

A New History of Shinto

John Breen and Mark Teeuwen

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“Written by two scholars at the forefront of the study of Japanese religions, this book offers much more than a brief history. It is in fact a very bold and lucid attempt to redraw the parameters that govern our understanding of that elusive body of thought and practice we call Shinto. After an excellent overview of the development of Shinto through time, the authors present a series of case studies, of a shrine, a myth, and a rite, that reveal neither a precious fossil, nor the remnant of a pristine, primitive past, but a constellation of institutions and practices that was for ever evolving in response to changing demands. This book will surprise and on occasion shock; it will surely be required reading for all those interested in Japan and the Japanese.”

Richard Bowring
University of Cambridge

“*A New History of Shinto* contains fresh material presented in an entirely original format. Co-written by two of the world’s leading academic authorities on Japanese religions, this book is a substantial and highly readable introduction to Shinto, informed by the best of recent scholarship. The volume offers a host of surprises for any reader who thinks that Shinto is Japan’s ancient indigenous faith, and at the same time provides much new information and fresh insights for those more familiar with the research findings which have radically transformed our understanding of Shinto in recent years. Overall, the book sets a new standard for a concise introduction to Shinto. It should be required reading for anyone interested in Japan and religion.”

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Conventions and Abbreviations Used in the Text

In this book we follow the standard convention of giving Japanese names in Japanese order, with the family name followed by the given name. Less conventionally, we refer wherever possible to Shinto kami, often inadequately translated “god” or “gods,” as “kami,” without italics.

Finally, a note on periodization is called for. A number of conventional period names are used in the text, sometimes without dates. For easy reference, these dates are listed here:

Nara	710–794
Heian	794–1185
Kamakura	1185–1333
Muromachi	1336–1573
Edo	1600–1867
Meiji	1868–1912
Taishō	1912–1926
Shōwa	1926–1989

Perhaps unwisely, we often refer to the Nara and Heian periods collectively as “ancient” or “classical,” Kamakura and Muromachi as “medieval,” Edo as “early modern.” Meiji and after are the “modern” period, and “premodern” thus refers to pre-Meiji. Whenever these terms are encountered in this book, they are used in these particular senses. Note also that the lunar calendar prevailed in Japan until 1873, when the Japanese government adopted the solar calendar.

Abbreviations

<i>NKBT</i>	<i>Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei</i>
<i>SBS</i>	<i>Meiji Ishin Shinbutsu Bunri Shiryō</i>
<i>SNKBT</i>	<i>Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Shintō Taikei</i>

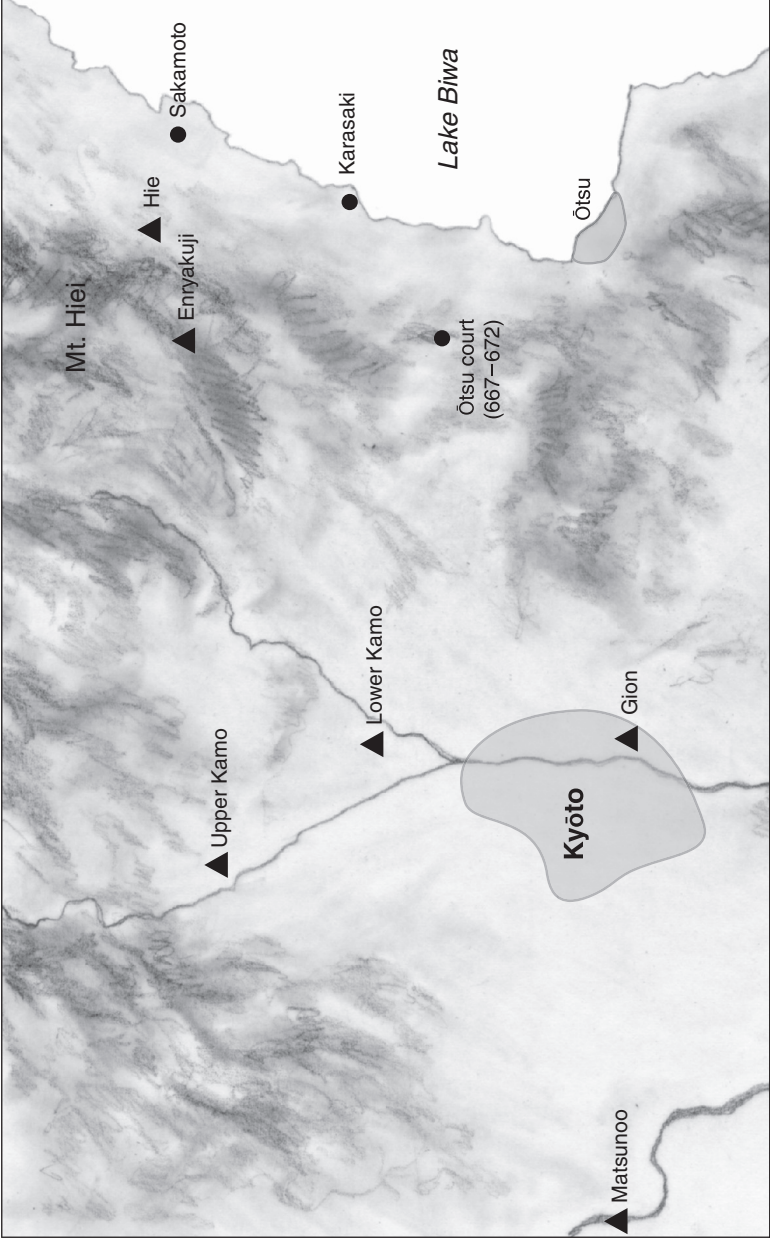
Prologue

The premise for *A New History of Shinto* is the more or less obvious point that Shinto is a construct, that Shinto is not in other words coeval with heaven and earth. At some time in the past, it came into being. It follows from this observation that there must have been a “pre-Shinto,” a time, that is, when Shinto did not exist, and there must also have been historical processes of “Shintoization” that led to its construction in particular ways at particular times. In this book we are every bit as interested in exploring this “pre-Shinto” and pursuing these “Shintoization” processes as we are in the Shinto construct itself. The method we adopt is to devote three core chapters to in-depth, historical case studies of three central Shinto motifs: shrines, myth, and ritual. Specifically, and for reasons which will become apparent, we focus on the Hie Shrines, east of Kyoto in Shiga Prefecture, the myth of the sun-goddess and the rock-cave, and the Great Rite of Feasting, known as the *daijōsai*. The other chapters range more broadly and less deeply, but always critically, across different Shinto themes in premodern and modern Japanese history.

A New History of Shinto is a co-authored book, and we shared the research and writing load equally. Mark Teeuwen was responsible for Chapters 1 and 4; John Breen wrote Chapters 5 and 6. Chapters 2 and 3, as well as the Conclusion, were co-written, with Mark Teeuwen being responsible for the early and medieval sections, and John Breen for the early modern and modern. Both of us incurred numerous debts in the researching and writing of our

different chapters and sections, which we want to record here. Both authors want to thank Kirsten Berrum of Oslo University for drawing and redrawing the Hie maps. Mark Teeuwen would like to thank Michael Como and Herman Ooms for generously sharing their work on the ancient period with him, Kadoya Atsushi for good company and for directing him to some wonderful sources on the medieval period, and Mori Mizue for giving him free tickets to the Noh play that is discussed in Chapter 4. He is also grateful to Arne Kalland for the photograph of *iwato kagura* at Shingū and to Yajima Arata from Shibuya Kuritsu Shōtō Bijutsukan for the reproduction of *Shichifukujin iwato no kurabiraki*.

John Breen wants to thank Takagi Hiroshi of Kyoto University for lots of advice and friendship, the shrine priests Sagai Tatsuru and Suhara Norihiko, and the local historian Yamaguchi Yukitsugu both for sharing their deep knowledge of Hiyoshi Taisha, and for introducing him to some invaluable written and visual sources. He wants to record his gratitude, too, to the archivists at Shiga Prefectural Library and Shiga Prefectural Office, as well as to Iwahashi Katsuji of the National Association of Shrines and Kase Naoya of Kokugakuin University. It goes without saying that any shortcomings in the arguments presented are solely the responsibility of the authors.



Map 1 The geographical location of the Hie Shrines



Western compound

- 1 Omiya → Omiwa (1873) → Nishi Hongū (1928)
- 2 Shōshinshi → Usa (1869)
- 3 Marōdo → Shirayama-hime (1873)

Eastern compound

- 4 Ninomiya → Hongū (1873) → Higashi Hongū (1928)
- 5 Jūzenji → Juge (1869)
- 6 Sannomiya
- 7 Hachioji → Ushio (1869)

Other

- 8 Omandokoro
- 9 Ōji → Ubuaya (1869)

Map 2 The position of the seven shrines in the Hie precinct

Chapter 1

An Alternative Approach to the History of Shinto

In today's Japan, Shinto has a distinct identity. Shinto is the religion of shrines (*jinja*, *jingū*), large and small sanctuaries that are distinguished from Buddhist temples by their characteristic architecture. These shrines, some 100,000 in all, are managed by about 20,000 Shinto priests, who are immediately recognizable from their traditional attire. The shrines accommodate a multitude of deities. While these deities differ from one shrine to another, they clearly belong to the same category (called *kami*), and they are obviously different from the buddhas and bodhisattvas of Buddhist temples. Similarly, shrines stage a dazzling variety of ceremonies, but it is evident even at first glance that they share a common ritual language.

Still, however clear the contours of modern Shinto may be, in some ways it is also very difficult to pin down. According to official statistics, Shinto is Japan's largest religion, with more than a hundred million "adherents," a number that amounts to well over 80 percent of all Japanese. Yet only a small percentage of the populace identify themselves as "Shintoists" in questionnaires conducted by the media or by Shinto organizations. This reflects the fact that while many Japanese participate in shrine events and make use of the ritual services offered by shrines, only very few regard Shinto as their religious identity. Seen through the eyes of the average patron of shrines, Shinto remains a very vague concept. Shrines may be categorized as Shinto and temples as Buddhist, but this distinction is of little consequence to those who

make use of their services. It makes sense to distinguish shrines from temples, but with few exceptions it is impossible to differentiate between “Shintoists” and “Buddhists.”

Of course, the fact that Shinto hardly functions as a religious identity does not mean that shrines are taken lightly. As “religious juridical persons” (*shūkyō hōjin*) in law, shrines cannot be supported by public funds under Japan’s postwar constitution.¹ They depend for their upkeep on the largess of the inhabitants of their “parish” and the general public. Without a steady stream of income, no shrine can survive; a shrine priest much less so. When a shrine ceases to make itself relevant to the community on which it depends, it will disappear almost instantly. In this perspective, the fact that so many shrines have survived good times and bad over centuries bespeaks a truly astonishing staying power. Ultimately, this remarkable resilience is down to the never-ending efforts of generations of shrine priests, who time and again have succeeded in finding new roles and new sources of income for their shrines, and to the willingness of shrine parishioners and other patrons to make their resources available to them.

Shrines may have a permanent priest, but most do not; such smaller shrines are maintained and run by people in the neighborhood, or share a priest with a number of other shrines. Statistics show that, overall, there is about one priest to every five shrines. There are also a few hundred large and very large shrines: the Ise Shrine, for example, has some 600 personnel, ranging from priests and musicians to office workers. But of course, shrine priests cannot keep a shrine afloat on their own. Equally important is the role played by worshipers’ organizations (*sūkeikai*, *hōsankai*) and neighborhood associations (*chōnaikai*), which organize the community’s participation in and funding of shrine events.

How does a shrine work? Shrines are places where kami are believed to reside. The focus of most shrines is the main sanctuary, or kami hall (*shinden*), usually a simple wooden or concrete building in traditional style. The shrine’s main deities are said to dwell in this building, often in mirrors or other “kami objects” that are permanently hidden from view. In front of the kami hall is a worship hall (*haiden*), from which the visitor looks up to the sanctuary. Prayers are said in this worship hall. Only priests may

approach the sanctuary, and even they seldom enter its inner recesses where the kami is hidden. The area around the two halls is often parklike, and even in an urban environment it tends to look like a small natural forest, or at least it will feature a few trees. Access to the shrine precincts is through a characteristic torii gate. Visitors enter by way of this torii and rinse their hands and mouth at a basin with running water before proceeding to the worship hall. At larger shrines, they will pass by a shrine office (*shamusho*), where they can ask a priest to perform a ritual or buy kami tablets, amulets, postcards, and a variety of souvenirs. Most will pass the office without a glance, throw a coin into the money box (*saisenbako*) at the worship hall, clap their hands, and bow their head briefly in prayer before hurrying off once more into the secular world beyond the torii. The most popular opportunity for such a shrine visit is New Year. Some 70 percent of all Japanese visit a shrine in the first days of the New Year (a practice called *hatsumōde*);² outside this rush-hour period shrines tend to be very quiet places.

Shrines perform three categories of rituals. One is personal prayers for individuals or families. After *hatsumōde*, which also belongs to this category, the most popular practices are *hatsu miyamairi*, the first shrine visit of a newborn baby, and *shichi go san*, a shrine visit to celebrate a child's third, fifth, or seventh birthday. These rites are observed by some 50 percent of Japanese. On these occasions, a priest will intone a solemn prayer (*norito*) and dancing maidens called *miko* will perform in front of the altar. The participants make a symbolic offering (a branch of the ever-green *sakaki* tree called a *tamagushi*) and are offered a sip of sacred rice wine (*miki*), signaling a mutual promise between the kami and the worshiper. Other popular rituals are purification rites for building sites and cars, weddings, prayers for avoiding misfortune in "dangerous years" (*yakudoshi*), and prayers for success in examinations.

The second category of shrine rituals is of an imperial nature. These rituals are standardized across the land and occur simultaneously at most manned shrines. The most important ones are *kinensai* (February 17) and *niiname-sai* (November 23). Both are classical court ceremonies in which the emperor prays for (*kinensai*) and

gives thanks for (*niiname-sai*) the year's harvest. As we shall soon see, these rituals only entered the ritual calendars of shrines in the late nineteenth century. Other national rituals have a similar imperial theme: *kigensetsu* (February 11) celebrates the founding of the nation by the mythical emperor Jinmu, which tradition dates to 660 BC; *Meijisetsu* (November 3) the birthday of the Meiji emperor; and *tenchōsetsu* (December 23) the birthday of the present emperor. These rituals, which do not draw large crowds, symbolize Shinto's connections with the imperial house.

The third and last category consists of shrine festivals (*matsuri*). Apart from New Year, festivals are the main occasions on which shrines really come to life. Shrine festivals reflect local traditions and are spread across the year. Large festivals last for many days and give a cultural identity to whole cities, as well as attracting thousands of visitors and tourists. Small festivals are intimate affairs, not unlike neighborhood parties. The most common pattern of a festival is a parade, for which the kami is transferred from the kami hall into a palanquin called a *mikoshi*. The *mikoshi* is carried or wheeled through the neighborhood and temporarily installed at various sites where the kami is entertained with dancing, theater performances, wrestling matches, archery contests, and the like. Festivals tend to be run by the local community rather than the shrine priests, who take center-stage only as ritual specialists performing liturgical tasks such as the transfer of the kami to the *mikoshi* or the recitation of prayers. Most of the festivities take place outside of the shrine and are managed by selected community members. Typical of shrine festivals is that they engage large parts of the community in their proceedings, and that they envelop the community in a carnivalesque atmosphere in which much is allowed and all is forgiven. All in all, some 25 percent of Japanese participate in a local festival of this kind.

Where in all this is "Shinto"? For shrine priests, these three types of rituals are all part of a single tradition. For most participants, however, the coherence in their own ritual behavior does not derive from such categories as Shinto and Buddhism. From their point of view, the New Year shrine visit belongs together with the Buddhist *obon* festival in August and the eating of

Christmas cake in December. All events of this kind form part of a single calendrical cycle of seasonal festivities (*nenjū gyōji*) that brightens up the routine of a busy life. For most, “religion” and “faith” have little to do with it.

Conceptualizing Shrine Practice as Shinto

“Shinto” as an overarching construct may have little appeal to the average shrine patron, but it has had a profound influence on the design and operation of shrines. Also, individual shrines are aware of the fact that, without a broader conceptual context, each shrine would be even more vulnerable to social change. Shrines explain their function in society in terms of “Shinto” and market themselves under that flag. Developing Shinto as a concept, then, is of utmost importance to the shrine world as a whole.

In the postwar period, this has been one of the main functions of the National Association of Shrines (*Jinja Honchō*; hereafter NAS), an umbrella organization working on behalf of some 80,000 member shrines. NAS was founded in 1946, at a time of deep crisis when it was far from obvious that Shinto would survive the demise of the old imperial Japan. All agreed that if Shinto was to be rescued from rapid disintegration, it needed to be reinvented. Yet the direction that Shinto would take after Japan’s catastrophic defeat in the war was far from clear. The choices made by leaders of the shrine world at this crucial juncture reveal much about the position of shrines in society, and about the ambiguities of “Shinto” as a conceptualization of shrine practices.

In the turmoil immediately after Japan’s capitulation, the shrine world had good reason to fear for its future. Since 1868 shrine ritual had been a matter of political importance to the Japanese state, and especially from around 1900 onwards Shinto had occupied a secure place at the center of Japan’s national identity. The allied powers that occupied Japan in September 1945 saw Shinto as the ideological foundation of Japanese “emperor worship” and aggressive expansionism. They moved quickly to remove its influence from the public sphere by drastic measures.

In the face of this threat, shrines fought an uphill battle on all fronts. Budgets were nonexistent, and many of the leaders of the old Shinto establishment were being purged from public life. Nor was it easy to find sympathy among the general public. In the face of Japan's disastrous collapse, most Japanese felt a profound aversion to the propaganda that they had been bombarded with for over a decade, and shrines suffered for their long-standing association with that propaganda. Shinto was utterly out of synch with the times and many could not envision its survival in the new, democratic Japan of the future. The Occupation authorities were in fact convinced that if they left it alone, Shinto would disappear by itself. They abstained from the use of force against even the most militarized shrines in the sure knowledge that, over time, these shrines would fold without their help.

However, as things turned out, Shinto proved more robust than most had imagined. The large majority of shrines not only survived but found renewed prosperity as soon as the worst period of economic hardship was over. In 1946 such an outcome must have appeared less than likely, even to the Shinto leaders who formed NAS's early policies. The possibility that Shinto would fall into the abyss of modernization and democratization was felt to be very real, and those who worked to save the shrine world had strong views on what Shinto was to represent in this new age.

Among the debaters, we can discern three main camps. The first, led by Ashizu Uzuhiro (1909–92), stressed Shinto's role in uniting the Japanese people under the spiritual guidance of the emperor. The second, drawing on the work of the ethnologist Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), rejected the idea that centralist imperial ideology was at the core of Shinto. Instead, this group stressed the spiritual value of local traditions of worshipping local kami, in all their centrifugal variety. The third, fronted by Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953), argued that if Shinto was to survive, it should be developed from an ethnic religion into a universal one.³

These three positions reflected radically different approaches to Shinto. Ashizu was an imperial loyalist and activist who saw Shinto in a political context. Yanagita and Orikuchi, on the other hand, were academics with a nativist bent, both specializing in Japanese folklore and dedicating their careers to a search for the

deepest roots of Japan's religious culture. Within NAS, Ashizu fought a hard battle to exclude the influence of Yanagita and Orikuchi from the new shrine organization.⁴ He feared that their emphasis on regional diversity would tear apart Japan's sense of national unity, and even suspected that their views were being used in a leftist conspiracy to destroy the nation. Initially, Ashizu prevailed, but over time the alternatives offered by Yanagita and (to a lesser degree) Orikuchi have bounced back.

We will return to NAS and the shifting positions of its spokesmen in Chapter 6 of this volume. For now, our main point is that all of the three "camps" that struggled over the authority to give new direction to Shinto in 1946 drew on different aspects of the tradition as it existed at that time. Shinto was a political construct designed to instill a "national spirit" in the people; but it was also a bottom-up complex of local rituals and festivals with little internal coherence; and finally, it included a number of religious groups that adhered to universalistic teachings. Let us take a brief look at each of these strains of Shinto, all of them still alive and well in present-day Japan.

Meiji and the Formation of Shinto as a State Cult

To understand the three faces of Shinto, we need to turn our attention to the prewar period. The formative years of modern Shinto are concentrated in the half-century between 1868, the year of the so-called Meiji Restoration, and 1915, when Tokyo's Meiji Shrine was inaugurated. Many have argued that Shinto was "invented" in this period, and it is indeed beyond doubt that pre-Meiji Shinto was a very different animal from its post-Meiji heir.

In the twelfth month of 1867 a small band of insurgents arranged for the emperor to issue an imperial rescript announcing the abolishment of the shogunate. The rescript called for a restoration of direct imperial rule, as in the days of the first (mythical) emperor Jinmu. Soon it became clear what this meant for shrines. The new regime was to be based on the principle that "rites and government are one" (*saisei itchi*), and in the third month of 1868, all shrine priests were placed under the

authority of a newly resurrected ancient institution, the Jingikan, or Council of Kami Affairs. This Council was put in nominal charge of all shrines. In the ensuing weeks shrines were methodically separated from Buddhism. Buddhist priests, deities, buildings, and rituals were banned from all shrines. In the words of Allan Grapard (1984: 245), the Meiji government “forced thousands of monks and nuns to return to lay life and watched without moving when innumerable statues, paintings, scriptures, ritual implements and buildings were destroyed, sold, stolen, burnt, or covered with excrement.” It was at this time that Shinto became physically and institutionally distinct from Buddhism.⁵

Why this sudden obsession with shrines? The radical reforms of 1868 drew on a wave of nostalgic nativism that idealized Japan’s age of antiquity as a divine era of natural harmony and innocence. Japan needed to make a fresh start; to do this, it had to rid itself of the accretions of history. Many branded Buddhism, which had enjoyed a privileged status under the Tokugawa shogunate, as one of the corrupting influences that had undermined Japan’s ancient vigor. In a sense, this was a simple result of the changing times. In spite of the shogunate’s continued support, Buddhism had already lost its former position of intellectual dominance to Confucianism by the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century it had become a popular target of Confucian condemnation. The Meiji revolution itself was fueled by a heady mix of Confucian ethics and imperial patriotism, in which Buddhism was either marginalized or refuted.

Another factor behind the Meiji institutionalization of Shinto was an acute sense of crisis in the face of Western expansionism. It was feared that Christianity would gain a foothold in Japan, with devastating effects on the nation’s cohesion and, ultimately, its chance of survival. The new Shinto was also a means to enhance the visibility of the emperor, who was now the sole focus of national unity. The Meiji government looked to shrines as a means to educate the people and make them aware of their new status as imperial subjects.

In effect, the new Meiji cult of shrines functioned as a form of Confucian-inspired ancestor worship. By honoring the ancestors

of the nation, a community was created that celebrated a shared past. To this end, shrines were redefined as places that commemorated heroes of the state. The centerpiece of the new shrine system was Ise, the shrine of the imperial ancestor and sun-goddess Amaterasu. It is no coincidence, then, that in the third month of 1869 Emperor Meiji (who was only 16 years old at the time) became the first emperor ever to worship at the Ise Shrine.⁶ In 1871 all other shrines were arranged on a hierarchical scale, from imperial and national shrines at the top to prefectural shrines, district shrines, and finally non-ranked shrines at the bottom. At the same time, hereditary lineages of priests were abolished and a state-sanctioned system of appointed priests was put in its place. In this way shrines were appropriated by the state and designated as sites for the performance of state rituals (*kokka-no-sōshi*). From this time onwards, state-appointed priests were to perform an increasingly standardized set of state rituals as local representatives of the emperor. Their performance of these rituals aimed to unite the people with their emperor in a shared act of ancestor worship, in the manner of a family that gathers in front of the family altar to create and renew a sense of shared purpose and solidarity.

The effect of these measures was that, for the first time, “Shinto” took on very clear contours. Shinto was about shrines, the emperor, and Japan, and it had a clear boundary vis-à-vis Buddhism. Yet in many other senses Shinto still remained a disconcertingly vague concept. As the government would soon find out, there was no consistent teaching that was readily available for the Shinto missionaries whom the Council of Kami Affairs began to send out into the country in 1870. Shinto thinkers disagreed on even the most fundamental questions. Which kami should be incorporated in the imperial cult? What is their relation to each other? What do the classical texts teach about life and death, good and evil, reward and punishment? No consensus could be reached on any of these central questions, and under these circumstances an effective missionary campaign was impossible.

Moreover, it was clear almost from the start that the goal of enhancing national cohesion would not be served by alienating

Buddhists. Already in 1872 the Council of Kami Affairs was closed down and replaced by a new institution called the Ministry of Edification (Kyōbushō).⁷ This Ministry coordinated a new grand campaign, run by official “national evangelists” (*kyōdōshoku*), to spread Japan’s “Great Teaching” to the populace. The campaign also coopted Buddhist priests, and its Great Teaching was deliberately kept as neutral as possible. It merely stressed three general points: (1) respect for the gods and love for the country; (2) observance of the “Principles of Heaven and the Way of Man”; and (3) reverence for the emperor and obedience to his government. Again, the message consisted of a combination of universal Confucian ideas with Japanese symbolism. The role of shrines in this scheme was to give substance to that Japanese focus, pointing ultimately to the emperor as the father and chief celebrant of the nation.

As the political situation began to settle in the 1870s, the question arose what status this national Great Teaching should have. Buddhist groups, most notably the Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) sect, soon felt ill at ease within the shrine-dominated campaign and objected to having to worship deities that were never part of their own tradition. Adopting the Western concept of “religion,” they argued strongly that “Shinto” was not and never should be a member of that category. Buddhist representatives maintained that, in contrast to temples, shrines were not sites of *religion* but of *ritual*. Participation in shrine rites, then, should not be premised on faith or belief. It could not be anything more than a simple expression of respect for the Great Men who had built the nation. This line of reasoning not only served to give Buddhism a monopoly over the “religious” realm; it also allowed the government to combine freedom of religion (eventually guaranteed in the Constitution of 1889) with a continued official shrine cult. As renewed bickering among Shinto ideologues and protests from Buddhist groups reduced the campaign to a shambles, the government took drastic measures. In 1882 shrine priests were forbidden from engaging in any “religious” activities (such as preaching, conducting funerals, or selling amulets); two years later, the Great Teaching campaign was discontinued.

After this debacle the state’s interest in shrines waned rapidly. The urgency of the early Meiji years had faded, and Christianity

had by now proved less threatening than first feared. Significantly, the government planned to phase out state funding for shrines, which caused all the more hardship because all temple and shrine lands had been confiscated in 1871.

It was only after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–5 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5 that new opportunities arose for shrines to make themselves relevant to the government. A wave of renewed self-confidence inspired much patriotic enthusiasm, expressed in a ritual format that put shrines center stage. The fallen from these wars were enshrined in newly founded military shrines, including Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and a range of “nation-protecting shrines” (*gokoku jinja*) elsewhere, and shrine visits by the military, as well as school classes, became a new social ritual. At the same time, a growing socialist and communist movement swept over Japan, preaching class struggle and revolution and inspiring fear that national unity was threatened. Under these circumstances Shinto once more became a focus of attention. In 1906 thousands of village shrines were merged with the aim of retaining only one shrine in each community, which could then serve as a stage for national, imperial ceremonies (Fridell 1973). The earlier plan to end state support for shrines was abandoned and a new financing system was introduced; also, the Shinto liturgy was standardized by law. When Emperor Meiji died in 1912, a large plot in central Tokyo was reserved for a shrine in honor of his spirit and that of the empress. This widely advertised project, which was finished in 1915 with the inauguration of Meiji Shrine, finally set Shinto squarely on the map by triggering a national media campaign and engaging large numbers of people in an explicitly “Shinto” undertaking (Imaizumi 2007). Until 1945 Shinto was to serve as Japan’s “non-religious” state cult, propagated with increasing zeal especially after 1931 as the country headed into war.

All these changes had a profound effect on shrines. The erasure of earlier ties with Buddhism proved to be only the beginning of an intense period of transformation. Many shrines simply disappeared, while new ones dedicated to national heroes (ranging from the Meiji emperor to fallen soldiers and paragons of virtue from earlier ages) were erected across the country, and even in

Japan's colonies. Pre-Meiji shrines that survived all reforms were often redesigned and given a new identity: a new name, or even a new set of kami taken from the imperial classics. As ancient priestly lineages disappeared, local traditions were lost and exchanged for standardized procedures drawn up in Tokyo. On top of all this, shrines lost their traditional sources of income (notably, shrine lands) and had to adapt to a new social context, marked by increased mobility and modernization in all its different guises.

The first and second categories of rituals performed at shrines today that were mentioned above, namely the personal and the imperial, were products of this short period of intense modernization that began in 1868. We have already noted the introduction of imperial rites; some of the "private" rites that now constitute the mainstay of shrine ritual are even newer. The New Year ritual of *hatsumōde* developed from a variety of earlier customs in the early twentieth century. In Edo (as Tokyo was called before 1868), people had visited shrines dedicated to the Seven Gods of Fortune to pray for luck in the coming year; in many other places, worshippers selected a shrine or temple that was located in a lucky direction from one's house (*ehō-mōde*), as determined by a Yin-Yang specialist of divination (*onmyōji*). Also rites of purification for, say, building plots had before Meiji been a speciality of Yin-Yang diviners; the performance of such rites by shrine priests was a twentieth-century innovation. Shinto marriages only gained popularity after the wedding ceremony of Crown Prince Yoshihito (the future Emperor Taishō) in 1900. *Shichi go san* has older roots in earlier rites of passage for children, but these did not typically involve shrines. This ritual gained its modern form only in the Taishō period (1912–26). Before that time, customs varied from one region to the next; in the Kansai area, for example, there was no tradition for taking young children to shrines, and instead 13-year-olds were taken to Buddhist temples. The custom of drawing lots to foretell one's personal fortune (*omikuji*) at shrines and tying them to branches in the shrine grounds, as depicted on the cover of this book, spread in the same Taishō period. The origins of today's *omikuji* can be traced back to early Edo *Kannon kuji* (Avalokiteśvara lots), popularized first at Tendai temples and later

by, again, Yin-Yang diviners (Ōno Izuru 2002). All these rites were actively promoted in the modern era in response to shrines' loss of economic independence. After all, shrines had lost both their landholdings and the right to engage in "religious" activities, including even the sale of amulets. These new practices were designed as "nonreligious" opportunities to draw people to shrines; they were new ritual services that shrine priests could offer without breaking the law.

In December 1945, only months after Japan's surrender, the American-led Occupation issued the so-called Shinto Directive (Shintō shirei). The stated aim of this Directive, made explicit in its first article, was to put an end to "the perversion of Shinto theory and beliefs into militaristic and ultranationalistic propaganda, designed to delude the Japanese people and lead them into wars of aggression." The Directive prohibited all financial contributions to Shinto shrines from public funds, as well as all forms of official support for Shinto rites or ideas. At the same time, shrines were offered a new lease of life as private religious organizations: "Shrine Shinto, after having been divorced from the state and divested of its militaristic and ultranationalistic elements, will be recognized as a religion if its adherents so desire." In February 1946 shrines were registered under a new law as religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin*), and NAS was founded as a new umbrella organization.

Rather than making a radical break with the past, NAS opted to hold on to many elements of the Meiji state cult. It retained the leadership of the Ise Shrine, and to this day the organization makes a great effort to distribute Ise deity amulets (*jingū taima*) to households throughout Japan, for both ideological and financial reasons. The imperial rituals instituted in the Meiji period have a prominent place on the ritual calendar of member shrines, just as they did before the war. Perhaps most importantly, NAS inherited the Meiji view of Shinto as a non-religion. This partly explains Shinto's weakness as a religious identity. NAS sees Shinto as a "public" ritual system open to all members of the community irrespective of their "private" beliefs, not as an exclusivist religion. Thus, if Shinto does not function as a religion, this is primarily due to a choice made by the shrine organization itself.

Shinto as Folklore

The state cult of shrines and its legacy in NAS's policies stand out as a major factor in the crystallization of Shinto, both before the war and after. However, we should not be tempted to believe that before 1945 shrines were simply stages for patriotic ceremonial. If that had been the case, Shinto would indeed have imploded in the aftermath of Japan's capitulation. The fact that the number of shrines hardly decreased at all after the discontinuation of the state shrine cult must cause us to pause, because it proves that the imperial cult was never more than an ephemeral superstructure. Even when nation building was at its most intense, state ritual was not all there was to Shinto. In fact, the evidence suggests it was not even the most important part of Shinto.

In spite of the centralizing policies of the government, shrines continued to function first and foremost as stages for local community festivals. Within the confines of this category, the variety is endless: spring festivals in prayer for a good growing season, autumn festivals in thanks for the year's crops, New Year festivals to pray for good business in the coming year, summer festivals to ward off illnesses, hunting rituals, fishing rituals, purification rituals, and celebrations of local foundational events.⁸ In spite of the fact that most of these ceremonial occasions do not primarily address imperial themes, even prewar shrine administrators recognized their importance. Local festivals were far more effective in inspiring the general public to be actively engaged in shrine affairs than the ideological rites of imperial Shinto. Festivals were profoundly affected by the separation of shrines from Buddhism in 1868, but they nevertheless displayed a measure of continuity with the period before Meiji. Their nature was such that they were not easily assimilated into a standardized, secularized imperial cult. A rite in which court emissaries presented imperial offerings was added to the festival proceedings at shrines of high rank, but otherwise local festivals remained peripheral to the interests of Shinto ideologues.

To others, however, it was the mystery of this endlessly variegated body of local practices that constituted Shinto's true appeal. The most influential thinker and writer to call attention to local