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The Formation of Secularity in Japan¹

Introduction:

This essay represents an attempt to understand the early history of secularity in Japan in the light of Charles Taylor's A Secular Age. Following a skeletal reprise of those elements of Taylor's work that seem most relevant, it attempts to recast well-known aspects of modern Japanese history and religion in the light of Taylor's account. The paper closes with an assessment of the attempt to extend Taylor's characterization of secularity to Japan.

The Secularizing Discourse of the Early Meiji Period in Taylorian Perspective

Taylor's complex portrayal of the secular contains many strands of evidence and argument at different levels, ranging from individual "dilemmas" and "cross-pressures" and the transformations of elite thought, to broad social change. Among these, the perspective that seems most closely to match the changes through which Japan became a secular society is Taylor's presentation of secularity as a project of elites.¹ He develops this characterization in stages, beginning with his discussion of "the disciplinary society" (A Secular Age, chapter 2). By around 1800, he writes, European elites came to regard a "civilized" country as one that curtailed disorder (which they identified with sin) by restricting carnival and other aspects of popular religion, confining the insane, and in a more positive mode, educating the masses in rationality, self-discipline, and self-control. These elite interventions depended on a prior assumption of the malleability of human nature and on elites' confidence that they could mold the masses in imitation of civilizing ideals. Taylor asserts that elites absorbed buttressing ideas from Deism, namely that "human flourishing" is the highest purpose of Divine Providence; that reason is sufficient to discern the order of existence; a denial of miracles, and the idea that the universe operates according to impersonal rules (A Secular Age, pp. 222-224). Temporal frames of reference changed, so that the image emerged of societies evolving through stages, based on ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment. Naturally, European society was characterized as "civilized," while the rest of the world occupied less developed stages (A Secular Age, pp. 289-292). At an individual level, these changes brought elites an "ethic of freedom," "disengaged reason," and a "sense of invulnerability" (A Secular Age, p. 300). Taylor holds that secularization originated in the changed conditions of belief that characterize this disciplined, rational order (A Secular Age, p. 295). He emphasizes repeatedly that this complex process cannot be reduced to a "subtraction theory," according to which in modernity humanity attains to

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rationality by shedding religious beliefs (See for example pp. 22-29, passim; 157, 169, 245, 253, 270, 294, 530-531, 573-579).

The idea of secularity as an elite project emerges even more sharply in the works of Talal Asad and his interpreters.² For example, summarizing Asad's work, Partha Chatterjee's characterization accurately expresses what unfolded in Japan:

In all countries and in every historical period, secularization has been a coercive process in which the legal powers of the state, the disciplinary powers of family and school, and the persuasive powers of government and media have been used to produce the secular citizen who agrees to keep religion in the private domain.³

Japan's first encounter with secularity was inseparable from mid-nineteenth century Western imperialism. The Japanese were acutely aware of China's degradation and defeat in the Opium Wars, and they saw clearly that if they failed to strengthen Japan, Western powers would colonize it. Determination to prevent colonization was a powerful force in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, a revolution that overthrew the Tokugawa shogunate and brought to power a small group of oligarchs from Western Japan. The new government struggled to fortify and modernize the country within restrictive, unequal treaties.

Western powers pressured Japan to Westernize in order to be considered "civilized," making this transformation a condition for revision of trade treaties that disadvantaged Japan through extraterritoriality provisions, onerous tariffs, and other diplomatic humiliations. National pride was stung by clichés about the savagery of "Orientals," deployed to justify shielding foreigners from the Japanese legal system. The tariffs burdened the new government and prevented it from protecting nascent Japanese industries. Nothing less than Japan's independence was at stake. In an effort to escape this semi-colonial subjugation, Japan complied as fast as possible with Western demands for reform, ushering in a massive campaign of Westernization. Educating the people and creating a modern military were the first orders of business. The Ministry of Education was established in 1871, inaugurating a program of compulsory education following American and French models. Conscription was instituted in 1873. In that same year a debate arose in the government over a plan to invade Korea. While the proponents were eventually defeated, it was widely assumed that Japan should acquire colonies of its own, along the lines of the Western empires.

As Japan entered treaty relations with Western powers, it was necessary to find a Japanese term for "religion."⁴ The word eventually appropriated was *shūkyō*, meaning literally, the 'teachings' (*kyō*) of a 'sect' (*shū*). This word had been used previously in technical Buddhist writings, but it was not part of the vernacular. Several pre-modern terms expressed the idea of faith or designated groups practicing different styles of worship, but pre-Meiji Japan did not conceive of religion as a general phenomenon, of which there are local variants like Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, etc.⁵ *Shūkyō* pointed towards a propositional definition of religion. It did not immediately become part of the vernacular following its use in treaties, but such early Westernizers as Fukuzawa Yukichi

and members of the Meiroku Society used it (see below).⁶

Japanese Secular Thought

By the mid-1870s a vigorous debate on “civilization and enlightenment” (bunmei kaika) in the new Japan was underway, producing a discourse of secularity. Promotion of secular thought under Western influence and pressure is an aspect of Japan’s experience that has no parallel in Western history (obviously) or in Taylor’s narrative. Partha Chatterjee’s remarks on the circumstances governing the appearance of secularity in Asia are highly instructive:

[S]ecularization is necessarily a normative project formulated and directed by a small elite minority. The historical challenge before this elite is to steer the project by using the coercive legal powers of the state as well as the processes of reform of religious doctrine and practice--all within a global context where power must be legitimized by a large measure of popular consent. This is a task that is unprecedented in Western history.⁷

We will examine the thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), widely regarded as “*the* central figure in Japanese thought during the second half of the nineteenth century,” the person more responsible than any other for providing the “intellectual impetus” for Japan’s modernization.⁸ Fukuzawa was well read in the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, and had thoroughly absorbed their stadial theory of civilization.⁹ Fukuzawa’s goal as a writer, journalist, translator of Western texts, exponent of Western ways, and later as educator and founder of Japan’s first private university was “to create in Japan a civilized nation as well equipped in the arts of war and peace as those of the Western world.”¹⁰

Fukuzawa and the rest of the intellectual elite of the early Meiji period (1868-1912) began life as members of the samurai class at the end of the preceding Tokugawa period (1600-1868). They were educated in the Confucian classics and trained to remain aloof from “superstition.” Because of a national policy requiring everyone to be a parishioner of a Buddhist temple, elites supported Buddhist ancestral rites, and were buried or cremated by Buddhist ceremony. They did not usually, however, admire Buddhism. Their Confucian teachers regarded Buddhism as otherworldly and its clergy as corrupt. Elites criticized Buddhism as irrational and overly concerned with the afterlife. Those in authority regarded Buddhism as they regarded religion generally: useful for regulating the populace, but unsuitable as a philosophy for themselves.¹¹ Thus in the transition to the Meiji period, elites did not pass through anything analogous to Taylor’s turn to Deism. Their Confucian background was sufficient to provide a humanist, mostly atheist, this-worldly mindset.

The early Meiji elite had educated themselves in Western languages, history, philosophy, and culture, often including intense study of Dutch and then English when they were young men before the Restoration, and later through periods of foreign travel and study. They regarded education as essential to maintaining Japan’s independence from predatory Western imperialism. Many of them entered the new government¹² and encouraged Westernization of society. In 1871, the government commanded all men to cut

off their topknots, making Western haircuts the norm. All male civil servants were to wear Western attire, and students soon adopted Western-style uniforms. Women's fashions shifted to Western style more slowly, beginning with parasols, shawls, and other accessories. The Rokumeikan, or Deer Cry Pavilion, a hall in central Tokyo adjacent to the imperial palace, became an emblematic site for these sartorial reforms. Prominent members of Japanese government and elite society met with Westerners at the Rokumeikan to display their mastery of English and such Western conventions as ballroom dancing and public mixing of the sexes. The aristocracy adopted Western formal dress for the Rokumeikan balls, which were frequently pictured in woodblock prints. These changes in dress, deportment, and styles of social interaction undoubtedly produced many stresses that Taylor might describe as "dilemmas" and "cross-pressures."¹³ Cartoonists had great fun parodying the elite as it enacted Western ways.¹⁴ The great divide between the modernizing elite and the mass of the rural peasantry, the ironies of life among an elite that knew more about Western thought and society than about Japan's own intellectual history, the mixture of hubris, arrogance, and vanity among the bureaucracy—all these elements provided rich subjects for Japanese writers.¹⁵

A perennial optimist, Fukuzawa believed that Japan could become a rational, ethical society based on science, the spirit of independence, and education. He did not regard religion as essential to Western civilization or to Japan's attainment of civilization, yet he wrote over eighty essays on religion.¹⁶ In one piece particularly notable for its utilitarian pragmatism, he wrote that Japan should conform to Western ways in religion and permit the practice of Christianity, if only to escape being ostracized by Western nations.¹⁷ He was not, however, an advocate of Christianity; he compared the medieval Japanese Buddhist saint Shinran (1173-1262) favorably to Luther, noting that while Shinran had preached universal salvation, rejected killing, and inspired his sect to massive growth, Luther was responsible for a century of bloody religious wars.¹⁸ Despite admiring Shinran, however, Fukuzawa tended to disparage Japanese popular religious life and to regard it as based on ignorance.

[A lack of rational thinking] gave rise to [the Japanese people's belief] that demons and gods exist. They named the causes of calamities "evil gods" . . . and of nature's blessings, "good gods" . . . In Japan, the myriad gods of Shinto . . . were just such beings.¹⁹

For Fukuzawa and other Meiji elites, loyalty to the nation was the highest value. Loyalty meant a commitment to Japan becoming a rich country with a strong military (fukoku kyōhei). Fukuzawa worried, however, that without some transcendent authority to inspire loyalty, the nation's resolve might falter.

It is extremely difficult to maintain morality without religion. The great scholars of the West constantly struggle with this problem. Yet . . . in Japan . . . our samurai have been able to maintain a high personal morality while ignoring religion. . . One reason . . . is that they were aided by Confucianism. . .²⁰

While Confucianism might have performed this useful function in the past, however, Fukuzawa regarded it as outmoded and inappropriate to modern Japan. As a provisional measure to sustain morality, he recommended that the government nurture indigenous piety. As the masses grew more rational, he believed, they would be able to slough off religion and superstition and cultivate themselves in loyalty, like the elite.²¹ He imagined Japan's ideal transformation as a "subtraction story," in which religion would be supplanted by philosophy, but the problem of secular morality's ultimate source remained unresolved.

Fukuzawa's publications emerged alongside debates on religion in the journal of the Meiroku Society, a group of intellectuals to which he belonged.²² The Meiroku Society was founded by Mori Arinori (see below) in 1873 to promote civilization and enlightenment. It published forty-three issues of its journal over the years 1874 to 1875, for a public exchange of views on a wide range of issues facing the new Japan.²³ The Society distinguished between individual belief and outward practice, regarding private conviction as the essence of religion. Ultimately they rejected the idea of a state religion for Japan.²⁴ Like secularizing European elites before them, Meiroku Society members were supremely confident of their ability to mold society to adopt their vision. Regarding the relation of religion to the state, Mori wrote, "I feel that religious matters should be left to the individual preference of the people since the government's responsibility is only to protect human life and property."²⁵ Nishi Amane, who wrote several essays on religion for the Society's journal, took the position that since the state cannot compel the people to believe in any particular creed, it should stay out of the question of belief entirely.

. . . [T]he government offices for supervising religions should be allowed no more control over religion than is necessary to prevent religious disturbances. We need not bother to question whether people believe in foxes, badgers, Buddhas, or angels. The fate of the various religions is entirely their responsibility, not ours. We are interested only in preventing injury by religion to temporal rule, protecting this

principle strictly, and punishing those who transgress it. Nor is the state concerned with whether a certain religion is right or wrong.²⁶

At the time, the government was in the midst of the Great Promulgation Campaign (1870-1884, Taikyō senpu undō), in which it relied on a group of nativist scholars and Shinto activists to compose and propagate a national creed loosely based on Shinto. The Campaign failed miserably and exposed the government to widespread ridicule for the fabricated nature of the creed and the incompetence of the people recruited to preach it.²⁷ Fukuzawa wrote in 1875,

... Shinto has not yet established a body of doctrine. . . Shinto has always been the puppet of Buddhism . . . It is only an insignificant movement trying to make headway by taking advantage of the imperial house at a time of political change.²⁸

The views of Fukuzawa and the Meiroku Society members can be understood as a critique of the government's heavy-handed efforts to indoctrinate the people in what amounted to a state doctrine.²⁹ The failure of the Campaign ultimately turned the government toward acceptance of limited religious freedom, which was the position of Fukuzawa and the Meiroku Society. That ideal was included in the 1889 Meiji constitution's twenty-eighth article:

Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief.³⁰

Meiji Buddhist Reform Movements

In a recent work, Taylor characterizes the kind of religion that is acceptable to secularizing elites:

A good, or proper, religion is a set of beliefs in God or some other transcendent power, which entails an acceptable, or, in some versions, a "rational" morality. It is devoid of any elements that do not contribute to this morality and thus of "superstition."³¹

Chatterjee summarizes how such a religion could emerge:

Sometimes this has been done by putting external and forcible constraints on the public political presence of religion. . . . More compatible with liberal political values, however, and in many ways the more successful process has been the secularization resulting from an internal reform of religion itself.³²

As we shall see below, early Meiji persecution of Buddhism stimulated reform movements that greatly transformed Buddhist intellectuals' conceptions of the essence of Buddhism, turning it into a set of individual beliefs from which "superstitious" elements had been eliminated. The new Meiji government withdrew the patronage that Buddhism had formerly enjoyed through two moves, an 1868 edict calling for "separation of the

Buddhas from the Kami” (Kami are the supernaturals of Shinto), and laws legalizing clerical marriage and meat eating (1872).³³ The separation edict was widely understood to encourage the extermination of Buddhism. Temples were ransacked. Kami images and symbols were taken out of temples, Buddhist images and personnel were removed from shrines, and thousands of priests were forced to laicize. The former requirement that everyone be a temple parishioner was allowed to lapse. Temple and shrine lands were seized and many temples razed or their buildings converted to secular purposes.³⁴ This edict, which represented the adoption of the most virulent anti-Buddhist views of “hard-line Shinto and Nativist scholars,” resulted in the destruction of as many as 125,400 temples, or 63 percent of the total.³⁵ The edict drastically undercut Buddhism’s economic base and undermined society’s respect for it. Likewise, the government’s abandonment of its role as enforcer of sectarian law, signaled by the edict allowing priests to marry and eat meat, plunged Buddhist denominations into debate over clerical marriage.³⁶ Both of these policies stimulated reformist attempts to restore Buddhism’s honor, its authority among the people, and the government’s trust. The result brought Buddhism into line with secularists’ ideas of the proper sort of religion for modern Japan.

Inoue Enryō (1858-1919), an influential Meiji-period Buddhist reformer, writer, and educator, dedicated his career to ridding Buddhism of “superstition.” His aim was to reform Buddhism from within and thus to transform it into a respected adjunct of government. He especially wanted to extirpate belief in demonic spirits. To that end, he composed an encyclopedic study of popular beliefs in monsters (*yōkai*) and became known as “Dr. Monster” (*yōkai hakase*). He inveighed against popular beliefs in possession by animal spirits such as foxes and badgers, beliefs in astrology, the power of curses, and divination, and belief in *tengu* (winged spirits, combining bird and human characteristics, that represented evil mountain ascetics reborn in monstrous form). Inoue also sought to purge Buddhism of cosmological elements that were not confirmed by science, such the notion that the universe centers on the cosmic mountain Sumeru. Inoue asserted further that true Buddhism is entirely in accord with science, and was prepared to jettison as “superstition” anything that did not meet scientific standards. He ended up describing Buddhism as a set of private, individual beliefs shorn of superstition, thus aligning Buddhism with the secularists’ ideal. Later Buddhist reformers of the 1890s continued Inoue’s anti-superstition campaign as the central element of their agenda.³⁷

Early Meiji Buddhism struggled to reconcile its world-denying aspect with the national goal of Japan becoming a rich country with a strong military. Reformers tried to rebuild Buddhism in line with the new government, by “modernizing” themselves through foreign study, and by encouraging the religion to take on new social roles.³⁸ Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911) was one of the most talented young Buddhist clerics to be sent abroad for study. European travel led him to advocate religious freedom, separation of religion from state, and the concept of human rights. He regarded human rights as an important index of the level of a society’s development. Like Inoue Enryō, he tried to reconcile Buddhism with science. He also attempted to ally Buddhism with Western ideas of truth in an effort to harmonize Buddhism with Western philosophy.³⁹ Ōuchi Seiran (1845-1918), a Buddhist layman active from the Restoration to the 1890s, argued for a trans-sectarian lay Buddhism. He argued that the state should stay out of the realm of

religion, and also that Buddhism could be a powerful means of enlightening the people. Both men wrote prolifically and founded a number of Buddhist societies and journals. Both held that Buddhism should engage in social welfare work, a position that we can regard as resisting the assertion that religion should be entirely absent from the public domain.⁴⁰ Buddhist reform campaigns clearly illustrate the way in which elites' secularizing agendas stimulated the creation of new religious forms conforming to those agendas. Secularity and religion thus may be regarded as mutually constituted phenomena in Meiji Japan.

The Anti-Superstition Campaign in Education

The public schools were the single most important agency in spreading a secular outlook among the people. Mori Arinori (1847-1889), founder of the Meiroku Society, served as Japan's first Minister of Education from 1885 to 1889. His administration put in place anti-superstition measures that persisted through the first decade of the twentieth century. A drive to eradicate popular belief in tengu was central to the effort. Tengu were believed to cause illness through spirit possession, and people traditionally employed healers to perform cures through exorcisms. The Ministry of Education tried to stamp out these "superstitions" through textbooks on Morality, a compulsory subject introduced to the public schools from 1880.⁴¹ To develop Morality pedagogy, the government convened a blue-ribbon committee that included Inoue Enryo.⁴² Anti-superstition lessons were incorporated into Morality textbooks, under such titles as Meishin ni ochiru na (Don't fall into superstition!) and Meishin o sakeyō (Avoid superstition!). One example from these lessons was the story of an old woman who consulted a physician only after several unsuccessful attempts to have shamans and faith healers cure her of trachoma. By the time she got to a "real" doctor (one trained in Western medicine), it was too late, and she became blind. She deeply regretted that she had 'fallen into superstition.'⁴³

Secularity and State Shinto

In the same timeframe as Buddhist reforms and the educational system's anti-superstition measures, Japanese nationalism, also a defensive reaction against Western imperialism, burgeoned into an ideological, semi-religious phenomenon of its own, State Shinto.⁴⁴ State Shinto became an important element of Meiji secularity in the sense of its use by the government and the media to suppress heterodox religions of the period and to mold imperial subjects. According to Thomas Dubois, this phenomenon in Japan was mirrored in "the attempts . . . of the states of postcolonial Asia to replicate sacred and transcendent principles of national unity."⁴⁵

These attempts occasionally used religion overtly, as in state cults or religious monarchies, but more frequently involved the pseudo-sacralization of the state. This was most spectacularly pursued through the equation of the national body with cultic figures, such as the Japanese Meiji Emperor, Mao Zedong, or Sukarno, who were themselves the embodiment of transcendent struggles for national wealth and power, Marxist destiny, and anti-imperialist territorial integrity, respectively. In each case the new state created and held fast to a sacred ideology that was meant to galvanize citizens by inspiring them with visions of the national past, present, and

future. As it had in Europe, the national essence became the soul of public life, while other beliefs, particularly those defined as ‘religious’, were often cordoned off to an optional and private realm.⁴⁶

In effect, State Shinto solved the puzzle that had so perturbed Fukuzawa as he worried how morality could be upheld without a transcendent religious authority. The answer emerged in a cult of the nation and the monarch, transcending the privatized sphere of religion, its observances made obligatory for imperial subjects, whatever their personal religious beliefs. The glorified “national structure” or “national polity” (*kokutai*) and the imperial house ultimately emerged as morality’s transcendent source.

At the time of the Restoration’s 1868 edict to “separate Buddhas from Kami,” however, Shinto did not exist as a freestanding, independent religious tradition. During most of its history, it had been cocooned within Buddhism, and during the early modern period many shrines were either administered by Buddhist clergy or simply managed informally by the peasantry. Except for a handful that had become pilgrimage sites, shrines were preeminently local institutions lacking horizontal networks. There was no theology uniting the whole or even a significant portion of them. Thus shrine priests, never so well educated as Buddhist clerics, were not prepared to function on a national stage in 1868, as the failure of the Great Promulgation Campaign had amply demonstrated.

In response to this reality, the bureaucracy took charge. All shrines and their priests came under national management; they were incorporated into a uniform ranking system and ordered to perform an annual calendar of ritual coordinated with the emperor’s palace rites. All shrines were designated public facilities for the performance of state ritual. They were explicitly not to be regarded as religious. This bureaucratic fiction could never be truly reconciled, however, with traditional shrine devotions, private ceremonies, and local festivals that were overwhelmingly religious in character and to which the people were deeply attached.

In order to refocus shrines on the nation, the government constructed new shrines to honor deified emperors, historical imperial loyalists, to provide a symbolic bulwark against foreign influence in the port cities, and for the war dead.⁴⁷ As mainland Japanese moved into Okinawa and Hokkaidō, they established shrines there that were also incorporated into the national system. By 1945, some 1640 shrines had been established in the colonies throughout the Japanese empire. During the early Meiji period, shrines were administered alongside temples, but as of 1900 the shrines were given their own Shrine Bureau within the Home Ministry.

Seen in the light of Taylor’s account of secularization, shrines were transformed to serve as official sites for obligatory expressions of loyalty to the nation, while religion was relegated to the private sphere. Only within the private sphere did people enjoy freedom of religion. Buddhist priests were forbidden to stand for election, and Shinto priests were forbidden to preach, elements pointing toward a prohibition on religious expression in the public realm by these clerics. Yet while the public sphere was shaped by these exclusions, overall this is not a story of “subtraction” but of centrally orchestrated creation, addition,

sculpting, and molding of a ritual order explicitly placed outside the sphere of religion, to glorify the nation and its transcendent source of morality, the emperor. Not only that, State Shinto was also an integral part of secularizing efforts to eradicate heterodox religions.

Modern Media Police the Boundaries of Religion

In 1894 the newly established newspaper Yorozuchōhō built its circulation through sustained exposés of the new religion Renmonkyō (literally, ‘Church of the Lotus Gate’) and its founder, Shimamura Mitsu (1831-1904), accusing her and her followers of sexual and financial misconduct, besmirching Shinto’s image, and leading the people into superstition. Yorozuchōhō was a Tokyo daily tabloid, which had gained popularity exposing the scandals of upper-class society.⁴⁸ Shimamura’s biographical details have not been determined with certainty, but it seems that she began healing in Kokura in the late 1870s and moved to Tokyo in 1882. When a cholera epidemic struck that year, she began to distribute “holy water,” which she claimed could cure cholera.⁴⁹

From the late 1870s through 1895, there were annual outbreaks of cholera, dysentery, typhoid fever, smallpox, and diphtheria. Major cholera outbreaks with death tolls over 10,000 occurred in Japan in 1879, 1882, 1885, 1886, 1890, and 1895 (coinciding with Renmonkyō’s major growth). Over seventy percent of those infected died, meaning that contracting the disease was a virtual death sentence. Moreover, there was no cure at the time. A medical system had been established in Japan in 1874, while a public health system was established in 1879, but the only effective measure to slow cholera’s spread was by quarantining the victims. To be quarantined was to be given up for dead, so people were understandably reluctant to comply with quarantine orders. Perhaps in response, public health enforcement was shifted to the police as of 1893. Since medical science had so little to offer, perhaps it is not surprising that people would have flocked to Renmonkyō for holy water, a treatment that was arguably not much less effective than the measures that government could provide.

In 1882 the government introduced a distinction between shrine Shinto and the sectarian varieties of Shinto, implicitly limiting the sphere of recognized religious groups outside of the shrines, Buddhism, or Christianity to organizations belonging to one of thirteen Shinto sects. Numerous religious associations formed from healing cults or a founder’s revelations affiliated with Taiseikyō, one of the recognized Shinto sects, as a means of acquiring recognition and protection from police investigations. Taiseikyō’s criteria for accepting such affiliations were loose and flexible, even accepting groups with no real claim to Shinto identity.⁵⁰ In 1883 Shimamura affiliated her group with Taiseikyō, evidently hoping that the merger would provide protection from further police scrutiny, although Renmonkyō’s doctrines were derived from Buddhism. The group marked that year as the date of its official founding.

Renmonkyō grew to 900,000 members, at such a fast pace that by 1884 it was able to erect buildings in Kokura and Tokyo that occupied a whole city block, a massive and unusual display of wealth for a newly established religion of the time. The number of branch churches rose to rapidly in Japan, with overseas branches in Hong Kong and

Shanghai. The group's phenomenal growth was also evident in Shimamura's meteoric rise in the ranks of Taiseikyō, reaching its top ranking of Grand Master (daikyōsei) by 1890. Renmonkyō's stunning growth, wealth, and promotion of holy water gave it a 'public' character at odds with secularists' beliefs about religion's rightful confinement to the private realm.

But after sustained attack in 1894 by Yorozuchōhō and other newspapers, membership dropped sharply. The papers criticized the use of holy water, claiming that Renmonkyō's meetings were places of assignation and sexual impropriety, that Shimamura herself (over sixty by this time, which meant that she was a very old woman for Japan of that time) was sexually immoral, and also that she led the female members into immorality, even forcing them to have abortions. This gendered dynamic in Yorozuchōhō's attack displayed palpable misogyny. Other religious groups used holy water or equally "superstitious" elements in curing, however, so this factor did not set Renmonkyō apart definitively. One of Yorozuchōhō's most telling criticisms was the charge that Renmonkyō sullied the purity of Shinto. The gist was as follows: Renmonkyō falsely calls itself "Shinto." To allow it to exist in any form "is to allow the spiritual basis of Shinto to be destroyed, to damage the dignity of the imperial ancestors, and to despoil the entirety of the imperial dignity and the prestige of our national polity." For this reason, "this evil religion should be denied the name of Shinto," and the authorities should disband it immediately.

Shinto is the Way enshrining the spirit of Japan's imperial ancestors; our people do not revere Shinto because it is a religion, but because it is the Way, which deifies the imperial house and reveres the national polity. As a result, for Shinto to be injured is for the national polity and the imperial house to be injured, and for the noble spirits to be defiled.⁵¹

Having no independent media of its own, Renmonkyō was unable to respond effectively, and could only get its point of view to the public through the filter of the very newspapers that were dedicated to its destruction.

Comparing Yorozuchōhō's coverage of Renmonkyō with that in other papers, we find that while Yorozuchōhō carried 94 articles about the group from late March through late April, 1894, the older, established newspapers did not find Renmonkyō nearly so newsworthy.⁵² For example, during the period of the Yorozuchōhō exposé, the Asahi shinbun carried six articles, while the Yomiuri shinbun carried three, excluding rebuttals that Renmonkyō itself placed with both papers in a futile effort to counter the charges against it.⁵³

Even after the 1882 division between shrine and sect Shinto, the existence of miscellaneous religious associations outside the sphere of State Shinto had been more or less tolerated, provided for under the mechanism of affiliation with a recognized Shinto sect. But Yorozuchōhō argued that the bureaucrats administering religious affairs were not doing enough uphold Shinto. Arousing prurient interest through lurid suggestion, the paper's sustained coverage focused public attention on the paper's demand that the religion be disbanded, eventually goading Taiseikyō, the police, and the Bureau of Temples

and Shrines to act against Renmonkyō. Taiseikyō stripped Shimamura of her Grand Master ranking, and the Bureau repeatedly required Shimamura and other leaders to appear for questioning. The public health officers within the police determined that Renmonkyō's "holy water" was unfit for human consumption and ordered that its distribution cease (April 28, 1894).⁵⁴ While this order did not officially disband the religion, its numbers dropped precipitously and made it impossible to carry on.

The incident quickly escalated to a "witch hunt," determined to rid society of an evil in an era of repeated epidemics. Renmonkyō was an easy target; having grown to massive size overnight, it had not yet had time to develop doctrine of significant philosophical depth. Its growth was mainly dependent upon its reputation for cholera-curing holy water, and without that, Renmonkyō may not have had much to offer. Japan's newly-established medical and public health systems undoubtedly regarded holy water both as a harmful superstition and a challenge to their authority. When police prohibited holy water distribution, Renmonkyō was bound to lose members, no matter what the newspapers said about it. It is difficult, however, to estimate the likelihood that the police would have acted without Yorozuchōhō's reporting.

The media emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a new, non-government agent seeking to narrow the sphere of tolerated religions and to suppress religious associations of which it disapproved by fomenting widespread public disapproval. The Renmonkyō incident is integrally related to secularity, because Yorozuchōhō's coverage worked to convince readers that only "approved" forms of religion should be allowed, and that society is endangered if a heterodox religion shows rapid growth, conspicuous wealth, or women in public roles. In spite of bureaucratic rhetoric to the effect that Shinto is not a religion, Yorozuchōhō proceeded as if it were a state religion whose honor and purity were polluted by Renmonkyō's very existence. This incident was a precursor for a similar persecution of another female-headed religion, Tenrikyō, in 1896.⁵⁵ The incident probably encouraged the leaders of yet another rapidly expanding, female-founded new religious movement of the early twentieth century, Ōmoto, to purchase their own nationally-circulating newspaper, so that in the event of a media attack like Yorozuchōhō's they would have a way to tell their side of the story.⁵⁶ Renmonkyō's inability to respond effectively to media attack for want of its own mouthpiece illustrates vividly the way in which the public sphere in a secular state can appear to be a level playing field for all voices but operate in fact to exclude and suppress religions that refuse to confine themselves to the private realm.⁵⁷ The Renmonkyō incident inaugurated an antagonistic relation between religion and media in Japan that arguably persists to the present day.

Conclusion

Viewed in the light of Charles Taylor's account of secularity, Japan may be seen as an early example of an elite Westernizing, secularizing project undertaken in defensive reaction against Western imperialism, preceding similar developments in Turkey, India, Indonesia, and China. Earlier scholarship viewed secularity as a passive, neutral by-product of modernization, but examining secularity as an elite project allows us to understand it as an historical phenomenon with actors who debate the social roles of religion and create

bureaucratic mechanisms for the production of a secular populace. We see more clearly how elite debates informed the bureaucracy that created the institutional means for indoctrinating the populace with elite ideals. We obtain a new understanding of Buddhist reform movements as acting in tandem with the bureaucracy to “privatize” Buddhism, in line with secularists’ conception of religion as properly belonging to the private sphere, along with an element of resistance in the call for Buddhist social welfare measures. We have seen how secularity in Japan is integrally related to nationalism and its sacralization of the state and the monarch. This understanding allow us to develop a perspective on State Shinto as providing an analog to a state religion, precisely and paradoxically because of the fiction that it was not a religion. We can see how the media acted to depress society’s tolerance for heterodox religions, ostensibly to uphold Shinto’s honor, thereby stimulating the government to suppress forms of religion that did not conform to the secular order. Beyond these discrete results, however, we can see that Japan’s secularizing project brought social institutions into line with it, forced religion to respond to it, and allowed the media to create a profitable role for itself in policing religion. Taylor’s work thus reveals unexpected connections among the actors and institutions that transformed Japan into a secular society and that brought Japanese religions into conformity with a secular ideal.

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¹ This perspective on secularity is one of several stances seen in current scholarship; for a study laying out the options, with extensive references see Philip S. Gorski and Ates Atlnordu, After Secularization? Annual Review of Sociology 34 (2008): 55-85, especially p. 74.

² See for example, Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) chapter 7: "Reconfigurations of Law and Ethics in Colonial Egypt," pp. 205-256.

³ Partha Chatterjee, 2006. Fasting for Bin Laden: The Politics of Secularization in Contemporary India. In Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors. Edited by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 60.

⁴ Japan's treaty partners sought freedom for Christian missionaries to proselytize in Japan, and such provisions had to be translated into Japanese.

⁵ The shift to the perspective of "world religions" had yet to emerge; see Masuzawa Tomoko, 2005. The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism. Chicago and New York: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Suzuki Norihisa. 1979. Meiji shūkyō shisō no kenkyū. Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku shuppankai, pp. 13-17.

⁷ Chatterjee, 2006. Fasting for Bin Laden, p. 62.

⁸ These characterizations are widely accepted among historians of Japan, expressed here by Fukuzawa's biographer Albert Craig in The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi, revised translation by Eiichi Kiyooka, with a Preface and Afterword by Albert Craig (Lanham, New York, and London: Madison Books, 1992), vii, and Albert Craig, Civilization and Enlightenment: The Early Thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), ix. Fukuzawa's An Outline of Civilization (1875, Bunmeiron no gairyaku) is believed to have sold several tens of thousands of copies. Meanwhile, his Conditions in the West (Seiyō jijō), first series 1866, is said to have sold more than 250,000 copies.

⁹ Craig 2009, pp. 11-32.

¹⁰ Craig 1992, p. 214.

¹¹ Nevertheless, Fukuzawa insisted on continuing the tradition of periodic Buddhist memorial rites for parents and friends as an important obligation even after the Restoration, and he claimed that he refused to associate with people who neglected this duty; see Koizumi Takashi. 2011. Fukuzawa Yukichi to shūkyō. Igirsu tetsugaku 34: 5-18. An older, English-language essay by Koizumi contains much of the same material: Fukuzawa Yukichi and Religion. Asian Philosophy 4, no. 2 (October 1994): 109-124.

¹² Fukuzawa, however, remained aloof from government.

¹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, chapters 16-18.

¹⁴ Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1889), a woodblock-print artist and painter, turned caricaturist in the Meiji period. He parodied the pretensions of the Westernizing elite by portraying them as pipe-smoking monsters in top hats or as monster school teachers drilling monster pupils on the alphabet.

¹⁵ See for example Nagai Kafū's short story concerning a young newly appointed prefectural governor and his wife that involves their overwhelming joy in attending a Rokumeikan ball, called "Shinnin chiji." The story emphasizes the pathos of the characters' ambition and vanity and ends with their deaths from tuberculosis; See Nagai Kafū, Shinnin chiji, in *Kafū zenshū*. 29 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, vol. 2, pp. 173-224.

¹⁶ Craig, 2009, p. 103; Koizumi 1994, p. 109. Fukuzawa's attitude to Christianity in particular and religion in general was contradictory and evolved over his lifetime. As a young man, he expressed the loathing of Christianity that was typical of the elite at the end of the Tokugawa period. According to Koizumi Takashi, however, in lessons he set for his sons in 1871, he wrote that God (which he transliterated as *goddo*) determines the events of life, and that God must be obeyed (Koizumi, 2011: 7-8). In other contexts, such as his *An Encouragement of Learning* (1872-76, *Gakumon no susume*) he referred to "Heaven," as in this famous passage that begins the work: "It is said that heaven does not create one man above or below another man. This means that when men are born from heaven they are all equal." [David A. Dilworth, translator, with Umeyo Hirano, Sophia University Press, 1969, p. 1]. In his translation of Western texts, Fukuzawa sometimes used Heaven as a translation for God. Fukuzawa had a number of friends and acquaintances among Christian missionaries, and after his son Ichitarō expressed the desire to be baptized in 1884, Fukuzawa's attitude toward Christianity softened considerably, and he retracted his former opposition to the propagation of Christianity in Japan.

¹⁷ Shūkyō mo mata sei'yōfū ni shitagawazaru o ezu (1883). *Fukuzawa Yukichi Zenshū* vol. 9, pp. 529-536.

¹⁸ Craig, 2009, p. 109.

¹⁹ Craig, 2009, p. 122.

²⁰ Quoted in Craig, 1992, p. 409.

²¹ Fukuzawa Yukichi. 1958-1971. Tokkyō no setsu (1883) In *Fukuzawa Yukichi Zenshū* vol. 9, p. 294, quoted in Craig 1992, p. 411.

²² Fukuzawa operated a newspaper called *Jiji shinpō*. He often developed his ideas through serialized editorials and then published a collection of them separately. His views became well known among the educated class and within the government.

²³ A comprehensive survey of the thought of early Meiji Japanese secularists would have to include Inoue Kowashi, a highly influential bureaucrat and one of the drafters of the Meiji constitution of 1889. I hope to address his position in a separate essay at a later date. The Meiroku Society's journal submissions regarding religion have been surveyed in two forthcoming publications by Trent Maxey and Jason Josephson in much greater detail than will be possible in the present essay; Josephson, Jason Ānanda, forthcoming 2012. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. University of Chicago Press, chapter 7; Maxey, Trent, forthcoming 2012. *The "Greatest Problem": Religion and State Formation in Meiji Japan* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 143-144

²⁴ Maxey, Trent, forthcoming 2012. *The "Greatest Problem": Religion and State Formation in Meiji Japan* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 143-144.

²⁵ Braisted, William Reynolds, Assisted by Adachi Yasushi and Kokuchi Yūji. 1976. *Meiroku zasshi, Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976, p.78.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

²⁷ A small number of nativist (*kokugaku*) figures, mainly from the faction of Hirata Atsutane, held office in the early Meiji government. Bureaucrats composed an official creed loosely based on Shinto, and authorized Shinto priests to create a network of preachers to spread it to the populace. Because the creed had no basis in popular religious life, however, and because it was composed of platitudes about obeying authority and revering the emperor (who previously had played no role in popular religious life), the people found it incomprehensible and its priests ludicrous.

²⁸ Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 18th ed. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983), p. 195. This passage is also discussed and translated in part in Muraoka Tsunetsugu, *Studies in Shinto Thought*, translated by Delmer Brown and James Araki (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1964). p. 210.

²⁹ On the Great Promulgation Campaign, see Hardacre. 1986. Creating Shintō: The Great Promulgation Campaign and the New Religions. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12/1: 29-63. Fukuzawa and others no doubt recalled and hoped to avoid repetition of the foreign relations disaster that occurred following the 1868 roundup of some 3,000 “hidden Christians” who had emerged when Catholic missionaries had returned to Japan. Their exile, harsh treatment, and the death of 600 of them had been regarded among Western diplomats and in the foreign press as spectacular evidence of Japan’s barbarity.

³⁰ The Constitution of the Empire of Japan, 1889; <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html>, accessed November 27, 2011. The constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) were central to the efforts of elites to mold the populace into loyal subjects of the empire, but spatial limitations make it impossible to discuss them more fully in this essay.

³¹ Charles Taylor, *Western Secularity*. 2011. In *Rethinking Secularity*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Mark Jurgensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 35.

³² Chatterjee, 2006. Fasting for Bin Laden, p. 60.

³³ During the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), the shogunate patronized Buddhism in many ways. It required the entire populace to affiliate with a Buddhist temple. Virtually no exceptions were made. Once a family became a parishioner of a temple, the affiliation was maintained over future generations, regardless of the personal beliefs of any of the living members, even including the priests of Shinto. The shogunate enforced these regulations through a religious court presided over by Magistrates of Temples and Shrines. Their verdicts constituted cumulative precedents. These courts adjudicated a wide range of matters: disputes of all kinds involving temples and shrines, the behavior of priests, the duties of lay parishioners to maintain the temple in good repair and guarantee the priest’s livelihood, temple ownership of land and the division of its produce between the temple and its tenant-cultivators, and a host of other matters. The relation between Buddhism and the state in the early modern period was very advantageous to Buddhism. Buddhist temples had considerable autonomy in the way they dealt with peasants residing on temple land. The shogunate reiterated its regulations for each Buddhist sect and confirmed each temple’s landholding with each new shogun’s accession and also frequently made gifts of land to significant temples. The assumption was that the temple would draw its material support from the produce of that land, received as taxes from peasant cultivators. The state’s underwriting and enforcement of internal sectarian hierarchies and rules confirmed that the relevant institutional arrangements bore the imprimatur of the state and gave the sects great power over their clergy. The sects acquired great wealth in many cases, and many temples were rich enough to act as moneylenders. Buddhism acquired a captive audience of parishioners to support it materially and to be indoctrinated in its teachings.

³⁴ Allan Grapard, Japan’s Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shintō and Buddhist Divinities in Meiji and a Case Study: Tōnomine. *History of Religions* 23 (February 1984): 240-265.

³⁵ Richard Jaffe, *Neither Monk Nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 58. This figure obscures significant regional differences, so that while some areas strove to wipe out Buddhism, others, where there was less anti-Buddhist or pro-Shinto sentiment, showed a reduction of temples by one-fourth to one-third; see Helen Hardacre, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Study of the Southern Kantō Region, Using Late Edo and Early Meiji Gazeteers* Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies Number 41 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 153 ff.

³⁶ The major exception was the Jōdo Shinshū denomination, whose priests had married since the medieval period.

³⁷ Jason Josephson, When Buddhism Became a "Religion": Religion and Superstition in the Writings of Inoue Enryō *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33/1 (2006): 143-168.

³⁸ Yoshida Kyūichi. 1992. *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi kenkyū*. Tokyo: Kawashima shoten, pp. 2-6.

³⁹ Ikeda Eishun. 1976. *Meiji no shin bukkyō undō*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, pp. 136-156.

⁴⁰ Commenting on Meiji Buddhist charity, Winston Davis sees it as a way for Buddhism to ingratiate itself with the government; the interpretation offered here does not necessarily conflict with Davis’ view. See Winston Davis. 1989. Buddhism and the Modernization of Japan. *History of Religions* 28/4: 330-332.

⁴¹ The earliest Morality textbooks were compiled by Motoda Eifu (1818-1891), an influential Confucian advisor to the government, who had also contributed to the drafting of the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890).

⁴² Inoue later devoted an entire volume to tengu, called Tenguron (1903).

⁴³ Figal, Gerald. 1999. Modern Science and the Folk. Chapter 3 of Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 77-104.

⁴⁴ For an overview of recent scholarship on State Shinto, see Okuyama Michiaki. 2011. "State Shinto" in Recent Japanese Scholarship. Monumenta Nipponica vol 66, no. 1, pp. 123-145. For an historical study of State Shinto, see Helen Hardacre. 1989. Shinto and the State, 1868-1988. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁵ Dubois, Thomas David. 2005. Hegemony, Imperialism, and the Construction of Religion in East and Southeast Asia. History and Theory Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Some of the state-created new shrines included satellites of the Ise Shrines (Yokohama Kôtai Jingû, facing the major harbor for foreign ships, and other shrines called Daijingû or Kôtai Jingû); shrines for imperial loyalists (e.g., Minatogawa Jinja (1872); shrines for the war dead (Yasukuni Shrine, whose predecessor was established in 1869, and the Nation-Protecting Shrines that served as Yasukuni's provincial satellites); shrines dedicated to an emperor (Meiji Jingû, Kashihara Jingû, Heian Jingû); and overseas shrines.

⁴⁸ The Yorozuchôhō was founded in 1982 by Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862-1920). The paper itself was a tabloid, issued daily in Tokyo, which specialized in revealing scandals in upper-class society, as well as serializing the publisher's many mystery novels. The Christian reformer Uchimura Kanzō was briefly on its staff, but left in 1899, calling the paper's staff a group of 'social outsiders,' (fugūsha), implying that they focused on scandal because of a sense of their own inferiority; see Ariyama Teruo. 1979. Risōdan kenkyū 1. Momoyama Gakuin Daigaku shakaigaku ronshū 13 (1): 37-64.

⁴⁹ For comprehensive accounts of Renmonkyō and its suppression, see Sawada, Janine. 2004. The Enemy Within. In Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 236-258 and Takeda Dōshō. 1991. The Fall of Renmonkyō and Its Place in the History of Meiji Period Religions. In New Religions. Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. Translated by Norman Havens. Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, Tokyo, pp. 25-57.

⁵⁰ Taiseikyō was founded by Hirayama Seisai (1815-1890), who before the Meiji Restoration had been a shogunal official involved in foreign relations (he was among those who met Commodore Perry and also received Dutch and Russian emissaries). Later he was made head priest of the Hikawa Shrine, where Emperor Meiji had promulgated the Charter Oath announcing the formation of the Meiji government and its founding principles. Founded in 1879, Taiseikyō venerated the emperor and perpetuated the teachings and pantheon of the Great Promulgation Campaign. Practice centered on recitation of the misogi harai prayer, a major prayer in the Shinto tradition. The group acted as an umbrella for various groups, such as Renmonkyō and Misogikyō, which were otherwise unaffiliated with recognized religious organizations. See Kamata Tōji. 2002. Hirayama Seisai to Meiji no Shintō. Tokyo: Shunbunsha.

⁵¹ Takeda, The Fall of Renmonkyō, p. 42.

⁵² The full text of each article in the Yorozuchôhō series is available in Takeda Dōshō. 1989. Yorozuchôhō ni yoru Renmonkyō kōgeki kyanpēn. Nihon bunka kenkyūjo kiyō 63: 67-176 and Takeda Dōshō. 1991. Yorozuchôhō ni yoru Renmonkyō kōgeki kyanpēn-2. Shintō shūkyō 144: 74-96. The 1991 article contains the final two days of coverage, the longest by far.

⁵³ These figures are based on a survey of the digital archives of both newspapers.

⁵⁴ Takeda, 1991, pp. 49-51.

⁵⁵ Tenrikyō was founded in 1838 by Nakayama Miki (1798-1887) as a healing cult, later developing a comprehensive teaching and religious practice based on worship of a universal deity she called "God the Parent." Miki denied that her teaching was "Shinto," but her successors forged a link in order to escape persecution. After 1945, Tenrikyō repudiated the idea that it derived from Shinto.

⁵⁶ While Ōmoto operated a national newspaper successfully, that was not sufficient to save it from persecution. It was brutally suppressed in 1921 and again in 1935. Helen Hardacre, 1998. Asano Wasaburō and Japanese Spiritualism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. In Japan's Conflicting Modernities, Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930. Edited by Sharon A. Minichiello. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998.

⁵⁷ Asad, Formations of the Secular, pp. 182-186.