the *Great T'ang Record of the Contents of the Canon* of Tao-hsüan (596–667) of Nan-shan the *Commentary on the Discourse* is mentioned. To be precise, in the *Record of the Contents of the Canon*, scroll 1, it gives the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* translated by An Shih-kao [ca. 148] of the Latter Han and then in a detailed note it says that “śramaṇa T'an-luan is the author of a commentary on a discourse explaining this.” Since this “commentary on a discourse” is a commentary to the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, the mention appears at the end of the first *Sūtra of Infinite Life* [translation]. But this is not all that the Nan-shan work tells us. Toward the end of the entry on the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life* that appears later on, there is a statement that would be inappropriate to append to the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* itself, to the effect that in the latter portion of the fourth scroll of the *Record of the Contents of the Canon*, in the *Record of Bodhiruci of Wei*, it says: “With regard to the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life* in 532 a monk made a written record of [his] discussions [with Bodhiruci].” Fur-

ther, at scroll 8, it says "*Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*," and in the latter part of scroll 9, it says it was "eight pages."

Beyond these, we have the *Descriptive Catalogue of Translated Sūtras*, scroll 4, [by Ching-mai, ca. 665], and the *Catalogue of Printed Works of the Buddhist Schools*, scroll 6, [by Ming-ts'uan, ca. 695] that say there was a *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, a one scroll work of eight pages. Also, in scroll 13 [of the same work, as well as the *K'ai-yuan Record*, scroll 6 and 12, latter portion, [by Chih-sheng, 669–740] and the *Chen-yuan Record*, scroll 22, [by Enshō, ca. 778], all of them have "*Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life*, one scroll," indicating the original *Discourse* but not indicating the *Commentary on the Discourse*.

However, in those entries on the *Discourse on the Sūtra of Infinite Life* where the number of pages is indicated, all of them say this is "a one scroll work of eight pages." If this is a work of eight pages, then it cannot be the *Discourse* compiled together with the *Commentary on the Discourse*. This would seem to indicate that the *Commentary on the Discourse* was left out of the [sūtra] repositories in the T'ang. But at least until the Chen-yuan era [785–805] of the T'ang, there is evidence that the *Commentary on the Discourse* enjoyed a vogue. As I mentioned before that the *Commentary* is found in the *Hui-lin Yin-i* of the T'ang. In *Yin-i*, scroll 47, there are four places where the *Commentary on the Discourse* is cited. However, judging from the sūtra catalogues, as explained above, it seems to have been left out of the [sūtra] repositories, as the *Commentary on the Discourse* fell from popularity and in the end became obsolete.

In the present collections, we find the *Discourse on the Pure Land* in the Koryo, Sung, and Ming collections, but not the *Commentary on the Discourse*. However, there is something that the late Kaitetsu-in [Zuie, d. 1782] used to say: that we should be happy the *Commentary on the Discourse* was not included in the Sung and Ming collections. The reason he said this was the *Discourse on the Pure Land* in the Ming collection is full of omissions, hence it was a good thing the *Commentary on the Discourse* was not included in the Sung and Ming collections otherwise it too would have ended up that way.

All of the texts of the translations of sūtras and commentaries that were done during the years of unrest of the Five Dynasties period (907–960) at the end of the T'ang are corrupted and have mistakes. It is important to keep this in mind when reading those texts. This *Commentary on the Discourse* [perhaps] was lost during the disturbances of the Five Dynasties, or it might have already become obsolete before that time. By the time the Great masters Jikaku [Ennin, 794–864] and Chishō [Enchin, 814–891] entered the T'ang in its final years, the *Commentary on the Discourse* was no longer in circulation. This is perhaps the reason why it was not brought to Japan from the continent. Since the *Commentary on the Discourse* was not transmitted to the [sūtra] collection of our Northern Citadel [Mount Hiei],

this would seem to be the reason why the Venerable Genshin was unable to examine it and thus was unable to cite it.

On the other hand, if we ask when it was that [T'an-luan's] *Commentary* reached Japan, it was transmitted to the Southern Capital [Nara] for the first time at the beginning of the T'ang. Evidence of this is seen during the reign of her fortieth emperor, Tenmu (673–686).² During the Hakuho period (672–685), Dharma Master Chikō (ca. 673) of the Gangōji temple in Nara wrote the *Record on the Pure Land*, 5 scrolls [no longer extant]. This record by Chikō was made after he examined [T'an-luan's] *Commentary on the Discourse*.

Thus, in the *Origin of the Pure Land Lineages* by the Venerable Gyōnen (1240–1321) of Tōdaiji we can see a note that says, "Dharma Master Chikō, a monk of the Gangōji of Japan, made a five-scroll *Record on the Treatise on Birth*. As he adopted the principal points made by T'an-luan, it was through T'an-luan that Chikō was able to arrive at an understanding of the Three Treatise [school]." From this we can glean that Chikō examined the *Commentary on the Discourse* and grasped its principles to write his *Record on the Pure Land*. At that time, when Japan was in the Hakuho period, in the Land of Han the T'ang had just begun, and the Great Master Shan-tao was still alive. It was from that time that the *Commentary on the Discourse* was transmitted to the Southern Capital [Nara] of Japan.

It occurs to me that this *Commentary on the Discourse* made the crossing from the the Land of Han along with other treatises of the Three Treatise school. Of the Eight [Buddhist] Schools of Japan, the Three Treatise school is the oldest of the transmissions. The first transmission to Japan was from Dharma Master Ekan of the Koryo [Korea] who received a direct transmission from the Great Master Chia-hsiang [Chi-ts'ang, 549–623] of the T'ang. The grand disciple of Dharma Master Ekan was Dharma Master Chizō who again entered the T'ang to receive the transmission of the Three Treatise school. The disciple of Chizō was Dharma Master Chikō of the Gangōji [in Nara].

In the Pure Land tradition, it is said the Great Master T'an-luan was first a follower of the Three Treatise school but abandoned it for the Pure Land way upon [hearing what] Bodhiruci had to teach. Before we too readily agree that this indeed must have been the case, we must look at the fact that the Three Treatise school of the Southern Capital regarded Master T'an-luan as a teacher in their school. The reason I say this is because we have a person like Dharma Master Chikō of the Three Treatise school who writes a five-scroll *Record on the Pure Land*, and while it is acknowledged that Master T'an-luan also believed in the Pure Land way, ultimately he is to be regarded as a teacher of the Three Treatise school. Thus, [Gyōnen's] *Origin of the Pure Land Lineages* says, "It was through T'an-luan that Chikō was able to arrive at an understanding of the Three Treatise [school]." Seen from this perspective we can glean the fact that this *Commentary on*

the Discourse was transmitted to the Southern Capital long ago as one of the works of the Three Treatise school. I think this gives a fairly accurate account of the route by which the *Commentary on the Discourse* arrived in Japan.

After that, the *Ten Causes of Birth* was composed by Vinaya Master Eikan [1033–1111; also known as Yōkan], who belonged to the Tōdaiji in the Southern Capital, hence was another member of the Three Treatise school. It is said that the Three Treatise school of the Gangōji was later transmitted to the Tōdaiji. As a result we find the *Commentary on the Discourse* cited in Eikan's *Ten Causes of Birth*.

Now, during the age of the original Founder [Hōnen, 1133–1212], the *Commentary on the Discourse* was flourishing in the world, and we see it cited in the *Senchakushū*. At that time, because the original *Discourse* was referred to as the *Discourse on the Pure Land* as well as the *Discourse on Birth*, as seen in [Genshin's] *The Essentials of Birth*. Likewise, with the *Commentary on the Discourse*, from ancient times it was referred to as either the *Pure Land Commentary on the Discourse* or the *Birth Commentary on the Discourse*; in [Eikan's] *Ten Causes of Birth* it is called T'an-luan's *Pure Land Commentary on the Discourse* and in [Hōnen's] *Senchakushū* it is T'an-luan's *Birth Commentary on the Discourse*. At times the original Founder [Hōnen] cites from the *Commentary on the Discourse*, but by and large the *Senchakushū* relies on Shan-tao almost exclusively to explain matters, though [Hōnen] might have used the *Commentary on the Discourse* for his own personal reference without using passages from it.

Now, in the case of the Founder, [Shinran] Shōnin of our [Jōdo Shinshū] school, as has been said from long before, everything depends on the Seven Patriarchs, especially on T'an-luan, for it is especially on Master T'an-luan that the principle of our school is established. For that reason in the *Kōmonrui* [Shinran's work, popularly known as the *Kyōgyōshinshō*] the *Commentary on the Discourse* is cited some thirty-eight times. The *Commentary on the Discourse*, in its two scrolls, upper and lower, is cited virtually in its entirety in the *Kōmonrui*. It can be said that the *Commentary on the Discourse* holds the key to understanding what it truly means to be Jōdo Shinshū, the basic guidelines on which our school models itself being laid down in the Founder's *Kyōgyōshinshō*. The two kinds of transference for going forth and returning, the four cardinal points of teaching, practice, reception, and realization—all of these principles come from [T'an-luan's] *Commentary on the Discourse* that deliberates these matters in depth. Therefore, those who deem themselves heirs to the present tradition must apply themselves to understanding the *Commentary on the Discourse*.

NOTES

1. Kōgatsuin Jinrei, *Chūron koen*, vol. 1, in *Jōdo ronchū kōgi* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1973), pp. 1–5.
2. Editors' note: The designation of Temmu as the fortieth emperor of Japan is according to the old count and is not supported historically.

