



**Frédéric Girard, *Vocabulaire du bouddhisme japonais, Tome I-Tome II* [Hautes Études Orientales-Extrême-Orient no.45]**

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REFERENCES such as a dictionary of Japanese Buddhist terminology in Western languages can hardly be said to be in abundance. But this work by Frédéric Girard, *Vocabulaire du bouddhisme japonais*, is peerless. Its value is not limited to the academic specialist, but is also useful for the nonspecialist as well. This dictionary of two volumes, which is the result of the author's notes taken during his readings over many long years, retains traces of its former appearance as personal notes, that is, the layout of pages is awkward. Also, as Girard notes deliberately in his "Preface" ("Glossaire de termes bouddhiques japonais"), the descriptions for various entries lack formal unity. However, the accumulation of this vocabulary is enlightening for the reader in the sense that it represents the fruit of the efforts of an accomplished authority on Buddhist research in French.

Girard considers the question of translation throughout his "Introduction" and "Preface." In fact, judging from a historical survey of its transmission and development, we understand that this is a fundamental issue in Buddhism and Buddhist studies. In China, for instance, the assimilation of Buddhism was facilitated by large-scale governmental support of the translation of Buddhist sutras originally in Sanskrit. Japanese monks introduced the sutras that had been translated into Chinese, but they read and interpreted them principally as texts written in Sino-Japanese, *kango*, instead of translating them into Japanese, *wago*. Even though these

two languages have the same sinographic expressions in common, the readings and grammar are dissimilar, and the Japanese inevitably interpreted and translated Chinese into Sino-Japanese in the reading process. The perspective of translation allows us to extract some interesting problems from Girard's *Vocabulaire*.

First, we may take notice of the issue of the Sino-Japanese terms, which are used for the headwords following their reading, transcribed in the Roman alphabet. The comprehension of these terms involves the difficulty arising from their polysemy. To take an example, the well-known term *bosatsu* 菩薩 (I, 67–68) appears as the translation of the Sanskrit, *bodhisattva*. The author gives some translations into French: *Être à Éveil, être voué, promis à l'éveil*, and *être d'éveil*. 菩薩 is an abbreviation of *bodai satta* 菩提薩埵, that is translatable into *Être qui recherche l'éveil* (I, 54). We also learn that a new translation of *bodhisattva* is 覺者有情 (*kakusha ujō*), to which the author applies *être [sensible] d'éveil, être qui recherche l'éveil*. These two Sino-Japanese—or originally Chinese—translations are composed of four totally different characters. The traditional one is a phonetic transcription of the source-term, and the other new one is a translation of its meaning (*bodhi* and *sattva* correspond respectively to 覺者 and 有情).

In this case, the French translations seem to explain the canonical sense of *bodhisattva* more intelligibly than the Sino-Japanese translations, owing to the determinative function of the French grammar that lacks Sino-Japanese and Chinese antecedents. Nevertheless, the French translator could not render *bosatsu* or *bodai satta* without fully grasping its concept. Automatic translation is absolutely impossible. Here, our first problem grows into a second, the impossibility of compiling a glossary or a dictionary for Buddhist terminology that suits all needs. Girard points out the problem precisely: “How was an originally same concept or an originally same idea understood and interpreted by different individuals through several languages of expression? The design is almost a reckless act which is tantamount to the impossible” (I, vii). This is the point relative to the core of translation studies. But “after Babel,” did the polyglotism and the multiple interpretations of words bring about only negative consequences for Buddhism? On the contrary, reading *Vocabulaire* makes us aware of the cultural richness that Buddhism has given birth to through each linguistic branch. “The translations converted the sense of words” (I, vii, xi). We might say that the translation, even if it is “mistranslation” or a different kind of interpretation, produced the diversity of Buddhism and supported its acculturation.

These views are reflected in the construction of *Vocabulaire*. Hence, aside from the translation(s) of the headwords that he proposes, Girard's “notes” do not try to give systematically complete explanations, but rather show abundantly his extracts, including the terms from various references that were found in the Japanese contexts. For *bosatsu*, for example, Girard cites passages from *Traité de la grande vertu de sages* (Étienne Lamotte), *Dictionnaire sanscrit-français* (Louis Renou), *Mahāyānasūtralaṃkāra* (translation by Sylvain Lévi), *Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*,

*Luoyang qielanji* 洛陽伽藍記, and *Nihon shisō taikai* 日本思想大系. Moreover, he adds references to secondary literature such as *Daijō bosatsudō no kenkyū* 大乘菩薩道の研究 (Nishi Yoshio 西義雄), *Barabudur* (Paul Mus), *Mahāvibhāsā*, and *Studies in the Lankāvatāra sūtra* (D. T. Suzuki) (I, 67–68).

The reader can recognize a conceptual panorama from the Indian origin, via the Chinese interpretation, to the Japanese assimilation, and consequently, a translator may become discouraged, thinking that to translate a Buddhist term is impossible. In Japan, *bosatsu* is conceived as “a title given by the court to great monks applying themselves to social deeds” (I, 68). Girard adopts “bienfaisance,” which may be an equivalent of “charity,” to translate *bosatsu*. It is the context that defines the concept or the sense of a term, or to put it another way, the translation has to be realized according to the right comprehension of the context.

Needless to say, *Vocabulaire* is a rich source of knowledge—diachronic, synchronic, and multilingual information—for Buddhist studies in French. The reviewer, a scholar of translation studies but an outsider with regard to Buddhism, will continue to use it as a practical collection of translation data. One can hope for a modification of some points that the author probably already knows well: to clarify the layout and usage of different signs and abbreviations, and to unify the way of describing each headword. These modifications would make our reading and understanding of the text easier.

Mayuko Uehara  
*University of Meisei, Tokyo*