

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF “SHINTO”

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Abstract:

Perhaps dating back to the fourth century BCE, Shinto traditions in Japan have evolved through the years and have become distinct as Buddhist and Chinese influences have migrated eastward. Kami, supernatural creatures that live in heaven or exist on Earth as sacrosanct forces in nature, are a distinctive aspect of Shinto, which continues to permeate modern Japanese culture. The term "Shinto" refers to the religious ideas and customs that are said to have originated in Japan before the sixth century CE, when Asian religious traditions began to be imported into the country. With a few historical exceptions, the Japanese have avoided attempting to spread Shinto outside of their country because they consider it to be the core of their cultural identity and legacy. Contrary to popular belief, Shinto has had a significant influence on world history. Shinto had a significant impact on how Japan interacted with foreign cultures. Furthermore, it is still a significant religious and cultural institution in modern Japan.

Keywords: Shinto, kami, Buddhism, monk, Japan, worship, political dominance, shrine.

Introduction:

It is challenging to pinpoint the exact start date of Shinto. Shinto had neither a founder nor a written heritage. Instead, the components of what was afterwards called Shinto evolved across many years, possibly from the fourth century BCE to the sixth century CE. Ritual experts revered supernatural beings known as kami during this time; Shinto literally translates as "Way of the Kami." While the word "spirit" is one commonly used translation for kami in English, the notion of the kami defies easy explanation. According to one Shinto scholar from the seventeenth century,

—I'm still not sure what the word kami means. However, in general, it may be claimed that kami refers to the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped as well as the gods of heaven and earth who are mentioned in ancient texts. It also covers things like animals, plants, trees, mountains, seas, and so on. Any phenomenon that was extraordinary, powerful, or awe-inspiring was referred to as a kami in ancient times. (Tsunoda 1958, 21; Motoori Norinaga)

Japan had no unified state prior to the seventh century CE. Instead, several clans were in charge of their respective regions. According to historians, one of these clan heads was successful in persuading other strong clans of his capacity to converse with the kami. The hereditary chief of

this clan made connections with other clans during the fifth and sixth centuries, and Yamato became the name of Japan's first state. The head of the ruling clan assumed the titles of both "emperor" of Japan and sovereign of this state. Shinto was associated with the new ruling dynasty because of that clan's relationship with the kami. The regalia that stand for imperial rule, for instance, are kept in three of the most significant Shinto temples. The major place of worship for the kami Amaterasu, the sun god and divine ancestor of the imperial family, is the Grand Shrines at Ise, which have been renovated every twenty or twenty-one years since the seventh century. Certain Shinto ceremonies related to the imperial family, such the installation of a new emperor, are typically performed at the Ise temples.

During this early time, Shinto's institutional and doctrinal structure lacked cohesion. The rest of Japanese society had its own forms of worship, which were only incorporated into Shinto in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; its rituals and practises were mainly restricted to the social and political elites of the clans. In contrast to Buddhism, which reached Japan in 538, Shinto became more precisely defined. Buddhist sutra copies were transported to Japan by Korean monks from the state of Paekche, and many of these monks settled there and became instructors. Buddhism, in contrast to Shinto, had a founder, written scriptures, and an exegetical tradition. Buddhism captivated Japan's aristocracy because it was far more sophisticated than Shinto in terms of its teachings and customs.

Buddhism's "magic," as demonstrated by some Buddhist monks' familiarity with medicinal plants and healing, also appeared to be superior to Shinto's. A conflict between Buddhists and Shinto priests emerged in the sixth century, and it was around this time that Shinto started to take on a distinct institutional identity.

Emperor Shomu almost made Buddhism the official state religion in 745 CE, but Shinto never lost its intimate connection to the imperial court (701–756; reigned 715–749). The introduction of less esoteric, more doctrinally based schools of Buddhism throughout the eleventh century also contributed to Buddhism being more popular with the common public. Shinto officials generally paid little attention to common worshippers.

RYOBU SHINTO

There were two significant changes in Shinto during Japan's classical and mediaeval periods (the seventh through fifteenth centuries). The first was the creation of an esoteric branch of Shinto known as Ryobu Shinto in the ninth century, which combined esoteric Buddhism with Shinto by

associating specific Shinto deities with specific Buddhist deities. The Buddhist gods were prioritised over the Shinto gods since they were seen as manifestations of the latter. Buddhist teachings filled the doctrinal gap left by Shinto in Ryobu Shinto. Up to the fifteenth century, Ryobu Shinto dominated the doctrinal Shinto world.

YOSHIDA SHINTO

Ryobu Shinto's concentration on Buddhism in its theology frustrated Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511), a Shinto priest. He infused Neo-Confucian principles and ideas into Shinto and turned the syncretistic hierarchy of Ryobu Shinto upside down. The outcome was known as Yoshida Shinto. Prior to the seventeenth century, there were various Buddhist-Shinto fusions, but Yoshida Shinto eventually came to be identified with the imperial court, and Yoshida priests became the court's ritual experts.

SHINTO AND MODERN JAPAN

A new branch of Shinto studies was developed during the early modern era, roughly between 1600 and 1870, by academics and intellectuals who wished to rid Shinto of all foreign influences. These nativist academics, or kokugakusha in Japanese, claimed that Buddhism was an alien religion and that Shinto needed to be freed of its long-standing ties to it. Because Neo Confucianism was an intellectual immigration from China, Yoshida Shinto's emphasis on it was problematic. The nativists regarded it as their duty to purge Shinto of foreign doctrinal impurities and replace them with teachings and ideals that were truly Japanese. They claimed that these lessons might be discovered by carefully and in-depth studying Japan's traditional literature, particularly works written between the seventh and thirteenth centuries.

The nativists believed that the only way to address the issues in their society was to declare a truly unique Japanese culture based on Shinto once it had been thoroughly cleaned. However, early modern nativists thought that one of Shinto's distinctive and significant characteristics was its absence of clearly defined teachings. They contended that since the kami had already endowed the Japanese with the ability to self-regulate, there was no need to regulate their behaviour. Shinto's veneration for nature is another component that the nativists drew emphasis to and that is still significant in modern Shinto. Mountains, rock formations, and waterfalls are examples of beautiful natural settings that are thought to have their own kami. A modest shrine is built as a memorial to the kami, signified by a torii, a gate-like construction made of two support beams and a crossbeam.

Shinto was given fresh cultural and political authority in 1868, when samurai political dominance ended and the emperor was, in theory, returned to actual power. Shinto priests argued that the new administration should be based on the one that was in place before warrior rule began in 1192. Shinto priests were employed by government officials in the quest to establish a state religion, despite the fact, that efforts to revive the imperial government of the classical era were abandoned in favour of the establishment of a government akin to that of the European powers. Japanese intellectuals asserted that the Europeans' achievements in science and technology were partly due to the intensity of their religious beliefs. They believed that in order to make Japan a powerful nation like countries in the West, the Japanese needed to recognise and prioritise their own ideals. The Shinto priests were able to create and adopt State Shinto after extensive discussion, mostly with Buddhists. As a result, Shinto played a crucial role in the development of modern Japan.

Supporters of State Shinto were outspoken proponents of the idea that Japan was destined to rule the rest of Asia throughout the 1930s and 1940s. "Special attack brigades" were established after the tide of World War II shifted against Japan, with the most well-known members being the suicide pilots who crashed their aircraft into enemy ships. The Japanese called these pilots the kamikaze, the "wind of the kami," in a deliberate allusion to a typhoon that had arrived, seemingly in response to the prayers of Shinto priests, and destroyed the boats of an invading Mongol army in the thirteenth century. The hope was that these pilots could reverse Japan's military decline. It was hoped that the kami would protect Japan from the Allies in the same way that they did from the Mongols.

One shrine in the postwar era has stirred up debate outside of Japan. To honour the spirits of those who had fought for the imperial court after the collapse of the samurai authority in 1868, Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo was first constructed around the end of the nineteenth century. Later, it was used as a place of respect for sailors and soldiers who had lost their lives in conflicts including World War I, the Russo-Japanese War, and the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The ranks of those who had perished in World War II were added to that number in the postwar era. Prime Minister among other government officials have visited the shrine on business. Outrage at what the people of North and South Korea, as well as the People's Republic of China, perceive as a display of respect for the victims of an unfair and aggressive war, as well as evidence that Japanese claims of regret for the war are untrue, has been sparked by this.

CONTEMPORARY SHINTO

The Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952)'s top brass insisted that the Japanese dismantle State Shinto. Despite permitting the royal institution to continue, Shinto itself divided into two main forms. The first is a branch of Shinto that succeeded State Shinto and consists of rituals centred on the emperor and the imperial court but free of prewar ideology. The other grew out of customs that weren't specifically connected to the imperial court. These were the kind deeds that many Japanese people did to commemorate significant occasions, such as adolescence, the coming of age of young adults, and particularly weddings.

Shinto also appears in the daily lives of regular people in different ways. In modern Japan, rites of purification are commonplace. Shinto places a lot of emphasis on the metaphors of cleanliness and filth. Many Japanese may pay Shinto priests to expel evil spirits from persons, places, and things in order to purify them. After construction is finished and before a construction site is made public, it is typically cleaned. Many Japanese buy talismans (omamori) from temples for things like academic success and successful conceptions in order to summon the protection of the kami. At Shinto shrines, students write messages with their hopes for academic success and attach them to tree branches the night before their high school or university entrance tests. All around Japan, people take part in festivals that are typically planned around nearby Shinto temples throughout the year.

Perhaps it is not incorrect to refer to Shinto as a religion of practitioners rather than believers. While some devotees follow Shinto entirely, the majority of Japanese people do both, displaying what some Japanese scholars see to as a type of psychological "cohabitation." For instance, it is typical for families to make offerings at both a Buddhist altar and a Shinto "kami shelf" (kamidana) in their home (butsudan). For the respect of ancestors and recently deceased family members, the latter is particularly significant.

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