

Fact Sheet:

Karma and Punishment: Prison Chaplaincy in Japan
Graduate Student Grant, Adam Lyons
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Project Description and Goals:

My dissertation analyzed prison chaplaincy (*kyōkai*) in Japan from the Meiji period (1868-1912) to the present day focusing on the chaplaincy activities of Jōdo Shinshū (commonly referred to as Shin Buddhism), Christian sects, and Tenrikyō. The sources for this study were drawn from archival research, interviews with chaplains, and site visits to prisons and religious institutions. This study draws on theoretical insights arising from recent scholarship on the legal construction of religion as an object of governance. I argued that religionists have historically played an enormous role in articulating 1.) conceptions of the human and 2.) frameworks of moral responsibility that have become foundational to correctional theory and practice in Japan. I employed the methods of discourse analysis, institutional history, and legal anthropology to reveal how religious concepts and practices are simultaneously concealed and perpetuated under the structuring influence of secular law.

Methodology:

This dissertation was based on data drawn from archival research and fieldwork conducted in Japan in the summers of 2011, 2012, 2013, and during an extended period of fieldwork from June of 2014 until August of 2016. The primary archival materials included texts produced by the National Chaplains' Union (*Zenkoku Kyōkaishi Renmei*) and sectarian publications. In addition to secondary literature, I read chaplaincy manuals, how-to guides, case books, and vocational journals written for the chaplaincy. I conducted formal interviews with twenty-seven chaplains in the Tokyo and Kansai areas and benefited from countless conversations and informal social gatherings with many more members of chaplains' unions over two years. During my extended research trip, I participated in chaplains' study retreats (in Tokyo, Kyoto, Tenri, and Mt. Kōya) and joined the monthly meetings of the editorial board for the new edition of the standard chaplains' manual held at the National Chaplains' Union Office in Tokyo. Finally, I visited chaplains in their temples and churches in Tokyo, Saitama, and Chiba, and I observed chaplaincy sessions in four Tokyo area correctional facilities (Kawagoe Juvenile Prison, Fuchū Prison, Tachikawa Jail, and Tokyo Jail). The primary bibliography is composed of sources from the archives of Jōdo Shinshū at Ryūkoku University, Tenrikyō at Tenri University, the National Library of Corrections in Tokyo (*Kyōsei Toshokan*), and typically non-circulating sectarian training materials received directly from chaplains of various affiliations.

In conducting archival research and interviews, particular attention has been paid to the role of some key concepts that roughly fall into four categories: 1.) visions of morality and interpretations of crime; 2.) conceptions of personhood and the role of religion in the Good life, 3.) articulations of formal responsibilities of the chaplaincy, and 4.) statements of the religious or existential meaning of the work of chaplaincy itself. Interview questions addressed a range of issues including the chaplains' individual biographies, training, responsibilities, chaplain-client relationships, relationships with prison staff and other chaplains, opinions about the role of

religion in society and the history of chaplaincy, and beliefs about the efficacy of chaplaincy and religion as means of character reform. During site visits, I paid particular attention to chaplain-client interactions, rituals, texts used during chaplaincy sessions, and the content of sermons.

Results:

The debate on secularization in contemporary Japan tends to overlook fundamental continuities in the relations between religions and state that the modern, secular nation inherits from past regimes. My project, *Karma and Punishment: Prison Chaplaincy in Japan*, reframes this discussion by analyzing both historically and ethnographically the role of religious doctrines and practices in structuring the ethos and the practices of one of the paradigmatic institutions of the modern state—the prison. I found that religious doctrines and practices have influenced the development of the ethos of the correctional system as well as its rehabilitative methods, and that such influence is pervasive in the prison system today. At the same time, religious sects have tailored their services to the needs of prisons by interpreting crime and its effects as religious issues flowing from spiritual disharmony. My research reorients the current conversation about secularization in Japan by questioning the margins between religion and the law of the secular state, casting doubt on our ability to neatly define boundaries between these two mutually constitutive realms. Ultimately, even if Japanese are less invested in religious doctrines and organizations than they once were, the ethos and praxis of secular institutions of governance remain deeply rooted in the legacy of inherited religious traditions even as those traditions adapt to new institutional and governmental arrangements.