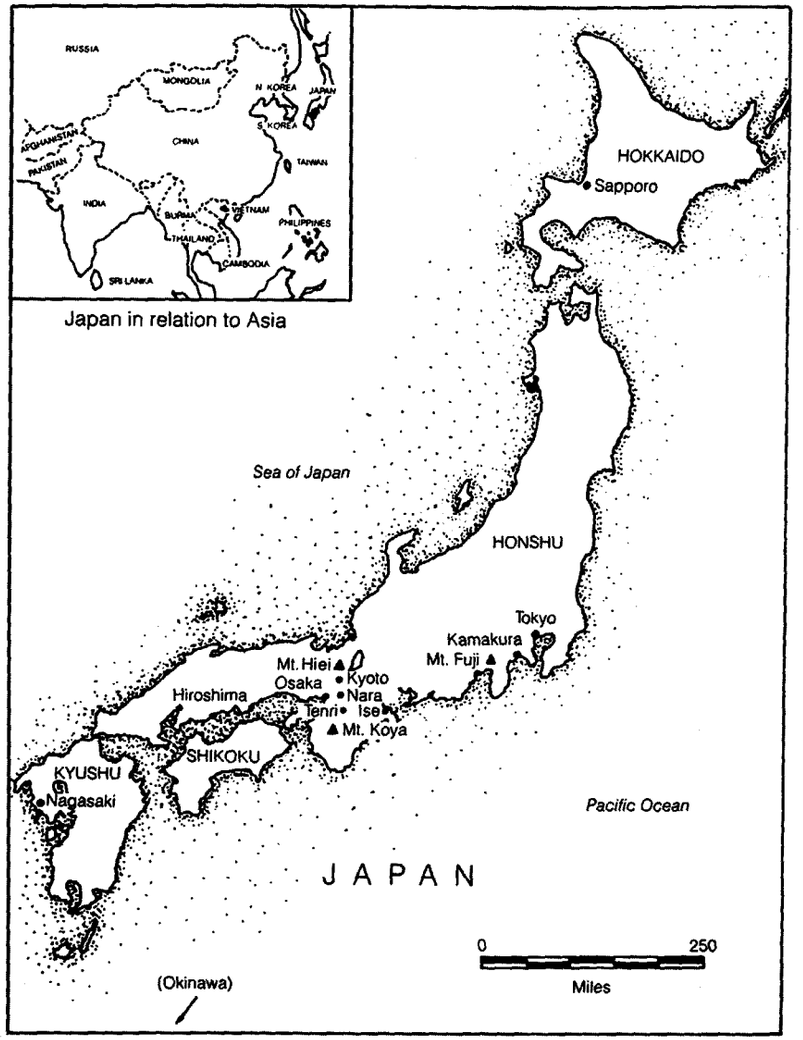


For more detailed maps showing the distribution and concentration of various religions in Japan, see Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Shinto" and "Mahayana Buddhism (Japan)," in Historical Atlas of the Religions of the World, *ed. Ismai'il Ragi al Faruqui and David E. Sopher (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 127–32, 195–99.*

1

Introduction

From prehistoric times to the present, religion has played an important role in the life of the Japanese people. Archaeological evidence documents religious activities dating back more than two millennia; in recent centuries many so-called New Religions have arisen in Japan and have become active in other lands such as the United States and South America. Yet, there has never been a single institution called "Japanese Religion" with its own scriptures, priests, buildings, and rituals, and most people do not "belong" to one Japanese religious organization the way modern Americans and Europeans say they "belong" to a church. (In other words, Japanese religion is not a single monolithic ecclesiastical body such as Roman Catholicism.) The religious heritage of the Japanese includes a number of individual traditions—some native to Japan and some imported, some highly organized and some not formally institutionalized. Through time, various influences interacted to form a distinctive religious system, and it is in this sense that we refer to "Japanese religion."

The term "Japanese religion" is not the title of a specific religious organization, but rather a general abstraction we can conveniently use to refer to the total Japanese religious heritage—its beliefs, practices, and institutions in Japan. Looking at Japanese religion in this way also has benefits for understanding religion outside Japan. First, it shows us the limitations of looking at religion and religious life as mutually exclusive churches or religious institutions (even in America and Europe). And second, recognizing the fact that "Japanese religion" is a general abstraction helps us realize that a single term used to represent any complex tradition with a long history—be that tradition Christianity

or Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism—is also necessarily a general abstraction.[1] Our pilgrimage through Japanese religion should not only help us better understand the Japanese tradition, but also throw light on the complex character of other cultures and religions.

FIVE RELIGIOUS STRANDS

Japanese religion is a variegated tapestry created by the interweaving of at least five major strands: Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and folk religion. Christianity, which entered Japan in the sixteenth century, may be considered a sixth strand, but because it did not contribute to the formation of traditional Japanese religion, it will be treated later, at the point of its appearance in Japanese history (in Chapter 12).

Shinto today is a formal religion of myths, rituals, shrines, and priests. It emerged from the beliefs and practices of prehistoric Japan, but in close contact with the religious influences of China and Korea. Central to Shinto is the notion of Japan as the land of the *kami* (gods or spirits), who both embody the national tradition and inhabit the natural surroundings of every locale. ("Shinto" means "the way of the *kami*.") The presence of Shinto shrines in small villages and even on the roofs of city department stores is living testimony to the pervasiveness of Shinto in Japan.

Three strands of the Japanese religious tradition—Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism—are importations from Korea and China. Buddhism, the most prominent of the three, was founded in India by the Buddha (Prince Gautama, April 8, 565 [or 563] to February 15, 486 B.C.E.)[2] in the sixth century B.C.E.[3] The formal message of Buddhism known by most Westerners is the existential philosophy or way of life expressed in the traditional account of the founder's life. From this viewpoint the Buddha, dissatisfied with the prevailing religious system in India, practiced meditation until he arrived at a realization (or enlightenment) of the true nature of human life. He taught freedom from suffering by avoiding the desire that causes suffering and thereby achieving a peaceful existence. This philosophy of life became the basis for a monastic community that developed commentaries and ritual practice, and provided religious services for lay followers. Before Buddhism arrived in Japan, it traveled to China and Korea and underwent considerable transformation into a philosophically, ritually, and institutionally complex religious tradition. At this time Buddhism was received by the Japanese as part of Chinese civilization. Initially, Japanese Buddhists continued Indian and Chinese practices, but they later developed distinctively Japanese forms of practice, thought, and organization.

Taoism and Confucianism arose in China. Taoism developed out of the ancient Chinese reverence for nature and notions of the orderly but ever-changing rhythm of the cosmos. Philosophical expressions of Taoism are found in writings such as the *Tao Te Ching*. The beliefs and practices of Taoism have much in common with Chinese religious customs associated with

cosmological notions, the almanac, and divination. Although Taoism never existed in Japan as a formal religion, elements of Taoism (together with aspects of Chinese religion) were accepted there, and heavily influenced Buddhism and Shinto as well as popular religion.

Confucianism is the Chinese tradition set in motion in the sixth century B.C.E. by the teachings of Confucius (K'ung Ch'iu or Kong Qiu, 551–479 B.C.E.) and thereafter institutionalized by the Chinese state and accepted in other parts of Asia. Confucius, who grew up in a time of great social and political turmoil, insisted on a return to virtue and benevolence. After his death, his teachings became the basis for education and government, serving as the wider rationale for the hierarchical social and political relationships within an agricultural economy. The formal tradition of Confucian teachings and institutions—known in the West as "Confucianism"—provided a comprehensive system for ordering governmental and social harmony, placing great emphasis on family stability and filial piety (obedience of children to parents).[4] Various aspects of Confucian teachings have been prominent in Japan. At times the state directly supported Confucian teachings and institutions, but the indirect influence of Confucianism through family upbringing and education was equally if not more important than direct government support; both directly and indirectly Confucianism provided notions of social and political identity.

"Folk religion" generally refers to beliefs and practices that have been handed down and have existed outside organized traditions. Some folk practices, such as rituals associated with hunting and rice agriculture, may date back to prehistoric times. Some more recent aspects of folk religion are actually the popular adaptation of formal traditions and might be termed "popular religion." Whether called folk religion or popular religion, these beliefs and practices are woven into the fabric of people's everyday life in areas such as personal experience, home, work, and annual celebrations.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

The saying "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" is quite appropriate to the study of Japanese religion. We must view it as a unified whole or complex tapestry because the individual strands did not exist in isolation, neither in the course of history nor in the dynamics of religious life, but the "whole" of Japanese religion did continue through time. Throughout Japanese history each "part" or strand was influenced by one or more of the others. Shinto, for example, arose out of ancient Japanese religious practices (such as rituals related to the growing of rice); but it was organized more systematically in reaction to the introduction of highly organized Buddhism, and it assimilated some aspects of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. We will trace this process of mutual influence in later accounts of each religious strand. The important thing to remember here is that any one strand such as Shinto is not just Shinto pure and simple: it is a combination of several influences.

Even more important, people experienced Japanese religion as a unified worldview rather than as separate alternatives or individual traditions. A distinctive feature of Japanese religious history is that individuals usually have not belonged exclusively to one religious tradition but instead have consciously affiliated themselves with, or unconsciously participated in, several traditions. In the West, people have commonly claimed to be (or are conveniently labeled) Protestant or Catholic or Jewish, usually as "members" of particular religious institutions. In Japan, it has been customary for a person (usually a family) to participate in both Shinto festivals and Buddhist memorial services, to practice Confucian ethics, to observe Chinese customs, *and* to follow beliefs of Taoism and folk religion. In general, it is better to characterize Japanese religion as "both/and" instead of "either/or." If we could have asked the traditional Japanese person, "Are you Shinto or Buddhist or Confucian or Taoist?" an appropriate response could have been a simple "yes," meaning that the person was Shinto and Buddhist and Confucian and Taoist. There would be no contradiction in this answer, for the person would have participated in the various traditions at different moments of his or her life. Japanese women and men usually have found religious fulfillment not in one tradition by itself but in the total sacred power embodied in a number of traditions.[5]

How can we make sense of the coexistence of so many religious traditions? It is best to approach them much as the Japanese people have experienced them. In the Japanese religious heritage there is both unity and diversity. Even within the context of a single tradition, a diversity of attitudes may be found. For example, both Buddhism and Shinto include a wide range of religious expression, from the most widely held beliefs to the most abstract philosophy. In earlier ages an illiterate peasant might practice popular forms of Shinto worship and popular Buddhist devotion, while a scholar combined the abstract theories of Shinto and Buddhism. Within a religious tradition there are several levels of religiosity, and an individual finds his or her own experience of unity by participating at a particular level in several different traditions. An average person would pick up the popular threads of the Buddhist and Shinto strands to weave a popular worldview; an intellectual would select the theoretical threads of the same strands to develop a more sophisticated worldview. The unity is in the worldview of the individual, and each person has a particular version of the common worldview. When seen from the perspective of individual worldviews, there are as many Japanese religions as there are Japanese people: the unity called "Japanese religion" (in the singular) is what they share in common. (The same can be said of any religious tradition: there are as many Christianities or Buddhisms as individual Christians or Buddhists; the general terms "Christianity" and "Buddhism" refer to the respective shared commonality.)

Japanese religion can be seen as a balance of unity and diversity, but it is too complex a subject to be explained by the simple metaphor of threads and strands. An important aspect of this unity and diversity is the tension between national unity and local traditions. From ancient times, myths and rituals have been deliberately brought together to express national unity under the imperial line; yet the people of every area liked to pride themselves on

their unique local rites and usages. This diversity, however, has usually strengthened rather than threatened the overall national unity. The great importance of local custom for Shinto shrines makes the shrines all the more highly esteemed in the eyes of the nearby people as concrete symbols of their involvement in the long Japanese tradition. Local customs tend to enhance rather than diminish national traditions such as reverence for the emperor. Therefore, as we encounter features of diversity and elements of tension in Japanese religion, we should not assume that they necessarily represent contradictions. Rather than outright contradictions, they may be seen as expressions of the variety and tension within a larger pattern of unity.

One of the easiest ways to trace the interaction of unity and diversity is to follow the interweaving of the various strands throughout the course of history, and this book takes such a historical approach. As any culture (or religion as part of a culture) moves through time, it maintains an ongoing identity and continuity while constantly undergoing change. "History," as the sequence of human events, flows through time as an endless process with no obvious compartments or labels, and follows no written script.[6] Nevertheless, historical study of a total culture (or the religious dimension of a culture) enables us to distinguish dominant aspects of continuity and change. For convenience in study and ease of comprehension, in this book Japanese religious history is discussed in terms of three major periods, each one marked by significant change. (Elements of continuity, or "persistent themes," in Japanese religion will be discussed in Chapter 2.)

The three major periods—discussed respectively in Parts I, II, and III—emphasize the discontinuity in religious institutions. The first period (from prehistoric times to the ninth century C.E.) sets the stage for the formation of Japanese religion. In this initial period, the most important religious traditions all make their appearance. In the second period (between the ninth and the seventeenth centuries), these traditions develop and organize independently and interact with each other. The third period (from the seventeenth century to the present) witnesses the tendency toward formalism, which in turn stimulates renewal. (For a concise overview of the history of Japanese religion, see the "Table of Japanese Religious History," pp. x–xi.) This brings us to the present, where we must wait for the next act in the unending drama of Japanese religion. For religious history does not end with the third period; it will continue and be transformed by future events.

NOTES

1. Such historical terms and generalizations carry their own ambiguities; for the ambiguity of the term "Japanese religion," see Neil McMullin, "Historical and Historiographical Issues in the Study of Pre-Modern Japanese Religions," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* vol. 16, no. 1 (1989), pp. 3–40, especially pp. 24–25.

2. The Buddha's birth and death are recognized by different dates from country to country.

3. Dates in this book will be given according to the Common Era (C.E.) or as Before Common Era (B.C.E.) instead of A.D. and B.C.

4. For a critical treatment of Confucianism, commenting on both its historical significance and its relevance for the present in China and world history, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991).

5. The point emphasized here is that Japanese people have usually found religious fulfillment within a number of traditions, rather than in affiliation to a single organization. Tension and conflict appear within any social group, a theme developed in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition,* eds. Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann (Princeton: Princeton University, 1982). See also Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, eds., *Conflict and Religion in Japan,* vol. 21, no. 2–3, of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (June–Sept. 1994).

6. Richard K. Payne has pointed out the dangers of reifying history in "organic" patterns, because "there was no script . . ." to history. See his preface to *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism,* ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1998), pp. 13–14. Three major historical periods are used in this book as a means of seeing patterns within the continuity and discontinuity of Japanese religion, and enabling the student to enter the concreteness of Japanese religious history.

2

Persistent Themes in Japanese Religious History

The unity of Japanese religion is evidenced by a nexus of persistent themes that are present in most historical periods and cut across most of the religious strands. One may be dominant in a particular period or more prominent in a single religious strand, but generally they all blend together in the formation of the traditional person's worldview. The recurrence of six themes indicates the unity of Japanese religion: (1) the closeness of human beings, gods, and nature; (2) the religious character of the family; (3) the significance of purification, rituals, and amulets; (4) the prominence of local festivals and individual cults; (5) the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life; and (6) the intimate bond between religion and the nation.

THE CLOSENESS OF HUMAN BEINGS, GODS, AND NATURE

In contrast with the formal teaching of monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, Japanese religion emphasizes neither one sovereign God nor a sharp distinction between the many gods and human beings. In Japan, mortals and gods alike share in the beauty of nature. The tendency of Jewish and Christian theology is to think of a hierarchy with God first, human beings second, and nature a poor third. In the worldview of Japanese religion, these three realms are on more nearly equal terms: the aim is for humans, gods,

and nature to form a triangle of harmonious interrelationships. Agriculture and fishing, for example, are closely related to the rituals and festivals of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Zen Buddhism, in particular, together with Shinto, expresses a love of nature akin to the Taoist sentiments of living in harmony with nature. The ideal of harmony among humans, the gods, and nature is a cornerstone of Japanese religion.[1]

In this context, "gods" can be understood as either the *kami* of Shinto or the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* (Buddhist divinities) of Buddhism. (Because there is no exact English equivalent for the word *kami,* it will be used throughout the text without translation.) The important thing to remember is that *kami* is much more inclusive than the English word "god." The notion of *kami* is elusive because of the great number of *kami* and their various forms. Early Japanese writings relate that many *kami* participated in the creation of the world and in a mythological age of specialized divinities (not too different from the mythological world believed in by the ancient Greeks and Romans). In addition to the *kami* of mythology, natural objects, animals, and even human beings have been identified as *kami,* in ancient times as well as today. In fact, according to one of the greatest Shinto scholars, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801),

> Generally speaking, [the word] "*kami*" denotes, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient texts and also the spirits enshrined in the shrines; furthermore, among all kinds of beings—including not only human beings but also such objects as birds, beasts, trees, grass, seas, mountains, and so forth—any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary, and is awe-inspiring, is called *kami.*[2]

If they were considered powerful enough, "evil and mysterious things" also rated as *kami,* because the primary consideration was the power to inspire and not "goodness or meritorious deeds." The identity of *kami* is so elastic that perhaps the best general term for understanding *kami* is the notion of the sacred.[3]

Humans are closely related to both *kami* and Buddhas. In fact, men and women can even rise to the status of a *kami* or Buddha. The emperor was considered to be a living *kami* because he was a direct descendant of the *kami.* Other human beings can attain divinity, also. For example, the military ruler (*shogun*) Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) was venerated as divine or semidivine even during his lifetime, and was enshrined as a major object of worship when he died. The founders of Buddhist sects, too, have been revered as semidivine or divine, and during the last two centuries many founders of New Religions have been viewed as powerful, living *kami.*

THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THE FAMILY

A second theme of Japanese religious history is the crucial religious function of the family, which is said to include both living and dead members. The dead are so important that the label of ancestor worship has been applied to Japanese religion. Family unity and continuity are essential for carrying out the

Clothing and eyeglasses of family dead are placed on statues of Jizo on Mount Asama, near the Ise Shrines. The custom is to bring objects of clothing, toys, glasses, and even false teeth as a partial means of enshrining spirits of family dead. (New Year's week, 1980)

Paper-thin strips of wood are placed in these racks on Mount Asama, near the Ise Shrines. The strips represent the spirits of the dead and contain the deceased's Buddhist posthumous name, granted by a Buddhist priest during the funeral ceremony. The faithful may "purify" the spirits of the dead by pouring water over the wooden strips. (New Year's week, 1980)

important rituals honoring the spirits of family ancestors. Even beyond the family itself as a living unity, the dead—their burial or cremation—and periodic memorials have great religious significance.[4] The deceased can rise to

Lighting a candle for the dead is a custom practiced in many traditions. In Japan, the candles are often enclosed in a glass case, as they are here on Mount Asama near the Ise Shrines. (New Year's week, 1980)

Rain does not cancel a trip to visit the ancestors on Mount Asama, near the Ise Shrines. The visitors are flanked on the left by large wooden, memorial stupa *(distinctive of Mount Asama) and on the right by the more customary stone memorials. (New Year's week, 1980)*

a Buddha (*hotoke*), and the tacit understanding is that after a fixed number of periodic memorials a dead person joins the company of ancestors as a kind of *kami*. Some shrines are dedicated to the spirits of famous men, such as the great ruler Tokugawa Ieyasu. At present, the religious function of most Buddhist priests and temples is to perform masses and memorials for family ancestors.

The family is important not only for revering ancestors but also for providing cohesion for religious activities. In Japan the family unit has usually consisted of more than one set of parents and their children. The Japanese family has often been an extended family of three or more generations and some relatives; sometimes workers who were not biologically related to the family members were part of the group. From ancient times, the head of the family line served as a priest, and prominent families combined political and religious leadership in their family heads. The home was formerly the center of religious devotion. Traditionally, every home featured a miniature shrine (sometimes called a "god-shelf," or *kamidana*) for daily prayers. There was also a Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) for daily offerings to family ancestors in general and periodic memorials for specific ancestors. *Kamidana* are still found in some homes, especially in rural areas, and are retained in such places as small shops and even in oceangoing ships. *Butsudan* are found in many homes, even in some modern apartments where *kamidana* are often missing. These family altars indicate the central religious function of the home. Various semireligious seasonal activities (notably at New Year's) also take place in the home.[5]

Because the family was such an important social and religious institution, it is not surprising that as Shinto and Buddhism became highly organized, their priesthoods eventually developed along hereditary lines. Japanese social as well as religious organization emphasizes a hierarchical ordering based on respect for elders. Even modern businesses and the New Religions are organized in terms of loyalty and belonging that have been compared to the model of the Japanese family.[6] During the past century of industrialization and urbanization, the Japanese family has experienced many changes, and yet the notion of family remains an important social and religious ideal.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PURIFICATION, SPECIFIC RITUALS, AND AMULETS

A third persistent theme in Japanese religious history is the significance of purification, specific rituals, and amulets. These elements often represent borrowings from Indian and Chinese traditions, but they have become thoroughly integrated into the Japanese religious scene. Purification is present in all religious traditions, but is especially prominent in Japan. In front of every Shinto shrine, water is provided for washing the hands and rinsing the mouth before approaching the shrine. The insistence on purification—both physical and spiritual—is basic to Japanese religion. Formerly, many prohibitions and purifications were connected with matters such as death and menstruation. The emphasis on purity carries over into contemporary customs such as the practice of soaking in a hot bath and the provision of a damp face cloth for guests. Purification rituals using salt, water, and fire—all considered to be purifying agents—abound in Buddhist, Shinto, and folk traditions. The danger of impurity and the ideal of a pure state is central to the Japanese religious ethos.[7]

The performance of specific rituals is much more important than the acceptance of comprehensive creedal statements (such as those found in Christianity).[8] A host of rituals takes care of every conceivable human and spiritual need. Many rituals are connected with agriculture and fishing in order to relate humans, gods, and nature in a beneficial manner. Some rituals meet personal crises such as sickness. In traditional Japan, religion served the needs of the people not with a uniform, weekly, service, but with a large number of particular rituals tailored for the individual and the occasion, from blessing a fishing fleet to rites for transplanting rice, from the purification and blessing of a building site to the exorcism of a possessed person.

Amulets (also called charms or talismans) are found within the popular practice of many traditions, with varying attitudes of formal sanction, reluctant tolerance, or outright rejection. Although a minority in Japan objects to the use of amulets, Japan is one culture (in some ways similar to Thailand) where amulets are both formally sanctioned and widespread in popular practice. Talismans or amulets distributed by Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples include a number that provide blessings or protection such as blessing of the home, warding off fire, or preventing or curing sickness. These amulets may be paper, wood, cloth, metal, or even plastic. In modern times, one of the most popular amulets is for "traffic safety"—protection against car accidents.

The "charm" of religious power can be conveyed not only through physical form, but also in verbal or recited form. Buddhist scriptures (in Chinese translation) are recited by priests as blessings; phrases from the scriptures are memorized and recited by laypeople not so much from intellectual assent to their doctrinal content, as out of respect for their power and ability to provide immediate benefit to the reciter. Taoistic charms and formulas have influenced both Shinto and Buddhism, but Buddhism is the major source of popular prayers and magical formulas.[9]

THE PROMINENCE OF LOCAL FESTIVALS AND INDIVIDUAL CULTS

A fourth theme of Japanese religious history is the prominence of local festivals and individual cults.[10] Unlike Christian churches, Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines are not the sites of weekly services, but this does not diminish their importance. Because periodic festivals usually are the expression of the whole village or section of a large city, they are unifying forces that link individual homes in a common religious expression based on a shared worldview. Social and economic activities of small villages often have centered on the Shinto shrine. The local festival with its carnival atmosphere is typical of Japanese religiosity: this is the place and time when most Japanese come into contact with the sacred power of *kami* and Buddhas.[11] In this light we can understand why the celebration of Christmas has become a popular "festival" in modern Japan, even though Christianity as an organized religion has not prospered there.

Performing the "hundredfold" (ohyakudo) *repentance by walking back and forth one hundred times while silently repenting. Usually the path is marked by stone pillars at each end, and even during cold weather the walk is performed barefoot. (At the "sacred land"* [goreichi] *of the New Religion called Gedatsu-kai, Kitamoto, 1979)*

An example of the interrelationship of religious practices: At the left is the stone pillar marking one end of the "hundredfold" repentance path. At the right is a stone basin where visitors are rinsing hands and mouth with water. In the background (behind several trees) is a sacred archway or torii; *behind the* torii *and at the left is seen the outline of a Shinto shrine. Visitors to such religious headquarters are free to perform religious practices at one or more (or all) of these sites. (At the "sacred land"* [goreichi] *of the New Religion called Gedatsu-kai, Kitamoto, New Year's Day, 1980)*

Votive pictures (ema) *bought at a Shinto shrine are inscribed with the person's petition and hung on a special rack near the shrine. (Kyoto, 1979)*

Individual cults for Shinto and Buddhist deities, though not organized on a national scale, play an important role in religious devotion. The *bodhisattvas* of Buddhism, especially popular *bodhisattvas* such as Jizo and Kannon, have claimed probably the largest following. Statues of these *bodhisattvas* are found in the villages or along the roadside as well as in temples, and they receive the worship and prayers of all those who look to them for spiritual help. Usually priests play little or no role in these devotional cults. Ordinarily a small group of people will form a voluntary association (called *ko*), which meets regularly in the members' homes for services dedicated to one *bodhisattva,* and individuals or the entire association may go on pilgrimage to one site or a series of sites sacred to the *bodhisattvas* (or other object of worship). Various *kami* (including gods of Indian and Chinese origin) are revered by groups of fishermen or other tradespeople. Often the existence of a flourishing cult of this kind at a shrine or temple accounts for most of its visitors and financial income. An individual need not join a specific group to say prayers at home or visit a nearby or distant holy site to pay respects and make offerings to a particular *bodhisattva* or *kami*—one that has provided blessing or protection to the person.[12]

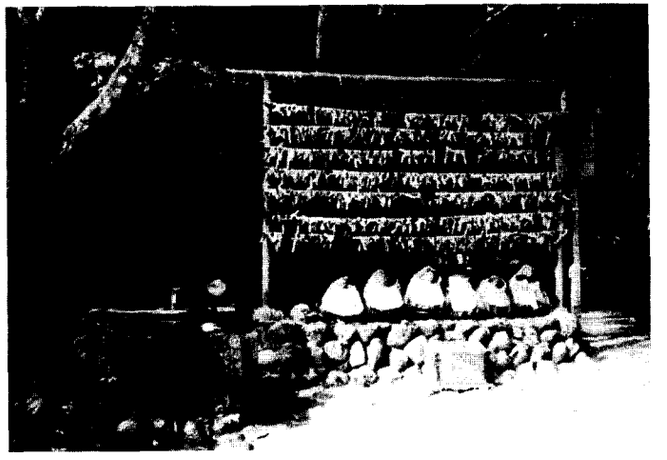
THE PERVASIVENESS OF RELIGION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A fifth theme in Japanese religious history is the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life. The Japanese identification with gods and nature, the importance of the family, the significance of specific rituals and amulets, the prominence of individual cults—all bring religion into natural and close relationship to

everyday life. For example, although there is no regular weekly attendance at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, people visit shrines and temples at regular stages or extraordinary occasions in an individual's life. Traditionally, about a month after birth a young infant was carried to the local Shinto shrine and presented to the guardian deity. In case of sickness or special need, one usually went to the shrine or temple that granted an appropriate blessing. Likewise, in recent times the traditional wedding often takes place in a Shinto shrine, and the funeral mass is performed (like the subsequent memorial celebrations) in a Buddhist temple.

Through both formal and informal means, religion has been specifically related to economic activities. Some temples and shrines, for example, are oriented to the fishing communities in which they are found; priests of these institutions pray for large catches, safety on the sea, and repose for the drowned. Some saints are formally considered the patron figures of certain crafts. In an informal sense, many folk practices are inseparable from the various stages of rice cultivation.[13]

Even human sexuality and reproduction are perceived and expressed in religious terms. For example, conjugal harmony of married couples and fertility for rice fields are requested from wayside deities (*dosojin*), which are represented by stones on which are carved explicitly sexual symbols or the figures of a man and woman embracing. Religion even pervades the Japanese sense of humor. For example, the great Zen saint of China, Bodhidharma (who sat in meditation until his legs fell off) is remembered in Japan as the legless doll called Daruma, who, as many times as he falls, always rights himself.[14]



Fortune papers (mikuji) *are hung on a special rack over small statues of Jizo near a Buddhist temple. (Kyoto, 1979)*

THE INTIMATE BOND BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE NATION

The sixth theme of Japanese religious history is the close relationship between religion and the Japanese nation—a bond that has existed practically from the birth of the identity of the Japanese people. One of the central mythical tales of ancient Japan relates that the emperor, as descendant of the Sun Goddess, is the sacred leader of the Japanese islands (which were created by the gods or *kami*). In effect the emperor was the symbolic head of ritual and government. Although he seldom ruled the government directly, the rituals he performed were for the benefit of the entire country.

This ancient connection between religion and nation is at the heart of Shinto; yet Buddhism also expressed this theme. Buddhists helped unify and support the government, and the state patronized Buddhism. Buddhist priests prayed for the safety of the imperial family and read special scriptures for the peace and prosperity of the state. Imperial families donated private homes for use as temples, and the state eventually built provincial temples in every province so that Buddhist prayers and scriptures for the state could be read in every area of the country.

Taoism and Confucianism, too, were used in early Japan to support the emperor and the state. The government's Bureau of Divination (Onmyoryo, the bureau of *yin-yang*) ensured that the state and the ruler conformed to the "way" of the universe; this bureau, patterned after Chinese practices, shared many features with Taoism. Confucian ethical notions were incorporated in the view of emperors as embodying Confucian virtues of social harmony and benevolence.

Between 1868 and 1945, the intimate bond between religion and the nation was used by the state to support nationalism and militarism. Many people, both Japanese and Westerners, feel that this particular policy was a distortion of the Japanese tradition. In Chapters 17 through 19 of this book we will see how the problem of the relationship of state and religion is being debated in Japan. However this question is resolved, the close tie between religion and the nation at large is an indelible feature of Japanese history.[15]

THE TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

These six themes give us some idea of the dynamics of religious life in Japan. Traditionally people did not belong exclusively to one organized religion but drew upon various traditions as they participated in religious activities. A person wishing to express reverence for nature was not likely to stop and distinguish between the Shinto notion of *kami* dwelling in natural objects, Zen Buddhist ideas of oneness with nature, and Taoist concepts of conforming to the way of nature. It was more important to venerate the sacred forces of nature than to identify and separate the historical influences upon the Japanese

view of nature. Similarly, there has not been a clear-cut distinction between separate themes. Veneration of *kami* in nature and respect for Japan as a divine nation (land of the *kami*), for example, usually have been seen as closely related.

The six themes express the general view of the world held by most traditional Japanese people. A Japanese person acquires these perceptions of the world by seeing memorials held for ancestors in the home, participating in shrine festivals, and taking part in rituals for the transplanting of rice. More often than not, such a worldview is held unconsciously. Although parts of it may be written down in formal doctrine, the entire worldview is more a matter of personal memory than a written handbook. The worldview is shaped as a person gradually develops a sense of identity by participating in cultural life. As we trace the historical formation of Japanese religion, we should keep in mind that this shared worldview has given continuity to religious life. We will focus on this shared worldview, remembering that, as in any religious tradition, there are as many individual variations or expressions of the worldview as there are individuals who hold it.

NOTES

1. As in any culture, the Japanese view of nature is highly idealized, and in actual practice Japanese people have acted to control and exploit nature in ways that contradict the ideal of harmony with nature. For a volume of essays emphasizing the ambivalence and diversity in Japanese views of nature, see Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland, eds., *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives* (Surrey: Curzon, 1997), especially "Japanese Perceptions of Nature: Ideals and Illusions," pp. 1–35.

2. Quoted in Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801)* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1970), p. 84.

3. Mircea Eliade has elaborated the notion of the sacred as a general feature of all religion, but dominant within cosmic religions. See his *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959).

4. See Elizabeth Kenney and Edmund T. Gilday, eds., *Mortuary Rites in Japan,* vol. 27, no. 3–4 of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (Fall 2000).

5. In a comparison of the "worlds" of Japanese and Americans, Gordon Mathews notes that "the distinct institutional presence of religion is often greater in American lives than in Japanese lives," and "the most common form of religious observance in Japan is in the home." See Gordon Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living? How Japanese and Americans Make Sense of Their Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p. 229.

6. The family is important in all religious traditions, so the Japanese family is not unique in this regard. The point here is that family (and home) are much more prominent in Japanese religion than in contemporary America and Europe. Both Japanese and foreign scholars have discussed at length the complex subject of the interaction between self and society in Japan—see, for example, Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970); Robert J. Smith, *Japanese Society: Tradition, Self, and the Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983); Dorrine K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), especially Chapters 4 and 5; Nancy R. Rosenberger, ed., *Japanese Sense of Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992); Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr., eds., *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language* (Princeton: Princeton

University, 1994). For ancestors, see Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1974). For a comparison of self and society within Japanese and American culture, see Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living?* Bito Masahide writes that "Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, . . . one social phenomenon that is central to the development of religion and thought . . . " is "the establishment of the *ie* (house or lineage) as the basic unit of social organization among both the *bushi* (warrior class) and the rest of the population." See his "Thought and Religion: 1550–1770," in *Early Modern Japan,* vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), pp. 373–424; see p. 373. For an extended treatment of "traditional" family religion, see Michael Jeremy and M. E. Robinson, *Ceremony and Symbolism in the Japanese Home* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1989).

7. For two works emphasizing the importance of purification in Japanese religion, see Geoffrey Bownas, *Japanese Rainmaking and Other Folk Practices* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), and Emiko Namihira, "Hare, Ke and Kegare: The Structure of Japanese Folk Belief" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1977). For a briefer treatment, see Emiko Namihira, "Pollution in the Folk Belief System," *Current Anthropology,* vol. 28, no. 4 (Aug.–Oct. 1987), pp. S65–S72.

8. "Japanese religion . . . stresses action rather than analytic thought or understanding"; "ritual . . . pervades Japanese life . . . more so than does religious doctrine." Herbert E. Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), p. ix. The priority of ritual over doctrine is also noted by McMullin, "Historical and Histiographical Issues," pp. 10–12, and Scott Schnell, *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999).

9. For an article on amulets, see Ian Reader, "Actions, Amulets and the Expression of Meaning," in his *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991), pp. 168–93; for a treatment of magic and rituals in medieval Japan, see Jolanta Tubielewicz, *Superstitions, Magic, and Mantric Practices in the Heian Period* (Warszawa: Wydawa VW, ZGWN, 1980).

10. The term "cult" has assumed negative meaning in modern times, such as "Satanic cult." Here we use "cult" in the neutral sense of devotion to or worship of a particular saint or deity—such as the cult of Mary or the cult of Shiva—by people who are not necessarily members of one large organization.

11. Among a number of books focusing on Shinto festival, *matsuri,* three are *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life,* trans. Norman Havens (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1988); Michael Ashkenazi, *Matsuri: Festivals of a Japanese Town* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1993); and Herbert E. Plutschow, *Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan* (Surrey: Japan Library, 1996). For a "taste" of festivals, see Keiichi Yanagawa, "The Sensation of Festivals," in *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life;* this article is excerpted in my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 212–17. For a handy popular treatment see Hiroshi Miyazaki, *Illustrated Festivals of Japan,* trans. John Howard Loftus (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1985).

12. For two treatments of the Kasuga cult, see Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of the Gods: A Study of the Kasuga Cult in Japanese History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992) and Royall Tyler, *The Miracles of the Kasuga Deity* (New York: Columbia University, 1990); for a treatment of a more specifically Buddhist cult, see Janet R. Goodwin, *Alms and Vagabonds: Buddhist Temples and Popular Pilgrimage in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1994). For the cult of Inari, see Karen Smeyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999).

13. In traditional Japan specific occupations/activities such as fishing and agriculture were sanctified by specific rituals; Grapard has shown that Zen utilized no ritual in advocating the "view that the entire realm of human activity is the site for realization of Buddhahood," and that for the Shinto-Confucian writer Hayashi Razan the divine was an internal

experience: "'The divine is located within the heart-mind of human beings.'" See Allan Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions,* vol. 20, no. 3 (Feb. 1982), pp. 195–221, especially p. 221.

14. For a study describing the interrelationship of folk customs and folk religion in theater and the arts, see Jane Marie Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyo Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1997). For a work treating the theme of sexuality and religion, see Michael Czaja, *Gods of Myth and Stone: Phallicism in Japanese Folk Religion* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974). For a work on Buddhist folk art, see H. Neill McFarland, *Daruma: The Founder of Japanese Art and Popular Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987).

15. For a discussion of the "commingling of 'political' and 'religious' symbols" in Japan, see McMullin, "Historical and Histiographical Issues," pp. 12–19. For a notion of Japan as a "sacred nation," which was "much more than nationalism or ultranationalism" see Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," pp. 214–18.