Bernhard Scheid

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SHINTŌ SHRINES: TRADITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

BERNHARD SCHEID

When we speak of a 'shrine' in Japanese Studies, we usually refer to a religious site dedicated to a Shintō deity (*kami* 神). 'Shrine' corresponds to a number of Japanese terms (*jinja* 神社, *yashiro* 社, *jingū* 神宮, *miya* 宮, etc.) but all these expressions indicate that the religious site in question belongs to Shintō and not to Buddhism or to any other religion. By contrast, the various Japanese expressions for a Buddhist site (*tera* 寺, *jiin* 寺院, etc.) are rendered as 'temple'. Thus, there is a clear semantic difference in Japanese between 'Shintō' and 'Buddhist' religious sites, translated as 'shrines' and 'temples' in Japanese Studies. In practice, however, it is often difficult to distinguish them. Not only foreign visitors but also many Japanese are therefore at times unable to tell whether they are paying a visit to a Buddhist or a Shintō sanctuary. The issue is further complicated by the fact that larger religious sites in Japan tend to include both religions. More precisely, large temple compounds usually have an area reserved for shrines of the (Shintō) protector deities of the main temple, while many large shrine compounds are surrounded by small Buddhist temples related to their deities. This double functionality of religious sites corresponds to the fact that most Japanese pay regular visits to both Buddhist and Shintō sites.

This chapter tries to provide some basic orientation in this confusing area, mainly from the perspective of shrine worship. Starting with the distinct characteristics of shrine buildings the discussion also provides an overview of the history of shrine worship, its complex interaction with Buddhism and its political functions in the modern period.

Visible and Invisible Aspects of Shrine Architecture and Layout

In a narrow sense, 'shrine' refers to a single religious building. A shrine building is typically a ground-level wooden structure with an ornate, gently curved roof, and can be of any size ranging from a miniature wayside shrine to an impressive hall. Small individual shrines can be found all over Japan at crossroads, scenic spots, in the middle of fields, in the

mountains, and nowadays even at the top of a modern skyscraper. In a wider sense, however, 'shrine' may also be used *pars pro toto* for a larger 'shrine compound' consisting of a main sanctuary and several auxiliary or branch shrines as well as a host of other religious buildings. Most Shintō activity takes place at such compounds and the main part of this article is therefore dedicated to these larger sites.

If we compare a shrine compound to a Catholic church, its different buildings can be likened to individual altars. Big churches usually comprise a number of altars dedicated to different saints, but there is one altar for the main object of worship that usually lends its name to the respective church. In Shintō (and also in Buddhism for that matter), the situation is similar. There is usually a main sanctuary and a number of side-halls for deities of lesser importance at a given site. However, in contrast to a Christian church, all these structures are scattered in an open area while the Christian altars are united in one big building. This reflects a functional difference between shrines and churches: while churches serve as meeting places of the religious community, shrines simply store the 'divine bodies' (*shintai* 神体) of their deities. If believers or casual visitors want to pay their respects to them, they do not attend a group ceremony but approach the sanctuary of the respective deity individually and perform a few ritual gestures of respect in front of it: bowing, clapping, offering small sums of money. Large scale celebrations are restricted to festivals, which are usually lively events in the open air. There is therefore no need for a big structure to shelter the whole community. The same is true, by the way, for most Buddhist temples in Japan.

Besides the main sanctuary (*honden* 本殿), a shrine compound also comprises buildings for ritual events, the so-called *haiden* 拝殿 or ceremony halls. Often, *haiden* are bigger than the main sanctuary of the respective shrine compound and may appear as the central building to the first-time visitor. In religious status, however, they are less important than the main sanctuary. They may be entered by anybody but usually ritual performers use them, while the common visitors remain outside. Only those who have paid for a particular ritual for their private benefit join the priests in the ceremonial halls.

Shrine compounds were typically built at the borders of a town or a village, ideally at the foot of a smoothly ascending hill. Halls and sanctuaries are scattered there in response to local topographic conditions rather than confirming to a strictly geometrical layout. Again, this is also true for many Buddhist sites. This 'marginalization' of religious sites accords

to an old tradition. In the remote past, it seems that shrines were not directly attached to the political center but were set up at some distance where transportation routes, the water supply, or distant views of the surrounding area could be controlled by the shrine. Shrines, therefore, seem to have provided a strategic (perhaps even a military) protection which turned into a symbolic protection from afar in later times. This pattern continued well into the Edo period (17th–mid 19th century) when the mausoleum for the founder of the ruling Tokugawa dynasty—the Tōshōgū 東照宮 Shrine built for the deified Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in 1617—was deliberately situated in Nikkō at the northern border of the Tokugawa heartland, the Kantō plain, some 100km north of the new capital Edo. In a similar way, many other important Shintō sites including Ise 伊勢 and Izumo 出雲 are found at comparatively remote places in the countryside. At least for premodern shrines there seems to be the rule of thumb that the more important a shrine the farther away it is built from the worshipping community. I will discuss possible reasons for this phenomenon in more detail below.

A shrine deity is usually in possession of a *shintai* or 'divine body'. The *shintai* is a concrete sign indicating the presence of the *kami* and is therefore the main object of worship in Shintō. In most shrines, nobody is allowed to look at the *shintai*, which remains hidden in the main sanctuary. Not even the priests would enter the sanctuary under normal conditions.

Typical *shintai* are mirrors (in ancient times bronze mirrors, then most prestigious and symbolic objects), swords, or curved beads (*magatama* 勾玉), but some shrines also contain statues of deities (as do Buddhist temples) or natural objects like rocks. Shintō practitioners may possess a miniature shrine at home, where a small paper strip with the name of a *kami* can serve as a *shintai*, while in a few famous cases, scenic landmarks like waterfalls (e.g. the Nachi Falls) or cone-shaped hills (Mt. Miwa 三輪山) are regarded as the 'divine bodies' worshipped at a nearby shrine. These shrines do not have a main sanctuary since the *shintai* is too big but the access to the *shintai* area is restricted by taboo regulations.

An alternative term for *shintai* is *(mi)tamashiro* (御)霊代, lit. 'representative of the (august) spirit [of a *kami*]'. This indicates that the *shintai* is not regarded as the deity itself but as a representation or an 'abode' of the *kami*. The most essential ritual at the inauguration of a new shrine, therefore, consists of 'calling down' or 'inviting' the intended *kami* to dwell in

the 'divine body'. The same *kami* may, of course, dwell in a number of shrines. In these cases, a 'branch-spirit' (*bunrei* 分霊) of an existing shrine deity is invited to dwell in a new *shintai*, which then becomes the object of worship at the new shrine.

As already mentioned, *shintai* are generally shrouded in secrecy and can only be viewed if they no longer serve as 'divine bodies'. Even priests must not look at them and often do not even know what their *shintai* actually consists of (cf. Nelson 1996: 31). At times when a *shintai* has to be taken out of its shrine, it is transferred to a temporary shrine (in case of rebuilding) or to a portable shrine (at festivals). Also at these occasions it remains hidden in a box. Great ritual care and preparations in form of abstention rites by the priests are necessary to avoid any disturbance of the *kami* during such a process of translocation.

The main hall of a really important shrine is usually once more shielded from public access by surrounding corridors or fences that allow nothing but a glimpse on the roof under which the 'divine body' is placed. In these cases, worship to the deity is usually done in front of the gate leading to that innermost district. Some shrines, like Kamigamo 上賀茂 in Kyoto or Kasuga 春日 in Nara, however, open their inner compounds at special events such as the New Year's festival. There is, therefore, no iron rule regarding the secrecy of the main sanctuary but rather a subtle play of concealment and exhibition related to the religious calendar of the specific site.

Visual Markers

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is often difficult to distinguish Shintō shrines from Japanese Buddhist temples if one merely regards their design and layout. Given the cultural importance and the long history of Buddhism in Japan, such architectonic similarities are indeed of no surprise. Nevertheless, the above mentioned semantic difference between 'shrines' and 'temples' is also expressed by a few distinctive symbols that indicate almost without fail whether a building is dedicated to a *kami* or to a Buddha.

The most characteristic of these visual markers is the *torii* 鳥居, a simple gate consisting of two pillars and two cross beams. There is virtually no Shintō site without this emblematic entrance. *Torii* are almost never adjacent to a wall or fence but stand free and merely indicate the symbolic passage from a mundane to a sacred space. Usually, one or several

torii are placed at the entrance of a shrine compound as well as in front of every individual shrine building.[1]

In spite of this emblematic function, we may find *torii* also in some ancient Buddhist graveyards (for instance at Mt. Kōya 高野山, the spiritual center of Shingon Buddhism). There is, moreover, a famous *torii* at the entrance of Japans oldest officially commissioned Buddhist temple, the Shitennōji 四天王寺 in Osaka (founded in 593). This suggests that the *torii* were not always an exclusive property of Shintō but may have served as general identifiers of sacred sites in early times.

A marker of similar symbolic value is the so-called *shimenawa* 注連縄 or divine rope. *Shimenawa* are simple ropes of straw and can be used to surround a sacred space or a natural object of awe-inspiring size or shape like a 'divine rock' or a 'divine tree'. More often, however, *shimenawa* are attached to a *torii* or hung below the entrance of a shrine building indicating the presence of a *kami*. Finally, Shintō sites can be identified by the famous zigzag streamers (*gohei* 御幣, or *shide* 紙垂), which are never used in a Buddhist context. They are usually made of white paper attached to a *shimenawa* rope, a ritual instrument, or a ceremonial offering.

Shintō architecture comprises a few other elements that may further serve to identify a shrine building. Most characteristic are the crossed wooden beams called *chigi* 千木. At the Grand Shrines of Ise and all other buildings following this type, they appear as extended rafters that project from either end of the roof, while in other cases they are X-shaped decorative elements riding on both ends of the ridgepole. Similar decorative symbols are the *katsuogi* 鰹木, ellipsoid bolts (their name is actually derived from the bonito fish, *katsuo* 鰹) placed between the *chigi* on the ridgepole. In contrast to the above mentioned *torii*, these roof ornaments are no unconditional requirements for a shrine building. In fact, shrines lacking *chigi* and *katsuogi* are the norm rather than the exception.

In addition to these identifiers of Shintō architecture and ritual, many other religious objects such as beautifully decorated wells or water basins (*temizuya* 手水屋) for the ritual purification of hands and mouths, stone lanterns (*tōrō* 燈篭), or entrance guardians in the form of 'lion-dogs' (*komainu* 狛犬), may be found at a shrine compound. While some authors list these objects also among the characteristics of a Shintō shrine,

[1] In some cases, for instance at the Fushimi Inari 伏見稲荷 Shrine in Kyoto, countless *torii* donated by individual believers form virtual tunnels leading from one sanctuary to another.

they are rather general items of a Japanese religious site, since they may be equally found in a Buddhist temple and are often of Buddhist origin. The same is true for lucky charms (*omamori* お守り), talismans (*ofuda* お札), votive tablets (*ema* 絵馬), and divination slips (*omikuji* お神籤), which are sold at every bigger religious institution, Buddhist or Shintō, alike. This indicates once more that shrines share many characteristics with Japanese Buddhist temples, and that the basic pattern of worship is quite similar, at least from a lay visitor's point of view.[2]

If there is any morphological characteristic that sets the above mentioned shrine markers apart from more general religious items, it is their preservation of comparatively simple, apparently 'archaic' elements. The simplicity of the material used for ropes and zigzag streamers corresponds to the simplicity in the form of the *torii*, the *chigi* and the *katsuogi*, which are regarded as remnants of ancient Japanese architecture. We may find this fondness of simplicity and conservation also in the ritual rebuilding of the Ise Shrines every twenty years, which occurs at a few other important shrines as well. Originally a common feature of ancient palace architecture the destruction and rebuilding of shrines is now done in a ritualized fashion.[3] While the material is always new, the construction techniques remain exactly the same—a most efficient way to preserve a particular style of architecture. Nevertheless, these strikingly archaic elements are but one feature of traditional shrine architecture. The vast majority of shrines are characterized by the elaborate styles of later ages, which developed, as already mentioned, hand in hand with Buddhist architecture.

Quantitative Aspects of Worship at Shrines

According to an ancient expression, the Shintō pantheon consists of *yaoyorozu no kami* 八百万の神, lit. 'eight-hundred myriads or eight millions of *kami*'. In other words, the number of *kami* is incalculable. No central authority exists to decide what may be actually called a *kami*. Every object of the visible world may be animated and any of these *animae* or spirits may be treated as a *kami*. Regarding shrines, however, it is possible to provide an approximate idea of their quantitative proportions.

[2] For a recent study that emphasizes the common approach to Shintō and Buddhism in Japan, cf. Reader and Tanabe 1998.

[3] The original function of this custom had quite practical functions to forestall the decay of wooden building, especially at times when stone fundaments were not yet in use (cf. Totman 1989: 13–18).

The government's Agency of Cultural Affairs notes there are about 80,000 shrines that are officially recognized as 'individual judicial religious persons' (*tan'i shūkyō hōjin* 単位宗教法人) (Statistics Bureau 2009). Only a small portion of these shrines have resident priests and constitute what has been called a 'shrine compound'. The vast majority are single, unmanned wayside shrines that may be compared to small chapels in Christian countries. Considering that compounds contain a multitude of side shrines, the total number of shrine buildings within or outside of larger compounds is sometimes estimated as about 100,000 or more.

Compared to Buddhism, the number of shrines is slightly larger than the number of temples (about 75,000), but temples are usually bigger and there are probably four times as many clerics in Japanese Buddhism than in Shintō.[4] In fact, the number of registered shrine priests is even less than the number of shrine sites. This suggests that many small shrines are maintained by lay believers. Organized religious activity is therefore much more developed in Japanese Buddhism, while the *kami* are often worshipped without professional guidance.

Most shrines belong to nation-wide networks headed by one of Japan's oldest and most prestigious shrines. In terms of prestige, the most representative shrine is the imperial ancestor shrine in Ise (actually composed of two sites, the 'Inner' and the 'Outer Shrine' and therefore usually rendered as the 'Grand Shrines of Ise'). Regarding the number of branch shrines, however, the network of Ise ranks significantly behind the networks of shrines dedicated to Inari 稲荷 or Hachiman 八幡.[5] The ties between the shrines in such networks are generally rather loose but their respective quantities reflect to a certain extent the popularity of shrine deities in present Japan.

[4] Government statistics list 79,000 Shintō priests as opposed to 314,000 Buddhist clerics in 2006 (Statistics Bureau 2009). The same statics indicate a dramatic shift in this relation. While Shintō priests decreased by about twenty percent from 1980 to 2006, Buddhists increased by about the same percentage. These numbers, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, since they are based on reports by the religious organizations themselves, not on independent research. For the general problems with statistics on Japanese religion see the article by Michael Roemer in this volume.

[5] According to *Shintō jiten* (Inoue et al. 1994), Inari Shrines, which can be identified by their fox guardian figures, comprise the largest network with 32,000 sites headed by the Fushimi Inari Grand Shrine in Kyoto. Hachiman Shrines follow suite with 25,000 sites. Shinmei 神明 Shrines, which belong to the network of Ise, only form the third largest group of some 18,000 sites (Inoue et al. 1994: 313; see also *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, s.v. "Shrine Names and Distributions"). Again, other sources arrive at slightly different estimations but the basic picture remains the same.

Figure 1. Grand Shrines of Ise, locked entrance to the "Inner Shrine" (Naikū). Largely disguised from public view, the main buildings of the Grand Shrines of Ise preserve ancient shrine architecture through ritual rebuilding every twenty years. (Photograph by John Nelson, 2006)

In addition, most shrines belong to the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁), which provides a different kind of nationwide network. It is an umbrella organization founded in 1946, immediately after the Second World War, in place of the governmental structures that oversaw shrines in the period of State Shintō (see below). For various reasons, several important shrines such as Fushimi Inari in Kyoto, the Tōshōgū in Nikkō, or the Yasukuni 靖国 Shrine in Tokyo, are not members of this organization.

Who are the Shrine Deities?

To the foreign visitor it is striking that many shrines are referred to by their place names rather than by the names of their main deities. Often, the main deity's name is not even known to the general populace. This indifference is not necessarily a phenomenon of modern secularism but can be observed already in premodern sources. It corresponds to the fact that shrine compounds tend to comprise so many different *kami*. Even the main sanctuary may be dedicated to two, three, or even more deities.

A good example is the famous Kasuga Shrine in Nara, originally the tutelary shrine of Japan's most powerful court aristocrats, the Fujiwara 藤原. Kasuga is simply a place name. In the eighth century, the Fujiwara turned this place into an ancestor shrine for four deities whom they regarded as their divine predecessors (Takemikazuchi, Futsunushi, Ame-nokoyane, Himegami).[6] The main sanctuary of the shrine therefore consists of four structures of almost the same size and layout dedicated to these ancestors. In the course of time, however, there emerged the 'Great Shining Deity of Kasuga' (Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神) as a distinct divine personality that figured prominently in several religious legends and paintings.[7] At the Kasuga site itself, however, we search in vain for a sanctuary or a *shintai* of this Kasuga deity. Rather, it seems to be a kind of super-*kami* represented by the whole compound.

The Fujiwara also erected ancestor shrines at other places including the Yoshida 吉田 Shrine in Kyoto. These sites contain the same set of deities as Kasuga. As the Fujiwara ancestor cult lost importance, however, these shrines came to be known again by their place names and assumed separate identities, e.g. Yoshida Daimyōjin 吉田大明神.

Thus, we can observe a strong inclination to localism. The unique character of a specific site can be emphasized to the extent that it becomes a *kami* of its own, while the names of the individual *kami* actually enshrined there tend to fall into oblivion. It seems as if the abundance of names that accumulated in the course of time at certain sites has lead to an overkill of information and a tendency among lay visitors to regard all *kami* as more or less the same.

In addition, there are indeed many anonymous *kami* of the field (*ta no kami* 田の神), mountain deities (*yama no kami* 山の神) or road deities (*dōsojin* 道祖神) worshipped at single wayside shrines or in the form of rustic stone monuments. It is tempting to relate these phenomena to 'animism', often mentioned in the context of Shintō. According to this interpretation, *kami* are basically nature spirits and therefore—like nature itself—always the same and always different like the 'sacred rocks' and 'sacred trees' mentioned above.

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[6] I have refrained from rendering Chinese characters here since the writing of these names is highly inconsistent in different sources.

[7] Together with Amaterasu and Hachiman, Kasuga was arguably one of the most powerful deities in the medieval and early modern periods, as evidenced by the famous 'Oracles of the Three Shrines' (*Sanja takusen* 三社託宣). Cf. Bocking 2001.

On the other hand, shrines such as Kasuga or Yoshida were (and sometimes still are) run by priestly lineages purportedly related to their respective *kami* by ties of kinship.[8] Such kin relations between *kami* and priests can be found in quite a number of shrines that trace their origin back to the imperial court in the classical period. These claims are backed by minute-genealogical tables that appear surprisingly reliable even after close historical inspection. The elites of Shintō priesthood are therefore intimately related to ancestor worship. Their anthropomorphic deities have little to do with 'animism'. This indicates a fracture between popular notions of *kami* and specialist shrine Shintō. Shrine priests, however, do not insist that lay believers know the names of their *kami*. Rather, priests and lay people are united by the use and acceptance of the same symbolic and ritual signifiers leaving open the question what these signifiers actually represent.

Historical Roots of Shrine Building: Palaces and Storehouses

In pre-historic times, rock altars (*iwasaka* 磐境), some of which are still extant at certain shrine compounds, or simple groves seem to have served as sites of worship. The character 'shrine' (*yashiro*), by the way, was also read as 'grove' (*mori*) in ancient texts like the *Manyōshū* 万葉集 of 759 (Sonoda 2000: 42–43). It is not quite clear when shrine building began in Japan, but it is generally held that the practice does not go far beyond the beginnings of Japanese history. To some degree, the advent of Buddhism in the sixth century CE may have spurred this development. Japan's earliest mytho-chronological texts, the *Kojiki* 古事記 of 712, and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 of 720, contain stories about the first building of shrines. These stories suggest two paradigmatic types of buildings which are also reflected in early shrine architecture: a palace and a storehouse.

The first paradigmatic example from mythological texts concerns the Grand Shrine of Izumo. Even today, the main hall of this large compound is a massive structure but according to records from the Heian period (late 8th–12th century), it must have been twice as big, rising as high as 16 *jō* (48 meters) and therefore even surpassing the hall of the Great Buddha in Nara. While this has long been regarded as a legend, recent archeological excavations testify that the hall was formerly built on a huge platform

[8] For the history of the Kasuga priests, cf. Grapard 1992; for the Yoshida priests and their relations to the Fujiwara, cf. Scheid 2001: chap. 3.

that may have been indeed of such a dimension. In any event, Izumo was certainly the tallest building of ancient Japan for many centuries.

This shrine was built, according to one legend, for the deity Ōkuninushi 大国主 who ruled the earth before the 'Heavenly Grandson' of the sun deity Amaterasu 天照 came down from the High Plain of Heaven (*Takama no hara* 高天原) to take over leadership on earth. This transfer of power was achieved by an apparently 'unequal' treaty, according to which Ōkuninushi yielded his rule to the imperial ancestor in exchange for a palace "with cross-beams [*chigi*] of the roof that soar high towards the High Heavenly Plain."[9] This palace eventually became the Shrine of Izumo. Even if this report clearly belongs to the realm of myth and cannot be taken at face value, it illustrates the idea that a shrine is basically the same as a palace. The Japanese word *miya*, by the way, can indicate both a shrine and a mundane palace and is by extension also used as a title for an imperial prince.

The paradigmatic example of a shrine as storehouse can be found at the Grand Shrines of Ise, which both accord to the same architectonical pattern. The founding legends of this shrine compound lead us back to the court of Sujin, traditionally regarded as the tenth emperor of Japan. The story takes place in a different region than Izumo—Yamato (today Nara prefecture), the heartland of the imperial dynasty—and in a much later time than the previous example. According to the chronicles, Sujin's reign is tormented by a horrible plague killing half of the population. He begins to suspect that Amaterasu and another deity whom he worships regularly *inside his palace* may be responsible for the plague and *removes* them. In a dream revelation, a deity who identifies himself as Ōmononushi 大物主 (the Great Master of Things) confirms that the plague is due to him and that it will not stop unless a new lineage of priests is installed to worship him. As soon as this happens, Ōmononushi calms down and eventually becomes the already mentioned deity of Mt. Miwa in the Nara basin, where the whole hill is regarded as the *kami*'s 'divine body'. This founding legend of the Miwa Shrine is the first concrete story referring to both a separate location of *kami* veneration and a separate lineage of priests in Yamato.

[9] This phrase is taken from a eulogy (*norito* 祝詞) of the high-priests of Izumo, contained in the *Engishiki* 延喜式, a document form the tenth century (Philippi 1990 [1959]: 72).

The sun goddess Amaterasu, by the way, is somewhat overshadowed by the Miwa deity in the Sujin story. Under the next emperor Suinin, however, an imperial princess is charged with the task to look for a place for the sun deity. After a long journey, she finds a suitable spot in Ise, far removed from the imperial palace. The story is explicitly related to Sujin's relocating the *kami* from his palace even if it took about one century (according to the legendary chronology) to find Amaterasu's final abode.[10]

According to the chronicles, the reigns of Sujin and Suinin are marked by a few other religious innovations such as the separation of cults for heavenly and earthly deities and the establishment of a 'department for worship' (Aston 1972: 1:178) at the court. This 'religious revolution' (Ellwood 1990) under Sujin and Suinin is generally seen as reflecting historical facts.[11] We can therefore surmise that the early Yamato rulers acted as priestly kings who administered both their ancestor deities (Amaterasu) and the tutelary deities of the country (the Miwa deity). A plague attributed to divine wrath may have led to the fact that the king conferred the *kami* (i.e., his priestly functions) to a new guild of ritual specialists. The *kami* were removed from the palace and received 'shrines', which caused the end of their harmful actions.

In this case, shrines seem to be means to control the potentially dangerous and hostile energies of a *kami*. *Kami* have to be placed in a fixed abode where special ritualists take care of them in order to prevent them from mischief. The early shrine deities of the Yamato region were therefore not only symbolic representations of the ruling dynasty, but also representations of adverse natural or historical circumstances that should be 'stored away'. This notion may have had an impact on the architecture of early Yamato shrines, which can be still observed at Ise: Ise shrines represent a storehouse rather than a palace (Mori 2003: 16).

In historical times, i.e. from the sixth century onward, shrine worship continued to display both aspects. On the one hand, shrines were clearly built for clan deities (*ujigami* 氏神) probably representing a kind of ancestor worship for the founders of local elite families (*uji* 氏) or an entire ethnic group. On the other hand, *kami* were also seen as the proprietors of

[10] For the most detailed reports on Sujin and Suinin, see the *Nihon shoki* (Aston 1972: 1:150–87); the *Kojiki* contains similar reports (Chamberlain 1981 [1919]: 208–42).

[11] The traditional dates of Sujin's and Suinin's reigns (97 BC–30 BC and 29 BC–70 CE, respectively) are certainly mytho-historical projections. Most historians agree, however, that their stories reflect historical developments at some time between the third and fifth century. Cf. Ellwood 1990 and Kidder 2007: esp. 189–207.

land into which new human settlements intruded. The tillage of new land was therefore combined with the erecting of a shrine in compensation for the ground acquired by the agricultural community.[12] In this case, the *kami* represent forces with interests different from those of the worshipping community.

Plagues and Festivals

The pattern that shrines originated from a time of crisis can be found again in subsequent periods of Japanese shrine history. As in the Sujin case, plagues, which occurred frequently in ancient Japanese history (Farris 1985), caused people to look for hitherto unknown deities as the culprits. These were often found in the vengeful spirits (*goryō* 御霊, *onryō* 怨霊) of historical personalities who had died an unjust death. The best known example is the case of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), a famous scholar, poet, and statesman who died in exile due to a political intrigue. After his death, Kyoto was tormented by a series of disasters. Eventually two shrines were built for him and the calamities stopped (or rather, were attributed to different *kami*). Today, Michizane is worshipped in some 10,000 Tenjin 天神 Shrines (the fourth largest shrine network) all over Japan. Owing to his reputation as a scholar he has become a deity of learning and is indeed particularly popular among pupils and students preparing for entry examinations at schools and universities. The original purpose of cults directed to Michizane, however, was the pacification of his wrathful spirit. Besides Michizane, there are also a number of less well known figures with similar fates who are collectively worshiped in so called Goryō (vengeful spirit) Shrines. Early examples date back to the ninth century and were always connected with the belief that these figures had caused others to die from unnatural diseases (Naumann 1988: 207–16).

The Yasaka 八坂 (formerly Gion 祇園) Shrine in Kyoto, is another famous shrine that was founded in the late ninth century to protect the city from epidemic diseases. It was dedicated to an obscure deity responsible for both the occurrence and the healing of plagues. Brought along

[12] The *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記, a regional chronicle of present-day Hibaraki Prefecture east of Tokyo written in the early eighth century, contains a very interesting story in this respect: the local *kami* appear in the form of horned snakes that attack all people who try to cultivate the land. An emissary of the central government eventually kills several of these snake *kami* but also sets up a shrine for them as a visible sign of a new contract regarding ground rights. This measure settles the issue (Aoki 1997: 50).

from India by Buddhism it was called the Ox-headed King (Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王) and is sometimes identified with the Medicine Buddha (Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来) or with the mythological deity Susanoo.

A most striking common feature of these deities is the fact that shrine worship was accompanied and sometimes even predated by gorgeous festivals (*matsuri* 祭) for these *kami*, including the performance of musicians, dancers, and clowns that attracted the whole population of the city. This tradition has been continued ever since. Festivals to former plague deities are still among the most popular religious events of all Japan including the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto (organized by the Yasaka Shrine) or the Tenjin Matsuri in Osaka (organized by one of the biggest branch shrines dedicated to Michizane).[13] Thus, these shrines not only share a common feature in the fact that they originated from times of crisis, they were also designed with the purpose to delight their deities—and thus to prevent them from harmful action. This paradoxical intention probably reflects the religious thinking of early Japanese urbanism, which was accompanied by plagues of hitherto unknown dimensions.

The painter Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889), a satiric commentator of the political and social turmoil at the beginning of Japan's modernization/Westernization in the nineteenth century, has illustrated this mechanism very vividly in a sketch of a *matsuri* of mice. Like humans at a *matsuri* we see the mice carrying a heavy float along the street. Instead of a portable shrine, however, the float consists of a gourd on top of which a cat has taken seat. The cat is wearing a hat or 'crown' (*kanmuri* 冠) that not only Shintō priests but also statues of the *kami* are adorned with and is therefore clearly an object of worship. However, the cat's facial expression reveals that there are still some dangerous thoughts lingering in its mind. Nevertheless, the ritual jamboree of the mice waving Shintō wands (*haraigushi* 祓串) and dancing furiously around the float manages to keep the cat quiet for the time being. The relationship between dangerous deities and joyous festivals could not have been more adequately expressed than in this sketch by Kyōsai.

[13] The most popular festival in Edo, the third metropolitan area in premodern times, was organized by the Kanda 神田 Shrine dedicated among other deities to the spirit of Taira no Masakado (?–940), a rebel warrior who was eventually defeated by imperial forces but remained a local hero in eastern Japan. Although the history of his shrine is less well known than the histories of shrines in Kyoto, it seems that he was also regarded as a vengeful spirit (Sonoda 1975: 130).

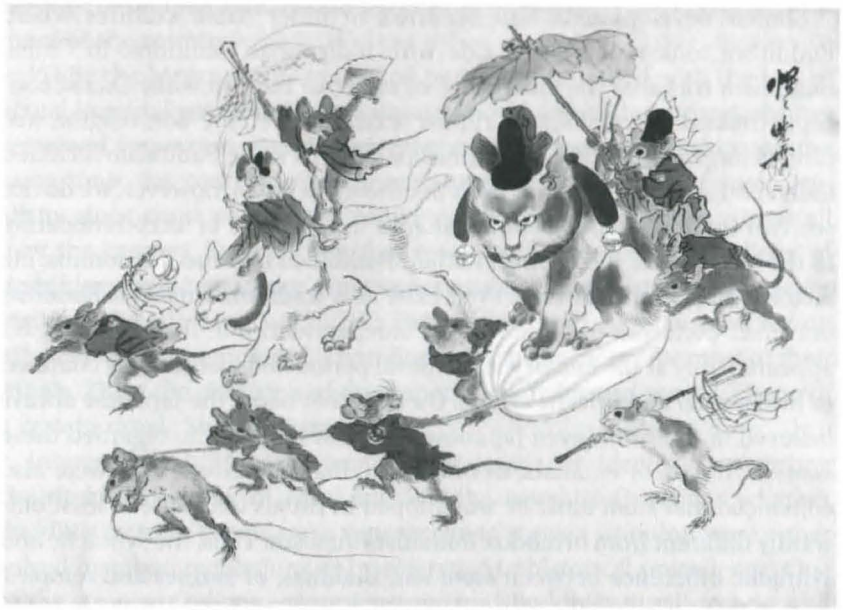

Figure 2. Festival of Mice (Kawanabe Kyōsai, 1879, colored sketch on paper, 37.7 × 52.5cm—© Courtesy of the British Museum)

Buddhism

As the above examples illustrate, Buddhism cannot be ignored in the history of shrine building. Buddhist temples not only provided the models for several aspects of shrine architecture, Buddhist monks also propagated certain *kami* and erected shrines for them. The rationale behind such syncretistic action was that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may choose to appear in the guise of a *kami* in order to reach the Japanese more effectively. Technically, the identification of *kami* and Buddhas was based in most cases on the so-called *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 pattern according to which the *kami* formed the 'trace' (*suijaku* 垂迹) left behind on earth by the 'original form' (*honji* 本地) of the Buddhas. By this rationale, which emerged slowly between the eighth and the thirteenth century, *kami* such as Hachiman, Kasuga, and later even Ise (Amaterasu), were used to propagate faith in the Buddha. Naturally, general concepts of the *kami* were fundamentally affected by this process.[14]

[14] For recent studies on the history of this concept see Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003.

Similar developments also occurred in other Asian cultures where Buddhism took root side by side with indigenous traditions. In China, Buddhism triggered the emergence of religious Daoism while Daoist concepts trickled into Chinese Buddhist texts. In Tibet, the Bon religion was formed largely according to Buddhist paradigms while Buddhism included indigenous mountain deities in its pantheon. In Japan, however, we do not see two traditions taking similar shapes in a process of 'accommodating to the weapons of the enemy'. Rather, Buddhism became the dominating factor while 'Shintō' did not even exist as a tradition outside a Buddhist universe. Concepts of Shintō as an independent, non-Buddhist religion appeared only at the end of the medieval period and were largely confined to intellectual and priestly circles. On the other hand, the Japanese always believed in the *kami* (even Japanese Buddhist monks who regarded these *kami* as 'traces' or emanations of the Buddha). Moreover, they were also convinced that *kami* must be worshipped in rituals that were at least outwardly different from orthodox Buddhist ritualism. Thus, the syntactic and symbolic difference between *kami* and Buddhas, or shrines and temples, was always maintained, while ideological conflicts between these traditions were virtually nonexistent up until the Early Modern (Edo) Period. Together, temples and shrines formed one religious system that was characterized by a syncretic discourse and a ritual division of labor.

In the classical (Nara and Heian) period, the central government did everything to promote the spread of Buddhism which was more or less synonymous with continental civilization. On the other hand, the court managed to keep a set of ceremonies dedicated to the *kami* under the direct authority of the Tennō and a few leading aristocratic families. They also extended this ritual system to the provinces where—with the exception of Kyushu—Buddhist temples took root much later than in the center.[15] Imperial court ranks were bestowed not only on local strongmen but also on the shrines of their tutelary deities. Thus, shrines served to define and legitimate status hierarchies between the center and the periphery. This is most accurately documented in the *Engishiki*, a document from the tenth century which not only contains a list of some three thousand imperially recognized shrines but also minute details about the give and take of offerings between these shrines and the imperial court. It appears, therefore, that the spread of shrines and the spread of Buddhist

[15] This can be verified, for instance, in regional chronicles (*fudoki* 風土記) from the eighth century (cf. Aoki 1997).

temples developed side by side in order to strengthen the central government of the country.

While the hierarchy of center and periphery dwindled with the loss of actual imperial power in the medieval period (12th–16th century), shrines remained important for the representation of local leadership. At the same time, the court retained some authority in the field of *kami* ritualism, since court ceremonies remained the model for shrine rituals all over the country. Even shrines that rose to prominence as 'guardians' of Buddhism and were under strict supervision of Buddhist temples (as for instance the Hie Sannō 日吉山王 Shrine serving the temple complex on Mt. Hiei 比叡山), employed a non-Buddhist shrine clergy for most of their rituals. Thus, the charisma of the imperial court formed the backbone of a certain ritual, 'Shintoist' autonomy.

Interestingly, there was hardly any dogma or ideology supporting the ritual dichotomy of *kami* and Buddha worship. Questions whether Buddhist or *kami* rituals were appropriate in a given situation were either solved by taboo regulations or by reference to historical precedence. One of the strongest taboos separating *kami* and Buddhist ritualism was, and still is, the notion that *kami* must be kept away from pollution (*kegare* 穢) by death, blood and illness. Thus, mourning rituals but also exorcism and healing came to be dominated by Buddhists, while 'Shintō' was and is reserved for the more this-worldly concerns in life.

Patterns of Shrine Kami

As we can gather from this however incomplete overview, shrines at the end of the premodern period were dedicated to a wide range of quite diverse deities. While some originated from times immemorial, others were regarded as the spirits of human figures who are very well documented by historical sources. The creation of shrine *kami*, therefore, did not end at some point in history but was and still is an ongoing process.

In order to arrive at some kind of systematization, I would like to arrange shrine *kami* according to their myths of origin (*engi* 縁起) which reveal the major motivations for shrine building. In doing so, I have arrived at four groups: (1) deities of mythological origin, (2) wrathful spirits, (3) deities of Buddhist origin, and (4) deified historical rulers. In the following, I will explain the characteristics of each group. I will moreover show that (5) many shrine deities combine two or more of these types. In the next subchapter, I will explain types of shrines that originated in the modern era.

(1) The first group of deities can be found in the imperial chronicles and a few other early texts that form something like a 'canon' of Shintō. The most prominent example is of course Amaterasu, the female ancestor deity of the imperial house who has her main sanctuary at Ise in Mie prefecture. Like Amaterasu, other mythological deities such as Ame-no-koyane or Takemikazuchi were the object of ancestor worship (in this case by the Fujiwara) and were enshrined in places like Kasuga in Nara or Kashima 鹿島 in the Kantō region that still belong to the most representative religious sites of the country. Interestingly, some prominent shrine sites of the ancient period such as Matsunoo 松尾, Fushimi Inari and probably also the Kamo 賀茂 Shrines in Kyoto started as the ancestor shrines of immigrant families from Korea, in particular the Hata 秦 whose mythical origins are also recorded in the chronicles.[16]

Other mythological deities may have been the ancestors of regional chieftains whose individual names were replaced by more generic names like Ōkuninushi ('Great Lord of the country'), Ōkunitama 大国魂 ('Great Spirit of the country'), and others. Shrines for Ōkuninushi, for instance, can be frequently found in Izumo and other regions that posed a certain threat to the central government in prehistoric periods.

Finally, Japanese myths also mention nature deities like (again) Amaterasu (the sun), Watatsumi 海神 (the sea), or Toyouke 豊受 (grains). This list, however, is not very long and highly inconsistent since the combinations of deities and elements of nature vary according to the respective sources. Generally it can be said that ancient *kami* were believed to have an influence on weather, harvest, illness, war, and many other aspects affecting the whole society. But they were not necessarily associated with one aspect only, as for instance the gods in the Mediterranean Ancient World. Rather, they were tutelary deities for a certain territory or a group of people and were held responsible for their particular concerns. Moreover, genealogical relations to the imperial house were clearly most important when a deity was enshrined in early historical times.

(2) The belief in vengeful spirits of persons who died an unjust death—my second category of shrine deities—is probably a universal phenomenon and has become the source of gruesome ghost stories all over the world. In Japan, however, some of these stories have been taken seriously

[16] The importance of Korean immigrant cults is emphasized in a recent study by Michael Como (2008). For the Kamo Shrine and its relations to Korean immigrants, cf. Nelson 2000.

enough to attribute the status of a *kami* to such spirits and to devise shrines and rituals in order to 'pacify' them. The most famous examples were already mentioned above, i.e. the Kitano Tenmangū 北野天満偶 Shrine or the Yasaka Shrine, both in Kyoto. Suffice it to add that the fear of vengeful *kami* was a persistent feature from mythological times all through premodern Japanese history and is still a factor in *kami* worship. The apex of the belief in this in this category of deities, however, seems to have been the Heian period (late 8th–12th century).

(3) A surprisingly large group of shrine *kami* derives from Buddhism. Besides the above mentioned Yasaka Shrine dedicated to the Buddhist 'Ox-headed King', the best known examples include four of the Seven Lucky Gods (Hotei 布袋, Benzaiten 弁財天, Bishamonten 毘沙門天, and Daikoku 大黒) worshipped today at both Shintō and Buddhist sites.[17] Other types of Buddhist deities derive from Buddhist temple lore. Famous examples include the seven main deities of the Hiyoshi (or Hie Sannō) Shrine, which guard the spiritual center of Tendai Buddhism on Mt. Hiei near Kyoto, or Hachiman at the Tamukeyama 手向山 Shrine at Tōdaiji 東大寺, the site of the Great Buddha in Nara. There are also *kami* deriving from very specific founding legends, as in the case of the Asakusa Kannon 浅草観音 Temple (Sensōji 浅草寺) in Tokyo, which traces its origins to the miraculous discovery of an image of Kannon 観音 by three fishermen. These fishermen are now worshipped as protecting *kami* of the temple in the Asakusa Shrine 浅草神社 attached to the temple compound.

(4) While the heroic ancestor deities already mentioned were turned into shrine deities only after the 'living memory' of their deeds had already vanished, there are also rulers of exceptional actual power and influence who were turned into *kami* immediately after their demise. This seems to be a comparatively late pattern originating from the end of civil wars during Japan's medieval period and may have started with the self-idolization of Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first 'unifier' of the early modern Japanese state.[18] The most famous example, however, is Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty of military rulers enshrined

[17] The ensemble of the Seven Lucky Gods appears in the late medieval period and seems to derive from a conscious attempt to unite different religious traditions. Besides the four deities mentioned, it comprises two Daoist deities of long life (Fukurokuju 福禄寿, and Jurōjin 寿老人) and only one, Ebisu 恵比寿, of Japanese origin.

[18] In a recent study, Jeroen Lamers (2001) doubts the purported self deification by Oda Nobunaga, which is based on contemporary Christian sources. Nevertheless, Nobunaga certainly introduced new dimensions of self aggrandizement that became step stones for his predecessors Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

at the Tōshōgū Shrine in Nikkō. Most scholars agree that his enshrinement was done according to Ieyasu's personal will.[19] This seems to have inspired a kind of deification boom among several leading military houses of the Edo period (1600–1867). In the countryside, there are quite a few shrines dedicated to feudal lords (*daimyō* 大名) all from this period (Roberts 2009). In this case, the characteristic ambiguity which we have observed in shrine worship so far is replaced by a blunt ideology of dynastic power. This sets this group of deities apart from the spirits of historical persons who became dreadful *kami* against their will.

Incidentally, humans may turn also in Buddhist icons of worship, as for instance Kōbōdaishi Kūkai (774–835) worshipped in his mausoleum at Mt. Kōya, and a few other Buddhist 'saints'. In these cases, their apotheoses are explained by their exceptional virtues. When rulers were turned into kami, on the other hand, political power seems to be the decisive criterion. The relative ease by which the rulers' souls could be turned into *kami* indicates that the difference between *kami* and other spirits is mainly a question of ritual practice, not of fundamental theological or philosophical consideration. A spirit becomes a *kami* when it is treated like a *kami*.

(5) Some of the most 'successful' *kami* in Japanese religious history combine several elements of the above mentioned groups: Hachiman (often misleadingly labeled the 'Japanese god of war') is a deity of obscure origin in Japan's most western part, Kyushu. In the eighth century, he became important for both Buddhists and the imperial court. On the one hand, he was identified with the mythological emperor Ōjin and was declared an imperial ancestor deity while at the same time he was regarded as a Buddhist Bodhisattva (enlightened being) and was therefore represented in the form of a Buddhist monk (Kanda 1985). Later, he was also worshipped as the ancestor of the leading military ('samurai') houses and thus became one of the most popular shrine deities in Japan. In spite of his fame among military houses, he retained his Bodhisattva title until the so-called separation of *kami* and Buddhas (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) legally enforced in 1868 at the very beginning of the Meiji period. Hachiman is therefore a most successful combination of Buddhist and ancestor deity.

Inari commands even more shrines than Hachiman but they are usually rather small. This deity is equally of obscure origin, but one trace is leading to Korean immigrant groups (see above). Sometimes represented

[19] For details see Boot 2000 and Scheid 2003.

as a young woman, sometimes as an old man, Inari is associated with prayers for abundant rice and with fox belief (Smyers 1999). In the founding legend of its main shrine, the above mentioned Buddhist monk Kūkai plays a leading role, so Buddhism may be again responsible for the spread of this particular form of *kami* worship. These examples may suffice to show that shrine deities can be of very diverse origins and cannot be confined to local deities of Japanese origin let alone to deities mentioned in the classical myths.

Shrines in the Modern Era: Creating a New Paradigm of Service to the State

As is commonly known, Japan's rise as a modern nation state started in 1868 with an ultimately successful attempt to re-establish the imperial institution as the political center of the country. The *coup d'etat* initiating this process, generally known as Meiji Restoration, is literally the restoration of imperial power under Emperor Meiji. Nevertheless, this 'restoration' initiated a vast number of innovations and returned to old traditions only in name. The representation of the emperor himself is one of the most striking examples. Not only were images of the emperor publicly displayed—a breach of the century old 'iconography of absence' (Screech 2000) surrounding the figure of the ruler—in these pictures Emperor Meiji appeared in two radically different forms: first, in the traditional courtly garb that is also used by shrine priests, and secondly in Western style military uniform. The figure of the emperor, therefore, represented both the nominal 'restoration' of the antique court and the adoption of Western institutions, above all the military.

At the outset of the Meiji period, 'Shintō' was supposed to play a leading role in spreading the new image of the emperor. This role of Shintō had been prepared by various groups of intellectuals during the latter half of the Edo period. Yet, in order to fulfill this role, religious institutions with a distinct Shintō identity were necessary. However, in spite of the symbolic characteristics of Shintō shrines mentioned above, almost all shrines were institutionally intermingled with Buddhist temples. In some cases, shrine priests (*kannushi* 神主) were completely lacking and even the shrine rituals were performed by Buddhist monks, while in most other cases shrine priests were supervised by a Buddhist institution.

This situation led to the legal enforcement of 'separation of *kami* and Buddhas' already in the first year of Meiji (1868). In the following short

but violent wave of anti-Buddhist resentment a large number of religious institutions (mostly Buddhist, but also some shrines) were physically destroyed. Many Buddhist clerics were forced to return to lay life, or to change their confession and enter into the employment of shrines.[20] Shrine lands, on the other hand, were declared national property and their priests were defined as government officials. Hereditary priesthood and individual possession of shrine land was (in theory at least) abolished. Shrine worship became standardized.[21] Thus, Shintō priests were forced to divert from their family traditions, lost their traditional sources of income, and were—initially at least—supposed to act as 'evangelists' of a national ideology centering on the modernist emperor.[22] When this initial phase of 'State Shintō' calmed down after a few years the official ideology of the state shifted towards the model of a European constitutional monarchy. The constitution enacted in 1889 contained among others the principle of freedom of faith (Article 28), while there was no mention of any state religion, let alone of 'Shintō'. Shrine priests, therefore, could not have been happy with this course of events at all.

'State Shintō', as it was later called, eventually gained momentum after Japan's first military successes against China and Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century. Gradually, emperor worship and shrine worship were brought in line. Public ceremonies honoring the Tennō became compulsory in schools and at universities. New national holy days in the form of shrine festivals were introduced. Shrines were defined as sites of Tennō worship that should be attended by all loyal Japanese subjects. According to official phrasing, this kind of shrine worship had nothing to do with 'religion' but was simply a patriotic ceremonial act.

This so-called 'doctrine of the non-religious nature of shrines' (*jinja hishūkyōron* 神社非宗教論) is generally regarded as a facile subterfuge to reconcile the nationalist use of shrine traditions with the constitutional

[20] Cf. Hirose 1997 for an interesting case study. Hirose Kazutoshi, retired head of Mitsumine Shrine, reports in this autobiographical essay that his ancestors were turned from Buddhist into Shintō priests when the predominantly Buddhist site of Mitsumine was forced to become a shrine after the Meiji Restoration. Consequently, the family obeyed orders and faithfully continued their religious duties under a different confessional affiliation.

[21] For studies on the effects of *shinbutsu bunri* at local sites see for instance Thal 2005; Antoni 1995; Grapard 1992: chap. 5.

[22] The term 'national evangelists' translates *kyōdōshoku* 教導職, lit. 'agents of the way of the teaching'. The English term was coined by Helen Hardacre in her seminal study *Shintō and the State* (1989).

principle of religious freedom.[23] It is not as outrageous as it may appear to a Western observer, however. As we have seen, imperial court 'Shintō' was indeed primarily a ritual tradition without any dogma or belief system. If 'religion' is defined as a system of beliefs and dogmas as is the case for Christianity, Shintō could be indeed regarded as a non-religious ceremonial practice. While such a definition of 'religion' would be rightfully criticized as Eurocentric, it was—and still is to some extent—the predominant Japanese understanding of the term *shūkyō* 宗教 ('religion'), a neologism coined in the Meiji period. Ironically, the prewar doctrine of the non-religious nature of shrines makes some sense, if it is based on a narrow, Eurocentric definition of 'religion'. In the case of State Shintō, such a Eurocentric concept of religion not only accorded to the view of many contemporary Christian observers, it was also adopted by the government in order to propagate Tennō worship in spite of the principle of religious freedom.

The idea that Shintō is a religion in each and every aspect comparable to, for instance, Buddhism or Christianity, is largely a post-war argument in reaction to State Shintō.[24] It is found already in the famous *Shintō directive* drafted at the beginning of the Allied occupation (1945), which stipulates that "Shrine Shintō, after having been divorced from the state and divested of its militaristic and ultra-nationalistic elements, will be recognized as a religion if its adherents so desire."[25] According to the principle of separation of state and religion, 'religion' is further defined as an entirely 'private' matter where the state has no right to interfere. Conversely, the state must not support any religion by public means.

These stipulations were taken over by the postwar constitution and still determine the judicial reality in present-day Japan. Owing to the experience of State Shintō, the sphere of religion (including shrines) has been completely separated from all state institutions. Not even classes on comparative religions are allowed at public schools.

In spite of the official rejection of State Shintō, shrines created during the prewar-period are still in existence and continue to function as popular places of worship. The most prominent example is the Meiji Shrine built for Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) and Empress Shōken (1849–1914) who were enshrined there posthumously in 1920. Considering the millions of

[23] See, for instance, Antoni 1998: 211.

[24] This point is stressed among others, by Isomae Jun'ichi (forthcoming).

[25] Article 2e(2). Translation by Helen Hardacre (1989: 169).

Japanese who visit the shrine at the New Year's celebration (*hatsumōde* 初詣) every year, it is certainly Tokyo's most popular Shintō shrine today. At first sight, this imperial mausoleum (*jingū*) differs little from premodern shrines and does not show the monumentalist features of contemporary nationalist architecture in Europe. It was not only deliberately modeled after the Kitano Tenmangū Shrine in Kyoto (the so-called *gongen* 権現 style applied also at the Tōshōgū in Nikkō), it also avoided the use of modern construction material such as concrete and steel. Even the fact that a historical person was elevated to the status of a shrine deity was not without precedence, as we have seen.

On the other hand, Meiji Shrine also introduced a range of innovations in the history of shrine worship. It was the first imperial ancestor shrine (*jingū*) designed for mass worship. "Never before had people from every area and social station been invited to think of themselves as having a rightful connection to a national cult center" (Hardarce 1989: 94). Consequently, the shrine was not situated in a remote area like Ise or Nikkō but as close as possible to the center of the city. New customs like *hatsumōde* (New Year's shrine visit) developed hand in hand with this new concept of mass participation in national religious events that replaced the premodern 'iconography of absence'.

Yasukuni Shrine in the immediate proximity of the imperial palace in Tokyo is another representative of shrines created by State Shintō. Initially, it was erected for the spirits of loyalists who died for the emperor in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. Later, all Japanese war dead were equally worshipped there. Eventually, even persons that were executed as war criminals after the war, as for instance Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948), sometimes called the 'Japanese Hitler', were included among the *kami* of Yasukuni Shrine.[26] This makes Yasukuni Jinja a highly controversial political issue. China and Korea as well as oppositional political circles in Japan regard it as a symbol of Japanese war crimes and demand its abolition. Leading right-wing politicians, on the other hand, deliberately provoke uproars from these critics by paying semi-official visits to the shrine, thereby indicating implicit sympathies with the prewar regime and criticism of the postwar Japanese Constitution.

From a religious historian's point of view, this kind of war memorial is indeed an innovation of State Shintō that did not exist before the modern

[26] For recent studies on the religious and political controversies regarding Yasukuni Shrine, see Nelson 2003, or Breen 2007.

era. It could therefore be defined as an element of political ideology, not of 'genuine religious' function. On the other hand, it would be difficult to dismantle Shrine Shintō of all relations to political power. As we have seen, shrines have a strong tradition as religious sites directly supervised by political rulers. It is this tradition, which makes the 'separation of state and religion' extremely complicated in the case of Shintō.

After the Second World War, shrines shifted from a radically 'public' into a radically 'private' sphere. While they were formerly defined as governmental institutions, they are now private religious enterprises. Any support from stately institutions is strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether this change in judicial status really marked an ideological breach as well. An interesting case in point is the Hokkaidō 北海道 Shrine in Sapporo. This shrine was founded under name of Sapporo Jinja 札幌神社 at the beginning of the Meiji period (1871) with the explicit aim to help the 'colonization' (*kaitaku* 開拓) of this region that was mostly inhabited by the native Ainu people. The shrine, however, remained rather modest until the postwar period, or more precisely until the 'Olympic year' of 1964.[27] In this year, Emperor Meiji was included among the shrine deities and the name of the shrine was changed into Hokkaidō Jingū 北海道神宮, lit. 'Imperial Ancestor Shrine of Hokkaidō'. The compound was greatly enlarged and is now regarded as a protective shrine for the whole region of Hokkaidō (Inoue et al. 1994: 680–81). At least on a regional scale, the strategies of State Shintō are still working with amazing candidness.

Ritual Changes and Continuities

Apart from obviously political agenda, modern Shintō adapted to the dramatic changes in everyday life under Western influence and the corresponding religious needs. One of the most striking innovations among Shintō-specific customs is the already mentioned New Year visit at shrines (*hatsumōde*), which most Japanese perform no matter whether they are actually 'believers' in Shintō or not.[28] While the New Year has always been an important date in the Japanese calendar, mass worship at shrines at this occasion did not exist in premodern periods. In addition, many

[27] 1964 saw the Summer Olympics in Tokyo and became an economic and cultural turning point in postwar Japan. 1972, Winter Olympics were held in Sapporo.

[28] It should be noted, however, that *hatsumōde* is also quite popular at Buddhist sites as for instance at the already mentioned Asakusa Temple in Tokyo.

modern Japanese consider the *hatsumōde* of a newly born baby as a *rite de passage* comparable to baptism in Christianity. A more specific ceremony for small children can be held at the so called *shichigosan* 七五三 (lit. seven-five-three) festival performed at most shrines in mid-November when children of the respective ages receive a *harae* 祓 ceremony.[29] Interestiñgly, both traditions do not go far beyond the modern era, at least as regards the ubiquity of their performances. This indicates a successful attempt of modern Shintō to monopolize the formerly secular field of childhood rituals. A similar trend can be observed in the field of marriage, which increased in importance when polygamy was legally forbidden in the Meiji period. On the level of ritualism, shrine ceremonies meet fierce competition by Christian style weddings. Today, Japanese Christian weddings are neither performed nor consumed by Japanese Christians only but have become a trans-religious standard. They appeal to a romantic image of marriage a la Hollywood and are moreover cheaper than a full fledged Shintō wedding. The latter is, by the way, again a modern invention influenced by Christian customs.[30] Finally, there has also been an initiative to establish Shintō funerals at the beginning of the Meiji period, in spite of the mentioned death taboo. This initiative has not met with general acclaim, however. Today, only a small minority of the Japanese employs funeral rites according to Shintō while the vast majority adheres to Buddhism in this respect. Thus the famous expression "born Shintō, married Christian, buried Buddhist."

Another comparatively new field of ritual activity monopolized by shrine priests is the purification of the soil (*jichinsai* 地鎮祭) before the erection of a new building. Most Japanese who intend to build a new house would ask a shrine priest to perform such a rite. More traditional functions of shrines include dramatic performances of Noh or *kagura* 神楽, a specific form of religious dance and drama usually visualizing mythological topics. Finally, certain shrines may serve as the centres of specific 'brotherhoods' usually related to mountain ascetism (*shugendō* 修験道) or similar 'cults' (*shinkō* 信仰) that can be neither defined as a religion of their own nor as a mainstream form of Shintō practice.

[29] *Harae* means lit. 'to wipe out' and is done with a so-called Shintō wand (*haraigushi*) waved by a priest above the object that has to be purified.

[30] Cf. Ōbayashi 1997 who points out the crucial precedence of an imperial wedding ceremony invented for prince Yoshihito (later Taishō Tennō) and princess Sadako in May 1900.

In spite of all ideological and institutional changes within the world of Shintō shrines, patterns of individual, everyday worship to the *kami* do not seem to have changed fundamentally since the end of the pre-modern period. They are, by the way, basically the same patterns that people also apply at Buddhist sites. In both cases people perform simple gestures of respect, offer small amounts of money or sometimes food, and may recite a short formula or an individual prayer. As indicated by the votive tablets (*ema*), where people write down their wishes at shrines and temples, worshipers are mostly concerned with immediate this-worldly problems. Shrines and temples alike serve the need to express these wishes by specializing on various areas of benefits such as health, success at entrance examinations, traffic security, easy childbirth, finding a partner, and so on. Perhaps the most striking example of this pragmatic approach is the consecration of individual cars usually performed by Shintō priests. Another, quite peculiar example is the Kanamara Shrine festival (*kanamara matsuri* かなまら祭) in Kawasaki, where homosexuals pray for protection from Aids (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 57–58).

This broad range of ritualistic activity has been aptly described as 'freedom of expression' (Nelson 2000) by which shrines adopt to the 'ecological niches' of their environment. Moreover, freedom of expression refers to the fact that it is up to the individual 'customers' to decide which shrines they would like to visit, which kind of ritual service they want to have employed, and which personal relations connect them with the respective *kami*. This rather relaxed stance towards religious traditions is not only compatible with a modern consumer society, it is also positively received by foreign observers who can easily participate in modern Shintō. Nevertheless, this openness is not necessarily an enduring characteristic of Shintō. Rather it may be seen as a specific response to the crisis shrines faced at the abolishment of State Shintō at the end of the war. The still undecided functionality of Shintō in postwar society is reflected by the above-mentioned fact that ultra-nationalist legacies are equally present and exist side by side with liberal forms of religious engagement.

Conclusion

In concluding this discussion, let me sum up the most important factors that have led to the present situation of Shintō shrines. The question of how shrines can be distinguished from Buddhist temples has led us into what might seem to be a confusing discussion of religious institutions and

concepts. As we have seen, shrines always served the worship of deities (*kami*) that were different from Buddhist entities. This difference has been expressed semantically in language as well as visually in architectonical symbols. If we ask in what respect *kami* differ from Buddhas, and shrines from temples, however, the answer is no longer simple and changes according to the historical period under consideration.

In pre-Buddhist times, a pattern of sacred kingship seems to have led to the identification of rulers with *kami*. Thus, buildings for the *kami* were and still are regarded as 'palaces'. At the same time, 'storing away' potentially dangerous deities seems to have been an important incentive to build up permanent structures for the *kami*. This aspect long survived in the notion that harmful spirits could be pacified by building shrines for them. Early Buddhism contributed to the pacification of *kami* by converting them to Buddhism and at the same time retained their fearful nature by employing them as guardians of Buddhist temples. Gradually *kami* were seen as specific manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas but a certain symbolic and ritual difference between the two categories of higher beings remained. This differentiation resulted in a syncretic discourse and a ritual division of labor that prevailed for the most part of premodern religious history in Japan. The peaceful coexistence of *kami* and Buddhas differed not only from Europe where Christianity displaced almost all other forms of religion, but also from other Buddhist countries such as China or Tibet where Buddhism was at the same time challenged and emulated by competing religious traditions.

The question why shrines did not fuse completely with Buddhism but retained at least some ritual autonomy is intimately related to the imperial institution. Although the early imperial court was largely based on the model of China, the *kami* were administered by institutions that did not exist on the mainland. Thus, pre-Buddhist and 'pre-Chinese' forms of worship survived, or rather, mainland Buddhist and Chinese rituals were combined with the existing ritual traditions and eventually became the core of shrine worship. While this tradition served the maintenance of imperial power in the classical period, the imperial court itself was reduced to a kind of priestly institution in later times. In spite of a strong element of localism in shrine worship and the fact that most shrines were supervised by Buddhist temples, shrines generally acknowledged the court as an authority in ritual questions and looked for patronage by the court. Thus, the idea to use shrines as ideological strongholds for the project to re-establish the Tennō as the political center of a modern nation state, was actually quite natural from a historical point of view.

Nevertheless, the modernist innovations of the new Meiji-government were anything but compatible with ancient shrine traditions. Therefore, it took some institutional and ideological trial and error until the system of 'State Shintō' gained momentum. In fact, it is still a matter of academic debate whether State Shintō can be regarded as one ideological system, or whether different ideological approaches counterbalanced each other until the end of Japan's ultra-militaristic regime. In any event, the nationalist use of Shintō and the attempts to abolish it have led to a new situation of shrine worship in terms of institutional history, but also in terms of religious conception:

- After the Meiji Restoration, governmental institutions replaced Buddhist temples as supervisors of shrines. After 1945, these institutions were abolished and shrines remained as private religious corporations.
- Modern 'Shintō' was regarded as different from Buddhism, which raised the question of the religious nature of shrine worship. The official answer that 'Shintō' (or rather Shrine Shintō) was purely 'ceremonial' and therefore 'non-religious' was unsatisfactory for most scholars of religion both in Japan and abroad. After World War II, Shintō was officially declared a religion but the question of "religion according to which definition?" is still unsolved.
- The potentially dangerous nature of *kami* is no longer a dominant characteristic feature. *Kami* may be asked for peace and safety but their potential to create just the opposite is no longer emphasized. Conversely, even the most elevated centers of national cult have become accessible to the common people.

Despite all these changes, the common people's approach to the *kami* seems to provide a stabilizing factor in shrine Shintō. For most Japanese, shrines are symbols of local identity. By extension, this localism may include patriotic pride but nationalism does not seem the primary motivation to pay a visit to a Shintō shrine. Rather, shrines are places to pray for this-worldly benefits and protection from immediate risks and dangers. By taking seriously the immediate needs of the populace and adapting ritual service accordingly, shrines have managed to survive in an increasingly consumist, market-oriented society. Seen from a wider perspective, this pragmatic combination of more or less ancient ritual elements and new religious demands appears as a most persistent feature of Japanese shrine worship.

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