

Shifting Subjectivity in the Translation of Shinran's Texts

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Introduction

AS Luis Gómez has pointed out, translation of classical Buddhist texts tends to be either theological or philological. In response to the Honganji Translation Committee, that translated and compiled *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter CWS), he recommends that such a translation as this, needs to be undertaken in ways in which the reader's imagination is not stripped away.¹ In his mind, it is important to keep the ambiguities of scholarly Buddhist terms in translation as well, as new interpretations of these are always possible.

* This paper was originally prepared for the Classical East Asian Buddhist Texts Workshop held from June 30-July 4, 2005, which was sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Oregon in conjunction with the Department of Religion at the University of Southern California. The author wishes to express his acknowledgment to those who participated in the said workshop, particularly to Professors Mark Unno, Andrew Goble, and Lori Meeks who helped develop this presentation into its present format. The author also wishes to acknowledge Reverends Peter Lait and Hashimoto Tomoyoshi for their personal discussions on the concepts of *osō* 往相 and *gensō* 還相, and Professor Hirota, who provided information and insights of which the author was unaware. Lastly, but not least, the author would also like to thank the Shinshū Ōtani-ha (Higashi Honganji) Fellowship for Pure Land Studies for supporting him in his endeavors.

¹ Gómez 1983, p. 80.

The translator's mission should be to make Shinran's unique interpretation of scripture available to the English-language reader in an idiom that is accessible to him. Modern translations of the terms and the texts that Shinran was trying to explicate should reflect, as far as possible, the ambiguities, the problems, and the contexts with which he had to deal. If he is trying to give a particular definition of faith, why should we obscure this fact by rendering the word he is grappling with in such a way that we will not have to struggle with it?²

The difficulty in translation is to what extent translators should include their own theological understandings while making literal references, and how to maintain the author's unique philological analysis without generalizing it.

In this paper, I should like to explore contemporary issues and problems related to the translation of Shinran's magnum opus, *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証, namely the shifting of subjectivity from the absolute to the conventional. By focusing on two of his essential concepts, *shinjin* 信心 and *ekō* 廻向 as taken from the CWS, I should like to examine how the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and its related texts are read in the English language. However, at first, a general approach to translation needs to be presented as a backdrop to this Shin Buddhist doctrinal discussion.

Categorization of Texts and Methods of Translation

In the study of translation, theorists classify texts into three categories, based on their characteristics and correspond to them as such with that particular style of translation in mind: (1) literary and authoritative texts are considered expressive as the writer makes his/her personal use of the language; (2) scientific and technical texts as informative; and (3) texts which include polemical writings, publicity, propaganda as vocative. When these texts are translated, the first group is rendered with an individual style, emphasizing the source language with the writer being seen as the first person (such as "I"); the second group with a neutral/objective mode underscoring the target language with the situation being taken as the third person (such as "it"); and the third group with a persuasive or imperative stance, stressing the target language, with the reader regarded as the second person (such as "you").³

² Ibid., p. 83.

³ Newmark 1981, pp. 12–16.

In spite of these differences, two methods of translation can be employed to any text, namely communicative and semantic, though these two often overlap one another in a single work. However, translators are concerned with formality, emotiveness, and simplicity in either case. The communicative translation tries to produce the same effect on readers as the source language does on those reading the original text, whereas the semantic type attempts to convey the exact contextual meaning of the source language through a close analysis of both the semantic and syntactic structure of the target language. The primary purpose of the former is to communicate and therefore is related to speech, whereas that of the latter is to think and so is connected to thought. This type of classification often parallels the differences between universalist and relativist positions. In approaching expressive texts, communicative translation assumes that literalness is possible since the translator has a message to convey, even though the difficulty of the translation still remains due to either the obscurity of the source language or the lack of equivalent terms in the target language itself. Semantic translation, on the contrary, assumes that, because communication is often interrupted due to thoughts and feelings embedded within the particular culture the writers are raised, messages as such cannot be fully conveyed.⁴

The *Kyōgyōshinshō* contains all these three dimensions mentioned above. The text is expressive as Shinran utters his joy and gratitude, for example, when encountering Hōnen and the Primal Vow; descriptive/informative, since Shinran collected passages from various sutras and commentaries so as to explain the Primal Vow more effectively; and vocative/persuasive as he urges those who read the text, to take refuge in this particular vow. The translations of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* tend to be semantic as the translators were engaged in the thought processes of a relationship between the source language and the target one, e.g., whether *shinjin* is equivalent to faith or not.

Concepts of shinjin and ekō

The *Kyōgyōshinshō* has been translated three times, namely by Yamamoto Kōshō (1958), whose translation was later incorporated into the Ryūkoku Translation Series (1966), Suzuki Daisetz (1973),⁵ and Nishi Honganji

⁴ Ibid., pp. 21–22, 39, 60, 68.

⁵ Suzuki 1973. Suzuki translated only the first four volumes of the text, and hence did not touch those on *shinbutsudo* 真仏土 and *keshindo* 化身土.

(1997).⁶ There are also two partial translations by Inagaki Saizō (1954) and Sugihara Shizutoshi (1957).⁷ In the previous translations, *shinjin* is translated as “faith,” kept as it is in the CWS, but rendered as “entrusting heart” in the most recent edition of *A Record in Lament of Divergences: A Translation of the Tannishō*, (2005), which is also part of the CWS, though published and revised separately. *Ekō* itself is translated as “[merit] turning-over” by Suzuki and as “directing of virtue” or “directing merit” in the CWS.

Shinjin is the most important concept in the Shin Buddhist doctrine. Although it is defined as, “One’s entrusting to Amida’s Primal Vow, which is at the same time the negation of one’s calculative thinking, brought about by Amida’s working”⁸ in the “Glossary of Shin Buddhist Terms” in volume two of the CWS, *shinjin*, for the first time, appears as untranslatable in the texts themselves. In an exchange between Thomas Kasulis and Yoshifumi Ueda, the latter clearly states why the committee of translators chose to keep *shinjin* as it is.⁹ In his mind, “The fundamental difference between *shinjin* and faith is that while the concept of faith stands on the duality of God (creator) and man (created), *shinjin* is the oneness of Buddha and man, or man’s becoming a *buddha*”¹⁰ and “Shinran’s teaching, then, is not one of salvation through ‘faith,’ for *shinjin* is not a means to salvation but salvation itself.”¹¹ In other words, as one cannot escape the Judeo-Christian preconceptions associated with the term “faith,” *shinjin* becomes untranslatable in English. Since then, whether *shinjin* needs to or actually can be translated or not has remained controversial.

Nevertheless, it seems that this debate was brought to another dimension sometime after the publication of the CWS. When publishing *Letters of Rennyo* (*Gobunshō* 御文章 or *Ofumi* 御文) in 2000, those involved, translated *shinjin* as “entrusting heart.” Also, in the second edition of the English translation of the *Tannishō* 歎異抄, which I have already mentioned, *shinjin* is likewise rendered as such. In its Preface, the translators’ intention is stated as follows:

⁶ “The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way” in CWS.

⁷ Yagi 1985, pp. 29–30.

⁸ CWS, p. 206.

⁹ See Kasulis 1981 and Ueda 1981.

¹⁰ Ueda 1981, p. 507.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

As a verb form of *shinjin*, Shinran used the word *tanomu*, which literally means “to entrust oneself” to something greater than oneself, to indicate the religious attitude that one maintains in the realization of Amida’s compassion. As a result, we have decided to translate *shinjin* as “entrusting heart,” both in the *Letters of Rennyo*, published in 2000, and now in this second edition of the *Tannishō*.¹²

By breaking away from the theological debate about *shinjin* and faith, the group of translators started using a literal translation of the former.

In the Shin Buddhist tradition, *shinjin* is directed toward sentient beings along with nembutsu by the virtues accumulated by Amida Buddha. In the causal stage, Bodhisattva Dharmākara made forty-eight vows so as to liberate all sentient beings from the wheel of birth-and-death. Upon the fulfillment of these and various related practices, he became Amida Buddha. According to one of the vows (namely the 18th-the Primal Vow), as long as sentient beings call Amida’s Name, one can realize birth in his Pure Land. This takes the form of nembutsu or *namu-amida-butsu* 南無阿弥陀仏 (I take refuge in Amida Buddha). However, instead of reciting this, Shinran places priority on entrusting oneself to the Primal Vow alone, which Dharmākara made countless ages ago. This entrusting is *shinjin*, which Amida directs (*ekō*) toward sentient beings.

When the notion of *ekō* or “directing of virtue” is rendered into English, translation of the concerned passages becomes problematic, as there is an absence of an actual subject and the infusion of perspectives of both the absolute and sentient beings (including Shinran himself) in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. However, by investigating the Japanese honorifics existing in the source language, which is written in *kanbun* (Classical Chinese), Shin Buddhist scholars are able to determine that Shinran is indicating Amida/Dharmākara to be the one, who directs these virtues. In the translation itself, however, the subject is unclear; yet it is possible to infer it as being that of the Bodhisattva, practitioner, or even “devotee.” Here below, the original passage describing the “directing of virtue” is given in Japanese, followed by the CWS’ translation:

回向に二種の相あり。一つには往相、二つには還相なり。往相は、己が
 功德をもって一切衆生に回施したまいて、作願して共にかの阿弥陀如来

¹² Hongwanji International Center 2005, p. x.

の安樂浄土に往生せしめたまうなり。還相は、かの土に生じ已りて、奢摩他・毘婆舍那・方便力成就することを得て、生死の稠林に回入して、一切衆生を教化して、共に仏道に迎えしめたまうなり。(emphasis added for honorific words).¹³

The directing of virtue has two aspects: that for going forth to the Pure Land and that for return to this world. “Directing for going forth” means to give one’s virtues to all sentient beings and to aspire to bring them all to birth in Amida Tathagata’s Pure Land of happiness. “Directing for return to this world” means that after being born in that land, fulfilling samatha and vipasyana, and gaining the power of compassionate means, one returns and enters the thick forests of birth-and-death, teaches and guides all sentient beings, and brings all to enter the Buddha-way together (emphasis added for subjects).¹⁴

Shinran quotes this passage from T’an-luan’s *The Treatise on the Pure Land*, in which however, “directing for going forth” (*ōsō ekō*) was originally read as 往相は、己が功德をもって一切衆生に回施して、共にかの阿弥陀如来の安樂浄土に往生せむと作願するなり。“‘Directing for going forth’ means to give one’s own virtues to all sentient beings and to aspire to be born together with them in that Pure Land of Amida Tathagata.”¹⁵ In other words, as the translators mention in a note to this translation, “Shinran takes the subject of this passage on directing virtue to be Dharmākara Bodhisattva, while the original speaks of bodhisattvas generally.”¹⁶

In the first part of the above describing the “directing for going forth,” something in the translation is missing.

往相は、己が功德をもって一切衆生に回施したまいて、作願して共にかの阿弥陀如来の安樂浄土に往生せしめたまうなり。

In Shinran’s text, *onore* (lit. “my”) *ga kudoku o motte* represents the voice of Dharmākara, but for the rest of the sentence, the perspective switches to that of sentient beings, as the honorific here expresses Shinran’s gratitude to the former. The intersection of these two views is lost in translation, partly due to the lack of such a stylistic language in English.

¹³ *Shinshū seiten* 真宗聖典 (hereafter SS), p. 233.

¹⁴ CWS vol.1, p. 104.

¹⁵ “Shinran’s readings.” CWS vol. 2, p. 254.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In the second part of these passages, describing the “directing for return to this world,” not only is the subject unstated but also the voices of both Dharmākara and the sentient beings, who achieve birth in the Pure Land, are hardly distinguished in the original text.

還相は、かの土に生じ已りて、奢摩他・毘婆舍那・方便力成就することを得て、生死の稠林に回入して、一切衆生を教化して、共に仏道に迎えしめたまうなり。

Those who are born in the Pure Land and fulfill *śamatha* and *vipāśyana* are sentient beings, and the “one” that returns and guides them is Dharmākara. However, in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, such a demarcation is not as explicit as in the translation, in which the subject of this passage is rendered as “one”—indicating a conventional subject. The translators’ introduction to the translation is helpful again as it clarifies the identity of the subject:

Through the working of the Vow, those who realize shinjin will be able, after being born in the Pure Land, to become superior bodhisattvas working in this world for the salvation of all beings . . . however, Shinran presents it as an expression of Other Power, and he interprets the bodhisattva’s return to this world as a reference to Dharmākara’s working. In “Chapter on Realization,” it is those who have attained birth in the Pure Land that return as bodhisattvas, and their working and that of Dharmākara are seen as one.¹⁷

By reading this, it is understood that the subject that “returns and enters the thick forests of birth-and-death, teaches and guides all sentient beings, and brings all to enter the Buddha-way together” is Dharmākara, united with those who have attained birth in the Pure Land. Without consulting this note however, it is unclear what “one” in the passages of “directing for return to this world” represents. In fact, in Suzuki’s translation, the subject of “return” is stated as “the devotee.”

The returning [movement] is to come back to this world after having been born in the Pure Land. Having now perfected the practice of *śamatha* and *vipāśyana*, and acquired the power of devising various means of general salvation for all beings, [the devotee] returns to the forest of birth-and-death to teach all beings, so that they will all turn toward the way of the Buddha (*emphasis added*).¹⁸

¹⁷ “Introduction to Teaching, Practice, and Realization.” CWS vol. 2, p. 53.

¹⁸ Suzuki 1973, p. 115.

When the passages of “directing of virtue”—particularly for “directing for return to this world” are translated, the subjectivity shifts from the absolute to the conventional. Therefore, in this respect, how are we able to understand this change?

Shifting the Subjectivity

Before investigating the significance of this alteration, I should like to explain *when* “one’s return” takes place and *why* the concept of the virtue “directing for return to this world” is important. Hee-Sung Keel is correct in saying, “It is clear that for Shinran the ‘return’ is something that occurs in our next life, i.e., after we have attained the Pure Land and enlightenment.”¹⁹ Hence, Shin Buddhist scholars tend to claim that it is not the conventional subjects, including themselves, who gain the power of compassionate means and so help others in this world. By asserting that no ethical guidance is found in Shinran’s textual understanding of the “directing for return to this world,” Shin Buddhist followers have generally remained inactive concerning social issues.²⁰

Recently, American scholars have further developed the understanding of “directing of virtue.” For instance, for Thomas Kasulis, the “directing for going forth” means “compassion will arise of itself to relieve us from our personal anguish” and the “directing for return to this world” implies “compassion will arise of itself . . . to bring us into the world as agents of a compassion beyond what I myself can be.”²¹ By lessening the emphasis on textual analy-

¹⁹ Keel 1995, p. 150. Shin Buddhist scholars’ discussion on *ōsō* and *gensō* including their application to one’s daily life has varied, even though these two concepts are always treated as an inseparable pair derived from Amida’s working. For instance, Soga Ryōjin defines *ōsō* as the nembutsu through which one attains birth in the Pure Land, and *gensō* as the nembutsu expressing one’s gratitude to Amida Buddha, based on one’s obtainment of *shinjin* (Soga 1947, pp. 199–200). According to Kaneko Daiei, *ōsō* is the aspiration for the other world, *paryavasāna*, and the longing for the state in which one transcends one’s own senses and consciousness, whereas *gensō* reflects the world of the other shore upon one’s daily life and perceives all phenomena as they are (Kaneko 1952, pp. 60–61).

²⁰ Needless to say, some scholars have challenged such a cliché, namely that Shin Buddhism lacks ethical responsibility. For instance, Kenneth Tanaka discusses such concerns in Pure Land soteriology, based on the doctrine of *Jyōgyō daihi* 常行大悲 (constantly practicing great compassion), which is “more spiritually oriented and more self-reflective than the dominant forms of ethical models found in the West.” See Tanaka 1998, p. 100.

²¹ Kasulis 2001, p. 35.

sis, he tries to observe the dynamics of the virtue “directing for return to this world” as follows:

Yet, that *tarikī* [Other Power] is itself compassionate and knows no bounds. So its working not only takes the person of *shinjin* to the Pure Land, but also in its expansive response to suffering, compassion returns that person to the world of suffering beings and in that way the person is a vehicle for Amida’s compassionate agency. That is why Shinran could first encounter the Pure Land Way not through philosophical analysis or textual scholarship or Tendai practices, but only through his encounter with Hōnen. In turn, Shinran’s followers encountered it in the person of Shinran. What they really encountered was not Shinran’s wisdom or compassion . . . what they encountered was instead the working of the Vow through Shinran. Shinran’s moral and spiritual agency was not his own (*jiriki*), but that of someone or something else (*tarikī*).²²

Kasulis’ interpretation of the text appears to be reasonable, especially when the subject of “directing of virtue” is not specified, but rather shown to be “one.”

As I stated earlier, shifting the subjectivity from the absolute to the conventional is a phenomenon, which appears in the process of translation. One may however ask why the translators did not put the subject as Dharmākara, for both “directing for going forth” and “directing for return to this world” if this was indicated by Shinran? Such a claim seems plausible. However, if they had done so, as Dennis Hirota, head of the CWS translation team might argue, they would have prioritized a choice of a theological interpretation over that of a philological one, because in the passage of “directing for going forth,” the subject appears as *onore*, not Dharmākara, in the source language.²³

Secondly, Hirota points out the features of written Chinese from which Shinran draws strength in his reading of the Pure Land texts. One such aspect is “the frequent lack of explicit indications of tense and relationships.”²⁴ Concerning the concepts of “directing of virtue,” Hirota states:

²² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²³ Hirota states that the translation emphasized the linguistic function of the text and Pure Land Buddhism, rather than an intellectual and ideological understanding of the doctrine. See Hirota 1998, p. 265.

²⁴ Hirota 1993b, p. 119.

Even in passages that appear unambiguous in context, Shinran finds a latitude unavailable in Japanese for interpretations that deviate from the preceding commentarial traditions. One major use of such features concerns designations of the agent of action. With the arising of the doublesided horizon of the self, practitioners experience a reversal in the direction of the activity that moves them toward awakening. To articulate this, Shinran adopted the Mahāyāna concept of “directing” (*ekō*) merit gained through practice toward attainment.²⁵

It was the vagueness of expression found in the *Ching-t'u lun-chu* 淨土論註 (The Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land) of T'an-luan 曇鸞, in which the identity of *onore* is not clearly stated, that made Shinran construct a new interpretation of the subjectivity by making a notation of grammatical readings, such as honorific words. To put it differently, it was in the way he read the passages that Dharmākara emerged as the subject and for this reason, those passages dealing with “directing of virtue” are expressive in the categorization of the texts which I mentioned earlier. Therefore, Shinran was able to establish that this “directing” was due to the spontaneous working of Dharmākara by reappraising T'an-luan's passages, in which Dharmākara never explicitly appears as the subject, without changing their order or adding any *kanji* characters to them. If, however, Dharmākara or Amida were stated directly to be the agent of “directing of virtue” in the translation, there would be too much divergence from the source language.

Thirdly, in Shinran's mind, Dharmākara Bodhisattva and Amida Buddha should not be conceived as separate entities, and in fact, in another part of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran defines the subject of “directing of virtue” as being Amida Tathāgata.

Finally, “aspire for birth” is the command of the Tathagata's calling to and summoning the multitudes of all beings. That is, true and real entrusting is the essence of aspiration for birth, which is not the directing of merit through the self-power of meditative and non-meditative practices, whether performed by ordinary people or sages of the Mahayana or the Hinayana. Therefore, it is called “not-directing.”

²⁵ Ibid.

However, sentient beings of the countless worlds, floundering in the sea of blind passions and drifting and sinking in the ocean of birth-and-death, lack the true and real mind of directing virtues; they lack the pure mind of directing virtues. For this reason, when the Tathagata was performing bodhisattva practices out of pity for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction, in every single moment, every single instant, of his endeavor in the three modes of action, he took the mind of directing virtues as foremost, and thus realized the mind of great compassion. Accordingly, the Buddha directs this other-benefiting, true and real mind of aspiration for birth to the ocean of all beings. Aspiration for birth is this mind of directing virtues.²⁶

The merit of “not-directing” refers to Shinran’s spiritual conviction that it is impossible for conventional subjects to transfer the virtue for birth in the Pure Land due to their own egotistical concerns. It is the circular movement of Dharmākara to Amida and vice versa, in which the merit is directed to all sentient beings. Thus, the subject of “directing of virtue” cannot be limited to either Dharmākara or Amida alone.

The alteration of subjectivity, therefore, reflects both theological and philological concerns involved in the translation. However, by changing the approach, I should like to argue its significance from a different angle. By referring to the post-colonial translation discourse when discussing the theory of Tathāgata’s Three Bodies and the Shin Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths (*shin zoku nitai* 真俗二諦), absolute and worldly, I should like to investigate the issue of the changing of subjectivity.

A Search for “New Conceptual Frames”

For post-colonial theorists, translation needs to be examined in connection with the power relationship of a particular culture in which two languages are involved. According to Talal Asad, functionalists require a translation to be evaluated positively in their own social context, which reflects the residual of an absolute claim to enlightened reason. This type of translation is cultural, in which institutionalized practices are exercised over less advanced countries, including the so-called Third World, involving the inequality of language, which Asad defines as “a feature of the global patterns of power

²⁶ CWS, vol. 1, pp. 103–4.

created by modern imperialism and capitalism.”²⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty also makes a similar argument when discussing the two models of translation, non-modern and modern. In the former, for instance, the translation of Hindu gods into an expression of Islamic divinity is based on local and term-for-term exchange in which rhetorical skills, such as alliteration and rhyming, are used. In the latter, however, translation tends to be mediated by or referred to as a “third category,” in this case, the notion of God in Christianity, so that it appears to be “universal.” Chakrabarty calls this type “an act of translation modeled on Newtonian science.”²⁸

As part of the solution to such a cultural translation, which is conditioned by professional, national, or international powers, Asad calls for an internal critique to be developed in the process of translation.

The good translator does not immediately assume that unusual difficulty in conveying the sense of an alien discourse denotes a fault in the latter, but instead critically examines the normal state of his or her own language. The relevant question therefore is not how tolerant an attitude the translator ought to display toward the original author (an abstract ethical dilemma) but how she can test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms.²⁹

Translation, involving cultural exchange, needs to be self-reflexive, as the issues of what is being translated or not as well as for whom the translation is being made, reflect the inequality of power.

As the power relationship between the “First” and “Third” Worlds is unbalanced, Carol Maier suggests that it is imperative for translators to inquire into the connection between subjectivity and identity in the translation itself, since it is the “translating subject” that acts between two particular cultures, so helping to understand identity as “a learned or constructed allegiance rather than an innate condition.”³⁰ For instance, although what is indicated by the term “woman” in daily usage is abstract (such as age, appearance, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth), individuals employ it anyway as a point of departure in order to construct both their own and collective identities. In like manner, a translator seeks to create “new conceptual frames” in which one

²⁷ Asad 1993, pp. 172, 199.

²⁸ Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 83–86.

²⁹ Asad 1993, p. 190.

³⁰ Maier 1995, p. 31.

culture is introduced to another, by not relying on ready-made formulae available to either of the two. This is his/her obligation in the field of cross-cultural transliteration, a form of self-critique, by not merely using established and unexamined structures.³¹

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the applicability of the post-colonial discourse on the translation practice of transliterating classical Buddhist texts, it is possible to construct a new conceptual frame of “one” in the passages of “directing of virtue” if the translating subject is able to help shape the spiritual identity of the translator and/or reader who is engaged in Shinran’s text. For this, I now turn to the theory of Tathāgata’s Three Bodies and the Shin Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths.

According to the *trikāya* theory, Buddha is classified into three bodies: *dharmakāya* (Dharma-body), *sambhogakāya* (Enjoyment-body/Reward-body), and *nirmānakāya* (Transformed-body). The first of these three is the essence of Buddha’s realization, namely *tathatā* (suchness) or *śūnyatā* (emptiness). The second refers to Amida Buddha, who enjoys the Pure Land and the Dharma as the consequence of the fulfillment of Bodhisattva Dharmākara’s vows and various practices. The third one indicates the physical Buddha, Śākyamuni, as the manifestation of the Dharma in a historical context. *Sambhogakāya* is also the concretization of the Dharma-body, which is also called the *niśyandakāya*, meaning the outflow of the latter, motivated by “great compassion.” Hence, there is a dual function in this Enjoyment-body—the concretization of the absolute and transcendence of the human Buddha—in order to bridge the gap between the first and third bodies. Without *sambhogakāya*, the Dharma that Śākyamuni Buddha had realized, could have been seen as merely personal, and if so, after his death, it might have lost its legitimacy. In this sense, *sambhogakāya* “shouldered a temporary meaning while being a true reality, and regained its historic nature while transcending history.”³²

Amida Buddha, thus, has two aspects: the manifestation of the Dharma-body or formless reality as compassionate means (*hōben hosshin* 方便法身) and the fulfillment of Dharmākara’s vows and practices (*hōjin* 報身). Hirota defines these two concepts of Amida as follows:

Amida is seen either as Buddha compassionately emerging from

³¹ Ibid.

³² Nagao 1973, p. 38.

formless reality or as the culmination of aeons of practice to save all sentient beings. In fact, it is above all the entire causal *narrative* of Dharmākara-Amida that is the emergence of dharma-body as compassionate means, that is, of comprehensible *form*. At the same time, the narrative progresses from the aeons of practice performed by Dharmākara toward Amida's Buddhahood as the formless light of wisdom. That is, conversely, the narrative itself moves toward attainment of the formless.³³

The first current is Amida's spontaneous action in order to personify itself so as to make the narrative available to sentient beings; yet, this anthropomorphic aspect of Amida is based on the premise of the second movement in which the narrative makes them realize the world of oneness. In this context, the alteration of subjectivity in the passages of "directing of virtue" can be understood as the agency of Amida/Dharmākara, which makes itself move from the absolute to the conventional, so that the reader of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* realizes his/her authentic engagement with it. In other words, "one" stands for both the dual aspect of this agency and the reader's active participation at the time of reading the text. If this is so, I suggest that the subject "turns into" the ordinary from the absolute, as the transformation reflects Amida's natural working.

Nevertheless, changing subjectivity can also indicate the possibility of the degradation of Absolute Truth to a worldly one in the doctrine of the Two Truths, which has been and continues to be the core of Shin Buddhist teaching, though the concept itself, however, still causes theoretical debates in the organization. In the Mahāyāna tradition, Absolute Truth (Skt. *paramārtha-satya*) refers to the ultimate teaching, which transcends mundane affairs, while Worldly Truth (Skt. *saṃvṛti-satya*) corresponds to the rules of this world. The relationship between these two often conflicts. In the Shin Buddhist tradition, however, this doctrine previously served as the basis for the institution in order to formulate its relationship with the state. Perhaps, one of the letters of Rennyō, the eighth abbot of Honganji (1415–99), can best summarize this point:

In particular, first of all, take the laws of the state as fundamental and, giving priority to [the principles of] humanity and justice, fol-

³³ Hirota 2001, p. 53. Also, for his detailed discussion of "interfused movements between form and formlessness," see Hirota 1993a, pp. 50–93 and Hirota 1993b, pp. 91–130.

low the generally accepted customs; deep within yourself, maintain the settled mind of our tradition; and outwardly, conduct yourself in such a way that the transmission of the dharma you have received will not be evident to those of other sects and other schools.³⁴

The leaders of both Honganji (Nishi and Higashi) in the Meiji period developed Rennyō's ideas in such a way as to justify their participation in the state apparatus by propagating to their followers that the basis of the Shin Buddhist doctrine was the laws of the state (*ōbō ihon* 王法為本). However they went even further during World War II, by explaining that the duty of Shin Buddhists was to die gloriously on the battlefield, and by manipulating the *Kyōgyōshinshō* so as to avoid possible condemnation from the state over the fact that Shinran had criticized the emperor concerning his persecution of the nembutsu teaching. In the Postscript to the text, Shinran states:

主上臣下 (*shushō shinka*)、法に背き義に違し、忿を成し怨を結ぶ。これに因って、真宗興隆の大祖源空法師、ならびに門徒数輩、罪科を考えず、猥りがわしく死罪に坐す。あるいは僧儀を改めて姓名を賜うて、遠流に処す。予はその一なり。しかればすでに僧にあらず俗にあらず。このゆえに禿の字をもって姓とす。 (*emphasis added*)³⁵

The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. As a result, Master Genkū—the eminent founder who had enabled the true essence of the Pure Land way to spread vigorously [in Japan]—and a number of his followers, without receiving any deliberation of their [alleged] crimes, were summarily sentenced to death or were dispossessed of their monkhood, given [secular] names, and consigned to distant banishment. I was among the latter. Hence, I am now neither a monk nor one in worldly life. For this reason, I have taken the term Toku [“stubble-haired”] as my name.³⁶

Either by deleting the two characters of *shushō* (emperor) or placing the preposition *no* (of) between *shushō* and *shinka*, Shin Buddhist leaders could claim that it was not the emperor, himself, but his ministers who had been responsible for suppressing Hōnen's *Nembutsu Sangha*.³⁷

³⁴ Translated by Rogers (1991, p. 215).

³⁵ SS, p. 398.

³⁶ CWS vol. 1, p. 289.

³⁷ Mori 1973, p. 232. See also Rogers 1991, pp. 326–8.

The manipulation of the text mentioned above is extreme, but *when the translation is taken at face value*, it is possible to interpret the subject that transfers the merit as an ordinary being, in the same way as Suzuki inserted “the devotee” into the passages concerning “directing for return to this world.” In the light of such a reading, the action of one who “teaches and guides all sentient beings” is justified as he/she receives *shinjin*, even though such an action is often connected with one’s egotistical desires. In other words, by separating the “directing for going forth” from that of “directing for return to this world,” *shinjin* becomes something to be gained after which, one is able to carry out the mission to save the world. Amida’s Primal Vow is now replaced with justice, which is asserted by the human ego.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate one of the ambiguities observed in the translation of Shinran’s passages of “directing of virtue.” The shifting of the subjectivity from the absolute to the conventional cannot be dismissed simply as a problem of linguistic differences. Instead, by creating new conceptual frames—dynamic movements of form and formlessness, in which Amida/Dharmākara’s agency is involved, and by reducing the absolute subject to a colloquial language—I have tried to preserve the untranslatability of a yet completely new transliteral interpretation of the dual concept of *ōsō-gensō*.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CWS *Collected Works of Shinran*. Translated by Dennis Hirota, Inagaki Hisao, Tokunaga Michio, and Uryuzu Ryushin. 2 vols. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997.
 SS *Shinshū seiten* 真宗聖典. 15th ed. Edited by Shinshū Seiten Hensan Iinkai 真宗聖典編纂委員会. Kyoto: Higashi Honganji, 1995.

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