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An anti-secularist pan-Asianist from Europe: Paul Richard in Japan, 1916–1920

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Abstract

The modern Japanese nation-state that was established from 1868 onwards was marked by a strong tendency towards the separation of state and religion: religions were protected as a private matter, but the public sphere was resolutely kept free of them. This was mainly done so that competing religions would not get in the way of state-sanctioned emperor worship. The latter, although imbued with elements from Shinto, was carefully defined as non-religious, so that emperor worship could be prescribed without harm to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion. This secularist approach to policing religions was broadly shared among Japanese elites—but it did not remain unopposed.

From around the turn of the twentieth century, dissatisfaction with the separation of the religious and the secular spheres began to be voiced, especially by pan-Asianist activists, who sought to combine the spiritual unity of Asia with the political liberation of Asian countries from Western colonialism and imperialism. Although Japanese pan-Asianism has conventionally been seen as a purely political movement, one cannot explain it fully without taking into account its spiritual dimension, which up to the 1920s drew its primary inspiration from India. This article will show how pan-Asianist activists in Japan opposed mainstream secularism and discuss what their vision for a unified Asia was. In doing so, it will focus on the Japanese reception of the Frenchman Paul Richard, an important political activist-cum-spiritual seeker who was a central node in the network of Indian and Japanese pan-Asianists in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: Japan; secularism; Pan-Asianism; State Shinto; India; Second World War

Introduction

In 1916, the Frenchman Paul Richard arrived in Japan, having spent several years in India. Relatively unknown in his native France, Richard was hailed as a great poet-philosopher during the four years of his stay in Japan and became somewhat of a celebrity there. His attraction for his Japanese contemporaries is usually explained by his advocacy of pan-Asianism under Japanese leadership. As I will show, however,

it was also through his anti-secularist agenda that Japanese intellectuals and activists were able to connect with Richard. Both his Japanese allies and Richard saw politics as being in need of spiritualization and argued that the political project of pan-Asianism required a religious foundation, necessitating the leadership of a spiritually superior Japan.

This was, in 1910s Japan, anything but a mainstream argument. Indeed, anti-secularism was clearly an item on the opposition's agenda, against a political mainstream that was in favour of keeping religion out of politics. This assessment itself goes against the received wisdom of the literature on modern Japan. Because of the gradual establishment of State Shinto (see below) after the Meiji Revolution, conventional accounts of the history of the relationship between state and religion in modern Japan have tended to portray Japan as a case of failed secularization—which was, both for modernization theorists and Marxists, a clear sign that modern Japanese society was somehow defective. In their view, the forced participation of large parts of the population in shrine rites amounted to the establishment of a state religion, in effect producing an imperfect modernity, a conclusion informed by the tacit acceptance of the idea that secularization is a necessary corollary of modernization.[1]

In reality, the Constitution of the Japanese mpire promulgated in 1889 explicitly provided for freedom of religion, which prompted officials to limit the purview of State Shinto to formal expressions of reverence to the emperor. The emperor had been installed as the ideological centre of the new nation-state since 1868, and it was mainly to ensure his aloofness in religious matters that religious freedom was granted while a ritually charged emperor worship was increasingly implemented. This bundle of practices, known today as State Shinto, was until 1945 carefully defined as non-religious, so as not to come into conflict with the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion. So, rather than a narrative of failed secularization, we might employ one of a state-imposed secularism. Indeed, between the 1870s and 1930s the modernizing elites in Japan were rabidly secularist, as many examples from religious policy, and especially the field of education, show.[2]

These mainstream state policies did not remain unopposed, however. Many of those Japanese individuals and groups who teamed up with Paul Richard from 1916 onwards were unhappy with the relegation of the religious to the private realm and demanded a re-spiritualization of the political in various concrete forms. One main motive of this line of thought was the idea that only through religion, concrete religions, or forms of spirituality could a lasting bond be formed between the nations of Asia. In this way

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[1]Compare the account by Isomae Jun'ichi, who sees the case of Japan as 'deviating' from the framework of 'the modern dichotomy of religion and the secular'. See Jun'ichi Isomae, 'Discursive Formations Surrounding "Religious Freedom" in Modern Japan: Religion, Shintō, the Emperor Institution', in *Religion and Secularity: Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europea and Asia*, (eds) Marion Eggert and Lucian Hölscher (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 217–230, here: p. 229.

[2]Helen Hardacre has pointed out a large number of examples of this secularist attitude of Meiji-period political elites in a paper that tries to make sense of Charles Taylor's theses in regard to Japan. See Helen Hardacre, 'The Formation of Secularity in Japan'. Paper presented at the 'Secularism beyond the West' conference (Oñati, Spain, 2011). Available at Harvard University's DASH repository: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8843159, [accessed 26 September 2022]. A case study of the secularizing policies and secularist mindset of a key policymaker of the Meiji period has been presented by Saitō Tomoo, *Inoue Kowashi to shūkyō: Meiji kokka keisei to sezoku shugi* (Tōkyō: Kōbundō, 2006), esp. p. 17.

anti-secularism became an important element in the prominent political movement of pan-Asianism, although it has suffered from a lack of attention in existing scholarship.[3]

By 'anti-secularism', I refer to the refusal to separate politics from religion, to explicit calls to respiritualize politics, and to the ambitions of religious groups to become active in the political arena, but also to rejections of a strict division of modern science and religion. The idea that religious groups might have an explicit anti-secularist programme—that 'religious institutions often refuse to accept their assigned marginal place in the private sphere'—is also one of the points of departure for José Casanova in his landmark *Public Religions in the Modern World*.[4] The sociologist Casanova, however, sees this as a trend typical of late modernity, that is, the 1980s onwards, and not as a general possibility. Furthermore, other than Casanova, who is thinking here of the Catholic Church, the anti-secularist mindset is not necessarily limited to 'religious institutions' in the narrow sense, but can be shared by political movements or activists, such as Richard and his fellow Japanese pan-Asianists I investigate in this article.

The main body of this article will be devoted to analysing the example of Richard, who spent many years living in Asia in the 1910s and early 1920s. During his four year-stay in Japan, he emphasized a type of spirituality that drew upon various esoteric sources, at the same time combining this emphasis with advocating for the national emancipation of colonized Asia. It is precisely this combination of an explicit political programme with a spiritual foundation that made him a compelling partner for Japanese pan-Asianists in the second half of the 1910s.

Secularity in modern Japan

Dichotomies that were similar to, and to some degree functional equivalents of, the separation between the religious and the secular as it emerged in Europe did exist in premodern East Asia, including Japan. Yet, there was neither a shared terminology that authors could make use of, nor was the issue of great importance in political theorizing, an otherwise well-developed field in East Asia before the nineteenth century.[5] Rather, thinking about the relationship between religion and other societal spheres only took

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[3]The enormous two-volume sourcebook on Pan-Asianism with a strong focus on Japan edited by Sven Saaler and Christopher Szpilman has perhaps done the most to re-establish Pan-Asianism as a factor in modern East Asian history. Yet, the editors never mention religion even once in their 41-page introduction to the collection, and the actual grounds on which Asian solidarity was imagined are given short thrift throughout the introduction. At its most specific, the factors of 'racial unity' and 'commonalities in culture and language' are mentioned. See Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, 'Introduction: The Emergence of Pan-Asianism as an Ideal of Asian Identity and Solidarity, 1850–2008', in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, Vol. 1: 1850–1920*, (eds) Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), pp. 1–41, here: pp. 11, 15 and 34.

[4]José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 41. Casanova further argues that some religions strive for a visible public stance that may challenge mainstream normative ideals, 'that at least some forms of "public religion" may also be understood as counterfactual normative critiques of dominant historical trends' (ibid., p. 43). He is thinking here of the Catholic–Protestant divide.

[5]Christoph Kleine has stressed the view that premodern Buddhist figures of thought are close functional equivalents to modern ideas of secularity. See C. Kleine, 'Religion and the Secular in Premodern Japan from the Viewpoint of Systems Theory', *Journal of Religion in Japan*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1–34.

on a sense of urgency after the imperialist encroachment of Asia by the West reached Japan in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Around 1800, fear of the colonization of minds by the foreign religion of Christianity came to the fore in political reactions to incursions on Japanese territory by Russians and other Europeans, later joined by ships from the United States. Such disquiet was partly fuelled by lingering memories of the first wave of the Christian mission to Japan around 1600, after which Christianity was strictly prohibited, but was now additionally energized by the role missionaries played in the more recent history of European colonialism in other parts of Asia. Most prominently, the scholar Aizawa Seishisai, whose work would go on to influence a generation of revolutionary leaders in mid-nineteenth century Japan, held in 1825 that 'to prevent a likely Western invasion of Japan in the near future, Japan had to construct a firm national ideological foundation'.[6]

New ways of locating religion thus emerged through processes of creatively countering the challenges posed by the West. Throughout East Asia, one form of reaction was the attempt to divide Western knowledge into aspects to be adopted or rejected, to see the useful 'civilization' (such as technical progress) as not inevitably connected to the useless 'culture' (including religion).[7] This idea found expression in similar, but not identical, formulas throughout East Asia: 'China as the substance, the West as the function' (Chin. *zhongti xiyong*); 'Eastern way, Western instruments' (Kor. *dongdo seogi*); or 'Japanese spirit, Western technology' (Jap. *wakon yōsai*). In each case, the 'substance', 'way', or 'spirit' is thought to encompass a wide range of 'cultural' achievements, including religion, but certainly also referring to political systems or legal structures. Yet, religion emerged as the hard core of this notion of culture: even after the new Meiji government had entered a course of wholesale Westernization around 1870, including its political structure, it upheld the prohibition of Christianity for several more years. The fear of conversion 'of the hearts and minds of the people' to the evil foreign creed continued to inform political discourse for a long time after the practice of Christianity was finally permitted in Japan.[8]

It is partly through a prolonging of this defensive posture that the modern configuration of state and religion emerged in Japan in the latter decades of the nineteenth century—although, again, premodern precedents could also be cited.[9] In this configuration, religious freedom was granted through the Constitution (enacted in 1890), but religions remained policed within narrow boundaries, even though an outright 'Religions Law' did not become a reality until 1940, that is, in a situation of total war, when the state was increasingly able to push through its agenda unilaterally. Even before 1940, however, the attitude of the modern Japanese state towards religions came close to the model of secularism that Rajeev Bhargava has called 'the idealized French model' in which 'the state must be separated from religion but the state

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[6]Kiri Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 118.

[7]I am indebted to Markus Dreßler (Leipzig) for this idea.

[8]See Trent E. Maxey, *The 'Greatest Problem': Religion and State Formation in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

[9]The experience with combative Buddhist groups that had amassed worldly powers rivalling those of the feudal lords in sixteenth-century Japan had been a major motive in shaping the religious policy of the Tokugawa government (1603–1868).

retains the power to interfere in religion'.[10] From the 1890s onwards, religious entities were closely monitored: in 1899 religious activities at schools were forbidden, and groups that did not closely adhere to the limits imposed upon them, such as several new religions and some of the more outspoken Protestant groups, became targets of suppression in the 1920s and 1930s.[11]

In the sponsorship of State Shinto, in contrast, the state meticulously strove to maintain religious neutrality. Except for the last few years of total war in the first half of the 1940s, the special position enjoyed by State Shinto never meant that the state privileged Shinto at the expense of the 'real' religions. This is at least true of Buddhism, Christianity, and Sect Shinto, which received a degree of official recognition by officials wishing to co-opt them into the struggle against socialism and communism. But public ceremonies and the like were conspicuously devoid of religious symbolism or, at least, those State Shinto elements that were employed were not meant to displace any of the religions recognized as such.

Furthermore, while the majority of post-war scholars have criticized the pre-war construction of a supposedly non-religious State Shinto as a transparent fraud established for the sole purpose of facilitating the coercion of non-Shinto believers into participating in state-controlled rites, one finds that many pre-war contemporaries took the distinction between religious organizations, on the one hand, and a non-religious State Shinto, on the other, very seriously. In fact, as Jolyon Baraka Thomas has argued in his landmark study *Faking Liberties*, when compared to what was common elsewhere, 'prewar and wartime Japanese practices of religious freedom were extraordinarily normal'. Thomas characterizes the period when the Meiji Constitution was in force (1890–1946) as a 'secularist regime' and shows that religious freedom—even though continuously under discussion—was held up as an ideal even during the 1930s.[12]

Perhaps most surprisingly, Shinto priests themselves were not all happy with the state of affairs. While priests at State Shinto shrines appeared to be in a very privileged position, receiving protection and salaries from the state, their activities were also clearly circumscribed. They could not, for instance, hold funerals, which was a rite reserved for the 'real' religions, that is, mainly Buddhism and Christianity. The Japanese historian Azegami Naoki has pointed out that there was even a conscious movement against State Shinto by some Shinto priests around 1900.[13] Openly opposing the emasculated non-religious Shinto espoused by the state, they proposed to shed the constitutional right to freedom of religion and to make Shinto into an exclusive and full-blown state religion with everything that entails.

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[10]Rajeev Bhargava, 'States, Religious Diversity, and the Crisis of Secularism', *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 12, 2010, p. 12. From his stakeholder perspective, however, Bhargava assumes that this model 'encourages an active disrespect for religion', which is not borne out by the historical reality in states with such strong state control over religions.

[11]See Sheldon Garon, 'State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912–1945′, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1986, pp. 273–302.

[12]Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. 4, 27, 45.

[13]Azegami Naoki, *'Mura no chinju' to senzen Nihon: 'Kokka shintō' no chiiki shakaishi* (Tōkyō: Yūshisha, 2009).

The religious neutrality of the pre-war Japanese state—an assumption disputed by those historians who see State Shinto as a state religion—is best attested to by those who turned against it in its own time, that is, by the critics of secularism that are the subject of this article. Many of them could be found among the adherents of pan-Asianism, a contention that goes against the received wisdom about this movement, which is why a few clarifying words about pan-Asianism are in order before turning to Paul Richard, a central figure in galvanizing anti-secularist thought in Japan around 1920.

Pan-Asianism and religion

The 1910s were a watershed moment for pan-Asianism in Japan. Ideas of solidarity with other Asian countries had their roots in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement of the 1870s, which criticized the policies of the new Meiji government as pro-Western. Like other writers in the last decades of the nineteenth century, these early authors 'often envisioned cooperation [with Asia] on equal terms', while 'insistence on Japanese leadership *(meishu)* in Asia increased [only later] in proportion to the growth and expansion of Japan's power in East Asia'.[14] Before the First World War, the idea of pan-Asianism was still strongly opposed by both the political mainstream and the press, not least because of the great importance of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the first treaty between a European power and an Asian country concluded on equal terms, and the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy until the 1920s.[15] The First World War, however, discredited Europe both in terms of its centrality in international relations and its pre-eminence in the discourse on civilization. This led to a reappraisal of the international order, the result being that, in Japan, 'by the war's end, pan-Asianist visions of regional integration had thus come to be accepted, at least by public opinion and some politicians, as a realistic scenario for future international relations in East Asia'.[16]

The Japanese government, which had formalized its colonization of Korea a few years earlier in 1910, increasingly played the pan-Asianist card in its attempts to achieve independence vis-à-vis Europe, which led to 'the ideologization of "Asia" from the early Shōwa period (1925–1989) onwards'[17] and culminated in the wholesale adoption of pan-Asianist rhetoric by the late 1930s and early 1940s. This outcome, however, was far from clear in the 1910s, so that one can legitimately speak of a 'civil-society driven discourse on Asianism "from below"'[18] and characterize this period by its relative openness: on the verge of becoming more important, pan-Asianism was still indebted to its oppositional beginnings. In other words, calls for Asian solidarity were not yet automatically synonymous with the claim for Japanese leadership, although this association became more prominent against the background of the annexation

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[14] Saaler and Szpilman, 'Introduction', pp. 9 and 13.

[15] Ibid., pp. 15–16.

[16] Ibid., p. 17.

[17] Torsten Weber, *Embracing 'Asia' in China and Japan: Asianism Discourse and the Contest for Hegemony, 1912–1933* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 2.

[18] Ibid.

of Korea and the hostile China policy exemplified by the Twenty-One Demands Japan issued in 1915.

Although pan-Asianism has thus come to be taken seriously as a political force by recent scholarship, the motives of the historical actors have not necessarily received equal attention, possibly because they constitute an intellectual embarrassment. Ideas about the unity of all of Asia on the grounds of language, ethnicity, or religion seem far-fetched today. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they were implausible under the different historical circumstances of pre-Second World War Japan.[19] Indeed, the notion that Asia shared a common spirituality or religion was prominent in the earliest intellectual articulations of pan-Asianism around 1900, in the works of Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933), or Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). What is important to note in the context of this article, however, is that these influential writers were more interested in aesthetics than in politics and that they were not in close contact with the political pan-Asianist groups that already existed. Even when Okakura spoke of Japan's leading role in Asia in *Ideals of the East*, first published in English in 1903, the means he outlined to do so were to "'recognize and develop consciousness of these [Asiatic] modes." This was the task that Okakura set for himself—that of developing the modes of Asian consciousness. He sought to make of himself a "man who can ponder and dream at pleasure—a highly cultivated man."'[20]

The peculiar fusion between spiritual-religious aspirations and the political liberation of Asia in very concrete terms had to await the global catastrophe of the First World War, after which it received a certain degree of popularity in Japan. Increasingly now, political pan-Asianism was argued to stand on spiritual grounds, or even that concrete religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, or a fusion of those, had a decisive commonality.[21] This kind of argument became feasible partly because it was promoted early on, while the Great War was still ravaging Europe, by someone who was perceived to be able to speak authoritatively on these issues: Paul Richard, a spiritual seeker from France, who had ended up in Japan more by accident than by design.

Paul Richard: A spiritual pan-Asianist

Paul Richard (1874–1967), although all but forgotten today, was a key figure both in the esoteric circles of the early twentieth century and in the contemporary anti-colonial movement.[22] When Richard stayed in Japan between 1916 and 1920, he became a fixture in Asianist circles there, which included basically all leading figures of

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[19]This has been shown for the case of Islam in Japan in Hans Martin Krämer, 'Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents: The Reception of Islam and Translation of the Qur'ān in Twentieth-Century Japan', *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 73, no. 3, 2014, pp. 619–640, here: pp. 620–621.

[20]Brij Tankha, 'Okakura Tenshin: Writing a Good History upon a Modern Plan', in *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism: Shadows of the Past*, (ed.) Brij Tankha (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009), pp. 27–45, here: p. 32.

[21]See, for instance, Eddy Dufourmont, 'Tanaka Ippei: "Islam and Pan-Asianism", 1924′, in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, Vol. 2: 1920–Present*, (eds) Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), pp. 87–91.

[22]Unless noted otherwise, biographical information was taken from the unpublished memoirs that Richard left behind, which were expanded and edited by his son: Michel Paul Richard, *Without Passport: The Life and Work of Paul Richard* (New York et al.: Peter Lang, 1987).

the day such as Kita Ikki (1883–1937), Tōyama Mitsuru (1855–1944), Uchida Ryōhei (1874–1937), Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939), and especially Ōkawa Shūmei (1886–1957), who translated a number of Richard's works into Japanese and who will be treated in a separate section below.[23]

Richard had not been destined to arrive in Japan. Having originally been a minister for the Protestant Reformed Church in Lille in northern France, he quit the ministry over a conflict with the church authorities regarding his political views. Those became increasingly radical, and in the years before the First World War, Richard was member of the Republican, Radical, and Radical-Socialist Party and worked for the progressive Paris daily newspaper *L'Aurore*, a representative organ of anti-colonialist, anti-militarist, and internationalist movements in France before the Great War. At the same time, Richard experimented with a number of esoteric and spiritual movements such as Freemasonry, Theosophy, or Max Théon's Cosmic Movement. He soon published his own synthesis, the 300-page *The Living Ether and the Supranervous Realism* in Paris in 1911.

From his early days as a Christian minister, Richard never thought of politics and religion as independent domains of life; he explicitly rebelled against the notion that religion should be relegated to the private realm when he proclaimed in his 1914 esoteric book *Les Dieux*: 'It is time to break the chains of the secular insinuation.'[24] For inspiration on how to overcome the modern European configuration of religion and politics, Richard increasingly looked to Asia. In his work for *L'Aurore*, he frequently covered non-European politics, sometimes identifying spiritual sources of renewal in Asia, such as in an article on religious reforms in Persia from 1911:

> It is a characteristic of our epoch that it awakens the oldest peoples, shaking them out of their sleepiness, defying the risks of the regenerative transformations. The movement, like all great human movements, is coming from the Orient towards the Occident. After Japan, China, Persia and Turkey, the first Islamic countries and perhaps others, as well.[25]

He combined his interest in political reform in Asia and esotericism when he decided to go to India. In the French possession of Pondicherry in 1910, he befriended Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), the militant revolutionary turned guru. Together with his wife Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973),[26] Richard returned to Pondicherry in 1914, only to be removed by the French authorities as a politically undesirable individual in 1916 in the volatile atmosphere of the First World War. The British government in

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[23]Information on the individuals Richard met while in Japan is taken from Yoshinaga Shin'ichi, 'Ōkawa Shūmei, Pōru Rishāru, Mira Rishāru: Aru kaikō', *Maizuru kōgyō senmon gakkō kiyō*, vol. 43, 2008, pp. 93–102, and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, 'Paul Richard: To Japan, 1917, and the Dawn over Asia, 1920′, in *Pan-Asianism, Vol. 1*, (eds) Saaler and Szpilman, pp. 287–295.

[24]Paul Richard, *Les Dieux* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1914), p. 208.

[25]Paul Richard, 'En Perse', *L'Aurore*, 21 November 1911, p. 1

[26]Mirra Richard (née Alfassa) later became the head of Aurobindo's ashram and is commonly known as 'The Mother'. Information on her is mostly available through writings by her followers, and little serious scholarship is available. See, however, Boaz Huss, 'Madam Théon, Alta Una, Mother Superior: The Life and Personas of Mary Ware (1839–1908)', *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, vol. 15, 2015, pp. 210–246, especially pp. 215, 219–222.

India detailed Richard's political activities in a 1915 memorandum entitled 'Seditious Conspiracy in India':

> Paul Richard, to whose association with Arabindo Ghose I have referred in previous reports, has been ordered by the French Government to leave Pondicherry and return to France to serve as a reservist. The real reason of the order is that he has made himself obnoxious to the Governor by his association with political refugees and his anti-British intrigues. Paul Richard's main object in coming to Pondicherry was to stand for election as Deputy. He enlisted all the extremists on his side and canvassed Pondicherry and Karikal vigorously with their assistance. His election speeches were socialistic and violently anti-British. […] During his stay in Pondicherry he has been in daily association with members of the extremist party, in particular with Arabindo Ghose, with whom he collaborated in the production of the [journal] *Arya*.[27]

His work with Aurobindo, though, can hardly be labelled as simply political. Rather, he tried to work productively with Aurobindo's yogic teachings by fusing them with insights based on his own Western philosophical training. In *Arya*, which appeared between 1914 and 1921, Aurobindo, Paul, and Mirra Richard attempted to carve out a position for themselves in modern Hinduism, staying within fairly conventional perimeters by focusing on a reinterpretation of the Vedas, specifically the Upanishads, and the Yogic tradition. Paul Richard, however, went one step further by attacking the foundations of modern epistemology and developing an alternative secularity by questioning the boundaries between science and religion. In a critique of the fundamental presumptions of physics, Richard wrote in 1914:

> To produce our conscious perceptions it was necessary that all the diffused clarities which the intelligence and the sense-faculty in our rudimentary being could assemble or could produce, should converge towards certain points in the vastness of infinity destined to form the field of our experiences and of our progress, and each of our possible conquests in that field, always obtained by a greater concentration of light, has circumscribed around us, by the very act of giving it precision, the province of the visible.[28]

The 'province of the visible', however, is just a limitation produced by 'our utilitarian Sciences'. The true causes of all phenomena, in contrast, lie not in the visible, but in the invisible. Philosophy, as Richard understands it, means 'the discovery of its hidden sense', of 'a truth too profound for us', that is not revealed by scientific methods. Richard here refuses to accept the modern division of labour between science and religion, and claims that insight into 'the very origin of being and of the universe' is really only possible through a religious approach. Although Richard prefers to refer to the quest for inner truth as 'philosophical' in the text referred to here, elsewhere in

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[27] Quoted in: 'Documents in the Life of Sri Aurobindo: Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Paul Richard 1911–1915', *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1989, p. 111.

[28] Paul Richard, 'The Wherefore of the Worlds', *Arya*, vol. 1, 1914, pp. 6–10, here: p. 8.

Arya it is abundantly clear that he and Aurobindo are calling for a 'synthesis then of religious aspiration and scientific faculty', as '[s]cience could not move a step without faith'.[29]

After his removal from India in 1916, Richard was keen to get back to Asia, but, barred from re-entering India, he settled for Japan. Even there he was kept under surveillance by the secret police as he was considered politically dangerous, particularly through his associations with a group of Indian revolutionaries in exile, but he was able to stay on for four years. While in Japan, Richard certainly made no secret of his belief that Japan would take the leading role in the task of liberating Asia from the yoke of Western colonialism and imperialism. Among other activities, he cooperated with James Cousins, an Irish poet who taught English literature at Keiō University in Tokyo after the First World War, to produce the English-language *Asian Review* in 1919 and 1920, a sister journal to *Ajia jiron*, the organ of the radical pan-Asianist society, Kokuryūkai.[30] The Kokuryūkai, also known in English as the 'Black Dragon Society', is known as '*the* Pan-Asian organization par excellence'.[31] Founded in 1901 by Uchida Ryōhei, the Kokuryūkai reached its peak of influence around the time of the First World War, when it also began to undergo a period of transformation: 'During the first decades of its existence, the Kokuryūkai was not considered in Japan […] to be a right-wing or particularly extremist association.' Instead, its leaders and members advocated Asian solidarity in theory and aided revolutionaries in Korea, China, and even the Philippines in practice.[32]

It was during this time of change that Richard collaborated with Uchida. While the articles he wrote for the English-language journal were comparatively tame, he published several openly pan-Asianist articles in *Ajia jiron*, such as one on Japan's role in fighting against racism in international relations,[33] and another on the need to establish a federation of Asian nations directed against Europe.[34] These Japanese-language articles contributed to his fame among Japanese pan-Asianist activists, as did his best-known book from these years, *Au Japon*, published in a quadrilingual edition in 1917, with his original French, English and Chinese translations, as well as a Japanese rendition by Ōkawa Shūmei.[35] In this work, Richard addressed Japan as 'a liberator

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[29]Anon., 'The Question of the Month: What Is the Synthesis Needed at the Present Time?', *Arya*, vol. 1, 1914, pp. 56–57, here: p. 56.

[30]For more details on the cooperation between Cousins and Richard on this journal, see Hashimoto Yorimitsu, 'Airurando shinchigaku-to no ajia shugi? Jeimuzu Kazunzu no Nihon taizai (1919–1920) to sono yoha', in *Ajia o meguru hikaku geijutsu/dezain-gaku kenkyū: Nichiei-kan ni hirogaru 21-seiki no chihei*, (ed.) Fujita Haruhiko (Osaka: Ōsaka University, 2013), pp. 31–34.

[31]Sven Saaler, 'The Kokuryūkai, 1901–1920′, in *Pan-Asianism, Vol. 1*, (eds) Saaler and Szpilman, pp. 121–132, here: p. 123.

[32]Ibid., pp. 124–125.

[33]Paul Richard, 'Jinshu-teki sabetsu teppai mondai to Nihon kokumin no tenshoku', *Ajia jiron*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1919, pp. 23–27. Reprinted in *Kokuryūkai kankei shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 155–156.

[34]Paul Richard, 'Mazu Ajia renmei o jitsugen seyo', *Ajia jiron*, vol. 3, no. 5, 1919, pp. 27–32. Reprinted in *Kokuryūkai kankei shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 187–189.

[35]The Japanese translation was reprinted in 1924, 1925, 1941, and 1958; shorter excerpts can be found in numerous other Japanese works of the pre-war period.

of nations'[36] and stated: 'Debtor of Asia, take pride in returning to her nations, a hundredfold increased, all that they gave to thee. In exchange for the old lessons of these masters now slaves, return to them their freedom, the mastery of themselves.'[37]

Richard, although always hyperbolic, was certainly not just speaking figuratively, as he made abundantly clear: 'Liberate and unify Asia; for Asia is thy domain. Asia is thy field of action and, if needed, thy field of war; thou knowest it well.'[38] In the end, Richard saw Japan 'at the head of a free federation of Asia',[39] as he explained more explicitly in *The Dawn over Asia*, a work published in 1920, during the last year of his stay in Japan:

> Awaken Asia! Awaken Asia! Awaken her in two ways. For your work must be double: at once material and spiritual. Awaken Asia by organising her, by uniting her. And to that end, be not masters, but allies of her peoples. Cease you also to cherish against them prejudices of race. Treat them as brothers, not as slaves. Those who are slaves liberate that they may become your brothers. Form with them a single family. Organise the League of Nations of Asia—the United States of Asia.[40]

This was Richard's *basso continuo* in his works from the late 1910s. Any political action, according to Richard, was meaningless without the accompanying appropriate spiritual attitude. India, in particular, due to its superior spirituality, needed to become a nation independent from the morally degenerate Europe. Japan's leading role in Asia, too, had a religious grounding, writes Richard:

> Land loved by the Gods, they too are reconciled in thee. While everywhere their religions interchange malediction, thy benevolent cults, instead of excluding complete each other: one being that of the divine immanence, of the One in all, in space where move the living forces of nature, in time where dwell the ancestors, living too; and the other that of the transcendence, of all in one, beyond time and space, in the eternal repose of the supreme benediction. [...] And around them, in the shelter of their benevolence, other religions may come to raise their altars, to be pacified, perhaps purified at this contact. And as thou hast received in the past the religion of the Orient, thou receivest to-day that of the Occident [...] But was it not necessary that all, meeting thus, should learn to form together, in unity, the more perfect religion of the future. [...] As it is in thee that they assemble, so it is from thee that they await their possible synthesis of harmony, their festival of light, O child of the Sun![41]

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[36]Paul Richard, *Au Japon*. Quadrilingual edition (no publisher given, 1917), p. 20.

[37]Ibid., p. 26.

[38]Ibid., p. 30.

[39]Ibid., p. 32. In contrast to the contribution to Japanese pan-Asianism I have stressed here, Stephen Hay instead attributes the 'concept of the unity of Asian civilization' in Richard's thinking to the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. See Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 127.

[40]Paul Richard, *The Dawn over Asia* (Madras: Ganesh, 1920), p. 6.

[41]Richard, *Au Japon*, p. 21.

Here Richard picks up on the Orientalist trope of Japanese religious syncretism,[42] but, unusually for his time, he reverses its negative evaluation and instead sees in it the positive reconciliation of religions. To Richard's mind, the spiritual superiority due to this syncretism also allowed Japan to play a leading political role within Asia. Richard's conflation of politics and religion is perhaps most curious where militant political rhetoric blends with religious hyperbole that draws on biblical language, such as towards the end of *To Japan*:

> This voice is the voice of the Lord of thy work. He will accomplish this work with thee, but he can also accomplish it without thee, against thee. To the Lord of the Nations who to-day tills this earth to found there the Kingdom of his Justice, what nation could long offer resistance? He advances amidst the peoples, and his Judgement precedes him. Vanquished already are those who resist him; victors from now are those who fight with him. […] Hail to thee [i.e. Japan], warrior, in whom salute each other the archangel of Force and the archangel of Peace.[43]

The 'work' Richard refers to here somewhat elliptically is the political union of Asia. While Japan had the means to play a leading role in this effort, it needed to do so in a cooperative spirit with the other Asian nations. While clearly Richard had already struck an exhortative tone, his words were still infused more with hope for, than with anxiety about, Japan's foreign policy. The balance tipped somewhat during his stay in Japan, when worries regarding Japanese imperialism came to outweigh his hopes for Japan as the liberator of Asia from Western colonialism. In this, Richard's development paralleled that of Rabindranath Tagore, whose stance towards Japan also changed markedly between his first and second visits to that country in 1916 and 1924. According to Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, the initially enthusiastic reception of Tagore in 1916 'cooled within days' because of Tagore's disparagement of the nationalistic tendencies apparent in Japan. Yet, '[o]n Tagore's subsequent visits to Japan, in 1924 and 1929, the response was cooler and cooler still'.[44] Although Dutta and Robinson locate the change in the Japanese audience and not in Tagore himself, one might well point to a change of heart in the visitor himself, who would be very blunt about his estimation of Japan's role in international affairs in 1932: 'In Japan's blood has entered the poison of imperialism from the West'.[45] But earlier than this one could still hear him express, in an interview with the *Manchester Guardian* given upon departing Japan

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[42]Unknown to earlier observers of Japan, who had tended to stress the religious competition in Japan, this view had become pronounced by the end of the nineteenth century, prominently exemplified by Okakura Tenshin in his 1903 *Ideals of the East*. See Kakuzo Okakura, *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (New York: Dutton, 1920), pp. 7–8.

[43]Richard, *Au Japon*, p. 35.

[44]Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 203. Curiously, Saaler and Szpilman see Tagore's enthusiasm for Japan as increasing between 1916 and 1924: 'During his first visit, Tagore condemned Japanese nationalism as an imitation of Western practices […]. However, in 1924, when demonstrations against the United States Asian Exclusion Act erupted in Japan, Tagore spoke out on a number of occasions in favour of pan-Asian unity to audiences of several thousand' (Saaler and Szpilman, 'Introduction', p. 24).

[45]Rabindranath Tagore, *Journey to Persia and Iraq, 1932* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Pub. Dept., 2003), p. 29. This passage was pointed out to me by Nahid Mozaffari.

in August 1916, sympathy for an 'associated Asia' as a result of Japan's 'mission to unite and lead Asia'. This was plausible to Tagore in 1916 because 'from India to Japan there is much of religion and art and philosophy which is a common possession'.[46]

It is important to note that in Tagore's political appraisal of Japan, his list of commonalities with India begins with 'religion'. Tagore was quite in agreement about this with Richard, but also with a number of Japanese pan-Asianists such as Ōkawa. I will now turn to examining those resonances, especially in terms of questions about the relationship of politics and religion, and thus the reason for Richard's popularity in Japan during his stay there.

Asianists, Japanists, and Paul Richard

Richard, Tagore, and Ōkawa Shūmei

In gauging Richard's impact on Japan, it is instructive to turn to the parallel case of Tagore, who has received more attention in the secondary literature so far. I would like to differ here from the assessment offered by Tomoko Masuzawa:

> The impact of Tagore's spiritualized message upon the native intellectuals of Japan and China were apparently minimal. [...] Despite Tagore's best intentions, the imaginary of the East, an identity predicated primarily on the hopeful [...] idea of the supremacy of the spiritual over material, did not find its feet anywhere on solid ground.[47]

Obviously, what Masuzawa has in mind was the eventual failure of the idea of Asian solidarity once Japan opted for aggressive imperialism in China and other parts of the continent from the early 1930s onwards. Still, Tagore's message resonated with important parts of his Japanese audience during a certain time corridor around 1920, when the future path of Pan-Asianism was still marked by a degree of openness. His reception was very similar to that of Paul Richard; in fact, the two travelled together through Japan during Tagore's first visit in 1916. And just as Tagore liked to write about religion in the singular, in a mode of transcending 'conventional religions', Richard frequently spoke of 'spiritual(ity)' instead of individual religions.

Tagore's and Richard's association with pan-Asianist groups and individuals have frequently been reduced to mere expediency. In this view, they were exploited as convenient spokespersons for the seemingly good intentions of Imperial Japan (which had in reality already set its sight on the conquest of the rest of Asia). This is perhaps most egregiously argued in the case of Ōkawa Shūmei, possibly because he became such a prominent spokesperson for the imperialist far right sector of Japanese political life in the 1930s. Ōkawa, who has been described as 'the most prominent and

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[46] Cited in: Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World-Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 116–117. Ōkawa Shūmei also quotes this interview passage in his endorsement of Tagore in a 1916 booklet on popular movements in India. See Ōkawa Shūmei, *Indo ni okeru kokuminteki undō no genjō oyobi sono yurai* (no publisher, 1916), pp. 5–6.

[47] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 290–291. Masuzawa, who has not herself read the 'native intellectuals of Japan and China', here follows the earlier argumentation of Stephen Hay.

influential Asianist ideologue of imperial Japan in the three decades from WWI to the end of WWII', was one of the authors who around 1920 propagated pan-Asianism but declared that Japan should not be the leader of a liberated Asia—'To act in these ways would be just a repetition of the mistakes of the Western nations'.[48] At the same time, Ōkawa's motives for seeking solidarity with Asia are often portrayed as having been exclusively political, thus highlighting the contrast between the 'religious' motive of Muslim Asianists from Western Asia and the interests of Japanese activists, such as Ōkawa, 'to serve purely political visions of an Asian awakening that would serve the Japanese Empire'.[49]

In reality, Ōkawa's interest in religion was long-standing, deep, and earnest. He had entered Tokyo Imperial University in 1907 to study in the Department of Philosophy. In his 1951 memoirs, he described the motives for choosing this subject as follows: 'The reason for entering into the Philosophy Department of the university was not at all that I wanted to become a scholar; rather, it was because I sought true religion. I thought that by reading the works of Western scholars, I would understand what true religion is.'[50] Ōkawa's interest in religion was thus far from purely academic. Having grown up in a family of ardent believers in Sōtō Zen Buddhism, he became personally invested in religion when he encountered Christianity as a youth.[51] Although he mainly focused on Buddhism in his university studies, Ōkawa would soon be drawn to Islam, a subject to which he devoted many publications during his lifetime. It was here, in Islam, that Ōkawa thought he had found a characteristic that would become central to his understanding of pan-Asianism. Christopher W. A. Szpilman summarized Ōkawa's views as follows: 'by fusing state and church [Islam] had successfully challenged the West with its uniquely Asian values'.[52] In Ōkawa's own words, reminiscing about the early 1910s: 'It was around this time that for the first time I felt drawn to the faith of Muhammad, in which not a single hair will fit between religion and politics.'[53]

Hence, just as it is wrong to dismiss Ōkawa's interest in Islam as simply motivated by political goals—despite his lifelong interest in the religion and despite his having devoted several years to translating the Qur'ān—it is just as misleading to see his and others' association with the spiritual leaders from India and Europe as nothing but a political ploy. Rather, Ōkawa not only spent considerable time with Richard (sharing his home with the Richards for several years during their stay in Tokyo) and translated the immediately politically useful tracts that Richard penned, he also translated the obscure and several hundred pages' long collection of religious and spiritual aphorisms from around the world, which was published as *The Eternal Wisdom* in English in 1922 (Japanese version, 1924). These extracts were first published in the

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[48] Aydin, *The Politics*, p. 112. The quote from the Ōkawa article is from p. 119.

[49] Selçuk Esenbel, 'Abdürreşid İbrahim: "The World of Islam and the Spread of Islam in Japan," 1910', in *Pan-Asianism, Vol. 1*, (eds) Saaler and Szpilman, pp. 195–203, here: pp. 200–201.

[50] Quoted in: Usuki Akira, 'Ōkawa Shūmei no Isuramu kenkyū: Nihonteki orientarisuto no manazashi', *Nihon shisōshi*, vol. 72 (2008), pp. 130–152, here: p. 130.

[51] Azuma Ryūichi, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu* (Tōkyō: Shunjūsha, 2002), p. 193.

[52] Christopher W. Szpilman, 'The Dream of One Asia: Ōkawa Shūmei and Japanese Pan-Asianism', in *The Japanese Empire in East Asia and Its Postwar Legacy*, (ed.) Harald Fuess (Munich: Iudicium, 1998), pp. 49–63, here: p. 60.

[53] Ōkawa Shūmei, *Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū, Vol. 1* (Tōkyō: Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū kankōkai, 1961), p. 789.

pages of *Michi* (The Way), the journal of the Dōkai (The Way Society). The Dōkai, which Ōkawa had joined while still enrolled as a university student,[54] had been founded in 1912 by Matsumura Kaiseki (1859–1939), a Christian with eclectic leanings; indeed, the Dōkai's founding idea was to focus on the commonalities of Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shintō. When Richard lived in Tokyo with Ōkawa, he invited Matsumura to his home, where the two had a revealing discussion on politics and religion, a dialogical version of which Matsumura published in a book soon afterwards.

Richard set out by suggesting that he had the impression that Matsumura was more political than religious, which Matsumura denied (although in the process acknowledging that 'religion sways the rise and fall of nations'). Richard then suggested that in the current times of political crisis, what Japan needed were people like Matsumura, who were both politicians and religionists: 'In times like these, we must have spiritual politicians (*seishin-teki seiji-ka*). Politicians that rely on other's intelligence or tricks are no longer good enough. We need people who firmly believe in the will of Heaven and overlook the great movements of the universe.' Matsumura admitted that 'it is a point of shame that there are so few spiritual or religious personalities in our political world' and embarked on a longer explanation of Japan's modern history, during which nation and society, 'having become infatuated [with] European material civilization, eventually abandoned the spiritual and religious direction'. Reviving the latter was precisely the Dōkai's programme, Matsumura mused, and he declared himself in complete agreement with Richard, whose insights he described as 'prophetic'.[55]

Tanaka Chigaku and the Kokuchūkai

Although it was Ōkawa who introduced Richard to many of the individuals and circles in which he mingled in Japan, Richard's acquaintances went beyond those people to include groups that might best be described as rivals of Ōkawa's programme. One of the most prominent multiplicators of Richard's views was the Kokuchūkai (National Pillar Society), a nationalist association founded by the flamboyant Tanaka Chigaku, an adherent of a modernized version of the traditional school of Nichiren Buddhism known as Nichirenism (Nichiren shugi). Despite its roots in Buddhism, Nichirenism is well known for its involvement in and influence on politics in 1920s and 1930s Japan, most conspicuously in the form of the Kokuchūkai member Ishiwara Kanji, who was the mastermind behind the fabrication of the 1931 Manchurian Incident, the beginning of Japan's Fifteen-Year War (1931–1945) in Asia.

The Kokuchūkai also had an explicitly anti-secularist agenda. In 1923, it founded a political party that ran candidates in the Diet elections, initially unsuccessfully, but eventually yielding one representative in the 1937 elections. The party openly advocated a religious revolution in Japan through grounding the nations and its institutions, including the emperor, within the principles of the Lotus Sutra. In declaring such radical goals, Tanaka could point to a long tradition of the Nichiren sect's attempts to meddle in politics, beginning with Nichiren (1222–1282) himself, who was

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[54]Usuki, 'Ōkawa Shūmei', p. 131.
[55]Matsumura Kaiseki, *Jinkaku ron* (Tōkyō: Tōadō, 1920), pp. 252–264. The quotes are from pp. 259 and 260, respectively.

sent to exile for the overly public warnings he issued against the government of his time.[56]

Tanaka invited Richard and his wife to an exclusive multi-day celebration at the sect's headquarters in Miho (Shizuoka prefecture) over the New Year period of 1920. In his lecture there—at least in the only version available, which is through Kokuchūkai publications—Richard emphasized the similarities between Nichirenist thinking and his own, in particular in regard to the relationship between the divine and the mundane:

> The doctrine of Saint Nichiren is, as far as I know, extremely brief and clear. That is to say, it pronounces the transmission of the civilization of Heaven to Earth. Moreover, this is not only the most exalted idea in the East and Asia, but also the most precious idea for all the world.
>
> Heaven and Earth are originally not separate. Since Earth appears as if it tore man away from Heaven, man has forgotten about Heaven, but if we manage to leave behind this stupid ignorance, we can always reside in Heaven, and Heaven can live in our hearts. This idea is the fate of all of Buddhism. Earth becomes one as it rises to Heaven, and at the same time man must enter into divine life; thus, all of mankind must become Buddhas. At present, Earth is polluted, which is why not many Buddhas live here, but once it will be cleansed in its entirety, it will become possible to elevate the world and transform into Buddhas. Yet when it comes to the sequence of this, before Earth can become Heaven, Heaven must first be able to descend upon Earth.[57]

These seemingly vague and lofty ideas had a clear political dimension to them. In a letter Richard wrote to Tanaka after leaving Japan in late 1920, he clarified that he saw his own work 'in the same vein as yours, in the establishment of a new divine kingdom',[58] and the Kokuchūkai publication dispelled any doubts by quoting Richard as having said that he was asking Tanaka to 'battle tirelessly for his great mission of erecting a Heavenly realm on this very Earth'.[59]

Conclusion

The anti-secularism analysed in the writings of Richard and his Japanese interlocutors is mostly implicit—there are no programmatic announcements about secularism or laïcité. It is clear enough, however, that Richard's programme would not have been possible on the grounds of the modern secularist configuration: for him (as for Ōkawa, Tanaka, and many others around 1920), politics was unthinkable without a religious

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[56]An overview of the history of Nichiren opposition to governments throughout history can be found in Jacqueline Stone, 'Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2–3, 1994, pp. 231–259.

[57]Paul Richard, 'Tenjin yūgō no sakai', *Dokku*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1920, pp. 20–24, here: p. 22. I am grateful to Yoshinaga Shin'ichi for bringing this material to my attention.

[58]Paul Richard, 'Ikoku no tayori', *Tengyō minpō*, 16 November 1920, p. 2.

[59]Hoshino Takeo, 'Futsukoku tetsujin Pōru Rishāru hakase o Miho ni mukaete', *Dokku*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1920, pp. 16–20, here: p. 20.

foundation. In fact, at least in Richard's case, his sceptical attitude towards the role reserved for religion in secularist modernity went further, as his musings about the relationship between science and religion show. It was in the realm of politics, and especially the international relations of Japan in Asia, and of Asia in the world, however, that Richard's ideas found fertile ground for a few years following the First World War.

One reason why a spiritually infused pan-Asianism was particularly successful in the Japan of the 1910s and 1920s is that it combined anti-Western Asian solidarity with a familiar anti-materialist sentiment. As in the rest of the world, Western civilization in Japan had long been associated with material progress, although this association had been a positive one at first. Increasingly, the focus on the material side and the lack of a proper spirituality was regarded as a deficiency. Around 1920, two new factors contributed to this trope: the first was the catastrophe of the First World War, which in the eyes of many contemporaries meant the bankruptcy of Western civilization and the ideas behind it; the second was that the critique of Western materialism and the quest for Eastern spirituality were now increasingly also articulated by Europeans themselves. Richard was one of them, and his being a *European* critic of Europe lent him added authenticity in 1920s Japan.

Although I stress here the novelty of the situation in the 1920s, the idea that Eastern spirituality might complement, or be an antidote to, Western materialism is much older. Specifically, it has a genealogy going back to European ideas about India. By the end of the nineteenth century, European intellectuals who were 'motivated by a disillusionment with Christianity, but also Western life, with the growth of industrialization and new political forces' turned towards the supposed superior spirituality of India, as expressed in a Hinduism that was by then 'sufficiently reformed and strengthened'.[60] It may have been no coincidence that intellectuals from India (Tagore) or intellectuals with a vested interest in India (Richard) were prominent in emphasizing this superior Eastern spirituality even when in Japan.

Tagore and Richard contributed to the spiritualization of the political project of pan-Asianism. Around the turn of the century, less intellectually polished political groups such as the Kokuryūkai, often active on the ground in neighbouring Asian countries, had stood next to theoreticians with aesthetic or literary concerns such as Okakura. It was not until the 1910s and 1920s that the political idea of pan-Asianism gained new potential through spiritual backing or spiritual ideas becoming stronger through being associated more closely with political movements. Richard and his allies were key players in this process.

The movement also acquired decidedly anti-secularist overtones, portraying the Japanese state as guilty of the same kind of superficial materialism as the West and lacking a proper spiritual foundation. That kind of foundation could, in the eyes of Japanese pan-Asianists of the 1910s and 1920s, only be found on the Asian continent. Many concretely identified this Asian spirituality with Buddhism, Islam, or Confucianism, the proper exercise of which was then said to be lacking in modern Japan. The main reason for this perception, widespread among pan-Asian activists of

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[60]Ursula King, 'Some Reflections on Sociological Approaches to the Study of Modern Hinduism', *Numen*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1989, pp. 72–97, here: pp. 87–90. See also Masuzawa, *The Invention*, p. 289.

the 1910s and 1920s, was the secularism of Japanese elites. In this period, the secularity of Japanese society—the division of religion from politics, the banning of religion from public life and education, its relegation to the private realm—became one set item among the ills of modernity afflicting Japan identified by Richard and the Japanese thinkers and activists described in this article.

That 'emic conceptual boundaries between the religious and the secular in colonial Asian societies were contingent and contentious'[61] is amply attested to by the further fate of pan-Asianism in Japan. As an imaginary it was short-lived due its appropriation by the Japanese state in the 1930s. Many of the same Japanese who had pursued pan-Asianism as a project against the state and had actually worked together with Chinese and Korean nationalists on the continent now came to support state-sponsored Asianism, often maintaining the same rhetoric of a spiritually superior East. At the same time, the critical, anti-secularist impetus vanished from the discourse entirely. The seat of superior spirituality was now uncritically seen in Japan, based on the alleged purity of the Japanese people, their cultural advancement, and the unequalled auspiciousness of the Japanese emperor. Japan's alleged spirituality had become little more than a hollow phrase to support the wartime machinery of Japanese aggression throughout Asia.

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[61]Martin Ramstedt, 'Introduction to the Workshop Theme'. Paper presented at the workshop 'Emergent Spheres of the Secular in Colonial Asia' (Humanities Centre of Advanced Studies 'Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities', Leipzig University, 2017).