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## Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion

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Shinto has long been regarded as a crucial element in Japanese religion that gives it distinctiveness and individuality. The common man's view of Shinto usually includes the following assumptions: Shinto bears the unmistakable characteristics of a primitive religion, including nature worship and taboos against *kegare* (impurities), but it has no system of doctrine; it exists in diverse forms as folk belief but at the same time possesses certain features of organized religion—for example, rituals and institutions such as shrines; it also plays an important role in Japan's ancient mythology and provides a basis for ancestor and emperor worship. In short, Shinto is viewed as the indigenous religion of Japan, continuing in an unbroken line from prehistoric times down to the present.

Many people have discussed the role of Shinto in Japanese history and culture, but depending on the person there are slight differences in interpretation. These can be divided into two general categories. The first includes those who believe that, despite the dissemination of Buddhism and Confucianism, the religion called Shinto has existed without interruption throughout Japanese history. This has become the common man's view, and it is the conviction of Shinto scholars and priests particularly. The second includes those who think that, aside from whether it existed under the name Shinto, throughout history there have always been Shinto-like beliefs and customs (*shinkō*). This kind of interpretation is frequently found in studies of Japanese culture or intellectual history. This view

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can be traced back to the National Learning (*kokugaku*) scholar Motoori Norinaga in the eighteenth century, and it is reflected more recently in Yanagida Kunio's work on Japanese folklore. The same trend is discernible in the writings of Hori Ichirō, who claims an opinion similar to Robert Bellah's and Sir Charles Eliot's.<sup>1</sup> Hori defines Shinto and "Shinto-ness" as "the underlying will of Japanese culture." He argues that Shinto has been the crucial element bringing the "great mix" of religions and rituals absorbed by the Japanese people into coexistence. Moreover, it has forced them to become Japanese in character. Maruyama Masao, speaking as an intellectual historian on the historical consciousness of the Japanese people, is also of this school. He maintains that the thought processes found in the myths of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* continue to exist as an "ancient stratum," even though other layers of thought have been superimposed in subsequent ages.<sup>2</sup> Maruyama is somewhat sympathetic to "Shinto thinkers of the Edo period"—including of course Motoori Norinaga—"down to the nationalistic moralists of the 1930's," and he even construes their assertions to be "a truth born of a certain kind of intuition."

Of these two groups, the views of the second demand special attention, but they should not be looked upon separately from those of the first. The two represent in a sense the external and the internal aspects of the same phenomenon. The views of the second group can be summarized as follows:

1) Shinto, with the Japanese people, is enduring. It is "the underlying will of Japanese culture," to borrow Hori Ichirō's phrase, an underlying autonomy which transforms and assimilates diverse cultural elements imported from outside. In the words of Motoori, any cultural element of any period (even Buddhism and Confucianism) is, "broadly speaking, the Shinto of that period."<sup>3</sup>

2) Even though one can speak of Shinto as a religion along with Buddhism and Taoism, "Shinto-ness" is something deeper. It is the cultural will or energy of the Japanese people, embodied in conventions which precede or transcend religion. Here, the "secularity of

1. Hori Ichirō, *Hijiri to zoku no kattō* (Heibonsha, 1975).

2. Maruyama Masao, "Rekishi ishiki no kosō," *Rekishi shisōshū*, ed. Maruyama Masao (Chikuma Shobō, 1972).

3. Taken from the *Tōmonroku* by Motoori Norinaga, thought to have been written between 1777 and 1779. This work is a compilation of answers to questions asked by his students. *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, Vol. 1 (Chikuma Shobō, 1968), p. 527.

Shinto'' is stressed. Whether people who maintain this position like it or not, what they advocate is akin to the Meiji Constitution, which did not regard State Shinto as a religion and on that basis placed restraints upon the thought and beliefs of Japanese citizens. It is also similar to the rationale adopted by certain movements today which seek to revive State Shinto.

3) Based on this line of thought, "the miscellaneous nature of Japanese religion," whereby a person may be Buddhist and Shinto at the same time, is taken as an unchanging characteristic of Japanese culture. When such a formula is applied to all cultural phenomena in history, then a miscellaneous, expedient, irrational, and non-intellectual frame of mind, more than any effort at a logical, unified, and integrated world view, is extolled as that which is most Japanese.

The views of the second group when compared to those of the first differ in conception and central argument, but insofar as they both regard Shinto as a unique religion existing independently throughout history, the two share a common premise and reinforce one another. This view, however, is not only an incorrect perception of the facts but also a one-sided interpretation of Japanese history and culture. It is hoped that this article will demonstrate that before modern times Shinto did not exist as an independent religion. The main points of my argument will be as follows:

1) It is generally held that an indigenous self-consciousness is embodied in the word Shinto. I would argue that the original meaning of the word differs from how it is understood today.

2) The ceremonies of Ise Shrine, as well as those of the imperial court and the early provincial government, are said to have been forms of "pure Shinto." I would like to show that they actually became one component of a unique system of Buddhism which emerged in Japan and were perceived as an extension of Buddhism.

3) It is said that Shinto played a secular role in society and existed in a completely different sphere from Buddhism. I would maintain that this very secularity was permeated with Buddhist concepts and was itself religious in nature. The greater part of this paper will examine this question and the preceding two in their ancient and medieval contexts.

4) Finally, I would like to trace the historical stages and the rationale whereby the term Shinto came to mean the indigenous religion or national faith of Japan and to clarify how and when Shinto came to be viewed as an independent religion.

I. *Shinto in the Nihon shoki*

The word Shinto is commonly taken to mean Japan's indigenous religion and to have had that meaning from fairly early times. It is difficult, however, to find a clear-cut example of the word Shinto used in such a way in early writings. The intellectual historian Tsuda Sōkichi has studied the occurrences of the word Shinto in early Japanese literature and has divided its meaning into the following six categories: 1) "religious beliefs found in indigenous customs passed down in Japan, including superstitious beliefs"; 2) "the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a *kami*, the status of *kami*, being a *kami*, or the *kami* itself"; 3) concepts and teachings concerning *kami*; 4) the teachings propagated by a particular shrine; 5) "the way of the *kami*" as a political or moral norm; and 6) sectarian Shinto as found in new religions.<sup>4</sup> From these it is clear that the word Shinto has been used in a great variety of ways. Tsuda maintains that in the *Nihon shoki* Shinto means "the religious beliefs found in indigenous customs in Japan," the first definition, and that it was used from that time to distinguish "Japan's indigenous religion from Buddhism." He also claims that this basic definition underlies the meaning of Shinto in the other five categories.

It is far from conclusive, however, that the word Shinto was used in early times to denote Japan's indigenous religion,<sup>5</sup> and for that reason Tsuda's analysis of examples in the *Nihon shoki* should be re-examined. The following three sentences are the only instances of the word Shinto in the *Nihon shoki*:

- 1) The emperor believed in the teachings of the Buddha (*Buppō* or *hotoke no minori*)<sup>6</sup> and revered Shinto (or *kami no michi*). (Prologue on Emperor Yōmei)
- 2) The emperor revered the teachings of the Buddha but scorned Shinto. He cut down the trees at Ikukunitama Shrine. (Prologue on Emperor Kōtoku)
- 3) The expression "as a *kami* would" (*kamunagara*) means to conform to Shinto. It also means in essence to possess one's self of Shinto. (Entry for Taika 3/4/26)

4. Tsuda Sōkichi, *Nihon no Shintō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1949), chapter one. *Kami* is the Japanese word for a deity or spirit. The word Shintō, which is of Chinese origin, is made up of two characters: *shin* meaning *kami* and *tō* meaning way or upright conduct.

5. *Nihon shoki*, II, Vol. 68 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (Iwanami Shoten, 1965), note on "Shintō," p. 556.

6. In an early manuscript, the Japanese gloss *hotoke no minori* is added to the

In examples one and two it is possible to interpret Shinto as distinguishing "Japan's indigenous religion from Buddhism," but that need not be the only interpretation. Tsuda himself indicates that in China the word Shinto originally meant various folk religions, or Taoism, or sometimes Buddhism, or even religion in general.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the word Shinto is actually a generic term for popular beliefs, whether of China, Korea, or Japan, even though in examples one and two it refers specifically to Japan's ancient customs, rituals, and beliefs, regardless of whether they were Japanese in origin. Since the *Nihon shoki* was compiled with a knowledge of China in mind, it is hard to imagine that its author used the Chinese word Shinto solely to mean Japan's indigenous religion. Though there may be some validity in what Tsuda says, the word Shinto by itself probably means popular beliefs in general.

In examples one and two Shinto is used in contrast to the word *Buppō*, the teachings of the Buddha. Tsuda takes this to mean "Japan's indigenous religion," but there are other possible interpretations of this without construing it to be the name of a religion. For example, it could mean "the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a *kami*, the status of *kami*, being a *kami*, or the *kami* itself," Tsuda's second definition of Shinto. In fact, during this period the character *dō* or *tō*, which is found in the word Shinto, meant not so much a road or path but rather conduct or right action.<sup>8</sup> Hence, Shinto could easily refer to the conduct or action of the *kami*.

In example three there are two instances of the word Shinto. While it is not unthinkable to interpret them as "popular beliefs in general," Tsuda's second definition, "the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a *kami*. . .," is perhaps more appropriate, since the word *kamunagara* in the quotation means "in the nature of a *kami*" or "in the state of being a *kami*." The sentences in example three were originally a note explaining the word *kamunagara* as it appeared in the emperor's decree issued on the day of this entry, and according to Edo period scholars it was added sometime after the ninth century when the work was transcribed.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is not reliable as evidence for what Shinto meant at the time the *Nihon*

Chinese characters *Buppō*. Of course this was written after the ninth century, but it may have been read that way from the time of the manuscript.

7. Tsuda, chapter one.

8. *Jidaijetsu kokugo daijiten* (Sanseidō, 1967); *Iwanami kogo jiten* (Iwanami Shoten, 1967). Both works give examples of *michi* used to refer to Buddhist doctrines, but this is not to say that the meaning doctrine is included in the word *michi*.

9. *Nihon shoki*, II, p. 574.

*shoki* was compiled. Even if it were, it is more likely that the compiler did not use the same word in two different ways but rather applied the same definition, "the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a *kami*. . . ," in all three examples.

Another possible interpretation of Shinto in the *Nihon shoki* is Taoism. Based on recent studies, it is clear that Shinto was another term for Taoism in China during the same period.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as Taoist concepts and practices steadily passed into Japan between the first century A.D. and the period when the *Nihon shoki* was compiled, they no doubt exerted a considerable influence on the ceremonies and the beliefs of communal groups bound by blood ties or geographical proximity and on those which emerged around imperial authority. Among the many elements of Taoist origin transmitted to Japan are the following: veneration of swords and mirrors as religious symbols; titles such as *mahito* or *shinjin* (Taoist meaning—perfected man, Japanese meaning—the highest of eight court ranks in ancient times which the emperor bestowed on his descendants), *hijiri* or *sen*<sup>11</sup> (Taoist—immortal, Japanese—saint, emperor, or recluse), and *tennō* (Taoist—lord of the universe, Japanese—emperor); the cults of Polaris and the Big Dipper; terms associated with Ise Shrine such as *jingū* (Taoist—a hall enshrining a deity, Japanese—Ise Shrine), *naikū* (Chinese—inner palace, Japanese—inner shrine at Ise), *gekū* (Chinese—detached palace, Japanese—outer shrine at Ise), and *taichi* (Taoist—the undifferentiated origin of all things, Japanese—no longer in general use, except at Ise Shrine where it has been used since ancient times on flags signifying Amaterasu Ōmikami); the concept of *daiwa* (meaning a state of ideal peace, but in Japan used to refer to Yamato, the center of the country); and the Taoist concept of immortality. Early Japanese perhaps regarded their ceremonies and beliefs as Taoist, even though they may have differed from those in China. Hence, it is possible to view these teachings, rituals, and even the concepts of imperial authority and of nation as remnants of an attempt to establish a Taoist tradition in Japan. If that is so, Japan's ancient popular beliefs were not so much an indigenous religion but merely a local brand of Taoism, and the word Shinto simply meant Taoism. The accepted theory today is that a systematic form of Taoism did not

10. Fukunaga Kōji, "Dōkyō ni okeru kagami to tsurugi—sono shisō to genryū," *Tōhō gakuho*, 45 (Kyōto, 1973); Fukunaga Kōji, "Tennō to shikyū to shinjin—Chugoku kodai no Shintō," *Shisō*, 637 (1977).

11. Here both *hijiri* and *sen* are written with the character *ninben* with *yama*.

enter Japan in ancient times,<sup>12</sup> but it is not unreasonable to think that over a long period of time Taoism gradually pervaded Japan's religious milieu until medieval times when Buddhism dominated it completely.

Three possible interpretations of the word Shinto in the *Nihon shoki* have been presented above. It is not yet possible to say which of these is correct, but that should not preclude certain conclusions about Shinto. What is common to all three is that none view Japan's ancient popular beliefs as an independent religion and none use the word Shinto as a specific term for such a religion. Also, there is no evidence that any other specific term existed. Moreover, when Buddhism was introduced into Japan there was a controversy over whether or not to accept it, but there is no indication that these popular beliefs were extolled as an indigenous tradition. Hence, Shinto need not imply a formal religion per se, and it need not indicate something which is uniquely Japanese.

## II. *The Significance of Shinto Deities in the Ancient Period*

In the previous section the word Shinto was analyzed to show how it was used and what it meant in ancient times. Now it is necessary to consider the institutional significance and place of *kami* in Japan during that period, especially as evidenced in the *jingiryō* laws and in Shinto-Buddhist syncreticism.

The *jingiryō* is a set of laws of ancient Japan which instituted ceremonies to the *kami*. Needless to say, these laws include only those rites which had state sponsorship, but they nonetheless represent a fair sampling of the ceremonies current at that time. In brief the *jingiryō* laws cover the following topics: 1) the season, title, and content of official annual ceremonies; 2) imperial succession ceremonies and *imi* (seclusion to avoid things tabooed); 3) the supervision and administration of ceremonies; 4) *ōharai* (an official ceremony to exorcise evils and offenses from people); and 5) the administration of government shrines.

It is well known that the *ritsuryō* law code of ancient Japan was modeled on the codes of Sui and T'ang China. Many scholars have already pointed out that the *jingiryō*, one section of the *ritsuryō*, was based on the Chinese *shiryō* or *tz'u-ling* code, which has been reconstructed in forty-six articles.<sup>13</sup> When compared to the T'ang *shiryō*,

12. Shimode Sekiyo, *Nihon kodai no jingi to Dōkyō* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1972).

13. *Ritsuryō*, Vol. 3 of *Nihon shisō taikai* (Iwanami Shoten, 1976), p. 529.

the *jingiryō* is seen to occupy an identical position in the overall order of the law code and to correspond to the *shiryō* in topic and sentence structure. The official ceremonies described in the *shiryō* include: 1) *shi* or, in Chinese, *ssu* (veneration of *kami* of heaven); 2) *sai* or *chi* (veneration of *kami* of earth); 3) *kō* or *heng* (deification of the spirits of the dead); and 4) *sekiten* or *shih-tien* (deification of ancient sages and masters). From these the *jingiryō* of Japan incorporated only the first two and then added imperial succession ceremonies and *ōharai* ceremonies, not found in the *shiryō*. These changes probably reflect differences in the use of ceremonies in Japan and China which the compilers of the *ritsuryō* code took into account. Notwithstanding these differences, both codes are alike in that they record popular ceremonies of society at that time, even though they include only those ceremonies which had official or political significance. The importance which Japan's *ritsuryō* code placed on *kami* derived ultimately from such ceremonies. Originally, *kami* were popular local deities connected to communal groups bound by blood ties or geographical proximity, and later to the imperial concept of state as well. The *kami* associated with ancestor worship are one example of such local deities. As the section following the *jingiryō* in the *ritsuryō*, the government drew up the *sōniryō*, laws for Buddhist institutions, to regulate priests and nuns. By compiling the *sōniryō* separately from the *jingiryō*, the government placed ceremonies for *kami* in a different dimension from religions such as Buddhism which exerted a special influence on society through its high doctrines.

In subsequent centuries the significance of *kami* changed somewhat from what it had been under the original *ritsuryō* system. During the eighth century the state enthusiastically embraced Buddhism, and the Empress Shōtoku, in collusion with the priest Dōkyō, established a policy that was pro-Buddhist in the extreme. Recent scholars have shown how this policy met with opposition in aristocratic and court circles, and they claim that in conjunction with political reforms at the beginning of the ninth century there emerged the concept of Shinto as an independent indigenous religion.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, it was during these ninth century reforms that court Shinto ceremonies and Ise Shrine's organization were formalized. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that Shinto was perceived as an independent religion in opposition to Buddhism at this time.

As is already well known, between the late eighth century and

14. Takatori Masao, *Shintō no seiritsu* (Heibonsha, 1979).



the eleventh century Shinto and Buddhism gradually coalesced with one another (*shinbutsu shūgō*)—or, more precisely, veneration of the *kami* was absorbed into Buddhism through a variety of doctrinal innovations and new religious forms. Among the doctrinal explanations of the *kami* were the following: 1) the *kami* realize that they themselves are trapped in this world of samsara and transmigration and they also seek liberation through the Buddhist teachings; 2) the *kami* are benevolent deities who protect Buddhism; 3) the *kami* are transformations of the Buddhas manifested in Japan to save all sentient beings (*honji suijaku*); and 4) the *kami* are the pure spirits of the Buddhas (*hongaku*). Among new religious forms were the *jingūji* (a combination shrine and temple) and Sōgyō Hachiman (the *kami* Hachiman in the guise of a Buddhist monk). Such religious forms are exemplary of ceremonies and objects of worship which could not be distinguished specifically as Shinto or as Buddhist. The first stage in this process of Shinto-Buddhist syncretization covered the late eighth and early ninth century. During that period the first two doctrinal explanations of *kami*, mentioned above, became current.

It is only natural that at this stage people became more cognizant of the *kami*, especially in relation to the Buddhas. Examples of this are found in the *Shoku Nihongi*. The entry there for 782/7/29 states that Shinto cannot be deceived and that numerous recent calamities are retribution meted out by the great *kami* of Ise and all the other *kami* in return for the negligent use of mourning garb widespread among men. Such disrespect for decorum, and by extension for the *kami*, indicates implicitly the popularity of the Buddhas over the *kami*. Another example from the *Shoku Nihongi* is an imperial edict of 836/11, which states that there is nothing superior to Mahāyāna Buddhism in defending Shinto and that one should rely on the efficacy of Buddhist practices to transform calamity into good. This passage indicates that it is the Buddhas who guarantee the authority of the *kami*.

These examples reflect a heightened awareness of *kami* during this period, but they by no means imply that Shinto was looked upon as an independent and inviolable entity. On the contrary, there was more of a sense that Shinto occupied a subordinate position and role within the broader scheme of Buddhism.

### III. *The Meaning of the Word Shinto in Medieval Times*

The *Konjaku monogatari*, composed around the eleventh century, contains the following two references. First, an old woman

in China was possessed with heretical views: she served Shinto and did not believe in Buddhism. Second, there was an outlying province in India which was a land of *kami*, and to this day the words of Buddhism have not been transmitted there.<sup>15</sup> Here “Shinto” and “land of *kami*” have nothing to do with Japan but clearly indicate “local deities” and “a land devoted to its local deities.” Although these references are from a collection of Buddhist tales, they show that even in this period the word Shinto was used in its classical sense, as it was in China and in the *Nihon shoki*.

In medieval times the word Shinto generally meant the authority, power, or activity of a *kami*, being a *kami*, or, in short, the state or attributes of a *kami*. For example, the *Nakatomi no harai kunge*, a work on Ryōbu Shinto of Shingon Buddhism, discusses the relationship of *kami* and Buddha in the following way: “The Buddha assumes a state in which *kami* and Buddha are not two different things but are absolutely identical. The Buddha constantly confers his mark (*suijaku*) on Shinto.”<sup>16</sup> Here Shinto must mean *kami* or the state of being a *kami*. The word Shinto is used in the same way in the *Shintōshū*, a collection of tales from the Sannō Shinto tradition of Tendai Buddhism:

Question: For what reason do the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas manifest themselves in the form of Shinto?

Answer: The Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas manifest themselves in various forms out of compassion for and to save all living beings.<sup>17</sup>

Besides these there are numerous other examples of Shinto used to mean *kami*.

A saying in common parlance in medieval times was, “Shinto is a difficult thing to speculate about.” This example, if any, is representative of what Shinto ordinarily indicated in that period. It does not mean that one cannot conjecture about the religion or doctrines of the *kami* but rather that it is difficult to fathom the conduct, the intentions, and the existence of the *kami* by human intellect. Such a definition of Shinto was current throughout the medieval period, and even the *Japanese Portuguese Dictionary* of 1603 contains the following entry: “Xinto (*camino michi*). *Kami* [*camis* in the original] or

15. *Konjaku monogatarihū*, fasc. 7, story 3; fasc. 3, story 26.

16. *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, Vol. 5 (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1909), p. 160.

17. *Akagi bunkobon Shintōshū*, Vol. 1 of *Kichō kotensekisōkan* (Kadokawa Shoten, 1968), p. 12.

matters pertaining to *kami*.”<sup>18</sup> The *camino michi* recorded here is the Japanese reading of the Chinese characters for Shinto. It is clear that this word *michi* likewise does not mean doctrine. *Michi* in the medieval period, just as in ancient times, indicated conduct or ideal state like the *michi* in *mononofu no michi* or *yumiya no michi* (the way of the warrior). Hence *kami no michi* means the state of being a *kami* or the conduct of a *kami*. Even when *michi* is compounded with another character and read *tō* or *dō* as in Shinto, the compound can have the meaning of the other character alone. An example of this is found in the *Gishi wajinden* which states in reference to Himiko that “she served the *kidō* (demons).” The same can be said of the *dō* and *tō* of *myōdō* (deities of the world of the dead) and *tentō* (deities such as Bonten and Taishakuten), words which appear in *kishōmon*, medieval documents containing oaths sworn before *kami* and Buddhas.

The next question that must be dealt with is what religious content this word Shinto was said to have contained. As pointed out earlier, during medieval times Shinto was generally interpreted as one part of Buddhism. This was possible because the concepts contained in Mahāyāna Buddhism provided a rationale for absorbing folk beliefs. Just as a unique form of Buddhism evolved in Tibet, so in medieval Japan Buddhism developed a distinctive logic and system of its own.

Nominally, medieval Buddhism comprised eight sects, but it was not unusual for individuals to study the teachings and rituals of all the sects. The reason is that the eight held a single doctrinal system in common, that of *mikkyō* or esoteric Buddhism (Skt. Vajrayāna). The Buddhist teachings that were recognized as orthodox during the medieval period had *mikkyō* as their base, combined with the exoteric teachings or *kengyō* (Buddhist and other teachings outside of *mikkyō*) of each of the eight schools—Tendai, Kegon, Yuishiki (Hossō), Ritsu, etc. These eight sects, sometimes called *kenmitsu* or exoteric-esoteric Buddhism, acknowledged their interdependence with state authority, and together they dominated the religious sector. This entire order constituted the fundamental religious system of medieval Japan. Shinto was drawn into this Buddhist system as one segment of it, and its religious content was replaced with Buddhist doctrine, particularly *mikkyō* and Tendai philosophy. The term

18. *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam* (Nagasaki, 1603); *Nippo jisho* (Iwanami Shoten, 1960).

*kenmitsu* used here refers to this kind of system.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the twelfth century, various reform movements arose in opposition to this system, and there even appeared heretical sects which stressed exclusive religious practices—the chanting of the *nembutsu*, *zen* meditation, etc. Nonetheless, the *kenmitsu* system maintained its status as the orthodox religion until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In *kenmitsu* Buddhism, the most widespread interpretation of the religious content of Shinto was the *honji suijaku* theory, based on Tendai doctrine. According to this theory, the *kami* are simply another form of the Buddha, and their form, condition, authority, and activity are nothing but the form and the acts by which the Buddha teaches, guides, and saves human beings. Shinto, therefore, was independent neither in existence nor in system of thought. It was merely one means among many by which the Buddha guides (*kedō*) and converts (*kegi*) sentient beings. The *Shintōshū* cited earlier contains about fifty tales in which the Buddha takes on the form of a *kami* and saves human beings. The word Shinto in its title presupposes this meaning—i.e., conversion by the Buddha. With Shinto interpreted in this way and with people's beliefs based on this kind of interpretation, individual Shinto shrines sought to emphasize the distinctive capacities and lineage of their own *kami* as a manifestation (*suijaku*) of the Buddha, as well as the unique teachings and practices passed down in their shrine or school. These claims were expanded through complicated doctrines and tortuous theories into a class of teachings now called sectarian or *shake* Shinto (Tsuda's fourth definition of the word Shinto, "the teachings propagated by a particular shrine"). Ryōbu Shinto of the Shingon tradition and Sannō Shinto of the Tendai tradition are typical examples of such teachings. Individual shrines in different areas adapted these teachings in such a way that during the medieval period countless theories of Shinto arose.

The theory of Shinto propounded by the Ise Shrine tradition, sometimes called Ise or Watarai Shinto, is of decisive importance in a consideration of medieval Shinto. Modern intellectual and Shinto historians have generally regarded Ise Shinto, which became active in the thirteenth century, as evidence of Shinto's tenacious, though hidden, existence as "Japan's indigenous religion" throughout medieval times. Moreover, they see it as the starting point for subse-

19. Kuroda Toshio, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1975), chapter three.

quent medieval theories of Shinto as they began to break away from Buddhism.<sup>20</sup>

It is well-known that even during Buddhism's apex in the medieval period Ise Shrine maintained ancient rites—whether uniquely Japanese or Taoist in origin—and upheld proscriptions against Buddhist terminology, practices, and garb. But it is equally important to realize that Ise Shrine did not completely reject Buddhism, for Buddhist priests would visit the shrine and Ise priests themselves possessed considerable knowledge of Buddhism. In this light, the proscription against anything Buddhist was probably regarded as a peculiar and mysterious practice, incomprehensible to society in general and even to the Shinto priests at Ise. This proscription, for example, is treated as strange in Mujū's *Shasekishū* and Tsūkai's *Daijingū sankeiki*, works closely associated with Ise Shrine, and in treatises by outstanding priests of Ise, such as the *Daijingū ryōgū no onkoto* by Watarai Tsunemasa. For the medieval mind this was only a natural response. The problem that arises here is how to explain in Buddhist terms what was a truly peculiar practice for the times, or even more so, how to advocate it in all good conscience as a praiseworthy feature of the shrine. The works mentioned above actually begin with this kind of question and end up expounding the immeasurable virtues of the *kami* at Ise. Also in Ise Shinto there is the expression "not to breathe a word about Buddhism." This in fact does not imply a rejection of Buddhism but rather indicates a special attitude or etiquette assumed in the presence of the *kami*. As stated previously in another article, this view draws on the philosophy of innate Buddhahood (*hongaku shisō*) found in esoteric Buddhism which was popular at that time, the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> In the final analysis, Ise Shinto was nothing more than one form of sectarian Shinto, which took for granted the existence of the Buddhas.<sup>22</sup>

In the *Hieisha eizan gyōkōki* of the early fourteenth century, it states:

There are identical as well as differing aspects in the method of conversion used by the *shinmei* (*kami*) in other lands and that used by Shinto in our own land. Our land, which is a land of the *kami*, is

20. Ōsumi Kazuo, "Chūsei Shintōron no Shisōteki Ichi," *hūsei Shintōron*, Vol. 19 of *Nihon shisō taikai* (Iwanami Shoten, 1977).

21. Kuroda, p. 521.

22. Kuroda Toshio, "Chūsei shūkyōshi ni okeru Shintō no ichi," in *Kodai Chūsei no shakai to shisō: Ienaga Saburō kyōju taikan kinen* (Sanseidō, 1979), p. 151 ff.

superior in that human beings are benefitted by "the light of the Buddha melded to become one with our world of dust" (*wakō dōjin*, i.e., the power of the Buddha harmonized with our mundane world and manifested as *kami*).<sup>23</sup>

This passage is indicative of how the word Shinto was interpreted in medieval times. It was not used to distinguish popular beliefs from Buddhism but rather to signify the form in which the Buddha converts and saves human beings.

#### IV. *Shinto's Secular Role*

If Shinto is a manifestation of the Buddha and one form in which he converts and saves human beings, there arises the question of whether *kami* play precisely the same role as the Buddha. Here it is important to note the secular character of Shinto in medieval times. Many of the representations of *kami* familiar to people in the medieval period were secular in form. Admittedly, there were also numerous examples of syncretism with Buddhism, for instance, Sanskrit letters used to symbolize invisible *kami* or a Buddhist image enshrined in the inner sanctuary (*shinden*) of a shrine, or again Hachimanshin portrayed as a Buddhist monk, or Zaō Gongen as the Buddhist deity Myōō (Skt. Vidyārāja). Nevertheless, in many of the Shinto statues, portraits, and narrative drawings that survive today, *kami* were depicted in such secular guises as noblemen, ladies, old men, young boys, Chinese gentlemen, travelers, and hunters. A number of these became formalized iconographically during the thirteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

The same can also be said of how the word *suijaku* (manifestation) was comprehended. *Suijaku*, as understood by the common people in medieval times, was not the abstract or philosophical idea found in the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism but was mythological in nature or perhaps associated with concrete places or events. The term *suijaku* literally meant to descend from heaven to a given spot and to become the local or guardian *kami* of that spot.<sup>25</sup> Hence, at that spot there would arise a legend of the mysterious relationship between men and *kami*, and the very area enshrining the *kami* would

23. Okami Masao hakase kanreki kinen kankōkai, *Muromachi gokoro—chūsei bungaku shiryōshū* (Kadokawa Shoten, 1978), p. 366.

24. For Hie Shichisha, see *Enryakuji gokoku engi* in *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho*, chapter one; for Kasugasha, see Kageyama Haruki, *Shintō bijutsu* (Yūzankaku, 1973), p. 170.

25. Kuroda, *Nihon Chūsei*, p. 451.

be looked upon as sacred ground where profound doctrinal principles lay concealed. The history of this manifestation—that is, its development over time—was related in the form of an *engi* (a historical narrative), and the positioning of its enshrinement—that is, its location in space—was depicted in the form of a mandala (a rational layout). This indicates that the legends, the architectural form of early shrines, and the rituals of worship were interpreted as mysterious principles expressing Buddhist philosophy. In short, secular representations in Shinto actually expressed an essence which was strongly Buddhist. The link between Buddhism and Shinto in medieval times is exemplified by the Kike school at Enryakuji. This school, which specialized in chronicles, concentrated on mysterious legends, especially Shinto legends, as a means of plumbing the depths of Buddhism.<sup>26</sup>

Also in the medieval period Shinto was associated with numerous secular functions and duties. Shinto observances at court, such as the Daijōe (a rite performed by the emperor upon his succession) and the Jinkonjiki (a biannual offering to the *kami* by the emperor) had no other purpose than to enshroud in mystery secular authority. Nonetheless, they derived their meaning from the fact that secular mystery lay within a world encompassed by Buddhist law. Eventually, the worship of *kami* became inseparable from secular authority, but at the same time it was incorporated into the multi-leveled *kenmitsu* system with its unique logic and structure resulting from Buddhism's development in Japan. Secular though it was, Shinto did not coexist aloof from Buddhism, nor did it constitute a non-Buddhist stronghold within the Buddhist sphere. Rather, its secularity functioned, in the final analysis, within a Buddhist world.

Because shrines were Buddhism's secular face, their upkeep was the responsibility of the secular authority, even though they themselves were integrated into Buddhism's system of control. For that reason, the imperial court made regular offerings to twenty-two specially designated shrines, and the provincial government bore the responsibility for ceremonies and maintenance at major shrines (*sōsha*, *ichinomiya*, and *ninomiya*) in the provinces. In the Kamakura period the bakufu stipulated in article one of the *Goseibai shikimoku*, the Jōei law code, that "efforts must be made to keep shrines in repair and not to neglect their ceremonies," thereby stressing the importance of maintaining shrines in the provinces and on *shōen* under bakufu supervision. In article two it dealt with Buddhist

26. Hazama Jikō, *Nihon Bukkyō no kaiten to sono kichō*, Vol. 2, p. 245ff.

temples and their functions. These indicate not only the responsibilities that the bakufu inherited from the provincial government of the previous period but also the obligations which secular administrative authority had to fulfill to religion.

As stated earlier, Shinto was looked upon as a skillful means by which the Buddha, in his compassion, might lead people to enlightenment or deliver them to his Pure Land. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in actuality Shinto played an important role in the administrative power upholding the secular order. As pointed out in the previous section, the ability of "the light of the Buddha to meld and to become one with our world of dust" (*wakō dōjin*) was constantly stressed in medieval times, but that expression reflects an understanding of Shinto's ultimate significance or its final objective. On an everyday level, people felt a strong sense of fear toward the *kami*. For example, in many medieval oaths (*kishōmon*), it is recorded, "If I violate this pledge, may the punishments of Bonten and Taishakuten, of the *kami* of the provinces, and especially of the guardian *kami* of this *shōen* be visited upon this body of mine." It goes without saying that what was sworn in such oaths was, without exception, actions of worldly significance or things relating to the preservation of the secular order, rather than anything to do with religious affairs. It is true that in Buddhism also people would petition the Buddha for "peace in this world and good fortune in the next" (*gense annon gosei zenshō*), but as a general rule matters of this world were addressed to the *kami* and those of the coming world to the Buddha. In times of worldly difficulty one might pray for the protection of the *kami* and the Buddha, but first and foremost for that of the *kami*. Or, when heading into battle, one would beseech the *kami* for good fortune in war. Concerning the *kami* and their power, it was generally said that they were strict in both reward and punishment. Such views simply highlight the influence and control which religion exerted over secular life.

Though there is not enough space to deal with it adequately here, the belief that "Japan is the land of the *kami*," with both its political and religious implications, was based on the secular role of Shinto described above. The secularity of Shinto and the political applicability of the concept of "the land of the *kami*" does not indicate that Shinto was without any religious character but rather shows that the Buddhist system which lay behind it pervaded all aspects of everyday life. The present-day illusion that Shinto is not a religion derives historically from a misunderstanding of this point.



V. *The Emergence of the Concept of Shinto as an Indigenous Religion*

The following two sentences are found in the *Shintōshū*:

- 1) Question: On what basis do we know that Shinto reveres the Buddha's teachings?
- 2) Question: How are we to understand the statement that the Buddha's realm and Shinto differ in their respective forms but are one and the same in essence?<sup>27</sup>

Both of these questions pose *kami* and Buddha against one another. In the first Shinto clearly indicates the *kami* themselves, whereas in the second Shinto may be interpreted as the deeds, state, or authority of the *kami*, but it also conveys the idea of a realm of the *kami* by contrasting it to the Buddha's realm. A similar passage is found in the *Daijīngū sankeiki* by Tsūkai:

Amaterasu Ōmikami is paramount in Shinto and the Tathāgata Dainichi is paramount in Buddhist teachings. Hence in both *suijaku* (manifestation) and *honji* (origin or source) there is the supreme and the incomparable.<sup>28</sup>

In this case Shinto may be understood as the ideal state of being a *kami*, but it is also important that, as a concept juxtaposed to "Buddhist teachings," it assumes a sphere of its own, meaning "the realm of *suijaku*," teaching and converting in the form of a *kami*. This is especially true of the Ise school's theory of Shinto. For example, in the *Hōki hongī* Shinto is contrasted to the "three jewels" (the three basic components of Buddhism—the Buddha, the Buddhist teachings, and the Buddhist order), or in the *Ruishū jingi hongen* it is juxtaposed to *bukke* (Buddhist schools).<sup>29</sup> These imply that Shinto and Buddhism belong to separate spheres in the phenomenal world even though they are identical in essence. Examples which transfer emphasis to the word Shinto in this way are quite conspicuous in Ise Shinto. This was a natural tendency, since the Ise school's theory of Shinto had to stress the efficacy of Shinto above all, even more than other schools of sectarian Shinto.

The word Shinto, when set up as an object of contrast in this

27. *Akagi bunkobon Shintōshū*, pp. 226–27.

28. *Jingū sankeiki taisei*, in *Daijīngū sōsho*, p. 70.

29. *Watarai Shintō taisei*, I, in *Dai Jingū Sōsho*, pp. 54, 695.

way, emerged with a sectarian meaning or with a special sphere of its own, even though fundamentally it meant the authority of the *kami* or the condition of being a *kami*. This is not to say that it immediately assumed the meaning of a separate teaching or religion liberated from the framework of Buddhism. Rather, what Ise Shinto tried to do was to cast the realm of Shinto in a resplendent light. This was attempted by reducing the terms contrasted with Shinto to purely Buddhist phenomenon and forms—i.e., Buddhist teachings, “three jewels,” Buddhist schools, etc.—and by defining Shinto relative to them. All the while, Buddhism, the overarching principle which embraced and unified both, was left intact as the ultimate basis. The Ise school also attempted to aggrandize Shinto by diverse embellishments and additions to Shinto that were non-Buddhist and by cloaking it in a dignity similar to that of the Buddhist scriptures. Nonetheless, in this case also the principles which Shinto held in common with Buddhism were likewise stressed.

In this way the word Shinto came to refer to a Japanese phenomenon, school, or sphere of Buddhism qua religious truth. This meaning of the word paved the way for later stages in which Shinto became a term for Japan’s indigenous religion. The writings of the priests at Ise as well as the theories of fourteenth century Shinto thinkers such as Kitabatake Chikafusa, Jihen, and Ichijō Kanera (corresponding to Tsuda’s third definition of Shinto, “concepts and teachings concerning *kami*”) played a particularly important role in this process. Nevertheless, it was not because these thinkers were critical of *kenmitsu* Buddhism, which was the orthodox religion of the medieval period. Rather, they were all adherents of the orthodox teachings, so that any statements they made, which might at first seem to oppose those teachings, were nothing more than an attempt, extreme though it may have been, to enshroud in mystery the authority of the governing system at a time when it was isolated and in decline. With the rise of the Shinto-only school (Yuiitsu or Yoshida Shinto) at the end of the fifteenth century, the word Shinto became more and more identified as an indigenous form of religion. It was even interpreted as the highest religion, though identical in essence with Buddhism and Confucianism. At this point the meaning of the word began to depart from the orthodox teachings of *kenmitsu* Buddhism. It just so happened that during this period the power of the orthodox religious order was in a state of decline because of the strength of various heretical movements of so-called “new Buddhism,” particularly of Shinshū uprisings (*ikkō ikki*). The Shinto-

only school, which was one branch of sectarian Shinto, simply took advantage of this situation for its own unfettered development.

Beginning in the seventeenth century a Confucian theory of Shinto, with much the same structure as medieval theories, was formulated by Hayashi Razan and other Edo period scholars. Based on this interpretation of Shinto, the definition of Shinto as the indigenous religion of Japan, as opposed to Taoism, Buddhism, or Confucianism, became firmly fixed. Moreover, the Confucian concept of *dō*, the way, also influenced the word Shinto, imbuing it with the meaning of “the way, as a political or moral norm” (Tsuda’s fifth definition of Shinto). Of course, Confucian Shinto amounted to nothing more than theories of the educated class subordinating Shinto’s true nature to Confucianism. Actual belief in the *kami*, however, as found among the common people at that time, remained subsumed under Buddhism.

The notion of Shinto as Japan’s indigenous religion finally emerged complete both in name and in fact with the rise of modern nationalism, which evolved from the National Learning school of Motoori Norinaga and the Restoration Shinto movement of the Edo period down to the establishment of State Shinto in the Meiji period. The Meiji separation of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri*) and its concomitant suppression of Buddhism (*haibutsu kishaku*) were coercive and destructive “correctives” pressed forward by the hand of government. With them Shinto achieved for the first time the status of an independent religion, distorted though it was. During this period the “historical consciousness” of an indigenous religion called Shinto, existing in Japan since ancient times, clearly took shape for the first time. This has remained the basis for defining the word Shinto down to the present. Scholars have yielded to this use of the word, and the population at large has been educated in this vein.

There is one further thing which should be pointed out. That is that separating Shinto from Buddhism cut Shinto off from the highest level of religious philosophy achieved by the Japanese up to that time and inevitably, moreover artificially, gave it the features of a primitive religion. Hence, while acquiring independence, Shinto declined to the state of a religion that disavowed being a religion.

### *Conclusion*

This article is an attempt to trace Shinto throughout Japan’s entire religious history by extracting samples dealing only with

Shinto from each period. The reader may be left with the impression, contrary to the assertion at the beginning of this essay, that Shinto has indeed existed without interruption throughout Japanese history. This is only natural considering the sampling method used. Moreover, it is undeniable that there is a certain continuity to it all.

Therein lies the problem. Up to now all studies of Shinto history have emphasized this continuity by means of such a sampling process. In doing so they have applied to all periods of history a sort of surgical separation of Shinto from Buddhism and thus from Japanese religion as a whole. By such reasoning, anything other than Shinto becomes simply a superficial overlay, a passing thing.

The meanings of the word Shinto, as well as changes over time in customs and beliefs, would indicate that Shinto emerged as an independent religion only in modern times, and then only as a result of political policy. If that is so, can this continuity be regarded as a true picture of history? Or could it be that what is perceived as indigenous, or as existing continuously from earliest times, is nothing more than a ghost image produced by a word linking together unrelated phenomenon? Up to just one hundred years ago, what constituted the religion and thought of the Japanese people in most periods of history was something historical—that is, something assimilated or formulated or fabricated by the people, whether it was native or foreign in origin. This thing was something truly indigenous. In concrete terms, this was the *kenmitsu* Buddhist system including its components, such as Shinto and the Yin-yang tradition, and its various branches, both reformist and heretical. It, rather than Shinto, was the comprehensive, unified, and self-defined system of religious thought produced by Japan in pre-modern times. Even today it is perpetuated latently in everyday conventions as the subconscious of the Japanese people.

Throughout East Asia, Mahāyāna Buddhism generally embraced native beliefs in a loose manner, without harsh repression and without absorbing them to the point of obliteration. The question here is how Japan should be interpreted. While acknowledging Japan as an example of this East Asian pattern, should one consider the separation of Shinto and Buddhism to be an inevitable development and, in line with Meiji nationalism, perceive Shinto as the basis of Japan's cultural history? Or, should one view *kenmitsu* Buddhism's unique system of thought, which evolved historically from diverse elements, including foreign ones, as the distinguishing feature of Japanese culture?

Considering the magnitude of the problem, this article leaves much to be desired. It is hoped, however, that it has served to dispel fictitious notions about Japan's religious history and religious consciousness, and about Japanese culture in general.

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