

Keynote Address : Modernization and Religion

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Keynote Address: Modernization and Religion

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This is the sixth meeting of the Taniguchi Symposium in Civilization Studies. It has become customary for me to give the keynote address of the symposium.

The theme of this year's symposium is "Comparative Civilization Studies of Religion." As the opening speaker, I would like to share my views of how religion can be treated from the perspective of comparative civilization studies. At the same time, I hope to stimulate the participants in the symposium, all of whom are specialists in some aspect of religious studies, and to provide some assistance for the presentations and discussions that will take place throughout this coming week.

There are two central purposes of this Symposium on Comparative Civilization Studies of Religion. One aim is to question the role that religion played during the developmental period of modern civilization in Japan. The other is to examine comparatively and consider the meaning of the role religion played or is playing in the process of modernization in the civilizations of countries other than Japan.

Previously, the issue of religion has usually been treated from the standpoint of comparative religion. But I think a main aim of this symposium is to use the phenomenon of religion as a lens through which to study civilization comparatively. I hope there will be discussion of theoretical aspects as well, critical reexamination of issues such as Max Weber's interpretation of the relationship between modernization and religion.

In this opening address, I would like to focus on the perspective that informs the entire symposium. I will leave the particulars and the theoretical problems to the specialists.

First, let us consider Buddhism and Christianity, the religions of East and West, in a comparative way, from the perspective of the map of world religions as they represent the civilizations of the world. There would seem to be many points that could be compared in the relationship between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the Christianity of Western civilization and the relationship between Mahayana and Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism in Eastern civilization.

The word "Catholic" used in Christianity comes from the Greek *katholikos*, meaning "universal". Thus we have the Church, a universal that transcends the State, the universal Church. Feudal lords represented the State and authority, and it is from them that the opposition of Church and State was born.

If we look for something in Japanese religion that corresponds to the universality of Catholicism, it is the colossal Buddhism that came from China rather than the

indigenous Shintō. Buddhism in Japan has endeavored to accommodate itself to the national order, but as a system of thought it is universalistic. A Japanese king (emperor) has never controlled Buddhism; the teachings of the Buddha envision a universal realm known as the Western Paradise, a realm that clearly transcends the power and authority of the Imperial court. This is the world of Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, a universal world.

But in Japan, although Tendai and Shingon were the predominant classical sects, Zen was brought in from China, and Nichiren and Jōdo Shinshū, both sects with early modern aspects, were also born. All exist side by side. If we think of Zen, Nichiren and Jōdo Shinshū as having stepped outside of the universal or "catholic" world in Japan, then we can see them as corresponding to the Protestant groups in Christianity that stepped outside of Catholicism. In this sense, Japan's situation is similar to that of Germany, where Catholicism and Protestantism exist together despite a tendency to be differentiated geographically. From a comparative point of view, we might call Jōdo Shinshū the Protestantism that emerged in Japan from the Mahayana Buddhist world.

In contrast to the Catholicism of the Western European world, East Europe had the world of Orthodoxy. Although the Greek Orthodox Church usually comes to mind when we think of Orthodoxy, Orthodox Churches also existed in close association with the State in such areas as Serbia, Macedonia, Russia, Armenia and Bulgaria. I mentioned "the world of Orthodoxy," but in actuality there is no unified, universal Orthodox world. Rather, there are many separate religions that are distinguished along national lines. In other words, there is a national Church, an *église nationale*, in Eastern Europe as opposed to the universal Church, or *église catholique*, in Western Europe.

There is a parallel in the Buddhist world of the East to this *Eglise Nationale* Orthodoxy that is differentiated by country. It is the world of Theravada Buddhism that can be seen in countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Burma. Buddhism takes a different form in each of these countries.

Also, although it may seem peculiar at first glance, there were some early Christian groups that are not attached to the Church in Rome. The Coptic Church, active in parts of Egypt and Ethiopia, is one. There was violent argument in the Christian world throughout the fourth century over the issues of Christ and the Trinity. The question was finally settled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 where the dual nature of Christ as both divine and human was affirmed. Dioscuros, Bishop of Alexandria, was dismissed for his monophysite stance, which acknowledged only one, divine nature. As a result, the Egyptian Church stood alone, and after 457 it appointed its own Bishop of Alexandria in opposition to the supporters of Chalcedon. This was the beginning of the Coptic Church.

There is a parallel to the Coptic Church in the Buddhist world: the Buddhism of Tibet. The Coptic faith and Tibetan Buddhism are descended from Christianity and Buddhism, respectively, but both are very different from the central tradition. Both are centered mainly in mountainous areas and have a strongly esoteric and

mystic aspect. They are also similar in that modernization has been extremely slow within their religious worlds.

Long before Christianity became established as a great religion, there was popular belief in Mary or the Earth Mother Goddess in the Mediterranean Sea area. Venus was an Earth Mother Goddess, and belief in Demeter = Dea Mater = Mother Goddess existed from ancient times. Jupiter = Deus Pitar was the Father God.

Gods as mother and father can also be seen in the early Japanese belief in Izanagi and Izanami. Primitive Shintō in Japan was a set of popular beliefs, not an organized religion with a doctrine. With the forceful entry of the colossal universal religion that was Buddhism, Shintō reorganized indigenous beliefs and fortified its base; State Shintō took shape as a self-protective measure on the part of Shintō. Thus Shintō was institutionalized, and in the end a path of peaceful coexistence between Shintō and Buddhism was created.

If we look in the Christian world for a parallel to this early State Shintō, I think it is the Druids. Druidism represents a stage before the coming of Christianity, and it was born of a reorganization of indigenous beliefs. The counterpart to this in China is Taoism. Because of the impact of Buddhism on indigenous popular beliefs, Taoism reorganized itself, created a doctrine and sacred texts, and became a systematic religion.

I have made very broad comparisons, but perhaps they show the potential of a civilization studies approach to the comparison of Eastern and Western religion.

Now let us move ahead to modern Japan, to new religious movements such as the Shintō sects since Meiji and the new religious groups that have emerged increasingly after the war.

Sectarian Shintō, new religions like Taishakyō, Tenrikyō, Konkōkyō, Shintō Shūseiha and Ontakekyō that appeared around the time of the Meiji Restoration developed in a form that was not bound to political authority. But in what form exactly did they bring salvation? It may be that the role of these Shintō sects lay in offering a vision of utopia that was operative even while people's real problems remained unsolved. This was especially the case with Ōmotokyō. The new religions gave people hope for the future. And perhaps in doing so, they gave encouragement to people suffering within the contradictions of modernization.

Since the 1930's, new groups such as Seichō no Ie, Sekai Kyūseikyō, and Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan have had great force in Japan. How are we to assess them? And at the same time, we must consider the historical meaning of the new Buddhist religious movements, groups like Reiyūkai, Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai. These new Buddhist groups are all related to the Nichiren sect and have been successful at the organization of a mass movement. We must raise the question of why Nichiren-related groups have been successful whereas those related to other Buddhist sects have not.

And can we not deal with the issue of nationalism in religion in relation to Sōka Gakkai? In this group, we see the tendency to consider worldwide strategy at the same time that religious nationalism is being emphasized. What does it mean for a

religion to stress something so national? This "national" is different from the *Eglise Nationale* that I mentioned earlier. The highest authority of a State Church rests in the sovereign of the nation; in other words, the person with the highest political authority also controls the Church. But the nationalism of the Japanese new religions is of another dimension.

At the same time, Sōka Gakkai brought political authority and religious power together into a unity which aimed at the creation of an ideal world. The Kōmeitō political party was born in this way. But the separation of Church and State is a fundamental principle of the Japanese constitution, and, moreover, the union of Church and State was not favored by the people. As a result, Kōmeitō appears to have abandoned its ideal of a political and religious unity in the late 1960's. From the point of view of civilization studies, however, the broad scale of Sōka Gakkai's attempt must be recognized despite its failure.

I also hope that Reiyūkai and Risshō Kōseikai, some of the new religions based on Nichiren Buddhism that I mentioned earlier, will be discussed in terms of their place in the history of Japanese civilization. In short, I wonder if we can't present in concrete terms the relationship between Japan's modernization and the undulations of the various new religions since the period just prior to the Meiji Restoration.

In this regard, many new groups have emerged out of the Protestant stream of Christianity. We also need to explore an explanation for why so many of these new groups have emerged from Protestant Christianity in European, especially American civilization, and why so few have come from Catholicism.

And we must think about Christianity as an element of religion in modern Japan. Can we say that Christianity has been successful as an organized religion in Japan? With approximately 1,050,000 Christians in Japan today, under one percent of the population, organized Christianity can only be said to have failed. This failure is not as complete as that of the Swedish attempt to proselytize in Mongolia, but organized Christianity in Japan cannot even be compared to the great successes in Korea and the Philippines. And this failure in Japan came despite the huge amounts of human energy and funds that have been poured into the effort from European countries and especially from the United States.

On the other hand, we must recognize that Christianity has had great humanistic and intellectual influence in Japan. Many of the founders of modern Japan were influenced intellectually by Christianity. At the same time, we can see the influence of Christianity in the monotheistic thought of Hirata Atsutane, a Shintō theorist from the late Edo period. Indeed, Christianity had a strange impact on religion in modern Japan.

To give a simple example, wedding ceremonies performed before the deity at a shrine appear to have been born from the influence of Christianity. Wedding ceremonies at shrines began in the second decade of the Meiji period when Senge Takatomi, who had been central in the formation of early Meiji religious policy, returned to Izumo and embarked on the wedding business, making use of the folk

belief that the Izumo Shrine was an *enmusubi* shrine, a shrine for making good matches between men and women. In Japanese Shintō before that time, it was thought that the Shintō deities did not intervene in human affairs, and there was no such thing as a wedding at a shrine. The deities were believed to hold responsibility for the tranquil flow of the natural world, for the mountains, rivers, grasses, trees and abundant crops; they did not intervene in human affairs. But in presiding over wedding ceremonies, they began to intervene. Senge Takatomi himself wrote that shrine weddings were a form created under the influence of Christianity. Thus, although we cannot deny that organized Christianity failed in Japan, it did have a broad impact.

Looked at in this way, the influence of Christianity in modern Japan is similar to the influence that Confucianism had in Japan. It is also more appropriate to speak of Confucianism as having had great influence in the dimension of culture and human life than to speak of its role as a religion in Japan. In this regard, recently it has been said that the religion of Confucianism stands behind the modernization of the newly-industrializing economies of Asia (the Asian NIEs) such as Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. But is this really the case? I do not think Japan is a Confucian country; Confucianism was taken up in the dimension of people's lives, but not as a religion. And even if we were to say that Confucianism provided a base for the successful modernization of Japan, then how do we explain the fact that China, the birthplace of Confucianism, has been so slow in modernizing? Rather, modernization in Japan is related to the fact that it did *not* become a Confucian country. This problem of Confucianism and the Asian NIEs is another that could be examined as part of this symposium.

Now, let us move away from Japan for a while to consider modernization and Islam. If I were placed in a situation in which I had to choose one of the religions in the world or die, I would choose Islam. Islam is what I might call a truly simple religion, one in which each individual human being faces Allah, the One God, one to one. This kind of strict individuality does not exist in either Christianity or Buddhism, religions which are mediated by church and clergy. Although there are people in Islam who guide one's prayers, there is no clergy. In place of a clergy, individuals must observe various precepts in their daily lives so as to face Allah with a pure body. The saying of prayers five times a day, abstention from alcohol and pork, abstention from other meats killed by non-believers, abstention from eating the mid-day meal for one month each year—one who does not observe these precepts cannot be said to be a Muslim.

In the Islam world, religion, governance, and economics are bound together indivisibly. Religion extends into all areas of people's lives. But the Islamic countries have cut their connections with modern, universal civilization, and beyond living in the present world, they cannot move ahead. On the one hand, there is movement by believers to preserve their own cultural identity, while at the same time there is movement to universalize in order to live, and the clash of these two ways of thought is creating great discord that obstructs modernization. I think this is one

way of explaining the present situation in the Islamic world.

Strictly speaking, however, Islamic society exists within the present-day world, and it is probably impossible for the Muslims to continue rejecting Western civilization and still move ahead. If such is the case, then I wonder in which direction the discord mentioned above will begin to be resolved.

I have my own hypothesis. I think that Islamic society will maintain something like a basic Islamic doctrine as its core while it accepts Western elements. In association with this kind of movement, a logic will be constructed to the effect that the Western elements are merely insignificant details which will not influence the basic core. If this logic is systematized, it will imply that Western civilization is not to be over-estimated. There is a possibility, I think, that this kind of logic will be constructed.

At this point we must consider things from the opposite direction as well, from the question of what modernization was and is to the human race. Modernization is usually thought of as intensified industrialization and as something that cannot be separated from Westernization. In reality, most modernized nations have followed that model. But will modernization and Westernization continue to be indivisible in all civilizations and societies? Of course, I have no answer to this question. But if it is possible for many people to begin to live richer lives even without passing through the process of Westernization or industrialization, and if we can call their experience "modernization," then it may be that a new form of civilization is not impossible. If, without passing through the industrialization stage, a country were able to create devices and systems that encouraged its people to feel happy spiritually even though their daily lives were not especially rich in a material way, we might have to call that achievement a form of modernization. I do not think we can rule out the possibility of such a set of devices.

The possibility I have just presented resembles communist thought in some ways. But it seems to me that fundamentally, communism seeks happiness for people against a backdrop of industrialization. It may be that a different form of "modernization," something like the one mentioned above, will emerge from civilizations that believe in the Islam or Hindu religions. We can do nothing more than hypothesize at this time, but it may be that this prognostic role is a part of the work that has been assigned to us in this symposium.

And speaking of prognostication, as the last point in my opening address let us turn to the question of the shape and role of religion in the future world.

I have already spoken of the role religion has performed and is performing within the historical contexts of several different societies and civilizations. But all human beings experience suffering and worry born of the very fact of being alive. This cannot be denied. Aren't the worry and suffering that accompany the reality of being born and living in the world something universal to all humankind?

For example, Buddhism speaks of the Four Sufferings of birth, old age, illness, and death. Whether one accepts these four as suffering or not is a discussion of a different dimension; however that may be, Buddhism sees these four things as suffer-

ings that no human being born into this world can escape. How do present-day religion and present-day people deal with suffering and worry, the universal problems of being human?

The worries and sufferings of being human may be found among the victims of the social contradictions that have been produced at every stage of history and among those who are social successes; suffering and worry are something that everyone experiences, irrespective of social class. The suffering that comes from illness may be alleviated depending upon one's social or economic position in society, but becoming ill is something that no one can escape. Even modern people cannot simply run away from illness. Nothing can be done about birth, old age, illness and death.

Let us take death as an example of how modern people are dealing with suffering and worry. On the one hand, people in the modern world have installed devices so that they rarely have to see death with their own eyes. It might be said that in this way they are trying to resolve the suffering engendered by confrontation with death. If we look at the environs of our lives in the contemporary world, we notice immediately that people today give the appearance of knowing a way to live as if death did not exist. At the very least, they can live their lives without believing in, or having forgotten their own death. The suffering associated with death is eliminated through this kind of living.

To speak in more concrete terms, it has become more and more rare for an individual today to die in his or her home, surrounded and supported by family and children. Death has become something that happens in a hospital, out of the sight of children. A person doesn't die in the midst of a supportive family, he or she simply disappears from that spot. There is no longer a place where we can actually see what death is. This may be seen as one way of avoiding suffering.

On the other hand, however, today many people gather to hear what can only be called instruction to prepare one for death. It was reported on television the other day that young Buddhist priests from the Buddhist Information Center are making visits to individual households to listen to people's worries and sufferings. A priest will continue to visit someone until he or she dies, and as the time of death draws near, their talk probably turns to preparing for death. This is like individual instruction in how to face death.

Such instruction is also available for groups and is drawing large numbers of people. Bukkyō University in Kyoto offers a course entitled "Lectures on How to Understand Death." In these lectures, the issue of death, which would appear to have been forgotten by people today, is addressed directly through discussion of such problems as the last years of one's life and how to understand the dying. Attention is also given to the major question of how to face one's own death. Buddhist priests, physicians and college professors participate as lecturers.

Thus, in the present, when it would appear that death has been forgotten, people are nevertheless grappling seriously with the issue.

Using the example of death, I have spoken of the devices created by modern

rationalist society in order to help us forget the Four Sufferings. But even if we forget, these sufferings and worries are real. Isn't it precisely the duty of organized religion to strive so that people will look directly at their suffering and yet gain spiritual understanding and peace?

In the future, things will probably become more convenient in a material sense, and the world will probably become a place where *all* people can lead pleasurable lives. This is because we are working toward that goal now. But the suffering associated with being alive cannot be eliminated. And because of this, it is very possible that in the world to come, religion will come to the fore more than it has in other times.

Today, religion brings release for people suffering from the many contradictions produced by industrialized society. But religion will have to respond to the new contradictions that continue to emerge from an information society predicted to progress further and further. How will it respond or adapt? Or rather, how will religion face its own information revolution?

Religious phenomena such as individual protective spirits and rituals for the souls of dead babies have become popular in modern Japan. These phenomena have risen to popularity on the backs of the information industry. There is no need for difficult doctrine; religion is attempting to respond to individuals, to solve individual problems. These phenomena illustrate well the individualization that is characteristic of information societies. In the industrial age, problems were solved by mass production, by making many of the same thing. But today, mass production does not suit. Today we make a few each of many different things. It is the age of mass individualized production.

I think religion is following the same path. Personal protective deities are emphasized, individual meditation is seen as important. This is extremely individualized religion, religion attempting to respond to each individual in a different form. Just as the worries and suffering of each person are different, so religion is handing out personal prescriptions rather than relieving the suffering of all sentient beings.

In this talk, I have tried to present my own thoughts as well as a broad overview with regard to several issues germane to this symposium entitled "Comparative Civilization Studies of Religion." As I mentioned at the beginning, my responsibility as the opening speaker is to stimulate the participants, and thus I have merely tried to identify some general issues. I look forward to the more detailed discussions of the coming week.

Translated by Elizabeth HARRISON