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Japanese Buddhist War Support and the *Kanchō* System

When Jōdo Shin Buddhist leaders gathered for a conference in early 1941 to formulate their sect's wartime response, they did so at the bidding of their sect's *kanchō*, or administrative head. To explain organizational dynamics that contributed to patterns of war support by Japanese Buddhists, this article details the state's imposition of a *kanchō* system of governance on Buddhist organizations from 1884 to 1945. While Buddhist organizations had leeway in determining the selection process, term length, and specific powers of their *kanchō*, in all cases extraordinary authority was concentrated in a single individual. This article details how the *kanchō* system was implemented in major Zen, Jōdo Shin, Jōdo, Shingon, Nichiren, and Tendai organizations; examines the pro-war activities of *kanchō* prior to and during the Fifteen Years' War period (1931–1945); and uses the case of the 1941 Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference to illustrate how the autocratic *kanchō* organizational structure amplified a sect's most pro-war voices.

KEYWORDS: modern Buddhism—Japanese imperialism—religion and war—religious organizations—religious law

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ON 13 February 1941, twenty-six leading officials, scholars, and preachers belonging to the Ōtani denomination of the Jōdo Shin sect were gathered at Higashi Honganji 東本願寺 in Kyoto to discuss Buddhism, nationalism, and the escalating war situation. The conference was convened and moderated by sect official Ōtani Eijun 大谷瑩潤 (1890–1973). Eijun’s opening address clarified the purpose of the conference:

Considering the intensifying national circumstances before us and reflecting upon the desires of the Superior Foremost One (*kami goichinin* 上御一人 [that is, the emperor]), we people of religion cannot continue with the same thinking as in the past. Even regarding our sect’s doctrines, we must deeply reflect upon whether to go on expressing them just the same as we have in the past. If we go on as we have in the past, we will be neglecting our duties as national citizens. Even in the scriptures, there is expressed the idea that [wars] related to the prospering or perishing of a people are holy wars (*seisen* 聖戰). In certain scriptures, killing is thought of as evil, but in present-day circumstances, how should we look upon that way of thinking?... Seeking the way as a human being and carrying out one’s duties as a national citizen must always be in accord. Recently, the content of religious preaching has come under investigation, and restrictions have been placed upon certain doctrines.... There have been various critiques from the public. If our sect in particular has a deep relationship with the Imperial House, then it is essential for us to formulate doctrinal expressions befitting the age and expressive of loyalty.

(*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 3)

Following this call for new doctrinal expressions clarifying their sect’s loyalty to the emperor and support for the war effort, Eijun added a final word of warning: “Producing unified doctrinal expressions with which to instruct the sect is your duty. If you now fail to unify, we will have to trouble the honorable Dharma Master” (*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 3).

“Dharma Master” (*hossu* 法主) was a title conferred upon the chief priests of Jōdo Shin denominations’ head temples that signified their leadership in doctrinal matters. In the modern era, these figures also functioned as the *kanchō* 管長, or administrative heads of denominations. As stipulated in the Ōtani denomination’s 1929 constitution, the Ōtani *kanchō* possessed ultimate authority to interpret sect doctrine, appoint or dismiss resident temple priests and instructors, appoint or dismiss sect administration employees, confer awards on or administer punishments to sect members, and issue executive orders (*Shinshū Ōtaniha*

shūken). The final word on the Ōtani denomination's wartime orthodoxy indisputably lay with its *kanchō*, Ōtani Kōchō 大谷光暢 (1903–1993), an adamant supporter of the war effort. At the time of the February 1941 conference, he was touring military outposts in the South Pacific with his wife, Ōtani Satoko 大谷智子 (1906–1989), a sister of the empress. Judging by Kōchō's repeated appeals to sect members to contribute all they could to the war, as well as the remarks of Eijun (Kōchō's uncle) quoted above, it is clear that sect leaders assembled at the conference were expected to unify around revised doctrinal expressions maximally aligned with state ideology and war policies.

The same organizational dynamic of *kanchō* governance was present in all Japanese Buddhist organizations. According to Cabinet Instruction No. 19 issued in 1884, every Buddhist and Sect Shinto organization was required to appoint a *kanchō*, whose confirmation was subject to the approval of the Minister for Home Affairs (HASEYAMA 1956, 92; UMEDA 1971, 122–125; ABE 1970, 280).¹ *Kanchō* of Buddhist organizations would be in charge of regulating sect and temple law, determining positions and titles for priests and instructors, and appointing, promoting, and dismissing priests and instructors. The same *kanchō* requirements persisted under the 1940 Religious Organizations Law that superseded the 1884 ordinance. Buddhist and Sect Shinto organizations had leeway in determining the process for selecting their *kanchō*, their *kanchō*'s term length, and the specific powers invested in the position. In line with democratizing trends, many Buddhist organizations instituted elections to determine their *kanchō*. Yet even in the most democratic of Buddhist organizations, the result was a tremendous concentration of power in a single individual.

Previous scholarship on modern Japanese Buddhism has tended to highlight democratizing reforms: independent, non-sectarian movements; increased lay involvement and authority; demands for unrestricted study of Buddhist teachings; and incorporation of democratic processes into sect administrations. Yet alongside such reforms, it is important to note a contradictory development: the establishment of centralized, autocratic rule within Buddhist organizations to a degree perhaps unprecedented in Japanese history. As documented below, administrative control over more than sixty thousand Japanese Buddhist temples and their more than ten million members came to rest in the hands of just ten *kanchō*. This centralization of power had major implications for the kind of thought and practice that could flourish within mainstream Buddhist communities.

Investigating this centralization of power, this article asks: Who were these Buddhist *kanchō*? How were they selected? What powers did they possess? How

1. Sect Shinto organizations such as Kurozumikyō 黒住教 or Izumo Taishakyō 出雲大社教 were distinct from the Shinto practiced at the vast majority of Japan's shrines, which were managed by the state and deemed "nonreligious" (HARDACRE 2017).

did they exercise those powers? And ultimately, how did the *kanchō* system shape possibilities for war support or war resistance among members of major Buddhist organizations? The article first explains the need for a new approach to the study of Buddhism and war that focuses on organizational dynamics. It then places the Japanese government's establishment of the *kanchō* system in historical context; surveys how that system was implemented in major Zen, Jōdo Shin, Jōdo, Shin-gon, Nichiren, and Tendai organizations; and gives an overview of the wartime activities of individual *kanchō* and *kanchō*-led organizations prior to and during the Fifteen Years' War (1931–1945). The final section of the article returns to the case of the Ōtani denomination's 1941 conference to demonstrate how organizational pressures stemming from the *kanchō* and his appointees functioned to amplify the most nationalistic, pro-war voices while marginalizing less pro-war ones. This research aims both to enrich our understanding of the causes of modern Buddhist war support and to point more broadly to the importance of organizational dynamics in shaping Buddhist doctrine and ethics.

Buddhism, War, and Organizational Dynamics

In scholarship on modern Buddhism and war, the works of Brian Victoria loom large, and for good reason. *Zen at War*, published in 1997, was the first work in English to document the deep nationalism, emperor worship, and pro-war attitudes characteristic of many Japanese Buddhist leaders during the modern period. Although Victoria's focus was on Zen, his book abounds with nationalist, pro-war quotations from prominent members of many Japanese Buddhist sects. Victoria also showed that such pro-war rhetoric was followed up with action, including prayer services for victory in battle; memorial services for fallen soldiers; chaplaincy on the battlefield; zazen instruction for military officers, soldiers, and factory workers; and donation of war planes. Victoria did an impressive job documenting the phenomenon of modern Japanese Buddhist nationalism and war support. However, in *Zen at War* and a follow-up work titled *Zen War Stories*, Victoria offered only limited analysis of the underlying causes of that phenomenon.²

In the decades since the publication of *Zen at War*, the literature on modern Japanese Buddhism and war has grown considerably. Many studies have examined cases of specific Buddhist individuals and groups: revolutionary activists who rebelled against the state (SHIELDS 2017; RAMBELLI and UCHIYAMA 2013),

2. Acknowledging that lack, VICTORIA inserted a new chapter titled "Was It Buddhism?" to the end of the revised edition of *Zen at War* (2006). There, he narrates the long history of Buddhism-state alliances from ancient India to Japan, explaining such alliances with reference to political pragmatism, incorporation of Daoist and Confucian ideals, misuse of the doctrine of *upāya*, and connections with the samurai class.

ultra-rightwing thinkers and military officers (ŌTANI 2012; GODART 2015), a soldier (TERASAWA 2018), and a variety of scholars and intellectuals (KLAUTAU 2017; ISHII, KONDŌ, and NAWA 2020). There has also been much scholarship on D. T. Suzuki's views on war (KIRITA 1995; SATŌ 2008; SUEKI 2009; VICTORIA 2010; 2013). All of these detailed studies of individuals are fascinating and instructive in various ways. However, without a better understanding of Buddhist organizational dynamics, it can be difficult to know how representative or influential such individuals were. Suzuki, for example, was a lay scholar affiliated with the Rinzai Zen sect but employed by a Jōdo Shin university. As such, he did not possess official doctrinal authority within any sectarian organizations, and there is little evidence that his scholarship had a major impact during the war. Thus, it is unclear what, if anything, Suzuki's case tells us about broader patterns of Buddhist support for or resistance to nationalism and war. The same is true of rightwing Nichirenists like Ishiwara Kanji 石原莞爾 (1889–1949) and revolutionaries like Senoo Girō 妹尾義郎 (1889–1961), who each led relatively small, independent movements outside the bounds of mainstream sectarian Buddhist organizations.

Christopher IVES (2009) points the way toward a more robust study of the factors behind modern Japanese Buddhist nationalism and war support. He approaches his topic through an extensive review of the scholarship of Sōtō Zen scholar-priest Ichikawa Hakugen. ICHIKAWA (1970) launched the study of modern Japanese Buddhist war support. As Ives details, Ichikawa's works examined the conservative political implications of Zen's emphasis on non-discrimination, affirmation by negation (*sokuhi* 即非) logic, direct experience, and cultivation of peace of mind in the present moment. Seeking to go beyond such doctrinal analysis, IVES (2009, 107) argues for closer examination of the symbiotic relationship between Buddhist organizations and political rulers. The opening chapter of his book documents the Japanese state's persecution of Buddhist organizations in the early Meiji period, its crackdown on political dissent following the 1911 High Treason Incident (Taigyaku Jiken 大逆事件), its "thought guidance" (*shisō zendō* 思想善導) campaigns in the 1920s, and its demands for ideological unity in the 1930s and 1940s. It also highlights the convergence of interests between Buddhist organizations and the government in confronting what were perceived to be common enemies: Christians, socialists, and the "new religions." The result of these pressures, according to Ives, was a pattern of Japanese Buddhist leaders working to construct a "useful Buddhism" that would contribute to nation-building and societal development (IVES 2009, 23).³ Ives's macro-level

3. LOBREGGIO (2017) calls attention to another important historical factor behind modern Japanese Buddhist nationalism: disillusionment over the League of Nations' rejection of the racial equality proposal and harsh treatment of Germany.

discussion of sociopolitical pressures helps contextualize Victoria and others' micro-level observations about cases of war support and resistance among Buddhist individuals. Yet the intermediary level of organizational dynamics—how individual Buddhists fit into Buddhist organizations, how those organizations were structured and governed, how broader social and political pressures on individuals were mediated by those organizations, and so on—remains unaccounted for.

As highlighted in the long quotation at the outset of this article, there existed a tension between Buddhist teachings of non-killing and public pressure on Buddhists to support the war. Within a Shin Buddhist context, further tensions existed between state demands for kami reverence and Shin teachings against kami reverence, and between state teachings on Japan as a divine land (*shinkoku* 神国) and Buddhist teachings on seeking rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. Individual Shin Buddhists had good reasons to oppose the war and the pro-war, imperialist reframing of Shin teachings. Shin layman Hirose Akira 廣瀬 明 (1919–1947) is a case in point. As a student at Ōtani University from 1939–1942, Hirose was pressured by sect leaders and military training officials to affirm that his faith in Amida supported his devotion to the emperor. Hirose's diary records his Buddhism-inspired reluctance to do so, as well as his misgivings about worshipping kami, glorifying this world rather than the Pure Land, and subordinating his individual will to the state (TERASAWA 2018, 2–3). After being forced to graduate early and enlist in the army, Hirose's disapproval of Shin sect leaders persisted. According to Terasawa's analysis, Hirose "saw that, instead of taking responsibility for issues of faith and society, the Shinshū leadership was focused on institutional survival, opportunistically allying themselves with the ultranationalists. Hirose insisted that each Shinshū believer must reject denominational pride and become independent" (TERASAWA 2018, 5). Why were Hirose and others unable to effectively "reject denominational pride and become independent"? Why did Buddhist leaders' militarist agenda win out on the whole?

To understand what drove Japanese Buddhist war support writ large, we need more studies of Buddhist organizational dynamics. In his study of religious violence, Bruce LINCOLN (2006) argues that there are four main interlocking features of any religion, all of which must be taken into account: a discourse, a set of practices, a community, and an institution. Regarding religious institutions, Lincoln writes:

Coherence over space and continuity over time [of a religion] are secured by formal or semiformal structures staffed by officials, experts, and functionaries authorized to speak and act not only on behalf of the community, but also on behalf of the tradition or religion itself. Such structures vary tremendously in their size, power, rigidity, elite status, funding, degree of centralization, degree of hierarchy, and style of operation. But in whatever form they take, they house

the leaders who assume responsibility for preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of the group's defining discourse; supervision of its rituals; adjudication and enforcement of its ethics; nurturance, defense, and advancement of the community. Sometimes they derive considerable wealth from such service, and they are regularly caught up in serious contradictions. The most important of these is the contradiction between their own corporate self-interests and those of the community, and that between the need to accommodate change while preserving claims to eternal truth. (LINCOLN 2006, 7)

In regard to modern Japanese Buddhism, scholarship to date has provided valuable insights on the corporate self-interests of Buddhist leaders, the diverse interests and beliefs of rank-and-file Buddhists, and the contradictions between them. What remains to be clarified is how Buddhist organizations were structured and governed and thus how contradictions between Buddhist leaders and community members were resolved. Japanese-language scholarship has been somewhat better in addressing issues of Buddhist organizational dynamics.⁴ Drawing upon that scholarship and my own analysis of government and sect documents, the remainder of this article will explore the structures and dynamics of Buddhist organizations prior to and during the Fifteen Years' War.

Establishment of the Kanchō System

The groundwork for centralized, autocratic rule within modern Japanese Buddhist organizations was laid in the Tokugawa period. To establish administrative oversight over Buddhist organizations and to enlist their help in monitoring the populace, the shogunate issued laws requiring all Buddhist temples to incorporate themselves into head-branch relationships with other temples. Mirroring the feudal power relations of the era, Buddhist sects were organized into an elaborate system of head temples (*honzan* 本山), intermediate head temples (*chūhonji* 中本寺), minor head temples (*kohonji* 小本寺), direct branch temples (*jiki matsuji* 直末寺), and descendant branch temples (*mago matsuji* 孫末寺). In the case of the Jōdo Shin Honganji denomination, records show instances of eight levels of head-branch relationships, such that a decision to appoint a new resident priest at the lowest-ranking temple would require successive approval from seven higher-ranking temples (AKAMATSU and KASAHARA 1963, 338).

4. HASEYAMA (1956) and UMEDA (1971) provide thorough accounts of religious law and organizational structures in modern Japan. TAKEUCHI (1971) and KASHIWAHARA (1986) are examples of detailed studies of organizational development within particular Buddhist sects or denominations. Regarding war specifically, a number of Japanese- and English-language works have investigated the impact of the 1940 Religious Organizations Law (GARON 1986; KRÄMER 2011; NIINO 2014). For a brief review of Japanese scholarship on modern Japanese Buddhism and war, see ŌTANI (2015).

Although a sect's head temple theoretically governed over the entire sect, in practice, regional head temples directly administered their branch temples on many matters, held considerable landholdings, and were sometimes headed by the nobility; as such, they possessed considerable independence and authority. Each sect was also required to establish one or more administrative head temples (*fungashira jin* 触頭寺院) in the vicinity of the capital of Edo. These temples served as liaisons between the government and the sects. Although technically branch temples under the authority of a head temple, these administrative head temples were frequently in a position to oversee and overrule their head temple (TAMAMURO 2006).

In the modern era, this complex balancing of authority was eliminated, as the new Meiji state mandated that authority be centralized in a single individual at a sect's head temple. The origins of this mandate lie in the Great Promulgation Campaign (Taikyō Senpu Undō 大教宣布運動). In 1869, the state had mobilized Shinto priests to instruct the populace about their new government and its Shinto-based imperial ideology. This program faltered, in part due to Shinto priests' lack of facility in public preaching. To address this failing, the state launched the Great Promulgation Campaign in 1872, this time enlisting Buddhist priests to work alongside Shinto priests and others. For this purpose, each Buddhist sect was required to appoint a *kanchō*.⁵ Initially, only seven Buddhist sects were recognized; but in 1874, the state relaxed its restrictions, permitting denominations within sects to appoint their own administrative heads. *Kanchō* were charged with overseeing the cultivation of "doctrinal instructors" (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職) who could convey state-authorized teachings to the populace. All Buddhist priests were required to pass state-administered examinations to obtain doctrinal instructor status in order to continue working as priests.⁶

This campaign also broke down, mainly due to Buddhist opposition to the requirement that instructors preach Shinto-based content. In 1884, Cabinet Instruction No. 19 announced the end of the campaign and its doctrinal instructor system and the start of the *kanchō* system. For some, this signified the end of unwanted government influence in religious affairs. Imakita Kōsen 今北洪川 (1816–1892), *kanchō* of the Rinzaï Zen Engakuji 円覺寺 denomination, issued an announcement to sect members:

5. Regarding the initiation of the *kanchō* system, see KASHIWAHARA (1990, 51–52) and IKEDA (1998).

6. Doctrinal instructors were required to teach the three principles of "reverence for the kami and love of the country," "clarifying the principles of heaven and the way of humanity," and "revering and assisting the emperor and obeying the will of the court"; see KETELAAR (1990, 87–135) and HARDACRE (2017, 376–380). For an example of a lecture given by a Jōdo Shin priest, see KRÄMER (2021).

Now, through the announcement of Cabinet Instruction No. 19, the doctrinal instructor position has been abolished. This ends all interference of the government and makes religion independent. From now on, the rise or fall of religions will be purely entrusted to the responsibility of each religious person.

(TAMAMURA and INOUE 1964, 671).

Imakita's proclamation exaggerated the independence that would be enjoyed by Buddhist organizations. The 1884 Cabinet Instruction retained the former system's requirement of appointing a *kanchō* and specified the powers that were to be invested in the position. Moreover, a *kanchō*'s appointment, rules for selection, and exercise of his authority would all be subject to the approval of the Home Ministry. Thus, although the end of the Great Promulgation Campaign marked the state's retreat from active management of Buddhist affairs, the state still retained considerable authority to influence Buddhist affairs through the oversight of *kanchō* (UMEDA 1971, 124). A subsequent cabinet instruction in the same year specified that Buddhist and Shinto *kanchō* must be treated as having the rank of "imperial appointees" (*chokuninkan* 勅任官) (HASEYAMA 1956, 95; TSUJIOKA 2017, 12). This was a rank conferred by the emperor upon military generals, prefectural governors, presidents of imperial universities, and others. This ordinance thus conferred high social status on *kanchō* while highlighting the ongoing close relationship between them and the imperial government. In political scientist MARUYAMA Masao's (1963, 1–24) terms, these cabinet instructions can be understood as efforts to bring Buddhist leaders into close proximity with the emperor and incorporate them into the nation's political hierarchy and emperor-centered structure of values.

Implementation of the Kanchō System

The Buddhist organizational landscape was in considerable flux for much of the modern period, as Buddhist sects broke apart into independent denominations, joined together into new sects or confederations, or adopted new sect laws.⁷ Thus, the number of Buddhist organizations headed by *kanchō*, the powers those *kanchō* held, and the process by which they were selected shifted over the years. In the early 1920s, Japan's Ministry of Cultural Affairs published a series of reports on the nation's religious organizations. The first of those reports, published in 1921, summarized how each Buddhist and Shinto organization had implemented the *kanchō* system (SSC 1). In what follows, I rely on that government

7. UMEDA (1971, 132–140) details the formation of thirteen sects and fifty-six denominations by 1925 and their amalgamation into twenty-eight denominations in response to the 1940 Religious Organizations Law.

document to report on the state of Buddhist organizations at that time, while drawing on relevant sect law documents to provide further details.⁸

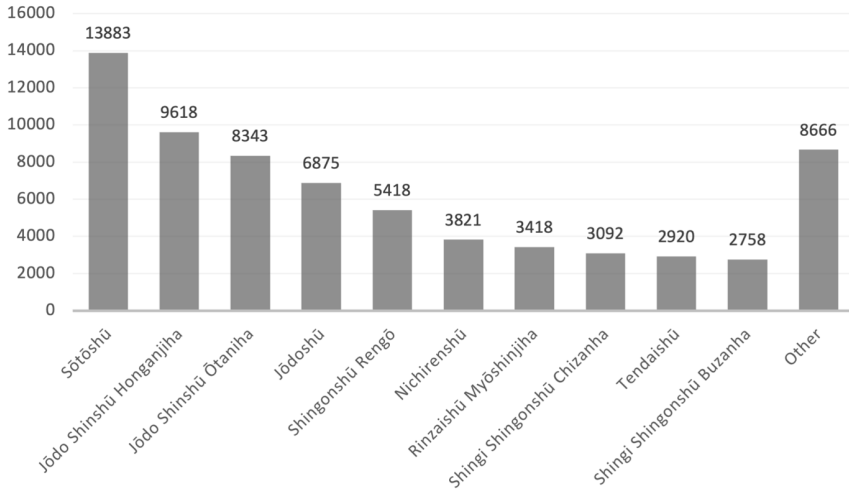
According to the 1921 report, Japan had thirteen Shinto organizations and fifty-one Buddhist organizations headed by *kanchō*. The Buddhist organizations were affiliated with the Jōdo Shin (10), Sōtō (1), Shingon (4), Jōdo (4), Rinzaï (14), Nichiren (9), Tendai (3), Ōbaku (1), Ji (1), Yūzū Nenbutsu (1), Hossō (1), Ritsu (1), and Kegon (1) sects. Some of the organizations were “sects” (*shū* 宗) while others were “denominations” (*ha* 派) of sects; in many instances, the distinction is moot since denominations had become entirely independent. The organizations varied greatly in terms of size, as judged by the number of temples: ten out of fifty-one organizations oversaw 87.4 percent of all temples in Japan (see TABLE 1). That means that administrative control over more than sixty thousand Buddhist temples and their more than ten million members was overseen by ten individuals.

A *kanchō*'s official job was to administer his sect (or denomination) in accordance with his sect's teachings and constitution. The sect constitutions (*shūken* 宗憲) of most Buddhist organizations specified that the *kanchō* had the authority to appoint or dismiss priests; confer ranks on priests and instructors; appoint or dismiss all sect administration employees; confer awards and punishments on sect members; convene and adjourn the sect's legislative assembly; veto laws passed by that legislative assembly; and, in urgent situations, bypass the sect's legislative process and issue executive orders. A few sect constitutions (for example, Tendai and Shingon) granted a role to *kanchō* in levying sect fees and overseeing sect finances, but for the most part, *kanchō* did not have direct oversight over their organization's budgets. Naturally, a *kanchō* did not perform all these duties single-handedly. In most organizations, much of this work was delegated to an administrative director appointed by the *kanchō* and known by various titles depending on the sect and time period (for example, *shūmu sōchō* 宗務総長, *jimu sōchō* 寺務総長, *shūmuin sōmu* 宗務院総務, *kantoku* 監督, *shikkō* 執行).

Although no such requirement was demanded by the 1884 Cabinet Instruction, most sect constitutions—including Sōtō, Honganji, Ōtani, Shingon, Tendai, and Jōdo—granted *kanchō* ultimate authority over doctrinal judgments. For example, the Sōtō sect constitution states, “The *kanchō* judges arguments concerning sect teachings” (*Sōtōshū shūken*, 19); the Ōtani constitution states, “The *kanchō* judges what is correct or false regarding sect principles” (*Shinshū Ōtaniha shūken*, 7); and the Kogi Shingon sect constitution states, “Concerning

8. I consulted the following sect constitutions: *Jōdo shūsei* (1928; most recently revised in 1923), *Kogi Shingonshū shūken* (1931; issued in 1926 and revised thereafter), *Nichirenshū hōki* (1935), *Shinshū Ōtaniha shūken* (1937; issued in 1929 and revised thereafter), *Sōtōshū shūken* (1927; issued in 1922), and *Tendaishū kenshō* (1924; issued in 1915 and revised thereafter).

TABLE 1. Buddhist organizations by number of temples



The number of temples is based on 1922 data compiled in ssc (18: 13–27). That report indicates a total of 68,812 Buddhist temples, 7,176,208 Buddhist households, and 12,408,870 Buddhist followers (ssc 18: 3). The population of Japan in the same year was approximately fifty-six million. Estimates of Buddhist followers vary greatly depending upon method of calculation. A decade and a half later, the Buddhist Federation reported 41.8 million Buddhist followers—at a time when Japan’s population was approximately seventy-two million.

Shingonshū Rengō 真言宗連合 (Shingon Sect Confederation) refers to a confederation of eight Shingon denominations belonging to the “old doctrine” (*kogi* 古義) faction headquartered at Mt. Kōya 高野. Technically, they constituted eight separate organizations. However, the director of the confederation functioned as *kanchō* for all eight organizations, so I treat them as a single organization in TABLE 1. The Kogi Shingon sect would be formed in 1925 by three denominations from the Shingonshū Rengō.

The “other” category includes 2,378 temples belonging to the other thirteen Rinza denominations; 1,420 temples belonging to the other eight Jōdo Shin denominations; 1,280 temples belonging to three Jōdo denominations; 1,156 temples belonging to two Tendai denominations; 1,015 temples belonging to the other eight Nichiren sects; and 1,417 temples belonging to other miscellaneous sects.

TABLE 2. Buddhist *kanchō* systems

	ELECTORS	CANDIDATES	TERM
Jōdo Shinshū Honganjiha	none	son of <i>kanchō</i>	no limit
Jōdo Shinshū Ōtaniha	none	son of <i>kanchō</i>	no limit
Tendaishū	none	<i>tandai</i> appointed by <i>kanchō</i>	no limit
Sōtōshū	resident priests of at least “dharma ground” rank	resident priests of “service ground” rank; 35 years of monkhood; 50 years of age	no limit (rotates annually between Eiheiji and Sōjiji abbots)
Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha	resident priests of at least sixth dharma rank	5 individuals nominated by for- mer <i>kanchō</i>	5 years
Jōdoshū	all resident priests and teaching center directors in for- eign districts	abbots of 3 head temples (who were also elected)	no limit
Shingonshū Rengō	all resident priests	abbots of 6 head temples	no limit (from 1925; 7 years)
Nichirenshū	all resident priests (as of 1924)	abbots of 44 head temples	3 years

understandings of sect tenets held by priests, parishioners, and adherents, the *kanchō* judges what is correct and what is false” (*Kogi Shingonshū shūken*, 7). In different language, the Tendai and Jōdo sect constitutions also affirm their *kanchō*’s ultimate doctrinal authority: “The Tendai *zasu* 座主 [prelate, that is, the *kanchō*] carries on the great model of the lineage of patriarchs and holds total doctrinal authority within the sect” (*Tendaishū kenshō*, 5), and “The [Jōdo sect] *kanchō* carries on the great model of the lineage of patriarchs and purifies and corrects doctrinal propagation” (*Jōdo shūsei*, 2).

The *kanchō* selection process varied widely by sect (see TABLE 2). The Jōdo Shin and Tendai sects were the least democratic. In Jōdo Shin organizations, the *kanchō* was a hereditary position passed down from father to son along with the title of Dharma Master and the position of head temple abbot (*honzan jūshoku* 本山住職). This tradition of hereditary succession was possible because sect founder Shinran had married and fathered children, declaring himself “neither monk nor layman.” Within the Honganji and Ōtani organizations, leadership passed down through Shinran’s bloodline to the *kanchō* of the modern era. In the Tendai sect, the *kanchō* position was assigned to the traditional head of the sect, known as the *zasu*. The *zasu* appointed one or more priests to the position of *tandai*, or judge. At the time of a *zasu*’s death or resignation, the most senior *tandai* rose to the position of *zasu*.

All other major Buddhist sects and denominations selected their *kanchō* through a voting process. The election of sect leaders was not an entirely new phenomenon of the modern period. During the preceding Tokugawa period, the most common practice was for head temple abbots to select their own successors, who then had to be approved by the shogunate. However, Jōdo and Shingon sects had held elections by ballot (*irefuda* 入札) to select certain head temple abbots and sect leaders. In other cases, the selection of head temple abbots had been achieved through mutual consensus (for example, in the Nichiren Minobu denomination) or through systems in which headship rotated regularly among priests of different lineages (as in the Zen sects).⁹

Participation in the modern election of a *kanchō*—either as a candidate or as a voter—was generally restricted to male resident temple priests (*jūshoku* 住職).¹⁰ Participation was further restricted on the basis of temple or priestly ranking systems. In the Sōtō sect, where the *kanchō* position rotated annually between the abbots of the sect’s two head temples, Eiheiji 永平寺 and Sōjiji 總持寺, the election of the abbots was based on a temple ranking system. Temples

9. Information on early modern temple priest selection processes is compiled and discussed in SSC (5: 14, 48–49, 60).

10. Most Rinzai Zen constitutions (including that of the Myōshinji 妙心寺 denomination) and all Jōdo constitutions specified that voting was restricted to “male priests” (SSC 1: 25, 30–42); other sect constitutions did not specify a gender.

belonged to three categories: high-ranking “service ground” (*echi* 会地) temples where important dharma services and retreats could be held, medium-ranking “dharma ground” (*hōchi* 法地) temples, and low-ranking “ordinary monk ground” (*heisōchi* 平僧地) temples. In the election of a new abbot of Eihei-ji or Sōjiji, all resident priests of temples of “dharma ground” rank or above in good standing with the sect could vote. Candidates had to be resident priests of “service ground” temples and have a monastic age of at least thirty-five and a birth age of at least fifty.

In the most restrictive elections, candidates for *kanchō* or head temple abbot positions were directly nominated by the former *kanchō* or head temple abbots. Thus, in the Rinzai Myōshin-ji denomination, a departing *kanchō* nominated five candidates in consultation with an advisory committee. In the Sōtō sect, prior to their deaths or resignations, abbots of Eihei-ji and Sōjiji made lists nominating ten candidates, but qualified individuals not appearing on that list could still run for election. In the Shingon sect, where eight denominations were joined together in a confederation, the *kanchō* and abbot of the “general head temple” (*sōhonzan* 総本山, that is, Kongōbuji 金剛峯寺 on Mt. Kōya) was elected from among the abbots of the sect’s six “great head temples” (*daihonzan* 大本山). For the election of a great head temple’s abbot, that temple (presumably its former abbot) nominated five qualified candidates of the third priestly rank or higher, who then had to be approved by the abbots of the other great head temples.

The Nichiren sect provides an example of a *kanchō* election process being democratized over time. The sect had three types of head temples: one general head temple (Kuonji 久遠寺 on Mt. Minobu 身延), four great head temples (Hokekyōji 法華經寺, Honmonji 本門寺, Myōkenji 妙顯寺, and Honkokuji 本圀寺), and thirty-nine head temples. Beginning in the 1890s, an election was held every three years, with the abbots of all forty-four head temples voting to select one of their members to serve as *kanchō*. In 1914, candidates for the *kanchō* position were restricted to the abbots of the general head temple and four great head temples. However, in 1923, candidacy was opened again to abbots of any of the forty-four head temples, and voting rights were granted to all resident priests of branch temples of the fifth rank and above. Finally, in 1924, voting rights were extended to all resident temple priests regardless of rank.¹¹ The Jōdo and Shingon sects also granted voting rights to all resident temple priests regardless of rank, both in elections of *kanchō* and of head temple abbots.

11. See the entry for “*kanchō*” in NICHIRENSHŪ JITEN KANKŌ INKAI (1981). The sect’s forty-four head temple priests were also elected. When resigning or transferring to a new position, a head temple priest nominated three candidates, who were required to be of a certain priestly rank. Resident priests of branch temples under the oversight of that head temple, along with the abbots of the sect’s other head temples, could vote in the election (*Nichirenshū hōki*, 66–67).

Term length for the *kanchō* position varied by sect (see TABLE 2). In the Jōdo Shin, Tendai, Sōtō, and Jōdo sects, it was a lifetime position. In these sects, elections could be quite infrequent. For example, Yamashita Gen'yū 山下現有 (1832–1934) served as the Jōdo sect's *kanchō* from 1902–1934. The Nichiren sect adopted a three-year term. The Rinzai Myōshinji denomination adopted a five-year term. Within the Shingon sect confederation, the *kanchō* position was a lifetime appointment, but when that confederation broke apart in 1925 and denominations associated with Mt. Kōya, Ninnaji 仁和寺, and Daikakuji 大覚寺 temples founded the Kogi Shingon sect, they adopted a seven-year term for their *kanchō*.

The power possessed by *kanchō* was held in check somewhat by the legislative and budgetary powers of sects' legislative assemblies (*gikai* 議会, *shūkai* 宗会). These assemblies were also a new feature of Buddhist organizations in the modern period. In some cases, all members of an assembly were elected; in other cases, a portion were appointed by the *kanchō*.¹² As with elections of *kanchō*, participation in elections was frequently restricted based on temple or priestly rankings (for details, see ssc 4). Only in the postwar period would participation be extended to laypeople. It is beyond the scope of this article to review the nature of these assemblies and the extent of their powers vis-à-vis the *kanchō* and sect administrations. Here it is sufficient to note that *kanchō* generally had the authority to convene or adjourn the meetings of those legislative assemblies, veto decisions reached by those assemblies, and issue executive orders separate from those assemblies' legislative processes.

Political Activities of Kanchō

Kanchō not only had extensive authority within their sectarian organizations; they also served as representatives of their sects in dealings with the state and other outside groups.¹³ When state leaders sought Buddhist assistance in moral reform campaigns, anti-Communism initiatives, or spiritual mobilization for war, they approached the *kanchō* with their requests or demands. By and large, Buddhist *kanchō* cooperated with those requests. In exchange, they lobbied the state in regard to proposals for a national religious organizations law, compensation for temple lands that had been confiscated by the state, and legislation allowing religious professionals to hold public office.

12. The proportion of appointed to elected members shifted over time. For example, in the Ōtani organization, a legislative assembly composed entirely of appointed members was formed in 1895. In response to a protest movement demanding reform, that assembly was expanded in 1897 to include some elected members. Democratizing reforms continued, such that by 1925, all assembly members were elected, and all resident temple priests could run for or vote in an election (KASHIWAHARA 1986, 116–121).

13. A *kanchō*'s authority to represent his sect in making agreements with other Buddhist organizations was formalized in the Shingon and Tendai sect constitutions.

When proposals for a national religion law were being debated in the National Diet in the late 1890s, some Buddhist *kanchō* collaborated in lobbying government officials to reform the bill; others joined forces to oppose the bill on the grounds that it failed to grant Buddhism a higher status than Christianity (ABE 1970; KASHIWAHARA 1990, 145).¹⁴ The bill was voted down in the House of Peers in 1900. A similar dynamic played out in 1912 when the Home Ministry requested Buddhist *kanchō* attend a “Conference of the Three Religions” aimed at enlisting Buddhist, Sect Shinto, and Christian organizations in a moral instruction campaign. A meeting of Buddhist *kanchō* and other Buddhist leaders was convened to coordinate a response. Again, many expressed resistance on the grounds that the state’s plans would place Buddhism and Christianity on the same level. Yet the *kanchō* of most Buddhist organizations agreed to participate in exchange for political favors (DOHI 1967).

At a meeting of Buddhist *kanchō* in 1912, it was decided to establish an organization for *kanchō* and other top Buddhist officials to cooperate on issues of common concern. In 1915, that organization was renamed the Buddhist Federation (Bukkyō Rengōkai 仏教連合会). It was governed by twelve directors appointed by their respective sects or denominations.¹⁵ This federation financed pan-sectarian initiatives ranging from political lobbying and international Buddhist exchange to disaster relief and war preparedness training. Through distribution of pamphlets and a monthly journal (*Seikyō shinron* 政教新論), it also served as a conduit of information from the state to Buddhist temples and organizations across the country. For example, after a 1924 meeting with the prime minister, Buddhist *kanchō* and administrators used the Buddhist Federation to distribute instructions to temples regarding how to support the state’s “thought guidance” campaign (KASHIWAHARA 1990, 203–205). Similarly, following the 1937 China Incident that led to Japan’s declaration of war against China, Buddhist *kanchō* traveled en masse to Tokyo to pay their respects to the imperial kami at Meiji

14. Only from 1889 was Christianity officially permitted in Japan through constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, and even then, it was not incorporated into the *kanchō* system. From 1899, Christianity came to be regulated by Home Ministry Order No. 41, which specified requirements regarding preaching activities and construction of religious facilities. The more detailed and stringent regulations that applied only to Buddhist and Sect Shinto organizations (especially the 1884 Cabinet Instruction pertaining to *kanchō* governance) marked those religions as having higher social status than Christianity; see DOHI (1967, 95) and UMEDA (1971, 130–131).

15. Originally named the Bukkyō Kakushū Konwakai 仏教各宗懇話会, the Buddhist Federation’s twelve directors represented Tendai, Shingon, Shingi Shingon Chisanha, Shingi Shingon Buzanha, Rinzai (including Ōbaku), Jōdo Shin Honganjiha, Jōdo Shin Ōtaniha, eight other Jōdo Shin denominations, Sōtō, Jōdo, Nichiren, and miscellaneous denominations (Jōdo Seizan denominations, Ji, Yūzū Nenbutsu, Shingon Risshū, Hossō, Kegon, and Ritsu). Each year, an election was held to select one or more of those directors to serve as executive director (*Nihon Bukkyō yōran*, 215–218; KASHIWAHARA 1990, 188; ŌSAWA 2015a).

and Yasukuni shrines and to visit the emperor at the Imperial Palace (ANDERSON 1956, 48).¹⁶ The Buddhist Federation then distributed pamphlets explaining the nature of the war; held conferences promoting spiritual mobilization; promoted religious services of gratitude for the imperial army and “alms begging to repay the country” (*hōkoku takuhatsu* 報国托鉢); led efforts to provide support and care for soldiers; and coordinated receptions and gifts for visiting leaders of state (*Nihon bunka dantai nenkan*, 224–229).

In 1940, the Buddhist Federation was reestablished with the more patriotic name of Great Japan Buddhist Society (Dai Nihon Bukkyōkai 大日本仏教会) and with a new mission of “assisting the heavenly work [of the emperor]” (*tengyō o yokusan suru* 天業を翼賛する). It was headed by Jōdo Shin Kibe denomination *kanchō* Kibe Kōji 木辺孝慈 (1881–1969) from 1940–1941, Nichiren *kanchō* Sakai Nisshin 酒井日慎 (1855–1944) from 1942–1943, and Jōdo *kanchō* Ikuhō Zuien 郁芳随円 (1967–1945) from 1944–1945.¹⁷ It coordinated Buddhist missionary activities throughout Japan’s empire, collected temple bells and other metals for donation, fostered friendly relations with Thai Buddhist leaders, and dispatched priests to the warfront in Burma to carry out pacification efforts (ŌSAWA 2015a, 31–35, 40–43).

Separate from these collective efforts, individual *kanchō* shaped their sects’ responses to war through speeches, rituals, and administrative actions. For example, during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, Honganji denomination *kanchō* Ōtani Kōson 大谷光尊 (1850–1903) traveled the country encouraging sect members to purchase government bonds. Ōtani denomination *kanchō* Ōtani Kōei 大谷光瑩 (1852–1923) awarded honorific posthumous names to sect members who died in battle. And Jōdo sect *kanchō* Hino Reizui 日野靈瑞 (1818–1896) urged sect members to contribute money to relief funds for soldiers and their families. All three also visited military sites to offer comfort and inspiration to Japanese soldiers (OGAWARA 2010, 109–113).

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, this pattern of *kanchō*-led Buddhist war support only grew. Honganji denomination *kanchō* Ōtani Kōzui gave a lecture promoting military service that was published as a pamphlet and used as the basis for military chaplains’ sermons. Kōzui’s extraordinary fundrais-

16. Another meeting of Buddhist *kanchō* with the emperor and the minister for cultural affairs took place in November 1942 (ŌSAWA 2015b, 32).

17. Kibe Kōji, who was a younger brother of former Honganji denomination *kanchō* Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876–1948), had also served as president of the Myōwakai 明和会, an intersec-tarian Buddhist organization that functioned as a liaison between the Japanese army and Japanese Buddhists. In 1937, the Myōwakai exchanged statements with Chinese Buddhists regarding the ethics of the Sino-Japanese War, characterizing Japanese aggression in terms of “the benevolent forcefulness of ‘killing one in order that many may live’” (VICTORIA 2006, 87; NIINO 2014, 214).

ing, chaplaincy, and morale-boosting efforts later won him an imperial rescript of appreciation (OGAWARA 2010, 164–169). Nichiren sect *kanchō* Kubota Nichiki 久保田日亀 (1841–1911) declared his loyalty to the war effort, founded a patriotic organization, and collected donations for soldiers (OGAWARA 2010, 170–171). And Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1860–1919), *kanchō* of both the Rinzai Engakuji and Kenchōji 建長寺 denominations, served as a military chaplain in Manchuria, preaching to soldiers about the righteousness of their cause and the importance of cultivating mental fortitude; he then published a book and multiple articles about his experiences (AUERBACK 2012).

At the start of the Fifteen Years' War, Jōdo sect *kanchō* Yamashita Gen'yū spoke out in approval of Japan's military takeover of Manchuria and establishment of a new nominally independent nation there (JŌDOSHŪ 2018). Likewise, Ōtani denomination *kanchō* Ōtani Kōchō sent a telegram to the League of Nations declaring the legitimacy of Japan's actions in Manchuria (FUKUSHIMA 1995, 166). Then in a speech to Ōtani members, Kōchō urged remembrance of Buddhists' debt to their emperor and service to their country in accordance with the doctrine of the “mutual dependence of the two truths” (*nitai sōe* 二諦相依) (*Shinshū* 363: 1).¹⁸

The pro-war efforts of Umetani Kōei 梅谷孝永 (1863–1945), *kanchō* of the Tendai sect from 1927–1940, are detailed in *Tendai zasu ki* records published by Enryakuji. His addresses to the Tendai community during the Fifteen Years' War regularly highlighted the debt the sect owed to Emperor Kanmu, who had granted permission to sect founder Saichō to establish an independent sect on Mt. Hiei. In August 1937, Umetani joined other Buddhist *kanchō* in traveling to Tokyo to visit the emperor and empress, palace officials, and government officials to express his wishes for “enhancement of the emperor's majesty and perpetuation of the army's good fortune” and to present gifts of sacred talismans (*Tendai zasu ki*, 61). Back on Mt. Hiei, Umetani instructed his sect about the need to contribute support to the “holy war” that would bring peace to East Asia (*Tendai zasu ki*, 64). Umetani also participated in or oversaw memorial services for deceased emperors, memorial services for the war dead, condolence visits and donations to military hospitals, and the dispatching of priests to serve as military chaplains. Some of those donations and funds came directly from the Umetani Shōtoku Foundation (*Tendai zasu ki*, 63).

The nationalist, pro-war statements of Sōtō Zen sect *kanchō* Hata Eshō 秦慧昭 (1862–1944; *kanchō* from 1934–1935 and 1941–1944) have been well-documented by scholars. For example, in a January 1942 journal article, Hata defined the

18. Within modern Jōdo Shin communities, the Buddhist doctrine of “absolute truth” (*shintai* 真諦) and “conventional truth” (*zokutai* 俗諦) was interpreted to refer to Buddhist teachings and secular law respectively (ROGERS and ROGERS 1991).

Buddhist doctrine of “right intention” as a matter of “vanquishing the self and serving the public,” explaining that such an attitude would be fundamental to the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (TAKEUCHI 1971, 246). And in a December 1942 article, Hata echoed others’ observations about the coincidence of the dates of Śākyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment and of the emperor’s declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain, remarking that the latter event signified “the enlightenment of East Asia” (VICTORIA 2006, 131).

In terms of active war support during the Fifteen Years’ War, no Buddhist *kanchō* outdid the efforts of Ōtani Kōshō 大谷光照 (1911–2002) of the Jōdo Shin Honganji denomination. Like his counterpart in the Ōtani denomination, Kōshō enjoyed the noble rank of “count” (*hakushaku* 伯爵), granted to the head of his household by the Imperial Household Agency in 1896 (TSUJIOKA 2021). Noble rank was a unique feature of Jōdo Shin *kanchō*, who belonged to eminent families descending from the sect founder Shinran; other Buddhist sects, traditionally committed to monastic rules of celibacy, were not led by households that could inherit and pass down noble rank. In practice, noble rank conferred the right to visit the inner precincts of the Imperial Palace, attend Gakushūin 学習院 (Peers School), serve in Japan’s House of Peers, and marry other members of the nobility.¹⁹ Kōshō’s predecessor Ōtani Kōzui had married the sister of the former empress. In a match arranged by prince and soon-to-be Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文麿 (1891–1945), Kōshō also married a princess (ANDERSON 1956, 132).

Kōshō was unique among Buddhist *kanchō* in enlisting in the military. He served in 1936 and again from 1939 to 1941, rising from the rank of private to lieutenant (ANDERSON 1956, 132–134). His military service was loudly promoted in Honganji publications as a model for sect members to follow. When not engaged in armed service, Kōshō made multiple tours of the warfront to console and motivate troops in Manchuria and China. On one such tour in late 1937, Kōshō visited Nanjing the day after it fell to Japanese troops. During his four-day visit, he participated in a ceremonial march into Nanjing and officiated at a memorial service for the war dead. Kōshō’s visit coincided with the start of the well-documented Nanjing Massacre. An adamant supporter of Japan’s army, Kōshō reported that during his four days in and around the city, he observed only a peaceful environment with no indications of any massacre (ARA 2002, 311). Back in Japan, Kōshō visited the Imperial Palace, Meiji Shrine, and Ise Grand Shrines to pay his respects to the emperor and the imperial kami. He also

19. Honganji *kanchō* Ōtani Kōzui had attended Gakushūin; Kōzui’s brother Ōtani Sonyu 大谷尊由 (1886–1939) served in the House of Peers from 1928 and was appointed Minister of Colonial Affairs from 1937–1938.

traveled the country giving patriotic sermons and served as an official in the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA), the fascist political party created in 1940 by Prime Minister Kono (ANDERSON 1956, 134–138). During the Allied occupation, Kōshō would be purged from all public offices due to his involvement in the IRAA (WOODARD 1972, 187, 203).

Ōtani Kōchō, *kanchō* of the Ōtani denomination, promoted the war through sermons, a national radio address, visits to the warfront, *kikyōshiki* 帰敬式 initiation rites for soldiers shipping off to war, and funeral services for the war dead.²⁰ Following the Pearl Harbor attack, Kōchō declared to the Ōtani community that the emperor's goal of uniting “the eight corners of the world under one roof” (*hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇) was rooted in a desire for shared peace and prosperity among East Asian nations, and that faithful Buddhists ought to exert themselves to repay the “unfathomable imperial blessings” they had received (*Shinshū* 484: 3). Kōchō's wife, Satoko, also contributed to the war effort by preparing care packages for soldiers, making condolence hospital visits to wounded soldiers, composing jingoistic poems and hymns, and accompanying her husband on trips to the warfront.²¹

Such are examples of how some prominent Buddhist *kanchō* used their influence to promote war support among Buddhist communities. Future scholarship might investigate the wartime actions of other prominent *kanchō* or the underlying reasons for the *kanchō*'s uniform support for the state and its wars.²² In the next section, I will examine more closely the impact of the *kanchō* organizational structure on the dynamics of war support among Buddhist scholars.

Organizational Dynamics of Buddhist War Support

The February 1941 Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference (Shinshū Kyōgaku Kondankai 真宗教学懇談会) was organized and moderated by Ōtani Eijun, uncle of *kanchō* Ōtani Kōchō. Within the Ōtani denomination, members of the Ōtani family were treated like royalty. Like the *kanchō*, they enjoyed noble status and were distinguished from commoners by honorific titles. Two months after the February 1941 Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference, Eijun would be appointed

20. Carried out specifically for soldiers shipping off for war, *kikyōshiki* initiation rites took on connotations of preparing soldiers for death. Having been initiated into the Jōdo Shin community, it was thought that death in battle would lead to rebirth in Amida's Pure Land (NIINO 2014, 63).

21. For details on Kōchō and Satoko's wartime activities, see SCHROEDER (2022, 154–157).

22. During the Fifteen Years' War, such *kanchō* included Mochizuki Nikken 望月日謙 (Nichiren *kanchō*, 1936–1941), Sakai Nisshin (Nichiren *kanchō*, 1941–1944), Suzuki Tenzan 鈴木天山 (Sōtō *kanchō*, 1935–1940), Tōkai Tōtatsu 東海東達 (Rinzai Myōshinjiha *kanchō*, 1932–1937), Mineo Daikyū 峰尾大休 (Rinzai Myōshinjiha *kanchō*, 1937–1941), Iwai Chikai 岩井智海 (Jōdo *kanchō*, 1934–1937), Ikuhō Zuien (Jōdo *kanchō*, 1937–1945), and Takaoka Ryūshin 高岡隆心 (Shingon *kanchō*, 1934–1939).

head of sect affairs. Eijun's convening of the Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference, appointment as head of sect affairs, and subsequent restructuring of the Ōtani organization all seem to have been responses to the 1940 Religious Organizations Law. As Eijun's opening remarks at the conference allude (quoted above), the state was increasingly scrutinizing and censoring religious teachings. Prime Minister Hiranuma Kiichirō's 平沼騏一郎 (1867–1952) remarks in a 1939 speech to the Imperial Diet regarding the Religious Organizations Law exemplify the state's hard line on religious teachings: "In our country, the instructions of the ancestral kami, which is to say the way of the kami, is the absolute way, and the people of our country all must respectfully follow it. Teachings which differ from or conflict with it are not permitted to exist" (*Dai nanajū yon kai Teikoku Gikai*, 320).

To understand the dynamics of the Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference, it is necessary first to note who was in attendance. Alongside members of the Ōtani family, top-ranking sect officials, and top-ranking sect scholars, two individuals stand out: Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971) and Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976). Their presence was surprising because they essentially had been excommunicated from the sect for a decade. In 1928, owing to unorthodox doctrinal studies methods and viewpoints (for example, describing Amida's Pure Land as an "idea" rather than a "substance"), Kaneko was accused of heresy and pressured to resign from his professorship at Otani University and to relinquish his status as a priest (SCHROEDER 2014; MURAYAMA 2021). Two years later, Kaneko's mentor and colleague Soga was also accused of heresy and pressured to resign from his professorship. Throughout the 1930s, neither scholar played any significant role in Ōtani sect affairs. However, both independently gave lectures and published writings on Shin Buddhism's connections to the Imperial House and State Shinto ideology. Kaneko additionally joined a Ministry of Education research association devoted to promoting "national spirit," gave lectures at government-sponsored conferences, and published books through affiliates of the Ministry of Education (ISHII 2012; SCHROEDER 2022, 161–170). In a time of escalating political pressures, sect administrators like Ōtani Eijun turned for help to Soga and Kaneko.

At the conference, Kaneko and Soga outlined their unorthodox interpretations of Amida Buddha, Amida's Pure Land, and their relationship to Japan, the emperor, and the imperial kami. For example, Kaneko remarked, "It's not incorrect to say that the Buddha Land is the land of the kami. The land of our ancestors [that is, the ancestral kami] is the Pure Land. The Pure Land scriptures are the nation's scriptures. The Pure Land *nenbutsu* [chanting the name of the Buddha], just as it is, is reverence toward the land of the kami" (*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 20). Similarly, Soga drew connections between Amida Buddha and the imperial sun kami Amaterasu, arguing that both are "ancestors" who are different from "religious gods," and that Amaterasu can be viewed as a manifestation

of Amida (*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 8). In discussing the relationship between loyalty to the emperor and faith in Amida Buddha, Soga argued that “Amida’s Primal Vow and the emperor’s primal vow are in accord” (*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 15). “Primal Vow” (*hongan* 本願) refers to Amida Buddha’s vow to save all sentient beings; by speaking of “the emperor’s primal vow” and claiming it to be in accord with Amida’s Primal Vow, Soga seems to attribute salvific power to Japan’s emperor.

Traditionalist scholars at the conference resisted Soga and Kaneko’s identification of the Pure Land with Japan and of Amida Buddha with Amaterasu and the emperor. They continued to frame Shin Buddhists’ loyalty to the emperor in more modest terms, for example, as a matter of repaying historical debts owed to the Imperial House for supporting Buddhist institutions. Essentially, they sought to support the state and its wars without sacralizing them. At times, this resistance to a fuller embrace of State Shinto ideology led them to criticize state policies. For example, Kōno Hōun noted contradictions between the content of State Shinto rituals and the state’s explanation of those rituals as “nonreligious” duties of all loyal citizens. Accepting the premise that Shinto rituals were to be nonreligious, Kōno criticized the state as “mistaken” in promoting *norito* 祝詞 prayers, *harae* 祓 ritual purification ceremonies, and prayers at home altars (*kamidana* 神棚), all of which he judged to be “religious” (*Shinshū kyōgaku kondankai*, 5–6).²³

Following the conference, Ōtani Eijun’s new administration conferred high scholarly ranks on Soga and Kaneko, restored them to professorships at Ōtani University, appointed them to a committee in charge of settling doctrinal disputes, invited them to give prestigious lectures, and appointed them to head two of four departments in a new research institute. These actions were obviously a fulfillment of Eijun’s stated intention to cultivate personnel more skilled at combating negative public perceptions of Shin Buddhism as unpatriotic (*Shinshū* 479: 2). Soga and Kaneko thus became central voices in Ōtani doctrinal affairs during the remaining war years, proclaiming to sect members and the public at large the convergence between Shin Buddhist teachings and State Shinto ideology and the reasons why Shin Buddhists ought to sacrifice themselves for the war effort (SCHROEDER 2022, 184–186).

There is every reason to suspect that similar dynamics played out within other Buddhist organizations. *Kanchō* and the administrators they appointed had the power to make crucial personnel decisions to determine who would lead their

23. In 1936, Kōno had faced backlash for publishing an article describing kami such as Amaterasu and Hachiman as “sentient beings within the deluded realm of karmic transmigration” (*rinne no kahō meikai no ujō* 輪廻の果報迷界の有情) (*Shūso shōnin no jingikan*, 15). At that time, sect administrators pressured him to resign his position as president of Ōtani University. Otherwise, he does not seem to have been disciplined for any of his other politically controversial remarks.

organizations during the war years. Organizational pressures stemming from above helped shape an environment where the most nationalist, pro-war voices became prominent and resistant voices were marginalized. In a rare case like that of Takenaka Shōgen 竹中彰元 (1867–1945), a temple priest in a small town in Gifu Prefecture who had dared in 1937 to speak out loudly against the war with China, Ōtani sect administrators responded with denunciations and punishments that effectively silenced him (ŌTANI 2012, 145–147). The Shin Doctrinal Studies Conference shows that even among Buddhist leaders, there existed a variety of political viewpoints toward the state ranging from sacred devotion to pragmatic loyalty to outright criticism. Organizational pressures from the *kanchō* system help explain why, within major Buddhist organizations, any resistance to state ideology or initiatives failed to congeal into collective action. In MARUYAMA’S (1963, 60) terms, the *kanchō* system effectively created “petty emperors” who enforced acceptance of state ideology within their communities. The only potential for coordinated resistance existed outside those organizations among small, independent Buddhist movements, the clearest example being socialist Nichiren Buddhist Senoo Girō’s Youth Buddhist Alliance (SHIELDS 2017, 203–225).

Conclusion

It is sometimes remarked that Buddhism is a religion “without any pope.” It is true that no single figure possesses doctrinal or administrative authority over all Buddhists. The Dalai Lama is not the “Buddhist pope.” However, if the term “pope” is used in a looser sense to indicate an individual with ultimate authority over doctrinal and administrative affairs within a religious organization, one might say that modern Japanese Buddhist organizations were governed by popes.

The reality of modern Japanese Buddhism governed by pope-like figures grates against prevailing modernist depictions of Buddhism as an individualist path where each practitioner is permitted—or even expected—to question authority and investigate the teachings directly through personal study and experience. Approaching the study of Buddhism from such a perspective, one may be surprised to discover millions of Buddhists joining together in declaring their total loyalty to an emperor and dedication to imperialist wars. But in practice, Buddhism has rarely functioned as an individualist endeavor. Most Japanese Buddhists in the modern period belonged to hierarchical sectarian organizations governed by *kanchō*, and those *kanchō* and their appointees exerted powerful pressure on sect members to adapt Buddhist teachings and practices to wartime demands. Investigating such organizational dynamics is critical for gaining a better understanding of what accounted for modern Buddhist war support and of what practical steps might be taken by Buddhists intent on ensuring their tradition’s independence from the state in the future.

In documenting the background, implementation, and effects of the *kanchō* organizational system, this article has only scratched the surface of modern Japanese Buddhist organizational dynamics. Viewing Buddhist organizations as “corporations” that share much in common with for-profit businesses and other collective enterprises (McLAUGHLIN, ROTS, THOMAS, and WATANABE 2020), one might ask: What management strategies were adopted by Buddhist *kanchō* and their appointees in mitigating conflicts and achieving organizational objectives? How were the demands of various shareholders and stakeholders within and outside Buddhist communities balanced? How did Buddhist organizations foster self-sacrificing attitudes among their members? How were the decisions of Buddhist leaders shaped by economic interests? And how were Buddhist organizations modeled after or otherwise influenced by non-Buddhist organizations, such as Shinto or Christian organizations, *zaibatsu* business conglomerates, or the Imperial House? To get to the root of why individual Buddhists engaged with war and other issues as they did, it is essential to learn more about the organizations that they gave shape to and by which they were in turn shaped.

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