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Norms of war in Japanese religion

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One defining characteristic of the Japanese historical situation regarding war and peace is that, until the modern period, the country had been involved in very few conflicts with foreign powers. Until the nineteenth century its conflicts with groups outside Japan had been limited to a disastrous invasion of the Korean peninsula in the seventh century, some attacks by pirates on the southern island of Kyushu in the ninth century, two attempted invasions of Japan by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and another invasion of Korea at the end of the fifteenth century. On the other hand, in the centuries leading up to the inauguration of the Tokugawa regime in 1603, Japan was racked by a series of internal conflicts among rival warlords, culminating in a century-long civil war that was brought to an end only with the institution of the new regime. Consequently, perhaps the most important influence on the pre-modern Japanese concept of peace was the experience of internal conflict and the consequent emphasis on stability and social order. As a result, pre-modern discourse on peace in Japan tends to emphasize internal social order, and there is little development of theories regarding international relations.

The situation changed dramatically, however, with the end of the Tokugawa policy of isolation and the opening of the country by the Meiji regime in 1868. As part of its policy to become a modern nation-state, on a par with the Western powers, in short order a national army was created and universal conscription introduced. Japan went to war with China in 1894 over spheres of influence on the Korean peninsula, and gained Taiwan as a colony as a result of that war. Ten years later, Japan

fought Russia, and with its victory was granted privileges in Manchuria. Korea was annexed in 1910 and, by allying itself with European forces fighting Germany in World War I, Japan was able to expand its control in China. It was in this context that Western pacifist and just war ideas entered intellectual and public discourse in Japan, largely through the activities of several influential Christians.

The experience of defeat in World War II and the postwar occupation of the country, and, especially, the experience of having been the only country to suffer the use of atomic weapons, have, of course, been decisive in forming postwar Japanese attitudes towards war and peace. *Heiwashugi* is the term used by most Japanese to describe their position, but while usually translated as “pacifism” it often refers to a presumption against the employment of force, rather than its absolute rejection.¹ Article 9 of the postwar Constitution “forever renounce[s] war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force [as] a means of settling international disputes”, but this is not normally interpreted as an absolute rejection of the use of force, and spending on the Self-Defense Forces is among the highest military spending in the world.

Along with this “pacifism”, another characteristic of the Japanese religious concept of war and peace would be what I have identified in previous research as a “civilizational” element.² Civilization refers to a refined moral state of being, but it is often also used as a discriminating concept, to distinguish between areas where such a state exists and where it is absent. I propose the concept of civilization because I believe that the Japanese concept of peace encompasses both of these elements, namely an emphasis on individual moral cultivation and, at times, an oppositional schema derived from a sense of ethnic or cultural superiority. Therefore, the idea of peace based on the concept of civilization emphasizes the active pursuit of the moral cultivation of the individual, leading to a refined, civilized state of being that is identified as the foundation of a peaceful society. Furthermore, the idea of civilization can lead to a conceptual distinction between civilized regions and uncivilized regions, which in turn can result in a cultural sense of mission towards the spread of civilization as it is enjoyed in one’s own region. Indeed, it was rhetoric reflecting this idea of mission that was used to justify, if not in fact inspire, Western colonialism as well as Japan’s own military and colonial enterprises. Such rhetoric has also occasionally led to cases of extreme violence and atrocities, as seen in both Western and Japanese colonialism.

Japanese religion

Although Buddhism and Shinto are identified today as the major religious traditions of Japan, throughout much of Japanese history the two

were so closely intertwined as to form a single religious complex with various expressions, and the forced separation of the two as the result of government policy at the beginning of the modern period in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in a great upheaval in Japanese religious practice that, some have argued, continues to have repercussions today.³ In addition, these religious traditions have been combined with elements of Taoism and Confucianism from China, issuing in a kind of common or popular religiosity that is not easily contained in any one religious tradition. Christianity, introduced to Japan in the fifteenth century by the Catholic missionaries who accompanied the Spanish and Portuguese explorers, was actively persecuted throughout the early modern period (seventeenth century to mid-nineteenth century), and small groups of “hidden Christians” continue to preserve a secret faith tradition that they trace back to the time of persecution. Reintroduced in the modern period, Christianity has had little success in attracting members in Japan, with less than 1 per cent of the population belonging to one of the Christian churches. Christian influence is generally acknowledged as greater than those membership numbers would indicate, however, especially in the fields of education and social welfare, as well as the concept of war and peace.

The modern period has seen the proliferation of new religious movements in Japan. Some of the new religions trace their roots to the end of the early modern period in the first half of the nineteenth century. Groups from this period are often based on folk religious practices and the experiences of a charismatic founder, and they can be described as attempts to revitalize traditional cultural elements in the face of the influx of Western influences during that century. Another wave of new religious movements emerged in the immediate postwar period, attracting much media attention in Japan as well as abroad. These movements were often Buddhist-based lay movements, and some of them have been successful in attracting followers numbering in the millions. Part of the reason for their success is that they offered the increasingly urban population a means to perform traditional ancestor rites in the home, independent of the Buddhist clergy and temples that they left behind in the move to the cities. Finally, a third wave of new religions has emerged since the 1970s, mirroring religious developments predominantly seen in the West. These movements emphasize personal spiritual development and encourage the adoption of ideas and practices from a wide range of religions in order to contribute to that development.

The choice of these new religious movements as a window into the concept of war and peace in Japanese religion is perhaps problematic for some. These groups are often looked upon with suspicion, as at least a degenerate form of religion if not, in fact, dangerous either to their believers or to society at large – an impression that was reinforced by the poison-gas attack on the Tokyo subways by a new religious group on 20

March 1995. However, it would appear that nearly one-half of those who profess religious belief in Japan are members of one of these groups.⁴ This would indicate that it is precisely these new religious groups that mediate the religious traditions of the country most effectively to the contemporary population, and reflect most clearly contemporary religious ideas of war and peace.

Pre-modern developments in religious concepts of war and peace

Although specifically Christian ideas on war and peace were introduced only in the nineteenth century, we can identify elements within the Buddhist tradition that correspond to pacifist and just war ideas as developed in the Christian West. For example, *fussesho*, the Buddhist proscription against the taking of life, provides the basis for the development of an ethical rejection of any use of force. However, similar to the case in the West, where the practice of pacifism becomes limited to certain individuals or small groups, the injunction of *fussesho* is, in practice, also seldom held to be absolute and is often limited to monastics. In his study of the social ethic of ancient Buddhism, Nakamura Hajime points out that sutras written in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition around the eighth century speak of a duty incumbent upon the sovereign to defend the state, even if this necessitates the use of force.⁵ Nakamura goes on to indicate that injunctions to embark upon war only if there is a real chance of victory, to weigh the gains to be made by war against the destruction it will cause, to limit the extent of war, to engage in war only as a last resort, and to be prepared to take care of enemy wounded can be found in the Mahayana writings of this period.⁶ All of these would correspond to elements of the just war theory as it developed in the West.

Nakamura also points out that the Mahayana Buddhist tradition places an emphasis on the wisdom and individual moral cultivation of the sovereign and the sovereign's subjects as the foundation for a peaceful society. For example, in the *Shiju Kegon* (c. fourth century), the following five conditions are given for a peaceful society: (1) that the sovereign lead a simple and thrifty life, (2) that the royal family lead a life of fidelity and not covet treasures, (3) that administrators be faithful to their positions and that there not be any unjust officials, (4) that all the people be righteous and deferent, and that there be no fear of theft, and (5) that the borders be at peace and that there be no fear of invasion.⁷ It is significant that the final point dealing with secure borders is preceded by four points that emphasize the individual moral cultivation of the sovereign, the court and public officials, and the general populace.

The concept of the moral cultivation of the individual as the means to establishing peace was further developed and concretized during the period of relative stability that characterized pre-modern Japan, and it emphasized the virtues of stability and order. In recent years it has become commonplace to argue that rhetoric concerning the maintenance of proper relationships and harmony masks a considerable amount of dissent and conflict in Japanese society. The treatment of *bushido*, or the Way of the Warrior, in the intellectual history of Japan is one example of this phenomenon. Although modern tracts on *bushido*, beginning with the famous work by Nitobe Inazo,⁸ emphasize loyalty as the foundation of the social order, the increasing emphasis on loyalty was in fact one of the results of the establishment of the Tokugawa order. The century-long period of civil strife that preceded the Tokugawa regime testifies to the presence of a more rough-and-tumble warrior ethic that marked this period of personal advancement through shifting loyalties. Indeed, some scholars argue that pragmatism and disloyalty were more the norm, contrary to the image portrayed in emerging rhetoric on the warrior ethic.⁹

For this reason, with the end of the so-called Warring States period and the establishment of the Tokugawa political order at the beginning of the seventeenth century, there was an understandable concern that the ideological underpinnings of this fragile new order be made secure. Herman Ooms argues that this was accomplished by a bricolage of ideological constructs, borrowing from the Buddhist, Shinto and Confucian traditions.¹⁰ This ideology, as reflected for example in Tokugawa Ieyasu's *Testament*, published in the early seventeenth century, emphasizes the virtues of loyalty, benevolence and trust, and affirms the use of military power to preserve good order. In the *Bendo* and *Taiheisaku* treatises, written almost one hundred years later by the Confucian scholar Ogyu Sorai, the preservation of order is given an even more prominent place. According to Sorai, the duty of the sovereign is to ensure that the realm is at peace, and, indeed, it is the maintenance of order that is the true expression of benevolence. Furthermore, the use of military power for the sake of maintaining good order is positively encouraged, and Sorai argues that this imperative overrides all other moral duties, even that of the preservation of life.

Yasumaru Yoshio has argued that, in addition to the above values of loyalty and good order, hard work, thrift, filial piety and other common values were promoted in the latter half of the pre-modern period by popular preachers such as Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), and thus became widely spread throughout Japanese society as a kind of popular morality.¹¹ Furthermore, Yasumaru points out that the cultivation of such virtues was used as the answer to the social problems caused by the economic upheavals of that time, contributing to an emphasis on individual

moral cultivation that has remained prevalent in Japanese society until the present day.

Having sketched very briefly the outlines of the development of the concept of individual moral cultivation as the foundation of peace, let us now consider in turn the oppositional schema of “the civilized” and “the uncivilized” and the idea of national mission as it was developed in Japan.

The concept of a unique Japanese cultural identity has perhaps been expressed most clearly in the idea of Japan as *shinkoku*, the “Land of the Gods”. Satomi Kishio outlines the development of this idea in his intellectual history of the concept of “national polity”.¹² There he states that the first recorded use of this term can be found in the *Nihon Shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan), purportedly an early history of Japan compiled in the eighth century. The term further appears in records of prayers offered at Ise in 870 to protect the nation from pirate attacks on the southern island of Kyushu. The belief that Japan enjoys special protection as the Land of the Gods was strengthened by the unsuccessful Mongol invasion attempts in the thirteenth century. Furthermore, Satomi points out that around this time the concept of the Land of the Gods came to be connected with the idea of justice, resulting in the belief that Japan and its rulers embody justice by virtue of the fact that Japan is the Land of the Gods. By the time of the Muromachi Shogunate in the fourteenth century this concept had become connected with beliefs concerning the unbroken reign of the imperial family, an indication of order and stability that is both the result of the special favour of the gods and a proof of cultural superiority.¹³ In the late sixteenth century this concept was used as justification for the invasion of the Korean peninsula. At that time, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had succeeded in subjugating most of the warlords in Japan, turned his sights on Korea, proclaiming it the duty of Japan as the Land of the Gods to extend the benevolence of good order to all of Asia.¹⁴ The cruelty that accompanied that invasion – there are reports that the ears and noses of 30,000 decapitated Koreans were cut off and sent to Japan – indicates how such a concept of cultural superiority and the mission to “civilize” can lead to extreme violence, and foreshadowed the violence and atrocities that accompanied Japanese military action in the twentieth century, the acknowledgement of which remains a point of controversy today.

The above cluster of beliefs centring on the concept of Japan as the Land of the Gods was given a place of prominence in the writings of *kokugaku*, or the National Learning School, an awakening of Japanese nativism in the later half of the Tokugawa period. In this movement, Buddhist and Confucian influences were rejected as foreign and there was a search to identify what the origins and distinctive traits of native

Japanese culture might be. The concept of Japan as the Land of the Gods was, therefore, central to these nativist scholars, and the need to return to an initial pristine existence was emphasized.

The modern period

In the early part of the nineteenth century, as the Tokugawa policy of national isolation came under increasing threat by the appearance of Western and Russian ships in Japanese coastal waters, the two elements of an emphasis on moral cultivation and an oppositional schema based on a sense of cultural superiority were combined in the so-called “expel the barbarians” (*joi*) concept. Perhaps the clearest formulation of this concept is *The New Theses*, composed in 1825 by Aizawa Seishisai, a retainer of the Mito domain north of Tokyo. In this work Aizawa relies on the arguments of the National Learning scholars to explicate an original Japanese cultural identity, tied to the national creation myths and beliefs pertaining to the emperor. He asserts that this national consciousness is expressed above all in the virtues of loyalty and filial piety, and calls for the establishment of a national religion based on these beliefs and virtues, and the performance of national rituals in order to enhance the unity of the people. Although acknowledging the importance of military preparedness to repel incursions by foreign powers, Aizawa concludes that it is ultimately the awareness of the unique Japanese cultural identity and the adherence to the fundamental virtues of loyalty and filial piety that will provide peace and security for the nation.¹⁵

As Carol Gluck points out, in modern Japan this combination of individual moral cultivation with ideological elements that promoted a sense of ethnic superiority became a type of civic creed, through formulation in the Imperial Rescript on Education (signed by Emperor Meiji on 30 October 1890) and later commentaries on the Rescript.¹⁶ Furthermore, as seen previously in Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s justification of the invasion of the Korean peninsula in the sixteenth century, the extension of this peace and security, of the benefits of civilization, to the other countries of Asia could easily become the motivation for colonial exploits. Indeed, such rhetoric was used in the modern Japanese colonial expansion, which culminated in World War II.

Finally, Christian pacifist and just war concepts were introduced in the modern period through the influence of some prominent Christians, foremost among them Uchimura Kanzo. Although initially supportive of Japan’s military intervention in Asia in the late nineteenth century as a “righteous war”,¹⁷ early in the next century he came to the resolution that “I am for the absolute abolition of all wars. War is murder, and

murder is a crime.”¹⁸ As a reason for his conversion, he offers the following:

The result of the Sino-Japanese War taught me that war is destructive and offers no benefits. Korean independence, the motivation for the war, is in fact less secure than ever; morality in Japan, the victor, has been immensely corrupted, and no one has been able to rein in marauders in China, the vanquished enemy.¹⁹

Postwar developments

A look at the doctrine and activities of some of the new religious movements will illustrate how the above elements have been developed in postwar Japanese society. I begin with three groups that can be identified as being within the Buddhist tradition – Nipponzan Myohoji, Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai – to illustrate some of the complexities and ambiguities of postwar pacifism.

Nipponzan Myohoji

Nipponzan Myohoji is a small group of both lay and religious Nichiren Buddhists, numbering about 1,500 people. The first Nipponzan Myohoji temple was established by Fujii Nichidatsu in northern China in 1918. Fujii was born in 1885 in Kumamoto Prefecture, in the southern part of Japan. At the age of 19 he decided to become a Nichiren Buddhist monk and studied extensively in Tokyo and Kyoto before leaving on a missionary trip to China in 1917. Following the establishment of his first temple the following year, Nipponzan Myohoji temples were established in five other places in Manchuria within the next six years. In 1923, Fujii returned to Japan and in the following year a Nipponzan Myohoji temple was established at the foot of Mt Fuji. After Fujii’s mother died in 1930 he embarked upon his next, and what he himself considered his most important, missionary endeavour – the return of Buddhism to India, the land of its birth. Perhaps the most important outcome of his activities in India was a series of audiences with Mahatma Gandhi. In later years Fujii often identified his own philosophy of non-violent activism with Gandhi’s example.

Nipponzan Myohoji preaches an adherence to the principle of absolute non-violence, based on the Buddhist law of *fussesho*, which prohibits the taking of any life. In a sermon with that title given in 1950, just after the outbreak of the Korean War, Fujii called for steadfast perseverance in the path of non-violence, fully aware of the consequences such practice would engender in a world divided into two armed camps.

If disarmed Japan adheres to and practices persistent nonviolent resistance in light of the imminent international situation ruled by violence, the communist countries would seize the opportunity and give rise to a violent revolution and occupy Japan. At the same time, democratic countries would use Japan as their valuable strategic advanced base. At any rate, it is unlikely that we would be able to avoid being trampled, dishonored and killed at the will of today's violent civilization.²⁰

There are indications in Fujii's writing, however, that the proscription against taking life fundamental to the pacifist position is not necessarily absolute. During the United States' participation in the Vietnam War, preference was given by Fujii to the Vietnamese nationalists fighting against the US troops, and their armed struggle was even offered as an example of non-violent resistance. His criticism of the United States, although directed at its reliance on military might in general, focuses on the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons, an issue of obvious importance in Japan, a point that I shall return to later. As the developer of nuclear weapons and the only nation to use them, the United States is condemned by Fujii as "an enemy of humankind" and "a criminal who destroys civilization".²¹

Soka Gakkai

Until its excommunication in November 1991, Soka Gakkai was officially a lay movement within the Nichiren Shoshu sect of Buddhism. The loss of approbation by its parent body, however, does not seem to have had a lasting adverse effect on this group, since it remains strong institutionally and its 8 million members make it the largest new religion movement in Japan. It also remains the object of considerable controversy in Japan, largely as a result of its political activities.

Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930 by Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, an educator who stressed the role of creativity and personal experience in his educational philosophy. As its original name – Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, or Academic Society for Value-Creating Education – indicates, in its origins the group was primarily composed of educators interested in Makiguchi's philosophy. However, Makiguchi had become involved in the Nichiren Shoshu faith through an acquaintance in 1928, and from the mid-1930s the group gathered around him began to take on an increasingly religious character. Makiguchi and his leading disciple, Toda Josei, were imprisoned in 1943 as a result of their opposition to the religious policy of the wartime government, and Makiguchi died in prison in late 1944. As a result, it fell to Toda to rebuild Soka Gakkai following the war, and the fact that Soka Gakkai could claim a membership of over 800,000 families at the time of his death in 1958 attests to Toda's success in that task.

This phenomenal growth was at least in part the result of the intense proselytization activities of the Gakkai membership, activity centred on a method called *shaku-buku* that sought to wear down potential recruits through the employment of extreme polemics. It was also under Toda's leadership that Soka Gakkai initiated its political involvement, sponsoring more than 50 of its own candidates in local elections held in 1955. As a result of increasing involvement, and success, in both local and national election campaigns, Soka Gakkai founded its own independent political party, Komeito, in 1964. With a party constitution calling for the establishment of world peace based on a "global nationalism" and "human socialism", Komeito sought to steer a middle course between the conservative government and the socialist opposition. In elections held the following year, Komeito garnered over 5 million votes, making it the third-largest political party in Japan. Its successor, New Komeito, is currently the junior partner in the coalition government led by the Liberal Democrats.

Soka Gakkai professes to be a pacifist group, and it has long been engaged in drives against nuclear weapons and in peace education activities. Toda's successor, Ikeda Daisaku, has been prominent in international peace forums, addressing the United Nations General Assembly special sessions on disarmament and receiving the United Nations Peace Award in 1983. In his numerous proposals on peace and disarmament, Ikeda makes continual reference to the ideal of universal disarmament and resolution of conflict through negotiation. Any change to the post-war Peace Constitution, which renounces war as a sovereign right, is opposed, and the Constitution is held up as a model for all nations.²² The lack of a Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces is decried,²³ overseas deployment of those forces as part of the UN's Peacekeeping Operations is proscribed,²⁴ and the Japanese government is criticized for seeking protection under the United States' nuclear umbrella.²⁵ It would appear, however, that Soka Gakkai compromises on all of these principles in its continued support of New Komeito.

Ikeda himself recognizes the occasional need for the application of force in order to maintain order, although he would shift responsibility for the deployment of such force from the nation-state to an international body such as the United Nations. For example, although he disallows permanent membership for Japan on the UN Security Council – based on a perceived obligation for such members to participate in collective security activities, a requirement whose fulfilment he maintains is prohibited by the Japanese Constitution – this prohibition is apparently considered to be unique to Japan.²⁶ Specifically, the necessary use of force for

the maintenance of collective security is recognized in the case of the Persian Gulf War.²⁷

By choosing active involvement in the formation of public policy, Soka Gakkai and Ikeda have been forced to compromise their pacifist ideals. Rather than the strict pacifist option, which bans the use of force in any situation, their position is better characterized as calling for a limitation on the use of force. Indeed, even groups less politically involved tend towards this latter position, as indicated by the case of Rissho Koseikai.

Rissho Koseikai

Rissho Koseikai, which claims a membership of 6.5 million, rivals Soka Gakkai as a mass religious movement within the Buddhist tradition. Rissho Koseikai was also founded in the 1930s and enjoyed spectacular success in attracting members in postwar, urban Japan. Although following a path in some ways radically different from Soka Gakkai – remaining independent of any traditional Buddhist sect and pursuing a policy of cooperation with other religious groups – the rivalry between these two groups has, at times, been very public and very intense.

Rissho Koseikai was founded by Niwano Nikkyo and Naganuma Myoko in March 1938 and continued under their joint leadership until Naganuma's death 20 years later. While Niwano dabbled in various folk religious practices, some of which are still practised in Rissho Koseikai, it was Naganuma who possessed the charismatic power that allowed her to enjoy considerable influence over the direction of Koseikai's early development. After her death in 1957, authority was concentrated in Niwano's hands, and under his direction Koseikai has become a leader in the movement towards inter-religious dialogue and cooperative activities to promote peace.

Niwano was born into a large family in a farming village in northern Japan, an environment that by all accounts was a determining influence on his character and religious beliefs. Imbued with the traditional values of honesty, hard work and harmonious relationships, like many of his generation he left for Tokyo at the age of 17. There Niwano became interested in several forms of divination and folk religious practices before finally joining Reiyukai, a new religious movement in the Nichiren Buddhist tradition in 1935. It was from Reiyukai that Niwano developed an interest in the formal study of Buddhist doctrines, and it was the triple influences of traditional values, folk religious practices and Buddhist doctrine that contributed to the belief system of the group that he founded.

Like many other new religious groups, Rissho Koseikai became involved in politics in the early postwar period through its support of independent candidates. After the formation of the Komeito in the mid-1960s, Koseikai increasingly threw its support behind the rival Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as part of its opposition to Soka Gakkai's political activity. The relationship with the LDP soured, however, owing to the conservative party's efforts to provide official recognition and support to Yasukuni Shrine, the Shinto establishment dedicated to Japan's war dead, including convicted war criminals.

In addition to such political activity, Rissho Koseikai has chosen to concentrate on the promotion of civic and inter-religious movements. In 1970, Niwano was instrumental in organizing the First World Conference on Religion and Peace in Kyoto, and on both the national and international level Rissho Koseikai remains a central figure in the work of this inter-religious body. In 1978 the Niwano Peace Foundation was established to provide funding for development projects, primarily in Asia, and to promote peace research. That same year Niwano was also invited to address the United Nations General Assembly First Special Session on Disarmament.

Niwano and Rissho Koseikai do not advocate a strictly pacifist position. In his writings, the necessity of a Self-Defense Force is explained by means of the analogy of public safety. Niwano points out that, although we would all like to live in a society where it is not necessary to lock your door or to maintain a police department, humanity has not yet reached the stage where that is possible. The challenge for humanity, and especially for people of religion, is to make reality reflect the ideal, to create a world where force or the threat of force is no longer necessary. Until that ideal is achieved, however, the necessity of force is recognized.²⁸ However, Niwano displays a distrust of the concept of justice, the ethical basis normally given as the criterion for judging when force is necessary. The concept is criticized as lacking tolerance, and specifically as devoid of meaning in the age of nuclear weapons. Although these arguments reflect broadly held contemporary opinions regarding just war theories, alternative criteria for judging when force needs to be applied are not provided.

The doctrine of these three groups mirrors public debate in contemporary Japan, where pacifist rhetoric dominates but there is little awareness of the implications of this position. Although the use of force is to be avoided if at all possible, there is at least a vague recognition that there are certain extreme situations that might necessitate the employment of force, but debate on what might concretely constitute such situations is avoided, in fulfillment of the desire to maintain a "pacifist" position. We

turn now to postwar developments in the civilizational element of the concept of peace in Japanese religion.

Shuyodan Hoseikai

Shuyodan Hoseikai is a relatively small new religious group, comprising approximately 12,000 members. Its faith and practices reflect both the folk religious traditions and popular morality of Japan, as expressed by its founder, Idei Seitaro.

Idei Seitaro was born at the turn of the century in a poor farming community north of Tokyo. The already poor soil of the area was made largely unusable owing to pollution from local mining operations. Idei left for Tokyo at the age of 15, and he spent the next several years shining shoes, delivering papers and supporting himself with other odd jobs. After finishing his compulsory military service, he returned to Tokyo in 1923, just in time to suffer the effects of the Great Kanto Earthquake. There are indications that Idei began his own spiritual journey at about this time, as he recalls several experiences of receiving revelations while on pilgrimages in the area south of Tokyo. In the latter half of the 1920s Idei became an active member of the Tenri Kenkyukai, an offshoot of Tenrikyo, an early new religious group, which was critical of the contemporary social and political situation. In 1928, Idei was arrested, along with 500 other members of the Tenri Kenkyukai, for distributing leaflets critical of the government.

After his arrest, Idei temporarily ceased his religious activities and found employment in a munitions factory. In 1934, however, he quit his job and returned to religious work, this time acting independently as a kind of miraculous healer and preacher. In 1935 he was arrested once again, this time for promoting a contemporary theory that maintained that the emperor was merely an organ of the state, contrary to the official state doctrine, which exalted and deified the emperor. Upon his release from prison in 1938, Idei returned to his religious work and in 1941, with the aid of two retired army and navy officers who had become his followers, Idei was given permission to establish Shuyodan Hoseikai as a juridical foundation.

The collection of Idei's teaching during the war years, compiled by Hoseikai,²⁹ reflects the ambiguity of his position, namely a person with an arrest record for political crimes who nonetheless was able to obtain official permission to found a religious group in the most repressive of climates. Within this collection of teachings, although there are admonitions to love and respect all people, specifically including one's enemies, one can also find comments that seem to acknowledge the necessity of the war and call for renewed efforts to win the war. Furthermore, Idei

actively employs concepts such as the “Land of the Gods”, but frequently this concept is used as a standard to condemn injustice and corruption in contemporary society, calling for moral cultivation commensurate with this exalted position, rather than as an expression of cultural superiority.

With the end of the war, Idei began to call Shuyodan Hoseikai’s facilities “Homelands of Peace” and proclaimed that the purpose of the organization would be to establish world peace. The practice of offering a prayer for peace every day at noon at Hoseikai’s Tokyo headquarters was begun in 1952, and from 1958 Hoseikai began the erection of Peace Stone monuments in various locations at home and abroad. Since the mid-1970s an annual peace march can also be counted among this group’s peace activities. There is no doubt, however, that Shuyodan Hoseikai’s basic approach to peace is through the moral cultivation of its individual members.

By its very name this group proclaims its overriding interest in moral cultivation, for “shuyodan” means Association for the Cultivation of Morals. In the 10 Essential Points,³⁰ which summarize the teaching of this group, the followers are called upon to realize that they are children of God and to strive to learn the law of nature that they may live correctly. They are told to be thankful in all things, and to remember the value of labour. The head of the house is to be respected, children are to be loved and the harmony of the household should be maintained by striving for mutual understanding. They are to be aware of their words and actions and relate to others with a bright and warm heart. They are not to begrudge others their wealth or envy their virtue. They should not allow themselves to be discontent or to voice their displeasure, but instead should humble themselves, avoid conflict with all and cultivate a spirit that respects all people. They should take seriously their own responsibility, readily accept the instruction of their superiors and follow their direction unwaveringly.

Fujii Kenji has pointed out that this emphasis on relations within the family and with one’s co-workers and neighbours, a so-called “ethic of daily life”, is common to many of the new religions.³¹ What is interesting here, however, is that Hoseikai explicitly makes this the foundation of its work to establish world peace. In the words of the founder, “Offering thanks to all things and aiming at friendly relations with all is the teaching of Shuyodan Hoseikai, and this is the road to world peace”.³² Furthermore, the fact that the facilities of this group are called “Homelands of Peace” indicates that, in the beliefs of Hoseikai, the various activities that take place there, in particular the interaction of the members with each other and the study of the group’s teachings, are in themselves efficacious towards the establishment of world peace.

The civilizational divide

We have seen above how Nipponzan Myohoji's tendency towards a position of absolute pacifism under the influence of its founder, Fujii Nichidatsu, did not extend to his position regarding US involvement in the Vietnam War. His opposition to US involvement reveals most clearly how the oppositional element in the Japanese religious concept of war and peace has developed in the postwar period. To trace this development we can begin by looking at the contents of a letter that Fujii delivered to Gandhi during one of their meetings in the 1930s to explain his purpose on his mission to India.

Fujii begins by stating his belief that it is Indian Buddhism that is the true mother of Japanese civilization, and he goes on to express his regret that this same Buddhism finds no followers in the land of its birth. Moving on to the issue of Japan's military activities in Manchuria, which had already begun to attract the condemnation of various countries throughout the world, Fujii acknowledges that Japan has been forced into a position of isolation because of its actions in China, but states that, even if it should face the threat of armed coercion from the whole world, Japan should not sway from the course it believes is just. Fujii maintains that, although Japan might be a country small in area, the fact that in its 2,600-year history it has not once suffered invasion from a foreign power indicates strength out of proportion to its size. Furthermore, according to Fujii, aside from one or two wars fought to protect itself from destruction, in that 2,600-year history Japan for its part has not invaded any other country. Indeed, Fujii maintains that no other country in the world can boast such a peaceful history as Japan. Fujii goes on to state that it is religion, namely Buddhism, that has made Japan such a peaceful nation, and for that reason it is Japan's mission to spread that faith, so that other countries might enjoy the peace with which Japan has been blessed.³³ The contents of this letter clearly reflect the acceptance of some of the beliefs pertaining to Japanese ethnic or cultural superiority, connected in Fujii's case with belief in Buddhism as the foundation of that superiority.

After Japan's defeat in the war, Fujii returned to Kumamoto, the place of his birth, to contemplate what course of action he and Nipponzan Myohoji should take. He says that it occurred to him there that Japan had been most at peace during the early years of its history, just after Buddhism was introduced to the country. Of that golden age he writes: "The prime mover to the establishment of peace in that age undoubtedly was Buddhism. I naturally became convinced that a peaceful cultural nation was formed and a moral and orderly society emerged in those days

thanks to nothing but Buddhism.”³⁴ He goes on to state his belief that the centre of that Buddhist faith was the stupa, a memorial containing the relics of the Buddha. It is this belief that became the motivation for one of the primary postwar activities of Nipponzan Myohoji, the erection of stupas, or Peace Pagodas, throughout Japan and the rest of the world. Construction work on the first such stupa was begun in Kumamoto City that very year, and completed in 1954.

Since the mid-1950s Nipponzan Myohoji has also been active in opposing US military bases in Japan, which Fujii has described as tools for the United States’ invasion of Asia.³⁵ In the 1970s, members of Nipponzan Myohoji participated in activities obstructing the construction of the New Tokyo International Airport at Narita, on the grounds that it could also be used for military purposes, specifically to support the US military intervention in Vietnam.

We have already seen how Fujii justified armed resistance to the US intervention, a judgement against the United States at least partly based on its use of atomic weapons against Japan. The nuclear threat in particular is used by Fujii to develop an oppositional schema of civilization, where the fault-line is identified as lying between science and faith, East and West, Buddhism and other religions. This is perhaps seen most clearly in a sermon of Fujii’s entitled “Scientific Civilization and Religious Civilization”. There he states that “scientific civilization”, which has developed in the West since the sixteenth century, has led to ever more destructive wars in Europe and the European colonization of the world. Furthermore, this civilization has culminated in the development of weapons such as nuclear weapons that now threaten the destruction of humanity itself. In opposition to this, “religious civilization” teaches the value of life and promotes the development of trust among peoples. Fujii then goes on to echo his earlier claims concerning Japan’s peaceful history, saying here that wars of aggression have been rare in the history of Asia, because of the influence of Buddhism.³⁶

Thus, in Fujii’s postwar thought the oppositional schema included in the concept of peace based on the idea of civilization has been shifted from one anchored in a specifically Japanese ethnocentrism to one that discriminates between science and religion, the West and the East, other religions and Buddhism. In this worldview, it is the spread of the culture of faith, specifically Buddhist faith, that is seen as the necessary condition for the establishment of peace in the world.

Fujii’s take on the civilizational divide is perhaps more radical than most. More representative of the mainstream of current religious ideas in Japan would be that of Soka Gakkai. In its doctrine, Soka Gakkai tends towards an inclusivistic paradigm that goes beyond the divisions of East and West, towards a fusion that is described as a “third civilization”.

In rhetoric reminiscent of Nipponzan Myohoji's Occidentalism, Soka Gakkai argues that the tide of history has turned against Western materialism and toward Eastern, Buddhist spiritualism. However, this will result not in the victory of one over the other but rather in a fusion of the two, and historical circumstances have determined that Japan is to play a central role in that fusion.

At the present time, when the tragic contradictions and distortions of the Western materialistic emphasis have begun to appear, the course of history has focused on the importance of Eastern Buddhism ... It is clear that the unstoppable tide of history calls for a civilization founded on humanity's awakening to a higher dimension, transcending Western, rationalistic culture.... Here, let me say a word or two about the fusion of Eastern and Western civilization and Japan's mission. Since the Meiji Period, Japan has chosen the path of Europeanization, and has taken on Western sensibilities. Oriental traditions have also come to rest in Japan, as if it were the final stop on a train line.... Japan is the only country that has suffered an atomic bombing. In addition, geographically it is located as a bridge between East and West, a favorable place to contribute to world peace.... As the meeting point of Western and Eastern civilization, Japan possesses the call and responsibility to take the leadership in building a new civilization.³⁷

Conclusion

Post-Cold War realities, and in particular the so-called war on terrorism, have brought the issue of Japanese pacifism to the forefront. The current effort on the part of the government to modify Article 9 of the Constitution will further intensify the debate. It remains to be seen, however, what criteria will eventually be adopted to clarify when the use of force is necessary or justified. Individual moral cultivation as the key to establishing a peaceful society will find a great deal of resonance with current trends that emphasize personal development and spirituality over organized religion, although notions of cultural superiority or national mission will remain problematic.

Notes

1. In a recent survey only 15 per cent said that in the event of war they would fight for their country, as opposed to 48 per cent who responded that they would not fight in any event and 26 per cent who said that it would depend on the circumstances. The survey was conducted in 2001, and a report on the results can be found in Robert Kisala, Nagai Mikiko and Yamada Mamoru (eds), *Shinrai shakai no yukue* [The Future of a Society Based on Trust]. Tokyo: Harvest-sha, 2007.

2. Robert Kisala, *Prophets of Peace: Pacifism and Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.
3. For a discussion of this issue, see Robert Kisala, "Japanese Religions", in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006, pp. 3–13.
4. Figures regarding religious affiliation in Japan are notoriously unreliable. Almost every Japanese is nominally a member of one of the major Buddhist sects. Additionally, the entire population are automatically counted as parishioners of the local Shinto Shrine, resulting in a total religious membership of well over 200 million, nearly double the population of the country. Ministry of Education, *Shukyo Nenkan* [Religions Year-book]. Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1996.
 Membership figures for new religious groups are likewise based on the self-reporting of the groups, and wildly varying criteria for membership often lead to clearly inflated results. On the other hand, there is little dispute that several groups counted among the new religious movements can rightly claim a membership in the millions, so a total figure of 15 per cent of the population would not be unreasonable. In terms of people who identify themselves as belonging to a particular religion, total religious membership has remained at about 30 per cent throughout the postwar period, as measured in several independent social surveys – see, for example, Nihonjin no kokuminsei chosa Tokei Suri Kenkyujo Kokuminsei Chosa Inkaikai (ed.), *Nihonjin no kokuminsei* [National Characteristics of the Japanese]. Tokyo: Idemitsu Shoten, 1991; and Nihonjin no shukyo ishiki chosa NHK Yoron Chosabu (ed.), *Nihonjin no shukyo ishiki* [Religious Awareness of the Japanese]. Tokyo: Nippon Hoso Shuppan Kyokai, 1984. Ishii Kenji provides a useful summary of postwar survey results: Ishii Kenji, *Gendai nihonjin no shukyo ishiki* [Religious Awareness in Contemporary Japan]. Tokyo: Shin'yosha, 1997.
5. In reference to the *Daijo Taishu Jizo Jurinkyo*, quoted in Nakamura Hajime, *Shukyo to shakai rinri* [Religion and Social Ethics]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959, p. 351.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 388–389.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 384–386.
8. Nitobe Inazo, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1969.
9. William Farris, for example, argues against facile comparisons with the emergence of feudalism in Europe, precisely because "warriors acted more like mercenaries than vassals, repeatedly betraying their lords and switching their loyalties to the winning side". William Wayne Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan's Military, 500–1300*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 312.
10. Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570–1680*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
11. Yasumaru Yoshio, *Nihon no kindai to minshu shiso* [Japanese Modernization and Popular Thought]. Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1974.
12. Satomi Kishio, *Kokutai Shisoshi* [A History of the Concept of National Polity]. Tokyo: Hentensha, 1992.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 217–219, 282–291.
14. Nakura Tetsuzo, "Hideyoshi no Chosen Shinryaku to Shinkoku" [Hideyoshi's Invasion of Korea and the Land of the Gods]. *Rekishi Hyoron*, 314, 1976.
15. For a translation of the *New Theses*, see Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
16. Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 120–127.
17. Uchimura Kanzo, *Uchimura kanzo zenshu* [Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, vol. 3, 1981, p. 39.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 296.

19. Ibid., vol. 12, p. 425.
20. Fujii Nichidatsu, *Kill Not Life: Fusessho*, trans. Yumiko Miyazaki. Leverett, MA: Nipponzan Myohoji New England Sangha, 1985, p. 15. In this quote from Fujii's sermon I use the translation prepared by Nipponzan Myohoji.
21. Fujii Nichidatsu, *Buddhism for World Peace: Words of Nichidatsu Fujii*, trans. Yumiko Miyazaki. Tokyo: Japan-Bharat Sarvodaya Mitrata Sangha, 1980, p. 176.
22. Ikeda Daisaku, *Proposals on Peace and Disarmament: Toward the 21st Century*. Tokyo: Sōka Gakkai International, 1991, p. 66.
23. Ibid., p. 66.
24. Ibid., p. 132.
25. Ibid., p. 9.
26. Ibid., p. 132.
27. Ibid., p. 129.
28. Niwano Nikkyo, *Heiwa he no michi* [The Road to Peace]. Tokyo: Kosei Shuppansha, 1972, pp. 76–77.
29. This collection was published in three volumes as *Idei Seitaro Kunwashu* [The Collected Moral Lectures of Idei Seitaro] by Shuyodan Hoseikai between 1980 and 1982. *Idei Seitaro kunwashu*, vols 1–3. Tokyo: Shuyodan Hoseikai, 1980–1982.
30. “Shuyodan Hoseikai Koryo” [The Essential Points of Shuyodan Hoseikai's Teaching], reproduced in the members' handbook.
31. Fujii Kenji, *Seikatsu kiritsu to rinrikan* [Rules of Daily Life and Ethical View], in *Shinshukyo jiten* [New Religions Dictionary]. Tokyo: Kobundo, 1990, pp. 236–251.
32. Shuyodan Hoseikai Misesu no Tsudoi, *Mujoken jikko* [Unconditional Practice]. Tokyo: Shuyodan Hoseikai Misesu no Tsudoi, 1980, p. 306.
33. Fujii's letter, written in Japanese, was translated into English before being delivered to Gandhi by one of Fujii's disciples. However, I have been able to find only a copy of the Japanese original, reproduced in *Byakuju*, a collection of Fujii's sermons published in 1983. Fujii Nichidatsu, *Byakuju* [The Collected Sermons of the Reverend Fujii Nichidatsu]. Tokyo: Nipponzan Myohoji, 1983, pp. 74–83.
34. Fujii Nichidatsu, *My Non-Violence: An Autobiography of a Japanese Buddhist*, trans. Yamaori Tutsuo. Tokyo: Japan Buddha Sangha Press, 1975, p. 91.
35. Ibid., p. 118.
36. Fujii Nichidatsu, *Tenku* [The Sermons of Fujii Nichidatsu]. Tokyo: Nipponzan Myohoji, 1992, pp. 22–25.
37. Harashima Takeshi, *Soka Gakkai*. Tokyo: Seiki Shoten, 1969, pp. 88–89.