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The Insect in the Lion’s Body

Kaneko Daiei and the Question of Authority in Modern Buddhism

Jeff Schroeder

In April 1928, news spread of a scandal brewing at Ōtani University, the Buddhist university affiliated with the Ōtani denomination of the Shin sect. Professor and monk Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976) was under attack for the heresy of ostensibly denying the existence of the Pure Land in a work entitled The Idea of the Pure Land (Jōdo no kannen 浄土の観念).1 Ōtani University students and faculty and Buddhist writers throughout Japan fired back in Kaneko’s defense, expressing outrage at the censorship of his intellectual freedom. Such press spilled over into major Japanese newspapers and international Buddhist journals.2 Skepticism toward the

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1. See Kaneko 1925. In fact, a second work was also at issue: Shinshū ni okeru nyorai oyobi jōdo no kannen 真宗に於ける如来及浄土の観念 (1926). However, The Idea of the Pure Land was the foundational work and the one overwhelmingly discussed in the press, so my analysis will focus on it. Higan no sekai 彼岸の世界 (1925) was a companion work to The Idea of the Pure Land, but it was not the subject of debate or heresy charges.

2. In the English journal The Young East, Masatoshi Gensen Mori, author of Buddhism...
Pure Land and charges of “heresy” (ianjin 異安心) were nothing new; what had changed was the institutional and social terrain. The conflict between conservatives who defended traditional modes of doctrinal exegesis and modernists who advanced new, independent methods of Buddhist studies reached a dramatic peak in this conflict. At stake was not one individual’s theory of the Pure Land but the very nature and locus of authority for defining Buddhist truth.

In his study of a string of clashes in the Ōtani denomination that preceded the Kaneko affair, Ryan Ward (2004, 130) underlines that “modern heresy problems were not only [problems of] interpretations of the Pure Land but were problems of who held the authority to issue orthodox interpretations of those doctrines.” Attention to the “authorizing processes” that play a part in determining religious truth is an important stream in contemporary religious studies. In a landmark paper, Talal Asad (1993, 54) asserted that the possibility and authoritative status of religious practices and utterances are to be explained “as products of historically distinctive disciplines and forces.” This paper will examine the historical forces that aligned to undermine previous orthodoxies and lend authority to Kaneko’s modernist approach to Shin Buddhist studies (shinshūgaku 真宗学). In this case, it was the institution of the modern university that gave force to Kaneko’s theories and threatened to undo the Shin Buddhist establishment’s system for legislating truth.

**The Heresy Incident**

On 26 November 1927, a wealthy donor and member of the Ōtani denomination’s accounting committee by the name of Tashiro Jūemon 田代重右衛門³ made a telephone call to one of the sect’s kōshi 講師 (lecture...
master) to complain about Kaneko Daiei’s unorthodox teachings and report that the accounting committee was consequently discussing the option of defunding the university. Three days later, the same Tashiro burst into a meeting of the Jitōryō 侍董寮 (“correction committee” that makes judgments on orthodoxy) and declared that this matter was inciting problems at various branch temples. He went on to send copies of writings by “two professors,” presumably Kaneko Daiei and his senior peer Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971), to the university for review (Miharu 1990a).

The Jitōryō promptly determined that Kaneko’s theories did contradict sect teachings, and they entrusted this finding to the Head of Doctrinal Affairs (kyōgakubuchō 教学部長). He consulted with university officials, who ultimately placed Kaneko on leave in April 1928 after various negotiations. Kaneko had initially been willing to quietly submit to the administration’s orders but was persuaded by supportive faculty to defend himself (Mizutani 1934, 264). The new university president requested a formal meeting between Kaneko and the Jitōryō. Instead, Kaneko and just two members of the Jitōryō met, but no resolution was reached. The Head of Doctrinal Affairs then proposed that a lower committee reconsider the matter, but members of the Jitōryō took offense at this and appeared on the verge of resigning. In the midst of this conflict, an accounting meeting was held and the university budget was slashed. Next, eleven university leaders, including the president, submitted letters of resignation, and a student protest movement took shape. The Head of Doctrinal Affairs then submitted a report to the Abbot 法主, presumably relaying the Jitōryō’s previous verdict (ODH 1: 338–41).

The Kaneko incident was resolved when university leaders agreed to a process of mediation and had their resignations withdrawn, and when Kaneko “voluntarily” resigned his professorship. In January 1929, Kaneko also resigned his status as a monk (sōseki henjō 僧籍返上). These “voluntary resignations” were widely perceived to have been forced upon Kaneko. The

4. ODH 2001 and Mizutani 1934 both relate that Kaneko’s works were judged “to oppose sect teachings” (宗意に反する, 宗意に違する), yet neither documents any source. Official documents of the Jitōryō’s verdict have not been located.

5. Hassu 法主 (dharma leader) was one of three titles then held by the Abbot. The others were kanchō 管長 (administrative head of the sect) and Honganji jūshoku 本願寺住職 (abbot of [Higashi] Honganji temple).
conflict was quieted momentarily, but Soga Ryōjin’s March 1930 announce-
ment of “voluntary resignation” caused new waves of student protest and
critical press to erupt (ODH 1: 341–54).

Certain aspects of these events ought to give us pause: (1) There was a
two-and-a-half-year delay between the publication of *The Idea of the Pure
Land* and the start of the conflict. Why was Kaneko’s well-publicized work
not questioned earlier? (2) The conflict was initiated by the accusations of
a financially influential layman. To what extent did financial concerns or
the opinions of laypeople influence the determination of sect orthodoxy?
(3) Kaneko was never officially pronounced a heretic. The Abbot, legally the
ultimate authority on sect doctrine, was silent throughout the affair, and the
Jitōryō’s findings were never reported publicly. Why was Kaneko’s purported
heresy never officially condemned? These peculiarities belie the fact that
this was not the simple affair of a conservative institution silencing a theory
judged to be heretical. To understand the true nature of the incident, we
must first turn to an examination of Kaneko’s work.

*The Birth of Shin Buddhist Studies*

The birth of modern Shin Buddhist studies may be dated to Octo-
ber 1922 when Kaneko gave a lecture series on the occasion of Ōtani University’s official promotion to university status. In these lectures, published as
“Prolegomenon to Shin Buddhist Studies” (*Shinshūgaku josetsu* 真宗学序説)
in 1923, Kaneko presented his argument for the construction of a new Shin
Buddhist studies that would be rooted in rational methods and rightfully
take a place alongside other academic disciplines.6 Kaneko’s lectures were
the product of years of work carried out in tandem with his lifelong mentor
and friend, Soga Ryōjin. The two Shin scholars charted the contours of the
new academic discipline in private journals (*Seishinkai* 1901–1916; *Kenshin*
1920–1923; *Butsuza* 1926–1932) and in their personal correspondence.

The following comment by Soga in an October 1920 letter to Kaneko,
gives some indication of the radical reversal in perspective and method to
which they aspired:

6. An English translation of and commentary on this work by Robert F. Rhodes is found
in *Blum and Rhodes 2011*. 
I think that it no longer works [for me] to be a monk. I think that to first make a conclusion and then construct the reasons for it is a great sin in the academic world. To the extent that one is not free from the monastic temperament, the construction of a true sectarian studies is in vain.

(SOGA et al. 1982, 134)

In Soga’s understanding, a monk starts with a pre-established conclusion and generates an argument to support it, while a scholar investigates the facts in order to arrive at a conclusion. In traditional sectarian studies, the Pure Land sutras and Shinran’s writings were studied according to an established commentarial tradition, largely stemming from Zonkaku’s Rokuyōshō 六要鈔 (Sōden gishō geppō 2010, 3). In a sense, the conclusions were already established by this interpretative tradition, so the scholar’s only work was to “construct the reasons” for those conclusions. In iconoclastic fashion, Soga declared, “Although it is unreasonable to aspire to the words of the Founder [Shinran], if words at least on the level of Kakunyo or Zonkaku are not produced, the sect is doomed” (HIROSE 1982, 139). Soga and Kaneko sought to supplant reliance on Kakunyo and Zonkaku with a practice of studying Shin scriptures anew.

As for method, Soga insisted on the need for him and Kaneko to personally experience the “facts” of Shin teachings and build Shin studies on the “principles” found therein:

To speak on sectarian studies without an unshakeable foundation will yield nothing more than empty theories. Concerning the facts (jijutsu 事実) of Shin Buddhism, upon which sectarian studies should be built, we must seriously take up a worshipful, humble attitude…. I believe we must truly experience (taiken 体験) these facts of Shin Buddhism. (SOGA et al. 1982, 138)

In this April 1921 letter, Soga builds upon his teacher Kiyozawa Manshi’s 清沢満之 (1863–1903) definition of religion as pertaining to “subjective facts.” Kiyozawa had used such a definition to defend religious truth in the face of scientific skepticism, yet Soga and Kaneko found in it the basis for an empirical study of Shin teachings. They would construct theories on the basis of subjective “facts” that they discovered through introspective “experience” —a term whose meaning overlapped with the term for scientific “experiment.”

7. For Kiyozawa’s essay on religion as “subjective fact,” see KIYOZAWA 2003 (vol. 6), 283–84. For an English translation, see KIYOZAWA 1936, 41–42. I intend to further examine the
Kaneko’s “Prolegomena to Shin Buddhist Studies” presents Shin Buddhist studies as a modern academic discipline akin to the sciences. Parallel to the scientific study of the natural world through experimentation, Shin Buddhist studies would study the Pure Land sutras through the method of “introspection” (naikan 内観) revealed by Shinran and the seven Shin patriarchs who preceded him. Rather than studying the “circumstances” (jiyū 事由) or outward, historical details of Pure Land teachings, Shinran revealed the method of looking inward to discover the “reason” (riyū 理由) or “inner necessity” of such teachings (KANeko 1966, 69–70). The “reason” for Shin teachings is only discovered when one has an experience of Amida Buddha’s manifestation within one’s own mind (KANeko 1966, 97–99). As if to argue for its rationality and scientific credibility, Kaneko compares Shinran’s discovery of this introspective method with “Kant’s so-called ‘Copernican revolution’” and “Einstein’s new theory of relativity” (KANeko 1966, 91–92).

Kaneko contrasts his method with the “principle of doctrinal authority” (kyōken-shugi 教権主義), which he says has long characterized Shin sectarian studies. As alluded to in Kaneko’s following comment, this term in practice referred specifically to the principle of placing the authority to interpret scriptures with the Abbot and his representatives on the Jitōryō:

The “principle of doctrinal authority” that has long been practiced is not the true method. I am not opposed to placing authority in the doctrines. However, I have doubts as to whether up until now it has been a “principle of doctrinal authority” or a “principle of human authority” (jinken-shugi 人権主義) (KANeko 1966, 56).

Kaneko’s discussion proceeds with the observation that reverence for Shakyamuni Buddha should not displace the search to understand his teachings. In the same way, Kaneko’s discussion implies that direct study and experience of the truth of the teachings must not be displaced by a reverence for and trust in sectarian authorities.

At the same time that he was theorizing the field of Shin Buddhist studies,
Kaneko was also attempting to put those methods into practice in his study of the Pure Land. The results of his research were presented in October 1924 in a two-part lecture series, published in February 1925 as The Idea of the Pure Land. The work is comprised of two sections. The first is a brief explanation of Kaneko’s personal understanding of the Pure Land, written as a commentary to the opening lines of Vasubandhu’s Jōdoron 浄土論, while the latter is a much longer analysis of how these personal views are supported in various scriptures.10 This two-part structure exemplifies how, for Kaneko, personal religious experience precedes and enables religious understanding and correct scriptural interpretation—not the other way around.

Kaneko’s understanding of the Pure Land, presented in the first section, can be summarized as follows. Thorough reflection on one’s sorrow (nayami 恙)11 and sins (zai 罪) leads to a transformation of the mind and accompanying acts of taking refuge (kimyō 帰命) and seeking rebirth (ganjō 願生). Only at this moment do the self, Buddha, and Pure Land manifest themselves. The Buddha is manifest as the light of one’s true self shining upon the darkness of one’s mundane self. Simultaneously, the Pure Land is manifest as the light of the true, invisible world that shines upon the darkness of the mundane, visible world. Because the self only exists in relation to its surroundings and a Buddha necessarily exists in relation to a Buddha land, the Pure Land is an inextricable part of the Shin theological system.

The following passage is Kaneko’s explanation of the nature of the Buddha’s existence (and by extension, the Pure Land’s) and the relationship between such knowledge and one’s own introspective experience:

It is not that one first understands that there is a Buddha and then takes refuge in him. Rather, at the same time that an attitude of taking refuge appears in me, the Buddha objectively comes forth. Therefore, when we come to know

10. The shorter first section has been translated into English by Wayne Yokoyama as “The Concept of the Pure Land” in the Eastern Buddhist in “Two Thinkers on Shin: Selections from the Writings of Soga Ryōjin and Kaneko Daiei” (Soga et al. 1995). However, this translation is not without its problems, including the repeated rendering of kyakkanteki 客観的 as “subjective” instead of “objective” (e.g. 129, 135).

11. The Buddhist connotations of this term can be unpacked as “the mental action of self-affliction in coming to know one’s bad actions as bad actions and being stuck with this knowledge, yet not benefiting by the remonstrance of others” (Digital Dictionary of Buddhism entry for 悔, accessed 23 November 2013).
ourselves purely and the act of purely taking refuge then comes forth, there
is no question of whether or not the Buddha exists. To say this in reverse, the
words “being” and “non-being” are the problem…. The Buddha that comes
forth does not have “being” in the sense that we ordinarily think of it. It is
something that does not apply to those words and that transcends so-called
“being” and “non-being.” Here I will use the words “pure objectivity” (junsui
kyakkan 純粋客観). This is because when we ordinarily say “being,” this is not
pure objectivity but only a “being” that is manufactured by our words. Even
without bringing up Kantian philosophy, [it is clear that] the concept we have
of existence is constructed through the coalescence of various things like
temporality, space, and cause and effect, so the determination of my being
here is not purely objective. Pure objectivity is the Buddha’s appearance upon
our putting hands together in worship [which occurs] prior to and transcen-
dent of our thoughts of being and non-being. (Kaneko 1925, 18–19)

Kaneko here describes the Buddha’s existence in terms of “pure objectivity”
unmediated by our defiling subjectivity.12 Through introspection, the Buddha
and his Pure Land are perceived “as a fact in my mind” (Kaneko 1925, 24).
The Buddha and his Pure Land both “transcend” and “exist inside” us. Sub-
jectivity and objectivity are entangled, so the real distinction is not between
subjective and objective realms, but rather between the realm of mundane
subjectivity and objectivity, and the realm of true subjectivity and objectivity.

In the second section, Kaneko draws on passages from various sutras and
commentaries to represent three modes of understanding the Pure Land:
(1) as an invisible “Idea World” (kannenkai 観念界) that forms the basis for
this world, (2) as a hypothesized “Ideal World” (risôkai 理想界) to be actual-
ized, and (3) as an “Existing World” (jitsuzaikai 実在界) to which we may go.
Kaneko’s analysis comes with the repeated disclaimer that “the borders [of
these three categories] are certainly not strict. As we gradually speak on the
question of how much the content of ‘Idea’ and ‘Existence’ differ, we may
no longer be able to discern [any difference]” (Kaneko 1925, 37). This is
because the true Pure Land as Idea World is the world that actually exists in

12. Kaneko’s language of “experience” and “pure objectivity” is suggestive of Nishida
Kitarō’s theory of “pure experience.” There are various connections between the two think-
ers: Nishida was influenced by Kiyozawa; Nishida also lectured at Shinshū Ōtani Univer-
sity; Nishida and Kaneko were both readers of William James and Henri Bergson; and
Kaneko and Soga read and discussed Nishida’s works. Further research ought to be done to
clarify the relationship between Shin doctrinal modernists and Kyoto School philosophers.
“purely objective” terms, whereas the “existing world’ we ordinarily experience and speak of is only the dream-like projection of our deluded minds. Buddhist practice must aim at the purification of one’s own mind and not turn away from one’s present self and world and seek salvation elsewhere. Purification of one’s mind naturally has the effect of purifying others’ minds and one’s surroundings, but it would be a mistake to interpret Pure Land teachings as advocating social activism.

Exhibiting the modern spirit of skepticism, Kaneko professes the utility of harboring doubts about Buddhist teachings and the surface meaning of scriptural language. Doubts about the Pure Land’s existence function similarly to the doubts that people in previous ages had about whether evil beings are really deserving of rebirth in the Pure Land. In both cases, doubt is necessary for the cultivation of awareness of human despair, which enables salvation. Regarding language, Kaneko is skeptical that one could simply have faith in the teachings “as they are.” Scriptural language is not transparent; a process of introspection and experience is required to unlock its meaning (e.g. Kaneko 1925, 138).

Kaneko’s work includes references to Plato, Kant, and William James, and scholars have often explained Kaneko’s theory in terms of these Western philosophical influences (e.g. Murayama 2010). However, it is also true that Kaneko makes his argument via references to the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, Flower Garland Sutra, Sutra of Immeasurable Life, Nirvana Sutra and Nagarjuna. Kaneko does adopt the term “Idea” from Plato, but an argument could also be made that Kaneko’s theory is Buddhist at heart and merely dressed up in Western philosophical language. It lies beyond the scope of this paper to delve into this question, but it is important to note here that Kaneko’s engagement with Western thought and terminology invited the scorn of traditionalists.

Ostensibly, Kaneko’s work was under attack for its alleged denial of the existence of the Pure Land. According to Kaneko’s report, the Jitōryō was concerned that his work may have “denied the teaching of ‘point West and posit a form’ (shihō rissō 指方立相) and descended into ‘self-nature and mind-only’ (jishō yuishin 自性唯心)” (Chūgai nippō, 15 June 1928). Yet Kaneko also commented, “The people who claim [my work] to be heresy don’t point to anything concrete…. Even in speaking with the two Jitōryō individuals and reading Mr. Murakami [Senshō]’s pieces, I really don’t get the feeling that
this is a problem of heresy” (Hataya 1993, 288). To be sure, Kaneko’s *The Idea of the Pure Land* did unveil his skepticism toward the notion that the Pure Land existed in a conventional sense. Yet skepticism toward the Pure Land’s “objective” existence and the production of non-literal, philosophically nuanced interpretations of it were a long-standing feature of the Pure Land tradition in the modern and pre-modern periods (Tanaka 2007). I would submit that the innovative and controversial aspect of Kaneko’s work was not its theory of the Pure Land but its method of research. *The Idea of the Pure Land* was problematic in that it boldly implemented and sought to validate an introspective method of studying Shin teachings, previously outlined in “Prolegomenon to Shin Studies.” It argued that only through personal religious experience could one penetrate the true meaning underlying scriptural language and plumb the realm of “pure objectivity” wherein the Buddha and Pure Land are found. On the basis of the “facts” of his experiences, Kaneko would construct a rational, systematic academic discipline akin to Western science. This was to construct a new authority to speak on Shin teachings independent of the Abbot and the sect’s “principle of doctrinal authorities.” It was this new source of authority that posed a threat to conservatives within the denomination and elicited charges of “heresy.” This picture will come into clearer focus when we take a longer view of the history of institutional conflict between doctrinal modernists and traditionalists within the Ōtani denomination.

*Institutional Change at Ōtani University*

As pointed out in articles of the period and as is evident from even a cursory study of the history, the Kaneko heresy incident represented only the latest and largest boiling over of a conflict that had been brewing for decades. This conflict pitted conservatives against a group of “doctrinal modernists” descended from Kiyozawa Manshi. Between 1896 and 1930, Inoue Höchü, Urabe Kanjun, Akegarasu Haya, Andō Shuichi, Sasaki Gesshō, Kaneko Daiei, and Soga Ryōjin were successively investigated for

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13. For example, see “Meiji irai no Ōtani-ha no mondai: Kaneko mondai no rekishikan” 明治以来の大谷派の問題——金子問題の歴史観 in *Chūgai nippon* (3–5 June 1928).
Ryan Ward’s analysis (2004) of the incidents preceding the Kaneko affair reveals that they had less to do with the particulars of theological argument and more to do with the method and attitude of study. In particular, conservatives found fault with the modernists’ engagement with Western learning and the impression they gave of “innovating” novel interpretations rather than faithfully “transmitting” the established teachings. I would also emphasize that these incidents can all be connected to institutional changes: the Urae and Inoue incidents of 1896 and 1897 to the Shirakawa reform movement and creation of Shinshū University; the Akegarasu and Andō incidents of 1910 and 1913 to tensions over Shinshū University’s return to Kyoto; and the Sasaki, Kaneko, and Soga incidents of 1923, 1928, and 1930 to the university’s promotion to official university status along with the institutional birth and development of Shin Buddhist studies. While differences in belief and method of study may have provided the basis for the conflict, it was institutional changes that catalyzed those tensions into action.14

The overarching trajectory of these changes is from an early modern seminary to a modern university. As shown in the Table on the following page, the Takakura Seminary changed names several times before merging with Shinshū University in 1911. Shinshū University had emerged from the Daigakuryō as an independent institution in 1896, although its official founding is conventionally dated to its opening in Tokyo in 1901. All the institutions were located in Kyoto unless otherwise noted. An institution’s government-granted status, if any, is noted in parentheses. What follows is a partial narrative of this institutional transformation and its relation to the Kaneko incident.

In 1899, Kiyozawa Manshi received a request from the Ōtani authorities to take up the position of president of Shinshū University. This was a surprising turn of events considering his expulsion from the sect two years

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14. A further event could be added to this history of conflict: the murder of Senshō-in Kūkaku in 1871, likely due to his role in sect administration changes that undermined the authority of “lay retainers” (坊官 or 堂僧). Although Kūkaku’s case was not a “heresy incident” or directly related to Kiyozawa and his followers, it is significant that Sasaki Gesshō penned a lengthy article to commemorate Kūkaku’s life in 1920 and explained the “foundering spirit” of Ōtani University with particular reference to Kūkaku in his 1924 presidential address (Sasaki 2013, 21–2). For information on Senshō-in Kūkaku and his murder, see ODH 1, 46–58. For information on “lay retainers” in the Ōtani denomination and their loss of authority in early Meiji, see Kashiwahara 1986, 25–34.
earlier for his role in leading the Shirakawa reform movement. This movement had critiqued various aspects of the sect administration, including its failure to prioritize and provide sufficient funds for doctrinal study. It also called for the redistribution of power from the main temple to branch temples through the establishment of a new representative body. The movement failed to achieve most of its aims, but head administrator Atsumi Kaien 渥美契縁 was replaced by the more liberal Ishikawa Shundai 石川舜台, who would allow Kiyozawa’s reinstatement and service at Shinshū University.

Kiyozawa agreed to take charge of Shinshū University on condition that it be moved to Tokyo and that he be allowed free reign to design the university policies and curriculum. Remarkably, these demands were met, and Shinshū University was reopened in Tokyo in October 1901. The curriculum Kiyozawa designed placed precedence on the study of philosophy and language in an attempt to further bring sectarian studies into a modern, global context. At the same time, however, Kiyozawa was strongly opposed to a student movement that sought accreditation from the Ministry of Education on the grounds that this would compromise the university’s religious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1665–1754</td>
<td>Unnamed seminary (in northern Kyūshū)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754–1868</td>
<td>Takakura Gakuryō 時倉学寮</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868–1873</td>
<td>Takakura Gakuryō 護法場</td>
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<tr>
<td>1873–1882</td>
<td>Kanrenjō 貫練場</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882–1896</td>
<td>Daigakuryō 大学寮</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896–1901</td>
<td>Takakura Daigakuryō Shinshū University 真宗大学 (“professional school”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901–1911</td>
<td>Shinshū University Shinshū University (“professional school” from 1907)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911–1922</td>
<td>Shinshū Ōtani University 真宗大谷大学 (“professional school”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922–present</td>
<td>Ōtani University 大谷大学 (“university” 単科大学)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table: History of Ōtani University and the Takakura Seminary.

* Information compiled from odh 1 and the “Introduction” to SASAKI 2013.
mission. He resigned over this matter in October 1902 and retired to his home temple, dying the following summer.\textsuperscript{15}

In the ensuing years, a divide grew between Shinshū University in Tokyo and the Takakura Seminary in Kyoto, the former charged with “educating” sect members (\textit{kyōiku 教育}) and the latter with “guiding” sect members toward a correct understanding of the teachings (\textit{kyōdō 敎導}). The division was exacerbated by rising enrollments at Shinshū University and declining ones at the Takakura Seminary. As an effort to unify sectarian education and reassert the significance of the Takakura Seminary, the Head of Doctrinal Affairs introduced a bill to return Shinshū University to Kyōto and merge it with the Takakura Seminary. When the bill passed by a close vote, university president Nanjō Bun'yū, professors Sasaki Gesshō and Soga Ryōjin, and others resigned in protest. In the end, a student movement in opposition to these changes eventually led to the dismissal of certain conservative faculty formerly of the Takakura Seminary and the rehiring of Nanjō Bun'yū and Sasaki Gesshō.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1916, Kaneko Daiei was appointed to the faculty despite not having any postgraduate education. His hiring was a function of the positive reception of his 1915 book \textit{The Teachings and History of Shin Buddhism} (\textit{Shinshū no kyōgi oyobi sono rekishi 真宗の教義及その歴史}), sympathetic colleagues at Shinshū Ōtani University like Sasaki, and a student movement calling for his and Soga’s appointment (Hataya 1993, 281). The flipside of Kaneko’s hiring, however, was a refusal to hire Soga. According to Kaneko’s recollection, “I heard there were people who were quite dissatisfied, thinking that the ‘flanking attendant’ had come without the ‘main image’” (Hataya 1993, 282). Soga relates that many at Shinshū Ōtani University strongly opposed him, while Kaneko was more acceptable because he was younger and “able to compromise.” In fact, he even attributes Kaneko’s heresy incident to his own arrival at the university in 1925 (Soga Ryōjin senshū geppō 1971, vol. 5, 8).

In 1918, the Ministry of Education implemented a new university system through the University Ordinance (\textit{Daigakurei 大学令}), which finally opened up the possibility of university status to private universities. Consequently, the 1920s would see a tremendous boom in enrollment in higher education.

\textsuperscript{15} For biographies of Kiyozawa, see KYÔGAKU KENKYÛSHO 2004a and YOSHIDA 1961.

\textsuperscript{16} This history is related in ODH 1.
Shinshū Ōtani University sought to take part in these social advances, and made the necessary arrangements, eventually achieving university status in 1922. Among other things, this meant changing its name from Shinshū Ōtani University to Ōtani University, as “Shinshū” referred too explicitly to its religious affiliation. Part of the significance of official university status was that the university would take on a public mission to serve the nation. Although such public status stood directly opposed to Kiyozawa’s wishes, the change was interpreted positively by his followers as a mandate to open up Shin Buddhism to the world.17

Along with its name change and expansion of purpose, Ōtani University brought in acclaimed faculty like D. T. Suzuki and revised the curriculum to reflect a broader, more modern education. One such change was the 1920 renaming of its “Sectarian Vehicle” (shūjō 宗乗) and “Other Vehicles” (yojō 余乗) departments as departments of “Shin studies” 真宗学 and “Buddhist studies” 仏教学 (ODH1, 274).18 Conservatives were displeased with this change insofar as it seemed to place the study of Shin scriptures on the same level as other academic fields.

On the heels of these changes, Kaneko gave his “Prolegomena to Shin Buddhist Studies” lectures to define the new field. The lectures were reprinted in the university journal Gasshō 合掌 and published as a book. Kaneko and Soga also promoted their vision for Shin Buddhist studies in further articles in Gasshō and in their private journal Kenshin 見真, which they distributed widely, including to kōshi scholars who would later try them for heresy (SOGA et al. 1982, 194). Many readers greeted Kaneko and Soga’s Shin Buddhist studies warmly. For example, an October 1922 review of the first issue of Kenshin discusses Kaneko and Soga’s “pure subjectivity research” as “the pride of the university” (Gasshō, December 1922, 44).

17. For example, Soga commented, “Ōtani University is no longer a sectarian university. It is a transsectarian university…. It is a university that follows Japan’s national university system while being managed by the sect. Therefore, the study of Buddhism is liberated from the sect into general society” (ODH1: 293–4).

18. More specifically, the previous “departments” (gakka 学科) of shūjō and yojō were converted into various “sections” (kamoku 科目): shinshūgaku 真宗学, Bukkyō gairon 仏教概論, shōjō bukkyōgaku 小乗仏教学, daijō bukkyōgaku 大乗仏教学, and Bukkyōshi 仏教史. In 1924, the curriculum was revised to create three “departments”: Bukkyō gakka 仏教学科, tetsugaku gakka 哲学学科, and jinbun gakka 人文学科. Each of these housed various “sections,” with shinshūgaku falling within Bukkyō gakka. See ODH2.
The momentum of the reformers continued to grow when Nanjō Bun'yū’s tenure as second president of the university came to an end and Sasaki Gesshō took his place in 1923. In a historic 1924 convocation speech entitled “Ōtani University’s Founding Spirit,” Sasaki defined Ōtani University’s mission as the “liberation” of Buddhism from its sectarian confines into the academic community and society at large (Sasaki 2013, 25–26). In the speech, he also noted his pleasure that “the term ‘Shin Buddhist studies’ has become quickly accepted by society at large” and his anticipation that “Shin Buddhism as an academic discipline will be deepened in the future” (Sasaki 2013, 26–7). Sasaki’s presidency was widely heralded by modernist scholars and staunchly opposed by conservatives. Students, infected with Sasaki’s optimism and spirit of reform, likened their university to a “sleeping lion” that was in the process of waking up (Yamada 1973, 55). His presidency lasted just long enough to see Soga Ryōjin appointed to a professorship before Sasaki died suddenly of pneumonia in March of 1926.

In short, the ongoing struggle to control Ōtani University was shifting in favor of the modernists who aimed to supplant traditional sectarian studies with a new Shin Buddhist studies that would engage with the wider intellectual world and partake in the authority of “rational methods” and the right to “free inquiry” associated with modern academic study. For readers who might suppose that this was merely an academic matter, it should be emphasized that the distinction between “study” and “practice” was blurry—the modernists were advocating the “study” of scripture through a “practice” of personal introspection that was not bound by the authority of religious institutions.

Parallel to these institutional changes at Ōtani University in favor of the modernists, we also see a counter-reaction by Ōtani authorities to tighten up its system for identifying and adjudicating cases of heresy. Its ability to prosecute heresy trials was perhaps the sect’s best weapon for stemming the sea tide of change being ushered in by modernists. In 1907, the Head of Sect Affairs19 had issued a brief set of three regulations defining and explaining the duties of the jitō (members of the Jitōryō):

**Article One:** The jitō are appointed by the Abbot from among the kōshi.

19. The name (and duties) of this leading sectarian administrative position changed throughout the modern period. For the sake of simplicity, I use the term Head of Sect Affairs (宗務総長 shūmusōchō) throughout. See Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho 2004b for a complete listing.
Article Two: The jitō respond to inquiries from the Abbot regarding sectarian principles (shūgi 宗義).

Article Three: When there are individuals who run counter to sectarian teachings (shūi 宗意), the jitō receive orders from the Abbot to rectify this (tōri su 董理ス).

In 1921, however, the Jitōryō regulations were extensively revised. The thirteen articles of the new regulations more clearly defined the number of Jitōryō members (fourteen), the length of their appointments (three years), the position of the Jitōryō within the Ōtani administrative structure, and further details related to its duties (e.g., public lectures on sect teachings and quarterly reports to the Abbot via the Head of Sect Affairs) and leadership structure. In addition, Article One expands the primary purpose of the committee: “Article One: The purpose of the Jitōryō is to elucidate sectarian teachings and to govern over their academic interpretations (gakkai 学解)” (ODH 2: 277). This distinction between “sectarian teachings” and “academic interpretations” recalls Kiyozawa Manshi’s distinction between “sectarian principles” (shūgi 宗義) and “sectarian studies” (shūgaku 宗学), where the former represents the unchanging truth revealed by Shinran and the latter represents the changing exposition of those teachings by Shin followers (Kiyozawa 2003, vol. 7, 111–23). These Jitōryō regulations thus express the authorities’ acknowledgment of and attempt to control the growing influence of modern Shin Buddhist studies.

In December 1922, the Head of Sect Affairs also issued an announcement in the Ōtani denomination’s newsletter Shūhō 宗報 reminding its members of the unchanging nature of religious truth and expressing regret that “recently there are those who mean to spread the influence of the changing intellectual world into this denomination, not only mistaking the correct meaning of our fundamental principles but also extending this to others” (ODH 2: 285). The announcement goes on advise Ōtani members to report on “any monk or lay within our sect who harbors mistaken notions of faith in the teachings” (ODH 2: 285). Further instructions were issued in the following year on specific procedures for reporting on such matters (ODH 2: 286). These announcements do not name names, but all the evidence suggests that Kaneko, Soga, and possibly Sasaki were the targets.20 This target-

20. It is tempting to speculate on a possible connection to Nonomura Naotarō of the Honganji denomination. Nonomura first published his controversial opinions on the Pure
ing of Kaneko by late 1922—well before the publication of *The Idea of the Pure Land*—further reveals that much more was at issue than his theory of the Pure Land.

Here it is also worth mentioning certain conservative countermeasures that postdated the Kaneko incident. Alongside the Jitōryō, a new Sectarian Teachings Inquiry Board was established in September 1928 to investigate issues of orthodoxy and heresy (MIZUSHIMA 2010, 331–34). Next, in July 1929, the Shin Buddhist Graduate Institute was established to better support traditional sectarian studies (MIZUSHIMA 2010, 331–34). To fund this institute, the Shin Buddhist Ōtani Denomination Sectarian Studies Prosperity Foundation was established in November 1930 by none other than Tashiro Jūemon, the initial accuser of Kaneko (KITANO 1934, 87–93). These institutional gymnastics brought on by the Kaneko affair again point to the deeper significance and broader contours of this conflict.

*Intellectual Discourse in “Chūgai nippō”*

Another critical dimension to Kaneko’s heresy incident was the discourse that surrounded it in the national *Chūgai nippō* daily Buddhist newspaper. Such discourse overwhelmingly recognized Soga and Kaneko’s right to freely pursue their studies. At the same time, it turned a critical eye on institutional Buddhism’s traditional methods for arbitrating doctrinal disputes. To the extent that the Ōtani authorities cared about public relations and the standing of Shin Buddhist teachings in the intellectual world, it must have been influenced by this public discourse.

Buddhist heresy incidents were rampant in the 1920s. Outside the Ōtani denomination, the major incidents were the Honganji denomination’s 1923 suppression of Nonomura Naotarō’s 野々村直太郎 theories of the Pure Land and the Sōtō Zen sect’s “True Faith Dispute” (*Shōshin ronsō* 正信論争), which began in November 1928 involving Nukariya Kaiten 忽滑谷快天 and Harada Sogaku 原田祖岳. Yet the pages of *Chūgai nippō* reveal countless smaller incidents. On February 24, 1928, before news of the Kaneko problem sur-
faced, the lead editorial commends authorities of the Kōshō denomination 兴正派 of the Shin sect for publicizing the proceedings of an ongoing heresy case. The author comments:

At a time when the main temples of each of the sects have the custom of being oversensitive to matters of orthodoxy, rushing directly to decisions of “heresy” or “correct teachings,” and judging the accused, the gentle attitude of the Kōshō denomination is truly praiseworthy…. When an academic explanation (gakusetsu 学説) has become influential, to reject [this] other academic explanation on the basis of one’s own academic explanation and then call it “heresy” and expel [its proponent] from the sect is just improper.

On 15 March, the lead editorial discussed yet another heresy case within the Honganji denomination involving Yanase Saishō 梁瀬斉聖. The editor remarks, “It is unbearable for heresy problems to be dealt with politically or administratively. These [cases] must be publicly evaluated through research on the correct teachings.” Such comments display the editor’s positive valuation of public academic deliberation and disdain toward the sectarian politicizing of theological disagreements.

The Kaneko affair first surfaced in Chūgai nippō on 13 April and arrived on the paper’s front page on 17 April, where it would remain almost without exception through 3 August. The 17 April editorial first introduces the incident, expressing uneasiness over the rumor that this problem was initially raised by “a layman possessing financial might.” It then emphasizes that the issue represents a general problem faced by “every university established by a Buddhist sect.” This problem is framed as follows:

A resolution of this problem must address the fundamental conflict between sects centered on doctrinal authorities and universities whose mission is the inquiry into truth. The question is whether free inquiry and the doctrinal authorities can coexist. Will the freedom to conduct research be pressured by the doctrinal authorities? Or will the doctrinal authorities themselves engage in self-reflection and explore new ways forward?

The author identifies a conflict of authority between “doctrinal authorities” 21—the Abbot and Jitōryō—and individual scholars who independently...

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21. This term “doctrinal authorities” (kyōken 教権) might also be translated “doctrinal authority” or “authority of the teachings.” However, in this case, it is clear that the author has specific people and institutions in mind.
advance theories in an academic setting. In the very framing of the problem, the author takes a clear stand on the side of “free inquiry” by suggesting that a proper resolution would require self-reflection on the part of the doctrinal authorities.

Later editorials echo these themes, relentlessly calling into question the actions of Ōtani authorities and the traditions of the sect:

This must not merely be evaluated according to the Jitōryō’s doctrinal authority but should be considered by the wider general academic world. Although it is not unreasonable to exclude from the sect a person who opposes the doctrinal authorities, those doctrinal authorities themselves ought to be carefully critiqued… What is doctrinal authority? How is doctrinal authority established? (18 April)

In the Honganji denomination, the members of the heresy investigation committee will reach a decision regarding Yanase via secret ballot. What significance does this have? Is this determining truth and falsity by majority opinion? Does this suggest that without using secret ballots, the scholars could not correctly voice their opinions? (24 May)

As a university, it is fine to fire someone who is deemed to have no value as a university professor, but short of that, it is unacceptable to force someone on leave. This must not be determined according to the convenience or inconvenience of the so-called “doctrinal authorities.” The sect’s course of action and the university’s course of action are separate matters. (30 May)

Let us have the individuals of the Jitōryō, university scholars, and Kaneko himself publicly step forward into the academic world and attempt genuine evaluation and argument to throw light on the true authority. (6 June)

These editorials present idealistic views of the separation of university and sect and of the absolute right to free research by scholars of religion. They take offense at the notion that Kaneko’s theories would be judged privately by the Jitōryō and instead call for scrutiny of the doctrinal authorities themselves. In defending Kaneko, the author challenges the sectarian authorities to come out into the limelight and defend their traditions and beliefs.

The Chūgai nippō editor was not alone in his beliefs. Various writers contributed articles defending Kaneko and questioning the methods and

22. Based on the consistent viewpoint, I suspect these editorials were all penned by the same author. The editor listed on the newspaper’s front page is Araki Kazumichi 荒木一道.
However, rather than delving into such writings, it is more instructive to consider three counterexamples by defenders of the sect and its “doctrinal authorities.” Lacking documentation of the Abbot’s views or the Jitōryō’s verdict, these are perhaps the best documents we have for approaching the opposing side’s beliefs and motivations.

Shimotsuma Kūkyō 下間空教 (1878–1931), a high level Ōtani administrator who would be appointed Head of Doctrinal Affairs in 1929, authored a series of three articles that appeared on the Chūgai nippō’s front page (27–30 May). The articles begin with a discussion of the famous 1920 incident in which Tokyo Imperial University professor Morito Tatsuo was persecuted for his writings on anarchistic thought. Shimotsuma describes how the government banned his writings, removed him from his faculty post, and convicted him of the crime of causing public disorder. He then presents arguments in favor of and opposed to these government actions before concluding in agreement with the government that restrictions can and should be placed on university research in light of the public duties of university professors under the 1918 University Ordinance.

Turning to Kaneko, Shimotsuma argues that just as “anarchism” is an unacceptable research conclusion in the context of a public university system, so is “heresy” an unacceptable research conclusion for Shin scholars. As for the definition of heresy, Shimotsuma emphasizes that the Ōtani constitution, like those of all other denominations of Shin Buddhism, defines the Abbot as ultimate arbiter on doctrine, a provision that is the very basis for the unity of the sect. While Shimotsuma defends the “doctrinal authorities” system in terms of its function and legal basis, it is significant that Shimotsuma avoids discussion of the ultimate basis of the Abbot’s authority—his blood descent from Shinran. At least in this public form, Shimotsuma and his conservative peers did not find it prudent to emphasize this doctrine of

23. The following are English translations of some of these articles’ titles: “Let us not kill new roots with the affair of Professor Kaneko: Worries about the current state of the Ōtani denomination” (27 May); “The obstinate three kōshi of the Jitoryō acting both as prosecutor and judge: Criticism of their ignorance of academics” (10 June); “Deep sympathies for the approach of a researcher and way-seeker: Considering the matter of Ōtani University Professor Kaneko” (30 June–3 July), and “An argument for reconstructing heresy investigation law” (18–21 July).
blood lineage, which pointed simultaneously to the sect’s feudal past and to the nation’s modern imperial institution.

Regarding the new field of Shin Buddhist studies, Shimotsuma points out that certain individuals doubt whether such studies are truly an “academic field” and thus deserving of “freedom of research.” He replies that although sectarian studies must promote sectarian goals and conform to established teachings, it is nonetheless an academic discipline in that it “applies scientific organization to its materials” and “pursues formally philosophical methods.” Therefore, it should be allotted some degree of freedom of research. In Shimotsuma’s acknowledgement of Shin Buddhist studies as a legitimate field of study rooted in scientific and philosophical methods, we see the tension of the Ōtani authorities’ desiring to support the growth of modern Shin Buddhist studies without giving away too much authority.

Shimotsuma’s articles also bring our attention to the broader historical context of government suppression of “dangerous thought” in incidents like the 1920 Morito Incident, the 1925–1926 Kyoto Gakuren incident, and the 1928 mass arrests of Communists. In this period, Chūgai Nippō and the Ōtani University newspaper abounded with discussions of Communism, Marxist thought, and Buddhism’s role in national “thought guidance” (shisō zendō 思想善導). By referencing this larger context, Shimotsuma sought to justify the application of limits to the “free inquiry” of Kaneko and other Shin scholars. Just as Marxist thought threatened the Japanese state, so, too, did Kaneko’s theories threaten Pure Land Buddhism, Shimotsuma implied.

Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929), an early pioneer in Buddhist studies who famously propounded (and was disrobed for) the theory that Mahayana sutras were not the words of Shakyamuni Buddha, weighed in on the Kaneko debate with a three-part article series in Chūgai nippō (13–15 June). His articles are written from his perspective as the former Ōtani University president, offering guidance to administrators. 24 Murakami depicts Kaneko as an arrogant, naïve young scholar out to make a name for himself with theories that would “destroy our sect at its roots.” 25 Referencing a well-

24. For discussion of Murakami’s conservative turn in later years and his critique of Kaneko, see Ward 2005. Murakami had served as Ōtani University’s president from 1926 until April 1928 when he resigned due to illness. He expressed regret at having failed to quietly bring closure to the Kaneko incident while in office.
known trope from the *Brahma’s Net Sutra*, he declares Kaneko to be “the insect in the lion’s body” (*shishi shinchū no mushi* 獅子身中の虫), eating away at Buddhism from within. The astounding aspect of Murakami’s critique is that he piles insult upon insult after admitting he has not even read *The Idea of the Pure Land*. Instead of taking up the content of Kaneko’s works, he judges Kaneko on other bases, such as his referring to Shinran as merely “Shinran” instead of the more respectful “Saint Shinran,” or his indulgence in abstruse intellectual pursuits that are no benefit to the masses of Shin believers. Through such arguments, the well-reputed senior scholar showed himself to be out of step with the spirit of the times that valued fair and open academic dispute. For these reasons, Murakami’s articles provoked a series of critiques in the ensuing issues of *Chūgai nippō*.

Tada Kanae 多田 鼎 (1875–1937) was one of Kiyozawa Manshi’s three main disciples, along with Akegarasu Haya and Sasaki Geshō and was a long-time friend and colleague of Kaneko and Soga. However, in 1914, Tada experienced a crisis of faith and turned his back on Kiyozawa and joined the “doctrinal authority” camp (KAKU 2005). Five years before writing his oft-cited critique of Kiyozawa (TADA 1933), Tada offered the most prominent doctrinal critique of Kaneko’s *The Idea of the Pure Land* in an eight-part article series printed in *Chūgai nippō* (17–26 June). The main point of Tada’s critique is that Kaneko has confused “personal realization” (*koshō* 己証) with “personal understanding” (*jige* 自解). The former results from “listening and reflecting on” (*monshi* 聞思) the teachings, which causes the “transmitted dharma” to descend into oneself; in contrast, “personal understanding” rises up from one’s own calculations rooted in self-power (19 June). Tada concludes that Kaneko’s approach “would make Shin Buddhism into a kind of introspective philosophy. At the very least, it would make Shin Buddhism into a gate of the so-called saintly path. It is certainly not work that comprehends the fundamental meaning of the rebirth of foolish people” (22 June). Not only does an introspective method fail to place proper importance on the scriptures, according to Tada, but it transforms Shin Buddhism into a Zen-like discipline, disconnected from Shin’s original spirit of offering salvation to even foolish people.

Tada’s opinion of the new Shin Buddhist studies is as follows:

I also recognize the establishment of Shin Buddhist studies and anticipate that research’s development. What is important in this research, of course,
is one’s research approach. Researchers of sectarian studies, just like general scientists, must always take an impartial and selfless approach. That is to say, just as botanists who study various plants reject their own subjective judgments and apply themselves to investigating the universal laws and the unique phenomena that describe the workings of those various plants,... researchers of sectarian studies, taking up the true words of the Buddhas and the interpretations of the great patriarchs, must also reject personal discriminations and instead shed light on the unique meanings of those teachings and the principles that unify them.... So-called freedom of research must be rooted in this selfless sincerity. This selfless, scientific research of sectarian studies will perfect sectarian studies and become the basis for actual practice.

(21 June)

Like Shimotsuma, Tada acknowledges the validity of a modern Shin Buddhist studies rooted in “scientific” methods. For Tada, however, Kaneko violates scientific principles insofar as he allows personal discriminations to enter into his research. Scientific objectivity here is defined as a matter of the researcher’s attitude and character. Essentially, Tada’s critique comes to take the form of an attack on Kaneko’s character.

Tada’s 8-part article series ran concurrently with an 8-part series by Kaneko (17 June–12 July) that further explained his research methods and findings and responded to Murakami and Tada’s critiques. Kaneko distinguished himself from Tada by saying:

According to Tada’s explanation, all one should do is receive the Buddha’s name (myōgō 名号) presented to one in the teachings. However, by just listening in that way, I cannot attain any kind of impression, but am rather left wondering in vain about the meanings of “good teacher” and “have faith” and “Tathāgata” and “Buddha’s name.” (1 July)

As discussed above, Kaneko was skeptical that Shin teachings could be received “just as they are” due to the vast disconnect between the true meaning of Shin scripture and the conventional meaning of common language. To understand what it is to “have faith in the Tathāgata” or to “receive the Buddha’s name,” one must actively engage in introspection. Only in the depths of doubt and despair can one discover Amida Buddha and his Pure Land. In this regard, Tada’s version of “listening and reflecting” on the teachings was insufficient for Kaneko.

The debate continued when Tada followed with a further 14-part article
series (19 July–3 August) and when various other writers chimed in with critiques of Tada’s position, analyses of Kaneko’s theory of the Pure Land, and reflections on Kaneko and Tada’s dispute. Kaneko’s heresy incident had become a cause célèbre in the Japanese Buddhist world, and the overwhelming tide of opinion was in favor of Kaneko and critical of the tradition of “doctrinal authority.” Moreover, even Kaneko’s critics by and large recognized the legitimacy and value of the new Shin Buddhist studies that Kaneko was pioneering.

While the above discussion focused on discourse in Chūgai nippō, it should be noted that Ōtani University professors and students also spoke out in defense of Kaneko in the university newspaper. On top of that, eleven professors including the university president resigned, and students organized general assemblies, held meetings with university officials, and issued written demands to the president. The period from March 1928 to 1932 came to be termed “the age of chronic student disturbances” in which all kinds of protests and strikes occurred at schools throughout Japan (SMITH 1972, 213–19). Student and faculty unrest at Ōtani University was surely propelled forward by this general mood of unrest and revolt, which must have put Ōtani University and sect authorities on guard. All of this background of widespread heresy incidents, critical press, and student unrest factored into the resolution and aftermath of the Kaneko affair.

Conclusion

Although the Jitōryō determined that Kaneko’s works contradicted sect teachings and their report was eventually submitted to the Abbot, the incident’s resolution took the form of Kaneko “voluntarily resigning” without any public verdict coming down from the Abbot or Jitōryō. As Mizushima Ken’ichi (2010, 334–5) comments, “The sectarian institution avoided the debate on ‘heresy,’ and tried to reach a resolution by acting ‘administratively’ and as much as possible ‘neutrally.’” The incident’s ambiguous, “administrative” resolution—along with the time lag between the publication of The Idea of the Pure Land and its investigation—makes sense, given all the evidence presented above that it was not Kaneko’s theory of the Pure Land that was on trial. The real issue was the modernist group as a whole and its promotion of an independent Shin Buddhist studies.
This point is further corroborated by the fate of Soga Ryōjin, who was accused of heresy and forced to “voluntarily resign” in March of 1930, triggering another storm of protest in the press and a larger student uprising at Ōtani University. Again the Ōtani authorities handled the situation “administratively,” avoiding public comment on Soga’s “heresy.” Emblematic of this are the comments of Shimotsuma Kükýō, then Head of Doctrinal Affairs, who faced questions at a sectarian assembly as to whether Soga’s “academic understanding” had been “punished as heresy by sect authorities.” He responded, “I am not a sectarian scholar so I do not know whether it is heresy. But because [Soga’s] writings gave rise to controversy within our denomination and there was a fear that they would destroy the peace of doctrinal study, he graciously resigned, so this was an administrative matter” (ODH 1: 349).

The striking point about Kaneko and Soga’s heresy cases is how ambiguous and non-committal the sect was in repressing them. This paper’s analysis of shifts in the institutional and social-intellectual terrain that bolstered the authority of Kaneko and Soga’s Shin Buddhist studies suggests that the Ōtani authorities either could not, or did not, want to condemn Kaneko and Soga outright or decisively cut ties with them. Kaneko and Soga had achieved too much authority. Here I do not mean to imply that the Ōtani authorities were necessarily disingenuous or unconcerned with truth. As we have learned from Foucault, the relationship between authority and truth is far from simple. It could be argued that Kaneko and Soga’s acquisition of authority was not merely a convenient outcome of changing trends but the result of substantive innovations that effectively rediscovered—or reproduced—the truth of Shin teachings. Certain among the Ōtani administration may have perceived legitimacy in Soga and Kaneko’s truth claims and potential in their Shin Buddhist studies for the revival and broader dissemination of Shin religiosity. Ōtani authorities may have sought to leave the door open for Kaneko and Soga while temporarily appeasing the interests of more traditional-minded scholars and wealthy lay members.

Soga and Kaneko’s work in setting Shin Buddhist studies on a modern academic footing in the 1920s must be interpreted as a success that was not undone by their respective heresy incidents. Kaneko went on to write popular tracts on Shōtoku Taishi that were officially recommended by the wartime Japanese government ( Ishii 2012). In 1941, Soga and Kaneko were
both reinstated and rehired at Ōtani University, with Soga being appointed to kōshi status in 1941 and Kaneko in 1944. Soga went on to become the postwar intellectual leader of his sect, the president of Ōtani University, the head of the Jitōryō, and a prominent public intellectual, engaging in public discussion with the likes of D. T. Suzuki, Nishitani Keiji, and Tanabe Hajime. Seen in retrospect, the sect’s censorship of their work appears as a temporary measure that softened the sect’s growing pains while advancing Kaneko’s and Soga’s careers.

From at least the start of the Meiji period, Ōtani authorities recognized a need to gain knowledge of broader intellectual and religious currents so that Buddhism could thrive in a new age of science, religious competition, and nation-building. As troublesome as Kiyozawa Manshi’s Shirakawa reform movement had been, sect authorities were keen to capitalize on his intellectual talents, leadership skills, and fervent religious devotion, and thus appointed him president of Shinshū University. Similarly, as controversial as their writings were, Kaneko and Soga were of great value to their sect as outstanding scholars who promised to turn Shin teachings into an intellectually legitimate object of study and belief. Their relationship with their sect was not parasitical; it was symbiotic. It was the creative tension between sectarian administrators and doctrinal modernists, between a pre-modern seminary and a modern university, and between the “principle of doctrinal authority” and the “spirit of free inquiry” that propelled the modern evolution of Shin Buddhism forward.

Abbreviation


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