Profane Exploitation: Modern Japan's Treatment of Nature

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Abstract

The topic of this thesis revolves around a consideration of American historian Lynn White's essay, entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," which asserts that Christianity, as interpreted and understood by the Western World – specifically North America and Western Europe – is what has "made it possible to exploit nature with a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" throughout the world; and, this includes the country that I have chosen as the focus for my thesis, Japan.[1] That said, the thesis topic goes on to argue, using modern Japanese history to respond to White's assertion, that the motive for the archipelago's increasingly exploitative attitude and treatment toward nature, though religious, is considerably more elemental; it is Japan's collective desire to better ensure its own self-preservation – a fundamental part of religion according to the French sociologist, and primary theorist for this thesis project, Émile Durkheim.

[1] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

Profane Exploitation: Modern Japan's Treatment of Nature

Introduction

The Kyōhō famine of 1732-33 was the first "of Japan's three great famines of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868)."[2] The shortage ravaged the western and central regions of Japan, including both the island of Shikoku, and the southwesternmost of Japan's islands, Kyushu. In the year 1732 alone, forty-six southwestern *han* (domains) lost approximately 75 percent of their crop;[3] and by the epidemic's conclusion, authorities recorded a total of "12,072 deaths from starvation and 2,646,020 people reportedly suffered from hunger."[4] With this noted, much of reason for Japan's dreary situation can be credited to the chilled rains that plagued the land. However, the principal troublemaker was the mass emergence of *unka* or 'plant hoppers,' which caused extensive crop damage throughout southwestern Japan and to this day, pose a serious threat to the rice crops in Asia – a staple food for the continent's population.[5]

Taking wing on seasonal winds from China, a swarm of plant hoppers arrived in Japan during the spring and early summer of the year 1732; however, farmers in Japan's western provinces believed them to have risen from the earth's crust. And, many thought the pests to be, in actuality, the spirit of the vengeful general Saitō Bettō Sanemori (1111-83), who died in their fields centuries earlier, and – in an effort to act out a grudge that he held against the farmers of western Japan – returned during their rice transplanting season

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[2] Brett L. Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010), 46.
[3] Conrad D. Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 237.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*, 46.

inside the bodies of the plant hoppers "to ruin rice crops: this was their Buddhist-inspired historical explanation of insect behavior."[6]

With this considered furthermore, this explanation decided not only the nature of Japan's early agricultural entomology but also how early modern entomologists in Japan sought "to eliminate the threat caused by [the] pests."[7] Accordingly, early attempts made by Japanese farmers to rid themselves of the plant hopper infestation consisted of efforts to '*control*' the winged creatures, as if the spirit that enlivened them could be appeased or scared away, though prayer, scarecrows, oil extermination techniques, and the erection of shrines[8] – all of which was inspired by cultural values in their religiosity and history, and done with an assumption that spirits of historical personalities and past circumstances like the rancor "of a shamed, defeated warrior, [and] not insect behavior or migratory patterns (the cognitive or instinctual capacities of their brains)," were the ultimate determinants of Japan's unfortunate condition.[9]

With this understood, it should come as little surprise that another explanation for the famine, as told by farmers in Fukuoka *han* in the Chikuzen Province, considered the plant hopper infestations to be a vision of Michizane's Dazaifu spirit – "a reference to the classical scholar and statesman, Sugawara no Michizane (845-903)."[10] In accordance with his story, furthermore, in the year 899, Emperor Uda appointed Michizane "minster of the right (udaijin)"[11] and in the year 901 the Fujiwara – political rivals to Michizane – jealous of his influence inside the imperial court, accused him of plotting against

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[6] Ibid, 47.
[7] Ibid, 48.
[8] Ibid, 47.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid, 48.
[11] Louis-Frédéric Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 908.

Emperor Daigo, Uda's successor.[12] In consequence, he was exiled then sent to govern Dazaifu on Kyushu, where he would go on to uncompromisingly proclaim his innocence, until his death in the year 903.

Shortly after Michizane's disgraceful death, a number of his political rivals died – in what many believed to be his first spiritual act of vengeance. So in an effort to quickly *control* his revengeful spirit, he was "officially rehabilitated, and posthumously given the highest honors."[13] In addition, shrines were erected in his name, and many commoners in Japan have divinized him, making him a sort of *kami* (deity) of literature. Nonetheless his memory, not unlike that of Sanemori in the western provinces of Japan, remained closely related to the fear of his relentless rage, which ultimately served as fodder for the farmers of Fukuoka in the year 1732 to use as their explanation for the plant hopper infestation – an explanation which again was inspired by the cultural values in Japanese religiosity and history.[14]

As the plant hopper assault on western Japan gave way to other insect infestations however and the country's Tokugawa period gave way to the Meiji, Japanese farmers not only adjusted their tactics in search of more effective ways to rid themselves of swarms of harmful creatures, but also – and consequently – their understanding of insects as well. Efforts to *control* insects threatening crop production were as a result, largely abandoned, and regarded as obsolete and unproductive; for the Meiji Japan discovered other remedies to "[*eradicate*] pests, ones more chemical in nature."[15] This shift in their approach would

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[12] Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia*, 908.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*, 55 (italicization added for emphasis).

quickly go on to prove more effective for Japan; nonetheless, such success would come at a significant cost for their people.

Caught in the friendly fire of Japan's innovative efforts to manage harmful insects was "the spiritual life of nature" – an exorcising of their national mindset, which held the belief that a spirit "could inhabit insect bodies, or any other part of nature for that matter, in favor of a new scientific view of [nature]."[16] As a consequence, plant hoppers were no longer seen as "fleshy bodies and crunchy shells possessed by historical spirits."[17] They were reduced to mere bugs – soulless automatons acting on the impulses of nature, which infrequently intersect with the religious and cultural values in the lives of people in Japan – and, like the remainder of nature in Japan during this period in history, their destruction and manipulation – or simply their exploitation – was, as a result, justified and adopted as common practice.

Considering this development in Japan's history, American historian Lynn White, in his essay entitled, "the Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" presents a claim that boldly asserts that Christianity, as interpreted and understood by the Western World – in particular, in North America and in Western Europe – is what "made it possible to exploit nature with a mood of indifference to…feelings of natural objects," throughout the world; which includes the country at the center of this thesis, Japan.[18] This is to say furthermore, that White believes the suspension of the belief and respect for the spiritual life of nature, which increasingly beings to take place, as Japan moves from the Tokugawa period to the Meiji era, was motivated by westernization and modernization, espoused by the Christian

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

faith. As I understand, however, the motive for the archipelago's increasingly exploitative attitude and treatment toward nature – though religious – is considerably more *elemental*; and, to mistake this for Christianity alone, places at stake the ability to embrace a more rational understanding of this pattern of mistreatment.

With this stated, to substantiate this assertion against White's claim, one must first have a basic knowledge of Japan's historical and spiritual makeup. In addition, and most importantly, one must also have a clear understanding of the primary features of religion; something which one could not arrive at, according to founding father of sociology Émile Durkheim, "without tracing historically the manner in which [religion has fundamentally, and] gradually taken shape."[19] For these reasons, this thesis will first employ explorations of modern Japanese history and religiosity, followed by a study of Shinto – the country's indigenous religion – and to close, an engagement of Durkheim's, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in order to respond to White's essay, and in doing so argue that the true motive for Japan's exploitation of nature is the collective desire to better ensure its own, 'self-preservation.'

The Greatest Psychic Revolution in the History of the Western World

To begin my argument against Lynn White's claim that Christianity served as the motive for the East's exploitation of nature it would be remiss not to first provide context for the assertion. With that being said, it should be understood that White is a 20th century historian and a chief authority in the field of medieval history. His essay, "The Historical

[19] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Trans. Karen E. Fields, (New York: Free Press, 1995), 3.

Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," was published in the journal of *Science* in the year 1967, and at that time, it inspired an extended, national debate regarding religion's role in both creating and sustaining the Western world's infectious, exploitative treatment and attitude toward nature. Moreover, the main concern of his essay insists that humans once believed themselves to be a part of nature – an understanding, which was acutely "conditioned by beliefs about [human] nature and destiny—that is, by religion."[20] But – as records, dating as "early as the 2nd century [which cite writings by] both Tertullian and Saint Irenacus of Lyons" indicate – this understanding was largely rejected with Western society following "[t]he victory of Christianity over paganism;" from which point on, the faith grew to such a level of authority and acceptance in the West that it not only influenced the cosmology, but also the "daily habits of actions" of those who lived in the West.[21] As a consequence, the former understanding of humanity as a part of nature was substituted for a Christian-inspired, anthropocentric interpretation of 'man's relation to nature,' which was governed by an implicit faith that was seated inside perpetual progress, and was "unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient."[22]

In consequence of this decisive shift in the West's relationship with nature – what White describes as the "greatest psychic revolution in the history of [Western] culture" – a dualism between man and nature was imagined in the West that was rooted inside of the Christian faith and stood in clear contrast with "ancient paganism and Asia's religions."[23] As these pagan, spiritual perspectives had maintained, according to White, humans were

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

inseparably integrated into a "web of natural relationships"[24] throughout which animistic beliefs reinforced the notion that "every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill [had] its own genius loci [or] guardian spirit" that was accessible to men.[25] In subsequence the practitioners of these religions; before taking from nature to cut trees, dam rivers, or mine mountains; believed it essential to "placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated."[26] Because of the refutation of pagan animism, modern Christian understanding of nature in the West, by contrast, saw fit to give no consideration to such an authority in their dealings with nature.

As the 'post-pagan' Western societies believe, humans – as the only being created in G_D's[27] image – not only share in G_D's transcendence of nature, but also are heritors of the will of G_D, which allowed and, in fact, even insisted "that man exploit nature for his proper ends."[28] Moreover, there to facilitate this Christian-sanctioned, exploitation of nature was the marriage between science and technology, arranged by North America and Western Europe, which afforded the West "technological power over nature, [which] can scarcely be dated before 1850" – both a critical moment in Western development and that of the East, as well.[29]

Traditionally, as White does well mention, science in the West was "aristocratic, speculative, [and] intellectual in intent;" whereas technology was viewed as "lower-class,

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[24] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Concepts of Nature and Technology in Pre-Industrial Japan," *East Asian History*, vol. 1 (1991): 83.
[25] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.
[26] Ibid.
[27] As a personal preference, and a sign of reverence, the creator and sovereign of the universe and the source of all moral authority – according to the Christian faith – will be spelt throughout this paper with an underscore in place of the "O" that is typically present in the normal spelling.
[28] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.
[29] Ibid, 1203.

empirical, action-oriented," venture that was separate in its consideration.[30] Their sudden fusion – a merging of the theoretical and empirical approaches to the natural environment – in the mid-19th century, is a notable consequence of the slightly prior and contemporary democratic revolutions, which "by reducing social barriers, tended to assert [a] functional unity of [the] brain and hand" in the West.[31] More importantly however, it was guided by a Christian theology that views humans as "superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it at the slightest whim."[32]

The outcome moreover was the development of modern science and, more chiefly modern technology – or rather, 'successful technology,' as White describes it – which is not only intimately tangled with modern science, but also distinctly occidental, remaining so to this day; for, as Indian intellectual A.K.N. Reddy claims, technological materials are similar to genetic materials in that they carry with them "the code of the society in which [they were] produced and survived."[33] Subsequently everywhere following the year 1850, whether "in Japan or in Nigeria, successful technology [is] Western,"[34] and consequently, endowed with the theology that guided its design. Furthermore, all of this – the marriage of modern science and technology in addition to the creation of 'successful' technology – according to White, has set the global stage – props and all – for a disastrous conclusion,

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[30] Ibid, 1204.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid, 1206.
[33] A. K. N. Reddy, "Alternative technology: a viewpoint from India," *Social Studies of Science*, accessed January 17, 2015, http://www.eastasianhistory.org/sites/default/files/article-content/01/EAH01_04.pdf, 332.
[34] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1204.

similar to that described in the final acts of the concept developed by German sociologist Max Weber, "the disenchantment of the world."[35]

As Weber's concept details, the disenchantment of the world signifies the cultural devaluation, and subsequent "elimination of all spiritual forces" in human life, as a result of a "rational development of Occidental monotheism, specifically by biblical prophets," and which ultimately concludes in a restricted capacity for both mystical thought, and for mystical practice.[36] And, if left unchecked moreover, nature's importance, and its warrant for compassion, which is customarily expressed in both spiritual and religious traditions – notably in the East – will be left in the wake the modern Westernized ethos, and humans, "even with the best of intentions [will be] unable to give religious ideas a significance for [the environment] which [it] deserve[s],"[37] and "the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature" will fade away.[38] To put this simply, gone are the days of antiquity in the Western world – which continued to characterize the East, according to White – where the notion of pagan animism served as the sole, decisive factor in man's dealing with nature.[39] For, the Christian faith made it so that nature was completely at man's disposal to be mastered and manipulated as they see fit – a spiritual development that, as White insists, would go on to serve as the motive for Eastern society's shift away from their harmonious approach to nature.[40]

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[35] Steven Grosby, "Max Weber, Religion, and the Disenchantment of the World," *Society*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2013): 301.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, 303.
[38] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Though I recognize that White's essay goes on to claim that embracing a relationship with nature similar to the lovingly considerate relationship that St. Francis of Assisi – the patron saint of both animals and the environment – cultivated with nature, would serve as fitting solution to curtail the exploitative treatment and attitude toward nature throughout the world. I have chosen to omit this information for the sake of this

The Exploitative Western and Harmonious Eastern Approach to Nature

With the context of White's claim now considered, historian of modern Japan and Korea, Tessa Morris-Suzuki challenges his line of reasoning – in her article, "Concepts of Nature and Technology in Pre-Industrial Japan," which is published in the journal of *East Asian History* – in her attempt to dispel the notion that there ever existed a clear division, as White's essay suggests, among "an exploitative 'Western' and a harmonious 'Eastern' approach to nature, the latter being particularly associated with ['pagan'] philosophies of traditional Japan."[41] As Morris-Suzuki maintains, moreover, it is rather unlikely that there ever once subsisted one *collective* and traditionally harmonious "Japanese attitude toward nature spanning [both] centuries and social divisions without change or variety," prior to the emergence and influence of Western Christianity.[42] As it happens, even in the isolated world of Tokugawa Japan, *individual* "philosophies of nature were not imprisoned like [a fossil] in a cultural bedrock," but rather they were diverse, dynamic and subject to change over time.[43]

Examples of this diversity, according to Morris-Suzuki, are littered throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in the collection of evolving ideas regarding nature and technology that was held by the Japanese scholars and academics of the time. One of the strongest of them is found in a divergence of opinion about humans' place in nature, existing between

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paper, which does not intend to present a solution for this development; but rather, it simply aims to offer a greater understanding of its religious origins.

[41] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Concepts of Nature and Technology in Pre-Industrial Japan," *East Asian History*, vol. 1 (1991): 81.

[42] Ibid, 97.

[43] Ibid.

the 17th century Japanese philosopher Kumazawa Bazan and Utopian 18th century thinker Andō Shōeki. Moreover, Kumazawa, who is frequently cited for his conservative position regarding pre-modern Japanese philosophy, insists that humans are more than just one of the many, indistinguishable portions of the natural world. Rather, they are a distinct and a special part of it and they play an inimitably active purpose in its growth and survival. As Kumazawa communicates through a use of the metaphor of a plum tree inside of a garden – a recurring image in Tokugawa Japan – the hidden roots of a plum tree are like the sky, the trunk is the nation, "the leaves are the myriad things [i.e. the natural environment] and the flowers and fruits are human beings.[44]

With this stated, in order to consider Andō's contrasting understanding of nature, it should be said that in his writings, "the word 'nature' (*shizen* 自然) means far more than 'the physical environment': rather, it is a metaphysical concept implying the self-existent, the ground of all being."[45] As he goes on to edify then, "[in] the world of Nature, human beings work, in accordance with the operation of Heaven and Earth: there is not the least divergence between man and nature."[46] Concrete evidence for this explanation, according to Andō, is found in the fact that the patterns of human farming coincide with the patterns of the four seasons. As he puts it, moreover, "this truly indicates the very concord of man and Nature, in which Heaven's way of giving growth to everything conforms to the ways of direct cultivation."[47]

Though subtle this variance in the interpretation of nature between two individual scholarly minds born less than a century apart, speaks volumes of the potential, and likely

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid, 83.
[46] Ibid, 83.
[47] Ibid, 84.

more significant differences between *collectives* – "for example, Heian nobles, Kamakura warriors, and Tokugawa peasants" – throughout centuries of Japanese history.[48] This is to say that the single variety between Kumazawa and Andō is indicative of a larger diversity in Japan's approach to nature that was both representative of the Japanese people, and the period in which they lived; some of which moreover, were peaceable and empathetic, like that which White determines to be a traditional Eastern approach to nature and others that could have been exploitative and apathetic like that of the Western world. Nonetheless, as Morris-Suzuki does well to point out in her article, it was not until Tokugawa Japan gave way to the Meiji period, and Japan began to open its doors to the West, that their national agenda intentionally rejected a harmonious approach to nature,[49] in what amounted to the Japanese government's attempt "to help [its] people overcome [their] spiritual weakness and acquire the knowledge and technology to exploit their natural environment."[50] With that said these two consecutive periods in Japan's history, as I will now begin to explain, serve as the historical foundation for my argument.

Emergence of the Japanese Nation-State

The Tokugawa period is named after a ruling family of warriors which had begun to emerge from obscurity in the 15th century and rose to power in the year 1603 following Tokugawa Ieyasu's decisive victory in the Battle of Sekigahara.[51] The fight was waged in the year 1600, and it was the product of a far-reaching, power vacuum left by the death of

[48] Ibid, 82.
[49] Ibid, 94.
[50] Ibid, 95.
[51] The Tokugawa name was given to the period in the early 17th century.

Ieyasu's predecessor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi – a leader in Japan that virtually unified Japan by the year 1591 – who appointed five elders to ensure the security of his throne for when his son, Toyotomi Hideyori came of age; one of whom was Ieyasu.[52] The elders however, were ultimately unsuccessful in honoring his request. They began jockeying among each other shortly after Hideyoshi's death in the year 1598 for power, position and the claim to who would follow the newly deceased leader, as the next in the line of succession.[53] This would quickly go on to set the stage for the battle, which precipitated Ieyasu entrance into leadership and the conception of the *Tokugawa Shogunate* – the stable and final, feudal military government of Japan – that was headed by the *shogun* (general) and two hundred or so *daimyo* (lords) who ruled autonomous realms under, though sometimes grudgingly, the shogun.[54] Furthermore Ieyasu then, was able to complete Hideyoshi's task of creating a unified Japan, which remained relatively peaceful until the final days of the Tokugawa period in the year 1868.

Understanding this, it should be mentioned that the dream of a unified Japan and a collection of territories insecurely held under one government structure were not the only contributions that Hideyoshi made to Ieyasu's ascent to power. There were a number of others; one being when Hideyoshi, fearing potential rebellions, forbade Japan's peasantry class from owning swords in the year 1588.[55] This would help to enforce the hierarchy on which Tokugawa Japan successfully operated. Perhaps the most noteworthy contribution though, is his banning of Christianity in the year 1857. The reason for this, in Hideyoshi's words, was because he believed that "Japan was 'the country of kami'" – referencing the

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[52] Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia*, 839.
[53] Ibid, 978.
[54] John Hunter Boyle, *Modern Japan: The American Nexus* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 80.
[55] Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia*, 994.

prominent pagan, according to White, belief that deities inhabited Japan.[56] Such a belief produced the environment in Japan that allowed for *sakoku* (national isolation), or seclusion laws, to take root and later form the isolationist policy applied from 1639 to 1868, "under which relations with European countries was forbidden on pain of death…and relations with Asia countries were strictly controlled."[57]

So by the mid-1800s Japan was a largely isolated and "loosely organized union of largely independent feudal domains, [since no] emperor had exercised sovereign control over [the land] for more than a thousand years."[58] This would all start to change after the Meiji restoration in the year 1868. From this moment, the Meiji – meaning, "Enlightened Government" – era had begun in Japan, a period which endured from September 8, 1868 through July 30, 1912 – corresponding with the reign of Emperor Meiji, and starting with a restoration of imperial rule and creation of a new government to succeed the Tokugawa Shogunate.[59] Consequently, this epoch is often characterized as the beginning of the Empire of Japan, during which time the country made a transition from an isolated feudal society to a modern nation-state organized under a single, national government. With this stated, the primary catalyst for such an extreme transition according to historian John Boyle, was arguably the most defining event of the late-Tokugawa period, the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, of the United States Navy.[60]

In the year 1852, Commodore Perry was chosen for a diplomatic mission in Japan that intended to open Japanese ports to American trade. He would arrive in the year 1853,

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 813.
[58] Boyle, *Modern Japan: The American Nexus*, 80.
[59] Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia*, 624.
[60] Boyle, *Modern Japan: The American Nexus*, 128.

to the scene of a land with "no transportation faster than a horse, no telegraphy, no ocean-going vessels, no modern factories, no universities, no steam engines, and [most notably] no forges capable of casting cannon."[61] Although the land's period of collective isolation did not lead to the cultural ruin or economic stagnation for Japan, an overshadowing side-effect – as Perry's visit clearly highlighted – of the strict foreign policy weighed down all of Japan: they "had been bypassed by the scientific revolution going on in Europe" led by those who traditional Japanese wisdom considers to be barbarians from whom nothing of worth could be learned.[62] Using this – as well as the intimidating presence of a number of other, technologically superior, Western – to his advantage, Perry was able to make some considerable headway in his dealing across the Pacific Ocean, which proved costly for the archipelago. Furthermore, in the wake of his mission the United States and other Western powers forcibly coerced Japan into a series of unequal treaties which crafted semicolonial ties with Japan, leading finally to severe defiance by some of the daimyos, the restoration of the Emperor's rule and the close of over two centuries of peace and isolation under the Tokugawa Shogunate. Perhaps most importantly however, this time marks the beginning of a terrible domestic crisis in Japan, triggered by foreign powers, which demanded even "more radical change at home and more open attitude toward the outside world" from the an emerging Japanese nation-state.[63]

In the years directly following Perry's mission, Japan's primary objective was "to concentrate all of [its] resources and energies on domestic rebuilding," and subsequently, drastically revolutionizing the country's "political, economic, educational…military" and

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[61] Ibid, 75.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 76.

most relevantly, agricultural institutions.[64] All of this furthermore, was to be done in their attempt to modernize, industrialize and fortify a national empire – through social reform, and the employment of 'successful' technology – in the hope that this will help Japan to achieve its most urgent, foreign policy goal, "the revision of the unequal treaty system in order to break the semicolonial ties forced on Japan by Western powers."[65] Undertaking this, though, meant Japan needed to take full advantage of its natural resources to support its nation-building process. In consequence the nation was faced with the daunting task of revisiting the accepted, traditional beliefs in an effort to refashion their approach to nature nation-wide, to resemble a more Western, Christian-inspired approach. The result was the considerable reorganization of Shinto.[66]

Shinto in Japan

Shinto – "or *kannagara no michi*, literally 'the way of the deities'"[67] – is Japan's indigenous religion that developed in the 6th century from the combination of the nation's traditional spiritualities, and progressively "took shape as an organized religion under the influence of Buddhism and Chinese culture,"[68] becoming its own, exclusive religion after following its distillation from both Confucian and Buddhist teachings in the 18th century,

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[64] Ibid, 128.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Rosemarie Bernard, " Shinto and Ecology: Practice and Orientations to Nature," *The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*, accessed March 9, 2015, http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/shinto/.
[67] Ibid.
[68] H. Byron Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations; Second Addition* (Belmont, C.A.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), 6.

through a process of "Purification."[69] The religion focuses on ritualistic practice aimed at maintaining a connection with Japan's ancient past, as well as the worship of kami, which refer to the divinity or sacred essence that manifest itself in many distinct forms, "[r]ocks, trees, rivers, animals, places, and even people" – stressing the interconnectedness, which humanity is believed to have with nature.[70] One of the most recognized of these kami – as Boyle indicates – were the emperors of Japan that, though human and alive, were thought to "stand above ordinary humans as awesome figures who trace their ancestry back to the Sun Goddess."[71] It did not prove too difficult in consequence for the Meiji government to effectively centralize and reorganize Shinto "according to a hierarchy that brought even the smallest outlying Shinto shrines within the fold of state administration, [and] with the emperor…at the center."[72]

There to assist in this process was *haibutsu kishaku* (literally, "against the Buddha and against Shaka [Shakyamuni]"), which was a Japanese "religious reform movement in the…early Meiji period…that aimed to place Shinto shrines completely beyond the grasp of Buddhism and to promote Shinto as the state religion."[73] The religious movement was inspired by the vested interest that Buddhism as an institution had placed in the shogunate system during the Tokugawa period, which ultimately made the religion a suitable target for all parties that had worked for the downfall of the shogunate and the restoration of the Emperor. Accordingly it would go on to lead to the demolition of some Buddhist temples,

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[69] Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 101.
[70] Stuart D. B. Picken, *Essentials of Shinto: An Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), xxii.
[71] Boyle, *Modern Japan: The American Nexus*, 75.
[72] Rosemarie Bernard, " Shinto and Ecology: Practice and Orientations to Nature," *The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*, accessed March 9, 2015, http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/shinto/.
[73] Nussbaum, *Japan Encyclopedia*, 276.

"notably in Kyushu, but never took on the scope of a true persecutory movement"[74] And, it ended with the effective parting of Buddhism and state Shinto and the reorganization of both religions so that the former was forced to adapt to Japan's modern landscape and the latter became a tool of the emperor and the state.

As a result, the elements of Japan's 'pagan' – as White designates – or indigenous religion that were not directly related to animism were subjected to, "a great deal of overt state influence and control as the Japanese government systematically used [the religion's practice of] shrine worship as a major force for mobilizing imperial loyalties on behalf of modern nation-building."[75] Subsequently, what once inspired the worship of nature was now engaged by the state to evoke its exploitation. And, what would soon follow was the destruction of the nation's environment that "gradually increased to such proportions that the archipelago came to stages of severe environmental degradation several times, only to be barely saved by systematic, usually centrally managed, programs of reforestation," and cleanup.[76]

Considering this progression, I concede – to the credit of White – that it certainly seems like Christianity must be the reason for Japan's gradual adoption of an exploitative relationship with nature, given that the religions' disregard of pagan animism mirrors that of Japan's, during the very period in which the nation began to open itself up to Western influences. However, in the case of Japan, Shinto – in spite of the nation's use of foreign technology and ideas like modernization and industrialization, together with a culture that emerged from Christianity – was used to fit the nation's exploitative, national agenda, not

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Wilbur Fridell, "A Fresh Look at State Shinto," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. vol. 44, no. 3 (1976): 548.

[76] Rosemarie Bernard, " Shinto and Ecology: Practice and Orientations to Nature," *The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*, accessed March 9, 2015, http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/shinto/.

Christianity. And yet, Japan ultimately came to have a similar, manipulative relationship to that which the West came to adopt nearly 1700 years earlier.[77] Perhaps the most noted difference though was that it was G_D who 'endorsed' the Western exploitation of nature and it was the Emperor – serving as 'acting deity' – that supported it in Japan. That being said, the next logical alternative explanation then is to assume that perhaps westernization is what led to this development in Japan; but such an explanation fails to answer why the exploitation of nature initially began in the West. With this said, I do agree that religious components contributed to both an increasingly exploitative attitude and treatment toward nature in Japan; however, I disagree that this motive was Christianity. For the true motive for the country's increasing exploitation of nature furthermore, is their collective desire to better ensure own, 'self-preservation,' an essential part of every religion including Christianity and – in the of Japan case – Shinto. And, in an attempt to support this claim, I will now employ a brief summary of Durkheim's work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, for corroboration*

Durkheim's Take on the Elementary Form of Religion

A sociologist by profession and reductionist by nature, the context of Durkheim's work is fashioned around his belief that the only way to truly, and holistically understand, as he phrases it, anything "human at a specific moment in time—[particularly] a religious belief," one must begin by defining it – which in this case is religion, or "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things…set apart and forbidden" – and then one

[77] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

must look "back to its simplest and most primitive form."[78] Driven by an assumption that this 'elementary form' provides a lens, through which one can see the origins and internal mechanics of religion past and present moreover, he took it upon himself to both observe, and analyze Australia's indigenous religious traditions. From these observations, he formed the base on which his claim of universally applied thoughts on the role and the purpose of religion rest firmly upon.

Totemism according to Durkheim – which is the Aboriginal religion that he chose to observe – embodies every essential aspect of religion, including its lynchpin: a division of "things into sacred and profane;"[79] meaning, that the "primitive" faith is comparable to the more sophisticated, "civilized" religions dominating the West, and the pagan religions in the East as well.[80] This stated, further evidence of their likeness and perhaps their most important correlation, is the totem – Totemism's central, sacred symbol, and the object of its practitioners' affection – which he claims is a basic form of the central, sacred symbol in every religion.

As Durkheim claims, the totem – like all religions' sacred symbols – is an abstract representation for society and the product of the social environment, which follows when one member of a society comes to realize that he can survive, but as a lone individual, he cannot[81] – a notion that is quite familiar to the Catholic faith which claims that a human's "innermost nature…is a social being, for from the beginning 'male and female He created them'…[and unless] they relate to others, persons can neither fully live nor develop their

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[78] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 3.
[79] Ibid, iii.
[80] Ibid, xxii.
[81] Ibid, xli.

potential."[82] As Durkheim goes on to explicate, the subsequent sense of interdependency, that the individual experiences in society after this realization is nurtured as he continues to draw strength and culture from it; and as a result he seeks out a target toward which he, and other members of society can gather and express their elation and appreciation for the safety that society – what ultimately amounts the community's god – provides. The totem – in the form of kami inhabiting nature, or the emperor – furthermore, is the target. In the words of Durkheim moreover, "[the totem] expresses and symbolizes two different things …from one point of view, it is the outward and visible form of…the totemic principle or god; and from another, it is also the symbol of a particular society that is called a clan."[83] Noting this, the ritual activity of collectively aiming praise and humble adherence toward both 'the god' and the symbol of society creates effervescence – according to Durkheim – or a bubbling-up that brings about a feeling of identity and of belonging in which profane individuals utterly lose themselves in the electricity generated by the social sacredness of the community in which they subsist.[84]

With this understood, this vast symbolic system which, as Durkheim states, makes religious and social life possible by expressing and maintaining the sentiments and values of the society is universal to all cultures – including Japan's following the emergence of state Shinto in the early Meiji period, after the haibutsu kishaku.[85] For all religions, as he claims, are complex, social functions that unite profane individuals through shared beliefs and practices into a sacred community; thus allowing the self to converge with others and self-preservation to become community preservation. For this reason, the purpose behind

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[82] Bernard V. Brady, *Essential Catholic Social Thought*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 117.
[83] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, xxxv.
[84] Ibid, xli.
[85] Ibid, 233.

all human practice of a religion, East or West, ancient of modern, is invariably social and contingent on the existence and preservation of a 'social self.' To put it simply moreover, the 'driving-force' behind a religion – in particular, the separation between the sacred and the profane as well as the worship or totems – is the product of society's collective 'self-preservation' or perhaps more precisely the preservation of the safety and identity that the community provides the individuals who take part in it.

Conclusions

Taking Durkheim's argument into consideration, I deduce that this driving-force behind religion has formed tension – between Japan's collective desire to better ensure its preservation and to maintain the sacred, social and religious symbols of this preservation, despite the fact that it would stifle the ability for the nation to continue to ensure its own preservation – which helped to facilitate the societal shift in Japan's approach to nature, following Commodore Perry's visit to Japan and during the Meiji Period. For, without this collective move away from a harmonious approach to nature – which was inspired by their traditional, animistic Shinto beliefs – Japan would have stood at a considerably disadvantaged position relative to the more industrialized Christian-backed Western powers that were threatening Japan's sovereignty with the unequal treaty system and had no hesitations about exploiting nature for their benefit. The Meiji government, in consequence, reorganized Shinto to emphasize the emperor's position as the nation's central totem, their god, as well as "the symbol and fulcrum of cultural identity and…homogeneity;" thus, effectively sacralizing the emperor and subsequently

profaning nature so as to justify its exploitation.[86] In short, Christianity was not the motive of the nation's increasingly exploitative attitude and treatment toward nature; the true motive for the exploitation is its collective desire to better ensure its own self-preservation, which was ultimately sanctioned by a function of the elementary form of religion.

In closing it is worth reiterating that I hold that Japan's motive for the exploitation of nature – what appeared according to White, to be Christianity – was nothing more than self-preservation: the rational sentiment that lay at the root of every religion. It should also be noted that I do not condone this exploitation; rather a simply hope to have explained why it happened. And, perhaps with this knowledge, a clearer understanding of Japan's abandonment of its harmonious approach to nature will be brought to light; an understanding, which not only provides an accountable explanation for the country's pattern of mistreatment for all to learn from Japan's example – an element that is noticeably absent from White's claim – but also threatens to fade into the backdrop of Christianity should it not be embraced.

[86] Harry Harootunian, *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. Peter Van Der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 159.

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