

Rethinking the Dichotomy between Religious and Secular: The Emergence of Religion in Modern Japan

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ABSTRACT

It is generally said that the separation of religion and state is a common principle in the contemporary world. In contrast with that, the blend of religion and state in Islamic states is considered an anachronism or a symptom of reactionism. This criticism, however, doesn't take into account how the relation of religion, state and the secular realm has been historically conceptualized. In this paper, I examine how Japanese intellectuals discussed the dichotomy between religion and secular shortly after the dichotomy was introduced in Japan during the process of modernization in the late 19th century.

First, I discuss how the foremost Japanese writer, Sôseki Natsume (1867-1916), dealt with the dichotomy between religious and secular in one of his works, *Kokoro (Mind, 1914)*. Sôseki describes the secular in opposition to the religious and applies the antinomy between religion and secular antinomy to other relations, such as those between the individual and the state, or between the mind and body. I then juxtapose Sôseki's *Kokoro* with another critique that shares the same title, *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life (1896)*, written by one of his contemporaries, Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904). Hearn postulates that before the concept of religion emerged in modern period, there was another belief system that worked as a basis of society, and on which common people still establish their self-identities. I argue that both Sôseki and Hearn develop their discussion in order to dissolve the religious-secular dichotomy; Sôseki intends to integrate the oppositional relations between religious and secular, Hearn blurs the boundaries between religious and secular and refers to them collectively as "Oriental Ego," which, as a result, cause him to be trapped in another dichotomy, namely the antinomy between West and East. Finally, I emphasize that, Hearn finds the same basis in the West as well as in the East, and although he underestimates it, he ends up displacing boundaries from religious/secular to East/West. I conclude that the discussion on the religious and the secular in early modern Japan would lead us to go beyond the religious-secular dichotomy and to obtain an alternative framework of dealing with the contemporary world as a whole.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Mariko Naito works as a research fellow at University of Tokyo Centre for Philosophy. She obtained her MA from the Faculty of Language Information and Sciences, the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 2002. She will receive her Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 2010. Her research field is Japanese literature and comparative literature. She is currently working on a project that looks at narratives based on Taoist beliefs in the global Asian context.

Reviewing Singapore's Secularization Model

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the different phases of secularization adopted by the Singapore government since independence in 1965. Three phases have been identified where 1) religion is shifted to the background 2) religion is placed in the foreground and 3) religion is in the spotlight. Playing a highly interventionist role, the state adopts a particular model in response to external and internal stimuli. While officially proclaiming a neutral stance, the state accords preference to specific forms of religion in its nation-building efforts. Forms of religion that contribute towards building a productive workforce and social stability to achieve greater economic success are promoted while those that are perceived to have a converse effect are suppressed. The implications of this policy is analysed with reference to global trends and through the use of examples of local religious groups such as SOKA, ISKCON, tang-kis and evangelical Christianity.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Rodney Sebastian is currently undertaking a Master of Social Sciences programme at the Department of Sociology, NUS. His thesis is entitled: *Managing NRMs in Singapore: Case study of ISKCON*. He conducts research on South Asian based religions in Singapore and has co-authored articles such as *Who is a Brahmin in Singapore?*, *Conversion and the Family: Chinese Hare Krishnas*, and *Hare Krishnas in Singapore: Agency, State and Hinduism*. He is also working as the Research Assistant for the FASS Religion Reseach Cluster which organizes academic events related to religion and as the officer for the Lee Kong Chian NUS Stanford Initiative on Southeast Asia.

“Who Acknowledges His Right?”: Prelude to the “Modernization” of Judicial System in Mid-nineteenth Century Iran as seen in Persian Legal Documents

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ABSTRACT

In nineteenth century, Asian and Middle Eastern countries faced with European pressure more drastically than previous centuries. One of these pressures is reflected in the conclusion of so called “unequal treaty” which included consular jurisdiction. In theory consular jurisdiction system urged Asian and Middle Eastern countries to modernize their legal and judicial system so this system is seen as a beginning of modernization of law in these countries. We know so called commercial court or mixed tribunal as a part of consular jurisdiction that was introduced in some of the Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

On the one hand when we consider the process of ‘secularization,’ we sometimes encounter the problem of the “separation of law and religion.” It is worthy to inquire into the commercial court system in order to understand the process of secularization of a certain country.

In this presentation, as one specializing in Iranian History, I investigate the beginning of judicial reform in mid-nineteenth century Iran especially focusing on the acknowledgement of private right. There is great debate on the court system in nineteenth century Iran.

I discuss the contents of an article in the Russo-Iranian commercial treaty of 1843 which is the first “unequal treaty” for Iran, from the viewpoint of official registration. I thus analyze the character of *Divankhane-ye tejarat*—that is, a commercial court (/ commercial council) where the registration of private contracts and settlements of litigation took place through an analysis of Persian legal documents. Hence, I investigate the primary transition of the relationship between the state and religion in the legal system of Modern Iran.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Naofumi Abe is a research fellow at the University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy. He obtained his Master degree from the Department of Asian History, the University of Tokyo in 2002. He studied at department of History, the University of Tehran in Iran from 2003 to 2006. He is currently working on his Ph. D dissertation concerning Family history in Iran from the mid-eighteenth to the end of nineteenth century with analyzing Persian legal and judicial documents.

State and Religion:

Relationship and Changing of State and Religious Ideology in the Nineteenth-century Thailand

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, the monarchy has been a main focus of Thai society and has owned special status in Thai society. A factor which influenced the special status of the institution of monarchy is religion concepts of kingship. The notions of state and monarchy in Thai traditional state connected with religious concepts of kingship. Religious ideologies were applied to endorse the king's legitimacy. Conceptions of *dharmaraja* in Buddhism and *devaraja* in Brahman-Hinduism were widely accepted ideals of kingship among Thai monarchs. These religious concepts of kingship have an impact on the perception and understanding of the institution of the monarchy in traditional society.

In the mid-nineteenth century, new attitudes of Western modernity and civilization influenced the changes of Thai monarchy. Cosmological concept of Thai kingship was changed into concepts of secularization. The modernizing elite adjusted their attitudes, in accordance with changes sweeping through the world. Old rituals and old beliefs were changed to represent civilized status of Thailand and Thai monarchy.

Focusing on the relationships between state and religious ideology, this study will throw light on the use of religious concepts of kingship in the support of royal legitimacy and authority of Thai Kings in the nineteenth-century Thailand. The interactions between religious ideologies and political institution will be examined. Also, the study highlights secularization of the state and the monarchy from the mid-nineteenth century.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Siriporn Dabphet is a Ph.D. candidate of Department of History, NUS. She did her B.A. (History) and her 1st M.A. in Asian History at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. She started her career as a lecturer at Department of History in this University in December 2000. She also researched in ancient Thai law. In 2006, she came to further her 2nd M.A. in history at NUS. Her M.A. thesis researched on the use of ritual to support legitimacy of Thai kings, especially the coronation ceremony since the mid-nineteenth century. Her Ph.D. thesis is about the legal foundation of state stability in the early Bangkok period by focusing on ancient Thai law code.

Vicissitudes of *Nourūz*/New Year's Festival in the Iranian Context

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ABSTRACT

Festivals provide a suitable theme for analyzing the impact of modernity on "religion". Today, we can find many cases in which religious festivals were "secularized" in the course of time. However, modernity has occasionally generated dynamics operating in a different fashion. This presentation focuses on the transition of *Nourūz*, the New Year of the Iranian calendar, which is now widely celebrated as a traditional festival throughout Iran and Central Asia. In the pre-Islamic period, *Nourūz* had a close connection to Zoroastrianism and was regarded as the most important festival within the Persian empires. Although orthodox theologians sometimes objected to its infidelity under Islamic domination, the *Nourūz* festival generally continued to hold a high position in Iran, while eschewing the Zoroastrian features. Afterwards, the day came to be revived as a festival of the "state" from the period of Safavid Iran (1501-1736), interestingly enough, in defining its Islamic nature. Babism and Bahaim which emerged from Islam as new faiths during the Qajar period (1796-1925), furthermore, attached great importance to *Nourūz*; for example, the year of their religious calendar commences on this day.

In view of these facts, we may conclude that *Nourūz* passed through strange vicissitudes; namely, *Nourūz* was sacralized in conjunction with the modernization of Iran. It is worthwhile considering these phenomena in detail, paying attention to the period between the Safavid and Qajar dynasties, during which Iran experienced the age of modernity. There are numerous studies concerning *Nourūz* that sustain notions of a longstanding Iranian identity, but little research exists that treats the matter of the particular kinds of vicissitudes this festival underwent as Iran was shaped as a modern nation. Such research will help to shed new light on a series of questions dealing with the intricate relationship between modernity and religion, from the standpoint of the Iranian festival.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Yoichi Isahaya currently belongs to the Area Studies Department of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo. He obtained his MA (Hons) from the Department of Asian History, Kobe University in 2007. He is currently researching the mutual acculturation between Iranians and Turks, focusing on their calendars and festivals in Iran and Central Asia where these two peoples have interacted for a long time. He is also a research fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and a collaborative research fellow of the University of Tokyo's Center for Philosophy. His research interests center primarily on the history of Central Eurasia and cultural contact in this region.

Literati: The Negotiators of the Chinese State and Locales in Ming Dynasty

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ABSTRACT

China is vast in territory. It will be romanticizing matters if we are to believe that what take place in major economic and political centers is always effectively transmitted to rural areas. This being the case, how did the late imperial Chinese state associate the populace and locales, and assimilate them into its governmental system, if this was ever possible? Scholars have proposed that one of the ways late imperial Chinese bureaucratic system exhibited the inclusion of the public into the state is reflected through the workings of religious cults, mainly through religious or veneration practices, and shared beliefs. Many discussions on religions and politics among scholars have evolved from or developed into the binaries of state-locale (society), orthodoxy-heterodoxy, top down/bottom up-interaction, and “scienticization-emotionalization”. Fortunately, a more convoluted view has emerged to demonstrate that there are more tales under the masquerade of the binaries and static demarcations. The research of scholars like Hymes, Szonyi and Duara has exposed us to a complex mammoth social structure that functions as a bridge between the state and the populace. There is more room that awaits our research that can enhance our understanding of late imperial China. For this paper, I will focus on 15th to 16th Ming China and on Jinjiang locale. Materials that I will be covering include local gazettes, tomb inscriptions, family genealogies and works written by Jinjiang literati. During my field trip to Fujian in December, I plan to visit shrines, temples and conduct oral interviews with the descendants of some Jinjiang literati. The information garnered will become part of my research materials.

The project of building an imaginary bridge between the state and populace involved numerous agents. Religious personnel, local officials, and the locals themselves were the most direct ones. What about indirect ones? Who contributed to the daily maintenance of religious grounds? There ought to be financial and cultural promoters. Merchants were the primary financial pillars. They were the ones who helped spread the ideology as they were traveling between places and logically speaking, were literate. Another agent, the local elites and by which I refer to literati who aspired to be officials as shown by their unyielding participation in civil service examinations, played cardinal roles too in the religious field. They were the most probable cultural promoters. I am particularly interested in the negotiating process between them and the state and also between them and the locales. How did they mediate the flow of ideologies, information, to-dos and not-to-dos between the state and the society? What sort of conflicts of interest they encountered? What did they regard themselves as? The above-mentioned are the questions which I will try to answer.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Hong Ciyuan Lily is currently doing my post-graduate studies at National University of Singapore. She did her bachelor degree in NUS, majoring in Chinese Studies and have now returned to the university to procure a Master degree, under the Department of Chinese Studies. Her academic interests include philosophy, both Chinese and Continental, Chinese history and foreign languages. The research area for her Master thesis centers on late imperial China, particularly the late Ming period. It will involve cross-disciplinary research methodology of intellectual and local history as well as philosophy. She has chosen to zero in on Jinjiang which is a county-level city of Quanzhou Municipality in Fujian. It is located in the southeastern part of the province. Cai Qing, a Neo-Confucian who was a native of Jinjiang and his disciplines and associates are the principal figures of her research. Lily is interested to find out how these Neo-Confucians responded to popular religions, while taking into consideration their unusual identity as Neo-Confucians. She earnestly hopes this research will enhance our understanding of the relationship between local history and Chinese philosophy as well as the relationship between the imperial state and its societies.

Old Scriptures in New Language: A Study of Discourse in Modern *Yuli Baochao*

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ABSTRACT

Printing and circulating of moral books (善書) has been a practice among the Chinese to gain spiritual merits since the Song dynasty. The idea of circulating moral books to gain spiritual merits is based on the belief that some people would turn for the better when they read the books, or hear its content from the others. Often, the content incorporated ideas of supernatural belief to promote merit-doings. This practice of printing moral books continues to exist till the present day. The moral books printed lately can be found in two forms: (1) a reprint of the original texts; (2) an edited version of the original texts, in which the editing can come in the form of translating the original text into modern Chinese, adding in related content, and others. In view of this, this paper would be a preliminary study of the editing that is done to the modern moral books by comparing four different versions of *Yuli Baochao* (玉曆寶鈔), a type of moral books which encourages merit-doings through the idea of karmic retribution and existence of hell. Two of the four versions studied were published in the period of late Qing dynasty and early Republican, and the other two are published within the past decade. The focus of comparison would be on the differences between the older and newer versions, as well as that in the two newer versions. By comparing the styles of writing, the prefaces and additional content found in the four versions, this paper aims to explore how the modern editors of *Yuli Baochao* appropriate this old scripture into the modern context, so as to better achieve its aim of spreading the ideas of karmic retribution and to encourage merit-doings.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Goh Yu Mei is currently a Master of Arts candidate in the Department of Chinese Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. She received her B.A. (Hons) degree in Chinese Studies from National University of Singapore in 2008. Her research interests include Chinese popular religions, social history of Ming and Qing China and social life of Chinese in Malaya.

Japanese Religious Spirit in the Writings of Tadakazu Uoki during the World War II

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ABSTRACT

In the period between the 1930s until after the World War II, “Japanese spirit” was commonly utilized by the Japanese government, and by philosophers and scholars of religion. The Japanese government used the term to construct a notion that all ethnically Japanese shared an innate nationalistic consciousness which regarded the emperor as a supernatural leader of the nation state. It also referred to Japanese superiority. Although the government’s definition of the term dominated the minds of Japanese, the Japanese spirit was a vaguely defined concept, which held different meanings depending on the context and intention in which it was used. This presentation analyzes how and why the term “Japanese religious spirit” was used by Tadakazu Uoki (1892-1954), one of the prominent Christian scholars during the war period.

In his most famous book, *The Spiritual Tradition of Japanese Christianity* (1941) (『日本基督教の精神的伝統』), Uoki uses the term “Japanese religious spirit” to refer to a Japanese essence which is evoked and developed when it encounters a foreign religion. Uoki suggests that upon encountering a new religion, such as Christianity, Japanese individuals come to understand the “truths” revealed by the religion, only through the transformation of their Japanese religious spirit. In the case of Christianity, Uoki argues that “Japanese Christianity” develops as the result of the Japanese religious spirit encountering and interacting with Christianity. In this theory, the agent that reveals religious truths to an individual is not only the Christian God, but the process is also dependant on the Japanese religious spirit. Therefore, Uoki’s interpretation of the Japanese religious spirit as an agent which regulates the acceptance of Christianity contradicts the fundamental Christian notion that the Christian God is the one and only God that transcends all other beings.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Noriko Kanahara is a first year doctoral student at the University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy (Secularization, Religion, State Program). She has a BA in cultural anthropology from Bard College, an M.Phil in Migration Studies from University of Oxford (St. Antony’s College), and an MA in Area Studies from University of Tokyo. She has worked on transnational migration and effects of state policy on lives of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East under the ongoing “war on terror.” She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in New York, Oxford, and London. Currently she is conducting a research on how followers of transnational Islamic movement Tablighi Jama`at experience and establish “*umma*,” or “Muslim community,” in their daily lives. Her interests include transnational migration, transnational religious network, Islam, anthropology of policy, and late 19th century -1950s Japanese intellectual history.

Kang You Wei, the Martin Luther of Confucianism and His Religious Nationalism and Modernity

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ABSTRACT

Kang You-wei is remembered in Chinese history as the conservative reformer of the late-nineteenth century who attempted to salvage the failing Qing dynasty through institutional reforms. His refashioning of Confucius as a reformer and Confucianism as an ideological justification for institutional reforms, is commonly equated as a political expedient to counteract the oppositions of anti-reform faction in court. To the other intellectuals, especially the post-May Fourth generations, his action is an example of cultural nationalism that is to preserve the “backward traditions” of China against the tide of western pressures for changes. The essentialist reading of Kang as a political reformer or a cultural conservative cannot account for the religious or redemptive (*Jiu-shi*) strand of his thought and approach to Nationalism and modernity. Indeed, Liang Qichao, writing in 1901 remarked that his teacher was a “religionist” (*zongjiao jia*) who in reforming of Confucianism to its original state was the “Martin Luther of the Confucian religion” (*Kong Jiao*). Kang was interested in the Kung-Yang school of Confucianism (New Text) which portrayed Confucius as a magical or messianic uncrowned King (*Su Wang*) who created the true doctrine instrumental in bringing mankind towards the utopian future of Great Harmony (*Da-Tong*). The desire or intensity experienced by Kang in changing the world according to his renewed version of Confucian teaching, was a result of what Shmuel Eisenstadt calls “the Axial age tension” within world religion. This study purports to highlight his attempt to disassociate Confucianism from the corrupted imperial orthodoxy and at the same time reform the imperial state through his “true doctrine” of Confucianism. In addition, I will like to study the connection of Christianity (Protestantism) and Kang’s attempt to make Confucianism into a Chinese religion and later the state religion of the Chinese nation. It was through Confucianism as a state religion, that Kang attempted to fashion a national body, similar to state Shintoism in Meiji Japan, linking the constitutional monarch with the Chinese people. Kang’s Confucianism cannot be simply expressed as a form of backward “cultural nationalism” as he viewed his ultimate goal as the salvation of the whole world through his Confucian version of modernity. Kang’s version of religious modernity opposed to Western secular modernity which promotes intense competition and selfish individualism through capitalism and nation-states. This study seeks to address Kang’s vision of Confucian modernity which was forced to retreat in the twentieth century under the “anti-religion” forces of nationalism, secularism and modernization.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Tay Wei Leong is a graduate student from the department of History, National University of Singapore. He is a history enthusiast who loves to survey the past and to show its relevance for the living present. His main research interest is on the intellectual and social history of late imperial and Republican China. He is currently working on Kang Youwei and the fate of Confucianism in modern China for his research dissertation. In his free time, he like to read books on various subjects as well as taking pictures of his mundane life and the fast changing world around him.

**A Viewpoint of 'Secularization, Religion and the State':
Japanese Historian AMINO Yoshihiko and his Concept of 'People'**

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ABSTRACT

In this presentation, I deal with a text from 1978 by AMINO Yoshihiko in order to rethink the relation among "secularization, religion and the state." Amino was a Japanese historian who studied Japan's Middle Ages. In 1978, he published a book titled *Muen, Kugai, Raku: Liberty and Peace in Medieval Japan* (Muen, Kugai, Raku: Nihon Chusei no Jiyu to Heiwa). This book attracted attention in academic circles and is now regarded as one of Amino's representative works. In this book, Amino assumed a dichotomy between religion and the secular state in Japanese history and viewed the religions of this time as symbols of Japanese "liberty" and "peace." That is to say, he, as a Japanese historian, strongly valued religion over the secular state. In his view, secularization in the modern era is a "terminal disease." He characterized modernity not as the expansion of the domain of the secular state, but rather as the decline of religious power.

The purpose of this presentation is to analyze Amino's discussion in 1978 in order to think through the problem of our viewpoint when we refer to "secularization, religion, and the state." Amino presupposed two conflicts: "people vs. (despotic) authority" and "religion vs. (secular) authority." He integrated these views and created another conclusion contrary to the contemporary general perception. This is the discovery of religion's function of saving the suppressed "people." In this presentation, I will argue that by paying attention to their relationship to the "people" and thereby introducing a new viewpoint, Amino reached a unique valuation on "religion" and "authority" in Japan's Middle Ages and that, furthermore, he criticized the viewpoints which other prior discussions tacitly adopted. This argument shows that we can see the effectiveness of the third term "people" toward the question of "religion vs. state" and "secularization."

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Chikara Uchida is currently a doctoral student at the Department of Area Studies, University of Tokyo. He obtained his Master of Arts from the same department in 2009. He is currently researching the historiography (history of history and historians) in Japan of the 1980s, focusing on Japanese medievalist Yoshihiko AMINO (1928-2004) and his works. His research interests center primarily on the "social history" movement of the 1980s, the relation between history and society, and the social role of historical studies.

Europe, Civilization and Christianity: Victor Hugo and the Problem of Human Rights at the Time of the Algerian Conquest and Laicization

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ABSTRACT

Why do we find the *Stasi Report*, the official report on the “Head Scarf Affair” in France, to be discriminatory against Muslim people? The reason is the historical formation of *laïcité* itself, rather than just a lack of understanding towards Muslim people.

In order to trace the roots of this approach, we examine the notion of Victor Hugo, as one of the first advocates of *laïcité* and human rights. Hugo enthusiastically supported minorities and attacked the ecclesiastical authority in Europe, but said almost nothing about the religious inequality and violation of basic rights in Algeria. What does his silence mean?

Although Hugo was a humanist, his logic was that each of them would become a “perfect” human by education. The same logic supported his colonialism. He believed that colonization was the way to civilize or “humanize” the “barbaric” world. However, the integration into humanity actually means the assimilation into European civilization. Also, he identified Christianity, especially Catholicism, with European Civilization. Thus, Colonization meant changing the Islamic world into a Christian one.

For this thinker of *laïcité*, being a Christian is a precondition for being a “human being” and for being protected under the umbrella of *laïcité*. His view was that in order to believe freely, one must believe in Christianity and be assimilated into Europe.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Akiyoshi Ono is currently a full-time Ph. D Student at the Department of Language and Information Sciences, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo. He obtained his MAS from Department of Language and Information Sciences, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo in 2009. He is currently researching on the political ideas and the social role of Romantic poets in nineteenth century France, especially Victor Hugo and Alphonse de Lamartine. His research interests are mainly on French Romantic Literature, Political thought, History of Religion, Nationalism, and the Formation of “Europe”.

To be Religious and to be Political in Colonial Algeria: The Ulama and Nationalists in the 1950s

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ABSTRACT

When we compare the Association of Ulama (Islamic religious scholars) and the radicals (those who were for national independence) in the history of Algerian nationalism, we find a striking difference between the two with respect to their attitude toward religion. The Ulama, even in the age of nationalism, always pretended to be non-political. For them, politics was the opposite of religion. On the other hand, the radical nationalists, or at least some of them, referred to religion as the ultimate end of their political struggle. What is the reason the Ulama refused to be seen as political, while being effectively involved in political activities? This is the main question of this study.

This paper will focus on the divergence in the interpretation of religion between the Ulama and the nationalists. While the Ulama dealt with religion as a collective identity of al-Umma (community of believers), seeing themselves as its legitimate representatives, the nationalists understood religion primarily in terms of individual identity, a relationship between oneself and God. The difference between these two logics arises from the different understanding about collectivity. In the Ulama's framework, the religious community or al-Umma doesn't presume autonomous individuals as in the case of citizens in a modern society. In the nationalist imagination, on the other hand, the society should be made of equal citizens who make free choices for their own religion or their political participation.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Shoko Watanabe is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Area Studies of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the University of Tokyo. Her major is the History of Modern Algeria, from the 1930s to the eve of the Algerian independence war of November 1, 1954. She is currently researching the Association of Algerian Ulama (founded in 1931), with reference to the formation of Algerian nationalism. She published an article on the colonial education policy entitled, "Politics of Arabic Official Instruction in Colonial Algeria: the Question of its prestige and the Society between the 1930s and the 1950s" (in Japanese). This appeared in the *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 22-1, 2006, pp. (87-111). She has also worked on translations entitled, *Selected Texts of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama*. SIAS Working Paper Series 4 (in Japanese) Tokyo, which appeared in SIAS, Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 2009, pp. 76

The State, *Ulama* and Religiosity: Rethinking Islamization of Contemporary Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic resurgence movement of the 1970s has arguably led to an increase in religious consciousness among the Malay-Muslims in Malaysia, and the impact can be felt to this very day. The call for a greater Islamization of society by various influential resurgent groups, such as Darul Arqam and ABIM, have forced the Malaysian government to come up with Islamic related policies, programmes and institutions. During this period, more Malays began to display their commitment towards Islam by sticking on their car screens labels that proclaim 'The Quran is the answer,' and 'Islam is the best'. The donning of *tudung* and the other Arabic styled garments also began to be more visible in society. As more and more women began putting on the *niqab* (the veiling which only reveals the eyes), and the men wearing the pony-tailed skull-cap (*serban*) and Arab-style loose robe (*jubbah*), there was also a greater preoccupation with the segregation between men and women, and between secular and more 'religious' Malays in society. Not only are the Malays becoming overly obsessed with *halal* food (permissible food), there was also a surge in demands for cassette tapes and reading materials on Islam. The increase in demand for such religious commodities and products has elevated the status of their 'suppliers', namely the religious elites (the *Ulama*) in society.

The objective of this paper is to uncover the role of dominant religious personalities in the Islamization of contemporary Malaysia. It seeks to analyze some of the state's strategies in dealing with the increasing religiosity of the Malays in contemporary Malaysia, by paying close attention to its treatment on the *Ulama*. While many academic works have dealt with the state's carrot-and-stick measures in handling the various resurgent groups- through the introduction and setting up of Islamic programmes and Islamic institutions, and the strict regulation, if not banning, of the deemed 'deviant' Islamic organizations- very little focus has been given on the important actors who have made these measures possible and sustainable. In this paper, I argue that the Islamization process of contemporary Malaysia requires a re-thinking. Instead of looking at Islamization as a statist, top-down process, there is a need to recognize the significant role played by the *Ulama* as the 'legitimizing elements' which is essential in any Islamic movements and organizations, and in validating any Islamic discourses. In fact, it is the *Ulama*, and not the state elites, that determine the success and failure of ideological projects such as Islam Hadhari and 'One Malaysia', for they are revered as the main providers of an Islamic perspective in every field of knowledge. Apart from utilizing the legal instruments and control of key institutions, the state's ability to win over the hearts and minds of Muslims and to remain a dominant Islamization actor rests on its ability to ride on the *Ulama's* popularity, charisma, and authority, in attempting to authenticate their ideological projects or counter dissenting voices in society.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Norshahril Saat is currently a full-time Masters Candidate at the Department Of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore. He obtained his BA (Hons) from the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore in 2008. He is currently researching on the Role of *Ulama* in contemporary Malaysian society, focusing on their religious orientations and their impact. He has participated in various local and international academic conferences, including those organized by Asia Research Institute (ARI) and University Sains Malaysia (USM). His research interests are mainly on Political Islam, Singapore and Malaysian Politics, Civil-Society, and International Organizations.

“The Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom” in Two Cities: A Comparative Study of State-religion Relations in Singapore and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore and understand relations between the state and a religious organization outside of civil society. It focuses specifically on The Boys’ Brigade (BB) in Singapore, a uniformed organization that operates in schools. This departure from the civil society illustrates how religious organizations can be understood to be taking a proactive stand as portrayed by Stark’s “religious economy”. This paper will compare the case of the BB in Singapore and Malaysia. The common colonial history of these two countries, coupled with a distinct form of government allows for a greater comparison between a state that is secular (Singapore) and one that is closely linked to religion (Malaysia). This paper will first draw out some important similarities and differences in regime types that had an impact on the way in which the BB has adapted and positioned itself in relation to the state. Next, in tracing the historical establishment of the BB, this paper will illustrate how the BB shifts its focus to align itself to the secular state in order to retain its legitimacy and maintain its relevance in both countries. Drawing on a state-corporatist perspective for the Singapore case, this paper argues that in reaction to the secular state’s policies, the BB, which started as a Christian organization, adopts methods of circumvention to negotiate state policies that prohibit proselytization. These methods include an emphasis on community service, coupled with a simultaneous rhetoric of character development among students, who makes up the majority of its membership. This paper then argues that these two aspects, which are highly valued by the state allows the BB to further its Christian agenda while threading the delicate line demarcated by the state. The case of the BB in Malaysia will provide an important contrast to the policies implemented by the secular Singaporean state that values religious harmony. Through the comparison of these two cases, this paper hopes to contribute to the discussion of secularization and religion in contemporary societies by suggesting that in an increasingly secular world, religion adopts secularized strategies to remain relevant to society so as to be able to reach out.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Allan Lee studied at the National University of Singapore and graduated with a B.Soc.Sci(Hons) in Sociology. He is currently in his first year of candidature, working towards his M.Soc.Sci degree. His current research, part of a larger project for his intended PhD project, looks at social movements in Thailand, focusing on the “Red vs. Yellow” clash. Allan’s research interests include Religion and the State (with particular interest in Christianity), Social Memory, Social Movements and Political Sociology.