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THE RECENT TENDENCY TO “INTERNATIONALIZE” SHINTO: CONSIDERING THE FUTURE OF SHINTO STUDIES

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BREEN, John and Mark TEEUWEN: *A New History of Shinto*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 280 pp, ISBN 978-1405155168.

In the past couple of decades it has been obvious that many Japanese Shintoists want to internationalize Shinto in order to attract believers – but these believers are not from outside but mainly from inside Japan. This “internationalizing” strategy can typically be seen in the Kokugakuin University Faculty of Shinto Studies (Kokugakuin Daigaku shintō bunka gakubu 國學院大學神道文化学部), the Meiji Jingū Research Institute (Meiji Jingū kokusai shintō bunka kenkyūsho 明治神宮国際神道文化研究所) and the International Shinto Foundation (Shintō kokusai gakkai 神道国際学会, ISF), institutions, which are funded by Japanese money in the name of internationalization. They frequently hold international conferences and provide lectureships at the University of London SOAS, the University of California Santa Barbara, Columbia University, and so on. They also send their members to these universities in order to get doctorate degrees. Yet in truth, despite their extensive international activities, they don't seem to seriously believe that Shinto can obtain followers from non-Japanese nations; after the Asian-Pacific War almost all Japanese understand that Shinto is just a national religion, not a world religion. Instead, they are promoting the so-called internationalization of Shinto to draw *Japanese* people into increasing their belief in Shinto. This rationale is evident when we look at statements such as the following from Imaizumi Yoshiko 今泉宜子, a Senior Researcher of Meiji Jingu Research Institute. It is obvious that she points to the international respect that is given to Meiji Jingū mostly in order to persuade *Japanese* readers of Shinto's international fame.

It is a day of celebration: A couple is standing in front of a camphor tree and is having their picture taken just after their wedding ceremony has concluded. We can only wish them

eternal happiness. [...] After the reconstruction of the shrine, athletes from all over the world came to worship at the shrine. In 1964, the Olympic village for the Tokyo Olympics was built in Yoyogi Park, right next to Meiji Shrine.¹

In this context, it was probably no coincidence that a new book on Shinto entitled *A New History of Shinto* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), was written in English by two authors, John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, who are the leading scholars riding the wave of this movement.

The book has six chapters: “An Alternative Approach to the History of Shinto”, “Kami Shrines, Myths, and Rituals in Premodern Times”, “The History of a Shrine: Hie”, “The History of a Myth: The Sun-Goddess and the Rock-Cave”, “The *Daijōsai*: A ‘Shinto’ Rite of Imperial Accession”, and “Issues in Contemporary Shinto”. Overall, it is a well-balanced description of the history of Shinto that seeks to avoid the model of diachronic history but rather focuses on important individual perspectives that explore all the forms of Shinto. After a general survey (Chapter 1), it proceeds by way of “one particular shrine (Chapter 3), one myth (Chapter 4), and one ritual (Chapter 5)”. The penetrating concern throughout this whole book is to “slice through history in a different and [...] more informative way than a book that begins by imposing the modern category of Shinto on pre-modern times” (p. 22). The authors conclude “it was only with Meiji that the contemporary meanings of this rite and its Shinto identity were determined” (p. 23). Thus they historicize the seemingly ahistorical appearance of Shinto, which has had a long record of such claims in the modern period. Concerning Chapter 1 they state

[w]e began this book with a critical survey of Shinto in modern Japan. We identified Shinto’s modern invention in the nineteenth century, and then explored the dynamics of its subsequent accommodation to postwar democracy. In the nineteenth century, the modern nation-state had a vital role to play in shaping and defining Shinto (p. 199).

In Chapter 2, they offer “a brief survey of historical developments that served to bring Kami shrines, myths, and rituals together” (p. 21).

[I]t is questionable whether ritual sites in different parts of Japan were perceived as specimens of a single category “shrines” before the classical period. Shrines came to form such a distinct category only when shrine cults were treated as members of a single species by the imperial court (p. 24).

1 IMAIZUMI, 2008: 134–135.

From its first instance of use in *Nihon shoki*, the word that we today read as “Shinto” had had clear Buddhist connotations. In Japan, it was used almost exclusively in the context of Buddhist kami worship [...] (p. 46).

In Chapter 3 they select the case of Hie shrine

to focus on another important shrine [distinguished from Ise shrine] that can give us a better idea of what was prior to Shintoization. [...] This shrine was a pioneer in many different ways: in its symbiosis with the Buddhist establishment on Hiei’s slope; in its economic and political role as a holder of lands and a center of kami-assisted warfare; in its contribution to early formulations of Shinto; in the tragedy of its late medieval destruction and early modern rebuilding, and its lengthy and, at times, violent struggle to break away from the Buddhist control exerted by Hiei’s monks (p. 22).

In Chapter 4, focally

[t]he myth that we will follow through history is the tale of the sun-goddess Amaterasu who hid in a rock-cave and thus threw the world into darkness [...] and it has had an exceedingly rich afterlife in many different contexts. [...] [I]n many of its later incarnations, the myth was not primarily interpreted as a political one, but rather as a metaphor of enlightenment practices, or as the origination myth of performative traditions such as *waka* composition, Noh, and kami dancing (*kagura*). Only after Meiji were such interpretations purged from the historical record, in what we may understand as a determined attempt to re-establish the court’s monopoly on imperial symbolism (p. 23).

In Chapter 5, the example of ritual chosen is

the imperial enthronement ceremony called the *daijōsai*, or the “great rite of [rice] consumption”. The *daijōsai* [大嘗祭] was in many ways the defining ritual of modern state Shinto. After all, it was the greatest of the imperial state rites, dramatizing the emperor’s exclusive relationship with Amaterasu, and so narrating in the most powerful and persuasive fashion the transcendental nature of the imperial line. [...] The ritual is not as old as the modern state maintained; its original meanings were quite different from those now established; and, moreover, it was by no means consistently regarded as a necessary element of imperial enthronements (p. 23).

In Chapter 6, the authors “return to NAS [National Association of Shrines (Jinja Honcho 神社本庁), ordinary Japanese Shinto’s main umbrella organization] to examine its operations and agendas.” They state:

From the second half of the twentieth century, following Japan's defeat in the war, the Allied Occupation, and the promulgation of the Japanese Constitution, the key player has been the National Association of Shrines (p. 199).

So they ask,

What matters to NAS in the twenty-first century? What challenges does it face, and how does it meet them? What lies beyond NAS parameters? (p. 199).

As we can see above, the authors' apparent approach is to historicize the ahistorical guise of Shinto. However, we should interrogate their deeper purpose as to what kind of image they would give us of Shinto as they apply historicization chiefly in order to criticize the NAS. In other words, we should investigate more closely the kind of "critical" historicization they are attempting. Many scholars of religion, even nowadays, tend to insist on their neutrality toward religious groups and believers of their research object. Non-Japanese scholars of Shinto in particular believe in their neutrality as external observers. However, we find such scholars naïve to believe in the existence of a neutral space free of political content, especially in the case of Shinto, which was committed to establishing the political and cultural identity of Japaneseness during the modern period. In this sense we should always keep in mind that advocacy of neutrality is also a kind of politics of de-politicization.

Klaus Antoni, professor of Tübingen University, in a review of an earlier volume edited by Teeuwen and Breen on *Shinto in History* (2000), which was financially supported by ISF,² pointed out the fact that "John Breen and Mark Teeuwen are founding members and members of the executive board of the ISF."³ In addition, he mentioned that "John Breen was chair of the SOAS Center for the Study of Japanese religions, which was funded by a donation from the ISF."⁴ Antoni described ISF further as having "extremely deep links to the New-New religion known as 'World Mate' (formerly 'Cosmo Mate'), which has an active international mission."⁵ "[T]he World Mate branch in London was started in 1997 by the founder Fukami Tōshū [深見東州], internationally known also as Handa Haruhisa."⁶ Given this background, it is not surprising that they

2 BREEN/TEEUWEN, 2000.

3 ANTONI, 2001: 409.

4 Ibid.: 409.

5 Ibid.: 408. On World Mate see PROHL, 2000.

6 ANTONI, 2001: 408.

do not really deal with Shinto during the Asia-Pacific War. This attitude accords with Fukami's statement that since in this period Shinto was "hijacked by Japanese military junta for nationalist political gain, Shintō faith has had an unfortunate association with fascism."⁷ According to this view, Shinto as imperial ideology was just a deviation from the original form of Shinto as the national religion. Thus Antoni concludes that Breen and Teeuwen's purpose of writing is, even if unconsciously, to paint "an apologetic picture of Shintō allegedly innocent of any involvement in politics and especially the war's ideology."⁸

Antoni's review was written in 2001, more than ten years ago. At that time, the Shintoists had just begun to implement their strategy of internationalization and so it was the ISF that was the sole target of his criticism. But we think his criticism essentially remains valid today, even if the tactics not only of ISF but also of Meiji Jingu and Kokugakuin University have become more diverse and seemingly milder. The above quoted Imaizumi Yoshiko, Senior Researcher of Meiji Jingū Research Institute, is a case in point with an interesting academic career. She graduated from the Department of Comparative Literature and Culture at University of Tokyo under the supervision of Professor Kobori Keiichirō 小堀桂一郎, who is a scholar known to worship at Yasukuni shrine as a demonstration of Japanese national pride against Western countries. Then she became a licensed Shinto priest at Kokugakuin University and received her Ph.D. at the University of London under the supervision of John Breen. During this time, she was sponsored by Meiji Jingū through the introduction of Abe Yoshiya 阿部美哉, President of Kokugakuin University at that time. Based on her nationalist orientation and on Kobori's influence, she was able to develop her academic career to match the internationalization strategy of Shinto as shaped through the western gaze. She has shown absolutely no sensitivity to the Asian experience of suffering under the pre-war Shinto polity.

Many non-Japanese scholars who study Shinto history have been persuaded to join this movement, attracted by the abundant financial support and rich documentation on Shinto that are reserved for the exclusive use of those affiliated with Shinto organizations. Nowadays, it has thus become rare to find outspoken criticism of these organizations, as it was expressed by Antoni, whether by non-Japanese or Japanese, including even self-proclaimed Marxist historians and

7 Cited from ANTONI, 2001: 408.

8 Ibid.: 407.

critical scholars of religion.⁹ We cannot help but wonder how, given these circumstances of dependence, scholars of Shinto are able to maintain a posture of intellectual criticism. As we see it, they can safely historicize Shinto only as long as they stick to a discourse of the “discontinuity of continuity”, as opposed to an elucidation of the “continuity of discontinuity”. We have never seen a case where someone with such affiliations has studied the contemporary internationalizing movements of Shinto organizations, ISF, Meiji Jingu and Kokugakuin University, in terms of an ideological critique.

Is there really any academic freedom in the study of Shinto? Academic freedom only seems to be guaranteed as long as one does not criticize the implicit presuppositions of the internationalization of Shinto, i.e. the worship of the Japanese emperor and admiration of Japanese nationalism. Actually, the authors were originally asked by the Center for Japanese Religion, University of London SOAS, to write this review for their journal, but they subsequently asked us to eliminate all the critical references to ISF and Meiji Jingu in our essay, claiming that such references were tantamount to personal attacks on ISF and Meiji Jingu. Does it suggest any genuine academic freedom when one is barred from explicitly criticizing the close relationships between scholars and proselytizing organizations?

It is obvious when we read Breen and Teeuwen's new book that the books, which they reference, tend to be precisely writings by Shinto scholars affiliating themselves with ISF, Meiji Jingu, and Kokugakuin University. From ISF, the references are to Allan Grapard, Abe Ryuichi 阿部龍一 and Sonoda Minoru 園田稔, as well as to Breen and Teeuwen themselves and a few others; from Kokugakuin University, to Sakamoto Koremaru 阪本是丸, Okada Sōji 岡田莊司, Takeda Hideaki 武田秀章, Nishioka Kazuhiko 西岡和彦, Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝, and Endō Jun 遠藤潤; from Kōgakukan University 皇學館大學 of Ise, to Nitta Hitoshi 新田均; and in addition to Imaizumi Yoshiko's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation from Meiji Jingu.

On the other hand, there are several strands of research that remain conspicuously absent, especially the writings by scholars of religious studies, by Marxist historiographers, and from the fields of colonial and popular history. The significant works that criticized State Shinto, like those by Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良, Koyasu Nobukuni 子安宣邦, Yasumaru Yoshio 安丸良夫, Aka-

9 See the following website, which lists several Japanese scholars' names of Shinto history who are not Shintoists, and who are committing themselves to a project funded by Meiji Jingu: <http://www.kokugakuin.ac.jp/event/ken06_221023.html> (visited January 14 2013).

zawa Shirō 赤澤史朗, Morioka Kiyomi 森岡清美, Takahashi Tetsuya 高橋哲哉, Azegami Naoki 畔上直樹, Sakano Tōru 坂野徹, Inoue Hiroshi 井上寛司, Shimazono Susumu 島藺進, Klaus Antoni, and Harry Harootunian, definitively deserve the attention of everyone interested in the history of modern Shinto. Special mention should be made of Murakami's epoch-making book *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 (State Shinto) published in 1970, which was the academic foundation from which the postwar debate on State Shinto started. Following Murakami's work, Yasumaru Yoshio's *Kamigami no Meiji isshin* 神々の明治維新 (Meiji Restoration of Japanese Gods and Goddesses) appeared in 1979, describing the process of establishing freedom of religion as the distinct path of Japanese modernity. Then Akazawa Shirō's *Kindai Nihon no shisō dōin to shūkyō* 近代日本の思想動員と宗教統制 (Ideological Control and Regimentation of Religions in Modern Japan) was published in 1985, exploring the historical realities of the State Shinto system in the 1920s–1930s.¹⁰ All three, Murakami, Yasumaru and Akazawa, are well known as leading scholars of Marxist historiography in postwar Japan, along with the American scholar Harootunian, who wrote a brilliant paper on “Memory, Mourning, and National Morality: Yasukuni Shrine and the Reunion of State and Religion in Postwar Japan” in 1990.¹¹

Breen and Teeuwen also make no reference to the significant works that treat State Shinto policy in the colonies, such as the writings on colonial Korea by Aono Masaaki 青野正明, Yamaguchi Kōji 山口公二, Jun Sung-Kon 全成坤, Kim Tae-Hoon 金泰勲, Han Sokki 韓哲曦, and on colonial Taiwan by Chai Jin-Tan 蔡錦堂 and Hsu Cheng Wu 徐正武¹². Furthermore, the readers of their book ought to counterbalance its information about sect Shinto (教派神道) and folk religion through Yasumaru Yoshio's monograph on the founder of Ōmoto-kyō, *Deguchi Nao* 出口なお, Katsurajima Nobuhiro's 桂島宣弘 *Shisōshi no jūkyū seiki* 思想史の十九世紀 (Nineteenth Century in Japanese Intellectual History), and Kawamura Minato's 川村湊 *Daitōa minzokugaku no kyojitsu* 大東亜民俗学の虚実 (Truth and Falsehood of ‘Great East Asian Folklore’).¹³ Concerning ancient to early modern history, classical studies like Tsuda Sōkichi's 津田左右吉 *Nihon koten no kenkyū* 日本古典の研究 (Study of Japanese Classics, 1948–1950) and Ishimoda Shō's 石母田正 *Nihon kodai kokka ron, dai ni bu* 日本古代国家論、第二部 (State Theory of Ancient

10 MURAKAMI, 1970; YASUMARU, 1979; AKAZAWA, 1985.

11 HAROOTUNIAN, 1999. Also see HAROOTUNIAN, 1988.

12 HSU, 2005.

13 YASUMARU, 1977; KATSURAJIMA, 1999; KAWAMURA, 1996.

Japan, Part II, 1973) prepared the foundation for a critical reading of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, texts which were written in the eighth century with a political reason in mind, but which later came to be artificially re-defined as the canon of State Shinto in the modern period.¹⁴

The reference gaps in this book indicate the authors' orientation, perhaps even unintentionally, towards focusing only on the history of Shrine Shinto that is affiliated closely with the Shinto shrine association world (*jinjakai* 神社界) while avoiding studies that critique the emperor system, which was the ideological core of modern Shinto and of the empire as it invaded East and South East Asia. At that time, sect Shinto and popular religion, which had different traditions, were distinguished from shrine Shinto in order to resist or appropriate the authority and power of State Shinto. However, is the history of Shinto solely that of shrine Shinto? We recall Antoni's former critique of Breen and Teeuwen's earlier work as "the propagation of apologetic viewpoints on Shinto, especially denying Shinto's inherent political nature."¹⁵

Of course, it would not be fair to generalize that Breen and Teeuwen's presentation of Shinto is representative of the work of all non-Japanese scholars. Chinese and Korean scholars can hardly accept simple, affirmative descriptions of the history of shrine Shinto because of their memory of being invaded by the Japanese empire. In the West, some German scholars of Japanese studies like Antoni find it hard to work harmoniously with the Shinto Shrine Association because of their memory of Nazism, which praised Aryan mythology and led to the creation of extermination camps. Neo-fascism is certainly not the agenda of Breen and Teeuwen, who are in fact quite critical about the nationalist interpretation of Shinto as an unchanging core of the Japanese nation. But we find it of utmost importance to urge people to consider the dark side of ideologies like religion, which have a history of killing people and forcing them to obey, and their volume is lacking in this respect. For us there seems to be an alternate direction in the study of Shinto, which involves rethinking the existence of others who were injured by the propagation of Shinto. At the very least, Japanese Shintoists, if they truly desire the internationalization of Shinto, have to consider the Asian readers who have experienced being colonized by the Japanese empire. For many East Asians, Shinto is not an exotic tradition meant only for the eyes of people who have had no tangled relationship with Japanese society but rather a concrete political product – at least in the modern globalizing context.

14 TSUDA, 1948–1950; ISHIMODA, 1973.

15 ANTONI, 2001: 408.

Nowadays some conservative native elites in Japan want to have their particular way of creating their identity recognized by foreigners as a national religion called “Shinto”. They argue that the particularity of Japanese Shinto was never mingled with other national essences; even its mixture with Buddhism is interpreted as a “syncretism”, which presumes a pure origin of Shinto at the beginning of their history (Breen and Teeuwen call this “pre-Shinto”). The current “internationalization” movement of Shinto intends to elevate such particularistic discourse by securing international recognition for it. In this discourse, foreigners eternally remain outsiders, set over against the Japanese who are the insiders, because each side belongs to a different national religion and culture. As long as foreign scholars of Shinto maintain their position as outsiders of a kind of Shinto treated as the Japanese national religion, they can also keep the appearance of a neutral position as objective observers, who are not participating or involved in the Japanese context. Yet although there is no conception of them as participating or involved observers, actually statements made from their position as allegedly neutral observers result in some kind of political effect, which is none other than the “politics of de-politicization” of Shinto as the national religion.

We wonder: is this the best way to create our human conversation? Is the best approach really to homogenize a national identity based on Shinto in a manner that affirmatively corresponds to what Japanese conservatives expect? On the contrary, we think a more productive way of communicating would be to heterogenize national identity, not least through the intervention of critical statements by non-Japanese. As Benedict Anderson showed in his epoch-making book *Imagined Communities*, the notion of nation was an invention in Western modernity, alongside the notion of imperialism.¹⁶ In this sense, Shinto, whether it is defined as a national or an imperial religion, should also be thought of as an invented category. This invented characteristic of Shinto was already pointed out by Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 in the 1940s and reemphasized by Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄 in the 1970s.¹⁷ Breen and Teeuwen in many passages even seem to share this standpoint about Shinto. Actually their statement, “Shinto, in our view, appears not as the unchanging core of Japan’s national essence,” (p. 228) sums up their attitude toward Shinto; implicitly following Kuroda, they coin the interesting term “historical processes of ‘Shintoization’”. Using this idea, they are able to refute the idea of “the unchanging core of Japan’s national

16 ANDERSON, 2006 (1983).

17 TSUDA, 1949; KURODA, 1995. Among the papers of Kuroda translated into English, “Shinto in the history of Japanese Religion” best represents his view on this matter (KURODA, 1981).

essence” by referring to “pre-Shinto”. Thus their book does sustain a very useful point, that of understanding Shinto in terms of the historical perspective of the notion of nation. Breen and Teeuwen also seem to recognize that history is made up of the two elements “continuity” and “discontinuity”. The present challenge, however, is how to connect the two elements, in order to respond to the question of whether history is the “continuity of discontinuity” or instead the “discontinuity of continuity”. These are not the same. If we think Shinto is the “discontinuity of continuity”, a change occurs on the surface of “the unchanging core”. On the other hand, if Shinto is considered as the “continuity of discontinuity”, the continuity is just a singular illusory point, situated amidst a discontinuity, which denies the existence of an “unchanging core”. To the extent that this book takes up the former position, the meaning of “Shintoization” (p. ix) becomes the awakening process of the Shinto tradition from “pre-Shinto”, which works against the authors’ critical intention of asserting the historical character of Shinto. Breen and Teeuwen do criticize the National Association of Shrines (神社本庁) and Yasukuni Shrine (靖国神社), which, they say, “idealize Shinto in its prewar, state-sponsored guise” (p. 119). Almost all Japanese critical intellectuals seem to agree on this point regarding the violation of the separation of the State and religion, although conservative Shintoists tend to oppose separation. “Shinto in its prewar” form, however, did not only have a “state-sponsored guise” but was also the symbol of imperialism. Breen and Teeuwen use the term “imperial” to refer to the royal family. But “imperial” should be understood as referring to the whole empire, which was the fundamental perspective of prewar Shinto. In that era Shinto shrines first expanded to the colonized areas of East Asia and then to the South East under the banner of the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

The concept of national religion only came into existence with the modern period, where nations first emerged, and likewise Shinto as a national religion is merely the discursive product of modernity. At the same time, modernity is the period not only of the nation-state but also of imperialism, and again prewar Japan is no exception. The theory of Shinto as imperial ideology goes back to the very beginnings of Japanese modernity, at least to Kume Kunitake’s 久米邦武 paper “Shintō wa saiten no kozoku 神道は祭天の古俗” (Shinto as an Ancient Cult of Worshipping the Sky) in the middle of Meiji period, which was followed up by Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍蔵 and Kakei Katsuhiko’s 笈克彦 works in the 1910s–1940s. All three scholars, especially Torii and Kakei, were professors at Tokyo Imperial University and had great influence not only on the Japanese mainland but also in her colonies Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria. Yet

simultaneously the identity of Shinto was unavoidably articulated by the interaction between the Japanese homeland and its colonies. As is clearly seen in the writings of the Korean scholar Choi Nam-sun 崔南善¹⁸, Shinto was constantly exposed to the dangerous possibility of appropriation and subversion because the framework supported the civil right of non-Japanese nations (the colonized) throughout the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere (*Daitōa kyōeiken* 大東亜共栄圏) to counter the Japanese nation (the colonizer) by appealing to the “universal” notion of Shinto.

Consequently, during the prewar and wartime periods, Shinto always oscillated between being a national religion and a more open-ended “imperial” religion. In the latter sense, Shinto would be understood as a transnational religion, not exactly an international religion, but an imperial religion that transgresses national boundaries. In the former sense, it would strive to be a national religion, with a “desire” to draw its national boundary clearly. Only after the defeat of Asian Pacific War were these two poles unified into the national discourse of Shinto. Putting Shinto in such a comprehensive critical perspective has the potential to help the Japanese exit from a narcissistic community preoccupied with self-praise. Under the contemporary globalizing situation, what study of Shinto needs to do is not to “internationalize” Shinto with the goal of supporting Japanese particularism, but to *transnationalize* it, thus transforming Japan’s presumed homogeneous subjectivity into a consciously heterogeneous one. From this perspective it is particularly important to study the phase of the discourse of Shinto as an imperial or world religion, which flourished from the middle of Meiji period to the end of Asian Pacific War. This prewar discourse unquestionably functioned as a form of violence that forced non-Japanese in East or South East Asia to worship the Japanese imperial family, the symbol of the Japanese empire, through the cult of Shinto shrines, and yet this discourse always exposed Japanese particularism to subversion and appropriation by other religious or cultural traditions that were invaded and colonized by the Japanese empire. Shedding light on the trajectory of this earlier imperial discourse of Shinto enables rethinking both the dangers and the possibilities of universalism/universality in bridging between peoples, and furthermore it assists in deconstructing the notion of a “we”, which the practice and studies of modern Shinto have been committed to construing as a substantial entity.

18 SHIM, 2012; JUN, 2005.

In order to transnationalize Shinto, we put forward two key areas for reexamination: first, the Emperor system, and second, the concept of “religion”. The relationship of Shinto with the Emperor system is an unavoidable topic if one wishes to define Shinto as the core essence of the modern Japanese state. This is because modern, re-invented Shinto was tied strongly to the Emperor system, a fact that is prototypically expressed in institutions such as the Meiji and Ise shrines. The practice of people praying to gods and goddesses related to the imperial family in their everyday life was given the political connotation of supporting the Emperor as the symbol of the Japanese nation or empire, since in modern Shinto, discourse on all kinds of gods and goddesses was redefined in terms of their relation to the history of the Japanese imperial family. If scholars of Shinto interpret its history as the continuity of discontinuity, they will finally be able to confront the idea of the Japanese Emperor system, which insists on an eternal “continuity” through the blood-ties of the Japanese imperial family, which allegedly transcend any surface changes.

Secondly, we propose to pay close attention to the arguments concerning the doctrine that Shinto shrines were *not* religious institutions, a fundamental doctrine in modern Shinto discourse that has recently been taken up by several Japanese scholars. Although the initial proponents of this doctrine explicitly stated that they were “adopting the Western concept of ‘religion’”, they insisted that “Shinto” was not and never should be a member of that category (p.10). However, modern Shinto has always been subject to the strong influence of the Protestant concept of “religion”, ever since Japanese society opened to the West. The discourse of Shinto, which defined it not as religion but rather as morality was a reaction created by seeking to avoid the competition of Shinto with Christianity; in contrast to Buddhism and the so-called “new religions”, which were all freely defined as “religion”.

Subsequently the whole population of the Japanese empire had to worship the Japanese emperor as a public duty, regardless of what religion they believed in personally. At the same time, native Japanese elites knew well that Shinto could not, and should not, be simply reduced to the Protestant concept of “religion”, for Shinto has rooted itself into the life of ordinary people not only through discursive doctrine, which Protestantism mainly focuses on, but also through the bodily practice of Shinto rituals. Shimazono Susumu’s 島蘭進 book *Kokka shintō to Nihonjin* 国家神道と日本人 (State Shinto and the Japanese), as well as Inoue Hiroshi’s 井上寛司 book *Nihon no jinja to “shintō”* 日

本の神社と「神道」(Shrines in Japan and the Concept of “Shinto”) provide important material in this respect.¹⁹

As Shimazono suggests (following Talal Asad’s argument²⁰), when we problematize the Western concept of “religion”, even the idea of the separation of state and religion becomes untenable, because this modern idea itself derived from a specific concept of “religion” as belonging to the private sphere, in contradistinction to “politics”, which belonged to the public sphere. In this sense, the desire of the National Association of Shrines and of Yasukuni Shrine who “idealize Shinto in its prewar, state-sponsored guise” can even be comprehended positively: we may appreciate it as a mode of resistance against non-Westerners, which is critical of the privatized concept of “religion”. A critical analysis of the relationship of Shinto with the concept of “religion” illuminates the limitation of the idea of the separation of state and religion in establishing a “secular” neutral space in modern society. The modern concepts of “Shinto” as well as of “Shinto shrines” are, as Inoue Hiroshi explains, evidently a historical product that was a secondary reaction to the concept of “religion”. This critique, however, does not imply affirming the discourse of Shinto as public religion. The whole dichotomy of the private and the public itself is a historical product of modernity that is to be dislocated along with that of secular and religious.

Before the modern period, Shinto had a very unclear and pluralized shape making it indistinguishable from Buddhism and Confucianism – as Breen and Teeuwen repeatedly point out. Shinto has never been homogenous and harmonious regardless of any doctrinal insistence to the contrary. This character may lead us to think of the possibility of a Shinto “critical regionalism” with “heterogeneity”, a potentiality which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak insists on,²¹ which could allow Shinto’s coexistence with others through the deconstruction of the emperor’s political and religious power. Certainly, we cannot simply dismiss Shinto as nothing but a political ideology, for it provides a beneficial idea of “homeliness” tying in with everyday life to many people living in Japan. On the other hand, people committed to Shinto cannot be indulged in their narcissistic fantasy of national identity at the cost of neglecting the historical suffering of so many Asian Others, which Shinto had a hand in causing. So we submit that in the future, scholars of Shinto, whether they are Japanese or non-Japanese, Shintoist or non-Shintoist, could make their greatest contribution by deconstructing,

19 SHIMAZONO, 2010; INOUE, 2006.

20 ASAD, 1993 (Chapter 1 and 2).

21 SPIVAK, 2008 (Chapter 3).

without either dismissing or praising, the homogenized identity of Shinto, in order to enact a new form of heterogeneous subjectivity for people in Japan.

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