

# ***Comparative Analysis of Church-State Relations in Poland and Japan***

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**Abstract:** The problem of religious beliefs and their communities has been a very controversial topic throughout human history. In modern states, most governments adopted the Western idea of separating the churches and the governments. Under the development of globalization, the Eastern states, like the states in East Asia, also followed this trend. This thesis compares and contrasts the church-politic relationship of Poland and Japan to show the similarities and differences between the Western and Eastern countries on the separation of the Churches and States. The thesis compares this topic from the angles of churches and the government's attitudes toward each other and the churches in the judiciary of these two states. It ends up with the idea that Poland states their secular position in the world but still has a close relationship between the Catholic Church and the government. Even though the Japanese government has a vague relationship between the Shinto and Buddhist communities, it still strictly performs the separation of churches and states in public. The research may provide a view for Western scholars and government to encourage them to put down the idea of Orientalism and get experiences from the Eastern World about the religion topic.

**Keywords:** European studies, Asian studies, religion studies, comparative analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Throughout history, human beings have continuously encountered the unknown. When people are facing things that they cannot use their knowledge to explain, they tend to rely on supernatural beings, so religion is born. With millions of years of development, religion now is not only about supernatural beings. It combines multiple aspects, such as community and identity. Compared with the modern patterns of government, religion is like an antique from centuries ago. However, religion is still closely linked to the political aspects in the Eastern and Western parts of the world.

This essay analyzes the relationship between politics and religion in the Eastern and Western world by comparing Poland and Japan's situation. According to the most recent data from Statistics Poland, more than 96% of the population is committed to a church or a religious association. With the long history of Catholic church development, Poland can be one of the most representative states in secular Europe to study the Church-politic relationship. In East Asia, which is more than 8000 kilometers from Poland, Japan is becoming increasingly religious. According to the data collected by the CIA World Factbook and the NHK research, the religious affiliated population is over 60% of their population, and the number keeps growing over time, making Japan the most religious-affiliated country in East Asia compared with China and Korea peninsula. However, most Japanese do not

believe in a specific religion even though they practice the religious tradition and attend affiliated communities. This situation makes Japan a state worth research on its Church-politic relationship.

For the definition of religion in this essay, since most of the patterns of religion are developed from the Western world, like the World Religious Paradigm, they have too many limits in defining Eastern religious beliefs. Therefore, this essay only focuses on the most popular religious beliefs that satisfy four essential features of religion, which are belief, mythology, practices, and community, to cover most of the religious beliefs in the Eastern and Western world. In Poland and Japan, the religion that meets the standard is Catholicism, Buddhism, and Shinto.

## **2. Church-Politic Relationship in Poland after WWII**

For the History of the Republic of Poland after the Second World War, it is easy to divide into two parts by its political regime. The first part is the Communist part. In 1944, the Red Army of the Soviet Union marched into the Polish territory and liberated Poland by defeating all Nazi invaders in early 1945. In the Yalta Conference of February 1945, the United States and Great Britain admitted the political control of Poland by the Soviet Union. From then on, Poland fully adopted the Soviet type of Communism in their political regime and combined all their political parties into one PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza) party.

Under the Control of Communism, the Church-politic relationship in Poland went into a conflict and contradictory situation. The Communist government took away nearly all the power and performed secular reform in Poland to get rid of the effect of the church in the public aspects. However, since the influence of the Catholic Church on Polish people is deeply rooted, it is impossible to eradicate its community. On the contrary, the government also needs the influence of the Catholic Church to govern their people, so even though the Communist government strictly limits the power of the church, it still has a relatively high level of autonomy compared to other states that use the Soviet model of Communism [1].

In 1956, a fierce workers' movement broke out in Poznan, Poland. The workers united, asked for lower taxation, and improved their working conditions and payment. However, the PZPR ignored the workers' demands and turned this peaceful protest into a violent uprising. This uprising had an extremely negative effect on the government among the Polish people, so to restore the reputation of the PZPR, the government chose to rely on the influence of the Polish Catholic Church. The PZPR offered to send a representative to communicate with the church and promised them terms like autonomy, restoration of publication of Religious books, and education in schools [2]. With the help of the church, PZPR resolved the domestic conflicts. However, after the Poznan uprising, the government was afraid of the rapid growth of the Catholic community, and limits and restrictions were put on the Catholic church again.

In the 44 years of Communism in Poland, the Church-Politic relationship experienced constant conflicts and cooperation. In 1980, the Solidarity Party unified people from different social classes who wanted to change the Soviet model of political regime in Poland. The Solidarity Party grew rapidly in the 1980s. It defeated the PZPR in the election of 1989, and the Republic of Poland changed from a Communist government into a democratic government in the same year. From this time, the second part of the Polish history has begun.

In the Solidarity movement, the involvement of the Catholic Church played an important role. Even though the Solidarity movement is mainly economic and political, the church in the 1980s can be considered as the heart of the mobilization [3]. The Polish Catholic Church represented the national identity of Poland, and it is also a symbol against the Soviet Communist government. It also provides help for the members of the Solidarity and uses its influence to gain a large number of supporters.

After 1989, because of the church's central role in the Solidarity movement and the establishment of the new democratic government, the church's power increased rapidly in Poland. In the same year,

a law was passed that aimed to grant the church various exemptions from taxation, and two years later, the Law of Relationship with the Catholic Church was amended and permitted the church to act beyond the frame of the Constitution [4]. In contemporary Poland, the church still has great power in its influence and close relationship with political aspects. This article analyzes the reason for this type of Church-politic relationship from the aspects of church, government, and laws.

## **2.1. Church's Power to the Polish Government**

After the solidarity movement, the domestic status of the Church in Poland greatly increased compared to the Communist period, partially due to the change of political regime. In the political aspect, even though the Church declares that they are neutral in the election without supporting any specific political party, they still strictly define the value of the candidates and support the idea that matches the Catholic value [5].

In the election of 1991, the bishops of the Polish Catholic announced at the conference of the Catholic Church that the believers should vote for the candidates whose ideas matched the values and beliefs of the Christian community. After the announcement by the bishops, some local churches even provided their believers with a list of parties they needed to vote for, and some right-wing electoral committees used the churches that supported them for the campaign [5]. In the election of 1993, the Polish Catholic Church officially attended the political election by establishing a Catholic Electoral Committee.

Even though these efforts were made, the right-wing conservative party supported by the Church did not win the elections of these two years. It even caused conflicts inside and outside the Catholic Church, and the general public doubted the leading position of the Church in the political area. So, in the election of 1997, the Churches adopted a more reserved strategy. The bishops called on every citizen in Poland to be active in voting and declared they would not connect the value of Christianity with specific political parties [5]. However, they added that they were only dissatisfied with the policies made by the United Party of Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasants Party, the governing party at that time [2]. It seems that the Catholic Church stayed neutral in the election. Still, the general public stills listened to the advice made by the bishops. They avoided voting for the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasants Party, which was what the Catholic Church expected. At the end of the election, the United Party of Christian-Democratic Solidarity Electoral Action and the Liberal Freedom Union got the most seats in the parliament. The Church is satisfied with this result, and from here, the Church's voice in the Polish election became one of the leading factors for the public to vote and for political parties to win the seats.

It is hard to say that the Catholic Church fully controls the Polish elections' voting system. They only focus on the Christian moral sphere in the elections, as they always advocated before. However, since their strong influence and authority among the Polish people, they do lead the people's vote.

## **2.2. Polish Government's Communication to the Church**

The Polish government, since 1989, has kept an ambiguous attitude toward the Catholic Church, similar to the Communist government. The government wants to respond to the European Union's call and teach its members about the separation of government and Church. However, in practice, since the power of the Polish Catholic Church in the elections, the government's policy-making and public affairs are still highly influenced by the Catholic Church.

After Poland successfully changed their political regime in 1989, one of the most popular political problems about religion was the issue of religious education in schools left during the Communist period. During the period of Communism, the religious education in schools was intermittent. When the government needed to use the influence of the Church to solve public issues, they started to

recover religious education. Still, the Communist government resisted removing religious beliefs from public affairs, including schools. On the contrary, the Catholic Church in Poland has never given up on bringing religion back to schools. With the drastic rise in the political status of the Catholic Church in Poland after 1989, the Church took this opportunity and started long debates with the government. With continuous pressure from the Catholic Church, the government signed the decree and returned religious education to public elementary, elementary, middle, and high schools in 1990 [4].

From 1990 to 1992, the government experienced multiple debates about the future of religious education in Poland. The government built a special committee for this topic to prevent the debates from extending to the general public or being restricted in Congress [2]. In 1992, the new Minister of Education increased the number of religious courses in schools and allowed religious belief elements to appear in public schools [2]. For the religious education topic, since the Catholic Church has already blended into the national identity of Poland after the control of religious study during the Communist period, the Church and the public had a strong will for the recovery of the religious course in schools. However, opening up the religious course will encourage more young people to become loyal to the Church and further expand their influence to the larger groups in Poland. This thesis suggests that it is the situation that the Polish government wants to avoid since the more influence of the Church, the Church can affect the elections and other public affairs that the government should administrate. With the unlimited expansion of the Church's influence, the politicians may also rely more on the Church for election, which creates a cycle that continuously reduces the power of the secular government and increases the authority of the Catholic Church.

In February 2022, Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. During the Ukrainian War, Poland became the focus of the Ukrainian refugees. According to the UNHCR, about 6.3 million refugees were received by Poland [6]. The Polish government quickly responded with a new bill, Act on Aid for Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of Ukraine, including providing jobs and financial aid and establishing new special funds in state budgets for aiding Ukrainian refugees [7].

Before the Polish government, the Polish Catholic Church first took action when the Archbishop announced the aid from the Church to the Ukrainian refugees. Every parish of Poland responded to the Archbishop and helped the refugees during the wartime. At this moment, the Catholic Churches and the government became interdependent. At the beginning of the Ukrainian War, the government had already received many refugees. Still, the government needed systemic solutions before the act of aiding Ukrainians came out [7]. The Church took the leading position of helping these refugees and sent volunteers to ensure the basic living conditions of the refugees. After the government took action to help the refugees, they still relied on the volunteers from different parishes, which formed a situation in which the government provided funds and the Churches provided volunteers. From the Ukrainian War, we still see the powerful influence of the Catholic Church in Poland after more than 30 years since 1989 and the close cooperation between the government and the Church.

### **2.3. The Church in Judiciary of Poland**

Besides the police making, the control of the Catholic Church also appears in the legislation. Secular legislation examines the stage of the division of politics and religion in a state. Poland claims that it is a secular democratic state, but it has church-overseeing Laws.

One of the most controversial events of the Church in the legislation is the debates on the Anti-abortion law. In the Catholic idea, abortion is another word for murder. They think that unborn babies are still considered as life and abortion is to kill this young life. The debates about abortion happen in many states worldwide, like the Roe v. Wade movement in the United States, which is also led by

religious communities. The debates about abortion gradually developed into debates of religious values and human rights, and they became more severe in Poland.

In 1956, the Communist government allowed women to perform abortions. The Catholic Church strongly opposed it, but the Communist government ignored all the voices that came from the religious communities. After the solidarity movement, the Church again took advantage of influence to restart the debates on abortion law. In 1991, the government wanted to use voting to decide the result of the debate. The Church again opposed the government's action and, using speeches and many sermons across the country, stopped people from voting for the abortion law [2]. By continuously using the Church's influence to put pressure on the legislation, the legislative passed the anti-abortion law in 1993, which strictly restricts abortion by adding multiple conditions for abortion. The Church had a phase of victory on the anti-abortion, but they still wanted to expand and created a completely anti-abortion law. Finally, in 1997, under the great pressure of the Catholic Church, a stricter anti-abortion law was passed by the legislative, which removed more conditions that allowed women to perform abortions [2]. The Polish Catholic Church successfully brought their value into the legislative segment of the country, which marked a tighter government control by the Church.

After the debates about the abortion law, in 1997, the new Constitution of the Republic of Poland was ratified. In drafting the Constitution, the Polish government collaborated with all different social groups in the states, including the Catholic Church. The involvement of the Church in drafting the Constitution is quite normal, especially in states like Poland, where the Catholic Church has a high position in public. Article 25 mentions the relationship between the Church and the government. This article, "The relationship between the State and churches and other religious organizations shall be based on the principle of respect for their autonomy and the mutual independence of each in its sphere, as well as on the principle of cooperation for the individual and the common good" [8]. It shows the secular position of the Polish government by showing the attitude to separation of the states and the religious organization. However, the word "churches" here specifically points to the Catholic Church which can be a metaphor of emphasizing the special position of Catholic Church in Poland. Also, Article 25 mentions: "The relations between the Republic of Poland and the Roman Catholic Church shall be determined by international treaty concluded with the Holy See, and by statute" [8]. It proves the special position of the Catholic Church in Poland. It uses a vague expression to state the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Republic of Poland, which the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church decides. Both quotations cryptically state that the Catholic Church in Poland has a special position in society, and its relationship with the state is also affected by the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican.

### **3. Church-Politics Relationship in Japan after WWII**

Compared with Poland, even though Japan can be considered the most religious-affiliated state in East Asia, it still has strict separation policies between the church and the public area. The Second World War officially ended with Japan signing the surrender documents on the USS Missouri in 1945. During the postwar period, Japan was occupied by the United States for seven years. With the help of the United States, Japan overthrew most of the systems set during wartime. The scale of change is nearly as large as the political regime change in Poland in 1989. During this change, Japan also reformed its attitude toward religious beliefs.

During wartime, Japan modified its Religious Organization Law. Even though the Prime Minister claimed that the modification of the Religious Organization Law was to protect the equal development of all the religious communities in the state, in practice, the modification greatly enhanced the social status of Shinto. It renamed it "State Shinto (Kokka Shinto)," which linked the Shinto with the populism in Japan and made Shinto the State Religion [9]. Therefore, after 1945, the



government abolished the Religious Organization Law, ratified the Religious Corporation Act, and added the Shinto Directive Law to abolish the State Shinto. The Religious Corporation Act, just as its name, made the religious groups in Japan corporations. Under this act, the religious groups required certification by a series of rules set by the government, and every religious group needed a corporation to ensure its legitimacy. This act shows that all of the religious communities in Japan need to be supervised and managed by the government.

After ratifying the Religious Corporation Act in 1946, the Japanese government ratified the New Japanese Constitution. The Constitution specified the government's attitude toward religion that the government should strictly perform the separation of religion and politics and respect the freedom of religious beliefs of the citizens. The attitude of the Judiciary in Japan, shown by these two laws, is completely different from that of Poland. In Poland, the Catholic Church was protected and recognized by the Constitution, and the Catholic Church can use its power of influence to control the legislation. However, the Japanese government strictly prohibited religion from interfering in politics and set rules to oversee and manage the religious communities after the Second World War.

The effort made by the Japanese government made Japan a comparatively secular state to the states like Poland. It still needs to get rid of religion politically fully. The Buddhist and Shinto groups have the largest size among all the religious communities in Japan. Unlike people in Western countries who could only believe in one religion and join only one religious community, the Japanese people do not like to declare their religious beliefs and attend multiple religious communities. With the strong influence of these two religious groups, they have an ambiguous relationship with the government.

### **3.1. The Religion's Attitude to the Japanese Government: Case of Soka Gakkai**

The religious communities of Buddhism in Japan have been divided into multiple groups. Among all of these Buddhist communities, the one that has the closest relationship to the government is the group of Soka Gakkai (創価学会).

The Soka Gakkai was a religious community based on the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism(日蓮正宗), which is a minority branch of Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra. Makiguchi Tsunesaburo and Toda Josei first founded it. Both of them were in an elementary school. Makiguchi was the principal, and Toda was his employee. Makiguchi was highly influenced by the idea proposed by the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. He combined Buddhism with his educational ideas as a scholar and an educator. He completed a volume of a treatise called Soka Kyoikugaku taikei, translated as System of Value-Creating Educational Study. The word "Soka" means Value-Creating, which is the goal of life in Makiguchi's idea. The treatise was published by Toda in 1930 and established the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creation Education Study Association) [10]. The association soon gathered many educators who also believed in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

However, during the Second World War, Japan was armed by the State Shinto and put 21 association members, including Makiguchi and Toda, into jail, and Makiguchi died in prison. Toda was bailed before the surrender of Imperial Japan, reestablished the association, and named the Soka Gakkai. With the surrender of Imperial Japan and the collapse of the State Shinto, Toda, as the president and corporation of the association, started gathering a large number of members and promoting the Nichiren Shoshu to become a state religion. Toda preached about bringing peace to the world and saving the Japanese in danger. In 1955, the Soka Gakkai officially started intervening in politics by sending committees to Congress and wanted to combine the politics of Buddhism. After the election, Soka Gakkai won 3 seats in the Congress and continuously enlarged in the next few years [9].

After the death of Toda in 1958, the third president, Ikeda Daisaku, continued developing the idea of Toda and established the Clean Government Party (Komeito) and won seats in the House of

Representatives. Ikeda combined the idea of Soka Gakkai into the idea of the Clean Government Party and provided many votes to the Clean Government Party by the Soka Gakkai [11]. In the 1970s, the Clean Government actively collaborated with the Liberal Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party. Ikeda and Soka Gakkai also promoted the normalization of diplomacy between Japan and China by advising Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, who was from the Liberal Democratic Party.

In the 1990s, President Ikeda weakened the religious expression in their political idea and changed it into expressions like humanism or contribution to the world in order to separate the religious elements from the party [9], but the Clean Government Party still received many votes from the Soka Gakkai and continuously performed the secular political movement and washed all the elements of religion away. With the large number of voting brought by the influence of Soka Gakkai and tight collaboration with the Liberal Democratic Party, the Clean Government Party maintains a solid political status [9].

The case of Soka Gakkai and its relationship with the Clean Government Party represents the religious communities' specific attitude toward the government. There is a strong desire for religious groups to participate and intervene in politics. Still, due to the strict religious separation laws set by the Japanese Constitution and the Religious Corporation Act, if the political party that the religious group supports needs to maintain its status in the political aspect, it needs to complete the secular transformation and get rid of the elements of the religious beliefs. It is a completely different attitude compared with Poland. In Poland, the Catholic Church controls the idea of the political party with its influence and votes, so if a political party wants to win the election, it needs to rely on the Catholic Church and show its Christian value to the public, which is an exact opposite situation to the Japanese religious groups.

### **3.2. Government's Attitude to Religion: Case of Shinto and Yasukuni Shrine**

The separation of religion and politics is performed strictly by the Japanese Constitution. However, in the 21st century, multiple Prime Ministers of Japan did not get rid of the Shinto elements during their administration, which is different from the case of the Clean Government Party. In the 21st century, a trend of reviving the State of Shinto started to appear in the Japanese government, making the relationship between Shinto and the Japanese government controversial.

The Yasukuni Shrine is one of Japan's most famous Shinto shrines in the Kudan District of Tokyo. Because of its close relationship with the emperor families of Japan and the State Shinto movement in the Second World War, the status of the Yasukuni Shrine has always been very high in the Shinto community. It has become the core of the State Shinto [12]. After the Second World War, the Yasukuni Shrine was given the new job of memorizing the death in the war. This change made the Yasukuni Shrine controversial, especially among the East Asian States.

First, the Yasukuni Shrine enshrined multiple high-rank war criminals during the Second World War in 1959, and the number of glorified war criminals continuously rose in the next few years. It shows an attitude of the Japanese government that wants to legitimize the crimes of Imperial Japan by transforming the war criminals into deities, which is a rejection of the Tokyo War Crime Tribunal [12]. The other controversy is that it violates the Japanese Constitution of the separation of religion and the state where the Prime Ministers visited and sponsored a Shinto Shrine.

To deal with the conflict between the public visiting the Yasukuni Shrine and the separation of religion and the state, the government led by the Liberal Democratic Party has made a great effort. In 1946, the Yasukuni Shrine got government certification according to the Religious Corporation Act, which recognized the legitimacy of its position as a sacred site for Shinto. The Congress claimed that the visit of the Prime Minister and the sponsor by the Liberal Democratic Party to a legitimate religious sacred site was a violation of the Constitution. The Liberal Democratic Party also uses the

Constitution to fight back and ensures the freedom of belief for the citizens. It defines the visit by the Prime Minister as a “Private action” instead of an official visit [12]. Also, the Liberal Democratic Party stated that their visit was not for religious purposes. Instead, they were doing it with the purpose of Humanism only for mourning the dead in the war [12]. Even though these statements were made, the government was still criticized by different groups in Japanese society and states like China and North and South Korea. Nevertheless, under heavy pressure, the Japanese government still insists on the tradition of visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, which has a political purpose.

Many Scholars in Japan claim that the Prime Minister’s official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine has the merit that the visit will enhance the National Defense [12]. It means that the visit is an action to remember and learn from the idea of the people who sacrificed in the war for the national interest. It can increase the willingness to strengthen the national defense force and make more people join the Japanese Self-defense Force. From this perspective, the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine was to raise the populist idea in the minds of the Japanese people to strengthen the armed forces of Japan, which is almost the same idea as the State Shinto movement. The Liberal Democratic Party later confirmed this view. In the election of 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party put forward a slogan of “Nihon Wo Torimodese,” which means to take back the strong and proud Japan [13]. After the surrender in the Second World War, Japan was strictly restricted by the allied states like the United States in its military and economy. The Japanese government always wants to take back their autonomy. With the decision made by Prime Minister Abe to expand the Japan Self-Defense Force in the 2010s, it is easy to see the ultimate political aim of the Right-wing Liberal Democratic government is to take back national pride and autonomy through strong armed force. Therefore, the visit to Yasukuni Shrine or the Shinto religious communities is used as a tool for the Right-wing government to raise populism in Japan to achieve political goal. It is also different from the situation in Poland that even though both Poland and Japan emphasize religion as their national identity, the Catholic Church uses the Polish government to achieve their religious goal. Still, the Japanese government is using religious beliefs to achieve political goals.

#### 4. Conclusion

Both the Poland and Japan cases show the close relationship between politics and religion, whether in the Eastern or Western countries. However, the case study shows a sharp contrast in the attitude toward dealing with the religious and political relationships in the Eastern and Western World. In Poland, the government claims that the Republic of Poland is a secular country with a separation of religion and state, but the position of the Catholic Church is absolute. The Church was recognized and protected by the Constitution after 1989, and its strong influence among the Polish people made it control the ideas and values of the political party. The government in Poland also needs to rely on the Catholic Church to maintain its political position.

On the contrary, the situation in Japan is completely different. The Constitution and the Religious Corporation Act ensure the separation of religion and state is strictly implemented, and the government has the right to manage and supervise the religious communities. Even though there are cases in which religious groups want to intervene in politics, like the Soka Gakkai and the Clean Government Party, they need to eliminate the effect of religious beliefs to keep their position in the political segment. What’s more, the Japanese government uses religious beliefs as a tool to achieve its political goals, like the Right-wing Liberal Democratic Party and the Shinto community.

The idea of secularism and the separation of Church and state was first proposed in the Reformation movement in the 16th century, and it was highly emphasized in the Western World. However, many Western countries, like the Republic of Poland, are still dominated by religious communities. In the Eastern World, states like Japan keep a secular government that aligns with Western values. In the context of globalization and the trend of secularizing the states, the Western



World should give up its stereotypes and Orientalism toward the Eastern World and try to get experience in dealing with the Church-Politic relationship from the Eastern States.

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