

Introduction: Formations of the Secular in Japan

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In recent years, a number of new historical studies have traced the formation and development of the category “religion” (*shūkyō* 宗教) in (early) modern Japan.¹ They have shed light on the profound political embeddedness of the category, showing how its conceptualization and implementation were intertwined with statehood and national ideology, which led to the transformation of earlier practices and ideas. As these works demonstrate, in modern Japan the newly incorporated category “religion” came to occupy a clearly demarcated space, differentiated from other societal realms such as governance, education, and science. The isolation of secular orthodoxy from a privatized realm of contingent belief was central to the formation of the modern imperial state. Later, in the postwar period, the category was reshaped according to the demands of the occupying forces, who stipulated the constitutional separation of religion and state.

What counts as religion continues to be debated and negotiated. There is disagreement over the extent to which religious organizations should be allowed to be active in supposedly “public” realms such as education and party politics. Moreover, it appears that recently, the category of religion has come to be perceived negatively as “sectarian” or even “potentially violent,” and fewer people are willing to associate with groups that they identify with this label.² In response, some religious actors have sought to overcome the limitations imposed on them both by legal secularism and by antireligious sentiments among the general public by reframing their activities in alternative terms, such as culture, tradition, or spirituality. Thus, throughout modern and contemporary Japanese history, religion’s category boundaries have been continuously challenged and reshaped, and so, by extension, have been the spaces usually referred to as “secular” (*sezoku* 世俗), namely those spaces explicitly configured as *not* religious.

It has been argued that “religion” and “the secular” are Western parochial terms that emerged in the particular historical context of European Christendom and were imposed on a variety of non-Western practices and traditions in a colonial context.³ Critical genealogies of “religion” and “the secular” such as those by Talal Asad have convincingly demonstrated that these categories are far from universal: developed in a European setting, they reflected

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1 Hoshino 2012; Josephson 2012; Maxey 2014. For an overview, see Thomas 2013.

2 For a discussion of negative perceptions of “religion,” see Baffelli and Reader 2012.

3 See, for example, Fitzgerald 2007.

early modern power configurations, and their “universalization” was embedded in imperialist projects even if the categories were appropriated and transformed by non-Western actors.⁴ Thus, Asad and like-minded postcolonial scholars have contributed significantly to the re-historicization of these concepts and, accordingly, to the overcoming of universalistic, *sui generis* understandings of religion.⁵ The title of this special issue, *Formations of the Secular in Japan*, is a direct reference to the work of Asad, whose genealogical approach and conceptual criticism constitute an important source of inspiration for us. At the same time, however, some of the articles in this volume depart from Asad, notably in problematizing his assertion that “the secular” was a uniquely Western product, developed in a Christian context and forcibly imposed upon non-Western Others. They show that the religious-secular dichotomy played a central part in modern state formation in Japan, in spite of the fact that Japan was one of a handful of non-Western countries that escaped colonization.⁶ The categories of religion and the secular were not simply imposed by “the West”: they were also shaped by Japanese (state and religious) actors, who drew on preexisting notions and practices as much as on newly imported ones.

Whatever their origins, there is no denying the fact that in modern times, “religion” and “the secular” have acquired profound significance worldwide. The definition and demarcation of “religion” is central to governance in imperial and post-imperial states, not only in Europe and the US but also in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. “Secularity” and “secularism” have long ceased to be Eurocentric terms. Although they developed in the context of “North Atlantic Christendom,” as described by Charles Taylor, they have been implemented, appropriated, and at times subverted in nation states with profoundly different worship traditions, taking on a variety of new meanings in the process.⁷ Countries as diverse as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Senegal, and Turkey have all developed their own particular secularist ideologies and their own models for classifying and regulating religion.⁸ These models are by no means fixed: various actors (religious and otherwise) constantly challenge existing categorizations, for instance by claiming a more visible role for particular religious ideas and practices in the public realm, or, by contrast, by seeking to exclude supposedly “religious” practices and symbols from that realm.

Japan is no exception. The question of whether or not there were functional equivalents to “religion” and “the secular” in the premodern period has been discussed by several scholars, and will be taken up again in this issue in the articles by Paramore, Teeuwen, and Krämer, who examine continuities between pre- and post-Meiji Japan.⁹ At the same time, they argue, recognizing such continuities helps us to understand the profound transformations and inventions wrought by the formation of “religion” in the Meiji period.¹⁰

⁴ Asad 1993; 2003.

⁵ On this topic, see also Masuzawa 2005; McCutcheon 1997.

⁶ Maxey 2014.

⁷ See Taylor 2007 for a discussion of the formation of the religious-secular dichotomy in the Western historical context.

⁸ Bubandt and van Beek 2012a; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015; Casanova 1994; 2006; Chatterjee 2011; Dressler and Mandair 2011; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; van der Veer 2013.

⁹ Reader (2004) and Kleine (2013) have argued that premodern Japanese society was characterized by a differentiation between a “secular” and a “religious” realm similar to the modern period. For a critique of these arguments, see Horii 2016.

¹⁰ Josephson 2012.

Indeed, the question of how to define the incorporated Western category of “religion” (and, accordingly, how to classify and manage existing practices and organizations) became central to the Meiji government’s modernization project.¹¹ As the newly configured “religion” was differentiated from other societal realms, various secularist ideologies were developed. Some of these would exercise considerable influence on modern and contemporary Japanese society and politics, as well as, not surprisingly, on “religious” organizations themselves. In postwar Japan, the problem of religion’s definition and legal demarcation has lingered on: controversies related to the legal position of “religion” in Japanese society and politics emerge and reemerge periodically, and the meanings and societal position of “religion” remain as contested as ever.

To grasp the large variety of contexts that are impacted by this ongoing contestation, some concrete examples may be helpful. The following three episodes illustrate the fact that boundary wars over “religion” can be very concrete and intrusive, and are triggered by all kinds of major and minor incidents.

Kyoto, May 1967

Seven shrine priests are arrested for breaking election laws. They have performed *tōsen kigan* 当選祈願 rituals for a politician (a certain Nakano), who has asked them to pray for his election to the House of Representatives earlier in the year. When Nakano is arrested for corruption, the priests get caught up in the matter, and some of them are detained in police custody for up to twenty days, while being pressured to sign documents in which they admit their crime. In the end, they receive fines, against which six of them appeal. The *tōsen kigan* rites involve offerings of saké, and the police claim that such offerings constitute bribes or vote buying. When a priest protests that these are offerings to the gods and not personal “gifts” to the priests, the police investigator reportedly objects that “the gods have not drunk any of the saké, while the priests have.” The Kyoto branch of the National Association of Shinto Shrines (Kyōto-fu Jinjachō 京都府神社庁) argues that this kind of “atheistic, oppressive attitude” is unconstitutional because it tramples on the freedom of faith. If this is allowed to pass, the priests state, “all offerings and donations made to religious organizations, whether they are shrines, temples, or churches, will be regarded as secular bribing of religionists, or as complicity in corruption.”¹²

Kyoto, July 1985

The city government implements what it calls the Ancient Capital Preservation Cooperation Tax (*koto hozon kyōryokuzei* 古都保存協力税), which requires Kyoto’s major thirty-seven temples to collect a tourist tax from visitors. The Kyoto Buddhist Association (Kyōto-shi Bukkyōkai 京都市仏教会) protests that temple visits are religious acts, and therefore cannot be taxed by the authorities. They argue that the new tax is a serious breach of the freedom of faith, and refuse to cooperate. The situation rapidly escalates into a full-scale “temple strike.” The city’s most famous

11 Hoshino 2012; Maxey 2014; Krämer 2015.

12 *Jinja shinpō*, 20 May 1967, p. 1.

temples remain closed to all visitors for three years, and tourist numbers in Kyoto nosedive. It is only in the spring of 1988 that the conflict is resolved. The city government cuts its losses and rescinds the tax. Temples, meanwhile, introduce measures to make sure that nobody will ever again mistake a temple visit for mere tourism, for example by replacing entrance fees with “entrance donations.”¹³

Ōita, December 2015

The prefectural council of Ōita prefecture, working towards the designation of the landscape of Usa City as a UN-recognized “Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System,” publishes a calendar for 2016, featuring beautiful photos of the area, with 1,870 calendars distributed locally using ¥590,000 from public coffers. On 26 December 2015, however, the prefectural Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Planning Division intervenes and withdraws the calendars. The problem, division head Murai explains, is that the calendar contains information about lucky and unlucky days (*rokuyō* 六曜). “If people end up believing in unfounded superstitions, this may lead to discrimination. Such matters should not be included in official publications. We apologize for not having checked this [calendar] more thoroughly.”¹⁴

Through countless conflicts and incidents of this kind, the boundary between the secular and the religious is constantly concretized anew in a process of negotiation and renegotiation. Intrusions of the secular into the religious sphere, or vice versa, are vigorously opposed—understandably so when institutional interests are at stake, as in the first two examples, but even when this is not so obviously the case, as in the third incident. The “formation of the secular” is the cumulative history of such negotiations, both reflecting and gradually transforming the grammar of religion within Japanese society.

A “Global Comparative Perspective”

Until recently, most scholarly accounts of secularization and secularism were primarily concerned with developments in so-called Western societies. A number of scholars have pointed out that classical secularization theories—which, as Casanova aptly summarized, predicted the decline of religious beliefs, the privatization of religion, and the differentiation of the religious from other societal spheres, all of which were seen as inevitable consequences of modernization—were grounded in Eurocentric notions of modernity and corresponding social-evolutionist views of historical progress.¹⁵ Likewise, secularist political theories such as those proposed by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas are primarily informed by Western European and North American history and ideology, and fail to engage seriously with non-Western world views and historical developments. Accordingly, several historians have argued that the secular-religion binary is essentially a Euro-American historical construct, developed in a Western Christian context, which was imposed upon a variety of non-Christian Others in the context of modern imperialism. This, as we have seen, is the

13 Graburn 2004, p. 135.

14 *Ōita gōdō shinbun*, 26 December 2015, p. 27.

15 Casanova 1994.

argument of Talal Asad, as outlined in his influential work *Formations of the Secular* (2003). Similarly, in his monumental historical study *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor argues that modern secularization is the outcome of unique historical developments that took place in the context of Latin Christendom, notably the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Central to this process, according to Taylor, was the development of an “immanent frame” (that is, an epistemological framework that is fundamentally this-worldly) as the default mode for explaining phenomena, which caused religion to lose its self-evidence and become one option among others.

In recent years, however, the study of secularities and secularisms—now often written in the plural, in order to allow for the diversity of forms they have taken—has moved beyond notions of Western exceptionalism and classical West–East (or North–South) dichotomies. A new “global comparative perspective” is emerging, allowing for “a less Euro-centric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions.”¹⁶ Although many secularities and secularisms emerged in modern colonial or semi-colonial contexts, they were not merely Western constructs that were imposed upon passive colonial subjects. Notions of secularity were actively appropriated, altered, and implemented by various non-Western actors, who drew on European ideology *as well as* indigenous world views and conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, recent years have seen an increasing awareness of the global interconnectedness of formations of “religion” and the “secular.” More and more scholars are studying the historical processes by which European categories influenced, and were transformed by, non-European practices and beliefs. Examples include Peter van der Veer’s comparative study of configurations of “religion,” “secularity,” and “spirituality” in China and India, and the significance of these categories for nation-building projects in both countries.¹⁷ It also includes the recent works on the formation of the category “religion” in Japan by Hoshino, Josephson, Maxey, and Krämer, as well as Dessì’s work on the impact of globalization on Japanese religion and secularity.¹⁸

The new “global comparative perspective” observed by Casanova is also illustrated by the fact that in recent years, various anthologies have been published in which Asian secularities and secularisms are discussed explicitly and extensively, either as the main focus or in comparison with other regions.¹⁹ Two of these volumes contain articles discussing aspects of secularity and secularization in Japan, either in contemporary society or historically.²⁰ In this special issue, we seek to explore further some of the issues introduced in these anthologies. Instead of taking for granted the supposedly “Western” character of the secular-religion dichotomy, we raise the question of whether it is possible to speak of premodern Japanese secularities, thus challenging the widespread assumption that “the immanent frame” is a uniquely Western historical product. Significantly, several historians

16 Casanova 2006, p. 11.

17 van der Veer 2013.

18 Hoshino 2012; Josephson 2012; Maxey 2014; Krämer 2015; Dessì 2013.

19 Bubandt and van Beek 2012a; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011; Eggert and Hölscher 2013; Heng and Ten 2010; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008.

20 These are Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015 and Eggert and Hölscher 2013, both of which contain two chapters on Japanese cases. Mullins (2015) and Porcu (2015) look at developments in contemporary society; Isomae (2013) and Krämer (2013) approach the topic historically.

have argued that, although the terms “religion” (*shūkyō*) and “secular” (*sezoku*) were created as calques in the early Meiji period, a similar societal differentiation may have already been in place in the Edo period or even earlier, and it is possible to speak of premodern or early modern Japanese secularism *avant la lettre*.²¹ In their implementation of European legal and societal categories, Meiji-period politicians and scholars could not ignore preexisting Japanese epistemological frameworks, which were embedded in their own thinking; and when venturing from the theoretical to the concrete, they had to work around the institutional structures shaped by Edo-period rationales and policies.

The articles in this issue trace the various genealogies of the secular in modern Japan, taking into consideration premodern precedents as well as modern adaptations and the various “imperial encounters” by which they were shaped.²² This is not merely of historical interest. In spite of many twists and turns, we maintain that there is a thread tying together the different stages of the history of the secular in Japan. Even the three rather random examples given above illustrate such threads of continuity. Beyond questions of corruption, the 1967 arrest of priests displays obvious echoes of Meiji-period discourse: the Peace Police Bill of 1898 had already banned priests and other religious actors from engaging in political activities.²³ The argument that temple visits are by definition religious was first used by Kyoto temples in that same year, in protest against a prefectural tax imposed to subsidize the maintenance of old shrines and temples in the city.²⁴ Finally, the scrapping of the Ōita calendar in 2015 drew on a more recent precedent: in 2005, the Buraku Liberation League (Buraku Kaihō Dōmei 部落解放同盟) protested against the publication by Ōtsu City of pocket diaries featuring lucky and unlucky days, arguing that public endorsement of superstitions regarding impurity led to discrimination. Each new incident, then, carries within it the traces of earlier bouts of negotiation over the boundaries between the secular and religious spheres, and the limitations that those boundaries impose on actors of all hues.

For these reasons, the articles in this volume will cover a period that stretches from the premodern to the contemporary period, approaching the subject matter from historical as well as social scientific perspectives. What these articles have in common is that they examine formations of the secular in Japan—societal, legal, and ideological—and, in doing so, attempt to rethink the modern history of Japanese (non-)religion in the light of recent theoretical developments. This does not mean they are all in agreement. The authors approach the topic from various angles, drawing on different theories. Some engage with the work and terminology of Charles Taylor, which they apply to a Japanese historical context. Others draw on the ideas of Talal Asad, José Casanova, and others. As editors, we have deliberately refrained from imposing a single theoretical model upon these different case studies, and we have not asked the authors to define “religion” and “the secular” in accordance with our own preferences. Rather, we have invited them to offer their own definitions and interpretations. The authors represent a variety of disciplinary angles (historical, sociological, anthropological, and legal/political), thematic concerns, and interpretations. This diversity, we argue, is one of the defining features—for better or

21 Kleine 2013; Paramore 2012; Teeuwen 2013.

22 See van der Veer 2013.

23 Maxey 2014, p. 229.

24 Fujita 2014.

worse—of contemporary scholarly debates on the secular, secularism, and secularization. Instead of downplaying this diversity, and the conceptual fluidity (or, at times, confusion) characterizing these debates, we wish to highlight it as an opportunity for cross-disciplinary engagement.

A Secular Japan?

The question of whether Japan is a “secular” or a “religious” society is not particularly new. Already in the 1970s, Reischauer and Jansen famously argued that Japan is a secular society in which religion only plays a peripheral role, and that “the trend toward secularism that has only recently become marked in the West dates back at least three centuries in Japan”—a statement that has been both criticized and derided, but that is arguably worth reconsidering.²⁵ Secularization theory has been a core concern of sociologists and scholars of religion since the 1970s, and its possible relevance (or lack thereof) for Japan was the subject of much debate, as illustrated by the fact that several conferences and two special issues of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* were devoted to the topic.²⁶ Somewhat later, sociologist of religion Winston Davis examined the topic of the “secularization of Japanese religion” in an interesting theoretical essay.²⁷ However, in the 1990s and the first decade of the twentieth century, classical unilinear accounts of secularization lost much of their appeal as scholars worldwide focused on the perceived “return of religion” or “desecularization” of the world.²⁸ Accordingly, the topic of secularization in Japan received little scholarly interest during this period.

This appears to be changing. The topic of the decline of (rural) religious institutions has recently returned to the forefront of debates on Japanese religion.²⁹ Somewhat ironically, the first issue of the newly launched *Journal of Religion in Japan* was devoted to secularization and religious decline, with one of the authors even predicting the death of Japanese religion within “two decades.”³⁰ Containing articles by Mark Mullins, John Nelson, Elisabetta Porcu, and Ian Reader, the journal constitutes one of several recent publications reconsidering secularization in Japan.³¹ Reader’s article is the most outspoken of the four, arguing that religion in Japan is in serious trouble, and that classical accounts of secularization as the “decline of religion” deserve to be reassessed. Reader equates institutional decline with secularization, and provides some impressive evidence of such decline; yet he does not reflect upon ways in which the categories of “religion” and “the secular” have been shaped and reshaped in the Japanese context. The articles by Nelson and Mullins, on the other hand, are clearly informed by recent theoretical debates concerning the multiplicity of secularities and secularisms; they argue that processes of secularization

25 Reischauer and Jansen 1995, p. 203.

26 Volume 3:4 (1976) and volume 6:1–2 (1979). The former includes articles by Bryan Wilson and Thomas Luckmann, as well as an interesting contribution by Jan Swyngedouw on secularization in the Japanese context (Swyngedouw 1976). The latter includes more articles on the topic, written by leading sociologists and scholars of religion.

27 Davis 1992, pp. 229–51.

28 For example, Berger 1999; Stark 1999.

29 For example, Fuyutsuki 2010; Ukai 2015.

30 Reader 2012, p. 34.

31 Mullins 2012; Nelson 2012; Porcu 2012; Reader 2012.

in Japan are neither unilinear nor all-encompassing, and that they are complemented by processes of sacralization and the *de*-privatization of religion.

Scholars who write about these topics face several conceptual challenges. First of all, the term “secularization” carries multiple meanings and is used differently by different authors.³² Casanova famously distinguished between three understandings of secularization: “the decline of religious beliefs and practices” (which, he adds, “is the most recent but by now the most widespread usage of the term in contemporary academic debates on secularization”); “the privatization of religion”; and “the differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science)” from religion.³³ Thus, it is possible for a society to experience secularization politically (that is, the imposition of restrictions to religious institutions and symbols in the public sphere), while simultaneously experiencing an increase in the number and popularity of religious organizations. Considering the conceptual fluidity characteristic of secularization debates, participants in such debates should clearly define their terms.

Second, it is important to point out the semantic distinction between *secularization* as a historical process (or, rather, a number of related processes); *the secular* as a modern epistemic and societal category; *secularism* as a type of ideology or political system concerned with limiting the position of religion vis-à-vis politics and other secular spheres; and *secularity* as the state of being secular.³⁴ José Casanova defined “the secular” as “a central modern category—theological-philosophical, legal-political, and cultural-anthropological—to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from ‘the religious.’ [...] It should be obvious that ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ are always and everywhere mutually constituted.”³⁵ By contrast, we understand “secularism” to refer to a range of ideologies or world views that stipulate the separation of religion from purportedly secular spheres (for example, politics and education) and seek to restrict the societal space allocated to religion.³⁶ It should also be noted that, whereas the terms “secular,” “secularism,” and “secularization” have received ample scholarly attention for decades, the derived notion of “secularity” has only recently become the focus of intense academic debate. Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt define the difference between “secularism” and “secularity” as follows: “We propose to reserve the concept of secularism for the ideological-philosophical program—hence, for the explicit ideology of separation—and related political practices, and the concept of secularity, by contrast, for the culturally and symbolically as well as institutionally anchored forms and arrangements of differentiation between religion and other social spheres.”³⁷ In other words, secularity is more descriptive and implicit than secularism, which refers to ideological programs to demarcate or enlarge the secular sphere.³⁸ The recent focus on “secularity” as a conceptual alternative to “the secular” and

32 See, for instance, Dobbelaere 1981; Demerath 2007.

33 Casanova 2006, p. 7. Cf. Casanova 1994.

34 Asad 2003; Casanova 2011.

35 Casanova 2011, p. 54.

36 See Rots in this issue. Cf. Bubandt and van Beek 2012b, pp. 7–8.

37 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, p. 881.

38 It should be noted that Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt’s definition of “secularism” is narrower than the one offered by Casanova, who states that secularism may be held either consciously or unreflexively, “as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality” (Casanova 2011, p. 55). Accordingly, Casanova does not use the term “secularity” much.

“secularism” has given rise to a number of publications on “multiple secularities” worldwide, some of which discuss Japanese cases.³⁹

Thus, although sociological debates about the secularization of Japanese societies (understood variously as religious decline, as privatization, or as functional differentiation) continue to be important, they are not the full story. And whereas the perceived *secularization* (or lack thereof) of modern Japanese society has engaged both historians and sociologists of religion for decades, until recently considerably less attention has been given to Japanese varieties of *secularism*, let alone to the ways in which *the secular* has been shaped and reshaped in the course of Japanese history. Although this appears to be changing, Japanese cases have not yet received much attention from scholars of these issues outside of Japanese studies, especially those approaching the topic comparatively. Therefore, we believe, it is important that scholars of Japanese history and religion not only are *informed* about the ongoing debates on secularisms, secularities, and secularization, but they should also *contribute* to these debates more actively. With this special issue, we hope to make a further contribution to the understanding of formations of the secular and secularism in Japan, and also to the ongoing debate on ways in which these categories have been given shape in different cultural and political contexts more broadly.

The Articles

This issue is organized chronologically, and begins with articles by Kiri Paramore, Mark Teeuwen, and Hans Martin Krämer that address the question of the degree to which “religion” and “the secular” are exclusively modern concepts. Each of these articles is based on different empirical materials, and while they all dispute Asad’s categorical definition of non-Western adoptions of “religion” as colonial imports, they offer very different alternatives to this view. Paramore points out that what he calls the religious and the political were already conceptually differentiated in ancient China in a manner that must be described as “reflective” in Charles Taylor’s terminology. He doubts that a premodern era of naïve religious faith, as imagined by Taylor, ever actually existed even in Europe. Rather than searching for the origins of secular reflexivity, Paramore argues, we should be tracing the changing patterns of interaction between already differentiated religious and political spheres. From this point of view, he proposes that Japan moved from a Buddhist-mediated balanced regime of political-religious relations, by way of a tumultuous interlude where *Ikkō ikki* 一向一揆 presented a competing regime, to a Confucian-mediated regime that achieved a new balance. The collapse of Confucianism in the Meiji period undermined this equilibrium, leaving Japan without the means to integrate religion and politics and forcing it to exclude religion from the public sphere as an arena that was by definition irrational and divisive.

Mark Teeuwen offers a different perspective on aspects of continuity between the Edo and Meiji periods (and beyond). Like Paramore, he stresses the radical novelty of late medieval faith-based identities, as pioneered by the *Ikkō ikki*. The alternative “regime” (to borrow Paramore’s term) of such faith groups formed the rationale of the early modern

39 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015; Nelson 2012. These works echo the terminology of S. N. Eisenstadt (2000), who famously argued that there are “multiple modernities” at work in the world, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric accounts of modernization.

temple certification system. Teeuwen discusses the dilemmas of this system as a form of secularity—after all, it involved the constant negotiation of the boundary between the worlds of “faith” on the one hand and governance on the other. Teeuwen recognizes the legacy of this centuries-long process of negotiation in Confucian-inspired notions of “unity of ritual and government” (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致), which gave prime importance to ritual as a mediating practice between what would later be called religion and politics. Teeuwen’s first argument is that this Confucian model, which stressed ritual as an integrating practice, continued to compete with the modern discourse on “religion” into the twentieth century, and influenced the mapping of “religion” and “the secular” in the process. His second point is that the institutional realities of temples and shrines, formed under the temple certification system, greatly limited the implementation of modern ideological reforms, and are underemphasized in research on the conceptualization of religion in Japan.

Hans Martin Krämer, too, underlines the crucial importance of “parallel indigenous conceptual traditions” as a factor that determined the reception of Western concepts of religion and secularity in the Meiji period. He argues that the notion that religion and the secular form separate realms had a “prehistory,” and that pre-Meiji ideas were crucial to the reconception of this notion by Japanese actors, who used the new term “religion” to solve the pressing problems that threatened their institutions in the new age of “civilization.” Krämer focuses on the Shin priest Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) and demonstrates how this key figure combined time-honored Shin notions of “the Kingly Law and the Buddha Law” (*ōbō buppō* 王法仏法), “the two truths of transcendence and worldliness” (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦), and also the primacy of faith as preached already by Shinran, together with Western ideas about religion and the state in his struggle to defend Shin Buddhism from Shinto pressure. In the process, Krämer concludes, Shimaji became a pioneer of Japanese secularism. Of course, Shimaji’s secularism diverged from Western models, but there is no doubt that it shared so many traits with that many-hued family that it came to be recognized as a reconceived form of secularism, construed by integrating both inherited and newly received Japanese and Western ideas in a specific political context.

James Mark Shields writes about the New Buddhist Association, a lay Buddhist group most active between 1899 and 1915. Its members strove to create a nonsectarian movement of lay Buddhists who expressed their faith through active engagement in society. To them the word “new” meant sincere, morally sound, rational, free of both dogma and superstition, and oriented toward this world. In contrast to the Association of Buddhist Sects, which appealed to such ideas as *ōbō buppō* in the hope of securing a privileged position for Buddhism within the Japanese state, the New Buddhists held the secularist view that independence from the government was a prime condition for freedom of faith. In other ways, however, the New Buddhists were anything but secularists. They did not seek to separate “private” religion from the public realm; quite to the contrary, they saw social activism as the essence of modern Buddhism. Shields finds parallels to the ideas of the New Buddhists in Western philosophical traditions, and he compares their ambition to take faith out of the temples and into the “real world” with Protestant movements that sought to Christianize society by secularizing the church. His article reminds us of the many meanings of the term “secular,” and serves as a warning against assuming that only one was relevant to Meiji Japan.

The articles by Kate Wildman Nakai and Erica Baffelli both address a topic that has received relatively little attention from scholars of secularism: higher education.⁴⁰ These articles show how shifting conceptions and classifications of “religion” and “secularity” exercised considerable impact upon the development of (higher) education in modern and contemporary Japan. Nakai discusses the role of “religion” and “secularism” in early twentieth century Japanese higher education. Drawing on the work of Ahmed Kuru on French and Turkish secularism, she argues that Japan’s educational policy at the time was likewise characterized by “assertive secularism,” as the state restricted religious education and ceremonies at all state-accredited schools. Christian universities had to find ways to negotiate these restrictions. Meanwhile, however, they also had to respond to the government’s attempts to promote shrine and emperor worship among students. Using the history of the private Catholic university of Sophia University in Tokyo as a case study, Nakai shows that university leaders initially were unwilling to comply, adopting a position of “passive secularism.” After the 1932 Yasukuni Shrine incident, however, the leadership of Sophia University changed its position, and started promoting the notion that shrine worship was a nonreligious act of patriotism, “compatible with Catholic belief and practice.”

In the postwar period, the government no longer imposes shrine worship as a mandatory educational activity. However, the Ministry of Education still accredits schools and universities based on educational standards that may be considered secular. As Erica Baffelli argues, several new religions have attempted to set up “alternative models for mainstream systems,” including education. Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 and Tenrikyō 天理教 are two well-known examples of so-called new religions that have successfully negotiated state secularist demands and established universities that draw upon and incorporate religious beliefs and practices, while simultaneously offering educational programs that meet the standards of the ministry. By contrast, Baffelli shows, Kōfuku no Kagaku’s 幸福の科学 application for permission to establish a new university was rejected in 2014. This may have been partly due to changing attitudes to religion in post-Aum society, but the decisive factor appears to have been Kōfuku no Kagaku’s failure to recognize that higher education based primarily on the founder’s spiritual revelations is fundamentally at odds with the ministry’s definition of “science.” In other words, contrary to some other new religions, which successfully developed alternative models, Kōfuku no Kagaku offers an interesting recent case study of a movement that has failed to negotiate the demands and speak the “secular” language of the dominant mainstream, at least with respect to higher education. It also shows that education remains one of the fields where the boundaries between religion and secularity are continuously contested and redrawn, today as much as in the prewar period.

Isaac Gagné’s article likewise looks at attempts by new religions to negotiate postwar secularism. It examines the case of Kagamikyō (a pseudonym), a comparatively small new

40 This is not to say that the topic has been completely neglected: there have been some publications addressing issues pertaining to secularity and (higher) education (for example, Waggoner 2011). Revealingly, though, hardly any of the edited volumes referred to in this introduction (Bubandt and van Beek 2012a; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011; Eggert and Hölscher 2013; Heng and Ten 2010; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008) contain articles that explicitly address secularism in relation to education (Dressler and Mandair 2011 is the exception, as it contains an article on Buddhism and education in Burma). The topic has not received much attention from leading theoreticians such as Talal Asad, José Casanova, or Charles Taylor either.

religion that has recently gone through a process of “internal secularization.” Drawing on the work of Karel Dobbelaere and others, Gagné argues that internal secularization “is driven by the organizational leaders’ active transformation of their internal structure, rituals, and even symbolic meanings within their organization toward conformity (or at least complementarity) with another referential world.”⁴¹ This referential world, Gagné shows, is perceived as “secular” and even hostile to “religion”; thus, deemphasizing the “religious” aspects of Kagamikyō has become a strategy employed by the leadership to ensure institutional survival. The article outlines several recent transformations within this organization, which have led to the removal or adaptation of practices that were considered too explicitly “religious.” Recently, Kagamikyō has reinvented itself as a “global superreligion”: it seeks to gain legitimacy domestically through its “international” activities, such as foreign exchange and mission abroad, and attract new followers by constructing a “Paradise on Earth Theme Park” that includes sports facilities and an art museum. Interestingly, however, Gagné’s ethnographic data reveal that some of the older-generation members are uncomfortable with the recent transformations, not only because of the financial burdens involved but also because of the changes in worship practices.

Gagné’s analysis of Kagamikyō’s recent transformations corresponds to what Rots in his article refers to as “discursive secularization”: “processes by which beliefs, practices, and institutions previously classified as ‘religion’ are redefined and reconfigured (by many of the leading actors involved) as ‘culture,’ ‘tradition,’ ‘heritage,’ ‘science,’ or even ‘nature’; in sum, as non-religion.” Rots points out that discursive secularization is an important feature of many contemporary Japanese organizations, but adds that this does not necessarily imply the decline of devotional practices or beliefs. Shrine Shinto is a case in point. Drawing on the works of Charles Taylor and Kuroda Toshio, Rots argues that contemporary Shinto ideologues wish to reestablish their tradition as the public “immanent frame” underlying Japanese culture and society—similar to what Jason A. Josephson has referred to as the “Shinto secular.”⁴² Yet this newly reimagined public, “secular” Shinto is by no means devoid of gods, rituals, and other “sacred” elements, for (discursive) secularization can go hand in hand with sacralization. In his article, Rots focuses on two authors in particular: influential Shinto scholar Sonoda Minoru 蘭田稔 and president of the Association of Shinto Shrines Tanaka Tsunekiyo 田中恆清, both of whom assert the existential significance of shrine groves (*chinju no mori* 鎮守の森) as sacred community centers that lie at the very foundation of Japanese culture and society. Shinto, they assert, is a fundamentally public, immanent worship tradition that precedes and transcends any modern differentiation between a religious and a secular realm.

Thierry Guthmann’s article likewise addresses contemporary Shinto ideology, in relation to the increasing influence of nationalist lobby organizations such as Nippon Kaigi 日本会議. Guthmann acknowledges the fact that many actors within these organizations argue that Shinto is not a religion; nevertheless, he suggests, the ideology of these “nationalist circles” continues to have a profoundly religious dimension. This is particularly visible in their emphasis on emperor worship as a core aspect of a proud Japanese nation, as well as their patronage of Yasukuni Shrine. Guthmann’s understanding of secularization is strongly

41 See Dobbelaere 1981.

42 Josephson 2012, chapter 5.

influenced by the French notion of *laïcité*, which implies that the state apparatus and public education are independent from religious institutions and adopt a position of neutrality on religious matters. Despite the fact that Japanese society has experienced religious decline, Guthmann argues, nationalist circles within the country continue to retain strong links with religious institutions—not only the Association of Shinto Shrines, but also various new religions and some Buddhist organizations. Moreover, they advocate notions of the nation and the emperor that are of a fundamentally religious nature. Thus, Guthmann concludes, the “secularization” of groups such as Nippon Kaigi appears impossible.

Last but not least, Ernils Larsson’s article looks more closely at some of the issues introduced by Guthmann and Rots. In particular, it addresses some of the legal dimensions of postwar secularism by discussing the attempts of Shinto actors and their ideological allies to negotiate and overcome constitutional limitations. In early 2016 many shrines throughout Japan participated in a campaign for constitutional reform, urging visitors to sign a petition supporting such reforms. Larsson addresses the involvement of the Association of Shinto Shrines with these campaigns, asking why this organization has become more politically active in recent years. Of crucial importance, he argues, were two court rulings, which—in contrast to earlier rulings—established that Shinto shrines, as religious organizations by law, cannot qualify for state support: the Ehime case of 1997 and the Sunagawa I case of 2010. Larsson demonstrates that these rulings are indicative of a new legal paradigm that perceives Shinto as a religion subject to the same limitations as other religions. He sees the active involvement of the Association of Shinto Shrines with Nippon Kaigi’s attempts to gain public support for constitutional amendments—among others the introduction of a distinction between “religion” and “custom”—in the light of these legal struggles.

Concluding remarks

The articles in this special issue show some noteworthy differences in approach, not only methodologically but also theoretically and conceptually. Reflecting a variety of academic disciplines ranging from history to sociology, from comparative religion to political science and from anthropology to philosophy, “secularism” and “secularization” have long been topics that defied easy disciplinary classification and definition. At times, this has led to conceptual confusion and misunderstandings. At other times, however, it has provided opportunities for cross-disciplinary interaction and cooperation, opening up important new insights. The recent mushrooming of books and edited volumes on secularisms and secularities “beyond the West” clearly shows that the topic is by no means exhausted: as religion and the secular remain highly significant and often contested categories in societies worldwide, the historical and anthropological study of their formation is of immediate social and political relevance.

Beyond the differences in approach, the articles in this volume have several things in common. First of all, all authors stress that the Meiji concepts of “religion” and “the secular” were not simply foreign impositions or colonial imports. Rather, in their construction of these categories, leading Meiji-period actors drew upon, adapted, and reinterpreted premodern concepts and practices. Second, some of the tensions and themes already present in Meiji-period Japan resurfaced at various times in later pre- and postwar history, and remain unresolved today. Higher education and law are two of the societal fields where religion-secular boundaries continue to be renegotiated and redrawn. Issues related to

state patronage of shrines, religious activism in the public sphere, protection from state coercion and persecution, and other questions pertaining to the limits of religious freedom continue to come up periodically. And third, all the articles in this special issue show that, throughout modern and contemporary Japanese history, religion and secularism were no mere abstractions. They were, and are, *social realities*, the definitions and demarcations of which have very real consequences for people's lives.

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