

REVIEW ARTICLE

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“Civil Religion” in Japan?

Rethinking the Arguments and Their Implications

IN THE FIELD of the study of religion, a number of attempts have been made to bridge Western and Japanese scholarship. Among them, considerations of the applicability of Western concepts to Japanese cases are especially important because religions in Japanese history, culture, and society are completely different from Christianity and other Abrahamic religions that have greatly influenced the characteristics of the study of religion in the West. In my view, there is one concept that deserves special attention—“civil religion.” As is widely known, if we put aside the prehistory of the concept, starting with Rousseau and others, this concept was—at least in the field of the contemporary sociology of religion—originally discussed by Robert BELLAH (1967) in his argument about American society.

In scholarly literature written in English more recently, a number of publications contain chapters related to civil religion (PARSONS 2002; CRISTI and DAWSON 2007; ROBERTSON 2009). According to Annika Hvithamar and Margit Warburg, the subjects surrounding civil religion, nationalism, and globalization have caught the interest of scholars in various disciplines, including history, sociology, and political science. With this understanding, they edited and published a compilation with Brian Arly Jacobsen (HVITHAMAR, WARBURG, JACOBSEN 2009). All these publications illustrate that the concept of civil religion has somehow been kept alive, at least in the study of religion published in English,

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not to speak of an accumulation of scholarship on civil religion in the United States as a particular and original case.

I will first review the current arguments on civil religion in the publications mentioned above. Then I will take up the question as to how this concept has been applied to a Japanese case by reflecting on discussions on civil religion in Japan developed in English by Bellah and other scholars, including TAKAYAMA (1993) and DAVIS (1992). Finally, I will attempt to contextualize the most recent discussions on civil religion in Japan by referring to the related concepts of “public religion” and “national religion” in Japan.

Based on the understanding of the field summarized above, this article will try to reflect on the implications of the arguments of “civil religion” in Japan, while thinking about some commonalities in those arguments, with the purpose of reaching a renewed understanding of the scholarly approaches toward modern Japanese religion.

Arguments on “Civil Religion” in the Sociology of Religion

Gerald Parsons takes up three cases of civil religion from the UK, the USA, and his own field, Siena, Italy (PARSONS 2002). If I only focus on the first two cases, the basic characteristics of his arguments can be summarized as follows.

In Parsons’ view, in both the UK and the USA, public rituals associated with the remembrance and commemoration of the war dead are regarded as an important element of the “civil religions” of these nations, although they are not the only expression of them. In the UK, there are a series of other expressions in royal symbols and rituals, whereas in the USA, there are others in presidential symbols and rituals. In the history of national rituals of the remembrance and commemoration of the war dead, the First World War was crucial both in the UK and the USA, but in the case of the latter, in the formation of the rituals of American civil religion, the Civil War was as important as, or more important than, the First World War. With the Civil War in the USA, and the First World War in the UK, although there were a few precedents, both nations needed to treat fallen soldiers of these massive wars as individuals, devising rituals to remember and commemorate the war dead individually on the one hand, whereas on the other hand they also needed to both physically and ritually give unknown fallen soldiers certain treatment. In both wars, a massive number of ordinary people were conscripted and died. Treating fallen soldiers as individuals was important because they themselves wanted to be treated as people who died for a solemn cause that either the Union in the North, the Confederacy in the South, or the UK put forward.

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In his arguments about civil religion, Parsons refers to five functions that a civil religion fulfils that have been developed by Richard Pierard and Robert Linder: 1. it will refer to the widespread acceptance by a people of a shared sense of their nation's history and destiny; 2. it will relate their society to a realm of absolute meaning; 3. it will enable them to look at their society and community as in some sense special; 4. it will provide a vision which ties the nation together as an integrated whole; and 5. it will provide a collection of beliefs, values, rites, ceremonies, and symbols which, taken together, give sacred meaning to the life of the community and thus provide an overarching sense of unity that transcends internal conflicts and differences (PIERARD and LINDER 1988, 22–23). In Parsons' understanding, "the invention and subsequent history of the principal rituals of remembrance of those killed in war in both the USA and the UK do, indeed, reflect and express most—if not all—of the characteristics of civil religion identified by Pierard and Linder," although "in both contexts, these processes are far from being straightforward, unambiguous or uncontested" (PARSONS 2002, 42).

A civil religion is comprised of symbols and rituals shared by a community or society of a nation, but Parsons also pays attention to more personal practices of the remembrance and commemoration of the war dead. Pilgrimage to the cemeteries, battlefields, and memorials of the two world wars has become resurgent since the mid-1980s, after a time of disinterest among the population. Renewed interest in such pilgrimages can be attested to in novels and films such as Steven Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*, where an American veteran returns to a cemetery in Normandy. As for academic studies, Parsons notes that "the 1990s witnessed a growing recognition that the whole area of war memorials, remembrance, and the cultural significance of such phenomena and activities, had been curiously neglected by historians hitherto. Articles and books duly began to appear with increasing frequency" (PARSONS 2002, 74). One reason for the increase in public interest in war memory is that the fiftieth anniversaries of a number of key moments and events of the Second World War were held from 1989 until 1995.

I will not trace all the detailed arguments by Parsons here, including his exploration of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, but only point out his attention to the war memorial in the discussion on civil religion. Reflecting back on Robert Bellah's suggestion of a possible idea for the future not of an American civil religion but a "new civil religion of the world," Parsons proceeds to comment:

[I]f such a broader concept of a world civil religion were to emerge, then the role of war cemeteries and war memorials—experienced and interpreted not as commemorations of national pride or military glory, but as monuments to human loss and grief—might prove a strangely effective element of such a religion. (PARSONS 2002, 101)

A world civil religion is a concept that we cannot easily imagine in the current age of religious pluralism. But if we are to think about a civil religion that can be found in parts of the world other than the UK or the USA, the remembrance and commemoration of the war dead may well be an important element of a civil religion outside of these two nations. Here we can see one possibility of the applicability of the concept of civil religion to a society or nation other than the UK or the USA. Although highly polemical, Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo provides a concrete focus for the argument of a Japanese civil religion based on Parson's suggestion of this concept.

More recently, Marcela CRISTI and Lorne L. DAWSON (2007) also discuss the concept of civil religion. Their theoretical argument mainly focuses on the American context, and then moves, though briefly, to civil religion in a comparative perspective. They start their argument by presenting their own usage of the concept as follows:

A civil religion is a system of symbols, beliefs, and rites of a reverent and celebratory kind, concerning the myths, history and destiny of a people that is used to establish and express the sacred character of their social identity and the civic and political order associated with it. The elements of this civil religion are commonly derived from, yet institutionally distinct from, existing religious systems. In some instances the civil religion may be the result of strong emotional commitments to political ideals that are elevated to a position of transcendence consonant with religious beliefs, yet without any specific reference to traditional religious systems. (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 269)

Cristi and Dawson review a wide variety of arguments on American civil religion stimulated by Bellah and succeeding scholars, and also refer to criticisms of the concept. They then attempt to recast the concept of civil religion "as a continuum of possibilities for the public expression of religion" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 268). According to them, "[t]his continuum varies from a conception of civil religion as 'culture,' as a spontaneous and integrative social phenomenon, to a conception of civil religion as 'ideology,' as an imposed and manufactured political resource" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 268). One conception of civil religion as "culture" reflects "the classical Durkheimian position which ascribes sacredness to the group and asserts that each collectivity has a common religion" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 276), and the other conception of civil religion as "ideology" reflects the Rousseauian political approach that presupposes a political ideology "constructed by the state and/or its political leaders, and used as a political resource" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 276). Cristi and Dawson note that there will always be ambiguity when one introduces into one's argument the concept of "sacred," as in Durkheim. Regarding this point, they avoid further arguments for resolution in this chapter, only presenting the

following sentence: "It suffices to say that sacralization entails attributing an ultimate meaning and importance, as well as a sense of permanence, even eternal significance, to whatever is held sacred" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 281).

As to the comparative perspective on civil religion, Cristi and Dawson find in the existing literature at least three common types of civil religions: 1. totalitarian, state-directed civil religions; 2. sacralized forms of nationalism, imposed with various degrees of indoctrination and/or coercion; and 3. civil religions manifested as historically specific ideologies promoted by a political or intellectual elite (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 281). They enumerate several examples of each type. As to totalitarian, state-directed civil religions, they subdivide "state-based" and "church-based," and as one example of the former, they refer to "State Shinto in Japan from 1868 to 1945" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 281). For State Shinto, in their view, "there was an overt identification of political and religious allegiances," which can also be regarded as an example of the second type (sacralized forms of nationalism, imposed with various degrees of indoctrination and/or coercion; CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 282).¹ Their explanation is based on the discussions by Bellah and Takayama that will be reviewed later in this article, and goes as follows: "In Japan the emperor was assumed to be linked genealogically to the prehistorical age of the gods, and the Japanese social structure was justified in strictly religious terms" (CRISTI and DAWSON 2007, 282). The concept of "State Shinto" is considered to be highly debatable, but as Cristi and Dawson suggest, we should possibly rethink Shinto in the late Meiji through the early Showa era, and whether it can arguably be called "State Shinto" or not in the larger framework of the civil religion debate.

Roland ROBERTSON (2009) approaches the topic of civil religion through the perspectives of globalization and theocratization. He mentions State Shinto, regarding it as a "political religion" among other cases, while he notices President Lincoln's statement that the US Constitution constituted a political religion (ROBERTSON 2009, 453). Although Robertson does not seemingly elaborate on the relation between the concept of "political religion" in Lincoln and his own usage of the concept, he refers to the other cases as follows:

Other societies with political religions (or theocracies) have included Nazi Germany, contemporary North Korea, and the period of State Shinto in Japan (approximately 1890 until 1945); while China is surely a very prominent contemporary case. (ROBERTSON 2009, 453)

As for the relation between the concept of "civil religion" and that of "political religion," he presents his understanding in the following way:

1. For recent discussions on State Shinto, mainly by Japanese scholars, see OKUYAMA (2011).

Political religions were, and are, forms of religion that have been, or are, “invented” in order to provide a rallying point of reference for the inhabitants of particular societies. These contrast with Bellah-type civil religions. Whereas the latter provide a standard to which the relevant society has ideally to conform, political religions and theocracies are much more directly manipulable by specific regimes. In Bellah’s formulation, the state religion of, for example, Japan—namely, State Shinto—was not a civil religion, precisely because it served the interests of a particular regime. There are, and have been since the late nineteenth century, many examples of political or state religions.

(ROBERTSON 2009, 471)

Here Robertson differentiates between civil religion and political religion, referring to Bellah’s original idea about civil religion that contains a prophetic and eschatological role that would judge a nation on earth by resorting to higher ideals. For Robertson, a political religion can be understood, in contrast, as a religion that is utilized by a political regime. In his understanding, so-called State Shinto is considered to be a political religion, rather than a civil religion. Now we need to rethink the arguments accumulated in the study of modern Japanese religious history, especially those elaborated on in the theoretical framework of civil religion in Japan. Before proceeding to this subject, the last part of Robertson’s article deserves special attention. He reminds readers of another area of Bellah’s academic interests that started well before his expertise on American religion, by juxtaposing American civil religion and its counterpart in Japan. The very last sentences of his argument reads:

[I]n spite of Bellah’s strenuous attempts to oppose the distortion of civil religion into a theocratic, authoritarian form, it is striking that this is precisely what appears to be happening in many parts of the world, not least in the USA itself. There is some irony in this, since in the years before Bellah published his very influential article on American civil religion in the late 1960s he had been a scholar of Japan. And in speaking of the USA, he emphatically declared American civil religion to be very different from Japanese state religion prior to the Pacific War.... Irony lies in the fact that it is in the USA that one now finds a particular problem of a politicized civil religion with a strong theocratic tinge. In Japan, on the other hand, there are certainly elements of theocracy, but only intermittently do they have a direct effect on politics.

(ROBERTSON 2009, 472)

As has been shown, the current discussion about civil religion, directly or indirectly, relates to the Japanese case. Robert Bellah himself had given his thought to this possible topic—civil religion in Japan—earlier than these recent discussions. We will go back to his argument in the next section, and then proceed to other scholars’ treatment of civil religion in Japan.

Japanese Civil Religion in Scholarship Abroad

BELLAH (1980) gives a comparative argument on both American and Japanese civil religions, referring to his own theoretical scheme of religious evolution. Based on the idea of the development of five religious symbol systems, primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, and modern, Bellah contrasts civil religions in these two nations. He explains that, "In Japan in the recent past and to a certain extent even today there seems to have survived a civil religion of archaic type (involving a fusion of divinity, society, and the individual), whereas the United States has a civil religion of distinctly modern type (with a high degree of differentiation between divinity, society, and the individual)" (BELLAH 1980, 28). As can be seen from this citation, Bellah's idea of religious evolution derives from his insight into the differentiation of social systems, and that of related symbolism reflected in the world view and cosmology of a given society. In his view, one contrast between premodern non-Western societies and modern Western societies can be summarized as hierarchy and equality in the structure of each society, and each of these characters can be found "at the core of the respective civil religions" (BELLAH 1980, 28), though he admits that there have been some exceptions to each case.

Since Bellah discusses a civil religion of archaic type surviving in Japan even until today, it is important to ask how he describes religion in modern Japanese society. He notices the importance of conscious rational manipulation in the hierarchical aspect of Japanese civil religion, and although there were precedents in history, he thinks that "clearly the prime example of conscious manipulation is modern Japanese civil religion, composed of the modern emperor system and its pervasive ideological influence, of which state Shinto was only a part" (BELLAH 1980, 31). Bellah refers here, though critically, to Winston Davis's usage of "civil religion" around the turn of the century through the prewar period of the 1930s. Davis states:

The pivotal symbols in this [civil] religion were the sacred ancestors of the imperial family. By homologizing these deities (i.e., the lineage ideology of ancient Japan) with the ancestor worship of the common people, the government thought to create a feeling of national unity and dedication. The machinations of Japan's new industrial and military leaders which caused such suffering and deprivations among the rural masses, were now beautified as the "wish" of the imperial ancestors.

(Winston Davis, cited in BELLAH 1980, 32–33)

Regarding Davis's analysis, Bellah's comment relates to the meaning of hierarchy in Japan:

Hierarchy in Japan as elsewhere is linked to an ethical system and a set of values. Clearly, from the Confucian point of view, which has been most explicit about these matters, the legitimacy of rule is contingent upon the embodiment

of values. Rulers who are not benevolent and righteous do not deserve to rule. Only virtuous rulers deserve respect. Though in Japan the enormous importance of lineage muted this ethical conception of politics, it did not destroy it.

(BELLAH 1980, 32–33)

After arguing about American civil religion, Bellah again presents his understanding of Japanese society in the last part of his chapter:

Japanese society has seldom been a system of amoral exploitation, and individual Japanese have not been reduced to the fearful and spiritless automatons despotism classically creates. Indeed, the presence of public spirit and concern for the common good in Japan rivals the public consciousness of the great republics. Without facing this paradox Japan remains an enigma.

(BELLAH 1980, 38)

Davis's argument cited above actually showed his understanding of the attempts to strengthen national unification around the early twentieth century by homologizing the common people with the imperial deities through the imperial household. Although Bellah seemingly wants to criticize Davis's argument, he does not really disprove Davis's point. If we only focus on the concept of civil religion in Japan, Bellah argues that the archaic type of civil religion has survived through Japanese history, referring also to ethically positive meanings in the hierarchical society of Japan. Thinking about the citation in Bellah's argument, Davis seems to present an important treatment about this concept, so I will focus on his argument later. But before that, another argument deserves to be mentioned.

TAKAYAMA's article (1993) was originally written around the end of the Showa era, the last years of Emperor Showa, when reflection of the aggressive war of 1931 to 1945 followed by the disastrous defeat, and a postwar reevaluation of history was occurring, while some revisionists were trying to recast the legacy of Japanese society and culture in a positive light. At this very moment, Takayama saw the attempt to revitalize Japanese civil religion emerging.

As it was originally written more than twenty years ago, Takayama's argument has its limitations, especially in his dependence on an outdated understanding of not only of Shinto but also of so-called State Shinto, on which there have been many academic debates in the past fifteen years or so. The concept of civil religion itself is not clearly defined in Takayama's argument, but we can assume that it basically refers to the semi-religious Japanese regime comprising of the imperial system and Shinto-related rituals that continued from the Meiji era to the end of World War II. This can be illustrated in his description below:

With Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945, the Allied powers demanded the abolition of the Japanese civil religion molded during the nationalistic and ultranationalistic periods. With this Japan lost more than the divine prerogatives of the throne and the immense institution of State Shinto. These were

only the external symbols of something much deeper: the Japanese sense of issues and destiny based on the nation's ancient cosmological world view.

(TAKAYAMA 1993, 109)

As the title of his article shows, Takayama notices the revitalization of this pre-war (ultra-)nationalistic complex of the imperial system and Shinto, especially in the situations surrounding Yasukuni Shrine, among others. First, the so-called Yasukuni Shrine Bill to renationalize Yasukuni Shrine was repeatedly presented to the Diet, from 1969 to 1974, though in the end it was dropped. Second, Prime Minister Miki Takeo visited Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August 1975, the first time for a prime minister to do so on this particular day, making the politicians' visits to this shrine a political problem; this was followed by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's visit on the same day in 1985 in his capacity as prime minister. Third, Yasukuni Shrine announced in 1979 that in the previous year it had enshrined fourteen war criminals judged by the Tokyo Trials (International Military Tribunal for the Far East) to be class-A war criminals. It follows from this enshrinement that any solemn visit to Yasukuni Shrine from 1978 onwards would mean a visit to the place where the war criminals of the wars in the Asia Pacific region were religiously revered.

Another major topic of that revitalization in Takayama's essay is the textbook controversy and possible education reforms, promoted by the politicians of the (then) ruling Liberal Democratic Party, as well as conservative thinkers and intellectuals. The controversies regarding the fundamentals of public education in general—and textbooks in particular—have continued until today, and in the meantime there was a revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2006. Advocating traditional values and conservative morals can be regarded as an example of resurgent nationalism, but it seems to me to be doubtful whether it can be reasonably called an example of the revitalization of "civil religion." Takayama himself does not present any convincing argument on this matter, but only concludes:

[W]henver government leaders take up such national religio-political issues as the nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine and the moral education of children, other related issues inevitably emerge. These include the restoration of the emperor system as the center of the state, the promotion of national defense efforts, anti-Communism, the revision of the peace constitution, and the reform of education, particularly in the areas of social studies and history—issue closely associated with the framework of Japanese civil religion.

(TAKAYAMA 1993, 118)

This framework of Japanese civil religion remains unclear in Takayama's argument, but as mentioned earlier, the complexity of the imperial system and Shinto can be counted as its main element. He seems to keep a somewhat static understand-

ing of Shinto when he describes that the fundamental metaphysics of the Japanese attested to in Shinto communal rites and festivities remained intact, and that “[t]he traditional cosmology and religious values that help shape the Japanese cultural identity and upon which Japanese civil religion was constructed have survived without much alteration to the present day” (TAKAYAMA 1993, 119). We could say that since the time when Takayama’s essay was written, the understanding of historical Shinto has undergone major revisions, as has that of State Shinto, but this is another issue for scholarly consideration, separate from that of civil religion.

I will now focus on the third example of the discussions of Japanese civil religion in scholarship abroad. DAVIS (1992) discusses “civil religion” in relation to another series of arguments known as “Japan theory.” Davis originally published this in 1983 at a time when economic growth had generated excessive self-confidence among Japanese authors (and also foreign authors such as Ezra Vogel, the author of *Japan as Number One*) about Japanese uniqueness. According to Davis, one function of Japan theory is self-defense, especially self-defense against charges brought by foreign people or countries. He then continues that “[t]he symbolic defense, justification, or legitimation of a society is, of course, one of the major roles of a ‘civil religion,’ a point not to be forgotten when we later examine Japan theory as a secularization of the civil religious sentiments of the prewar period” (DAVIS 1992, 260).

In his terminology, “civil religion” is defined in contrast with “civil theology,” as is shown in the following explanation:

By “civil religion” I mean to imply... a “network of moods, values, thoughts, rituals, and symbols that establishes the meaning of nationhood within an overarching hierarchy of significance. While civil religions are the precipitates of traditional religious communities, they transcend specific religious communities and dogmas. The symbols and suasions of the civil religion must speak to “all sorts and conditions of men.” “Civil theology,” on the other hand, is the articulation of civil religion by the elite. One could say that civil religion—a reticulation of implicit sentiments—is “thought in.” Civil theology is “thought out.”

(DAVIS 1992, 298, note 84)

Based on this understanding of civil religion and civil theology, Davis explains his understanding of Japan theory as a secularization of civil religion. He notices that “many of the values and self-images of prewar Japan continue to flourish in the Japan theories of the postwar period,” pointing at “consensus, unity, harmony, paternalism (or hierarchy), asceticism, loyalty, flexibility, efficiency, and so on” among such values and self-images (DAVIS 1992, 269). These elements of Japanese values were, in his view, contained in the civil religion of prewar Japan:

In the civil religion of prewar Japan these values were securely grafted into the emperor system and the Way of the Warrior (*bushidō*), and were therefore suf-

fused with the religious and patriotic emotionalism of that period of history. With the defeat of Japan in 1945, this civil religion was radically secularized.

(DAVIS 1992, 269)

Now on this point again, Japanese civil religion, especially that of the prewar period, is characterized as something related to the imperial system. Since Davis does not mention Shinto here but *bushidō*, it will be necessary to ask what *bushidō* really was in history, and what the relationship was among the imperial system, *bushidō*, and Shinto. Davis holds the idea that prewar civil religion was secularized after the war. In his view, in the course of this secularization, “[m]any of the functions of the civil religion of pre-1945 Japan—the generation of national purpose, symbolic self-defense, value-consensus, and so on—are now being assumed by the symbols, values, and imagery produced by the literature of Japan theory” (DAVIS 1992, 269).

Although he suggests a possibility that Japan theory might give birth to a new civil religion after the secularization of the prewar civil religion, “because secularization itself is not inevitably a one-way or irreversible process” (DAVIS 1992, 270), the basic idea of Japanese civil religion in Davis’s argument is that with this secularization the values of the prewar civil religion have been succeeded by postwar Japan theory.

More recently, Atsuko ICHIJO (2009) mentions civil religion in Japan with a special reference to State Shinto from the perspective of nationalism studies.² As a specialist in nationalism, Ichijo discusses nationalism in the modern Japanese case, especially in the period between 1868 and 1945, but here I mainly focus on her argument on civil religion, which is actually dealt with in a short concluding part of her chapter. Before jumping to this, it is necessary to get an idea of her understanding of State Shinto. State Shinto is, in her view, characterized as a modern invention or fabrication constructed by the emerging state of Japan through “manipulating religion, customs and traditions for the purpose of state- and nation-building” (ICHIJO 2009, 125). She points out monotheistic features in this State Shinto on the understanding that nationalism as a modern phenomenon tends to take a form of political monotheism, suggesting that modernity is built on the Judeo-Christian traditions (ICHIJO 2009, 129). Referring to earlier discussions on State Shinto as a civil religion brought up by Bellah and Cristi, the latter treating State Shinto as “civil religion à la Rousseau,” (CRISTI 2001, 142) Ichijo pays attention to the relations among civil religion, political religion, and nationalism.³ According to Ichijo, State Shinto can be regarded as a Rousseauian version of civil

2. Ichijo uses macrons with “Shintō” and “State Shintō” in her chapter, but here I only use “Shinto” and “State Shinto,” even when citing her.

3. Cristi devotes one book to a discussion on civil religion and political religion, but her arguments cannot be discussed in detail in this article. See CRISTI 2001.

religion, a political religion, and nationalism at the same time (ICHIJO 2009, 134). Then, in the closing part of her chapter, Ichijo leaves the following question:

The interesting area of enquiry would then be whether there was any sign of the emergence of a “civil religion à la Durkheim” in Japan of the same period, and if so, what is its relationship with State Shintō and nationalism in general. In this way, the utility of the concept of civil religion outside the United States could be tested. Also, this would be an endeavour to shift the focus of enquiry from the state-dominated level to the more “popular,” “lay” level, the area that is often neglected in many sociological studies. (ICHIJO 2009, 134)

These four authors—Bellah, Takayama, Davis, and Ichijo—focusing on the Japanese case, would all agree that the prewar sociocultural regime of Japan, crystallized in a political-religious complex comprising the imperial system and Shinto (or *bushidō*), can be regarded as “civil religion.” Cristi and Dawson would join in this arena, suggesting some differentiation of the terminology, whereas Robertson would call it “political religion” rather than “civil religion.” Bellah, Takayama, and Davis would also agree that the values of the prewar civil religion have continued until today, either under the revitalization as discussed by Takayama, or under another form of Japan theory as argued by Davis.

Here we see a couple of issues emerge. Theoretically, is the concept of civil religion useful enough for scholars of religion to discuss the prewar Japanese regime? Or is a more nuanced argument about the conceptualization to differentiate civil religion and political religion, or a Rouseauan civil religion and a Durkheimian civil religion, necessary in such a discussion? Has it been convincingly proved that the prewar values of that political-religious complex have remained until today under some form or another? Parsons pointed out another subject—the remembrance and commemoration of the war dead on a massive scale, which is specifically a new element that has appeared only in the postwar years. Can this subject be satisfactorily situated in these arguments mentioned above? This article will not tackle these issues head on, but will present other arguments to reflect on, namely, the arguments presented in Japan, which I will turn to in the next section.

Arguments in Japan on Japanese Civil Religion and Related Concepts

Almost independently of these arguments discussed above, Yonehara Ken takes up the subject of modern Japanese national identity, referring to both civil religion in Rousseau and a national entity (or national polity, *kokutai*) in modern Japan. In Yonehara’s understanding, the theory of a Japanese national entity can be regarded as a civil religion. He explains:

The theory of a national entity is a product of the acute apprehension that the crisis of being colonized might fall on Japan. Taking the dual challenges of

modernizing the nation and of keeping national independence, Japan created one kind of civil religion, that is, the theory of a national entity. A number of thinkers, including Fukuzawa Yukichi, sought the foundation of a national identity in Shinto and the unilinearity of the imperial lineage, attempting to base the core of the national entity there. Civil religion is, however, a fiction constructed arbitrarily after all, and cannot but turn out to be defective.

(YONEHARA 2002, 5–6; author's translation)

In Yonehara's understanding of Rousseau's civil religion, in modern nation states where the secularity of the state needs a tool to sanctify the state itself, as such a tool civil religion should not be too universal in its teachings, so that loyalty to the state may not become weaker. On the other hand, it should not be too particular in its teachings so that loyalty to the state may not become exclusive and oppressive (YONEHARA 2002, 14). Applying this understanding to modern Japan, Yonehara traces the arguments of national entity held by intellectuals from the Meiji through early Showa periods.

If I focus more on his argument of civil religion than on national entity, one critical thinker, active in the late Meiji through the early Showa eras, deserves special attention. According to Yonehara, Christian thinker Kinoshita Nao's (1869–1937) criticism of the theory of a national entity is quite severe. Kinoshita attacked such ideas as a model of the (Japanese) state conceived as a family with the imperial household at the core, and the related religion of ancestor worship, both contained in national entity theory. In this national entity theory, in Kinoshita's argument, the emperor is accepted by the nation not only politically and legally, but also morally and religiously, and Kinoshita insisted that the religious image of the emperor, and "the national religion," in Kinoshita's words, should be analyzed critically (YONEHARA 2002, 33–34, 44–45). Kinoshita was also critical of some Christian churches in Japan at the time because of their compromise with the national entity ideology (YONEHARA 2002, 45).

Yonehara's conclusion is that as a civil religion of modern Japan, national entity theory did not function successfully and it became a principle of exclusion and oppression. He is not interested in delving into academic conceptualization, but his suggestion that national entity theory be reviewed from the perspective of civil religion theory would stimulate further reflection. The relations among the imperial system, the national entity, and Shinto will also be a focus of further study.

More recently, Michael Pye and Kiba Akeshi had a brief discussion on civil religion in Japan at a symposium held in Japan. Pye tries to situate civil religion in contemporary Japan in a context between "primal religion" and "spiritual culture" (PYE 2009, 29–30).⁴ Critically referring to the earlier definitions of civil

4. Since Pye's chapter does not contain a name of a translator, he may have prepared his chapter in Japanese; English translations are therefore my own, based on Pye's discussion in Japanese.

religion by Robert Bellah and Robert Nisbet, Pye himself presents his definition of civil religion as “a system of symbolic ideas and ceremonial actions generally considered to be obligatory, by which the developed social life entailing a variety of institutions is sustained and promoted” (PYE 2009, 33). According to Pye, civil religion is situated in relation to religious groups and public institutions. “Civil religion has vague relations with religious groups or traditions that support or sometimes criticize civil religion” (PYE 2009, 33).

Pye categorizes consciousness of place (for example, the Japanese archipelago felt as something sacred), consciousness of time (for example, seasonal ceremonies annually celebrated), festivals in society (beyond the framework of Shinto), and rituals in the course of lifetime and rituals for the dead as the elements of civil religion in contemporary Japan (PYE 2009, 36–37). These categories look similar to those in primal religion, but he notes that civil religion lacks this-worldly soteriology that would meet an individuals’ needs.

In reaction to Pye’s argument as well as to another presented at the symposium, Kiba comments on several points. In Kiba’s understanding, civil religion can be understood as transcendental or religious ideas that justify the formation process of a modern nation state, or the idea of the history of such a state. On this point, civil religion functions as a supplier of normative foundations in the modern public sphere that is generally removing interference from religious values (KIBA 2009, 48). Thus said, Pye’s argument about civil religion, that it is excessively dependent on the categories deriving from primal religion, seems doubtful. From Kiba’s historical standpoint, an ahistorical projection of the modern concept of civil religion onto a premodern era must be avoided (KIBA 2009, 48). In a word, Japanese civil religion can be understood as ethical and moral values comprising of diligence, frugality, and filial piety that originated from popular thoughts and Buddhist traditions but was appropriated for the purposes of national unification (KIBA 2009, 48–49). Kiba thinks, however, that these kinds of values have broken down in postwar Japanese society.

These arguments developed in Japan have added a few points to the discussions on civil religion on Japan accumulated abroad. The theory of a national entity, as argued by Yonehara, naturally seems to have some relationship with the postwar arguments of Japan theories—the question is how we should relate one with the other. Pye, on the other hand, has presented his own view of civil religion as much closer to primal religion, although Kiba is very critical of it. In Kiba’s understanding, modern Japanese civil religion also seems to be closer to the traditional value system that was, in his view, appropriated by the nation. Here it seems necessary to ask how civil religion can be located in the multilayered stratification of value systems, from basic and traditional popular thought, to nationalist and ideological political thought in modern Japan. The elements

of civil religion are one object of inquiry, and we now understand that the position of civil religion in relation to other value systems is another.

Concluding Remarks

The arguments thus far have covered some breadth of the discussion on civil religion in Japan, but there are still other areas that I have not touched on. Here I will only briefly mention an argument by another Japanese scholar.

Tsushiro Hirofumi is a religious studies scholar who introduced José Casanova's argument on "public religion" into the Japanese academic circle as the Japanese translator of Casanova's *Public Religion in the Modern World* (CASANOVA 1994). Although he is Casanova's translator, Tsushiro does not exclude other scholars in his own discussion on "public religion" (TSUSHIRO 2005). These other scholars include specialists in US religious history such as John F. Wilson. However, Tsushiro seems to have skipped theoretical arguments as to how to connect the discussion—particularly surrounding modern Christianity either in the cases of Casanova, Wilson, or others—with his own discussion on the Japanese cases. Without apparently paying attention to this theoretical gap, he then proceeds to systematize his own understanding on "public religion" in the Japanese context, briefly referring to such related concepts as "national religion" and "civil religion."

"National religion" in Tsushiro's usage is considered to be a sub-category of public religion. In the description of the modern Japanese case, he seems to have avoided the concept of civil religion intentionally. Even though the concept of civil religion is absent here, another issue is already present. We should ask here what the relations are among public religion, national religion, and possibly political religion already mentioned above.

After reviewing the discussion on civil religion, and particularly the Japanese situation, the following are some concluding thoughts. First, when we argue a concrete case, the question of whether a specific concept—"civil religion," "political religion," "public religion," "national religion"—is applicable or not is, in my view, not a good question. As long as arguments have been accumulated by referring to some abstract concept, a historical or social phenomenon argued under that concept must have some common features with a different historical or social situation. Thus this application will make a comparison possible between two or more phenomena, promoting further consideration and hopefully leading to renewed understanding of those phenomena under consideration.

In our case, if we think about a possible "civil religion" in Japan, this has stimulated us to think about commonalities and differences between American civil religion, which was originally discussed under this concept, and Japanese civil religion, if any. This kind of comparative research will at least, in turn, contextualize both the American case and the Japanese case, and possibly shed light on

any specific features in each case. This should make it possible to rethink American civil religion under a renewed understanding of civil religion in general.

Second, and more specifically in the case of Japan, we have witnessed scholarly interest in the prewar Japanese religio-political regime that is comprised of the imperial system and Shinto, among others, at the core. This is also related to the accumulated arguments about so-called State Shinto, which I have not delved into in this article. With the understanding of the scholarly discussion of civil religion, we should consider this issue further; see OKUYAMA 2011.

Finally, regarding the postwar situation in Japan, a number of scholars have some interest in finding continuity or a reappearance of values from the prewar regime. What has remained or reappeared from prewar Japan in contemporary Japanese culture and society, and how it has happened? It is important for us to keep asking these questions.

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