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Un-Civil Religion: Shinto and Shūkyō in Postwar Japan

Justin Lawrence

May 1st, 2015
In Japan, there have been times when people who serve their community or nation are enshrined and venerated as spirits. In the case of Yasuko Nakaya, she did not want her husband to be remembered in this way because they were both Christians. However, a group of officials in the Self Defense Force (SDF) helped a veteran’s association get her husband enshrined at a gokoku (nation-protecting) shrine. Nakaya took them to court and was awarded damages because the court ruled that the enshrinement violated the constitutional division between the state and religion. However, the SDF continued to appeal the case and it came before the Supreme Court where they decided that the SDF was not at fault as they were not directly involved and their motivations were not based in religion. Rather, the court argued that they intended to improve morale and were helping an organization act out social custom rather than a religious rite. This gets at a very important question. How do religion and the state relate to each other in Japan today? There are some scholars who argue that the concept “civil religion” encompasses the relationship between religion and the state in modern Japan. Civil religion itself is something that is hard to define and difficult to discuss in the Japanese context due to the history of the term religion.

Religion and Civil Religion

The definition of religion has a very long history that is bound up in the Enlightenment and the modern European obsession with categorizing everything. Talal Asad speaks directly to religion as an anthropological category in *Genealogies of Religion* where he argues that religion, as defined and discussed in the past, does not work as a proper category because it fits one society at one time as he explains in the context of the shift from the defining characteristics of
Christianity from the Middle Ages to the 17th century.\(^1\) Since there is a shift in the understanding of religion in the same place and in the same religious tradition, it would only follow that there would be more of a change in the understanding of similar phenomena in another country with a completely different religious tradition. Jason Josephson describes how it was difficult for “religion” to be translated in Edo Japan when the Americans came because a single term that encompassed both belief and practice that also included all traditions did not exist in Japanese at the time.\(^2\) This idea is echoed in Junichi Isomae’s article where he discusses how religion had various terms that were used for translation in the early years of Japan’s introduction to religion such as \textit{shūshi} 宗旨, meaning sect laws, but that term had the connotation of practice and did not encompass the idea of belief like religion did.\(^3\) The word eventually chosen for religion in Japan was \textit{shūkyō} 宗教, which came to mean something more internal, based on faith rather than external practice.\(^4\) From these articles it is clear that religion is not a very old concept in relation to the existence of religious traditions in Japan.

Civil religion itself is a phrase that Jean-Jacques Rousseau coined to describe the need for a religion of the state that could guide the morality of the people. Rousseau describes civil religion as something that has a god who is intelligent and mighty, upholds the sanctity of law, and rewards the just while punishing the wicked. Civil religion, according to Rousseau, is something that the government uses to unite the people across all religions unless the state itself is the arbiter of the religion, in which case others are expelled from the state on the basis of not being a part of the religion.\(^5\) Emile Durkheim presented another idea for civil religion which is

\(^1\) Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion}, 40-42  
\(^2\) Josephson, \textit{The Invention of Religion in Japan}, 79  
\(^3\) Isomae, “The Conceptual Formation of the Category ‘Religion’ in Modern Japan,” 230-231  
\(^4\) Josephson, \textit{The Invention of Religion in Japan} 200-201  
\(^5\) Rousseau, \textit{Social Contract and Discourses}, 121-122
that religion itself is something that society creates to perpetuate itself and have an ideal toward which to work. People practice the rites and rituals to affirm their unity as a society.  

Williams and Demerath argue that Rousseau’s idea of civil religion is created by the government and instituted upon the people, while Durkheim’s idea of civil religion is a creation of the people that naturally occurs in society. However, even though Rousseau and Durkheim both have forms of civil religion derived from their theories, it was not until Robert Bellah examined civil religion in the context of the United States that it became something popular to discuss among scholars. Bellah argues that a civil religion borrows from the greater religious background found in the area and is used to create a system that borrows from both the secular and religious institutions. Explaining this union further, civil religion is a structure that is made by taking bits of both the ancien régime and the modern democratic institution to successfully fit government actions in religious language without singling out one religion as superior, invalidating the idea of separation between the state and religious authority. Bellah’s definition fits more along the line of Rousseau’s definition of civil religion, which makes that definition a starting a point for the discussion of civil religion.

There are many different opinions on civil religion from various different scholars. Ronald Beiner argues that civil religion is not the successful merger of politics and religion and is instead a “necessary contradiction” as a religion that is good for politics is tyrannical and a religion that works more for the people does not work well for politics. His point is that the ideal civil religion is not something that can exist in society since there has been a division of the state and religion; there is not a proper way to recreate the union of the state and religion. This

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6 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 422, 427
7 Demerath and Williams, “Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society,” 156
8 Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 13-16
9 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 82-83
point goes against the Bellah’s point of fitting the government into religious language. Bruce Murray discusses civil religion in the United States, and argues that it is the sacred weaving of the people together as a nation though patriotism and nationhood. In his definition of civil religion, he draws closer to the Durkheimian idea of civil religion as something that comes up from the people, which in his definition is the patriotism and nationhood which is held as sacred by the people through different traditions. However, Murray does further mention arguments on the topic of civil religion in the courts. This discussion ranges from the idea of non-sectarian prayer at public school graduations in the case of Lee v. Weisman in which civil religion was mentioned as existing, but not being allowed to sponsor prayer due to the Establishment clause of the Constitution. However, the Supreme Court also decided that the words “under God” were permissible in the Pledge of Allegiance because it fell under the banner of “ceremonial deism.”

Civil religion is a term that means different things, including religious language and meaning welded to the state actions, such as the Pledge of Allegiance. It is clearly a category whose meaning is up for debate even within the Western world, but it can become more complex when applied to places outside of the West. In the case of Japan, there are many differences in how civil religion presents itself.

Something else that is important when discussing religion in Japan is the lack of religious adherence claimed by the Japanese people. A survey conducted in 2005 by the Japanese General Social Survey found that 60% of the people in Japan do not follow a specific religion and of those who do, over 50% did not have a strong devotion to any religion. Religion is something that is difficult to measure in Japan because of how the term “religion” was forced on the country when it first had contact with the United States. As such, there are high levels of people who

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10 Murray, *Religious Liberty in America*, 42-44
12 Tanaka, “Limitations of Measuring Religion,” 848
claim not to be religious in Japan at all, and religious activity is something that is ascribed to the Japanese people. Further, civil religion is an etic category that the scholars have attempt to apply to postwar Japan to describe what they see as the celebration of the Japanese identity or government support of religious institutions.

Civil Religion in Postwar Japan

Scholars have various positions on civil religion in postwar Japan. There are some who argue that civil religion along the lines of State Shinto is on the rise while others argue that the civil religion found among the people is more about celebrating being Japanese through local festivals. There are those who would also argue that there is a celebration of being Japanese in a theory known as Nihonjinron 日本人論, or Japanese Theory. There is also the belief that civil religion is not something that exists in Japan at all. I argue that civil religion is not a term that should be applied to postwar Japan because it gives a sense of unity that does not exist when looking at those things argued to be civil religion.

Some scholars, such as K. Peter Takayama, take a more Rousseauean route in examining civil religion. Takayama in his 1988 article argues that since the abolition of State Shinto in the postwar era, there has been a loss of Japanese national identity that was not fulfilled in the forms of democracy and progressivism.13 Takayama explains that during the early postwar era, Japanese people mostly felt that the old ways of the prewar era could sustain them, but that idea changed with the growing affluence of the 1980s under the rule of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).14 He argues that the LDP has been trying to recreate the civil religion of the past by attempting to rewrite the textbooks and nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine. Specifically, he uses a quote by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone who argues that they Yasukuni Shrine is equivalent

14 Ibid, 335-336
to Arlington Cemetery and that in order for it to fulfill its true function properly, the shrine must be transferred from Shinto control to government control. Takayama argues that a new civil religion is on the rise in Japan due to the growth of the new nationalism and seems to come from a perspective that it is a foregone conclusion. I believe that civil religion is not a foregone conclusion; rather, I think that there is too much disunity in the discussion of how Yasukuni should be governed for scholars to argue that civil religion is on the rise in Japan.

Ian Reader argues that civil religion still exists in Japan. However, his idea of civil religion is different than the idea that Takayama believes is taking hold. Rather than the Roussaeuean government leading the revitalization of State Shinto, creating a civil religion from the top down, he believes in a more Durkheimian civil religion that exists among the people centering on the idea of the furusato 古郷, or “one’s native village.” In this model, the people create civil religion based on the rituals surrounding the village shrines and matsuri 祭り, festivals. Reader argues that the community festivals and their related activities are merely part of being Japanese and not necessarily religious. While I do agree that civil religion can be created from the people celebrating their identity, I do not necessarily agree with Reader that the practices of the Japanese in their festivals connect to a civil religion because religion in Japan is not easily defined. I believe that what Reader is observing is just religious action in Japan rather than civil religion raised up from the people.

Winston Davis takes yet another approach to the idea of civil religion in postwar Japan, namely that civil religion from the prewar era, State Shinto, has been secularized to form the theory of Japanese identity, or Nihonjinron. Davis argues that although it is fragmented,

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15 Ibid, 338
16 Reader, “Civil Religion in Contemporary Japan,” 11
17 Ibid, 20-21
*Nihonjinron* has overtaken the old idea of State Shinto to become the new basis of Japanese identity, and that with time it may even become a Japanese civil religion. Davis’s argument hinges on the idea of secular and religious being two separate things and the idea that State Shinto has in fact gone through a secularization process, despite the very idea of civil religion being something that muddies the line between what is secular and what is religious. Even more problematic is that Davis takes these ideas out of their contexts when using them in relation to Japan and that is why I do not find his notion of a secularized civil religion very compelling.

Harumi Befu argues along the lines of Davis that *Nihonjinron* fits the idea of being the Japanese civil religion. However, he believes this because there is no other identity-based theory that is more highly supported by the Japanese people. He brings up percentages of people polled who accept *Nihonjinron* as a proper way to measure Japanese identity and nearly all of those polls showed less than 50 percent support or belief in *Nihonjinron*. I disagree with Befu by simply promoting support for civil religion in Japan because it is still something that is contentious among the Japanese people. Concerning *Nihonjinron*, there were equal amounts of people who agreed with the idea that it was a good fit for Japanese identity and those who were not sure if it fit. The lack of a clear unity on the subject means that civil religion should not be used to describe this as it is not wholly supported by the people.

Michiaki Okuyama’s views on civil religion in postwar Japan differ considerably from these positions. Rather than arguing whether a specific idea fits the phenomena in postwar Japan, Okuyama argues that it is good to think about the phenomena in Japan and then compare it to a phenomenon that exists elsewhere to better contextualize what both mean. I do not agree with

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18 Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, 369-370
19 Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 119
20 Okuyama, “‘Civil Religion’ in Japan?” 75-76
the assertion that the debate about a specific concept should be dismissed in Japan because if scholars are going to discuss the concept, then there needs to be a named concept to discuss.

I believe that civil religion is not a proper etic application to postwar Japan because there is too much division about the arguments presented by scholars for it to fit properly. Regarding the relationship between the government and religious institutions, there seems to be a less well-defined answer than either it is State Shinto in a new form or that civil religion is nonexistent. The courts do not completely agree on the way religion and the state are allowed to interact and even more importantly, the people do not completely agree about the relationship between the two. There are significant voices on both sides of the issue that try to prove their point, and because of the lack of sufficient agreement, I would argue that civil religion is too definite a term to fit the discussion that goes on about the nature of the relationship between the state and religion.

**Case Studies and Methodology**

I will start this evaluation of civil religion in postwar Japan by discussing the applicability of “civil religion” in the courts, focusing more on Rousseau’s idea of civil religion. There are various important court cases that set up the precedent for the separation of religion and the state in Japan, focusing more on the government’s ability to go through with different actions that support religious institutions. The 1976 Nakaya Enshrinement case dealt with how the SDF helped an organization enshrine a widow’s husband against her wishes, upon which the Supreme Court and the lower courts did not completely agree. There is also the 1989 Ehime Donation case which dealt with the local government using public funds to donate trees to a local shrine, which was defended as merely being a cultural practice and not religious. The disagreements between the lower and upper courts speak more to how the relationship between
the government and religion is disagreed upon between the courts. Further, the Supreme Court broke the precedent of defending the government in cases involving the support of religious institutions when it came to the 1997 Yasukuni Shrine visitation case, where the court said that it was not constitutional for the prime minister to visit the shrine in an official capacity.

The Yasukuni Shrine is a very important symbol in the discourse on civil religion in Japan today. It enshrines the souls of those who died in service to the defense of Japan and included in this group are 14 class-A war criminals. There is a debate surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine and how proper it is for prime ministers to visit the shrine and make public worship at the shrine. There are also other issues that affect the nature of government visits to Yasukuni, like the fear of nationalism and its effects on relationships with South Korea and China. The separation of the state and religion issue that comes with the Yasukuni Shrine is not wholly partisan, both members of the conservative LDP and the more liberal Democratic Party of Japan, DPJ, are a part of the group called “let’s go to Yasukuni Shrine to pay homage together” (minna de Yasukuni ni sanpai suru kaigi みんなで靖国に参拝する会議). With the division among the members of the Diet and the issues surrounding Yasukuni in general there is no consensus on whether prime minister visits are allowed or whether that would constitute breaking article 20 of the Japanese constitution forbidding support of a particular religion.

In the past two case studies, I plan to focus on Rousseau’s definition of civil religion. In this one, I will focus more on Durkheim’s definition of civil religion, focusing on the people celebrating their own identity. Matsuri are a way that people from the community come together and celebrate their identity in such a way. The matsuri are festivals and they can occur on many different levels depending on which festival it is. There are some which are purely local and are

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21 Ryu, “The Yasukuni Controversy,” 706-707
not well known outside of the village or town and there are others which are very well known such as the Gion matsuri. This case study points to the question as to what exactly religion is in Japan. As discussed previously, Japan had the idea of religion imposed on it when America came to the country and forced it to open, trying to secure the freedom to worship in Japan. Belief was not something that was central to the idea of worship in the Japanese case before the arrival of the West and it can still be that way today. It is important to understand how religion works in Japan when examining this type of civil religion because religion can be based more on practice than belief. Matsuri are religious festivals and the community celebrating them does not necessarily make them civil religion. The debate about whether the practice of religion among the people is civil religion seems to be unimportant in the light about how religion is understood to be more praxis based in Japan.

Civil religion is something that was defined outside of the context of Japan and scholars debate whether it exists in the postwar era. The majority opinion seems to be that civil religion exists in the postwar era, but I would argue that it is far more discussed and debated among the Japanese for one opinion to simply be for it to exist or not to exist. I argue that civil religion, a category not used by the Japanese people, does not exist in postwar Japan. There is too much debate and discussion for it to properly be used as a label for postwar Japan.
Section 1: The Courts

Shinto is the religion which has been the most linked with government power in the modern and contemporary eras. This has created a number of different court cases which deal with the separation of the state and religion, focusing almost entirely on the relationship that different levels of government have with the Shinto religion. But in order to properly analyze the relationship between the postwar government and the Shinto religion it is important to examine what Shinto is and if it qualifies to be a religion at all. From there it is possible to look at the different cases that attempt to clarify the relationship between the government and religion. These court cases can serve as a litmus test for how the government sees the separation between the state and religion. There is disagreement not only between the different court levels and the judges who serve on the courts, but also among the people of Japan in how close the government and religious authority should be. The closer they are, the more reminiscent of State Shinto it is. The Tsu City Groundbreaking Ceremony case, the Minoo Memorial case, the Nakaya Enshrinement case, and the 1997 Ehime Shrine Donation case are all cases that address the separation of the state and religion. In examining the court cases and the reactions of those people who participated in them, it is clear that the disagreement about government-sponsored rituals and donations is significant enough that something akin to the idea of Rousseauian civil religion does not exist in postwar Japan.

Rousseauian civil religion is the idea of reconciling the state and religion into one thing in which both are supported. Hammond describes that civil religion is something that must exist as separate of both the government and religion, something that is guided by both, but something
independent. The disagreements and arguments that exist in postwar Japan deal with the very nature of how the government and religion get overly entangled. The Rousseauian idea of civil religion cannot work because the government and religion do not work in tandem with each other. This same problem does not exist in the United States, because the United States was founded with the idea of “religion” and the idea of the separation of the state and religion. With this foundation, something like civil religion could be created in order to legitimize the government while still allowing for the government to have no mandated religion. Japan had no concept of religion, the traditions were just teachings that people followed. The religion that was constructed in order to unite the Japanese people is Shinto and is important to the discussion of civil religion.

Shinto is considered by many to be the indigenous religious tradition of Japan, something akin to “animism” which reveres nature. However, a problem comes up in trying to define Shinto as religion and even further in trying to define it as something separate from the other religious traditions in Japan such as Buddhism. As discussed previously, religion is an import to Japan from the Western world via the Americans who came in 1853 demanding religious freedom for American citizens who would visit Japan. The definition of religion is especially important when looking at the construction of Shinto in the modern era. Tracing the idea of Shinto in Japan, it originally started out as a way to describe the three teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) that were imported from China, and the growth of Shinto as something more closely associated to what it means today started in the fifteenth century. There was a separation of Shinto from Buddhism in Japan which helped to construct it as Shinto, which could have been considered something less of a unified tradition and more something akin to local festivals and

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22 Hammond, Varieties of Civil Religion, 43-44
23 Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 98
local gods that was tied very closely to Buddhism. Part of the separation was the reemphasis of the emperor as the descendent of the sun goddess Amaterasu and his importance as the leader of Japan in the cult of the emperor.\textsuperscript{24} The cult of the emperor is deeply important to the institution of State Shinto. In Japan today, Shinto is something that can be described in various ways,

As the aforementioned Kawagita explains, “Shinto is recognized as the collective daily customs innate to the Japanese people which is perceived as a thought, a precept and a religion and it is also perceived as the ideology of the ultranationalists (State Shinto).” This “collective daily customs innate to the Japanese people” could be called civil religion. Shrines exist all across Japan and have become the object of worship for many citizens, and furthermore, they have deep roots in our daily lives. In other words, it is civil religion (or possibly public religion).\textsuperscript{25}

Essentially, Shinto is something that is more than religion; it is something that is thought to encompass every Japanese person’s experience. Nitta also considers this definition to be representative of civil religion, as it explains that is something intrinsic to every Japanese person. However, there are people in Japan who do not uphold Shinto as something sacred that they need to follow and actively reject it as a way of practice for their lives. Broad claims aside, the definition that Nitta provides is a good way to understand that Shinto can be seen as more than just religion in the Japanese context.

This more expansive definition of Shinto can explain how Shinto was constructed in the postwar era under American Occupation. During the Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa eras, from around 1868 until 1945, Shinto was not taken as a religion at all, but rather a political and civil way that people worked in society. State Shinto is often the term that comes to mind when discussing Japan during the war. State Shinto can be misconstrued as a state religion, but as Jason Josephson argues: “Japanese policy makers often described it as ‘national ceremonies’ (kokka no soshi) ‘national teachings’ (kokkyo), ‘political teachings’ (chikyo), or patriotic ‘duty’

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid}, 100-101
\textsuperscript{25} Nitta, “Seikyou bunri to shimin shukyou ni tsuite no hougakuteki kousatsu,” 23
whose realities they contrasted to a religion they characterized in terms of belief (shinkyō).”

Shinto, during this period from the Meiji to end of World War II, was in a privileged position in which it was something beyond just a religion. State Shinto was a category of civic teaching tied to the government. During American Occupation, there was something known as the Shinto Directive according to which State Shinto was supposed to be removed through the freedom of religious establishment and the separation of the state and religion. Thus, something which had been a part of the government for so long was suddenly removed by adopting a strict separation of the state and religion after World War II by the American Occupation. This means that something as simple as a groundbreaking ceremony as standard practice before all construction is made more difficult because the government and religion are not supposed to mix.

The first major case that dealt with the authority that the government has when regarding religion is the Tsu City Groundbreaking Ceremony case. In this case, before building a school gymnasium the city government sponsored a Shinto ceremony, jichinsai, which is a way within Shinto to ensure a safe construction project. The case was brought to the local courts by a member of the Communist party who had to attend the event as a city leader. The Supreme Court sided with the government and in its argument stated that while the act of sponsoring the ceremony did in fact have religious significance it was not comparable to an act which might support Shinto or oppress other religions. This is an important point as it serves as the standard by which all other cases are judged by when dealing with the separation of the state and religion. The action that the government is sponsoring must not oppress other religions and also must not promote the religion. Otherwise, government sponsorship of religious events is legal, since it is

26 Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 133
27 Nitta, “Seikyou bunri to shimin shukyou ni tsuite no hougakuteki kousatsu,” 24
28 White, “Reexamining Separation,” 40-41
29 Nitta, “Seikyou bunri to shimin shukyou ni tsuite no hougakuteki kousatsu,” 27-28
impossible for the government and religion to not interact. The district court, where the suit was originally brought, decided that the Shinto Shrine did not need to return the money since the ceremony had a secular purpose.30 The Nagoya High court disagreed and decided that the money needed to be returned after the original court decision was appealed by the plaintiff, Sekiguchi, and held that there had to be a strict separation between the government and religion or the freedom of religion cannot be guaranteed.31 The Supreme Court had agreed with the district court but disagreed with the Nagoya court and so the Supreme Court created the standard stated above in order to give a guiding principle that could be used in other such situations where the separation of the state and religion became unclear.

The Minoo Memorial case deals with how honoring the war dead and veterans play into the separation of the state and religion. The case dealt with two residents of the city, Satoshi and Reiko Kamisaka, who argued that the relocation of a war shrine, *chūkonhi* 忠魂碑, was an entanglement of the state and religion in a way that violated the constitution. They specifically targeted this case because they lived during the war and they did not want their children in the elementary school near where the memorial would be placed to have to be under the imposing sight of the memorial. They aimed to take the city to court in order to resolve it on a public stage.32 The reasoning behind the entanglement argument was because all souls who are enshrined in the *chūkonhi* were also enshrined in Yasukuni and the government had agreed to pay for the relocation and lease of public land to the Japanese Association of War Bereaved Families (JAWBF) for the memorial which was a kilometer away, in front of an elementary school.33 The Osaka district court agreed that moving the stone was too much of an entanglement

30 O’Brien, To Dream of Dreams, 85
31 Ibid, 86-87
32 Ibid, 9-10
33 Ibid, 4-5
with religion and ordered that the money be returned, which caused a stir among Mayor Nakai and different groups, one the most notable of which was JAWBF. It is easy to see here that Mayor Nakai, the defendant, had a great deal of support as there was widespread criticism of the court decision; however, there was also support for the plaintiffs in the case, the Kamisakas. When it was time to go through with the next trials, they had to hire lawyers because Mr. Kamisaka was no longer in good enough health to argue on his own behalf. Much of the money that was raised came from people all over Japan to support the plaintiffs in their endeavors. The support for both sides of the case shows the divisiveness surrounding the separation of the state and religion. Observing the divisiveness between people on the subject of the separation of the government and religion allows one to see how something like civil religion, which depends on the agreement of the people about which actions violate the separation of the state and religion, cannot exist in postwar Japan.

When the Osaka High court handed down its decision on the Minoo Memorial case, the judges reversed the decision of the district court. Where in the district court the inscription of the characters chū, kon, and hi on the chūkonhi memorial made it an object of religious veneration that was inextricably tied to the Yasukuni shrine, the high court simply ruled that the memorial was not an object of religious veneration. The disagreement in the decisions of the courts is different in this case than in the Tsu case because in the latter the Supreme Court looked at the event and created the “purpose-effect standard” to judge government and religious entanglement, whereby if there is significant promotion or oppression of a religion as seen through the eyes of the “average” citizen, then the two would be overly entangled. In the Minoo Memorial case, the Osaka High court sidestepped the argument of the religious nature of the shrine by simply not

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34 Ibid, 103
35 Ibid, 105
36 Ibid, 109-110
acknowledging the shrine as a place of religious meaning. The Minoo Memorial case is based on people’s attitudes to the memorial structure. In the case of the courts, the decision was split between the two and the appeal sent to the Supreme Court was rejected because they reasoned that the “average” citizen of Japan would not see the memorial as something religious.\(^{37}\) There are more ways to look at the shrines, such as the enshrinement of people in war memorials.

The Nakaya Enshrinement case is the case that was used at the beginning of this thesis. A woman, Yasuko Nakaya, was contacted by her prefecture’s *gokoku* shrine, to inform her that her husband had been enshrined there and that there would be annual rituals to honor him as a *kami* 神 for protecting the country. Mrs. Nakaya fought against this and sued the Self Defense Force (SDF) and SDF Friendship Association for enshrining her husband because this violated her religious freedom as a Christian which her husband had respected in life.\(^{38}\) The case itself dealt with the freedom to practice religion and the line that keeps the government and religion separate from each other. Mrs. Nakaya won the first two cases, in the local court and in the district court, with both holding that she was owed money from the SDF Friendship Association and the SDF itself since it had been discovered that the SDF had been involved in the enshrinement of Mrs. Nakaya’s husband. However, the enshrinement of her husband was not reversed because the *gokoku* shrine and members of the SDF Friendship Association could also claim religious freedom and Mrs. Nakaya herself was not forced to go worship at the shrine.\(^{39}\) The issue that was most pressing for the case itself seems to have been the implication that the government, in this case the SDF, had in fact been in conversation with the SDF Friendship Association concerning the enshrinement of Mrs. Nakaya’s husband. If there was not any evidence of a link between the two, then the courts would have likely ruled that Mrs. Nakaya was not forced to do

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\(^{37}\) Zachman, “The Postwar Constitution and Religion,” 234  
\(^{38}\) O’Brien, *To Dream of Dreams*, 142-143  
\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*, 186-187
anything regarding her husband’s enshrinement and removing him from the shrine would violate the religious rights of the Yamaguchi gokoku shrine priests and members of the SDF Friendship Association.

When the case reached the Supreme Court, it was ruled that the SDF and the SDF Friendship Association did not collaborate in a way that showed government support for Shinto in the enshrinement of Mrs. Nakaya’s husband. Moreover, since she was not required to participate in any events regarding his enshrinement, her own religious beliefs were not hindered in any way. However, even though this was the majority opinion, there was significant disagreement among the judges about what the SDF had done. One judge had a dissenting opinion, but there were also those in the majority who were critical of the SDF’s actions in the case, ranging from believing that the SDF should have exercised more self-control on the enshrinement to the belief that the SDF was fully complicit in the enshrinement and breaking the separation the state and religion, but not actually infringing on Mrs. Nakaya’s freedom of religion. The division of opinions between the judges on the Supreme Court demonstrates the disunity on the opinion of what the government is allowed to do concerning religion. Beyond just the judges on the Supreme Court, the local and district courts and the Supreme Court disagreed on what the government is allowed to do in regards to religion. The decision here officially sides with the government agreeing that there was no significant violation of Mrs. Nakaya’s freedom of religious belief and that the SDF was not heavily involved in the enshrinement of Mrs. Nakaya’s husband. However, in looking at the different judges’ own opinions on the matter, there is much greater critical diversity in how the SDF handled itself in the situation and how it, as a government agency, should act in regards to such religious matters.

40 Ibid, 197-198
41 Ibid, 199
In 1997, there was a large break with tradition in regards to how the Supreme Court dealt with the entanglement of religion and the state. The decision that broke this tradition was the Ehime Tamagushi case in which a governor in Ehime prefecture was donating *tamagushi* 玉串, offerings of tree branches, to local Shinto shrines and the Yasukuni shrine. In the past this had been allowed as a social custom, but it was struck down.\(^{42}\) The Supreme Court decision striking this down was incredibly important since it broke the precedent of the Tsu standard by looking at how the “average” citizen would view the donations and judge if the action was too much of an entanglement between the state and religion. In this case, the Supreme Court argued that there needed to be a higher amount of scrutiny applied when looking at the involvement of the state in religious affairs.\(^{43}\)

Tracing the case itself, it started in the district court to determine whether or not the governor was allowed to use city money for donations to different Shinto shrines, including Yasukuni shrine. A Buddhist priest took the governor to court and argued that he was privileging Shinto above other religions and violating the constitutional separation of the state and religion. The district court agreed with this reasoning and ordered the money to be paid back to the city. The case was appealed and went to the high court where it was decided that the governor was simply acting within the confines of social customs and did not significantly privilege one religion as defined by the Tsu case. In a case like this, the Supreme Court would normally side with the government in their decision. However, the Supreme Court deemed that the donations were illegal, not because the government needs to be completely uninvolved with religion, but rather because the government should remain neutral, at the very least giving offerings to other

\(^{42}\) Morimura, “Freedom of Religion and the Separation of the State and Religion,” 23-24
\(^{43}\) Nelson, “Implications of the 1997 Supreme Court Decision,” 797
established institutions, such as Buddhist temples.\textsuperscript{44} The important part of the ruling is that the Supreme Court decided that privileging one religion over another makes the government religiously biased, which could affect official visits to the Yasukuni shrine.

The courts have never agreed really on the idea of the separation of the state and religion. The district courts tend to be more critical of state involvement in religious affairs and rule that practices such as the Minoo memorial relocation were unconstitutional. The Supreme Court tends to side with the government, arguing that government officials were merely following social customs. There is also contention about the subject among the people of Japan, as seen in the numbers of people who support both sides of these arguments in the different cases. Further, the American Occupation force made Shinto into a religion in order to keep the nationalism of State Shinto under the wartime government. Practices which had been considered secular were suddenly considered religious, making the separation of the state and religion more difficult when concerning former government practices. Because of these disagreements about the separation of the state and religion, and the 1997 ruling from the Supreme Court, civil religion does not exist in postwar Japan. There is not enough agreement for government sponsored rituals and donations to function as something that guides the nation by the means of principle, such as in the definition provided by Rousseau.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 805-806
Section 2 – Yasukuni Shrine

Scholars such as K. Peter Takayama and Mark R. Mullins have argued that civil religion is something that is centered on the Yasukuni Shrine. Yasukuni is a holdover from the wartime era when it was used to house the souls of those who died in defense of the nation. The souls were deified and held there as they continue to help aid the defense of Japan in the afterlife. Yasukuni is a private religious shrine that is not owned or operated by the government, however, there have been and still are times when members of the government will make official visits to the shrine and perform a religious ritual. The nature of the souls enshrined at Yasukuni makes these actions more noteworthy than other examples of civil religion. From the late nineteenth century through World War II, Japan invaded many different countries in Asia. This history has remained a point of contention between Japan and other modern Asia nations, most prominently China and Korea, as Japan has made few acknowledgements of the past war crimes and has people who served in the war enshrined as sacred spirits. The Yasukuni shrine is the most contentious shrine between China, Korea, and Japan as there are fourteen class-A war criminals who are enshrined there as country-protecting deities. The visits to the Yasukuni shrine and the gifts that are given to the shrine by the prime ministers of Japan cause a lot of controversy between the countries and can make international news. The issue of the Yasukuni shrine appears in newspapers in countries outside of Asia. This international focus on the Yasukuni shrine makes it hard to act as a center for civil religion because civil religion, in a nation where there is a strict separation between the government and religion, needs to be covert; attention would ruin the ruse of separation.

Robert Bellah, in his article, “Civil Religion in America,” claims that in his speech, Kennedy vaguely refers to God as the source from which all rights of people come from in the
United States and the vagueness allows nearly all Americans to identify with the speech.\textsuperscript{45} Civil religion is something that exists as something vague for all people in the nation to gather behind. This is not the case for the Yasukuni Shrine as there is so much attention from the international community and from the politicians who either wish for it to be made into a state institution or want remove the class-A war criminals. It is too divisive to serve as a proper center that quietly unifies people. This does not mean that the people at the Yasukuni shrine have not \textit{tried} to unify everyone together through rhetoric of the Yasukuni Shrine. There is a guide for children when they are visiting the shrine in order to answer any questions that the children might have about the shrine. It is narrated by Poppo the pigeon and ends by telling the children that they must now “treasure ‘Our Japan,’ which these people protected.”\textsuperscript{46} The people who protected Japan are people who fought in various wars and are now worshiped at the shrine. A cute pigeon tells children that they should honor these souls because they are Japanese and it is their duty to honor those who died for Japan. It is a way for the people to begin to see the Yasukuni Shrine as something that is deeply important to Japan and Japanese identity because the people who are enshrined there fought for the nation in order to keep it protected and free, which is only partially true.

Yasukuni Shrine was originally built during the Meiji era as a shrine to honor “men who sacrificed themselves in civil conflicts on the emperor’s behalf.”\textsuperscript{47} It was a site that was intimately tied to the symbol of the emperor and to the military. Yasukuni had a deep connection to the various wars that Japan participated in because those who were killed in war would be enshrined there. Since the shrine had been a place to honor and enshrine all who had fallen in defense of Japan, most Japanese did not consider the shrine a religious site and neither did

\textsuperscript{45} Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 3
\textsuperscript{46} Gardner, “Nationalistic Shinto,” 339
\textsuperscript{47} Breen, \textit{Yasukuni, the War Dead, and the Struggle for Japan’s Past}, 12-13
General MacArthur after his discussions with Catholic priests, Bruno Bitter and Patrick Byrne. It was considered a civic institution where people could worship freely without breaking the codes of their own religions. Yasukuni prospered during all of the wars and had strong funding from the government. During the 1930s and 1940s, Yasukuni started to become more militarized because of World War II and other conflicts that Japan was involved in to expand the empire.

The occupation forces declared that Yasukuni shrine was a religious institution and that the government needed to stop funding it in order to comply with the separation of the state and religion along with the delegitimization of State Shinto after the war. The shrine continued to hold the spirits of war dead, but it did not enshrine the fourteen class-A war criminals that it is infamous for housing today. The head priest did not want to risk placing such high-level war criminals in the shrine and thus declined the requests from the Ministry of Health. It was not until a new high priest came into office in 1978 that Yasukuni allowed the class-A war criminals to be enshrined there as deities. From this point onwards, the Yasukuni shrine would be firmly situated in political debates primarily between China and Japan as to the justification of enshrining these war criminals and about subsequent visits by prime ministers to the Yasukuni shrine in their capacity as public officials.

The Yasukuni shrine has always been entangled with the state and religion, as it started out as a shrine which supported the state and was part of the Meiji regime’s new State Shinto policy after the Tokugawa era. Even after the occupation forces separated the state and religion in the constitution after the war, Yasukuni still remained close to the government. Between 1969 and 1974, the Yasukuni Bill was brought before the Diet in order to nationalize the Yasukuni

48 Mullins, “How Yasukuni Survived the Occupation,” 96-97
49 O’Dwyer, “The Yasukuni Shrine and the Competing Patriotic Pasts of East Asia,” 150
50 Breen, Yasukuni, the War Dead, and the Struggle for Japan’s Past, 19
51 Ibid, 9-10
shrine six times. It failed each time, even with support from different right-wing groups such as JAWBF and the Association of Shinto Shrines, because it breached the separation of the state and religion.\textsuperscript{52} After the enshrinement of the class-A war criminals, such a bill would be even less likely to get passed into law because of the rift it would have caused between China and Japan. Civil religion is something that acts covertly in a society such as postwar Japan. It cannot be too overt as people can start to raise issues with contradictions if they attract too much public attention. Yasukuni is at the center of international controversy between Japan and China and Korea because of the war crimes of those who are enshrined there. The international controversy extends beyond just Asia as it has made headlines in areas such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where the issue has been portrayed in the \textit{New York Times} and \textit{The Times}, respectively.\textsuperscript{53} This is international attention that allows for many different vantage points and as such Yasukuni cannot be a center of civil religion. In order for something to properly act as a center of civil religion, there has to be a covert element to it, but since Yasukuni is at the heart of such controversy it cannot act as an effective center.

During Prime Minister Koizumi’s tenure, he visited the shrine many times in an official manner, which elicited harsh and increasing criticism from China, such that by late 2005 China’s representatives were “refusing to meet with Koizumi on the sidelines of East Asian regional meetings.”\textsuperscript{54} From the perspective of the Chinese government and people, the visits that Japanese prime ministers have performed as public officials seem to legitimize the shrine. The prime minister going to the shrine also presents problems for the separation of the state and religion in Japan because if the prime minister goes to the shrine and observes the customs in his

\textsuperscript{52} Takayama, “Revitalization Movement of Japanese Civil Religion,” 333
\textsuperscript{53} Wong, “Japan’s Gift to Shrine for Soldiers Angers China,” A11; Tony Bonnici, “Japanese Leader’s Visit to War Shrine Prompts Fury – China,” 35
\textsuperscript{54} Breen, \textit{Yasukuni, the War Dead, and the Struggle for Japan’s Past}, 23
or her position as a public official, then it seems as though the government is condoning the enshrinement of the war criminals at Yasukuni. A way to get around the controversy would be to remove the class-A war criminals from the shrine and place them elsewhere, which would, in the eyes of some Japanese officials, make China and Korea accept the Yasukuni shrine more readily. However, the problem with that is that the priests at the shrine argue that such a removal cannot be done because the souls are bound to the shrine and beyond that, the government cannot just remove the war criminals because doing so would violate the separation of the state and religion. There is no way to actually separate the shrine and the war criminals without the shrine being made into a secular institution, which the LDP and the priests of the shrine do not actually want because then it would ruin the entire point of the Yasukuni shrine, a place where the spirits of the war dead can rest after serving the nation.

The Yasukuni shrine is also a focal point for political players, such as Japanese nationalists, who want to see Japan as a country unto itself. There are Japanese ultranationalists who believe that without a place to mourn their dead, Japan is not truly a “normal” country in the sense that the United States is “normal” country. This belief is tied into the belief that Japan is not a “normal” country since it cannot have a standing military as defined by the constitution. The argument can seem compelling, but the two places are not actually equal in terms of designated status, as Yasukuni is a private religious organization, while Arlington cemetery is simply a cemetery where veterans and war dead are buried and is in fact owned by the military, meaning it is not a private, religious institution. Another problem that arises with this vision of the Yasukuni shrine is that the people who want to restore it to a place of national importance are often associated with other nationalistic ideals for Japan. One such group is Japan Conference,

55 Ibid, 6
56 Takayama, “Revitalization Movement of Modern Japanese Civil Religion,” 337-338
Nippon Kaigi 日本会議, which has support from various high-ranking people in Japanese society, such as business leaders, government officials, and officials from Shinto shrines. One part of their mission is to support official visits to the Yasukuni shrine in addition to “patriotic education” and constitutional revision. The group is much more in line with the right-wing nationalist view of how Japan should be and a part of that vision seems to be the support of an official state-centered morality. This action on their part seems to suggest that either that the Japanese government has not fully devoted itself enough to an ideal morality for the people or that there is no state-centered morality in Japan.

Politicians are also divided on the subject of the Yasukuni Shrine. More nationalistic politicians favor support and official visits to Yasukuni, but those who are more liberal do not. The focus by nationalist groups in Japan to get Yasukuni recognized as a state institution also hampers the shrine’s ability to act as a proper center of civil religion because the discourse surrounding the shrine is not covert enough. Yongwook Ryu produced a survey that asked about feelings toward Yasukuni among members of the LDP and other political parties, which led him to discover a bipartisan group of politicians who wanted to institute official visits to the Yasukuni shrine. There is also a significant group of politicians in the LDP and other parties who do not believe that official Yasukuni visits should be sanctioned. This data complicates the issue as the conservative LDP is not all of the same voice when it comes to the idea of official Yasukuni visits and there are disagreements within the DPJ as well, meaning that there is an unstable foundation for supporting the Yasukuni shrine as a bastion of civil religion. There are also massive organizations within Japan that have opinions on this issue which has cause more division and demonstrations in Japan. There have been demonstrations by labor unions and other

57 Mullins, “The Neo-Nationalist Response to the Aum Crisis,” 110-112
58 Ryu, “The Yasukuni Controversy,” 706-707
non-governmental organizations to the visits to the shrine.\textsuperscript{59} Public division about the Yasukuni Shrine keeps it in the public eye, thus undermining it as an effective bastion of civil religion because civil religion needs to be covert.

This might be a too overt for civil religion in postwar Japan, but there is another way that scholars have theorized civil religion in postwar Japan. Winston Davis has theorized that since Japanese religion has become secular, so too has the civil religion, which has become \textit{Nihonjinron}, the theory of Japanese uniqueness.\textsuperscript{60} This argument is similar to the one of Yasukuni shrine being civil religion as they are both nationalist and have the idea of Japanese exceptionalism associated with them. The difference is that \textit{Nihonjinron} is less overt than Yasukuni. There are things about \textit{Nihonjinron} that do not qualify it as a civil religion however, first of all in the fact that it is not is not unified, which Davis himself even states in his chapter.\textsuperscript{61} The lack of unity on what actually constitutes the Japanese national character and conflicting notions based largely on the author’s personal experience means that it cannot really be quantified into a civil religion.

In addition, there is nothing religious in nature about \textit{Nihonjinron}. In Davis’s argument, he brings up the fact that \textit{Nihonjinron} has some of the same uses that civil religion had during the war, but there is nothing religious about \textit{Nihonjinron}, it is more of a genre of literature rather than a religion used to create social cohesion. Another thing about \textit{Nihonjinron} is that many Japanese people, when polled, do not subscribe to the main core beliefs of \textit{Nihonjinron}, usually being fewer than fifty percent. And while Befu mentions that even though this does fail Davis’s own criteria for civil religion, it still works because it is the most agreed upon ideology.\textsuperscript{62} This

\textsuperscript{59} Shibui, “The Yasukuni Shrine Dispute,” 204
\textsuperscript{60} Davis, \textit{Japanese Religion and Society}, 254
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid}, 270
\textsuperscript{62} Befu, \textit{Homogeneity of Hegemony}, 118
really does not mitigate the fact that it does not cover a majority of the population. If *Nihonjinron* needs majority support in order to be considered civil religion, then scholars should adhere to that metric rather than adjust the criterion to fit the theory.

Neither the Yasukuni shrine nor *Nihonjinron* fit the Rousseauean definition of civil religion in postwar Japan. There is too much controversy around the Yasukuni shrine for it to be a proper center of civil religion. There is the international level of scrutiny that is placed on the shrine between China, Korea, and Japan, which makes headlines around the world, including in Europe and the United States. The central controversy concerns the enshrinement of class-A war criminals from World War II and the visits that prime ministers have made in an official capacity. Chinese and Korean officials view this as giving the shrine and enshrinnements legitimacy, and because they are such important diplomatic and trade partners with Japan, there is a split within the government between politicians who support prime ministers’ visits to Yasukuni and those who do not. There have been demonstrations and court cases by different groups in Japan over the visits that are made to the Yasukuni shrine. With all the attention that is devoted to Yasukuni, it cannot act as a focal point for civil religion because civil religion needs to be covert. Civil religion needs to be understood as not breaking the separation of the state and religion and it has to be uniting for the people, rather than divisive.
Section 3: Festivals

Separate from the legalistic side of civil religion, which follows more along the lines of Rousseau's argument regarding a state-guided morality, there is another type of civil religion that Emile Durkheim described as society needing a religion of shared beliefs and rituals in order to maintain itself. Durkheimian civil religion keeps society together by having regular communal rituals that give participants a sense of unity. Some scholars claim that this type of civil religion exists in postwar Japan instead of the Rousseauean type of civil religion. Durkheimian civil religion is a different type of civil religion than has been previously discussed in this paper. Rather than imposing religious unity on the country from the government, it is the union of a people through religious identity. The people of the society have a collective belief and identity that is affirmed through ceremonial actions that unite them as a people. It is through these collective beliefs and actions that a society is held together and maintained. This form of civil religion requires participation in these social rituals and an ideal toward which society can work.

The primary proponent of a Durkheimian notion of civil religion is Ian Reader, who argues that civil religion in Japan is the local matsuri and pilgrimages that are performed to unite the people under the ideal of the furusato, one’s own village, to create a spiritual homeland in the modern world. Putting on festivals and going on pilgrimages unite people as Japanese through practice rather than belief, which is why Reader labels them “civil religion” rather than “religion.” The problem with this view is that it assumes that practice without belief is not religious, which does not fit in the Japanese context. The term “religion” was introduced to Japan at the very end of the Tokugawa era and the beginning of the Meiji era. People in Japan debated how to translate

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63 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 427
64 Ibid, 422
65 Reader, “Civil Religion in Contemporary Japan,” 19-20
“religion” into Japanese because there was no comparable existing term that combined belief and practice. Belief became the dominant component of “religion” because by the nineteenth century the English term “religion” was based primarily on understandings of Protestant Christianity. Religious action in Japan is therefore understood as not religion because of the way that religion was defined early on. Toshimao Ama gives an explanation how action, rather than just belief, became more important as the way to salvation in the world throughout the Tokugawa period and beyond. Festivals and pilgrimages can be thought of as religious actions because even if there is no belief in the people performing in the festivals and making pilgrimages, the action is the important part. Further, there is the problem with ascertaining a person’s belief. Answers can change based on time the time that the question is asked, say during a matsuri, and can change based on who is asking about the person’s belief. It is difficult to rely on this metric fully.

Winston Davis also claims that Durkheimian civil religion exists in postwar Japan, but he argues that civil religion has arisen as Japan has secularized due to the growth of the money economy. However, Davis’s view of the secularization of Japanese religion does not hold up because the use of money does not mean that acts are not religious. Funerals and other memorial services have been practiced in Japan for a long time and money has been taken by the priests, but it has not made the acts any less religious. Davis also argues that belief has fallen in Japan because of the use of money in religious practice. According to Davis, “Most shrines and temples are more concerned about assisting members to fulfill their religious obligations to kith and kin than they are with developing with an articulate worldview.” This argument seems to privilege belief over practice in the vein of the religious landscape of the West and does not

66 Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 78-79
67 Ama, Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?, 20-22
68 Davis, Japanese Religion and Society, 236
69 Ibid, 253
properly place Japanese religious practices in their proper context. This argument about religion also imagines a special “pure” form of religion that is separate the economic sphere of society.

There are two case studies that will show that Davis’s and Reader’s arguments do not hold up. In Reader’s argument, there seems to be a focus on the shared religion of the people as being a form of civil religion.\(^7^0\) However, the special designation of civil religion rather than “religion” seems useless. Reader focuses on the local *matsuri* as a way to explain why the people who share this religious practice are engaging in civil religion. The reasoning seems to be that since Japanese people share this practice that is not necessarily defined as either Shinto or Buddhist it is therefore civil religion. Reader does not designate them as “religion” because people from all religions can participate in these festivals without believing in them, but that privileges belief over practice and keeps to a Western-centric view of religiosity. Davis, on the other hand, takes a separate approach and does not consider practice in conjunction with the use of money as a part of the religion and is instead a sign of the secularization of Japan.\(^7^1\) Davis seems to present the view that religion is not something that money can be involved with or else the religion is has become corrupted by the “secular” world. This can be shattered by looking at the various memorial services that have been practiced in Japan for a very long time in which priests take money from the mourning family to perform the rites that support the temple. The use of money does not make the ritual any less religious and yet Davis considers it decay in belief because people are not going to temples in order to fulfill spiritual growth and just focus on the obligation to the deceased family. The designation of civil religion is a way for the scholars to sidestep the question of what “religion” itself means in Japan. Reader takes the local *matsuri* to be civil religion because not all of the people necessarily believe in the meaning

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\(^7^0\) Reader, “Civil Religion in Contemporary Japan,” 11

\(^7^1\) Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, 236
“behind” the action. Davis argues that the secularization of Japan has led from State Shinto determining Japanese national identity to *Nihonjinron* as a secular civil religion without giving proper consideration to the construction of the “secular” and “religious,” and taking the use of money to signify the secular.

*Matsuri* most commonly refer to the Shinto shrine festivals that are practiced in various different towns and cities around Japan. There are different types of festivals ranging from ones at the local level to ones on the national level.\(^72\) Since there is such variety of *matsuri*, there are many different ones that can be applied to test Reader’s argument about *matsuri* being civil religion. Furukawa is a small rural town in the Hida region, part of the northern Gifu prefecture in Japan. It remained mostly isolated until the trains connected it to the rest of Japan in the 1930s.\(^73\) Furukawa *matsuri* is a festival that is practiced in the spring when warmer weather has come to the area and the cherry blossoms are just blooming in the village and is where the local *kami* is believed to come into the village and the people petition them for the good harvests for the year. However, the social aspect of gathering all the people together for one large effort has become more important in the contemporary period.\(^74\) While Schnell does note that there is a difference in the social gathering aspect of the contemporary Furukawa *matsuri*, it is not something that is actually mutually exclusive, since large harvests do require a large community effort.

The *matsuri* in the contemporary period begins at 10:00 am with the gathering of Shinto priests, parish elders, *miko*, shrine maidens, *gagaku* musicians, and low-ranking shrine officers file into the main shrine hall. Once in the hall, the head priest waves a branch over the group who

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\(^72\) Ashkenazi, *Matsuri: Festivals of Japanese Town*, 4

\(^73\) Schnell, *The Rousing Drum*, 33; 270

\(^74\) Ibid, 71
is bowing down with eyes forward.\textsuperscript{75} Something important that Schnell mentions in his analysis of the \textit{matsuri} is that the \textit{kami} is treated as an honored guest as the offerings are presented before the altar on a table.\textsuperscript{76} This is the offering part of the \textit{matsuri} and is not actually a part of the larger fanfare; it is very ritualistic and measured. At 1:00 pm, people gather outside of the shrine in order to escort the \textit{mikoshi}, portable shrine, on its way around the town. But before the \textit{mikoshi} can be taken around the town, the head priest has to take the \textit{kami} from the main shrine to it in an amulet wrapped in cloth while he is wearing white gloves and a white mask. The musicians around will play their instruments more loudly in order to build drama for the transfer as the head priest places the talisman in the \textit{mikoshi}.\textsuperscript{77} The \textit{mikoshi} is then paraded around town in a set path with abbreviated rituals of the shrine ritual being performed and it eventually settles at the building called the \textit{o-tabisho} for the rest of the festival.\textsuperscript{78} This is the more formal part of the event, as the rest of the event is filled with more revelry as the night comes about.

This part of the \textit{matsuri} is known as the \textit{tsuke daiko}, rousing drum ceremony, and it is when a drum is played and paraded around town starting at 10:00 pm.\textsuperscript{79} Overall, the festival is very exciting with a lot of lively behavior and many people throughout the town participating in the procession. This excitement has led to it being a very famous \textit{matsuri} for people to visit from around Japan.

The importance of the community in creating the large event cannot be understated as it really has become a focus of the Furukawa \textit{matsuri} in the postwar era. This type of event is what Ian Reader would label as civil religion in his argument about the practice of \textit{matsuri} unifying people through the \textit{furusato} ideal. The event has been a way for the town of Furukawa to attract

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}, 85-86
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid}, 86
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid}, 88
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid}, 91-93
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid}, 98-100
tourists by attempting to create a sense of nostalgia in the communal village ceremony of the past.\textsuperscript{80} While it may seem like there could be a distinction between “religion” and “civil religion” in this matsuri, like Reader has claimed in his article, that is not the case. The practice of the matsuri and its attraction for tourists are rooted in religion. The event hearkens back to the imaginary of a more community-oriented Japan rather than the consumerist society that has become so prominent in the contemporary period. This has been played up by the community in order to attract tourists and build the economy in the very rural town. As such they have built a museum with certain pieces of the festival along with a movie of the rousing drum ceremony so that more people would attend the town more often than just the matsuri.\textsuperscript{81} Reader argues that this is what defines these festivals as civil religion because the Japanese people are searching to recreate an idealized past within modern society.\textsuperscript{82} I argue that the special designation of civil religion complicates the matsuri because religious practice, even with money and tourism surrounding it, is still religious practice.

Davis argues that the secularization of religion in Japan set up the environment in which a new civil religion could come about. His argument is that the money economy started this secularization process. He argues that as money became more present, the groups that were in charge of festivals and rituals became less cohesive and also time that was spent for religious ritual shrank as people needed to spend more time in work to get money. Also the modernizing influence of a standard time and calendar that slowly ended the applicability of local customs based on the lunar calendar.\textsuperscript{83} In response to this, one need only look at the practice of funeral Buddhism in the Tokugawa era. Priests charged money for memorial services which would aid

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 271
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 272
\textsuperscript{82} Reader, “Civil Religion in Contemporary Japan,” 19-20
\textsuperscript{83} Davis, Japanese Society and Religion, 236-238
the deceased family member in their movement in the afterlife. Particularly important was the ordination of the dead as a Buddhist monk and getting a Buddhist lineage chart with their dharma name.\textsuperscript{84} The family spent money in order to have their relative taken care of in this way and it would lead them to a better rebirth. This was a religious ceremony and people spent money on it in order to help their family members move throughout the next life and into a better one. Part of the reason that this became so prominent was the fact that the Tokugawa government enforced a registration system in which all families must be aligned with a certain Buddhist temple in order to be proved not Christian. The temples had a lot of power in the way they could keep outcasts in line by giving them bad posthumous names and only those with a lot of money could buy their way out of it.\textsuperscript{85} This was a way that temples could keep people in their parishes following the order of Tokugawa society.

The temples also had a lot of power in the way that they sold medicine during the Tokugawa era. One such medicine was a herbal pill called Gedokuen which was sold through the Soto Zen sect of Buddhism because, according to legend, it was given to Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, by the \textit{kami}, Inari and was supposed to be passed down his dharma lineage.\textsuperscript{86} This was a way to connect the medicine of divine origin and made it special. Not only was associated with Buddhism through Dogen, but also to Shinto through Inari. This medicine was also bound up in the economy because of the great demand and it was distributed through the Soto Zen temples. Beyond just this example of money being used, Davis’s assertion assumes that the use of money leads to the secularization of religion, which is based on a modern, Protestant-centric notion that religion should be separate from the economic and political spheres. Further, it implies that religion would just become secularized in every society that had a money

\textsuperscript{84} Williams, \textit{The Other Side of Zen}, 42-43
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid}, 30-31
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid}, 90
economy and while religion does change, it does not just become secular. And this belief of the
secularity does not fit in with premodern or non-Western societies as well because it is just as
much of a construct as religion. Without religion, as understood in a modern, Western context,
secularity cannot exist as secularity is described as the lack of religion.

All in all, the designation of Durkheimian civil religion in postwar Japan does not hold up.
Reader’s argument that there is civil religion in the way that people seek an idealized past
through the practice of matsuri does not take into proper consideration the importance of practice
instead of just belief. He seems to argue that matsuri are civil religion because they are practiced
in order to fulfill an obligation to the community and bind the community together through
tradition rather than centering on belief in the deity that the matsuri is honoring. However,
religion in the context of Japan has been defined by actions, and not necessarily belief. Davis’s
argument about the secularization of Japanese religion leading to a new civil religion does not
hold up because money does not just lead to the secularization of religion. In addition, there were
religious practices that have been performed with the exchange of money in the Tokugawa era.
Durkheimian civil religion does not fit with postwar Japan because it unnecessarily complicates
Japanese religion. The use of “civil religion” by scholars is a way to explain away religious
activity that is too economic and thus secularized, or purely ritual actions. There is still a
Protestant-centric understanding of religion which keeps scholars from fully being able to study
religion in a comparative sense because religions other than Protestant Christianity do not fit the
same mold.
Conclusion

In 1996 Ama Toshimaro published *Why Are the Japanese Non-Religious?* (Jpn.: *Nihonjin wa naze mushūkyō nano ka?* 日本人はなぜ無宗教なのか), which quickly became a bestseller. The book deals with the seemingly conflicting way that Japanese people claim to be not religious but also engage in different religious activities. The book presents a paradoxical notion in that people in Japan are non-religious and yet still engage in religious activity. Many scholars have accepted the concept of Japanese non-religiosity, which has led to certain maneuvers in analyzing Japanese people’s participation in religious activity. One of these maneuvers has been to describe such activities as civil religion.

Civil religion is a concept that was created to imagine a society running perfectly. Rousseau argued that there might be a religion of the state that brings unity to the people but does not call them to be loyal to any other institution or look out for a better afterlife. Another view is that civil religion can take the form of a group of people practicing a religion they may not believe in, but is done in order to promote community and follows more along the lines of Durkheim’s idea of religion and society’s intermingling. Robert Bellah’s “Civil Religion in America” brought civil religion into the modern context, where it was eventually applied to Japan in both the pre- and post-World War II eras. Various scholars have argued that civil religion is a proper designation for postwar Japan, but I argue that religion, rather than civil religion, works as a better term overall.

Religion is a term that was originally coined in the West and translators in Japan had a difficult time making sense of the term because there was no term like in Japan before that time.

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87 Josephson, “The Paradoxes of Secularism in Contemporary Japan,” *Nonreligion & Secularity* (blog)
88 Rousseau, *Social Contract and Discourses*, 121-122
Since the translation was based mostly on the idea of belief following Protestant Christianity, that is the primary metric for religion with the new term shūkyō in Japan. This has led to a belief that people in contemporary Japan are non-religious because polls show that the people do not subscribe to a certain religion, but they do practice religious rituals and generally believe that these rituals are important. Since the basis of religion that most people in the West have rests on belief, it is important to understand the differences that exist in other places regarding religion. Religion can be actions that people perform rather than the beliefs that people have, so that the term “religion” can fit different cultural contexts that did not develop with a concept of belief-centered religion. In the case of Japan, there is a history of ritual practice to gain benefits in both this world and the afterlife rather than just active belief. This helps to inform the notion that Japan is a non-religious country.

There are three different areas that I look at to see the possibility of civil religion being an adequate designation for postwar Japan. The court cases are a context to observe and understand civil religion by seeing if the courts uphold the support of religion by the government. Yasukuni shrine is another context to see if civil religion is a proper description of Japan because of Yasukuni’s past as part of State Shinto and prime ministers’ annual visits to the shrine. Festivals have also been brought up as a way to describe Japanese civil religion because of the way that the people participate in them in order to create community rather than actually believing in the actions that they are performing. They go through the motions because it is expected. These are all ways that scholars have argued that civil religion exists in postwar Japan, but I have argued that this is not the case.

89 Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 78-79
90 Josephson, “The Paradoxes of Secularism in Contemporary Japan,” *Nonreligion and Secularity* (blog)
91 Ama, *Why the Japanese are Non-Religious?*, 16-17
Court cases are more an example of Rousseauean civil religion in that the various court cases deal with how the government supports religion specifically. In the case of the courts, religious ritual had been upheld as a viable use of public funds in different Supreme Court decisions in Japan starting with the Tsu City Groundbreaking Ceremony Case.\(^\text{92}\) The case set the standard of looking at all future cases where the government and the religion intermingled too closely. And while the Supreme Court favored the government in the majority of these hearings, the local and district courts did not. In later cases, like the Nakaya Enshrinement case, there have even been splits of opinions on the Supreme Court regarding the separation of the state and religion.\(^\text{93}\) The government has shown that there is not enough agreement on the case of the nature of the separation of the state and religion to viably call the use of religious ritual civil religion because there is not a solid position that can be held about it.

The Yasukuni shrine is another site that scholars like K. Peter Takayama use as an example of civil religion. Yasukuni shrine is a place where souls of the war dead were enshrined after giving their lives for the empire and has a history that is deeply ingrained in the Japanese imperial domination of Asia. Part of that history is the enshrinement of fourteen class-A war criminals in Yasukuni and annual visits and shrine offerings from various prime ministers such as Prime Minister Koizumi, which has elicited harsh criticism from China and Korea.\(^\text{94}\) While there are those, like K. Peter Takayama, who have argued that this is a sign of growing interest in the revitalization of an old State Shinto style civil religion in Japan, I argue that such a thing cannot be possible in the context of the Yasukuni shrine.\(^\text{95}\) Yasukuni is a place that has a lot of attention focused on it because of the controversial nature of the war criminals enshrined there.

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92 White, “Reexamining Separation,” 40-41
93 O’Brien, To Dream of Dreams, 142-143
94 Breen, Yasukuni, the War Dead, and the Struggle for Japan’s Past, 23
95 Takayama, “Revitalization Movement of Modern Japanese Civil Religion,” 328-329
and civil religion needs to be more covert in order to act as a proper bastion of social unity. If the Japanese government were to put its full support behind Yasukuni, it would not only be an issue between China and Korea and Japan, it would also make headlines around the world meaning something like the revitalization of civil religion through Yasukuni could not be possible. Moreover, the shrine is a religious institution rather than just a governmental or secular space; the visits to the shrine by the prime ministers could just be described as religious acts rather than civil religious acts.

“Religious” is also a good way to describe the actions of people who participate in local matsuri in Japan. Ian Reader has argued that there are those who do not necessarily believe in these actions and merely use them to fulfill and obligation to the community rather than a personal religious act.96 This is more of an example of Durkheimian civil religion as the argument focuses on the creation of community through religious practices, thus making it civil religion. I argue that Reader is focusing too much on the belief aspect of the religion and not enough on the action of the religion, which is arguably more important in a Japanese context which did not have the concept of religion until it was introduced in the Meiji era.97 The argument for civil religion does not make much sense when religion works perfectly fine to describe the matsuri as they are performed in different villages. The notion of civil religion complicates the description and understanding of religion in Japan, focusing on belief without giving proper examination to the action of religion.

In the larger scale of the discussion of religion in Japan, issues arise when identifying postwar Japan, especially Shinto actions and areas, as specifically civil religion. Shinto is oftentimes discussed and thought of by a majority of people as something unique to Japan that

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96 Reader, “Civil Religion in Contemporary Japan,” 16
97 Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 78-79
had either an unbroken continuous worship throughout Japanese history or served as an underlying mood of the Japanese people, even if it is not practiced.98 By focusing on Shinto as something unique to Japan and removing its religious nature, as some scholars have done, the comparative study of Shinto cannot be done because there is nothing else to which to compare it. By looking at Shinto and Shinto practices as civil religion there is too much focus on how these actions are civil religion rather than just religion. Another important thing to consider when looking at civil religion is the stress of a Protestant mode of comparative study of religion. Rather than focusing on religion as action and practice, all the focus is on the belief aspect of religion, and while that is an important part to the study of religion, it is just that, a part. As Asad has argued there needs to be an unpacking of the definition that scholars have of religion before looking at religion to make sure that the study is not marred by the understanding of religion from one particular historical perspective.99 If there is to be significant comparative study of religion, then religion as defined in the more Protestant belief-centric model of religion needs to be discarded and religion needs to be approached in a more holistic manner. Civil religion in postwar Japan complicates the study of religion and does not make sense in the context. It is more apt to look at religion to better study and understand.

99 Asad, Genealogies of Religion, 54
**Bibliography**


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