Shintō & Nationalism in Japan

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Outline

- Definitions of Shintō and nationalism
- Early forms of state-centered veneration
- Buddhism's role in the state
- Constitutional and religious nationalism
- Shintō and modernity
- Shintō and religion
- The spirituality of nationalism
- The ‘Dark Valley’
- Post-war changes
- Nakasone > Koizumi > Abe
- The future and Nippon Kaigi
Key Definitions of Shintō

- Locations of shrines
- Material symbolism
- Ritual practices
- Imperial connection
Meiji Shrine
What is/are kami?

- Anything seen or sensed that is full of power, mysterious, marvelous, awe-full
- Uncontrolled, strange, beyond comprehension
- Humans can be defied if their actions warrant it
- Story of Sugawara Michizane > Tenjin
- Kami embody anxiety about relationship with natural world
- Most kami were place specific until Meiji restructuring, then national
- *Nigimitama* (beneficial power)
- *Aramitama* (wrathful power)
Metaphors for Shintō

- Like the air breathed by the Japanese people
- Like a pearl formed around an imperial center
- Like a doll dressed by its owner
- Like an empty plate that holds favorite foods
- Like an onion with many layers but an empty center
What’s up with the term “Shintō”?

- The word "shinto" has virtually no meaning to the majority of Japanese people.
- The common Japanese does not affiliate with Shintō religion; but does relate to shrines (jinja) and deities (kami).
- "Shintō" is what the contemporary shrine establishment and spokesmen would have the common person think and do.
- "Shintō is the indigenous religion of Japan, continued in unbroken line from ancient times till today. Shintō also upholds Japan’s polity, focused on the imperial institution."
The Weight of Buddhism

- Since 538, Buddhist rituals, organizations, orientations, priests, have always protected state and society
- Buddhism's appropriation of kami veneration is primary (*honji sui jaku*)
- During Edo period (1603-1868), imagine the Grand Shrine of Ise with 200+ Buddhist temples!
- "Shintō" is both a non-Buddhist ritual tradition, but also a national institution of kami ritual under the control of the imperial court

Shigisan, Osaka region
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each nation should govern itself
the nation is the only rightful source of political power (and popular sovereignty)
N. aims to build and maintain a single national identity to promote national solidarity
N. crystallizes and organizes feelings, motives, and actions that otherwise remain rudimentary and undirected
N. evokes the forces of patriotism, ethnocentrism, exclusivism, and racism
N. as ethnic, civil, religious, folk, and so on
(Smith 2010, Yack 2010)
In Japanese, linguistic usage complicates definitions by using its own terms...

- **kokuminshugi (kokumin shugi)**: Civic nationalism
  - "-ism as a principle, doctrine, or rule"
- **kokkashugi (kokka shugi)**: State-centered nationalism
- **minzokushugi (minzoku shugi)**: Ethnic nationalism
- **kokusuishugi (kokku shugi)**: Extreme nationalism
- **kokkashijōshugi (kokka shiō shugi)**: State supremacy

From the Meiji Constitution, 1889
State-centered attention in Japanese history

- **Shōtoku Taishi** (574-622 CE)
  - Clan from Korea; defeated Mononobe
  - Constitution states that a smoothly functioning state requires the harmony of each man who knows his place (Confucianism)

- **Mongol Invasions** (1274, 1281)
  - Fighting for “Nippon-no-kuni”
  - Personal glory transcends state concerns

- **Meiji Revolution** (1868)
  - Aizawa Seishisai and Shinron (1825)
  - **Kokutai** as a key term: “the nation’s body”
  - **Shintō** as the delivery vehicle for new values
  - **Kokutai no hongi**: “Cardinal Principles of the National Body” (1937)
Creating National Unity

“White Rooster” (Kawamura, 1929)

Meiji Emperor, 1878
Meiji period, 1868-1912

“Hyaku sen, Hyaku shō,” Nihon Manzai Book (100 Collected Laughs) on Russo-Japanese war, 1904
Japan from Meiji to Taishō Periods

- Government moved to enhance Shintō as the religion that validated imperial rule

- Japanese constitution of 1889 guaranteed religious freedom

- Rescript on Education (1890)

- The state needed a world-class economy, army and navy, and respectable standing in the family of nations, plus a docile, hard-working citizenry supporting that façade
Shintō and Modernity

- Shinron published 1825
- British victors in Opium War (1839-1842)
- Matthew Perry appeared in 1853; treaty 1854
- Japan’s reaction? Sonnō joib
- Ise talismans falling from sky (1867)
- Civil War in Japan (1867-68)
- New government 1868; Shintō is on stage! Shōkonsha started in 1868, Kyoto; moved to Tokyo in 1869
- Dept. of Shrine Deities (1868), replaced by Ministry of Shrine Deities (1871), replaced by Ministry of Religions (1872), replaced by Bureau of Shrines and Temples (1877), then Bureau of Shrines and Bureau of Religions (separate institutions, 1900 >)
Shintō and Modernity (continued)

- Shintō chosen to serve as the spiritual tradition at the heart of the new government
- Buddhism was forcibly separated from Shintō shrines

Hibiya welcomes Emperor after conclusion to 1904-05 war with Russia
“Breaking Temple Bell” by Tanaka Nagane (1907)
Shintō chosen to serve as the spiritual tradition at the heart of the new government

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- But Shintō is not a religion!
  - It has “foundational” rituals and patriotic symbols
  - **shrine mergers** from 1906-1912; from local to state shrines
  - Shintō changed away from local deities to a faith of Japan’s national identity, and the sacred character of its emperor
  - 1913 regulation identified all Shintō priests as employees of the state
Is Shintō a Religion?

Religion is now seen as a system of language and practice—belief and action—that organizes the world and society in terms of what is considered sacred.

The sacred is culturally constructed and can thus have any content.

Wm. Paden, Religious Worlds
Overseas Shrines

Location of Chosen Jingu (Korea Shrine) on Namsan,
Overseas Shrines

Figure 6: Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall on the former site of Chūsen Jinja (Korea Shrine) on Namsan, Seoul. Source: "Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall / Yeonghwan Lim Sunhyun Kim." ArchDaily.
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The Spirituality of Nationalism

Yasukuni Shrine, Main Sanctuary
Map of Yasukuni Shrine, 2019
The Enshrinement Ceremony (Shōkon no Gi)
Emperor at Yasukuni
1935
Ad for Yasukuni Shrine

“Aoge chukon, mamore yo, Izoku”

Look up and venerate the spirits, Izoku kai!”

Izoku-kai • Bereaved Families Association
State Shintō at Local Sites

- “State Shintō” begins in early 1900s
- All shrine priests became state employees in 1913
- All shrines now become national institutions
- Many state shrines had no parishioners at all
- Local priests embraced new function as centers of community education
- Shrines represented the only religion able to renew the people in body and spirit
- It can purify society because of its deep roots in citizens’ inner being

Ueno Park torii, 1930s
Sophia University, 1932

- Yōhai incident of 1929
- Catholic apostolic delegate said don’t do it because not ordered
- Huge scandal, Nagasaki to Tokyo
- Uneasy compromise
- Sophia est. as a university in 1928
- 3 Catholic students did not join in a group trip to Yasukuni in 1932
- What does “reverence at shrines” (jinja sanpai) mean to schools?
- “…none other than to express patriotic commitment and sincere loyalty” (Min. of Education)

High School Baseball Tournament, 1937
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The ‘Dark Valley’ by 1944...

- All-inclusive state control of society and government
- Shrines certainly but also temples and churches support the war
- No dissidents in society
- Education, media, consumer, religious cultures all work for the emperor and state
- Everyone has already lost a loved one in the war and the bombing of Japan (in which 425k+ died, 8.5 million homeless) is yet to begin
Firebombing Campaign, March 1945

Hamamatsu 1945

Tokyo 1945
Postwar Repositioning

- Allied Occupation’s “Shintō Directive” (1945)
- Shintō seen as social propaganda, used as a tool of ultra-nationalism and a disguise for militarism
- U.S. support is crucial to stabilizing Japanese industry and society; Korean war (1950-53)
- Yasukuni can continue as solace for citizens, and yet it becomes the hub of nationalism
- Nationalism reemerges in late 1950s and 60s
- Izoku-kai (Bereaved Families Assn.) becomes dominant at Yasukuni and advocates for secret enshrinement of Class A war criminals (1978)
- New religions begin, but Shintō shrines—under Central Assn. of Shrine’s (Jinja Honchō) direction—carry on
Nakasone Yasuhiro
1982-87 as Prime Minister

Koizumi Junichiro
2001-2006

Abe Shinzō, 2006-07
2012-present
Nippon Kaigi • “Japan Conference”

“Nippon Kaigi’s Passions to Return to Prewar Japan” (2015)

“Nippon Kaigi and Shrine Association” (2016)

“Nippon Kaigi’s Human Networks” (2016)
Nippon Kaigi’s Agenda (2019)

- To rebuild the might of the armed forces
- To revise wartime history to include Japan’s liberation of East Asia during World War II
- To assert Japan did not fight a war of aggression…
- …nor did the rape and pillage of Nanjing in China, which historians estimate killed up to 200,000 people, ever happen
- To keep women in the home
- To promote revision of Japan’s pacifist constitution
- To restore the status of the emperor to a prewar position
To Summarize...

- “Shintō” begins as a Chinese term used by Buddhists to explain non-Buddhist rituals, deities, and practices (Teeuwen)
- For much of its lifetime, it is syncretic with but different from Buddhism. Both traditions protect the state, ruler, emperor and, by extension, society
- “State Shintō” is an invented tradition, at odds with the affiliation of common people to shrines and kami
- Nationalism resonates in how national and political unity is promoted via various strategies
- Shintō and nationalism come together in the 1820s, then develop after the Meiji period begins in 1868
- State Shintō becomes a non-religious tradition, serving state, society, imperial household in totalizing ways (1913 >)
So you never know!