

Adding Flesh to Bones: Kiyozawa Manshi's Seishinshugi in Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought. Edited by Mark L. Blum and Michael Conway. Pure Land Buddhist Studies. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 490 pages. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-9207-4.

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This new collection of essays on the Seishinshugi 精神主義 (“spirit-ism”) Buddhist reform movement associated with Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) is a companion volume to the earlier *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology*.¹ The earlier work comprised translations of essays by Kiyozawa and three of his followers: Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971), Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976), and Yasuda Rijin 安田理深 (1900–1982). *Adding Flesh to Bones* aims to “flesh out” that earlier work with seventeen scholarly essays examining the origins, contours, and impacts of Seishinshugi thought. Together, these two works shed considerable light on a major twentieth-century Buddhist reform movement, display the intellectual vitality of modern Pure Land thought, and showcase a variety of approaches to the study of modern Buddhism.

The new volume's most praiseworthy feature, in my view, is its inclusion of nine chapters authored by Japanese scholars and translated into English. English readers now have access to Sueki Fumihiko's assessment of Kiyozawa's views on ethics, Yamamoto Nobuhiro's findings that various works attributed to Kiyozawa were in fact authored by his disciples, Hase Shōtō's investigations into Soga Ryōjin's thought, and six other essays by prominent Japanese scholars. The volume also contains a balance of authors writing from within and outside the Shin 真 tradition: some chapters seem intent on promoting the ideas of Kiyozawa and his followers, while others are written from more detached Buddhological, philosophical, or historical perspectives. The result is a dynamic collection of essays inviting readers to engage with Seishinshugi thought in both critical and sympathetic ways.

Adding Flesh to Bones begins with a brief introduction describing Kiyozawa's life and times and outlining the book's seventeen chapters, but readers not familiar with Kiyozawa and Seishinshugi are advised to turn to *Cultivating Spirituality* for more thorough introductions. The rest of the book is organized into two sections: “Kiyozawa and Seishinshugi: Formative Roots” and “The Legacy of Seishinshugi: Impact and Influence.” In what follows, I will review the book's contents in relation to four themes: Seishinshugi's cast of characters, basis in Shin tradition, social ethics, and propagation efforts.

¹ Blum and Rhodes 2011.

“Seishinshugi” is the name adopted by Kiyozawa and his followers in the latter years of Kiyozawa’s life to describe their shared religious standpoint. Briefly stated, Seishinshugi emphasizes introspection, realization of the limits of one’s powers, and a transformative encounter with Amida Buddha, or in Kiyozawa’s philosophical terminology, “the Infinite” (*mugensha* 無限者). *Cultivating Spirituality* introduced Seishinshugi through the writings of four of its core members. This volume contains further studies of those individuals alongside studies of a wider cast of characters: predecessors Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) and Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919) (chs. 2, 3, 4); core Seishinshugi members Akegarasu Haya 暁烏敏 (1877–1954) and Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875–1926) (chs. 6, 10, 14); female participants in the movement including Akegarasu Fusako 暁烏房子 (1886–1913), wife of Haya (ch. 8); Kyoto school philosophers Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) and Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962), who were inspired by Seishinshugi (chs. 9, 15); and D. T. Suzuki (Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙, 1870–1966), who worked with Seishinshugi members at Otani University (ch. 14). These additional studies enrich our understanding of where Seishinshugi came from, who participated in it, how its diverse participants related to one another, and how it influenced thinkers outside the movement.

Yamamoto’s chapter draws a sharp line between Kiyozawa and his disciples, presenting evidence that Kiyozawa’s disciples believed themselves to have a firmer basis in Shin faith than their master. Capitalizing on Kiyozawa’s renown as a graduate of Tokyo Imperial University and as a well-known scholar, they promoted their understandings of Shin teachings in Kiyozawa’s name by revising or recomposing his writings, reportedly with Kiyozawa’s consent. Through a careful analysis of how Kiyozawa’s disciples altered his writings, Yamamoto identifies a fault line separating Kiyozawa’s spiritual humility and dispassionate, rational arguments from his disciples’ spiritual conceits and emotion-driven, grace-based faith. Yamamoto further suggests that emotion-driven, grace-based understandings of religion were an underlying cause of the later embrace of imperialist ideology by Seishinshugi followers and others.

The following chapter by Fukushima Eiju provides a counterpoint. Rather than working to sort out the original, unadulterated views of Kiyozawa from those of his disciples, Fukushima argues that it is more productive to examine the disparate images of Kiyozawa (e.g., as philosopher, as religious seeker, as modern-day Shinran [親鸞, 1173–1262]) that have arisen over time. Fukushima’s survey of the history of Kiyozawa memorialization and scholarship leads him to conclude that “there are as many images of Kiyozawa as there are people who write about him”—each valuable and authoritative in its own way (p. 168).

Michihiro Ama’s chapter breaks ground in examining women’s participation in the Seishinshugi movement. In particular, he translates and analyzes poems, short stories, and confessional accounts published by women in the journal *Seishinkai* 精神界.

Such publications demonstrate their author's disregard for misogynistic teachings on obstacles to women's spiritual advancement; their self-perceptions as autonomous, liberated individuals leading others toward enlightenment; and their participation in the production of modernist doctrinal discourse, as in this bold statement by Takei Fuku 武井ふく (d.u.): "How great this universe is! The Pure Land is being formed moment by moment, just for me" (p. 205).

Seishinshugi adherents like Takei reconceptualized Amida Buddha, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, and the Western Pure Land as imminent realities that one could encounter here and now through practices of introspection. In response, critics regularly accused Seishinshugi adherents of heresy and of allowing Shin faith to be corrupted by foreign ideas. A persistent question addressed in scholarship on Seishinshugi is the extent to which its modernist interpretations are rooted in Buddhist scriptural traditions, especially the writings of Shin sect founder Shinran. The overarching answer of the essays in this volume is that—surprising as it may seem—they very much are.

The book's opening chapter by Mark Blum first tracks the historical emergence within the Shin sect of a doctrinal viewpoint equating "absolute truth" (*shintai* 真諦) with an interior experience of faith and "worldly truth" (*zokutai* 俗諦) with secular law. Blum then describes Kiyozawa's rejection of that viewpoint and his propounding of an alternate understanding of the two truths consonant with Nāgārjuna and Mahayana tradition. According to Blum, Kiyozawa's rethinking of the two truths cleared the way for a potential return to Shinran's ethical stance of skepticism toward non-Buddhist authorities. Separately, Nishimoto Yūsetsu's chapter on Kiyozawa's understanding of Shinran's *Tannishō* 歎異抄 also underlines Kiyozawa's engagement with, and faithfulness to, Shinran's writings.

Among Kiyozawa's scholarly disciples, Soga Ryōjin stands out as the most influential, most innovative, and most challenging to understand. Thankfully, *Adding Flesh to Bones* includes three useful chapters elucidating Soga's thought while commenting on its basis in Shin scripture. Soga famously interpreted Dharmākara—the bodhisattva described in the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* as engaging in kalpas of practice, issuing forty-eight vows, and constructing the Western Pure Land—as an expression of the true self or mind (i.e., buddha nature) that arises within a person at the moment of faith. Michael Conway presents this interpretation as fully warranted by Shinran's description of Dharmākara's cultivation of a pure mind of faith and bestowal of that mind upon sentient beings (p. 260). The brunt of Conway's chapter investigates the mind-bending details of Soga's further equation of Dharmākara with the *ālayavijñāna* consciousness of Yogācāra Buddhism. While this equation has no basis in Shinran's writings, Conway shows its usefulness for Soga in explaining the psychological dynamics of other-power (*tariki* 他力) faith without recourse to talk of supernatural beings.

Robert Rhodes's chapter examines a famous essay by Soga critiquing the academic view of Buddhism as originating with Śākyamuni. Soga instead explains Buddhist history as the history of Amida's compassionate vow unfolding in this world from before Śākyamuni's time. Rhodes notes that Soga likely derives this historical viewpoint from Shinran's *Shōshin nenbutsu ge* 正信念仏偈 hymn. Hase's chapter focuses on Soga's rethinking of *ekō* 回向, a term generally glossed as "merit transference." Instead of conceptualizing *ekō* as the self-assertive act of a transcendent being bestowing merit upon people, Soga understands *ekō* as a process of self-denial in which undefiled buddhahood takes form within the defiled karmic world, specifically through our most deeply felt instincts (*honnō* 本能). Hase presents Soga's interpretation as effective in helping correct misunderstandings of Shinran's teachings on *ekō*.

Adding Flesh to Bones also includes two chapters on Yasuda Rijin, the premier disciple of Soga. Paul Watt's chapter discusses Yasuda's "demythologizing" interpretations of Amida Buddha, karma, and the *nenbutsu* 念仏 practice of chanting Amida Buddha's name. As Kaku Takeshi documents in the following chapter, Yasuda's demythologizing of Shin doctrines was inspired by his dialogue with Paul Tillich and by knowledge of Rudolf Bultmann's approach to Biblical interpretation. As for whether Yasuda's demythologizing interpretations were still based in Shin tradition, Kaku notes that Yasuda portrays Shinran and Vasubandhu as themselves demythologizers of Buddhist doctrine. Yasuda understands demythologization as a process of "entering into the myth oneself" and discovering its "existential significance" (p. 398)—a process he sees at work in Shinran's and Vasubandhu's scriptural interpretations (pp. 395, 401).

On the theme of social ethics, critics have long accused Seishinshugi of teaching passive acceptance of the world as it is. Critics and scholars have also highlighted the failure of Seishinshugi members to adopt a critical stance toward Japanese imperialism; to the contrary, Akegarasu Haya, Kaneko, and Soga all spoke out in praise of Japanese imperialism and crafted doctrinal interpretations in support of that agenda.²

The theme of Seishinshugi's social ethics is squarely addressed in Mark Blum's chapter on the two truths. Blum presents Kiyozawa as rejecting his sect's doctrinally and ethically dubious interpretation and instead advancing a compelling argument, deeply grounded in a suprarational nirvanic perspective, that "the ultimate value of morality is that it cannot be clarified and cannot be carried out even when it is clarified" (p. 33). Sueki Fumihiko's chapter also positively appraises Kiyozawa's moral philosophy. Sueki highlights how Kiyozawa's conceptualization of religion as distinct from and transcendent of secular morality theoretically served to loosen the stranglehold that state morality had on Japanese Buddhists. Yet Sueki also argues that the project of developing a

² For example, see Kondō 2013; Schroeder 2022; Schroeder 2023, ch. 5.

Buddhist ethics is left incomplete by Kiyozawa—a project Sueki proposes to pursue by developing an “ethics of care,” in contrast to an “ethics of justice.”

Conway and Kaku point to resources for a Shin Buddhist ethics in the writings of Soga and Yasuda, respectively. In Soga’s equation of the three minds of faith with the three aspects of *ālayavijñāna* consciousness, Conway finds a workable ethical standpoint: the mind aspiring to birth in the Pure Land becomes, in Soga’s telling, a mind cognizant of one’s oneness with absolute, immeasurable life (i.e., Amida Buddha) and striving to transform this world into the Pure Land—an unachievable ideal that is nonetheless useful in guiding ethical choices. Kaku describes the ethical implications of Yasuda’s philosophy in similar terms: in gaining faith, a person realizes oneness with true suchness, “rise[s] up within the Tathāgata,” and comes to play a role in the salvation of all sentient beings (p. 410).

Melissa Anne-Marie Curley’s essay on Tanabe Hajime’s philosophy of metanoetics also addresses the topic of social ethics. Guided by Soga’s theories, Tanabe finds in Shinran’s writings useful resources for theorizing finite beings’ relationship with “absolute nothingness” as a dialectical one involving both union and repulsion (as opposed to mystical union or dualistic theism). An understanding of this relationship, according to Tanabe, is key to understanding the operations of history, to gaining individual autonomy, and to learning to construct a healthy society based upon repentance and love. On the whole, the chapters by Blum, Sueki, Curley, Conway, and Kaku demonstrate that, at least on a theoretical level, Seishinshugi thought could potentially form the basis for a sophisticated ethical standpoint rooted in Buddhist values, critical of the state, and aimed at proactively bringing about a more compassionate and caring society.

A final theme of *Adding Flesh to Bones* is the effectiveness of Seishinshugi reformers in propagating Buddhism in a modern world marked by scientific skepticism and cultural pluralism. After surveying the challenges facing Japanese Buddhists prior to and during the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912), Iwata Mami’s chapter highlights the reform efforts of Shimaji Mokurai, especially his calls for Buddhists to replace their conservative, defensive posture toward Christianity and the West with a willingness to adopt foreign ideas and practices. Miura Setsuo’s chapter on the parallel lives and projects of Inoue Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi highlights their shared goal of introducing modern higher education into the Buddhist world. Following in Shimaji’s and Inoue’s footsteps, Kiyozawa and his followers felt a need to engage with the wider world of philosophy, religion, and science in order to generate modern ways of understanding and promoting Buddhist teachings. We see such tendencies on display throughout this book’s chapters—in Kiyozawa’s efforts to remake his denomination’s educational system (ch. 3); in his arguments for religion’s autonomy vis-à-vis philosophy (ch. 9); in Yasuda’s borrowing of terminology from Tillich, Heidegger, and other Western thinkers (ch. 16); and in Sasaki Gesshō’s explanations of Shin Buddhism via discussions of

pre-Mahayana Buddhist texts, European literature, and popular concepts of “personality” and “self-cultivation” (ch. 10).

Viewing the Seishinshugi movement from the skeptical, independent perspective of D. T. Suzuki, James Dobbins’s chapter raises questions about the limits of Seishinshugi propagation efforts. After documenting Suzuki’s affinity with Sasaki Gesshō but relative indifference toward Soga and Kaneko, Dobbins provocatively suggests that we understand Seishinshugi as comprising two branches: Soga and Kaneko’s “Shin exceptionalism” alongside Sasaki’s “Buddhist universalism”: “Suzuki and Sasaki sought to discover what the essence of Buddhism is and to identify it in all forms of Buddhism including Shin. . . . Soga and Kaneko, on the other hand, wanted to separate Shin out from other forms of Buddhism and to proclaim it as distinct and special” (p. 345). Dobbins goes on to ask “whether the valorization of Soga and Kaneko [as opposed to Sasaki or Suzuki] has in fact created an insular and introspective version of Shin Buddhism that is difficult to communicate to non-Shin audiences, including foreigners” (p. 345). *Adding Flesh to Bones*’s final chapters on the doctrinal interpretations of Soga, Tanabe, and Yasuda seem to bear out this point: although unquestionably creative and modernist, their interpretations are also rather jargon-filled and inaccessible to outsiders. At the outset of his most famous essay, “Waga shinnen” 我信念 (My Faith), Kiyozawa made a point of eschewing the traditional, technical terminology of *ki* 機 (instrument; one who believes) and *hō* 法 (Dharma; that which is believed in) in favor of plain, nonsectarian language.³ It seems fair to ask whether Kiyozawa’s disciples strayed from that outward-looking, nonsectarian spirit, and with what consequences.

Although *Adding Flesh to Bones* already stretches to almost five hundred pages, I would have liked to see an additional chapter on the study of Kiyozawa’s thought by philosopher Imamura Hitoshi. In several chapters, contributors to this volume highlight the significance of Imamura’s reassessment of Kiyozawa’s thought from a non-Shin philosophical perspective, so a translation of an article by Imamura would have been welcome. Also, considering that Kaneko Daiei was featured in *Cultivating Spirituality* as one of Kiyozawa’s core disciples, the lack of any chapter here specifically on Kaneko’s thought was an unfortunate omission. Finally, a more comprehensive view of Seishinshugi thought and ethics would have required at least one chapter on nationalist developments within Seishinshugi thought during the height of Japanese imperialism.

These lacunae aside, I strongly recommend this book for its diverse academic perspectives on the roots, internal diversity, impacts, and limitations of the Seishinshugi movement. The book’s introduction boldly claims that Kiyozawa’s approach to Buddhism “became the hallmark of modern Buddhist thought in Japan” and “proved

³ Blum and Rhodes 2011, p. 93.

immensely influential, not only in modern Shin Buddhism, but within Japanese Buddhism as a whole” (p. 2). While such claims strike me as exaggerated and unsupported by the evidence, it is at least clear that Kiyozawa and his followers had a revolutionary impact on the world of Shin Buddhism, while attracting considerable attention from wider communities of philosophers and scholars. I expect that this book, together with *Cultivating Spirituality*, will provide an essential foundation for future academic studies of, and personal engagements with, the rich tradition of Seishinshugi thought.

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