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*Joseph M. Kitagawa*

SOME REMARKS  
ON SHINTŌ

For the historian of religions, Shintō presents some very difficult and disconcerting questions. The majority of historians of religions is not conversant in the Japanese language and thus does not keep abreast of the scholarly debates carried on by a few Western Japanologists and various Japanese scholars behind the “*kanji* curtain.” There is, moreover, a general feeling among Western scholars that Shintō is not a major religious tradition and is thus less relevant to the study of religion per se than are the major religions. These scholars do not realize that Shintō, intact from prehistoric times to our own and intertwined with the arts and politics, with Buddhism and Confucianism, presents historians of religions with myriad historical and theoretical challenges.

In approaching Shintō, we must consider a number of closely interrelated preliminary issues. First, how can we classify Shintō: is it a tribal, cultural cult, or is it a universalistic religion? To date, most scholars have stressed the particularistic orientation of Shintō, derived primarily from the historic experience of the Japanese people within the context of their own islands and rarely addressing itself to anything like the universal human condition. We must acknowledge, however, that—since World War II especially—some scholars have begun to insist on universal religious features within Shintō that remain to be explored.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Nanzan Shūkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, ed., *Shintō to Kirisutokyō: Shūkyō ni okeru Fuhen to Tokushu* (Shinto and Christianity: The universal and the particular in religion) (Tokyo: Shunjū-sha, 1984), p. 50.

Second, how do we approach the problem of Shintō's own "identity": is it a religion or is it something other than a religion? Far from a simple question, this is a more complex issue than most Shintō scholars and many historians of religions think. We recall that the Japanese government, determined to create "State Shintō," a new religious superstructure, from 1882 to 1945 advocated Shintō as a "nonreligious" emperor cult and a patriotic national morality to which every Japanese, regardless of his or her religious beliefs and affiliations, was expected to pay homage. Those who subscribe to the view that Shintō is nonreligious in character point out that, strictly speaking, Shintō has no scripture comparable to the Bible or the Qur'an and that between 1882 and 1945 State Shintō prohibited preaching. Moreover, lacking a sophisticated cosmological, ethical, and metaphysical orientation, Shintō freely appropriated insights from the Yin-Yang and Taoist cosmological systems, from Confucian ethics, and from Buddhist metaphysics. Conversely, those who cite the prominence of the priesthood, liturgies, charms, amulets, and parish organizations emphasize the religious character of Shintō. The issue has in a sense been settled by the disestablishment of State Shintō and its transformation into Shrine Shintō (*Jinja Shintō*), which has been legally recognized as a religion since World War II.<sup>2</sup> I suspect that the debate will not stop here, however.

The third, and by far the most disturbing, question surrounds the terminological ambiguity inherent in the term Shintō, a term that seems to have a very loose and a very broad range of meaning. In the main, Shintō scholars claim that not only religious but also all communal and cultural features of early Japan—at least those features apparent before the massive introduction in the fifth and sixth centuries of both Sino-Korean civilization (bringing Confucianism, Taoism, and the Yin-Yang school) and Buddhism—may be considered the domain of Shintō, or the "Way of *Kami* (the Sacred, or the Sacred Being)." For example, Naofusa Hirai of Kokugakuin University states:

Shinto has existed in Japan without any founder since the time the ancestors of the Japanese people began living in this land. According to this view, therefore, the core of Shinto belief is the communal religious experience accumulated in the actual lives of the Japanese for many centuries.

<sup>2</sup> See Shūten Ōishi et al., eds., *Sengo Shūkyō Kaisōroku* (Recollection of religious affairs in the immediate postwar period) (Tokyo: Shinshūkyō-shinbun-sha, 1963); and William P. Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

Shinto phenomena are indeed expressions of this religious experience, but the medium of these expressions was always the past history, culture, and society of Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Thus while Shintō did indeed include religious beliefs and practices, the meaning of the expression Shintō was certainly not confined to what we now refer to as religion. The term itself—a combination of the two Chinese characters *shin* (“*kami*”) and *tō* (“the way”)—originated only after the introduction of Buddhism in order to differentiate between the indigenous cults and the beliefs and practices of the newly transplanted religion of the Buddha;<sup>4</sup> and Buddhism soon prospered to become “the creed of half Japan,” to quote the title of Arthur Lloyd’s well-known volume.<sup>5</sup> Within a short time, moreover, Shintō and Buddhism developed a pattern of amalgam (*Shin-Butsu Shūgō*) known as *Ryōbu-Shintō* or *Sannō-Ichijitsu Shintō*.

A number of interesting questions have been raised as to whether the Shintō-Buddhist amalgam implied a fusion of the two systems on an equal basis or whether anything like great and small traditions existed within such a syncretistic entity—and if they did, which was the greater and which the smaller? The multidimensional character of Shintō seems clear: in early Japan, it was the cult of tribal ancestors under the influence of ancient Chinese culture; later, it allied itself with Neo-Confucianism in a form of Confucian Shintō known as *Suiga Shintō* (we still have today such Confucian Shintō sects as *Shūsei-ha* and *Taisei-kyō*) and fused with *Kokugaku* (“National Learning”) in the form of *Kogaku Shintō* (“Ancient Learning Shintō”) in the pre-modern period; finally, it absorbed the family-based imperial national ideology, becoming the State Shintō of modern Japan. Questions have inevitably been raised concerning the nature of Shintō’s alliances with so many different traditions: did it lose its own substance in order to accommodate itself to alien systems?

It is not surprising that the well-entrenched habit of dividing Japanese religion into two halves, Shintō and Buddhism, dies hard. Many Shintō scholars are still tempted to classify all non-Buddhist religious forms and features under the category of Shintō. For instance, Sokyō Ono, an undisputed spokesman of Shrine (*Jinja*) Shintō, divides all

<sup>3</sup> Naofusa Hirai, “Fundamental Problems of Present Shinto,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960), p. 304.

<sup>4</sup> See Karl Florenz, “Die Japaner,” in *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Alfred Bertholet and Eduard Lehman (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1925), p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Lloyd, *The Creed of Half Japan* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1931).

of Shintō into two main branches, Ritualistic (*Matsuri-gata*) Shintō and Doctrinal (*Oshie-gata*) Shintō. He has no doubt that with around eighty thousand shrines scattered throughout the country, Shrine Shintō is central to the Ritualistic branch; but he also concedes that Imperial Household Rituals (*Kōshitsu Saishi*) and Folk Rituals (*Minzoku Saishi*) must also be included in that branch. More controversial is his view of Doctrinal Shintō, which he sees as embracing all thirteen Sect Shintō denominations (*Kyōha Shintō*), even those clearly non-Shintoistic in ethos; Neo-Sectarian Shintō (*Shin kyōha kyōdan*); and finally, those New Religions (*Shin Shūkyō*) that can be identified as Shintōistic.<sup>6</sup> Yet while such a classification of religious groups might partially explain Shintō-Buddhist relations in history, it certainly does not reflect the reality of contemporary statistics: there are today 144 Shintōistic religious corporations (legally recognized religious units), 165 Buddhistic, 38 Christian, and 29 others.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, statistics of this sort vary widely, reflecting changes in the self-identities of various groups.<sup>8</sup>

In post-World War II Japan, where the principle of religious liberty is guaranteed, people recognize and respect the rights and privileges of Shintō. (I refer here mainly to Shrine Shintō, consciously excluding the eighty-two older Sect Shintō groups and forty-six new Shintō sects.) Yet both outsiders and non-Shintō Japanese are disturbed by the fact that adherents of Shintō tend to speak on behalf not only of their own religious group but also of all Japanese, on the grounds that to Shintō belongs the supreme prerogative and responsibility to define the basis of the Japanese nation and its society and culture. For example, according to Motohiko Anzu, a leading Shintō theoretician, “the Japanese who . . . take a rather serious view of this life know *through experience* [and] *through historical fact* . . . the existence of the Emperor as the absolute condition of the life of the Japanese race” [*italics mine*].<sup>9</sup> To be sure, many people recognize Anzu’s right to affirm the inseparability of Shintō and the essential quality of Japan as an Emperor state or Imperial reign<sup>10</sup> because, as he sees it, the emperor is the direct descendant of the deity who founded Japan and deputized the sovereign of the state on earth. However, neither Anzu nor anyone else has the right to superimpose

<sup>6</sup> See Sokyō Onō, “The Concept of Kami in Shinto,” *Proceedings of the Second International Conference for Shinto Studies, Continuity and Change (Jitō to Henka)* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1968), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

his Shintō belief on non-Shintō Japanese, although many Shintō believers rightly hold that it is their legal right to affirm their Shintō belief and to attempt to persuade others to their point of view. The difficult question, of course, is, What is the scope of Shintō belief and practice apart from what Shintō theoreticians explicate? Strictly speaking, Shintō has no definitive scripture and has historically allied itself with many different religious and semireligious traditions, so that an assessment of its character and parameters is indeed difficult.

Factors such as these present serious problems to historians of religions, who on one level must submit their understanding of Shintō (or of any other religion, for that matter) in terms of sources, dates, and theories to experts within the tradition but who, on another level, must ultimately be sensitive only to the evaluations of their fellow historians of religions. In such a situation, scholars within the Shintō tradition are ironically inclined to regard themselves as the sole arbiters of their tradition, refusing to recognize the scholarly prerogatives of historians of religions or anyone else. Certainly it is foolish for scholars, historians of religions among them, to underestimate the competencies, knowledge, and familiarity of Shintō experts on Shintō matters, but these scholars must formulate their own professional views of Shintō—views that will inevitably differ from Shintōists' views on the subject. Moreover, the views of Shintōists on Shintō will ultimately constitute important data for our scholarly task.

With this brief discussion of the preliminary issues, then, let me go on to propose some ways of interpreting the diverse phenomena that constitute the Shintō tradition.

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Historians of religions have often been accused of not taking sufficiently seriously the subjective element involved in the study of various religions. It may be that philosophers of religion and theologians are better equipped to deal with the “inner” meaning of religion. Certainly their attempts to do justice to the faith affirmations of other religions through dialogue is salutary, even though this approach may not be applicable to prehistoric or dead religions. Yet difficult though it may be, we must make every effort to balance the inner, soteriological meanings and the outer, historical, sociological, anthropological, and cultural meanings of our areas of inquiry and to interpret the nature of the relationship between them.

Relative to Shintō, I will try to explore the *matsuri* (usually translated as ceremonials or rituals) as the “inner” meaning; *matsuri-goto* (usually translated as government) as the “outer” meaning; and *saisei-ichi* (unity of religion and government, or of the ceremonial and the

political dimensions) as the principle relating the two. It is my intention to show that in its “inner” meaning Shintō has inherited the religious experience of the ancestors of the Japanese people, the proto-Japanese, whereas in both its “outer” meaning and the “principle relating the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ meanings” Shintō reflects the impact of Sino-Korean civilization and Buddhism, both of which heavily influenced Japan after the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. It is my hope that historians of religions will avoid both the mistake of the architects of modern Japan from the late nineteenth century onward in equating the “outer” meaning of Shintō and the “principle relating the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ meanings” with the meanings and institutions of early (pre-fifth-century) Japan, and the pitfall of many contemporary Shintō theoreticians in equating the “inner” meaning with the “outer.”

Despite the archaeological significance of early Japan for Shintō, a detailed discussion of Japan’s prehistory is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>11</sup> Archaeologists trace evidence of human habitation in the Japanese islands as far back as twenty thousand years.<sup>12</sup> Japan’s prehistoric period is usually divided into three phases: the Jōmon (“code pattern” used for pottery) period, around 2500 B.C. or earlier, up to 250 B.C.; the Yayoi (after pottery unearthed in the Yayoi district of Tokyo) period, around 250 B.C. to A.D. 250; and the Kofun or “Tomb” period, around A.D. 250 to A.D. 550. Many historians accept the Tomb period as the early period of Japanese history rather than as part of its prehistory.

Inhabitants of the Japanese islands are presumed to have come originally from the northern, western, and southern parts of Asia. Masao Oka, a noted ethnologist, plausibly hypothesizes that the main structure of Japanese culture and society was a fusion of five components: Melanesian, Austro-Asian, Tungusic, Micronesian, and Altaic.<sup>13</sup> In the course of time, these early island inhabitants imported arts and techniques from Asia, learning to use iron and bronze and, of primary importance, to produce food through the art of paddy-field rice cultivation. As Richard K. Beardsley rightly points out, “What is most striking about the way of life in the late Pre-historic

<sup>11</sup> See Joseph M. Kitagawa, “Prehistoric Background of Japanese Religion,” *History of Religions* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1963).

<sup>12</sup> Among numerous publications on the subject, see *The History of Kanagawa*, (Yokohama: Kanagawa Prefectural Government, 1985); and Nara-kenritsu Kashiwara Kōkogaku kenkyūjo, ed., *Yamato no Kōkogaku—Archeology in the Nara Prefecture* (Kashiwara-shi: Kōkogaku-kenkyūjo, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> See Masao Oka, “Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan” (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1933).

Period is that it was so much like the way of life in Japanese villages fifteen centuries later.”<sup>14</sup>

Of crucial importance to the early Japanese were two terms, *kami* and *uji*. The first, *kami*, has a wide range of meaning: gods, spirits, sacred and superhuman nature or beings. It refers to all beings—both good and evil—that possess extraordinary qualities and that are awesome and worthy of reverence. The early Japanese are believed to have found *kami* everywhere: in the heavens, in the air, in the forests, in the rocks, in the streams, in animals, and in human beings. But while they accepted the *kami* as separate beings within a vast plurality, their fundamental affirmation focused on the sacrality of the total cosmos. That is, they took for granted the common *kami* (sacred) nature shared by all beings within the world of nature. The term *kami* also encompassed the mysterious life force that brings about growth, fertility, and production. An old legend tells us that in the Land of Reed-Plains (an early name for Japan) “there were numerous [*kami*] which shone with a luster like that of fireflies, and evil [*kami*] which buzzed like flies. There were also trees and herbs all of which could speak.”<sup>15</sup> There were also terms closely related to *kami*: *tama*, which sometimes meant the spirit of a *kami* or a person, and *mono*, which often was used to refer to the spirit of animals.

The second term, *uji*, was designated the primary social unit of early Japan and was the precursor of a territorially based cluster of lineage groups sharing the same tutelary *kami* (usually translated as “clan”). Each *uji* was held together by the *uji* chieftain (*uji-no-kami*), whose authority over the land and people within his domain was derived from cultic prerogatives given him by the *kami* of the *uji* (*uji-kami* or *uji-gami*).

A most important activity in early Japan was *matsuri* (rituals and ceremonies) for the *kami*. Scholars agree that the original meaning of the term *matsuri* is contained in the form *matsurau*, which means “to be with,” “to attend to the needs of,” “to entertain,” or “to serve” the *kami*, the soul of the deceased, or a person of higher status. That the physical act of *matsurau* implied the mental attitude of respect and reverence and the willingness to listen, to serve, and to obey was assumed. For example, on the occasion of *tama-matsuri* (*matsuri* of the soul) when the ancestral spirits were believed to visit the homes of

<sup>14</sup> Richard K. Beardsley, “Japan before History: A Survey of the Archaeological Record,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (May 1955): 333.

<sup>15</sup> *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, trans. W. G. Aston (Tokyo: Japan Society, 1896; London, 1924; Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1972–78), 2:64.



their living descendants, the head of each household offered meals and drinks to the visiting spirits and entertained them as if they were alive. A similar motif of *matsurau* was evident in the *matsuri* for *kami*.<sup>16</sup> We note that, with the addition of the honorific, *o-matsuri* has come to mean any kind of festive celebration, religious or secular.

When we look to the sociopolitical organization of early Japan, we find that available data are very fragmentary. A third-century record mentions a number of principalities with a female shamanic ruler reigning over the preeminent one. Another Chinese record later indicates that five Japanese rulers had official dealings with the Sung court during the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>17</sup> Scholars, myself among them, assume that toward the end of the fourth century one of the powerful clans (*uji*), later known as the “imperial” clan, began to dominate the others and eventually established the Yamato kingdom, which was, in effect, a confederation of semiautonomous clans each owning and ruling its respective territory. The Yamato rulers paid tribute to China and in return received the kingly title from the Chinese imperial court. Within Japan, however, they solidified their influence over other clans on the basis of their mythological claim to be the genealogical descendants of the solar deity, Amaterasu, who was believed to be the tutelary *kami* of the imperial *uji*.

Manabu Waida rightly suggests that the Yamato ruler “was not the absolute monarch ruling over a centralized state but merely a *primus inter pares* who ran the politics, controlling and being controlled by [other *uji* chieftains who held titles in the court].”<sup>18</sup> Like the chieftains of other *uji*, the Yamato ruler was expected to attend to (*matsurau*) his *uji* deity. At the same time, he tried to establish externally the legitimacy of his kingly ruler by assuming the prerogatives of conferring court titles, granting sacred seed at spring festivals, establishing sacred sites for the *kami*, and regulating rituals for them, all of which came to be known as *matsuri-goto* (“political administration”). His kingly duties, simultaneously magico-religious and political, were clearly dictated by the precarious will of the heavenly *kami* transmitted to him through dreams and divination. As far as can be

<sup>16</sup> See Kunio Yanagita, *Nihon no Matsuri—Japanese Festivals* (Tokyo: Sōgen-sha, 1953); also Joseph M. Kitagawa, “Matsuri and Matsuri-goto,” *Religious Traditions* 2, no. 1 (April 1979): 30–37.

<sup>17</sup> For fuller accounts of Chinese references to Japan, see L. C. Goodrich, ed., *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, trans. Ryūsaku Tsunoda (South Pasadena, Calif.: P. D. & Ione Perkins, 1951); and Paul Wheatley and Thomas See, *From Court to Capital: A Tentative Interpretation of the Origins of the Japanese Urban Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> Manabu Waida, “Sacred Kingship in Early Japan: A Historical Introduction,” *History of Religions* 15, no. 4 (May 1976): 323.

ascertained, this close relationship between his own religious duty (*matsuri*) and his kingly political administration (*matsuri-goto*) was designated as the “unity of religious and political affairs” (*saisei-itchi*) and was, in fact, the earliest known instance of relating the “inner” meaning of *matsuri* and the “outer” meaning of *matsuri-goto*.

This type of horizontal ad hoc relationship between the Yamato ruler and other *uji* chieftains, as well as the relationship between *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto*—called “indigenous function-ism” and which Ichiro Ishida finds qualitatively different from “functionalism”—was eventually displaced in the seventh century by a more vertically oriented hierarchical and legalistic relationship that was developing in the centralized imperial state under the impact of Sino-Korean civilization and Buddhism; and it was this new pattern of the centralized imperial state that was regarded as normative for Shintō by government leaders in the late nineteenth century and by some contemporary Shintō theoreticians.

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The penetration of Sino-Korean civilization and Buddhism brought many changes to Japan. As mentioned earlier, the term Shintō was adopted to refer to a hitherto nameless, unsystematized magico-religious-cultural tradition, even though the adoption of the new name did not imply that Shintō became a coherent religion overnight or that all magicocultural features were absorbed into Shintō. Buddhism was officially introduced to the Yamato court in A.D. 552 (some sources say A.D. 538) and soon established itself among influential *uji* groups. More important, the loose horizontal ad hoc “function-ism” that had characterized the Yamato confederation of semiautonomous *uji* groups was superseded by more rigid hierarchical principles leading to the formation of a centralized imperial state. Japan thus emulated the example of China, which had been unified in A.D. 589 by the Emperor Wen Ti of the Sui Dynasty, who authenticated his claim to semidivine authority by depending on Confucian, Buddhist, and, to a lesser degree, Taoist symbols.<sup>19</sup>

The new sinified policy initiated in Japan at the turn of the seventh century by Prince Regent Shōtoku and his advisors exalted the throne and the *matsuri* (rites) for *kami*, upheld Buddhism as the final resort of all beings, and invoked the Confucian tenet of propriety as the

<sup>19</sup> See Ichiro Ishida, *Shinto Shisō-shū or Collected Works of Shinto Thought* (Tokyo: Chickuma-shobō, 1970), pp. 3–6; on Wen Ti, see Arthur F. Wright, “The Formation of Sui Ideology,” in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 71–104.

basis of political administration. The Yamato regime utilized the two “universal” principles of the Chinese Tao and the Buddhist Dharma as the framework of the “external” meaning of political administration (*matsuri-goto*), now subordinated to the “inner” meaning of the “particular” Japanese experience as exemplified by the *matsuri* and supported by the old myths. The ancient principle regulating the relations of *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* (i.e., *saisei-itchi*, or the “unity of religion and government”) was thus seriously stretched.

The new political ideology was more fully articulated in the late seventh and early eighth centuries by the Ritsuryō (imperial rescript) system, which elevated the sovereign to the status of living (manifest) *kami* whose divine will was communicated by a series of imperial rescripts. For example, those penal codes and the civil statutes that had been brought from China were promulgated as the divine will of the sovereign. The ideal of the Ritsuryō system was the transformation of the Japanese nation into a soteriological community in which the sovereign would act simultaneously as sacred monarch, chief priest, and living *kami*. In order to implement this ideal, the Ritsuryō government restructured the court system and ordered the compilation of the two mythohistorical documents, the *Kojiki* (The record of ancient matters) and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), as well as records of local surveys (*Fudoki*) and a register of aristocratic families (*Shinsen-shōjiroku*). Within the government, the Department of *Kami* Affairs (*Jingi-kan*) was placed side by side with the Great Council of State (*Dajō-kan*), which encompassed as well the Yin-Yang Bureau (*Onmyō-ryō*). The government also controlled the activities of Buddhist priests and nuns.

In the main, the Ritsuryō government was indifferent to the religious differences among various traditions, adopting the position that they all sang the same song with different tunes. This stance may account for the tolerance toward the Shintō-Buddhist amalgam that emerged after the ninth century and remained intact for the next ten centuries. This amalgam was sanctioned by the Department of *Kami* Affairs, which was controlled by the politically astute Nakatomi family, one of the hereditary families of priests from which developed the main branch of the Fujiwara oligarchy.<sup>20</sup> The traditions of other priestly families—the Imbe and the Sarume, for example, which were probably more religious but politically less astute than the Nakatomis—were sadly neglected by the government.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Joseph M. Kitagawa, “Shadow of the Sun: A Glimpse of the Fujiwara and the Imperial Families in Japan,” in *Austrina*, ed. A. R. Davis and A. D. Stefanowska (Sydney: Oriental Society of Australia, 1982), pp. 422–38.

<sup>21</sup> See G. Kato and Hikoshiro Hoshino, trans., *The Kogoshū: Gleanings from Ancient Stories* (Tokyo: Meiji Japan Society, 1926).

As we have implied, Shintō inherited from the tradition of ancient (pre-fifth century A.D.) Japan the “inner” meaning of *matsuri* as service. In addition to the usual triad of *matsuri* as whole life, *matsuri* as an expression in rites, and *matsuri* as a mental and inward attitude, Sokyō Ono mentions a fourth element, the importance of the “element of mystery,” implying further such ideas as “mysterious power,” “power of reconciliation,” and “power of unity.” As he puts it, “Its true meaning expresses the faith that there is some power which works between the worshippers and the worshipped. . . . It is in this mysterious power that not only *kami* but all human beings are united.”<sup>22</sup>

The “outer” meaning of Shintō (*matsuri-goto*), however, changed radically under the Ritsuryō system. For the most part, Shintō accepted the Ritsuryō principles of the mutual dependence of *Ōbō* (“the sovereign’s law,” based on a fusion of indigenous Japanese and Confucian ideas) and *Buppō* (“the Buddha’s Law”); the institutional syncretism between Shintō and Buddhism (*Shin-Butsu Shūgō*); and the belief that Japanese deities were manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas in India (*honji-suijaku*).

It is an ironic fact of history that even before the Ritsuryō ideal achieved coherence it had begun to erode. The ideal of the sovereign’s divine right to “reign” as well as to “rule” the nation was seriously compromised by the successful efforts of the Fujiwara to rule the nation as regents of the imperial family; the rule of *insei*, or retired monarchs; and the feudal regimes of warrior families (*bakufu* or *shōgunate*). Contradictions were implicit in the cumbersome rules and regulations prescribed by the *Procedures of the Engi Era*, the epitome of Ritsuryō legalism.<sup>23</sup> The popularity of Buddhist eschatological belief and the rise of Pure Land pietism combined to bring about the birth of indigenous Japanese Buddhist schools in the thirteenth century, the introduction of Zen Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, and the attempted Mongol invasion of Japan, all of which gradually eroded the very structure of the Ritsuryō system; but by far the most important factor was the resurgence of the ancient indigenous ad hoc “function-ism” as exemplified by the simplicity, naturalness, and directness of the warriors’ outlook on life and the world. The resurgence of the indigenous spirit also stimulated a new movement within Shintō, the Watarai Shintō, initiated by Watarai Yukitada (1236–1305) and systematized by Watarai Iyeyuki (1254–1351). In this first self-conscious “spiritual” movement among Shintōists, its

<sup>22</sup> Ono (n. 6 above), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> See Felicia Bock, trans., *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970–72).

advocates, concerned with the lack of a Shintō doctrine, compiled the *Shintō Pentateuch* (*Shintō Gobusho*). Reacting against the prevailing custom of the Shintō-Buddhist amalgam, they sought instead a rapprochement of Shintō and Confucianism and the Yin-Yang tradition. Pro-Confucian sentiment was also expressed by Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354), a pious Shintō layman and royalist general, who equated Shintō with the imperial state in his writings entitled *The Records of the Legitimate Succession of the Divine Sovereigns* (*Jinnō-shōtō-ki*).<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the efforts of the Watarai Shintō and Kitabatake, the “internal” meaning of Shintō was explicated not in Shintō terms but, rather, in a confucianized Shintō logic, while its “outer” meaning primarily reflected emperorism as already defined by the Ritsuryō system. A similar Shintō-Confucian amalgam was advocated by Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1551), who espoused the Yoshida- or Yuiitsu- (“the only”) Shintō movement.

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The period between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries was an eventful time for Shintō. The death knell of the moribund Ritsuryō system was struck by Oda Nobunaga (1535–82) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), who eliminated one of the cardinal Ritsuryō principles, that of mutual dependence between *Ōbō* (the sovereign’s law) and *Buppō* (Buddha’s law), by burning famous Buddhist edifices and killing a large number of Buddhist priests. Following in their footsteps, Tokugawa Iyeyasu (1542–1616) established in 1603 the Tokugawa feudal regime (*shōgunate* or *bakufu*), which lasted for two and a half centuries. The Tokugawa regime retained the second and third Ritsuryō principles, the institutional Shintō-Buddhist syncretism (*Shin-Butsushūgō*) and the belief in Japanese deities as manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji-suijaku*), both of which aided Shintō. Moreover, in seeking its legitimation in Neo-Confucianism, the Tokugawa regime catered to a number of Confucian advisors who often allied themselves with Shintō because of their anti-Buddhist sentiments. Thus, as George Sansom once marvelled, “as an institution, Shinto displayed remarkable powers of self-preservation.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite its unique agility at maintaining political survival, during the Tokugawa period Shintō displayed little creativity in theoretical

<sup>24</sup> See R. Tsunoda et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 273–85.

<sup>25</sup> George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 229.

or practical domains. The influential Yoshida Shintō, which controlled many shrines, continued to engage in such semi-Buddhist practices as *goma* (an adaptation of the *homa* sacrifice), *kanjō* (baptism), *kaji* (incantation), and *hitaki* (burning rite).<sup>26</sup> The aforementioned Yoshikawa Shintō continued its efforts to homologize Shintō and Neo-Confucianism (especially the tradition of Shushi, or Chu Hsi [1130–1200]), confirmed in the belief that Chu Hsi’s philosophical idea of the Great Ultimate was one and the same with the *kami* Kunitokodachi, who appears in the ancient Japanese myth. The Suiga (“descent of divine blessing”) Shintō, founded by Yamazaki Ansai (1618–82), a Shintō-Confucian with a reputed three thousand disciples, taught the virtue of a circumspect attitude (*tsutsushimi*, similar to the Neo-Confucian idea of reverence) and Emperor worship.

The impressive growth of the National Learning (Kokugaku), which promulgated the scholarly study of ancient Japanese thought and literature, greatly encouraged the Fukko (“Ancient Learning”) Shintō. Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), the chief spokesman of this school, affirmed the pantheism of the *Kojiki* (The record of ancient matters) and rejected the influence on Shintō of Buddhist metaphysics and Confucian rationalism. Through his efforts the idea of *musubi* (the spirit of birth and becoming) became an important theological concept of Shintō.<sup>27</sup>

A young contemporary of Motoori, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), developed a monotheistic Shintō theology most likely influenced by the Christian legacy attributed to Jesuits writing in China during the Ming period (1368–1662) and a belief in the “concealed world” where souls reside after leaving this world. According to Hirata, the *kami* of ancient Japanese myth, Ame no Minaka-nushi, is the same deity as the Christian God, the Chinese Heavenly Deity, and various other deities; different cultural groups simply call him by various names.<sup>28</sup> Hirata’s monotheistic view, however, was neither understood nor appreciated by most followers of Shintō.<sup>29</sup> Toward the end of the Tokugawa period, Shintōists allied with the nationalistic Confucianists, the scholars of the National Learning, and others active in the anti-Tokugawa and pro-imperial cause.

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<sup>26</sup> See Yasuhiro Ono et al., comps., *Nihon Shūkyō-jiten—Dictionary of Japanese Religion* (Tokyo: Kōtun-dō, 1985), p. 62c.

<sup>27</sup> See Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga, 1730–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); and Muraoka Tsunetsugu, *Studies in Shinto Thought*, trans. D. M. Brown and J. T. Araki (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> Nanzan Shūkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo (n. 1 above), p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Ono et al., comps., p. 63b.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, dissatisfaction in Japan with the Tokugawa regime was widespread and there was increasing outside pressure, from the United States especially, for Japan to reopen her doors to international trade. In 1867, the exhausted feudal regime “gave up the ghost” and the boy emperor Meiji (r. 1867–1912) assumed the rule of the nation. Meiji had for advisors a group of pragmatic statesmen who pursued simultaneously the contradictory objectives of renovation (*ishin*) and restoration of monarchical rule (*ōsei-fukko*). They had the ardent support of Shintōists, particularly those of the Ancient Learning School, for their goal.

The Meiji government had originally planned a return to the ways of the fourteenth century but was ultimately persuaded by the Shintōists to “go all the way back to the time of [the first legendary emperor] Jimmu.”<sup>30</sup> Such an injunction implied, however, that the government could return to the seventh and eighth centuries when the Ritsuryō state was instrumental in compiling the accounts of Jimmu in the mythohistorical works of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. Still and all, Shintōists maintained their hopes that in restoring the past, the new Japan would enable them to harmonize the “inner” and “outer” meanings of Shintō; and the government, determined to advocate Shintō, in 1868 reestablished the Department of *Kami* Affairs originally instituted by the Ritsuryō regime in A.D. 701. However, the Meiji regime also issued in 1868 an edict separating Shintō and Buddhism (*Shin-Butsu Bunri-rei*), thus reversing the second cardinal principle of the Ritsuryō system and one that the Tokugawa had supported. Feeling that they had been suppressed by Buddhists for ten centuries, many Shintōists took part in the violent but unofficial movement of *Haibutsu kishaku* (“exterminate Buddha”).

The government’s policy of turning Shintō into a national religion ironically backfired,<sup>31</sup> in large part because of the lack of firm doctrinal or ethical tenets in Shintō. The government did, however, in 1870 begin to emphasize the element of “emperor worship” in Shintō. In 1871, the Shintō Ministry (*Jingi-shō*) replaced the Department of *Kami* Affairs, which was replaced in turn in the same year by the Department of Religion and Education (*Kyōbu-shō*). The new department was charged with handling the ill-fated “Great Religion” (*Daikyō*) movement, which had been, in effect, an attempt to disseminate modified Shintō teachings and practical ethics. In 1873, the Meiji regime removed the official ban against Christianity held over

<sup>30</sup> Hideo Kishimoto, comp., *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era*, trans. John F. Howes (Tokyo: Ōbun-sha, 1956), p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–64.



from the anti-Catholic Tokugawa feudal government. In the course of time, the sentiment in favor of religious freedom was expressed by enlightened Buddhist leaders and strongly endorsed by Western diplomats, resulting in the very limited religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of 1889 to the adherents of Shintō, Buddhism, and other faiths. According to I. Hori and Y. Toda, “the government publicly admitted that its attempt to make Shinto a national religion had been in error.”<sup>32</sup>

With the tacit approval of many Shintō leaders, the government now terminated the “Great Religion” and established the hitherto unknown entity, “State Shintō,” as an ancestor-worship cult but not as a religion.<sup>33</sup> Even though preaching, funerary rites, and obviously religious activities were not allowed within State Shintō, many religious symbols such as charms and amulets and semireligious activities surrounding community festivals were tolerated. Moreover, since it was not considered a religion, State Shintō had great latitude in utilizing the national and local governments, the public educational system, and the army and navy to propagate the Shintō version of ancestor-worship, the emperor cult, and patriotic morality (e.g., *shūshin*, or ethics). As Hori and Toda state, “It was apparent that to claim that Shinto was not a religion was nothing more than a ruse. [For that reason] many of the priests lacked confidence at the end of World War II when Shinto had to start once more as a religion because of the contradictions that had stemmed from this subterfuge.”<sup>34</sup>

Yet establishing State Shintō and granting limited freedom of religion did not solve all of the Meiji government’s religious problems. The dissolution of the feudal past fanned both a spiritual awakening and the growth of spontaneous magicoreligious practices. The government classified many of these practices as “folk religion,” while others were called “pseudo religions” or “quasi-religious associations” (*ruiji shūkyō* or *shūkyō-ruiji-dantai*). (By 1930 these associations numbered 414; by 1935, over 1,000.) Also, in part to encourage active religious and proselytizing works of Shintō, the government was compelled to admit thirteen groups as “Sect Shintō” (*Kyōha Shintō*) denominations, although some had only dubious connections with Shintō and many of these declared their independence as “new religions” (*Shinkō shūkyō*) after World War II. Ministers of the Sect Shintō denominations were not permitted to participate in the celebrations of State Shintō.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 94–95.



From 1868 to 1945, years that mark major events in the history of modern Japan—the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), the annexation of Korea (1910), World War I, and World War II—Shintō shrines throughout the country were mobilized to serve as agents of State Shintō. “While preserving their traditional local rituals, shrines poured their energies into the diffusion and propagation of emperor worship and nationalism.”<sup>35</sup> One can imagine the political influence and grandeur of modern Shintō just by reflecting on the gigantic edifice of the Heian Shrine, built in the early Meiji era as a replica of one of the buildings of the old capitol in Kyoto; the Yasukuni Shrine for the war dead since 1868; the Meiji Shrine, which enshrined the Emperor Meiji and his Empress; and Shintō shrines destroyed by war in Formosa, Sakhalin, Korea, Manchuria, the Coral Islands, Saigon, Java, Wake Island, Hong Kong, and Surabaja.

It is sad that modern Shintō, which could have developed a genuine spiritual movement comparable to the Ise Shintō movement in the thirteenth century, ultimately succumbed to the temptations of power, security, and prestige and thus overemphasized the “outer” meaning of Shintō at the expense of the “inner” meaning. This emphasis was succinctly characterized by a noted Shintō historian: “Shintō equals politics (*matsuri-goto*).”<sup>36</sup>

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The surrender of Japan to the Allied Powers at the end of World War II was a traumatic experience for Shintō, which had been riding high during Japan’s modern period. Shintō leaders were stunned by a swift succession of events that included in 1945 the disestablishment of State Shintō through the “Shintō Directive” and in 1946 the Emperor’s public denial of his *kami* nature. There followed a smooth transition from State Shintō to Shrine (*Jinja*) Shintō which, according to the “Religious Juridical Persons Law,” is now legally recognized as a religion.<sup>37</sup>

Although Shintō could count on the piety and support of the general populace, it still faced many difficult practical problems.

<sup>35</sup> Shigeyoshi Murakami, *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century*, trans. H. B. Earhart (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980), p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Kenzō Kobayashi, *Gendai Shintō no Kenkyū—a Study of Modern Shintō* (Tokyo: Risō-sha, 1956), p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> See William P. Woodard, *The Religious Juridical Persons Law* (Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1960), and *The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions* (n. 2 above), pp. 93–102.

Stripped of all official subsidies, some 17,000 priests had still to maintain 80,000 shrines. Moreover, 80 percent of these priests were obliged to hold second jobs—as teachers or office workers, for example—in order to make a living. There is little hope for an immediate improvement of this situation. Even confining our discussion to Shrine (*Jinja*) Shintō alone, leaving aside the Sect (*Kyōha*) and other Shintō groups, the complexity still defies any simple characterization. In the main, however, all Shintō adherents think—and like to feel that they speak for all Japanese, although this is open to question—separation of state and religion, a cardinal principle of postwar democratic Japan, is fundamentally wrong. Their position is based entirely on their experience since Japan had always operated on the principle of unity of government (*matsuri-goto*) and religion (*matsuri*). No wonder that, according to Murakami, “in the early 1950’s, the Shinto leaders mounted a reactionary movement for the revival of State Shinto. For the majority of small shrines, which did not have ties with the lives of the people and which were poor in revenue, this provided a pragmatic basis for fantasizing the dream of reinstating the special privileges they received under the State Shinto system.”<sup>38</sup>

As one might expect in a postwar situation, Shintōists were more concerned with the “outer” meaning of Shintō than with the “inner.” To most people so concerned, even the principle relating the “inner” and “outer” meanings of Shintō—*saisei-itchi* (unity of religion and government)—becomes part of the “outer” meaning (*matsuri-goto*) itself. Moreover, in their oversimplified logic, these people tend to conclude that what was good for Shintō was good for Japan and vice versa. By and large, Shintō leaders showed close affinity with the nostalgia of the masses for the old political order and a simplistic devotion to the Grand Shrines of Ise, which enshrined the tutelary ancestress of the Imperial House and the sun deity, Amaterasu, and to the Yasukuni Shrine for the Dead. It was only natural that vote-hungry politicians found them easy targets. As Murakami says, “The nationalization of Ise Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine is considered a major breakthrough in the movement to restore State Shinto. . . . This reactionary movement was supported by right-wing members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, right-wing organizations, local veterans’ associations, the association of families of dead soldiers, the Association of Shinto Shrines [Shrine or *Jinja* Shintō], and such religious organizations as Seichō no Ie and Kokuchūkai. On the

<sup>38</sup> Murakami, p. 131.

whole, this tendency received the support of the government and the party in power.”<sup>39</sup>

Of course, within the democratic system of religious liberty the Shintōists have every right to support the Ise and Yasukuni Shrines, or any other cause they wish. What is expected, however, is that they—or any other religious group—articulate *both* the “inner” and the “outer” meanings of their religion instead of affirming only a one-sided meaning as so many Shintō theoreticians have done to date. In this sense, Hirai’s statement is most pertinent: “The delay in formulating a theology [cognitive explication of the ‘inner’ meaning] for contemporary Shinto is partly due to the 64 years [from 1894] of bureaucratic control of Shinto.”<sup>40</sup> We are greatly encouraged in this respect by the serious intellectual activities current in such institutions as the Kokugakuin University in Tokyo; and at least one writer also recognizes the important contributions to be made to the “outer” meaning (a more objective view, he feels) by religious morphology and *Religionswissenschaft*.<sup>41</sup> The task, however, is multidimensional in scope and of staggering proportions.

Immediately after the end of the war, Origuchi Shinobu, a renowned scholar of folklore studies, raised a question concerning Shintō without belief in the Emperor.<sup>42</sup> That most Shintōists disagreed with Origuchi’s position is less significant than the fact that his position was not even considered an optional view of Shintō. Similarly, in 1967 several non-Shintō scholars, notably Heinrich Dumoulin (Zen), Nishitani Keiji (philosopher), Nakamura Hajime (comparative philosophy), W. Theodore deBary (sinology), Robert N. Bellah (sociology), Hans H. Baerwald (political science), and Robert S. Ellwood (history of religions), offered numerous helpful suggestions toward an articulation of the “inner” and “outer” meanings of Shintō.<sup>43</sup> I do not know how these suggestions have been received by Shintōists; but Shintōists should by now understand that those religions in the United States firmly committed to the “inner” meanings of the truth claims of their traditions have managed to forge “outer” meanings enabling them to live harmoniously in mutual support of the principle of religious freedom.

Those of us who are historians of religions must have a genuine respect for and understanding of Shintō, though we have little to

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> Hirai (n. 3 above), p. 306.

<sup>41</sup> Kobayashi, pp. 57–64.

<sup>42</sup> Nanzan Shūkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo (n. 1 above), pp. 37–39.

<sup>43</sup> See *Proceedings of the Second International Conference for Shinto Studies* (n. 6 above).

contribute to the Shintō faith as such. We are aware, however, that “to be a religion of the new world, [Shintō] must also provide salvation and solutions for human problems besides merely maintaining the function of Shinto shrines as the spiritual centres of group life.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hirai, p. 305.