

REVIEW ARTICLE

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The Concept of Religion in Modern Japan Imposition, Invention, or Innovation?

Hoshino Seiji 星野靖二, *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gainen: Shūkyōsha no kotoba to kindai* 近代日本の宗教概念—宗教者の言葉と近代 [The Concept of Religion in Modern Japan]. Tokyo: Yūshisha Press, 2012.

Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

THE TWO books reviewed here are excellent examples of critical but constructive approaches to the category of religion that have become possible thanks to a recent reflexive turn in the field of Japanese religious studies (ISOMAE 2003; SHIMAZONO and TSURUOKA 2004; HAYASHI and ISOMAE 2008). Jason Josephson’s *The Invention of Religion in Japan* offers a creative theoretical apparatus that many students of Japanese religion and history will find immediately useful. The book takes a long view that extends back just prior to the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) and through to the early twentieth century, highlighting the ways that terms such as “superstition” and “heresy” articulated the boundaries of “religion,” particularly in legal contexts such as international relations and domestic statecraft. Hoshino Seiji’s historically detailed case studies and narrower temporal scope provide a nice counterbalance to the broad, top-down analysis Josephson favors. *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gainen* focuses specifically on the Meiji era, showing how abstract conceptions of “religion” emerged from intellectuals’ apologetic discourse. Both books will undoubtedly fructify

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future scholarship through their persuasive challenges to previously regnant paradigms and through their careful historical research.

The Invention of Religion in Japan

Jason Josephson boasts a formidable linguistic skill set and a corresponding fluency with theoretical material; he puts both to extensive use in this wide-ranging book. He begins from the premise—long recognized by the academy but still in need of repeating—that “religion” is not a natural, universal category. However, in a twist on scholarship that has explained “religion” as a product of European attempts to make sense of cultural differences (ASAD 1993; MASUZAWA 2005), Josephson argues that “religion” is a term that has exerted greater influence at the level of international law than it has in the musings of anthropologists struggling to render different value systems mutually intelligible. In Japan, religion was invented to solve pressing diplomatic problems, and Japanese people proactively participated in that invention rather than being passive recipients of an immutable anthropological category.¹

Josephson’s focus on the scale of international diplomacy and national domestic policy means that his book is not an account of how specific Buddhist, Shinto, and Christian leaders made the category of religion their own. However, his top-down view informs his stimulating observation that categories such as “superstition” exert considerable pressure on both “religion” and “the secular.” Here Josephson contributes not only to our understanding of religion-state relations in Japan, but also to the theoretical literature on secularity and secularism, which has—until very recently—largely overlooked non-Euro-American cases, and also how unequal geopolitical power relationships have inflected secularity in Europe and North America (MAHMOOD 2010).

In discussing the general feasibility of applying the category of “religion” to Japan, Josephson distinguishes between two competing definitions of religion that have been prevalent in the Euro-American world. In an earlier version, reference to a god or gods formed an indispensable core of the definition, and religion was understood to have been “revealed” to different cultures. This “theocentric” definition has gradually (if incompletely) yielded to a secularized and globalized “hierocentric” version, in which religion represents a unique phenomenon that forms a discrete aspect of human experience. Theocentric definitions of religion posit one universal revelation from the Christian god to various cultures; non-Christian systems of ritual and thought have therefore been

1. Although Josephson’s work is largely unprecedented in Japanese studies, several scholars of South Asia (KING 1999; VAN DER VEER 2001; PENNINGTON 2005) have identified how local intellectuals appropriated the category of religion, skillfully wielding it in both domestic (British colonial) and international contexts.

understood as flawed representations of a pure original (of which Protestant Christianity has remained the paradigmatic model). Hierocentric definitions have rejected the prerequisite of divine revelation, preferring instead to posit a dichotomy between “sacred” and “profane,” and suggest that “the sacred” can be found in all human cultures. Josephson rejects this sacred/profane dichotomy as specious, showing that the anthropological concept of “the sacred” is inherently based on the earlier, theocentric model. The remainder of the book traces how these two definitions came to be applied to Japan.²

In Chapter 1, Josephson argues that Tokugawa officials’ classification of Christianity as a “heresy” (*jakyō* 邪教) meant that they treated it not as a foreign “religion” but as a deviant version of local practices. He shows that the Japanese had two strategies for addressing the presence of Christianity on the archipelago without resorting to the category of religion per se. The first, “hierarchical inclusion,” organized difference under a totalizing framework that could elide apparent dissimilarities. This was the case when, for example, local interpreters understood the Christian Deus as just another name for Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来. The different nomenclature was not understood as representing an alternate cosmological viewpoint but was instead subsumed under the preexisting framework of Buddhist cosmology. The second strategy, “exclusive similarity,” operated by excluding on the basis of resemblance, treating difference as an aberrant imitation. Citing the case of the maligned Tachikawa-ryū 立川流 lineage as an example of native discourses of aberrant behavior, Josephson shows that the category of heresy works by treating a particular group or practice as similar yet illegitimate. By attributing distasteful practices to demonic influence, Buddhist elites could define orthodoxy.

In Chapter 2, “Heretical Anthropology,” Josephson juxtaposes Tokugawa period historical records detailing European observations of Japan with Japanese observations of Europeans. While Josephson’s point is to show that both groups relied on the concept of heresy in their attempts to understand the other, he gives slightly more weight to Japanese accounts as a way of dislodging the presupposition that Europeans were the only ones observing a foreign culture and struggling to make sense of its barbaric practices. Just as Europeans read Buddhism as a heretical form of Christianity, the Japanese read Christianity as a Buddhist heresy. An appendix includes a translation of one such Japanese attempt in 1709.

The Japanese lacked the category of religion as a way of making sense of this encounter, but the European grasp on “religion” as a universal category was also

2. Josephson’s narrative historically ends in the early twentieth century, making the connection between his account and contemporary Japanese religious studies more implied than explicit, but this also allows him to distinguish his project from earlier studies (particularly Iso-MAE 2003).

tenuous. Chapter 3 proceeds with this in mind, as Josephson examines how “religion” emerged as a political term used in the treaties ratified between Japan, the United States, and western European nations.³ Noting the flurry of translation that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century as Japanese interpreters attempted to find or create appropriate domestic analogues for foreign words and ideas, Josephson draws on linguistic theory to show that as the prototype for “religion,” Christianity retained a primacy of place even when that category was reformulated to include non-Christian practices. Although they were in a relatively weak position in terms of international power relations, Japanese interpreters were not passive recipients of this Christian-centric “religion.” Through tactical practices of selective translation and creative interpretation, late Tokugawa and early Meiji leaders proactively misread the diplomatic term “religion” in order to build prophylactic barriers against Christian incursion.

In Chapter 4, Josephson lays out the first part of his account of how Shinto came to be understood as a non-religion in Meiji era governmental policy. He argues that Shinto was not, as has commonly been assumed, a “religion” that was reconfigured as a political system. Rather, Shinto was molded in the hands of Kokugaku 国学 scholars to operate as a comprehensive “science.” European understandings of science were intimately connected with Christian cosmology, so Japanese interpreters operating under the Tokugawa ban on Christianity had to “secularize” European scientific knowledge before Europeans themselves did. Using new philological and textual critical methods, these Japanese interpreters then shrewdly showed that ancient Japanese people had understood, for example, the heliocentric conception of the universe long before Europeans had, effectively making European science a pale imitation of a Japanese original. Kokugaku and Mito School intellectual strains subsequently blended in Ōkuni Takamasa’s 大國隆正 (1792–1871) *hongaku* 本学, a comprehensive worldview that directly informed the political disposition of the nascent Meiji state. What appeared to be “religion” (that is, Shinto) was actually a comprehensive type of knowledge that incorporated cosmogony, “natural philosophy,” and political theory.

As a logical extension of his argument that Shinto operated as a National Science, Josephson asserts in Chapter 5 that Shinto formed the basis for a secular system in Meiji era Japan. This perspective may be counterintuitive to readers more familiar with the older model of Shinto as Japan’s national religion from the period between 1868 and 1945, but that model has been sharply and deservedly called into question in recent Japanese scholarship (OKUYAMA 2011). Questioning the “State Shinto” model does not mean running to the opposite extreme

3. Josephson’s claim that provisions for “religious freedom” in international treaties served as a cover for Christian missionary activity corroborates recent scholarship on the Middle East (MAHMOOD 2012).

of defending what was clearly an ideologically powerful (and ultimately violent) worldview. Crucially, Josephson shows that as a secular system, Shinto exerted as much ideological force as any state religion might, forcing religions to define themselves in opposition to a Shinto conceived as “neutral,” antecedent to private religious “belief,” and equivalent with Japaneseness. This “Shinto secular” formed a common core-type secularism that undergirded the Meiji state by superseding all other religious commitments.⁴

Through a creative excursus on the development of realist fiction and biopolitics, Josephson shows a two-step process whereby “the real” became equated with the National Science worldview in Meiji era Japan. Although the empirically unverifiable aspects of that worldview (deities, a divine cosmogony) gradually receded in the arena of natural science, they survived in Shinto-inflected political theory. The understanding of reality that resulted deeply influenced compulsory education, the “secularization” of shrines and the laicization of shrine priests, and the formal separation of Shinto from Buddhism. The resulting secularized Shinto vision of the Japanese *kokutai* 国体 functioned analogously to the secularized Christian theology that informed nineteenth-century European political sovereignty. It also became distinguished from a private, “religious” variety of Shinto when the government began to reconfigure Shinto lay associations as “religions” akin to Buddhist denominations in the 1870s.

In the next phase of his argument, Josephson argues that part of the process of formulating a modern “Shinto secular” state was to identify certain practices and groups as incompatible with “the real” posited by the Meiji state. The “civilization and enlightenment” rhetoric of the era was applied not only to customs but also to ritual: as secular Shinto rituals came to serve as markers of civilization, alternate ritual forms were suppressed. This resulted in a standardization of the national ritual calendar, suppression of “lewd” practices such as phallus worship, and persecution of fortune-tellers and their ilk. The rise of scientific authority and new disciplines such as psychology also caused, by the 1880s, a new form of (partial) disenchantment in which the neologism *meishin* 迷信 (superstition)

4. Although the category of “the secular” forms a crucial linchpin of Josephson’s argument here, he unfortunately glosses over important distinctions between “the secular” (an ostensibly neutral, non-religious space), “secularism” (an ideology aiming to create such space), “secularity” (a quality of social structure or epistemology predicated on the presupposition that “the secular” exists), and “secularization” (understood alternatively as the inexorable retreat of religion from public space or the proactive exile of religion by the state). This minor criticism aside, in his indication of the mutual imbrication of “religion” and “the secular” and his attendant recognition that varieties of secularism exist, Josephson is consistent with some recent scholarship (for example, JAKOBSEN and PELLEGRINI 2008). His argument is also, to my mind, a considerable improvement on the problematic “State Shinto” model. This contribution will become more apparent as others apply Josephson’s insights to the early twentieth century.

came to replace heresy (*jakyō*) as the identifier for unsavory ritual practices. Contemporary legal codes exhibit a transition wherein “black magic”—formerly banned because it was perceived to be physically dangerous—came to be censured instead because it was “superstitious,” while individuals suffering from fox possession and similar ailments came to be treated as mentally ill. Meanwhile, official attempts to restrict missionary activities led to the introduction of the new, abstract category of “religion” into international treaties. Policymakers inscribed the new distinctions between science and superstition in treaty provisions for “freedom of religion.”

In Chapter 7, Josephson upends the familiar Saidian account of Europe’s masterful encounter with the passive “Orient,” showing that Japanese interpreters played active roles in formulating European understandings of the new academic field of “Japanese religions.” While European interpreters held strategic advantage in early discussions of “Japanese religions,” Japanese intellectuals and policymakers wielded tactical agency to reconfigure the category of “religion” to suit their particular interests. Intellectuals with diplomatic experience and contributors to the influential policy journal *Meiroke zasshi* 明六雜誌 weighed in on what counted as “religion” in Japan, what role it should play in statecraft (particularly “civilizing” projects), and how the diplomatic problem of “religious freedom” was best resolved.

The diversity of interpretations seen in the pages of *Meiroke zasshi* indicates that the concept of “religion” had not yet solidified in the 1870s. Despite these differences, the contributors generally understood “religion” as a positive, “civilizing” influence that could be distinguished from negative “superstition.” As an example of how this language developed among contemporary religious leaders, Josephson very briefly highlights Shimaji Mokurai’s 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) interpretation of Shinto as a secular field compatible with Christianity and Buddhism, with the latter two traditions now understood as distinct “religions.” Josephson concludes by showing that even as Japanese intellectuals’ understandings of religion were influenced by their interactions with academics during their diplomatic missions to Europe, European scholars embraced ideas about “Japanese religions” that they had absorbed from their Japanese counterparts. The category of “Japanese religions” was born out of this process.

Chapter 8 examines the formation of the 1889 Constitution of the Empire of Japan. Against the view that the Meiji constitution served as one of the foundational documents for a theocratic “State Shinto,” Josephson persuasively shows that the constitution was not only akin to contemporary European constitutions in its association of sovereignty with divinity, but also in the circumscribed nature of its guarantee of religious freedom. In fact, the Meiji constitution was in some ways more liberal than many contemporary constitutions, some of which explicitly outlined a state religion (Norway, Spain), and some of which

singled out specific groups for exclusion (Jews, in the Norwegian constitution). Josephson also makes the important point that freedom was granted to *shinkyō* 信教 (understood as interior belief) but not to *shūkyō* 宗教 (understood as a general category encompassing various denominations and sects). Japanese subjects were therefore free to believe whatever they wanted, but the government reserved the right to police their public activities. Subsequent laws and ordinances would make such policing even more explicit, while journalism would subject marginal groups to strict supervision of a different sort. Josephson cites the well-documented cases of Renmonkyō 蓮門教 and Tenrikyō 天理教, both of which suffered from journalistic calumny in the 1890s. Such marginal groups had to adjust their doctrines and ritual practices to conform to legal definitions of “religion” or risk persecution (Tenrikyō survived, Renmonkyō did not).

The Japanese state also directly impinged on matters of belief through public education, providing students with lists of unacceptable beliefs (fox possession, *tengu* 天狗) while simultaneously exhorting them to assent to the “Shinto secular” worldview of imperial divine descent. This substantiates Josephson’s claim in the opening of this chapter that modern states do not merely control religion by restricting it to the private sphere or by administering policies of toleration. Education serves as a way for states to engage in subject-formation, producing a particular type of citizen who embraces certain parameters for her belief.⁵ Josephson concludes the chapter by showing that the birth of Japanese religious studies at the turn of the twentieth century contributed directly to the shift from *theocentric* to *hierocentric* understandings of “religion,” in which de-Christianized interpretations of religion as a universal aspect of human existence reflected the direct mediation of Japanese scholars.⁶

A short conclusion summarizes the book by showing the mutually imbricated nature of the categories of “the secular,” “superstition,” and “religion.” Josephson maps these onto a more abstract set of principles, in which modern secular states align themselves with a neutral, self-evident realm (“the real”). This scientific approach negates the “delusory” world of superstition (magic, the demonic), articulating a distinction between “mandatory truth” and “backward superstition.” In this view, religion is one species of “superstition,” but it is a species that cannot be wholly eradicated by scientism. Josephson describes religion in this sense as a “paradoxically optional set of beliefs between state truths

5. Although he is less sanguine about the category of “State Shinto,” this places Josephson’s argument in line with SHIMAZONO’S (2010) recent book on that subject.

6. This interpretation is based on Josephson’s argument in the Introduction (8–11), as the words “hierocentric” and “theocentric” seem to have been transposed on page 246. This is one example of the apparently hasty copyediting of the book, which is otherwise meticulously assembled and argued.

[science] and banned delusions [superstition]” (260). Religion becomes a third term through which “the real” and “delusion” are mediated.

The Concept of Religion in Modern Japan

Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gainen is more cautiously argued than *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, but Hoshino Seiji’s points are equally stimulating. In the preface, Hoshino lays out the basic goals of the project, clarifying that the aim of the book is not to discuss the “essence” of (perennial, universal) religion, nor is it to identify “genuine” and “false” religion or to obliterate the category of religion altogether. Rather, Hoshino traces how non-elite religious intellectuals who were skilled in the use of abstract concepts naturalized the category of religion over the course of the Meiji era. He shows that their apologetic rhetoric—which was inherently designed to garner legitimacy for certain traditions through comparison and contrast with others—created “religion” in an increasingly abstract sense. Without any trace of combativeness, Hoshino effectively refutes the scholarship that has treated “religion” as a foreign imposition by showing the alacrity with which local intellectuals adopted and reflexively applied the term.

While all of Hoshino’s subjects belonged to a well-educated class, none of them were the elites at Tokyo Imperial University or the politicians and bureaucrats responsible for formulating Meiji religious policy. Hoshino describes this emphasis as both a strength and weakness of his book. To my mind, the benefits are clear because some literature already exists on policymakers (for example, YAMAGUCHI 2005; MAXEY 2005). Hoshino also acknowledges that his focus on this literate class does not allow him to discuss grassroots-level religious leaders who were less prepared to discuss religion as an abstract concept (a topic for future research if supporting materials exist). While this limitation of scope is pragmatic, some readers may wonder about the criteria used to select the intellectuals he does study. For example, the preponderance of liberal Christians in his account may slightly undermine his attempt to theorize about the development of “religion” outside of those circles, and his Buddhist cases were lay intellectuals rather than clerics.

Chapter 1 provides a swift historical overview of the factors that contributed to the emergence of the modern category of “religion” in Europe, tracing the emergence of natural theology and Deism and their subsequent impact on anglophone understandings of religion, which in turn directly affected the conception of religion introduced to Japan by Christian missionaries.⁷ The remainder of the chapter is a literature review covering the major contributions to historicizing the category of religion in both Anglophone and Japanese scholarship. While

7. Hoshino’s discussion of Christian natural theology and Deism bears more than passing resemblance to Josephson’s treatment of Kokugaku as “National Science.” This parallel deserves further study.

this retrospective provides welcome context for the material that follows, the exhaustive survey of foregoing scholarship sometimes overshadows Hoshino's own points. Two things merit further explanation here.

First, Hoshino rightly argues that it is insufficient to say that a belief-centric *shūkyō* replaced a practice-oriented *shūshi* 宗旨 or *shūmon* 宗門 wholesale in the middle of the nineteenth century. The neologism extended the semantic range of these previously existing terms rather than obliterating them outright or overnight, and Hoshino traces the process whereby *shūkyō* became not only the preferred translation of the foreign term “religion” but also a reflexive category. He shows that “religion” was hardly imposed on Meiji-era Japan, but rather that it was proactively adopted and modified by contemporary intellectuals.

Second, using “religion” apologetically necessarily meant to think of the category comparatively. Over the course of the Meiji era “religion/*shūkyō*” became a sort of lingua franca through which previously incommensurable ideas about civilization, transcendence, and morality became mutually intelligible. To put this slightly differently than Hoshino himself does, what we now call “religion” did not become *privatized* with the importation of conceptions of interiority and the primacy of faith, but rather (or also) “religion” became very *public* as various interest groups reinterpreted their own positions in light of a category they collectively understood as meaningful. Hoshino describes this as progressive “abstraction,” in which religion ceases to indicate one specific tradition (for example, Christianity) and comes instead to indicate a universal phenomenon with various local expressions. Through this “religionizing” (*shūkyōka* 宗教化) process, even groups that rejected the label (or were deemed to not warrant it) eventually came to be understood as “religions” in their own apologetic discourse and in public administration.

Part 1, “Religion as Civilization,” is historically grounded in the period between the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the early 1880s; it shows how various thinkers mobilized “religion” in print and public oratory (*enzetsu* 演説), tying it to “civilization” (*bunmei* 文明), “learning” (*gakujutsu* 學術), and “morality” (*dōtoku* 道德). Chapter 2 shows that early Meiji Christian apologists such as Uemura Masahisa 植村正久 (1858–1925) held deeply ambivalent views about the relationship between religion and civilization. Even as they identified Christianity as a “civilizing” agent, they criticized the contemporary tendency to admire Christianity merely because it was the religion of powerful Western nations. Hoshino shows that anglophone Christian discourse of the mid-nineteenth century mobilized science—particularly mechanistic understandings of the universe wedded to teleological conceptions of progress and providence—in apologetic writings that treated Christianity as an agent of civilization.

Christian missionaries initially mobilized a *kanbun* 漢文 text formerly used in Chinese missions to appeal to literate Japanese audiences, highlighting the supe-

riority of Christianity by appealing simultaneously to Confucian and scientific understandings of mechanical and moral universal order. The Japanese interpreter of this text, Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832–1891), avoided Christology entirely in his representation of Christianity as a rational, moral order. Both Uemura and Nakamura embraced a vision of Christianity (that is, religion) that was simultaneously universal and civilizing: Uemura posited an intrinsic “religious sentiment” that could be cultivated through “civilizing” education; Nakamura used traditional Confucian rhetoric to both affirm and subtly challenge the missionary equation of Christianity with civilization.

In Chapter 3, Hoshino focuses on the figure of Takahashi Gorō 高橋吾良 (also 五郎), a Christian convert who was a founding member and regular contributor to the ecumenical Christian magazine *Rikugō zasshi* 六合雜誌. Hoshino focuses on a period in the early 1880s when Takahashi wrote a series of articles that attempted to outline the relationship between religion (*shūkyō*) and academics (*rigaku* 理学). Although the distinction between neutral “learning” and confessional “religion” is often understood as one mark of modernity, Hoshino shows that at this stage the two were intimately connected. For Takahashi, scholarship was not separate from morality, and study of the natural world ultimately led to virtue through the medium of encounter with the Creator. Although contemporary Christians such as Naruse Jinzō 成瀬仁蔵 (1858–1919) critiqued Takahashi’s conception of religion as excessively intellectual, in the mid-Meiji era this conception of religion was apparently quite influential.

In Chapter 4, Hoshino turns to the Buddhist world and the practice of *Bukkyō enzetsu* 仏教演説, a form of public oratory targeted to audiences who may not have had any particular affiliation with (or affinity towards) Buddhism. Drawing on fascinating documents such as *Meikyō shinshi* 明教新誌 articles by Ōuchi Seiran 大内青巒 (1845–1918) and contemporary guidebooks for orators, Hoshino shows that *Bukkyō enzetsu* became a prominent new media form in the early 1880s that allowed Buddhists to target “people of middling ability and above” and counteract contemporary critiques of Buddhism as an outmoded religion for the ignorant. In contrast to earlier forms of Buddhist oratory, *enzetsu* was neither a detailed lecture on a specific Buddhist text (*kōgi* 講義), nor was it a performative homiletic sermon (*sekkkyō* 説教). Rather, *enzetsu* performed an essentially apologetic task by defending Buddhism in a general, pan-sectarian sense. In this inherently comparative project, Buddhism was positioned as one religion among many, with the category of “religion” superseding any given tradition or group.

In Part II, “From Civilization to Religion,” religion comes into its own as a category separate from both civilization and scholarship. In Chapter 5, Hoshino traces arguments about religion found in Kozaki Hiromichi’s 小崎弘道 (1856–1938) 1881 translation of J. H. Seelye’s 1873 *The Way the Truth and the Life* and in Kozaki’s own *Seikyō shinron* 政教新論 (New treatise on state and religion,

1886). Briefly, Seelye distinguished between human-made and divinely revealed religions, suggesting that only Christianity belonged to the latter category, and that Christianity alone maintained a state of political and doctrinal purity instead of allowing itself (like Buddhism) to mix with local superstitions or be influenced by temporal authority. In *Seikyō shinron* Kozaki reproduced Seelye's argument in its broad strokes, arguing that the adoption of Christianity was necessary for civilizing projects due to its ability to provide moral guidance. While Christianity therefore became the prototypical model for religion, Kozaki's interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and other religions softened the sharp distinction seen in Seelye's work, treating the difference as one of degree rather than kind.

Chapter 6 takes up Nakanishi Ushirō 中西牛郎 (1859–1930) as a counterpoint to the famed Buddhist reformer-apologist Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919).⁸ Whereas Enryō's intellectualist Buddhist apologetics were conducted using the language of Western philosophy, Nakanishi's less confrontational approach borrowed from the (originally Christian) "Natural Religion/Revealed Religion" paradigm to show that in order to qualify as "religion," a tradition must have a revelatory element. Nakanishi argued that Buddhism was superior to Christianity in the rational quality of its revelation. While both men advocated academic, rational comparison of religions, Enryō's commitment to finding the religion most suitable to Japanese culture (Buddhism) can be contrasted with Nakanishi's less culturally bounded interpretation.

Chapter 7, "From Civilization to Religion," returns to Uemura Masahisa, tracing a major shift in his thinking about "religion" that occurred between 1880 and 1890. Whereas at the beginning of the decade Uemura posited Christianity as equivalent with civilization and as the single candidate for status as Japan's national religion, an 1888–1889 trip to the United States exposed him to Christian hypocrisy, shattering long-held illusions and forcing him to treat religion as an abstract, universal field divorced from Western civilization. While Uemura remained committed to a teleological model of religious development, now religions were ranked as "true" and "provisional," with all religions regarded as greater or lesser expressions of absolute truth. In the context of increasing cultural nationalism, Uemura's new universalist interpretation of religion served to both defend Christianity and to provide clarity in the distinction between religion and non-religion. Uemura also embraced the emerging field of comparative religion as the most advanced of the various academic disciplines.

Part III, "The Rearrangement of Religion and Morality," focuses on the end of the Meiji era. Here Hoshino shows how the 1891 Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930) *lèse-majesté* incident and the subsequent furor over the "clash

8. Hereafter I refer to this Inoue as "Enryō" to distinguish him from his contemporary Tetsujirō.

of education and religion” exemplified a new phase in which religion existed as a discrete category separate from—and potentially inimical to—morality. Chapter 8 examines Uemura’s response to the Uchimura incident. While some contemporary Christians attempted to distinguish “superficial rituals” (rites venerating the emperor as the political head of state) from “rituals with religious elements,” Uemura joined other Christians in arguing that it was incumbent on the state to remove any trace of religiosity from rituals held at public schools in order to conform to the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. However, these initial responses to the incident left “religion” and “religious ritual” largely undefined, so Uemura proceeded to clarify his own position in an article entitled “Lèse-majesté and Christianity” in the Christian journal *Fukuin shūhō* 福音週報. The article was suppressed after publication, but in it Uemura turned the lèse-majesté incident into an opportunity to counter anti-Christian sentiment by arguing that rituals involving obeisance in front of the imperial portrait were inherently uncivilized.

When Inoue Tetsujirō’s famous tract *Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突 emerged in 1893 and portrayed Christianity as fundamentally incompatible with national morality, Christians responded by either suggesting that there was no such opposition between religion and morality or that morality was modulated through religion. Uemura took the latter approach, showing in a serial article entitled *Konnichi no shūkyōron oyobi tokuikuron* 今日の宗教論及び徳育論 that patriotism could be harmonized with the love of god, and that true patriotism would fulfill the divine mission and surpass national borders. In order to fulfill national objectives moral education would be necessary, but only religion (not secular morality) could truly accomplish such goals. Uemura’s rhetoric showed that in the 1890s “religion” and “morality” came to be understood as discrete fields, although the arguments about whether religion subsumed morality within it or vice versa remained inconclusive.

Chapter 9 returns to Nakanishi Ushirō, particularly this influential thinker’s appraisal of religion and morality in the “clash of education and religion” debate that occurred in the wake of the Uchimura incident. While Nakanishi’s contribution to this debate, *Kyōiku shūkyō shōtotsu dan’an* 教育宗教衝突断案 (1893), was not intended to provide a general treatise on religion, in his discussion of Christianity and its relationship to “Japan” Nakanishi offered just such a view. Nakanishi, who spent some time contributing to the Unitarian journal *Shūkyō* 宗教, admired the Unitarian commitment to biblical textual criticism and their rejection of the doctrines of Jesus as a redeemer or as the son of god. He urged fellow Buddhists to emulate this rationalist spirit. Whereas Tetsujirō had famously argued that Christianity was fundamentally incompatible with the Japanese national character, Nakanishi encouraged his readers to determine how Christianity might be assimilated. He engaged in some logical acrobatics

to support this point. While he rejected Inoue's claim that religion should submit to the state, he placed Japan's unique *kokutai* above garden-variety religion, going so far as to say that Japanese Christians should reject the Old Testament in order to make Japanese Christianity compatible with the historical vision of the unbroken imperial lineage. All religious traditions that subsumed themselves under the overarching *kokutai* ideology could and should be tolerated.

The section concludes with a chapter in which this newly naturalized concept of religion was articulated in the Christian journal *Shūkyō oyobi bungei* (Religion and the arts), initially published in 1911. This journal targeted an educated urban class, representing the views of Uemura's Japan Christian Church and the membership of Tokyo Theological Seminary. It reflected both a maturation of Japanese Christian theology and a new focus on "religion" as a specific topic of analysis. Contributions from Uemura and other Christians highlighted the personal quest for meaning and the solution of such quests through academic inquiry. Although contributors took Christian superiority over other religions for granted, they did so by appealing to the academic enterprise of comparative religious studies.

Hoshino's lucid conclusion provides a temporal framework to show how "religion" changed over the course of the Meiji era. In the early Meiji era religion was understood as intimately associated with the natural order and universal reason and as indissolubly linked with both "civilization" and "learning." However, this conception of "religion" became unstable as modern epistemology (*kindai no chi* 近代の知) gained prominence. Academic critique led to the location of religion in a separate domain, now understood as a discrete, unique field essentially characterized by transcendence. This did not mean that religion was no longer a subject of academic investigation, but rather that the split between religious practice and academic inquiry was now taken for granted. The new discrete field of "religion" was also separated from morality. The Uchimura *lèse-majesté* incident prompted some interpreters (such as Nakanishi) to posit morality as superseding religion while others (such as Uemura) saw religion as the essential prerequisite for moral development.

Ultimately, in the late Meiji era religion came to be understood not only as essentially transcendent, but also as having "belief" at its core. Hoshino clarifies that his story is not a teleological account wherein religion ineluctably became synonymous with "belief," but rather that this belief-centric view emerged out of a protracted process of interpretation. The author's claim is not that "belief" did not exist in earlier periods, but rather that as "religion" emerged as a reflexive category, it gradually came to include "belief" as a prerequisite and defining characteristic. This reasonable view complicates the excessively simple rubric of a belief-centric *shūkyō* replacing a practice-centric predecessor.

Making Religion in Japan

Even a somewhat lengthy review can hardly do justice to these two fine books. By way of conclusion I will briefly put their respective contributions into focus using a framework provided by DRESSLER and MANDAIR in their recent edited volume (2011). Dressler and Mandair argue that “religion” and “the secular” are not merely co-constitutive, but that “religion-making”—in the sense of treating religion as a discrete and unique category—occurs in three distinct patterns. Namely, religion is constructed through secular political formations (“religion-making from above”), apologetic discourse (“religion-making from below”), and academic inquiry (“religion-making from outside”). This rubric is admittedly artificial, but it helps to clarify trends that have characterized the reflexive literature on the academic study of religion and to situate these books within those trends.

“Religion-making from above” happens as states determine the criteria by which certain groups or movements are recognized as religions. As ASAD (2003) has demonstrated, this occurs when governments posit the existence of a neutral field called “society” and divide social life into “religious” and “non-religious” areas, with the latter political field understood as “the secular.” Josephson nuances Asad’s claims by showing that religion is co-constitutive not merely with the category of the secular but also with the category of “superstition.” He also persuasively demonstrates that the categories of “religion” and “superstition” may be equally useful to political and ecclesiastical authorities engaged in legitimizing projects.⁹ Like Asad, Josephson engages in a top-down analysis that examines “religion,” “the secular,” and “superstition” from the perspective of national policy (which is, in turn, modulated by international pressures). This elucidates a great deal about secularism and religion-making as a tool of statecraft, but leaves unanswered the question of how specific interest groups—clerics and denominations in particular—understand themselves to represent “religion.”

“Religion-making from below” occurs as interest groups mobilize the category of religion to attract the attention of potential converts, possible competitors, and the state. Hoshino’s book shows how religious intellectuals in the Meiji era used the category of religion for apologetic purposes, thereby fostering a new sense of “religion” as a universal category. Although Japanese interpreters clearly took Protestant Christianity as the paradigmatic model of religion, they were evidently willing to modify both Christianity and “religion” to make each fit with the Japanese cultural milieu. The discursive activities of these mid-level intellectuals rarely influenced state policy directly, but Hoshino persuasively shows that they exerted considerable influence on general understandings of

9. ASAD (2003, 253–54) briefly mentions superstition in similar terms.

“religion.” He therefore challenges the tendency to treat the category of religion as a foreign imposition, implicitly rejecting the romanticization of a pre-*shūkyō* Japan seen in some foregoing scholarship.

Finally, “religion-making from outside” describes the process whereby academics identify specific social and cultural phenomena as “religious.” Decades of critical reflexive scholarship have highlighted how the academic study of religion is problematically built around a constructed category. Some of this scholarship has been sharply critical of the entire enterprise and less than sanguine about its future. While the importance of recognizing the artificiality of “religion” is indisputable, it would be folly to interpret the imperative to relentlessly question dominant paradigms as a mandate to dismantle the field, in no small part because non-academics continue to apply the category to themselves and others.¹⁰

With that in mind, both books do an admirable job of intelligibly and gracefully standing within the tradition of religious studies while showing how arbitrary its primary object of analysis is. They exemplify how evidentiary historical research and discourse analysis can elucidate the adventitious circumstances that have contributed to the ongoing definition and redefinition of “religion.” While both persuasively show that “religion” had to be adapted to the Japanese milieu, neither simplistically assumes that religion was unidirectionally forced upon Japan by foreign powers. Instead, they show how non-European agents exerted pressure on the category from the moment they began using it. Scholars of religion have been wringing our hands over the unfair imposition of “religion” on populations that lacked native equivalents, but this anxiety may have hindered our ability to take a careful look at how most variants of “religion” at use in the academy today are *not* purely Eurocentric. Moreover, contemporary usage is not merely the result of Euro-American magnanimity, of “how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism” (MASUZAWA 2005). Rather, “religion” has been powerfully modulated by non-European legal, apologetic, and academic interventions for as long as the term has existed in its modern sense.

The Way Forward

Reflexive scholarship can easily become insular, but these books admirably speak to audiences outside of religious studies. Both authors show the importance of “religion” as an aspect of intellectual and political history, and people in fields such as anthropology and sociology will also find helpful the historical context behind the contemporary discrepancies between professions of belief, frequency

10. This issue was the topic of a vociferous debate between Timothy Fitzgerald and Ian Reader (FITZGERALD 2003, 2004a, 2004b; READER 2004a, 2004b).

of ritual practice, and religious affiliation in contemporary Japan. Both also have much to contribute to the recent flurry of social scientific and humanistic scholarship on secularity, most of which has overlooked the Japanese case.

Future scholarship can continue to contribute to this literature by elucidating the precise nature of modern Shinto in its “religious” and “secular” aspects. Josephson’s argument that a “Shinto secular” undergirded the Meiji state is in line with an earlier strain of Japanese scholarship that posited a unique “Japanese-style relationship between religion and the state” (YASUMARU 1979, 208–209; INOUE and SAKAMOTO 1987). This vision is a reasonable corrective for the early postwar scholarship that problematically treated prewar and wartime Japan as entirely lacking any semblance of separation, but it is persuasive only insofar as it focuses on the national scale. Competing interest groups operating at subnational scales undoubtedly interpreted the religion-secular-superstition relationship in diverse ways. In that regard, future historical scholarship will necessarily complicate Josephson’s portrayal of “Shinto” as a monolithic, unitary system, and more work is necessary to elucidate how exactly the “Shinto secular” operated as Japan moved into the twentieth century. For example, scholars can productively build upon Josephson’s discussion of the “Shinto secular” by tying it to exemplary historical research on shrines and shrine priests (for example, AZEGAMI 2012) to show whether shrine priests understood themselves to be doing “religion,” “civic ritual,” or something else entirely. This can also minimize the temptation to regard Shinto itself as an autonomous agent rather than an amalgamation of concepts and traditions constantly subject to the interpretations of competing stakeholders.

As Josephson’s brief treatment of Shimaji Mokurai attests, Buddhist clerics also played important roles in the development of “religion” in Japan that deserve closer scrutiny. Hoshino’s slight emphasis on Christian thinkers is sensible because Christianity obviously served as the prototype for “religion” in the Meiji era, but the Buddhists who do appear in Hoshino’s narrative may not represent mainstream Buddhist clerical opinion. Nakanishi was a lay Buddhist with Unitarian leanings, and Enryō dismissed Buddhism as defunct even as he attempted to rationalize and harmonize it with modern Western philosophy. Ōuchi Seiran, one of the chief proponents of *Bukkyō enzetsu*, was also a laicized priest; his journal *Meikyō shinshi* was explicitly trans-sectarian and therefore probably only obliquely represented the more sectarian views of some of his clerical contemporaries. The fact that trans-sectarian publications served as venues where “religion” was articulated in an abstract sense makes them ideal primary source material for Hoshino’s specific project, but future research on extant *sectarian* publications will elucidate when and why Buddhist clerics reflexively described their own sects as “religions.”

One final point about terminology. Josephson’s decision to describe the emergence of the category of religion in Japan as an “invention” falls in a venerable line

of scholarly precedent of highlighting a commonsense concept as “invented” (for example, HOBBSAWM and RANGER 1983; MASUZAWA 2005). Reference to invention now serves as scholarly shorthand for awareness of the historically contingent, intrinsically political, and dangerously seductive nature of categories that are too easily taken for granted. This is a useful rhetorical strategy, but the passive construction “the invention of...” may obfuscate *who* does the inventing and *why*. Obviously invention never happens in a vacuum, but if scholars intend to suggest the creation of something wholly new when they use the word, then neither book is actually describing the “invention” of religion in Japan. Rather, each author in his own way describes a process of *innovation* wherein Japanese agents carefully selected from the concepts at their disposal and reconfigured them to suit their needs. This may seem a purely semantic point, but words come with entailments that can mislead, distort, and reinforce. One challenge for the future will be to discover ways to talk about the constructed nature of “religion” that do not denigrate the meaning of religion for those who apply the term reflexively, that do not diminish awareness of religion’s evident ideological power, and do not dismiss the idea of religion itself as a mere scholarly phantasm. Religion is “made” by states and apologists as much as it is made by scholars, and the “real” lies no more in our ability to identify religion’s historical and discursive origins than it does in the elucidation of religion’s material underpinnings or its political (and occasionally violent) effects.

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