# Trajectory of Religiosity in Modern and Contemporary Japan

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## Abstract

The importing of western notions of religion brought created the binary opposition of true religion versus false religion in Meiji Japan; true religion is based on monotheism, doctrine, and sacredness, whereas false religion implies multiplicity, practice, and secularity. The Japanese term shūkyō was constructed in the early Meiji under the idea of true religion, and that word thus excluded Japanese religious orientations which have been profoundly related to multiple participations. After the World War II, Japanese religiosity revives to show tolerance, diversity and multiplicity. The first binary between monotheistic exclusivity and polythemic multiplicity becomes invalid when the new constitution guaranteed unconditional religious freedom. The second binary opposition between doctrine and practice becomes irrelevant to describe contemporary Japanese religiosity after the Imperial ideology lost their validity. From the early history of Japanese religion, practice has preceded doctrine, but these two are not mutually exclusive. To categorize religions according to the binary between true religion and false religion disregards the fact that doctrine and practice, the sacred and the secular are interrelated, and the fact that the religious harmony of multiple affiliations does not create conflicts in Japanese religiosity.

**Keywords:** Formation of religious notion in modern Japan, Religiosity in contemporary Japan, Religious practice in Japan after WWII.

## 1. Introduction

According to recent data, Japanese people are gradually losing interest in religion; the numbers of people who belong to religious organizations are decreasing year by year, and international comparisons of religiosity show that Japan is ranked lower in most categories which indicate religious interests (Ishii, 1997). Edwin Reischauer and Marius Jansen's comprehensive study on Japanese contemporary religion concludes that religion plays no central role in society and culture in Japan (Reader and Tanabe, 1998). Some philosophers, including the postmodernist Jacques Derrida, agree that Japan is one of the leading nations that represent the postmodern, secular phenomenon (Odin, 1995).

On the other hand, one can still argue that religion in Japan is not a peripheral phenomenon; nearly 100 million people made New Year's visits (*hatsumōde*) to shrines and temples in 2006, and many people still make annual grave visits during *obon*, even in urban areas. After Aum shinrikyō's sarin gas attack in 1996, most people came to distrust not only new religions, but also established religious organizations. In spite of this, interest in the

fortunetelling and spirituality has gradually increased; the famous fortune teller Hosoki Kazuko's books are still popular. Another influential spiritualist, Ehara Hiroyuki sold more than 7,000,000 books on healing and spirituality. It can be argued that in contemporary Japan there exists a religiosity which is different from what westerners define as religion.

In this article, I look at what religion means in Japan, and how its definition was formed in the modern period and has influenced the contemporary understanding of Japanese religiosity. Then I examine actual contemporary religious orientations which are not always considered as religious according to the western definition.

## 2. Formation of the Notion of Religion in Modern Japan

The Japanese word *shūkyō* was originally invented in late Edo period in order to translate English word "religion." The US-Japan Amity and Trade Treaty in 1858 translated the English word "religion" for the first time, and the terms *shūshi*, (the practice of the doctrine) and *shūhō* (the law of the doctrine) were used in the document. From the late Edo period to the early Meiji period, the neologism spawned other translations such as *shūkyō* (the teaching of the doctrine), *shūmon* (the entry to the doctrine), *hōkyō* (the teaching of the law), *kyōmon* (the entry to the teaching), *shintō* (the way of gods), and *seidō* (the way of sacredness). Among these translations, Isomae argues that the terms *shūshi* and *shūmon*, which connote religious practice, were used more frequently than terms such as *seidō* and *hōkyō*, which entail doctrine and philosophy. Isomae claims that this preference of terms reflected the fact that for the most people, religion meant "religious practice" at that time (Isomae, 2003).

However, when Protestantism and its missionaries became prevailing among Meiji intellectuals, the term *shūkyō*, which implies doctrine and denomination, was finally chosen for the translation for "religion." Ian Reader argues that the term *shūkyō* thus was defined as something separated from actual religious orientations in Japanese society. The term implies commitment or belief to only one order or movement, which has not existed traditionally in Japanese religious behavior, and which tends to repress many of factors involved in the Japanese religious process (Reader, 1995). In contemporary Japan, the word *shūkyō* still connotes the notions of a full commitment to a particular doctrine to the implicit exclusion of others. The modern definition of religion thus left out what had been religious in traditional Japan.

Literary critic Karatani Kōjin (1993) explains this establishment of the notion of religion as the modern ideological construct. Before the Meiji period, the contradictions of polytheism or ambiguity in Japanese tradition had never been realized; the polysemic nature of *kanji*, the diversity of polytheism, and multi-political leaders such as emperor, *shōgun*, and *daimyō* in the Edo period just existed as contradictions and never caused a conflict. However, once western concepts of linear historicism, monotheism, and centrality came to Meiji Japan, the binary opposition of the West and the "Other" was realized. Meiji Japan, with its policies of centralization and homogenization, became a westernized modern nation by being conscious about its status as "Other" to the west.

Karatani further claims that the theme of exploration of the modern self, spirituality, or interiority in Japanese culture was not a mental or psychological phenomenon. This is because modern subjectivity is rooted in materiality and comes into existence only by being established as a system. Karatani emphasizes the systematicity which produced modern interiority, explaining the example of the formation of *genbun'ichi* (unification of the spoken and written language) and the discovery of the self. He attempts to reverse the assumption that it was the needs of modern interiority that gave rise to the *genbun'ichi* movement, and to propose that the formation of the *genbun'ichi* system made modern interiority possible (Karatani, 1993). The modern self or interiority did not exist as a premise but was constituted through a material form, the *genbun'ichi* system. Also, Karatani explains that it was not modern interiority that gave a birth to the Japanese confessional I-novel. It is the system of confession which came from Christianity that produced the interiority that confessed, or true self. Karatani (1993) insists that we have to examine these formations of modern constructed

discourses carefully in order not to "legitimate, a metaphysics which sees the existence of the self and its expressions as natural and self-evident" (p. 61). Karatani also explains that once modern interiority was established, its origins, the *genbun'ichi* system and Christianity, were quickly forgotten, and modern interiority was considered as the premise. He stresses that we need to challenge basic presumptions of theoretical centrality, linear historicism, and originality in such modern systems which function to conceal the origin of modern ideological constructs.

The same dynamics applies to the formation of religion in modern Japan. The import of western notions of religion, in particular Christianity, brought about binary oppositions such as monotheism versus polytheism, exclusiveness versus religious tolerance, doctrine versus practice, and other-worldliness versus this-worldliness. This realization constructed the religious binary opposition between true religion and false religion. True religion means the exclusive commitment to absolute belief according to the particular doctrine, whereas false religion implies the multiple commitments to various beliefs through secular practices. The term *shūkyō* was constructed under the influence of true religion, that is, western monotheism and absolute centrality, and gained wide currency in the mid-1870s. It thus excluded Japanese religious orientations which have been profoundly related to participation, custom, ritual, action, practice and belonging for a long time. It was not the rise of modern religiosity or spirituality which created the meaning of modern religion in Japan. Rather, it was the system of religion, especially Christianity, that shaped the content of religion in modern Japan.

According to the modern definition of religion which was shaped by the influence of Christianity, in particular Protestantism, the Meiji government invented its own henotheistic modern religion of State Shinto, for it felt threatened by Christianity. Carol Gluck (1985) makes a similar argument to Karatani's. Gluck claims that westerners and western customs became metaphorical images presenting one kind of ideological mirror to reflect Japan. Westerners and western religion themselves had never been the point: "what mattered was the idea of the West that the Japanese had created for purposes of self definition." Christianity itself was not important at all: Japanese people used it as a mirror to define their original religion. Thus, State Shinto was constructed as the Japanese equivalent of Christianity in the west as Itō Hirofumi mentioned in 1888.

John Breen also argues that State Shinto is the embodiment of the ideological construct of modern religion. In the very beginning of the Meiji period, State Shinto or "restoration Shinto" was first established on the ruins of the diverse Shinto schools of premodern Japan, such as the Yoshida, Shirakawa, Kikke, Hirata schools, as well as multiple shrine cults all over the land. However, the government dismissed these old schools as not suited to the new modern age, and created a new tailored Shinto which would steer Japan through the new menace of the international environment. Thus Breen concludes that State Shinto became a product of modern constructed ideology:

> [Meiji Shinto] was a state-ordered, state-penetrated network of shrines, run by state-appointed clergy who celebrated state-approved rituals that conformed, more or less, to state sanctioned ideology. Where there had been multiple cults at multiple shrines attached to multiple schools – or to none – with multiple rituals reflecting multiple theologies, there was now just Shinto. This, anyway, was the theory (Breen, 2000, p.249).

The binary opposition between the west and "Other" and the system of Christianity brought about the new modern idea of religion. State Shinto as its product was shaped to function as a Japanese version of a monotheistic religion.

Overwhelming influences of modernity and westernization thus created the ideological construct which functioned to repress religions other than State Shinto. Janine Tasca Sawada's *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (2004) reveals the way in which the new term "religion" repressed and redefined traditional Japanese religious orientations. In the early Meiji period, neologisms

were adopted in order to express new ideas and objects from the west. However, they also revised old concepts, for the circulation of new concepts brought about changes in the meanings of old terms. The Chinese characters *kyō* (teaching, doctrine, religion) and *gaku* (learning, study) played pivotal roles in the process of lexical rearrangement, creating new Japanese words such as *kyōiku* (education) and *shūkyō* (religion) as well as leading to reinterpretations of older compounds such as *gakumon* (learning) and *jitsugaku* (practical learning).

Sawada focuses on the circumscription of Confucianism during the first two decades of Meiji to illustrate how modern constructed ideologies of religion rearranged and redefined Confucianism as something outdated and non-religious in a rapidly westernizing society. Sawada discovers three major reset processes of Confucianism in the early Meiji period. The first process is that Confucian studies were removed from emerging public university curricula. Immediately after the Restoration, the courtier Iwakura Tomomi emphasized Shinto and nativist studies in public higher education in order to repress the residual influence of Confucian thought that he associated with shogunal polity. The "College Statutes" legislated in 1868 aimed not only to compete with the threat of Christianity but also to suppress Confucian and Buddhist influences in the educational system. This displacement of Confucian studies at the state's highest educational institutions was not because of the devaluation of Confucian learning itself, but because of the perception that these concepts lacked universality and practicality. Meiji government elites chose utilitarian models of curriculum which emphasized western disciplines in order to create a modern nation (Sawada, 2004).

This emphasis on the absence of practicality in Confucian studies in public discourse is the second process of repressing Confucianism in the early Meiji era. For Meiji intellectuals and educated people, the stereotypical model of Confucian studies which valued classical learning as a form of moral cultivation was considered as impractical and unsuited to the modern nation. Not only Confucian studies, but most other pre-Meiji educational and religious systems were forced to be categorized as recondite types of learning, which had nothing to do with utilitarian concerns. At the same time, the word *gakumon,* which originally came from Confucianism, experienced the major reset of its meaning. Fukuzawa Yukichi's influential book, *Gakumon no susume* (An Encouragement of Learning, 1872-76) explicitly redefines the term. He claims that learning does not consist of impractical pursuits such as the study of obscure Chinese characters and classical texts but has to deal with practical matters such as arithmetic, geography, physics, or economics. In public discourse, specialized, higher, utilitarian types of education were thus considered as superior to ordinary and impractical forms of learning such as Buddhist teachings and Confucian moral cultivations (Sawada, 2004).

The last process is to disassociate Confucian-related programs from religion and to promote them under other names in the public domain. Sawada argues that the new term *shūkyō* functioned to separate religion from all other major concepts; religion was placed in opposition to politics, science, education, as well as Confucianism and its common representation as "learning" (*gakumon*). Early Meiji intellectuals initially denounced Confucian learning as outdated, yet they thought Confucian self-cultivation theory was valuable. It is clear that the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo*) reflected Confucian moral education, urging Japanese citizens to pursue learning as well as to advance the public good. It is very obvious that Rescript directly relied on the premise of *shūshin*, yet many of the government elites did not admit it. Therefore, even though the institutions which promoted traditional Confucian learning gradually disappeared during 1860s -70s, a new version of *gakumon* had to be renamed and grounded in different social spheres. Hence, through these three processes, the conceptual system of modern religion repressed the impractical aspects of Confucian philosophy and changed Confucianism into the non-religious, practical learning of self cultivation (Sawada, 2004).

Buddhism, too, experienced a major reset forced by the modern construct of religion. Since the medieval period, Buddhism and Shinto had maintained a syncretistic coexistence, and

most Japanese people could not distinguish a Shinto *kami* from a Buddhist bodhisattva. However, once the necessity of creating Japan as a modern nation-state and its absolute monarchy were realized in the early Meiji period, this syncretism between Shinto and Buddhism was no longer allowed. In order for the emperor to have the absolute power to control the new modern nation-state and its centralized authority, revival of the emperor's religious status was necessary; Japan needed to have its own monotheistic religion to compete with western counterparts. The first reset the government attempted was the order for the separation of Shinto and Buddhism in 1868. The councilors of the state prohibited Buddhist words such as *bosatsu* in Shinto shrines, the use of Buddhist ritual tools in Shinto services, and Buddhist deities were renamed Shinto *kami*. Shinto's burial rites by Shinto clergy were reinstated, and former Shinto-Buddhist priests who ran the shrines were forced to return to lay status, and later began joining the Shinto clergy. Thus, in order to nationalize Shinto to justify the imperial sovereignty, the government decided to "purify" Shinto from the foreign influence of Buddhism (Murakami, 1980).

This separation of Shinto and Buddhism consequently caused the persecution of Buddhism (*haibutu kishaku*) throughout the nation. In this order for the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, the government repeatedly stressed that the order was not for attacking and destroying Buddhism, and stated that "the instructions should be carried out peacefully" (Murakami, 1980, p. 25). However, the order resulted in violent attacks on Buddhist institutions including destruction of Buddhist statues, scriptures, tools, and even temples themselves. This persecution was led by local government officials, Shinto priests, Confucianists, and Hirata Kokugaku scholars. In Toyama domain, for example, they saved one temple for each Buddhist sect, decreasing the number of temples by consolidation. The most extreme example was in Matsumoto domain, where people abolished all Buddhist temples, and forced the priests to do farming instead. Murakami argues that this movement of persecution was based on the anger of the masses, people's rage against Buddhism, which had been an authority in the hierarchy of the feudal system, through the leadership of the lowest officials in the new government (Murakami, 1980). Despite the fact that Confucian ideologies were closely knitted with Edo politics, Confucianism did not experience such direct attacks for it had not coalesced with Shinto as much as Buddhism had. The bashing Buddhism experienced was a result of the profound syncretistic relationship between Shinto and Buddhism.

The leading principle of separation of Shinto and Buddhism ushered by the Meiji Restoration, however, came to be revised after a few years. In order to oppose the advance of Christianity, the government changed its explicit efforts to nationalize Shinto and attempted to reset the role of Buddhism again. This time, government officials promoted Shinto-Buddhist amalgamation, for they decided that Shinto needed more supporters to compete with its western counterparts. In 1871, the government adopted the Great Teaching, which was a syncretistic policy of indoctrination using Shinto, Buddhism, and the various folk religions in the Great Teaching Academy (*Taikyō-in*). However, the propagation of the Shinto-Buddhist amalgamation failed in three years, for it was too impractical to try to reunify Shinto and Buddhism under a joint administration (Earhart, 1982). Because of this failure, the government decided to create a different control over Buddhism; it allowed each Buddhist sect to establish its own teaching agency and to propagate on the basis of its own doctrine. In exchange for this tentative autonomy, the government created a new system of taking full control of the individual Buddhist sects by means of the chief priest (Murakami, 1980). Buddhism thus seemed to revive from the persecution in the beginning of Meiji, yet its reestablishment was due to the adaptation to the hegemony. Unlike Confucianism which was led to lose its identity by the government, Buddhism did not suffer from its identity crisis, and ranked as second in the religious hierarchy. However, it could not survive without compliance to state control and subjugation to the imperial deity.

In the area of new religions, the same manipulation by the government occurred. In the 1880s, Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō became very popular among the farmers, merchants, and industrialists who experienced social upheaval and the adaptation of capitalism during the late Edo and the early Meiji. Both religions had doctrines of worldly salvation, and gained

popularity first in the Osaka area and then quickly spread throughout the country. Tenrikyō founder Nakayama Miki (1798-1887) and Konkōkyō's Kawate Bunjirō (1814-83) suffered due to the government's control of religious belief. Both of them continuously refused to become subordinate to State Shinto and were arrested repeatedly throughout their lifetimes. In 1882 the government separated State Shinto as a government institution from other Shinto-affiliated organizations. These Shinto-affiliates were named sect Shinto, and supervised as religious subdivisions of State Shinto (Earhart, 1982). In the 1880s, by the time both Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō had developed into nationwide organizations, these new religions prepared doctrines to comply with State Shinto and requested to be recognized as individual sects to avoid further oppression and to legalize their missionary work. After two religions were officially recognized as independent sects, Konkyōkyo in 1900 and Tenrikyō in 1908, they continued to serve national interests and gained further popularity (Murakami, 1980).

Sect Shinto was given privileges and protection from the government which treated its leaders as imperial appointees. However, most sect Shinto religions were diverse in doctrine and tradition and some had very little to do with Shinto ideology. This government strategy of enclosure was intended to solidify the status of State Shinto which still lacked popular support and recognition and to compete with Christianity which represented the west. Murakami explains that this phenomenon is a modern ideological manipulation, stating that "various popular and folk religious groups of the late Edo and the early Meiji were brought under control and organized as the sect Shinto, to be used as support for the State Shinto system" (Murakami, 1980, p. 46).

At the same time, the embodiment of the concept of new modern religion, State Shinto was intentionally disguised as something non-religious by the government. When the government established the policy of separating the State Shinto from religion in general in 1882, it gave State Shinto a special status beyond its religious function, one of performing national rituals. The legislation set up a framework in which State Shinto was not a religion. Although the Meiji Constitution established in 1889 supposedly allowed religious freedom, in reality it was only pretence of religious tolerance to Christianity for the benefit of the west. The government needed the emperor's religious authority as the most powerful ideological tool for control of the people. After the 1890s, the meaning of the word *shūkyō* came to be defined as a full commitment to a particular doctrine to the implicit exclusion of others, for the government created a model of people's universal commitment to State Shinto. This definition of that word remained the same until the end of World War II.

As we have seen, in rapidly westernizing Meiji Japan, the binary opposition of true religion and false religion which was brought by the system of Christianity produced the ideological construct of the new concept of religion. The State Shinto as its product was shaped to function as a Japanese version of monotheistic religion. The contemporary presumption that the word *shūkyō* emerged naturally in history has to be carefully questioned; the establishment of the modern definition of religion repressed several important Japanese religious processes and orientations, which the Meiji government wanted to reset.

## 3. Contemporary Religiosity in Japan

Japan's defeat in World War II dramatically changed religious dynamics in the country. State Shinto was dismantled by order of the Allied occupation forces in 1945 and later the emperor publicly denied his divinity. In 1946, a new constitution was promulgated, to go into effect in 1947. The postwar constitution, which guaranteed unconditional religious freedom, triggered a revival of original Japanese religious orientations and new religions rapidly grew in this tolerant climate (Tamura, 2000). We have seen that westernization in the early Meiji period brought about binaries such as the West versus Other, monotheism versus polytheism, doctrine versus practice, nation versus individual. Especially, the binary opposition between true religion and false religion influenced the formation of the notion of the term *shūkyō*. True religion connotes the exclusive commitment to a particular belief system according to a particular sacred doctrine, while false religion means multiple commitments to various beliefs through a number of secular practices. The term *shūkyō* was based on true religion, leaving

out the original Japanese religious orientations. Post war religiosity in Japan which lost the ultimate centrality of the divine emperor deconstructs such a differentiation, and starts to show tolerance, diversity and multiplicity which the word *shūkyō* could not connote. The following discussion will examine how the assumptions of true religion are deconstructed in the contemporary religious orientations.

## 3.1 Monotheistic Exclusiveness versus Polytheistic Multiplicity

As we have seen, the Meiji constitution advocated religious freedom, yet this religious tolerance was only possible on condition of compliance with the absolute authority of the emperor. After monotheistic centrality disappeared with the dismantlement of State Shinto, multiple affiliations in original Japanese religious orientations revived. Ian Reader explains that in Japan, there was syncretistic affiliation of Shinto-Buddhism for centuries, and this multiplicity of belonging has been a recurrent theme in Japanese religious history. Even during the prewar period, people could not differentiate between *kami* and bodhisattva. Yet this does not mean that deities were treated equally. The divine imperial lineage was supreme. It was impossible for other religious organizations to totally escape from the whole State Shinto hierarchy during the prewar period. Once the western concept of centrality and monotheism was realized in the early Meiji Japan, polytheistic diversity disappeared and "the center" was created; supremacy in Japanese religious dynamics was designed to belong to the emperor, and other religious organizations could not help but accept this hierarchy.

It was immediately after the war that this traditional multiplicity of religious affiliations came to be explicitly observed. Multiple affiliations in contemporary Japanese religious culture need not involve Shinto-Buddhism syncretism, but can incorporate more religious activities. In particular, Japanese new religions often encourage their members to obey the social obligations of Shinto and Buddhism as well as to follow their own doctrines. Reader introduces Earhart's study on Gedatsukai, a new religion with a Buddhist background as the best example. Gedatsukai teaches its members that they should respect traditional values and practice Shinto and Buddhism, while also following the religion's teachings and practices (Reader, 1991).

Religious organizations that require exclusive adherence to their doctrines have not been very common in Japan. Even the followers of religions which forbid their members to participate in other religious orientations do not always adhere to such rules. The examples are Sōka Gakkai and Pure Land Buddhism: Sōka Gakkai advocates that its members must follow the absolute truth in thirteenth-century Japanese priest Nichiren's teachings, and that other religious doctrines and practices are heretical. As Richard Hughes Seager (2006) points out, it is well known that in the 1930s and 40s Gakkai's founder Makiguchi Tsunesaburō refused to capitulate to the demands of the state, stating that the emperor had no divinity. He and the second leader Toda Jōsei were charged with lèse-majéste, and Makiguchi died in prison in 1944. These two leaders' defiance and faith in Nichiren's teachings is said to reflect contemporary Gakkai doctrine. However, in reality many Gakkai members participate in some religious activities such as attending shrines and praying for good luck outside of the Gakkai's religious doctrine. The case of Jōdo Shinshū believers shows a similar attitude which explicitly indicates religious pluralism in contemporary Japan. The Jōdo Shinshū sect teaches absolute faith in the Amida Buddha whose compassion will lead them to rebirth in the Pure Land after death. To participate in other religious events or practices, such as asking help from other sources and obtaining talismans, is regarded as lack of faith. However, Kaneko Satoru's study clarifies that members do participate in all the other general socio-religious activities and events; the statistics shows that 43 per cent of the members maintain a household Shinto altar, with 17 per cent obtaining amulets, and 13 per cent praying regularly for this-worldly benefit and good luck (Reader, 1991).

Data from The Religion Almanac (Shūkyō nenkan) most clearly proves the fact of multiple affiliations. In 1996, about 70 per cent of the population, over 87 million people, were classified as Buddhist, about 93 percent of the population, over 116 million people, as Shinto, about 1 million as Christian, and 10 million as other religions. The total comes to 215 million

members in Japanese religious organizations, and the fact that the actual population of Japan was 125 million shows that a very large number of people are registered to more than one religion. This number was not considered very accurate since most religious organizations in Japan tend to provide inflated numbers of their membership by counting every member of a household or anyone who attends their meetings and events. However, this statistics shows how contemporary Japanese people have a recognized sense of religious affiliation and that this sense of affiliation is multiple and diverse (Ishii, 1997). These facts suggest that multiple religious affiliation does not mean that Japanese people have an "inferior" sense of religiosity; there is an incredible number of religious organizations in contemporary Japan. It is necessary to overcome the modern presumption that multiplicity and non-exclusivity in Japanese religiosity can be used to distinguish "true" or "false" religion; multiple affiliations does function to enhance the religious dynamic in contemporary Japan.

We have looked at cases where religious affiliations by participants become increasingly diverse and flexible due to the disappearance of centrality in Japanese religion in the post war period. The same change occurs not only in the side of participants but also in the side of organizers; the guidance of the religious organization for the participants becomes flexible, showing tolerance to the participant's freedom. New religions such as Mahikari, for example, recruit many participants to the seminars or meetings to gain more memberships. However, in the case of Mahikari, more than 50 per cent of participants drop out of their courses, for attendance is not mandatory. Sōka Gakkai too changed its forceful recruiting methods after the third leader Ikeda Daisaku became president. Among major religions, Shinto, which suffered the most from the removal of governmental support just after the war, appeared to lose its role in post war society, yet it revived as a flexible religion with multiple faces. John K. Nelson's detailed anthropological study of Kamigamo Shrine suggests that contemporary Shinto came to flourish because of its non-central, flexible, tolerant nature. While State Shinto had a centralized dogma and absolute leadership, contemporary Shinto explicitly reflects its traditional characteristics such as no central dogma, no particular religious leader, and no sacred text. However, neither doctrine nor institutional demand damages Shinto's socio-cultural practices such as providing festivals, baby-dedications, marriages, casting out misfortune. And for many people, shrines function simply as a place for sightseeing (Nelson, 2000).

Nelson's fieldwork at Kamigamo Shrine shows how Shinto shrines have multifunctional roles in the neighborhood. His observations indicate that a majority of visitors come to the shrine in order to interact in some way with the religious ideology of the site, yet few of these visitors would consider themselves worshipers. The geographical setting of the shrine with its pleasing natural surroundings allows visitors to have the freedom to approach the site in their own ways, mainly for sightseeing. The open layout of the shrine as well as the signs and markers on the sites are subtle and not controlling. Most visitors, however, behave according to the shrine's cultural logic and attempt to pray. There are several ways to approach the inner sanctuary, yet no proper course or way of venerating the deity. This fluid condition enables visitors to structure their visit at their will. In addition to the fluidity of the site itself and the ways of worship, the absence of the authoritative presence of priests helps visitors to interact with the site in their subjective ways (Nelson, 2000). Nelson (2000) stresses that this public freedom of expression is "inherent to the structural longevity of the institution of shrine Shinto and evokes an individual's desire for similar freedoms as he or she goes about life in modern world" (p.51). Contemporary Shinto does not impose on visitors specific adherence to its teaching, and allows them to visit the site whatever their purposes are. This tolerance greatly helped Shinto to revive in such a short period of time. As we have seen, the side of the organizers becomes tolerant and flexible to respond to the needs of the participants who seek multiple religious experiences. The prosperity of religious organizations and the high visit rates for religious sites clarify that multiple affiliations activate Japanese religious dynamics. Religious plurality does not cause conflicts between religious organizations; rather it enhances values in each religion. It is a modern constructed idea to consider such multiplicity as something not truly religious. Multiplicity is one of the most significant features of Japanese religiosity.

## 3.2 Doctrine versus Practice

Japanese religion has placed importance on practice -- participation, custom, action, ritual, and belonging -- in its history. It is true that Buddhism which possesses numerous doctrines has developed detailed studies of texts and beliefs, but it also has offered a set of rituals and religious austerities to go along with doctrines. In Japanese religious dynamics, doctrine always has accompanied practice, and practical pursuit rather than religious faith has been the more primal phenomenon since the prehistoric period. However, as we have seen, the modern construction of the definition of religion created the ultimate doctrine to legitimate the authority and divinity of the emperor. The Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890 illustrated that national doctrine advocated absolute obedience to the Nation and the imperial tradition stating, "should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth." (Mullins et al, 1993, p. 81). The Rescript itself played the role of the creed of State Shinto, imposed upon all Japanese people a particular moral and religious doctrine, and maintained a powerful hold on national moral education until the end of World War II.

Major religious practices were subordinate to this doctrine, for rituals and customs had to observe the rules in the Rescript and the constitution. For example, the new religion Ōmoto which has been active since the 1890s repeatedly tried to comply with the ideologies of the nationalism and the imperialism, and attempted to become a registered sect Shinto organization several times. It even organized quasi-military preaching units called *chokurei-gun* in 1916, and the ultra-right wing organization called Showa Shinsei-kai (Showa Sacred Society) in 1934. Even though Ōmoto was affiliated with Sect Shinto and subjected to the right wing ideal of the "reconstruction of Japan" as a divine country, the organization underwent major prosecution twice when its practices became very popular (Tamura, 2000).

Post war religion is completely liberated from the strict regulations imposed by authority, and diverse religious practices come to be performed at liberty. The role of practice in contemporary Japanese religion is the overwhelmingly primary element. For example, Reader argues that situations such as a death in a family demand actions which express the latent religiosity of contemporary Japanese people. Japanese people "become" practicing Buddhists on certain occasions related to the deceased: a wake is usually held on the evening of the death or the next day; the funeral is held on the day following the wake unless that day is an inauspicious day; cremation and burial are held within hours of the funeral. When memorial services are held on the seventh day and the forty-ninth day after the funeral, their intense association with the Buddhist mode ends. This association is reawakened during seasonal festivals or anniversaries of the death (Reader, 1991).

Some scholars of Japanese Buddhism criticizes the formalism in contemporary Buddhism, dealing only with necessary death rituals and not teaching its philosophical doctrine of enlightenment; a renowned scholar of Buddhism, Tamamuro Taijō, terms present day Buddhism "Funeral Buddhism" (*sōshiki bukkyō*) claiming that the Buddhism today is solely about mortuary rituals, losing its power to bring healing and good fortune to followers. Not only Tamamuro but also other major religious scholars argue that this corruption is not due to the *danka* system which the Edo *bakufu* established, but to the priests who ingratiated themselves with authority (Tamura, 2000). However, this corruption theory is based on the dichotomy between true religion and false religion, in which the latter is condemned for lacking its philosophy and dealing mainly with popular forms of practices. Stephen G. Covell (2005) introduces Jacqueline Stone and Ribin Habito's work on Heian Buddhism and Nam-lin Hur's study on Edo Buddhism which describe the harmonious relationship between doctrine and practice, and argues that the binary opposition between true and false is a modern subjective assumption.

It does not mean that belief is rejected or regarded as unimportant in contemporary religious life. Even though Japanese people seem to follow formalistic death rituals, their latent Buddhism is manifest, for they act, even if only temporarily, with religious sincerity. Also, the study shows remarkably high levels of belief and devotion in individual activities and

asceticism. Reader (1991) points out that action precedes belief and this action is not in a religious sense dependent on religious doctrine. In contemporary Japanese religious orientations, it is rather practice brought about by specific occasions that helps to awake a sense of religiosity that nurtures the seeds of belief. For example, the Sōtō Zen sect is aware that rituals and ancestral ceremonies bring about a profound relationship between their members and the temple. Much of its religious teachings are about social obligations of ancestor veneration, and through rituals the formal relationship sometimes becomes deeper, nourishing the sense of belief in its members. Not only contemporary Sōtō Zen sect but also Buddhism throughout its history in Japan is based on the realization that belief develops though contact and action, stating "ritualism may at times be formal but it can also progress in the right circumstance into committed participation and belief" (Reader, 1991, p.17).

The fact that practice comes first in Japanese religious orientations is manifested most clearly in new religions. Winton Davis's study (1980) on Mahikari which advocates spiritual healing techniques by hand called *okiyome*. The group has a practice place called *dōjō* and the interested participants can join the seminars to study their teachings and healing practices. The seminars last two days and the participants are able to give healing power to others with a special amulet regardless of their acceptance of the doctrine itself. The injunction of belief is very common in other Japanese new religions. Another example is the Sōka Gakkai, the biggest Buddhist organization. Sōka Gakkai asserts that one can solve all personal and social problems through absolute faith in the Lotus Sutra. The followers recite the chant called *daimoku*, "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo," a phase literally means "Hail to the Lotus Sutra of the dharma." This practice of chanting and following daily liturgy called *gongyō* is the ultimate and only way to attain one's goal. This practice does not demand the prior belief of Nichiren's philosophy. Instead, the Gakkai members insist that performing the practice will prove its validity. When followers achieve their own goal through the performing of the practice, theories and beliefs will be taught to support their successful experience (Seager, 2006). Thus, as we have seen, the State Shinto doctrine and the ideology imposed by government had the power to control all religious practices during the prewar period. It was belief that shaped the ways of practices. Complete religious freedom enables religious organizations to place their practices first, but it does not mean that practice does has no relationship with doctrine. To understand that doctrine or practice has its supremacy according to the binary opposition simplifies the complexity of the relationship between the two. In contemporary Japanese religiosity, it is practice which helps to nourish belief. Practice and doctrine function complementarily in postmodern Japanese society. Japanese people perform religious practices when situational necessities arise, and feel religious sincerity, albeit such sincerity is temporal. Effective practices often lead to more profound understandings of doctrines and beliefs.

## 3.3 The Sacred versus the Secular

Related to the argument of the binaries between centrality and diversity, between doctrine and practice, there is the binary between the sacred and the secular according to the dichotomy of "true" and "false" religion. The modern constructed notion of religion places importance on the sacred text, the sacred deity or not-this-worldly interests. For example, the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education which gave doctrinal backup to State Shinto proclaimed that the emperor is not only the absolute center of the nation but also the sacred living god, and the descendant of a divine imperial line. The constitution defined the emperor both to be "sacred and inviolable," asserting such divinity is based on the imperial "line unbroken ages for eternal" (Gluck, 1985, pp. 77 and 142). The Imperial Rescript on Education declared the sacredness of the imperial line, stating "our imperial ancestors from Amaterasu and Jinmu through the unbroken line of historical emperors" in its initial phrase. The emphasis on the imperial linage indicates the government's intention to treat the divinity of the Meiji emperor not as one time only but as something continuous from past to future in order to justify the emperor's absolute authority. These texts became the official confirmation that Shinto doctrine had its validity from the beginning of national time. It was the first time in Japanese history that official documents certified the absolute power of the emperor. Especially, the Rescript was intensively used for education to spread nationalism and emperor

worship. Thus, State Shinto doctrine and the imperial texts of 1889-1890 together with the emperor himself were treated as the sacred triumvirate that represented the essence of Japan versus the west. These policies of the Imperial government helped the concept of religion to connote sacredness in modern Japan.

However, Japanese religion has been predominantly dealing with secular and practical benefit from the earliest religious history. Certainly, even though venerating something sacred and concern with life after death are still important factors in Japanese contemporary religious orientations, fulfilling secular wishes through practice is the mainstream in Japanese religions. Some scholars claim that it is the Japanese new religions that promote the idea of *genze riyaku* (this-worldly benefit or practical benefits in this lifetime), which generally involve primarily material or physical gains such as good health, healing, success in this lifetime. They maintain the position that it is a relatively new idea that religion stresses such immediate secular benefits from religious practices. Studies conducted in the 1950s by Buddhist and Shinto scholars often criticized new religions' incomplete doctrines and focused only on this-worldly benefits by magical practices. There is an underlying assumption that focus on the secular issues in religious orientations is something "false" or "wrong," lacking theologically "sacred" and "true" doctrines. However, Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr. argue that the phenomenon of seeking this-worldly, practical benefits existed since the very early history of Japanese religion. It is a modern presumption that popular, pragmatic, and secular interests in religious activities are something not traditional and are contrary to the doctrinal, sacred, and theological approaches (Reader and Watanabe, 1998).

Reader and Tanabe assert that the economics and materialism of this-worldly benefit is an intrinsic feature of Japanese religion in general, including Buddhism which is usually considered as a religion of other-worldliness, renunciation and transcendental wisdom. In fact, Buddhist temples have long functioned to promote practical benefits through prayers, petitions, and the purchase of talismans and amulets. These temples which offer this-worldly benefit are not exceptional; the temples which are famous for austere religious practices and behaviors also affirm such benefits. For example, the head temple of the Sōtō Zen sect, Eiheiji, is famous for its austere training for its monks, and is one of the most important sites for praying for this-worldly benefits. Several other important Sōtō Zen sect temples were renowned for their status as prayer temples at which to petition for secular interests and benefits. Actually, these predominant roles of Buddhist temples, both as centers of meditation and training to achieve enlightenment and as centers of prayer for this-worldly benefits, are not contradictory but complementary. Monks and trainers do not see a contradiction between these two roles (Reader and Watanabe, 1998).

Reader and Tanabe deconstruct the presumption that the pursuit of this-worldly benefit in temples does not have any relationship with Buddhist doctrine, faith and philosophy. They argue against this premise, showing that Buddhist doctrines in fact affirm the secular interests and desires of followers. The sutras themselves teach the power of Buddhism to reward people's secular desires and wishes. It is not syncretic assimilation of folk practices or expediential needs that makes Buddhist temples a center for this-worldly benefits. Among many Buddhist doctrines, the most influential one, the *Lotus Sutra,* shows that Shakamuni actually mentions such secular interests and benefits. He preaches to people so that they can gain excellent benefits, and once they understand the Law, "they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences" (Reader and Watanabe, 1998, p. 73). It is clear that Shakamuni affirms the good things of the present world through the teaching of Buddhist laws. This section of the Lotus Sutra has been considered to be forgotten by scholars until the modern period, but in fact it was well remembered and modified as a catch phrase among people. The modified phrase "tranquility in the present life and a good place in the next." is found in *Eiga monogatari* (Tale of flowering fortunes) which describes the prosperity of the Fujiwara clan in the Heian period and carved in the stone column at the entrance to the Ima Kumano Temple in present day Kyoto. This section of the sutra manifests that the affirmation of this worldly benefits in Buddhism is not an East Asian invention, but rather from original Indian Buddhist teachings (Reader and Watanabe, 1998).

On the other hand, other Buddhist sutras explicitly deny secular human desires and wishes. The condemnation of passion and selfishness is the mainstream understanding of the Buddhism as a worldly denial religion. This affirmation and denial of secular desire in religious doctrines is obviously contradictory, yet the example of another sutra resolves such a contradiction. One Section of the *Flower Garland Sutra* mentions that the Buddha Vairocana (Dainichi) promises people salvation from the miserable human condition caused by secular desires. The sutra condemns human passions such as desire, love, and greed, yet it does not recommend their renunciation, but rather their fulfillment in this world through Vairocana. Reader and Tanabe explain that "to satisfy one's own desire is greed; to have a Buddha satisfy one's own desire is a blessing" (Reader and Watanabe, 1998, p.81). This is the theoretical framework of this-worldly benefit; *riyaku* are rewards given by compassionate divinities who affirm the secular, selfish interests of human beings but allow for the morality of praying to the gods, who grant them wishes. Hence, it is a mistake to presume that Buddhism, especially in its sacred doctrines, absolutely denies the secular wishes of human beings. Buddhism rather affirms this-worldly wishes and grants them when they sincerely petition to the deities.

On the other hand, Shinto does not have such a contradiction of affirming and denying secular desires and practical benefits. It is true that Shinto in general is concerned with purification and sacredness but it has never denied the existence of secular wishes and the granting of this-worldly benefits. Rather, ideas of purification and sacredness help to justify people's secular concerns such as spells against misfortunes. Reader and Tanabe point out that Shinto's doctrines and texts explain the fact that Shinto has existed for this-worldly benefit; Shinto mythology and legends such as the *Kojiki* state that the role of Shinto deities is to provide people the good things which make life in this world more fruitful. Shrines such as those for Hachiman, Inari and Tenjin gather many petitioners seeking this-worldly benefits. The comprehensive study of Japanese Inari worship by Karen A. Smyers (1999) shows that Inari worship is not group oriented but rather individual, establishing a personal relationship between Inari and the worshipper. This personal connection deepens when their secular wishes such as good harvest, business prosperity, and household security are repeatedly answered. Reader and Tanabe also mention that to venerate a particular *kami* in a particular shrine establishes a close connection between faith and acquisition of this-worldly benefits. Shinto and its doctrines never deny the desirability of secular interests and wishes, and have continued to provide practical benefits to worshippers. As we have seen, not only new religions but also traditional religions such as Buddhism and Shinto have the doctrinal backup to affirm secular interests, and promise to provide answers for such requests through faith in sacred gods or Buddha. Sacredness and secularity are not exclusive ideas in Japanese traditional religious orientations, rather they rely on each other; we find that doctrines promise that secular interests are fulfilled through reliance on deities. Believing in magical healing in the new religious organization or purchasing amulets in temples and shrines appears almost non-religious in the eyes of westerners, however in such commercialized activities, there is the religious dynamic that reliance on the sacred through practices fulfills secular wishes. To differentiate religions depending on sacredness overlooks the complex relationship that sacredness and secularity are actually intertwined with each other in Japanese contemporary religiosity.

## 4. Conclusion

The importing of western notions of religion, in particular Christianity, created binary oppositions such as monotheism versus polytheism, exclusiveness versus religious tolerance, doctrine versus practice, in the early Meiji period. The realization of the difference between West and Other also brought binary opposition between true religion and false religion. True religion is based on monotheism, doctrine, and sacredness, whereas false religion implies multiplicity, practice, and secularity. The term *shūkyō* was constructed under the influence of true religion, and that word thus excluded Japanese religious orientations which have been profoundly related to multiple participations, practices, and secular concerns. The modern "religion" in Meiji directly meant State Shinto, the Japanese version of Christianity as Itō Hirofumi mentioned. Formation of State Shinto suppressed and reset other religious organizations until the end of the World War II.

After the State Shinto system was dismantled, post war Japanese religiosity started to show tolerance, diversity and multiplicity which the word *shūkyō* could not connote. The post war religiosity deconstructs the binary oppositions derived from the dichotomy of true religion versus false religion. The first binary between monotheistic exclusivity and polythemic multiplicity becomes invalid when the new constitution guaranteed unconditional religious freedom. The post war religious tolerance revives multiple affiliations of participants and flexible reactions of religious organizations. It is often observed that the existence of multiple religions in one culture causes some competitions and conflicts. Yet, religious plurality in contemporary Japan does not cause conflicts between religious organizations; rather it enhances values in each religion. The second binary opposition between doctrine and practice becomes irrelevant to describe contemporary Japanese religiosity after the Imperial Rescript on Education and the Meiji constitution lost their validity. From the early history of Japanese religion, practice has preceded doctrine, but these two are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it is practice which helps followers to understand doctrine and to nourish belief. Practice and doctrine act synergistically in postwar Japanese society. Effective practices often lead to more profound understandings of doctrines and beliefs. The final binary opposition between the sacred and the secular becomes an inappropriate opposition in Japanese religion. Not only new religions but also traditional religions such as Buddhism and Shinto have the doctrinal backup to affirm secular interests, and provide the answers for such requests through faith in the sacred. Sacredness and secularity are not contradictory ideas in Japanese traditional religious orientations, rather they are functioning complementarily; doctrines promise that secular interests are fulfilled through reliance on deities. Thus, to categorize religions according to the binary between true religion and false religion disregards the fact that doctrine and practice, the sacred and the secular are interrelated, and the fact that the religious harmony of multiple affiliations does not create conflicts in Japanese contemporary religiosity. Japanese religious dynamics can be one of the best examples that challenge the drive of dividing things into two oppositions and privileging one. The dynamic represents diversity, multiplicity, and flexibility which transcend simplistic dichotomies and activate postmodern religious movements.

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