Religion as Political Postulate in the Writings of the Modern Buddhist Philosopher Inoue Enryō

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Academic discourse on religion in late nineteenth-century Japan led not only to new theoretical reflections about religious doctrine but also to a proto-sociological analysis of religious institutions and practices. On his first inspection tour to the West, Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919) examined the institutional relationship between religion and the state in the increasingly imperialist Western countries. In his philosophical attempt to justify religion under modern circumstances, Enryō undertook a functional analysis of religion within the framework of the nation-state. As Enryō was aware that in an age of empirical science theoretical claims about transcendent reality were unpersuasive, he explored pragmatic arguments that postulate religion as an indispensable complement to politics. By enhancing the morality, optimism, and mental peace of the people, he argued, religion secures the social stability that is the first condition for the successful operation of the state. This article reconstructs this argument using several works from Inoue's middle period (ca. 1889–1902). In the conclusion, it will reflect upon the character and provenance of Inoue's pragmatic theory of religion. In particular, it will discuss the postcolonial critique of the concept of religion and the paternalism apparent in Enryō's argument.

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A COMPENSATION THEORY OF RELIGION

The early Inoue Enryō (ca. 1881–1888) is known particularly for his effective criticism of Christianity in *Shinri kinshin* 真理金針 (Golden Compass of Truth, 1886) and *Bukkyō katsuron* 仏教活論 (Living Discourse on Buddhism, 1887).[1] It is less well known that Enryō had emphasized from his very first publications that there existed a phenomenon to be feared even more than that of Christianity, namely, the growing number of "nonreligious people" (*mukyōsha* 無教者) in Japan.[2] In order to differentiate between the various debates, Enryō distinguished several levels of discourse in *Shinri kinshin*.[3] On the first level, Buddhists have to face antireligious criticism from science and politics in the public sphere. The second level can be specified as the *inter*religious level on which interreligious dialogue as well as comparative discourses or apologetic debates about the advantages and disadvantages, or the truth and untruth, of different religions are located. On the third level, *intra*religious doctrinal debates between the different sects and strands within Buddhism are located. From this it becomes clear that Enryō never doubted that Buddhism falls into the same category as Christianity. Christianity and Buddhism are in competition with each other because they are both religions, and yet they are on the same side against antireligious sentiments, likewise because they are both religions.

Although most of Enryō's writings on Buddhism revolve around its philosophy and the prospects for its reform, the more general question of how to justify religion as such represents another strand of his thinking, which did not cease even in his later years (ca. 1906–1919). Enryō's firm standpoint as a man of religion can be seen in his very last piece of writing where he announced the creation of a new religion called the Philosophy Sect (Tetsugakushū 哲学宗) based in the Temple of Philosophy on Mount Morals (Dōtokusan Tetsugakuji 道徳山哲学寺).[4] The latter is another name for his Temple Garden of Philosophy (Tetsugakudō Kōen 哲学堂公園), which he built in an area that lies within today's Nakano 中野 Ward in Tokyo. In this essay, I will try to reconstruct from Enryō's middle-period writings his position concerning the necessity of religion. I will thereby answer the question of what Enryō considered to be the essential characteristics of religion that Buddhism and Christianity share.

After graduating from Tokyo University in 1885, Enryō was a stipendiary priest of the Ōtani 大谷 branch of Shin Buddhism still formally tied to his sect. However, instead of returning to the head temple of his sect in Kyoto or even to his family

[1] IS 3: 2–249 and IS 3: 22–188. Enryō's writings are found in *Inoue Enryō senshū* 井上円了選集 (Selected Writings of Inoue Enryō), cited as "IS."

[2] Miura 2007, p. 71.

[3] IS 3: 18.

[4] Inoue 2015b.

temple in a small village in the vicinity of Nagaoka 長岡, Enryō interpreted his role as that of a lobbyist for Buddhism in Tokyo. He was convinced that the case for religion had to be made in the new capital. Enryō was aware that the progressive government did not consider religion a relevant aid for modernizing Japan. Rather, it was perceived as a problem—if not the "greatest problem" of all.[5] Although religion was a constant issue in the political discussions among the members of the Iwakura 岩倉 Embassy (1871–1873),[6] the embassy—which had the mission to inspect the institutions and technologies of powerful Western countries—largely ignored religious organizations. Without mentioning Christianity explicitly, the Ministry of Doctrine's statement on freedom of faith in 1875 and the granting of institutional autonomy to Buddhist and Shinto sects in 1884 had made apparent the political trend to separate religion and the state.[7] Anticipating that the constitution to be promulgated in 1889 would grant freedom of religion, the feeling of crisis among Buddhist leaders in the face of energetic Christian missionary activities was exacerbated. Enryō, although certainly informed about the earlier Shin Buddhist missions to Europe,[8] felt there was a lack of information about religious institutions in the West and decided to travel to, and inspect, the Western countries on his own. As Marti-Oroval's research has brought to light, just three days before leaving for the United States in 1888, Enryō met with a member of the inner circle of the government who was also part of the Iwakura Embassy. In all probability, it was Inoue Kowashi 井上毅 (1844–1895) who pointed out to Enryō the French system of governing religions. The French legislation granted freedom of faith but still distinguished between officially "recognized" and "nonrecognized religions." And indeed, after his return to Japan, Enryō put forth his proposal in *Nihon seikyō ron* 日本政教論 (Treatise on Politics and Religion in Japan, 1889) citing the politics of Austria and France as models.[9]

The episode shows moreover that Enryō's overseas inspection tour was already based on the premise that Buddhism's role as a religion in Japanese society was comparable to the role of Christianity in the West. Even more so, it is hard to imagine that Enryō—while visiting the cemeteries and cathedrals of Christianity, watching elaborate rituals and inspecting Byzantine artworks, meeting Catholic priests in brocade robes, and seeing old people praying on their knees—doubted for a moment that Christianity and Buddhism were two instances of the same social phenomenon. If the category of religion comprising "Christianity and Buddhism as its dual prototypes" had not yet been

[5] Note in this regard the title of Trent Maxey's *The "Greatest Problem": Religion and State Formation in Meiji Japan*. Maxey 2014.

[6] Maxey 2014, pp. 72–92.

[7] Maxey 2014, pp. 133, 177–82.

[8] Krämer 2015, pp. 88–113, chapter 4.

[9] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 23: 66; Marti-Oroval 2022; see also Maxey 2014, pp. 175–76.

established in Japan at that time,[10] Enryō surely would have conceived of it along these lines on his journey. In postcolonial scholarship it is, however, often assumed that the adoption of the Western concept of religion (translated as *shūkyō* 宗教) in Japan aided a distorted understanding of indigenous traditions.[11] In particular, it is held that the concept caused a shift away from an understanding of religion as something practical and public to an understanding of religion in terms of faith, privacy, and doctrine.[12] From the absence of a clear-cut equivalent to the modern term "religion" in early modern Japanese, scholars such as Jason Josephson make the further claim that "Japanese religion" was first "invented" by the adoption of the new Western category.[13]

The dominance of Western terminology in many parts of the former colonialized world may suggest some kind of *cognitive imperialism*. The Western academic discourses during the colonial age treated their objects without integrating the voices of those they were defining and categorizing.[14] However, the same cannot be said without qualification about Japan, one of the few countries that evaded colonialization by the aggressive imperialist nations. Applying the same model of power-driven semantic subjugation to the Japanese case robs the Japanese of their agency. Before assuming blind imitation or misled Occidentalism, one should first examine the rationales behind the intellectual appropriation and practical assimilation of the new semantic framework by Japanese religionists and politicians.[15] Monographs by Trent Maxey and Hans Krämer have superbly shown that it is not enough to look at terminology but that it is also necessary to observe the influence of the semantic opposition of the terms "religion" and "secular" on concrete institutional policies regarding Buddhism, Christianity, and also Shinto.[16]

Another institutional policy of particular importance in regard to the acculturation of Western semantic paradigms was the establishment of the first modern research university in Japan in 1877. As I have argued elsewhere, the integration into modern Japanese not only of the opposition of religion versus the secular but also of the semantic structure of philosophy and science on the one hand versus religion and superstition on the other—as well as of many other terms and concepts—entered a new phase with the foundation of Tokyo University.[17] It was here that the discourses of modern

[10] On the conceptual history of *shūkyō* 宗教 (religion) and its acculturation in modern Japan, see Krämer 2015, especially chapter 3; the quotation can be found on page 18.

[11] Isomae 2012, p. 227; Klautau 2012, pp. 26–36.

[12] Isomae 2003, p. 35; Josephson 2006.

[13] Josephson 2012.

[14] Paramore 2010.

[15] Krämer 2015, pp. 6–8; Schulzer 2019, pp. 37–42.

[16] Maxey 2014 and Krämer 2015.

[17] Schulzer 2019, p. 67.

Japanese humanities were taking shape in the very metalanguage Western and Japanese scholars alike continue to use today. I consider Enryō's arguments reconstructed in this essay as evidence that the term "religion" was less culturally predetermined and the terminology imported from the West afforded more intellectual freedom than postcolonial critiques assume.

Enryō's observation that Christianity was as integral a part of Western societies as Buddhism was of Japan resulted in new arguments about the political necessity of religion. In the first part of his *Ōbei kakkoku seikyō nikki* 欧米各国政教日記 (Journal on Religion and the State in Western Countries, 1889), published three months after he returned to Japan, we find a paragraph with the header "Politics and Religion are Like Two Sides of the Same Coin" (*Seiji to shūkyō wa hyōri no kankei o yū su*) 政治と宗教は表裏の関係を有す).

> Politicians should know that religion is the reverse side of politics. Religious people should know that politics is the face of religion. For example, in politics, however enlightened a ruler and his ministers may be, they cannot make each and every person in their country free and fully happy. However humane the ruler establishing the laws may be, he cannot bestow well-being equally in both quality and degree to each and every person, poor and rich, noble and low. And if there are those satisfied on the one side, there will necessarily be those dissatisfied on the other. If there are those content on the one side, there will be those discontent on the other. Such discontented and dissatisfied minds will necessarily feel depressed and fall ill, [or] they will [sooner or later] crack and riot. Yet, if we look at the reality, why is it that all those discontented with politics and those dissatisfied with the laws do not express their discontent and do not riot, but instead live for the most part satisfied and peacefully? This could not happen without the influence of religion. Those unable to find happiness externally in politics look for bliss internally in religion. Discontent with laws is channeled into religious satisfaction. Dissatisfied and discontented people all settle in the inner realm (*kyōri* 境裏) of attaining spiritual peace (*anjin ritsumei* 安心立命). If there were no religion, discontent with politics would inevitably be directed at politics.[18]

Enryō's argument in this paragraph is thoroughly pragmatic. Instead of broaching the question of religious truth, he recommends religion as a necessary complement to the deficient world of politics. There must be a world of religion because a world of

[18] *Ōbei kakkoku seikyō nikki*, IS 23: 31–32. All translations are by the author unless stated otherwise.

politics alone could never be stable. Religion compensates for the deficiencies in the social and political realm.[19] This is the most basic form of his argument, whose further development I will examine below. Drawing upon the "postulates of practical reason" of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), we can call Enryō's position "religion as a postulate of political reason," or "religion as political postulate." Kant believed that our hope for retribution in the afterlife originates in our ideal of the "Highest Good," which is defined as the convergence of morality and happiness. Since there is no empirical guaranty that happiness will be distributed proportionally to morality in this life, our expectation that justice will eventually prevail gives rise to the hope for an afterlife. Kant called this kind of "rational faith" a "postulate of practical reason."[20]

Paraphrasing Enryō's arguments in Kantian terms is not to say that Enryō was influenced by the German philosopher in his ideas about religion. His first and, as far as I can see, only serious attempt to study Kant was made around the year 1892. By then he was lecturing at his Philosophy Academy on the philosophy of religion based upon an English translation of a book by the German theologian Otto Pfleiderer (1839–1908).[21] In the section on Kant, Enryō comments on Kant's postulate of an immortal soul and is rather unimpressed and critical: "To say that the soul must be immortal so that the ends of morality can be achieved has some kind of logic to it. But to judge based on this that the soul is truly immortal must be regarded as a mistaken theory. However, Kant believed that his argument had the same certainty to it as a mathematical inference."[22]

Enryō got two things wrong here. First, it is not the moral ends that make an immortal soul necessary, but the realization of the Highest Good. For the convergence of perfect morality with perfect happiness is only possible if a proportionate allotment of suffering and happiness to evil and good persons, respectively, after death indeed takes place. Second, Kant did not believe that this line of thought made any ontological judgment about the immortality of the soul possible; much less did he believe that he had proved it with mathematical certainty. Enryō must have mistaken the word "postulate" in its mathematical sense as a kind of axiomatic truth. Kant merely pointed

[19] A similar point was made by Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) as early as 1872 in his influential *Sanjō kyōsoku hihan kenpakusho* 三条教則批判建白書 (Critique of the Three Standards of Instruction): "With religion one makes people good, with politics one makes people invest effort. If one can achieve harmony between the two, one has the so-called mutual dependence of politics and religion and the ideal balance between form and content" (Krämer 2015, p. 146). Rather than *compensation*, as per Enryō's argument, this can be called a theory of religion and politics as *complements*. Shimaji (along with Enryō) was a founding member of the Politics and Teaching Society (Seikyōsha 政教社; see below). He was also a lecturer at Enryō's Philosophy Academy.

[20] Kant (1788) 1908, pp. 110–11, 124–26.

[21] *Shūkyō tetsugaku*, IS 8: 321–573; Pfleiderer 1886.

[22] *Shūkyō tetsugaku*, IS 8: 461.

to the empirical fact that the human intuition that moral behavior *deserves* happiness is not satisfied in this world; from this disappointment springs forth our hope for justice in another world.

It is therefore difficult to imagine that Enryō was influenced by Kant in what I dub Enryō's "theory of religion as political postulate." The difference between Kant's postulate of practical reason and Enryō's postulate of political reason allows us to reflect upon the question of whether he should be read as a religious thinker or a political philosopher. Introducing Enryō as a "Buddhist philosopher" in the title of this article—although true for many of his writings—is not correct for all of them. There are certainly many (including the 3,500 pages on *yōkaigaku* 妖怪学 [mystery studies] or his *Sensō tetsugaku ippan* 戦争哲学一斑 [A Fragment of a Philosophy of War])[23] where he does not speak as a Buddhist at all, but solely as a philosopher. Whether the theory of religion introduced here is Buddhist in character or better understood as an instance of philosophy of religion more generally is debatable and will be given more consideration in the concluding discussion of this essay.

Yet even in his books about Buddhism, Enryō was not necessarily speaking as a Buddhist. At least it seems clear that the standpoint he rejected, or that he had overcome, was that of the Buddhist apologist. This is apparent in a lifelong slogan of his—*gokoku airi* 護国愛理 (protection of country, love of truth). This phrase reflects both the primacy he gives to the "love of truth" over dogma and—particularly relevant here—to his commitment to protecting Japan. Although *gokoku* a Buddhist term with a long history in East Asian Buddhism, it is Enryō's use of this idea that marks him as a philosopher (and arguably a nationalistic one) as opposed to a Buddhist scholar arguing along orthodox lines. In the history of East Asian Buddhism, the term *gokoku* served to recommend Buddhism to the political elite of a particular kingdom or empire. Revering the Three Jewels would have benefits for the ruler and his country in ways that ranged from heavenly protection by Buddhist deities to the employment of capable monks as court scribes.[24] Enryō instead does not start out from promises about Buddhism's potential benefits but takes the existence of the modern nation-state as his premise.[25] Looking at nation and society as an integrated whole or, as he also says, as a social organism,[26] he answers the question whether not only Buddhism but religion in

[23] Enryō's writings on *yōkaigaku* are collected in IS volumes 16–21. The book *Sensō tetsugaku ippan* (see Inoue 1894) is not included in IS.

[24] Balkwill and Benn 2022.

[25] Enryō's secular premise becomes very clear when compared with an apologetic treatise written by Gesshō 月性 (1817–1858), another Shin priest active a generation before Enryō. See Klautau 2021. Instead of calling to protect the country in order to protect the Dharma, like Gesshō, Enryō argues that the Dharma is necessary to protect the country.

[26] Shibata 2018, p. 11.

general is at all necessary in modern society. By pointing to the deficiencies of a nation without religion, he justifies religion from a functional perspective that would appeal to intellectuals and politicians in the secular sphere rather than to Buddhist clergy.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF RELIGION

Between writing the first and the second parts of *Ōbei kakkoku seikyō nikki*, Enryō published *Nihon seikyō ron*.[27] The Japanese term *seikyō* 政教, which appears in both titles, literally means "politics and teaching," leaving it unspecified whether *kyō* stands for religious teaching or secular education. In the case of the name Seikyōsha 政教社—a society Enryō cofounded with Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), Miyake Setsurei 三宅雪嶺 (1860–1945), and others just two months before going on his trip to the West—the secular rendering, "Politics and Teaching Society," seems more appropriate. Although Enryō's *Nihon seikyō ron* is a contribution to the overall program of the Politics and Teaching Society, the text was more specifically a political call for legal privileges for Buddhism to the disadvantage of Christianity. Hence, the translation "politics and religion" in the title of the work is more accurate.

Enryō's argument for a new legal status for Buddhism as an "officially recognized religion" (*kōninkyō* 公認教) along the French model starts out from a similar claim to what we have observed above. Enryō specifies the end of politics as national independence, stability, and social welfare. In order to quell violence and riots among the masses, uneducated people have to be satisfied, and a remedy for their disadvantages must be provided. "For controlling the thoughts of the uneducated masses (*gumin* 愚民), there is nothing better than religion."[28]

However, Enryō continues, religion cannot fulfill its vital function to appease the masses if the minds of the people are driven apart by strife between different religions. The powerful sway religion has over the common people is confirmed by the enormous danger of religious wars as amply testified to by European history. In addition, the violence from Buddhism and Shinto against Christian missionary activities in Japan and the terrifying reports of the Taiping Rebellion in China between 1850 and 1864 must have made this sufficiently evident to the Japanese political leadership. "Strife in religion turns into strife in politics," Enryō warns.[29] Religious peace in the country therefore is of vital importance to the government. Christianity, though an intruding force, is not a bad religion per se, but is foreign to Japanese civilization and therefore endangers religious peace in the country. The main force of Enryō's argument thus lies in emphasizing the historical fact that Japanese civilization is unthinkable without Bud-

[27] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 8: 51–69.
[28] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 8: 57.
[29] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 8: 56.

dhism. Not only Japanese art, ceremonies, and customs, but the Japanese polity and imperial household have especially deep historical ties with the Buddhist religion.[30] Enryō's depiction of Buddhism as the lifeline of Japanese civilization was very much in tune with the slogan of the Politics and Teaching Society: "preservation of national genuineness" (*kokusui hozonshugi* 国粋保存主義). The fact that Buddhism had been a fully naturalized religion of the Japanese people for around one thousand five hundred years served as the basis for Enryō's call to restrict Christian missions and to officially recognize Buddhism as *the* Japanese religion by granting legal privileges, such as the exemption of the priesthood from military service, the exclusive mandate to teach elementary school education, and the creation of a government-sponsored school for religious studies where Buddhist studies could be pursued.[31] The political movement for the legal status of Buddhism as the "officially recognized religion," which Enryō had spearheaded and which came to be debated across the whole Buddhist spectrum, was unsuccessful in the end. The movement eventually faded away around 1900 when the proposal for a bill on religion was rejected by the House of Peers.[32]

References to historical facts or to the social status quo as brought forth by Enryō in the context of his lobbying for Buddhism can be valid arguments in political discourse, but they do not represent a philosophical theory for how politics essentially needs religion, or for how the logic of politics has consequences that reach into the field of religion. We do find some further elements of a philosophical theory, though, in Enryō's book *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron* 教育宗教関係論 (On the Relationship between Religion and Education, 1893), which is his contribution to the debate that was instigated by Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1856–1944) under the banner of *Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突 (Collision between Religion and Education, 1893). Prompted by the so-called "incident of disrespect" (*fukei jiken* 不敬事件) provoked by the actions of Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930), a Christian, in 1893, Inoue Tetsujirō launched an attack on Japanese Christians arguing that, due to their monotheistic faith, they were unable to be truly loyal to the Japanese emperor and the Imperial Rescript on Education.[33] Instead of using the opportunity to repeat his own criticism of Christianity, Enryō presented a text of a very different character. As the title indicates, the book attempts a theoretical examination of the relationship between government-sponsored education and religion. The text is divided into a theoretical section that discusses the philosophical and academic relationship between education

[30] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 8: 55–56.

[31] *Nihon seikyō ron*, IS 8: 66.

[32] Maxey 2014, pp. 209–32. For recent Japanese literature on the movement, see Marti-Oroval 2022, p. 218, n. 1.

[33] Hasegawa 2013.

and religion[34] and a practical section where he discusses the institutional relationship between the two.[35] Although Enryō touches on some of his arguments about the philosophical deficiencies of Christianity in the theoretical section, in the practical section, where he discusses the function of religion in society, no criticism of Christianity is found.

Enryō examines the institutional relationship of government-sponsored education and religion according to three groupings: (1) schools and temples, (2) schools and the government, and (3) temples and the government. It is in the paragraphs about the relationship between temples and the government that we find further interesting hints about Enryō's practical philosophy of religion.

Essentially, Enryō repeats here his belief that religion is necessary in order to make up for the inequalities found in the secular world. However, before doing so Enryō proposes that the relationship between religion and politics can be thought about in two ways: (1) in relation to faith and (2) in relation to religious institutions. Regarding faith, Enryō points out that religion balances economic and political inequalities by teaching about the existence of an immortal human soul. Being endowed with such a soul, the poor and discriminated against can find relief and joy in religion in the same way as everybody else. Following this logic of compensation, Enryō even claims that "poor people who have no hope in this world can experience a bliss [in religion], by which they spiritually even surpass rich people."[36]

However, concerning the function of religion to harmonize society, it is the second consideration—the role of temples and churches—that Enryō focuses on in the passages I will discuss below. We have to consider not only the class differences between rich and poor but also

> the differences between the sexes and between the old and the young, . . . the distinction between the wise and the uneducated, and the differences between varying professions and villages. Since there is all this disparity among the people, there exists the tendency in politics [for these groups] to alienate and exclude each other. Now, it is the strength of religion to stand in between, to harmonize and allow for things to go smoothly and peacefully. In the realm of politics, feelings from below cannot rise, and the will from above does not reach down. The situation between high and low is one of alienation and stagnation. Therefore, one day the spirit of those suppressed will crack and a great revolution will occur. However, people who take refuge in one and the same religion will gather no matter whether rich

[34] *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron*, IS 11: 454–66.

[35] *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron*, IS 11: 466–81.

[36] *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron*, IS 11: 476.

> or poor, noble or common, man or woman, old or young, and they will sit on equal seats. Friendly feelings for each other pervade, conversations are exchanged, and thereby the harmony of society naturally arises.[37]

Enryō here argues that, not because of doctrine or faith but merely through the egalitarian character of a parishioner community, religion works against social discrimination and fosters good relations among people. Enryō further points out that not only are vertical class boundaries ameliorated, but also horizontal gaps in society are bridged by religion. Religion, for example, functions as a mediator for marriages across different villages and enhances the mobility of the people through pilgrimages. Last but not least, religion provides human life with a ritual structure that stabilizes society without the need to resort to force.

> Religion controls the ceremonies and rituals of society. Although in our country there seem to be fewer examples of this than in the West, Shintoism and Buddhism respectively control the great rites of marriages and funerals. Letting them do so also works to keep balance and order in the country.[38]

Enryō's arguments about the egalitarian character of the parishioner community, the mediating function of religion, and the ritual order of society all exhibit a sociological perspective. On his travels through Western countries, Enryō awakened to the fact that, despite all doctrinal differences, the sociological formations that Buddhism and Christianity represented were surprisingly similar. His journey allowed him to provisionally take a step back from a focus on doctrinal content and observe the social function that churches, rituals, and parishioner gatherings have in Western countries as well as in Japanese society. Enryō's functional analysis of religion in society is a fruit of this comparative perspective. From one example little can be deduced. With two examples, that is, religion in the East and religion in the West, both differences and commonalities become apparent. Such commonalities first constitute a concept of religion that is not predetermined by one or the other cultural sphere. The commonalities Enryō discovered were the social functions religion fulfilled equally in East and West. This observation triggered him to formulate an elementary sociology of religion, which in turn led to his abstaining from further attacks on Christianity.

Enryō's new functional perspective on religion, which is also apparent in his lectures on religious institutions delivered between 1890 and 1896,[39] was moreover seminal

[37] *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron*, IS 11: 476–47.

[38] *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron*, IS 11: 477.

[39] *Shūkyō gaku kōgi: Shūkyō seido* 宗教学講義：宗教制度 (Lectures on Religious Studies: Religious Institutions), IS 8: 167–297.

for his project in his later years, the Personal Cultivation Teaching Assembly (Shūshin Kyōkai 修身教会), or Morality Church. With this initiative he attempted to combine the beneficial social effects of religious ceremonies and parish gatherings with social education based on the Imperial Rescript on Education.[40] If religious services had a positive effect on society independent of the actual teachings, why not use these mechanisms to promote the secular morals of the Imperial Rescript on Education? Enryō's Morality Church initiative was therefore very much in line with the arguments we have discussed above. The project was an attempt at a practical reconciliation of education and religion.

RETRIBUTION IN THE AFTERLIFE

However, rather than sociological analysis, it was Enryō's argument about the immortal soul in *Kyōiku shūkyō kankei ron* that bore more philosophical fruit in his thinking. At the beginning of this essay, I pointed out that the young Enryō was concerned about antireligious sentiments in Japanese society. In 1898, Enryō started another campaign, this time not aimed at convincing the government to patronize religion but rather criticizing directly the very mindset that considered religion an obsolete vestige of the past. For Enryō, the epitome of antireligious ideology was materialism, which he attacked in his *Ha yuibutsu ron* 破唯物論 (Discourse Refuting Materialism, 1898). With his former role model Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901) and his mentor Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之 (1836–1916) especially in mind, he criticized the first-generation enlightenment thinkers for having wished to build a "temple to materialism" in Japan on a "mountain of egoism." Thirty years after the Meiji Restoration, this mindset, Enryō diagnosed, was spreading like a disease all over the country so that the "Temple of Materialism on Mount Egoism" (Jirisan Yuibutsuji 自利山唯物寺) was quickly transforming into the "Temple of Bodily Desires on Money-Worship Mountain" (Haikinsan Taiyokuji 拝金山体欲寺).[41]

The arguments Enryō brings forth in *Ha yuibutsu ron* to support his claim that the materialist worldview subverts the morality and the courage of the Japanese people are more polemical than systematic. One year later, Enryō presented similar arguments in a more convincing fashion in *Reikon fumetsu ron* 霊魂不滅論 (Theory of the Immortality of the Soul, 1899). In this work, Enryō again distinguishes between theoretical and practical arguments. In the first part of the book, Enryō tests several theories that would allow for the possibility that the soul does not perish with the biological end of human life. Yet even with a lot of goodwill, the arguments he proposes can hardly be

[40] Inoue 2015a.

[41] *Ha yuibutsu ron*, IS 7: 549–50.

called anything other than pseudoscientific.[42] Enryō's later tendency to suppose entities or forces like "mental electricity" (*seishin denki* 精神電気) in order to explain the phenomenon of alleged telepathy would find a limited audience today.[43] This aspect of Enryō's later thought is also the background for the sneering portrayal of Enryō in the short story *Koto no sorane* 琴のそら音 (The Fake Sound of the Zither, 1906) by Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916).[44]

But in *Reikon fumetsu ron* Enryō also clearly states that in the end neither the existence nor the nonexistence of an immortal soul can be established by empirical means. Yet not everything that cannot be verified by experiment is meaningless, Enryō holds.[45] Therefore, he attempts to show in the latter chapters of the book that the belief in the immortality of the soul is "practically" (*jissaijō* 実際上) necessary.[46]

> It seems that materialist observations are mostly made by successful people in times of success. This is why I wish such people would imagine times of disappointment when proposing their theories. If they believe that they will not experience disappointment throughout their lives, they should try to think from the position of those people who do experience disappointment in this world. For if we do not, our worldview and our idea of humanity will not be able to give satisfaction to the majority of people in society.
>
> According to my humble considerations, the theory of the mortality of the soul, although appropriate for successful people in times of success, is inappropriate in cases of disappointment, whereas the theory of the immortality of the soul is appropriate to both cases of success and of failure. In short, I am convinced that the theory of the immortality of the soul is the only way to give peace of mind and satisfaction to everybody in society, no matter rich or poor, noble or low, lucky or unlucky. It is evident that there is no other way to provide peace of mind, particularly to those people who experience a lot of suffering and pain.[47]

This passage contains another version of the compensation theory of religion we encountered in Enryō's earlier writings. Yet in this context the inequalities that religion has to make up for are not only the inequalities produced by society and politics but all disparities in happiness resulting from all possible existential circumstances. This shift is due to the fact that Enryō at this stage is not arguing anymore as a lobbyist

[42] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 309–412; Marti-Oroval 2019, Mizutani 2023.

[43] Kōda 2016, p. 168.

[44] Natsume (1906) 2017; Figal 1999, pp. 38–39.

[45] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 355, 357.

[46] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 370.

[47] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 365–66.

for religion in the political sphere. He is now trying to justify religion as such against materialist skeptics. Although the deficiencies religion has to compensate for are not necessarily produced by only social and political circumstances, Enryō's argument still relies on the political logic that disadvantages have to be compensated for. It is not only politics or society that is unjust; the empirical world is unjust, and if religion does not provide consolation, society is always in danger of falling apart.

The comforting function of the idea of an immortal soul becomes most evident in life-threatening situations. The ultimate loss—the loss of life—can only be compensated for by the promise of an afterlife. In Enryō's view, the immortality of the soul is therefore the only final insurance against desperation caused by whatever tragedy the individual may encounter. It allows the individual to endure all kinds of suffering and even to approach death without fear. The theory of the immortality of the soul therefore gives the mind strength for every kind of activity. It is particularly valuable for military education, according to Enryō, because it fosters the preparedness to die. Considering the wars Japan may face in the future, such a teaching should be disseminated to the whole nation. The resolve to die for one's country "is in fact the Golden Castle and Iron Walls (*kinjō teppeki* 金城鉄壁) that secure the independence of the nation. It is the very basis of a rich country with a strong army (*fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵)."[48]

This argument seems to be the ultimate consequence of the idea that religion has to be postulated for the sake of securing the integrity of the nation. Yet why did Enryō accuse the materialist of immorality, or in his words, of building a "Temple of Bodily Desires on Money-Worship Mountain"? In the last chapter of *Reikon fumetsu ron*, Enryō presents another significant argument. The belief in an immortal soul not only helps one to endure all kinds of suffering, it also guarantees the validity of moral laws:

> There are good and bad people in society. Although there are state laws to regulate this, there are certainly a lot of sinners who escape the law. Moreover, the law has the power to punish bad people, but it is insufficient for rewarding good people.[49]

Enryō inferred from this that only the belief in retribution, that is, karmic retribution after death, guarantees that people will follow moral laws. After death, good people will be rewarded and bad people will be punished. Without this belief, "people will believe that they can do evil and commit sins as long as they do not come into conflict with the law."[50]

[48] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 368.
[49] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 368.
[50] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 364–65.

> How can the materialists and those who advocate the mortality of the soul solve this problem? Through the teachings of "the survival of the strongest" (*yūshō reppai* 優勝劣敗) and "the law of the jungle" (*jakuniku kyōshoku* 弱肉強食) they do nothing else but drive people into degeneration and self-neglect. In order to give people moral satisfaction, it is essential to assure them by teaching the immortality of the soul that there will be retribution of good and evil in the afterlife.[51]

In Enryō's view, morality in society can only be sustained by the shared belief that there will be retribution in the afterlife that compensates for the injustices of the world. In other words, religion is not a theoretical claim but a political postulate that follows from our existential mission to create stable and just societies. In his late period, Enryō further developed his argument for religion as a postulate of social justice. Karmic retribution in this world and beyond became a postulate derived from the emotional logic of human conscience. The moral person not rewarded by fortunate circumstances in life is consoled by a good conscience; the evil person who eludes just punishment is tormented by the pangs of a bad one. The primacy of political reasoning that was apparent in the texts of his middle period thus later shifted to a more general concern for the demands of human conscience.[52]

TWO CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Religion and Retribution

First, I would like to add a reflection on the concept of religion and the idea of retribution that Enryō presupposes in the arguments presented above. At first sight, it is surprising that a renowned advocate of Buddhist philosophy argues so strongly for an immortal soul, as the teaching of impermanence and no-self are known as core doctrines in almost all strands of Buddhism. Interpreting Enryō favorably here, he does not claim that the individual soul is unchangeable or will exist eternally. This would surely contradict the ultimate goal of Buddhism—release from the circle of rebirths and the cessation of suffering. For the sake of his argument, Enryō merely has to claim that the soul does not "perish" or "die" (*fumetsu* 不滅) with the biological death of the individual person. And it is clear that the equally central Buddhist teaching of karmic retribution does presuppose this. The problem is how the relative permanence of the subject of retribution spanning at least two lifetimes is to be harmonized with the ultimate Buddhist claim that nothing is permanent, and Enryō does not attempt to

[51] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 369.
[52] Schulzer 2019, pp. 273–76.

resolve this. Instead, this question might well be one of the greatest philosophical difficulties concerning Buddhist doctrine generally, and a problem that was well understood in East Asia since the early reception of the religion in China.[53]

In *Shinri kinshin*, Enryō championed the law of karmic retribution and its rationality over against the Christian notion of an anthropomorphic God who admits souls to heaven or sends them to hell.[54] However, in *Reikon fumetsu ron* we also find the following remarkable passage:

> Upon teaching the cause and effect of good and evil [i.e., karmic retribution], the need to suppose heaven and hell follows a natural course of thinking. It is not necessarily irrational or illogical. The stories of devils and [boiling] kettles in hell or lotus flowers and music in heaven are simply beyond reason. Seen from a nonreligious standpoint, they are nothing but illustrations of happy or painful conditions. In other words, these are questions of faith, not of reason.[55]

Here, Enryō does not cite the Christian imagery of heaven and hell, but those of Pure Land Buddhism.[56] And he refers to the stories and illustrations as objects of faith, not of reason. His perspective as a philosopher of religion as opposed to an apostle of faith thereby becomes apparent. The quote is even more remarkable as Enryō himself was brought up and educated in the Pure Land tradition and entered the priesthood at the age of thirteen. Enryō's reasoning here demonstrates just how far he moved in the direction of being a free-thinking intellectual rather than an orthodox apologist. That he is not speaking on behalf of his own sect is also evident from the fact that his whole argument rests on the premise of the law of karmic retribution, which Enryō rightly considered a transsectarian Buddhist doctrine. In fact, the teaching of his own sect—the Shin Buddhism founded by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263)—can be cited as an exception to the iron law of karma in Buddhist doctrine.[57] The famous saying by Shinran, "Even a virtuous person can attain rebirth [in the Pure Land], how much more easily

[53] Liebenthal 1952, p. 332.

[54] *Shinri kinshin*, IS 3: 52.

[55] *Reikon fumetsu ron*, IS 19: 354. The same passage is quoted in Mizutani 2023, p. 84.

[56] The motifs can be found in the early Japanese Pure Land text *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (Essentials about Rebirth) by Genshin 源信 (942–1017). A text that Enryō also cites as he discusses Buddhist hells is his *Yōkaigaku kōgi* 妖怪学講義 (Lectures on Mystery Studies), IS 18: 164–65. In the Taishō edition of the *Ōjōyōshū* (T no. 2682, 84) see page 36 for the boiling kettle in hell and pages 41–42 for the lotus flowers and music in the Pure Land. While the former passage was collected by Genshin from the *Yuqie lun* 瑜伽論 (T no. 1579), the Pure Land imagery originates from the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 観無量寿経 (T no. 365); see also Genshin 1963, vol. 1, pages 31 and 118, respectively.

[57] Enryō discusses the dogmatic tension between other-power faith and the law of karma in *Shinshū tetsugaku joron* 真宗哲学序論 (Prolegomena to a Philosophy of the Shin Sect), IS 18: 220–23.

a wicked person!" expresses this relativization of the principle of karma in Shin Buddhism.[58] Due to human imperfection, our attempts to qualify for rebirth in the Pure Land by good deeds are doomed to fail. Not only is faith the only path to salvation, but faith in Amida's grace may even override the consequences of an evil person's bad karma.

From the above, it is clear that Enryō argues neither from a sectarian nor from a transsectarian perspective. In terms of Enryō's distinction of three levels of discourse introduced earlier, the focus of this essay has been upon the first level, that is, debates in the public sphere concerning the very validity and existence of religion. Enryō abstracts from the specific mechanisms of transcendent retribution and concentrates on the idea of moral retribution as such. He was not only aware that retribution in the afterlife was both a Christian and a Buddhist dogma, but he even knew of the judgment of the dead as found in ancient Egyptian religion some three thousand years ago.[59] In a later writing, Enryō further pointed to an ancient Chinese source that clearly identifies the way of heaven with retributive justice.[60] In sum, we can say that Enryō rightly identified the idea of retribution as a universal intuition of justice around which many myths and religious traditions of the world crystallized.[61]

In light of what has been discussed so far, I find it very difficult to share the sense of skepticism harbored by postcolonial scholars toward the concept of religion in Meiji-period Japan. The concept not only afforded Enryō the means to compare Buddhism and Christianity from a sociological perspective, it also allowed him to specify the idea of retribution as a plausible *tertium comparationis* when discussing religious doctrine. This observation in turn allowed him to single out Buddhism as the religion that, more than any other, has made the idea of retribution conceptually explicit and spelled out in rational terms. Thus, far from distorting his own culture by employing foreign terminology the concept of religion allowed Enryō to highlight a universal notion of justice lying at the very heart of his own religion. It also does not seem plausible that the single category of religion could have caused a shift in the understanding of Japanese religion away from matters of practice to notions of faith or doctrine. As has been pointed out, it was not only that the semantic fields of religion, philosophy,

[58] *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (Compendium of Lamentations about Divergences; T no. 2661, 83: 728), collected by Yuien 唯円 (1222–1289). The translation cited is from Bandō 1996, p. 10.

[59] *Yōkaigaku zasshi* 妖怪学雑誌 (Mystery Studies Journal, vol. 20, 1901), IS 21: 314.

[60] *Meishin to shūkyō* 迷信と宗教 (Superstition and Religion, 1916), IS 20: 265–66. "The path of heaven brings weal to the good and woe to the evil." The original source to which he refers is the *Shujing* 書経 (Book of Documents), ch. 12.

[61] Plenty of evidence can be found in Kelsen (1946). Unfortunately, the English title *Society and Nature* gives no clue as to the book's contents. The original German title, *Vergeltung und Kausalität* (Retribution and Causality), is much more appropriate. For a more recent study, see Obeyesekere 2002.

superstition, and science informed Enryō's thinking, but also that a much broader array of terms including those of society, the nation-state, politics, economics, and social welfare, created the discursive space in which Enryō's thinking developed. We must also not forget the claim of the postcolonial scholarship discussed above—that the use of the term *shūkyō* distorted the understanding of Japanese traditions—itself also relies on the paradigmatic distinction between theory and practice. The line of thought reconstructed in this article started out from an analysis of the function of religion in the modern nation-state. It was this sociological perspective—one that provisionally abstracts from specific doctrines or types of faith—that pointed Enryō to the role of religions in providing a horizon of justice that is otherwise missing in societies of arbitrary inequalities. So instead of a bias toward doctrinal issues, we observe that Enryō treats religious practice and religious doctrine separately. Academic discourse is by nature theoretical, insofar as universities, for methodological reasons, maintain a certain degree of distance from their objects of inquiry. But it may still take as an object of inquiry the social practice of religions as well as religious ideas. The modern research university and its metalanguage afforded Japan new lenses with which to view itself. It did not invent things or distort them. If academic terminology employed by the humanities was indeed used as a tool of cognitive subjugation in the age of imperialism, this was, in my view, not the fault of the terminology.

Religion and Paternalism

It is a fundamental insight of Kantian philosophy of religion that religious ideas about the supernatural are poorly understood if judged solely as metaphysical claims.[62] Notions of the transcendent rather arise from the human hope for justice and salvation. It is in the final instance irrelevant if we imagine an ultimate judgment day or a circle of reincarnation; what is important is only that there is some kind of continuity beyond death so that retribution is at all possible. This alone would satisfy the human need for justice and motivate moral conduct. As a philosopher who accepted the worldview of scientific enlightenment, Enryō knew that metaphysical claims about a transcendent reality had lost much of their credibility. And yet, Enryō was convinced that people need to believe in an afterlife in order to believe in the Good. They have to be *induced* to believe it because otherwise the harmony of society and the stability of the nation-state would be in danger.

A further question now arises concerning the origin and character of the *paternalism* that is apparent in Enryō's argument. Interestingly, Enryō proposed in *Shinri kinshin* to interpret the idea of a transcendent God who judges good and evil as a "means"

[62] Kant (1787) 1904, pp. 595–670.

(*hōben* 方便, Skt. *upāya*) to guide the uneducated Christian masses.[63] It would be naive to assume that in the long history of Christianity there were not some priests who did adhere to the cynical attitude that the notions of heaven and hell were mere fictions needed to tend their herds. However, it would be cynical on our part to suppose that such paternalism is a deceitful ploy used by an essentially cunning priesthood. Rather than assuming that only the lowest motives are at work here, it is fair to assume that there are indeed representatives of the Christian religion whose faith in the existence of a God as guarantor of justice is sound and honest. Likewise, it would also be misguided to allege that there are no Buddhist clergy who truly believe in a literal interpretation of Buddhist doctrines. Yet there is a Buddhist concept that does facilitate a paternalistic attitude on the part of Buddhist teachers. This is the very concept Enryō uses to interpret the Christian notion of God mentioned above, namely, the Buddhist concept of "means."[64]

The Buddhist concept of means is best illustrated by the simile of the raft.[65] The raft is a helpful tool to ferry one across a river, but once the other shore, or salvation in metaphorical terms, is reached, the raft becomes obsolete. One should not cling to it but simply recognize it as a mere means. The concept allows one to interpret heterogeneous Buddhist doctrines as varying means to the same end. If taking refuge in a particular buddha comforts an individual being, the question about the ultimate existence of that buddha becomes secondary. A Buddhist priest can thus encourage various kinds of Buddhist practice and worship as long as it has beneficial effects for the believer. This type of attitude on the part of Buddhist clergy can easily be interpreted as a white lie and become at times indistinguishable from paternalism. However, as long as the end of the respective teaching is the consolation and peace of mind of the believer, a paternalistic attitude might be acceptable. What is problematic is when—and this is the case in Enryō's argument—the means is proposed not only to make people *happy* but to make them *moral.*

Confucians have, from early on, accused Buddhists of using their teachings about paradise as incentives, and those about hell as deterrences, to encourage people toward moral conduct.[66] Based on what has been said about the Buddhist concept of means, it may be argued that Buddhist doctrine, more so than Christian doctrine, predisposed clergy to develop paternalistic attitudes. Still, since karmic retribution is a core dogma of Buddhist faith, we should also not be too cynical and regard the intended use of doctrine among the Buddhist priesthood to be manipulative. The ultimate end of Buddhism is after all the overcoming of suffering. And morality is a necessary condition to

[63] *Shinri kinshin*, IS 3: 49.
[64] On Enryō's use of the concept, see Schulzer 2016.
[65] Pye 2003, pp. 117–33.
[66] Zürcher (1959) 2007, p. 263.

achieve this end because an immoral person will suffer the consequences of his actions and hence cannot find salvation. Arguably, retribution in the afterlife is therefore not taught as expedient means for the sake of morality but as a reality for the sake of salvation. Whereas in Buddhism the ultimate end is indisputably the deliverance from suffering, moral justification before God is more central to the Christian faith. Paternalism to make people moral not for the sake of the individual but for the sake of God is therefore more likely to occur in Christianity.

The discussion of whether Enryō's postulate of retribution in the afterlife is more Buddhist or more Christian in character comes to no clear conclusion. The closest parallel to Enryō's practical theory of religion as political postulate may in fact be found neither in Buddhism nor in Christianity, but rather in the philosophy of Plato. In the *Republic*, Socrates reasons that it would be permissible for a politician to invent beneficial myths that advantage the state.[67] It was Karl Popper (1902–1994) who famously argued against Plato that such paternalism is illicit in open societies that cherish truth, freedom, and democracy.[68] This criticism applies *mutatis mutandis* to Enryō's argument. The fact that there is no evidence that Enryō was aware of this aspect of Plato's philosophy underlines the independence of Enryō's intellectual development. Enryō, who embraced the new identity of philosopher, was freely roaming the modern conceptual paradigm in his quest for a contemporary intellectual assessment of Buddhism. In doing so, he unknowingly, now and again, approximated insights similar to some of those of Plato and Kant.

ABBREVIATIONS

IS — *Inoue Enryō senshū* 井上円了選集 (Selected Writings of Inoue Enryō). 25 vols. Edited by Tōyō Daigaku. Tokyo: Tōyō Daigaku, 1987–2004.

T — *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–35.

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[67] *Republic* 389b; 414b–415d.

[68] Popper 1957, pp. 191–98.

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