The Revival of Public Shintō:

Politics, Environmentalism, and Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract

Shintō is often recognized as Japan's indigenous religion embedded with Japanese animistic beliefs such as kami cults. However, upon investigation, Shintō is much more complex, as it constantly changes and transforms; even whether it independently existed in pre-modern Japan (before 1868) is up for debate. National Learning (Kokugaku 国学) scholars and their studies significantly contributed to the rhetoric that Shintō is native to Japan and that it is Japan's tradition and culture, rather than a religion. The creation of a public institution in the Meiji period (1868–1912) known as "State Shintō" also gives Shintō a robust nationalistic characterization. Overall, this thesis investigates the revival of public Shintō in contemporary Japanese society in light of the religious-secular divide, Shintō environmentalism, Shintō nationalism, and "Japanese animism."

In particular, this thesis emphasizes the importance of sociopolitical context for Shintō's development throughout Japanese history. It examines how Shintō adapts to new sociopolitical environments and argues that Shintō's definitional ambiguity is the key to its adaptation. More importantly, it proposes that Shintō's recent trend of aligning itself closely with environmentalism is yet another adaptation to the contemporary context—the global environmental crisis. Moreover, this thesis also interrogates the tendency of Shintō to be perceived as a public religion in contemporary Japanese society. It investigates the Constitution of Japan and its connection with Shintō. Namely, it argues that the legal interpretations of the Constitution contribute to Ise Shrine's success, as Ise sophisticatedly avoids the controversy around Articles 20 and 89 of the Constitution by focusing on the rhetoric of shrine forests (*chinju no mori* 鎮守の森). This research examines the deployment of Shintō environmentalist discourse to promote Shintō in light of such conservative and nationalistic revivals.

Furthermore, this thesis introduces the recent scholarly debate over "new animism." With this mythological understanding of "animism" in mind, this thesis examines animated films such as *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no totoro* となりのトトロ; 1988) and *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-hime* もののけ姫; 1997), directed by Miyazaki Hayao. It argues that Miyazaki and

his "Japanese animism," despite his own disavowals of promoting any institutionalized religion, accelerate the spread of Shintō as not only an ancient worship tradition but also a universal "green" religion; that is, the spread of Shintō environmentalism. This highlights the need for greater awareness of these films and the messages they convey, which resonate with the assertions made by Japanese conservatives regarding Shintō and shrine forests.

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Introduction

Shintō is the indigenous faith of the Japanese. It is a way of life and a way of thinking that has been an integral part of Japanese culture since ancient times. It is the foundation for the yearly lifecycles, beginning with the New Year's Day visit Japanese pay to a Shintō shrine to wish for good luck.

—Jinja Honchō 神社本庁[1]

I do not go to worship at a shrine at New Year. It's because I can't believe that the gods are inside those gaudy shrines. It seems much more likely to me that the gods of the Japanese are deep in the mountains and far-off valleys.

—Miyazaki Hayao 宮崎 駿[2]

There is a religious feeling that remains to this day in many Japanese. It is a belief that there is a very pure place deep within our country where people are not to enter. In that place, clear water flows and nourishes the deep forests.… This feeling is not recognized as a religion on the same level as the world's religions, but for Japanese it is definitely a religious feeling… The forest that is the setting for *Princess Mononoke* is not drawn from an actual forest. Rather, it is a depiction of the forest that has existed within the hearts of Japanese from ancient times.

—Miyazaki Hayao[3]

The Revival of Secular Shintō and Shintō Environmentalism

What is Shintō 神道? It is common to hear that Shintō is the indigenous religion of Japan or is

not a religion at all. Such definitive claims of Shintō, however, ignore the fact that Shintō as a

concept has consistently developed throughout the Japanese history. In fact, when defining

Shintō, one could easily treat the imagined kami cults from prehistory as Shintō's religious root

and the Japanese imperial lineage as embedded in Shintō's history. For example, according to the

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Shintō is "the indigenous religion of Japan consisting chiefly in

the cultic devotion to deities of natural forces and veneration of the Emperor as a descendant of

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[1] Jinja Honchō 神社本庁, "What is Shintō?," accessed January 19, 2023, https://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/shinto/index.html.

[2] Miyazaki Hayao, *Starting Point: 1979–1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 1996), 360.

[3] Miyazaki Hayao, *Turning Point: 1997–2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2008), 88.

the sun goddess [Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神]."[4] The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists Shintō as "the native religious system of Japan, the central belief of which is that the *mikado* [帝, the Japanese emperor] is the direct descendant of the sun-goddess and that implicit obedience is due to him."[5]

Notably, both dictionaries seem not to challenge the perception of Shintō being Japan's indigenous religion, which is a problematic premise when discussing Shintō and Japanese "animism." As they assert the link to the sun-goddess, Amaterasu, it seems that both definitions do not clearly separate ancient Japan's kami cults and the later institutionalized Shintō. However, claiming Shintō as a kami-based indigenous religion with an unbroken history in Japan is simply inaccurate. Indeed, it is challenging to formulate a comprehensive definition of the term "Shintō." One of the critical reasons, as Mark Teeuwen argues, is that there is no such thing as a concrete and definable Shintō in different periods of Japanese society, because it is consistently redefined (i.e., "produced") every time it is used as a conceptualization or an abstraction.[6]

Indeed, this thesis pays more attention to the ambiguity of Shintō. This means that the concept and practice of Shintō can evoke discussions about the religious-secular divide and facilitate Shinto's integration into a new social and political system. Put differently, from ancient times to the present day, societal and political structural changes are often the key for Shintō to transform in its forms, definition, practices, and significance. Discourse on Shintō is not accomplished by any particular party but more likely by a collective intellectual and political effort throughout Japanese history. In the current stage, though it is not agreed upon by many scholars in the field of Japanese religion, Shintō is often seen as a belief or religion that is native to Japan, closely aligning with nature and the environment.

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[4] *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "Shinto," accessed January 20, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Shinto.
[5] *Oxford English Dictionary.com*, s.v. "Shinto," accessed January 20, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/178222?redirectedFrom=shinto&.
[6] Mark Teeuwen, "From *Jindō* to Shinto: A Concept Takes Shape," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 233.

Unsurprisingly, the scholars who advance Shintō as indigenous and animistic often trace it back to the study of the National Learning (Kokugaku 国学), which overly emphasized the indigenous side of ancient Japan. However, these scholars tend not to mention that National Learning is closely associated with Meiji Japan's modernization, industrialization, and Westernization; the three "-izations" also contributed to Japan's nationalism and imperialism prior to 1945. The contemporary scholars' advance of the innate connection between "animistic Shintō" (compared to institutionalized Shintō) and nature is yet another example of Shintō's adaptation to current social and political changes through the selective presentation of Shintō.

This thesis discusses Shintō's definitional ambiguity and aims to unveil the importance of recognizing how secular Shintō and Japanese nationalism are making a comeback using the Japanese version of environmentalism, or Shintō environmentalism, as described by scholar of Asian religions Aike. P. Rots.[7] It investigates the history of Shintō and asserts that Shintō's attribute of being definitionally ambiguous comes to the fore when dramatic social and political changes happen. Hence, it is not odd to see that contemporary Shintō transforms itself into an environmentally friendly ideology, since the global environmental crisis has become one of the most debated global topics. The definitional discursiveness of Shintō allows it to cater to the present-day public and their concerns.

This thesis further interrogates connections between the rebirth of public Shintō and environmentalism in contemporary Japanese society. It scrutinizes the stakes for defining "religion/non-religion" and how the Shintō environmentalist paradigm helps revive a public Shintō. It accomplishes this through the depoliticization and disassociation with the imperial family and reconceptualizing Shintō as a nature religion, national tradition, and worldview. In particular, I investigate how recent Japanese political conservatives, such as Abe Shinzō 安倍晋三 (1954–2022) and the Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyū Minshutō 自由民主党), reshape the importance and function of Ise Grand Shrine.

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[7] See Aike P. Rots, "Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation: The Shinto Environmentalist Paradigm and the Rediscovery of *Chinju no Mori*," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42, no. 2 (2014): 205–233.

Although the Shintō's state organization ("State Shintō") was dissolved by the Allied Occupation, recent political conservatives such as the late Abe Shinzō and Shintō organizations, such as the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁) and the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership (Shintō Seiji Renmei 神道政治連盟), actively promote a new public Shintō through shrines such as Yasukuni and Ise. Shimazono Susumu has thoroughly investigated the recent trend of reviving State Shintō in contemporary Japanese society. In addition, Rots addresses that Shintō associations and the ideologues thereof echo Japanese conservatives' claims and propaganda. For instance, Jinja Honchō, a generally conservative organization, is devoted not only to the topics of Shintō and environmental issues, shrine forests (*chinju no mori* 鎮守の森), and *shikinen sengū* 式年遷宮, but also to the support and re-sacralization of institutions such as Yasukuni Shrine.[8]

Members of major religions have paid significant attention to global environmental issues and proposed various solutions according to their religious doctrines and practices. Associations with ecological issues are a possible adaptation strategy that can prove new legitimacy for religious institutions, and Shintō is no exception. However, Rots asserts that the Shintō environmentalist paradigm is closely intertwined with ideas of what it means to be Japanese, and it could challenge the constitutional separation of state and religion.[9] Some Shintō scholars (e.g., Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛 and Ueda Masaaki 上田正昭) and conservative politicians utilize the concept of shrine forests to build a bridge between the imagined Japanese ancestral animistic past and the present global environmental crisis to create an ecological ideology that is unique and native to Japan.

Furthermore, though reframing shrine worship and rituals (e.g., *shikinen sengū*) as "Japanese traditional culture" can be seen as a common tactic for negotiating legal restrictions on receiving public funding or religious education, it contributes to the general secularization and publicization of Shintō. In short, portraying Shintō as Japan's "indigenous religion" or

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[8] *Shikinen sengū* refers to a ritualized reconstruction event which takes place every twenty years at Ise Grand Shrine.
[9] Rots, "Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation," 205–233, 217.

"traditional culture" is problematic and can invoke a rise in Japanese nationalism. Still, this view has become more popular in contemporary Japanese society through the forged connection between the environment and Shintō "tradition." This research builds on previous scholarship, such as that of Shimazono Susumu and Chika Watanabe, who argue that Shintō's approach towards nature echoes Japanese culturalist and nationalist ideologists who believe that Japanese people are traditionally predisposed to living harmoniously with nature.

Moreover, animated films such as *Princess Mononoke* implicitly accelerate the spread of Shintō as not only an ancient worship tradition but also a universal "green" religion, as they explore (albeit most likely unconsciously) Shintō environmentalism.[10] The director of those films, Miyazaki Hayao, has explicitly expressed his intention of showing Japanese animism, or the so-called indigenous religion of Japan, as Japanese tradition to his audience,[11] and he incorporates modern environmentalist thinking about human-nature relationships into his works.

This thesis investigates whether the spread of Shintō through media is intended not only to promote "Japan's indigenous religion" but also to construct a "green" or "environment-oriented" global religion. This thesis examines how this kind of promotion is mediated in contemporary Japanese popular culture, which has been one of the most prominent means of propagation. Moreover, this thesis examines Japanese popular cultures and their explicit representations of "animism" and kami cults. In particular, it scrutinizes the discourse of "new animism" in light of Shintō environmentalism in Japanese popular culture. By no means does this research take an anti-environmentalist stance. Instead, it calls for more attention to both conscious and unconscious exploitations of the contemporary environmental crisis to increase the political and social influence of Shintō and recreate a new "public Shintō."

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[10] Gwendolyn Morgan, "Creatures in Crisis: Apocalyptic Environmental Visions in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*," *A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 172–183.

[11] Lars-Martin Sørensen, "Animated Animism—the Global Ways of Japan's National Spirits," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (2008): 181–196, 183.

The Arrival of Religion in Japan

Another problematic claim in the abovementioned dictionary definitions is that the term "religion" appears to be suitable to describe Shintō. The word "religion" is a fundamentally Eurocentric term deeply rooted in European Christianity, and "religion" (*shūkyō*) in Japan (and East Asia in general) does not necessarily comply with the meaning of separation of church and state as practiced in the West. This existence of definitional differences and ambiguity surrounding the term "religion" (*shūkyō*) enable Japanese conservative groups to capitalize on advancing Shintō as non-religious. Hence, the term should always be used with caution when discussing Japanese religions such as Shintō and Buddhism.[12] In addition, Jason Ānanda Josephson presents the two fundamentally different ways of thinking about religion in the modern West and argues that they both fail to describe Japanese "religion." The "hierocentric" definition of religion fails to compensate for the fact that there is no native sacred-profane binary in Japan; the "theocentric" definition of religion heavily resembles a Protestant understanding of religion, in which a monotheistic God is always at the center of religion, and undermines the diversity of Japanese practices. Thus, neither definition accurately describes Japanese devotional practices."[13]

The concept and the definition of "religion" were literally carried to Japan by Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858) and his infamous "black ships" (*kurofune* 黒船) on July 29, 1858. Before Perry's unfriendly visit, Tokugawa Japan had little knowledge of the term "religion," nor was it necessary for Japan to distinguish between "religion" and "secularity." However, the situation quickly changed when Perry led a fleet of warships to Japan and demanded diplomatic negotiations. Soon after, the governments of Russia, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and France joined in clamoring for full access to Japanese ports.

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[12] See also Jun'ichi Isomae, "The Conceptual Formation of the Category 'Religion' in Modern Japan: Religion, State, Shinto," trans. Galen Amstutz, *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1, no. 3 (2012): 226–245.
[13] Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 8–10.

Although the great powers' main concerns were trade and economic gains, many of their domestic constituencies looked to Japan for missionary purposes. Hence, the topics of religion and religious freedom also appeared in international treaties as a shadow of Christianity between Japan and the Western powers, as the diplomats of Christendom demanded rights and religious toleration from the Japanese government. However, the issue of translating the term "religion" stood out since the international law texts that justified these religious rights did so in Christian theological language. Under pressure from the Western powers demanding freedom for Christianity under the guise of freedom of religion, Japanese policymakers still had difficulties understanding what kind of "freedom" they were being asked to grant, as the term "religion" had little legal meaning to the Japanese government.[14] For instance, Article 8 of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the United States (*Nichibei shūkō tsūshō jōyaku* 日米修好通商条約), also known as the Harris Treaty, included the statement "Americans in Japan shall be allowed the free exercise of their religion, and for this purpose shall have the right to erect suitable places of worship."[15] While this statement might seem straightforward in English, it was difficult for the Japanese counterpart to translate it accurately.

It was Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) who eventually popularized the term *shūkyō* 宗教, which was originally a word derived from Chinese Buddhist dictionaries, as an "equivalent" term to "religion" in the West. *Shūkyō* is a compound of two characters: *shū* 宗 (meaning "lineage," "principle," or "sect") and *kyō* 教 (meaning "teaching" or "teachings"). Thus, *shūkyō* literally means the "teachings of lineage" or "teaching of the principles." However, this definition cannot fully capture the meanings of the Western term "religion," and the sense in which the term is used today has its origins in the Euro-American word "religion."[16] Hence, it is crucial to take the philology of Japanese "religion" into account when discussing whether Shintō should be considered a "religion."

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[14] Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 73.
[15] *Nichibei shūkō tsūshō jōyaku* 日米修好通商条約 (Tokyo: National Diet Library, 1858), 31–32, accessed January 21, 2023, https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/787948/1/286.
[16] Isomae, "The Conceptual Formation of the Category 'Religion' in Modern Japan," 227.

Because of this difference between Japan's and Western definitions of "religion," it is convenient for contemporary Shintō environmentalist scholars, organizations, and politicians to point out that Japan has its own religious culture before the arrival of "religion." They argue that Shintō does not belong to the foreign category of religion but should be more accurately described as Japan's culture and tradition. Interestingly, they often trace Shintō's development back to prehistorical and classical Japan, with a strong focus on animistic beliefs and practices, instead of the immediate early modern Japan or the medieval period. Indeed, while it is fair to question whether the Western category of "religion" is the best fit for Shintō or any other non-western religions, the selective presentation of Shintō history is problematic. Furthermore, the "animistic beliefs" and "animism" in question are also under criticism for being selective (the debate of "new animism"), which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite concerns surrounding the recent categorization of Shintō, Shintō organizations and conservative politicians continue to promote it as Japan's tradition and culture. In doing so, they tend to overlook Shintō's religious characteristics and its historical development in the medieval era. Especially, with a strong emphasis on the environment and natural forests in light of the imagined Japanese animistic past, these groups propose a new form of Shintō that is native to Japan and not under the foreign category of "religion." They claim this Shintō represents an anti-modernization, anti-industrialization, and anti-urbanization stance. In short, the introduction of "religion" to East Asia is closely intertwined with Western expansion, and Shintō, as an East Asian "religion" (*shūkyō*), does not necessarily adhere to the Western concept of the separation between church and the state. Because of this ambiguous definition of "religion," conservative groups in Japan exploit this to promote Shintō as non-religious, which opens up the possibility to argue that Japanese religions are not strictly categorized as "religion" but rather intertwine with Japanese culture in a more secular manner.

Shintō and Secular

The Japanese term *shūkyō* was used by the modern Japanese government for the sake of creating a secular country that could separate the "public" and "religion." It was a phenomenon that accompanied Japan's incorporation into the Western definition of civilization, or "civilized nations." In the process of modernization and Westernization, religion was expelled from the public domain and driven into a private and non-scientific domain. Hence, instead of using the category of "religion," it might be more helpful for Japanese "religions" including Shintō to be examined in the context of secularism as a whole.[17] That said, the term "religion" is still useful as an analytic tool when discussing contemporary Shintō and how Japanese conservatives manipulate the use of "religion."[18]

Secularism in the Meiji period was thus an effort made by the Meiji government to create a dichotomy between religious and non-religious. However, the Meiji government did not simply sort Japanese religions into the "religion" category and leave them alone. Rather, it incorporated contemporary studies and the Restoration Shintō movement (*Fukko Shintō* 復古神道) to create a perfect secular state religion.[19] It might sound odd to see "secular" to be the adjective for "religion," but Shintō is definitionally ambiguous enough to incorporate these two words in a phrase. In addition, Buddhism in the early Meiji period was attacked for being foreign. Shintō became the only belief that was native enough and able to fit the state secularization project.

The Meiji government started the Great Promulgation Campaign in 1872, which promoted close ties among state religion based on Shrine Shintō, the imperial family, and the country.[20] After the Great Teaching Promulgation Campaign failed in its goal to create a "national doctrine," the Meiji government cemented the power of the imperial system and an

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[17] See also Karli Shimizu, *Overseas Shinto Shrines: Religion, Secularity and the Japanese Empire* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 2.
[18] For instance, while labeling Shintō and Shintō shrines as "religion" to benefit from various tax breaks, Shintō and political conservatives also promote Shintō as public to increase its public visibility.
[19] It primarily drew upon Nativist studies, as the Restoration Shintō movement was led by the Nativist scholars.
[20] Helen Hardacre, *Shintō: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 376.

institutionalized public, secular Shintō.[21] In particular, the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution (*Dainihon teikoku kenpō* 大日本帝国憲法) in 1889 legally kept "religion" (*shūkyō*) or personal beliefs separate from the state while stripping the public ritual of shrines from doctrinal teachings. Hence, the modern concept of religion was utilized by the Japanese state, as part of the political system of secularism.[22] In other words, the process of defining "religion" was a source of power or authority for the secular state to use for its benefit and convenience.[23] Shintō greatly benefited from this state secularization project and enjoyed the privilege of being the sole one that could perform secular national rites.

Consequently, the state-operated Shintō secularization process then allowed the Japanese people to freely choose their own religions (Buddhism, Sect Shintō, and Christianity), but the government kept national Shintō rituals in the secular sphere. In other words, except for Shintō, religion as a category protected recognized religions from persecution by limiting them only to a private sphere that was not allowed in schools or politics. The secular and Shintō, however, were considered universal to all imperial subjects and supposedly had no religious association. Moreover, according to Isomae, religiosity and ethics coexisted within the category of *kyō* (teaching) before the arrival of the Western concept of religion. However, at this juncture the two were clearly divided; ideology relating to the imperial institution and the worship of ancestors of the imperial family were considered secular.[24]

Buddhist leaders also contributed to the secularization of Shintō. For instance, one of the well-known Shin Sect 真宗 leaders, Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), argued that Shintō was not a so-called sectarian teaching, or *shūkyō,* but only a civic teaching (*jikyō* 治教).[25]

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[21] Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 13.

[22] Shimizu, *Overseas Shinto Shrines*, 4; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1–2.

[23] See Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[24] Isomae uses the phrase "moral domain," but "moral" might be confusing and ambiguous. Hence, this thesis instead uses the phrase "public domain."

[25] Shimaji states, "I have not yet completely penetrated this thing called Shinto, but what I can say for sure is that it is not a so-called sectarian teaching [*shūkyō*]… In olden times, when Buddhism had not yet entered Japan, only a

Shimaji asserted that since Shintō is not a so-called sectarian teaching (*shūkyō*), Buddhism (especially the Shin Sect) as a sectarian teaching should work together with Shintō (civic teaching) to rule the country.[26] Shimaji's acknowledgement of Shintō's secularity served to promote Buddhism in the public sphere. The Kyoto school and the associated Zen Buddhist scholars,[27] however, claimed Zen Buddhism to be not religious but an experience, and they untied Zen from the category of religion for advancing it in the public sphere. In short, the secularization process in Meiji Japan involved a struggle for public influence among different religious groups. Because of its claims to be "native" and have a lasting connection with the imperial family, the "secularized Shintō" became the only one endorsed by the Meiji government.

The Shintō secular thus became a legal and theoretical foundation for the later secular Shintō organization known as "State Shintō." However, the phrase "State Shintō" is a problematic term to use because it was only popularized after World War II by Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良 (1928–1991) in his book *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 (1970), and the pre-1945 Japanese government rarely used the term. Hence, the retrospective use of the term is problematic. However, this thesis will nonetheless use the term if needed for the sake of argument and convenience.

Environmentalism and "New Animism"

How is the Meiji secularization of Shintō relevant to contemporary Japanese society? After all, the so-called State Shintō was dissolved by the Allied Occupation after Japan's surrender in 1945. However, the very spirit of secular Shintō was not dismantled, since Shintō can still be

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civic teaching [*jikyō*] existed in our country. There is thus no obstacle to the coexistence of a sectarian teaching and a civic teaching, but how could one human possibly have two sectarian teachings at the same time." In Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷, "Kengen: Kyōdō shoku no jikyō shūkyō kondō kaisei itsuki" 建言: 教導職の治教宗教混同改正につき, cited in Hans Martin Krämer, *Shimaji Mokurai and the Reconception of Religion and the Secular in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2015), 67.

[26] Hans Martin Krämer, "Reconceiving the Secular in Early Meiji Japan: Shimaji Mokurai, Buddhism, Shintō, and the Nation," *Japan Review* 30 (2017): 63–77, 68.

[27] For example, Nishida Kitaro and D. T. Suzuki.

perceived as a public "religion." What makes the new secular Shintō different is an emphasis on the Japanese primitive culture and religion, or the Japanese "animism"—that is, kami cults. E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) introduced his evolutionist definition of religion in *Primitive Culture* (1871) and argued that animism was the primitive form of religion during the development of human society. Tylor's introduction and understanding of animism were greatly based on Eurocentric and Orientalist thinking.[28]

Nevertheless, it seems some Japanese politicians (e.g., Abe Shinzō) and filmmakers (e.g., Miyazaki Hayao) consider Japan's "animism" and "animistic beliefs" as their cultural roots. The Western imported category of religion thus becomes a convenient excuse for them to argue that Japanese "animism" is definitionally not as narrow as Western monothetic religions. Since the dichotomy between religious and non-religious was only brought to Japan in the nineteenth century, it is not strange to think "native" Japanese religion lies beyond the dichotomy. However, such rhetoric might be too abstract for the general public, so a contemporary popular topic is needed. In fact, the global environmental crisis is the perfect topic for Shintō secular supporters (e.g., Jinja Honchō) to demonstrate the imagined Shintō "animistic tradition" of worshipping natural forests.

In other words, contemporary Japanese politicians and filmmakers are taking a similar path that the Nativist scholars did two centuries ago: tracing Shintō's development back to prehistorical and classical Japan. The difference is that the Nativists argued against foreign religions like Buddhism; in contrast, the new secular Shintō argues for Shintō's superiority against the Western category of religion, along with Western modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. This thesis thus calls for attention to a revival of a new secular Shintō and the redefinition of the category of religion by propagating the so-called "Japanese animism" and utilizing the contemporary popular topic of environmentalism.

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[28] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Research into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871).

A common mistake many tend to make is the mixed use of Shintō and animistic religion. Indeed, Japanese animistic beliefs and practices (e.g., kami cults) are the foundation of the later institutionalized Shintō, but it would be inaccurate to use Shintō and "Japanese animism" interchangeably. Although Miyazaki refers to Japanese animism as an ontology or a philosophy instead of a religion per se, he suggests that there is an innate relationship between animation and animism.[29] In fact, Miyazaki's presentation with images, stories, and sounds of the enchanted world of animism helps spread the image of the indigenous faith of the Japanese. The issue here, however, is that Shintō organizations actively promote Shintō as Japan's indigenous religion, and less-informed audiences can hardly distinguish the difference between Shintō and Japanese animism. Hence, Miyazaki's films possibly not only "baptized a whole generation with animistic imagination," as Yoneyama Shoko asserts,[30] but they also deepened global audiences' misunderstanding of Shintō. This thesis then investigates Japanese anime films and "new animism" in light of the global environmental crisis.

Chapter Overview

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the discussions of Shintō and "State Shintō," which are the two core concepts of this research. It investigates the development of Shintō throughout Japanese history and argues that Shintō's definitional ambiguity allows it to always transform into something fitting the contemporary social and political framework. This chapter further asserts that the contemporary Shintō secularization movement in light of environmentalism is yet another Shintō transformation, this time to accommodate the global environmental crisis. By examining Shintō's history, it is no surprise that Shintō can be modified to a society's needs. This chapter uses a historical approach to examine "Shintō" from the prehistorical to the modern period, and it introduces scholarship by

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[29] Shoko Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan: Voices for the Anthropocene from Post-Fukushima Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 159.
[30] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 159.

Shintō studies experts such as John Breen, Mark Teeuwen, Allan Grapard, Kuroda Toshio, Bernhard Scheid, Fabio Rambelli, Shimazono Susumu, and Helen Hardacre. It then engages the concept of "secular Shintō" by investigating recent scholarly discourse, such as those of Jolyon Thomas and Jason Ānanda Josephson, on the invention of separation between "religion" and "secularism" in early modern and modern Japan.

The second chapter introduces the core theme of this research: Shintō environmentalism. It argues that Shintō environmentalism as a concept is utilized by Japanese political conservatives and Shintō ideologues to promote Shintō as a non-religious and nature-worshipping indigenous Japanese religion. It further addresses the similarities between Ise Grand Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine regarding their roles in advancing a secular Shintō and contemporary Japanese nationalism, if not imperialism. This chapter engages with primary sources such as the Constitution of Japan and the websites and publications of Shintō-related newspapers, Japan Conference (Nippon Kaigi 日本会議), the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership, and Ise Grand Shrine to examine how Japanese political conservatives and Shintō ideologues portray themselves to the public. Moreover, the chapter investigates the discourse of the revival of public Shintō in contemporary Japan by looking into the work of recent scholars such as Jun'ichi Isomae, Ernils Larsson, Mark Mullins, and John Breen along with Aike Rots' discussion of the "Shintō environmentalist paradigm." It unveils that when it comes to Japan's environmentalism, unlike the progressive environmentalist promotion in the West, conservative groups have a louder voice.[31] Furthermore, this chapter connects Shintō environmentalism with the revival of public Shintō by arguing that Shintō environmentalism helps Shintō to be perceived as secular again and, thus, expands Shintō's public influence in contemporary Japanese society.

The last chapter is devoted to the globalization of Shintō and "animism" through Japanese popular culture. This chapter explores the intellectual concept of "new animism" by

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[31] This is not to say that there are no progressive groups in Japan that promote environmentalism. For instance, Friends of the Earth Japan (FoE Japan) is an environmental organization that promotes progressive environmentalist and social ideologies. "About Us," FoE Japan, accessed August 20, 2023, https://foejapan.org/en/about-us-en/.

examining scholarship by Graham Harvey and Darryl Wilkinson and uses it as a methodological tool to examine so-called "Japanese animism." It investigates popular anime films such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (Kaze no tani no Naushika* 風の谷のナウシカ; 1984) and *Princess Mononoke*—which have implicitly forged a connection between *kami* and the environment—using textual, visual, and historical analysis. Miyazaki, the films' director, has openly expressed his thoughts on kami cults and the so-called Japanese animistic tradition in his books and interviews, and he both implicitly and explicitly expresses his thoughts in these films.

This chapter scrutinizes scholarship about Miyazaki's films, such as that of Lars-Martin Sørensen, Jolyon Baraka Thomas, and Yoneyama Shoko. It argues that many of Miyazaki's notions are, in fact, conceptually inaccurate. Despite Miyazaki's historically problematic understanding of Shintō, or animism/kami cults, his works are undeniably popular worldwide and have conveyed successfully the idea of Shintō as Japan's indigenous and primitive religion. In short, the last chapter interrogates the propagation of Shintō in contemporary Japanese popular culture and its link to the revival of public Shintō.

Chapter 1:

Religion in Motion: Sociopolitical Changes and Shintō Transformation in Japanese History

> Because Shintō has Kami at its center, it might be assumed that it is a religion… [In fact,] [e]ven today, the question whether Shintō should be considered a religion remains controversial. Shintō is highly diverse and stratified in every historical era. It is never "just one thing." In some respects and some eras, the concept of religion is not particularly helpful in understanding it.
>
> —Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 2019[32]

Shintō and its core, kami or kami cults, have consistently appeared in Japanese history since the development of written language in Japan. However, the difficulty of studying Shintō is that the very term does not represent a singular entity but rather a continuously developing and changing concept.[33] For example, on the one hand, scholars such as Sonoda Minoru 薗田稔, professor at Kyōto University and chief priest of Chichibu Shrine in Saitama, argue that "real" Shintō has to be understood as "nature-loving spiritualism" and a non-political set of emotions and rituals, which only suffered radical political abuse in the modern age (1868–1945).[34] On the other hand, scholars under the influence of Kuroda Toshio, such as Mark Teeuwen, argue that Shintō is merely a spiritualistic world, incomprehensible without the framework of esoteric Buddhism.[35]

Although the representation of Shintō is not constant throughout history, is there an internal logic or pattern that Shintō relies on during its transformation? This chapter does not intend to search for a comprehensive definition of Shintō; rather, it introduces some of the characteristics of Shintō in different historical eras. In particular, it argues that the definitional

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[32] Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 2.

[33] Fabio Rambelli, "Introduction: The Invisible Empire: Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan," in *Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan*: *The Invisible Empire*, ed. Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 3–4.

[34] See Klaus Antoni, "Does Shinto History 'Begin at Kuroda'? On the Historical Continuities of Political Shinto," in *Politics and Religion in Modern Japan: Red Sun, White Lotus*, ed. Roy Starrs (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 87; Sonoda Minoru, "Shinto and the Natural Environment," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2000), 32–46.

[35] For example, see Mark Teeuwen, "The Kami in Esoteric Buddhist Thought and Practice," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2000), 96.

ambiguity of Shintō allows it to transform into something suitable to the contemporary social, political, and religious system. It then proposes that the recent secularization process of Shintō in light of environmentalism is yet another adaptation, in this case to the current global environmental crisis. Through an investigation of Shintō's history, this chapter shows that definitional ambiguity is the key for Shintō to transform amid various sociopolitical changes.

This chapter introduces Shintō in three sections: (1) "Japanese animism" and the creation of early Shintō in ancient Japan; (2) Shintō and its continuity in medieval Japan; and (3) Shintō, Kokugaku 国学 (National Learning), and "State Shintō" in modern Japan.[36] Each section has its own dedicated studies, and it is not possible to comprehend the complexity of Shintō history in one chapter. Rather, it emphasizes the transformations that Shintō as a whole has experienced. In other words, it examines how sociopolitical changes influence the conceptual representation of Shintō, and it calls for more attention to the reasons that Shintō manages to transform itself in different eras.

This chapter discusses the complexity of Shintō throughout the history of Japan up to the end of WWII and provides a concrete historical survey to help clarify misunderstandings such as Shintō being Japan's indigenous religion. More importantly, it proposes that not only is the contemporary secularization process of Shintō not new, but that there is also an internal logic for Shintō transformations that includes the recent discourse of Shintō environmentalism. Post-WWII Shintō and controversies, however, will be examined in the next chapter in light of politics and law, as it has a more direct connection to the discussion of Shintō environmentalism and other contemporary Shintō movements.

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[36] The phrase "State Shintō" is problematic because it was only popularized after World War II by Murakami Shigeyoshi (1928–1991) in his monograph *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 (1970); the pre-1945 Japanese government rarely used the term. The term will be scrutinized at the end of this chapter. See Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良, *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970).

Early Creation of Shintō in the Classical Period

This section examines the appearance of "Shintō" in ancient Japan. According to Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄 (1926–1993), the common people's view of Shintō usually includes the following assumptions. First, Shintō bears the characteristics of a primitive religion, including nature worship and taboo against "impurities" (*kegare* 穢れ), but it has no system of doctrine. Second, Shintō exists in diverse forms as folk beliefs but simultaneously possesses certain features of organized religion, such as institutionalized shrines and rituals. Third, Shintō plays a vital role in Japan's ancient mythology and provides a basis for ancestor and emperor worship. Essentially, Shintō is often viewed as the indigenous religion of Japan, continuing in an unbroken line from prehistoric times down to the present.[37]

However, how much truthfulness does this popular view contain? The so-called indigenous religion may refer to worshipping kami (which may be translated as "god," "deity," or "spirit")—that is, kami cults—of Japan. However, this view ignores the fact that Shintō is different from kami worship. For example, kami in the ancient form of kami worship may be the spirits of a particular place or natural forces like wind, rivers, and mountains, but they were neither regarded anthropomorphically nor be seen as embodying moral principles. Later under Buddhist influence, the kami came to be conceptualized anthropomorphically, and therefore mystical figures such as the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami began to appear in historical records,[38] primarily the *Kojiki* 古事記 (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 712 CE) and the *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 (*The Chronicles of Japan*, 720 CE). In short, the conventional view of Shintō is problematic because it treats kami cults as equal to Shintō, regards Shintō as completely native to Japan, and presumes an unbroken continuing history of Shintō.

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[37] Kuroda Toshio, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," trans. James C. Dobbins and Suzanne Gay, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 1–21, 1.

[38] See Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 1; Aike P. Rots, "Shinto's Modern Transformations: From Imperial Cult to Nature Worship," in *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*, ed. Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salemink (New York: Routledge, 2014), 125–143, 126.

I argue that it was right after the import of continental religions, philosophy, rites, civil systems and so on that the imperial court officialized kami cults as the early institutionalized Shintō in the late seventh century, since the form and function of that Shintō was drastically different from preceding kami cults.[39] For instance, "the "indigenous" sense of kami is that they were not necessarily always beneficial to humanity because nature can produce flooding, droughts, and other natural disasters, and thus human compassion was not a feature of kami in the prehistorical era. However, the early institutionalized Shintō performed annual state rites for the peace and prosperity of the realm,[40] which would never make sense for earlier kami cults or Japanese "animism."

Ōbayashi Taryō 大林太良 (1929–2001), a prominent Japanese ethnologist and scholar of comparative cultural studies at Tokyo University, states that "Shintō in the broader sense is the primeval religion of Japan, in the narrow sense a system for political purposes constructed from primeval religion and Chinese elements."[41] This characterization of Shintō indicates the crucial part for understanding Shintō: Shintō should always be examined in its contemporary sociopolitical context, especially when significant social and political changes are taking place. Despite the scholarly debate over when an independent Shintō institution was created, it is hard to deny that a political and state-ritual entity named "Shintō," or *jindō*,[42] existed after the arrival of various imports from the continent. The Chinese cultural and political influence was profound for the Japanese imperial court, as Chinese models of governance were adopted by the Yamato court in approximately the sixth century. Agricultural rites, the worship of ancestral deities, and

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[39] On the one hand, scholars such as Helen Hardacre, Inoue Nobutaka, and Itō Satoshi argue that there was an independent Shintō institution in the classical period of Japan (the classical period lasted from the sixth to the twelfth centuries, when Japan was highly influenced by Chinese culture such as Buddhism and Confucianism). On the other hand, scholars such as Kuroda Toshio, Inoue Hiroshi, and Mark Teeuwen assert that Shintō only existed as a spiritualistic concept under the framework of esoteric Buddhism in the medieval period, and it only became independent after the Meiji Restoration (1868).
[40] See Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 29–40.
[41] Cited in Antoni, "Does Shinto History 'Begin at Kuroda'?" 89. See the original text in German in Ōbayashi Taryō and Watanabe Yoshio, *Die Welt der Religionen 6: Ise und Izomo* (Freiburgh, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1982), 135.
[42] See Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 242.

state ritual, which were under the heavy influence of Confucianism, were introduced as expressions of the ruler's authority.

Japan then transformed from a tribal-like loose government to a Chinese-style centralized government by adopting and establishing the Chinese legal code called *ritsuryō* 律令 in the ancient Japanese court in the late seventh century.[43] Critically, court ritual, or as I call it, early institutionalized Shintō, was created under such continental influence around the same time. After the implementation of the *ritsuryō*, the new form of government created the Council of Divinities (Jingikan 神祇官) to make sure that official kami rites were performed correctly in accordance with the kami law (*jingiryō* 神祇令). Hardacre and Shintō historian Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝 argue that Shintō's origins stem from the ancient court, kami law, and the Jingikan.

Inoue summarizes the shape of Shintō at this time in his introduction to *Shintō: A Short History*:

> The classical system of kami worship clearly possessed all the elements of a fully fledged religious system. Its origin is difficult to date, but it was completed as a system after the establishment of a central imperial state governed by an adapted version of Chinese law (J. *ritsuryō* [律令]). Shrines all over the country were included in a system of "official shrines" (*kansha* [官社]). This network of official shrines formed the *network* of kami worship's religious system. Also, the *constituents* of kami rituals were clearly identified, and their message (the system's substance) was transmitted to society through ritual prayers (*norito* [祝詞]) and imperial decrees (*senmyō* [宣命]). It is not possible to identify a religious system that might be described as "Shintō" before the systematization of kami worship by the new imperial state during the classical period, because the constituents, network, and substance of kami cults during this early period were too ill-defined.[44]

Hardacre and Inoue essentially argue that once systemization and centralization emerged in the late seventh century, "Shintō" was recognized as different from animistic kami cults because of the implementation of the Jingikan, a structured ritual calendar, kami law, and the incorporation of kami priests into the government.[45]

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[43] The *ritsuryō* system refers to a civil legal system adopted from the continent. It consists of penal codes (*ritsu* 律) and administrative law (*ryō* 令).

[44] Inoue Nobutaka, "Introduction: What is Shinto," in *Shinto: A Short History*, ed. Inoue Nobutaka, trans. Mark Teeuwen and John Breen (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1–11, 5.

[45] For the detailed ritual calendar and rites, see Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 32–35.

Nevertheless, whether this signifies the establishment of an independent Shintō in the late seventh century, it is evidently a watershed in the history of Shintō. Critically, I argue that this profound transformation of "Shintō" was its first adaption from various kami cults to fit the new political and social transformation. Moreover, the scholarly debate over whether "Shintō" was institutionalized as an independent ritual system in fact indicates the definitional ambiguity of Shintō at this time. That is, the creations of the court ritual system and the Jingikan served an important purpose of installing a Chinese-style imperial governing system. Although the Jingikan was not directly borrowed from the continent, it was undoubtedly influenced by Chinese social and political structures. Put differently, institutionalized Shintō was not created out of the need to organize kami cults; rather, it resulted from the sociopolitical changes of the archipelago at that time. As Inoue Hiroshi 井上寛司 argues, "[Shintō] functioned as a term and concept that encompassed an extremely ideological and political assertion upholding the secular order of Japan's nationhood and royal authority [*kokka ya ōken no arikata* 国家や王権のありかた]."[46]

In short, the formation of "Shintō" was thus more likely to be concerned with its practical function than doctrinal definition. Keeping "Shinto" definitionally ambiguous was beneficial for overseeing various kami rites and traditions, and providing a well-defined Shintō was not a priority for the imperial court. Since Shintō was never adequately defined in its early institutionalized process, it is relatively simpler for later governments to redefine Shintō for their needs, and such lack of clarity in Shintō's definition has continued since the category of "Shintō" was invented.

The Term Shintō and Japanese Tradition

Another issue for the aforementioned conventional view is that Shintō is often viewed as the indigenous religion of Japan. Because of a lack of written records, it is difficult to clearly identify what "Shintō," or kami cults, were before the completion of the *Kojiki* and th *Nihon*

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[46] Inoue Hiroshi, *Nihon no jinja to "Shintō"* 日本の神社と「神道」 (Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 2006), 56, translated and cited in Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 43.

shoki. Hence, the so-called ancient Japanese tradition, culture, and animism are largely the result of contemporary imagination. Moreover, the two texts are also problematic for providing a sense of kami cults in ancient Japan for three reasons: 1) the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* were written after the importation of written languages from the continent; 2) Buddhist monks contributed significantly to the construction of the two texts; and 3) the two texts, being court and official documents, could be ultimately viewed as justifications and legitimization of the imperial house.[47]

Even between the two texts, there are different emphases and interpretations. For instance, on the one hand, the *Kojiki* presents one single, continuous, and purposive narrative that legitimizes the imperial family, and it later inspired the "Nativist scholars" (*kokugakusha* 国学者) such as Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 in the Edo period (1603–1868). On the other hand, the *Nihon shoki* usually offers more than one variation of each episode.[48] It shows that various branches of tradition were known to the court authors, which made multiple Shintō interpretations possible.

For example, Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (1873–1961), a Japanese intellectual historian at Waseda University, characterizes the early use of the term Shintō into six categories: 1) religious beliefs found in indigenous customs passed down in Japan, including superstitious beliefs; 2) the authority, power, activity, or deeds of a kami; the status of kami; being a kami; or the kami itself; 3) concepts and teachings concerning kami (e.g., Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道 and Yuiitsu Shintō 唯一神道); 4) the teachings propagated by a particular shrine (e.g., Ise Grand Shrine and Sannō Shintō 山王神道); 5) the way of the kami as a political or moral norm; and 6) sectarian Shintō as found in new religions.[49] In addition, Tsuda argues that in the *Nihon shoki shintō* means "the religious beliefs found in indigenous customs in Japan," because the term was used to distinguish "Japan's indigenous religion from Buddhism at the time."[50]

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[47] See also Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 47–48; Antoni, "Does Shinto History 'Begin at Kuroda'?" 89–91.
[48] Antoni, "Does Shinto History 'Begin at Kuroda'?" 91–92; Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 64–69.
[49] Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉, *Nihon no Shintō* 日本の神道 (Iwanami Shoten, 1949), 1–5.
[50] Tsuda, *Nihon no Shintō*, 13.

Unlike Tsuda, Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (1918–2001), a specialist on Taoism, argues that Taoism played a central role in shaping early Japanese culture, especially the imperial system.[51] Fukunaga asserts that Japan's early religious developments echo the development of Chinese religion, and the term *shintō* in the *Nihon shoki* likely refers to a Chinese religion, possibly Taoism. Fukunaga's position on Shintō is iconoclastic because it subverts the conventional view of Shintō as uniquely Japanese.[52] In other words, the term used in the *Nihon shoki* probably refers to popular and folk beliefs about kami in general, in contrast to the more structured teachings such as Buddhism. More importantly, Hardacre argues that though the term perhaps refers to the activities of unspecified spirits, which are distinguished from Buddhist divinities, it does not explicitly refer to being indigenous to Japan or belonging to an organized institution.[53]

Kuroda also challenges the characterization of Shintō as Japan's indigenous religion. Similar to Fukunaga, Kuroda indicates that it is possible that early Japanese regarded their ceremonies and beliefs as a localized version of Taoism. Although he does not provide a unique understanding of the term Shintō, he proposes a rather radical view of Shintō. Essentially, Kuroda argues that Shintō is an ideological and spiritualistic term and an independent Shintō organization did not exist until the modern period.[54] In other words, Kuroda asserts that the premodern concept of Shintō does not imply a formal religion per se, nor does it indicate something uniquely Japanese.

Moreover, by examining the history and narratives of Buddhism in early Japan, Teeuwen concludes that the term Shintō was pioneered by Buddhist monks in the official accounts during the process of establishing of Japanese Buddhism and that *shintō* referred to shrines and their kami.[55] In addition, Teeuwen warns that these three occurrences of the term *shintō* are extremely

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[51] Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 237.
[52] Also see Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 42.
[53] Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 42.
[54] See Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," 4–7.
[55] For a detailed investigation, see Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 237–40.

isolated, as the word Shintō does not occur anywhere else in the *Nihon shoki*. In its sequel, *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 (797 CE), the term occurs only once. Critically, the word does not occur at all in any other contemporary official compilations or documents, including the *Kojiki*, the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (759 CE), and the *Fudoki* 風土記.[56] Teeuwen then argues that *shintō* was a Buddhist term, adopted in Japan from Buddhist sources, by providing another appearance of Shintō in early Buddhist texts, that is in the biography of Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the patriarch of Japanese Tendai 天台 Buddhism.[57] Teeuwen's argument is broadly congruent with a view of Shintō history that is favored among recent specialists in Japanese medieval religious history.

All the aforementioned interpretations of "Shintō" show that it is an extraordinarily complex and unclear term to use in the context of the classic period of Japan. Because of the lack of sources, scholars must puzzle out the meaning and usage of the term from a handful of court texts. Although recent scholars do not agree upon what the term "Shintō" refers to in the classical period, their research suggests that its origin is unlikely to be of native Japanese origin and that it does not necessarily refer to an "indigenous Japanese religion."

In addition to Shintō's various interpretations and origins, I argue that Shintō's practical function in the Japanese sociopolitical context is more important, as it was invented to give expression to the new national identity of Japan, with the kami-born emperor at the pinnacle. In other words, "Shintō" as a court ritual system was created primarily for the adaptation of a new political and social system imported from the continent rather than religious proposes. Hence, it is unsurprising that there was no concrete definition of Shintō when the term was invented and used. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of Shintō allows scholars, religious leaders, and politicians in later periods to selectively interpret the materials of Shintō to suit their specific agendas, regardless of their underlying purpose.

Medieval Shintō

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[56] Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 240.
[57] See Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 242.

Shintō in the medieval period gradually became associated with Buddhism, and like Shintō and kami in the ancient and classical periods, there was no clear picture of it. The expression "medieval Shintō" (*chūsei shintō* 中世神道) is an umbrella term referring to several different discourses on the kami: the kami were variously envisioned as protectors of Buddhism and the Buddhist; as suffering beings in search for salvation; as bodhisattvas or as manifestations of buddhas; as independent entities that had to be kept separate from Buddhism and its rituals. Hence, there was no unified discourse on the *kami* and many of these so-called medieval aspects dated to previous times and kept developing further in the later periods. Fabio Rambelli characterizes "medieval Shintō" as "neither Shintō nor medieval."[58]

This section does not try (perhaps it is impossible) to conduct a comprehensive history of Shintō in medieval Japan; instead, it pays more attention to the unclarity and complexity of the term and the concept of Shintō in medieval Japan. It proposes that the concept and practical function of "Shintō" in this period went through a second adaptation to the new social, political, and religious context. It introduces Kuroda Toshio's understanding of Shintō along with his well-known *kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制 theory. It investigates the popular Buddhist theory of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 to indicate the degree of amalgamation between Buddhism and Shintō in this period. It argues that in this period, Buddhism was the dominant religious, social, and political entity, and Shintō was under the significant influence of Buddhism. However, this does not mean the concept of Shintō lost its characteristics and importance (e.g., Yoshida Shintō); this rather shows that Shintō was capable of transforming itself to better fit a new sociopolitical environment because of its discursiveness.

First, it is necessary to introduce the social, religious, and political changes in the medieval period, as the context is crucial for Shintō's development and for this chapter as a whole. In the middle and late Heian period, roughly spanning the tenth through the twelfth

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[58] Fabio Rambelli, "Re-Positioning the Gods: 'Medieval Shintō' and the Origins of Non-Buddhist Discourses on the Kmai," in *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, eds. Bernard Faure, Michael Como, and Iyanaga Nobumi (Kyoto: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2006–7), 305–306.

centuries, the influence of the Jingikan over kami affairs began to decline, while a new order emerged. A new set of shrines patronized by the court superseded the older annual calendar of shrine rites decreed by kami law. During this time, imperial patronage expanded significantly beyond those rites counted as "official" or "public." In addition, there was a growing tendency for aristocrats to express personal faith, particularly kami and a privatizing, individualizing tendency in enhanced devotional attitudes directed to the kami, which was considered such a central feature of Japanese religious history from the later Heian period onwards.[59] Moreover, with their land, the court and aristocracy established priestly orders to administer their distant fiefs and branch shrine, which were not under the Jingikan's supervision. Noteworthily, the Jingikan had little or no role in administering the affairs of these new shrines or the shrines of the great aristocratic families. The ritual and festival styles originating in the capital were transmitted to the provinces since the branch shrines far from the home shrine would conduct rites and ceremonies patterned after the observances at the home shrine.

At the same time, the distinction between public and private, official and nonofficial broke down, and Shrine and temple combinations became the norm. Buddhist and kami rites were coordinated within combinatory institutions in which the Buddhist clergy typically held greater authority and power over complex resources. Moreover, the overall popularization of Buddhist devotional cults among Japanese people and the diversified and specialized "Buddhist sects" (later known as "Kamakura Buddhism") in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) pushed Shintō further to the sideline regarding religious and political influences. In this context, new structures between kami and Buddhist divinities emerged, proposed by esoteric Buddhism, expressed through new philosophical paradigms, rituals, and artistic forms, also known as the Shintō-Buddhist syncretism.

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[59] Allan Grapard, "The Economics of Ritual Power," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2000), 68–94; Allan Grapard, "Shrines Registered in Ancient Japanese Law: Shinto or Not?" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 119–26.

In addition to court Shintō's decreasing influence and structural change, conceptions were also altered. Kuroda and Teeuwen propose that in medieval times, the word Shintō generally meant the authority, power, activity of kami, being a kami, or deeds of kami. Shintō and kami also became more "Buddhist" regarding their Buddhist interpretations and the changes of names of kami and rituals to Buddhist ones.[60] Moreover, scholars such as Kuroda firmly argue that before the Meiji period, shrines were not independent of Buddhist temples, institutionally or theologically.[61] Instead, they propose that the original meaning of the word "Shintō" differs from how the term is used and understood in postwar Japan,[62] and they assert that Shintō was an independent religion only in modern times from 1868 on and then only as a result of political policy (i.e., *shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離).[63]

Kuroda argues that there were eight sects considered orthodox in medieval times, and they all shared a single doctrinal system in common: *mikkyō* 密教 or esoteric Buddhism.[64] Combining with exoteric teachings or *kengyō* 顕教 (Buddhist and other teachings outside *mikkyō*), these eight sects compose exoteric-esoteric (*kenmitsu* 顕密) Buddhism in Kuroda's model. Kuroda further identified a medieval system of ruling elites (*kenmon taisei* 権門体制), which incorporated these eight sects; rather than labeling these sects as "Old Buddhism," Kuroda categorized them as "exoteric-esoteric" schools operating within this system. Moreover, despite the challenges posed by heterodox-reform movements (often referred to as "Kamakura Buddhism") to the "exoteric-esoteric system" (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制) in the late twelfth century, Kuroda argues that the exoteric-esoteric establishment persisted as the foundational

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[60] See Allan G. Grapard, "Japan's Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shinto and Buddhist Divinities in Meiji (*shimbutsu bunri*) and a Case Study: Tōnomine," *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (1984): 240–265.

[61] See Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion."

[62] Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," 3.

[63] Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," 20.

[64] The eight schools are Tendai, Shingon, and the six Nara schools (Kusha, Jōjitsu, Sanron, Ritsu, Hossō, and Kegon schools).

religious framework within medieval Japan's political structure and retained its orthodox position until the early sixteenth century. [65]

Although Kuroda's argument is not free from critique, he proposes one crucial perspective: Shintō is not continuous as many believe. More importantly, Kuroda provides a new theological framework to understand Shintō in medieval Japan. That is, Shintō can be seen as an integrated part of the Buddhist doctrinal system instead of an independent religious system. However, though Kuroda treats Shintō not as an independent religious entity, as if Shintō was *passively* incorporated into a more robust and influential Buddhist cosmology, it can be argued that Shintō and its agents (e.g., individual shrines) *actively* transformed themselves to better fit the new religious and political system (e.g., form temple-shrine complexes). Without a doubt, the late classical period witnessed a decline in imperial power and the rise of the shogunate (*bakufu* 幕府). The significance here is that, as addressed above, in medieval times, Shintō functioned as court rites (less as folk religious beliefs or rites for common people), and with the decline of the imperial court and the Jingikan, court Shintō gradually lost its functional importance—but that's not to say that kami cults did. Furthermore, under Kuroda's framework, the orthodox eight schools, with their close association with political elites (e.g., court aristocracy and warrior authorities), held a dominant position in medieval Japanese religion. Individual Shintō shrines, kami cults, and even the court Shintō had no position to compete with Buddhism, nor did they have the political support to compete. Thus, I argue that cooperating with Buddhism was a practical way for individual shrines and kami cults to keep their establishments and religious traditions, and this action need not have been a passive one.

Another popular interpretation of Shintō in this period is the *honji suijkaku* theory based on Tendai doctrine in the *kenmitsu* Buddhism. *Honji suijaku* is an idea of buddhas as the "original ground" (*honji* 本地) and kami as "manifest traces" (*suijaku* 垂迹). This became one of

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[65] Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," 11–12. See also David Quinter, *From Outcasts to Emperors: Shingon Ritsu and the Mañjuśrī Cult in Medieval Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 25–27.

the most dominant forms of Buddhist-kami relations throughout the medieval period.[66]

According to this theory, in early medieval times, local deities called kami were largely

understood to be "the form in which the Buddha converts and saves human beings" based on

Buddhist teachings and guides.[67] Put differently, kami were seen as local manifestations of the

powers of non-local buddhas.

The theory was developed from Shintō and Buddhism's gradual coalescence between the

late eighth and the eleventh centuries. Not surprisingly, the coalescence did not put Shintō and

Buddhism on the same level, but the Shintō kami were absorbed into Buddhism through a variety

of doctrinal innovations and new religious forms. Examples of new religious forms were the

jingūji 神宮寺 (a combination shrine and temple) and Sōgyō Hachiman 僧形八幡 (the kami

Hachiman in the guise of a Buddhist monk). One eleventh-century characterization of the

relationship between Buddhism and Shintō, or *jindō*,[68] reads as follows: "In truth, the moon of

the presence of original enlightenment illuminates the Lotus Seat in the state of Buddhahood; but

the sun, which dims its brightness and mingles with dust, descend to the assembled shrines in the

form of *jindō*."[69] In short, according to *kenmitsu* Buddhism and *honji suijaku*, Shintō gradually

took a subordinate position and role within the broader scheme of Buddhism from the Heian

period onward.

Yoshida Kanetomo and Yuiitsu Shintō

However, it is crucial to keep in mind that Kuroda's *kenmitsu* system is only one interpretation of

medieval Japanese religion, and this chapter so far has indicated the possibility for kami cults to

have had their own agency in their transformation into something fitting to the overall political

and religious system. Yoshida Shintō 吉田神道 in the late fifteenth century, for example, was the

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[66] Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 109–111.
[67] Teeuwen and Rambelli, "Introduction: Combinatory religion and the *honji suijaku* paradigm in pre-modern Japan," 6; see also Kuroda, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," 12.
[68] See Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 242.
[69] "Iwashimizu fudan nenbutsu engi" 石清水不断念仏縁起, in *Honchō bunshū* 本朝文集 53, Enkyō 2 (1070), cited in Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shinto," 246.

first lineage that consistently used the term "Shintō" as a self-designation for their own religious system and form a new interpretation in the history of Shintō and medieval religions in general.[70] The creation of Yoshida Shintō thus clearly indicates that there was *active* agency among the Shintō groups in the medieval period. This creation was the result of yet another sociopolitical change.

Yoshida Kanetomo's privileged relation with Shintō was based on two factors: 1) his family's long tradition as imperial court ritualists, and 2) the development of their family tradition into a comprehensive religious system, known as Yuiitsu Shintō 唯一神道, the "One-and-Only Way of the Kami."[71] Since the Heian period, the Yoshida family was one of four houses entitled to a leading position in the Jingikan (the office of divine matters in the traditional court administration, as mentioned in the first section with more detail). However, the Ōnin War (1467–1477) destroyed both the imperial palace and the buildings of the Jingikan. In this situation, Yoshida Kanetomo founded Yoshida Shintō to not only "save" the Jingikan, but, more importantly, ensure the Yoshida house's hegemonic position. Yoshida Kanemoto proliferated the title of *jingi chōjō* 神祇長上 ("master of deities"), which was substituted by *jingikan ryō* 神祇官領 for himself and his successors. He also rebuilt the most sacred site of the Jingikan, the Hasshinden 八神殿, which housed the protective kami of the imperial palace in his own shrine precincts. This implicit usurpation of courtly kami ritualism was largely uncontested for a century, showing the firm position of the Yoshida family regarding kami and court rituals.[72]

More importantly, though the structure of Yoshida Shintō's secret transmission resembled many Buddhist concepts and rituals (e.g., *shintō kanjō* 神道灌頂), it in fact excluded Buddhist entities in its iconography and ideology.[73] Unlike some kami interpretations prior to Yoshida

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[70] Mark Teeuwen and Bernhard Scheid, "Tracing Shinto in the History of Kami Worship: Editors' Introduction," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 202.

[71] Bernhard Scheid, "Shinto as a Religion for the Warrior Class: The Case of Yoshikawa Koretaru," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 303–304.

[72] Scheid, "Shinto as a Religion for the Warrior Class," 303.

[73] See Fabio Rambelli, "The Ritual World of Buddhist 'Shinto': The *Reikiki* and Initiations on Kami-Related Matters (*jingi kanjō*) in Late Medieval and Early-Modern Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 270.

Shintō, Yoshida Kanetomo made clear that the significance of the doctrine he invented is that it distinguishes Buddhist and non-Buddhist classics. The most unique part of Yoshida Shintō was that if there happened to be doctrinal parallels between Buddhist and Yoshida teachings, it was Buddhism that derived them from the original teaching of the kami, as opposed to the Buddhism-oriented theories such as *honji suijaku*. This clearly shows that Yoshida Shintō made efforts to distinguish itself from medieval Buddhism. Hence, Kuroda's theory does not apply to Yoshida Shintō since it not only existed but also actively tried to differentiate itself from Buddhism. Critically, since "Shintō" was never adequately defined when it was created, it makes Yoshida's "One-and-Only Way of the Kami" doctrinally possible, as it could incorporate Buddhist teachings and make them its own.

The creation of Yoshida Shintō thus shows the importance of the political and social context regarding Shintō and its development in history. Yoshida Kanetomo sensed the weak position to which the court Shintō and Jingikan had been reduced and started to advance his version of Shintō for religious legitimacy over not only court Shintō (or any other form of Shintō) but also Buddhism. Yoshida Shintō shows that even within a dominant Buddhist society, Shintō did not lack agency to advance its public reach. Thus, it is not surprising to see that Shintō can transform itself to better fit contemporary secular Japanese society for a greater public reach.

In sum, this section touched on the complexity of "medieval Shintō." As I have shown, "medieval Shintō" as an umbrella term accommodates varieties in doctrines, rituals, and societal impact. This section introduced Kuroda and his well-known *kenmitsu* system, which portrays Shintō and kami in a subordinated position under Buddhist cosmology (in particular, *honji suijaku*). In contrast, Yoshida Kanetomo and his invention of Yoshida Shintō considered kami the first derivation and Buddhism as a secondary elaboration. However, it is undeniable that even for Yoshida Shintō, Buddhism's presence was not neglected. Although Buddhism was in the dominant position in this period, Shintō found ways to coexist and even developed its own cosmology that positioned Shintō as superior. Overall, this section called for more attention to the sociopolitical context when discussing Shintō's development; it also proposed that Shintō

institutions such as Yoshida Shintō had their own agency even in the medieval times, and this definitional ambiguity allowed Shintō to actively integrate the dominant contemporary teachings into its own.

Meiji Shintō and the Creation of "State Shintō"

This section introduces the radical development of Shintō after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. It proposes that the Meiji Restoration created new significant sociopolitical changes for Shintō to adapt and transform for the third time. The new interpretations and changes of Shintō, however, did not emerge from the "new and enlightened" Meiji government; many of them were rooted in the late Edo period, namely the schools of Kokugaku. It shows the importance of the sociopolitical context for Shintō's development, as Shintō again transformed itself to be useful for the new Meiji government. Its flexibility in definition was helpful for the Meiji government to pick and choose and formulate a secular ideology for the state ("State Shintō"). Intentionally or not, Kokugaku scholars played a role in constructing a new theological framework for the Meiji government to use.

Before going further, a brief introduction to Kokugaku is warranted. The term Kokugaku first refers to a group of poets, local historians, and hereditary shrine priests who were interested in rediscovering the spirit of early Japan, local shrines, and deities with the study of ancient Japanese texts.[74] The critical part during their rediscovery of Japanese history was to locate Japan's pre-Buddhist past. The most influential of the early Nativist scholars was Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), because he started to pay attention to the *Kojiki*, which by his time had largely fallen out of use. Crucially, Norinaga revealed that the history of Japanese rulership extends back to a distant age when the kami created the world, and his work catapulted the *Kojiki* to a new level of importance.

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[74] The conventional translation of the term is Nativism or National Learning, but Josephson argues that it should be translated as "National Science." However, for the sake of the argument, this chapter will use the translation of Nativism throughout. See Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 295–97.

One of Norinaga's students, Hattori Nakatsune 服部中庸 (1757–1828), completed his treatise on the creation chapters of the *Kojiki*, *Sandaikō* 三大考 (Reflections on the Three Great Realms), and asserted that the Japanese classic had anticipated Western astronomy.[75] This can be considered a milestone for Kokugaku to transform their teachings and leanings into a more "modern consensus": becoming secular and scientifically compatible. Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) further developed Hattori's position by claiming that Japan was naturally compatible with Western science because it was the kami who transmitted knowledge (e.g., medicine) to the West. Such understandings of Western civilization and science already indicate their nationalistic attitude toward their studies.

In addition, Nativist scholars were known for reinvestigating ancient Japanese history by examining classical texts, and through their study they attempted to draw a connection between the Japanese imperial family and the kami who created the land of Japan. Constructions of "Shintō" as an independent, pre-Buddhist, indigenous Japanese tradition were also developed by late Edo Kokugaku scholars. Hirata Atsutane's scholarship in Nativism reconciled the previous mythologies, such as the study of the *Kojiki* and other classic literature, and incorporated concerns for practical ethics in Shintō.[76] From a historical perspective, the emergence in Japan of such new religious identities is evident in the Meiji period, which was characterized by the massive development of science and technical knowledge and by the creation of new hybrids such as "State Shinto" and the myth of the emperor as the divine father of the nation, largely in response to Western influence.

Moreover, Atsutane wrote voluminously on the notion of Japan's uniqueness and superiority, which are the fundamental teachings of Kokugaku ideology. For example, he stated that "the Imperial Land is created by the gods named Izanagi and Izanami, where Amaterasu Ōmikami is born, and the Imperial lineage has ruled for ages. [The Imperial Land] is superior to

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[75] Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 111.
[76] Mark McNally, *Proving the Way: Conflict and Practice in the History of Japanese Nativism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 2–3.

any other lands [*kuni* 国], and it is above all other lands [*sōkoku* 宗国]…"[77] Atsutane also wrote, "The Imperial Land [*kōkoku* 皇国] is the motherland of all other lands."[78] In other words, he believed that the land of Japan was at the dominant position in the "Shinto" or *kami*-centred cosmology. Such characterizations and understandings of the origin of Japan later became parts of the Meiji government polity, namely the "national polity" (*Kokutai* 国体), which indicates "Japan as a single person [as the] divine descent of the people" and "[The Imperial Throne 皇室] as a Sacred Family."[79]

To summarize, the Nativists emphasized the importance and uniqueness of Japanese culture. Thus, modern researchers were inspired by Nativist scholars such as Atsutane to think of Kokugaku as a form of proto-nationalism.[80] Fortunately, the Meiji government was interested in building a nation-state, and the world in the nineteenth century in general was embracing nationalism for nation-building processes. The Nativists' ideology perhaps was one of the major reasons that the Meiji government found their studies fitting to the new regime.

Indeed, the Nativist scholars played a vital role in contributing to the establishment of "State Shintō," a public institution that performed national rites and was closely tied to the imperial family and the state. Shintō, nevertheless, under the promotion of Nativists, seemed to become inseparable from the nationalistic and even imperialistic Japan. D. T. Suzuki repeatedly stated that militaristic Japan would go down with Shintō (or "New Shintō," as Suzuki described).[81] Thus, it was clear that Nativists advocated the amalgamation between Shintō and nationalistic Japan. Although figures such as Norinaga and Atsutane did not live through the

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[77] Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎 et al., eds., *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系, vol. 50, *Hirata Atsutane, Ban Nobutomo, Ōkuni Takamasa* 平田篤胤, 伴信友, 大国隆正, eds. Tahara Tsuguo 田原嗣郎, Seki Akira 関晃, Saeki Arikiyo 佐伯有清, Naga Noboru 芳賀登 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 14.

[78] Ienaga et al., *Hirata Atsutane, Ban Nobutomo, Ōkuni Takamasa,* 21.

[79] Agustín Z. Jacinto, "The Return of the Past: Tradition and the Political Microcosm in the Later Nishida," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 132–148, 141.

[80] See also Mark McNally, "The *Sandaikō* Debate: The Issue of Orthodoxy in Late Tokugawa Nativism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 359–378.

[81] See Satō Kemmyō Taira, "D. T. Suzuki and the Question of War," trans. Thomas Kirchner, *The Eastern Buddhist* 39, no. 1 (2008): 61–120.

Meiji period and the birth of the Japanese nation, their students and their ideologies (e.g., *fukko Shintō* and *ōsei fukko* 王政復古, Restoration of Kingly/Imperial Rule) indeed worked closely with the state, if not being completely united. Atsutane particularly contributed to reintroducing a metaphysical, speculative exegesis of Japanese classical texts and developing Kokugaku into a politico-religious ideology. Inoue Nobutaka argues that Atsutane's religious form of Kokugaku played a prominent role in the doctrines of Shintō sects in the Meiji period, especially with the doctrine of *fukko Shintō* and the propagation of national evangelists.[82]

However, it is crucial not to forget that the sociopolitical changes during the Restoration made it possible for the new Meiji government to widely implement Kokugaku ideologies. In addition, while Kokugaku ideologies contributed to Japanese nationalism, it is also true that the government needed a nationalistic doctrine to continue its nation-state-building process. Again, in the nineteenth century, Japan was not in the minority regarding embracing nationalism for modernization. It is evident that many European nations at that time also embraced nationalism for modernization, unification, and nation-building. Nevertheless, this section underlines the importance of both the Japanese and global sociopolitical context, which was critical to Shintō development and contributed to the creation of "State Shintō."

In fact, the Meiji government intended to create a religious system that could promote Shintō as a national religion. There were many reasons for which Shintō was chosen as Japan's national religion. For example, Kokugaku scholars had established an intellectual framework for the Meiji government to build upon, and Shintō's definitional ambiguity was more convenient to work with than other religions (e.g., Buddhism). However, there is little room to neglect the dominant influence of Buddhism in medieval Japan. Hence, to create a Shintō-based national religion, it was crucial to deal with the overwhelming presence of Buddhism in society. Moreover, Japan was pressured by the West to create a nation that separated religion and state. Hence, the global political context essentially required the Meiji government to establish a

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[82] Inoue Nobutaka, "The Formation of Sect Shinto in Modernizing Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 405–427, 425–426.

"secular state," which was defined by Western understandings of religion and non-religion. In this context, Shintō adapted, or was adapted by various groups, to become a new entity, whether religious or not, to fit the new political and religious system.

The precedent for the Meiji "restoration" of imperial power was grounded in specific ancient texts and practices for political legitimacy. However, Buddhism had been influential for centuries. For instance, Buddhism had long served as the local census bureau, tax offices, and so on for the *bakufu*, and Buddhist priests had served as sole executioners of funerals and festivals.[83] Nonetheless, the newly established Meiji government was heavily influenced by Nativist scholars, instead of Buddhist personnel, regarding its policies on religion and rites. For instance, Kamei Koremi 亀井茲監 (1824–1885), vice-minister of the Office of Rites, and Fukuba Bisei 福羽美静 (1831–1907), under-secretary for the Office of Rites and instructor of the Meiji emperor in Shintō ceremonial, were the two figures most responsible for the drafting of the decree of the Separation of Shintō and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri rei*).[84] In fact, Kamei was a student of the Hirata School, and Fukuba belonged to the school of Ōkuni Takamasa; both schools were associated with Kokugaku.[85]

More importantly, the separation edicts advocated by Nativist scholars and bureaucrats were very much hostile to Buddhism. On January 3, 1868, the Meiji government proclaimed the Charter Oath, and Article 4 thereof reads as follows: "All absurd usages of the old regime shall be abolished and all measures conducted in conformity with the righteous way of heaven and earth."[86] Although this article may vague and innocuous, it was soon proved that it clearly targeted Buddhism. A mere three days after the promulgation of the Charter Oath, the first separation edict echoed Article 4 in its aim to sweep away and break off "ancient evil customs" by "removal of all Buddhist priests, acolytes, and retainers from Shinto shrines throughout the nation. Therefore, all administrative duties of shrine were to be carried out by Shinto priests

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[83] Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 45.
[84] Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 8.
[85] Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 8.
[86] Cited in Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), 5.

alone."[87] The second edict, issued less than two weeks after the first, forbade the use of Buddhist names for kami. It further prohibited the use of Buddhist statuary as an image of the kami as well as their presence within a shrine compound. During this early Meiji period, over forty thousand temples were closed nationally, thousands of priests were forcibly laicized, and countless temple artifacts were destroyed.[88]

However, the backlash from the anti-Buddhist movements quickly caused nationwide unrest and protests. The Meiji government knew it was necessary to adjust its policies on Buddhism and its religious policies in general. In 1872, the Office of Rites was transformed into the Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō 教部省), and the so-called Great Promulgation Campaign (*taikyō senpu* 大教宣布) began, which laid the basis for a system of "missionaries" (*senkyōshi* 宣教使) charged with preaching a set of state-sanctioned doctrines throughout the country. Critically, the so-called "Great Teaching" was propagated to all subjects of Japanese, and the most essential three teachings read as follows: "(1) respect for the gods, love of country; (2) making clear the principles of Heaven and the Way of Man; and (3) reverence for the emperor and obedience to the will of the court."[89] On May 14, 1871, the Council of State (*Dajōkan* 太政官, which was considered a return to the *ritsuyō* institutional framework) proclaimed that shrines were not private but public institutions, and the system under which positions at shrines were hereditary within traditional priestly lineages was abolished.

However, the Shintoists and Nativists appointed as missionaries under the Meiji government's scheme proved to be ill-fitted and ineffective. In 1872, a new system of "national evangelists" (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職) was introduced, and Shintō priests and Buddhist monks were appointed as national evangelists. However, this newly created institution, in fact, worked against the separation of kami and buddhas implemented only four years earlier, which threw the religious world into turmoil.[90]

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[87] Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 9.
[88] Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 7–9.
[89] Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 376.
[90] Inoue, "The Formation of Sect Shinto in Modernizing Japan," 411–12.

Facing such a chaotic social and political environment and threats to their tradition's very continued existence, Buddhists did not prematurely concede their religious and political influence. For instance, the Jōdo Shin sect 浄土真宗 was one of the first to act. Higashi Honganji 東本願寺 and Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 first hoped to bribe the government into ameliorating its policies. Then the two branches took the lead in the summer of 1868 to form the Alliance of United Buddhist Sects for Ethical Standards (Shoshū Dōtoku Kaimei 諸宗道徳会盟). The alliance was an unprecedented act for institutional Buddhism, since any intra-sectarian Buddhist organizations had been forbidden by the Edo *bakufu*. Moreover, the organization proclaimed to work for the sovereignty of Buddhism, and, interestingly, called for Christianity to be not simply denounced but expelled from Japan.[91] Seemingly, instead of arguing against the claim that Shintō was "indigenous" to Japan, Buddhist leaders considered Christianity "more foreign" than Buddhism. Buddhists concluded that one way of demonstrating their usefulness to Japan's new nationalistic leaders was to support an anti-Christian campaign, which came to be known as "refuting evil and exalting righteousness" (*haja kenshō* 破邪顕正).[92] In other words, Buddhist leaders realized that aligning themselves with the nationalistic sentiment of the times could help them weather the anti-Buddhism sentiment. In fact, such strategic moves later contributed to ensuring Buddhism's survival in Japanese society, along with Buddhists' significant efforts to combat Shintō Nativists' radical agenda. Nevertheless, the efforts made by the Jōdo Shin sect resulted in them breaking away from the Great Teaching Institute and eventually led to the final abolishment of the system of national evangelists in 1884.

Through the chaotic first twenty years of the Meiji period, Shintō was not as successfully transformed as the ideologues wanted. However, these efforts made by the Meiji government still ended the Buddhist-dominated Shintō-Buddhist syncretic system and pushed Buddhist leaders to align themselves with Kokugaku ideologies and the nationalistic state. More importantly, the notions of Shintō as "indigenous" to Japan and as a public institution were gradually accepted by

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[91] Victoria, *Zen at War*, 6.
[92] Victoria, *Zen at War*, 6.

the Buddhist leaders, who had the strongest religious influence in Japan. Thus, the sociopolitical context again changed, and Shintō adapted again to meet it. The promulgation of the Meiji Constitution and the formal establishment of "State Shintō" crystalized Shintō's adaptation, as the Constitution and Article 28 thereof legally separated the sects and national rites by borrowing the term "religion" from the West.

The Intellectual History of "State Shintō" and the Revival of New "State Shintō"

This section investigates the emergence of the term "State Shintō." The term only becomes popular for intellectual use after WWII and is retrospectively applied to the pre-1947 Japanese religious system. I trace these intellectual developments of the term after WWII and provides an understanding of "State Shintō." More importantly, I underline that the creation of "State Shintō" was a result of Meiji's sociopolitical environment and Shintō's ability to transform itself to fit a modernized and Westernized society. Critically, such an ability still exists in today's Shintō, represented by Shintō environmentalism.

Among Western scholars, the term "State Shintō" was first thoughtfully and carefully investigated by Daniel C. Holtom (1884–1962), one of the foremast pre-war chroniclers of modern Shintō in either Japanese or English. Holtom used "State Shintō" to describe the government's policies on shrines and Shinto ceremonies as they developed from the 1870s. He suggested that the Meiji policies, such as the separation of the Bureau of Shrines from the Bureau of Religions within the Home Ministry and the nationwide distribution of amulets from the Ise Grand Shrine dedicated to Amaterasu Ōmikami,[93] proved that Shintō was actually a religion, but an outmoded one that had been manipulated for political use.[94] In addition, Holtom famously claimed that Shintō, or the Shintō used by the pre-surrender Japanese government, was

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[93] Kate Wildman Nakai, "State Shinto," in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese* History, ed. Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (London: Routledge, 2017), 147.
[94] Thomas, *Faking Liberties*, 161.

the driver of Japanese expansionism and militarism, the "engine of war."[95] Under the influence of Holtom, the Allied Powers dismantled State Shintō and its affiliations, despite the fact that the pre-war Japanese government clearly distinguished non-religious State Shintō (*Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 or *Jinja Shintō* 神社神道) from the religion of Sect Shintō (*Shūha Shintō* 宗派神道 or *Kyōha Shintō* 教派神道).[96]

Regarding postwar scholarship on the debate over State Shintō, the most crucial scholar is Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良 (1928–1991) and his influential monograph, *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 (1970). According to Murakami, one of the foundational characterizations of the later known "State Shintō" is the separation of the rites and sectarian (or religious part of) Shintō,[97] and he claims that State Shintō is based on a fusion of "Shrine Shintō," primitive folk religion, with "imperial house Shintō" (or court Shintō), centered on the emperor and court rites.[98] Murakami points out a concrete understanding of the abstract term "State Shintō" by stating that State Shintō is a national rite that "surpasses religion" (*chō shūkyō* 超宗教).[99] In Murakami's view, people at all levels of society can be viewed as active participants in State Shintō in a cycle of national holidays (or "ritual days") linked to major imperial celebrations, such as worshiping the emperor. More importantly, Murakami regards State Shintō as a state religion responsible for inculcating an attitude of unquestioning obedience to the state, which led the country into militarism, imperialism, and disastrous wars, resulting in Japan's 1945 defeat.[100] In short, in Murakami's view, Shintō was, in effect, taken over by the state and transformed into a tool of indoctrination in a manner and to an extent unparalleled in other Japanese religions: a public religion or a national religion.

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[95] Hardacre, *Shintō and the State,* 6; Thomas, *Faking Liberties*, 162; Nakai, "State Shinto," 148; Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 356.

[96] Nakai, "State Shinto," 150; Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 117–119.

[97] "Saishi to shūkyō no bunri ni yotte kokka shintō no kihonteki seikaku ga sadamatta" 祭祀と宗教の分離によって国家神道の基本的性格がさだまった; see Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 78.

[98] Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 14–16.

[99] Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 78–80.

[100] Also see Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 355.

Murakami's understanding and characterization of "State Shintō" profoundly influenced later scholarship. Nonetheless, more recent work, such as of that Ashizu Uzuhiko 葦津珍彦, Sakamoto Koremaru 阪本是丸, Nitta Hitoshi 新田均, and Shimazono Susumu 島薗進, suggests that Shrine Shintō, as the main body of State Shintō, was not always allied with the militarist, expansionist, and totalitarian ideologues who advocated for *Kokutai* discourse.[101] For example, Sakamoto Koremaru suggests that the history of State Shintō was more limited regarding its existence.[102] He claimed that State Shintō only lasted for forty-five years, starting from 1900, and for the majority of its operation, the institution was ineffective.[103]

Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this thesis to determine how effective State Shintō was before 1945; instead, it aims to highlight the sociopolitical context that led to the creation of "State Shintō." That is, "State Shintō" as a national rite was a product of Meiji's political and religious policies. Its characterization of separating the rites and sectarianism aimed to create a modern Japanese state that separates religion and state. Yet, the national Shintō institution was created, and it was because Shintō was able to capitalize on the ancient court rites as its tradition and culture. Worshiping emperors as kami should be considered a performance of religious ritual, but Shintō's definitional ambiguity allowed it to twist the worship as a public rite. I argue that from 1868 to 1889,[104] Shintō as an ideological concept constantly adapted to radical political and religious transformation, and I characterize this process as Shintō's third adaptation. The promulgation of the Meiji Constitution finalized the process, and the result was the creation of

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[101] Ashizu Uzuhiko 葦津珍彦, *Kokka Shintō to wa nandatta no ka?* 国家神道とはなんだったのか (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1987, new edition, 2016); Sakamoto Koremaru 阪本是丸, "Kokka Shintō taisei no seiritsu to tenkai 国家神道体制の成立と展開," in *Senryō to nihon shūkyō* 占領と日本宗教, ed. Ikado Fujio 井門富二夫 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1993), 165–202; Nitta Hitoshi 新田均, *Kindai seikyō kankei no kisoteki kenkyū* 近代政教関係の基礎的研究 (Tokyo: Taimeidō, 1997); Nitta Hitoshi 新田均, *"Arahitogami" "Kokka Shintō" to iu gensō: Kindai nihon o yugameta zokusetsu o tadasu* 「現人神」「国家神道」という幻想—近代日本を歪めた俗説を糾す (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2003); Shimazono Susumu, "State Shinto in Lives of the People: The Establishment of Emperor Worship, Modern Nationalism, and Shrine Shinto in Late Meiji," trans. Regan E. Murphy, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 93–124.

[102] Sakamoto, "Kokka Shintō taisei no seiritsu to tenkai," 195.

[103] Shimazono, "State Shinto in Lives of the People," 96–97; Sakamoto, "Kokka Shintō taisei no seiritsu to tenkai," 195.

[104] Murakami characterizes this period as the "formative period" (*keisei-ki* 形成期); see Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 78–80.

"State Shintō," a public entity that fitted the Western definition of the separation of state and religion.

Crucially, as Murakami indicates, there were signs of State Shintō's revival, including the reinstitution in 1967 of a national holiday to commemorate the putative founder of the Japanese empire, legendary Emperor Jinmu 神武天皇.[105] However, as we will see in the next chapter, unlike Murakami's observation on State Shintō's revival, recent scholars, such as Rots, Watanabe, and Shimazono, argue that contemporary Shintō leaders and Japanese political conservatives adopt a seemingly non-religious stance to reframe Shintō as "traditional Japanese culture" by taking it into the public sphere as a pro-environmentalism and pro-nature set of practices, rather than an intrinsically religious tradition.[106]

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the history of Shintō from the prehistorical and premodern to modern Japan. It points out the problems of the term "Shintō" since it contains mixed and sometimes even conflicting meanings in different contexts. In addition, this chapter traces back to the very creation of Shintō, whether as a religion or philosophy, and asserts that there is little evidence to consider Shintō as Japan's "indigenous religion." It further indicates that Shintō as a court ritual was created as a result of contemporary political structural changes, namely the import of the Chinese civil and legal system. From the very beginning, Shintō's practical function was more important than its doctrinal purpose, and thus it was never adequately defined. Shintō's definitional ambiguity allowed for various interpretations in later periods, and it is convenient for many to pick and choose for their needs and agendas.

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[105] Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 219–21; Nakai, "State Shinto," 152.

[106] Aike P. Rots, "Public Shrine Forests? Shinto, Immanence, and Discursive Secularization," *Japan Review*, no. 30, (2017): 179–205; Chika Watanabe, *Becoming One: Religion, Development, and Environmentalism in a Japanese NGO in Myanmar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 69–70; Shimazono Susumu, "Religion and Public Space in Contemporary Japan: Re-activation of Civilization of the Axial Age and the Manifestation of State Shinto and Buddhism," in *Dynamics of Religion* 67, eds. Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 31–35.

Shintō in the medieval period became more complex because of the involvement of Buddhism. The dominance of Buddhism in this period created religious theories such as *honji suijaku* to explain the co-existence of Buddhism and Shintō. One of the most well-known theories is Kuroda's *kenmitsu taisei*, which denied the existence of an independent Shintō institution. However, this chapter calls attention to the significance of sociopolitical context, which was the key to Shintō's transformation. Moreover, it argues in part against Kuroda's theory by showing that Yoshida Shintō had active agency even in a Buddhist-dominated society.

The Meiji Restoration brought significant social and political turmoil to Japanese society, and "religion" as a category was redefined. When the Meiji government's early efforts turned out to be unsuccessful, it promulgated the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education to legally separate Shrine Shintō and Sect Shintō. The former soon became the essence of national rites, later known as "State Shintō," closely tied to the imperial family. This chapter highlights that the whole sociopolitical transition in the early Meiji period contributed to the creation of "State Shintō." Because of Shintō's definitional ambiguity, Shintō and Kokugaku ideologues were able to combine a part of the ancient court ritual tradition and imagined prehistoric kami cults into a nationalistic and culturalist "new Shintō."

The next chapter turns its attention to postwar law, politics, and Shintō shrines such as Yasukuni and Ise, to scrutinize how and why Shintō transformed after the dismantlement of "State Shintō."

Chapter 2:

Politics, Law, and Environmentalism:

A New Approach to Advance Shintō in Contemporary Japanese Society

The last chapter asserted, in keeping with Hardacre, that Shintō is never "one thing" but has been a combination of different concepts, practices, and beliefs throughout its development. It indicated that the notion of Shintō being "Japan's indigenous belief" is problematic or even bluntly wrong. In addition, the last chapter highlighted the importance of the sociopolitical context in different periods for Shintō's development. This chapter further proposes that the current global environmental crisis provides crucial context for contemporary Shintō's next adaptation. Indeed, Shintō organizations and Shintō-associated politicians utilize the global environmental crisis to promote their version of Shintō as Japan's tradition and culture in a nationalistic and chauvinistic manner. As discussed in the last chapter, they are able to depict Shintō in an intellectually problematic way because of Shintō's definitional ambiguity.

Not only does the use of the term "State Shintō" have the problem of being retrospective, but it also strongly implies close connections to the imperial family and imperialistic Japan. This thesis does not, however, argue that there is no tie or any other less obvious relation between present-day Shintō and the postwar imperial family. However, further using the term "State Shintō" might complicate the discussion because of its implication for the prewar institution. Hence, this chapter consistently uses terms such as "public Shintō" or "secular Shintō" to differentiate the pre-1945 Shintō institution and post-war Shintō.

Rots has clearly shown his awareness that contemporary Shintō, in general, is caught in a paradox. He argues that, on the one hand, Shintō organizations are concerned with the environment and internationalization; on the other hand, they are increasingly nationalistic and explicitly political.[107] Shimazono has explicitly called out the revival of "State Shintō" in contemporary Japanese society through activities, by various conservative groups such as

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[107] Rots, "Public Shrine Forests?" 202.

visiting Yasukuni Shrine and campaigns to redefine Shintō as "culture" and "tradition." Mark Mullins has pointed out that conservatives' recent efforts to secularize and renationalize Yasukuni Shrine are serious actions aimed toward reviving a public Shintō in the twenty-first century.

This chapter builds on Rots, Shimazono, and Mullins' arguments and further claims that Shintō environmentalism is a disguise used by the lobby groups to advance Shintō as non-religious. It explores the postwar constitution and argues that the current interpretation of Articles 20 and 89 does not help the conservative groups' blunt claim for Shintō as Japan's "tradition" or "culture," nor does it revive "State Shintō." In short, Article 20 legally guarantees religious freedom for all groups and individuals by prohibiting the Japanese government from privileging any religion or religious group, and Article 89 prohibits public funds from financing any religious organization or their associates. Detailed discussion will be provided in the following sections.

The constitutional dilemma forces the conservative groups to find a new approach, which I call the Shintō environmentalism approach. This new approach avoids controversies and potential violations of the Constitution of Japan regarding Articles 20 and 89, and it uses environmentalism to reach out to a more diverse audience and gain international recognition for public Shintō. This is not to say that recent scholarship has not investigated this topic, but this thesis calls for more attention to how the constitutional interpretation of Articles 20 and 89 contributes to the rise of Shintō environmentalism. It especially emphasizes the sharp contrast between the Yasukuni and Ise Grand Shrines in promoting a public Shintō, as well as how the controversies around Yasukuni contribute to the success of Ise.

Environmentalism and ecology have become global concerns in recent years. From the Kyoto Protocol (1997) to the Paris Agreement (2016), the international community is paying more attention to global environmental issues than before. Various eco-friendly policies have been implemented by governments worldwide, especially the Western developed countries, and Japan is no exception. However, in addition to public policies, the Japanese government has

utilized the global environmental crisis to promote its ideal conservative version of Shintō. Unlike the liberal ideologically driven policies in the West, Shintō and environmentalism seem to be driven by conservatives. That is not to say that all environmental movements are related to conservativism; instead, this thesis calls for more attention to the close connection between the Shintō environmental movements and conservatives in Japan.

The chapter also demonstrates that while environmentalism aims to protect humanity's future, it nevertheless is political and power oriented. In other words, environment-related policies are still made by politicians, who may have other agendas beyond any environmental policy. For example, implementing a carbon tax can be seen as an action to protect the environment, but it could also be seen as a tactic to reduce political support from oil and gas companies to the conservative government. In addition, any country that can host an official international summit about the environment can show its political influence in this arena. Hence, environmental policies are hardly only about ecology, but they are politically oriented, and Japan exemplifies this point.

In Japan, the popular consciousness of "religion" is often understood in a highly restricted way to refer only to activities by individuals with a clear sense of membership and belonging to an organized religion (e.g., a New Religion or Christian church). It is no secret that the category of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教) is not very popular in Japan today, as scholars, mass media, and religious leaders have noted.[108] Indeed, many Japanese claim themselves as "non-religious" (*mushūkyō* 無宗教), which means they are do not associate themselves with any religious organization because they do not identify as belonging exclusively to one particular

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[108] For example, Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader, "Editors' Introduction: Impact and Ramifications: The Aftermath of the Aum Affair in the Japanese Religious Context," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 39, no. 1 (2012): 1–28; Hardacre, *Shintō: A History*, 515–19; Kobayashi Toshiyuki 小林利行, "Nihonjin no shūkyōteki ishiki ya kōdō wa dō kawatta ka~ ISSP kokusai hikaku chōsa 'shūkyō' nihon no kekka kara" 日本人の宗教的意識や行動は どう変わったか～ISSP 国際比較調査「宗教」・日本の結果から～, *NHK*, April 2019, https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yoron/pdf/20190401_7.pdf; Manabe Atsushi 真鍋厚, "'Nihonjin wa mushūkyō' to shinjiru hito ga kizuitenai shinjitsu: Shizen shūkyō, shintō no kokkyōka, shingaku—tokuyū no mittsu no jijō"「日本人は無宗教」と信じる人が気づいてない真実 自然宗教、神道の国教化、心学ー特有の 3 つの事情, *Tōyō Keizai* 東洋経済, October 10, 2022, https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/627356.

religious group. However, there is a distinction between *mushūkyō* (non-religious) in Japanese and the "secular" in English.

Talal Asad demonstrates that categorizing as "religious" or "secular" is a function of discourse and the product of particular religions.[109] Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一 also argues that Japan was following the principles of Western-style enlightenment on "church and state;" 'religion' (*shūkyō*) was entrusted to the sphere of the individual's interior freedom, while the 'secular' sphere of morality (*dōtoku* 道徳) was determined to be a national and public issue. In addition, he asserts that the very notion of an individual with an interiority was, for the first time, made possible as a form of self-understanding only through the transplantation of Christianity and the related concept of religion.[110] Rots (2014) argues that being "secular" or "religious" is not a natural given but the outcome of a historical process of classification and negotiation. Moreover, whether Shintō is classified as "religious" or "secular" is subject to debate. This thesis agrees with Rots' assertion that Shintō; as an East Asian "religion" (*shūkyō*), does not necessarily conform with the meaning of separation of church and state, as practiced in the West. However, because of this ambiguous definition of "religion," Japanese conservative groups are able to capitalize by advancing Shintō as non-religious.

Hence, when engaging with religion and "secular" in Japan, it is essential to be aware that the categories of "religion" and "non-religion" are not naturally developed in the land of Japan, but a result of a combination of Western import and Japanese localization.[111] The term "secular" does not accurately reflect how the Japanese think of non-religious. In fact, many Japanese people often pay visits to shrines and temples as well as carry various "amulets" (*omamori* お守り) in their backpacks and wallets for good fortune or better luck in various aspects (e.g., transit, health, and school exams).

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[109] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 2003.
[110] Jun'ichi Isomae, "The Formative Process of State Shinto in Relation to the Westernization of Japan," in *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations*, ed. Timothy Fitzgerald (London: Routledge, 2014), 93.
[111] See Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that Japanese people are not very interested in religion. Especially, the incident of the Tokyo subway sarin attack of 1995, carried out by members of Aum Shinrikyō (*Oumu Shinrikyō* オウム真理教), caused a widespread sentiment distrusting anything associated with "religion." Such anti-religious attitudes continue to be held widely today.[112] The assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō in 2022 did not help the reputation of religion in Japan: the suspect's family (and proposedly the motivation of the suspect) is associated with a new religious movement derived from Christianity named the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Sekai Heiwa Tōitsu Katei Rengō 世界平和統一家庭連合), more commonly known as the Unification Church (Tōitsu Kyōkai 統一教会).

Although Shrine Shintō and Shintō organizations are aware of the general negative consensus toward religion in Japan, Shrine Shintō itself is under the category of religion. That is, in February 1946, individual shrines were registered under the Religious Corporations Act (*Shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法) as religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人),[113] and Jinja Honchō was founded as a new umbrella organization for Japan's eighty thousand or so shrines.[114] Significantly, shrines and Jinja Honchō were legally defined as private religious institutions instead of public ones supported by the government. Hence, for Shintō and Shintō organizations, the obvious question becomes how to attract people (mainly Japanese people but also audiences from outside Japan) to visit and, ideally, donate to the shrines. This is because Shintō shrines, like any other religious juridical persons (e.g., Buddhist sects and Christian churches), have to compete with each other in the religious market and are responsible for their own revenue.

Against this social and legal background, it is no surprise that Jinja Honchō tries to disguise its religious elements of Shintō as public and secular, to avoid scaring away potential "believers." In addition, their effort to rebrand some of the rites and celebrations as public and

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[112] Baffelli and Reader, "Editors' Introduction: Impact and Ramifications."
[113] More precisely, Individual Religious Juridical Person (*tani shūkyō hōjin* 単位宗教法人).
[114] Jinja Honchō is registered as a Comprehensive Religious Juridical Person (*hōkatsu shūkyō hōjin* 包括宗教法人).

even national can also be seen as a means to secure public funding and government support. Then, how do Jinja Honchō and other advocates plan to re-categorize and redefine Shintō? And which current trends in the field of contemporary Shrine Shintō can help these groups achieve their agenda?

Rots highlights five general trends in contemporary Shrine Shintō, four of which can be seen as strategies for conservative Shintō groups to promote their goals. That is to re-create a secular or public Shintō in contemporary Japan. The five trends are as follows:

> [F]irst, the ongoing attempts to re-establish Shinto as a national ritual-symbolic system and re-sacralise the public sphere; second, the discursive and institutional 'dereligionisation' of shrines and ritual practices, and their re-categorisation as 'traditional culture' and '(world or national) heritage'; third, the increasing popularity of shrines as sacred places believed to possess spiritual power ([known as] 'powerspots'), and corresponding processes of commodification; fourth, widespread institutional decline, and the economic marginalisation of many (mainly rural) smaller shrines; and fifth, the popularisation of notions of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship containing important ecological knowledge, as well as associated conservationist practices.[115]

Rots' list covers the overall postwar Shintō development, and he clearly demonstrates the importance of each trend. However, the list can be examined further regarding the difference between each trend.[116]

This chapter argues that the first, second, and fifth trends can be merged or incorporated into one singular trend: contemporary Shintō movements (mainly advocated by conservative groups, organizations, and politicians, as will be discussed below) intended to rebrand Shintō as a non-religious, public, and, more importantly, "traditional culture." In other words, I do not think these three listed trends are independent, but only one with different and seemingly unique characteristics. These three trends share similar goals, which can be observed as promoting Shintō and its influence in the public, secular (state) sphere. Even the third trend proposed by Rots can be seen as a not independent trend, but an elaboration from a singular overall contemporary Shintō development, that is, to redefine Shintō as secular and public.

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[115] Rots, "Shinto's Modern Transformations," 133.
[116] Rots recognizes that these trends could be categorized differently and that there is overlap among the trends. See Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 1.

The third trend in Rots' list regarding the commodification of Shintō is significant in propagating a seemingly more non-religious oriented, culturally and tradition-interpreted Shintō, in contemporary Japanese society. It is also one of the major reasons for attracting more visitors to Ise Grand Shrine. Moreover, anime, manga, and other forms of popular culture can, and likely are, currently reforming the global audience's understanding of Shintō and possibly the meanings of "religion" and "nonreligion." The discourse on popular culture and Shintō environmentalism will be reserved for Chapter 3 of this thesis, along with an investigation of Miyazaki Hayao's films.

The first section of this chapter introduces the legal status of the postwar Japanese religion, especially Shintō under the new constitution, immersed with the Western understanding of religion and state, drafted and implemented by the Allied Forces and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. It first scrutinizes Articles 20 and 89 of the postwar constitution and then looks into a few legal cases regarding Shintō and freedom of religion. This section demonstrates that the current legal interpretation of the constitution does not favor portraying Shintō as traditional and non-religious after 1997. Under this condition, the lobby groups, who want to push Shintō as non-religious, need to find other approaches to advance Shintō to the public. Revising the constitution is certainly one option, but it is very challenging because of the proposed revision of Article 9, which prohibits Japan from maintaining professional military forces and renounces war as Japan's sovereign right of the nation. The alternative is Shintō environmentalism, which attracts far less criticism. This thesis argues it is the only feasible approach in terms of advancing Shintō as a public and non-religious entity (or, in other names, such as tradition and culture) under the current constitutional interpretation of Articles 20 and 89.

The second section of this chapter turns its attention to Yasukuni Shrine and Ise Grand Shrine as examples to determine how politics plays a vital role in contemporary Shintō. While the lobby groups intend to advance both Yasukuni and Ise as non-religious in Japanese society, Yasukuni continues to be a source of endless controversy. This section demonstrates that it is legally and politically much safer for present-day Japanese nationalists and culturalists to use

environmentalist notions to legitimize and gain support. It is also more convenient to categorize

Shintō as Japan's "tradition" and "culture" in the guise of environmentalism, thus redefining

Shintō and specific Shintō rites and ceremonies as public—that is, non-religious. It also explores

the failed efforts to promote Yasukuni in contrast with Ise's success. More importantly, it shows

that Shintō can never be discussed without the Japanese political context in contemporary Japan.

Struggles between Law and Religion

> We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners. The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.
>
> —Potsdam Declaration, 1945

This section introduces a handful of Supreme Court cases that interpret freedom of religion in

Japan. Indeed, the implementation of the Constitution of Japan in 1946 guaranteed the separation

of religion and state, which legally (ideally) prevented any potential state-sponsored institution

like "State Shintō" from emerging, particularly Articles 20 and 89 of the constitution. They are

written as follows:

> Article 20: Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

> Article 89: No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority.[117]

The two articles clearly distinguish between the state (public) and religion (private). It seems that

Japan has genuinely installed the Western model of the "separation of church and state."

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[117] The Constitution of Japan can be viewed online at
https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

However, there are ways for Japanese political and cultural conservatives to bypass the two articles. First, laws can be interpreted differently in various situations; the two articles are no exception. In other words, even without altering any wording of the two articles, political and cultural conservatives can maneuver Shintō practices as non-religious or public; thus, these practices do not fall within two articles' purview. Second, there are efforts to alter the wording of the two articles, namely the "Draft for Revision of the Constitution of Japan" (*Nihonkoku kenpō kaisei sōan* 日本国憲法改正草案) published by the LDP in April 2012, so that they can project particular Shintō rites and celebration as more religiously neutral.

This section examines the challenges postwar Shintō faces under the new understanding of the separation of religion and state through Supreme Court rulings on the topic of freedom of religion. The results of these rulings contribute to the recent development of Shintō environmentalism, since environmental issues are seemingly less political and religiously oriented, but more public and nature oriented. It also demonstrates that claiming Shintō rites and ceremonies as non-religious is not persuasive enough, especially to other religious groups (e.g., Christian and Buddhist). This section also briefly introduces postwar Shintō, which will benefit the chapter's overall argument. That is, environmentalism in Japan can be seen as a disguise for the Shintō-related conservatives to attract less political controversy while gaining more support from the government as well as the public in both legal and financial terms.

However, it is crucial first to review the time of the Occupation period (1945–1952) and consider how Shintō survived after the dismantlement of "State Shintō." Through the Shintō Directive (*Shintō shirei* 神道指令), issued by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) on December 15, 1945, "State Shintō" was disestablished and replaced by "Shrine Shintō (*jinja shintō* 神社神道)." [118] Shrine Shintō, on the other hand, according to the Shintō Directive, would be "recognized as a religion if its adherents so desire and will be granted the

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[118] "State Shintō" was defined in the The Shinto Directive 1945 as "that branch of Shinto (*Kokka Shintō* or *Jinja Shintō*) which by official acts of the Japanese Government has been differentiated from the religion of Sect Shinto (*Shūha Shintō* or *Kyōha Shintō*) and has been classified as a nonreligious cult." See "The Shinto Directive 1945," *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 1, no. 2 (1960): 88.

same protection as any other religion in so far as it may, in fact, be the philosophy or religion of Japanese individuals."[119] The Directive's overall aim was to establish the free practice of religion. It was assumed that this required a "clear separation of religion and state,"[120] even though one could argue that forcibly disestablishing a seemingly "secular" or "public" institution such as "State Shintō" still violates the principle of religious freedom since "State Shintō" did have religious aspects.[121]

It was difficult for the Allied Forces to issue a directive for the abolishment of any particular shrine without violating the principle of religious freedom, which the Initial Post-Surrender Policy[122] had ordered them to declare and establish for the Japanese people, similar to the intention from the Potsdam Declaration. In addition, the Directive instructed to end government financial support for administering shrines. The Japanese government was required to remove Shintō elements from all public institutions, including the removal of domestic Shintō altars (*kamidana* 神棚) from schools and public offices, the elimination of Shintō elements from textbooks and curriculum, and the termination of forced shrine visits (*sanpai* 参拝) on the part of students, teachers, and government officials.[123]

In short, the Allied forces and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers intended to disestablish the repressive public institution of State Shintō and establish a new order in Japan where the separation of state and religion is clear. These intentions are clearly shown in the Constitution of Japan, especially in Articles 20 and 89. However, it is important to remember that the "separation of church and state" was mostly, if not all, borrowed from Western understandings of religion and nonreligion.

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[119] "The Shinto Directive 1945," 85–89.

[120] Mark Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, *Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2021), 45.

[121] See Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan*, 329; Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 43–44.

[122] United States Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan, https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/shiryo/01/022/022tx.html, accessed March 16, 2023.

[123] The Shinto Directive 1945; Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 45.

After the dismantlement of "State Shintō," Jinja Honchō (the Association of Shinto Shrines; another common translation is the National Association of Shrines, NAS) was founded as a new umbrella organization for about eighty thousand shrines across Japan. More importantly, Breen and Teeuwen write that Jinja Honchō did not make a radical break from pre-1945 Shintō. It goes to great effort to distribute Ise deity amulets (*jingū taima* 神宮大麻) to households throughout Japan, and it still performs the imperial rituals instituted in the Meiji period. Moreover, they argue that Jinja Honchō inherited the Meiji view of Shintō as a non-religion and a "public" ritual system.[124] Thus, even after the dismantlement of institutional "State Shintō," the newly created non-governmental Jinja Honchō did not fully break away from the Meiji era's understanding of Shintō and its rites. The ambiguous attitude towards Shintō regarding whether it is religious significantly contributes to the postwar Shintō conservatives' understanding of public Shintō rites and, ultimately, a revival of "State Shintō."

It is also important to keep in mind that regardless of whether the postwar Japanese government found the constitution and its definition of the separation of church and state or of religious freedom fitting, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers forcibly installed the postwar constitutional system in Japanese society, which lasts to this day. This thesis argues that the Japanese constitutional definition of freedom of religion is one of the core conflicts in the present-day Shintō debate. On the one hand, the Japanese conservative lobby groups, namely the LDP, Jinja Honchō, the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership, and Japan Conference, are actively working to revive a new form of "State Shintō," which I call public Shintō. On the other hand, religious groups who embrace the constitution's definition of freedom of religion, especially Buddhist and Christian communities, constantly challenge conservative groups and politicians' attempts to privilege Shintō, Shintō rituals, and local Shintō shrine communities (*ujiko* 氏子). This conflict has been demonstrated in several court cases.

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[124] Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 13.

The first Supreme Court case regarding postwar freedom of religion with a focus on Shintō is the 1977 ruling in Tsu City 津市 in Mie 三重 Prefecture. It concerns a milestone regarding the separation of religion and state which heavily involved Articles 20 and 89. The case focuses on a groundbreaking ceremony (*kikōshiki* 起工式) in January 1965 at the site of a new public gymnasium in the city of Tsu. The city council used public funds to pay the fee for the priests from the local Ōichi Shrine 大市神社 (¥4,000), who officiated the ceremony. In addition, the offerings (*kumotsuryō* 供物料) were paid from public funds (¥3,363). Tsu City's actions were unacceptable in the eyes of Sekiguchi Sei'ichi 関口精一, a local city counselor. Sekiguchi launched a lawsuit against the city council and argued that using public funds for the groundbreaking ceremony violated Articles 20 and 89.[125]

Though a detailed legal analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to present some of the ruling sentences regarding freedom of religion in Japan as well as the following cases. Hence, I refer to the work of scholars such as Ernils Larsson who have closely examined postwar Japanese laws and religion. According to the document Shōwa 46 (*gyō-tsu* 行ツ) 69,[126] in the first ruling, presented in Tsu District Court, the court ruled against the plaintiff Sekiguchi. The court stated that the groundbreaking ceremony was, in fact, a "secular event" (*sezokuteki gyōji* 世俗的行事) devoid of religious purpose and was therefore allowed under Article 20, although it could be seen as a "religious event" (*shūkyōteki gyōji* 宗教的行事). In addition, the court also claimed that the compensation paid to the shrine priests was too low to have any real meaning, and thus the behaviour of the city was not in violation of Article 89.[127] However, the second instance court overruled the previous conclusion. The court argued that the groundbreaking ceremony did surpass the limits of a "simple social ritual (*shakaiteki girei* 社会的儀礼) or secular event" and that it should be viewed as a "religious ceremony characteristic of Shrine Shinto." Moreover, the court concluded that since the "non-religious nature (*hishūkyōsei*

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[125] Shōwa 46 (*gyō-tsu*) 69, 2, cited in Ernils Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," *Japan Review: Journal of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies* 30 (2017): 227–252, 231.
[126] It refers to the way the Japanese legal documents are categorized and organized.
[127] Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232.

非宗教性)" of the Japanese state was not presented as the constitution mandates in this case, it was a clear violation of both Articles 20 and 89.[128]

However, the Supreme Court reversed the second ruling, arguing that a "total separation of religion from the state is in practice close to impossible" and that the state may still contain some degree of connection with religion. Indeed, Ken Arai 洗建, a professor emeritus of Komazawa University 駒澤大学 who specializes in Japanese religion and law, argues that law is not as simple as an objective system of knowledge but is subject to people and social norms in different eras.[129] That said, when discussing the groundbreaking ceremony in Tsu City, Arai claims that though the ceremony was arguably grounded in Japanese tradition and custom, the Supreme Court should not compromise the principle of "separation of state and religion" and open a door for collusion (*yuchaku* 癒着) between the state and a particular religion (in this case, Shrine Shintō).[130]

The ruling from the Supreme Court indicates the dilemma that religious laws still reflect a state's understanding of religion, and this connection between religion and state is difficult to sever. More importantly, the ruling in the Tsu groundbreaking case established a "purpose and effect" standard (*mokuteki kōka kijun* 目的効果基準), which has been used in all subsequent cases concerning Articles 20 and 89. This standard aims to determine whether the government's purpose is to subsidize, promote, and advance religion and whether it had that effect behind a challenged case.[131] In addition, the court argued that the phrasing "religious activity (*shūkyō katsudō* 宗教活動)" should not be understood as including "all activities by the state and its organs which bring them into contact with religion." Rather, if those activities do not include the promotion and subsidization of specific religions or any attempts at "oppression or interference," they should not be seen as "religious activity." More importantly, when determining whether an

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[128] Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232.
[129] Ken Arai 洗建, "*Shūkyōhō to nihon bunka* 宗教法と日本文化," in *Senryō to nihon shūkyō* 占領と日本宗教, ed. Ikado Fujio 井門富二夫 (Tōkyō: Miraisha, 1993), 143–44.
[130] Arai, "*Shūkyōhō to nihon bunka*," 154–55.
[131] Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232; Arai, "*Shūkyōhō to nihon bunka*," 154.

act constitutes a proscribed "religious activity," it is not enough for it to be officiated by a religious professional, but the religious evaluation of common people regarding the activity should also be taken into consideration.[132]

In other words, the definition of "religious activity" needs to consider whether and to what degree religious consciousness exists and its influence on common people. The Supreme Court further argued that people in Japan believe in Shintō as members of a local community instead of as individuals, and it implied that Shrine Shintō was different from other forms of religiosity because it was more focused on ritual (*saishi girei* 祭祀儀礼) than on proselytization and missionary work.[133] The Supreme Court concluded that "the groundbreaking ceremony is a ceremony with a religious source in a festival to pacify the kami of the land," but common people do not perceive the ceremony as having a "religious meaning" (*shūkyōteki igi* 宗教的意義). Instead, the common people consider the groundbreaking ceremony to be "a completely secular ritual conducted in accordance with general social customs."[134]

This case is important for three reasons. First, the case is considered a milestone in the legal sense for both freedom of religion and the separation of state and religion. More importantly, it shows how the justices interpreted these two articles, and the legal interpretation was in favor of the conservative and Ise rhetoric of portraying Shintō as tradition and culture. Second, the ruling from the Supreme Court showcased that Shrine Shintō can be viewed as ritual performance with less religious implication. Any special treatment of religion is problematic in light of the constitution, and the conservative Shintō advocators use similar rhetoric to treat Shintō rites and ceremonies as having less religious meaning or as public rituals. Moreover, the ruling demonstrates that as long as Shintō rituals are considered public and secular, the law in Japan will not stop them from being performed by public officials. Because of the "purpose and effect" standard, any court can make a judgement to see if the government is promoting one

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[132] Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232.
[133] Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232.
[134] Shōwa 46 (*gyō-tsu*) 69, 6–9, cited in Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 232.

religion without discussing the separation of religion and state. The Tsu ruling unsurprisingly fits Shintō well, since common people see many of Shintō rituals as tradition and culture. Thus, if the ruling extended to other shrines, such as Yasukuni and Ise, as long as these rituals were perceived as secular and public, there would be no violation of the constitution. This ruling certainly blurred the definitions of Articles 20 and 89 and, in effect, allowed the government to fund "secular" Shintō rituals and promote Shintō in society.

Third, the so-called common people's view of Shintō is not reliable for determining whether Shintō is understood as secular or religious. It is too convenient for the Supreme Court to present the common people's view of Shintō as not religious without any sophisticated explanation. The assumption of the common people's view is yet another strategy that more recent conservatives use to legitimize Shintō rituals in public and propagate a public Shintō. As mentioned above, many Japanese people claim to be "non-religious," yet they may often visit Shintō shrines. Thus, under the dichotomy between "religious and secular," which is not accurate in describing non-Christian culturally oriented religions, Shintō rituals can be considered "secular."[135] Thus, the Tsu ruling is legally overwhelmingly in favor of the Shintō as an ostensibly nonreligious tradition and culture narrative.

However, the Ehime Tamagushiryō ruling of 1997 fundamentally changed the Supreme Court's legal interpretation of Articles 20 and 89. The case concerned the offerings paid to Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and the local Gokoku Shrine in Ehime 愛媛 Prefecture between 1981 and 1986 by members of the Ehime prefectural government. The payment included nine offerings of *tamagushiryō* 玉串料 (a small amount of cash offering to a shrine) at Yasukuni Shrine for a total sum of ￥45,000 and multiple offerings of *kentōryō* 献灯料 and *kumotsuryō* 供物料 (both are cash offerings for funeral rites that substitute for real goods) in local festivals and

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[135] Following the Tsu ruling, the Supreme Court's rulings on the SDF (Self-Defense Forces) enshrinement case in 1988 and on the Minoo 箕面 memorial case in 1993 both referred to the Tsu ruling and used "purpose and effects" to conclude the two cases did not attempt to promote religion. See Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 234–36.

shrines. The case was filed by a group of twenty-four plaintiffs led by a Shin Buddhist priest named Anzai Kenji 安西賢二.

The first ruling produced by the district court argued that these offerings were considered substantial enough to count as "support and promotion of the religious activities of Yasukuni Shrine and the Gokoku Shrine," and they were considered a violation of Articles 20 and 89. However, the second court overturned this ruling, arguing that "for common people, making offerings such as *tamagushiryō*…can…be accepted as a social ritual." In addition, the second court considered the sum of money to be too small to count as "support" to promote religious activity, and thus these offerings in fact did not violate Articles 20 and 89.

The Supreme Court, however, for the first time, amended the Tsu ruling by focusing on Yasukuni Shrine's status as a Religious Judicial Person. The justices argued that offering *tamagushiryō* at Yasukuni and *kumotsuryō* at the local Gokoku shrine made by the Ehime prefectural government would "give common people the impression that these religious groups were something different from other religious groups." In particular, Justice Ōno Masao 大野正男 pointed out the central role of Yasukuni Shrine in "State Shintō" and asserted that the argument that "shrines are not religion" is tied to prewar ideology. In concluding the Ehime ruling, the Supreme Court argued that offerings paid to these shrines "could not escape their religious significance." Moreover, the ruling indicated that the prefectural government had crossed the limits of the "cultural and social condition of our country," and thus the offerings were in violation of the Article 20 prohibition of "religious activity."[136]

The Ehime ruling has been seen as a "landmark case." From 1977 to 1997, Shintō was considered culture, but after the Ehime ruling Shintō rituals were considered religious in the legal sense. The Ehime ruling then strongly affected Articles 20 and 89, as it rejected the so-called common people's view. It abandoned the "purpose and effect" standard and focused on the direct evidence of government offering to a Religious Judicial Person. Any public funding under

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[136] Cited in Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 237–38.

the name of supporting tradition and culture to shrines and Shintō rituals is challenged by the Ehime ruling. As a result, it became much more difficult for conservatives to claim their offerings to shrines (e.g., Yasukuni) have no religious implication since, in effect, they were supporting private religious institutions. Portraying Shintō rituals and ceremonies as public and secular continues to be the conservatives' rhetorical strategy to legitimize any government funding to the shrines and public endorsement of Shintō, and they desperately wish to keep this narrative of Shintō, as shown in the LDP's proposed revision for the constitution in 2012 (see below).

The ruling further contributes to the change of approaches for conservative groups. Under this ruling, future official visits and offerings can be challenged in court, and the rhetoric of Shintō as tradition and culture would not necessarily help the conservative groups win lawsuits. This is not to say that these groups have stopped trying to nationalize Yasukuni or redefine it as non-religious; rather, they need a new approach to prevent the latest interpretation from stepping in when they advance public Shintō. Hence, while conservatives continue to make the Japanese legal system favorable for them to interpret Shintō as non-religious through constitutional revision, they also seek an approach that will not trigger too much opposition to their promotion of Shintō as Japan's "tradition" and "culture." This thesis demonstrates that the new approach is Shintō environmentalism. Nonetheless, it is also important to demonstrate that the change of interpretation of Articles 20 and 89 is one reason that Shintō environmentalism has become one of the core strategies for the conservatives to promote public Shintō.

After the Ehime ruling, a set of three similar cases related to the enthronement rites (*daijōsai* 大嘗祭) of the former emperor after the death of the Shōwa emperor Hirohito 裕仁 (1901–1989). These cases concern the visits made and offerings paid by their respective prefectural governors at the time of the enthronement of the Heisei emperor Akihito 明仁 (1933–) in 1990. In short, the justices found that although the rites had "connections to religion," they did not favor any single "special religion," as they viewed the *daijōsai* as "traditional rites that commonly take place at the time of imperial succession." The significance of these cases is

that the contemporary Japanese monarch still enjoys ideological continuity since the Meiji era, which is relevant to the Yasukuni Shrine and the empowerment of the emperor in present-day Japanese society. Importantly, legally categorizing imperial ceremonies and rites as "traditional" (*dentō gishiki* 伝統儀式) opens the door for promoting, subsiding, and advancing public Shintō. Furthermore, while Ise is the primary shrine enshrining Amaterasu and supporting the narrative of the imperial lineage, it attracts much less legal attention than other shrines. It seems that emperor-related ceremonies and rituals are more easily accepted as tradition and culture, which may be one reason that Ise has a better reputation than Yasukuni.

The rulings that would eventually cement the Ehime line of argument as legal precedent and close the door for interpreting Shintō as culture were determined by the Supreme Court in 2010. Sunagawa 砂川 City authorities in Hokkaido had allowed two shrines privileged access to municipal land: Sorachibuto Shrine 空知太神社 and Tomihira Shrine 富平神社. However, the Supreme Court stated that Sorachibuto and Tomihira Shrines were unmistakably "Shintō" and their practices were considered "religious." Thus, according to Articles 20 and 89, the acts of Sunagawa City in the case of Sorachibuto Shrine were prohibited.[137]

However, one of the counterarguments for this case merits attention. One of the fourteen judges, Horigome Yukio 堀籠幸男, argued that the constitution was not breached in the Sorachibuto case since Shintō was a traditional ethnic belief and had its origins in Japan's unique culture.[138] Although the Supreme Court eventually ruled the case unconstitutional, the understanding of Shintō among common people in contemporary Japan does require more attention. Furthermore, this case was only the second verdict of unconstitutionality delivered by the Supreme Court, yet there are thousands of shrines across Japan that stand on municipal land.

Although small shrines like Sorachibuto and Tomihira attracted enough legal and social attention, Ise Grand Shrine, as one of the largest and most important shrines, seems to be left

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[137] For a detailed discussion, see John Breen, "'Conventional Wisdom' and the Politics of Shinto in Postwar Japan," *Politics and Religion Journal* 4, no. 1 (2010): 68–82.
[138] Breen, "'Conventional Wisdom' and the Politics of Shinto in Postwar Japan," 68–69.

alone in legal issues when it promotes Shintō as non-religious. There seems to be no clear-cut way to distinguish religious and non-religious in the case of Shintō, since notions such as Shintō being "tradition" or "custom" are deeply rooted in the Japanese populace. Shintō environmentalism, of course, is another essential reason for Ise's success in avoiding controversies and legal problems. As shown in the next section, environmentalism is a convenient disguise.

In sum, this section argues that the current constitutional interpretation of Articles 20 and 89 bluntly indicates that Shintō as "tradition" and "culture" is not supported by the Supreme Court. Put differently, the Japanese state and prefectural government could not provide public funds or offerings to Shintō and Shintō-related activities by claiming they are "tradition" and "culture." Especially, the Ehime ruling of 1997 directly indicates that it violates the constitution to public visit or offer Yasukuni. However, this ruling did not stop more recent prime ministers from visiting Yasukuni, and official visits to Ise seem to fall out of the scrutiny of the new interpretation of Articles 20 and 89. This is why more attention is required to investigate Ise's approach to advancing a public Shintō.

Two Sides of a Coin: Yasukuni Shrine and Ise Grand Shrine

> In this world filled with beautiful forests, our country was the country blessed by the purest environment. The people lived together with nature, loved it, worshipped and lived in harmony with it; for thousands of years, they grew forests and lived in forests, in an ideal environment… As so much of Japan's green is disappearing, people are now once again becoming aware of the importance of shrine forests all over the country.[139]

In the context of the new interpretation of the constitution, Japan Conference was established in May 1997, and it is possibly the largest conservative organization in Japan. Japan Conference includes members from Jinja Honchō, the Ise Grand Shrines, and the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership. Moreover, one of Japan Conference's most important goals is to revise the

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[139] "Jinja to 'midori' zadankai" 神社と「緑」座談会, *Jinja Shinpō* 神社新報, three parts, 1982; cited in Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 71.

postwar constitution. Although the proposal for Article 9 revision regarding the ability to declare war and legally build a regular army (this does not apply to the Japan Self-Defense Force) has attracted the most attention, the revisions for Articles 20 and 89 are also critical for Japan Conference in defining Shintō in the society. The establishment of Japan Conference and its intention to revise the constitution indicates that a favorable constitutional interpretation of Articles 20 and 89 is a less feasible option for defining Shintō as non-religious for the Shintō conservatives. Thus, Japan Conference and other conservative groups need to find other approaches to secularize and even nationalize Shintō.

Shimazono points out that a new form of "State Shinto" has manifested in contemporary Japanese society, along with political movements to further its influence.[140] For example, in recent years, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and his cabinet ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine can be viewed as an effort to redefine Yasukuni Shrine as a public (i.e., non-religious) martyr site. This is because the public martyr site in Tokyo, Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery 千鳥ケ淵戦没者墓苑, has provided memorial services since 1959, and there is no need to have another martyr site in the same city. Instead, by visiting Yasukuni Shrine, these politicians are aim to strengthening the importance of the emperor in contemporary Japanese society, which could be seen as a conservative proposition. Such high-profile conservative advocacy has attracted strong opposition, which argues that public figures' official visit to Yasukuni Shrine as a Religious Juridical Person violates the religious freedom defined by the constitution.[141]

In response to the criticism of Shintō nationalist movements, the lobby groups react in two major ways. First, they attempt to redefine Shintō shrines and rituals as public by trying to revise the laws and nationalize some shrines along with the rituals. Then, the lobby groups can treat them as Japan's tradition and culture, thus avoiding discussing religious freedom.

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[140] For example, see Shimazono Suzumu, *Kokka Shintō to nihonjin* 国家神道と日本人 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010); Shimazono Susumu. "Religion and Public Space in Contemporary Japan: Re-activation of Civilization of the Axial Age and the Manifestation of State Shinto and Buddhism," in *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present*, eds. Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 31–46.

[141] More precisely, Yasukuni Shrine is legally registered as an Individual Religious Juridical Person, unlike Jinja Honchō, which is registered as a Comprehensive Religious Juridical Person.

This approach is amplified by the LDP's proposal of "Draft for Revision of the Constitution of Japan" (*Nihonkoku kenpō kaisei sōan* 日本国憲法改正草案) in April 2012. The proposed amendments to Articles 20 and 89 restate the attribute of Shintō being traditions and customs. The first two paragraphs of Article 20 are more or less identical to the current constitution, but paragraph 3 indicates the change in a significant way:

> It is unacceptable for the state and the local governments as well as for other public organizations to conduct education or other religious activities for the benefit of a specific religion. However, that which does not surpass the confines of *social ritual or manners and customs* (*shakaiteki girei mata wa shūzokuteki kōi* 社会的儀礼又は習俗的行為) is not affected by this restriction.[142]

As to the revised version of Article 89, the LDP's draft adds one more sentence to the current version, which states:

> Public money or other public property must not, *with the exception of cases under the stipulations given in Article 20 Paragraph 3*, be disbursed to or offered for the use, benefit, or support of organizations involved in religious activities or for religious organizations.[143]

As shown in the proposed texts, Japan Conference and the LDP clearly intend to rewind the constitutional interpretation of Article 20 to pre-1997 norms. In other words, this proposed revision could allow justices to interpret Shintō as "social ritual or manners and customs." In fact, the proposed amendments indicate that the current constitutional interpretation of Shintō is not favored by the conservatives and their agenda.

However, because of controversy around Article 9 of the LDP's proposed revision, the amendment still faces significant domestic and international challenges. In particular, there are vast numbers of Japanese and considerable activism against the revision of Article 9. For instance, in 2004 the Article 9 Association (Kyōjō no Kai 九条の会) organized a number of scholars, authors, public intellectuals, and social activists to work for the preservation of Article 9. The preservation movement quickly expanded across the country, and by 2008 there were some six thousand groups registered across the country. In 2015, Abe and his cabinet re-

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[142] Translated and cited in Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 245. See the original draft in Japanese at https://www.jimin.jp/policy/policy_topics/pdf/seisaku-109.pdf ; emphasis mine.
[143] Translated and cited in Larsson, "Jinja Honcho and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 246; emphasis mine.

interpreted Article 9, extended the mandate of Japan's military beyond "self-defence," and made it permissible for the government to deploy forces in "collective defense." However, according to a survey conducted by the *Nihon keizai shimbun* 日本経済新聞 in April 2015, only 29 percent of those polled supported the cabinet's reinterpretation of Article 9, while 52 percent were opposed. Since Article 9 is part of the package deal of the revision of the constitution, Articles 20 and 89 are difficult to revise. Hence, revising the constitution is also a high wall that conservative politicians must cross to legally visit and fund the shrine.

The second approach that lobby groups use to respond to the criticism is that, by utilizing the global trend of environmentalism to disguise Shintō as a "green religion," they disassociate the revival of public Shintō with nationalism and cultural chauvinism. In the case of Ise Grand Shrine, it exemplifies the so-called "Shintō environmentalist paradigm." The paradigm claims that Shinto is a primordial tradition of nature worship (sometimes referred to as "animistic"), which contains ancient ecological knowledge on how to live in harmonious coexistence with nature.[144]

This section argues that the second approach is currently more effective in advancing Shintō. It chooses Yasukuni and Ise as a pair of examples to demonstrate that environmentalism makes it much easier for domestic and international audiences to accept the notion of Shintō as non-religious. Although revising laws is always an option, it also faces greater opposition, as shown in the Yasukuni case. In addition, the enshrinement of convicted war criminals in Yasukuni shrine critically differentiates itself with Ise Grand Shrine, as the latter has fewer direct connections with WWII and thus has fewer controversies among Japanese people and the international community. In fact, one of the few implicit connections to the war that Ise has is Ise's enshrinement of Amaterasu Ōmikami and the claim that the Japanese imperial lineage directly descends from Amaterasu. However, even such statements become less valid and

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[144] See Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 4.

important because of the Shōwa Emperor's public renunciation of divinity after WWII, known as "Professing His Humanity" (*Ningen sengen* 人間宣言).[145]

In this context, applying to Shintō an environmentally oriented meaning in Ise Grand Shrine can gradually change the common people's view of contemporary Shintō. Moreover, by constantly telling the reimagined narrative that Shintō since prehistorical times has always been nature-oriented, shrines can use the current global environmentalist trend to re-portray themselves as non-religious, which is shown in the Ise case.

Rots (2014 and 2017) and Mullins (2021) have pointed out that a significant difference in perception exists between Yasukuni and Ise, and Shintō environmentalism might contribute to the difference.[146] This section thus emphasizes the challenges that Yasukuni faces when the conservatives promote Shintō as non-religious; moreover, it demonstrates that these challenges actually contribute to Ise's success as it finds another approach to promote public Shintō.

In an effort to redefine the images of Shinto shrines, Shintō actors are concerned with relatively lesser controversial matters such as state support for local shrines and festivals and the use of public funds to preserve shrine forest land and buildings (e.g., shrine forests and *shikinen sengū* 式年遷宮). In addition, the Japan Conference homepage clearly states they aim to establish a human-nature harmonious society and a co-prosperity world.[147] The second half of this statement echoes the wartime Japanese fascist slogan of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. At present, however, environment becomes the force to create a "co-prosperity" world instead of the military. One of the top priorities of the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership is to make the society revere the imperial lineage, the imperial family, and Japanese traditional

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[145] "Emperor, Imperial Rescript Denying His Divinity (Professing His Humanity)" *Tennō "Ningen Sengen"* 天皇「人間宣言」, 1946, Tokyo: National Diet Library, accessed 15 August, 2023, https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/03/056shoshi.html.
[146] For example, see Rots, "Shinto's Modern Transformations," 125–143; Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 2021.
[147] Nippon Kaigi, "Nippon Kaigi to wa" 日本会議とは, accessed March 30, 2023, https://www.nipponkaigi.org/about.

culture, as well as to be proud of Japan's culture.[148] It is worth noting that the Shintō Association

of Spiritual Leadership is currently supporting 259 members of the National Diet,[149] so along

with Japan Conference, their political influence is significant to the government.

It is also no secret that former Prime Minister Abe had close connections with the Shintō

Association of Spiritual Leadership and Japan Conference. During his second term, Abe

promoted the movement that aimed to change the name of Culture Day (*Bunka no hi* 文化の日;

on every year's November 3, that is Meiji Emperor's birthday) to Meiji Day (*Meiji no hi* 明治の

日). In addition, Abe conducted a couple of official visits to Yasukuni Shrine and made offers to

the shrine under the name of the prime minister. According to Shimazono, Abe's actions and

efforts to revise the constitution are evidence of reviving "State Shintō" in the contemporary

period.[150] However, such an obvious nationalistic, even imperialistic, goal hardly went without

criticism and opposition. Especially with direct regard to Shintō, official visits to Yasukuni

Shrine always provoke strong domestic and international criticism. Thus, I argue that Shintō

environmentalism is the option, and possibly the sole option in contemporary Japan, to

effectively advance Shintō and its rites and ceremonies in public.

Yasukuni Shrine and Its Political Controversy

Nevertheless, it is important first to investigate one side of the coin, Yasukuni Shrine, to better

understand why environmentalism is essential the success of the Shintō "secularization

movement." The case of Yasukuni Shrine indicates why Shintō environmentalism is publicly

supported by political, religious, and cultural conservatives—it is a less controversial approach.

While the Jinja Honchō regards Ise as the highest-ranking shrine because of the enshrinement of

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[148] The original sentence in Japanese states: 万世一系の皇統と悠久なる歴史を持つ皇室と日本の伝統文化を尊重し、自国の文化に誇りを持てる社会づくりをめざします. See Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership, "Shinseiren ga mezasu kuni zukuri" 神政連が目指す国づくり, accessed April 2023, https://www.sinseiren.org.
[149] See the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership's official website "Ōen shiteimasu" 応援しています！, accessed April 2023, https://www.sinseiren.org.
[150] Shimazono Susumu, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō: Tennō sūkei o meguru shūkyō to seiji* 戦後日本と国家神道: 天皇崇敬をめぐる宗教と政治 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2021), 305.

Amaterasu, the ancestral deity of the imperial household, and its head position in affiliation with eighty thousand shrines across Japan, Yasukuni has often functioned as the symbolic center for the lobby groups' main concerns, including the renationalization of Shinto, patriotic education, and the promotion of historical revisionism.[151] Hence, Yasukuni Shrine could be seen as a pioneer for Ise regarding postwar nationalism despite Yasukuni's uniqueness status as a shrine dedicated to the war dead, and Ise could learn to avoid the controversies that Yasukuni faces. That is, though Yasukuni and Ise have different characteristics in their representation, they are both closely associated with the imperial family and the efforts to portray Shintō as non-religious. By examining how Yasukuni Shrine has been protested for its nationalistic and imperialistic representation, it can be easier to understand how Shintō environmentalism became an alternative tool to advance nationalistic and conservative agendas.

In 1979, it became known that Yasukuni Shrine had "secretly" enshrined B and C class war criminals in 1959 and had extended enshrinement to fourteen Class A war criminals in 1978 under the direction of Chief Priest Matsudaira Nagayoshi 松平永芳. Since then, many felt that the shrine had legitimized the worst aspects of Japanese imperialism and militarism by conducting these enshrinements, which constituted a transformation of "war criminals" into "deities to be worshiped." Even the Shōwa Emperor, Hirohito, stopped visiting the shrine in 1975 because of these enshrinements, and his successors have done the same.[152]

On August 1983, former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro 中曽根康弘 (in office: 1982–1987) first visited Yasukuni Shrine, which made the site the center of attention. While Nakasone was not the first postwar prime minister to visit the shrine, he was the first to visit after the enshrinement of the Class A war criminals. Equally important, while the previous prime ministers usually explained that their visits were conducted in a "private" capacity (*shinjin no shikaku* 私人の資格) or avoided indicating whether their visits had been personal or official,

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[151] Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 118.
[152] John Breen, "Introduction: A Yasukuni Genealogy," in *Yasukuni: The War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past*, ed. John Breen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 3.

Nakasone's visits remained ambiguous in this regard. In addition, the Supreme Court, perhaps unintentionally, cooperated with this opinion by following the Tsu ruling of 1977, stating that it would not constitute a violation of Article 20 if the purpose was not religious if and the action did not aim to support or promote one particular religion.[153]

Nakasone visited Yasukuni once more but did not follow any traditional Shintō ritual protocol. However, it is enough, Mullins argues, for the general public to portray Nakasone as a "pro-Yasukuni" nationalist when he made the visit accompanied by most of his Cabinet members regardless of whether his visit was "religious" or "non-religious."[154] Prime Minster Nakasone's visits ignited a complex controversy around the shrine. Many intellectuals and religious leaders, predominantly Christian and Buddhist, expressed their strong opposition to the Prime Minister's initiative. Domestic lawsuits were launched against Nakasone and the government for violating the constitutional separation of religion and state.

Overall, despite the efforts by Fujinami and Nakasone to redefine "official visits" as civic and non-religious, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Yasukuni is registered as an Individual Religious Juridical Person. In addition to domestic protests, countries such as China (PRC) and South Korea also voice their discontent towards ministerial visits. It is also essential to identify the difference between domestic and international protest: the domestic opposition to the prime minister's Yasukuni visits is primarily rooted in the constitutional debate; the international protests are around war responsibility and justification of the behaviour of the war criminals.

It is worth noting that conservative groups tried to change the religious status of Yasukuni Shrine. From 1969 to 1974, the LDP, along with the Japan Association of War-Bereaved Families and other right-wing religious groups, tried to pass the "Yasukuni Shrine Bill" (*Yasukuni Jinja hōan* 靖国神社法案), a bill to renationalize the shrine and provide direct government support. This was because under Article 89, it was not possible to provide any public funds to an

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[153] The Tsu ruling of 1977 was discussed in detail in the previous section.
[154] Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 123.

Individual Religious Juridical Person such as Yasukuni Shrine. Nevertheless, these efforts were in vain.

Because of the backlash from Nakasone's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, it was not until 1996 that another prime minster, Hashimoto Ryūtarō 橋本龍太郎 (in office: 1996–1998), visited the shrine. However, former Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō 小泉純一郎 (in office: 2001–2006) again sparked controversy at Yasukuni Shrine. Between 2001 and 2006, Koizumi visited the shrine a number of times in his official capacity. His visits were not surprising given that he had served as Vice-President of the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership in 2000.[155] Domestically, there was strong opposition against Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and eight different court cases were launched against him across the nation for violating the constitution. Moreover, over nine hundred plaintiffs claimed that his behaviour caused them mental anguish and demanded compensation. Although some district courts dismissed these lawsuits, the Fukuoka District Court in April 2004 and the Osaka High Court in September of the following year ruled that the prime minister's visits violated the constitution but denied compensation for damages.[156] Internationally, Koizumi's behaviour also provoked widespread international concern. In particular, the governments of South Korea and China (PRC) issued strong official statements and criticisms of his actions.[157]

Similar to the situation after Nakasone's visits in the 1980s, the prime ministers following Koizumi—Abe Shinzō (first term, 2006–2007), Fukuda Yasuo 福田康夫, and Asō Tarō 麻生太郎—avoided visiting the shrine. However, during Abe's second term as prime minister from 2012–2020, Abe officially visited the shrine on December 26, 2013, and his visit again provoked strong domestic and international criticism. Not surprisingly, South Korea and China protested the visit, and even the United States expressed its "disappointment."[158]

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[155] Tsukada Hotaka 塚田穂高, *Shūkyō to seiji no tentetsuten: Hoshu gōdō to seikyō itchi no shūkyō shakaigaku* 宗教と政治の転轍点—保守合同と政教一致の宗教社会学 (Tokyo: Kadensha, 2015), 46–57.

[156] See also Breen, "'Conventional Wisdom' and the Politics of Shinto in Postwar Japan."

[157] Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 130–31.

[158] Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 132.

Moreover, since Yasukuni Shrine was registered as a religious corporation after the war, the enshrinements of Buddhists and Christians without their families' consent can be seen as coercion of religious minorities in Japan. To make the situation worse, Yasukuni priests have insisted that "de-enshrinement" is impossible regardless of the will of bereaved families.[159]

In addition, the war museum (Yūshūkan 遊就館), is another core problem with Yasukuni Shrine. It was restored and expanded in the post-Occupation period. The museum contains many historical items from the Meiji Restoration to the end of World War II and, more importantly, a narrative that glorifies the modernization and imperialization process. John Breen states that the museum promotes a rather "selective memory" of the past, and the narrative tends to glorify the wars of Japan's modern century.[160] Thus, Yūshūkan's implication of supporting imperialist Japan is hard to deny, which provides another reason for the neighboring countries to protest Japan's prime minister or other officials to visit the shrine and the museum.

To summarize, there is ongoing controversy around Yasukuni Shrine because of its significance in the Asia-Pacific War and for the imperial family. Although prime ministers Koizumi and Abe still visited Yasukuni after the Ehime ruling, their visits did not advance Shintō in any significant way. The dilemma is that these conservative politicians receive more criticism domestically and internationally when visiting Yasukuni, while they need support from the general public to pass their revision of both to Yasukuni bill and the constitution. Moreover, these politicians cannot stop visiting Yasukuni because they need to show their support for the imperial family and their nationalistic sentiments. It is difficult for the conservative groups to promote Shintō through Yasukuni, even though they seem not to give it up.

Ise Grand Shrine, Shrine Forests, and Public Ritual

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[159] Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism*, 136.
[160] John Breen, "The Dead and the Living in the Land of Peace: A Sociology of the Yasukuni Shrine," *Mortality* 9, no. 1 (2004): 76–93, 91.

Ise Grand Shrine can achieve similar goals in a much safer way by binding Shinto with environmentalism, despite the fact that the representation of Ise and Yasukuni within Shintō does not differ much. Yasukuni Shrine often receives attention from Buddhist and Christian groups who use Articles 20 and 89 to legally challenge any state-related activities, official visits (especially by prime ministers), and financial offerings. By contrast, Ise Grand Shrine does not have many negative associations and has largely avoided controversy in the postwar period (e.g., no convicted war criminals are enshrined in Ise). Not only has Ise Grand Shrine been portrayed and viewed as far less political than it really is, but former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō even included a tour to Ise for international leaders as a part of the G7 Summit in May 2016.[161]

Ise Grand Shrine most notably includes an Outer Shrine (*Gekū* 外宮) and an Inner Shrine (*Naikū* 内宮). While the Outer Shrine enshrines the rice cultivation goddess Toyōke Ōmikami 豊受大神, the problem here lies in the Inner Shrine, where the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami is enshrined. Amaterasu Ōmikami is believed to be the divine ancestress of the imperial lineage, going back to Emperor Jinmu 神武天皇, the first recorded emperor, said to have founded Japan in the seventh century BCE. Hence, although it is clear that there is a strong connection between the imperial family and Ise Grand Shrine, there is little controversy around the shrine and its activities.

Abe asserted that Ise is the prime manifestation of Japan's "traditional culture" (*dentō bunka* 伝統文化), and it is characterized by social harmony, unique aesthetics, and a patriotic love of the country.[162] Such statements ignore the fact that much of what today counts as "ancient tradition" was reinvented in the Meiji nation-building process in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the "love of nature" supposedly expressed in ritual and cultural practices.[163] However, to Abe, Ise is the manifestation of "the ancient Japanese spirit"

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[161] The group included Abe Shinzō (Japan), David Cameron (UK), François Hollande (France), Angela Merkel (Germany), Barack Obama (US), Matteo Renzi (Italy), and Justin Trudeau (Canada).
[162] See John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A Social History of the Ise Shrine: Divine Capital* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Rots, "Public Shrine Forests."
[163] Also see Thomas, *Faking Liberties*, Chapter 5.

and of core importance for the continuation of the imperial institution and, by extension, the wellbeing of the nation as a whole.[164] Hence, Ise Grand Shrine, at least to Abe and other political conservatives, is closely associated with nationalism and even imperialism. However, the G7 international leaders had little hesitation when visiting Ise, especially the Unites States, whose officials often raise concerns about Japanese official visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Although the G7 leaders did not engage in worship or any other religious activities, their visit undoubtedly had profound symbolic significance to Shintō. It is hard to imagine any international summit would have their meetings include a visit to Yasukuni Shrine.

In short, on the one hand, Yasukuni Shrine, the religious site that enshrines Japan's war dead, is a widely recognized symbol of contemporary nationalism, especially due to its enshrinement of fourteen Class A war criminals. High-profile visits by public officials and politicians are often seen as a violation of the constitution. Yasukuni Shrine became the symbolic focus of a new Japanese identity based on the ideal of self-sacrifice for the nation and emperor. This understanding of the shrine is what the coalition of neo-nationalists—LDP politicians, Jinja Honchō, Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership, and Japan Conference—seek to restore in contemporary Japan.

On the other hand, Ise Grand Shrine carries the significance of Japanese "tradition" and "culture" through its rituals and ceremonies. For instance, the conservative lobby groups (including Jinja Honchō, Shintō's de facto central authority) actively promote a view of Shintō as the ancient "public" worship tradition of Japan, and Ise is the embodiment of the romantic-nationalist notions of Japan as a sacred country with a unique traditional culture.[165] In fact, Jinja Honchō's official pamphlet, *Soul of Japan*, clearly states that the modern emperor is a descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami, the 125th (now, the 126th) emperor in a direct line.[166] Hence, Ise Grand Shrine partially functions to promote and, more importantly, legitimize

[164] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 2.
[165] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 2–3.
[166] *Soul of Japan*, accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/sys/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/soul-of-japan.pdf.

nationalistic and even imperialistic notions, which are very similar to the conservatives' efforts in Yasukuni.

Thus, if one carefully examines Yasukuni Shrine and Ise Grand Shrine, one will find that the two shrines are not so different in terms of what they represent and the messages they can convey to contemporary Japanese society. However, they are perceived as distinct, if not opposites, by the common people as well as religious groups other than Shintō.[167] In general, environmentalism often may be associated more with left-wing/liberal activism, especially in the West; however, it can also go hand in hand with religious conservatism and popular nationalist discourse.[168] Moreover, Rots states that it is precisely on the topic of 'the environmental' and the importance of shrine forests that different groups, representing various political and ideological positions, can come together and strengthen ties.[169] That is one of the critical reasons for the increasing popularity of the Shintō environmentalist paradigm.[170]

Rots argues that "nature" and "the environment" are discursively depoliticized, and he proposes the term "Shintō environmentalist paradigm" to refer to the "trend to conceptualize Shinto as a worship tradition intimately connected with 'nature,' and the explicit discursive association of 'the environment,' 'nature conservation,' and 'ecology.'"[171] Although perhaps it is accurate to claim that "nature" and "the environment" are discursively depoliticized, environment-related public policies cannot be described as the same. Japan and Shintō environmentalism exemplify this. In fact, "the environmental," or the "greenwashing of Shintō," might be the top priority for contemporary Shintō religious leaders and various Shintō political

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[167] Rots made a similar comparison between Meiji Jingū and Yasukuni Shrine; see Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 8.

[168] See also Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 2.

[169] In principle, "shrine forest" refer to the groves surrounding Shintō shrines, which may be anything from a handful of isolated trees to sizeable forests. In recent years, conservative Shintō leaders, such as Jinja Honchō's current president Tanaka Tsunekiyo and scholars such as Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru, have argued that shrine forests reflect the origin of Japanese culture and tradition and are closely associated with ecology. However, the association of shrine forests with ecology and nature conservation only started to appear in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For a detailed discussion, see Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 5.

[170] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 68.

[171] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 68–69.

advocates. Critically, these Shintō political advocates do not only treat Shintō environmentalism as an ecological problem, but more importantly as a means to spread their nationalistic political agenda and propagate a new form of Shintō to not only the Japanese but a global audience. The new form of Shintō refers to an environmentally oriented public Shintō, one that can carefully avoid conflicts with Articles 20 and 89 of the constitution.

To be clear, this thesis does not oppose any genuine Japanese (and global) environmentalist movement. Instead, it focuses on the political significance of Jinja Honchō's approach to environmentalist activities and argues that Shintō environmentalism as a new form of Shintō resulted from the current global sociopolitical context. It further argues that Shintō's definitional ambiguity and discursiveness fit this trend perfectly. Especially, such a discursiveness is convenient to integrate the reimaged prehistorical kami cults, the environment, and ecology.

In his monograph *Japanese Religions and Globalization*, Ugo Dessì points out that the recent attention shown by Shintō institutions to the issue of ecology is not only the continuation of the conservative's traditional rhetoric, but also a specific way of adapting to global trends. In addition, the response given by Shintō to the growing global awareness of an impending environmental crisis is "modulated through a selective approach to the tradition, which emphasizes the allegedly immemorial and respectful attitude of Japanese people towards a 'divine' nature." In short, contemporary Shintō has adopted the global trend of environmentalism, which may meet the growing expectation of global society.[172]

For instance, in June 2014, Jinja Honchō held a conference in Ise with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). The conference, named "Tradition for the Future: Culture, Faith and Values for a Sustainable Planet," brought together representatives of different religions to discuss environmental issues and promote interreligious dialogue. It is worth noting that the conference was attended by representatives of various religious organizations worldwide—

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[172] Ugo Dessì, *Japanese Religions and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013), 51–52.

Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, Sikhism, Shintō, and various Protestant denominations. As part of the conference, attendees also paid their respects to the sun goddess Amaterasu.[173] Paying respects to Amaterasu clearly indicates that Shintō at least has some attributes of being non-religious so that many representatives of different religions can accept such an action.

This case shows that there is a global environmentalist awareness and trend regarding religion. Many religions have expressed their concerns about contemporary ecological problems that human society is facing as a whole, and Shintō is no exception. In fact, Jinja Honchō is clearly aware of the global trends in environmentalism. In its English-language publications, Jinja Honchō has repeatedly stressed its awareness of global environmental problems and offered Shintō as the solution. For example, it states:

> In recent years, so many environmental problems, such as rise of temperature of the earth, destruction of the ozone layer, exhaustion of natural resources, and massive dumping of waste, have become global issues, and it is strongly required to take effective measures against these problems, as well as measures for natural preservation, amenity improvement, and pollution control… Shinto regards the land and its environment as children of Kami. In other words, Shinto sees that nature is the divinity itself.[174]

This conference is an excellent example to show that Shintō is not the only religion that is interested in environmental issues. Hence, by identifying Shintō with environmentalism, Shintō organizations can host such conferences and project more influence (political, cultural, and religious) on the world. Moreover, environmentalism is a new opportunity for religions such as Shintō to acquire legitimacy, locally, domestically, and internationally. Because of the awareness of environmental issues such as global warming and extreme weather, the general public is more interested in searching for solutions to these contemporary issues.

To associate one religion with environmentalism seems to be an approach to attract more audiences, and it is precisely what Ise is achieving.[175] For example, in 2013, there were more

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[173] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 3.
[174] "Nature, It Is Divine Message from Shinto," Jinja Honchō, accessed April 13, 2023, https://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/publications/nature/index.html.
[175] See also Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 311.

than fourteen million people who visited the Ise ritual ceremony, while the number of visitors was only 830,000 in 1993. Shimazono argues that though the commercial success around Ise and the "power spot" boom also helped the increasing number of visitors to Ise, the revival of "State Shintō" may be another reason for this phenomenon.[176]

Hence, by using the topic of "the environmental," more global audiences could start to be interested in Shintō and its affiliated notions; however, the danger of such a popularity is that more audiences would perceive Shintō as what the Japanese conservatives claim—Japanese culture and tradition. As established in this chapter, such claims often contain nationalistic and even imperialistic implications. More importantly, by increasing the popularity of Shintō, or to be precise, a secular/public Shintō, the Japanese conservative groups can help their bid for revising the constitution, especially regarding Articles 20 and 89. Hence, the seeming depoliticization of the "Shintō environmentalism paradigm" is where the problem lies.

Nevertheless, because of recent events, such as the rise of an internationally more aggressive China, COVID-19, North Korea's missile testing, and the assassination of Abe Shinzō, public opinion in support of revision seems to be changing. In the recent election in 2022, the LDP and its allies controlled two-thirds of the members of both houses of the National Diet. According to Article 96, the current prime minister, Kishida Fumio 岸田文雄, and the LDP can potentially propose a motion to initiate constitutional amendment. However, even if a proposal is presented, an amendment must be presented to the people in a referendum. It would still be extremely difficult for the conservatives to break the status quo.

In fact, it is exactly the status quo that the LDP and its allies face that leads them to use Ise Grand Shrine and environmentalism in order to change the public view of Shintō. Breen states that one reason is that the law's inconsistent application across different religions. For instance, the prime minister can attend Christian churches and Buddhist temples without too much criticism. This thesis further argues that even within one religion, the law is applied

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[176] Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 311.

inconsistently. For example, since the 1970s, it has been the custom for Japanese prime ministers to visit the Ise Grand Shrines at New Year with all their cabinet members to venerate Amaterasu and praying for Japan's flourishing. Moreover, prime ministers such as Christian Ōhira Masayoshi 大平正芳 (1978–1980), socialist Murayama Tomiichi 村山富市 (1994–1996), and Hatoyama Yukio 鳩山由紀夫 (2009–2010) of the Democratic Party have all "officially" visited Ise and participated in the veneration. The media and general public give this annual event very little critical attention, and so far, it has not prompted any legal action.

Shimazono points out that Ise Grand Shrine is more closely associated with the imperial family than the government, but it seems to be natural (*tōzen no koto* 当然のこと) to conduct these "unnatural" (*fushizensa* 不自然さ) official visits. In addition to Breen's argument on the inconsistency of law application, Shimazono argues that the reason Yasukuni and Ise attract different legal attention lies elsewhere. He claims that when structuring the social consciousness of Japan, Japanese politics, mass media, and intellectuals are unaware that they are under the illusion (*sakkaku* 錯覚) that Japan is still not an independent country but under the rule of the GHQ (General Headquarters during the Allied Occupation). Under this illusion, the public, politicians, and constitutional experts pay more attention to unlawful behaviour under international law than domestic law. Moreover, Japanese society has the spirit (*kifū* 気風) to justify the Allied Occupation and the Tokyo Trial (International Military Tribunal for the Far East). In other words, Yasukuni Shrine was classified by the trial as wrongdoing that symbolized the ultra-nationalistic and imperialistic Japan; hence Japanese society, whether it is conscious of it or not, desires to follow international law and judgment and pays much more attention to Yasukuni than Ise Grand Shrine.[177]

However, it is not only the inconsistency of the law that is applied or societal illusions, but also Shintō environmentalism that makes the difference. Shintō environmentalism helps improve Shintō's public image by avoiding the sharp criticism that Yasukuni Shrine faces and

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[177] Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 303.

shifting the general opinion about Shintō from being religious to being public and secular to

avoid legal action based on Articles 20 and 89. Former Prime Minister Abe and the lobby groups

also advance Shintō by utilizing Ise Grand Shrine in, as Shimazono states, a less noticeable way

with their policies;[178] I call this the Shintō environmentalist approach. For instance, Prime

Minister Abe and his eight cabinet members participated in the "Ise Grand Shrine Ceremonial

Year for the Transfer of the Shrine" (*Ise Jingū shikinen sengū* 伊勢神宮式年遷宮) in 2013.

According to Ise Grand Shrine's official description:
> Every twenty years, a new divine palace with the same dimensions as the current one is constructed at an alternate site which is adjacent to the main sanctuary. It involves about 30 rituals and ceremonies beginning with the ritual cutting of the first trees for the new divine palace. The sacred apparel, furnishings and divine treasures to be placed inside the sacred palace are also remade. Once they are prepared, the Holy Mirror (a symbol of Amaterasu-Omikami) is moved to the new sanctuary by the Jingu priests. This ritual is called Shikinen Sengu.[179]

From this description, it is clear that the ceremony is a religious ritual and ceremony concerning

Shintō and Amaterasu. Although the *Asahi Shimbun* 朝日新聞 and scholars such as John Breen

criticized Abe's participation in this ritual from the perspective of the separation of state and

religion, it certainly did not receive as much attention as when Japan's prime minister visited

Yasukuni Shrine.

Shimazono argues that it public figures such as prime ministers should not be allowed to

participate in such a religious ceremony, even if they claim it as a "private visit," as their actions

may be perceived as nationalizing the ritual.[180] Moreover, though the ceremony is not a national

event but a religious event enacted by a religious corporation (Ise), many think it is natural for

prime ministers to participate in the national ceremony.[181] Shimazono asserts that the prime

minister's participation in the "Ise ceremony" can be seen as a postwar version of the "unity of

ritual and government" (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致). He further argues that such official visits to Ise

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[178] Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 306.
[179] Ise Jingu, official website, "Shikinen sengū," accessed April 2023, https://www.isejingu.or.jp/en/ritual/index.html.
[180] In Shimazono's original words, "今回の参列はプライベートな信仰を越えた行為と受け取るべきで、遷宮の国家儀礼化とも理解できる;" Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 307.
[181] Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 307.

Grand Shrine violate the separation of state and religion, as Ise Grand Shrine is not different from any other religious institution under the postwar constitution. More importantly, because of the close connection between Ise Grand Shrine and the imperial family, treating Ise Grand Shrine as a suprareligious institution and ceremonies as public rites could cause "a revival of State Shintō" (*kokka shintō no fukkō* 国家神道の復興) in present-day Japan. The increasing number of visitors to Ise is not irrelevant to the revival of "State Shintō," since Ise Grand Shrine is the symbol of Shintō.[182]

Thus, Ise is the most recent development of Shintō and the conservatives' efforts to restore Shintō's status as national and public. The lobby groups' intentions are apparent from visiting Yasukuni Shrine to advocating constitutional revision. However, Shimazono does not explore further the reasons that different perceptions of Ise and Yasukuni exist. Not to mention, while Ise Grand Shrine has received criticism from the mass media and scholarship on Japanese religion, the criticism has certainly never reached the level of that of Yasukuni Shrine. Claiming Ise Grand Shrine's ritual and ceremonies as tradition and culture (and thus public) is not enough to explain the difference between the two, since many public figures have also applied similar reasonings to Yasukuni Shrine. Both shrines are nationalistic and even imperialistic, but the core difference lies in Shintō environmentalism.

This is what Rots called the "Shinto environmentalist paradigm," which has been legitimated by means of a re-imagination of prehistorical "Japanese" people as living in harmonious coexistence with their natural surroundings, supposedly expressed in "animistic" beliefs and practices. Scholars who share these ideas, such as Sonoda Minoru and Ueda Masaaki, often assert that in the modern period, "Japan's traditional environmental awareness" has been largely forgotten as a result of the import of Western technology and ideology, which have caused widespread environmental, moral, and cultural deterioration.[183] It has been suggested that "the Japanese" have a unique way of relating to nature, diametrically opposed to the "Western"

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[182] Shimazono, *Sengo nihon to kokka Shintō*, 307–310.
[183] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 136; Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*.

tendency to control and exploit nature. Japanese culture is supposedly characterized by a profound love of nature, an intuitive appreciation of its beauty, and harmonious coexistence between humans and their natural surroundings. In these scholars' views, the solution to contemporary problems (social as well as ecological) therefore lies in the re-establishment of ancient modes of relating to nature. For example, the preservation and reconstruction of shrine forests is an essential approach.

Furthermore, Sonoda argues that shrine forests represent the public character of Shintō the best. It is said that shrine forests constitute the original shape of shrines, and they are also seen as the focal points of shrine festivals (*matsuri* 祭り), one of the most important communitarian activities in traditional Japanese culture. By conducting these shrine festivals and ceremonies, similar to their ancestors, people establish continuity between the present and the past. Thus, in addition to their ecological value, shrine forests also have the considerable symbolic significance of representing continuity between the ancestral past (i.e., 'traditional' values and cultural practices) and the present. For scholars such as Sonoda, shrine forests provide a seemingly valid argument for making a strong tie between contemporary Shintō environmentalism and Japanese traditions and culture, which can well be considered a denial of history.

The current president of Jinja Honchō, Tanaka Tsunekiyo 田中恆清, has expressed similar opinions that shrine forests represent of the origin of Japanese society, as these are the places where people sense the presence of the sacred and come together to perform worship ceremonies (*matsuri*). According to Tanaka, Shinto originated in reverence for nature in ancient times, and "nature" has remained its foundation.[184] Critically, he plainly states that shrine ritual worship and governance (*jinja no matsurigoto* 神社の祭り事) are always public and that these prayers can be seen as a form of public devotion.[185]

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[184] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 65.
[185] Tanaka Tsunekiyo 田中恆清, *Shintō no chikara* 神道のちから (Tokyo: Gakken, 2011), 7; translated and cited in Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 96–97.

These claims about Shintō are obviously inaccurate, since Shintō and its ceremonies have clear and sound religious implications, and the concern for nature preservation is also a modern invention.[186] It is not convincing for the president of Jinja Honchō to claim the prayers and worship are public and thus non-religious. However, these claims can indeed attract audiences who are not interested in "religion" (*shūkyō*) but interested in Japanese culture and tradition. Moreover, supporting environmental preservation does not sound terrible in the slightest. But as mentioned above, the current Jinja Honchō's president, is a core member of Japan Conference (vice president), and his attempts to connect Shintō environmentalism with Japan's culture and tradition are, in effect, promoting a new form of public Shintō.

Breen and Teeuwen also indicate that Jinja Honchō's promotion of the Shintō environmentalist paradigm and use of shrine forests can be seen as a sophisticated form of greenwashing in order to conceal its nationalist agenda.[187] Morris-Suzuki argues that images of nature in Japan have played a central role in constructing imaginations of nationhood,[188] and she claims that "different ways of understandings the natural environment evolved over time and created a store of vocabulary and imagery which have been central to modern constructions of what it means to be 'Japanese.'"[189] Rots also argues that conceptions and representations of nature were central to the construction of the postwar Japanese nation. This scholarship, along with Shimazono's arguments for the revival of "State Shintō" in contemporary society, shows that Shintō environmentalism is not just about the environment; it also can be seen as a tool through which to define what is Japanese. It is crucial to remember that Shintō environmentalism is Shintō's adaptation to the current global sociopolitical context. This is the reason that Shintō environmentalism seems to fit the global environmental narrative quite naturally.

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[186] See also Rots, "Public Shrine Forests;" Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Julia Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[187] Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shintō*, 209.
[188] Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan*, 35.
[189] Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan*, 38.

Hence, it is both surprising and not surprising to see that while the same set of groups supports Yasukuni and Ise, the results are contradictory. Even without making a direct contrast to Yasukuni, the interpretations of Ise and shrine forests from Tanaka and Sonoda clearly indicate a strong nationalistic, or *nihonjinron*, implication. The emphasis on Japan's reimagined history and society is utilized to promote Shintō as non-religious and environmentally oriented. In other words, images of nature are often connected to embodiments of the nation, and in Japan, this notion can be considered a sort of *nihonjinron* discourse. It claims that Japanese people have embraced environmentally friendly ideologies since ancient times, and it is only because of imports from the West that Japan lapsed in this nature-loving tradition. Such notions, combined with Jinja Honchō's claims that Shintō is the solution to global environmental problems, put Shintō in a unique position. Furthermore, these notions make Japanese people unique since Japanese people always love nature. Even though the call for preserving nature sounds more liberal than conservative, the lobby groups behind the Shintō shrines are indeed conservative. This thesis calls for more attention to this type of narrative, proving that Ise Grand Shrine, or Shintō environmentalism in practice, shares more with nationalism and imperialism than some may think.

Although Rots is not wrong to state that environmental problems do not constitute the main concern of most contemporary Shintō actors, it is more accurate to say that contemporary Shintō's environmental narrative is the most effective approach for Shintō organizations and lobby groups to advance Shintō. It is difficult to discern how genuine the concerns of Shintō shrines such as Ise with environmental problems in Japan, as their motivations and needs may not always be transparent or well-understood by outsiders. Still, it is clear that Ise and its supporters' intention is to promote Shintō as an environment-friendly, non-religious, and public entity. The primary purpose for doing so is not to make the public forget the connection between Shintō and the imperial family; rather, it is to strengthen the tie without directly mentioning the emperor or the imperial lineage.

Keep in mind, it is the same groups (e.g., Japan Conference and SAS) who openly support a more influential imperial system and promote reimagined Japanese tradition and culture. It is difficult not to think these groups would promote Ise and shrine forests to the world without connecting them back to the imperial family. Although Rots indicates that shrine forests are oriented more toward the local than the national or global, shrine forests do support perceptions that Shintō rituals can be public and that Shintō is an environmentally oriented world religion. The influence that Ise and shrine forests bring to Shintō organizations as a whole can and will impact Japan's politics and policymaking. In particular, the growing number of international Ise visitors proves that Shintō is increasing its audience globally. Such a tendency can impact the public's perception of Shintō, which would make the argument for Shintō and its ceremonies being public more appealing. In other words, there would be less resistance or criticism when conservatives advance Shintō as a public entity, both legally and culturally. Therefore, Ise Grand Shrine can be the opening that leads to the revival of "State Shintō," which is designed as public and non-religious.

Conclusion

This chapter continues the argument that sociological context is essential to Shintō's development. It introduced the postwar constitution, especially the articles relevant to Japanese religion. In particular, it addressed Supreme Court rulings that decisively impacted Shintō in the public sphere. The Tsu ruling of 1977, which lasted until 1997, legally provided Shintō some breathing room in public so long as the Shintō rituals and ceremonies did not aim to promote Shintō as a religion. The Ehime Tamagushiryō ruling of 1997 legally rejected the notion that Shintō rituals are tradition and culture; thus, the legal interpretation of Shintō as non-religious could no longer apply, which includes Yasukuni Shrine.

Although this did not stop Japanese prime ministers from visiting the shrine, the Ehime ruling caused legal troubles for conservatives. Hence, revising Articles 20 and 89 seems to be the only option for conservative politicians to visit the shrine legally. However, this chapter argues

that contemporary environmentalism can advance Shintō as a public and non-religious entity. More importantly, the iconic shrine of Shintō environmentalism, Ise Grand Shrine, receives far less domestic and international criticism for embracing the global trend of religious environmentalism. Such a strategy results from Shintō's adaptation to the new global sociopolitical context—the rise of concern about the global environmental crisis. Thanks to Shintō's definitional ambiguity, Shintō environmentalism can be adopted naturally into current Shintō conservatives' rhetoric.

However, as the chapter has explained, the conservative natures of Ise and Yasukuni do not differ significantly. Instead, Shintō environmentalism is a clever and sophisticated approach used by the lobby groups and Jinja Honchō to promote the *nihonjinron* discourse that Japanese people and their "native" religion differ from the West's technology and religion.

The next chapter will investigate Shintō environmentalism in Japanese popular culture and examine how anime and manga spread this ideology, intentionally or unintentionally. It will further explore the internationalization of Shintō, which would essentially empower and legitimize Shintō's claim of being non-religious and eco-friendly.

Chapter 3:

Shintō Environmentalism and Shintō Internationalization:

Examining Miyazaki Hayao and Japanese Popular Culture

The last chapter demonstrated how Shintō environmentalism contributes to contemporary Japanese nationalism and imperialism. In particular, it highlighted the similarities between Yasukuni Shrine and Ise Grand Shrine regarding their representations in the eyes of Japanese conservatives. It further argued that Shintō environmentalism is the key to advancing Shintō in the public sphere in present-day Japan. This chapter continues this but turns its attention to the internationalization of Shintō environmentalism with a focus on Japanese popular culture. Especially, this chapter focuses on Japanese animated films directed by Miyazaki Hayao and produced by Studio Ghibli.

Such a focus merits scholars' attention primarily thanks to Miyazaki's writings and open interviews, which clearly indicate his intention, philosophy, and understanding of Shintō and the "animism" behind his works. Although Miyazaki has consistently distanced his works and philosophy from any institutionalized religion, such as Buddhism and Shintō,[190] his works nevertheless contain close ties to Shintō. He and his films in fact promote an imagined Shintō through the appearance of such things as *torii* 鳥居, [191] as well as and humanized deities.[192] More importantly, Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli as a whole explicitly indicate their "animistic" understanding of Japan's nature, especially natural forests (*mori* 森).[193]

Because of Studio Ghibli's phenomenal success in the global film industry, it has attracted the attention of Japanese and other scholars from various fields, such as film studies, media studies, literature studies, and sociology. However, this chapter uses religious studies to scrutinize Miyazaki's films, focusing on Shintō environmentalism. With this purpose in mind, I

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[190] For example, see Miyazaki Hayao, *Starting Point: 1979–1996*.

[191] A gate entrance to a Shintō shrine, usually vermillion in color.

[192] These deities can speak and have feeling similar to human beings, and some of them even have moral standards.

[193] The alternative term, *hayashi* 林, is said to refer to human planted wood. See Ueda Masaaki, *Mori to kami to nihonjin* 森と神と日本人 (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2013), 13–14.

intend to discuss the following three films directed by Miyazaki: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, and *Princess Mononoke*.

This chapter builds on recent work by scholars including Hori Iku, Jolyon Baraka Thomas, Yoneyama Shoko, and Komura Akiko to demonstrate how Miyazaki's anime films represent "Shintō" (or, in his words, "animism") with Japan's nature. In addition, it relies on scholars such as Helen McCarthy and Susan J. Napier to offer cinematic understandings of these films, and Ugo Dessì to build a framework for the internationalization of Shintō environmentalism. Crucially, it aligns with scholars like Graham Harvey, Isabel Laack, and Darryl Wilkinson in introducing the contemporary discourse surrounding the "new animism" debate. This chapter then applies the "new animism" discussion to "Japanese animism" and Japanese popular culture by examining the work of Thomas, Rambelli, and Yoneyama on the relationship between Japanese "animism" and "new animism."

In light of "Japanese animism," I argue that it is in fact a product of capitalism and commercialism. Essentially, this chapter clarifies some of the mischaracterizations of "Japanese animism" and Shintō made by Miyazaki and asserts that these mischaracterizations contribute to Shintō secularization in contemporary Japan and beyond. Ultimately, this chapter argues that Miyazaki and his films promote Shintō environmentalism to not only Japanese people but audiences worldwide, regardless of Miyazaki's own intentions to do so. It further demonstrates that Miyazaki's films and Shintō environmentalism together depict Shintō as Japan's tradition and culture, a claim also made by the Japanese conservatives. Miyazaki's films then can be seen as having the implications of presenting Japanese nationalism, despite Miyazaki's clear anti-war and anti-imperialism stance.

It must be warned, however, this thesis is not an ethnographic study that measures quantitatively what impact these films have brought to Japanese and other societies regarding religion or Shintō. At the stage of this thesis, it is nearly impossible to conduct significant enough surveys or interviews to reflect how the audience's understanding shifts after viewing Miyazaki's

films. Hence, this thesis pays more attention to how Shintō environmentalism is promoted

through Miyazaki's films, but not its actual impact on the audience.

I am aware that Studio Ghibli is only one of the most successful Japanese anime

producers worldwide, and other Japanese popular media in various forms are undeniably

successful. For instance, the Godzilla (*Gojira* ゴジラ) "special effects" (*tokusatsu* 特撮) film

series is another well-known example of the internationalization of Japanese popular culture. The

original move, *Godzilla* (*Gojira*; 1954), is a direct reaction to the hydrogen bomb test at nearby

Bikini Atoll operated by the U.S. military, as well as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki.[194] Japan, as the sole country that suffered directly the devastation of nuclear bombs in

an armed conflict, has a deep and robust anti-nuclear sentiment.[195] Hence, Godzilla, a giant deep-

sea creature mutated by American hydrogen bomb testing, is an imagination of nature's revenge

on human technology and environmental pollution. Some of the films in the Godzilla series, such

as *Godzilla* and *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (*Gojira tai hedora* ゴジラ対ヘドラ; 1971), directly

address issues of nuclear and industrial pollution. These films also merit attention for

demonstrating the differences between Miyazaki and other popular series regarding expressions

of environmental concern.

Miyazaki Hayao and Japan
> I do like animism. I can understand the idea of ascribing character to stones or wind. But
> I do not want to laud it as a religion.[196]

Before driving into Miyazaki's works in detail to discuss Shintō environmentalism, it is essential

to introduce his life and his understanding of Shintō and animism. One common scholarly

criticism of Miyazaki's works is that they involve *nihonjinron* discourse, because they (and

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[194] The original film explicitly expresses the anti-nuclear sentiment. However, many films in the Godzilla series
rarely convey such sentiments, and some of them even portray Godzilla as the hero and savior of the humanity and
the Earth.
[195] Hiroshima 広島 (August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki 長崎 (August 9, 1945).
[196] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 333.

Miyazaki himself) often convey appreciation for Japanese natural beauty and animism. Such characterizations of Miyazaki and his works often lead to the conclusion that he is a supporter of Japanese nationalism. This section illustrates that Miyazaki does not purposely promote Japanese nationalism through his works based on his interviews and writings. It further argues that Miyazaki's understanding of Japan's animism is not accurate. In fact, his misunderstanding of animism promotes Shintō, despite his efforts to avoid institutional religion. No one but Miyazaki can confirm if his words are sincere, but the consistency of his expressions helps us to make reasonable judgments on his position on pre-1945 Japanese aggression and Japan as a nation.

Miyazaki was born in 1941 during WWII. Miyazaki's family was relatively fortunate compared with many Japanese families at that time. His father was an executive member of Miyazaki Aircraft, a company owned by his uncle. Even in wartime, the family business was successful, and they were well-off. Although his father was conscripted, he was not sent to the front lines. Prior to his squad's departure for mainland China, his superior inquired if anyone had reservations about going. Miyazaki's father raised his hand and expressed his inability to join due to the presence of his wife and children. Consequently, he remained at home, contributing to the production of components for military aircraft. This connection between his father and industries associated with war, coupled with the family's comparatively comfortable lifestyle during the war, profoundly impacted Miyazaki. It instilled in him a sense of guilt toward the victims affected by Japan's aggressive actions in Asia.[197] He comments on his sentiment towards the imperialistic Japan:

> Before I knew it, I became a boy who disliked Japan... Around me were adults who boasted about stabbing Chinese people to death. As I found the stupidity of the Japanese army in all aspects hidden behind their glorious stories, I was utterly disappointed. I became a Japanese who disliked the Japanese. I trembled with a sense of guilt towards China, Korea, and countries in South East Asia, and could not help but negate my own existence... I disliked the Japanese nation, the Japanese people, and the country's history... Even while engaged in animation work, I preferred films set in a foreign country. While wanting to use Japan as a movie background, I could not have a liking for its folklore, legends, or mythology. I disliked everything about Japan.[198]

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[197] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 249–50.
[198] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 265–66.

Miyazaki's words clearly express his anti-war and anti-aggression position, and he admits that his attitude toward Japan is reflected in his works. This brief background suggests that Miyazaki is unlikely to defend intentionally Japanese wartime nationalism or imperialism through his works.

However, the primary problem of Miyazaki's works lies in these films' animistic themes. Sørensen argues that since animism is often the main theme of Miyazaki's works and animism is the basis of Shintō, Miyazaki's anime thus promotes nationalism in Japan because Shintō was the foundation of nationalism in pre-1945 Japan.[199] Here, there are two critical questions that need to be identified. First, why is Miyazaki interested in Japanese animism, or the "animism," he claims? And second, does Miyazaki desire to include his understanding of animism in his anime? As mentioned above, it is unlikely that Miyazaki is promoting nationalism on purpose, but unintentionally advancing Shintō can still indirectly promote *nihonjinron* discourse.

"New Animism"

It is essential to begin by examining the intellectual implications of "animism" in the twenty-first century before delving into Miyazaki's interpretation of the term as a non-scholar. In 1871, E. B. Tylor and his influential *Primitive Culture* first proposed the pejorative concept of "animism," which was an early evolutionist attempt to understand the origins of religion. Tylor's understanding of the development of religion in human history was that animism is the earliest form of religion in primitive societies as compared with more civilized and advanced monotheistic religions such as Christianity in Victorian Europe. However, the study of "animism" and evolutionist theories were increasingly discredited in the twentieth century. It was not until the very end of the twentieth century when the term or concept of "new animism" was revisited by scholars in the field of anthropology. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century,

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[199] Sørensen, "Animated Animism."

"new animism" has attracted attention from diverse academic fields such as religious studies, sociology, and philosophy.

Recent scholarship, most notably by Graham Harvey,[200] proposes to break free of the Eurocentric pejorative understanding of the "old animism" and develop a discursive field of "new animism" based on "indigenous" ontologies and worldviews.[201] Scholars began to pay more attention to indigenous cultural concepts of person and nature and propose theories relating human relationships with nonhumans.[202] Moreover, scholars such as Nurit Bird-David and Harvey actively promote the characteristics of "new animism" as advantageous for ecologically harmonious living and solutions to the contemporary global environmental crisis.[203] The "new animist" scholarship heavily focuses on the "living world," which, as suggested by Darryl Wilkinson, expresses profound concern for ecological matters.[204] Building on studies of indigenous ecologies, the "new animism" scholarship emphasizes a contrast with Western ecology, in which animals and nature are regarded as fundamentally lacking in human forms of subjectivity. Thus, "new animist" scholars' proposal of a new relationship between humans and nature (or "nonhuman personhood") can be seen as an alternative theoretical framework to Western Christian academia's pejorative understanding of "animism."

However, this revisionist approach to "animism" has not gone uncriticized. For instance, Wilkinson asserts that the concept of the "new animism" should only be recognized as an analytical metaphor predominantly found within scholarly dialogues, as it only encompasses

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[200] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Harvey, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013); Harvey, "If Not all Stones Are Alive...: Radical Relationality in Animism Studies," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 11, no. 4 (2017): 481–497.

[201] See Isabel Laack, "The *New Animism* and Its Challenges to the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 32, no. 2 (2020): 115–147, 121.

[202] Harvey argues that "Animists are people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others." See Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, xi.

[203] See Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40 no. 1 (1999): 67–91.

[204] See Darryl Wilkinson, "Is There Such a Thing as Animism?," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2017): 289–311, 285.

selectively specific "indigenous" understandings of non-Western ontologies.[205] In addition, regarding the "new animist" claims of providing ecological solutions to the current environmental crisis, Wilkinson points out that such applications of the label "indigenous" to cases of "animism" are problematic, and he asserts that the "new animism" is only indigenous to the global environmental crisis in the twenty-first century.[206] Especially, Wilkinson questions if the scholars who promote "new animism" sincerely believe in trees, rocks, and so on as literal persons. If not, Wilkinson argues that there is little difference between Tylorian animism and "new animism," which are both based on Western projections of non-Western ontology and religious beliefs.[207] In addition, Thomas argues that for a "real animist," the term "animism" would not be used since the term implies a false premise that a real divide exists between humans and nonhumans.[208] Yoneyama also criticizes "new animism" for selectively choosing cases (mostly hunter-gatherer indigenous communities), maintaining Eurocentricism, and paying very limited attention to contemporary Asia.[209]

"New animist" scholars' proposal to build a new theoretical academic framework to study animism has merits in interdisciplinary fields. However, the selective use of "indigenous" concepts can hardly represent animist beliefs in actuality—so-called "new animism" is merely another Western projection of the "real animism" (if there is one).[210] One of the notable few differences with "old animism" is that "new animists" differentiate "new animism" by promoting a progressive (anti-modernization, anti-industrialization, and anti-urbanization) and seemingly non-Eurocentric understanding of the world and the "indigenous" religion, instead of having a

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[205] Wilkinson, "Is There Such a Thing as Animism?," 289.

[206] Wilkinson, "Is There Such a Thing as Animism?," 290.

[207] Wilkinson, "Is There Such a Thing as Animism?," 305.

[208] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 168–69.

[209] Yoneyama Shoko, "Miyazaki Hayao's Animism and the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 7/8 (2021): 251–266. That said, Yoneyama actively promotes her own version of new animism; see Yoneyama Shoko, *Animism in Contemporary Japan: Voices for the Anthropocene from Post-Fukushima Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

[210] In Tylor's time, it can be argued that the global crisis was when the West encountered non-monotheistic religions and beliefs worldwide. Tylor's evolutionist understanding of religion provided a theoretical framework to ensure that Western Abrahamic religions, primarily Christianity, and societies were in a superior position.

strong imperial and colonial sense. Rather than a non-Western alternative approach toward global ecological challenges, "new animism" by default, as developed in the West, has the attribute of caring for the global environment in the twenty-first century.

"New Animism" in Japan

Recent scholarship demonstrates that Shintō is an excellent example of combining centuries-old traditions (religious and ritual traditions) with modern advanced technologies.[211] They argue that this animism developed and dramatically changed Tylor's understanding: animism is no longer associated with being primitive or backward but has become more advanced with modern science. More importantly, animism now concerns critical modern issues, such as ecological problems, human-nature coexistence, and human-nonhuman relations.

However, regarding Japanese popular culture that promotes "animism" as a worldview and a timely response to modernization and industrialization, Thomas criticizes such interpretations by asserting that while many Japanese animated films present humanity's connection with nature, there would not be a real division between humans and nature in a "real animist world."[212] Then, what do filmmakers aim to achieve through their works? Thomas argues that "animist" presentations in Japanese animated films only show contemporary filmmakers and their audiences' ever-growing distance from nature.[213] Thomas critically points out the phenomenon in the Japanese *anime* industry that many works present kami cults and other seemingly animistic beliefs in light of environmental concerns.

Yoneyama, however, presents "new animism" in Japanese popular culture in a positive light. In particular, she argues that Miyazaki's presentation of "animism" (she calls it "critical animism" that has developed from "new animism") provides new perspectives to rethink human-

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[211] For example, Sørensen, "Animated Animism;" Kathleen Richardson, "Technological Animism: The Uncanny Personhood of Humanoid Machines," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 60, no. 1 (2016): 110–128; Timo Kaerlein, "The Social Robot as Fetish? Conceptual Affordances and Risks of Neo-Animistic Theory," *International Journal of Social Robotics* 7, no. 3 (2015): 361–370.
[212] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 169.
[213] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 158.

nature relationships and respond to the climate crisis by challenging what often goes under the name "new animism." That is, Miyazaki's presentation argues against human-nature dualism, secularism, and Eurocentrism. Moreover, she argues that Miyazaki's animism pays deserved attention to Japanese local politics and history, especially Shintō.[214] However, I argue that Miyazaki's works also selectively use "indigenous" elements of Japanese folk beliefs (e.g., folk Shintō) to address concerns about industrialized capitalist society. Such selective and excessive use of the "indigenous" has the danger of being "Japan-centric," and thus implies an underlying *nihonjinron* discourse, despite Yoneyama's firm denial that Miyazaki's and her own promotion of animism do so.[215]

Furthermore, I agree with Casey Brienza's argument that Miyazaki and other Japanese filmmakers' depictions of "animism" are in fact products of capitalism and commercialism.[216] With the presentation of the familiarity of Shintō and the contemporary anxiety of the global environmental crisis, many animated filmmakers selling the ambiguous concept of "animism" to audiences who are more interested in nature or the environmental crisis. In this way, audiences are not obligated to have a clear consciousness of "animism" to understand the environmental messages these works convey. Hence, the "animism" in animated films is not a purpose in itself, but a convenient tool to attract viewers with anxiety over the estrangement from the natural world and the global ecological issues.[217] In short, both "new animist" scholars and Japanese animated filmmakers decide to present selective "indigenous" concepts to address current environmental issues. This could be attributed to the anxiety experienced by urban dwellers who are distanced from nature. However, this thesis argues that urban consumers, primarily in Japan, exemplify commercialism through their engagement with anime, drawing upon the familiarity of "animistic beliefs" and expressions of environmental concern.

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[214] For a detailed discussion, see Yoneyama, "Miyazaki Hayao's Animism and the Anthropocene."
[215] See Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 24,160–61.
[216] See Casey Brienza, "Objects of Otaku Affection: Animism, Anime Fandom, and the Gods of … Consumerism?" in *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Routledge, 2013), 479–490.
[217] See also Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 158.

Miyazaki, "Animism," and Shintō

> My understanding of the history of Shintō is that many centuries ago [the originators of Japan] used Shintō to unify the country and that it ended up inspiring many wars of aggression against our neighbours. So, there is still a great deal of ambiguity and contradiction within Japan about our relationship to Shintō, many wish to deny it, to reject it.[218]

In the context of Japan, animism often refers to the worship of kami by Japanese people in the prehistorical era.[219] Indeed, Miyazaki considers kami cults as the belief in animism, which he defines as "the idea that there is a personality in small stones and wind."[220] Miyazaki's understanding of animism is primarily influenced by the botanist Nakao Sasuke 中尾佐助 (1916–1993) and his book *The Origin of Cultivated Plants and Agriculture*.[221] When Miyazaki felt guilty and depressed because of Japan's aggression in Asia, Nakao's book, along with his understanding of Japan's nature, led Miyazaki to view Japan in a more positive way. Nakao argues that Japanese culture is not distinct or isolated, but rather shares many similarities with other cultures found in forested regions that are abundant with evergreen trees characterized by thick, dark green, and shiny leaves. At that moment, Miyazaki came to a profound realization about the significance of expanding his Japanese identity beyond the confines of Japan's national borders. Therefore, his transition from Western influences to embracing Japan did not signify a shift toward nativist political nationalism. In essence, he awakened to the captivating beauty and abundant richness of the Japanese natural environment.[222]

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[218] Mark Vallen and Jeannine Thorpe, "Spirited Away: Miyazaki at the Hollywood Premiere," *The Black Moon* 13 (September 2002), accessed May 15, 2023, www.theblackmoon.com/Deadmoon/spiritedaway.html.

[219] For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[220] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 472.

[221] Nakao Sasuke 中尾佐助, *Saibai shokubutsu to nōkō no kigen* 栽培植物と農耕の起源 (Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, 1966).

[222] Yamanaka Hiroshi, "The Utopian 'Power to Live': The Significance of the Miyazaki Phenomenon," *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark W. MacWilliams (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 237–255, 251–252.

Upon embracing Nakao's theory regarding forests in Japan, Miyazaki began to perceive the forest as possessing a divine essence and acknowledged its role as a foundation of Japanese indigenous religion. He discerned that shrine forests, the forests that encircle Japanese shrines, predominantly consist of broadleaf evergreens.[223] He also tied the forest to what he calls a "primitive religious feeling" (*genshiteki shūkyōshin* 原始的宗教心).[224] In addition, Miyazaki views kami as victims of the wartime public institution, "State Shintō," as it was exploited and burdened with nationalism once it became associated with the nation.[225] It is worth noting that Miyazaki distinguishes kami from religion and expresses agreement with the concept of "animism."[226] He claims that animism is not a religion but a philosophy or an ontology.[227]

It is evident that Miyazaki is interested in the imagined "Japanese animism" of the prehistorical era. However, his understanding of Shintō and animism completely omits Shintō's development in Japan's medieval period, as he only draws a contrast between imagined prehistorical animistic beliefs and "State Shintō," which existed in imperial Japan before 1945. Miyazaki's understanding of "animism," under the influence of Nakao, is interested in Japan's nature, especially natural forests. Such characterizations of animism are closely aligned with the Shintō environmentalist paradigm, which has been legitimated by means of a re-imagination of prehistorical 'Japanese' people as living in harmonious coexistence with their natural surroundings, supposedly expressed in 'animistic' beliefs and practices. Miyazaki mentions shrine forests as one of the critical features of prehistorical Japan's forests. This, of course, echoes the discussions laid out in the previous chapter that present-day Shintō and political conservatives treat shrine forests as an essential strategy for advancing Shintō in the public sphere.

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[223] Miyazaki, *Returning Point*, 112.
[224] Miyazaki, *Returning Point*, 116.
[225] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 116.
[226] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 472.
[227] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 161, 182.

Regarding whether Miyazaki intentionally draws a connection between Japanese animism and his animated films, the short answer is yes. Miyazaki explicitly admits that the projects he has directed have a direct link to animism.[228] He claims that "I know the word a*nimation* probably comes from *animism*," as he suggests an innate relationship between animism and animation.[229] Eriko Ogihara-Schuck asserts that Miyazaki has incorporated his animistic beliefs into many films.[230] Miyazaki himself, however, constantly states that his films had no association with any specific religion, including Japanese religion.[231] Despite Miyazaki's effort to distance himself from institutional religions, it still shows that Miyazaki is very much interested in promoting a Shintō-like religion, or his version of "animism," to his audience. That is, while being nonanthropomorphic and bearing no moral principles are two key features of "ancient animism," Miyazaki develops an opposite definition of "animism" by seeing personality in kami and treating kami as human along the lines of the early Shintō tradition that was developed in the late seventh century and early eighth centuries CE.[232] For example, he uses the metaphor of "people" to describe kami: "I think that kami in Japan are really modest people."[233] Treating kami as human beings is a tradition that developed after the arrival of continental religions, philosophies, and legal codes in Japan (e.g., Buddhism and Taoism) in the sixth to seventh centuries, and by the late seventh century kami cults had already started to be institutionalized.

Moreover, kami in pre-institutionalization kami cults did not have the attribute of being good or evil. Yet, Miyazaki clearly has the intention to characterize his "kami" with such a moral distinction. For example, the animal deities in *Princess Mononoke* identify the ideology of

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[228] Morgan, "Creatures in Crisis," 172–173; Charles Newell, "The Films of Hayao Miyazaki: Shinto, Nature, and the Environment," in *Education About ASIA* 18, no. 3 (2013): 82–83.

[229] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 159.

[230] Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, *Miyazaki's Animism Abroad: The Reception of Japanese Religious Themes by American and German Audiences* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014), 36.

[231] Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki, Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 120–21.

[232] See Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 1; for detailed discussion, see Chapter 1 above.

[233] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 501.

protecting the forest (nature) as good and the people in ironworks (humans) as evil.[234] Miyazaki depicts animism in his films as a central role in determining the life and death of not only humans but also the earth; he also incorporates modern environmentalist thought about the human-nature relationship in his works.[235] However, it is well-established that ancient animism does not have environmentally friendly or moral principles.[236]

Critically, he does not hide his intentions of injecting animism into his films from the general public. In response to another interviewer who suggested that animation can become a medium that enables small children to understand the profound idea of animism, Miyazaki pointed to animation's limitations: "Due to technical reasons, it is difficult to create animations which reach the level of animism."[237] Regarding creating animist deities in anime, Thomas explicitly argues against such claims by asking if filming apparatus are also "animistic" so as to create deities.[238] Indeed, even more ironically, though Miyazaki often shows his appreciation of Japan's nature and preindustrial Japanese society in his films, most filming apparatus are industrial products. Nonetheless, it is still critical to recognize that Miyazaki is proud of Japanese animism and intends to promote it to young generations. The only problem he finds is that he does not have the right tools to create a profound feeling of animism in his films.

However, scholars such as Thomas firmly argue against the claim that anime and animism have an innate tie. Thomas asserts that the words "animation" and "animism" do not have significant functional equivalence beyond their etymological similarity, and anime should not be assumed to be a vehicle for connecting audiences with "animistic" cultural traditions that are supposedly endemic to Japan.[239] He argues that contemporary anime does not represent ancient animism because the concept of animism is always already dependent on an

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[234] A detailed film plot is provided in the next section.
[235] Morgan, "Creatures in Crisis," 173.
[236] Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*, 1, 19.
[237] Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 138.
[238] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 163.
[239] For a detailed discussion, see Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 157; see also Mauro Arrighi, "Techno-Animism: Japanese Media Artists and Their Buddhist and Shinto Legacy," in *Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan: The Invisible Empire*, ed. Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 143–156, 156.

epistemological sundering of nature from culture of the sort that "animism" in the classical sense would never allow.[240] Hence, Miyazaki's understanding of animism is not as authentic and classical as he claims to be. Instead, his "animism" is a combination of the reimagined ancient "animism," modern and industrial technology, and a nature-focused ideology.

It makes sense for Thomas to assert that "animism" (*animizumu* アニミズム) in Japan is an "invented tradition," because the term "animism" has no indigenous equivalent in Japanese, and it is written in the katakana syllabary, which is reserved for foreign loan words.[241] In fact, Miyazaki's "animism" resembles some characteristics of "new animism" in respecting nature, but "real animism" does not have a moral duty towards nature. In other words, Japanese ancestors, believed to have animistic beliefs, would not express their beliefs by propagating the idea of protecting nature. In addition, Casey Brienza seriously doubts the existence of the combination of anime and animism. He argues that in this contemporary manifestation, animism appears to persist in Japan; however, if *otaku* オタク,[242] who are often enamored with anime, are regarded as examples of modern animists, then their deity is the mundane god of consumerism, with the video store serving as their place of worship.[243]

It would make more sense for Japanese filmmakers to claim that they incorporate an early form of institutionalized Shintō, which under the influence of Buddhism began to have moral principles. In the case of Miyazaki, I propose to characterize his works as holding in common views with Shintō instead of what he calls Japanese "animism." This is for two reasons: 1) Miyazaki's many presentations of his "animism" and kami (e.g., *totoro* and *shishigami*) are indeed anthropomorphic and embody moral principles (e.g., explicitly express care of the environment in their universes) as his version of kami cults clearly resembles medieval Shintō; 2) Miyazaki's mischaracterizations of kami cults align with key aspects of Shintō conservatives'

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[240] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 168.
[241] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 162.
[242] An otaku, according to Brienza, is "a suspicious, socially awkward male who is more comfortable around two-dimensional cartoons than real, three-dimensional people, somewhere between the English-language 'nerd' and 'geek.'" See Brienza, "Objects of Otaku Affection," 481.
[243] Brienza, "Objects of Otaku Affection," 490.

rhetoric (e.g., Shintō is Japan's indigenous beliefs that has a close association with Japan's forests). Overall, it is essential for this thesis to address a more accurate description of Miyazaki's understanding of kami cults as many scholars who are not Shintō specialists are often misled by Miyazaki's words and presentations. Though it is difficult to separate kami cults and institutionalized Shintō clearly, Miyazaki's claim of presenting "ancient animism" in his works is simply inaccurate. Moreover, the notion that Shintō, and especially the animistic part of Shintō, is the "ancient" and "indigenous" ritual tradition of Japan is historically problematic because of the constant transformations and invented traditions.[244]

Yoneyama asserts that Miyazaki's "critical animism" contributes to the development of the scholarly debate over "new animism" by focusing on non-Western indigenous traditions like kami cults. However, this thesis argues that Miyazaki's misrepresentation of Shintō and kami cults should not be ignored. In fact, such misrepresentation carries the risk of creating a "Japan-centric" ideology regarding solving the current global environmental crisis. It is ironic to see that Miyazaki, who is interested in pre-industrialized Japanese society, uses industrial tools and the capitalist system to present and promote his works. Thus, if animism crumbles in representing itself in anime, the only thing left is the agenda of anime directors.

To answer the questions posted at the beginning of this section: Miyazaki is interested in promoting, and trying even to *recreate*, "Japanese animism" through his anime films and other works. Hence, for Miyazaki, anime is a form of expression, a mode of communicating his philosophy, and a vehicle to connect his audience with his ideas about humanity's relationship to the natural world. "New animism" uses "classical animism" as a tool for solving present-day problems such as environmental degradation and an ever-growing sense of alienation from the natural world. More importantly, such applications of "classical animism" can easily turn into the nationalistic project of describing Japanese traditions as uniquely apt for environmental problems on a global scale. It is evident that Miyazaki's understanding of animism shares similarities with

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[244] See also Rambelli, "Introduction: The Invisible Empire," 3–4.

"new animist" scholars such as Harvey. That is, they both selectively present "indigenous" concepts of non-Western ontologies; in Miyazaki's case, they are kami cults. While Miyazaki's portrayal of "animism" in his films holds some merit in relation to the mythological discussions of "new animism," it is important to highlight that these intentional depictions of a modern-constructed "animism" should be recognized as reflective of the director's personal ideology rather than an accurate representation of "animism."

Japanese Popular Culture, Shintō Environmentalism, and Internationalism

Although Miyazaki thinks he is promoting "animism" and a harmonious nature-human relationship (or human-nature nondualism), critically his efforts can be seen as an advance of Shintō, particularly Shintō environmentalism. However, it is much more complicated in actuality. Miyazaki consistently claims that he does not promote any institutional religion, and this stance would actually attract the audience who are not interested in any organized religions in Japan. In addition, his so-called ancient Japanese "animistic" beliefs, cultural roots, and tradition would also interest non-Japanese audiences with orientalist interests.

More importantly, for scholars whose expertise is beyond Japanese religion, it is hazardous for them to simply take Miyazaki's words at face value and present his anime as expressing Japanese animistic beliefs and tradition. It is common to see religious beliefs, practices, and other forms of religious elements in Japanese anime. But why does a society that is uninterested in (institutional) religion like to write and read manga (often made into anime if they are popular) that contain explicit religious implications?[245] Komura Akiko suspects that "the influence of Japanese people's religiosity" is the reason behind such creations. Komura argues that adopting an animistic perspective is crucial when examining the intersection of Japanese

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[245] For example, Kurumada Masami 車田正美, *Saint Seiya* (*Seinto Seiya* 聖闘士星矢), Tokyo: Shueisha, 1985; Nakamura Hikaru 中村光, *Saint Young Men* (*Seinto Oniisan* 聖☆おにいさん), Tokyo: Kodansha, 2006.

popular culture and religion, as it enables a comprehensive understanding of how popular

religious themes are portrayed in manga and anime.[246]

With such a perspective, anime can serve as a catalyst for attracting people to visit

shrines, instead of bringing more audience to believe in religion (Shintō). In particular, by

portraying the characters of anime works as individuals associated with shrines and utilizing real

shrines as settings, it hints that shrines and Shintō are familiar aspects of Japanese people's lives

(e.g., local shrines in Japan). Moreover, by integrating religious elements into the lives of anime

characters, such as deities, saints, or religious objects, Komura argues, a subtle sense of

religiosity emerges, creating unique religious perspectives that transcend institutionalized

religion.[247] However, conservatives can use the non-religious perception of Shintō and the shrine

to attract young audiences, and Komura does not address this.

In short, Komura argues that religion in anime is not really about religion, but more about

making Japanese audiences feel familiar when they see their local shrines in anime. Furthermore,

she argues that anime fans who become shrine visitors may perceive the amulets and talismans

offered at the shrines, in which they put anime merchandise-related items, simply as anime

merchandise rather than as religious objects.[248] Such understandings of anime and religion put

Japanese people in a unique position in perceiving religion. More importantly, Komura's

argument makes religion in anime not really religion but a Japanese tradition and culture. In fact,

lacking a direct and clear connection with Shintō's religiosity would help advance Shintō as

secular and public. Hence, arguments made by scholars such as Komura about Miyazaki and

religion help the promotion of Shintō being Japan's tradition and culture (non-religious) and

distinguish Japanese people's understanding of religion (Shintō) from the rest of the world. It,

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[246] Komura Akiko, "Anime and Religion: Thinking about Japanese Spirituality" (*Anime to shūkyō: Nihonjin no shūkyō ni taisuru shisei wo kangaeru* アニメと宗教：日本人の宗教に対する姿勢を考える), *The Journal of Applied Sociology* 137, no. 64 (2022), 137–146.
[247] Komura, "Anime and Religion," 144.
[248] Komura, "Anime and Religion," 142.

then, clearly shows a cultural chauvinism regarding Shintō as a non-monotheistic religion and its relationship with Japan's nature.

Moreover, according to Dessì's fourteen-step theory of the internationalization of Japanese religions, Miyazaki's understanding of animism fits Dessì's fifth step of selecting "native" religious elements as resources to shape new glocal identities. He proposes that Japanese religions select and adopt foreign cultural and religious elements as resources to shape new glocal identities (step four) and select "native" religious elements as resources to shape new glocal identities (step five).[249] Miyazaki's understanding and promotion of animism perfectly fit these two processes. First, as mentioned above, the term "animism" is a foreign word in Japan; and second, Miyazaki promotes Japan's natural forest and shrine forests as Japan's traditions from the prehistorical era through his works.

By forging a connection between Japan's nature and Japanese religions ("animism"), Miyazaki contributes to the glocalization of Japanese religion. Especially, as global ecological issues become ever more pressing, Miyazaki's "animism" can be seen as a unique "Japanese ancient wisdom" with which to address and solve these contemporary problems. Furthermore, though Dessì's theory presents thorough processes for the internationalization of Japanese religion, this thesis suggests that Shintō environmentalism can simplify the process, benefiting from the already established global consensus in search of effective environmental solutions.

Dessì's steps six and seven emphasize promoting the superiority of Japanese culture and rejecting foreign cultural elements. These are often seen in the works and writings from Miyazaki and scholars who promote Shintō environmentalism: they tend to reject monotheistic religions (e.g., Christianity) and position Shintō or Japanese animatic beliefs as unique and superior. Similar processes also work overseas (steps 8–12), but ultimately, steps thirteen and fourteen point out that the globalization of Japanese religions needs to address pressing social problems left unsolved through politics, education, and science. The global ecological concern

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[249] See the complete fourteen points in Dessì, *Japanese Religions and Globalization*, 6–7.

exemplifies Dessì's definition, and Shintō environmentalism can indeed promote Shintō to the world through media such as Japanese popular culture.

Of course, Dessì's argument of the globalization of Japanese religions is not the sole theory, but his approach does fit well in the case of Miyazaki. That is, the world (especially the West) has a consensus that environmental problems are crucial to human's future; at the same time, animistic beliefs about nature presented in Japanese anime seem to offer a pearl of wisdom to postmodern society. This combination easily reminds glocal audiences to think of current ecological problems when they watch anime films. In other words, the implications of environmentalism and Shintō in anime films can create a new glocal identity, which is presented as a unique tradition and culture: Shintō environmentalism.

Furthermore, the global popularity of Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli's films Shintō's popularity. For many, it is challenging to differentiate Shintō and "animism" when they visit a Shintō shrine. For example, Lucy Wright argues that Miyazaki is cinematically practicing the ancient form of Shintō, which emphasizes an intuitive continuity with the natural world.[250] She claims that Miyazaki adeptly incorporates an animistic ontology into his meticulously crafted fictional universes, drawing inspiration from ancient Japanese beliefs, rituals, and mythologies. His cinematic works articulate a captivating fusion of earthly spirituality, prominently rooted in the profound legacy of the Shintō tradition.[251] Such assertions of Miyazaki's works would mislead readers who are not familiar with Japanese religion and treat them as practicing ancient Shintō tradition instead of, as Miyazaki claimed, "animism." Even the ancient Shintō traditions that Wright mentions are an invention of tradition from the late Edo and early Meiji periods.[252]

Thus, Miyazaki's promotion of his "animism" can be seen by scholars as an approach to advance nationalism and chauvinism because of its selective presentations of Japan's "indigenous culture." For example, Wright asserts that since Miyazaki has said he only makes

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[250] Lucy Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees: The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki," *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 10 (Summer 2005), 1.
[251] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 1.
[252] See Breen and Teeuwen, *A Social History of the Ise Shrine*; Rots, "Public Shrine Forests."

films for the Japanese market, he actively participates in *nihonjinron* discourse with this audience in mind.[253] Yoneyama argues against this position by saying such claims lack an understanding of Shintō in Japanese culture and ignore Miyazaki's own position regarding Japan. She proposes that Miyazaki's presentation of Japanese indigenous culture provides a new perspective on responding to the climate crisis, "critical animism."[254] However, I argue that in the case of Shintō environmentalism and nationalism, Miyazaki's personal understandings of Shintō or "animism" have little impact; the fact is that Miyazaki's animism is closely aligned with the Shintō conservative scholars' agenda.[255] In short, Shintō environmentalism and Miyazaki can be considered as showing an interdependent relationship for increasing global popularity.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind
> There has never been a work of art created which did not somehow reflect its own time…
> *Nausicaä* comes from the new worldviews regarding nature which came about in the
> '70s.
> —Miyazaki Hayao[256]

Among Miyazaki's animated films, four of them have clear implications of Shintō, or in Miyazaki's words, animism: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*. Except for *Spirited Away*, the rest of the films show Miyazaki's thoughts on nature and ecology. Moreover, although audience perceptions of any film are beyond Miyazaki's intention, his films are still influential in many aspects. It is true that Miyazaki claims his films are made to entertain his audience instead of presenting any messages to humanity.

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[253] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 2.

[254] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 160; "Miyazaki Hayao's Animism and the Anthropocene."

[255] See, for example, Umehara Takeshi, who is perhaps the most representative proponent of these ideas. He argues that Shintō has nothing to do with pre-war nationalism, but "originated as a form of nature worship, rooted in the civilization of the forest." In addition, Umehara claims, as a form of Japanese spirituality this provides Japan with a crucial resource for developing a new civilization overcoming the European issues caused by industrialization, modernization, and urbanization; see Umehara Takeshi, "The Civilization of the Forest," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1999): 40–48. Moreover, these ideas can be traced back to the early nation-building formations such as pre-war anti-western rhetoric, the writings of Watsuji Tetsurō 和迁哲郎 (1889–1960), and Kokugaku 国学 thought. For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[256] McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki,* 72.

Thomas expresses a similar point of view. He acknowledges the value of examining traditional religious sources to understand the origins of religious themes in popular films, but he asserts that focusing solely on this approach overlooks the role of filmic entertainment as a distinct religious practice that may intentionally distance itself from conventional religious forms.[257] Nevertheless, it is crucial to scrutinize how these films contribute to Shintō environmentalism and thus Shintō internationalization. More importantly, this thesis calls more attention to the innate connection between Miyazaki's films and Shintō environmentalism. Although the films under study here were made decades ago, their message is more relevant to present-day global society as environmental issues become ever more important to the world community.

The story of *Nausicaä* is staged in a postapocalyptic world, where the earth is full of the spreading Sea of Decay (*fukai* 腐海), a large forest of mutated fungi and plants populated by giant, dangerous insects called Ōmu 王蟲. A thousand years before the protagonist Nausicaä was born, technology ran out of control and people developed huge weapons in the form of gigantic biochemical warriors that unleashed fire and destruction on the world. Nausicaä and her community live in a relatively safe area with clean soil, the Valley of the Wind. As the story develops, they are unfortunately involved in the armed conflicts between the two larger factions in the story, Pejite and Tolmekia. By accident, Nausicaä discovers that the Ōmu protect the fungal forest with the intention of safeguarding its hidden secret: the ancient petrified trees located on the forest floor, which possess the ability to purify the contaminated soil and water. The Tolemkian leader Kushana revives the Fire Demon, the last of the God Warriors that destroyed the world a thousand years ago, to use against the Ōmu, but her plan fails and enrages the Ōmu. Nausicaä eventually saves a baby Ōmu from the rampage by sacrificing herself. Ultimately, she is resurrected by the Ōmu and delivers the message that humans' role is to cooperate with nature instead of dominating it.[258]

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[257] Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 161.
[258] For the sake of space, the story is over-simplified here; for a detailed discussion, see McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 81–89.

Gwendolyn Morgan asserts that Miyazaki assigns a pivotal role to apocalyptic themes in order to communicate the potential devastation that human actions can inflict upon the environment.[259] Recent scholars perceive these portrayals as a cautionary message, indicating a discord between our present lifestyle and values and the inherent harmony of nature. The story of *Nausicaä*, from the beginning, clearly expresses anti-industrialization sentiment. The world of Nausicaä was destroyed by advanced technology, and the Sea of Decay is the result of the ancient powerful weapon. It is evident that Nausicaä, as a character, tries to convey the message that humans are destroying nature while fungal forests and the Ōmu are trying to protect and purify the environment. In addition, the power of the Fire Demon can be seen as a metaphor for nuclear destruction in our world, and the Sea of Decay is the fallout that nuclear wars can bring.

Scholars such as Yamanaka Hiroshi and state that they find the story *Nausicaä* religious. Significantly, the resurrection scene at the end of the film echoes Christian messianism.[260] Even Miyazaki admits that the scene is too religious. He states, "Even though it wasn't my intention to create a miraculous movie, it turns into a fine old religious scene. Even in the scene where Nausicaä comes back to life, I did not intend any religious desires or miracles. Rather, when I realized that whatever I had been thinking had suddenly entered into the realm of religion I was really taken aback."[261] However, regarding the scene before the resurrection, Miyazaki claims that Nausicaä's act of throwing herself before the charging Ōmu is borne from animistic motivation. Nausicaä's readiness to sacrifice herself is not because she wants to protect her people as a savior, which is more common in a Christian interpretation, but because she compassionately intends to return the injured baby insect. Thus, Miyazaki claims that it is his heroine's respect for nature that drives her to self-sacrifice, as she is "dominated by animism."[262] Nevertheless, whether the last scene of *Nausicaä* is interpreted as animistic or Christian, it is evident that Miyazaki combines his animation with religion. In fact, the two interpretations could

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[259] Morgan, "Creatures in Crisis," 180.
[260] Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 237–255.
[261] Miyazaki, cited in Thomas, "Spirit/Medium," 113.
[262] Ogihara-Schuck, *Miyazaki's Animism Abroad*, 36.

be a reason for *Nausicaä's* global popularity, as audiences with different religious backgrounds can interpret the story differently.

It is true that in comparison with *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Princess Mononoke*, *Nausicaä* depicts few "animistic" and Shintō-related aspects, but the film expresses an unmistakable message about environmental degeneration and destruction. Moreover, the film indicates evident anti-industrial and anti-technology sentiments, as the unforgiving living environment is caused by human's uncontrolled technology and ambition to rule over nature. In addition, the Ōmu can be seen as an important animistic motif, as they are a part of the natural system that protect the fungal forests purifying manmade pollution. According to Wright, the purification process in *Nausicaä* echoes Kokugaku scholar Norinaga's understanding of purity and pollution. Norinaga references a story from the *Kojiki* in which the kami Izanagi washes away his impurities after escaping from the realm of death (*yomi no kuni* 黄泉の国), and he argues that the true purpose of purification (*harae* 祓え) is to remove what is evil or polluted.[263] Both Nausicaä and the Ōmu can be understood as presentations of animism: Nausicaä values all life in her world, which echoes Norinaga's claim that wondrous natural things are "*kami-given*;" the Ōmu are aware that the entire forest operates as a purifying organism and acts to defend the forests and thus the earth. Indeed, when the Pejite sadistically torture a baby Ōmu in order to provoke the adult Ōmu to a murderous rampage through the valley, Nausicaa's grandmother says that "the anger of the Ōmu is the anger of the earth. Of what use is surviving, relying on a thing like that [the Fire Demon]."[264] Thus, according to Wright's argument, the Ōmu are a god-like race, deeply intertwined with the newly formed ecosystem and possessing the remarkable ability to empathize telepathically with the suffering of all creatures inhabiting the Sea of Decay, extending beyond their own species. Despite enduring aggression from the Tolmekians and Pejite, the Ōmu are not a vengeful race.[265]

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[263] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 4–5.
[264] A line from the film *Nausicaä*, cited in Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 5.
[265] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 6.

Yoneyama also asserts that Miyazaki uses the character of Nausicaä and her relationship with the Ōmu and the Sea of Decay to demonstrate the theme of human-nature relationships and articulate animism in his work. In particular, Nausicaä does not treat the Ōmu as mere insects, but as lifeforms similar to humans.[266] For example, in the scene where Nausicaä tries to protect the baby Ōmu:

NAUSICAÄ: Go away! There is nothing here!
             <The Ohmu that Nausicaä is hiding behind her makes a noise.>
FATHER: It's an Ohmu larva. She's been possessed by the insects. ...
             As I feared. ... Give it to me...
NAUSICAÄ: No! It's not doing anything wrong!
FATHER: Insects and humans cannot live in the same world.
NAUSICAÄ: No! No!
             <Father grabs the Ohmu and takes it away.>
NAUSICAÄ: Do not kill it! Please...[267]

Nausicaä uses the phrase "this person" (*kono hito* この人) to personify the Ōmu, which shows that she values all living beings, which can be interpreted as an animistic belief.

With such implications imbued in *Nausicaä*, it is possible to make a connection between animism/Shintō and environmentalism. In fact, *Nausicaä* is considered one of the most eco-focused films made by Miyazaki, and its influence on global audiences is profound. More importantly, as Susan J. Napier indicates, one of the essential reasons for the global popularity of Japanese anime is its participation in global culture. In particular, many Japanese commentators describe anime as *mukokuseki* 無国籍 or "stateless."[268] Such a practice clearly appears in *Nausicaä*, as the character of Nausicaä is based partly on a princess from Greek mythology who was closer at heart to nature than to the society of gods, as well as on an ancient Japanese story about a princess who loved insects.[269]

In addition, character names and architectural styles in the film are more Western than Japanese, but the original audio and Nausicaä's view of nature is more Eastern (or, in Miyazaki's

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[266] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 184.
[267] Translated and cited in Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 184.
[268] Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 22–24.
[269] Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 184.

words, evocative of "Japanese animism"). Although the film does not mention Japan directly, it is still known as the creation of a Japanese director who has a strong opinion on Japanese animism. The combination of non-Japanese and Japanese styles also fits Dessì's system for the internationalization of Japanese religion, that is the practice of adopting non-Japanese elements into Japanese ones and then exporting them to the global community. While Nausicaä is depicted as a messianic savior, the film still presents an animistic belief through the portrayal of the Ōmu. Although Dessì's theory includes that Japanese religions in Japan may reject foreign cultural and religious elements (step seven), I argue that since there is a more pressing issue presented in the film, that of environmental crisis, the "native" Japanese and foreign cultural and religious elements can co-exist under a global social problem.

The implications of nuclear war and an apocalyptic fallout are evident in the film. It is interesting to draw a parallel with another popular title, the *Godzilla* series. William M. Tsutsui indicates that postwar monster movies such as *Godzilla* were the first Japanese popular culture form to have a major global impact. Since the first *Godzilla* film made by Tōhō 東宝 in 1954, the series has been popular both domestically and worldwide.[270] In particular, the 1954 film has attracted continuous academic debate regarding its anti-war and anti-nuclear stance. Moreover, according to Andrea Castiglioni, Godzilla can be seen as a violent deity (*aragami* 荒神) which brings destruction to human society. Castiglioni argues that this destruction in the most recent Japanese Godzilla movie (*Shin-Gojira* シンゴジラ, 2016) aims to eradicate our existing habitat and establish a new one characterized by a biological reality rooted in the fusion of animals and plants.[271] Although Castiglioni explicitly discusses the recent Godzilla film, his argument also applies to the ones made in the last century. That is, Godzilla in various films represents the fears and challenges that contemporary society faces. For example, the first film is a direct reaction (or

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[270] William M. Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2010), 11; Miyamoto Yuki, "Gendered Bodies in *Tokusatsu*: Monsters and Aliens as the Atomic Bomb Victims," *Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 5 (2016): 1086–1106, 1086–1087.
[271] For a detailed discussion, see Andrea Castiglioni, "From *Your Name.* to *Shin-Gojira*: Spiritual Crisscrossing, Spatial Soteriology, and Catastrophic Identity in Contemporary Japanese Visual Culture," in *Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan: The Invisible Empire*, ed. Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 171–186.

even protest) to the U.S.'s nuclear testing, and *Shin-Gojira* is a reaction to the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

Nevertheless, over the course of many years, the archived body of Godzilla has been subject to diverse interpretations. It has been seen as a collective embodiment of soldiers' spirits, a sorrowful mass representing the civilians who perished during World War II. Additionally, it has been viewed as a manifestation of Japan's deep-seated fear stemming from the incendiary bombings carried out by the U.S. Air Force on Tokyo. Conversely, Gojira has been portrayed as a symbol of nuclear power that both devastates Japan and, paradoxically, safeguards it. More relevant here, Godzilla movies from the sixties and seventies such as *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* show a benevolent Godzilla shielding Japan from the attacks of malevolent creatures.

In the 1970s, Japan's economy developed rapidly. However, along with such economic success, urban and industrial waste became severe byproducts. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* reflects such social concerns by creating the monster Hedorah, also known as the Smog Monster. The monster's name comes from the Japanese word *hedoro* へどろ, which refers to sludge, slime, vomit, or chemical ooze. In this film, Godzilla acts as a savior to fight against Hedorah instead of an enemy of humanity. It is evident from the villain's name alone that the film tries to ask for more attention to urban and industrial waste. In this case, Godzilla can be seen as having a similar representation of the Ōmu that protect the environment from human pollution. In other words, Godzilla in this film can be seen as a kami that fights against human industrial and urban pollution.

Nonetheless, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* attracts much less attention despite the overall popularity of the Godzilla series. Even though this film's anti-industrial and environmental sentiments are profound, there is little scholarly discussion of it. I argue it is because the religious medium of Japan's environmentalism is Shintō, and while Godzilla can be understood as a kami, there is little connection with the Shintō establishment. Without aligning with the Shintō establishment's promotion and propagation of shrine forests, films like *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* lose a great opportunity to attract new audiences. Essentially, simply pointing out the

industrial pollution problem is not enough to attract audiences' attention. However, films that embed Shintō environmentalism and the imagined prehistorical understanding of the environment, an ongoing ideology and a potential solution to the current global environmental crisis, can more easily connect with their audiences. This is one of the critical reasons that Miyazaki's films, made in the 80s and 90s, are still popular today.

This is also why Miyazaki's films are easily perceived as containing environmental agendas. That is, these films express environmental concerns by presenting the Japanese "traditional view" of nature and animistic beliefs, especially through presenting the importance of forests. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, and *Princess Mononoke* all communicate the concept of Japan's forests in their own ways. *Nausicaä*, as I have discussed, presents the fungal forests as the essential purifying organism. Forests and shrine forests as concepts are crucial to present-day Shintō's rhetoric of Shintō environmentalism. However, films such as *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* lacks synchronization with the Shintō establishment such as Ise Grand Shrine. The following two films have a much more profound presentation of forest and Shintō, which more effectively promotes Shintō environmentalism to global audiences.

My Neighbor Totoro

My Neighbor Totoro is the story of two young girls, Mei and her big sister Satsuki, who move with their father to an old house in a rustic neighborhood outside Tokyo. One day, Mei follows a mysterious creature through their yard, and soon after she finds a family of cuddly creatures called "totoro." Although Satsuki and their father have their doubts about Mei's story, the father still kindly explains that it might be the spirit of the camphor tree that protected Mei while she was lost. The family accordingly makes an outing to the old shrine situated at the base of the tree to pay their respects to this spirit. Then, Satsuki soon sees Totoro in person in front of a bus stop. As the story develops, Mei becomes lost again when she tries to visit her ill mother in the hospital by herself. Satsuki appeals to Totoro for help, and soon she is carried by the Catbus—an

amalgamation of a school bus and a cat-like creature, featuring a dozen legs instead of wheels. This magical form of transportation leads her directly to her lost sister.

My Neighbor Totoro, overall, implies a much stronger connection with Shintō and kami: Totoro seems loosely based on traditional conceptions of kami. To be specific, being anthropomorphic makes Totoro much closer to the definition of early Shintō kami, which were incorporated with continental philosophies and religions from the late seventh century, instead of belonging to animistic kami cults in the prehistorical era. According to McCarthy, Miyazaki described the totoro as "nature spirits" belonging to the same category as those commonly found in Japanese religion. Miyazaki clarified that the movie, in his view, is unrelated to any religious beliefs or traditions.[272]

It is true that an anime spirit cannot be traced to any specific religious tradition or classical text because characters appear for a variety of narratological reasons that have little to do with "official" doctrines (e.g., institutionalized Shintō). However, Miyazaki's creation of Totoro can be seen as an invention of his own kami. Based on Totoro's characteristics, it can well be seen as a Shintō kami instead of an animistic deity, as Miyazaki often claims. McCarthy highlights the film's deliberate juxtaposition of Miyazaki's fantastical spirits and the stagnant, lifeless symbols associated with traditional religion. One significant scene takes place near a bus stop, where Mei becomes unsettled by the motionless and slightly foreboding fox statues adorning a small Inari shrine beneath a tree.[273] However, when Totoro appears shortly afterward, both Mei and her sister instinctively place their trust in the gentle, furry spirit. In this way, Totoro embodies a unique nature spirit, intentionally contrasted with institutional concepts of kami found in Shintō. More importantly, McCarthy argues that the film promotes an alternative perception of kami regardless of whether Miyazaki's audiences believe in the existence of

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[272] McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 120–21.
[273] Inari shrines 稲荷神社 enshrine the kami Inari, who is usually associated with agricultural affairs.

totoro.[274] McCarthy's analysis of the film's pastoral storyline, coupled with the reimagined kami, serves as a dual critique of both traditional religious institutions and modern urban lifestyles.[275]

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the film *My Neighbor Totoro* has implications for a reimagined Shintō tradition, no matter how scholars define it. However, it is also crucial to pay more attention to the tree and forests in this film when discussing Shintō and "Japanese animism." According to Wright, the tree holds tremendous significance within Shintō cosmology, representing the revered powers of productivity and fertility attributed to the kami. In the *Kojiki*, there is a mention of a deity named "Takagi," whose name translates to "Lofty Tree." Norinaga interpreted "Takagi" to be the same deity as Musubi-no-Kami 産霊神, the "High-Integrating Deity." This kami is believed to be the primordial being which gave rise to Izanagi and Izanami. Hence, following Norinaga's interpretation, Takagi can be understood as the "Lofty Tree Deity," symbolizing a cosmic tree personification. Therefore, the concept of the "world tree" carries the significance of representing nature's life-giving essence.[276]

Trees and forests are in fact essential to the story of *My Neighbor Totoro*. When Mei is lost for the first time, she follows a group of small totoro into the bushes and meets the large sleeping Totoro at the base of the giant camphor tree. The scene introduces totoro as the "spirits" who dwell in the camphor tree, which embodies the camphor tree with animistic and even Shintō implications. Then, after Satsuki and their father find Mei asleep, the father leads the family to formally visit the camphor tree to express their gratitude. The scene is particularly important to the discussion of Shintō environmentalism. The tree is encircled by a *shimenawa* rope 注連縄, and there is a small *torii* gate nearby. These are clear indications of a Shintō shrine. According to Ueda Masaaki, in the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, the character for shrine "社" is read as *mori*, the same pronunciation as "forest" (*mori* 森). More importantly, early Shintō did not build shrines with *torii* but simply hung *shimenawa* ropes around forests to make a "shrine." In addition,

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[274] See McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 120–21.
[275] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 115.
[276] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 7.

shimenawa were an indication of kami dwelling and prevented anyone from cutting down the tree. Ueda argues *shimenawa* is a sign of Japanese people's respect for the forest and a manifestation of human-nature harmony. Or, in other words, *shimenawa* and the related practices indicate the concept of shrine forests.[277]

Moreover, Stuart Picken suggests that some of the very earliest Shintō shrines probably took the form of a *himorogi* 神籬, "a sacred, unpolluted place bounded by rope and surrounded by evergreen plants and trees."[278] Thus, presenting *shimenawa* in *My Neighbor Totoro* clearly suggests a connection to Shintō. More precisely, the scene in *My Neighbor Totoro* is very similar to ideas of the Shintō environmentalism, which argues that prehistorical 'Japanese' people lived in harmonious coexistence with their natural surroundings, supposedly expressed in 'animistic' beliefs and practices.

The last notable occurrence in which the film presents forests is when Mei and Satsuki dream of Totoro helping them grow acorn seeds planted in their garden into giant trees. This scene again indicates the animistic/Shintō creatures who use their power to mature forests, which implies the close relation between Shintō and forests. Although it might be just a dream in the story, the presentation of the connection between Shintō and forests can still be influential to the audience.

Yamanaka argues that Miyazaki's focus on the trees and the forests of Japan along with the beauty and richness of the Japanese natural environment does not mean that he began to lean toward nativist politics, as he argues that Miyazaki's presentation of kami only expresses a secular shift in response to the three "izations"—Westernization, industrialization, and modernization.[279] However, Yamanaka seems not to consider recent Shintō secularization efforts made by the Shintō establishment and political conservatives in contemporary Japan—treating Shintō as non-religious and promoting an imagined Shintō tradition to both domestic and

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[277] Ueda, *Mori to Kami to Nihonjin*, 13–14.
[278] Stuart Picken, *Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Roots* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1980), 49.
[279] Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 251–52.

international shrine visitors. In this regard, scholars such as Yamanaka help advance non-religious Shintō in their analyses of Japanese anime. In essence, these studies help build a medium for Japanese culturalist and nationalist claims. This argument may overstate things, but there is little room to deny that Miyazaki expresses the uniqueness of Japanese culture found in trees and forests.

Yamanaka also suggests that Totoro serves as a reflection of the underlying unease experienced by Miyazaki's Japanese audience, stemming from their gradual disconnection from the spiritual entities that embody the awe-inspiring forces of nature.[280] In addition, he, as well as Yoneyama, highlight the significance of Miyazaki's optimistic message of rejuvenation, noting its strong resonance with the principles of folk and Shrine Shintō.[281] The combination, then, can be easily understood as meaning that Japan's forests and trees represent an ancient form of Shintō. With consideration of Shintō conservatives' propaganda, it is not difficult for Ghibli's audience to associate the films with Shintō and environmentalism. Especially, the emphasis on the connection between "nature spirits" and trees and forests makes Shintō environmentalism even more relevant. Yoshioka Shiro also suggests that *My Neighbor Totoro* (and *Princess Mononoke*) appeal to their audience's unconscious memories of an ancient Asian evergreen forest culture.[282] Moreover, as *My Neighbor Totoro* is an even greater global commercial success than *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, substantial implications of Shintō and its relationship with forests in the film could impact global audiences with a more profound impression of Shintō and environmentalism. Furthermore, the film shows Miyazaki's yearning for a pre-industrial Japanese countryside with an emphasis on natural forests and trees, which fits Dessì's theory of selecting "native" Japanese religious elements as resources to shape new glocal identities.

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[280] Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 252.

[281] Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 253; see also Yoneyama, *Animism in Contemporary Japan*, 179–183.

[282] Yoshioka Shiro, "Heart of Japaneseness: History and Nostalgia in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark W. MacWilliams (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 266.

Princess Mononoke

> I think that the Japanese did kill *shishigami* [Deer God] around the time of the
> Muromachi era. And then we stopped being in awe of forests ... From ancient times up to
> a certain time in the medieval period, there was a boundary beyond which humans should
> not enter.... After *shishigami's* head was returned, nature regenerated. But it has become a
> tame, non-frightening forest of the kind we are accustomed to seeing. The Japanese have
> been remaking the Japanese landscape in this way.[283]

Princess Mononoke is the story of a young man named Ashitaka from an indigenous northeastern

Japanese village. Driven from his community because of a curse, Ashitaka travels on his faithful

steed, Yakkle, to the southwest forest where the Shishigami (the great god of the forest) dwells.

This forest setting is flanked by an ironworks facility positioned amidst the tranquility of a

central lake. There is an uneasy relationship between the humans at the ironworks and the animal

deities of the forest. Human workers serve their employer Lady Eboshi by mining the

surrounding mountains for ore, destroying the natural habitat. Ashitaka soon finds out that as the

leader of the ironworks, Eboshi provides sanctuary for former prostitutes and people suffering

from leprosy. On the side of the animals, a young human girl named San, who was raised by

wolves, regularly raids the ironworks on behalf of the animals to drive the humans away.

As the story develops, Jiku—an avaricious and duplicitous monk—and imperial agents

plan to kill Shishigami and steal the deity's head with a warrant signed by the emperor, for its

blood can bestow immortality. Although Ashitake tries to intervene in the humans' plan, the

imperial hunters successfully capture the deity's head with Eboshi's help. However, the body of

the decapitated deity relentlessly searches for its missing head and threatens to destroy the whole

forest and the ironworks. Fortunately, Ashitaka and San are able to return the head in time, and

life returns to the forest.

If *Nausicaä* primarily addresses the issue of environmental destruction and *Totoro*

focuses more on the forests and trees in Japan's countryside, then *Princess Mononoke* combines

both elements of the forests and trees and of the ecological destruction of Japan. The historical

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[283] Miyazaki, interview 1997, cited in Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 8.

setting for *Princess Mononoke* is the Muromachi period (1392–1573). This era is argued to have been a time of great upheaval when the relationship between humanity and nature radically changed. For instance, the Portuguese began exporting firearms ("hand-cannons") to Japan in 1543, which signified the end of the Iron Age. The ironworks in the film is a clear representation of such social change.

As Wright indicates, Miyazaki does not attempt to present a historically accurate narrative; rather, he aims to portray a shift in power dynamics within the escalating clash between the natural realm and the burgeoning industrialized human society. Thus, a crucial juncture emerges when humans initiate a war against the wild deities (*kamigami* 神々).[284] For instance, Shishigami, a great god of the Muromachi period's folk religion and dreadful deity who is believed to control the source of life in the Japanese forest,[285] is a great example of the conflict between humans and nature.

Princess Mononoke depicts several points of struggle between nature and humans. First, the ironworks, where many outcasts live, need resources to survive, and it is not evil for these vulnerable people to live. However, by exploiting the resources of the nearby forests, the ironworks destroys the living environment for many animals and gods. Second, the imperial agents want to obtain Shishigami's head for human society's flourishing or the emperor's immortality. However, killing Shishigami would cause the total collapse of the forest, about which the humans care very little. Thus, the film depicts humans as selfish enough to destroy forests and kill the animals living there to solve the difficulties they face (especially for the ironworks). Hori Iku 堀郁 summarizes that the humans use violence for their survival, while nature uses violence against human's exploitation of nature.[286]

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[284] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 8.
[285] Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,' 252.
[286] Hori Iku 堀郁, "Watashitachi wa shizen to kyōsei dekiru no ka? 'Mononokehime' no tetsugakuteki kōsatsu 私たちは自然と共生できるのか?『もののけ姫』の哲学的考察 (Can We Coexist with Nature? Philosophical Reflections on 'Princess Mononoke')," *Journal of Policy Studies* 28 (2008): 99–107, 105.

Hori argues that *Princess Mononoke* is at the peak of Miyazaki's yearning for nature and distrust of the civilization and technology that destroy nature.[287] Similar to the previous films, *Princess Mononoke* has substantial implications for "Shintō." Wright argues that Miyazaki shows two important tenets of Shintō in *Princess Mononoke*: respecting the kami and love of nature.[288] In particular, Wright indicates that Miyazaki's cinematic approach can be seen as a revival of the ancient, institutionalized form of Shintō. He draws inspiration from this natural Shintō, emphasizing an intuitive, non-dogmatic relationship with nature.[289]

Princess Mononoke is unique in that Miyazaki presents an approach to the coexistence of humans and nature, even under human and nature's violence. Miyazaki seeks the ancient Shintō understanding of nature to reconcile the conflict.[290] At the end of the film, Ashitaka and San return the head to the god with their "human" hands, a symbolic gesture of peace made between nature and humanity.[291] However, such understandings of human-nature harmony and the Shintō-environment relationship echo the claims of Umehara Takeshi and Yasuda Yoshinori 安田喜憲 that Japanese people's understanding of nature (*shizenkan* 自然観) has close ties with Japan's forests. In addition, they attempt to build a new relationship between humans and nature based on Japanese understandings of nature and religion, such as "ancient Shintō." Similar to Miyazaki's stance on nature and religion, their advocacy for "forest thought" (*mori no shisō* 森の思想) highlights the significance of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, rooted in an animistic and polytheistic perception of the natural world. In the process of developing this theory of animism, Umehara consistently questions monotheism, as he considers it to be the cause of the nuclear, environmental, and ethnic crises worldwide because it justifies human conquest of nature and, notably, of other human beings.[292] Thus, their understanding of

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[287] Hori, "Can We Coexist with Nature?" 102.
[288] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 10.
[289] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 11.
[290] Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees," 1–12; Hori, "Can We Coexist with Nature?" 102–105.
[291] Okuyama Yoshiko, *Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 124.
[292] See Umehara, "The Civilization of the Forest," 40–48.

Japan's nature and forests exemplifies *nihonjinron* discourse that generalizes Japanese people's understanding of human-nature harmony and puts it in a unique position. In other words, they promote the ideology of Shintō environmentalism and nationalist claims of Shintō as non-religious and Japan's tradition and culture.

The critical part here is that Miyazaki shares such views of Japan's forests. Regarding *Princess Mononoke*, he has expressed that the forest inhabited by the kami represents a realm of spirituality. He clarifies that the film does not portray an actual forest, but rather a symbolic representation of the forest that has resided in the collective consciousness of the Japanese people since ancient times.[293] In fact, Miyazaki's understanding of Japan's forests has greatly been influenced by Umehara. During the final stages of completing *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki approached Umehara to write a passage for inclusion in the film's pamphlet, which was intended for distribution to the audience.[294] Hence, there is a clear connection between Miyazaki and Umehara's thoughts on Japan's nature-human harmony. The combination of Umehara's assertation about Japan's natural forests and Miyazaki's presentation of Japanese "animistic beliefs" centered on Japan's forests can generate a new international identity for Shintō: Shintō is a religion that has serious concerns about human-nature coexistence. More importantly, films such as *Princess Mononoke* express strong criticism of humans' behavior toward nature and the kami that dwell in the forests. Such a criticism indicates the superiority of Japan's ancient religious beliefs regarding human-nature harmony compared to an industrial society.

Umehara, as one of the pioneer advocates of Shintō environmentalism, greatly shaped Miyazaki's understanding of Japan's ancient forest and Shintō. Such interpretations then widely spread to global audiences through Miyazaki's works. Although Miyazaki and Umehara are both against "State Shintō" and imperialist Japan, at the same time they support nationalistic ideas of Shintō and "Japaneseness" by promoting the imagined Shintō tradition of human-nature

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[293] Miyazaki, *Returning Point*, 106.
[294] Miyazaki, *Returning Point*, 116.

harmony. Yet, it is difficult for the general audience to identify the inaccuracy of the Shintō tradition and the ancient Japanese people's view on nature. Therefore, films such as *Princess Mononoke* promote the apparent connection between Shintō (or animistic) deities and Japan's natural forests; in other words, they advance Shintō environmentalism through Japanese popular culture. Through the three anime films, this thesis shows that Miyazaki constantly presents so-called Japanese "animism." Examining Miyazaki's understanding of and attempts to present "animism" in his films, this thesis argues that his works accelerate the spread of the view of Shintō as not only an ancient worship tradition but also a universal "green" religion— in short, the spread of Shintō environmentalism. It further warns that his presentations of "animism" and "Shintō tradition" echo Japanese conservatives' claims about Shintō, which support *nihonjinron* discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed Japanese popular culture's relevance to animism and Shintō. In particular, it focused on Miyazaki as one of the most influential animated film directors in the world and his works. This chapter first introduced Miyazaki and his perception of animism. It argued that Miyazaki's films have a close connection with "animism," as described by Miyazaki, and Miyazaki has a clear intention to include such "animistic beliefs" in his works. Second, this chapter examined Miyazaki's so-called animism and its relationship to an early form of institutionalized Shintō. It argues that there are inaccuracies in Miyazaki's understanding of animism, and it raises the danger for scholars whose expertise is not in Japanese religion to just present Miyazaki's understanding of Shintō and "Japanese animism" as it is.

Last, this chapter addresses the close connection between Miyazaki, Shintō environmentalism, and the internationalization of Shintō. It offers *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, and *Princess Mononoke* as examples to demonstrate that Miyazaki's words indeed promote Shintō environmentalism. While it may not be his intention to do Miyazaki's works do advance the reimagined Shintō and its ties with Japan's nature. In

particular, these films often present scenes and characters that resemble Shintō instead of animism. More importantly, according to Miyazaki's interviews and works, his works are significantly influenced by scholars such as Umehara, who promotes Shintō environmentalism; Miyazaki presents similar views to those scholars' arguments. Such "hidden" messages behind the films contribute to the revival of a public Shintō in contemporary Japan and overseas; moreover, they can also be seen as parts of *nihonjinron* discourse which promotes the uniqueness of Japan and Japanese nationalism. However, through a medium of Japanese popular culture (anime), these views can be much easier for global audiences to receive and accept. This chapter is not a reception study, and it does not have quantitative data to unequivocally prove that Miyazaki's films have changed the global perception of Shintō. Nevertheless, in effect, Miyazaki's animated films contribute to the internationalization of Shintō environmentalism, regardless of the director's intention. Therefore, this thesis calls crucial attention to the connection between the propagation of Shintō environmentalism and Japanese popular culture such as anime.

Conclusion

Environmentalism has become one of the most heated topics in the global community. Shintō, often perceived as Japan's non-religious tradition and culture, plays a central role in bearing Japan's environmental concerns and proposing a modern solution to such a global challenge. However, from the ancient to the modern period, Shintō has been defined in various ways to fit the overall political and religious structures of the times. The same is true in contemporary Japanese society. Chapter 1 of this thesis argued that considering the sociopolitical context is essential to understanding Shintō's development. That is, Shintō constantly adapts itself to its contemporary sociopolitical environment.

Moreover, Shintō's definitional ambiguity allow it to easily adapt to new social, political, and religious environments. Furthermore, this thesis argued that Shintō environmentalism results from Shintō's current adaptation to the pressing global environmental crisis. The Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015), for instance, showcase world nations' political commitment to engage with global environmental sustainability. At the same time, Shintō organizations have hosted many conferences regarding ecology and environmental issues with various religious groups.

Because institutional religions such as Christianity are unpopular in Japan, Shintō organizations such as Jinja Honchō have shifted Shintō's narrative from that of a religion to that of a non-religious, environmentally oriented Japanese tradition and culture. With an extensive focus on shrine forests, Shintō organizations emphasize the imagined Shintō history and animistic beliefs to present a Shintō tradition continuous with nature. However, such a portrayal of Shintō has the danger of running into *nihonjinron* discourse, for it puts Shintō in a unique position in solving contemporary environmental issues. Simultaneously, in Chapter 2, I proposed that Shintō environmentalism is used by Japanese conservatives to disguise their advancement of Shintō as a public and non-religious entity. In addition, I compared Ise Grand Shrine with Yasukuni Shrine and suggested that the controversy around Yasukuni contributes to Ise's success.

Ise Grand Shrine utilizes the portrayal of a non-religious Shintō to advance its influence with domestic and international audiences. Despite Ise's close connection with Japanese cultural and political conservatives, who promotes postwar nationalism, the shrine optimizes the narrative of the imagined relationship between Shintō and the environment and avoids the political, legal, and social controversies often faced by Yasukuni Shrine. I argue that Yasukuni and Ise represent similar nationalistic sentiments, but Ise is more sophisticated in avoiding debates over constitutional violations by focusing on the shrine forests rhetoric.

Furthermore, a public or non-religious Shintō often proclaimed to have a close tie with the environment may be more easily accepted by the international community. For example, though the construction of San Marino Shrine in Italy was supported by Jinja Honchō and Japanese right-wing politicians, because of its self-portrayal of being eco-friendly, it was welcomed by the local authorities of San Marino.[295] With the internationalization of Shintō in mind, this thesis examined Japanese popular culture, focusing on the animated films of Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki Hayao. Chapter 3 first introduced the recent scholarly debate over "new animism" and argued that Japanese filmmakers' selective presentation of "animistic traditions" is problematic. Miyazaki's films often present themes of environmentalism and "animistic beliefs" with a focus on Japan's forests which plant seeds in his audience's mind that Shintō/animism is closely associated with nature. These concepts have become internationalized through the overall popularity of Japanese popular culture and Studio Ghibli.

It is difficult to argue the exact degree of influence Shintō environmentalism exerts on the public's changing perceptions of Shintō. Still, this thesis argued that Shintō environmentalism is closely related to Japanese political and cultural conservatives and that Japanese popular culture is a medium for advancing Shintō environmentalism. With the Shintō establishment's agenda in mind, it is evident that they try to utilize shrines such as Ise to promote Shintō as non-religious and environmentally oriented. Moreover, such characteristics of contemporary Shintō could

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[295] Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, 197–98.

produce a new form of public Shintō, or a revived "State Shintō," closely associated with nationalism and the imperial family. In essence, Japanese popular culture then becomes a catalyst for Shintō nationalism worldwide. That is, though Miyazaki likely has no intention to promote Japanese nationalism or praise prewar Japan's military aggression, his works closely tie with Japanese conservatives and cultural chauvinists conservatives regarding Japan's nature, especially forests. Hence, with the Shintō establishment's recent promotion of Shintō environmentalism, Miyazaki's works can be seen as a part of Shintō environmentalism since they share many common elements.

Furthermore, with the growing popularity of Japanese anime worldwide, Japanese and non-Japanese audiences often visit shrines mentioned in anime, manga, and other forms of popular culture. The audiences may visit shrines with no religiosity, and Shintō's self-proclamation of being non-religious certainly helps those who belong to organized religions to ease their concerns. Shrine visitors can treat shrines as sites of Japanese tradition and culture or places for purchasing merchandise such as amulets (*omamori* お守り). It is thus important to observe the increasing number of shrine visitors who might consider Shintō shrines as non-religious. Significantly, foreign politicians' participation in shrine visits can advance public Shintō significantly. For instance, the most recent G7 summit was hosted in Japan in May 2023, and the G7 leaders together visited Itsukushima Shrine 厳島神社.[296] Such high profile visits to shrines can strengthen the impression that Shintō is more about tradition and culture than religion. Thus, with the propagation from Japanese popular culture and international politics, Shintō has growing support to proclaim itself as non-religious. In addition, with Shintō organizations' emphasis on the environment and nature, Shintō becomes an environmentally oriented public religion.

That said, this thesis does have its limitations regarding examining Japanese popular culture. It has primarily focused on Miyazaki and his films while many anime are considered to

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[296] See the official website of the G7 Hiroshima Summit; "G7 Leaders' Visit to Itsukushima Shrine," *G7 2023 Hiroshima Summit*, accessed July 3, 2023, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/en/topics/detail006/.

be associated with Japanese religion. For example, *Natsume's Book of Friends* (*Natsume Yūjinchō*, 夏目友人帳） and *GeGeGe no Kitarō* ゲゲゲの鬼太郎 are excellent anime works that contain "monsters" (*yōkai* 妖怪) and Shintō elements.[297] In these anime works, the line between animism and Shintō is blurred, and many consider them to express animistic beliefs instead of Shintō beliefs similar to Miyazaki's works. Essentially, these anime also contribute to the secularization of Shintō in contemporary Japan. Video games also deserve more attention regarding their relationship with Japanese religions. For example, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* (セキロ：シャドウズ ダイ トゥワイス, 2019) contains various elements of esoteric Buddhism and kami cults.[298]

A close examination of the history of Japanese popular culture and its relationship with Japanese religions is also beyond the scope of this thesis. Scrutiny of such works in light of Shintō can potentially reveal the changes in popular culture over the past several decades. That is, as established in Chapter 2, the concept of Shintō environmentalism was only developed in the 1970s and 80s; various popular cultural works may reflect these social and political changes. Although this thesis mentions the Yasukuni controversy and Godzilla films in the 70s and 80s as examples, more research can be conducted in that regard.

Nevertheless, with the ongoing global attention to ecology, Shintō has the potential to play an even more prominent role in solving contemporary environmental issues by focusing on Japan's nature and the imagined Shintō traditions. But to do so, Shintō organizations would have to move beyond mere rhetoric and start pushing impactful, eco-friendly domestic legislation, participate in substantial initiatives on a global scale, and collaborate with the Japanese popular culture industry to reach broader audiences.

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[297] *Natsume Yūjinchō* 夏目友人帳 (*Natsume's Book of Friends*), created by Midorikawa Yuki 緑川ゆき, directed by Ōmori Takahiro 大森貴弘, Brain's Base, 2008; *GeGeGe no Kitarō* ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, created by Mizuki Shigeru 水木しげる, directed by Tsuji Masaki 辻真先, FNS (Fuji TV), 1968.
[298] FromSoftware, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* セキロ：シャドウズ ダイ トゥワイス, Activision, PlayStation 4/Windows/Xbox One/Stadia, 2019.

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