

5-2014

Shinto: An Experience of Being at Home in the World With Nature and With Others

Marcus Evans

Western Kentucky University, marcus.evans@topper.wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses>

 Part of the [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Evans, Marcus, "Shinto: An Experience of Being at Home in the World With Nature and With Others" (2014). *Masters Theses & Specialist Projects*. Paper 1343.

<http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/1343>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

SHINTO: AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING AT HOME IN THE WORLD WITH
NATURE AND WITH OTHERS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department Philosophy & Religion
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

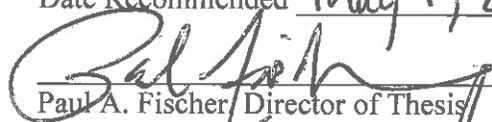
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

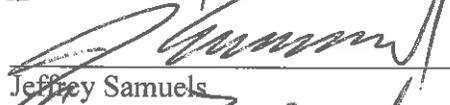
By
Marcus Evans

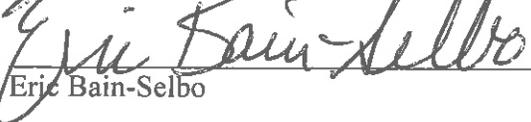
May 2014

SHINTO: AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING AT HOME IN THE WORLD WITH
NATURE AND WITH OTHERS

Date Recommended May 1, 2014


Paul A. Fischer / Director of Thesis


Jeffrey Samuels


Eric Bain-Selbo

 5-14-14
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research Date

To my companion Chie Tanaka who, throughout this project, provided me unconditional
friendship and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Were it not for the many people who offered their encouragement and advice, then neither this project nor my career in graduate school would have been successful. I would like to thank Dr. Jeffrey Samuels and Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo who encouraged me to pursue graduate studies, and who demonstrated faith in my academic capabilities even when I demonstrated little faith in myself. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Fischer who supervised most of my graduate research, including this thesis, and from whom I learned the significance of freedom and flexibility—following one’s bliss and being happy—in the processes of researching, writing, and learning. I also am grateful to Dr. Audrey Anton and Ms. Paula Williams, who frequently endured my rants about my insecurities and frustrations; they both have been consistent sources of encouragement and inspiration. I would like to thank Dr. Lindsey Powell, who sadly passed away before the submission of this thesis, for being a reader on my thesis committee along with Dr. Fischer and Dr. Samuels. Though I never had a course with Dr. Powell, there were a few informal conversations during which he revived my energy and fascination by his knowledge and excitement about Japanese culture and Shinto. Lastly, I would like to thank my graduate colleagues and friends (Jonathan Spence, Michelle Sorrels, William Simpson, and Terry Shoemaker) with whom I entered into the program. Not only did they assist me in the editing and peer review process, but they also made my graduate career a pleasant and memorable experience. Space will not permit me to name all the other people, inside and outside Western Kentucky University, who supported me throughout my graduate experience. Thanks to you all.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Affective and Ontological Understandings of Kami.....	13
Chapter 2: Natural Aesthetics and Atmosphere of Shinto Shrines.....	35
Chapter 3: Ecstasy and Effervescence of Matsuri	55
Chapter 4: Experiencing Shinto and Approaching Religion Existentially	78
Bibliography	85

SHINTO: AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING AT HOME IN THE WORLD WITH
NATURE AND WITH OTHERS

Marcus Evans

May 2014

90 Pages

Directed by: Paul Fischer, Jeffrey Samuels, and Eric Bain-Selbo

Department of Philosophy & Religion

Western Kentucky University

This study discloses Shinto's experiential and existential significance and aims to articulate Shinto's sacred objective. It shows that Shinto, by way of experience, communicates being in the world with nature and with others as a sacred objective. This suggests that Shinto, in communicating its objective, appeals to the emotions more so than to the intellect; and that Shinto's sacred objective does not transcend the natural world of both nature and everyday affairs.

This study pursues this goal by showing the experiential and existential dimensions of the three primary features of Shinto: it shows how *kami* (or *kami*-ness) is thought of as an awe producing quality of being/s that are mostly associated with the natural world; how Shinto shrines' aesthetics and atmosphere are thought to evoke a feeling of the natural world's sacredness; and how festivals are thought to be ecstatic and effervescent occasions that regenerate an affirmation of being in the world with others.

Though this study does not employ a strict methodological approach—insofar as the conclusions herein are based primarily on literature review—it was motivated by an existential outlook on the study of religion and assumes that the term “religion” refers primarily to an existential phenomenon that pertains not necessarily to socio-historical institutions but to a *way of being* in the world.

Introduction

One of the most interesting aspects of a religion is the way in which it orients human beings in the world. Without restricting the kinds of religions to two exclusive categories, one may say that some religions orient human beings in the world with the anticipation of an ongoing existence (an afterlife) or a communion with something beyond the world. Such religions condone *belief* in a transcendent objective. Other religions, however, orient human beings in the world with no (or relatively little) anticipation of something transcendent. In such cases, a religion condones affirmation of living in the world of one's actual existence. Shinto, the topic of discussion here, is a religion of the latter kind.

Shinto, however, is not a religion in any conventional sense, insofar as it does not demand conversion, commitment to a creed, or affirmation of belief. Shinto has no central teacher, founder, or holy book. And, with the exception of Shinto priests and certain Japanese thinkers, people typically do not identify themselves as "believers" of the Shinto faith or as Shintoists; people typically do not become Shintoist as if going from one religious faith (or no religious faith) to another. Rather, Shinto appears to exist primarily as a facet of Japan's cultural expression in terms of shrines, rituals, and festivals.

In this study, I aim to illuminate Shinto's sacred objective and how Shinto communicates that objective. But before I posit what that objective is, I will comment upon two general outlooks on Shinto. These outlooks are not directly opposed to each other by any logical necessity, but they allow for two approaches to Shinto that shapes how Shinto is presented in contemporary academia. The first outlook is primarily

historical, whereas the second is phenomenological and existential. The historical outlook appears to be dominant within the contemporary discussion of Shinto. However, in light of what I perceive to be the fundamental significance of religion, the second outlook is relevant to the overall approach and aim in this study. I will discuss the second outlook in the context of Mircea Eliade and his insight on the discipline of the phenomenology or history of religions.

Historical Outlook on Shinto

The historical approach developed primarily in response to the fabrications of Japanese nationalism and imperialism in the early 20th century. It aims to deconstruct the traditional conception of Shinto history and reconstruct what Shinto “really” was, and then became, in light of the events preceding and following Japan’s restoration of imperial rule (Meiji Restoration) in 1868.¹ Prior to the restoration, Japan underwent an intellectual current in which Japanese scholars attempted to extract a Japanese essence (e.g., a pure Shinto) that was unadulterated by traditional influences (e.g. Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) from China. After the restoration, up until the end of World War II, some Japanese nationalists and imperialists capitalized upon the idea that, since ancient times, a so-called pure-Shinto—which consists of the Japanese people’s reverence for a long line of emperors descending from the sun goddess (Ama-terasu-omikami)—was the indigenous religion of the Japanese people. Looking back to ancient times (7th to 11th centuries CE.), nationalists and imperialists tried to re-unify matters of

¹ For a general discussion on Shinto and state affairs from the Meiji to the late 20th century, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State: 1868-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

government and worship.² Sometime shortly after the imperial restoration, ritual activity conducted at nationally recognized shrines were categorized as belonging to State Shinto. The activities performed around local shrines—to which different teachings, rituals, and founders were central—were identified as sectarian Shinto. Although this political dimension of Shinto nowadays may not ostensibly exist to those who perceive Shinto phenomena (e.g., shrine and festivals) on the surface, its by-product, the idea of an overarching Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan since ancient times, still persists. The historical approach challenges this idea by arguing that a so-called pure-Shinto tradition, as it is often presented today, is a merely a national and imperialist fabrication that legitimizes a political agenda.

Mark Teeuwen is an outspoken advocate of this outlook.³ According to Teeuwen, there was no unified pure-Shinto tradition that we can speak of in ancient Japan. Instead, based on ancient provincial legends and stories, Japan's ancient landscape consisted probably of particular *kami* cults and shrine rites that varied by locale. Teeuwen notes that “The crux of the matter is that *kami* shrines, myths, and rituals are a great deal older than their conceptualization as components of Shinto. Therefore, the only way to delve into the history of these shrines, myths, and rituals is by laying the concept of Shinto aside, at least at the start.”⁴

² Documentation that reflects this early state of affairs is found in the *Engi-Shiki* (Procedures of the Engi Era, 927 CE.), which shows the early imperial court's efforts to regulate the ritual, economic, and national affairs of at least 2,861 shrines and their respective *kami*. For a translation of the first ten books of the *Engi-Shiki* see Felicia G. Bock, trans., *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books I-V* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970) and *Books VI-X* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972).

³ John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21. For other historical reevaluations of Shinto, see John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, “Shinto Past and Present,” in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Ito Satoshi, Endo Jun, and Mori Mizue, *Shinto: A Short History*, trans. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, and ed. Inoue Nobutaka (London/New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Mark Teeuwen and Bernhard Scheid, “Tracing Shinto in the History of Kami Worship,” *Japanese Journal*

Teeuwen claims that what we may typically identify as ancient Shinto—the national system of shrines and rites that developed to its apex around the 10th century CE—was actually not at all an overarching tradition named Shinto. Rather, it was a national *kami* cult (*jingi* cult, 神祇), consisting of the imperial court, the Office of Kami Affairs, and the Office of Administration. In an effort to consolidate its power, this national cult regulated shrines and *kami* worship throughout Japan under the so-called rites and edicts of *kami* (*jingiryō*, 神祇令).⁵ Furthermore, Teeuwen says, the *jingi* cult was influenced significantly by the ritual practices and philosophies from China. Even when a so-called tradition of “Shinto” began theoretically to take shape in the 12th to 13th centuries around the Ise Shrines, it was heavily influenced by Buddhist, Daoist, and Yin Yang thought, and was far from being a pure Shinto tradition.⁶

The primary concern that this historical outlook on Shinto poses here is: if what we think about Shinto today is merely a fabrication of modern nationalists and imperialists, then does one implicitly contribute to a political agenda, if one interprets Shinto primarily through the lens of what it has become in the years following the imperial restoration? How much suspicion of contemporary Shinto should one maintain in light of its historical realities and its former national associations? As Wilhelmus Creemers says, “The emphasis given to certain aspects of so-called pure Shinto before and after the Meiji Restoration (1868) has produced many interpretations and scholarly

of Religious Studies 29, no. 3 and 4 (Fall, 2002), 195-207; and Kuroda Toshio, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” trans. James C. Dobbins and Suzanne Gay, in *Journal of Japanese Religion* 7, no. 1 (Winter, 1981), 1-21.

⁵ Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36-46. Elsewhere, Teeuwen argues that the “concept” of Shinto did not develop until about the 13th to the 14th century CE. Prior to this time, the term “Shinto” was probably pronounced as “jindo,” a term which referred to no religious tradition but simply to “kami” or “things that pertain to kami” in opposition to Buddhist deities or Buddhism. See Mark Teeuwen, “From Jindo to Shinto: A Concept takes Shape,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (Fall, 2002), 233-263.

treatises on Shinto. In view of the bias underlying many such interpretations and treatises, it is very difficult to decide whether or not they can be accepted as reliable sources of information.”⁷

Creemers’ suspicion is not without justification. I am aware of the fact that what Shinto is today, is not necessarily what it was in the past. I also have no problem acknowledging that Shinto was used, throughout history, as a political instrument. But this emphasis on Shinto’s historicity, especially its political dimension, may misleadingly give the impression that a discussion of Shinto, solely from the historical perspective, has greater importance than any alternative consideration of the subject. Shinto today may have an underlying significance, relative to which its politics and history are only secondary or subtle.

John Nelson, in his ethnographic study of the Kamo shrine in Kyoto, notes that the Shrine’s precinct is laden with political significance, but Nelson shows that this place today is open “to a variety of interpretations” in light of the fact that there is no serious attempt among Shinto priests to educate the precinct’s visitors regarding the history of the shrine or even the object of its enshrinement.⁸ In other words, since the shrine is not a center where people are educated about its historical significance—in fact, as Nelson points out, many of the priests themselves may not be aware of the shrine’s history and politics—the importance of the shrine’s history and politics may not be a conscious matter for those who visit the shrine on their own terms. If such a phenomenon at Kamo is applied to Shinto in general, then it would entail that regardless of whether Shinto is a

⁷ Wilhelmus H. M. Creemers, *Shrine Shinto After World War II* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 5.

⁸ John K. Nelson, *Enduring Identities: the Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 243.

modern fabrication, it does not obstruct any interpretation of Shinto beyond the confinement of its historicity.

Phenomenological and Existential Outlook on Shinto

The second outlook on Shinto is, to some degree, ahistorical. It acknowledges Shinto's historical and political circumstances, but its primary aim is not to unravel the complexities and contradictions of Shinto's role throughout history as a religious institution. Rather, it is ultimately concerned with illuminating the significance of the Shinto phenomenon as it relates to human existence. This outlook is closely akin to Mircea Eliade's perspective on the goal of religious studies, the insights of which will be useful to cite here.

In order to understand Eliade's prospectus for religious studies, it is essential to note how he understands the term "religion." Eliade perceives the term "religion" as problematic in light of the theistic weight that it carries in the West. He says that insofar as we do not understand the term "religion" to pertain necessarily to belief in god/s, then "religion" may be used to refer generally to the human experience of the sacred.⁹ Here, the sacred does not refer to a substantial entity in itself (e.g., a god) but rather to a quality of something/s when it discloses itself as "real, powerful, rich, and meaningful."¹⁰ Eliade notes that to experience the sacred is to experience the world in such a way other than a

⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), i.

¹⁰ Ibid. To propose the objective existence of "the sacred" as a substance or being-in-itself would require that I liken "the sacred" to a Platonic "form" and try to logically deduce its essence (or definition). In such a case, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to deduce a sound definition of "sacred." In this study, I think of "the sacred" adjectively, that is, in reference to the quality of a phenomenon. Although Eliade is sometimes confusing on how he understands "the sacred" (i.e. whether "the sacred" is an extant thing or simply a quality of things), I prefer his description of it as one of two "modes of being in the world" or as "two existential situations" of the "*sacred* and *profane*." See Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Inc., 1987), 14-15.

sequence of “meaningless appearances and disappearances.”¹¹ In light of this, religion does not necessarily refer to socio-historical institutions, central to which may be deities and creedal commitments, but rather to an existential disposition of human beings (*homo religiosus*), who desire to evade the *angst* of mere existence (bare facticity and temporality) in order to experience being in the world sacredly, meaningfully, and affirmatively.¹²

Thus, with regard to the study of religion, Eliade says that “the task of the historian of religions is not completed when he has succeeded in reconstructing the chronological sequence of a religion or has brought out its social, economic, and political contexts.”¹³ Though “There is no such thing as a ‘pure’ religious datum, outside of history,” religious phenomena are not always reducible to the historic (social, political, and economic) contexts in which they are conditioned.¹⁴ Eliade claims that “the historian of religions is in a position to grasp the permanence of what has been called man’s specific existential situation of ‘being in the world,’ for the experience of the sacred is its correlate.”¹⁵ In other words, the historian of religion may disclose not only historic contexts of religious phenomena, but the ways in which human beings, because of their existential disposition, orient themselves religiously in the world, making their experience of the world a sacred and meaningful matter. This outlook within the context of religious studies is named the history or phenomenology of religion.

¹¹ Eliade, *Quest*, i.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8-9. Eliade discusses the issue of temporality best in *The Myth of Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 141-162.

¹³ Eliade, *Quest*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Only a few scholars within the discipline of religion approach Japanese religious phenomena and Shinto in this respect. Joseph Kitagawa, in his work on Japanese religious history, notes that he “approach[es] Japanese religion historically, not only in the sense of studying its involvement in the social and political life of the nation in various historic periods, but also to show how the universal phenomenon of religion has unfolded itself in the drama of Japanese history.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, he clarifies that this approach entails disclosing the “inner logic” of Japanese religious structures, myths, and rituals throughout Japan’s history.¹⁷ Hirai Naofusa also takes this approach in his historical study on Shinto’s conception of man in order to unveil “the meaning of life” for Shinto in various historical *and* “existential” situations.¹⁸

There are other authors who, though not in the discipline of religion, go beyond Shinto’s historical conditions to unveil Shinto’s existential significance. Aware of Shinto’s political dimensions, they also entertain ideas of what Shinto can mean for people today. To cite a few, Joseph W.T. Mason, writing during the apex of Japanese ultra-nationalism in the early 20th century, boldly says that “Shinto is neither a political expedient nor a prop for any special form of administration. Attempts to use it such-wise cannot confine Shinto, which is universal in its spiritual concepts.”¹⁹ Mason analyzes Shinto in light of Henri Bergson’s philosophy of a “creative impetus” underlying all natural phenomena, and claims that Shinto is reflective of humanity’s most basic intuition that all phenomena is connected and evolves from a spiritual source.

¹⁶ Joseph Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), 3.

¹⁷ Joseph Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 35.

¹⁸ Hirai Naofusa, “The Concept of Man in Shinto” (MA Thesis/Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1954), 8.

¹⁹ Joseph W. T. Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto: The Primeval Foundation of Creative Spirit in Modern Japan* (1935; repr., Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1967), 9.

Thomas Kasulis, a contemporary historian of Japanese philosophy, says that Shinto in modern times presents us with two kinds of nostalgia: one that lends “authority to state control,” and another that “beckons us back to a form of connectedness that has been all but erased.”²⁰ According to Kasulis, Shinto has a unique way of facilitating a feeling of intimacy with our surrounding environs (especially nature). In a similar respect, the philosopher Robert Carter notes that Shinto is Japan’s “*Weltanschauung*,” by which he does not mean “the codified set of regulations and dogmas propounded in the nineteenth century under the title of State Shinto.”²¹ Rather, it refers to the worldview of an early agrarian culture, which can provide us an alternative model to help facilitate a feeling of “belonging in the world.”²² Again, each of these authors attempts in his own way to illuminate what he perceives to be the existential significance of Shinto aside from its historical and political realities.

Objective of this Study

As stated above, this second outlook is the one which I adopt. I prefer this outlook, because I understand religion to be an existential phenomenon, a disposition of being human. Religion does not pertain only and necessarily to socio-historical institutions, but also (perhaps first and foremost) to a *way of being*, in terms of how human beings relate to the world and evade the angst of existence in order to remain rooted affirmatively (or religiously) in the world. Thus, the overall objective of this study is not to illuminate the complexities of Shinto’s history and politics, but rather to disclose

²⁰ Thomas Kasulis, *Shinto: The Way Home*, Dimensions of Asian Spirituality Series (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 170.

²¹ Robert Carter, “The Significance of Shintoism for Japanese Ethics,” in *Encounter with Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 36.

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

what I perceive to be Shinto's existential significance: that is, how Shinto aims to root individuals in the world. Specifically, I aim to show that *Shinto, by way of experience, communicates being in the world with nature and with others as a sacred objective.*

This aim entails first, that Shinto, in communicating its sacred objective, appeals to the emotions more so than to the intellect. Shinto's sacred objective does not become the objective of others by way of discursive argumentation but by way of experience, whether it is through the aesthetics of nature or communal effervescence. Secondly, though every religion is concerned with our existential relationship to the world in which we find ourselves, Shinto's uniqueness resides in the fact that the affirmation of being in the world itself *is* the objective. Shinto's sacred objective does not transcend the natural world (i.e. the world of nature and of everyday affairs).

Organization of this Study

This study is organized thematically into three chapters pertaining to three constituents of Shinto: *kami* (神), Shinto shrines (*jinja*, 神社) and festivals (*matsuri*, 祭). I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of each theme, since due to the sheer plethora of *kami*, shrines, and festivals, each topic alone can be an ambitious self-contained study. But in each chapter, I discuss the emotional and existential dimensions of *kami*, shrines, and festivals by utilizing various sources from Shinto priests, scholars of Shinto (who may or may not be Shintoists), historians of Japanese philosophy and religion, and scholars of Japanese architecture and arts. Of course, some of these sources will have their relevance to particular chapters only.

The first chapter on *kami* is concerned with the concepts of god, the divine, and the sacred in Shinto. The indispensability of *kami* to Shinto is inherent in the word “Shinto” itself: *shin* (*kami*, 神) and *to* (*michi*, way, 道) is typically translated as “the *kami* way” or “way of the *kami*.” Here, I will show how *kami* (or *kami*-ness) is thought of as an awe producing quality of beings that are mostly associated with the natural world. Overall, this chapter will show that though *kami* may refer to discrete entities, *kami* is better understood as the *kami*-ness of things, in the natural world, based on the experiences thereof. It should also be noted that despite *kami*’s importance, it is the most subtle aspect of Shinto, and the chapters that follow are concerned with more ostensible features of Shinto. Assuming that one visits Japan and knows nothing about Japanese religious history or culture, one’s introduction to Shinto may begin with the perception of shrines and festivals. One’s understanding of *kami* may come after the fact of one’s experience of the latter two.

The chapter on *kami* is supplemented by the second chapter on Shinto shrines. This chapter first elaborates upon the de-emphasis of both proselytization and theological/doctrinal propagation among Shinto priests and shrine centers. Then, it discusses Shinto shrines’ aesthetics and atmosphere as a representation of the natural world’s sacredness. This chapter shows how Shinto shrines are thought to evoke a feeling of being at home in the natural world.

The third chapter, on Shinto festivals, deviates from the previous two in that the emphasis is no longer on the features of nature (e.g., mountains, groves, etc.) but rather on the natural world of *being with others*. Here, I touch upon the communal aspect of festivals but emphasize the orgiastic and ecstatic atmosphere with which festivals may be

associated. One will see how festivals, on the threshold of sacredness and profaneness, are thought to re-invigorate human beings, revitalizing the sacredness of being in the world with others.

In the fourth chapter, I conclude by reflecting on the significance of “experience” in the phenomena of Shinto (and religion) in light of Rudolf Otto’s conception of the religious experience. Furthermore, I comment upon the implications of this study as a motivation for thinking about existential phenomenology as a suitable approach to the study of religion. I do not offer technical details about methodological strategies in employing such an approach—in fact, I do not strictly employ such an approach in this study insofar as the conclusions herein, though existentially motivated, are based primarily on literature review—but I offer some reflection on what I anticipate to be the primary concerns of an “existential phenomenology of religions.”

Chapter 1: Affective and Ontological Understandings of *Kami*

Japan is sometimes referred to as the land of “eight million *kami*.” Tasuku Harada and Sokyo Ono, early 20th century commentators on Japanese religions, describe several kinds of *kami*. Harada says that there are mythological *kami*, who are described in Japanese classical literature; “patriots and heroes,” who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of their community or country; and various “phenomena and objects of nature” that may generate a feeling of reverence.²³ Ono says that “*kami*” is an honorific term for “noble [and] sacred spirits”²⁴ but also refers to “qualities of growth, fertility, and production” in addition to “guardian spirits of the land, occupations, and skills.”²⁵

But despite the descriptions provided above, Harada and Ono maintain that little importance has been given to the conceptual elaboration of *kami*. Harada says that in Japan’s history there has been an “absence of any serious attempt to define the character or attributes of *kami*. The Japanese mind in all ages has been quite content without definite conceptions [of *kami*].”²⁶ Instead, “*kami* should remain forever mysterious and incomprehensible.”²⁷ Ono says that though “the Japanese people themselves do not have a clear idea regarding the *kami*, they are aware of the *kami* intuitively at the depth of their consciousness and communicate with the *kami* directly without having formed an idea [of *kami*] conceptually or theologically.”²⁸ These perspectives are more or less corroborated by Floyd Ross who, in his work on Shinto, says that “when Western writers use the words god, deity, or God for *kami*, they are confusing Western ways of thinking with

²³ Tasuku Harada, *The Faith of Japan* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 31.

²⁴ Sokyo Ono and William P. Woodard, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1962), 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶ Harada, *Faith of Japan*, 46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Ono, *Kami Way*, 8.

Japanese ways of feeling.... If *kami* is to be understood in its fuller Shinto sense, it must be experienced in the context which lies beyond words or theological concepts.”²⁹

First, it is doubtful that *kami*, throughout Japan’s history, was understood without any theological preconceptions. Many scholars and Shinto priests, throughout history, attempted to explain theologically the nature of *kami*.³⁰ Secondly, contrary to Ross’s position, it is doubtful that people can know a concept (such as *kami*) prior to having prerequisite experiences and former conceptions of a similar kind from which that concept can be abstracted and nominalized.³¹ In other words, *kami* is not an innate idea that people come to understand by way of mystical intuition but is rather an abstraction that people come to understand by way of experience and discourse. But the fact that human beings possess prerequisite experiences and intellectual preconceptions that assist them in understanding the nature of *kami* does not reduce the significance that experience (or affectivity) has in relationship to things attributed *kami*-nature. When it comes to understanding *kami*, the role of experience and emotion is often accented.

It is the objective of this chapter to show that “*kami*” may be understood to qualify being/s that are primarily *in* and *of* the natural world whose significance is experienced rather than intellectually cognized. To elaborate, I intend to show how *kami* is understood from both emotional and existential (or ontological) perspectives. One will see that an emotional dimension is often associated with *kami*, insofar as *kami* are

²⁹ Floyd Ross, *Shinto: The Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 32.

³⁰ Some of these theologies were influenced by Buddhism, Daoism, Ying Yang thought (*Omyodo*), and Confucianism. For a collection of essays that deal specifically with the relationship between *kami* and Buddhist deities, see Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, eds., *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003).

³¹ I maintain an Aristotelian epistemological outlook, which entails that knowledge of concepts begins with the concrete experiences of particulars from which, by way of abstraction, generalizations (conceptions) are formed. In other words, I understand the concept of “cup” or “cup-ness” by way of abstracting from several experiences of particular cups. It is the same also with the concepts of *kami* and *kami*-ness.

frequently described as awe-inspiring, mysterious, or even dreadful beings—all of which may be characteristics of *kami*-ness. Furthermore, even though this *kami*-ness may qualify various deities, ancestors, and spirits who are discrete entities, it is primarily understood to qualify those beings in and of natural phenomena. It is not my intention to dismiss the significance of *kami* as discrete entities (ancestors, spirits, or mythological figures) but rather to emphasize *kami*-ness as a quality of being/s—and particularly those beings of nature—that evokes our emotions.

It should be disclosed that although some of the authors I cite below may posit the objective reality of *kami*, I avoid such propositions and maintain, especially for purposes of this chapter, that *kami*-ness is an existential modifier of beings both real and imagined. Here, I understand the term “*kami*” no differently from the term “sacred,” insofar as I perceive both of these terms to refer fundamentally to a quality of being/s and not necessarily to discrete beings in substance and essence.³² For me, the fact that *kami* can be nominally identified with concrete “beings” of nature, does not prove the objective existence of *kami* (or even the sacred). It simply shows how *kami* is understood to be rooted in and of the world of nature. In light of this basic psycho-ontological³³ understanding of *kami*, I infer that the experience of *kami*-like beings in the world is understood to have priority over the intellection of *kami* as discrete beings.

First, I will make apparent the relevance of those *kami* who are spoken of in Japan’s ancient mythologies. Then, using authors who vary from self-proclaimed Shintoists to scholars of Japanese religions and philosophy, I will give an overview of the

³² The only qualitative difference between the terms *kami* and sacred is that the former is unique to Shinto, having a multifunctional role within the history of Japan’s cultural repertoire.

³³ “Psycho-ontological” is a term I adapted from Joseph Spae who mentions specifically a “psychological ontology of the *kami*.” See Joseph Spae, *Shinto Man* (Tokyo: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1972), 42

reservations regarding the translation of *kami* as deity or god. Thereafter, utilizing the work of Daniel Holtom, I will show how Japanese authors have understood *kami* etymologically which, although linguistic in method, had emotional connotations. From there I will focus on the emotional aspect of *kami* by discussing the worldview of Motoori Norinaga, whose outlook of *kami* is paradigmatic in terms of how *kami* is generally understood in contemporary times. One will see that Motoori's description of *kami* demonstrates best how *kami* is understood as an affective quality of being/s. Furthermore, Motoori's description of *kami* will also serve as a pivot point, at which I will turn to show how *kami* has been understood ontologically as a quality of being/s primarily in and of the natural world.

***Kami* in Japanese Literature**

Japanese mythological literature from the 8th century CE provides some of the earliest references to *kami*. The *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712 CE.) begins its story with three primordial *kami* (Ame-no-mi-naka-nusi-no-kami, Taka-mi-musubi-no-kami, and Kami-musubi-no-kami) from which emanated the sky and the earth along with seven generations of following *kami*. In the seventh generation, a procreative couple (Izanagi-no-kami and Izanami-no-kami) created both the Japanese islands and several other *kami* that would inhabit both the heavens and earth. In reference to a time when *kami* were blatantly active in worldly affairs, this period in both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720 CE.) is referred to as the age of *kami*. During this time, several distinguished *kami*, such as Ama-terasu-omi-kami, Ninigi-no-mikoto (Ama-terasu-omi-kami's grandson), and a cohort of heavenly-*kami*, had a role in establishing

and legitimating the reign of an imperial lineage. Ama-terasu-omi-kami and the heavenly-*kami* commissioned Ningi-no-mikoto to usurp authority over the terrestrial domain which, at that time, was under the rule of earthly-*kami*.

Undoubtedly, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* are politically sensitive texts. They can be read not only as mythological explanations of the creation of Japan, but as literary depictions of historical events in which territories were subdued and subjugated by people who consolidated their power throughout Japan.³⁴ In this case, heavenly-*kami*, associated with the Imperial Court, appear to be political rationalizations that probably had little existential relevance to everyday Japanese folk at that time. In fact, I would maintain that mythological *kami* have little relevance to most Japanese people today. These mythological *kami*, far from being objects of devotion among the majority of ancient and present day Japanese, have their relevance mostly in the domain of literature if not in the consciousness of select priests, philosophers, or political propagandists. For this reason, this chapter is not concerned with the particular *kami* in the classical texts but rather with a more general conception of *kami*.

Issues Surrounding the Word “*Kami*”

Quite a few authors show their reservations about equating the term *kami* with the terms spirit, god or deity. There is uncertainty among scholars about whether the term *kami* carries the same conceptual weight of the latter three alternatives. Joseph Kitagawa says that the “ambiguous meaning of the term *kami* alone demands rigorous and multidimensional analysis and research.”³⁵ He states that “Its usual translation as ‘spirit’

³⁴ Mori Mizue, “Ancient and Classical Japan: the Dawn of Shinto,” in *Shinto: A Short History*, 12-13.

³⁵ Joseph Kitagawa, *Understanding Japanese Religion*, 36.

or ‘god’ is quite unsatisfactory and misleading.”³⁶ Robert Carter notes that translating *kami* as god “misses the mark in almost every way, and is more an overlay of Western assumptions (and theological requirements) on a very different tradition.”³⁷ Stuart D.B. Picken maintains that even though *kami* can be “translated into English in a variety of ways...the most inappropriate [translation]...is ‘god.’”³⁸ Picken suggests that terms such as “the divine” and “the mysterious are better candidates because they are less specific in the imagery they generate, particularly to Western observers.”³⁹

Joseph W.T. Mason, an early 20th century writer and sympathizer with Shinto, says that the term “*kami*” should stand alone, since it is unique to Shinto and denotes no form of dualism as do the terms deity and god. Mason says, in his exposition on early Shinto mythology, that

The words Deity and God, as generally used, imply a separation between man and Divine Spirit, and between materiality and Divine Spirit. Their usual theological meanings lead not only to dualism, but, often to a triple conception of existence: first, the Divine Spirit, dwelling apart from the universe; second, mankind who by various processes may acquire an element of Divinity...; [and] third, Nature, materiality and animals forever excluded from possessing the divine nature.⁴⁰

Kami (or “Divine Spirit” as Mason prefers) is concomitant with all existence; and, unlike the term “deity,” *kami* implies no separation between humanity, nature, and god/s.

Norman Havens and Inoue Nobutaka note that *kami* was not equated with a Western conception of God until the mid to late 19th century when Protestants began to translate the Bible into the Japanese language. In the 16th century, Catholic missionaries

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Robert E. Carter, “The Significance of Shintoism,” 40.

³⁸ Stuart D.B. Picken, *Historical Dictionary of Shinto*, vol. 104 of Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, 2nd ed. (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 146.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Joseph W.T. Mason, *The Spirit of Shinto Mythology* (Tokyo: The Fuzambo Company, 1939), 3.

translated God as *Tenshu* (天主) and equated *kami* (神) instead with both Japanese holy-men, saints, and the mythological figures in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*.⁴¹ So prior to the Protestant presence in Japan, there was no conflation of *kami* with god. Furthermore, these authors note that though some *kami* may reasonably be compared to mythological deities in the ancient world, *kami* do not share qualities that are typically attributed to an anthropomorphic god from the Judeo-Christian standpoint. Havens points out that the term “*kami* in Japanese is characterized...neither [by] infinity, omniscience, goodness (at least in any necessary sense), immutability, omnipotence, simplicity, nor unity.”⁴²

Basil Hall Chamberlain, the first Japanologist to translate the *Kojiki* into English in the late 19th century, exclaims that *kami* is one of the most difficult words to translate into English. He says that

Indeed there is no English word which renders it with any near approach to exactness. If therefore it is here rendered by the word ‘deity’ (‘deity’ being preferred to ‘god’ because it includes superior beings of both sexes), it must be clearly understood that the word ‘deity’ is taken in a sense not sanctioned by any English dictionary; for *Kami*, and ‘deity’ or ‘god,’ only correspond to each other in a very rough manner.⁴³

According to Chamberlain, *kami* does not connote even “divinity,” insofar as divinity is associated strictly with gods and deities. In fact, for Chamberlain, the term *kami* entails nothing more than something of “superior” status.

A Japanese to whom the origin of the word [*kami*] is patent, and uses it every day in contexts [that are] by no means divine, does not receive from the word *Kami* the same impression of awe which is produced on the more earnest European mind by the words “deity” and “god,” with their different associations. In using the word ‘deity’ therefore, to translate the

⁴¹ See Inoue Nobutaka, “Perspectives Toward Understanding the Concept of Kami,” in *Kami*, vol. 4 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion, trans. Norman Havens (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1998), 7-8. Also see Norman Havens, “Immanent Legitimation,” in *Kami*, 229-230.

⁴² Havens, “Immanent Legitimation,” 228.

⁴³ This is cited in Danciel C. Holtom, “The Meaning of Kami. Chapter I. Japanese Derivations,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, no. 1 (Jan., 1940): 1.

Japanese term *Kami* we must, so to speak, bring it down from the heights to which Western thought has raised it. In fact *Kami* does not mean much more than ‘superior.’⁴⁴

Daniel Holtom, in his inquiry into the meaning of *kami*, cites a few attempts, among both modern and pre-modern Japanese scholars, to deduce the meaning of *kami* based on philological reasoning. One opinion is that the verb *kashikomi* (畏), which means to feel awe, fear, or dread, is the etymological root of the term “*kami*.” Arakida Hisaoyou notes that “[t]here are all sorts of interpretations of the word *kami* and all of them are wrong.”⁴⁵ Instead, “*Kami* has the meaning of awe-inspiring and dreadful (*kashikomiosoru*).”⁴⁶ Another opinion is that “*kami*” has its origins in the term “*kabi*” (彼△) which refers to something that is mysterious, strange, and marvelous.⁴⁷ Hirata Atsutane says that the

ka of *kabi* has the meaning of “that”...and is a demonstrative used to point out an object. Bi is a word that is used to indicate something mysterious. *Kabi* and *Kami* are the same word. [Furthermore] *kabi* was the source of all things that came into existence in the world...and, since the idea is that of something very mysterious and strange, not only the *kami* which performed the work of creation, but also everything else in the world possessing marvelous and strange power was called *kami*.⁴⁸

Holtom points out that the word *kami* is also thought to have its roots in terms denoting superiority, highness, or above. This interpretation derives from the recognition that the Chinese ideogram for “up” or “above” (上) could equally be read as “*kami*” (神).⁴⁹ Ise Sadatake says, for example, that “[t]he reading of *kami* (神) means above (上). Because a

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

thing is venerated it is regarded as above and called *kami*.”⁵⁰ What is interesting about these etymological accounts is that they all suggest that the term “*kami*” refers particularly to beings which, depending on their relative position and status, are able to evoke the emotions.

Holtom personally maintains that *kami* has its roots in a deep psychological and emotional apparatus from which gods and deities themselves arise. He says,

The fact that objects and events which must be classified outside of the proper modern definition of deity are numerous among the *kami* makes it necessary to look for an original complex of experience beneath the *kami*-idea, or the *kami*-emotion, that is broader and more fundamental than the idea of god. We are not dealing here with a conception that can be exclusively equated in its primary significance with the notion of god as formulated in present-day Western theology or even as the deposit of the study of the history of religions, but rather with a more fundamental emotion out of which the gods themselves have grown.⁵¹

This “fundamental emotion,” Holtom says, is a “sentiment which modern man comprehends in the terms holy and sacred.”⁵² The term *kami*, signifying an affective quality of sacred-ness, refers to a specific deity only when it is attributed a nominal modifier that signifies a personality.⁵³

Holtom, therefore, contends that etymological interpretations are only approximations to explaining “the psychological...origin of the notions of the ‘holy’ and the ‘sacred.’”⁵⁴ In the final chapter of his study, he says that although “we have had to forego any clear expectation of being able to decide what *kami* denotes when reduced to its literal verbal elements, we are, at the same time, whatever the original roots [of the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁵¹ Daniel C. Holtom, “The Meaning of Kami. Chapter III. Kami Considered as Mana,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 4, no. 2 (Jul., 1941): 352.

⁵² Ibid., 351.

⁵³ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

word] may mean, prepared to look for a primitive psychological matrix in the reactions of awe and mystery in the presence of the unknown and uncontrolled.”⁵⁵ Although the results of these etymological accounts are indicative of a psychological (or religious) experience, the experience itself is not the premise but merely the logical conclusion of deductive reasoning. According to Holtom, the meaning of *kami* must be sought beginning with the inner experience itself—not from etymological analyses of terms—from which the *kami* concept arises. Perhaps this is why Holtom does not critically disapprove of Motoori Norinaga’s description of *kami* which, as will be shown below, has its basis in the affective ground of experience.

Motoori Norinaga’s Description of *Kami*

Motoori Norinaga, an 18th century Japanese physician and literary scholar, provided a description of *kami* that is alluded to in almost every discussion of the subject.⁵⁶ Holtom says that “Motoori’s statement...may be accepted as one of the most penetrating expositions of the meaning of *kami* to be found in the entire range of Japanese literature.”⁵⁷ A few comments about Motoori’s background and worldview, before citing his description of *kami*, will help to further illuminate the relevance of his understanding of *kami* in relation to this study.

Motoori was of the Native Studies movement that employed philological methods to the study of ancient Japanese literature in order to unveil a distinctive

⁵⁵ Ibid., 351.

⁵⁶ This movement is referred to as Kokugaku (Nativist Studies/National Learning). For a study on the personality of Motoori Norinaga, see Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga: 1730-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁵⁷ Daniel C. Holtom, “The Meaning of Kami. Chapter II. Interpretations by Japanese Writers,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, no. 2 (Jul., 1940): 33.

Japanese spirit. According to Motoori, the *Kojiki* accurately reflects both the ancient way of Japan (and the way of *kami*) which contrasts sharply with the way of the ancient Chinese.⁵⁸ In ancient China, he says, scholars and sages overrated the value of rational thinking. He says in his commentary to the *Kojiki*,

Comparing the theories in Chinese writings and the ancient traditions of our country, one finds that the former appear quite reasonable and true, whereas the latter sound insignificant and shallow....Generally, a theory in the Chinese tradition is one which some intelligent man in old times evolved after thinking over all things deeply and seeking for their principle....However, human intelligence is limited, and the real principle is inscrutable. How could one presume to know, for instance, about the origin of heaven and earth? Since this kind of conjecture is often quite wrong...it is very arrogant to believe that all things in the world, including the beginning of heaven and earth, can be explained by one's theory. This is a false mental attitude in those who do not realize the limitation of man's intelligence.⁵⁹

Thus, the ancient way of Japan (and of the *kami*) was, by contrast to ancient China, one in which people did not speculate theoretically about a causal principle and purpose underlying natural phenomena. Since "human intelligence is limited," people in ancient times did "not arbitrarily reason out the matters about *kami*."⁶⁰

Instead, the ancient people placed greater emphasis on intuition and on a keen sensitivity to things. Motoori refers to this state of sensitivity as *mono no aware* (物の哀れ) in which one is attuned to the movement of one's mind-feelings/heart (*kokoro*, 心) relative to the beauty of natural phenomena and to intimacy within human relations.⁶¹ Motoori developed his ideas on *mono no aware* long before he wrote his description of *kami*, and although these ideas pertain specifically to possessing a sentiment for natural beauty, human love, and compassion, they obviously influenced his outlook on *kami*.

⁵⁸ Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga*, 77.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

This is because Motoori's understanding of *kami* strongly emphasizes emotional elicitation as a common denominating factor.

Furthermore, though Motoori personally maintained a faithful reverence to Amaterasu-omi-kami and Taka-mi-musubi-no-kami, his description of *kami* mentions neither of these two as quintessential examples of what is *kami*. Instead, he emphasizes the *kami*-ness of things. In his description of *kami*, Motoori admits that he does not "well understand the meaning of the word *kami*," but he lists several things that are called *kami* based on their ability to evoke the emotions. He says that

Speaking in general it may be said that *kami* signifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped. It is hardly necessary to say that it includes human beings. It also includes such things as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains, and so forth. Anything whatsoever which was outside of the ordinary, which possessed superior power, of which was awe-inspiring, was called *kami*. Thus *kami* are of many kinds. Some are noble, some are base; some are strong, some are weak; some are good, some are bad. They are diverse...and thus, since they are of various sorts, it is a matter of great difficulty to set them all in a single line.

Eminence here does not refer merely to the superiority of nobility, goodness, or meritorious deeds. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*. It is needless to say that among human beings who are called *kami*, the successive generation of Sacred emperors are all included. The fact that Emperors are called 'Distant *Kami*' is because from the point of view of common people, they are far-separated, majestic and worthy of reverence. In a lesser degree we find, in the present as well as in ancient times, human beings who are *kami*. Although they may not be accepted throughout the whole country, yet in each province, each village and each family there are human beings who are *kami*...The *kami* of the Divine age were for the most part human beings...and since the people of that time were all *kami*, it is called the Age of the Gods.

Furthermore, among things which are not human, the thunder is always called 'sounding *kami*.' Objects like dragons, the (tree spirit), and foxes, inasmuch as they are conspicuous, wonderful and awe-inspiring, are also called *kami*....

There are further examples in which rocks, stumps of trees and leaves of plants spoke audibly. These were all *kami*. There are, again, numerous places in which seas and mountains are called *kami*. This does not have reference to the spirit of the mountain or the sea, but *kami* is used here directly of the particular mountain or sea. This is because they were exceedingly awe-inspiring.⁶²

Simply put, *kami* can be any being—animate and inanimate; real and imaginable; humans and animals—endowed with an ability to evoke awe, dread, or a sense of extraordinariness. Interestingly, Motoori’s description does not employ the philological method, of which he is a specialist and which was in vogue during his day. Motoori does not, in the most technical sense of the term, “define” *kami*, but “describes” the being of *kami* based on affective conditions. His description of *kami* involves no theoretical rationalization of the existence of *kami*-itself, but rather involves an intuition of a dialectical relationship between one’s emotions and the *kami*-ness of things.

Since Motoori, *kami* has been frequently described as a quality of things that evoke emotions.⁶³ To cite a few examples, Muraoka Tsunetsugu, an early 20th century scholar of Japanese intellectual history, says that *kami* is “an honorific term for sacred objects having awesome potency” or anything revered for its *awe-evoking capability*.⁶⁴ Robert Wargo, a contemporary philosopher, notes that “whenever an object or a place inspired a sense of awe in man because of its power or beauty, it was said to be a *kami*—or a place where a *kami* resided.”⁶⁵ Yuditaka Yamamoto, a priest of the Tsubaki Shrine

⁶² Holtom, “Meaning of Kami. Chap. II,” 34-35.

⁶³ Spae, *Shinto Man*, 43.

⁶⁴ Muraoka Tsunetsugu, *Studies in Shinto Thought*, trans. Delmer M. Brown and James T. Araki (JPN: Ministry Of Education, 1964), 2.

⁶⁵ Robert J.J. Wargo, “Japanese Ethics: Beyond Good and Evil,” *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 503. Cited also in Carter, “Significance of Shintoism,” 41.

in Mie, Japan, likewise says that *kami* “means any divine being or anything in the world and beyond that can inspire in human beings a sense of divinity and mystery.”⁶⁶

These definitions of *kami*, like Motoori’s definition, attribute to the term “*kami*” a modifying value. Havens notes, regarding “Motoori’s definition of *kami*,” that it “seems to have ... more of a function as an adjectival reference to various kinds of things which stimulate a certain attitude or response, than as a description of an essence or substance.”⁶⁷ The emphasis is on *kami*-ness, as an affective quality of beings, as opposed to *kami* as discrete beings in and of themselves.

***Kami* as Being/s in the Natural World**

But if this emotional experience of *kami*-ness is brought about by beings that evoke the experience, then what can be said about the ontological status of these beings themselves? What, exactly, are the kinds of beings that are commonly attributed this modality of *kami*-ness? In Motoori’s description above, *kami* did not signify by necessity any being beyond the natural world. Motoori claims that all “beings” (even grass) can be *kami* provided they are capable of evoking awe, and most of the beings that he mentions are of the natural world. The fact that his description of *kami* is associated primarily with the natural world is apparent in the criticism it aroused among early Japanese conservatives, who contended that Motoori’s conception of *kami* minimized the importance of early ancestor worship by over-emphasizing nature worship.⁶⁸ Also, given Motoori’s personality and earlier ideas about *mono no aware*, it should be no surprise

⁶⁶ Yukitaka Yamamoto, *Kami no Michi: The Way of the Kami* (Stockton, CA: Tsubaki America Publications Department), 63.

⁶⁷ Havens, “Immanent Legitimation,” 235.

⁶⁸ Holtom, “The Meaning of Kami. Chap. II,” 32-40.

that his understanding of *kami* is rooted in the experience of nature. Motoori, in an attempt to unveil the sentiments of the ancient Japanese towards the natural world, emphasizes that some beings of nature (e.g. mountains and seas) are not merely inhabited by *kami* but are *kami*. He even maintains that most of the *kami* in the Age of the Kami were human beings. This reinforces the notion of *kami* as a quality of concrete and sensually perceivable beings.

Some authors treat *kami* within the wider scope of so-called Japanese phenomenism and realism.⁶⁹ This refers to an intellectual and cultural trend in which Japanese people religiously, aesthetically, and practically, demonstrate fondness for the affairs of the natural world more so than any ideal world.⁷⁰ Tsunetsugu situates the Shinto outlook on the world within the context of an early Japanese worldview which has the characteristic of realism: that is, he says, a way of “thinking which affirms and values the real. Even when propounding ideals, such thought is based on the real, not veering towards that which is simply imagined.”⁷¹ Tsunetsugu maintains that the early Japanese had a tripartite outlook on existence in terms of the visible world (life and the “unconcealed” or “manifest” being), the invisible world (death and the “concealed” or “un-manifest” being), and the dialectical processes between the two (birth and

⁶⁹ Hajime Nakamura devotes an entire chapter to discussing this paradigm in Japan titled “The Acceptance of Phenomenism” in his *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964), 350-406. Chikao Fujisawa says “Shinto...blends idealism and materialism into an archetype of *meta-realism*.” See Chikao Fujisawa, *Zen and Shinto: A History of Japanese Philosophy* (New York: Polyglot Press, 1959), 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Ian Reader and George Tanabe Jr. provide contemporary anthropological insight into to this inclination, within Japanese religiosity, to be concerned primarily with receiving practical/this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*) in everyday affairs. See Ian Reader and George Tanabe Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

⁷¹ Tsunetsugu, *Shinto Thought*, 21-22.

becoming).⁷² The “concealed,” says Tsunetsugu, existed only as a “negative aspect” of the “manifest,” and that which was “manifest” or “real was always fundamental.”⁷³ In Shinto’s conception of *kami*, he notes that there are “myriad *kami*” that are thought to be “dispersed among natural objects and human beings,” but *kami* that are visible (manifest *kami*) have priority relative to *kami* that are invisible and imaginative.⁷⁴ In other words, *kami* that are “real” have priority to *kami* that are “less real,” and *kami* that are “less real” have significance only in relation to the phenomenal world which is real.⁷⁵

In this respect, the *kami* of most importance were not the imaginable *kami* but rather *kami* that “shows itself” like Eliade’s hierophanies.⁷⁶ As the *kami*-ness of a thing may appear before one in the form of a tree, mountain, or waterfall, they are “manifestations of sacred realities,”⁷⁷ or realities that appear to possess a sacred quality. Robert Gall, in his philosophical analysis of *kami*, states that “the *kami*...is more realistic (*genjitsu shugi* 現実主義) than it is polytheistic or animistic, because it is simply a way to reach things;” for it appears that the “gods are not...objects of speculation or a theology, but indications of awesome forces and powers [that show themselves] active in the world in and around us.”⁷⁸

Several authors have alluded to *kami* ontologically—via both theology and philosophy—and have emphasized *kami*’s immanence if not identification with the being

⁷² Ibid., 22. Alicia Matsunaga also argues that, although in the early Japanese worldview, there was a conception of the High Plain of Heaven (*Takamagahara*) and the domain after death (*Yomi-no-kuni*), “there was no conception of a preternatural world as distinct from the terrestrial.” See Alicia Matsunaga, “The Land of Natural Affirmation. Pre-Buddhist Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 21, no. 1/2 (1996): 203-209.

⁷³ Tsunetsugu, *Shinto Thought*, 22.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 23-24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Eliade defines a hierophany as when “something sacred shows itself.” However, I have already stated my contentions regarding Eliade’s understanding of “the sacred.” See Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 11

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Robert Gall, “Kami and Daimon: A Cross-Cultural Reflection on What is Divine,” *Philosophy East and West* 49, no. 1 (Jan., 1999): 65.

of things or even being itself. This was hinted at above by Mason who, applying Henri Bergson's philosophy to the primordial beginnings in Japanese mythology, maintained that *kami-nature* (Divine Spirit) was inherent in all things.⁷⁹ Shinto, according to Mason, since its early beginning has maintained an intuition that the spirit is not separate from matter; all material existence is at the same time spiritual. The universe, having emanated from the Divine Spirit (which he associates with the primordial *kami*, Ame-no-mi-naka-nusi-no-kami) is itself Divine Spirit/*kami*. He says regarding the extended version of the idiom "*kami no michi*" (way of *kami/kami* way):

This term, in itself, is a shortened form of the original Japanese idiom, Kami Nagara no Michi, meaning: As it is or however it is, (it is) the Divine Way of Kami. Expressed more briefly: Everything is Divine Spirit. All appearances in the universe are materialized forms of Divinity's evolution.⁸⁰

Joseph Spae, a Catholic theologian and founder of the Oriens Institute for Religious Research in Tokyo, says that the "psychological ontology of *kami*" can be considered as "a serious effort toward the spiritualization of earthy things."⁸¹ Spae, however, in light of his own theological bias, does not view this sacred immanence in a positive respect. In his attempt to explain the sentiment of *kami-nature* among the Japanese people, he says:

The Japanese people "sense" in many things a reality which lies beyond the phenomenal reality; they sense the existence of a noumenal realm which transcends the phenomenal realm, constituted in time and place. Hence their feeling of awe in the presence of an extra-sensorial reality or power superior to them which they call *kami*.⁸²

Furthermore, he continues

⁷⁹ Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*, 15-16.

⁸⁰ Mason, *Spirit of Shinto Mythology*, 3-4.

⁸¹ Spae, *Shinto Man*, 42.

⁸² *Ibid.*

What distinguishes the Japanese perception of reality, it seems to me, is that, in the case of the *kami*-feeling, the noumenal reality remains encased in its phenomenal setting of time and place. It does not ascend towards a noumenal unity, distinguished by supreme personality and ultimacy, such as the God of Christianity.⁸³

Spae acknowledges the importance of “sensing” and “feeling” *kami* as well as the ontological status of *kami* as being “encased” in the natural world. However, in light of his preference for Rudolf Otto’s notion of the sacred, as the wholly other *numen*, he contends that the feeling for *kami* is merely a desire for something more ultimate beyond the natural world: namely, God.

Other scholars, such as Carter and Havens, in their treatment of *kami*, implicitly challenge Otto’s notion of the sacred as something beyond the domain of the natural world. Carter notes in his essay on Shinto ethics that “*kami* means something more like the mystery, superior quality, and the awesome,” but goes further to say that “divinity, the awesome, the mysterious, the *mysterium tremendum* is immanent in the world, rather than transcendent and separate from the world.”⁸⁴ Havens, speaking of *kami* in the most general sense, suggests that *kami* is not a thing beyond a modality of being/s. He says that “the Shinto *kami* concept does not refer to a transcendent, ‘wholly other’ principle or being apart from creation, but rather to a quality of being with full participation in the unity of existence.”⁸⁵

Keiji Nishitani, a Japanese philosopher of religion, asserts that Shinto perceives divinity existentially; for the being of “things” as they “are in themselves” is the reality to which the term “*kami*” refers. Speaking of *kami* nominally as “god,” Nishitani says that

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Carter, “Significance of Shintoism,” 40.

⁸⁵ Havens, “Immanent legitimation,” 231.

In Shinto the “be” of “god” is linked with the existence of “things;” that the meaning of “god exists” is conceived as one with the opening up of the place of the reality of the “be” of things.... The “be” wherein things manifest themselves in their reality is identical with the fact that God’s “be” is present therein.... When we speak of things “as they truly are in themselves,” we are in the field of religion.”⁸⁶

Nishitani’s treatment of *kami* is reminiscent of an early attempt to deduce *kami*’s meaning from the terms *kangamu* and *kagami* (嘉牟, 嘉美), each of which connotes the act of “viewing brilliantly” as a mirror reflecting all things perfectly as they are in themselves.⁸⁷ This “seeing things” with clarity as they are in themselves is an attribute of the (Divine) Mind, as is reflected in this statement of a 14th century writer, Imbe Masamichi:

Kami is from *kangami*.... The Divine Mind, like a clear mirror, reflects all things in nature. It operates with impartial justice and tolerates not a single spot of uncleanness. That which in Heaven is *Kami*, in nature is Spirit and in man is Sincerity. If the spirit of nature and the heart of man are pure and clear, then they are *Kami*.⁸⁸

Kami, in this context, is not a being beyond man and nature; instead, nature, man, and *kami* are one and the same provided the mind sees all natural phenomena as they are in themselves without discrimination.

Some authors, such as Robert Gall and Chikao Fujisawa, have discussed *kami* in light of Heidegger’s philosophy. Gall, in his article comparing notions of divinity between Motoori and Heidegger, says that *kami* has its being in the existent world. He notes that Motoori’s understanding of *kami* is similar to Heidegger’s understanding of *Daimon*, insofar as both “point to being” and gives that which is “ordinary” a greater significance. *Kami* are things which are ordinary to our everyday mode of consciousness

⁸⁶ Spae, *Shinto Man*, 42.

⁸⁷ Holtom, “Meaning of Kami. Chap. I,” 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

but have become extraordinary; and even in this mode of extraordinary, there remains no metaphysical division between *kami* and the everyday world of things-at-hand. In this case “what is divine is incomprehensible not because it so utterly transcends us or is so esoteric by nature that we cannot understand it, but because it is so close, so near, so simple, [and] so ‘ordinary.’”⁸⁹

Fujisawa too claims that Heidegger’s “Being” may be “conceptually equated with *Kami*.”⁹⁰ He says that “it can hardly be denied that the Western Philosophy of Existence is in quest of what corresponds to [the] Shintoist *Kami*, identical with what Heidegger vaguely intimates as Being.”⁹¹ Whereas an existentialist, who finds existence problematic, may seek rootedness in Being—or a feeling of at-home-ness in the mundane world—by finding solace in something beyond the world, the Shintoist evades the problem by accepting the existence (“being” or *kami*) as an end in itself. Fujisawa, a devout Shinto priest as well as a political philosopher of the mid-20th century, boasts that in Shinto, unlike in Western traditions, sacredness of the world is naively affirmed, and the pursuit “of [a] Shinto theology... can transcendently surpass, while immanently remaining in this world.”⁹² Similar to Motoori, Fujisawa maintains that on account of *kami*-immanence, “the remotest age of *Kami*,” as is reflected in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, “penetrates into the modern age of man,” and that “this Shintoist thought orientation... prevents *the holy* from being opposed to *the mundane*.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Gall, “Kami and Daimon,” 66.

⁹⁰ Chikao Fujisawa, *Concrete Universality of the Japanese Way of Thinking: A New Interpretation of Shintoism* (JPN: Hokuseido Press, 1958), 26. See also Fujisawa, *Zen and Shinto*, 63.

⁹¹ Fujisawa, *Concrete Universality*, 27.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Conclusion

If one conceives of *kami* in the same respect as the foregoing treatments, then one might also see that the potential to be led astray by translating *kami* as “spirit” or “god” resides in the tendency to think of such terms as something necessarily beyond the material world. Instead, sacredness, divinity, or *kami*-ness in Shinto is very much oriented towards the affections of amazement, wonder, and awe towards the natural world by which such emotions are evoked. To borrow Eliade’s words, “all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic reality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.”⁹⁴ So whereas Havens says that the idiom “eight million myriads of *kami*” should be considered “as countless phenomena capable of arousing the recognition of...non-everyday presence,”⁹⁵ one might also say that the idiom refers to how *countless natural phenomena* are capable of arousing recognition of an *everyday presence*.

One can now reasonably infer, in light of knowing that since *kami* is associated most fundamentally with awe-invoking power in the natural world, that it is rather the *feeling of kami in relation to the world*, as opposed to the *intellectual comprehension of kami in relation to abstract entities* that is emphasized in Shinto. My intention was not to dismiss *kami* as discrete entities, but rather to emphasize *kami* as emotion evoking beings that are thought to be closely associated with the natural world. In the next chapter, one will find sound reasons why the *kami*-ness of the natural world might be attributed as Shinto’s sacred objective in opposition to *kami* as discrete entities. One will find that though contemporary Shinto is not active in propagating theology, it allows for the

⁹⁴ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 12.

⁹⁵ Havens, “Immanent Legitimation,” 235.

experience of *kami*-ness in the natural world to speak for itself via Shinto shrines'
atmosphere and aesthetics.

Chapter 2: Natural Aesthetics and Atmosphere of Shinto Shrines.

The National Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honcha) defines shrines as dwelling places for *kami*, where ritual activities pertaining to the seasons of nature and to the “major events in the life of the individual, community, and nation” are facilitated.⁹⁶ Shrines, the presence of which are usually indicated by one or more vermilion gateways (*torii* 鳥居),⁹⁷ are constant objects of perception when traveling in Japan. As early as the 10th century nearly 3,000 shrines existed throughout Japan’s archipelago. Today, nearly 90,000 shrines exist in Japan, an estimate which does not account for the plethora of shrines one sees in the mountains and waysides in rural areas. Due to their overwhelming presence, Ian Reader says that “Shinto is a prominent element in Japan’s physical landscape.”⁹⁸ And, due to the ambience that surrounds most shrines, one may also say that Shinto is a tradition that highly prizes the natural world.

Shrines are frequently described as places that provide an atmosphere conducive for aesthetically experiencing the features of nature. David Shaner notes that shrine environments are where “a deep affinity with nature is thus occasioned by a lack of separation between man-made architectural artifacts (places of worship) and that which is being honored.”⁹⁹ Sokyo Ono claims that “throughout the entire country” of Japan, “the most beautiful spot in any community is generally the site of the shrine,”¹⁰⁰ the context of which should be “closely associated with a keen sense of the beautiful,—a mystic sense

⁹⁶ Ono, *Kami Way*, 50.

⁹⁷ *Torii* are the red and wood beams that stand before the entry of shrines and temples as a gateway demarcating the sacred precincts. They basically consist of two erected vertical beams affixed above to one horizontal beam.

⁹⁸ Ian Reader, *Shinto*, Simple Guides, 2nd ed. (2001; repr., London: Simple Guides, 2007), 10, 16.

⁹⁹ David Shaner, “The Japanese Experience of Nature,” in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, eds. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 1989), 166.

¹⁰⁰ Ono, *Kami Way*, 97.

of nature.”¹⁰¹ On the surface, Shinto shrines are thought to represent the natural world as a sacred objective, the recognition of which is evoked by way of shrines’ atmosphere and aesthetics. It is the aesthetics of the shrine atmosphere, as an awe-evoking means of communicating *being at home in the-natural world* as a sacred objective, with which I am concerned in this chapter.

First, I will discuss how confidence is placed in the Shinto shrines’ ability to communicate, independently of doctrinal and theological propagation, Shinto’s sacred objective. In light of which, the role of shrines’ natural aesthetics and atmosphere will be brought to attention. Then, I will discuss the construction of shrines in order to show how shrines’ materiality and location give precedence to nature, in terms of the objects they demarcate, their natural and simplistic adornment, or the way in which they accommodate the landscape and seasons. In this context, I will give special attention to the Grand Shrines of Ise in Mie for their aesthetic of natural simplicity and for the fact that these shrines are often discussed as being exemplary of Shinto aesthetic sensitivity. Lastly, I will discuss the existential significance of experiencing shrine architecture and atmosphere, in terms of how they are thought to produce a feeling of being at home in the world.

Shrines: Not Centers of Religious Discourse

Though shrines are places where ritual activity is facilitated, they are not institutions where visitors receive doctrine through oral teachings and exhortation. Ono writes that “in the transmission of Shinto... not much attention has been given to the philosophical or doctrinal expositions of the faith... [and] very little literature has been

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

written to aid worshippers in understanding the nature of the enshrined *kami* and the meaning of the shrine rites and practices.”¹⁰² The Jinja Honcha says that “there is nothing comparable to entering the faith through response to missionary effort and...conversion.”¹⁰³ Instead, being unconcerned about theological argument and persuasion, shrine visitors and attendants neither “ask about God [nor] receive teachings about God, and then enter religion through conversion.”¹⁰⁴ To be accurate, there are people who produce literature in order to provide Shinto a theoretical and organizational umbrella, but there is hardly ever any missionary campaign on behalf of Shinto. The “transmission” of Shinto’s understanding of sacredness resides not solely in doctrinal dissemination but partly in the experience of the shrine atmosphere.

The Shinto priest Motohisa Yamakage says that he was once exhorted by another priest concerning the responsibilities of their profession. None of the responsibilities entailed overt doctrinal propagation as much as to tending, with care, to the shrine precincts.

Shrines should gather parishioners together and not teach them.... We should not give any lectures to those who come to pay respect at the shrine. We have to respect their positions or ideas. We should neither criticize them nor force them to follow our ideas. For the shrine is a public facility, and we don’t ask which religion or sect they belong to. The shrine is the place we give moral education. It is the place where they freely feel and learn something in their own way. Therefore, I devote myself with my whole heart to clean the place of the shrine, and I think it will satisfy me if people *feel* the spirit of *kami* or learn some morality in their own way by immersing themselves in the clean atmosphere of the shrine.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ono, *Kami Way*, 92.

¹⁰³ Shinto Committee for the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions, *An Outline of Shinto Teachings* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1958), 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Motohisa Yamakage, *Essence of Shinto: the Spiritual Heart of Japan*, ed. Paul de Leeuw and Aidan Rankin, trans. Mineko S. Gillespie, Gerald L. Gillespie, and Yoshitsugu Komoru (Tokyo, JPN: Kodansha International, 2006), 77. [italics mine].

The responsibility of the priests is to maintain a kind of atmosphere at the shrine in which people can have a personal experience of *kami*.¹⁰⁶ Yamakage says that “the purpose of the shrine is not to impose a single idea or belief system, but to create a pervasive sense of reverence and awe and so enable us to access the spiritual dimension.”¹⁰⁷

Ono claims that “It is not easy to express the meaning of this faith in creed, doctrine, or philosophy;” the “*kami* faith” has to be “caught and not taught.”¹⁰⁸ The power of Shinto resides “in its emphasis on sensory experience...rather than...theological discourses.”¹⁰⁹ For this reason, Ono says that Shinto’s “Dependence has been placed almost entirely on the sensory appeal.”¹¹⁰ Ono thinks that the overall aesthetic or sensory appeal of Shinto representation is in itself powerful enough to “catch” the hearts of Japan’s dispassionate youth:

Yet, even though a systematic exposition may be lacking, there can be no question but that after the spiritual wandering and indifference of youth have spent their course, the sensory appeal, the feeling of awe and mystery...which these engender [will] bring many an individual back to the patrimonial shrine and the only spiritual home he has ever known.¹¹¹

Ono describes the feelings generated at a shrine in terms of “a tingle of excitement [and] a thrill of joy” that is felt as “one enters... a grove that surrounds a shrine, or” as one “stands within the view of the *torii* and sanctuary.”¹¹² The “magnificent...cypress trees

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ono, *Kami Way*, 92. Picken echoes Ono in the same terms: he says “Shinto is indeed a religion that is “caught” rather than “taught,” its insights are “perceived” before they are “believed,” its basic concepts are “felt” rather than “thought.” Picken says again, regarding a Shinto purification ritual that “the energizing life of the waterfall meet and explain more eloquently than any number of words why Shinto, with neither scriptures nor saints, has survived as the basis of Japanese religion and culture and why it will continue to remain the living spiritual roots of Japanese culture.” See Picken, *Essentials of Shinto: An Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), xxxii.

¹⁰⁹ Ono, *Kami Way*, 92-93.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹² Ibid., 93-94.

create within the devout an inexpressible feeling of awe and wonder.”¹¹³ Like Yamakage’s colleague, Ono says that “instead of developing theoretical explanations of the invisible world, shrines were established as sacred places to which the *kami* could be invited and where man could experience their presence.”¹¹⁴

Representatives of the Jinja Honcha corroborate Ono’s claims. They too maintain that shrine environs, independent of theological (or doctrinal) discourse, are powerful enough to produce an experience of *kami*. The Jinja Honcha begins by describing the atmosphere of the shrine with an aura of mystery:

The unique atmosphere of the Shinto shrine—this atmosphere of harmony with nature and the closeness to the mystery of eternity—also leads one to the faith with a mysterious convincing power. The Shintoistic atmosphere flowing through life accords with the mystery of the shrine. It is traditionally arranged to give joy and mysterious excitement especially to the young....

Thus, even without the intervention of words and the printed page, Shrine Shinto binds man with the Divine through the immediate response of the soul.¹¹⁵

The Role of Shrine Aesthetics

The above are just a few statements positing that shrines and their surroundings should function evocatively by evoking a feeling of *kami*-ness. This ability to evoke one’s feelings resides in the shrines’ environs and atmosphere which are associated with a clean, pure, and simplistic aesthetic of nature.¹¹⁶ Simply put, Shinto shrines are examples of a phenomenon in Japanese culture where both religious and aesthetic-sensibility coalesce to communicate affectively the *kami*-ness (or sacred-ness) in nature.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁵ Shinto Committee, *An Outline*, 9-10.

¹¹⁶ Jean Herbert, *Shinto: At the Fountain-head of Japan* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1967), 90.

Hideo Kishimoto, in his discussion on Japanese cultural trends, claims that “In their achievements, religious and aesthetic values are not two different things. Ultimately, they are one for the Japanese.”¹¹⁷ Kishimoto explains that Japanese religion and aesthetics concentrate on “the attitude of man, that is, how he accepts the given environment.”¹¹⁸ This affinity between Japanese religions and natural aesthetics—between Shinto shrines and natural environs—is illustrated in Shinto visual arts.

According to Hageyama Haruki, the visual arts that are associated with shrines are “deeply imbued with a reverence for nature and for natural phenomena.”¹¹⁹ Early “Shinto imagery” is generally “rich” in places and things such as “seas, islands, mountains, rivers, [and] growing plants.”¹²⁰ Haruki notes that anthropomorphic imagery of *kami* are rarely found at a shrine; instead, things of nature such as “a lofty tree...a towering waterfall, or an awe-inspiring mountain” are “felt to be particularly” the symbols “suggestive of [a] divine presence.”¹²¹

Furthermore, Shinto Shrine *mandalas* graphically emphasize the natural landscape. In Shinto *mandalas*, shrines are depicted from an aerial viewpoint and are often situated within exaggerated representations of mountainous or forested landscapes. Interestingly, such *mandalas* do not depict the shrine precincts as the sole objects of aesthetic contemplation to the exclusion of their surrounding environment. Susan Tyler says, regarding the Shinto *mandalas* of the Kasuga Shrines in northern Kyoto,

¹¹⁷ Kishimoto, Hideo, “Some Japanese Cultural Traits and Religions,” in *The Japanese Mind*, ed. Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: Hawaii Press, 1968), 117. This symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and religion in Japan is evident in the relationship between Zen Buddhism and the arts of self-cultivation (tea ceremony [*chado*], flower arrangement [*ikebana*], and the various martial arts).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Kageyama Haruki, *Shinto Arts: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan* (New York: The Japan Society, 1976), 13-14.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

A *miya mandara* can be so very simple that if one did not know better it would seem nothing more than a landscape painting. It is the religious importance of the landscape itself that gives these paintings their special place in Japanese art. In Japanese religion in general, landscape has a large role, while in Shinto the divine is embedded in landscape.... [T]he significance of landscape and natural phenomena in Shinto is perhaps more obvious than elsewhere at present, and Japan preserves [through its art] early ideas of the land and its features as the very being of the gods.¹²²

Whereas Buddhist *mandalas* tend to represent pure-lands (Buddhist heavenly realms of bliss) as abstract or cosmic realities, Shinto *mandalas* are strategic and artistic means of romanticizing shrines and their surrounding environs as sacred localities by depicting shrines and their associated landscapes as pure-lands on earth.

Robert Ellwood and Richard Pilgrim speculate that in Japan's early religious life the "sacred reality was revealed not so much through words and scripture but in religio-aesthetic intuition, experience, and sensitivity."¹²³ Ellwood and Pilgrim write that "[t]he shrines of Japanese Shinto indicate this," insofar as "they often stand in the sacred natural surroundings that are beautiful and pure."¹²⁴ Joseph Campbell too interprets the shrines and their rites as an aesthetic means, without the crux of doctrinal and theological discourse, to evoke an awareness of the natural world. He provides a description of a ritual performance in the atmosphere of a shrine:

Such a place of worship is without images, simple in form, wonderfully roofed, and often painted a nice clear red. The priests, immaculate in white vesture, black headdress, and large black wooden shoes, move about in files with stately mien.... The pines, rocks, forests, mountains, air, and sea of Japan awake and send out spirits on these sounds. They can be heard and felt all about. And when the dancers have retired and the music has stopped, the ritual is done. One turns and looks again at the rocks, the

¹²² Susan C. Tyler, *The Cult of Kasuga Seen Through Its Art* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1992), 39.

¹²³ Richard Pilgrim and Robert Ellwood, *Japanese Religion: a Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985) 84.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

pinetrees, the air and sea, and they are as silent as before. Only now they are inhabited, and one is aware anew of the wonder of the universe.¹²⁵

Campbell concludes that “Shinto,” at its very foundations, “is a religion not of sermons but of awe....and, as such, it is addressed as art (music, gardening, architecture, dance, etc.) to the sensibilities—not to faculties of definition.”¹²⁶

The presence of Shinto in contexts beyond the geography of Japan also exemplifies the significance of natural aesthetics in communicating its sacred objective. Sarah Ishida, in her ethnographic study of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine in America, which is located in Granite Falls, Washington, offers a personal account of a Shinto shrine’s intimacy with the beauty of its surrounding environment. One morning, on her way to a purification ritual at the precincts, she notes:

I walked with my friend from the shrine guest house across the road, through the first *torii* gate, and down the wooded path approaching the shrine. [The] sun filtered through the leaves, and between the sounds of the gravel crunching beneath our feet, we could hear the birds singing and the gentle rustle of the wind. If the goal was to build a Shinto shrine in America where one could appreciate the *kami* within the beauty of nature, then TGSA was a success.¹²⁷

Yukitaka Yamamoto, head priest of the Grand Tsubaki Shrine in Japan and founder of the Tsubaki Shrine in America, also claims that shrines are environments designed to heighten one’s sensitivity to the natural surroundings. He says succinctly, concerning Shinto, “sacred spaces,” and aesthetic sensitivity:

To be fully alive is to have an aesthetic perception of life because a major part of the world’s goodness lies in its often unspeakable beauty.... These ideas cannot be taught directly.... This is why Shinto is associated with

¹²⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (New York: Arkana, 1991), 475.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 475-77.

¹²⁷ Sarah S. Ishida, “The Making of an American Shinto Community” (MA thesis, University of Florida, 2008), 32.

sacred spaces, either places of striking natural beauty or places that have an atmosphere that could strike awe in the heart of the observer.¹²⁸

Interestingly, Yamamoto's commentary on "sacred spaces" and "aesthetic perception" is also reflective of Motoori's outlook, in which possessing sensitivity to things (*mono no aware*) has priority over discursive thinking.

From Shrines of Nature to Shrines of Ise

The earliest shrines in Japan were probably not buildings per se but rather temporary locations in nature (*yashiro*, 社) demarcating the *kami* presence by stones, a pile of rocks (*iwasaka*, 磐境), or a group of evergreens and rope (*shimenawa*, 注連縄). Haruki thinks that Shinto's natural aesthetic has its origins in relation to these early forms of demarcating a *kami*'s dwelling. Regarding the early Japanese rituals, he writes that they "were performed in natural settings" which were "beautiful or awe-inspiring" and therefore "thought to be imbued with the spiritual presence of *kami*."¹²⁹ Contemporary evidence of such awe-inspiring sites, designated by stone or heaped rocks, can be found upon and around Mt. Miwa in the Yamato region or even within the vicinity of the Grand Shrines in Ise. Examples of awe-inspiring places demarcated by rope (*shimenawa*) are the Nachi Waterfalls in Kumano, at the peak of which a *shimenawa* stretches its width. There exist also the twin rocks protruding from Ise Bay, between which a rope links them together as if they were wedded. All such places, along with several other natural features, such as trees, marked by *torii* or *shimenawa*, may represent a continuity of

¹²⁸ Yamamoto, *Kami no Michi*, 68.

¹²⁹ Haruki, *Shinto Arts*, 15.

sacred and aesthetic sentiments towards un-enshrined natural objects from earlier times.¹³⁰

With the advancement of agriculture, shrines became permanent buildings modeled after raised-floor granaries, some of the most representative of which that exists today are the Grand Shrines of Ise. However, with the influence of Chinese and Korean Buddhism and culture, shrines evolved in grandeur, consisting not only of central houses for the *kami* (*honden*, 本殿) but also auxiliary buildings such as the halls of worship (*heiden*, 幣殿), offerings (*haiden*, 拝殿) and performance (*kaguraden*, 神楽殿). Shrines then developed their own architectural styles (*zukuri*, 造) identifiable by varying styles of *torii* and roofs individuating their aesthetic appeal. Places such as Fushimi Inari in Kyoto, Kasuga in Nara, and Itsukushima in Hiroshima, are examples of this artistic development of shrine types.

However, the Grand Shrines of Ise stand out to most authors and contemporary Shintoists as uniquely embodying the aesthetic sensitivity of Shinto. The Ise Shrines are examples of building that show a conservative use of only wood, straw, and gold. Thus they are acknowledged for having an aesthetic restraint demonstrating natural simplicity. Svend Hvass claims that “Japanese architecture is at its best” when “it is simple yet refined,” and “nowhere is that illustrated better than in the Ise Shrines.”¹³¹ In terms of its placement and features, the Ise Shrines and their auxiliary buildings are encircled by four wooden fences encompassed by a forest of cryptomeria. The shrine itself is a three-bay-by-two-bay building constructed solely with unfinished cypress, for its walls and

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Svend M. Hvass, *ISE: Japan's Ise Shrines, Ancient Yet New* (Holte, Denmark: Aristo Publishing, 1999), 86.

supporting beams; thatch, for its roof; and gold caps or trimmings, for protecting the finishing edges of the wood and for enhancing the radiance of the unfinished cypress within the sunlight.¹³² Its golden radiance is most notable in the days following its 20th year cyclical reconstructions: on account of which it is justifiably named the “Divine Brightness Style” (*shinmei zukuri*, 神明造). The grounds on which the Ise structures rest also show natural simplicity, being furnished with white pebbles and stones similar to those in Zen gardens. The roof, however, on the main building is its signature feature: it consists of “X” shaped rafters (*chigi*, 千木) that vertically protrude the gabled ends, and beams (*katsuogi*, 鯉木) that horizontally weigh upon the ridges between the X-shaped protruding rafters.

Chikao Fujisawa claims that “evidently the Grand Shrine at Ise...represents the very quintessence of Shinto architecture, breathing archaic simplicity and natural serenity.”¹³³ Masaharu Anesaki alludes to the fact that the Ise shrines are reconstructed every twenty years and, for that reason, notes that Ise is the “most ancient example of Japanese architecture [that] is still carefully preserved,” although it is “hardly more than a cluster of straight pillars, thrust into the earth and covered with grass.”¹³⁴ Anesaki also writes that though “it cannot be exactly called artistic...it has an unquestionable appeal, the appeal of archaic simplicity and pure sobriety.”¹³⁵ Joseph Mason attributed the Ise

¹³² *Ibid.*, 86-92.

¹³³ Fujisawa, *Concrete Universality*, 92. Elsewhere Fujisawa says, regarding the both the *chigi* and the shrines: “From the thatched roof of the hall of worship soar skywards crossbeams in the form of an X and this vertical projection...must be looked upon as a kind of ‘spiritual antenna,’ enabling man to come into existential communication with the kami.” Furthermore, “[t]he wooden architecture of the Ise Grand Shrine is the purest expression of the original and genuine taste peculiar to the Japanese people, who are fond of simplicity, purity, spontaneity, brightness, and sincerity. It is rebuilt every twenty years faithfully preserving its original structure.” See Fujisawa, *Zen and Shinto*, 20.

¹³⁴ Anesaki Masaharu, *Art, Nature, and Life in Japan* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1974), 32.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

shrines with a quality of “simple freshness” alongside a “delicacy and feminine refinement” whose constant rebuilding signified “creative regeneration.”¹³⁶

Kenzo Tange, an architect and co-author of the first major photographic publication of the Ise Shrine precincts in 1953, also writes that “the entire...course of Japanese architecture starts at Ise.”¹³⁷ Here he is referring to “the use of natural materials in a natural way, the sensitivity to structural proportion, the feeling for space arrangement, [and] especially the tradition between architecture and nature.”¹³⁸ He says, however, regarding his first visit to Ise, that “the buildings, their placement, and their form and space, moved me deeply. Plain to the point of artlessness, they nevertheless possess a highly refined style.”¹³⁹ Even more interesting is how Kenzo interprets his experience. He vividly describes Ise’s natural surroundings and summarizes his visit in terms of a mythic nostalgia, which Eliade might say is the “Religious man’s profound nostalgia...to inhabit a ‘divine world,’” where his “house shall be like the house of the gods.”¹⁴⁰ Kenzo says that

Avidly I absorbed everything I saw: the white-capped waves rolling into the Ise Bay, the dense forests, the crystal clear waters of the Isuzu River, the stone terraces here and there, the mysterious rocks in conspicuous places, the tranquility reigning over the alternate sites.... All these seemed to support and enhance the space and the form of the two main sanctuaries, glimpsed in the light filtering down through the age-old cryptomeria trees. I felt as if I had been transported back into the world of archaic religious myths of the Japanese people.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Mason, *Meaning of Shinto*, 214, 217.

¹³⁷ Kenzo Tange and Noboru Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), 16.

¹³⁸ Ibid. One should note that the natural mystique of atmosphere and architecture is not the prerogative of the Ise shrines alone. Anesaki suggests that the aesthetics of natural simplicity is also reflected in traditional Japanese homes. Anesaki says, in the context of discussing Japanese houses, that “there are many buildings in Japan, the severe simplicity of which is the result, not of the poverty of ignorance of their builders, but of the artistic restraint and refinement.” See Anesaki, *Art, Life, and Nature*, 32.

¹³⁹ Kenzo, *Ise: Prototype*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 65.

¹⁴¹ Kenzo, *Ise: Prototype*, 14-15

He sums up his visit thus:

At Ise it flashed through my mind that this shrine might itself be viewed as the symbolic form of religious myths. Here in nature dwells the gods; the myths are made manifest. The rocks and trees, the very sanctuary building themselves, are images of the deities.¹⁴²

Nature precedes Artifice

The Grand Shrines of Ise are known for their natural simplicity, but there are other shrines (in addition to Japanese Buddhist temples) that are known for the ways in which they accommodate and show continuity with their environment. Joseph Spae says, about Japan and religious architecture, that “In a country of stunning natural beauty” there are “shrines and temples which architecturally, one would almost say, emotionally, blend into the surrounding nature.”¹⁴³ For instance, the Itsukushima Shrine in Hiroshima, which is known for its *torii* that stands in the Seto Inland Sea just before the shrine precincts, is exemplary of architecture that harmonizes with both the landscape and seasons. Because the Itsukushima precincts are erected on the seafloor, the main shrine and its auxiliary buildings appear as if they were intentionally built to float upon the sea during periods of high tide.

Kevin Nute suggests that Japanese architecture in general (both ancient and contemporary) is often constructed, not merely as “built forms which have no connection with their location” but, as responsive to place, time, and being.¹⁴⁴ He notes the importance of background landscape in relation to Japanese architecture. The natural background (whether hills, mountains, or trees) is often utilized to frame the continuity

¹⁴² Ibid., 15.

¹⁴³ Joseph Spae, *Japanese Religiosity* (Tokyo: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1971), 31-32.

¹⁴⁴ Kevin Nute, *Place, Time and Being in Japanese Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

between nature and architecture. In other words, some places are built so that the “view of a distant natural landscape” is framed as a “part of a built foreground.”¹⁴⁵ Nute explains that the practice of framing things of natural phenomena, such as a mountain view, into the constructed landscape, is to make things from afar seem close within, or as a part of, one’s settings. Anesaki too notes the importance of natural background in the religious architecture in Nara:

[W]e must remember that the temple and palace buildings...are always to be looked at with their natural background and foreground. The grandest architectural group in Japan is perhaps that of the Central Cathedral and its subordinate buildings in Nara... Even this group, an expression of the harmony between national unity and the religious ideal, is so placed and distributed that the background of hills and the interference of trees breaks up the regularity of the architecture. The buildings would lose much if they were deprived of the giant cryptomerias that surround the temples of the slope of the Kasuga hills at the background.¹⁴⁶

Overall, architecture that accommodates nature (or manifests continuity with nature) shows that nature takes precedence in relation to constructed forms. In relation to Shinto shrines specifically, nature is the source that lends to shrines their natural aesthetic and aura.

Joseph W.T. Mason writes that “Nature, not man, enlarges Shinto Shrines...Long before man offered his structural contribution to the Shrines, Nature made hers. Man’s additions are auxiliary.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, shrines that are constructed by human hands are complimentary to nature; but the original shrines themselves that capture the essence of Shinto inspiration were the natural phenomena itself, as indicated above with regard to the early demarcations of *kami*-ness (the *yashiro*, *iwasaka/iwakura*, and *shimenawa*). Mason claims that sacred spaces demarcated, not by buildings, but by straw rope and

¹⁴⁵ Nute, *Place, Time and Being*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Anesaki, *Art, Life, and Nature*, 15.

¹⁴⁷ Mason. *Meaning of Shinto*. 204.

rocks, show that “it is not necessary for man to employ architects, builders and artists for the construction of a spired edifice to show his understanding of spirituality.”¹⁴⁸ Instead “an evergreen mountain may represent the universality of divine spirit...more effectively than a closed cathedral.”¹⁴⁹ But still, Mason says, a Shinto shrine’s simplistic materiality along with its natural setting visibly manifests Shinto’s theological subtleties as does the un-enshrined beings of nature (the primordial shrines) themselves.

Shrines of wood generally have been added to the Shrines of Nature’s construction, but they do not replace Nature. The Shrine buildings always unite with the surroundings that Nature contributes. The buildings retain the simplicity of Nature and do not seek artificial adornments. They are primitive in design and construction, as though Shinto instinctively realizes that the primaeval intuition of universal spirituality must remain simple and direct to escape theological complications and misconceptions.¹⁵⁰

Being at home in the World and Nature

In light of the above, the shrine-atmosphere is more than a mere place of aesthetic-rest. In fact, Clifford Geertz says that a culture’s “religious” and “sacred symbols” both objectify “its moral and aesthetic preference” and “supports...beliefs about the world’s body by invoking deeply felt moral and aesthetic sentiments as experiential evidence for their truth.”¹⁵¹ In other words, symbolic representation should aesthetically, and thus emotionally, reinforce a worldview. Shrines, as aesthetic representations, should express a “specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic” which

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 208.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 208.

¹⁵⁰ Mason, *Meaning of Shinto*, 214. Shaner, similarly to Mason, refers to “outdoor Shinto gates (*torii*),” that demarcate objects of nature (e.g., mountains, waterfalls, trees, or groves) as “entrances to temples without walls.” Shaner, “Japanese Experience of Nature,” 166.

¹⁵¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89-90.

should be intuitively and “emotionally convincing.”¹⁵² Geertz’s idea is to some degree applicable to Shinto shrines, insofar as shrines are places where “nature itself may be viewed as a kami symbol.”¹⁵³ In Geertzian terms, Shinto shrines are symbolic of a “worldview” that sees sacred-ness (or *kami*-ness) in the natural world, and an “ethos,” which advocates affirmation of being in the natural world.¹⁵⁴ In Hideo Kishimoto’s words, Shinto Shrines are places where the aesthetic and the religious coalesce to help “emancipate man from [his] worries and anxieties”¹⁵⁵ by encouraging him/her to affirm “the given environment.”¹⁵⁶

Robert Carter says that the goal of experiencing the shrine environs is to reconcile oneself to the wonder of “being.” Carter, speaking as if he were a tourist guide, provides a sensually evocative account of experiencing a shrine atmosphere.

Shinto shrines are simple and natural affairs, usually wooden, and they may be thought to mark the natural rather than to replace or confine it. The beautiful torii, or entrance gateway to a shrine, are perhaps to be thought of as notable exclamation points: Here! Here! Here is divinity which is all around you, but since you do not seem to recognize it, then here it is harder to miss, to overlook. Can you feel it now? [That is], the remarkable sense of awe, of incredible fascination, the hair standing up on the back of your neck, together with the weakness in the knees or an increase in the heart rate. Any or all of these alert you to the fact that you are in the presence of mysterious divinity. Now, as you leave the shrine, can you take away with you, and sense as though for the first time, the incredible beauty of the falling snow, of the mist, of a great blue heron lumbering slowly overhead, of the chattering squirrel? If the world is now alive with the spirit of divinity, then Shinto has done its work, and you

¹⁵² Ibid., 90. Similarly, Chikao Fujisawa says that at “the core of Japanese aesthetic symbolism” is the ability to simplify “all things complex and complicated” so “that the visible and invisible, and the metaphysical and physical remain undivided.” This “Japanese aesthetic symbolism [is one] to which a great many foreigners will feel irresistibly attracted.” See Fujisawa, *Zen and Shinto*, 26.

¹⁵³ Ueda Kenji, “Shinto,” in *Religion in Japanese Culture*, eds. Noriyoshi Tamaru and David Reid (Tokyo/New York: Kodansha International, 1996), 32.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵⁵ Kishimoto, “Japanese Cultural Traits and Religion,” 117.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 118.

have been reopened, in a way born again to the astonishing wonder of being in its many forms.¹⁵⁷

Carter suggests to the reader that the shrines and their *torii* gates are indicators accenting the various aspects of being (e.g., the weather, the trees, and the animals) that, though always present, are often overlooked.

Jean Herbert provides a similar interpretation of shrine experience. He begins by noting the dramatic reaction of a few foreigners whom he accompanied to the shrines of Ise. Herbert explains their response to the shrine atmosphere in terms of its existential significance. Shrine environs, he says, have the ability to evoke a sense of kinship to nature and humanity and thus alleviate the existential feelings of alienation and angst.

On more than one occasion, I entered the precincts of some great Shinto center, particularly Ise, with groups of foreigners who knew absolutely nothing about it and were not particularly interested, and yet were so deeply struck by the atmosphere they found there that some of them actually shed tears. The best explanation I can offer is that the Shinto shrine is a visible and ever active expression of the factual kinship... which exists between individual man and the whole world... When entering it, one inevitably becomes more or less conscious of that blood-relation, and the realization of it throws into the background all feelings of anxiety, antagonism, loneliness, discouragement, as when a child comes to rest in its mother's lap. A feeling of almost palpable peace and security falls upon the visitor as he proceeds further into the holy enclosure, and to those unready for it, it comes as a shock.¹⁵⁸

Herbert's interpretation is in sync with Kishimoto's analysis of the dynamic between aesthetics and religion, in which both function to induce a feeling of serenity, peace, existential harmony and affirmation of the world.

Similarly, both Thomas Kasulis and Kevin Nute advocate the idea that architecture and shrine environs can induce an existential feeling of at home-ness in the

¹⁵⁷ Carter, "Significance of Shintoism," 60.

¹⁵⁸ Herbert, *Fountain-head of Japan*, 92.

world.¹⁵⁹ Kasulis says, regarding the *torii* which demarcates the pathway to a shrine, that “it is a tangible gateway to an intimacy with the world.” Furthermore, “when people get lost in the details of everyday life, when they disconnect from their capacity for awe, they often feel homeless. The *torii* shows the way home.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, Shinto markers point to those places that evoke a feeling of appreciation and being-alive in the world: that is, in the words of Spae, being in the world in such a way where “‘nature’ is not an object...opposed to man,” but instead a place where “man lives in it... through an astonishing emotional and ontological empathy.”¹⁶¹ Kasulis recalls, like Herbert, the testimony of some foreigners who lived in Japan.

Most foreign tourists to Japan have been impressed with the extraordinary serenity, restrained design, and natural beauty of Shinto sites. Towering trees, white gravel grounds, carefully pruned shrubs, and beautiful flowers instill peace in many visitors, a peace arising not from aesthetic flight from the world but from a heightened participation and outright enjoyment of it.... I have heard many foreigners say they felt oddly at home in such environs. Some who have lived in Japan for some time have gone so far as to say that on many occasions they have “felt Shinto” themselves.¹⁶²

Nute, however, discusses this feeling of being at home in the world in Heidegger’s terms of “dwelling” in regard to how some built environments are constructed to help one live in the world more fully. Nute says that his study of Japanese architecture “is about built environments which...seem able in a number of ways to enhance our experience of being. It is suggested that...this includes helping us to orientate ourselves and making us feel more at home in the world; making us more alive

¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, Floyd Ross says that “Shinto arose out of the attitudes and way of living of a people who were very much at home with their environment.” See Ross, *Way of Japan*, 47.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Kasulis, *Shinto: The Way Home*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Spae, *Shinto Man*, 11.

¹⁶² Kasulis, *Shinto: The Way Home*, 1.

to the moment and the passage of time.”¹⁶³ This, he claims, is architecture that “celebrates existence.”¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to share an anecdote regarding the experience of an African American Zen priestess named Angel K. Williams. Perhaps her experience can help illuminate the significance of aesthetics in facilitating one’s existential (or even spiritual) well-being. Her experience is not directly related to Shinto but is associated with the same cultural milieu in which religion and aesthetics serve the similar existential purposes. Williams says that at the age of twelve she became agnostic and abandoned the African American church. Her disillusionment with the church (and even her urban surroundings) resided in not finding her habitation aesthetically satisfying. Thus, she felt “out of sync” with her surroundings, but began to feel differently when she encountered a traditional Japanese home.

That all changed when I saw a traditional Japanese house and garden for the first time. I discovered that I didn’t lack a sense of home...To put it simply, the clean, open space spoke to me and I could see how it could work for me without having to be filled up with things. Empty was no longer empty. After that encounter with “home,” I began to see things with different eyes. It was as if I had been blind to the beauty of things and now I could see.¹⁶⁵

In this experience Williams found at-home-ness in the world. It was after her experience that she sought its interpretation in the Zen studies of D.T. Suzuki, and thus sought

¹⁶³ Nute, *Place, Time, and Being*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁶⁵ Kyodo Angel Williams, *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace* (New York, NY: Viking Compass, 2000), 4.

existential solace in Zen, a tradition which shares with Shinto the same affinity for affirming the natural world.

The previous chapter illustrated, by looking at how *kami* is understood in an emotional and ontological sense, that for Shinto the world of nature (e.g., mountains, trees, natural groves, and etc.) is to be experienced as sacred; this chapter has examined the sacredness (or *kami*-ness) of nature in the context of Shinto shrines' atmosphere and aesthetics. And, in light of shrines' atmosphere and aesthetics, it is clear how the experience of such environs, as opposed to intellectual (or doctrinal) discourse, is thought to evoke recognition of nature's sacredness. Not only that, I have attempted to illuminate the existential significance of the shrine experience: that shrine aesthetics and atmosphere are thought to evoke a feeling of existential contentment with being at home in the natural world.

Being at home in the world of nature is only one dimension of Shinto's sacred objective. The next chapter will diverge to the extent that the focal point will move away from the world of nature into the social world by bringing attention to Shinto's festive representation, the experience of which is thought to encourage being in the world with others, in everyday affairs, as sacred objective itself. One will see how festivals are thought to *re-vitalize* the sacredness of a world that is already sacred.

Chapter 3: Ecstasy and Effervescence of *Matsuri*

Matsuri, like shrines, are one of the most visible aspects of Shinto.¹⁶⁶ In essence, *matsuri* refers to an act of worship in the senses of attending to, waiting upon, entertaining, obeying, or showing respect and reverence to an object of a superior status. But as an event, and as Norman Havens tells us, *matsuri* are “commonly associated with [Japan’s] spectacular seasonal ‘festivals.’”¹⁶⁷ And similar to Shinto shrines, *matsuri* are thought to be a means by which Shinto attracts people and communicates its sacred objective. Robert Carter notes that though Shinto offers “no scripture,” “no revelation to study,” and “no systematic moral code,” it offers us “at least...festivals, festivals, and more festivals.”¹⁶⁸ The Japanese sociologist Kiyomi Morioka claims that if not for “the magnificent construction and superb arrangement of the shrine and what lies within its precincts,” then the “attractiveness” of Shinto, in light of the effects of secularization upon Japanese religiosity, “may consist of a manifestation of miraculous power, of beautiful and impressive festival rites.”¹⁶⁹ The Shinto priest Motohisa Yamakage, who was cited above in the chapter on shrines, refers to “rituals and festivals” as Shinto’s “great lifeline,” which shows “that religion does not exist solely or primarily at the level of language.”¹⁷⁰

But according to the National Association of Shinto Shrines, *matsuri* are communal festivals that should regenerate a kind of day-to-day worship in which one is

¹⁶⁶ Ian Reader notes that, in Japan, festivals are held nearly “all year round,” and can be found “occurring somewhere on virtually every day of the year.” See Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 63.

¹⁶⁷ Norman Havens, “Translator’s Postscript: *Matsuri* in Japanese Religious Life” in *Matsuri*, vol 1 of *Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions*, trans. Norman Havens (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988), 147.

¹⁶⁸ Carter, “The Significance of Shintoism,” 38.

¹⁶⁹ Kiyomi Morioka, *Religion in Changing Japanese Society* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1975), 71-72.

¹⁷⁰ Yamakage, *Essence of Shinto*, 42. See also Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 176.

enthusiastically cooperative with others in one's communal, local, and national context by fulfilling one's responsibilities to his/her work, family, community, and nation. The National Association of Shrines says that one's "day-to-day life is service of the Divine, in the full sense of the word *matsuri*."¹⁷¹ The basic idea is that "members of the common social group...should unite in carrying out purification and *matsuri*,"¹⁷² because through such "common effort, something is born which is unattainable by individual effort.... [W]here one, if alone, would moan in disappointment, lose hope, and be unable to take one more step," then through participation in *matsuri*, one would become "saved [and] encouraged [by the group] and can continue to do good."¹⁷³ Here, the Association says, the faith of the individual "is animated," being "backed up by social faith."¹⁷⁴

Matsuri, as communal festivals, function basically as a means of re-invigorating the sacredness of being in the world with others. But, as this chapter will discuss, *matsuri* is thought to accomplish this goal by facilitating an ecstatic and effervescent atmosphere that seemingly synthesizes sacred and profane activity. This is because the experience of *matsuri*, in their most extreme cases, may be thought of as an ontological regression into a primordial state of being (chaos) from out of which arises harmony, creativity, and order. The aim of this chapter is to show how Shinto aims to reinvigorate individuals and generate an affirmation of being in the world with others as a sacred objective through the ecstatic and effervescent experience of *matsuri*.

I will briefly comment on the early origin of *matsuri* with respect to local and territorial communities whose bonds were solidified by festival rites. Then I will discuss

¹⁷¹ Shinto Committee, *Outline of Shinto*, 10.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

matsuri's general structure and show how it progresses from solemn rites to ecstatic and effervescent occasions; this will provide a framework to contextualize some personal testimonies of those who have written about their experiences of *matsuri*. Thereafter, I will discuss two studies—one on the concept of “sacred transgression,” and one on the significance of “sensations”—as they relate to the vitality and the importance of experience in *matsuri*. Lastly, I will discuss the sacred objective that underlies *matsuri* experience, as it relates to a dialectical phenomenon of regression and renewal. This will be illuminated in light of early Japanese mythology and in view of what some authors maintain about the ontological emergence of order from chaos—or the sense of revitalization arising from a regression into a primordial state of being—in the context of *matsuri*.

Early Significance of *Matsuri*

Some scholars note that early forms of *matsuri* were rooted in socio-economic relatedness within a given locality. Harada Toshiaki claims that *matsuri* originated in early communal worship of the clan *kami*—called an *ujigami* (氏神)—the practice of which had more territorial significance than mere ancestor worship. According to Harada, early *matsuri*, partly because of territorial conditions, accented the sacredness of the community who enacted the festival more so than the personality of the *ujigami* (or ancestral spirit) who was theoretically (or technically) the object of worship during the celebration. Harada goes at length to express how early *matsuri* was more about community, region, and sacred space than about the worship of discrete entities. He says that “it is unreasonable to locate the origin of *ujigami* festivals in ancestor worship

alone,¹⁷⁵ since early Japanese kinship groups were based not on common ancestors but rather on the “condition of living within common territorial borders.”¹⁷⁶ The *ujigami*, as a tutelary *kami*, was originally a localized and “geographical or territorial concept”¹⁷⁷ and became associated with “ancestors” only when “the concept of divinity took on more pronounced anthropomorphic characteristics.”¹⁷⁸ Harada says that in “an agricultural society like that of Japan...in which people lead sedentary lives within a fixed locale, territorial conditions are essential to the society’s solidarity. Leading their lives together with an intimate relation to a specific area...people come to observe rituals in common as a central part of their social life.”¹⁷⁹

Sonoda Minoru likewise emphasizes the communal aspect of early *matsuri*. Sonoda situates the origin of *matsuri* within the context of what he refers to as early Japanese “hometown cults,” by which he means “*ujigami* cults in [their] local communities.”¹⁸⁰ These early “Japanese villages and towns,” Sonoda says, “were local communities not only in the modern sociological sense, but also in a spiritual sense.”¹⁸¹ Sharing similar means of living in the domains of “agriculture, forestry, and fishing...these communities also constituted communal ‘sacred worlds’” that “defined the sacred order of the village in the two dimensions of space and time.”¹⁸² If Sonoda and Harada are correct, then the significance of *matsuri*, since its early beginnings unto now, was always the sacredness of being with others in one’s community.

¹⁷⁵ Harada Toshiaki, “The Origin of Rites of Worship within the Local Community,” in *Matsuri*, 24.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁸⁰ Sonoda Minoru, “Shinto and the Natural Environment,” in *Shinto in History*, 42.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

Structure and Experience of *Matsuri*

Interestingly, Sonoda provides a description of an early *ujigami* festivity that is more or less reflective of *matsuri*'s contemporary atmosphere and structure and thus provides a place to begin discussing *matsuri*'s general structure, ambience, and the experience thereof.

Ujigami rituals led the kami along the roads from the mountain shrine to the village shrine and from the village shrine to the field shrine in a procession, thus transforming the entire village community into a sacred, liberated space. During this period of festivities (hare), the village is turned into a market place and the community is re-invigorated.¹⁸³

To be exact, there are at least three structural features that are constituent of most *matsuri*. Borrowing from Michael Ashkenazi in his anthropological study of a Shinto festival, most *matsuri* consist of a period of ritual purification and *kami* invocation; a parade or the *kami* procession (which is where Sonoda's description begins); and a time of feast and festivities.¹⁸⁴ Below is a discussion of these three structural features with a heightened emphasis on the second and third.

Matsuri is typically preceded by formal and stately rituals of purification that involves minimal participation of the public. These rituals are performed by priests, who mediate between the *kami* and its' local patrons. Anyone that has a significant role in the festival must undergo the rites of purification. The priests, for example, for a few days preceding a festival, may abstain from alcohol, certain foods, or entertainment. After the purification process, the *kami* is invoked by drum, dance, and liturgical prayer (*norito* 祝詞) in order that its presence may be transferred from the shrine precincts unto the

¹⁸³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Ashkenazi, *Matsuri: Festivals of a Japanese Town* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 30, 49, and 65.

miniature shrine (*mikoshi* 神輿) in which it will temporarily reside. But, according to the Shinto scholar and philosopher Ueda Kenji, aside from rites of purification, the two forms of ritual activity that are the most attractive about the festivals are “the deity’s symbolic tour of the parish, and the special performances and general merrymaking that contribute to the entertainment of the *kami*.”¹⁸⁵

The tour of the *kami* throughout the parish, which is generally called either the parade or the procession, is the second structural feature of *matsuri*. Many authors note that the parade tends to be one of the most visually appealing aspects of the *matsuri*. The parades, Stuart Picken says, are “the most extravagant and colorful aspects” of Shinto festivals.¹⁸⁶ Jean Herbert too describes the parade as a “colorful pageant” and as the “most spectacular part of...*matsuri*” that “is by no means the least of the attractions for tourists and for the most devout worshippers alike.”¹⁸⁷ In terms of features, Herbert describes the material culture that might likely be displayed in processions. In most cases “the pageant comprises a long procession” in which participants are adorned in traditional garments and more: one finds “priests...in full dress, some of them on horseback, occasionally in palanquins, delegations of *ujiko* [i.e. shrine patrons] from various wards of the parish, delegations of *geisha*, groups of musicians, groups of dancers, *samurai* in full armour with their attendants, lantern bearers, floats and special palanquins.”¹⁸⁸

Sokyo Ono claims that the procession is the most exciting and most meaningful aspect for the overall community.¹⁸⁹ He notes that “The essence of the procession...is the movement of the *kami* through the parish,” the performance of which begins with the

¹⁸⁵ Kenji, “Shinto,” 40.

¹⁸⁶ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 179.

¹⁸⁷ Herbert, *Shinto: the Fountainhead*, 178.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁸⁹ Ono, *Kami Way*, 68.

“symbolic transfer of the *kami* from the inner sanctuary [of the main shrine] to an ornate and gilded sacred palanquin (*mikoshi*).”¹⁹⁰ This temporary and portable shrine is hoisted upon the shoulders of its bearers and carried, sometimes in an alarming and turbulent fashion, throughout the neighborhood. In some cases, at least forty men may be required to help carry the *mikoshi*, the energy for which is usually aroused by inebriation along with rhythmic syncopation in both chanting and the movement of several bodies.¹⁹¹ Highlighting the importance of experiencing the event, Ono says that “when [the] young men in *happi* coats and with [their] towels wrapped tightly about their heads shout “*washo, washo,*” as they zig zag down the streets with the sacred palanquin... they experience an exhilaration unimagined by those who do not enter into the spirit of the occasion.”¹⁹² According to Yo-ichiro Hakomori, in his essay on *matsuri*, the very intense nature of the *mikoshi* procession “is designed to effect awe in the onlookers.”¹⁹³

The third structural feature of *matsuri* is the *naorai* (直会) which Ashkenazi defines broadly as feast and festivities that happen throughout the entire neighborhood on the evening and night after the procession.¹⁹⁴ Ashkenazi says that “For most participants [the feasts and] festivities are the festival. They are certainly the most visible and most sought after part of a *matsuri*.”¹⁹⁵ On neighborhood streets, during these festive evenings and nights, one may see several food, soda, and alcohol vendors, colorful neighborhood floats, fireworks, Chinese lion dances, traditional Japanese dances, theatricals, and

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Gloria Granz Gonick, *Matsuri: Japanese Festival Arts*, in Textile Series no.6 (Los Angeles: UCLA Flower Museum of Cultural History, 2002), 50-51.

¹⁹² Ono, *Kami Way*, 94-95.

¹⁹³ Yo-ichiro Hakomori, “The Sacred and the Profane in Matsuri Structures,” in *Matsuri: Japanese Festival Arts*, 86.

¹⁹⁴ On occasions in which festivals last for two or more days, feast and festivities may occur on both the night/s preceding the main procession and the night following the procession.

¹⁹⁵ Ashkenazi, *Matsuri*, 65.

sporting events. Unlike the events of ritual purification that precede the procession, the atmosphere of feast and festivities is generated by mass participation.¹⁹⁶ Ashkenazi notes that, at least for most of the adults, this part of the *matsuri* tends to become the orgiastic occasion. It consists of “drunkenness, singing, and other lighthearted activities” that follows the procession and is the “real *naorai*” which possesses deep social implications.¹⁹⁷ Ashkenazi cites one gentleman, discussing the importance of *naorai*, who says that “the meaning of the ritual is entirely social... It is an opportunity for us to get together and do something as a community. Drinking and eating together, even getting drunk, is for us Japanese a special way of feeling togetherness”¹⁹⁸

Personal Testimonies of *Matsuri* Experience

The festivities and feasts, for the most part, provide the context for the personal testimonies of *matsuri* that I cite below, all of which show how the activity and atmosphere of *matsuri* impressed sensational memories upon those who experienced the event/s. These memories were more or less meaningful or bizarre—that is, either in the sense of affecting the experiencer’s outlook in relation to the world and others, or in the sense of arousing their awareness of a sacred but profane dimension that is frequently characteristic of *matsuri*. Following these personal accounts, I will discuss the vitality of *matsuri* in light of Sonoda Minoru’s and Yanagawa Keiichi’s evaluation of the subject in terms of “sacred transgression” and “sensations.” Overall, these personal accounts and the following discussion highlight the importance of experience in *matsuri*.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Hiroyuki Ozawa has photographed major *matsuri* across Japan for over three decades. In a publication of twenty-six years' worth of his work, Hiroyuki notes how the experience of Tokyo's *Sanja Matsuri*, facilitated by the Asakusa Shrine, changed both his outlook on his self-identity and his career. Prior to photographing *matsuri*, he was an electrical engineer for Japan's National Railways, a job which he says was dull and unsatisfying.¹⁹⁹ A year after having purchased a camera and taken photography courses, he said:

I came across the Sanja Festival. The passionate enthusiasm that I saw in the streets—the sense that the crowds and the *mikoshi* being shouldered through them had somehow become one—soon had my camera clicking, until I found myself out of the National Railways and all set to become a professional cameraman. It was all, without doubt, thanks to the Sanja Festival....

Looking back, I have come to feel that what moved me at the *Sanja* Festival was the glimpse it gave me of the “gods” of Asakusa. For much the same reason, I continue to pursue festivals throughout Japan....*Matsuri* means a once-a-year exchange with the deities, an exchange that involves ridding the mind of the self, purifying the soul, awakening to the preciousness of life, and feeling gratitude for the blessings of nature. The things that move me about festivals, I suspect, is the realization that the feelings of awe and gratitude towards the gods that the Japanese have harbored since ancient times exist inside me, too, giving me an unconscious sense of identity.²⁰⁰

Hiroyuki has confidence in the ability of photography to communicate what *matsuri* is about. Though he complements his photos with brief descriptions of each *matsuri* displayed, he hopes that the “selection of photos thus amassed [in the English edition]...will serve to give the non-Japanese reader some knowledge of what Japanese festivals are like, but above all...that it will inspire a desire to come to this country [i.e.

¹⁹⁹ Hiroyuki Ozawa, *Spectacle and Spirit: The Great Festivals of Japan*, trans. John Bestor (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1999), 118.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Japan] and see at least one festival at first hand.”²⁰¹ It is implied that visual perception of *matsuri*, even by way of photography, may arouse the desire to experience the actual *matsuri* themselves.

Thomas Rimmer, in the introduction to Hiroyuki’s photographic compilation, notes that one summer, while in Tokyo, he was privileged to experience the *O-Bon* festival—a three-day celebration, observed nearly throughout the entirety of Japan, technically in honor of the annual return of ancestral spirits. Preceding his reflection, Rimmer emphasizes the experiential value of *matsuri*. “Japanese festivals,” he says, are “a form of art” that “must be actually experienced to be altogether understood and enjoyed.”²⁰² He speaks of how, through the music, motion, and intensity of the crowd, he became personally absorbed into the communal flow of things. He says,

I think this occasion marked the first time in my life when, to the seduction of the music, the movement, the powerful energies of that moment, I felt myself completely, yet safely, able to abandon any ordinary sense of self in order to become part of a deeper communal rhythm. The experience was a bit disconcerting at first, yet eventually produced a natural sense of well-being and pleasure that left me refreshed and full of good humor.²⁰³

Rimmer also notes that, in light of American festivities (e.g., *Mardi Gras*), it is not the case that “we in the West have no experience of our own” of “what might be described as...communal ecstasy.... But in America, where our culture has been so influenced by Protestantism, these kinds of festivals, half ritual, half entertainment, remain the exception rather than the rule.”²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid, 6.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

A Portuguese author, Wenceslau de Moraes, gives a 1914 eyewitness account of the *Obon Matsuri* in the town of Tokushima in Shikoku. Moraes experienced a community of people absorbed in “fun,” a phenomenon that Ashkenazi says is “critical for understanding festivities” given that a “major part of festival participation can be credited to the lure of entertainment, of fun, of enjoyment, that participants feel...”²⁰⁵ But provided the mass activities of singing, dancing, the effervescence of the crowd, the sensations of noise and colliding bodies, all in the context of the night, the atmosphere that Moraes witnessed seemed rather unusually intense. Moraes notes the nostalgic sentiment held by some elders of the town, who claimed that the *Obon matsuri* of their day lost the intensity of those of the past. Moraes says that, to the contrary, the evening festivities that he witnessed were unlike any social event he ever experienced in terms of the restlessness of the public participation. Citing the elders first, he says that

The dance of the festival of the dead in Tokushima is already dead, the old men say, for forty or fifty years ago it was really an intensity, a delirium. But as for me, what I saw for three or four days last year constitutes one of the strangest spectacles which the social life in Japan might offer.

An hysteric frenzy occupies all the people like [a] contagion.... All go out into the street during the day and during the night. But principally it is at night when the festival is... most animated, and then we find some similarity with a rough carnival, and we can find...some...intense and mysterious folly....

The crowds fill the principle streets. From time to time, a noisy group appears from side road, opening the way with great shouts and violent bumps. The lanterns lifted on high pole[s] illuminate as in a mad phantasy the crowds—men, women, children, those who play in some mad rags the samisen [i.e. traditional Japanese guitar], other who sing, others who dance and gesticulate as mimic[s] bewitched. The *geisha* can be distinguished from the others by the gentility of their rich tunics of silk, and by their faces half-hidden in those wide hats of legendary use here.

²⁰⁵ Ashkenazi, *Matsuri*, 72-73.

But it is not only geisha who dance; half the population of the city dances, including those old and decrepit, old women, and feeble children.²⁰⁶

William Currie, in an entry of *One Hundred Things about Japan* (published in 1969), provides reflective accounts of two *matsuri* in the towns of Kamakura and Chichibu just outside of Tokyo. Currie notes that, in Kamakura, the “wonder” and “exhilaration” he felt during the festival was not unusual, but the dynamic of “the sacred and the profane” was a phenomenon that he never experienced before, and was something he thought to be peculiar to *matsuri* and the Japanese worldview. Then, with regard to festival in Chichibu, Currie pays close attention to the surrounding environs and speaks of the sacred and the profane in terms of celebrants “divine intoxication.” First, regarding the festival in Kamakura, he says

I don't have any trouble recalling the combination of wonder and exhilaration I experienced that day, because the same feeling has been repeated many times during the last fifteen years.

Carnivals and street fairs were not new to me, nor were outdoor religious festivals and processions. But the mixture of the sacred and the profane, the solemn and the earthy, rich symbolism and gaudy hucksterism—this was something I had not experienced before. I had the feeling that if one could understand the spirit of the *matsuri*, then one would have gone a long way toward understanding the Japanese way of looking at the world.

Then, with regard to the second festival at Chichibu, he continues,

Recently I attended the Night Festival at Chichibu, on the outskirts of Tokyo, one of the most colorful *matsuri* in all Japan. All the elements were there that make the *matsuri* an exciting event: expectant crowds of people gradually becoming more and more involved in the action; the ceaseless rhythm of drums and jingling, bell-like instruments; the wild procession of the *mikoshi*, or ‘temporary dwelling places of the god,’ weaving in and out of the crowds.

²⁰⁶ Wenceslau de Moraes, *Bon-Odori in Tokushima: Essays of a Portuguese Hermit in Japan*, trans. Kazuo Okamoto (Osaka, JP: Union Press, 1979), 151, cited in Ozawa, *Spectacle and Spirit*, 7-8.

What makes the Chichibu festival particularly colorful is the brightness radiating from the hundreds of lanterns strung around the *mikoshi*, in this case large, three-tiered floats which have to be pulled by several men with long, sturdy ropes. The stalwart young (and not so young) men pulling the floats and riding on them showed more than the usual degree of “divine intoxication” expected of the *mikoshi* bearers, with *sake* and contagious enthusiasm providing most of the intoxication. As a background to all this, the winter sky was lit up constantly by a spectacular fireworks display that continued through the evening.²⁰⁷

Lastly, Yo-ichiro Hakamori says, regarding his “first memories of *matsuri* as a young child,” that he vaguely recalls the “sounds, music, gaiety; adults and children in masks dancing; [and] the abundance of foods and games.”²⁰⁸ Of all things, he says, “I remember [the] *matsuri*’s intoxicating revelry and laughter...I witnessed the sense of freedom people had to exhibit and possess, the characteristics [of which were] deemed appropriate for celebration.”²⁰⁹ Like Rimmer, Hakomori notes that *matsuri* may be similar to the American *Mardi Gras*, with regard to the occasional unrestrained and profane behavior; but the mark of *matsuri*, he suggests, is its sacredness, since the “Shinto gods to whom the festival is dedicated are present during the event.”²¹⁰

Sacred Transgression and Sensations

The foregoing testimonies serve to highlight the significance of experience in *matsuri*. They show how *matsuri* were experienced as ecstatic and effervescent occasions (some having a kind of regenerating effect); they also show how *matsuri* were experienced as communal moments when people suspended their etiquette and social norms to participate in sacred though ostensibly profane behavior.

²⁰⁷ Yanagawa Keiichi, “The Sensation of Matsuri,” in *Matsuri*, 8-10.

²⁰⁸ Yo-ichiro Hakamori, “The Sacred and the Profane,” 77.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Regarding the sacred and profane aspect of *matsuri*, Sonoda Minoru describes it as a phenomenon of “sacred transgression.” Reflecting too on his childhood memories of festivals, Sonoda says that “what I could not comprehend was the fact that at the time of *matsuri*, some men, and on occasion even some women—people who normally were among the most upright and proper of those known to me—could pull out all the stops and engage in unrestrained uproar.”²¹¹ Furthermore, Sonoda did not understand just why the *kami*, who was a significant feature of the festival, could seemingly care less about such behavior.²¹² Sonoda notes that both evening and night festivities may occasionally “involve a kind of public license for the casting away of everyday restraints and for the kind of behavior which in normal common sense would be disdainfully dismissed as vulgar.” But such vulgarity, he says, has its origin in some early Japanese festivals where

human behavior which appeared at night tended toward a chaos differing immeasurably from the principled conduct of the day governed by the light of reason. The act of drinking and feasting to excess had the effect of breaking down the everyday rhythm, drunkenness and excessive behavior leading to quarrels and debauchery, while foul language and vulgar stories became the seed of raucous laughter. All of these elements...resulted in a heady atmosphere and disorderly uproar.²¹³

In his assessment of contemporary festivals, Sonoda says that “those *matsuri* which continue to exhibit [a] dynamic vitality today are characterized by aspects coming equally from the two poles” of the “[sacred] ‘ritual (*saigi* 祭儀) and [profane] ‘festival’ (*shukusai* 祝祭).”²¹⁴ Sonoda notes that this profane dimension of *matsuri* is brought about within the experience of the “‘collective effervescence’ noted by Durkheim” in addition to the utilization “to the greatest possible degree” of “music and dance and the effects of

²¹¹ Sonoda, Minoru, “Sacred Transgression,” in *Matsuri* 35.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

abundant fire, light, and color.”²¹⁵ In other words, the phenomenon of “sacred transgression” arises from “a [religious] situation which aims explicitly for an excessive consumption [or indulgence in the senses] accompanying the casting off of every kind of restriction.”²¹⁶ Interestingly, this aspect of “transgression” does not morally devalue *matsuri*; instead, it keeps *matsuri* from becoming a mere organized and rationalized ritual plot divorced from human sensitivity. Thus, Sonoda says, it is “my inescapable feeling...that whenever we speak of the religious vitality of festivals, we must consider head on without prejudice the significance of this tendency toward ‘sacred transgression.’”²¹⁷

Yanagawa Keiichi gives more attention to the role of sensations in the phenomenon of *matsuri* and challenges scholars to consider *matsuri* not solely from the perspective of anthropological or sociological structuralism, functionalism, and symbolism but in terms of embodiment and sense impressions. Yanagawa admits that these methodologies, which he too has employed in the past, have contributed significantly to the study of *matsuri*.²¹⁸ However, he says that “when we take up the problem of *matsuri*...it is [first] in the form of sensations that the phenomenon is recorded in our memories.”²¹⁹ There is “a kind of sensual reaction that occurs in us prior to such thought” about a *matsuri*’s symbolic meaning, function, and underlying societal structures. The allusion that is often made to a sort of communal ecstasy in the context of *matsuri* has its basis in a “raw experience” which arises from “the various concrete conscious experiences occurring as the result of the stimulation of specific sense organs,

²¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 69.

²¹⁸ Yanagawa Keiichi, “Sensation of Matsuri,” 5-7.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

sense nerves, or sensing portions of the brain.”²²⁰ Therefore, Yanagawa notes that “the problem of the body figures greatly in the subject of *matsuri*.”²²¹ He says that

certain states of consciousness occur from people’s physiological condition, such as musical rhythm in *matsuri*, or the noise, or again the flags of various colors, the Chinese lanterns and costumes, the food, the *mikoshi*, the smells, or again the sense of balance and motor activities accompanying it, and the sensations arising from the internal organs. All of these things are exploited to the fullest extent within the festival....²²²

In light of this, Yanagawa encourages the development of a method for evaluating *matsuri* that does not reduce them solely to the objectives of underlying social structures but rather gives importance to the role of sensations in maintaining their vitality.

Highlighting the affective dimensions of *matsuri*, Yanagawa notes that it is not the case that symbols employed in *matsuri* (e.g. the neighborhood’s *mikoshi* or brightly colored clothing and banners) have no social or functional relevance; but even then, when such symbols are mobilized, they tend to “call up within us what in general may be called a ‘sentiment of the holy.’”²²³ In essence, Yanagawa says, “it may be possible to say that the *matsuri* is more an ‘emotional’ than an intellectual experience.”²²⁴

Mythological Theme

But for Shinto, the sensation of *matsuri* is not an end in itself. Underlying such an experience is thought to be a restorative and re-creative process in which order emerges from chaos and optimistic affirmation of the world with others arises from the revitalization of human energies. Sonoda says that this “divine transgression seen in

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 14.

²²² Ibid., 15.

²²³ Ibid., 17. Emphasis on the term “sentiment” is mine.

²²⁴ Ibid., 15.

matsuri phenomena can be directly linked...to the concept of chaos [and]...creative regeneration,” a mythological theme that “becomes the direct source for the dramatic structure of festivals.”²²⁵ *Matsuri*, in their most intense state, are expressions of a mythic motif which demonstrates “a return [to order] effected by the self-negation of order.”²²⁶ Although Sonoda does not refer to any specific myth, perhaps he would agree that this motif is present in early Japanese mythology. Here, I will discuss the significance of *matsuri* in reference to a mythological account in the *Kojiki*.

The *Kojiki* says that Ama-terasu (the sun-*kami*), while preparing for a harvest festival, was offended by her brother (Susano-no-mikoto) who tossed a horse flayed backwards into a weaving hall where she was working. Ama-terasu, who was offended by the act, hid behind a rock-cave door and, because of the absence of her presence, caused darkness to encompass both the heavens and the islands of Japan. Afterwards, several *kami* planned a celebration, consisting of divination, liturgical recitation, and entertainment, to lure Ama-terasu from out of the cave. After the formalities of divination and liturgical recitation, Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto, a Heavenly-*kami* and dancer, rolled up her sleeves, “became divinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals.”²²⁷ Then, Ame-no-uzume engaged in a sensually evocative and comedic dance. This performance stimulated laughter among the myriad of *kami*, and they too began to participate in song, music, and dance. The festive atmosphere successfully aroused the curiosity of Ama-terasu, who was pulled from the cave by a fellow *kami* after she opened the door to peek and see the reason for the celebration and

²²⁵ Sonoda Minoru, “Sacred Transgression,” 74.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 75..

²²⁷ Donald L. Phillipi, trans., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 88.

commotion. Thereafter, following the return of Ama-terasu, both sunlight and order was restored to the heavens and to the islands of Japan.

This occasion does not go unnoticed by authors and scholars who attempt to unveil the significance of *matsuri*. Carol Gonick notes that Ame-no-uzume's dance was "Executed with robust sensuality" that "engage[d] the attention of the deities and delight[ed] them."²²⁸ And, like most "*matsuri* throughout Japan today," this shows the "salutary power of earnest entertainment enhanced by the power of dress—and undress" which shocks and changes even the "disposition" of the *kami*.²²⁹ Thomas Kasulis says that this myth shows how *kami* "prefer a party given in their honor" than "acts of reverential kowtowing." Instead "*kami* want to be honored by being included in the festivities of life," which at the same time show their desire to be connected joyfully with others.²³⁰ In addition, Herbert Plutschow describes this occasion as one of the most "ancient renewal rituals" recorded in Japanese literature.²³¹ Plutschow notes that

When she [i.e. Ama-terasu] hid herself, chaos prevailed as the world was plunged into a primordial darkness in which things lost their outline and became confused. The distinction of things, and essential element of order, could no longer be held. Ama no Uzume's dance, therefore, was a ritual attempt to renew the order, much like *matsuri* we still observe today.²³²

Mircea Eliade contends that religious festivals, in both archaic and contemporary times, represent a periodical (or ritual) "travel back" to "reintegrate a sacred time of origin" and thus become "contemporary with the gods."²³³ If this mythological account of the occasion at the rock cave is accepted as a literary archetype of contemporary

²²⁸ Gonick, *Matsuri: Japanese Festival Arts*, 31.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Kasulis, *Shinto: The Way Home*, 62.

²³¹ Herbert Plutschow, *Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan* (New York: Japan Library, 1996), 53-54.

²³² Plutschow, *Matsuri: Festivals of Japan*, 53.

²³³ Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 91-92.

matsuri, then it could be maintained that “the experience of sacred space and sacred time,” within the context of today’s *matsuri*, “reveals a desire to reintegrate a primordial situation...in which the gods and the mythical ancestors were...engaged in creating the world, or in organizing it.”²³⁴ To be clear, however, such a phenomenon as described is neither as literal nor as mystical as it may seem, but it is rather ontological. As Eliade notes,

We have no warrant for interpreting periodic return to the sacred time of origin as a rejection of the real world and an escape into dream and imagination. On the contrary, it seems to us that, here again, we can discern [an] *ontological obsession*.... For to wish to reintegrate the *time of origin* is also to wish to return to the *presence of the gods*, to recover the *strong, fresh, pure world* that existed *in ill tempore*. It is at once thirst for the sacred and nostalgia for *being*.²³⁵

In other words, insofar as it applies here, it is not the case that *matsuri* constitutes a conscious attempt, among celebrants, to return historically to the ancient past-times of *kami*—in fact, I doubt that most celebrants in *matsuri* (even those bearing the *mikoshi*) are conscious of the *kami* (mythological or local) in any discursive or theological respect. Rather, the communal ecstasy of *matsuri* may constitute a kind of *returning* to a primordial state of one’s *being in the present* (absorbed in the ecstasy of being here and now).

Regression and Renewal

In the ecstatic and effervescent context of *matsuri*, there may be little bifurcation between conceptions of time and of oneself and others. Plutschow notes that

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid., 94.

“*matsuri*...dissolves time and order.”²³⁶ Also, “It makes people forget their everyday identities, placing them in a different ontic realm.”²³⁷ Everyday existence, “as we ordinarily experience it, dissolves,” and the “natural and supernatural merge into a divine totality.”²³⁸ Concretely, this refers to the sense of a loss of identity (or suspension of social norms and distinctions) in communal ecstasy. The regression into this state of being was suggested in some of the personal testimonies cited above.

James Boyd and Ron Williams, in their interpretations of Shinto, describe this primordial state of being in light of George Bataille’s “immanent immensity.”²³⁹ This refers to a state of human “animality” that precedes human (social) order, in which we do not envision ourselves as one among many in a world of hierarchy and tasks, where sentient and insentient beings are merely “things” present at hand for our utility.²⁴⁰ Boyd and Williams say that “The casual violence, caprice, and intoxication that often occur [in *matsuri*] take the participants, and perhaps the onlookers, beyond the world of projects, and may momentarily break through to that level of being that paradoxically dissolves all individuality and distinction.”²⁴¹ Thus, one’s engrossment “in such festivals can occasion a momentary erasure of the discontinuity we all experience between ourselves and the world.”²⁴²

But Boyd and Williams highlight the significance of this state in terms of Shinto’s conception of *musubi* (産霊)—a term which, as Picken says, generally refers to the

²³⁶ Plutschow, *Matsuri: Festivals of Japan*, 30.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ James W. Boyd and Ron G. Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol 55, no. 1 (Jan., 2005), 38-39, 51.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

process or “spirit of binding, becoming, growth, harmonization, and completeness,”²⁴³ but is also associated with “a life-giving power, a generative, creative force that is the basis of all life.”²⁴⁴ Boyd and Williams note that *musubi* “is of central importance in the Shinto worldview.”²⁴⁵ When seen from the perspective of *matsuri*, they write that

It is this type of festival activity that seems to warrant an augmented interpretation of the process of the *musubi* principle itself—as a level of being and apprehension that is beyond individuation, particularities, and relations. There is an intimation of a prior state from which we emerged but of which we are a part... The excesses of these types of festivals may momentarily reveal our deep embedded-ness in the immense process of *musubi* itself.²⁴⁶

In other words, whereas regression would seem to hinder the life-giving and creative process, regression into the ecstasy of *matsuri* is regression into the creative processes itself.

Regression into the creative processes, the primordial state of one’s being, should have “renewing” or “re-invigorating” implications for both the participants and the community at large. Sonoda notes that “within any society or group which observes festivals involving an orientation toward a kind of sacred transgression,” the principle of “rebirth through a return of the self [i.e. self-identity and order]” restricts the chaos.²⁴⁷ Also, from a “release of excessive energy... a new intoxication, born from the limits of fatigue, will produce a new liberation of mind.”²⁴⁸ In other words, *matsuri* helps alleviate tension and reproduces afresh a mental state and will to exert one’s effort along with others in daily life. According to Plutschow, *matsuri* is the means by which “communal

²⁴³ Picken, *Historical Dictionary of Shinto*, 205.

²⁴⁴ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: an Interpretation,” 34.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

²⁴⁷ Sonoda, “Sacred Transgression,” 74.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

life returns to its original source and vigor.... Through the *matsuri*, people may...partake of the original energies—energies they will need to restore the order.”²⁴⁹ Simply put, from a loss of self in the ecstasy with others comes a return, to the world of project and social distinction, of a renewed and revitalized self with others.

In more than one context, Shinto philosopher Ueda Kenji articulates (though in less ontological terms) this conception of regeneration and revitalization in relation to *matsuri*, individuals, and community. He notes that “*matsuri* relieves people from...strains and tensions [of everyday social order] by bringing their energies to white heat in the religious context.”²⁵⁰ The “communal festival,” he says, “makes a contribution to group solidarity by its orgiastic overturning of normal standards of behavior.”²⁵¹ Elsewhere, in a discussion on Shinto’s outlook on humanity, Ueda notes that “Shinto does not consider human beings as anything that can be physically or psychologically isolated.”²⁵² As a fundamental condition of being human, “all humans receive their life in historical and social relatedness.”²⁵³ But social relatedness must be maintained by mental energy (or life’s power) that, though it may be destructive, is revitalized and restrained through rituals and festivity. Ueda explains that

Shinto is a faith that seeks the essence of existence in life-power.... At times life-power tends rather to harm or even destroy itself. When humans as individuals are psychologically mature, self-restraint can control to some extent this destructive tendency. Even here the continuation of this restraining power all but obliges us to give priority to the underlying value orientation at the basis of the human personality and to acknowledge the existence of a mental energy whose values are continually replenished.... To put it in other words, this mental energy

²⁴⁹ Plutschow, *Matsuri; Festivals of Japan*, 31.

²⁵⁰ Kenji, “Shinto,” 41

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ueda Kenji, “Shinto’s View of the Human,” in *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 545.

²⁵³ Ibid.

with its value orientation is transmitted through participation in festivals...whose strict preservation of form guarantees its vitality.²⁵⁴

Conclusion

In reflection on the foregoing insights into this sacred but profane renewing phenomenon of Shinto festivals, one may say that Shinto *matsuri*, on their most ecstatic occasions, ontologically and existentially have the affirmative characteristics that Eliade attributes generally to archaic festivals of the so-called “religious man.” Speaking in regard to the ontological dimension and renewal factor of religious festivals, Eliade says that

On the existential plane this experience [of returning back to primordial/mythological origin] finds expression in the certainty that life can be periodically begun over again with a maximum of good fortune. Indeed, it is not only an optimistic vision of existence, but a total cleaving to being.²⁵⁵

In Plutschow’s terms, *matsuri* does not attempt to reestablish a “sacred world from a profane world” but rather to re-sacralize “the world at a time when the sacred energies are about to weaken.”²⁵⁶ Provided that *matsuri* actually achieves this objective of replenishing individuals and the community through ecstatic, orgiastic, and effervescent occasions—restoring order and vitality, from out of reversion to chaos, to individuals participating within and along with others in their social matrix as a sacred goal in itself—then one may maintain, as Plutschow suggests, that *matsuri* is a festive interruption into a world that is already sacred. In other words, *matsuri* is the sensually indulgent and ecstatic means by which the vitality for optimistic participation in daily activities is restored, an objective that is sacred in itself.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 94.

²⁵⁶ Plutschow, *Matsuri: Festivals of Japan*, 26.

Chapter 4: Experiencing Shinto and Approaching Religion Existentially

Based on the experiential dimension of Shinto that was emphasized in each chapter, it may seem that the significance of Shinto (and religion) can be described primarily in the experiential terms of Rudolf Otto, an early 20th century phenomenologist and advocate for a non-reductionist approach to the study of religion. Otto, in an attempt to unveil the significance of religion in a way that evades socio-historical scientific reductions, claims that the essence of religion resides in a “religious experience” of the “numen” that transcends all rational categories and thus cannot be “explained” in rational terms. To experience the numen means to experience the “wholly other” which is neither of this world nor of this “scheme of reality.”²⁵⁷

But it is apparent that the “Shinto experience” is not the same as Otto’s “religious experience.” Despite Shinto’s emphasis on experience, the object of that experience ideally does not transcend the domain of the natural world, nor does it evade rational understanding. In fact, the Shinto experience can be generated outside of a Shinto context. I assume that nearly any human being can have an awe-inspiring, ecstatic, and effervescent experience both of nature and of being with others on a festive occasion. What makes such experiences specifically Shinto is nothing mysterious and transcendent but simply Shinto representations (shrines and *torii*), occasions (*matsuri*), and language (e.g. terms like “*kami*” or “*kami-ness*”) that point to aspects of the world, or that facilitate activity in the world, and thus disclose the world in such an awe-inspiring, ecstatic, and effervescent way.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 28-29.

²⁵⁸ Perhaps one can also include here the personal disposition of the individual in relation to Shinto environs. The emphasis of significance of the shrine environs, festivals, and language in the evocation of

Though I too, along with Otto, hope that the phenomena of religion will not always succumb to the reduction of socio-scientific (social, cultural, economic, and etc.) analysis, one should be aware that my focus on the experiential dimension of Shinto serves only to show how experience plays a significant role in communicating Shinto's sacred objective; it highlights the somatic means of evoking a kind of experience of the world that cultivates affirmation, commitment, or binding to the world, so that one, by the very fact of that affirmation, commitment, or binding, can be said to exist (or "to be") in the world religiously. In other words, emphasizing the experience of Shinto is not for the purpose of preserving a unique and irreducible "Shinto experience" but rather for showing the way that experience of Shinto phenomena more or less facilitates a certain existential mode of being.

Existential Outlook on Religion

As stated in the introduction, I understand the term "religion" to refer primarily to an existential phenomenon having to do with a way of being in the world. On my way to a conclusion, I would like to entertain briefly the possibility of developing an existential phenomenology as a viable approach to the study of religion. My intent is not to provide details regarding the methodological organization and rigor of such an approach, but rather to instigate thought on how the study of religion can take such a direction—what would be its concerns or scope—and to stimulate further questions on what it means to perceive religion as an existential phenomenon.

emotions does not negate the significance of the sentimental orientation of the individual as if he/she was totally passive in the experience.

Perhaps the philosopher Merold Westphal, in his essay on existentialism and religion, can help clarify the pertinence of approaching religious phenomena with an existential outlook. With regard to his own discipline of philosophy, Westphal notes that when reading philosophical texts, we do not engage in a mere objective reading of old books that ultimately have “*nothing to do with us*.”²⁵⁹ Instead, we “hear the texts of great thinkers as voices that address us directly, offering interpretations of our being in the world full of possibilities for our beliefs, our actions, and our affects or attitudes.”²⁶⁰ Thus, according to Westphal, the study of philosophy is an existential engagement that has “*everything to do with us*”²⁶¹ It is not a participation in the objective analysis of ideas for analysis’s sake. From an existential perspective, philosophical study is an involvement that is often compelled by the need to reflect on one’s own existence in relation to the world.

Then, with regard to religious studies, Westphal notes that though religion is an existential phenomenon, the existential aspect is hardly a dimension that one can expect to be treated within the discipline of religion. This is implicit in his statement below:

“Religion” suggests an observable object or phenomenon. Thus we have Religious Studies departments where religion [as an observable object] is what is studied. There’s nothing very existential about being a scholarly observer [of religion]. Existentialism is about the urgency of deciding what to do with our lives, more specifically, what to do with my own life.²⁶²

Instead, the aim to understand religion is often a so-called objective pursuit of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical facts about religious institutions. Hardly ever, if ever, do

²⁵⁹ Merold Westphal, “Existentialism and Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 322

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

scholars of religion deal with the significance of religion (or what it means to be religious) in relation to the existential conditions from which religious ways of being might arise: such as, the fact of temporal existence, anxiety, nihility, and having to make critical choices and commitments for no apparent reason other than the sheer fact that one *just happens to exist* in an inter-subjective nexus of obligations, responsibilities, and possibilities. I think that such matters, as they pertain to religion, are often discussed within the domain of philosophy more so than in the field of religious studies.

The lack of existential evaluation of religious phenomena reinforces my concern that the dominant outlook on the study of religion today is one which allows religious phenomena to be observed and explained primarily in historical, cultural, and sociopolitical terms. It is not that these aspects have no bearing on existential realities; indeed, they constitute the circumstances that condition human existence. But I often feel that all the academic discussion about employing such approaches leads to more focus on the primacy of particular research tools—which are thought to be social scientific, objective, and capable of producing duplicable results—more than on the religious phenomenon itself.²⁶³ Such approaches, of course, may unveil a wealth of objective facts about particular religious phenomenon, informing us well about historical, cultural, and sociopolitical forces at work, but they do not always help us synthesize those aspects of religious phenomena that encourage affirmation of being in the world. One is not encouraged to see how a phenomenon such as Shinto, which though conceptually burdened with a political history, is latent with the potential to help us re-evaluate our well-being in relation to nature and others.

²⁶³ It should be noted that since I think religion to be an inherently existential phenomenon, then pursuing an existential approach to the study of religion entails that the phenomenon of religion itself will be the primal focus on one's study.

It is my hope that religious studies will welcome discussions on religious phenomena that aim not only to unravel historical and social facts but also to disclose ontological and existential insights. In doing so, scholars of religion must consider that human beings are not just mere subjects existing in opposition to a world of objective and impersonal facts. Rather, they exist in the world inter-subjectively—with moods, affections, and aspirations towards things and others—and thus relationally, as beings toward several possible ways of existing, in which “to exist religiously” is simply one possible mode of being. As Sanford Krolick says in his study of temporality and myth, “a genuine phenomenology of religion,” in the sense of an existential phenomenology, would want “to describe the unified totality of being-in-the-world on the far side of any separation of [the] experiencing subject from the objects of experience” and “to demonstrate those forces that bind the human subject to his world and thus constitute the fundamental structure of a meaningful existence.”²⁶⁴ Though Krolick is concerned specifically with the phenomenon of mythic existence, he says that generally “the phenomenologist of religion will have to begin his work with some analytic of human existence (like that offered by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, for example)” which “will afford the researcher a set of descriptive ontological categories by means of which to approach the religious phenomenon.”²⁶⁵

Lastly, in thinking about an existential approach to religion, I must mention again Mircea Eliade, whose insights I have noted above in relation to each constituent of Shinto and in relation to my outlook on religion. Eliade encourages a hermeneutical

²⁶⁴ Sanford Krolick. *Recollective Resolve: A Phenomenological Understanding of Time and Myth* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), xiv.

²⁶⁵ Sanford Krolick, “Through a Glass Darkly: What is the Phenomenology of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17, no. 3 (1985): 197.

methodology in application to religious myths, symbols, and rites, which is based on an ontological and existential motivation—that is, to illuminate the ways in which human beings overcome the angst of temporal existence by modifying their being in the world as a religious (or sacred) affair. The philosopher Douglas Allen notes that “Eliade’s approach to religious phenomena, at least on several levels of interpretation,” has “more in common with various approaches in existential phenomenology than with most approaches of scholars in the History of Religions.”²⁶⁶

Eliade conceives of religion as a total existential orientation; as the religious person’s irreducible mode of being in the world. By reflecting on the archetypal symbolism, those inexhaustible ‘ciphers’ of reality, Eliade creatively formulates those most general of existential concepts, which reveal the fundamental structures of the human condition, of our ‘true’ nature and our ‘real’ mode of being in the world.²⁶⁷

Many scholars may think that Eliade’s approach is intuitive and not grounded on empirical facts but, as Allen suggests, we should understand Eliade’s approach not as an aim for retrieving empirical and objective facts—the gathering of which can be duplicated by others—but rather as a lead for a “new philosophical anthropology” in which the “primary symbolic structures of religious experience” are used to “illuminate the fundamental structures of the human consciousness and mode of being *generally*, of the human condition as *such*.”²⁶⁸

But Eliade often employs his existential hermeneutics in relation to ancient religious phenomena such as archaic myths, symbols, and rituals. It is my hope, however, that the hermeneutical framework provided to us by Eliade—and the categorical tools provided by other existential phenomenologists per se, such as

²⁶⁶ Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade’s Phenomenology and New Directions* (Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 240.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, as was more or less suggested by Krolick—will be utilized alongside methodological resources of today in order to interpret the existential significance of “contemporary” religious phenomena. One, for instance, might combine fieldwork with existential analysis and reflection. Such an approach would employ not only a hermeneutics of the ontological structures of the human being in general and of religious experience/s in particular, but would also take seriously people’s understanding of their religiosity—and their being in the world—in consideration of their personal narratives, emotions, and commitments.

Conclusion

In summary, this study attempted to illuminate the experiential and existential significance of Shinto. Shinto shrines and festivals, as representations of Shinto, are kinds of experiential phenomena laden with existential significance. The experience of such phenomena does not disclose information about the history and underlying political agendas of Shinto; instead, shrines and festivals disclose the world experientially as something worth affirming—as something *kami*-filled and sacred. My approach has been existential in terms of motivation, and I hope that it encourages thought about approaching religious phenomena in such a way that allows existential reflection on—and existential interpretation of—religious phenomena. In the case of Shinto, reflecting on and interpreting its existential significance does not require that we appropriate Shinto as a personal faith; but we can be encouraged to reflect on and cultivate ways of facilitating a feeling of at home-ness within our respective existential circumstances and possibilities.

Bibliography

- Allen, Douglas. *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions*. Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978.
- Anesaki, Masaharu. *Art, Nature, and Life in Japan*. Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1974.
- Ashenzaki, Michael. *Matsuri: Festivals of a Japanese Town*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Breen, John and Mark Teeuwen. *A New History of Shinto*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Bock, Felicia. *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books I-V*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970.
- Bock, Felicia. *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books VI-X*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972.
- Boyd, James W. and Ron G. Williams. "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective." *Philosophy East and West* 55, no. 1 (2005): 33-63.
- Breen, John and Mark Teeuwen. *A New History of Shinto*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Breen, John and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*. New York, NY: Arkana, 1991.
- Carter, Robert E. "The Significance of Shintoism for Japanese Ethics." *Encounter with Enlightenment: A Study of Japanese Ethics*, 35-62. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Creemers, Wilhelmus H.M. *Shrine Shinto After World War II*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of Eternal Return*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Inc., 1987.
- Fujisawa, Chikao. *Concrete Universality of the Japanese Way of Thinking: A New Interpretation of Shintoism*. JPN: Hokuseido Press, 1958.
- Fujisawa, Chikao. *Zen and Shinto: A History of Japanese Philosophy*. New York, NY: Polyglot Press, 1959.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gall, Robert S. "Kami and Daimon: A Cross-cultural Reflection on What is Divine." *Philosophy East and West*, 49: 1 (1999): 63-74. JSTOR, www.jstor.org.
- Gonick, Gloria Granz. *Matsuri: Japanese Festival Arts*. Textile Series 6. Los Angeles: UCLA Flower Museum of Cultural History, 2002.
- Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People: India, China, Tibet, Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964.
- Hakomori, Yo-ichiro. "The Sacred and the Profane in Matsuri Structures." *Matsuri: Japanese Festival Arts*. Textile Series 6. 77-96. Los Angeles: UCLA Flower Museum of Cultural History, 2002.
- Harada, Tasuku. *The Faith of Japan*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926.
- Harada, Toshiaki. "The Origin of Rites of Worship within the Local Community." *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*. Vol. 1 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. Translated by Norman Havens. 20-32. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988.
- Hardacre, Helen. *Shinto and the State: 1868-1988*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Haruki, Kageyama and Christine Kanda. *Shinto Arts: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan*. JPN: Japan Society, 1976.
- Havens, Norman. "Immanent Legitimation: Reflections on the Kami Concept." *Kami*. Vol 4 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. 227-246. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1998.
- Havens, Norman. "Translator's Postscript: Matsuri in Japanese Religious Life." *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*. Vol. 1 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. 3-19. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988.

- Heisig, James W., Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, eds. *Japanese Philosophy: a Sourcebook*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011.
- Herbert, Jean. *Shinto: At the Fountain-head of Japan*. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1967.
- Hirai, Naofusa. "The Concept of Man in Shinto." MA Dissertation, University of Chicago School of Divinity, 1954.
- Holtom, Daniel C. "The Meaning of Kami. Chapter 1: Japanese Derivations," *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, no. 1 (1940): 1-27.
- Holtom, Daniel C. "The Meaning of Kami. Chapter 2: Interpretations by Japanese Writers," *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, no. 2 (1940): 392-413.
- Holtom, Daniel C. "The Meaning of Kami. Chapter 3: Considered as Mana," *Monumenta Nipponica* 4, no. 2 (1941): 351-394.
- Hvass, Svend M. *ISE: Japan's Ise Shrines, Ancient Yet New*. Holte, Denmark: Aristo Publishing, 1999.
- Inoue, Nobutaka, ed. *Kami*. Vol 4 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Translated by Norman Havens. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1998.
- Inoue, Nobutaka, ed. *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*. Vol. 1 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Translated by Norman Havens. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988.
- Inoue, Nobutaka. "Perspectives Toward Understanding the Concept of Kami." *Kami*. Vol 4 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. Translated by Norman Havens. 1-19. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1998.
- Inoue, Nobutaka ed. *Shinto: A Short History*. Translated by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- Ishida, Sarah S. "The Making of an American Shinto Community." MA Thesis, University of Florida, 2008.
- Kasulis, Thomas P. *Shinto: the Way Home*. Hawaii: Hawaii University Press, 2004.
- Kitagawa, Joseph. *Religion in Japanese History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

- Kitagawa, Joseph. *On Understanding Japanese Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Kishimoto, Hideo. "Some Japanese Cultural Traits and Religions." *The Japanese Mind*. Edited by Charles A. Moore. 110-121. Honolulu: Hawaii Press, 1968.
- Krolick, Sanford. *Recollective Resolve: A Phenomenological Understanding of Time and Myth*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987.
- Krolick, Sanford. "Through a Glass Darkly: What is the Phenomenology of Religion?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17, no. 3 (1985): 193-199.
- Kuroda, Toshio. "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion." Translated by James C. Dobbins and Suzane Gay. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (1981): 1-21.
- Mason, Joseph W.T. *The Meaning of Shinto: The Primaeval Foundation of Creative Spirit in Modern Japan*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1967.
- Mason, Joseph W.T. *The Spirit of Shinto Mythology*. Tokyo: Fuzambo Company, 1939.
- Matsumoto, Shigeru, *Motoori Norinaga: 1730-1801*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Matsunaga, Alicia. "The Land of Natural Affirmation. Pre-Buddhist Japan." *Monumenta Nipponica* 21, no. 1/2 (1996): 203-209.
- Mizue, Mori "Ancient and Classical Japan: the Dawn of Shinto." *Shinto: A Short History*. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. Translated by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen. 12-62. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- Morioka, Kiyomi. *Religion in Changing Japanese Society*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1975.
- Nelson, John K. *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000.
- Nute, Kevin. *Place, Time and Being in Japanese Architecture*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Ono, Sokyō and William P. Woodard. *Shinto: the Kami Way*. Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1962.
- Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. Translated by John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

- Ozawa, Hiroyuki. *Spectacle and Spirit: The Great Festivals of Japan*. Translated by John Bestor Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1999.
- Pilippi, Donald L, trans. *Kojiki*. Tokyo, JPN: University of Tokyo Press, 1968.
- Picken, Stuart D.B. *Essentials of Shinto: An Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- Picken, Stuart D.B. *Historical Dictionary of Shinto*. Vol 104 of Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements. 2nd ed. Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011.
- Pilgrim, Richard and Robert Ellwood, *Japanese Religion: a Cultural Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985.
- Plutschow, Herbert. *Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan*. Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1996.
- Rambelli, Fabio and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Reader, Ian and George Tanabe. *Practically Religious*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998.
- Reader, Ian. *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991.
- Reader, Ian. *Shinto*. Simple Guides. 2nd ed. 2001. Reprint, London: Simple Guides, 2007.
- Ross, Floyd H. *Shinto: The Way of Japan*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.
- Shinto Committee, comp. *An Outline of Shinto Teachings*. Tokyo, JPN: Jinja Honcho (The Association of Shrines) Kokugakuin University, 1958.
- Shaner, David. "The Japanese Experience of Nature." *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*. Edited by J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames. 163-182. Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 1989.
- Sonoda, Minoru. "Festival and Sacred Transgression." *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*. Vol. 1 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inoue Nobutaka. Translated by Norman Havens. 33-77. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988.
- Sonoda Minoru, "Shinto and the Natural Environment." *Shinto in History*. Edited by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen. 32-46. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

- Spae, Joseph J. *Japanese Religiosity*. Tokyo, JPN: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1971.
- Spae, Joseph J. *Shinto Man*. Tokyo, JPN: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1972.
- Tange, Kenzoe and Noboru Kawazoe. *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965.
- Teeuwen, Mark and Bernhard Scheid. "Tracing Shinto in the History of Kami Worship." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3 and 4 (2002): 195-207.
- Teeuwen, Mark. "From Jindo to Shinto: A Concept Takes Shape." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3 (2002): 233-263.
- Tsunetsugu, Muraoka. *Studies in Shinto Thought*. Translated by Delmer M. Brown and James T. Araki. JPN: Ministry of Education, 1964.
- Tyler, Susan C. *The Cult of Kasuga Seen Through Its Art*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1992.
- Ueda, Kenji, "Shinto." *Religion in Japanese Culture*. Edited by Noriyoshi Tamaru and David Reid. New York: Kodansha International, 1996.
- Westphal, Merold. "Existentialism and Religion." *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Edited by Steven Crowell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Yamakage, Motohisa. *The Essence of Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Heart*. Translated by Mineko S. Gillespie, Gerald L. Gillespie, and Yoshitsugu Komoru, edited by Paul de Leeuw and Aidan Rankin. Tokyo, JPN: Kodansha International, 2006.
- Yamamoto, Yukitaka, *Kami no Michi: the Way of the Kami*. Stockton, CA: Tsubaki America Publications Department, 1999.
- Yanagawa, Keiichi. "The Sensation of Matsuri." *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*. Vol. 1 of Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions. Edited by Inour Nobutaka. Translated by Norman Havens. 3-19. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1988.
- Wargo, Robert J. J. "Japanese Ethics: Beyond Good and Evil." *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 4 (1990): 499-509.
- Williams, Angel K. *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*. New York, NY: Viking Compass, 2000.

