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From Disciples to Dissidents

Student Protests and Reform Movements in Meiji-Era Buddhist Universities

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Buddhist higher educational institutions in the Jōdo Shin Ōtani and Sōtō Zen sects became sites of dramatic student protests. This article situates these movements within three overlapping contexts: student strikes in Japan, parallel activism in the United States and parts of Europe, and institutional changes that contributed to the professionalization of the Buddhist priesthood. Student-priests, emboldened by a growing conviction that they had the right to participate in institutional governance, challenged traditional authority and staged collective actions, which were far from isolated incidents. Instead, these protests reflected a broader national and global phenomenon of late nineteenth-century student activism and a shift in attitudes toward educational and religious authority. Student-led campaigns resulted in significant reforms, including the removal of lay administrators and the establishment of public discussion halls. Drawing on frameworks from sociology and the history of higher education, this study argues that such activism was pivotal in the modernization of Japanese Buddhism. These protests not only catalyzed institutional change but also played a crucial role in establishing academic freedom within Buddhist universities and reshaping the relationship between religious authority and educational independence, leaving a lasting impact on Japanese Buddhism.

KEYWORDS: Meiji Restoration—Buddhist education—modernization—student protests—professionalization of priesthood politics

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During the final decades of the nineteenth century, a series of student protests took place at Buddhist higher educational institutions within the Ōtani denomination of the Jōdo Shin sect and the Sōtō Zen sect. At these proto-universities, students engaged in collective action ranging from public protests to mass petitions to schoolwide strikes, challenging traditional authority structures within their institutions. In each case, students and their faculty supporters were punished for their defiance and in one instance, a school was forced to close after a mass expulsion of the student body. How did systemic changes to Buddhist higher education make these protests possible? To answer this question, and to better understand Meiji-era Buddhist student protests, this study situates Buddhist protests within three overlapping strata: student strikes in Japan, student strikes in the United States and parts of Europe, and institutional changes that contributed to the professionalization of the priesthood. Rather than an epistemological product of modernization, this study approaches these historical changes as a systemic consequence of the adoption of the university model. I employ Vivienne Schmidt's "discursive institutionalism" to analyze the actions of student-priests as local actors who translated rather than simply imported global educational models. I also draw on Harold Wilensky's professionalization theory to examine how Buddhist universities became contested sites in the transformation of the priesthood from a status to a modern profession. In applying these sociological models, I argue that, as Buddhists, student-priests actively translated the emerging global model of higher education for their sectarian contexts, and they created universities with structures and norms that enabled student collective action.

Historical Background

To better appreciate the changes to Buddhist clerical education brought on by the Meiji period, I begin with a brief sketch of Buddhist seminary education in the preceding Tokugawa period.[1] It should be noted that while each sect possessed its own idiosyncratic style and had educational institutions with a distinct structure, what follows is a generalized snapshot about broad trends across Buddhist seminaries. Early in the seventeenth century, the bakufu sought to limit

1. This study focuses on Buddhist higher educational institutions that I call "seminaries." There were, however, many other forms of Buddhist education. For an examination of the modalities of education in the Tokugawa period, Buddhist and otherwise, see Montrose (2021).

Buddhist involvement in the political sphere by establishing education requirements for all priests. The bakufu even went so far as to sponsor the construction of seminaries in the hopes that priests would spend more time studying and thereby stay out of governmental affairs. The effect of these policies was a proliferation of such Buddhist educational institutions across all the major sects. Many of these institutions emulated the head-and-branch temple system with a head seminary and several regional branch seminaries. It was common for students and instructors to float between the head and branch schools. At their peak, some of the head seminaries had enrollments surpassing one thousand student-priests (KDHN, 2; ODH, 19).

Though sources from this period are scarce, the number of surviving records increased in the nineteenth century; it is from these records that we can glean more about the curricula. Curricula for much of the Tokugawa period emphasized sectarian doctrine and exegesis, mirroring wider textualist and fundamentalist trends that were augmented by new printing technologies (WATT 1984; BODIFORD 1991; RIGGS 2004; BARONI 2006). Students attended lectures, copied sutras, read commentarial works, gave practice lectures, and engaged in doctrinal debates. Toward the mid-nineteenth century, when the government's enforcement of the anti-Western ban began to wane, the Ōtani denomination of the Jōdo Shin sect began to offer sporadic opportunities to study non-Buddhist subjects. The first recorded instance of this was a lecture offered in 1824 titled "Introduction to Confucianism." In 1831, students read and discussed the *Nihon shoki* 日本書記 (ODH, 44). In 1863, during the tumultuous Bakumatsu period, the institution offered a lecture on Christianity and Heliocentrism. This was a preview of larger changes to come in Buddhist education.

With the onset of the Meiji Restoration, Buddhist sects experienced seismic shifts in their political, social, and economic status. The uncertainty brought about by these changes were compounded by the opening of Japan to the US, United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Russia. The educational landscape was changing too. Through travel and education abroad, scholars operating outside the Buddhist sphere like Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) and those within the Buddhist world like the Jōdo Shin priest Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄 (1849–1927) carved out new channels for the flow of ideas between Japan, the US, and the UK.[2] Fukuzawa traveled to the US and Europe in the 1860s and subsequently made a major impact on Japanese education. He founded one of Japan's first private universities, Keio, and by the mid-nineteenth century, he was widely recognized as Japan's foremost scholar of Western studies. Fukuzawa translated many Western-language works on a number of subjects and was a prolific writer of original works. His *Encouragement of Learning*, a treatise written in seventeen

2. For more on Nanjō Bun'yū's life and works, see ZUMOTO (2004) and STORTINI (2020).

installments from 1872 to 1876, sold more than 200,000 copies (Fukuzawa 2007, 448). He opens the piece with "Heaven never created a man above another nor a man below another" (*Gakumon no susume*, 1). This saying, a powerful statement about equality coming from a globe-trotting former samurai, became his most commonly quoted maxim (Fukuzawa 2007, 449).[3]

On the Buddhist side, Nanjō studied Sanskrit at Oxford University in 1876 with famed philologist Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), and their translation and editorial collaborations were numerous.[4] Upon his return to Japan, Nanjō was highly sought after for his Sanskrit expertise from both secular and sectarian institutions alike. In 1885, the University of Tokyo's Literature Department hired Nanjō as a lecturer in Sanskrit and Buddhist texts, and he split his time between his duties at the University of Tokyo and speaking at temples around Japan.

Even before Nanjō's and Fukuzawa's contributions, ideas about the place of knowledge in a burgeoning imperial state were gaining traction. Article 5 of the Charter Oath promulgated by Emperor Meiji 明治 (1852–1812) in April 1868 states, "Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world in order to promote the welfare of the empire" (*Gokajō no Goseimon*). This set into motion a decades-long series of experiments in public education at the national level that other interest groups including the Buddhist sects sought to both support and emulate.[5] At its most basic level, Article 5 established the role of knowledge in service to the empire. More than two decades later, this understanding of the role of knowledge as serving a larger project was still in use, only this time by the Minister of Education for the Ōtani denomination, Atsumi Kaien 渥美契縁 (1840–1906). In an 1894 internal document, Atsumi writes, "The spreading of the teachings is through propagation. The root of this propagation is scholarship" (ODHS, 151). In both statements, knowledge is mobilized for practical aims, but the role of education as a means to acquire status must also be accounted for. Just as the Meiji government sought global recognition of Japan's status as an empire,

3. Fukuzawa initially trained in Dutch studies but in the late 1850s shifted to studying English after recognizing its wider international applicability. I use the vague label "Western studies" above both because that is a translation of the term *yōgaku* 洋学 or *seiyōgaku* 西洋学 that Fukuzawa used, but also because as a polymath, Fukuzawa was not a specialist of any one subject and had a variety of intellectual interests (Nishikawa 1998; Craig 2009, 8–9).

4. Some examples include the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*, the *Amida Sūtra*, and the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (Stortini 2020).

5. By "support," I am pointing to the efforts of Buddhist sects to continue finding a role for priests in public education, much as was done in the Tokugawa period when priests taught young children basic skills and moral education at "temple schools," or *terakoya* 寺子屋. The contributions of Buddhist priests to education in the early Meiji period before the government had trained enough teachers cannot be overestimated. This is most striking in the case of the Great Promulgation Campaign discussed later in this study.

Buddhist sects saw education as a path to recover their standing domestically and build status internationally.

Among Buddhist sects, the Jōdo Shin sect was the first to recognize the pivotal role education would play in this new era, while the Shingon sect was among the slowest to adapt.[6] Even as early actors, the Jōdo Shin sect struggled to expand clerical education beyond the sectarian models of the Tokugawa period.

Buddhist Student Protests in Meiji Japan

Sometime during the first half of 1869, student-priests from the Ōtani denomination staged a note-burning protest outside the gates to their school, conveying their frustration and anger with a lecturer named Genjuin Tokujū 賢殊院得住 (d.u.). During the Meiji Restoration, Buddhist sects faced an array of crises as their former hegemonic status was upended. Many sects responded by pursuing clerical education reforms that included the study of Christianity and other subjects such as heliocentrism and Western philosophy. Genjuin staunchly opposed the study of Christianity in Buddhist schools. Before the protest, Genjuin argued:

> The power to destroy the Dharma is in the hands of Śākyamuni's disciples…. Just as when you work to eradicate Buddhism's enemies, more enemies will grow in their place, it naturally follows that if you willingly [work to] eradicate Christianity, more Christians will grow in its place…. Throw away the "self power"-driven efforts to destroy non-Buddhist teachings and entrust in the divine power of Śākyamuni. (ODH, 53)

This debate quickly boiled over into classrooms and strict new regulations were implemented.[7] In each classroom, two students were appointed to observe and mediate conflicts and to maintain order and peace during lectures. Nanjō Bun'yū was a student at this time and writes about two such students: one was referred to simply as "Kanabō," a reference to the thick iron rod he carried with him, from Enshū (modern day Shizuoka); the other was a physically imposing man named Ryūshū from Echigo (modern day Niigata) (*Kaikyūroku*, 21). Nanjō also writes that this system, while usually successful, could not suppress all outbursts.

During one of Genjuin's lectures, students interrupted and demanded he explain how exactly studying Christianity would only serve to promulgate Christianity. According to Nanjō's account, the students waited for Genjuin's response, but he was unable to answer; instead, he took his seat and looked down toward

6. ABE (2014) argues Shingon was relatively late to curricular reforms because of sectarian consolidation and deconsolidation, causing the sect's education system to get lost in the tumult. He also argues funding was an issue and that priority was on preserving esoteric teachings over providing education in secular subjects.

7. It is unclear in the sources available whether these regulations were coming from school administrators or the sectarian leadership.

the floor. Following that incident, the students gathered in front of the school and exclaimed, "There is no way to take notes on a lecture when you cannot answer our question. Our notebooks are now soiled, and we may as well burn them and throw them away" (ODH, 55). As a result of these protests, Genjuin was demoted and ultimately resigned in July 1869.

Around the same time of the confrontation with Genjuin Tokujū, students of the Ōtani denomination's schools pursued other avenues for reform, including changes to sect governance structures. During this period, the Ōtani denomination had two main institutes of higher learning. This division of labor stemmed from a hesitation early in the Meiji period about teaching non-Buddhist subjects in the same building as Buddhist ones. Consequently, the Gohōjō 護法場 (Institute for the Protection of the Dharma) was founded in August 1868 for the purposes of teaching non-Buddhist subjects. The curriculum centered on four pillars: Confucianism, Nativist Studies (*kokugaku* 国学), Christianity, and Western science. It was common for students to attend both the Gohōjō and the more traditional sectarian institute, the Gakuryō 学寮 (Academy).

In March 1869, three students delivered a letter to the head temple, Higashi Honganji 東本願寺. The letter begins by restating the mission of the Gohōjō: "Since the founding of the Gohōjō, young volunteers from various regions have gathered. The objective is researching subjects *suitable to the times* such as the Shinto classics, Confucianism, and other non-Buddhist teachings" (ODH, 49; emphasis added). The letter also includes demands for reforms based on what the students called the head temple's "misgovernment" of the sect, though they did not provide examples of what was meant by misgovernment. Finally, the letter called for the resignation of the lay retainers known as *kashin* 家臣 or *terazamurai* 寺侍, recommending they be replaced by priests. In the Tokugawa period, all scholarly matters within the Ōtani denomination were delegated to the Gakuryō. Temple governance was divided into dharmic affairs (*hōmu* 法務), which was handled by the clergy, and lay (or secular) affairs (*zokumu* 俗務), which was handled by lay retainers. The lay retainers worked as intermediaries who relayed communications from the head to the branch temples. The students who submitted the letter to the head temple representing the reform-minded clergy wanted a bottom-up organizational structure. To them, this meant that branch temple priests, not bureaucratic lay middlemen, should directly convey the will of the branch temples to the head temple (KASHIWAHARA 1986, 25).

In a dramatic response to the letter, the head temple leadership made attempts to seize the three students. However, the students narrowly evaded apprehension by taking refuge in the Gohōjō. Despite escaping, the students were ultimately ordered to serve a week of disciplinary seclusion; supporting teachers and staff were also disciplined by the denomination (ODH, 49). Even as they were disciplining students for their defiance, the denominational leaders were responsive

to the students' requests. In May 1869, the denomination established a public discussion hall (*shūgisho* 衆議所) for the clergy, laity, and students to openly express their opinions about the direction of the denomination. Within weeks of the discussion hall's opening, the Gohōjō students again submitted a petition along with branch temple priests from Ōmi Province (now Shiga Prefecture). Their letter highlighted the growing rift between the lay retainers at the head temple and the branch temple clergy over whether to prioritize the denomination's financial challenges or education (ODH, 50–51). The petitioners advocated for a focus on education and leadership reform, going so far as to say that those who were indifferent or critical of this direction, including lecturers at the Gakuryō, should be removed from office (ODH, 50–51). These tensions culminated in the abolition of the lay retainer position in 1870, a move that the Ōtani denominational history credits in part to the persistent protests of student-priests. Replacing the retainers were new administrative positions that were to be filled by branch temple priests.

Ōtani historian KASHIWAHARA Yūsen (1986, 25) has argued that the elimination of lay retainers from the denominational governance structure was the most impactful step in the modernization of denominational affairs.[8] Among the first priests to be appointed to these new positions were alumni of the Gohōjō, scholar-priests such as Ishikawa Shuntai 石川舜台 (1842–1931) and Atsumi Kaien. For KASHIWAHARA (1986, 32), the reform of the governance structure and the involvement by Gohōjō alumni in the new structure is evidence for the impact of these student protests, fostered in large part by the culture of the Gohōjō. Over the next two years, the power struggle between reform and conservative factions persisted and tensions grew stronger, culminating in the assassination of Senshōin Kūkaku 闡彰院空覚 (1804–1871), a prominent instructor at the Gohōjō and Gakuryō.[9] Though no one was charged with his murder, Kūkaku's untimely death was likely an act of retaliation by one of the lay retainers who had been ousted under the sectarian governance reforms discussed above and for which Kūkaku was an advocate. These reforms, though contentious, signaled an emerging new culture within these institutions, one with intellectual daylight between the schools and the sects. This new dynamic empowered students to speak out when they disagreed with those in positions of authority, with school policies, or with the direction the denomination was taking. This is a pattern we will see mirrored throughout subsequent examples in this study.

8. Kashiwahara explains that eliminating lay intermediaries and constructing a system wherein the head and branch temples are directly connected allowed for a greater opportunity for the will of the branch temples to be reflected in the head temple; he links this to the notion of *kōgi seitai* 公議政体, or public deliberative government, a concept in the first article of the Charter Oath.

9. For more on Senshōin Kūkaku's life and assassination, see MONTROSE (2019).

Though not as early as the Ōtani denomination, the Sōtō Zen sect's Sōtō Daigakurin 曹洞大学林 (Academy) made efforts in the Meiji period to expand and modernize its education.[10] Beginning in 1883, in addition to the continuation of sectarian studies, students could select either a Chinese or Western studies elective track, and in 1886, a research course was established. Just six years later, a series of student protests began that would stretch over a ten-year period and resulted in multiple school closures (KDHN, 179–197). There are scant surviving details for the first two protests. The KDHN explains only that students and the school's administration began to clash at the end of 1888. This led to the expulsion en masse of the student body and the subsequent closure of the school in January 1889. The following month, the school superintendent, Tsuji Kenkō 辻顕高 (1824–1890), resigned, and Hara Tanzan 原担山 (1819–1892) was appointed acting superintendent. Hara's acting status was made permanent in 1891, when a conflict flared up once more. The school was forced to close again for a few months until January 1892, when the formerly expelled students were allowed to re-enroll. While we know little about the causes of these earlier protests and resultant closures, some aspects are hinted at in a subsequent 1899 protest, from which more details and documents survive.

In December 1899, the Sōtō Academy's entire student body (save for two students, Akihira Tokujō 秋平徳乗 and Kubota Jisshū 久保田実宗, who opted out) submitted to the school and sectarian authorities a petition of no confidence in the vice principal (*kyōtō* 教頭), Tsutsukawa Hōkai 筒川方外 (d.u.), and dean (*gakkan* 学監), Oka Sōtan 丘宗潭 (d.u.) (KDHN, 182). The complaints lodged against the sect-appointed school administrators fell into two categories. First, students accused the administrators of neglecting their duties. This included lesson times changed without notice, disorderly lessons, failure to sufficiently answer student questions, and a lack of transparency about rule changes. Second, the students accused the men of behaving in an improper manner. They described the two men as having terrible tempers, complained that they were regularly rude to students, and cited instances of harsh name-calling, such as referring to groups of students using the counter for animals (*ippiki* 一匹, *nihiki* 二匹, and so on) and denouncing students as "heretics" (*gedōto* 外道徒). In another complaint, Oka is accused of viewing students as slaves, citing an instance where Oka warned that if students questioned the rules, they might be asked to leave the school. The students asserted that they were unable to respect Tsutsukawa and Oka as leaders or as academics, and they implored the administrators to investigate the matter.

10. The Sōtō Academy is the former name of Komazawa University. In accordance with Ministry of Education guidelines accompanying the University Ordinance of 1918, sectarian universities were restricted from bearing the names of their sect, and as a result, all sectarian universities had to change their names (Hayashi 2008).

Students also filed a second petition to the Department of Sect Affairs (Shūmukyoku 宗務局) requesting both men be disciplined (KDHN, 186–187).

For their part, Oka and Tsutsukawa wrote the sect, disputing the allegations (KDHN, 182–183). After lamenting the students' behavior and slump in academics, they explained that since the time of their respective appointments, they had been single-mindedly devoted to reforming the school, which had necessitated a change in teaching methods. The two administrators claimed that it was not they, but the students whose conduct was rude and improper. They also described students as being chronically absent from class, breaking curfew, and not taking their studies seriously. Importantly, Tsutsukawa and Oka attributed much of the students' bad conduct to the influence of former students from the past decade who had served as agitators and masterminds to the current student body's actions. This reference to bad conduct of former students is one clue that the conflict that had spurred earlier student protests still loomed in institutional memory. Regarding the use of animal counters to refer to students, they explained that this had been in reference to these rebellious graduates of the school and not to anyone in the current student body. With this, the administrators directly connected the prior conflicts from the late 1880s to the current dispute, suggesting that earlier tensions had never been fully resolved (KDHN, 179).

The rest of the school administration sided with Oka and Tsutsukawa. Their primary concern was that students had broken school rules by being insubordinate, including through the act of petitioning itself. As further evidence of insubordination, the school cited the refusal of the third-year class to attend any of the vice principal's lectures on the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵 (KDHN, 188). The sect found itself in a difficult position, wedged between the students and administrators. There was a time, in the Tokugawa period, when this matter might have been resolved by the government, but by the mid-1880s, the Meiji government had retreated from sectarian affairs (JAFFE 2001, 70–71). The power vacuum that had resulted from the privatization of religious organizations left the sect with few options. Ultimately, head priests from four different temples were brought in to mediate, resulting in the sect siding with the administrators (KDHN, 191).[11] However, the sect told the students that they could avoid expulsion if they repented in front of the main Buddha image and agreed to resume taking classes from Oka and Tsutsukawa. The students refused to comply with the sect's wishes, and as a result, all students were expelled. The teachers who had supported their cause were fired. Without students, the school was forced to close temporarily.

11. The four mediators were Kitano Genpō 北野元峰, head priest of Seishōji 青松寺; Kinoshita Ginryū 木下吟竜, head priest of Sōsenji 総泉寺; Ōtani Taidō 大渓泰童, head priest of Kōunji 功運寺; and Kōda Zuihō 香田随芳, head priest of Kensōji 賢崇寺.

Conflicts of this sort were not exclusive to the Sōtō sect and Ōtani denomination. I uncovered a few additional instances of student-led protests, but with insufficient detail for analysis.[12] In 1901, at the Shingon Chisan sect's middle school for instance, students accused the dormitory supervisor of corruption. The *Concise Fifty-Year History of Taishō University* mentions this event, describing it as a "major disturbance," but only explains that it was the result of a lack of trust between the students and the dormitory supervisors and that after this incident dormitory governance was changed to allow for greater student autonomy and self-regulation (Taishō Daigaku Gojūnen Ryakushi Hensan Iinkai 1976, 217).[13] Without additional examples provided in Buddhist sources, one way to better understand what was going on in these institutions is to situate them within the broader landscape of student collective action both domestically and globally.

Occurrences of Student Protests Across Japan

If we zoom out beyond Buddhist schools, it becomes apparent that students throughout Japan were experiencing discontent with their schools and finding ways to voice that discontent. These examples bring our Buddhist case studies into the fold of a nationwide negotiation between old and new educational styles, structures, and aims. In Japan, such changes began with curricular reforms in the early Meiji period, which bred new ways of thinking about the world, including educational institutions and students' place therein. For instance, in 1894, the government changed the executive and judicial appointment system by requiring an examination for all applicants, whereas previously, Tokyo Imperial University law graduates could be appointed without examination. Though the university was new, having been only established seventeen years prior to this dispute, tensions nevertheless developed over older traditional status-based models of education and governmental appointment. In response, Tokyo Imperial University law graduates staged a total boycott of the first exam (Amano 2009, 312). Law graduates were not the only ones protesting. Morooka Sukeyuki's (1955) timeline of social movements in the late 1880s–1890s records over thirty instances of student strikes and several directives from the Ministry of Education aimed at curtailing student strikes. Though the majority of these occurred in middle schools and high schools, a notable university strike took

12. Iwata Mami's (2016) study of the short-lived Takanawa Buddhist University (Takanawa Bukkyō Daigaku 高輪仏教大学, the Jōdo Shin sect's Nishi Honganji denomination) draws fruitful parallels, though the conflicts Iwata discusses were driven by the university's faculty and staff and did not appear to be student-centered.

13. An email inquiry to Taisho University scholars with extensive knowledge of its history did not yield additional information on this incident.

place at Keio University in early 1888.[14] The Keio strike involved over two hundred students and was covered in at least one local newspaper (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 22 February 1888). Later that same year, the strike discussed above took place at Sōtō Academy. It is highly likely that Sōtō student-priests would have known of similar student protests taking place around them, including the one on Keio's campus, less than two kilometers away.[15]

While it would be impossible to account for all instances of student collective action, we can understand protesting Buddhist students were part of a nascent student-activist subculture taking shape in modernizing Japan. In his study of Japan's radical student movement of the 1920s and 1930s, Henry D. Smith defines student activism in the Meiji period using an ascending typology: student rows, school strikes, and political protests. SMITH (1972, 21–24) describes student rows as "brawls, pranks, and riots," seen most often in the lower-level schools and less so at the university level. School strikes, Smith points out, were more organized than the chaotic outbursts of student rows but usually lacked ideological underpinnings and were limited to a single school. Political protests, in contrast to school strikes, possessed ideological underpinnings that transcended the grievances of a single school and therefore commonly united students across multiple schools.

The protests in the Ōtani and Sōtō institutions fall between Smith's school strikes and political protests. Like the Buddhist case studies, most school strikes discussed by Smith were rooted in student dissatisfaction with administrative decisions. SMITH (1972, 23) cites examples of protests over the firing of a popular teacher or demands to fire an unpopular one, unhappiness with dormitory rules such as curfew times, disputes over curricular changes, and complaints about dining hall food. SMITH (1972, 25) argues that through Meiji-era school strikes, "Japanese students came to be convinced that they had the right to a voice in school administration, and experience showed such techniques as strikes and

14. Morooka's survey of social movements in the 1880s–1890s derives primarily from coverage in the *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞. While labor movements, both industrial and agricultural, are his primary focus, he includes a third section for "other movements," in which schools are frequently cited. It is here that he documents press coverage of student strikes and other instances of protest and collective action. Among the more than thirty instances captured, the vast majority were in middle and high schools and most appeared to be driven by student dissatisfaction with rules or school personnel, a pattern we find mirrored both in our case study Buddhist schools, as well as globally. (MOROOKA 1955).

15. In 1888, Keio's campus was in the same location it stands today, in the Minato Ward of Tokyo. Sōtō Academy's campus, however, was not in the Komazawa neighborhood, its present location, but in the Kita Higakubodanchi neighborhood (this area is now known as the Roppongi Hills). Thus, in 1888 Keio's and Sōtō Academy's campuses were less than two kilometers from one another.

demonstrations to be effective guarantees of that right."[16] Smith rightly identifies the newly held belief among students that they had a "right to a voice" in school matters, but his framework holds that this belief lacks ideological underpinnings that might transcend any single institution and unite students across schools. While I came across no evidence to suggest explicit collaboration or unified efforts across these schools, Buddhist or otherwise, the similarities in the students' demands suggest a phenomenon that does in fact transcend individual institutions.

It is not enough to understand our examples as parallel but isolated incidents. The occurrence of student strikes in analogous school settings outside the Buddhist world contextualizes the behavior and motivations of protesting student-priests as part of wider social change. The tension between the sect and their universities mirrored dynamics taking place throughout Japanese higher education. As the Meiji state was opening public universities in the service of training technocrats for its modernization project, private universities such as Keio and Waseda were offering an alternative vision for modernization that privileged academic freedom from the state. Huda Yoshida al-Khaizaran (2011, 165) observes that in a "two-way process Keio and Waseda were the product of Meiji Renovation and in turn contributed to the cultural transformation of a new civic society, renegotiating traditional values with consequent changes in education, in the socialisation of leaders and in social stratification." Like the Meiji state, Buddhist sectarian leaders viewed their universities as places for training Buddhists in service to the sect, a position that in many ways continued the traditional monastic education of previous eras. In contrast, Buddhist reformers approached these universities as a new type of institution, one in which academic freedom from the sect, or any other institution, was a requisite.

In other words, at the heart of this distinction was the question of whom or what does the university exist to serve? For the Meiji government, it was unequivocally the state. For Buddhist leadership, it was the sect. For students at private universities, including Buddhist ones, this answer was not so straightforward.

16. Smith (1972, 1) opens his book by highlighting the tension between students' self-image as "independent critics who stand apart from established institutions and see the flaws and tensions to which those enmeshed in the institutions are blind" and the reality that it is that very same institution that "molds student attitudes and thus, unwittingly, prepares the way for radical behavior but also provides a base of organization without which students would be powerless to exert political pressure." This tension is explored throughout his later chapters dealing with the late Taisho and early Showa periods but is underdeveloped in the sections on the Meiji period. To explain how students found their voices in the Meiji period, Smith gives only passing mention to factors such as behavioral tendencies of youth, rapid urbanization, and a shared belief in a "natural elite" to lead Japan. This is perhaps because Smith's study does not focus on this period, but it nevertheless has the effect of underemphasizing the role of curricular and institutional change in the development of student protest culture.

Student collective actions at Buddhist institutions signaled that the university also existed to enable personal and social advancement beyond merely training students to fulfill their roles as priests. Many of these young Buddhists, belonging to a privileged class receiving the highest level of Buddhist education available, identified strongly with their role as students, distinct from and in addition to their role as priests. Ōtani University's first president, Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903), wrote that he initially joined the priesthood because it provided him access to an education that he otherwise could not have afforded. In the following passage, Kiyozawa speaks of the decision to become a "bonze," a colloquialism for priest:

> The reason I thought to become a priest was that if I became a bonze and went along to Kyoto I would be given a good education at the expense of the head temple. Since I was living in circumstances that made it completely impossible for me to study as I wanted to, it was a delight to be provided with a life-long education, so I became a bonze. (Translated in JOHNSTON 1972, 51)

As Kiyozawa expresses here, the priesthood was a means to an education and not, as one might expect, the other way around. HASHIMOTO Mineo's (2003, 14) work on Kiyozawa likewise led him to conclude "the main reason for Kiyozawa's ordination was poverty."

While Kiyozawa was an exceptional figure, his perspective nevertheless allows us to entertain the idea of similarly motivated student-priests with priorities (and, arguably, loyalties) that may have differed from some of their less educated peers in the priesthood. It is reasonable to assume that student-priests like Kiyozawa had a vested interest in the growth and success of not only their sect but also their educational institutions, as evidenced by the fact that Kiyozawa led educational reform movements designed to foster independence from sectarian control.[17]

Thus, we can understand this divide in the Buddhist world between the perceived roles and functions of the scholar/student and the priest as a part of a larger national clash over differing views on the function of higher education. If, taking a sociological approach, we accept that institutions "complicate and constitute the paths by which solutions are sought" (DIMAGGIO and POWELL 1991, 11), this becomes a clash between two institutions, sects and universities, with divergent paths and solutions for meeting the challenges brought on by the Meiji period. As we saw in the scene with Genjuin Tokujū, a flash point for these differing views centered on disagreement over the curriculum. Western models of education introduced critical approaches to the study of religion that sharply contrasted with traditional modalities of Buddhist education. One

17. For a recent in-depth study of Kiyozawa Manshi's reform movement, see SCHROEDER (2022).

individual who embodied this tension was the prominent Jōdo Shin scholar-priest and Buddhist reformer Murakami Senshō 村上専精 (1851–1929). Ryan Ward (2020, 887), in his study of sectarian backlash to Murakami, observes that doctrinal disagreements were of secondary concern behind "demarcating an inviolable boundary between the sectarian and the academic." At a time when Buddhist sects were threatened by many outside forces, the critiques made by internal reformers were intolerable to many within the sect, particularly the leadership. And yet, as evidenced by the protests in our above case studies, these internal critiques persisted.

From this brief discussion, we can see that dissenting students at Buddhist schools were not operating in isolation, but in fact reflected broader social upheaval. It is now worth zooming out once more to consider the ways in which these protesting Buddhists were part of a global phenomenon.

Student Protests as a Global Phenomenon

Japan was not the only country experiencing a rise in student protests in this period. Rather, the Japanese protests were part of a broader global trend in higher education at the time. Historians of higher education in Europe and North America have looked at the bottom-up, or consumer-driven, movement coinciding with a series of educational reforms that began in the late eighteenth century and stretched into the early twentieth century. Regarding the boom of student protests in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the US, John R. Thelin posits,

> There were instances of student demonstrations, revolts, and acts of sabotage, rebellious incidents in which students seemed to be expressing genuine dissatisfaction with archaic administration, disrespectful faculty, and a dull course of study irrelevant to the issues they would face as adults. (Thelin 2011, 64)

For Thelin, the root of these "rebellious incidents" stemmed from student interest in novel intellectual trends at the time, such as liberty, individual rights, and self-determination. Though contextual distinctions cannot be overlooked, the role of these new ideas in overturning conventional educational models is nevertheless relevant here.

Like their counterparts in the US, students at Buddhist schools in Japan interpreted some of these new ideas and approaches to learning in ways that contributed to a critical reassessment of their relationship to authority. This reassessment revealed intersecting political, generational, and ideological fault lines within the sects and their universities and led to clashes with sectarian leadership. As part of this reassessment, student-priests began taking ownership over their education, and the result was protests and collective action that challenged

conventional power dynamics within the sect. As Mark Edelman Boren (2019, 1) explains, universities are institutions that "paradoxically encourage following rules while encouraging the challenging of preconceptions." In his comparative work of historical student movements around the globe, Boren marks the mid-nineteenth century as a turning point for global student resistance, which he attributes in large part to the formation of student organizations, especially in the German states. Germany was also the model par excellence for higher education in the nineteenth century, and both the US and Japan sought to emulate the novel German research university. Boren's work primarily focuses on student political protests and thus is of a different nature than our focus. Nevertheless, his array of nineteenth-century examples of student collective action in Spain, England, France, Turkey, India, and the US reveal that in the crucible of modernization, students and universities were engaged in a dialectic of power (re) negotiations across the globe (Boren 2019, 33–49).

Rather than viewing these as parallel but disconnected phenomena, we might use political scientist Vivien A. Schmidt's (2008) "discursive institutionalism" to interpret how the Buddhist reformers and student protesters were actively engaged with this global phenomenon. The concept of discursive institutionalism addresses some of the shortcomings of new institutionalism when applied to global contexts.[18] Previous new institutionalist scholarship interpreted the worldwide diffusion of modern institutions such as museums, universities, prisons, and even symphonies, theorizing this phenomenon as "global isomorphism" (Meyer and Rowan 1991). Likewise, we may add to this list of modern institutions the global isomorphism of student protests and collective action. But global isomorphism does little to explain the role of local actors beyond seeing them as simply conforming to institutional norms. In contrast to this top-down view, discursive institutionalism approaches local actors as "utiliz[ing] world cultural discourses" to facilitate institutional change (Alasuutari 2015, 169). Accordingly, discursive institutionalism posits that *translation* rather than diffusion is a more fitting label for the processes that produce global isomorphism.

This notion of translation is relevant for understanding the push for curricular and structural changes as part of a broader process of Buddhist engagement with the emerging global cultural discourses around higher education and the category of "world religions." In the Ōtani case study, much of the conflict

18. Schmidt (2008, 305) is careful to distinguish her use of the term "discourse" from the postmodernist use of the term: Her definition is a "more generic term that encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed." "New institutionalism" is a broad umbrella term for approaches that center institutions, broadly defined. It emerged in the 1970s as a corrective response to rational choice explanations for individual interests and agency by instead revealing the dialectic ways in which institutions and individuals are co-constitutive.

centered on whether or how much to integrate new subjects from the West into Buddhist higher education. The pro-reform actors were active agents interpreting and translating these subjects for their own purposes while at the same time considering whether or how much to invest in inserting Japanese Buddhism into the developing framework of the world religions and its accompanying category of study. This kind of institutional translation work was of course taking place alongside other forms of translation, including the translation of European-language scholarship into Japanese and the production of new works on Japanese Buddhism in European languages (Iwata 2016; Stortini 2020). In the Sōtō example, students combined their understanding of the ethical and moral standards from their own tradition with the critical approaches and organizing methods emerging out of the modern university. We can glean some of the types of ideas and texts they were engaging with from the KDHN, which provides a list of texts comprising the curriculum. These included works by prominent intellectuals of the day such as Francois Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe* (1828), John William Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (1862), and Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Ethics* (1879).[19] And while the exact manner in which Sōtō students engaged with these texts is unknown,[20] their presence in the curriculum nevertheless signals an interest in participating in global discourses. This dialectic between local actors and global discourses serves as an important corrective to portrayals of unilateral or top-down diffusion of modern models of higher education.

Student Protests and the Professionalization of the Modern Priesthood

Professionalization is another helpful lens through which to comprehend the changes to the priesthood during the late nineteenth century. To grasp this process of professionalization, it is essential to examine the role of status (*mibun* 身分) in the late Tokugawa. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the status of the Buddhist priesthood was largely linked to its hegemonic authority over the temple registration system and the bureaucratic machine that it produced. The repeal of the temple registration system upended this status previ-

19. While the selection of these texts follows some major intellectual trends of the time, it is also a result of which books were brought to Japan from the US and Europe, either by foreign or Japanese scholars spending time abroad. In the latter group the most influential was Fukuzawa Yukichi (2007, 200), who said the following about his impact on foreign texts in Japan: "This use of American text books in my school [Keio University] was the cause of the adoption all over the country of American books for the following ten years or more. Naturally when students from my school in turn became teachers, they used the texts they themselves had studied. And so it was natural that those I had selected became the favored text books throughout the country."

20. The KDHN's authors caution that the list of foreign subjects and texts were largely aspirational at first, as the school lacked faculty qualified to teach all the subjects (KDHN, 140–141).

ously held by Buddhist priests. David Howell's work on the nineteenth-century transition from early modern to modern social structures contextualizes this disruption within a dissolution of the status system across all sectors of society. Howell (2005, 154) asserts that in the Meiji government's efforts to build a new centralized state, it dismantled the "internal autonomies" that characterized the Tokugawa structure, "dumping the contents of the nested boxes of the status system into the single container of imperial subjecthood." According to Howell (2005, 8–9), this transformation represented a reconceptualization of civilization itself, establishing new norms and social organization, the enforcement of which prompted the deployment of "a full Foucauldian arsenal of technologies of modernity" including schools, the military, prisons, and pageantry. This new environment, which increasingly eschewed status in favor of internalized modern norms and individual livelihood, provided fertile grounds for the professionalization of the Buddhist priesthood.

As Miura Shū (2014, 210) and James Ketelaar (1990, 215) have observed, the Meiji period signaled an important transition for the Buddhist priesthood from a *status* to a *profession* (*shoku* 職). But just what is meant by the term "profession" and the process through which this transition unfolded is underexamined in the current literature. For this, works within the field of sociology on professionalization theory can be instructive. In his research on the development of professionals in modern societies, Harold Wilensky (1964, 138) explains that "any occupation wishing to exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training, and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy." Buddhists lacked many of these elements following the Meiji Restoration. Furthermore, the overhaul in nationalized education in the Meiji period led to an increase in the average education level of the general populace. Wilensky (1964, 150) also observes that when education levels rise among the general population, one effect is "greater skepticism about matters professional, more skepticism about the certainties of practice, [and] some actual sharing in professional knowledge (the mysteries lose their enchantment)." For the priesthood, this meant the need for more schooling to maintain educational superiority over the laity.

Many Meiji-era Buddhists shared this belief that education was the ideal tool by which Buddhism could reassert its value to the state.[21] A well-educated priesthood was thus a necessity. Buddhists made an early effort in the Meiji period by actively participating in the state's Great Promulgation Campaign as National

21. Two primary examples of this were Sōtō Zen priest Hara Tanzan and Jōdo Shin priest Yoshitani Kakuju 吉谷覚寿 (1843–1914), the first two Buddhist Studies lecturers at the University of Tokyo (Klautau 2025).

Evangelists (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職) for the Great Teaching Institute. This campaign was a mobilization effort to disseminate State Shinto as the national ideology among the citizenry. When initial efforts that involved only Shinto priests failed, Buddhists were permitted to serve as National Evangelists beginning in 1872, an opportunity seized upon by many sects.[22] By 1873, Buddhists had successfully petitioned to include Buddhist themes in their preaching, and they did so by creating a Buddhist curriculum for the Great Teaching Institute that deemphasized sectarian difference and emphasized aspects of Buddhism that were useful to the state by promoting public order (Lyons 2019, 223–225). This effort, led by the Jōdo Shin sect, was significant because it was the first time Buddhists experimented with creating a modern, pan-sectarian curriculum.

Absent much of the Great Teaching Institute curricula itself, scholars have tended to rely on Great Teaching Institute examination study guides published by the Buddhist sects to glean what priests studied; these publications featured commonly shared Buddhist themes like co-dependent origination, karma, the four noble truths, buddha-nature, and morality.[23] In emphasizing trans-sectarian rationalized ethical themes, Adam Lyons (2019, 223) has argued that participation in the Great Teaching Institute is an example of Buddhists framing dharmic teachings in the language of modern civil religion. By 1875, however, it became apparent that the campaign and institute were working to undermine Buddhism in order to establish an emergent State Shinto. This led to withdrawals of support by Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1831–1911), who initially led the efforts for Buddhist inclusion in the campaign, and the Jōdo Shin sect, which represented the largest delegation of National Evangelist priests. The institute, already on tenuous financial and organizational grounds before the Jōdo Shin sect withdrawal, closed a few months later in May 1875 (Hardacre 1989, 44–48). The Great Promulgation Campaign continued without an instructional headquarters until 1884, when it, too, ended. Even after the Great Promulgation Campaign concluded and the Great Teaching Institute closed, Buddhists fought to maintain their voice in the public sphere by advocating for the ability to serve as public educators.

22. In fact, members of New Religions, Nativist Studies scholars, and even entertainers were allowed to serve as National Evangelists from 1872 as well (Hardacre 1989, 43). Numbers of National Evangelists vary widely depending on the source and date of the records used. Ogawara (2004, 51) explains that in 1874, the year prior to the Great Teaching Institute's closure, there were 3,043 Buddhist National Evangelists (out of approximately 118,000 priests nationally) and 4,204 Shinto National Evangelists (out of nearly 10,000 priests nationally). Ketelaar (1990, 105) offers much higher numbers of National Evangelists based on a record from the Bureau of Shrines and temples dated to 1880; he writes that among a total number of 103,000 evangelists, 81,000 belonged to Buddhist sects, of which Shin Buddhists made up the largest amount at almost 25,000.

23. Only a few scholars have written about these unpublished study guides (Lyons 2019).

Involvement in the Great Teaching Institute was more than just a way for Buddhists to prove their usefulness to the state: it was also a means to redefine Buddhist teachings and education for a new era and via new institutions. EJIMA Naotoshi (2014, 8) has critiqued the popular assertion that Christianity was a primary influence on Buddhist groups in the early Meiji period; he argues instead that participation in the Great Teaching Institute had a greater impact. In their interactions with the public as National Evangelists, Buddhist priests actively linked Buddhism to the reforming Meiji state and the institutions that came with it. Not only was this a valuable proselytization opportunity that many Buddhist groups found too good to pass up, the experience of educating the public on unfamiliar topics exposed gaps in priests' own knowledge about the emerging civil society, gaps that were later rectified through revisions to Buddhist curricula. Thus, early experimentations with expanded curricula at the Great Teaching Institute were important steps toward professionalization.

Wilensky's observations hold relevance among scholar-priests today, with the continuation of the same anxieties about Buddhism's "exclusive jurisdiction" and the need for public trust. In a 2004 roundtable discussion between scholars from Japanese Buddhist universities, Taisho University professor Koyama Ten'yū 小山典勇 commented:

> My personal hope is for scholars in sectarian studies and those who deal with intellectual history to pursue a much greater level of knowledge in their specializations. This specialization is what differentiates us from society in general and it's what allows us to have a critical voice. Frankly speaking, even though it's often said that religion has a degree of non-secularity or a renunciatory quality to it, in reality, unless more people who embody these qualities appear, it's difficult to convince society of religion's value. (WARD 2004, 455)

Koyama's statement highlights the effect of a continued rise in education levels into the contemporary period on the status of the priesthood. In this process that began in the Meiji period, the educational reforms pursued by protesting student-priests bore consequences for whether priests would remain members of the intellectual elite and, relatedly, contributed to the reprofessionalization of the priesthood to serve as modern educators.[24]

As we have seen, Buddhist universities served as important sites of the rebuilding process as Buddhist sects sought to claim their professional authority. For WILENSKY (1964, 142, 144), phases of professionalization begin with "doing full time the thing that needs doing," followed in short order by the need for training. The next step is to form associations, which he describes as follows:

24. This vision of priests as educators for the new state existed in theory but was never fully realized because of legal developments over the course of the Meiji period that drew stricter separations of religion and state.

> All of this is accompanied by a campaign to separate the competent from the incompetent. This involves further definition of essential professional tasks, the development of internal conflict among practitioners of varying background, and some competition with outsiders who do similar work…. The newcomers see the oldtimers [*sic*] as a block to successful professionalization; the latter see the former as upstarts… what is true of internal conflict is also apparent in external relations: hard competition with neighboring occupations seems to go with these later stages of professionalization. All occupations in the human-relations field have only tenuous claims to exclusive competence.
>
> (Wilensky 1964, 144–145)

Wilensky highlights here the commingling of internal and external pressures and competition, generational tensions, and insecurity about what he called "exclusive competence." The dynamics described here as early indicators of professionalization were present in Buddhist higher educational institutions from the earliest days of the Meiji period and are responsible for many of the external tensions and internal conflicts we have just examined.

Conclusion

To conclude, I return to my original question: how did systemic changes to Buddhist higher education make these student protests possible? Wilensky's work on professionalization paired with Schmidt's work on discursive institutionalism give us new ways to better understand some of the dialectic processes as well as the systemic consequences of the adoption of the university model. With Schmidt's discursive institutionalism, we can interpret the note-burning carried out by student-priests as an expressive act of translation. In asking Genjuin to explain his stance, the students drew on at least two conventions of the modern university. The first was students' expectation they be permitted to study Christianity as part of the exercise of academic freedom and critical inquiry required in the academic study of religion. The second was the institutional norm of questioning authority (as seen in Boren's global historical survey of protesting students). In utilizing these conventions, student-priests actively translated the isomorphic institutional form of the university for the Japanese Buddhist context.

Though Schmidt's discursive institutionalism is instructive for interpreting the act of note-burning itself, it fails to get at the underlying motivations of the protesting student-priests. For this, Wilensky's framework helps us to see student collective action as part of the tensions inherent in the professionalization process. These tensions began internally between traditional and reformer factions over how professional competence is defined. While the traditional Buddhist faction drew on preexisting models of competence, reformers argued that new professional competence was required to address the loss of status previously

vested in the priesthood. Though success for the protesting students was rarely linear, over the course of the Meiji period and into the subsequent decades of the twentieth century, the Buddhist university became increasingly central to the professionalization of the modern priesthood. The modernization of Japanese Buddhism, then, emerged not as an epistemological product but as a systemic consequence of the new Buddhist university. The Buddhist university model, translated by these student-priests, became more powerful over time, even as the institution allowed for intellectual daylight between itself and the sect. This productive tension between competing institutional priorities and intellectual freedom continues to be negotiated in Buddhist higher education in Japan today.

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ODH *Ōtani Daigaku hyakunenshi* 大谷大学百年史. Ed. Ōtani Daigaku Hensan Iinkai 大谷大学百年史編纂委員会. Ōtani Daigaku, 2001.

ODHS *Ōtani Daigaku hyakunenshi: Shiryōhen* 大谷大学百年史—資料編. Ed. Ōtani Daigaku Hensan Iinkai. Ōtani Daigaku, 2001.

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