

Introduction I

The Paradox of Asymmetry

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This publication grew out of the “Graduate Workshop on Secularization, Religion and the State” that was held on January 21, 2010 at the National University of Singapore (NUS) under joint sponsorship of the NUS Asia Research Institute and the University of Tokyo. Collected here are revised versions of 12 papers presented at the workshop by young scholars. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all staffs of the UTCP, Naito Mariko in particular, who have helped me devotedly to edit and publish this book.

At the outset, I would like to briefly outline the background to the workshop. I started teaching the seminar “Secularization, Religion and the State” as part of the Mid-Term International Philosophical Education Program on Co-existence at the University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy (UTCP). The main concerns of the seminar were as follows. The phenomena of “religious revival” taking place across the present-day world cannot be convincingly elucidated in terms of the existing, simplistic secularization thesis. What is happening with religions around the world? Will human society be torn apart by the two conflicting vectors of secularization and religious revival? What sort of relationship needs to be established between the secular, the religious, and the state, that is conducive to the realization of coexistence among human beings? The purpose of the seminar was to encourage participants to think about and discuss these issues. At each session, we took up cases concerning secularization, religion and the state from various regions around the world, including the Middle East, Europe, North America, China and Japan, and discussed how we should properly understand them, not by placing them

in the context of a specific region or country, but by drawing a comparison with cases in other regions, and bringing the entire world into view.

Each graduate seminar at the UTCP is allotted a budget for inviting outside researchers, from within and outside the country, to give lectures or teach seminars. In October 2008, we used a portion of this fund to invite Mr. Clark Lombardi, Associate Professor of Islamic Law at the University of Washington Law School, to deliver two lectures and comment on presentations by our graduate students. In addition to making very interesting presentations on the activities of *ulamās* (Muslim intellectuals) and Islamic Law in actual use in present-day Egypt, Professor Lombardi made pointed and penetrating comments on the presentations by UTCP's graduate students. We are very grateful to him for the great trouble he took to visit Tokyo, in spite of his busy schedule, and for the great services he bestowed on us.

As I had intensive discussions with Professor Lombardi both within and outside of the seminars during his short stay in Tokyo, we felt very relaxed with each other and became close friends. Professor Lombardi advised me to get in touch with a friend of his at NUS who shared our interests. Thus, through this introduction, I sent an e-mail to Associate Professor Michael Feener, starting the whole process leading to this workshop.

Upon exchanging several e-mails, I learned that there was an ongoing seminar at NUS on "Secularization, Religion and the State." This was, in fact, a book-reading group participated in by researchers on a regular basis, but I mistook it for a seminar run by Professor Feener, and proposed that we hold a joint workshop of graduate students enrolled in the two seminars offered under the same name at NUS and the University of Tokyo. Professor Feener willingly consented to my proposal, agreeing to solicit presenters within NUS.

For my part, I called upon graduate students enrolled in my seminar, both post-doctoral (PD) fellows and research assistants (RAs) to wrap up our two-year-long seminar by making presentations at a joint workshop in Singapore on their themes of interest. Seven ambitious young researchers volunteered to deliver presentations, and this was how this interesting joint workshop was brought to life. Professor Feener took the trouble of making all the necessary preparations for the workshop,

including securing a conference room, drawing up the program, and making announcements about it to NUS faculty members, calling for their participation. Furthermore, I am grateful for Professor Feener's generosity in writing one of the introductions to this book.

In my 2005 book entitled *Isurâmu-Sekai no Sôzô* (*The Creation of the Notion of the Islamic World*), I pointed out that the notion of the "Islamic World" or "Muslim World" was coined by intellectuals of nineteenth-century North-Western Europe, who believed that "Europe," to which they belonged, was an embodiment of all positive value, as a concept carrying a meaning completely opposite to "Europe."¹ They thought that concepts such as progress, freedom, equality, democracy, science, and secularization were positive values with which "Europe" at the time was equipped. The "Islamic World," in direct opposition to this, was conceived as a space embodying negative values such as stagnation, inconvenience, inequality, despotism, superstition, and religion.

The dichotomous view of the world that opposes "Europe" or "the West" to the "Islamic World" is often used, along with the corresponding dichotomous schemes that oppose the modern to the pre-modern, and the secular to the religious, in explaining phenomena that arise in the contemporary world. Partly because of the easily comprehensible nature of such a dichotomous view, some Muslims who identify themselves as "non-European" or "non-Western" often adopt this same view in criticizing Europe or the West. But perhaps the root of the whole problem lies in this very dichotomous view that sees the world in binary opposition.

Having sounded alarm bells against using the term "Islamic World" without careful consideration in my book mentioned above, I have proceeded to contemplate the need to carefully re-examine the two opposing terms of "religion" and "secularization." I believe that this is indispensable for a reconsideration of the dichotomous view of the world that opposes "Europe" or "the West" to the "Islamic World," and for redressing various problems afflicting the present-day world. In my

1. Haneda Masashi, *Isurâmu-sekai no Sôzô* [*The Creation of the Notion of the Islamic World*] (University of Tokyo Press, 2005 [in Japanese]). Part of my argument can be read in English in the following article: Haneda Masashi, "Modern Europe and the Creation of the 'Islamic World,'" *International Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007): 201–220.

seminar at UTCP, I read pertinent works and discussed with students various examples from around the world. Through these efforts, I have realized once again that “religion” and “secularization” are notions that are by no means peculiar to the West and Islam, but part of key concepts indispensable for understanding Asian societies, including Japan, China, and those of Southeast Asia.

Let me mention here one important question that we have encountered in these discussions: the question of which language we should use in discussing the issues of secularization and religion.

Talal Asad has elucidated that in the case of European languages, the process by which the concept of “secular” took shape in the period from the 17th to the 18th century coincided with the one by which the concept of religion took on a distinct meaning.² In other words, the meaning of the words “secular” and “religion” in European languages have interwoven into them social and cultural experiences in areas that had been inhabited until the 16th century by Christians, and, in particular, by Roman Catholic Christians.

People who use English and other European languages make use of these two words in order to analyze and understand not only phenomena that appear in societies of Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians of various denominations, but also similar phenomena that appear in non-Christian societies.³ The system or configuration of meaning and values peculiar to European languages, and in which these two words are incorporated (and may possibly be called “modern knowledge”⁴), is characterized by Asad as “power.” It is so-called because it is according to

2. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), id., *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

3. Even regarding European languages, the configurations peculiar to each language must differ subtly from one another. There is no denying, therefore, that treating different European languages as all part of one category is fraught with problems. It is also true, on the other hand, that intellectuals who believe that they belong to Europe have been trying to form a common sphere of discourse and a sort of ideal image of society that do not make much of differences among languages. In this respect, it seems safe to assume that the established configuration in one European language does not differ much from that of another, at least when each is used in discussing “Non-Europe.” This explains why this paper lumps European languages together into a single category.

4. Asad calls it “modern liberal tradition.” See Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 236.

this system's logic that the relationship between politics and religion in Saudi Arabia, for instance, is analyzed, despite belonging to a completely different system, and is condemned as non-modern.⁵ It has already been made clear in academic disciplines, however, that the modern European system of knowledge cannot be regarded as universal, and that it is no more than a system based on a world-view harbored by a specific group of people at a specific time. The problem is that many people involved in international politics, military affairs, and the mass media, are still subscribing to the world-view based on modern knowledge, with the result that the very combination of powerful people and modern knowledge constitutes "power" in the real world.

Let us next turn to the question of what significance there is for us in discussing in the Japanese language various phenomena of the present-day world, using the terms "sezoku" and "shûkyô," which are the Japanese equivalents of "secular" and "religion," respectively.

The words "sezoku" and "shûkyô" made their appearance in the latter half of the 19th century as Japanese translations respectively corresponding to the words "secular" and "religion" in English and other European languages. Although the two words had been in use in Japan with different connotations, they began to be used from that time onward with new connotations. Japanese intellectuals of the latter half of the 19th century tried to reinterpret Japanese society at the time by taking a fresh look at it with the use of imported vocabulary that had been originally developed to explain modern European societies. The system of modern knowledge was used as a yardstick to measure the degree of modernity of Japanese society at the time, so to speak. The adoption of the concepts of "secular" and "religion" constituted part of these efforts.

Whatever parts of Japanese society that could not be plainly explained or understood in terms of the imported modern vocabulary were often reformed and rearranged to suit the system of modern knowledge. "Religions" were discovered afresh, and their doctrines were reinterpreted modeling after Christianity. Popular religions were reorganized, and those that failed to meet the standard of "religion" were condemned and suppressed as pagan or superstitious.⁶ Moreover, the history of Japanese

5. *Ibid.*

6. Isomae Jun'ichi, *Kindai Nihon no Shûkyô Gensetsu to sono Keifu: Shûkyô, Kokka, Shintô*

society before the latter half of the 19th century was also subjected to reinterpretation with use of the concepts of “religion” and “secular.” It is certain that the system of modern knowledge wielded massive power to restrain Japanese society, which it deemed non-European, and the world-view of people living in that society, and forcibly transformed them.

It should also be mentioned that Japanese society at the time, when the concepts “secular” and “religion” were introduced, was not of the same structure as modern European society of the same period. Subsequently, as the words “sezoku” and “shûkyô,” while retaining a close relationship with the configuration of meaning and values of European languages, were put to use in the slightly different modern Japanese language system in order to explain the reality of Japanese society, they gradually acquired peculiar implications of their own. As a matter of fact, the words “sezoku” and “shûkyô” in present-day Japanese are not completely synonymous with the words “secular” and “religion” in present-day European languages.

Much the same is also likely to be the case with the configurations peculiar to other languages, including Chinese. There are some languages, such as Persian, that use the word “secular” as is, without translating it into an equivalent word in the language. Even in such a case, the Persian word “secular” and the word “secular” in European languages may not be completely synonymous.

At any rate, we have been using the Japanese language, and discussing the phenomena of secularization and the relationships between religion and politics in various parts of the present-day world as viewed from the perspective of the Japanese language system. Is it possible to say that the picture of the present-day world as we understand it, on the one hand, and the image of the world harbored by another group of researchers who have been doing the same thing in English, on the other, are completely identical? We cannot, and should not, answer in the affirmative to this question in a simple-minded manner. We might say that this question is becoming more significant today, as the process of globalization proceeds apace, and as mutual understanding among different groups of people around the world is becoming all the more important.

[*Religious Discourses in Modern Japan and Their Genealogies: Religion, the State, and Shintoism*] (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 2003), 39–63.

I am of the opinion that there can be no effective way out of such a situation other than by further honing English, which has been recognized as an international language for academic discourse, into a more genuinely international language. There is one interesting paradox in this respect. The English language in its present state is closely tied in with the system of meaning and values of modern Europe that has prevailed since the 19th century. As astutely pointed out by Asad, English is still characterized more as a language of people living in the English-speaking sphere, rather than as an international language. On the other hand, many of the non-European languages, including Japanese, have constructed their own peculiar configurations after understanding the system of modern knowledge that has been generated by European languages since the 19th century, and absorbing and internalizing that system as part and parcel of their own. Ironically enough, when the authenticity and universality of the system of modern knowledge has begun to be shaken, and it has come to be deemed increasingly appropriate to treat various languages across the globe on an equal footing with the European languages, we realize that the non-European languages have been equipped with much richer and more divergent meaning and content than the European languages.

We should put as much information as possible on “secular” and “religion” that is discussed in the context of non-European languages into English, and thereby try to build new configurations. Given the fact that the system peculiar to European languages was different from that peculiar to non-European languages to begin with, this is by no means an easy task. But if we recall the historical fact that modern knowledge worked on the “non-European” world, and transformed its society and its configurations, this undertaking may not be totally impossible. Only when English develops to such an extent as to include pieces of information on the non-European world expressed in the respective contexts of non-European languages, and as to cease to talk about such pieces of information in the context peculiar to European languages, will it become a genuine international language.

All the papers presented at the joint workshop in English deal with secularization and religion in “non-Europe.” We are indeed tackling a task that needs to be done in the world of the humanities. I sincerely

hope that this workshop will prove an important moment for young researchers at the University of Tokyo and the National University of Singapore to start working hand in hand in opening up new frontiers for the worldwide studies of the humanities.

Last but not least, I would like to offer my special words of thanks to Professor Kobayashi Yasuo, leader of the UTCP, for his generous support in convening the workshop and in the publication of this book.