

Shinto, primal religion and international identity

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National identity and religious diversity in Japan

Questions of social and political identity in Japan have almost always been accompanied by perceptions and decisions about religion. This is true with respect both to internal political issues and to the relations between Japan and the wider world. Most commonly these questions have been linked to the changing roles and fortunes of Shinto, the leading indigenous religion of Japan. Central though Shinto is however, it is important to realize that the overall religious situation is more complex and has been so for many centuries. This paper examines some of these complexities. It argues that recent decades in particular have seen the clear emergence of a more general "primal religion" in Japan, leaving Shinto in the position of being one specific religion among others. On the basis of this analysis some of the options for the Shinto religion in an age of internationalization are considered.

The complexity of the relations between religion and identity can be documented ever since the Japanese reception of Chinese culture, which led to the self-definition of Shinto as the indigenous religion of Japan. The relationship is evident in the use of two Chinese characters to form the very word Shinto (shen-dao), which was otherwise known, using Japanese vocabulary, as *kannagara no michi* (the way in accordance with the *kami*).¹ There are of course some grounds for arguing, apparently straightforwardly, that Shinto is the religion of the Japanese people. Two reasons are particularly strong. First, Shinto is not the religion of any other people, although it is generally assumed that other people probably have their own gods. Second, a Japanese person only needs to be born in order to participate in the way of the *kami*; by the same token it is impossible or at least very difficult for an individual to escape this identification. Stated thus, Shinto could be regarded as a natural, national religion, or as one might say, the primal religion of Japan. The current situation is however no longer straightforward. Indeed it is doubtful whether the picture has ever been quite so conveniently simple since the introduction of Chinese culture and Chinese socio-political systems into Japan.

At a very early stage the imported religion, Buddhism, was also mobilised to great effect in the statecraft of the Soga clan, who turned it against the more traditionalist Mononobe and Nakatomi. In particular, Buddhism was massively advanced by the Soga Prince Shotoku (573-621) acting as regent under his devoutly Buddhist aunt the Empress Suiko, who came to the throne in 592 after a coup d'état carried out by her uncle, Soga no Umako. As is well known however, Prince Shotoku (or in Japanese Shotoku Taishi), also promoted Confucian values. Thus the concept of *wa* or harmony was given prominence in the first item of his famous seventeen-articled "constitution", which was really a list of admonitions to the ruling class. Ever since that time, despite their changing fortunes throughout the centuries, the threefold traditions of Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism have

¹ The word *kami* becomes *kan-* in this phrase through elision with the following *nagara*. Even in this apparently Japanese phrase the term *michi*, meaning "way" may have come into use in response to the Chinese use of "way" (*dao*, in older times transliterated as *tao*) as a general term for for ritual and value systems.

continued to participate in various ways in the establishment of social and political identity in Japan.

Shotoku Taishi himself became the focus of a cult which carried forward this syncretistic pattern down to the present. Since he has been regarded widely as a national symbol, a personality who both received Chinese teachings and stood up as a Japanese figurehead, he has been claimed by various parties in the arguments over the very nature of Japanese identity. Of particular interest in this regard is the account given of Shotoku Taishi by the leading early Japanese specialist in the history of religions, Anesaki Masaharu. Anesaki drew on Shotoku Taishi's image in 1943, in order to highlight the universalist message of Buddhism at a time when Shinto in its ultranationalist mode was dominant². Thus the struggles of one century were used, delicately enough, to illuminate the struggles of another, as so often in the history of ideas, values and politics.

The histories of the various types of Buddhism which have prospered in Japan may all be read in terms of their degree of Japaneseness and the extent to which they have been mobilized politically from time to time. The long-standing exclusion of Christianity during the Tokugawa Period was a political decision, but one which spoke eloquently of the potential of foreign religion to be a threat to national identity. The latter was secured by compulsory registration of the whole population at Buddhist temples (known as the *danka* system). This in turn has had a lasting effect on widespread assumptions about what it means to be Japanese and about what it means to be Buddhist in Japan. Large-scale nominal Buddhism continues even today, in spite of the Shinto resurgence which began during the selfsame Tokugawa Period and which swept forward to political dominance with the Meiji Restoration (of imperial power) in 1868.

In recent times, but also beginning in the nineteenth century, the so-called "new religions" have all pitched their message in various ways to take account of the kind of identity which Japanese people have felt that they have, or felt that they could or should aspire to. Early twentieth century clashes between the state and certain of the new religions may be understood as being the consequence of rival interpretations of the destiny of the Japanese people. A striking example is the case of Oomoto-kyo, whose headquarters were at one point flattened by government tanks (the so-called "Oomoto incident").

Since the second world war ended it has been above all the new religions, with their greatly increased freedom, which have spearheaded the consciousness of a new internationalist identity which would match their universalist messages. Some of these are Buddhist. One thinks of the Reiyukai, the Rissho Kosei-kai and the Soka Gakkai. Others have a more general character, examples being PL Kyodan, Tensho Kotai Jingu Kyo, or Byakko Shinkokai³.

For the Japan of today the largely successful operation of the post-war constitution, combined with the peace-time strength of the Japanese economy, has led to new variations in the contributions and the uses of religion in questions of identity. The Buddhist denominations in many cases also share in the articulation of Japan's new internationalization (*kokusaika*, as it is commonly called in Japan

2 *Monumenta Nipponica* II, 1943.

3 Treated, with special reference to this question, in the present writer's "National and international identity in a Japanese religion: Byakko Shinkokai" in Hayes, V.C. (ed.) *Identity Issues and World Religions, Selected Proceedings of the Fifteenth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, Netley (Australia) 1986, 234-241.

itself). Missionary expansion, as in Zen Buddhism or in Shin Buddhism (Jodo Shinshu) requires a lessening and a loosening of tightly Japanese forms of teaching and practice, and this may have a slight inward effect through the mediation of Japanese leaders who are exposed to wider cultural pressures. In many ways the religions of today minister pastorally, if sometimes unreflectively, to the complex responses of the Japanese population to the outside world. This role has if anything become more important, rather than less, with the massive increase in popular travel.

The adaptive path of Shinto

As mentioned at the outset, the history of "Shinto", as opposed to its prehistory, began with the reception of Chinese literary culture, i.e. *kanji*-based⁴ culture, without which the idea of Shinto as we know it could never have arisen. It is not simply that the very word is Chinese in form, as opposed to "*kami no michi*"; for the latter also cannot be directly documented before the introduction of writing from the continent. More significant is the counterpoint set up with Buddhism which, like the writing system, had also arrived from the continent. This counterpoint, brought about by the very invention of a designation for Shinto, implies that ever since there was "Shinto", historically speaking, there has been the beginning of a reflective consciousness about its nature, at least on the part of a few. This found further development in the idea of *shinbutsu shugo*, for the abstracted conception of "assimilation" (*shugo*) implies the differentiated positing of *shin* and *butsu* (i.e. gods and buddhas) to begin with. Thus in Japan, as in China and elsewhere, the very fact of religious pluralism proved to be the seedbed of reflection on religion, both from religious standpoints and eventually from non-religious standpoints⁵.

Although the history of Shinto in a strict sense began with an act of consciousness concerning itself, this does not mean that it did not have a prehistory. This too is significant.

Not all religions have a prehistory. Founded religions, it may be argued, do not. This is put rather sharply. Of course founded religions too make their first appearance in a given religious-historical context. Indeed they often owe far more than is admitted by their representatives to the traditions on which they draw, Buddhism on the Indian ascetical tradition, Christianity on Judaism, Sikhism on both Hinduism and Islam, and so on. Moreover founded religions are sometimes presented as having existed in some sense previously, unrecognised until revelation or enlightenment makes them known. Such arguments are a tribute to their universal consciousness, for it is felt that history cannot ever have been without them. Hence from a Buddhist point of view it was believed that there must have been previous buddhas; these were therefore given names and life-stories. Yet such religions do not really have a prehistory in the sense meant here for the case of Shinto.

Even before there was "Shinto" in the invented sense it may be assumed that there was a prehistoric network of rites and festivals to regulate the relations between humans and the *kami* and between both of these and the recurring patterns of nature and life. It was out of these such elements that Shinto as we know it was constructed. In this sense therefore it may be argued that Shinto,

4 *Kanji* are the Chinese (*kan-*) characters (*-ji*), which, through being adopted as the first writing system of Korea and Japan, have had a dramatic influence on the development of these languages as such.

5 C.f. the present writer's "Three teachings (*sanjiao*) theory and modern reflection on religion", forthcoming in proceedings of the Regional Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in Beijing, April 1992.

prehistorically, was a primal religion. This terminology, rendered in Japanese as *genshukyo*, is explicitly shared by Sonoda Minoru in his introduction to a multi-authored work entitled *Shinto, Nihon no minzokushukyo*. Historically however, "Shinto", named and reflected upon, was adjusted to a new and more complex cultural and political situation with the incursion of Chinese culture. As has already been argued, from that time onwards, "Shinto" may be regarded as an *adjusted* primal religion. Indeed through all the history of Japan there has been a series of further adjustments to the character and position of Shinto, right down to the latest phase of adjustment (in 1945 and thereafter) to the establishment of a secular democratic state. The effectiveness of this adjustment has recently been seen in the particular, complex way in which the recent enthronement ceremonies (*sokuirei/daijosai*) were carried out.

If this is kept in mind it will be realised that it is no accident that at the very same time that Japanese society was thrust into the modern age of internationalism a resurgent Shinto was fostered by the state. When the internationalism of Meiji and Taisho times (with some incipient hegemonialism) was overtaken by the radical hegemonialism of the early Showa Period, Shinto was increasingly pressed into service for political ends. The political role of Shinto during this period was based on a high accentuation of its particularism, and ideologically the high point of this may be seen in the work *Kokutai no Hongi*, published on March 30th 1937. The concept of *kokutai*, translated by Gauntlett and Hall as "national entity", may be regarded as a nationally oriented, ideologised focussing of the particularist aspect of Shinto⁶. The very idea of *-tai* implies particularistic focussing in physically delineable form, i.e. body (*karada*, the Japanese reading for the character *-tai*). But that it is *koku-tai* (*koku* meaning nation) implies the dominance of centralised political coherence over against the natural pluralism which has characterised Japanese society in most of its history.

The post-war situation of Shinto

Shinto consciousness is currently alert and has been heightened recently (1990) by the holding of the accession ceremonies (*sokuirei/daijosai*) for the newly installed Tenno (Akihito)⁷. These ceremonies fell into two parts, the first being non-religious and involving the government in the person of prime minister Kaifu and the second being carried out as a series of restricted Shinto rituals in the "private" grounds of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. In general it may be said that the separation of religion and the state required by the constitution was successfully maintained by this format. Controversy continues however over a different problem, namely that of the status of Yasukuni Shrine, where the war-dead are enshrined. The question here is whether it should be left as a private corporation in law or renationalized as a state institution. In the wider background there is also the question of possible state support for the costs of rebuilding Ise Shrine, where the sun-goddess Amaterasu who is regarded as the ancestor of the Tenno is revered⁸. These and other related issues illustrate the tendency in some Shinto quarters to seek a return to a much closer association with the state, on the grounds that Shinto should be regarded as the national religion of the Japanese

6 C.f. J. O. Gauntlett (trans.) and R. H. King (ed.), *Kokutai No Hongi, Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, Newton, Mass. 1974.

7 I was fortunate enough to be able to visit Japan again at this time, and to be able to meet the Emperor's personal adviser on ritual or ceremonial questions. A more detailed account is in preparation.

8 Ise Jingu is traditionally rebuilt once every twenty years at great expense, e.g. in 1973 and now again in 1993, but currently the cost continues to be born by massive private donations, partly from industry.

people.

However, the further adaptation of Shinto to the post-war political situation, i.e. the disestablishment of religion, the separation of religion and the state, and the foundation of the Jinja Honcho (Association of Shinto Shrines) as an independent religious juridical person (*shukyochojin*), reopened the way for a different appreciation of the nature of Shinto and in particular of its inner-Japanese pluralism and particularism.

Now this point is not one which can easily be documented from literature. The assessment here is made on the basis of observations and conversations at many Shinto shrines and with many participants in Shinto events, including leading priests but also lay persons falling into various social categories. The current situation of Shinto is that there are certainly some strong centralist tendencies. These are focussed by the Association of Shinto Shrines, by Ise Jingu and to some extent by other really major shrines such as Atsuta Jingu, and by the Shinto of the Imperial Household. A supporting role is played by the Kokugakuin University in Tokyo and by the Kogakkan University at Ise. At the same time however, and this is the point emphasized here, there is a keen appreciation of the *particularist* aspect of Shinto, shrine by shrine. Patriotism is certainly deeply rooted in Shinto circles. However, in spite of the strength of the centralising institutions mentioned above, this may and indeed should be distinguished from the heavily ideologised State Shinto of pre-1945 times. Thus while voluntary patriotism and even elementary tenno-ism may easily be observed, at shrines, the shrines are also allowed to be themselves and their own kami are celebrated in their own right. This may be regarded as the most natural form of Shinto particularism. The point may be stated in one simple sentence. Every mountain has its *kami*.

Without pursuing the historical vicissitudes in all their detail, it is evident that Shinto, through its spokesmen and organizers, has been able to move with the times politically. Far from being a simple, ancient set of customs relating to fishing and agriculture, as it is sometimes presented, Shinto has long since adjusted to the demands of sustained modernization, the process probably beginning with the "National Learning" (Kokugaku) scholars in the middle of the Tokugawa Period. For this reason Shinto may be regarded as an example of "adjusted primal religion", a phrase which is meant to indicate that the essential parameters of Shinto as primal religion have not been changed as such, but that many adjustments have taken place in order to maintain its position in developing, and indeed highly developed socio-political circumstances. This process is dramatically evidenced, at latest, by the simple fact of disestablishment which took place in 1945, at the end of the second world war. It is only possible to "disestablish" a religion which is overtly institutionalized at the highest level. It is only because Shinto had become, in tandem with some of the elementary values of Confucianism, a national political ideology as well as a religious system, that it could afterwards deliberately be set apart from the state. This procedure, which was largely effective, left "Shinto" in the form now generally known as "Shrine Shinto" in the position of being one specific religion among others.

Japan's new primal religion

The *consequences* of the changing institutional fortunes of Shinto for Japan's current religious situation have not yet been fully understood. They are, in brief, that Shinto has been left intact as a well organized religion under the general leadership of the major shrines and the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honcho), but that it no longer by itself provides the centre of gravity for the religious activities of the population in general. The centre of gravity is provided now by what can only be described as a new *primal religion*, carried along by the religious interests and needs of the population but determined by no single religious organization or institution. This modern "primal religion" certainly has its antecedents which are readily discernible since the beginnings of mass culture in the Edo Period, and which strengthened throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However it is only with the closure of the modern period of Shinto domination through government, which ran from 1868 to 1945, that it has come into its own as the generally understood matrix for all specific religious activity in Japan.

If the shape of this new primal religion of Japan may be briefly described it will be viewed in terms of a network of overlapping concepts of sacred space and time. The parameters of this sacred space and time are those of Japanese society and memory. This is complemented by life festivals of various kinds and rituals for the management of death and the care of the ancestors, which all take place in the context of the religiously articulated space-time network. Tying these complementary concepts together (space/time, life/death) are the many rites of **transaction** which are thought to ensure, or at least to facilitate the continued functioning of the whole⁹. Since this religious consciousness and activity is in principle understood to be coterminous specifically with Japanese society, Japanese geography, Japanese economic needs and Japanese experience of the generations, we are certainly concerned here with a **primal religion**, and not with a universal religion. Hence, as can often be observed, relations with the world beyond the above named parameters are typically regarded as problematic.

In our current times the point to note is that the primal religion of Japan today, taking the totality of Japanese society into consideration, is no longer Shinto, though Shinto contributes in many ways to it and feeds upon it. Rather, the contemporary primal religion is a more general and more neutral religious complex with its own vitality and its own persistence. Buddhism and the various, in many cases locally influential new religions also stand in a complex relationship to this unnamed primal religion. At the same time the current options for Shinto continue to be influenced by its heritage as Japan's primal religion of the past, even though in the course of time it has been significantly adapted and adjusted. This point will be taken up again later under the heading "*kami* and their neighbours".

It may be pointed out that the above argument is both theoretical *and* historical. The recognition of the current religious pattern for what it is may be regarded as "grounded theory" arising out of observation. Yet it also has historical implications. In historical terms we are compelled to note the displacement of an earlier primal religion of Japan which may be admitted once to have been Shinto. The periodical adjustments of Shinto, however, have culminated in its elevation to being the

9 This understanding of Japan's "new primal religion" is worked out in detail in another work by the present writer.

national ideology of a modern state and, in the last radical adjustment of disestablishment, to becoming legally, and to a large extent effectively, one specific religion among others. This historical course of development has had the effect of leaving it open for the primal religion of the people to define itself in other ways.

Internationalism, internationality, internationalization

Before proceeding further with the main argument a brief discussion of the terms "internationalism", "internationality" and "internationalization" is needed to set the context. Questions of identity in relation to religion are at the present time, for Japan, deeply influenced by the way in which Japan's relations with the rest of the world are conceived.

In spite of the continued popularity in Japan itself of the flag-word "internationalisation" (*kokusaika*), this term is avoided here because it represents, and continues to require, a discussion in itself. For one thing, the perspective preferred in this paper is not restricted to the recent decade or so in which "internationalisation" has become a popular subject of discussion. More substantively, the term is very often used to refer to the effective projection of Japanese interests into the world arena. This process is indeed far advanced. Less aggressive Japanese viewpoints still consider, not inaccurately, that much remains to be done to achieve a general adaptation of the population to consciousness and behaviour patterns which are presumed to have world-wide currency. (The word currency is used advisedly here, rather than validity, for, typically, Japanese viewpoints tend to subordinate universals to questions of practical behaviour.) It may be argued therefore that the most widely current understanding of "internationalisation" in Japan is deeply flawed, for it represents the outward affirmation of a perspective which remains essentially closed and is not open to the real pluriformity of the human world. A desirable internationalisation on the other hand, to specify an alternative from the viewpoint of the present writer, would be open to social and cultural modes which really are different and would enable Japanese people, and other people, to move betwixt and between such different situations without undue strain. This should not merely ease communication and trade but also provide a basis for the cooperative solution of the numerous problems affecting the planet as a whole. This point of view may be classed as an example of "internationalism", which of course may take various forms depending on varied ideological perspectives.

It is therefore the word "internationality" (rather than *-isation* or *-ism*) which is used in the present context. The age of internationality, from which we can nowadays no longer absent ourselves, began for different countries at different times. It broke in fully upon Japan in the Meiji Period, introduced in 1868 with the "restoration" of imperial authority to centrality in place of the Tokugawa shogunate. This is because from that time on it was recognised by the country's leadership that it was no longer possible to keep Japan isolated from the world-wide interactions of political and economic activity. The carefully managed protectionism of Japanese society, which had indeed preserved the country from being colonised by others, gave way to dynamic interaction, demanded by the United States but at the same time turned, in the main, to Japan's advantage.

Needless to say, the form which internationality has taken worldwide has varied dramatically both in terms of projected opinion and in terms of real history. Political hegemonies, general proletarian revolution and international free trade are all competing versions of internationality. It remains to be

seen whether the last of these, which is currently riding so high, can really provide the ground rules for the organisation of the whole world and thus the basis for the solution of planetary problems. It may prove to be the case that the dynamic requirements of international capitalism continue to demand inequality between the world's major regions and thus produce the continuation of various forms of political protectionism. However this may be, we find ourselves in an age of competing forms of internationality, some replacing others in a dramatic way and others being variants which jostle side by side in more subtle ways. Current interest in "globalism" is simply one variant of these, partly espoused by those who benefit from the current economic power centres. It may yet turn out to be an illusion as far as serious sociological theory is concerned.

These considerations are merely intended to set the context for the paradox of the particularism of Shinto and the claims of internationalism in one form or another. It may be stated at once that Shinto is understood here most certainly to be "a religion" and that it therefore requires assessment in terms of the historical and comparative study of religion. The well-known political discussion as to whether Shinto is to be classed as a religion or as a non-religion will therefore not be pursued further at this point.

The options for Shinto

What, then, are the options for Shinto on the background of this general situation. Clearly Shinto has a strongly Japanese identity in itself, as has already been explained above. Yet although it is widely respected and although many Shinto rites are observed as occasion demands, Shinto is no longer compulsory for all Japanese. Many people today in fact owe allegiance to value and belief systems which can at least be sharply distinguished from Shinto, even if they are not overtly declared to be in contradiction to it (as usually in the case of the Soka Gakkai). Many of the popular new religions and at least some of the traditional Buddhist denominations such as Jodo Shinshu convey a sense of universalism, by which is meant that they are understood to address a common human condition which is not restricted to Japanese people. As a result they engage in overseas missions, with varying degrees of success. This understanding of the wider appropriateness of one's own religious belief for others fits in neatly with the current awareness of Japan's place as part of the wider network of nations. In other words it fits with the general tendency to affirm the desirability of internationalization (*kokusaika*) as mentioned above. But where does this leave Shinto, which is simply not an international religion? And where does it leave the new primal religion of Japan, which is not organized institutionally with any single focus but which seems to have its own dynamics?

Being a polytheistic system the most evident formal characteristic of Shinto is its "particularism". This term will be explained further below, but for the moment it may be summed up in the sentence "Every mountain has its *kami*". This sentence refers in principle to Japanese mountains and to Japanese *kami* (i.e. supernatural beings to whom respect is due, deities as understood in Shinto). At the same time Japanese society is currently experiencing an unprecedented degree of international exposure and activity, not only economically but also culturally. This is leading millions of Japanese people regularly to places on this planet where there are, at least apparently, no *kami*. Or, if there are *kami*, they are *kami* who do not resort to the Great Shrine of Izumo in the late autumn for the regular

reunion of all the *kami* of Japan. Yet the "way of the *kami*" (the literal meaning of "Shinto") continues to flourish in the Japanese islands. Shinto as a religion, not least as an organised religion, is by no means in the doldrums. Hence there is a profound question about the particularism of Shinto in the context of the ever-deepening effects of "internationalism". What is the nature of the claim which the "way of the *kami*" lays upon those many people of Japan who sense a natural allegiance to it? How does it fit with perspectives and values of a more universal currency or validity?

Fundamentalism as an option?

It is well known that even today, under the conditions of the separation of religion and state, freedom of religious allegiance, and democratic pluralism, there are various strains and tensions between competing religious bodies in Japan. The status of Yasukuni Shrine has attracted considerable attention and strong feelings, for example. Other questions have been the financing of the recent enthronement ceremonies and of the twenty-year rebuilding of Ise Shrine which last took place in 1993. The very success of several major Buddhist organisations and of new religions of various kinds in attracting the interest and allegiance of the population has braced the competitive spirit of Shinto circles. Even at New Year it seems necessary to put up posters at shrines urging people to pay their first visit of the year to their local shrine, the implication being that they should only then go off to other places such as the flourishing Shingon Buddhist temples at Narita or Kawasaki. Thus there is a question within Japan itself as to how to cope with religious pluralism in a competitive world. Is fundamentalism, i.e. Shinto fundamentalism, the answer?

It may be assumed that the character of a religion on its home ground will bear some relation to the manner of its perception of the wider world. On this basis it will be recognised that fundamentalism is an easy, deceptively easy, but ultimately unsatisfactory answer. It is unsatisfactory in modern times for general intellectual reasons, which will be evident to most readers and need not detain us now. But it is unsatisfactory for the Shinto world in particular because it implies an isolationism of consciousness which does not match the requirements of the age of internationalism. Many Shinto leaders are aware of this.

Strangely enough it is quite convenient for religions which bear a universalist message to adopt a more or less fundamentalist stance, as many Buddhist organisations in effect do. This is because internationalism provides opportunities for well organised missionary activity which does not for its own part have to meet the *challenge* of internationalism. However Shinto is not, at least not in this usual sense, a missionary religion, especially now that hegemonialism has been abandoned as a political option. Thus a fundamentalist stance would seem to offer no solution, for Shinto, to the challenge of pluralism in an age of internationalism. Although this may seem strange at first sight, the intellectual challenge of internationalism in the contemporary world is therefore stronger for Shinto than it is for Buddhism.

A universalist form of Shinto?

A different option for Shinto leaders might be to perceive within the Shinto tradition a general message for humankind, one thought to have some kind of universal validity. In other words, if Shinto conveys profound truth or truths, why restrict awareness of these to Japanese people? Why should Shinto not stand alongside Buddhist organisations in presenting a universal message to the world? The very idea of a Japanese starting point for universal salvation is not at all unknown. Nichiren believed that, just as the Buddhadharma had come from India and China to Japan, so in clarified and purified form it should be conveyed again from east to west. Zen Buddhism and Jodo Shin Buddhism similarly are not expending their missionary efforts on some vague, ecumenical form of early Buddhism; rather they invite the world to adopt a view of Buddhism formulated in Japan, to learn Japanese terminology and to take up specific practices such as the *nenbutsu* or *zazen*.

Admittedly Buddhism had a universal message from its very inception, so that a better parallel might be the Hindu tradition, which, like Shinto, was primarily ethnically oriented. It was in the cradle of the Hindu tradition however that the universal messages of Jainism and Buddhism were conceived, those also of the Upanishadic literature, of Vedanta, of Bhaktiyoga and of modern Hindu missions to the world such as the Ramakrishna Mission and more recently ISKCON etc.. Looking to Japan one may see a parallel in those Shinto-derived movements such as Kurozumi-kyo, where the founding shrine is still to be seen but the organisation has become an independent "religious juridical person" whose members do not even have to be Japanese. Other well-known cases are, variously, more or less clearly linked to Shinto consciousness, e.g. Konkokyo, Tenrikyo, Oomotokyo, Byakko Shinkokai. In these the universal claim or message is clear, while it is equally clear that the message goes out from its sacred centre in Japan.

A more ambiguous example would be Taisha-kyo, based on the Grand Shrine of Izumo (Izumo Taisha). The normal shrine functions of the Grand Shrine of Izumo exemplify the particularist character of Shinto in strikingly clear fashion. It is after all the focus of an alternative, ancient mythology and the home of the disgraced *kami* Susanoo-no-mikoto who had trampled down the ricefields of Ise's Amaterasu-omikami. It is also the place of recourse of all the Shinto *kami* of Japan once a year, which may be regarded as an integrative event, integrative however at some distance from the seat of the ancestors of the imperial house and hence again a symbol of particularism. Izumo is a sacred place which cannot easily be digested in a centralised, simplified ideology. Taisha-kyo is something else again. Though based on the Grand Shrine and drawing pilgrims to it, its teaching (for it is a teaching, a *kyo*) is more generalised and addressed to believers anywhere in Japan. Thus it bears what might be considered to be an incipient universalism, even though there is apparently no missionary outreach beyond the shores or citizens of Japan itself.

There comes a point when neo-Hinduist religious movements of wide appeal lose their relation to the Hinduism of the Indian people (if this admittedly problematic "-ism" terminology may be permitted for convenience' sake). In so far as similar developments may be perceived on the background of the Shinto tradition the same point is reached some time. Thus, although Tenrikyo was once classified under the official category of "Sect Shinto" (really a contradiction in terms) it regards itself as an independent revelation bearing a message of salvation for all mankind. The

historical experience and the precise definition varies from case to case. In the Konkokyo grounds for example there still stand the Shinto "shrines" built to legitimate it as a Shinto sect during the pre-war nationalist years. But Konkokyo no longer reveres local kami in the particularist manner of Shinto; the focus is found in the person of the living master who is seated in the sanctuary to give his guidance freely to all comers, every day, year in, year out, that is, universally. There is no longer any formal relationship with Shinto organisations.

The same point may be considered in the other direction. The Byakko Shinkokai, for example, is a product of the post-war period and thus it has never needed to define itself formally in terms of a relation to Shinto tradition. Its central concern is the search for peace in the age of internationalism, through liturgical prayer for every single nation on earth. Nevertheless in a broad sense there is also a clear relation to various elements in the religious background of Japan, and this includes Shinto. For individuals this may be seen in the practice of purification (*o-kiyome*), which however takes on a more personalised pastoral dimension than is usual at Shinto shrines. For the movement as a whole it may be seen in the belief that peace will issue from Japan to extend over the whole world. This is clearly a compensatory alternative for the pre-1945 belief in the divinely legitimated mission of Japanese imperialism, to which Shinto mythology had been harnessed.

It will be seen from these examples that while the model of a universalist message going out from a sacred place is quite frequent in Japan this is not the solution for the Shinto world in general. No major Shinto shrine has quite taken this step, although conceivably, for example in the form of Taisha-kyo, it could have done or could do. Under current circumstances the particularist celebration of the local kami is a much stronger theme, reinforced as it is through the supporting network of organisational and to some extent kinship relations between the shrines.

Kami and their neighbours

What options then remain? If we further consider the known character of Shinto in terms of the general morphology of religions it is reasonably clear that in spite of the complexity of its increasingly adjusted forms it may still be regarded, as indicated above, as a "primal religion". Primal religion pays gives recognition to the ancestral lineage of a specific family, clan or nation, and to the myths and legends which articulate it. It secures social continuity by means of rites of transition, and it secures the economic base of society so perceived by *calendrical rites*. In emergency, *occasional rites* are used, for example to avert drought or epidemics. The conceptual perspective is characterised by cosmological symbolism suggesting repetition and stability, in spite of the known dangers. Divine power is understood to be focused or located in a particularistic and therefore polytheistic mode. Thus meaning is geographically delimited and distant exogenous groups are of little interest except as a potential threat. The specific village or on a larger scale the region, understood indeed as a "country", *kuni*, to which one's family belongs, is what matters. Needless to say, for Japan these conceptions had been extrapolated as far as the natural coast-line borders at an early stage, and the mythologies coordinated, or at least loosely integrated accordingly.

It may be argued, therefore, that the resultant Shinto religion has oscillated and continues to oscillate, between a Japan-wide perspective with various unifying symbols and continued focus on the geographically and socially particular. For this reason the emphasis on Amaterasu-omikami and

upon Ise Jingu, which is sometimes very strong, does not lead to henotheism (i.e. ethnically conditioned monotheism). It leaves the complex polytheism of the many shrines more or less intact. Polytheism expresses the distinctive quality of each specific area, each specific shrine and each specific festival. One might almost say therefore that while Shinto is a religion, it is at the same time many religions. It is significant that there is little competition between the many shrines. Well-known shrines such as Kumano, Suwa, Kashima, to name but three, do not vie for the interest of the population with special teachings. In polytheism the various *kami* are either relatives or neighbours.

If we regard this as the most natural feature of Shinto, and the historical coordination of this diversity up to the natural geographical boundaries of the Japanese islands as an additional superstructure which has from time to time been politically used, or misused, then we have a third model with which to address the question of Shinto in the age of internationalism. Unlike the option of fundamentalism (which is an essentially blinkered view), and unlike the option of producing a claim to a universal message of salvation, which has been tried in various quarters in Japan, the *particularism* of everyday Shinto is understood (though not as a theoretical concept) by most of those who participate in it. The essential point is quite simple. Just as there are neighbours and relatives within Japan, so too there are neighbours and relatives outside Japan. The geographical borders of Japan, though beautiful, are in principle accidental. Moreover, political legitimation and even sovereignty are in principle relative and not, as portrayed in *Kokutai no hongii*, absolute, immutable and unquestionable.

In other words, if every mountain has a *kami*, every *kami* has a neighbour.

The Shinto-theological correlation of this perception with the actual religious and cultural situation of other parts of the world is of course not a matter for an observer and commentator such as the present writer. It will involve a further adaptive phase on the part of Shinto leaders and teachers, which may be regarded as already in progress in certain quarters, though largely at the level of academic interaction. Moreover many further questions will emerge. Two are particularly evident to any specialist in the study of religion and these at least shall be named.

First, what of the relation between such a conception and those religious systems which perceive a universal meaning in their own specific teaching, not only the major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but also the many lesser known cases both in Japan (including those mentioned above) and abroad? At the very least knowledge and dialogue are required here, in both directions. Religions with a universal message have produced different answers to this question; but will there be an answer from within the Shinto world?

Second, who *are* the natural neighbours of the Shinto *kami*? It might be a matter for them, so to speak, to recognise each other, even to meet, perhaps occasionally at Izumo and occasionally elsewhere. Are they to be found only in East, North and South-East Asia, or also in other parts of the world? Primal religion in its simpler forms has had an extremely chequered history in recent centuries, suffering from well organised repression on behalf of various other ways of thinking. Moreover many of the minority peoples for whom their own specific primal religion has been a significant cultural feature have suffered economic and political repression, loss of their natural environment, relative demographic reduction, and other hardships. These are not necessarily the

peoples with whom Japanese society in general seeks massive economic and cultural interaction in the first instance. For example, they are not themselves represented among the seven leading industrial nations. Many of them are however linked in the Union of the Peoples of the North (Soyuz Narodhi Severa) which has its main office in Moscow. It may be that Shinto representatives, while supportive of modern, economically successful Japan (as seen from the countless company and factory shrines), could see a particular opportunity in this regard. At the same time there are two other cases of substantially adjusted and, by now, highly complex and influential primal religion, namely Hinduism and Judaism, so that the question of bilateral comparison is posed here too. What may be said, for example, about the relations between polytheism (Shinto), idealist monism (some forms of Hinduism), and ethnically located monotheism (Judaism), and how do particularist and universalist themes emerge in practice in religions which emphasise one or other of these?

It may seem presumptuous to pose such questions. It may also seem futile to expect elaborated answers from a system where ritual is dominant and ideas are deeply embedded in social assumptions. However we should bear in mind that Shinto, for all its social practicality and unquestioned ritualism, is one of the most intellectually articulated and resourceful primal religions in existence (along with Hinduism and Judaism). One thing is certain, in an age of ever hastening internationality these and other questions will not go away. If universalist claims to religious truth are intellectually clear to their proponents, they seem surprisingly numerous and diverse, and thus ultimately unsatisfactory, to many observers. The particularist character of primal religion, on the other hand, may give undue reinforcement to ethnic isolationism, and is just as likely to fall into fundamentalist simplicism as any other religion. This of course is very dangerous, and although it is not an academic point, the warning about undue emphasis on ethnicity, which eventually leads to conflicts, should be repeated at any appropriate opportunity. These traps may be avoided however by positive recognition of the particular neighbour. Thus, understood at its best, Shinto may help in its own way to build human bridges in the age of internationality.

So what of Japan's new primal religion?

There remains one further question. If there is any validity in the above reflections on the options open to the Shinto religion, can the same be said for what was earlier described as the new primal religion of Japan? The reason why Shinto may be said to have "options" in these matters, is that as Japan's "adjusted primal religion" it is served by an array of supporting institutions, spokesmen and indeed thinkers. Japan's new primal religion however has no institutions, no spokesmen, and no thinkers. It is therefore likely that its particularist character, which is unreflectingly coterminous with *Japanese* space and time will tend to reinforce ethnic identity rather than to promote a sense of internationalism. The transactions of Japanese religion at this level are supposed to facilitate and even to ensure the functioning of Japanese society. Japanese people are more united in their new primal religion, whichever particular shrine or temple they seek out on the several occasions when they are needed, than they are ever again likely to be over a thought-out allegiance directed specifically towards Shinto. On the other hand the institutional looseness of the new primal religion allows features to be incorporated which to some extent reflect the influences of a world experienced increasingly by the Japanese population as international. Thus "safety for the family", a common prayer, is understood to be dependent upon world peace, at least as far as international

affairs affect Japan. "Safety in traffic" is complemented nowadays with the request for "safety in the air", which implies international travel as well as internal flights. Eventually, the need to perform rites of transaction outside Japan's geographical space, as notably in Hawaii but also elsewhere, will leave some kind of a mark on consciousness even within Japan. Yet these are but straws in the wind. The most important tendency as a countervailing force to ethnocentricity in Japan's new primal religion will come from those specific religions, Buddhist schools and new faiths alike, which contribute to it in various ways. The primal pattern of religious action and consciousness will in general continue to reinforce the common identity of Japanese society. Yet on the other hand it will remain open, like a receptive sponge, to the influences of specific religious leadership from many quarters. This includes but is not limited to the world of organized Shinto. Japanese religious leaders have a considerable responsibility here.

N.B. This paper has been developed out of talks given at the (Shinto) Kogakkan University, Ise in autumn 1990, at a conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies, at Berlin in September 1991, and at a conference of the Finnish Association for the Study of Religion, at Helsinki in May 1993. Particular thanks are due to my hosts at Ise and at Helsinki.

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