The Position of *Mushūkyō* Practice in Religious Dialogue

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宗教間対話における「無宗教」行動の位置づけ

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世論調査によると約８割の日本人は「無宗教」を自称することである。ところが、この「無宗教」は英語の「non-religious」と対等の言葉ではない。なぜなら多くの日本人は、無宗教を自称しても宗教的行為を行うからだ。無宗教の理解に、新たな解釈がない限り宗教と無宗教間の生む相違点は多文化に大きな妨げとなる。こうした「無宗教理解」のため本論文は４部に構成されている。（１）宗教とりわけ日本における宗教分析を紹介する。（２）「内容」と「機能」という宗教学の研究方法を紹介する。（３）日本の宗教的歴史を踏まえ、６世紀から現在に至るまでの歴史を部分的に説明する。（４）「宗教的文化」において、無宗教の行動を考える。宗教行動を考えることにより日本における「宗教」定義が拡大され、宗教間対話の改善につながる。

キーワード：無宗教、市民宗教、宗教的行動

１．Introduction

Statistics characterizing religion in Japan often yield curious results. Take, for example, the 1985 yearbook published by the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs which recorded 76% of the population to be affiliated with Buddhism and 95% Shinto, totaling 171% (Reader and Tanabe 1991：6). Similar results were collected from religious institutions that in 2009 placed religious membership at 270 million—more than twice the country's population (Takahashi, 2012：5). Paradoxically, when Japanese are asked personally about their beliefs on religion, the tables turn. A 1981 survey on "The Religious Consciousness of the Japanese" showed that 65.2% of the Japanese denied having personal religious faith (Swyngedouw, 1993：50). Results by a 2009 Religious Data Book recorded over 70.9% of respondents claimed to not profess a religion at all (Ishii, 2007). Similar studies by Hiroshi Iwai and Tadaatsu Tajima confirm trends that Japanese tend to disassociate themselves from religious belief (Iwai, 2004；Tajima, 2008).

In 2017, I also conducted a survey of the religious beliefs and practices of first year Bunkyo University students in the Foreign Language Department. Out of fifty-five responses, 80% of students claimed to "believe" in non-religion, 14% in Buddhism, and 4% in Christianity. In contrast, over 70% claimed to have visited a shrine in 2017. Reflecting this mix in opinions, when asked to choose between six terms they associate with religion, students choose words like "important" (36%), "interesting" (7%), "no interest" (21%), "doubtful" (21%), "unnecessary" (4%), and "other" (2%). This survey revealed how Bunkyo University Students reflect many of the religious trends dominating Japanese society.

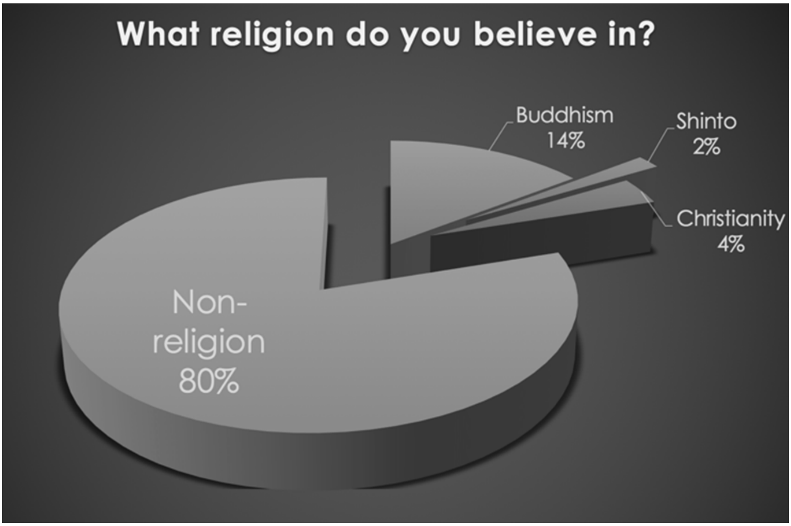

Figure 1 : Student's Religious Belief

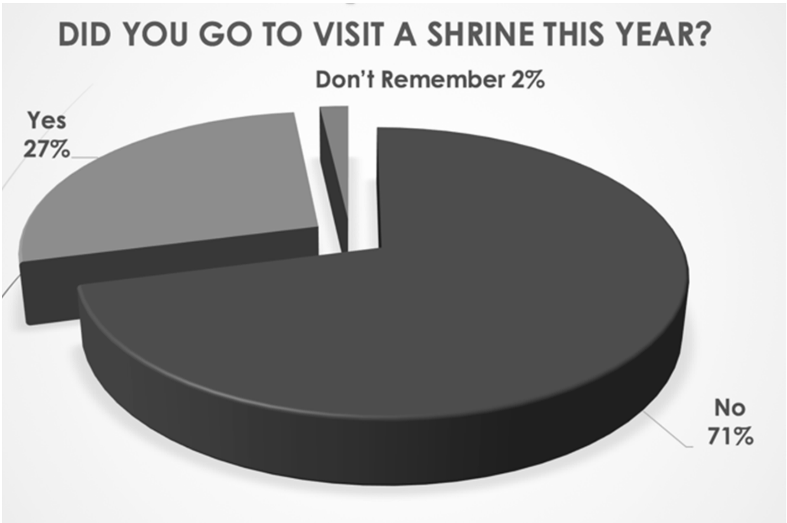

Figure 2 : New Year Shine Visits

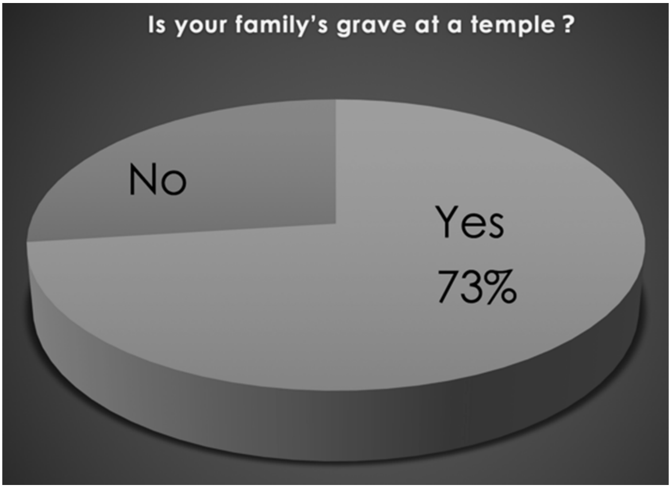

Figure 3 ：Percentage of students with family graves at Buddhist Temples

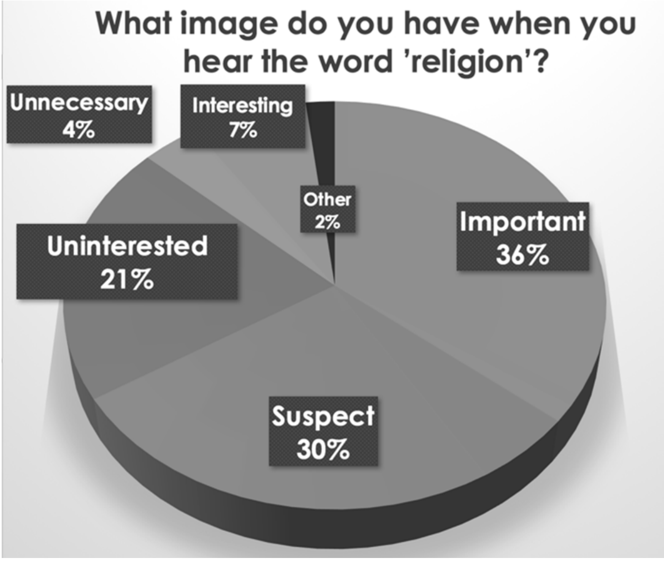

Figure 4 ：Various Images students have of religion

High rates of ‘non-religious religious practice’ have led to numerous international problems as many Japanese youth have come to associate religion with indifference or even contempt (Ishii, 2014). At a national level, religious indifference has led Japanese politicians to perform religious acts such as shrine visits, in disregard for separation between religion and state. At a personal level, non-religious action has been misunderstood as being religiously magnanimous by foreigners who upon marriage find themselves unable to perform religious acts due domestic disputes over religion (LeMay, 2017 ; Cahill, 1990). If the Japanese are serious about engaging in domestic and foreign multiculturalism the issue of religion in Japan needs further analysis.

To better understand the complexities of religion in Japan, this paper is divided into four parts. First, the religious environment of non-religion in Japan is introduced. Section two uses key methods of substantive and functional religious inquiry to make better sense of the current situation of Japan. Section three sketches Japanese religious history from the sixth century to the present, tracing religion (shūkyō) from pre-religious times (a distinction I make referring to religion as ‘religion’) to the present. Section four returns to the sociological classifications to discuss the need for a wider and more conducive definition of Japanese religion that includes practice.

2. Understanding Religion through Sociology

Studies on the sociology of religion begin by separating questions about religious substance from questions concerning religious function. In other words, substantive questions relate to classifying religion.

These questions “try to identify the key features of religion” (Bird, 1999 : 10). By contrast, functional questions “refer to how religions link people together in communities” (Ibid., 11). These provide explanations for why individuals and communities use religion.

A. Phenomenology of Religion

Contrary to commonly held belief, there is no universal definition of religion. This was the conclusion scholars of phenomenology arrived at more than a century and a half ago. Classic nineteenth-century founders of the study of religion presumed that religion was a uniform and fixed idea. They took for granted that history was a matter of chronological events leading up to more advanced systems of belief. Accordingly, religion as an institution needed no explanation. It was a quasi-certitude that early scholars did not challenge (Strenski, 2015 : 77).

Some of the first locations of scientific religious inquiry came from the Netherlands as government supported the scientific study of religion through funding the creation of new centers of research (Ibid., 79). The first generation of religious scholars were people like Cornelis P. Tiele, William Brede Kristensen and Gerardus van der Leeuw who asserted three necessary features of religious study. These included: 1) detaching study from belief through “ ‘bracketing’ one’s beliefs”, 2) classifying religion according to different kinds (as opposed to degrees of advancement), and 3) discovering the “unique and innate capacity for religiousness” possessed by all humanity (Ibid., 81-82). Through this systematic study, the idea of religion as a human construct came into vogue.

The scientific breakthroughs occurring in Europe did not hold real world significance until several decades later when Chicago hosted the 1893 World Parliament of Religions. At this event, the presence of Hindi, Buddhist and Islamic leaders challenged the superiority of Christianity. In theory, the existence of these religions had been known, but this was the first time small-town Christians met practitioners in person. This created a firestorm of religious inquiry as participants began to suspect that "the Hebrew-Christian tradition was not unique". In the words of Jon Butler, et al, the World Parliament was the spark that led "hundreds of missionaries, and thousands of their supporters [...] to suspect that Islam, Hinduism, and especially Buddhism carried highly developed ethical systems of their own. From there it was only a short step to the conclusion that those religions offered equally valid paths to God" (Butler et al., 2011 : 268).

B. Religious Substance and Multiculturalism

As the sociology of religion evolved, scholars began classifying religions by the characteristics they shared. These included rituals, myths, dress, customs and food. Instead of searching for a religious sui-generous through the discovery of primitive religions, scholars isolated key features found in world religions. Their intent was to find fundamental building blocks they could better use to analyze religion. This turned out to be more difficult than initially anticipated.

The more religions were compared with each other through systematic data analysis the more religious terms traditionally used in Hebrew-Christian studies began to break down. Take for example the idea of ‘God’. Should this word symbolize a monotheistic ‘God’ or polytheistic ‘gods’? What about Buddhism that does not believe in either, but rather a higher power known as “Buddha”? Or how about Confucianism that does not believe in a higher power at all? Scholars found that the more specific their analysis became, the more fractured were the results.

Scholars have tried to caste religion in a more positive light through painting it with broad brushstrokes in hopes of masking its difference. Take Houston Smith for example, whose book *World Religions* has been a best seller for decades (Smith, 2009). In this book, Smith explains the complexities of world religions, but constructs his argument under the supposition that all the world's religions are inherently equal. Paradigmatic of this idea is Smith's metaphor that all world religions are unified in their desire for the same thing. They are as different paths leading up the same mountain.

For those not swept away by the beauty of this allegory, the generalities Smith refers to do not hold water. In his book, *All Gods are Not One*, Stephen Prothero claims that Smith takes an academic scalpel to world religions in hopes of finding a common denominator (Prothero, 2012 : 5-7). In effect, his actions mirror religious scholars a century earlier who were concerned with finding religions' primitive origins. Not only does Smith do a disservice to religion, he forces religions of the world to evaluate themselves against prefabricated rubrics that originate from Judeo-Christian traditions. To claim all religions are equal by using generalities that dilute difference insults believers and their capacity to be comfortable with discursiveness.

Prothero touches on an old argument of the occident over the orient best voiced by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism*.[1] According to Said, the discovery of the East by the West was both physical and psychological. The latter continues to exist today in the English language through words that exert authority over non-Western cultures. Tomoko Masuzawa refers to this imbalance in her work *The Invention of World Religions* where she uncovers a hidden bias in the way the study of religion has been constructed around Western notions of things 'religious'. Masuzawa argues that this imbalance has helped in Western domination. She explains saying,

> [T]he period in which the protean notion of "religion"—which had not been until the eighteenth century, a particularly serviceable idea [...]—came to acquire the kind of overwhelming sense of objective reality, concreate facticity, and utter self-evidence that now holds us in its sway. As a result of this development, it has come to seem entirely gratuitous, if not to say quixotic, to challenge the reality of religion or to question those familiar truisms that are freely circulated about this reality (Masuzawa, 2005 : 2).

According to this argument, how we conflate certain beliefs and practices as constitutive of world religions has simplified the complexities that exist, often in favor of a Western interpretation. Rather than placating the differences between religions, the goal of religious scholars should be to understand them, why they exist, and what this means for our life today.

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[1] Said (1979) was the first to explain how France, Britain and later the United States controlled the East by creating a 'universal' language for interaction. By imposing on the East proscriptive analysis, argued Said, the West 'Orientalized' it, suppressing its will under hegemonic power.

C. Functionalism

The study of functionalism was headed by names like Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Émile Durkheim who discussed what religion does rather than is. Radcliffe-Brown was the first to criticize evolutionary views of ‘primitive’ religion as being futile attempts at understanding religion. He and his cohorts believed it was much more important to understand the ritual systems and their relationship to society. Even though Radcliffe-Brown believed that religions were illusionary and erroneous, he nevertheless recognized them as performing important social functions by providing social order（Hamilton, 1995：113-114）.

Durkheim differed from Radcliffe-Brown in how he understood religion as performing essential functions that revealed human nature. He believed that the group makes the individual, and therefore humans were imbued with a “sensation of perpetual dependence” on each other. This relationship “overwhelms us, commands us, creates in us a feeling of obligation and sacrality（sic.）for its holy objects, such as the human individual”（Strenski, 2015：134）. Durkheim had a unique ability to link scientific reason with religious belief. He understood that the two needed each other because if the believer could not understand science and the scientist could not empathize with the believer, they were like "blind [men] trying to talk about colour" (Ibid., 135). Durkheim understood that ritual actions created society and sustained its relationships with the divine (Ibid., 139).

Writing on human ritual action, Karen Armstrong (2006) analyzes the myths etched into the caves in Lascaux, France by primitive men as an example of how humans are inherently religious animals (32-33). Nicholas Wade (2009) adds to this stating that religions have a propensity to unite their members by providing mutual trust, and a moral code, and for this reason remains with us today.

> Given the costliness of religious behavior, and its salient role in determining primitive society's ability to deal with foes both internal and external, the forces of natural selection seem very unlikely to have ignored it. If religious behavior offered no benefit, groups that wasted time and resources this way would have been eliminated by groups that did not bear such a handicap in the struggle for survival (Ibid., 62).

In typical Durkheim parlance, Armstrong and Wade claim that we can understand how religion functions by analyzing its significance to the group, a significance closely related to the human condition.

3. Japanese Religious History

To understand what religion looks like in Japan we must consider what religion looked like before this term was coined. This section traces some of the hallmark events in Japanese religious history from pre-Buddhism, to the Edo and Meiji eras. This discussion reveals how religion has been deeply impacted by political forces and not merely the subjective beliefs of the individual.

The contemporary worldview of the Japanese is a composite of parts from its Confucian, Shinto, and Buddhist past. This syncretic lifestyle makes up what Swyngedouw calls, "fractions" (*bun*), or religious parts that are subordinate to the entire religious system. Each new element that has been accepted into the whole "acknowledge [s]" the "(limited) roles and claims" of the others "by not overstepping the assigned boundaries of any given individual" (Swyngedouw, 1993 : 63). In doing so, these parts feed into the "life-power" of Japanese society and help construct a religious culture its members seldom question. The following will provide a thumbnail sketch of religion in Japanese history to understand how each religious "fraction" fits together.

A. The History of 'Religion' in Japan

The first vestige of what might be called a 'religion' appeared on Japanese shores in the early sixth century with the introduction of Buddhism from China and the Korean peninsula. It was emperor Yōmei and the conversion of his son prince Shōtoku that paved the way for Buddhism to merge with Shinto and Confucianism in what is called the Japanese "melting pot" (Andreasen, 1995 : 42). As time passed, various strands of Buddhism entered Japan and mixed with indigenous Shinto beliefs creating a *shinbutsu* (Shinto and Buddhist) amalgamation.[2] From the Nara (710-794) to the Heian (794-1185) and from the Heian to the Kamakura (1185-1333) periods Shinto mixed with Buddhism and Buddhism with Confucianism such that each new era brought with it changes to its worldview.

Feudal leadership entered Japan's historical scene in the fourteenth century during a civil war lasting more than a century (1467-1603). At the end of this period, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) slowly galvanized their base by forming allegiances with other fiefs on the main islands of the Japanese archipelago. The absence of a political form of government meant that temples were responsible for their own protection. Some achieved this by amassing large armies of warrior monks. Part of the adroit statesmanship of the shoguns was their ability to control religions and their followers through military might. Oda Nobunaga's burning of the Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei and his slaughter of the lay Ikkō sect exemplifies the iron-fisted control emperors used to rule (Sansom, 1952 : 220). Then there was the Tokugawa government's routing and suppression of the Jōdo Shin sect through dividing the Honganji main temple into East and West branches (Sansom, 1952 : chapter 19). After Tokugawa Ieyasu united the mainland of Honshu in 1603, he continued the authoritarian control of religion practiced by his predecessors.

From 1603-1867 the Tokugawa shogun maintained a period of peace through instituting a system of control that manipulated

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[2] Otherwise known as *shinbutsu shūgō*. All the historical dates listed here and below have been verified by Sasayama, et al. 2017.

‘religious’ institutions. During the Edo period, the Tokugawa emperor used ‘religion’ to strengthen a weak governmental structure. Robert N. Bellah explains the pressure to comply with this religio-political control in the following.

> Religion supplied a context of ultimate meaning to the central value system through the fact that the primary collectivities in the society—the nation and the family—were conceived of as religious as well as secular bodies. [...] Acting in closest accord with the political values of the society, that is, giving one's full devotion to one's particularistic superiors, and expressing this devotion in vigorous and continuous performance with respect to the collective goal, was seen as the best means to acquire the approval and protection of divine beings or to attain some form of harmony with ultimate reality (Bellah, 1957 : 39-40).

Bellah writes how the Tokugawa shogunate systematically grouped families around temples and shrines as a means of maintaining peace. Religious buildings were used for government purposes as all members in the community had to register births, deaths, marriages or travel permits (Hashizume and Osawa, 2012 : 24-26 and Ama, 2005 : 20). Centering towns and villages around religious buildings fundamentally altered neighborhood relations as individuals were forced to supervise each other in a system of public monitoring.[3]

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[3] A reason behind the system of temple registration, known as the *terauke seidō*, was to uncover hiding Christians who were then tortured or killed.

Forcing temple registration led to the creation of the *danka* system[4], or a form of membership based on family lineage. Although the *danka* system officially ended in 1871, many Japanese families are still connected to the temples where their ancestors claimed membership. And many connections within rural towns are built along these lines (Hendry, 2013 : 60). This temple connection surfaces during times of life transition when deaths and births are commemorated through religious rituals (Mullins, 1993 : 7 ; Reader, 1993 : 85-86).

B. The Invention of Religion in Japan

Before the Meiji Era, there was no word for religion as it is known and used today. What existed looked more like a 'sect' (*shūha*) of an "exoteric-esoteric" form of Buddhism (Kuroda, 1993 : 18). In the 20th century the Meiji government replaced the notion of 'sect' with the contemporary notion for religion (*shūkyō*) and legally separated Buddhist ritual from politics. Yet Japanese religion did not align perfectly with Western equivalents. Josephson explains how the Meiji government "tactically select [ed]" what sectarian practices to include within new definitions of religion (Josephson, 2012 : 195). By doing so, the Meiji government attempted to impress upon Western powers that Japan was not a theocracy but a first-world, democratic nation-state. Constructing this image required it define Buddhism as Japan's national religion and convince its Japanese subjects that what they had been practicing all along was known as religion (*shūkyō*), a putatively universal term with equivalents in other countries.

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[4] A *danka* is the association of a family to a given temple.

Western notions of religion were forced upon Japan (Masuzawa, 2005). Nevertheless, through the Meiji Restoration the Japanese government took definitive steps to control this term's parameters (Josephson, 2012 : 195). From 1871-1873 a group of Japanese statesmen and scholars called the Iwakura Mission were sent at the behest of the Meiji government to America and Europe to report on differences in culture, religion and politics (Sasayama, 2017 : 272). The images the Iwakura diplomats Fukuzawa Yukichi and Tsuda Mamichi had of religion respectively were somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, Fukuzawa saw Western religion as an "exclusively interior" belief that combined "internal consciousness" with morality and intellectualism (Josephson, 2012 : 201), while on the other, Tsuda criticized belief in miracles as "obstacle[s] to progress" (Ibid., 207). Regardless of this difference in thought, those in the Iwakura contingent agreed that the prototype of religion—namely Western Christianity—was a very different animal than the *shinbutsu* amalgamation of Japan.[5]

Arguably one of the largest points of continuity between the Tokugawa and Meiji governments was ideological control through state ideology. This theocracy-in-practice-and-not-in-name unified the Japanese under a sacred canopy that had as its mythical head the emperor and his connection to Shinto gods. The Meiji government was an "imminent theocracy" that functioned as a "non-religious or super-religious cult of national morality and patriotism" that was superimposed upon "nominal constitutional guarantees of freedom and religious belief" (Kitagawa 1966 : 267). Under this theocratic umbrella "all Japanese" were expected to be "'naturally' loyal to the emperor and empire", and those who refused would "not be tolerated" (Bellah, 1957 : 105). Under Meiji, ancient Shinto rites that had fallen out of use under Tokugawa rule were restored, and the *shinbutsu* amalgamation that had largely controlled ritual practice during the Edo period was forcefully separated into Buddhist and Shinto factions. This event called *shinbutsu bunri* eventually led to the destruction of thousands of Buddhist images and the defrocking of hundreds of monks (Ellwood, 2004 : 175-176 ; Breen and Teeuwen, 2000).[6]

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[5] For more on how religion in its early stages was merely another name for Christianity, see Thomas 2013 : 3-21.

Extirpating Buddhism from Shinto Shrines and government property was only one example of how the Meiji government controlled religion. Another was instituted through public education. The Meiji government employed a three-tiered form of religious oppression that included creating a governmental space for State Shinto (Covell, 2009), controlling private religion through constitutional laws and decrees, and using education and subterfuge to suppress subversive groups it labeled 'superstitious' (Josephson, 2012 ; Ellwood, 2008 : 174). The hunt Meiji conducted against superstitious beliefs would infect public and private life. The new religion of Tenrikyō, founded in 1838, is a prime example of how Meiji interfered with impunity in religious institutions it perceived as threatening.

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[6] This event is referred to as *haibutsu kishaku* (Sasayama et al., 2017 : 270).

Tenrikyō had amassed enormous popularity through using holy water and magical healing techniques to cure physical and mental sickness. Claims of controlling such a means to public health was not only a threat to government hospitals, but also a distraction to the Meiji government's aim toward progress（Ellwood, 2008）. By 1896, the Home Ministry had "issued a secret directive to prefectural governments to keep closer control of Tenrikyo"（Josephson, 2012：239-240）. Tenrikyō responded by curbing some of its more controversial practices of faith healing and health amulets such as one that supposedly granted painless childbirth（Ibid., 240）. In the eyes of the government, Tenrikyō's response was insufficient. In hopes of discouraging this and other groups from practicing subversive beliefs, it created lessons in national school textbooks that encouraged children to "avoid superstition" and "honor your parents" lest one falls into "fear and psychosomatic illness"（Ibid., 239-240）.

Manipulating religion was a practice that continued into the Showa era（1926-1945）with its 1940 Religious Organization Law. This required Buddhist and Christian traditions to merge or face constant harassment and scrutiny. This order required the fifty-six sects of Buddhism to be reduced to twenty-eight, and the thirty-five sects of Christianity to be reduced to only two: one Protestant and one Catholic（Ellwood, 2008：187）. In addition, "the duty of all loyal citizens" was that they periodically visit state Shinto Shrines. This applied to individuals and groups as prominent as even Sophia University, the largest Catholic university in the country（Nishiyama, 2000；Mullins, 1998 : 19).

Historical key points laid out here have shown how Japanese rulers have commonly interfered and manipulated the religious acts of the Japanese for centuries. Under Edo, Meiji, Taisho and Showa eras the institutional face of religion was hidden under the auspice of Shinto—a pseudo-religious nationalism. While Shinto commands no official position in the government today, elected officials continue to dance around the issue of religion and politics when it encourages the performance of ‘Japanese’ rituals that transcend the delicate and often opaque separation between religion and the state (Takayama, 1993). Remnants of Japan’s theocratic past continually resurface every now and then, a situation evident in modern Japanese culture.

C. Religious Difference between East and West

This overview of religions’ place in Japanese history shows that what is understood as religion in Japanese contemporary society is fundamentally linked to the royalty and aristocracy that manipulated the meaning of religion and its contemporary application. When comparing Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism to Christianity, Meiji reformers must have been struck by numerous inconsistencies some of which I have included below:

1. The Buddha is not a deity, but a transcendent human/figure.
2. There is no congregation in any of these three religions.
3. Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism have no initiation

process.

4. Membership in Buddhism is linked to the family, Shinto to the geographical community.
5. Confucianism has no official concept of membership.
6. There are no religious buildings in Confucianism.
7. Ideas of Sin/salvation and the holy/profane mean little in Japanese culture.
8. Relations with the Buddha or the Shinto kami are impersonal.
9. There is no understanding of the Sabbath (i.e. Sundays).
10. Practice, more than belief is central to these three religions.

Given the choice, Meiji reformers decided these differences set Japanese apart from their Western religious counterparts. The result has been a heavy association with non-religion, turning Japan into (in the words of blogger Matthew Coslett) "the most religious atheist country" in the world.

4. Functionalism in Japanese *Mushūkyō* Context

What the Japanese understand as religion is rooted in its industrial past that took steps at confining religion to narrow Western definitions in which few Japanese have been satisfied. High rates of non-religion exemplify this. To better understand how religion functions in Japan, we need to expand religious discourse outside the mundane and often moribund typologies of Japanese religions into a larger definition that includes practice. To do this, this section considers civil religion, performance and religious practice.

A. Holistic Religion

To understand Eastern religions, it is essential to consider how philosophical traditions of the East place “more emphasis...on ritual performance and moral injunction” than Judeo-Christian religions (Wilson, 1982 : 64). Practice is central to Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism, and sets these religions apart from doctrine-centered, monotheistic religions.[7] A major distinction of Eastern religious practice comes from applying a different worldview that does not separate the sacred from the profane (Bautista, 2016 : 54-55). In other words, religion in the East is more fluid and transgresses boundaries between the holy and mundane. It is for this reason Japanese do not find it contradictory to perform religious acts in supposedly secular environments all the while denying their religiosity (Adkins, 2010). Evidence of this difference is provided below through studies on civil religion, spirituality and culture.

1) Civil Religion

The term civil religion emerged in the mid 20th century as Thomas Luckman and his contemporaries tried to explain how increasing secularization was impacting church absence and religious change (Luckman, 1969). To explain church flight, scholars searched for religion outside institutional church structures. In his 1967 article,

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[7] For more on how religion is stereotyped in Japan see Ishii 2010.

Civil Religion in America, Bellah examined the inaugural addresses of U.S. presidents to expose how the state was guilty of promulgating religious ideology through the words of its leaders (Bellah, 1970). In later works, Bellah and his predecessors adapted studies on civil religion to the cultures in Japan and Europe (Bellah, 1957 ; Bellah, at al. 2014 ; Casanova, 2009).

Studies on civil religion have led to broader definitions that better portray the landscape found in Eastern societies. Of these, I find the words of Winton Davis to be especially helpful. Davis includes in his definition of civil religion more specific references to national ideology including those "mood-, symbol-, value-, thought- and ritual-traces, which establish a national self-identity" (Davis, 1973 : vii). Davis's broad definition of religion blurs the criteria between believer and non-believer, reminding us that such a distinction is difficult to apply to the Japanese context.

２）Japanese Spirituality

Ethnographic works by Ian Reader and George Joji Tanabe (1994) and Karen A. Smyers (1999) exemplify what Shimazono Susumu (2012) calls the new spirituality of Japan. Characteristics of this religious change is the privatization of religion that relates less with fixed communities over long periods of life and more with personal products (such as amulets), religious sites, or religious services (like weddings). Shimazono describes religion in Japan today as a "spirituality" that breaks with conventional notions of religious membership. According to him, the religion of the future will focus on the individual using religion and manipulating it into their life experiences, not vice versa. There is still no telling how this fundamental shift will affect Japanese society (Shimazono, 2012).

３）Japanese Religious Culture

Steven Covell (2009) in his chapter in *Modern Japanese Culture* uses the term "Japanese religious culture" to "present the religious life of modern Japan from myriad viewpoints" (147). Covell provides a historical overview much like I have done above to show how remnants of Japanese religious change throughout this country's long history remain within contemporary Japanese culture. Explanations of temple Buddhism and Shrine Shinto impress upon the reader the expanse of religious culture in Japan today, and show how religious minorities should be read as precursors to a gradual shift in Japanese customs.

If we understand that culture is the "life-sustaining oxygen" that "allows groups of human beings, both as individuals and in groups, to interpret our respective physical, social, and cognitive environments", then it goes without saying that religion falls within this typology (Sheftall, 2016 : 14). I have introduced concepts of civil religion, spirituality and religious culture to expose the broad application religion plays in Japanese society today. The ubiquitous nature of this religious culture has existed in Japan as an unquestioned reality, which Jan Van Bragt rightfully claims few Japanese have ever had a choice in accepting.

> If [religious] choice, [ever existed in Japan], it was rather in the sense of the possibility of different specializations on the basis of acceptance of the system as a whole. The individual was free to choose one of the various Buddhist schools as a path to personal liberation, (…) but this step did not mean for the individual concerned a rejection of the syncretic system (Bragt, 2002 : 13).

For the better part of Japanese history there has not been an option for religious dissent, and when people did choose to do so, they were often met with hostility and social "othering" (Clammer, 2001).

B. Choosing a Method: Goffman and Performance

The high percentage of Japanese associating with non-religion would have us believe that to be non-religious means to be Japanese. In this section, I look to Ervin Goffman's study on performance to show that regardless of how Japanese identify themselves verbally, through performing characteristics of Japanese religious culture they effectively construct an identity of self-as-Japanese.

Goffman was the sociologist that took the Shakespearean adage, 'all the world is a stage' and put this at the center of his ontology. "[S]ocial intercourse", he claimed, "is itself put together as a scene is put together," such that "life itself is a dramatically enacted thing" (Goffman, 1959 : 17). The act humans perform is partially conscious, but in most cases not. "[T]he performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he (sic.) can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality". The performer 'lives' this persona from public actions to private movements conducted in the recesses of home. The entirety of this created reality surrounds them from things owned to the relationships kept (Ibid., 17).

Through playing the part of a Japanese, the actor begins to dress, speak, think and believe as Japanese. When Japanese perform certain acts over others they affirm their connection with Japanese culture (Ibid., 17). Goffman tells us that "performance is 'socialized', molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman, 1959 : 33). In similar parlance, Japanese perform a form of non-religion called *mushūkyō* through participating in numerous ritual actions that construct this identity. Because this identity differs from non-religions of other countries, I specify this term here by referring to it as *mushūkyō*.

Religion remains influential in Japan in the way it functions within a Japanese understanding of *mushūkyō* performance. It sounds like a contradiction to claim that religion is encased within non-religion, but that is only because the English word for religion is wholly inadequate to capture the present-day religious environment of Japan. Just as Western notions have proven inadequate to capture the religious vicissitudes of the Japanese, so too have Western notions of non-religion. When Japanese use the word *mushūkyō* they do not definitively reject things supernatural outright, but instead practice a wide array of religious traditions (Ama, 2005 : 1 ; Tajima, 2008 : 54 ; Zuckerman et al., 2016). In doing so, Japanese have constructed their national identity through *mushūkyō* practice (Iwai, 2004 : 79-80).

Below I summarize some of the more transformative rituals Japanese use to construct *mushūkyō* identity.

C. Calendar events

If you look at a Japanese calendar, you may be surprised by the number of red-numbered holidays spread throughout the year. In total, there are sixteen public holidays when schools and workplaces close. While not all holidays are practiced with the same degree of reverence, all help construct Japanese identity through public performance. For example, December 23rd is devoted to the Heisei emperor's birthday. Other holidays heavily influenced by the royal family are Showa Day (April 29th) and Ocean Day (3rd Monday in July). On these days, news programs about the emperor are broadcast and the royal family makes public appearances.

In addition to holidays associated with the emperor are celebrations with obvious connections to Shinto and the state. These include the National Foundation Day (February 11th) and Constitution Day (May 3rd). Studies on civil religion in Japan show us that sanctifying days associated with governmental activity is common practice for nation-states (Pye, 2009 : 29-41). On national holidays, many Japanese spend this time visiting religious sites, or conducting religious acts such as participating in temple or shrine festivals (Reader and Tanabe, 1991). A preliminary search of websites at Yasukuni, Meiji Shrines, Yasaka, and Nikko Shrines all reveal that February 11th is an important day of celebration.[8] From this, it is safe to say that there is a close connection in modern-day Japanese activity to respect paid to the emperor and the nation-state (Fujimoto and Tsukada, 2012).

１) Public Education and Sports

Sensational topics about the connection of Yasukuni Shrine to the government often dominate religious debate. What is frequently overlooked, however, is the connection public education has played in teaching Japanese about 'acceptable' religious practice. The contemporary education system has been conflated with religious meaning since its creation under the Meiji and its reconstruction under the Showa eras (Gordon, 2014 : 136, 313). The practice of using public education to train its imperial military in the 20th century was reinterpreted into modern-day Japanese practices of nationalism.

Symbols of this religious inculcation come from national holidays where all students are expected to attend sports events. Pressure for university students to participate in 'circle' activities on the Health and Sports Day (second Monday of October) or grade school students in their club activities held on Cultural Day (November 3rd) is indicative of an education system that values conformity to a public calendar over private religious activities. The collective culture of sports and club activities molds the habits and relationships of students by controlling the time they have at their disposal to conduct themselves outside of public school events (LeMay, 2017).

As Eric Bain-Selbo and D. Gregory Sapp (2016) point out,

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[8] February 11th was a national holiday created in 1870 to commemorate the mythical "birth" of the Japanese nation (said to begin in 660 B.C.E.). For more see Gordon, 2014, p.285.

sports can function in much the same way as religion. Included in sports is the goal of increasing physical and spiritual strength or regulating the social interactions one has with group members. These sports can elicit a kind of fanaticism from its players and supporters. The innocence and unquestioning obedience children and parents pay to the public education system interferes with children's religious activities. Examples of this abound from complications with absence for religious activities, to dress and food （Nakagawa, 2001 ; Dias, 2016）. Interference in the private lives of religious believers is evidence that the school system is complicit in condoning a *mushūkyō* identity.

２）Festivals, Ascetic Practice and Folk Events

The Shinto *matsuri* also attracts tourists from near and far to participate in local culture. Most *matsuri* are held at parks offering *bon-odori* dancing, *taiko* drum music and a wide range of vendor food. In districts with famous temples, these will often have their own *matsuri* once or more a year. In case communities own large wooden carts called *dashi*, these are decorated and pushed by groups of men （and sometimes women） usually associated with the local Shrine. In this fashion, not only do Shinto shrines supply local communities with places to venerate the *kami* or perform hallmark transitions of life, but their connection with the *matsuri* forms a bedrock of community relations （Hendry, 2013 : 57-67）.

Tullio Lobetti （2014） classifies the *matsuri* alongside with other *shūgyō* practices like mountain climbing, walking on hot embers, splashing oneself with cold water in the middle of winter, and other feats. Lobetti recognizes how ascetic practices are easily "borrowed or exchanged between different religious environments", a phenomenon the practitioner does not perceive as a contradiction. It is common for practitioners to perform an elaborate array of ascetic practices throughout the year (Ibid., 105), while seldom perceiving them as religious—even whilst talking about the power and blessings associated with them (Ibid., 35). In this manner, ascetic acts typify the blending of sacred and mundane practices common in Japanese culture.

Other holidays with Shinto and Buddhist overtones include New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, Obon, the Spring Equinox Day, Autumn Equinox Day, and the Coming of Age Day (Pye, 2009). On these days temples will hold events that are observed by thousands. Practitioners will buy amulets and *daruma* figures, pull *omikuji* fortunes, receive blessings and even take part in Buddhist recitation of sutras. This occurs amidst a lively culture of eating food and merrymaking.

In recent years, there has been a trend to distance folk practice from its religious past by performing rituals in locations with little to no religious significance. This "Folklorism" has commodified practices that once contained religious significance for local communities by eliminating discourse concerning belief and how these practices relate to the communities from which they originate. As media markets these rituals to a wider audience, much of their context is lost and religious significance forgotten (Kadota, 2012 : 143-144). In this manner, a variety of religious acts now construct the Japanese collective identity, but the cost of this national identity has been an amnesia that has disassociated the religious from its contemporary folk reality.

3）Life Transitions

Alongside national holidays is the ritualized culture of life transition. Events such as a baby's first blessing at a Shinto shrine (*hatsumairi*), further blessings and photo shoots at children's third, fifth and seventh birthdays (*shichi-go-san*), celebrating transition into adulthood (*seijin shiki*), Christian-style weddings, Buddhist funerals, cemetery visits and a complex system of venerating the dead on the anniversary of their death[9] are all examples of how religion is intricately intertwined within the lives of Japanese. Taking pictures and receiving name plaques to decorate the home is an important means Japanese express their allegiance to the community and exert their Japanese identity. These transitional events are met with wide acceptance as parents are given permission to be absent from work and children from school—absence that otherwise would be difficult to come by (LeMay, 2014). Implicit in the wide acceptance of rituals of life transition is the priority given to these over other 'religious' acts.

4）Tourism

Tourism is also connected to religion, and visiting religious sites are frequently advertised by travel agents as Japanese cultural (rather than religious) events. Millions of Japanese travel domestically and internationally to locations that evoke a sense of wonder or awe. Some prime examples of domestic tourism include Mt. Fuji, Tōdaiji, Nikkō or Nagasaki (Okuyama, 2012 : 119-124). Pilgrims are taught about the religious significance of these sites and may even receive a talk from a monk or a blessing from a Shinto priest. The centrality these locations play in Japanese history help reaffirm participants' Japanese identity.

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[9] According to Buddhist tradition, death anniversaries called *kaiki* are celebrated after 1, 3, 7, 13, 17, 23, 27, 33, 37, 50 years after the person's death.

Domestic and international 'power spots' have also become popular locations for Japanese to visit. This trend was popularized by television star and 'spiritual councilor Ehara Hiroyuki, who suggested his viewers travel to these locations and "pick up some of the power [found there] to take home" (Ibid., 125-126).[10] When participants visit power spots (which are typically heavily associated with Shinto and Buddhism) they often make physical contact with the shrine or environment and take pictures to memorialize their visit.[11] In some cases, local governments and travel agencies have sensationalized this trend by developing 'power spot tours' to local sites such as the Meiji Shrine or international spots such as Red Rock national park in Sedona, Arizona, USA (Okuyama, 2012 : 125 ; Shimazono, 2012).[12]

D. *Mushūkyō* as Lived Religion

When considering religions' influence in Japanese society we must be careful not to artificially separate the theocracy of the Edo and Meiji eras with the present (Okuyama, 2012). The two are not unrelated. The Japanese government continues to support religious policies under the auspices of *mushūkyō*, and at the very least gives deference to *mushūkyō* acts under the assumption that they are objectively non-religious. This section has introduced many of the practices Japanese perform throughout their lives that shapes their *mushūkyō* identity. Following this religious culture demands Japanese participate in a wide variety of rituals and events. In effect, the heavy commitment associated with performing these acts has transformed *mushūkyō* into the spiritual default of the Japanese.

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[10] Ibid., 123.

[11] Ibid., 124.

[12] Religious tourism and power spots have even been responsible for the nomination for UNESCO sites for their historical and cultural significance (Kadota 2012 : 144).

5. Conclusion

This paper has delineated the reasons why so many Japanese identify with Japanese non-religion, referred to as *mushūkyō*. By and large, since the term religion (*shūkyō*) was coined under the Meiji government, it has not been warmly received. This is due to Japan's religious past that included myriad religious acts within its definition of Japanese culture. In other words, Japanese do not have to 'believe' to 'identify' with *mushūkyō*. All that is necessary is that they do it.

The surprising percentage of Japanese who identify with *mushūkyō* makes it as an international outlier. This should raise concerns about what *mushūkyō* is and how it is taught. I have alluded to the negative association of religion in the public schools, but this topic needs to be revisited in further research. Why is this important? Understanding religion or non-religion is important because religion continues to be a topic relevant in international and multicultural exchange. If Japanese are serious about their relationship with non-Japanese, or even ideological minority groups within its borders, it is imperative they understand their own views toward religion better. Simply identifying as non-religious as a convenient means of avoiding religious dialogue will not fare well for Japan in the future.

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