

Unofficial Envoy: the Shin ministers who went to Hawaii prior to the Hongwanji's mission

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Introduction

In this presentation, I would like to show the early mission of Shin Buddhism in Hawaii and its background. The first official group of Japanese immigrants, who were mostly farmers and peasants, was sent to Hawaii in 1868 to work for plantations. Since 1885, more Japanese immigrated to Hawaii as contract laborers. Although they initially planned to return home in Japan after obtaining sufficient money, their plantation life was harsh under low wage, tedious work, primitive living conditions and violence from their bosses, and most of them had nothing to do but to stay in Hawaii.

Under these circumstances, the first official Japanese Shin minister was sent to Hawaii in 1898 by Nishi Hongwanji with the purpose of establishing temples. However, prior to the Hongwanji's officially recognized mission, there were a number of unrecognized or unofficial envoys of Japanese Shin ministers who privately went to Hawaii to deliver the Jodo Shinshu teaching and support Japanese immigrants. The first unofficial minister Kagai Soryū (1855-1917, 曜日蒼龍) arrived in Hawaii in 1889, and more ministers followed soon after.

It is not widely known that most of these “unofficial” ministers were graduates from a small private academy called “Tōyō Gakuryō (東陽学寮)”, located in present-day Oita prefecture of Kyūshū, Japan. Tōyō Engetsu (1818-1902, 東陽円月), a *kangaku* scholar, the highest rank the order of the traditional Shin Buddhist studies program, owned this academy and it was located at his temple. As a Shin Buddhist, Engetsu believed that Shin followers must actively contribute to their societies. This served as a guiding principle for many of his students to engage in social activities, one of which included the unofficial Hawaii envoy that preceded the Hongwanji's officially recognized mission.

1. Soryu Kagai and his Mission in Hawaii

The official history of Shin Buddhism in Hawaii began when Nishi Hongwanji first sent Bishop Satomi Hōji (里見法爾) to Honolulu in 1898. Imamura Emyō (今村恵猛, 1867-1932) subsequently arrived in Hawaii and became the second bishop.¹ Along with Satomi, they established the first Honolulu temple on Fort Lane.

However, prior to the Hongwanji's officially recognized mission, Soryu Kagai privately came to Hawaii and started propagating the teaching of Shin Buddhism and supporting Japanese immigrants already living there. Kagai was born in 1855 as a first son of Kōtoku-ji temple in present-day Oita prefecture. He studied Shin Buddhism at Daigakurin institute of Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto and Tōyō Gakuryō in Oita.



Kagai Soryū (1855-1917)

In 1888, he planned to leave for Hawaii. According to his notes that were later compiled and titled, *Hawaii Fukyō no Hōshin* (布哇布教ノ方針), in those days several newspapers and magazines reported that a number of Japanese immigrants, who were mostly from “Kyusyū” and were Shin Buddhists, suffered from loneliness in a distant island living amongst a non-Buddhist culture.² Reading these articles, Kagai was motivated to visit Hawaii and support and cultivate their faith and spirituality. In 1889, seen off by hundreds of Kōtoku-ji temple members and many Buddhist ministers, Kagai left his temple.

His notes further tell that after his arrival to Honolulu, Kagai intended to establish a base temple, invite more ministers from Japan, and propagate Shin Buddhism. However, his primary goal in propagation was not directed toward Americans but rather, the Japanese migrant workers. Also, as he states in his notes, “Now, the religious soil of Hawaii is covered by Christianity. I am afraid its poison could finally reach Japan in the near future.” One of his main methods to deliver Shin Buddhism in Hawaii was to be critical of Christianity. He was thus trying to protect against the

¹ Moriya Tomoe, *America Bukkyō no Tanjō: 20 Seiki Shotō niokeru Nikkei Shukyō no Bunka Henyō*, (Tokyo: Gendaishiryō Press, 2001), 101-134.

² Kagai Soryū, “Hawaii Fukyō no Hōshin” in *Dendō Kai Zasshi* 19 (1889).

promotion of Christianity in Japan by taking it head-on at the forefront of Christian country.

2. Supports from Tōyō Gakuryō

As mentioned above, Kagai had a plan to establish more temples all over Hawaii after building the base temple, and inviting more Shin ministers from Japan.

Interestingly, almost all of these Japanese ministers who Kagai listed to strengthen his mission were graduates from Tōyō Gakuryō, where he received his education from.

The listed names are as follows: ³

Nishizawa Dōrō (西沢道朗), Gamō Ungai (浦生雲涯), Hagino Kōun (萩野行運), Himeji Tokuō (姫路徳心), Kuwahara Kakujō (桑原覚成), Kaneyasu Mitsutoshi (金安三寿), Satō Gyōshin (佐藤行信), Fujimura Sōyoku (藤村僧翼, Kagai's brother), Abe Jōei (阿部定映), Takayama Dōen (高山道円), Kunisaki Hōjun (国崎法順), Sanada Kenjun (真田賢順), Umetaka Shuzan (梅高秀山), Kudō Seigyō (工藤誓行) and Takada Yujō (高田誘成)

Along with Kagai himself, these were the members that consisted of the “unofficial envoy” to Hawaii. Except their academic history at Tōyō Gakuryō, their individual contributions to the early Hawaii mission is still largely unknown due to the lack of historical sources. However, in some records dating between 1889 to 1897, which is the time after Kagai's arrival in Honolulu to the time that Nishi Hongwanji headquarters first sent its official minister, they describe this time as an “unclear era” or a “dark age of the Hawaii mission.” ⁴ Some records even describe that many “suspicious ministers” were working there without permission from Hongwanji, and

³ Kagai Soryū, “Hawaii Fukyō no Hōshin” in *Dendō Kai Zasshi* 19 (1889). Doki Keisai, *Hawaii Kaikyō Shōshi: Hawaii Hōpa Hongwanji*, (Kyoto: Dōbōsha Press, 1999), 11-18. Hiura Yasunori, *Kyūsyū Shinshūshi to Yokkaichi Betsuin*, (Oita: Usa Press, 1970), 122-123. Takayama Hidetsugu, “Hawaii Shoki Kaikyō to Kyūshū niokeru Shinshū Network” in *Nenpō Nihon Shisōshi* (2011): 6.

⁴ Louise H Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii: Its impact on a yankee community*, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), 46-52. Doki Keisai, *Hawaii Kaikyō Shōshi: Hawaii Hōpa Hongwanji*, (Kyoto: Dōbōsha Press, 1999), 13. Hōpa Hongwanji, ed. *Hawaii Kaikyō Shi*, (Honolulu: Hōpa Hongwanji Hawaii Kaikyō Kyōmusho Bunshobu, 1918), 77.

their presence burdened the Japanese immigrants with financial troubles.⁵ Although it is not determined yet, I speculate that most of these “suspicious ministers” are the unofficial ministers from Tōyō Gakuryō.

In those days in Japan, there were few associations for international Shin Buddhist missions such as the International Buddhist Networks (海外宣教会) and Young Shin Buddhist Association (真宗青年伝道会). They played important roles in attracting Japanese people to learn about Shin Buddhist missions overseas, creating networks with Buddhists outside of Japan, and also fundraising for their activities. Kagai was a regular member of the International Buddhist Networks. Kagai could have asked for help in appealing ministers who were from these organizations, yet he did not do so. He focused his attention on gaining support from Tōyō Gakuryō. This is probably because Kagai felt that he shared common study experiences, ideologies, and principles with the other students from this school.

Tōyō Gakuryō is one of the largest Shin Buddhist private academies in Oita, Kyūshū. This academy was established by Engetsu’s father Tōyō Enchō (東陽円超) in 1850 at Saikōji temple. Until its closure in 1912, Tōyō Gakuryō educated more than 850 Shin ministers. The most well-known feature of this academy is that many of its graduates were interested in social engagement, which is unusual in comparison to the students of the other Shin Buddhist academies at the time.⁶

According to the Saikōji temple records, graduates from Tōyō Gakuryō delivered the Dharma to Kagoshima, Hokkaido, China and Russia in addition to Hawaii. Takeshi Fujii points out that these social and international activities were encouraged by the guidance of the second chief lecturer Tōyō Engetsu, who also actively engaged in various social activities himself.

3. Downfall of Kagai Sōryu

Despite the fact that Nishi Hongwanji had shown a positive attitude toward Kagai’s Hawaii mission at first, they suddenly backtracked on their support. In 1889, *Kaigaibukkyōjijō* (海外仏教事情, Vol.4) introduced that Kagai, a member of the

⁵ Hompa Hongwanji, ed. *Hawaii Kaikyo Shi*, 80-81.

⁶ Kodama Shiki, “Gesshō to Shinshū Kyōdan” in *Ishin no Sengaku Gesshō no Kenkyū* (1979): 39-99. Tatsudani Akio, “Shūgaku to Ango” in *Ryukoku Daigaku 350 Nenshi* (2000): 531-533.

International Buddhist Networks (海外宣教会), had engaged in a Hawaii mission, and that Nishi Hongwanji and International Buddhist Networks were supporting him. Later however, criticism about supporting a monk from a specific Buddhist denomination arose among members of other Buddhist schools since the International Buddhist Networks was considered to be a non-denominational organization. Eventually, the Young Shin Buddhist Association (真宗青年伝道会) began to support Kagai instead of the International Buddhist Networks, and they collected donations for his mission. However, their support did not last long either. On June of 1890, Nishi Hongwanji suddenly enacted an order which canceled Kagai's Hawaii mission under the name of Governor General Ōzu Tetsunen (大洲鉄然). This order does not explain the specific reasons for Hongwanji's decision, but other documents, *New Hawaii* (新布哇) for example, indicate a few of those.⁷

One reason is that Kagai adopted the English word "God" in explaining Amida Buddha even though Shin Buddhist scriptures differentiate Amida from other gods or deities. Accordingly, his way of expressing and understanding Amida was considered problematic or heterodox, *J. ianjin* (異安心), among the Shin Buddhist sangha, and this was the reason as to the cause for the cancelation of Hongwanji's support. By re-examining the historical documents, Naoki Nakanishi insists that this event did not actually occur but was a fabricated story.⁸

Can there be another possible reason why Hongwanji canceled Kagai's support? The primary underlying reason is that Hongwanji became cautious of Shin Buddhists in Kyushū who had independently established non-denominational organizations and networks. One of the largest of these was the Kyushū Buddhist Organization (九州仏教団). Their aim was to expand Buddhism and change the Buddhist disciplines beyond Buddhist denominations. Hongwanji considered Kagai and the unofficial envoys from Tōyō Gakuryō as an independent enterprise similar to the Kyushū Buddhist Organization. In fact, Kagai stated in *Dendōkaizasshi* (伝道会雑誌) about his vision for the Hawaii mission, that he would proceed this task with Buddhists from multiple

⁷ Hashimoto Hidegoro, *New Hawaii* (Tokyo: Bunseishoin Press, 1902), 172-174.

⁸ Nakanishi Naoki and Yoshinaga Shinichi, *Bukkyō Kokusai Network no Genryū: Kaigai Senkyokai (1888-1893) no Hikari to Kage* (Kyoto: Sanninsha Press, 2015), 35-36.

denominations in order to confront Christianity, which closely corresponds to the aims of the Kyushū Buddhist Organization. This could be the main reason why Hongwanji shifted their attitude toward Kagai's independent Hawaii mission. Kagai's mission thus ended within seven months on October of 1889.

4. Tōyō Engetsu's View on Person of *Shinjin* and His Downfall

On July of 1890, about nine months after Kagai's downfall, Engetsu was also met with adverse circumstances. During this time, he was chosen as a main lecturer of *ango* (安居), an annual academic study session held in the summer at the institute of Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto. The main lecturers of this event are traditionally chosen from those who were bestowed the *kangaku* title, therefore it was considered a great honor for Engetsu to be assigned to this position.



Tōyō Engetsu (1818-1902)

However, Engetsu's Dharma message at *ango* was seen as problematic, and Hongwanji finally invalidated his lectures before its conclusion. The brief content of his dharma message given to *ango* students is as follows: ⁹

Reflecting on ourselves, it is a serious issue that Shin ministers encourage others to attain faith in Shin Buddhism, saying one can attain birth in the Pure Land no matter how evil they are or how much they are unable to create any good. If we keep emphasizing these aspects, people will misunderstand that the doctrine of Shin Buddhism is against general morals. In addition, it is problematic to believe that persons of *shinjin* are still walking toward hell. I would strongly like to contradict such understandings and to insist that persons of *shinjin* no longer are making the journey to hell. Embraced by Amida's working, one's karmic evils which would bring them to birth in hell eradicate completely, and one's good aspects naturally arise.

⁹ *Meiji 23 Nen Anjo Kiroku*, is a collection of multiple handwritten documents which record specific details regarding Engetsu's *ango* on 1890. I was given an opportunity to read these documents at the library of Saikōji temple.

Previous researches introduce his unique theory of eradicating karmic evils (滅罪論) described above and give it the name of “the theory of eradicating the working but leaving the appearance of karmic evils” (用滅相存説). This means that after attaining shinjin, karmic evils or sins do not cause one’s birth in hell, but rather, the residue of karmic evil will remain until one’s death. In this interpretation, Engetsu wanted to emphasize one’s good aspects instead of those evil aspects.

In the days when Engetsu was alive, immoral activities had become problematic in many parts of Japan. Engetsu surmised that misunderstandings about the state of the person of shinjin encouraged immoral activities amongst Shin followers. He keenly felt the need to show accurate interpretation in terms of the theory of eradicating karmic evils to make the followers value virtuous acts and positively contribute to their societies. Thus, Engetsu’s understanding of the Shin Buddhist doctrine was created to invite followers to engage in social activities, which actually served as a guiding principle in Tōyō Gakuryō and many graduates grew to be socially and internationally conscious just as Kagai did.

However, Engetsu’s attitude toward Shin Buddhist doctrine was considered radical and heterodox for most traditional Shin scholars at that time, because they believed that attaining shinjin does not completely extinguish the fire of karmic evils until one’s death, and that it was extremely hard for followers to benefit others. Consequently, Nishi Hongwanji, issued an order to dismiss Engetsu as the main lecturer of *ango* under the order of Governor General Ōzu Tetsunen (大洲鉄然). As a result, another Kangaku scholar succeeded the rest of his lectures. Engetsu reluctantly went back to Oita and resumed teaching at his private academy Tōyō Gakuryō.

It is impossible to view these two incidents, the downfalls of Kagai and Engetsu which took place relatively close to each other, as completely separate and unrelated. Since Engetsu was the leader of the unofficial envoys to Hawaii and was an influential scholar in the Kyushū region, Hongwanji attempted to unseat his position and weaken his influence. Hence, Kagai’s mis-translation about Amida and Engetsu’s supposed heterodox interpretation on karmic evil were the fabricated justifications for Hongwanji to attack their reputations.

Conclusion

Tōyō Gakuryō educated and cultivated many Shin Buddhist ministers under the guidance and influence of Tōyō Engetsu. Students deepened their relationships with each other while living together under the same roof. The networks they established became the most reliable sources of strength for graduates when they wanted to take action on social issues. Tōyō Gakuryō was a private academy typical in those days but it was unique in that it spearheaded an effort to expand propagation overseas in the nineteenth century. This is what is known as the “unofficial Hawaii mission.” Furthermore, Engetsu’s unique interpretation of Shin Buddhist doctrine promoted social engagement amongst its students. Tōyō Gakuryō provided students with a way to reflect on Engetsu’s life as a social activist who had a background in traditional Shin Buddhist studies.

In Hawaii, another student by the name of Nishizawa Dōrō (西沢道朗) stayed behind after Kagai’s departure and remained there until Nishi Hongwanji began their official mission. It can be speculated that Nishizawa somehow attempted to continue the work of the unofficial mission, but the details are unclear due to lack of historical sources. I would like to leave this as a subject for future analysis.