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SHINTO RESEARCH AND THE HUMANITIES IN JAPAN

by Kamata Toji

Abstract. Three approaches to scholarship are “scholarship as a way,” which aims at perfection of character; “scholarship as a method,” which clearly limits objects and methods in order to achieve precise perception and new knowledge; and “scholarship as an expression,” which takes various approaches to questions and inquiry. The “humanities” participate deeply and broadly in all three of these approaches. In relation to this view of the humanities, Japanese Shinto is a field of study that yields rich results. As a religion of awe, shrine groves, community, arts, and entertainment, it offers a research field that joins together the study of human beings, nature, society, and expression. Though we elucidate the characteristics of Shinto and

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its differences with Buddhism, we also draw attention to the seven dimensions of “place, way, beauty, festival, technique, poetry, and ecological wisdom,” and then finally take up “research on techniques of body and mind transformation” as a comprehensive and creative development in the “humanities.”

Keywords: arts and entertainment; awe; beauty; ecological wisdom; geology and geography; nature; place; techniques of body and mind transformation; way

The current state of the humanities in Japan is catastrophic. Both the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the universities are inclined to favor the sciences. A group of leading national universities, including the Universities of Tokyo, Kyoto and Tohoku, are participants in a system under which they focus on the promotion of research in the sciences as “research universities.” Under this system the humanities are criticized as being out of date and lacking in practical utility, even if in some quarters the importance of a liberal education, of which the humanities are the backbone, is asserted. Far from this being reflected in the actual curriculum, we find that the humanities are gradually being eliminated.

Such being the case, the condition of the humanities today and their outlook for the future are severe, and there is a pervasive sense of pessimism. Unable to shake free of this, the humanities become ensnared in their own trap. In various academic societies in the humanities, all we do is grumble about the lack of vitality and, not knowing what to do about it, we cannot find an effective way out.

The root cause of the decline of the humanities is, of course, a downturn in intellectual creativity and allure. If something is appealing, people will take an interest in it and be drawn toward it. That they do not is due to a lack of intellectual creativity and excitement. Our powers of imagination, insight, and expression decline, and we are unable to present a vision of a world to be regarded with wonder.

At the same time, there is the effect of a preference for the sciences under the administrative initiatives of the central government’s Ministry of Education. Another factor is being exposed to and bound by visible quantitative evaluation methods where such things as the aggregate numbers of English-language articles published in international journals with high impact factors, numbers of citations, numbers of PhDs awarded, and so on are expressed numerically. Added to this, the policy of “the integration of humanities and sciences” has not really made it past the slogan stage. Even though we may try to engage the humanities and sciences, neither side is able to leave their own fortresses and come to grips with their counterpart. This gives rise to mistrust, disregard, and presumption regarding the other’s

discipline and methodologies, and this rigid condition is compounded by specialization, compartmentalization, and laziness.

In circumstances such as these, having been given the opportunity of taking part in this conference on “The Presence and Future of Humanity in the Cosmos: Why Society Needs both the Sciences and the Humanities,” I want to attempt a reexamination of the meaning and value of the humanities from the perspective of Shinto research in Japan.

Before I address the subject of “Shinto,” I should like first to speak about my own thinking on the subject of “the humanities” and “scholarship” in general. I believe there are the following three kinds of “scholarship”:

- (1) Scholarship as a way—with the aim of character formation and cultivation of humanity.
- (2) Scholarship as a method—with the aim of intellectual training, advance of cognitive function, and gaining of new findings.
- (3) Scholarship as an expression—refining techniques of expression of questions of study in poetry, storytelling, or theatre.

The first of these, “scholarship as a way,” shows the way of character formation and the deepening, cultivation, and refinement of humanity based on a student’s aspirations, motives, existential meaning, and ethics, or, as Confucius says in the *Analects*, “At fifteen, I set my heart on learning.”

The second, “scholarship as a method,” shows the way of aspiring to achieve renewal of outlook, conceptual innovation and discovery, and acquisition of new knowledge, through a clear method and discipline such as can be found in all areas of study, including the sciences and the humanities.

The third, “scholarship as an expression,” shows the way of pursuing and deepening questions and explorations within forms of expression such as, in the West, the Platonic dialogues, Augustine’s *Confessions*, or Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, or to give Japanese examples, Kūkai’s *Sangō shiki*, Hōnen’s *Senchaku hongan nenbutsushū*, and Kanetomo Yoshida’s *Yuiitsu Shintō myōbō yōshū* (doctrinal works in question-and-answer form from mediaeval Japan), or Miyazawa Kenji’s *Nōmin geijutsu gairon kōyō* [Outline survey of farmers’ art]. “Scholarship” can be expressed in the form of a dissertation that clearly shows the process of introduction (establishment of the question), main body (presentation of case studies or experiments and argument) and conclusion; but meaningful insight into the nature of thought and comprehension can also be expressed in other ways. The richness and creativity of study cannot be limited to today’s one-sided, uniform evaluation method that gives top priority to peer-reviewed academic articles.

I believe that these three kinds of study exist, and that all three are important, indeed indispensable.

WHAT IS “SHINTO”?

I should now like to talk about “Shinto,” the fundamental religious culture of Japan. Generally speaking, whether in the West or in Japan, talk about “Shinto” is overshadowed by the images of nationalism and militarism linked to “State Shinto.” I wish to offer a more progressive reassessment of “Shinto,” liberating “Shinto” from this kind of “Shinto Nationalism” and its historical associations in Japan. I wish to view it through newer and broader understandings and images of “Shinto” in the contexts of the Asian region and the wider Pacific Rim area (Kamata 2011).

The reason why “Shinto” can serve as a case study in the context of this symposium is because “Shinto research” can in no way be limited to the “humanities” alone. Research from the disciplines of the “natural sciences” is no less important than the “humanities.” Because “Shinto” is a “forest religion,” a “religion of natural wisdom,” not only “research into humanity,” but also “research into nature” is essential.

In 2012, I edited and published the book *Nihon no seichi bunka—Samukawa Jinja to Sagami no kuni no kosha* [The culture of holy places in Japan: Samukawa Jinja and old shrines of Sagami Province] (Kamata 2012). On that occasion, scholars from the sciences, such as earth scientists, astronomers, ecologists, and environmentalists, carried out joint research with scholars from the humanities, such as archaeologists, historians, scholars of religion, and folklorists. By analyzing data from the ALOS weather and communications satellite, we determined the positions of the shrines, reproduced the changes in the earth’s crust and changes in the shoreline (sea level) and geomorphology over the 10,000 or more years since the Japanese archipelago as we know it today began to take shape, and studied the positions and processes of transition in which Samukawa Jinja and other old shrines were established and maintained.

From this study, the relationships between the shrines of the Jōmon period and other ancient sites clearly emerged. Goro Uchino, head of the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics at Kokugakuin University, held that “research in *kokugaku* (national studies) is the comprehensive study of Japanese culture,” but we can say in addition that Shinto research is the comprehensive study not only of Japanese culture, but of Japanese nature and culture. Producing this kind of “comprehensive study” leads to the clarification of the meaning of the “humanities” and the opening of a way to the future.

Not only from the viewpoint of the study of nature, but also from cultural studies and religious studies, “Shinto research” needs to be comprehensive. This is because “Shinto,” in its history of 10,000 years or more, produced syncretism with Confucianism and Buddhism, and with Daoism and Onmyōdō (“the way of yin and yang”). To grasp this kind of cultural complex requires a multidisciplinary study encompassing

comparative religion, comparative civilization, and comparative culture, and, in addition to global perspective, detailed local area studies (climate theory, climate clinical studies, folk tradition). In methodology, too, not only studies of literature and ideas but also field and clinical studies (clinical psychological studies of the folk mind) and experimental studies (such as brain science and genetic studies) are required.

In shrine Shinto, a “forest religion,” whose shrines are called *chinju no mori* or “guardian forests,” research is also needed into what kind of “mind and body transformation” takes place in this forest: the sound world of the forest, its acoustic ecology; and “mind and body transformation” in prayer and festival.

Shinto, this “forest religion,” was also syncretized with Buddhism to form Shugendō, a “forest and mountain religion.” The *sennichi kaibōgyō* (thousand-day circumambulation of Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei) in Japanese Tendai Buddhism, the *okugake* practice at Kinpusenji Temple in Yoshino, the *mineiri* (“entering the mountain”) rite on Mount Haguro (Dewa Sanzan Shrine and Kōtakuji Temple)—these and other ascetic mountain pilgrimages are journeys of discipline, of prayer to, encounter with, and unification with, the Japanese *kami*. Shugendō is a mountain religion that involves walking through forests and mountains, where knowledge and thought of the forest and mountain, and techniques of “mind and body transformation” based on these, have been further deepened and developed.

I have not yet given a clear explanation of what “Shinto” is. Clearly describing “Shinto” is not easy (Takatori 1979; Kuroda 1980; Ueda 1996; Inoue 1998; Kanno 2001; Sugawara 2005). The first reason for this is that Shinto has no clear teaching or doctrine. Because of this, it is sometimes said that “Shinto is a doctrine-free religion,” and although this is not entirely wrong, it does not mean there is nothing there at all. There are shrines, and there are festivals. There are also classical writings such as the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, *Kogo shūi*, and *Sendai kuji hongei*, which record myths and traditions. Although it is true that there is no clear doctrine, it may be said there is a kind of “latent doctrine” (Kamata 2012).

By contrast, Buddhism has clear doctrines. The “three seals of the Dharma” (all things are in a state of incessant change, all things lack inherent identity, and nirvāna is perfect tranquility); the “four noble truths” (the truth of suffering, the truth of the arising of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path); the “noble eightfold path” (right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration); the twelve “nidānas” or causes (ignorance, formation, consciousness, name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age and death)—these can be said to be essential or fundamental Buddhist doctrines. On the basis of these teachings of Shakyamuni Buddhism or early Buddhism, the

ontological and epistemological theories of Mahāyāna Buddhist schools such as the Mādhyamaka or Chūkan school and the Yogācāra or Yuishiki (Consciousness-only) school emerged, and further there developed the systems of theory and practice (rituals) of esoteric mantra or *shingon* and mandala. In this sense, Buddhism can be said to be the totality of contemplation and practice resulting from the input of massive energy into tireless doctrinal innovation.

In comparison, Shinto doctrine is like a candle in the wind, and we can hardly be sure that there even is such a thing. Yet the fact that such an unsure “latent doctrine” has stayed alive so tenaciously as the core of Japanese culture has aroused the admiration of non-Japanese authors such as Lafcadio Hearn, who wrote:

Buddhism has a voluminous theology, a profound philosophy, a literature vast as the sea. Shinto has no philosophy, no code of ethics, no metaphysics; and yet, by its very immateriality, it can resist the invasion of Occidental religious thought as no other Oriental faith can. (Koizumi 1990)

And yet for Shinto, this is a sad comment as well as a welcome one. This paradoxical mode of existence, where presence is enhanced by nonexistence, is something that can be ascertained only in response and opposition to something that does have existence, and cannot be grasped explicitly. How can a religious culture (mode) with such a lack of clarity as its basis for existence be carried forward into the future? The present age is one in which awareness of one’s *raison d’être* is necessary in order to continue to exist. Meaning, value and results are demanded in all things; for example, world natural heritage sites, world cultural heritage sites, important cultural properties, important intangible folk cultural properties, community ties. All are faced with the necessity to assert their *raison d’être* in their own words. Such is the age we live in.

But if we go back in time, we can glimpse the seeming lack of explicit structure in Shinto in the circumstances in which the word “Shinto” first appeared. This occurred as a contrast to *buppō* or Buddhist teaching. In a passage of the *Nihon shoki* dealing with Emperor Yōmei (d. 587 CE) we read that he “believed in the teachings of Buddha (*buppō*) and revered the way of the *kami* (*Shinto*).” Further on, in the account of Emperor Kōtoku (596–654 CE), we read that the Emperor “honored the teachings of Buddha but disregarded *Shinto*.”

Here we see the first recognition of the difference between Shinto and Buddhism. The word *buppō* (Buddhist teaching) indicates that this is a system of teachings in which one can be said clearly either believe or not believe. Shinto, on the other hand, does not have such “teachings,” and thus can only be the object of “reverence” or “disrespect.” Being the accumulated traditions of the ancestors maintained since ancient times, there can only be two attitudes toward it: respect or disrespect. It is not

something in which we can separate truth from falseness so that we can say we believe or do not believe. Here we can clearly see the difference between “Buddhism as system of teachings” and “Shinto as accumulated tradition.”

Then, some fifty or more years after its first appearance, when Buddhism, although still new, had time to become established as a new tradition, we encounter an attitude according to which one either “reveres” or “disrespects” Shinto. Emperor Kōtoku revered “Buddhism” but disregarded “Shinto.” How was his attitude disrespectful to “Shinto”? We are told that his disrespect for Shinto was shown by his cutting down trees in the precincts of Ikukunitama Shrine in Settsu Province. His failure to care properly for trees held to be sacred is here recognized as “disrespect toward Shinto.”

Based on this difference in awareness between “Buddhism” and “Shinto,” I should like to attempt to express the “latent doctrine of Shinto” in the following way.

Shinto lacks a distinct doctrine, but it is expressed in various forms. I shall try to position Shinto as expressed through Shinto’s “latent doctrine” according to the following seven characteristics:

- (1) Shinto as religion of “place”
- (2) Shinto as religion of “way”
- (3) Shinto as religion of “beauty”
- (4) Shinto as religion of “festival”
- (5) Shinto as religion of “technique”
- (6) Shinto as religion of “poetry”
- (7) Shinto as religion of “ecological wisdom”

Shinto is, above all, a “poetics of space” existing as a field, as a place. It exists visibly, and continues to exist, as poetics of the forest (shrine), as geometry of the purified space, as topology of the sacred ground, as memory and document of place. This is the “shrine”; this is the “guardian forest” (Kamata 1990, 2008).

To be sure, this is not an explicit system of teachings, but it is a practice of a lifestyle—a way of proceeding through life—with a truly stylistic, clear form, an approach to life and living. “Shinto” has lived in “shrines,” through “shrines,” and together with “shrines as places” as a kind of traditional culture; as a path of life.

In such a “place” or “path,” freshness, purity, feeling, and atmosphere are valued above all. When asked what is the most important thing in Shinto, many shrine people and Shintoists reply “cleansing.” Cleansing comes first, second, third and fourth. In this saying that cleansing is the spirit of Shinto, we find a spirit and a sense of adoration and care for the primordial mode of life, the pure origin.

Kakisaka Mikinosuke, Chief Priest of Tenkawa Benzaiten Shrine in the Yoshino Mountains, has called this *futomani* (Kamata 1985) Ordinarily, the word *futomani* refers to ancient practices of divination, but Chief Priest Kakisaka says that *futomani* does not refer to divination, but to the natural manifestation of things as they are ([*futo*] *sono ma[ma ni]*), and acceptance of and dealing with these naturally manifested events and phenomena. These things are manifested and accepted by the action of “cleansing.” Thus, “cleansing” is the foundation and basis of all things.

Motoori Norinaga would no doubt express this in a verse:

*Shikishima no
yamatogokoro o
hito towaba
asahi ni niou
yamazakurabana*

What is the spirit of the land of Yamato (Japan)?
The sight of mountain cherry blossom in the morning sun.
(Poem written on Motoori's self-portrait)

The Japanese “spirit” is the “spirit” of the mountain cherry blossom shining faintly and modestly yet purely as it is touched by the rays of the morning sun. This is the sensory basis that is stylized in the most important of Shinto rites, the *misogi harai* or purification. Concepts and rites of purification are backed by a “latent doctrine” centered on a pure origin, as symbolized by “cherry blossom in the morning sun.”

Shinto, with this “latent doctrine,” is thus a “sensory religion” or an “artistic religion.” Its sensory and artistic characteristics reveal themselves in the mind and body transformation ritual technique called *matsuri* or “festival.”

The essence of *matsuri* is the renewal and regeneration of life by the performing art of ritual, *wazaogi*. Its mythical origin is described in writings such as the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Kogo shūi* as the rite performed by the *kami* in front of the door of the heavenly rock cave. This rite was performed to resurrect the *kami* Amaterasu, who had hidden herself in the heavenly rock cave (meaning a symbolic death) and to bring about her reappearance. In essence, it expresses a message of death and rebirth.

At this time, the *kami* Ame-no-Uzume performed a dance holding bamboo grass in her hands, and, entering a trance, exposed her breasts and vulva, causing much laughter among the assembled *kami*. The female womb is where life is conceived and born, and the breasts nourish and nurture life. By showing these parts of her body, she expressed the birth of life, and the yearning for, celebration of, and joy at the appearance of life was manifested in the laughter of the *kami*. Incidentally, the Chinese ideogram chosen to stand for the word “laughter” in this text is the same

character used for “flowering,” which enables us to understand their joy at this rebirth.

Matsuri is a celebration of this appearance of life, or *miare*. This is a reinvigoration, or *tamafuri*, an activation of life, a technique (*waza*) of transformation of mind and body of *kami* and humans to a fullness of life and a state of resonance. Central to this “technique” is performance (*wazaogi*).

The word *wazaogi* first appears in the *Nihon shoki*, where it denotes a spiritual art performance calling forth and activating the soul, as performed by Ame-no-Uzume. It is also the creation of a time and space of eroticism incorporating various sensual and grotesque symbolisms and methods.

This nonroutine erotic time and space is a singularity, a “poem” in which mythical time and space come out in a primal opening up into our daily life, and by means of this “poem” the world and life are grasped in a narrative manner and are reincarnated through the circuit of *matsuri*. In this sense, Shinto is a “religion of poetry,” a “religion of narrative.”

Thus, Shinto is a religion of tradition, in which life force and wisdom are held in awe and veneration and passed down to be applied in day-to-day life. In contrast to Buddhism, which is a religion of teaching, a religion of enlightenment, Shinto is a religion of tradition, a religion of awe.

As Lafcadio Hearn says, Shinto does seem not to have any explicit philosophy or code of ethics. However, in the “manifestation” of Shinto, through “place,” “way,” “beauty,” “festival,” “technique,” and “poetry,” Shinto’s “latent doctrine” pulsates steadily. This lifeline of Shinto I call “ecological wisdom.” The pulse of “ecological wisdom” alive in the totality of “manifestation” that is Shinto is the kernel of Shinto’s “latent doctrine” (Koizumi 1990).

Here, I define this “ecological wisdom” as “the wisdom and technique of a system for maintenance of a sustainable and creative balance between the natural and the artificial, developed through keen observation and experience in daily life, based on a profound and humble awe and respect for nature.” Shinto is replete with this profound “ecological wisdom.” A concrete expression of this “ecological wisdom” is the regular rebuilding of the shrines at Ise and Izumo and the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SHINTO AND BUDDHISM, OR *KAMI* AND BUDDHA

I have presented an outline of Shinto, defined its characteristics as a religion of the senses, a religion of art, a religion of narrative (poetry) and a religion of ecological wisdom, and positioned it as a religion of tradition and a religion of awe (Kamata 2009).

Buddhism, however, appeared with characteristics essentially the opposite of these characteristics of Shinto. First, the senses are relativized (the

“emptiness of the five aggregates”). Art is shunned (song, music, and dance that excite sensuality are prohibited or suppressed). One opens one’s eyes to the order of the world (dharma) rather than being intoxicated by stories. By adopting precepts, one consciously severs the chains of ecological wisdom as being *samsāra*, the cycle of life and death. Denying or relativizing traditional systems such as Brahmanism, rather than looking with awe, one practices *vijñāna* (consciousness) (*satori*) observing and recognizing phenomena as they are (right view).

If this original Buddhism is taken to be the essential principle of the religion, it is hard to see any point of contact with Shinto. I have developed the following motto of three differences between *kami* and Buddha to show the fundamental differences between Shinto and Buddhism:

1. <i>Kami</i> exists, Buddha comes into being	<i>Zaishin/jōbutsu</i>
2. <i>Kami</i> comes, Buddha goes	<i>Raishin/ōbutsu</i>
3. <i>Kami</i> stands, Buddha sits	<i>Risshin/zabutsu</i>

As I mentioned earlier, “Buddha” is a person who has achieved enlightenment, that is, an enlightened person. “Buddha” is first and foremost a person who has seen the suffering of the world and the self as it is and correctly perceived its root cause (a person who has practiced “right view” and achieved perfect enlightenment). The truth into which insight is gained at this time is the true nature of things that makes this world exist—impermanence, non-self, dependent origination, emptiness, and the like. The aim of Buddhist teaching and Buddhist practice is—by knowing this nature of things, this basis of existence (cognition of truth = *satori*)—to show how to become a wise person who can break free from the reality of suffering that appears through the self—afflictions, pain, doubt—that is, to “become Buddha.”

Thus, a person who breaks free from afflictions and doubt and recognizes truth is called an enlightened one, or Buddha, and respected as someone who has gained enlightenment, regarded as a model of human life, and eventually as an object of devotion.

Buddha is one who has attained a state free from suffering in which afflictions are extinguished (*nirvāna*, absolute calm, peace of mind), who has crossed from this shore (this world of suffering and doubt) to the other shore (*nirvāna*). Another name for the Buddha who has broken free from this suffering is “king of healing” and the technique and way he showed is the path of “removing suffering and giving peace.”

Thus, “Buddha” is a wise person who consciously shuns the “ecological wisdom” that gives shape to the world of survival, shows the path of escape from the chain of *samsāra* it forges, and achieves this path himself or herself.

This is a very different figure from the powerful presence (nature, animal or plant, hero, ancestor) known as *kami*.

However, in Japan, a dead person, and by no means necessarily one who has attained enlightenment, is often referred to as *hotoke* (Buddha), and death itself is referred to as *odabutsu*, which comes from the name of Buddha. Here, it seems that the scope of meaning of the word *hotoke* has been extended limitlessly so that it even refers to a dead person who has not attained enlightenment. This would seem to be a serious deviation from, even a contradiction of the original view of Buddhahood. *Kami* and *hotoke* are, properly, completely different modes of existence. Nevertheless, in Japan, a unity of opposites has come about. This includes the idea of “original enlightenment” in Tendai Buddhism, according to which all things are already enlightened. Here we see a transformation (collapse or deepening?) of Japanese Buddhism, in which Buddhist practice, which shunned the idea of “ecological wisdom,” has been further refined and actually has come back to the idea of “ecological wisdom.”

However, the first fundamental difference between *kami* and Buddha was “*kami* exists, Buddha comes into being.” *Kami* is something that exists as a natural phenomenon such as, for example, thunder or water, whereas Buddha is someone who has attained enlightenment through practice, and thereby become Buddha. *Kami* “exists,” “appears” as the world of being, as phenomena of nature, whereas Buddha is not something that exists as it is, but someone who, through certain practices and experiences, has attained the stage of consciousness of an enlightened one.

The second difference is “*kami* comes, Buddha goes.” *Kami* is a visiting powerful presence that comes like a typhoon, whereas Buddha is a human being who has crossed to the other shore and reached the world of enlightenment free from afflictions, that is, the world of nirvāna. Accordingly, the contrast can be made between *kami*, which is something that comes (a visiting thing), whereas Buddha is someone who goes to the other shore (one who crosses over).

The third difference is “*kami* stands, Buddha sits.” In Japanese when we count *kami* we use the counter word *hashira* (“pillar”); the famous Onbashira Festival at Suwa Taisha Shrine centers on a sacred pillar called the *onbashira*. In contrast to this *kami*, which is a standing thing of power, Buddha is a person who attains liberation by practicing *zazen*, sitting in meditation, and in profound meditation by practicing “right view” and “right concentration.” We count *kami* using the counter *hashira* or “pillar,” whereas Buddhas are counted using the word *za* (seat) or *tai* (body).

Kami stands, Buddha sits. Here we see the vertical character of *kami* and the horizontal character of Buddha; the rupturing nature of the “shaking” *kami* and the interdependent connectedness of the compassionate Buddha; the empowering *kami* and the expowering Buddha; the grotesque *kami* and the soft Buddha; the scourging *kami* and the assuaging Buddha.

Analyzed in this way, *kami* and Buddha are one hundred and eighty degrees apart. These two concepts of the sacred with their completely different principles and orientations have, in Japan, where so many things have been melted down, given birth to and continued to breed a mode of bonding which we call the idea or culture of *shinbutsu shūgō*, or syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism. Whether we call it the Shintoization of Buddhism or the Buddhistization of Shinto, there can be no doubt that a tremendous Japanization of Buddhism has taken place. The prime example of this Japanization is the Tendai idea of “original enlightenment,” which we see expressed in propositions such as “afflictions are enlightenment,” “demons and Buddhas are one,” and “all things are already enlightened.”

SHINTO CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HUMANITIES: NATURE AND CULTURE

Japanese people are frequently said to be “tolerant” in matters of religion. Although this observation requires some further comment, it is not off the mark. To be sure, we visit Shinto shrines at the New Year, we visit our ancestors’ graves at the festivals of *higan* and *bon*, we hold Buddhist memorial and funeral services, and when Christmas comes we put up Christmas trees, sing “Jingle Bells” and wish each other “Merry Christmas!” This “tolerance” is quite reckless, it has to be said. Seen from the viewpoint of people from a monotheistic culture, such behavior must look unprincipled in the extreme. How did this “tolerance = recklessness = lack of principle” come about?

I believe that this “tolerance” stems from the diversity of the Japanese “climate.” Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of “diversity” here, natural diversity and cultural diversity.

First, natural diversity. When the Tōhoku earthquake of March 11, 2011 struck, one of the things that deeply impressed the Japanese people was the fact that the Japanese islands are “floating,” as it were, on top of four different tectonic plates.

In the land creation myth with which the *Kojiki* opens, we find the memorable phrase “when the land was young it was like floating oil, and drifted like a jellyfish.” Before the Japanese archipelago took shape, it is described as having been like floating “oil,” like a drifting “jellyfish.” That this was a truly accurate intuition was proved by the Tōhoku earthquake, but anyone who lives on the Japanese islands with their frequent volcanic eruptions and earthquakes will understand from experience that the earth and the sea are fluid and continually changing. The appearance of the coastline undergoes major changes because of subsidence and upthrust caused by seismic activity. Landslides caused by typhoons or concentrated heavy rains are frequent; river flooding is a fact of life.

Living on islands such as these, it is impossible to hold to the unrealistic belief that the earth is solid and unmoving as a rock. These islands are indeed floating and drifting like “oil,” or like a “jellyfish.”

Plate tectonics explains this as the sliding of four plates. The Japanese archipelago is a composite archipelago on four plates: the North American, Eurasian, Philippine Sea, and Pacific Plates, interlinked in a cross-shape. Because of this, in the floor of the Pacific Ocean there are massive trenches such as the Japan Trench and the Nankai Trough, and underlying the islands themselves there are major rifts and faults including the Fossa Magna and the Japan Median Tectonic Line. The Japan Trench, formed by the sinking of the Pacific Plate under the North American Plate, at its deepest point is 8,020 m deep, nearly the same as the height of Mt. Everest, which is 8,848 m. The Nankai Trough is formed by the sinking of the Philippine Sea Plate under the Eurasian Plate. Meanwhile, the great north–south rift known as the Fossa Magna is at the border between the North American and Eurasian Plates. At the interface of these plates are active volcanoes including Yakeyama, Myōkōsan, Shiranesan, Asamayama, Yatsugatake, Fujisan, and the Hakone Mountains, presenting a spectacular landscape.

In 1968, the scholar of Japanese literature Katsumi Masuda (1923–2010) argued in the book *Kazan rettō no shisō* [*Intellectual Culture of the Volcanic Archipelago*] that the archetype of “the *kami* that could only be born in Japan, the true native *kami* of these islands” was the *kami* Ōnamochi. From records that “there was a *kami* in the sea off the coast of Ōsumi Province, who created an island” and “the name of this *kami* was Ōnamochi,” Masuda infers that “Ōnamochi was the name given to the *kami* of a seabed eruption, and concludes that this name means “a *kami* who has a large hole (*ō-ana-mochi*)” and that this is “the deification of the volcano itself with its large crater.”

On November 15, 1986, the volcano Miharayama on the island Izu Ōshima erupted. Ten years later, to mark the anniversary of the eruption, the District of Ōshima held a fire festival inside a great crater formed by the lava flow, and a symposium entitled “Volcanic Cosmology: Living with Holy Fire” was held at the Volcano Museum built after the eruption. I was responsible for planning and chairing the symposium.

Japan is a volcanic archipelago. It is also an earthquake archipelago, a typhoon archipelago, and a heavy snow archipelago. In summer it is lashed by wind and rain from typhoons; in winter by wind and snow. Summers are hot, winters cold. There are few countries with similarly extreme weather cycles.

Japan is the only country sitting on a tectonic crossroads with four overlapping plates. What is more, these islands are surrounded by four ocean currents: two warm currents, the Kuroshio or Japan Current and the Tsushima Current, and two cold currents, the Oyashio or Kuril Current

and the Liman Current; all four collide in the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan. This results in the complex and varied marine fauna at the confluence of these ocean currents, which make excellent fishing waters. Then there are the two major forest zones of the laurel forests of western and lowland Japan and the oak-beech forests of eastern and upland Japan. Thus, the geology and physical geography of the Japanese islands present a crucible of complexity and diversity rare in the world.

Then, overlying this is a historical-geographical complexity and diversity. From three directions, north, west, and south, peninsular, continental, and island elements from the Korean peninsula, continental China, and the islands of Southeast Asia have flowed in and combined, giving birth on the Japanese islands to a truly hybrid culture and civilization.

The diverse, multilayered, pluralistic, and varied nature of the Japanese archipelago in all its aspects, tectonics, weather, oceanography, fauna and flora, environment, ecosystem, culture and civilization, served as the “climatic” condition, or womb, for the birth in these islands of a polytheism we call “*yaororozu no kami*” (eight million or myriad *kami*), and in the records *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Fudoki*, these *kami* go on a veritable rampage. A wild, frantic, breathless tumult it was. This state is described at the beginning of Part Two of the Age of the Gods in the *Nihon shoki*:

[Taka-mi-musubi] desired to establish his august grandchild Ama-tsu-hiko-ho-ho-ninigi-no-Mikoto as the Lord of the Central Land of Reed-Plains. But in that Land there were numerous Deities that shone with a luster like that of fireflies, and evil Deities which buzzed like flies. There were also trees and herbs all of which could speak. Therefore Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto assembled all the eighty Gods, and inquired of them, saying: “I desire to have the evil Gods of the Central Land of Reed-Plains expelled and subdued. Whom is it meet that we should send for this purpose?” (Aston 2005)

In other words, there were many *kami* shining like fireflies and evil *kami* making clamorous noises, and even the trees and grasses were talking. This is a mythical expression of the volatile nature of the environment with its many volcanoes, earthquakes and typhoons. These nature deities conducted themselves in a violent way. Unless they were assuaged, development of the land, rice cultivation and national unity could not proceed. How can this land, with its complex and fragmented multiplicity of *kami*, be brought together? This can be said to be the main theme of Japanese culture and thought.

Originally, the word *kami* was a coverall word used with a sense of awe, respect, and praise for the dynamic movement of these various natural events and the wildness of their diversity; to offer an analogy, it was something like a computer “folder.” A folder is an assemblage or a category in which we can enclose a multiplicity of related items, or “files,” by putting into it various items of information, formats, and conditions.

The “*kami* folder” was a “folder” in which are kept together certain sacred feelings, knowledge, powers, and phenomena embraced by people living on the Japanese islands.

For example, there are a number of words expressing divine power, divinity, spirituality, or spiritual power in what we might call the “*chi* file,” such as *ikazuchi* (thunder spirit), *kagutsuchi* (fire spirit), *nozuchi* (field spirit), *kukunochi* (tree spirit), and *mizuchi* (water spirit). This *chi* is the origin of the *makurakotoba* or poetic epithet for *kami* found in the *Man'yōshū* anthology, *chihayaburu*. Thunder, fire, trees, and water are all natural events and natural things. They are manifestations of the generative power *musuhi* creating and moving the world by the dynamic of wild force. In the *Nihon shoki* this *musuhi* is written as “birth-giving spirit.”

Words with this suffix *hi*, what we might call the “*hi* file,” include *musuhi* (birth-giving spirit), *naohi* (good spirit), and *magatsuhi* (evil spirit). This group of divine powers or divinities expresses certain functionalities or workings.

Besides these, there is the “*mi* file,” which includes *yamatsumi* (mountain spirit) and *wadatsumi* (sea spirit), indicating a comparatively wide natural realm, and many other words and concepts expressing divine power, divinity, spiritual power or spirituality, of which we can mention *mono*, *nushi*, *tama*, *oni*, and *mikoto*.

Although these “file” groups expressing the divine powers, divinities, spiritual powers, and spiritualities of *chi*, *mi*, *hi*, *mono*, *nushi*, *tama*, *oni*, and *mikoto* were forming clusters, a sense for recognising the generation and manifestation of *kami* in all these natural phenomena near and far was incorporated and enveloped in the overall “folder” of *kami*.

It is in these natural geographical, historical-geographical, and cultural conditions that the religious spirit of the Japanese islands formed. In other words, the bedrock of “Shinto” is a gathering point of converging tectonic plates and converging cultures, a symphony of Eurasian/Pacific Rim ritual culture; and this “Shinto” which developed on the Japanese islands is a three-dimensional crossroads of the nature and culture of these islands.

In this “climate” the native religion Shinto and the new arrival Buddhism syncretized to produce a peculiar syncretic culture. This Shinto-Buddhist syncretic culture has been a *basso continuo* sounding through Japanese culture to the present day.

I believe that, long before this syncretism of *kami* and Buddha was worked out, various *kami* came together at this meeting point of tectonic plates, this crossroads of major oceanic currents, and developed a culture of symphonic “syncretism of *kami* and *kami*,” and it was on this ground that, much later, in the sixth century CE, Buddhism was brought first from the Korean peninsula and soon afterward from continental China, and mingled with the local *kami* to bring about a “syncretism of *kami* and Buddha.” Thus, I believe that “syncretism of *kami* and Buddha” is

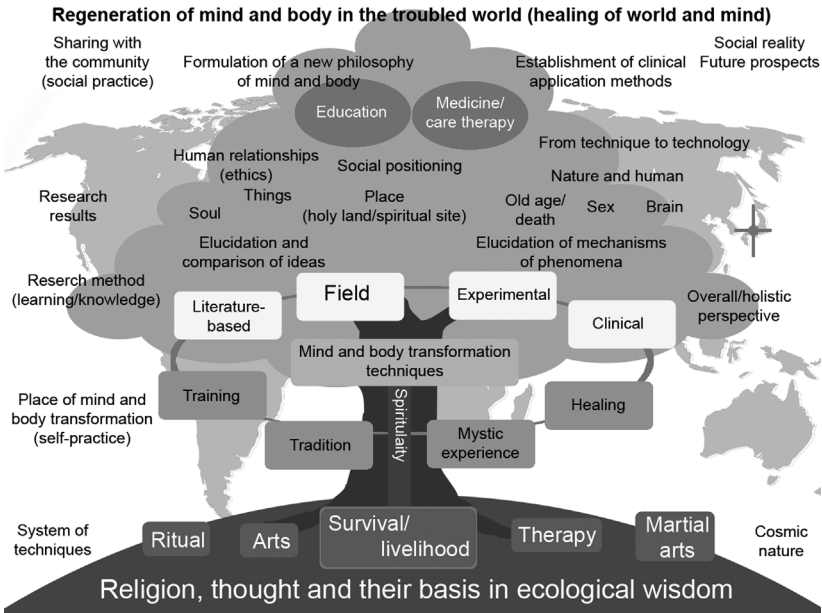


Figure 1. Multidisciplinary conceptual diagram of “mind and body transformation techniques.”

one branch of “syncretism of *kami* and *kami*.” It is this characteristic of “meeting/syncretism” that has given birth to the “tolerance” which is an expression of the “Japanese religious spirit” (Kamata 2009, 2011).

Originally, “Buddha” meant an enlightened one, a person who has attained enlightenment. In Japan, however, we call dead people “Buddhas” and use the word *odabutsu*, which comes from the name of Buddha, to talk about death itself. In Japan, the scope of the word *hotoke* or Buddha is expanded way beyond its meaning of an enlightened person to cover any dead person, who might not be enlightened at all. At its most extreme, we find the idea in Tendai original enlightenment doctrine that “all things are already enlightened,” that is, trees, grasses, and the land itself all become Buddha, indeed are already Buddha. This ultimate idea of all things as Buddha is an inconceivable leap from original Buddhist thought and practice. Yet this idea of “original enlightenment” was supported by the “Japanese religious spirit.”

This “original enlightenment” was actually originally a term imported from China, but in Japan it was expressed in terms of the body and objects. This spiritualization of the body, this spiritualization of objects led to the idea and practice of “attaining Buddhahood in one’s own body” (self-mummification) and to the disciplines of the Nō drama, the tea ceremony, and ikebana. In these products of Japanese cultural creativity the intuition

and insight of the “ecological wisdom” worked out in the climate of Japan can be seen actively at work. “Ecological wisdom” is “the wisdom and technique of a system for maintenance of a sustainable and creative balance between the natural and the artificial, developed through keen observation and experience in daily life, based on a profound and humble awe and respect for nature.” For the practice of medical care, too, a care cycle for the future rooted in “ecological wisdom” needs to be established. Japanese “spiritual care” needs to follow the long path of “language of trees and grasses” toward “all things being already enlightened,” listening to the diverse “voices” of the Japanese islands while maintaining its links with what Kato Kiyoshi calls “natural care/healing through nature” (Inoue et al. 2012; Kamata 2014b).

This is the meeting point of religion and medical care in the land where Ōkuninushi, the *kami* of medicine (*kami* of healing) encountered the Buddha, and the Buddha nature manifested as Yakushi Nyorai, the king of healing, an example and a model that Shinto research can hold up as a “multidisciplinary study.”

CONCLUSION

As an attempt at such a multidisciplinary study and with the support of two major grants from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences (*Kakenhi*), I have been conducting a comparative religious study of mind and body transformation techniques: a multidisciplinary research into techniques connecting mind, body, and things, which resulted in various edited volumes (Kamata 2012, 2014a,b,c) as well as developing a new multidisciplinary research project on mind and body transformation techniques and spiritual violence, arts for purifying negative emotions arising from religious experience, to be executed in the period 2015–2018. By investigating techniques of mind and body transformation in the troubled world of modern society, the aim of these research projects is a healing of the world, and healing of the mind. With subjects including Zen Buddhist mediation (*zazen*), mindfulness meditation, Shinto meditation practice, and contemplation, we represent a research team of more than thirty scholars, not only from religious studies and humanities, but also from neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and clinical psychology, and we are vigorously promoting an interdisciplinary and trans-regional research approach that combines the insights of the humanities and sciences. We have already published more than eighty ground-breaking research articles in our annual reports (Kokoro Research Center 2012–2015).

These techniques of mind and body transformation refer to techniques of transitioning, transforming, and converting the condition of mind and body to a condition that is ideal for the person concerned. Since ancient times, various “techniques” have been developed, transmitted and practiced

in the various fields of religion, art, the performing arts, martial arts, sports, and education. There are many such fields, for example prayer, festival, coming of age, baptism, anointing, and other traditional religious rites, various kinds of meditation and initiation, martial and physical arts practice and sports training, singing, chorus, dance, and other arts, healing, therapy, and care, and educational programming, whose origins, various aspects, structures, essence, meaning, applicability, and future prospects can be investigated. This study also offers multidisciplinary findings and criteria in body theory, physical technique theory, training theory, and research in altered states of consciousness, mystical experiences (religious experiences), conversion, and mind healing.

The key, the most general mind and body transformation technique is breathing technique, as in the Zen saying “regulate the body, regulate the breath, and regulate the mind.” Also of great importance in Japanese arts and martial arts is “center of gravity” (making the hips or abdomen the center). In this connection, we must also consider spinning, jumping, stepping, and head-shaking such as in Sufi dancing. We can identify various mind and body transformation techniques which link the realm of the body, which can make these things visible, to the realm of the mind which can be sensed without being seen, and further to the realm of the spirit which cannot be seen and can barely be sensed, and yet which has its own reality in religious experiences and ideas of various kinds.

Also linked to this, as another approach to “multidisciplinary study,” I began last year the publication of “A Course of Spiritual Studies in Seven Volumes.” As a first attempt at a synthesis of “religion and medicine” in Japan, in this series I have recently edited and published four volumes (Kamata, ed., 2014a,b,c) of *Spiritual Studies*, with *Volume 1: Spiritual Care*, *Volume 2: Spirituality and Medicine and Health*, *Volume 3: Spirituality and Peace*, and (still to come) *Volume 4: Spirituality and Environment*. Further volumes on education, on art and performance, and on religion are scheduled for publication in the near future.

What I call “spiritual studies” here means a scholarly exploration which takes mind, body and soul as one, involving life value, way of life, and purpose in life. In inquiring into the place and meaning of human existence in this world, “spiritual studies” aims to grasp holistically the realms and phenomena that have been called mind, body, and soul, breaking down conventional academic boundaries that have limited the segmented specialist fields of psychology, dealing with the mind, physiology, and neurology (brain science), dealing with the body, and religious studies and theology, dealing with the soul.

Among the above-mentioned seven volumes, there is a reason for the first two volumes being on “spiritual care” and “medicine and health.” The reason that the first volume is on spiritual care is that I thought it appropriate to deal first with the pressing and serious existential question

of how each individual is to get through life in society following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, which struck sixteen years after the Kobe earthquake of 1995 made “mental care” a major social issue. I considered that the development of “mental care” to “spiritual care” had made material progress in these sixteen years.

The “Japan Society of Spiritual Care”, founded in 2007, certifies “spiritual care professionals,” and since 2012 Tōhoku University has certified “clinical religious professionals.” Since the Tōhoku earthquake, there has been a need for comprehensive care taking in funeral care, palliative care, and grief care, and a training program for “clinical religious professionals” as a course in the practical religious studies department at Tōhoku University began in April 2012. This is another manifestation of the “humanities” as “multidisciplinary study.”

The world has now entered an age of frequent extraordinary disasters. This is, of course, not without causes. But because there are a combination of very complex factors involved, time will be needed to elucidate the overall mechanism. And many people feel intuitively that conditions have reached such a dangerous extreme that we cannot wait. In his teachings, the Buddha once used the allegory of the “poisoned arrow.” If a person has been shot with a poisoned arrow, before seeking an explanation, the first thing to do is to remove the arrow and treat the wound, otherwise the victim will die. Such is the situation we find ourselves in.

I believe that the stage is set for the “humanities” as a “multidisciplinary study,” as a “core study.”

I should like to end with my thoughts on the meaning of the “humanities.” An important method in the “humanities” is comparison. By comparing certain things, cultures, and ideas with other things, cultures, and ideas, we can shed light on their inherent characteristics and relativize them. This comparison and the relativization that seems implied in it are an indispensable task and basis for dialogue if we are to avoid falling into an exclusivistic “single absolute.” Thereby, a synthesis can be born. Through this work of “comparison–relativization–synthesis” it is possible to know our own smallness, weakness, foolishness, our own negative side, and to curb the occurrence of “violence” manifested on various levels.

Science is the scholarly activity of analyzing mechanisms. The humanities, by contrast, is the scholarly activity of interpreting and decoding meanings. Faced with the depth of meaning, we in the humanities must further deepen ourselves and our explorations.

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