The Philosophy of Translation

From Nishida Kitarō to Ogyū Sorai

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Given that the only means of expressing philosophy is language, "translation" can provide an effective perspective from which to examine philosophical discourse. In this sense, translation cannot be seen as merely a means of transmitting philosophy expressed in one language to another culture. Furthermore, inquiries regarding translation should not be confined to the question of "how to translate" which has so far been the primary focus of the discourse in translation studies.[1]

In the field of Dutch studies (蘭学) in the Edo period, Sugita Genpaku and Maeno Ryōtaku, translators of *Kaitai shinsho* (解体新書,[2] 1774), adopted different attitudes towards translation. The former seems to have rendered the general meaning of the passage in question without regard for subtle details or the meaning of particular words in order to facilitate the prompt application of the information contained therein to medical treatment, whereas the latter's objective seems to have been to acquire a thorough knowledge of Dutch for the sake of Dutch studies itself. In the

1. An interdisciplinary field that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century in the West and is now developing rapidly. See Munday 2008).

2. Sugita and Maeno produced this Japanese translation of a Dutch text entitled *Ontleedige Tafelen* which was itself a translation of *Anatomische Tabellen* (1722), a German text by Johann Adam Kulmus.

differing approaches taken by Sugita and Maeno the question of "how to translate" is given a different answer concerning the degree of fidelity to the original text that is to be maintained, and the two approaches their translations exemplify are sometimes referred to as "free translation" and "literal translation."

Questions raised by translation cannot all be resolved by reference to a point of view regarding the relation between a "source language" and a "target language," or a "source text" and a "target text." In other words, they involve not only objective aspects considered by the translator but also subjective aspects present in him or her. We should note that there are latent philosophical questions involved in translation. What I want to emphasize is that translation has closer links to philosophy than is usually assumed; the translation of philosophy is inseparable from the philosophy of translation.

This idea forms the basis of my research project entitled "On the Convergence of Translation and Philosophy in Modern Japan" (翻訳と近代日本哲学の接点). The first stage of my examination of this issue focused on Nishida Kitarō, or, more precisely, on the construction of his philosophy. The three points listed below characterize his philosophy and at the same time are indispensable to any consideration of the essential meaning of his philosophical discourse. If we are attentive to the fact that a "philosophical language" in Japanese was itself being newly created through the formal processes at work in this discourse we can see how these points bring into relief this essential meaning. The three points are as follows:

> 1. Creation of Sino-Japanese terminology (漢語).
> 2. Creation of the grammar of a philosophical language.
> 3. Interpretation and assimilation of Western logic.

The most important factors here, which in effect produced what I have called "the convergence of translation and philosophy," are the modernization of the Japanese language and "the unification of the written and spoken language" (言文一致).

In the past I have conducted my examination of the translation of philosophy based on this approach, and going forward I aim to extend the scope of my inquiry to include an analysis of Ogyū Sorai's 荻生徂

徠 (1666–1728) thought concerning translation as expressed in his Edo period writings. Considering this issue in the context of the pre-modern period means clarifying the convergence of translation and philosophy in terms of a more complete history—namely a history of philosophical translation in Japan.

The introduction and assimilation of sinographs (漢字) forms a crucial part of the process of cultural evolution in Japan in light of the fact that Japanese thought was created and refined through the use of these characters. By examining sinographs it can be demonstrated that we cannot discuss Japanese philosophy without taking the perspective of translation into account.

Translation is an act by means of language as well as the result of expressing something in a language. The language in which thought was expressed and developed in the Edo period has, in a certain sense, been carried over into modern Japanese. Classical Chinese (漢文) and its variant, "reading classical Chinese in Japanese" (*kundoku* 訓読), were used in order to translate texts from Western languages. The *kundoku* method of reading actually includes a mechanism of translation, but this is something not normally noticed by those employing it. According to Maruyama Masao, Ogyū Sorai was the first to develop a "comparative" perspective and perceive the existence of Chinese as a foreign language (MARUYAMA and KATŌ 1998, 24–5). In other words, Sorai made a landmark discovery which then allowed him to develop a literary theory and philosophy. Both of these were integrated into his "studies of ancient Chinese" (古文辞学). The prevailing themes of his scholarly studies can be seen as issuing directly from this novel methodology.

Looking at the points regarding translation laid out above, I can now state the purpose of this short paper more clearly. It consists in, first, finding a theory of translation in Nishida's philosophy, and, second, examining Sorai's studies of translation from the point of view of the convergence of translation and philosophy. The former may lead us to a potential new theory of translation which will add another point to the three mentioned above.

I will begin with a further examination of the concept of a "philosophy of translation."

Towards a philosophy of translation

The "philosophy of translation" can be seen as an essential issue in how philosophy is to be conducted. This idea derives from Jean-René Ladmiral, a French scholar of translation studies, who writes:

> The translation of philosophical texts, the translation of philosophy indicates that strictly speaking there is a philosophy of translation … in other words that there is a philosophical wager (*enjeu*) in every translation. (Ladmiral, xiii)

The "philosophical" nature of translation means being "reflective," and Ladmiral therefore focuses on the psychology of the translator. He explains:

> When I assert that translation studies (*traductologie*) is a reflective discipline, it is first a real conceptual reflectiveness that I think of; but it is also what I will call a certain psychological reflectiveness, which is in direct continuity with the former. (Ladmiral, xx)

The continuity between "conceptual reflectiveness" and "psychological reflectiveness" reminds us of the cognitive process. On the other hand, Ladmiral takes into account a "psychoanalysis of translation," that is to say, the "psychological work that a translating subject does on himself." He points this out on the grounds that psychoanalysis has a basis of philosophical reflectiveness in common with philosophy. Put more precisely, translation, as a difficult practice in itself, requires the act of reflection on all aspects of this process before reaching the point of verbalization or conceptualization. According to Ladmiral, the verbalization practiced in the act of translation is analogous to psychoanalysis for the individual involved.

Ladmiral's position hints at the possibility of applying Nishida's "logic of the place, or *basho* 場所," to translation studies. My perspective, however, does not focus on translators as subjects by delving into this "therapeutic" view of the act of translation, but aims instead at a study of translation not merely in terms of what is normally called "translation" but also a broader conception of this process which takes into consideration the whole culture or cultures involved along with all possible

means of expression. Here Roman Jakobson's well known approach can go some way to connecting Ladmiral with Nishida. Jakobson proposes three forms of translation:

1. Intralingual translation or reformulation (rewording), which consists of the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of other signs of the same language.

2. Interlingual translation or what is normally referred to as translation, which consists of the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of another language.

3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation, which consists of the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of systems of non-linguistic signs (JAKOBSON, 79).

The structuralist linguist Jakobson, who espouses the Saussurian arbitrariness of the *signifié* and *signifiant* of the language in question, regards equivalence, in other words translation, as one of the most important linguistic problems. Keeping his ideas in mind, let us return to the question of "conceptual and psychological reflectiveness" in order to examine language as an expression of philosophical thought. Nishida's logic of place (*basho*) seems to be a fitting epistemological model to employ here in that its structure retains both the deepening of consciousness and that which unfolds beyond consciousness. The rough structure of *basho*, as Nishida himself describes it (NKZ 5, 123), can be divided into three strata:

1. being (有): the world of nature;
2. nothingness (無): the world of consciousness; and
3. absolute nothingness (絶対無): the intelligible world (叡智的世界).

Nishida's original conception of *basho* is not a logic that addresses expressing oneself in a foreign language or the issues that arise surrounding the differences between Japanese and other languages. But it should not be difficult to relate Nishida's *basho* to these sorts of questions, or in other words to the perspective of translation, if we consider that its structure is based on language. I shall here give an outline of the logic of place with reference to linguistic birth and disappearance.

The name "*basho*" indicates that the logic of place is distinguished from

the Aristotelian formulation of logic as "S is P" or "subject is predicate." The logic of *basho* presupposes a predicate where a subject is placed: "the 'subject' is in the 'predicate'." This way of thinking excludes the opposition between subject and predicate, and moreover gives priority to the predicate rather than to the subject. The operation of predicating that fundamentally supports the logic of *basho* is conceived with the aim of infinitely deepening the meaning of knowing. The predicate defines itself and immediately becomes the subject.

1. Being: The World of Nature

In the place of "being," where predication is latent, the reflective function of consciousness has not yet appeared, and a series of judgments—simple judgments as well as more profound judgments—unfold. Objects of these judgments are things (物), situated in the place of being because they have already been objectified (NKZ 5, 102–3). It is in this way that thoughts concerning judgments can be verbalized. The "conceptual reflectiveness" that Ladmiral considers to be one of the two aspects of reflection would correspond to this phase of the logic of *basho*. The act of translation involves units such as words, terms or idiomatic expressions of which the *signifié* in the source-language is evident for the target-language. Significantly, the role of interpretation has not yet come into play.

2. Nothingness: The World of Consciousness

The phase of "nothingness" is characterized by reflection, that is to say a "self-awakening (自覚)" by which "knowing and known become one" (NKZ 5, 106). As self-awakening deepens, non-conceptualized or non-verbal things are further excavated. The translation of philosophy necessarily passes through this self-reflective consciousness. Ladmiral's "psychological reflectiveness" might be thought of as occurring in the place of nothingness. However this process of translation must result in conceptualization and verbalization without remaining in nothingness, otherwise all attempts at translation would end in failure. The translator tries to understand what the philosopher in question reflected on *before* expressing it in language. To put it another way, he or she tries to

directly experience the philosopher's reflection and self-awakening. This attempt is a process of interpretation.

3. Absolute Nothingness: The Intelligible World

"Absolute nothingness" represents intuitive knowledge. In this last stratum of *basho*, the reflective consciousness is founded on "expressing itself" (自己自身を表現するもの) which transcends the opposition between "expressing" (表現するもの) and "being expressed" (表現せられるもの). "Expressing itself" is also "seeing itself" (自己自身を見るもの), a process that unfolds in the world of "intelligible intuition" (知的直観) (NKZ 5, 118–19). Nishida also created another expression for intelligible intuition: "seeing the form without form (形なきものの形を見る)" (NKZ 4, 6). *Basho* is a boundless source of creation for all things, and the world of objects seen by the self resides in an "objective mind" (客観的精神), that is to say a "cultural phenomenon" (文化現象) (NKZ 5, 120–1). As for its relation with translation, the *basho* of intelligible intuition does not provide a moment of "translation" as the term is normally used, but rather in a broader sense that makes use of other forms of expression, such as poetic, artistic, or religious expression. We may assimilate this idea into the account of translation between language and non-linguistic signs and the translation between non-linguistic signs set forth by Jakobson. But poetic language seems to be more suitably placed in absolute nothingness.

The above-mentioned explanation presents the birth of language in the translator as a self who awakens himself or herself, and yet the stratum of absolute nothingness entails the non-verbal moment of the translator's activities. This moment may be distressing for the translator since it is a state in which he or she cannot express something in language, or, in other words, when he or she cannot translate. This moment which impedes translation may not be necessary; it may be better not to have untranslatable words at all. Nevertheless, is *basho* not, as a foundation of reflective consciousness, "a boundless source of creation for all things"? Does this not include verbal expressions? To what level can the translator deepen his or her infinite *basho*? This is the "philosophical wager" of translation.

Ogyū sorai's studies of translation

To consider Ogyū Sorai's ideas of translation, let us start with a brief sketch of the history of the written Japanese language, an understanding of which is necessary in order to grasp the problems that he revealed.

The Japanese, who possessed no written characters to express their oral language, adopted sinographs from China, and at the same time also acquired knowledge of classical Chinese (漢文). Until the Heian period (794–1192), these imported sinographs were used as phonograms (表音文字) to represent words and elements of speech native to Japanese such as enclitic particles (助詞), auxiliary verbs (助動詞), nouns, and proper nouns. Around the middle of the tenth century, two syllabaries made of up "*kana*" characters, namely "*katakana*" and "*hiragana*," were created based on sinographs or *kanji*. These syllabaries developed because of their convenience for describing indigenous grammatical elements (certain particles and auxiliary verbs, for example) which did not exist in Chinese. However, erudite persons and Buddhist priests continued to be well versed in sinographs and make use of them in writing. The written language and the spoken language were nearly identical during the Heian period, but they became divided when two ways of writing emerged after *The Tale of Genji* was written in the ninth century. From the Kamakura period (1192–1333) on, as the Japanese style of writing and the Chinese style of writing grew closer together, the written language increasingly parted ways from Japanese as it was spoken.

A method of reading of classical Chinese in Japanese (漢文訓読 or 訓読) was invented by a Sino-Japanese bilingual in the Heian period. It involved the use of reading signs (訓点) that he devised in order to understand the meaning of Chinese texts by rearranging the Chinese words to suit Japanese word order (Kōsaka, 208). People employing this method also added the grammatical elements lacking in Chinese and *furigana* (Japanese pronunciation of the sinographs) between the lines. In addition, expressions such as "*ikani iwanya*" and "*subekaraku…beshi*" were created to fit the meaning of certain Chinese phrases (Yamaguchi, 56–8). The use of these techniques enabled readers to understand the original text without rewriting it as a grammatically correct Japanese sentence.

The phrase "*kanamajiri bun*," or "sentences combining sinographs and syllabics," is used to refer to the style that evolved out of *kanbun*.

In light of the above, it seems more appropriate to translate "*kanbun*" as "Sino-Japanese." When Japanese learn how to read *kanbun* it should be regarded as an ambiguous object of study, as it is neither a foreign language nor completely Japanese.

In the Edo period, Japanese Confucians wrote their essays in the "*kanamajiri bun*" style. However Ogyū Sorai perceived that classical Chinese was a foreign language, and that one has to read it as a foreign language in the context of its own ancient time and place, and not as a form of Japanese, in order to understand the Chinese classics accurately. For Sorai, the reading of classical Chinese in Japanese, or "*kanamajiri bun*," is nothing other than translation. This insight led him to his own conception of what translation should be, which in turn led him to produce the *Yakubun sentei* (訳文筌蹄) (1711 or 1714–1715).

Yakubun sentei literally means "linguistic dictionary" or "linguistic manual for translation." Etymologically "*sen* 筌" ("*fusego*" in its original Japanese reading) is a "fish trap" and "*tei* 蹄" is a "rabbit snare," but a secondary meaning of "*sentei*" is "that which is forgotten after attaining an object," or in other words that "a word is forgotten after the transmission of its true meaning." In fact, *Yakubun Sentei* is considered to be a "book explaining the meanings of words" for the purpose of studying translation into plain Japanese, but *not* for the purpose of "reading classical Chinese in Japanese" called *wakun* (和訓), which was the conventional method up until that time (osz, 736). Sorai framed and developed his "*yakugaku* (訳学)," which should be translated as "translation studies,"[3] through the creation of this dictionary. This is the essence of Sorai's *yakugaku*.

How did he perceive the question of translation? *Yakubun sentei* includes a "Prologue" (「題言」) where Sorai develops his thoughts on translation by reflecting on his own experiences of reading and writing Chinese beginning in his childhood, as well as his study of ancient Chi-

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3. Taking account into *yakugaku* appeared, with its denomination, in the 1950's in the West (see note 1), it seems significant that Sorai founded *yakugaku* as a field of "study" in the eighteenth century in Japan.

nese (古文辞) or "ancient rhetoric." For the most part *Yakubun sentei* is comprised of explanations of homophones. The most important 2433 verbs and adjectives in sinographs are classified according to synonyms. Japanese readings (和訓) are assigned in the traditional broad way, with the same pronunciation being used for many different characters with similar meanings. However the original readings in Chinese are differentiated according to their respective sinographs, since in many cases different characters are pronounced similarly in Japanese but differently in Chinese. Sorai carefully distinguishes between these multiple readings in Chinese and explains them in simple Japanese. This latter distinction is the new translation (新訳) approach that he proposed after considering *wakun* to be a method which risks mistranslation (OSZ, 549,736).

To clarify, let us take a look at some examples of explicative translation which appear in *Yakubun sentei*.

過 is a character which is integrated into a group of synonymous sinographs, 誤, 謬, 錯, 差, 訛, 過, 失, etc., with an old reading of "*ayamaru*." Sorai explains this as follows: "過 is read in Japanese as *ayamachi*. The fact that the individual in question acts without "ill will" (悪意) is expressed using 過, but if someone acts with the intention of committing an *ayamachi* (過) this is described as an instance of evil (悪) or ill will (悪ノ心ナキヲ過ト云ヒ、過ノ心アルヲ悪ト云フ)" (OSZ, 301; YOSHIKAWA, 654). In other words, 過 denotes a mistake or failing which may be irresponsible but is not intentional.

To take another example, 改 belongs to a group of characters with the old reading *kau* or *aratamu*, 変, 化, 換, 貿, 易, 博, 更, 代, 替, etc. According to Sorai, it is read *naosu*. However, *naosu* has two meanings: *tadasu* (正ス), which means to correct an error or put something right, and *aratamu* (改), which means to redo or reform. 改 is always used in conjunction with other sinographs to create words such as 更改、変改 … [ナヲスナリ、但シナヲスニ二ツアリ、ユガミヲナヲスハ正スナリ、シナヲスハ改ナリ、更改、変改 … ナド連用ス、…] (OSZ, 142; YOSHIKAWA , 654).

These examples allow us to reflect further on the notion of translation, or *yaku* (訳) in Sorai's thought. The translations with explanations that he proposes here for the two sinographs are not expressed in a Sino-Japanese style of *kana majiri*, but rather in the style of classical Japanese, which would have been very simple and easy to understand for his read-

ers. He persists in the exclusion of *wakun*, as well as the practice of reading *kanbun* by rearranging the characters into a natural Japanese word order in accordance with "return marks" (返り点) that have been added to the Chinese text for this purpose.

As Sorai points out, Japanese scholars consider *wakun* as an "exegesis (訓詁), but in fact it is translation. And they do not notice that it is translation" (osz, 547). To put it another way, one can practice reading classical Chinese in Japanese (*wakun*) without reflection, and so the difference between *wakun* and translation (*yaku*) is to be found in reflectiveness and interpretation. We can say that *wakun* corresponds to literal translation by means of only a fixed system of reading.

The purpose of Sorai's studies of translation consists in expounding what he views as the correct way of reading Chinese books, which itself forms a basis for the study of Confucianism. Chinese writings should be read precisely according to what is written in the original Chinese without any additions or alterations. In short, these writings should be read by pronouncing words in the Chinese manner and by following the Chinese syntactical rules. But for scholars who have not yet acquired the requisite skills in Chinese, Sorai suggests a translation into simple Japanese (*yaku*), instead of a direct reading of the Chinese.

The background for this claim can be found by looking at the form of Confucian textual studies practiced in Sorai's time as well as the broader intellectual circumstances in which he grew up. Regarding the lectures known as *kōshaku* (講釈), he is critical of the lecturers' use of *wakun,* and specifically of their explanation of the meaning of words based on *wakun,* for its distortion of the original significance. Sorai's conception and methods of translation were therefore presented as a completely new way of studying Confucianism in opposition to the ordinary methods of studying ancient texts.

How did Sorai come to perceive the necessity of reading Chinese as it is and of translating it into the Japanese of the Edo period? What sort of path led him to reject *wakun* for its ambiguous styling between two languages? Sorai began reading classical Chinese as it was, without "return marks," in his childhood, and would write his family's journal and his father's teachings (口授) every night in classical Chinese. He also mastered spoken Chinese (Yoshikawa ,641, 649). It seems reasonable to

suppose that Sorai's remarkable Chinese abilities, aided by a first-hand familiarity with nearly all of the important available works in classical Chinese, developed not only his aural sense but also his sensitivity to comparative culture.

I would suggest that such a comparative perspective must suppose the existence of an "other," and it is at this point that I believe we can recognize the emergence of translation in today's sense of the word. Sorai explains that the Chinese cannot understand the "true face" (本来の面目) of their language by themselves, and illustrates this with the analogous case of people in the South becoming aware of the difference between their own climate and that of the North. The Japanese who practice *wakun* can grasp the grammatical structure of Chinese (OSZ, 548). Without acknowledging the other, we cannot attain a specific notion of translation. The ancient Greeks, who were proud to be monolingual, did not have a particular word equivalent to "translation." It is unlikely that they would have had an impartial view of foreigners, since for them Hellenization meant civilization. Koyasu Nobukuni asserts that "the ideology behind reading classical Chinese in Japanese is that one reads one's own language without being conscious of facing another language, or the other, and so one ends up reading phrases written in another language through the pre-suppositions of one's own language, or oneself." (KOYASU, 99–100). In short, Sorai became aware of translation, and, consequently, awoke the self-awareness of the translator.

The studies of translation that Sorai elaborated, after becoming aware of the existence of the other, rested fundamentally on a mastery of Chinese as a foreign language. In the "Prologue" and *Yakubun jimō* (訳文示蒙, *Illumination of Translation*), he instructs the reader on how to understand, interpret and translate Chinese texts. This process of reading might be taken immediately as an act of translation. The sinographs are closely related to the written Japanese language, and are thought to have trained the Japanese to think based on logographic cognition during the long history of their use. As a result reading sentences that are composed only of *kana* reduces the speed of comprehension even for native Japanese speakers. We can see this in the following example of a verse in classical Chinese by the Tang poet Zhang Ji:

月落烏啼霜満天
月落ち烏啼いて霜天に満つ
(つきおちからすないてしもてんにみつ：

The moon goes down,
A crow caws
Frost fills the sky.

If we know each logograph used in this verse this implies that we understand the meaning of each, or in other words that we are able to express it in Japanese and combine the sinographs with the *kana* required to form a grammatically correct Japanese sentence. The translation of each logograph is immediate; Japanese readers form associations between sinographs and meanings but this does not occur with the *kana*.

Ogyū Sorai takes special notice of the visual effect of the sinographs. He was fully conscious that sounds in "the ear" and "the mouth" cause problems for Japanese attempting to understand classical Chinese. But since their eyes are not unlike those of the Chinese, he reasons, it is by means of these that they have to work hard to understand the texts in question and in so doing improve their appreciation of Chinese writings. The "atmosphere" (義趣) and "nature" (気象) of poetry or philosophical writings, like "pure grace" (清雅) and "sublime depth" (雄深), can touch our heart through vision. The "homonyms" that characterize the Japanese language are varied in meaning, atmosphere, and nature, he continues. These "boundaries" (境界) between meaning and atmosphere, atmosphere and nature, will appear only if we "illuminate our mind and hone our vision (心と目を雙ながら照らして)." A "philosophy of translation" would explain this as the self-reflection that infinitely deepens our understanding of words. According to Sorai, there is something that the "force of the translation of a word" does not ultimately reach. Therefore, he writes that "translation is a "fish trap" (筌)," that is to say "what is forgotten after the attainment of an object"; it is the means of understanding. Nevertheless, "the true and correct translation can be realized only if one catches the implied meaning" (osz, 559).

Sorai concludes his Prologue with the phrase, "it is my *yakugaku* that can unite China and Japan (華と和とを合して之を一にするは、是れ吾が訳学)." He recommends the study of classical Chinese to scholars because,

according to his perspective, the basis of all thought and scholarly pursuits is to be found in the classics of China — "the land of the saints." The essence of Sorai's study of translation should be considered in terms of its role as a means for the study of classical Chinese. He praised Chinese culture as superior to Japanese culture, although he did not denigrate the latter. He emphasized the need for translation, and furthermore for translation into colloquial Japanese (俗語). What ideology, then, did he develop? It was certainly not that of a nationalistic rivalry with China, but rather an enthusiasm for scholarly studies and a surpassing comprehension of language. Is it not extraordinary that profound reflection on two languages and a specialist's insight into them allowed a self-educated Confucian to discover translation as an essential means for scholarly studies under the isolationism which deprived Japan of immediate encounters with a foreign country, or the other?

Sorai's insight into the perspective of translation seems to arise out of his sensitivity to the nuance of sinographs to which several Japanese *kun* readings are assigned. This sensitivity is clearly of a linguistic nature and one that pertains to the difference between the two sides of a word, that is, to the *signifié* and *signifiant* and their arbitrariness. Thus Sorai's conception of translation is notable for the way that it takes into consideration that which is not yet verbalized—or more precisely, the flow from a non-verbalized potential language to its verbalization within the visual world of Sino-Japanese. On this basis, I would argue that the intuitive act in Nishida's philosophy of absolute nothingness is comparable to the core of Sorai's translation studies. This short paper has thus uncovered a common foundation for the philosophy of translation in Sorai and Nishida that is worthy of further exploration.

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