Introduction

Secularities in Japan

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The contributions assembled in this special issue of JRJ are the outcome of the workshop “Secularities in Japan,” held at Leipzig University from 18 to 20 July 2018 within the framework of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences “Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities.”¹ This international and interdisciplinary collaborative project, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), has set itself the task of describing the global diversity and conflictuality of currently existing “*institutionally as well as symbolically embedded forms and arrangements for distinguishing between religion and other societal areas, practices and interpretations*” (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr 2016: 28; cf. Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012: 881; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Wegert 2013: 612) and of explaining them with reference to historical trajectories and cultural imprints. “Secularity” is defined in the project as interrelated *epistemic* and *social structures*, in which the religious and the non-religious are *socially differentiated* (institutionally, legally, organizationally, spatially, habitually, life-worldly, etc.) and are *conceptually distinguished* (taxonomically, semantically, discursively, symbolically, etc.) by relevant actors in a binary schema, whereby the corresponding demarcations can be variable, negotiable, controversial, and blurred. “Secularity” is thus an analytical concept that seeks to avoid the ideological connotations of the term *secularism* and it is only indirectly related to theories of *secularization*. This term, conceived as an ideal type, merely describes *conceptual distinctions* and

1 For further information see the website of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe “Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities” at <https://multiple-secularities.de>.

institutional differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres and practices without taking a normative and modernization-bounded position that tends towards some kind of evolutionism, inherent in several classic theories of secularization.

Rather, one of the project's assumptions is that the diversity of current forms of distinction and differentiation between the religious and the non-religious can be explained at least in part by historical path dependencies or probabilities, which can be attributed to the formation of epistemic and social structures over extended periods of time. These culture-specific structures, it is assumed, provided both resources and constraints (cf. Giddens 1986: 25) regarding options for action and interpretation on the side of relevant actors at a time when practically all existing or emerging nation states were forced under Western pressure to regulate in some way the relationship between 'the religious' and 'the secular'—even if those entrusted with the task may initially have had no clear idea of what exactly it was or whose relationship they were supposed to regulate. Thus, it is not presupposed that secularity or religion are universal, supra-historical concepts. Even if one contends that religion (which is the precondition for the formation of secularity) is a modern Western concept in the first place and was imposed on non-Western societies in the course of colonialism and imperialism, it can still be established that the appropriation of these concepts was not mere passive acceptance. Rather, concrete local actors equipped with a considerable degree of agency appropriated Western concepts, institutions, knowledge regimes, and the like selectively, creatively and driven by their own interests—and being to some degree dependent on already existing 'indigenous' epistemic and social structures, they did so in a culture-specific manner. This (among other, often contingent factors), we assume, accounts for the great variety of arrangements between the religious and the non-religious in global modernity. We are not dealing here with a mere process of diffusion, nor with an inevitable increase in convergence.

Current religion-related distinctions and differentiations are thus systematically investigated in the project with regard to their historical prerequisites and possible precursors as well as various forms of interdependence in the course of historical development. This draws our attention to the institutional, conceptual and epistemic continuities, which are all too easily overlooked against the backdrop of the ruptures undoubtedly caused by the 'common shock' of the encounter with the Western hegemonic powers. And it also draws attention to the agency of local actors. In short, the project aims to grasp and describe the differences between secularities in global modernity and to reconstruct their historical causes. Accordingly, this special issue contains both historical and contemporary examples from Japan.

Recent publications indicate how relevant the issue of secularity is in relation to Japan (Porcu and Watt 2012; Kleine 2013; Dessì 2013, 2017a; Rots and Teeuwen 2017). However, the question of ‘Japanese secularities’ is not only relevant, but also highly contentious, at least as far as the question of whether, in the pre-modern history of Japan, signs of a distinction/differentiation between “organized nexuses of activities” (Stowers 2008: 442) that could be reasonably defined as religious and non-religious from a modern perspective are already discernible. Some authors recognize such tendencies (Kleine 2013, 2018; Dessì 2013: 19–23; Teeuwen 2013; Reader 2016; Paramore 2017), while others completely deny them. It is obvious that the question is closely related to the problem of the cross-cultural and cross-epochal application of the concept of religion. In this respect, the critical positions oscillate between a nuanced emphasis on the Western genesis and the relative novelty of the concept of religion in the Meiji period, i.e. the assumption that *shūkyō* 宗教 “was by any reasonable definition a de facto neologism, expressing a concept that, in its precise contours, had not been expressible in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean hitherto” (Krämer 2010: 6; cf. Krämer 2010, 2013, 2015; Josephson 2006, 2012) as well as a categorical rejection of all attempts to assert structural and conceptual continuities, which would imply a retrospective, some would say ‘anachronistic’ application of concepts such as ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ to pre-modern, non-Western contexts (Horii 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Fitzgerald 2003; Isomae 2012). The latter position, clearly expressed in Horii’s assertion “that there was no ‘religion’ in premodern Japan” and that “Therefore, there was no ‘secularity’ in pre-modern Japan, either” (Horii 2018a) seems to exclude any genealogical reconstruction of epistemic and social continuities beyond the nineteenth century. From a synchronic perspective, it has also been suggested that the multiple-secularities framework is not only applicable to recent developments in the field of contemporary Japanese religions, but can also be integrated in a theory of religion under globalization that, while aware of postcolonial critiques of the concept of religion, does not renounce to its use as a *second-order* concept (Dessì 2017: 177–183).

From another perspective, the denial of potential continuities from pre-modern to ‘modernized’ Japan, voiced by the aforementioned Western scholars, seems to overlap to some extent with the deeply rooted skeptical attitude toward the idea of secularization within Japanese academia. Within this context, a generic and unspecified ‘Western secularization theory’ is usually blamed for claiming the universality of the concept of ‘church’ (exemplified by Yanagawa Kei’ichi and Abe Yoshiya’s position) and for predicting the irreversible decline of religion. These two aspects are, for many Japanese scholars, contradicted by the general disinterest of the Japanese in ‘dogmas’ and by the

mushrooming of new religious movements since the postwar years, among other things (Dessì 2017b). It is apparent that within the Japanese debate, such oversimplified views of secularization have largely prevented a productive focus on the broader issue of functional differentiation, one of the perspectives that might contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how religion in Japan negotiates borders with other domains of social life, both synchronically and diachronically. The last decade has seen a somewhat renewed interest in the issue of religion and the secular in Japan, but a transition from mainstream views, often claiming a sort of Japanese exceptionalism in opposition to 'Western theories,' to new original approaches open to a less selective reading of the international debate might not necessarily be smooth (see, for example, Fujiwara Satoko's defense of some controversial aspects of Yanagawa's theory in this special issue) (cf. Dessì 2017b). It is our hope that the multiple-secularities framework might offer yet another opportunity for an open and fruitful discussion between Japanese and non-Japanese scholars on the issue of secularity, which has already started in this volume.

In this regard, it is worth recalling that the *Journal of Religion in Japan* has devoted considerable attention to secularity and secularization since its inception in 2012 (e.g., Mullins 2012; Nelson 2012; Porcu 2012; Reader 2012; Kleine 2013), including the publication of the special issue "Secularity and Post-Secularity in Japan: Japanese Scholars' Responses," guest edited by Fujiwara (2016). Therefore, we gratefully welcome this opportunity, kindly offered by the general editors of the journal, to publish these contributions in a new special issue on "Secularities in Japan."

Contributions to this volume are arranged chronologically and approach the issue of secularities in Japan from different perspectives. In his article "Critical Junctures in Japanese History and the Path Dependency of Secularities," Christoph Kleine applies the approaches of critical junctures and path-dependencies to ancient Japan. Using the example of the accelerated sinicisation and Buddhicisation between the sixth and eighth centuries, he attempts to show that some epistemic and social structures, which became relevant for the gradual shaping of the relationship between the religious and the secular in Japan, developed very early on at critical junctures. At certain points in history, he argues, contingent events like the threat of an invasion by Tang China forced far-reaching decisions, such as the adaptation of Chinese institutions and administrative rules to strengthen Japan's administrative and military capabilities on the one hand, while rejecting the Chinese meritocratic principle of rule by "the mandate of heaven" to consolidate the rule of the Yamato Clan on the other. These decisions eventually lead, to a certain degree, to a disentanglement of imperial rites, statecraft, legitimation of power, and Buddhism.

They engendered *longue durée* structures and concomitant path probabilities for the formation of a specifically Japanese form of secularity in the modern period.

Katja Triplett's "Religion, Medicine and the Notion of Charity in Early Jesuit Missionary Pursuits in Buddhist Japan" aims to shed light on whether the differentiation of religion and medicine in early modern Japan was influenced by the Jesuits. Triplett argues that not only had Japanese Buddhism already developed a traditional set of emic taxonomies concerning the nexus between religion and medicine (focusing on the "field of merit") before the encounter with Western missionaries, but that the secularity emerging in the Edo period resulted from the increased popularity of Neoconfucianism rather than the impact of the Catholic notion of *caritas*.

Kawata Koh's contribution to this issue, "Secularization and the *Jōruri* Plays: The Decline of Religious Belief and the Search for Secular Salvation in Early Modern Japan," focuses on the transition between medieval Japan and the Edo period through the analysis of literary forms. Kawata argues that while medieval Japan (following Satō Hiroo's interpretation) was a deeply religious culture, the development of the shogunate was characterized by progressive secularization understood as a relative detachment from religious beliefs and the marginalization of the religious sphere. Kawata is particularly interested in the psychological aspects of such early secularization, which he finds exemplified in *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 plays such as *Jōruri monogatari* 浄瑠璃物語, *Sonezaki shinjū* 曾根崎心中, and *Kinpira jōruri* 金平浄瑠璃. In these plays, he argues, it is possible to detect the emergence of a more secular idea of salvation through the ideas of *kokoro* 心 and *shinjū* 心中, mainly as a reaction to the increased power of the State.

Hans Martin Krämer's "‘Even Three-Year-Old Children Know that the Source of Enlightenment is not Religion but Science’: Modern Japanese Buddhism between ‘Religion’ and ‘Science,’ 1860s–1910s" highlights an aspect of secularity that is often neglected in favor of the differentiation between religion and politics. He shows that in the Meiji period, the question of a differentiation of 'the religious' as a distinct social domain was perhaps debated even more intensely in juxtaposition to science rather than politics. Krämer presents examples from this period to show that religious actors had a choice between two options in that regard: (1) To assert the compatibility of religious teachings with the findings of modern science, or (2) to strictly separate religion and science with regard to their functions, means and aims of knowledge. The co-existence of the "secularist" or "orthodox solution" (option 2) and the "anti-secularist" or "esoteric solution" (option 1) in Meiji Japan can neither be fully accounted for chronologically nor by affiliation to a specific Buddhist tradi-

tion. Krämer demonstrates that both camps “already argued from within a logic of the secular/non-secular,” which was not just an “import from the West” but should be regarded as “one part of a global discourse on religion.”

In her contribution “Practicing Belonging? Non-Religiousness in Twenty-First Century Japan,” Fujiwara Satoko builds upon the work of Yanagawa Keiichi and Abe Yoshiya on the *ie-mura* イエ・ムラ system to interpret some current trends in Japanese society as a revival of “*religion* as a human relationship.” Recent forms of religiousness centered upon the idea and practice of *tsunagari* つながり (relationship/belonging) such as the *tsunagari* wedding, the Shibuya Halloween celebration, and the *goshuin* (stamp) boom, she argues, are no longer based on the *ie-mura* framework, but rely on an analogous longing for stronger human relationships. This quest for recognition is especially strong among the youth, who are suffering a generational identity crisis due to the vanishing of traditional relationships. For Fujiwara, the phenomena under study therefore reveal an attempt to re-sacralize human relationships by directly venerating *tsunagari* rather than symbolizing a nexus of relations with supernatural beings, thus resulting in a sort of religion of human relationships that “is not religious but not entirely secular, either.”

In conclusion, Aike Rots’s “World Heritage, Secularisation, and the ‘Public Sacred’ in East Asia” focuses on the issue of heritagisation with reference to religion. Rots focuses primarily on Japan (with some comparisons with other East Asian countries such as South Korea and Vietnam) to argue that UNESCO recognition and registration on the World Heritage List can lead both to the secularization/deprivatization of religious sites (since religious actors are forced to compromise with secular authorities and worship becomes optional) and to new processes of sacralization (as selected sites have the opportunity to raise their standing and attract renewed interest in their rituals and practices). For Rots, this heritage-making relates to the issue of multiple secularities because it leads to the distinction between “religion” and “cultural heritage,” a distinction that is inherently plural because of the multiple configurations of local heritages.

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