

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC RELIGION: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE YASUKUNI SHRINE

Abstract

In considering religio-political problems, the term public religion has been utilized by not a few scholars during the last decade. The Yasukuni Shrine, the largest memorial institution for the war dead in Japan, is a typical case in the discourse on public religion, which has been discussed from various viewpoints in many contexts. I propose to analyze the issue of the Yasukuni Shrine in a triangular scheme that relates three realms of the social: politics, religion, and culture. Manifestations of public religion in the broadest sense can be analyzed as forms of inter-mobilization between these three camps. Further, mobilization occurs within several spheres, i.e., the state, political society, civil society, folk society and global society. This wide scope allows analyzing the so-called Yasukuni problem as well as other religio-political problems multi-dimensionally. This approach, supposedly, leads to a better understanding of the issue and, ultimately, to a more stable situation.

Key words: Public Religion, Japanese religion, Shinto, the Yasukuni Shrine, nationalism, the war dead, cultural nationalism, cultural religion.

Introduction: Counter Currents in the Religious Domain

The tide of studies concerning religion and politics and the broader theme of religion and society during the last half century has shown thematic discontinuity and continuity at the same time. While most theories on secularization in the 1960s and 1970s forecasted the decline of religious influence on society, other theories on religious revitalization in 1980s reported various instances of increasing social engagement by traditional religions. Among the latter, Robert Bellah discussed the political role to be played by 'Civil Religion in America', and contrasted 'the light and shade' of the religious dimension, that is, decent civility of life vs. aggressive nationalism. The problem of fundamentalism in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and their related conflicts represented the overwhelmingly dark side of religion. It was in such a condition that discussions on public religion have flooded in the last decade of the 20th century.

In a broader sense, public religion refers to various activities relative to collective values or behaviors taken by the majority of the population in a certain area. The bright side of public religion is expected to be a concern for community, and its dark side is suspected to come from inward totalitarian suppression through acts of terror, cultural

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decadence, and subsequent irrationality, and from outward oppression through chauvinistic patriotism.

Every private faith, except extreme world-fleeing mysticism, is implicitly orientated to public religion. Collective action in a religious context naturally tends to be public. It is difficult for religion to be irrelevant to the public (Tsushiro 2005). Among several other topics, in this chapter I will particularly focus on the issue of Yasukuni shrine.

Religion-Centered Views of Public Religion

In the narrowest sense, the term public religion refers to socio-political action taken by religious actors. Here we find theoretical or typological approaches focused on the problem of politics (state, society) and religion on one hand, and on the other, descriptive approaches analyzing particular cases. Case studies on American public religion are numerous, of which Martin E. Marty's work is representative (Marty 2000). Apart from domestic American studies, Jose Casanova offers a theoretical typology analyzing five cases of Christianity representing several countries (Casanova 1994). Due to this seminal work, many studies on public religion emerged not only in the West but also in Japan, Canada, China, Indonesia and so on (Tsushiro 2005, Miedema 2006, Xie 2006, Intan 2006, Hwan Cha 2000).

For good examples, one can check the Internet using the words 'nation under god' and numerous books will appear. One of those is a collection of essays titled *A Nation under God?: Essays on the Future of Religion in American Public Life*. As easily imagined, one finds the adjective 'American' everywhere in the essays. A basic stance of these authors, both scholars and believers, is expressed as follows. They are "not inclined to go along with the thoroughgoing secularization of public life;" "we need a new set of terms on which to define the role of religion in our public life," but "without allowing any one faith to dominate public affairs," posing "no threat to democratic values" and "no threat to tolerance."

Since these essays constitute one group of a typical discourse on American national public religion, one cannot expect any novel assertions. Common claims are as follows. "The quality of our (American) public life...could be enhanced by making room for a more overt reliance on resources derived from our religious traditions;" it is true that "there are dangers involved in any such public use of ideas and symbols drawn from religious sources," but "there are other dangers we run in denying ourselves access to such resources." Therefore, "we shall be able to make much further progress in realizing the ideas that democrats now espouse without relying on the kind of visions that historically have come from appeals to 'Revelation,' since 'most citizens...in a nation that had a long history of separating but also combining piety and politics in ingenious ways...want and expect the matter to be handled in another way" than the extreme positions such as "secularists and [the advocates of] the Religious Rights." Thus "the ecumenical style that these communions have adopted in seeking to bring their influence to bear on public affairs would appear to be just what is now called for." The repetition of 'we' in these essays appears to be an assertion as if "the nation or America is the Church", as in the Pledge of Allegiance (Douglass and Mitchell, 2000: ix~xiii, 137).

Apart from these nationalistic accents on 'America', Robert Wuthnow emphasizes the specific religious aspect transcending the secular, particularly in the case of Christianity,

stating that “the Judeo-Christian tradition” has never “been able to confine its interests within narrow ethnic, regional, or national boundaries,” and that Jesus’ “compassion must extend beyond ethnic borders” (Wuthnow, 1992: 153).

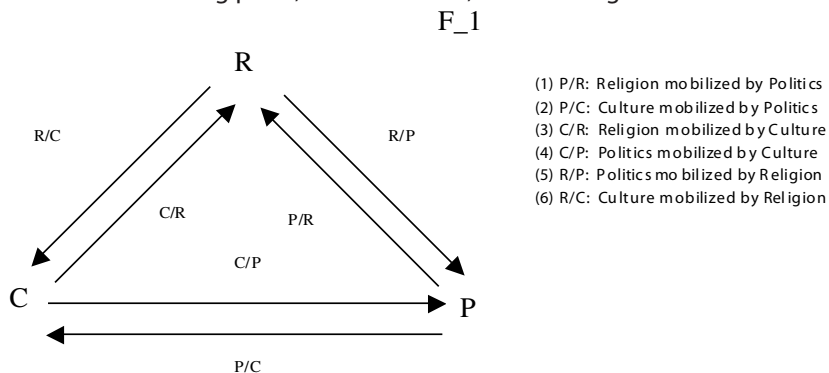
In this way, without either any consideration concerning particular situations, nor with due self-examination, the theological views as in the following may end up in inclusive expressions to the extent that not only America but all countries are ‘nations under God’: “Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God fulfilled the good pleasure of the Father by shedding his own blood and making an incomprehensibly vast purchase of men out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation;” and “Christ died for all men without exception” (Beasley, 2005: 25, 28). These assertions result in enveloping the whole world within one religious value system, and identify themselves as a global type of thinking that reminds us of colonialism.

On the other hand, there are pluralist assertions based on cultural and religious diversity expressed by participants who engage in inter-religious dialogue. For example a Jewish rabbi writes as follows. Although some orthodox rabbis “reject pluralism completely,” other rabbis mention that: “Some features of Jewish theology warrant pluralism,” since “God intended that we all think differently...and learn from others” (Douglass and Mitchell, 2000: 213-3). This may be described as a type of thought that posits “All nations with their respective gods under God’. In this way, the theme of public religion may be readily understandable by exemplifying religious nationalism or nationalistic religion, but the relationship between religion and society inevitably becomes extremely narrow and one-sided.

Public Religion in a broader Context: a Triangular Scheme

The following is an attempt to grasp the theme of public religion in a broader sense as collective religion pertaining to various levels of the social. In this case, some types can perhaps hardly be called instances of religion, but this cannot be avoided when one tries to illustrate and clarify typological differentiation within the frame of public religion. Thus, taking public religion in a broader sense, I have developed six types that show how the three realms, i.e. religion, politics, and culture, mobilize each other.

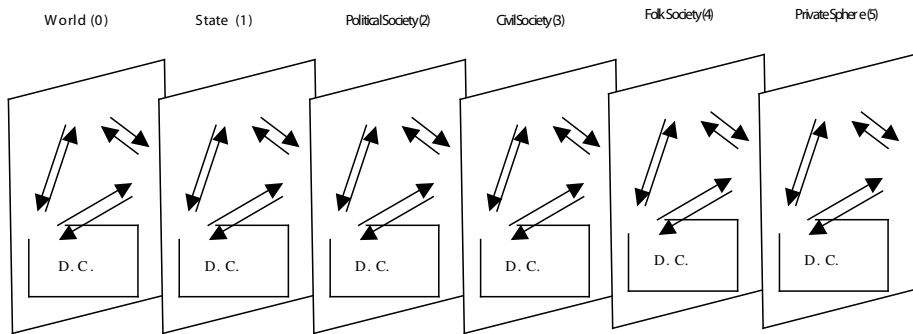
The direction of the arrow in the triangular scheme of public religion below indicates the starting point, in other words, the initiating factor.



F.1 Triangular scheme of public religion (Tsushiro, 2005:31)

By combining the six types of mobilization with the five spheres within which they occur, we arrive at thirty subtypes. The five spheres are the following: [1] the national state, [2] the political state, [3] civil society and [4] a national/folk society. To these we may have to add the world as a whole [0] that might be of considerable importance in the future. I use the term 'deep culture' to refer to the cultural reservoir underlying collective manifestations (Tsushiro, 1995). As for specifically religio-political constellations (R/P, P/R), a state religion is located in sphere [1], a political party based on a religious organization in sphere [2], a civil religion in sphere [3], a folk or national religion in sphere [4]. The same applies to culturally religious or politico-cultural phenomena.

F_2



F.2 Six Present and future spheres (Tsushiro, 2005: 69)

All the above classifications are collective manifestations of religion developing in the world. However, since they originate in personal faith of each individual, a private sphere [5] might also be taken into consideration whenever public religion is at issue, but again, most ideally, a global sphere [0] can be imagined, too.

A mass of issues concerning various relationships of religion and society can be located somewhere within this scheme. Since these thirty types are technically introduced, adequate examples of each type cannot be readily presented, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. Yet, in the following I will try to make connections between the types and give respective examples.

Type R/P-1 represents religious rule over the state. Meiji Imperialism, basing itself on an exoteric type of religion is an example of this category. Type R/P-2 refers to political action by a religious group or organization. The Soka Gakkai—the matrix of Soka Gakkai International (SGI)—organized the Komei political party that is typical for this category. Type R/P-3 refers to civil movements such as the peace, charity, and human rights movements initiated by religious actors. Type R/P-4 may stand for various forms of community action in a national/folk society led by a religious faith. Type R/P-0 may be understood either as a global civil religion or global action by some religious organization implementing a global strategy. According to a sharp comment by Yamaori Tetsuo, no other religions except the Vatican and SGI have such global strategy.

Other Types of Public Religion

Type P/R-1 represents a religious state initiated by politics. Meiji Imperialism has often been seen as a case of this category, that is, imperialism based on a type of esoteric religion. Type P/R-2 indicates the mobilization of religious sources by a political party. In this case, canvassing religious votes is most characteristic. Type P/R-3 represents mobilization of religious people by a secular civil movement, when members of religious groups sympathize with those objectives. Type P/R-4 may refer to occasions where people in a national society resort to religious power to secure local communities. Type P/R-0 refers to the rule or control of religion by secular global government, examples of which can be found only in utopian literature.

Type P/C-1 represents the political use of arts and sports by a national government. War literature, war movies, and especially sports inspired by nationalism are typical. Type P/C-2 refers to cases in which cultural events are promoted by a political party. Type P/C-3 stands for cases when musicians and artists are mobilized for participating in manifestations of civil movements. Type P/C-4 refers to the invention of folklore to develop or renew village communities, which sometimes is said to be folkloristic in intent. Type P/C-0 mainly refers to registration of cultural heritages by UNESCO.

Type C/P-1 is the category of powerful cultural impact on national policies. Here, we can mention the National Learning School in early 19th century Japan as a characteristic example which became the philosophical starting point of Meiji Restoration. Type C/P-2 can be exemplified by cases in which artists turn to politics. Type C/P-3 refers to civil movements initiated by artists. Type C/P-4 refers to the impact of ethnic culture on local governments that attempt to conserve historical landscapes at economically irrational costs. Type C/P-0 implies the cases in which cultural appeals affect global politics directly. This, however, is hardly imaginable, since no culture has effective power over human behavior as a whole.

Type R/C-1 refers to the relationship between culture and religion at the national level where religious institutions and rituals are designated as cultural treasures. Type R/C-2 refers to cultural events sponsored by religious organizations, backed up by a political party. Type R/C-3 refers to civil movements by religiously sponsored artists. Type R/C-4 implies the utilization of cultural treasures by folk religion. Type R/C-0 stands for transnational religious culture, as exemplified the religious institutions such as the Vatican rituals performed as instances of a World Cultural Heritage.

Type C/R-1~4 and C/R-0 constitute religious culture initiated by cultural actors. Religious culture can be regarded as the stage of the formation of culture through religious creativity, but it can also be seen as an instance of decline of religion. In other words, the former appears at the initiation of public religion, and the latter at its end phase. In both stages, the fusion of religion and culture is apt to be affected by politics.

Within this extensive scheme for describing public religion, the case of Yasukuni Shrine can be discussed as a religion initiated by politics at the national level, as type P/R-1. This, however, extends also to religious culture at the level of civil society and folk society, that is, types R/C-3~4 and C/R-3~4.

Present Situation of Japanese Religion

In this chapter, we adopt the point of view according to which various forms of diverse religious action—public religion writ small—constitute a singular public religion—public religion writ large. Soka Gakkai and Yasukuni Shrine are typical Japanese public religions in the former sense. Compared with these two, other Buddhist and Shinto denominations enjoy only little political influence. The latter are more relevant to popular religious customs than to politics. Their temples and shrines presently are part of Japan's cultural heritage, at least so for visitors. David Martin regards this type of religion as 'civic religion' ('civil religion' plus folk religion) on the ground that it is not private. This type of religion is equivalent to public religion in our broadest sense (Martin, 1978: 1~5, 52~3).

Jose Casanova mentioned instances of public religions in Japan in his note concerning 'public religions in the modern world.' He explains: "In terms of Japan's 'public religions,' equally interesting is the fact that both Buddhism and Shinto have alternated as established state religions in the past" (Casanova, 1994: 243). As is well known, this shift occurred at the time of the Meiji Restoration. Interestingly, while Casanova introduced the topic of Japan's 'public religions,' in fact, he referred only to Japan's 'state religion.' This implies that he, as a non-expert of Japanese religion, perhaps was unable to grasp the varieties of Japan's forms of public religion except for state religion. Or more correctly, in the case of Japan, Casanova discusses public religion solely in its political dimension. For present purposes, we would like to describe the religious situation in contemporary Japan using the broader definition of public religion.

Since the appearance of Bellah's 'Civil Religion in America,' quite a few discussions have followed his view, looking for an equivalent 'civil religion in Japan,' focusing on the function of social integration. Among those who take a negative stance concerning this question, some authors regret the disadvantage of Japan of having no orthodox religion like other nations (Noda, 1995). Others explicitly advocate the cultivation of a sense of modern citizenship. In the positive group, many mention that Shintoist and Buddhist beliefs as well as Emperor worship still exist in Japan. Yamamoto Shichihei belabored the idea of *nihonkyo*—as similar to Judaism for the Jews—namely, 'the religion of Japanese-ness' (Bendasan 1970). Ikado Fujio extensively discussed the idea of 'religion as deep culture,' consisting of 'spirit beliefs, ancestor worship, and family lineage consciousness' (Ikado, 1990). Others maintain that *nihonjinron* ('Japan-thought' that emphasizes Japan's cultural uniqueness) functions as a civil religion for the Japanese, thus reinforcing nationalism as in the case of many other nations (Davis, 1992; Yoshino, 1992). Still others regard Shinto in various disguises as having a persistent influence on a Japanese sense of identity (Nelson, 2000).

Given that Yasukuni Shrine could become a memorial for the war dead just as the USA's Arlington National Cemetery and as similar institutions in most other nations, these would be examples of political religion that was invented in the century of nationalism. As for Yasukuni Shrine, it was controlled by Japan's military administration before 1945. As such, it was one of the central institutions of state religion, a strictly normative type of public religion. After the war, however, it was changed into a private religious association.

Consequently, the so-called Yasukuni issue is highly complex one, about which many opinions have been expressed, to the extent that the number of opinions is presently exhausted so to speak. Yet, as far as I can see, many views focus one-sidedly on Yasukuni shrine as one instance of a national public religion (P/R-1), which polarizes into pro- and contra-positions. For example, one defender of the status quo claims that Yasukuni Shrine is a public religion in the same sense as Christianity is a public religion in the USA, which is a multi-ethnic country. "We, likewise, have Shinto as our public religion" (Uesaka, 2003:161~162). The critical side counters that the Yasukuni brand of religion constituted worship of the Emperor and the State. (Takahashi, 2005: 30). Thus, both critics and defenders are locked in a one-sided battle, while neglecting other sides of the complicated Yasukuni issue. But again, still others wander in various directions and get lost in a forest of different opinions.

Let us focus on two points: one, a possible alternative institution to Yasukuni-Shrine, and the other, a consideration of the war dead.

The Yasukuni Shrine: Possibility of an Alternative?

The government has forwarded a plan to establish a new national cemetery for the war dead as a substitute for Yasukuni Shrine in order to resolve the existent uneasiness of the matter. This would solve the constitutional problem of the 'separation of state and religion', but other critical points remain. For one thing, it would revive the process of establishing the Yasukuni Shrine, and for another, it would revert to the same statement as earlier of 'Shinto is a non-religious phenomenon'. In other words, the plan of a new memorial is not different from the plan to nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine as a non-religious association.

The above aspects of national religion are related to the priority of politics (P/R-1). Though politically highly serious, viewed from the substantial meaning of public religion, the issue is rather simple. Central institutions of a nationalistic religion (P/R-1) are by definition nationalistically colored. In order to technically clear the hurdle of the 'separation of state and religion,' the religious factor (R) must be minimized to the function of a memorial for the war dead with minimal religious decorations.

As far as I know, the most transparent view on Yasukuni problem is the one presented by Mitsuchi Shuhei. Mitsuchi points out the unbalanced character of the Shrine as a private corporation with a nationalistic origin. He foresees two alternatives: one, following customary beliefs, is to settle as a popular shrine, and the other is the possibility of a universal memorial for all the souls of the war dead (Mitsuchi, 2005: 197~198, 231~240). The former possibility of a popular shrine represents type R/C-3 or R/C-4, both of which are unproblematic, having little relevance to politics. A transition towards passive religious culture, however, would take many years to materialize before its political and social energy is consumed. In the mean time, Yasukuni Problem has still much fuel to be fired. The latter possibility, a Yasukuni Shrine as a universal memorial for all the war dead can be characterized as the type R/P-O, of which we have some examples among religious groups in civil society. Notwithstanding, it must also be remembered that a small shrine called 'Chinreisha,' dedicated to all souls, was set up within the precincts of Yasukuni Shrine several decades ago by devote priests.

The humanistic ideal of 'a memorial for all the war dead' is occasionally touched

on by both sides pro and contra, but there is no room for discussion. A defender says: "To memorialize the souls of the former enemy is nothing to be joked about" (Uesaka, 2003: 67). A critic mentions: "If you talk about sympathy for the war dead as a whole, why not memorializing former enemies, too?" (Takahashi, 2005: 166). Certainly, memorializing all the war dead has never been done by any national government yet. Nevertheless, there are many examples of memorial services including all war dead held by religious denominations and civil associations [3] as well as similar instances in the private sphere [4]. These occurrences may point towards of a future universal memorial.

The War Dead and the Religious Issue of Death

Thus far I have discussed the Yasukuni issue within the general scheme of public religion. At the center of the problem, however, lies another serious theme, that is, the reality of the dead.

Memorial services that express feelings for the departed implicitly presuppose the existence of souls or spirits. Yet, earnest reflection on this theme is rarely observed in contemporary Japan or elsewhere. Without reflection on those beliefs, however, commemoration of the dead, whether ancestors or the war dead, will continue to waver between custom and sentimental remembrance. In respect to the above, it is well known that the contemporary philosopher Umehara Takeshi discussed ancient shrines and temples that had been established to reconcile the spirits of the victims by the executors themselves. Younger authors of religious studies, such as Yamaori Tetsuo and Nakamura Ikuo, have applied this thought to the Yasukuni Problem (Kawamura, 2003: 30, 263). When public religion or any other religion reflects on ultimate conditions, the issue of death and the departed arises. In other words, any religion that in due time does not focus on the reality of the dead has not much *raison d' être* as a religion.

Here we come to an old question, whether funerals are for the dead or for the living. I will not dwell on the latter case. As for the former, however, it may mean both honoring the dead—which very often extends to political manipulation of the dead by the living—and solacing the dead, which equals to listening to the dead.

'Listening to the dead' in a religious context usually means paying attention to the experiences of those who died. In a specific Japanese religious context, the relatives of the departed request a shaman or medium to let them 'hear the voices of the dead'. Sato Takehiro in his monograph on Okinawa religion points this out as follows: A *yuta* (one term for shaman in Okinawa, Japan), listening to the spirits of those who have become victims of the war, hears their voices and sees them with his/her own eyes. He/she uncovers the fraud of political rituals that does not come to the fore in national narratives (Sato, 2006:142~3).

The severe war criticism in the narrations of *yuta* has never been established as a theme of religious and other studies until very recently, because this practice has been a taboo in studies of shamanism in post war Japan. Ikegami Yoshimasa reports in his paper on the bereaved relatives of the war dead, that many people secretly requested an *itako* (another term for shaman) in order to hear the voices of fallen sons, husbands, and fathers (Ikegami, 2006:38~9).

According to many reports, the dead do not only speak in anger or sorrow about

the tragic conditions of the war, they also voice their concern and care for their bereaved relatives and the imagined community. As a Christian aptly states: "The reality of the dead de facto seems to be forgotten in traditional religion," and "in order to apologize to the dead, the plight of the departed must be kept in mind." Further he insists that: "Memorials for dead must be universal rather than national, since religious and national differences are of no account in the afterlife" (International Institute for the Study of Religions, 2004: 100~101).

To sum up, earnest reflection on the seriousness of death brings to mind the awareness of an afterlife, far beyond the concerns of politics, society, and institutional religions. This seemingly extreme profession of belief in an afterlife (Nakamura, 2006: 227) urges us to reconsider the very condition that death transcends the narrow humanism of the living, not to speak of their interests. It transcends life on earth.

Certainly, the interests of the living shape religion, the more so when the actuality of death is lost. This tendency is reinforced by institutionalization. Institutional religion cannot help straying away from the land of living and dying. The late Miyata Noboru, one of the most famous scholars of folk religion, puts it aptly in his posthumous book: "A religion in decline loses contact with the otherworld. This implies a loss of sensibility for the otherworld and spirits. What remains is a shell of religion" (Miyata, 2001: p. 53). Nevertheless the living faithful cannot do without their associations, temporal or permanent, large or small. The task of religious professionals, in order to live their religious ideals in this world, probably is put to in place accentuation on the reality of the dead over and against the temporal interests of the living. Although looking like a detour, in last resort, this leads to the sublimation of Public Religion.

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Тсуширо Хирофуми

ВИШЕДИМЕНЗИОНАЛНО РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ ЈАВНЕ РЕЛИГИЈЕ: СА СПЕЦИЈАЛНИМ ОСВРТОМ НА ЈАСУКУНИ ХРАМ

Резиме

Приликом разматрања религијско-политичких проблема током последње деценије, термин јавна религија коришћен је од стране не малог броја научника. Храм Јасукуни, највећа меморијална институција у Јапану посвећена палима у рату, типичан је случај у дискурсу о јавној религији о коме се расправља с различитих тачака гледишта у многим контекстима. Предлажем да се питање храма Јасукуни анализира у оквиру троугаоне схеме која се односи на три друштвена подручја: политике, религије и културе. Манифестације јавне религије у најширем смислу могу се анализирати као облик интерне мобилизације између ова три подручја. Даље, мобилизација се јавља унутар неколико области, то јест, унутар државе, политичке заједнице, цивилног друштва, народне заједнице и глобалног друштва. Овај широк спектар омогућава мултидимензионалну анализу такозваног проблема Јасукуни, као и других религијско-политичких проблема. Овај приступ, по свој прилици, води бољем разумевању наведеног питања и, коначно, стабилнијој ситуацији.

Кључне речи: јавна религија, јапанска религија, шинто, храм Јасукуни, национализам, пали у рату, културни национализам, културна религија.

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