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Reconfiguring Buddhism as a Religion Nakanishi Ushirō and His *Shin Bukkyō* **



In this paper, I focus on Nakanishi Ushirō (1859-1930), arguing that he tried to reconfigure Buddhism as a religion in mid-Meiji Period. Nakanishi conceptualized his *Shin Bukkyō* (New Buddhism) as a reformed Buddhism that was opposed to *Kyū Bukkyō* (Old Buddhism). He could be counted as one of the Buddhist reformers in mid-Meiji Period, but his arguments were somehow unique. For example, Inoue Enryō in this period insisted that Buddhism was a philosophical religion, which became popular and was considered to be an appealing Buddhist apologetics. However, Nakanishi criticized such an idea. He claimed that Buddhism was not a philosophy but a religion, emphasizing faith as the basis of *Shin Bukkyō*. While stressing the aspect of faith, Nakanishi also argued that religion must not disregard human reason. In this sense, indeed he differed from Kiyozawa Manshi or Uchimura Kanzō who developed the existential understanding of religion by solely relying on faith in the late Meiji Period. However, with his attempt to grasp religion—Buddhism—in relation with faith, or with the internal sphere of the individual, Nakanishi could be understood in a unique and transitional position in the history of religion and/or Buddhism in modern Japan.



Keywords: Nakanishi Ushirō – *Shin Bukkyō* – Buddhist apologetics – Inoue Enryō – Kiyozawa Manshi – The concept of *shūkyō*.

Introduction

In this paper, I focus on Nakanishi Ushirō 中西牛郎 (1859-1930),¹ especially on his arguments with regard to *Shin Bukkyō* 新仏教, or New Buddhism. In the context of Buddhism in modern Japan, the term *Shin Bukkyō* is most commonly associated with the so-called Shin Bukkyō movement promoted by the Bukkyō Seito Dōshi-kai

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1. Most previous works read 牛郎 as Ushio. (Cf. *Kokushi Daijiten*; Thelle 1987) However, I decided to read it as Ushirō, because there are some articles of his time stating it as Ushirō.

仏教清徒同志会 (Buddhist Puritan Society) founded in 1899 (it was later renamed Shin Bukkyōto Dōshi-kai 新仏教徒同志会, New Buddhist Society). This lay-oriented Buddhist organization was not affiliated with any Buddhist denominations, and it advocated the reform of Buddhism through its magazine *Shin Bukkyō* 新仏教, which was published from 1900 to 1915. It was this magazine that made the organization—and its *Shin Bukkyō*—famous.

Nakanishi's *Shin Bukkyō*, in comparison, was not well known, even though he explained the term *Shin Bukkyō* in his first book *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* 宗教革命論 (Treatise on the Religious Revolution) as early as 1889. Nakanishi has scarcely been mentioned in the history of Buddhism in modern Japan. If so, why is it important to consider Nakanishi's arguments?

1. Why should Nakanishi's Arguments be Considered?

His arguments concerning *Shin Bukkyō* have two interrelated claims. First, he insists on the supremacy of Buddhism over all other religions, especially Christianity. Second, he strongly calls for the reform of Buddhism. While he was convinced that Buddhism had the potential of surpassing other religions, he also thought that this potential was not fully realized by Buddhism in its current state. Therefore, he stressed that the two goals of proving its supremacy and reforming Buddhism must be pursued simultaneously.

With regard to these two claims, the former can be seen as Buddhist apologetics and the latter as part of the Buddhist reform movement in modern Japan. However, Nakanishi is not recognized as a central figure of either group. For example, in some dictionaries, he has been described as a “journalist of religions,”² and a “nationalist,”³ but not as a “Buddhist reformer,” nor even a “Buddhist.” If he is mentioned in previous research, it is often because of his short but official affiliation with the Unitarian Church (cf. Suzuki 1979; and Thelle 1987), which is not the main concern of this paper.

Furthermore, he is not the only person who attempted to combine Buddhist apologetics with the reform of Buddhism.⁴ If we consider the Buddhist reform movement, there are indeed many more prominent people in this movement, such as Inoue Enryō 井上円了, Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学, Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之

2. Cf. entry Nakanishi Ushirō in *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten* 日本キリスト教歴史大事典.

3. Cf. entry Nakanishi Ushirō in *Kokushi Daijiten* 国史大辞典.

4. For example, in his Buddhist apologetics, Inoue Enryō urged a reform of Buddhism. (Cf. Inoue 1886-7; 1887) Concerning the connection between Buddhist apologetics and the reform of Buddhism, Mori Kazuya (2007) considered Buddhist apologetics (*gohō-ron* 護法論) to be a “self-portrait” of Buddhism.

and his colleagues, and the people associated with so-called *Shin Bukkyō* movement. I do not intend to argue that Nakanishi is more important than these people in the history of Japanese Buddhism. However, I try to provide an explanation for Nakanishi's arguments and reconsider them in the context of Buddhism as a religion in modern Japan. In my view, Nakanishi promoted *Shin Bukkyō* on the basis of his own understanding of religion. In other words, he attempted to reconfigure Buddhism as a religion that had its own "religious values" independent of human wisdom; the question of how it could be independent of human wisdom will be discussed later in the paper. This rationale might appear mundane because many contemporary narratives on religion are made with the premise that religion is only that which has "religious values."⁵ However, it was certainly unique at the time Nakanishi first stated it, when his contemporaries associated Buddhism with philosophy. It is this uniqueness that I try to consider in this paper.

Even though his ideas did not start, or influence, any movement, he managed to make a certain impact on Buddhists of his time through his writings. From this perspective, investigating his arguments can contribute to the study of the construction of 'Buddhism' in modern Japan. James Edward Ketelaar (1990) has offered a number of criticisms on this issue, but this paper will cover several aspects of modern Japanese Buddhism that he did not consider.⁶

In the following section, I begin with a brief sketch of Nakanishi's life, with a focus on his interest in Buddhism. In Section 3, I will consider his understanding of *Shin Bukkyō* through a discussion of his views on religion itself. Finally, in Section 4, I will juxtapose his narratives against those concerning Buddhism and religion in modern Japan.

2. The Life and Works of Nakanishi Ushirō

2.1 Educational background

In the beginning, I should state that some basic facts about Nakanishi are still unknown. Here, however, I try to provide a brief sketch of his life, relying mainly on his own retrospection in his later life. (Cf. Nakanishi 1903; and 1929)

5. Some scholarly works focused on the historical process of forming the idea of *sui generis* religion (cf. Asad 1993; in Japanese context, Isomae 2003 and Hoshino 2006a). Although the concept of "religion" has been scholarly reconsidered, the actuality of "religion" cannot be easily denied or thrown away.
6. I would like to point out that Ketelaar does not argue about the influence of Christianity in the development of Buddhism in modern Japan, nor does he refer to prominent Buddhists such as Inoue Enryō and Murakami Senshō 村上專精, who played a lead role in understanding Buddhism in Japan around 1890. (Cf. Hayashi 2007) Nakanishi advocated his *Shin Bukkyō* based on his knowledge of Christianity

He was born in 1859 as the firstborn son of a scholar of Chinese classics who served the Kumamoto clan in Kyūshū. Owing to this background, Nakanishi Ushirō⁷ was given the status of samurai of the Kumamoto clan and obtained knowledge of the Chinese classics. In his youth, it is said that he learned English in Tokyo (at Kangaku Gijuku 勸学義塾) and Nagasaki (from Herbert Maundrell, a missionary of the Church Missionary Society). He mentioned that since he was not satisfied with the teaching imparted, he moved to Kyoto in ca. 1880⁸ and managed to study at Dōshisha Eigakkō (present-day Dōshisha University) with the help of his friend Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰.

Remembering his Dōshisha days, he wrote that he began to study both Christianity and Buddhism during this period. Marquis Lafayette Gordon, a teacher at Dōshisha University and a missionary of the American Board, gave him a Christian book written by the Scottish theologian Thomas Erskine⁹ and asked him to translate it into Japanese. Although he wrote that he completed the translation of the book, it is unfortunate that the translated version was neither published nor has been found.

Nakanishi noted that he often visited Akamatsu Renjō 赤松連城 of the Nishi-Honganji 西本願寺 branch of Jōdo Shin-shū during this period and thus remained in contact with Buddhism. How Nakanishi became acquainted with Akamatsu is not known; however, it was Akamatsu who helped him in obtaining financial support from the Honganji-ha a few years later.

Although, the exact dates of the period of Nakanishi's stay in Kyoto are unconfirmed, it is estimated that he studied there from around 1880 until the end of 1881, at most. One record states that Nakanishi taught at the Seiseikō 濟々黌, an elite private high school in Kumamoto, from January 1882 to September 1886. (See Kumamoto Kenritsu Chūgaku Seiseikō 1912: 30-31, 50) Therefore, it can be reasonably inferred that Nakanishi returned to Kumamoto around 1882 and stayed there at least until 1886.

2.2 Nakanishi's first book

Nakanishi reminisced that he completed his first book *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* (Treatise on the Religious Revolution) in 1887 (published in 1889). This book

and as a criticism of Inoue Enryō's argument.

7. Based on such knowledge, he later wrote an introductory book on Chinese classics, *Kangaku katsuron* 漢学活論 (Utilizing the Chinese Classics) in 1895.
8. One piece of circumstantial evidence is that his teacher M.L. Gordon came to Dōshisha in 1879.
9. It is possible that this book was *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* published in 1820; but this has not been confirmed.

consists of three parts: “The cause of the religious revolution,” “The incidents pertaining to the religious revolution,” and “The effects of the religious revolution.” I will discuss the details of this book later in this paper. Here, I would like to point out that Nakanishi first posited what he held to be the essence of religion, and then, based on this understanding, he juxtaposed the history of Christianity against that of Buddhism in Japan in his time. It should be noted that this book was written under the strong influence of evolution theory, the dominant ideology of the time. Through this book, Nakanishi seeks to bridge the gap between metaphysics and history; he observes that throughout the course of history, religions have appeared to be gradually evolving toward their ideal form. Based on this observation, he asserted that the Reformation of the sixteenth century should be seen as a stage in the evolution of religion, which was an ongoing process. Further, he believed that the Buddhism of his time needed such evolutionary stages.

This book was highly praised by Akamatsu Renjō. Akamatsu invited Nakanishi to Kyoto and introduced him to Ōtani Kōson 大谷光尊, the 21st chief abbot of Nishi Hongan-ji. Based on Akamatsu’s recommendation, Nakanishi was offered support from the denomination, which enabled him to travel to America. Nakanishi wrote that he intended to visit the Theosophical Society in New York; however, for some reason, he had to return to Kumamoto from San Francisco. His stay in America was rather short—from June 1889 to January 1890. (see Anonymous 1890a)

2.3 His advocacy of Shin Bukkyō

Upon returning to Japan, he was appointed as an assistant principal (*kyōtō* 教頭) of the Bungaku-ryō 文学寮 in 1890, a school of Nishi Hongan-ji.¹⁰ During this period, he worked in an unknown capacity at the Bungaku-ryō, and this appears to be the closest relationship he ever had with a Buddhist denomination. It is unclear as to what subject he taught in the school, and this should be investigated in the future. However, he actively wrote about Buddhism in this period and published several books besides *Shūkyō kakumei-ron*; he also contributed many articles to *Keisei hakugi* 経世博議 (Forum on Governing the Nation), a monthly general magazine of which he was the chief editor.

As I mentioned above, the term *Shin Bukkyō* is generally associated with the magazine *Shin Bukkyō* and the people involved in it. However, through his writings

10. There is an article in *Hansei-kai zasshi* that notes his appointment (Anonymous 1890b). Bungaku-ryō was established in 1887, in a merger with its predecessor Futsū Kyōkō, which was founded in April 1885. Futsū Kyōkō was the first school of the Honganji-ha that openly declared that it would accept students who were not Buddhist monks. This was a topic of debate within the denomination. (Cf. Tanigawa 2003)

in this period he had already advocated *Shin Bukkyō* (New Buddhism) as opposed to *Kyū Bukkyō* 旧仏教 (Old Buddhism).

2.4 His reputation during that period

A Buddhist temperance association named *Hansei-kai* 反省会 was founded in 1886 by a few students of *Futsū Kyōkō* 普通教校, a forerunner of the *Bungaku-ryō*. Since its claim of temperance was closely related with that of Buddhist reform, it is described as a pioneer of the Buddhist reform movement. (See Fujiwara 2004: 114) The magazine *Hansei-kai zasshi* 反省会雑誌,¹¹ first published in 1889, is what made the association *Hansei-kai* famous and influential.

Around 1890, this magazine carried several articles that favorably mentioned Nakanishi. For example, in an article that listed six books that promote true Buddhism, two of Nakanishi's books, namely, *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* and *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron* 組織仏教論 (Treatise on Systematic Buddhism), were selected alongside the renowned *Bukkyō katsuron* 仏教活論 by Inoue Enryō.¹² Moreover, a reader in Tokyo submitted an article that listed fifteen "important pairs" in Buddhist society, in which Nakanishi and Inoue were listed as a pair and were described as "the two brave generals of new Buddhist literature." (*Reireikoji* 1891: 20-21) Some other articles too paired Nakanishi with Inoue (for example, *Kedō* 1891; *Mokumokukoji* 1891), and it is observed that both were highly regarded by the writers and readers of *Hansei-kai zasshi*.

As indicated by previous authors, Inoue's writings were epoch-making in the history of Buddhist apologetics in modern Japan because he drew from modern scientific knowledge and, above all, Western philosophy while arguing in favor of Buddhism. (See Mineshima 1975; Serikawa 1987) In this sense, Inoue's contribution toward the modernization of Buddhism cannot be overemphasized. (Ikeda 1998: 323) At this point, however, I would like to point out that Nakanishi was also highly esteemed in this period. His writings did have a certain impact on his contemporaries, even though they are not often mentioned today.

For example, in 1901, Kiyozawa Manshi studied Nakanishi's *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron*, Inoue's *Bukkyō katsu-ron*, and Murakami Senshō's *Bukkyō ikkan-ron* 仏教一貫論, and described these books as three pioneering works that argued in favor of Buddhism from a philosophical viewpoint.¹³ Certainly, Kiyozawa's *Seishin shugi* 精神主義 tried

11. The name of *Hansei-kai zasshi* changed to *Hansei zasshi* 反省雑誌 in May 1892, and to *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 in January 1899.

12. YB (unknown) 1890. The six books are *Bukkyō wakumon* 仏教惑問 by Saitō Monshō, *Bukkyō ikkan-ron* 仏教一貫論 by Murakami Senshō, *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* by Nakanishi Ushirō, *Bukkyō katsu-ron* 仏教活論 by Inoue Enryō, *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron* by Nakanishi Ushirō, and *Bukkyō taii* 仏教大意 by Shaku Unshō.

13. Cf. Kiyozawa (1901: 61-65). Kiyozawa's perception contradicted Nakanishi's own self-

to counter such philosophical narratives on Buddhism. However, it was through encounters with such narratives in and around 1890 that Kiyozawa had deepened his own understanding of Buddhism,¹⁴ and Nakanishi's works were certainly of influence.

2.5 His developments later in life

In July 1892, he was dismissed from the Bungaku-ryō. (Kōsaka 1937b: 28) He reminisces that he got into bad terms with Fujishima Ryō'on 藤島了穩, the housemaster (*ryōchō* 寮長) of the Bungaku-ryō, for some reason. This caused antagonism between the students supporting him and those supporting Fujishima. As the dispute became uncontrollable, the denomination decided to dismiss both him and Fujishima. Therefore, he never worked with the denomination again; however, Fujishima still remained an important part of it. As mentioned above, Nakanishi's writings were highly regarded by some Buddhists; at the same time, his arguments caused a lot of controversy. According to Nakanishi, there were many attacks on him from "the stubborn and obsessed *Kyū Bukkyō*" in this period. (Nakanishi 1893a: 211)

Thereafter, he joined the Unitarian Church in Tokyo and became the chief editor of its magazine *Shūkyō* 宗教 (Religion).¹⁵ He contributed some articles on Buddhism to this magazine, which suggest that his interest in Buddhism continued. This turn may sound sudden and strange; however, it should be pointed out that he had genuine interest in Unitarianism and had acquired knowledge of it as well, perhaps by reading Christian books.¹⁶ Further, he was convinced that Unitarianism was compatible with Buddhism in its true form; he even stated that Unitarianism could help in the reform of Buddhism by *jiyū tōkyū* 自由討究, or free discussion of religion, and he criticized old Buddhists for persecuting the Buddhist reform movement. (Cf. Nakanishi 1894b)

Nonetheless, regardless of his intentions, his reputation among Buddhists virtually withered away. He was described as a betrayer and was criticized alongside

understanding expressed in *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron*—Nakanishi claimed that philosophy could not totally explain Buddhism. In my view, this gap explains Nakanishi's transitional position between philosophical religion and existential religion. I will discuss this point later in this paper.

14. Cf. Mineshima 1970. Also, Hino Keigo 日野圭悟 suggested to me that Kiyozawa's understanding of faith was based on his disagreement with philosophical issues such as pantheism.
15. Nakanishi is thought to have become affiliated with the Unitarian Church in March 1894 (cf. Nakanishi 1894a); however, he might have joined earlier.
16. Nakanishi already mentioned Unitarianism in *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* (1889), and his consistent interest in it can be observed throughout his writings at this period.

Saji Jitsunen 佐治実然, another ex-Buddhist who had joined the Unitarian Church.¹⁷ As Kōsaka Kuraji (1937b: 28) noted, although the impact of Nakanishi's writings was far from negligible, it did not last long. Soon, he left the Unitarian Church in 1895, however, because he became disappointed with Unitarianism when he found out that it was incompatible with Buddhism.

The details of his life after this incident are rather sketchy. It is known that he wrote the book *Gongo hōjō* 嚴護法城 (Strict Protection of the Dharma Castle) in 1897, which supported Atsumi Kaien 渥美契縁 by criticizing the Buddhist reform movement. He then turned to Tenri-kyō 天理教 in 1900. Tenri-kyō is a new religion founded by Nakayama Miki in 1863, and became very popular at this time. However, many people, especially intellectuals, accused it of being an immoral and pernicious religion (*inshi jakyō* 淫祠邪教) and the government monitored it. Under such circumstances, esteeming Nakanishi for his knowledge of religions, Tenri-kyō leaders invited and asked him to help reorganize its rituals and doctrines (Kaneko 1976), in order to receive official recognition by the government. With the new version of doctrines, Tenri-kyō was given the status of an independent religion in 1908, and Nakanishi wrote two books on Tenri-kyō in this period: *Shūkyō-dan* 宗教談 (Discourse on Religion, 1903) and *Kami no jitsugen to shite no Tenri-kyō* 神の実現としての天理教 (Tenrikyō as the Realization of *Kami*, 1929). In his last years, he was invited to Fusō-kyō, one of the thirteen sects of prewar Shintō, and edited its doctrine.¹⁸ Nakanishi died in 1930, though details of his death are not known.

Apparently, Nakanishi's developments in his later life make him less popular and a more difficult person to study, especially if one concentrates on a certain denomination or a certain religious tradition. In my view, on the one hand Nakanishi kept his own vision of an ideal religion which was never achieved to the end; on the other hand, he utilized his knowledge of religions to earn his living.

3 His Arguments in Favor of Shin Bukkyō

3.1 Shin Bukkyō in the mid-Meiji Period

In this section, I focus on Nakanishi's arguments in favor of *Shin Bukkyō*. However, I will begin with a brief explanation of the term *Shin Bukkyō* in the mid-Meiji Period. The term *Shin Bukkyō* means "New Buddhism." From mid-Meiji through the Taishō Period, it is often used in contrast with *Kyū Bukkyō* (Old Buddhism), inferring that Buddhism must be reformed from the old into the new.

17. See Anonymous 1895. Saji Jitsunen was referred to as a "corrupt Buddhist monk" in the article "Yunitarian-kyō." (Anonymous 1893)

18. It is said that a Fusō-kyō leader from Kumamoto wished that Nakanishi elaborates its doctrines. See Araki (1957: 391-392).

Especially in the mid-Meiji Period, there was a popular idea that Buddhism was something anachronistic; the term reflected the sense of crisis among some Buddhist priests and laymen, who thought it was important to counter such an idea by accomplishing its reform.

Although it is not clear who created the term for the first time, Nakanishi's *Shin Bukkyō-ron* 新仏教論 (Treatise on New Buddhism) published in 1892 is thought to be the first book including the term *Shin Bukkyō* in its title. Moreover, a few years earlier, Nakanishi had already explained his *Shin Bukkyō* in his first book *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* published in 1889, dedicating the entire last chapter of it to the description of *Shin Bukkyō*. It seems that Nakanishi and Inoue Enryō were in the leading position concerning the arguments on *Shin Bukkyō*; they were, as mentioned above, described as “the two brave generals of new Buddhist literature.” (Reireikoji 1891: 20-21)

3.2 His works concerning *Shin Bukkyō*

After his first book *Shūkyō kakumei-ron*, published in 1889, Nakanishi wrote several books on Buddhism: *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron* in 1890, *Shūkyō taisei-ron* 宗教大勢論 (On The General Tendency on Religion) in 1891, *Shin Bukkyō-ron* 新仏教論 (On New Buddhism), and *Bukkyō dainan-ron* 仏教大難論 (On Problems of Buddhism) in 1892.

Throughout these works, Nakanishi consistently advocated *Shin Bukkyō*, though each focused on a different aspect of *Shin Bukkyō*. *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* mainly tried to present the relationship between Buddhism and civilization, with Christianity and the history of the West as a frame of reference; he argued that the Reformation was one step of *shūkyō kakumei* 宗教革命 (revolution of religion). As Roman Catholicism was reformed into Protestant Christianity, he wrote, *Kyū Bukkyō* must be reformed into *Shin Bukkyō*, claiming that Buddhism also needed a revolution.

Soshiki Bukkyō-ron was an attempt to develop *Soshiki Bukkyō* 組織仏教, that is, what he envisioned as “systematic Buddhism.” According to him, this was similar to the systematic theology of Christianity, and he urged the need for a unified Buddhist theology that pursued a pan-Buddhist truth. In this sense, he was convinced that there was the pan-Buddhist truth that was consistent among all Buddhist denominations or among each form of Buddhism, for example, Theravada or Mahayana. In addition, he emphasized the importance of comparing Buddhism with other religious traditions, for other religions might contribute some partial truths and help in the evolution of Buddhism toward its ideal form. *Shūkyō taisei-ron* is similar to *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* in the way it deals with civilization, except that it provides a detailed discussion of the relationship between philosophy and religion.

His claim of *Shin Bukkyō* was highly regarded by some young Buddhists of the time, such as Furukawa Rōsen 古河老川¹⁹ and Nōmi Yutaka 能海寛,²⁰ however, at the same time, it received much criticism from others, as he noted in *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron*. Through *Shin Bukkyō-ron*, he tried to reply to such criticism; thus, it is very important to study *Shin Bukkyō-ron* for understanding his *Shin Bukkyō*—its strengths and its weaknesses—though most of the core ideas presented in *Shin Bukkyō-ron* were already introduced in previous works.

The theme of *Bukkyō dainan-ron* is slightly different because it discusses the relationship between Buddhism and politics as well as the method of Buddhist studies. While it is true that after publishing *Shūkyō kakumei-ron*, he consistently criticized actual Buddhism, his criticism is harsher in *Bukkyō dainan-ron*. He criticized high-ranking Buddhist priests for hindering the reform of Buddhism, and further, he condemned the hierarchical system of Buddhist denominations. Apparently, he was far from satisfied with the situation of Buddhist society at that time.

His next book *Sekai sansei-ron* 世界三聖論 (On the Three Saints of the World), which was published in 1893, presented a comparison of religions rather than dealing with Buddhist reform. This work compares Buddha, Confucius, and Christ, and thus Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity.

As I pointed out above, Nakanishi's motivation in reforming Buddhism into *Shin Bukkyō* was maintained even after he joined the Unitarian Church; however, Nakanishi's reputation decreased in Buddhist society, in which he had no strong foothold. Therefore, although Nakanishi's activity should be examined more thoroughly, it could be said that his arguments on *Shin Bukkyō* were losing its appeal for contemporary Buddhists.

3.3 The characteristics of his notion of Shin Bukkyō

3.3.1 Contrast with Kyū Bukkyō

As mentioned above, Nakanishi contrasted *Shin Bukkyō* (New Buddhism) with *Kyū Bukkyō* (Old Buddhism). Such ideas were clearly presented in several key theses in *Shūkyō kakumei-ron*:

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19. Furukawa Rōsen was a leading Hansei-kai member and he is understood as a forerunner of *Shin Bukkyō* movement promoted by the Bukkyō Seito Dōshi-kai in the late-Meiji Period. (Cf. Yoshida 1970: 123-124) Furukawa's high regard for Nakanishi can be found in his "Nijūyōnen igo no nidai kyōto." (Furukawa 1891, 5)
 20. Nōmi Yutaka was an Hansei-kai member and known for his failed attempt to reach Tibet. Takamoto Yasuko (2009) pointed out that Nōmi was very much impressed by Nakanishi's argument at that time.

- (1) *Shin Bukkyō* is progressive, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is conservative.
 - (2) *Shin Bukkyō* is open to common people, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is elitist.
 - (3) *Shin Bukkyō* is spiritual, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is materialistic.²¹
 - (4) *Shin Bukkyō* is based on faith, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is based on learning.²²
 - (5) *Shin Bukkyō* is active in society, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is satisfied as it is.
 - (6) *Shin Bukkyō* is historical, while *Kyū Bukkyō* is dogmatic.
 - (7) *Shin Bukkyō* is based on reason, while *Kyū Bukkyō* still clings to superstitions.
- (Chapter 12 of SKR: “*Kyū Bukkyō* must be reformed into *Shin Bukkyō*”)

We can observe a sharp contrast between *Shin Bukkyō* and *Kyū Bukkyō*. Such contrast is the central idea of *Shin Bukkyō*, which was repeated several times throughout his works in this period, and it certainly attracted some Buddhists. An editorial article written by Furukawa Rōsen in *Hansei-kai zasshi* mentioned these issues and commented that it “completely agrees with such comparisons.” (Furukawa Rōsen 1891: 5)

3.3.2 Unification rather than separation

Since Nakanishi severely criticized Buddhism as it existed in his time, both his supporters and opponents thought that he aimed to establish a new Buddhist organization. However, in *Shin Bukkyō-ron*, he made it clear that he never intended to create a new organization, for it would lead to conflict among Buddhists. He advocated *tōitsu* 統一 (unification) rather than *bunri* 分離 (separation), and *chōwa* 調和 (harmony) rather than *tōsō* 鬭争 (struggle). (ShBR: 7) Further, he envisioned the reform of Buddhism into a unified and harmonized religion. What was urgently needed was the reform of existing Buddhist denominations, not the establishment of a new one. Besides, in his opinion, such reform was to be made not by “external measures” but “the faith within.” (ShBR: 3) He believed that *Shin Bukkyō* could be realized by a series of such reforms and that radical means were not needed.

In this sense, he intended to be a reformist rather than a revolutionist, even though he did not have a firm foothold in any Buddhist denomination, or even in any Buddhist organization. This explains, to some extent, his emphasis on his idealistic and interpretative aspects in reforming Buddhism; he claimed that *Shin Bukkyō* was not another Buddhist organization, but that it “thinks of Buddhism more profoundly” and “interprets Buddhism with a view broader than that of conventional Buddhists.” (ShBR: 9)

21. He also wrote “*Shin Bukkyō* considers material as a means, while *Kyū Bukkyō* considers it to be a goal.” (SKR: 180)

22. He wrote “Learning means knowledge, faith means practice.” (SKR: 180)

3.3.3. *Ideal rather than practical*

Nakanishi's polarization between the "ideal" and the "practical" can be observed, and his emphasis on the idealistic aspects raised questions with regard to the practical implementation of *Shin Bukkyō*. As mentioned above, in *Shūkyō kakumei-ron*, Nakanishi claimed that *Shin Bukkyō* must be actively practiced in society. Further, in *Shin Bukkyō-ron*, he wrote that merely creating ideas is not sufficient, but that these ideas should also be practiced. However, he stated that such practice could be started only after an idealistic basis was established. He claimed that social or political activities merely represent the "exterior aspects" of Buddhism; the practice of Buddhism must be guided from "within," based on nothing but "faith" or "conviction." (Chapter 2 of ShBR: "The First Step in the Practice of *Shin Bukkyō*") Thus, he wrote that *Shin Bukkyō* was "not operational but rather speculative, not institutional but rather influential, not materialistic but rather idealistic." (ShBR: 9)

In summary, Nakanishi thought that although *Shin Bukkyō* was in sharp contrast to Buddhism as it existed at the time, it should not take the form of a new, independent Buddhist organization. Rather, it would be achieved through the reform of conventional Buddhism that especially focused on idealistic aspects. In this sense, he held some image of an "ideal Buddhism" in his mind and projected it as *Shin Bukkyō*, the goal that must be pursued. In this respect, it is necessary to clarify what he considered as the ideal form of Buddhism. In other words, what kind of "religion" should Buddhism become?

3.4 *His understanding of religion*

As stated above, Nakanishi emphasized faith and belief as the basis of *Shin Bukkyō*. In this regard, it cannot be denied that this reflected his own conviction about Buddhism. He wrote: "My faith in Buddhism will not be shaken even if the universe is destroyed. Furthermore, I am convinced that the truth of Buddhism is above criticism based on secular knowledge." (Nakanishi 1891b)

However, by focusing on a subjective commitment to Buddhism, he also intended to protect the realm of "religion" from secular and academic knowledge. To understand his arguments concerning religion itself, it is important to remember that the concept of modern "religion" was newly introduced into Japan with its translation *shūkyō* 宗教 in the Meiji Period. (Cf. Isomae 2003) Nakanishi had to define religion itself before arguing about Buddhism. In this course, he claimed that human knowledge could not totally explain religion, and thus, Buddhism.

3.4.1 "Revealed Religion" as the essence of religion

Nakanishi argued that there are two types of religion: *Shizen-kyō* 自然教 and *Kenji-kyō* 顕示教, which mean "Natural Religion" and "Revealed Religion,"

respectively. (SKR: 1)²³ According to him, “Natural Religion” is a religion that can be studied and understood through science and philosophy. Thus, he concluded that “Natural Religion” lies within the realm of human wisdom. On the other hand, “Revealed Religion” is a religion that “reveals something that can be neither studied nor understood by human wisdom, something that shows its infinite and eternal nature” (SKR: 2) and should be considered as being distinct from “Natural Religion.”

He wrote that “being natural and revealed are two important elements of religion” (SKR: 2) and argued that all religions have both natural and revelatory aspects at the same time. However, he concluded that the definitive aspect of religion was “revelation”—Chapter 2 of *Shūkyō kakumei-ron* was titled “*Shūkyō* is the matter posited by revelation.” Such “revelation” transcends human wisdom; therefore, the “so-called true revelation is not within the reach of science or philosophy.” (SKR: 16-17) In this sense, he focused on the “infinite and eternal nature” of religion, and considered this to be essential. Such an idea is in contrast with the conception that being rational is essential to religion, which was more common at that time.

3.4.2 Religious and Buddhist apologetics

Although Nakanishi’s intention was merely to promote Buddhism, he began by arguing about religion itself or the essence of religion, recognizing both Christianity and Buddhism as religions. Admitting that Christianity was also a religion, he insisted that Buddhism can be a more advanced religion and argued that monotheism would evolve into pantheism, which Buddhism would embody in its ideal form.

His understanding of religion, Christianity, and Buddhism was different from that of his contemporaries, such as Inoue Enryō. He knew that:

Some Japanese scholars considered Buddhism as the philosophical religion and Christianity as the revealed religion, and then compared them as different religions. In my view, however, Christianity and Buddhism are not different in that they have a basis in human nature and contain revelatory aspects. (SKR: 2-3)

Here, he criticized both Buddhist and Christian apologetics in their logic concerning religion. For him, it was simply wrong to claim Buddhism is the philosophical religion and Christianity not, or Christianity is the revealed religion and Buddhism not, for both religions had both philosophical and revelatory aspects.

I would like to mention that the Kozaki Hiromichi’s 小崎弘道 argument is a good example of Christian apologetics which Nakanishi tried to criticize. Kozaki, one of the leading Japanese Christians at that time, insisted in 1886 in his book *Seikyō*

23. With regard to these categories, Nakanishi mentioned that such classification was done by “Western Scholars.” Considering his intellectual background, these categories are obviously borrowed from Christian theology.

shinron 政教新論 (New Treatise on Politics and Religion) that Christianity is the only revealed religion, while all other religions are natural religions. (Cf. Hoshino 2001) Kozaki categorized Christianity as a revealed religion and Buddhism as a natural religion, whereas Nakanishi found both aspects in Buddhism as well as in Christianity. Even though they utilized similar categories, they drew different conclusions that suited their different purposes.

As to Buddhist apologetics, Inoue Enryō's argument is a good example. Inoue insisted that there are two aspects of religion, namely, emotional and intellectual. While he admitted that religion has an emotional aspect, he declared it to be obsolete. For him, present-day religions must be intellectual and should be in accord with reason. (Inoue 1886-7: *Zokuzokuhen*, part 3) Thus, Inoue attempted to promote Buddhism based on reason. He asserted that Christianity only has the emotional aspect, while Buddhism contains both emotional and intellectual aspects. (Inoue 1886-7: *Zokuzokuhen*, part 3) He wrote: "the reason I denounce Christianity" is because it is "incompatible with contemporary academic theories." (Inoue 1886-7: *Shohen*, part 1) Therefore, he concluded, Buddhism is superior to Christianity since the latter lacks the intellectual aspect.

It should be pointed out that the idea of Buddhism as a philosophical religion, which Inoue advocated,²⁴ had become popular and was considered to be a new and appealing form of Buddhist apologetics at that time. This could be understood as a reversal of the previous Christian apologetics that considered Buddhism as a religion inconsistent with advances in human knowledge.²⁵ By utilizing the knowledge of (Western) philosophy, Inoue insisted that Buddhism be more consistent with advanced human knowledge; such an argument was acclaimed by Buddhists of his time who had faced criticism from Christians.

Nakanishi, however, objected to such apologetics about Buddhism. He criticized *Kyū Bukkyō* for being based on learning and insisted that *Shin Bukkyō* be based on faith; according to him, the proof of superiority of a certain religion could not be based on whether it is in accord with human knowledge or not. While he did not object to grasping religion through philosophy, he insisted that such an attempt can neither totally explain one's faith, nor cover "religious values." (SoBR: 169) According to him, religion is "never the result of rational speculation or logical construction."

24. Jason Josephson (2006: 159) pointed out that the sense of something absolute that is beyond reason is observed in Inoue Enryō by analyzing Inoue's text *Meishin to shūkyō* 迷信と宗教 (Superstition and Religion) originally written in 1916. My point here, however, is that Inoue did not esteem something that is not in accord with reason in this mid-Meiji Period.

25. Such Christian narratives were supported by the idea that Christianity, like science, was integral to (Western) civilization. Thus, "higher criticism," which interprets the Bible as a historical text, had a significant impact on Japanese Christians of the Meiji Period. (Cf. Ballhatchet 1996)

(SoBR: 174) What Nakanishi claimed is that Buddhism, as a religion, has a revelatory, that is, transcendental, aspect, or “religious values,” as well as Christianity.

In this sense, Nakanishi was convinced that the definitive aspect of religion is its own “religious values,” and that religion must be distinguished from philosophy. He wrote: “philosophy is posited by theories, so that theories could defeat it. Religion is not posited by theories, so that theories could not defeat it.” (SoBR: 174) While he knew that apologetics of a certain religion relying on philosophy might succeed, he realized that such a theory might backfire against that religion itself—he learned that Christianity was once defended, and then was attacked by theories relying on human knowledge.

3.4.3 Religion and reason

As mentioned above, Nakanishi asserted that religion had its own values and this thus distinguished religion from philosophy. It is this notion that makes his understanding of religion unique for his time. At the same time, however, he did not insist that religion be something that depends only on faith. For him, religion must not disregard reason or the laws of human thought. He explained:

Referring to something as being more than human wisdom means that it is above reason, but never contrary to reason. Something that is above reason can never be attained through mundane reasoning or academic knowledge. However, something that is contrary to reason is contrary to the laws of human thought, such as recognizing one as two, or positing an effect without a cause. Therefore, although a revelation is not gained by reasoning or knowledge, why does something that is contrary to the laws of human thought convince me? It should be known that such distinction is critical in determining whether a revelation is true or false. (SKR: 17)

Here, he asserted that a true religion would never be contrary to reason. While he granted that the definitive aspect of religion was “above reason,” such a religion was eventually developed through reason. In another article in this period, he wrote that “people cannot be convinced of supernatural phenomena that are contrary to the general and natural laws.” (Nakanishi 1890b) In this sense, even though he admitted that religious values are independent of human knowledge, religion, in his mind, could not overstep the boundary of reason; he, as well as his contemporaries, was convinced of the importance of human reason.²⁶

26. His optimistic views on evolution of the universe were interrelated with this conviction.

4. Christianity as a Challenge and Religion as a Model

When describing the reaction of Buddhists to Christianity in the early Meiji Period, Natto R. Thelle (1987: 196) used the phrase “Christianity as a challenge and a model.” Nakanishi did actually read about Christianity, and was apparently even influenced by it. Furthermore, he advanced apologetics of Buddhism while referring to Christianity. Thus, it can be said that his belief is a typical example of Thelle’s observation. In Nakanishi’s opinion, however, the model was not just Christianity but religion itself. He began his arguments by positing religion as being beyond Christianity. While borrowing concepts such as “Revealed Religion” and “Natural Religion” from Christian theology, he tried to reconfigure them as universal ones that could be applied not only to Christianity, but also to Buddhism, as well as to all other religions. In other words, he strove for generalizing concepts concerning religion, although they were originally derived from Christianity; this was similar to what the pioneers of comparative religion attempted. In this sense, although his aim was to defend Buddhism, his arguments functionally served to defend the realm of religion that could include all religious traditions.

5. Reconfiguring Buddhism as a Religion

Based on such an understanding of religion, Nakanishi advocated *Shin Bukkyō*. He believed that Buddhism in its ideal form was the one true religion while reiterating that Buddhism as it existed must be thoroughly reformed. In this sense, since he considered *Shin Bukkyō* to be associated with the ideal religion, it could be said that he attempted to reconfigure Buddhism as a religion that was based on faith and was independent of human knowledge. It seems that while emphasizing the metaphysical aspects of religion, he failed to view religion as a tangible organization. This might be partly because he did not have a strong association with any of the Buddhist denominations, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, he imagined religion as an abstract concept rather than a this-worldly association. While it is true that he tried to protect Buddhism by this act of reconfiguration, at the same time, the ultimate result may have restricted Buddhism to being only an abstract “religion.” He seem to have disregarded the other—non-“religious”—aspects of “religion,” such as practices including prayers, meditation, and rituals on the one hand, and so-called ‘superstition’ on the other.

It has been already pointed out that the term *shūkyō* in modern Japan came to be strongly associated with ‘belief’ aspects, such as doctrines, and to lose ties with ‘practice’ aspects, such as rituals. (Cf. Isomae 2003) In other words, there was a current that *shūkyō* came to be understood as something related to individual’s internal sphere. With his emphasis on idealistic and interpretative aspects,

Nakanishi's conception of *Shin Bukkyō* went well with such a current; or rather, reflexively, his discourse somehow functioned as a driving force behind it.

6. Nakanishi's "Religious Values"

To close this study, let me say that Nakanishi's insistence on "religious values" can be described as being a forerunner of the attempts to identify the essence of religion within religion itself, which we might refer to as the "philosophy of religion." On the one hand, Nakanishi's stress on the importance of subjective commitment to religion, such as faith or belief, was, in comparison with the Buddhist apologetics of his contemporaries, unique.²⁷ On the other hand, his religion, and thus his *Shin Bukkyō*, was something that could not overstep the boundary of reason. According to him, religion was indeed granted its own autonomous realm. Autonomy, however, was not unconditional. In 1893, when Inoue Tetsujirō's 井上哲次郎 *Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突 (The Clash of Education and Religion) raised several controversies, Nakanishi declared that national polity (*kokutai* 国体) be placed above the realm of religion, while admitting that religion is universal. (Nakanishi 1893b; cf. Hoshino 2006b)

In summary, Nakanishi Ushirō's position in the history of Buddhism in modern Japan, as well as that of religion, can be understood as a transitional one. While he was certainly unique among his contemporaries, in that he held and expressed a sense of subjective commitment to Buddhism,²⁸ he did not carry through his existential understanding of religion, unlike such figures as Kiyozawa Manshi or Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三.²⁹ As Kiyozawa mentioned Nakanishi's *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron* as a philosophical argument of Buddhism in his retrospect (Kiyozawa 1901: 61-65) regardless of Nakanishi's self-understanding that philosophy could not explain religion, it seems that Nakanishi's argument was not sufficient from Kiyozawa's viewpoint. In other words, while he imagined religion as having a sense of autonomy—through ideas such as "the faith within" and "external measures" (ShBR: 3)—he simultaneously placed a certain limit on that autonomy. In this sense, while his arguments were transitional, it foresaw the conditioned autonomy that religion in modern Japan would embrace.

27. In grasping religion, Nakanishi hinted at the importance of religious practice against knowledge. Although this is an interesting point, he did not develop it further.

28. In my view, he was unique not because he had a subjective commitment to Buddhism, but because he had a strong vocabulary to theorize and express it.

29. Shimazono Susumu (2008) recently highlighted the significance of Kiyozawa Manshi and Uchimura Kanzō in the history of religion in modern Japan, for their existential understanding of religion.

Conclusion

On the one hand, it is common to say that in the late-Meiji Period Kiyozawa Manshi left a deep impact on Buddhism in modern Japan, as well as on other religious traditions. (Cf. Ikeda 1976; Shimazono 2008) On the other hand, when focusing on Buddhism in the mid-Meiji Period, most previous studies highlight Inoue Enryō. (See, for example, Mineshima; 1975, and Serikawa 1987) It is true that Inoue's assertion of Buddhism as a philosophical religion in the mid-Meiji Period had a great impact on his contemporaries. However, in my view, such an assertion does not lead to the argument of Kiyozawa who emphasized one's 'faith' towards religion. In this paper, I tried to locate Nakanishi Ushirō in a transitional position between two understandings of Buddhism, that is, Buddhism as a philosophical religion in the mid-Meiji Period and Buddhism as nothing but a religion in the late-Meiji Period. Nakanishi's arguments in favor of *Shin Bukkyō* could be understood as an attempt to reconfigure Buddhism as a religion, not as a philosophy.

Furthermore, my point is that Nakanishi theorized that a religion must be based on certain transcendental "religious values." Even though his arguments of "religious values" had certain limitations—they were not religious enough from Kiyozawa's viewpoint—his focus on them was closely related to the current concerning religion itself in modern Japan. Thus, examining Nakanishi's *Shin Bukkyō* would help in understanding how such a general current mutually interrelated with a religious tradition, in this case Buddhism, in modern Japan.

Abbreviations

SKR = *Shūkyō Kakumei-ron*
 SoBR = *Soshiki Bukkyō-ron*
 ShBR = *Shin Bukkyō-ron*

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