

Standing Alone in the Faith of Non-Obedience: Suzuki Daisetsu and Pure Land Buddhism

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Introduction

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE of influential thinkers and writers like Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) is measured not only in their printed legacy but in the cultural influence of their ideas upon its listeners and readers. In this sense, D. T. Suzuki, as he is usually known in the West, can be said to have played a unique role as one of the most influential “patriarchs of transmission” of Buddhism to the West in the modern period. Because of his position as the first and for many years the only Japanese scholar and practitioner of Zen who wrote frequently and coherently in English, today people speak of “Suzuki Zen” and among Western scholars of the Zen tradition, one could even point to a line between Suzuki and post-Suzuki writing that slowly emerged in the 1980s under the impact of Western scholars who came to Japan to study under post-Suzuki figures like Yanagita Seizan and Ishii Shūdō. However, any appraisal of Suzuki’s influence must take into consideration differences between his reception in Japan and in the West. Considering the body of contemporary writing about Suzuki in the light of his writings in both Japanese and English, one is struck by the nearly complete absence of discussion in English about his writings on Pure Land Buddhism.¹ While Suzuki is considered primarily a student of the literature and culture of the Zen tradition in both Japan and the West, he also devoted considerable time to essays on Pure Land themes throughout his career that have been widely read in Japan, very little of which has found its way into English to date. In this regard, it is

¹ One exception is the recent work by Elisabetta Porcu (2008).

worth noting that one of the few Japanese scholars to attempt a biographical sketch of Suzuki was Bandō Shōjun, a scholar of Pure Land literature.² In this essay I will first show how Suzuki regarded Pure Land rather than Zen as the dominant form of Japanese religious consciousness and then offer an analysis of how he understood some of the more potent signs, symbols, and doctrines of that form of Buddhism.

Ultimately it is this last question—Suzuki’s own religious perspective—on which I hope to shed some light. I will examine four topics among the many aspects of Suzuki’s fascination with Pure Land thought that are relevant to that query: (1) the role of the study of Shinran within Suzuki’s oeuvre, (2) his investigations of the problematic of *jiriki* 自力 and *tariki* 他力, (3) issues connected to his incomplete yet landmark translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証 by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), and (4) his controversial decision to translate *hongan* 本願, the “vows” or “resolutions” (Skt. *pūrva-praṇidhāna*) associated with Amitābha (Amida)³ Buddha, as “prayers.”

The Appeal of Shinran

Although a thorough study of Suzuki’s life and work that critically established the place of his Pure Land writings within all of his works would surely be most fruitful, it would be a Herculean task considering the extraordinary volume of writings he has left us: the recent and expanded edition of his complete works—only those in the Japanese language—comes to thirty-eight volumes. Although the first publication by Suzuki that explicitly deals with Pure Land Buddhism was a co-translation of Shinran’s biography that was published in 1911, there is evidence of Suzuki’s attraction to Pure Land thought as early as the turn of that century.

In 1902, Suzuki publishes a short article in Japanese in which he expounds on three passages from the Chinese Buddhist canon,⁴ one of which mentions the word *hongan-riki* 本願力 to describe the working of the dharma

² See Bandō 1993.

³ The name “Amida” is the Japanese pronunciation of 阿弥陀, pronounced Amituo or Amito in Mandarin. This form is an abbreviated transliteration of the names Amitābha or Amitāyus, both of which refer to the same buddha. Since this article is primarily concerned with Japanese language discourse, hereafter I will use the Japanese pronunciation Amida in reference to this buddha.

⁴ “Dokkyō sansoku” 読經三則, originally published in the journal *Shin bukkyō* 新佛教 vol. 3, no. 10, pp. 285–288, and reprinted in SDZ at vol. 30, pp. 289–91.

body in order to spiritually aid living beings. Although this is a use of the term in a generic sense, Suzuki's exposition on the passage is revealing in that he associates this generic *hongan* of all buddhas with the particular *hongan* of Amida Buddha. Another remarkable aspect of this article is Suzuki's critical reference to the translation of this phrase into English as "the Power of the former prayer(s) made by the Tathāgata"⁵—a rather odd translation for this concept which I will discuss in some detail below. In addition, in 1909, he publishes a fifteen-page article in English entitled "The Development of Mahayana Buddhism"⁶ in the first volume of *The Buddhist Review*, the journal of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain. There he contrasts *karma* and *pariṇāma* (Jpn. *ekō* 回向), commenting that whereas *karma* is unrelenting, *pariṇāma* is accepting. In the 1902 piece, he comments that "those who believe in *tariki*" are those who believe in the Christian doctrine of "Let thy Will be done," a view that echoes his later comment about *pariṇāma* being "accepting," itself a statement that assumes Shinran's understanding of the term. In these two early works, we can see his sympathy with the Pure Land stance that living beings simply cannot overcome their karmic weight and are overjoyed to find a salvific force that aids them.

Suzuki's interest increasingly turns toward a creative interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism beginning in 1938, running through the war years, and into the postwar period. The volume of his writings about Zen from the 1940s onwards is modest by comparison to his works on Pure Land. This shift toward Pure Land is exemplified by two of his publications that appeared in December of 1948. The first is a thirty-two page booklet on Zen in English entitled *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*.⁷ The second is a 400-page book on Pure Land in Japanese entitled *Myōkōnin* 妙好人, or Pure Land "saints"—one of the most important topics in Japanese Pure Land.⁸ Today, Suzuki's work on the *myōkōnin* is considered a classic, and one of his major contributions to Japanese Buddhist scholarship.

His longer pieces of writing (more than ten pages) on Zen themes in Japanese after the war are Japanese translations of works that he wrote originally in English, such as *Kegon no kenkyū* 華嚴の研究 (1955) which

⁵ SDZ, vol. 30, p. 290.

⁶ Suzuki 1909.

⁷ Probably one of the first publications on this theme in English.

⁸ We can infer that he worked on this material during the war since his first publication on *myōkōnin* came in 1947.

includes a translation of a long essay from *Essays in Zen, Third Series* (1934), or *Zen to seishinteki bunseki* 禪と精神的分析 (1960), a translation of *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (also 1960). Although significant works by Suzuki on Zen continued to appear in English, many of them are actually revised versions of earlier publications. Even his *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959), which garnered so much recent attention, is an expanded edition of his 1938 original. Suzuki's philological work on texts important in the Zen tradition, such as the *Laṅkāvatāra* and *Gandhavyūha* sutras or the Shenhui 神会 (684–758) and Huineng 慧能 (638–713) materials from Dunhuang 敦煌 all date from the prewar period. However after the war, his major works are the English translation of Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* (1973) and modern Japanese translations of the diaries of Asahara Saichi 浅原才市 (1850–1932), one of the *myōkōnin*. The lectures he gave at the New York Buddhist Academy in 1957 and 1958 were all on Pure Land themes, and were later published as the book *Shin Buddhism*. This book has been reprinted a number of times and the Japanese translation continues to sell well today. It has also been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Chinese.

In our attempt to discern the role of Pure Land Buddhism in Suzuki's work, we are rather fortunate that Suzuki himself reflected on the significance and role of the Pure Land teachings within his work *Nihonteki reisei* 日本の靈性 (Japanese Spirituality, 1944).⁹ In these essays, Suzuki elaborated his view of the nature of Japanese religious consciousness. Suzuki's project was not a retrospective on his own work, but these essays nonetheless serve as a guide to his thinking about the meaning of Buddhism and Shinto (and Christianity) within the context of, or even as a product of, Japanese cultural history. Although they predate his most extensive Pure Land writings (most published in the early 1960s), these essays offer a useful and, for Suzuki, an unusually critical perspective on Japanese Buddhism as a whole and the place of Pure Land Buddhism within it.

Despite Suzuki's renown at the time as a champion of Zen, in chapter after chapter of *Nihonteki reisei*, he repeatedly states that for him it is the thought of Shinran and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) that expresses Japanese religious consciousness most deeply. When Suzuki discusses Kamakura-period Zen in *Nihonteki reisei*, he does so only in broad, general terms, discussing only the thought of Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) and even then

⁹ Volume Eight of *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* (hereafter SDZ). In 1972 the Japanese Ministry of Education, with support from UNESCO, published a translation by Norman Waddell under the title *Japanese Spirituality*.

only by comparison with Shinran. By contrast, his discussion of Hōnen and Shinran is detailed and lengthy, and includes their disciples and the development of their lineages.

Assumptions that Suzuki was a “purveyor of Zen” are deep-seated in the West, and *Nihonteki reisei* has been used to espouse this view. Robert Sharf contends in his essay, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” that Suzuki claimed “Zen and Zen alone constitutes the heart of Japanese spirituality”¹⁰ by citing the essays in *Nihonteki reisei*. Sharf’s critique of the *nihonjinron* 日本人論 nationalism in *Nihonteki reisei* is well-argued and often cited and although I agree with his view that Suzuki makes a number of irrational claims in those essays that does indeed reflect a form of religious nationalism, I cannot agree with the inferences he makes regarding the place of Zen in these essays, and consequently about the kind of nationalism favored by Suzuki.

The thesis of *Nihonteki reisei* is that truly Japanese religiosity emerged in the Kamakura period. This is outlined in an Introduction and then restated and developed in detail over four chapters which are the heart of the book. Quoting only from the problematic translation *Japanese Spirituality* and only from the Introduction, Sharf fails to mention that Zen has a decidedly minor role in the book and in Suzuki’s overall thesis. Even the discussion on Zen in the Introduction is cursory and reaches no more than two pages, while the discussion on Pure Land that follows is covered at three times that length and in much more detail.¹¹ Chapters 1 and 2 then discuss developments in Japanese religion in the Heian and Kamakura periods with the focus clearly on the rise of Pure Land and nenbutsu. Chapter 3 is on Hōnen and his concept of nenbutsu, and Chapter 4 is on the Pure Land saints known as *myōkōnin*. When Sharf quotes Suzuki’s statements expressing the prevailing view of his generation that there was a dawning of a new religious consciousness in the Kamakura period, once again he incorrectly glosses those statements as being about Zen whereas Suzuki’s focus is clearly on Pure Land. Sharf does this most explicitly when he alters a quotation from Suzuki about the deep imprint that Kamakura-period religiosity has left on the Japanese psyche by adding his own Zen hermeneutic in brackets; to wit: “Today, seven hundred years after [*the blossoming of Zen, Zen*] has come in substance to be the basis for the Japanese character, thought, religious

¹⁰ Sharf 1995, p. 155, n. 71.

¹¹ Even in Chapter 2, Zen is only mentioned in very brief terms concluding with a promise to revisit this topic at another time.

faith, and esthetic taste.”¹² But this insertion is unwarranted: this section of *Nihonteki reisei* that Sharf is quoting¹³ is not specifically about Zen. Rather, it is about the spirituality of Kamakura-period Buddhism as a whole. And following this, when Suzuki rhetorically asks how he would characterize Japanese religions in the Kamakura period, he answers by listing Pure Land Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Nichiren 日蓮 Buddhism, and Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道, *in that order*. Clearly there is no hint of the primacy of Zen anywhere in this scheme.

And if one might think that this focus on Pure Land reflects Suzuki only when writing for a Japanese audience and that Sharf’s reading reflects Suzuki’s leanings when writing for the West, compare with a similar essay written in English entitled “Japanese Thought,” published in 1952 in a two-volume encyclopedia of philosophy edited by S. Radhakrishnan. Here is how Suzuki described the new religiosity of the Kamakura period in that piece:

It was in the thirteenth century that the Japanese masses were really awakened to the religious consciousness and along with it a philosophical reflection on reality. . . . The fact is that the teaching of Hōnen and Shinran really and truly echoes what was then moving in the hearts and minds of the Japanese people generally. It was not their artificial production, it was simply the response to the spiritual needs of the people in those days. Buddhism then became the religion of the Japanese who re-created it to satisfy their requirements. The Pure Land School of Buddhism is the creation of the Japanese religious genius.¹⁴

In this essay Zen is not even mentioned, suggesting a further refinement of the Pure Land focus in *Nihonteki reisei* right after the war. He does discuss Bashō and the concept of *sabi*, but neither are identified as Zen. If anything, Suzuki might be taken to task for some bias toward Pure Land in both these examples; but after reading *Nihonteki reisei* and “Japanese Thought,” it is exceedingly difficult to see how one could infer that Suzuki felt “true” Japanese spirituality was about Zen.¹⁵ One reason why I want

¹² Sharf 1995, p. 129.

¹³ SDZ 8, p. 51.

¹⁴ Suzuki 1952, pp. 600–601.

¹⁵ In fact, this conflation of Zen and Japanese Buddhism is not limited to Sharf’s comments on Suzuki, but occurs in Sharf’s references to Zeami 世阿弥 (1363–1443) and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) as well.

to clarify the role that Pure Land Buddhism played in Suzuki's religious worldview is that the English translation of *Nihonteki reisei* and the Radhakrishnan volume have both been out of print for decades but the view of Suzuki as promoting a form of Zen nationalism remains widespread.¹⁶

It goes without saying that the scholars of Japanese Buddhism are in a continuous process of re-assessing its history as new materials are discovered and the authority perceived in methodologies and theories of interpretation ebb and flow. I mention this because in reading *Nihonteki reisei*, it is important to keep in mind that Suzuki was writing from essentially a prewar perspective and thus this work (and others) embody notions that a great many people find outdated and even embarrassing today, more than sixty years later. He is quite dismissive of Heian-period Buddhism, for example, as overly intellectualized, overly ritualized, and at times he uses the word "feminine" to describe Heian culture and thought. His usage is not explicitly pejorative, but insofar as he contrasts Heian Buddhism with the new forms of Buddhism that arose in the Kamakura period which Suzuki finds to be much more refreshing, honest, spiritually compelling and "masculine," the gender-bias implication is obvious. Suzuki's essay reflects the prevailing opinion of prewar scholarship that hailed the new schools of Kamakura-period Buddhism as wholly different and somehow more "Japanese." That perspective is *de rigueur* for his generation. What is unexpected and noteworthy for many, however, is his elevation of Hōnen and Shinran as the quintessential spokesmen for this new religious outlook—rather than famous Zen figures like Dōgen, Keisan 瑩山 (1268–1325), or Eisai 榮西 (1141–1215), or innovative thinkers based in traditional religious orders like Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) from the Kegon school or Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) from the Hossō.

While I have stressed the importance of Suzuki's religious writings on subjects other than Zen here, one can discern nevertheless an approach in these works that reflects religious values that I think we can identify as "Zen-like" in that they present themes common in Zen lore regarding religious experience. Two of these themes that come to mind immediately are the valorization of religious experience over the intellectual understanding

¹⁶ In discussing Suzuki's views on Pure Land in *Nihonteki reisei* as opposed to his statements on Zen, I do not mean to imply that "Pure Land as *nihonjinron*" is somehow a better argument than "Zen as *nihonjinron*." There is much evidence to suggest that in *some* of his writings, Suzuki did indeed entertain such prejudices, and *Nihonteki reisei* is probably the easiest place to find examples of them.

of religious “thought,” and a certain hostility directed toward that form of intellectual understanding as hindering rather than helping the “experience.” One of Suzuki’s major contributions to the history of Japanese Buddhist studies is his work on the *myōkōnin*, as mentioned above, the choice of which reflects the centrality of experience in Suzuki’s understanding of religion. Although not the focus of this particular study, it is worth stating that Suzuki is clearly drawn to these individuals because they present unambiguous examples of both themes stated here as held in common by the Zen and Pure Land traditions: that is, the authority of religious experience and the pitfalls of the intellectual study of Buddhist thought. The paradox here, of course, is that Suzuki’s own career was not as a Zen master leading committed individuals in a *zendō* 禅堂 but as an intellectual who wrote and spoke about religion. However, whether for historical or personal reasons (and probably both), Suzuki was always attracted to commonality among different religious traditions, and frequently sought quotes from one to illuminate another. He is well known for doing this with Christianity and Buddhism, and his writings on Pure Land and Zen often exhibit the same pattern. From as early as 1923, for example, Suzuki is comparing and contrasting Zen and Pure Land approaches to Buddhism. I am referring to what is, to my knowledge, the earliest example of his exploration of the intersection of the two approaches through their common use of the term *anjin* 安心¹⁷ in a four-part essay in the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報 entitled, “Godō to anjin ketsujō” 悟道と安心決定 (Awakening to the Path and Confirmation of the Settled Mind).¹⁸ *Anjin* (Ch. *anxin*) throughout the Sino-Japanese world refers to conclusive religious attainment but it is particularly prominent in the Zen and Pure Land traditions, and here Suzuki compares its description in both.

Although such comparisons are admirable and affirming, they can mask important differences in brotherly light. For this reason, Suzuki’s writing on the similarities of Zen and Pure Land, such as these *anjin* essays, are less interesting to this reader than his struggle to come to terms with seemingly unbridgeable difference. Here it is worth pointing out, however, that all of Suzuki’s early writings on Pure Land (however lengthy) occur within the framework of a comparison with Zen, reflecting his greater knowledge of the Zen literary tradition. In some sense, this approach never really changes,

¹⁷ Suzuki actually dealt with *anjin* in one of his first publications, “Anjin ritsume no chi” 安心立命の地, which appeared in two parts in the journal *Shūkyō*, vol. 26 (1893) and vol. 28 (1894).

¹⁸ SDZ, vol. 17, pp. 258–66.

for though he knows the three Pure Land sutras designated by Hōnen to be authoritative, Suzuki's interpretation never exceeds what might be referred to as the "Suzuki perspective" which is limited by (1) his focus on individual religious attainment, and (2) his persistence in viewing Pure Land from within the Shin tradition. This perspective approaches the Pure Land scriptures through Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?), Shinran, and the later Shin tradition, most notably Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499), along with the Edo- and Meiji-period *myōkōnin*. His familiarity with Chan literature of the Tang and Song is never matched by a similar knowledge Pure Land literature—rarely does he delve into the doctrinally complex legacy of Tang or Song period Pure Land thinkers such as Daochuo 道綽 (562–645), Shandao 善導 (613–681), Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592), Jiakai 加才 (c. 7th century), Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), or Yuanzhao 元照 (1048–1116). And even for Japan, there is little evidence that he was particularly familiar with the writings of Genshin 源信 (942–1017) or Hōnen, not to mention Shinran's contemporaries.

Certainly there are limitations to Suzuki's critical stance on the history of Chan/Zen given that, again, his was a prewar perspective. By contrast, however, I think it is also fair to conclude on balance that whatever degree of historicism Suzuki brought to his study of that tradition is conspicuously absent in his writings on Pure Land. Suzuki's historical study of Zen may have served to support his religious impulses or his religious impulses may have served to motivate his historical study of Zen. But in the case of Pure Land there is no similar pretense of "speaking for the tradition." What is quite apparent in the dialogs with Pure Land thinkers published after the war, Suzuki seems to stand outside marveling at what goes on. What appears to have captured his interest were concepts, such as *tariki*, *myōgō* 名号, *hongan* and *nenbutsu*, along with what he saw as testimonials of personal religious experience in Pure Land figures such as *myōkōnin*, which he could compare with literary evidence of the same experience in the Zen tradition. Concern with concepts and testimonials characterizes perhaps ninety percent of his writing on Pure Land themes, and both also allowed him to explore how Pure Land Buddhism is and is not like Christianity, particularly Christian mysticism. This explains why, for example, in his book *Jōdokei shisōron* 浄土系思想論 (Essays on Pure Land Thought), Shandao is only mentioned specifically for the passage in his writings that triggered Hōnen's awakening,¹⁹ and his continual interest in *myōkōnin*, whom he referred to in English as "*tariki* mystics." It is thus not surprising

¹⁹ See SDZ, vol. 6, p. 130.

that he always has an eye out for examples when *both* concerns came together, as in his long essay on nenbutsu and *kōan* practice.²⁰

Dialoging Zen and Pure Land: Essays on jiriki and tariki

Jiriki (self-power) and *tariki* (other-power) are terms originally used in Northern Song documents without garnering much attention. In the Kamakura period, however, they become central to the normative discourse used to distinguish Pure Land Buddhism, which holds that the determinate factor in liberation is the *other* power of Amida, from other paths that prefer the conception that one can attain liberation by one's own efforts. The general usage of these terms is based on a rather facile identification of "*jiriki*" with the more traditional, "meditative" approaches to praxis such as early Buddhism, Zen, Yogācāra, and the Vajrayāna traditions, as opposed to the designation of what we might call "faith-based" traditions of Buddhism, specifically Pure Land, as "*tariki*." This identification was presented by the Pure Land exegetes of the Kamakura period as a way to define their own approach as a commensurate alternative. This is not the place to discuss how these concepts were born or their hermeneutic development, but suffice it to say, *jiriki* and *tariki* only make sense in terms of each other because all religious epiphanies reflect a dimension of knowledge and power wholly new, i.e., beyond the known self. Thus *jiriki* and *tariki* fade in meaning unless used as a pair. In modern usage, the words have been transformed into synonyms for "practice" and "faith" for many, particularly in some aspects of the Shin tradition. They often appear as rubrics representing how one views this or that tradition of Buddhism, especially in terms of how the sectarian legacies of the Edo period self-identify today: e.g., Zen is *jiriki*, Shin is *tariki*, despite the absurd reductionism of thinking that Zen could ever be a tradition devoid of faith and likewise that Shin could be devoid of practice.

Nonetheless when people who "study" Zen talk about Pure Land and vice versa, the topic of *jiriki* and *tariki* inevitably seems to come up. Suzuki was fascinated with the *jiriki-tariki* problematic and wrote on it repeatedly. He was fond of bringing in discussion of this topic in all his Pure Land writings, and there are at least four essays identically called "Jiriki to tariki" 自力と他力 (Self-power and other-power) published in 1911, 1924, 1926, and

²⁰ "The Koan Exercise and the Nembutsu," in Suzuki 1933, pp. 146–54. See similar sentiments in an essay (Suzuki 1935) written after a trip to China in 1934 where he spoke with Yinguang 印光, a strong advocate of the study and practice of both Chan/Zen and nianfo/nenbutsu.

1965, in addition to a dialog with Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971) on the topic published posthumously in 1972.²¹ It is my guess that he saw in this rhetoric a convenient way to focus on the paradox that Mahayana Buddhism presents as a system in which everyone is promised that he or she can become a Buddha, yet no one actually does. Although Suzuki does not identify the *jiriki-tariki* problematic as a specifically *Japanese* approach, there is little doubt that he was well-aware of the lack of any analog in Sanskrit or even most canonical Chinese exegetical writings.

In his 1911 essay, “Jiriki to tariki,” Suzuki begins with a disclaimer about his knowledge, confessing that it was insufficient to write a credible biography of Shinran or even discuss the origins of the Shin sect of Buddhism. This comment serves to frame his comments on *jiriki* and *tariki* as not coming from an historical perspective. In other words, Suzuki is informing his reader that this essay is not going to be a critical look at the origins and development of the notions of *jiriki* and *tariki* but should be read instead as a kind of philosophically or psychologically creative response to the implications of the *jiriki-tariki* problematic itself. Here is a concrete example of Suzuki looking at Shin as a source of information about pertinent religious issues that “Suzuki the seeker” is struggling to unpack, and not as an historical enigma that “Suzuki the scholar” needs to unravel.

Suzuki’s interest in this article is two-fold: (1) what are the implications of the *jiriki* and *tariki* ways of thinking, and (2) how are we to understand the relationship between the Zen and Pure Land traditions in this regard as representatives of each? Regarding the former, he offers a list of opposites that might be understood in terms of *jiriki-tariki* as a general approach to understanding the human experience. Referring to these as two poles of a conflict or at least competition, he offers the examples of affect versus knowledge, believing (*shin* 信) versus discriminating (*funbetsu* 分別), one’s heart versus one’s head, materialism versus idealism, and so forth, continuing with a fairly long list of what the two positions of *jiriki* and *tariki* symbolize to him. Despite the fact that he calls this pairing “the two extremes of the religious world” and refers to them as being “in conflict” (*arasoi* 争い), suggesting a rivalry, many of the associations offered here suggest different aspects of the same structure or approach. Thus we also have the process of seeing versus the eyes as the organ of sight, mind (*seishin* 精神) versus form

²¹ SDZ, vol. 30, pp. 434–37; vol. 31, pp. 285–92; pp. 336–39; vol. 19, pp. 523–26; vol. 20, pp. 315–17. The dialog with Soga appears in *Suzuki Daisetsu zadanshū* 鈴木大拙座談集 (hereafter SDZD), vol. 5, pp. 135–39.

(*keigai* 形骸), syncretic versus analytic, transmission outside the teachings (associated with Zen) versus the written word (associated with Shin), or interior versus exterior. In the end, he concludes that liberation or salvation transcends all such distinctions, and the religious experience of people coming from either side will end up in the same place. This is a rather strong expression of faith on his part, and shows that from the beginning of his writing career—he was forty-one in 1911—Suzuki was someone of deep faith. The essay was printed in a Shin journal called *Shūsokan* 宗祖観 on the occasion of the 650th anniversary of Shinran's death. This perhaps explains the overwhelming focus of the piece on the *tariki* side. In any case, he states that “mysticism is the life of all religion” and those who have such mystical experiences will naturally see that whether one comes to the truth from the *jiriki* or the *tariki* side, they arrive at the same conclusion. Also, despite his later positive writings on these two figures, here he takes Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme to task for what he sees as an approach that tries too hard to explain religion (*ugachisugi* 穿ちすぎ). The essay is interesting at the very least because (1) it defines both *jiriki* and *tariki* quite narrowly as Zen and Pure Land, (2) it shows Suzuki's strong sympathy with Shinran and the Shin tradition very early in his career, (3) it valorizes religious experience over its verbal expression as the *sine qua non* for giving someone an authoritative voice, and (4) he accepts the view of contemporary historians that the Zen and Pure Land movements in the Kamakura period were parallel in that they arose as a reaction against the theorizing that had come to dominate “establishment Buddhism” at that time, and that therefore they both represent the assertion of the primacy of experience as an alternative model.

By contrast, the 1924 essay on *jiriki* and *tariki* was published in *Goshū* 護宗, (Protecting the Order) a journal published by a Zen temple in Kyoto. Although Suzuki allows himself to speculate in the 1911 essay on where the different approaches of *jiriki* and *tariki* might lead, in the 1924 essay he is solely concerned with how religious awakening transcends such distinctions. In this piece he does not discuss *jiriki* and *tariki* or their implications directly. Rather, they are merely implied when he presents his frame of how religion is studied and how it *should* be studied. He argues that the study of religion is too often reduced to one or two of its aspects, such as rational and superrational, or philosophy and ritual. And while some say that religion is based in fear because creation myths are all about awesome power, but this sense of fear reminds us of the presence of an *other* that is different from oneself. While not criticizing the *tariki* claims of Pure

Land, Suzuki makes a highly critical statement about Christianity: referring to the inevitable rupture that occurs when one senses the presence of the superrational, the nondual, he comments that Christianity speaks in a childish way of a heaven where angels who are pure of heart represent ideal virtue, but as the childish mind matures an inevitable rupture occurs as one becomes aware of their own oppositional relationship with that world, and this is a source of suffering. Thus people speak of this in terms of love, but to love the unreachable brings suffering. In the infinite world, however, self and other are no longer in opposition, as “*other* is embraced by *self*, and as a result *self* is completed.”²² Suffering is thus described as something we are aware of in the finite world where self and other stand in opposition, where their distance is painfully felt, but suffering is absent in the infinite world where self and other are fused.²³ We also suffer because we try to grasp what the *other* is with reason, which is inevitably insufficient. When reason disintegrates into paradox, by its very nature it becomes unsustainable and is ruined, but that ruination of reason is precisely where the *other* is. But even those who try to put reason aside often cling to that stance and fail because the *other* is constantly moving. When we can somehow transcend being trapped by our reason can we touch that which transcends reason. He then quotes from the *Biyan lu* 碧巖錄 (Blue Cliff Record), a *kōan* collection used by the Rinzai school, and discusses the arising of self-awareness based on the first four stages of the *pratītyasamutpāda* doctrine. Ultimately, this essay is quite analytical and even doctrinally specific, showing how when speaking with his “Zen voice” Suzuki waxes philosophical. The reader is given thought-provoking ideas about *ji* (self) and *ta* (other), but nothing about *jiriki* and *tariki*. There were times when he liked to talk about Zen to his Pure Land audiences and about Pure Land to his Zen audiences, but this was not one of them. This second *jiriki-tariki* essay is thus using the self-other dichotomy as a trope to talk about Zen.

The third essay entitled “*Jiriki to tariki*” (1926) is also written from the perspective of Zen, as it appeared in another Zen publication called *Busshin* 佛心 (Buddha-mind). This is a more mature work: though published only two years after the previous essay, here Suzuki is much more focused on Buddhist issues. For the first time he defines *jiriki* not as Zen but

²² SDZ 31, p. 288.

²³ This kind of language, particularly because he uses finite and infinite as synonyms for impermanent and permanent, strongly echoes Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) although he is not named.

as indicative of the much broader rubric of the so-called “path to self-perfection” or *shōdōmon* 聖道門, that is, he uses *jiriki* in the same manner as Japanese Pure Land commentators. The *shōdōmon* language, coined by Daochuo, is the Chinese expression of what in Japan came to be called the *jiriki* path. *Tariki*, on the other hand, is a broader term in Japan and can be applied to how people approach nenbutsu practice, for example. Suzuki is much more compelling when he initiates his essay in this way. He can also then say to his Zen audience, “but after all, the most *jiriki* among all *jiriki* traditions is Zen.”²⁴ Without dwelling on their differences, Suzuki states that a typical *scholar* sees the divide between *jiriki* and *tariki* as steep, but in fact when they are carefully examined, what is *jiriki* seems to be *tariki*, and vice versa. After demonstrating how unquestionably *jiriki* Zen is, illustrated by the intense devotion to practice called for in Zen, Suzuki then asks if the awakening experience in Zen—*satori* 悟—is actually a *tariki* moment or a *jiriki* moment? The question comes down to the sudden, unexpected nature of that awakening. He gives examples of the various words used in Chinese Zen texts to express this awakening, and quotes a famous line about releasing one’s hold on the edge of a cliff, and after “the end,” coming back to life. The “end” here means the end of *jiriki* and the coming back to life is clearly *tariki*. For the first time in Suzuki’s articles on the subject, we see a definition of what *jiriki* and *tariki* actually mean from the perspective of the individual practitioner: *jiriki* is the consciousness of effort, and *tariki* is when that consciousness disappears and is replaced by an attitude of accepting death. In parallel fashion, in Pure Land it makes no sense to speak only of *tariki*, for *tariki* has meaning only when one has exhausted *jiriki*. In other words, “*tariki* exists because *jiriki* makes it possible.”²⁵ This essay is the strongest statement thus far about his frustration with those who distinguish Zen and Pure Land on the basis of concepts like *jiriki* and *tariki*.

Suzuki’s last essay devoted to *jiriki* and *tariki* first appeared in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* in 1965, nearly forty years later. This essay forms the first in the book, *Daisetsu tsurezure gusa* 大拙つれづれ草, a collection of Suzuki’s short essays primarily from the early 1960s that was published by the Yomiuri Shinbunsha in 1966. This essay is the only one of the four written for a general rather than a sectarian audience. He begins with yet another definition of *jiriki* and *tariki*, explaining that *tariki* refers to Shin Buddhism, and *jiriki* refers to all other forms of Buddhism, a marked contrast from

²⁴ SDZ, vol. 31, p. 336.

²⁵ SDZ, vol. 31, p. 339.

his 1926 piece. This is an explicitly Shin sectarian statement, reflective of a self-perception among teachers and writers of Shin that it is unique even among all forms of Pure Land Buddhism, a view that seems to have gradually grown stronger during the twentieth century. Another example of how modern Shin scholarship influenced Suzuki can be found in this article in his use of the term *zettai tariki* 絶対他力, or “absolute other-power.” It is quite common for *zettai tariki* to be used in contemporary Japan as a representative label for Shin thought in general or Shinran’s thought in particular, but the term is a modern invention. While many people assume the phrase was coined by Kiyozawa Manshi, he used terms like *zettai mugen* 絶対無限 (absolute infinity) when discussing *tariki* but did not put them together into one phrase. The term originated when Kiyozawa’s essays were collected and published after his death and one of his students changed the title of his essay, “*Tariki no kyūsai*” 他力の救済 (The salvation of *tariki*), to “*Zettai tariki no daidō*” 絶対他力の大道 (The great path of absolute *tariki*).²⁶ Suzuki’s use of *zettai tariki* shows quite clearly that he read Shin scholarship and Kiyozawa but, as mentioned above, he shows little knowledge of other forms of Pure Land thought and practice.

This 1965 essay primarily deals with Asahara Saichi, one of the *myōkōnin* that Suzuki spent so much time studying. Saichi offers Suzuki another vehicle for demonstrating the unity of Zen and Pure Land religious experience because Saichi seems to express a view of nenbutsu and of Amida Buddha that closely mirrors Suzuki’s own: namely, that it is a kind of mystical union. In Suzuki’s description, Saichi does not use the nenbutsu to attain the Pure Land, he becomes the nenbutsu—he becomes the sacred name of the buddha itself. In other words, for Saichi, *tariki* is a *tariki* that is beyond the *jiriki-tariki* distinction. By contrast, Suzuki says very little about *jiriki* in this essay, but he does define both *jiriki* and *tariki* at the beginning of the essay in a way different from his descriptions in the earlier essays discussed above: “*Tariki* is attaining the place of confirmed *anjin* (settled mind) by means of the single power of the buddha; *jiriki*, by contrast, wakes up *tariki* by means of one’s own individual effort.”²⁷ Thus *jiriki*

²⁶ The Kiyozawa disciple who came up with the new title was Tada Kanae 多田鼎 (1875–1937), but many of Kiyozawa’s essays had their titles changed by other people editing them. This seems to have been quite common in the Meiji period. The recently re-edited complete works of Kiyozawa published by Iwanami Shoten restores all the original language, both titles and even some individual words within the essays.

²⁷ SDZ, vol. 20, p. 315.

is now defined in terms of—given meaning by—*tariki*. This view is not inconsistent with his 1926 essay on the *jiriki-tariki* problematic in which he borrowed Kiyozawa's somewhat idealistic formulation that “*tariki* comes at the exhaustion of *jiriki*” but this statement suggests a process rather than a complete reversal in the form of a sudden realization. Since this article was written almost two decades after *Nihonteki reisei* and is consistent with his conclusions there that *tariki* Shinshū lies at the heart of Japanese Buddhism, I would argue that what we are seeing here is a mature statement after much reflection.

Finally, I would like to refer to a dialog on *jiriki* and *tariki* between Suzuki and Soga Ryōjin, one of the most influential voices in contemporary Shin thought in the modern period.²⁸ In many ways, Soga parallels Suzuki's stance inasmuch as they both are not bound by the traditions of Shin dogma, yet Soga also differs from Suzuki in that he is a self-identified Shin thinker and, as professor of Shin Buddhism, evidenced much more detailed knowledge of the Pure Land doctrinal tradition. As both served on the faculty of Otani University in the 1920s and were close to each other in age, they were on friendly terms, with Suzuki writing a preface to one of Soga's books. In this preface and other recorded dialogs between them, we see the parallel nature of their approach. Soga, however, with his precise knowledge of the intellectual tradition within which Shinran was operating, is able to offer a contextualization of Shinran's approach that is often missing in Suzuki. In one recorded dialog, Suzuki questions Soga on how one comes to have faith, and broaches the topic of *tariki*. Soga asks why he refers to coming to have faith as *tariki*. Suzuki responds that it is the effect of *tariki* that *jiriki* is motivated to take action. Suzuki then elaborates using the analogy of the activities of “Godhead” in “creating and saving the world” which he sees as similar to the buddha's salvific activity. Suzuki here advances his view that the “wish” (*negai* 願い) of the buddha to save others is not the buddha's own wish but compassion itself, operating on its own. Thus to Suzuki, the vows of the buddha are not *his* vows per se, they are everyone's vows, and their completion symbolizes the buddhahood thus attained in everyone. Soga responds:

That [interpretation] is all very fine, but if you interpret things in that way . . . something remains that cannot be interpreted away.

²⁸ This dialog took place on December 8, 1958, at the Miyako Hotel in Kyoto. It was originally published in the Shin journal, *Shinjin* 真人, and is reprinted in SDZD, vol. 5, pp. 124–50.

Even if the principle is understood, in reality this is not how things are and this is a big problem.²⁹

Soga does not accept Amida Buddha as “a product of our arbitrary subjectivity,” which he identifies as limited precisely because it is subjective.³⁰ Suzuki’s response illustrates the depth of his conviction that Amida and all he represents can only be understood as something completely internalized and therefore understood subjectively. In Suzuki’s words:

Insofar as Amida said that if his vows are not realized he himself will not attain perfect awakening and he did attain that awakening and the Pure Land was thus created, we can say—perhaps this is just my thinking, what I believe myself, or my experience, any of these [explanations] will do—but to my thinking as long as I myself have not attained buddhahood, as long as I have not opened up to perfect awakening, then Amida has not attained buddhahood.³¹

What is of course striking here is that the internalization of Amida is not merely as a potential but as an accomplished fact. For Suzuki, the Pure Land as an ideal is thus something of one’s own creation, and the vows of the Buddha are not something that one would depend on (*sugaru*) as the outside force that enables the individual to accomplish what cannot be done on one’s own. I will return to the implications of this statement on Suzuki’s view of *hongan* below, but putting this back into the context of *jiriki* and *tariki*, it would appear that in Suzuki’s language this *tariki* is not the *tariki* of *jiriki-tariki*, which he understands epistemologically but rather an ontological *tariki*, *tariki* as an ontic presence.

These essays on *jiriki* and *tariki* tell us how Suzuki approached Pure Land thought and how his approach evolved over time. First, his approach changed somewhat depending on his intended audience. And yet, his most explicit identification of *tariki* with Shin Buddhism came in an essay directed to a non-Shin audience. The timing of that essay—1965, some forty years after his previous efforts—may account for this somewhat. In

²⁹ SDZD, vol. 5, p. 138.

³⁰ *Soga Ryōjin senshū* (hereafter SRS), vol. 1, p. 17. But in contrasting objective knowledge and religious knowledge based on faith, Soga states that because faith as the subject is itself an inconceivable mystery, there is no further need for an objective Tathāgata separate from this subjective faith (SRS, vol. 1, p. 22).

³¹ SDZD, vol. 5, p. 138.

his prewar essays, *tariki* is explained as Pure Land Buddhism or the Pure Land Gate (*jōdomon* 浄土門), a technical term from Chinese Buddhism to indicate all forms of Pure Land Buddhism. His shift to an explicitly Shin perspective suggests influence from a heightened self-awareness among the Shin scholars with whom he associated, something that I have hinted at above and that I believe became particularly pronounced in the first decades after World War II. The contrast between his identification of Shin and his position in *Nihonteki reisei*, published in 1944, is striking. In that publication he is also primarily interested in Shinran, but he makes it clear that he does not regard Shinran's thought to have been particularly different from Hōnen's thought.

But as for what *jiriki* and *tariki* actually mean and how they relate to each other, Suzuki is remarkably consistent through more than fifty years of writing. The key to understanding both is religious experience itself, which he defines in this context as a sudden awakening to a transcendent *other*. In this way, both Zen and Pure Land arrive at similar religious territory. It is only in his later writings, however, that we have what we might call Suzuki's final statements on *jiriki* and *tariki* understood on the one hand epistemologically, that is, *jiriki* as a means to get to *tariki*, and on the other hand ontologically, in a statement specifically on *tariki* as what I am calling the ontic presence of buddhahood attained in the world.

Translating Shinran: The Kyōgyōshinshō

Let us now turn to another major expression of Suzuki's view of Pure Land Buddhism: the translation he made of the first four fascicles of Shinran's *magnum opus*, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, the title of which he translated as *The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realization of the Pure Land*. Suzuki completed the initial draft in only 3 months in 1961 but was never able to complete the project. He left behind only the first four of six fascicles when he died in 1966.

To date, there are four English translations of this work and in comparing them, we can reaffirm not only how much of the translator we read in any rendering of authoritative scripture, but also how much Suzuki's approach differs from the others. In addition to Suzuki's translation, there is one by Yamamoto Kōshō 山本晃紹 (1898–1976),³² one by Inagaki Hisao,³³ and the

³² Yamamoto 1958.

³³ Inagaki 2003.

one included in *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter CWS) published by Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha International Center—all of which are affiliated with the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji branch or Nishi Honganji church. Suzuki's association with the Shinshū Ōtani-ha organization or Higashi Honganji should also be noted. All four were published in the postwar period, and only Yamamoto's appeared before Suzuki's. A marked up copy of the Yamamoto translation is among Suzuki's books kept at the Matsugaoka Bunko, so we know that he consulted it. Yamamoto's translation was truly pioneering, and we see how he struggled to convey the religiosity of the language, often selecting English prosody reminiscent of the King James translation of the Bible. By contrast the two later translations by Nishi scholars are more literal and somewhat flat. From the extant manuscripts of Suzuki's translation at the Matsugaoka Bunko, we know that he agonized over how to translate such key notions as *hongan*, *shinjin*, and *nenbutsu*. Although eschewing the biblical approach of Yamamoto, Suzuki nevertheless comes down on the side of religiosity. That is, he does not hesitate to use language that conveys the emotive force of the text, even if that language violates the strict, literal meaning of the doctrines it represents. Still, there are places where his translation is more faithful to the text's original intent than any of the other translations, especially those produced after his. Below, I will discuss Suzuki's approach to translating certain key terms to highlight his perspective on Shinran and Shinran's thought and then examine his overview of Shinran in his unpublished preface.

Ōjō as Awakening

One of the most crucial differences between the other three translations and Suzuki's is his interpretation of *ōjō* 往生, which is generally translated as either "rebirth" or "birth in the Pure Land." While the other translations consistently go to great lengths to mold their representations of Shinran as advocating the religious goal of reaching the Pure Land *at death* (even to the point in the CWS of adding language not in the original), Suzuki steadfastly refuses to read Shinran in this way.

Siding with what may be called the mystical tradition of the *Anjin ketsujōshō* 安心決定鈔, an anonymous text on Pure Land thought and practice dating to the late Kamakura period, Suzuki takes a position more or less identical to his colleague Soga Ryōjin. He affirms the doctrine of *kihō ittai* 機法一体, or "unity of individual and Dharma," from the *Anjin*

ketsujōshō. While there is a range of interpretations of this doctrine, the core principle expresses some sense of immanence of the sacred in the life or consciousness of the individual. Thus, *ōjō* interpreted according to *kihō ittai* is generally understood as a religious awakening that happens *in life* rather than in death. There is some question about where Shinran and Hōnen stood on this question, just as there is an ambiguity in the way this viewpoint is discussed throughout the Chinese Pure Land tradition as well. But in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, Suzuki makes his position clear:

Now we see that the *Nembutsu*, or the *Myōgō*, or the “*Namu-amida-butsu*” is at the center of the Shin faith. When this is experienced, the devotee has the “steadfastness of faith,” even before he is in actuality ushered into the Pure Land. For the Pure Land is no more an event after death, it is right in this *sahāloka dhātu*, the world of particulars. According to Saichi, he goes to the Pure Land as if were the next-door house and comes back at his pleasure to his town.³⁴

When we look at how this issue of *ōjō* is expressed in the four translations of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Suzuki’s work clearly parts company with the other three.

This is evident in the way the different translations handle an interesting but somewhat ambiguous passage in the second fascicle, or *Gyō no maki* 行卷, where the topic is praxis. In the following example, Shinran quotes from a commentary on the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 (Sutra on the Contemplation of Immeasurable Life) written by the monk Yuanzhao (Jpn. Ganjō) mentioned above, a Vinaya master of the Northern Song dynasty who also advocated Pure Land thought and practice. In a statement echoed much later in both Suzuki and Soga, Yuanzhao affirms the importance of seeing all teachings and all practices in Buddhism as *upāya*, or expedient means. Below is (1) the original Chinese, (2) my literal translation, and the translations of (3) Yamamoto, (4) CWS, and (5) Suzuki.

(1) Shinran:

元照律師云、或於此方、破惑証真。則運自力故、談大小諸經。或往他方、聞法悟道。須憑他力故、說往生淨土。彼此雖異、莫非方便。令悟自心。³⁵

³⁴ Suzuki 1957, p. 162.

³⁵ *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* (hereafter SSS) vol. 1, p. 121b. Yuanzhao’s work in three fascicles is *Guan wuliangshoufo jing yishu* 觀無量壽佛經義疏 (T no. 1754), and this passage can be found in T 37, 279b21–24.

(2) My translation:

Vinaya Master Yuanzhao said, “It may be destroying illusion and realizing truth on this side which, as it is born by self-power, is discussed in the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna sutras. Or it may be venturing to that side, hearing the teaching and awakening to the path which, as it depends on the other-power, is explained as birth in the Pure Land. But though this and that [approach] may differ, do not deny that it is *upāya* that enables us to liberate our own minds.

(3) Yamamoto translation:

The venerable master Yuan-chao says: “Or as one in this world crushes out illusion and attains truth, one at once works out the Self-Power. And all the Mahayana and Hinayana sutras tell thus. Or one goes over to the Other World, hears, and attains the Way. As one rests on the Other-Power, birth in the Pure Land is talked about. There is a difference of the ‘other world’ and ‘this world’. And not one is not that which is not the expediency. This is but to make one awake in enlightenment.”³⁶

(4) CWS translation:

Master Yüan-chao states: “In breaking through delusion and realizing true reality in this world, one employs self-power; hence [self-power practices] are taught in various Mahayana and Hinayana sutras. In going to the other world to listen to the dharma and realize enlightenment, one must rely on Other Power; hence, birth in the Pure Land is taught. Although these two ways differ, they are both means [provided by Śākyamuni] for leading one to realization of one’s mind.”³⁷

(5) Suzuki translation:

Ganjō the Vinaya Master says: It is on this side that appeal is made to the self-power to destroy illusions and attain the truth. So we talk about various sūtras belonging to the Mahāyāna or to the Hīnayāna. On the other side, the other-power is evoked in order to listen to the Dharma and be awakened in Enlightenment. So the

³⁶ Yamamoto 1958, pp. 63–64.

³⁷ CWS, vol. 1, p. 60.

sūtras talk about being born in the Pure Land. Though each has its own way, and one differs from the other, the essential thing is to realize one's own mind in spite of methodological discrepancy.³⁸

The point of the Yuanzhao passage is that the self-power forms of Buddhism rely on *upāya* no less than the other-power forms. This is solid Mahāyāna doctrine that was intended to show that Pure Land Buddhism is not significantly different from other forms of Buddhism. In his reference to “this side” and “that side,” Yuanzhao describes how these two different attainments are called “destroying illusion and realizing truth” and “birth in the Pure Land.” In regard to the latter he refers to standard Pure Land tropes such as “other-power” and “hearing the Dharma,” but he is somewhat vague about whether these practices take place in the here and now. That is, he does not explicitly state whether these are practices performed in order to get to the Pure Land, or after arriving at the Pure Land for the purpose of attaining buddhahood. Yuanzhao was most likely vague in order to include both possibilities. Suzuki's phrase, “the other-power is evoked in order to listen to the Dharma and be awakened in Enlightenment,” is an astute translation of this passage that clearly expresses the centrality of the themes of praxis and *upāya* in the original. But notice how both Yamamoto and CWS move the practice and attainment associated with *tariki* to the Pure Land, stating “In going to the other world to listen to the dharma and realize enlightenment, one must rely on Other Power.” Thus in the perspective of the latter, *tariki* is necessary to get to the Pure Land, then and only then does praxis occur and then final liberation. But in Suzuki's view, birth in the Pure Land is itself a form of *upāya*, merely another name for “evoking” the *tariki* that brings forth the sound of the Dharma in a way that produces awakening. The Yamamoto and CWS readings reflect the conviction that Shinran's message to his followers was confirmation of the impossibility of religious attainment in this life. Thus one “goes to the other world to listen to the dharma and realize enlightenment” on “that side,” begging the question of how practice “on this side” could be meaningful.

Nenbutsu as Thought

The notion of nenbutsu is absolutely central to Shinran and all of Pure Land Buddhism. In Japan, the person who endowed nenbutsu with such enormous

³⁸ Suzuki 1973, pp. 66–67.

significance was Hōnen, and Shinran is explicit that his understanding of nenbutsu derives entirely from Hōnen. But nenbutsu was a complex, multidimensional notion by Shinran's time, and has not been easily defined by anyone from the Kamakura period onward.

One of Shinran's famous contributions to Buddhist thought was to view his own nenbutsu practice as derived from the *tariki*-power of the Buddha. Indeed, when *jiriki* and *tariki* are discussed today, this point is often what defines the *tariki* position. It is also widely assumed that, following Hōnen's insistence on the importance of verbalizing the nenbutsu, Shinran only used the word to refer to vocalizing the name of Amida Buddha. But what of the *nen* of nenbutsu when used alone? Outside the context of nenbutsu, the first syllable *nen* typically means to keep in mind, to concentrate on something, and is used as either a noun or a transitive verb. Even in modern Japanese, the word *nenriki* 念力 is used to mean "the power of concentrated thought." What is often lost in reading Shinran and Hōnen is that their use of nenbutsu, while generally referring to recitation, never loses this dimension of psychological concentration. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that Hōnen was breaking new ground by insisting that people reconsider the nenbutsu as a verbal practice but he never reduced it to a mantra by insisting that its power lies in its sound, regardless of the practitioner's mental state. In Shinran's time debate continued unabated over precisely what the *nen* in nenbutsu was; he alludes to this controversy about the nature of *nen* to support Hōnen's valorization of recitation nenbutsu, and I would argue that the *Kyōgyōshinshō* itself can be read as an apologetic for the Hōnen doctrine. In any case, it is important when reading both Hōnen and Shinran, and indeed any of the many Kamakura-period Pure Land thinkers, to remember that *nen* is multivalent. On this important point, the Suzuki translation stands out once again, this time for preserving the important dimension of *nen* as thought.

The differences in reading are most clearly visible in how the translators handle the word *ichinen* 一念, or a single *nen*, an evocative term in Japanese Pure Land doctrine because many among Hōnen's disciples saw in it an expression of sudden enlightenment. Indeed, many scholars today place Shinran among that group, but this view is not normative for the institutional doctrines of many Shin sects, although I will not go into that issue here. Insofar as the word *nen* (Ch. *nian*) in sutra literature often translates *citta* in the sense of "individual thought," and in all extant translations of

Sukhāvativyūhasūtra into Chinese the term *ichinen* (Ch. *yingnian*) represents *eka-citta*, we know the original intention of the sutra's Chinese-language translators was for *ichinen* to represent "a single moment of thought." The term also famously appears in the passage which describes the fulfillment of the eighteenth vow of Amitābha in the Chinese translation attributed to Saṃghavarman (approximately third century) in the phrase *naishi ichinen* 乃至一念, literally "as little as one *nen*." It may be interesting to note here that this phrase in the extant Sanskrit version of this sutra contains the word *citta*, further showing that the word *nen* in this context originally refers primarily to an interior moment, though verbalization could also be occurring. In the Zen tradition, the word *nen* also has prominence in phrases like *munen* or "no thought." As someone familiar with Sanskrit and Zen, we naturally find Suzuki to be keen on keeping the psychological dimension of *nen* prominent in translating Shinran. But his perspective is not universal.

Unlike the previous example, in the text below we are looking not at a quote from another source but Shinran's own explication of the term *ichinen* in the chapter on practice in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Here is the original text followed by three translations. Because the three other translations follow the same course, I have limited this example to (1) Shinran's text, (2) my literal translation, (3) the CWS translation, and (4) Suzuki's translation.

(1) Shinran

凡就往相回向行信、行則有一念、亦信有一念。言行之一念者、謂就称名
偏数、顯開選択易行至極。³⁹

(2) My translation

Regarding the practice and faith of the merit-transfer directed toward reaching the Pure Land (*ōsō ekō*), practice has just one thought (*ichinen*) and faith also has just one thought (*ichinen*). In saying "the practice that is one thought" we are speaking about the number of times one recites the name [of the Buddha], by which it is revealed that the chosen easy practice [is] the ultimate [practice].

(3) CWS translation

Concerning the practice and shinjin that Amida directs to us for our going forth: in practice there is "one utterance" (*ichinen*), and in shinjin there is "one thought-moment" (*ichinen*). The one utterance

³⁹ SSS, vol. 1. p. 118b.

of practice reveals, in terms of the number of voicings, the consummation of the easy practice selected in the Primal Vow.⁴⁰

(4) Suzuki translation:

As regards the living (practice) and the faith which make the outgoing *ekō* possible, there is “one thought of practice” and there is “one thought of faith.” By “one-thought of practice” is meant that according to the number of times the Name is pronounced, the ultimate significance of the practice chosen as the easiest is to be elucidated.⁴¹

In this passage Shinran distinguishes between a single *nen* of faith and a single *nen* of practice, highlighting faith as a realization, an attainment. In the case of practice, *nen* refers to the number of times the name is uttered. Because Shinran uses the word *shōmyō* 称名, “reciting the name,” to gloss *nen* in terms of practice, the text only makes sense to assume Shinran uses *nen* in the more general, Buddhistic sense of *citta* in the passage as a whole. We can thus paraphrase what Shinran is doing in this passage as follows: “Regarding the important matter of how we get to the Pure Land, first we transfer our merit toward that end, and then to ensure our success in this endeavor we must focus our efforts on one concentrated mental moment that is both a moment of practice and a moment of faith. And this only occurs when we recite the nenbutsu whereby that special psychological event is filled with the sound of the Buddha’s name, and when this happens this simple utterance is revealed to be the ultimate fulfillment of the path as chosen by the Buddha himself for us.”

Here we see that Suzuki’s translation works better than CWS precisely because he keeps the sense of *nen* as thought. Suzuki only varies from the original in his abridged rendering of *ōsō ekō* 往相回向 as “outgoing *ekō*.” CWS, on the other hand, displays a strong tendency throughout to read nearly all instances of *nen* in Shinran as verbalized nenbutsu, of which the passage above is but one example. But the result is confusing for a number of reasons. First, the parallel structure of Shinran’s original language in the single thought of practice and faith is lost because *nen* in the former is rendered as an utterance and *nen* in the latter as a thought-moment. Second, Shinran’s explanation that *nen* here refers to vocalization is lost; it makes

⁴⁰ CWS, vol. 1, p. 55.

⁴¹ Suzuki 1973, p. 60.

little sense to say that “utterance” means “voicing” so instead the translation renders this line to only be about the number of utterances. This is a major loss because the discourse context in which Shinran was writing—the apologetic aspect of the text—disappears when the tension between *nen* and *shōmyō* is removed like this. In ignoring the wider psychological meaning of *nen*, the Yamamoto, Inagaki, and CWS translations only make sense within the Shin community. But insofar as Shinran completed this work after returning to Kyoto and the communities that supported him at this time all lived outside the capital and are presumed to have had only minimal education, this is an anachronistic way of reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō* since in choosing to write this work in Chinese and filling it with copious quotations of sutras and patriarchs of East Asian Buddhism, his intended audience was the highly educated elite community of monks and aristocrats in the capital. It is ironic that while Suzuki’s writings on Pure Land as a whole evince only minimal knowledge of Shinran’s contemporaries compared to the other translators, it is the Suzuki translation that best represents how we imagine how the *Kyōgyōshinshō* was read in thirteenth-century Japan.

Hongan as Prayer

Arguably the most interesting, even controversial, word choice in Suzuki’s translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is his decision to use “prayer” to translate terms usually rendered as “vow.” The words used in Chinese generally include either the character *yuan* 願 (Jpn. *gan*) or *shi* 誓 (Jpn. *sei*), often together or in other compounds such as *hongyuan* 弘願 (Jpn. *gugan*), *suyuan* 宿願 (Jpn. *shukugan*), or *hongshi* 弘誓 (Jpn. *gusei*).⁴² When used together as *shiyuan* 誓願 (Jpn. *seigan*) the chances are good that the antecedent was *praṇidhāna*, as in *shiyuan boluomiduo* 誓願波羅蜜多 for *praṇidhānapāramitā*, one of the ten “perfections.” As all bodhisattvas take common vows and personal vows, originally the word *benyuan* 本願 (Jpn. *hongan*) simply meant a vow taken in the past, as a translation of *pūrvapraṇidhāna*. But because the character *ben* 本 in Chinese also meant basic, original, or fundamental, this word was taken up by the Pure Land

⁴² Both *yuan* 願 and *shi* 誓 can represent many different Sanskrit or Prakrit words. *Yuan* tends to represent words that suggest intention or wish such as forms of *√iṣ*, or conviction such as *adhi+√muc* (e.g., *adhimukti*). *Shi* implies some kind of promise, thus it was also used for *pratijñā* (claim), *śapatha* (oath), even *satyavacana* (“words of truth” as a kind of pledge).

tradition as their standard name for vows of Amida (who, is said to have made twenty-four, thirty-six, or forty-eight individual vows, depending on the version of the sutra). The adoption of the moniker *benyuan/hongan* is not unique to Amida's vows, but it adds solemnity and shows a development toward the mythic.

In Japan, Hōnen is very specific about calling the vows of Amida *hongan*. At times Hōnen uses *hongan* to designate all forty-eight vows and at times he uses it to designate only the eighteenth vow, following Shandao. Shinran is unambiguously devoted to his teacher Hōnen, and it is quite clear that Shinran's faith was based in some kind of religious experience that confirmed Hōnen's teachings. But how did Shinran understand *hongan*, and how should this word be translated? For translators with a knowledge of Sanskrit, like Suzuki and Inagaki, there are three contexts to consider: (1) India: should they ignore the associations with the Chinese word *ben/hon* and simply translate the Sanskrit *pūrvapraṇidhāna* that *hongan* originally represented, (2) Medieval China-Japan: should they try to communicate the linguistic associations Shinran must have felt in the word *hongan* apropos of similar Chinese-language Tendai jargon in his lexicon employing the same *hon* prefix, such as *hongaku*, *honmon*, *honshin*, *honbutsu*, *honzon*, *honji*, as well as Hōnen's teaching on the universal significance of Amida's *gan* as transcending the *gan* of other bodhisattvas and buddhas, or (3) Contemporary Japan: should they express the implications the Shin tradition today reads into Shinran's usage of *hongan*? A similar problem exists with words like *nenbutsu*, which is a form of praxis but also a form of belief, and *myōgō* (Ch. *minghao*), the sacred name of a buddha that functions as symbol of that buddha, his power, vows, compassion, wisdom, achievement, and so forth.

To ascertain why Suzuki would translate *hongan* as prayer, we need to know what he understood both *hongan* and *prayer* to mean. Although he left no record of precisely how he understood the word "prayer," Suzuki did leave written musings about translation difficulties, including some of the key doctrinal terms in Pure Land Buddhism. These statements are scattered throughout his writings from as early as 1902 to as late as 1966, and though varying in content do express a remarkable consistency regarding his perspective on how Pure Land Buddhism should be understood. And that perspective is strikingly mythic. In one way or another, Suzuki consistently rejects the temptation to create simple formulas and maligns those who want everything spelled out; for him, this is how religion dries up and loses

its salvific power. He tells a story, for example, in *Shin Buddhism* (1970) about a man named Shoma whom he describes only as a devoted Shin believer working as a day laborer, but whose biography must have come down as one of the “remarkable men” known as *myōkōnin*. Though uneducated, Shoma’s understanding of the Pure Land episteme was so profound that people would travel great distances to meet him to obtain some kind of spiritual guidance. Suzuki relates a story of a man who travelled several hundred miles to speak with Shoma. Upon arrival, he found Shoma pounding rice, a tiring and repetitive task from which most people would enjoy a diversion. But despite the man’s pleas, Shoma would not even look at him, much less stop work to answer his questions. The family that had hired Shoma took pity on the man who had travelled so far and implored Shoma to take a rest and speak to him, but Shoma refused, so the family invited the man in for tea in the hopes that Shoma would soften. Finally as the man was about to leave, Shoma said, “If you are in such a desperate state of mind, you are altogether wrong in asking me about such things. Why don’t you ask Amida Sama himself? He is the one who deals with such things. It’s not my business.”

This story can serve as a metaphor for Suzuki’s approach to Pure Land and indeed all Buddhism, which is one that stresses the imperative of personal affirmation of any teaching or doctrine. In other words, like Shoma, Suzuki believed that Pure Land Buddhism can only be understood through direct interaction with the myths, symbols, and metaphors of the tradition. Akin to the finger pointing at the moon in the Chan tradition, Shoma tells his visitor, “Look, you know where the moon is, how do you expect me to get you to see it?” The flip side of this, of course, is that Suzuki earned his living by writing and speaking about the moon—how people have thought about it, written about it, and so forth. This contradiction is also, oddly enough, typical of many influential modern Shin thinkers, and is particularly evident in Kiyozawa Manshi and Soga Ryōjin. Suzuki probably never met Kiyozawa, but as mentioned above he and Soga were friends. I believe there is evidence that specifically points to Soga’s influence on Suzuki’s thinking on Pure Land matters, and I will touch on that briefly below.

But to return to specific translation issues, there is considerably more material on what Suzuki did with the problematic word *hongan* than with *prayer*, so I will summarize the sources on the former first. The 1902 piece that I mentioned above is called *Dokkyō sansoku* 読經三則 (Reading Sutras:

Three Cases), originally published in the influential Meiji-period journal, *Shin bukkyō* (New Buddhism). The article is in Japanese but midway through he muses on the question of how a word like *hongan-riki* (the power of *hongan*) should be translated into English. In this case, the sutra quoted is not one narrating the myth of Amida but a textbook of Mahayana doctrines called the *Mahāyānāvatāra* (入大乘論, T no. 1634), the topic being the “traces” of the *dharmakāya* in the world and their impact. Suzuki does not mention Amida and the essay is only glossing a Chinese text into Japanese but nevertheless adds the following parenthetical comment (words that appear in English are in single quotes):

Incidentally, putting *hongan-riki* into English as ‘Power of the former prayer (or prayers) of the Tathāgata’ would only be a literal translation, and there would be nothing worse than this to mislead those who do not know Buddhism. We search for the core and the expression of the *dharmakāya* existing from the ancient past, and we also wonder what ‘prayer’ would there be? The power of the *hongan* is an energy that pervades the universe, it is a magnanimous, expansive energy, it is ‘Will.’ In Christianity, this would be called ‘divine Will.’ One who believes in *tariki* gives himself over to the *hongan* of Amida without intervening diversionary thoughts; they are [like] those who believe in the Christian notion of ‘Let thy Will be done.’ I do not see any major gap between the two.⁴³

From the same period we also have the following statement about *pranidhāna* in his English language book, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (1907), a landmark publication at a time when few Sanskrit materials had come to light and historical Mahāyāna studies were just beginning:

Let me remark here, however, that “vow” is not a very appropriate term to express the meaning of the Sanskrit *pranidhāna*. *Pranidhāna* is a strong wish, aspiration, prayer, or an inflexible determination to carry out one’s will even through an infinite series of rebirths. Buddhists have such a supreme belief in the power of will or spirit that, whatever material limitations, the will is sure to triumph over them and gain its final aim.⁴⁴

⁴³ SDZ, vol. 17, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Suzuki 1963, p. 307.

What Suzuki does not seem to understand, at least in this passage, is that from a theological perspective, divine will and prayer are quite different. To wit, we expect God to have divine will but we do not expect him to pray; prayer only makes sense from the side of the created, not the creator. The idea of Yahweh having “an inflexible determination to carry out his will” or “a supreme belief in the power of will,” to borrow Suzuki’s language, implies the possibility of divine doubt in his own powers, which is not only incomprehensible for the Abrahamic God, it is incomprehensible for a buddha as well. Despite the fact that, unlike the Abrahamic God, buddhas frequently talk to their communities and use encouragement and admonition to communicate what they hope their followers will do, it is only Buddhists who have not yet attained buddhahood, i.e. “bodhisattvas” in Suzuki’s case, that maintain “a supreme belief in the power of will.”

Suzuki seems to have sensed some problem with this approach even in this early period because elsewhere he abandons “prayer” and goes back to “vow.” For example, in 1924 he published “Sayings of a Modern Tariki Mystic” in English about the *myōkōnin* Shichiri Gōjun 七里恒順 (1835–1900) in *The Eastern Buddhist*.⁴⁵ In this piece he uses “vow” and “Original Vows” exclusively, even glossing the latter in a note as a translation of *pūrvapraṇidhāna*, briefly explaining the story of Amida and his forty-eight vows. In the Sanskrit-Chinese-English glossary included in his 1930 *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*, he glosses *pūrvapraṇidhāna* as *hongan* 本願 and “original vow.”⁴⁶ In another 1930 piece called “The Shin Sect of Buddhism,” published in English in the *Osaka Mainichi* (and reprinted in *The Eastern Buddhist* in 1939),⁴⁷ Suzuki used “Original Vow” (singular), and “Amida’s vows” (plural). This essay is noteworthy in that he includes his own translation of the content of what he terms “the forty-eight vows” and even explains how the vows have been understood in Japan based on the *Anjin ketsujōshō*. Nowhere is there any mention of the word “prayer” or any discussion of a problem with rendering *gan* or *hongan* as “vow.”⁴⁸

When we move to the postwar period, we find Suzuki still struggling with the problem of translating *hongan* but he had found a new approach

⁴⁵ Suzuki 1924.

⁴⁶ Suzuki 1981, p. 419.

⁴⁷ The article appeared in the 23 May 1930 issue of *The Osaka Mainichi* & *The Tokyo Nichi Nichi*. The article in *The Eastern Buddhist* is D. Suzuki 1939.

⁴⁸ Somewhat later, in 1939, Suzuki’s wife Beatrice also published a translation of Shinran, in this case, the *San Amida butsuge wasan*, in which she also uses “Vow” (B. Suzuki 1939, pp. 287–88).

in the notion of immanence. In a 1961 essay entitled “Hongan no kongen,” he brings back an argument made in a brief statement in 1931 simply called “Hongan,” and mentioned above in his dialog with Soga Ryōjin.⁴⁹ Namely, that the *hongan* of Amida Buddha are the *hongan* of everyone. All bodhisattvas make *hongan* and as a collective spiritual force these are never exhausted; thus separating the *hongan* of Amida from the *hongan* of myself as an individual is delusional. Our dependence or reliance (*sugaru*) on *hongan* is therefore a working of the *hongan* that is the essence of myself as a spiritual individual. If we were to give up believing in what I can do as an individual, we give up believing in what the Buddha or any deity can do, and vice-versa. Thus belief in *hongan* means that we are bodhisattvas, that we are Buddhas.

Returning to the Soga-Suzuki dialog mentioned above, what we see in Soga’s response to Suzuki’s radical internalization of the *hongan* is not an outright rejection but a felt need to clarify the situation. In Soga’s view, while Amida’s *hongan* may be identified with my *hongan*, my *hongan* are not Amida’s *hongan* but rather something incorporated within Amida’s *hongan*. Soga thus maintains a degree of transcendence in the Buddha that Suzuki wants to eliminate. I take this to be an example of Suzuki’s mythic approach to Pure Land thought that fuses the metaphysical with the mundane, and that stands in contrast with the de-mythologizing program of Soga in which human-as-mundane and Buddha-as-transcendent must be kept as facts of existential reality as is.

This story takes another turn when we examine some unpublished materials that Suzuki wrote in the process of drafting his *Kyōgyōshinshō* translation that have recently come to light. I call the reader’s attention to two in particular: an unfinished Preface to the translation,⁵⁰ and an offset printing of a draft of the translation sent in 1961 to Miyatani Hōgan 宮谷法含 (1882–1962), the administrative head (*shūmu sōchō* 宗務総長) of the Ōtani-ha institution.⁵¹ The version of Suzuki’s translation that appeared post-

⁴⁹ “Hongan no kongen” 本願の根元, SDZ, vol. 29, pp. 116–29. “Hongan” from 1931 is at SDZ, vol. 35, pp. 150–51.

⁵⁰ This preface was discovered by Wayne Yokoyama in the attic of the library at the Matsugaoka Bunko.

⁵¹ See the description on the Otani University Museum’s website, “Daisetsu to Shinshū” 大拙と真宗 (<http://www2.otani.ac.jp/daisetsumuseum/catalog/d/img/074-2.html>), a part of “Daisetsu: Sono hito to gakumon” 大拙:その人と学問. I would like to thank the Matsugaoka Bunko and Shinran Bukkyō Sentā for permission to use these materials here, and acknowledge the assistance of Wayne Yokoyama in bringing these to my attention.

humously in 1973 was significantly altered from this 1961 offset draft, and this Preface—a creative essay on Shinran’s thought—was never published in any form.⁵² Most importantly for this discussion, in the 1961 draft *hongan* is translated consistently as “vow” rather than “prayer.” In addition, the word *gyō* is rendered as “practice” instead of “living” as appears in the 1973 published edition.

Interestingly, the unpublished (and unfinished in the form it was discovered) Preface contains a discussion of what the *hongan* express, the motivation behind them, and the difficulty of translating the concept. Throughout this essay Suzuki’s renderings of *hongan* are various: “resolve,” “prayer,” “vow,” and most commonly left untranslated as *gwan*, the romanization of the older Japanese pronunciation for *gan*. We can infer from this that Suzuki was having trouble deciding which word to choose and in discussing the concept retreated to not translating it at all. Akin to the example cited above where Shinran defines the single *nen* of practice as *shōmyō*, here Suzuki’s describes the meaning of *gan* and the longer form *seigan* 誓願 :

Gwan is the abbreviated form of Sei-gwan and *praṇidhāna* is its original Sanskrit form. *Praṇidhāna* literally means “to . . . [incomplete]

Dharmākara’s “desire” or “wish” or “resolve” or “prayer” could not be expressed by a single *gwan* or *sei*. *Gwan* is “a wish” or “a prayer” and *sei* is “to vow” or “to pledge”. Either is a too weak term for the Bodhisattva’s inflexible will to carry out all his wishes for all beings in every quarter of the world, immensely extending in space and continuing everlasting in time. And he is proclaiming them not only before a single personage known as the Buddha World-Ruler but to every being in existence occupying every corner of space and every moment of time. The Chinese translation compounded *gwan* and *Sei* and coined a word *sei-gwan* though this was far from being satisfactory to cover the immensity of Dharmakara’s conception. The Chinese mind never had occasion to handle ideas of this magnitude as they encountered in the B[uddhist]. sutras.

Pranidhana [*sic*] or Sei-gwan is generally rendered in English [as] “a vow”, but to my mind “vow” is too inane and misleading.

⁵² The 1973 publication contains a foreword by Nishitani Keiji, an editor’s Preface by Itō Emyō and Okamura Mihoko, and a short (two-page) introduction by Itō Emyō.

For Dharmakara's [*sic*] resolute will is the direct reflexion of the highest and deepest Reality whose structure is Infinite Light and Eternal Life, Mahāprajñā and Mahākaruṇa [*sic*] or Mahakriyā, the 48 "Resolutions" of the Bodhisattva sound too prosaic. The term Prayer I have adopted here is not quite appropriate either. For one thing it reminds us of [the] Lord's Prayer. The fact is however that wherever new things or ideas are introduced we have to have correspondingly new words to which we are not at all used [to]. New wine is not to be put into old bottles.

Dharmākara's 48 *gwan*, though in reality numberless, are all the reflections of Infinite Light and Eternal Life which constitute the essence of Buddha. They are not mere earnest desires in vows on the part of Dharmakara as Bodhisattva. They all belong to him, they all issue from him. They are prayers originally making up his very being, and the prayers are not objectively directed to anybody outside himself. They are the Mahā Karuṇā. The Mahākaruṇā is the Mahāprajñā. Superficially they may appear contradicting each other, but in truth they are identified in the body of Amida as Dharmakāya. This truth of identity is then sheer given [*>*given sheer] expression in the original prayer as underlining the story of Dharmākara which is told in detail in the *Larger Sutra of Amitābha Buddha*.⁵³

This would suggest that, despite his reservations and despite his call to "have new words" when needed, Suzuki did finally settle on "prayer" for *hongan*. This of course begs the question of what "prayer" meant to him. We know that he rejects the use of prayer as found in the Lord's Prayer. We do find the expression "Amida's Prayer" in his translation, however, which seems to me to be problematic. His statement that these are prayers "not objectively directed to anybody outside himself" is suggestive, however, and Suzuki's mention of "desire" in the above suggests that the recent work of Hase Shōtō may be instructive here. Although Hase does not touch on the notion of prayer, in *Yokubō no tetsugaku* 欲望の哲学 (The Philosophy of Desire), he opines that a transcendent principle of desire at work is what we are seeing in the notion of the *gan* of Dharmākara, that as an expression of

⁵³ This preface will be included in the revised edition of Suzuki's translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* that will be published from the Shinshū Ōtani-ha in commemoration of the 750th Memorial Service for Shinran.

hope this operates in an entirely different manner than the egoistic desire centered on oneself.⁵⁴ Suzuki's notion of prayer might thus be understood as a way of expressing Hase's notion of nonegoistic or transmundane desire.

But the best tool for understanding Suzuki's view of *hongan* is probably Soga Ryōjin, who is the Pure Land thinker whom I would argue had the greatest influence on Suzuki. With little of Soga translated into English at the present time,⁵⁵ not much is known of his thought outside Japan, but suffice it to say Soga is one of the most influential Buddhist philosophers of twentieth-century Japan. Soga was very much a contemporary of Suzuki in terms of age (Soga was only five years younger than Suzuki and both lived to the age of ninety-five), and the two shared religious perspectives on a range of issues. Moreover the two men taught together at Otani University for many years and appear together in print in a number of places, so in addition to their commonality of professional concern and age, their friendship is also well-attested to. Although Suzuki does not specifically cite Soga as the source for his ideas, he does mention him in a number of his essays.

One of Soga's most influential essays is "Chijō no kyūshu: Hōzō Bosatsu shutsugen no igi" 地上の救主：法藏菩薩出現の意義 (Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva's Advent), published in 1913 in *Seishinkai* 精神界, the journal of the Seishinshugi movement founded by Kiyozawa Manshi.⁵⁶ In this work, Soga argues forcefully that the *hongan* have salvific power precisely because they represent Dharmākara as a bodhisattva *before* he completed the path and became Amida Buddha. The vows symbolize a transcendent empathy in Dharmākara/Amida, but though we are attracted to the universal light of the Buddha as a symbol of ultimate wisdom, this is too remote to actually impact us individually. Even if the story of Dharmākara is conceived of as religious theatre, that is, as the Buddha manifesting as Dharmākara to bring his message closer to living beings suffering in this reality, nevertheless it is not Amida but Dharmākara who we can feel inside ourselves as we draw closer to the truth of the

⁵⁴ Hase 2003.

⁵⁵ Jan Van Bragt made a serious study of Soga in his final years. His translations of three of Soga's key essays will appear in *Practicing Spirituality*, Mark Blum and Robert Rhodes, eds., forthcoming from SUNY Press.

⁵⁶ This can be found in SRS, vol. 2, pp. 408–21. A translation summary will appear in *Practicing Spirituality*.

Dharma. The gap between human and Buddha is simply too great because, in Soga's words, "the eternal Tathāgata of Unhindered Light stays on the level of an object of our yearning, in other words, on the level of our ideas, and as such cannot be our savior."⁵⁷

Soga insists on viewing the *hongan* as part of the practice of Dharmākara, and frequently refers to "the vows of Dharmākara" rather than "the vows of Amida." This is immediately relevant to Suzuki's description of the *hongan* as "Dharmākara's 'desire' or 'wish.'" The workings of the *hongan*, therefore, are meaningful because Dharmākara is, in Soga's words, "born directly in the mind of human beings" and as such, the voice that calls us through the *hongan* arises within the breast of each person. Thus, "the *hongan* of Dharmākara Bodhisattva is called the ark on the great ocean of *saṃsāra*, intimating that the calling voice arises from the depth of my soul, from right under my feet."⁵⁸ The key is thus the participation of Dharmākara in our own subjectivity.

Now while Soga never goes so far as to state that this participation means that it is us who proclaim the *hongan*, he does imply something very close: "As a human Buddha, Dharmākara Bodhisattva is, as such, the eternally existent Amida Buddha; at the same time, in another aspect, he is the true subject of the self that seeks salvation. I have expressed this idea with the words, 'the Tathāgata is none other than myself.'"⁵⁹ For Soga, then, Dharmākara is himself "the figure of the unity of *ki* (believer) and *hō* (dharma, tathāgata)."⁶⁰ As seen above, Suzuki also likes to cite the phrase "the unity of *ki* and *hō*," a trope common in Shin thought since at least Zonkaku 存覚 (1290–1373). But while Soga speaks of "Dharmākara becoming me," he nevertheless recognizes that Dharmākara is still Dharmākara and precisely because of that power he is able to act as savior. Soga's argument is strong because of the unique role of Dharmākara as both Tathāgata and ordinary person. Dharmākara is not only the object of the faith of the individual but also its "true subject" seeking that faith as well. Suzuki does not specifically distinguish Dharmākara from Amida as Soga does, but as mentioned above he nevertheless asserts a merging if not identification of the Buddha's activities with one's own activities, including the production of bodhisattva vows. In Suzuki's language, true practice

⁵⁷ SRS, vol. 2, p. 410.

⁵⁸ SRS, vol. 2, p. 412.

⁵⁹ SRS, vol. 2, p. 413.

⁶⁰ SRS, vol. 2, p. 413.

only occurs when the subject disappears; in this move it is the practice that is identified with the subject. To wit, “The path is *namu amida butsu*, and the person is *namu amida butsu*. In other words, *namu amida butsu* treads the path of *namu amida butsu*.”⁶¹

What I am suggesting is that Suzuki’s concept of “prayer” reflects his understanding of Soga’s focus on Dharmākara as both subject and object of the *hongan* itself. Soga speaks of “pure practice” defined as the practice that is solely focused on realizing the truth of the *hongan*, and asserts that Dharmākara is both “the master of the *hongan* and its intended object.”⁶² In a preface written for one of Soga’s books and dated 1963, Suzuki uses the phrase employed by Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) indicating nondualistic perception, “the self-identity of absolute contradiction” (*zettai mujun no jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一) to explain his own understanding of the paradox in Pure Land Buddhist thought as interpreted by Shinran and the Shin tradition. Although this piece was published in the time between the completion of his early draft of his *Kyōgyōshinshō* translation which uses “vow” for *hongan* and the final version which uses “prayer,” Suzuki unfortunately does not touch the subject of how to interpret *gan* within Soga’s system of thought or how to translate it. Through personal correspondence, however, I have received independent confirmation that in his last years teaching at Otani he discussed his decision to change “vow” to “prayer” along with another change for *gyō* 行 from “practice” to “living.” The latter change is less difficult, for there are numerous places where Soga and Suzuki both discuss Shinran’s understanding of common, daily experience as contributing to religious understanding. Suzuki is particularly enamored with the *geta* maker Asahara Saichi, a *myōkōnin* who relished the presence of the Buddha in his work to the point that he wrote, “[Amida-sama,] do not take away my defilements (*bonnō*, Skt. *kleśa*), for if you do my gratitude will disappear.”⁶³

In his 1962 lecture, “Waga shinshūkan” 我が真宗観 (My View of Shinshū), Suzuki refers to Meister Eckhart’s view that “Christ is born in my heart in each breath upon breath, moment upon moment,” which helps him explain how “a single breath of *namu amida butsu* can sweep away the evil karma of infinite kalpas.”⁶⁴ And elsewhere in that work, “The Great Practice is where

⁶¹ SDZ, vol. 35, p. 92.

⁶² SRS, vol. 2, p. 414.

⁶³ Cited in “Hongan no kongen,” SDZ, vol. 26, p. 121.

⁶⁴ SDZ, vol. 6, p. 350.

Amida and I become unified as individual and Dharma (*kihō ittai*). . . . Thus, to chant the Name of Amida is to become that Amida whose name you chant.”⁶⁵ Similarly, in *Shin Buddhism*, he writes, “Amida is really ourselves—this is the reason why we can accept the story of Amida so easily and understand the story of Shōma and other such devoted people.”⁶⁶ In the same work, he also speaks of “the perfect identity or absolute identity” of the sacred Name (*myōgō*) and the one who calls that Name.⁶⁷

Suzuki easily, even eagerly, accepted the notion that Amida Buddha as a savior figure in all his symbolic representations (the sacred Name, nenbutsu practice, his vows made as Dharmākara, Dharmākara himself, Amida himself) can be identified with by the believer/practitioner. But as Soga reminded him, to say that “I identify with Amida” is not to say that “Amida identifies with me,” a crucial distinction in Soga’s shift in focus from Amida to Dharmākara. Perhaps because of his Zen-inspired perspective, Suzuki typically moves in the direction of eviscerating the self by means of transcending the self through identification with something beyond the self. This leads him to posit “the perfect identity or absolute identity” with Dharmākara, and thereby with everything in Dharmākara’s career, from five kalpas of contemplating his future Pure Land, to enumerating his *praṇidhāna*, to attaining buddhahood. Notice the contrast in their positions in the following dialog between the two men that was published posthumously in 1972:

Suzuki: Amida said that if he does not do this or that [if his vows are not realized], he himself will not attain perfect awakening and it is said that having attained complete awakening, [his] pure land was created. However, what I think, or what I believe or experience—call it what you will—to my way of thinking, as long as I myself have not attained buddhahood, as long as I have not realized perfect awakening, then Amida has not attained buddhahood.

Soga: If you believe in the *hongan* of Amida, then you can be born in the Land of Bliss.

Suzuki: It is not enough to merely believe in the *hongan* of Amida. When Amida’s *hongan* becomes your own *hongan*, the complete awakening of Amida is accomplished and the Land of Bliss is created.

⁶⁵ SDZ, vol. 6, pp. 356–57.

⁶⁶ Suzuki 1970b, p. 36.

⁶⁷ Suzuki 1970b, p. 55.

Soga: Well, that point is rather difficult. When the *hongan* of Amida becomes your own *hongan*; you are quick to say that, but there seems to be somewhat of a problem in that way of thinking. Can Amida's *hongan* become my *hongan*? There is a problem in whether or not this can be done. If you get to the point that you believe, then one could say that that belief must be the same thing as the *hongan*, for there would be a mutual similarity (*sōtsū* 相通). Because there would be a mutual responsiveness (*sōō* 相応), you could say that Amida's *hongan* becomes my *hongan*, or that my *hongan* is absorbed into the *hongan* of Amida and is accomplished therein.⁶⁸

Once again, Soga is at pains to fully accede to Suzuki's immanent perspective, revealing Suzuki's radical presumption that he can only understand the *hongan* when they become his own, and similarly that he must make a transition from *sattva* to *buddha*—just as Dharmākara Bodhisattva became Amida Buddha—in order to comprehend the meaning of the accomplishment of the vows. What this dialog suggests for the problem at hand is that Suzuki's approach to the enigma of the *hongan* is to identify with Dharmākara such that Dharmākara's *gan* become his *gan*. At the same time he never loses his perspective as Suzuki Daisetsu—in one late essay he describes his mind as being in the Pure Land, and his body as being in this *saha* world.⁶⁹

This is where I think we can understand the notion of “prayer” resurfacing for him as an alternative, perhaps even better, translation for *gan* than desire, wish, or vow. There are of course many kinds of prayer; nonpetitionary prayer may express worship or gratitude, and so-called contemplative prayer aims at a heightened awareness of the sacred, but even these notions direct prayer at a transcendent authority. By contrast, Dharmākara's “prayers” are directed *downward* at living beings mired in karmic restraints and Suzuki never speaks of directing the *hongan* at buddhas in the way that “prayer” is normally used. More likely is that Suzuki was thinking along the lines of “nonreferential” religious language encased in ritual as defined by Wittgenstein, perhaps even anticipating the work of D. Z. Phillips, whose interpretation of Wittgenstein's analysis on the subject of prayer came out in 1966, the year Suzuki died. Islamic prayer has been seen as similarly

⁶⁸ SDZD, vol. 5, pp. 138–39.

⁶⁹ SDZ, vol. 29, p. 125.

nonreferential, and many Buddhist ritual utterances, indeed the very notion of Bodhisattva vows itself, are nonreferential in that they avoid reference to any objectified listener.⁷⁰

In conclusion, I would argue that the word “prayer” can be apropos if we view the *hongan* first, from Soga’s perspective as Dharmākara-centered rather than Amida-centered, and second, as meaningful to the “ordinary person” when they are embodied in a functional way within the individual. In other words, prayers as nonreferential aspirations in a Buddhist sense in that the person making the prayer and the object of the prayer are not distinguished. For Soga, both roles define who Dharmākara is. For Suzuki, these roles not only define Dharmākara but are also imminent within the individual aspirant, understood in the course of his/her everyday life by means of the “resolute will” that Suzuki idealizes in Buddhists down here on the ground. The term *yokushō-shin* 欲生心 (the desire to be reborn in the Pure Land expressed by an ordinary person, one of the so-called “three minds” doctrine in Pure Land discourse, is an example of a traditional doctrinal notion that reflects both aspects of Dharmākara’s “prayers”: imploring us to come to the Pure Land as well as us imploring him to help us get there. Thus it is not surprising that a synonym for *yokushō* is *hotsugan* 発願, “bringing forth one’s personal *gan* for birth in the Pure Land.” We easily forget that “to pray” also had a nonreligious usage when one wanted to entreat someone to do something. Though largely gone from our vocabulary today, by coming to America in the early twentieth-century, Suzuki may have learned this usage at that time, contributing to his lack of hesitation to use the word “prayer” to express entreaty or urging between living beings who have not attained buddhahood.

In recent years Suzuki has been examined critically for a number of his views on Zen and Pure Land, as well as bushido and nationalism, all of this separate from the difficulties that many have expressed regarding his final decision to translate *gan* or *hongan* as “prayer.” Leaving such critique aside, I have attempted to achieve the modest goal of highlighting some of Suzuki’s more interesting thinking related to Pure Land Buddhism. Admittedly, much of this thinking was colored by his background in Zen, especially his discussions of *jiriki-tariki* and the approach of his translation of Shinran’s *Kyōgyōshinshō*. As we have seen, *jiriki* and *tariki* have become reduced today into signs marking “Zen” and “Pure Land Buddhism” for many, the latter increasingly defined as Shinran defined it. Even in light of the Zen

⁷⁰ See Phillips 1966. See also Streng 1967 and Richards 1990.

influence, his translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* was very much a lively and thought provoking “Suzuki” reading of Shinran that opens up those words to much richer associations, and it is indeed regrettable that he died before he could translate the final two chapters of that work. Aided by the fact that he was not translating for an audience limited to Shin believers and his years of expertise in putting Japanese Buddhist sentiment into English, for this writer Suzuki’s translation achieves a degree of faithfulness not seen in the others, although it does employ some idiosyncratic choices of words.

Like his admired Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Suzuki was a public intellectual, and the sheer volume of his writings is testament to that fact. In this essay, I have offered a window onto his perspective on Pure Land Buddhism, only one aspect of the D.T. Suzuki corpus but nevertheless important and largely neglected. Suzuki’s writings on this topic are far broader and deeper than what I have been able to muster here, but if this short piece leads to further studies on Suzuki’s view of Pure Land Buddhism, it will have been a meaningful effort. Comparing Suzuki to his contemporaries and friends, Nishida Kitarō and Soga Ryōjin, we find three different perspectives on what is essentially the same topic: religious experience. In general, Japanese scholars regard Nishida as having done *tetsugaku* 哲学 (philosophy), Soga as having done *shūgaku* 宗学 (sectarian study), and Suzuki as having done *shisō* 思想 (thought). It is this last category that is, of course, the most difficult to explain as *shisō* combines the other two but also adds religious studies, aesthetic studies, and essentially any other form of cultural studies that the author finds relevant. As touched on above, compared to scholars of Pure Land thought like Soga, for Suzuki historical consciousness—in this context, concern for either what went before Shinran and Hōnen or what their contemporaries were saying—is only minimally evident in his writings. His interest is in ideas, not history, and criticism of Suzuki as burdened by a political naïveté is therefore somewhat justified, as it is for anyone focused on ideas and their relationship to experience, particularly when the topic is religion. Perhaps the best illustration of this is a statement made by Suzuki himself in the English language book, *Shin Buddhism*:

(James Bissett Pratt [1875–1944] and I) came to this conclusion: Myth and legend and tradition—tradition may not be a good term—and poetical imagination are actually more real than what we call factual history. What we call facts are not really facts,

are not really so dependable and objective. Real objectivity is in metaphysical subjectivity, you might say, metaphysical truth or poetic legend or religious myth. So we agreed that the Amida story has more objective and spiritual reality than mere historical truth or fact, and Amida has more metaphysical foundation than objective historical fact. Amida is really ourselves—this is the reason why we can accept the story of Amida so easily and understand the story of Shoma and other such devoted people.⁷¹

ABBREVIATIONS

- CWS Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga and Ryushin Uryuzu, trans., *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997.
- SDZ Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙. *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集. New enlarged edition. 40 vols., ed. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi 久松真一 Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益 and Furuta Shōkin 古田紹欽. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999–2003.
- SDZD Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙, et al. *Suzuki Daisetsu zadanshū* 鈴木大拙坐談集. 5 vols., ed. Furuta Shōkin 古田紹欽. Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1971–72.
- SRS Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深. *Soga Ryōjin Senshū* 曾我量深選集. 12 vols., ed. Soga Ryōjin Senshū Kankōkai 曾我量深選集刊行会. Tokyo: Yayoi Shobō, 1970–72.
- SSS Kashiwabara Yūsen 柏原祐泉, Chiba Jōryū 千葉乗隆, Hiramatsu Ryōzō 平松令三 and Mori Ryūkichi 森龍吉, eds. *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 真宗史料集成. 13 vols. Kyoto: Dōbōsha, 1974–83.
- T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.

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⁷¹ Suzuki 1970b, p. 36.

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