

Benefit for Others in Kaneko Daiei's Thought: His View of the Pure Land and the Religious Organization

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“Benefit for others” in Buddhism does not relate only to individual Buddhists who benefit others; rather, it also relates to the Sangha that encompasses individual Buddhists.¹ Therefore, to consider the issue of “benefit for others,” we need to look at individual Buddhists and at the Sangha, the denomination. According to Shin Buddhism, only Amida Buddha can benefit others fundamentally. In Shin Buddhism, benefit for others is expressed as the working of the two aspects of *ekō* (回向, merit transference). How then can we understand the act of benefiting others by a single practitioner and also by the Sangha?

This paper investigates the idea of benefiting others in the thought of Kaneko Daiei (金子大榮 1881-1976), a scholar of modern Shin Buddhist studies who proposed a distinctive understanding of the Pure Land. Kaneko argues that only a person who knows the impossibility of benefiting others can truly benefit others, and that in the gathering together of such people, we can perceive the Pure Land in the real world.

The first part of this paper considers how the passive attitude of receiving benefit from Amida Buddha turns into the active practice of benefiting others.² The second part discusses the passive and active characteristics of benefit for

1 Miyashita [2015] points out that, for Śākyamuni Buddha, the Sangha is his society in the first place. In order to consider benefit for others in Buddhism, this viewpoint is important to avoid making the issue unclear. Miyashita Seiki, *Can we attain to the confidence of “Thus I Have Heard”?: Faith and Society to the Buddha Śākyamuni, The Journal of the Doctrinal Study of Shin Buddhism*, vol. 36, p. 21.

others by the denomination. Finally, the ideal form of the religious organization is examined based on Kaneko's idea of the "Pure Land within the world".

There has been little research on Kaneko's understanding of how the religious organization should function in the world, since he has not systematically addressed the issue in any works.³ In this paper, the fragments of his thought from his important writings are recomposed in order to bring us a better understanding of benefiting others.

Benefit for others by individual Buddhists

According to Shin teachings, sentient beings attain nirvana assuredly through the two aspects of Amida Buddha's *ekō*. Here, the passivity of individuals receiving benefits from Amida's working is emphasized. This is one reason why people sometimes think Shin Buddhism does not teach that sentient beings can benefit others. Kaneko wrote, "Our religious desire is to be born in the Pure Land and to return from the Pure Land, through the two aspects of Amida Buddha's *ekō* that are outgoing and returning."⁴ What are the Pure

2 Kigoshi [2016] indicates that Shin Buddhists usually have a strong "brake" against benefiting others. This is because the teaching is based on the idea that sentient beings cannot accomplish such activity completely. However, there are times when the sentient beings are moved [身が動く] to benefit others. This is a big change from self power to other power and there is a dynamic tension between self power and other power. This understanding is also remarkable especially in Kaneko's thought of returning *ekō* when we look at his idea of benefit for others. Kigoshi Yasushi, *Is Volunteer Activity against Shinran's Teachings?: A Conflict of Understandings of Other Power*, p. 86.

3 Hataya and Tatsudani [1993] highly appreciate Kaneko's understanding of the Pure Land and point out that his understanding of the Pure Land is connected with the issue of the denomination. However, they also note his understanding takes a very passive stance toward the real world. Later in this paper, the passivity of Kaneko's understanding is discussed. Hataya Akira and Tatsudani Akio, *Kaneko Daiei: Monshi no Kyogakusha, Thought of Pure Land Buddhism*, vol. 15, p. 336.

4 *Kyogyoshinsho no gaiyou*, p. 7, [われわれの宗教的要求に往還二相ありて、それは回向せられたるものであるといふこと、これ親鸞の真宗教の根本原理である].

Land and the two aspects of *ekō* in Kaneko's thought?

His understanding of the Pure Land had matured in the 1925 work *Jodo no kannen*. In that work, he writes that we cannot be born in the Pure Land by moving from one space to another. The Pure Land is not such a world. It is a world that is only perceived by the sentient being who wishes to be born there. Moreover, that land is discovered by the being who despairs of being born, yet keeps wishing to be born. An individual can find this world at anytime in the heart of wishing to be born. Kaneko thought that is the meaning of birth in the Pure Land. Outgoing *ekō* is the experience of self-denial through birth in the Pure Land.

Individuals who attain birth in the Pure Land are gifted with the power of returning to this world, which is full of impure passions (煩惱 defilement). This is returning *ekō*. Such an individual is still unable to remove his or her impure passions completely; however, these passions are not obstacles for awakening and do not control such an individual.⁵ This individual accepts the reality of passions, feels pity for this reality filled with such passions, believes deeply in the teaching of Amida Buddha that is taught for those who have impure passions, and engages in the work of teaching others.

Kaneko explains: "Returning *ekō*, which means teaching others freely, is the act of a bodhisattva, we cannot think that we will be able to accomplish this."⁶ Nevertheless, through the despair at the possibility of birth in the Pure Land, receiving the gift of outgoing *ekō*, and the individual is given the merit of returning *ekō*. In this way, the individual who could never benefit others turns into the being who can benefit others through the two aspects of *ekō*.

According to Kaneko, the merit of returning *ekō* brings about the attainment of "new flesh," which he explains as the "power to feel reality (correctly)."⁷

5 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 6, p. 60, [それは感覚意識の世界への還来である。煩惱動乱の境地への回入である。誠にそれは「還る」のである。故に感覚意識に支配せらるるのではない。ただよく感覚し意識するのである].

6 *Kyogyoshinsho no gaiyou*, p. 11, [それは到底われらがこの世に於いて為し得るものとは思へない].

The body and the impure passions are no longer hindrances that need to be removed for liberation. In fact, these become a springboard for seeking truth, and a vessel for sympathizing with the sufferings of others. The being who has a body of flesh and passions teaches the Buddhist doctrine to others who have flesh and passions.

Thus, Kaneko first notes the aspect of passivity insofar as one's religious desire is satisfied by the two aspects of *ekō*. Second, he suggests that this satisfaction develops into the active practice of benefiting others, which is brought about by the merit of returning *ekō*. Such is Kaneko's understanding of the Pure Land and of Amida Buddha's *ekō*.

Benefit for others by the Sangha

In *Jodo no kannen*, Kaneko connects the topic of the Pure Land to that of the religious organization. In his explanation, discovery of the teaching of the Pure Land provides a basis for the religious organization.⁸ Kaneko discusses the religious organization in terms of the denomination.⁹ The denomination has an exclusive character, and it often takes an antagonistic stance toward other sects. Isolated from society, the religious organization sometimes becomes completely useless in society.¹⁰

From Kaneko's perspective, originally, the religious organization was not supposed to be useless to society. At the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, the religious organization was very important to people, who believed that

7 *Kyogyoshinsho no gaiyou*, p. 12, [新たなる肉体とは新たなる能感力である].

8 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 4, [国家とか社会とか教界とかいふものはどういふ基礎を持たねばならないのであるかといふような事を、段々思ふて来ますと、どうも其後ろに若しくは其根本に浄土といふやうなものを人間が見て行かなければ、夫等のものも満足に考へて行けないのではないのであらうかといふような事が、自分の心を支配して居るのであります].

9 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 39, [教会といふものは今日でいふと宗派のようなものです].

10 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 39, [段々狭い世界に這入つてしまつて、遂に社会の爲めに貢献することも出来ないことになつてしまふので今日では宗派といふものは詰らぬもののように考へられて居るのであります].

belonging to a certain religious organization provides a path to liberation.¹¹ Listening to Śākyamuni Buddha's teachings is to belong to the Sangha. Belonging to a religious organization means joining a Sangha and following the tradition of its teachings. Encountering Shinran's thought means gathering together into a religious organization with other people who follow Shinran's thought.

In light of the fact that Kaneko discussed the religious organization in *Jodo no kannen*, it is clear that his view of the Pure Land affected his understanding of the religious organization. Kaneko describes the actually existing religious organization as "the visible church (見える教会)," and insists that to provide a foundation for the visible church, it is necessary to discover the Pure Land as "the invisible church (見えぬ教会)."¹² What does it mean to discover the Pure Land as the foundation for the religious organization?

As discussed earlier, the Pure Land for Kaneko is a world found in the despair of this actual world. Those who wish to be born in the land of truth give up trying to be born there by themselves. They come to believe that it is impossible to be born in the Pure Land since they live an existence filled with evil and suffering. Our self, which is generated through various relationships with others, is representative of this actual world. Relationships with our parents, siblings, friends and all sorts of other beings surrounding us bring our self into existence.¹³ Of course, the generation of our self also depends upon our time period, society, and the religious organization we belong to. To despair of oneself is to take oneself as a suffering that represents all of these.

11 *Jodo no kannen*, pp. 39-40, [本当の意味に於ける宗派とか教会とかいふものはそんな詰らぬもので無くて、其の根本には非常に原始的なよい意味を有つて居つたに違ひ無い、此の教会に這入るといふことはもはや或る一種の救ひを意味する位の意味を有つべきものである、又實際有つて来たので無からうかと思ふのであります]。

12 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 42.

13 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 22, [私には親があり兄弟があり友達がある、私の周囲には多くの人が居り私の時代といふものがあるのであります。[……] 仏教の言葉でいへば、我といふものによつて代表されたる一切衆生といふものの居る現実の世界といふものがある]。

Being in this world, a suffering self seeks rebirth in another world that is essentially different from the present world.¹⁴ This means the one who is unable to get out of the present world sees everything in it as suffering. Therefore, the rebirth to gain a completely new life in this present world is required.

Kaneko described the same thing about the religious organization. Discovering the Pure Land as the foundation for the religious organization is the act of despairing of the self who represents the actual religious organization and also the act of discovering the true creativity of the religious organization being in the organization. This creativity itself is the invisible Pure Land that has provided a basis for the actual religious organization for a long time. Kaneko thus developed a concept of benefit for others by the Sangha that preaches the teaching of the Pure Land to society through the religious organization composed of those who have gained a new life by the two aspects of *ekō*.¹⁵

The religious organization based on the idea of the “Pure Land within the world”

The main points of the previous sections can be summarized as follows. Amida's working to benefit others through the two aspects of *ekō* enables individual Buddhists to teach and benefit others. As for the religious organization, those who belong to it discover the Pure Land as its foundation, and the religious organization benefits society through the preaching of Pure Land doctrine.

14 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 124, [即ち吾々の自覚が徹底しないといふとたとひ御浄土といふようなものを考へて見ましてそれは此の吾々の住んで居る世界と本質的に異つた世界を考へることは出来ない、此の世界へ往くとしても大体同じ質の世界へしか往くことは出来ない].

15 *Jodo no kannen*, p. 43, [絶対唯一の教会があつてそれを見える社会に向つて発表する時に初めて教会といふものが意味を有つのである。即ち全社会の背景に絶対唯一の教会を有つべきものであるといふことを教会の人が社会の人に御知らせする、さういふときに於て初めて教会が活躍して来るのであります].

Kaneko's thought about the religious organization in *Jodo no kannen* shows his intention to critically rebuild the religious organization by reinterpreting the idea of the Pure Land, which was disparaged by many as irrational in the 1920s. However, Kaneko was accused of heresy (異安心) for his understanding of the Pure Land, resigned his job at Otani University in June 1928, and left the priesthood in February 1929. Kaneko's thought completely conflicted with the reality of the Shinshu Otani-ha (真宗大谷派). At that time, Kaneko's idea was misunderstood as a complete denial of the existence of the Pure Land and not accepted by the Shinshu Otani-ha. He returned to the priesthood in June 1940 and was reinstated at Otani University in November 1941 just before the Pacific War broke out.

In a work published after the war titled *Kyogyoshinsho no kenkyu* (1956), Kaneko proposed the religious organization based on the idea of "the Pure Land within the world (世界内浄土¹⁶)."¹⁶ The religious organization is the visible church and the Pure Land within the world is the invisible church as the foundation of the actual organization. The Pure Land within the world does not imply that this world is the Pure Land or that we must change this world into the Pure Land. It signifies a world that transcends our world, but at the same time, it signifies a world that Nenbutsu devotees perceive within this world.¹⁷

What is the religious organization based on the Pure Land within the world? Kaneko writes that this religious organization does not exist as a particular organization. Rather, this organization consists of those who wish to listen to the true teaching.¹⁸ Kaneko holds that people within this organization do not judge each other. He writes that they are connected so intimately that they do not need to introduce themselves to each other.¹⁹

16 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 123.

17 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 124, [我等はこの不滅の真実を念仏の行信に於て感知する。その感知の有るところ、そこに浄土といはるるものがある].

18 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 122, [真宗教団の意義は、ただ志を同うして真実の法を聴かうとする人々の集合といふ外にはないであらう].

What does it mean to form an organization with people who need no introduction? It means that people who belong to this organization cannot identify who is a member and who is not. As a result, the feeling of unity as a particular religious organization becomes weak. This is not a gathering confronting society directly as a particular religious organization; rather, from this viewpoint, all of society is understood as belonging to one organization. Without naming one another, people come and go to create a society called organization as an image of constellation. Kaneko compared the true teaching perceived by a Nenbutsu devotee to a little star at night.²⁰ A little star shines so subtly that sometimes we can hardly see it. Like a little star, glimmering lights of devotees are sometimes hard to find but surely correspond with each other. The constellation is a metaphor for the unstructured religious organization by these devotees.

The religious organization in *Jodo no kannen* has importance in society by introducing the teaching of the Pure Land. The significance of the religious organization in *Kyogyoshinsho no kenkyu* is the invisible gathering of people who wish to listen to the true teachings.

Conclusion

It is of course important for the religious organization to confront, criticize and enlighten society. However, if a large organization confronts society only with vague understandings and becomes unable to question its own fundamental position, it is better to have a small and unstructured group to correspond with the actual individual through specific activities. Without confronting the society actively and mainly listening to the true teaching with the nameless people around you may sound passive for a the religious organization. However, this passive side of the organization needs to be appreciated because this does not mean the religious organization must simply affirm social

19 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 125, [かへつて純真なるものは名告りあはぬところにあるやうにも思はるる].

20 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 124.

conditions or give up criticizing society.

In Kaneko's explanation, the religious organization could confront society within the world by people connecting with each other without naming themselves just like clear air or pure water.²¹ Taken for granted just like clear air or pure water, sometimes these people are not appreciated by society. Kaneko believed that the Sangha does not exist outside of society; rather, the Sangha itself is the society. Both benefit for others by the active organization in *Jodo no kannen* and benefit for others by the passive religious organization in *Kyogyoshinsho no kenkyu* have a role to play.

Kaneko understands benefit for others in terms of a dynamic tension between these active and passive characteristics of the action of benefiting others in Shin Buddhism. Kaneko's work surely gives us better understanding of the importance of discovering the action of benefiting others within the tension.

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21 *Selected Works of Kaneko Daiei*, vol. 9, p. 125, [念仏者に願はしきことは、善き空気を作り清き水となることである].

Understandings of Other Power [ボランティアは親鸞の教えに反するのか 他力理解の相克]、法藏館、2016.