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On the Significance Today of the Religious Practice of Ōta Kakumin[1]

MATSUMOTO IKUKO

INTRODUCTION

IN THE HISTORY of Hongwanji is a figure at risk of being forgotten yet well-deserving of attention, a priest named Ōta Kakumin 太田覚眠 (1866–1944),[2] who was engaged in ministerial activities for almost thirty years between 1903 and 1931 while based at Urajio Hongwanji 浦潮本願寺 in Vladivostok, Far Eastern Russia. Urajio Hongwanji was a Japanese Buddhist temple of the Nishi Hongwanji denomination of Shin Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū) that was active in Vladivostok from 1886 to 1939. As part of its establishment of power, the *bakufu* government of the Edo period (1603–1867) had instated a policy of national seclusion (*sakoku* 鎖国) which prohibited trade with all countries except for the Netherlands, China, Korea and the Ryūkyū Islands. The end of this period of rule brought about the opening of the country and the concomitant departure of a large number of Japanese in search of work or different lifestyles abroad. These emigrant

[1] This essay is a simplified and translated version of *Ōta Kakumin to Nichiro kōryū: Roshia ni michi o motometa bukkyōsha* 太田覚眠と日露交流：ロシアに道を求めた仏教者, Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2006.

[2] Previous research on Ōta includes Katō 1980, Morgan 1998, and Tsukinoki 2002, but because of the insufficiency of research materials, little valid research has been carried out. There is also research that concludes that Ōta was a "spy," such as that of John J. Stephan (1994). Stephan adduces as evidence for this claim material from Ōta 1925, Katō 1980 and Ishimitsu 1979, but an examination of these materials reveals there is no evidence whatsoever to support it.

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Japanese became an object of the preaching activities of Buddhist denominations, the most fervent of which was Nishi Hongwanji.[3] Of the platforms for Nishi Hongwanji's preaching, the branch temples in Hawaii (founded in 1889) and Taiwan (founded in 1896) are well known, but the oldest of them was Urajio Hongwanji in Vladivostok.

Beginning with the dispatch of the Nishi Hongwanji preacher Tamon Sokumyō 多聞速明 (1820–1890) in 1886 to minister to the Japanese immigrant population of Vladivostok, and ending with the return to Japan of the preacher Toizumi Kenryū 戸泉賢龍 (n.d.–1987), and the closure of Urajio Hongwanji in 1939, the temple served as the spiritual foundation for the Japanese immigrants.[4] These immigrants to Vladivostok[5] called the city "Urajio"; in Russian, its name literally meant "conquer the east." The word "Hongwanji" was affixed to this to form the name of the temple.[6] The head priest who represents the history of this temple best is Ōta Kakumin.

The most remarkable of Ōta's achievements was the work he undertook helping the Japanese left behind in Siberia during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) to return to their homeland. Furthermore, in 1936 he entered Mongolia independently, at an advanced age, and strove to revive Lamaism that was endangered by religious persecution orchestrated by the Soviet Union. Ōta was a figure who was able to exist in the gap between the cultures, politics and religions of Japan, Russia and Mongolia, and in his thought might be found some guidance concerning the problems of our own times caused by the conflict between state and religion.

THE LIFE OF ŌTA KAKUMIN

In order to understand the thought and activities of Ōta, the author has divided his life into four periods. The first section covers the thirty-seven-

[3] In Shinran's teachings, the term *jishin kyō ninshin* 自信教人信 ("to realize faith in oneself and to guide others to faith") is used. It means putting one's faith in the nenbutsu and at the same time relaying the teachings to others. Shin Buddhism employs this term as a basic part of its proselytizing activities and it is significant not only in the spread of Shin Buddhism within Japan, but overseas as well.

[4] Nishi Hongwanji Kaigai Kaikyō Yōran Kankō Iinkai 1974. The description of Urajio as "the spiritual foundation" is found in the writings of Toizumi Yoneko 戸泉米子, the wife of the last minister at Urajio Hongwanji (Toizumi Kenryū) and of the granddaughter of one of the Japanese immigrants of Vladivostok, Horie Machi 堀江満智. See Toizumi 2001 and Horie 2002.

[5] The Japanese population of Vladivostok at its peak (in 1919) was 5,915 (Kojima 2001).

[6] On the history of Urajio Hongwanji, see Matsumoto 2007.

year period between his birth in 1866 and his departure for Vladivostok in 1903 which is called "The Youth Years." The second covers the period of fourteen years between leaving for Vladivostok and the beginning of the Russian Revolution in 1917 which can be called "The Russian Period (Russian Empire)." The third period, "The Russian Period (Soviet Union)," is the span of nineteen years from the start of the revolution to the departure to Mongolia in 1936 just after his return to Japan. The fourth period is that of eight years between 1936 and 1944 when Ōta died in Mongolia at the age of seventy-nine, which will be called "The Mongolian Period." Let us now examine Ōta's life in the framework of these periods.

Youth

Ōta was born on 16 September 1866, two years before the Meiji Restoration, at Hōsenji 法泉寺 (Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha) of Yokkaichi 四日市 in Mie 三重 Prefecture. What kind of education did he receive in the period between childhood and adolescence? He studied Buddhism under the tutelage of his adoptive father, Kakukei 覚恵 (n.d.–1901) and was taught the Chinese classics by a local scholar, Ōga Kenrei 大賀賢励 (1819–1906).[7] He subsequently entered a Buddhist school in Kyoto, the Kakumō Kyōkō 摑網教校 where he took Buddhist Studies as well as classes in the general curriculum.[8] He also took a special course in Russian at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages (Tokyo Gaikokugo Gakkō 東京外国語学校, present-day Tokyo University of Foreign Studies).[9]

In 1893, at the age of twenty-eight, Ōta became a priest.[10] His childhood name was Takemaro 猛麿 but after his coming-of-age ceremony he was called Hajime 一. However, at the time of ordination he changed his name to Kakumin.[11] In a pamphlet Ōta produced in commemoration of his tonsure ceremony, *Tokudo miyage* 得度小言 (A Few Words on Becoming a Priest) can be found hints of certain aspects that shaped his basic philosophy. The

[7] Fujimoto 1963, p. 5.

[8] Inoue 1930.

[9] Tokyo Gaikokugo Gakkō 1901.

[10] Ōta 1894, p. 2.

[11] In *Tokudo miyage*, Ōta mentions his change of name, but the origin of the name "Kakumin" is not recorded. However, in the same work, he writes: "We can never know when life will come to an end. We should focus on having a peaceful life so that when that time comes we will not feel regret and we will be prepared," suggesting that the name "Kakumin" denoted this awareness (*kaku* 覚) to the proximity of death (*min* 眠) and the principle of acting in accordance with such an awareness.

first was the education he received from his grandmother, Teikō 貞香 (n.d.–1884); the second, that which was given him as a petty officer in the army during his adolescent years. Through these, Ōta learned to uphold the value of saving other peoples' lives at the risk of one's own and this value was to determine the direction of the rest of his life.

Ōta had a military past. He graduated from both the Sendai Army Academy (Sendai Rikugun Kyōdō Gakkō 仙台陸軍教導学校) in the Infantry Department and the Department of Riflery at Tokyo's Toyama School (Toyama Gakkō 戸山学校). He was drafted into the army and stationed at the Nagoya base. In October 1894, not long after being admitted, he was late for curfew and attempted to pass through the gate by pretending to be an Acting Special Master Sergeant. A court-martial was convened to discuss the matter of Ōta's disobedience and his use of a false title, and in November a lenient sentence of one year and three months was passed down. He was imprisoned at the Nagoya base. However, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) in July of the same year, Ōta was pardoned. He was released in March of 1895 and went on to join the war.[12]

In 1899, Ōta wrote *Kashi seido kaikaku shigi* 下士制度改革私議 (My Opinion about Reforming the System for Non-commissioned Officers)[13] in which he advocated the improvement of the position of non-commissioned officers. The work developed out of his own experiences in the military. For example, one can point to his suggestion regarding permission for staying out at night. Ōta declared that if soldiers were forbidden from staying out in order that they may be assembled swiftly in times of emergency, then commissioned officers should likewise be prohibited. He asserted that this was a discrimination to be corrected. The background to such an assertion was the above-mentioned incident of disobedience and use of a false name. Such military experiences highlighted discrimination and contradictions within the army. In Ōta's critical stance might be discerned elements similar to that of Nogi Maresuke 乃木希典 (1849–1912) who exposed corruption in Meiji society and its army as shown in "Gunjin kokoroe jūgokajō" 軍人心得十五箇条 (The Fifteen Regulations for Soldiers). A groundwork of common philosophy was thus laid for Ōta's later encounter with Nogi. The relationship between these two figures will be discussed below.

[12] "Kei kinko kōbi rikugun hohei ittōsotsu Ōta Kakumin hoka hachimei tokusha no ken" 軽禁錮後備陸軍歩兵一等卒太田覚眠外8名特赦ノ件. In *Kōbun zassan* 公文雑纂 17, 1895, Rikugun-shō, 00354100.

[13] Ōta 1899.

Another noteworthy aspect of *Kashi seido kaikaku shigi* is the examination it undertakes of the non-commissioned officer systems of Germany, Italy, France, Prussia, England, Australia, Russia and other countries, which is made prior to the criticism of the system of Japan. It is upon this examination that the defects of the Japanese system are assessed. The criticism of Japan's system as based on an understanding of those of foreign countries was characteristic of the nature of Ōta's thought in later times. However, he did not necessarily oppose the draft system itself. On 21 March 1901, he delivered a lecture entitled "Chōhei tekireisha ni tsugu" 徴兵適齢者に告ぐ (Addressing Those of Appropriate Age for the Draft)[14] at a conference on the subject. In this talk, he called for youths to be drafted, and criticized the older generation born in the Edo period who found the draft system unsatisfactory.[15] The context of such remarks was his opposition to the Edo-period feudal system. Ōta held the system from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onward that made all citizens soldiers and treated all people as of equal status as far preferable to the Edo-period system of recruitment as a special privilege reserved for the samurai class.[16]

At the age of thirty-nine, in 1901, Ōta became the sixteenth head priest of Hōsenji, but in 1903 at the orders of the head temple of Nishi Hongwanji, he travelled to Vladivostok as a missionary.[17] The abbot of Nishi Hongwanji at that time was Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876–1948), the twenty-second abbot of that denomination, who regarded the idea of advancement overseas with insight and passion.

The Russian Period (Russian Empire)

From October 1903, instability in the relations between Russia and Japan came to the attention of the citizens of both nations. Japanese people with inquiries continued to come forward to the Japanese trade administrator

[14] Ōta 1902.

[15] Draft regulations had been enacted in 1870, but although a draft order was officially announced in 1873 it was riddled with problems, injustices and contradictions such as exemptions for householders and their successors as well as the purchase of exemption. Despite revision, a basic resolution to the problem was never reached.

[16] The samurai occupied a privileged position at the top of the hierarchy into which the Edo-period system divided the social groups of samurai, farmer, craftsperson, and merchant.

[17] "July–September, 1903: Gaikoku ryoken kafuhyō, Mie ken" 外國旅券下付表　三重縣, held by Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan 外務省外交史料館 (The Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan), 3–1–1051. The name of the organ within Nishi Hongwanji that issued this order is unclear.

stationed in Russia, Kawakami Toshitsune 川上俊彦 (1861–1935). As a result, on 12 October, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Komura Jutarō 小村寿太郎 (1855–1911) made the following statement in response to the concerns of Japanese residents in Siberia about the possibility of an outbreak of war between Russia and Japan:

> Because our government has done its best in terms of conduct and management in the negotiations between Japan and Russia up until now, we are certain that the good relations between us will continue without change. Thus, we believe that the misery that would be brought about by a military solution to the Manchuria problem will not occur.[18]

However, Kawakami, a resident of Vladivostok, was familiar with the geography and the transport system of Siberia. He could see that failure to issue a repatriation order well in advance of the beginning of the war would mean that there would be many who would not be in time to comply with it. And so, on 31 December, Kawakami, in response to Komura, requested permission to issue an immediate announcement of the high possibility of war between Russia and Japan.[19] However, because the issue of a repatriation order to the Japanese residents of Siberia was tantamount to a declaration of war with Russia, Komura instructed Kawakami to "wait on standby." Kawakami, as a public servant of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had no choice but to follow Komura's instructions.

On 23 January 1904, Ōta asked Kawakami to announce the repatriation order straightaway. However, even though it was also Kawakami's wish to do so, it is thought that Ōta knew that according to the intentions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs this was impossible. Ōta therefore stated that if Kawakami was, as a servant of the state, unable to issue such an order to the foreign residents without government sanction, then as a priest whose role it was to help people, he would take responsibility and make the announcement himself.[20] Kawakami did not, at this junction, issue the repatriation order. It seems that as the course of events unfolded, Ōta acted with the

[18] "Nichiro sen'eki no sai zairo kōkan oyobi teikoku shinmin hikiage ikken, ōshū keiyu no bu" 日露戦役ノ際在露公館及帝國臣民引揚一件、欧州経由之部 4, held by Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan, 5–2–1–14, 840108.

[19] Ibid., 840106.

[20] *Kyōkai ichiran* 教海一瀾 238, 24 December 1904.

consciousness of a clear distinction between the roles appropriate to state and to religion.

Ōta also sent a letter to E. I. Alekseev (1843–1918), Governor General of the Far East requesting assurance of the safety of the foreign population:

> At the present time, there are approximately six thousand people of the same religion as myself, living in various regions of Siberia. They are all settled in various occupations. This is because they are blessed by Your Excellency's great kindness. I wish to be grateful, yet if by some event the relations between our two countries were to be damaged and become unpleasant, many of those who share my religion would return home, though many would stay here and continue their work. In Christianity it is said that one should "love thy neighbor." Your Excellency is a true member of that faith and his ministers and subjects are too. Were the military of our countries to engage in warfare against each other, the Buddhist residents here might suffer abuse and discrimination. This would be unacceptable. If you can love even your enemies, then you can surely love those who are not your enemies. I want to believe that, following that reason, this [abuse] will not occur. However, wartime brings a sense of insecurity and danger. At the start of a war between our countries, what facilities will Your Excellency provide for those who share my religion who will return home, and what kind of protection will you give those who remain here? I ask for your thoughts now because I wish to inform and reassure those of my religion that they may continue in their occupations at peace. I would like Your Excellency's prompt and detailed answer. I pray to the Buddha for aid in the happiness of Your Excellency who protects the people of my religion who live in Siberia.
>
> Ōta Kakumin, priest of the Japanese Buddhist Hongwanji temple of Vladivostok [To] the Governor General of the Far East, His Excellency Alekseev.[21]

Notable is Ōta's attitude toward the Governor General, to whom he appeals not as a Japanese to a Russian but as a Buddhist to a (Russian

[21] *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞, 1 January 1904.

Orthodox) Christian. Ōta asserts that at the heart of the Christian faith is the recognition of the principle based on Christ's teaching "love thy neighbor" and appeals for this principle to be acted upon, in the form of protection of Japanese residents in the event of an outbreak of war between Russia and Japan. Transcending the conflict between religion and state suggests one aspect of Ōta's philosophy.

However, the Governor General, responded in a telegram simply, "A peaceful resolution through the negotiations between our countries is fully expected. However, please be reassured that in the event of a disruption, the utmost protection will be extended to the Japanese people."[22] Regarding this, Ōta stated, "I felt it deplorable that only three days after I received this notice, hostilities commenced in Lushun [Port Arthur]."[23]

According to a report by Kawakami, the number of Japanese people residing in Siberia in January of 1904 was 6,480.[24] On 3 February, Kawakami issued a repatriation order to the Japanese residents in all regions of Siberia and they began to repatriate. 2,696 foreign residents boarded the first ship, an English vessel, and set sail on 6 February, docking on the 8th at Tsuruga 敦賀 in Fukui 福井 Prefecture. The second, and last ship, was a German vessel; 1,511 residents embarked on the 13th, arriving at Moji 門司 in Fukuoka 福岡 Prefecture on the 15th.[25] Those who had been living in the environs of Vladivostok, or in areas with relatively good transport systems, were able to return home to Japan safely. But those in distant regions, or in places deprived of good transport, were not able to board the last ship and were left behind in the deep regions of Siberia. According to Kawakami's report, the number of Japanese remaining in Siberia at this point was 986.[26]

International society at the time protected foreign resident civilians in hostile territories under international customary law which held that they not be killed or robbed. Furthermore, Japanese interests were assured protection by the United States and in the event that the Japanese foreign residents needed it, this could be requested. However, in 1900, much of the Chinese community of Blagoveshchensk was massacred by the Russian army in the Boxer Uprising (*Hokushin jihen* 北清事変). The Japanese government was concerned for the safety of the Japanese left behind in Siberia.

[22] *Kyōkai ichiran* 教海一瀾 238, 24 December 1904.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "Nichiro sen'eki no sai zairo kōkan oyobi teikoku shinmin hikiage ikken, ōshū keiyu no bu" 4, 840113.

[25] Ibid., 840310–840316.

[26] Ibid., 840307–840308.

Ōta was one of those who felt a sense of urgency about the Japanese community. He gathered the community together, and made it his mission to take them home, resolving to remain there. However, Kawakami reacted to Ōta's resolve by telling him, "Your mission is not only in Siberia. Your priority now is to serve in the war and to console soldiers on the battlefield"[27] He strongly advised Ōta to return to Japan, who stated in response, "There are one hundred thousand priests in Japan yet no matter how highly-ranked, no matter how virtuous they may be, they cannot intervene in Russia. The Buddha has appointed me alone with this noble mission."[28] He refused to yield his position and, moved by Ōta's religious convictions, Kawakami eventually granted him permission to remain.

In the background of Ōta's resolve were, in fact, the Russian people and the Russian Orthodox Church. In a letter sent from Siberia to the head temple of Nishi Hongwanji, he wrote that "if I consider that many Russian priests are, at this time, paying attention to the attitudes of Japanese Buddhist priests, I must not be unmanly,"[29] indicating that he had resolved to behave so as not to cause any shame as a Japanese Buddhist priest *vis-a-vis* the Russian people. Ōta sharply criticized the disregard held by the Russian Orthodox Church clergy for the salvation of the people. It is thought that on many occasions he explained to the clergy that religion was for the sake of the people. For a figure that held such ideas, abandoning the Japanese left behind in deep Siberia to return to Japan was unthinkable.

On 12 February 1904, Ōta left Vladivostok, passed through Habarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Perm, and with 800 Japanese immigrants, he boarded the German vessel "Wilhardt," and set sail from the German port of Bremerhaven. The ship docked in Nagasaki on 6 December.[30] A register of the names of these immigrants of Blagoveshchensk and Nikolayevsk is kept at The Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. A statistical examination shows that many of those who returned to Japan with Ōta were prostitutes.[31] Immediately after his return, Ōta

[27] Ōta 1925, p. 8.

[28] Ibid.

[29] *Kyōkai ichiran*, 5 November 1904.

[30] The numbers of Japanese in Siberia who returned to Japan, recorded according to area of residence, were: Nikolaevsk 277, Blagoveshchensk 225, Zeya 54, Khabarovsk and regions of Manchuria 196, Sakhalin 63 (*Shin Aichi shinbun* 新愛知新聞, 9 December 1905). This newspaper reported a total of 825 which appears to be an error in calculation; the total was 815.

[31] The Japanese brothels in Blagoveshchensk are also mentioned by Chekhov (1860–1904). He wrote in a letter sent to an acquaintance, Svorlin that when he visited Sakhalin in 1890 to

spoke out frankly about the existence of Japanese prostitutes in a lecture at Ganshōji 願正寺 in Saga 佐賀 Prefecture.[32] Also soon after his return, during an inquiry, he stated, "In our company, there were many people who had had their money and goods stolen. More gravely, there were women who were violated,"[33] emphasizing that the chastity of women had been jeopardized. When the Russo-Japanese War broke out, at the forefront of Ōta's mind was surely the existence of women in the various Siberian regions. His firm insistence on remaining in Siberia, rejecting the advice of Kawakami was likely driven by his sense of the dangers faced by these women.[34]

After returning to Japan, he spent a short time resting at Hōsenji, his home temple, in Yokkaichi. In the first month of 1905, however, he set off to the combat zone to minister to the troops. He arrived in March in Dashiqiao 大石橋 (located near the city of Haicheng 海城, China) where he encountered General Nogi. Nogi appeared while Ōta was reciting sutras and the nenbutsu over the bodies of dead Russians, and said, "What can a military chaplain think of such a sight?"[35] Ōta responded with the Buddhist expression "One killing, many lives" (一殺多生 *issatsu tashō*), and gesturing at the battlefield before them, he said "The lives of so many young Japanese and Russians have been stolen, and what we see here is but a fraction. But through this sacrifice, many future lives will be saved, and I hope that that is what a battleground is for." Nogi, in response, switched the words "killing" and "life," stating that for him it would be more appropriate to say "One life, many killings" (一生多殺 *isshō tasatsu*).[36] The "one life" of Nogi's expression referred to his own, as a survivor. The "many killings" were those of the young

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collect material, he had spent a night with a Japanese prostitute (Nakamoto 1981, pp. 46–47). Because there are no registers, there are no figures available regarding the brothel situation in Zeya and Khabarovsk, but it may be surmised that it was similar to that of Blagoveshchensk.

[32] *Saga shinbun* 佐賀新聞, 20 December 1904.

[33] "Nichiro sen'eki no sai zairo kōkan oyobi teikoku shinmin hikiage ikken, ōshū keiyu no bu" 1, 5–2–1–14, 830697.

[34] Ōta (1925) writes that he frequently visited the Japanese brothels and encouraged the prostitutes to visit Urajio Hongwanji. According to Morgan 1998, there was at Urajio Hongwanji a society called "Akebono-kai" which was a mutual aid organization for prostitutes.

[35] Ōta 1938b.

[36] The expression *issatsu tashō* is a Buddhist one that expresses the idea that sacrifice of the few allows salvation of the greater number. It is used with slightly different meanings according to denomination. It has been used as a slogan to justify mass slaughter but this differs from Ota's use.

Japanese and Russians. Nogi exposed the suffering he was experiencing as he lived on to grow old while the lives of such youths had been taken away.

Ōta was impressed by the personality of Nogi, who showed no pride in Japan's victory and who deeply grieved the lost lives of the enemy troops.[37] Nogi's attitude of treating the souls of the deceased enemy with respect equal to that he would accord those of his allies was evidenced too in his construction in Lushun, after the occupation, of a commemorative obelisk for General Kondratenko (1857–1904) and in 1907, that of a monument for the Russian dead in Lushun. In later years, Ōta wrote that he had "immediately asked for permission to minister to the troops, and was able to take part in The Battle of Mukden. In the fields of Manchuria I again came into contact with Russians, and towards the dead bodies of Russian soldiers I was filled with compassion, and offered sutras with all my heart, and for me that was an extension of my work preaching to the Russian people."[38] His decision to go to the combat zone as a military chaplain reflected not only the wish to offer consolation to the Japanese soldiers but also to pray for the souls of the enemy combatants who had died there.

The Russo-Japanese War ended in September of 1905. Following orders from the head temple of Nishi Hongwanji, Ōta once more travelled to Vladivostok in May 1906, as a missionary of Urajio Hongwanji. He invested his efforts there into the construction of a hall for preaching. July 1914 saw the outbreak of the First World War. The diplomatic relations between Japan and Russia took a positive turn after 1914 when they entered into an alliance and therefore the building work for the preaching hall at Urajio Hongwanji proceeded without problems. The roof-beams were raised in May 1915, and in the presence of Ōtani Kōzui, a completion ceremony was held.

[37] A gap of around thirty years separates the exchange between Ōta and Nogi and his record of it in 1938. Why did he write at that particular time about something that had occurred thirty years previously? Pertinent to this question are the words Ōta used when recalling the battlefield during the Russo-Japanese War: *mushō kaisatsu* 無生皆殺. This term was not simply used in recollecting the war. Although General Nogi had lamented over the loss of life in the war, saying his was the "one life" that remained, when Ōta was writing, Nogi had long since passed away and his humble spirit had been lost, as well. Ōta used this restatement of Nogi's words to sharply criticize the degeneration of the Japanese government and military, implying that the spirit underlying their actions was nothing more than "to kill all" (*kaisatsu*). Such a term was intended as a criticism of what he perceived as the moral decay of the Japanese state and military at the time of writing in the 1930s.

[38] Ōta 1933.

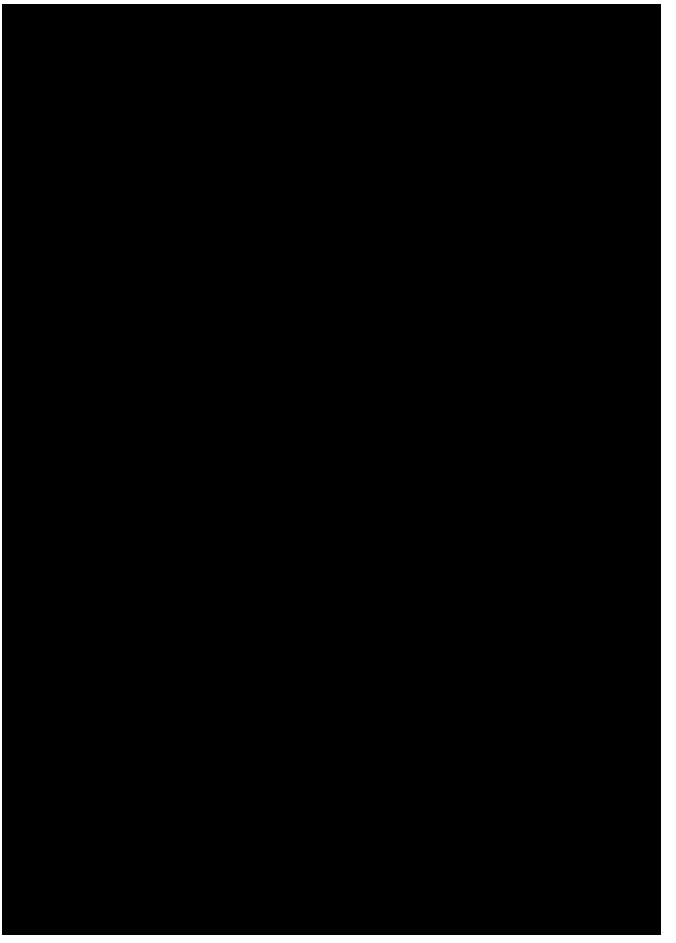

Figure 1. Ōta Kakumin, accompanied by a guard on patrol when visiting the Japanese camp in the Ural mountains (Summer, 1904)

The Russian Period (The Soviet Union)

The Russian Revolution began in February 1917. In October, Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) formed his government. In March 1918 when the Soviet authorities attempted to remove themselves from WWI by concluding a peace treaty with Germany, the governments of America, England, France and Japan resolved to dispatch troops in July, giving as their motive the rescue of the Czech soldiers held captive in Siberia. Of those who were involved, the intervention attempt that was on the greatest scale and that

lasted for the longest period of time was that of the Japanese army. In January 1918, Ōta was appointed Missionary Director for the Troops by the head temple of Nishi Hongwanji. Following the orders of the army commander he formed a consolation group (*imondan* 慰問団) and travelled around Siberia.

In October 1922, the Japanese troops retreated from Siberia. With the withdrawal, Ōta attempted to erect a monument, Urajio Chūkonhi 浦潮忠魂碑, in the communal cemetery for the Japanese at Urajio Hongwanji. However, this construction project was not necessarily based on his design, because he met with resistance from the Japanese government. In the construction of the monument he tried to copy the Kōrai no Jin Teki Mikata Kuyō-hi 高麗陣敵味方供養碑 (memorial monument for enemy and allied troops fallen in Koryŏ).[39] Concerning this monument, he wrote the following:

> Of the memorial monuments built in Japan, of all those in my prayers the one to which I pray with the most joyful gratitude is the Korean battle monument erected on Mount Kōya by the governor of Satsuma, Shimazu Hiroyoshi [Yoshihiro], and his son on their return in triumph from the Korean campaign for the souls of those who fell in Korea. . . . If one reads the characters on the face of the monument, one can see the incised words, "In order that all those soldiers who fought in Korea may enter the Buddhist path." . . . The governor of Satsuma and his son built this monument forgetting grudges towards even those who turned their swords against them, and with a prayer for all equally to attain enlightenment. This is the spirit in which a memorial monument should be erected.[40]

Ōta wanted to construct the Urajio memorial monument based on the same sentiments as those that had underpinned the making of the Korean campaign monument. Such sentiments were shared too by Nogi. However, at the time, the Department of the Army and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected Ōta's proposal.[41] From this, one can infer a deep rift between Ōta's philosophy and that of the system in place from the Meiji period onward.

[39] This memorial tablet was erected at Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺 on Mount Kōya in 1599 by the noblemen Shimazu Yoshihiro 島津義弘 (1535–1619) and his son Tadatsune 忠恒 (1576–1638) to memorialize the souls of those who had died in the Campaign of Keichō 慶長. The Campaigns of Bunroku 文禄 and Keichō (1592–1598) were invasions of Korea in campaigns led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598) to conquer the Ming dynasty.

[40] Ōta 1925, pp. 162–63.

[41] "Kinen kensetsubutsu kankei zakken" 記念建設物関係雑件, held by Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan, 5–2–9–11.

What were Ōta's thoughts concerning the Soviet Union? His writing reveals thorough evaluations of Lenin's policies for the people. He also acutely observed the adoration of the public for Lenin and tried to convey this to his Japanese readership. Further, he wrote frequently, and with words of admiration, on the educational activities for the public conducted by Nadezhda Krupskaya (1869–1939), Lenin's wife. On the other hand, he sounded alarm bells over the tendency he saw to worship Lenin as a god rather than as a politician, and remarked scathingly that this tendency should be termed "Lenin religion." At the same time, he also acidly commented that it might resemble the "dual faith" (*nijū shinkō* 二重信仰) of Japan. His use of the term "dual faith" was an attempt to criticize the trend of the time that held worship of the emperor above Buddhism, Christianity and other religions in Japan.[42] The period during which Ōta was writing critically about "Lenin religion"[43] was one in which ultranationalist attacks on and challenges to the interpretation of the imperial institution as outlined by Minobe Tatsukichi 美濃部建吉 (1873–1948) were at their height.[44] In other words, Ōta's criticism of "Lenin worship" in the Soviet Union was infused with criticism aimed at the imperial system of Japan.

In 1931, when his Soviet Union visa was not reissued, Ōta decided to return to Japan. In the summer of that year he travelled to Moscow and Leningrad.[45] Ōta shook hands with Stalin in Moscow. He also met a woman in Leningrad he refers to as "Ms. K," a scholar of Buddhism who could speak Japanese and had, she said, graduated from university having written a thesis on Buddhism.[46] During the period of the Russian Empire, she had

[42] Ōta's use of the term "dual religion" was clarified in Ōta 1935e (p. 65), in which he wrote, "I was told pointedly, and with an ironic laugh, by a Russian priest, that "Japanese Buddhists worship [Shinto] deities on their Buddhist altars—do they not practice dual religion?" The Russian people of today must be thinking the Japanese dual religion is ridiculous. I feel I want to make sure we don't become the laughing stock of the world."

[43] Ōta 1935d.

[44] "Theory of the emperor as an organ of the state" (*tennō kikansetsu* 天皇機関説) was an interpretation of the Meiji Constitution presented by Minobe, which proposed that the power to rule lay with the state and that the emperor was the highest organ of the state. This theory was an attempt to lay a theoretical basis for rule by political parties, but this theory was rejected in 1935 along with the rise of Fascism and Minobe stepped down from the seat he had held in the House of Peers. His writings were banned and he was excluded from the academic world.

[45] Ōta 1935a, p. 12.

[46] "Ka joshi o omou" カ女史を憶ふ in Ōta 1935a (pp. 1–82). "Ms. K" was a pseudonym used to protect her position and others connected to her at that time in Soviet society. Ōta did

served the empress as a lady-in-waiting but with the revolution and the fall of the empire, she had been reduced to begging in order to survive.[47]

However, Ms. K had established a Buddhist convent,[48] collected alms and trained other followers. Because the Soviet Union was a system completely opposed to religion, the convent of Ms. K was monitored and oppressed by the authorities. Yet, she stated that "the officers are the messengers of the Buddha; jail is a *nenbutsu dōjō* [place for the practice of the nenbutsu]"[49] and only deepened her faith, which deeply impressed Ōta who recorded the following:

> In order to save one woman, I will exert so much strength as no doubt to cause others to laugh, but please forgive me. It's just my nature. It's because I am sensitive. If I think someone has potential, even if it is a woman, or just one person, I will without hesitation exert all my efforts. I don't put on any show, nor alter my behavior. If someone risks their life to listen to the Dharma teaching, and to pursue the Buddhist path, I will risk mine along with them to help them realize their desire. But in today's world I did not think there was any person so great. I thought I would just yearn for my home for thirty years and then return, empty, to Japan. But Ms. K is, effortlessly, just such a person. Ah, it is

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not record anything of her ethnic origins either. That she was a citizen of Russia is likely but there is a possibility that she was of another ethnicity.

[47] Ōta's description of his encounter with Ms. K involved "begging" as a central theme. Ōta (1935b, pp. 45–46) writes: "While taking a walk, I looked forward to offering some money to a beggar standing by the side of the road. I have been doing such a thing for a long time, so I have had many interactions with beggars and there have been many with devout hearts. The last one with whom I had an interaction was Ms. K in Leningrad. Long ago, when Empress Kōmyō 光明 [701–760] washed the dirt from beggars' bodies and made offerings, the last beggar turned into a brightly illuminated Buddha. Although that last beggar, Ms. K, did not pray with illuminated eyes, she most certainly prayed for the illumination of my heart." It was proclaimed that an ideal society with neither poverty nor alms-collecting had emerged after the revolution in the Soviet Union, but the reality was very different. Figures such as Ms. K, who had occupied privileged positions in Imperial Russia and were rejected after its fall by the Soviet Union were reduced to begging to make their way. Ōta recorded this situation.

[48] The main practice hall for the nenbutsu was in the environs of Leningrad, in Novaya Derevnya and there were thirty practitioners. A branch existed in Moscow, with ten. It seems that many of the practitioners had been members of the military or bureaucracy in Imperial Russia.

[49] Ōta 1935a, p. 9.

> so long that I have been waiting for you. I became your intimate friend immediately and truly feel I have known you for always. And so, even if I lost my life now I'd have no regrets.[50]

Meeting Ms. K brought deep insight to Ōta regarding the problems related to the conflict between state and religion. Ōta had spent over around thirty years in Vladivostok as a representative of Urajio Hongwanji and in a sense he had been protected within the mammoth structure of the Hongwanji religious organization. While maintaining a place in this organization, he continued to display his own individual humanity, as we have seen. However, Ōta was not yet satisfied. And in Ms. K, he found a brighter light at the end of the tunnel of his thirty years in the Hongwanji system. He discovered a yet deeper level of religious meaning; religion not for the state but as faith for humans, and reverence for the human soul.

Further, in "Ka joshi o omou" カ女史を憶ふ (Remembering Ms. K), Ōta directed criticism at the Japan of 1934.[51] At the time, freedom of thought was severely limited. His critical message was that the human heart could not be violated even when one is persecuted, as is clear from Ōta's record of his encounter with Ms. K, who would not abandon her faith even in the face of persecution.

In November 1931, Ōta returned to Japan after around thirty years of life in Russia. Following his return, he presented his experiences in Russia in the religious journal, *Daijō* 大乗. During the twenty-two months between February 1934 and November 1935, Ōta continued to publish articles by the month. The five years between his return to Japan and departure to Mongolia was also the period of the "May 15 Incident" (1932) and the "February 26 Incident" (1936).[52] Yet, there is no mention of these matters in his work. He continued to write about his own experiences and observations in Russia and the Soviet Union and his work on this foreign country was underlain by a critical message about his own.

In April 1935, a "Living Buddha" of Inner Mongolia visited Japan and,

[50] Ōta 1935a, p. 80.

[51] Ōta 1934.

[52] The "May 15 Incident" was an attempted *coup d'etat* in Japan by young naval officers that took place on 15 May 1932. The plan failed, but the incident was to exert a significant influence on the Japanese government, opening the way to Fascism and militarism. The "February 26 Incident" occurred on 26 February 1936 and was an uprising by the Kōdō-ha 皇道派 faction of the Imperial Japanese Army.

as host, Ōta escorted him to Ise Shrine.[53] At this time, he received an invitation from an advisor to this venerable dignitary to visit Mongolia. Citing reasons of age, Ōta declined the invitation but in March 1936, he decided to go,[54] and set off in July. He had already reached the age of seventy-one. His decision to go to Mongolia in his late years was likely to have been influenced by the impression Ms. K had made on him. Having witnessed such a person who continued to protect and spread the teachings of Japanese Buddhism even amidst persecution in the Soviet Union, he remarked, "In Russia, Ms. K is doing my duty for me."[55] What was this duty? It was to resist the religious persecution of the Soviet Union, and to continue to preach the Japanese Buddhism that remained on Soviet soil. However, Ōta could not fulfill that duty and returned to Japan. He must have been filled with a deep sense of remorse.

He crossed into Mongolia in 1936. In "Nyūmō no Ji" 入蒙之辞 (Greetings upon Entering Mongolia), which he presented soon after entering the country, appears the passage:

> Russia [the Soviet Union] is invading the western part of Outer Mongolia. Russia is against religion and it is the policy of the government to wipe out religion. Therefore, Lamaism in Outer Mongolia is in a position of grave danger. We, who are of the same Buddhist religion, and especially you who are of the same ethnicity, must feel a sense of empathy with the Lamaists of Outer Mongolia and must in a religious sense aid and save them. Also, we must prevent the invasion of these evil ideas further east.[56]

Ōta spoke of his reason for going there in such a way, as originating in the desire to preserve Lamaism in Inner Mongolia, as a response to the Soviet policy of eliminating religion. However, despite the deep impression Ms. K had made on him by protecting the Japanese Buddhist faith while faced with oppression, he had left the Soviet Union one time and gone back to Japan. But by locating himself in Inner Mongolia where the aggressive hand of the religion-opposing Soviet Union threatened to encroach, he invested his efforts in protecting Lamaism and perhaps it was in this way that he fulfilled the "last wishes" of Ms. K.

[53] Ōta 1935c.
[54] *Nagoya shinbun* 名古屋新聞, 13 March 1936.
[55] Ōta 1935a, p. 80.
[56] Ōta 1936, pp. 56–57.

Research on the issues surrounding Ōta's crossing into Mongolia has been undertaken by Tsukinoki Mizuo, who emphasizes the connection between Ōta and the military authorities: "The links between Ōta and the military are not clear. However, it is likely that had there been no link, it would have been quite impossible for Ōta to travel to Mongolia—with which his previous preaching work in Siberia had no connection—at the advanced age of seventy-one, and to die there."[57] However, a close reading of the materials related to Ōta clearly reveals that Ms. K played a part in his decision to go to Mongolia. Needless to say, a more in-depth study is required in order to clarify the reasons and the activities he undertook in Mongolia, but it is beyond question that Ms. K played a factor in his decision-making

The Mongolian Period

Ōta was engaged in the instruction of lamas at Jiningsi 集寧寺 in Xing'an 興安, but rather than forcing his Buddhist faith (Shin Buddhism) onto the Mongolian people, he respected their religion and his intent was to help to revive and develop it. He wrote, "They are Mongolian, so of course they speak Mongolian but most cannot read it. This is an illiterate community. It has long been under the rule of China but the people cannot read Chinese. They study Tibetan exclusively. Education here is nothing but teaching and learning Tibetan. . . . The Mongolian people must learn Mongolian, the basic language of their country."[58]

Thus, he encouraged training in the reading and writing of Mongolian. On the other hand, he established a place for instructing Japanese at Jiningsi, and endeavored to support Japanese-language education.[59] However, his teaching did not exceed the level of helping to transmit Japanese culture.[60] He insisted that the national language should be Mongolian. He also set up a site at Jiningsi where medicine could be distributed called Ciyantang 慈眼堂, and administered care for eye diseases to the Mongolian people.[61] He also provided inoculations against infectious diseases.[62] Through his work, he unfailingly addressed the reality of the people. As in his activities

[57] Tsukinoki 2002, p. 6.
[58] Ōta 1937b, p. 44.
[59] Ōta 1937a, p. 41.
[60] Ōta 1936, pp. 57–58.
[61] Ōta 1937a, p. 41. Also, in Ōta 1937b, p. 43, he writes "in order that even one person will not have an eye disease, and in order that even one person will not be illiterate."
[62] Ōta 1938a, pp. 106–10.

in Vladivostok, we can see here Ōta's occupying a "free" position that transcended the boundaries of the Shin Buddhist denomination. On 30 November 1944, Ōta passed away at Jiningsi. He was seventy-nine years old.

THE THOUGHT OF ŌTA KAKUMIN

A great change can be observed in Ōta's thought between the period before he went to Vladivostok (his youth) and after. One can say that that was a change from prioritizing the state to prioritizing religion. The activities of the first period of his life were deeply colored by "patriotic youthfulness." In the three works of his early period, his complete investiture in the Meiji state is indicated. In contrast, in Vladivostok, he ventured into a place where there resided many prostitutes, people at the lowest rungs of society. This was likely because Ōta deeply respected the ideas of Shinran who had asserted that "the lowly who are hunters and peddlers" were the same as "you and I." Here, one can say that Ōta could not remain a "patriotic youth"; he held deep inner religious feelings.

The actual experience of living day to day with the prostitutes can be surmised to have had a remarkably deep impact on Ōta's thought. These prostitutes had been alienated from the state since their youth. They fell outside its framework and this is why they had travelled all the way to Vladivostok to live and work. Through his contact with them, Ōta was forced to face up to the limits of "religion within a state framework" and this no doubt impacted on both his view of the state and of religion.

The Russo-Japanese War was decisive in this process of deepening his thought. Aware of the risk that Japanese people could be left in the deep reaches of Siberia, the state prioritized diplomatic strategy and failed to issue a repatriation order. Ōta, prioritizing the lives of the people, urged Kawakami to issue it immediately, but his request was not met. Not only this, but the state, in the last phase, tried to close the repatriation process even with the knowledge that there were still Japanese people left in Siberia. In the face of Ōta's consolation of the Japanese left behind, Kawakami, as a state official, advised him to go back to Japan. But Ōta, who saw people completely deserted by the state in an emergency situation, asked himself who would save them if not religion, and needless to say was unable to follow Kawakami's advice. Opposing the request of the state, he chose the path of religious salvation for the prostitutes and victims of discrimination. Helping those refused protection by the state at the risk of his own life surely created a significant change in his view of state and religion.

Ōta had experienced the great social and political changes brought about by the Russian Revolution from within Russia. Accordingly, this essay has divided Ōta's life into the periods "The Russian Period" (Russian Empire) and "The Russian Period" (The Soviet Union). However, in comparing Ōta's thought before and after the revolution, one cannot find a great difference. He accepted rather dispassionately and as necessary the great turning point that the revolution represented. Further, he evaluated and criticized without emotion the new power of the Soviet Union. He also predicted clearly that it would fall, and wrote about this frankly. One can say that the change in thought between that of his youth and that of the period of time in the Russian Empire was a result of decisive experiences that had come to impact on his view of state and religion. On the other hand, living through the fall of the empire and the rise of the Soviet Union seemed to have sharpened such views further.

Research by Katō Kyūzō has addressed the changes in Ōta's thought. He explains that the dispatch to Siberia altered Ōta's viewpoint from that of a citizen to that of an official.[63] However, a fresh reading without bias of Ōta's body of written work discloses that the truth is quite the opposite. That is to say, the Russo-Japanese War was the turning point, and Ōta changed from a nationalist to one who prioritized religion for the sake of the people over religion in the interests of the state. It must be emphasized that this change in thought came about through his contact with prostitutes and other victims of discrimination.

In the final "Mongolian Period," Ōta did not impose the *senju nenbutsu* 専修念仏 (sole nenbutsu practice) on others but instead threw himself into reviving Lamaism, and to improving the hygiene and lifestyle of the people, which reveals a religiously non-exclusive approach. In his very late years, at the age of eighty-six, Shinran explained the concept of *jinen hōni* 自然法爾, stating that Amida, the supreme object of his worship, was a "means" or "tool" by which one could realize that all is made to become so by itself.[64] Of course, Shinran had not abandoned the practice of *senju nenbutsu*; he was a deeply devoted practitioner. It was based on this that he claimed that religion was a "method" and this represents a significant point in Shinran's religious understanding. Ōta's case is similar. At the time of going to Mongolia

[63] Katō suggests that this was the reason that on the occasion of the dispatch of troops to Siberia, Ōta offered the assembly hall of Urajio Hongwanji as living quarters for the soldiers (see Katō 1980, pp. 104–5).

[64] Shinran 1956, p. 56.

in his late years, nothing had changed at all regarding his status as a priest of Nishi Hongwanji. He did not, in his approach to the Mongolian people, see himself first and foremost as a devotee of the *senju nenbutsu* but was intent on reviving Lamaism. In this way, he, like Shinran, while a *senju nenbutsu* devotee, also displayed the will to discern humanity beyond religious or sectarian boundaries. At a time when man-made religion has come to be considered the highest goal in itself, and thus come to dominate the lives of people, this attitude might hold some meaning for us today.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have attempted to introduce the life and thought of Ōta, the Director of Missionary Work of Urajio Hongwanji. Ōta might seem like just another priest, yet he was a figure who could not extract himself from the lives of the people—it was here that he was in his element. And the stages for his activities stretched as far afield as Russia and Mongolia. A huge change occurred during Ōta's life, the change from his position as a nationalist in his youth to a position informed mostly by religion, and was triggered by his bringing home of the Japanese left in Siberia during the Russo-Japanese War. Among those he "saved" was a large number of prostitutes. Through his encounters with these women, who had been spurned by the state, he was able to realize a kind of religion that could not be contained within the framework provided by the state. In that sense, what he really saved was perhaps not the prostitutes, but himself.

The memory of Ōta has been preserved in an extremely limited number of materials. Consequently, as a subject of previous research, he has been treated as merely a "spy." However, this writer's research has brought to light a large number of related materials and works written by Ōta himself. Whilst living in the state system of "Great Imperial Japan," he had the unusual experience of, in the very same period, an anti-religion system in the Soviet Union, and his writings reflect a great many other keen observations and analyses. These might well provide suggestions today for the conflict and resolution between state and religion that continue up to the present day.

(Translated by Elizabeth Tinsley)

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