stimulus provided by the entrance of Buddhism. The time span and complex character of Shinto's emergence can be appreciated just by looking at the origins of the word "Shinto."

For many centuries the religious traditions and practices within the Japanese islands were loosely organized around family lines, with no central organization, without even a common name. Gradually the imperial family and its traditions came to be considered supreme over all other families, but still no name was given to the larger or smaller traditions. Not until Buddhism and advanced Chinese culture formally entered Japan (about the middle of the sixth century C.E.) was there any need to distinguish the traditional practices from any contrasting cult. Then, apparently because Buddhism called itself the "way of the Buddha" (*Butsudo*), the traditional religion set itself apart by the counterpart term "Shinto," meaning "way of the *kami*." The two Chinese characters forming the word "Shinto" originated in an earlier Chinese term pronounced *shentao,* but in Japanese "Shinto" is traditionally understood in the Japanese expression *kami no michi* ("way of the *kami*"). The significance of these words is to indicate the "way of the Japanese divinities," even though Shinto as an organized religion was influenced by the "foreign" religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.[2]

MYTHOLOGICAL MATERIALS AND THE ORIGINS OF SHINTO

A major difficulty in comprehending the formation of Shinto is that as soon as we pass from prehistory into history, Chinese cultural influence is already evident. In fact, foreign influence is most conspicuous in the written documents because the Japanese had no written language prior to the influx of the Chinese script. Among the first written records in Japan are the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* (the latter is also known in the West as the *Nihongi*), chronicles compiled on court order and completed in 712 and 720 C.E., respectively. These early Japanese documents, mixtures of cosmology, mythology, and chronicles, contain the earliest recorded forms of Shinto. Thus, there is good reason to begin an investigation of Shinto's formation with these two writings.

In some Western publications the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* have been viewed as the watershed of myth from which later Japanese religion (particularly Shinto) is derived, but this general notion is misleading. In the first place, these scriptures reflect both political and religious motives for unifying Japan. They were compiled by the court elite and did not necessarily mirror the faith of the country at large. In the second place, there is no such thing as a "foundational myth" in Japanese religion. For the Japanese there is neither one sacred myth nor one set of sacred scriptures considered as authoritative for all people. Within a prehistoric or tribal people a common myth typically defines the worldview or the emergence of reality. In so-called higher cultures, such as

India, sacred scriptures like the *Vedas* blend with indigenous motifs to provide the religious base on which later scriptures, commentaries, epics, and even popular dramas are based. In contrast, in Japan no common myth or body of religious scripture pervades the whole religious scene. Even apart from the question of foreign influence, the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* were never that popular and important in the religious thought and practice of the people.

These reservations concerning the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* have been made not to minimize their importance for Japanese religious history, but rather to set them in the proper perspective so that we may see more clearly their complex character and their relevance for comprehending the formation of Shinto. For example, the opening passage of the *Nihongi* is a creation story that is not Japanese but is borrowed from a Chinese account of creation (in terms of the Chinese bipolarity of *yin* and *yang,* or female and male). It appears that the Japanese writers sought prestige for their own traditions by prefacing them with a Chinese form of cosmology. (Throughout most of Japanese history there has been reverence or at least respect for the cultural tradition of China, to a much greater degree than Europeans glorify their cultural roots in the Greco-Roman tradition; on the other hand, in some periods such as the Tokugawa there was a reaction to excessive praise for Chinese culture, with exaggerated preference for Japanese culture and religion as unique and superior.) From this point—the beginning of recorded history in Japan—all things Chinese tended to have an exalted status in Japanese eyes. Even the notion of possessing a history or dynastic chronology and recording it in written form seems to have been borrowed from China. These ancient Japanese books begin with a Chinese tale, and Chinese elements are sprinkled throughout.

The Chinese cosmological episode sets the stage for introducing the unorganized Japanese traditions. The Chinese contribution is the notion that the cosmos emerged out of "a chaotic mass like an egg," which then separated into heaven (male) and earth (female). This notion serves as a general explanation for the origin of the world and all the divinities. The first two chapters of *Kojiki* and *Nihongi,* entitled "The Age of the Gods," give a patchwork picture of tales concerning the generations of gods and the founding of the Japanese islands. In this mythical period, seven generations of divinities, or *kami,* culminated in the marriage of Izanagi (a male *kami*) and Izanami (a female *kami*). They brought about the appearance of the Japanese islands by thrusting the "jewel-spear of Heaven" from the bridge of heaven into the briny waters below. Then they descended to the land that had appeared, and they produced other *kami* as well as other features of the universe.

One major theme of the mythology is the descent of the so-called Sun Goddess Amaterasu from this couple: from Amaterasu comes the imperial line of Japan. This is only one of a number of themes or cycles that have been blended together into a combination of mythology and chronology. In general the other themes have been subordinated to the tradition of an imperial line descended from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. One purpose of "The Age of the Gods" is to justify the divine origin of the emperors and empresses whose

reigns are recorded in the remainder of the book. In fact, these chronologies were written on command of the imperial court. According to one account, a person who had memorized all the ancient stories and genealogies recited them for transcribers (who wrote them down by using Chinese characters). Nevertheless, the records in both their intention and their content favor the stories surrounding the imperial line.

We noted earlier that in ancient Japan there were many large lineages (*uji,* or extended families) independent of each other in their religious and political leadership. Probably the imperial line derives from a lineage that became dominant over other extended families and subsequently unified the country both politically and religiously. To unify the religion in pre-Buddhist times apparently meant to orient all the competing traditions around the tradition of the ruling line. After the entrance of Buddhism and advanced Chinese culture, this composite tradition was enhanced with Chinese elements for prestige and was written down.

The *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* illustrate two important aspects of early Japanese religion: first, the divine (or semidivine) descent of Japan and her people, and, second, the proliferation of *kami* intimately related to the land and people. For example, even in these early records we can recognize the characteristic Japanese love of nature as a combination of religious and aesthetic emotion. These themes are not limited to the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi;* rather, they seem to have persisted in the life of the people from prehistoric times onward.[3]

Other early Japanese writings are helpful for understanding the religious context out of which Shinto was formed. The seventh/eighth-century *Manyoshu* is the first anthology of Japanese poetry, blending lyric and religious themes.[4] The ninth-century *Kogoshui* is a valuable document recording a rivalry between several priestly families. Even as early as the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., there were distinct theological and ritual factions. "Shinto" is the name applied to the religious tradition that attempted to unify and perpetuate these themes, beliefs, and practices; the development of this tradition as a more highly organized institution came much later.

In this light, it is much easier to understand how, traditionally speaking, the Japanese could not divorce themselves from Shinto. Even though Shinto did not exist as a comprehensive ecclesiastical body until recent times, it has defined much of the character of the Japanese cultural and religious heritage. On both the local and national planes Shinto hallows the homeland and the Japanese people, as well as the nexus of the religious, political, and natural order. Given this situation, we can understand why Shinto scholars emphasize that Shinto is a natural expression of Japanese life—rather than the product of a definite set of doctrines or the result of a conscious conversion or the act of becoming a "member" of a particular institution. Also, we can realize why there has been a close association of religious devotion, patriotism, and reverential respect for the emperor. Indeed, archaeological evidence documents the fact that the imperial regalia (sword, mirror, and jewel) were sacred from prehistoric times.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SHINTO: PRIESTS AND RITUALS IN SHRINES

We have seen that the religio-political combination was present even in the lineages or extended families of early Japan. The government of eighth-century Japan continued this tendency by establishing a powerful department of religion as part of the state's administration. Sir George Sansom has given a succinct description of the department of religion:

> It was concerned with the performance of the great religious ceremonies (such as the rites of enthronement and national purification, and the festivals of the first-fruits and harvest thanksgiving), the upkeep of shrines, the discipline of shrine wardens, and the recording and observance of oracles and divinations. It presided over the worship of the national divinities, and had nothing to do with Buddhism.[5]

In Japan, as in many early civilizations, religion and the priesthood served as two complementary arms of the government: the emperor (as the divine ruler) was responsible for the ritual as well as the administrative propriety of the realm. In many ancient traditions, the perpetuation of the ritual order was seen as necessary for maintaining the whole cosmic order. Therefore, it is important to note the contents of this ritual.

From Yayoi times to the present, Japanese religion has been linked with every phase of growing rice. Although the planting of rice occasions a festival, this and other phases are overshadowed by the climax of the rice harvest, at which time the new rice is offered up to the *kami* as thanksgiving. The enthronement ceremony for a new emperor was patterned after the annual thanksgiving harvest ceremony. Even today rice is an important offering both in Shinto shrines and also in the small Shinto altar in homes. Other important annual ceremonies are the public purifications that take place at the midpoint and end of the year.

The ritual prayers (*norito*) for the public ceremonies are recorded in codes called the *Engishiki.*[6] The *Engishiki,* or Codes of the Engi Era, were not written down until 927 C.E., but they contain much earlier materials. In particular the *norito* prayers or liturgies presented in Shinto ceremonies, recorded in the *Engishiki,* are valuable for understanding early Shinto. The priest who reads the *norito* serves as an intermediary between humans and the *kami.* After undergoing a period of preliminary purification, the priest "calls down" the *kami* at the beginning of the ceremony and "sends them away" at the close of the ceremony. Sometimes this is acted out by opening and closing the doors to the inner sanctum (*shinden,* or "*kami* hall") housing the sacred object (*shintai,* or "*kami* body"), which symbolizes the presence of the enshrined *kami.*[7]

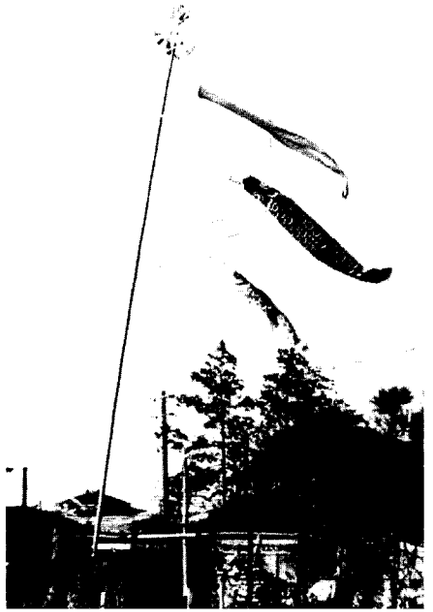
In recent times Shinto institutions and rites have been dominated by male priests, while women known as *miko* are assistants or general labor. In ancient times, women played a much more important role both in government and in Shinto: unmarried princesses served as priestesses at the Ise and Kamo shrines.

The sacred archway (torii) *before a local Shinto shrine. (Kawarayu, 1979)*

These priestesses maintained their virginity and purity in order to preside over the main rituals of these shrines.[8]

The rites and celebrations of Shinto center around shrines (*jinja*), which are still found in the smallest villages as well as in the largest cities. (In English usage the word "shrine" is the general term for the Shinto building—*jinja* or *miya;* the word "temple" is the general term for the Buddhist building—*tera* or *-ji*.) Usually one passes through a sacred arch (*torii*), which helps define the sacred precincts of the shrine. Devout believers purify themselves by pouring water on their hands and rinsing their mouths. The present shrine buildings reveal Buddhist and Chinese architectural influence, but some are still constructed according to the ancient models. These shrines are built on poles above the ground and have a thatched roof: they can be seen today at Ise, one of the Shinto strongholds that consciously attempted to reject Buddhist influence. (At Ise, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, is enshrined.) This ancient shrine architecture seems to have affinities with architecture to the south of Japan. As Shinto scholars like to point out, its natural beauty is accentuated by the use of wood and thatch left bare of decorations.

One theory concerning ancient Japanese religion is that originally there were no shrine buildings; rather, a shrine was simply a sacred precinct set apart in a certain area or around a sacred object such as a tree or stone. Sacred precincts often were the sites where the ancestral spirits dwelled. This is a valuable insight for linking ancestor worship with Japanese notions of *kami* and festivals. Only later did the twofold Shinto architecture appear, with a worship hall (*haiden*) in front and a smaller *kami* hall in back. The worship hall is where the priests (and sometimes the people) direct prayers toward the *kami* hall, which contains the presence of the enshrined *kami* symbolized by a



On May 5, the boys' festival, paper or cloth streamers of carp are flown from tall bamboo poles next to the home. Usually there is one carp for each young son in the family. (Sendai, 1963)

sacred object such as a mirror or sword. Shinto ritual involves elaborate offerings of food—rice, vegetables, salt, fruit, and fish—which at the conclusion of the ceremony may be consumed by priests and laypeople as an act of communion with the *kami*. As Shinto became more highly organized in medieval times, local shrines were considered to enshrine specific *kami* named in the *Kojiki*.

Religious activities at the Shinto shrine centered around the rhythm of the religious year and an individual's lifespan. The earlier Japanese religious tradition seems to have observed the seasonal order of the year, with spring festivals and fall festivals to mark the planting and harvesting of rice. Even today, spring and fall festivals are still important celebrations in most city shrines. Of great importance, too, have been the purification ceremonies at midyear and New Year's, to wash away the physical and spiritual "pollutions" or "defilements" of the previous half-year.[9]

Five traditional festivals (also revealing Chinese influence) have come to be celebrated throughout Japan: (1) first day of the first month, New Year's festival; (2) third day of the third month, the girls' festival (or dolls' festival); (3) fifth day of the fifth month, boys' festival; (4) seventh day of the seventh month, star festival; and (5) ninth day of the ninth month, chrysanthemum festival. Although this formal system of five festivals is a complex mixture of Chinese and Japanese elements, the festivals have become an integral part of Japanese home and village life.[10]

Religious activities at the shrine also revolved around the events in an individual's life. Traditionally, the newborn child was dedicated at a shrine on his or her first trip out of the house. At other specific ages a child visited the shrines again. Usually special youth groups helped carry out the processions of festivals. In more recent times it has become the custom to be married in a shrine. Also, a visit to a shrine has always been appropriate in any time of crisis. For example, a soldier going off to war would pray for safekeeping at his local (guardian) shrine where he had been carried as a baby. All such visits brought individuals into contact with the *kami,* the sacred power that sustains human life.

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SHINTO

The preceding discussion of the history and nature of Shinto shows how native and foreign elements were blended together into one great national tradition. At the same time, the discussion shows that Shinto cannot be viewed simply as the indigenous religion of Japan by contrasting all other traditions as foreign. Misconceptions have arisen partly because earlier Western scholars tried too hard to compartmentalize Shinto and Buddhism into separate religions. Also, the emphatically national character of Shinto was exaggerated by Western scholars who studied Shinto during its nationalistic phase from about 1867 to 1945, and this image of Shinto has persisted in the West. Shinto is best understood within the broader historical context of Japanese religion.

Because Shinto has such a long history and has interacted so much with other traditions, it is difficult to sharply distinguish Shinto from all other Japanese traditions. Muraoka Tsunetsugu, a Japanese scholar widely respected for his critical interpretations of Shinto history, claims that there are three distinctive characteristics of Shinto. First, there is Shinto's emphasis on the identity of the Japanese nation with the imperial family and the descent of this family from ancestral *kami.* Second, Shinto practices a "realistic" affirmation of life and values in this world, accepting life and death, good and evil, as inevitable parts of the world we live in. Third, Shinto features a reverence for the "bright" and "pure" in all matter and thought, attempting to overcome physical pollution with rites of exorcism and bad thoughts with a "pure and bright heart." In Muraoka's interpretation of Shinto and its distinctive features, the first characteristic is political, the second is philosophical, and the third is ethical. The three are interrelated and interact to form the "intellectual strain" that defines Shinto throughout Japanese history.[11] This interpretation is valuable because it locates *distinctive* characteristics of Shinto without claiming that they are the *unique* property of Shinto. As we have seen in the chapters on persistent themes and prehistoric developments, and as we will see later, these hallmarks of Shinto play a large role in Japanese religious history.

A brief summary of the formative period of Shinto will help us focus on the most significant developments. Of greatest importance is the fact that shortly after Buddhism's appearance from China, Shinto appeared as a loosely organized tradition and assumed its basic shape. Shinto did not create completely new forms, but organized the preexisting heritage into a distinctive tradition. This tradition included a mythology, pantheon, priesthood, liturgies, and shrines. Recorded in the *Engishiki,* a tenth-century official writing, is a system of over six thousand shrines named in connection with annual offerings from the court. Shinto fashioned this tradition in reaction to, and partly in imitation of, Buddhist and Chinese importations. Throughout Japanese history, Shinto has manifested a tension between the intention of preserving Japanese traditions and the process of adopting foreign traditions. Next we will discuss the imported traditions; in Part II we will return to the problem of how Shinto adopted these imported traditions; in Part III we will view Shinto as a modern, highly organized religion.

NOTES

1. The term "indigenous" has been used to refer to the synthesis of Japanese culture that existed prior to extensive Korean and Chinese influence from the early centuries of the Common Era. This usage of "indigenous" is helpful for contrasting the earliest Japanese culture with the influence of later continental civilization, so long as we remember that even the prehistoric Japanese culture itself was a combination of diverse strands.

2. Toshio Kuroda has emphasized that the term "Shinto" as the name of a separate religious institution is a relatively modern development. See Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," trans. Suzanne Gay and James C. Dobbins, *Journal of Japanese Studies,* vol. 7, no. 1 (1981), pp. 1–21; reprinted in *Religion and Society in Modern Japan: Selected Readings,* ed. Mark R. Mullins et al. (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1993), pp. 7–30. Kuroda's views, and the distinction between Shinto as a specific institutional organization and as a broad cultural influence, will be discussed in Chapter 11. Kuroda and some other scholars have seen Taoist influence in the Chinese precedents of *shentao* for the term Shinto and *tianhuang* for the term *tenno* (emperor in Japanese); see the discussion of these issues in Mark Teeuwen, "Shinto and Taoism in Early Japan," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami,* eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Surrey: Curzon, 2000), pp. 13–31.

3. *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697,* trans. W. G. Aston, *Transactions of the Japan Society,* supp. 1, vol. 2 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896; subsequently reprinted separately), p. 106; Donald L. Philippi, trans. *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1968). For comments on the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* by the eighteenth-century scholar Motoori Norinaga, see Chapter 14. For an excerpt of the *Kojiki,* see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 13–19.

4. See *The Manyoshu,* trans. Japan Society for the Promotion of Scientific Research (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940; reprinted, New York: Columbia University, 1965). For an excerpt, see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 170–72.

5. Sir George Sansom, *A History of Japan,* vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University, 1958), p. 68. For a detailed treatment of the department of religion established in 702 C.E., see Sir George Sansom, "Early Japanese Law and Administration," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan,* Second Series, vol. 9 (1932), pp. 67–109; vol. 11 (1935), pp. 117–49.

6. See Donald L. Philippi, trans., *Norito: A New Translation of the Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers* (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1959); for an excerpt see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 196–200. Also see Felicia Gressitt Bock, trans., *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books I–V* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970) and *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books VI–X* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972).

7. For a historical overview of the Shinto priesthood, see Tatsuo Hagiwara, "The Position of the Shinto Priesthood: Historical Changes and Development," in *Studies in Japanese Folklore,* ed. Richard Dorson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1963; reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1980), pp. 221–36. For "internal diversity" within the Shinto priesthood, especially in early Meiji, see Helen Hardacre, "The Shinto Priesthood in Early Meiji Japan: Preliminary Inquiries," *History of Religions,* vol. 27, no. 3 (Feb. 1988), pp. 294–320.

8. See Robert S. Ellwood, "The Saigu: Princess and Priestess," *History of Religions,* vol. 7 (Aug. 1967), pp. 35–60; he notes the ideal of intensive purification, exclusion of Buddhist and non-Shinto traditions, the "taboo" of forbidden words, and avoidance of defilement. However, in actual practice, even as a "High Priestess," such women could participate in Buddhism; such was the case with Senshi, who "wrote 'Buddhist poems,' and through them expressed something of her Buddhist faith, while she was at the same time High Priestess of the Kamo Shrines (*Saiin*)." The interaction and tension between Shinto and Buddhism is seen in Edward Kamens, *The Buddhist Poetry of the Great Kamo Priestess Daisaiin and* Hosshin Wakashu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990); see especially pp. 5–8. Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan,* p. 269, notes that "The process by which female loci of religio-political power were abolished . . . needs to be explored." It is noteworthy that although men came to dominate formal positions of power in religion, especially priesthoods, women continued to play important religious roles in home and village. D. P. Martinez has discussed the "muted group model" of women's religious experience in general and has proposed a new model for viewing women and religion in Japan that does not accept the argument of "some feminists . . . that there was a decrease in women's status as the more male-dominated Buddhist ideology was accepted in Japan." See D. P. Martinez, "Women and Ritual," in Jan van Bremen and D. P. Martinez, eds., *Ceremony and Ritual in Japan: Religious Practices in an Industrialized Society* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 83–200, especially pp. 185–86.

9. For references to Shinto festivals, see note 11 in Chapter 2.

10. A colorful description of these five festivals is found in U. A. Casal, *The Five Sacred Festivals of Ancient Japan: Their Symbolism & Historical Development* (Tokyo and Rutland, VT: Sophia University and Charles E. Tuttle, 1967).

11. See Tsunetsugu Muraoka, "Characteristic Features of Japanese Shinto: Japan's Uniqueness in Oriental Thought," in his *Studies in Shinto Thought,* trans. Delmer M. Brown and James T. Araki (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1964), pp. 1–50.

5

Early Japanese Buddhism: Indian Influence with Chinese Coloration

Buddhism, like any major religious tradition, is a complex subject that can be viewed from many angles. To take just two examples, it can be seen as an Indian export that entered and dominated other Asian cultures and religions, or as a local religious development that radically transformed the entering Indian import. It can be described as an elite monastic and priestly heritage with its lengthy scriptures and abstract teachings, or as a popular movement with various "folk" beliefs and devotional practices. In fact, the various religious, philosophical, and institutional phenomena that can be grouped under the category of "Buddhism" are so diverse that it is hard to include all of them, and it is difficult to find a single category large enough to hold all of them. Where we begin, and what we focus on, largely determines what we mean by Buddhism. In this book we will start with India and move quickly to Japan, emphasizing the interaction of Buddhism with the Japanese religious world.

Buddhism arose in India, but by the time it reached Japanese shores, it had already been transformed within India as well as in the passage across the Asian continent. Buddhism has a long, rich heritage worthy of its own description and interpretation; here we can treat only the place of Buddhism in Japanese religious history. On the one hand, Buddhism made a tremendous contribution to the religious scene in Japan; on the other hand, Buddhism was transformed by its synthesis with the Japanese tradition. The twofold result is that as Japan became a Buddhist nation, Buddhism became a Japanese religion. In the initial or formative period, the Buddhist impact upon Japanese culture and