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Twenty-First Century Research on *Seishinshugi*

1. *Two works on Seishinshugi*

One hundred years after the fact, we are at last in a position to approach the truth about *Seishinshugi*, the famous Buddhist reform movement launched in late Meiji by Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863-1903)¹ and his followers through their Buddhist journal *Seishinkai* 精神界 (1901-1918). Until now, *Seishinshugi* 精神主義² has been understood as an intellectual movement led by Kiyozawa and carried forward by those who shared his faith. In the period when it was launched, contemporaries commonly viewed it this way. In the post-war period when it became an object of historical research, the standard assumption was always that *Seishinshugi* was the culminating point in Kiyozawa's thought and the religious movement developed by his followers on that basis.

However, it seems that this assumption rests upon a series of misunderstandings. *Seishinshugi* was indeed an intellectual movement led by Kiyozawa and his followers. Yet Kiyozawa and his followers each held opinions and faith different from one another. To a certain extent, this diversity managed to co-exist within the form of a single movement, but it also repeatedly gave rise to disagreement and conflict. In other words, there existed no singular, commonly

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1. Translator's note: Kiyozawa Manshi was a Buddhist cleric within the Ōtani branch 大谷派 of the Jōdo Shin sect 浄土真宗 (commonly abbreviated as "Shin").
2. Translator's note: *Seishinshugi* has most commonly been translated into English as "Spiritualism" or "Spiritual Activism." However, "Spiritualism" is problematic for its association with the Western movement related to communication with spirits of the dead; "Spiritual Activism," on the other hand, is problematic for conferring a sense of social activism on the movement – a highly disputed point. Other suggested translations are also problematic: "cultivating spirituality," "spirit-ism," "spiritual awareness," and "idealism." If Western-language scholars and students are to join in the project of "approaching an understanding of the true nature of *Seishinshugi*," it may be necessary to jettison these misleading translations and use the original term.

shared intellectual movement called *Seishinshugi*; rather, there existed a complex movement carried out by multiple individuals who harbored diverse points of view.

YAMAMOTO Nobuhiro's 2011 "*Seishinshugi*" *wa dare no shisō ka* (Whose Thought is 'Seishinshugi?') brought these facts into view through meticulous textual critique and investigation of the persons involved. One can say that it is no longer possible to discuss *Seishinshugi* without building upon Yamamoto's argument. This book has brought about a kind of paradigm shift in *Seishinshugi* research. The first purpose of this review essay is to discuss the scope of Yamamoto's research and the issues that arise from it.

Two years after the publication of Yamamoto's work, a new study on *Seishinshugi* was published by the same publisher (Hōzokan) in the same series (*Nihon bukkyōshi kenkyū sōsho* 日本仏教史研究叢書). This was KONDŌ Shuntarō's 2013 *Tennōsei kokka to "seishinshugi"* (The Imperial State and 'Seishinshugi'). To roughly summarize its contents, it presents empirical evidence for the claim that from the late Meiji period (1868-1912) through the Shōwa period's Fifteen Year War (1931-1945), Kiyozawa Manshi's and his followers' *Seishinshugi* movement functioned to support the authority of the "imperial state."

Treating *Seishinshugi* as a monolithic movement, Kondō's work focuses on critiquing its historical function. In light of Yamamoto's work, one has to say that the assumptions underlying Kondō's argument are flawed. Indeed, there are points in the text that rest upon considerable misunderstanding. Despite this fatal flaw, Kondō's work still has great significance as *Seishinshugi* research. In the history of the modern Japanese nation-state, what social function was performed by the intellectual movement of powerful Buddhists who spoke out under the name *Seishinshugi*? Kondō's work, based on a careful investigation of this question, produces valuable findings. This essay's second purpose is to critically examine the significance of those findings.

One century after the fact, what potential is there in new twenty-first century research into the history of *Seishinshugi*, which is understood to have been an intellectual peak of modern Japanese Buddhism? I will try to shed light on this by reviewing the aforementioned two works on *Seishinshugi* and briefly investigating a few topics that emerge.

2. "*Seishinshugi*" *wa dare no shisō ka* by Yamamoto Nobuhiro

Whose thought is *Seishinshugi*? Until the 2011 publication of Yamamoto's work bearing this title (or until publication of a few articles³ that provided the foundation for that work), the prevailing view was that "*Seishinshugi* is the thought of Kiyozawa Manshi in his final years" or "the thought of Kiyozawa in his final years as inherited

3. See Yamamoto 2009 and 2010.

by his disciples.” But as Yamamoto’s claims are gradually accepted, it is becoming the norm among scholars conversant with the latest research to view *Seishinshugi* as neither the thought of Kiyozawa in his final years, nor something having that as its foundation.

Well then whose thought is *Seishinshugi*? It is the joint product of the various strands of thought of Kiyozawa and his multiple followers – or that at least is our most correct understanding at present. Yamamoto’s work made a great contribution to *Seishinshugi* research by empirically establishing this new understanding. I present a summary of his work below.

Kiyozawa’s thought is often discussed in terms of a division between his “early period” and “later period.” The period until the mid-1890s, during which time he put his efforts toward studying religious philosophy, is understood as his “early period”; the subsequent years leading up to his death in 1903, during which time he developed his *Seishinshugi* thought, is understood as his “later period.” However, if one compares the representative work of Kiyozawa’s “early period,” *Shūkyō tetsugaku gaikotsu* 宗教哲学骸骨 (Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion, 1892), and a work written during his “later period,” “Yūgen mugen roku” 有限無限録 (Notes on the Finite and the Infinite, 1899),⁴ one cannot discern any real gap or discontinuity. As for the various articles published by Kiyozawa in *Seishinkai*, the majority can be read as sharing the same perspective as “Yūgen mugen roku” while ideas and statements of a very different sort can also be found scattered about. So is Kiyozawa’s “later period” thought consistent with his “early period” thought or not? With this question in mind, Yamamoto set out to carefully read Kiyozawa’s writings and analyze letters and other sources to see if all the articles in *Seishinkai* attributed to Kiyozawa really were purely his work.

According to the testimony of his contemporary followers, especially Akegarasu Haya 暁鳥敏 (1877-1954), Kiyozawa apparently told his followers they could revise his writings as they wished. It is also apparent that his followers occasionally “composed” (*seibun* 成文) his writings and published them in *Seishinkai*. Here “composed” refers neither to Kiyozawa’s disciples making a clean copy of his written drafts nor to faithful transcribing of his lectures. Rather it refers to major rewriting of Kiyozawa’s drafts by his disciples or, in some cases, production of texts never written or spoken by him at all. The articles “composed” in this way were published in *Seishinkai* under the name “Kiyozawa Manshi” and disseminated to the world as “Kiyozawa’s thought.”

Faced with these facts, Yamamoto divided the articles published in *Seishinkai* under Kiyozawa’s name into two groups – those written purely by Kiyozawa that do not contradict his statements outside of *Seishinkai* and those that passed through a process of “composing” at the hands of his followers. These two groups

4. See Ôtani Daigaku 2002-2003, vol.1 (pp.3-34) and vol.3 (pp.101-150), respectively.

of articles exhibit striking points of difference in writing style and thought: (1) In first-person expressions, Kiyozawa almost never used other than the first-person singular *gojin* 吾人; in the “composed” articles, the first-person plural *warera* 我等 and *watakushidomo* 私共 are also used. (2) Kiyozawa consistently speaks in his own words, only rarely quoting scriptures or other texts or referring to the names of eminent monks or other people; this is not the case in the “composed” articles. (3) Kiyozawa almost never used the rhetorical device of mixing the plain form (*-da* だ, *-de aru* である) with the polite form (*-desu* です, *-masu* ます); this sometimes appears in the “composed” articles. (4) As a proponent of introspection, Kiyozawa avoided forcefully urging others in regard to their lifestyle or faith; such a style does appear in the “composed” articles. (5) In Kiyozawa, there is no intellectual tendency toward a “principle of grace” (*onchō shugi* 恩寵主義) whereby one abandons morality and completely entrusts one’s body and mind to the Buddha’s grace; such a tendency is quite evident in the “composed” articles.

Through classification on the basis of these five points, Kiyozawa Manshi emerges as an individual who was scrupulous in regard to his own words and interior self and who never let up in his contemplation of the relationship between morality and religion. On the other hand, the “composed” articles exhibit the tone of a preacher with a strong Buddhist group identity and a tendency to rely upon the authority of scripture and eminent monks; they also contain religious thought in which the tense relationship with morality goes flaccid. So who was it that “composed” these articles that diverged so much from Kiyozawa’s natural inclinations? It seems it was mostly Akegarasu Haya and Tada Kanae 多田鼎 (1875-1937).

While heavily involved in *Seishinshugi*, Akegarasu tended to take an absolutist stance on religion as wholly transcendent of morality, blot out his individual features within the Buddha’s grace, and renounce questions regarding the good and evil of his own behavior. On the other hand, Tada was a young Buddhist who had great reverence for scripture and records of the Buddha and who went on to join those who espoused the view that ultimate authority lies in scripture (*seiten shijō shugi* 聖典至上主義). Moreover, he had a strong self-awareness as a preacher and a notably forceful way of speaking. One can say that both were thinkers and Buddhists of a quite different type than Kiyozawa. In the articles bearing Kiyozawa’s name that they took part in “composing,” their thought and religious viewpoints are reflected markedly. In contrast, Yamamoto finds that the intellectual tendencies of followers like Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875-1926) and Andō Shūichi 安藤州一 (1875-1950) were mostly in line with Kiyozawa.

So why did Kiyozawa approve of having these articles disseminated to the world in his name? According to Yamamoto, it was due to his personal views on education. In Kiyozawa’s thinking, people mature by studying the teachings of the past and publicly expressing their understanding in their own words. If his followers could

mature as persons by publishing their ideas and responding to critics, Kiyozawa did not seem to care whether those ideas were presented to the world in his name.

Such are the main points of Yamamoto's work. As noted above, the appearance of this work has made it basically impossible to view *Seishinshugi* as simply the thought of Kiyozawa in his final years. If one keeps in mind that *Seishinshugi*, as promoted in *Seishinkai*, continued for more than ten years after Kiyozawa's death, it can be viewed as an intellectual movement that involved Kiyozawa for only a short period and then came to have his followers as its principal actors. And as described above, their thought contradicted Kiyozawa's in significant ways.

Chapter Three of Yamamoto's work, titled "Multiple *Seishinshugi*," investigates the different personalities and modes of thought of Kiyozawa's followers. Chapter Four, "Kiyozawa's *Seishinshugi* – His Relationship with Akegarasu Haya," argues that most of the problematic thought taken to be Kiyozawa's *Seishinshugi* and critiqued in his time and in later periods was actually that of Akegarasu's. Potential for new *Seishinshugi* research lies in extending these groundbreaking arguments.

First, by further clarifying the details of these multiple *Seishinshugi*, scholars can reexamine the movement's historical significance. If *Seishinshugi* is not the thought of Kiyozawa in his final years but rather a complex intellectual movement by multiple Buddhists that included Kiyozawa, scholars ought to pursue a detailed understanding of the different modes of thought and personal histories of all those involved. Only then will it be possible to interpret the significance of this complex movement born at the intersection of a multiplicity of lives and modes of thought.

The *Seishinshugi* movement was created by a group of individuals, each possessing a unique point of view, who sought to take part in a new project to reconstruct Buddhism, particularly Shin Buddhism. The greatest potential for future *Seishinshugi* research lies in discarding the assumption that it represents the culminating point in Kiyozawa's thought and reinvestigating it with a view toward these multiple *Seishinshugi*.

Second, in addition to advancing our understanding of these multiple *Seishinshugi*, there is also the task of reexamining Kiyozawa Manshi's thought and actions. Now that it has been ascertained that *Seishinshugi* was probably not a new culminating point in Kiyozawa's thought, it is invalid to interpret his thought with reference only to *Seishinshugi*. Suspending the evaluation of his thought on the basis of *Seishinshugi*, scholars ought to reexamine the true worth of Kiyozawa's thought in its totality from his early period through his final years.

When that task has been accomplished, it may finally be possible to correctly understand the relationship between Kiyozawa and *Seishinshugi*. To what extent did Kiyozawa's thought and lifestyle play a role in the *Seishinshugi* movement that developed in his final years and after his death? What position did it hold within the multiple *Seishinshugi*? And among those aspects of *Seishinshugi* that have been

judged problematic, which can be found to have their origin in Kiyozawa's thought? These are all questions that ought to be investigated in the wake of Yamamoto's work.

One hundred years after the fact, we are at last in a position to approach the truth about *Seishinshugi*.

3. Tennōsei kokka to “Seishinshugi” by Kondō Shuntarō

Since its emergence, *Seishinshugi* was the subject of many critiques. Some critiqued *Seishinshugi* from a conservative standpoint, accusing it of deviating from and misunderstanding traditional Shin teachings. Many others critiqued *Seishinshugi* as a form of subjectivism concerned only with inward states and lacking awareness of society. In the post-war period, the representative critiques of this latter sort were carried out by Akamatsu Tesshin and other Buddhist historians at Ryūkoku University.⁵ Kondō Shuntarō belongs to that lineage, and his *Tennōsei kokka to “Seishinshugi”* can be understood as a collection of critiques of *Seishinshugi* from that perspective.

Taking as its goal the construction of a total picture of the *Seishinshugi* movement, Kondō's work researches Kiyozawa's thought in the late Meiji period as well as the *Seishinshugi* expressed by his followers in later periods. Its main theme is how *Seishinshugi* in concrete historical situations related to the imperial state and its “ethnic religiosity” (*minzoku shūkyōsei* 民族宗教性). Specifically, it discusses the pronouncements of *Seishinshugi* advocates concerning several prominent events in modern Japanese history – the Ashio Copper Mine Incident, the “Great Treason” Incident, the “Uniting the Three Religions” meeting and death of Emperor Meiji, and the Fifteen Year War – and whether that discourse reinforced the religiosity of the imperial state.

Early in the book, Kondō states, “As is well known, *Seishinshugi* is the culminating point in Kiyozawa Manshi's faith, which provided the basic standpoint of the *Seishinshugi* movement” (p. 3). The book was based on his dissertation submitted to Ryūkoku University in 2011, and the basic arguments had been drafted even prior to that. Thus, Kondō's work does not really take into account the insights of Yamamoto's *Seishinshugi* research. Having been constructed prior to the paradigm shift brought about by Yamamoto's work, its arguments rest upon an assumption that is now difficult to accept – that “*Seishinshugi* is the culminating point in Kiyozawa's thought in his final years, which was inherited by his disciples.” Accepting as self-evident the notion of *Seishinshugi* as a monolithic movement,

5. For example, see Akamatsu 1977; Fukushima 2010; Uji and Saitō 2011.

Kondō's work lacks awareness of its multiplicity.

In fact, the book repeatedly makes *Seishinshugi*, rather than individuals like Kiyozawa or Akegarasu, the subject of sentences, at times giving the illusion that *Seishinshugi* exists as an actual metaphysical substance transcending the words and deeds of individual Buddhists. Of course, this may be a methodological requirement deriving from the book's project of constructing a total picture of *Seishinshugi*. Yet one cannot deny the impression that the use of this methodology is connected to the book's lack of attention to the intellectual differences between individuals.

For example, the book argues that even during the period of the Fifteen Year War (1931-1945), thirty years after Kiyozawa's death and more than ten years after publication of *Seishinkai* had ceased, *Seishinshugi* "continued to live as the core of faith" for Kiyozawa's followers (p. 196). This statement may have some truth to it, yet it ignores the individual circumstances of how Kiyozawa's followers related to his teachings and to the subsequent development of *Seishinshugi* within their own life histories, trying to impose upon all of them a uniform *Seishinshugi*.

Despite these problems with its assumptions and methodology, this work makes an important contribution by clarifying problematic aspects in the thinking of representatives of modern Buddhism (specifically of the Shin sect) in regard to their relationship with the imperial state. In particular, Chapter Six, "*Seishinshugi* during the Fifteen Year War: Focusing on Akegarasu Haya and Kaneko Daiei," analyzes the connections between Buddhist thought and the religiosity of the imperial state in "wartime doctrinal studies" – the war-supportive discourse of Buddhists during wartime. This is an extremely interesting study that takes part in a recent upsurge in interest among scholars of modern Japanese history in the topic of war and religion (especially Buddhism).

Akegarasu Haya, who actively cooperated with war efforts during the Fifteen Year War, resided firmly in a spirit of faith in the "Absolute Infinite" and proclaimed his advancement on the "path of the imperial subject" in coming to have complete loyalty toward the Emperor. Also, by conceiving of the war as a manifestation of "divine will" (*shin'i* 神意), he interpreted the reality before him within a Shintō context. Understanding the Emperor both as a "living kami" and a "living Buddha," he sacralized the imperial state twice over through national Shintō mythology and Buddhism. His "Absolute Infinite" did not belong to a dimension transcending present reality; it mapped directly onto the present imperial state.

Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881-1976), who along with Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875-1971) is recognized as a founder of modern doctrinal studies within the Ōtani branch of the Shin sect, constructed an argument of war support from a slightly different perspective than Akegarasu's. Kaneko took cooperation in the state's "holy war" to be "a great task assigned to Buddhists." Reading notions of kami and "the Japanese spirit" into Prince Shōtoku's *Seventeen Article Constitution*, Kaneko discovered therein the way of life for Buddhists. This Shintō-Buddhist

theory made the “Buddha dharma” subordinate to the “minds of the kami.” Within these limits, it did try to preserve a space for Buddhism and did not completely dissolve the boundaries between Shintō and Buddhism. Yet Buddhism protected in this way affirmed the imperial state’s authority system and wars, thereby losing its religious universality.

Akegarasu and Kaneko thus took subtly different stances in their wartime doctrinal studies, but in both cases, according to Kondō, one can see “the plunder of their subjectivity by the imperial state and their resulting embrace of ethnic religiosity” (p. 222). Kondō notes that these Buddhist arguments in support of the war did introduce religious aspects unique to Buddhism, so in that sense, they did not represent total acceptance of the imperial system. On the other hand, he argues that in terms of the actual historical function it performed, their religious discourse ended up absolutely affirming present reality, reinforcing the subjugation of human life and individual expression within the context of “ethnic religiosity.”

Recently, there have been notable advances in research on the actions, thought, and doctrinal studies of Buddhists during the war period. In regard to Buddhists of the Ōtani branch of the Shin sect, most important are a series of works by Fukushima Eiju in the 2000s,⁶ and also NIINO Kazunobu’s recent study on “Imperial Way Buddhism” (2014). Fukushima looks at how Akegarasu’s wartime thought attempted to synthesize Buddhism and the worldview of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon-shoki* myths. While noting Akegarasu’s accommodation to state power, Fukushima points out that in Akegarasu’s attempt to change the reading of the national myths through the interpretive code of Buddhism, one might also detect discord with or protest against the state.

Niino also looks at Akegarasu and Kaneko’s wartime discourse, interpreting their thought as one form of the broader phenomenon at that time of “Imperial Way Buddhism.” According to Niino, the “Imperial Way Buddhism” advanced by these representative Shin followers during the war went beyond the standard stance of the modern Shin establishment, the so-called “ultimate and conventional two truths” (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦) (adherence to Shin faith within one’s mind and to national morality in one’s outward behavior), to a view of “ultimate and conventional as one truth” (*shinzoku ittai* 真俗一諦). In bringing about a perfect fusion of Shin faith and the “Imperial Way,” their thought could no longer be called “Buddhist thought,” for it had become indistinguishable in character from “State Shintō.”

Fukushima, Niino, and Kondō take up nearly identical topics, but each arrives at a subtly different understanding of the relationship between Buddhism (of the Shin sect) and the imperial state or State Shintō. These differences are extremely interesting. To summarize, Fukushima emphasizes discord that arose between Buddhism (of the Shin sect) and State Shintō; Niino claims that there

6. See, for instance, Fukushima 2003 and 2006.

was no discord but only fusion of Buddhism and State Shintō; and between these two, Kondo finds a space where Buddhism did not totally synthesize with state religiosity, but he concludes that in practice it ended up absolutely affirming the imperial state.

The subtle differences in these three scholars' views may originate from differences in how they think about Buddhism's character as a religion and its universality. If one thinks that modern Buddhism possessed some measure of religious universality that exceeded the bounds of the modern Japanese state, then there is always the potential for discord to arise with the state's religiosity. If one thinks that modernized Buddhism had no universal qualities that exceeded the state, it is easy to imagine that fusion of Buddhist thought and the state's religiosity would come to completion without difficulty.

In the end, did the Buddhism reconstructed in Japan's modern period have any universality that could rise above the framework of the state? If so, in what forms was it expressed to society? If such universality did not exist within modern Buddhism, was modern Buddhism nothing more than reinforcement for the religiosity of the modern Japanese state? Kondō's work reports that such universality is consistently lacking from the *Seishinshugi* of Kiyozawa and Akegarasu, but is that a valid conclusion?

Kondo's collection of arguments on *Seishinshugi* is an impressive achievement that invites us to look anew at these important points in the field of modern Buddhism.

4. New developments in research on modern Buddhist and Shin history

It has repeatedly been claimed that *Seishinshugi* was the intellectual peak or representative reform movement in modern Japanese Buddhist history. At this point, one can say it has become a classical topic in the study of modern Buddhism. In discussing two works that reexamine this classical research topic, this review essay has pointed to the emergence of new research themes and important problems requiring rethinking. In other words, their reexamination of *Seishinshugi* is not just a tedious variation on a classical theme, but rather a pioneering effort to bring forth novel perspectives on the modern history of Buddhism and the Shin sect.

Of course, not all research on the modern history of Buddhism or the Shin sect is trying to build upon this classical theme. For example, in 2014, two books were published in succession on Chikazumi Jōkan 近角常観 (1870-1941), a Shin cleric whose importance in modern Japan rivaled that of Kiyozawa or Akegarasu.⁷ Iwata Fumiaki's work discusses Chikazumi's widespread influence on contemporary intellectuals while my own work investigates the transformations brought about

7. See Iwata 2014 and Ōmi 2014.

within modern Japanese Buddhism by Chikazumi's religious movement. Our works are thus motivated by slightly different research concerns, but both bring fresh perspectives to the field by discussing a famous figure in modern Buddhist and Shin history who has been neglected in scholarship.

Chikazumi did have some connections to Kiyozawa and others involved with *Seishinshugi*, but the important part he played in modern Shin history was quite different from theirs. By advancing research on Chikazumi, these two works may offer insights for *Seishinshugi* research. More fundamentally, by taking up issues that have not been considered in recent *Seishinshugi* research, they have contributed to reforming our understanding of modern Buddhist and Shin history.

By reexamining a classical research topic from a new vantage point and by ambitiously taking on a neglected topic, research on modern Buddhist and Shin history is striving to reach a new stage.

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