Religious Warfare

*How Shinto and Buddhism influenced Japanese nationalism and militarism*
Abstract

In this essay, the religious aspect of the growing nationalism in Japanese society during the early years of the 20th century, is thoroughly examined. The effects it had on Japanese warfare before and during the Second World War will also be examined as well. While Shinto became the state religion of Japan and the flagship for the deity worship of the Emperor, Buddhist scholars and priests became the spokesmen for the new Imperialistic views, especially within Nichiren and Zen Buddhism.

The history of Shinto and Buddhism is briefly examined as well. When did Shinto become a religion? When was Buddhism introduced to Japan and by whom? How did the religions coexist together throughout the years? What are their similarities and differences? These questions will be examined as well as other facts about Shinto and Buddhism.

A detailed explanation will also be made about the changes that were made during the Meiji revolution and how Shinto became the state religion up until the end of the Second World War. The concept of the emperor being not only the head of state but also a deity to be worshipped is also thoroughly explained, with details of how he became a living god after his ceremony.

The radial national movement created by many of the Buddhist scholars and priest during the Imperial years will be explained in details. When did the scholars start to interpret their Buddhism teachings in ways that benefited emperor worship and nationalism, similar to Nichirenism? How did the movement influence radical groups that were responsible for assassination on politician and well known businessmen? Who were influencing people within the Imperial army and in what way?

Finally, there will be a section that explains how the kamikaze pilots were praised and glorified within both religions. Zen mentality during the war will also be explained.
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Introduction

World War 2 is one of the more walloping events in human history. The effects of the war were massive in scale and unlike anything else that had happened to the world society. Indeed, people all over the world might have more than just one image of the war. However, In most western countries, the subject of World War 2 is most likely not taught in classrooms without mentioning the genocidal act known as The Holocaust. Around 6 million Jews were killed during the genocide. Indeed the religious motivations for the genocide of the Jews were undeniable as it was the horrendous end result of anti-Semitism that had grown rapidly in the third Reich and other European fascist states. The evidence for the Nazis’ religious motivations can be found in many different ways. If the phrase “Gott mit uns” (God with us) which could be found on Wehrmacht soldiers’ belt buckles, was not a good enough indication of that, other factors such as the alliance between the Catholic Church and the fascism parties of Europe, Hitler’s statement in “Mein Kampf” about doing god’s work by warding off the Jews, Hitler’s telling his audience during one of his rallies that they all live by one great commandment given to them by god, should be more than sufficient.

However, genocidal acts that occurred in East Asia before and around the same time as the Holocaust may have been overlooked to a certain degree. The religious factors, resembling the ones that motivated the Holocaust, that were behind the mass murders committed by the Japanese military during the Second Sino War and World War 2, might not be as infamous. Nevertheless, after researching the connections between the religious motivations and the war crimes, it becomes relatively clear that there seem to be obvious connections between Shinto and Buddhism, influencing Japanese nationalism and militarism.

Much like during The Holocaust, certain religious groups were targeted by the Japanese army. In China alone, a large portion of the Hui Muslim community was


killed, along with hundreds of mosques being burned down and destroyed. The attempt to clear a certain religion out of a region such as Nanking (now romanized as Nanjing), seems like part of a plan to change the religious landscape. The Japanese were trying to colonize their captured territories with haste, by forcing the citizens to learn Japanese and to adopt the Japanese culture; most notably in Korea. This included the religious ideology of the Empire as well.

There was though one marked fundamental difference between swearing allegiance to Adolf Hitler or to the Emperor of Japan. While indeed Hitler was the head of the state, when people would swear allegiance to him, they swore allegiance to the *Führer* in front of almighty god. In case of the Emperor of Japan, people where not swearing allegiance to the Emperor in front of god, but in fact the Emperor was the god being sworn to. A deity that was acknowledge until the end of the war, whereupon the allied powers, under command of General Douglas MacArthur demanded the Emperor to denounce his divinity.

The following chapters will explain in more details what religious warfare indeed is and how Japan led their religious institutions inflict their nationalism and militarism, which lead to their own religious warfare.

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The definition of religious warfare

Before discussing Japan specifically, the definition of the term religious warfare needs to be defined. War is definitely not a recent concept in human history, nor is it the only conducted by humans. Archaeological evidence indicates that warfare has not only been a part of human history for the last 10,000 years, but that even some animal species have shown signs of organized warfare, whether it is a group of chimpanzees expanding their territory or an ant colony invading another ant colony\(^7\). In simple terms, some animals wage war to expand their territories.

In many ways, the same can be said about humans throughout history, although the reasons for war have been more complicated. Throughout human history, it has been hard to pinpoint the cause of war to one particular biological or natural reason like in the case with animals. Men have waged wars for many reasons. Whether it be economical or territorial reasons. Sometimes wars are fought even for the sake of revenge\(^8\). Indeed the reasons for wars were most likely more simplistic 10,000 years ago, during the years as humans were evolving their hunting skills.

The idea of a religious war is a much more recent concept in human history. Arguably, the claim can be made that the first documented religious wars we have references to, can be found inside the old testament. However, one of the earliest examples of a massive scaled war fought in the name of a religion, and probably one of the more famous examples, is the almost 200 year period of the Crusades, starting from the first crusades in 1095 until the crusaders last defeat in 1291\(^9\). The Catholic Church was responsible for sending thousands of soldiers into the “Holy Land”, in

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order to make sure that the Jerusalem would be under Christian control. This conflict of trying to seize political and territorial control in the middle east, ended up with casualties in the millions. However, those numbers would seem small compared to the devastating “Thirty Years War” (1618-1648) that would become the deadliest war in European history, not including both world wars\(^\text{10}\). That time the conflict was not between Christians and another religious group, but in fact a conflict within Christianity. However, it is debatable whether the number of casualties during the Thirty Years War, or the fact that the last conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Europe ended just a couple a decades ago in the country of Northern Ireland, is more tarnishing to the image of Christianity as a religion of peace.

Christianity is obviously not the only religion that has had conflicts. Islam has been the cause of many conflicts throughout history, both within the religion itself and against other religions. Judaism is also behind some of histories religious conflicts, mostly known in the form of Zionism, which has been one of the main reasons for the Israel-Palestine conflict to this day\(^\text{11}\). Non-monotheistic religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism in other countries and other religions have also been connected to other religious conflicts throughout history.

However, major wars that have been fought in the name of specific religions have not really been conducted only by the religious establishments. Instead, the religious establishments try to manipulate and influence the larger states, countries and organizations to conduct their wars for them. In the book “Peacemaking and Religious Violence: From Thomas Aquinas to Thomas Jefferson”the following is written:

> In the medieval era or the twenty-first century, religions typically rely upon some partner, such as a nation, an empire, or an ad hoc organization, to provide the means for conducting terrorist attacks or warfare\(^\text{12}\). (Johnson, 2009)

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Nevertheless, how are these conflicts categorized as being religion based? One of the synonyms for religious warfare is the term “holy war”. The basic definition according to the Merriam-Webster: “A war that is fought to defend or spread one group's religious beliefs”(Merriam-Webster, 2015)\textsuperscript{13}.

By that definition, saying that the Japanese were defending their beliefs would not be an accurate statement, since they were the invading force. However, one can definitely use the definition on the basis that the Japanese were spreading their religious beliefs. In chapter 5, State Shinto, detailed explanations will be given about how the Japanese tried to make Shinto the state religion in not only Japan, but also in their captured territories, especially in Korea.

A brief history of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan

Shinto

Shinto worship, or Japanese native animism as it is in its form today, has evolved gradually ever since its beginning during the Jomon-Yayoi periods. Modern Shintoism is very different from Koshinto, which is translated as “the original Shinto of ancient times”\(^\text{14}\). Koshinto worship during those periods was a animistic form of nature worship, where people would pay homage to spirits of the mountains, the fields, the rivers and etc. During the fourth and fifth century, these spirits became personalized, becoming the deities of the local ruling clans. They would be worshipped at special ritual sites as well. During the sixth century, Shinto became a state religion for the first time as the ruling Yamato court started to use the religion to underpin its control over the country. Later on, it evolved into the imperial religion that lasted for more than a millennium, as the emperor was now the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess\(^\text{15}\).

Shinto is not a religion that is practice in one particular way. In fact, there are different types of Shinto. The following explanation is from the book “Shinto: The Ancient Religion of Japan”:

‘Shrine Shinto’; the main tradition of Shinto that consists in taking part in worship practices and events at local times. ‘Imperial Household Shinto’; the religious rites performed exclusively by the imperial family at the three shrines on the imperial grounds. ‘Folk Shinto’; including the numerous but fragmented folk beliefs in deities and spirits - including divination, spirit possession, and shamanic healing. ‘Sect Shinto’; a legal designation originally created in the 1890s to separate government-owned shrines from local organised religious communities. And finally,


‘Koshinto’ (literally meaning ‘Old Shinto’) a reconstructed ‘Shinto from before the time of Buddhism’, today based on the Ainu religion Ryukyuan practices\textsuperscript{16}. (Aston, 2015)

Although there are no specific sacred documents in Shinto such as the Bible in Christianity or the Koran in Islam, the religion is prominently featured in the old historical documents known as Kojiki and Nihon Shoki. Although, Nihon Shoki is consider to have much more detailed descriptions on Shinto compared to Kojiki. Nihon Shoki is more specific on details such as Emperor Jimmu’s enthronement in 660 BCE. and his relation to the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu\textsuperscript{17}.

Shinto was influential throughout the centuries, but had to sometimes bow down to the stronghold that Buddhism had in the country\textsuperscript{18}. However, in this chapter there will be a section explaining how both religions were able to coexist together until the the Meiji resurrection (1868). Shintoism most influential period was during the Meiji resurrection as it became the state religion up until the end of World War Two.

**Buddhism**

Buddhism is believed to have been first introduced in Japan during the 6th century\textsuperscript{19}, around the same time as Shinto became the state religion for the ruling Yamato court. The arrival of Buddhism most likely influenced the evolution of Shintoism in Japanese society\textsuperscript{20}. Buddhism was first officially introduced to emperor Kimmei by king of Paekche King Seong Myung, which would later be a part of the Korean kingdom, although there were definitely ambassadors of the religion coming

from China years before that\textsuperscript{21}. The initial introduction was met with some strong oppositions by the ruling clans in the country, but as time passed, more and more official support was to be found for the growth of the religion\textsuperscript{22}. Prince Shotoku made the religion become part of the government in 593 A.D. by adding Buddhism principles to the ruling constitution back then. Buddhist buildings were being built by the support of the government, so that the Buddhist monks would work with the government\textsuperscript{23}.

Buddhism later on evolved throughout the later periods. During the Nara period (AD 710 - 794) the six schools of Buddhism (Sanron, Hosso, Kegon, Ritsu, Kusha, and Jojitsu) were introduced in Japan as a direct import from China. These schools would shape the foundation of Buddhism in Japan and later on the educational landscape. During the Heian period (794 - 1185), two other schools were imported from China, Tendai and Shingon. While these schools would rise to power, the Mahayana Buddhism (a liberal Buddhist school, whose supporters spread Buddhist doctrines, which preached that enlightenment is for all sentient beings\textsuperscript{24}) ordination platform became well established. This would change the Buddhist culture quite severely, as it would evolve into a much more unique Japanese religion. With the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Zen and Nichiren Buddhism first became influential in Japanese history\textsuperscript{25}. Zen Buddhism became associated with the ruling Samurai class as it was considered the Buddhist sect for warriors\textsuperscript{26}. Zen and Nichiren Buddhism would become a big factor in during the nationalistic period before and during the two world wars.

Comparing the religions

The origins of Shinto and Buddhism are different. The Shinto religion is originated in Japan, while Buddhism was indeed an imported religion, originated in India, introduced to the Japanese by the Chinese and the Koreans. However, Shinto is not that unique to Japan and Buddhism in Japan did indeed become a unique sect compared to other countries. While we call Shinto an original Japanese religion, it is inspired and originated from ancient Chinese inscriptions. Though Shinto is definitely a Japanese religion, Animism, which is the root for Shintoism, can be found in many places of the world. Interestingly enough, there seem to be a connection to animism and the Buddhist religious practices in Thailand and Cambodia.

Shintoism is indeed a polytheistic religion. It is though more debatable if Buddhism can be called polytheistic, monotheistic or neither. Most of the different sects of Buddhism that are practised in Japan are related to the large branch of Buddhism called Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism is often referred to as East Asian Buddhism as it spread out over countries such as China, Korea and Japan among others. It is believed that a form of Mahayana Buddhism that is practice in Japan for example, resembles polytheism. “Deva”, or what the Japanese call “ten”, are some sort of divine people or creatures that are not human, but not necessarily gods. This concept might have been very adoptable in Japan since there was already a very similar polytheistic system within Shinto.

Shintoism might look less complicated compared to Buddhism. While Buddhism is spread around the world in many different sects, even within Japan as well, Shinto is not really divided into sects or branches. In general, everywhere in Japan, Shinto is


practised in the same way. As mentioned before, although Shinto is mentioned in ancient Japanese documents, there are no sacred or holy texts. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are sacred scriptures that are called “sutra”. Many of these different sutras were influential in Japan, but the one sutra that stood out was the “Golden Light Sutra”. It is considered to be most influential on clarifying the role of the Japanese Emperor in the Buddhist religion in Japan.\(^{30}\)

**Shinto and Buddhism coexisting together in Japan**

In general, people in western society follow only one religion, usually a monotheist religion. The idea of mixing different religions and ideologies is not a common thing. In some cases, the religion condemns their believers for worshipping another god or deity. The large monotheist religions share many things in common but are also very specific about how these things are interpreted differently. For example, in the Islamic faith, Jesus Christ is considered a messenger of God, a prophet that was the son of Mary that led the children of Israel to a new revelation. However, it is also said that he is not the son of God nor that the incarnation is true.\(^{31}\) These things would make it hard for those religions to coexist as some sort of a multi-choice religions.

In eastern culture however, different religions and ideologies have been able to exist together, especially the non monotheistic religions. In China for example, the term “San Jiao” which in English translates to “three teachings”, is a term for using the teaching of the three main Chinese religions, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, in a harmonious way.\(^{32}\)

Though there have been differences and even power struggles between Shinto and Buddhism in Japan, both religions have been able to exist with each other in the same...


\(^{31}\) Ibrahim, Y. (no date) Jesus Christ in Islam. Available at: https://www.missionislam.com/comprel/jesusislam.html.

\(^{32}\) http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/ort/teachings.htm
harmonious manner. The amount of temples and shrines that are built near each other, even joined together as well, plus the festivals that are traditionally connected to both Buddhism along with other factors, indicate that the relationship between Shinto and Buddhism in Japan has at least been much more successful than any other religions in Europe or the Middle East for example.

In the book “Shinto from an International Perspective”, written by Yamaguchi Satoshi, there are two theories presented to explain why the relationship between Shintoism and Buddhism was indeed possible. The first theory is called the theory of the emancipation of Kami by Buddhism. The following quote can be found in chapter 2 of the book named “The Historical Development of Shinto”:

“It was thought in Buddhism that the deities of Brahmanism and Taoism were supernatural, but not yet liberated from karma and transmigration; the same idea was also applied to Shinto’s kami. Buddhist bonzes, therefore, began to build Buddhist temples (called jingu-ji) from the early Nara period and chanted sutras in Shinto shrines, believing that by doing so they could lead Shinto kami to a state of enlightenment and liberation.”(Satoshi, 2012)

The other theory is the theory of Kami protecting Buddhism. That theory indicates that it was more about the Shinto’s Kami protecting Buddhism rather than getting enlightenment from the latter. Shinto’s Kami were enshrined in Buddhist temples while Shinto shrines were built close to the Buddhist temples. Furthermore, when new Buddhist temples were being constructed, Buddhist bonzes would worship nearby Shinto shrines as guardian deities.

Whether either theory or both of them might be right, they do indicate that both religions had the bases for a cooperative relationship between each other. At first, it seems that it is because of the nature of Buddhism that the religions work well together, just like Buddhism did with the other religions in China. But coexisting


together means that both parties must be willing to work with each other. In the following passage that can be found on the Patheos Library web-site, a good example is given for why Shinto might have adopted well with Buddhism:

“Related to the kami is the understanding that the Shinto followers are supposed to live in harmony and peaceful coexistence with both nature and other human beings. This has enabled Shinto to exist in harmony with other religious traditions.” (Patheos Library, no date)

However, it can be debated if indeed it was always a good thing to have both religions working well with each other. For instance, the way both religions became very nationalistic after the Meiji era and up until World War Two, could be looked at as a rather unhealthy relationship. That neither religion could become a force against growing fascism in the country was most unfortunate.

35 Patheos Library (no date) Shinto origins, Shinto history, Shinto beliefs. Available at: http://www.patheos.com/Library/Shinto.
The emperor as a united symbol for Shinto and Buddhism in Japan

Arahitogami

“Another aspect of Shinto is its close association with the Imperial Family. In the past the emperor was even treated as a “living god.” This was especially true in the years of Japan’s imperial expansion, from the late 19th century until the end of World War 2. During this time the government promoted emperor worship as a way of unifying the country behind its policies.” (Fumiko, 2015)

The first time the term Arahitogami is mention, it is brought up in the ancient records of the Kojiki. Just as the Kojiki is the first document to bring up Shinto practice, it is also the first one to mention the idea of a “kami” (the word for a deity in Japanese) in human form. Not to confuse it with the term Ujigami, which was more of a protective deity for families or small societies, Arahitogami is a term for the Emperor as a divine deity, an actual living god. Throughout Japanese history, the emperors were always believed to be the descendants of Amaterasu, the sun goddess. The word “Tenshi” (Son of Heaven) was a term adapted from the Chinese during the Asuka period in the 7th century. It was also the first time where the “land where the sun rises” was mention. During that period, the Yamato state delivered a message to the Sui emperor in China declaring that the Japanese Emperor was also a son of heaven. However, the power of the Japanese Emperor was absolute, something that the Chinese Emperor did not have.

Because of these factors, the Emperor was always a symbolic authority in Japan. However, the Emperor was not always in control. During the eras of the shogun, the role of the Emperor was described by Portuguese explorer as similar to the role of the

Pope in Europe. He might have been a united symbol for the country, but he had almost no political power\textsuperscript{39}.

But unlike the Pope, \textit{Arahitogami} takes it a step further than just being a religious leader. Not only is the Emperor a descendent of a deity, but in fact a deity to be worshipped. But only the Emperor would be consider a manifest deity. So when Emperor Hirohito took over the reins after his fathers death, he had to be purified during a special ritual ceremony known as “\textit{Daijosai}”. During the ceremony, he re-enacted symbolically the descent from the “plain of high heaven” in Shinto mythology. He also had to be in the fetal position for him to be able to unite with the spirit of Amaterasu. The ceremony would end with him offering food to Amaterasu and other Shinto deities. Once the ceremony was done, which took place over night until the early next morning, Emperor Hirohito was now regarded as a living god\textsuperscript{40}.

As he became \textit{Arahitogami}, the image of the Emperor became the front of the Japanese nationalistic movement that began to increase its power during the early years of the Showa period. The explanation to why it happened so soon after his ceremony is detailed in the following passage that can be found in the biography “Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan”:

“Furthermore, during the very period in which political parties were rising to the apogee of their power, Hirohito’s ritual enthronement and defecation gave mystical intensity and strength to his double image as the living deity (\textit{araitogami}) and supreme commander of these rites countered “democracy” and pacifism at home and anti-military initiatives abroad. Only after Hirohito and his entourage had military officers act out their dissatisfaction with party governments by resorting to aggression in Manchuria.\textsuperscript{41}”

Because of the exploitation of the Emperors deity role during the fascist period in

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Japan, the Humanity Declaration (*Ningen Sengen*) was a document that the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, requested Emperor Hirohito to sign and issue after the Second World War. It was one of the conditions made for the Emperor so he could still be in office. The following is the original wording of the declaration with an English translation as well:

“The ties between Us and Our people have always stood upon mutual trust and affection. They do not depend upon mere legends and myths. They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine, and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world.“

_Hakko ichiu_

The term *Hakko ichiu*, which literally means “eight crown cords, one roof”, is a nationalistic slogan that was popular before and during the Second World War. The origins of the slogan can be found in Nihon Shoki. According to the ancient documents, Emperor Jimmu, who is believed to be the first Emperor of Japan, used the slogan to justify his rule over the entire country. Though there have never been really concrete evidence about the existence of Emperor Jimmu, his legendary status lives on up to this date. His accession is still celebrated today on “National Foundation Day” which is on February 11th.

Now there is not a clear religious connection to the original term in Nihon Shoki, except for the connection that is made between Emperor Jimmu and Amaterasu. The case could be made that because Emperor Jimmu was believed to be an descendant of Amaterasu, as mention before, Arahitogami, the idea of *Hakko ichiu* could be

42 Emperor, imperial Rescript denying his divinity (professing his humanity) (2003) Available at: http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/03/056shoshi.html.

embrace with more ease. There would be a connection to Shintoism again.

But the term did not get its 20th centuries nationalistic meaning from Shintoism. Instead, it was adopted and revamped by Buddhist priests instead. One of the founding fathers of Nichirenism, a nationalistic Buddhist movement based on the teaching of Nichiren, Tanaka Chigaku (last name being Tanaka), had contrived the phrase for his nationalistic agenda. His interpretation was that the term was a divine decision made by Jimmu, establishing himself as an imperial ruler of not just the nation of Japan, but to have his rule expanded over the world as well.

While at the time it was not acknowledge during the ruling government, it gradually gained support throughout the first decades of the 20th century. In the book “Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan” it is stated that:

“Starting around 1928 Hirohito and his reign became associated with the rediscovery of hakko ichiu, an expansionist belief that imparted new dynamism to Japanese nationalism.” (Bix, 2001)

During 1940, the slogan was finally made as an official slogan for the Japanese Empire. It was included in the “National Basic Kihon Kokusaku Yoko”. At first, it was used to justify Japanese occupation in nearby countries such as China for example. Later on, it was used as part of the Japanese propaganda against the Allies to justify their later on invasions into colonies owned by the British and the French for example.

The slogan proved to be one of the factors that would united Shinto and Buddhism under the same nationalistic idealism, which was that the Emperor was in fact a divine leader that should expand his rule worldwide. After having being almost wiped out by during the Meiji period by Shinto nationalistic forces, Buddhism, in the form of nationalistic movements such as Nichirenism, found itself being vital part of the nationalistic propaganda that sustained itself all the way to the end of the Second


World War.
The rise of Shinto after the Meiji revolution

State religion

At the beginning of the Meiji period, during the restoration, the new government at the time decided to start utilizing Shinto shrine worship, mainly to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Emperor as a deity, and as a symbol in which citizens of the Japanese Empire could unite under. Indeed these were one of the first steps during the Meiji period where the government tried to establish a nationalistic agenda. Many scholars and politicians at the time felt that Shinto was the one ideology that could support Imperialistic practices and therefore be the ideal nationalistic ideology. In the book Shinto from an International Perspective, written by Yamaguchi Satoshi, the following explanation can be found in Chapter 7, Institutional Aspects of Shinto Shrines:

“The Meiji government took this measure because it had a religious and political objective, which was to make Shinto the spiritual basis of the nation, in contrast with the Tokugawa Shogunate in the Edo period which used Buddhism to control the people.” (Satoshi, 2012)

Even though there was now state support for the Shinto religion, and families were now obliged to be registered at shrines, it did not mean that other religions were no longer allowed to be practice. In fact, the Meiji constitution’s article 29 does somewhat allow “religious freedom”. Translated into English, the article directly quotes: “Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief.”

However, because of the institutional control, Shinto was forcefully inserted into Japanese society, especially with the youth. Japanese school children were obligated to learn about Shinto. From ceremonial recitations to the Emperor to constant class

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48 The constitution of the empire of Japan, Translated by Ito Miyoji (2003) Available at: http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html.
trips to shrines. At this point, Shinto priest were now hired as teachers at public schools. Even in Korea, children were forced to worship at Shinto shrines. During the expansion period of the Japanese Empire, Shinto was being spread around the occupied countries and territories. Shinto shrines were being built in these places, even though in some cases there was never any history of Shinto worship. Most of the shrines were built in Taiwan, Manchuria and Korea. All of those countries had large national shrines dedicated to Amaterasu and the Emperor, who at the time was Emperor Meiji. It was debated by some Shinto scholars that the shrine in Korea should have been dedicated to a founding deity in Korea rather than to the Emperor. The government did not agree with their views and rejected the proposal. After the war, most of the shrines were abolished and the grounds were used for a completely different purpose. For example, the national large shrine in Taiwan, called the “Taiwan Jinja” was soon demolished after World War II and later on a hotel was constructed on the same grounds as it used to be.

The term “State Shinto” was not really used until the “Shinto directive” was issued in 1945. At the beginning of the document, a statement is written that says that the directive is made for several things, including the “Dissemination of State Shinto”. The term was created so that the abolishment of Shinto practice, done in the name of the government, could be better explained and determent. Under the new constitution, freedom of (and from) religion was now guaranteed, and Shinto was not only separated from the state, it was in fact banned in many public places. Schools were no longer allowed to conduct Shinto worship or visit shrines. Local events and fundraising were also not permitted to be hold at shrines. To this day, city festivals that might share its roots to Shintoism, are allowed to be held but not supervised nor influenced by members of the local shrines.

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**Haibutsu kishaku**

**Haibutsu kishaku** is roughly translated as “the abolishment of Buddhism”. It has had quite the history, all the way since the Kofun period. As mention before, Buddhism is indeed an imported religion in Japan. During the Kofun period, Buddhism was not part of the official establishment yet. The viewpoint that the locals had during that period was that Buddhism felt very foreign to them, especially since the missioners were mostly Chinese monks. Therefore, the original cause for the anti-Buddhism movement might have been motivated by xenophobic views.

Haibutsu kishaku appeared from time to time in Japanese history, as Buddhism went through its highs and lows. As mention before, Shintoism and Buddhism had been able to coexist together most of the time in a peaceful manner, but conflicts over power within the government lead to the biggest blow ever for the Buddhist religion that happened during the Meiji revolution. Before the new Meiji government took control, Buddhism had been the official religion for the Tokugawa shogunate. When the new Meiji government finally took over after the revolution, Buddhism lost its influential government role over to Shintoism. This time the reasons were based on nationalistic views as the “foreign” Buddhism religion should bow out for the “original Japanese” Shinto religion. This transaction was called “shinbutsu bunri”, which roughly meant the separation of Shinto and Buddhism.

The transformation was quite brutal for Buddhism in Japan. Great Buddhist temples and structures were being demolished all over the country. Around almost thousand of temples were destroyed and their properties were taken over and in some cases Shinto structures were constructed instead. Buddhist priest were all of a sudden forced to become Shinto priests.

In the end, Buddhism had lost its large influence that it had during the Tokugawa period. Many schools of Buddhism tried to regain influence by adopting to the

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nationalistic environment that was increasing during the early 20th century.
**Buddhism influencing Japanese politics and soldiers**

**Nichirenism**

The teachings of Nichiren, a well known Buddhist priest in Japanese history, have been very influential on the traditional Buddhist schools in Japan. Even today, the more modern schools, such as *Soka Gakkai* for example, still follow the teachings of Nichiren in some ways. Nichiren lived during the Kamakura period. As mentioned before in the chapter about the history of Buddhism, the Kamakura period was the era when Buddhism became associated with the samurai class. Many of Nichiren’s followers at the time were from the samurai class.

Nichiren’s teachings were mostly based on the idea that Japan would be the centre of Buddhism’s regeneration. One of his wishes was that the Buddhism would become part of the state and it’s law establishment. His reasons are explained in the book “Japanese Religions: Past and Present”:

“When, at a certain future time, the union of the state law and the Buddhist Truth shall be established, and the harmony between the two completed, both sovereign and subjects will faithfully adhere to the Great Mysteries. Then the golden age, such as were the ages under the reign of the sage kings of old, will be realized in these days of degeneration and corruption, in the time of the Latter Law. Then the establishment of the Holy See will be completed, by imperial grant and the edict of the Dictator, at the spot comparable in its excellence with the Paradise of Vulture Peak. We have only to wait for the coming of the time. Then the moral law (*kaiho*) will be achieved in the actual life of mankind. The Holy See will then be the seat where all men of the three countries [India, China and Japan] and the whole *Jambudvipa* [world] will be initiated into the mysteries of confession and expiation; and even the great deities, Brahma and Indra, will come down into the sanctuary and participate in the initiation.”54 (Readern, Stefansson, and Andreasen, 1993)

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During the Meiji period, a different tone of preaching started to emerge among Nichiren scholars. It was later on called “Nichirenism” (Nichirenshugi in Japanese)\textsuperscript{55}. The teachings of Nichiren were now being interpreted in a much more nationalistic tone compared to his original teachings. One of the more influential writings within Nichirenism was “The Doctrine of Saint Nichiren” (Nichiren shonin no kyōgi)\textsuperscript{56}. Tanaka Chigau, who has been mention before for having reinterpreted the slogan “Hakkou ichiu” for his nationalistic propaganda, was also the writer behind The Doctrine of Saint Nichiren and one of the main spokesmen behind Nichirenism\textsuperscript{57}. In his writings, Tanaka tried to interpret Nichiren’s views of unification as having Japan as the centre of the world. In Tanaka’s view, Nichiren’s prophecy could only be carried out in military fashion. For that reason, he characterized the military roles for Nichiren and the nation of Japan in his essay named “The Restoration of the Nichiren Sect” (Shumon no ishin):

“Nichiren is the general of the army that will unite the world. Japan is his headquarters. The people of Japan are his troops; teachers and scholars of Nichiren Buddhism are his officers. The Nichiren creed is a declaration of war, and shakubuku is the plan of attack....The faith of the Lotus will prepare those going into battle. Japan truly has a heavenly mandate to unite the world"\textsuperscript{58} (Tanaka 1931, 16; trans. from Lee 1975, 26)

It is quite clear that Tanaka tried to justify Japanese militarism and occupation overseas by reinterpreting Nichiren’s teachings and ancient slogans such as “Hakkou ichiu”. Tanaka started to form quite the movement around him, starting out with the creation of the Nichiren Buddhist organization named “Kokuchukai” (translated as “Pillar of the Nation Society”) in 1914, ending up with a large number of followers.


\textsuperscript{56} Tanaka, C. (1910). Nichiren Shōnin no kyōgi : ichimei Myōshū tairi. Kamakura-machi (Kanagawa-ken) : Shishiō Bunko, Meiji 43.


\textsuperscript{58} Tanaka. C (1931, 16); The Restoration of the Nichiren Sect” (Shumon no ishin). trans. from Lee (1975, 26)
during the early years of the 20th century, which included many famous literary figures and even important military figures\textsuperscript{59}.

One of the notable figures following the teachings of Nichirenism was Kanji Ishiwara, a general within the Imperial Japanese army\textsuperscript{60}. He is known for being part of the Manchuria invasion and being responsible for the Mukden “incident”\textsuperscript{61}. The incident is now described as “ruse de guerre” or an act of military deception. A staged terrorist attack was made against a Japanese railway company that was based near Mukden. A small amount of dynamite was used to create a minor explosion on railroad track that was not strong enough to destroy it. Later investigation proved that it was a Japanese military officer who had planned the attack. Right after the staged terrorist attack was made, the Imperial Army of Japan decided to invade Mukden and the rest of Manchuria as a response to the attack\textsuperscript{62}.

Months before the staged terrorist attack, Kanji Ishiwara and other military colonels had planned out the invasion of Manchuria. Many reasons have been given for why the Imperial Japanese army wanted to invade the region. An obvious reason, which is true to almost all wars could be the desire for the rich resources in the region. But whatever the reasons might have been, it corresponded well with Kanji Ishiwara religious ideology. He believed that the conflict, which Nichiren described as something happening before the “Buddhist truth” would prevail, was about to happen soon. In his mind, Japan would have to take the role of “liberating” China and East Asia, so that the nations would stand united against the West. Indeed, he did look at the Manchuria invasion as a sacred mission\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{60} Perez, L. G. (2013). Japan at War: An Encyclopedia: ABC-CLIO.
For Kanji Ishiwara, it is hard to imagine him as religiously inspired without the teachings of Nichirenism. Many soldiers in The Japanese army had adapted to the new style of Buddhism teachings like Nichirenism. One of the main reasons might have been how well the religion fell in line with the State Shintoism ideology. Indeed, it was Tanaka who also did preach about uniting under the Emperor as the religious leader of the Empire. With combining the teaching of Nichiren to nationalistic ideologies such as the ones found within State Shinto and then using the slogan “Hakkou ichiu”, Tanaka had popularized Buddhism again in Japanese society after its fall during the Meiji restoration.

**Blood League terrorist attacks**

During the years when Tanaka Chigau was a preacher at Kokuchukai academy in Shizuoka prefecture, one of his pupils was a man named Nissho Inoue. He would later become one of the more infamous right wing fascist leaders during the Imperial era in Japan. Before he decided to become a Nichiren preacher, he had been trying to become a Zen Buddhist priest. But in both cases, he did not finish his studies. In fact, he went on his own and later on created his own temple in Ibaraki prefecture named Rissho Gokokudo. Even though he had not become a fully certified Buddhist priest, he decided to become a self-taught preacher at his temple, attracting young people to listen to his far right militaristic ideology.

At the beginning of the 1930's, Nissho Inoue had moved to Tokyo and later created a right wing terrorist organization called “Ketsumeidan” or as it is translated to English, the Blood League. Most of the members were fairly young men, some of them being university students. According to the definition passage under “Blood League Incitant” in the book Concise Dictionary of Modern Japan, The group’s agenda was “to eliminate those public figures whom they regarded as having betrayed their country internationally or as having enriched themselves at the expense of farmers.”

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and peasants”65. (Hunter, 1997)

One of the reasons for why Nissho Inoue decided to establish his terrorist group, was the failed coup d’état that had happened during October 1931 on the ruling Japanese government, which is why it has been named the “October Incident”. Members within the Imperial Japanese Army had tried to overthrow the government with the support of some nationalistic groups as well. The attempt failed mainly because many of co-conspirators backed out and also because information about the plans to overthrow the government had leaked to the authorities66.

Nissho Inoue had made it clear to his followers that he believed that the Emperor should become the supreme political ruler of the nation. This view of his would fit with his Nichirenism views, as it resembles the teachings of Tanaka Chigau. Nissho Inoue had also come to the conclusion that the only way to achieve the national reform that he desired, so he could start the “Showa Restoration”, was to use violent measures against targeted politician and well known business men. The slogan he created later on for the terrorist group would only affirm that viewpoint; “one man, one death”67.

Nissho Inoue had connections with members of the Imperial Japanese Army who agreed with his views on the current government. As with many other nationalist during that era, they were heavily against the idea of Japan accepting both the Washington Naval Treaty and then the later London Naval Treaty. The weapons that Nissho Inoue was able to collect for the terrorist group were most likely supplied by the disgruntle members of the army, although there are no clear evidence of that. Once Nissho Inoue had distributed the weapons to his fellow accomplices, he gave them orders on which politicians and business men they would target. Only a few of

them would eventually follow Inoue’s orders and actually assassinate their targets.\(^{68}\)

The first one to get assassinated was Junnosuke Inoue (coincidentally sharing the same last name with the man who wanted him assassinated). He was known for being the governor of Bank of Japan for several years before joining the Minseito political party and then later on becoming the financial minister of Japan. During a political campaign for a fellow *Minseito* member in early 1932, Junnosuke Inoue went to a meeting somewhere in a suburb in Tokyo. As he stepped out of his car, Sei Konuma, one of Nissho Inoue followers, approached Junnosuke and fired four shots at him, hitting him three times and piercing through his lung. The news of his assassination spread quickly around the world and was on the front page of well known newspapers such as *The New York times*.\(^{69}\)

Around a month later, a well known business man named Dan Takuma, who was the manager of Mitsui Zaibatsu, one of the largest corporate groups to this day, was also assassinated by another member of Inoue’s terrorist organization. Dan Takuma was regarded as “a symbol of the evil power of high finance in government”. Having graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he had been influenced by western ideas of government and democracy, which clashed completely with Nissho Inoue’s ideology.

Soon after the second assassination, Nissho Inoue and other members of the terrorist organization where arrested. However, only a couple a months later, a group of naval officers who had joined Inoue’s organization or shown support to his cost, elaborated their own scheme to enforce “Showa Restoration” by assassinating the current prime minister at the time, Inukai Tsuyoshi. He had been struggling to control the Imperial army during his short tenure as a prime minister. Militants and nationalist like Nissho Inoue were extremely upset with the prime minister for limiting the


number of soldiers deployed to China during the Imperial Army’s extension\textsuperscript{71}.

What soon followed were court cases against the assassins where their views and propaganda were being displayed. As they kept pledging their loyalty to the Emperor, the general public started to sympathize with the assassins. As the public pressure started to amount on the government and justice system, the assassins where given very light sentences compared to the nature of their crime\textsuperscript{72}. It was considered as a victory for the growing nationalistic movement in the country and as a defeat for democracy and those who support it.

Many factors might have been behind the events that led to this tragic murders, but the connection that can be made to Tanaka Chigau seems almost indisputable. His new interpretation on Nichiren’s teachings, which led to the nationalistic ideas of Nichirenism, influenced Nissho Inoue ideology. Inoue creates his own temple and later on terrorist organization to violently achieve his religious and ideological goals. His followers then gain support and sympathy from the general public, and most importantly, within the Imperial Japanese army. Later on, Tanaka’s views on Japan becoming this military force that would uniting the world were coming closer to reality.

**Zen mentality rejuvenated for war**

Originally from China, Zen Buddhism became established in Japan and was able to flourish more in Japan compared to the other Asian countries\textsuperscript{73}. One of the factors that make Zen Buddhism unique compared to the other sects of Buddhism is how much


the religion is influenced by Taoism. In fact, the way Taoism affected Japanese culture was likely through its influence on Zen Buddhism\textsuperscript{74}.

As mention before, Zen Buddhism grew significantly during the Kamakura period with the Samurai class. There have been several reasons suggested to why Zen was received so well by the Samurai. The ideas of loyalty, courage, fearlessness that can reach to the point of death, were all ethical factors that might have registered with the Samurai. Zen grew even more popular within the military regime at the time, also known in Japanese as “bakufu”, when the ruling regent at the time, Hojo Tokiyori (1227-1263), became very attracted to Zen meditation, which eventually led him to attain enlightenment from a Chinese master. Zen Buddhism later on became part of a state institution, as the ruling Ashikaga shogun established the Rinzai school. Zen monks became highly useful for the shogun, as they would be used as diplomats, even being sent on missions to China to secure financial resources\textsuperscript{75}.

Zen Buddhism would lose some of its influence on the state during later periods, as it became static and uninspired, especially during the rule of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi. Although other Buddhist institution did not fair well under the Tokugawa period, Zen Buddhism seemed be the only Buddhist sect that was still in a good condition as it when through a revival stage\textsuperscript{76}.

After the Meiji restoration, the new government decided to try to centralize Buddhism by totally reconfiguring the sects of the religions in Japan. Only a few of them were recognized by the government. Zen Buddhism was one of them, along with Nichiren Buddhism plus several others\textsuperscript{77}. Every Buddhist sect that fell outside of the seven sects that were recognized, suffered throughout the cleansing period, \textit{haibutsu kishaku}, which has been mention before. At the beginning, the Meiji government tried to put one administrative head (\textit{kancho} in Japanese) in charge over each Buddhism sect, regardless of the different school within the sect. With time, the government

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Baroni, H. J. (2000). Obaku Zen: The emergence of the Third sect of Zen in Tokugawa, Japan. Honolulu, HI, United States: University of Hawai‘i Press.
\end{itemize}
ased on its policy and allowed three Zen sects to become independent sects with their own administrative head, Sato, Banzai and Baku.

These Zen schools were able to adapt to the new atmosphere that came with the Meiji period. In fact, at that point in time, the schools were being categorized under the term "shin bukkyo" which directly translated means "New Buddhism". The definition for that term is that Buddhism had received new interpretation from the new religious policies from the Meiji government. The new ways of interpreting Buddhism were more philosophical, and socially committed78. This type of Buddhism was considered adaptable for western society.

However, as with other Buddhist sects, Zen Buddhism gradually became more nationalistic during the early years of the 20th century, as the focus was now on “debt of gratitude” to the “Tenno”, which meant the Emperor of Japan, equal to the worship of the sentient beings of Buddhism, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Zen also became connected to the Japanese military after the Russo-Japanese war. Many soldiers within the Imperial army started to practice Zen meditation as the number of Zen teachers, who supported Japan’s imperialistic ventures abroad, started to grow rapidly. Among them was Soyen Shaku. He served as a chaplain during the Russo-Japanese war. The arguments that he made to justify Japanese military aggression, were looked upon as being nationalistic and xenophobic. He defended the Imperial army’s aggression in Manchuria in many lectures and essays, saying that war was not necessarily horrible if it was being fought for an honourable cause79.

In 1930, the idea of Imperial-state Zen (Kokoku Zen) started to emerge. The idea was that a soldier’s ego would have to yield for the purpose of serving the Emperor on the battlefield80. Violent acts were being committed by the soldiers of the Imperial army that were being justified by Zen ideology of discipline and bringing about awakening and spiritual purity through fighting. Ian Reader writes about the subject in the book “Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World”:

Zen notions sanctifying violence as a spiritually empowered and mystical deed helped create, promote, and justify the deeds of violence, murder, and atrocity that were carried out in the name of Japan by its militarists as they first sought to exert their influence over the Japanese government and state, and later as they waged war and sought to subjugate other countries and peoples under the Japanese yoke. (Reader, 2009)

In 1998, an American Soto Zen priest Brian Daizen Victoria, wrote the book “Zen at War”, which gives a detailed image of how Zen organizations were supportive of Japanese militarism. In the book, Victoria also makes enquiries about the writings of some of the Buddhist priests as well as the Zen proponents, including D.T. Suzuki. Victoria claims that Suzuki played an important role of promoting Japanese militarism before World War 2 ended. In his writings, Suzuki claimed that the main priority of a religion should be safeguard the existence of the state. He had also written xenophobic things such as the Chinese were heathens who should be punished in the name of the religion.

Victoria did also write about Harada Daiun Sogaku in his book “Zen War Stories”. A renown Soto Zen master, Sogaku’s quotes were very militaristic in nature, from thinking it would be necessary to have a fascist state ruling for 10 years, to maintaining that the mission of the Japanese people is to rule the worlds and that everyone would have to be prepared to die for the honour of serving the emperor. However, Victoria claims that the following is Sogaku’s most infamous quote:

[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war.

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Verse: I bow my head to the floor in reverence of those whose nobility is without equal. (Victoria, 2002)

Victoria’s conclusion in his books was that Zen schools grievously violated Buddhism fundamentals when they supported Japanese militarism. Victoria’s books drew a lot of attention at the time. After “Zen of War” came out, leaders of Japanese Zen organizations publicly recognized and apologised for their predecessors support of militarism within the Imperial army.

Shinto and Buddhist priests glorify kamikaze attacks

Kamikaze comes from the Japanese kami, “god”, and kaze, “wind”. In the year 1281 a strong gale destroyed a fleet of Mongolian ships that was about to invade Japan. The Japanese term “wind of god” was adopted in the Second World War by Japanese bomber-pilots who purposely and suicidally crashed their planes on allied targets (Verma, 1999).

The Mongol invasion had a significant impact on Japanese culture and religions. Not only had the Japanese been able to defeat a much stronger invading army twice, but also been aided by catastrophic nature events. During the period between the two invasion, sutras had been distributed to individuals, and to temples for priest to preach them (especially within the Nichiren sect at the time), which were expecting a miracle to happen. Many believed from now on that the kami or Buddha was protecting the country.

In 1937, the government started to distribute Kokutai no hongi, which was a discourse on the kokutai, and on the ideological and spiritual role of the emperor. The nationalistic agenda of the document was transparent as the main focus within the pamphlet was on how Japanese people and state were superior over all other nations. The word kamikaze is brought up in the pamphlet as a reminder. A reminder that the “divine winds” that saved Japan from Mongol invasions, proved that Japan was indestructible and divinely protected. The pamphlet also focused on the emperor as a living god that required every Japanese citizen to follow his command:

All Japanese subjects had the duty to give Hirohito their absolute obedience. In practice, that meant “to live for the great glory and dignity of the emperor, abandoning one’s small ego, and thus expressing our true life as a people.” Here, in essence, was that peculiar amalgamation of Shinto, Buddhist, neo-Confucian, and Western monarchist ideals, known

as kodo—“the imperial way,” that powered Japanese aggression, and was used by army leaders to browbeat critics and by right-wing thugs to justify their terrorist actions87. (Bix, 2001)

Because the kokutai represented the ultimate worship of the emperor, it became part of the suicide pilots’ ceremony. For many of them, it was vital to carry their own copy of the pamphlet, for they wanted to show how grateful they were to the emperor. Many of the pilots’ last written words were about the emperor as the supreme father figure of the Japanese nation88.

In this case, the willingness to die for the emperor would already be considered as a religious sacrifice, since it has been already established that the nation believed in him as a deity, which was both supported within Shintoism and and most Buddhism sects at the time. However, within both religions, the kamikaze culture was being glorified, in particularly the death of a kamikaze pilot. For example, one of the more notable shrines in Japan is the Yasakuni shrine in Tokyo. After the Meiji restoration, the shrine became a place to honour the military personnel that died in combat89. Sacrificing oneself for the nation was not only acceptable, but even desirable, which is why many of the kamikaze pilots visited the shrine before eventually fulfilling their mission. They were being told that after their sacrifices, all of their spirits would end up at the shrine. Many of the kamikaze squadron mates talked about eventually meeting each other at the shrine during their last moments together90.

Within Buddhism, the pilots were being glorified for their heroic sacrifice for country and emperor. The Zen Buddhism sects were particularly vocal on how courageous the pilots were. Dr. Masunaga Reiho, a Soto Zen scholar-priest, wrote in a Buddhist newspaper that “the source of the spirit of the Special Attack Forces lies in the denial of the individual self and the rebirth of the soul, which takes upon itself the burden of history. From ancient times Zen has described this conversion of mind as the achievement of complete enlightenment.” (Victoria, 1998)

Zen Buddhism’s contempt for death was one of the factors that inspired the training of the kamikaze pilots. The idea that death was preferable than the dishonour of surrender, made it easier for the thousands of young pilots to conduct these suicide missions, as well as for the large number of soldiers that were captured by the enemy forces, to commit suicide. Author and journalist, Christopher Hitchens, suggests that Zen Buddhism did indeed influence the kamikaze training by writing the following: “And since "Zen treats life and death indifferently," why not abandon the cares of this world and adopt a policy of prostration at the feet of a homicidal dictator?” (Hitchens, 2007)

During the last years of World War 2, Japan’s leaders were ordering these kamikaze attacks, even though they knew that the pilots would not be able to stop the American fleets. But some of them believed that if their Japanese “warriors” would do their part and sacrifice themselves, then the kami would do their part. This myth that was based on a strong gale that destroyed the Mongol fleet in 1281, did not become real as Japan eventually had to surrender.

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Conclusion

It is quite clear that after the Meiji restoration era, a form of religious nationalism had been established by the influence of Shintoism and Buddhism. Shinto was declared the state religion and the emperor had not only become the nations leader under the new imperial rule, but also revived as the head of the Shinto religion as more than just a leader, but in fact a deity to be worshipped.

Buddhism had to adopted to the new religious environment. While some sects of Buddhism almost perished, others sects were able to adapt to the new environment by reinterpretting their religion with new philosophical ideals. Priests and scholars within Nichiren and Zen Buddhism were advocating nationalistic views based on their interpretation, plus adopting the emperor as their religious leader as well. Some of them even created their own terrorist organizations to violently promote their agenda. The military was also under the influence of Zen priest and scholars who supported their brutal tactics by declaring it was for the greater good.

However, to answer the question if the Japanese warfare during the Sino-Japanese war and World War 2 could be categorized as religious warfare, the brief answer would be yes. In fact, the Japanese literally used the term “holy war” (seisen) to justify their presence in the South East Asian territories. Asia had to be united against the European colonial rule, with Japan as the guardian and the emperor as leader for all Asian people95. That is why Shinto shrines were being build all over these territories. That is why citizens in the neighbouring countries of Japan had to swear allegiance to the emperor. A Japanese religion and a deity (the emperor) was being forcefully implanted in the occupied territories.

Throughout history, when religions become an influencing factor on warfare, an enormous amount of cruel and brutal actions seems to be easier to execute. For the Imperial Japanese army, this was not a dissimilar concept. After all, their actions were being approved by the religious leaders at the time:

In order to establish eternal peace in East Asia, arousing the great benevolence and compassion of Buddhism, we are sometimes accepting and sometimes forceful. We now have no choice but to exercise the benevolent forcefulness of "killing one in order that many may live" (issatsu tasho). This is something which Mahayana Buddhism approves of only with the greatest seriousness⁹⁶. (Hitchens, 2007)

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