A SOGA RYŌJIN READER

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Jan Van Bragt

A Soga Ryōjin Reader

Edited by

Wamae Muriuki

with an Introduction by

Michael Conway

CHISOKUDŌ

Cover graphic: Heather Midori Yamada

ISBN: 978-1973812081

Nagoya, Japan
http://ChisokudoPublications.com

for Yasutomi Shin'ya

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Foreword

James W. Heisig

When Jan Van Bragt died in 2007, he left behind a trove of translations he had been working on intermittently between 1989 and 2003. Five years later, at my request, the members of his congregation gathered the files together and sent them on to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, where he had worked for twenty years until retiring in 1995. We decided that our first priority was to publish a collection of Van Bragt's own writings. In 2014, with the collaboration of the staff and former members, we edited two volumes, one of essays written originally in Japanese, the other of essays written in English.[1]

The translations presented a different kind of challenge. Those of us in contact with Van Bragt knew that he had decided to take advantage of his withdrawal from formal academic life to work his way through the *Collected Works* of Soga Ryōjin. His affection for Soga, a man who has been called "arguably the most innovative thinker in the history of modern Shin Buddhism,"[2] was well known among those engaged in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In his office he kept a signed calligraphy of Soga's, the characters 自然法爾 painted on dark silk. When he

1.『宗教間対話に導かれて：京都学派・仏教・キリスト教』(Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2014), ed. by Terao Kazuyoshi and Kim Seung Chul; *Interreligious Affinities: Encounters with the Kyoto School and the Religions of Japan* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2014), ed. by J. W. Heisig and Kim Seung Chul.

2. Robert F. Rhodes, "Soga Ryōjin: Life and Thought," Mark L. Blum and Robert F. Rhodes, *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2011), 101.

retired he set it at the main entrance of the Institute where it stands to this day. More explicitly, in 1993 he wrote:

> And, to add a more personal note, when reading the Shinshū "theologian" whom I am most familiar with, Soga Ryōjin, I must confess that I often come across formulations that express Christian doctrine in a most felicitous way and are excellent food for my spiritual life.[3]

His first published was a patchwork of passages he culled from a book of Soga's 1940 lectures and published in 1984 in the pages of the Nanzan Institute's *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* under the title "The Core of Shinshū." The only other translations published during his lifetime were "A Savior on Earth" and "Shinran's View of Buddhist History." All three of these essays are reproduced in this volume with Van Bragt's original footnotes.

During his periodic visits back to the Nanzan Institute, I often pressed Jan into letting us see his translations and make a plan for publication. Instead of answering the question directly, he would talk about how his admiration for Soga continued the grow the more he worked on the texts, and how important he thought Soga's ideas for Christian theology. I should have pressed him harder. As it was, at his death we found ourselves left with hundreds of pages of partial translations, subdivided by Van Bragt for his own convenience, and interspersed with his own critical comments and allusions. It was hard to know where to start, but there was no doubt that this work needed to be made public.

Quite by chance, things fell together in 2011. I edited short passages for a *Sourcebook* on Japanese philosophy[4] and released permission for three of the longer translations to be included in an anthology on modern Buddhist thought, both of which published that year.[5] As it

3. *Interreligious Affinities*, 89.

4. J. W. Heisig, T. P. Kasulis, and J. C. Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 273–9.

5. Blum and Rhodes, *Cultivating Spirituality*, 107–56.

happened, Thomas Kasulis, one of the editors of the *Sourcebook*, introduced us to one of his doctoral students, Wamae Muriuki, who was in Japan on a research fellowship at Ōtani University in Kyoto. It was during a discussion at the Nanzan Institute in 2011 that he offered to take on the task of editing Van Bragt's notes into publishable form.

The task was immense, and only one of the jobs that Dr. Muriuki had to juggle, first as visiting instructor in religious studies at the College of William & Mary and then as lecturer in Buddhism and comparative religion at the University of Nairobi. By late 2016 the materials had been sorted out and the style touched up in preparation for the publication that you now hold in your hands. Michael Conway generously agreed to write an introduction to put the translations in context.

We are proud to dedicate this collection to Yasutomi Shin'ya, whose encouragement and guidance were an important part of Van Bragt's translations. I am told that it was through Yasutomi that his work on Soga received formal recognition among Shin Buddhist scholars at Ōtani University. Mark Blum, who knew them both personally, wrote in a recent letter: "I always had the sense that Jan read Soga because Soga inspired him in his own faith, but I also felt that Yasutomi had a similar relationship to Christian theology and that Jan's reading of Soga helped Yasutomi himself understand Soga." Our hope is that these pages will move others to that same spirit of adventure.

Note from the Editor

Wamae Muriuki

The present collection represents only a portion of the entire *Selected Works of Soga Ryōjin*, which runs to 12 volumes in total. The translation here covers Volumes 1 through 7 and Volume 10, though few of the pieces that appear in these volumes were translated in their entirety, and the omitted sections were not always marked clearly. It appears that Jan Van Bragt chose only those passages that caught his eye or that seemed to sum up the point of a particular essay. In a few instances, the translation was omitted altogether in favor of a few lines of resume. Those entries have been omitted from this collection.

As a work of translation in progress left behind far from complete, this collection posed a number of editorial challenges. First, as Michael Conway's Introduction will detail, Soga Ryōjin's writing is dense with allusions to Buddhist philosophy, texts, debates, and sectarian Jōdo Shinshū scholarship. Soga not only assumes the reader's familiarity with these ideas but interweaves them with Western philosophical terms and concepts. In addition, his writing style has a rhythm and cadence that is quite difficult to render into English.

Second, Van Bragt's English translation is inflected with his own particular Flemish style, which I have tried to maintain with only modest adjustments. To reconstruct his sentences radically into more flow-

ing English would amount to retranslation, which I was not comfortable doing. As it is, I feel that this collection benefits from my attempt to preserve the distinct voices of two great scholars.

The manuscripts of Jan Van Bragt's translation were peppered with parenthetical notes, questions, comments, glosses, and allusions, most of which have been preserved and set off in indented italic type.

Subheaders set flush left and in italic type were added by Van Bragt as a way to organize Soga's original essays. The rest of the text and its internal divisions are Soga's own.

My own footnotes, which are few and only for clarification, are set off in square brackets. Footnotes added by the editors of the three previously published essays have been omitted.

As noted in the Introduction, the essays gathered here represents Soga Ryōjin's often personal and affective grasp of the inner life and experience of the Pure Land believer. Soga, like Shinran, struggled to find a language that best expresses the experience of *shinjin* in one's life. As we see, for example, in section 9 of the *Tannishō*,[1] the lived experience of Pure Land faith contains a number of unresolved tensions. In this particular dialogue with Yuien-bo, Shinran notes that even though he should be leaping for joy at the prospect of rebirth in the Pure Land, he does not find that feeling within him. Rather than causing him to worry, he finds that this is all the more a sure sign of rebirth in the Pure Land, because it shows that he is not without karmic afflictions. These very karmic afflictions make him the particular target of Amida's Vows, whose presence (and his awareness of their presence)[2] is the sure sign that his rebirth is assured.[3]

Similarly, Soga's work contains a number of productive tensions that the reader would do well to pay attention to: this world and the

1. *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic* (Honolulu: Buddhist Study Center Press, 1996), trans., Taitetsu Unno, 12–13.

2. See below, 442–3.

3. See below, 277, 353–4.

Pure Land, Dharmākara and Śākyamuni, foreground and background, subject and object, *ōsō* and *gensō*, *ki* and *hō*. Planted in the fertile ground of Soga's mind, the interplay of these tensions burst forth, like the bodhisattvas breaking through the earth in the *Lotus Sutra*, in the inward and "intimately sensed"[4] fullness of his thought.

4. See below, 283–4.

Introduction

Michael Conway

Soga Ryōjin 曽我量深 (1875–1971) was likely the most innovative and influential Shin Buddhist thinker of the twentieth century. Born as the third son of a temple family in rural Niigata, Soga had a long and varied career within the academic institutions of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha 真宗大谷派, the second largest of the ten denominations of Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, a Buddhist school founded in the thirteenth century based on the work of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262). Shinran himself was a creative Buddhist thinker who radically reinterpreted the teachings regarding Amida Buddha and his Pure Land that were a pervasive element in many of the strands of Buddhism present in Kamakura-era Japan. Soga—active in the century when Japanese society was radically transformed in the process of modernization initiated in response to Japan's encounter with the industrialized nations of the West—advocated a return to Shinran's thought and spent the majority of his career in an attempt to clarify its unique significance, especially its validity and importance in a period that was characterized by one of his contemporaries as an "Age of Skepticism."[1] Soga's work is focused on showing the meaning that

1. See Yoshinaga Shin'ichi's "After Olcott Left: Theosophy and 'New Buddhists' at the Turn of the Century," *The Eastern Buddhist* 43/1–2: 116, where he refers to an article by

the Pure Land teachings and Shinran's interpretation of them have for present experience. That project entails the rejection of positing salvation in a post-mortem realm and a fierce criticism of those in the Shin tradition who have done so as being oblivious to the true significance of Shinran's Pure Land soteriology.

This book is a collection of partial translations and English language summaries of essays and lectures presented by Soga over the course of most of his career, from his early days as a graduate student to the 1960s, although the majority of the works predate the end of World War II. These translations, therefore, afford us an opportunity to see the arc of the development of Soga's thought painted in broad strokes through the peak of his career. The pieces included below, however, are far from easy to read.

There are, I believe, three major sources of that difficulty. The first two lie in Soga's style of presentation. Most importantly, Soga's works are all based on a specific, intuitional grasp of the nature of salvation in Shin Buddhism which he never specifically or comprehensively articulates. Instead, all of his works are meditations on the significance of that experience of liberation in light of the scriptures and history of the tradition. Thus, in order to understand Soga's writing, one must have a sense of the problems that he is addressing and the overall thrust of the answers that he himself has discovered, because unfortunately he is not necessarily kind enough to always provide that information upfront for his readers.[2]

Furukawa Rōsen 古河老川 (1871–1899) that takes that stance.

2. At the start of a series of lectures on the "three minds" (see below, 394–5, Soga tells his audience: "So where do I lay my standard in speaking? I lay it within myself. I am not certain if I am the most foolish person; there may well be someone more foolish than me in the world, but since I know best my own foolishness, when I speak, I speak to myself to the point where I can truly say, 'Yes, that is definitely the case; there is no falsehood in your words; yes, that is for sure.' That is, today I would like to speak to the point where I can nod to myself and accept what I myself am saying with certainty. So all of you are just accompanying me in that process. In other words, you are totally insignificant" (SRS v: 155). While Soga is joking with his audience here, the passage does give us an idea of his

The second difficulty comes from the fact that Soga is deeply steeped within the Shin exegetical tradition and expects his readers to be so, as well. Soga was a scholar of Shin doctrinal studies and weaves his thought with the thread of the scriptural tradition, so the essays below are chocked full of references to complex Shin doctrinal concepts and positions with absolutely no explanation. Soga's readership was primarily the Shin clergy and faithful who had a strong familiarity with texts and tenets he refers to—either through a strenuous educational process or a lifetime of inculcation in listening to sermons. The readership of the present volume, however, cannot be expected to share that same level of specialized knowledge.

The third difficulty arises from Jan Van Bragt's attempt to alleviate the first two problems by presenting interpretive summaries and highly elided translations of Soga's works, skipping over or chopping down vast swaths of rigorous Shin exegesis in order to make the thrust of his ideas accessible to a broad, English-reading audience. While these attempts have been quite effective by and large, there are points in the translations below where Soga appears to be even more prone to abrupt changes of subject or leaps in reasoning than he actually is. The reader should take care to note that the pieces presented below are far from a comprehensive picture of Soga and his ideas. They are more a rough sketch which I hope might serve to further the process of introducing this important Shin thinker to a non-Japanese audience (and I imagine that Van Bragt shared that hope).

The primary purpose of this introduction is to provide readers with some of the background information that will be necessary to understand the pieces collected below. In particular, I will aim to address the first two difficulties introduced above by providing some of the context, historical and doctrinal, that frames Soga's writings. First, I will introduce several pertinent elements of the historical context that informed Soga's work. Second, I will attempt to briefly

attitude regarding the need to explain himself to his listeners.

describe the original insights that form the core of Soga's thought, so that readers will be able to see how these play out in the writings below. Third, I will provide an introduction to the basic Shin doctrinal concepts and categories that Soga uses to express his original insights, in hopes that readers will be able to refer back to this section as a key in their attempts to understand Soga's dense, reference-laden prose.

Seishinshugi's creative return to shinran

Soga was born in 1875, the ninth year of the Meiji government's project to modernize Japan and attain parity with the nations of the West. That project not only involved a drastic restructuring of Japanese society, it also entailed dramatic changes in the world of thought and religion. Until the forced reopening of Japan after the arrival of Commodore Perry's Black Ships in 1854, the Japanese government had been generally successful in maintaining a policy of isolation from the nations of the West for over two hundred years. The information regarding changes in Western thought that did trickle into the country was not widely disseminated, so thinkers and representatives of religious denominations could, by and large, ignore them when speaking to their followers. The isolationist policy and concomitant banning of Christianity within Japan further benefitted Buddhist institutions by mandating temple membership for the entire populace, which insured a solid financial basis for those organizations.

The end of those policies and the proactive attempts by the Meiji government to introduce Western thought into Japan threatened Japanese Buddhism on a variety of levels (let alone the government's direct attacks on Buddhist organizations and their autonomy in its early days[3]). Temple membership became optional, Christian missionaries and other advocates of new forms of religious devotion appeared

3. See James E. Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

on the scene, which put Buddhist institutions in a position where they needed to convince their membership of the validity and importance of their teachings. Western sciences and the positivism that dominated the late nineteenth century were introduced, which called into question many of the basic tenets of Buddhism. The Buddhist worldview, with its trichiliocosm of Mount Sumerus, hells, and heavens, was challenged by the Western discipline of astronomy, as was the idea that Amida might indeed actually exist in a Pure Land trillions of Buddhalands to the west of our world. The academic discipline of Buddhist studies was also introduced from Europe with all of its methodologies and assumptions essentially intact, which led to the questioning of the foundation of virtually all the established schools of Japanese Buddhism through the argument that the Mahāyāna sutras were not preached by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, but were instead the products of a later age.

Seishinshugi as a response to the challenges of modernity

Needless to say, Japanese Buddhists responded vigorously and variously to these many challenges. Soga's formative years, from his teens through his twenties, saw the start of a variety of movements to reassert the significance of Buddhism, both for society and the individual, and to reinvigorate it to meet the demands of this new age. Soga's earliest writing indicates his intention to participate in this process and the discussion that was set off by these new movements. The movement which is most pertinent when considering Soga is *Seishinshugi* 精神主義, which grew up around Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) and other young priests in the Shinshū Ōtani-ha. Although Soga first criticized the ideas presented in *Seishinkai* 『精神界』, the journal that was the mouthpiece of the movement, he later became a wholehearted supporter of it and a primary contributor to *Seishinkai*. *Seishinshugi*'s ideals, and Soga's doubts about them, served to shape his thought throughout his career, so I would like to discuss them in some detail here.

Kiyozawa Manshi was educated at Tokyo University with funds from the Shinshū Ōtani-ha. There he majored in Western philosophy. After graduating, he took up a position in the denomination's educational institutions, where he spent most of the rest of his short and tumultuous career. Kiyozawa began the *Seishinshugi* movement as plans were taking shape to found a denominational university in Tokyo under his leadership. Through articles in the *Seishinkai*, Kiyozawa and his followers at the Kōkōdō 浩々洞, an experiment in communal living centered around Kiyozawa, aimed to breathe new life into the Shin tradition by expressing the content of Shinran's religious insight without recourse to the traditional doctrinal apparatus. Rather than use terminology from the scriptural tradition to describe that insight, they employed a variety of new terms created to express Western philosophical categories to elucidate Shinran's thought for their modern audience. For instance, Kiyozawa often uses the terms finite and infinite, or absolute and relative, to discuss the nature of Shin spirituality and the relationship between the believing subject and the object of faith. These new terms provided an immediacy to the message and also freed the speakers from the constraints developed over the course of more than six hundred years of Shin exegesis.

Along with this attempt to distance themselves from traditional doctrinal categories, Kiyozawa and his companions also held an extremely present-centered, experientialist view of Shin salvation. Kiyozawa argued that the existence of gods, buddhas, Pure Lands, and hells was a subjective fact to be proven within the minds of each individual, not an objective fact that could be proven through the methodologies of Western sciences such as astronomy.[4] In response to the question of the existence of the afterlife—an important element of Shin soteriology during the Edo period, especially given the emphasis placed on "the paramount element of the life to come" (後生

4.『清沢満之全集』 [Collected works of Kiyozawa Manshi] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003; hereafter, KMZ) VI: 283–4.

の一大事)[5] by Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499), Shinran's eighth-generation descendent and "restorer" of the tradition—Kiyozawa states that he is not in a position to comment, because it is something that he has not actually experienced.[6] In that essay, Kiyozawa's last piece of writing before passing away, which came to be seen as the most direct expression of the understanding of faith in *Seishinshugi*, Kiyozawa stresses the present, experiential benefits of faith in the Tathāgata, lauding the peace, comfort, and strength that that faith afforded him even as his tuberculosis-racked lungs were failing. In this way, Kiyozawa's *Seishinshugi* attempted to respond to the skepticism of his age by arguing that the proof of the validity of Buddhist teachings could be found in the experience of salvation itself. Soga, reflecting back on Kiyozawa's significance for him, says that Kiyozawa's position that "I do not believe in the Tathāgata because it exists; the Tathāgata exists for me because I believe in it," had immense impact on him throughout his career.[7] *Seishinshugi* thus secured a space for the existence of Amida and the Pure Land, not in an objective or post mortem realm, but within the individual believing subject.

Kiyozawa's project can be seen as an attempt to creatively return to Shinran's thought, to rediscover its immediate, experiential significance and thereby maintain its currency at a time when simple faith in the narrative of salvation preached in the foundational scriptures—that one practiced in this life to be welcomed at the moment of death by Amida and his retinue and led to rebirth in the Pure Land—could

5. This term appears in Rennyo's pastoral letters, which are read as part of the liturgy in services at Shin temples and homes. In particular, it is part of the concluding passage of perhaps the most famous of those letters, which is read at funerals and memorial services. See *Rennyo Shōnin Ofumi: The Letters of Rennyo* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), trans., Ann T. Rogers and Minor L. Rogers, 121.

6.「我信念」 [My faith], KMZ VI: 163; *December Fan: The Buddhist Essays of Manshi Kiyozawa* (Los Angeles: Shinshu Center of America, 2014), trans., Nobuo Haneda, 53.

7. See the lecture that Soga gave in commemoration of his ninetieth birthday:「我如来を信ずるが故に如来在ます也」[The Tathāgata exists because I believe in him], SRS XII: 143–86.

no longer be accepted by a large portion of the population. Shinran does indeed designate those scriptural passages as expedients that do not express the true significance of Birth in the Pure Land[8] and focuses particularly on the "single thought-moment of faith" (*shin no ichinen*) as the most important element of salvation. This creative return, however, directly contradicted the orthodox stance that had dominated the Shin school at least since the time of Rennyo. Therefore, Kiyozawa argued that the exegetical tradition that grew up after Shinran's passing should not be taken as authoritative. When his project of doctrinal modernization was called into question by some of the more conservative members of the denomination, Kiyozawa replied by arguing that his attempt to clarify the content of Shinran's thought was equally as valid as any previous attempt. He writes:

> There is a clear, sharp distinction between the school's doctrine and doctrinal studies that must never be confused. *The school's doctrine is based on the establishment by the school's Founder [Shinran], while doctrinal studies are made up of the discussions and research of scholars who come after him. One is the Dharma gate to be interpreted, while the other is the words of interpretation. Thus, although the school's doctrine is settled and not to be changed, there is no problem if doctrinal studies develops and changes [over time].* The *doctrine of our Shin school* is to be found in the six volume extensive work [i.e., Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*], the scripture that establishes the foundational teaching of our school. The words there are perfectly clear and set like the stars in the sky. Who could possibly move them? *Doctrinal studies* investigate and consider this doctrine from an academic perspective, and regardless of their relative depth or quality, they are all equal in being the personal opinions of students of the doctrine.[9]

8. See Shinran's discussion of two inferior types of Birth in the Pure Land in the chapter on transformed buddha-bodies and lands in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*『教行信証』, *Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hangwanji-ha, 1997), trans., Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, Ryushin Uryuzu (hereafter, CWS) I: 207–40, esp. 208 on the fulfillment passages for the 19th Vow.

9.「貫練会を論ず」[Discussing the Kanrenkai], KMZ VII: 113.

Although this particular passage predates the publication of *Seishinkai* by a few years, the stance described here certainly was shared by the members of the *Seishinshugi* movement. They saw themselves as attempting a direct clarification of Shinran's thought without recourse to the doctrinal apparatus that had developed over the history of the school after his passing.

While this position freed them considerably, it also prevented them from relying on the rich resources that the tradition had at hand for dealing with the extremely complex problems that face a human being living a religious life. Their emphasis on translating Shin terminology into modern, Western terms did not just make their message more palpable to their audience, it also served to set them at a distance from the Shin scriptural tradition itself, which meant that issues that had already been considered and resolved in the course of the school's history again needed to be addressed.

Soga's criticism of the limitations of Seishinshugi's approach

The difficulties that arose from this alienation are particularly apparent in *Seishinshugi*'s treatment of the issue of the relationship between ethics and religion—a major problem among religious thinkers during the Meiji 30s and 40s. It is brought up repeatedly in the pages of *Seishinkai*, generally to the effect that the establishment of a firm foundation for one's life, that is, faith, is most essential and that ethical issues are subordinate to the awareness that arises from that all-important faith. Ethical standards are pertinent primarily as an opportunity for one to realize one's own limitations and confirm one's need to rely upon a power beyond oneself. This stance, of course, has its source in Shinran's thought, especially in his emphasis on other-power faith and can be seen in the passage at the end of the *Tannishō* where Yuien 唯円 (c. 1222–1289) relays that Shinran often said "I am completely ignorant of good and evil.... The *nenbutsu* alone is true."[10] While *Seishinshugi*'s

10. *Tannishō: Passages Deploring Deviations of Faith* (Berkeley: Numata Center for

position, especially as it was articulated in the early issues of *Seishinkai*, does have such roots in Shinran's ideas, it does not necessarily do justice to the delicacy with which he approached the problem of ethical action by the person of faith.

Soga's criticisms of *Seishinshugi*, published in January 1902, just a year after *Seishinkai* began, focus on this apparent lack of a guide for ethical action in the world after the attainment of faith. After stating clearly that "I am the first to believe in *Seishinshugi*,"[11] he writes:

> What I specifically respect about *Seishinshugi* is its passivity, its emphasis on resignation; *Seishinshugi* is a set of ideas that heals the moralistic suffering that arises from past behaviors. At the very least, it is a way of thinking that frees one from uselessly wasting one's life's efforts on the recovery of the past and allows one to turn all one's strength to future activities. As the reverse [of this attitude to the past], they order us to work greatly in the future. Yet they do not teach what we should do in the future, they provide no positive standard or format for discernment. They simply provide pure, singular, undifferentiated power or qualities. They have given a child a sharp whet sword. I see just how dangerous *Seishinshugi* can be, because it is irrationalism; because it is a system of thought that calls for blind action..... In short, while *Seishinshugi* is extremely effective in focusing a passive attitude toward the past and being resigned about one's past mistakes, one's past evils, I cannot help but say that it is worth practically nothing as a guide to one's future actions. They do nothing more than just providing the energy for blind action.[12]

Soga here praises *Seishinshugi* as liberating one from concerns with one's ethical transgressions in the past, but points out that it fails to provide a standard for ethical action in the future.

Kiyozawa and others replied to Soga's criticisms in the pages of *Seishinkai*, but Soga responded that he was not satisfied by their

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Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), trans. Bandō Shōjun and Harold Stewart, 21.

11. SRS I: 291. See below, 106.

12. SRS I: 292–3. The above passages are partially translated below, 106.

answers. In the February 1902 issue of *Mujintō*『無尽灯』[The inexhaustible lamp], a journal published by Shinshū University which Soga was editing at the time, he again takes up the issue and after thanking the several authors who attempted to address his concerns, he says:

> Unfortunately, I regret that I have gained virtually nothing [from the responses]. My doubts remain just as they were before. It seems that the Tathāgata has deigned not to resolve my doubts for a time in order to forge my spirit. I respectfully withdraw my doubts. I have nothing other than gratitude.[13]

This indicates that Soga chose not to press the proponents of *Seishinshugi*, who were his classmates and colleagues, friends and teachers, at the university, for a solution to the problems that he posed, but instead decided to seek out an answer for himself. In the following months and years, Soga became an active member of the *Seishinshugi* circle, living in the Kōkōdō and even editing *Seishinkai* for a time. It seems that much of his work that appeared in the pages of the journal was in fact his attempt to provide a solution to this problem based firmly in the Shin scriptural tradition.

His next and last criticism of *Seishinshugi*, which appeared in June 1902, contains the following passage which is telling about the nature of the solution to the problem that Soga would eventually set forth: "Differently from you people of the *Seishinkai*, I believe in the basic unity of religion and ethics. I am a person who believes that the highest existent in religion [i.e., the Tathāgata] is identical to the ethical ideal."[14] Following in the line of *Seishinshugi*, Soga here does not use the term Amida, or even Tathāgata, but instead the philosophy-inspired term 至高実在者, literally, the highest actually existing one, but his intention to indicate the Tathāgata is clear. Ultimately, this stance plays itself out in Soga's argument that Dharmākara Bodhisattva, or Amida Buddha in the stage before attaining buddhahood, becomes the subject of the

13. SRS I: 308.

14. SRS I: 309. See below, 107.

person of faith in the moment of its awakening. That is to say, Soga's most innovative and original position in Shin doctrinal studies—that salvation occurs with the advent of Dharmākara—was taken up in an attempt to answer the question of how the person who has attained faith should live in the world. He employs this image (and a variety of other Shin doctrinal categories) to serve as a guide to action in the future.

As such, Soga's career can be characterized as an attempt to complete the creative return to Shinran begun by Kiyozawa and the other members of the Kōkōdō. Through that more thorough return to Shinran, Soga tried to fill in perhaps the largest blank left by Kiyozawa's untimely death: How does faith shape and guide the lives of those who live it? In many ways, Soga aimed at a resurrection of the various Shin doctrinal terminology and categories that are conspicuously absent from the early issues of *Seishinkai*. At the same time, Soga wholeheartedly agreed with the initial aims of the movement, especially that of maintaining the currency of Shin religiosity in the modern intellectual milieu, as well as its fundamental stance about the primary importance of liberation in the present. As we will see in the next section, Soga not only actively participated in the project of attempting to express Shin ideas in contemporary language, he also creatively reworked many of the central themes in traditional Shin doctrinal studies to provide an answer nuanced enough to account for the complexity of human religious experience.

Soga's basic intuition and original contributions to Shin doctrinal studies

Given the complexity of both human beings and the Shin doctrinal system that Soga was working in, his works are quite challenging to read. As I noted above, he does not necessarily prioritize explanation for the sake of his readership in the majority of them, but instead directly expresses his insights based on an unspoken—and pre-

sumably shared—grasp of the nature of liberation or salvation in Shin Buddhism. In this section, I will try to shed some light on that foundational understanding that informs all of Soga's works and then briefly introduce the four most innovative elements of Soga's thought which are developed and discussed variously in the pages below.

Soga's grasp of the human problem and its solution in the moment of faith

First, we must note that Soga, like virtually all Buddhist thinkers, sees the fundamental problem of human beings—the problem that must be solved by religion—as the profoundly deep-seated delusion that alienates them from the world as it actually is. Soga refers to this true world variously, as Great Nature or suchness, and holds that salvation for human beings consists in a recognition and return to that fundamental reality of Oneness. As such, Soga is very much in line with the majority of the Buddhist tradition, which sees liberation as an intuition of one's lack of a substantial self and recognition of one's fundamental identity with the whole of existence.

Following on Shinran, however, Soga takes an extremely pessimistic view of human beings' capacity to bring about that intuition for themselves and sustain it over time. Soga is skeptical for a variety of reasons, but the primary one which he refers to repeatedly below is that he sees such attempts to be expressions of what Shinran calls "the self-mind that engages in meditative and non-meditative practices," in the preface to the chapter on faith in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.[15] Simply put, this is the mind of self-power, which Shinran describes as expecting rewards for certain behaviors and punishments for others.[16] The world does not necessarily always accord with such human expectations, so Shinran and Soga see them as fundamentally deluded and going against the grain of the truth of the world as it is. There-

15.『定本教行信証』[*Kyōgyōshinshō*, critical edition] (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1989; hereafter, TK), 95. See CWS I: 77 for a slightly different translation.

16. 罪福心 [mind of punishment and reward]. TK, 95; CWS I: 228.

fore, Shinran says that such practitioners "are ignorant of true shinjin, which is diamond-like."[17] That is to say, those practitioners' faith is only solid to the point that their expectations of results are fulfilled and will fall apart when they are not. Further, Shinran criticizes those expectations as inherently self-centered, in the sense of expecting to reap the benefits of one's own deeds.[18] Shinran also argues that such attempts to effect one's own liberation belay a profound mistrust and misunderstanding of the Buddha's wisdom,[19] which can see the perfection of true suchness just as it is. That is, practicing to achieve an insight into true suchness is in fact based on the assumption that the reality of oneself and one's world somehow needs to be changed, which, from the perspective of the Buddha's wisdom, is fundamentally delusional.

Also following on Shinran, Soga recognizes the dangers—antinomian and other—that adhere to this monistic worldview which denies the necessity for action on the part of the person to bring about salvation. To describe this problem, Soga often refers to the other half of the couplet in the preface to the chapter on faith referred to above which reads: "The monks and laity of this latter age and the religious teachers of these times are foundering in concepts of 'self-nature' and 'mind only,' and they disparage the true realization of enlightenment in the Pure Land Way."[20] Here, Shinran is criticizing the idea that Amida and the Pure Land are simply concepts referring to the original purity of the human mind, or the original perfection of the self and the world as they are. Soga takes this passage as an admonition not to fall into

17. TK, 95; CWS I: 77.

18. 雑毒之行 [practice mixed with poison], a term initially used by Shandao in his commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, is used by Shinran to refer to this self-centered element that necessarily mixes with any practice, however altruistic its intent. See TK, 102, 121; CWS I: 84, 98.

19. See TK, 308; CWS I: 240 in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and the "Hymns on the Offense of Doubting the Buddha's Wisdom,"『定本親鸞聖人全集』 [Collected works of Shinran, critical edition] (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2008; hereafter, TSZ), II: 188–201; CWS I: 413–17.

20. CWS I: 77; TK, 95.

complacency or self-justification on the grounds that one is by nature already one with Amida and that this world is indeed the Pure Land if properly conceived.

Soga sees true Shin salvation as a delicate instant of insight that avoids these two pitfalls in religious seeking. Shinran calls that instant "the single thought-moment of faith." Based on a passage at the start of the second fascicle of the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* (無量寿経, hereafter, *Larger Sutra*), Shinran holds that this moment of faith arises upon hearing the message contained in the name of Amida Buddha: *Namu Amida Butsu*, which can be translated as "Take refuge in the working of the Tathāgata's immeasurable light and immeasurable life!" For Shinran, hearing this call—to return one's life to the immeasurable life that it is a part of and to live based on the infinite wisdom of the Buddha—and responding in kind is the crux of salvation. The recognition of one's fundamental oneness with immeasurable life essentially accords with the general Buddhist view of liberation mentioned above. By placing the cause of that insight in the name itself and therefore outside the realm of the volition of the hearer, Shinran solves the problem of self-power seeking. By describing the relationship between the faithful and immeasurable life and wisdom as one of "bowing down" or "taking refuge," Shinran maintains a tension and distinction between true suchness and the subject of liberation. While that distinction is collapsed in the single thought-moment of faith, for Shinran it does not disappear entirely until the moment of death, when he says that the person of the *nenbutsu* attains complete nirvana.[21]

Soga sees this instant of insight brought about in hearing the name—an insight into one's oneness with the perfection of true suchness—as the centerpiece of Shin salvation. Soga focuses on its instantaneous or momentary nature as a continual present, repeatable infinitely, and from there develops his thought based on a distinctive sense of time. For Soga, that present instant is absolutely and

21. CWS I: 123; TK, 151.

completely conditioned by the past. That is, regarding the past, that instant contains an awareness of one's conditioned, limited nature—an intuition of oneself as the result of the working out of karma since time immemorial. From that angle, one is not free and boundless, but bonded and bound by karmic circumstance. The present insight in the moment of faith understands and accepts the reality of that limitedness just as it is. This element leads to acceptance of and satisfaction in the present and, ultimately, an insight into the perfection of one's oneness with the world.

Yet, above or based upon this intuition of perfection in the present, Soga also sees an intentionality toward the future. Throughout his career, Soga described this intentionality in a variety of ways, but the two most influential and enduring were his description of it using the image of Dharmākara Bodhisattva from the *Larger Sutra* and his focus on the importance of the "aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land" that Shinran says is an essential element of the moment of faith. Using both of these concepts, Soga argues that while faith, with its passivity and acceptance of the perfection of the world just as it is, is certainly an essential element of the fundamental insight that brings salvation, the true lifeblood of Shinran's soteriology lies in the aspiration toward the liberation of all sentient beings, or toward the Pure Land, which necessarily entails a denial of the present situation and an intention toward a different future.

This three-faceted insight forms the core of Soga's thought and is in the backdrop of all the essays collected below. It plays itself out in a variety of ways and while Soga's way of expressing it and the doctrinal concepts that he uses to describe its significance change over time, it is the essential stance that informs all of the discussions in the following pages. This stance is also the basis of his response to the problem he saw in *Seishinshugi*, for he believed that Shinran's thought did indeed provide a guide or overarching direction regarding future action: an ethical impetus that arose out of the insight that is *shinjin*. Soga's position is particularly apparent in two of his four most important contribu-

tions to Shin thought—his reinterpretation of the role of Dharmākara and his discussion of the significance of past karma (*shukugō* 宿業)—so I will address those first before briefly introducing the other two—his understanding of Śākyamuni and his creative translation of Shin doctrinal categories into contemporary terminology. These latter two can be seen as Soga's continuation of the *Seishinshugi* project in that they are attempts to maintain the currency of the Shin tradition in the modern, skeptical age that he was living in.

Soga's understanding of Dharmākara Bodhisattva

For much of Shin history, Amida was conceived as a savior figure who had in the distant past made vows to welcome anyone who believed deeply in him and said his name even ten times into his Pure Land. This image is firmly grounded in the scriptural tradition, which further holds that Amida has attained enlightenment ten eons (or *kalpas*) ago. From the time of Rennyo, Shin faithful were encouraged to say the name and faithfully beseech Amida to save them.[22] That salvation was seen as the "the paramount element of the life to come" and was believed to occur in a post-mortem paradise. Shinran's thought, however, contains many elements that do not affirm this traditional narrative of Pure Land salvation. As we saw in the previous section, the proponents of *Seishinshugi* engaged in an attempt to return to Shinran and clarify the significance of his thought without the later accretions of the exegetical tradition, much of which failed to recognize the radical nature of Shinran's denial of many elements in earlier

22. Another one of Rennyo's most often read letters reads: "Laymen and Laywomen lacking wisdom in the last [Dharma] age [should know that] sentient beings who, making their minds single, deeply ask the help of Amida Buddha, not turning their minds in other directions, single-heartedly and steadfastly, and say, 'Save me, O Buddha!' will necessarily be saved by Amida Tathāgata, even if the karma from their transgressions is profound and heavy. This is the meaning of the eighteenth Vow to bring about Birth in the Pure Land based on the *nenbutsu*." See 『真宗聖教全書』[The complete sacred teachings of Shinshū] (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941; hereafter, SSZ), III: 500; the translation here is based loosely on Rogers and Rogers, trans., *Rennyo Shōnin Ofumi*, 107.

Pure Land thought and devotion. In his reinterpretation of the figure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva, Soga particularly focused on Shinran's repeated reference to him in the chapter on faith in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Although for Rennyo, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, Amida Buddha's causal stage, was little more than backstory that provided additional evidence of the efficacy of the vows and certainty of salvation through them,[23] Shinran situates this figure as an essential element of *shinjin*, or the mind of faith, referring to his practice over and over again in his discussion of its content.

Soga picked up on Shinran's discussion and presented the argument that this Dharmākara is the true subject of faith, the believer, as opposed to the traditional view which sees Amida Buddha as the savior and object of faith. In the earliest formulations of this idea, which were laid out in the pages of *Seishinkai* and other journals in 1912 and 1913, Soga describes Dharmākara as a savior on earth, one who does not save externally and at the end of life by bringing one to paradise,[24] but instead from within the subject of each individual believer who hears the *nenbutsu* and awakens to what Shinran calls the "Vow-mind" (*ganshin* 願心) within themselves. Perhaps the most original aspect of Soga's idea is the clear designation of the Dharmākara as the "subject" of faith and his explicit inversion of the traditional subject/object paradigm in Edo-period Shin. Shinran himself does not use these categories, which were introduced along with the introduction of Western philosophy to Japan in the Meiji period, but his description of Dharmākara as the source and foundation of *shinjin* intimates that he intended Dharmākara to be interpreted as both interior and immedi-

23. See letter 8 in volume 4 of *Ofumi*, SSZ III: 491; Rogers and Rogers, *Rennyo Shōnin Ofumi*, 97.

24. Shinran also criticizes Pure Land devotion that expects to be met at the moment of death and welcomed into the Pure Land as an insufficient, mistaken form of seeking. See, for instance, the first letter of *Mattōshō* 末灯鈔, CWS I: 523; TSZ III: 59–60.

ate to the believer, not exterior and eventual the way that Shin after Rennyo saw Amida.[25]

Soga develops this idea throughout the 1910s and 1920s, considering its significance variously primarily in the pages of *Seishinkai*, but also in other journals after its publication was suspended for lack of funds, editorial support, and content in 1918. These considerations can be seen as Soga's attempt to answer the question of how the faithful are supposed to live in the world, what they are to value and aspire for in their lives. At risk of oversimplification (and that risk is large given the tenacity and deep-rooted nature of self-power thinking in human beings), the answer is that they come to share in the aspiration of Dharmākara laid out in the *Larger Sutra*: to become a buddha and to genuinely effect the liberation of all sentient beings. That is to say, the faithful come to live in the bodhisattva ideal symbolized by the character of Dharmākara, but not necessarily at the level of discursive consciousness and volition. It may perhaps be better to say that the faithful take on the significance of Dharmākara through the transformative instant of awakening to the meaning and message contained in the name.

As we have seen, however, that instant and consciousness differs fundamentally from the ordinary discursive thinking that human beings engage in, and from the perspective of that ordinary thought can only be described as what Shinran and Soga call 不可思議, which Van Bragt translates below as "mystery."[26]

25. For a fuller discussion, see my "Dharmākara as the Subject, Not Object of Faith: The Reinterpretation of Amida's Causal Phase in Modern Shin Thought" in *Faith in Buddhism*, Imre Hamar and Takami Inoue, eds. (Budapest: Institute for East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, 2016).

26. We should be careful to note that this position is not esoteric in the sense of a hidden knowledge available only to the initiated few, but instead is a stance that follows closely in the line of the Mahāyāna attitude toward the human ability to genuinely grasp themselves and their world based on ordinary, discriminative thought. That is, Soga and Shinran share in the general suspicion toward human discursive reasoning that has been common to Mahāyāna Buddhism since the time of Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250).

The delicate problem caused by the presence of human discursive thought constantly attempting to conceive and objectify something that it is not capable of conceiving, leads Soga to describe the "Three Great Principles of Shin Doctrine" as follows: "(1) I am I. (2) The Tathāgata is I. (3) I am not the Tathāgata."[27] He also writes, "We wonder about the wondrous meaning of 'The Tathāgata is I,' and at the same time are aware that 'I am forever I and not the Tathāgata.'" Thus, although Soga argues that the person who has the insight that is *shinjin* becomes one with the Tathāgata, or takes on the vows for universal liberation set forth by Dharmākara, that does not necessarily entirely obliterate or overcome that person's ordinary, deluded ego-consciousness. This means that Soga's understanding of the ethical imperative contained in Shinran's thought is not just a simple exhortation to be a strong, world-transcending bodhisattva, but involves a more subtle reordering of priorities and values that also entails a profound mistrust of one's own persistently self-centered discursive thinking.

From 1918, Soga begins describing what he sees as the relationship between this intuition of one's inconceivable identity with Dharmākara—which cannot become the object of ordinary thinking—with the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). This consciousness is posited in Yogācāra thought as the foundation for conscious experience. Soga's basic grasp of salvation described above is rooted in Shinran's thought, but it is also informed significantly by his original understanding of Yogācāra descriptions of consciousness, especially this indelible storehouse consciousness, which, although never becoming the direct object of human ideation, serves as its basis and foundation. Van Bragt has not translated much of Soga's works regarding the *ālaya-vijñāna*, but the term does appear occasionally below. We should also note that Soga's argument that Dharmākara Bodhisattva is the *ālaya-vijñāna* was taken up at meetings of the Ōtani-ha's organ to maintain orthodoxy and the subsequent criti-

27. SRS IV: 351–2. See below, 354.

cisms from more traditional scholars within the denomination led him to leave his post at Ōtani University for a time in the 1930s. It seems that Soga was attempting to use the concept of the *ālaya-vijñāna* as a bridge to describe how the salvation of one individual might truly be conceived of as the salvation of all, which is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of Dharmākara's vows and the bodhisattva spirit that they embody.

Soga's theory of the role of past karma

In traditional Yogācāra doctrine, the *ālaya-vijñāna* is the store of the effects of all past karma, as well as the store of all future karmic potentiality. Soga not only discusses the three elements that Shinran holds are essential facets of *shinjin* (the sincere mind, the mind of hopeful entrusting, and the aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land) in terms of these phases of the *ālaya-vijñāna*, his later discussions of the significance of past karma are also heavily influenced by this idea that human beings are profoundly and entirely conditioned by past circumstance, while also possessing infinite potential towards the future. As such, his position on the role of past karma in Shin soteriology, which he develops primarily in lectures he gave on the *Tannishō* at the Ōtani-ha's summer retreat in 1942, can be seen as an outgrowth of the considerations he made regarding the role of Dharmākara. Soga argues that in the intuition of past karma, one does not only recognize one's limited, conditioned nature, one also becomes aware of one's total responsibility for the whole of existence. That is, for Soga, seeing oneself as the product of karmic circumstance leads to a recognition of one's complete responsibility for the whole of it.[28] This awareness itself comes to shape one's actions, so can be seen as a source of direction for ethical action.

28. See below, 443–6, where Soga writes: "Such, indeed, is the figure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. Without the awareness of this figure, we would divide evil and responsibility among ourselves: this is my responsibility and that is yours. In so doing, we would make our own responsibility light and load the heavier part on the shoulders of the others. That is the natural tendency of the human ego.... Supposing the number of Japanese to be a

The concept of past karma was introduced into the Shin tradition by the *Tannishō*. In chapter 13 of that work, Yuien relays that Shinran told him that even the smallest transgression is the result of the working out of past karma in the present. While this chapter could very well be read as Shinran's complete denial of the necessity to lead an ethical life, for all actions, good and bad, are presented there as simply the result of previous karmic circumstance beyond individual volition, Soga instead seeks to read it as an admonition to lead one's life in awareness of one's responsibility to the world. In later works, Soga further develops this idea as a guide to ethical behavior. In a short essay entitled "Past Karma," written in the postwar period, Soga points out the shared nature of our karma and then says:

> People often ask, "What should I do?" but one should ask that to past karma. In doing so, one will see a new light and, following in that light, go forward, choosing what is necessary in the working out of naturalness.... Just vainly asking, "What should I do?" is to be the tramp of the world of thought. Today, tramps of the world of thought are all over the place. Do not vainly worry over "What should I do?" The awareness of past karma and the Tathāgata's light will show us what we are to do. All we need to do is practice the path in light of that teaching, and by practicing that path return to our original natures.[29]

The ethical guide provided by past karma does not take the form of specific stipulations such as "Always do this," and "Never do that." Instead, grounded firmly in his view of the importance of immediate

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hundred million, I must take upon myself only one hundred millionth of the responsibility, and can leave the 99,999,999 other parts to others. As long as we reason in this way, arithmetically, there is no genuine consciousness of karma. Such consciousness implies the sense of being linked 'by blood' to all others.... When we enter the world of karma in this way, we come to understand the moods of all kinds of people, and all human beings come to be linked with one another by 'blood.' Therefore the deeds of all human beings become our own responsibility. We then take upon our own shoulders the sins and pains of all sentient beings" (SRS VI: 156–8).

29. 『曽我量深講義集』[Collected lectures of Soga Ryōjin] (Tokyo: Yayoi Shobō, 1978), III: 115–16.

experience, Soga here argues that immediate karmic circumstance, guided by the light of the wisdom represented in the name, will provide clear insight into the next right step to be taken. These ethical choices are not made based on abstract principles or conceptions (which are the product of human discursive thought and therefore deluded), but instead based on a very immediate intuition of what should be done in any given moment, based on the present circumstances, and guided by the values (or virtues) expressed in the name and the story of Dharmākara which it represents.

Soga's view of Śākyamuni and his "translation" project

The third major contribution of Soga's to Shin studies that needs to be introduced here is his understanding of the role of Śākyamuni in Shin Buddhism. Soga sets forth the position that Śākyamuni is the product of Amida and not the other way around. This stance, too, has its roots in Shinran's thought. For instance, in the chapter on practice in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran creatively rewords a passage from Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Bhumīs* to read that all buddhas—even Dharmākara's teacher Lokeśvararaja—keep in mind Amida's original Vow, indicating that their buddhahood is in fact reliant on Amida, or the truth that Amida symbolizes.[30] Soga picks up on this attitude of Shinran's and uses it to make a defense of Shin Buddhism against the Buddhist studies scholars of his day who argued that the Pure Land scriptures were in some way inferior because they had not been preached by the historical Buddha.

Soga, of course, does not pretend to be a historian or believe that somehow Amida preceded Śākyamuni in time. Instead, he shifts the field of the argument from the historical questions of who said what when to the more foundational, philosophical questions of "What did Śākyamuni awaken to?" and "What made that awakening possible?" Soga belittles his contemporary scholars of Buddhist studies who fail

30. TK, 30–31; CWS I: 23.

to address these questions as completely missing the substance of their subject. He answers that Śākyamuni's awakening is firmly grounded in what came to be described as Amida.[31]

The fourth of Soga's major contributions is his translation of central Shin doctrinal concepts into modern Japanese. He does this repeatedly throughout his works. As we saw above, Dharmākara is referred to as the subject of faith, which itself is a category borrowed from Western philosophy. In order to stress the intuitional and non-rational nature of the awareness of past karma, Soga uses the modern term "instinct" (本能) to describe it. Merit transference (回向), one of the central concepts in Shinran's soteriology, is said to be "expression" (表現), while the adornments (荘厳) of the Pure Land are described as "symbol" (象徴). In the postwar period, when the question of individual rights of citizenship were a major topic of discussion, Soga argued that the traditional term for virtues (功徳) could be translated as "rights." These creative translations were Soga's attempt to maintain the currency of Shinran's ideas in the rapidly changing world of thought in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century and can be viewed as Soga's extension of *Seishinshugi*'s project.

In closing this section on Soga's originality, one important point about the nature of Soga's thought remains to be stressed. While Soga was a great thinker, possessed of immense intellectual capacities and profound insights, we must also remember that he saw himself primarily as an articulate representative of the common people of rural Niigata and had few pretensions about himself as a thinker. His obsession with the multitudes of bodhisattvas who welled forth from the earth while Śākyamuni was preaching the *Lotus Sutra* is a reflection of that self understanding. For Soga, those innumerable, nameless

31. This view of the relationship between Amida and Śākyamuni appears repeatedly below, but is most clearly articulated in "Shinran's View of Buddhist History" (pages 409–32 below), which is a transcript of the lecture Soga presented in commemoration of his sixtieth birthday (SRS V: 385–471).

bodhisattvas were his own ancestors in Niigata, as well as the ancestors of the parishioners of the temples where he was born and worked as a young man. Soga saw himself as giving a voice to their straightforward religious sensibility in the midst of the intellectual changes that were occurring in modern Japan. Yasutomi Shin'ya, to whom this volume is dedicated and who knew Soga toward the end of his life, once cautioned me not to mistake Soga for a refined philosopher but to remember him as he was: an extremely insightful and equally blunt country priest who was quick to criticize both himself and others. Readers should keep that advice in mind as they read his words in the following pages.

Soga's sources in shin tradition

Soga was, more than anything else, a Shin exegete whose primary focus was the explication of the significance of Shinran's thought. As such, he makes frequent reference to passages and concepts that appear in Shinran's works, as well as the many scriptures that Shinran drew on in composing them, in addition to ideas and imagery present in the broader Buddhist tradition in East Asia. It will be impossible to provide a comprehensive introduction to all of those ideas in this section, but I hope to present some of the most pertinent and frequently occurring elements in Shinran's thought that appear below. As Soga grounds himself primarily on Shinran's *magnum opus*, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, I will focus on it, introducing some of its most important passages along the way.

In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran offers a radical reinterpretation of Pure Land soteriology where he argues that the whole of human religious experience is founded on the working of the Tathāgata, Amida, and thus transcends the realm of usual human volition and discursive thinking. He makes this argument by discussing Amida's merit transference (*ekō*) as the foundation of the teaching (*kyō* 教, translated as "doctrine" below), practice (*gyō* 行), faith (*shin* 信), and realization (*shō*

証) that is experienced by sentient beings in the process of their moving along the Buddhist path to complete nirvana. Shinran holds that the vows Amida made in his causal stage work in the backdrop of sentient beings' experience of this path, effecting the merit transference that serves to transform human beings from foolish, ordinary people into entities who are "equal to the Tathāgatas."[32] Shinran focuses on three of those 48 vows—the 17th, 18th, and the 11th—and makes them the centerpiece of his discussion of practice, faith, and realization, respectively.

Shinran holds that the 17th Vow serves as the foundation for what he calls "great practice," or the element of the Tathāgata's merit transference that brings people in touch with the teachings represented by the name, *Namu Amida Butsu*. That Vow reads:

> If, when I attain Buddhahood, the countless buddhas throughout the worlds in the ten quarters do not all praise and say my name, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.[33]

Here, Dharmākara vows that on attaining enlightenment, his name will be praised by the Buddhas of the ten directions. Shinran interprets the myriad buddhas in this passage to mean the historical teachers who relay the *nenbutsu* to the faithful, thereby bringing about the arising of the single thought moment of faith within them. Soga's discussion of the seven Shin patriarchs, as well as the history of the Buddhist tradition, is founded on this view of Shinran's that they are expressions of the concrete working of Amida's 17th Vow in the world to bring the message of liberation to the ears of those in need of hearing it.

The 18th Vow, which Shinran quotes and comments upon in the chapter on faith of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, reads as follows:

32. TK, 124; CWS I: 100.

33. CWS I: 13; TK, 17–18. See also 大正新脩大蔵経 (Tokyo: Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1928–1934; hereafter, T), no. 360, XII: 268a24–5; Inagaki Hisao, trans., *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995), 34.

> If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the ten quarters who with sincere mind, hopefully entrust, and the aspire to be born in my country up to ten times are not born there, then may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. However, those who have committed the five grave offenses and slandered the right Dharma are excluded.[34]

Although in traditional Pure Land Buddhism, this Vow was seen as an admonition to call Amida's name in order to receive the benefit of Birth in the Pure Land after death, Shinran makes a more faithful reading of the letter of the Vow (which makes no reference to saying the name) and interprets it instead as an admonition to faith. He goes further, however, in the chapter on faith, arguing that the three minds called for here in the Vow are not the product of human volition, but instead are the product of the Tathāgata's working within the minds of sentient beings. At the beginning of his detailed discussion of how each of these three minds are bequeathed upon sentient beings, he writes, "Whether practice or faith, taken together, there is nothing that is not realized through the merit transference of Amida Tathāgata's pure Vow-mind."[35] As noted above, Shinran holds that the awakening of this mind of faith occurs in the instant of hearing and understanding the name. He argues that both the call—the voice of historical teachers to take refuge in Amida—and the response—the taking of refuge or returning to immeasurable life and wisdom—are the "inviolable command" (勅命) of the Tathāgata summoning sentient beings to the Pure Land.[36] Through this interpretation, Shinran takes both practice and faith out of the realm of the volition of sentient beings—thus freeing it from the dangers of self-centeredness and self-seeking that he holds adheres to any human act or thought.

This basic structure of being called from without and responding at a profound, visceral or instinctual level is the centerpiece of both

34. TK, 97; see CWS I: 80 for another translation. See also T XII: 268a26–8; Inagaki, *Three Pure Land Sutras*, 34.

35. TK, 115; see CWS I: 93 for another translation.

36. TK, 48; CWS I: 38 and TK, 127; CWS I: 103.

Shinran's and Soga's understanding of liberation in Shin Buddhism. Soga often refers to Shandao's parable of the two rivers and the white path to discuss these two elements. The story goes that a traveler in a distant and lonely place found himself in an impossible situation—pursued from all sides and confronted with two rivers, one of fire and one of water (symbolizing anger and greed), with only a small path less than a foot wide between them as an avenue of escape. When the traveler decides to step on to the dangerous path, he hears two voices: one from the eastern shore behind him, encouraging him to go forward, and another from the western shore, summoning him to proceed on the path and pay no heed to the dangers of the fire and water. Hearing these voices, he forges ahead, but is called back by his pursuers, whom he ignores, until he finds himself, in an instant, at peace and surrounded by friends on the western bank. Shandao explains that the voice from the eastern shore symbolizes the teachings left behind by Śākyamuni while the one from the western shore symbolizes the intention of Amida's vows.[37]

For Soga, these two voices are the external call of our teachers to live in the *nenbutsu* (the merit transference of the 17th Vow) and the desire that arises within us to do so (that of the 18th), respectively. Our discursive minds are situated on the path (scorched by self-centered anger and doused by self-centered desire) between those two calls and liberation takes place when it fully conforms to those commands in the single thought moment of faith.

Shinran held that the person of faith who truly accords with those commands attains the stage of non-retrogression on the path to buddhahood and joins in the company of the rightly settled based on the working of Amida's 11th Vow. This Vow, which is quoted in the chapter on realization in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, reads:

> If, when I attain Buddhahood, the human beings and devas in my land

37. Shinran quotes the parable in full at the beginning of the chapter on faith. See TK, 108–12; CWS I: 89–91.

> do not dwell among the settled and necessarily attain nirvana, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.[38]

Although in traditional Pure Land Buddhism, this Vow was read to mean that those who had achieved entry into the post-mortem Pure Land were assured of complete enlightenment in the life after the next, Shinran saw this Vow as the foundation for joining the company of those assured of attaining buddhahood in this life[39] and attaining great nirvana at the moment of death.[40] Shinran also makes reference to the 22nd Vow in the chapter on realization, arguing that it serves as the foundation for the compassionate action of bodhisattvas of the Pure Land within this world as a function of the returning aspect of the Tathāgata's merit transference. Soga makes a creative interpretation of the significance of this element in Shinran's thought as well, but it is too complex to address fully here. Suffice it to say that Soga sees both aspects of that merit transference (the going, or *ōsō* 往相, and returning, or *gensō* 還相), as adhering to sentient beings who have attained faith.[41]

Shinran was well aware that this moment of faith is fleeting and that the human discursive mind is extremely tenacious, staying with one until the moment of death. He also held that Dharmākara Bodhisattva was aware of this difficulty within human beings and made vows to address that problem and assure that it would not ultimately prevent sentient beings from realizing full liberation. This is what is referred to as the progression through the three vows (三願転入) below and is the primary subject of the chapter on transformed buddha bodies and lands, which is the sixth and final chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. In that chapter, Shinran focuses on the 19th and the 20th Vows, correlates them with the *Contemplation Sutra* and the *Amida Sutra*, respectively,

38. CWS I: 153; TK, 196.
39. TK, 138–9; CWS I: 112.
40. TK, 151; CWS I: 123.
41. See, for instance, SRS III: 227–8; and below, 252–3.

and argues that both the vows and the sutras were preached as expedients to deal with the problem of the mind of self-power, or human discursive thinking that expects certain results for certain behaviors. Put very simply, he holds that these vows and scriptures, with their encouragement to engage in various practices, were laid out to lead sentient beings on the path to the awakening of the single thought moment of faith and to ensure that they ultimately attain enlightenment.

The *Contemplation Sutra* preaches a wide variety of meditative and non-meditative practices which it states will bring about the result of Amida meeting practitioners at the moment of death and leading them to the Pure Land. The 19th Vow likewise calls practitioners to "cultivate various virtues"[42] and promises that such people will be welcomed into the Pure Land at death by Amida and his retinue. Shinran situates these teachings as a necessary gate which must be passed through to recognize the importance of the Pure Land teachings, but must eventually be left behind as an inferior and deluded mode of engagement with them.[43]

The *Amida Sutra* calls for the wholehearted, exclusive practice of the *nenbutsu* and states that those who do so will be born in Amida's Pure Land after death.[44] The 20th Vow also calls on practitioners to "set their thoughts on my country and plant various roots of virtue,"[45] which is read to mean actively engaging in the practice of self-power *nenbutsu*, promising that they will ultimately receive the fruits of Birth

42. TK, 270; see CWS I: 208.

43. There is a tradition within Shin doctrinal studies from the Edo period to associate the works of the latter four Shin patriarchs, Daochuo 道綽 (562–645), Shandao, Genshin 源信 (942–1017), and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), with the *Contemplation Sutra* while associating the first three Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250), Vasubandhu (c. 400–480), and Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?) with the *Larger Sutra*, thus ranking them in relative importance. The first three were said to have clarified the true teaching presented in the *Larger Sutra* while the latter four, although based firmly in the teaching of the vows from the *Larger Sutra*, were thought to have presented their ideas in line with the expedients presented in the *Contemplation Sutra*. That stance informs much of Soga's discussion of the patriarchs below.

44. T no. 366, XII: 347b11–16, Inagaki, trans., *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 123.

45. TK, 296; see CWS I: 229.

and enlightenment. Shinran closes his considerations of the significance of these two sutras and these two vows by saying that they are indeed profoundly significant in the process of seeking, but that he himself now aims to attain the true "Birth difficult to conceive" that is the result of the 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows.[46] That is, he expresses his intent to leave behind the expedients and attain the true Birth which he defines as "all receiving a body of natural emptiness, a body without limitation,"[47] which Soga styles as the return to Great Nature or the intuition of one's oneness with the world. Soga, too, holds these two provisional, expedient vows to be important and discusses their significance variously in the pages that follow.

This short introduction to Shinran's thought fails to do justice to it, but I hope it might help interested readers get a handle on the most prevalent themes addressed by Soga below. Although the above presents the bare minimum to make the following intelligible, I would strongly suggest that those with little familiarity with Shinran's thought take the time to look into the doctrines he and his predecessors have laid out before attempting to tackle the works presented below. There is much useful secondary scholarship in English[48] and many of the primary sources have been translated,[49] so there are plenty of resources

46. TK, 309; CWS I: 240.

47. TK, 265–66; CWS I: 203.

48. Ueda Yoshifumi and Dennis Hirota's *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989) is a good place to start. Kenneth Tanaka's *Pure Land Buddhism: Historical Development and Contemporary Manifestation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004) provides a good introduction to the thought of the seven patriarchs.

49. In addition to CWS and Inagaki's *Three Pure Land Sutras*, Pure Land related works by Nāgārjuna are available in English: *Nāgārjuna's Discourse on the Ten Stages (Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā): A study and translation from Chinese of verses and Chapter 9*, trans. Hisao Inagaki (Kyoto: Ryukoku Gakkai, 1998). Also available in English are those by Tanluan, *Ōjōronchū: Tanluan's Commentary on Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Pure Land*, trans. Hisao Inagaki (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1998); Daochuo, *Collection of Passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss*, trans. Zuio Hisao Inagaki (Takatsuki, Osaka: Horai Association International, 2014); and Shandao, *The Method of Contemplation on Amida*,

available to the person who wishes to unpack Soga's dense but stimulating discussions. There surely await many insights for those willing to engage with Soga and the tradition that he was working within.

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trans., Zuio H. Inagaki (Takatsuki, Osaka: Horai Association International, 2010); and *Liturgy for Birth*, trans. Zuio H. Inagaki (Takatsuki, Osaka: Horai Association International, 2009).