Awakening Faiths:
The Ideological Influences in D. T. Suzuki's Translation of
Açvaghosha's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna

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本稿は中国仏教における重要なテキスト、Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna（『大乗起信論』）の鈴木大拙による英訳を考察する。大拙による翻訳を他の二種類の英訳と比較しながら大拙が主に用いた語句に焦点をあて、そこから大拙のイデオロギー背景を明らかにする。

This paper looks at the ideological influences that shaped D. T. Suzuki's 1900 translation of the important Mahayana Buddhist work, *Açvaghosha's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna* (hereafter *The Awakening of Faith*). It will compare Suzuki's translation of certain key terms in the source text with other alternative translations and will seek to clarify the ideological implications of Suzuki's particular choices of words and phrases.

Ideology and translation

To describe a translator, particularly a translator of a religious work, as being *ideological* may seem to some to imply a sense of criticism of the translator, as though one were seeking to 'expose' the translator's innate prejudices with the aim of declaring a translation to be inaccurate and invalid. Such a view is based on an understanding of *ideology* as being a set of prejudiced ideas that warp one's view of an objective reality and this is indeed the way the term 'ideology' is often used in general conversation. However, I am using the term *ideology* here in the sociological sense of beliefs and values that *all* people have as a consequence of their social background. Ideology is unavoidable and all social action is shaped by ideology.[1]

Translator choices

Any act of translation involves numerous decisions on the part of the translator. An individual word may be translated by a range of synonyms, phrases, explanations, and other devices, in the target language. There will, usually, be at least *more than one* valid and error-free choice available to the translator when translating a word or phrase.[2] What determines which word or phrase a translator will use cannot always be reduced to one factor. Important influences can include, among other things, pressure to conform to a standard institutional terminology or pressure to ensure that a chosen word slots in coherently and cohesively with the other words in the target text. What concerns us here, though, is one further salient factor that shapes word and terminology choice—the ideological background of the translator.

Seeing ideology in a translation

Ideologies explicitly and implicitly reveal themselves to the world through language in the form of set terms and phrases that hold a special meaning for the members of a particular ideological grouping. Such terms and phrases become part of the *cultural capital* by which the ideological grouping shapes its own discourse and asserts and maintains its common membership and affiliation.[3] Furthermore, an ideology is manifested not only through the terms and phrases it uses in its discourses but also by the terms it does not use. We can understand this in the sense that the signs that make up the semiotic system of a particular ideology's texts and discourses are defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. That is, we know the significance of a sign from its distinction from other alternate signs that encompass the cultural capital of other conflicting ideologies. Viewed in this sense, any given translator is, through his translation, appropriating an (original) text, and through terminological patterns derivative of the translator's cultural capital, rendering that text into a form that is a further incidence of the ideological discourse to which the translator is affiliated. Of course the original source text in question does not change and will always be available for appropriation

by translators allied to other competing ideological groupings. The view of translation I am offering here, then, is one which asserts, Bourdieu-style, the fact that it is the *social* rather than the *discursive* that shapes the translator and his translation. In other words, it is society that shapes language, and not the other way around.[4]

D. T. Suzuki's ideological background

What, then, can we state to be Suzuki's ideological motivations and background at the time he wrote his translation of the *Awakening of the Faith*. Three particular strands can be highlighted. First of all, Suzuki was affiliated with a movement within Buddhism that has been branded 'Buddhism Modernism'[5]. Secondly, at the time of the translation, Suzuki was working in Illinois in the USA at the Open Court Press, a publishing house involved in the publication of works of world philosophy and religion. The publishing house was run by Paul Carus, Suzuki's mentor, a German-born neo-Kantian philosopher who was actively engaged in seeking new understandings of Eastern thought. Thirdly, Suzuki, like other Buddhist promoters during this period, was concerned about the hegemonizing actions of Christian scholars who sought to explain away Buddhism as a distortion of Christian truth. I will describe below in more detail each of these strands.

"Buddhist Modernism"

The late 19th and early 20th Century saw the rise of "New Buddhism" in Japan. With the emergence of a modern, secular based education system in Meiji Japan and the appearance of Christianity as a competing world view with the potential to entice the loyalties of Japan's intelligentsia away from traditional faiths, some among the Japanese Buddhist clergy sought to make Buddhism more accessible and 'relevant' to modern people. Such efforts included opening temples to lay participants and producing a new Buddhist discourse that would explain Buddhism in a style a modern audience would find less archaic and obscure, and more philosophically systemic – a religion based on rationality as much as, if not more than, revelation. It was from out

of this movement D. T. Suzuki emerged as an interpreter and apologist for Buddhism.[6]

Carus and the search for a world religion

While Buddhist modernism was arising in Japan, in the West there was a trend among many Western intellectuals towards a non-institutional, individual and pragmatic-based religious consciousness. This was based on the view that all the major World religions contain an essence of truth but that this truth is wrapped up and obscured behind atavistic sectarian garbs. The hope, then, was that by removing the superstitions, the narrow dogmas, and the institutionally-mediated and controlled religious experience from organized religion one would be able to achieve a spiritual vision that was more objectively rational and more individually imminent. One proponent of this search for a rational view of the world informed by the essential truths of all world religions was Paul Carus for whom, as I have mentioned, Suzuki was working when he completed his *Awakening of the Faith* translation. Carus in fact wrote a publisher's preface for the translation where he says: "… there are striking similarities between the very terms of Açvaghosha's system and expressions which I have used in my own philosophical writings."[7] As we shall see below, Suzuki's close association with Carus is manifest in various terminological choices made in the translation.

Defense against Christian appropriation

Another ideological force of relevance to the shaping of this translation was the rival religion of Christianity which, around this time, had been explaining Buddhism to Western audiences in terms of Christianity's own tenets. Such explanations often presented Buddhism in a negative light, describing it as an uncaring religion seeking a final goal of salvation through annihilation in a universe dominated by unconscious but callous forces.[8] Part of Suzuki's motivations in making his translation of the *Awakening of Faith* was to seek to explain Buddhism in its own terms and to combat the perceived propaganda and misrepresentations offered by rival Christian commentators. This is clear from Suzuki's foreword wherein he states:

The study of Buddhism has recently made gigantic strides, on this side of the Atlantic as well as on the other … Even Christians who were without sympathy for "heathen" religions have now taken up the study of Buddhism in earnest. Nevertheless, it appears to me that the teachings of Sakyamuni are not yet known in their full significance and that they do not yet command just appreciation. Though intolerant critics lose no chance of vigorously and often wrongly attacking the weak points of Buddhism, which are naturally seen at the surface, clear-sighted people have been very slow to perceive its innermost truth…. The present English translation of Açvaghosha's principal work is therefore dedicated to the Western public by a Buddhist from Japan, with a view to dispelling the denunciations so ungraciously heaped upon the Mahayana Buddhism.[9]

And so with this mission statement, Suzuki set out to translate this text in a way that, as we shall see, was shaped by the concerns of modern Buddhism and a Carus-style search for philosophical and religious plurality.

The text: *The Awakening of the Faith* 大乗起信論[10]

The Awakening of Faith was most likely written originally in Chinese and not actually authored by *Açvaghosha* (an Indian Buddhist philosopher). It remains an important work in the Mahayana canon and contains many important concepts of Mahayana philosophy. In particular it discusses the relationship between the undefiled and "empty" *tathāgatagarbha* and the *alayavijna* (supra) consciousness that operates in the world of phenomena and dualistic differentiation. The work is noteworthy for its attempts to reconcile these two concepts (often through the use of vivid and clever metaphors) creating a synthesis between the eternal mind and the deluded mind.[11] The text is also noteworthy for providing an early example of the important concept of "*hongaku*" which was emerging at the time in Chinese Buddhism and was to play a major role in later Japanese-based Buddhist discourse. The term will be explained further below.[12]

The other translations

Suzuki's translation will be compared below to two other existent translations. The first one, by Timothy Richard, is entitled *The Awakening of Faith* and was first published in 1907[13] and the second, also entitled *The Awakening of Faith,* was published by Yoshito Hakeda in 1967.[14] The Richard translation was produced around the same time as Suzuki's translation. Richard was a Christian missionary working in China. His interest in completing his own translation of the Ashvagosha text was to show connections between the concepts in the text and Christianity—a goal diametrically opposed to that of Suzuki. I quote here at length what Richards wrote in his autobiography *Forty-five years in China: reminiscences* where he details his interests and motivations in translating this book (as well as his awareness of Suzuki's version):

I had previously, however, in 1884, come across a very remarkable book which had made clear in my mind the secret of the influence of Buddhism [in China]. This treatise was called "The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana School of Religion." A devout Buddhist who had been converted from Confucianism, and who was master of Buddhist philosophical terms, had offered to help me to translate the book into English if I could spare the time. This book I translated in 1891 with his help, though my translation was not published till after another, by Suzuki, had appeared. Its author, Ashvagosha, was the founder of the Mahayana School of Buddhism, a new sect that arose towards the end of the first century A.D. in North-West India, opposed to the Hinayana or original School of Buddhism. The doctrines of the new school were those of "one soul immanent for good in all individual immorality and growth in the likeness of God, of the importance of faith in God to produce good works, and of the willingness of the best spirits to make sacrifices to save others." … I was greatly struck by the Christian nature of the teaching of the book. [My square brackets][15]

In this way, Richard and Suzuki's versions can be considered to be emergent from two separate ideological backgrounds, one Christian, the

other Buddhist.

Hakeda, in the preface to his translation, states "It is hoped that this translation of the work will prove of value to the Western readers in increasing their understanding of the basic tenets and practices of Mahayana Buddhism and that it will assist them in becoming more familiar with that rich and important branch of the Buddhist religion, which, along with the other great religious and philosophical systems of Asia, is rapidly becoming recognized as part of the cultural heritage of all mankind."[16] The preface is dated as being written in 1966. The tone of the preface contains none of the defensiveness of Suzuki's preface. Instead it assumes that its target audience is waiting and ready to accept without prejudice the text to be translated. The contrast in tones in many ways reflects the huge strides Buddhism had made in the west by the 1960s where, thanks in large part to Suzuki among others, it was no longer an obscure exoticized religion but was "part of the cultural heritage of all mankind". Hakeda does actually comment on Suzuki's translation stating that it is "the most reliable" (of earlier English-language efforts).[17] This comment along with the general sentiment of the rest of Hakeda's preface suggests that Hakeda's translation, in ideological terms, inhabits the same space as Suzuki and is discursively supplementary to, rather than a replacement of, Suzuki's translation.

The translations compared: four key terms

To illustrate the ideological significance of the terminological choices Suzuki made, I have highlight four particular words and phrases from the text below. In discussing the choices Suzuki made in translating these four words and phrases, I will make comparisons and contrasts with the alternate translations offered by Richard and Hakeda.[18]

（衆生）心[19]

We first of all look at the term 衆生心 which is translated by Suzuki as "the soul of all sentient beings (*sarvasattva*)"[20]. For the same term Richard uses the phrase "Soul of all living beings" while Hakeda renders it as "the

Mind of the sentient being".[21] Accordingly both Suzuki and Richard use the word "soul" for the concept 心. Obviously for Richard, by using this word he can give the original concept a Christian denotation. On the other hand, Suzuki's reason for using the word "soul" is made clear in his footnote to that word where he explains that he is using the word in the sense denoted by Paul Carus. He writes, "'Soul' is not used here in a dualistic sense, but as Dr. Paul Carus defines it in the last chapter of *The Soul of Man*. Speaking of the soul of the universe he defines the term as 'the formative principle which gave and still gives shape to the world (loc. cit., first edition, p. 47)'"[22]. There is a danger of course, for Suzuki, that in using this word the original concept may become enshrined in Christian connotations. But his use here of Carus's term can be explained in sociological terms as his adoption of the cultural capital he shares with Carus as a member of a specific social grouping of intellectuals. In micro-sociological terms, the word "soul" as a signifier is, what Randall Collins has dubbed, a "*charged* symbol"[23] reinforcing social solidarity within the group of intellectuals to which Suzuki and Carus belong. As Collins points out, "… the sense of words … is their symbolic connection to social solidarity, that is, to their past histories and present usage in interaction ritual chains."[24] The word "soul" may have had Christian connotations for Richard, but for Suzuki it had connotations specific to his local situation as a cohort of Carus.

本覚[25]

As I have mentioned above, this concept was to become a key point of focus in the development of Mahayana Buddhism. Suzuki translates it as "enlightenment *a priori*"[26]. Richard uses the phrase "original state of enlightenment"[27] and Haneda expresses it as "Original Enlightenment"[28]. Jacqueline Stone in her recent well-received recent book *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* talks about the difficulty of translating this term. She comments, "There is no scholarly consensus as to the best English translation of the term *hongaku*. 'Original enlightenment,' 'innate enlightenment,' and 'inherent enlightenment' have all been used." She points out that although all these

terms can be misleading, she favors "original enlightenment" (Haneda's term) as it keep alive the double meaning in Japanese of 本 as both something innate and as the point of initiation of a process, and also (importantly for our discussion) because, as she remarks, "this precedent has been set by Yoshito Hakeda in his translation of the *Awakening of Faith*".[29] This last comment by Stone is noteworthy because it seems to imply that, of the three translations here, Hakeda is the version that is, at least for the term 本覚, gaining the most legitimacy as an item of symbolic capital among contemporary English language users of the text.[30]

Looking at how Suzuki translated this term ("enlightenment *a priori*") it is possible to assume that his connection with the neo-Kantian Carus may have had some influence in this choice of terms as the phrase "*a priori*" is an important phrase in Kantian epistemology.[31] However, such Latinisms give the concept an archaism and obscurity which, unlike Hakeda's term, underemphasizes the importance and newness (for a western audience) of the concept of 本覚. This may account for its failure to attain a status in terms of the symbolic capital of contemporary English-speaking Buddhist scholars.

仏[32]

One very obvious distinction between Richard's work and Suzuki's (and of course Hakeda's) in terms of ideology is the existence of the word "God" and "Godhead" in Richard's text and its absence in Suzuki's and Haneda's. The editors of the 1960 edition of Richard's translation, for instance, report that Richard "considered [tathagata] might sometimes best be rendered *Messiah* in English".[33] Richard's search for the God of Buddhism is also manifest in how he deals with the following two lines:

（唯佛窮了：唯仏のみ窮了するものなり。AND
是故此義唯佛能知：是の故に此義は唯佛のみ能く知るなり。[34]

He translates these as "Only Buddha (God) understands all." AND "This mystery only Buddha understands."[35] Meanwhile Hakeda translates it as "only the Enlightened ones have thorough comprehension of it." AND "Only the Enlightened Ones are able to understand what this means."[36] Suzuki translates it as "The only one who can have a clear and consummate

knowledge of it is the Tathâgatha." AND "it can be fully comprehended by Buddhas and by no others."[37] Both Hakeda and Suzuki have rendered 仏 in the plural thus separating this concept from any particular historical, messianic personage (i.e. Sakyamuni). However, Richard seems to searching for the homologous God and savior to be found in Christianity, a perception that was quite common among the first generation of scholars from Christian backgrounds studying Buddhism.[38] It is worth noting though that the original text does permit the three different versions here. 仏 can be plural or singular, and depending on one's interpretation, can be the historical Buddha or can be translated as the more transcendent Tathâgatha (as done by Suzuki) or more inclusive Enlightened ones (as done by Hakeda). It is the ideology of the translator and the reader that makes each interpretation right or wrong.[39]

滅法[40]

A further important clash between Suzuki and Richard's translation occurs in regard to the following two particular excerpts. The original reads:

(First excerpt) 是故三界虚偽，唯心所作，離心則無六塵境界：是の故に、三界は虚偽にして唯心の所作なるのみ，心を離るるときは則ち六塵の境界無ければなり。

(Second excerpt) 以心生則種種法生，心滅則種種法滅故。：心にして生ずるときは則ち種種なる法は生じ，心にして滅するときは則ち種種する法は滅するを似ての故なり。[41]

Richard translates it as:

(First excerpt) *Therefore the phenomena of the three worlds (of desire, of form, and of no form) are mind-made. Without mind, then, there is practically no objective existence.*

(Second excerpt) *When the finite mind acts, then all kinds of things arise; when the finite mind ceases to act, then all kinds of things cease.*[42]

Suzuki translates it as:

(First excerpt) *Therefore the three domains (triloka) are nothing but the self-manifestations of the mind [i.e. âlaya-vijñâna which is practically identical with suchness, bhûtatathatâ]. Separated from the mind, there would be no such things as the six objects of sense.*

(Second excerpt) *When the mind is disturbed, the multiplicity of things is produced; but when the mind is quieted, the multiplicity of things disappears.*[43]

And Hakeda offers this:

(First excerpt) *The triple world, therefore, is unreal and is of mind only. Apart from it there are no objects of the five senses and of the mind.*

(Second excerpt) *When the deluded mind comes into being, then various conceptions (dharma) come to be; and when the deluded mind ceases to be, then these various conceptions cease to be.*[44]

We can see in these three versions a microcosm of the changing perceptions on Buddhist thought in the English-speaking world. The first version, by Richard, seems to be asserting an interpretation of Buddhism where nothingness is supreme. According to this, Buddhism envisages enlightenment to be about extinguishing the mind that 'acts' leading to a state where there is 'no objective reality'. This, inadvertently or not, reflects a view of Buddhism as being a religion of "nihilism" and annihilation, something Suzuki opposed[45]. In contrast to Richard's version, Suzuki and Haneda's choice of phrases soften the idea of the mind being extinguishing. Suzuki talks of 'quieting' the mind, and Haneda qualifies the mind in question as being those minds that are in a 'deluded' state. Suzuki and Haneda also de-emphasise the extinction of 'things': Suzuki seems to be saying it is the 'multiplicity' of 'things' rather than the 'things' themselves that disappear, while Hakeda is using the word 'conceptions' thus emphasizing that Buddhism's goal is not about making things disappear *per se* but making our illusions about 'things' disappear.

In terms of the development of Buddhism in the English-speaking world, a second point worth noting about the three extracts is that Suzuki and Richard both use the word "things" for 法. On the other hand, Hakeda uses the term "dharma" (in brackets). It would seem that by the time Hakeda was producing his translation in the 1960s, *dharma* had become domesticated enough in the English speaking world to be incorporated untranslated into a target text such as this. Suzuki was writing when dharma was still for English-speakers a relatively unknown Sanskrit word decades before it was to become familiar

enough to appear in general literature (such as in, for example, the title of Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*).

Conclusion

What I hope I have demonstrated here is how the same source text can produce a plurality of correct and accurate translations that will vary greatly in accordance with the ideological background of the translator, influencing his choice of words and phrases. Indeed, Hakeda, himself best summarizes this situation in regard to the *Awakening of the Faith* using the discourse of Buddhist ideology: "A text of such difficulty and conciseness of language may be interpreted in many ways depending on the translator's *karma* = his predisposition, mentality, life experience, etc."[46]

Notes

1   For example Schulze (1973: 115–116) defines ideology as follows: "I propose we view ideology as a pattern of beliefs shared with other individuals and/or a group, which are held to be highly relevant to the group and individual, which are capable of generating high commitment, and which serve to justify and generate the particular values, norms, attitudes, and behavior of a group and its members."

2   For example, Pym (1992: 282) discusses the idea of 'non-binarism' in translation in the sense that translation work does not operate between finding what is the correct translation and avoiding the incorrect one, but choosing among a range of alternate and, at some level, valid translations.

3   Collins (1998: 47) discusses the role of words in the cultural capital of individuals as follows: "Words, like any other feature of cultural capital, have a history across IR [interaction ritual] chains. They are generated (or introduced to new individuals) in some interactional situation, and are loaded with the emotional significance corresponding to the degree of solidarity in that particular encounter. Once acquired as part of one's repertoire, they become a means for negotiating further situations. A word smoothly accepted or awkwardly taken is a way of testing whether someone else will participate in further solidarity ritual with oneself; and words are attractors or repulsers which move one toward or away from particular encounters."

4   For example, Bourdieu (1991: 106)

5   See McMahan 2008

6   Snodgrass (2003: 216)

7   Asvaghosa (2003: iv)

8   See Snodgrass (2003). Kakuzo Okagura, the author of the influential *The Book of Tea* chastised the West on this point. (1939: 6) "The Christian missionary goes to impart, but not to receive. Your information is based on the meagre translations of our immense literature, if not on the unreliable anecdotes of passing travellers." That Suzuki was aware of Christian misrepresentations of Buddhism is evident in his translation of Soyen Shaku's *Reply to a Christian Critic* (1913: 121–125) where Shaku, a major figure in the World Parliament of Religions chastises the John Henry Barrow, a principle organizer of the Parliament, for his dismissive comments about Buddhism.

9   Asvaghosa (2003: x and xii)

10   For the source text, I use the text as printed (in Japanese characters) in 大上記論心論 published by 岩波文庫. For further comparison and explication, I provide a Japanese translation from the same source next to the original Chinese version.

11   See Hubbard, Smith College (2008), 高崎直道 (1991: 11)

12   Stone (1999: 6)

13   Richard 1907

14   Hakeda 2006

15   Richard (1916: 334–335). Hakeda criticizes Richard's translation believing that it "suffers from an attempt to read Christianity into the text." and is "more Christian than Buddhist in tone." (2006: 11)

16   Hakeda (2006: xi)

17   Hakeda (2006: 11)

18   Two translations of the *Awakening of the Faith* were done-one attributed to Paramārtha (499–569) and one to Śikṣānanda (652–710). Richards and Hakeda worked with the former and Suzuki with the later. However, the translation by Śikṣānanda was mostly a reproduction of Paramārtha's. The translation items I have highlighted can be assumed to refer to both versions of the source text.

19   宇井, 高崎 (1994: 22)

20   Asvaghosa (2003: 53)

21   Richard (1907: 44), Hakeda (2006: 35)

22   Asvaghosa (2003: 53 Footnote 1)

23   Collins (1998: 23)

24   Collins (1998: 47)

25   宇井, 高崎 (1994: 28)

26　Asvaghosa (2003: 62)

27　Richard (1907: 49)

28　Hakeda (1907: 43)

29　Stone (1999: 369 footnote 1)

30　Following Bourdieu's use of the terms, the difference between *symbolic capital* and *cultural capital* is that everyone has some particular form of cultural capital but society grants symbolic capital to some more than others. (Swartz 1997: 90, 287–288)

31　Russell (1996: 641)

32　宇井, 高崎 (1994: 42)

33　Richard (1907: Note by Redactor)

34　宇井, 高崎 (1994: 42)

35　Richard (1907: 56)

36　Hakeda (2006: 54)

37　Asvaghosa (2003: 78, 79–80)

38　Snodgrass (2003: 114)

39　For example 仏教学辞典 (2003: 385) defines 仏 to be the idea of a particular quality of one who has attained enlightenment, as well as the historic Buddha, and the mythic buddhas.

40　宇井, 高崎 (1994: 42)

41　宇井, 高崎 (1994: 40, 42)

42　Richard (1907: 55)

43　Asvaghosa (2003: 77, 78)

44　Hakeda (2006: 52, 53)

45　For example Suzuki (1949: 58)

46　(Hakeda 2006: 12)

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