

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Invention of Religion in Japan.* By Jason Ānanda Josephson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 408 pages. Cloth \$90. Paper \$30.

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This sweeping new study of the Japanese state's construction of the categories of religion, superstition, and the secular represents an exemplary attempt to bring the study of modern Japanese history and religion into conversation with broader discussions of modernization and the concept and history of religion. Building on past scholarship on modern Japanese religion by James Ketelaar, Helen Hardacre, and Isomae Jun'ichi, as well as incorporating discussion of critical theory, linguistics, history of science, and international law, Josephson weaves together a fresh narrative of Japanese nation-building in its relation to religion. At the same time, his analysis of how Japanese intellectuals and officials strategically translated and redefined the term "religion" challenges unilinear accounts of the history of religion that presume a Christocentric category foisted upon hapless foreign cultures. While primarily concerned with Meiji period (1868–1911) Japan, Josephson's account also considers Japan's pre-modern past and parallel histories in Europe. It is rife with colorful anecdotes and imaginative evocations of history's "lost possibilities"—the alternate histories that might have been if "religion" had been translated differently, for example (pp. 222–23). Sophisticated yet highly readable, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* will be edifying reading for general readers and students as much as for specialists.

Before discussing each chapter in turn, I would like to sketch the primary motivations and assumptions underlying Josephson's work. As is clear from the title, Josephson seeks to demonstrate that the category of religion had to be *invented* in modern Japan, which is to say it was neither an indigenous category, a natural product of encountering Western religions, nor a simple reproduction of the Western category. In tracking the history of Japanese encounters with Christian missionaries and Western officials,

which ultimately led to Japan's forced adoption of a category of religion, Josephson persistently sets out to reveal both the agency and the rationality of Japanese responses. Ultimately, at the heart of his project is an attempt to demonstrate through comparison with Euro-American cases that the Japanese state's path of modernization—including its Shinto-inflected imperial ideology and definition of Shinto as non-religious—was not as bizarre or exceptional as has usually been thought. This is not to defend the Meiji Japanese state but rather to critique it as one modern nation-state among many.

One major assumption of this study is that it was first and foremost the Japanese state that invented these categories. Treating religion and the secular as legal and diplomatic categories—an important corrective to the predominant intellectual history approach—this account privileges the perspective of the state and largely omits discussion of how these state-legislated categories were received. Josephson summarizes, “the definition of what legally counted as a ‘religion’ was tactically selected to appease Western powers at the same time that it was strategically imposed on Japanese subjects” (p. 195), but what remains to be told is how Japanese subjects in turn tactically subverted that definition. I will return to this problem below.

Chapters 1 and 2 present an analysis of the early modern Japanese engaging with Christianity without a concept of religion. In the first instance, Japanese officials took sixteenth century Catholic missionaries to be Shingon Buddhist monks from India and attempted to assimilate them. This was not, according to Josephson, a mistaken response based on ignorance and poor translation but rather a traditional technique for reconciling difference in line with Shingon hermeneutics, *honji suijaku*, and so on. When Christianity proved unassimilable, it was judged a heretical form of Buddhism and outlawed. This, too, according to Josephson, was in keeping with a long Buddhist tradition of dealing with heresy from the *Śūramgama Sutra* to Shinran to the suppression of the Tachikawa school, in which a belief or practice is dangerous because it is an aberrant imitation of—dangerously *similar* to—the true teaching. In all cases, there was no need or inclination to see Christianity as a member of a larger category of religion alongside and different from Buddhism. The category of religion would only be invented in Japan when imbalances of power created a context in which Christianity could no longer be effectively excluded as a heresy. Theoretically, Josephson thus explains the genesis of a concept of religion in terms of the forced acknowledgement of difference, but he is quick to point out how the concept can “inherit the structure of heresy discourse”

in which foreign religions are perceived as false imitations of one's own religion (p. 68).

These chapters' richly detailed discussion of heresy discourse along with the introduction's rebuttal to Ian Reader's and Michael Pye's writings on the term "*shūkyō*" (pp. 6–8) provide some support for Josephson's central claim that no concept of "religion" existed in pre-modern Japan. Yet a fuller treatment of the topic would require more consideration of terms like "*sankyō icchi*" and "*gedō*" (briefly discussed on pp. 15, 275). As such, Josephson may not persuade scholars who hold that something akin to a concept of religion did exist in pre-Meiji Japan. Ultimately, his analysis of early modern Japan may lean a bit too heavily on evidence from the modern period: "Not only did [late nineteenth century] Japanese intellectuals and translators produce different terms for religion, they also debated which indigenous traditions and practices fit into the category. . . . This is clear evidence that it is glib to talk of Japanese religion projected back through the centuries" (p. 8).

Chapter 3 offers close readings of the Japanese translations of freedom of religion clauses in early Japanese-Dutch and Japanese-American treaties. According to Josephson's reading of the Harris Treaty, the Japanese strategically translated the term "religion" five different ways to minimize the negative impact of the concession. Accurately perceiving the Americans to be seeking freedom to practice and propagate Christianity, Japanese translators treated "religion" as a polite euphemism for Christianity and avoided applying the term to Japanese practices. Thus, "the failure to recognize religion as a universal phenomenon was not rooted in a Japanese misunderstanding but rather in Japanese insight—an entirely defensible reading of what was at stake for the Euro-American powers" (p. 92).

Chapters 4 and 5 present Josephson's most startling claims, namely that Shinto was conceived of and constructed as a *science* and that this Shinto-science was central in the formation of the *secular* Shinto state. Chapter 4 traces the pre-Meiji formation of Shinto by scholars of *kokugaku* and *mitogaku*, which Josephson provocatively translates as National Science and Mito Science, respectively. Many *kokugaku* scholars including Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) developed their inventive readings of Shinto texts in tandem with avid study and interpretation of Western science. Based on the observation that Tokugawa censors ensured any Western scientific treatises that entered Japan lacked (or were stripped of) references to Christianity, Josephson explains the formation of Shinto science in terms of the substitution of Shinto deities for the Protestant

God latent within European science. Similarly, he explains the formation of a Shinto political science by Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863) and others as a re-imagining of Western political forms with Shinto ritual substituted for Christianity as the unifying force behind national consciousness. Josephson argues that Shinto’s longstanding self-representation as a science made it attractive to the state and rendered plausible its definition as non-religious.

Chapter 5 then argues that in constructing a secular nation-state that allowed for religious freedom, the secular was constructed out of these Shinto-scientific concepts and forms—just as Protestant concepts and forms were (and are) embedded in Western secularism. In effect, Josephson is sidestepping debates about the periodization and scope of “State Shinto” by positing an expansive “Shinto secular” that contains “State Shinto,” whether broadly or narrowly conceived. Previous scholarship has generally shared a consensus in recognizing Shrine Shinto and Shinto-inflected imperial ideology and ritual to be religious, and debate has largely concerned the extent to which the state’s deployment of religion should be understood as a coherent and consistent program rooted in state support of the Shinto establishment. Josephson, by contrast, declares all of this state deployment of religion to represent the particular Meiji Japanese configuration of the secular.

Josephson is proposing a new language for how we talk about *kokugaku* and State Shinto, but his assertions are not as radical as they may appear. First, he states at the outset that his analysis intentionally focuses on the overlooked connection between *kokugaku* and science to the exclusion of other aspects of *kokugaku*, so his assessment is evidently not meant to be comprehensive. Second, in defining *kokugaku* as “science,” he intends something along the lines of “natural philosophy” and implies no connection to Baconian science, for example (p. 296). For Josephson, *kokugaku* should be understood as science to the extent that it “did see itself” and “was regarded” as rooted in objective evidential research (p. 296); in this view, self-representation and perception count more than content or method. Finally, I would suggest that many of the examples Josephson cites (for example, the many Shinto claims that *kami* set in motion scientific forces) do not represent claims to be science as much as claims to be compatible with or to transcend science.

As for the Shinto secular, Josephson defines the secular as “result[ing] from an ongoing sublation (*Aufhebung*) of religion, which it simultaneously encapsulates, transforms, and opposes. Some secular concepts represent the transposition of religious concepts into a new key or configuration at the very moment they are presented as oppositional” (p. 135). In his analysis, the Meiji Japanese state just so happened to subsume within the secular a

high degree of visibly religious content. Here Josephson intends to force his reader to explode the category of the secular beyond its conventional bounds. Rather than uphold a narrow, Western-centric definition of the secular with its disguised Protestant contours, Josephson calls on us to recognize Meiji Japan's Shinto-infused political ideology, rituals, and education as a form of the secular structurally identical to other secularisms.

There remains considerable room to dispute Josephson's account of the Shinto secular. He states that Shinto was not a state religion because "it did not attempt to establish confessional unity or a powerful majority church. Likewise, it did not produce converts or Shintoists—merely Japanese subjects. Most significantly, by being separate from religion, it was argued that participation in the Shinto state was fully compatible with religious freedom" (p. 133). This depiction of State Shinto can be disputed from numerous angles, as can its implied definition of state religion. Here, I would like to consider the last point—that *it was argued* by the state that its Shinto-inflected ideology and rituals, as a "common core that transcended Japanese sectarian conflicts" (p. 134), were fully compatible with religious freedom. This framing of the issue places emphasis on state *discourse*. Essentially, if the state says Shinto is secular and codifies that into law, it must be so. But was this argument for a "common core" Shinto secular accepted? Were the laws obeyed? Josephson cites evidence to show that "the preponderance of opinion in the period seemed to be that Shinto was not a religion" (pp. 94, 291), yet to the extent that counterexamples can be offered (from Uchimura Kanzō [1861–1930] to Makiguchi Tsunesaburō [1871–1944]), it is clear that the categories of religion and the secular remained in play after their legal definition by the state. Although Josephson would not dispute this point, his account's privileging of the state's perspective may leave some readers with the false impression that its ideological constructions were hegemonic.

A case in point is Josephson's analysis of the Great Promulgation Campaign as a secular propaganda enterprise. He writes, "Although often accused by scholars today of attempting to fabricate a state religion, the campaign drew its members from all Buddhist and Shinto sects, and the ministry responsible issued a statement explicitly guaranteeing freedom of belief" (p. 152). Yet it is not only contemporary scholars today who viewed the campaign in such a way. In 1872, Shin Buddhist thinker Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911) and Ambassador to the United States Mori Arinori (1847–1889) published separate critiques that explicitly accused the campaign of attempting to construct and impose a religion on the nation (*Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and its Persecution*, by James Edward Ketelaar [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990], pp. 125–30). In spite

of the state's guarantee of "freedom of belief," Buddhist monks who served in the campaign were pressured to deny Buddhist teachings (*ibid.*, p. 123); moreover, the campaign had the effect of legally banning Buddhist monks and anyone else from preaching or holding religious services outside of the state-run program (*ibid.*, p. 122). Josephson's account, while acknowledging resistance to the campaign, remains glued to the state's perspective. Was the Great Promulgation Campaign secular or religious? Josephson highlights the state's view of the matter, but that view was far from wholly dominant.

Chapter 6 turns to the construction of a category of superstition, which Josephson sees as the true counterpoint to the formation of the secular (where religion is the remainder—the superstition that could not be effectively negated). The chapter traces how various forms of divination, spirit possession, healing rituals, and talisman use were illegalized as part of the movement to extinguish evil customs of the past. Heretical practices of preceding periods, suppressed for their access to demonic power, were redefined as delusional beliefs obstructing progress toward civilization. Josephson emphasizes that superstition—like religion and the secular—was not a natural or self-evident category; rather, decisions regarding what to include or exclude were ideologically determined. In one example, he explains how fox possession was officially defined as mental illness even while receiving implicit authorization at the state-sponsored Fushimi Inari shrine. Clearly, this was not a straightforward process of "disenchantment," for many "enchanted" forms were subsumed within the Shinto secular while others were legally permitted as religion.

With the secular and superstition in place, Chapters 7 and 8 return to the invention of the category of religion. Chapter 7 discusses the variety of proposed understandings and translations of religion by influential Meiji intellectuals in the 1870s, demonstrating that they did not even agree on what constituted Japan's religions. In addition to doubts about Confucianism and Shinto, Buddhism's status as a Japanese religion was questioned on account of its foreign origins, lack of a divinity, lack of a system of ethics, or subsumption within politics. Insofar as religion's definition and translation were still in play, the state had significant flexibility in choosing what sort of freedom to offer and to whom when it granted constitutional freedom of religion.

Chapter 8 turns to the Meiji Constitution to show how the state legally defined religion. Through an illuminating discussion of foreign constitutions, Josephson shows that the Meiji Constitution's promotion of a divine emperor and its extremely narrow definition of religious freedom were very

much in keeping with nineteenth century European norms. He provocatively concludes, “what scholars see as Shinto extremism turns out to be transplanted European monarchism” (p. 230). Josephson then demonstrates how the state’s assurance of freedom of religious belief came hand-in-hand with continued (1) policing of religious organizations and practices, (2) persecution of “superstitious” beliefs and practices, and (3) intervention in people’s private lives, especially through ethics education. Josephson here means to challenge current understandings of modern secularism’s supposed recognition of a private sphere of belief immune from government intervention. These chapters also propose interventions in standard narratives of Orientalism and the history of religious studies by tracking how Japanese intellectuals infused their own notions of religion into Western academic discourse from the 1870s forward.

Bringing fresh eyes and language to bear on familiar topics, Josephson takes aim at many standard assumptions in the fields of modern Japanese religion and religious studies. At points, he is intentionally provocative or overstates his case for rhetorical effect, which naturally opens him to critique. There are scholars of Japanese religion who will fault Josephson for not engaging more deeply with disciplinary scholarship on *kokugaku*, State Shinto, and so forth. Yet it seems to me Josephson’s real strength is his ability to draw international comparisons and cross disciplinary lines. If anything, I wish he had played on such strengths further, for example, by reviewing scholarship on the “enchantment” lying within Western secularism to bring into sharper focus his argument about the Shinto secular. Josephson’s bold claims and theoretical insights are sure to inject fresh life into old debates and provoke students and scholars to think more deeply about the translations and categories they use and too often project anachronistically into the past.

*Great Living: In the Pure Encounter Between Master and Disciple.* By Kemmyo Taira Sato. New York: American Buddhist Study Center Press, 2010. xv+204 pages. Paper \$24.95.

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In his foreword to *Great Living*, Rev. Chimyō Takehara notes that this volume had its genesis in a series of lectures on the *Tannishō* delivered by Rev.