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Reconceiving the Secular in Early Meiji Japan: Shimaji Mokurai, Buddhism, Shinto, and the Nation

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In the early Meiji period, Japanese Buddhists had to come to terms with a number of profound changes. The prime challenge for the clerical elite was the radically new religious policy of the Meiji government, no longer favoring Buddhism in the framework of the early modern temple registration system, but rather privileging Shinto in its attempts to find a suitable place for Japanese religions in the modern Japanese nation state. Institutionally, Buddhism was faced with the Great Promulgation Campaign initiated under the auspices of the Ministry of Edification from 1872 onwards. Anyone who wanted to continue religious teaching needed to join the campaign; at the same time, Buddhists were prohibited from engaging in sectarian proselytization while teaching under the campaign's umbrella.

Priests of the Jōdo Shinshū were active in overcoming this impasse, and among them Shimaji Mokurai of the sect's Honganji branch was particularly effective. As a member of the first group of Japanese Buddhists to travel to Europe in 1872, he combined the traditional scholarship of a Buddhist priest with modern Western knowledge gleaned in France, Great Britain, and Germany. Drawing on premodern Japanese terminological precedents, Shimaji first conceptualized the separation of the spheres of politics and religion and, slightly later, that of "religious and secular teaching." Out of this separation, a concept of "religion" first appeared in Japan.

Shimaji's intellectual move to separate a sphere of "religion" in order to free Buddhism from the restraints of early Meiji religious policy has structural parallels with the political ideology of secularism as described by Talal Asad. Contrary to Asad's assumptions, however, secularism clearly is not purely a Western project. The case of Shimaji shows how Japanese thinkers and political actors drew upon their local tradition as well as new Western knowledge to come up with their own solutions to specific political problems that arose in the transition of Japan to the modern era.

Keywords: secularization, secularism, modernity, modernization, Talal Asad, José Casanova, Charles Taylor, Jōdo Shinshū, concept of religion, religious policy

Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, Talal Asad was arguably the first to challenge, if not thoroughly, then acrimoniously, the idea that secularization is a useful concept to describe the non-West. According to Asad, the West has pursued “the attempt to construct categories of the secular and the religious in terms of which modern living is required to take place, and [in terms of which] nonmodern peoples are invited to assess their adequacy.”¹ Asad argues that secularity is part of a political project by the West, a key element of modernity. As such it is expected from non-Western peoples, too, and used against them if they fail to live up to this yardstick.² The result of this project of secularism (which, unlike secularity or secularization, is an ideology) is that non-Western people can legitimately be portrayed as lacking a key feature of modernity.³ We can see here, in other words, a somewhat disguised continuity of the modernization paradigm that was so important in the social sciences throughout much of the postwar period, not least in its application to Japan.⁴

Furthermore, one may detect in Asad’s argument a structural analogy to the use of the concept of “religion” outside the West. That is to say, “religion” was imposed upon the non-West as part of the broader imperialist project of Euro-America since the nineteenth century. Again, societies were not viewed as equal unless they could be demonstrated to have proper religions. The two categories of religion and secularity are, of course, envisaged by Asad as complementary: modernity requires the separation of the spheres of religion and the secular, and one can only speak of religion once it has been identified as a distinct sphere from the secular.

The idea that “religion” is not transparent, but a category with a specific history of its own worthy of scholarly investigation, has recently gained much currency even in a field as remote as Japanese studies. Over the last few years, no fewer than four monographs in English have seized upon the idea that the history of the category “religion” needs to be investigated.⁵ While the relevance of these historical studies is generally acknowledged, some students of Asian religions have turned their findings into a normative argument about the inadequacy of the analytical concepts deployed, proposing to operate rather with emic terminology. Although this may strike some as extreme, this move has in fact gained wide currency in recent years. In fact, for the case of Japan, Timothy Fitzgerald suggested in his 2000 book *The Ideology of Religious Studies* that religion cannot be usefully disentangled from culture, so that “the Japanese configuration of values is more fundamental analytically” than the concept of religion.⁶ One may add that his book was not well received in the field when it first came out.⁷

More recently, the argument that we should do without analytical categories imposed by the West has perhaps been advanced most forcefully in the field of South Asian studies,

1 Asad 2003, p. 14.

2 Asad 2003, p. 13.

3 Asad is here mainly thinking of Arab Muslims.

4 A recent historical contextualization of modernization theory and its treatment of Japan can be found in Conrad 2012.

5 Josephson 2012; Maxey 2014; Isomae 2014; Krämer 2015.

6 Fitzgerald 2000, p. 180.

7 See the review by Ian Reader (Reader 2004).

where it undoubtedly has also been propelled by the broader and more nuanced approach assumed by Dipesh Chakrabarty.⁸ More narrowly focused on the difficulties surrounding “religion,” the work of the “India Platform” at Ghent University in Belgium led by S.N. Balagangadhara has gained some notoriety for espousing the refusal of categories formerly deemed universally valid (in fact, this earned Balagangadhara the epithet of “fascist” because of the happy use Hindu nationalists are making of his theories). Balagangadhara and his colleagues stress the roots of the secularization model, with “its division of society into a temporal political kingdom and the spiritual kingdom of Christ,” in Protestant Western thinkers such as John Locke, and argue that when this model “travels beyond the boundaries of the Christian West or when western societies become multicultural, it threatens to lose its intelligibility.”⁹ Richard King and Gavin Flood have also recently stressed that the colonialist patina of the supposedly universal analytical concept of Western origins is so thick that the only remedy lies in going back to indigenous categories.¹⁰ Prominent Sinologists who have made the case for abstaining from the use of the analytical concept of religion when describing modern or contemporary China include Vincent Goossaert and Tim Barrett.¹¹

While I acknowledge the problems inherent in presupposing seemingly universal concepts that really have their parochial origins in Europe, this line of arguing overlooks three important points. First, even if one maintains that Western notions of the separation of church and state were alien to Asian societies in the nineteenth century, they have now been in the region for over 150 years and have become sedimented in manifold ways, so that one cannot simply argue them away.¹² Second, those seemingly monolithic Western categories have a very dynamic history of their own; they were not fixed in the nineteenth century and were and are heterogeneous even within the so-called West.¹³ Third, and perhaps most importantly, the reason why Western categories were able to catch on easily in Asia is not only to be found in the force of Western colonial impositions, but also in parallel indigenous conceptual traditions.

So, where do we find such indigenous sources—following the three points just mentioned—for the idea of secularization or secularity?¹⁴ The actual term “secularization” (*sezokuka* 世俗化) did not enter the Japanese language until Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 used it in his magnum opus *Nihon Shushi gakuha no tetsugaku* 日本朱子学派之哲学 (The Philosophy of the Zhu Xi School in Japan) in 1905. One can, however, trace the genealogy of “the secular” further back. The somewhat simpler word *sezoku* 世俗 used to render “secular” from European languages was, as far as we know, first employed by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 in his 1875 *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 文明論の概略 (Outline of a Theory of Civilization). Interestingly, this first occurrence is in a passage about Reformation

8 Chakrabarty has explicitly criticized the uncritical application of supposedly universal European categories of historiography to Indian history long before his seminal 2000 book *Provincializing Europe*. See for example Chakrabarty 1992.

9 De Roover and Balagangadhara 2008, p. 523.

10 King 2013, Flood 2013.

11 See Goossaert 2005 and Barrett 2005.

12 To be fair, this is one of Goossaert’s main points in two articles of his (Goossaert 2005 and 2006).

13 See the contributions on Europe in Eggert and Hölischer 2013.

14 The following paragraph is based on Krämer 2015, pp. 114–36.

Age Europe.¹⁵ Although *sezoku* became well established as an antonym of *shūkyō* 宗教 in scholarly language by the end of the nineteenth century, it seems that it was not until Inoue in 1905 that the scheme was consciously applied to Japan.

Still, there is a prehistory to the notion of a division between “religion” and “secular,” and in this essay I will focus on very early Meiji articulations of such precedents. I will do so by analyzing Buddhist authors’ discussions of the place of religion in society vis-à-vis other societal forces during the very early Meiji period, when the new abstract terminology that was to become fundamental for the modern Japanese language was formed. Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) was a scholar-priest of Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, thoroughly trained in the traditional disciplines, who went to Europe for an extended period early in his life, and who was deeply involved in the political skirmishes of early Meiji religious policy. His example will serve to show how the reconception of the secular played out in practice in the most well-established and institutionalized religion of nineteenth-century Japan. Reconception is here understood to mean the confluence of the three points just mentioned: a) the impact of contact with the West, drawing on b) indigenous conceptual traditions, and c) concrete political agendas of the period in question. All three points will serve to show that we can clearly identify Shimaji as someone who conceptualized the opposite of religion in such a way that we cannot simply explain it as a Western imposition.

Shimaji Mokurai in the Early 1870s

Shimaji is well known in studies of modern Japanese religious history as one of the first to advance the modern notion of freedom of religion and the idea of “Shinto as non-religion,” to borrow from the title of the contribution by Ernils Larsson to this present issue. The decisive intellectual move in arguing against Shinto as religion was to acknowledge the existence of a category of religion in the first place. As the first Japanese author to provide any substantial discussion of “religion,” Shimaji did so mainly negatively, that is, by contrasting the religious sphere he wanted to establish anew with other entities or by delineating it against them.¹⁶

We can trace the evolution of Shimaji’s thinking about religion and its main opposite in three steps, over the span of a few years from 1872 onwards. While these steps are not perfectly chronologically distinct, they do reflect something like an evolutionary development. In all three phases, we will see that the contrast he makes is with the sphere of politics. Although it is obvious that the category of the political is not identical with that of the secular, I will here concentrate on excavating these three contrasts from Shimaji’s texts, and save my thoughts about the congruity or incongruity of the category of the political with that of the secular for the conclusion.

The immediate context of Shimaji’s utterances was twofold. First, Shimaji had been sent by his head temple, Nishi Honganji 西本願寺, to Europe in 1872 to investigate European

15 Fukuzawa is here basically paraphrasing European works such as those by Thomas Henry Buckle or François Guizot.

16 Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–1889) published a sixteen-page booklet entitled “Religious Freedom in Japan” in 1872, albeit in English and not directed toward a Japanese readership. He reiterated his points in Japanese in *Meiroku zasshi* 明六雜誌, the journal of the Meiji Six Society (Meirokeisha), in 1874. By this time, other opinion leaders had jumped in, and a lively debate about the relationship between state and religion ensued. In contrast, Shimaji wrote down his first thoughts on the topic two years earlier, in 1872.

ways of religion. In the background of this mission was a sense of crisis and the urgent need for internal reform following the period of radical Shintoist anti-Buddhist iconoclasm in the late 1860s. Second, while in Europe, Shimaji learnt of the new experiments in religious policy the Meiji government began to undertake in 1872. One year earlier, while still in Japan, Shimaji had successfully petitioned the government to set up a Ministry of Edification (Kyōbushō 教部省). While Buddhists had hoped that the new ministry would be less exclusively Shintoist, the ministry soon began its Great Promulgation Campaign (*daikyō senpu undō* 大教宣布運動) employing instructors (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職) from across Japan, who were to expound on the “Three Standards of Instruction” (*sanjō kyōsoku* 三条教則). These three standards, published by the ministry in April 1872, and their interpretation by the government were seen by Buddhists such as Shimaji as overly pro-Shintoist and thus prompted a flurry of memoranda and petitions seeking to abolish this system.¹⁷

It was in this context that Shimaji handed over a report to Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 (1825–1883), head of the Iwakura mission to Europe and North America, when both men met in London in August 1872. Shimaji had drafted a report titled *Ōshū seikyō kenbun* 欧州政教見聞 (Things Seen and Heard on Politics and Religion in Europe), at the beginning of which he wrestled with defining what was to be the object of his inquiry. The following passage marks Shimaji’s first identification of a separate sphere of religion:

“Religion” [*kyō* 教]—what is this? It is what one uses to lead people and to support politics [*sei* 政]. Yet, leading people does not mean ruling them. And supporting politics does not mean conducting politics. The object of politics is to erect a system, to promote the sciences [*hyakugaku* 百学], to further productivity [*shokusan* 殖産], and to secure the people each at his/her place. Yet it is religion which helps propel this. [...] When I observed politics in Europe, first there was religion, revered by high and low. Indeed, the political system as well as laws must fully rest upon religion. To grow up, to marry, to be interred, to worship your ancestors—all of this is religion. Work and rest—both are religion. All things in the life of men, from birth to death, are without exception religion.¹⁸

What we see here is a first awareness of a distinct category of religion. It is juxtaposed to “politics,” which includes economy (“to further productivity”) and science (“to promote the sciences”). From these spheres religion is seen as separate in that it “does not mean conducting politics.” At the same time, however, it is deeply intertwined with politics, “which must fully rest upon religion.”

Shimaji here—and perhaps later, too—still clings to an older paradigm of religious support for politics and vice versa.¹⁹ In doing so, he was fully in line with mainstream Shinshū expositions on the Three Standards of Instruction, which were at pains to demonstrate somehow the compatibility of these overtly Shintoist tenets with Buddhist

17 After returning from Europe, Shimaji was successful in convincing his head temple to abandon the Great Promulgation Campaign in 1874, the beginning of the end for the Ministry of Edification, which was dissolved in 1877.

18 Shimaji 1872a, p. 198.

19 This can be seen in later texts of his as well, thus throwing into doubt the claim that he was a forerunner of religious freedom. See Krämer 2015, pp. 60–62.

teachings. Higuchi Ryūon 樋口龍温 (1800–1885), for instance, a senior scholar at the Takakura Gakuryō 高倉学寮, the academy affiliated with Higashi Honganji 東本願寺 in Kyoto, also argued in a text completed in January 1873 that religion (of which, one must add, he did not yet have a clear-cut concept) was the necessary foundation of politics:

In order to rule (*osamu* 治む) a nation (*kokka* 国家), one must without fail rely upon a religion (*kyōhō* 教法). Without religion (*kyō* 教), government cannot be conducted, and the people have nowhere to return to. This is like taming a horse without a bridle. Therefore, a religion (*kyō*) is the fundament for ruling a country (*kuni* 国). Currently, all the Western countries have their respective religion. One says that if a religion prospers, its country will without fail also prosper. Even countries like ancient China and India had their respective religions. In India there had been, before the emergence of the Buddha, teachings based on the ten good deeds of the cakravartin kings (*rinnō jūzen* 輪王十善). Yet, after the emergence of the Buddha, the kings of the sixteen great countries all ruled their kingdoms through his teachings. This is why the Buddha frequently expounded upon the Law of the King.²⁰

By the time Higuchi was writing this, Shimaji had already developed a markedly different stance. In what is today his best known piece of writing, a petition to the emperor written in December 1872 when he was in Paris, Shimaji more clearly distinguished between politics and religion:

The difference between politics (*sei*) and religion (*kyō*) should never be obscured. Politics is a human affair and governs only outward forms. Moreover, it separates countries from each other. Religion, however, is the work of the divine and governs the heart. Moreover, it runs through many countries. In politics, one will therefore in no way be mindful of others but entirely strive for profit for the self. Not so in religion: one never thinks of the self but first and foremost desires to benefit the other. As for politics separating countries from each other, what is deemed right in a republic is wrong in a monarchy. The policies adopted by autocratic governments are rejected by constitutional governments. Depending on the foundations on which countries are established, their policies are as irreconcilable as ice and charcoal. [...] That both Japan and China have traditionally erred in [the relationship between] politics and religion seems to me to stem from their having frequently confused the two. In the old days, the Europeans erred [here] as well, and their culture was enormously backward. In recent times, however, they have come to see this and have now reached great results. I wish this for our country as well.²¹

In this petition, titled *Sanjō kyōsoku bihan kenpakusho* 三条教則批判建白書 (Critique of the Three Standards of Instruction), one can see clearly how religion and politics have come to be defined as occupying distinct domains of social action. In the language of system theory, one could say that they are defined as two functionally differentiated subsystems. Thus,

20 Higuchi 1873, p. 73.

21 Shimaji 1872b, pp. 15–16.

Shimaji can be read to say that politics deals with everything that works for the national interest, while religion is about the principles of love and mercy that rule the interactions of human beings in society.²²

Now, in that same 1872 petition, Shimaji uses the neologism *shūkyō* twice. It was not until 1874, however, that he began to render religion as *shūkyō* more consistently. His main reason for doing so was that he now made a finer distinction. He no longer opposed religion and politics, but now sought to differentiate within “teaching” (*kyō*). Basically, his move was to take the older umbrella term of “teaching” or “instruction” and extricate from it religion, as a certain subtype of “teaching.” What, however, is then left? This is the topic of a petition of 1874, in which Shimaji again rails against the Ministry of Edification:

I have not yet completely penetrated this thing called Shinto, but what I can say for sure is that it is not a so-called sectarian teaching [*shūkyō*]. If one now nonetheless attempts to make it into a sectarian teaching, the harm for Japan and the shame from the outside will be enormous. In olden times, when Buddhism had not yet entered Japan, only a secular teaching [*jikyō* 治教] existed in our country. There is thus no obstacle to the coexistence of a sectarian teaching and a secular teaching, but how could one human possibly have two sectarian teachings at the same time?²³

Reminiscent of the division between outer and inner that Shimaji had already expounded upon in the second text quoted from earlier, another Shinshū author, Kusunoki Senryū 楠潜龍 from the Ōtani branch of Jōdo Shinshū, defined this “secular teaching” in 1874 in a treatise on the “Seventeen Themes,” which were to be disseminated alongside the Three Standards of Instruction:²⁴

Beautifying the customs of the nation by rectifying laws, improving the morals of the common people by clarifying rewards and punishments, taking care that there are no disloyal subjects in the nation and no impious children in families, correcting names and clarifying human relationships: this is called the secular teaching [*jikyō*], and if those above teach it, those below will follow. Yet while the secular teaching rewards and punishes outward forms and past events, it does not promote and chastise the right and wrong of the inner heart and that which has not yet taken shape.²⁵

There is no consensus in the scholarly community today as to what this *jikyō* is or how to translate it, largely because the term has been obsolete in the Japanese language since the late nineteenth century. Shimazono Susumu has proposed “indoctrination,” others have

22 Interestingly, both definitions are quite different from the way Niklas Luhmann has identified the central binary codes for the subsystems of politics (power/no power) and religion (immanence/transcendence). This may be due, among other factors, to the fact that Shimaji wrote as a religious stakeholder and was thus more likely to list positive values as constitutive of religion rather than an abstract, neutral principle. Furthermore, the binary code of immanence vs. transcendence identified by Luhmann does not work well in a religion such as Buddhism that does not clearly externalize a transcendent deity. See Luhmann and Kieserling 2013.

23 Shimaji 1874, p. 65.

24 The Higashi Honganji sect took the official name of Shinshū Ōtani-ha 真宗大谷派 (the Ōtani branch of Jōdo Shinshū) in 1881.

25 Kusunoki 1874, p. 141.

tried “governing doctrine” or “doctrines of rule.”²⁶ I have chosen “secular teaching(s)” because *jikyō* is consciously employed in opposition to an emphatic definition of religion as the realm of the inner heart, the shapeless, and the unspeakable. In contrast, *jikyō* clearly refers to the this-worldly management of social relations and has no way of accessing this inner domain. There is no sense of superiority or inferiority; the two are simply on different planes. In this sense of a domain that is distinct from and not touched by religion, and consciously and explicitly established that way, Shimaji’s opposite of religion may justifiably be called “the secular.”

What I would like to highlight is that the real goal of the Shinshū Buddhist authors was to devise a strategy against the Shinto dominance of religious policy in those early years of Meiji. By defining Shinto as mythology, an expression of ancestor reverence, or a set of purely civil rites supporting the imperial institution—in other words, as secular—those authors sought to carve out a domain of “religion” that would protect Buddhism against Shinto by removing the former from competition with the latter. That is, the perception of a pressing political issue, namely “the Shinto problem” in the eyes of those Buddhist authors, was crucial in forming their theoretical point of view on defining the domain of “religion” and the nonreligious. Yet, Shimaji and his colleagues did not invent the conceptual oppositions underlying their new terminology out of thin air. Instead, there was a long tradition in Japanese Buddhism of thinking about the dichotomy of the sacred and the secular realm, although of course it was never expressed in so many words.

The Premodern Sources of Shimaji

Already in Indian Buddhism, “the Law of the Buddha” (Sk. *buddha-dharma*, Jp. *buppō* 仏法) was opposed as a rhetorical figure to “the Law of the King” (Sk. *rāja-dharma*, Jp. *ōbō* 王法) or “the Law of the World” (Sk. *loka-dharma*, Jp. *sehō* 世法). It is important to note that this was not a distinction between domains. Rather, as Christoph Kleine has noted in an analysis of the Japanese medieval Buddhist formula of “mutual dependence of the Law of the King and the Law of the Buddha” (*ōbō buppō sōi* 王法仏法相依), both terms are to be understood as immanent to the religious code. The order of the ruler is associated with *samsāra*, while that of the Buddha is associated with *nirvāna*, both of which are marked by specific ways of life.²⁷

In the course of time, however, the *ōbō-buppō* formula was no longer exclusively used in Buddhist doctrinal studies but became part of the political language. By the fifteenth century, it was an important point of reference in attempts by Honganji 本願寺, the dominant institution within Jōdo Shinshū, to rein in unruly elements among its adherents. Rennyo 蓮如, Honganji’s leader at the time, disapproved of the militancy of his followers and admonished them to follow the precept of *ōbō ihon* 王法為本: “make the Law of the King the fundament” or, as Michael Solomon translates it, “secular authority as fundamental.”²⁸ In 1474, Rennyo admonished the faithful in a pastoral letter: “First and foremost, you shall make the moral practices of the world [*seken* 世間] your fundament by adhering to the Law of the King [*ōbō*] on the outside and cultivating other-power [*anjin* 安心]

26 Shimazono 2005, p. 1086; Maxey 2014, p. 33; Ketelaar 1990, p. 129.

27 Kleine 2013, pp. 240, 247–49.

28 Solomon 2006, p. 401.

in your inner hearts.”²⁹ Rennyō’s formulation is interesting not least because of the close identification of the Buddha-dharma with the heart, prefiguring Shimaji’s and Kusunoki’s later association of religion with the domain of the heart.

Ōkuwa Hitoshi 大桑齊 has pointed out that Rennyō—as well as his immediate successors—used the term *ōbō* in only a few rare instances; thus it was not until the Tokugawa period that *ōbō ihon* came to be broadly recognized as a Shinshū ideal. Furthermore, Ōkuwa has argued that *ōbō* originally stood less for the concrete political authorities and more for the “moral practices of the world,” also mentioned in Rennyō’s 1474 letter.³⁰ This changed during the Tokugawa period when submission to political authority was increasingly stressed as an ideal by Honganji leaders. Towards the end of the period, the slogan “mutual dependence of the Law of the King and the Law of the Buddha” gained even more salience when the locus of the Law of the King was shifted from the bakufu to the emperor. Jōdo Shinshū writers used this slogan to identify the protection of the dharma with the protection of the nation during the 1850s and 1860s.

In 1869, immediately after the formal restoration of imperial power, Fukuda Gidō 福田義導 (1805–1881), a scholar-priest from western Japan, published a “Commentary on the Sutra of Political Discourse on the Law of the King” (*Ōbō seiron kyō ryakuchū* 王法政論經略註), in which he lauded the traditional model of mutual dependence of the Law of the King and the Law of the Buddha for its relevance to the present.³¹ He saw the protection of the imperial realm by Buddhist institutions and the nurturing of the latter by the government as the best way to fend off Christianity. That creed was a heresy (*jabō* 邪法), against which the specific Japanese blend of the three teachings of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism (*shinjubutsu sankyō* 神儒仏三教) and the benevolent rule of the emperor would offer protection. This benevolent rule, however, was best guaranteed by clinging to Buddhist tenets, hence the mutual dependence of Buddhism and worldly rule.³²

In contrast to Fukuda, however, who used the traditional figure of “mutual dependence of the Law of the King and the Law of the Buddha” to argue for a traditional order and cited the unity of the three traditional teachings as his ideal, his contemporary Shimaji drew on it in a broader sense, so as to develop an argument that departed from nostalgic notions of Buddhist supremacy through state patronage. What is crucial here is that Shimaji thought of them as two logically separate spheres, regardless of which was held to be more important. From there, it was a small step toward the notional separation of *sei* and *kyō*. He reinforced this by referring to another established conceptual pair: the notion of “the two truths of transcendence and worldliness” (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦). Originally, this dichotomy spoke of two types of truth, an ultimate one (*shin*) and a merely relative one (*zoku*). By the second half of the Tokugawa period, however, *shinzoku nitai* came to be employed in a somewhat different sense: *shintai* now stood for the Shinshū teaching of faith in salvation through Amida Buddha, while *zokutai* referred to the worldly and political realm, including existing social norms.³³

29 Quoted in Ōkuwa 2006, p. 172.

30 Ōkuwa 2006, pp. 175 and 189.

31 The full title of the sutra commented upon by Gidō reads *Butsui Udenno setsu ōbō seiron kyō* 仏為優填王說王法政論經. In this sutra, Buddha explains the faults and merits of kingship to King Udayana (優填王).

32 See Kashiwahara 1980, p. 414.

33 Fujii 2002, p. 110.

Again, the rhetoric was crucially foregrounded when the Shinshū sect—in this case at first only its Honganji branch—turned against the bakufu and toward the emperor. In 1863 the Honganji branch head, Kōnyo 広如, made reverence for the emperor the official policy of his sect, and since then, the *zokutai* part of the logic of “the two truths of transcendence and worldliness” increasingly came to be identified with the imperial institution.³⁴ Early in the Meiji period, this logic became part of the self-definition of the Honganji branch of Jōdo Shinshū when Kōnyo defined it as one of four core points for priests and laymen alike in 1871.³⁵

The particular way in which Shimaji and his colleagues conceptualized the relationship between religion and society/the state/the secular in the early Meiji period was certainly informed by the marked Shinshū tradition of situating itself vis-à-vis the state through the discussion of formulas such as “the two truths of transcendence and worldliness.” We can add here that an important criterion for dividing the two realms was their identification as responsible for the “outside,” that is, the world, and the “inside,” that is, the heart. This was notable in Rennyo’s 1451 letter to the faithful already quoted above: “First and foremost, you shall make the moral practices of the world [*seken*] your fundament by adhering to the Law of the King [*ōbō*] on the outside and cultivating other-power [*anjin*] in your inner hearts.”

It is no coincidence that the rhetoric of the heart would figure so strongly in Shimaji. Rather, it had gained central importance already in Shinran 親鸞, revered as the founder of Shinshū. When Shinran argued that full reliance on the power of Amida Buddha was the only way toward awakening, he put “trust” or “faith” (*shinjin* 信心; literally, “a trusting heart”) in Amida at the center of his innovation within Pure Land thought. More traditional and inner-sectarian explanations of Shinshū doctrine emphasize that, for Shinran, “this term signifies the central religious awakening or experience in the Pure Land path, and his entire teaching revolves around the clarification of its nature and significance.” We see the central importance in the connection that faith, or “trusting heart,” establishes between the practitioner and Amida, because “faith” is not an expression of the believer’s individual will but is granted by Amida: “This *shinjin* is therefore also ‘given’ and is itself the Buddha’s wisdom-compassion turning itself over to beings.” In this sense, Buddha and human beings can become one through the latter’s “trusting hearts.”³⁶

It was easy for early Meiji Buddhists such as Shimaji to identify in this “faith-heart” the crucial distinguishing element of religion, as opposed to secular domains such as politics. Yet, Shimaji was politically shrewd enough also to make sure to identify a connection between religion (or, more concretely, Buddhism), with its privileged channel of access to the heart, and politics. In his 1872 “Critique of the Three Standards of Instruction,” he observed:

[P]olitics obeys human nature and gives humans what they desire. If humans merely fulfill their desires, they come to have the hearts of lions and wolves. Laws are employed in order to control this. [...] Yet, even if one governs peoples’ outward

34 See Iwata 2010, p. 7.

35 See Rogers and Rogers 1990, p. 9.

36 Ueda and Hirota 1989, pp. 146–50.

forms, one does not yet govern their hearts; if one suppresses the shoots, one has not yet stopped the root. Here, only religion (*kyōhō*) can come to the rescue: it controls people's hearts and stops the root [of their desires], and thus drives the lions and wolves from their hearts.³⁷

Although the heart is here defined mainly via its ethical faculty, the point is that it is not accessible through the domain of “secular teachings” (*jikyō*—that is, Confucianism or Shinto). Rather, if the state wanted to be sure of the allegiance and compliance of the common people, it would have to employ a full-blown religion. To Shimaji's mind, there was no question that this could only refer to Buddhism. Clearly defining the separate domains of religion and the secular and debating the relationship of the two was thus no idle intellectual exercise for Shimaji, but rather a crucial move for finding a way out of the political crisis that Meiji Buddhism found itself in after the anti-Buddhist iconoclasm of the late 1860s and the promulgation of the Three Standards of Instruction in 1872.

Conclusion

Since the time of Max Weber, secularization has been defined in various ways. Older approaches have usually employed the term to refer to the disenchantment of the world, the “progressive shrinkage and decline of religion,”³⁸ or the “replacement of a religious by a technological-scientific interpretation of the world.”³⁹ Certainly, no one ever thought in these terms in Japan up to the middle of the nineteenth century, although some Tokugawa-period Confucians may have wished that society would move in this direction. Shimaji certainly did not think in this way, either. However, if we look to more recent attempts to give useful definitions of secularization, I believe that we can easily detect parallels between current conceptualizations of the relationship between religion and the nonreligious and Shimaji's early struggles with this issue. Charles Taylor has defined secularity in his “sense 1” as “the shift from the premodern *connection* of political organization to some notion of ultimate reality towards the modern state, which is free from this connection.”⁴⁰ The classical—and more precise—definition of this layer of meaning of secularization comes from Spanish sociologist José Casanova and goes as follows:

The process of societal modernization as a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.⁴¹

37 Shimaji 1872b, p. 16

38 Casanova 1994, p. 20.

39 Pollack 2009, p. 10.

40 Taylor 2007, pp. 1–3.

41 Casanova 1994, p. 19. Casanova was not the first to identify this layer of secularization, which Talcott Parsons, Robert Bellah, and even Émile Durkheim had already referred to as a process of differentiation of religion (see Dobbelaere 1981, p. 11). Yet Casanova was the first to connect it precisely to modernization and to stress that the religious sphere is indeed “newly found” in the course of the process of secularization in the sense described by him.

Both Casanova and Taylor speak of an anonymous social process. As Asad has pointed out, it is instructive to turn our analytical gaze instead to active efforts to achieve the outcome described by Casanova and Taylor, that is, the political ideology of secularism. It is not difficult to identify this attitude in the writings of Shimaji from the 1870s. He wanted to differentiate and compartmentalize religion in “its own newly found religious sphere” not because he thought it deserved to decline in relevance, but precisely because he wanted to salvage what could be salvaged in the face of the advent of modernity. While not overly interested in theorizing about the sphere against which religion was to be established, Shimaji was willing to concede to “secular teaching” the realm of morality and human relationships, saving for religion the domain of the inner heart, the ineffable.⁴²

To conclude, I have tried to argue that Shimaji developed a program of secularism, one he closely associated with modernization—although he preferred to speak of a process of “enlightenment” (*kaika* 開化). This program rather closely resembles that described by Asad as a purely Western project, imposed unilaterally upon the rest of the world. To be sure, Shimaji developed his program under the influence of the West: it was no coincidence, after all, that he began writing his sharp critiques of current religious policy while in Europe. Still, the Western categories of religion and the secular were neither “invented” in nor simply “transplanted” or “exported” to Asia, but rather “reconceived” there, within the context of contemporary political agendas. In the case of Shimaji, this immediate context was “the Shinto problem,” that is, the challenge posed to Buddhism by the religious policy of the early Meiji government, which seemed to favor Shinto heavily. Searching for an answer to this challenge, Shimaji drew on insights learned from and in the West, even as he relied upon his particular religious and sectarian tradition, namely Jōdo Shinshū, and in this sense on indigenous sources of secularism.

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⁴² To be sure, Shimaji insisted that Buddhism partook of both spheres, secular teaching as well as sectarian teaching (=religion). I noted above that “the inner heart” was also used by Shimaji to refer to the ethical dimension, although again in the sense of a domain only accessible to religion. The important move for him was to argue that Shinto had nothing to do with this latter domain, however it may be defined.

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