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"War is a Crime": Takenaka Shōgen and Buddhist Resistance in the Asia-Pacific War and Today 竹中彰元「戦争は罪悪である」アジア太平洋戦争当時と今日における仏教徒の抵抗

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Translated and with a comment by Brian Daizen Victoria

In this country it is uncommon to have the opportunity to reflect on the conscience of those who were opposed to war. However, now is the time to direct our thoughts to the way of life and words of a Buddhist priest who risked his life in the prewar era to proclaim: "War is a Crime."

The village of Taruichō in Gifu prefecture once prospered as a stage on the pre-modern Nakasendō main road. Today, when you get off the train at Tarui station on the Tōkaidō line, you find yourself in the midst of an agricultural area full of rice paddies. Travelling by car for another four kilometers eventually takes you to an old temple by the name of Myōsenji, affiliated with the Ōtani branch of the Shin [True Pure Land] sect.

To the left of the main entrance to the temple is a stone pillar on which are inscribed the words: "War is a Crime." At the bottom, the pillar states: "This is the temple of Abbot Takenaka Shōgen."

Takenaka Shōgen, born 1867; Studied at Tōyō University and Ōtani University (as they are now called). Other priests in the Ōtani branch who spoke out against the war include: Ueki Tetsujō, abbot of Jōnenji temple in Ise city.

This is the name of the Buddhist priest who spoke the words on the pillar in this corner of Gifu prefecture on September 15, 1937, some two months after the outbreak of full-scale war with China. By this time Japan was in a state of war, just as if it had tumbled down a hill. The priest, Takenaka Shōgen, was the fourteenth generation abbot of this temple, a high-ranking

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priest in the Ōtani branch of the Shin sect. He was seventy years old at the time.

It so happened that this was the date Takenaka accompanied the village members of the Association of Army Reservists who were heading to the train station in Tarui to give a rousing send off to soldiers heading for the frontlines on the continent. According to the *Tokkō Geppō* (Monthly Bulletin of the Special Higher Police Division), edited by the Security Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Takenaka made the following statement along the way:

> War is both criminal and, at the same time, the enemy of humanity; it should be stopped. In both northern and central China, [Japan] should stop with what it has already occupied. War is never a benefit to a nation, rather it is a terrible loss.... From this point of view, I think it would be wise for the state to stop this war.

It is said that some of the villagers who heard these remarks got angry and showered abuse on Takenaka. However, his remarks didn't stop. According to the same police bulletin, on October 10th, Takenaka stated the following about the war at the annual memorial service for previous abbots of a nearby temple:

> It looks to me like aggression. From a Mahayanistic point of view, it is improper to deprive either oneself or others of their lives to no purpose, incurring enormous financial costs and loss of life in the process. War is the greatest crime there is.... It would be better to stop the war in such places.

A few days later, on Oct 21st, there was another Buddhist service in a village temple. At that time a number of Buddhist priests who had heard rumors of Takenaka's earlier statements demanded a retraction from him. According to records from his later court trial, Takenaka replied as follows: "Since there is freedom of speech I am not concerned whether I am called in by the military police or the Special Higher Police Department. I have no fear about anything I have said."

On October 26th the village police arrested Takenaka. Two of the priests present at the first memorial service, not villagers, had secretly reported his remarks to the village office. He was indicted under Section 99 of the Army Penal Code that forbade "fabrications and wild rumors." On April 27, 1938 the Nagoya High Court rendered its final verdict, a four-month prison sentence, suspended for three years.

The War Collaboration of the Ōtani Branch of the Shin Sect

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竹中彰元と仏教者の抵抗

現在に問う「戦争は罪悪である」という言葉

成澤 宗男

この国では、戦争に反対した良心が顧みられる機会は希だ。だが戦前、生命を賭して「戦争は罪悪である」と呼びかけた僧侶の言葉と生き様に、今こそ思いをはせたい。

かつて中山道の宿場町として栄えた、岐阜県の垂井町――。JR東海道線の垂井駅で下車し、水田が広がる農村地帯を車で4キロほど走ると、やがて明泉寺という真宗大谷派の古いお寺が見えてくる。

そして山門の左端には、「戦争は罪悪である」との文字が彫られた碑が建っている。文字の下には、「竹中彰元師之寺」とある。

中国との全面戦争が始まって約2カ月経った1937年の9月15日、坂を転げ落ちるように戦時国家となっていった時代に、美濃の一隅でこの碑に刻まれた「戦争は罪悪である」という言葉を叫んだ僧侶がいた。明泉寺14代住職で、大谷派の高僧であった竹中彰元師である。そのとき、70歳であった。

この日、折しも垂井から大陸へ出征する兵士を熱狂的な「万歳」で見送るため、駅に向かおうとしていた在郷軍人会の村人に対し、竹中師が道すがら語りかけた言葉が内務省警保局編の『特高外事月報』に記録されている。

「戦争は罪悪であると同時に、人類に対する敵であるから止めたがよい。北支の方も中支の方も、今占領している部分だけで止めた方がよい。決して国家として戦争は得なものではない。非常に損ばかりである。（略）戦争は此の意味から止めた方が国家として賢明であると考える」――。

これを聞いた何人かの村人は、怒って竹中師に罵声を浴びせたという。だが、師の発言は続く。10月10日、今度は村のある寺での、前住職年忌法要の席であった。

「自分は侵略の様に考える。徒に彼我の生命を奪い莫大な予算を費い人馬の命を奪うことは大乗的な立場から見ても宜しくない。戦争は最大の罪悪だ。（略）もう此処らで戦争は止めたがよかろう」（同『月報』より）――。

さらに10月21日、別の村内の寺で法要が行なわれた際、すでに竹中師の噂を聞きつけていた僧侶らが発言の撤回を求めたが、師は後の裁判資料によると次のように答えたとされる。

「言論は自由だから憲兵や特高課から来ようが何ともない、自分の言ったことについては少しも恐れはせぬ」――。

結局、村人ではなく最初の法要に居合わせた僧侶二人が役場に密告したため、竹中師は同月26日に地元の警察に逮捕された。陸軍刑法第99条（造言飛語罪）で起訴され、最終的に翌38年4月27日、名古屋控訴院（高裁）で禁錮4カ月、執行猶予3年の刑が確定する。

本山の戦争協力

それから7年後の45年10月21日、竹中師は、自身が「罪悪」「侵略」と見抜いた戦争を15年間も続けた天皇制ファシズムが滅亡するのを見届けたかのように、77年の生涯を終える。同年8月15日、女学校時代に「あんたの爺さんは非国民や」といじめ抜かれた竹中師の養子・界雄の娘の照子さんが、「おじいちゃんの言うたとおりやったね。今に表彰されるかもしれんね。それまで頑張らないかんよ」と、病床に伏していた竹中師に語りかけた。師は、「うふふ。そうかい」と微笑んだという。

竹中師は逮捕から世を去るまで、「戦争は罪悪である」という言を一度でも修正したり、撤回した形跡はない。ただ、33年に本山での法要儀式「報恩講」で、布教使として説教するほどの地位にあった竹中師は、その2年前から始まっていた満州事変について反戦的な言辞を口にしたことはなかった。しかも日清・日露戦争時から他の仏教教団と同様に天皇制国家の戦争政策を全面的に支えてきた大谷派は、事変直後にも「国家の大方針を確認して各その本分に従い国論統一に就」くようにとの、各寺院宛「論達」を出す。そうした教団の高僧でありながら、竹中師はなぜ「戦争は罪悪である」と発言するまでになったのか。

学生時代に「仏教教団の戦争責任」をテーマとする卒業論文に取り組み、「戦争に反対した仏教者はいなかったのか」という問題意識から『特高外事月報』を読み漁

明泉寺山門前の、「戦争は罪悪である」の碑（撮影／編集部）。記事は大東仁著『戦争は罪悪である　反戦僧侶・竹中彰元の叛骨』（風媒社）参照。

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Seven years later, on October 21, 1945, Takenaka died at the age of seventy-seven, just as if he had wished to make certain of the collapse of a war that had lasted for fifteen years, a war based on Imperial fascism that he regarded as a "crime" and "aggression." Takenaka had an adopted daughter named Kaiō. Kaiō's daughter was named Teruko. While at a girl's school during the war years, Teruko's fellow students tormented her, saying, "Your grandfather is a traitor!" On August 15, 1945, [the day of Japan's surrender], Teruko visited her grandfather in the hospital and said, "It ended up just as you said it would, grandfather. You might be given an award so you must try to stay alive." Takenaka only smiled and said, "Is that so."

From the time he was arrested until the time he died, there is no indication that Takenaka retracted or revised his statement: "War is a crime." On the other hand, it is also true that in 1933, at the time Takenaka gave sermons at the main branch temple on the theme of repaying the debt of gratitude owed others, he made no antiwar remarks regarding the Manchurian Incident that had occurred in 1931, two years earlier.

The same thing can be said about the Ōtani branch as a whole. From the time of the first Sino-Japanese war [of 1894-5] and the Russo-Japanese war [of 1904-5], the Ōtani branch gave its full support to a Japan headed by the emperor just as the other Buddhist sects did. Just after the Manchurian Incident, the branch headquarters sent a directive to all affiliated temples that they were "to validate the great national policy and, fulfilling their respective roles, endeavor to unify public opinion." Takenaka was a high-ranking priest in the branch. Why hadn't he spoken out earlier about this issue? Why had it taken him so long to state: "War is a Crime"?

Daitō Satoshi is a priest in the Ōtani branch who wrote his university graduation thesis on the war responsibility of Buddhist sectarian organizations. He went on to question whether any priests had opposed the war, leading him to read the *Monthly Bulletin of the Special Higher Police Division.* It was there that he first encountered Takenaka's previously unknown case. Daitō believes it was the increasing pace of the branch's war collaboration that led Takenaka to speak out when he did:

> The first thing the branch headquarters did in 1936 was forbid the reading of a passage in the *Godenshō* [Life of Shinran Shonin] that criticizes the 13th century emperor who oppressed Shinran, founder of the Shin sect. From the end of that year through the following year the head of the branch went to worship at the Ise, Meiji and Yasukuni Shinto Shrines. This is despite the fact that

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> Shinran had forbidden this practice.
>
> Still further, the branch headquarters effectively forced Konō Hōun, then president of Ōtani University, to resign because he had written an article in the branch's magazine stating that not even Amaterasu, [the Shinto Sun Goddess and alleged progenitor of the Imperial family] need be worshipped.
>
> The branch's series of actions disregarding the teachings of its founder must have come as a shock to Takenaka who was a well-educated priest who had studied at two universities. This may have been what caused him to have doubts about the war with which the branch was collaborating.

Approximately seven months after Takenaka's conviction, i.e., in November 1938, the branch headquarters stripped him, among other things, of his qualification to propagate the branch's teachings. It was not until sixty-nine years later, i.e., in 2007, that his status was reinstated. As a priest, Takenaka had done no more than express the original Buddhist teaching that one should not kill. Why, then, had it taken so long to restore his status?

The Restoration of Takenaka's Reputation

In 1990 I participated in a peace exhibition that was held at the Nagoya headquarters of the Ōtani branch of the Shin sect. Takenaka's anti-war statements were featured there and caused quite a stir. Exhibition visitors said, "There was such a terrific person as this!" Further, in 1995 Daitō Satoshi reported on another peace exhibition at the branch temple for the Ōgaki district in Gifu prefecture. Takenaka was widely viewed as "the pride of our district," and interested priests held a series of lectures at his temple on the anniversary of his death. This in turn led to the start of a petition campaign calling on the headquarters of the Ōtani branch of the Shin sect to restore Takenaka's reputation.

However, at the branch headquarters no one even knew Takanaka's name let alone about the punishment he had received. It thus took some time until finally, on October 19, 2007, a "Great Assembly in Honor of [Takenaka Shōgen's] Restoration" was held at Takenaka's temple. The branch's Secretary-General, its top administrative officer, attended the meeting and read a proclamation stating: "It was a big mistake for this branch to have not only failed to listen to Takenaka's aspiration for peace but punished him as well. I wish to sincerely apologize."

Nevertheless, the current Abe administration recently made what it described as a "Cabinet decision" to approve a policy of "collective self-defense," thus taking the first step on the road to war. I wonder if this isn't a good time to sincerely take to heart Takenaka's statement made some seventy-seven years ago: "War is a Crime."

Takenaka Shinshō is the seventeenth and current abbot of Myōsenji. He states:

> I first heard of Shōgen's [anti-war] remarks a few years before he became well known at the assembly to honor him. My father never told me anything about him except to say that he was a very stubborn old man who went around preaching here and there.
>
> Thinking about it now, I realize that what he did was terrific, risking his life in the process. Had

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> it been me, I wonder if I could have done it. Be that as it may, it is exactly because we are now able to speak freely that I take the opportunity to talk to my parishioners about such issues as war and nuclear power plants. I would like to see an increase in the number of priests discussing these things, for it ought to be the role of Buddhists to talk about the dignity of life. No doubt Shōgen faced a lot of difficulties, but at the end of the day he was unable to turn his back on the path of the Buddha.

One can only wonder whether this country now intends to repeat what Takanaka so strongly admonished against, i.e., the action of taking one's own life and that of others. In other words, taking the bloody path of killing others and being killed by others. In postwar Germany, the memory of those who risked their lives to fight against the Nazis and war has been passed down from one generation to the next including memorials built in their honor.

However, in this country we still tearfully remember soldiers like *kamikaze* pilots and others who "fought for their country." On the other hand, we have continued to ignore the wartime antiwar consciences of people like Takenaka. Now it appears we are going to have to pay the price for having done so.

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Translator's Comment by Brian Daizen Victoria:

Having earlier described Takenaka Shōgen's anti-war stance in my book *Zen at War* (pp.74-75), it is a pleasure to introduce this courageous priest to a wider audience. His outspokenness is all the more precious because so very few of his fellow Buddhist priests did likewise. In fact, nearly to a man Japan's Buddhist leaders played the role of 'cheerleaders' for the war effort.

However, as this article makes clear, Takenaka came to embrace his anti-war stance at a relatively late date, i.e., in the aftermath of

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Japan's full-scale invasion of China starting in July 1937. By that time nothing short of a massive show of anti-war defiance by Japan's Buddhist leaders, in the context of a broad antiwar movement, could have stopped Japan's aggressive policies, and even that might not have been enough. Thus Takenaka's statements had little effect.

In addition to the relative tardiness of Takenaka's statements is the fact that at least on the surface his remedy was simple, i.e., "In both northern and central China, [Japan] should stop with what it has already occupied." Needless to say, this would have left much of the Japanese empire intact, e.g., Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, etc. Given this, it can be justifiably claimed that Takenaka was not so much opposed to Japan's colonial empire as he was to "biting off more than you can chew." Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to label Japan's post-1937 military invasion of China an act of "aggression."

At best, what can be said of Takenaka was that he, together with a handful of other wartime, anti-war Buddhist priests, demonstrated that there were still conscientious religionists within Buddhist circles, no matter how few in number. Today, it remains to be seen is how many such religionists will come forward to oppose Japan's recently adopted policy of once again sending its military forces abroad to fight wars of "collective self-defense," this time allied to the United States. Time will tell.

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