

The High Treason Case and the Shinshū Ōtani Denomination

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Although there were four high treason cases in modern Japan, the term usually refers to the case involving Kōtoku Shūsui. Hence, in the paper, the term “High Treason Case” will be used to refer to this case.

The High Treason Case was forged by the Meiji government to eradicate the circle of socialists who had gathered around Kōtoku. In May 1910, several socialists were discovered making bombs in order to assassinate Emperor Meiji. In the wake of this discovery, twenty-six socialists, including Kōtoku, were arrested and prosecuted for high treason. Almost all of those accused, however, were innocent. Although Kōtoku knew of the plot, he never joined it. Twenty-four of them were sentenced to death in January 1911. Half of them, including Kōtoku, were executed within a week, but the sentences of the rest were reduced to life imprisonment.

It is well known that there were three Buddhist monks among the accused. One of them, Takagi Kenmyō, belong to the Shinshū Ōtani denomination. The others were Uchiyama Gudō, who belonged to the Sōtō sect, and Mineo Setsudō, who was a monk of the Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai sect. Like the others, Takagi was innocent. However, he had opposed the Russo-Japanese War and criticized licensed prostitution in his district. In short, he opposed nationalism while trying to restore spiritual truth to society. Although he was a priest and an important forerunner of the liberation of the oppressed minority, he did not receive much support, and this had let him to associate with Christian activists. As a result of his involvement with the High Treason Case, the Ōtani denomination defrocked Takagi on November 10, 1910 and expelled him

on the day of the verdict, January 18, 1911. Takagi killed himself in prison in Akita on June 24, 1914.

To show its support of the Meiji government, the Ōtani denomination established the Ōtani-ha Jizen Kyōkai (The Ōtani Denomination Association for Social Welfare) in keeping with the Imperial Rescript for saving the poor. The government was also urged to take measures against criticism for oppressing socialists. Both the establishment of the Association for Social Welfare and Takagi's defrocking were done to calm the wrath of the Meiji government. However, the High Treason Case had a strong impact on the intelligentsia. In my paper, I will discuss the response to the case by three writers: Tokutomi Roka, Ishikawa Takuboku and Mori Ōgai, and consider how their reactions differed from that of the Ōtani denomination.